

**Frontier Aesthetics:
Troubling Contact Zones in the Postcolonial Imagination**

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Abstract

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The frontier, this project proposes, is a historically ongoing concept, signifying assemblage, and discursive construction inviting new kinds of encounters between postcolonial and aesthetic theory. A signpost of occupation, dispossession, and geopolitical encroachment, and a recurring motif in popular storytelling today, the frontier, this dissertation suggests, presents an opportunity to critically engage (and perhaps rethink) postcolonialism's general wariness of aesthetic theory and aesthetic theory's traditional tendency to isolate aesthetic experience from historical and cultural circumstance. Toward this possibility, this project surveys of a variety of "frontier genres" in the Canadian context: The popular frontier zones of Canadian art, the feminist wild, the Pacific Northwest, and the western, as they appear in contemporary television, award-winning literature and cinema, and institutions (such as national galleries). Utilizing historically informed postcolonial analysis of these sites, as well as aesthetic attention to their generic stylistic features and characterizations, I aim to illuminate the productive ambivalence the frontier poses to the disciplinary boundaries of postcolonial and aesthetic concern, and thus, the frontier's significance in affirming interdisciplinary relationships and animating decolonial futures.

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Statement on Positionality

This dissertation was undertaken while in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal, as an uninvited guest on the unceded territories of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation, and during my ongoing occupation of the unceded, west coastal territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

My positioning as a White settler and cis woman on Turtle Island, and the various relations spawning from that identity, are inextricable from this project. The economic and political investments of settler colonialism (and their reiteration and subversion through art that this project studies) is a subject I arrive at intimately. As a fifth generation Canadian and third generation Vancouverite, my lineage is entangled with my previous generation's westward movement across Turtle Island in pursuit of land and wealth. This journey, and its accompanying project of converting stolen, Indigenous land into property, is a recurrent theme in this study: The history of settler colonialism, and its storied representations by various authors and filmmakers is, here, engaged through a critical, postcolonial lens. Simultaneously, this history of colonial accumulation narrates my own terms of arrival within the landscapes of the present. Engaging settler colonialism as both a general frame of reference and a lively political project in which I am enmeshed has been one of this project's general aims.

This dissertation's focus on forested landscapes, the colonial attribution of "wilderness," and the ambiguities, possibilities, and erasures that term facilitates, is likewise tethered to questions of my own identity. Working as a treeplanter for many years on unceded Wet'suwet'en territory, my livelihood depended on the fraught contingencies between reforestation and deforestation, conservationist desires and mass clear-cutting, occurring on and imposed onto unceded Indigenous lands. My enmeshment with these dimensions of B.C.'s forestry industry almost certainly precipitated this project's stake in the question of "wilderness," as not only present in colonial literature but environmentalist rhetoric today (particularly as studied in Chapter 2).

Finally, I come to this project as a monolingual, English-speaking student of Literature, of the broad and at times tenuous category of "Postcolonial" Literature, and specifically, of Indigenous literature in "Canada." By nature of this positioning, I am an outsider to literature that not only guides this project's intended critical and decolonial thrust, but also, the articulation of marginalization that drives the field of postcolonialism itself. Yet, while history and lived experience situates me in settler colonial worlds, the work, writing, and thinking of Postcolonial Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Indigenous Literature have granted me tools to critically examine the relations and ways of knowing propagating and inherited by those worlds. While the contributions and interventions of this project, therefore, orient towards the field of Settler Colonial Studies, the fields of Indigenous Studies and Literature are, as I see it, essential to this project's capacity to undertake the work of scholarly intervention at all. I approach these fields, and the specific works of Indigenous Literature here studied, as a scholar very much reliant on secondary sources to guide my understanding of language and context, and as a grateful outsider and reader, looking to learn and grow.

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Image 4. Closing shot from the end of John Ford's *The Searchers* (2016). In the image, Ethan Edwards is seen leaving the homestead.

Image 5. At the beginning of Zacharias Kunuk's *Maliglutit (Searchers)* (2016), the decision to exile a group of men on the basis of their immoral conduct is negotiated by the community.

Image 6. In the following scene in the sequence (from Kunuk's *Maliglutit*) the banished men can be seen departing the settlement.

Introduction

Reading the Frontier Today

This project surveys primarily Canadian frontier-oriented media to trace the frontier's liveliness in settler and decolonial imaginaries. The environmentalist frontier of the "Pacific Northwest," the feminist "wild," the western, and canonical landscape painting are frontier venues organizing this study. These venues, while conjuring different geographies, collectively animate the frontier's location at the intersection of real and imagined space, a location this dissertation reads through a set of comparative surveys. Particularly, I engage the frontier under the rubric of a series of frontier dialectics—comparative readings of frontier-oriented media revealing it as a cultural deposit of colonial imaginaries and subversive site of decolonial politics.¹ This study is particularly germane to renewed demands for decolonization and Indigenous resurgence in the specific location of what many call Canada and the United States. As the status of "land," as well as how we related to and live alongside it, is increasingly at issue in settler worlds and decolonial struggle (Simpson, Coulthard, Tuck and Yang), this study explores the materialities and mythologies that sustain and undermine settler's claims to land and decolonial media animating resistance to those claims.

Returning to "the frontier" is perhaps an unlikely orientation for a project aligning itself with decolonial intent. This project's founding premise—that the frontier is implicated in colonial assemblages—is arguably a dubious politic and an obvious claim. A word associated with colonial ethos (Kakel; Klein), "the frontier" implies the reanimating of colonial romanticism only to reiterate what Ferdinand de Saussure has already made clear: While the sign may be arbitrary,

¹ There are several key terms indelible to this study (notably, "colonial" and its variety of prefixes): Postcolonial, anticolonial, and decolonial are used extensively throughout this project to articulate varying intents. This project might (broadly) be understood as examination of settler-colonial aesthetics and their political deconstruction through subversive, frontier-oriented art. Within this context, these terms articulate the various postures, horizons, and stances of the art objects under study, and their wide-ranging theoretical significance. As postcolonial scholars have identified, recognizing the affinities and differences between these terms is essential to mobilizing reckoning and repair in colonized worlds, spaces, and practices. While these terms invoke several meanings (and their distinctions warrants its own analysis) their significance might be understood, broadly, as adhering to a general set of principles. Whereas "anticolonial" (broadly) signifies praxis, "postcolonialism" is tethered to scholarship and disciplinary orientation grappling with what it means to live in the wake of colonialism, and finally, "decolonial" is closely bound to efforts aimed at destabilizing Eurocentrism (see Lydia Hiraide's discussion of these differences). In the case of the latter term, while "decolonial" is largely rooted in Latin American scholarship (and particularly, the work of Walter D. Mignolo), it has assumed a much wider global significance and finds unique expression in Turtle Island. Eve Tuck and K. Yang, for example, describe decolonization as that "which brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (1) and caution against its "easy adoption" (1) into other, more general discourses of social justice. Decolonization, they assert, is "accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity" (35) and in that regard, is explicitly entangled with the material politics of stolen land.

its apparent immutability in the present is the result of forces prior. Language “is radically powerless to defend itself against the forces ... shifting the relationship between the signified and the signifier” (75) and, hence, “always appears a heritage of the preceding period” (71). Postcolonial signification, it might therefore be said, inherently bears colonial vestige, and the “frontier” especially so. It’s definition today as *both* a “border between two countries” and “the edge of land [between] settled and built towns, beyond which the country is wild and unknown” (Oxford) reveals the endurance of a colonial aesthetics wherein the relation between “wild and settled” propagates the logics of expansion. As anticolonial scholars have elaborated, “wild” does not occlude Indigenous sovereignty, yet is an adjective which, when cast through the colonial apparatus, sanctions a political order that does.²

The frontier’s definition testifies to this process of naturalization. Migrating from Spanish *frontera* (borderland), to French *frontiere* (borderland of a country), to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, “frontier” made the rounds in Europe before travelling with emigrants to the “New World” in the early 17th century. Following the American Revolution, “frontier” accrued significance as interest in Americanisms grew. This period would mark its semiotic transitions from “borderland” to the expanding “West”—incited in the Noah Webster 1806 dictionary and pronounced throughout the 19th century (Mood). The frontier’s growing ties to American Independence ensured that by the frontier’s formal “closing” in 1890³ it was “the central myth/ideological trope of American culture” (Slotkin 8). This significance would be solidified in Frederick Jackson’s Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” of 1893 elaborating the frontier as the “wild/civilized” emblem of an American democracy premised on settler exceptionalism and Indigenous erasure—a glorification of colonial right undergirding settler nostalgia (Trimble-Young) and “pathological melancholia” in the century to come (Byrd, “Beasts of” 611). The frontier’s accumulated mythos would render it, hence, a laden and polarizing signifier: central to settler colonial and American studies and, in anticolonial semantics—akin, facetiously, to the “F word” (Klein) or, more earnestly, obsolete.

