

Haptic Aesthetics and Skin Diving: Touching on Diasporic Embodiment in the Works of Anne
Michaels, Dionne Brand, and David Chariandy

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B.A., Laurentian University, 2012

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Supervisory Committee

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by

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Abstract

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This thesis focuses on the aesthetics of the sense of touch – haptic aesthetics – in contemporary Canadian diasporic literature. My reading of diasporic embodiment will discuss three contemporary novels, Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For* (2005), and David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant* (2007), for what these novels suggest about the incoherent nature of cultural boundaries and the alternative possibilities for embodiment and community formation through an analysis of the sense of touch. Set in the urban and suburban spaces of Toronto, Ontario, these narratives represent diasporic bodies and experiences less through concrete acts of social, historical, or biomedical identification, and more so through creative tactile and affective gestures of agency and community. I explore the ways in which diasporic subjects in these novels negotiate their biomedical, sociocultural, and geographic positions through haptic metaphoric processes of what I call “skin diving.”

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Dedication

*To Noam,
for all of your playful puns and loving encouragement.*

*To my mom Sheri,
whose curiosity throughout my academic journey has never wavered.*

Introduction: Touching on the Incoherent Subject of Diaspora

how is it possible to make sense of our selves, if the boundaries that tell us who 'we' are are incoherent, or fragmented, or fuzzy, or somehow unreal, or fluid or on the move? Thus, identity is itself limited because it does not mark the same place: no one is identical. (Thrift and Pile 179)

Nigel Thrift and Stephen Pile's assertion, from *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation* (1995), of the incoherent quality of identity is not only true of cultural embodiment but also of the relationship between an illusory sense of stable identity and the sense of touch. Inasmuch as identity is a fiction whose boundaries we often try to reinforce, touching deconstructs the sense of a *coherent* boundary of the body, as the boundaries that mark touch – who is touched, who touches, when touch begins, and when it ends – are always fragmented, unfinished or indefinite, shifting, and topographically uneven. I wish to call on two connotations of the word 'coherent' to characterize my definition of the coherent self: as an adjective, coherent first refers to stickiness, to something that clings firmly together, forming a boundary, and second to thought, speech, or reasoning, of which all of the parts are consistent and go well together ("coherent, a," OED Online). In this thesis, by coherence, I mean the desired quality or state of combining or connecting with others innocently or apolitically through physical, social, or intellectual integration or understanding.¹ Especially in the spatial definitional practices of cultural studies, the attempts of some literary and cultural theorists, geographers, or politicians to arrive at a sense of coherence have directly or indirectly insisted on drawing and maintaining the boundaries of political legitimacy and sovereignty (whether in mapping the physical migrations of people or in defining what it means to embody a particular cultural group), despite the less

¹ I would like to distinguish here between the version of the political that I imply by invoking the word "apolitical," where bodies may or may not be subject to certain forms or circulations of power, which I place in relation to or opposition with the notion of innocence (that is, a state of unawareness rather than a state of virtue), and other constitutive forms of the political, where participation or productive action may occur on behalf of, against, or by the political subjects in question.

coherent accounts of bodies that continue to mark the human subjective experience. Such efforts in establishing a sense of cultural coherence have included the initiatives of contemporary Canadian politicians like Conservative Federal Minister Jason Kenney, who served as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration from 2008 to 2013 and campaigned to win over the votes of the immigrant population through symbolic gestures of community building with members of different cultural groups (including cross-cultural instances of touch, like hand shaking, embracing diverse public figures, and sporting culturally significant garb, such as the Sikh rumala). These initiatives, which were often intended to show a kind of public affirmation fostered in more private spaces, such as synagogues, temples, or mosques, reveal the powerful symbolic and political potential of touch. A more micropolitical language of touch illustrates how subjects not only occupy and cross into different communities coherently and harmoniously but also discordantly, incoherently, and even irresponsibly; this language of touch thus challenges the way that symbolic instances of touch have taken precedence over the haptic, providing a kind of cultural engagement that might leave behind the politics of the Left and the Right, while not ignoring them.

This thesis will discuss three contemporary Canadian diasporic novels, Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* (2005), and David Chariandy's *Soucouyant* (2007), for what these novels suggest about the incoherent nature of cultural boundaries and the alternative possibilities for embodiment and community formation through an analysis of the sense of touch. Set in the urban and suburban spaces of Toronto, Ontario, these narratives represent diasporic bodies and experiences less through acts of social, historical, or biological identification, and more so through creative gestures of agency and community. Carrying with them different cultural contexts and thematic styles, *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All*

Long For, and *Soucouyant* demonstrate how diasporic subjects build and sustain affiliations with other bodies in and across their communities, and also show how subjects experience the pressures of a host country to embody fixed physical and cultural positions and integrate into the social fabric by retreating to the marginalia of Canadian liberal multiculturalism. Dionne Brand describes such complex negotiations of diasporic subjects in the host country in *What We All Long For* in terms of the “small objects of foreignness placed in their way” (125). Negotiating the terrain of contemporary Toronto entails that diasporic subjects touch and interact with the materialities of other bodies and spaces in order to uncover either “the larger space of commonality” or discover how it was “denied” to them (Brand 125). Drawing attention to the superficial promise of cultural coherence and the imposition of cross-cultural contact in the host country, these novels also reveal unexpected forms of agency, that is, the subject’s capacity to act and form communities through the sense of touch. *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* show diverse forms of local and global touch, including physical proximate gestures of identification and affiliation, as well as more distant forms of grasping and longing for touch that extend across different bodies and spaces. In the introduction to this thesis, I will lay out the theoretical groundwork that has concerned scholars of diaspora, haptics, materiality, and affect, and move into a discussion of how these novels challenge the representation of coherent cultural identity through diasporic embodiment in contemporary Canada.

In *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (2007), Mark Paterson argues that due to a linguistic shortfall, the more somatic experiences are represented as ostensibly “incoherent or seemingly ineffable” (14). In *Fugitive Pieces*, the novel’s protagonist Jakob Beer alludes to this ineffable quality in the process of historical witnessing, describing how time has been a “blind guide” (5). In *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (2008), Michel

Serres describes touch as the last perceptual means of identification and navigation in a state of total blindness: “Touch is the last remaining means of guiding yourself” (18). In *The Senses of Touch*, Paterson thus points to new ways of articulating touch, feeling, and movement, including those emerging in recent interdisciplinary research fields, such as haptics and affect theory. Like Paterson, I use ‘haptic’ to refer to the sense of touch – to cutaneous, tactile, and other bodily orientations, as touch is most often associated with tactile contact, somatic movement, and physical immediacy, bringing distant objects and people into proximity.² Touch is primarily understood as the action or act of touching with the hand, finger, or other part of the body. *Tactile touch* can therefore be classified as immediate and direct physical contact, being near enough to touch or be touched, being within reach or accessible, or the potential for contact (“touch, v,” OED Online). In addition to the connections between touch and tactility, the etymology of the term haptic is associated with aesthetics and the metaphoric extension of the meaning of touch to the semantic field of affect and emotion: to be touched means to be affected emotionally as well as physically.³ *Affective touch* can be understood both physically and metaphorically, in terms of physical immediacy, as bodies sense, feel, and are touched by other bodies and things in response to and as a result of affects (like emotional stimuli, but consisting of pre-discursive or non-discursive intensities, forces, or impacts), but also in terms of the metaphoric states or responses of characters and readers in the context of a fictional narrative. Touch not only functions as a physical form of verification but also a platform for understanding the less coherent or conscious forms of touch, such as the connections between different bodies in and across the social, political, or geographic boundaries of contemporary life, some of which

² Touch can be divided into several sub-senses, including proprioception (the body’s felt position), kinaesthesia (the sense of the movement of the body and limbs), and vestibular sense (a sense of balance derived from information in the inner ear).

³ The term ‘haptic’ etymologically derives from the Greek words *haptikos* meaning “able to come into contact with,” and from *haptain* meaning “to fasten” (“haptic, n,” OED Online).

may be accidental or arbitrary, as well as within the structure and form of a novel.⁴ This is not to say that tactile touch is incapable of inciting an emotional response or implying a metaphoric relation, but rather to show how physical contact does not need to be achieved for bodies to touch and be touched.

In recent years, haptics has emerged as an interdisciplinary mode of study in the fields of computer science technology, psychology, engineering, and aesthetics. Yet little scholarship has taken up the sense of touch in cultural studies, apart from some recent anthologies on the history of the senses. Haptics originated as a tactile feedback technology in the twentieth century, expanding the functional and expressive possibilities of the user in applying forces, vibrations, or motions to the machine or device (including aircraft controls, telephones, computers, video games, and other touch screen technologies). Haptic technologies have also made it possible to investigate how the human sense of touch works and have inspired contemporary theorists to trace the philosophical and social history of touch.⁵ The sense of touch has had shifting importance in the history of Western thought. Sight has been privileged as the primary sense of intellect, “the noblest of senses” (Scarry 165), and touch as the basest sense. Despite the accounts of Greek philosophers, Enlightenment empiricists, contemporary psychologists, and phenomenologists, who have recognized the interdependence of the senses and have granted sensorial information varying degrees of specificity, autonomy, and transferability, reading and theorizing the body’s senses has often proceeded in “desensualized textual fashion” (Serres qtd. in Marinkova 6). Thrift contends that there is no “stable ‘human’ experience” (2) in Western

⁴ In *The Senses of Touch*, Paterson has similarly distinguished between ‘immediate’ and ‘deep’ or metaphorical touching” (2).

⁵ Some notable theoretical works in related disciplines include Michel Taussig’s *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1993), Constance Classen’s *The Book of Touch* (2005), and Mark Paterson’s *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (2007), and Michel Serres’s *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (2009). Works that have focused on haptics in a literary context include Milena Marinkova’s *Michael Ondaatje: Haptic Aesthetics and Micropolitical Writing* (2011) and Abbie Garrington’s *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (2013).

thought and because the human sensorium is constantly undergoing reinvention by shifting and adding parts to itself, any one theory of touch is insufficient in describing the changing phenomena of bodies and their senses. I contend that the language of touch (which very often surfaces in conjunction with the other senses, that is, as a multisensory language of touch) has naturally permeated many works of diasporic literature, in large part because such narratives describe the complex physical, emotional, and political negotiations of diasporic subjects not only in tactile or emotional terms but in aesthetic terms; a diasporic language of touch thus involves representing qualities such as thoughts of return, relationships with other communities in the diaspora, and lack of full assimilation into the host country. An interdisciplinary theoretical approach to the haptic aesthetics of diasporic literature must necessarily combine theories of tactility, affect, and diasporic embodiment, and together these dynamic developments may work towards what James Clifford has described as a body of theory “dwelling-in-travelling” (2).⁶

During the past two decades, what is now referred to as an “affective turn” has taken place in the social sciences and humanities, advancing discussions around culture, art, subjectivity, and bodies, first initiated by critical theory and cultural criticism under the influence of post-structuralism and deconstruction. The turn towards bodies and affect has in large part implicated a contemporary sense of discontinuity regarding the subject and the less intentional aspects of bodily and social experience. Affect theory gained its footing in psychoanalysis in the mid twentieth century, drawing from a psychoanalytical understanding of affects, their discrete categories, and biological or physiological responses, applying them to social theory. Affect

⁶ Clifford’s term “dwelling-in-travelling” from *Routes Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997) has created a useful context within which to explore how acquiring a second home creates a means of re-discovering and re-connecting with places that hold special meanings in peoples’ lives, thereby serving to counter the sense of place-alienation and dislocation associated with globalization (qtd. in Hall and Muller 113).

theory is attributable to Silvan Tomkins's multivolume *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1962), where he contends that the role of affect has been grossly underestimated in studies of human behaviour, having been previously subordinated to the function of biological drives.⁷ Tomkins states that the primary motivational system of the subject is "the affective system," and that biological drives have motivational impact "only when amplified by the affective system" (6). The affective system in fact provides the "blue-prints for cognition, decision, and action" and is capable of being instigated by both learned and unlearned stimuli (Tomkins 22). The subject's ability to "duplicate and reproduce himself" is guaranteed not only by a responsiveness to biological drive signals but by a responsiveness to whatever circumstances activate positive or negative affects, such as "joy, distress, startle, disgust, aggression, fear, and shame" (22). The subject's physiological and even biological behaviours are thus motivated, intentionally or not, by the body's affects. Postmodern psychoanalysts Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari confirm this assertion in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), where they describe affect or affection as neither a personal feeling or sentiment, but rather an ability to affect or be affected; it is a "prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another" (xvi) and implies an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. Furthermore, Brian Massumi describes the incoherent, autonomous nature of affects, positing that affects escape "confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is" (qtd. in Thrift 180).

In response to Massumi's classification of affects, Thrift has asked how it is possible "to group around states that are neither dependent on lasting objects nor on fixed locations?" (22).

⁷ Affects appear earlier in Spinoza's *Ethics*, where he defines the body's power of acting or being "increased or diminished, aided or restrained" (154) according to its interaction with other bodies or forces. Spinoza defines forty-eight different forms of affect (such as love, hatred, hope, fear, envy, and compassion), which are all manifestations of three basic affects: desire, pleasure, and pain or sorrow.

Thrift defines affect in his work “as the property of the active outcome of an encounter,” which takes on the form of an increase or decrease in the ability of the body and mind alike to act, which can be “positive and increase that ability (and thus ‘joyful’ or euphoric) or negative and diminish that ability (and thus ‘sorrowful’ or dysphoric)” (178). Thrift’s emphasis on relations is especially important, as affects occur in an encounter between “manifold beings” (178), and the shifting outcome of each encounter depends upon what forms of contact, relations, or contexts these beings enter into. I have incorporated affect theory into my examination of haptic aesthetics because affects provide a highly flexible, although perhaps likewise quite slippery, means of exploring what constitutes touch and describing different social interactions and behaviours.

Having named the affective turn in the twenty-first century, Patricia Ticineto Clough explains in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007) that she wanted to revisit the various intellectual discourses that she and other authors explored in order to “refind the capacities of critical theory to address the reconfiguration of technology, matter, and bodies” (3). I am interested in how this shift towards affect has pointed to matter’s capacity for self-organization in being informational and communicative with other bodies in a culture that sees all matter tending toward entropy. Michael Hardt notes in the foreword to Clough’s *Affective Turn* that because affects most often refer equally to the body and the mind, to both reason and the passions, they enter “the realm of causality” regarding the intentional aspects of the body and bodily expression (“Foreword: What Affects Are Good For,” Hardt ix). Yet theorists like Clough and Marinkova have also embraced how affects can be less teleological and freer in their workings than other aspects of the body, as affects are understood in between perception and consciousness, stimulus and response, physiology and psychology and thus resist the more

definitive structures of biological and tactile social experience. Clough grants considerable agency to affects because they possess a forceful capacity to affect other bodies or urge their actions, even inciting physiological responses that are unlearned. She defines affects as “pre-individualized bodily forces augmenting or diminishing a body’s capacity to act” (Clough 1). Marinkova similarly grants affects a form of agency in their relationship to the sense of touch, noting that haptics and affects share the potential for a “prediscursive ‘enfleshed’ agency” (6) that is not reducible to social structures. Prior to cognition or a coherent sense of embodiment, affects can be attached to a diversity of things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects. Although affects are not always reducible to social structures, the circulation of forms of social power and inequality can shape affective, embodied experiences. Affects, as flexible and mobile forces or intensities that influence the subject’s body, provide a more explanatory way of reading the complex movements and negotiations of diasporic or transnational subjects in contemporary spaces of Canada.

Alongside discussion of affects is the question of representing embodiment, of which Taussig wonders, in deconstructing the production of cultural artifacts and their inner and outer significations: “why is embodiment itself necessary?” (8). By embodiment, Taussig means the role that the physical body plays in shaping the mind and the relationship of this representational practice to the production of knowledge. Addressing concerns of representation and knowledge production, specifically regarding Cuna curing figurines in native Panamanian culture, Taussig questions the problematic history of ethnography in representing cultural embodiment (that is, the “fundamental split between the outer carved form of the curing figurines and their inner substance” [8]), including the ties between ethnographic practices, native healing, and the history

of colonial racism. Ultimately, Taussig's question regarding the necessity of embodiment drives at the same concerns regarding subjective coherence and sovereign bodies in critical cultural studies. Thrift also cautions that the recent turn to corporeality has allowed a series of assumptions to be "smuggled in about the active, synthetic and purposive role of embodiment" (10). In particular, it is assumed that bodies are always "bodies-in-action," able to exhibit a kind of "continuous intentionality, able to be constantly enrolled in activity" (Thrift 10). Every occasion, according to Thrift, in this theoretical realm seems to be "willed, cultivated or at least honed" (10). He contends that with this overemphasis on intensity and intentionality, embodiment should also include "tripping, falling over, and a whole host of other such mistakes" (Thrift 10). Pursuing similar intersections between the concrete and more transitory forms of embodiment, I would like to discover the possibilities of haptics in challenging the necessity of unified or monolithic forms of embodiment by tracing alternative means of relaying of the histories and experiences of diasporic subjects and their communities through creative sites of touch or metaphors of contact.

Furthermore, in contemporary discourses of diaspora, theorists such as Rogers Brubaker, Robin Cohen, and William Safran continue to debate what constitutes diasporic embodiment, especially in the contexts of globalization and cyberspace.⁸ The term diaspora has traditionally referenced communities of people dislocated from their homelands – those who have been dispersed from an original homeland, often traumatically, to one or more foreign regions. The term has seen much revision from the traditional victim diaspora to additional grounds for migration, including labour, imperialism, or trade, and more deterritorializing contexts, such as

⁸ The term 'diaspora' etymologically derives from the Greek words *dia* (across) and *sperin* (to sow or scatter seeds) and refers to a scattered or dispersed population with a common origin in a smaller geographic area. The term has traditionally referred to the expulsion of the Jews from Israel in the sixth century BCE, when they were exiled to Babylonia ("diaspora, n," OED Online).

those groups who do not have a literal homeland but who still experience a similar historical disconnection from an ethnic identity or fixed origin. In this vein, Rogers Brubaker warns that as the term diaspora is increasingly used in different contexts, its meaning has been “stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural, and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted,” resulting in what he calls a “‘diaspora’ diaspora” – a dispersion of the meanings of the term in “semantic, conceptual, and disciplinary space” (1). Rather than stretch the term ‘diaspora’ too far beyond its original contexts or commit to a universal, fixed notion of diasporic embodiment, I hope to implicate the sense of touch more broadly across the shifting terrain of contemporary diasporic and transnational discourses.

For Robin Cohen, it has been necessary not only to draw critically from the Jewish tradition of diasporic studies but to be sensitive to the inevitable dilutions, changes, and expansions of the meaning of the term as it comes to be more widely applied. In terms of the traumatic dispersal of diasporas historically, Cohen concedes that although many diasporas are seen to be “born of flight rather than choice” (180), migration scholars often find it difficult to separate voluntary from involuntary migration. Cohen also remarks on the sense of protectionism and unease that invariably steeps discussions regarding what constitutes contemporary diasporic embodiment:

The history of the Jewish diaspora is one not only of endurance and achievement but also of anxiety and distrust. However economically or professionally successful, however long settled in peaceful settings, it is difficult for many Jews in the diaspora not to ‘keep their guard up,’ to feel the weight of their history and the cold clammy fear that brings the demons in the night to remind them of their murdered ancestors. The sense of unease or difference that members of the diaspora feel in their countries of settlement often results in

a felt need for protective cover in the bosom of the community or a tendency to identify closely with the imagined homeland and with co-ethnic communities in other countries.

(20)

Common among diasporic communities is the ongoing desire for proximity to tradition, land, or origins; not surprisingly Cohen cites the “weight of their history” (2) as being a proximate one. In my own examination of diasporic embodiment, I proceed carefully in this regard, mindful of the same weight felt by critics, including the vulnerabilities that have accompanied these definitional practices. Such vulnerabilities include risks of prejudice and apprehension among and outside of diasporic communities, as well as general resistances to alternative modalities that might constitute a broadening or shifting sense of diasporic embodiment. Such discursive anxieties also generate new, rigorous, and creative forms of cultural theory, some of which I hope to examine through an analysis of the sense of touch.

