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AN IMPERIAL DIET: FROM CACAO TO COCONUTS – REPRESENTING EDIBLE
BODIES IN THE AMERICAS FROM THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

An Imperial Diet: From Cacao to Coconuts – Representing Edible Bodies in the Americas from the Eighteenth Century to the Present

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This dissertation endeavors to prove through a series of visual mediations that the alimentary tract signifies a gastropoetical dialectic between the eater and the eaten. Alimentary discourse is capable of developing a visual language that illustrates the interiority of appetites of empire through the politics of provender. In this study sugar, cacao, pineapples, and coconuts operate as a lens to view the scaffolding of social and artistic strategies. This project is committed to the excavation of image construction, the visual representation of the African Diaspora in the Americas, and understanding the formation of gastronomical narratives through colonial discourse. Anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz suggests that anthropology has the capabilities to answer the *outside* and *inside* meanings of food pathways; but so far it has not done so. This dissertation will be able to offer insight into these issues. In a way, this work calls out what I consider obvious omissions regarding the connections between art history, the visual archive, and tropical food pathways by clearly articulating the power of these foods to transform cultures of vision and the induction of a modern world system. Ultimately, my dissertation offers a critical study of race, gender, sexuality, transnational, and transhistorical food pathways.

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INTRODUCTION

An Imperial Diet: From Cacao to Coconuts – Representing Edible Bodies in the Americas from the Eighteenth Century to the Present

I believe that the taste of freedom and the taste of food may
be much more closely linked than they seem at first to be.
---Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, 1996

Food is personal. Food is at once personal and then we personalize food with our customs, religious beliefs, fad diets, ethical eating, fair trade, and personal preferences. However, in its final installment, food becomes our person. Through the process of digestion the nutrients from what we consume become assimilated into our bodies absorbing fats, proteins, and carbohydrates so that the food and the body become one. As the old adage goes – “We are what we eat.” Author bell hooks expands this analogy and re-conceptualizes its affectation on the body. She references the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hahn who states that putting images inside of our heads is just like eating. She advocates Hahn’s postulation that we “eat” images. Such that if “we are what we eat” then can it also be said that we are what we see?¹ If we eat images and become what we see, then how is our natural constitution transformed when we feast our eyes upon images of sugarcane, chocolate, bananas, and other tropical comestibles?

This dissertation decodes the cultural meanings of representing tropical foodstuffs in the Americas from the late eighteenth century to the present. Sugar and bananas have become two

¹ bell hooks. “No Beasts in the Wild.” <http://newblackman.blogspot.com/2012/09/bell-hooks-no-love-in-wild.html>.

of the most significant food sources on earth. Sugar is the most popular source of sucrose as a refined carbohydrate. Tropical foods such as cacao, pineapples, and coconuts conjure the paradisiacal and the exoticism of the Americas. In this study sugar, cacao, pineapples, and coconuts operate as a lens to view the scaffolding of social and artistic strategies. These powerhouse foods have built empires, global economies, transformed international palettes, and even dominated governments. This project is committed to the excavation of image construction, the visual representation of the African Diaspora in the Americas, and understanding the formation of gastronomical narratives through colonial discourse. By looking critically at the layering of images regarding these foodstuffs we discover the interface of these food pathways with sexuality, blackness, techniques of power and hierarchies of taste. This master palette of constructed cultural meanings paints a portrait of these tropical comestibles that far exceeds their nutritional values.

By culling the visual archive of sugar, cacao, pineapples, and coconuts, which are emblematic of the bounty of colonialism, we are able to establish a foundation for discussing the intersectionality of borders, social formations, gender, sexuality, class, race, value systems, and other structures of power. I have chosen each of these commodities specifically over other possible alternatives because of their relationship to building empires, transforming landscapes, and their representation both materially and artistically within a visual archive. My narrowed focus of four tropical comestibles presages that I will not include a discussion of the billion dollar industry of coffee.

Coffee has been one of the most consistently and profitably traded commodities since the sixteenth century. Contemporary authors argue that studying coffee serves as lens for understanding larger theoretical trends. Statistically speaking, Latin America produces twice as

much coffee as the rest of the world combined and coffee has served as the principal export of seven Latin American countries during the mid-1980s.² Referencing a medieval manuscript on humoral medicine, author Wolfgang Schivelbusch suggests, “It is of secondary concern to us that coffee should be condemned in this medical expert’s report. What matters are the notions, images, and ideas that are presented.”³ Indeed the notions, images, and ideas surrounding coffee present an archive that includes coffee production, labor, customs, and coffee houses resulting in a robust body of work deserving of further exploration.

Also deserving of further attention outside of this dissertation is a discussion of bananas that mediates its representation within visual culture, performance, and high art. Bananas are the fourth most consumed food in the world after milk, rice, and wheat. Bananas historical rise to becoming the fourth most consumed food in the world is closely tied to its relationship with sugar. Once the profitability of sugarcane began to wane with the increase of competing markets in sugar beet production, emancipation, emerging Asian markets, the Sugar Duties Act of 1846, and the increase of international free trade, colonial investors eagerly sought new avenues to sustain market share and increase their business. Enter bananas. Sugarcane stalks were rooted up and bananas were planted in the same soil. The changing political and agricultural forces compromised earlier artistic conventions and some artists sought to address these agro-anxieties through visual representations of blackness. For example, some of these anxieties are addressed in the work of Lithuanian born, Brazilian artist, Lasar Segall’s *Banana Plantation*, 1927 and *Child with Lizards*, 1924. *Banana Plantation* features a black man in the center of the

² William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik, eds. *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500-1989*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

³ Wolfgang Schivelbusch. *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 45.

composition surrounded in a sea of banana plants. His head and neck appear to grow as an emerging stalk of the banana plant. His corporeal body is consumed by the foliage and replaced with an overwhelming burden of labor represented by the interminable jungle of banana plants. His face bears the horrors of a life in the verdurous landscape. An approach that considers the influence of eighteenth and nineteenth century pictorial narrations of Brazil as a tropical, untamed paradise by European “traveler-reporters,” and how these constructions of the primitive spectacle may have influenced Segall’s work would provide a useful framework.

Bananas have also been popularized because of their performative aspects within popular culture. The art of performance complicates a simplistic narrative that goes beyond identifying the signifiers of objectification and imperial desire. This dissertation looks at how visual culture is, “not just a product but also a production, not simply as socially constituted but also as socially constituting.”⁴ Some of these aspects are represented by the cultural phenomena of Josephine Baker, Carmen Miranda, and Miss Chiquita Banana. Exploring these images and performances would offer a case study into the projection of colonial desire by using food as a sign system. These studies would include an exploration of the aesthetic revolution of l’art nègre in Primitivism and the re-negotiation of sexuality and racial fetish. Food as a sign system contains specific grammar that reiterates the transmittal of certain beliefs and behaviors.

Roland Barthes’s article *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption* states that food is not just a nutritional substance, but that it also serves as a sign system of communication. Barthes contends that food as a body of discrete signs, images, attitudes, protocols of usages, situations, and behaviors functions as a real sign. Barthes’s methodology

⁴ Sidney W. Mintz. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 14.

incorporates the critical theory of semiotics as a system of ciphers for decoding and revealing the various meanings offered by food. Barthes identifies the “spirit” of food as being a coherent set of food characteristics and habits that form a composite unit applicable to describe a general system of tastes and habits. He then semantically decodes the “spirit” of food to reconstruct systems and syntaxes through a brief examination of advertising. Barthes describes how food serves as a commemorative sign system signaling the national past. This dissertation decodes how food serves as a commemorative sign system signaling a colonial past with contemporary reverberations. He asserts that advertising sublimates a masculine and/or feminine sexuality when food is associated with certain images creating an eroticization of food. His theories on masculinized foods and feminized foods gain greater contextual currency when thinking about the phallic associations with bananas and the female associations with sugar which often result into what he theorizes as an eroticization of food. Then Barthes describes a third area of consciousness constituted by the concept of *health*. He argues that advertising and “conditioning” help formulate certain attitudes around food and health. He supports his argument by describing sugar as producing energy, margarine building solid muscles, coffee dissolving fatigue, and Coca-Cola producing relaxation.

He argues that because eating replaces, sums up, and signals other behaviors that it functions as a sign. Therefore, it would follow that bananas too function as a sign system indicative of political markers of identity, instruments of public humiliation, and as comedic agents. By interrogating the visual archive of bananas within art, visual culture, and popular culture we are able to map a visual biography of bananas that illustrates *how* bananas have become derogatory analogs of the black subject. This cultural mapping leads us through the work of leading visual artists and the performing arts. Future research questions guiding this

work might consider: How did bananas become deeply associated with blackness? How has this visual and performative register which re-enacts the banana/black supposition been sustained over the past 150 years? What are the consequences of the conflation of race and fruit? This is a quite compelling area of research that combines art history, culinary anthropology, and critical race theory that could lead to a greater understanding of the human condition.

However, there are several other examples of ‘fruits of empire’ that authors have tapped to understand economic and military powers, national identities, literary studies, or the fascinating historical and social influences that are fundamental to global movements of exchange. For example, James Walvin’s *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* looks at tea, coffee, tobacco, chocolate, coffee, the potato, and sugar. I draw upon his well-rounded research and especially his notes on the addictive qualities of certain commodities as they relate to the formation of Empire. Nelson Foster’s and Linda S. Cordell’s edited volume, *Chilies to Chocolate: Food the Americas Gave the World*, applies a more eco-conscious approach when discussing the “evolutionary and cultural trajectory” of tomatoes, potatoes, amaranth, vanilla, maize, beans, chili peppers, cacao, quinoa, and other culinary stars with global consequences.⁵ Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s work on the breadfruit is a stunning example of the historical impact of a single commodity. Her article, “Globalizing the Routes of Breadfruit and Other Bounties” has served as a model for its interdisciplinary and theoretical approach, as well as, a constant inspiration for how to discuss the social lives of tropical commodities. My interdisciplinary approach considers all of the aforementioned strategies and builds a case that

⁵ Nelson Foster and Linda S. Cordell, eds., *Chilies to Chocolate: Food the Americas Gave the World*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1992), x. The editors are interested in building an acquaintance with food that retrieves food from abstraction. They further quote Wendell Berry who says that eating, “is inescapably an agricultural act, and that how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, the way the world is used.” Foster, vii.

mediates high art and visual culture by using an art historical methodology which is seldom applied to food studies.

Although most food studies are heralded for their interdisciplinary value in anthropology, sociology, gender studies, racial and ethnic studies, disability studies, and other academic domains, it is rare for scholars to incorporate art history within the discourse. For example, in a recent article on the intersectionality of food studies the authors mention that, “food studies, with its tentacles in anthropology, sociology, history, the history of science and philosophy, literary and cultural studies, and political science, is a ripe locus for the examination of African American life and history.”⁶ The absence of art history from the discussion of food studies is quite remarkable considering the first point of contact with tropical comestibles for many people was through illustration, rendering, or the ubiquitous staple within painting – the fruit/food still life.

Anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz suggests that anthropology has the capabilities to answer the *outside* and *inside* meanings of food pathways; but so far it has not done so.⁷ I believe an art historical approach utilizing a transnational, transhistorical framework will be able to offer insight into these issues. In a way, this work calls out what I consider obvious omissions regarding the connections between art history, the visual archive, and tropical food pathways by clearly articulating the power of these foods to transform cultures of vision and the induction of a modern world system. This work engages with contemplating the *outside* and *inside* meanings of food pathways by considering how these foods function on a meta-level beyond just their

⁶ Psyche Williams-Forsen and Abby Wilkerson, “Intersectionality and Food Studies,” *Food, Culture & Society*. Vol. 14, Is. 1 (March 2011), 10.

⁷ Mintz, Sidney W. *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 32.

nutritional value and on economic, political, or historical stages. How do these foods function as surrogate bodies carrying imaginary constructions of race and identity? How do they represent the commerce of bodies and sex? How is power shifted or advanced with regards to the changes in a society's food consumption habits?⁸

Contribution to the Field

Valerie Loichot's *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature* (2013) is the project that most closely identifies in theory and principal with this dissertation although Loichot's main focus is literature and not the visual arts. Loichot takes up Caribbean literature, and the occasional advertisement almost exclusively to examine the relationship between Caribbean people and food as she reads novels in dialogue with the cultural construction of the Caribbean self. She reflects upon the cultural appropriation of food identifying sites of empowerment and loss, discursive cannibalism, overeating and pathologized hunger, and how Francophone, Anglophone, and Creolophone writers construct humanity. Loichot's thoughts on pathologized hunger, gluttony, and food and the body are especially germane to my discussions regarding tropical commodities and strategies of resistance. Ultimately, Loichot's goal is to, "substitute the controlling images of Caribbean people defined by food pathologies and transgressions by exposing acts of constructing humanity through literal, allegorical, or metaphorical acts of cooking and eating."⁹

⁸ Mintz, Sidney W., 17.

⁹ Valérie Loichot. *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), x. Thinking about commodities in conjunction with the African influence on foodways in the Americas offers a practical approach that incorporates recipes, history, economical, geographical, the social sciences, and religious influences. Like Loichot, Anne L. Bower's edited volume, *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture* also explores the intersections between food and the literary arts. As Bower states, "Food, it turns out, is an excellent locus for the study of group dynamics-how different populations exclude, include, reject, accept, and otherwise influence each other." Anne L. Bower. *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 8. Also see *Soul and Spice*:

She accomplishes this by looking critically at the works of Edouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire, Edwidge Danticat, Gisele Pineau, Dany Laferriere, Suzanne Césaire, and Maryse Conde. I identify the consumption of edible bodies within the title of this dissertation, *An Imperial Diet: From Cacao to Coconuts Representing Edible Bodies from the 18th Century to the Present* because my discussion regarding consumption and the art of appetite is central to the discussion around commodities. Loichot configures a somewhat similar approach in the literary arts saying, “The edible woman and man become digestible and assimilated in their metaphorical or metonymic association with ingestible products: bananas, sugar, rum, or chocolate.”¹⁰ She reflects on the work that tropical comestibles perform in terms of a hypertrophic sexuality on a metaphorical level that constitutes feminine and masculine figures. She describes how these figures alike, “are turned into rum or coffee, breasts become dates, mouths are watermelon slices, and eyes, cocoa beans.”¹¹

This ordering of human anatomy as devourable dates, watermelon, or cocoa beans not only makes explicit the similarity of organic shapes (dates=breasts, mouths=watermelon slices, eyes=cocoa beans), but also presents an arrangement that touches on the humorousness of these juxtapositions. By gesturing towards the comical through the replacement of body parts with food, Loichot exposes the subversive quality of how these images operate. Comedy therefore becomes an intermediary between object and audience by negotiating the terms of an image’s meaning and reception. The comedic element not only brokers our acceptance of images, but through the power of comedy also sustains and maintains the generative quality of certain representations ensuring perpetual reiterations. In other words, because some images of edible

African Cooking in the Americas by Heidi Haughey Cusick (1995) and *Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America* by Frederick Douglass Opie (2008.)

¹⁰ Loichot, xx.

¹¹ Loichot, xxi.

bodies can read as “funny” they get reproduced over and over again in ways that are uncritical of their construction and oblivious to the destructive racial fallout.

Of course, the other side of the coin regarding edible bodies is entertaining a discussion regarding cannibalism. The work of Peter Hulme, Francis Barker, and Margaret Iversen in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* has been very useful in rethinking the Brazilian anthropophagy movement, considering imperialism as a form of cannibalism, and locating otherness in the figure of the cannibal as a kind of constructed racial difference. William Arens’s “Rethinking anthropophagy” and Sergio Luiz Prado Bellei’s “Brazilian anthropophagy revisited” both emphasize the discourse of cannibalism as a legitimate academic concern. As Martinician author Suzanne Césaire sublimely states in *Misère d’un Poésie: Jean-Antoine Nau*, “Martinician poetry will be cannibal or it will not be.”¹² This diasporic approach to anthropophagy allows for more connectedness in an exploration of art of the Americas.

Methodologically, this dissertation is also informed by Arjun Appadurai’s theoretical perspective regarding the social lives of commodities. Appadurai argues that focusing on the things that are exchanged and not just the forms or functions of exchange allows for the possibility to consider the politics between exchange and economic value. This has allowed me to consider the commodities themselves at a deeper level (sugar, coconuts, pineapples, etc.) and thereby understand the social dimensions of exchange, the cultural construction of desire and demand, and the patterns and movements of the politics of value. Although Appadurai primarily approaches commodities from an anthropological standpoint he says, “commodities are not of fundamental interest only to anthropologists. They also constitute a topic of lively interest to social and economic historians, to art historians, and, lest we forget, to economists though each

¹² Robert Bernasconi, ed., *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press (2003), 117.

discipline might constitute the problem differently.”¹³ Art historians are mentioned again saying, “No social analysis of things (whether the analyst is an economist, an art historian, or an anthropologist) can avoid a minimum level of what might be called methodological fetishism.”¹⁴

The construction of my chapters according to a focus on individual commodities is an example of this return to methodological fetishism that looks at the socialization of tropical comestibles as objects encoded with values and significance. Experiencing the social life of things as dialectical incorporates their cultural biographies and creates a value framework for understanding the politics of demand. Appadurai argues that the basis for understanding the logic of demand takes place in the political logic of consumption. He states, “Taking my lead from Veblen, Douglas and Isherwood and Baudrillard, I suggest that consumption is eminently social, relational, and active rather than private, atomic, or passive.”¹⁵ Each chapter explores the consumptive social, relational, and active lives of tropical comestibles.

Considerably influential in this project has been the work of Mimi Sheller’s *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* and *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*. Sheller’s chapters, “Tasting the Tropics: from sweet tooth to banana wars” and “Eating others: of cannibals, vampires, and zombies” have been particularly motivating in thinking about ethical interventions, ‘consuming publics’, body-to-body relationships, and the politics of travel, tourism, and infection. However, it has been Sheller’s discussion of commodities or mobilities as flows of objects within cultural geographies and global markets that illuminates circuits of consumption and exploitation. Sheller’s histories of sexual

¹³ Arjun Appadurai. *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*. (New York: Verso, 2013), 11.

¹⁴ Appadurai, 11.

¹⁵ Appadurai, 37.

citizenship have also provided an exceptional framework for understanding the sexual politics of comparative slave systems. She argues that, “a politics of the body and of sexual citizenship must be central to any liberation movement and to any theory of freedom.”¹⁶ If as Sheller argues, erotic agency is the antithesis of enslavement, then the representation of erotic agency in combination with the enslaved or demoralized body in an artist’s work can possibly be read as a two-edged sword. The actor’s agency could implicate, “the sexual subject in relations of domination and subordination and offering a route out of such relations, which may be seized as an enabling possibility.”¹⁷ Such possibilities intersect with this project when I discuss the work Kara Walker and bodies of excess and erotic agency.

The early stages of this dissertation were guided by the work of Sidney W. Mintz. In *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* Mintz’s anthropological approach looks carefully at the production, consumption, and power of sugar. His focus on the Anglo-Caribbean sugar industry considers how the rise of sugar gave rise to cultural meanings. With a nod to visual culture, Mintz also included colonial illustrations of sugar harvesting, labor, and elegant sugar molds from a French cookbook of *haute cuisine* as part of his discussion in *Sweetness and Power* acknowledging the importance of including images and the work they perform when included in an anthropological study of commodities. Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power* and his book *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* have served as the pre-cursor for many contemporary books regarding the social lives of food, exploring how the moral performance of eating socially conveys messages of status,

¹⁶ Mimi Sheller. *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*. Durham: Duke University Press, (2012), 241.

¹⁷ Sheller, 260.

gender, and group membership. I draw upon Mintz's work throughout various chapters, but especially as I discuss sugar in chapter one.

Also, foundational to the field of gastronomy and food studies is Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's 1825 gastronomical treatise, *The Physiology of Taste; Or, Transcendental Gastronomy*. Brillat-Savarin's approach looks at the flow of commodities, specifically, the properties and uses of sugar, chocolate and coffee as examples of how fundamental they are to gastronomical knowledge. His philosophical reflections on the moralities of food entertain such entanglements with appetites, the senses, obesity, fasting, order of alimentations, and even death. He defines gastronomy as examining, "men and things for the purpose of transporting, from one country to another, all that deserves to be known, and which causes a well arranged entertainment, to be an abridgement of the world in which each portion is represented."¹⁸ Brillat-Savarin's early 19th century observations regarding the burgeoning field of gastronomy is a primary resource to reflect upon when I am discussing late 18th century through mid-19th century artworks.

Chapter Organization

Every chapter is introduced beginning with recipes and memories from the *Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* which was first published in 1954. The publication of this dissertation also marks the 50th anniversary of Toklas's death in March 1967. I have chosen to initiate each chapter with Toklas's *Cook Book* because this strategy harmonizes the chapters of sugar, bananas, cacao, pineapples, and coconuts in a way that synthesizes their flavors creating layers of depth and structural cohesiveness. This narrative device also reflects upon the

¹⁸ Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. *The Physiology of Taste; Or, Transcendental Gastronomy*. (Dublin: Merchant Books, 2009), 47.

interdisciplinarity of this project by including literature, philosophy, ecology, politics, and history. As Valérie Loichot asserts, “Cooking is the ultimate articulation of the corporeal and the cerebral.”¹⁹ Therefore, incorporating recipes from Toklas’s *Cook Book* situates the culinary in relation to the materiality and corporeality of artistic and cultural production. Sarah Garland describes Toklas’s recipes as a kind of displaced autobiography saying, “The Cookbook’s incessant codas of ‘and then we ate’ can be read as memorials to a part of their life that left obvious traces.”²⁰

Toklas’s *Cook Book* is a food memoir of her life with partner Gertrude Stein and the life they shared with many talented and renowned friends and acquaintances. Toklas wrote *Cook Book* almost a decade after the death of Stein and while she was hospitalized for several months with hepatitis. She elucidates upon their life in Paris, travels to the countryside, life during War and Occupation, the servants, the habits and tastes of many famous friends, their motorings in Aunt Pauline (a Model T Red Cross ambulance) and Godiva (a “two-seater open”), and recipes. In a touching forward, M.F.K. Fisher describes the division of labor – Gertrude wrote and Alice cooked. “Of course Stein, who seldom skipped a good meal and knew thoroughly the pleasures of a well-tended palate, never boiled water, much less an egg, as far as is known. Her ‘secretary-companion’ tended to all that, and her delicious food kept Gertrude’s ink flowing for all their long life together.”²¹ In a way, this dissertation is a combination of double duty – it is writing and “cooking” together.

¹⁹ Loichot, 1.

²⁰ Sarah Garland, “‘A cook book to be read. What about it?’: Alice Toklas, Gertrude Stein and the Language of the Kitchen.” *Comparative American Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (March 2009), 52.

²¹ Alice B. Toklas. *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1954), *xiii*.

A recipe is a formula. It is an expression of a chemical prescription with a specific ordering of proportions and is concerned with how the molecules relate to certain temperatures. Toklas pays close attention to particular dishes that should be served cold or hot, immediately removed from heat, and the chemical reaction between certain ingredients. This dissertation is a kind of recipe meditating on the formulaic or paradigmatic structures of visual histories and the (al)chemical reaction of certain ingredients. In other words, what do bananas have to tell us about race, sex, masculinity, or humor when presented in certain compositions or “recipes?” How do certain “recipes” become an ordering of expectations, circulated, re-inscribed, and modified to taste? The visual constructions of the food discussed here operate similarly to recipes.

The organization of this dissertation is structured according to foodstuffs: sugar cane, cacao, pineapple, and coconuts. Chapter one begins with looking at sugar cane. Originally considered a luxury food product in Europe and mainly used medicinally, and as a condiment or spice, sugar became more democratized as the sweet tooth of Europe grew creating global competition. Early eighteenth century prints and paintings exhibit an artistic focus on sugar that embodies the campaigns of the colonial project to showcase the abundance of raw materials and possibly persuade investors. Many of the English sugar plantation entrepreneurs were also members of Parliament and had a strong stake in promoting a positive image of the sugar plantation system in order to protect their financial investments. They employed artists to paint the picturesque sugar plantation minus the slave quarters. The romanticized aesthetics of the picturesque were solicited to counter abolitionist campaigns. I believe the sugar coated sentimentality of the picturesque sugar plantation is an expression of the social construction of memory and the desire for the nostalgic experience, or what can be described as an appetite for

“imperialist nostalgia.”²² In this chapter I contemplate the relationship between memory and food. I look at how these images are reproductions of an ethnographic mode serving as relics to illustrate perceived hierarchical notions of human difference.

I briefly examine the history of sugar cane in the Americas before turning to the artistic production of artists John Genin, Andrea Chung, Vik Muniz, and Kara Walker. The legacy of sugarcane lives on today as I construct a comparative analysis between the *Portraits of the Sugar Children*, 1996, by Vik Muniz and Kara Walker’s *The Marvelous Sugar Baby*, 2014. Starting with black paper and then “drawing” a portrait by sprinkling white sugar until forming an image, Muniz generates wistful portraits of children who are the offspring of sugarcane workers. Once complete, he captures the skillfully rendered portrait in a photograph, pours the sugar in a glass jar, and begins a new portrait. Kara Walker’s blockbuster installation at the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn, *The Marvelous Sugar Baby*, 2014 featured a monolithic sculpture of a sugared sphinx figure with a ‘mammy’ head. The primary sculpture of the sugar sphinx consisted of over 30 tons of sugar. The installation was a limited engagement drawing over 130,000 visitors from all over the world into the Domino Sugar storage shed on the East River in the Williamsburg neighborhood in Brooklyn. Like Muniz, Walker fashions her own sugar children by accompanying the sphinx with thirteen treacled sculptures of young boys who like the sphinx deteriorated over time due to rising temperatures and heavy traffic leaving the smaller sculptures in various states of decay and melted sugar. I am very interested in the elasticity and etherealness of the material that both artists are utilizing and how layers of meaning, the past and

²² Renato Rosaldo identifies in *Culture and Truth* that “imperialist nostalgia” is “often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed” which blurs contemporary cultural strategies that celebrate the continuity of primitivism. See bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” *The Consumer Society*. (New York: The New Press, 2000), 346.

present, the body and the bite melt, and mold, and vanish. I will examine the intensely controversial sugar/black body and the phenomenology of the event as a pluralistic portrait.

In chapter two I discuss cacao. It has been exactly 100 years from Marcel Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder*, 1914 to Oscar Murillo's chocolate factory installation, *A Mercantile Novel*, 2014. This centennial comparative analysis offers insight into the consistencies and disparities of how two artists engage with the aesthetics of chocolate as inspiration, medium, modernism, and the mechanical. Although the term cacao refers to the seed kernels of the fleshy pods of the cacao tree and the term “chocolate” refers to consumable substances containing cacao, whether in beverage or solid forms, I will toggle between both terms.²³ Taking the lead from Marcy Norton who affirms that, “Despite this increasing emphasis on the importance of ‘luxury groceries’ for transformations in European culture and economy, scholars have failed to recognize the primacy of chocolate in the pantheon of tropical imports.”²⁴ As it relates to art history, I too agree that many scholars have failed to recognize the primacy of chocolate in the pantheon of the canon and the contemporary. This study grounds the popularity of cacao within the historical and the gustatory. I examine how a visual paradigm of chocolate grounded within a historical context informs aesthetic dispositions, attitudes, and desire. As a result, the historicizing of chocolate demonstrates how visual and cultural tastes are developed, negotiated, and embodied by machines, automatons, and related to treatments of blackness and sexuality. I begin by looking at Marcel Duchamp’s, *Chocolate Grinder Number 1*, 1913 and *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*, 1914 and then consider Oscar Murillo’s *Colombina* series, *A Mercantile Novel*, 2014, which involves an installation of a live chocolate-making factory in a Chelsea blue-

²³ Marcy Norton. “Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics.” *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 111, No.3 (June 2006), 660.

²⁴ Norton, 666.

chip gallery. Both artists deal with the physicality of chocolate production, modernism, consumption, labor, and the aesthetics of pleasure.

Chapter three focuses on pineapples. I have chosen to narrow the discussion of pineapples primarily to one artist, Agostino Brunias, because I believe his work best illustrates the historical context of pineapples and, of course, because we are able to locate pineapples in his work, both physically and metaphorically. However, I first pre-date the discussion to the 17th century by introducing a portrait of King Charles II receiving a pineapple from his royal gardener. As witnessed in the portrait of Charles II the pineapple has a royal pedigree, having been highly sought after by several monarchs, emperors, and presidents throughout history.²⁵ In fact pineapple possession was not only associated with imperial expansion in the West Indies, but pineapple possession becomes an obsession closely tied to wealth, decadence, prosperity, privilege, and the values which become associated with the bourgeoisie. I explore the persuasive qualities of Brunias's work that were used in the colonizing mission in order to attract investors to the newly acquired islands.

Finally, chapter four considers coconuts in the work of two Caribbean artists, Francisco Oller and Heino Schmid. Nineteenth century painter Francisco Oller takes up coconuts as an icon of tropical wonderment. This mysterious fruit from the islands becomes a marker of national or rather Caribbean self-identity in the work of Oller as Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with Spain shifts to the United States in the late 19th century. In 2011-2012 Schmid created *Landmines*, an installation of several dried coconuts whose surfaces are studded with

²⁵ During a trip to Barbados in 1751-2, future first President of the United States of America, George Washington experienced more fruit on a table than he had ever witnessed before saying, "There are many delicious fruits', but the pineapple, China orange and avocado...nothing pleases my taste as much as these." O'Connor, 58. A recipe called "Pineapple Pudding" appears in *Thomas Jefferson's Cook Book*. John F. Kennedy's wedding to Jacqueline Bouvier in 1953 featured pineapple boats for dessert.

steel nails and positioned in a loosely scattered assemblage on the floor. In his nail-studded coconut sculptures, Schmid also draws upon the coconut for its perception as nutty curiosity while staking a native ownership through coconut symbolism. This discussion of coconuts is therefore bisected into two halves. The first part is devoted to the work of Oller and his painting, *Still Life with Coconuts*, 1893. The second part looks at the work of Schmid's coconut installation sculptures, *Landmines*, 2011-2012. This study of coconuts which begins in the late nineteenth century and ends around 2013 offers a way of looking at coconuts and material culture through the lens of trans-geographies, identities in process, and geopolitical aesthetics. The span of time from the late nineteenth century to 2013 also allows for ruminations on where Caribbean identities have traveled, shifted, or remained consistent during an almost 120 year period.

Each one of these subjects: sugarcane, cacao, pineapples, and coconuts could be a dissertation in its own right. Indeed entire books are written singularly on each of these individual food subjects. My ambition with this work is not to create an exhaustive study of tropical comestibles, but to manage the parts as bite-sized pieces forming a cohesive whole. An intellectual sample platter of tropical delights focusing on individual art works provides a workable solution for conceiving the whole through its tasty constituent parts. Ultimately, my dissertation offers a critical study of race, gender, sexuality, transnational, and transhistorical food pathways. The interrogation of paintings, photography, and installations as they relate to food networks pushes the boundaries of the art of the Americas and visual culture. By exploring the complex transnational relationships between the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Western Europe I argue for a broader understanding of the Americas.

Chapter One

Sugar

Sugar cane reach up to God
And every baby crying
Shame the blanket of my night
And all my days are dying

---Maya Angelou, *The Complete Collected Poems*, 1994

Sugar makes me cry. And the tears are salty and bitter.

---María Magdalena Campos-Pons, *Sugar/Bittersweet*, 2010

Alice B. Toklas's grand introduction to her recipe for Iced Soufflé begins with her pronouncement saying, "Here is the recipe for the ineffable."¹ Begin with 2 cups of sugar, 8 yolks of eggs, 1 whole egg in a heavy enameled saucepan over a low flame. Take some time to beat the mixture with a rotary beater. Once it starts forming pointed peaks, remove it from heat, and flavour with 1 tablespoon of kirsch or anisette. Cool the mixture on ice. Then pour it into a soufflé dish, sprinkle 3 macaroons on top that have been dried in the oven, rolled and strained.² Refrigerate the soufflé for 3 hours. Toklas's final note on serving Iced Soufflé is, "This is a particular favourite with men."³ I have included Iced Soufflé in the introduction of a chapter on sugar because one of the recipe's main ingredients is sugar and because I want to think about how sugar has become, "a particular favourite with men" in a way that articulates the "ineffable" into thoughtful, savory expression.

¹ Alice B. Toklas. *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1954), 134.

² Toklas, 134.

³ Toklas, 134.

In *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* Sidney Mintz's anthropological approach looks carefully at the production, consumption, and power of sugar. His focus on the Anglo-Caribbean sugar industry considers how the rise of sugar gave rise to cultural meanings. With a nod to visual culture, Mintz also included colonial illustrations of sugar harvesting, labor, and elegant sugar molds from a French cookbook of *haute cuisine* as part of his discussion in *Sweetness and Power* acknowledging the importance of including images and the work they perform when included in an anthropological study of commodities. Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* and his book *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* have served as the pre-cursor for many contemporary books regarding the social lives of food, exploring how the moral performance of eating socially conveys messages of status, gender, and group membership. However, as it relates to the focus of this chapter his book, *Sweetness and Power* has provided a firm foundation for thinking about the social lives of sugarcane grounded within a historical context.

Sugarcane is the most popular source of sucrose as a refined carbohydrate. It is propagated asexually and lives in tropical and subtropical climates requiring lots of water and labor for production. Sixteenth century Spain pioneered this process of producing sugar in the Americas through technology, African slave labor, and the plantation system. Originally considered a luxury food product in Europe and mainly used medicinally, and as a condiment or spice, sugar became more democratized as the sweet tooth of Europe grew creating global competition. At the forefront of this global trade competition was England. As Mintz points out, "England fought the most, conquered the most colonies, imported the most slaves (to her own colonies and, in absolute numbers, in her own bottoms), and went furthest and fastest in creating

a plantation system. The most important product of that system was sugar. Like tea, sugar came to define English ‘character.’”⁴

British consumption of sugar increased by 2,500 percent in 1800. Thirty years later total production (including beet sugar) included 572,000 tons of sugar to an almost exclusive European market. Within sixty years, by 1890, six million tons of sugar was exported. As Dr. John Orr concluded, “looking back at the 19th century, that the single most important nutritional datum on the British people was their fivefold increase in sugar consumption.”⁵ Many of the English sugar plantation entrepreneurs were also members of Parliament and had a strong stake in promoting a positive image of the sugar plantation system in order to protect their financial investments. They employed artists to paint the picturesque sugar plantation minus the slave quarters. These romanticized aesthetics included the majestic palm trees, rolling hills, healthy crops, and gentle streams as they advertised a peaceful slave labor existence. Like living in a picturesque postcard these images were solicited to counter abolitionist campaigns. However, with emancipation forces at work, slaves were freed by England in 1834-38, France in 1848, Puerto Rico in 1873-76, and Cuba in 1884. The profitability of sugarcane began to wane with the increase of sugar beet production, emancipation, emerging Asian markets, the Sugar Duties Act of 1846, and the increase of international free trade. This study will demonstrate how meaning is intertwined, eroticized, and naturalized through images of sugar and the arts. I will also look at how sugar is anthropomorphized through the embodiment of sugar sculpture and installation.

⁴ Sidney W. Mintz. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 38-39.

⁵ Mintz, 73.

In An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque, Krista S. Thompson investigates the significance of visual images and visibility generally in the Anglophone Caribbean. The decline of “king sugar” led to the rise of visual images and sightseeing was crowned the “new sugar,” the new means through which the islands would be consumed. Images of sugarcane workers from the archives at the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans feature black laborers holding sugar cane to their mouths as if in obedience to a command as indicated by the awkward posturing that is unrealistic when actually eating sugarcane (Figs. 1.1-1.3). The clumsiness of these postures betrays the manipulation that was employed to convey a sense of the “lazy, carefree black laborer on the sugar islands.” By presenting the islands as picturesque, authorities hoped to lure white tourists to become migrants and help boost the dwindling white populations. Touristic photographs portrayed the success of colonialism in civilizing black subjects. The photographic spaces were read as safe, clean, exotic, and available. Industry promoters chose the medium of photography because it was more effectual than paintings, easily accessible through postcards, and conveyed the so-called reality of the island’s dreamlike tropical landscape.

Roland Barthes talks about the “reality effect” of photography. Author Brian Wallis supports Barthes’s “reality effect” and goes on to say, “By supplying an overabundance of information, photography confuses and problematizes its message; it creates what author Roland Barthes calls a ‘reality effect,’ a semblance of realism bound to detail.”⁶ Thompson identifies the corruptness of this semblance of realism in her work on Jamaican photography. Thompson investigates the program of The United Fruit Company and British Elder, Dempster and

⁶ Brian Wallis. “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerrotypes.” *American Art*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (Summer 1995), 48.

Company as the entities most committed to promoting a “New Jamaica.” The black population was assumed to be the enviable inhabitants of paradise who were slothful and didn’t have to labor much because of the Garden of Eden wherein they dwelled. The stillness of the black bodies in a tropically lush landscape communicated the domestication of nature and its inhabitants. One of the representatives from the United Fruit Company said that because of ‘black laziness’ they were obliged to import coolies on contract from India. Clean Indian laborers, like black washerwomen, became feasts for the eye, exotic commodities available for visual consumption. However, the faces wear mask-like expressions, perhaps concealing the disenchantments of everyday hard labor. Even though some authors have reproduced these photographs in their books for effect, they almost never discuss these images in any constructive way, if they are referred to at all. For example, in *Sugar Changed the World: A Story of Magic, Spice, Slavery, Freedom, and Science* by Marc Aronson and Marina Budhos, the back cover photo which uses one of these photographs is not explained.

The sugarcane photographs of laborers are especially beguiling in the duplicity of enchantment. The figures are standing with the cut sugarcane stalks placed at their mouths as if they are enjoying the sweet pleasures of paradise (Figs. 1.2-1.3). Yet, the bodies are stiff and rightfully reluctant. The disenchantment is found in the illegality of cane workers indulging in eating sugar cane. The long history of enslaved (often starved and malnourished) cane workers who ate sugarcane and were then punished, whipped, tortured, dismembered, or even killed is enough to stall consumption, if not kill the appetite entirely for sugarcane. France’s *Code Noir* of 1685 and 1724 strictly forbade slaves from purloining food that might supplement an already greatly impoverished diet. As a result of food theft, which might include sugarcane, livestock, or vegetables, slaves would, “be punished...by judges who will...condemn them to be

whipped...and to be branded with a *fleur de lys*, (*Code Noir*.)”⁷ Therefore, cane workers casually eating sugar cane was a fantasy; just like these images – a contraption of enchantment.

Thompson asks, “Why did the picturesque become such a central mode of description for planters in Jamaica? To what end was picturesqueness wed to ‘the sugar-cane cultivated landscape?’” Thompson describes these images in terms of an “aesthetics of concealment” which provided a ready-made mask through which planters and the artists they commissioned could disguise the conditions, violence, and brutality of the plantation. Also, any signs of modernization and technology were removed from the photographs which were doctored to create paradisiacal images. The black laborers served as peripheral props to the main photographic subject: bananas, yams, coconuts, etc. The women in *Banana Carriers* were viewed as complements to the tropicalized landscape, signified by the banana, they were part of the scenery (Fig. 1.4). These photographs were rendered as “truthful” although they were staged. These orderly displays conveyed the message that the tropical landscape has been tamed and domesticated, the environment is safe and no longer wild and threatening. The landscape/people have been subjugated. These highly constructed photographs reveal a preoccupation with tropical enchantments and reconstituted memory for the sake of profitable capitalist ventures while subsequently cheating this pleasure with heavy doses of disenchantment. By situating the photographs within the historical context of sugarcane in the Americas we are able to see beyond the charming veneer of the paradisiacal and witness the complexity of image construction.

The social lives of sugar and bananas have an intimately intertwined history that not only shares the same soil, but the same position as two of the most profitably traded global

⁷ Valérie Loichot, *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 35.

commodities. How were colonial investors going to be able to sustain market share and increase their business during the waning years of sugarcane profit margin losses? Enter bananas.

Sugarcane stalks were rooted up and bananas were planted in their same soil.

Subsequently, the banana worker was nominated by industry to be the most appropriate visual icon for the Caribbean. This identified a shift from the sugar plantation picturesque to the banana fields/banana laborers in the visual economy. The United Fruit Company exercised their fleet of steamships and extended their footprint on the seas by launching a tourist trade that led white clientele from the United States and Europe to their banana plantations in the Caribbean. The company promoted their industries of bananas as tourism propaganda through extensive marketing campaigns of lantern lectures, promotional materials, and the power of the picturesque, dreamy landscape. The tourist gaze is activated as tourists are encouraged to “feast their eyes upon” the fecundity of the tropical scenes as a kind of visual consumption. “Such images fed metropolitan desires for both eating tropical fruit and visually consuming tropical landscapes.”⁸ Therefore, the act of viewing, or the “tourist gaze,” becomes what I refer to as the “tourist graze.” In the interest of tourism and economic development, these photographs may have been fashioned to stimulate the settlement of a diminishing white population in the Caribbean. The tourist’s visual consumption actually *grazes* the images of tropicity sampling portions of fruits, flora, fauna, and inert black bodies. The picturesque becomes the tool of enchantment – the magical incantation or the irresistible charm in the culture of vision.

Chapter one looks at sugar by incorporating a transnational, transhistorical survey of paintings, photographs, sculptures, and installations. I have included a discussion of these

⁸ Krista S. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 58.

sugarcane photographs from around the turn of the century as a precursor for discussing how sugar is represented, embodied, manipulated, and fed upon by viewers. All of these engagements with sugar inform the discourse of this chapter. I conduct a survey of sugar in art objects from the late nineteenth century through to the contemporary period. In the contemporary period I will look at photographs, sculptures, and installations that speak to the political and historical treatment of sugar and transatlantic slavery. However, my next focus will look at the work of Cuban cookbooks, followed by a discussion of the work of artist Andrea Chung, and finally I offer a much closer look at the work of Vik Muniz and Kara Walker while addressing shared aesthetics, materiality, and the black body as a consumable entity. Ultimately, this chapter rests upon a deeper discussion of Kara Walker's *Sugar Baby* installation at Domino Sugar Factory in 2014 and culminates into a richer tableaux of sugar body politics.

In Christine Folch's article *Fine Dining: Race in Prerevolution Cuban Cookbooks* she examines the cultural production of race in Cuban cookbooks dating from 1857 – 1956. Folch draws on theories of taste and social status, per Pierre Bourdieu as she articulates that food is a site of cultural contention, self-identification, agency, and creativity. I engage with Bourdieu's work on taste and social hierarchies in a more intimate reading of Walker's work. Folch endeavors to go beyond showing struggles for political, economic, and cultural hegemony through eating as she discusses how cookbooks also operate in the realms of the imaginary and nostalgic through their iterability. Her methodology uses these cookbooks as primary, interlocuting documents that demonstrate struggles for hegemony through their text (recipes, advertisements, illustrations, and non-recipe texts.)

The colonial, mid-nineteenth century cookbooks she examines are: José Legran's, *Nuevo manual del cocinero cubano y español* (1857); Juan Cabrisa's *Nuevo manual de la cocinera*

catalana y cubana (1858); and Enrique Langarika's *El cocinero de los enfermos, convalecientes y desganados, manual de cocina cubana* (1862.) These recipes are marked by Afro-Cuban ingredients such as *viandas* – which are starchy root vegetables that include *ñame* (yam), *boniato* (sweet potato), malanga, yucca, potatoes, as well as, *quimbombó* (okra), *fufú* (mashed, boiled *ñame/viandas*), and plantains. Folch describes the several *fufú*, *ñame*, and plantain recipes that feature prominently in these cookbooks and argues that the later cookbooks make an attempt to obscure the presence of Afro-Cubans by 'whitening' the recipes. This is accomplished by including fewer recipes that include Afro-Cuban ingredients and infusing more European tastes that included quails and soufflés. Folch incorporates Bourdieu's theories on taste and social status by describing how these cookbooks become civilizing tools that are critical to maintaining the reproduction of class hierarchies. She also incorporates Marxist capitalist logic as she argues that these cookbooks were for a literate population with discretionary income who through the commodification of culinary knowledge participated in the expansion of capitalism.