This project invests in how such dynamics render the frontier both hyper-visible and elusive in matters of postcolonial concern. Rather than utilizing the frontier to solely affirm postcolonialism’s political interests, I ask what its presence reveals about postcolonialism’s field of visibility, today. Semantic aversion to “frontier” performs the political impetus of postcolonialism, as a discipline of reflexive failed historicism grappling with the inaccuracy of its name’s suggestion of being after colonialism (Ahmed *Strange*).⁴ Simultaneously, the frontier

² Leanne Morten-Robinson locates the origins of white possession in the colonial perspectival economies of “the frontier” as a boundary between empire’s project and its perceived *terra nullius* (“notions of the new and previously unexplored, the unknown” [5]). This perspective, she asserts, shapes Australia’s national narratives and property distributions today. Similarly, Sarah Prout and Richard Howitt’s examination of “frontier imaginings” observes how “enduring settler imaginings about the nature of ... rurality—discovered, claimed, tamed, settled, transformed and economically viable ... give tangible expression to the realities of Indigenous ‘Otherness’ in ... [contemporary] rural contexts” (397).

³ In 1890 the Bureau of the Census announced that the frontier was closed on the basis that there was no longer any unsettled land remaining in the western United States (see United States Census Bureau).

⁴ Sara Ahmed advocates a reading of “post-coloniality as a failed historicity: a historicity that admits of its own failure in grasping that which has been, as the impossibility of grasping the present” is necessary in realizing the field’s desired political outcomes. As Ahmed elaborates,

invokes how colonial afterlife central *to* postcolonial concern persists beyond its traditional boundary. 2021 marked “the return of the western” (Jha)—a claim affirming the persistence of the frontier’s colonial imaginaries, yet through the distortive prism of the genre’s mass cultural aesthetics. While the western “has always been preoccupied with ... mythic settlement,” deriving its “vitality” from the “colonial Frontier myth” (Panay 2), these preoccupations are simultaneously obscured by genre’s sense of “‘organized inevitability” or “tacit contract for how an encounter will proceed” (Cohen 44). The western, explored in this project’s final chapter, is one of many frontier genres inviting less *settled* methodologies for theorizing colonial hauntology—methodologies that might move past postcolonialism’s devaluing of aesthetics and towards their significance to the present’s hyperaesthetic conditions.⁵

And yet, postcolonialism’s disciplined aversions offer beginnings: assertions of the frontier’s colonial, celebratory feeling⁶ emphasize that the frontier generates certain modes of feeling, revealing aesthetic modes of analysis undergirding postcolonialism’s semantic economies. This project begins at those gestures, moving beyond their wary lack of resolve, to rather ask how aesthetic theory might help elaborate the colonial frontier’s hold on the postcolonial imagination and gesture *beyond* postcolonialism’s disciplinary purview. While the western has been widely identified as venue of colonial reiteration, filmmakers such as Chloe Zhao, Kelly Reichardt, Danis Goulet, Jane Campion, Jeymes Samuel, Jordan Peele, and Zacharias Kunuk have utilized its generic myth of settlement to destabilize its colonial presumptions. In their hands, the western genre becomes fecund territory to not only consider its fabric of capitalist desire, heteronormative enclosure, racialized erasure, and hyper-visibility, but for also subversively “invent[ing] new genres for the kinds of speculative work we call ‘theory’” transpiring within its borders (Berlant *Cruel Optimism* 21). This frontier-oriented art does not contradict postcolonialism’s assertions of aesthetic theory’s colonial problem (Mignolo; Spivak; Gene), so much as suggest there is political merit to engaging its dominant structures up close. Importantly, the politically-laden site of the western affirms frontier genres—and genre itself—as not solely a literary organizing principle, but a persistently negotiated force of socio-political life.

While this project takes frontier genres as its outward focus, its impetus derives from the very ordinary ways in which frontier imaginaries shape our political moment. If the prevalence of the western today troubles the ease with which “frontier” can be semantically willed away, so too do blockades. Over the past four years, land defenders at British Columbia’s Unist’ot’en Blockade (Wet’suwet’en) and Fairy Creek Blockade (Pacheedaht) have protected ecological diversity from the extractive impulses of Canada’s resource industries. These blockades, constructed out of

“post-colonialism has already been accused of its failure as a history ... bound up with an inadequate temporality in the very assumption of the ‘post’” (*Strange Encounters* 10).

⁵ Sianne Ngai argues that “aesthetic experience has been transformed by the hypercommodified, information-saturated, performance-driven conditions of late capitalism” (*Our Aesthetic* 1). Ngai observes that these shifts have disoriented the distinctions between the aesthetics’ formal dimension (or questions of style) and subjective levels of judgement (or feeling-based evaluation) and hence, repositioned “the relevance of aesthetic to critical or other nonaesthetic judgments aimed at producing knowledge” (1). Ngai’s insights illuminate how, under these current conditions, popular imagery and aesthetic motifs (such as the frontier) present not only aesthetic compositions (prompting questions style) but subsequently, ongoing histories of commodification, investment, production, circulation, and monetization, worthy of study.

⁶ See Kakel.

wood, recycled parts, and interlinked limbs, have asserted material boundaries between the provincial and federal government's homogenizing optimizations and Indigenous self-determination and environmental stewardship. Subject to RCMP and police raids, these sites affirm the frontier's animacy as an ongoing site of occupation and militarization, where colonialism's structure⁷ is enacted and refused. Simultaneously, they testify to the frontier's aesthetic certitude in relation to state power. Coastal Gas Link's response to protestor-felled trees blocking site-access—a public statement expressing safety concern for all, “including those who wish to protest [their] activities”⁸—featured aerial shots of the scene. Aesthetic analysis, here, unsettles the apparentness of the statement's concern: the authoritative grammar of the drone shot (Sheller; Fuller & Wiezman) proves a vital mechanism in redirecting attention from the ecological risks of pipelines and towards obstructed roads. Reading these images through an aesthetic-anticolonial frame, or, against the “instrumental function for which they were created,” opens an “unlikely interplay between the vernacular and the state” (Campt 5)—one revealing the “ongoing colonization of everyday life by [contemporary] information technologies” alongside the visual grammars of colonial risk management (Sheller 73). As Tiffany Lethabo King reveals, cartographic rendering of Indigeneity as a “chaotic and sensuous natural feature of the landscape” has long aestheticized colonial anxieties about the risks Indigenous sovereignty poses to settler extraction (85).

