

CLOWNING CANADA:
PERFORMING THE STRUCTURED INNOCENCE
OF SETTLER COLONIAL DOMESTICITY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

February 2024

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Abstract

This dissertation is a research-creation project that involves both creative and written outputs. The creative project is an original short film, *Land Hunger*—a dark, feminist, clown satire of settler colonial nation-state building that explores how gendered histories of domestication were foundational for colonization in Canada and are still viscerally haunting the present. The written component incorporates critical theory, personal reflection, creative writing, and historical research to explore the question: What performance praxes are needed right now for settler artists to create work that pushes against hegemonic yet invisibilized structures of Canadian nationhood? While my research looks at the potential for settler performance practices to unsettle our cultural stories of Canadian-ness, my inspirations and theoretical anchors come from the fields of Indigenous resurgence and decolonization, which centre relationality to the land within research. My theoretical framework grapples with the question of settler artist accountability and responsibility within performance practice, stemming from the argument that culture is integral to the creation and maintenance of power structures (Said, 1994). I follow a genealogical process in the Foucauldian sense, which entails sifting through hauntings between the past and present to find not the origin of nation but rather its palimpsestic and discursive formation on the land and the gendered body.

This project originated in the messy, personal, and creative questioning of my relationship to the land I am on, to the nation-state of Canada, to the histories that brought me here, and to the discourses of power that weave through them. I argue that theories of settler colonialism, gender, and whiteness are not just the subject of my research, coincidentally resulting in a creative output; rather, these theories drive the foundational way that I come to understand my relationship to the land and to my performance practice. I attempt to chart an

approach to performance practice that makes this central, arguing that settler theatre artists are structurally implicated in the ongoing reification of the colonial project of Canada. Therefore, as storytellers, we can work to make visible and imagine alternatives to white settler structures of nation and subjecthood that are often normalized in settler culture as invisible and unchangeable.

This dissertation is dedicated
to all Indigenous land defenders and their allies,
from Turtle Island to Palestine.

And, also, to the land itself, that defends all of us.

Acknowledgments

This doctoral project would never have begun or been completed without many extraordinary networks of support and inspiration.

Thank you first to my supervisor, Dr. Honor Ford-Smith for your generous support, creativity, and adamant advocacy for praxis, without which I truly could never have imagined this project. Thank you to my amazing committee, Dr. Jill Carter and Dr. Leesa Fawcett for your curiosity, provocations, and encouragement throughout this process. I am extremely grateful for this brilliant trio of women who have guided me throughout these years.

I had two main anchors outside of my committee that grounded me in this process. Thank you to my incredible partner Jacob McLean for providing constant emotional support and care as well as invaluable feedback, edits, and long discussions on both the film and writing. I would never have started or finished grad school without your love and encouragement. Thank you to my clown-other-half, Alexandra Simpson, for your continual support and irreplaceable creative relationship, particularly through filming, dramaturging and co-directing *Land Hunger*. I have no idea what sort of artist I would be without your partnership.

Thank you to my additional friends and arts community that have helped me create *Land Hunger*: particularly Anita Castelino, Emma Kerson, Emily Hughes, Peyton Lebarr and Abigail Whidden, as well as all of my wonderful clown community. Thank you to John Turner, my clown teacher, for everything you taught me and for supporting and discussing this dissertation with me. Thank you to Leesa and Michael for generously offering me their beautiful house and the trees and river around it, where I filmed *Land Hunger* and wrote a large portion of this dissertation.

Thank you to my friends and peers for being there to commiserate, distract from, or hold my hand through the muck of grad school confusion and imposter syndrome: Mikaela Viljoen, Stephanie Johnson, Stefan Hegerat, Ben Kapron, Mandy Buntten-Walberg, Rachel Fernandes, Kelly King, Ronak Ghorbani, Camille Turner and so many others. Thank you especially to my mother Carole Johnson for helping with my many autoethnographic questions as well as for a seemingly endless encouragement and excitement for everything I set out to do.

Thank you to all the artist-activist-scholars before me for demanding that graduate studies (and not only MFAs) become a space to *create* art and for advocating that this creation is not only data to be analyzed but can constitute research itself.

I am very grateful for the material support that made this dissertation possible, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship - Doctoral), Ontario Graduate Scholarship, Canadian Association for Theatre Research McCallum Scholarship and the dian marino Award.

And thank you to the land and its caretakers, without which I would not have been able to create this project: that includes the area now known as Tkaronto—the lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, as well as many other nations both recorded and unrecorded, and the traditional territory of the Tiononati (Petun), Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe nations, located near Orangeville, Ontario.

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Preface | A Short Film



As a research-creation project, this dissertation involves both creative and written outputs. The creative project is a short film called *Land Hunger*, created, performed and edited by myself, co-directed by Alexandra Simpson and myself, and produced by Animacy Theatre Collective. *Land Hunger* is a dark, feminist, clown satire of settler colonial nation-state building. Playing with the genre of Chaplinesque early 20th-century silent films, it looks at the ways that gendered histories of domestication in Canada were foundational for colonization and are still viscerally haunting the present.

The film can be viewed using this private link:
animacytheatrecollective.com/land-hunger-2/
Password: LandHunger

Introductions

*There is a stubborn insistence by Canada, the provinces, and territories,
that they own the land.*

—Hayden King & Shiri Pasternak, *Land Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper*, p. 8

*Canadians have a myth about themselves, and it seems this myth is inviolable.
They are innocent.*

—Lee Maracle, *My Conversations With Canadians*, p. 10

Nations themselves are narrations.

—Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. xiii

The Cottage: A Photostory

It is July 2020, a few days after Canada Day—which also happens to be my birthday—and I am sitting on a small wooden dock with my feet comfortably dangling in one of the clearest lakes I have ever swam in. Wait, but it is also the thirty-plus summers before that, when I dangled my legs off this dock just like I am now. Wait, but it is also July of 1883 when the creation of this dock in this spot became possible, but perhaps I am getting ahead of myself. Perhaps we can just say that there are many Julys layered within this place. The dock is precariously yet reliably propped up on large rocks and each of its wooden boards gets replaced one by one as years of lake water and bare feet disintegrate them. As a millennial urban apartment renter living in an unprecedented housing crisis, this is the only physical place I have had a lifelong relationship with. My grandfather bought this land when my father was a child and it now belongs to my uncles, who generously allow me to continue visiting every summer. This is possibly the most common narrative of cottage ownership throughout the province of Ontario in the country that, to many, is referred to as Canada. Hundreds of these stunning lakes are speckled with white settler family cottages like this one.

The dock at my cottage sits on large rocks because, more than half a century ago, my grandparents moved them into one pile, offering the perfect structure for a homemade dock, and clearing a sandy open swimming area right next to it. I think someone told me that the sand isn't even from this lake, that my grandparents

dumped it in, transplanted from somewhere else. Today, this practice would be illegal, as it disrupts important habitats for the wildlife in the lake. I assume my family would never repeat this practice; I am certain my grandparents had no idea that it was harmful. I am fairly certain. And yet the next generations benefit from it year after year. It is the most perfect swimming spot.



Figure 1: My mother (pregnant with my younger sister), my older sister, and myself (age 5) sitting on the dock at my cottage.

The foundational premise of this project rests on the political significance of storytelling as well as on the interwoven nature of form and content. Beginning my dissertation with a photostory¹ demonstrates, through practice, that my orientation to this project—and to academia more broadly—is primarily that of a theatre creator. This photostory includes narratives of innocence, haunting, domesticity, and whiteness, and is, therefore, the jumping off point (to use a dock

¹ A photostory is exactly what it sounds like, that is, a short combination of images and words that tell a story. The form of a personal photostory to begin this dissertation is inspired by the archive “Photoseries Canada,” which was a mid-20th century initiative by the National Film Board of Canada to create a decades long project of collecting photostories that would promote and share a “portrait of nationhood” of Canada (National Gallery of Canada; Canadian Photography Institute, 2018).

metaphor) for my dissertation. It positions me as a white settler in relation with the specific area of land that I have the most history with, which is a small, cedar tree-filled plot (to use a story metaphor) of land located on unceded Algonquin territory in North Frontenac County, Ontario.² While in many ways my project started to form in 2020, its roots stretch back many years. My grandfather who built the cottage was raised by his grandmother, who came over to Canada in July of 1883 as a Home Child—a category which is a grey area somewhere between an adopted child and an unpaid domestic servant for a settler family—and whose story inspired the central themes of gendered domestication, innocence, and nation building that this project grapples with.

This dissertation is a research-creation project interwoven with fiction, personal reflection, critical theory, and historic research, resulting in—and stemming from—a *performance praxis* within the settler colonial nation. Its major contribution lies in addressing decolonial performance practices for theatre creators, exploring the specific role of white settler artists in unsettling the embodied narratives through which their gendered and racialized subjectivities have been shaped. I refer to this as a *heterotopic praxis*—stemming from the Foucauldian term *heterotopia* taken up by theatre scholars—which forefronts critical imagination for theatre creators and performers, encouraging an engagement with multiple layers of social, cultural, and geographical history and difference that our lives are always already encoded in. I frame this through a palimpsestic understanding of land-human relations within theatre creation, which invites a complex and hauntological layering of space/place and time. This introduction will offer a critical reflection on the circumstances that sparked this project, exploring the form of research-creation and where I locate my work within the artistic and academic landscape. I

² See the Algonquins of Ontario's website for more information about ongoing treaty negotiations in this area: <https://www.tanakiwin.com/>

will then summarize the chapters that follow, the last of which focuses on a detailed analysis of *Land Hunger*, the short film I created from this research that forms my main creative output.

The photostories winding through this dissertation speak to settler histories and relations with space and place in the context of Canada. They explore this idea of heterotopic spaces—a central theory for my project, which I will elaborate on in Chapter 2—where multiple layers of space-time and all its rehearsals of possibilities³ are living and breathing on top of one another, palimpsestically peeking through if you take the time to look (Foucault, 1986; Tompkins, 2014). One of these layers, deeply connected to the dock yet also completely distinct from it, is 1492 Land Back Lane.

Creeping Blockades

That same July of 2020, a few weeks after I sat reflecting on a homemade dock, Six Nations land defenders reclaimed an area of land adjacent to their reserve that was slated for a housing development project by a company called Foxgate Development. This land is part of the Haldimand Tract, an area surrounding the Grand River that was “given” to Six Nations for their allegiance to the British during the American Revolution and to compensate for their own land that was lost during that war (APTN National News, 2020). Dubbed 1492 Land Back Lane, the land defence is on one of the rare parts of the Haldimand Tract that is not developed into settler towns and municipalities. Six Nations land defenders and their allies are fighting the assumed right of settler expansion through domestication, which, in this case, manifests in a for-profit housing complex. That is, this movement clearly demonstrates how an increase in housing (aka land) allows an expansion of the settler population and further limits Indigenous access to land.

³ See Tompkins 2014 p. 3.

Skyler Williams, Six Nations land defender and spokesperson for 1492 Land Back Lane, succinctly describes this phenomenon when he says:

every other community across the country...they've all grown, exponentially, over the last 100 years. Except for reserves. Reserves are the only ones in the last 100 years that have gotten nothing but smaller. And so, as those surrounding communities begin to encroach on those lands, to be able to hem us in so that we can't grow, so that we can't expand...this is a problem...[this] should be a problem for everybody (qtd in Hill, 2021).

Yet despite this reality laid out by Williams, hegemonic settler-Canadian culture maintains **a narrative of innocence** around Canadian land acquisition via domestication, as the epigraphs to this introduction indicate. The stubbornness of these narratives sparked the creative praxis that became my dissertation. The mayor of Haldimand County, the local jurisdiction covering the land that 1492 Land Back Lane is on, issued statements in opposition to the “protest,” attempting to garner support by using the rhetoric of innocent, hardworking, settler Canadians that we have seen re-enacted for centuries. In his defence of the housing development, the mayor states that the project “will either employ or house over 1,000 Ontarians who will *support their families and pay their taxes*” (Hewitt, 2020, my emphasis). In order to pursue this innocently domestic agenda, the Ontario Provincial Police moved in on the Six Nations land defenders with excessive force, violence, and funding, firing rubber bullets, dragging a land defender across the ground, and arresting over thirty people (Palmater, n.d.). While authors such as Tiffany Lethabo King provide the important critique that overly friendly words like domestication, settlement, or disappearance obfuscate the violence that these processes require (2019, p. 45), my exploration of these historical and ongoing narratives critiques the discursive

process by which they become invisible to so many people. In doing so, I frame the settler myth of innocent domesticity as inextricable from the violent nature underlying it.

For centuries, Indigenous people across Turtle Island have been protecting their lands and waters from the seemingly endless encroachment of settler colonial capital. The specific reasons for any land encroachment vary from a pipeline expansion project, a liquefied natural gas export terminal, a golf course, logging, mining, hydraulic fracturing, a provincial park, or a condominium, to name a few common sites. Despite the many examples, in every case the overall intention behind the encroachment is for the benefit and ultimately the *expansion* of settler society. While Indigenous oppositions to such projects through direct action have entailed blockades, occupations, or camps that block access to land—some of the most famous in recent Canadian history being Unist’ot’en and Gidimt’en on Wet’suwet’en territory, 1492 Land Back Lane on Six Nations territory, or the Oka Crisis at Kanehsatake—John Borrows (2005) reminds us that these are really *counter occupations*; the original occupation or blockade in each of these instances is set up by settlers and the Canadian state. Indeed, Canada has acquired (and continues to accumulate) its land through the invasion and occupation of Indigenous territories. Borrows describes this territorial acquisition as a "creeping blockade" that has been occurring over several centuries (2005, p. 45). The creeping blockade is much less visible to the general Canadian imaginary than Indigenous "counter-blockades" are, as the population on this land is now made up of a strong majority of settlers/non-Indigenous people, that is, a population of people who continuously and materially benefit from the creeping blockade. The "structured invisibility"⁴ of the creeping blockade is perhaps one of the greatest impediments to settler solidarity with Indigenous movements, as it perpetuates the story of innocence.

⁴ This term comes from Ruth Frankenburg in her book *White Women, Race Matters: the Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993), which I will expand on in the following section.

I have been involved in activist organizing in solidarity with Indigenous land defence movements for many years now. The height of these movements so far, at least during my own time as an activist in Tkaronto,⁵ occurred in the winter of 2020 during the #ShutDownCanada protests, shown in Figures 2 and 3. This movement had been growing for some time, but it erupted in response to the RCMP's violent armed raid on Indigenous land defence camps in Wet'suwet'en territory, where Indigenous people have been protecting their territory from proposed pipeline projects for over a decade.⁶ Indigenous peoples and settler allies here in Tkaronto and across Turtle Island mobilized in various ways to support them. "Indigenous blockades," writes Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, are "a refusal of the dominant political and economic systems of Canada. They are a refusal to accept erasure, banishment, disappearance, and death from our homelands" (2021, p. 10). The #ShutDownCanada movement saw these blockades and direct actions swell across the country in what felt like an unstoppable force of rage. Trains halted because the rails seemed constantly covered in fierce chanting bodies. Small business owners lamented their innocent victimhood to sympathetic CBC News camera lenses, while the Wet'suwet'en people and their allies directly faced \$25 million worth of armed intimidation.⁷ These blockades were public **performances**, yet they refused popular understandings of culture as symbolic and unthreatening. Instead, they carried the full weight of **decolonial** possibilities inscribed in the theory that "nations themselves *are* narrations" (Said, 1994, p. xiii, see also Anderson, 2016; Bhabha, 1990). This embodied disruption was both discursive and material, and it was gaining momentum.

⁵ Note that I was not yet living in Tkaronto during Idle No More or the movement to stop the Line 9 Pipeline.

⁶ See <https://unistoten.camp/> for information on the ongoing land defence and ways to support.

⁷ This is the amount that Canada spent on the RCMP surveilling, intimidating and arresting the Wet'suwet'en on their own unceded lands. This number is from October of 2022 and so is likely much larger by now (Hosgood, 2022).



Figures 2 and 3: Rail blockades that occurred in Tkaronto in the winter of 2020, before the pandemic hit. Photos taken by anonymous participants and posted on Facebook by Rising Tide Toronto.

And then a global pandemic hit and in fear and confusion most of us left the streets and sheltered inside our domestic spaces. For far longer than we could have anticipated, that is where we stayed. During this time, the capitalist-colonial forces crept back onto Wet'suwet'en land and began drilling.⁸ While we eventually organized a few marches for 1492 Land Back Lane late in the first summer of the pandemic, it did not come close to the momentum across the country that had built at the start of 2020. For myself, when the pandemic started, I sat inside, researching historical instances of domesticity as colonial land theft for this dissertation while isolating myself from the world in my own domestic space. Despite my dedication to an **autoethnographic** framework, I remained oblivious to these parallels for quite some time.

Before continuing this narrative, I would like to briefly touch on my recent use of three terms, which will be further expanded upon throughout the dissertation. These are performance, decolonization, and autoethnography. As I will explore in later chapters, my personal experience of the term performance comes strongly from within what Baz Kershaw (1999) calls the “theatre estate,” that is, an institution of an established theatre or dedicated performance space (see also Filewod, 2011, p. 5). Yet, at the same time, my use of the term performance incorporates cultural performances of nation, whether that is through childhood make-believe games of settler-pioneering or performances of resistance to the capitalist-colonial status-quo, as in the above example during Shut Down Canada. This variety demonstrates the ways that, as Selena Couture describes, the term performance needs to “account both for purposeful theatrical presentations and for performance that seeks to assert identity by publicly challenging cultural norms” (2019, p. 5). I am drawn to articulations of the term offered by performance theorist Diana Taylor, who,

⁸ As Raina Delisle (2021) succinctly states: “As the pandemic gripped Canada in spring 2020, provinces and territories announced that only ‘essential services’ that preserve life, health and basic societal functioning were allowed to continue operations. Across the country, the majority of industrial projects got the green light” (n.p).

drawing on Elin Diamond, theorizes performance as a “*doing*” (2015, pp. 7–8), writing that “performance offers a way to transmit knowledge by means of the body” (2015, p. 36). This orientation towards an active body in the world is useful for practice-based projects in general, but also for my understanding of decolonial performance.

The term decolonial is used in many different academic fields for a variety of purposes, which are sometimes only vaguely defined and at other times contradict each other. This dissertation does not attempt a full overview of the field of decolonial, postcolonial or settler colonial studies but rather is interested in the intersection of decolonization and performance in *practice*, particularly as it manifests in the settler colonial context of Canada. Authors Sium, Desai, and Ritskes (2012) describe the impossibility of a singular definition for decolonization, a term whose magnitude and urgency causes it to transform across time and space even as it creates connections and pathways for spatially and temporally elusive solidarities as it travels. In their article “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” authors Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang famously critique the tendency they have observed of academics and activists using the term “decolonization” as a general replacement for other social justice terminology without any reference to Indigenous peoples as producers of knowledge or without referencing the context of settler colonialism. Decolonization, then, becomes a term that is often just used to indicate a general reference to Indigenous rights. More often than not, this reduces the concept of decolonization to a metaphor, which alleviates settler guilt without calling for any real change. Decolonization for Tuck and Yang must thus entail actual return of Indigenous land.⁹

⁹ While this step feels like it is far from becoming a reality in Canada, it is important to note, as Franz Fanon (1963) foresees in his call for reparations, that in itself this repatriation still falls short of a just plan to combat settler colonialism in the 21st century, given how badly polluted the land now is.

While I agree that the term decolonization should not be used as mere pacifying rhetoric to alleviate settler guilt, my interpretation of Tuck and Yang does not preclude the possibility for acts to be decolonial when they do not directly and immediately result in land repatriation. This strict usage would make the term invalid for any arts-based practices, as rarely does physical land become repatriated during or directly following a performance. As Martineau & Ritskes—in their article on decolonial struggle in Indigenous arts practice—specify:

Our task, therefore, is...to expand, open, and defend Indigenous art-making's ruptural potentiality...that break from and through colonial enclosures to (re)discover, in their movement, turning and transformation, open spaces of imagination and creativity. When this is connected to material struggles to liberate Indigenous lands, languages and lifeways, art reveals its power in fugitive motion by disrupting and reconfiguring the normative order of sensible experience (2014, p. x).

Therefore, my use of the term decolonization responds to the physical land and the power structures that control access to it, yet an artistic practice which does not immediately impact access to land is not inherently contradictory to the material needs of decolonization. It can help realize them if it stays oriented towards dismantling structures of power that reify land theft.

Critical autoethnography can pair well with a decolonial performance framework. I will expand on this term more through a reflection on my practice in Chapter 3, but it is important to note for now that the field necessitates an examination of the self in order to gain an understanding of how the self is formed by (and contributes to the formation of) broader *structures of power* (Madison, 2005). Autoethnography thus can forefront the self within research not for individualistic self-improvement but rather to locate, understand, and disrupt

oppressive systems of power. In this way, it complements decolonial and performance theories through an active liveness rather than a metaphorical abstraction.

Now, with a better foundation of these central concepts, I will turn to the ways in which I began to view the creeping blockade as intrinsically tied to an identity of innocence.

The Structured Innocence of Domesticity

During the height of the Shut Down Canada era, as a settler activist, I ended up in many conversations with curious or disgruntled settlers asking questions about the movement. The most common settler question in response to Land Back movements, or sometimes in response to my use of the term decolonization in describing my doctoral research, seemed to be something along the lines of: “Well, where do they want us to go?” Stó:lō novelist and playwright Lee Maracle (2017) points out, from her many book tours engaging with settler audiences, that this is a common question for Canadians. For many years, this question has annoyed and stumped me—to say that yes, we should all leave, felt reactionary, never mind impossible, but to say that no, we can stay, felt like it affirmed the status quo as inevitable. Navigating this rhetorical trap has become easier for me now through theorizing the creeping blockade’s myth of innocence.

This popular settler question—the “Where do *they* want us to go?” trap—clings possessively to innocence because, of course, there is no answer that offers a feasible solution for the average settler-Canadian to *individually* undo the violent atrocities of the structure we are in. The settler who asks the question knows this. They know they will not be asked to trace their European origins and then move to that country, and so the question discursively frames inaction and ignorance as the only practical solutions. The question thus demonstrates a reactionary fear of not being innocent: if there is no clear individual action to right an injustice, then how could the individual who takes no action be a perpetrator? And if there is no way that they are a

perpetrator then, of course, they are innocent. This logic follows definitions of innocence in legal discourse, which frame innocence as the opposite of guilt (Fletcher, 1998, p. 161). This definition sets up a problematic dichotomy for settler subjectivity since neither guilt nor innocence are useful for building decolonial solidarity.

Instead of playing into this strategically unhelpful dilemma, I advocate for Dylan Robinson’s theory of seeing white settler-Canadians as “perpetrators of *intergenerational irresponsibility*,” which requires us to “shift the framework of perpetration from *action to inaction*” (D. Robinson & Martin, 2016, p. 63, my emphases). This framing of (ir)responsibility is central to my understanding of innocence, which I define in the settler colonial context as an attachment to an identity that is *unimplicated* in injustice and therefore void of any responsibility to change it.¹⁰ The theory of intergenerational irresponsibility demonstrates that the structure of colonial land theft that defines the Canadian state is strengthened by settler passivity. What we (settlers) now experience as inaction is, en masse, a very active and embodied process. It is important to note here that my project is not calling for individual settlers to take on *blame and guilt* as perpetrators; as stated above, these popular inversions of innocence make a weak foundation for decolonial allyship.¹¹ Rather, this dissertation calls for settlers to see the relationship between passivity and action differently; it calls for a disruption of the narrative of innocent domesticity, a narrative which upholds a status quo that is clearly not working.

The fact is that, for most settlers, immigrants and refugees in Canada (although each for widely different reasons), we do not have another land to “return” to. Yet this does not leave us

¹⁰ This definition comes primarily from Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack’s writing on whiteness and innocence (1998)—which I expand on in later chapters—with inspiration from D. Robinson & Martin (2016), Maracle (2017), Tuck and Yang (2012), and Frankenburg (1993), among others.

¹¹ In her *Ally Bill of Responsibilities*, Algonquin Anishinaabe author Lynn Gehl’s first step is: “Do not act out of guilt, but rather out of a genuine interest in challenging the larger oppressive power structures” (2011).

only one option. Perhaps the question is not “Where should we go?” but rather “How should we stay?” This question is inspired by Haudenosaunee scholar Dan Longboat (2016), who, in a keynote address I attended at a symposium on Indigenous Environmental Justice, asked the audience to: “Learn how to live in place. Learn how to live like you’re going to stay.” As settlers, we can perhaps still learn to love the land we are on and live in good relation with it, but we must start by aligning ourselves actively against the violent structures of Canadian statehood and find ways to support Indigenous-led movements for Land Back, not out of fear or guilt or shame but because, as Ariella Aïsha Azoulay—discussing her film that explores archives which demonstrated sites of possible solidarity between Jews and Palestinians before the State of Israel was declared in 1948—writes “The time has come for the second generation of perpetrators—descendants of those who expelled Palestinians from their homeland—to claim *our* right, *our* fundamental and inalienable human right: *the right not to be perpetrators*” (2012).

I would like to note that while my piece is concerned with relational accountability (Wilson, 2001) in theatre and performance on stolen land, I am primarily writing and creating this dissertation with settler audiences and artists in mind, while remaining indebted to Indigenous decolonial movements and theorists for the frameworks and analysis that I rely on. That is, I am cognizant of the fact that relational accountability and responsibility will look different for settlers and Indigenous peoples and therefore, although I am writing alongside Indigenous movements and hope to create future settler/Indigenous collaborations from this work, I am not theorizing how Indigenous artists might relate to their land. This distinction took a while for me to understand, and for a long time during my doctoral studies, I felt confused as to what extent settlers should either collaborate with Indigenous artists or not address colonization in our art, which in practice implies that Indigenous people have more responsibility to address

the effects of colonization than settlers do. This is not in any way to argue against collaboration, rather, it is to politicize a settler artist as implicated in and *accountable* to the structure of colonization whether or not an Indigenous presence is there to remind us of this fact. That is, when Indigenous-settler collaborations have not or cannot occur within a particular creative project—as was the case with the creation of my film *Land Hunger*—settlers are not exempt from any responsibility to respond to the oppressive systems they benefit from.

In this dissertation, I use an embodied performance practice to explore the colonial structure of domesticity. In the early days of the colonial project, this structure was *actively* imposed on white bodies and, in very different ways, on Indigenous bodies, as well as Black, Chinese and other immigrant or enslaved labourers. I argue this structure is now upheld through ongoing, passive embodiment. That is, this violent structure now thrives simply by us (white Canadians) doing what feels like nothing. This is what I call the **structured innocence of domesticity**, drawing on Ruth Frankenburg's (1993) theory of the structured invisibility of whiteness. This structure means that, as we live, we expand and, as we expand—especially if we are unconscious of our historic relation to the very land through which our expansion is even possible—we can passively advance the settler colonial structure of land theft—that is, we can become the creeping blockade. This expansion/creeping blockade can take many forms, such as housing developments, resource extraction, or golf courses that occur on Indigenous land without free, prior, and informed consent.¹² This framing of the structured innocence of domesticity ruptures the idea of the nice settler-Canadian subject who is the unfortunate descendent of colonizers but does not actively produce violence herself. Canadians are very attached to this protagonist and the narratives of innocent domestication that accompany her. My work seeks to

¹² The terms of this consent must also be determined by Indigenous nations, not just by the Canadian state (see H. King & Pasternak, 2019, p. 9).

frame settler passivity as complicity with the colonial structure rather than innocent detachment from its effects. I also argue that it is not through self-flagellating victimhood (of being forced back to Europe, refusing to procreate, or simply drowning in our guilt) that we break this colonial structure. It is through a resolute alliance with Indigenous resurgence and movements for Land Back, such as 1492 Land Back Lane, Unist'ot'en camp or Gidimt'en Checkpoint. It is therefore ironic yet surprisingly fitting that this dissertation, created through an unavoidable practice of passive isolation within the domestic sphere during a pandemic, advocates for an active solidaristic movement both in the cultural and material realms: in the stories we tell each other, in the streets, or on the land. In this way, we can attempt to challenge the creeping blockade that is moving across so-called Canada.

Research-creation

The major contributions of this dissertation can be framed as two different threads that are woven together throughout the written and creative components. The first contribution is the artistic output (the short film *Land Hunger*), which is accompanied by a critical analysis of the settler structure of Canada (the theory and histories). The second contribution is an inquiry into the *process* of theatre creation in relationship to movements for decolonization and the need for a shift in how settlers relate to and tell stories about the land. These two threads of content and creation are distinct yet co-constitutive, which itself is one of the central tenets of my practice: that is, the practice of crafting and telling a story is not always neatly separable from the story itself. This is in keeping with theorists of research-creation, performance research, or practice-as-research, who argue that artistic practice both comes from and generates research; documentation of and critical reflection on the process thus become integral components of the research (Arlander, 2018; Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012; Loveless, 2019, 2020).

The first of these two threads—the theoretical analysis that underpins *Land Hunger*—has been introduced in the previous sections of this introduction, and loosely follows the trajectory that I initially laid out in proposing this dissertation topic. The second of these threads, that of process, slowly and somewhat unintentionally emerged out of this work. Yet this unintentional output was, in a way, intentional; if research-creation means that a creative process itself produces knowledge through its creation, then research-creation can rarely predict its own full contribution in advance. Furthermore, as Owen Chapman writes,

the conjunction research-creation no longer simply acts as an adjective, but as a noun—reifying not just the outcome (as focusing on ‘the project’ tends to do), but on the combined process and product—the holistic totality that is the initiative, the inspiration, the trials and tribulations, successes and failures, and in some (not all) cases, material and intellectual outcomes that are mobilized through diverse means. (in Loveless, 2020, p. xix)

I thus did not intend to write about the *process* of devised physical theatre creation and clowning in a settler colonial context when I started this dissertation, yet this has now become one of the core contributions of my project. Therefore, the process I discuss is laid out through reflection on my practice after the fact. The methods of creation that I have drawn on during this doctoral research stem from my practice of research-creation as a physical theatre artist and it is only in retrospect that I have theorized these methods into a process that is offered for others to use or teach. The form of a dissertation, with its finalized and formalized expectations, is thus a nerve-racking medium for this project, yet it is also the only medium that has allowed such space-time to critically explore how this type of work is created in relation to the land. My process of devising is therefore by no means a clean, tidy blueprint. It is, however, deeply reflexive of its

own inherent messy entanglements, which I believe to be a fruitful offering for other artists, who I hope can use, expand, disrupt, and play with the process as it evolves through the doing of it.

The process of theatre creation that I employ is heavily inspired by Pochinko clown training, as taught to me by John Turner (of the famous clown duo Mump & Smoot) at the Manitoulin Conservatory for Creation and Performance, which was more commonly known as the Clown Farm. I began this training at the start of my PhD and have since used it as a springboard for my own performance and theatre creation, both as an individual artist and with my theatre collaborator, Alexandra Simpson, and the collective we run together (Animacy Theatre Collective). We have created several plays and projects through Animacy, and the process we use to create our work gave me the practice and experience that I use to draw on a framework for creating *Land Hunger*. With a foundation in clowning and mask, Animacy is heavily influenced by a model of feminist and land-based research-creation. Our process of creation is structured as a collaboration between research, embodied play, and site. This means that when making a new show, we always incorporate extensive research and theory, physical improvisations, and the materiality and history of the performance space or rehearsal room into the creation process. While my process of creating *Land Hunger* was necessarily distinct from other Animacy productions—although my collaborator directed and advised on the piece, the studio creation time was done solo—I drew heavily on the process that we have developed together over the years. *Land Hunger* thus rests on the foundation of my clown duo work with my collaborator and our practice of research-creation through Animacy.

Contributions and Chapter Summaries

This project has asked me to consider the always-evolving cultural stories that settler-Canadians relate about ourselves and to what extent these stories can be disrupted through the processes by

which we create and tell them. My dissertation thus asks the question: What performance praxes are needed right now for artists to create work that pushes against hegemonic yet invisibilized structures of Canadian nationhood? I argue for an embodied and self-reflexive approach to settler theatre creation that seeks to critically respond to patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial structures of power. This requires a theory of settler accountability and responsibility for creating theatre on stolen land. Settlers are often—and understandably—searching for *the* way of being a settler that lets them be innocent. Rather than mapping the fixed location where we can comfortably stand, permanently “curing” our white guilt,¹³ my contribution towards settler accountability is to advocate for a commitment to the messy, difficult, and embodied *movement* that relationality to land/history/nation requires in a settler colony. The orientation of a movement rather than a cure initiates an ongoing, active, and engaged practice of being in relation to the world and showing up to respond to frequently shifting structures of power and oppression. In this way, we can work towards creating new understandings of white settler subjects that are structurally in solidarity with Indigenous resurgence and decolonization. My contribution to this effort explores *performance practice* as a way of knowing. To develop this praxis, I draw on theories and methods of clowning, site-specific and environmental theatre, Indigenous and decolonial theatre, and devised theatre. This framework positions my short film *Land Hunger* as both a research output and an experiment in research process. As a critical and creative exploration of the structures of power that hold up a Western nation-state, this work contributes to the intersecting fields of Performance Studies; Environmental, Indigenous and Settler Colonial Studies; Critical Race Studies; and Research-Creation.

¹³ See Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s novel *Noopiming: A Cure for White Ladies* (2020) for inspiration on this phrasing. While the title satirically refers to a cure *against* white ladies, my initial interpretation of the title was that it was offering a cure for white ladies themselves. I see this interpretation as my own desire for settler innocence.

Chapter 1 is a discussion of the theoretical framework that my dissertation rests on. I use my white settler ancestry—specifically the genealogical thread of Home Children as “nation builders”—as a catalyst to explore the way that theories of whiteness, gender, and their discursive and overlapping practices structure land theft in the formation of a settler nation, drawing particularly on Edward Said’s writing on culture and imperialism and Ruth Frankenberg’s theory of the structured invisibility of whiteness. This chapter asks: What is excluded or included in the making of nation and subject? Stemming from Avery Gordon’s hauntology, I explore what is absent within the presence of Canada. Grounded in Indigenous methodological frameworks of land and relationality through the works of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Shawn Wilson, and Lindsay Lachance, I argue that performance is integral to the way that narration and mythology help structure the gendered and racialized colonial project.

Next, Chapter 2 takes up this framework in relation to performance practice. Beginning with performance theorists such as Diana Taylor who centre archival hauntings in the present day, I analyze methods of my own Western performance training to argue for a theatre praxis that forefronts relational accountability to land and Indigenous nations, framed as a *heterotopic praxis*, drawing on Joanne Tompkins’ use of the term. Chapter 3 furthers these theories through a process of creatively responding to the archive. This is part of my methodology wherein creative practice is itself a way of doing research. I offer segments of my archival analysis of the structured innocence of settler domesticity through both existing texts (such as the early female pioneer writers Elizabeth Simcoe and Catherine Parr Traill) and through my own critical fabulation of the gaps in between what we are able to know. I end with a critical autoethnography of my own personal archive through childhood make-believe stories, arguing that there is a haunting, embodied presence of settler histories within the present day.

Chapter 4 critically reflects on my time in-studio at an arts residency, which is where the main character of *Land Hunger* first emerged. Pairing Julie Salverson’s writing on foolish witnessing with Jill Carter’s articulation of settlers soliciting welcome to a territory, I explore what the process of embodied research can offer in terms of consent and settler relationality. While this chapter examines questions of method as they relate to and are co-constitutive of content, Chapter 5 makes a similar argument for medium/form. Rather than arguing for a neat conclusion that posits the short film genre as the best form for this project, I argue for the productivity of movement across forms and mediums, inspired by Natalie Loveless’s term *polydisciplinamory*. I draw on Laura Levin’s theory of the figure/ground relation to explore how this movement itself helped shape my conversation around artist-land relations in a settler colonial, extractive, capitalist world. I posit that to grapple so tumultuously with form was, in retrospect, a way of grappling with my own relationship to site/place/space/land and therefore in itself was a way of doing research. Chapter 6 looks at the framework of the palimpsest in performance to analyze the film, *Land Hunger*. Each section of this chapter parallels a chapter of the film, analyzing the way that it explores the structures of domesticity and innocence that Canada is built on and that settlers reify through their continued performance. The film *Land Hunger* is itself a core component of this dissertation, and it is recommended to be viewed before the written component (see instructions for viewing in the Preface, p. vii).