Folch looks at the illustrations, advertisements, and visual elements of the later cookbooks as ways of 'folklorizing' the non-white Cuban population. This tactic of folklorizing results in caricaturized decorative vignettes of Afro-Cubans and Asians which Folch argues mitigates the physical threat of Afro-Cubans by presenting Cuba as a mostly white space with European culinary tastes. During the time of these cookbooks there arose fears stemming from the lingering threats of black uprisings. The racial projects of mocking, ignoring, and trivializing the non-white population in cookbooks from 1900 – 1959 are intended to present an all-white Cuba. Folch briefly applies a gendered analysis to these cookbooks by admitting that culinary production is obviously gendered and how the cooking in elite Cuban households was done by Afro-Cuban women. She paraphrases Sidney Mintz who describes how Afro-Cuban women

created Cuban cuisine. These assertions are analogous to the title of Walker's *Sugar Baby* which specifically pays homage to the unpaid and overworked artisans who shaped our tastes from the sugarcane field to the kitchens, and finally our mouths. Other than these brief admissions, Folch focuses more on racial and cultural production as she examines Cuba's two-tiered racial system of white and *de raza* (which included negroes and mulattos.)

Particularly helpful are Folch's references to the work of Fernando Ortiz, Cuba's chief (white) authority on Afro-Cuban culture and author of the seminal *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Ortiz's *Tobacco and Sugar* was a foundational text in the study of tobacco, sugar, and the political agents who helped to shape Cuba's economy. He is also noted for introducing the neologism, *transculturation*; the process of exchange between two cultures where both contribute, converge, and interpret meaning. Folch's work on identifying colonial Cuban cookbooks as embedded within Afro-Cuban cultural production is useful for studying how food relates to a population through primary source documents and contributes to the discourse of *afro-cubanidad*. Engaging with these nineteenth-century cookbooks offers a different kind of Cuban counterpoint to the Alice B. Toklas cookbook that I draw upon in each chapter. Folch's work in this area illuminates the prodigiousness of a culinary archive that articulates food, race, and social hierarchies in a way that is not found in Toklas's work.

After many failed attempts at driving a sugarcane economy, Louisiana's sugar cane production thrived after the intervention of Spain's technology and expertise with New Orleans becoming a large sugarcane producer, as well as, a major port for the importation of Cuban rum. As by-products of sugarcane, rum and molasses were also very important to the sugar industry and Cuba was one of the leading producers in the sugar islands. The New Orleans-based French artist, John Genin's, *Allegory of Sugar Cane*, 1884 is an example of the landscape of sugar

plantations in Louisiana and the embodiment of sugar as a mixed-race black woman (Fig. 1.5). *Allegory of Sugar Cane* features a young woman of African descent, identified by the artist as an octaroon, standing next to a sugarcane field, holding two stalks of sugarcane while cutting the top off of one stalk with a knife. The artist has identified the body of this mixed race woman of African descent as “allegorical” to sugarcane. This work offers a rethinking tropes of colonialism, considers food pathways, and the shaping of consumer appetites through the visual representation of a racially “in-between” body.

John Genin’s *Allegory of Sugar Cane* features a young woman wearing a white Empire gown, with a relaxed mint green girdle wrapped around her body and tucked into her pink belt at her waist. She is standing barefoot in a cane field. Her bare feet grounding her body to the soil of the cane field offering a sense of homestead and belonging to the sugar producing earth. She is holding two stalks of sugar cane, one piece stands almost twice her height with its leaves branching out asymmetrically and appearing almost anthropomorphically as a figural counterpart, or double portrait. She is in the act of cutting the other piece of sugarcane whose top has fallen to the ground. The knife is positioned horizontally underneath her breastplate. The cut stalk bisects her body and splits the body between her breasts. Her smile is pleasantly greeting the viewer in an introduction.

The New Orleans-based French artist John Genin used picturesque techniques in his *Allegory of Sugar Cane* from 1884. Her hair is fashionably coiffed with curls in place. She smiles demurely at the viewer. However, the most revealing detail of this work is the artist’s identification of the woman as an “octaroon.” She is a woman of mixed-race African decent – that is 1/8th black ancestry. I visited the Historic New Orleans Collection in the French Quarters where this painting is housed and wanted to know more about the artist and the woman in the

painting. I discovered that not only was she the artist's model, she was also the artist's legal wife. However, as an "allegory" Genin has chosen a mixed-race woman of African descent to symbolically represent sugarcane. The woman's body becomes one with the sugarcane as an edible entity. In this case, sugarcane becomes *feminized* and *raced* with the octaroon female body. Perhaps this is why the artist has chosen to paint her wearing a green girdle representing the green of the sugarcane and a white Empire gown symbolizing the white processed sugar. As Barthes suggests saying, "there are supposed to be masculine and feminine kinds of food. Furthermore, visual advertising makes it possible to associate certain kinds of foods with images connoting a sublimated sexuality."⁹ The woman's body becomes eroticized in a way that sublimates gender, sexuality, and even violence with the wielding of a knife cutting the stalks. Her cutting the sugar cane stalk may indicate agency or it may reference the black laborers charged with cutting the cane while simultaneously referencing the model's own blackness. Nevertheless, the model's body becomes an allegory for sugarcane – a sugared, edible body. Although she is a well-dressed woman in delicate attire, she is identified as a mixed race black woman and therefore could have been committed to the cane fields as labor under unfortunate circumstances. However, it is the conflation of the black body and sugarcane as allegory that I am interested in here. Fernando Ortiz makes similar assertions when referring to the enslaved Africans arriving to the sugar plantations in Cuba saying, "They arrived deracinated, wounded, shattered like the cane of the fields, and like it they were ground and crushed to extract the juice of their labor."¹⁰ This is a simile that Ortiz interrogates at length saying, "All of them snatched from their original social groups, their own cultures destroyed and crushed under the weight of

⁹ Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," *Food and Culture: A Reader*, eds. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 1997) 24.

¹⁰ Fernando Ortiz. *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 101.

the cultures in existence here, like sugar cane ground in the rollers of the mill.”¹¹ More than metaphor, sometimes accidents occurred in the sugar mills that literally grounded black bodies into the sugar. Genin’s *Allegory of Sugar Cane* is reflective of the picturesque sugar plantation landscape and black body as sugar body.

Andrea Chung is a San Diego-based artist of Trinidadian and Jamaican descent who grew up in Texas. Her practice embraces multi-media and has become known for her video narratives, sugar sculptures, mixed-media drawing, and print assemblages. She focuses on photography as a way to mine the archive of tourist advertisements, challenge colonial legacies, and experiment with illusions of time and space.

It was during her Fullbright Fellowship in Mauritius, an island east of Madagascar, where she began investigating the history of the maroon population on the island. Like many other slave societies, maroons were escaped slaves who fled into the often mountainous or obscured regions of the landscape, quite often living among unfavorable, treacherous terrain, concealing themselves and abating capture. Chung discovered a similar history shared by the maroons of Mauritius which she shares in a soulful re-telling in the 8-minute video projection, *Untitled, Bain de Mer*, 2013 (Fig. 1.6). One day the maroon society that had existed in the mountainous region of Le Morne witnessed the approach of armed British soldiers. These emissaries were sent by the crown to inform the maroons that slavery had been abolished and that they were at liberty to live as free people without concern for re-enslavement. However, assuming the soldiers were approaching the camp to re-enslave them, the maroons committed themselves to an agreed upon contingency plan. Should their lives be threatened with re-capturing, the maroon community had

¹¹ Ortiz, 98.

established that they were to meet at a certain point atop a high cliff and commit themselves to the waters of the deep rather than suffer re-enslavement. As the armed British soldiers approached the maroon camp, each member traveled to the cliff and when finding no one there, each member knew they had already jumped to their deaths and commenced to join their family and community members in death. Chung has recovered the names of the maroon members, written them on a wall, and then solemnly scrubs each name from the wall with water and sponge. As an almost reverse Vietnam Memorial, where architect Maya Lin orchestrated each fallen veteran's name inscribed on the wall as water washes over the marble surface; Chung writes the names and water washes and scrubs the names from the wall – committing the names to the water below, just as the maroon members' bodies were committed to the water below the cliff. Chung's video begins with the sound and visual of an ocean's crashing waves repeating in succession upon the beach as she repeats various phrases throughout the video in succession. The narrator begins,

It is said, when the slaves living on the rock saw the soldiers coming, even though it was to tell them of their freedom that they came. They jumped off the rock to their deaths. It is simply an unbearable story. It is said, that when the first people to escape slavery made their way to the high rock at the extreme southwest of the island, it was in the hope that from there they might be able to see their homeland or even that one day a ship would come to take them home. When instead it was a detachment of armed British soldiers that they saw coming after them, even though in fact the orders these soldiers had were to tell them that slavery no longer existed and that they were now free men. They saw no practical prospect of escape and flung themselves, all of them, from the high tops of the rock that had been their temporary home and towards the waiting ocean below. Men and women. Children and the old. All died in the same way. It is a simply unbearable story.¹²

¹² <http://www.andreachungart.org>

The repeating phrase, “It is a simply unbearable story” is what reverberates throughout the video inscribed upon the viewer’s consciousness – the very unsufferableness of tragedy, tragedy that sanguinely speaking could have been avoided. The viewer participates vis-à-vis Chung in the memorialization of the names, and bestowing honor through mindful gesture that restores or rather completes the necessity for the burial ritual.

Chung’s interest in the history of Mauritius is extended through to the contemporary in a site specific installation at Helmuth Projects in San Diego in 2013. The installation consisted of two works, the aforementioned video projection, *Bain de Mer*, and a sculptural piece, *Bato Disik* (Figs. 1.7-1.9). In a shallow white, rectangular basin filled with water, Chung has populated the large bath with fishing boats, similar to those used by Mauritian fisherman. These boats have been cast in sugar and over time dissolve and disappear reflecting upon the disappearance of the fishing industry in Mauritius. Light is reflected throughout the amber colored boats as we are reminded of the history of the sugar/slave industry in Mauritius. Chung is spinning multiple histories here – the local and the global. She speaks to the particular Mauritius history of the tragedy of the maroons of Le Morne, to the history of the sugar industry/slave industry, and to the contemporary faltering of the local fishing industry due to the illegal overfishing by major entities through corrupt channels. Thematically, she speaks to the global through the use of sugar as a medium which responds to the enslavement of millions of people to work on the sugar plantations, the struggle of societies to move from colonial industries to sustainable contemporary eco-conscious economies, and how the material legacies of colonialism are contestable sites beckoning historical analysis.

Bain de Mer and *Bato Disik* are reminiscent of artist Isaac Julien’s video installation, *Western Union: small boats*. Julien layers the sound of the telegraph machine over images of

landscapes and seascapes, which emphasize migration and memory. We see bodies underwater, moving, writhing, struggling with their fates. Ranjana Khanna summarizes the video's themes as, "stories of presence and absence, pleasure and possibilities, but also prejudice, exploitation, depletion, the side effects of modernism, and the after effects of globalization."¹³ Most of these themes Khanna identifies in Julien's work are present in Chung's work especially the presence/absence of the maroons, prejudices and exploitation, and the destructive after effects of aggressive capitalistic forces under globalization.

Chung's *Bato Disik* boats over time melt and twist, turning in upon themselves, becoming smaller, misshapen sugary things. The glistening, brown sugar reflection of the dissolving boats upon the water conveys a stillness that belies the slow-motion melting of the sugar boats. The boats, like the names of the *Bain de Mer* maroons are poetically re-commissioned to become one with the water. During Chung's study of the fishing industry in Mauritius, she took notice of the fishing lures used by local fisherman. A glass bottle with fishing lure was the method of choice. In her installation *Sink and Swim*, 2013, Chung replicates the fishing tool by casting bottles made of sugar and fastening actual fishing lures in like manner to the sugar bottles (Fig. 1.10). She hung the bottles like a mobile from the ceiling and like the dissolving flotations, the sugar bottles melted on to the floor, creating sticky trickles of brown sugar, topped off by the white plastic of fishing lure. The lure or allurement of both melting apparatuses is the sweetness of the medium. The sugar attracts attention from viewers like willing insects drawn to the seductive play of light refracted through the diaphanous skins of sugar bottles and boats. The senses are invaded by the pleasurable candied aroma that sugar

¹³ Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza, eds. *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*. (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2014), 177.

provides as it lingers in the gallery space. As the bottles melt and collapse like fishing glacé coating the floor with their saccharineness, the pattern of shapes, lines, inlets, isles, and even geographies begin to appear shaping up like sugar maps.

I have included a discussion of Chung's work because the materiality of sugar at play through time and space is repeated in the subsequent discussions of Vik Muniz's and Kara Walker's work with sugar. Walker's installation of the *Sugar Baby* shares a similar aesthetic and practice of the dissolving sugar sculpture, as well as, a similar approach to discussing comparative slave systems, the reconstitution of memory, and the material legacies of colonialism affecting present dispositions. Just like Chung's melting sugar bottles/fishing lures, Walker's sugar sculptures of children dissolve into congealed, sweet blackened maps on the floor of the Domino Sugar Factory. This shared attunement to the materiality and mediality of sugar by Chung and Walker promotes the stimulation of the senses, attracts an engaged spectator, and transforms melting sculptures in unexpected ways opening up interpretation in ways that are also unexpected.

Vik Muniz and Kara Walker

I will now turn to a series of portraits created by the Brazilian born, Brooklyn-based artist, Vik Muniz, *Portraits of the Sugar Children*, 1996, produced on the island of St. Kitts in the Caribbean (Figs. 1.11-1.12). Starting with black paper and then "drawing" a portrait by sprinkling sugar until forming an image, Muniz generates wistful portraits of children who are the offspring of sugarcane workers. Once complete, he captures the skillfully rendered portrait in a photograph, pours the sugar in a glass jar, and begins a new portrait. Kara Walker's 2014

blockbuster installation at the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn, *The Marvelous Sugar Baby* incorporated over 30 tons of sugar to create a monolithic sculpture of a sugared sphinx figure with a ‘mammy-like’ countenance (Fig. 1.13). Like Muniz, Walker fashions her own sugar children by accompanying the sphinx with treacled sculptures of young boys, some carrying baskets of rock candy and granulated sugar and others toting hands of bananas. I am very interested in the elasticity and etherealness of the material that both artists are utilizing and how layers of meaning, the past and present, the body and the bite melt, and mold, and vanish.

Vik Muniz was vacationing on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts in 1995 when he was introduced to a group of children who were the offspring of sugarcane workers. Impressed with their carefree attitudes Muniz began taking Polaroid photographs of the children. Later the children introduced Muniz to their parents who worked in the sugarcane fields performing a treacherous labor that generations prior have toiled with since the seventeenth century. Sugarcane was introduced by the Portuguese in St. Kitts by way of Brazil in the 1640s. Shortly thereafter, thousands of Africans were captured and enslaved to power the European controlled sugar plantations, in what Antonio Benítez-Rojo refers to as plantation machines saying, “This family of machines almost always makes cane sugar, coffee, cacao,...bananas, pineapples,...and other goods whose cultivation is impossible or too expensive in the temperate zones; furthermore, it usually produces the Plantation, capitalized to indicate not just the presence of plantations but also the type of society that results from their use and abuse.”¹⁴ Originally considered a luxury food product in Europe and mainly used medicinally, and as a condiment or

¹⁴ Antonio Benítez-Rojo. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective, Second Edition*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, 9.

spice, sugar became more democratized as the sweet tooth of Europe grew creating global competition and driving the need for increasing physical labor.

Vik Muniz's, *Portraits of the Sugar Children*, is a series of six portraits that the artist “drew” with sugar on black paper. This was the first time Muniz worked with the medium of food – a material format that would become a hallmark of his work and most notably for his technical mastery with such viscous mediums such as chocolate, spaghetti, peanut butter, jelly, caviar, and black beans. For example, in 1997 Muniz recreated a famous Hans Namuth action portrait of the artist Jackson Pollock at work on one of his large drip paintings. Using chocolate syrup as his “paint” Muniz rearticulated the Hans Namuth portrait solely in chocolate syrup. The syrupy concoction that worked as the medium of this portrait also was a reflection of the viscous paints that Pollock dripped like syrup on his canvases. Muniz further tested his fluency in chocolate syrup creating glutinous portraits of Marilyn Monroe, Bella Lugosi as Dracula biting a woman, and a three-panel recreation of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. It is noteworthy to mention that Muniz uses an edible medium to paint Dracula in the action of “eating,” as well as, Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* being focused on an epochal moment of communal eating thereby creating layers of consumption through medium and context.

Muniz's, *Double Mona Lisa*, 1999, was made from peanut butter and jelly. It was fashioned after Andy Warhol's *Double Mona Lisa* (1963); which of course was fashioned after Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1503-1517.) The *Double Mona Lisa* portrait was painted with one jelly Mona Lisa and one peanut butter Mona Lisa. In 2004, he painted a series called *Caviar Monsters* where he rendered images of Dracula, Frankenstein, the Mummy, the Creature from the Black Lagoon, and other characters from the horror genre exclusively in black caviar on white paper. He photographed the painted portraits creating chromogenic prints and then

mounted them on aluminum. During an interview with *DROME* Magazine in 2012 Muniz was asked *why* he chose to paint with food and in his response he clarifies,

Paint is just made out of different components, like food, it only has a different consistency. When you work with something that has a taste, immediately you evoke a different sense and it is interesting to create pictures that work in many sensory levels. Generally, I'm more concerned with taste, rather than food. In fact, I don't really use food, but I use things that spoil, because that justifies the photographic act.¹⁵

This evocation of the senses is an area that I explore more thoroughly in the work of Kara Walker, especially the senses of taste and smell and how they affect the installation experience transporting the viewer. Muniz's disavowal of not using food, even though his paintings were created using: chocolate syrup, caviar, black bean soup, coffee beans, or peanut butter and jelly, can be read as a clear assertion of wanting to separate his practice from the association of painting with food which may allude to the kitschy and craftsmy and thus misconstrue him as an ersatz artist. Rather, the disassociation from the food medium that catapulted his artistic success can be interpreted as matter of strategy for an artist yearning to being taken seriously as a legitimate, creative force. Even though by 2012 Muniz had already achieved immense success as an international artist.

Ultimately, Muniz painted with an edible medium. Although Muniz describes his approach using food as being more concerned with taste his portraits are not eaten, they are photographed and consumed by collectors and the public. Likewise, his *Double Mona Lisa* is not for eating and neither are his sugar children. It is the trope of the consumable black body that is at stake here in Muniz's *Portraits of the Sugar Children*. I want to consider more closely his

¹⁵ Francesca Cogoni. "Vik Muniz: Food for the Soul." *DROME* Magazine. (September 2012), <http://www.dromemagazine.com/vik-muniz-food-for-the-soul/>.

statement, “I use things that spoil, because that justifies the photographic act” as it relates to the sugar children photographic project.¹⁶ But first, Carlyle Van Thompson’s, *Eating the Black Body: Miscegenation as Sexual Consumption in African American Literature and Culture* and Vincent Woodard’s, *The Delectable Negro: Human Consumption and Homoeroticism with U.S. Slave Culture* are just a couple of interventions embracing a discussion regarding the desire and consumption of subjugating black bodies through sexual violence. Woodard buttresses his argument with words like “taste,” “appetite,” and “delectable” in order to draw attention to how the desire for the enslaved African or black American had epicurean implications. He says, “the desire was less about literal consumption and more about the cultivated taste the white person developed for the African.”¹⁷ The intersections of colonial desire, appetite, and consumption of vulnerable black bodies are explored through the literature and archive of both authors. Likewise, Kyla Wazana Tompkins elaborates on these developments by focusing on nineteenth century literature, the literary function of the kitchen, the mouth as a site of political intensity, and the occasional black caricature.

Central to Tompkins’s book, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*, is the dialectic of the eaters and the eaten. She interrogates the consumption of black bodies in three antebellum novels: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig*. She concludes,

If Stowe’s representation of blackness as food serves to develop the metaphor of objectification, like Hawthorne’s it also renders the black body appetizing to her readers. And while the invitation to consume blackness is not explicit, the extensive food

¹⁶ Cogoni, <http://www.dromemagazine.com/vik-muniz-food-for-the-soul/>.

¹⁷ Vincent Woodard. *The Delectable Negro: Human Consumption and Homoeroticism with U.S. Slave Culture*. New York: New York University Press (2014), 18.

metaphors would seem to indicate that the desire to commune with and consume blackness is latent in the text.¹⁸

She develops a literary history of eating culture that closes in on the links between eating, racial formation, and political culture.¹⁹ She explains the book's project further stating, "The image of the black body as an edible object is a strong and consistent trope in this book, and it is an image that carries the weight of many centuries of forced labor, of coercive and violent sexual desire, and of ongoing political struggle."²⁰ Although Tompkins's studies are relegated to the nineteenth century and my images reach into the contemporary period, the same tropes and aesthetics appear in the works under discussion in this dissertation.

I have included the work of these authors as a small example of a whole corpus of scholarly attention where authors are referencing the trope of the consumable or "delectable" black body. As such, the portraits of young black children made from sugar who would eventually find their destiny in the sugarcane fields laboring like their parents takes on more profound contingencies of interpretation. To return to Muniz's methodology of, "I use things that spoil, because that justifies the photographic act," I ask to what extent can the bodies of the children he uses be read as despoiling fodder for consumption that justifies the photographic act?²¹ Tompkins quotes the work of Karen Sánchez-Eppler who explores the role of children in

¹⁸ Kyla Wazana Tompkins. *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 113.

¹⁹ Tompkins, 8.

²⁰ Tompkins, 8.

²¹ Another way of thinking about the term 'spoil' is in regards to its popular usage referring to a "spoiled child," referencing the overindulged, privileged child. Again the association between Muniz's usages of spoil with children carries multiple layers of meaning. Further insight into the image of the colonial child is expanded upon at length by Bill Ashcroft in *On Post-Colonial Futures: Writings Past Colonialism*. (London: Continuum, 2001.) Ashcroft states, "While transformations of those tropes, such as 'the child', employed to 'other' colonized peoples, has been a widespread function of post-colonial discourse, the interrelation between the material economies of colonialism and the transformative dynamic of that discourse has been profoundly important." Ashcroft, 67.

nineteenth century American culture saying, “children consistently figure in Hawthorne’s fiction as the sign of commodity capitalism, ‘suggesting how closely Hawthorne associates the market with children.’”²² Therefore, Muniz as a white Brazilian artist with a, “cultivated taste for the African,” creates photographs of black children rendered in an edible substance which embodies layers of commodity fetishism, both historical and present, that catapult the artist’s career into a trajectory of astounding success following his subsequent engagements with food portraits. Like Sánchez-Eppler’s conception of Hawthorne, Muniz too associates the market, both art market and sugarcane industry, with children as a sign of commodity capitalism. Through the use of sugar he renders the young black bodies, “appetizing to the viewers.”

Muniz titled the portraits according to some notable physical quality of each child. For example, some of the portraits are entitled, *Big James Sweats Buckets*; *Valicia Bathes in Sunday Clothes*; or *Ten Ten’s Weed Necklace*. Muniz “paints” texture in the portraits by ascribing indentations of layers of sugar with his fingers. These “fingerprints” are usually more apparent when viewing the large photographs in person. When seen in person – each sugar granule is afforded its own spatial significance; whereas any small restructuring of any granule could drastically change the portrait. There is a seductive quality in the puffy whiteness of sugar crystals that halos each child in a billowy poof of snowy clouds. However, closer inspections betrays the clouds with the finger of the artist as you notice each child is covered with the impressions of someone’s fingers undercutting the youthful innocence with the possible threat of physical violence. At this point upon closer inspection you realize someone’s hands have been all over these children. Vanessa Silberman’s article, “Vik Muniz’s Ten Ten’s Weed Necklace” addresses the fleeting quality of the portrait as if the child will disappear saying, “the sugar itself

²² Tompkins, 95.

appears to be swallowing the boy as his arms fade into a white blur, lending Ten Ten an angelic, ethereal air that the other children lack.”²³ She describes his presence as not completely established leaving one to wonder about the ghost-like bodies of children haunting the sugar palette.

After each portrait is drawn with sugar, Muniz photographs the drawing, places all of the sugar in a small glass jar that he refers to as an “urn” and affixes the original snapshot on the jar. Silberman describes the correlative body of sugar ashes in the “urns” as a reflection upon the seasonal burning of the sugarcane fields. Like the ashes of a dearly departed family member, the sugar urns are a kind of memorial for the once effervescent portrait of a soon-to-be-departed carefree and jovial child who would shortly join the ranks of their parents in the sugar fields. The laboring bodies that would produce the sugarcane, are drawn with the sugar, and returned to their sugar grave. The conflation of sugar and the black body refers to the terrible colonial histories of slaves working over 16 hours a day cutting, hauling, crushing, boiling, milling, and packaging sugarcane. Often compared to resembling a factory, the boiling house was, “where the juice from the crushed cane was transferred for reduction, clarification, and crystallization.”²⁴ This process was fraught with accidents resulting in the dismemberment and mauling of bodies, even death.

However, the colonial is now. We do not have to look to eighteenth century plantation images to find tropes of the laboring black body in the sugarcane field. Although slavery was abolished in St. Kitts in 1834, the sugarcane workforce comprised approximately one-third of the island’s labor force thereafter. However, in 2005 the government of St. Kitts closed down the

²³ Vanessa Silberman. “Vik Muniz’s Ten Ten’s Weed Necklace.” *Gastronomica*. (Summer 2007), 7.

²⁴ Mintz, 47.

sugarcane industry in favor of developing the island's tourism industry. Many of the former sugar-field laborers were able to secure employment cultivating various fruits and vegetables.²⁵ It is here that Silberman finds hope with a shift of the narrative as she celebrates the escapement of Muniz's *Sugar Children* from the fate of the sugar fields. Nevertheless, I do not want to oversimplify the exchange of one industry (sugar cane) for another (tourism) as if the latter is not complicated and fraught with its own endangerments. I believe the transition of colonial island economies from agro-industrial plantation systems to contemporary tourist industries is a complicated adjustment. It is this dissolving of time and space that I am after here where the colonial/present, sugar portrait/sugar urn, bodily presence/ethereal body that appear in Muniz's work find habitation in the work of Kara Walker's *Sugar Baby*.

Kara Walker's *The Marvelous Sugar Baby*

"What did they live on?" said Alice, who always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking. "They lived on treacle," said the Dormouse, after thinking a minute or two. "They couldn't have done that, you know," Alice gently remarked. "They'd have been ill." "So they were," said the Dormouse; "very ill."

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* at times contemplates the existential dilemma of subsisting exclusively on a treacle diet. The term treacle is a British idiom that refers to the dark brown syrupy molasses obtained from raw sugar during the refinement process.²⁶

²⁵ Silberman, 8.

²⁶ I use the term treacle at times when referring to Walker's work because of the shared nineteenth-century aesthetic associations between this term and the visual and literary archive, such as can be found in Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Mintz adds that, "molasses, or treacle, cannot be crystallized further by conventional methods. It is, of course, quite sweet, and can be used for sweetening food; in the English diet, it was for more than a century at least as important as any crystalline form of sugar; in refined forms, it remains important to this day." Mintz, 22. According to one of my conversations with Creative Time representatives, Sidney W. Mintz's, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, was a primary source and reference for the artist when conceiving of the *Sugar Baby* installation.

Moreover, Carroll suggests an etiological exposure assessment of an exclusively treacle diet endangering one's wellness and resulting in great illness. Carroll uses Alice's great interest in eating and drinking, (read: 'Drink me.' 'Eat me.'), as the operative expression of his fascination with treacle and other sugared variants which sweeten the narrative leading to adventures into the absurd. Kara Walker's black and white cut out silhouettes are historical treatments of the absurd and the obstinately ridiculous, yet terrifying predicaments of U.S. slavery and the plantation agro-industrial complex. Walker's *A Subtlety* is a kind of 'Adventures in Sugarland' – an exploration of treacled bodies, labor practices, and the apotheosis of mother sugar as a raced, gendered, Sphinxed goddess.

Walker's blockbuster installation at the Domino Sugar Factory, *A Subtlety or The Marvelous Sugar Baby*, drew over 130,000 visitors from all over the world and was only available for public viewing on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for a few weeks in the spring of 2014. The installation featured thirteen sculptures of young black boys made of resin and coated in molasses. Through time and heat the sugary black bodies partially dissolved into sticky liquefied footpaths leaving the sculptures in various states of dismemberment and disappearance.

The official title for Walker's piece is:

At the behest of Creative Time Kara E. Waker has confected:

A Subtlety

or the *Marvelous Sugar Baby*

an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined
our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New
World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar

Refining Plan

Walker's predilection for creating superfluous, romanticized titles is typical of her approach in attempting to invoke a nineteenth century aesthetic both through visual and literary traditions. For example, her 1997 installation of black and white silhouettes titled, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* shares the use of the embellished title inspired partially by the 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written by Harriett Beecher Stowe. The curatorial remarks from Creative Time had this to say,

Presiding over the cavernous Domino building in seeming repose, Walker's sphinx is a hybrid of two distinct racist stereotypes of the black female. She has the head of a kerchief-wearing black female, referencing the mythic caretaker of the domestic needs of white families, especially the raising and care of their children, but her body is a veritable caricature of the overly sexualized black woman, with prominent breasts, enormous buttocks, and protruding vulva that is quite visible from the back. If this evocation of both of both caregiver and sex object – complicated by her coating in white sugar – feels offensive, it is meant to. It is part of what Walker has come to be known for. If the racial and sexual connotations inherent in the sphinx and her attendants were not enough, Walker's work is also about sugar and the history of its production and trade. It is a story of slavery and a triangular trade route that ensured a sufficient quantity of slaves, of industrial power, our contemporary culture of consumption, and much more. In fact, in researching sugar as she developed the work, Walker looked at thousands of years of history (as evidenced by her use of sphinx). The heart of her title, *A Subtlety*, refers to sugar sculptures that adorned aristocratic banquets in England and France [during] the Middle Ages, when sugar was strictly a luxury commodity. These subtleties, which frequently represented people and events that sent political messages, were admired and then eaten by the guests. Perhaps Walker's *Subtlety* is just a little less subtle.

The Domino Sugar Factory built in 1927 on the East River in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn was originally a storage facility that held tons of sugar to be processed for whitening. The soon-to-be demolished factory had been shuttered for over a decade when it hosted its final installment of sugar profundity courtesy of Creative Time and Kara Walker. In their curatorial remarks, Creative Time emphasizes the racial and sexual connotations of the 75-foot sugar

sphinx whose kerchief-covered mammy styled head emphasizes the stereotype of the desexualized black female, domestic laborer while the prominent hips and buttocks with exposed vulva emphasizes the stereotype of the overly sexualized bodies of black women. To this latter assumption I would like add that the domestic labor represented by the mammy stereotype is a double-bind of labor. The hypersexualized buttocks and vulva I believe also represent the forced sexual labors of enslaved black women to produce additional enslaved offspring/laborers as represented by the sugar and resin boy sculptures and to satisfy the sexual whims of those who fancied themselves their masters. The sphinx's body becomes an extension of the plantation machine as sexual machine. The sugared sphinx *in situ* resided in the same physical location of the sugar processing machinery at the Domino Sugar Factory. Loichot adds that, "One could argue that the representation of women as reproductive machines is already part of the plantation machinery, which reduced women's bodies to the production of children as profit."²⁷ I address the embodiment of the figure as an Egyptian sphinx and the conundrums of interpretation that flavor this work later in the discussion.

While Muniz gravitated towards individualized portraits of children, Walker created a singular "type" of child that stood representative for all of the enslaved children engaged in plantation labor. Walker's sugar resin boys stood approximately four feet high and took on the countenance of an 18th or 19th century black caricature with oversized head, sheepish grin, bare-chested, and whose bottom was covered unceremoniously with a loin cloth (Fig. 1.14). The small boys carrying oversized baskets containing sugar crystals, powdered sugar, and orange resin-colored sugar rocks appear incapable of lifting such heavy burdens with such undeveloped arms. Walker may be commenting on the ridiculousness of these mammoth labors, particularly

²⁷ Loichot, 40.

focusing on children subjected to forced labor for the sake of satisfying Western Europe's growing sweet tooth. As Sidney Mintz points out, "England fought the most, conquered the most colonies, imported the most slaves...and went furthest and fastest in creating a plantation system. The most important product of that system was sugar."²⁸ They are a reminder of colonial slavery where the blackamoor appears in paintings or the decorative arts as ornamental devices of pleasure and as reflections of the wealth of the patron.

Each young sugar boy holding a basket functions in a similar fashion after the manner of porcelain decorative blackamoors designed to hold sugar, cream, or as sweetmeat bowls or salt cellars that could be found on a well set table in the 18th or 19th century. Pierre Bourdieu reminds us in *Dinstinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* that the bourgeoisie observe a strict sequence of food consumption as an "expression of habitus of order, restraint and propriety which may not be abdicated."²⁹ He identifies the bourgeois social relationship to food as a disciplined behavior concerned with the social ceremony of the sequence of dishes, attention to different utensils, a hierarchical seating plan, and an etiquette that not only involves an invisible censorship of bodily pleasure, but could also be extended to the observation of the aesthetic refinement of the porcelain object such as the decorative blackamoors. Referring again to the previous curatorial quote from Creative Time who suggests that,

The heart of her title, *A Subtlety*, refers to sugar sculptures that adorned aristocratic banquets in England and France [during] the Middle Ages, when sugar was strictly a luxury commodity. These subtleties, which frequently represented people and events that sent political messages, were admired and then eaten by the guests.

²⁸ Sidney W. Mintz. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 38-39.

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 196.

Although, I compare Walker's sugar boys to the decorative porcelain objects that were fashioned to resemble blackamoors and hold sweets, I want to acknowledge the tradition of confecting sugar sculptures that adorned aristocratic banquets. Mintz acknowledges the early tradition of these sumptuous confections in Europe when sugar was still considered a luxury grocery saying, "As a decoration, sugar was obviously important in ceremonial contexts, such as weddings, birthday parties, and funerals, where sculptured sugar could serve to memorialize."³⁰ In this respect, Walker's use of sugar sculptures are extensions of ceremonial traditions that could serve to memorialize a person or entity. In the title of her confection she memorializes the unpaid skilled laborers of sugarcane from the fields to the kitchens and the installation at Domino Sugar Factory memorialized the end of an era in sugar production in Brooklyn.

It is also important to note that while Muniz's sugar children and Walker's sugar sculptures were not devoured, the sugar sculptures at the aristocratic banquets were eaten by the guests. As I hope to prove throughout this dissertation consumption is not indiscriminate and can take place at many levels. However, in function and aesthetics, I believe Walker's sugar sculptures are more closely aligned with the decorative porcelain blackamoors.

Adrienne L. Childs's chapter, "Sugar Boxes and Blackamoors: Ornamental Blackness in Early Meissen Porcelain," looks at exoticized figures of the blackamoor popularized in Meissen porcelain beginning in the early 18th century. She describes how the black figures often represented allegories of Africa or the Americas and were usually restricted to the role of servant. Childs describes one such sugarbowl, *Negress with Basket*, which she attributes to Kändler and Johann Friedrich Eberlin who created it for Meissen in 1741, as being in a typical

³⁰ Mintz, 122.

rococo style that emphasizes the black female's dark skin coloring, red lips, and white eyes.³¹ However, much like Walker's sugar boys who are in the gesture of offering, Childs identifies this gesture in *Negress with Basket* as an intercession between the diner and the contents of the bowl which functions in the manner of a servant. She describes a similar male and female blackamoor porcelain companion set located today at the Rijksmuseum that were used as part of the dessert program in the, "grand 'St. Andrew' service created by Meissen for Empress Elizabeth of Russia in honor of her heir's marriage."³²

However, it is the final piece in Childs's essay that most closely resembles Walker's sugar boys in function and likeness. *Moor with Emerald Cluster*, c. 1724, sculpted by Balhsar Permoser (1651-1732), and in the Dresden collection features a smiling black male figure whose crowned head is tilted up, his nude body is dripping in gold jewelry including elaborate bracelets, necklaces, and cuffs attached to all of his limbs and torso (Fig. 1.15). Childs identifies a kind of "African Exoticism" that appears in Permoser's work as a conflation African bodies and American Indian bodies which she classifies as characteristic of eighteenth-century exoticism. *Moor with Emerald Cluster* holds an emerald step that was presented to August of Saxony by Emperor Rudolf II in 1581 and was a part of a series of four moors altogether; the second and third held trays of pearls, while the fourth held a tray of crystals.³³ Childs goes on to contextualize the social functions of these objects saying, "These moors are the ultimate in ornamental blackness, encrusted with jewels and precious metals, their bodies both display and deliver the wealth of distant lands and embody the unabashed accumulation and consumption of

³¹ Adrienne L. Childs, "Sugar Boxes and Blackamoors: Ornamental Blackness in Early Meissen Porcelain." *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth Century Porcelain*. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 163.

³² Childs, 163.

³³ Childs, 171.

exotic luxury goods by European elites.”³⁴ The social function of the decorative blackamoor was also extended into the public sphere and can be traced to a time when, “In England, it was fashionable for aristocratic women to be accompanied by a black boy, who was treated as a sort of toy (when he outgrew this role, he was usually sent to the Caribbean).”³⁵ This extension of the young black boy as an expensive trinket that would reflect the owner’s wealth and status to a public audience is a colonial tradition that Walker may also be addressing.

Therefore, these ornamentalized black figures that Childs identifies as displaying the wealth of distant lands function in a similar fashion to Walker’s young boys as the very embodiment of the wealth of the sugar plantations through their constitution of sugar flesh. Furthermore, the accumulation and consumption of exotic luxury goods by European elites is also represented in the literal consumption of sugar by European and American elites. We find that, not only in function are Walker’s sugar boys similar to *Moor with Emerald Cluster*, but also in a shared aesthetics.

Although the moor is represented as an adult male, unlike Walker’s much younger sugar children, the moor’s skin glistens in a lacquered darkness, reflecting light in way very similar to the reflection of light off of the hard candied bodies of the young boys. Also, like Walker’s sugar boys holding baskets of sweet rock crystals, the moor is also holding a basket filled with emerald crystals. These figures are also both in a position of serving which Childs conceives of as symbolic of maintaining a social hierarchy, as well as, referencing the luxury and wealth of the New World. In a quote that almost anticipates Walker’s sugar children, Childs compares

³⁴ Childs, 171.

³⁵ When the child outgrew his usefulness as a toy through the passing of his youth, being sent to the Caribbean was a sentence of hard labor and not a vacation. Matthew Parker. *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies*. (New York: Walker & Company, 2011), 299.

Moor with Emerald Cluster to *Negress with Basket* saying, “Both substances being offered are rooted in the colonial encounter, the emerald from Colombia and the sugar from Brazil or the West Indies.”³⁶ Childs’s essay was published four years before Walker’s installation, however, the trope of the ornamentalized black as a colonial servant in the decorative arts has been popularized since the sixteenth century. Childs concludes that, “The close association between sugar, slavery, and the Meissen object exemplify how material culture celebrated black slavery in a manner that recast human degradation and exploitation into exotic vignettes.”³⁷ It is this ornamentalization of the black subject as sugar bowl and intercessor that is reflected in Walker’s sugar boys in the tradition of material sumptuousness, exploitation of the black body, and consumption of luxury goods by colonial elites.

Some of the young boys are carrying hands of bananas drawing upon the closely related histories of sugar and bananas. The profitability of sugar cane began to wane with the increase of sugar beet production, emancipation, emerging Asian markets, the Sugar Duties Act of 1846, and the increase of international free trade. How were colonial investors going to be able to sustain market share and increase their business? Enter bananas. Sugar cane stalks were rooted up and bananas were planted in the same soil. Sugar plantations became banana republics. This may be a possible explanation for some of the young boys toting bananas, as well as, the oft cited association between bananas and blackness.

The young boys wear the same mask of silent contentment offering their sweet basket of goods to the audience. On this wise, I was confronted with a disturbing experience at the installation. As I stood viewing one of the sugar boy sculptures, a group of young men and

³⁶ Childs, 173.

³⁷ Childs, 167.

women next to me were observing the same child whose “skin” glistened like a melting sweet. One of the white men expressed his own hunger for the young boy’s body saying, “I want to lick him, but I can’t.” I was struck by this young man’s at once public vocalization to lick the boy and at the same time his self-conscious negation of the pleasure principle. As if to publicly acknowledge that although licking the young boy would be pleasurable, he is willing to deny himself this pleasure as a kind of moral asceticism. This man’s wish to lick the young boy catapulted my mind into the past when such behavior would have been routinely visited upon the lives of the enslaved. Saidya V. Hartman addresses a predilection for this kind of inappropriate behavior that scandalizes vulnerable black bodies in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* as she looks at the legal and social ramifications of *State of Missouri v. Celia, a Slave*.

In *State of Missouri v. Celia*, Celia was a slave who was purchased by her owner, Robert Newsome. Newsome had begun continuously raping Celia beginning the day she was purchased and ending when she killed him four years later. Hartman goes on to describe the efforts of Celia’s attorney to prove Celia was acting in self-defense against her attacker and should be protected by Missouri’s laws regarding crimes of ravishment against women which applied to white women and enslaved women alike. However, the courts disagreed, found Celia guilty, and sentenced her to death by hanging. Hartman goes on to say, “As *Missouri v. Celia* demonstrated, the enslaved could neither give nor refuse consent, nor offer reasonable resistance, yet they were criminally responsible and liable.” Hartman quotes Leon Higginbotham’s remarks regarding the case saying Celia’s guilt, “held that the end of slavery is not merely ‘the [economic] profit of the

master' but also the joy of the master in the sexual conquest of the slave.”³⁸ Likewise, under the threshold of slavery the young boys could neither give nor refuse consent to be licked.

Furthermore, artist Renée Green's work explores the relationship between the textile industry and the slave trade as located in the production of *toiles indiennes*, a fabric popularized by the French aristocratic classes during the 18th and 19th centuries. Noted for their bright colors and tropical scenes, Jennifer A. González describes how the *toiles indiennes* fabrics were used to create elaborate garments, upholstery, and curtains.³⁹ In Green's 1994 installation, *Taste Venue*, in New York at the Pat Hearn Gallery, she upholstered an entire room, wall, chairs, chaise longue, pillows, and pajamas in the style of a mauve and white *toiles indiennes*. Green designed her own pattern to include eighteenth century French aristocratic pastoral scenes, a black slave in chains, a hanged white Frenchman during the Haitian Revolution, and a Senegalese nun.⁴⁰ However, as the title, “Taste Venue,” suggests, behind a circular cutaway flap of the *toiles indiennes*, Green has included a reproduction of an image of a white eighteenth century slave owner licking the face of one of his black slaves, tasting his sweat as a determinant of his health and subsequent monetary value. The flap must be lifted by the viewer to witness this event emphasizing the surreptitious form of knowledge. An event that stands in contradistinction to Bourdieu's treatise on bourgeois taste whose social ceremony of the meal is committed to the denial of, “the crudely material reality of the act of eating and of the things consumed, or, the

³⁸ Saidya V. Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press (1997), 86. Hartman adds, “The black body was simply the site on which the “crimes” of the dominant class and of the state were externalized in the form of a threat.” Hartman, 82.

³⁹ Jennifer A. González. *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 224.