Fairy Creek's representation in mainstream media has likewise utilized grammars of risk management and chaos. Descriptions of “creative, dangerous, and challenging” protest measures position law enforcement as a “rescue operation more than an enforcement operation” (Fraser). The conjuring of police, as rescuing protestors from themselves, is both fleeting and saturated in the Manichean allegories of “savagery and civilization, anarchy and democracy”—significations, Byrd argues, that have perpetually animated the frontier's myths of colonial right (“Beasts of” 603). As well as materially asserting frontiers between the conflicting sovereignties of “postcolonial Canada,” the Unist'ot'en and Fairy Creek blockades affirm that the frontier's aesthetics invariably shape, and struggle over, the geopolitics they reflect.

At its core, this project asserts that interpreting the frontier as a simultaneously postcolonial and aesthetic concern invites a reading of land whose sense of generic “organized inevitability” reveals the power-laden infrastructure of its apparentness. The frontier is a malleable signifier, whose ability to move from ostensibly “postcolonial” to “aesthetic” matter might stoke productive cross-disciplinary coalitions. Indeed, at the same time that overtly political frontiers were being constructed in Wet'suwet'en and Pacheedaht territory, and risk-management deployed in response, American and Canadian contestants were flying to Chilko Lake (Xeni Gwet'in) to endure the eighth season of the popular reality survival series, *Alone*. Located inland, north of Vancouver Island and south of the Morice River, Chilko Lake's high grizzly bear density was the ideal venue for “the most dangerous season ever” of the televised experiment, that would see the last lone survivor, having succeeded the “ultimate test of man's will to make it in the wild,”⁹ winning \$500,000. The geographic intimacy and diverse evocations of *Alone*'s Chilko Lake, Unist'ot'en, and Fairy Creek bespeak an ongoing history of colonization.

⁷ With reference to Patrick Wolfe's foundational assertion that colonialism is a structure not an event.

⁸ “Coastal GasLink comments on Unist'ot'en Actions,” January 7, 2020.

⁹ As stated in the season's trailer, released by the History Channel, in anticipation of the show's June 2021, release.

The very ability to organize nature (and B.C.'s temperate rainforest, specifically) into "discrete and separate objects of aesthetic reflection, scientific inquiry, and economic and political calculation" is an "aftereffect" of colonialism's representational modes (Willems-Braun 11). Read together, however, these politicized and popularized geographies affirm analytical possibilities when "frontier" is upended from its anticolonial semantic ostracization, its neutral "borderland" definition, and co-option by colonial imaginaries to rather animate coeval "past and present geographies" (McKittrick 1) that "do not neatly replicate or privilege geographic patterns, ... cartography, or conquest," nor neatly ascribe to the "imagined" or "real" (2). In dialogue, these venues reveal the frontier's material interruption of myths of "postcolonial Canada," alongside the cultural-aesthetic management of such myths, as "risk" is either mitigated towards the extractive use-value of forested space, or amplified, towards elaborating one's mastery of it. Read as a postcolonial and aesthetic concern, the frontier, this project contends, might offer one avenue for "reading towards a new analytic" of the present's interstices, and of "knowing [the] past, in excess of the fictions of the archive" (Sharpe 13).

The Frontier's Postcolonial Aesthetics

Understanding the relationship between postcolonial studies and aesthetic theory is essential to parsing the frontier's significance, today. If colonial frontier imaginaries haunt popular genres, then postcolonialism's investment in critically analyzing colonial structures might interrupt the dissolution of that haunting into the disinterested¹⁰ connotations of aesthetic experience (or the notion that the "aesthetic quality is distinguished from all elements of content" [Nieuwenhove 177]). Aesthetics, as a field, "does not allow for normative disciplines" (Lorand 1) and is "in the awkward position whereby a second-order theory has no first-order theory upon which to reflect" (2)—a philosophical conundrum nurturing the oft-held idea that aesthetic experience *just is*. As George Ramonos asserts, "a felt distinctive feature of aesthetic experience ... is its so-called directness or immediacy ... wherein this immediacy is imagined to derive or consist, however, is very unobvious" (73). Postcolonialism's premise of colonial power might offer one means of clarification. Walter Mignolo's distinctions between Aesthetics, as a field of study premised on the philosophy of aesthetic judgement, and aesthesis, as the experience of sensory touch the field strives to understand, presents a summary of these disciplinary relationships. Aesthetics, Mignolo writes, "colonized aesthesis," shaping "sensibilities [through] established norms of the beautiful and the sublime, of what is art and what is not"; aesthetics involves the colonization of sensoria, in service to empire (*The Darker Side* 19). It is in the spirit of this understanding that postcolonialism has "warily avoided the theory of aesthetics, perhaps for fear that it might contaminate the political integrity of a field that has remained staunchly critical of the filiative hegemony of English literature" and art, and moreover, the perpetuation of Eurocentric hierarchy (Ashcroft 410). Yet, if postcolonialism brings political definition to aesthetic theory's transcendental vagueness, the field of aesthetics might, likewise, advance the aims of postcolonial

¹⁰ European theories of aesthetic "disinterestedness" have their origins in 18th century British thought (notably in Lord Shaftbury's writings on egoism and ethics). In the field of aesthetics, particularly, "disinterestedness," as a central premise of aesthetic experience, would be solidified in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, asserted as "the first moment in a judgement of taste" (Stolnotz 131). This premise would prove central to the field and its iterations—from Schopenhauer's configuring of aesthetic experience as "pure, will-less contemplation" to Adorno's "rejection of the politicization of aesthetics" entirely (Hohendahl 158).

theory. As Sara Ahmed argues, the historical premise assumed by postcolonialism, and its “translating into a meta discourse,” impedes the field’s “grasping the present” (*Strange* 10). For Ahmed, postcolonialism, rather than offering an infallible frame, “allows us to investigate how colonial encounters are determining, and yet not fully determining, of social and material existence” (11). This project posits that shifts in the field of aesthetics, away from “beautification ... [and towards the] careful attunement and noticing” of asymmetrical relations (Fuller and Weizman 12), might offer one avenue for engaging “how and where colonialism persists after so-called decolonisation” and advancing a “postcoloniality as that which is yet to come” (Ahmed, *Strange* 13).

Notably, for the purposes of this project, the frontier’s particular aesthetic animacy in popular culture today suggests that postcolonialism’s aversion to aesthetics might overlook insight into the colonial afterlives central to its concerns. Indeed, the frontier is, in many ways, principal to postcolonial thought. A defining feature of postcolonialism is its “grounded[ness] in the historical context of colonialism” (Young 4)—a historical context, which, as many Indigenous and anticolonial scholars assert, subsists through land expropriation. As Eve Tuck and K. Yang’s oft-cited “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” affirms, genuine decolonization must contend with the material realities of settler-colonialism as the “biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the ‘domestic’ borders of the imperial nation” (4). As postcolonial frameworks reveal, “territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” (Wolfe 388) and capitalist relations are colonial relations, wherein power is structured through ownership (Coulthard). Postcolonialism’s materialist tenets harken the frontier as a historical-geopolitical boundary of violent encroachment—one whose westward movement relied on a calculated process of “clearing the plains” through colonial settlement, the weaponization of famine and disease, and treaty coercion (Daschuk). This historical consciousness undergirds wariness of the frontier’s overly abstracted significations; indeed, “the very term frontier can sometimes obscure the real and affective homes that come to be built on the original displacements enacted by the promise of extraction” (Ruiz 7). Postcolonialism, hence, resists the frontier’s dissolution into aestheticized signification. As Tiffany Dang asserts, “landscape” in postcolonial frameworks reveals how “historical forms of biopower and racialized dispossession ... not only reflect social and political power relations as a symbolic aesthetic medium but is itself an instrument and agent of power” (1008; see also Hunt and de Leeuw).