Before beginning Chapter 1, I would like to first make a brief note on terminology. Throughout this dissertation, I oscillate between Indigenous and settler placenames, such as Tkaronto and Toronto or Turtle Island and Canada/North America. This is largely due to the messy entanglements of naming in a colonial, patriarchal and capitalist world. While I debated this for a

while, my decision not to exclusively use Indigenous placenames is based on my desire to speak about both the land and the colonial structure that was placed on top of it. Using a combination of naming practices felt fitting in this regard. I often also use the descriptor “so-called” before naming Canada, which calls attention to its imposition on top of Indigenous sovereign nations. I decided not to do so every time, merely for ease of reading.

Chapter 1

Performance and the Settler Nation: A Theoretical Framework

To be unmarked or unnamed is also simply to embody the norm and not to have actively produced and sustained it. To be the norm, yet to have the norm unnamed, is to be innocent of the domination of others.

— Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack, “The Race to Innocence,” p. 341

Reflected in Stone: A Photostory

There is a large monument that sits with shiny grandeur in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough), on Barnardo Avenue. There are thousands of girls named on this plaque, girls who were once given labels such as destitute or orphan, to name only the kindest ones. There is one girl whose name I came here to see. I search for it even though I can tell within minutes that it is not here. This large monument screams of accuracy, meticulously exhaustive research, and permanency, yet someone decided to skip the first 72 children that I know are in the records. Her absence has been written in stone. I can look at her name in the archives wherever I take my laptop, but I can't touch it. Her record floats in the internet waves (is that how internet works?). It is not grounded in this land.

Am I disappointed just based on the principle of it? Does it feel sloppy? As if they can't even bother to attend to each impoverished British girl who they clearly have a record of, meanwhile they erect an ostentatious monument that purports to be for all of them? Does it feel more like this monument is addressing the idea of the children rather than their actual selves? Would I still think that if my ancestor was one of the thousands who was included here—would I even notice anyone was missing? Do I just feel like I need a record in stone that says I came to this land in this way? Is my desire to know about Ella just about a craving for settler emplacement?

Or does it help me imagine who she is in the creation of Canada and the creation of me, which get celebrated together on that same first of July every summer? That same month that she arrived here, I remind myself, because the monument isn't doing it for me. Would her name in this stone on this piece of earth where she first arrived help me recognize her?

Would it help me know how she tip-toed through orphanages, how her nose was runny, how she thought of salvation or despair when she got off the train. How she was attacked by mosquitos for the first time and told to shush. When I was eight, orphans were the epitome of romance for all my make-believe stories – Orphan Annie, Oliver Twist, Anne of Green Gables, Mary Lennox, Pippi Longstocking, Madeline, and all the fictional ones I created in between these. It thrilled me to pretend to be each of them. Did I come here for these ghosts?

When I step back and stop looking for her name, I can see my own outline. I see my body that got here through her body, I see my body reflected in the stone where her absence is forever memorialized.

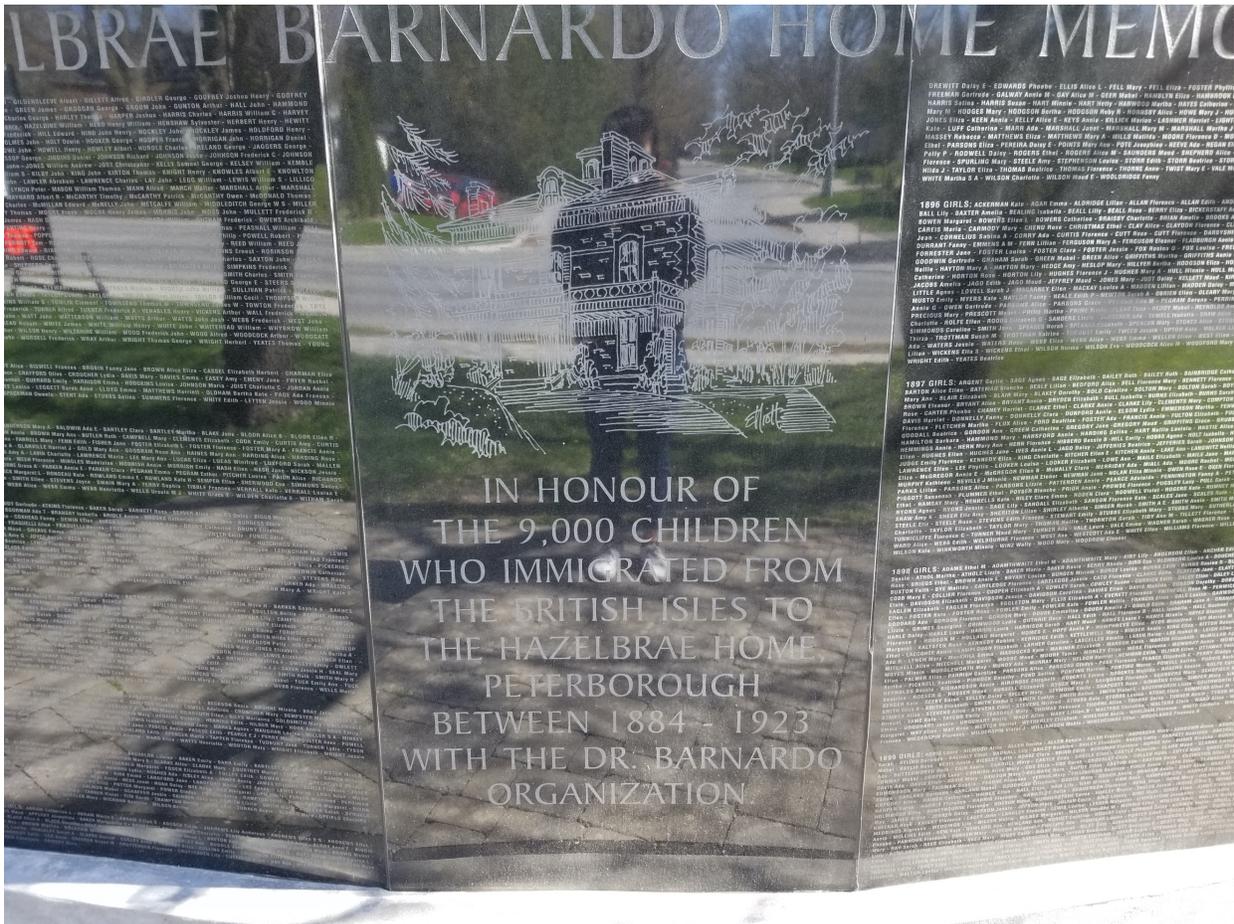


Figure 4: Me taking a photo of my reflection in a monument honouring Barnardo's Home Children.

This dissertation project originated from the messy, personal, and creative questioning of my relationship to the land I am on, to the nation-state of Canada and the nations that it was put on top of, to the histories that brought me here, and to the discourses of power that weave through them. Following feminist and Indigenous scholars who have argued that what you are able to know and not know is shaped largely by your own social location, I begin from my own ancestry and expand outward in dialogue with the scholarship on the broader environmental and social context in which we find ourselves. I will demonstrate how theories of settler colonialism and whiteness are not just the subject of my research, coincidentally resulting in a creative output; rather, these theories drive the foundational way that I come to understand and practice performance. While my research looks at the potential for settler performance practice to contribute to disruptions of our cultural stories of white Canadian-ness, my inspiration and theoretical anchor comes from the fields of Indigenous resurgence and decolonization, which centre relationality within research. My theoretical framework therefore grapples with the question of settler artist accountability within performance practice, stemming from the argument that culture is integral to the creation and maintenance of power structures (Said, 1994). I follow a genealogical process in the Foucauldian sense, which entails sifting through hauntings between the past and present to find not the origin of nation but rather its palimpsestic and discursive formation. In analyzing not only what a settler colonial nation-state is but how we come to know what it is, we can build a better foundation of possibilities for a decolonial world. This chapter argues that performance is integral to the way that narration and mythology help structure the ongoing gendered and racialized colonial project, asking: what frameworks for theatre creation are needed for artists to disrupt the structured invisibility of white domesticity? How is this work

distinct for settler artists, even as it is entangled in shared worlds and movements of Indigenous, refugee or immigrant artists also living on this land?

The Presence of Absence: Investing in Whiteness

My performance praxis is haunted by settler colonial ghosts. These ghosts—the lineage of social structures and actors that have shaped my approach to creating theatre—are central to my relation to the stolen land that I live on, which is in turn a foundation for how I create theatre. As Avery Gordon writes, “If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place” (1997, p. 8). Gordon writes about the ways in which colonized, oppressed, or enslaved figures haunt the present despite the violent ways their stories and bodies have been concealed, erased, or otherwise made invisible (see also Philip, 2011; Saleh-Hanna, 2015). My work takes up this idea by looking at the distinct ways that white settler ghosts can haunt the present day even through their extreme visibility. That is, unlike colonized and enslaved peoples—whose stories have been so often violently invisibilized within dominant history—white settlers are hardly lacking in archival representation. This is revoltingly clear in the contrast between the large monument for orphaned white girls shown in the above photostory and the hundreds of unmarked graves of Indigenous children that are currently being uncovered at residential school sites across so-called Canada. It is believed that the full number of children who are buried at these schools will *never be known*, as the record keeping—facilitated by the very colonial programs responsible for the children’s death—was so poor (The Canadian Press, 2023). The record keeping for future white Canadian settler subjects, however, has clearly been drastically different.

The white girls who were diligently archived in the Peterborough monument that I visited were Home Children, part of a project of child emigration to British colonies—such as Canada, South Africa, New Zealand or Australia—in order to solve the crisis of urban poverty in Britain. From 1863-1939, over 100,000 orphaned or impoverished children were brought from Britain to Canada (Cameron, 2018, p. 533). My paternal great-great-grandmother, Ella Hillier, was born into a workhouse in Bath, England, around 1873. She was taken into John Barnardo’s Village Home for Orphan Neglect and Destitute Girls in 1881. Barnardo later came to run one of the largest Home Child organizations for Britain’s colonies. In July 1883, Ella, aged somewhere between 8-10, arrived in Canada as one of the 72 who made up the very first shipment of Barnardo’s Home Child girls (*Immigration Records*, 2013). The children were brought to a brand-new receiving home in Peterborough called Hazelbrae where, like thousands after them, they awaited a request from an eligible family, at which time they would be sent on a train to their new home/work (Corbett, 2002, p. 39). Home Children are now well-known as tragic yet stalwart pioneers, with novels, books, research organizations, and TV shows commemorating them. Then Prime Minister Stephen Harper even named 2010 the Year of the British Home Child. In a strange anomaly to this public recognition, Ella herself is invisible within this monument except through my own reflection, captured in this photo (Figure 4)—a mysterious but not necessarily news-worthy mistake. Yet the omission alerts me to a broader feeling of *absence within presence* that haunts this site.

Shortly before celebrating Home Children with their own year, this same Prime Minister publicly declared that Canada has “no history of colonialism.” The juxtaposition of these two declarations rhetorically decouples Canada’s history of Home Children from the violence of colonial land theft (K. Alexander, 2016, p. 397), demonstrating, as Selena Couture poignantly

describes, “the necessity of oblivion for the continuation of settler colonial subject positions and ongoing violent extraction” (2021, p. 397). The history and rhetoric around Home Children make me wonder: is the presence that is absent from this monument the very soil that it sits on top of? Is it the material of the stone itself? Looking back on my photos of this monument I see the way that the trees and paved roadways are also reflected in the polished stone; the surface is so shiny it almost makes the reflection clearer than the monument itself. It nudges me to consider the way that class, race, gender, and colonialism structured the relationship that Home Children had *to the land*. This relationship is absent in the dominant narratives of these British child emigration programs, which mostly focus on the personal journey of perseverance that was required of the young subjects—and yet their relation to land was central to the entire project, starting generations before Ella and the first group of Barnardo Home Children came over.

Between the 15th and 17th centuries, Britain experienced a massive wave of “enclosures,” where what had been communally held land, or feudal commons, was forcefully transformed into private property (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7; Federici, 2004, p. 62). The loss of land resulted in the mass migration of people into large urban centres where employment was scarce, work was demanding, and wages were low. By the mid 19th century, at the same time as an estimated 85% of the earth was owned and managed by European white men, Britain was facing a crisis of economic inequality that was largely framed as a crisis of population, of job opportunities, or of poor people (McClintock, 1995, p. 5). While many officials in the colonies were wary of accepting these masses, they also had a need for labour, particularly domestic labour, which a child emigration program could offer free of charge. In marketing his child emigration philanthropy, John Barnardo made a case for the Home Child’s British status trumping their poverty, demonstrating the racial goals of the Canadian nation when he wrote that emigrating

children “suppl[y] what the colonies are most in want of, an increase of the English-speaking population” (qtd in Corbett, 2002, p. 26). Barnardo also implemented a selection process for which children would emigrate and which would remain in British orphanages; to make the cut for the apparently esteemed “Canada List,” children needed to have training in domestic work, no perceived mental or physical disabilities, an acceptable character, determined by being “honest, industrious and capable,” “taught to revere the Bible as God’s word,” and “free from taint” (Corbett, 2002, p. 28). This performance of careful preening and selection was apparently not a notable contradiction to Barnardo’s motto of saving desperate and innocent young children, as if there was a natural hierarchy determining how much saving one really deserved. Their access to land was therefore both shaped by their poverty—through their loss of the commons—and their race—through the way that whiteness offered land ownership in Canada. I will briefly discuss the differentiation, construction, and fluidity of the categories of race and class for Home Children in a settler colonial structure through the theories of racial formation, racial capitalism, and the corresponding investment in whiteness in relation to settler colonial nation-making.

Settler cravings for place and belonging find a fitting outlet in the archetypal orphan story, where absence (of nuclear family, parents, children etc.) finds cathartic resolution in adoption and a newfound sense of attachment to place (Shields, 2018, p. 527). This attachment has been discussed as “settler affect” (Rifkin, 2013; Shields, 2018) or “settler emplacement” (Morgensen, 2009) and is poignantly defined as “exaggerated attachment to place identities grafted onto colonized places” (Shields, 2018, p. 519). In Canada’s favourite orphan story—and one of my favourite books growing up—*Anne of Green Gables*, the character Marilla Cuthbert applies to adopt an orphan boy to help on the farm. She explains her orphan preferences to her friend Rachel Lynde:

At first Matthew suggested getting a Barnardo boy. But I said ‘no’ flat to that. ‘They may be all right—I’m not saying they’re not—but no London street Arabs for me’, I said.

‘Give me a native born at least . . . I’ll feel easier in my mind and sleep sounder at nights if we get a born Canadian.’ (Montgomery, 1998, p. 26)

Of course, when Marilla speaks of a “native born,” she means a child with British heritage who was born in Canada, not a child who is Indigenous to Turtle Island. She ends up getting a Canadian orphan, though famously not of the gender she would prefer, and this orphan’s story to find belonging enacts a satisfying settler affect. While Anne is initially rejected on the basis of her gender and has to create and prove her emplacement, the above discourse shows that she still would have been preferred over Ella—strangely on the basis of race. Home Children—referred to above as a “Barnardo boy”—were white-skinned, British-born children living in Canada whose poverty *racially* differentiated them from white-Canadian or white-British children.

In the above excerpt, Home Children’s shifting categorization are a poignant example of the ways in which, as Jodi Melamed articulates, “racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires,” demonstrating the ways in which capitalism is always already racial capitalism (Melamed, 2015, p. 77). This is true of colonialism as well, and Home Children are moved between racial categories as the coordinating structures of capitalist-colonial power require. They are at first not considered white, fitting into the role of unpaid child labourers to maximize the reproduction of a white settler farm or household. Then, in adulthood, they become white, fitting into the role of settlers who can take up their own land for the nation of Canada. This shift finds its logic through the lens of racial formation theory, which shows how the making and unmaking of racial categories and their meaning is always happening through systems of power (Omi & Winant, 2014). Each shift in racial categorization for Home Children in Canada thus helped

further expand a Christian Anglo-Saxon nation-state, redefining, as needed, what is considered “Canadian.”

Furthermore, Melamed takes up Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s argument for understanding racial capitalism as founded upon an *antirelationality*,¹⁴ where the highly controlled categorizations that racial capitalism relies on divided the subjugated from each other and thus geographically and socially minimized the potential for solidarities to form. In this sense, racism can be defined as “the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in *distinct yet densely interconnected* political geographies” (Gilmore qtd in Melamed, 2015, p. 78). Division and domination based on shifting categories of difference are therefore crucial to understanding the intersecting structures of race, class, gender, and colonization in the creation of Canada. Still, racial capitalism was not necessarily simply a post-feudal conspiracy by the bourgeois to further divide the working class, as it has been debated that the practice of equating divisions of difference with those of race was established before the age of capitalism and the colonization of Turtle Island (Kelley, 2017). For my research, I emphasize the way patriarchal racial capitalism weaponized difference, or an antirelationality, to steal and control Indigenous land in the creation of Canada. This is the context in which Home Children were able to fluidly move across racial formations, and their history helps show how unstable racial categories have always been (Omi & Winant, 2014).

This movement is specifically tied to a racialized distribution of land/wealth in a settler colonial context, which George Lipsitz calls a “possessive investment in whiteness,” a theory which makes clear the “relationship between whiteness and asset accumulation” (2018, p. viii). Cheryl Harris theorizes the legal history of property ownership and race in the Americas—which

¹⁴ (Wilson Gilmore, 2002)

has many overlaps with the Canadian context—when she writes that "Possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property—was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that whiteness—that which whites alone possess—is valuable and is property" (1993, p. 1721). Whiteness offers access to property and land, as can be seen in the forced removal of Indigenous people onto reserves so that more land could be given to new citizens, primarily white British men, who would hold the land as private property. In this way, access to land and racial differentiation are intertwined. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson puts it, the "logics of white possession and the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty are materially and discursively linked" (2015, p. xiii). While property is commonly thought to refer to an object of possession, such as a house or car, it has been theorized more broadly as a *right* that can apply to material or immaterial things, such as an education, or a reputation (Harris, 1993, pp. 1724–1725). As Carmen L. Gillies' study on racism in education demonstrates, Métis students have described the way that the ability—and choice—to pass for white within the Canadian public school system gives them certain rights, for example, the right of "use and enjoyment" of school grounds, which Harris shows is a key component of property rights (Gillies, 2022, p. 151; Harris, 1993, p. 1734). Whiteness therefore not only allows for greater access to land/property in a settler colonial state, but it also acts as property itself.

Ruth Frankenberg, in her extensive research on white women's understanding of their own whiteness, demonstrates the way in which white people find white culture difficult to recognize or name as such. Instead, non-white cultures are named in the ways that they differ from white ones; whiteness itself thus becomes an "unmarked marker of others' differentness" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 203). Through such unmarking, white dominance and privilege are

normalized to the point of invisibility, which Frankenberg terms a “structured invisibility” (1993, p. 6). Seeing whiteness as a structure, rather than a biological feature, reinforces the idea that whiteness is not a natural system of categorization but rather a relatively recent and frequently shifting system of power (Omi & Winant, 2014; Painter, 2010). Notably, whiteness may, on many occasions, be hyper visible to Indigenous people or people of colour, who suffer most acutely from its structure; as Moreton-Robinson writes, Indigenous people “experience ontologically the effects of white possession” (2015, p. xiii). It is thus important to distinguish that hauntings—and their foundations of invisible/visible, past/future, or presence/absence—are experienced differently for different bodies. Yet there is still a hegemonic narrative through which the assumed neutrality of settler subjecthood can be made invisible to itself while simultaneously taking up an enormous amount of space, both on the land and in the archive. It is clear that “there are inextricable connections between white possessive logics, race, and the founding of nation-states” (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. xiii), and yet these connections become obscured, or structurally *absented*, despite their overwhelming *presence*.

These are the logics which allow Home Children to be discursively separated from the colonial project of land theft. Home Children are now culturally seen as tragic but heroic figures, helping work the land to create food for settler families and helping farm wives to raise children and keep a respectable house. They are described by one historian as Canada’s “most courageous and successful nation builders” (Corbett, 2002, p. n.p.). Yet, the nation they were (consensually or otherwise) building via domestication was undeniably an intentionally white, Christian, heteropatriarchal society which, if the children survived the extreme abuse and neglect that many suffered, they and their future descendants stood to materially benefit from (Brandon, 2015; Corbett, 2002). Unlike Indigenous people (and with much more ease than Black, Chinese, or

many other immigrants of colour) these Home Children would grow up to one day have the ability to own land themselves, even if for women it was largely, but not exclusively, through their white husbands (S. Carter, 2016). This land would then be passed on to their children for generations to come. Even as an urban renter, I experience the generational accumulation that comes from this investment in whiteness through continued access to the cottage described in the introduction, which was built by my grandfather, the grandson of a Home Child.



Figure 5: The Hazelbrae monument for Home Children in Peterborough, with the Canadian flag erected next to it. Photo from the British Home Children Canada website.

There is therefore a violence of land theft haunting this stone monument. It is both the theft of British feudal commons via enclosures with the beginning of capitalism and the historic and ongoing theft of Indigenous land on Turtle Island by what is now the state of Canada. This is a violence that Canada pretends it has moved past, yet whose presence hauntologically underlies modern-day liberal discourses of a peaceful, multicultural nation-state, as shown in Figure 5, where a Canadian flag flies over the Hazelbrae monument to Home Children. Today, surviving Home Children and all of us who are descended from them are estimated to make up approximately 11% of the Canadian population (Bagnell, 2001; *British Home Children in Canada*, n.d.; Morrison, 2006), while the Canadian government estimates that Indigenous people make up approximately 4.9%¹⁵ (Government of Canada, 2017). Furthermore, the Canadian government claims control of 98.8% of the land in Canada, while Indigenous people currently only control¹⁶ approximately 0.2% (Manuel, 2015, p. 8). Thus, the Home Child project was in fact quite helpful in the acquisition of territory, forming a significant addition to the ranks of the structurally invisible creeping blockade of domesticity, which to this day continually takes up increasingly more land. This is the absence that haunts the monument, inscribing via omission a certain myth of Canadian nation-making. This dissertation argues that the haunting gaps in Canadian mythology are important to understand in order to disrupt dominant hegemony. I will therefore turn now to theories of nation-making and the cultural narratives that enact them, starting with an Indigenous framework of relationality.

¹⁵ This is of course only according to the way that Canada defines who is Indigenous and who is not, which relies on colonial logics of recognition (Coulthard 2014). This is therefore an approximate number that comes from a certain narrative of Indigeneity as put forward by Canada.

¹⁶ Again, this “control” is according to Canada’s legal system, itself dubious at best in this regard, and not necessarily the legal systems of many Indigenous nations. Due to Canada’s military and economic dominance though, this number is still important even if it has little to no legal foundation.

Relational Accountability and the Land: A Teeter-Totter Framework

Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree) explains that Indigenous research methodologies centre the fundamental *relationship* between the researcher and what they are researching (2001). This framework can therefore counter the antirelationality that Gilmore argues racial capitalism relies on. As an artist, activist, and academic, relationality is a foundational lens that forms my understanding of research, which I take to mean that my research is neither exclusively about me nor am I fully extricable from my research. The genealogical anchoring in the above section came from questions I had about my relationship to historical and ongoing processes of settler colonialism; from this orientation I came to theorize broader settler subject and nationhood formation in relation to racialized, gendered, and classed structures of domination. While being distinctly a settler project—that is, written by a settler and largely aimed at settler artists—my research stems from Indigenous methodological and theoretical frameworks that put the researcher’s relationality front and centre. In his article “What is Indigenous Research Methodology?” Wilson writes that to do research is to answer to “*all your relations*” which positions the pursuit of knowledge not as an abstract concept but as “relational accountability” (2001, p. 177). What does this look like for settler research and performance praxis?

Indigenous researchers and artists remind me that a primary locus of decolonial struggle lies in the presence of Indigenous people who are on the frontlines protecting the land (Coulthard, 2014; L. B. Simpson, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Land dispossession, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues, is the largest attack on Indigenous lives and knowledges (2017, p. 170). Jill Carter writes how Indigenous movements are the “embodied offerings and withholdings” which “promise to destabilize the hegemonic structures of containment,” positioning “Indigenous *resistance to occupation, extraction, and erasure as a performance that*

is inseparable from the Indigenous body” (2020a, p. 17 emphasis in original). The destabilizing work of these embodied offerings are what make the structure of containment visible to me in the first place. Indigenous artists, theorists and land defenders make the violent colonizer that is stuck to Canadian subjecthood continually easier for me to see, creating the foundation that makes this dissertation possible. While this research is primarily a solo project that critically reflects on settler-Canadian subjecthood through embodied performance, it stems from a deep reflection on Indigenous methodologies, radical resurgent movements, and land defence practices.

Simpson writes that, “to survive *as Nishnaabeg*...we shouldn’t be just striving for land-based pedagogies. The land must once again *become* the pedagogy” (2014, p. 14). This quote has haunted me for the past decade since Simpson’s article “Land as Pedagogy” first came out. In her other writing, Simpson (2008) also describes relationality through the Nishnaabeg concept of *Bimaadiziwin*, or “living the good life” (see also LaDuke, 1999). She writes:

In a real sense for the Nishnaabeg, relating to one's immediate family, the land, the members of their clan, and their relations in the nonhuman world in a good way was the foundation of good governance in a collective sense. Promoting *Bimaadiziwin* in the affairs of the nations begins with practicing *Bimaadiziwin* in one's everyday life (2008, p. 32).

Throughout this dissertation, I have struggled with the ways in which Indigenous theorists and artists fundamentally inspire and orient this project yet in so many ways these theories will act differently on settler bodies. How can the land be the pedagogy when my relationship to the land presupposes violent dispossession? It feels like kidnapping someone’s grandmother and then asking her to be your mentor. Drawing on these Anishinaabe theories of relations, I grapple with

the question of how settler artists can understand Bimaadiziwin and come into relation with this land in a good way.

Situating my theoretical framework around the notion of land as pedagogy and forefronting my relational accountability is a delicate balance. On the one hand, I want to avoid the kind of settler emplacement (see Morgensen, 2009) which romanticizes my relationship to Turtle Island, performing an emotional belonging—or “settler affect” (Shields, 2018, p. 519)—that erases the structures of whiteness that have allowed me to have this relationship and denied others that same possibility. I do not want my love for this land to be a justification for the project of Canada. Yet on the other hand, a dismissal of my love for the land and the way that it sustains my life would frame me as outside of this ecosystem, easily extricable from the land, justifying the Cartesian, extractive, and hierarchical separation of nature/human that patriarchal-colonial destruction is founded on (Plumwood, 2002). At the start of this doctoral work, I thought I should be able to by and large map out the exact location in the centre of this ethical teeter-totter, which is not something I have succeeded in doing. The answer I am left with, for now, is much messier, more complex, and yet strangely simple, for it is not a *location* on the metaphorical teeter-totter but a *movement* along it. I am trying to get better at noticing the signs that I have teetered too far in one direction, and I try to resist jumping off the play structure altogether, reminding myself to instead walk carefully in the other direction. Thus, rather than theorize a static and precise point of balance, this dissertation is propelled by the *movement* of balancing.

The movement of balancing requires deep and ongoing reflection on the physical land itself and a commitment to our responsibilities—as humans in an ecosystem—to protect it against the onslaught of extractive capitalist structures. These structures have a stronghold on

settler relations to land, and solidarity with Indigenous land defence movements can be a fruitful place to untangle them. Yet the practices of Indigenous/settler collaborations or separations are also part of a particular balance that needs to be taken seriously. The chasms produced by centuries of structured antirelationality on Turtle Island need to be taken into account when settlers consider how their presence can become productive solidarity for decolonial futures.

Relational Responsibility and Performance: Owning a Piece of the Story

Many Indigenous writers, scholars, lawyers, artists and elders across Turtle Island show the centrality of culture, including story and language, to their sovereignty as nations, and argue for the importance of cultural resurgence in the multifarious movements to regain their lands and territories (Appleford, 2005; J. Carter, 2016; T. King, 2008; Lachance, 2021; MacKenzie, 2020; Mojica, 1991; Nolan, 2015; Nolan & Knowles, 2016; L. B. Simpson, 2011). Jill Carter discusses how “performing Others across Turtle Island continue to develop somatic and dramaturgical strategies that combat extraction, obstruct penetration, and thwart satiation” (2020a, p. 17). In a similar vein, looking at colonial relations globally, Honor Ford-Smith draws on Sylvia Wynter’s argument that “when we re-center the margins we effectively change how we see the world because we destabilize binary constitutions of self and other” (2019, pp. 153–154). This “re-centering” signifies a resurgence of Indigeneity that colonial forces assumed they would be able to destroy, but which has in fact never disappeared.

Indigenous scholars and artists have written about how decolonial work often challenges liberal cravings for reconciliation, or coming together, since, however uncomfortable it is for settlers to hear, it is, in fact, not always beneficial for us to be active in Indigenous spaces of resurgence (Kovach, 2009; Recollet & Johnson, 2019; D. Robinson & Martin, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). To a certain extent, then, decolonial movements in Canada

are strengthened by David Garneau’s “irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality” (in D. Robinson & Martin, 2016, p. 26). That is, while decolonization work may benefit from dialogue and collaboration, it also “sometimes requires occasions of separation—moments where Indigenous people take space and time to work things out among themselves, and parallel moments when allies ought to do the same” (Garneau in Robinson and Martin 23). My research is situated in this “parallel moment” of settler unsettling, which, it is important to note, neither forecloses nor necessitates collaboration. As Jill Carter elaborates, based off her own work facilitating the devised theatre show *Encounters at the ‘Edge of the Woods’* with a large cast of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists (created for Hart House Theatre’s 100th year anniversary in 2019), irreconcilable spaces are about “carving an edge from which to call out and to respond, from which to ask consent and to grant it, and from which to alternatively meet to re-treat with or to retreat from each other with a promise to meet again and again and again...” (2022, p. 174). Although my own “retreat” was largely necessitated by a public health lockdown, I still believe in it as an ethical framework. Indigenous theatre theorists are thus a central inspiration for my work, but my practice is specifically coming from the positionality of a settler.

In her doctoral research, Algonquin Anishinaabe dramaturg and scholar Lindsay Lachance outlines her theory of Relational Indigenous dramaturgy for Indigenous theatre creation, arguing that this work is a “redefining of dramaturgy to include processes that are more than new play development practices or highly intensive research obligations, processes that are to be understood as relational and inclusive of the people, places, spirits and other beings involved” and that “celebrate Indigenous resistance through artistic embodied thought and action” (2018, p. 2). She notes the ways that this is distinct for Indigenous theatre makers and describes how the process of creation necessarily changes (she calls it “community-engaged

dramaturgies” instead of “land or place-based dramaturgies”) when working cross-culturally with settlers and Indigenous artists together. Importantly, for my work, she notes the “lack of responsibility” often expressed by settler audiences and artists, elaborating that in the context of our current moment of supposed reconciliation,

it is necessary for all Canadians to ‘own a little piece’¹⁷ of Canada’s colonial histories in order for us all to move forward in a positive way...I suggest that we consider the phenomenological experience of attending theatre as a call and response: I see what's happening onstage and I think about how to give back to what I have experienced. (2018, p. 12)

While Lachance is discussing the performer/audience relationship, particularly with non-Indigenous audiences attending Indigenous theatre, I believe her argument is also true for settler artists who may feel that “irreconcilable spaces” leave them with general guilt but no actual *responsibility* in the kind of art they make. This feeling of action-less guilt can sometimes produce a reactionary response in settlers. Here I am thinking of the show *bug* by the manidoons collective (created and performed by South Asian and Ojibwe artist Yolanda Bonnell and directed by Métis artist Cole Alvis) presented at Theatre Passe Muraille in 2018. manidoons received aggressive backlash, particularly from white theatre critics, when they requested that only IBPOC writers review the show. Bonnell describes the reactionary culture that it produced in her roundtable discussion on the show’s reception after the fact, writing “I don’t know why some settlers immediately go to talk about free speech because then *even the disruption of colonial state systems of oppression becomes about them*. It’s so toxic. They centre their own comfortability in a topic of discussion that is about making them uncomfortable.” (Alvis et al.,

¹⁷ This is a direct quote from the play *The Edward Curtis Project*, by Métis-Dene playwright Marie Clements.

2021, p. 113, my emphasis). I argue that, following the lead from Indigenous theatre artists like Lachance and Carter (who explicitly draw on the work of artists like Yvette Nolan, Monique Mojica, Gloria Miguel, or Marie Clements), there is a necessity for settler theatre artists to create decolonial performance practices that do not infringe upon Indigenous calls for distinct spaces of irreconcilability when such spaces are needed, yet also do not create their own reactionary aggression in response to these calls, recognizing that solidarity requires both messy entanglements and intentional separations.

There are numerous ways that settler accountability and responsibility have been cultivated within arts spaces. Most of the ways this has been theorized in the Canadian context is through collaborations, for example, with artists Maria Campbell (Métis) and Linda Griffiths' (settler-Canadian) famously tumultuous collaboration on their play *Jessica*—which almost ended their creative and personal relationship over issues of representation and appropriation, all of which they eventually documented in their text *The Book of Jessica* (2000)—or, more recently, Jill Carter's curation and direction of the collective creation *Encounters at the 'Edge of the Woods,'* described at the start of this section. These have been incredibly important and are brave practices to learn from in trying to figure out how to (or how to *not*) productively come together in creative spaces. I find this idea particularly useful when teaching, as a classroom, whether artistic or academic, may be filled with students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Since my doctoral work has been a solo creative project, my theoretical and methodological framework is a contribution to theatre praxis that responds to the fact of its location in a settler colony regardless of the direct involvement of Indigenous artists in that specific project. This is not to say that Indigenous artists are not fundamentally shifting the cultural and discursive landscape that makes settler critical and artistic inquiry even possible, as I've noted is the case with this

project. It does mean that the onus for settler accountability does not have to be borne by Indigenous artists. Indigenous-settler artistic collaboration can create powerful decolonial possibilities, but this collaboration is not a pre-requisite for settlers to take responsibility for the structure of land theft and their own stories that uphold it.

It is in this sense that my praxis responds to the ghostly structure of invisibility. For example, the Canadian state has historically understood the threat that Indigenous culture poses to Canada's false claims of jurisdiction, attempting genocide against Indigenous peoples in part through militarily enforced restrictions on ceremonies, languages, performances, and other cultural practices. Today, however, hegemonic liberal discourse in Canada often carves out small pockets where Indigenous cultural resurgence is encouraged to exist, as long as it stays unthreateningly in its dedicated space as part of a Canadian multicultural mosaic (Coulthard, 2014; L. B. Simpson, 2017). This system implicitly assumes the underlying authority and legitimacy of Canada as a nation that can generously recognize and incorporate many Others within its hegemony (Coulthard, 2014). This authority is therefore now largely invisible to settlers, thus narratively becoming a neutral container that is very kindly tolerant of difference. That is, modern-day Canadian nationalism, which is inherently in opposition to Indigenous sovereignty, to a certain extent actively makes space for Indigenous resurgence, encouraging its existence as one beautiful part of what Canada is made of. But the very act of making space, and thus outlining exactly where that space should start and stop, relies on an assumption of Canadian jurisdiction over Indigenous lives. In its generosity it makes the Canadian state *more* invisible, naturalizing instead of problematizing its power and authority. I therefore argue that challenging the construction and reification of this structure, whose assumed naturalness—as I will elaborate on further in the following sections—echoes *terra nullius* rhetoric, is a process

through which settler artists might engage with the goals of Indigenous resurgence and decolonization.