Cohen acknowledges that as much as the Jewish diasporic tradition has been at the heart of any definition of diaspora, it is necessary to take full account of this complex and diverse concept in order to transcend its more tradition iterations, noting how the word is now being used in a variety of new and suggestive contexts. As William Safran also notes, the term diaspora is now deployed as “a metaphoric designation” describing different categories of people with a broad base of affiliations and contexts, such as “expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*” (83). Safran’s invocation of the metaphoric dimension of the concept provides an opportunity to involve the specificities of bodies and senses in a broader discussion of global diasporic communities. I hope to unsettle previous definitions of diaspora by embracing a more sensual and affective reading of diasporic subjects and their communities, which opens up new possibilities for transnational affiliation and

community formation in global experience.

According to both Cohen and Safran, the term diaspora designates “*different peoples*” (21), that is, peoples whose communal, ethnic, or racial affiliations mark them as “other” to a dominant or majority elite class, such as Pakistanis in Britain, the Chinese in South East Asia, Greeks, Poles, Palestinians, Latin Americans, or blacks in North America and the Caribbean, and so on. Pushing this designation even further, I claim that the term diaspora and associated narratives of transnational movement now, more than ever, emphasize different peoples as well as their *different bodies*, experiences, and senses, thus expressing the diversity and interplay of the senses and affects, influencing or resulting from diasporic movements and other transnational affiliations. The invocation of *different bodies* in diasporic discourse also points to other contexts, including biopower and biomedicine, as well as broader implications of multiculturalism, transnationalism, and globalization.

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006), Benedict Anderson proposes a now well-known definition of the modern nation as an “imagined community” (6). He writes that imagined communities are “*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will not know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). Such communities are *symbolically* constituted more than they are actually comprised, this being in large part due to the proliferation of the print media, which has made it increasingly possible for national political awareness despite the distance between community members. Working in conjunction with Anderson’s characterization of community, I would like to conceive of diasporic communities and their respective bodily and geographic longings in terms of this definition of the national community as an imagined community, as it sheds an important light on the condition of being

both away from a cultural body in terms of felt proximity and yet within the shared space of a community that is always present by way of the collective social imagination.⁹ According to Anderson, communities are distinguishable not by their “falsity/genuineness,” but by “[styles] in which they are imagined” (6), styles that facilitate an awareness not only of the space of the modern nation but also unforeseen forms of shared proximity and community formation.

In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1987), Elaine Scarry similarly conceives of a shared social condition within a particular national or political space, where pain happens “not several miles below our feet or many miles above our heads but within the bodies of persons who inhabit the world through which we each day make our way, and who may at any moment be separated from us by only a space of several inches” (4). Like Anderson’s notion of imagined communities, in which nationhood is shared even in absentia, Scarry speaks of shared social pain through a similar double bind of proximity and unawareness. She continues:

when one speaks about ‘one’s own physical pain’ and about ‘another person’s physical pain,’ one might almost appear to be speaking about two wholly distinct orders of events. For the one person whose pain it is, it is ‘effortlessly’ grasped (that is, even with the most heroic effort it cannot *not* be grasped); while for the person outside the sufferer’s body, what is ‘effortless’ is *not* grasping it (it is easy to remain wholly unaware of its existence; even with effort, one may remain in doubt about its existence or may retain the astonishing freedom of denying its existence; and finally, if with the best effort of sustained attention one successfully apprehends it, the aversiveness of the ‘it’ one

⁹ One might also make note of the irony of Anderson’s assertion regarding “imagined communities,” as these are communities sometimes imagined in the negative sense of community formation under a pretext of war, extremist nationalism, chauvinism, or other mal intent. Affective understandings of imagined community formation must, therefore, necessarily incorporate an understanding of positive and negative affects – both senses of joy and grief, animosity, and fear – that may or may not constitute a shared experience of touch.

apprehends will only be a shadowy fraction of the actual 'it'). (4)

Although Scarry does not describe pain in precisely the same relational sense as affect (that is, a subject does not have pain *for* someone but just pain), I argue that the sense of being in pain and embodying pain can sometimes be equivalently as relational as other affective states and therefore, at times, equally as evocative of a sense of touching or of being touched. For Scarry, physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to “a state anterior to language,” such as “the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). Even as Scarry contends that pain evades language by always moving beyond it, I claim that this state of pain is not unlike its affective antecedents, as bodies either carry on in pain or in an affective state of hurting that is prior to discourse or cognition, but this state is nevertheless always relational, even if unintentional: “we do not simply ‘have feelings’ but have feelings *for* somebody or something” (Scarry 5).

Despite the apparent ease with which I seek to conceive of the sharing of affect or pain, in citing Scarry, I wonder how any conscious form of relationality is achieved. Scarry asks: “Who are the authors of this attempted reversal, the creators or near-creators of a language of pain?” (6). The language of pain is not easily constructed in isolation, even as writers seek to articulate traumatic experiences or histories through the more free flowing narratives of fiction; rather, the language of pain is affectively and relationally built. As Chariandy grants in *Soucouyant*, “History is about relations” (106). I suggest that the same language of pain manifests itself throughout the narratives of the three novels, within the imagined communities and the unimagined affiliations that take place between diasporic bodies, especially through gestures of touch. As Scarry claims that whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its “unsharability,” ensuring this unsharability through “its resistance to language” (4), I would like

to propose that such resistance to language produces its own forms of communication, not necessarily through an active representative voice but through a felt language of the body, something affective, sensual, shifting, and at times creative.

In *Empire* (2000), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have likewise identified a “paradox of incommunicability” (54) regarding the failed communication of social, national, and global struggle, calling for the construction of a “new common language that facilitates communication, as the languages of anti-imperialism and proletarian nationalism did for the struggles of a previous era” (57). However, Hardt and Negri ultimately fall short in this regard, as they admit that recognizing a common enemy and inventing a common language of struggle is an important political task, but that this line of analysis “fails to grasp the real potential presented by the new struggles” (57). For Hardt and Negri, their intuition tells them that the “model of horizontal articulation,” that is, the global relational model of power that centers only on the main political actors (public officials, regulators, and service providers) rather than a diversity of local and global bodies (including both citizens and diasporas), is inadequate in “recognizing the way in which contemporary struggles achieve global significance” and that such a model “in fact blinds us to their real potential” (57). Rather than adopt this horizontal model, I propose a “lateral” (Berlant 759) form of articulation in describing the local and global contexts of haptic diasporic community formation (although they imply the same thing, the term ‘lateral’ carries a more tactile exploratory connotation than ‘horizontal’ in Berlant’s work). Berlant introduces “lateral agency” as a sociopolitical interruption across the uneven terrain of biopolitics, which has consisted of the “physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people” (759) through forms of racism, poverty, and obesity in capitalist Western societies. Such a form of agency “recasts the taxonomies of causality, subjectivity, and life” (758), as subjects are

conceived of more humanely and empathetically across the public or private terrain where such inequalities have been dispersed. I propose a form of lateral agency that traverses this terrain (not solely as a *surface* phenomenon but also as a *deeply* affective interaction), deconstructing the boundaries of coherent subjectivity and social experience, which have shaped or misshaped what constitutes diasporic embodiment. Insofar as haptic communication occurs laterally across the skin surfaces of bodies as well as across the boundaries of local and global communities, the language of touch offers an articulation that grants diasporic subjects the agency to metaphorically traverse the otherwise restrictive hierarchical boundaries of social and geographic space in order to form both tactile and newly imagined communities. The language of touch thus reveals how sociocultural relations occur not only through vertical or hierarchical articulations but also through lateral and empathetic haptic affiliations. I will later explore the sense of touch laterally in terms of its surface implications as well as its depths with respect to the Caribbean myth of the soucouyant and diasporic metaphors of skin diving.

Having traced recent theorists interested in the bodily capacities, affects, and sociocultural affiliations of the contemporary subject, I seek to expand these ideas further by developing an interdisciplinary approach to the haptic aesthetics of contemporary diasporic literature. By haptic aesthetics, I mean the qualities of touch, including tactile and affective touch, traceable in literature through narration, metaphor, imagery, and other aesthetic elements. According to Paterson, aesthetics – which refer to “our capacity for feeling, sensing and being affected” (83) – involves a sense of touch, including visual, tactile, and affective qualities that inform our worldly encounters with things. Similar to recent approaches to cultural geography that have emphasized “practices” and performativity (such as Nigel Thrift’s non-representational theoretical approach), and as a relatively new theoretical intervention in literary studies, haptic

aesthetics remains a somewhat unstructured and thus highly performative means of reading and exploring literature. However, thematically, haptic aesthetics allow the reader to understand the extent to which diasporic subjects feel tactilely or affectively engaged with or removed from their sociocultural or geographic contexts. Marinkova describes haptic aesthetics as a multisensory reading that “implicates touch but is not reduced to it, that involves the aesthetic without idealizing it, that is ethical without moralizing” (5). She suggests that haptic aesthetics “rejoice in the exploration of the intimate space of the bodily and the microsocial space of the interpersonal” (4). She seeks to demonstrate how such a brand of aesthetics has an empowering micropolitical potential, which participates in the political domain without entirely discarding the invocation of aesthetics. Haptic aesthetics in diasporic literature point to the complex physical, emotional, and political negotiations of diasporic subjects in aesthetic terms, representing both the proximate and distant aspects of transnational experience less through coherent identification and more so through creative and sensually evocative narratives, character development, metaphor, and imagery. I explore haptic elements in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, although fictional, in terms of how they illustrate the very real material affiliations of diasporic subjects in contemporary Canada.

As a work of historical fiction dealing with the aftermath of the Holocaust (described by the novel’s protagonist Jakob Beer as a “biography of longing” [17]), Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces* grapples with the warning given by Theodor Adorno, following the Holocaust, that “[t]o write after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today” (Adorno and Tiedmann xv). *Fugitive Pieces* seeks to develop a language adequate enough to describe “the most important events” of Jakob’s life, the ones that he did not “witness” but nevertheless experienced from “behind a wall, from underground” (17)

while he was hidden. *Fugitive Pieces* concerns the impossibility of coherent testimony and embodiment in response to the atrocities of the Holocaust. It considers the tactile and affective affiliations of first- and second-generation diasporic subjects following the Holocaust, or what Patricia Clough calls “bodies of ‘entanglement’” (7). With respect to Michaels’s haptic aesthetic, the novel traces the proximities, distances, and traumatic entanglements of those affected by the aftermath of the Holocaust. Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For* is also suitable for an analysis of its aesthetic shift towards the body and the senses; like the art installation of the novel’s protagonist Tuyen, *What We All Long For* is quite literally a “book of longings” (151) as its title suggests. The novel traces the lives of first- and second-generation diasporic subjects living in contemporary Toronto. Like the narratives of trauma outlined in *Fugitive Pieces*, Brand’s novel tells a similar tale of “transgenerational haunting” (Clough 7), a trauma passed down from one generation to the next. Brand’s haptic aesthetic considers the “permutations of existence” (5) that take place among diasporic bodies in Toronto. Brand’s novel seeks to identify alternative sites of community, fostered haptically across diasporic communities through tactile and affective gestures of touch, including the “sandpapered... jostling and scraping” (5) that brings diasporic subjects together in Toronto. David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant: A Novel of Forgetting* similarly explores diasporic embodiment through a haptic aesthetic; it does so by confronting the complex social, medical, and political challenges faced by diasporic subjects through an account of dementia in Scarborough (northwest of Toronto) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Soucouyant* tells the story of Adele, a middle-aged Trinidadian woman with pre-senile or early-onset dementia. Adele and her husband were wary of the Canadian medical system following her diagnosis, as it “always seemed to presume meanings and circumstances which were never wholly familiar to them in the first place” (39). They were “especially

suspicious about medical institutions and offices. The scissors and hooks which certainly lurked in those antiseptic spaces” (39). These scissors and hooks, which are implicitly used to touch, prod, and probe the human body, suggest that a haptic violence informs their suspicions of the Canadian medical system. Chariandy’s novel tells of other more affirmative forms of touch that serve as alternative modes of communication and verification for Adele and those who care for her. *Soucouyant* not only contends with concerns of biomedicine, that is, the relationship between embodiment, the biological body, and the social nature of medical practice, but also the epistemological pressures faced by diasporic subjects in multicultural spaces, as the novel retells the Caribbean myth of the soucouyant, a female skin diving vampire that Adele later becomes in the suburbs of Toronto.¹⁰

I read *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* in terms of how they address the pressures of cultural coherence, official multiculturalism, and medical health across the haptic geography of Toronto through the diasporic language of touch. In “Skinscapes: Embodiment, Culture, and Environment,” David Howes writes that once in a while we are “tangibly reminded of the materiality of [our environments]” (29), that in a city like Toronto, the opportunity of acquiring “skin knowledge” of the environment is made more difficult, as the space itself has been designed so as “not to impinge on our skins” (28). “Skin knowledge” is the knowledge of the world that one acquires through one’s skin, as a combination of sense and memory embedded in the skin. It is what enables a person to find their way through and mediate his or her surroundings, locating sites of affiliation and community (Howes 27). Many of the physical movements and embodiments of diasporic subjects occur in some affiliation with their environments, in the urban or suburban spaces of the city: *Fugitive Pieces* moves from Nazi-

¹⁰ A soucouyant in Trinidadian myth, also known as Ole-Higue or Loogaroo elsewhere in the Caribbean, is a skin diving witch vampire. I elaborate further on the haptic implications of the soucouyant myth in Chapter Two.

occupied Poland to Greece, and eventually to Toronto's emerging multicultural landscape, including St. Clair Avenue and Danforth Avenue, the shared community of Greek and Jewish diasporas; *What We All Long For* centers on Toronto's Chinatown along Spadina Avenue, extending out to the suburbs of Richmond Hill, as well as abroad to the refugee camps of Vietnam and the Thai underground; and *Soucouyant* is located in the suburb of Scarborough and the Scarborough Bluffs, as well as flashing back to Adele's life in Chaguaramas, Trinidad. Whether they are conscious of it or not, subjects and their bodies are always in touch with the spaces that they occupy, through a kind of skin knowledge. This skin knowledge opens up bodies to the world, as environments, whether natural or built, "tattoo our skin with tactile impressions" (Classen 29).

Engaging with theorists associated with the affective turn and sensory studies, such as Clough, Marinkova, Thrift, and Paterson, who seek to discover new haptic affiliations with bodies and geographies, this thesis will work towards a new aesthetic understanding of diasporic embodiment, embracing what Haraway has described in cultural studies as the promise of "a never-settled universal," a collective and yet personal language achieved through "radical specificity" ("Ecce Homo" 54). I will engage with *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* for how they depict the haptic relationships that diasporic subjects have to other bodies and spaces. I contend that the tactile and affective relationships that these diasporic subjects have with their environments resemble a "constantly evolving distribution of different hybrids with different reaches" (Thrift 10). These shifting orientations and hybrids challenge the emphasis that has been placed on the coherent identification of cultural identity, embodiment, and geography. Furthermore, I seek to reveal the gaps and phantom limbs that emerge from

engaging with theories of the subject without insisting on concrete forms of embodiment or understanding.

In Chapter One of this thesis, I will focus on the communicative potential of touch, including tactile and affective forms of touch, the treatment of traumatized bodies, and other haptic ontologies of diasporic community formation. In Chapter Two, I will explore potential sites of institutionalized haptic violence and alternative possibilities for community formation and embodiment through diasporic skin diving. In Chapter Three, I will extend the possibility of skin diving and diasporic becoming further by exploring the local and global implications of hapticity, including the spatial binds and creative possibilities of deterritorialized diasporic touch. In my conclusion, I will retrace the purpose of my own project by implicating myself tactilely and affectively in the act of touching on history and cultural embodiment in contemporary diasporic literature.

Chapter One: How Touch Communicates

Do we learn a ‘mother touch’ along with a mother tongue? A tactile code of communication that underpins the way in which we engage with other people and the world? ... Our hands and bodies learn to ‘speak’ a certain language of touch, a language shaped by culture and inflected by individuals. (Classen 13)

In my introduction, I outlined some contemporary scholarship that has taken up the body and the senses in order to connect these theories to my own analysis of the sense of touch in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*. In this chapter, I will explore how touch communicates in these novels by examining both tactile and affective forms of touch. I have defined *tactile touch* as immediate and direct physical contact, being near enough to touch or be touched, being within reach or accessible, or the potentiality of contact (“touch, v,” OED Online), and *affective touch* as pre-cognitive bodily intensities, forces, or impacts. I hope to illustrate how both tactile and affective forms of touch reveal the diasporic subject’s desire for proximity or conversely, his or her feelings of vulnerability, and how the complex sociopolitical negotiations of diasporic subjects are expressed by either a literal or metaphoric language of touch. In addition to exploring the more palpable gestures of touch, including bodily embrace, touch by fingertips, the grazing of physical bodies, and touch as emotional stimuli, I will consider the haptic nature of diasporic community formation, using Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory – a relational approach to systems and bodies that emphasizes how component parts of a group can be detached from one assemblage, plugged into another context, and imply a interactive or material presence – in order to argue how diasporic communities can be reimagined physically, socially, and aesthetically in the host country. Assemblages, which originated as three dimensional postmodern works of art and have also surfaced as research terrain in the archaeology world, have by their very nature haptic contours and elements with

which the subject consciously or unconsciously interacts. I hope to emphasize the haptic connections of diasporic bodies through the formation of haptic assemblages, which will offer a new articulation of Anderson's "imagined communities" in the contexts of these novels.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, the sense of touch illustrates the diasporic subject's desire for proximity, fear of vulnerability, and other forms of shared experience, difference, or community in and across the landscape of Toronto. According to Marinkova, touch is not only cutaneous tactile experience but also the overall feeling of one's corporeality (proprioception and kinesthesia), and the "sense most difficult to localize in a particular organ, isolate from the rest of the sensorium, or even contain within the boundaries of the self" (6). Touch offers a way of understanding the complex bodily and cultural negotiations of diasporic subjects within and outside of their communities without imposing concrete forms of cultural coherence or identification.

Tactile touch denotes the direct connection of the senses (to put one's hand or finger, or some part of the body upon or into contact with something else so as to feel it). It implies the immediate contact and proximity among bodies of a shared social space. In cases of tactile touch, a moment of haptic perception occurs between two or more bodies, serving as a reminder of the contexts of their social relationships. Haptic perception – the process of recognizing objects or other bodies through touch – involves a combination of somatosensory perception patterns on the skin surface (such as edges, curvature, texture), by hand position and conformation, or experienced at a more combined level of the body in its orientation or relation to other bodies. In its most tactile manifestations, touch shapes a subject's encounter with his or her body in relation to other bodies and things, as it seeks to establish connection, assembly, and association between otherwise disparate objects or people, most often by tactile means. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob

relates how he was soothed by the weight of Athos's "safe, heavy hand" (21) on his head. Here, touch serves as immediate physical support to Jakob, as he and Athos maintain a secure and restorative relationship following their flight from German-occupied Poland. In *What We All Long For*, Brand writes regarding a difficult conversation between brother and sister that, "Tuyen felt [Binh's] arm around her shoulder more than she heard what he said" (145). As brother and sister, Tuyen and Binh occupy a complicated emotional space where tactile touch serves as a distraction for Tuyen from the content of their conversation. Similarly, in *Soucouyant*, Adele's son recounts a moment shared with his mother, as she moved her hand from his cheek up the side of his face, slowly tracing his eyebrows, and whispering "Eyestache" (92). Physical touch serves as a reminder of Adele's relationship to her son, who becomes her primary care giver as she slips in and out of awareness.