If the postcolonial discipline emphasizes the frontier’s overt and tacit colonial nature, then this posture extends to the field of Aesthetics itself. Through postcolonial frameworks, the field of Aesthetic philosophy is reimagined as a field of undisclosed land and power relations. This relationship manifests saliently in Gayatri Spivak’s reading of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (1790). Reading Kant’s practice for its “sustained private grammar of values” (*Aesthetic* 14) Spivak asserts: “Kant’s notion of ‘the world’ and ‘a self’ must be assumed in order for the human being to think that he (for Kant) has experience” (17). This “cosmopolitical double bind” (18), Spivak notes, is ultimately what encourages Kant’s “transcendental illusion”—an illusion which ultimately “influences [his] ground rules” (19). For Spivak, the “transcendental illusion” of Kant’s “celebrated definition of the aesthetic” hence affirms slippage between philosophical phenomena and philosophical *maneuvers* facilitating the impossible need to rationally know the world (18). Evident in Spivak’s critique is the compatibility between the European rationalizing of aesthetic experience and the rationalizing of European geopolitical expansion.

Postcolonialism’s moves to politically situate aesthetic theory likewise echo in work on imperialism. Indeed, “European liberalism was forged in parallel with imperial expansion”

(Mmembe, *Critique* 55). Lisa Lowe's exploration of global imperial relationships identifies how the private spaces of the Enlightened Rational subject, central to John Lock, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Kant's philosophy, were shaped by trade. The aesthetics of "cosmopolitan sensibility," emerging in conjunction with the trafficking of spices, tea, and cocoa through the home, would not only introduce colonial contingencies to the "private sphere," but the "sovereign" subjectivity of "the modern individual, or Western man, who possesses interiority of person, as well as a private household" (28). In the public sphere, Kant's valuing of disinterestedness has been posited as inadvertent testament to the ubiquity of economic interest accompanying industrialization (Karatani and Kohso). Kant's Sublime, while linked to scientific discovery, has been scrutinized for its tacit relation to "the exotic," linking "the construction of the 'self-determining' bourgeois subject" to "growing discourses of difference in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Armstrong 213). Indeed, while the Romantic movement and its turn to Nature is "understood as a project that self-consciously took an aesthetic turn" (Oelschlaeger 113), its global economies suggest it was not so much "opposed to modernity as one of its primary expressions" (Bewell 6). These interplays manifest in Kant's "quick look" to the Americas in *Observations*. Kant's fleeting reference to Indigenous populations and the slave trade—the "hundreds of thousands transported elsewhere from their countries" (58)—affirms that "colonial events and subjects never centered in the European discourse on the aesthetic" and that the Aesthetic is indeed "haunted by that which it excludes" (Gikandi).

Aesthetic theory, thus, while in many ways at odds with the political orientations of postcolonialism, reveals the colonial worlding central to its concerns. This relationship also reflects the centrality of the frontier in both fields. Kant's glance overseas, and pronouncement of character therein, affirms the intermingling of aesthetic theory and colonial mediascapes at the time. With their "ability to spread information as well as the contents of that dissemination" (Cohen and Glover 5) these mediascapes ensured that a "mixture of codes became, very early on, part of the European calculus" of representing colonial encounter (8). Indeed, Kant's aesthetic philosophy would emerge at a time of rapid colonial expansion and its accounting. Between the writing of *Observations* (1764) and *Critique of Judgement* (1790), James Cook's three *Voyages*, documenting travel to Australia, New Zealand, Antarctic and Pacific were published, and "frontier" shifted semantically to mirror the logics of expansion in the U.S. (Mood). Scholarship relating Kant's philosophy to the American Constitution, Revolution, and Bill of Rights observe these relationships in particular ways (Beck). More generally, the intimacies between Kant, as a philosopher of Aesthetics, Cook's mobilities, and Turner's frontier mythologizing, gesture the constellations of what Sarah Prout and Richard Howitt deem "frontier imaginings": a nexus "authoriz[ing] those whose presence they legitimize to write, order, and dominate" space (397). Prout and Howitt's likening the Australian "Bush" to Turner and Buffalo Bill's imaginings of "the Americas," particularly, reveals the colonial frontier's simultaneous globality and generic consistency.

If Kant emerges as a mediator between Aesthetic Theory and the frontier, so too does James Cook, as one of many "travelling narrators," or genre-makers, "whose words, charts, and intentions [would] accumulate...strange territories and gradually turn them into "home" (Said *Culture* xv). Like Kant, for whom "the night sky is one of the eminent examples of modern (natural) sublime" (Szécsényi 52), Cook's 1768 journey towards the Pacific Islands was

mobilized by the desire to observe the transit of Venus across the sun.¹¹ That this planetary spectacle would inaugurate “a wave of Pacific invasions that would sweep missionaries, merchants, convicts, and military occupations into the lives and lands of the Pacific Peoples” affirms the scalar politics of colonial aesthetic experience (Byrd 2). Cook is, likewise, a useful figure in conceptualizing the origins of the frontier genre. As Noel Currie argues, Cook’s ensuing voyage to Nootka Sound (1778) was central in propagating the “discovery narrative.” This genre would merge Cook’s way of seeing (“consist[ing] precisely of not seeing that which [was] alien” to it [22]), and his editor’s purchase in the marketable “discovery hero”—a purchase manifested through stylized amplification of the Pacific Northwest and Cook’s ability to endure it. *Voyages* is, hence, a colonial cartographic account but also testament to the curated aesthetics of “discovery” actively facilitating European reading publics’ investment in colonialism overseas, which I explore further in the second chapter of this project.

The significance of Cook and Kant, as agents of frontier genre-making, might suggest non-western aesthetics are simply anticolonial (Gene). Yet, in the era of globalization and reconciliation, non-western aesthetics are easily absorbed into the colonial agenda (Rickard; Appiah). As some scholars have suggested, it is not aesthetics but aesthesis, transforming aesthetics from a margin-periphery struggle to a site of decolonial production. As Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez assert, “decolonial aesthesis” begins from “consciousness that the modern/colonial project implied not only control of the economy, the political, and knowledge, but ... the senses and perception,” levying a “radical critique to modern, postmodern, and altermodern aestheTics” and making “visible decolonial subjectivities (4). Mignolo and Vazquez suggest that it is through acknowledgement of how “the structural shapes the sensorial” that aesthetic analytics gain decolonial value (Snorton and Yapp 5). Other decolonial scholars specify this insight. Zakiyah Iman Jackson’s examination of ontological plasticity—a dialectic between the body’s “thingification” and the “unruly conceptions of being”—deems art that does not “merely seek inclusion into liberal human conceptions” the engine of anticolonial possibility (1). Similarly, Neetu Khanna’s exploration of decolonialization’s “visceral logics” traces inherited colonial reflex in postcolonial literature’s somatic aesthetics. Revolutionary and colonized affects, Khanna argues, come from the same drive. The visceral is a critical “analytic for the violent landscapes of our postcolonial present” (8); it is a site wherein “colonial and postcolonial modernity are most violently at play” (12).

These scholars recognise and refuse aesthetics’ regulatory regimes and mine the capacity of aesthetics to “disrupt the flow of history-as-usual ... to take us down routes not readily available in the official archives of the state ... and to bring to the center of our analysis that which is unsayable and ineffable” (Ramaswamy 5). If the colonial frontier is an undisclosed feature of the Eurocentric discipline of aesthetics, it emerges here between aesthetics and aesthesis, as territorial negotiations between colonizing impulses and emancipated horizons. Contrary to notions that postcolonialism’s aesthetic devaluing emerges through the valuing of minoritarian politics (Young), aesthetically oriented anticolonialism positions aesthetics as a field of possibility for thinking through, but also *beyond* majoritarian/minoritarian frames. As Deepika Bahri’s *Native Intelligence* asserts, amidst the commodification of postcolonial literature,

¹¹ Jodi Byrd’s *The Transit of Empire* asserts: “The hope in the observation of the Venus transit was that it might help unlock the key to the universe’s mapping and offer astronomers the ability to calculate distances between celestial bodies in earth’s home galaxy” (2) ... an opportunity “creat[ing] a frenzy within the scientific circles of the European Enlightenment” (1).

aesthetics defy a text's translation into information, refusing extractive reading and revealing the work's sovereign "mode of perception relevant to its context" (20). As Fred Moten's advocacy of aesthetics' radical spirit asserts: "Whereas a powerful strain of postcolonial theory structures itself as the reversal of [the colonial] direction and its gaze," aesthetics invite the "discovery of a necessary appositionality" (34; see also Robinson). Aesthetics bear the possibility to not solely counter colonial logic but upend its rules of association—a process of semiotic breakdown Moten deems "third iconicity." Yet, if Moten's framing suggests a departure from postcolonialism's core tenets, the subtle conjuring of Homi Bhabha's "third space" invokes a shared horizon. Third space, Bhabha asserts, is a site wherein conditioned economies of association are seen and subverted; where "new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" transpire (55).