My theoretical framework of relationality, along with my position as an artist, has pushed me to consider the cultural forces that create settler consent¹⁸ for this structure. I therefore turn to the co-constitutive nature of settler subject and nationhood and the way that they are shaped and upheld through mythology.

Nation-Making, Land-Grabbing: Myth as Subject Formation

Sherene Razack writes about how the different mythologies of a white settler nation are “deeply spatialized stories” and that the first phase of this story is the story of *terra nullius*, where Europeans are entitled to land and that entitlement is made into law (2002, p. 3). The myth of *terra nullius* is thus historically linked to the myth of settler innocence, since many settlers may have initially taken up land in Canada believing it to be either vacant or inhabited by those whose practices of habitation do not justify their right to the land.¹⁹ The second phase for Razack is that of the pioneering, hardworking individual rendering so-called empty land productive (as defined by European-capitalist notions of productivity). “The true north strong and free” mythology, Razack writes, imagines an empty land “populated by white men of grit, a robust Northern race pitting themselves against the harshness of the climate” (2002, p. 3). *Terra nullius* as a mythology then quickly becomes invisible, allowing only the second phase of the story to define a national identity.

¹⁸ In his doctoral work, Paul J. Dornan (2020) takes up the Gramscian concept of consent in a settler context, where settler consent is sought through appeals to the comfort and familiarity settlers generally have with liberal values that can, in part, be seen to revolve around structures of private property.

¹⁹ John Borrows clarifies that the land under Canada was determined to be *legally*—but not literally—empty due to the colonial classification of Indigenous people and their land use as inferior to that of Europeans (2015, p. 702).

This helps explain how the white pioneer ancestor is not viewed by Canadians today as a violent land-privileged cog in the machine of settler colonialism—as the land giveaways inherent in *terra nullius* demonstrate—but rather as a self-made, independent individual whose hard work justifies his land wealth. The hardworking pioneer mythology thus obfuscates its own relationship to land theft, creating an *innocent* subjectivity. As Lee Maracle wryly notes, which I have quoted in the epigraph to the Introduction chapter, “Canadians have a myth about themselves, and it seems this myth is inviolable. They are innocent” (2017, p. 10). Robert A. Williams demonstrates that *terra nullius* has its pseudo-legal roots several hundred years before Christopher Columbus set foot on the continent, when a series of papal bulls decreed that the pope, being entrusted by Christ to care for *all* humans, had a divinely granted underlying jurisdiction over all people and, therefore, their lands (1990, pp. 13–15). In a poetic foreshadowing of Canadian mythology, this pope took the name of Innocent IV.

The myth of *terra nullius*—the positioning of land as so improperly used before European arrival that it was functionally vacant—is thus an integral, yet often invisibilized, belief for a settler colonial country. Lorenzo Veracini (2007) refers to this myth as one of “historylessness”—when the settler and the land they settle come together, the history of each must be shown to disappear in order to prioritize the new nation that will come from their union. Yet in hindsight we can see how palimpsestic the nation really is. The cultural narrative that says the history of Turtle Island begins around 1492 (and that anything before this is “pre-history”) is crucial to the settler colonial project (Freeman, 2010, p. 25; Quijano, 2000, p. 221). Victoria Freeman writes about Toronto’s 1884 week-long celebration of its 50th anniversary of incorporation, where the keynote speaker, scholar Daniel Wilson, proudly proclaims that Toronto has: “scarcely a past either for pride or for shame” and that the people of Toronto “*had great*

white sheets spread before them upon which they had to write the record of their city and young Dominion" (qtd in Freeman, 2010, p. 23, my emphasis). These great white sheets are the first story of Canada, rather than the innocent paper that the first story was written on.

A foundational legal structure on which this story rests is the doctrine of discovery, which, through *terra nullius*, gives license to cultural narratives of an empty land that is free to be made into private property. The doctrine of discovery is an explicitly outdated law that is mysteriously still the legal basis for much of Canada's claim to territory. Miller et al offer a concise definition of this doctrine:

In essence, the Doctrine provided that newly arrived Europeans immediately and automatically acquired legally recognized property rights in native lands and also gained governmental, political, and commercial rights over the inhabitants without the knowledge or the consent of the Indigenous peoples. When English explorers and other Europeans planted their national flags and religious symbols in 'newly discovered' lands...they were undertaking a well-recognized legal procedure and ritual mandated by international law and designed to create their country's legal claim over the 'newly discovered' lands and peoples. (2010, p. 2)

Indigenous legal scholars have shown how Canada (both through its highest legal system of the Supreme Court of Canada as well as through common public discourse) explicitly rejects any association with the doctrine of discovery while simultaneously having no other justification for their assumed jurisdiction over huge amounts of land (Borrows, 2015; Miller et al., 2010). The doctrine of discovery was always fictional, yet it is simultaneously of foundational importance to Canada's legality as a state today (Borrows, 2015, p. 742; Miller et al., 2010, p. 6). If *knowing* the doctrine to be fictional still leaves the settler state's authority intact, it is helpful to frame its

power through a Foucauldian discourse analysis, which asks not what is true²⁰ but how something is *made into truth* and what that making accomplishes in the world (Foucault, 2005; Macias, 2005). The contradiction between the doctrine's validity and its effect, then, tells us less about its legal weakness and more about the strength of mythologies and stories in creating the structures of power that a nation-state is built on. Analyzing how these discourses are produced is done in order to “accept that *they do not have to be the way they are*” (Macias, 2005, p. 238, emphasis in original). This is the theoretical lens of the relationship between art and activism through which I orient my research.

I began this project out of a desire to explore ways of performing stories that lend themselves to the larger project of decolonization through a disruption of settler-Canadian story-hegemony and the links this cultural domination has to land theft. As Edward Said famously argues, what often gets overlooked in the discussion of imperialism's voracious land acquisition is that stories and cultural production were and are a key aspect of this power structure:

The main battle in imperialism is over land...when it came to who owned the land...these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative...*nations themselves are narrations*. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. (1994, p. xiii, my emphasis)

What stories are settler Canadians telling each other and ourselves about who we are and how we are in relationship with this land? How are these stories told to newcomers who are brought into

²⁰ In our current era of increasing far-right conspiracy theories that reject scientific truths around, for example, climate change, as well as many other verifiable phenomenon, I find Tereza Macias' note on Foucauldian theories of truth helpful. She draws on Derek Hook, writing that the Foucauldian skepticism towards truth does not position it “as a relative term; rather, it focuses on the power struggles to grant some statements more validity than others” (Macias, 2005, p. 238).

the project of Canada? How are settler subjects still formed through the myths of *terra nullius* or the hardworking pioneer? If “the truth about stories,” as Thomas King writes, “is that’s all we are” (2008, p. 1), then how do these stories of Canada live in our settler bodies today? How do we embody and imagine them? Veracini writes that “an historical analysis of settler colonial forms and identity requires a specific attention to practice as a clue to consciousness...an appraisal of the imagination and psychology of settler colonialism is therefore needed” (2010, p. 76). While the stories offered in this dissertation are not quite an *appraisal*, they are a critical and fantastical exploration of the narration of Canada, specifically as it plays out as a structure of innocent domesticity on top of violent land theft.

At first, when I began asking myself the question of what stories white settlers tell them/ourselves about how we are in relation with the land, I thought of the standard general archetypes associated with a Canadian-ness: multiculturalism, niceness, politeness, peacefulness, even inclusivity. Although these would likely resonate, at least as a myth, with most Canadians, I am also cognizant of Homi Bhabha’s argument that, “despite the certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality” (1990, p. 1). That is, instead of this unifying, progressive and definitive idea of what a nation is (no matter what amount of truth we ascribe to it), a nation’s identity is a transient thing, as cultures shift with time. Rather than looking for a genealogy that can lead us to a precise and singular *origin* of nationhood, I thus argue for a method that takes into account the nation’s “unstable assemblage” and “heterogenous layers” (Foucault, 1984, p. 82). My genealogical approach to history, mythology, and nation is therefore palimpsestic and ongoing rather than linear and absolute.



This chapter has focussed on the iterative relations between mythology/story/narrative and colonial structures of power—particularly when these stories invisibilize their own construction—advocating for settler relationality and responsibility in performance creation. While I focused on the Canadian myth of innocence as my underlying framework for this project, this dissertation will also touch on the capitalist-patriarchal myths of ownership, domination, and mastery of a more-than-human—as well as feminized and racialized—world that underlie *terra nullius*. Instead of theorizing which myths and stories are, or are not, *definitively* Canadian, I argue that mythologies are central tenets of colonial power which uphold the Canadian nation by justifying its historic and ongoing land theft. The settler artist can therefore be a useful agent in producing and maintaining settler consent for the national project. Yet this means that the inverse must also hold true; she can be an equally useful agent in its disruption, starting with a practice that forefronts intergenerational accountability. This leads me to the next chapter, which is a continuation of my theoretical framework that looks specifically at performance praxis.

Chapter 2 Towards a Heterotopic Praxis

A heterotopia... is a technique for exploring theatrical space that enacts a 'laboratory' in which other spaces—and therefore other possibilities for socio-political alternatives to the existing order—can be performed.

—Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias*, p. 6

Poetry is sustained pressure on space.

—Dionne Brand, “The Shape of Language”

I now turn to the ways that this theoretical framework is manifested in a theory of performance practice. I first explore how the haunting presence of absence has been theorized in performance studies through Diana Taylor’s theory of the archive and the repertoire. I then outline a theoretical framing for my creative practice within this research-creation project as well as from my experience as a teacher and an independent theatre creator. As my methodological approach to theatre creation or training is still, in many ways, in process, my contribution here is not to prescribe a concrete method but rather to argue for a specific approach to theatre-making that draws on my own experience of praxis thus far. I critically reflect on my own acting training—which follows a method typical for Western fine arts schools—in relation to postcolonial and critical race theories from the previous chapter, positing that this pedagogy parallels mythologies of *terra nullius* and the structured invisibility of whiteness. I end by arguing for a heterotopic performance practice that considers the thick layers of history we stand on in order to rehearse the possibilities of a different future.

Scenarios of Transfer

In understanding the ways that nations can be formed and upheld through narratives, which are themselves produced through performance, my research takes up performance theorist Diana Taylor’s concept of scenarios, which she defines as “meaning-making paradigms that structure

social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes” that may overlap with texts or literary narratives, but which also encompass “corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language” (2003, p. 28). She demonstrates how scenarios function as “specific repertoires of cultural imaginings” (2003, p. 31) that are reified through their ongoing enactments. Taylor draws heavily on the example of scenarios of discovery, which stem from the narrative of the West first “discovering” the Americas. It is now the normalization of these scenarios that make them so difficult to rupture:

The very scenario that numbs us with familiarity occludes the atrocious outcome. As a paradigmatic system of visibility, the scenario also assures invisibility...Scenarios such as [the scenario of discovery] have become so normalized as to transmit values and fantasies without calling attention to itself as a “conscious” performance (Taylor, 2003, p. 54).

Scenarios of discovery have hugely influenced Canadian settler colonialism, yet the Canadian context should be recognized as distinct from, although reliant on, the Columbus narrative that has become foundational particularly for the United States and South America. While a thorough comparative analysis of the foundational myths of different ex-British colonies is outside the scope of this research, and therefore I am not making claims that Canadian scenarios are entirely unique to this part of the world, I will describe the scenarios from my research that particularly haunt this project.

Lorenzo Veracini theorizes what he calls “transfers,” which are essentially about justifying settler sovereignty by simultaneously Indigenizing the settler and removing Indigenous peoples (2010, p. 35). As the foundational myth of *terra nullius* shows us, this “transfer” is both intimately connected to land theft and requires performative embodiment. For example, in public school Canadian children are required to sing or stand for the national anthem each morning, the

lyrics of which claim that Canada is “our” “native land.” Through such repeated discursive performances, we claim a *transfer* of indigeneity from Indigenous people onto settler subjects.

Combining Taylor and Veracini, I therefore posit that *scenario of transfer* is a fitting term with which to explore the roles, rhetoric, and narratives that through repetition and performance create Canada’s racialized and gendered nation-state. Interestingly, Taylor also uses the term “transfer” to theorize the ways that knowledge and identity are transmitted through their performance. Scenarios of transfer, then, encompass both the structures of colonial narratives that justify settler sovereignty as well as the ways these narratives (and all the embodied behaviours within them) are continually performed. The contribution of my performance practice lies in its effort to make visible scenarios of transfer—which contain the structured innocence of domesticity—in order to de-familiarize the familiar, calling attention to what is “(un)conscious performance” in the maintenance of settler spaces.

To unpack scenarios of transfer requires a hauntological analysis, stemming from the iterative relationship that Taylor lays out between the archive (that which has lasting materiality, such as scripts, texts, or objects) and the repertoire (that which is embodied and live, and therefore with some quality of ephemerality). The two are deeply co-constitutive; that is, the archive of colonial memory is alive in the way it haunts the present through the repertoire, with the repertoire itself constantly changing the archive. I thus frame my dissertation as both stemming from and contributing to the archive. Taylor explains that “[a]s opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning” (2003, p. 20). Yet, at the same time, feminist and queer scholar Ann Cvetkovich’s (2003) work on what she calls the “archive of feeling” reminds us that archives themselves always exceed the tangibility of such

“stable objects,” encompassing affective responses generated from the more-than-material experiences of subjects. It is thus not just the repertoire that facilitates an archival haunting, it is also the multiple layers of feelings, stories, and happenings, which are absent from any records. So how do we engage with absence? And what does this engagement offer us?

A Foucauldian analysis makes clear that discourse is not just the text, speech, or language but also the social conditions through which circulation of or exclusions from the text are made possible (Foucault, 2005; Macias, 2005). Engaging performatively with the absences in archives can make visible hegemonic power structures by asking what is invisible and why. To explore these aspects of the archive—which may seem ephemeral but whose effects can be etched into bodies in the most tangible way—requires what Saidiya Hartman calls “critical fabulation,” which involves “straining against the limits of the archive” while “enacting the impossibility of represent[ation]” (2008, p. 11). It is about an imaginative and critical inquiry into the always unknowable, where fiction and story seep into the spaces between recorded words or images. Performing bodies are always responding to, resisting, or enacting the structures of power that shape communities and nations and it is through understanding performance’s propensity for critical fabulation that we can come to understand its destabilizing potentialities (Ford-Smith, 2005).

Performance offers pathways. It can avoid prescriptive pedagogy and it can simultaneously rupture normative structures and imagine new ones. These imaginings are not policy for a better world, rather they invite critical inquiry into what is possible and what is taken for granted. For example, during Canada’s invasion of unceded Wet’suwet’en lands on behalf of Coastal GasLink (CGL) pipeline, an anonymous group of people in Tkaronto visited the home of a Board member for the company TC Energy, which owns the majority of CGL. Dressed as

construction workers, they created a performative installation of a construction site on this Board member's pristine and sprawling front lawn, mirroring the scenes of environmental devastation on Wet'suwet'en territory by construction crews that land defenders had been sharing online (see Figures 6 and 7). This performance created pathways for the imagination. It did not prescribe that a productive solution to the creeping blockade of extractivism is to destroy every white settler property that has benefited from land theft. But it offered a comparison of land rights that denaturalizes the pervasive colonial-capitalist understanding of "empty" land as rightfully free for the taking. Within these logics, a heavily manicured pristine lawn is as unused and empty as unceded territory, and private property as defined by Canadian law is no more inviolable than Indigenous traditional territory as defined by Wet'suwet'en law.

This imagining is about disrupting settler logics of nation, based on mythologies of *terra nullius*, rather than requesting inclusion of Indigenous or immigrant populations. As Taiaiake Alfred writes, "The mythology of the state is hegemonic, and the struggle for justice would be better served by undermining the myth of state sovereignty than by carving out a small and dependent space for indigenous peoples within it" (2009, p. 82). While the medium of performance can foster settler consent for this hegemony, as any Canada Day celebration or visit from British royalty will make clear, it can also offer cracks in our cultural myths of nation-making.



Figures 6 and 7: A performative construction site on the lawn of one of TC Energy's Board members. Photos taken anonymously and posted to Rising Tide Toronto's Facebook account, June 2019.

The Chameleon-Puppet

My methodological approach to theatre creation is inspired by my training and practice as a performer, which included learning about what sort of framework I do and do not want to employ. This training, for me, was completely practice-based, although of course was underpinned by theory, whether or not I was aware of it at the time. My methodology is also inspired by my training in academia, which, in contrast, was primarily based in theory, although of course was underpinned by the experiences and practices of those writing the theory. My doctoral research has been an entangled combination of practice and theory, pairing, for example: land education with site-specific theatre; decolonial and postcolonial literature with clowning; feminist and critical race theory with devised creation; or historical research with playwriting. The lines between each of these categories themselves are also always blurring and shifting, thus I will explore their relations together rather than in these separate pairings.

To orient this approach, I will first share a critical reflection on some of my training as a theatre creator and performer. This will by no means be an exhaustive account—it is self-consciously fragmented—but it will nonetheless illuminate some of the major critiques that my theoretical framework offers my approach to creation and what this in turn offers my contribution to the landscape of performance practice in so-called Canada. Although I have had training in various disciplines, some of my most concentrated and formative training was in theatre school. This training was—and may still be—typical of Western fine arts institutions, at least for acting. The methods we were taught largely—although not entirely—stemmed from the founding father of modern Western actor training, Konstantin Stanislavski, with various methods from theorists such as Uta Hagen and Michael Chekhov (I studied at the Moscow Art Theatre School for a short time during my degree), or sometimes from physical theatre traditions which

can provide a counter to the dominant Stanislavski System, with theorists such as Tadashi Suzuki, Jacques Lecoq or Philippe Gaulier.

In my memory, Stanislavski's System for actor training was taught to me less as a specific pedagogy and more as *the* way that anyone becomes an actor. This recollection is backed up by, for example, the description from a popular text written about Stanislavski, which proclaims "The Stanislavski 'system' is still the only comprehensive method of actor training we possess" (Benedetti, 2004). This universal "we" is presumably—although of, course, invisibly—referring to white/Western cultures. Stanislavski, born in the mid 19th century, developed his system at a time when a more formalistic, less emotionally intricate or grounded style of acting was common; his system of training thus offered a ground-breaking alternative from what was then the established norm. His methods focus on getting the actor to reach the personal, empathic, and emotional depth of a character and to live fully in the "truth" of their world, thus subverting stereotypes and archetypes that have little to say about the human experience (Benedetti, 2004; Moore, 1984; Whyman, 2013). There is much in this method that remains useful in imagining and portraying an experience outside of one's own, as all characters are, yet many problems arise in adhering uncritically to this method (Brecht, 1964; Vasquez, 2022; Zarrilli, 2009).

Bertolt Brecht theorized that Stanislavski's method was overly concerned with an individual and internal experience, which ignored the impact of broader social structures and histories. Brecht uses the compelling example of Othello, arguing that to only focus on the experience of jealousy that Othello feels around Desdemona's suspected infidelity ignores the way that Othello's worldview has been shaped by his relationship to property and status through the class mobility he has worked hard to achieve. This understanding of the societal impact on

the character actually strengthens, rather than weakens, their relationship to the emotion of jealousy (Brecht, 1964, p. 162). While Stanislavski's method does require research on what he calls the "given circumstances" as well as the "super-objective" of the play, which could touch on the social structures Brecht points out, the primary focus of the actor's training is on the *internal* journey of a character. Overall, then, the biggest takeaway from my theatre training in terms of its pedagogical goals was that to be a professional performer is to be able to transform absolutely and without limits. That is, the training encouraged me to be the best possible chameleon-puppet, to transform myself completely as required by a director or writer's vision. The actor's role in society as oriented towards a political and critical engagement with the world and with structures of oppression was not part of this method.

This pedagogy reinforces the structured invisibility of dominant culture in that it ignores the way that who we are—and the social and material conditioning we have undergone based on race, gender, class, ability, orientation, trauma, privilege etc.—shapes our bodies in different ways. Canadian playwright and director Jordan Tannahill writes about his experience at a theatre school that was very similar to my own and which he attended a few years before I did. He reflects that, "[i]t seemed the goal of theatre school...was to render us empty vessels. Bodies without personalities, tics, or really any defining characteristics. One instructor actually described first year as being about 'stripping you down to nothing and building you back up'" (2018, p. 67). If a chameleon is known only as a creature that can blend into any environment, strategically disappearing anything distinct about its own self, then the chameleon-puppet actor is presumed to be able to empty herself of the distinctiveness of her own subjecthood in order to take on any role she is asked to.

Furthermore, the chameleon-puppet reifies the structured invisibility of whiteness, and assumes a white, European, middle-class, hetero-male, able-bodied experience as an over-representation of what it means to be human (Wynter, 2003). Alison Vasquez describes her struggles in both learning and teaching Stanislavski-driven training to Latinx actors, where even finding the “given circumstances” of the scene or character are already read as either correct or incorrect through a Eurocentric lens; that is, how a character might act in a given situation is falsely assumed to be separate from their cultural experience of the world since character is always already interpreted through white/dominant culture (2022, p. 132). Diane Roberts (2011, 2020) addresses this same issue through her performance method, the Arrivals Personal Legacy project. This project, structured as a performance workshop, counters the pedagogy of Western actor training that expects a theatre artist to aspire to a physical and emotional neutrality, under the belief that from this place alone she can best absorb and portray any character she is asked to play. This belief was mirrored in my own training, which included various methods of finding a “neutral body,” inspired largely by French physical theatre theorist Jacques Lecoq. This includes the use of neutral mask, where each actor creates a mask (often out of papier-mâché) of their “neutral” face that can be worn during exercises to better explore how we read character from the physical body alone.²¹ Unlike Roberts, however, who describes the experience of having a body/face with visible features of a black woman in a predominantly white class (2011, p. 43), for myself as a young white actor in a class that was largely white, I never considered that the

²¹ In my training we each created a neutral mask of our own face – the neutrality was therefore mostly a neutral expression rather than objectively neutral features. Yet it is common, and in fact prescribed in Lecoq’s method, to use a pre-made neutral mask. Lecoq describes how these masks are difficult to create and should have a quality of “calmness” and “a state of equilibrium” (2001, p. 38). He does not specify what neutrality means when facial features are all always marked by various signifiers.

neutrality I was achieving was already racialized and that this racialization—at least to a white actor—was structured as invisible.

The chameleon-puppet as a Canadian (although more generally a Western) performance pedagogy is an interesting manifestation of the national myth of *terra nullius*. Roberts describes the training process she went through as a prescribed “blinking out of self” and, indeed, in laying out his pedagogy of training using the neutral mask, Lecoq himself writes: “When a student has experienced this neutral starting point his²² body will be freed, *like a blank page on which drama can be inscribed*” (2001, p. 38, my emphasis). The similarities with early settler-colonial rhetoric in Canada are striking. Scholar Daniel Wilson, speaking at the 19th century Toronto bicentennial, spoke of Canada as “a nearly unvarying expanse, a blank... Its history is not only all to write, it is all to act” (qtd in Freeman, 2010, p. 25). It is assumed here that both body and land hold potential neutrality on which any story might be written. Tannahill aptly links this pedagogy to hauntology in his critique of Denis Diderot’s famous text *Paradox of the Actor*: “[Diderot] defined an actor’s ability in terms of absence—namely, an absence of any internal, innate identity...Diderot’s actors were blank bodies onto which the fantasies of others could be projected” (2018, p. 67). If a neutral/blank body is defined as an absence of markers that create a character, then the presence of absence that was theorized in the previous chapter is not only the structured invisibility of whiteness but also the general, haunting, *lack of a person* that a living actor body is supposed to be.

It is important to remember that this writing of character onto a blank body as a performance pedagogy has dangerous implications outside of theatre training. If nations are narrations, then how we train actors—that is, professionally recognized narrators—matters for

²² The gendered pronouns in this writing are a reminder of the ways in which neutrality here might be read as both white *and* male.

the settler colony. The latent coloniality of actor discourse is reflected in the writing of Michel Chekhov, a favoured student of Stanislavski's who branched off to create his own theory of actor training, which was a foundational influence for my theatre school's pedagogy. For example, at the start of his major text outlining his method, Chekhov argues that the actor should be able to imagine what it would be like to experience being any other person, recommending that actors in training, "try to *penetrate the psychology of different nations*; try to define their specific characteristics, their psychological features, their interests, their arts...Remain *objective* and you will enlarge your own psychology immensely" (2002, p. 4, my emphases). The push for neutrality or objectivity, then, is clearly linked to a colonial epistemology, where the white subject is seen as a neutral investigator innocently fascinated by racialized cultures and peoples as research subjects. While there have been critiques of Stanislavski, as well as attempts to change actor training—see, for example, pedagogies such as the Suzuki Method (Allain, 2003) or the recent movement of ex-theatre school students across Canada calling out the toxicity of the dominant pedagogy (M. Robinson, 2022)—his system remains the dominant approach to teaching acting.

What I call the chameleon-puppet is a common manifestation of Western actor training (Tannahill, 2018, p. 68), which is uncritically steeped in colonial mythologies of *terra nullius* and the structured invisibility of whiteness. Therefore, my method of both theatre creation and teaching is continually searching for ways to forefront critical imagination, encouraging an engagement with multiple layers of social, cultural, and geographical history and difference that our lives are always already encoded in. While the situatedness of knowledge is important here (see Haraway, 2020), I am particularly interested, for this project, in a palimpsestic framing of

land-human relations within theatre creation, which invites a complex layering of spaces on top of each other. For the purposes of this dissertation, this is what I refer to as a heterotopic praxis.

Heterotopic praxis

This framework for my practice draws on a variety of different performance pedagogies; these are primarily site-specific, environmental, and devised theatre/performance, each of which have intersections with theories and methods of clowning. Site-specific performance is best understood as a performance in which both place and event cannot be separated from each other and still remain the same. That is, the performance is not merely *set* in a non-traditional found space but is “conditioned”²³ by the site itself, just as one’s perception of the space will be altered through the performance (see Birch & Tompkins, 2012; Houston, 2007; Pearson, 2010; Pearson & Shanks, 2001). This theory intersects with the field of Land Education, as I will discuss more extensively in Chapter 4, which understands the potentialities of land—and all its histories and relationships, including structures of colonization and extraction and spiritual and emotional capacities—as a teacher rather than as subject matter (see Cajete, 1994; L. B. Simpson, 2014; Styres et al., 2013; Tuck et al., 2014). In its intentional focus on the ways that performance is shaped by place, site-specific performance leaves space for a more agential presence of land than most Western performance traditions—with their strong anthropocentric tendencies, sometimes demonstrated through land-as-background—usually allow.

This is also a potential component of environmental performance. This field is as difficult to define as each of the terms that make up its title. My first memory of this confusion was in my arts high school, where I eagerly awaited what our teacher said would be a full unit on a type of

²³ See Pearson and Shanks, 2001, p. 23.

theatre I had never heard of called environmental performance. I assumed this would be a political performance inspired by environmentalism and it was the first time I considered the potential for theatre to engage in political movements. I was extraordinarily disappointed to discover that all we were asked to do was to rehearse and perform a piece outdoors, rather than in the studio. There is therefore clearly much interpretation and confusion around the term, just as there is much interpretation on what is or is not the “environment.” In Western contexts, the popularity of the term environmental theatre/performance can generally be traced to Richard Schechner’s “coining” of the term in the 1960’s. He offers the definition that “environmental performance is one in which *all the elements or parts* making up the performance are recognized as alive” (Schechner, 1994, p. x, emphasis in original). It is therefore, unlike my high school teachers’ interpretations, not just about *where* a performance is set but rather *how* the performers relate to their surroundings. That is, environmental performances may be set within an indoor theatre space but they “explode” the dominant political-spatial arrangements of the spaces, such as the fourth wall or audience/performer relations (Knowles in Houston, 2007, p. 69).

Interestingly, this is a key feature of clowning as well, which I will explore more in Chapter 4.

Devised theatre takes many forms, but can very broadly be understood as a creation process in which a written script does not exist before the rehearsal process begins (Heddon & Milling, 2016, p. 3). The rehearsal process therefore creates, rather than executes, a script (whether the piece is text-based or not). While devised theatre is commonly theorized as work created by a non-hierarchical group, sometimes used as a synonym for “collective creation,” it can also apply to solo or duo artists. Overall, devised work has an emphasis on both physical creation in-studio through improvisation and the combined—rather than segregated—role of performer-creator (Heddon & Milling, 2016; Oddey, 1996). While this form has many benefits

for theatre creation, it should also be noted that, as with many non-hierarchical decision-making structures, it can demand a lot of time and requires thorough processes of communication which may not be possible or desirable for every single project (Oddey, 1996, p. 25).

In theatre school, the assignments which required us to use devised methods were, for me, beautiful forays into a rejection of the chameleon-puppet model. Devising allowed me to perform while also engaging with the political decision of what stories we wanted to tell; it therefore lends itself well to the field of research-creation. In my practice, devising can still be carried into structures that are typically more hierarchical, with separate roles of director, performer, writer, etc. For example, my theatre collective is run as a duo, where we create and perform together. Sometimes, as was the case for *Land Hunger*, one of us will take on the role of a director; yet for us this role is about offering a useful perspective from someone external to the action of the performance. It is not a hierarchical position over the performer-creator, and decisions are still made collaboratively as they would be were we both creator/performers. We often prefer the term “outside eye” as it implies a less hierarchical relationship, yet for *Land Hunger* I preferred to call us co-directors, as this term is much more recognizable, particularly within film, yet the shared role speaks to the collaborative approach that we take in our work.

The practice of clowning draws on all three of these broad and overlapping fields: the theatre space is often engaged with in non-traditional ways; regularly “invisible” theatrical elements such as a stage manager, lighting, or set might be openly acknowledged as constructed; the work rarely begins from a script; and it often involves the combined role of creator/performer. I will discuss clowning in Chapter 4 as a methodology and a method that I practice through the application of these theoretical frames.

These three fields (site-specific, environmental, and devised) are expansive and used across many cultures and disciplines regardless of their recognition as an academic field of theatre and performance. Furthermore, as this dissertation is an interdisciplinary project, I have only given a broad overview of these fields as they relate to my project. Even so, the main academic performance theorists cited so far in this section—with the exception of Indigenous theorists of Land Education—are largely white, Western academics. It is therefore important to be aware that, although these texts are useful explanations and framings, they most certainly stem from a praxis initiated by many theorists and practitioners from around the world. That is to say, the theory of letting site and space influence a performance or the practice of blurring the writer/performer/director roles in creating a performance were not *invented* by these Western academic institutions and individuals. For example, while Schechner’s argument for Environmental Theatre is useful for me to succinctly summarize a field of performance as an academic/artist/activist, he was writing in response to a global movement of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s, which had an enormous impact on theatre and its role in a shifting world (Heddon & Milling, 2016, pp. 13–14). These three fields and their major accompanying texts are useful resources for both pedagogy and praxis but did not occur in a vacuum; thus, their theorizations are indebted to the numerous performers and groups that have employed them.

My combination of these fields, and the many others that they overlap and intersect with, can best be understood through the concept of heterotopias. Heterotopia is a term originally developed by Foucault but engaged with much more thoroughly through subsequent theorists, particularly in the fields of theatre and performance. Foucault describes heterotopic spaces as those which are “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces,” such as theatre, where a physical space is layered with imagined spaces, or a mirror, where a physical object can

show an image as existing outside of itself (1986, pp. 24–25). Furthermore, the way that the past haunts the present within a given physical space is crucial within heterotopias, for, as Foucault argues, "it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space" (1986, p. 22).

Theatre theorist Joanne Tompkins uses heterotopias to discuss the layers and conversations between the physical and the imagined space-times that are created in the theatre. She writes:

heterotopia rehearses the possibilities of something else, something beyond that which the theatrical art form generates...[they] demarcate locations that offer an alternative to the status quo. They present an opportunity for characters to inhabit a zone that has a relationship with the workings of the actual world, but that is distinguished from that world. While all theatre achieves this at one level, theatre that is heterotopic depicts other possible spaces and places live in front of an audience,²⁴ and it offers spectators specific examples of how space and place might be structured otherwise. (2014, p. 3)

I argue for settler performance praxes that can prioritize theatre's heterotopic potential. This means that the research-creation is imbued with a critical engagement of multiple layers of histories, land, structures of power and the way that the performer/creator is positioned within them. Within this rehearsal of possibilities, we are rendering more visible the violent structures of settler statehood that we participate in, and we are also considering settler implication within the ecosystem. This praxis vulnerably implicates our bodies, histories, and futures not just in the subject matter of a theatre show but in the very process of its creation. Through its genealogical and embodied epistemology, I argue that the theoretical framing of heterotopic performance practices for settler artists can make more transparent the discursive fields within which colonial nation and settler subject are co-constitutive. My own theorization of a heterotopic research-

²⁴ As I will elaborate in Chapter 5, for the purposes of my dissertation, *Land Hunger* ended up resulting in the output of a video, however, my *praxis* was and always has been intended for live performance.

creation process starts with three formative questions that are based in a critical reflection on the performer's own subjecthood and stem from an Indigenous methodology of relationality: 1) What is the performer's relation to the research or narrative of the performance? 2) What or who is haunting them to be doing this work? 3) How they are in relation to the land that they are performing on/with? These questions might inspire practices of critical autoethnography, a term I will explore in the following chapter, but they are specifically not restricted to portrayals of the self. Rather, a heterotopic process necessitates that critical reflection is layered within praxis; the theatre creator finds who they are in relation to the work without being solely confined to portray a subject that perfectly matches their own self. A heterotopic praxis therefore requires that research/archive, self/community, and space/place are constantly in conversation.



In this chapter, I have outlined a framework on which my performance praxis currently rests. This framework is tangled up with critical theory, performance pedagogy/practice, and a haunting archive. These hauntings provided inspiration to begin this project and they shape my work as it continues to grow. The haunting archive of my ancestor, Ella, began this dissertation and it is within the heterotopic space-time between her story and mine that I began this work. Ultimately, my practice has been created through years of exploration and creation as a physical theatre artist/activist and has only been articulated as a framework through this writing. I expect that this framework will shift and grow with each new performance project I create. Through a heterotopic praxis, settler artists can find openings for better relations to land, to Indigenous nations, and to each other, even while those imaginings are currently messily constructed on top of the fragmented present. In the following chapter, I frame the methods of critical autoethnography, clowning, improvisation, and creative writing in relation to this framework.

Chapter 3

Responding to the Archive

*There is no way of understanding political identities and destinies without
letting fantasy into the frame*

—Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy*, p. 4

While the previous two chapters offered a theoretical overview of the way that haunting colonial histories are performed in the present day, this chapter explores how I came to this theoretical understanding through creative practice, which was formed in relation to settler colonial archives—both historical and personal—of female settler domesticity. That is, instead of offering a critical analysis of the archives themselves, I will share my creative practice of archival investigations, which entails hauntology, critical fabulation, clown improvisation, and an archive of feeling. While these theories have been discussed in the previous chapters, here I will offer a practical insight into the way that have been used in this dissertation; I will share critical, imaginative, and reflexive *responses to the archive* as a method of exploring the construction of settler colonial nationhood. After exploring performances of a critically fabulated historic archive, I will investigate the way that these same narratives were performed in my personal archive of childhood make-believe, using a practice of critical autoethnography.

The White Wives of Canada

The Home Children history that I discussed in Chapter 1 sparked my interest in the Canadian archives of other 19th-century female pioneers in Canada: women who, like Ella, were also the first in their families to come to Canada from Britain. Yet these histories are full of women who, unlike Ella, came here with some access to wealth, which is why they had the time to create a record of themselves. As I read through numerous settler-pioneer texts, I began a new process of

notetaking, stemming from the driving question: how are these stories alive in the present-day? Along with my regular academic notes, I began to write scenes, monologues, and characters that placed these women in 21st-century Canada. Sometimes they were ghosts, explicitly haunting a modern-day character; sometimes they were fictional adaptations of a historical character; and sometimes they cannibalized attributes of several historical figures into a modern-day scenario. While research on *archived performances* in the settler colony has been very useful in understanding how theatre has promoted and reified what Kym Bird calls a “domestic feminism” (2014, p. 16),²⁵ my research is instead a praxis of *performing the archive*.