⁴⁰ González, 225. Matthew Parker discusses the entanglements of textile manufacturing and the many faces of the slave industries in his book, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies*. (New York: Walker & Company, 2011.) He states, “Banks, insurance companies, shipbuilders and brokers all participated in and benefited from the trade, and profits were invested in manufacturing. Manchester in particular, thrived, producing textiles that the Liverpool shippers took to Africa to pay for the slaves.” Parker, 298.

basely material vulgarity of those who indulge in the immediate satisfactions of food and drink.”⁴¹ Bourdieu’s analysis of taste as a principle of classification that is embodied and helps to shape the class body as a cultivated disposition does not consider the literal manifestation of tasting the corporeal body. Although he concludes that, “It follows that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste, which it manifests in several ways.”⁴² Thinking about taste as a hierarchy of social behaviors manifest in several ways complicates Bourdieu’s location of the body as site of materialized class taste. Rather, Green’s and Walker’s work exposes the contemporary neocolonial desire of the white male observer to taste the candied body of the young black boy. Renée Green’s cutaway flap when raised, therefore responds in a similar fashion likened unto the lid of a covered dish revealing the desserts entrée of the consumable black body (again referring to Childs’s discussion of Meissen porcelain blackamoors as decorative sugarbowls.) At the same time, the flap when unattended, conceals the underbelly of colonial desire offering instead a serene landscape of aristocratic taste. This neocolonial desire or disposition of taste contradicts Bourdieu’s conception of the bourgeoisie’s commitment to the meal as social ceremony and as, “an affirmation of ethical tone and aesthetic refinement.”⁴³ To be clear, the act of tasting another human being’s sweat to assess their health condition and monetary value is unethical and a form of savagery that is the antithesis of aesthetic refinement. González elaborates on Green’s homology of taste and aesthetics of aristocratic habitus saying,

Collapsing two notions of taste – the aesthetics of aristocratic décor and the nearly cannibalistic gesture of the slave trader – Green’s installation also brought to mind the origin and etymology of the notion of taste as the primary eighteenth-century discourse on beauty in the arts.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Bourdieu, 196.

⁴² Bourdieu, 190.

⁴³ Bourdieu, 196.

⁴⁴ González, 228

My point here is to emphasize the comments made by the white man at Walker's installation to lick the young black boy are a wish fulfillment embedded in colonial desire and further represented by Green in the reproduction of this actual act grounded historically in a visual and literary archive. Brillat-Savarin reminds us that, "Gastronomy considers taste in its pleasures and in its pains."⁴⁵ These formulations of taste and desire manifest by the white men licking the slaves or licking the candied enslaved sculptures is indicative of Toklas's earlier quote of how sugar has become, "a particular favourite with men." Whether the sugar-overed body of a young boy or the tasting of a corporeal enslaved body, the construction of colonial appetites has a predictable and enduring menu of gastronomical favorites. Walker's anticipation of sugary racialized/sexualized bodies becoming edible favorites among certain viewers is made manifest in the afterlife of the show which I discuss later on.

These reiterations of past and present turning and falling back upon each other collapse the boundaries of time and space. As one audience goer described her experience saying, "I found the intensity of the exhibit, the space, and the smells propelled me both backward and forward."⁴⁶ Perhaps this backward motion in time/space and forward swoon into the present destabilizing our time/space continuum is part of the artist's intention in this installation. What happens when certain audience members' appetites for colonial slavery imagery and unmitigated privilege coupled with a sensorial explosion of the smell of warm baking sugar confounds

⁴⁵ Brillat-Savarin, 46.

⁴⁶ Kimberly D. Nettles-Barcelon, et. al., "Black Women's Food Work as Critical Space." *Gastronomica* (Winter 2015), 45.

present day ethical judgments? Walker is able to conjure colonial sensibilities in some audience members through this kind of antebellum aesthetic and veritable sweet battering of the senses.

While Muniz's sugar children portraits are dissolved and/or dismembered into urns, Walker's sugar boys could very well be dissolved by being "licked" to death. However, time and temperature dissolved the sugar boys and parts of the sphinx as well in Walker's installation. By the end of the installation after a few weeks, the heat, sun, and bodily traffic had melted the sugar resin boys into various states of dematerialization. Some of their arms had completely melted off, their feet spilling into dark black pools of sugar blood. Fragments of their bodies melted and collapsed into chunks of candied sludge by the end of the engagement at the Domino Sugar Factory.

Robin Bernstein's, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, historicizes the relationship between childhood and innocence beginning in the nineteenth century. During this period of high sentimentalism Bernstein posits that, "Childhood in performance enabled divergent political positions each to appear natural, inevitable, and therefore justified. I call this dynamic 'racial innocence.'"⁴⁷ As it relates to this discussion, Bernstein's engagement with childhood in the nineteenth century touches upon a depiction of black children in way comparable to Walker's sugar children. Bernstein states, "At the mid-nineteenth century, however, a romanticism sugared over into sentimentalism, writers began to polarize black and white childhood."⁴⁸ Bernstein's metaphor of a sugared over romanticism is analogous to Walker's aesthetic that draws attention to the sugared over bodies of children in bondage. However, it is Bernstein's attention to the stereotype of the insensate pickaninny in

⁴⁷ Robin Bernstein. *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*. (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 4.

⁴⁸⁴⁸ Bernstein, 43.

literature that most closely resembles the dismemberment of Walker's sugar children. Bernstein follows how the staged performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* eventually led to the characterization of the young black Topsy to become invulnerable to pain and suffering. To be able to experience pain was to be human and the justification of slavery was embedded in a discourse that classified enslaved Africans as inhumane and therefore insensate. Bernstein offers up the historical record as evidence saying,

Slavery had been legitimized in part by widespread claims that African Americans were impervious to pain. Thomas Jefferson, for example, wrote in 1781 in *Notes on the State of Virginia* that Negroes' "griefs are transient." Southern doctors claimed that people of African descent carried a hereditary disease called "dyaesthesia Aethiopsis," or an "obtuse sensibility of body" that supposedly rendered black people invulnerable to corporeal punishment.⁴⁹

I am including this discussion on the insensate young black child because of the disintegration of Walker's sugar children towards the final days of the installation. One by one, the boys lost hands, feet, arms, and various parts of their bodies. The dismembered sugar laborer was a common sighting during the colonial period because of the hazardous nature of the work that caused many to lose their digits, limbs, and even their lives in the process of cutting, hauling, crushing, and boiling the sugar cane. I reflect upon these articulations of dismembering as mimetic forces of disremembering. The practice of disremembering or forgetting the violent tragedies of slavery affected upon edible, saccharinized bodies is personified in the melting sugar children. In this respect, Walker's sugar children are sculptured struggles to remember a forgotten experience in way that tethers them, not only to labor, but also to a place. Jason Young argues in, "Through the Prism of Slave Art: History, Literature, Memory, and the work of P.

⁴⁹ Bernstein, 50.

Sterling Stuckey,” that, “even when we forget the meaning of those times and that place; even when we have never known, the very landscape retains the memory of it.”⁵⁰ James Young quotes Hershini Bhana Young who, “argues that rememory, ‘takes the form of shadows, images, and shapes that flicker by.’”⁵¹ Walker’s sugar children become memories tied to a sugar landscape, a specific place; a remembering through the shapes of children that flicker by through the slow dematerialization of their bodies. Rememory is closely tied to the work of author Toni Morrison. Morrison’s *Beloved* is a return, a reconciliation, and a “rememory” of the story of Margaret Garner and the haunting of her deceased child. Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw intertwines a reading of Morrison’s work with Walker’s and addresses the continuities of rememory. When discussing Walker’s *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* Shaw reads this as, “an effort to ‘rememory’ the visual stories out of the mediated testimonials of the traumatic events and lingering repercussions of slavery that [Sojourner] Truth’s slave narrative exemplifies.”⁵² Memories can be fleeting and haunting within themselves and Walker’s sugar children have the fleeting quality of a dissolving medium and the haunting African American cultural ethos of terrorizing slave narratives. In an absence of full consciousness, the sugar children therefore become the dismembered disremembered.

Matthew Parker’s, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies* explicitly details some of the grueling and deadly labors of sugar plantation life. The processing of sugarcane had to be administered to rather quickly because it starts to lose its sugar content once cut. Mintz describes the process of cutting the cane when ripe in order to preserve

⁵⁰ Jason Young. “Through the Prism of Slave Art: History, Literature, Memory, and the work of P. Sterling Stuckey.” *The Journal of African American History*. Vol. 91., No. 4, (Autumn, 2006), 395.

⁵¹ Young, 395.

⁵² Shaw, 52.

the proportion of sucrose in the juice adding that, “once it is cut, the juice must be rapidly extracted to avoid rot, desiccation, inversion, or fermentation.”⁵³ In addition to the field labor performed by slaves, Parker’s research uncovers the grueling and deadly sexual labors performed by many slaves against their will. The physical and sexual abuse of the enslaved are concomitant in any discussion of slavery, and most profoundly recognized on the sugar plantation because it was the largest and most successful of New World industries. Parker confirms this saying, “Sugar itself would shortly become the most important commodity in the world – enjoying a position in the eighteenth century akin to steel in the nineteenth and oil in the twentieth.”⁵⁴ These nuances of physical and sexual exploitation are both present in Walker’s installation.

It was in this moment of contemplating labor exploitation and rememory during the last weekend of the installation that I observed a young woman cry out to her male partner regarding one of the sugary boys’ crumbling state as she exclaimed, “Look! Oh no. He’s lost his arms!” Her apathetic partner shrugged his shoulders and without a word sauntered off. Walker’s application of nineteenth century aesthetics carries what Bernstein refers to as a system of signs or the scriptive thing that reveals a host of implied actions. The practices of scripted things enter our system of culture and are then performed. I believe the mostly apathetic viewer witnessing the dismemberment of Walker’s sugar boys reacted according to the scripted prompts that

⁵³ Mintz, 21.

⁵⁴ Matthew Parker. *The Sugar Barons: Family Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies*. (New York: Walker and Company, 2011), 2. The literature on the subject of the atrocities of sugar plantations is astounding. Therefore, I do not duplicate all of the author’s efforts here, but rather include a few of the sources that have been helpful in this research. See further, Ada Ferrer’s, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Carl Plasa’s, *Slaves to Sweetness: British and Caribbean Literatures of Sugar*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009); John C. Rodrigue’s, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes 1862-1880*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); Richard Follett’s, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana’s Cane World, 1820-1860*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Andrea Stuart’s, *Sugar in the Blood: A Family’s Story of Slavery and Empire*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

dictates the young black child as impervious to pain, like Topsy. Although this is a discussion regarding sugar sculptures, the children represented in these works whose bodies disintegrated into black puddles were often read according to the same script of one whose, “griefs are transient.” In Walker’s previous works of black and white cut out silhouettes, she has referred to the paper as a kind of “script” saying,

I’ve been interested in the way in which black people (or commonly: “African Americans”), or the way at least I responded to, or ignored, or reaffirmed or reinforced certain stereotypes about myself, other blacks, or more interestingly – white people – who retain a sense of white supremacy blithely unaware of the power Black life has over them. The silhouette is the most concise way of summing up a number of interests. [It is a way] to try and uncover the often subtle and uncomfortable ways racism, and racist and sexist stereotypes influence and script our everyday lives.⁵⁵

Darby English goes on to contextualize this quote by Walker in way that unpacks how the script functions. He identifies two primary functions of the script including the limiting possibilities of being through preexisting impositions upon the black subject’s consciousness and then the script as a key for decoding the black subject. He emphasizes that Walker, “conceives of the script as episodic and modifiable, already a distortion.”⁵⁶ English contends that histories act as fragmented scripts whose actors must re-perform in an unchanging manner. This performance of the script is what I witnessed during the encounter of the passive viewer and the dismembered sugar child. As a three-dimensional live sequence of actors and witnesses, a living tableaux of one of Walker’s black and white silhouettes, the audience took part in a drama that was provoked by such encounters with scriptive things. As a result of the scriptive thing, that is the insensate black child impervious to pain and suffering, the insouciant viewer performs by offering a

⁵⁵ Darby English. *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 84-85.

⁵⁶ English, 86.

dispassionate response. It is the response and interaction of the viewer that becomes increasingly central to Walker's work. I discuss the role of the audience in Walker's approach when exploring the post-production of the *Sugar Baby*.

The Aroma

Many attendees of the Walker installation commented on the powerfully sweet aroma wafting from inside the Domino Sugar Factory before they entered the facility. The scent of baking sugar hung heavy in the air during the late spring afternoons. The air was warm and honeyed teasing the attendees standing on line with great anticipation by first titillating the sense of smell before entering into the installation space. Instantly, the intoxicatingly sweet aroma activated memories recalling experiences of baking cookies, cakes, or desserts as social, familial, or celebratory activities. Diane Ackerman reminds us that there is nothing more memorable than a smell and breaks down the etymological meaning of breath as not being neutral or bland – but *cooked air*.⁵⁷ If our breath is *cooked air*, then outside the *Sugar Baby* installation, attendees breathed in *baked air*. The sense of smell is directly related to how we remember. Ackerman says that, “a smell can be overwhelmingly nostalgic because it triggers powerful images and emotions before we have time to edit them.”⁵⁸ In contrast to the senses of sight and hearing which have short-term memory, the sense of smell does not have short term memory. The sense of smell and memory are inextricably intimate as she reminds us that, “Alzheimer's patients

⁵⁷ Diane Ackerman. *A Natural History of the Senses*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 6. Ackerman adds that our lived experience is one that is in a constant state of simmering saying, “There is a furnace in our cells, when we breathe we pass the world through our bodies, brew it lightly, and turn it loose again, gently altered for having known us.” Ackerman, 6.

⁵⁸ Ackerman, 11.

often lose their sense of smell along with their memory.”⁵⁹ She connects the sense of smell with memory further referring to perfume as “liquid memory” and includes the work of Edwin T. Morris who admits in *Fragrance*, “there is almost no short-term memory with odors.”⁶⁰ Rudyard Kipling also states that, “Smells are surer than sights and sounds to make your heart-strings crack.”⁶¹ I believe Walker incorporates the sense of smell through the abundance of sugar to suggest a collective social memory that makes the audience’s heart-strings crack, bend, and break producing a multi-layered, multi-sensorial experience.

Chemist and perfume connoisseur Luca Turin assures us that it is our sense of smell that gives us about 90 percent of what we taste and not our “dwarfish” sense of taste itself which responds to the limited palate of sweet, sour, bitter, salt, umami (richness), and astringent. Turin believes that our sense of smell has the ability to respond to over 10,000 odorant molecules. Turin contemplates the theoretical engineering of the sense of smell as mostly about survival, moving us away from chemical compositions of decay and toxicities and instead towards edibles with typically lower molecular weights and therefore more easily digested. He adds, “Because smell is not about sex, contrary to popular belief, it’s about food and protection from decaying, poisonous things that can hurt you, to tell you whether whatever’s in your hand is good for you.”⁶²

In addition to smell warning us of danger, Ackerman emphasizes the seductive powers of the sense of smell harnessed by perfumers, masters of aromatics, and the natural producing pheromones triggering our libido and bodies into ovulation, courtship, and reproduction.

⁵⁹ Ackerman, 43.

⁶⁰ Ackerman, 11.

⁶¹ Ackerman, 11.

⁶² Chandler Burr. *The Emperor of Scent: A True Story of Perfume and Obsession*. (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002), 57.

Ackerman spends a particular amount of her argument discussing the history of scent in Egypt declaring it had become a national obsession during the reign of Queen Hatshepsut (New Kingdom, 1558-1085 B.C.) and that ancient Egyptians, “anointed their bodies with perfumes to ward off magical hexes, for medicinal purposes, and as beauty lotions, because they prized the feel of silky, scented skin.”⁶³ I have included a focus on the sense of smell, not only to describe the aromatic aura of sweetness emanating throughout the installation, but because of its relationship with memory, sex, food, and ancient Egypt – all tightly-knit factors of Walker’s *Sugar Baby*. “Smells spur memories,” and Walker’s *Sugar Baby* is a bittersweet aide-mémoire, not only of candied treats, but memories of slave systems, collective trauma, sexual exploitation, and ancient Egypt.⁶⁴ As a result, Walker is able to invoke a nineteenth century aesthetic not only through a visual assault of the senses, but also through the power of olfactory recall precipitating a full bodied nineteenth century experience.

The Sphinx

I will look briefly look at how Walker’s sugar sphinx is a monumental befuddlement of erotic agency and like all grand sphinxes – a conundrum, a riddle, and a mystery. Most critiques of Walker’s *Sugar Baby* have scarcely reflected upon the main sculpture’s embodiment as a sphinx and what significance this holds historically and aesthetically for the project.⁶⁵ Nor have

⁶³ Ackerman, 56-57.

⁶⁴ Ackerman, 37.

⁶⁵ Amber Jamilla Musser is one of the few exceptions that critically engages with the sphinx body in her article, “Queering Sugar: Kara Walker’s Sugar Sphinx and the Intractability of Black Female Sexuality.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. (Vol. 42, Iss. 1, 2016). Musser’s queering of Walker’s sphinx body is a way in which she offers, “a bridge between racialized and gendered vulnerability and pleasure. That is to say, queerness offers us a way to rethink black female subjects and allows us to dwell on what it would mean to reorient sexuality toward the animal.” Musser, 167.

critics justly considered the sphinx's left hand gesture. I will discuss the implications of both the sphinx figure and the left hand gesture, *mano in fica*.

Walker's sphinx is ostensibly modeled after the Great Sphinx of Giza in Egypt where it is referred to locally as, *Abu al-Hawl*, "The Father of Terror." It is a colossal statue of a recumbent lion with the head of a ruler.⁶⁶ It was originally painted over with a reddish ochre color, some of the remaining pigments have been identified in the headdress. The headdress representing the royal crowns of the *nemes*, which is a head cloth with lappets, and the *uraeus*.⁶⁷ Walker's sphinx also wears a headdress consisting of a kerchief that represents domestic labor of black women fashioned in a way to recall the pejorative mammy stereotype. Egyptologists are in dispute as to whether the Great Sphinx represents the pharaoh Khafre or Khufu. The sphinx was created at the site of the quarries where stones were taken to build the core of Khufu's pyramid.⁶⁸ Likewise, Walker's sphinx was created at the site of a storage facility where sugar was used to build the core empire of the Domino Sugar Company. The Great Sphinx spans over sixty meters long and twenty meters high, while Walker's sphinx spanned over seventy-five feet long and over thirty-five feet high. The Great Sphinx was originally chiseled out of the limestone and oriented along an east-west axis with relative precision, facing east.⁶⁹ Walker's sphinx was made out of donated sugar from the Domino Sugar Company and positioned on the east side of the East River in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn.

⁶⁶ Miroslav Verner. *The Pyramids: The Mystery, Culture, and Science of Egypt's Great Monuments*. (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 234-235.

⁶⁷ The *uraeus* represented the sacred asp (*Naja haje*) and appeared on the headdress of rulers as a symbol of sovereignty. Verner, 235.

⁶⁸ Verner, 236.

⁶⁹ Verner, 235.

Some Egyptologists believe the Great Sphinx was created by the pharaoh Kkafre, bears his image, and was constructed as part of a much larger pyramid complex. In various interviews, Walker has confirmed that the head of her sugar sphinx is indeed a type of self-portrait. In the New York Times article by Blake Gopnik he refers to his experience during the interview and quotes the artist saying,

I just noticed that her nose and profile are me, for sure,” Ms. Walker said. The “just” is hard to believe: In March, when I first visited studio in Manhattan’s garment district, she talked about enlarging the nostrils on an early draft of the head and, maybe unconsciously, pointed to her own nose as she did so.⁷⁰

Walker’s acknowledgement of the head of the *Sugar Baby* as self-portrait shifts the meaning of the work in ways that are estranged from her previous black and white cut out silhouettes. The silhouettes are flattened perspectives of all black bodies, which are cut outs made of black paper regardless of their representation of white or black subjectivities; void of the nuances and characteristics that would identify a particular individual. Darby English refers to the work of David Joselit who remarks that Walker’s, “re-contextualization of the silhouette amplifies its two-dimensionality, bringing to mind the ‘psychological flatness’ that arises when selves are constituted, and identities composed, in a constant play of surfaces.”⁷¹ Walker’s sphinx explodes the conscription of a two-dimensional silhouette and seeks full subjectivity through its commanding self-portrait and exposition as an unreadable, ancient monument of divinity – the Great Sphinx. The self-portrait as a mammy-sphinx eschews any simplified, lateral conclusions of singular consciousness.

⁷⁰ Blake Gopnik. “Rarely One for Sugarcoating: Kara Walker Creates a Confection at the Domino Refinery.” The New York Times, April 25, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/arts/design/kara-walker-creates-a-confection-at-the-domino-refinery.html?_r=2.

⁷¹ English, 88-89.

Rather, through a body that proves Oscar Wilde's veritable assertion, "Nothing succeeds like excess," the *Sugar Baby's* excess of tons of sugar and hypertrophic sexuality resists any flattened denouements. Barbara S. Lesko's, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*, confirms the power of excess as a disorienting venture as she quotes Herodotus saying, "the Egyptians are religious to excess, beyond any other nation in the world."⁷² Although the Great Sphinx of Giza is most likely representative of the pharaoh Khafre, many other sphinxes represented female personas whose riddles confounded the wisest of men over centuries. The inexplicable sphinx/goddess that carries multiple meanings is homologous to the mystifying sphinx and pantheon of Egyptian goddesses. Lesko's work in this area could very well be referencing Walker's *Sugar Baby* as she states,

It should be obvious that the ancient Egyptian goddesses in their strong images and many-sided personalities mirrored the women who filled many roles in that society – public responsibilities as well as varied domestic concerns – but they also surpassed them in powers and activities, due to their divine nature. The many forms these goddesses took – loving and nurturing, strong and aggressive, high spirited and sexual – reflect the many moods of human females.⁷³

According to Lesko's work, then Walker's *Sugar Baby* can also be read as an avatar, not only of the artist herself, but a collective representation that is an homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World. An homage to the women who contributed in several capacities addressing public and domestic concerns. The high spirited and sexual references of the sugar sphinx are also reflected in a very subtle gesture.

⁷² Barbara S. Lesko. *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 258.

⁷³ Lesko, 260, 262.

Walker's reclining sphinx has two outstretched parallel arms. The left hand is cupped under with the thumb protruding between the index finger and the middle finger. The right hand does not reflect this same posture and simply faces down in a loosely closed fist. The position of the left hand is an ancient gesture known as *mano in fica* or "fig-hand." This is a sexualized hand gesture representing the vulva penetrated by the lingham. Often practiced among early Romans the *mano in fica* was an apotropaic gesture used to protect one against the "evil eye." Also practiced in Greece, where the fig-hand is referred to as a "fist-phallus," it represents a display of the penis. Dr. Terri Hamilton describes the *mano in fica* as a, "derogatory sexual display, much like the raised middle finger, intended to convey the message 'fuck you.'"⁷⁴ So then, the sphinx can be read as body of self-preservation and defiance issuing a sexually derogatory rebuff to her would-be sexual offenders through the gesture of the *mano in fica*. In essence, Walker's *mano in fica* hand gesture is an ancient symbolic gesture of "fuck you." The primary usage of this gesture in the early Mediterranean also geographically locates its genesis in an adjacent region of the Egyptian sphinx. A more thorough discussion of Walker's sphinx calls out for serious unpacking, beginning with a historical understanding of the Hottentot Venus.

Hottentot Venus

Several critiques of Walker's *Sugar Baby* make reference to the Hottentot Venus, or Saartjie Baartman, who was born in 1789 in South Africa of the Khoi-San tribes. Baartman's body as spectacular hypersexual attraction becomes the prime foundational comparison for many when viewing the sphinx's voluptuousness. I provide a more detailed and thorough examination

⁷⁴ Dr. Terri Hamilton. *Skin Flutes & Velvet Gloves: A Collection of Facts and Fancies, Legends and Oddities About the Body's Private Parts*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 280.

of Baartman's life and the afterlife of her sexual anatomy in chapter two with regards to a discussion of chocolate. I believe Walker is drawing upon the aesthetic of Baartman as an archetype of public phenomenon that emphasizes the ravenous hunger for the hypersexual and available black female body. I will include a brief discussion of Baartman in this chapter to emphasize the scopophilic theatre of racial trauma that is evident in the life of Baartman and subsequently transpires in Walker's *Sugar Baby*.

In 1810, Baartman was exhibited in a cage from England to Paris and traveled performing at private parties often in a nude or nearly nude state. The visual excitement over Baartman was ignited because of the physical condition known as steatopygia, a protrusion of the buttocks. Paying crowds clamored over the incarcerated Baartman as Saartjie-mania tore through London inspiring songs, poems, fashion (the invention of the bustle), printed satires, caricatures, penny prints, and articles. Ultimately, Baartman died a short time later of exposure in 1815. French scientists dissected Baartman preserving her sexual anatomy under glass for observation at the Musee de l'Homme in Paris.

The medical and scientific obsession with Baartman becomes the, "master text on black female sexuality for Europe's scientific community."⁷⁵ Mireille Miller-Young's book, *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* is a wonderful study of the conflation of sugar with black female sexuality. Miller-Young exposes the colloquial uses of refined cane sugar and blackness to emphasize the use of sugar as metaphor for blackness and as commodity – that is the cultivation of sugar as a "murderous commodity" and the commodification of black female sexual labor. Miller-Young goes on to say,

⁷⁵ Mireille Miller-Young. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 34.

The lewdness and raw quality associated with brown sugar in popular discourse today thus shows how ideas about black women as naturally savage, super-sexual beings have flavored popular tastes even as they have driven a global appetite for (their) sweetness. While processed white sugar is held up as the ideal, there remains a powerful desire, indeed a taste, for the *real thing*.⁷⁶

Not unlike Sarah Baartman, the Sphinx's genitalia was on display for consumption by eager viewers clamoring to see, taste, and touch the *real thing* if possible. Although Walker's sphinx is a "white" body, literally a commodity in itself as a sugar body, she is still read as a black female and therefore racialized and gendered. Kamala Kempadoo's proposition of a "bottoms up" approach to the transformative process of sexual agents addresses women's sexual praxis through encountering the, "supposed, 'deviancy,' 'disorganization,' and general pathology of Caribbean sexuality."⁷⁷ Kempadoo questions,

To what extent, I ask here, can we read the "excesses" or "vulgarity" of Caribbean sexuality not simply as European inventions that refract upon Europeaness and that negate or demean the history and agency of the Other, but also as sedimented, corporeally inculcated dispositions that are lived and practiced every day?⁷⁸

Kempadoo's engagement with excess as a strategy of resistance embraces what Sheller determines erotic agency as the antithesis of enslavement. Both "excesses" and perceived "vulgarity" with the exposed vulva and 10-foot vagina of the sphinx are encountered simultaneously. While Kempadoo's work interrogates specifically Caribbean women's transactional sexual economies, a diasporic approach that employs a bottoms up approach is found in the work of Samantha Pinto. Pinto's conceptualization of the bottom as a metaphor for

⁷⁶ Miller-Young, 5.

⁷⁷ Mimi Sheller. *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 250.

⁷⁸ Sheller, 250.

diaspora is a possible methodology for understanding the critical force of how bottoms in excess contain too much meaning.

In her chapter, “It’s Lonely at the Bottom: Elizabeth Alexander, Deborah Richards, and the Cosmopolitan Poetics of the Black Body,” Pinto articulates how diaspora as bottom, “as that visceral plane of traumatized flesh and as the lyric category that threatens to contain too much meaning, from too many sources.”⁷⁹ Pinto’s bottoms up approach is particularly relevant to a discussion of Walker’s sphinx because she complicates the spectacularized bodies and sexuality of black women by considering black women as political agents. She states, “This double signification of physical bottoms acts as the sign of both success and excess for black women’s cultural significance, the vehicle by which black women as icons are made visible and rendered fantastic and tragic simultaneously in the lineage of Western representation.”⁸⁰ Because Walker’s sphinx is made mostly out of sugar (with a foam core), I read it as a gastropoetical bottom in excess. The advent of the edible body complicates responses to a body already assumed available for consumption through the exacting of colonial narratives. It is through the excess of sugar that the sphinx’s bottom resists conventional techniques of power and goes beyond intransigent definitions. Pinto, “claims the importance of reading the bottom and responding to it, putting the bottom into the realm of the imaginative and creative, refusing its relationship to the played-out narratives of martyrs, saints, and sinners.”⁸¹ Therefore, Walker’s sphinx responds as the “imaginative and creative” bottoms up force of resistance to definitions that would essentialize subjectivities and deny any engagement with black interiority.

⁷⁹ Samantha Pinto. *Difficult Diasporas: The Transnational Feminist Aesthetic of the Black Atlantic*. (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 46.

⁸⁰ Pinto, 45.

⁸¹ Pinto, 74.

Nevertheless, Sheller cautions that, “sexual agency has long been a two-edge sword, both implicating the sexual subject in relations of domination and subordination and offering a route out of such relations, which may be seized as an enabling possibility.”⁸² In other words, a bottoms up approach to Walker’s sphinx may become a, “discursively productive and complex site for reading the power dynamics of public histories and black women’s subjectivity and sexualities.”⁸³ The artist’s finesse of the post-production spectatorship contains other possibilities of subversive practices. I have included an abbreviated discussion of Sarah Baartman and a bottoms up approach to emphasize the hunger for scenes of abjection and subjection of the hypersexualized black female body on display and to offer alternative possibilities and perspectives. The rage of public excitement fueled by Baartman-mania is pertinent to a discussion regarding the crowds in attendance at the *Sugar Baby* installation.

Friendly Cannibals

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *The Futurist Cookbook* (1930) includes a dialogue amongst Futurist artists that could have been written for Walker’s sugar sphinx sculpture.

The screens vanished and there appeared the mysterious soft trembling sculptured complex which was her. Edible. In fact the flesh of the curve signifying the synthesis of every movement of her hips was even appetizing. And she shone with a sugary down peculiar to her which excited the very enamel of the teeth in the attentive mouths of his two companions. Higher up, the spherical sweetness of all ideal breasts spoke from a geometric distance to the dome of the stomach supported by the force-lines of dynamic thighs.

‘Don’t come near!’ He cried to Marinetti and Fillia. ‘Don’t smell her. Go away. You have evil, voracious mouths. You would eat her away from me without stopping for breath.’

⁸² Sheller, 260.

⁸³ Pinto, 74.

With the mouths of friendly cannibals, Giulio Onesti, Marinetti, Prampolini and Fillia restored themselves with a tasty morsel of statue every now and again.⁸⁴

This dialogue from *The Futurist Cookbook* is almost too rich for comparison with Walker's *Sugar Baby* in its clear articulation of hunger and inordinate desire for the female sugar sculpture. It is absolutely remarkable considering the episode in *The Futurist Cookbook* predates Walker's installation by over ninety years. Even as the Futurists describe how, "she shone with a sugary down," is similar to the language that Gopnik utilizes in his interview when he states, "stretching 75 feet from paws to rump is a great sphinx, demure as her Egyptian cousin but glowing from a recent sugar coating."⁸⁵ Just like the aforementioned Egyptian cousin, The Great Sphinx of Egypt belonged to a pyramid complex, so too does Walker's sphinx belong to a sugar complex of assorted saccharine sculptures. Even so the Futurists identified their sugar sculpture as belonging to a "sculptured complex." In addition to the "spherical sweetness" that is emphasized in the sphinx's exaggerated raised hips, buttocks, and vulva, we are able to identify a rapacious appetite by the viewer, not only among the Futurists, but quite explicitly within the Domino Sugar Factory.

Amber Jamilla Musser's article, "Queering Sugar: Kara Walker's Sugar Sphinx and the Intractability of Black Female Sexuality" begins to unpack some of the social media fallout that became entangled with the installation's pageantry. The Futurist's rebuke of, "Go away. You have evil, voracious mouths," could have been the maxim of those who were outraged by the rampant disrespect for the sculptures and subtly rephrased as, "Go away. You have evil,

⁸⁴ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. *The Futurist Cookbook*. (London: Penguin Books, 1932), 18-19.

⁸⁵ Gopnik, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/arts/design/kara-walker-creates-a-confection-at-the-domino-refinery.html?_r=2.

voracious eyes.” I substitute the word “eyes” for “mouths” because the audience was not able to physically taste of the sculptures, however, their voracious “eyes” feasted upon the buttocks, breasts, nipples, hips, and candied children with an inexorable ravenousness. The event at the Domino Sugar Factory is exemplary of the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hahn’s postulation that we “eat” images which I presented in the introduction of this dissertation. Amber Jamilla Musser confirms the inappropriate behavior of certain spectators,

In this way, the experience of seeing the sphinx is as much about the specter of black bodies and pain on display as it is about space, creating a space for blackness and reverence for blackness. Inappropriate behavior is read as a violation, a sign of disrespect to the legacy of slavery and an assault on the black bodies viewing the exhibit.⁸⁶

All of social media was ablaze with the photographs and videos of onlookers simulating licking the sphinx’s breasts, pinching nipples, licking the buttocks, penetrating the sphinx, with their tongues, hands, fingers, and groins, many men and women acted on the freedom to, “Grab her by the pussy.” Whether oblivious or indifferent to the colonial traumas of slavery represented in the sugar figurations or not, many of the attendees instead acted out sexual violence upon the sphinx while hamming it up for social media. In response to these lewd judgments and acts of violence, some attendees shouted, cried, hollered in pain, tears flowing, and took to social media to express their own outrage at such behaviors. For example, in Nicholas Powers’s essay, “Why I Yelled at the Kara Walker Exhibit,” he recounts his yelling at the installation, “You are recreating the very racism this art is supposed to critique.”⁸⁷ He goes on to say,

⁸⁶ Musser, 160.

⁸⁷ Nicholas Powers. “Why I Yelled at the Kara Walker Exhibit.” (June 30, 2014), <https://indypendent.org/2014/06/30/why-i-yelled-kara-walker-exhibit>.

Anger shot up my body like a hot thermometer. Face flushed, I walked to the Mammy sphinx. Couples posed in front of it, smiling as others took their photos. So here it was, an artwork about how Black people's pain was transformed into money was a tourist attraction for them. A few weeks ago, I had gone to the 9/11 museum and no one, absolutely no one, posed for smiling pictures in front of the wreckage.

I caught the eye of the few people of color, we talked and shook our heads at the jokey antics of white visitors. We felt invisible, and our history was too. It stung us and we wanted to leave. I forced myself to go the backside of the statue and saw there what I expected to see, white visitors making obscene poses in front of the ass and vulva of the "Subtlety." A heavy sigh fell out me. "Don't they see that this is about rape?" I muttered as another visitor stuck out his tongue.

The physical weight of all that sugar, a symbol of the pain and profit wrung from our ancestors, our black bodies, fell on us hard. All those lives destroyed, I thought, all that death. And then a white couple goofily posed in front of the Mammy sphinx's breasts. Nia and I left.

I have included an extended presentation of Powers's comments for three reasons. First, because his comments are emblematic of many other viewers who were also affronted by the public offenses and seemingly oblivious connection with histories of slavery and capitalism at stake here. Second, because it is this kind of voice that is seldom heard among the sensationalism and promotion of art event as spectacle. Third, because his observations are addressed in the afterlife of the exhibition by the artist.

Aftertaste

After the limited engagement of Walker's *Sugar Baby* installation, the sculptures were dismantled. A re-installation occurred at Sikkema Jenkins gallery where Walker included parts of the dissembled sugar sphinx, original drawings, materials related to the project, and perhaps

most surprisingly, video recordings of viewers interacting with the installation. Musser addresses the public's general astonishment upon discovering the artist's secret taping of the aforementioned bad behaviors.

Many hailed this discovery because it appeared to reverse the tide on these feelings of violation. Taping patrons without their consent and airing that material to the world was imagined as a way to humiliate those who took selfies and expose them to the same type of violation that some patrons experienced.⁸⁸

However, many of the offenders that were caught on camera violating the sugar complex, did not attend the post-production installation at Sikkema Gallery. So the supposedly, "Gotcha!" moment that would convict the conscionable transgressor was an imaginative episode. It did not transpire. This leads us to consider for whom was this redemptive pleasure reserved? In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Walker states,

I put a giant 10-foot vagina in the world and people respond to giant 10-foot vaginas in the way that they do. It's not unexpected. Maybe I'm sick. Sometimes I get a sort of kick out of the hyper essay writing, that there's gotta be this way to sort of control human behavior. [But] human behavior is so mucky and violent and messed-up and inappropriate. I've got a lot of video footage of that [behavior]. I was spying.⁸⁹

Walker's spectatorship of the audience or spying on the audience challenges the objectifying gaze. Loichot refers to the work of bell hooks saying,

In "Eating the Other," bell hooks recalls her childhood realization that spectatorship was not a universal right: "Amazed the first time I read in history classes that white slave-owners...punished black people for looking, I wondered how this traumatic relationship to the gaze that informed black parenting and black spectatorship."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Musser, 163.

⁸⁹ Musser, 164.

⁹⁰ Loichot, 138.

Thinking about Walker's spectatorship within this historical framework recontextualizes her gaze as political and counter-hegemonic. Rather than the death of the spectator, Walker's post-installation show consents to a kind of re-birth of the spectator by finding a way to, "sort of control human behavior." Idealistically the installation can be read as what Claire Bishop refers to as the desire to create an active subject, "one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation."⁹¹ Bishop discusses how Bertolt Brecht's abandonment of the long, complicated plot in favor of 'situations' that would interrupt the narrative through disruptive elements would lead to the audience disengaging with the protagonist and creating critical distance.⁹² Ultimately, the art event would lead to the spectator as author. However, Walker's post-show of the videos incriminating certain audience members' interaction with the sugar complex prohibits full spectator participation and a Brechtian distancing.

Amelia Jones's chapter, *Postfeminism, Feminist Pleasures, and Embodied Theories of Art*, is a feminist criticism on the use of term "post'feminism" within art discourse.⁹³ Jones continues her argument of postfeminism's influence from modernist, authoritative, masculinist models of art practices by looking at the Brechtian aesthetic theory of distancing. As a strategic construction of artistic value appropriated from postmodernism, distancing activates the spectator as an agent, making them conscious of their connection with the illusionary experience and function of representation. The spectators at Walker's installation signed waivers before entering the facility that indicated their image may subsequently be used. However, the most significant feature to Jones's argument is distancing's resistance to pleasure.

⁹¹ Claire Bishop, ed. *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 12.

⁹² Bishop, 11.

⁹³ Amelia Jones. "Postfeminism, Feminist Pleasures, and Embodied Theories of Art." *New Feminist Criticism*. Eds. Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven, (New York: Harper-Collins, 1991), 16-41.

Distanciation disallows the spectator's pleasurable experience of seductive images and prohibition as a desiring subject. Walker's videos implicating the inappropriate behavior of certain spectators are explicit in the spectators actively seeking pleasure through sexualized simulations, however were denied the carnal, corporeal pleasure of touch in these attempts. Jones supports this methodology by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theories of the aesthete's 'disgust' and renunciation of pleasures of the flesh in favor of an empty, ascetic pleasure that symbolically appeals to moral excellence and ethical superiority. Jones contends that this prohibition of pleasure is antifeminist and destructive because it denies female agency. She incorporates the work of French feminist Luce Irigaray who describes the disempowering effects of the refusal of female pleasure as complicitous with patriarchy. Ultimately, Jones supports a pluralistic approach to feminist art histories that recognizes the diversity of feminisms.

In this respect, the *Sugar Baby* was more about organizing a constructed situation that closes participation and thereby forsakes interpretation by the viewer. A Brechtian approach refuses to conceal the constructed event and instead lays bare for the spectator. Bill Ashcroft states that, "Because sugar is the reason for the most traumatized and disrupted colonial populations, it is also the focus of the most revolutionary cultural developments."⁹⁴ Walker's installation had the potential to be the focus of a revolutionary cultural and creative development that called for spectators as interpreters, or as artist Lygia Clark stated, "True participation is open; we will never be able to know what we give to the spectator author."⁹⁵ Ultimately, Walker's admitted "spying" on the spectator reveals a self-consciousness of how her self-portrait as mammy-sphinx would be perceived. In an almost prophetic moment that anticipated the

⁹⁴ Ashcroft, 73.

⁹⁵ Bishop, 18.

Sugar Baby, the artist delivered a statement in 1997 in an exhibition catalogue at the Renaissance Society, where she acknowledges:

How do I know that you are motivated and aroused by my presence in your sphere...a spectacle in the round...a delicious new confection...brought to your kingdom by the conquistadors of consciousness...to be molded and sculpted, cultivated and cuisined, consumed and defecated and consumed again.⁹⁶

The artist imagining herself as a confection, a spectacle in the round that would be devoured by spectators with whom she shares some trepidation about appeasing their appetites while at the same time resisting being consumed can be read as a reflection of her uncertain space as a black female artist in a mostly white environment. Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw interprets this statement as reflective of the pain of self-performance and artistic commodification and that it is representative of an artistic body that is feted and then fed upon, “a product presented to a hungry white art audience waiting to see how good she tastes.”⁹⁷ In a separate discussion, Shaw compares the career trajectory of African American artist Robert Colescott with that of Walker’s and their shared condemnation by some African Americans who have accused them of, “feeding the appetite that white American art consumers have for black flesh.”⁹⁸ Shaw extends the metaphor of consumption to Walker’s repurposing of stereotypical negative imagery of blacks saying, “she has received praise from those whose appetites are satisfied by the visual feast of grotesques that she purveys.”⁹⁹ I have included this brief discussion of Walker as an edible commodity to reflect upon the self-portrait of the sphinx in a way that illustrates one’s own angst about being eaten alive. Almost twenty years prior to *Sugar*

⁹⁶ Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw. *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 139.

⁹⁷ Shaw, 139.

⁹⁸ Shaw, 117.

⁹⁹ Shaw, 117.

Baby, Walker's visualization of herself as a delicious new confection informs this piece more than any other.

Conclusion

Sugar has a special talent for re-igniting the existential trauma of colonialism. Through sweetness it beguiles. Through whiteness it obscures. Each tiny processed granule wields the power of subtlety. Sugar in its totality is an invitation of pleasure and pain that raptures the senses. This chapter looks at artistic engagements with the legacy of sugarcane and considers how meaning is eroticized and allegorized calling attention to the traumas of social crisis and the temporality of presence.

Chung, Muniz, and Walker incorporate the materiality of sugar in their work in a manner that addresses the contentious and violent histories of sugar, the vulnerability of laboring bodies while contemplating how these legacies shape current social formations. Walker conceptualizes the mediality of sugar to draw attention to the traumas of the history of sugarcane's cultivation, production, commodity fetishism, and how the act of consumption transforms the consumer/viewer. By considering a diasporic approach this study exceeds the constraints of strictly colonial or nationalist frameworks and thereby is able to address comparative slave systems, labor exploitation, globalization, colonial and contemporary shared agro-histories, capitalism, and Pan-African identities. By way of comparative analysis we are able to draw conclusions regarding how Muniz and Walker created sugar children whose images or bodies rapidly dissipated into piles of sweet goo or granules and consider how these bodies were consumed by space, time, and audiences.

In the beginning of this chapter I reference Alice B. Toklas's grand introduction to her recipe for Iced Soufflé where she says, "Here is the recipe for the ineffable."¹⁰⁰ I chose this recipe because one of its chief ingredients was sugar, but also to demonstrate how sugar has become in her words a, "particular favourite with men."¹⁰¹ Toklas's use of the word "ineffable" refers to something that is beyond description, without expression, or unspeakable. In Shaw's, *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*, she labors with the term ineffable and its multilayered undercurrents permeating the traumatic legacy of slavery. She envisions Walker's work as a visceral manifestation of the gothic offering a voice to the, "disremembered and the unspeakable, the real and the imagined, of slavery."¹⁰² She looks at the provocative power of Walker's work to give, "voice to the discourse of the unspeakable," and predicts that her work, "will continue to be a fertile area of research as long as there is so much that remains unseen, yet unspoken."¹⁰³ It is in this regard that Walker's discourse of the unspeakable becomes a recipe for the ineffable and a particular favourite with men. The ineffable and the unspeakable are one recipe whose primary ingredient is sugar and whose aftertaste haunts us in the present. Throughout the Domino Sugar Factory and especially evident near the installation's exit, footprints can be seen tracking the sticky black sugar from the building into the outside world (Fig. 1.16). Walker incriminates the audience in this installation. The tackiness of our sugar past is stuck to all of us in the present.

¹⁰⁰ Toklas, 134.

¹⁰¹ Toklas, 134.

¹⁰² Shaw, 65.

¹⁰³ Shaw, 64, 156.

Chapter 2

Cacao

Oh, divino chocolate!	Oh, divine chocolate!
Que arrodillado te muelan	They grind thee kneeling,
Manos plegadas te baten	Beat thee with hands praying.
Y ojos al cielo te beben	And drink thee with eyes to heaven.
---Marco Antonio Orellana, in <i>The True History of Chocolate</i> , 2000	

This thing smells like a person. To be exact, thanks to the milky lactone note, it smells like an infant's breath mixed with his mother's hair spray...