The extent and form of touch can indicate the nature and stage of a relationship, as people "suggest, impose, accept or reject relationships through touch" (Finnegan 19). Touch is a powerful vehicle in the interactions between human beings, with conspicuous potential for "aggression, sex, and physical coercion" (Finnegan 18). The notion of "social touching," whether tactile or affective, thus reinforces the communicative potential of touch:

Touch represents a confirmation of our boundaries and separateness while permitting a union or connection with others that transcends physical limits. For this reason, of all the communication channels, touch is the most carefully guarded and monitored, the most infrequently used, yet the most powerful and immediate. (Thayer qtd. in Finnegan 18)

Inasmuch as touch may be guarded, monitored, or even rejected in certain contexts, it is ultimately associated with a form of social knowledge. The sense of touch, like vision, articulates an equally rich, complex world, a world of movement, exploration, and non-verbal social

communication (Paterson 2). Diasporic embodiments and migrations likewise imply a world full of complex movements and non-verbal social communications. For example, in *What We All Long For*, in contrast to Carla, her brother Jamal's complex and at times criminal relationship to the city of Toronto is described through the senses: "His life was in his skin, in his mouth, in his eyes, in the closest physical encounters. He operated only on his senses as far as Carla was concerned" (32). Yet touch is not so distant from thought as one might imagine (as indeed Carla later realizes in the novel), because touch is the one sense that can provide us with a "sensation of our mental processes" (Classen 5).

Tactile forms of touch occur throughout *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, reflecting the shifting, exiled nature of diasporic bodies and their ongoing challenges while living in the host country. In *Soucouyant*, we learn how touch has played a vital role in Adele's ability to mediate her surroundings, to form and reform relationships in spite of the changing extent of her illness and her isolation while living in Scarborough:

Touch has remained important to Mother. It steadies her to an increasingly alien world and jars her to recollection when sight and sound fail to do so. Mother may not always be able to remember me. Not always. But she instantly remembers physical quirks like my trick knee. She's also able to read something on the bumps of my spine and in my hair, a texture somewhere between the soft and tight curls of her own and the spiny quills of my father's. She recognizes the odd oblong shape of my skull and that my ears stick out.

(41).

Likewise, in *What We All Long For*, touch is important to Tuyen's father Tuan upon entry into his host country. Having worked in Vietnam as a civil engineer prior to his move to Canada, Tuan is unable to work in his own field and resolves to run a family restaurant in Toronto. He

takes up the hobby of drawing all the buildings in the city “as if he had built them... as if he was still what he was” (113-114). Tuan thinks about touch, contact, and movement differently than his wife Cam, who is still haunted by the event of their pasts; this is because the haunting sense of their past risks “days of paralysis” (114) for Tuan, his limbs feeling weak and unable to work. Tuan is only “too aware of how important it was to have the right weight of objects, the correct angle of alignment for a stable structure. So too with events” (114). In response to her father’s hidden toiling, Tuyen learned to draw and imitate him since she was a child, the “posture and movement of his drawing hand,” unaware of “what he was actually doing” (115). In each of these tactile forms of touch, there emerge important questions and implications regarding the diasporic subject’s sense of belonging and his or her sense of coherent embodiment and understanding in the public and private spaces of the host country.

Diasporic subjects affectively engage with and are touched by other bodies, things, and spaces in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*. Edith Wyschogrod writes that touch is “not a sense at all; it is in fact a metaphor for the impingement of the world as a whole upon subjectivity... to touch is to comfort oneself not in opposition to this given but in proximity with it” (qtd. in Paterson 147). Classen further relates how touch is “not so distant from thought as we might imagine” (5), precisely because touch is linked to and in many cases manifests itself as a form of affect, bringing bodies in contact with each other through pre-cognitive forces and impacts. In *What We All Long For*, for example, Tuyen acknowledges her relationship to her family and their traumatic diasporic history, noting that while in their presence, it “occurred to her that the silence between them was more than silence” (123). Their relationship constituted a withdrawal from touch, a “leave-taking” (123). Affective touch sometimes manifests itself differently from tactile touch, as it not only constitutes the contact of

bodies but also their emotional withdrawal. Paterson also explores a form of affective touch that is not entirely separate from tactile touch. He sees the possibility of embodied perception that does not exclusively involve interior mental content nor objective external events, one that is a “precognitive bodily engagement with the world,” which is part of our bodily bearing, calling this relationship the “body schema” (27). According to Paterson, touch, in general, consists of a manifold of sensations, as ‘feeling’ involves not only perception by touch, but also perception of the whole bodily state, involving introspection and somatic sensations (27). In *What We All Long For*, Tuyen is described, while holding her camera and spying on her brother Binh, as “watchful, feathered, clawed, and probing” (Brand 2). This passage reflects the tactile function of holding the camera and its affective touching quality, including both the visual element of observation and the affective force of “probing” (Brand 3). In his chapter “Affecting Touch: Flesh and Feeling-With,” Paterson inquires after the more transitory aspects of affective touch, wondering:

Is there *a* sense of touch, or are there in fact *many*? What is touch, after all? What if we consider touch as a metaphor ... as interpretive, enactive, expressive, as experiential framework and conceptual resource; bringing distant objects and people into proximity? The model not only for all other senses ... but a model for sympathy, of literally *feeling with*? (147)

Paterson questions the relationship between tactile touch and affective touch by challenging the necessity of proximity in order to achieve touch. Having cited Tuyen’s feeling of “leave-taking” (123) in the presence of her family, which indicates how touch can be a form of withdrawal even while in proximity, I argue that touch can be achieved at a distance, through the experience of “*feeling with*” (Paterson 147). In addition to the tactile instances of touch, the body’s affective capacities thus expand the definition of touch further by showing the intertwinings of “touching

and feeling, intercorporeality, and the exchange of affects between bodies” (Paterson 147).

Affective touch continually overflows the boundaries of physiological and psychological schemes of interpretation. As Abbie Garrington points out in “Touching Texts: The Haptic Sense in Modernist Literature,” the haptic sense combines touch, in the “reaching and touching of any part of the skin,” with “kinaesthesia,” or the “body’s appreciation of its own movement” (811). Touch constitutes both contact and the withdrawing from contact with another body or thing, either prior to the achievement of touch or following touch. At times, touch must necessarily imply its own absence, just as speech requires silence in order to be legible. Giorgio Agamben describes potentiality as “not simply the potential to do this or that thing,” to come into contact with something directly, but also “potential not-to, potential not to pass into actuality” (180). Insofar as the borders between touching and not touching are always fuzzy, the absence of touch suggests that some form of touching can actually be accomplished at a distance (such as in the Japanese form of palm healing called Reiki, which does not consist of direct physical contact). Even in the absence of touch, in the felt distance between bodies and things, touch is often still implied. The potentiality of touch can be seen in cultures like colonial India where castes of “untouchables” were permanently withdrawn from others in public spaces or in forms of contemporary harm reduction through social work, where subjects practice behaviours of avoidance in order to withdraw from any contact with harmful bodies or substances. The same potentiality of touch is present in diasporic communities, where subjects who have initially withdrawn from their homelands can anticipate some possible form of return, either physical or imaginative. However, some diasporic communities have chosen to withdraw from what they perceive as a cultural homeland due to political disputes (such as among some of the middle-eastern diasporas of the United States), and such physical and emotional withdrawals from intra-

cultural touch embody their own sense of independence and agency. Diasporic subjects can withdraw from touch, but they may from time to time experience the phantom limbs of their histories and be met with ghostly encounters of their pasts that have touching implications.

Having thus far examined the deliberate tactile instances of touch and embraced the more affective forms of haptic contact, I contend that the complex bodily negotiations of diasporic subjects in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* can best be understood in terms of their use of haptic metaphors of contact and affect interactions. For instance, in *What We All Long For*, when Tuyen finds a photograph near an ATM machine of a couple from 1968, whom she assumed were “in the heat of a love affair then,” she “put the photograph down gently, feeling its afterimage in her hand” (143). This “afterimage” is not merely the filmy quality of a picture left on Tuyen’s palm, nor does it chiefly imply a literal tactile site of touch; the picture affectively imprints Tuyen, transferring a narrative of two mysterious lovers from the image of the photo to the surface of her body.¹¹ In *The Skin of Film*, Laura Marks describes this form of affective touch as a form of haptic visuality, wherein one is “more inclined to graze than to gaze ... making oneself vulnerable to the image” (185). This suggestion of vulnerability in affective touch is also apparent in *Fugitive Pieces*, as Jakob becomes wary of sharing his traumatic past with Michaela through touch: “I know if she touches me my shame will be exposed, she’ll see my ugliness, my thinning hair, the teeth that aren’t my own. She’ll see in my body the terrible things that have marked me” (179). Jakob describes how Michaela seemed to carry his memories in her hands “unknowingly” (192). He further grants a vulnerable, unintentional nature to touch in how only after initiating physical intimacy through a kind of shared vulnerability did Michaela “so slowly, [like] an animal outlining territory... burst into touch” (180). Affective touch

¹¹ I read the affective context of this haptic encounter as Brand ends the paragraph and the first subsection of chapter twelve with this particular passage, providing no further details regarding the afterimage.

engages with a sense of alterity or difference by entering into relation with another body, and this form of touch is thus associated with either the prospect of empathy or a risk of potential harm or violence. Wyschogrod defines empathy as the “feeling-act through which a self grasps the affective act of another through an affective act of its own” (qtd. in Paterson 164). This sense of empathetic grasping may also be seen during Athos’ initial embrace of Jakob in the bog of Poland, trying to “convince [Jakob] of his goodness” (93), wherein Jakob realizes that it was not Athos’ words or his face, but his hands that reassured him: “If truth is not in the face, then where is it? In the hands! In the hands!” (93).

Tactile and affective forms of touch have a connective sociocultural potential, one that embraces both the possibility of touch in proximity to cultural meaning and other forms of touch at a distance. Diasporic touch involves the dual aspect of touching and being touched but without the concrete boundaries of geography, which have otherwise determined a sense of sociocultural coherence; instead bodies can relate to one another from separate geographic positions and can share new social meanings and significances (and this coming together is not always a conscious act of embodiment). Classen claims that touch is not just a “private act,” it is a “medium for the expression, experience and contestation of social values and hierarchies” (1). Although Classen broadly asserts how the “culture of touch” involves “all of culture” (1), touch can be and is shared in private, intimate, and physical encounters as well as in and across different diasporic communities. Although seemingly omnipresent, touch must be understood not universally, but rather in terms of its specific, contextualized interactions with other aspects of the body and other bodies in constituting a diversity of experiences.

Affective touch, which is most often relational and thus vital in creating community, is represented in *What We All Long For* by a kind of touching-sound. Tuyen conceives of the

beauty of Toronto as “polyphonic” (149), engendering a sense of many voices and thus many affective and physical bodies moving together in a collective shared space. This is what always “filled [Tuyen] with hope, this is what she thought her art was about – the representation of that gathering of voices and longings that summed themselves into a kind of language, yet indescribable” (149). Despite being warned in this moment by a Spanish woman that she must be careful “when [to] speak,” this polyphonic hapticity (that is, the experience of touching and being touch that combines into a kind of tactile-affective sound) suggests for Tuyen the promise for certain kinds of sociocultural “unities” (149). Similar “unities” or haptic gestures in the novel include the dancing of different sociocultural bodies at the downtown club the Paramount. The Paramount represents a place where people went to dance to diverse music and “feel their own skin, in their own life. ... Where else could you enjoy the only thing you were sure God gave you, your body, without getting into any kind of trouble for it?” (Brand 95-96). Dance, according to Thrift, is important, as it engages the whole of the senses:

in bending time and space into new kinesthetic shapes, [dance] taps into the long and variegated history of the unleashing performance, leads us to understand movement as a potential, challenges the privileging of meaning (especially by understanding the body as being expressive without being a signifier)... gives weight to intuition as thinking-in-movement, foregrounds the ‘underlanguage’ of gesture and kinetic semantics in general... teaches us anew about evolution... and is able to point to key cognitive processes like imitation and suggestion which are now understood to be pivotal to any understanding of understanding. (14)

The performativity of dance and bodily practices are linked together within what Thrift describes as “non-representational theory,” or the “theory of practices,” an interdisciplinary approach to

cultural geography that I will later engage with in Chapter Three. Catherine Nash has examined Thrift's theorization of dance – as “beyond the realm of language,” as “preverbal or preliterate” (Nash 656) – contending that any interdisciplinary approach to dance must necessarily be responsible to the gender, class, race, and ethnic implications that it neglects or denies, and I likewise see how an analysis of the haptic aesthetics of dance must be “radically contextual” (Nash 658) in terms of its gender, class, race, and ethnic implications. Nash writes that “the more abstract discussions of dance or performativity lose the sense of the ways in which different material bodies are expected to do gender, class, race, or ethnicity differently” (657). Furthermore, she sees how dance, in an unanalyzable world beyond language or cognition, appears unable, despite its stress on “relational selves,” to adequately combine with a sense of the “social or of social relations” (Nash 658). A haptic aesthetic approach to diasporic literature, therefore, radically maintains its sociocultural contexts, in how it not only reveals forms of physical embodiment, attending to the specific somatic functions of bodies in shared social spaces, but it also sites of cross-cultural community embraces, clashes, and other interactions (such as the exchanges between the West Indian girls and Nova Scotian girls who had a “rivalry” and “reputation for fighting” [95]), achieved through polyphonic modes of touch. The dance scene described in Brand's novel ultimately involves touching tactilely with other dancing bodies in proximity and with an awareness of social difference, as well as shared affective touching through emotional response to the melody and rhythm of the songs and the aesthetics of the scene: “the whole smoky gyration of ... the figures on the dance floor... all the crazy moves and all the broken hearts” (Brand 94).

This sense of community formation, shared through acts of tactile and affective sociocultural touch, can also be seen in *Soucouyant*, when Adele's son recalls a blessing that

occurred during his trip back to Carenage, Trinidad with his mother when he was a child. Retelling the story of their return that Adele is so fond of, he relates how his grandmother “cradled sea water over my head. An old, old gesture, she described it. Older than any church or religion, older than anything recorded as history” (117). Though Adele’s son does not remember this moment independently, he sees this journey back to the homeland as shared through an “old gesture” of touch, one that possesses a shared sociocultural meaning. This tactile act takes on the feeling of a diasporic baptism, a gesture of community building that Adele repeats several times throughout the novel, cupping handfuls of water in the kitchen sink, the bathtub, or along the lakefront of the Scarborough Bluffs. Furthermore, Adele describes her son’s body and his relationship to a collective diasporic history: “He have strange bones,’ she says. ‘Quarrels deep in he flesh.’ ... ‘He grandmother too. You can’t do nothing for bones. They like history. But you can boil zaboca leaves to remedy body ache. And planten leaves to slow bleeding. And there used to be something called scientific plant which could protect you against curses and bad magic” (Chariandy 8). Her son’s diasporic roots are deep in his flesh and bones, hidden from him, and only retrievable through affective forms of touch; these roots reappear throughout the haptic aesthetics of the narrative when Adele references communal sociocultural acts of tactile and affective touch, such as Trinidadian cures the ailments of the body and a familiar chant that she shares with her son: “Old skin, ‘kin, ‘kin,/ You na know me,/ You na know me” (5).

For Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces*, relationships of touch and affect, especially as they relate to sociocultural meanings, are not only linked to diasporic community formation but also to a history of ideological and material violence against the Jewish body. Jakob learned to “tolerate images” of this past rising in him at the level of his body “like bruises” (19), signifying not only the literal haptic weight of the Holocaust’s violence on the Jewish body but its respective

affective burdens. Carrying with him the memories of his struggle to survive, Jakob recalls while in Canada the ideological features of Nazism, the policies against the Jewish population that targeted their flesh and bodies, as gestures that were both physically violent and “beyond racism” (165). In response to the policies of “anti-matter” (165), Jakob recognizes the practice of preserving both the materialities and affective ties between bodies during and following the Holocaust.¹² In a scene recounted by Jakob, though not from his own firsthand experience, he describes how prisoners of the camps were forced to dig up the mass graves:

the dead entered them through their pores and were carried through their bloodstreams to their brains and hearts. And through their blood into another generation. Their arms were into death up to the elbows, but not only into death – into music, into a memory... into beliefs, mathematical formulas, dreams. As they felt another man’s and another’s blood-soaked hair through their fingers, the diggers begged forgiveness. And those lost lives made molecular passage into their hands. (52)

This is a molecular passage where the prisoners “carried their lives in their hands” (53), burying the shared traumas of the living and the dead. According to Meira Cook, Michaels represents memory and materiality as “contamination, a fleshly laying on of hands from the dead to the living and back again” (18). This bodily event signifies not only a series of physically coerced moments of contact but an unlikely process of haptic community formation: these subjects, otherwise represented without agency or mobility in the camps, tactilely and affective touch the bodies throughout the grave, interpreting their encounters not only as death but as “music... memory... beliefs... dreams” (52). Even though the event itself is unspeakable and

¹² The Holocaust was a war waged through policies of “anti-matter” (165) against the Jewish body that represented both affective and material social ties, which purportedly threatened the Nazi regime. Jewish people were not considered human, an “old trick of language” Jakob describes, which has been used throughout the course of history. According to Jakob, non-Aryans were never to be referred to as human, but as “‘figuren,’ ‘stucke’ – ‘dolls,’ ‘wood,’ ‘merchandise,’ ‘rags’” (Michaels 165).

unrepresentable, survivors such as Jakob discover alternative ways of embodying these memories and affective events.

Haptic forms of traumatic testimony also take place in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*. Foregrounding the hapticity of trauma is the role of haptic witnessing, as in *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob acknowledges his role in a form of bodily testimony, which is different from formal discursive testimony, relying less on the coherent account of events through language, and embracing forms of traumatic recollection through physical, sensual self-awareness. For instance, in *Fugitive Pieces*, rather than give testimony exclusively through language, Jakob admits how he sought out physical proximity to the “horror which, like history itself, can’t be stanch’d” (139). According to Shoshana Felman,

The specific task of the literary testimony is... to open up in that belated witness, which the reader now historically becomes, the imaginative capability of perceiving history – what is happening to others – *in one’s own body*, with the power of sight (insight) usually afforded only by one’s own immediate physical involvement. (Felman and Laub 108)

A witness feels the pressure or desire to give just testimony to an unascertainable event, in compliance with the “current episteme” (Foucault qtd. in Marinkova 63), which has determined the details surrounding that event, yet he or she must also contend with the pressures of his or her own physical involvement in the act of re-witnessing the event. When a subject gives testimony, he or she is faced with an overwhelming “crisis of truth,” coupled with what Jean-Francois Lyotard called the “incommensurability of language games” – the discrepancy and irreducibility of competing discourses surrounding the events, such as the ‘official history’ of the Holocaust (qtd. in Marinkova 63). Marks describes haptic witnessing as an attempt to “bring close” the traumatic event in question, “in a look that is so intensely involved with the presence of the other

that it cannot take the step back to discern difference, say, to distinguish figure and ground” (18). Bringing together the epistemological uncertainty of the event in its entirety and the urge to contribute to a viable historical account, the haptic act of witnessing thus entails negotiating the barriers presented by both formal processes of historicization and the qualities of the witness’s tactile body. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob’s awareness of the physical and affective involvement of witnessing in turn entails another kind of witnessing, a second one, that of his own self-conscious haptic witnessing, which goes beyond the sense of sight in “bearing witness to the witness” (Marinkova 74). At the level of his body, Jakob becomes self-aware of his own act of witnessing and what this act does to his body, senses, and affects. Bearing witness, according to Marianne Hirsch, involves both “the act of holding,” implying a caring, protective, and nurturing relationship to one’s traumatic past, and a “historical *withholding*,” which denotes an uncertain and highly vulnerable position to the historicization process (qtd. in Marinkova 64). I contend that this *withholding*, which is an affective form of withdrawal (opposite to affective touch, which denotes impact), is a necessary part of the act of witnessing, as it implies that there will always be aspects of testimony that the subject may not be able to fully articulate or absorb. There is a paradoxical nature to the “testimonial imperative to bear witness to *both* the cognitive truth of an event (its integration into the epistemological parameters of the age) – which would require critical distance – as well as to the phenomenological truth of an event (its perception by participants) – which would demand proximity to those implicated in it” (Hirsch qtd. in Marinkova 64). Haptic forms of witnessing are less threatening than formal testimony based on speech acts, as subjects can hold and withhold, delve deep and then resurface by tactilely and affectively tracing of their pasts. *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* each attend to this informal process of witnessing by holding and withholding. For instance, Adele’s

son conveys to Meera in *Soucouyant*:

Why she runs the tap all the time? ... Why she likes the flow of water on her hand? It's because of her childhood. She was raised in a village with a tough hand pump. It required both of your hands to work, and so you only get to feel one second of water at the most when you were alone. You see? The continuous flow is a luxury for her. (82)

The flow of water incites a private moment for Adele, as she is taken back to her homeland and is reminded of the circumstances of her life in poverty in Trinidad. Through this tactile process (engendering its own “processual language” [Marinkova 63]), Adele’s highly informal juncture of witnessing takes on a metaphoric, oscillating motion of holding and withholding the water and thus the details of the memory in question. Furthermore, in *What We All Long For*, haptic witnessing is seen in Tuyen’s “book of longings,” in her wood carvings, called *lubaio*, and in her larger tactile art installation, which charts the memories, traumas, and desires of diasporic subjects across the city of Toronto; these processes are both private and withheld (like the romantic associations that Tuyen makes between her tactile carving and her affective caressing relationship to Carla) and shared among her friends and her community, as she sees how the city was “full of longings and she wanted to make them public” (151).