While many of these explorations were done through creative writing, some were also explored in the studio, largely through clown workshops I took at the Clown Farm. While this creative practice helped form the very large iceberg of which *Land Hunger* is just the tip, during the process of creating I kept feeling frustrated, as if I were staring right at something but not able to see it. In hindsight, I wonder if it was the theoretical framework of heterotopic praxis that allowed me to eventually see the haunting that these histories perform in the everyday and how they “rehearse the possibilities of something else” (Tompkins, 2014, p. 3). In a way, much of my creative archival responses were building the messy layers of this history—archived or fabricated—that I needed, but my frustration came from trying to see them each as a separate story rather than as layers of colonial history.

The first female settler pioneer text I turned to was the diary of Elizabeth Simcoe, wife of the first Lieutenant General of Canada, John Graves Simcoe. Her writing follows the years 1791 to 1796 when her husband was stationed at various times in Niagara, Kingston, and what is now Toronto. The name Simcoe haunts Southern Ontario; from Lake Simcoe, the town of Simcoe, or

²⁵ (see also Bird, 2020; Filewod, 2002, 2011)

the three consecutive streets of downtown Toronto that are named John, Graves and Simcoe, the name is thoroughly mapped onto this area. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note that, “mapping, naming, fictional and non-fictional narratives create multiple and sometimes conflicting accretions which become the dense text that constitutes place. In short, empty space becomes place through language, in the process of being written and named” (2000, p. 144). In his seminal text *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson, drawing on Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul, explores how mapping is a powerful tool in land theft, as it in fact “anticipat[es] spatial reality,” discursively *inscribing*, not merely labelling, colonial power relations (Winichakul qtd in Anderson, 2016, p. 173). Elizabeth Simcoe was the perfect assistant for a narratively innocent colonial mapping, whose marks are still visible today. Along with two of her six children, Elizabeth accompanied her Lieutenant General husband throughout these five years; she would help him by drawing maps and sketches of the area where I am currently living. The following excerpt is a monologue and character I wrote as a response to her diary.

BETH

A modern-day clown of Elizabeth Simcoe. As the lights come up she bustles about in a kitchen. She finishes hanging up a sign that reads “Happy Birthday Francis.” She turns and notices the audience. She tries to hide her confusion and displeasure at their presence with a disciplined politeness. She addresses the audience directly.

Oh! Hello. So nice to have you. *She looks down at her white apron and struggles unsuccessfully to take it off.* Oh, this is just...so sorry about that, I would usually be a bit more - it's just - it's because I thought - well, it's not your fault at all of course, it's Mary - MARY?! MARY?! - it must be that Mary forgot I had said I couldn't have people over after all because I'm...not feeling well. So. *She smiles apologetically.* *Beat.* It is clear she assumed everyone would take the hint and leave. *She tries to hide her frustration at the audience's bad manners. The oven timer rings, and she is startled, turns it off. She puts on oven mitts and carefully opens a plastic Loblaws shopping bag that is sitting on the table, pulling out a plastic tray of mini muffins. She looks at the muffins and then the birthday decorations around her with pride.* Four years old, can you imagine? And the sweetest child you ever saw...he would have been here to greet you except I wasn't expect...not that I don't want - just because I'm...not feeling well. *Beat.* Oh wait, don't leave yet! *Beat.* I do hope you'll at least stay long enough to have a sweet. *She expertly places the muffins on a tray while talking.* Yes, my little Francis. What a big day. So generous of you all to come. An incredible child too, you know only four years old but already you can tell he'll be quite the leader, pretends he's in the military like his father,

lines all the boys in his class up against the wall and...*she is distraught for half a second, then recovers with a smile* well, you know how boys are. Muffin? *She passes them out.* Oh, and wait, before you go! *Beat.* I can quickly show you what I'm having made for him for the big day, just quick before you - now where did I put it, let me just tidy this, because of course I didn't know you were - *she goes to move some cardboard boxes that are too heavy for her. She stumbles and they topple over. Maps spill out everywhere - some old, some modern, some hand drawn. She tries desperately to stop them from being revealed but it is too late. She looks at the audience to gauge their reaction. Pause.* I have a mapping problem. *Beat.* *Throughout the following section the lights slowly become more dramatic and ominous.* I copy them out onto a fresh white sheet of paper so that my pen is my eyes and I'm gliding past mountains and waterfalls and miles of forest and prairies and I'm charting a path through it all, a path that people can follow and say AH NOW I KNOW HOW TO GET HERE and then I find new paths through mountains that haven't been named so I name them and they lead to more mountains and I make another path through all of them until I find the most beautiful valley with a fresh water lake warmed by the sun so that when I stick in my thermometer it dials up to a sweet, sweet 80 degrees but there's also a cool trickle running down from the mountain keeping that temperature perfect all year around and you can drink right from it and there are no mosquitoes or black flies because they haven't found a path here yet either and I have the most beautiful castle built for Francis²⁶ and every day we go out walking together and I map and I map and I map and I - *The phone rings, pulling her out of her reverie. She picks it up and then hangs up forcefully. Smiles at the audience.* Oh, here it is. What I'm having made for Francis. *She unfurls a blueprint.* A treehouse! I wanted it built by today, it's just our backyard is rather...does anyone here have a backyard? Raise your hands. *If no one does she asks who has a nearby park.* And does it have any very large mature trees? Raise your hands. Really? And now where do you live? *She encourages as accurate an answer as she can get in as casual a manner as she can muster and then very surreptitiously writes it down while smiling sweetly at them.* So, how were the muffins?

This is an early writing sample from this period in my process, when I would go back and forth between historical writings, theoretical texts and creative explorations of them. It was inspired by the idea of a haunting historical figure placed in the modern day as well as by theoretical texts around mapping in a colonial context. Sherene Razack argues that, whereas mapping was a tool for Europeans to make legal claims to land they purportedly discovered, “unmapping is intended to undermine the idea of white settler innocence,” nudging us to ask: “What is being imagined or projected on to specific spaces and bodies, and what is being enacted there? Who do white

²⁶ This refers to a summer residence that Elizabeth and John Simcoe had built for their baby, Francis, the location of which is still honoured today in the name of Toronto's Castle Frank subway station. While Elizabeth had 5 daughters already when Francis was born, they are barely ever mentioned in her diary, while Francis receives much attention (Simcoe, 1911).

citizens know themselves to be and how much does an identity of dominance rely upon keeping racial Others firmly in place?” (2002, p. 5). My practice of creatively and critically responding to the archive is thus done in the spirit of unmapping; it does not *successfully* unmap colonial territory, but it attempts to poke holes in the hegemony of cartographic narratives in Canada.

After Simcoe’s diary, I read the more purposefully journalistic writings of Canadian settler-pioneer sisters Susannah Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill. Moodie’s text, *Roughing it in the Bush: Or, Life in Canada*, is one of the most famous accounts of early settler life in Ontario, and, along with texts like Traill’s *Backwoods of Canada*, offered prospective British settlers a vivid account of their first-hand experience in 19th-century Ontario through a personal, nonfiction style. Overall, these settler women proudly present an optimistic, resilient, persevering attitude no matter what comes their way. It made me want to shake them and find what might be lurking underneath. Not long after creating the above character, Beth, I was learning new techniques of embodied theatre creation at the Clown Farm (more on this in Chapter 4) and through this physical work created the character Lizbuh. A grumpy descendent of all these pioneering women, she resents the bootstrap-pulling, individualist, can-do attitude that her relatives so enthusiastically portray in all their writing (which is also Sherene Razack’s hard-working pioneer mythology of Canada). As Catharine Parr Traill described it in 1852:

To be up and doing, [sic] is the maxim of a Canadian; and it is this that nerves his arm to do and bear. The Canadian settler...learns to *supply all his wants by the exercise of his own energy. He brings up his family to rely upon their own resources, instead of depending on his neighbours.*” (1986, p. 162)

Here, Traill is advocating for a culture that upholds a theory of antirelationality, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Wilson Gilmore, 2002). Lizbuh is an inversion of this cheerful and hardworking

settler stereotype; she is the embodiment of everything these women could never express in their diaries or letters. This was the description of her that I wrote in my journal:

She is an incarnation of all that 20th-century white women weren't allowed to be. She is surly, asocial, doesn't want kids, messy, and a bit grotesque. Maybe she is a suburban housewife trying to be like her settler relatives overseas who send her elegant letters. They had 1000 acres and many different homes, but Lizbuh has none of that, only a small square of squished suburbia that can barely host a tree fort in the backyard (Journal entry, August 2019).

After creating Lizbuh, I began writing drafts of scenes for a play that was tentatively titled *The White Wives of Canada* and would follow several different female historical figures in Canada and the way that their work of settling land, narratively framed through the structured innocence of domesticity, was part of the violent process of colonization. The play would revolve around Lizbuh in the present day as she reluctantly plays host to all these settler ghosts. The following is one of the scenes I wrote for *The White Wives of Canada*, where Lizbuh storms out of a dinner party she is hosting for the famous white women of Canada's past (this premise is inspired by Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls*).

Stage note: a backslash (/) indicates an interruption

LIZBUH fumes in the kitchen. She paces. Grabs a teacup and smashes it on the floor. Stares at it unfeelingly.

CATHARINE PARR TRAILL enters.

CATHARINE

Alright dear, I believe we've had enough of this dither dather.

LIZBUH

There are so many pieces...

CATHARINE

The others are starting to talk. Time to pull yourself up by the apron straps and make nice, chop chop.

LIZBUH

Chop chop.

CATHARINE

Enough. I mean it.

LIZBUH

I'm going to guess 1,867 pieces. What do you think? *She picks up the shards.*

CATHARINE

Preposterous

LIZBUH

You want me to come back out there.

CATHARINE

Good girl, I'm sure / they'll understand

LIZBUH

You might say you *need* me to come out there -

CATHARINE

No cause to make a fuss -

LIZBUH

What if I came out with little gifts. *She slices small cuts on her hands with one of the shards.* One for everyone at the party.

CATHARINE

Put that down.

LIZBUH

Chop chop. *LIZBUH heads for the door. CATHARINE grabs her.*

CATHARINE

I think you've gotten the wrong impression of me somehow. All I want - all I've ever wanted is just to see you on top of the world, doing whatever it is makes us - makes you, become everything you are already capable of, everything you already are... it's just that...not everyone knows it yet.

LIZBUH

Did you know that whales use echolocation to see, and pregnant mothers too, so a baby whale gets a whole visual image of the world before she's even born into it?

CATHARINE

Oh...see, even that, how smart you are, I'm so proud -

LIZBUH

It's like the whale mother is saying THIS IS THE WORLD!! SPOILER ALERT BABY!! You'll never see it for yourself now because I've just told you exactly how I see it and you'll never be able to unsee it, you will just constantly be chasing your tail wondering if someone told you to do that or if you just love the dizzying feeling.

While thematically inspired by my own ancestry, the foundation for these creative responses to the archive, which the last two examples of playwriting were part of, was largely historical and somewhat void of any links to myself as a white female settler subject. The historical link between colonization and gendered/racialized domesticity was clear, yet I struggled to feel the ways that it connected to me in the present day. In fact, the character of Lizbuh centered around this very idea: she is a white woman in the 21st century who badly wants to shake off all her colonial ghosts and be everything they are not, but she is unable to get rid of them. In this sense, even in her grumpy, mean, pouty form, she is still innocent, still decidedly *not* her ancestors. Perhaps not unrelated to this issue was the fact that, although Lizbuh initially came from improvisations in the studio (the process of which I will expand upon in the following chapter), all the writing that followed in this format was detached from an embodied process. *The White Wives of Canada* never coalesced into a full script, perhaps in part because I was still seeing its stories lined up in a linear history, instead of heterotopically entangled in each other. The next archival text that grabbed my attention, however, pulled me into a complex relationship with the present day through my own childhood stories and memories.

The Robinsonade

This text was Traill's 1852 children's novel *Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains*, purportedly the first "Canadian" children's novel. Based on Traill's own experiences as a settler-pioneer living near what is now Peterborough, *Canadian Crusoes* read to me like a fictional allegory of the creation of Canada and served as a compelling example of scenarios of transfer. The plot of *Canadian Crusoes* is roughly as follows: Three young settler children of Scottish and French parents (named Catharine, Hector, and Louis) become lost in the wilderness and subsequently: build themselves a home; rescue an Indigenous girl who eagerly joins their group;

learn to successfully live—indeed, thrive—off the land; and eventually return safely home, shortly thereafter growing up and marrying each other to form two land-owning, Christian, hetero-nuclear families. Both the scenario of transfer and the structured innocence of domesticity could not be more explicit here: the one Indigenous character that the children befriend (and call “Indiana,” which spells out her assumed representation of the entire Indigenous population of Turtle Island) is described as the last of her “race.” She eventually converts to Christianity and marries one of the white settler boys, simultaneously erasing any other Indigenous presence and indigenizing the settler project through its increased legitimacy via Indigenous assimilation.

Canadian Crusoes, as is made apparent by the name, is a Robinsonade,²⁷ a type of young adult adventure novel made popular through Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe*. The novel offers a fictional narrative set in the nonfictional landscape of Anishinaabe territory, between Cobourg and Rice Lake, roughly in the early 1800s (the year is unspecified) at a time when, as Traill describes it, “there was no obstacle to taking possession of any tract of land in the unsurveyed forests” (1986, p. 4). Traill herself moved to Canada from England and was an early homesteading pioneer in the area near Peterborough, in which her novel is set, which is also the location of the Home Children receiving home Hazelbrae, where my ancestor, Ella, was taken. Indeed, Elaine Freedgood (2010) makes a compelling comparison that the 19th-century poor British child in Canada is framed as a stalwart nation-builder, while in Britain poor children were seen as a disease. Narratively, then, the message is that “Emigration transforms small urban criminals into hardy colonial pioneers” (Freedgood, 2010, p. 397). As I theorized in Chapter 1 in relation to racial formation theory, this is an economic and racial transition, as the “small urban

²⁷ See (Lipski, 2022) for a recent overview of Robinsonade studies.

criminals” were termed “street Arabs”²⁸ in Britain while clearly becoming white Canadians once they crossed the ocean. Interestingly, the narrative transformation within these novels is not aimed at the impoverished children themselves (who would not be able to afford to buy the novel) but rather at the British middle class in the hopes that they “can agree with the massive emigration plans, including those for children, that are going forward all around them, and can also imagine, yet again, that poverty is a choice” (Freedgood, 2010, p. 404). In this way, the structures of race and class both support the colonial narratives needed to acquire land.

Indeed, when certain areas of the land are described throughout the fictional novel, Traill gives footnotes, speaking in her own personal voice, describing the ways that these lands, which in the novel were still “unbroken wilderness” (1986, p. 1), are now settled by various farms and families. This practice assumes a larger narrative (outside of the fictional world of the novel) that the author and readers all belong to, which is, of course, the narrative of British colonization of Turtle Island and the creation of the nation of Canada, therefore “[n]ot only is the diegetic space of the novel opened to us; our diegetic space is opened as well. We might step out of it and enjoy exercising our creative survival skills—first in fantasy, but possibly later in fact” (Freedgood, 2010, p. 402). This suggests an explicit link between story and land acquisition, that is, between a fictional narrative within colonial culture and the practical advancement (through survival tips and a sort of immigration marketing rhetoric) of settlements.

Reading Traill’s novel today at first seemed to present an overly easy target with which to critique early settler narratives of domination. The book is dripping with patriarchal, racist, and colonial rhetoric that explicitly infantilizes Indigenous peoples and assumes both a rightful

²⁸ Also referenced from *Anne of Green Gables* in Chapter 1, this is a term from the 19th century referring to impoverished and/or orphaned children that roamed the streets. The term itself clearly demonstrating racial formation theory in that class and race were collaborative constructs of power (for more on the term see Cameron, 2018; Joyce, 2011; Murphy, 2022).

dominance by white Christians over the land and an inevitable disappearance of Indigenous nations, naturalizing the structure of colonial violence. A few brief examples of this rhetoric are as follows: In assessing the probability of their own survival in the wilderness the children ponder, “I wonder who first taught the Indians to make canoes, and venture out on the lakes and streams. Why should we be more stupid than these untaught heathens?” (1986, p. 84) or, after Catharine befriends Indiana, the omniscient narrator proclaims, “how did the lively intelligent Canadian girl, the offspring of a more intellectual race, long to instruct her Indian friend, to enlarge her mind by pointing out such things to her attention as she herself took interest in” (1986, p. 113). If we took a linear, progressive view of history, the novel would be almost dismissible in today’s context—except as a regretful aspect of our history that we are profusely sorry about—based on the theory that mainstream culture now eschews such *explicitly* hateful rhetoric. From an archival perspective, this text as a historical document is a stunning example of the structured innocence of domesticity, perfectly laying out the violent settler culture that masqueraded as an innocent domesticity, even more compelling since, in its day, the novel was quite popular.

Yet my attention was primarily engaged in this novel not because it is an exemplary *archival* text of violent settlement spun as innocent domestication but because of the *repertoire* that stems from it. A hauntological, rather than historical, lens offered me a much more visceral reading. Besides the rhetoric and narratives that are easily discernible as explicitly racist and patriarchal, the novel in many ways reminded me of my childhood. In fact, I had to check with my family if I was somehow forgetting that this had been a favoured book growing up. Neither I nor my family have a memory of reading it, so I can assume *Canadian Crusoes* was not a foundational text for me. At the same time—again, minus the overtly racist and sexist language

that I am sure would have been red flags for my progressive parents—it seems almost like a blueprint for my favourite stories as a young white girl growing up in Ontario, which, I imagine, would be shared by many other white Ontarian children. I spent much of my childhood either making up stories, reading stories, writing stories, or enacting stories through dress-up, creating videos, plays, or performances for family gatherings—my easiest captive audience. These stories, as I will explore in the following sections, almost always involved a plucky young girl surviving in the wilderness. I thus turn to theories of critical autoethnography to explore the ghosts of this settler archive in my own life.

Living Bodies of Thought

Autoethnography has a strong relationship with embodied performance work, both of which position theory itself as not a fixed entity but rather a “living *body* of thought” (Pollock, 2006, p. 5, my emphasis, see also Holman Jones, 2016). This liveness is important for decolonial theory, as discussed previously, which requires an engagement with the world that is active and visceral, not abstract or metaphorical (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Therefore, for my research, the methodology of critical performance autoethnography frames settler colonial scenarios as a structure of oppression and a cultural performance, both of which require the active participation of settler bodies in order to survive. Autoethnography is about the partiality of knowledge and therefore pairs well with critical fabulation, which is formed through gaps and absences. The “auto” qualifier stems both from a focus on the cultural/racialized/gendered group that I belong to as the researcher as well as a study of my own performance practice as the researcher.

My turn to incorporate critical autoethnography comes partly in response to the archive, due to the way I see myself reflected in it, but it also stems from a response to Indigenous research methodologies of relationality, as outlined in Chapter 1, which ask that a

researcher/artist understand their self in relation to their project. The Western academy has a long history of extracting knowledge from Indigenous and racialized communities, with the assumed right to knowledge taking precedence over reciprocity or the needs of community and knowledge holders (Kovach, 2009; Recollet & Johnson, 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2001). The explicit positioning of myself in my research is thus also a move to avoid any false assumptions of the researcher as an unbiased, neutral authority on a subject (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Kovach, 2009). As Jill Carter writes,

As non-Indigenous peoples invest time and energy in re-educating themselves, in listening to and learning about the lands upon which they live and the Indigenous peoples who continue to steward these lands, they must take care to remember themselves. How is it that they come to be in this place at this moment? (2020b, p. 151)

Critical autoethnography as a methodology aligns well with this call. It centres the relationship of self to broader cultural, social, and political structures in order to better understand and situate oneself in a narrative. Furthermore, as opposed to other types of (auto)ethnography, the “critical” component references an explicit and *active* social justice orientation of the research (Madison, 2005, p. 197). Critical autoethnography is frequently used in both performance (Denzin, 2018; Kazubowski-Houston, 2016; Madison, 2005; Turner, 1982) and decolonial/postcolonial artistic and scholarly work (Chawla & Atay, 2018; Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Pathak, 2010). Chawla and Atay, drawing on Archana Pathak’s work, write that “autoethnography is the ‘postcolonial turn’ that ethnography, traditionally rooted in discourses and practices of colonialism, has taken because it re-centers the researcher (the Other) and her story as subject/participant and context in the field” (2018, p. 4). While the

autoethnographic component is not explicit in the final version of *Land Hunger*, it represents a large part of the foundation on which the film is built.

The heterotopic praxis of creation for *Land Hunger* was infused with critical autoethnographic research and I share segments of these personal stories throughout this dissertation. I will offer one story in more detail here, which exists in my own archive in the form of a home video that was taken at my 12th birthday party. This home video is one of the main reasons I decided to incorporate autoethnographic research into this dissertation, as it represents my own cultural performance practice around mythologies of the nation. While I had largely forgotten about this birthday party in my adult life, reading *Canadian Crusoes* caused me to search for the record of it that lived in a box of my old memories in my mother's basement.

On July 1st, 2003, on what I remember as a hot, humid, Canada Day in “our” nation's capital—that is, Ottawa—I turned twelve years old. For my party that year I decided to mandate all my friends to engage in my favourite activity: dressing up and acting out stories. Due to the logistical issues of amassing a live audience as a child—family gatherings notwithstanding—I frequently resorted to moviemaking. So, for my 12th birthday party, we borrowed a camera from a friend and my older sister—always my director and cowriter—and I asked each of my friends to send us a character breakdown ahead of the big day. We then wrote a plot that incorporated all these characters together. Obviously, I played the lead heroine.

My character could have been an adaptation of Catharine from Traill's *Canadian Crusoes*, with a '90's girl power twist. Her name was Saskia and she lived independently in the woods, taking care of her young sister, and providing for both of them with her bow and arrow and expert plant knowledge. In the days leading up to my party, I prepared the perfect set for our scenes of domestic bliss: I built a cabin in our backyard, lined it with shelves of herbs, and dug

out a small pond next to it. Or, at least, that was my vision. The video evidence, however, clearly demonstrates that the cabin was just two old plywood boards with various sticks and branches leaning against a tree; the herb shelf was a jar with a few teaspoons of aloe vera juice in it (meticulously milked from the leaves of my mother's small aloe plant); and the pond was a small tin baking bowl sitting in a hole in the ground.

While the plot of the film (which has many outtakes, a large and complicated mosaic of characters, shaky camera work, pixelated footage, and mumbling children) is both complex and difficult to fully discern, the vague structure follows two main characters: an adventurous and savvy girl, Saskia, and a zany boy from an upper-class family, Robin, who flees his village to avoid an arranged marriage, moving in with his wealthy grandmother who happily offers to leave her estate to him. Saskia is usually found gathering or chopping herbs in her domestic forest bliss—the plywood and stick structure. Eventually, Robin stumbles across her “house” while searching for a special book to cure his cousin's illness. Saskia and Robin team up for this noble saviour adventure and the movie ends abruptly with their wedding (see Figure 8).

With a bit more intentionality, this video could be a terrific satire of the settler state of Canada. While I imagine we were aiming for somewhere in the 19th century, the film maintains content and aesthetics ranging from the 17th to 21st centuries, echoing critiques of settler colonialism's confused relation to its own history, or “historylessness” (Freeman, 2010; Veracini, 2007). The geographical location of the story is also never mentioned, yet the actors whimsically flit in and out of accents that are either Eastern Canadian or enthusiastically upper-class British. I am not sure exactly why the accents were added; perhaps we were so steeped in Jane Austen and Harry Potter that we thought that's just what good stories sounded like. Theatre scholar Alan Filewod offers a compelling theorization of such choices when he writes that,

The desire for essential nationhood may in the end be little more than nostalgia for the sense of historical certainty that imperial colonialism provided. If so “Canadian identity” (or to use its more recent signifier, “national unity”) can never be achieved: it is nostalgia for a perpetually reinvented past. (in Gainor, 1995, p. 70)

The temporal and geographical disorientation in this video thus perfectly captures the nostalgia that Filewod writes about.

The video also offers a farcical portrayal of intergenerational wealth accumulation, which is largely responsible for white North Americans’ disproportionate land privilege through the possessive investment in whiteness discussed in Chapter 1, where whiteness can be materially linked to a “cash value” through the privilege of inherited wealth, education, property, or other opportunities passed on through friends and family (Lipsitz, 2018, p. vii). In a short scene near the end of the video, the young Robin bluntly asks his grandmother: “I was wondering who your heir will be – who will get all your money?” The grandmother decides on the spot that it will indeed be him (“that is very noble of you” he replies), after which he promptly heads off to get married. In the final scene, the heteropatriarchal acquisition of property between Saskia and Robin is wittily (if accidentally) queered by Robin not being played by the only boy at my birthday party but by another 12-year-old girl, who’s femme appearance was given only a half-hearted attempt at concealment. The clown logic at play in two 12-year-old girls—one dressed androgynously, one in an oversized wedding dress—very seriously staging a 19th-century British marriage in a small Canadian urban living room (as showcased in Figure 8) is the most fitting image with which to argue that this video is unintentionally a perfect clown satire of the capitalist settler state and its reliance on gender scripts.



Figure 8: A still from the home video of myself (in the wedding dress) getting married in the final scene of the movie

There are many crossovers between this home video and *Canadian Crusoses*. The Venn diagram where they overlap provided the premise for many of my clown improvisations and, in some cases, scenes of *Land Hunger*. One of the overarching themes across all three is the concept of a young white female and her domestic space as a metonym for the country (Freeman, 2010; Haskins, 2019). With varying levels of satire, Catharine, Saskia, and the clown-protagonist of *Land Hunger* all share the same ability to easily acquire land through domestication, which, as it did for early settlers, involves building a structure to live in: Catharine's is an unbelievably expert cabin, Saskia's demonstrates the kind of structure a child playing domesticity might realistically make, and *Land Hunger's* is a mockery of the gap between the previous two.

Within each of these domestic stories lies the related performance of hetero-monogamous coupling, with its implications for nation-building, land acquisition, and reproduction. In *Canadian Crusoes*, Traill proudly and explicitly narrates this trope, moving past the realm of metaphor as the footnotes explain how the author (also named Catharine) is now settled with a husband and children in the exact location where the story is set. Indeed, at the start the novel, Traill describes this area as being a “village in embryo” (1986, p. 2). Or, as one 19th-century promoter of British immigration to Canada put it, “whereas a thousand Englishmen in a colony are a thousand men and no more, every Englishwoman that you take out at the same time carries with her, as it were, four potential English colonists as well” (S. Carter, 2016, p. 9). In my home video, this narrative is echoed in the ending marriage scene, as well as in the name of the lead character, Saskia, which poetically (if coincidentally) means “Saxon Woman.” The Saxons, of course, were a Germanic people in Northern Europe who were partly responsible for colonizing England and whose name, along with the Angles people, is now almost synonymous with white British genealogy (Higham, 2013, p. 48). Thus, in keeping with the unintentional satire that is this home video, my character could be seen as an allegory for the mother of all white British people. *Land Hunger* alludes to this trope through the clown’s seduction of the camera and the implied pregnancy that is shown through a maple leaf twirling in her stomach: a clown rendition of birthing the nation.

This home video echoes several key theoretical and structural components of this dissertation. The first is hauntological, showing the strong connection between my own childhood of storytelling in 1990’s Ontario and that of early settler Canadian children’s fiction. The second speaks to the discursive power of mythologies, demonstrating the theory that the stories we tell are significant workers in the creation and reification of a nation. The third is a

matter of form: that of a short video. This research-creation project went through many iterations of form (including a live performance, a written script, a graphic novel, performed photography, and a photo essay), which I will discuss in Chapter 5, and while my goal is still to one day create a full-length live performance piece, for this dissertation, *Land Hunger*'s homage to the home video format is very fitting.



As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the ways that scenarios of transfer were narratively constructed and are constantly performed are intricately tied to the structure of Canada as a nation and the territory it claims. *Land Hunger* is both a satirical performance of these narratives as well as a personal reflection on them, and it stems from many historical and personal iterations of the way bodies can perform the nation, which I have shown through several examples in this chapter. In the following chapter, I unpack the theory and methodology of embodied creation in understanding how these stories live in the present and I do so by following my own process creating *Land Hunger*'s lead character: Candace.

Chapter 4

Clowning Canada: A Process of Embodied Research

what the map cuts up the story cuts across

—Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 129

Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 5

I am sitting on the cold beach of Gibraltar Point in early December of 2021, on the first day of a week-long arts residency on the Toronto Islands. The first snowfall has just blanketed the shore in a soft sheet of white. I write in my journal: “Why do beautiful places primarily make me sad to leave them?” Whenever I leave my tiny apartment and go somewhere quiet, private, and spacious—somewhere “natural”—I wish I just felt grateful, but I often feel greedy. There is a small creature in me that is repeatedly yelling: “How do I make this mine!?” I know why this creature is there, and, in a way, I have infinite patience for her. When I am stuck in small spaces with no guarantee they will ever get bigger, of course I want to cling to these moments of spaciousness as I come across them. Yet, at the same time, this feeling keeps reminding me of the hunger for land that I now see as inextricably linked to the settler colonial project. Over the course of this week on the Islands, using a process of embodied research, I slowly let this **land-hungry** creature surface. Eventually, she tells me that her name is Candace.

This chapter weaves critical reflection with a theoretical and experiential overview of the methodology of clowning and improvisation that I have used for this research-creation project. My research counters the assumption that arts-based methods will offer a “linear” causality between research and artistic product, as if the physical act of creation does not contribute to the research itself (Gray & Kontos, 2018). This follows Diana Taylor’s (2003) theory of the iterative relationship between the archive and the repertoire, discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, I will look at the embodied process of creation, done in-studio, as co-constitutive of both the research and

the output. I frame this chapter roughly around the residency that I had at Artscape Gibraltar Point in 2021, where the clown Candace first formed as a character. While I had been interested in a creative performance project that explores whiteness, settler histories, and land theft for many years before this, the specific period in which Candace fully emerged as a character was a turning point in my project. Drawing on theories of clown, embodied research, and land education to unpack the creation of Candace, this chapter asks: What does an embodied process offer a critical autoethnography of settler colonialism and domesticity?

The Fool at the Edge of the Woods

My performance practice draws on theories of land education, which overlap with the fields of environmental/site-specific theatre described in the previous chapter, but forefronts an understanding of structures of settler colonialism and how they play out on the land. Land education thus prioritizes an active orientation towards decolonization (Tuck et al., 2014). This orientation stands in opposition to the trend that Scott Morgensen (2009) calls “settler emplacement”—which was discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to settler responsibility—where settlers seek out ecological embeddedness while ignoring any structures of land theft that have created the conditions for this embeddedness. This settler emplacement, even under the well-intentioned guise of environmentalism, enacts scenarios of transfer through a logics of appropriation and displacement (Morgensen, 2009, p. 58) and is “incommensurable” with decolonization (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 16). Thus, as Tuck, McKenzie and McCoy write,

Maintaining settler futurity cannot be the purpose or side-effect of environmental education and research; this is not to say there is no future/ity for now-settlers, but that their relationships to Indigenous land and peoples must be informed by an unsettled imaginary. (2014, p. 17)

The movement towards this unsettled imaginary in relation to the land/environment—which must also include a disruption of the capitalist-patriarchal forces that colonial settlement thrives off—is where I position my creative work. As Leesa Fawcett writes, “the homogenizing tendencies embedded in referring to ‘our environment’ often go largely unquestioned... [c]ritical questioning includes ‘whose environment, whose nature, who benefits from particular answers, and why?’” (2013, p. 411). With these questions in mind, I turn to the specific land I was on while doing this dissertation residency. I follow the theory put forth by many Indigenous authors that land is not in dualistic opposition to the human, but rather is an entity encompassing a variety of social/cultural/political elements and relationships, including but not limited to the materiality of land/earth/water itself (Cajete, 1994; McGregor, 2009; Tuck et al., 2014).

The Mississaugas of the New Credit write how the Toronto Islands were unceded territory not included in the fraught 1787 “sale” of Toronto. In their booklet on the 1805 Toronto Purchase, which unsuccessfully attempted to clarify the 1787 purchase, they state: “To this day, the Mississaugas of the New Credit are adamant that they would never have knowingly surrendered the Toronto Islands, as they were sacred ground with significant religious and spiritual importance to the Mississaugas and to other First Nations as well” (n.d.). The history of the islands as a healing place for Indigenous people has also been noted by other recent historians (Freeman, 2011, p. 209; Johnson, 2013, p. 291), as well as further demonstrated in the 18th-century diary of Elizabeth Simcoe, wife of John Graves Simcoe, first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada (Simcoe, 1911, p. 103). As I prepared to visit the islands during the residency, it felt arrogant to expect this land should give me healing without something in return. But what does such consensual reciprocity even look like on stolen land?

To write a dissertation within an academic institution there are a series of consent forms which outline how human or animal participants will be protected and treated fairly. Without any human or animal participants, I began this project prepared to slip by such paperwork, but then one of my committee members asked me how I would get consent from the land. I did not know how to answer; there is no form or procedure for that. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer, artist and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson explains that a way of learning based on the land requires a theory and practice of consent. She writes that, “[c]oming to know...requires complex, committed, consensual engagement. Relationships within Nishnaabewin are based upon the consent—the informed (honest) consent—of all beings involved” (2017, p. 161). Reciprocity and consent are thus integral to implementing a theory of land education. This felt clear to me after reading Simpson and other scholars, as I elaborated on in Chapter 1, yet still I stumbled when faced with implementing any sort of *practice* that does justice to this idea.

I debated the question for a while during the leadup to my residency. The question felt like an insurmountable roadblock because settlers have not adequately adopted, learned, created, or passed on large-scale cultural practices of land-human reciprocity. This is not to suggest that no settlers across Turtle Island have ever formed reciprocal decolonial practices of being in relation with the land. Rather, it is that there are no standard cultural protocols for consensual relationality between the land and a Canadian settler, likely because our presence is premised on a lack of consent. The only thing I could imagine myself doing is some sort of performative request that presupposes the answer, knowing my degree and years of research rests on it, like a marriage proposal too expensive and elaborate for someone to answer with anything but a “yes.” That seems like an insult to the question. As time passed, I could feel myself growing impatient, wanting to just get a checkmark on the nonexistent consent form. If this feeling had a voice, I

could tell it would be the voice of that land-hungry creature who seems so restless. After all, colonial history teaches us that coercion can easily be later framed as a misunderstanding, particularly when there is a language barrier, which there certainly is between myself and the land. And so, in this case, I worry about how to tell coercion apart from consent. What would receiving this “yes” from the land even look like?



Figure 9: A view of downtown Toronto from the Toronto Islands. Photo taken by the author, December 2021.

On that first day in early December, I get off the ferry that travels between downtown and the Islands and stand at the edge of the beach on Wards Island, looking back at Tkaronto. I rarely see the land I live on in such a removed way, with this expanse of water between us, as shown in Figure 9. It makes me consider how my relationship to this land might be framed as a form of witnessing. On the one hand, the idea of being a witness to the land might seem to be abdicating

any responsibility by positioning oneself outside of the story. Yet, on the other hand, might the role of a witness actually be a productive form of distancing, where one can take a step back and look for a better way to come into a relationship with the land they are on? Julie Salverson's (2006) writing on performance and witnessing asks how one can witness something outside themselves in a way that recognizes relationship and difference, but calls the witness into an obligation with that which they witness. One difficulty for the witness occurs when they are afraid of engaging in an unethical way and so decide that disengagement is safest; they are unproductively paralyzed by the fear of accidentally causing harm. Considering an ethical framework for engaging with the land keeps producing this paralysis in me, as I struggle to design a protocol that I feel I should have been practising my whole life.