What Rush can do, as all great art does, is create a yearning, then fill it with false memories of an invented past...

---Luca Turin in *The Emperor of Scent: A True Story of Perfume and Obsession*, 2002

Hungry souls go away hungry.

---Wassily Kandinsky in *Duchamp: 1887-1968, Art as Anti-Art*, 2000

Alice B. Toklas's recipe for "Hot Chocolate" found in *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* includes melted chocolate, hot milk, and stories of whipping nuns. Like many of the recipes in the *Cook Book*, Toklas presents her recipes in memoir fashion fixed between anecdotes, traditions, memories of the war, and her life with partner Gertrude Stein. Her "Hot Chocolate" calls for 3 ounces melted chocolate to 1 quart hot milk. Bring the milk and chocolate to a boil and allow to simmer for ½ hour. Then the chocolate should be beaten for 5 minutes. Immediately following this recipe, without any separation, Toklas recalls, "The nuns made huge quantities in copper cauldrons, so that the whisk they used was huge and heavy. We all took

turns in beating.”¹ Toklas remembers herself and the nuns beating the chocolate as in continuous sequence with the ingredients that reads as one single recipe. “Hot Chocolate” becomes more than a sweet creamy brew of hot cocoa beaten to a frothy mixture. The other intangible ingredients are the memories from childhood.

Toklas’s recipe for “Hot Chocolate” intertwined with memories from childhood and the beating of the velvety cocoa mix is appropriate to the discussion of chocolate presented in this chapter. This is why I have chosen Toklas’s “Hot Chocolate” recipe above the other several recipes from her *Cook Book* requiring melted chocolate, including, a very popular recipe for “Very Good Chocolate Mousse,” “Crème Marquise,” (Jean-Jacques Rousseau was underlined); or her “Sacher Torte.”² Toklas’s physical exertion of beating the chocolate is reminiscent of the historical preparation of chocolate by the Maya who beat the honeyed cacao to produce a greatly desired frothy head. The physical labor of chocolate production and preparation combined with the historical kinship of these processes is addressed in the discussion of Marcel Duchamp’s *Chocolate Grinder* (1914) and Oscar Murillo’s chocolate factory installation, *A Mercantile Novel* (2014.) Furthermore, Toklas’s remembrance of making hot chocolate as interwoven with childhood memories is also a recurring theme in the work of Murillo. Though Duchamp as an adult pays tribute to the memory of seeing a chocolate grinder in a confectioner’s shop, both memory and chocolate are melted together and beaten to a foaming modernist mixture.

¹ Alice B. Toklas. *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*. (New York: Harper Perennial), 64. This quote also finds a similar reference in the first epigraph by Marco Antonio Orellana where the hands beating the chocolate are the same hands praying and looking toward heaven.

² The “Sacher Torte” recipe comes from an Austrian cook named Frederich who was in the employ of Stein and Toklas. Toklas describes him as enchanting and was delighted with his talents in the kitchen and confides that, “he told us that he and Hitler had been born in the same village and that anyone in the village was like all the others and that they were all a little strange. This was in 1936 and we already knew Hitler was very strange indeed.” Toklas, 43. As previously stated, many of the recipes are flavored with remembrances and impressions that express poignant historical moments.

It has been exactly 100 years from Marcel Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder* (1914) to Oscar Murillo's chocolate factory installation, *A Mercantile Novel* (2014). This centennial comparative analysis offers insight into the consistencies and disparities of how two artists engage with the aesthetics of chocolate as inspiration, medium, modernism, and the mechanical. Although the term cacao refers to the seed kernels of the fleshy pods of the cacao tree and the term “chocolate” refers to consumable substances containing cacao, whether in beverage or solid forms, I will toggle between both terms.³ Taking the lead from Marcy Norton who affirms that, “Despite this increasing emphasis on the importance of ‘luxury groceries’ for transformations in European culture and economy, scholars have failed to recognize the primacy of chocolate in the pantheon of tropical imports.”⁴ As it relates to art history, I too agree that many scholars have failed to recognize the primacy of chocolate in the pantheon of the canon and the contemporary. This study grounds the popularity of cacao within the historical and the gustatory. I examine how a visual paradigm of chocolate grounded within a historical context informs aesthetic dispositions, attitudes, and desire. As a result, the historicizing of chocolate demonstrates how visual and cultural tastes are developed, negotiated, and embodied by machines, automatons, and related to treatments of blackness and sexuality. I begin by looking at Marcel Duchamp’s, *Chocolate Grinder Number 1*, 1913 and *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*, 1914 and then consider Oscar Murillo’s *Colombina* series, *A Mercantile Novel*, 2014, which involves an installation of a live chocolate-making factory in a Chelsea blue-chip gallery (Figs. 2.1-2.3). Both artists deal with the physicality of chocolate production, modernism, consumption, labor, and the aesthetics of pleasure.

³ Marcy Norton. “Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics.” *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 111, No.3 (June 2006), 660.

⁴ Norton, 666.

What follows is a study in chocolate. My end objective is to give more texture to the discussion of Duchamp's chocolate grinders and to consider what a 100 year comparative analysis of chocolate has to offer art history. A historical retreat into the Mesoamerican and colonial history of cacao reveals its ritualistic use as power elixir, as a vehicle for the transmission of magical potions, shamanistic curative, and instrument of sexual witchcraft. An understanding of the cultural flows of cacao throughout history provides the connective tissue for contextualizing Duchamp's treatment of the fragmented being as figured in his *Large Glass*. This historical application of cacao re-figures the fragmentation of Duchamp's bride, bachelors, and chocolate grinder in a way that maps the social history of cacao and attempts achieving a kind of wholeness. This attempt at a re-constituted self refers to the figures in the *Large Glass*, as well as the embodiment of the *Chocolate Venus*, and the practices of both Duchamp and Murillo. I contemplate the endowment of erotic sensibilities and chocolate, and commentary on the aesthetic consumerism of the black female body as chocolate fantasy. I am focusing on the work of Duchamp and Murillo because this allows for a centennial survey of how chocolate and chocolate bodies are configured and endowed with various meanings. I approach Duchamp's work in a way that challenges conventional interpretations by reading race, and blackness in particular, in his *Chocolate Grinder* and *The Large Glass*. I accomplish this by examining the very thing consistently disregarded in his *Chocolate Grinder* – chocolate and also by invoking the original attributional influences that Duchamp himself documented.

Sexual Chocolate

William A. Camfield's, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain* features a close biographical and historical study of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*. Camfield admits to the staggering literature on Duchamp, but also states that, "an examination of this literature reveals that our knowledge of this readymade sculpture and its history is riddled with gaps and extraordinary conflicts of memory, interpretation, and criticism."⁵ I believe discussions of Duchamp's work figures prominently because his oeuvre is dynamically positioned for discussing a plurality of themes and representations including: the mechanical mind, modernity, masculinity, the destabilization and complexities of identity, artist collectives, transatlantic production, and many other layers of exchange.

Marcel Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder Number 1*, 1913 and *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*, 1914 were painted after he saw the actual chocolate grinding machines in a confectioner's shop in Rouen, France. Describing his experience Duchamp states, "...It was actually suggested by a chocolate grinding machine I saw in the window of a confectionery shop in Rouen. Through the introduction of straight perspective and a very geometrical design of a definite grinding machine like this one, I felt definitely out of the Cubist straightjacket."⁶ Duchamp clarifies this quote in a 1953 interview with Dorothy Norman saying that the spirit of his work at the time was close to the Cubist idea of 'dismantling,' but that in form his work was quite different from Cubism.⁷ Both original works are located in the collection of the Philadelphia

⁵ Camfield, William A. *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*. (Houston, TX: Menil Foundation, Inc., 1989), 13.

⁶ <http://musiqdragonfly.wordpress.com/tag/marcel-duchamp/>

⁷ Dawn Ades, Neil Cox and David Hopkins, eds. *Marcel Duchamp*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 74.

Museum of Art. *Chocolate Grinder Number 1* resembles the kind of mechanical rendering popularized in architectural schemata. The flattened picture plane is tilted up giving the viewer aerial access to the copper-colored tripartite drums emphasizing their rotating bodies. Dark shadows fall beneath the legs of the platform indicating a light source coming from the upper right division of the composition. *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* eliminates the dramatic shadow play and instead emphasizes the mechanical construction of the now golden drums conspicuously placed in the center of the composition. Duchamp has also added dissecting lines across each drum diagramming the cylinders. The original chocolate grinder that Duchamp saw in Rouen only had two castors for grinding cocoa and sugar into a fine texture. He added the third roller in an assemblage he referred to as ‘Louis XV.’

The same chocolate grinder appears in the lower foreground of Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* of 1915-23. *The Large Glass* is actually two large, double-paned windows of glass, “painted” with oil and lead wire. An unfinished work that was abandoned by Duchamp, *The Large Glass* is often referred to as his *magnus opus*, an unfinished masterpiece, and as Herbert J. Seligmann was reminded of Alfred Stieglitz’s remarks on *The Large Glass* in a public lecture at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 1926, “saying that he considered it a privilege to sit beside it, and that it was one of the grandest works in the art of all time not excluding Egyptian, Chinese, or even French, which was now the fad.”⁸

Duchamp’s *Chocolate Grinder Number 1*, 1913 and *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*, 1914 were finished works before he incorporated the mechanical object within *The Large Glass* in

⁸ Marcia Brennan. *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics*. (London: The MIT Press, 2001), 50.

1915. The chocolate grinding apparatus is tripartite consisting mainly of three rounded, barrel-shaped drums that would rotate, grinding the chocolate, while unified through a central spindle connecting the drums in a floating circular top. The grinding drums sit atop a multi-legged tray that has a performative quality like a mini-stage, a theatrical aestheticizing of the object through the use of shadow and perspective. The chocolate grinder is on display for inspection, not just for its mechanistic qualities, although its industrial performativeness is part of the aesthetic attraction; but rather, its functionality for grinding the sweet, brown stuff represents a mechanical autoeroticism that compelled Duchamp to write, “the bachelor grinds his chocolate himself.”⁹

When taken within the context of *The Large Glass*, the chocolate grinder is emblematic of the bachelor’s sexual, onanistic repetitions. The “bride” is represented as a motorized assemblage, hovering alone in the upper stratum, while her “bachelors” stand waiting below.¹⁰ Unable to consummate the love affair/marriage, the bachelors stand like chess pieces in a stale game of courtship. The ocular forms suggest witnessing to the futility of sexual engagement between the bride and bachelors. Marcia Brennan suggests that the artist was, “keeping with his emphasis on conceptual aspects of art over sensual ones and ‘intellectualism’ over emotion, in this work Duchamp presents cerebral, mechanized bodies with nongenerative sexualities.”¹¹ The emphasis on the mechanical, disembodied figure can be read as a sort of conjugation in Duchamp’s modernist vocabulary. Duchamp chooses a new lingo antithetical to the Cubist “straightjacket” of confinement that liberates any comprehensible, fleshly subjectivities. Rosalind Krauss describes this effect of the disembodied figure in Duchamp’s work as, “the

⁹ Brennan, 62.

¹⁰ Brennan, 60.

¹¹ Brennan, 60.

body without organs, the subject without a center, the world without Oedipus.”¹² Ellen Harris’s 1994 exhibition catalog, *Precision in America 1915 – 1941*, focuses on Precisionism in art and poetry. In the essay, “Reordering Reality: Precisionist Direction in American Art 1915-1941” Gail Stavitsky’s takes up a discussion of Duchamp’s *Chocolate Grinder No. 1* and proclaims that it could be considered as the first Precisionist painting in terms of it possessing, “clearly defined, static, simplified forms, isolated on a blank ground and described by Duchamp as being like a mechanical drawing.”¹³ Stavitsky hails Duchamp as being the pioneer of modernism in America. Even Duchamp is described with machine like qualities, not unlike how David Joselit describes him, particularly as being built with the precision of an instrument, scientifically designed, and whatever he touched had beautiful precision. These descriptions of Duchamp almost construct him as a mechanical King Midas automaton.

David Joselit’s *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910 – 1941* discusses how Duchamp’s malfunctioning and anachronistic machines or apparatuses operate in contradistinction to the perception of the machine as an optimistic trope of the modern celebrating the progress of mechanization and of proper working bodies. The key works that Joselit focuses on are Duchamp’s *Network of Stoppages*, *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors*, *Bride*, and *Chocolate Grinder No. 1* and *No. 2*. Joselit describes these works as illustrating the measurable and immeasurable and the interplay between masculine and feminine. Joselit says that, “Duchamp’s readymade gesture is both an act of inscription and a ruthless act of decoding: the thing loses its identity only to gain another....and another.”¹⁴ In this phrase I

¹² Rosalind Krauss. “Bachelors,” *October*, Vol. 52 (Spring, 1990), 55.

¹³ Harris, Ellen, et al. *Precisionism in America 1915-1941: Reordering Reality*. (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994), 39.

¹⁴ Joselit, David. *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp, 1910-1941*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 62.

mark the mechanical mind of technology as an epistemological force – as a migration within the machine. By the 1930s, Duchamp emigrates, “from things to actions and from machines to selves” as what Joselit describes as his process of the self-readymade.¹⁵

Other criticisms of his chocolate grinders (and oeuvre in general) focus on identifying queer sexualities and ‘proto-fetishistic/homosexual masculinity’ gestures through the application of a queer social history and psychoanalytic readings. For example, Paul B. Franklin amplifies the connections between queer history and art history by delving into the Haussmannization of Parisian city planning and waste management resources identifying queer resonances within the city’s *pissotières*. Of course, Duchamp’s, *Fountain*, is the primary exhibit in this discussion where Franklin correlates the controversy surrounding men’s public toilets during the 1910s and 1920s in Paris as inspiration for the aesthetic of a sculptural *toilette à la turque*. Franklin further locates queer sexualities when considering *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* and *Large Glass*. I will unpack this discussion of queer sensibilities later in my analysis.

Nevertheless, it is the rarest of considerations that actually ponders the subject of chocolate in Duchamp’s *Chocolate Grinder Number 1*, and *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*. Janis Mink suggests in *Marcel Duchamp: 1887-1968, Art as Anti-Art*, that chocolate carries sexual connotations when discussing Duchamp’s, *Grinder Number 2*, adding the oft-quoted analysis that the mechanized chocolate grinder is actually a metaphor for masturbation. Yet, Mink, avoids the question of *how* chocolate itself carries sexual connotations. We are not introduced to any historical reasoning for chocolate’s sexual associations. Henderson, likewise, reiterates that *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* is sexually suggestive, but withholds any evidence as to *how*

¹⁵ Joselit, 12.

exactly sexuality is communicated. However, Henderson indicates that the *Chocolate Grinder* references labor of an actual chocolate grinder. It is taken for granted that the reader is complicit in assuming that the sweet brown stuff automatically equates sex. This oversimplified deduction is troublesome because chocolate is also a common reference for blackness and therefore it would follow that blackness equates sex as well, at least according to this manner of presumptive reasoning. Chocolate and sex become assumed social equivalents. Chocolate therefore becomes decontextualized and its history obliterated. Chocolate is left here without a past.

It is vital to contextualize chocolate within the history of imperial expansion when discussing *Chocolate Grinder Number 1*, and *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* because we discover that while the productive force of labor has been reduced to the mechanical body with the chocolate grinder – it actually is referencing the labor performed by a flesh and blood body. The chocolate grinder was an actual person grinding chocolate before this labor was mechanized. The cacao beans would be removed from the pods, dried in the sun for several days, and then roasted. The roasted cacao beans would then be ground with a *metate* and mixed with water and other spices.¹⁶

The restorative practice of re-introducing an embodied subjectivity carries new meanings when considering Duchamp's dismantling of traditional figuration for a dialectical, spiritual phenomenon. Katherine Dreier and surrealist painter Roberto Matta reflected upon the philosophical issues of Duchamp's *The Large Glass* with a reading that expresses, "the desire to recover the fragmented self as a spiritual being."¹⁷ This reassembling of the fragmented body

¹⁶ A metate is a grinding stone used to grind cacao beans and corn. The cacao mixture would be shaped into chocolate bricks or tablets and would be preserved in this state up to two years. As a result of such a long shelf life, cacao was highly mobile. Its ability to make the lengthy voyage from New Spain to Europe and travel well throughout the continent contributed to its popularity as a medicinal drug and later as a luxury food item.

¹⁷ Brennan, 65.

finds its adhesive through the historical context of cacao and its several mobilities as surrogate for the black female body. These historical accounts located throughout a literary and visual archive are healing grafts stitching together a body fragmented into modernist mechanical parts. After discussing the historical narrative of chocolate bodies I will turn my focus to the dissected body and share the architecturally correlative strategy between Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* and the black female body as dissected entity. This study will show the illustrative tradition of representing the dissected black body reduced to mechanical parts and pieces and trace how these provincial techniques inform a modernist vision of representation.

The Chocolate Body

Cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) or “food of the gods” was an extremely significant substance in pre-Hispanic Maya and Aztec culture because it accounted for roles in economic, ritualistic, and political spheres. The Swedish botanist, physician, and zoologist, Carl Linnaeus, (1707-1778), first dubbed the food of the gods, *Theobroma cacao* while Miriam Hospodar points out the rest of Europe were swift to assign it the less scientific designation as “botanical slut.” She quotes the work of Joan Franc Raucher who in 1624 advised monks to abstain from chocolate because it was a powerful stirrer of passions. She cites the royal physician to England's King Charles II, Henry Stubbes, who publishes *The Indian Nectar, or a Discourse Concerning Chokolata* in 1662, saying, “As chocolate provokes other evacuations through the several Emunctories of the body, so doth that of seed, and becomes provocative to lust upon no other account than that it begets good blood.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, the Royal Physician's findings did not

¹⁸ Miriam Hospodar. “Aphrodisiac Foods: Bringing Heaven to Earth.” *Gastronomica*, (Fall, 2004), 87.

impede the consumption of cups of chocolate by King Charles II. Hospodar continues to outline the popular notions of chocolate as an aphrodisiac in England at this time as she quotes,

The great use of Chocolate in venery and for supplying the Testicles with a Balsam, or a Sap, is so ingeniously made out by one of our learned Countrymen already, that I dare not presume to add any Thing after so accomplished a Pen...; and I do not doubt but you London gentlemen do value it above all your cullises and Jellies, your Anchovies, Bononia sausages, your Cock and Lamb-stones, your Soys, your ketchups and Caveares, your Cantharides [Spanish fly], and your whites of eggs.¹⁹

Cacao beans represented a unit of currency and were used as monetary exchange and in tribute. According to the recorded text in the *Popol Vuh*, “cacao is one of the precious substances that is released from ‘Sustenance Mountain,’ along with maize.”²⁰ A vessel retrieved from Tomb 19 in Río Azul contains hieroglyphic markings for cacao and also has jaguar markings of the spotted cat on the handle.²¹ These cacao vessels were also used by shamans as part of an experiential ritualistic complex. Pre-Columbian scholars and authors of the *Memory of Bones*, Stephen Houston, David Stuart, and Karl Taube contend that, “No systematic study has ever been done of explicitly labeled cacao vessels *as artifacts*.”²² According to Maya mythology chocolate was one of the foods rescued by the god K’awil as he emerged from the underworld along with maize, honey, and various tropical fruits.

The ingredient of maize was added to early, pre-Hispanic recipes for chocolate, but later omitted in European recipes probably due to the despoiling of maize during the long voyage

¹⁹ Hospodar, 87. Hospodar refers to King Charles II’s reputation as a rather randy individual and therefore ascribes a predilection for chocolate as aphrodisiac to him. I continue an investigation into the sexual exploits of King Charles II in the following chapter on pineapples. King Charles II had claimed to harvest the first pineapple in Europe.

²⁰ Gabrielle Vail, “Cacao Use in Yucatán Among the Pre-Hispanic Maya,” *Chocolate: History, Culture, and Heritage*. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2009) 4.

²¹ Río Azul is an archeological site of ancient Maya civilization in northern Guatemala.

²² Stephen Houston, David Stuart, Karl Taube, eds. *The Memory of Bones: Body, Being, and Experience among the Classic Maya*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 113.

from New Spain to the Old World. Some chocolate beverages were sweetened with honey and spiced with “a native flower spice complex, *achiote*, and chili peppers.”²³ European preparations later altered chocolate beverages by substituting Old World spices such as cinnamon, anise, rose, and black pepper. Marcy Norton argues against the common assumption regarding the “Columbian Exchange” that European tastes, as the “embodiment of habits and aesthetic disposition” altered chocolate consumption according to a normative hierarchy of, “elevated European colonists over Indian subjects, or Christians over pagans.”²⁴ Rather her evidence concludes that European taste exposed the vulnerabilities of hegemonic ideologies and their susceptibility to indigenous cultural determinations. In other words, the entanglement of colonization produced the expediency of alternating cultural flows wherein the colonizer, “learned to like chocolate because of their continued material dependence on Indians.”²⁵

It is possible that chocolate with its associations with the divine served as an appropriate conduit within which to transmit edible healing concoctions. Just like coffee, sugar, and tea – chocolate arrived in Europe and gained popularity as a medication used to treat the humoral system. It was also a food source and beverage that was readily available and a good medium for incorporating other substances. The thickness, aroma, and grainy texture of chocolate could mask the unsavory tastes and smells of certain herbs or healing ingestibles. Scholars of ancient Maya culture have concluded that, “Our sources on the Classic Maya need to be supplemented by broader evidence from elsewhere in Mesoamerica, especially those rich sources on senses that come to us from the Early Colonial period.” Leading the charge on broader evidence may be the

²³ Marcy Norton, “Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the European Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics.” *The American Historical Review*. (June 2006), 684. Some of the Mesoamerican chilies enumerated by Norton include: *chichotes*, *chiltecpin*, *tonalchies*, and *chilpatlagual*.

²⁴ Norton, 691.

²⁵ Norton, 677.

use of chocolate and its cultivation, production, and ingestion through cultural practices from the ancient to the colonial.

The conquest of the Americas was not a singular event with clearly delineated boundaries of time and place. It was a process. As a result of the transatlantic slave trade, significant African communities emerged throughout the Americas. It is estimated that approximately 250,000 to 500,000 Africans were enslaved and brought to Mexico. During this period of conquest, Spanish men did not bring very many Spanish women with them. These conditions, as well as, imperialistic desires for expansion, led to the involvement of Spanish men engaging in interracial relationships with the native and African women. With the dwindling population of the Maya due to disease and destruction and the influx of a rising Afro-Mexican population, new social, political, economic infrastructures, and cultural practices shifted in ways that were unexpected. As a result, we are able to locate a reading of Classical Maya practices, such as chocolate consumption within the colonial period. It is during this period that chocolate continued to serve as conduit for camouflaging magic.

More than half of the Afro-Mexican population was employed as servants within households. Author R. Douglas Cope supports this in his book *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720*, saying, "...nearly half of all mulattoes were servants, an employment pattern even more accentuated among blacks."²⁶ These duties included preparing meals and as such these women were often accused of poisoning food, especially through chocolate. Witchcraft often had to be "eaten" or somehow ingested in chocolate, milk, or food in order for it to be effective. Chocolate's taste and thickness could

²⁶ R. Douglas Cope. *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720*. (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994) 87.

mask the ill-flavors that resulted from the addition of crow's heart, excrement, menstrual blood, and other substances.²⁷ Chocolate was also a drink easily given to acquaintances, friends, and relatives as a motion of hospitality, rather than wine, soup, or other foods.²⁸

Martha Few states that chocolate and sexual desire occurred, "frequently in early-modern Spanish literary texts and visual art."²⁹ She discusses how doctored chocolate drinks were served to men in efforts to control their sexual behaviors, gain love, cure insanities and sicknesses. Thus, when we observe the literary and visual archive we encounter patterns of agency exercised by women, especially women of color. As her study focuses on Guatemala, Few posits that, "Afro-Guatemalan women most likely learned to prepare chocolate from their Indian neighbors and served it to their families."³⁰ In the painting *From Spaniard and Black, Mulatto*, 1760-70, artist unknown, a family 'type' appears in a tranquil setting. The Afro-Mexican mother is tenderly rendered stirring a pot of hot chocolate in a moment of domestic tranquility. The creamy color of the chocolate is mirrored in the chocolate-like complexion of the mother. Chocolate here becomes a marker for edible, feminized blackness. As the mother is depicted standing next to the hot stove, the flames of fire reinforce the hot body of chocolate and the commodity fetishism of the black female body as hot inamorata. A similar trope of the black woman stirring chocolate is repeated in José de Paez's *From Spaniard and Black, Mulatto: detail Black Woman Stirring Chocolate*, 1770-80. The black mother is pictured in the same pose, stirring chocolate as she lovingly looks over her shoulder.

²⁷ Beatriz Cabezon, "Chocolate and Sinful Behaviors: Inquisition Testimonies," *Chocolate: History, Culture, and Heritage*. (New Jersey: A John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Publication, 2009) 46.

²⁸ Ibid, 46.

²⁹ Martha Few. "Chocolate, Sex, and Disorderly Women in Late-Seventeenth-and Early-Eighteenth-Century Guatemala." *Ethnohistory*. (Fall 2005), 676.

³⁰ Few, 677.

In her book *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century*, historian Joan Cameron Bristol explores the Afro-Mexican female experience and her search for unsanctioned alternative power. Bristol centralizes the Afro-Mexican female body as practitioner of witchcraft, healer, locus of secret knowledge, and latent potentiality of power and agency. It is Bristol's exploration of the Afro-Mexican female experience and chocolate that offers a secondary reading of these casta paintings, so that instead of a reading these images as scenes of domestic tranquility, what we may be witnessing is the preparation of sexual witchcraft on an unwitting male lover.

Bristol references Spanish Inquisition documents and catalogs the several occasions of Afro-Mexican women charged with using witchcraft. She explains these actions within a context of agency as demonstrations of power through secret knowledge and as transgressive acts challenging governing authorities. Some slaves practiced witchcraft against their owners who may have mistreated them. Bristol chronicles the fear that many slave owners had that their slaves may injure them as the result of witchcraft.³¹ "Slaves not only used magic on their own bodies; as in love magic cases, they also put substances in their owner's food. In 1626...a slave named Dominga, frustrated by bad treatment, bought powders from Native American sellers and put them in her owner's chocolate."³² Norton confirms the practice stating, "Women – particularly Indian and black women – became the purveyors of desirable knowledge and edible and potable substances, while Spaniards were the seekers and buyers."³³ The literary archive extensively enumerates occasions of concealing magic within chocolate, such as when a free

³¹ Tashima Thomas. *Rendering of a Mulata: The Discovery and Rethinking of Images of Mulatas in Colonial Latin American Art*. (San Diego State University: Master's Thesis, 2012).

³² Bristol, 169.

³³ Norton, 679.

mulata, Leonor de Isla, who reportedly had an unfortunate love life, “had mixed water and menstrual blood into her Spanish lover’s chocolate in order to maintain his love for her.”³⁴ So customary were these practices of sexual witchcraft and chocolate that Martha Few elucidates how mothers passed on to their daughters this knowledge as familial praxis. In order to abbreviate the numerous examples, and yet to properly contextualize the racialization and sexualization of chocolate, the most common trope is usually that of a mixed race woman of African descent practicing a form of sorcery in order to cure or command romantic affairs. Chocolate may be contaminated with mixtures of fingernails, pubic hairs, saliva, menstrual blood or other female body parts and/or fluids and then the concoction was served to the unwitting. The men who were fed the sexual witchcraft of compromised chocolate were literally ingesting female body parts and/or fluids, a quite literal expression of “eating the Other.” These bewitched beverages were often requisitioned by elite Spanish women and others who consulted the *curanderos* for their witchcraft. As a result, social anxieties regarding chocolate consumption increased growing suspicion of black women and chocolate.

Martha Few says that women took advantage of these associations by, “threatening to serve doctored chocolate beverages in the day-to-day conflicts and confrontations between men and women.”³⁵ Just as the historical contextualization of chocolate alters the way we read images of black women and chocolate in the colonial era, how do these historical references affect reading Duchamp’s *Chocolate Grinder Number 1* and *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*? In other words, how well preserved and consistent are the conscious or unconscious cultural determinations and social or sexual anxieties surrounding chocolate and female blackness

³⁴ Bristol, 166.

³⁵ Few, 684.

traveling through mercantile routes? While we revisit Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder Number 1* and *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* and the placement of a chocolate grinder in *The Large Glass* – let us consider what these images have to do with blackness.

Chocolat d'Afrique

In 1912, Duchamp was twenty-five years old and dissatisfied with Cubism. He was looking for artistic inspiration that would influence his painting. But, he needed a vitalizing creative force that he felt could only be found outside of traditional Parisian art coteries. The same year in June he attended a theatrical performance of the French writer, Raymond Roussel's *Impression d'Afrique*. As a precursor to Surrealism, Roussel wrote in a fantastical style of free association where plot lines turned in on themselves in unusual ways and teased out language in a manner that conjoined homophones and rhyming phrases. Duchamp had found his inspiration in Roussel and was in complete admiration of him as a poet, philologist, and philosopher.

Duchamp states,

It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*. From his *Impression d'Afrique* I got the general approach. This play of his which I saw with Apollinaire helped me greatly on one side of my expression. I saw at once that I could use Roussel as an influence. I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter. And Roussel showed me the way.³⁶

Linda Dalrymple Henderson confirms these influences saying, "Duchamp's models for his creative invention were the writers Alfred Jarry and Raymond Roussel."³⁷ Duchamp's departure

³⁶ Janis Mink. *Marcel Duchamp: 1887-1968, Art as Anti-Art*. (Köln: Taschen, 2000), 29.

³⁷ Linda Dalrymple Henderson. "The Large Glass Seen Anew: Reflections of Contemporary Science and Technology in Marcel Duchamp's 'Hilarious Picture'." *Leonardo*, Vol. 32, No.2, (1999), 113.

from the practicality of the two roller grinding mill with its container to keep the chocolate from spilling over which he has omitted is referred to by Henderson as a Rousselian invention.³⁸

Some scholars acknowledge the theatrical staging of the machines in Duchamp's *The Large Glass*, but have not connected his inspiration to Roussel's *d'Afrique*. Marcia Brennan states that, "While Duchamp's bachelor and bride machines obviously are theatrical and performative, their actual point of reference remains unclear."³⁹ However, Mink applies specificity to Duchamp's inspiration. She goes on to address that Roussel's Act III in *Impression d'Afrique* involves a glass cage on a table that contains a musical earthworm that leaves secretions of mercury on the instruments, and this is how it plays the zither. It is likely from this scene that Duchamp was inspired to create a glass cage, not for an earthworm, but for a bride. Duchamp wrote in his notes saying, "put the whole bride under a glass case, or into a transparent cage."⁴⁰

Impression d'Afrique was a mythical impression of Africa from the mind of Roussel. It was a fantastical performance of Africa and one where critic Stefanie Sobelle says contained "racist particulars of 'savage energy' ... That Africa is Roussel's choice location for such an exotic tale is certainly a side effect of colonialism, but it also serves as a commentary on European attitudes."⁴¹ Sobelle references the commentary of writer, publisher, and editor-in-chief at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mark Polizzotti, who took on the demanding process of translating Roussel's *d'Afrique*. Polizzotti comments on the European imagination of Africa

³⁸ Linda Dalrymple Henderson. *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 59.

³⁹ Brennan, 63.

⁴⁰ Mink, 30.

⁴¹ Stefanie Sobelle. <http://wordswithoutborders.org/book-review/raymond-roussels-impressions-of-africa>, June 2014.

saying, “European...expansion through the Dark Continent...helped foster the widespread Western notion of Africa as that alien place where weird practices, unspeakable horrors, and unheard-of flora and fauna lurked at every bend in the jungle path.”⁴²

Here lies the *idea* of Africa, not as a geopolitical fact, but as an impression or aberration of a fantastical Western imagination--an Africa that inspired Duchamp to create a work that places a woman under glass, behind a cage. Although the bride in *The Large Glass* is represented in the upper stratum, I will now turn the focus to the chocolate grinder in the lower stratum as it stands in connection with the bachelors. Shortly after attending Roussel’s *Impression d’Afrique*, Duchamp began an oil study for the *Chocolate Grinder Number 1* in 1913 and then later in 1914, *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*. The chocolate grinder is one of the central elements of *The Large Glass*.

Now as we understand a brief history of chocolate, its sexual associations with the black female body, and Duchamp’s admitted influence of *Impression d’Afrique*, we are able to locate blackness as inspiration and motivating force for *The Large Glass*. I argue that we are specifically able to identify female blackness, under glass, as represented by the chocolate grinder. I believe that an appropriate historic retrieval for understanding the confluence of *d’Afrique* as “an alien place of weird practices and unspeakable horrors,” the appropriation of a black female body under glass/behind a cage, and the fetishization of chocolate consumption is the case of Sarah, or Saartje, Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus.⁴³

⁴² Sobelle, June 2014.

⁴³ Along with the misinformation and mythologizing of Sarah Baartman comes the confusion regarding the spelling accuracy of her name. Some of the other common spellings are: Sartjee, Saartje, Saat-je, which are associated with the Anglicized spelling of Sara or Sarah. Sometimes Baartman is rendered: Bartman or Baartmann. Art historian Deborah Willis says that, “The Afrikaans diminutive ending ‘tjie’ is now generally regarded as patronizing.” See,

Chocolate Venus

Saartjie Baartman was born in 1789 in South Africa. In 1810, Baartman was exhibited in a cage from England to Paris and traveled performing at private parties often in a nude or nearly nude state. Over the next five years her popularity skyrocketed and Saartjie-mania ripped through London inspiring songs, poems, fashion (the bustle), printed satires, caricatures, penny prints, and articles. Sparked by the visual excitement of her body, crowds were titillated to view Baartman's condition called steatopygia, a protrusion of the buttocks. The voluptuousness of Baartman's body and her containment within a cage or behind glass, often on a stage was commensurate with racist ideologies of biological essentialism and the hazardous exposure to black female hyper-sexuality as pathological and primitive. Based on French scientists and zoologist's anatomical observations, Baartman was scientifically ranked among the lowest human species, racially and sexually distinguished from white women, and regarded as proverbially orangutan. She died from exposure in 1815.

It is the continuity of Baartman's afterlife as scientific specimen, dissected and on display at the Musee de l'Homme in Paris that continued to cook up fodder for the public's ravenous appetite for black female sexuality as aberrant horror. The black woman becomes identified by her sexual parts. All subjectivity is emptied out and she becomes a mechanical instrument disassembled to parts and pieces for the audience's viewing pleasure of her sexual anatomy. Sander Gilman states that, "The audience that had paid to see Sarah Bartmann's buttocks and fantasized about her genitalia could, after her death and dissection, examine both, for Cuvier

Black Venus 2010: They Called Her Hottentot, edited by Deborah Willis, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 2010.

presented ‘the Academy the genital organs of this woman prepared in a way so as to allow one to see the nature of the labia.’”⁴⁴

When Baartman died in 1815, Georges Cuvier was appointed as the Surgeon General by Napoleon Bonaparte, and as a result, Cuvier gained permission to examine Baartman’s body more closely. Robin Mitchell notes that Cuvier, “made a plaster molding of her body and dissected her buttocks; he then preserved her brain and her genitals in specimen jars.”⁴⁵ Mitchell goes on to describe the “real prize” of Cuvier’s anatomical dissection was the discovery of the “Hottentot apron,” a, “hypertrophy, or overdevelopment, of the labia minora, or nymphae. We did not at all perceive of the more remarkable particularity of her organization; she held her apron...carefully hidden, it was between her thighs, and it was not until her death that we knew she had it.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, Mitchell concludes that the scientific prioritizing of Cuvier’s “discoveries” re-established white male, patriarchal dominance over white and black women. The justification of Cuvier’s scientific analysis fortified imperial designs in Africa furthering the colonial project which contributed to the fantastical idea of an Africa as “an alien place of weird practices and unspeakable horrors.”

Yet, how is the Venus Hottentot like chocolate or the chocolate grinder? Art historian Alexander Nemerov, whose interpretative deductions propose some of the most mysterious associations and analysis, may serve as a model for tapping those subtle forces that bind ideas, projects, and strategies. My applied methodology is a process of historical reclamation, an

⁴⁴ Sander Gilman. “The Hottentot and the Prostitute: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality.” *Black Venus 2010: They Called Her Hottentot*, edited by Deborah Willis, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 18.

⁴⁵ Robin Mitchell. “Another Means of Understanding the Gaze: Sarah Bartmann in the Development of Nineteenth-Century French National Identity.” *Black Venus 2010: They Called Her Hottentot*, edited by Deborah Willis, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 41.

⁴⁶ Mitchell, 41.

exploration into the politics of vision, and the coagulation of bodily slippages reassembled for narratives of subjectivity. Reading with (and against) traditional criticisms of Duchamp's work allows for crosscurrents of chains of evidence. Nemerov addresses the unconscious reverberations of artwork by quoting American painter Edward Hopper saying, "So much of every art is an expression of the subconscious, that it seems to me most all of the important qualities are put there unconsciously, and little of importance by the conscious intellect."⁴⁷ Therefore, in addition to pondering Duchamp's conscious associations, it may be argued that most, if not all, of the important qualities in Duchamp's *The Large Glass* and chocolate grinders are arrived through the unconscious. For example, the chocolate grinder under glass, the dissection of black female sexuality, the Venus Hottentot whose naissance was in Africa and whose body was still on display at the Musee de l'Homme in Paris during Duchamp's residency in Paris, the absurdity of blackness in *Impressions d'Afrique* as his inspiration for *The Large Glass*, and the history of chocolate and black female sexuality are all important elements. Nevertheless, the relationship and continuity between all of these elements secures gravitas for reading Duchamp's chocolate grinders with regard to black female sexuality, consumer fetishism, and the edible chocolate body.

To further illustrate these associations, I turn to the work of American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks and her play *Venus*, (1995) which is based upon the life of Sarah Baartman, the Hottentot Venus. The scenes are numbered in reverse whereas scene 31 is at the beginning of the play and scene 1 is at the end of the play. In scene 21, "The Whirlwind Tour," Parks reimagines Baartman's life on the sideshow circuit as one of the Freak Acts. Baartman is exhibited as a caged, sub-human monstrosity. The sideshow overseer, referred to as Mother-

⁴⁷ Alexander Nemerov. "Ground Swell: Edward Hopper in 1939." *American Art* (Fall 2008), 69.

Showman cajoles patrons to serve Baartman chocolate saying, “Uh gift of chokluts is customary. Place yr treats at her feets and watch her feed.”⁴⁸ In scene 17, entitled “You Look Like You Need a Vacation,” Baartman’s examining doctor/lover, The Baron Docteur, says to Baartman, “I’ve brought you chockluts. Here. You like?” He gives her a box of chocolates in the shape of a red heart. She responds “I like.”⁴⁹ Parks layers this theme of chocolate throughout the play by peppering the scenes with acts of giving, receiving, and consuming chocolate. In scene 14, “In the Orbital Path of The Baron Docteur,” the doctor has committed himself to the tradition of offering chocolates to Baartman who is referred to in the play as Venus. After Venus receives another box of chocolates from the doctor, she asks him, “Do you think I look like one of these little chocolate brussels infants?”⁵⁰ She then makes another reference to consuming the chocolate confectionary, “nipples of Venus.” Parks’s conflation of blackness and chocolate serves as a metaphor for the medical community’s (read through the character of The Baron Docteur) and the European public’s voracious appetite for the black female body as Other, aberrant miscreation.

She culminates this hankering for chocolate (and chocolate colored flesh) with scene 3, “A Brief History of Chocolate.” Scene 3’s “A Brief History of Chocolate” finds Parks historicizing the origins of chocolate with the etymological reference to the Aztec word *cacao*, discussing its use as a monetary unit of exchange to its present day use as a gift of exchange between lovers. Venus says, “Chocolate is a recognized emotional stimulant, for doctors have recently noticed the tendency of some persons, especially women, to go on chocolate binges, binges either *after* emotionally upsetting incidents or in an effort to allow themselves *to handle*

⁴⁸ Suzan-Lori Parks. *Venus*. (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1995), 69.

⁴⁹ Parks, 90.

⁵⁰ Parks, 109.

an incident which may be emotionally upsetting.”⁵¹ In a recitation that at first may seem out of place, Parks solidifies her devotion to the use of the chocolate metaphor and the appetite for the fetishization of the black female body. Venus’s reference to the observations of doctors and their chocolate discoveries acts as a mirror to the main action of the play taking place between Venus and The Baron Docteur.

The doctor binges on Baartman’s chocolate body in life and in death. He obsessively dissects, records, and recovers every chocolate morsel of her body. For example, in her soliloquy on chocolate, Venus goes on to say, “While chocolate was once used as a stimulant and source of nutrition, it is primarily today a great source of fat, And, of course, pleasure.”⁵² In other words, while Baartman’s live body was once used to stimulate audiences as a source of consumptive flesh for an audience obsessed with devouring blackness as spectacle, it is today a source of fat. During the doctor’s dissection of Baartman, he says, “Her liver weighed 54 and $\frac{3}{4}$ ounces and was of a ruinous color and slightly fatty.”⁵³ Venus describes chocolate as a source of fat and pleasure. The Baron Docteur identifies Baartman’s liver, post-mortem, as “slightly fatty” and otherwise refers to the measurements of her subcutaneous fat, and the fat on the cushion of her buttocks. Through autopsy, The Baron Docteur further indulges his chocolate fix and feeds his pleasure. This is emblematic of the colonial practice of white desire for the black female body through the act of visual consumption. Through the circulation of hegemonic processes such as “the white gaze,” practices of white supremacist scientific racism, and consensus building, these associations of the black female body, chocolate, chocolate grinder, and

⁵¹ Parks, 157.

⁵² Parks, 157.

⁵³ Parks, 37.

dissection are therefore regurgitated and reassembled in Duchamp's, *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*, 1914.

The tripartite rotund drums of *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* emphasize Duchamp's perspectival analysis and attention to mechanical processes through lines that dissect each round drum into several smaller parts. The rounded body parts of the chocolate machine are not dissimilar to the spherical form of the chocolate Venus. As previously mentioned, before the act of grinding chocolate was mechanized, it was a labor performed by a flesh and blood body. And as the archive illustrates, chocolate was often grinded by women of African descent. The *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* included threads that were sewn, "into the canvas in an exact perspectival execution."⁵⁴ These threads sewn into the body of the round drums are reminiscent of the literal threads or stitches sewn into the body of Sarah Baartman when she was dissected post-mortem. The numerous lines/threads dissecting and dismembering of the drums of the chocolate grinder are reflected in Parks's numerous lines regarding the dissection performed by The Baron Docteur. In excruciating detail, the doctor records the details of dismemberment tabulating, "the height, measured after death, was 4 feet 11 and ½ inches. The total weight of the body was 98 pounds *avoirdupois*. In the following notes my attention is chiefly directed to the more perishable soft structures of the body. The skeleton will form the subject of future examination."⁵⁵ What follows next is over 200 lines of the play consigned to illustrating the results of Baartman's autopsy with special attention paid to her genitalia, of course. Through this protracted demonstration Parks clearly exemplifies the scientific and public treatment of Baartman, not as a subject, but as a scientific object.

⁵⁴ Mink, 48.

⁵⁵ Parks, 96.

The Baron Docteur's fiancée in *Venus* is referred to as the Bride-To-Be. She orbits the atmosphere of The Baron Docteur in a state of unrequited love. The Baron Docteur does not return her affections. His amorousness is fueled by Venus. The Bride-To-Be is reflective of Duchamp's bride in *The Large Glass* who orbits the atmosphere in the upper stratum, but whose relationship with the bachelor(s) is unconsummated. The spatial distance between the bride and the bachelors is also typical of how sexual relationships developed in colonial Latin America and the Caribbean. As previously mentioned, European colonizers did not bring many European women with them, but rather developed relationships with the native and African women. These men had access to the bodies of women of color and pursued and exploited those relationships. The Bride-To-Be is conscious of The Baron Docteur's infatuation with Venus and outraged that he is desirous of a Hottentot. The Bride-To-Be confides in the Docteur's mother and conspires with her soon to be mother-in-law regarding how to win the doctor's affections. The mother-in-law suggests that The Bride-To-Be camouflage herself as a Hottentot in order to win the Docteur's affections and "steal" him away from her.