Breakdown of the Chapters

This introduction reveals the frontier's significance as an aesthetic and postcolonial concern. The frontier, I have attempted to broadly illustrate, is a site of aesthetic enclosure and possibility, where historical encounters become genre, and genres' power-laden sedimentations subsist and are refused. In outlining this relationship, this review has turned to the frontier's significance across a spectrum of genres, emphasizing that aesthetic theory as a framework potentially absorbing the colonial frontier tacitly into its fold. It also posits the beach, Nootka Sound, the discovery narrative, the Australian "Bush," the western, and the blockade as sites where colonial aesthetics aggrandize and encode space, and anticolonial thinkers upend the mythology of those spaces. This project follows scholars conceiving of land as a material and imagined phenomenon in its turn to the (primarily) "Canadian frontier." Yet, while many of the frontier venues organizing this project fall within the colonially sanctioned borders of "Canada," some do not, affirming this project's location at the juncture of imagined space and real space, and investment in the sites where multiples epistemologies and fantasies of space converge. The venues of Canadian art, the Pacific Northwest, the feminist "wild," and the western, that organize this dissertation, share a signifying relevance to the "Canadian postcolonial imagination"—a relevance affirmed by their relation to Canadian anticolonial cultural production, or to popular culture, as a border-defying phenomenon. The dialectics that transpire here conjure "the frontier" as a sedimented assemblage, but also a malleable one, inviting undisciplined associations to transpire; a "third space," where postcolonialism and aesthetics coincide. Across each of these chapters' exploration of "frontier genres" and their reimagining, the frontier's significance as a site of simultaneous colonial constraint, postcolonial articulation, and decolonial possibility, is ongoing.

The first chapter of this project, "Shared Objects of Feeling: Property, the Picturesque, and Painted Canada" takes the genre of Canadian art as its subject. This chapter parses the relationship between the genre's nationalist, aesthetically mediated ethos and historical context. Canadian art, as a genre that innately reiterates the framing logics of the nation, offers a useful venue to theorize aesthetic theory's value of autonomy (in relation to the art object and its disinterested interpretation) alongside postcolonial theory's potential, unexpectedly shared stake in such a project. Aesthetic theory's investment in dissolving matters of context (or "the frame") and postcolonial theory's investment in denaturalizing colonial, national contexts such as "Canada," I propose, find solidarity in the shared desire to unsettle the bearing of nationalism on Canadian art's interpretation. This potential kinship informs this chapter's proceedings. The former of this chapter seeks to illustrate the imbrications of Canadian art's nationalist sense (or, to use Sara Ahmed's language, collective feeling) and its historical-economic conditions—as

analysis that situates itself through correlating the ascent of prolific Canadian artists (such as Emily Carr and The Group of Seven) to the industrial, institutional, and economic ventures of Canadian nation-making, itself. If the former half of this chapter undertakes critical analysis inspired by postcolonial and aesthetic theory's shared wariness of "Canadian" context, the latter half considers horizons where these discipline's shared stakes in aesthetic autonomy, potentially, converge. Here, I turn to the work of contemporary visual artists, Kent Monkman and Sonny Assu—two artists taking "Canadian art" as their subversive, referential subject. By reconfiguring the work of the Group of Seven (Monkman) and Emily Carr' (Assu) both artists illuminate Canadian art's innate attachment to the ideological and political messaging of the colonial frontier and simultaneously reconfigure this messaging through scenes of Indigenous rights, title, and futurity. Assu and Monkman hence invite viewers to recognize a postcolonial struggle over nation through, solely, the visual cues of disassembling and exposure.

The shared horizons of aesthetic and postcolonial concern guide the second chapter of this project, "Discovery Heroes, Eco-Heroes, and the Environmentalist Frontier of the Pacific Northwest." This chapter extends this study of genre, its power-laden nature and subversive potential, to a regional study. While the compatibility between genre theory and geographic space is, perhaps, less intuitive than that between art and literary classification, this chapter emphasizes how regions (and the Pacific Northwest particularly) are likewise governed by hegemonic forms of storying and historically contingent, imagined generic conventions. This chapter explores the relationship between the region's historical encoding as a "last frontier" in the colonial imagination and today, its significance as a "last frontier" in environmentalist conservationist ideation, as at once different, and simultaneously continuous forces of settler claim to the region. While this vantage may seem precarious (particularly, given the dire state of old growth depletion on the west coast, and environmental crisis, generally) considering the storied continuities between early, colonial exploration of the region and the region's significance as an environmentalist hold-out, today, illustrates how narratives of landscape in the Pacific Northwest are utilized to advance (and obscure) the region's ongoing dynamics of colonial expansion and reterritorialization. The initial portion of this chapter undertakes this analysis of the genre of the "Pacific Northwest" through a comparative reading of James Cook's 1776 journey to Nootka Sound in *Voyages III* and John Vaillant's Governor General's award-winning nonfiction account of eco-terrorist, Grant Hadwin, *The Golden Spruce*. Particularly, this portion considers these texts' conjuring of the colonial "discovery hero" and contemporary "eco-hero"—figures, I propose, who shared relation to west coast forest reveal the role of literary landscape rendering in assuring the safe passage of settler-colonial ideology. Yet, if the continuities between these texts reveal how settler colonialism finds footing in stark generic tropes of coastal forest (and particularly, its conquest and protection), then this chapter's latter section reveals the political implications of the region's more ambivalent renderings. Turning to the poetics, theorizations, and visual art of Eve Tuck, Nora Dauenhauer, and Hazel Wilson, I consider these artist's varied dynamic dissolutions of the binary tropes of wild, uninhabited Pacific Northwest forest. In dissolving the human/nature distinction, as well as and landscape's surface/subsurface boundaries, the conceptions of landscape advanced by these thinkers impose a threshold, or, impasse, to the advancement of the nature/culture binary, and hence, necessitate interrogation of its role in upholding various forms of colonial fantasy.

Chapter 3, "Girls Gone Wild: Staking a Claim at the Ontario Wilderness Frontier" considers feminist claims to eastern Canadian forest. This section deploys a comparative reading of Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), Leanne Simpson's *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* (2020), and the 2021 Emmy-winning showtime feminist survival television

series, *Yellowjackets*. These texts' shared, varying representations of the (primarily) Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Cree territory of Ontario offer a generative framework to consider the region's ongoing imagining through shifting, frontier-oriented, feminist frameworks. As I propose, Moodie's early representations of Ontario illuminate critical maneuvers in early feminist settler literature that at once utilize the wilderness (or, as Moodie terms it, "the bush") to endorse the project of colonial expansion through white-settler feminist consciousness, specifically. The political-ideological maneuvers of Moodie's account are productively unearthed and illuminated in Simpson's response: Read relationally, Simpson's vision of this same site (returned from "bush" to its Anishinaabemowin word, "Noopiming") as comprised of animate, constellated, and symbiotic relations, comparatively reveals the monotony of Moodie's Ontario landscape. Through Simpson's frame, Moodie's landscapes are sites which, despite their wild and untamed aesthetics, reinforce rather than bear upon Moodie's ideological outlook. In the latter half, I trace Moodie and Simpson's negotiation into the popular feminist survival television genre. Turning to *Yellowjackets*, I consider how this show reiterates and self-consciously undoes feminism's anthropocentric desires by casting the forest (what the girls in the show just call "it") as an impediment to and glorification of settler desire, but also as an animate character in its own right. Through Moodie, Simpson, and the show's dialogue, I propose we might read feminism's perpetual uses, abuses, and kinships with land as a vital undercurrent of popular feminist storytelling and historical reckoning.