It is important to remember that such protocols are not by any means a new idea. Indigenous nations have many different protocols and ceremonies to receive consent from the land. Settler culture writ large, however, has not normalized any (non-appropriative) practices to follow (see Kapron, 2017)—perhaps, back before we began to possessively invest in whiteness, there might once have been such practices between now-settlers and the various lands we once came from. This is not to say that these cannot still be (re)created with time and consultation with the nation whose lands one is on, or that no one is currently developing such work—for example, see the recently published treaties guide for the Tkaronto area, which beautifully combines theory, history, and activities (Talking Treaties Collective, 2022). Yet, for now, I realize that it is outside the scope of this dissertation to create such practices in the fulsome way they require. It makes me wonder if I will never *get* consent from the land in a finalized, check-marked ethics form sort of way. Maybe it is not something I can fully receive within this project right now. Yet perhaps there is something fruitful in the very act of asking and listening.

Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi theatre artist and researcher Jill Carter, also a co-author of the treaty guide mentioned above, describes an exercise she facilitated that I see as a potential start for creating protocols that settlers might use to engage with the land. She asks participants to engage in processes of "remembering and restory(ing) the self," which, rather than *receiving* an answer from the land, "re-replaces the settler within a ceremonial encounter at the 'edge of the woods,' soliciting a welcome to territory" (2020b, p. 152). Might "getting" consent for myself as a settler at this moment in history, where we are still living entangled in ongoing colonial atrocities and land theft, better be framed as recognizing and stepping towards that "edge"? Could the act of "stepping" rather than "getting" indicate an ongoing practice rather than a finality, a way of *relating* rather than a stamp of approval?

This question brings me to the clown. Salverson draws on a practice of clowning to theorize what she calls a "foolish witness." The definition of a clown or fool (and the distinctions between them), is expansive, temporally and culturally specific, and elusive to pin down even within each of its specificities. The clown is an "interdisciplinary phenomenon" who, in part, is responsible for "providing the foil for the shortcomings of dominant discourse or the absurdities of human behaviour" (Robb, 2007). Clown researcher, teacher and performer Jon Davison, in his book on histories of clowning practice, even questions whether or not "there is anything which always holds true for clowns" (2013, p. 3). Drawing on French circus historian Tristan Rémy, Davison explains how "clowns occur in different moments in different societies, being shaped by those moments and societies. In other words, clown history is a part of all other histories: cultural, social, political...." (2013, p. 19). My knowledge of the clown/fool is specifically about clowning as a performance tradition, which, as Monique Mojica explains, is only one aspect of clowning, as many Indigenous nations have sacred clown figures that are strongly protected and

that this dissertation does not elaborate on (in Norris, 2020, p. 58). For Salverson, the clown/fool can also be defined in part by a productive naïveté: she is one that is ignorant of how little she has to offer, ignorant of the enormity of the task before her, and ignorant of the exhausting effects of trying to make change. Her action, though, is to absurdly offer herself to the task anyway (2006, p. 154). “The destabilized position of the clown,” Salverson writes, “offers a place to consider relationships across difference—relationships of attention without resolution, of respect without capture” (2006, p. 155). I see this offer of an unsettled self as fruitful grounds to work towards Tuck, McKenzie and McCoy’s “unsettled imaginary” as well as a gesture towards Carter’s exercise of “soliciting welcome.” Pairing Carter and Salverson, then, I see my protocol of consent as occurring through the practice of becoming a **fool at the edge of the woods**.

I should specify that this foolish witness is an ethical framework that I came to use through a process of clowning and reading theory. This eventually resulted in a clown character (Candace) and a film (*Land Hunger*) that encourages audiences to consider their own potential for being a fool at the edge of the woods, yet the character of Candace, while clearly a clown, is not *this* fool. She hungrily eats the land; she does not wait at the edge and thoughtfully consider who she is or how and if she might be welcomed to the territory. She thus engages with the role of the foolish witness through her antithesis of it. I also explored the idea of the edge by starting the last scene of *Land Hunger* with the visual image of the edge of a forest, shown through a river that separates one edge from another. In fact, almost the entire film was shot along this edge and, while I filmed many shots that looked across the river, I realize now I never walked across. The farther edge of the river, then, is only ever seen in the film through a certain distance, or with the orientation of a witness.

A “Canadian” Clowning Practice

I began training at the Manitoulin Conservatory for Creation and Performance (commonly known as the Clown Farm) in the first year of my PhD. While I had long been interested, and had some experience, in clowning, I was looking for more extensive training with which to think through practices of embodiment in my theatre practice within and beyond my dissertation. The Clown Farm²⁹ was run by John Turner, of the famous Canadian clown-horror duo Mump & Smoot. Turner was a student of the late Richard Pochinko, a Polish Canadian theatre artist and teacher. Pochinko, along with his partner Ian Wallace, developed the pedagogy of clown training in the 1980’s that is now known as Clown Through Mask, Pochinko Clown, or sometimes, interestingly for my project, “Canadian Clowning.” Turner is now one of the most experienced teachers of Pochinko’s method and has taught at a wide variety of different institutions, both across Canada and internationally, for over 30 years (Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia, n.d.).

While some have made controversial claims that Richard Pochinko developed his method alongside an Indigenous teacher, Sonia Norris’ recent discussion with renowned Indigenous performers Monique Mojica, Jani Lauzon, Rose Stella, and Gloria Miguel, who collaborated with Pochinko and Wallace, concludes that the training is: “not rooted in Indigenous clowning practices, yet its history includes the explorations of Indigenous performers who greatly impacted the development of Pochinko’s method, while simultaneously using it to investigate their own Trickster traditions” (Norris, 2020, p. 60). Similarly, Joahanna Berti and Bruce Naokwegijig of Debajehmujig Theatre Group—a renowned Indigenous theatre group in Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island that has had a long-term creative relationship with John Turner—write that:

²⁹ After almost 20 years running, the Clown Farm, located on Manitoulin Island, was sadly not able to survive the immense financial toll of the pandemic and has recently close its doors for good.

During this complex era of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, the Pochinko-based process is a significant tool for creation, expression, and performance. The clown theatre training nurtures empathy, understanding, cooperation, reciprocal communication, and empowerment...At Debajehmujig, this clown work with its nurturing of identity and authenticity facilitates us in being uniquely community-based and Anishnabe. (2020, p. 38)

The most common form of clown training in Europe and North America today stems from the pedagogy of French theorist Jacques Lecoq and his student Philippe Gaulier. Richard Pochinko studied with Lecoq in developing his method. While I have studied less extensively in these European clowning traditions, one of the major differences between the two that can be felt immediately is that for Lecoq there is an *outside-in approach*, where the external form of the performer in front of an audience leads to an internal feeling. Pochinko training is the opposite; it employs an *inside-out approach*, asking artists to *start* with a vivid imaginative world that is explored extensively before any attention is given to the outer form (J. Turner, personal communication, August 25, 2018).³⁰ I thus find this latter training a fitting pairing with practices of critical autoethnography and relational accountability, not because it asks one to act out their personal experiences—in fact, it explicitly asks us *not* to do so—but because its focus on imaginative play necessitates that we bring who we are to the work. Monique Mojica also describes her experience of this work and how it allowed herself and fellow performers to “incorporate what we knew and to bring who we are into that process, culturally, historically,

³⁰ In further discussions with Turner on this point, he also elaborated on the ways that inside-out and outside-in approaches can each be useful at different points in the rehearsal process. For example, he finds the Lecoq training’s emphasis on form (*outside-in*) can be very useful at a later stage in the rehearsal process, which I agree with (J. Turner, personal communication, January 10, 2024). I find the Pochinko training, emphasizing *inside-out*, particularly useful for the early creation stage.

and from our land bases—because we were all from really varied cultures, each with our own stories about those entities and beings” (in Norris, 2020, p. 59). This is also where I see the value in Pochinko’s clowning method: it encourages the artist to bring their own subject position into their work, which includes the land they are on while encouraging a playful exploration of all aspects of the self. In other words, it leaves space for the fool at the edge of the woods because it *thrives off relationality*. It does not ask us to come to the work as a “blank page,” assuming that everything is available for discovery by the Robinsonade actor.

This practice of clowning thus follows the theoretical framework of the chameleon-puppet laid out in the previous chapter, as it refutes the idea that a body can be trained into a completely neutral subject in order to perform another character. Of course, to say that this practice *follows* my theoretical framework is to presume a linearity of process that research-creation can never achieve, as practice and theory are constantly shaping each other. The practice of clowning that I was drawn to was influenced by Indigenous performance and land education writers and practitioners (Berti & Naokwegijig, 2020; Norris, 2020), while at the same time, my understanding of these theories was shaped by my practice of clowning. To understand what I think of as an ongoing *spiral of relations* between land, performance, and theory within my research-creation process, I will turn to the field of embodied research.

Embodied Research and Walking a Word

On the first afternoon of my residency, I sit in a large drafty room that is now my studio for the week and take a look at the quiet emptiness around me. Is this room an “empty space” or “blank page”? Are rehearsal studios themselves meant to attempt neutrality? Yet the room does not feel like a blank page. For example, the first time I ever came to this residency I was given Indigenous and settler histories of the Islands and of the specific building I am in, and I think of

these stories whenever I walk through these spaces. This room is also where my theatre partner and I developed our first clown show years ago, and the space is saturated with memories of a certain improv, laughing fit or lunch break. Since then, hundreds of artists have likely used this studio, tiny remnants of their time visible in dust, paint chips, and floor scratches. It is a space thick with personal and collective memories. Yet the site-specificity of this studio, I imagine, comes from an artist's intentional choice to orientate themselves to any site's specificity, and is perhaps not unique to this physical room.

As I contemplate my studio space, thoughts around access to (or hunger for) space and land race around in my head like bumper cars, not able to get anywhere important and constantly hitting each other. I take a break from trying to make rational sense of these thoughts and turn instead to my body, beginning a clown exercise that facilitates an embodied exploration of a particular theme. I learned this exercise from my clown teacher, John Turner, who adapted it from Richard Pochinko's method of clowning. It begins with "walking a word through your body"—that is, letting your physicality absorb a word of your choosing in whatever way your impulses take you. My favourite part of this exercise is that the bumper car thoughts in my head get a forced vacation; the exercise is specifically *not* about physicalizing what I think the word means. The exercise is just about your imagination filling your body up with a word (not with the *explanation* of the word) and letting your body move in response. For example, if the word you are walking is "water," this does not mean you start to move as you think water would; you are not mimicking water. You simply let the feeling of the consonants and vowels within "water" move through your body, following any impulse to change your shape and movement (J. Turner, personal communication, February 2, 2019). For this exercise, I chose the word "Canada."

The exercise has many steps which are hard to communicate through a written paragraph, but I will outline them briefly here, using my own experience, before turning to theorize what they contribute methodologically. Eventually, with the physicality from the word “Canada” coursing through my body, I closed my eyes and shaped a piece of clay, letting my new physicality lead the impulses for the shape the clay would take. I did not open my eyes until the clay was done and, whatever shape I then had, I papier machéd over until I had a mask, which, as is often the case in this exercise, does not look at all like a recognizable face. I then felt the shape of the mask and interpreted that shape into a vocalization, which I let influence a new physicality in my body. I then explored which colours³¹ existed in which parts of the mask, painting the mask accordingly. At the end, I walked the physicality again, wearing this new mask and letting the flavour of each of the colours and their placement on the mask influence me. As one might imagine from the process, the result is not a beautiful mask to perform in; the masks might not even express any human facial traits and are extremely hard to see out of. As demonstrated in my journal entry (shown in Figure 10), in which I included a photo of the mask, the mask does not represent any recognizable traits associated with the word “Canada.” The masks are not the product; they are entirely about the process. The product is a character that has gone through several degrees of separation from what can often be an overbearing intellectual grip over the theme that I want to explore (or, what I call in the journal entry, the “shoulds of academia”). For me, this elaborate process is a system for bypassing the mind’s expectations of full control over the body’s creativity and knowledge, an expectation that is quite strong in academia (see

³¹ These are 7 characters that get created at the start of this training, which I did back in 2018 with Turner at the Clown Farm. Each person’s colours are unique characters with their own life and worlds and are based on physical exercises and explorations around the colours Red, Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange, Violet, and Indigo.

Batacharya & Wong, 2018). It thus encourages an embodied approach to research in a very practical way.

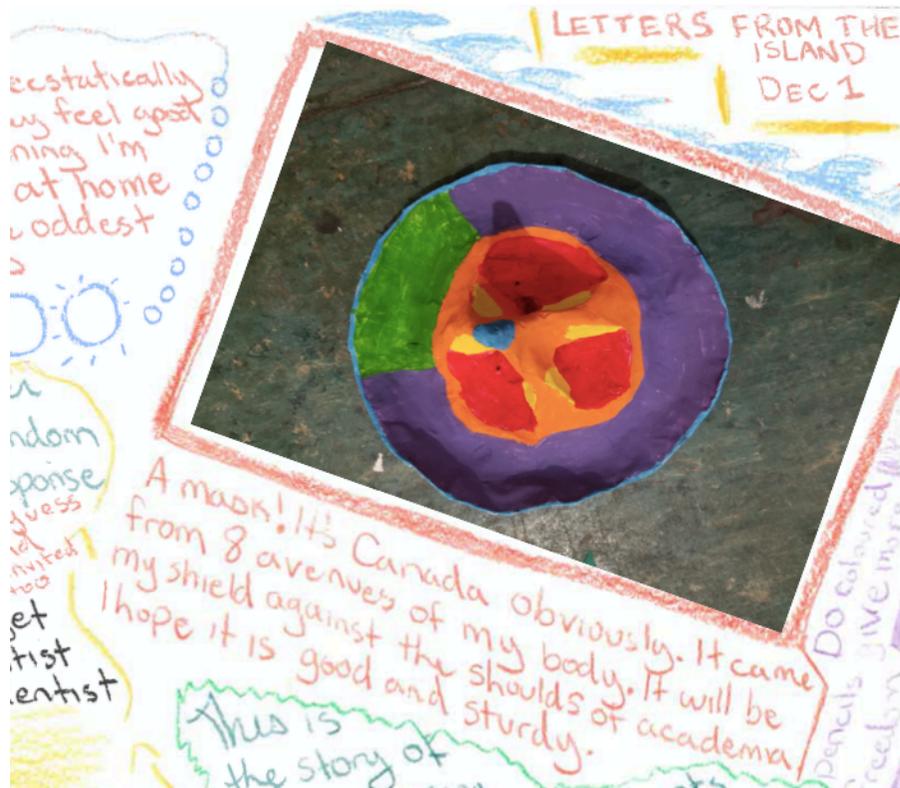


Figure 10: One of my journal entries while on the Islands, done in the form of a collage. The entry shows the mask of Canada with text below it reading: "A mask! It's Canada obviously. It came from 8 avenues of my body. It will be my shield against the 'shoulds' of academia. I hope it is good and sturdy." Photo by the author.

While all research conducted by humans is inherently embodied, seeing as none of the most brilliant minds would have written or thought anything without being part of a body, it is still not a common practice in the social sciences to methodologically incorporate and prioritize the way that research is produced by living bodies (Leigh & Brown, 2021; Thanem & Knights, 2019). Scholars in embodied research have noted how Western academic institutions still expect a hierarchized, Cartesian understanding of the mind-body, thus prioritizing a disembodied way of doing research, where a rational, objective mind is seen as separate from and superior to an

experiencing body (Batacharya & Wong, 2018). While links to the body might be more commonly explicit in performance and other arts fields, embodied research is also becoming more popular across a wide variety of disciplines. As Thanem and Knights, drawing on phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, describe:

[Embodiment] denotes the lived, sensorial, perceptual, experiential and active nature of the body, a body which incorporates the mind, and which is embedded and incorporated in the world...it is that material fabric through which we experience and know the world and ourselves in the world; and it is the medium through which we make sense of, think about, talk about, and enact the world whilst being embedded in it and shaped by it.
(2019, p. 36)

Embodied research has also been theorized as an important element of decolonization and anti-racist work. Frantz Fanon's seminal text *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) made important contributions to the theories of phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Fanon argued that the lived experience in a colonized world—which is so central to the fields of performance and critical autoethnography—does not precede racialization. “In the white world,” Fanon writes, “the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity” (1967, p. 83). There is no blank slate of embodied experience or an equally shared bodily schema; rather, the very way we can be in relation with the world is already shaped according to social constructs of difference such as race. This is not to say that race (or gender) is biologically constituted, but rather that power structures so strongly shape the modern-day world that there is no common experience of the world that can serve as a neutral starting point. As Jeremy Weate defines it, “Fanon's critique of phenomenology teaches us that the universal is the end of the struggle, not that which precedes

it” (2021, p. 171). That is, a world where there is an underlying shared experience of being a body in space regardless of race is the goal, not the starting point. This echoes my critique of the chameleon-puppet actor training in the way that a performer’s body, while still able to transform magnificently, does not precede its own markings (of class, race, gender, sexuality, etc). Instead, the body’s markings shape how it moves through the world and are thus integral in understanding embodied knowledge and research.

Furthermore, Beata Stawarska and Annalee Ring analyze Fanon’s critiques of Merleau-Ponty’s theories on the specific connection between language and embodiment, or what they call—paralleling Merleau-Ponty’s body schema—a *language-schema* (2023, p. 74). They describe how Fanon disrupted monolingual assumptions within phenomenology, where one’s world is defined by a singular familial language, which also aligns with that of the nation-state. For colonized peoples, a language-schema often contains multiple languages, and therefore multiple worlds and power structures, some of which may be in an antagonistic—rather than parallel—relation to the language of the governing state. Fanon’s assertion makes clear that language and colonial relations are intricately connected within phenomenology. This made me reflect on the fact that, throughout every draft or rehearsal of this creative project, Candace never spoke. She occasionally would speak gibberish but most often would not speak any language. Was I subscribing to Merleau-Ponty’s assumed universality of language in not situating her within a specific language? Or was it rather that Candace, in trying to claim a land she is not in relation with, needed to refuse the *situatedness* of language? For if, as Fanon argues, the very fact of speaking means “above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization” (qtd in Stawarska & Ring, 2023, p. 70), then Candace’s commitment to the historylessness of the project of Canada would necessitate that she not speak. For if she spoke, she would demonstrate

through her language, accent, or word choice the weight of a culture and all its geographic and temporal specificity (Stawarska & Ring, 2023, p. 69). As the maternal manifestation of a settler state, or a culture yet-to-be-born, I posit that Candace stays silent so that she can maintain her assumed ability to supersede time and space, naturalizing the project of settlement through its assumed universality.

Ta-Nehisi Coates also reminds us that no matter how much we *theorize* histories of racism and colonialism, these structures are still *felt* viscerally. He writes, “the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body” (2015, p. 10). This is not to undermine or dismiss the tremendous labour that theory can do for the world, but rather to highlight the importance of actively involving bodily *experience* in research. In their edited collection on the connections between embodied learning and decolonization within systems of education, Sheila Batacharya and Yuk-Lin Renita Wong write that,

Relations of power are at once discursive and material. No discussion of decolonization can therefore proceed without directly confronting the impact of colonization on the body—the ways in which colonial relations of power have shaped not only the discursive construction of a hierarchy of bodies but also the lived experience of embodiment. (2018, p. 17)

Therefore, given the existence of colonial structures within our bodies and within the worlds our bodies are in relation to, there is political power in framing bodies as capable of *producing* research as well as being the subject matter of research. As Honor Ford-Smith, drawing on Stuart Hall, writes, “the body becomes a field for the inscription of power...that can both inhabit and subvert the dominant representations that justify hierarchies of race or gender” (2019, p. 155).

My orientation towards the body thus focuses on the inextricable web of both biology and experience, rejecting biological determinism and highlighting the power structures that we live within and their effects on us. This is to avoid what can sometimes be a hierarchy of body over mind in theatre training, which we see manifest in the chameleon-puppet trap, or of mind over body in academia, which we see manifest in the pervasiveness of Cartesian dualisms. Following Merleau-Ponty's theory that consciousness is less about "I think" and more about "I can," my understanding of embodiment is about the ways that we can act on and impact the world around us (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 139). In linking this idea to a theory of performance, I draw on Diana Taylor's work when she writes:

We usually think of bodies as central to performance, as protagonists and agents of social change and artistic intervention. We must accept, however, that performance also functions within systems of subjugating power in which the body is simply one more product. Colonialism, dictatorships, patriarchies, torture, capitalism, religions, globalism, and so on, construct their own bodies. (2015, p. 96)

My embodied creation process for the character of Candace is an attempt to critically explore the ways in which the white settler female body is also inscribed with these bodies of power, which are so often invisibilized through normative narratives of innocence. Embodiment as a method of research and performance, then, is what Taylor calls a "doing to," a material and affective action in the world (2015, p. 86).

Meeting Candace and Clinging to Innocence

This process of walking the word "Canada" through my body resulted in the main character of *Land Hunger*: Candace. The full exercise took a few days to complete. I pushed the word "Canada" into a piece of clay that was so stiff it hurt my hands until I warmed it by an old space

heater filled with dust particles, material reminders of other bodies in this room before me. Now the word was in the clay, and I did not have to *think* about what it meant. I spent hours making a papier mâché mold, laying strips of newspaper dripping in glue and water across every inch of the mask-to-be and letting them harden into a resolve that I could not break, even though I put them there. Once they were hardened, I scraped the clay out and got to know this mask a bit better.

Actors are so dramatic. I am often sceptical of the theatre school tales of deep and lasting wounds from playing a character, but I felt a well of despair in my body after meeting Candace—or was it from coming back to myself afterwards? I had this strange, contradictory feeling of both wishing I had never started this project and simultaneously wishing I was still in her body, walking around the room like there was a little fire in me that could do anything. I wrote in my journal immediately after:

When I finished walking this mask, washing out the character in my body by visualizing bright white light,³² there was a resistance I've never felt in this exercise. I didn't want to wash her out, but I'm not sure why. I wasn't necessarily in love with her as I have been with other characters. Still, I didn't want to clean out, and I felt like I might cry as I did it. But this is all elaborate pretend, my now-self tells my then-self. Maybe washing her out of my body accidentally pulled out something of my own self that had latched on to her, or that she came from? All the sudden I had to see myself in relation (intimate, deep, blissful relation) to her. Is she who I wish I wasn't? If I let go, would I be her? I don't have the guts, do I? But does she? Did I already know her before today?

I find all my other masks³³ and colours charming, even the slightly pedophilic skunk or the slime monster. But this one I don't find charming. Ahhk I actually do. I just feel very bad about it.

³² “washing/cleaning out” is a visualization technique in clowning for letting a character fully leave your body at the end of an exercise. In an interesting parallel to my critiques of the actor training of a “blank page,” this exercise employs a similar metaphor with the colour white, where participants are asked to visualize a bright white light washing out the character that they have just been improvising in. However, unlike Lecoq’s method (and Diane Roberts’ critique of it), this visualization is to transition from a character to oneself: there is never a “neutral” person that is supposed to be achieved in between.

³³ In Pochinko clown training you find 6 masks that come from 6 directions, rather than from a theme or word, and 7 colours (which I explained above). They each have a similar exercise of character creation to the one I did for this mask.

*I have to move her [the mask] off my writing table and onto the craft table, maybe telling myself that's where she came from. She is scary. Is it later in the day than I thought, did I eat a small breakfast, or did she make me **hungry**? I wonder what her name is.*
(Journal entry December 2021)

There are many other exercises in the Pochinko training method once a mask is created and painted, which I learned over the years of training with Turner. While still wary of her, I did some of these exercises with Candace the next day. One of them goes something like this: After making the mask and walking it in your body, you improvise with the character in two stages of life, which, fittingly for this project, are called experience and *innocence*. Innocence can be roughly translated into a human age of 6 years. I convinced myself that this would be much better, that I should keep the Candace I just found in innocence, and I did a few improvisations this way. Some of these improvisations were exercises from Pochinko training, which involve finding a range of emotional experiences from the character's past, and some were based on settler scenarios of transfer via domestication from my research. Candace was still intense within these improvisations, but I could get to know her better. She was really a heroine: mischievously fun but ultimately blameless, relatable in exactly the ways I wanted to relate to her. Perhaps she could have been a young Saskia, the protagonist from my home video in Chapter 3. She felt clear, familiar, and cozy. But at the same time, she was so finished, so already explained: a victim of circumstances, a child blameless for how the world acts on her. She was lovely. It felt good to be her.

The Covid-19 Omicron variant, accompanied by several snowstorms, was hitting Toronto as my residency unfolded, so I had to share my studio work over Zoom with my supervisor. This eventually had a significant impact on the video form that my project would take, which I will

elaborate on in the next chapter. I performed a few clown turns³⁴ through our video call, using the premise of Candace as a young girl tragically stuck in an orphanage, waiting to be chosen. My supervisor found Candace enchanting as well, but then she asked if this character could get darker and I found that, indeed, she very easily could. I realized that I was claiming to critique the “innocent domesticator” within the general Canadian public while tightly grasping onto the image of her in myself.

Sherene Razack and Mary Louise Fellows developed a brilliant theory of gender and innocence that clarifies my own attachment to innocence as well as why this attachment was only shaken and made visible to myself through an embodied process. They argue that there is a pervasive and debilitating tendency for those in social justice, feminist, and activist spaces (they specifically focus on women, but I believe it holds true for other gender identities as well) to understand their own oppression as both more important than and fundamentally unrelated to the oppression of many others. To protect their right to push for change based on their own subordination, they may reject their complicit (active or passive) participation in the oppression or domination of other groups. Razack and Fellows term this process “the race to innocence” (1998, p. 335). When systems of domination are seen as isolated, fighting them without a framework that prioritizes the fact that they are in fact *interlocked* will never actually threaten the hierarchy (1998, p. 340). When our primary focus is the pursuit of our own innocence based on the isolated but visceral experience of our own unique subjugation, we foreclose a relational approach that puts our experience in conversation with that of others and in doing so we leave

³⁴ In theatre and clown, a turn is a short (around 2 minutes) performance consisting of an entrance, a happening, and an exit. Turns are often used in workshops to develop and practice technique but can also be useful in the initial phases of creating character and narrative for a show.

the *structure* that created our own subjugation unchallenged. Women³⁵ have a particular tendency to cling to our claims of innocence because any privileges we might benefit from (on the basis of race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) still do not erase the experience of misogyny and patriarchy and so to implicate ourselves in the domination of others feels like it will risk minimizing any claim to (and thus support for) our oppression on the basis of gender. We thus compete in the race to innocence, allowing struggles against subjugation to become isolated. In doing so we invisibilize the foundation of their existence.

It is thus important to become aware of the race to innocence, yet Razack and Fellows argue that an *intellectual* recognition of hierarchal structures does not necessarily result in a *felt* experience of our position in them (1998, p. 339). When I was developing Candace during this residency, I was five years into my doctoral studies and had a decent cognitive understanding of the intersectional nature of systems of oppression. Yet when I began to apply these theories in an embodied or *felt* way, through creating Candace, I immediately joined the race to innocence.

Batacharya and Wong explain how an embodied research method requires "engagement with the material foundations of our experience" in such a way as will "encourage us to engage critically with our own consciousness—to examine our perceptions and our reactions to them and thus begin to *unsettle responses conditioned by colonial frameworks*" (2018, p. 14, my emphasis). I realized through the practice of creating this character that I had not previously been able to "engage critically with my own consciousness," because my body was still trying to cling to the safety of what Tuck and Yang (2012) describe as "settler moves to innocence," which refers to purportedly decolonial efforts whose main aims are to ease settler guilt while maintaining the fundamental structure of colonial power. Trauma therapist Resmaa Menakem's

³⁵ Razack and Fellows wrote this article in the 1990's and do not mention how this theory relates to nonbinary, two-spirit, trans, or genderqueer folks so I use the term "woman" as this is the way it is described in their research.

theory of “white-body supremacy” helps me further understand my experience of becoming stuck in Candace-in-innocence, where he cautions at the outset of his book on racialized trauma that white readers may feel their bodies “reflexively restrict in order to protect you,” which is accompanied by a rhetoric of distancing, where we tell ourselves that this structure does not apply to us (2017, p. xiii). Menakem is thus describing a psychophysical impulse to partake in the race to innocence, which I experienced in my practice of clowning. It was only through this embodied work that my “rhetoric of distancing” became visible to me as a move to innocence and I came to better understand some of these stories, histories, and presents about colonialism and the way they live in (and come from) my body. My “emotional attachment to innocence” (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 343) is not solely cognitive or intellectual and therefore was only unearthed through an embodied exploration.

After realizing the strength of this attachment in my body, I decided not to go back to creating scenes or monologues from Candace-in-innocence. For the rest of my time on the Islands, I improvised with this older Candace who was anything but innocent. However, I want to highlight how crucial this early work was for my critical exploration of innocence and gender within settler relations to land. Not only did my embodiment of the race to innocence help make it more visible to me as a process, but without finding this character’s younger version, I would not have found one of the central premises and themes of *Land Hunger*: the paper doll chain.

Paper Dolls and Clown Gods

After initially discovering Candace-in-innocence, I did a series of clown exercises that helped me find the character’s world in an embodied and spontaneous way. One of these, which I learned from Turner, includes an improvisation in which you imagine the character’s world, from their perspective, in an instinctual image—that is, you welcome in the first thing your imagination

conjures when you visualize the world as the character. Often when I have done this exercise for other masks, the images initially seem to be complete nonsense: for example, a slime pit, a park full of wooden benches, or a dungeon. The meaning and theorizing might come after, but they are not part of the exercise itself. In this case, it was only in later reflections that I explored how the images I found for Candace stem from the research. While a theoretical understanding of embodiment should make this obvious, I am still always surprised by how my physical instincts in research-creation seem to know the work just as well as my mind does.

The first image that came to me in doing this exercise for Candace's world was a never-ending expanse of mountains. Then, slowly stretching out before Candace/me was a lineup of girls, all the same size, the same age, dressed in matching uniforms, yet with no feelings of solidarity between them. It was almost as if they were each in little glass cubicles. I then realized that Candace was part of this lineup herself. In journaling about this exercise afterwards, it hit me that this was strikingly similar to the story of my 19th-century Home Child ancestor, Ella Hillier, standing in an imagined lineup of orphaned girls waiting to see who would be chosen for the Canada List—that is, for future access to an amount of land that was impossible in their current situation. At this point in my process, I had done a fair amount of genealogical research for an article I was writing about critical family history and settler colonialism, but in my mind this research was not necessarily going to be related to my dissertation project. In my body, however, the connection was quite clear.

I decided to do some improvisations based on this image, and I developed various scenes of Candace waiting in an orphanage, feeling competitive towards all the other children that she hoped would not be chosen over her. In doing these improvisations, I was reminded of my clown teacher, John Turner, forbidding his students to mime during our in-class turns. His oft-repeated

philosophy was that “Clowns love stuff” (J. Turner, personal communication, August 22, 2018). The rationale goes something like this: When I mime an object, person, or character, I am in full control; the material world cannot surprise me if it only exists exactly as I determine it to. On the other hand, to find something tangible to work with in an improvisation allows me to playfully interact with my world, which might be full of surprises. Turner, following Pochinko, calls these surprises “gifts from the [clown] gods” (J. Turner, personal communication, August 24, 2018). The clown gods are present when you welcome in the inevitable unpredictability of the world to your rehearsal or performance space. Since I did not have an acting partner with me, and I did not want to mime the other girls in Candace’s lineup—which might have blasphemously banished the clown gods from my studio—I quickly cut out a chain of paper dolls to improvise with.

Paper dolls are a strange type of toy that I had not thought about since childhood. They can be cut into a long seamless chain, but they are also quite popular as individual dolls with different paper outfits that can be attached through small tabs. I only remember ever having one set of paper dolls as a child, and I loved them. My parents bought them to entertain my sister and I as we made the long road trip from Ottawa to Calgary in a small car with no air conditioning. The dolls came from the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Minnesota and all the characters were from the *Little House on the Prairie* novels, which my sister and I loved and had read multiple times (see Figure 11). The set came as a perfect heteronuclear family: a mother, a father, two kids and a dog. You could dress the dolls in a variety of pioneer outfits and there was even a blank white dress you could design and colour yourself. Being only five at the time, I cannot remember what I tried to draw, but nevertheless I have the memory of that exciting possibility of a blank page.



Figure 11: A sample page from *My Little House Paper Dolls: The Big Woods Collection* (Wilder 1995). I cannot find the dolls I had growing up, but images of the book are still available online at lauraingallswilderhome.com.

I found out recently that domesticity and settlement are quite popular themes in paper doll toys. Adams and Keene write that the form grew commercially successful in North America, arguing that paper doll toys had a uniquely powerful gift for doing “the cultural work in defining and defending a powerful myth of American life” (2017, p. 101). Furthermore, they draw on a 19th-century psychological study that demonstrated, perhaps unsurprisingly, how dolls were particularly useful for teaching girls how to be motherly and feminine (2017, p. 84). In browsing for different images of paper dolls today, I continually came across books and printouts of paper dolls made to look like 18th to 19th-century pioneer girls. A quintessential example is a book of paper doll toys from the year 2000 unironically titled “Betsy the Colonial Girl: Sticker Paper Doll.” The only text in the book briefly introduces the premise on the first page:

Betsy is a girl originally from Europe who has settled in the New World during the Colonial period. She loves to dress up in her beautiful clothes made of rich fabrics. You

can help Betsy get ready for a day of picking flowers, knitting, or playing with her doll with these quaint outfits. (Noble, 2001 n.p)

The paper doll image is clearly a rich metaphor for domesticity and settler colonialism, particularly as it connects to gender, race, and class. This is further demonstrated through visual artist Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, who created the series “Paper Dolls for a Post-Columbian World,”³⁶ a series of paper doll drawings satirizing colonial relations in America (Cornum, n.d.).

The image of the paper dolls, whether during my initial creation period, in later creative work, or in *Land Hunger*, recalls the often-complex position of white women settler-colonizers in the early days of creating Canada. White women could wield power over racialized Others, and upper-class white women even more so, particularly to the extent that they were able to “personify a narrow vision of respectable white femininity” (Perry, 2001, p. 174). Respectability, particularly in the 19th century, has been theorized as an assertion of superiority over others which offered a justification for domination; it necessitated a conformity to a certain performance of order and cleanliness which had clear boundaries and was expressed most vividly through the domestic realm (Fellows & Razack, 1998, pp. 346–348; McClintock, 1995, p. 42). In this sense, I imagine Victorian middle-class or middle-class-aspiring white women settlers as subjects living within and defined by heavily policed boundaries. Yet at the same time, these women also create the boundaries of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997). As Radhika Mohanram writes on the imperial structure of white British female subjectivity:

What made the British woman the innermost, the purest, was precisely that *she was also the boundary*, the space of dilution, making the outer into an inner. At the very moment the British woman played the role of the essential and constitutive of Britishness, she

³⁶ Select images of this brilliant series can be found here: <https://whitney.org/essays/on-jaune-quick-to-see-smith>

undermined it by showing her potential/ability to contaminate it. (2007, p. 34 emphasis in original)

I began picturing these boundaries as a strict and empty outline of a body. Only within this outline could a subject successfully perform the “narrow vision” of white domesticity. The paper dolls in a line, especially in contrast with Candace sticking out like a sore thumb, are my visualization of this respectability, similarly both menacing and tragic in their uniformity. They recall what Siegfried Kracauer (1995) terms “the mass ornament,” inspired by the 1890’s dance group the Tiller Girls, whose fame arose from their incredible precision of uniformity. Laura Levin describes the Tiller Girls as: “Perfectly matched in height and weight, the personality of the individual performer was submerged in favor of a group aesthetic” (2014, p. 59). I thus see 19th-century white women settlers as this mass ornament, an “army of occupiers” (S. Carter, 2016, p. 40) whose individual agency cedes to the project of conquest. Interestingly, the Tiller Girls, who are still a dance troupe today, were formed by John Tiller in 1890 to create a pantomime of *Robinson Crusoe*, the quintessential story of colonial conquest that Catharine Parr Traill’s *Canadian Crusoes* is based off.