The Mother: Our young man wants uh Hottentot tuh love. Uh Hottentot yr not, my dear. But with some skill you can pretend.

The Bride-To-Be: Pretend.

The Mother: Lets get to work. I'll get that Uncle on our side. We'll get you up, make you look wild. Get you up like a Hottentot.

The Bride-To-Be: Like a Hottentot?

The Mother: And bring my son to his knees! Lets get to work.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Parks, 124-125.

The chocolate grinder in Duchamp's work is evocative of black female sexuality and is even spatially connected to the bachelors. Even though Duchamp suggests that the bachelors grind their chocolate themselves – referencing the onanistic analysis, this masturbatory behavior is also featured in a scene between The Baron Docteur and Venus.

The Baron Docteur: Don't look! Don't look at me. Look off somewhere. Eat yr chockluts. Eat em slow. Touch yrself. Good. Good.

(He's masturbating. He has his back to her. He sneaks little looks at her over her shoulder. He cumms.)⁵⁷

Parks's bachelor doctor grinds his chocolate himself, while voyeuristically observing his chocolate Venus eat "chockluts." This mise-en-scene further illustrates the theatrical staging of Duchamp's *Large Glass*. The chocolate grinder stands in close proximity to the bachelors in the lower stratum, but exists only as sweet exotica servicing the sexual whims of the bachelors.

Art historian Paul B. Franklin's queering of Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder* identifies autoerotic male homosexual stimulation within the onanistic metaphor, saying, "I would argue that it more specifically alludes to *anal* masturbation where 'chocolate' is a sweetened form of shit. As Freud noted in 1908, cocoa = caca..."⁵⁸ Franklin further decodes the French lexicon of gay slang including the 'golden shower,' or the 'golden champagne' of male urine as "gastronomic delicacies." He applies a psychoanalytic methodology presenting case studies such as that of a homosexual man who desired to perform the duties of a toilet with his mouth – devouring shit. However, like almost all of the other analysis regarding Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder*, the exploration falls short of including a historical reading of chocolate or other case studies that would involve so-called "gastronomic delicacies." Nevertheless, I would like to

⁵⁷ Parks, 110.

⁵⁸ Paul B. Franklin. "Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp's Fountain and the Art of Queer Art History," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2000), 37.

include a case study that cross-examines a food pathway addressed in chapter one – sugar.

Matthew Parker's, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies* chronicles the lives of sugar barons in the Caribbean. By gleaning diaries and various primary source documents, Parker provides a foundation for comprehending the underpinnings of the British economy through Caribbean plantation culture.

Thomas Thistlewood was the proprietor of a sugar plantation in Jamaica and he owned many slaves whom he traumatized and demoralized with wretched cruelty. Because Thistlewood made provisions scarce, some slaves were caught eating the sugar cane in the fields, and as a result, he noted in his diary,

“‘Had Derby well whipped, and made Egypt shit in his mouth.’ This disgusting punishment, which became known as ‘Derby’s Dose’, did not even work. In July, one slave who had run away was given a ‘moderate whipping’, but was then ‘well’ ‘pickled’, ‘made Hector shit in his mouth, immediately put in a gag whilst his mouth was full & made him wear it 4 or 5 hours’. On another occasion a slave was made to urinate into another slave’s mouth. Cuttings and mutilations were also deployed.”⁵⁹

Understanding the historical degradation, mutilation, and violence experienced by enslaved persons suffering acts that Franklin refers to as pleasurable repositions his argument in a way that may appear ludicrous when acknowledging the historical significance of sugar and chocolate. This is a history conveniently eschewed in favor of commodity fetishism and the further sexualization of chocolate. I offer this cross-examination of Franklin’s argument as a case study for critiquing racial assumptions and overdetermined consumer fetishism that sexualizes chocolate and black bodies, without thinking critically about the historical treatments of food pathways. Plantation slave culture was wholeheartedly involved in the reproductive lives

⁵⁹ Matthew Parker. *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies*. (New York: Walker & Company, 2011), 274.

of enslaved persons. Sexual freedom is directly related to personal freedom. I confront these issues to address the complexities regarding food and the body, particularly how food is used to transmit messages regarding gender, citizenship, culture, and how these messages are exercised as instruments of power. Food mediates differences creating a kind of culinary mapping of the body--racialized, gendered, mutilated, sexualized--in ways that open discussions on diaspora and consumption. As Mintz states, "Dealing in food was dealing in freedom at many levels."⁶⁰

"It was often the black female body that provided the most extreme embodiment of 'otherness,' both for the proponents of 'rational' science and for Surrealism."⁶¹ Even in death Baartman was a specimen of science. One of Duchamp's notes suggests the Bride should be placed under glass as in a natural history display case creating a kind of scientific voyeurism. All of Baartman's subjectivity is emptied out, her past is forgotten, and her existence lies in the racist surveillance located in scientific corporeality. Her subjectivity is disfigured and distorted.⁶² Duchamp states regarding *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* saying, "The general effect is like an architectural, dry rendering of the chocolate grinding machine purified of all past influences. It was to be placed in the center of a large composition and was to be copied and transferred from this canvas onto *The Large Glass*."⁶³ Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* and *Large Glass* therefore share similarities with the Hottentot Venus and avant-garde practices of the modernist project that

⁶⁰ Mintz, 47.

⁶¹ Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlütter. *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic*. (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2010), 20.

⁶² I am making reference to Frantz Fanon's work in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961. He goes on to state, "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it." Unfortunately, in the case of Sarah Bartmann, her brain was emptied out, along with all form and content of her corporeal body and subjected to the interpretation of disfigurement. Although, I am able to apply the most acute literal application of Fanon here – I am also applying it to the modernist project. This quote from *The Wretched of the Earth* also appears in Walter D. Mignolo's, "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality," *Cultural Studies*, 21:2, (March 2007), 449.

⁶³ Mink, 48.

were looking at blackness, Negro sculpture, and other black cultural forms; emptying out meanings, transferring authorship, while distorting or disfiguring the original image. Fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto states, “To be modern is to tear the soul out of everything.”⁶⁴ The historical context of chocolate, including its manual grinding by racialized, black female bodies, has been torn out and assimilated into a chocolate grinding automaton. Duchamp states, “An artist expresses himself with his soul, with the soul the artwork must be assimilated.”⁶⁵ I will address the avant-garde and modernism as they relate to contemporary artistic practices in the conclusion of this chapter. However, now I turn from Duchamp’s chocolate grinding machine to the advanced mechanization of chocolate making through the assembly line in the work of artist Oscar Murillo.

The Chocolate Factory

Oscar Murillo’s exhibition *A Mercantile Novel*, on view at David Zwirner gallery in New York in spring 2014, featured an actual candy-making factory. Murillo’s exhibition was a re-installation of the chocolate factory Colombina from his hometown in La Paila, Colombia. La Paila is located in the Cauca Valley and is also where sugarcane has been harvested since the 16th century.⁶⁶ Colombina is a Colombian company known for its candy and confections, but also as it is revealed in Murillo’s exhibition, as a long time employer of Murillo’s parents, family, and friends, some of whom are still employed with the candy maker. Murillo invited thirteen Colombina factory workers (read: chocolate grinders) from Colombia to work on the assembly

⁶⁴ Yohji Yamamoto, *My Dear Bomb*.

⁶⁵ Mink, 48.

⁶⁶ <http://www.vulture.com/2014/06/oscar-murillo-perfectly-represents-contemporary-art-world.html>.

line and join in the chocolate making at Zwirner. The tricky part was securing 13 visas for all of the employees who resided in rented houses in the New York borough of Queens and commuted by subway to the gallery. Murillo stated, “This goes beyond the art world. If they don’t get visas, then it changes. [Regarding Plan B]: The whole thing freezes and it becomes an apocalyptic moment,” where the stainless-steel chocolate-making assembling line machine becomes sculpture.⁶⁷

The rear of the gallery was barred from public passage and is where the candy-making took place.⁶⁸ The front of the gallery space featured images of Murillo’s mother and father and their labor documents while employed at Colombina. David Zwirner says this about the installation:

Staffed by experienced candy-making employees, the production line at the gallery will manufacture one of Colombina’s signature candies, the Chocmelos®, following the same recipe, ingredients, techniques, and quality control procedures as the facility in La Paila. During the course of the exhibition, tens of thousands of candies will be produced and given away for free at the gallery. Gallery visitors and volunteers are invited to take candy and share it throughout the city’s five boroughs, whether on foot, by bike, by taxi, by subway, by bus, etc., reflecting all modes of typical transportation throughout New York City and the diversity of its communities.

Murillo frequently invokes his cultural heritage in his artistic practice. By turning the gallery into a fully operational production site, he opens up for considerations not merely about trade and globalization, but also about individual relationships and communities, roots and migration.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/arts/design/oscar-murillo-keeps-his-eyes-on-the-canvas.html?_r=2

⁶⁸ With the exception of the exhibition’s opening, the rear of the gallery was made unavailable to the public. However, during the opening of the exhibition, the rear (candy-making) area of the gallery was alive with gallery visitors sampling the chocolate and drinking champagne. During this time the candy-making machinery was not operating, most likely for health and safety reasons.

⁶⁹ <http://www.mercantilenovel.com/>

The Chocmelos® are disk-shaped chocolate covered marshmallows packaged in Murillo-designed reflective, silver plastic with a yellow smiling face on the cover's center. There were 7,000 Chocmelos® produced daily. They were piled deep in receptacles and laid out in abundance on cooling shelves for visitors to take at their pleasure. All visitors were invited to consume Murillo's chocolate – for free. The intermediate space of the gallery was where Murillo prepared thirty bottles of Dom Pérignon champagne whose boxes served as the supporting platform to host Murillo's pencil sketches of the *Venus of Willendorf* rendered in the style of Jeff Koons's *Balloon Venus*. Koons's *Venus* sculpture which was cast in the metallic, “inflatable,” style of his *Rabbit* of 1986 was commissioned exclusively by Dom Pérignon. These boxed bottles of Dom Pérignon with *Venus of Willendorf* sketches attached to the front established a direct connection with Koons. They were intermixed with votive-like sculptures of tall, clear glass cylinders that contained sundry articles including melted chocolate, golf balls, tennis balls, candle wax, etc. Above the bottles of champagne and chocolate votives was a large photograph of Murillo's mother at work in the Colombina candy factory. Her body enveloped in a white uniform and white head covering appears draped over a work station and seems to float above the chocolate and champagne offerings below. Her eyes are closed as if she were asleep or caught in the middle of blinking.

The website dedicated to promoting the exhibition encouraged visitors to think about the process of globalization, trade, transportation, communities, and even Murillo's own cultural heritage. I will elaborate further upon the nuances of the exhibition as they relate to the consumption of culture, chocolate as a surrogate for blackness, and the making of a Madonna of the chocolate covered marshmallows. I will intertwine these themes with the oft-cited comparison of Murillo with artist, Jean-Michel Basquiat and look briefly at the relationship between these two figures and artists Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons. Finally, I will conclude with a comparative

analysis of the Murillo exhibition with Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder Number 1*, *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*, *The Large Glass*, the *Venus of Willendorf* and the Hottentot Venus.

Sweet Tales of Childhood

In a vessel from Tomb 19 in Río Azul, Guatemala the chemical signature of cacao (theobromine and caffeine) was first identified by scientists from The Hershey Company in 1990.⁷⁰ As the makers of Hershey's chocolate and other sweets, The Hershey Company has funded and participated in archeological testing of pre-Columbian cacao vessels since the mid-1980s in conjunction with anthropologists from the University of Texas at Austin. Murillo's association of chocolate with notions of childhood, being and belonging are reverberated in the recanting of a Hershey's candy bar memory featured in AMC's emotionally dark drama, *Mad Men* during season six, episode 12 (2013.) Set in late 1960s New York, Don Draper (Jon Hamm), a senior advertising executive, is pitching his firm's campaign to Hershey's Company executives. Draper's pitch starts with a wholesome tale of how the Hershey's chocolate bar conjures images of childhood – his father rewarding him for mowing the lawn with a trip to the drugstore to pick out anything he wanted and he chose a Hershey's chocolate bar. *The True History of Chocolate* also affirms how, "sweets in general and chocolate in particular have been used as rewards from earliest childhood."⁷¹

⁷⁰ Gabrielle Vail, "Cacao Use in Yucatán Among the Pre-Hispanic Maya," *Chocolate: History, Culture, and Heritage*. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2009) 3.

⁷¹ Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe. *The True History of Chocolate*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007) 29.

Draper conflates his father's love with chocolate. Draper states, "Hershey's is the currency of affection. It is the childhood symbol of love."⁷² One of the Hershey's executives responds, "Sweet tales of childhood," as everyone grins in satisfaction.⁷³ Immediately and quite unexpectedly after the successful sales pitch, Draper succumbs to a crisis of conscience and reveals the true childhood memory of the Hershey's chocolate bar. Much to the shock and chagrin of his fellow ad executives, Draper confesses that he actually grew up as an orphan in a whorehouse. After going through the Johns' pockets for change at the request of one of the prostitutes, he was able to collect a few coins. With those few coins he bought a Hershey's chocolate bar. He ate his chocolate bar alone in a ritual of solitude. Draper's recollection of how he ate his chocolate bar with such ceremony is reminiscent of the Maya who conferred chocolate consumption with sacrament and ceremony during weddings, festivals, warfare and sacrificial rites. In deep reflection holding back tears, Draper affirms barely louder than a whisper, "Probably the only sweet thing in my life."⁷⁴

It is curious that Draper describes Hershey's chocolate as a "currency of affection" since cacao beans were once "the coin of the realm" in Mesoamerica as previously mentioned. Even more revealing, especially as it relates to Murillo's installation, is the association of chocolate as a childhood symbol of love. As I mentioned in the opening quote of this chapter, in a description of the perfume *Rush* by Luca Turin saying, "What *Rush* can do, as all great art does, is create a yearning, then fill it with false memories of an invented past."⁷⁵ Don Draper's yearning for love and acceptance translated into false memories of an invented past which are manifestly declared

⁷² AMC's *Mad Men*, Season 6, Episode 12, 2013.

⁷³ Ibid, 2014.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 2014.

⁷⁵ Chandler Burr. *The Emperor of Scent: A True Story of Perfume and Obsession*. (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002), 42.

as a haunting chocolate specter. Murillo's recapitulation of childhood memories of Colombina chocolate factory stand as a testament of childhood love and affection.

Popular culture has embodied the equivalent of the chocolate factory and childhood memories in Roald Dahl's youthful classic, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964). After an international lottery craze for the golden ticket, the lottery winners including the young boy, Charlie Bucket (the hero) and four naughty children are treated to an exclusive tour of the very private chocolate factory by its reclusive owner, Willy Wonka. As Wonka leads the tour into the Chocolate Room, he prepares them for the magnificent panorama of chocolate goodness saying, "This is the nerve center of the whole factory, the heart of the whole business! And so *beautiful!* I *insist* upon my rooms being beautiful! I can't *abide* ugliness in factories!"⁷⁶ Dahl's treatment of Wonka's chocolate factory could likewise be applied to Murillo's chocolate factory where childhood memories linger in a beautiful adaptation of the Colombina chocolate factory and where love and affection are presented through the vulnerability of childhood memories made public and the free dispersal of chocolate-covered marshmallows as tokens of affection.

The evidence does not reveal how many of these memories are inventions, nor is that the argument that I wish to interrogate. Although, Murillo's vigorous recreation of a childhood memory established by *A Mercantile Novel* begs the question if, like Draper, it was the only sweet thing in his life. However, I will note here that Murillo and his family moved to London when he was younger as one article put it, "When his family moved to London, settling in the East End, he spoke no English and described the adjustment as, 'an astonishing cultural displacement,' [adding] 'I was very lonely.'"⁷⁷ Nevertheless, I am interested in how chocolate is

⁷⁶ Roald Dahl. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. New York: Puffin Books, (1998), 63.

⁷⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/arts/design/oscar-murillo-keeps-his-eyes-on-the-canvas.html?_r=2

remembered and reformulated into an amalgamation of synesthesia and yearning. Moreover, how do false memories of the black female body inform artistic practice and transform the real into the fantastical?

Chocolate and Champagne

Murillo's employment of Négritude vis-à-vis the *Venus of Willendorf* reformulates a contemporary version of l'art nègre or the primitive, black female nude. Aimé Césaire first began using Négritude as an, "act of cultural and linguistic appropriation, reclaiming the pejorative term *nègre* and combining it with defiant references to the revolution in Haiti and to African roots to reverse its usage."⁷⁸ The *Venus of Willendorf* is often associated with a black female form. Her hair is fashioned in a braided cornrow style popularized by many black women. The *Venus's* full pendulum breasts, pregnant belly, and plumpness of form has historically been associated with fecundity and further racialized as a black female body. Jeff Koons capitalizes upon the historical treatment of the *Venus of Willendorf* and references these constructions in his Dom Pérignon Rosé, Limited Edition, *Balloon Venus*. I would even argue that his metallic *Rabbit* of 1986 serves as a pre-cursor for this piece. Now I turn briefly to the work of Koons to establish a framework for understanding Murillo's quotation of Koons's *Venus*, establishing a historic and racialized treatment of the black Venus figure, including the Venus Hottentot, and making further comparisons between Murillo's and Koons's unofficial "collaboration."

⁷⁸ Barson, 14.

Koons employs the Duchampian readymade and Dadaist aesthetic/political strategies of appropriation to re-contextualize everyday items. Richard Lacayo claims that while Koons was selling memberships at the Museum of Modern Art in New York he became aware of the Duchampian readymade objects such as the urinal, a bottle rack, or shovel. Lacayo goes on to quote Koons saying, “The readymade for me was a way to move from a subjective to an objective realm.”⁷⁹ Koons’s images automatically invoke questions of class, taste, and kitsch. His use of stainless steel, porcelain, ceramic, bronze, glass, marble, and living foliage are vehicles for transcending the dull-witted into the demonstrative. Herein, is the playground for eschatological and philosophical meanings that Koons establishes in his work through carefully articulated rhetoric. He alludes to the work as one that would invoke a psychological state. This is in response to Koons’s new vacuum cleaners and to the photograph of himself at five years old – a new artist. The same thought and motivation for such can be thematically understood in other works.

In *Rabbit*, 1986, Koons refers to his earlier readymades of the late seventies (1977-79), the colorful inflatables. In the late seventies he worked in brightly colored inflatable flowers that were placed on mirrors and plexiglass sheets. His earlier works consisted of manipulating the object by putting a bulb on the back of it or adhering fluorescent tubes inside tubular plastic and binding and object on the outside such as a tea kettle, toaster, or Hoover vacuum cleaner. Some art historians attribute Koons’s use of readymades to his familiarity with artificial environments growing up in his father’s furniture store. Murillo is clearly contemplating his childhood

⁷⁹ Richard Lacayo. “Show Me the Bunny: As he closes in on 60, Jeff Koons finally gets his really big show.” *Time*, (July 7-14, 2014), 93.

growing up in the light and shadow of the Colombina candy factory as evident in the recreation of another artificial environment – *A Mercantile Novel*.

Then in the late seventies Koons began to encase the object on display. This introduced his maintenance for the integrity of an object. Koons's *Rabbit* began in the readymade format. He then cast it in stainless steel. The bunny literally glistens and shimmers, reflecting the light from its spherical head, its belly poking out in a possible reference to the fecundity of rabbits, and sensuously wrinkled hip joints, and crowning ears. The carrot stands in for oral gratification and addresses the tasty consumption of the object. Like many modern iconic images, *Rabbit*, assumes the status of dumb idol or dumb bunny. But, the metallic presence of this bunny gives it a darker aura, reminiscent of Joseph Bueys's 1965 performance, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*.⁸⁰ The hard metallic surface eclipses any expectation of a soft, fluffy exterior and instead offers a kind of futuristic cyborg rabbit.

The rabbit as a symbol exemplifies mythic and legendary ontologies. In Christian iconography the rabbit may symbolize Christ's suffering and the hope of salvation. The rabbit is also a symbol of fecundity and lust. The rabbit's head is the logo for *Playboy* magazine – a publication known for its use of the nude female form. Koons's *Rabbit* can be read through these referents. The silver-skinned bunny's slick surface bounces light and reflections confidently across its curved body. *Rabbit* becomes a devotional icon in the religion that is Koons. Some scholars have speculated regarding the devotional quality of the *Venus of Willendorf* as a sculpture representing a fertility deity. To what extent can *Rabbit* be read as a similar devotional entity endowed with powers of fertility? I believe *Rabbit* serves as a

⁸⁰ I attended the Whitney Museum's exhibition, *Jeff Koons: A Retrospective* (2014). While viewing his *Rabbit*, I overheard one young woman say to her friend as they approached *Rabbit* saying, "Look, it's the evil rabbit. Look at him."

precursor to Koons's Dom Pérignon, *Balloon Venus* as they are both derived from pre-existing forms, manipulated, and recast in gleaming metal. Koons's *Balloon Venus* for Dom Pérignon is based upon his monumental work, *Balloon Venus*, 2008-12, fashioned in mirror-polished stainless steel in an edition of five. Dom Pérignon promises its Rosé 2003 to be "vibrant, seductive and infringing. A promise of both a divine and profane experience."⁸¹ These promises of Dom Pérignon's Rosé 2003 as "vibrant, seductive, and infringing" can also be considered when thinking about Koons's *Rabbit* and a possible connection with *Venus*. *Rabbit* may have served as an influence to Koons's *Venus* also because of the shared aesthetics of the roundness of their plump bodies, pregnant bellies, and bulbous organic parts. They also both share some of the same meanings of fecundity, lust, abundance, and luxury or "vibrant, seductive, and infringing." Koons has stated that he was drawn to the Paleolithic *Venus* because of its associations with fertility and ritual. "He has said that as a younger artist he looked for sources that were 'product-oriented,' whereas the Venus figure attests to his more recent involvement with 'connecting to things that are archetypal and profound, things that connect you to human history.'"⁸² His comment would seem contradictory since the Paleolithic-inspired Venus was used to market a product-oriented luxury brand of alcohol and not so much to connect with human history. As a luxury alcohol brand – Dom Pérignon benefits from the glamorousness associated with commissioning a work created by the highest paid living artist, Jeff Koons, an artistic/business collaboration indicative of the appetite for abundant fortune and wealth commonly associated with luxury brands.

⁸¹ <http://www.domperignon.com/image/limited-edition-jeff-koons/>

⁸² The Whitney Museum. "Balloon Venus (Orange)," 2008-12, Exhibition: *Jeff Koons: A Retrospective*, wall text.

Koons has been criticized for the self-commodification and carnivalesque promotion of himself and his work. Here is where Koons becomes analogous to Andy Warhol in the courting of the media to create a heightened fashionable persona.

The Virgin of the Chocolate-Covered Marshmallows

Murillo's *Venus of Willendorf* drawings on the bottles of champagne are made after Koons's Dom Pérignon Rosé, Limited Edition, *Balloon Venus*, which is made after the original, paleolithic *Venus of Willendorf*, ca. 28,000-25,000 BCE.⁸³ Murillo introduces a kind of Madonna-like subjectivity meets champagne and chocolate earth mother. The mural-sized photograph of Murillo's mother wearing a white Colombina uniform, her body curved, overshadowing the chocolates and champagne below infuses a decadent religiosity to the scene. Her head is crowned in a white halo/hair net that warmly hugs her soft, brown facial features. Her bowed body levitates above the chocolate. On the altar beneath the mural photograph, Murillo has staged the remnants of where a ceremony may have taken place. The residual signs of sanctification lie in the once lit, now melted, votives of chocolate, tennis balls, golf balls, candle wax, etc. Murillo's drawings of the *Venus of Willendorf* are committed to copies of his parent's work documents from Colombina. Some of these *Hojas de Servicio*, include a photograph of his mother, Virgelina, (whose name means Little Virgin), and her personal

⁸³ Recent scholarship has ceased referring to the paleolithic *Venus of Willendorf* as a "Venus" and instead now identify her as the *Woman of Willendorf* in order to avoid anachronisms in terminology. "Venus" figures refer to the Roman goddess of love and the term post-dates the Paleolithic figure by millennia. However, scholars agree that the *Woman of Willendorf* figurine emphasizes a potent fertility via the structuring of her reproductive genitalia which is featured between her full thighs, as well as, her abundant buttocks, and protruding belly. I refer to her as a "Venus" figure in this chapter to emphasize the continuity between "Venus" figures from various artists, but also to acknowledge the "coloniality of time and space" to refer to pre-historic figures in Greco-Roman terms.

information, (address, spousal information, etc.) Many renditions of the dark virgin as an image of religious devotion appear in medieval Europe. She is often portrayed as a black virgin sitting on the throne with the Christ child on her lap.⁸⁴ Murillo is clearly making a connection here between the Venus and Virgin figures through the association between the *Venus of Willendorf*, his mother Virgelina (or Little Virgin), and Koons's commercially successful *Balloon Venus*.

The apotheosis of chocolate in *A Mercantile Novel* recalls the novel of fellow Colombian, author Gabriel García Márquez's, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In Márquez's 1967 novel he discusses the small mythical town of Macondo and the mission of the local priest, Father Nicanor Reyna, to Christianize the inhabitants and raise funding for the building of a church.

The boy who had helped him with the mass brought him a cup of thick and steaming chocolate, which he drank without pausing to breathe. Then he wiped his lips...and closed his eyes. Thereupon Father Nicanor rose six inches above the level of the ground. He went among the houses for several days repeating the demonstration of levitation by means of chocolate while the acolyte collected so much money in a bag that in less than a month he began the construction of the church....but, José Arcadio Beundia insisted on rejecting rhetorical tricks and the transmutation of chocolate.⁸⁵

The combination of chocolate, levitation, transmutation, and miraculous acts of divinity are what I am after here. I also consider the transmutation of chocolate as art object. Murillo's strategy of inversion – that is presenting his work to an all-consuming, peckish public, but in the form of the literal act of consumption begs the question of “Who is consuming whom?” The Chocmelos® then accentuate the religious scene of transmutation or chocolate transubstantiation. However, instead of a wafer serving as the body and blood of Christ – the sweet disk-shaped Chocmelos® can be read as serving as the actual body of Oscar Murillo, a chocolitized body. “Eating the

⁸⁴ Images of the black virgin are expounded upon in Malgorzata Oleszkiewicz-Peralba's *The Black Madonna in Latin America and Europe: Tradition and Transformation*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2007). She is also associated with being a protectress and a nourishing mother.

⁸⁵ Gabriel García Márquez. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Perennial Classics, (1998), 90-91.

artist” is a concept that I explore more fully when considering Murillo’s experience in comparison with that of Jean-Michel Basquiat. As art historian Robert Farris Thompson stated regarding Basquiat, “Perhaps he sought...to achieve a type of existential and ontological wholeness through his work, and identity in opposition to Western desire to rip apart and consume blackness.”⁸⁶

Most critics rendered invisible the art objects and paraphernalia included in *A Mercantile Novel*. Images of Murillo’s parents and the glass containers which held melted chocolate, golf balls, and tennis balls were mostly appreciated as sentimental accoutrements. In fact, Murillo even dismissed the significance of the objects saying,

The contents of the factory are secondary. What I’m really interested in is the journey, with social mobility being at the heart of the thing. The workers from La Paila have never been to New York before – I want to see how they respond socially. Then there’s the semi-interaction with the art audience. That’s a friction I’m also interested in. To me, this is the most profound reflection of what my life has been.”⁸⁷

Murillo’s experiment in social mobility with the workers from La Paila may serve as a surrogate for his own ‘fish out of water’ experiences within the art world. Although this quote by Murillo de-emphasizes the art object: chocolate votives, framed pictures of his parents, projections of the plane that carried the workers, video of interviews with workers, and mural of his mother – each one of these objects contains special meaning as a ‘reflection of what his life has been.’ I wondered about the ceremoniousness that could have taken place upon this altar with objects that can be read as offerings or as apotropaic interventions. The consecration of the space by a young

⁸⁶ This quote is also directly related to the previous discussion regarding Sarah Bartmann and the dissection of the black female body and the desire to achieve wholeness. In a way, this project is dedicated to the reconstitution of bodies. Anthony B. Pinn. “‘Why Can’t I Be Both?’: Jean-Michel Basquiat and Aesthetics of Black Bodies Reconstituted,” *Journal of Africana Religions*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2013), 123.

⁸⁷ <http://www.details.com/culture-trends/critical-eye/201404/oscar-murillo-nyc-artist-a-mercantile-novel>

Afro-Colombian artist reliving a scene from his childhood conjured much more than considerations around trade, globalization, roots, and migration. These are practices reminiscent of cultural survival and the ceremonious dedication of space.

I believe this to be a dedication of space as an operation that seeks wholeness by establishing a sanctuary within a hostile environment – the Western art world’s “sacred” spaces of museums and galleries. I am reminded of an experience Basquiat had at the Museum of Modern Art in New York,

At the Museum [MOMA] Jean-Michel takes a bottle of water out of his coat and walks through the halls sprinkling the water here and there around him. ‘I’d piss like a dog if I could,’ he says, as they wander past paintings by Pollock, Picasso, Kline and Braque. Suzanne [his girlfriend] does not even ask what he is doing. She knows this is one of his voodoo tricks.⁸⁸

Murillo’s interest in social mobility is actually an interest in understanding the dynamics of race and class within art establishments rooted in colonial impulses. I read Basquiat’s ‘baptism’ of MOMA as a strategy of sanctification, not as a voodoo trick, but as a way to purify the space through water and grant sanctuary for his presence through the re-sacralization of a Western art institution. Quite remarkably, a similar momentous event took place in 2014 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York during the closing ceremony of artist’s Carrie Mae Weems’s “LIVE: Past Tense/Future Perfect” program when Afro-Cuban artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons sanctified the rotunda and galleries of the Guggenheim in a sacred ritual and spiritual procession. Andrea Kirsh described the entrance of the Afro-Cuban musicians playing upon their instruments into the Guggenheim while Campos-Pons initiated, “an African ceremony of blessing, pouring

⁸⁸ Pinn, 126.

ritual water into the museum's central pond, before the procession proceeded up the museum's ramp and into the exhibition galleries."⁸⁹

In Roberto Conduru's essay, "Bridging the Atlantic and Other Gaps: Artistic Connections Between Brazil and Africa – And Beyond," he discusses the work of Afro-Brazilian artist Rosana Paulino from São Paulo. He mentions how references to African or Afro-Brazilian domains, times, and places are rarely exclusive, but find overlap in the artist's experience: "Her work makes use of printed materials and manufactured objects and alludes to fetishes and sortilege (divination or prophesy) that may be linked – albeit not exclusively – to Afro-Brazilian religions."⁹⁰ In terms of the dynamics of the African Diaspora, which is sometimes referred to as the "African World," especially in terms of African or black cultural production across the globe, we are able to locate diasporic aestheticisms of printed materials and ritualized uses of the object in Murillo's chocolate factory. Murillo's chocolate votives with various manufactured objects and the *Venus* images can be read then as fetishes linked to a spiritual experience. These operate in tandem with memory and identity. Conduru goes on to describe one of Paulino's images of one of her ancestors, that may also share in dialogue with Murillo's work as he describes it as, "beliefs, memory, and the transmission of knowledge and practices from generation to generation that makes possible cultural survivals within adverse contexts."⁹¹ It is significant that Murillo's family has been employed by Colombina for four generations, and, therefore, we may assume that there has been a transmission of knowledge and practices from generation to generation. As discussed earlier, cultural survivals within the adverse contexts

⁸⁹ Andrea Kirsh, "Carrie Mae Weems LIVE: Past Tense/Future Perfect" at the Guggenheim." (May 1, 2014.) www.theartblog.org

⁹⁰ Roberto Conduru, "Bridging the Atlantic and Other Gaps: Artistic Connections Between Brazil and Africa – And Beyond," *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic*. Tate Liverpool (2010), 72.

⁹¹ Conduru, 72.

resulting from migration and displacement are dependent upon this transmission of knowledge and practices. In *A Mercantile Novel*, these have been rearticulated and ritualized in the form of the chocolate factory as a kind of host for memory and beliefs. This rematerialisation of the architectures of memory is recast with his mother, Virgelina, as the Virgin of the Chocolates, and christened with champagne bottles, not broken on the bough of a boat, but breaking down barriers that have restricted artists of African descent and in celebration of the launch of Murillo's career at Zwirner.

Murillo and Basquiat

Any discussion of Murillo in the press will most likely yield a reference to the artist, Jean-Michel Basquiat. It is the comparison du jour. For many critics it is sufficient to oversimplify a kind of twin-ness between Murillo and Basquiat because both men are of Afro-Caribbean heritage (Basquiat's mother was Afro-Puerto Rican and his father was Haitian), and both developed an artistic style that acknowledges art history, incorporates graffiti and verbal language, and is critical of capitalist forces. In the article, "6 Weird Things The Rubells Told *New York Magazine* About Oscar Murillo," the author recounts experiences the Rubells, who are patrons of Murillo, saying, "In one of several spots where Swanson compares Colombian-born Murillo to Jean-Michel Basquiat: 'Like Basquiat, Murillo is black, ambitious, and engaged with both art history and graffiti...Until recently he even shared a hairstyle with the late artist.' Mera Rubell adds this distinction: 'Or at least the movie version of Basquiat.'"⁹² The comparisons continue with Ms. Rubell discussing Murillo's work saying, "The last time I saw that kind of

⁹² <http://news.artnet.com/in-brief/6-weird-things-the-rubells-told-emnew-yorkem-magazine-about-oscar-murillo-55575>

energy was Keith Haring or Jean-Michel. It was so intense. I don't even think he was on drugs." (Murillo assured the reporter that he was "lucid and sober.")⁹³ This kind of reductiveness reaffirms Western appropriation of the black body as 'primitive' and are extensions of colonial politics that prohibit a complex, black male subjectivity.

I would like to introduce a double dynamic which scholars have not taken advantage of – the official collaboration of Basquiat and Warhol and the unofficial collaboration of Murillo and Koons (vis-à-vis *A Mercantile Novel*.) In this regard, I am able to explore how both Murillo and Basquiat deal with the visual consumption of black bodies, black cultural production, and how space is negotiated within these realms of artistic production. Murillo's *A Mercantile Novel* is a departure from his oeuvre that catapulted his career – painting.

Murillo has become known for his oil and oil stick paintings with scribbles of words like, "burrito," "taco," "water," "pasteles," "chorizo," "milk," demonstrating that the edible is on his mind. His use of language invokes the culinary and the act of consumption by proxy. Murillo's graffiti style is similar to Basquiat's as well as his use of food-inspired language. For example, in Basquiat's *Hollywood Africans*, from 1983, he writes the word "sugar cane" twice with the trademark logo attached. He also writes, "popcorn" and "tobacco," another addictive ingestible from the New World. Basquiat's use of the trademark symbol connects commodity fetishism and consumption. He is addressing the cultivation and production of sugar cane by enslaved Africans while connecting the black body to another machine of exploitation – the Hollywood system. Basquiat skillfully associates both machines of exploitation. In *Hollywood Africans*, he asks, "What is Bwana?" then crosses it out. This crossing out technique, often employed in

⁹³ <http://news.artnet.com/in-brief/6-weird-things-the-rubells-told-emnew-yorkem-magazine-about-oscar-murillo-55575>

Basquiat's work, just adds more emphasis to the thing that appears to be second-guessed, but is actually endowed with more meaning by its refusal. Bwana is a Swahili word for master.

Evidently, Basquiat is thinking about a master/slave dynamic as it relates to tropical comestibles and ingestibles such as sugar and tobacco and how these commodities produced mostly by black bodies are related to a master/slave dynamic in Hollywood as experienced by black actors. The correlations between Basquiat and Murillo are too numerous for the purposes of this chapter and deserve a more thorough investigation. Therefore, I am limiting my discussion and focusing on their production as it relates to the consumption of black bodies and artistic collaborations.

Anthony B. Pinn addresses Basquiat and the act of consumption saying, "Basquiat, in spite of his best efforts to signify and deconstruct, was consumed."⁹⁴ Pinn explores how African art is used to explore Western existential and ontological issues saying, "It was an aesthetic, an artistic consumption of the other... This was done through reconstruction (consumption) of the African continent along colonial lines as well as a similar process in the Americas, and through visual consumption."⁹⁵ Regarding Basquiat's artistic production, once his works were completed the dealers would become very possessive of his work and insatiable even, "Jean used to say, 'it's like feeding the lions. It's a bottomless pit. You can throw them meat all day long, and they're still not satisfied.'"⁹⁶ I contemplate the shared experience with Murillo's production as witnessed by patrons and dealers regarding the insatiable appetite for his work which translates directly to financial and material excesses. Could Murillo's assembly line of chocolate covered marshmallows function as surrogates for an assembly line production of his lyrical canvases sold

⁹⁴ Pinn, 128.

⁹⁵ Pinn, 112.

⁹⁶ Pinn, 128.

to hungry collectors? In other words, instead of ‘throwing them meat all day long,’ is Murillo feeding the lions chocolate?

There is a 31 year age difference between Murillo and Koons. There was a 32 year age difference between Basquiat and Warhol. The chocolate factory can be read as euphemism for black creative production. Murillo’s chocolate factory can also be interpreted as a reference to Andy Warhol’s studio, “The Factory.” “Speaking in 2002, musician John Cale said, ‘It wasn’t called the Factory for nothing. It was where the assembly line for the silkscreens happened. While one person was making a silkscreen, somebody else would be filming a screen test. Every day something new.’”⁹⁷ Murillo’s assembly line of chocolate covered marshmallows may be surrogates for an assembly line production of his paintings, videos, installations, or performances.

From the fall of 1984 to the summer of 1985 Basquiat and Warhol collaborated on almost 200 paintings. In October of 1984, Warhol noted in his diary, “So Jean Michel’s finding out how you have to be a business, how it all stops being just fun, and then you wonder, What is art? Does it really come out of you or is it a product? It’s complicated.”⁹⁸ Warhol is acting as mentor here. It is likely, however, that Basquiat was already conscious of the business side of art because of his use of the copyright logo “©” generously sprinkled among his canvases. Murillo shares this self-awareness with the word “Mercantile” in the title of the exhibition denoting the self-consciousness towards a business paradigm. This marriage of art and commerce also appears in the “unofficial” collaboration of Murillo’s quoting of Koons’s *Balloon Venus* as an art + luxury brand venture. Chocolate was once considered a luxury food item in Europe. As

⁹⁷ wiki.my 15 minutes. <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/feb/12/artsfeatures.warhol>.

⁹⁸ Pat Hackett, Ed. *The Andy Warhol Diaries*. (New York: Warner Books, 1989), 606.

previously mentioned, if cacao beans were once “the coin of the realm,” chocolate the currency of affection, and chocolate also a childhood symbol of love – to what extent is Murillo’s act of making Chocmelos® an act of “making” love?

The copyright logo is an expression labeling the commodity. The Chocmelos® can therefore serve as a kind of 3-D printing of the copyrighted language appearing in Basquiat’s work and the language of food that also appears in Murillo’s canvases, “burrito,” “taco,” “pasteles,” etc. Murillo’s assembly line of Chocmelos® is a chocolate theater of collapsing worlds. He is shifting the appetite from consuming the black body to consuming the chocolate treats. Is this a diversionary tactic to ensure cultural survival? Pinn states that, “But as is always the case, in light of the way power functions even within the realm of cultural aesthetics, Basquiat, in spite of his best efforts to signify and deconstruct, was consumed.”⁹⁹ I will discuss food as resistance in the conclusion of the dissertation. In the meantime, Sindey Mintz beautifully articulates the importance of dealing with food from production, to distribution, to status distinctions among enslaved Africans to freedom.

Dealing in food was dealing in food at many levels. For example, working in the production of food legitimized certain claims that the slaves would level against their masters; working in the distribution of food legitimized their masters; working in the distribution of food legitimized freedom of movement, commercial maneuver, association, and accumulation; working in the processing of food legitimized the perfection of skills that would become more important with freedom; and working in the emergence of cuisine legitimized status distinctions within slavery...¹⁰⁰

Murillo’s *A Mercantile Novel*, is a microcosm of dealing with chocolate at many levels.

⁹⁹ Pinn, 128.

¹⁰⁰ Sidney W. Mintz. *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 47.

Conclusion and One Hundred Years of Chocolate Solitude

It has been exactly 100 years from Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder Number 2* (1914) to Murillo's *A Mercantile Novel* (2014.) I chose to focus on these two works in the study of chocolate to survey the modernist aesthetic, appropriation of black cultural production, the chocolate *Venus* body, and the machinistic register over a 100 year period. As such, this work calls out blatant omissions of connecting chocolate from cultivation, production, and consumption with the larger political relationships regarding gender, sexuality, race, labor, blackness, imperial domination, and representation.

In *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* T.J. Clark identifies modernism as a failure, speaking as an archeologist unearthing a previous civilization; Clark discusses the ruins of modernism in terms of identifying the patterns of mental and technical possibilities: "Painting at the end of its tether, then. I do not intend to flinch from the cliché. We can best lay hold of these pictures' overweening ambition, it seems to me, if we see them under the sign of failure. They should be looked at in the light of – better still, by the measure of – their inability to conclude the remaking of representation that was their goal."¹⁰¹ Clark speaks to the failure of Duchamp's cleverness as a saving grace for modernism saying, "I too would like there to have been a sane (that is, surviving) van Gogh to cancel Seurat's nihilism, or a truly clever Marcel Duchamp to save us from Malevich's divine idiocy. But it turns out there was neither. This is modernism's worst discovery."¹⁰² I believe that European modernism and the

¹⁰¹ T.J. Clark. *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 187.

¹⁰² Clark, 167.

avant-garde consistently looked to the artistic forms of blacks for clues that may lead to the reasoning of modernism's problems.

My transnational methodology seeks not to simply subvert the center/periphery of art history, nor to negotiate canonical real estate within art history. Interventions in the canon of art history allow for understanding various approaches to blackness, hemispheric notions of identity, and foster dialogue regarding consumer fetishism and the consumption of culture. By incorporating a transnational, transhistorical approach as a testimony to the global complexities and mobilities of chocolate we are able to identify the visual rhetoric of food pathways within the vicissitudes of daily life.

CHAPTER THREE

Pineapples

Pineapple is great. She is almost too transcendent – a delight if not sinful, yet so like sinning that really a tender conscientious person would do well to pause – too ravishing for mortal taste, she woundeth and excoriateth the lips that approach her – like lovers' kisses she biteth – she is a pleasure bordering on pain, from the fierceness and insanity of her relish."

--- "*A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig*," Charles Lamb (1775-1834)

The pineapple became not just a fruit, but the embodiment of everything the nobility liked to think it stood for.

---*Americas First Cuisines*, Sophie Coe

A former servant in the household of the French Governor-General of Indo-China, Nguyen was an Indo-Chinese servant employed by Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein during their long summer vacation in Bilignin. He was responsible for the household work and cooking often combining French and Chinese menus blending first courses of soup, shellfish, noodles, and rice with later courses of French designs. It was his fruit purées and sorbets that Toklas delighted in the most. Every morning he placed a quart of fresh fruit purée of fruits gathered from the garden in the refrigerator complemented with fresh whipped cream. Toklas remembers his preparations for freezing that included almond paste, eggs, syrups, and puff pastes as inventive wizardry. She mentions the tasty combinations he would prepare in haste including a recipe for what he called "Coupe Grimaldi." "Fresh pineapple cut into inch squares is macerated

in kirsch for 1 hour, placed in a glass and covered with mandarin orange or tangerine sorbet, decorated with sweetened but unflavoured whipped cream and crystallised violets.”¹

Afterwards, Toklas wonders if this was his invention alone. Pineapple appears again in another recipe as part of a pineapple and banana fruit mousse which also includes the kirsch brandy distilled from cherries adding a multi-dimensional fruity flavor. Ultimately, she concludes that Nguyen was a perfect cook, as well as a kind and attentive valet. Toklas’s mediations on Nguyen’s ethnic and cultural difference culminate into a recipe on pineapples. This relationship between pineapples and ethnic and cultural difference will be teased out in the discussion regarding pineapples and the work of the Italian 18th century, itinerant artist, Agostino Brunias. However, I first pre-date the discussion to the 17th century by introducing a portrait of Charles II receiving a pineapple from his royal gardener.