In addition to the challenge of representing forms of historical trauma, another concern in the novels is the representability of contemporary sociopolitical trauma. In *What We All Long For* and *Soucouyant*, familial relationships within diasporic communities are challenged by the shifting state of domestic and global politics, in the very manner by which bodies are made accessible or inaccessible, exploited or liberated, depending on their status in Canada. In *What We All Long For*, the loss of Tuyen’s older brother Quy in Vietnam – this being the unrepresentable event for Tuyen’s family – is experienced differently by the first- and second-

generation members of their family because of their different sociopolitical experiences. Tuyen's older siblings, Ai and Lam, "who were the only other witnesses," were born in the old country and understood their positions in the family before Quy's loss as being "a matter of culture" (125). Tuyen and her brother Binh, born in Canada after their parents migration from Vietnam, occupy positions of "second-ratedness" by way of a "visceral marker" (125) of their unknowing. This second-ratedness not only marks their sense of un-belonging among their family members, implying both tactile and affective distance between siblings and parents, but also a sense of un-belonging within the landscape of multicultural Canada. Tuyen's relationship to her family in Canada as a second-generation member of her diaspora makes her at times more ambivalent towards her diasporic position and yet all the more curious about her family's loss, thus leading her to explore the spaces of her North American birthright with "independence, free love, and artistic irrelevance" (125). According to Johansen, the cosmopolitan second-generation characters in Brand's novel "move fluidly between these different worlds instead of seeing only rigidly demarcated worlds with strict rules for entrance" (55). Subjects like Tuyen, Oku, and Carla live the "real life of the city" in areas that would be rejected by the white elite of the city as "dirty and dangerous" (Brand 55). In these abandoned areas of the city, they are "able to reassemble and recombine parts of the city in ways that acknowledge their own presence and force recognition of their experience of Toronto." (55). In *Soucouyant*, Adele's diagnosis and subsequent memory loss also mark her family's fate in liberal Canada in an all-encompassing way and determine the extent of their sociocultural isolation while residing in Canada. As her son remarks, his mother's illness was "our belonging," that memory and its total absence was "a carpet stain that nobody would confess to," while Adele's diasporic roots were disregarded or forgotten, playing only in the background like the vague sound of "a television set left on all

night” (14).

Further complicating the role of the haptic witness is his or her relationship to the dead or less material bodies that circulate among diasporic communities. The presence or perception of ghostly bodies in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* presents a tactile challenge to diasporic community formation, an obstacle that diasporic subjects seem intent on overcoming. This challenge can be seen in *What We All Long For* in the complicated space that Quy occupies following his arrival back to Toronto and his entry into the lives of Tuyen, Binh, and the rest of their family. Having struggled to account for her parents’ loss, a loss she was not materially or emotionally privy to, Tuyen likewise struggles to witness Quy’s return. Upon meeting the now grown-up man Quy, Tuyen is propelled by Binh’s hand towards the body of this foreign person, involuntarily reaching for his shoulders, and admitting: “He felt like nothing, a ghost. She sensed something malevolent and withdrew her arms” (297). Brand writes that Quy had been “a ghost in [Tuyen’s] childhood, the unseen, the un-understood, yet here he was, insinuating himself in a simple meeting” (Brand 266). Tuyen struggles to physically and emotionally connect with Quy, shaken by the prospect of his return. In a more discretely affective scene in *Soucouyant*, Adele’s son experiences a site of haptic witnessing following his mother’s death through the tactile and affective association that he makes to the mark on his body:

There’s a mysterious bruise on my forehead. I touch it and wince at the sharpness of the pain, a dark brown egg. I have no other suit to put on, and the only one of my father’s that even remotely fits me is his embroidered cowboy suit of gold stitching and glittering rhinestones. I put it on and crazily convince myself that with a plain tie it’s alright for the funeral. That it’s a tribute of some sort. (141)

Adele's son appears compelled, in this bruised awakening, to re-conceive of his body through the borrowed skin of his father, to witness, through this tributary gesture, the embodiment of his parents in their own lives. As he reflects early on in the novel, memory is a "bruise still tender" and such witnessing, even when complicated by forgetting, can be the "most creative and life-sustaining thing that we can ever hope to accomplish" (32). Diasporic subjects remember and forget at the level of the body; this entails a creative capacity that allows them to "awaken to the stories buried deep within our sleeping selves or trafficked quietly through the touch of others... [it is] how we're shaken by vague scents or tastes... stolen by an obscure word, an undertow dragging us back and down and away" (Chariandy 32).

In *Fugitive Pieces*, the same desire to haptically perceive the bodies of the dead is seen in Jakob's relationship to his deceased family and community members, including Athos and Bella. For instance, following Athos's death, alone in their Toronto apartment, Jakob claims that he "felt Athos's presence so strongly... I could feel his hand on my shoulder" (Michaels 119). Likewise, Jakob admits how he wanted to "remain close to Bella. To do so, I blaspheme by imagining" (167). Marinkova would call this "the body witnessing," an enabling act of "presencing those that have been silenced by History makers" (69). Jakob describes his own fear of blaspheming by desiring proximity to bodies of nearly impossible recollection or contact, and in one sense, these bodies take on the quality of a phantom limb. Jakob's attempts to witness his deceased relatives resemble a phantom limb phenomenon, as he describes his relationship to his mother directly following her death: "I knew suddenly my mother was inside me. Moving along sinews, under my skin the way she used to move through the house at night, putting things away, putting things in order" (8). Diasporic subjects, like Jakob, Tuyen, and Adele, conceive of shared acts of witnessing, through tactile and affective forms of relationality that do not insist on

coherent testimony but that engender complex forms of embodiment and affiliations among diasporic communities in Canada.

The term ‘assemblage’ evokes haptic forms of diasporic community formation in shared social space. Assemblages can be understood as collections or gatherings of people or things. Assemblages carry touching connotations. In the visual art world, assemblages are understood as a three-dimensional or two-dimensional compositions put together using found objects, and in literature, in reference to a text that similarly is built from existing found texts through the piecing together of diverse materials.¹³ In more mechanical terms, an assemblage is considered an object of pieces fitted together, including gears and cogs, and denotes a somatic form of interaction, as the cogs work together in order to run the machine. In archaeology, an assemblage is a collection of items from a single datable component of an archaeological site. Assemblage theory, as conceived of by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), is a relational approach to systems and bodies that emphasizes how component parts of a group can be detached from one assemblage and plugged into another, where the part’s interactions may be different but still functional. Deleuze and Guattari take the term assemblage from the world of art, where the term has its most widely credited usage. Thus assemblage theory emphasizes the coming together of diverse bodies, such as diasporic communities, and emphasizes the fluidity, exchangeability, and shifting functionality of diverse communities, depending on the social, cultural, or geographic contexts.

In *What We All Long For*, Tuyen and Binh’s relationship to their own diasporic community is not only one of inherited and fixed cultural meaning but of complex negotiations

¹³ Assemblages are attributable to the rise of postmodernism in art, beginning with the cubist constructions of Pablo Picasso in the early twentieth century. The origin of the word in its artistic sense can be traced back to the early 1950s, when Jean Dubuffet created a series of collages of butterfly wings, which he titled *Assemblages d’empreintes* (1954).

according to the imperative to “disentangle puzzlement” (67) for their parents in the host country. This requires Tuyen and Binh to shift in and out of their diasporic community, as though forming and reforming assemblages with different functionalities. The sense of touch offers them the ability to shift proximities and affiliations with the prospect of new modes of understanding. Touch also implies the vulnerability and misunderstanding of bodies in shared social spaces. Brand describes how Tuyen often had to “apologize for touching that vulnerable spot” of her parents’ history, which she had been unable to translate in all her years as her parents’ “interlocutor” while living in Canada (Brand 69). More positively among her group of friends – who “shared everything,” despite how some things were “unknowable, unshareable” – it was usually Tuyen who creatively, emotionally, and tactilely “pushed and pulled at the borders of these things” (38).

In *Soucouyant*, the shifting nature of haptic assemblages is seen among the Trinidadian communities displaced by the American military, as well as among those who later immigrated to Canada taking advantage of the new Immigration Act “allowing coloured people into the country in greater numbers” (72). In both respects, the functionality of the assemblage is always only temporary and superficial; upon achievement of social or geographic convergence, the assemblage might then shift to some other formation. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the territory of an assemblage is made of “decoded fragments of all kinds, which are borrowed from the millieus but then assume the value of ‘properties’” (504), properties which eventually deterritorialize. Even as cities or sites of dispersed subjects appear to converge and co-exist uniformly (such as in the traditional schema of diasporic deterritorialization and reterritorialization), these communities are not designed to represent one thing indefinitely. Within the purportedly multicultural spaces of cities such as Toronto, diasporic subjects naturally

seek to determine the “content” and “expression” of their assemblage, to “evaluate their real distinction, their reciprocal presupposition” (504), that is, their sense of belonging, in order to evaluate their eventual shifts and changes within these spaces. Thus as Deleuze and Guattari maintain, the “rhythms” or refrains of relational bodies in contemporary spaces inevitably “take on new meanings” (504) and it is these rhythms themselves that seem to best define their formations and re-formations.

In the context of diasporic discourses and in the haptic spaces of Toronto, assemblage theory draws attention to the complex tactile and affective ties that diasporic bodies have with other bodies, things, and spaces, and accounts for the inevitably blurred boundaries that constitute tactile and affective forms of touch in shared social space. As Jakob explains in *Fugitive Pieces* regarding his own sense of belonging in the assemblages of the city of Toronto, he was able to walk “and temporarily shrug off [his] strangeness because, the way Athos saw the world, every human was a newcomer” (103). Athos optimistically sees how every human is able to understand, even abstractly, the phenomenon of un-belonging, as subjects are always vulnerable to relocation, to becoming the “newcomer” (103). This sense of vulnerability and understanding is conveyed somewhat differently in *Soucouyant*, as diasporic subjects are invited to assemble in Canada and yet face discrete disavowals while living in proximity to the dominant white culture. According to Chariandy, upon Adele’s arrival from such a distance and once made proximate to new bodies and social contexts, she understood the extent of her alterity, even in the purportedly shared space of Toronto:

[Adele] knew, of course, how ever more conspicuously different she was. People everywhere would offer cold cutting glances on streetcars and sidewalks, or wrinkle their noses and shift away, or stare openly at the oddity she had become in this land. She did her

best to ignore it or smile back when people seemed genuinely curious, but it sometimes was just too much, too heavy. (49)

Diasporic subjects such as Adele occupy uneven assemblages, existing in close proximity to other social bodies, while simultaneously living in alterity, vulnerable to the “cold cutting glances” (49) that are felt and experienced as sharp and intrusive tactile gestures against marginalized subjects in these spaces. Classen asks regarding the role of touch in community formation and the possible negative implications of touch: “When does touch confirm a social bond? When is it an intrusion?” (13). Classen’s question touches on the challenge of maintaining shared social space and affirmative communities, as touch also implies potential burdens and intrusions at the level of the subject’s body in his or her community.

To conclude this chapter, I maintain that the sense of touch offers a vital way of expressing the complex tactile and affective positions of diasporic subjects in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*. The aesthetics of touch help to understand how diasporic subjects negotiate the boundaries that link them as well as the boundaries that have divided them from their homelands and have alienated them in their host countries. Theorists such as Haraway might consider this haptic aesthetic approach to diasporic literature as characteristic of “partial, locatable, critical knowledges” which sustain the possibility of “webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (“Situated Knowledges” 584). Haraway indicates that such a commitment to mobile positioning is dependent on the “impossibility of entertaining innocent ‘identity’ politics,” that one cannot “relocate in any possible vantage point without being accountable for that movement” (585). This emphasis on responsible critical positioning is an important underlining feature of this thesis, which I will later discuss in more detail in my conclusion. In tracing both the public and

private sites of touch, I acknowledge how they are not immune to the broader structures of biopower and sovereignty. In the next chapter, I will explore the possibilities of touch in terms of the pressures of two powerfully influential discourses in contemporary North American culture: those of multiculturalism and biomedicine, historical paradigms I discuss below, felt by diasporic subjects in contemporary Canadian diasporic literature.

Chapter Two: Multicultural Pressures, Biomedical Spaces, and Diasporic Skin Diving

While multiculturalism has always been marked by ambivalence and viewed as a concept fraught with contradictions, ‘a slippery signifier onto which diverse groups project their hopes and fears’... the hegemonic views that have shaped the dominant literary tradition continue to operate. (Kamboureli 82)

In the contemporary West, much of the discourse concerning the control of touch arises from anxieties about the vulnerability of the social body – and ultimately, of individual bodies – to invasion and violation. Streets must be patrolled, schools guarded, and communities gated... Borders must be strengthened, travellers searched, and foreigners fingerprinted... Public health must be safeguarded and immune systems shielded... The disruptive power of unregulated tactility is as threatening to contemporary Western society as it was to the Victorians. However, it has a new global reach that seems to defy the traditional methods of control. (Classen 262)

The introduction and Chapter One explored how touch is not exclusively a surface tactile phenomenon but also a deeply affective, emotional interaction, wherein subjects can touch on the boundaries of embodiment and sociocultural belonging. This chapter will place these concerns in a distinctly Canadian context, by examining the extent to which aspects of Canadian society, including its policies of official multiculturalism and its biomedical spaces, seek to regulate and maintain the cultural and social boundaries of diasporic subjects at the level of skin and the body in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*. As Classen confirms in *The Book of Touch*, “controlling touch is an essential means of establishing and maintaining an orderly world” (259). I will elaborate on the ways in which diasporic subjects in these novels negotiate their biological and sociocultural orientations through the performative metaphoric processes of what I call “skin diving.” With respect to the Caribbean myth of the soucouyant, I examine the metaphor of skin diving as a play on cultural identity as a construction, including its reference to complex bodily orientation and spatial mobility. Embracing the aesthetics of skin diving entails conceptualizing cultural relations in lateral, affective, and deeply empathic terms.

I will begin this chapter by exploring the haptic space of Toronto in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, for what these novels suggest about the enactment of official multiculturalism in Canada. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob describes the city of Toronto as a place where “almost everyone has come from elsewhere ... bringing with them their different ways of dying and marrying, their kitchens and songs” (89). According to Jakob, Toronto is not only a city of arrival but also a “city of forsaken worlds,” possessing, within it, language as “a kind of farewell” (89). These three novels present Toronto as a city of arrival and farewell, as the center of a promised and yet unfulfilled Canadian multiculturalism. Upon his arrival in Toronto, Jakob views Toronto as a convergent site of disparate bodies, languages, and worlds, observing the cultural compromises of social bodies in the city through a shared language of “farewell” (89). Likewise, in *Soucouyant*, Adele and her late husband meet in Toronto and yet their earliest experiences seem to take place in a city that no longer exists, perhaps one that never really existed. To this effect, Chariandy writes that, “you’ll sometimes hear people talking about it” (69), this older version of Toronto, a place where people “cared for each other and children were allowed to play outside unattended” (69). This was a city

before the new dark-skinned troubles and the new dark-skinned excitements... where rice and pasta were still considered ‘ethnic foods,’ and one of the few places where a newcomer might have a chance of getting her hands on breadfruit or fresh coconut or the sunny heft of a mango was at the Kensington Market. (Chariandy 69)

The nature of Adele’s haptic community – consisting of those who shared the same space and with whom she may foster tactile or affective ties – shifts significantly throughout her life, both in her homeland abroad and in Canada. In Toronto, for instance, people no longer care for each other and collaborate culturally in their shared physical space. As Adele’s earliest experiences in

Canada attest, the pressures of multiculturalism encouraged integration among different ethnic and national bodies, but resulted in a state of incoherent proximity to disparate and dissociated bodies and communities. The failure of integration and the unfulfilled promise of multiculturalism instead result in the exclusions or absences of cultural diversity, in particular in the form of tactile loss experienced by Adele, as she longs to touch, taste, and hold Caribbean breadfruit, coconut, and mango again during her visits to Kensington Market. Adele and her family share a version of Canadian history that differs from its official history of multiculturalism, as Adele and her husband, respectively identified as an Afro- and an Indo-Caribbean, were “raised to believe that the other had ruined the great fortune that they should have enjoyed in the New World” (Chariandy 70). Upon meeting in Toronto, Adele and her husband “didn’t know each other but there was history between them all the same” (Chariandy 70). There were “mildewed explanations for why they shouldn’t ever get along,” as they had been brought up to detect, “from a nervous distance, the smell that accompanied the other. Something oily that saturated their skins, something sweet-rotten and dreaded that arose from past labours and traumas and couldn’t ever seem to be washed away” (Chariandy 70). Through shifting forms of haptic affiliation, that is, tactile or affective forms of touch and communication, diasporic subjects navigate the boundaries and spaces of their communities, exploring the complex, unkept promises of multiculturalism.

Today, Canada prides itself as an inclusionary cultural mosaic, despite its undeniable legacy of white Anglo-Saxon Christian heritage and exclusionary social practices. This cultural mosaic metaphor has been broadly seen as an expression of the so-called desire for a diverse and inclusive national fabric.¹⁴ However, this sense of pride regarding the cultural mosaic,

¹⁴ The term ‘mosaic’ was first used to refer to Canadian society by John Murray Gibbon in *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation* (1938). Gibbon was disapproving of the American melting pot concept, viewing it as a

propagated by Canadian government bodies (first made official in the 1988 Multiculturalism Act, though beginning earlier in the 1970s under the aegis of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau), has been in large part because Canadians initially benefited from the cheap labour immigrants offered and the cheap stolen land; it was only later in the 1990s and early twenty-first century that the celebration of cultural diversity, such as heritage day parades and other pan-cultural events, became the norm in Canada, implemented by the government and other formal social bodies in order to disguise the more nefarious history behind the constitution of the cultural mosaic.¹⁵ Brand illustrates the pretext of Canada's multiculturalism and the relationship of both diasporic and non-diasporic subjects to this cultural terrain in *What We All Long For*:

There are Italian neighbourhoods and Vietnamese neighbourhoods in this city; there are Chinese ones and Ukrainian ones and Pakistani ones and Korean ones and African ones. Name a region on the planet and there's someone from there, here. All of them sit on Ojibway land, but hardly any of them know it or care it because that genealogy is willfully untraceable except in the nature of the city itself. They'd only have to look, though, but it could be that what they know hurts them already, and what if they found out something even more damaging? These are people who are used to the earth beneath them shifting, and they all want it to stop – and if that means they must pretend to know nothing, well, that's the sacrifice they make. (4)

The pieces that have constituted the shifting terrain of the Canadian cultural mosaic, including its

process by which immigrants and their descendants were encouraged to cut off ties with their homelands and cultures in order to assimilate into the American way of life.