It was not until months after I got back from the Islands, while writing this chapter, that I happened to look back at my earlier genealogical research and noticed this haunting photograph of the first group of Barnardo’s Home Child girls at their receiving home in Canada, shown below in Figure 12. My ancestor, Ella, is listed in the archived caption for this photograph online, although the British Home Children Advocacy and Research Organization has confirmed for me that there was no saved order to the way names were listed and therefore no way to know which of these little girls in white pinafores she is.

Prior to writing this chapter, I had forgotten the details of this photo; I had not remembered that they were all in matching uniforms of white pinafores, eerily mimicking the paper dolls that emerged from my physical explorations. This is an example of the way that the physicality of clown training can pair wonderfully with research. Once I am embedded in the images and stories of my research, they will undoubtedly surface through embodied improvisation in ways I could never predict. Through this process it became clear to me that my body remembers things my conscious mind does not, and that this memory can be accessed through embodied practice.

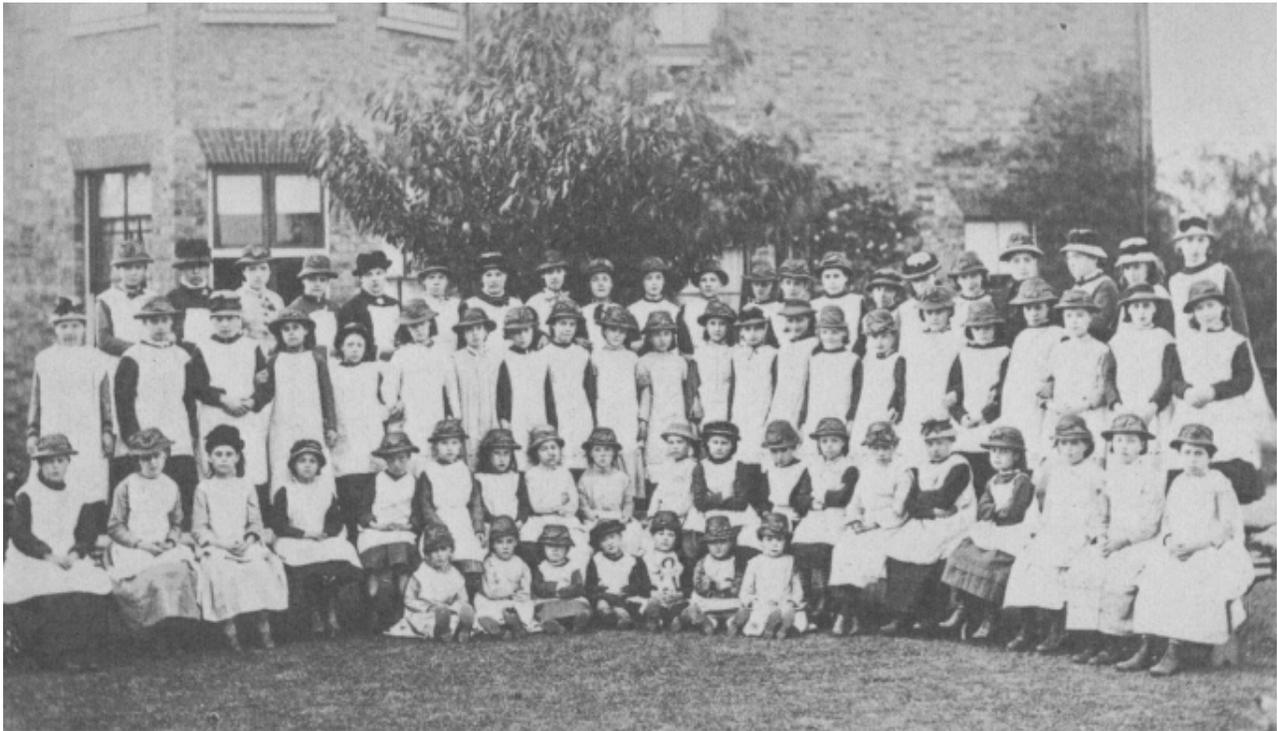


Figure 12: "The First Party of Girls to Arrive Under Barnardo's Own Organization. Arrived July 21 1883 Aboard the Sardinian." Sourced from British Home Children Advocacy and Research Organization.

In this way, my dissertation follows what practice/performance-based research advocates for, which is that the artistic process of creation is not just a reflection on the research, it also constitutes the research itself (Arlander, 2018; Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012; Loveless, 2020; Trimingham, 2002). Without an embodied clown practice, I would have never found this image of a lineup of identical white paper doll girls, with a fully human-clown body in their midst, which became the initial premise for *Land Hunger*. This was a clear manifestation of Taylor's argument that the archive and the repertoire "both exceed the limitation of the other... [m]aterials from the archive shape embodied practice in innumerable ways, yet never totally dictate embodiment" (2003, p. 21). Figure 13 (below) shows my journal entry that I created after improvising in the studio that day.

Improvisation is a crucial aspect of this practice for me. As Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston, drawing on theatre theorist Augusto Boal, writes, "improvisation—bypassing the censorship of the rational brain—connects to subconscious feelings and desires...improvisation allows me to treat a performance as an embodied and affective ethnographic research process, and not just a representation" (2016, p. 125). These improvisations are thus playful interpretations rather than accurate depictions of research: in this case, my lineup was decidedly not a historical replica of what I imagine Ella's might have been. My lineup felt mythical; the children were not competing to go to Canada, they were competing to *be* Canada. Therefore, only one of them would be chosen.

A row of paper dolls. Identical.



Except. One. One is a clown.



A disgruntled clown. Candace.



LETTERS FROM THE ISLAND
DEC 5

Candace struggles. Grows.



Are they all gonna stand there? Idiots.



She grows. She wiggles so hard.



Miraculously one arm comes free.



I DID IT! My arm moves, it is beautiful.



She uses her new arm to slap the other one free.



She dances. Hair grows red.



Haha you suckers thought you were so proper



Candace waves hello to her audience.



Candace does not speak English. Humans might call her speech "Gibberish."



She grows sharp teeth. She's always had an insatiable appetite



And she feels pretty hungry



Figure 13: While working on this project during my residency, I would create a "letter" each evening to send to my supervisor, in which I would creatively reflect on the day. This was my letter from December 5, 2021. Note the emphasis on **hunger** in the last image.

To be clear, Candace was in no way my ancestor Ella. She was sort of a demon. It felt like she came from an ancient mythology. Since no such mythology exists, I wrote in my journal the following story, playfully and instinctually attempting to describe Candace's origins after these improvisations:

A group of men sit around an ornate wooden table in a tall marble tower. I try not to see them in designer suits (since they are in fact ancient, from a different time), but I just can't help it. There may be some women in there as well, although likely not. There may be some who don't have white skin, although likely not. They are scheming the most common scheme for villains: world domination, of course. Although this time it is brand new. They know of no other scheme like this before. Before them lies a map, their blueprint for global conquest. A hand reaches down from the sky, through the ceiling of marble, its roof causing an avalanche that curiously kills no one in the tower. The hand grabs the map, rips it into large chunks, plops one down on a potter's wheel and shapes it into a beating heart. In 17th-century England a girl is sleeping in an orphanage, dreaming of a different world. The hand reaches into her chest and inserts this heart, which instantly takes to her and she to it, beating joyfully together. Or... perhaps this girl was never innocently sitting in an orphanage. Perhaps she was in fact methodically cutting out paper dolls, breathing life into them one at a time, whispering stories of who they could be. Perhaps Candace is one of these dolls. (Journal entry, December 2021)

Although at this point in my process I had no idea I would create a short film, this story that I wrote in my journal is reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin's famous scene in *The Great Dictator*, where his character Hynkel (a fascist dictator who is explicitly a satire of Adolf Hitler), conducts a two minute dance sequence with a large inflatable globe which, much to his melodramatic despair, eventually pops (Chaplin, 2003). The origin story I wrote above likely stemmed from an unconscious inspiration from Chaplin and was a foundation for the silent film *Land Hunger* in several ways: through images of mapping; through the image of a little girl cutting out paper dolls; and through the image of Candace as just one in a lineup of identical little white paper girls, waiting to become someone via the vast expanse of land that seems so available to them, that vast expanse of land that they are going to call Canada.

Hunger, or the Candaces in Us

My last days on the Islands were filled with improvisations of Candace, which started to form as a series of short clown turns based on different stages of settlement. These included: violently escaping from a line of paper dolls, becoming pregnant with a loaf of bread, creating a map for the best piece of land, cutting down branches to make a shelter, abducting a chipmunk as a pet and pulling seeds out of its mouth, planting a garden, or zealously eating a pile of leaves off the ground. Many of these initial improvisations grew and changed over the course of the next year to form the narrative arc of the film *Land Hunger*.

The theme of hunger, which only became the title of the film quite late in the process, was an explicit throughline in many of these improvisations during the early development of Candace, as can be seen through the various journal entries included in this chapter. For a while, many of my improvisations included Candace dressing up each of the paper dolls as a different settler-Canadian archetype and hungrily taking some of those attributes from them for herself. At some point, the improvisation would likely involve her eating, maiming, or tearing apart the paper doll. In these explorations, my studio floor would be littered with massacred paper dolls, a sample of which I took a picture of before cleaning up on my last day, shown in Figure 14. I did not leave the island with a storyline or even a clear idea of the medium this piece would take (e.g., photos, live performance, video, graphic novel—I will touch on in these ideas of form in the next chapter), but I did leave with a clear character who has a clear motivation.



Figure 14: Half-eaten and broken paper dolls litter the studio floor at Artscape Gibraltar Point. Photo by the author, December 2021.

“Hunger” is a pervasive trope among settler colonial scholarly discourse and Indigenous theorizations of whiteness. I realized this in going back to my reading notes after my clown explorations drew my attention to it. Several Indigenous scholars have pointed out how hunger is reflected in the words that many Indigenous nations chose to describe European settlers when they were first arriving. Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson describes how in his language Halq’emeylem, the word for a settler is a “xwelítém” which means “starving person” (J. Carter et al., 2017, p. 210). Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassal describes how the Hul’qumi’num and SENĆOŦEN word “hwunitum,” meaning settler, has been defined by some as “the hungry people” (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 16). And, similarly, Nlaka’pamux lawyer Ardith Walkem

shares how a Nlaka’pamux Elder described settlers as being “famished,” telling her that “newcomers never could stop eating away at the waters, at the land, at the trees, at the fish . . . and still never feel full or satisfied” (Walkem, 2007, p. 28). There are many different Indigenous languages across so-called Canada, and therefore many different naming processes for settlers as they arrived on these lands, not all of which refer to hunger. In her article on white settler hunger in the work of early 20th century playwright Susan Glaspell, Selena Couture draws on Indigenous words that define settlers as hungry to form her framework of analysis; yet she specifies the importance of learning from the specific languages of the land one is situated on (2021, p. 401). For myself writing in Tkaronto, I note that Anishinaabwemowin for settler is “zhaaganaash,” which, according to the Ojibwe People’s Dictionary, means “Englishman,” but which Métis writer Chelsea Vowel’s (who also goes by âpihtawikosisân) study of Indigenous words for settler is described as either “outsider” or “people of dubious character” (2016, p. 20).

While the three above examples that define settlers by their hunger all come from Indigenous nations on the West coast of Turtle Island—which is not where I am situated—I believe they still speak to structures of early settler-Indigenous relations that would have resonated across the land that the project of Canada was being built on. While the Anishinaabe may have chosen to primarily note white newcomers’ “dubious character” rather than their hunger in their naming practices, early settlers to this area have demonstrated their own colonial narratives of hunger. In one of Catharine Parr Traill’s journals, she describes her first sighting of the land of Turtle Island from the boat, writing about “feasting” her eyes “on the rich masses of foliage as they waved to and fro” (2006, p. 15). Edward West, an early 20th-century British man who wrote about his personal journey moving to the Canadian prairies to become a homesteader, writes, “one began to wonder if some of the immigration were not due to a sort of hereditary

land-hunger... a sort of instinct, inherited from Saxon or other ancestors, to get hold of a bit of Mother Earth..." (1918, p. 58, my emphasis). It was this quote that inspired the title *Land Hunger*, which felt like a fitting term for the settler state, but it also spoke to the focus on the body that this chapter has explored.

This theme of colonial hunger has not gone away throughout the past several hundred years and it is not exclusively contained within the borders of so-called Canada. Writing in the context of colonial relations in the Caribbean, Honor Ford-Smith describes what she calls the "cannibal scholar," who, in an inversion of colonial stereotypes of the Caribbean, "consumes the knowledge of the subaltern" while offering nothing in return, and who is "afraid to risk historical investigation of difference, who maintains the privilege of innocence while denying the ways in which s/he is formed by economies and cultures of global consumption" (Ford-Smith, 2007, p. 21). This insatiable figure haunts a geographical and temporally diverse range of colonial structures.

Paralleling this idea of the cannibal scholar, Dylan Robinson, in an article co-written with Jill Carter and Karyn Recollet, argues that what we are experiencing today is a "'steady state' of hunger" (J. Carter et al., 2017, p. 210; see also D. Robinson, 2020). That is, while hunger still evidently applies to resources via capitalist-colonial expansion, the word has also expanded into appropriation and assimilation, or a *hunger for Indigenous cultures*. He describes this as "hunger to do the right thing, to fit the Indigenous into one part of the multicultural mosaic, to understand and make accessible Indigenous 'issues' through settler logics" (J. Carter et al., 2017, p. 210). The hunger that drives Candace to violently domesticate her surroundings parallels the current Canadian state's push for reconciliation while coveting stolen land. This trope can be framed as a **hunger for settler innocence**, through which we can justify our relationship to this land.

Selena Couture uses the helpful term “hungry reading” to describe her process of analyzing early settler plays on Turtle Island, also drawing on, among other writers, Robinson’s theories of hunger (2021, p. 399). I apply this idea to my performance practice, using the *embodied* trope of hunger to explore gendered settler histories through improvisation and reflection. For me, however, while the theme of hunger had long been a common thread throughout my research, I was not aware of its centrality before creating Candace. It makes sense, though, that a process as inherently visceral as hunger became prominently visible to me only through embodied explorations.

In the month following my residency, I spent some time journaling about the experience and reflecting on the improvisations that came from it. In one entry I posed the question to myself: “Why does Candace keep devouring all these paper doll settlers?” The following is an excerpt of some of the answers I came up with:

Because so many white women were brought over here to feed the hungry machine of the state that wanted to grow and take more land and needed...white baby makers? Because any singular settler-female-paper-doll was not the problem, but they are each an important part of the structure that is the problem. Candace devouring them all proves there isn't a separate individual oppressor, there aren't a few bad apples that we can enlighten and then get on with our regular lives. We've got Candaces in us.
(Journal entry, January 2022)



This chapter has demonstrated how the short film *Land Hunger* was only able to be realized through physical exploration. By theorizing my process of creating the character Candace, I have explored the ways in which using the embodied practice of clowning, paired with theories of land education, has allowed me to access new understandings of white subjectivity in Canada. As Batacharya and Wong argue, "Decolonizing the body...is not a metaphor: it is a material entry point to the dislodging of colonial power, which has been imprinted not merely on minds but on

the body-spirit that is inseparable from the lands we are dependent on for life” (2018, p. 17). This chapter—and this dissertation—is notably not called “Canadian Clowning,” or “Clowning *in* Canada,” but rather “Clowning Canada.” This is because my methodology is about an embodied practice that implicates the subjective self while working to undermine—through the subversive nature of the clown—patriarchal and colonial structures. Without this focus on the materiality of the body, I likely would have remained what Salverson calls a paralyzed witness, stuck in the unhelpful space of guilt while trying to rationalize a move to innocence. Instead, I hope my work can contribute to the push for creating new white settler subjectivities that are prepared to stand as fools at the edge of the woods.

Chapter 5

A Theory of False Starts: On Form, Place and the Menace of Mimicry

In the context of performance, a world picture can assume many forms: a painted backdrop, a photographic projection, an urban building, a map, a website, and so on. Using these backdrops as foils, artists have often reinforced a humanist tradition that positions the human as an individuated figure standing outside of and in opposition to an environmental ground.

—Laura Levin, *Performing Ground*, p. 13

The woman represented materiality, and the man had the power to fashion that materiality into humans within the context of reproduction.

—Radhika Mohanram, *Imperial White*, p. 54

Content...is imbricated in the very forms used to communicate it.

—Natalie Loveless, *Responding to Site*, p. 254

After getting back from the islands, I spent months experimenting with Candace, particularly playing around with what *form* I wanted to use to both think through and share this work. Once a week I would bring any ideas, images, or scenarios from my research to a studio space and explore them on my feet as Candace. For over a year after the island residency, I kept experimenting with different outputs this piece would merge into, for example, live theatre performance, performed photography, portraits, graphic novel, photo novel, or video blog, to name the most prominent of many. This chapter explores the iterative relationship between form and subject and argues for the ways in which changes in artistic form can be integral to theoretical considerations of relationship to space and place in sites fraught with colonial histories/presents. That is, experiments in form can not only eventually produce a certain research output but are also a way of doing the research (Loveless, 2019). The theories of haunting, relationality, and land as pedagogy laid out from Chapter 1 were not a framework on top of which I created *Land Hunger*; instead, my artistic practice and theoretical framework were

each developed in conversation with the other. The false starts in form throughout my process are an important part of what makes this dissertation a research-creation project. I do not prescribe a blueprint with which to find the “best” artistic form for multidisciplinary research-creators, rather, this chapter will argue for the importance of welcoming false starts, those messy, murky, agonizing movements between artistic forms. **This movement has much to offer theories of heterotopic praxis and the performing body in relation to the land she performs in and with.**

Grasping at Forms

While on the islands, I had assumed that I was eventually developing a live theatre performance, as this is my main artistic discipline. Yet my project, to my constant surprise, pulled me through many different forms in the years between the original conception for the stage and the “final” film version. While live and filmed performances are perhaps the most closely related of all the forms I experimented with, each phase I went through still involved performance practice in some way. I realize in retrospect that I have spent most of my doctoral research treading water in a lake of many artistic forms, at various times grabbing onto the lifebuoys of live theatre, graphic novel, character study, performed photography, or film. With each form, I would find myself somehow back to treading water after a few months of being *so* certain that I had successfully played matchmaker between form and content. My desperate search for form has also strangely not ended with the completion of this dissertation; it has merely paused for longer than usual, clinging for now to the lifebuoy of silent short film. As I finish the final edits of *Land Hunger*, I am already making plans for an exploration of Candace within photos or live performances, this time altered from the project as I last conceived of it within these mediums. What is it about this

project that slips through my attempts at disciplinary form, or at any sort of recognizable container?

First, a note on terminology. I use the term “form” almost interchangeably with “medium” or “category.” The word “form” is often used without the need for a definition, yet its meaning in theories of art and aesthetics often differs (Arouh, 2020, p. 56). For the purposes of this project, I agree with Melenia Arouh’s argument that sometimes “we have to resign to [form's] flexibility and simply allow for the context to aid us in making sense of what is meant” (2020, p. 58). In this chapter, I use the term “form” to indicate a categorical shift in artistic medium between, for example, performed photography, graphic novel, silent film, or live performance. Following research-creation scholars’ insistence on the co-constitutive relationship between form and content (Loveless, 2019, 2020), this chapter showcases how my experimentation with form had a deep impact on the project itself, and how each shift in form altered the content.

Inspirations

I have drawn on several key inspirations from different artists across a variety of these disciplines, which each build the project in various ways. This is unique for my process of creation in my theatre work, as rarely within one project will I be so heavily inspired by artists in such different fields. I will turn to these inspirations and the ways they have seeped into the current form.

The Live Theatre Form

Karen Hines’ trilogy *The Pochsy Plays* was the most formative live theatre inspiration for this project overall. The three one-act, solo plays (*Pochsy’s Lips*, *Oh Baby*, and *Citizen Pochsy*) revolve around a series of darkly comedic monologues by the clown/bouffon-inspired character

Pochsy. Pochsy, performed by Hines, is a long-time worker at the fictional company “Mercury Packers,” and suffers dramatic mercury poisoning while resolutely declaring her allegiance to and love for the clearly exploitative and always disturbingly invisible capitalist class. The plays are a series of direct-address monologues and songs as Pochsy navigates her desire for romance, femininity, belonging, financial security and the general perils of a “terribly perfectly horribly beautiful world” (Hines, 2004, p. 148). She contrasts a proudly angelic demeanour against a world that is rapidly crumbling. Even while lying in a hospital bed, attached to an IV with a seemingly fatal ailment, Pochsy cheerily preaches what might be the tagline for Sherene Razack’s hard-working pioneer mythology that discursively reifies the capitalist-colonial nation: “You are what you believe yourself to be. Anything your mind can conceive and believe, it will achieve” (Hines, 2004, p. 31). This contrast epitomizes the Pochsy satire, leaving the audience/reader unsettlingly caught between a laugh and a sob.

Stemming from her training with both Richard Pochinko and Philippe Gaulier, Hines fuses Pochinko’s “personal” clown with Gaulier’s affliction-based satire of the powerful. While Gaulier’s bouffon has been critiqued for promoting an offensive ableism by mimicking disability for the sake of comedy, Hines’ “neo-bouffon” allows the affliction to be internal (Hines, 2004, pp. 12–13). Originally also conceived as an allegory for Canada—although the critique of the nation state of Canada is not too explicit in the final scripts—the character Pochsy was “sewn together from the severed body parts of white North American consumer culture” (Hines, 2004, p. 14). In many ways, Candace is an homage to Pochsy, but focused specifically on the Canadian state as a settler colonial structure of land theft. Although I’ve never seen Hines perform live, I first read *The Pochsy Plays* shortly before training in clown with Hines’ long-time collaborator John Turner at the start of my doctoral program and her work has been on my mind throughout

many iterations of the character that became Candace. While in the live theatre stage of my struggles with form, I developed an outline for a solo show with Candace that was inspired by *The Pochsy Plays*.

Tentatively called *The Can(a)dace Play*, this show was going to be a one-act, solo, clown-horror set in a black box theatre which, in a twist to the traditional blacked-out studio, would be completely white. The stage and walls would be constructed out of enormous white Bristol board with shapes invisibly cut out that could come up like a pop-out book so that they appeared to suddenly form out of the void of whiteness. There would be life-sized paper dolls forming a lineup across the stage in the preshow; when the lights come up, Candace would be placed in the middle as if she is one of them. Candace would blend into the white background—my initial vision for her costume barely changed throughout the process, so in this version, it was almost identical to how it appears in *Land Hunger*—being both defined by it and by the borders of her body in opposition to it. The set design would include projection mapping, where different images could be projected onto specific areas of the dolls, walls, floor, or Candace herself. The set would thus give the impression that Candace is inscribing her reality onto what she imagines to be a *terra nullius* blank slate of land. Any props needed during the show would be white paper cut-outs of the object in question, pulled as if by magic out of the set whenever Candace needs them. The entire performance ecosystem is thus overly defined by a terrifying, looming whiteness, which is both strikingly visible and simultaneously treated as nothingness to be made into usefulness by the dominating subject. In this way, Candace would perform a satirical embodiment of both the haunting presence of absence and the performer-as-chameleon-puppet.

While the specific scenes in this play differed from those in *Land Hunger*, the plot still generally revolved around what a clown friend of mine, in offering feedback on *Land Hunger*,

termed “DIY Settler Colonialism.”³⁷ Stemming from the premise of *The White Wives of Canada* play, discussed in Chapter 3, each life-sized paper doll became, in Candace’s imagination, a female pioneer archetype that she would carnivorously and horrifically maim to gain skills and experience from, basically becoming the ultimate Frankenstein monster of settler tropes (or, put more simply, and as the title of the play indicates, a personification of Canada). Near the end, Candace would begin to lose some of her control over her supposedly empty space; it would assert agency against her, disrupting her assumptions of its everlasting obedience. While I never finished a final version of this show, I developed a first draft in the months following my time on the islands. This work laid the foundation for *Land Hunger*, in that a paper doll violently frees herself from a paper doll chain and creates a domestic settlement out of the white world around her. This live performance form was integral to the research as a whole; in embodying this “neutral” subject who writes their desired story on the “empty” land, I began to make connections between the chameleon-puppet settler actor training and the stories of *terra nullius* that I was interested in exploring.

The Performed Photography Form

While on the island in a semi-lockdown state of the pandemic, my supervisor—who was now unable to visit me in studio—asked that I write a creative journal entry every day to send to her, some entries of which I have shared in other chapters (which we called “Letters from the Island”). Key to this practice was her prompt for me to think in images rather than words. This is where my slow and subconscious turn to image instead of live performance began. To keep my practice of performance within this new form, I turned to performed (self-portrait) photography, where an image is “staged solely to be photographed or filmed and ha[s] no meaningful prior

³⁷ Thank you to my clown colleague Emma Kerson for this phrasing.

existence as autonomous events presented to audiences. The space of the document (whether visual or audiovisual) thus becomes the only space in which the performance occurs” (Auslander, 2006, p. 2). Although I did not have a practice of photography, drawing, or graphic design, I felt strangely freed rather than intimidated by the shift between these forms. There was something about working outside of my primary discipline that helped move me out of the intellectual paralysis that I had been in for the past few years in debating how to imagine this story. I felt less distracted by the expectations I had on myself for the output and more invested in playing with the story and themes through a new lens to see what new understandings could come from it.

The aspect of photography that most enticed me to the form was the ability to juxtapose two images together, palimpsestically on top of one another, through the method of double exposure photography (Evans, 2015; Levin, 2014; Shevchenko, 2014). This method can easily be achieved by lining up two photographs in an editing software and changing the opacity of the top layer, so the bottom layer peaks through and the two appear to coexist in space-time together—this has been likened to the colonial politics of mapping multiple land claims to one area on top of one another (Corboz, 1983, p. 18). Double exposure photography, then, links time and place together and so can hauntologically help muddy the common idea that Canadian colonialism happened in the past. Drawing on feminist performance theorists Rebecca Schneider and Peggy Phelan, Laura Levin explores how the photo, being a sign of time passing—as to look at a photograph is always to look at the past—is “an ideal medium for communicating the sense of loss that is at the heart of subject formation” (2014, p. 34). I thus found performed self-portrait photography a compelling way to think through the way that colonial structures, often thought of historically, linger throughout time and infect the present-day formation of settler subjects. It was

through photography that I understood the theory of heterotopias, where multiple possible *elsewheres* can be inscribed onto a *now*.

A key inspiration for my performed self-portrait photography was the feminist artist Janieta Eyre, whom I found through Levin's work. Eyre's self-portraits are absurd, clownish, and disturbing. She uses double exposure to look at multiplicities of the self, often portraying doppelgangers of the same character. Eyre's work is characterized by vivid shapes, patterns, and colours on both subject and background, but what strikes me most in her work is a pervasively disconcerting haunting. Curator James D. Campbell writes of Eyre's work, "Her mythology has a demonic aspect...that transcends mere nightmare yet is always on the cusp of expression. Ghosts are birthed and channelled there" (2006, p. 27). I relate to this interpretation specifically through Eyre's gaze in these performances, as the strange and devastating subjects and their multiples often appear to stare directly at the viewer. In fact, these female bodies in almost exact replicas of each other in and of themselves offered me a new perspective on haunting and helped me reflect on my own use of multiplicities in the paper doll chain. The multiple presences of one body, achieved through double exposure, offer reflection on the discursive scales of time and space involved in structures of power.

Eyre also specifically plays with ideas of the feminine and the domestic, as is perhaps best displayed in her image from the series *Motherhood*, called "Making Babies," where a morose woman with bright red hair stirs a pot on the stove while both the pot and her hand are subtly dripping with red substance. A jar of eggs sits menacingly on the shelf behind her to the left, while on her right two perfectly round tomatoes rest on the edge of the counter in front of a wash of red light. This image deeply disturbed and intrigued me. When I first found it, I already had a clear image of Candace in my head and her hair was the exact same as Eyre's in "Making

Babies,” giving me the unsettling feeling of staring at a ghost of a character that so far only existed in my imagination.

The child’s toy kitchen in *Land Hunger* is an ode to this photo as well, as a young child stirs an empty pot in a make-believe domestic world. Furthermore, as Levin notes, the tomatoes, placed prominently on the counter, combine with Eyre’s costume to make a strong allusion to a red clown nose (2014, p. 56). Eyre’s use of the colour red in relation to femininity and domesticity thus provided multiple parallels and inspirations for me: Candace’s hair (which is also the archetypal orphan hair colour), her red nose, and the dripping blood of the paper dolls that she rips free of. The latter evokes visceral connotations of femininity and reproduction through menstrual blood, but it also demonstrates, in an ironic postcolonial reversal,³⁸ the white settler as cannibal, evoked through the imagery of consumption in the title *Land Hunger*. These two metaphors merge around the colour red: the settler woman cannibalizes the land not *despite* but rather *through* her feminine domesticity.

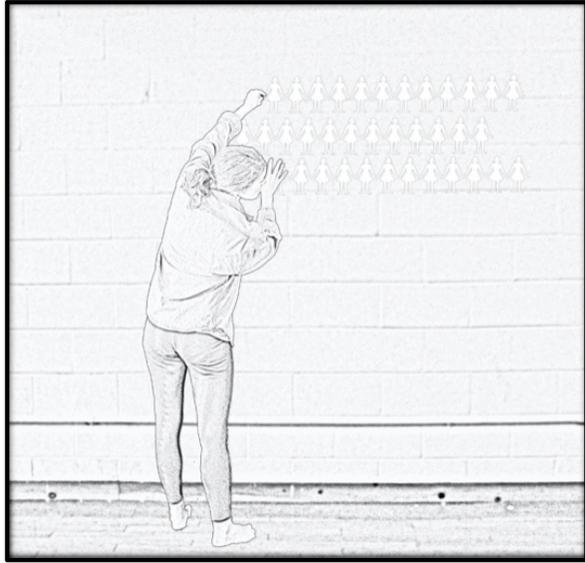
As is fitting for the practice of research-creation, my analysis of Eyre’s work came about through performance praxis. In fact, as I will explore at the end of this chapter, I now see my phase of the photography form as a research method for exploring Eyre’s work and Levin’s performance theory of land/performer relations. My use of images, particularly double exposure and performed self-portrait photography, helped me explore Candace’s subject formation in relation to the place-time around her, with all its multiple and overlapping histories and narratives. The move to think through images was crucial for my overall project, and photography became a necessary step in this process, such that I cannot imagine the film *Land Hunger* happening without it. As Levin writes,

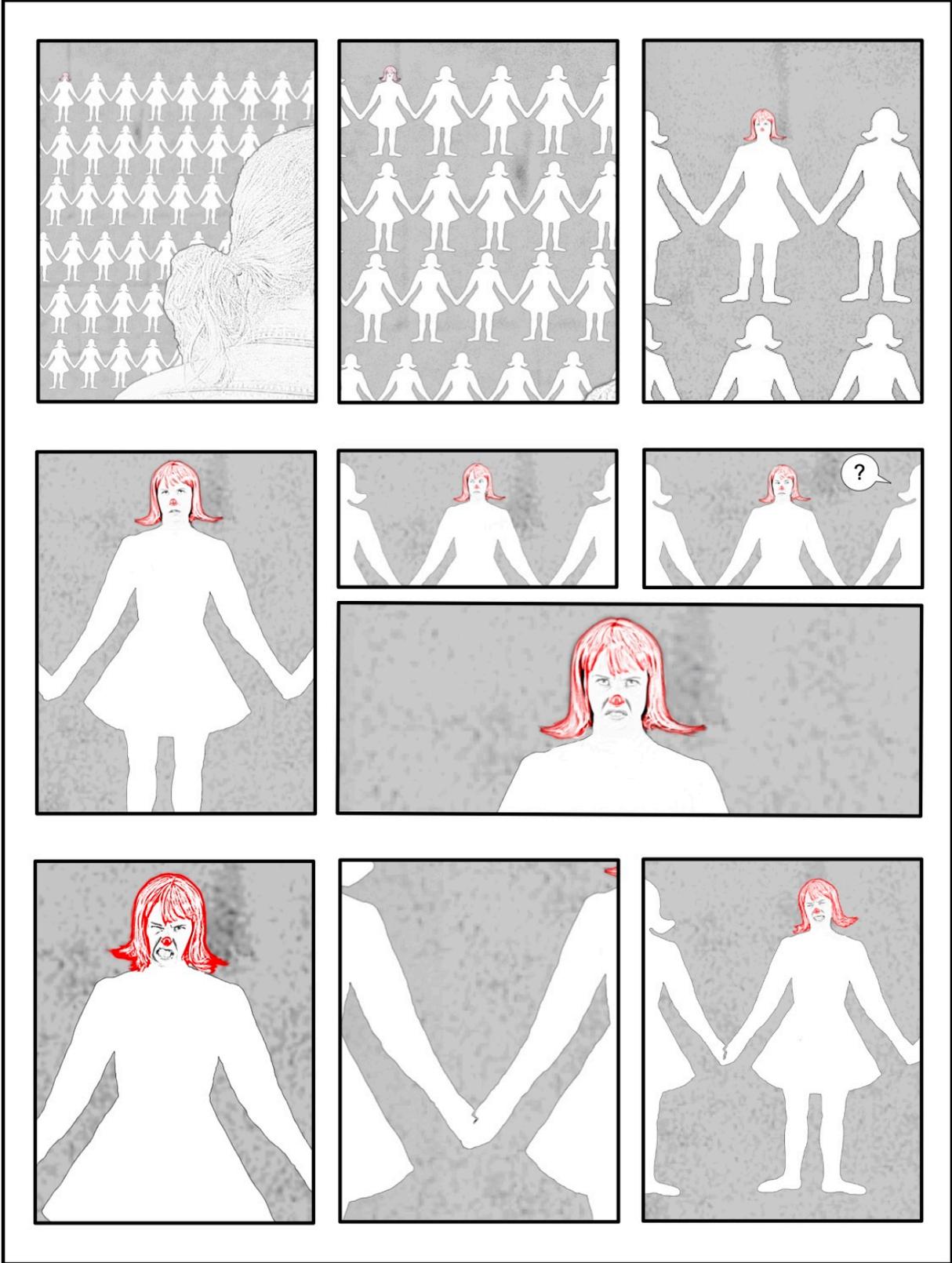
³⁸ See Ford-Smith (2007) on the figure of the cannibal as discussed in the previous chapter.

photography...literalizes the absorption of self into picture, thereby helping us to think politically about the normative assimilation of subject to cultural milieu as well as a more productive form of absorption, one in which the self is shown as being part of, and in sensuous correspondence with, its environment (2014, p. 36).

My journey into performed photography included many ideas for photos of Candace hauntingly juxtaposed against the regular scenes of my own urban life, staring at the camera with a similar intensity of gaze found in Eyre's work, while the rest of the world seems not to notice her. Eventually, perhaps pulled to a form of storytelling more related to my regular theatre practice, I started to experiment with using photos of Candace to storyboard narrative scenes. This morphed into using the form of a graphic novel to tell the story of Candace's escape from her paper doll prison. Figure 15 is the draft of the first chapter that I created for this novel, which uses a performance practice through performed photography, after which I edited the photos into the style of a hand-drawn graphic novel.

My foray into photography-based forms shaped the film that I ended up making, which I know would not have been the same if it had gone straight from live theatre to film. Perhaps, in this way, my many attempts at a photography-based output were what legendary comic artist Lynda Barry (2008) describes in the subtitle of her book *What It Is* as the "formless thing which gives things form." Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, my various attempts at different forms not only influenced the final output but also helped shape the theoretical foundation it is based on.