The final chapter, "North of the Western: A Genre's Archaeologies and New Frontiers" considers the frontier through the venue of the western, and namely, its traditional and revisionist tendencies. A genre regionally associated with the U.S., primarily manufactured in Hollywood, and closely bound to American ideologies of independence and nationalism, the western bears opportunity to consider the frontier's transnational significance, and hence, animation of cultural imperialism and border-defying, globalized storytelling. The western's placeless or ostensibly universal nature (as a broad, globally recognized genre) and simultaneous rootedness in the historical, economic, and material infrastructures of colonial expansion in the American west are this chapter's ultimate concern. As I propose, scholarship that has ceded the western to a form of "universal mythology" (Pippin 122)—while usefully elaborating the genre's ascent to global recognition and importantly, how these elevations necessitate a likening of the genre to American imperialism, itself—potentially overlook the western's close marriage with the material, situated work of colonial expansion and Indigenous dispossession. Simultaneously, I propose, postcolonial, historical-materialist critiques of the genre arguably fail to engage the western's universal magnitude, and thus, the potentially generative ways in which the genre's global reimagining and revisionism has productively elaborated its colonial constraints and decolonial horizons. In the latter half of this section, I turn to a comparative analysis of John Ford's 1956 classical western, *The Searchers*, and Inuk filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk's 2016 remake of Ford's film, *Malilgutit*. As I propose, Kunuk's techniques of estrangement—relocating Ford's film from Texas and Arizona to the Arctic and eradicating its central, overt theme of racial difference—necessitates a reckoning with the western's colonialism beyond its over-stated sightlines of land and race. In doing so, Kunuk advances a postcolonial-aesthetic interpretation of the western, attuned to how asymmetrical power-relations manifest not through overt racialized conflict and territorial acquisition and transgression, but the subtleties of filmmaking (camera angles, lighting, and soundscapes) and thus, composition, itself.

In dialogue, these chapters strive to illustrate the frontier's aesthetic politics, and in doing so, significance as a gauge on the postcolonial present. The frontier, this project proposes, is a signifying assemblage inviting new kinds of encounters between postcolonial and aesthetic

theory. A signifier of occupation and dispossession, and a recurring motif in storytelling, the frontier is situated at the juncture of postcolonial and aesthetic concern. In that regard, the frontier might compel a productive un-disciplining¹² of postcolonialism's general wariness of aesthetic theory (Ashcroft; Blocker; Young), or "panic of the visual" (Ramaswamy 5), and aesthetic theory's tendency to relegate its colonial history to mere footnotes and addenda, if considered at all. Contemporary media trends such as the "revival of cowboy movies"¹³ and "TV's survival boom"¹⁴ imply that while "the frontier" may be associated with histories of colonial geographic encroachment, it nonetheless persists as a site of affective-aesthetic animation, where the "event" of the frontier transpires in refracted ways. The western and survivalist television genres are some frontier venues, revealing how postcolonial histories of encroachment "become-genre" and colonialism "find[s] its genres of event," producing "affectively-invested zone[s] of expectations about the narrative shape a situation will take" (Berlant "Austerity" 2). This intimacy with genre, and the frontier's process of *becoming genre*, bears opportunity to examine the process by which ideas "get turned into lived and imaginary spaces...tied to geographic organization," up close (McKittrick 7). In animating postcolonial and stylistic concern, geopolitical and aesthetic matter, contemporary frontier representations provoke postcolonialism's concern for "the long line of continuity between the past and the present that has not been disrupted" and might engender new, aesthetically oriented approaches for contending with its endurance (Byrd *Transit of Empire* xiv).

¹² As Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* observes, "Despite knowing otherwise, we are often disciplined into thinking through and along lines that reinscribe. ... We must become undisciplined. The work we do requires new methods of research and teaching" (13). While Sharpe is writing in the context of Trans-Atlantic Slavery and the Black Diaspora, this description of "wake work," as an epistemological project bringing the aesthetic, historical, and systemic into relation, captures the wider merits of becoming "undisciplined" towards robust understandings of subjugation and resilience.

¹³ See Gruber, "The Revival of Cowboy Movies."

¹⁴ See Simillie, "TV's Survival Boom: A Consumer's Guide."

Chapter 1: Shared Objects of Feeling: Property, the Picturesque, and Painted Canada

In 2016, the AGO, in collaboration with art collector and entertainer Steve Martin, hosted its exhibition *The Idea of North*. The exhibit featured eighty paintings by Group of Seven founder, Lawren Harris (taken, in part, from the AGO's permanent collection), and travelled between Boston, Los Angeles, and Toronto. An official archive of Harris's images, the *Idea of North* presented a material collection of a single artist's work—produced, honed, and gathered over time—and, less formally, a sentimental archive of Canada, itself. These “scenes of a cold and empty northland, isolated peaks, and expanses of dark waters beyond barren shorelines,” the exhibition noted, “remain for many Canadians and non-Canadians the essential images of the country.”¹⁵ CBC affirmed these sentiments: “for their presentation of the country's rugged northern landscape” Alice Hopton reviewed, “Group of Seven Paintings are front and center in the hearts and minds of Canadians.” Alongside affirming the significance of Harris' work to the genre of “Canadian art,” *The Idea of North* thus animated the role images play within nationhood, generally. As many reviews of the exhibition implied, where, precisely, the aesthetic significance of Harris's particular pieces ended and their national significance began was unclear; what *was* apparent was that walking the halls of the AGO in 2016 brought an undeniable sense of *Canadianness*. As *Toronto Star* art critic Murray Whyte wrote, perhaps the most effective quality of the exhibit was its commitment to imagery beyond Harris and the Group of Seven's typical scenes of empty wilderness (and their associations with colonial nationalist mythmaking). Rather, the exhibit's inclusion of themes of industrialization and urban renewal inspired dynamic reflection; these scenes not only revealed the complex—often fraught—nature of Canadian urbanization and development but challenged viewer's own “selective view” of Harris and “culturally engrained privileging of [his] wilderness scenes above all else.” Rather than merely showcasing the landscapes for which the Group of Seven are widely known, *The Idea of North*, Whyte proposed, necessitated viewers bear witness to the “damning tale” of Canadian national development—a tale wherein poverty and gentrification are perceptible in the frame. As Whyte appraised: a “Comedian may have introduced America to Lawren Harris, but the real impact for us is a chance to better know ourselves.”