¹⁵ The Multiculturalism Act (also known as Bill C-93) recognizes the cultural diversity that constitutes Canada, but it does so, according to Kamboureli, by practicing a “sedative politics” (82), a politics that attempts to “recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to manage them” (82). It pays tribute to diversity and suggests ways of celebrating it, thus responding to the “clarion call” (Kamboureli 82) of ethnic communities for recognition, but without disturbing the conventional articulation of the Canadian dominant society. The Act sets out to perform the “impossible act of balancing differences, in the process allowing the state to become self-congratulatory, if not complacent, about its handling of ethnicity” (Kamboureli 82).

legacy of colonialism, are not smooth or evenly distributed across its surface, as the mosaic consists not only of seemingly harmonious parts, according to the government's official political agenda, but also intermingling disparate ones – parts that have been strategically ordered to reflect a particular ideology or political mandate but that in fact reflect the more complicated contours of Canadian social existence and its failed promises.

Despite the inclusive-sounding directives of Canadian multiculturalism, including those initially encountered by diasporic subjects while living abroad, Canadian multiculturalism has faced a wealth of criticism throughout its history for its complicated treatment of social and cultural difference. This has included Porter's portrayal, in a 1965 study, of Canada as a "vertical mosaic," in reference to the marginalization of minorities economically and politically upon entry into Canada (qtd. in Moodley and Adam 436). Although Porter's reproach of systemic inequality among immigrants and minority groups in Canada cannot be disputed, as we have and continue to live in a world consisting of hierarchical and exclusionary aspects of immigration between states, this characterization is indeed based on the forms of access and mobility present in Canada and abroad in the 1960s; following the Canadian government's official multicultural policies of the early 1970s, the contours of this mosaic shifted, as the entry and subsequent movement of immigrants in and across contemporary Canada changed drastically over the following decades. I suggest maintaining a lateral model of the Canadian cultural mosaic, one that includes not only tracing the surfaces, contours, and unequal distributions of this model, but also its potential depths and complexities. According to Moodley and Adam, immigrants have had to choose from mainly three identity options upon their arrival into Canadian society: "assimilation, where minorities adopt the identity of their new country and give up their old one; separation, where immigrants retain their old identity and reject the new national one; and

integration, where both identities are embraced which is the multicultural model” (431). I contend that *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* explore these complex decisions, embodiments, and disavowals through a “collage of encounters,” similar to the lateral cultural mosaic (or haptic assemblage), where diasporic bodies are simultaneously “fraught with scars and wounds” of their sociocultural movements and decisions, bearing traces of these excisions and other wounds that continue to be inflicted, while also holding the “hope of being-togetherness” (Marinkova 27). This hope of being-togetherness is negotiated in spite of the ongoing traces of trauma and through the complex tactile and affective negotiations of diasporic bodies in multicultural Canada.

Fugitive Pieces, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* focus on different sociocultural contexts in Canada and yet the framework of official Canadian multiculturalism remains a constant undercurrent through the haptic aesthetics of these novels. Their respective treatments of multiculturalism indeed have haptic implications, especially in terms of issues of citizenship, territory, health, and sociopolitical life through the physical and social pressures felt by diasporic subjects. Diasporic subjects, for instance, once out of touch with their homelands, occupy more complex positions as they may be both affectively tied to their homeland and physically established in the host country. Brand describes the orientation of diasporic subjects in *What We All Long For* as “border crosser[s]” and “borderless” (212-213), maintaining that these subjects are not only acutely aware of the constructed national and social spaces that they occupy but also their sense of un-belonging within them: “They felt the city’s violence and its ardour in one emotion” (212). According to Johansen, the identities of characters in Brand’s novel possess agency in their border crossing potential because they continually “oscillate between belonging and non-belonging” (48). This drift, especially when enacted in the city of Toronto, grants a

sense of tactile empowerment and agency to diasporic subjects. Rather than seek to integrate into the homogeneous fabric of official multiculturalism, diasporic subjects oscillate and trace the contours of the cultural mosaic but are not bound to it. Whereas Johansen contends that Brand's characters negotiate their subjectivities in public spaces, creating what she calls "'territorialized cosmopolitan' subjectivities," subjectivities with multiple affiliations across axes of gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, which are "firmly located in the physicality of Toronto" (49), I suggest that diasporic subjects also possess forms of deterritorialized subjectivity through the sense of touch. This deterritorialized subjectivity grants diasporic subjects such as Tuyen, Carla, and Oku greater forms of social mobility in some cases, but also leads to more complex social negotiations in others, depending on the extent of their deterritorialization (such as Quy's dangerous sense of mobility in *What We All Long For* and the uncertainty regarding his intentions toward Tuyen's family upon his arrival back in Canada).

I agree with Johansen's assertion that as characters continually oscillate between belonging and un-belonging, this process appears always linked to territory or some associative form of deterritorialization. Deleuze and Guattari grant forms of territoriality certain haptic qualities. Subjects, whether belonging or not, feel some tactile or affective response to the "smooth" and "striated" spaces ("nomadic" or "sedentary") of contemporary life; these spaces, which are never entirely static or separate, entail inevitable mixtures, passages, or oppositions of different sociocultural bodies (Deleuze and Guattari 474). In *What We All Long For*, Tuyen's family lives in the giant suburb of Richmond Hill, where other rich immigrants "live in giant houses" and occupy ostensibly safer positions outside of Toronto. There is a sense that these immigrants, once established, have been "firmly located" (Johansen 49) in the seemingly smooth space of suburbia (which grants them the freedom to move within and outside of the urban city center,

without the fear of identification or social stratification). Yet their affective ties to place give way to shifting insecurities and oppositions:

Richmond Hill is a sprawling suburb outside of the city. It is one of those suburbs where immigrants go to get away from other immigrants, but of course they end up living with all of the other immigrants running away from themselves – or at least running away from the self they think is helpless, weak, unsuitable, and always in some kind of trouble. They hate that self that keeps drawing attention, the one that can't fit in because of colour or language, or both, and they think that moving to a suburb will somehow eradicate that person once and for all. And after all the humiliations of being that self – after they've worked hard enough at two or three jobs and saved enough by overcrowding their families in small dour rooms and cobbled together enough credit – immigrants flee to rangy lookalike desolate suburbs like Richmond Hill where the houses give them a sense of space and distance from that troubled image of themselves. (55)

This passage articulates the desire of Tuyen's parents to escape the humiliation of becoming the un-belonging immigrants of a multicultural city; yet as they run away from "the self they think is helpless, weak, unsuitable," they simultaneously integrate into the seemingly smooth social fabric of the Canadian cultural mosaic, while ostensibly occupying one of the most culturally diverse and overcrowded immigrant communities north of Toronto, the "rangy lookalike desolate suburbs" (55). Johansen contends that negotiation of the "uneven terrain" of Toronto ensures that self-identification of first-generation migrating diasporic subjects, such as Cam, Tuan, and Jackie and Oku's parents, is never stable, as they do not possess a "firm foothold in the host land because it is not the homeland – a place which is always elsewhere if it exists physically at all and with which these characters have a fraught relationship that effectively precludes return"

(48). The process of self-definition is even more precarious for the second-generation characters, as they occupy uneasy positions in relation to the host country, their country of birth and primary place of residence, yet the bureaucratic officers of the state do not fully recognize their right to access all the practices of citizenship (Oku, for instance, is continually read as a criminal by the city's police force). As well, they are unable to fully connect with the homeland and traditions of their parents.

Conversely, Tuyen embraces a position of un-belonging in her decision to leave her family's home and seek out the culturally and socially diverse spaces (both smooth and striated) of Toronto. She seeks to immerse herself in spaces of disparate bodies, embracing different proximities than those offered by her family's homogenous cultural community:

She had left the embrace of her family – truthfully, not embrace, her family did not embrace. They fed you, they clothed you, they fattened you, but they did not embrace. Yet they held you. With duty, with obligation, with honour, with an unspoken but viselike grip of emotional debt. Tuyen wanted no duty. And perhaps that is what she had arrived at. Yet she wanted an embrace so tight, and with such a gathering of scents and touches. She wanted sensuality, not duty. She wanted to be downtown in the heat of it. Everyone walking in the city was senseless. She loved that. Everyone escaping the un-touch of familiars and the scents of fatalism gathered in the close houses. Familiarity was not what she wanted or what would make her feel as if she were in the world. It was the opposite. (62)

Tuyen's desire to escape her family's physical and affective embrace and integrate into the urban landscape is a haptic gesture of withdrawal, as she seeks to escape the dutiful bind of cultural coherence in Richmond Hill (invoked first as a tactile bind by the mentioning of a possible

physical “embrace” [62]), in search of more incoherent gatherings of people in urban Toronto, including the “scents and touches” (62) that characterize Toronto’s Chinatown district. With respect to both Tuyen and her parents’ haptic relationships to the city and its multicultural status, Brand’s novel conveys a sense of interminable physical and emotional negotiations enacted by diasporic subjects in the city of Toronto; some of these negotiations are performed by subjects in order to withdraw from or avoid the cross-cultural or homogeneous spaces of the city and other movements constitute an embrace of what I call ‘multicultural hapticity,’ wherein diasporic and immigrant subjects experience shifting feelings of belonging and disavowal at the level of their bodies, including their skins, affects, and emotions.

While this landscape specifically entices Tuyen in *What We All Long For* to interact and converge with other social bodies, to trace the diverse contours of the cultural mosaic, in contrast, this terrain operates differently in *Soucouyant* as a confusing space of disavowal for Adele upon her entry into Canada in the 1970s. Adele is harshly rejected from a Toronto restaurant when she ventures in one day to try lemon meringue pie; upon entering the restaurant and hearing a voice say, “[I]ook what just walked in,” Adele is told by the owner that “no coloureds or prostitutes are allowed to eat here” (50). In response to these gestures of repudiation, mainly from white Canadians, Adele insists to herself that “[s]he’s become too sensitive... She’s living the dream of countless people in her birthplace, stuck back there with the running sores of their histories” (51). This recitation of privilege within the official multicultural space of Canada implies the pressures felt by diasporic subjects to integrate into the unequal spaces of Toronto and elsewhere in Canada (despite the underlying and in some cases explicit sense of un-belonging experienced by these subjects).

Diasporic subjects and refugees are required by the state to identify and account for

themselves bureaucratically upon their arrival in Canada. In *What We All Long For*, upon the arrival of Tuyen's parents as refugees into Canada, Tuan and Cam are not only forced to provide an account of their migration and sociopolitical status for the purposes of the bureaucratic agenda (i.e. official government documentation), but provide a specific account of their bodies and emotional states:

Only when they arrived in Toronto would they fully construct their departure as resistance to communism. That is the story the authorities needed in order to fill out the appropriate forms. They needed terror, and indeed Tuan and Cam had had that; they needed loss, and Tuan and Cam had had that too. And perhaps with this encouragement, this coaxing of their story into a coherent wholeness, they were at least officially comforted that the true horror was not losing their boy but the forces of communism, Vietnam itself, which they were battling. Whatever the official story, her mother's cache of photographs told another, a parallel story, a set of possible stories, an exquisite corpse. (225)

Here, Tuan and Cam are forced to account not only for their departure from Vietnam in terms of their national disaffiliation, but also their affective bodily statuses, their "terror" and "loss," in order to render a "coherent wholeness" (225) to their claim as refugees within their new host country. Brand also explains how throughout her young life in Canada, Tuyen observed how her mother had "a mad fear of being caught without proof, without papers of some kind attesting to identity or place" (63). This felt pressure of the state to make diasporic bodies and their experiences cohere within particular social and bureaucratic frameworks contrasts the other more haptically rich and at times incoherent experiences of diasporic subjects while negotiating different cultural affiliations and geographies in Toronto. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Ben describes his family's

relationship to the Canadian state and the city of Toronto:

When my parents came to Toronto, they saw that most of their fellow immigrants settled in the same downtown district: a rough square of streets from Spadina to Bathurst, Dundas to College, with waves of the more established rippling northward towards Bloor Street. My father would not make the same mistake. ‘They wouldn’t even have the trouble of rounding us up.’ Instead, my parents moved to Weston, a borough that was quite rural and separate from downtown. They took out a large mortgage on a small house by the Humber River. (243)

Ben further describes his family’s desire to forget their traumatic pasts and disguise themselves while living in their host country, explaining how his father, a survivor of the Holocaust, was a man, upon arrival in the free nation of Canada, who had “erased himself as much as possible within the legal limits of citizenship” (232). Ben claims that silence was shared among the members of his small family, with “no energy of a narrative in my family, not even the fervour of an elegy. Instead, our words drifted away, as if our home were open to the elements and we were forever whispering into a strong wind. My parents and I waded through damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking” (204). Rather than speak and utter a testimony within the spaces of Canadian citizenship and health and wellness, Ben’s family maintains a persistent silence, which engenders a form of haptic diasporic community if only by virtue of the communal “damp silence” that they felt and occupied together.

The sense of un-belonging felt by first- and second- diasporic subjects extends from the macropolitical level of the state and its respective bureaucratic structures to the micropolitical level of the body, as memories and cultural knowledge are both discursively and physically rendered untranslatable in a foreign space. In *What We All Long For*, during a rhythmic game of

“riffing” (210) between friends, Carla describes her mother Angie and the complicated bodily position that she occupied in terms of a geo-social transposition to Tuyen and Oku:

Angie was a border crosser; a wetback, a worker in the immigrant sweatshop they call this city. On days like this I understand her like a woman instead of a child. Everybody thought she was a whore. She wasn't. She tried to step across the border of who she was and who she might be. They wouldn't let her. She didn't believe it herself so she stepped across into a whole other country. (212)

Years later after Angie's bouts of mental illness and her eventual suicide, Carla tries to translate the dual biological and social status of her mother's body; seeking to understand her leap from her in-between life into a “whole other country” (212), Carla insists on an alternative, more fluid orientation of her mother's death, one that preserves Angie's sense of agency rather than a constrained biomedical status. Conversely, and rather optimistically, in *Soucouyant*, Adele acknowledges her privileged position abroad as one of the “lucky ones,” given a “chance in a new land” because she sees how diasporic subjects left behind in the struggling homeland bear the burden of “the running sores of their histories” (51). Their son explains how Adele and her husband, living abroad in Canada, “found ways to believe and endure... They loved each other despite the nets of history and tradition. But it eventually died, their love” (80). Here, Adele and her family have not fully escaped the “running sores” of their history, but rather they inhabit a space that functions only “*despite* the nets of history” (80). Diasporic subjects such as Adele and her family thus enter and inhabit a space where they can never truly be healthy bodies or healthy citizens, as Haraway maintains that all Western cultural narratives about objectivity and even the health of the subject are “allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility” (“Situated Knowledges” 583). Combining this

collective historical condition of diaspora with Adele's own respective biomedical condition, Adele instead begins to "excuse herself from the world [she and her family] knew" (12), the new and complex world of affinitive opportunities and coherent social and biomedical spaces, which Adele initially and hopefully conceived of as the multicultural liberal state of Canada.

In this chapter, I also seek to illustrate how diasporic subjects in *Fugitive Pieces* and *Soucouyant* attempt to cope socially with the haptic pressures of illness and cultural trauma, which include but are not limited to Adele's dementia, Athos's depression and weak heart, and Jakob's deep-seeded melancholia. In *Soucouyant*, for instance, Adele's son describes his father's physical state following years of managing socially with his wife's illness: "I started to think about Father's paralysis that night. The clenching and unclenching of his fingers. The futile grasping" (Chariandy 20). In these narratives, coping with a medical condition or physical disorder entails dealing with the symptoms of a social illness, or conversely, dealing with a pathological cultural trauma entails reflecting deeply on the haptic or affective impacts of this trauma on the biological body, all of which must be negotiated within the shared spaces of biomedicine and multiculturalism.¹⁶ In *Fugitive Pieces*, Athos

fell into depressions, like a literal stumble into ruts in the road. He tripped, pulled himself up, carried on. Darkness dogged him. He burrowed in his room to work on his book, *Bearing False Witness*, which he knew somehow he would never finish, a debt left unpaid to his colleagues at Biskupin. (103)

Athos is "plagued" (104) while living in Canada with the "illness of his work" (103), a project

¹⁶ I use the term 'biomedicine' to refer to the relationship between embodiment, the biological body, and the social nature of medical practice. In medical science, biomedicine deals with the ability of humans to tolerate environmental stresses and variations, and it involves the application of the principles of the natural sciences, especially biology and physiology, to clinical medicine. In medical practice and in theory, this term is not entirely separate from the vast array of work done on biopolitics and governmentality, related to the political regulation of subjects as biological bodies; however, in referencing the biomedical contexts, I insist on reading the specificities and material binds of diasporic subjects' bodies without attempting to universalize their experiences under the framework of biopower.

that is historically inflected and based on the premise of a historical trauma that he and Jakob can never quite leave behind. Thus both Athos's project *Bearing False Witness* and his care of the soul of Jakob (97) are a heavy weight that plagues him while living abroad in Canada. Likewise in the novel, Jakob reflects on his own bodily relationship to the city of Toronto and its occupants, noting how "so many living so close together" (90), that while "others might have leaped up to explore their new world, [he] felt a stunning despair" (91). At night, "lying in bed unable to sleep," Jakob's body "pointed painfully towards its great ignorance" (110). Jakob's "great ignorance" refers not only to his felt foreignness in spaces throughout the city and his ignorance regarding the details of his family's deaths but a sense of affective numbness, akin to ignorance, in the wake of his grief following Athos' death. When Jakob discovers that Athos has died (with no official medical explanation regarding the cause of his death), Jakob concedes that his knowledge of the circumstances of Athos' death consists of only "fragments" (114) and that now left alone, he "sat at Athos's desk. In a small flat in a strange city in a country I did not yet love" (115). The haptic implications of Athos's death are later conveyed in Jakob's exploration of Athos's study, which served as a re-creation of his study in Zakynthos. Fingering the various objects found scattered throughout the "chaotic site" of the study, including a packet of letters on Athos's desk, Jakob discovers the "intimacy that death forces on us. ... I fingered the envelopes and smoothed the onion-skin" (115). Faced with the "silence of the empty flat" which pressed on Jakob with the "weight of self-pity" (115), Jakob is faced with the physical and affective loss of his diasporic community, which was centrally maintained by the presence of Athos.