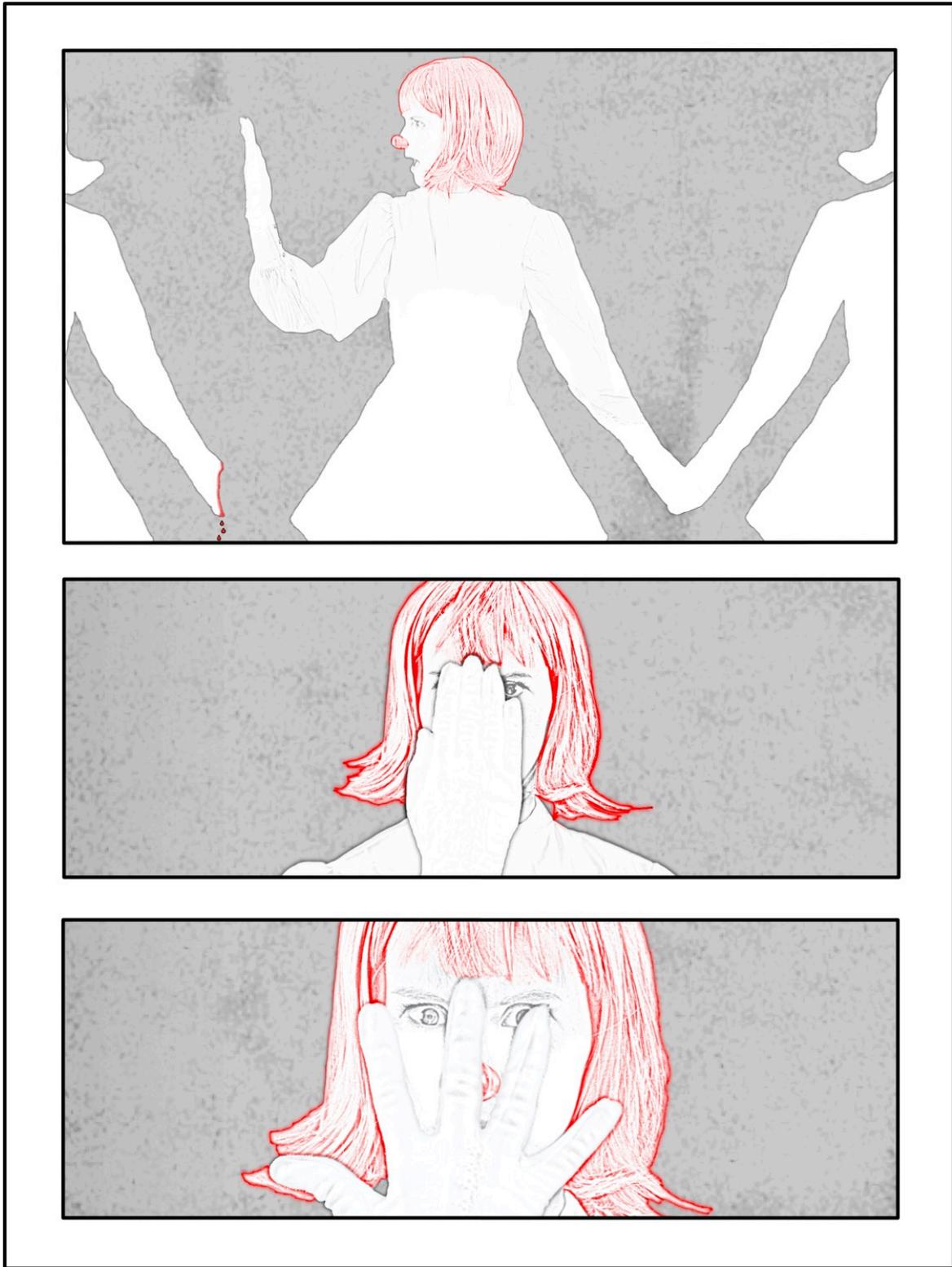


Figure 15: A draft first chapter from a graphic novel I began to make about Candace, using performed photography.

The Silent Film Form

The slow movement towards the form of the silent short film happened almost without my realizing it. It was as if I began imagining what was happening in the gutters³⁹ of my graphic novel pages in such detail that they came to life, adding so many mental still images that they became a moving picture. Perhaps the specific form of a silent film, then, was an organic transition from still images, as my graphic novel ideas had no speech bubbles. Yet, even if it was not a pre-meditated decision, the film was inspired by early 20th-century, black and white, Chaplinesque silent films.

Silent films are defined by the period roughly between 1895-1920s, which coincides with the historical era I have most focussed on in the history of the settler colony that became Canada. They are defined not by their silence or their lack of dialogue—musical scores and intertitle cards with dialogue were common—but rather through their lack of *synchronously recorded* sound and the innovations in storytelling that resulted from this restriction were crucial to the development of cinema throughout the 21st century (Kornhaber, 2020, p. 3). Today, the era is over-represented by Chaplin—who was a large influence on the form of *Land Hunger*—giving the false impression that this era of film, like today, was dominated by American production companies and thus assumedly developed largely by white men. Yet the form was popular globally with many influential characters outside of Chaplin, including many female filmmakers and actors who were just as influential to its development, such as Marion Wong, Alice Guy-Blaché, Lois Weber, or Greta Garbo (Kornhaber, 2020, p. 5). Also contrary to the modern-day film industry (which, although perhaps boasting a class-diverse audience base, is mainly characterized by the dominating excess of Hollywood and its celebrity millionaires), film

³⁹ The spaces in between panels in a graphic novel or comic strip (Horwat, 2018).

historian Steven J. Ross explains how the 1900s-1920s in America saw an era of silent films emerge as a popular medium created largely *by and for* the working class (Ross, 1998, pp. 6–7). Ross argues that silent films were a major influence in moulding a political consciousness in the masses of American workers at this time and that this was a clear transition from popular forms of melodrama and live theatre in the previous century (1998, p. 47).

The silent film era saw the rise of many new filmmakers from working-class backgrounds, such as comedian/clown Charlie Chaplin, who, although he is now most famous for his feature-length films (both silent and talking), initially became well-known for his comedic silent short films (Caron, 2006). Chaplin, like my ancestor Ella Hillier, grew up joining thousands of other poor children in one of Britain’s many orphan homes for “destitute” children, before crossing the ocean to Turtle Island. Chaplin’s films are distinguished by brilliant humour, subversiveness, slapstick, and above all else “eliciting laughs by poking fun” at the upper-classes (Ross, 1998, p. 46). Chaplin and his contemporaries exemplified the ability to get away with their constant critique of the capitalist class through laughter; without this comedy, as one of Chaplin’s contemporaries put it, they would surely have been more restricted in their criticism (Ross, 1998, p. 80). This brings me to the major axis around which each of these inspirations and their corresponding forms rotate: satire.

Satire

If the boundaries around the forms of live theatre, photography, and film kept shifting throughout my process, the genres of clown, bouffon, satire, and (to some extent) parody stayed present, although of course varied, throughout. Northop Frye categorized satire as consisting of two elements: the first is humour and the second is an “object of attack, that must always be in balance with each other in order to produce a satire” (1944, p. 76). That is, to attack without

humour or to have humour without a target for attack would not qualify as satire. Bouffon—a style which Eury Chang (2020) calls “critical clowning” for its ability to hold a mirror up to its audience to investigate their own involvement in the power structure being criticized—lends itself well to satire. The bouffon/clown is usually a character or persona that is rejected from or outside of society’s elites and must balance a fine line between entertaining and mocking the powerful. Like Chaplin’s character The Little Tramp, the lead clown figure might come from and speak to the masses, mocking their oppressors for and with them in the hopes, sometimes successful,⁴⁰ of radicalizing them to help create a better world. Or, like Hines’ Pochsy, the clown might come from the feminized working-class but speak to an audience that includes many variations of oppressor/oppressed, as so many of us currently do. For example, Hines, whose work has been described as “eco-satire” (Derksen, 2010), once wrote that she intends her work to be “an entertainment which certain corporate warriors might come to see, laugh at, hum along with...only to awaken the next morning and inexplicably hang themselves with their Armani ties” (Hines, 2004, pp. 14–15).

My use of satiric clowning is aimed primarily at audiences of white settlers, a group which Candace is technically a part of, unlike the traditional bouffon, who is explicitly and permanently separated from and oppressed by an audience of elites. Yet, at the same time, if Candace is the menace that modern-day liberal Canada pretends it is not, then would she not—as an unselfconsciously proud ghost of settler violence—likely be an outcast? The form of satire as taken up in *Land Hunger*, then, is not of the bouffon who speaks from the dominated margins—as a postcolonial satire might—but rather from the dominator margins, made up of the minority of dominant culture that does not know they are supposed to try and hide their colonial violence

⁴⁰ Steven Ross writes of historic instances where a working-class film directly resulted in labour organizing or strike action (1998, pp. 8–9).

or does know but refuses to do it. This is the location from which Candace is positioned as a critical disruption within the dominant culture. The (settler) audience⁴¹ is both a potential subject for decolonial solidarity (as Chaplin audiences were for class solidarity) and an object of critique (as with Hines and many other modern-day clown/bouffon audiences). That is, they are prompted to critically reflect on their intersectional and various roles within the power structures that define the current settler colonial apparatus.

Satire is heavily influenced by theories of mimicry, which is related to the field of postcolonial theory. Mimicry has been theorized in relation to colonial structures through multifarious functions from decolonial and postcolonial theorists, with Homi Bhabha most famously theorizing that “mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (1984, p. 126). I will briefly summarize several ways that colonial mimicry has been key for my praxis, which is by no means an exhaustive account of all mimetic processes. The first is when the colonizer mimics the Indigenous in order to survive on their land; this is fraught with colonial anxiety that such mimicking could produce sameness and therefore dissolve the hierarchies that the entire project of colonization is founded on. This is what Bhabha calls the *menace of mimicry*, writing that “in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference...mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (1984, p. 126). The second is the way that the settler colonizer mimics subjects of the colonial metropole—in Canada that might look like Mrs. Elizabeth Simcoe bringing her fine porcelain to a tent in the woods in 18th-century Canada (Simcoe, 1911). The settler subject thus constructs herself by mimicking both the colonizer and the colonized, demonstrating Michael Taussig’s argument that “mimesis has an

⁴¹ While *Land Hunger* audiences may be made up of people from many different backgrounds, the audience I had in mind while making this film is largely that of white settlers.

inbuilt propensity to provoke a chain reaction in which things become other things in a process of mimetic fission” which he calls the “metamorphic sublime” (2020, p. 44). The third is environmental mimicry, where a person or group shifts and changes in response to their physical surroundings. As Laura Levin writes, “humans routinely establish their identities through a complex process of morphological and environmental mimicry, a process wherein the visual markers of identity are transformed in response to the forms found in their settings” (2014, p. 6). Environmental mimicry can advance a deeper relationality, or, as Taussig demonstrates, a further exploitation of the natural world (2020, p. 5). The last process of mimicry that I am interested in is when Indigenous people subversively mimic the colonizer, perhaps as a guise with which to mock their oppressor or as a cultural survival mechanism, as banned Indigenous cultures might be secretly practiced under the guise of European ones (Keith Basso qtd in Roque, 2015, p. 203).

Candace partakes in colonial mimicry in various ways that stem from these theories. She attempts (although badly) to mimic Indigenous ways of living in the forest; she mimics Anglo-Saxon Christian forms of family structure and domestication; she invites mimesis through the style of a seven-step instructional video for colonization, meant to be mimicked by the audience; and she blends her body into her environment, matching its white snow. Although not Indigenous, her mimicry is also subversive through her crude portrayal of the colonial structure’s carnivorous violence. These structures of mimicry further my theory of relationality, as to mimic one must always be organized through relation. Levin draws on Alice Raynor’s work to discuss mimicry not only as imitation but as “ethical accounting,” a process of mimesis which “enables us to reflect on the ways in which we voluntarily and involuntarily fit into our environments, to reflect on the connections we are able (or willing) to recognize between self and group, producer and product, human and natural world ” (Levin, 2014, p. 13). In this sense, I frame my false

starts between artistic forms as a mimetic process of ethical accounting, ultimately becoming a method of research-creation and contributing to my theoretical understanding of performer/place relations on stolen land. This leads me to the main theoretical anchor of this chapter, which is the mimetic movement between artistic forms enacted as an environmental relationality.

Figure and Ground

My drafts of a live performance and a graphic novel for this project were both heavily reliant on the artistic tool of the empty space, whether through a black box theatre or a photography backdrop. My imagined set design for *The Can(a)dace Play* is reminiscent of Peter Brook's famous 1970 modernist rendition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the set was a large three-walled white cube on the stage (Knowles, 1998). Black box theatres have been extremely popular in Western theatre since the 1950s-1960s and, in my experience, are often a flexible and intimate playing space for clown and physical theatre (Trubridge, 2013, p. 146). Yet they are also, interestingly, a form of a blank slate, perhaps the spatial equivalent of the actor as a chameleon-puppet. Brook famously proclaimed, "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage" (1995, p. 7). On the one hand, this quote is inspiring for its anti-elitist potential, separating the definition of theatre away from its commercialization. On the other hand, it parallels a coloniality of space, wherein the designated theatre space is assumed to be empty, or even neutral, instead of a multifaceted place full of overlapping spatial histories (Tompkins, 2006, p. 3). Sam Trubridge argues that in highlighting the theatre as an empty space, "the stage became a 'terra nullius' upon which the director (as a kind of divine mark-maker) casts his actors in order to define the stage and declare that a moment of theatre is taking place" (Trubridge, 2013, p. 146). While this critique highlights a comparison between the scenic empty space and the neutral objective actor used in certain Western theatre training, it would be dismissive of many

performance traditions, including those by Indigenous or colonized peoples, to say that a black box theatre, by virtue of its reliance on the idea of empty space, is inherently colonial.⁴² So, then, why did a change in form, especially one that took away the black box, or “empty space,” in favour of site-specificity, create such a shift in my piece?

Laura Levin writes how Western conceptions of theatre and performance often situate a subject (the performer) in front of a background (the setting). This reifies the Cartesian narrative of an active human subject against a static environment, or what Levin describes as the figure/ground relationship. She points to Heidegger’s notion of the “Age of the World Picture,” which imagines a static world and a human subject that stands in opposition to, and in mastery of it, elaborating that “[n]o allowance is made for the possibility that the *world might look back* and, more disconcertingly, that the picture might be viewed from a different perspective” (2014, p. 8, my emphasis). In contrast, Levin argues for the “political possibilities of ‘performing ground’: a performance strategy in which the human body commingles with or is presented as a direct extension of its setting” (2014, p. 13). This commingling is both a fraught and a fruitful idea for performances by settlers in a colonial context, where our “backgrounds” are someone else’s land. The creative practice of exploring the figure/ground relationship led me to one of my central research questions: How should white settler theatre artists reject this colonial subject/background hierarchy that Western performance has long espoused without creating a commingling with place that reinscribes settler emplacement? In Chapter 1, I argued for a teeter-totter framework, which relies on the constant practice of relationality and thus the willingness for movement that this ethical balance requires. As I discovered through my troubled relationship with artistic form, this movement is also key to a framework for research-creation.

⁴² In Tkaronto’s theatre scene I am thinking specifically of the Aki Studio at Native Earth Performing Arts, a beautiful “black box” theatre space.

The foolish willingness⁴³ to move between drastically different artistic forms became a central research method for exploring this question of self and place in performance practice. For a long time, I wanted to play with the idea of performing ground through live performance or edited images that placed Candace in a struggle to manipulate and control her own background, which begins to develop its own agency and defy the frame she has imposed on it. Joanne Tompkins discusses Katherine Thomson's 2003 play *Wonderlands*, which centres around themes of Indigenous land rights in Australia. At the end of the show, the doors of the theatre building open and the actors exit onto the land itself, pulling the specificity of site/land into the discussions of colonization from the play and implicating the audience's presence on the land into the narrative (Tompkins, 2014, p. 2). This was something I wanted to try and replicate when I was envisioning *Land Hunger* as a live performance; that is, I wanted to somehow disrupt the tightly controlled black-box performance space with the presence of the land itself. I still hope to achieve this through either projections or windows and doors in my future live performance of this piece. This idea is also inspired by Chilean artist Manuela Infante's solo play *Estado Vegetal*, which explores a narrative in which "plants decide to reclaim their kingdom" (Manuela Infante, 2019). In many drafts of both the play and the graphic novel forms, I ended with some variation of Candace planting a perfect garden with a picket fence, only to find that plants are popping up which she never planted. She desperately weeds them, as they do not belong and are not part of her control over her place. The more she weeds, the more they grow, until they begin wrapping around her body and she collapses, unable to move. Eventually I created, but never

⁴³ This phrase is from Julie Salverson's theory, explored in Chapter 4: "The destabilized position of the clown offers a place to consider relationships across difference...In being foolish witnesses, we allow ourselves to fail while remaining always alert, ready, and willing to try" (2006, p. 155).

completed, this scene as a comic strip called “The Land Bites Back.”⁴⁴ In these images, whether imagined as a comic strip or a scene, I was thus playing with the settler subject’s desire for mastery over land while imagining the ways that the land might thwart these efforts.

Throughout my transition from live to image-based performance, the black box theatre remained a key structure, replicated through the form of photography backdrops and my favourite photo editing tool, the eraser. I did not realize at the time that my attempts to satirize narratives of *terra nullius* were frustrated by my uncritical reliance on the empty space as a theatrical tool; that is, while Candace struggled for control over her ground/landscape in the play or graphic novel, I, as the artist/performer, had *complete* control over it, through both my staging, design and editing processes. The land/background could do nothing that I did not plan and execute myself. Land was *not* pedagogy but rather a static symbol. This method of photography was imposing a “background” onto the blank slate of my studio, which ironically was the small domestic space of my apartment. My use of this form—and, of course, this is not necessarily true of all photography—only allowed in a heavily controlled and isolated aspect of place/space/land itself. Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s theory of antirelationality—theorized in Chapter 1 as racial capitalism’s strategy of division—is thus a strange but useful way to theorize the issues I struggled with in terms of the relation between content and form. The *content* of the photographs discussed narratives of a repressive domesticity while the *form* worked hard to pretend that the artist was not also isolated in her own domestic space.

⁴⁴ This title comes from three main references: The postcolonial anthology *The Empire Writes Back*, the Indigenous decolonial movement that uses the phrase “Land Back” to push for repatriation of stolen land from the settler-colonial state to Indigenous nations, as well as the above-mentioned quote by Laura Levin, where she argues that Western theatre and performance make “[n]o allowance...for the possibility that the *world might look back*” (2014, p. 8, my emphasis).

This is not to say that there is anything inherently uncritical about a black box theatre; in fact, I may still choose this form for a future live production of this piece, as my genealogy of false starts is layered and not linear. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am interested in the way my process required a literal disruption of the black box, empty space form—not just subject matter—to develop a more intentional relationship between land and performance. For this process, this disruption was only found through welcoming in the land itself as an agential element in the creation of *Land Hunger*. The main change in the turn to video was therefore about what the form brought out in my relation to the space. Through a long, confusing process of playing with form, my piece changed from a performance against a blank slate to a performance that, as I will elaborate on in the following chapter, was in many ways shaped by the demands of being on the land. This praxis, which draws on methods of site-specific performance, as I touched on in Chapter 2, necessitates that “multiple meanings and readings of performance and site intermingle, amending and compromising one another” (Pearson & Shanks, 2001, p. 23). For this project, there has been a distinct shift in the process and the final product due to the active choice to let the particularities of a site influence how a story is told. My relation to site-specific performance is thus less about the location of the performance and more about how the performance and location/ground are in an intentional relationship.

Polydisciplinamory

I found the format of video fruitful for this disruption, but in the end what I found most influential for my project was the frustrating struggle with form, medium, or genre. Just like the ethical teeter-totter of relationality, my changes in form helped me come to a theory of movement rather than destination. Thus, in retrospect, I see my struggles with form less as a failure to commit to an artistic decision and more as an orientation to what Natalie Loveless

(2019) calls “polydisciplinamory.” Polydisciplinamory is a theoretical framing of multiplicities within research-creation, which acknowledges that a commitment to a singular (monogamous) discipline, so prioritized in academia, does not adequately address the needs of many artists working with research-based projects. Loveless writes that this framework,

becomes an organizational principle for research-creation, one that helps tutor us in managing the frictions, dissonances, and different demands required by not only more than one discipline but more than one *form*, and to recognize these negotiations as always already imbricated in structures of power. (2019, p. 70, emphasis in original)

While creating this project, I was unaware of Loveless’ research on polydisciplinamory and had no idea that what felt like constant indecision was in fact helping me understand my theoretical and performance frameworks better. The one form that was used but not discussed so far in this chapter is that of the essay. The writing of this dissertation was partly done after completing *Land Hunger* in its current version; therefore, in the same way that the film was influenced by the many forms that preceded it, I do not doubt that future iterations of this project will be strongly influenced by the written component of this dissertation.

While I theorize these many forms as “false starts,” they are perhaps more fittingly a *polymorphous movement* through research if we understand research-creators as those who are using practice to theorize and explore research. Photography and live performance can be seen as false starts or dead ends when the goal is a short film, yet when the goal is to theorize through practicing, then my attempts at each of these forms can be seen as a way of doing research. Indeed, just as no single text can be easily pinpointed as the sole origin for a theoretical argument, it was not a single disciplinary practice but rather the use of *practice as research* that shaped my theoretical framework for settler/land relations in performance.



The eventual decision to move to the form of film was multifaceted and at times accidental. There were two main logistical reasons that *Land Hunger* was not made into a live performance for this dissertation: one being the fact that the Omicron wave of the Covid-19 pandemic was just beginning and to have my dissertation be dependent on a live performance, at that time, seemed inadvisable. The second reason was that my vision for the live performance, particularly the design aspects, began to exceed the scope that was attainable in the time I had for my dissertation. I thus decided that I would shift away from a live theatre performance for the purposes of the dissertation. I retained the idea, however, that this project would outlive my doctoral timeline and I would create a full-length live show with Candace in the future, using the research-creation work from my dissertation as its foundation. This is still very much my intent, and I hope to develop *Land Hunger*, drawing on my draft of *The Can(a)dace Play*, into a live play in the coming years.

Drawing on the insights of research-creation in academia, I now argue that the creative practice—and all its messy false starts and meandering mimetic paths—was thus not pursuing an output as much as it was conducting research. It was through experimentations with form that I developed a way of thinking through the relationship between performer and site, yet it was likely thanks to the specific practice of clowning that this movement between forms was even possible. It was clown training that taught me to trust in an embodied intuition, ultimately allowing me to sustain this project through so many changes. Without the fool-like willingness to plod along in the muck of this struggle, I know the stories of figure-ground that underlie this piece would have been profoundly altered. The nuances and contrasts that live performance,

photography, and film each offered helped me deepen a critique of the way that background-as-blank-slate is often used in performance, while also engaging with it as a useful tool to explore the layered histories and relationalities within place. In the next chapter, I explore the idea of these palimpsestic discursive layers on colonized land through a thorough analysis of the film *Land Hunger*.

Chapter 6

Performing Land Hunger

My view of performance rests on the notion of ghosting, that visualization that continues to act politically even as it exceeds the live...it hinges on the relationship between visibility and invisibility, or appearance and disappearance...performance makes visible (for an instant, live, now) that which is always already there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life. These specters, made manifest through performance, alter future phantoms, future fantasies.

—Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 143

The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions.

—Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 13

Land Hunger starts with the sound of a foghorn and ocean waves as a blurry white background very slowly comes into focus, eventually revealing a snowy forest. This opening is inspired by accounts of early settler experiences of coming to Turtle Island across the ocean, seeing the land for the first time and all the possibilities for their future that it holds. We thus see the land from the colonial perspective of an 18th-century settler, that is, as a blank white slate that, over the sounds of a ship on the ocean, becomes an “empty” forest. Yet we also see the actual land itself, a wooded area on Tiononatai (Petun), Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe traditional territory near Orangeville, Ontario. This chapter positions an analysis of *Land Hunger* around the hauntological theory that the violence of settler colonialism, which modern-day Canada obfuscates through reconciliation rhetoric, is in fact an active, embodied present. This idea will provide a throughline throughout the sections of this chapter, in which I offer a detailed analysis and critical reflection on the film. Each section corresponds to a chapter of *Land Hunger* and is accompanied by a short comic strip made from stills of the film paired with a quote from 19th-20th-century primary sources on settler colonialism. This chapter applies the lens of hauntology and the palimpsest to explore themes of domestication, gender, and land theft within the film.

“Prologue” or The Sloppy Palimpsest



Figure 16: A comic strip made from three stills of *Land Hunger*, paired with a quote from Canada's first surveyor general Colonel John Stoughton Dennis in 1880 (qtd in S. Carter, 2016, p. 38).

The first image of *Land Hunger* shows a wintry forest in black and white. The aesthetic is performatively archival; it claims a historical identity and yet, given the context, is clearly of this century. Feminist geographer Doreen Massey writes about space as a construction of multiple relations across a wide variety of scales, ranging from global to local and including dimensions of time. Her conceptualization of space resists the idea that space is fixed, both geographically and temporally (1994, pp. 4–5). The aesthetic of the film follows the theory that multiple layers of time are always infused within a space, disrupting the idea that space is bounded or singular. This is done in several different moments of double exposure—which was discussed in Chapter 5—where two videos are layered on top of each other at different opacities. This layering of space-time has been theorized in many ways in theatre and performance scholarship through a variety of useful terms, some—such as archive/repertoire, figure/ground, or double exposure photography—have been discussed previously in this dissertation. For the purposes of this chapter, I will turn to the concept of the palimpsest, which evokes the way that multiple histories and meanings of a place can be inscribed over top of one another, with each previous layer not being totally erased. This is a useful metaphor for *Land Hunger*, both for the imagery of layering

as well as for its focus on power relations in the consideration of who is doing the (never fully successful) erasing of a previous text.

The word “palimpsest” comes from the ancient process of reusing materials on which an older text has been written in order to write a new text. The process of scrapping off the old text from the manuscript was never absolute, thus a palimpsest can show a record of past inscriptions and histories underneath the new. The term is powerfully evocative and used across a wide variety of disciplines; I am particularly interested in the term as used in Black feminist and postcolonial discourse to describe the way that histories which some have attempted to bury are still present (M. J. Alexander, 2006; Dillon, 2005; Okello & Duran, 2021). Thinking alongside the palimpsest also aligns with theories of relationality and embodied research in the way that the researcher/performer is herself part of an inscription of space-time. As Okello and Duran write, drawing on Alexander Weheliye,

...palimpsest researchers should follow a practice of embodied critical self-reflexivity.

The act of naming it as an embodied practice is a way of signaling that it not only functions as a cognitive process of reflecting on one’s positionality throughout the study, but rather, to recognize the vulnerability that is attached to the flesh...(2021, p. 6)

Land Hunger explores this embodied palimpsest through the ways that the settler nation has—quickly and sloppily—fixed itself not as much to the *land* of Turtle Island as to settler bodies as fixed spaces of *terra nullius*: the grounds of a future nation. Yet, of course, the sloppy palimpsest of the settler state shows us that it was never a completed project and that Indigenous nations, along with the land, water, and creatures that they care for, have never been erased into a blank slate for European expansion. The palimpsest, therefore, offers a lens through which to understand an embodied relation between place, time, and bodies.

Throughout the process of creating *Land Hunger*, I have followed this theory of the palimpsest specifically in the context of the gendered and racialized history my own body, as a performer, has to the land I am on, which is always the setting for my performance. Laura Levin asks, "What does it mean to think about performing ground when, traditionally, women and other historically marginalized persons (non-white, lower class, queer, etc.) have been relegated to the background or have been made to stand in for the formal properties of space itself?" (2014, p. 17). For Canada, the way that race dictates how feminized bodies stand in for space is crucial, which Levin notes when she writes that "the presence of white women's bodies can, in several contexts, also make [non-white] bodies disappear" (2014, p. 101). In a settler colonial context, *Land Hunger* explores how, historically, white female bodies become the nation's ground through their performance of it; yet this narrative is resolutely distinct from becoming the *land*, which was a common narrative settlers developed towards Indigenous people, whose bodies were naturalized as part of the land of Turtle Island, but, of course, not the land of the nation (that is, the project of Canada). This was played out in a variety of ways, particularly through the violent conflation of Indigenous people with the natural landscape, which narratively allowed for the removal of people and the reshaping of the land. White women are therefore not Turtle Island—they are not the land—but they are Canada, the body of the nation. In this way, then, their/our bodies palimpsestically perform the scenario of transfer. It is important to note here that this film never imagines an Indigenous ontology of place, since, as discussed in Chapter 1, I do not believe this is a productive intervention for settlers to make. As a largely solo piece by a settler artist, it instead disrupts and satirizes settler relations with place without depicting or attempting to speak to present-day, pre-contact or future decolonial Indigenous relations with place, although I believe and hope that it would pair well with an Indigenous short film that does.

Given the rhetoric, narratives and even policies and laws surrounding the idea of Turtle Island as a blank white sheet of paper (as it was imagined to be at the moment of first contact), white settler women's bodies have made the spaces (largely through the family homestead) that become the nation. In this sense, they are always already seen as what Levin calls the "extension of the setting" (2014, p. 13) of the performance of creating Canada because their bodies were literally extending the setting, that is, taking up more land and extending the reach of what was becoming Canada. As Radhika Mohanram writes, "[W]omen...are considered requisite for the production of the meaning of the nation, as *they are located as the very ground upon which the meaning of the nation itself rests*. But in providing it with meaning, she is also simultaneously left out of the very meaning she constitutes..." (2007, p. 27, my emphasis). Thus, as Nira Yuval-Davis explores in her book *Gender & Nation*, embodiments of gender "play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations" (1997, p. 39). In Canada, white women have been used in the construction of the settler colony as the domesticator and dominator of *terra nullius* as well as the raw material that a nation can be built on by an exogenous patriarchal power structure.

In her piece "Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius," Métis visual artist Erin Marie Konsmo refutes the colonial narrative that equates Indigenous women's bodies with the land itself in order to promote the idea that both were/are available for the taking. Her beautiful artwork demonstrates the links between sexual and gendered violence against girls and women and colonial structures of land theft (Konsmo & Pacheco, 2016). It made me consider how different bodies have been inscribed as *terra nullius* at different times and the extent to which—if *terra nullius* can be seen as a white page palimpsestuously⁴⁵ placed over top of Turtle Island, rather

⁴⁵ Sarah Dillon describes the neologism as such: "'Palimpsestuous' does not name something as, or as making, a palimpsest. Rather, it describes the complex (textual) relationality embodied in the palimpsest. Where 'palimpsestic'

than Turtle Island itself—white female bodies are narratively used as the structure *and* resource of *terra nullius*.

“Arrive” or Whiteness, Snow and Camouflage



Figure 17: A comic strip made from three stills of *Land Hunger*, paired with one of the opening lines from the text “His Dominion” by the early 20th century Reverend W.T. Gunn, writing on *Home Missions in Canada* (Gunn, 1917, p. 3).

The image we see in *Land Hunger*’s first chapter, “Arrive,” is the series of white paper dolls strung about a forest, that “mass ornament,” or “Caucasian tsunami,”—as Alfred Crosby calls the 19th-century phenomena of huge amounts of Europeans spreading across the globe (1986, p. 5)—of identical cut-outs. Their white paper bodies blend into the white background of the snowy forest, that is, until one of them appears as a clown and her red nose, hair and large size disrupt the dolls’ pseudo camouflage. Since I have already theorized the central image of the paper doll chain in earlier chapters, I will instead focus here on the ways that “Arrive” introduces themes of whiteness as camouflage, expanding on Levin’s performance theory of figure/ground from Chapter 5.

As outlined in the previous section of this chapter, the visual methods I use to explore the relationship of land/body in a settler colonial context employ a constant framing of the white

refers to the process of layering that produces a palimpsest, ‘palimpsestuous’ describes the structure with which one is presented as a result of that process, and the subsequent reappearance of the underlying script” (2005, p. 245).

female body as the body of the nation, rather than the naturalization of the white female body as the land itself. This is first portrayed in “Arrive” through images of snow. While snow is recognizable as a natural feature of northern climates—such as the area of Turtle Island that Canada is on top of—it is also, being a visual white sheet spread over the land, infused with metaphors of a blank slate. Julie Cruikshank discusses a story shared with her by Kitty Smith—a Tlingit-Tagish woman born in the late 19th century—called *The First K’och’en*,⁴⁶ where Smith describes oral histories of Tlingit experiences of first contact. Cruikshank discusses Smith’s reflections “on social transformations and upheavals that accompanied the arrival of ambiguous strangers, their pale skins implying that they originated in the timeless dimension of this wintry world” (2010, p. 70). The use of snow in *Land Hunger* thus complicates any easy separation of figure/ground while also not naturalizing a settler presence due to her snow-coloured skin. For example, while Candace’s white body blends into the snow, the edges of her body, like the borders of a nation—both of which are sometimes visible, sometimes not—are made from the purposeful cutting out of paper shapes; these edges did not grow out of the land.

Levin theorizes the political potentials of camouflage in performance and the way that “blending in” can muddle the problematically rigid distinctions between figure and ground in so many Western performance practices. Camouflage, she writes, “can describe the very foundations of human subjectivity: how identity is, both consciously and unconsciously, constituted through space” (2014, p. 7). In “Arrive” we see Candace blending into the background through her whiteness while also absurdly acting as though her three-dimensional body blends into a lineup of paper bodies. Levin demonstrates how camouflage offers a certain embeddedness which can also be a tool of instrumentalization, as shown in military invasions

⁴⁶ The word k’och’en is defined by Cruikshank, citing Tlingit and Athapascan elders, as “the colourless ‘cloud people’” (2010, p. 51), referring to early settlers.

where soldiers and tanks may disguise themselves using aspects of the natural environment around them, such as leaves or bark (2014, p. 136). In this sense, where embeddedness is about “buy[ing] into a particular staging of the real” (2014, p. 138), Candace and the paper dolls in fact actively perform their proud contrast from the “real” of their environment. This might be best described through the metaphor of trees and paper; while a white piece of paper (and the doll that waits to be cut out from its frame) is made from the material of trees, it is a distinctly separate form that makes no attempt to associate with the surroundings that it relies on. So too do Candace and the dolls perform their subjecthood to the background of the land, acknowledging their aesthetic relation to the white world behind them while also demonstrating their distinctiveness—and domination. Snow, paper, and white bodies are therefore blended together, yet they also call attention to the determined construction of their distinctions as subject/background.

“Befriend” or Chipmunk Relations



Figure 18: A comic strip made from three stills of *Land Hunger*, paired with a quote from Luke 12:6-7 King James (qtd in Traill, 1986, p. 18)

The experience of figure/ground that I explored in the previous chapter (when discussing the blank slate method I used in my photography practice) was a stark contrast to my experience eventually filming the video, as is best exemplified in the chapter “Befriend,” where Candace

encounters a chipmunk and feels strongly that she has a right to have it as a pet. My entire performance of this scene was infused with the tangible demands of the setting/ground/place. It was -10 degrees, and I was wearing only a thin dress and tights. We had two days reserved to film most of the outdoor scenes and both days happened to have a significant amount of snow and wind. The “background” that had been dutifully added into my performed photography sessions post-production all the sudden became an extremely active scene partner. As Levin theorizes, “what makes site-specific works so exhilarating and potentially destabilizing to audiences [is] the unplanned eruption of the world into the performance frame” (2014, p. 106). The interjection of place as an agential and unpredictable aspect of a performance is difficult for the actor/director trying to get the shot they want, but it is perfect for the clown, who loves having a scene partner. In this way, “Befriend” contrasts the inanimate stuffed chipmunk with the animate weather; Candace pretends the former is her only scene partner and the latter a scenic backdrop, yet the activity of each would suggest the opposite. She grows furious over the *lack* of attention from this stuffed animal, yet at the same time gets equally furious by the *unwanted* attention of the wind and snow, which are nothing but a nuisance to her, representing her instrumentalization of the world around her. The weather-as-scene-partner in this section is thus intentionally thwarting Candace’s control; it demonstrates Candace’s existential fear of the “possibility that the world might look back” at her (Levin, 2014, p. 8).