In the 1670 British royal portrait attributed to Hendrick Danckerts, Charles II is portrayed receiving the first pineapple to be grown in England from his gardener (Fig. 3.1). The official title is, “Mr. Rose, the royal Gardener, presenting to King Charles 2nd the first pineapple raised in England.” Charles II stands self-assured, left hand on his hip, right hand extended with palm face down in a gesture of calming obedience. The King’s Gardener, John Rose, kneels before the king’s right hand while extending the succulent pineapple with its stem intact. The king is flanked by two spaniels. One spaniel stands motionless peering directly at the viewer, while the other spaniel kneels in front of the king, hind quarters tilted in the air and tail wagging. The king’s calming right hand gesture can therefore be interpreted as a command of canine obedience – as in “stay” or “sit” as both gardener and dog are kneeling at the foot of the king. The open

¹ Alice B. Toklas. *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1954), 189.

hand gesture is actually poised to casually grasp the pineapple. The momentousness of this occasion – the first pineapple to be grown in England is somewhat lost in the scene as the pineapple blends in with the architecture of the classical stone balustrade. The geometric-patterned, bulbous body of the pineapple is echoed in the forms of the balustrade. The Danckerts portrait draws upon the association of the pineapple with royalty, luxury, wealth, and power.

The scene, however, is mythical and may best be understood as an expression of the king's political aspirations. The actuality of this event is unlikely because, at the time, England did not possess the technology to produce a pineapple which required a constant temperature of over 60° F, soil temperature of no less than 70° F, and the right amount of light, water, and fresh air.² Even the attribution of this work is thrown into doubt as it was later discovered that it may have been painted by an English painter, probably John Michael Wright, who was more skilled in portrait painting than Danckerts. The representation of Charles II in this unofficial portrait alongside the sweet exotica of the pineapple is a powerful, if not somewhat strange, juxtaposition. Nevertheless, the painted duo is visually effective in demonstrating the king's intentions to promote overseas trade and his investment in the West Indies, home of the pineapple. However, the subtext of this painting suggests royal privilege and sexual intrigue. The manor illustrated in the background is Dorney Court located near Windsor, owned by the husband of Charles II's mistress, Barbara Villiers. Charles II's pet name for his mistress Villiers was, 'my sweet pineapple.'³ The conflation of pineapple, sex, royalty, and privilege is longstanding. "Charles [II] was the most indulgent King that England had seen in recent times, lavishing cash with abandon on his mistresses, his friends, even his horses...an assessment

² Fran Beaman. *The Pineapple: King of Fruits*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005), 50.

³ Beaman, 50.

echoed in Evelyn's assessment of the pineapple: they both 'fall short' of their reputation. He was not the first or the last to conflate the two."⁴ These conflations of the pineapple with wealth, possession, sex, and the exotic are therefore rooted in historical precedent and will be expounded upon in detail. This approach assists greatly in laying the foundation for this chapter's ensuing discussion of the pineapple.

The Traveling Pineapple

The resiliency of the pineapple made it a popular traveling companion on ships where it was able to survive due to its "resistance to drought and tolerance of desiccation."⁵ The high acidic content of pineapple also made it a popular antidote for scurvy. Fresh, undiluted pineapple juice was used by natives to treat amoebic parasites, intestinal worms, heal stomach disorders, and as a contraceptive.⁶ The apothecaries of Europe were eager to discover the healing properties of New World botanicals in order to secure new and profitable pharmaceutical markets. The pineapple was touted in the medical commentary by Nicholas Monardes who affirmed, "that it was 'good for Stomacke and likewise of the harte, and restore[s] the appetite lost.'"⁷ The healing properties of the pineapple also included being able to heal the sick; "it

⁴ John Evelyn was one of the founding members of the Royal Society, practiced his hand in horticultural experiments, and was in constant communication with the King's gardener, John Rose. Evelyn was also a confidant of the King and credited with writing *Elysium Britannicum*, a record of England's gardens and gardening practices. In *Elysium Britannicum*, Evelyn highlights the star power of the pineapple describing, "reported by all that have tasted it, to resemble the gusto of whatsoever the most luxurious or distinguishing Epicure can summon to his wanton imagination." See Beauman, 48.

⁵ Beauman, 31.

⁶ Kaori O'Connor. *Pineapple: A Global History*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 107.

⁷ As historian Paula de Vos explains these endeavors going systematically beyond the Conquistador's call for, "Gold, Glory, and God." De Vos explains further, "Spanish monarchs directed local administrators throughout the colonial period to look for new commodities: medicines and dyes produced from various trees, seeds, and stones of the Americas were particularly prized. In the case of inorganic pigments, the search for medicines and for sources of color came together, as seen early on in a medical tract written by Monardes, a physician from Seville who described various medicines arriving from the New World that Monardes experimented with." Paula de Vos.

gives present ease to such as are troubled with the Stone, or stoppage of Urine; nay it destroys the force of Poyson'. ”⁸

Through her research in the Archive of the Indies in Seville, Spain, historian Paula de Vos attributes the reasons for seeking natural history specimens (vegetal, mineral, animal) to an imperialist preoccupation for exploiting the utilitarianism of specimens as part of a global economy. This search for “green gold” in absolutist Spain was an endeavor to replace declining mineral wealth. By collecting demographic, cartographical, geological, and natural historical information through surveys administered by local bureaucrats, they were able to amass large amounts of information and meet the needs of transatlantic commerce. De Vos explains how the Bourbon Reforms were the result of Spain’s belief that it was in a period of decline because of decreased colonial revenues, weak leadership, and the loss of key territories. She identifies the height of the Bourbon Reforms from 1759 to 1788, corresponding directly with the period of natural history collections and revealing that Charles II acted as an enlightened king interested in the pursuit of science. Natural history collecting was supposed to reduce Spain’s dependence on foreign producers by creating a soup-to-nuts approach for providing the Empire’s needs. England was adopting a similar approach through its colonial projects.

De Vos explains the connection of this method of natural history collecting as a kind of “bioprospecting” or attributing a commercial, utilitarian purpose for the specimens. For example, the use of bark, fruit, sap, or leaves were now applied in medicines previously

“Apothecaries, Artists, and Artisans: Early Industrial Material Culture in the Biological Old Regime,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 45, Num.3, (Winter 2015), 277-336. For further details see also, Paula de Vos, “Natural History and the Pursuit of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Spain,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 40, Num. 2, (Winter 2007), 209-239; and Paula de Vos, “The Science of Spices: Empiricism and Economic Botany in the Early Spanish Empire,” *Journal of World History*, Vol. 17, Num. 4, (2006), 399-427.

⁸ Beauman, 29-30.

unknown to Europe. “Today it is known that the active agent in fresh pineapple juice and stalks is the proteolytic (able to break down molecules of protein) enzyme bromelain, which has many contemporary pharmaceutical, clinical and industrial applications.”⁹ As Hippocrates famously stated, “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.” Therefore, viewing the Danckerts portrait within the context of bioprospecting, (which really begins around the time of the Columbian Exchange, late 15th century), allows the viewer to understand King Charles II’s position as demonstrating his ability to subdue New World territories through his symbolic possession of the pineapple. Almost fifty years before the Danckerts portrait in 1625, Britain had taken possession of Barbados which was the main supplier of pineapple plants. “The presence of a pineapple (whether at the dinner table or in the form of a decorative motif) served to emphasize the fruits of British victory overseas.”¹⁰ The gravity of King Charles II’s representation alongside the pineapple carried a message of British power and overseas expansion.

Long a symbol of hospitality, it was customary in the West Indies after returning home after a long voyage for sea captains to present a pineapple near the entrance of their home as a signpost that neighbors were welcome for visitation. This custom adopted from the natives is what is believed to have led to the pineapple being associated with hospitality, but also, suggests the genesis of pineapples appearing outside of homes in a more permanent form.¹¹ Author Fran Beaman however, makes the fine distinction of the pineapple as a symbol of hospitality as deriving from North American associations. She states rather that, “Stone pineapples at the front

⁹ O’Connor, 108.

¹⁰ Beaman, 114.

¹¹ The pineapple even today appears in stone sculptures outside of homes, on front porches, as a symbol of welcoming. “Stone pineapples large and small appeared as statuary and decorations on the facades and roofs of hothouses.” O’Connor, 27.

gates of eighteenth – or nineteenth-century houses in Britain were instead erected to signify a certain lifestyle.”¹²

The pineapple has also been celebrated for its peculiarly prickly exterior and sweet interior. Anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz suggests that anthropology has the capabilities to answer the *outside* and *inside* meanings of food pathways; but so far it has not done so.¹³ This study of pineapples aims to address some of these exterior and interior meanings. Art History applied through a transnational, transhistorical framework offers insight into these issues. I will look at the historical associations of the pineapple with opulence, ownership, social inequality, and tropical wonderment.

I have chosen to narrow the discussion of pineapples primarily to one artist, Agostino Brunias, because I believe his work best illustrates the historical context of pineapples and, of course, because we are able to locate pineapples in his work, both physically and metaphorically. However, this focus must necessitate the omission of certain important aspects of the pineapple as it relates, for example, to the colonial and industrial history of Hawai’i. The rich history of pineapples in Hawaii yields tremendous room for discussion due to Hawaii’s strategic position both geographically along trans-pacific trade routes and empirically as caught between warring factions under monarchy and colonial rule. Contrary to popular myth, the pineapple is not a native fruit of Hawaii.¹⁴ Following in the footsteps of other agro-industrial plantations in the

¹² Bauman, 112.

¹³ Mintz, Sidney W. *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 32.

¹⁴ Author Kaori O’Connor makes a wonderful case for the deconstruction of the Hawaiian luau, where pineapples are always included, as a romanticized construction motivated by capitalist interests. O’Connor explains that, “In order to save tourism...it was necessary to reverse the work of the previous decades, and ‘re-Hawaiianize’ the islands for the benefits of visitors, creating a romanticized version of the past that owed more to Hollywood than to history. Nonetheless, this vision of polite primitivism took root in the popular imagination.” Kaori O’Connor. *Pineapple: A Global History*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 94-95.

Caribbean, the cultivation of pineapple followed the decline of sugarcane in Hawaii. Chinese and Japanese laborers were brought in to work the sugarcane and pineapple fields in Hawaii during the nineteenth century. After two hurricanes hit Puerto Rico in 1899, devastating the sugarcane industry, Hawaii also invited the immigration of Puerto Rican laborers around the turn of the century. According to some accounts, sometime after prohibition, Puerto Rican bartender, Ramon Marrero is credited with creating the Piña Colada (rum, coconut cream, and pineapple juice) at the Caribe Hilton in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The intertwining histories of sugar, pineapple, alcohol, the travel industry, politics, and the aesthetics of pleasure have produced a body of visual culture that deserves exploration. The sticky coupling of sugar and pineapple can even be seen on a Cuban stamp from 1982 which features the juxtaposition of a pineapple and sugarcane. The fine art and visual culture documenting these trajectories is quite revelatory. Basically, if a conversation about pineapples is going to be more *specific*, it will have to become more *Pacific* in its approach.

The word for pineapple in Brazil and Portugal is *abacaxi* which comes from the Indian word that references the original pineapple's strong fragrance, garnering it a bewitching reputation, and has since been bred out of the species.¹⁵ Variations of the word *añañas* (pineapple) are derived from the native Tupi-Guarani term. However, the Spanish refer to the pineapple as *piña*. Because the Spanish believed the pineapple most resembled a pine cone and an apple its name was rephrased eschewing adoption of the native appellation. Fran Beaman discusses this phenomena saying, "explorers were not content to accept another culture's linguistic decisions: 'Your majesty, language is the perfect instrument of empire' wrote the

¹⁵ For further details, see Fran Beaman. *The Pineapple: King of Fruits*. (London: Chatoo & Windus, 2005), 20 and Edouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 108.

Bishop of Avila to Queen Isabella in 1492. For this reason, there was no attempt at all to incorporate its existing name into Spanish.” This episode is important because it demonstrates the totalitarian desire of the colonial project that colonizes the tongue, as well as, the terra firma. Edouard Glissant addresses the importance of a people to speak their language and the freedom associated with it saying, “when a people speaks its language or languages, it is above all free to produce through them at every level – free, that is, to make its relationship to the world concrete and visible for itself and for others.” German explorer and traveler artist, Alexander von Humboldt’s writings of the Upper Orinoco mention:

The humid evening air is filled far and wide with the fragrance of the ripe *ananas*. The stalks of the pineapples, swelling with rich juice, rise between the lowly herbs of the meadow, and the golden fruit is seen shining at a distance from under its leafy crown of bluish-green.¹⁶

A gastronomical delight complete with mystery and a hefty passport, pineapples have been cultivated in the West Indies, Hawaii, Australia, South Africa, Malaya, Taiwan, the Phillipines, east and west Africa, southeast Asia, and other locales. In order to avoid taxation and purchasing from its competitors, the British Empire believed in cultivating pineapple among its British territories. These practices and appetites for imperial expansion are what I reference in the title of this dissertation. Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin explains in *The Physiology of Taste* regarding the mobilities of food pathways amongst various countries saying, “Gastronomy examines men and things for the purpose of transporting, from one country to another, all that deserves to be known, and which causes a well arranged entertainment, to be an abridgement of the world in which each portion is represented.”¹⁷ So, then, focusing on an itinerant artist like

¹⁶ Kaori O’Connor. *Pineapple: A Global History*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 45.

¹⁷ Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. *The Physiology of Taste; Or, Transcendental Gastronomy*. (Paris: Merchant Books, 1825), 47.

Brunias working primarily in the Caribbean is a reflection not only of the globetrotting pineapple, but also as an abridged mapping of imperial gastronomy.

Sufficiently, the tailoring of the discussion of pineapples to the work of Agostino Brunias is purposefully a pittance of the richness of possibilities. Nevertheless, I feel obligated to mention some of these various other possibilities that may hopefully yield fruit in the future. For now, this strategy likewise omits featuring the works of several other artists who have afforded pride of place to pineapples for they are way too numerous to mention here.¹⁸ However, because I am tying the symbolic capital of the pineapple to its royal associations as it appears in Brunias's work both literally and figuratively, I will analyze some of the historical and cultural origins of the pineapple first.

The Royal Pineapple

As witnessed in the portrait of Charles II the pineapple has a royal pedigree, having been highly sought after by several monarchs, emperors, and presidents throughout history.¹⁹ In fact pineapple possession was not only associated with imperial expansion in the West Indies, but pineapple possession becomes an obsession closely tied to wealth, decadence, prosperity, privilege, and the values which become associated with the bourgeoisie.

¹⁸ I am thinking about the work of Ian DeLeon whose pineapple performances include wearing a mask made out of a pineapple; the work of artist-curator Zina Saro-Wiwa and her performative approach to pineapples and its cultural narratives; and the photography of Ayana Evans whose images of pineapples touched by bloodied, white-lace gloves invoke the horrors of colonial histories.

¹⁹ During a trip to Barbados in 1751-2, future first President of the United States of America, George Washington experienced more fruit on a table than he had ever witnessed before saying, "There are many delicious fruits", but the pineapple, China orange and avocado...nothing pleases my taste as much as these." O'Connor, 58. A recipe called "Pineapple Pudding" appears in *Thomas Jefferson's Cook Book*. John F. Kennedy's wedding to Jacqueline Bouvier in 1953 featured pineapple boats for dessert.

Kaori O'Connor begins the pineapple's royal trajectory with King Ferdinand of Spain. After Christopher Columbus's second voyage to the Americas he returns to Spain with an offering for King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Columbus presents the King and Queen with a treasure trove of, "gold nuggets, golden curios such as masks and ornaments made by the Indians, and exotic birds, trees, animals and plants, including a pineapple. The fruit received the ultimate royal accolade: it was eaten by Ferdinand, who promptly declared that he preferred it to all others."²⁰ In a singular act of possession - consuming the pineapple, a new fruit from the New World, Ferdinand performs what King Charles II would do over 100 years later in the Danckerts portrait. "Taste and curiosity aside, the act was symbolic. With Columbus having claimed the West Indies for Spain, Ferdinand now made a show of consuming the fruit that represented his new possessions."²¹ The King's approval or "crowning" of the pineapple as his favorite fruit would become the standard of royal appetites.

The problem then becomes one of access. According to a royal courier on the Columbus voyage only one pineapple arrived to the shores of Spain unspoiled. All of the other pineapples turned to rot. The limited accessibility of this peculiar fruit drives royal horticulturists to finding new ways to successfully grow pineapples in Europe and thereby appease the royal appetites. "Royalty considered the pineapple their due, for in addition to coming from faraway climes in conditions of great danger and at incalculable cost, the fruit seemed to be the very embodiment of majesty."²² The pineapple quickly becomes known as the King of Fruits. French physician Pierre Pomet notes in his *Compleat History of Drugs*, "It is for this Reason that the King of

²⁰ O'Connor, 17.

²¹ O'Connor, 17.

²² O'Connor, 19.

Kings has placed a Crown upon the Head of it, which is an essential mark of its Royalty.”²³ The pineapple’s spiky crown is one of its most notable attributes that refer to a royal heritage. The crown of adornment and the geometrical pattern circling the pineapple’s body are not just beautiful armour to protect itself against predators, but the fragrant skin is layered in a Fibonacci series. The Divine Right of Kings is also found in the Divine mathematical proportions of the Fruit of Kings in a phenomenon known as “Divine Proportion.” In the ancient world this was known as the Golden Mean which affected architecture, city planning, literature, and compositions in art.

The basis is a constant called phi (1.6180339). Discovered by the Greek mathematician Euclid, phi emerges from a geometrical theorem that generates a series of numbers in which each number is the sum of the two preceding numbers: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, and so on. It was later named the Fibonacci series in honour of the great thirteenth-century Italian thinker Leonardo Fibonacci (also known as Leonardo of Pisa.)²⁴

As previously mentioned, the pineapple’s royal treatment began with its royal stamp of approval by monarchs, but was also experienced in the exorbitant cost of producing a pineapple harvest in Europe which added to its allure as a pride of possession. The production cost of a hothouse pineapple grown to maturity could easily cost up around \$3,000 per pineapple in today’s money.²⁵ The extravagant costs for building and maintaining hothouses and the gardeners who cared for the plants contributed to the royal aura of pineapple as a status symbol and coveted possession which was sometimes offered as a gift of the highest endearment. In

²³ O’Connor, 19

²⁴ Bauman, 5.

²⁵ O’Connor, 33.

1702 the pineapple was introduced into the court of the Sun King, Louis XIV (1638-1715) although it was cultivated unsuccessfully. The pineapple crowned the pyramid of sweetmeats, its likeness carved into sugar sculptures, and reigned supreme at the desserts banquet. The dinner table was a battlefield of political intrigue where the status symbol of the pineapple could influence guests. The Sun King, “deployed an army of architects, engineers, artists, plantsmen and gardeners to create a garden that was a grand political statement in the manner of the ancient Assyrian kings.”²⁶ Louis XIV’s morganatic wife, Madame de Maintenon hailed from Martinique and tasted pineapple in her youth which she described as a cross between an apricot and a melon. In what O’Connor describes as apocryphal she says that the King was so eager to taste a pineapple that he bit into it unskinned and cut his lip.²⁷ During the reign of his successor, Louis XV (1710-1774), the pineapple was finally successfully cultivated in the indoor royal gardens at Versailles.²⁸ Therefore, the appearance of pineapples within art and architecture are heavy laden with significance. Agostino Brunias’s, *A Negroes’ Dance in the Island of Dominica*, 1779, is one place where we can find the pineapple on display (Fig. 3.2).

Agostino Brunias

²⁶ O’Connor, 28.

²⁷ O’Connor, 29.

²⁸ In his attempts to woo a prospective mistress later known as Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV arranged a grand masquerade ball on the occasion of the Dauphin’s wedding in 1745. The masquerade allowed the king to move incognito among the courtiers. The King with all of his companions dressed as identical yew trees in the shape of pineapples. By this time the association of the pineapple with royalty was so indelible that the joke was understood that one of these trees was the king in disguise. After becoming the king’s mistress, Madame de Pompadour was ever fond of pineapples. O’Connor, 33.

In Agostino Brunias's painting, *A Negroes' Dance in the Island of Dominica*, a black couple are dancing in a polite revelry, reserved, yet joyful manner, while a seated drummer and another woman playing a tambourine accompany the festivities. A well-dressed mulata in a white dress and large hat lifts her skirt in a movement that is unclear and could be either dancing or passing by. She is looking at the dancing couple as a white gentleman is positioned directly behind her and motioning to the dancing couple with his right hand, perhaps offering to dance with her. Women are seen bending over unloading their fruits and vegetables and arranging appetizing displays of their wares for sale. In the central lower register a single pineapple appears, closely positioned to the mulata. The pineapple is removed somewhat from the other fruits and vegetables as it encroaches upon the dance floor space. The white gentleman's hand that seems to be ushering her to the dance floor is directly above the pineapple and offers a double introduction between mulata and pineapple in the one gesture.

In Brunias's *A Linen Market* we find a bustling marketplace scene filled with fruit and vegetable vendors, a linen stall selling linens including what may appear to be the popular and fine-quality Pulicat handkerchief, intended to be worn about the neck or wrapped around the head, and multiple conversations amongst the locals (Fig. 3.3). We are treated to the display of various local fruits and vegetables by vendors. The artist has taken care to represent the diversity of the marketplace population, Natives of Dominica smoking and scarcely attired, free and enslaved blacks wearing various garments indicating class and stature, white uniformed officers speaking with a black woman, and at the center of the activity Brunias positions two light-skinned mulatta women, finely dressed, purveying the linens. I begin with this image because it offers a typical view of Brunias's work and functions as a gateway into my main argument. Brunias has captured a scene in the daily life of the island, especially one that features depictions

of mulattas at its center. The fashionably dressed mulatta figures prominently in his work and becomes the hallmark of his oeuvre. It is Brunias's centrality of the mulatta figure that influences my argument which looks at how pineapples can be read as anthropomorphized embodiments of mulattanness. This of course, introduces many epistemological problems with the creation of an essentialized mulattanness. However, rather than approach these representations from that standpoint, I am comparing the social life of pineapples with the perceived social life of the mulatta in Brunias's work. By doing so we are able to command a more nuanced understanding of food pathways, fetishization of tropical comestibles, and the formation of tropical desire. My approach addresses the circulatory system of exchange that Edward J. Sullivan mentions in order, "to argue for the centrality of the Caribbean to the Western imaginary and as a site of major artistic production."²⁹ I am interested in how Brunias mediates these circulatory systems of exchange through a visual archive. I look at the work of Brunias, briefly examining his position and reception as a traveler artist, and how we may consider his works more critically as they relate to how desire works, how images function as propaganda for economic investment, and finally how they operate surreptitiously as anti-slavery imaginings revealing the hypocrisy and folly of racial hierarchies.

Sarah Thomas writes about itinerant European artists Agostino Brunias and Augustus Earle. She introduces a framework for reading Brunias as an Italian artist working within the margins of empire, "whose very mobility along the edges of empire was part of a much larger circulatory system of exchange (people, goods and ideas) and diplomacy that characterized

²⁹ Edward J. Sullivan. *From San Juan to Paris and Back: Francisco Oller and Caribbean Art in the Era of Impressionism*. (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2014), 5.

Europe's Age of Expansion."³⁰ The author's locating of Brunias within the context of mobilities that includes people, goods, and ideas speaks to my thesis regarding Brunias's images of mulattas and pineapples not only as the circulation of goods/tropical comestibles, but also the circulation of people and ideas around beauty, possession, and extravagance; her relegation of the Caribbean as belonging to the "edges of empire," however, expresses notions of center and periphery in a way that presents an uncritical spatial logic regarding the organization and function of empire. Thinking of the Caribbean as periphery to empire creates a dichotomy where the Caribbean is a kind of ad hoc, improvisational construction of space and England as the chief center of influence. This is a reductive conceptualization of the Caribbean because it theoretically incarcerates the purview of island spaces. In the case of Brunias, the islands of Dominica and Tobago where he painted scenes from daily life, would then be read as anterior models of Empire and dangerously cussing a simulacrum of Englishness. Rather than thinking of island spaces as the "confetti of empire" perhaps a more complex archipelagic approach that acknowledges not only the diversity (social, cultural, linguistically, environmentally) of island spaces but the connections between islands themselves and interconnections across the sea veritably expanding the perimeters of spatial logic would yield a greater understanding.

The "edges of empire" also implicates the hazardousness of locating a space that is on the "edge." I imagine the "edge" as a treacherous place, a kind of capricious brink of destruction where at any moment one may fall off the "edge" into the abyss. For example, the term "being on edge" reflects this kind of existential anxiety where someone on the "edge" experiences a nervous restlessness, or becomes a nervous wreck. I would like to propose thinking of the Caribbean not only in terms of theorizing archipelagic spaces, but also rephrasing the "edges of

³⁰ Sarah Thomas. "'On the spot': Travelling artists and abolitionism, 1770-1830." *Atlantic Studies*. Vol. 8, No. 2, (June 2011), 213.

empire” to the “edginess of empire” that is in terms of innovative spaces of trendsetting practices, radical thought, modes of existence, and cutting “edge” technologies. Therefore, I would like to think of Brunias’s commitment to working in what Kriz refers to as the Torrid Zone as participating and contributing to the “edginess of empire.”

Brunias was born in Rome around 1730 where he studied at the Accademia di San Luca. After meeting the Scottish architect Robert Adam, Brunias leaves for England where he gains employment from various British patrons. He is invited by Sir William Young, who would later become Governor of Dominica (ca. 1770), to accompany him to the newly acquired, former French colonies – specifically the islands of Dominica (where he spends most of his life), St. Vincent, and Tobago. For the next thirty years Brunias paints various genre scenes of the islands paying special attention to representing various races, marketplaces, dances, celebrations, flora, and fauna.

Most discussions of Brunias’s work involve an emphasis on “order, harmony, and civility” depicted in his social scenes. His work is at times placed within a Rococo tradition of the *fête galante*, an outdoor series of entertainments where the privileged are enjoying a scene from “everyday life.” Beth Fowkes Tobin supposes in *Picturing Imperial Power* that Brunias’s works were commissioned by the plantocracy as mementos and reminders for when they returned to England or resettled elsewhere. She refers to the dedications of paintings to military officers and colonial officials as evidence of these genre scenes as keepsakes and not just ethnographic arts. Indeed, although Brunias does feature flora and fauna of the islands, his work is not reproducing illustrations of natural history in terms of specimen collection and classification. Rather, Brunias appears more preoccupied and charmed by the “everydayness” of

shopping at the market, dancing, playing, bathing, and the ethnic diversity of island spaces rather than offering a dutiful rendition of life sciences.

Beth Fowkes Tobin and Dian F. Kriz contemplate the audience and patronage of Brunias's work in search of crafting a greater understanding of why Brunias painted the way he did and *why* he featured depictions of mulattas so consistently and prominently. Like Fowkes Tobin, Kriz argues that Brunias's work was commissioned for the plantocracy who were only part-time residents of the island. The strength of Kriz's argument is fully formed in her assertion that Brunias's works functioned as propaganda to entice plantocratic investors to the islands. In fact this appears to be the main reason that Sir William Young invited Brunias to the newly acquired territory in order to build a visual campaign that would convince investors. Hence, the lighthearted, playful scenes of social life build a case for island spaces that are, as Kriz emphasizes, "civilized" and "refined," and therefore less financially risky and blossoming with economic opportunities. Kriz states that the task of Brunias was, "to use art to promote the "cultivation" of newly acquired sugar colonies, by artfully depicting colonial social life in the British West Indies."³¹

However, in the promotion of these *civilized* spaces, what has been omitted is what Antonio Benítez-Rojo denotes as the Plantation machine. Benítez-Rojo refers to European controlled plantations in the following manner, "This family of machines almost always makes cane sugar, coffee, cacao,...bananas, pineapples,...and other goods whose cultivation is impossible or too expensive in the temperate zones; furthermore, it usually produces the Plantation, capitalized to indicate not just the presence of plantations but also the type of society

³¹ Kriz, 40.

that results from their use and abuse.”³² Brunias avoids the “everydayness” of plantation abuses, whippings, tortures, hunger, back-breaking labor and the dangers of cutting, collecting, crushing, boiling, and refining sugarcane. Brunias’s employers preferred a convenient visual strategy that elided the harsh realities of the Plantation machine. Instead they constructed a version of the stereotypical “happy Negro” that was contented in a tropical paradise.

The stereotypical “happy Negro” is also coupled with the exoticization of the mulatta figure in the British Caribbean. Brunias’s *French Mulatresses and Negro Woman Bathing* is described by Beth Fowkes Tobin as appealing to white male audiences saying, “By treating in a playful way white male desire for black women, the painting helps to foster the impression that such desires were harmless and essentially innocent, as signaled by this pastoral setting.”³³ The painting depicts three mulattas at various viewpoints of nudity, frontal, rear, and three-quarters rear, while a negro woman of darker complexion is kneeling in the water with one hand covering her sex, her left arm covering her left breast, and her right breast is exposed. The self-conscious postures of the two women on the left are those of someone who is knowingly being observed. The central mulatta figure is looking over her right shoulder perhaps in conversation with the woman on the left or perhaps her attention has been drawn to the clandestine action happening behind her. Between the crook of the branches lurks the face of a white man with an excited expression on his face actively observing the nude women from behind. The man’s body is vanished behind the tree’s trunk and we only see the all too giddy face of the voyeur betwixt the foliage. He seems to take pleasure in the naughtiness of his act because he chooses not to boldly

³² Antonio Benítez-Rojo. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Second Edition. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 9.

³³ Beth Fowkes Tobin. *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 149.

reveal himself. I believe Brunias's paintings can be read as representations of a playground for sexual tourism, sexual deviance, and a flashpoint for exotic beauty and abundance available for European male consumption.

Beauty and the Pineapple

In her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, author Mary Louise Pratt discusses the role of tropical ingestibles, mentioning the pineapple in particular, and their envoy into Europe via the figure of Empress Josephine. She argues that the idea of Romanticism may have originated in the contact zones of the Americas and the South Seas. She consults the work of Venezuelan writer, Teresa de la Parra, who proposed this idea in her autobiographical novel *Memorias de Mama Blanca* (Memoirs of Mama Blanca, 1929.) Pratt quotes the novel's narrator who says,

I believe that like tobacco, *pineapple*, and sugar cane, Romanticism was an indigenous [American] fruit that grew up sweet, spontaneous and hidden among colonial languors and tropical indolence until the end of the eighteenth century. Around that time, Josefina Tascher, unsuspectingly, as if she were an ideal microbe, carried it off [to Europe] tangled up in the lace of one of her headdresses, gave the germ to Napoleon in that acute form which we all know, and little by little, the troops of the First Empire, assisted by Chateaubriand, spread the epidemic everywhere.³⁴

Pratt's argument emphasizes the transcultural dimensions of Romanticism as an alternative to a canonical European Romanticism. She envisions the relational dynamics between Europe and the Americas as having "tangled genealogies." Pratt states, "Westerners are accustomed to thinking of romantic projects of liberty, individualism, and liberalism as

³⁴ Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 138. The emphasis on pineapple is my own.

emanating *from* Europe to the colonial periphery, but less accustomed to thinking about emanations *from* the contact zones *back* into Europe.”³⁵ I believe this is precisely why Pratt has chosen mobilities (tobacco, pineapples, sugar, Josephine, headdresses) emanating *from* the contact zones *back* to Europe in order to demonstrate their impact on European projects. The quote from Parra also addresses a culmination of pineapple, Josephine, and her headdress. My focus here is addressing the relationship between pineapples, Josephine, and the headdress as emblems of Caribbeanness, mulattanness, and beauty. Josephine fashioned herself in the style popularized by mulattas in Martinique which included adopting their sartorial expression, language, carriage, and their manner of headdress.

Kaori O'Connor confirms the renewal of France's royal interest in pineapples with the Bourbon restoration saying, "Napoleon's first consort, the Empress Josephine, who was brought up on a Martinique sugar plantation and built a grand heated pinery at her chateau, Malmaison.”³⁶ Empress Josephine's renewed interest in pineapples and establishment of a pinery was occurring in the relative contemporary company of President George Washington who also attempted to cultivate pineapples and built a pinery at Mount Vernon and Britain's George III, who cultivated the royal fruit at Kew Gardens and Kensington Palace. However, it is Andrea Stuart's biography of Empress Josephine, *Josephine: The Rose of Martinique*, which draws more cohesive conclusions regarding her self-fashioning after the style of mulattas in Martinique. Stuart describes Josephine's style saying,

Her style was reminiscent of that of the mulatto women who brought her up: opulent and highly seductive, just as it was their contagious Creole accents that inflected her beautiful voice with its appealing island lilt. Even her carriage, for which she would become so renowned in France, was like one of the 'Caribbean Venuses' of the islands, who walked, remarked one observer, as if they were

³⁵ Pratt, 138.

³⁶ O'Connor, 65.

‘floating across sand’, slowly and languorously, their heads held perfectly upright.³⁷

Stuart goes on to describe the madras headkerchiefs worn by the Creole women of Martinique that Josephine adopted and popularized in Europe. Stuart’s description of mulattas in Martinique as opulent and highly seductive coincides with the perception of pineapples in the West at this time. The work of Caribbean itinerant artists such as Brunias, whose paintings feature mulattas exhibiting the very sartorial panache emulated and transported by cultural icons such as Josephine, could have possibly contributed to the rise in this particular kind of Creole/mulatta aesthetic. The association of the mulatta body with pineapples and exotic otherness can also be seen in the work of French Canadian artist, Francois Malépart de Beaucourt.

Montreal’s Francois Malépart de Beaucourt painted, *Bust-length portrait of a black slave woman holding a plate of tropical fruits, including a pineapple*, 1786, in which the sitter is also sometimes referred to as a mulatta (Fig. 3.4). Her cumulous-like white blouse is draped off the right shoulder exposing the right breast with an erect nipple forming an invisible line pointing to the pineapple creating a double exoticism. Her fleshy nipple dangles above the pineapple emphasizing the tactile sensations of two different kinds of skin like tissue connecting two edible bodies (one literal/one metaphorical.) She is the other half of the fruity display presented as an exotic other. Both bodies representing the luscious fruits of the New World. The mulatta shares equal billing with her fruity companion as the title deliberately calls attention to identifying that she is holding a ‘pineapple.’ Beaucourt’s mulatta is represented as a tractable servant with a one-quarter smile who mollifies the male gaze with an offering of delicious otherness.

³⁷ Andrea Stuart. *Josephine: The Rose of Martinique*. (London: Pan Books, 2003), 12.

Charmaine A. Nelson refers to the mulatta in this painting as,

depicted in the process of seemingly consciously offering her body to the gaze of the white master/artist/viewer, an act that speaks to the issue of her agency. As such, she reveals a sexual self-knowledge (something that was decidedly inappropriate at that time for white women) and is therefore guilty of immorality.³⁸

The offering of the woman's body is represented through the offering of the plate of fruit, but more specifically, through the offering of the pineapple. Through archival sources, Nelson discovered that the sitter in the painting was Beaucourt's slave and mistress. However, Nelson clarifies the use of the term "mistress" by commenting on the limited agency a mulatta slave would have possessed in Canada at the time saying, "Black female slaves in colonial Canada would have had no such rights or privileges within relations with white citizens, especially in such cases where the citizen was a white male and their master."³⁹ I am interested in the construction of this particular trope of representation that juxtaposes the mulatta body alongside the pineapple in a dual meaning of exotic otherness and sexual availability.

In a similar, though somewhat peculiar arrangement, Le Masurier's painting of 1775, *A Mulatto Woman with Her White Daughter Visited by Negro Women in Their House in Martinique*, includes a finely dressed mulatta matriarch at the center of the composition (Fig. 3.5). In the lower right portion of the canvas is a cornucopia of tropical fruit on the floor. The visualization of agricultural plenitude is an example that Kriz refers to as a function of colonial imagery where people, commodities, and natural resources are displayed as evidence of the ability to turn a profit in the metropole. At the top of this fruity heap is a grand pineapple that is conspicuously leaning to the right paralleling the posture of the mulatta matriarch whose body is

³⁸ Charmaine A. Nelson. *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art*. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 24.

³⁹ Nelson, 24.

also conspicuously leaning to the right at the same angle of the pineapple. The artist has created parallel diagonal lines in the body of the mulatta and the body of the pineapple. As if they were mirror images of one another, both mulatta and pineapple collide in associations of tropical otherness, opulence, luxury, and even beauty. The matriarch's sexual availability for white male consumption is evident in the fruit of her womb presented next to her, her white daughter, indicating a sexual relationship with a white male patriarch has taken place. In the opening epigraph I quote from Charles Lamb's, *A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig*, saying,

Pineapple is great. She is almost too transcendent – delight if not sinful, yet so like sinning that really a tender conscientious person would do well to pause – too ravishing for mortal taste, she woundeth and excoriateth the lips that approach her – like lovers' kisses she biteth – she is a pleasure bordering on pain, from the fierceness and insanity of her relish.⁴⁰

Considering the metaphorical and literal translations of the mulatta body and pineapples presented thus far, Lamb's notes on pineapples could possibly be interpreted as a diaphanous veil sheltering his struggles and self-conscious entanglement with racial politics that condemned miscegenation. The mulatta matriarch represented in Le Masurier's painting, like so many others during this period is wearing an elaborate headdress. Both headdresses and pineapple crowns are sumptuously vertical arrangements capping coded bodies—the pineapples with the codes of the Fibonacci sequence and mulattas with the codes of racial and sexual politics.

Nelson describes the headdresses worn by many black women of the diaspora as proud symbols emphasizing beautification, identification, cultural continuity, and communication.⁴¹ Depending upon how these headwraps were wrapped, tied, or knotted could indicate the wearer's occupation (cane-cutter, laundress, house servant, fieldworker), marital status, geographical

⁴⁰ O'Connor, 67.

⁴¹ Nelson, 98.

location, or announce one's birthday.⁴² The mulatta women wearing elaborate headdresses is one of the most notable and consistent features of Brunias's work.

Brunias's *Free Women of Color with Their Children and Servants in a Landscape*, 1770-96, presents a family of mulattos surveying their sugar plantation (Fig. 3.6). The landscape's feathery brushwork is often compared to what one might find in a Jean-Honoré Fragonard or François Boucher painting. Again, at the center of the composition is a mulatta matriarch wearing a luxurious headdress topped with a tilted up wide-brimmed hat. Cristina La Porta's dedication to the history of fashion illuminates the significance of the main figure's ensemble as she describes her as wearing a linen or muslin dress, a *fichu* covering her shoulders and ending in a tight bodice that defines her torso and waist.⁴³ La Porta describes the fashionable figure thusly,

The bodice is similar to an English *jump* tied in front with ribbons, here colored a festive yellow. This lady's chic *sabot* sleeves are trimmed with two rows of (expensive) lace, and visible near her calf is just a hint of a pale blue petticoat.⁴⁴

Brunias pays close attention to clothing, hats, headdresses, and jewelry. In fact, fashion is crucial here. In the middle stand two alluring mulatto women, most likely sisters, whose clothes encapsulate an entire history of colonial mercantilism, sought-after textiles, and acts of sartorial subversion.⁴⁵

The two fashionably dressed sisters are accompanied by an older woman who may be their mother and accompanied by several darker skinned servants. The central mulatta figure, like in the La Masurier painting, is also represented within close proximity to her white children. She is gesturing towards her white son pointing at him, possibly as the heir of the estate, a reflection of the absent, white patriarch. The young boy's yellow and white-striped suit reinforces his

⁴² Nelson, 98.

⁴³ Cristina La Porta. "Fashion and Identity in Agostino Brunias's Caribbean Paintings." *Fine Art Connoisseur*. (Nov/Dec, 2013), 49.

⁴⁴ La Porta, 49.

⁴⁵ La Porta, 49.

butterscotch hair. His tailored knee-length breeches gather with bows just above his white stockings and black buckled shoes. Standing next to young boy are two darker skinned liveried male servants who appear slightly older than the little prince. They are smartly dressed in blue waistcoats with gold trim, but are barefooted, their unclothed feet distinguishing their lower social status.

La Porta argues for the subversive power of fashion as she quotes Haitian historian Jean Fouchard who contended that fashion became a battleground in the island colonies. She refers to the sumptuary laws imposed by governors that sought to create distinctions among social classes, “distinctions almost always based on race, women of color would find clever ways to skirt them.”⁴⁶ This is where the tradition of the vertical headdress mounted with a hat originates. The women of color were banned from wearing hats so they made an art of adorning themselves with 10 to 12 *mouchoirs* or kerchiefs.⁴⁷ This very tall bonnet was referred to as a *tête en lé* (or *tête cassie*, *cassie* being the gum adhesive used to form the bonnet.)⁴⁸ Various interpretations of the high bonnet would involve expensive fabrics, silks, or satins. It seems congruous for the crown of the mulatta body, the headdress, to be fashioned from luxurious materials just as the crown of the pineapple was embedded with the exact same significance – opulence, extravagance, and expensiveness.

Edward J. Sullivan recognizes this painting as a work about race and class, calling attention as well to the atmosphere of tranquility and prosperity:

This was naturally a point of significance for the artist’s clients, who had a major investment in the establishment of a vision of the Caribbean that, if not quite utopian, would nonetheless suggest that the islands were places where foreign

⁴⁶ La Porta, 49.

⁴⁷ La Porta, 49.

⁴⁸ La Porta, 49.

investments would be safe. This and many related works by the artist created an ambiance of luxury, calm, and even voluptuousness as a come-on for would be investors and settlers in the tropics.⁴⁹

Kriz argues that the persuasive qualities of Brunias's work were used in the colonizing mission in order to attract investors to the newly acquired islands. Just as I described earlier regarding the royal obsession with the pineapple, Kriz describes Brunias's obsessive focus with the mulatta figure. She states, "Brunias's *mulâtresses* provoke the fantasy of possessing a body that both is and is not white, bearing the marks of refined whiteness and the promise of savage sexual pleasure so closely associated with blackness."⁵⁰ These characteristics of obsession and possession have both been applied in this discussion to the historical entrée of the pineapple into Europe and U.S. colonies, as well as, to the mulatta body. Kriz's argument that Brunias's obsessive focus in representing mulattas was used as propaganda to invite colonial settlement and commerce further correlates to the use of the pineapple as a symbol of "welcoming" and "hospitality." However, a demonstration of this particular kind of hospitality expressed in the hypersexualization of the mulatta body is one that unfortunately encompasses "savage sexual pleasure."

In an effort to tether Brunias's *Free Women of Color with Their Children and Servants in a Landscape* to the Danckerts portrait of King Charles II receiving a pineapple I noticed one striking similarity. The exact same brown and white-spotted English spaniel appears in both portraits and in the exact same placement of the composition. Danckerts's spaniel rears his hind legs in a playful gesture minding the

⁴⁹ Sullivan, 17-18.

⁵⁰ Kriz, 55.

king. Brunias's spaniel appears more sure-pawed minding the central mulatta figure. Brunias's painting appears almost a century after the Danckerts portrait and yet appears to answer the call of King Charles II's colonial ambitions in the West Indies. Canine fidelity stands to witness the receiving of the pineapple and presentation of "pineappled" bodies as a successful colonizing mission.