In *Soucouyant*, Chariandy presents the precarious relationship between Adele, as represented by her biological illness, and her haptic relationship to her family and the Canadian medical system. For instance, Adele's son describes his return to his mother's home and his

confusion regarding his physical relationship to his ill mother:

I don't even know how Mother is reading me. As a stranger who suddenly roams her home, or as her younger son who has mysteriously returned after discovering, two years earlier, just how impossible it was to be around her. I don't know if Mother has been hurt by my absence, or if she's even noticed it. I don't know what meaning there can be between us now. (12)

Adele's son, confused here about his mother's psychological and physiological capacities, further explains his family's apprehensive relationship to the Canadian multicultural state through his parents' encounter with the medical system. Early on in the novel, Adele's son encounters a pamphlet in the garbage, discarded by his parents, outlining the appropriate procedures of medical professionals in dealing with patients with dementia who are ethnic minorities: "*One must especially be cautious when dealing with the uneducated and/or ethnic minorities. Often, an SWR test administered to these people will result in a clear positive when, strictly speaking, cognitive dementia as discussed is not truly in effect*" (Chariandy 41).¹⁷ As the pamphlet indicates, a medical professional must be cautious when a situation indicates that an ethnic person has symptoms of dementia without actually having the biomedical illness; this suggests that although a diasporic subject is invariably associated with a social pathology, his or her actual biomedical status may not be deemed official and therefore he or she may either be exposed to further more invasive medical testing or a formal process of disowning by the medical system. Joining his parents in avoiding these potential forms of haptic violence, the protagonist tells the reader that he returned the pamphlet to the garbage, having determined to

¹⁷ This form of medical regulation, although sensitive to the cultural contexts of medical subjects, functions chiefly in the service of an overarching biopolitical agenda of the kind Foucault theorized in *The History of Sexuality*, resulting in varying socially stratifying and alienating effects.

see his mother in “his own way” (41). In *Soucouyant*, Adele’s son also concedes regarding his mother’s health that he just wants to “know that Mother is safe. That she’s in someone’s hands. I’ve tried to say this in as unemotional a voice as possible, but there’s something ragged that I can’t help” (55). According to Paterson, a positive “exchange of vitality” can occur when a “healthy person purposefully touches an ill person with a strong intent to help or heal” (151). The passage from *Soucouyant* has twofold significance: first, it marks the desire of Adele’s son to see his mother receive care and for her to maintain haptic ties to other bodies in therapeutic and nonviolent ways; and second, it also signifies her son’s partial acquiescence to a biomedical system that would take Adele into its hands and offer an objective form of medical care and social confinement. Adele’s son in fact struggles to take his mother into his own hands: “‘Hold my hand, Mother.’ ‘You. You stop following me’” (123). The desire for contact through touch is evident throughout healthcare institutions, as Paterson explains that, “while independence, bodily integrity and self-sufficiency are encouraged in Westernized, industrialized cultures, we also value a more personal, intimate, emotional care where touch is crucial yet sharply spatially differentiated” (148). Personal, therapeutic, and healing forms of touch are approached in “some spatial contexts and body parts,” concludes Paterson, but “decidedly inappropriate in others” (148).

In *Soucouyant*, Adele’s journey as a diasporic subject is further complicated by her position as an ill body in her suburban community. Having rejected medical institutionalization, Adele is regarded by citizens in her community as the ethnic and biomedical Other. This is suggested during the Heritage Day Parade that takes place in Adele’s neighborhood. On the day of the parade, “*everyone* [is] invited to participate” in the Heritage Day parade in order to recognize “people of multicultural backgrounds” and “not just Canadians” (60). However, when

Adele disappears into the scene of the parade and emerges publicly in her underwear, she is not regarded as part of the “*performance*” (60) of community parade; rather, she is considered someone who must be removed. According to her son, Adele is kindly assisted by an older man and woman, assumed to be white and Canadian, back to her home:

Mother is now being helped somewhat unwillingly toward her home by an older man and woman. She seemed, magically, to grow to inhuman proportions. She swelled as big as one of those inflatable puppets you sometimes see on poles at parades. As looming and caricatured and awkwardly handled as that. Coming toward me. Coming home. (61-62).

Adele’s son describes this moment as “caricatured and awkwardly handled” (62), implying an uncomfortable form of tactile touching between Adele and these citizens. The Heritage Parade is not a scene of tactile violence by members of the host country against Adele; rather, these members of Adele’s outside community enact the normative behavior of what Daniel Coleman calls “white civility” (Coleman 5) by assisting her kindly though awkwardly back into her home, telling her son that she has a “Brave face” (Chariandy 62), but never returning to follow up regarding Adele’s well-being.

Fugitive Pieces, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* illustrate the challenges of diasporic subjects to negotiate their different cultural and biomedical identities in contemporary Canada. Yet Adele’s son also notes in *Soucouyant* how his mother “discovers anew the many riddles of her body, the holes in her face, the electric shock between her legs” (Chariandy 131). How might alternative possibilities be articulated for diasporic embodiment and community through the tactile and affective qualities of touch? What are the effects of insisting on a haptic form of theory that breaks from the imposition of coherence by gesturing towards new metaphors and ontologies of subjectivity and embodiment? I contend that there are alternative ways of

reading diasporic embodiment in the aesthetic contexts of these official multicultural and biomedical spaces. The title of Chariandy's novel refers to the Caribbean myth of the skin diving vampire, an aspect of the text that I have thus far left untouched. Chariandy's title points to some interesting possibilities for embodiment not only in his own text but also in *Fugitive Pieces* and *What We All Long For*, wherein the shifting nature of diasporic affiliations, orientations, and exchanges produce haptic processes of becoming, which I term "skin diving."

The soucouyant in Trinidadian and other Caribbean folklore (also known as Ole-Higue or Loogaroo) is a skin diving witch vampire, one who lives by day as an old woman on the margins of a village, and at night, strips off her wrinkled skin, puts it in a mortar and flies in the shape of a fireball through the darkness looking for a victim.¹⁸ Still in the shape of a fireball, the soucouyant enters the home of her victim through the keyhole or any crack or crevice. In Chariandy's novel, the soucouyant lives a reclusive yet "fairly ordinary life on the edge of town" and after seeking out her victim and sucking his blood, leaves him with "little sign of her work except increasing fatigue, a certain paleness, and perhaps, if he were to look closely on his body, a telltale bruise or mark on his skin" (135). If the soucouyant takes too much from her victim, he or she will die and become a soucouyant, or else perish entirely, leaving her killer to assume his or her skin. In *Soucouyant*, Adele relates tales of her childhood in Trinidad through the myth of the soucouyant. Such fragmented gestures of storytelling reflect the importance of honoring and preserving cultural memory, specifically Adele's need to remember who she was before the onset of her illness and to come to terms with her sociocultural position (as a marginalized position, much like the soucouyant figure) while residing in Canada. Yet Adele's son explains to a police officer in the novel why his mother chooses to frame her life experiences according to

¹⁸ "Soucouyant" is a French Creole term, so it necessarily was imported from elsewhere in the Caribbean. Patrick Chamoiseau also uses the figure in his novel *Texaco* (1998).

this particular myth:

it's not really about a soucouyant. It's about an accident. It's about what happened in her birthplace during World War II. It's a way of telling without really telling, you see, and so you don't really have to know what a soucouyant is. (66)

Knowledge of the American occupation of Trinidad in the 1940s (where the figure of the zombie gained wide currency), its destructive effects on Adele and her mother, and the literal and psychological disfigurement that it wrought on these women is central in the characters' piecing together of splintered memories of these diasporic subjects. The deployment of this myth ultimately exposes the haunting history of marginalization and trauma that sustains diasporic subjects as they cope with the challenges of illness and social alienation. According to Adele's son, "Mother never deliberately explained to me her past, but I learned anyway" (Chariandy 23). As the soucouyant myth is carried into present day Toronto, Adele's diagnosis with dementia coincides with the subtle suggestion throughout the narrative of her transforming into the soucouyant. Adele lives a reclusive life on the edge of Toronto and is witnessed by her son during several scenes wandering around like a soucouyant. The suggestion of Adele's transformation into the soucouyant is seen both in the public spaces of Scarborough and the medical healthcare system as well as in the private space of her home; this transformation specifically includes her shifting status as a medical dependent who must receive constant care from her son and caregiver Meera, as well as her role as the storyteller who provides fragmented accounts of the soucouyant myth to members of her diasporic community.

Extending the myth of the soucouyant to the material and affective experiences of different diasporic subjects, I would like to suggest that this skin diving metaphor is a truly haptic orientation insofar as it offers a metaphoric site of embodiment and agency in diasporic

discourses, similar to what Deleuze and Guattari call “becoming-imperceptible” (262).¹⁹ Skin diving usually refers to the action or sport of swimming under water without a diving suit, typically in deep water (as explored in Anne Michaels’s sensual book of poetry *Skin Divers* [1999]). Skin diving carries the connotation of mobility, with or without safety provisions, in different environments, but it also implies less ability or desire to control or intervene in one’s environment than in scuba diving. With respect to the Caribbean myth of the soucouyant, I examine the notion of skin diving not as enactment of cultural appropriation but as a play on cultural identity as a construction, including its references to complex bodily orientation and spatial mobility.²⁰ Indeed, as Paterson claims, if the subject’s body is “obsolete,” insofar as it is no longer coherent, then “flesh is to be celebrated, manipulated, metamorphosed” (Paterson 114).²¹ Marinkova has described the transformative potential of “skin shedding” in reference to the title of Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), a novel that focuses on the traditional representation of immigrant or migrant bodies in 1930s Toronto as a “symptom of disempowerment” (106). Marinkova claims that the potential of skin shedding to transform the language, politics, and embodiments of these migrants “does not obliterate the regulation of the corporeal that social and political exclusion operates” but rather, it shifts the reader’s attention to the “affective potential of the emancipated body” (106). Skin shedding depicts an orientation that “gives the corporeal an existence beyond that of a machine extension” (107), such as those used

¹⁹ The concept of “becoming-imperceptible” also relates to Deleuze and Guattari’s other conceptualized processes of becoming, such as “becoming-minor,” becoming-animal,” and “becoming-revolutionary,” in how each type of becoming marks a phase of moving away from subordinate categories or subject positions. Becoming-imperceptible thus calls for a form of positioning that is not fixed in time or space, while also resisting the calls of other theorists to make certain subordinated categories of subjects more visible and thus more objectively understood in literature.

²⁰ Thrift contends that “play” is a “perpetual human activity,” both performative and theoretical, with immense affective significance which is by no means confined to early childhood, and in which many basic ethical dilemmas may be worked through in ways which are both performative and theoretical (7).

²¹ Paterson explores haptic aesthetics in the fine arts world, concluding how similar metaphors of skin diving “allow for an alterity that cannot be experienced so radically or immersively elsewhere, facilitating an experimentation and play not only with the biological facticity of the body... but with its ‘functions’ and ‘identities’” (Paterson 107).

by migrants to build major landmarks in Toronto. Skin diving thus breaks away from how racial or ethnic identities have been theorized as mere surface constructions, and carries both the lateral connotation of skin as well as the deeper connotation of affect. Skin diving suggests how bodies constantly shift in their embodiments, proximities, vulnerabilities, and agencies, and are less bound to physical or social coherence.

Examining the problematic nature of maintaining universal scientific practices and the associated constructions of race in “Race: Universal Donors in a Vampire Culture. It’s All In The Family: Biological Kinship Categories in the Twentieth-Century United States,” Haraway calls for models of human interaction and difference rooted less in objective scientific practices (even for sociocultural purposes) and more so in “friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope” (285). Seeking to conceptualize new forms of social and scientific embodiment, Haraway advocates a form of theory that conceives of an “‘unfamiliar’ unconscious, a different primal scene where everything does not stem from the dramas of identity and production” (285). In *Soucouyant*, Adele’s role as the diasporic skin diver functions across a similar model. Her shifting embodiment means that she does not “understand that thing called memory,” as she is not bound coherently to the body’s “essence” or dynamism and her body never seemed to “abide by the rules of time or space, or individual consciousness” (166). Adele’s embodiment is epistemologically different from her son or her host culture, but she maintains haptic relationships with members of her community and even host country. For instance, as her son attends to her body in decline, they develop a haptic relationship in their collaborative maintenance of her body; this relationship simultaneously functions on the basis of avoiding Adele’s skin diving behaviours associated with her dementia (such as her shedding of clothing in the street during the Heritage Day parade),

while also accepting her often fragmented yet deeply affective personal stories regarding her past in Trinidad, which take on the metaphoric role of skin diving, as she shifts in and out of the role of storyteller and soucouyant.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob also describes a duration of healing following the tragedy of his family's death in Poland, when he sought to take another skin in order to hide from the Nazi authorities and delay the physical and affective impact of his loss: "In those days, I stayed in the small bedroom, willing my skin to take on the woodgrain of the floor, to take on the pattern of the rug or the bedcover, so I could disappear simply by stillness" (18). Skin diving not only denotes the mobility of the body, such as in the case of Adele's itinerant status, but also stillness and silence following trauma that has been destructive to the body. Skin diving allows the diasporic subject a form of embodiment that, although temporarily immobile, is not fixed in time or space and has a restorative potential. Jakob's geographic position also affects the extent of his skin diving, as his position in Poland is more restricted than his eventual position in Toronto. In *What We All Long For*, Toronto represents an ideal site for diasporic skin diving, as Brand writes that people "turn into other people imperceptibly, unconsciously, right here in the grumbling train" (5). Here, Brand describes the extent of skin diving and the haptic tactile contact between anonymous bodies in the city of Toronto: "after being sandpapered by the jostling and scraping that a city like this does, all the lives they've hoarded... all the inversions they've made for protection, all the scars and marks and records for recognition... There's so much spillage" (5).

Later on in *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob describes his haptic relationship to his wife's body as a kind of shared skin diving. He notes how, "Michaela forgets her body for hours at a time" yet her body is "there again, reappearing suddenly in the chair. And I feel deep appreciation for those heavy, sneaky limbs that have defied her mind's authority without it knowing. She looks at me,

all presence. While her body and I share our delicious secret” (190-191). Their sexual intimacy allows Jakob to momentarily escape his past, and this process of is a tactile experience, but it is also an affective one, as Michaela’s “hands carry [Jakob’s] memories” (192). Furthermore, the haptic quality of the body of history and memory takes on similar qualities of skin diving, as it is a body that ultimately traverses fixed temporalities or spatialities. Jakob explains that in recalling the past, there is “no absence, if there remains even the memory of absence. Memory dies unless it’s given a use. Or as Athos might have said: If one no longer has land but has the memory of land, then one can make a map” (193). Skin diving and its associated mythological and intimate social constructions, including Jakob’s haptic relationship to Michaela, point to complex and shared processes of becoming and unbecoming, hybrid identities rather than fixed cultural and biomedical orientations that take place at the level of the body through the aesthetics of touch.

In *Soucouyant*, it is not only Adele who must touch and feel in intimate ways to mediate her surroundings, to steady herself in an “increasingly alien world” (41). Adele’s son describes how at a crucial and early point in his life, something “seeped” into him, some “mood or manner was transmitted” and afterward, things became “more complicated” (101). According to Adele’s son, “I couldn’t always control the signals that my body gave off. I couldn’t always produce the feelings that were expected of me, or else translate my thoughts into meaningful statements. At the very least, I picked up my parents’ accent, including the inability to pronounce ‘thhh’” (101). In response to his linguistic (and at times bodily) struggles, and having limited knowledge of his mother’s complicated history, Adele’s son decides that he must haptically navigate his roots rather than proceed traditionally or discursively towards a coherent sense of understanding his mother. As a young boy, he was encouraged by his school librarian to treat a personal history as a “living book,” as “blood and flesh,” and as a “grammar for life” (137). His teacher, a representative of

the Canadian nation-state and an arbiter of a history that has marginalized blackness in many ways, encourages him, a young man born of the Caribbean diaspora, to explore the history of Caribbean peoples alongside the history of Canada. His teacher urges him to celebrate his history as one that not only records hauntings and deaths but that also offers new life to past diasporic generations. Rather than explore the documented history of Trinidad through traditional practices of reading historical accounts (or even examining visual accounts through photography), Adele's son comes to a palpable sense of his history through his haptic touching of the history books, books with "meanings [that] became riddles unto themselves" (136) as well as the mysterious marks his mother (and her death) leaves on his body: "a mysterious bruise on my forehead. I touch it and wince at the sharpness of the pain" (141). Together, this process provides a sense of physical embodiment (in touching and discovering the bruise and one's sense of fallibility) as well as haptic aesthetic affiliation, in how Adele's son engages with metaphors and affective traces of his mother in the present. Furthermore, when Adele's son's curiosity leads him to find his brother's cookie container full of family photos and keepsakes hidden in the basement of their home, he relates:

I sit on the couch and have a closer look at the container. It was once a five-pound tin of butter cookies, and it still bears the lines 'By Appointment to His Majesty, the King' as well as a Union Jack in vivid white and blue and red. I lift the lid off. Suck of air and an old smell. Inside are lost images. In the oldest photos, it's hard to distinguish the image from the condition of the photograph itself. Flesh takes on yellow contagions and limbs are hurt by creases. Feet and hands suffer from frayed edges and expressions fade into vagueness or duplicity. (Chariandy 114)

This alternative narrative, an interpersonal bodily one influenced by an archive of memory,

shifting skins, and resurgent folklore, allows Adele's son to reconstruct the history of his family in the space between Canada and the Caribbean, where, through an act of the imagination and will, there may exist "freedom of meaning" (Chariandy 194) and a potential site of healing. Adele's son identifies new possibilities in the "wild magic of existence," as geographies "[slip] into each other. Constellations wheeling above and seasons bleeding into each other so that some wintry neighbourhood can become tropical in an instant" (Chariandy 194). Adele's son haptically turns the pages of the "living book" of his family's history to find some alternative to the disempowering pathology of forgetting that has been imposed on his mother's body by her host country. This haptic turn, one towards the material body of history, extends to the kind of intimacy that is later established between Adele and her son when they Adele sits in the tub with her son seated beside her. Adele "looks slowly about without moving her head" and then looks up quickly at her son, who responds to her gaze through touch: "'Look, Mother. Your calves.' 'You calves?' 'These, Mother. These are your calves. They're beautiful.' 'They's not . . . beautiful.' 'They are.' 'Maybe. *Someways.*' 'Always'" (84).

Adele's son alludes to his mother's orientation following the onset of her illness in *Soucouyant* as a kind of "two-ness" (53), metaphorically comparing Adele's interchangeable embodiment to the taste of lemon meringue pie that she always longed to try in Canada (a "velvet sweet and sharpness at once" [53]). Following Adele's death, her son looks at himself in the kitchen window, "darkened to a mirror with the coming of night," asking himself: "Are these her cheeks, her eyebrows? Are my ears really like teacup handles?" (Chariandy 84). Adele's son reflects on how his mother's body has affected his own, passing her "two-ness" to him. In this nighttime scene, Adele's son references not only to the inherited physical characteristics of his mother but the qualities of her metaphoric skin diving as well. In a novel of forgetting, such

haptic orientations designate creative sites of becoming that allows for otherwise unsuspected sources of interaction and knowledge to occur, at the level of the subject's body and in his or her diasporic community. As Adele's son explains in *Soucouyant*:

I wanted to imagine her growing, not diminishing. I wanted to portray her awakening to something that we wouldn't have guessed at otherwise. The freedom of meaning, the wild magic of existence. Geographies slipping into each other. Constellations wheeling above and seasons bleeding into each other so that some wintry neighbourhood can become tropical in an instance. (194)

As a reader and critic, I have likewise sought to find a "freedom of meaning" pertaining to the sense of touch and diasporic skin diving, something akin to the "wild magic of existence" (Chariandy 194) that embodies the complex subjectivities of characters such as Adele. Tracing the sensory modalities of diasporic subjects entails finding a way towards new and creative "politics of effective togetherness" (Thrift 22). The pressing political task and social experiment necessarily becomes a "work of 'ensoulment' aimed at making more room in the world for new political forms" (Thrift 22), including haptically engaged forms of theory. Chris Ewart affirms in "Terms of *Disappropriation: Disability, Diaspora and Dionne Brand's What We All Long For*" how as "writers appropriate and represent difference, connections between theories involving the body and migration can protect and project their subjects in promising ways" (158). I likewise seek to trace the haptic qualities of diasporic literature not only to "protect" and "project" the more incoherent qualities of embodiment in "promising ways" (Ewart 158) but also to playfully engage with the metaphoric orientations of diasporic subjects in these narratives. This entails reading the chanciness of cross-cultural haptic encounters and metaphoric sites of skin diving, which Brand aptly describes in *What We All Long For*: "What floats in the air on a subway train

like this is chance. People stand or sit with the thin magnetic film of their life wrapped around them... Any minute you can crash into someone else's life, and if you're lucky, it's good, it's like walking on light" (4). *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* each point to alternative sites of cultural embodiment and togetherness through unforeseen forms of relationality, akin to what Brand describes in *What We All Long For* as a magnetism that invariably "wrapped around them" (4), resulting in the diasporic subject's self-awareness and his or her haptic engagement with other bodies and spaces across the city.