This instrumentalization of the world by a colonizing subject is the main thematic drive for “Befriend.” Theoretically, it comes from Ghassan Hage’s theory of generalized domestication. Hage writes how overlapping environmental or racial crises do not merely collide but rather stem from the same “dominant mode of inhabiting the world,” which is characterized by a violent instrumentalization he terms “generalized domestication” (2017, p. 14). Generalized

domestication, he argues, is a mode of relating to the world in which everything is positioned as existing only for the purposes of the domesticating subject (2017, p. 83). This theory is at the core of Candace's drive to domesticate the land and even herself. While her interaction with the leaves and branches demonstrates this relationship, it is perhaps most clear in her scene with the chipmunk, whom she clearly has no regard for outside of its role as a docile and obedient pet. While Hage notes that domination of nature and animals is not some foundational form of domination that all others mimic, he acknowledges that one of the most clear and common manifestations of generalized domestication is the way humans domesticate other animals (2017, p. 88).

In one of my early forays into archival history, which I found through an example of historical figure/ground performances offered by Levin, I noted a compelling example of generalized domestication and the way it intersects with gendered domination. In 1897 the new country of Canada gathered its elites in Toronto for a grand ball to celebrate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. Cynthia Cooper writes that the ball boasted extravagant costumes, many of which included (white, upper-class) women dressed up in elaborate ball gowns depicting various natural resources, with their male partners dressed as resource extractors—for example, a woman as “canned salmon” and her partner as a fisherman, a woman in a ballgown with gold nuggets sewn everywhere and a man with a miners belt, or a woman dressed to look like wheat and a man as a farmer. The teenage daughter of the then-Governor General of Canada was dressed as “Forests of Canada,” which was depicted through a white satin gown, painted around the bottom with orderly wooden fences and neatly lined trees. Most notably, as demonstrated in the image of the costume and its description, is that attached to her shoulder was a small stuffed chipmunk (Cooper, 1997).

When I was little, I loved playing “with” chipmunks. They were no doubt the inspiration for my childhood desire for pet hamsters, of which I had had six by the time I was nine years old (speaking of instrumentalization, tragically none of them lived longer than four months). Games with chipmunks seem to have been, and perhaps still are, an archetypal pastime for white settler Canadian/Ontarian cottage-going children. I know this to be true from my own experience of its popularity in white-settler-cottage culture, which is also verified by Julia Harrison’s ethnography of Ontario cottagers (2013, p. 79). Peanuts—with the shells on—were a crucial component of white-settler-child and Ontario-chipmunk relations. My memories of chipmunk interactions were entirely focused on trying to entice a chipmunk as close to me as possible, as shown in Figure 19, where my ten-year-old self on a camping trip tries unsuccessfully to get a chipmunk to come closer. The desire to domesticate was clearly experienced as a desire to befriend.

The scene “Befriend” was thus inspired by my own experiences with chipmunks; the stuffed chipmunk ballgown accessory described above; as well as one of the narratives in Catharine Parr Traill’s children’s novel *Canadian Crusoes*, discussed in Chapter 3, where a squirrel comes to live with the young settler girl Catharine in the house the children build together, seemingly choosing of its own free will to be her pet. In a demonstration of domesticated wildness, this squirrel shows its loyalty to its domesticator when, in one of the most racially charged sections of the book, an Indigenous man comes to kidnap the innocent Catharine from her house. The squirrel tries to warn its young mistress, showing its ultimate love and devotion to her and thus representing the “good” domesticated wilderness (squirrel) from the “bad” untamed wilderness (non-Christian Indigenous people).



Figure 19: Myself at age 10 on a camping trip in Ontario, attempting to befriend a chipmunk.

For “Befriend” I decided to use a stuffed chipmunk, who is the only other mammal we see Candace interact with, in order to echo the absurdity of Traill’s story, wherein it is clearly only the settler imagination that inscribes such easy, congenial, Snow White-style relationships between wildlife and early settlers. I would imagine that the squirrel of *Canadian Crusoes*, as with so many other aspects of the novel, only exists as a settler fantasy; the story leaves about as much room for the agency of wildlife outside of its service to the human as does a stuffed

animal. The stuffed animal used in *Land Hunger* thus portrays a sort of generalized Ontario cottage species that might exist in the settler imaginary; in size and tail shape it more closely resembles a chunky red squirrel, yet it has faded remnants of the distinctive chipmunk stripes down its back, as well as a colour more closely associated with the chipmunk. It harkens to Catharine Parr Traill's description of chipmunks as being "little striped squirrel[s]" (2006, p. 81). The unspecific design of this toy also points to its role as a fantasy pet; it generically stands in for all the small critters, from hamsters to squirrels to chipmunks, that are sought as domestic Others. Originally, I had also wanted Candace to befriend, or perhaps dress up as, a beaver since they are seen as a more quintessentially Canadian symbol. The scenes in *Land Hunger* where Candace attempts to harvest the branches of trees for shelter originally came about from a scene in *The Can(a)dace Play*—the earlier, live performance version of this project discussed in Chapter 5—after she fashioned herself some beaver teeth and inserted them into her mouth, where they remained for the rest of the play. In the end, I decided to simplify the story for the purposes of a short film by only using one other species for Candace to react with. I found that the chipmunk better helps showcase Ontarian/Canadian settlers' joy in domestication of wilderness as the yearned for but never attained fantasy pet.

In the same way that settler imaginaries elide non-humans, land, water, and Indigenous peoples into one category of wilderness, so too was this desire to befriend/domesticate nature enacted towards Indigenous peoples, and, of course, making friends with Indigenous people was crucial for settler survival. In discovering the paper doll image for *Land Hunger* and remembering my childhood set of *Little House on the Prairie* paper dolls, I decided to skim through this book series, as I read them so frequently as a child but could not recall too many details from them. There are numerous examples I could use for this section, but perhaps the

most fitting is when Laura, the protagonist of the story and the younger version of the author herself, is watching a large party of Indigenous people on route past their house—likely forcibly displaced to make way for white settlers such as themselves—and she sees a small Indigenous baby and mother travelling together:

“Pa,” she said, “get me that little Indian baby!”

“Hush, Laura!” Pa told her sternly.

The little baby was going by. Its head turned and its eyes kept looking into Laura’s eyes.

“Oh, I want it! I want it!” Laura begged. The baby was going farther and farther away, but it did not stop looking back at Laura. “It wants to stay with me,” Laura begged.

“Please, Pa, please!”

(Wilder, 2008, p. 308)

Of course, Ma and Pa admonish Laura and she does not “get” the baby. Yet the childish assumption that she could parallels a broader settler culture of generalized domestication, the relationship between generalized domestication and the 19th-century “cult of domesticity” (McClintock, 1995) as well as of blatant dehumanization of Indigenous people. It also enacts a scenario of transfer, which is closely linked with generalized domestication. That is, Wilder’s protagonist clearly subscribes to the understanding that all life exists for the purposes of the dominating subject (a tenet of generalized domestication), which would position all forms of life in whatever way best ensures the subject’s rightful claim to the land (which defines the scenario of transfer). A crucial aspect of this narrative is about the desire to own and control not only Indigenous land but also Indigenous knowledge about the land, as Dylan Robinson’s theory of settler hunger for Indigenous culture has demonstrated (J. Carter et al., 2017; D. Robinson, 2020). The act of taking and controlling Indigenous knowledge through classifying and organizing is deeply tied to the settler colonial project, which I will turn to next.

“Nourish and Classify” or Why Do You Need to Know That

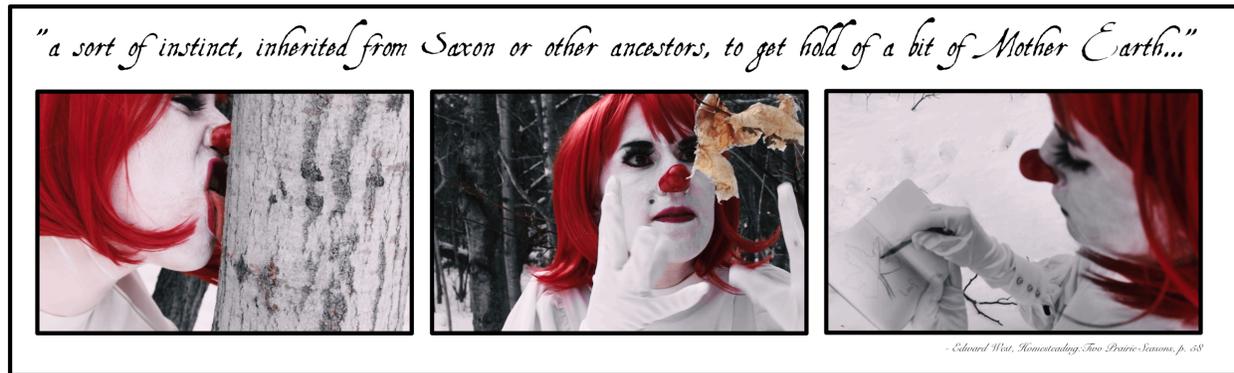


Figure 20: A comic strip made from three stills of *Land Hunger*, paired with a quote from 20th century homesteader Edward West (1918, p. 58)

In the scenes titled “Nourish” and “Classify,” Candace begins to extract from and categorize the world around her. She is driven by a desire to know as well as an assumption of her inherent right to that knowledge. David Garneau describes this as an essential “colonial attitude,” which is:

characterized not only by scopophilia, a drive to look, but also by an urge to penetrate, to traverse, to know, to translate, to own and exploit. The attitude assumes that everything should be accessible to those with the means and will to access them; everything is ultimately comprehensible, a potential commodity, resource, or salvage (in D. Robinson & Martin, 2016, p. 23)

This desire starts as Candace is overcome by a need for food and then shelter. It is very clear through these vignettes that our protagonist is only interested in the forest around her insofar as she can extract a certain use value from it. We see this in her attempts to eat bark or leaves or to break down branches for her house; yet the satire within these scenes lies in the fact that the leaves and shelter were clearly not ever very nourishing or sheltering. Therefore, unlike in classic Robinsonade adventure stories where we become emotionally invested in the character’s need for survival—and thus their victorious “mastery” of the land around them—we never actually get

the sense that Candace is in danger of not surviving. We are therefore emotionally removed from her struggle and more able to recognize its overwhelming focus on domination. This follows Bertolt Brecht's (1978) famous performance theory of alienation, which seeks a certain degree of emotional removal to better make way for political action outside of the performance.

The act of ordering, categorizing and classifying life as intelligible within a European framework and language is also a narrative tool of generalized domestication. It is linked with notions of mapping to render the natural world intelligible and functional for settler lives, or what Sherene Razack calls "creating a European discourse about a non-European world" (2002, p. 13). In "Classify," Candace enacts the "geography militant"⁴⁷—which Julie Cruikshank writes is a trope "characterized by aggressive naming practices" (2010, p. 19)—who maps and categorizes the world around her. This section comes from many improvisations I did with Candace around mapping, a term that I use as not just the creation of geographical maps but also as the categorization of the "New World" into a structure that is comprehensible through a white-Christian-capitalist-patriarchal ontology. This original premise came from a line in one of Catharine Parr Traill's letters, where she describes to a friend in England how she sketches (in a way a kind of mapping) the flora around her, labelling them with the Canadian "or even Indian" names if she knows them, if not she gives them her own names as their "floral godmother" (Traill, 2006, p. 109). The practice of naming (whether anglicizing Indigenous place names or imposing European ones on the land) was a specific tactic in early settler colonial history in Canada and had very tangible connections to the process of claiming jurisdiction over land. Indeed, so powerful was this tactic that, as Arthur Manuel demonstrates, his Secwepemc territory

⁴⁷ This term was coined by Joseph Conrad in his 1923 essay "The Romance of Travel" and is taken up by Felix Driver in his book *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (2001).

on Canada's west coast was able to be legally⁴⁸ claimed as British land merely by Captain Cook sailing past it and naming it as such (2015, p. 4).

While on the Toronto Islands, after first creating Candace and improvising with her mapping and categorizing fetish, I created the journal entry (Figure 21), titled "The Floral Godmother Eats the World," pairing the features of this figure/ground relationship that are both carnivorous ("Nourish") and paternalistic ("Classify"). This scene is also inspired by Indigenous scholars Karyn Recollet and Jon Johnson's account of the way this "floral godmother" figure lives on in the present-day. Recollet and Johnson have been giving walking tours of Indigenous history in Tkaronto for many years and they recount the difficulties they face with settler desires and expectations of fetishistically engaging with Indigenous knowledge as "'stuff' to know, rather than as a 'way' of knowing through the maintenance of sustained ethical relationships with more-than-human entities across domains of land, water, sky, and spirit" (2019, p. 179). They developed a philosophy and practice to help work through these encounters, which is based around the very useful question: "Why do you need to know that?" (2019, p. 180). This question shifts us from the role of a voyeur of the land into a more personal orientation that accounts for who and where we are (Recollet & Johnson, 2019, pp. 180–181). I used this question both throughout my own reflections on my orientation to the land I am on as well as when imagining fictional alternatives to the way so many settlers engaged with the land when first arriving here.

⁴⁸ Note that this was legal according to British law through the doctrine of discovery, not, of course, through Secwepemc law.



Figure 21: Journal entry from my residency on the Toronto Islands, December 2021.

“Settle and Grow” or The Angel in the House



Figure 22: A comic strip made from three stills of *Land Hunger*, paired with a quote from the International Order Daughters of the Empire 1929 National Meeting as recorded in the National Archives Canada (qtd in Pickles, 2002, p. 68)

In the scenes “Settle” and “Grow,” Candace leaves behind her violent ways (both of chipmunk abuse, aggressive naming, and attempts to cure an insatiable appetite) and adopts a demure, feminine, and sensual attitude. This contrast is an attempt to illuminate the ultimate violence that can underpin domesticity in a settler colonial context. As Beth Piatote writes, “A turn to the domestic front, even as the last shots at Wounded Knee echoed in America’s collective ear, marked not the end of conquest but rather its renewal” (2013, p. 3). Thus, Candace’s new role of the “Angel in the House,”⁴⁹ as she performs it in these two scenes, could be seen not as a denunciation of violent land theft but merely as a new tactic for it. After seducing the camera operator, Candace lies on the snowy ground, the overexposed camera settings blurring the edges of her white body with the white ground, as a red maple leaf starts to grow in her stomach. The previously clear distinctions between figure/ground dissolve, and the female body merges with the snowy ground, creating a white blank slate, or *terra nullius*, on which the future nation—shown through the Canadian flag that her body temporarily creates—can be imposed. This scene

⁴⁹ This term is commonly used to describe a Victorian ideal of womanhood as well as a male reverence for “natural” feminine qualities that happen to result in passive and uncomplaining domestic labour (Christ, 1977).

therefore dramatizes the moment in settler colonial land acquisition where “domesticity emerges as a central category linking personal bodies with national bodies” (Piatote, 2013, p. 8).

These two scenes portray the gendered history of settler colonialism in Canada and the way these narratives have been anchored around an innocent domesticity. In the early days of colonization in Canada, the majority of settlers coming over were men, who were culturally seen as more suited to “rough” lifestyles of building, mining and farming. Many scholars have noted that, particularly in the mid-19th to early-20th centuries, there was a concentrated push for imports of what was theorized to be, at that time, one of the most important colonial commodities for the New World: European women. Domestication, and its more feminine association, thus became the new face of colonization, following the previous, more masculine-associated methods of outright war with Indigenous peoples or between competing colonizers (Chilton, 2003, p. 39).

White women, as colonial officials planned it, would solve the looming threat of Indigenous-settler alliances via intimate relations between white men and Indigenous women, as it was then a given that any deviance from heterosexual monoracial couples was an unnatural occurrence that could be rectified by offering men a more appropriate sexual partner. Playwright Monique Mojica illustrates this in her play *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* with the character Madeleine, an Indigenous woman whose white male partner of 15 years leaves her when a white wife is brought over for him from Britain (1991, p. 47). Race was also intimately tied to property and therefore a structure that forcefully dissuaded interracial marriages and promoted white heterosexual models of the nuclear family—or what James Snell calls the “white life for two” (1983, p. 112)—was a powerful model for the growth of the settler colony as a white Anglo-Saxon nation. As Cheryl Harris argues on the historical relationship to race and land in the Americas:

...the conquest, removal, and extermination of Native American life and culture were ratified by conferring and acknowledging the property rights of whites in Native American land. Only white possession and occupation of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis for property rights (1993, p. 1716).

White women were thus thought to be a significant tool in land acquisition for the new colony that would become Canada; if otherwise nomadic men could “settle” down with a white wife, they would be compelled to cultivate land as their private property and would have the time to do so through her domestic labour (Perry, 2001, pp. 141–144). The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the creation of many female organizations in Britain and Canada that focussed on emigration (with names such as the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire,⁵⁰ Society for the Oversea Settlement of British Women, British Women’s Emigration Association or even as specific as Female Middle Class Emigration Society), with various journals and publications actively promoting emigration to Britain’s colonies. One of the more prominent publications, *The Imperial Colonist*, wrote that Canada is “waiting for the presence of women to make it possible for men to anchor themselves on the land” (in Bush, 1994, p. 400). Part (although not all) of this anchoring, of course, is that the white wife would presumably create a growing population of white babies. As Anna Davin notes, quoting an early 20th-century booklet on women’s health, a mother and her home were “the cradle of the race...Empire’s first line of defence” (1978, p. 53). In this way, white women as a force of domestication and therefore permanency, were the “imperial panacea” that the British colonists needed (Perry, 2001, p. 139).

⁵⁰ Surprisingly, this organization still exists in Canada today. While they now go by moniker of their initials, “IODE,” their active website proudly proclaims their long history, starting as a “federation of women to promote patriotism, loyalty and service to others” (2013, p. 173). See also Katie Pickles (2002) for a thorough and critical history of the organization.

At the same time as white women were being imported to settle purportedly *terra nullius* land through domestic labour and reproduction, the rights of Indigenous women were being violently eroded while they were being pushed onto smaller reserves of land. On top of forced sterilization and imprisonment on reserves, where colonial authorities controlled any movement over the new boundaries, Bonita Lawrence describes a “statistical genocide” through the sexist policies of the Indian Act, which denied status to the children of any Indigenous woman who married a non-status person (in Morgensen, 2012, p. 10, see also Goeman, 2013; H. King & Pasternak, 2018; Wolfe, 2006). This represents the specifically domestic violence of colonialism, which, as Beth Piatote (2013) argues, targeted Indigenous family and governance structures. Of course, this genocide was only possible through Glen Coulthard’s logics of recognition, where colonial powers create and enforce a structure in which they have the unique power to “recognize” who is Indigenous and who is not (2007, p. 13). Therefore, the importation of white women was the flip side to the subjugation of Indigenous women; they are contrapuntal histories that were designed to serve the same structure of empire and are thus created relationally. This is demonstrated in Hannah Moscovitch’s play *The Huron Bride*, where James, a young settler man in a small 19th-century pioneer town, explains why he brought his cousin (and soon-to-be-bride) over from Ireland, asking, “What are we but savages, without women?” (MacFadzean et al., 2011, p. 88). As James is implicitly referring to European women, the play illuminates how the construction of gender was/is deeply racialized (MacKenzie, 2020; McClintock, 1995).

Thus, while land theft was forwarding the settler colonial project of eliminating Indigenous people, white female domestic and reproductive labour was imported to build up a nation that could replace them. This labour is clownishly performed by Candace in both “Settle” and “Grow,” where she sweetly and innocently begins building the nation.

“Stay” or The Haunting of Animus Menandi

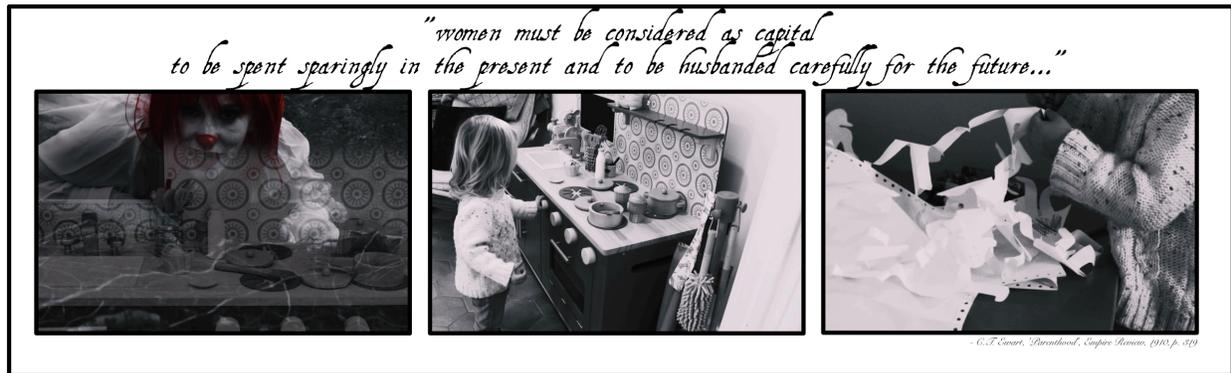


Figure 23: A comic strip made from three stills of *Land Hunger*, paired with a quote from C.T. Ewart in a 1910 publication of *Empire Review* called “Parenthood” *Empire Review* (qtd in Davin, 1978, p. 55)

The last scene of *Land Hunger* opens on a closeup of a riverbank, with, for the first time, synchronous audio and video; that is, the audio of water we hear is from the actual video recording, not a layered track. Candace pulls herself into view, struggling to hold on to the edge of the land. For the first time, she speaks—looking directly at the camera she says, “Help me.” As she struggles, a second image slowly comes into view layered overtop of her: that of a child’s toy kitchen set, the first indoor shot of the film. Eventually the kitchen scene takes over the frame, and a small blonde child appears, almost ghost-like, into the frame, happily stirring a wooden toy pot on the stove.

Titled “Stay,” this scene is based on a fundamental stage of the settler colonial project. As Patrick Wolfe famously put it, “The colonizers come to *stay* - invasion is a structure not an event” (1999, p. 2, my emphasis). Lorenzo Veracini draws attention to the historical root of the word “economy,” which comes from governing a household, to demonstrate how white settler economies are rooted in the domestic work of “settling” onto stolen land and can justify themselves through narratives of being hard-working, family-oriented citizens (2010, p. 16). He cites Thomas Jefferson’s theory that a settler’s intention to stay (or *animus manendi*, which was a requirement for becoming a citizen) should be based on how long they have lived there, if they

owned property, or if they had started a family (2010, p. 53, see also Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis, 1995, p. 14). These policies were clearly at work in Canada as well, where Indigenous people were removed from prairie lands, which were then given to settlers for a mere \$10 processing fee per 65-hectare plot and if after three years they had built a home and begun to work the land, they were allowed to keep it (*Dominion Lands Act*, n.d.). Rather than depicting the fixed, permanent, almost natural/historical associations with the word “stay,” this scene dramatizes the constant effort that is required to maintain the idea that space is fixed and bounded *as* Canada, offering a palimpsestuous juxtaposition between a small girl playing at domesticity in her toy kitchen and the clown-personification of the state of Canada struggling to affix itself to the land.

Doreen Massey argues that this perceived stasis of space, shown in the directive “Stay,” in part relies on gendered tropes surrounding the idea of home. She writes:

The construction of 'home' as a woman's place has, moreover, carried through into those views of place itself as a source of stability, reliability and authenticity. Such views of place, which reverberate with nostalgia for something lost, are coded female. Home is where the heart is (if you happen to have the spatial mobility to have left) and where the woman (mother, lover-to-whom-you-will-one-day-return) is also. (1994, p. 180)

There is a transfer of this construction of home from England to Canada that is facilitated by the presence of white British women: if “home is where the heart is...and where the woman...is also” then moving that “heart” to a new land stabilizes the new locality of home. This concept is mirrored in the 19th-century hymn, “The Home Over There” that plays during the final scene of *Land Hunger*. As we switch between a soggy, struggling Candace and a cozy, innocent little girl playing house, the hymn’s lyrics (written by 19th-century American minister DeWitt Clinton Huntington) are sung as follows:

Oh, think of the home over there,
By the side of the river of light,
Where the saints all immortal and fair
Are robed in their garments of white (O’Kane, 1904)

While the song itself implies that the “home” mentioned is a sort of heavenly after-life, I find the concept of a “home over there”—as well as the imagery of rivers and white clothing—fitting for a settler subject. The “over there” might apply to a 19th-century British worker longing for more land in the New World—or, perhaps, *hungering* for land—or a new settler who still feels strong ties to their European country of origin. It could also apply to the general unrooted element of the settler subject, who longs for the sense of emplacement that has never existed for them (Morgensen, 2009). Either way, the theme of “over there” draws out connections between site-specific performance and settler narratives, which are both characterized in part by a heterotopic layering of different possibilities of place-space-time.

This layering draws on ideas of ghosts and haunting. Candace elides past and present, becoming the ghost of the greed for domesticating land that Canada pretends it is not anymore. As Avery Gordon writes, haunting can describe:

those singular yet repetitive instances when *home becomes unfamiliar*, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises specters, and *it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future*. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view” (1997, p. xvi, my emphases)

Gordon's work focusses on how histories of oppressed, colonized, and enslaved peoples have not been successfully erased and are still an active force in the present-day. As I initially explored in Chapter 1, I have taken up this idea through thinking of the haunting that the oppressor-colonizer also performs; Candace is the ghost of Canada, haunting current liberal discourse of a multicultural, reconciled nation-state as a spectre of a violent past that has never actually gone anywhere but is merely hidden by a new narrative. One important aspect of this haunting is the audience/performer relationship, which is referenced several times throughout the film, but which finds its most explicit moment in this last scene.

Okello and Duran write that, "Methodologically, the palimpsest necessarily reads history, participants, and researchers as woven together, written over, and grappling with one another" (2021, p. 2), and this is the lens through which I see the audience/performer/research relationship. I began developing this idea after meeting with my theatre collaborator to discuss creating *Land Hunger* as a short film, where she asked me, "What does the clown think of being filmed?" Until this moment I had not considered the liveness of filming that a clown would of course take advantage of. So, to Candace, who is the audience and who is the camera operator? What does she think about telling a story for them, and how does their relationship relate to haunting and the palimpsest? As I had previously been working with still images, the turn to video transformed the way that I could practice clowning. Clowns thrive off a live audience and thus, in a way, the clown slowly dies when she is only ever by herself with a camera in a small apartment, having no agential factors (land or human) external to herself. The form of video changed this because, even though I still did not have a live audience, I did have a human behind the camera (who happens to be my theatre partner and the other half of my clown duo) and I had a live, unpredictable outdoor environment to interact with. While clown performances

encompass an enormous spectrum of styles, breaking the fourth wall is a very common element. Compared to many traditional Western theatre genres, the clown does not pretend they are *not* on a stage with a live group of humans there to see them. This proved particularly fruitful for the elision of past and present within the theory of haunting.

After this conversation, I purposefully incorporated several moments of breaking the fourth wall while filming, although I also suspect Candace would have ruptured this wall regardless of whether we planned for it or not. The ruptures occurred most notably in three places. Although Candace *looks* at the camera lens multiple times, I think of these three as significant in terms of their active invocation—rather than mere acknowledgement—of the audience’s presence; in this way, the audience is narratively framed within the world rather than as a witness to it. This first happens in Chapter 5, when Candace not only looks at the camera but directly addresses the audience/camera by attempting to seduce them.⁵¹ The second time the fourth wall is broken in this way is in Chapter 7 with the Young Girl, played by the wonderful Abigail Whidden, the daughter of one of my theatre collaborators.⁵² One of the shots I chose to keep in this section was an outtake where Abigail looks directly at the camera/camera operator, which at the time was me, and follows the direction that I give her, to stir the pot with a spoon. In these first two instances, the actor is looking at and speaking to the camera *operator*, which breaks the fourth wall through an acknowledgement of the artifice of the camera and may also be read as direct address to the audience. The third example, however, was intentionally performed as a direct address to a future audience. This occurs in the first shot of “Stay,” when Candace is

⁵¹ The audience might read this scene as Candace trying to seduce them or as Candace trying to seduce the camera operator. Both options are intentionally available for interpretation.

⁵² A side note on this collaboration: in asking Abigail’s parents about casting her in the film, their response was to send me a photo of Abigail in a stroller at a protest next to a sign reading “Abolish the Monarchy.” I include this anecdote because the film could be interpreted as a critique of the footage of Abigail herself and I want to be clear that Abigail’s family were active in constructing the anti-colonial message of the film as a satire.

trying to climb out of the river and asks the audience for help. Throughout all three of these examples, the device of audience/performer distance is unsettled for the viewer, whether they interpret an address being given directly to them or to the usually invisible camera operator. No matter which interpretation the audience takes, both diegetically implicate the viewer by removing the safe distance between performer and audience.

There is a haunting that occurs in acknowledging the audience in each of these instances—in a way, the audience may come to realize that they themselves are a ghostly, invisible presence in Candace’s world, who she sees as allies to her *animus manendi*. Her invocation of their presence shows how, while the violent colonial past haunts the performatively inclusive present, the current nation-state—with its land-wealth—is also a haunting dream of its past. Our present-day is in many ways the past colonizers’ hopes, dreams, or fears for themselves. Thus, Candace’s plea for the audience to help her can be interpreted through the theory that the ghost of colonial Canada is only kept alive through us (settlers) and requires our active participation in continuous nation-building in order for it to survive.



Land Hunger ends with a glimpse into the archive of my own settler storytelling, which has been woven throughout this dissertation. The last scene is a recreation of an old home video, where a small blonde child plays in a toy kitchen and draws on paper doll chains. This ending also represents the relation of the archive to the repertoire in reifying performances that perpetuate themselves with each generation, enacting a theory of heterotopias by “juxtapos[ing] in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). This is a key component of embodying the settler nation.

Conclusions

...the present, then, is a colliding of the past and the future. Everyday embodiment is therefore a mechanism for ancient beginnings. Engagement in these practices unlocks their theoretical potentialities and generates intelligence.

—Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, p. 193

How would our disciplines and methodologies change if we took seriously the idea that bodies (and not only books and documents) produce, store, and transfer knowledge?

—Diana Taylor, *Performance*, p. 99

The Menace of Mimicry: A Photostory



Figure 24: A still image taken from the 2022 CBC documentary "The Queen and Canada," showing a fictionalized encounter between a young Queen Elizabeth and her grandfather. The red nose is my own addition.

which reflects on different narratives of Canadian identity by offering a not-surprisingly fond depiction of Queen Elizabeth's relationship with Canada. The documentary starts with a story of Elizabeth as a young child. The narrator recounts how Elizabeth's grandfather, King George V, whom Elizabeth fondly called "Grandpa England," would take her for walks around the grounds of Windsor Castle. They would walk to a small log cabin on the grounds, which, according to the documentary, was built by "lumberjacks of the Canadian forestry corps" (The Queen and Canada, 2022). Unlike many female settler pioneer stories, evidently Elizabeth didn't need the hands-on experience of building her forest-home. She

wasn't the one physically settling, after all. Elizabeth purportedly loved to play in this cabin and would pretend to be the host of tea parties for Grandpa England. Apparently, this Queen-to-be believed that when she entered this cabin, she was literally entering Canada.

The story in this documentary, narrated with overflowing pride less than two years ago by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, encapsulates the relationships between performances of gendered domesticity and a very real power structure of nationhood. In this sense, the Queen-to-be's playful, innocent make-believe of Canadian domesticity can also be read as a practice for domination over Indigenous lands of Turtle Island, which she stood to inherit. Following Homi Bhaba's theory of colonial mimicry discussed in Chapter 5, encapsulated in my photostory's title, I have paired this story with a still taken from the CBC documentary—itsself a critical fabulation of a Canadian mythology—palimpsestuously edited to make visible Candace's haunting presence (see Figure 24). This photostory, mirrored throughout this dissertation in my own ancestral, historical, personal, and critically fabulated archives and repertoires of various narratives of homemaking in the wilderness, encapsulates the way that dominant narratives still rely on the structured innocence of domesticity to prop up the project of ongoing land theft in Canada.

In this research-creation project, I have argued that there is a felt attachment to white settler innocence in Canada that requires an intervention at the level of embodied praxis. The embodiment argument can sometimes be ignored in the pursuit of rational education which focuses on bringing to light hidden facts and realities. This enlightenment route of decolonization is necessary to fix the strategic settler ignorance that colonial structures create—and many settlers indeed become allies for decolonization through radical education—yet relying on it too heavily can ignore the invisibilized structures by which settlers passively embody the creeping

blockade. As Charlies Menzies aptly describes it, “polite education will not transform colonial power” (2013, p. 189). My argument for the role of theatre and performance in decolonization thus does not stem from the idea that stories are merely a palatable way for settlers to become better informed. It is instead based on the co-constitutive relation between narrative and nation (Bhabha, 1990; Said, 1994). The argument that theatre creators as cultural producers are heavily implicated in decolonization does not mean that theatre work is more important than direct action for land defence and land repatriation. I participate in grassroots organizing in solidarity with Indigenous land defence and it fundamentally influences who I am and the kind of art that I make. Rather, through the lens of relationality and genealogy, **settler artists are intricately woven into the discursive processes through which nations are created and therefore have a relational accountability to ongoing and historical structures of land theft.**

In this dissertation, I have thus advocated for a praxis of theatre creation by settler artists that is oriented around settler intergenerational responsibility to this land and the Indigenous nations that have been its caretakers since time immemorial. I call this a **heterotopic praxis**, which palimpsestically layers many histories of land, people, and structures of power, encouraging an active conversation between research/archive, self/community, and space/place. Through my short film *Land Hunger*, and through my critical reflection on its creation, I have demonstrated how my process is guided by three questions that are central to this praxis: What is the performer’s relation to the research or narrative of the performance? What or who is haunting them to be doing this work? How are they in relation to the land that they are performing on/with? Instead of providing a solution for the messy entanglement of white settler subjects in ongoing structures of colonization and land theft, my framework requires an active and engaged response to the constantly shifting narratives of nation, which I have articulated as a theory of

movement rather than a fixed location of settler ethics. This movement forefronts critical imagination, encouraging an engagement with multiple layers of social, cultural, and geographical history that our lives are always already embedded in.

The gendered, racialized, and classed structures within the creation of Canada are not accidental. Patriarchal white sovereignty, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) terms it, contains strategic methods of eliminating common ground on which solidarity between members of an oppressed majority might take place. Sylvia Federici writes about the strict rules that early colonial powers implemented to divide marginalized people, and how these measures indicate the extreme threat that solidarity across racial or gender divisions poses (Federici 2004, pp. 106–8). This gives insight into the necessity for settlers to learn about the histories of the land they are on, the intergenerational responsibility that comes with these histories, and to support Indigenous nations and frontline land defenders in ongoing movements for decolonization and land back. If colonialism is not historical but in fact ongoing, then so is the threat that solidarity poses to it.



In finishing the first draft of this dissertation in July 2023, I find myself again heading to the cottage to sit on the dock with my feet in the water. The Algonquin Nation is currently in negotiations with the provincial and federal governments for parcels of Crown land on their territory. Parcels 199C and 308 have small waterfronts on Brule Lake, just a 20-minute canoe ride south of my uncle’s cottage. This small act of taking land back feels both exciting and devastating: if I canoe north from the cottage, I could pass hundreds more acres of Crown land than what parcels 199C and 308 cover. Should it not be the Canadian government who requires negotiations, going through the Algonquin legal system to try and secure small parcels that are

allowed to remain “Crown” land within Algonquin territory, which was never ceded to Canada in the first place? The myth of *terra nullius* haunts this question. Its structure of innocence is invasively invisible. I hope we can start creating stories that unveil it.

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