The Emperor's New Buttons

Both La Porta and Bagneris discuss the afterlife of Brunias's work following the colonizing mission as evidenced in his miniature paintings which appeared on buttons that supposedly were worn by Haitian revolutionary General Toussaint L'Ouverture. The provenance of the Brunias buttons housed at the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York City presents a chain of evidence that follows (Figs. 3.7-3.8):

From Toussaint L'Ouverture to
 Servant boy c. 1802(?) to
 His heirs in Sedan to
 Professor Lelongt at Sedan to
 Etienne Accary
 Sold at Hotel Druot auction in Paris, 1939
 Purchased by Mrs. Pauline Riggs Noyes at auction
 Entered the collection of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum upon the death of Mrs. Noyes
 (1942)

According to the provenance, when L'Ouverture was incarcerated he rewarded a servant boy for his kindness with his holiday coat. The servant boy returned to his native Sedan with the gift of the bespangled holiday coat of silk and 18 buttons where it remained at the bottom of a trunk along with other family valuables. After his death the buttons were sold by family

members entering into the marketplace and circulated between various owners. Bagneris refers to the connection of the Brunias buttons with L'Ouverture as apocryphal and tenuous at best.⁵¹

Entertaining the possibility of Agostino Brunias and Haitian revolutionary General Toussaint L'Ouverture meeting to discuss a sartorial commission of 18 miniature paintings is a consideration worth savoring.⁵² Nevertheless, an investigative line of questioning narrows the pool of possible ownership. For example, who would have desired to own miniaturized images of mostly black Caribbeans? The buttons would have been worn on a very expensive formal coat. Who would have wanted to showcase images of blacks on an ensemble that would have been worn with great care in public? What were the conventions of fashion at the time for men of different colors, social background? Who would have been able to afford the commission of these luxury, designer buttons? Also, whomever was able to commission these buttons may have been a person who was held in high esteem in the eyesight of Brunias in order for him to accept the commission. Brunias was a successful artist who was consistently employed by the plantocracy, governors, and industry leaders. Who would have held such noteworthy importance

⁵¹ Bagneris states, "The early provenance of the buttons is anecdotal and the connection to L'Ouverture tenuous at best." Bagneris, Amanda Michaela, "Coloring the Caribbean: Agostino Brunias and the painting of race in the British West Indies, c. 1765-1800." Bagneris further questions the authenticity of the buttons as actual Brunias works. Although the button scenes clearly represent various images and scenes from Brunias's larger scale paintings, Bagneris believes the less trained hand of the buttons reflects either an unfamiliarity with the miniature format or rather a reproduction of Brunias's works by another artist. However, I believe that some of the looser brushstrokes that Bagneris is referring to as causing suspicion may be a result from working in a miniature format, but also perhaps due to time constraints. If the buttons did belong to L'Ouverture, Brunias may have not had much time to complete the commission. Furthermore, this indicates why Brunias may have chosen to reproduce figures and mise-en-scenes from his popular works because of the familiarity with painting the same figures over and over again would be easier in miniature. Bagneris's speculation regarding whether or not these buttons were painted by Brunias is however, not reflected in the correspondence and files at the Cooper-Hewitt. The buttons are assumed to be painted by Brunias. What is indisputable, whether by the hand of Brunias or not, the buttons are definitely in the style of Brunias's larger works.

⁵² Although Cristina La Porta writes regarding the buttons appearing in the exhibition catalog accompanying the exhibition, *Caribbean Crossroads* at El Museo del Barrio in 2012 saying, "its accompanying catalog illustrates the buttons that Brunias painted with scenes of mulatto and black people for the Haitian revolutionary general Toussaint L'Ouverture's uniform. It is quite possible the two men met" Cristina La Porta. "Fashion and Identity in Agostino Brunias's Caribbean Paintings." *Fine Art Connoisseur*. (Nov./Dec. 2013), 51.

in the eyes of Brunias to cause him to work in the miniature format with which he was unaccustomed?

The answer to these questions may be little more than an indulgence, or an exercise in the history of fashion, however, one may conclude that the construction of these buttons were designed to be worn on a man's overcoat of some significant, if not sentimental value because of the affectionate representations of Caribbean scenes from daily life on the buttons. We can also assume that the owner possessed a certain pride of Caribbean homeland or homestead and wanted to be reminded of the natural beauty of the landscape and the richness of the community's diversity as people and place are carefully represented on all 18 buttons. We may also assume the buttons adorned a luxury overcoat of someone for whom the sartorial expression was in a way its own battlefield. The incorporation of 18 buttons on a man's coat exceeds all sensible utility and is therefore more of a fashion statement since the surplus of buttons would have been "decorative" as opposed to functional. After considering this chain of thought, I argue that the owner most likely was a man of color. After narrowing the criteria of ownership, it is revealed the small pool of candidates for whom original ownership seems likely. So then, if these buttons did not originally adorn the holiday coat of Toussaint L'Ouverture, they were likely appreciated by someone of similar stature, a narrowly circumscribed group.

Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby makes a quite convincing case when discussing the uniform of a black Haitian man, Jean-Baptiste Belley, in the painting by Anne-Louis Girodet of the same name, 1797. Grigsby defines the importance of the military uniform as a sign when juxtaposed with a black body which although might appear unshackled, may still be interpreted as an enslaved body. "Slavery adhered to his or her black body; it could not be removed. Instead, Belley required appended signs – above all the French uniform – to be recognized as free, as

French, as deputy, and as officer.”⁵³ Grigsby contemplates the power of the uniform and expression of the self-contained Belley to assuage racial indignities and to what extent the figure’s elegance perpetuates the white supremacist assertions of, “fundamental incommensurability of black and white races?”⁵⁴ She quotes Richard Brilliant’s perceived failure of Belley in a French uniform saying, “Despite the stylishness of his clothing, Belley is portrayed as an outsider.”⁵⁵ However, Belley’s sartorial expression is akin to the black dandy which is a practice that intertwaves threads of political resistance.

Monica L. Miller asserts in *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* that the black dandy utilized the sartorial expression as a way to comment on their relationship to authority. Miller goes on to say, “To expose race as a device and assign other signifiers of identity as devices or tools, the black dandy’s method of choice is sartorial style and élan – his crafting and wielding of these weapons allow him to fashion freedom out of ambiguity.”⁵⁶ In order to clarify what could have been interpreted as an ambiguous black body – Girodet fashions Belley as exquisitely free and French through his use of the military uniform and relaxed pose. Steeve O. Buckridge prioritizes material culture by identifying how cultural expressions of dress act as strategies for survival. Buckridge states, “Clothing and unclothing the body, as well as the process and act of dressing up or down, are activities that transform, manipulate and reveal ideologies of both body and dress. We cannot treat dress as independent from the body because the two are inextricably tied.”⁵⁷ In a similar fashion, the headdresses

⁵³ Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby. *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 32.

⁵⁴ Grigsby, 50.

⁵⁵ Grigsby, 50.

⁵⁶ Monica L. Miller. *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 15.

⁵⁷ Nelson, 95.

worn by mulattas in various styles that carried so many different meanings could also be interpreted as sartorial expressions that mediated the black body in its relationship with authority. Brunias's buttons belonging to L'Ouverture's coat could have also functioned in like manner distinguishing a black body as unequivocally free and French.

Furthermore, the buttons are in excellent condition, with the exception of one button (out of 18) that is cracked and one or two are missing the threading loop on the back. It is very clear that these buttons were cherished by their owners for they have not been handled excessively and remain in wearable condition, an astounding feat considering they are 200 years old. I believe the precious treatment of these objects may be a reflection of the high regard held for their (assumed) original owner.

I introduce this series of speculation that these buttons may have actually belonged to L'Ouverture or, at least, someone of similar stature and political motivation to consider the relationship between the artist and the patron. This is important because it would presume that Brunias, an actively employed artist, may have been interested in an abolitionist agenda, or liberatory political practices at the very least. There is only one button where a white man appears. He is standing in the doorway of a humble home and looking upon two women of color in conversation. He has a very satisfied, yet quirky smile on his face. This is the same figure that has been identified in previous regular-scale Brunias works as a self-portrait. I was unable to confirm my suspicions in the Cooper-Hewitt files of this image on one of the buttons being an artist self-portrait. However, it has been confirmed in his larger works. If Brunias has chosen to represent himself on the buttons then it may follow that he supports the agenda of the one who commissioned the buttons. It would have been risky to associate himself with an abolitionist program when his bread-and-butter was supplied mostly by the pro-slavery plantocracy.

Nevertheless, we find a Brunias self-portrait on the buttons attributed to belonging to Toussaint L'Ouverture. This would have been a bold move for the artist.⁵⁸

As previously mentioned, Brunias's class as a painter would have been more consistent with the free people of color who were of a certain material privilege.⁵⁹ He was not the social equivalent of Sir William Young and the plantocracy. Some sources contend that Brunias was married to a woman of color and had close relationships with other people of color through close personal class ties. The Brunias buttons complicate the oeuvre of the artist by simultaneously representing the desires of the plantocracy, as well as, undercutting the colonial agenda through his abolitionist connections. Author Cristina La Porta offers a confirmation of Brunias's social position saying, "Indeed, as an Italian Roman Catholic who disdained, according to some accounts, the prejudices of his British employer, Brunias probably felt just as marginalized as the colored people he depicted."⁶⁰

Therefore, it could be possible that Brunias began to increasingly identify with abolitionist projects and even supported the efforts through his artistic contribution. If the buttons indeed belonged to L'Ouverture then this would have confirmed Brunias's political position as leaning towards the manumission of the oppressed. Just as the pineapples and the mulattas that he painted represented various meanings at different times, Brunias's career as an

⁵⁸ Bagneris confirms that both Lennox Honeychurch and Joan McMurray speculate that Brunias incorporated his self-portrait into several of his works. Bagneris, 21.

⁵⁹ Kriz describes Brunias's social circle saying, "he would have found his social equals not among the British Anglican planters and colonial officials of Young's circle, but among the free people of color who were primarily of French-African descent." Dian Kriz. *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement*, p. 40.

⁶⁰ Cristina La Porta. "Fashion and Identity in Agostino Brunias's Caribbean Paintings." *Fine Art Connoisseur*. (Nov./Dec. 2013), 51.

Italian itinerant artist held various meanings from painter for the plantocracy to possible artist insurgent.

Chapter Four

Coconuts

Eating is rhizome.
---Édouard Glissant, *Tout-Monde*

If you had teeth of steel, you could eat iron coconuts
---Senegalese proverb

Alice B. Toklas's recipe for "Coconut Marmalade" comes to us courtesy of the French poet and critic, Stéphane Mallarmé who describes the syrupy concoction as a "delicate dainty." Boil 2 cups of sugar and ½ cup of water in a copper kettle until it comes to a little pearl, then add the grated coconut to the mixture, stirring with a wooden spatula. After 15 minutes add 2 eggs to another kettle. Then add the coconut mixture to the eggs stirring the marmalade in the same direction. Remove from heat and flavour with vanilla, cinnamon or orange-flower water, and then return to the fire stirring for another five minutes. After letting the marmalade cool for five minutes, pour into a *compotier* (fruit dish) and serve cold.¹

Although Toklas refers to Mallarmé's Marmalade as incomparable, she differs with Mallarmé's preference for cooking the syrup for the length of time he suggests. She prefers a shorter duration, adding that her dessert was already an "excellent candy resembling a Chinese sweet long before it was time to add the yolks of the eggs."² Sarah Garland observes that Toklas is quick to point out the imperfectness of Mallarmé's dessert recipe, but folds this same criticism

¹ Alice B. Toklas. *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1954), 117. Stéphane Mallarmé was a French Symbolist poet and critic whose work is often credited as the artistic and philosophical pre-cursor to Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Futurism.

² Toklas, 117.

upon Toklas saying that, “despite the notoriety of the cookbook, her instructions aren’t infallible either.”³ She adds that Toklas’s cookbook was published with untested, unproofed recipes that have even ruined dinner parties when practiced faithfully according to her instructions. Traci Mari Kelly contends that recipe writing is an author’s promise of truth.⁴ However, Parama Roy decries the completely utilitarian cookbook that suffers from an encyclopedic regurgitation of recipes and regards it as much less compelling in “life” and “work.” She quotes Susan Leonardi on the subject who states that, “[A] cookbook that consisted of nothing but rules for various dishes would be an unpopular cookbook indeed. Even the root of *recipe* – the Latin *recipere* – implies an exchange, a giver, and a receiver. Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be.”⁵ Toklas’s *Cook Book* is far from being a strictly applied science of formulas, but it instead had become her “reason to be,” a context, a point, and story about the life she lived and shared with her partner and many other fascinating receivers of her culinary gifts.

If we consider, then, Kelly’s assertion that recipe writing is an author’s promise of truth – where is the truth in Toklas’s sometime fallible recipes? Finding truth in Toklas’s recipes is a

³ Sarah Garland, “‘A cook book to be read. What about it?’: Alice Toklas, Gertrude Stein and the Language of the Kitchen.” *Comparative American Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (March 2009), 44.

⁴ In “If I Were a Voodoo Priestess,” Kelly looks at the literality of recipe writing, “by signing the text – whether a book, a cookbook, an autobiography, or a recipe card – the author promises that this is the ‘truth.’” Garland, 44. However, this notion of truth as it relates to an autobiography becomes even more complicated when considering the playful “untruthfulness” of Gertrude Stein’s 1934 publication, *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Jeanette Winterson discusses this advent by describing how Stein vandalized the autobiographical form which had become a cliché of literature by remaking autobiography into fiction. Henri Matisse described Stein’s *Autobiography* as, “without taste and without relation to reality.” However, Winterson argues that, “Matisse was accusing Gertrude Stein but the irony of his charge was that is summarised precisely the complaints made against the Modernist movement as a whole, including Post-Impressionism and his own work.” Winterson contends that Stein’s re-discovery of the auto-biographical form was an essential exercise in discovering fresh work rather than clinging to stale remnants of the past. Jeannette Winterson. *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*. New York: Vintage International, 45-60. To what extent then can Toklas’s untested, unproofed recipes be interpreted as a kind of re-discovery of the recipe form in which she fictionalizes the form in a way that offers a fresh perspective on cooking and taste?

⁵ Parama Roy. “Reading Communities and Culinary Communities: The Gastropoetics of the South Asian Diaspora.” *Positions*. Vol., 10, Issue 2 (Fall 2002), 478.

speculative act. Rather than searching for truth in Toklas's recipes, I argue for reading them as expressions of her desire. The recipes are more akin to sketches of memory which become, "a measure of desire."⁶ So then it is possible to consider recipes as improvised performances of desire.

The performative condition of recipes is probably most unequivocally represented in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's, *The Futurist Cookbook*, published in December 1930. After writing his infamous *Futurist Manifesto* in 1909, Marinetti, along with several other Futurists turned their sights and appetites to a revolution in experimental gastronomy. The provocative *Futurist Cookbook* banned the consumption of pasta in Italy, the use of knives, forks, and after-dinner speeches, as well as, several other conventions. Futurist cooking was, "tuned to high speeds like the motor of a hydroplane, will seem to some trembling traditionalists both mad and dangerous: but its ultimate aim is to create a harmony between man's palate and his life today and tomorrow."⁷ Sandra M. Gilbert describes *The Futurist Cookbook* as a wholly new art form that reimagines cuisine as a kind of abstraction, repudiating bourgeois culinary traditions, "and in a way his radically innovative, often bizarre meal plans foreshadowed the avant-garde 'molecular gastronomy.'"⁸ However, Marinetti is not without his detractors; deeply criticized, Futurist cooking garnered much debate from gastronomes, art critics, journalists, and other artists alike. A kind of gastronomic theatre of the absurd, many of the recipes were culinary performances designed to enhance the senses. For example, Futurist Aeropainter, Fillia's recipe "a dinner of white desire" reads:

⁶ Garland, 45.

⁷ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. *The Futurist Cookbook*. (London: Penguin Books, 1932), 11.

⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert. *The Culinary Imagination: From Myth to Modernity*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 5.

Ten Negroes, each holding a lily in his hand, gather round a table in a city by the sea, overwhelmed by an indefinable emotion that makes them long to conquer the countries of Europe with a mixture of spiritual yearning and erotic desire.

Without a word a Negro woman cook serves them twenty fresh white eggs which have been punctured at both ends to inject the insides with a delicate perfume of acacia flowers: the Negroes inhale the contents of the eggs, without breaking the shells.

The Negro cook returns again with a tray laden with pieces of coconut studded with nugat, enclosed in layers of butter and arranged on a bed of boiled rice and whipped cream. Contemporaneously they drink undiluted anise, grappa or gin.⁹

I have included this abbreviation of the Futurist recipe “a dinner of white desire” because it emphasizes the performative aspect of recipes and because it calls for the ingredients of coconut and otherness through the performance of Negroes in a city by the sea. The recipe also yields to a hypnotic banquet of synesthesia absorbing scents of jasmine, anise, and acacia coupled with the exacerbation of spiritual yearnings mixed with erotic desire. My point here is manifest as two-fold, to emphasize the performative aspect of recipes and the concomitant association of coconuts with distant shores, desire, and spiritual yearning.

Recipes are living things, works in progress. The cobbling of time, techniques, and ingredients are some of the culinary liberties yielding delicious discoveries. English Professor and historian of African American foodways Courtney Thorsson argues that the didactic form of recipes are particularly suited to the work of “suturing” and “splitting.” She describes how the reader of a recipe is invited to perform the text. Toklas’s recipes, even the fallible ones, may function not just as textual instructions, but also as scripts for players in a performance. Toklas’s

⁹ Marinetti, 186. Several other Futurist recipes require a great deal of performance including, “geographic dinner;” “economical dinner;” “nocturnal love feast;” “summer luncheon for painters and sculptors;” and “extremist banquet” where the dinner guests are not allowed to eat food, but whose satiety comes from breathing various perfumes as they are surrounded by food sculptures equipped with vaporizers emitting scents of vanilla, red pepper, chocolate, and acacia flowers.

coconuts and Marinetti's "a dinner of white desire" both perform the work of otherness in memory and in culinary mode.

Toklas's contemplation of coconut's otherness is one of the most intriguing insights into the social life of coconuts in her food memoirs. Toklas contemplates the geographic origins of coconut when she describes the coconut as being the principal ingredient from the islands and their coasts. Toklas preemptively admits that anyone who has bought a coconut does not know what to do with it. She concedes this unknowingness to her Parisian identity saying, "For Parisians this classic fruit from afar, amongst the pomegranates or oranges and pineapples, remains a useless curiosity."¹⁰ Despite this so-called uselessness, Toklas finds another use for a similar rendition of the Mallarmé Marmalade in what she calls, "Coco Marmalade," which involves pouring the coconut mixture over cream and a pie crust. In fond remembrance she recollects, "It is still one of our favourite tarts."¹¹ The coconut here possesses mysterious qualities as a tropical exotic biota from afar, and yet its fruity otherness finds its way into Parisian appetites in full delicate daintiness.¹² Sarah Garland highlights the colonialist inflection appearing in Toklas's recipes that romanticize otherness as a kind of seductively ravishing force. She borrows from bell hooks's phrasing saying,

'ethnicity becomes a spice' just as historically desire has been given a material measure in the long and arduous trade routes behind sugar, coffee, sesame, and cocoa. Exotic and expensive ingredients lead to the crystallization of desire through the signifiers of luxury, abundance, and financial ease.¹³ Recipes and

¹⁰ Toklas, 117.

¹¹ Toklas, 117.

¹² One of the cooks who worked for Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas named Jeanne often cooked with coconut adding fresh coconut to chicken dishes. Jeanne would receive correspondence from Martinique and for a while it was assumed that she was from Martinique and therefore the coconut dishes she served were Martinician. However, Toklas mentions that they later discovered that Jeanne's cooking was not particularly Martinician, but in her own style. Jeanne is remembered for her strangeness, mysteriousness (which according to Toklas, Gertrude was unable to interpret), and for cooking often with coconuts.

¹³ Garland, 46.

ingredients from exotic travels and from colonial servants figure desire as geographical and social distance.¹⁴

The connection between ‘ethnicity becomes a spice’ and the recipes and ingredients figuring desire as geographical and social distance is what I am after here as they relate to the symbolic and cultural capital of coconuts in the Caribbean. The qualities attributed to coconuts in Toklas’s food memoirs also appear in the above quote by hooks especially Toklas’s emphasis on coconuts, colonial servants, and geographical/social distance. The two artists that I focus on in this chapter are Puerto Rican artist, Francisco Oller and Bahamian artist, Heino Schmid. 19th century painter Francisco Oller takes up coconuts as an icon of tropical wonderment. This mysterious fruit from the islands becomes a marker of national or rather Caribbean self-identity in the work of Oller as Puerto Rico’s colonial relationship with Spain shifts to the United States in the late 19th century. In his nail-studded coconut sculptures, Heino Schmid also draws upon the coconut for its perception as nutty curiosity while staking a native ownership through coconut symbolism. This discussion of coconuts is therefore bisected into two halves. The first part is devoted to the work of Oller and his painting, *Still Life with Coconuts*, 1893. The second part looks at the work of Schmid’s coconut installation sculptures, *Landmines*, 2011-2012. This study of coconuts which begins in the late 19th century and ends around 2013 offers a way of looking at coconuts and material culture through the lens of trans-geographies, identities in process, and geopolitical aesthetics. The span of time from the late 19th century to 2013 also allows for ruminations on where Caribbean identities have traveled, shifted, or remained consistent during an almost 120 year period. Mimi Sheller discusses how the movement of certain bodies must necessitate the immobilization of other bodies. The present day business of

¹⁴ Sarah Garland, “‘A cook book to be read. What about it?’: Alice Toklas, Gertrude Stein and the Language of the Kitchen.” *Comparative American Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (March 2009), 46.

coconuts is a billion dollar industry. As the exchange of commodities includes the travel of tropical comestibles, I consider which bodies are required to become immobilized. Could these immobilized bodies also be bodies of knowledge?

Toklas's description of coconuts creates a kind of twinness between coconut and geography. Coconuts are consistently represented within the spatial logic of terrestrial geographies allowing for coconuts and geography to become mutual surrogates where coconuts are defined by their geographical locations of origin and the geography of the island is defined by its coconuts. There are environmental forces at work that tether coconuts to their coastlines due to the combination of soil and ground water conditions. *Cocos nucifera* L. is a member of the Cocoidae subfamily of palms and grows best near tropical beaches with adequate rainfall and sunlight.¹⁵ Geographer George F. Deasy describes the seacoast as the most favorable terrain for the concentration of coconuts due to the porous sandy beaches saying, "It is a common coastal tree, and to a lesser extent a tree of the interior, throughout the Tropics" and therefore the primary reason why the commercial coconut industry of the world was founded along the seacoasts.

I liken the seacoasts to the epidermis of the island, the outermost layer of skin, and the most common point of contact with visitors. The porous sandy beaches with their abundance of coconuts act like the porous skin of the island body. The skin or epidermis of the island becoming the most recognizable characteristic of the body space. In her book *Skin Acts: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Black Male Performer*, author Michelle Ann Stephens foregrounds, "the

¹⁵ B.K. Maloney. "Palaeoecology and the Origin of the Coconut." *GeoJournal*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Dec 1993), 355-357. George F. Deasy describes the best temperature complex for coconut growth to be found in locations that are "always hot," with a mean annual temperature around 68 degrees F and for best growth 80 degrees F or higher; the minimum temperature the trees can tolerate is 45-50 degrees F. George F. Deasy. "Factors in the Commercial Coconut Industry." *Economic Geography*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Apr 1941), 130.

skin's role as a site of both libidinal conflict and intersubjective relationality – a site of drives and objects as well as transferential relations.”¹⁶ Drawing upon Paul Gilroy's work that describes the “racial epidermalization as an effect in the field of vision” can be useful in addressing how an epidermalization of island peripheries can impact a field of artistic vision. Stephens describes how, “Culturally, the perception of the skin was increasingly turned into a perception of distance.” The distance and otherness that is ascribed to coconuts can also be explored through this theorization of the skin which speaks to how the gaze reinforces concepts of detachment and difference. Stephens goes on to say,

As scholars recount how “the integument of the body has become a rigid boundary,” this same history of corporeal malediction that creates the skin as a mantle or epidermal casing shapes the geo-historical space of the colony where: “identity ceases to be an ongoing process of self-making and social interaction. It becomes instead a thing to be possessed and displayed. It is a silent sign that closes down the possibility of communication.”¹⁷

Therefore experiencing the coconut laden epidermis of the island body as a geo-historical space of the colony emphasizes the skin as a contested site of possession. In my discussion regarding Schmid's *Landmines*, I will consider how Sarah Ahmed's ‘ethics of touch’ visually translates the skin as a site of social differentiation. As Mimi Sheller describes the colonial experience as “tactile as well as visual,” I ponder the sense of touch as a locus of dispossession and decoloniality. The imminent danger of *Landmines* feels in concert with Sheller's thoughts on the tactile saying, “The ‘social body’ of a colonial society is formed by these sticky ‘economies of touch’ through which proximity and distance are managed.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Michelle Ann Stephens. *Skin Acts: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Black Male Performer*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 7.

¹⁷ Stephens, 23.

¹⁸ Mimi Sheller. *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 114.

The epidermalization of the island bears a coconut complexion. The correlative relationship between coconuts and the skin are evidenced quite literally in the high antioxidant content of coconuts that protects the skin. Its high vitamin C content can expedite wound healing through the stimulation of collagen production and assists in strengthening connective tissue. Coconut milk is used as a remedy for sunburned skin, reducing redness and inflammation, and coconut oil's cosmetic uses on the skin are too numerous to include here. In short, the connection between coconuts and the skin can be explored both through coconut's nutritive relationship with the body and metaphorically as a tropical island signifier. I am imagining the coconut here as a reductive symbol of the island's skin and as a marker of routed identity. Oller's *Still Life with Coconuts* and Schmid's coconut installation, *Landmines*, are two different ways Caribbean artists privilege island topographic symbols and display the skin. I would like to consider the coconut skin of the island as "a site of drives and objects" that lead us to conclusions about artistic devices, uprooted networks of identity, epidermal boundaries, the dangers of possession, and the woe of dispossession.

If as Édouard Glissant mentions that, "A man involved in agriculture is inevitably a man involved in culture: he can no longer produce innocently," then I consider what cultural knowledge is produced from Oller's and Schmid's involvement with the representation of local agriculture vis-à-vis coconuts.¹⁹ One can see the connection present in the term (agri)(culture) when separated accordingly and therefore begs the question of considering how "culture" is manifest in "agriculture." In order to stave off the trend towards an international standardization of consumption Glissant suggests a revival of the aesthetic connection with the earth. This aesthetics of the earth is one that Glissant describes, "as always, anachronistic or naïve:

¹⁹ Édouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 149.

reactionary or sterile...But an aesthetics of disruption and intrusion. Aesthetics of rupture and connection.”²⁰ These are the poetics that I believe are resuscitated in the works of Oller and Schmid as they encourage diverse sensibilities through communities of ecology and the politics of exchange. As Glissant further illuminates, “Have something to exchange that isn’t just sand and coconut trees but, instead, the result of our creative activity.”²¹

Coconut Origins

Around 545 CE, Cosmas, who had become renowned for his cartographical enterprises, wrote a treatise on the coconut palm, *Topographia Christiana*.²² Stephanie Pedersen describes in *Coconut*, that the origins of the coconut palm have been a focus of debate leading scientists to consider travel writings, fossils, art, and genetics in their search for unraveling the mysterious origins of coconut. She refers to the work of Odoardo Beccari, a notable palm specialist who asserted during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that coconut palms originated in the Southeast Pacific region.²³ His argument rested on the fact that there are, “more varieties of coconut palms in the Eastern Hemisphere than in the Americas.”²⁴ Acknowledging the mysterious and highly debatable origins of the coconut palm, Pedersen instead focuses on extolling the exceptional nutritional benefits of the coconut with the hopes of wooing the unconverted. Many of the medicinal and nutritional benefits of coconuts have been known to

²⁰ Glissant, 150-151.

²¹ Glissant, 153.

²² *Topographia Christiana* is famous for providing one of the earliest known world maps and for advancing the notion that the earth was flat; the author argues the idea of a spherical earth as “pagan” and provides scriptural reference based upon the tabernacle of Moses to support this idea of the earth being a rectangular plane.

²³ Most commercially grown coconuts originate in Southeast Asia and take approximately 1-2 months to travel to North America and Europe. It is almost impossible to determine the age of a green coconut.

²⁴ Stephanie Pedersen. *Coconut: The Complete Guide to the World’s Most Versatile Superfood*. (New York: Sterling, 2015), 1.

native users for centuries, however, Pedersen's work is written for the skeptical newcomers unacquainted with the superfood. A few notable qualities of this superfood include its ability to improve immune system functions; reduces parasitic, bacterial, fungal, and viral infections due to its medium chain fatty acids and lauric acid; assists in increasing metabolism and improving thyroid function; and helps to prevent heart conditions.²⁵

A Man and his Coconuts

Francisco Manuel Oller y Cestero was born in Puerto Rico on June 17, 1833 into an upper-middle-class family of Spanish origin.²⁶ At the age of eighteen, Oller traveled to Spain to study at the Academia de San Fernando.²⁷ He later traveled to Paris forging relationships with artists and mentors that he would maintain for most of his life. His first years spent in Paris (1858-65) would be followed by several other subsequent trips between Europe and Puerto Rico throughout his career. Oller's work was influenced by several artistic movements at various times including a fusion of Realism, Impressionism, Naturalism, Neo-Impressionism, Symbolism, in addition to his classical training in Madrid. Edward J. Sullivan counts Gustave Courbet as a significant influence upon Oller's work saying, "Courbet was a key figure within the development of Oller's sensibility during his first Parisian trip, and he would remain a

²⁵ Pedersen goes on to illuminate the nutritional components of coconut including: protein, fiber, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, potassium, zinc, vitamin C, B-complex, phytonutrients, fatty acids, amino acids, electrolytes, and antimicrobial elements. She emphasizes the potency and versatility of coconut including using the coconut milk, water, flesh, and meat providing several practical healthful uses and recipes. Pedersen, viii.

²⁶ Edward J. Sullivan. *From San Juan to Paris and Back: Francisco Oller and Caribbean Art in the Era of Impressionism*, 47. Sullivan indicates that Oller's upper-middle-class background and technical training could have afforded him a comfortable life accepting commissions for painting in churches and in the capital. The Spanish governor of the island, Juan Prim, had offered to finance Oller's education at the academy in Rome at the age of sixteen. However, his mother feeling he was too young for this venture, admonished him to wait for 2 years until he was eighteen when he went to study at the Academia de San Fernando in Madrid, Spain.

²⁷ At the Museo del Prado, Oller was exposed to Spanish paintings dating from the sixteenth century that served as a major source of inspiration. The most notable past director of the Academia was Francisco de Goya who had been the director in the late eighteenth century. One of Oller's instructors, Federico de Madrazo, who was also the director of the Academia, had also studied with Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres in Paris in the 1830s.

constant aesthetic force or spiritual mentor for decades.”²⁸ He developed a life-long friendship with Paul Cézanne and fellow Caribbean Impressionist artist, Camille Pissarro, his closest friend in Paris, who was from the island of St. Thomas.²⁹ Later in his career he founded several art schools in Puerto Rico admitting many women and people of color (including former slaves) from an assortment of social and economic backgrounds as students, an uncommon occurrence at the time.

Edward J. Sullivan’s book, *From San Juan to Paris and Back: Francisco Oller and Caribbean Art in the Era of Impressionism*, (2014), follows the life and work of Oller. The book’s title indicates the circuitous nature of the artist’s life and oeuvre beginning in San Juan, Puerto Rico traveling and living in Paris and returning to his homeland (with several European travels in between.)³⁰ The title also indicates the author’s agenda for creating a specific framework that places the artist in juxtaposition with Impressionism. Sullivan’s book endeavors to fashion a global art history by looking at an artist from the Americas who travels and works in Europe, forges relationships with European artists, actively participates in Parisian artistic life, and returns to Puerto Rico. I believe this is the author’s intervention to address the global turn of art history in a way that offers a re-mapping by addressing the local and the global simultaneously.

²⁸ Sullivan, 55.

²⁹ Sullivan calls attention to the unraveling of Oller’s friendships with Pissarro and Cézanne later in his career mentioning, “His friends Pissarro and Cézanne came to dislike some of Oller’s later works, and he was not an orthodox adherent to their manner of portraying the world.” Sullivan, 54.

³⁰ According to palaeoecologist B.K. Maloney, coconuts have already had a very circuitous route before they reached Puerto Rico. Maloney states that according to historical data, “Vasco de Gama found the coconut in India and East Africa and brought it back to Europe. By 1550 it had been established in the Cape Verde Islands, San Tome and Puerto Rico. It was the Spanish who brought the coconut from the Philippines to the Caribbean and the Portuguese, despite their earlier reluctance to plant, to Brazil to provision their ships.” B.K. Maloney. “Palaeoecology and the Origin of the Coconut.” *GeoJournal*. Vol. 31, No. 4, (Dec. 1993), 357.

Sullivan's *From San Juan to Paris and Back*, incorporates a kind of 'over there' and 'back again' travel narrative. Leon Wainwright challenges the difficulties of this 'over there' and 'back again/back then' approach when he talks about, "confronting and undoing not only the orthodox attachment to spatio-temporal narratives of cultural value, but the entire cross-matching of 'over there' and 'back then', which suffuses even the 'global turn' in art history."³¹

Wainwright advocates for a more exploded global art history that continually disrupts and exposes, "normative spatio-temporality in historical representation" in ways that are not always about contending with former imperial centers and the displacement of colonial peripheries.³²

Sullivan's and Wainwright's approaches need not be mutually exclusive. They both incorporate transatlantic perspectives that reveal the underpinnings of canon formations and demonstrate, "why there is a need to challenge the assumption of Caribbean anachronism."³³ Sullivan identifies the particulars of the latter critique of Oller's work as anachronistic by his fellow Impressionist artist friends.

Nevertheless, Sullivan takes up the literal re-mapping of Oller's career through various countries, artistic movements and connections cultivating a tension between the global as a spatial phenomenon and a Euro-centric narrative that argues for a more inclusive discipline. Talinn Grigor offers that, "To write global art history could suggest relentlessly revealing the normalcy of that marginalized history, of that time, of that place, of that agency, of that particular exchange and production, and of that art history as (normative) art history."³⁴ Sullivan is in line

³¹ Leon Wainwright. *Timed Out: Art and the transnational Caribbean*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 13.

³² Wainwright, 13.

³³ Wainwright, 16.

³⁴ Talinn Grigor. "What Art Does: Methodological Privileging of Agency and Art History's Global Dispute in 1901" found in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*. Eds. Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza. (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2014), 140. Grigor continues to address the shaping of a global art history by suggesting it would include a demonstration of global exchanges, global productions, and a global agencies which

with Grigor's approach, in so much, as he reveals the normalcy of Oller's marginalized history through the mechanics of his everyday life of exchange and production creating a rather (normative) spatio-temporality and global art history.

Sullivan's *From San Juan* also accompanied the exhibition, *Impressionism and the Caribbean: Francisco Oller and his Transatlantic World* at the Brooklyn Museum (October 2015-January 2016) that he co-curated with the Brooklyn Museum's Richard Aste, Curator of European Art. The exhibition emphasized the transatlantic nature of Oller's life and work confirming this as the first U.S. exhibition that presents Oller's work within its Old World and New World contexts. In accordance with the flow of the book, the exhibition accentuates Oller's relationships with French Impressionist artists Gustave Courbet, Paul Cézanne, Camille Pissarro, and Claude Monet. In this discussion I will refer to both the book and the exhibition when talking about Oller's *Still Life with Coconuts*.

Oller's *Still Life with Coconuts*, circa 1893, was featured as the signature image for the Brooklyn Museum show (Fig. 4.1). Gracing the cover of all of the exhibition's promotional materials are the dramatically staged verdant coconuts atop a wooden table. The entrance hall of *Impressionism and the Caribbean: Francisco Oller and his Transatlantic World* featured only two paintings, hung side-by-side, with the introductory wall text: Oller's *Self-Portrait* (1889-1892) on the left and *Still Life with Coconuts* on the right (Fig. 4.2 and Fig. 4.1). Sullivan reminds us that Oller had originally painted *Coconuts* as a companion piece to his *Still Life with Plantains* in the same year, 1893, in what the author refers to as two of his most successful works, "because they serve as indicators of the ideals that Oller wished to express in his

coincidentally are all at the heart of my discussion regarding the global exchange of tropical comestibles from the Americas.

figurative compositions and landscapes.”³⁵ *Coconuts* is a horizontal composition while *Plantains* is a vertical arrangement of plantains in various shades of ripeness, some green, some yellow, with fully erect tips and tautly ribbed skins emphasizing their youthful virility (Fig. 4.3). Oller’s phallogentric study of plantains and smooth, rounded coconuts could also be read as masculine/feminine companion pieces. Both works were originally painted to be hung side-by-side or on opposite sides of a dining room. However, the curatorial decision to usurp the traditional accompaniment of *Coconuts* with *Self-Portrait* achieves a greater urgency of vision because of the complimentary nature of *Coconuts* as a study in green and *Self-Portrait* as a study in red. In *Self-Portrait*, Oller represents himself as a bewhiskered aging artist in a bright red smock with black tassels issuing a furtive glance directly at the viewer. While this chapter mainly focuses on the tropical commodity of coconuts, *Self-Portrait* offers a venue for discussing another hotly battled commodity from the New World – cochineal.

An insect native to Mexico and living on nopal cactus, cochineal could be dried, treated, and excised to produce the most powerful and versatile red dyes in the world. Oller’s crimson artist smock could also be read as an acknowledgement of cochineal dyed garments worn to signify exceptional power and prestige, as well as, a commodity fundamental to the colonization of the New World; and for Oller possibly a source of regional pride and artistic legacy. Author Amy Butler Greenfield’s, *A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire*, thoroughly investigates the history of cochineal and its role in building empires. Extremely expensive and elusive, cochineal was used in the palettes of European masters such as Tintoretto, Vermeer, Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyck, Velázquez, Canaletto, La Tour, Gainsborough, Seurat, and J.M.W. Turner. To be more specific, Greenfield identifies

³⁵ Sullivan, 137.

Rembrandt's use of cochineal in his painting, *The Jewish Bride*, 1667, as witnessed in the bride's luxuriously red gown and shows how cochineal can be found in the sanguine skies of J.M.W. Turner's sunsets.

By the time of Oller's *Self-Portrait*, a synthetic red dye had been invented. However, Greenfield discusses at length the social life of cochineal during the Renaissance stating, "But for Renaissance merchants and artists, the scarlet turban was an effective form of self-advertisement – exotic proof of success in international markets and of their access to the most coveted red dyes."³⁶ She goes on to say, "To possess cochineal was to possess the color of military prowess and imperial glory – a metaphorical triumph that meant everything to Protestant England. Among Englishmen, their ability to steal cochineal from Spanish ships – and to make use of it in their own industries – was a point of immense patriotic pride."³⁷ Cochineal was used as the red dye for the British military's red coats and of great importance to the textile industry in general. Subsequently, Oller's self-fashioning in the scarlet red associated with cochineal could indicate a cultural pride and simultaneously an artistic connection with European masters. Cochineal, like many of the other commodities discussed throughout this dissertation, was crucial to the expansion of colonial powers. My point here is to go beyond the exhibition's decision to hang a "red" painting next to a "green" painting because of the complementary color display, and to briefly call attention to two major industries of tropical commodities, cochineal

³⁶ Amy Butler Greenfield. *A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 27. In Voltaire's *Candide*, he mentions satirically that cochineal is proof, "that humans were living in the best of all possible worlds." Greenfield, 85. Not just an artist's paint, cochineal was used as makeup as well. "In Elizabethan England, the startling contrast of vivid cochineal-stained lips and pallid white cheeks, coated with lead powder, was considered the height of beauty." Greenfield, 117-118.

³⁷ Greenfield, 81.

and coconuts, and contemplate how these two industries have shaped our world and affected artistic practice.

I believe the iconicity and self-referential nature of *Coconuts* is one of the reasons it was chosen to be the “face” of the exhibition, especially given that coconuts possess a long history as anthropomorphic “faces” in art, a subject I will turn to later in the chapter. The eight freshly picked green coconuts are interlaced with spiny stalks still attached to their fruits extending throughout the flattened picture plane. One coconut on the far left has been cut in half revealing its milky center and its sweet coconut meat has begun to be carved out as a smaller slice of white coconut meat sits temptingly close to the table’s edge. This particular technique of displaying a fruit of the New World cut in half, satisfying the curiosity of its interior, follows a traditional tableaux of representing New World agricultural bounty. Yet, despite the bountiful offering of these fleshy coconuts, an aura of mysterious uncertainty and wild abandon taints the atmosphere as if nature has reclaimed its fruits and dares the viewer to taste from its table.

The spindly stalks creep out from the nexus of the composition like arachnid extremities contributing to what Sullivan refers to as the “centrifugal force” of this painting, saying, “Oller paints a dark void at the center of the canvas, out of which radiate the stems as well as the coconuts themselves.”³⁸ The pronounced compression of space pushes the roughly hewn roots into the forefront of the beholder. The sharp points and scraggly edges of the root system prevent easy entrance into the scene. Oller creates a kind of coconut *Noli me tangere*. We may look, but not touch. The unruly roots create an organic blockade around the coconuts. In addition to the possessive tendrils, Oller has added another treacherous barrier to the fruits by

³⁸ Sullivan, 141.

placing a long wood-handled machete on the edge of the table with its sharp edge facing the viewer.³⁹ The handle of the camouflaged machete blends in with the board atop the table and the stalks of the coconuts due to the optical rhythms of the wooden table and wooden handle of the machete deceiving the eye. The unassuming machete is placed in a way that is rendered precarious because the machete's handle teeters off the edge of the table taunting the balance between handle and blade and the balance between visual consumption and inaccessible fruits. The somewhat concealed weapon, possibly used to cut down the coconuts, is seldom mentioned in the literature because of its obscured nature, misinterpretation, and because of the optical insistence on the green, fleshy coconuts.

Reconsidering Sullivan's title from a routed point of view that considers rooted origins, *From San Juan to Paris and Back: Francisco Oller and Caribbean Art in the Era of Impressionism*, is a direct reflection of what Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey identifies in her book, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. The comparative nature of *Routes and Roots* suggests that, "Attention to movement offers a paradigm of rooted routes, of a mobile, flexible, and voyaging subject who is not physically or culturally circumscribed by the terrestrial boundaries of island space."⁴⁰ Indeed, Oller's career offers a paradigmatic model of rooted routes, a globalized art history, and the flexibility and mobility of an artist who exceeded the boundedness of island spaces and yet returned to an island space as his homestead. Oller's *Coconuts* draw attention to the free-floating movement of the rooted structure as an expression of boundless energy that celebrates its own islandness without the

³⁹ Sullivan claims that this is not a machete but a "small knife" that would have been unable to cut down these coconuts. However, I disagree. When viewed closely, the machete exceeds the length of three large, whole green coconuts side-by-side. This is nowhere near the size of a "small knife" and could very well be the same instrument used to cut down the coconuts.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey. *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 3.

literal rootedness in island habitation. The coconut roots are their own voyaging subject. I return to the opening epigraph by Édouard Glissant, “Eating is rhizome” as an example of reading Oller’s *Coconuts* through a rhizomatic lens. Replete with culinary metaphors, Valerie Loichot advises that Glissant’s exploration of theoretical concepts through food is, “Perhaps because of the perceived trivial nature of the culinary, Glissant’s critics have overlooked his fertile reflections on food.”⁴¹ Oller’s artistic life, friendships with Impressionist artists, and *Coconuts*’s flattened picture plane could be addressed in this quote from Glissant saying,

When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place he has newly set anchor, he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and present belonging.⁴²

This is one of the reasons I have referred to *Coconuts* as self-referential. I believe the flattened picture plane isn’t just an artistic device that communicates the “pictorial urgency” of the composition, but may also represent a flattened, uprootedness communicating a kind of “existential urgency” of a man seeking the reconciliation of his artistic self-identity. Glissant’s reference to “being split” is also evident in the coconut split in half on the left side of the composition. *Coconuts* betrays a rooted identity that Glissant identifies as one that, “is founded in the distant past of a vision; allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land; rooted the thought of self and of territory.”⁴³

In contrast to rooted thought, *Coconuts* conveys a relational identity, “that is produced in the chaotic network of Relation; does not think of a land as a territory from which to project

⁴¹ Loichot, 2.

⁴² Glissant, 143.