The Idea of North, as it affirms the Group of Seven's “fundamentally Canadian” stature (Cimerallo), is one of many exhibits animating the significance of art objects and their surrounding archives to the “territorial and social” (Anderson 2), “imagined political community” that is the nation (6). Nations, Benedict Anderson argues, are imagined, and yet derive their “profound emotional legitimacy” (4) and “deep horizontal comradeship” (7) from material objects bearing the “image of their communion” (6). The nation, Sara Ahmed affirms, is a “shared object of feeling,” whose perceived legitimacy depends on perceived collective experience (a model Ahmed likens to “crowd psychology,” wherein “the individual gets drawn into the crowd by feeling the crowd's feelings as its own” [9]). If this is the case, exhibits such as the *Idea of North* affirm art's role in producing a national collective sense, and simultaneously, the nation's role in producing a collective sense of art. Nationalism does the work of “invent[ing] nations where they do not exist” and thus relies upon material, cultural conduits, or focal points, to not only emotionally legitimize its invention but render it recognizably legible to the masses [Anderson 6]). Yet, aside from affirming the significance of a figure such as Harris to the

¹⁵ As taken from the Hammer Museum's website's description of its 2015-2016 exhibit, “The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris.”

invention of “Canada” and its cultural objects, *The Idea of North* would affirm that the exclusions upon which “the nation” invariably relies. As Anderson notes, a nation’s perceived collectivity depends on its exclusions, perceived borders, and frontiers: nations are invariably “limited because even the largest of them ... has finite, if elastic, boundaries” (Anderson 7). The production of the nation, as a shared object of feeling and site of emotional investment hence relies, as Ahmed proceeds to elaborate, on the establishment of insiders and outsiders. The construction of a collective, central “‘you’ ... as the legitimate subject of the nation” depends on the simultaneous “attributing ‘others’” (Ahmed 1). *The Idea of North* illuminated these dynamics of national exclusivity as well. As less affirmative reviews of the exhibit proposed, more than evoking a sense of national unity, *The Idea of North* evoked the frictions of “Canada” as a nation inherently comprised of colonial difference. If *The Idea of North*’s curation reiterated the Group of Seven’s already inflated regionalism to a “point of saturation” (Dooley) some argued it was merely a reflection of colonial “Canada,” itself. David Murray Caoimhe’s review, “Whose Idea of North?” (and its rhetorical emphasis on colonial possession) elaborated such, asserting that the exhibit maintained clear projections of a national “you” and its “attributed others”: Given the “role that the Group of Seven [and Harris] played in promoting the idea of the Canadian landscape as terra nullius” Caoimhe argues, the exhibit’s “omission of Indigenous art from the archive” was at once “troubling” and unsurprising (Caoimhe). The Group of Seven, Caoimhe writes, may be a “shorthand for Canada” but importantly, was “designed to become a shorthand.” As suggested, the AGO’s exhibit reflects the ordinary maintenance of that design, revealing the curatorial principals through which national aesthetics and colonial desire converge.

Today, to dispute that “Group of Seven Painters and Emily Carr ... assume a very important role” in Canadian art and function, to some degree, as shorthands for the nation itself is likely a vain endeavour (Coates 140). The mass print reproductions of their work and their status as permanent collections in the country’s major galleries affirm their longstanding national value. Yet, given that “Indigenous nations are enframed by settler states that call themselves nations, and appear to have a monopoly on institutional and military power” (Simpson 10), questioning the terms by which “Canada,” as an object of feeling, is designed and legitimized *through* art, is a worthwhile task. Caoimhe’s affirmation of the Group’s relationship to colonial nationhood is not isolated; as Matteo Cimerallo recently proposed, “Let’s disassemble the Group of Seven’s colonial mythmaking.” Yet, Caoimhe’s attention to the parallels between Harris’ compositional tendencies and the AGO’s curatorial practices inspires robust methods for thinking through the role of art, and aesthetic vernaculars, in sentimentalizing colonial institutional, military, and national power. As Ahmed asserts, nationalism’s sense of collective emotion relies on cultural objects (such as paintings) bearing the “attribution of significance” (6). Yet, while such “objects are often read as the cause of emotions” our contact with such objects rather relies on the “histories that come before that subject” which then shape our “orientation toward them” (6). As affirmative reviews such as Whyte’s suggest, the *Idea of North* initiates a sense of national spirit; Canadianness (and its critical engagement), this mode of review suggests, emerges as a *natural* by-product of Harris’s work. Yet, in the spirit of Ahmed’s assertions, Caoimhe’s review invites a more thorough consideration of the exhibit’s affects and their directionality, emphasizing not to the causal nature of Harris’s aesthetics, but the historical and economic precedents underlying their emotional provocations. Caoimhe’s review thus bears more robust implications for reckoning with the emotion-laden category of national art—encouraging engagement beyond mere aesthetic appraisal. Indeed, as Eunsong Kim observes, the vestiges of traditional aesthetic theory—with its privileging of decontextualized and politically disinterested art—pervade contemporary culture; today, to consider the “function of finance in the art world” is perceived as

“something that takes away from art appreciation” (2). This privileging exists despite art “archives [functioning as] spaces that have been delegated as environmental where aesthetics can be propertized” (3). It is thus only in “directly talking about money, labor, and our relationships with(in) institutions [that we might] clarify the mystification process predicated upon culture” (Kim 4). Moreover, it is only in considering the material infrastructures of art that we can “understand the politics carried forth as sacred aesthetic expression, and to repatriate these havens in their entirety” (xi). As Caoimhe’s review suggests, rather than obscuring these relationships, Harris’s work glimpses the relationship between colonial systems of propertization and aesthetic experience. National art archives, endowed with the nation’s colonial vestiges and yet obscuring those vestiges through the aesthetic sentiment, provide potentially rich space to consider how, and where, aesthetics and nation-building projects converge.

Postcolonial studies, with its trained attention on the effects of colonial institutional and military power, offers a framework to pursue such a proposition. Given that “no history of modern visuality can ignore the constitutive fact of empire” and that a “critique of visual culture is only possible if we think Europe and its (former) colonies together within the same field of inquiry,” art deemed “fundamentally Canadian” provokes the “invariable imbalances of power, between (metropole and colony) shaping postcolonial concern” (Ramansay 12). As my following section, “Building Permanent Collection: Settler Colonialism and the Canadian image” seeks to reveal, “Canadian images”—namely, those generated by The Group of Seven and Emily Carr—are tethered to more ongoing structures of European expansion; there is a parallel relationship between the emergence of painted “Canadian” landscape aesthetics and the emergence of the nation, as they mutually function as extensions and expressions of commonwealth empire. These relationships that have been parsed through terms like “pictorial colonialism” (Bear Nichols) or “empires of vision” (Ramasamy)—phrases that seek to articulate the relationships between aesthetics, processes of settler propertization, and colonialism itself. Engaging the tropes and pre-eminent names of “Canadian art” through this framework thus necessitates a reckoning with the imbrications of the aesthetics expressions that evoke a sense of Canadianness and the structural conditions of Canada. If indeed art’s autonomy (and, the autonomy of aesthetic experience) dictates the valuing of art appreciation, today—if, indeed, considering the “function of finance in the art world” is perceived as “something that takes away from art appreciation” today (Kim 2)—then artists such as The Group of Seven and Emily Carr, in their explicit ties to national finance, institutions, and (less explicitly) military power necessitate more ambivalent, less definitive forms of aesthetic appreciation. In other words, The Group of Seven and Carr, in various ways, offer venues to explore how the collective feelings attributed to nationalism (compelled, circulated, and mediated through art) are imbricated with economic and industrial colonial processes. It is, I propose, in reading their distinctly “Canadian aesthetics” that we might consider how art “does not move away from possessive materialism but further cements it through aestheticization of property” (Kim 3).