Concluding this section, I have proposed a form of haptic criticism that examines the histories and affiliations of diasporic subjects in terms of their diverse negotiations, capabilities, and restrictions. This chapter has shown how the sense of touch preserves private spaces of bodily phenomena and affiliation by confronting the broader pressures of multiculturalism and medical health. I have also shown how forms of agency surface in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* through the haptic gestures of diasporic subjects and their associated processes of skin diving. Although I have not argued for any emancipatory role of touch in diasporic discourse, I have been concerned with sites where diasporic subjects can build communities and affiliations, not only laterally but also deeply and empathetically; yet such haptic tactile affiliations become increasingly difficult to conceptualize in global geographic contexts, as I will explore in Chapter Three. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will examine the haptic connotations of diasporic geographies in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, contending that the aesthetics of the sense of touch in these novels challenge the traditional geographic distinctions made between local and global spaces.

Chapter Three: Haptic Diasporic Geographies

The city concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with a multiplicity of other cultures and identities. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes these cultures and identities with 'otherness' thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere. (Sassen qtd. in Johansen 50)

...the hand will extend, be able to touch more entities and will encounter entities which are more 'touchable.' The set of experiences gathered under 'touch' will therefore become a more important sense, taking in and naming experiences which heretofore have not been considered as tactile and generating haptic experiences which have hitherto been unknown. (Thrift 103-104)

So far, I have traced the ways in which touch breaks down the sense of a unified and sovereign body in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*. The previous chapter discussed the physical and social pressures of the Canadian healthcare system and the inclusive-sounding policies of official multiculturalism in Canada. Chapter Two also proposed that the concept of skin diving offers a metaphoric form of cultural embodiment for diasporic subjects negotiating the complex sociocultural terrain of contemporary Canada. The task of this final chapter is to trace how particular geographies incite tactile and affective forms of touch in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*. I hope to show how these novels and their metaphors of contact and proximity point to the challenges of mapping the qualities of diasporic embodiment and movement. I also intend to convey how the aesthetics of touch blur the coherent boundaries between local and global spaces in contemporary diasporic literature.

Thrift and Pile point out that nowadays identity is often “hedged about with spatial metaphors,” or what Gilroy calls the “spatial focus” (10). This has entailed new forms of social and cultural mapping that are less dependent on visual representation, relying more on the interplay of the other senses in collaboratively tracing alternative sites of embodiment, such as

community mapping and even virtual social networking. According to Thrift, touch and the sensorium are manifold in “re-mapping the topography of the body and its sensory properties, from one mode of mediation to another” (105). Confined less by the concrete boundaries of cultural or geographic space, subjectivity can now be re-conceived as rooted in the “spatial home of the body” (Thrift and Pile 11). However, mapping the geographic affiliations of diasporic subjects throughout their associative narratives of “mobility” and “transculturation” (Thrift and Pile 10) has been particularly challenging, in large part because diasporic subjects often occupy shifting, unmarked, or transitional sites across the globe. In “Global Journeys: From Transnationalism to Diaspora,” Nadja C. Johnson explains that a diaspora is considered to be “a process, a practice” (54), not exclusively a category of people. Furthermore, in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall suggests that instead of thinking of identity as an “already accomplished fact,” critics should think of identity as a “‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (234). Although visual maps of diasporic migrations have tried to trace their official histories and geographic routes, these processes have tended to be inconsistent with the complex and changing social, political, and emotional affiliations of diasporic subjects and the lines that are drawn by the geographer’s hand never faithfully represent the subject’s physical or emotional passage. As Jakob notes in *Fugitive Pieces*, “[m]aps of history have always been less honest... The closest we come to knowing the location of what’s unknown is when it melts through the map like a watermark, a stain transparent as a drop of rain” (137). This passage supports the transient nature of mapping and attends to the failure of geographic representation to literally sustain itself on paper. Diasporic subjects, their communities, and their migrations are not typically represented on traditional maps but they are constituted through a series of performative practices and

embodiments. According to Johnson, “becoming a member of a diaspora community is a process of self-identification and consciousness” (54). This sense of self-identification and consciousness is less compatible with traditional geographic practices of mapping through visual representation and more in line with haptic aesthetics and non-representational practices emerging in cultural geography.

I contend that *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* illustrate the shifting boundaries of cultural embodiment through gestures of touch and this shifting embodied nature is incited not only by the diasporic subject’s relationship to particular sociocultural contexts but also by his or her haptic relationship to space. Such relational forms of embodied sociocultural geography can be seen in *What We All Long For*, as Brand emphasizes the sense of bodies grazing other bodies, the near touching of different subjects in the city space, the fear of too much cross-cultural contact:

Mornings are like that on the subway trains – everyone having left their sovereign houses and apartments and rooms to enter the crossroads of the city, they first try at not letting the city touch them, holding on to the meager privacy of a city with three million people. But eventually they're disrupted like this. Anonymity is the big lie of a city. You aren't anonymous at all. You're common, really, common like so many pebbles, so many specks of dirt, so many atoms of materiality. (3)

This emphasis on the proximate relationships between cultural bodies and space is seen in Nigel Thrift’s non-representational theory, an approach that challenges some of the assumptions about the field of geography and how it represents particular bodies and spaces. In his work *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (2007), a book based on the “leitmotif of movement in its many forms” (5), Thrift optimistically conceives of a tactile and affective world

of entanglements, performative presentations, and showings rather than exclusively discursive or visual representations.²² Given that there has been increasing interest in practice and performance in cultural geography, Thrift's approach attempts to move away from representation and the imposition of foreign epistemologies onto diverse forms of embodiment and space, re-focusing cultural geography instead on performativity and subjective bodily practices. In *What We All Long For*, Brand asks regarding the experience of living in Toronto, "[h]ave you ever smelled this city at the beginning of spring? Dead winter circling still, it smells of eagerness and embarrassment and, most of all, longing" (1). How does one map "longing"? Thrift and Pile seek to newly conceptualize mapping as "wayfinding," in order to respond to a series of representational challenges in the field of cultural geography:

The human subject is difficult to map for numerous reasons. There is the difficulty of mapping something that does not have precise boundaries. There is the difficulty of mapping something that cannot be counted as singular but only as a mass of different and sometimes conflicting subject positions. There is the difficulty of mapping something that is always on the move, culturally, and in fact. There is the difficulty of mapping something that is only partially locatable in time-space. Then, finally, there is the difficulty of deploying the representational metaphor of mapping with its history of subordination to an Enlightenment logic in which everything can be surveyed and pinned down. (1)

Rather than seek to maintain sovereign forms of representation or impose universal meanings onto bodies or spaces (especially as theorists often fail to relate the more experiential elements of culture through iconic, indexical, or symbolic aspects of semiotics), the non-representational

²² I also cite Thrift and Pile's collaborative work *Mapping the Subject*, for its interest in the "gateway between ... spatial metaphors and the interdisciplinary question of the constitution of the subject" (Preface).

model urges those using social theory and conducting geographical research to abandon the epistemological struggles of their antecedents and move beyond representation to develop a new performative language of experience. This entails engaging more actively, sensually, and creatively with the experiences and relationships of social bodies in proximity to other bodies, things, and spaces. Although I am not convinced that the non-representational theory model fully succeeds in thrusting cultural geography *beyond* representation, I am interested in its preoccupation with the “mundane everyday practices” (8) that shape cross-cultural relations in particular spatial contexts.²³ I view Thrift’s work on performativity and bodily practices as an important starting point in thinking about alternative ways of engaging with embodiment across highly contextualized sociocultural geographies. I have likewise concentrated on these details and practices throughout my own work, as haptic aesthetics serve as “material bodies of work or styles... corporeal routines and specialized devices” (Thrift 8) with great insight into the more incoherent aspects of diverse cultural life and spatial experience and that ultimately work towards new understandings of mobility, self-expression, and empathy.

Thrift proposes that “we could perhaps live in a less ‘stingy’ ... and more playful way,” overcoming or at least bypassing some of the “cringes that have been sewn into the fibers of our being as we have learnt how to be embodied” (4). The net outcome of this proposal would be that the “texture,” “feel,” and “outcome” everyday life could be reworked as “traditional forms of expression [are] slowly but surely breathed differently” (4). For instance, despite the sociocultural and medical challenges that Adele faces in Canada in *Soucouyant*, her son

²³ One criticism of theories of affect, including Thrift’s non-representational model, is that they ignore questions of class, race, gender and social power more generally. Nash cautions the neglect of these concepts, as the stress on the physical enactment of affects and tactile modes is sometimes coupled with a “depoliticized phenomenological sense of unconscious embodiment [that] appeals to the universal condition of human embodied life” (655). A return to the body, according to Nash, either leads to “understanding and denaturalizing the social differentiation of bodies through practices” or “a more generic and celebratory notion of the embodied nature of experience” (655).

describes how early on she “felt alive” in Toronto, “attuned at once to dozens of different voices and smells” (69). Just as Adele embraces the different voices, smells, and affects of Toronto, Thrift’s proposal to embrace the mundane details of bodily practices and spatial interactions likewise evokes a renewed sense of mobility and hapticity in everyday life, including the undoing of “sewn fibers” of coherent social being in order to experience the shifting “texture” of contemporary experience (4). With the suggested haptic “texture” of everyday life, Thrift embraces both the tactile and affective elements of spatial experience, as affects may be understood to influence or result from nearly every part of embodiment, including the precognitive moments that he describes as “coming-into-embodiment” (16). Thrift writes in “Spatialities of Feeling,” that when critics embrace the creative possibilities of affects in cultural geography, contemporary cities can be seen more than ever as “roiling maelstroms of affect,” where affects continually circulate, touch other bodies, and manifest themselves in “events which can take place either at a grand scale or simply as part of continuing everyday life” (171).

Inspired by Thrift’s non-representational model and its emphasis on the “texture” (4) of contemporary experience, I read the aesthetics of touch in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* for what they suggest about the diasporic subject’s creative haptic relationship to space and geography, including what I refer to in rather slippery terms as “territory” or “locality.” In *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob explains regarding the development of his relationship with Athos that they “entered a territory of greater and greater tenderness, two lost souls alone on deck on a black and limitless ocean” (22). Territory traditionally refers to an area of land under the jurisdiction of a sovereign state, or an area defended by one group against another. In *Fugitive Pieces*, territory also refers to the shared proximity of two or more bodies, carrying with them any number of haptic qualities and capacities, as a territory of tenderness

denotes the caring and caressing of an interpersonal relationship, the frailty of a body, or a felt and shared state, following an injury, wherein a body or several bodies are expected to heal.

Territory carries with it several broader historical-geographical contexts in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, including the history of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora and the Black Atlantic, the Holocaust, and refugee migrations following the war in Vietnam. I contend that in these novels, territory consists, as a shared space, of no clearly delineated social, political, or spatial boundaries, existing simply because it is felt and perceived internally and externally, affectively and at times tactilely by the bodies involved. In *Soucouyant*, for instance, Adele's son conveys the complicated sense of territory that he shares with his school librarian Miss Cameron, who had a "passion for local history" (103):

When we drifted apart, it wasn't for any of the reasons you might have supposed. It wasn't because there couldn't be a connection between the two of us. It wasn't because I couldn't recognize how special Miss Cameron was, or how lonely a woman like her would be in any 'traditional community' with little genuine interest in the past. But something loomed between us all the same. Something vague yet palpable, like a bruise or soreness after a night of fitful dreams. (105-106)

He and Miss Cameron eventually drift apart, unable to maintain a sense of proximity tactilely as they once did while exploring the history books of their local community, yet Adele's son senses how, affectively, there is something still shared between them, something linked to their locality that may only be rendered "palpable" (106). In *What We All Long For*, while some characters long for and effectively foster such territory, Brand also portrays the disparate and disconnected territories of diasporic subjects and their communities. Carla and her brother Jamal, for instance, do not share the same territory of tenderness, although they sometimes occupy a shared tactile

territory because of their familial relationship and their physical proximity to one another in Toronto. Their felt geographies are strikingly dissimilar and they foster very different haptic relationships to Toronto. Brand writes:

Jamal didn't see the city as she did. ... [Carla] saw the city as a set of obstacles to be crossed and circled, avoided and let pass. He saw it as something to get tangled in. Why couldn't he just see one step ahead of himself, she wondered, one want ahead of itself, as she crisscrossed and floated under the highway bypasses. (32)

This passage from *What We All Long For* is one example of the diverse haptic relationships that diasporic subjects have to cities and geographies. Carla desires some commonality with her brother in the shared social space of the city: "If she could give Jamal a memory, she thought – something like a lovely secret – he could hold it and it could perhaps make him strong when he needed it" (Brand 105). Yet she and her brother, two second-generation diasporic subjects, have very different sensual experiences in Toronto, one empathetic and ambitious, the other emotional, driven by desire and the "closest physical encounters" (32).

Haptic ties to geographies are not only felt tactilely, as objects and spaces are sensed in relation to other parts of the body, but also affectively in terms of the phenomenological perception of space, time, and history. Regarding the diasporic subject's distant orientation while living abroad, Jakob observes in *Fugitive Pieces* how it is "longing that moves the sea" (Michaels 75). Likewise, Athos observes while living in Canada how it is "love" that makes diasporic subjects experience a place differently, "just as you hold differently an object that belongs to someone you love" (82). This haptic affective relationship to geography and the feeling of being at home or away is best expressed through the sub-sense of proprioception, which refers to the body's felt position, most often through sensations not fully experienced in

direct contact but merely through sensitivity and affect. Abbie Garrington describes the dual function of proprioception in “Touching Texts: The Haptic Sense in Modernist Literature” as facilitating both “the information-gathering activities of the body through its sensing organs” and its “meaning-making” activities (811). Proprioception refers to the “awareness of our body’s position in space, using information derived from nerve endings in the muscles. It includes awareness of movement and position through tactility as well as kinaesthesia, that is, through surface as well as internal events” (Paterson 21). The dual function of proprioception can be seen in *Fugitive Pieces* in Athos’s gathering of information for his book: “He often applied the geologic to the human, analyzing social change as he would a landscape; slow persuasion and catastrophe. Explosions, seizures, floods, glaciation. He constructed his own historical topography” (119). Athos engages tactilely with the landscape as an archaeologist and he also engages haptically with history, slowly piecing together a historical topography through affective touch. Jakob also reflects on his own exploration of Toronto and other geographies, noting that sometimes “there are steep places, where one has to walk ahead of the other. If I can’t find you, I’ll look deeper in myself. If I can’t keep up, if you’re far ahead, look back. Look back” (292). The diasporic subject’s body and affects constantly work, whether consciously or not, to collect information in response to sociocultural and spatial contexts; this sometimes entails that subjects look deep within themselves rather than externally for a sense of touch and contact.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, diasporic subjects not only experience tactile and affective forms of touch but also touching geographic encounters that take on haunting or ghostly qualities. When one abandons concrete claims to representation in practices of cultural geography, haunting forms of spatial awareness begin to emerge. This haunting spatial awareness is expressed through tactile and affective forms of touch, which also

carry historical or sociocultural significance. This haunting awareness includes Jakob's relationship to Toronto in *Fugitive Pieces* and how it incites memories of his sister Bella, memories that have haptic implications:

I took in the cold beauty of Lakeshore Cement, with its small gardens someone thought to plant at the foot of each massive silo. ... I filled them with loneliness. I listened to these dark shapes as if they were black spaces in music, a musician learning the silences of a piece. I felt this was my truth. That my life could not be stored in any language but only in silence; the moment I looked into the room and took in only what was visible, not vanished. The moment I failed to see Bella had disappeared. ... I lived a breath apart, a touch-typist who holds his hands above the keys slightly in the wrong place, the words coming out meaningless, garbled. Bella and I inches apart, the wall between us. (111)

Geographies are tied to memories, and the infallible nature of memory here is tied to Jakob's haptic attempts to recall his sister through language. These complex associations could not merely be mapped onto traditional geography. Extending the memory from his own body to his sense of place, Jakob determines that he will live "a breath apart ... his hands above the keys slightly in the wrong place, the words coming out meaningless" (111) in order to retain haptic proximity to his sister. The haunting haptic quality of diasporic geography is also relayed in *Soucouyant*, as Chariandy explains the origin of the colonial settlement Carenage, which was named after the Spanish ships that "anchored there long ago to be careened. Cleaned of barnacles and made sleek and efficient again after the trips from Africa. 'What were they carrying?' Adele once asked. 'Ghosts,' the old woman answered" (Chariandy 182). Chariandy also describes the haunting cultural and geographic quality of Trinidad:

There is a world of strange music around Carenage. There is Chacachacare, a haunted island off the island's easternmost tip that was once a leper colony. Miles west, there is a magnetic road where carts and bicycles appear to roll uphill. Farther south, there are villages celebrating Hosay and Diwali and Phagwa, proving that Columbus was right, that it is possible to sail west from Europe and reach India. Farther south again, there is a pitch lake where the earth wells up black and prehistoric, where those who are not cautious might sink to their fate and perhaps be recovered centuries later, a body steeped in tar and half preserved, a teabag dripping juices. And farther south once more, the oilfields and the rigs with their fires burning through the night. (174)

The island of Trinidad consists of many localities, including its neighbouring islands, such as the abandoned ghost island of Chacachacare, traced by narrator and other diasporic subjects through the repetition of "farther south" and "farther south" again. Such memories of Trinidad, including the soucouyant, encompass a haunting (and undocumented) version of events, a "heaviness of a history that couldn't leave" (115), according to Adele's son.