⁴³ Glissant, 143-144.

toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps.”⁴⁴

Reading Oller’s chaotic network of twisted roots and large machete as relational indicators are inclined to an identity as a system of relation. As Glissant goes on to describe it as, “a form of violence that challenges the generalizing universal and necessitates even more stringent demands for specificity. But it is hard to keep in balance.”⁴⁵ It would therefore follow that as a representational force of a rhizomatic identity, the machete is “hard to keep in balance” as it teeters dangerously off of the table. The spiky root system is its own arrangement of violence in shape and abrupt, sharp edges. This is a very close gastropoetical reading of Glissant’s identity in relation, however, I believe *Coconuts* accomplishes what he refers to as an “aesthetics of the earth.” An aesthetics that he describes as one of, “disruption and intrusion” and “rupture and connection” is accomplished through the *Coconuts* root system “disrupted and ruptured” from their source of the coconut palm; “intruding” into the compressed picture plane; and “connection” through the vision and contemplation of the beholder.

Glissant could also be speaking of Oller’s *Coconuts* when he writes, “[s]ubmarine roots; that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its networks and branches.”⁴⁶ *Coconuts*, like Oller’s career was free-floating in the world through networks of friendship, artistic exchange, and the literal network of branches we find in the painting. I believe a rhizomatic reading of *Coconuts* could therefore be understood as self-portraiture. The hanging of *Self-Portrait* in the Brooklyn Museum exhibition alongside *Coconuts* foreshadowing this discussion allows us to consider

⁴⁴ Glissant, 144.

⁴⁵ Glissant, 142.

⁴⁶ DeLoughrey, 17.

coconuts, as the “skin” of the island in terms of painting Oller’s own skin as a self-portrait.⁴⁷

Sullivan’s reading of *Coconuts* leans towards the relational nature of the composition,

We read the composition in a circular way, as opposed to (or, rather, complementing) the back-and-forth motion of the plantains in the painting’s companion. The circular motion is enhanced by the roundness of the coconuts, and it is reiterated, at the extreme left, by the bulbous forms of the stems that extend beyond the confines of our field of vision at the right.⁴⁸

Finally, my approach has examined the precariousness of a Puerto Rican subject negotiating a transatlantic Caribbean artistic identity in a way that takes up the gustatory as a navigational compass. I argue that *Coconuts* becomes the protagonist in the life of an artist negotiating a rhizomatic identity. In the following discussion I consider how the materiality of coconuts serve as a counterpoint for synesthesia in the work of Heino Schmid.

Heino Schmid and *Landmines*

Born in The Bahamas in 1976, Heino Schmid currently lives and works in Nassau. He was trained at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia where he received a BFA in Photography and at the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual and Design in the Netherlands where he received a MA in Fine Arts. In 2011-2012 he created *Landmines*, an installation of several dried coconuts whose surfaces are studded with steel nails and positioned in a loosely scattered assemblage on the floor (Figs. 4.4-4.5). The installation was featured in the Volta art fair in New York in 2013. The VoltaNY website published the following observations on the piece:

The context of much of Heino Schmid’s work is concerned with narrative and the reconsideration of personal stories in the public forum. Using a variety of media such as video, drawing, installation and photography, he investigates the often

⁴⁷ “In a similar vein, Robert Sullivan’s poem “Ocean Birth” inscribes the emergence of the islands of the sea and imagines their human residents on the “skin of the ocean.”” DeLoughrey, 17.

⁴⁸ Sullivan, 141.

simple, sometimes irrelevant encounters and collisions between people and their environments.⁴⁹

I have included this quote because it addresses the narrative function within a public space and his perceived simple engagement with people and their environments to the point of causing collisions. All of these components are key functions of *Landmines* and to a certain extent – landmines themselves as explosive devices. Schmid takes up one of the most iconic symbols of the Caribbean and reconstitutes its connotations from relaxation, tourism, and beaches to one of deadly subterfuge through form and title. Patricia Mohammed refers to Caribbean visual iconography as signifiers of past colonial histories where slave and master relations afforded lifestyles of luxury to the wealthy and privileged saying, “The accretion of this metaphor is the more common coconut palm which draws the imagination of the economy tourist...emulating the past master’s experience in a scale writ smaller.”⁵⁰ There are possibilities of reading Schmid’s seizure of a tropical icon and challenging the dominant discourse through transformation of the object as an act of self-empowerment and self-representation. This re-appropriation of the dominant trope of Caribbeanness as a tactical strategy towards decoloniality allow us to consider how colonial hegemonic discourses are fractured, displaced, or dispossessed. Like Oller’s spidery tendrils surrounding the green coconuts, Schmid too has created a barrier around the coconuts through the application of numerous steel nails driven into the dried coconuts prohibiting the physical sensation of touch, yet charging the atmosphere with a sense of urgency and visceral intimidation. A stunning sculptural display, Schmid’s own coconut *Noli me tangere* is reminiscent of Kongolese nail fetishes where a wooden figure of a person or animal is subjected to the puncturing of steel nails throughout its body and head for the

⁴⁹ <http://ny.voltashow.com/archive/2013/list-of-exhibitors/heino-schmid/>

⁵⁰ Patricia Mohammed. *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation*. (Oxford: MacMillan, 2009), 297.

purposes of contractual agreements and magic. I am interested in the shared aesthetics between Schmid's *Landmines* and Kongolese nail fetishes and will consider how the materiality of Kongolese folkways are present in the Caribbean.

A landmine is a man-made explosive device that detonates once it has come into contact with a trespasser. They are often used as tactical barriers of warfare to protect borderlands, territories, or military encampments and have the ability to inflict collateral damage to any individual who unknowingly steps on them. Schmid emphasizes the tactility of this danger by including the large protruding steel nails from the coconuts which create a menacing exterior, discouraging the sense of touch. Another key feature of landmines is their near imperceptibility when they are embedded in the ground which, of course, adds to their effectiveness. Schmid's coconut *Landmines* are more obvious in their potentially destructive capabilities as they are scattered above ground and therefore may be considered as an artistically strategic device. Landmines get their name from the mines or tunnels that were dug beneath an enemy's military encampment where the earth would collapse due to the hollowed out space destroying the enemy's fortification. Later on technology was developed to plant explosive devices in these hollowed out mines and then detonate the explosives destroying the enemy's defenses. Today, rough-and-ready explosive devices created by paramilitary are commonly referred to as IED's, (Improvised Explosive Devices); the term landmine, however, usually refers to a device assembled by the military. Landmines are very controversial because of their ability to remain live years after military conflicts have been resolved and their ability to inflict incredible damage on an indiscriminate basis.⁵¹

⁵¹ The Ottawa Treaty was ratified in 1997 as an act to eliminate the world of landmines. Known formally, as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, The Ottawa Treaty includes 162 state parties. However, the United States of America, Russia, and China are not signatories of the Ottawa Treaty.

In *Kongo: Power and Majesty* edited by Alisa Lagamma, the various contributors draw attention to the history of art of the Kongo and its various pathways into European collections, contentious war entanglements, and the expansive powers of Kongolese art. Kongo here is spelled with a “K” in order to distinguish it from the colonized form of the term which is spelled with a “C.” The volume was produced to coincide with the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (September 18, 2015 - January 3, 2016.) *Kongo: Power and Majesty* is a wealthy volume rich in color images; historical text which provides a Chronology of Kingship of the Kingdoms of Loango and Kongo dating back to the 14th century; and author contributions regarding the details of various figures in the exhibition. The curatorial vision for the exhibition coincided with the book in spirit and representation displaying many of the sculptures, figures, paintings, and ephemera discussed in the book.

Alisa Lagamma coincides her discussion regarding Kongolese art with the oft cited references to Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899.) During Conrad’s position as steamship commander for the Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo he witnessed atrocities committed on forced laborers during the harvest for rubber and ivory. The brutality and violence he experienced under the reign of King Leopold II’s Congo Free State inspired the setting and action conveyed in *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad’s literary stage provides a framework for discussion of Kongolese art because *Heart of Darkness* occurs at the crossroads of tremendous colonial power shifts that would have devastating effects upon the Kongo and influence in other parts of the world.

After the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century, colonial forces sought control of the Kongo’s natural resources. The rise of western industrialization insured that the race for resources would take an international focus. The Kongo’s natural resources: timber, ivory, gold

dust, groundnuts, rubber, beeswax, guns, dyewoods, and especially palm oil fuel the rivalries among Great Britain, Portugal, France, and Belgium.⁵² Under these conditions of an increasingly contentious atmosphere were three new styles of *minkisi* of the *n'kondi* variety created from the Loango coast as apotropaic symbols of self-defense, even though the practice of creating *minkisi* was present long before the 19th century international conflicts.

Minkisi (or *nkisi* in the singular) are sculptural deterrents filled with personalized charms and magic. The wooden figurative statues may appear life-size or in the range of two to three feet high. Often placed outdoors in public spaces the *minkisi* were made from carefully chosen wood from a more durable variety to withstand the elements. Often represented as standing figures, mouth agape (some exposing filed teeth); arms *akimbo* as a sign of being ready for war; and a carved out abdomen where the *bilongo* was placed (sacred magic in the form of quartz crystals, reflective objects, animal claws, teeth, binding vines or other materials used to summon the spirit for power and protection.) The figure was then covered with nails and blades. In the edited volume, *Kongo Across the Waters*, the authors describe the activation of the *nkisi* by the ritual specialist and the supplicant who, “drove a small iron wedge or nail into the wood of the figure as a testament of their intentions and to animate the prayer.”⁵³ This is referred to as activating the figure’s *nganga*, or spiritual force or empowering matter.

For example, from the *Kongo Across the Waters* exhibition we find a 19th century *nkisi nkondi*, presumably Mangaaka, from the Yombe peoples of Mayombe in lower Kongo, DRC. A representative example, the standing figure, with arms *akimbo*, has an elongated ovoid head with wide open eyes seeing all, and mouth agape (Figs. 4.6-4.7). Mainly the expansive torso is covered in steel nails along with a few on the feet, legs, and jawline of the face creating a

⁵² Alisa Lagamma, ed. *Kongo: Power and Majesty*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), 221.

⁵³ Susan Cooksey, eds. *Kongo across the Waters*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 232.

simulated steel “beard” and contributing to the figure’s terrifying glare. Some figures have added pieces of raffa-cord bands known as *nsunga*, pouches to conceal witchcrafts, or added fragments of cloth, armbands, bracelets, layers of resin, animal fibers, in addition to other plant or mineral matter. The solar plexus is turned into an empty receptacle that once would have been filled with *bilongo*, but has since been removed. Some authors contend that when the *minkisi* were confiscated by European forces, the local priests removed the *bilongo* before they were absconded thereby diffusing the spiritual power of the vessel – much like deactivating a bomb or landmine. The authors discuss this deconsecration of the figure saying, “One may imagine local specialists engaged in acts of sabotage to decommission instruments of power, thereby releasing them in a sanitized and harmless form.”⁵⁴ Not all *minkisi* were decommissioned as some retained their *bilongo* intact during their confiscation and subsequent travels.

The purpose of these figures were to signify the symbolic gestures of contractual agreements related to trade or politics or as an arbitration of disputes, and were publicly consecrated. The violation of the agreement would mean the offending party would suffer great sickness or even death. In other cases, if someone was a victim of theft, a *nkisi* figure would represent a successful plan of retribution through the hunting down and punishment of the thief.⁵⁵ Cooksey goes on to say, “*Minkisi* of the *nkondi* type were sent after thieves and witches, and *nkisi* Mayangu was known to inflict them with *lubanzi*, a disease described as a stitch in the side, causing difficulty breathing.”⁵⁶ Because of the fierce scramble for possession of local resources by colonizers, the *minkisi* were promulgated by local leaders as a counterbalance to the

⁵⁴ Cooksey, 265.

⁵⁵ Lagamma adds notes from a letter written by Oscar Sonnenberg who described the powers of the figure to deter a crime, “When a Native has been robbed, he assists the priest of this fetish and begs him to drive a nail into the image against the known or unknown thief. During the art of driving the nail into the images he not only asks the Mangaka [sic] to punish the thief but all his family as well.” Lagamma, 227.

⁵⁶ Cooksey, 196.

local violence exacted against their humanity and resources. Much like the appearance of coconuts along the coastlines, it is among Kongo coastal communities that the Mangaaka found these *minkisi* to be most effective where consequences of lawlessness and crime were most deterred by their presence. As a result, “The dangerous hold of this potent weapon on the local imagination challenged European interests, prompting the widespread seizure of Mangaaka figures by the English, Portuguese, and Belgians.”⁵⁷ The *minkisi* were referred to as “bitter enemies of European governments” because of their power to stave off colonizing forces. The hostilities experienced along Kongo coastlines and within the interior of the territories therefore resulted in an increased production force of defensive *minkisi* as weapons against increasingly savage European powers hungry for natural resources. In a way therefore, the nail covered fetishes perform the service of landmines protecting borders and safeguarding Kongo communities from trespassers. However, before I launch a full comparative analysis between *minkisi* and *Landmines*, I would like to submit the relevance of Kongo cultural pathways in the Americas as they appear aesthetically in the work of contemporary artists.

Kongo society was subjected to the transatlantic slave trade through the capture of members of its diverse society who were transported to the Americas. *Kongo Across the Waters* refers to archeological evidence, extensive documentary data, and oral histories as it charts the appearance of Kongolese aesthetics in the Americas where the development of beliefs and practices are treated as part of the Kongo Diaspora. In lieu of reflecting upon the considerable archeological data presented in the literature that supports evidence of Kongo folkways and cosmological beliefs in the Americas, I would like to focus on the trends in contemporary

⁵⁷ Cooksey, 265.

Caribbean art and throughout the black Atlantic that reference Kongo aesthetics and draw comparisons to Schmid's *Landmines*.⁵⁸

Cuban artist, José Bedia, is a practitioner of the Kongo influenced Afro-Cuban religion, Palo Monte Mayombe, whose art draws upon his beliefs.⁵⁹ Since the 1990s, he has lived and worked in Miami. Susan Cooksey describes Bedia's painting *Nkisi Malongo Prueba Fuerza*, 1995, as an example of this fusion. In the work he represents two *nkisi* facing each other in communication with one another. His installations in this style of his oeuvre include installing elements relating to *minkisi* such as creating an actual container of *nganga* or *prenda* representing the spiritual force of the objects. Another artist living and working in Miami, but of Haitian descent, Edouard Duval-Carrié, embraces Kongo imagery and references to Haitian Vodou which draws upon its influences from African Fon, Yoruba, and Kongo religions in a syncretic gesture combined with Catholicism. He incorporates visual narratives of Vodou such as tracing the movements of African spirits from Haiti to Miami through his descriptions and iconography of *lwas*. In this Migration series (1996) Cooksey describes, "The Kongo Mayaka standing to the far right is dressed in forest leaves and wears a feathered headdress."⁶⁰

While a graduate student at Yale University in the late 1990s, Kenyan born and Brooklyn-based artist Wangechi Mutu created *minkisi minkondi* inspired mixed-media sculptures. These contemporary *minkisi minkondi* figures were featured at the Johannesburg Biennale in 1997 as an example of her work exploring the ritualized object and modernization of African rites and symbols. African American artist, Renée Stout, has engaged directly with

⁵⁸ This also means that I am circumventing a very rich discussion of the impact and engagement with African art among Modernists and African American artists in the early 20th century because it would become an incommensurable segue that would detract from my main discussion regarding coconuts.

⁵⁹ Kongo symbols appear in its graphic writing system (*firnas*).

⁶⁰ Cooksey, 363.

Kongo *nkisi* art throughout her career such as in *Fetish No. 2* (1988); *Self-Portrait no. 2 (Self-Portrait as Inkisi)*; and *Master of the Universe*, (2011-12.) Stout has constructed articulations of “*nkisi*-like objects that compelled her with their aura of hidden power.”⁶¹ Atlanta-based artist, Radcliffe Bailey, explores the history of the black Atlantic incorporating Kongo cosmology in his work. Contemporary artists such as Betye Saar, Carrie Mae Weems, Tania Bruguera, and David Hammons have also embraced similar approaches that challenge Western understandings of American identities through exploring African aesthetics. As suspected, these are just a few of several examples of Kongo influences in the arts that does not include, however, the Kongo presence in the decorative arts which would encompass an even richer cache of artistic evidence.

Returning to the Glissant quote presented of an aesthetics of the earth, “as always, anachronistic or naïve: reactionary or sterile...But an aesthetics of disruption and intrusion. Aesthetics of rupture and connection.”⁶² Both *minkisi* and *Landmines* ascribe to this definition of an aesthetics of the earth. African art forever contending with assignments of primitiveness in the West have often situated it as naïve and anachronistic. *Landmines*, through a kind of crudeness of natural and man-made materials could also be read as anachronistic or naïve and definitely reactionary as all landmine devices are. The potential for physical “disruption and intrusion” is represented in the *minkisi*’s powerful *nganga* and *Landmines*’s reference to explosive devices and its repellent steel nails. Yet, both *minkisi* and *Landmines* require the presence of an audience or someone to physically occupy the local space to energize the figure or installation. As mentioned earlier, the consecration of the *minkisi* was an openly held ceremony

⁶¹ Cooksey, 364.

⁶² Glissant, 150-151. Lagamma further clarifies that, “At the close of the nineteenth century, all trade had been taken over by foreigners.” Lagamma, 221.

that required public acknowledgement and *Landmines* requires a viewer in the public space as well to connect with the installation.

Schmid identifies as an artist of Dutch and Bahamian descent, not of Afro descent. However, I argue that Afro-Kongo aesthetics appear in his work as a result of the instinctive echo of Kongo Diasporic presence. Schmid reflects on his approach saying, “I trust that whatever there is about me that is Caribbean comes out in my work through the materials or visual references,” he adds. “I don’t question it too much because I believe all of these instincts are honest and make their way into the work and it becomes part of the discussion – it’s not a necessary reference to understanding the work.”⁶³ The universal metaphor of protecting one’s homeland from usurpers is present in the materiality of his installation. Schmid states, “Although I strive for universal metaphors, I approach each body of work in a very personal way. Using self-referential experiences as an avenue to illuminating collective experiences I hope to reveal the subtle dramas that inform social dynamics and ultimately bring those realities to the forefront for discussion.”⁶⁴ Schmid’s militarization of a Caribbean icon speaks to the social dynamics between possession and dispossession. Just as the production of *minkisi* was increased as an affront to the dispossession of resources and humanity, could *Landmines* also operate as form of fervent self-possession against the aggressive will of trespassers (read: tourism?) To what extent is *Landmines* a *minkisi* intervention exacted against colonizing touristic forces extracting local resources? According to the U.S. Department of State’s, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, the Bahamas receives approximately 5-6 million tourists a year with the majority of these visitors originating from the United States. The Bahamian economy is dependent upon tourism and banking as its primary sources of industry. The Bureau of Western

⁶³ <http://bermudanationalgallery.com/news/the-nassau-guardian-reports-taking-caribbean-art-to-the-world/>

⁶⁴ <http://ny.voltashow.com/archive/2013/list-of-exhibitors/heino-schmid/>

Hemisphere Affairs also contends that, “U.S. assistance and resources have been essential to Bahamian efforts to mitigate the persistent flow of illegal narcotics, guns, and migrants through the archipelago.”⁶⁵ These concerns exacerbate the vulnerability of a space that is simultaneously contending with touristic forces extracting local resources.

Returning to a metaphor discussed earlier regarding thinking about the coconut as an integument layer of the body, we may consider the aesthetic parallels between an individual landmine in Schmid’s work and how the sense of touch functions. The ironwork of the *nkisi* is associated with the act of piercing or cutting.⁶⁶ Although a wooden figure, the “skin” of the *nkisi* is regarded as a permeable membrane when the nails are driven in, as if piercing the flesh. Likewise, the dried skin of the coconuts in *Landmines* is rendered flesh-like, similar to a recently deceased figure whose skin has begun to draw back from the bone and shrink. The shrunken, fleshy coconuts are also pierced with nails across their skin. The dark brown, ovoid-round shapes of Schmid’s coconuts are strikingly similar to the head of a *nkisi nkondi* figure in the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The standing figure is covered head to toe with nails, his right arm is raised and would originally have held a small knife or spear. His body is covered with raffa and medicinal sacks that would have contained magic. He wears a hat, his eyes are wide open, and his mouth is agape. However, both the head of the Minneapolis *nkisi* and a close up of one of Schmid’s coconuts bear striking resemblances in color, shape, and materials (both are punctured with nails.) I am not explicitly drawing conclusions about Schmid’s *Landmines* as carriers of *nganga* or as re-imagined *nkisi nkondi*, however, I am drawing attention to the relevancy of a Kongo aesthetic in his work and the presence of Kongo inspired art in the black Atlantic. Both *minkisi* and *Landmines* are untouchable in a sense. The

⁶⁵ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1857.htm>

⁶⁶ Cooksey, 264.

profusion of nails, ferocity of the figures, the unknowing capabilities of Kongo magic or *bilongo* hidden in the abdomen, the activation of a hostile *nganga*, and in the case of *Landmines* the potential destructive capabilities of an explosive device all contribute to the look-but-don't-touch category.

Sarah Ahmed's 'ethics of touch' describes the skin as a 'locus of social differentiation.' While these objects were untouchable by some, they were not untouchable by their creators. She goes on to describe how this 'ethics of touch' takes shape saying, "We could consider how some forms of touch have been means of subjugating others, or of forming the other as a place of vulnerability and fear (colonial and sexual histories of touch as appropriation, violation and possession.)"⁶⁷ A landmine is definitely a means of touch that commands the subjugation of others, while the invisible touch of a vengeful *nganga* could subjugate its intended through sickness or death. More than that, we could read *Landmines* as an "aesthetics of the earth," that like *minkisi* during the colonial period, could operate from a place of vulnerability and fear, including violation of space or resources and their possession.

Conclusion

In her catalogue essay, "In Defense of Palm Trees," written for the groundbreaking exhibition, *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions*, (2011), author Tatiana Flores begins by considering the complicated image of the palm tree as a defining motif of Caribbean identity. She advocates for a Caribbean that acknowledges the spatio-temporal reality of its formation saying, "Historically colonized by Holland, Denmark, England, the United States, and France, in addition to Spain, the Caribbean spans a region of astounding diversity and syncretism

⁶⁷ Sheller, 114.

with the common threads of colonialism and slavery.”⁶⁸ This diversity includes biodiversity and the coconut producing palm trees. Flores acknowledges the treatment of the palm tree as a “jaded tropical image” and eschews the too familiar and limiting stereotypes of the Caribbean. While she is admittedly not advocating for more beachscapes necessarily, she encourages engagement with the richness of art produced by Caribbean artists, whom she describes as “natural global citizens” given the Caribbean as a geo-political site as a “laboratory for globalization.” Such that artists choose to engage with local subject matter, “instead of retreating into a hermeticist visual language that would have them deny their surroundings and backgrounds all together.”⁶⁹ I have endeavored to share a similar approach showcasing the work of two artists who engage with local flora while troubling the waters of stereotypical preconceptions of Caribbean artistic subjectivities. It is an approach, borrowing from Flores’s work, one that is “In Defense of Coconuts.”

⁶⁸ Tatiana Flores. “In Defense of Palm Trees.” *Wrestling with the Image*. (2011), 9.

⁶⁹ Flores, 13.

CONCLUSION

Each chapter in this dissertation begins with a recipe from the *Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*. One of the constant dinner companions of Toklas and Gertrude Stein was Ernest Hemingway who among other literati such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Sinclair Lewis, took pleasure in the company and cuisine of Stein and Toklas. The gastronome Ernest Hemingway believed that hunger was good discipline. During his time in Paris after he had given up journalism and commissioned pieces were scarce, skipping meals became more commonplace. Abstaining from the breads and sweets found in pastry shops was a difficult task when one's senses were battered with the scintillating sights and aromas of hot fresh baguettes wafting from *boulangeries* and cafes. He carefully circumnavigated his routes around Paris to bypass the fruit and vegetable stalls, wine sellers, bakeries, and pastry shops. Instead, he spent his time at Sylvia Beach's bookshop and the Luxembourg museum. Looking at the paintings of Paul Cézanne he found himself "belly-empty" and "hollow-hungry." It was in this state of hunger pains that he felt he could truly appreciate Cézanne as he observed,

I learned to understand Cézanne much better and to see truly how he made landscapes when I was hungry. I used to wonder if he were hungry too when he painted; but I thought it was possibly only that he had forgotten to eat. It was one of those unsound but illuminating thoughts you have when you have been sleepless or hungry. Later I thought Cézanne was probably hungry in a different way....Hunger is healthy and the pictures look better when you are hungry.¹

Sarah Garland describes how eight years after Gertrude Stein's death, Alice B. Toklas was inclined to sell some of Stein's collection of modern art in order to provide a sustainable living saying, "They had already sold Cézanne's 'Portrait of Madame Cézanne' in 1943 ("We ate the

¹ Ernest Hemingway. *A Moveable Feast*. (New York: Scribner, 1964), 65, 68.

Cézanne,” Alice sadly told friends later.) And despite the money that Picasso’s portrait of Stein would have generated, Toklas was determined not to part with any more paintings.”² In short, Cézanne was eaten and Picasso was off the menu. The work of Cézanne also inspired the appetite of art critics during his first solo exhibition in New York in 1910. In Charles H. Caffin’s review, “Note on Paul Cézanne” which appeared in the April-July issue of *Camera Work*, he states, “Through the medium of the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, New Yorkers have had a chance of *tasting* Paul Cézanne’s work in water colors.”³

Valérie Loichot characterizes the finer distinctions between tasting and eating saying, “There is a world of difference between this superficial, constrained, and subservient act of tasting,” and the privilege of enjoying the substantial flavors and substance of an entire meal. In other words, “tasting” Cézanne does not lead one (i.e. New York art critics) to a considerable understanding of the artist’s talents, but rather the tasting mechanism of tongue, taste buds, and mouth may result in an incongruous analysis or ill digestion. Tasting Cézanne indicates a reluctant consumption. The consumptive entity does not take whole bites “eating” Cézanne, but rather “tastes” Cézanne as if to test his agreeableness to the palate.⁴ However, in the case of Toklas, Cézanne had been completely devoured. I am interested here in what passions drive the consumptive entity and how do these impulses relate to creative practices.

Hunger motivates. Hemingway’s theory of hunger as good discipline is not without merit. When the body’s resources are not dispatched for digestion purposes, the faculties are

² Sarah Garland, “A cook book to be read. What about it?”: Alice Toklas, Gertrude Stein and the Language of the Kitchen.” *Comparative American Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (March 2009), 52.

³ Maurius de Zayas, ed. Francis M. Naumann. *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 11. The emphasis on “tasting” is my own.

⁴ Interestingly enough the words “palate” and “palette” are homophones. The palate is the roof of the mouth, a key element in the process of tasting, while a palette is the board an artist uses to hold and mix paints. The relationship between tasting and painting can even be located in language.

sharpened, and clarity of vision and cognitive abilities can become enhanced dramatically. These are temporary effects. Prolonged hunger can have devastating results. The body starts consuming protein reserves, the heart rate drops, blood pressure falls, body temperature is lowered, the immune system weakens, the brain sends signals to halt the release of insulin, and it is much easier for infections to take hold. Thinking about hunger has been one of the results of thinking about edible bodies. This research has fostered a greater understanding of the formation of appetites as social constructions. Whereas, I formerly conceived of appetites as strictly intuitive compositions biologically driven I now realize that the social construction of appetites is supported by visual histories of food and consumption. The formation of appetites is a balance between the biologically driven and the product of social construction. And because food is often an analog of the self, our appetites also reveal how we feel about others, the world around us, and our place in it.

Thinking about the transformative power of hunger as motivation has led me to consider the work of Parama Roy and her book, *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and The Postcolonial* which looks at alimentary investments and phenomenological questions of colonial difference between India and Great Britain. Hemingway's intermittent fasting was in response to limited resources and had the unexpected results of a profound appreciation of Cézanne. Roy's study of Mahatma Gandhi's practice of fasting as a revolutionary act of resistance takes on even more insightful consequences. She refers to Gandhi's renowned autophagous politics and how they relate to a story by Franz Kafka, "A Hunger Artist," saying:

Kafka's protagonist is not so much the hunger striker, whose privation is subservient to recognizably political objectives, but the faster, a figure whose starvation transgresses the relatively simple transactional logic of political or economic rationality. Kafka speaks

with considerable acuity of the incalculable delectation of fasting, which actively solicits, indeed exists for, an audience of admirers and worshipers.⁵

Kafka's, "A Hunger Artist," as an expression of hunger and desire that makes explicit the relationship between the artist and the viewer provides an accessibility that is manifest by several of the artist's work examined in this dissertation. Whether through the delectation of fasting or feasting, a model emerges of gastronomic dialectics that emphasizes optical consumption, alternative modes of self-possession, and strategies for decolonizing the alimentary canal. But, what about the reluctantly famished? What are the reflexive bodily ethics of eating and not eating and how are these indices of colonial cravings or epicurean hauntings? Sidney Mintz reminds us of the hunger of slaves that motivated movement and revolt saying, "Despite the many laws prescribing cultivation or rations, slaves commonly died of hunger, and a prime reason for *marronnage* – running away – was hunger."⁶ Loichot describes extreme hunger as transforming the living into the walking dead. These gothic hauntings erase, "the human face under the all-consuming face of hunger."⁷ Therefore, tropes of hunger, whether ascetic or forced recapitulate the hungry as political actor through the ethical potency of excess. While excess is often understood through the tropes of overabundance or being too much, excess here is recognized through extreme abstinence.

Loichot advises that the juxtaposition of metaphors of hunger with those of overeating, are steeped in a material experience of hunger.⁸ She considers how hunger is pathologized

⁵ Parama Roy. *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and The Postcolonial*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 95.

⁶ Sidney W. Mintz. *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 45.

⁷ Valérie Loichot. *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 178.

⁸ Loichot, xv.

through abstinence and its correlative of overindulgence or gluttony. Themes of pathologized overconsumption of the material and the diseased gluttonous body as monstrosity are exemplified in the video work of Wangechi Mutu's, *The End of Eating Everything*, 2013, (Fig. 5.1). This would be Mutu's first animated video commissioned for the Nasher Museum of Art. Like Mutu's maximalist collages that often feature Afro-futurist cyborgs, *The End of Eating Everything* is an animated collage of a central female excrescence whose blistered body is covered with tumors, mechanical parts, wheels, multiple arms flailing between pearls and bloody pustules. Mutu worked in collaboration with the recording artist, Santigold, whose head is dispatched on the floating grotesque body. Santigold's Medusa-like locks writhe and whip back-and-forth, curling in synchronicity with mechanical precision. The creature's body hangs heavy in the foreboding brown sky. A flock of birds noisily linger around the creature as she sniffs their bodies sampling their succulent smells. The creature's terrifying mouth opens wide as she feasts upon the birds in an aerial blood bath. Trevor Schoonmaker describes the scene:

She encounters a flock of black birds and cannot resist the urge to consume them. Her appetite is clearly enormous, voracious. Blood spills and birds scatter. The overstuffed creature eventually implodes in encircling whirls of smoke. As this grey cloud lifts, a new day dawns; the gluttonous creature emits a new hatchling generation of squid-jellyfish spawn, each possessing Santigold's talking head. In the end, a multiplicity of more benign, though still hungry, mouths take over from the all-consuming, self-satisfying singular entity.⁹

Schoonmaker describes this piece along with Mutu's video *Eat Cake* (2012), as addressing themes of overindulgence, wastefulness, and critiquing society's excessive consumption. I have included Mutu's *The End of Eating Everything* as a kind of alimentary

⁹ Trevor Schoonmaker, *Wangechi Mutu: A Fantastic Journey*. (Durham: Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, 2013), 38.

eschatology for a dissertation that has explored the acts of eating, digesting, eating the Other, gluttony, and various modes of consumption. Mutu's gluttonous cyborg is throbbing with disease, detritus, and desire. Brillat-Savarin discusses the affectation of overindulgence saying, "When gourmandize becomes gluttony, voracity or debauchery, it loses its name and attributes, falling into the hands of the moralist who will treat it by advice, or the medical man who will treat it by remedy."¹⁰ Mutu's creature is animated gluttony, a body that forsakes gourmandize due to its excess in oral greed. Mutu's creature is never satiated in its hunger. In similar fashion, colonial appetites are never satiated in their hunger for eating the Other. I have included a back-to-back discussion of hunger and overindulgence to illustrate the two are not mutually exclusive, but both operate as models in excess that reflect upon colonial histories, material experiences, and relate to the body's transformation. Loichot describes their mutuality saying, "Hunger and overconsumption need to be considered as logically related, yet unbalanced, attitudes toward food, rather than opposites."¹¹ Thinking about eating is thinking about not eating. I refer again to the work of bell hooks who says that we eat images. This dissertation has considered how this adage is manifested through a visual archive of sugar, cacao, pineapples, and coconuts. I have labored to illustrate how images are eaten, embodied, and replicated in ways that complicate and contribute to the discourses of art history and food studies.

Food is profoundly global. This research advances an interdisciplinary approach by decoding the cultural meanings of food, specifically the social lives of tropical comestibles and their role in building empires, transforming international palettes, and influencing governing powers. By culling the visual archive of tropical comestibles, which are emblematic of the

¹⁰ Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. *The Physiology of Taste; Or, Transcendental Gastronomy*. (Dublin: Merchant Books, 2009), 111.

¹¹ Loichot, 38.

bounty of colonialism, we are able to establish a foundation for discussing the intersectionality of borders, social formations, gender, sexuality, class, race, value systems, and other structures of power. This research in commodities and networks of exchange has been foundational in shaping my understanding of a global art history and creating cross-geographical dialogues. Roy identifies the contact zone of the colonial period as being located, “quite decisively in the alimentary tract.”¹² This dissertation has endeavored to prove through a series of visual mediations that the alimentary tract signifies a gastropoetical dialectic between the eater and the eaten. Alimentary discourse is capable of developing a visual language that illustrates the interiority of appetites of empire through the politics of provender.¹³ I have included various recipes throughout the dissertation to act as formulas that would correspond in taste and politics to the visual practices of various artists.

In essence, I have cooked up an offering of sugar, cacao, pineapples, and coconuts as a way to organize, interrogate, and express curiosity about the ways comestibles and consumption have not only produced empires, but become the constitutive elements of literal and metaphorical alimentation. Roy draws upon the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss who, “emphatically recognized, cooking has the contours of a language, with gustemes that correspond analogically with the phonemes that organize linguistic meaning.”¹⁴ Cooking, eating, digestion, and appetites in general contain not only linguistic meaning, but offer a pedagogy of alimentation that defines the

¹² Parama Roy. *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and The Postcolonial*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 33.

¹³ Loichot’s work elaborates convincingly on food as a language, and its ability to establish a vocabulary, syntax, and style that can be located specifically in Creole poetics. She quotes Roland Barthes to support these initiatives saying, “food items and practices amount to a, ‘veritable grammar of foods.’” As it relates to the presentation of art in this study, Loichot goes on to say, “food is not only an act of survival but also is an ‘art of survival,’ a term that locates the cultural stratagem in culture itself.” The observation of food as an ‘art of survival’ and one that is represented as culture itself is presented clearly in this dissertation in the discussions of the work of Andrea Chung, Kara Walker, Oscar Murillo, and Heino Schmid. Loichot, 36.

¹⁴ Roy, 11.

relationships between the colonizer and the colonized through belly politics and the gastropolitical imaginary. To return to the introductory statements of this dissertation – food is personal. But, in its final installment food becomes our person. Our literal and visual consumption becomes our constitution and therefore deserves our thoughtful consideration.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter 1





Fig.s 1.1-1.3 Photographs from The Latin American Library at Tulane University and from The Amistad Research Center in New Orleans, c. late 19th century-early 20th century.



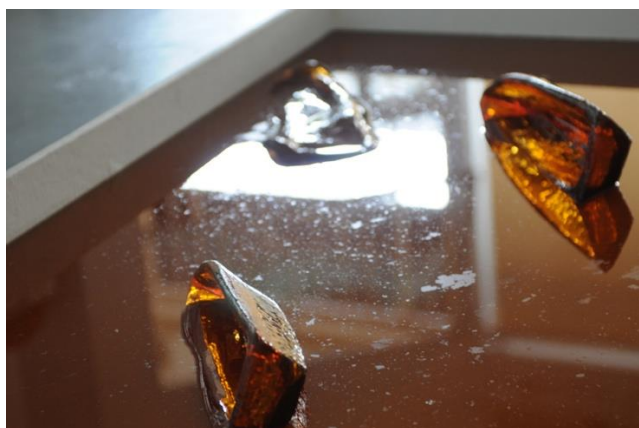
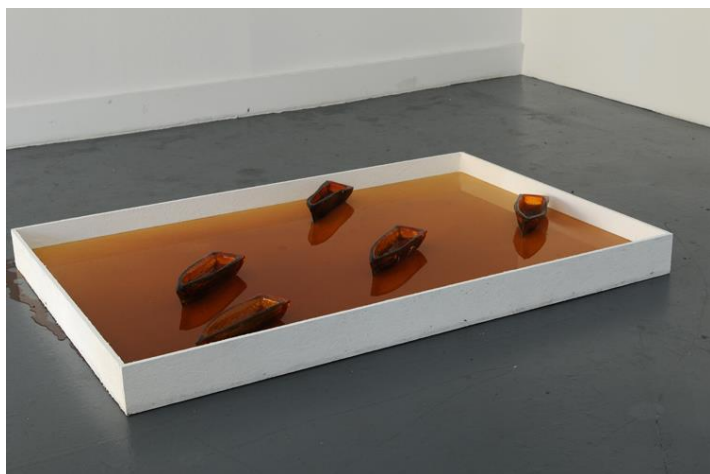
Fig. 1.4 Adolphe Duperly & Son. *Banana Carriers*. Jamaica. Photographs from The Latin American Library at Tulane University and from The Amistad Research Center in New Orleans, c. 1905.



Fig. 1.5 John Genin, *Allegory of Sugar Cane*, 1884.



Fig. 1.6 Andrea Chung, *Bain de Mer*, (Helmuth Projects), video still, 2013.



Figs. 1.7-1.9 Andrea Chung, *Bato Disik*, 2013.



Fig. 1.10 Andrea Chung, *Sink and Swim*, 2013.



Fig. 1.11 Vik Muniz, *Valicia Bathes in Sunday Clothes*, from the series *Portraits of the Sugar Children*, 1996.



Fig. 1.12 Vik Muniz, *Big James Sweats Buckets*, from the series *Portraits of the Sugar Children*, 1996.



Fig. 1.13 Kara Walker, *A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, 2014.



Fig. 1.14 Kara Walker, *A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, (sugar boy), 2014.

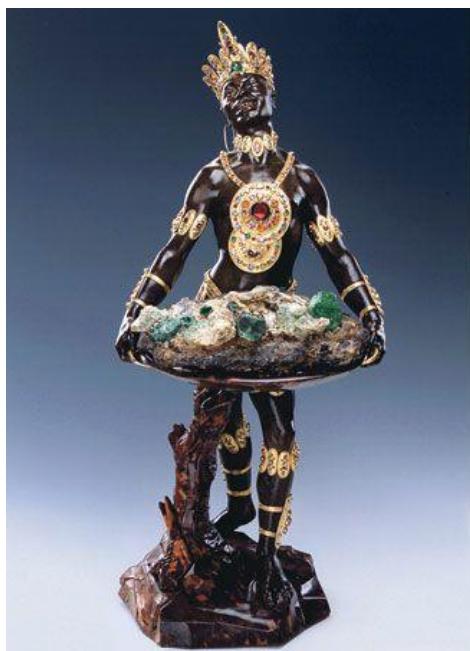


Fig. 1.15 Bathhsar Permoser, *Moor with Emerald Cluster*, c. 1724.



Fig. 1.16 Kara Walker, *A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, (close up), 2014.

Chapter 2



Fig. 2.1 Marcel Duchamp, *Chocolate Grinder Number 1*, 1913.



Fig. 2.2 Marcel Duchamp, *Chocolate Grinder Number 2*, 1914.

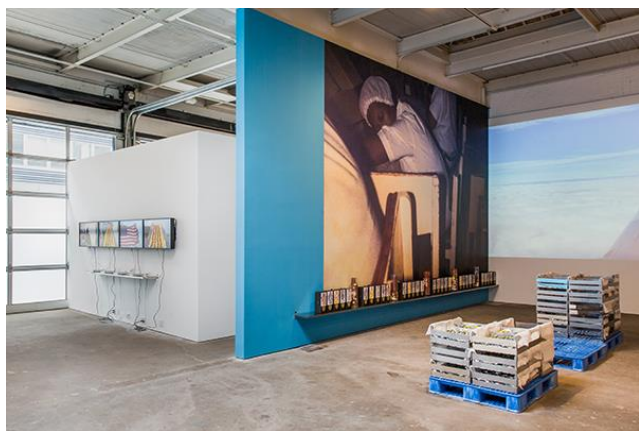


Fig. 2.3 Oscar Murillo, *A Mercantile Novel*, 2014.

Chapter 3

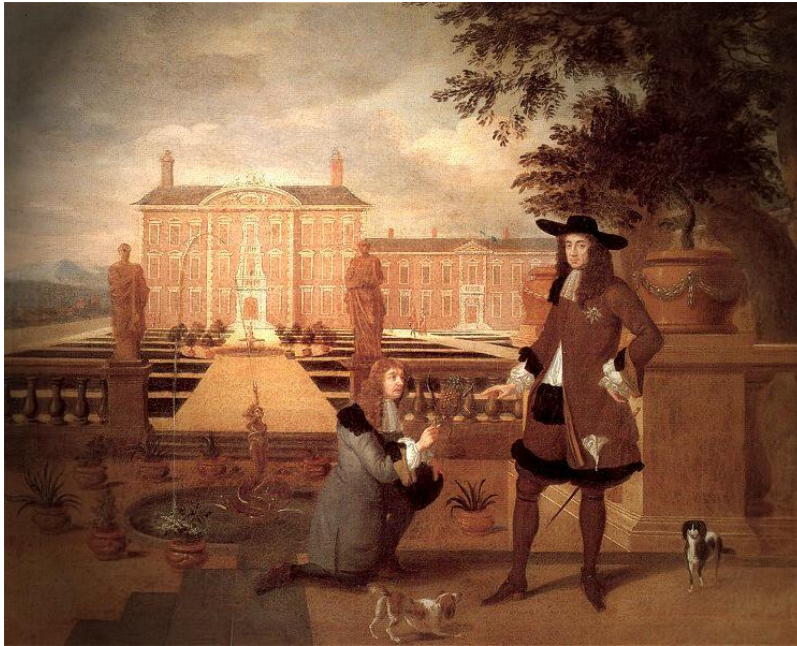


Fig. 3.1 Hendrick Danckerts, King Charles II, receiving gift of a pineapple from the Royal Gardener, John Rose, 1675.



Fig. 3.2 Agostino Brunias, *A Negroes' Dance in the Island of Dominica*, ca. 1779.



Fig. 3.3 Agostino Brunias, *A Linen Market with a Linen-stall and Vegetable Seller in the West Indies*, ca. 1780.



Fig. 3.4 Francois Beaucourt, *Painting. Bust-length portrait of a black / mulatto slave woman holding a plate of tropical fruits, including a pineapple*, 1786.



Fig. 3.5 La Masurier, *A Mulatto Woman with Her White Daughter Visited by Negro Women in Their House in Martinique*, ca. 1775.



Fig. 3.6 Agostino Brunias, *Free Women of Color with Their Children and Servants in a Landscape*, ca. 1770-96.



Figs. 3.7-3.8 Agostino Brunias, Toussaint L'Ouverture buttons, c. 18th century.

Chapter 4



Fig. 4.1 Francisco Oller, *Still Life with Coconuts*, c. 1893.



Fig. 4.2 Francisco Oller, *Self-Portrait*, 1889-1892.



Fig. 4.3 Francisco Oller, *Still Life with Plantains*, c. 1893.



Figs. 4.4-4.5 Heino Schmid, *Landmines*, 2011-2012.



Fig. 4.6 Power Figure (Nkisi N'Kondi: Mangaaka), Kongo Peoples; Yombe Group, 19th century.



Fig. 4.7 *Nkisi N'Kondi*, Kongo Peoples, 19th century.

Conclusion



Fig. 5.1 Wangechi Mutu, *The End of Eating Everything*, video still, 2013.

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