The language of touch also intimately traces diasporic geographies by alluding to the complex social, political, and economic contexts of diasporic relations. Jakob observes in *Fugitive Pieces* how there are "places that claim you and places that warn you away" (Michaels 157). Thrift cautions about the assumptions of scale that have occurred in cultural geography: "always be suspicious that the difference between 'large' and 'small,' 'macro' and 'micro,' 'general' and 'specific' is necessarily significant" (21). I am likewise wary of distinctions of scale and the circulations of power that permeate the shared geographic terrain that these narratives traverse, as these distinctions often conflate size or breadth with political or discursive importance. Tied to representations of cultural or political space are the ubiquitous circulations

of sovereign power that cannot go untraced. These circulations of power, whether state or global, implicate local and global terrains of inequality. This sense of a geography that contains both the contours of private narratives as well as public, political, or economic qualities can be seen in *Soucouyant*, in how Adele's son perceives his family's home in relation to his community, the natural landscape, and the rest of the city:

Despite the view and the fact that many consider the surrounding neighbourhood 'a *good* part of Scarborough,' our place is difficult to boast of. We are alone in a cul-de-sac once used as a dump for real estate developers. The house is old and bracing now for the real assaults of erosion. Even in summer, all windows facing south are kept shut. Because of the railway track, scarcely ten feet away. (9)

Their home is located in an isolated low-income cul-de-sac (although "a *good* part of Scarborough" [9]), in proximity to the slowly eroding waterfront of Lake Ontario. Adele's son understands the ironic way in which his family occupies their home in its precarious geographic position – on the eroding landscape at the edge of a Great Lake – just as they interact with their social landscape. In this scene, aware of his family's relative distance from the wealthy center of Toronto, Adele's son resolves to accept their marginal position, gazing out over the "weathered edge" of the lake, which has been "touched by the dying light of the city" (9). As a young boy, his teacher Miss Cameron also describes the haptically rich history of their family's home in Scarborough, encouraging him to explore the many mysteries buried deep in its foundation:

Yours is a very old place. In fact, the property is actually mentioned in one of the earliest surveys of the area. We're talking the beginning of the 1800s. Of course the house itself would be younger, especially the second story. Still, you should be on the lookout for relics, young man, especially in the basement. Misplaced books and toys. Diaries hidden

behind walls and under floorboards. I'm sure there are many interesting old things lurking about. (Chariandy 104)

First- and second-generation diasporic subjects experience the geographic contours of the host country differently, including sites of mobility and exclusion, depending on the context of their occupancy and affiliation. According to Miss Cameron, knowing the “history of a place means knowing the history of other places too” (106). Miss Cameron claims that this must involve tracing the history of Adele’s birthplace: “Look at these books about your mother’s birthplace. You should be very, very proud. Have you any idea of how important it was as a member of the British Empire?” (Chariandy 106). Despite his vague recollection of the journey back to Trinidad with Adele, Adele’s son is intimately aware of his complex relationship to his mother’s homeland and the sociopolitical contexts embedded in its geography: “I remember so little about that trip to Carenage. A tree branch blanketed with winged ants, the electric taste of some nameless fruit, the percussion of rain on a galvanized metal roof. Other things too. The sour stink of poverty. The sour stink of poverty. The heaviness of a history that couldn’t leave” (115). Their shared journey back to Trinidad involves not only tracing the geography of Carenage tactilely but also encountering the affective weight of a “history that couldn’t leave” (115), a weight that would inevitably follow them back to Canada.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, diasporic subjects are distributed unevenly across the topography of Toronto and the globe. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Ben describes his affective and tactile touching of the city of Toronto: “I came to an irregular and intimate knowledge of the city. Cities are built on compromising encounters, on shared affections for certain foods, on chance meetings in indoor pools” (Michaels 239). The diasporic subject’s sense of territory, or locality, extends from the private and public spaces of the city

itself to other global deterritorialized contexts. When subjects are in proximity to other bodies in these shared spaces, they have a sense of territory and contact, but when they are far away, moving beyond the city, they must imagine forms of emotional contact and affective touch. According to Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces*, one can “look deeply for meaning or one can invent it” (Michaels 136). For instance, Athos and Jakob become acquainted with the landscape of Toronto through creative tactile and affective associations to Athos’s familiar Greek homeland:

With a few words (an incantation in Greek or English) and the sweep of his hand, Athos sliced a hill in half, drilled under the sidewalk, cleared a forest. He showed me Toronto cross-sectioned; he ripped open cliffs like fresh bread, revealing the ragged geological past. Athos stopped in the middle of busy city streets and pointed out fossils in the limestone ledges of the Park Plaza Hotel or in the walls of a hydro substation. . . . Instantly, the streets were flooded by a subtropical salt sea. I imagined front lawns crammed with treasure: crinoids, lamp shells, trilobites. (98)

By stretching the bounds of locality, while remaining aware of its inevitable constructions, engagement with geography becomes an increasingly collaborative and creative pursuit; this pursuit includes the interaction between the streets of Toronto and the “subtropical salt sea” (98) drawn from Athos and Jakob’s memories of Greece. Jakob also discovers cases of creative spatial interaction when he first explores Toronto alone, noting how, as if determined by “historical accuracy” (not officially, but proven in his own life experiences), the “Greek neighbourhood of Toronto bordered the Jewish” (101). This creative negotiation of geography can especially be seen in *What We All Long For*, in terms of how Tuyen constructs her nomadic art, the *lubaio*, in response to a desire for “commonality” (307) among members of her diasporic community and their host country (which is also accompanied by a desire to be “unexceptional”

[307], to escape the bounds of national, social, or political coherence). To this end, Tuyen carves and sands the various “scores of scribbled longings” (307), none of which are entirely smooth, but that ultimately come to represent the incoherent aspects of a diasporic geography, including Toronto’s shifting histories, topographies, and embodiments, and longings that extend elsewhere.

Thrift contends that contemporary subjects can begin to perceive and feel distant forms of touch, such as the “invisible messages that inhabit the radio spectrum in their billions and etch another dimension to life” (17). Touch not only occurs in contact and proximity but also at a distance, without immediate tactile impressions. The extent of touch’s reach expands, by way of more fluid, mobile forms of geographic engagement from local to global scale. The diffusion of locality into larger global spaces of cities and countries necessitates a consideration of how geographic and cultural trends of deterritorialization pervade the metaphors in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*. Deterritorialization is a concept derived from Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), but has been re-appropriated in the field of anthropology in reference to the weakening ties between culture and place, signifying a loss of connection among diasporic bodies affected by a shift in geography. Deterritorialization refers to the losing control of a land or place that is already established, and consequently, reterritorialization has usually followed when the original national or political structures have been replaced (such as regime changes). In a political context, deterritorialization has accommodated the complex claims to citizenship and refugee status in the exile or displacement of diasporic communities following the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, migrations along the Black Atlantic, and other national or global events of massive population displacement and destruction; in such historical processes, states such as Canada and the US have not timely or justly accommodated the claims

of refugees from affected nations and allowed bodies to gain hold of new forms of embodiment and to establish themselves, or reterritorialize, into the more liberal democratic spaces of North America.²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari confirm how movements of deterritorialization have haptic connotations, describing processes that decontextualize physical, social, or political relations in terms of the smooth or striated passages of bodies. They describe how these smooth and striated spaces always exist together in “mixture,” implicating each other, as smooth space is constantly being “translated, traversed” into a striated space, and striated space is constantly being “reversed, returned” to a smooth space (474). In *Fugitive Pieces*, Ben describes his passage back to Greece and the touching response it incites regarding his relationship to Jakob and Athos: “I felt the power of your place speaking to my body” (266). Deleuze and Guattari contend that such passages between the striated and the smooth are “at once necessary and uncertain, and all the more disruptive” (493) to the collective claims for more coherent global geographies. This sense of the incoherent boundaries of local and global territory can be seen in how Adele’s son describes his mother’s anxiety regarding their temporary journey back to Carenage: “To Mother, the distance between the two places, Carenage and Port of Spain, always seemed immense, impossible for a child or youth to traverse, just as the distance between Carenage and Canada seemed immense and wholly impossible” (116). Travelling this distance proves nearly impossible financially for Adele and her family (they are only able to pay for Adele and her youngest son to travel back) and the distance also seems too “immense,” too uncertain for Adele to travel across alone with her young son. The haptic association that diasporic subjects have to the desirable process of reterritorialization can also be seen in *Fugitive Pieces*, following Athos’s

²⁴ Canada’s history of accommodating refugee claims has not always been an egalitarian one. In *Seeking Asylum: Human Smuggling and Bureaucracy at the Border* (2010), Alison Mountz examines how the Canadian state regulates transnational migration and specifically, the response of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to one event: the Canadian government’s interception of four boats, carrying 599 Chinese nationals, off the coast of British Columbia in 1999.

death, when Jakob decides he must return Athos's body to his homeland: "I will bring Athos home, to land that remembers him" (118).

Whether or not diasporic subjects are positioned in proximity to a specific geography or struggle feel haptic ties to place from a distance, these subjects are always implicated by the sense of touch. According to Paterson, "the loss of touch, more than any other sense, leads to feeling like an orphan in the world" (33). Precisely because the passages of diasporic subjects carry such heavy haptic implications, whether moving smoothly or encountering striated, restrictive terrains of migration, this emphasis on the sense of touch necessitates a growing awareness of the effects of migration on the subject's body, affects, and sense of place. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri call for a renewed discussion of the intersubjective exchanges of material bodies in systems governed by sovereignty. Arguing that theories have pointed towards contemporary forms of Empire in a "vague and confused way, with no awareness of the paradigmatic leap that this passage constitutes," they insist that we "delve deep into this passage, elaborate its terms, and make clear the lineaments" (Hardt and Negri 139) that constitute this theoretical shift. They contend that the better framework for distinguishing transnational geographies, between either local or global contexts, might instead be to refer to "different networks of flows and obstacles in which the local moment or perspective gives priority to the reterritorializing barriers or boundaries and the global moment privileges the mobility of deterritorializing flows" (45). Indeed, as Hardt and Negri assert, it is false to claim that critics can re-orient local identities in some sense "*outside* and protected against global flows" (45). I have likewise sought to delve deep into the language of the body in order to uncover these flows and affiliations, without making universal claims to identity, in hopes of adequately touching on the "hybridity and ambivalences of our cultures" (Hardt and Negri 139) through the haptic

passages of diasporic subjects in local and global contexts. As Jakob aptly conveys in *Fugitive Pieces*, “I know why we bury our dead and mark the place with stone, with the heaviest most permanent thing we can think of: because the dead are everywhere but the ground” (8). Jakob is mindful of the binds of geographic positioning, wherein subjects perceive themselves to be bound to a place but these ties prove all the while to be fleeting and ephemeral, as the dead are “everywhere but the ground” (80).

In this thesis, I have remained mindful of the transitory nature of physical ties to place in the shifting contexts of diasporic bodies and their movements. I have also sought to theorize a touching form of geographic engagement that is not bound to a particular territory or a universal form of embodiment (although engaging at times with these categories in order to offset them), one that is relational, shared, and ultimately creative in discourses of diaspora. *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* each contend with the struggle to move across physical, national, and global boundaries, as the characters attempt to imagine an affinity both to a changed homeland while residing elsewhere. These novels challenge the coherence of diasporic geographies by touching on and engaging with the haptic connections between the local and the global, as diasporic bodies traverse the boundaries of cities, nations, and global spaces, according to their respective forced or voluntary migrations across continents to their host countries. Revisiting Anderson’s claim regarding “imagined communities” first introduced in my introduction, I contend that such a relational form of community carries important haptic connotations in *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, as it denotes the possibility of affective touch, that is, a form of relationality or emotional contact, despite in the absence of tactile contact or geographic proximity. Imagined communities suggest that affective touch is achievable at a distance, and that geographies, as represented in these texts, are

metaphorically traversable and have haptic elements, both smooth and striated. Furthermore, these novels represent diasporic narratives across shifting geographic and social contexts through the creative piecing together of both diasporic histories and elements of the sociopolitical present. In the final section of this thesis, I will conclude by implicating myself in the haptic act of writing and thereby touching on the nature of these diasporic communities. My own piecing together of this thesis has attempted to respond to the traumatic weight of certain histories and the crisis of representation in discursive politics, but also the promise of a new more proximate form of cultural theory.

Conclusion: Phantom Limbs and the Challenges of Representing Touch

I felt that my study was in search of a different author. It kept changing direction, resisting the narrative threads I was intent on following, moving in and out of Canada and its literature, conflating various temporalities – and thus revealing my historical imagination to be other than what I thought it was. (“Critical Correspondences,” Kamboureli 2)

Above, I cite a passage from the introduction to Smaro Kamboureli’s *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* (2000), where she describes the tension of a diasporic critic’s self-location in producing a new critical project. She suggests that the main symptom of trying to understand the conditions of a particular social body has been that she herself became the “medium of representation” (iv). Referencing Stuart Hall, Kamboureli notes that “[p]ractices of representation. . . always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of *enunciation*” (4). Indeed, the very act of writing or searching for understanding implicates the critic’s proximate haptic role in the process of representation. My own process of writing this project has not merely been from a position of enunciation – of speaking about diaspora – but also a deeply haptic one. The process began with hundreds of post-it notes that I pressed against the pages of the books I selected, first the novels *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*, and later more theoretical texts on the sense of touch and the history of diaspora. My haptic project extended further as I thumbed through the chapters of these texts and traced lines along their individual pages with pencil, isolating passages that I felt aptly portrayed my own lines of inquiry. As I began to type on my computer, my affective ties to these narratives and their theoretical implications also proved to be tactile expressions, enacted in physical proximity to the subject matter through the tapping of keys in the construction of my own passages of partial understanding.

These tactile instances of touch were but the physical manifestations of my affective

haptic connection to the fiction of Michaels, Brand, and Chariandy. I moved to Victoria to attend grad school in August 2012 from Barrie, Ontario, a small city just north of Toronto; I grew up always in proximity to the big city, visiting Toronto so often in fact that, once far away, I began to regard it as my home. It came as no surprise that when searching for some inspiration to write my Master's thesis, I stumbled upon three novels set in the city of Toronto that focused on the complex physical and affective negotiations that diasporic subjects underwent in this place. Even as I moved to Victoria and made a new home for myself, my being away from my home in Ontario – from all of my relatives and the city I had known for so long – necessitated that I look back and find a way to remain connected to it through my work. This connection meant affectively engaging with the diasporic subjects of these novels and their interactions within the city's diverse spaces, including their tracings of the Humber River, Chinatown, Kensington Market, and Greektown. These spaces, which have figured prominently in some of my most meaningful life experiences, even still seem to resist faithful articulation in this project; they remain indiscernible sites of longing for me while I reside elsewhere. In the conclusion to my thesis, I implicate my own haptic role, including my affective and tactile attachments to the process of writing and re-writing about diaspora. In doing so, I embrace the notion of complex personhood regarding the more ineffable qualities of haptic criticism.

In her introduction “Her Shape and His Hand” from *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008), Avery Gordon touches on the ineffable nature of cultural discourse, noting that the challenges to subjectivity and shared social meaning (the desire to organize meaning at the site of the material subject) point to instances of “complex personhood” (4). Gordon describes the difficulty of reading the lives of those “who live in the most dire of circumstances,” who possess a “complex and oftentimes contradictory humanity and subjectivity

that is never adequately glimpsed by viewing them as victims or, on the other hand, as superhuman agents” (4). I conclude with Gordon’s work because of her focus on the more immaterial qualities of social bodies, including ghosts and hauntings, because she draws on an important relationship between living social reality, that which is observable, measurable, and interpretable, and the more foreign, alien, and marginal aspects of being. Gordon seeks to trace the material and affective threads connecting bodies together, even in the most immaterial cases, such as the intimate ghostly encounters that haunt and disavow social bodies. Haunting offers a theoretical reprieve and breaths new life into discursive spaces where the materialities of subjects are inevitably disembodied by the politics of representation. As Jakob grants in *Fugitive Pieces*, the “shadow past is shaped by everything that never happened. Invisible, it melts the present like rain through karst. . . . It steers us like magnetism, a spirit tongue” (17). Jakob claims that the evocative nature of the shadow event, not necessarily the real or official one, haunts him in his reading of the past, just as the haunting quality of touch has evoked tangible and even tactile experiences for other diasporic subjects discussed in this thesis. Jakob notes: “This is how one becomes undone by a smell, a word, a place, the photo of a mountain of shoes” (17). The critic, merely by tracing this shadow past, is likewise undone by a “word, a place, a photo” (17). By invoking Gordon’s hauntological work in the conclusion to this project, one that has sought to interpret the bodily and sensual faculties of diasporic subjects, I do so in order to leave open, rather than close off, my own reading of the more incoherent instances of touch and embodiment.

Embracing Gordon’s notion of complex personhood invites us to see life and culture “with portentous clarity,” while tracing events, stories, and history-making anonymously to the point where we might merely catch a glimpse of what Patricia Williams calls “the vast networking of

our society” and continue to imagine otherwise (qtd. in Gordon 5). I too have sought to understand the lives and material affiliations of diasporic subjects and communities in Canada, doing so while also acknowledging how my own pursuit is bound up in the impossibility of fully representing subjectivity, thus resulting in its own relational hauntings. Like others interested in the sensual and affective formulations of bodies, my approach has invariably been “beset by contradiction,” as the subjects I have sought to acquaint myself with simultaneously “recognize and misrecognize themselves and others” (Gordon 4) through the intersections of the physical, affective, and imaginary. This means that such an analysis will always be both “stuck in the symptoms” (4) of one’s troubles – the proximate and more empirical challenges to interpreting touch, including grain, scale, or intensity – while also possessing the means of transformation, reaffirming the complexity of identity and possibility of some form of social change. Complex personhood means that even those called ‘Other’ are “never never that,” that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, their social worlds, and their society’s problems are “entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching towards” (Gordon 4).

Haraway offers additional insight regarding the challenge of representation – especially in representing marginalized subjects, or “inappropriate/d Others” in literature. In “*Ecce Homo, Ain’t (Ar’n’t) I A Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape*,” Haraway identifies her focus as being on the discourses of “suffering and dismemberment,” specifically at the inflection point of crisis, where “all the tropes turn again” and we must find “ecstatic speakers” (48). The language of “dismemberment” draws attention to the very material severance of bodies of people throughout the histories of diaspora, including the somasensory implications of severed bodies as well as the affective qualities of the “phantom

limbs” of experience, which continue to haunt diasporic subjects. This phantom-limb phenomenon implies the very difficulty in conveying subjective experiences in literature, especially in regards to felt physical and affective traumas. On this point, Paterson has cautioned that, “to give any *alternative* account of ‘first-person reports of present experience... will do justice to their apparent ineffability” and yet it also avoids the assumption that they are reports on “private items” (28). Locating and clarifying these sensations is a notoriously difficult enterprise, based on potential error and subject to perceptions that might be misleading. Haraway examines Sojourner Truth’s famous 1851 speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” identifying her as the “the inappropriate/d figure of New World black womanhood” (52), the bearer of the promise of humanity for womanhood in general, and indeed, the bearer of the promise of humanity also for men. Telling the history of such a speaker who might figure the “self-contradictory and necessary condition of a nongeneric humanity,” Haraway asks, “[w]hat is it about this figure, whose hard name signifies someone who could never be at home, for whom truth was displacement from home that compels retelling and rehearing her story?” (54). She insists that we understand Sojourner Truth’s “body, names, and speech – their forms, contents, and articulations” as holding the promise for “a never-settled universal,” a common language that makes compelling claims on each of us collectively and personally, precisely through their “radical specificity,” through displacement and resistance to unmarked identities precisely as a means of claiming the status of “the human” (54).

Examining the fictional narratives of diasporic subjects and groups in Canada and participating in the very haptic act of reading and writing, I have sought to set aside the “Enlightenment figures of coherent and masterful subjectivity,” those legitimate heirs with access to language and the power to represent, endowed with inner coherence and rational

clarity. Like Haraway, whose focus is the figure of a broken and suffering humanity, signifying “in ambiguity, contradiction, stolen symbolism, and unending chains of noninnocent translation – a possible hope” (48), I have also engaged with the narrative specificities and ambiguities of diasporic subjects by opening up and unsettling the language of touch. Indeed, reading haptics in terms of its relationship to cultural embodiment does precisely this: it insists on the radical specificity of the body, its tactile and affective qualities, while promising a never-settled universal of sociocultural experience. It is from this promise of a new hybrid language of theory that I contend haptic aesthetics enter into cultural discourse, extending beyond the legacies of empirical sensory science or phenomenology, in order to foster a language where aesthetic, theoretical, and sensual explorations of the body make no implicit or direct demands on the coherence of the body. Therefore, as the legacies of more representational sciences still haunt the body of cultural theory, these felt phantom limbs of discourse emerge through the hybrid language of haptics.

Considering the challenges to subjectivity and critical representation presented by Kamboureli, Gordon, and Haraway, I wonder: what might it mean to relinquish the affairs of representation and coherent theoretical understanding and move towards a more haptic engagement with theory? I propose that critics relinquish concerns of concrete representation and social understanding, though not their critical involvement, embodiments, or ethics. This opens up a form of theory, although sometimes beset by the phantom limbs or ghostly encounters of previous theoretical discourses, that rejects the more universal knowledge-based pursuits of the past, which have been most often associated with vision, the objective eye, and fixed subject positions, this being in favour of more humane political and sociocultural practices. It is from this proposal that I seek to affirm the possibility of alternative diasporic affiliations, as subjects

throughout *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant* reveal new and more proximate modes of communication in and across diasporic communities, modes of communication that have thus far been neglected in cultural discourses.

In *What We All Long For*, as Tuyen and Binh prepare to introduce their parents again to their long lost brother Quy, Tuyen reflects how, “[t]his is what they’d done all of their lives... She felt comforted by their commonality, the same commonality that had made her so uneasy most of her life; it had made her long to be unexceptional. Yet, here was their specialness now carried between them to the door of the house... Wasn’t that what her art was all about in the end?” (Brand 307). I would like to end with this notion of commonality, a haptic commonality, even as it manifests itself unevenly across the topographies of *Fugitive Pieces*, *What We All Long For*, and *Soucouyant*. One task of this thesis has been to trace the complex contours and textures of diasporic embodiment in these novels, and in doing so, to recognize how even if the subject or geography cannot be fully traced, touch is present or implicated in almost every interaction. Indeed, in the increasingly disparate, fleeting, and yet all the while shared and proximate spaces of contemporary Canadian life, we find ourselves in need of some commonality, some mutual sense of touch. As Athos tells Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces* regarding their own journey together into intimate proximity, a proximity that eventually translates into a series of collaborative haptic writings: “We must carry each other. If we don’t have this, what are we[?]” (14).

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