Simultaneously, putting postcolonial frames onto Canadian art, perhaps counterintuitively, returns interpretation to the potentially autonomous and ostensibly spontaneous nature of aesthetic experience. J. Maggio’s note of caution—“when art is valued for its ability to ‘reveal’ and aesthetics is justified via the political, politics, and art, fail by confusing the proper role of both” (353)—could well be levied at the postcolonial discipline’s “panic of the

visual”¹⁶ (Jay and Ramaswamy 5) and insistence on the political context of the aesthetic. Yet, Maggio’s assertion has ambiguous implications when cast in relation to the category of “national art” particularly—a category which inherently prefaces its aesthetic concerns with the overtly political concerns of the nation. As this chapter proposes, postcolonialism’s anticolonial and potentially antinationalist sentiments, while elucidating the colonial and historical conditions of the archive also, potentially, enable art’s autonomy by deconstructing the framing conceit of “Canadian” in the first place. In other words, it is perhaps *through* reckoning with the national desire that encompasses the painting (in an effort to politically disassemble that desire) that possibilities for engaging the painting outside of its nationalist bent, and in the spirit of aesthetic autonomy, are glimpsed. In the following section, “Desiring Images/Desiring Archives,” I locate these possibilities in aesthetic and postcolonial theory’s shared concern for the power-laden nature of the archive. Scholarship emerging from the postcolonial tradition and scholarship invested in the aesthetic autonomy of the work of art, I suggest, share a mutual concern for the archive’s (or frame’s) invariable inflection for the autonomy of the subject or object. Specifically, postcolonial concern for subaltern voice amongst power-laden, colonial, and imperial regimes of representation and recognition, I suggest, finds resonance in philosophical concerns for the autonomy of the art object amidst the archive’s framing and context. Investments in the subaltern’s autonomous voice and the art object’s aesthetic autonomy, I propose, mark a potential, shared horizon of these theoretical frameworks.

In the final section of this chapter, I illustrate these shared horizons in an exploration of visual art itself. Here, I turn to two contemporary artists, Ligwilda'xw mixed media artist Sonny Assu and Cree painter Kent Monkman, both of whose works, in various ways, visualize a simultaneous investment in the constraints of the archive (and particularly, the “Canadian art archive” and ideas of Canadian national aesthetics) and in advancing forms of aesthetic recognition beyond, outside, and autonomous from this context. Both Assu’s and Monkman’s work exercises a subversive relation to the generic expectations of “Canadian art.” In the case of Assu, this consists of directly manipulating and superimposing images and commentary onto pre-eminent Canadian paintings (such as those by Emily Carr). In the case of Monkman, this consists of mimicking and manipulating famous Canadian paintings (such as those by Tom Thompson and the Group of Seven) and more generally, referentially deploying the techniques of classical landscape painting throughout his politically subversive corpus. Both artists, hence, utilize the generic expectations of the Canadian art canon to advance an anti-nationalist and anti-colonial reckoning, offering a multilayered imagery bearing a high sense of contrast, juxtaposition, and multiple, conflicting desires. Within Assu and Monkman’s archives, viewers are prompted to

¹⁶ In elucidating the “panic of the visual in (post)colonial studies” Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy turn to a discussion of Edward Said’s 1998 interview with WJT Mitchell, “The Panic of the Visual: A Conversation with Edward W Said” (from *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power*). In the interview, Said reflects on his experience of being “‘tongue-tied’” when asked about pictures, admitting that ‘just to think about the visual arts generally sends [him] into a panic.’” This, they note, “is an ironic confession from a scholar whose work has exerted enormous influence on those who think and write at the intersection of imperialism, postcolonialism, and visuality.” Importantly, Said’s use of the phrase, they suggest, signals a disciplined response to the “disorderly, frequently unpredictable, and occasionally incoherent world of images” and specifically, their “capacity to disrupt ... the certitudes of the written word” (5).

reckon with the painting as not sites of unified, national desire (or “shared objects of feeling”) but sites of multiple desires, whose apparent sense of contrast, discord, and friction, disrupts ideas of national collectivity by orienting to the political, circumstantial nature of aesthetic perspective. Monkman and Assu invite viewers to observe dissonance in the archive and, in doing so, perceive the archive as not a reiteration of “Canada” but a frontier space of ongoing encounter and negotiation, where zones of aesthetic-political expectations are perpetually territorialized, established, disrupted, and reimagined.

Exhibition Note: Desiring Images/Desiring Archives

The question of a picture’s autonomy has shaped various debates of the so-called pictorial turn. From the Frankfurt School’s concept of the “culture industry” and the practice of reading images as conduits for profit and propaganda, to Roland Barthes’ unearthing of an images’ mythological subtext, the pictorial has been approximated using semiotic and literary methods. The image’s innate relation to speech has been more explicitly interrogated by thinkers such as Ferdinand de Saussure, whose concept of the “sound image” rendered a symbiotic relationship between speech and images, or Jacques Derrida, whose identification of the image’s power to dissolve language into mere traces comprehended the negotiation and, at times, struggle between text-centric and visual mediums. As Derrida’s question, “Does speech act theory have its counterpart in painting? Does it know its way around painting?” suggests, the presumptions of speech, and its somewhat ubiquitous claim to legibility, is disoriented in the face of images (4); “you can always try to translate,” he writes, “but untranslatable it remains” (5). This perpetually frustrated tendency to utilize text and speech as a referent within pictorial understanding would compel WJT Mitchell to assert, “This [very] anxiety, this need to defend ‘our speech’ against ‘the visual’ is...a sure sign that the pictorial turn is taking place” (Mitchell). In a 1996 essay, Mitchell would seek to transcend this problem by advancing not a text but visual-oriented methodology for pictorial engagement. As Mitchell argued, the autonomous power of images (that is, their ability to “speak” on their own terms) was an ever-present, yet elusive, reality within the cultural lexicon: “every advertising executive knows that some images ... seem to have a surprising capacity to generate new directions and surprising twists in an ad campaign” (73). Yet, despite culture’s ongoing reinforcement and affirmation of the image’s ability to “act” autonomously, the interpretation of images, Mitchell argued, nonetheless relied on text-oriented models of subtext, context, and authorship. This tendency, Mitchell proposed, reinforced a relation to the pictorial wherein images, consequently, were readily interpreted not as autonomous, but conduits for underlying political intent—not actors, but vessels, whose meaning was derived through techniques of “critical exposure...of [oftentimes presumed underlying]...nefarious power” (74). In at-once acknowledging the image’s “surprising capacity” to produce affect (as assured through advertising) and yet reducing that sensation to matters of authorial intent, Mitchell proposed, prevailing methods of engaging the pictorial remained stagnated as “premodern attitudes” that were at once “easy and ineffectual” and “radically unsatisfactory” (74). Avoiding these entrapments and developing renewed approaches to pictorial engagement hence meant reassessing the nature of visual interpretation itself. Rather than mobilizing the desire to decode images, theorists of the pictorial, Mitchell proposed, ought to “shift the location of desire to the images themselves” (72)—a transition that depended on asking an admittedly “bizarre and unusual question”: “what do pictures really want?” (72).

Mitchell’s question is straightforward yet contains multitudes. In centering the image’s autonomous desires, Mitchell’s question, in one sense, intervenes into the “hegemony of textualism” (Conquergood 147) and its hindering of diverse interpretive methods of engagement

or the “embrace of difference ways of knowing” (146). Visual, sound, and performance studies scholars have identified the correlation between logocentric models, systems of domination, and streamlined interpretive modes (as Dwight Conquergood argues, the notion that “all the world is a text” simultaneously reinforces text-oriented models of interpretation and the “regulatory powers of state” [147]). Mitchell’s assertion that (as Jacques Rancière writes) the “world of images is not a world of genetically coded messages” but “a living tissue” (126) inspires circumvention of text-centric approaches to interpretation. To ask what “pictures really want” orients away from matters of subtext and context (and, their invariable recall of authorship) and towards the affective, aesthetic, and spontaneous potential of the image’s self-containment. Simultaneously, Mitchell’s question begets acknowledgement of the power of text-centric impulses themselves; indeed, Mitchell writes, amidst the prevailing impulse to read images as mere conduits and vessels, “Pictures may not be powerless, but they are a lot weaker than we think” (74). Conquergood has elaborated this relationship: the notion that “all the world is a text” (147) has “disqualified and repressed other ways of knowing that are rooted in embodied experience” (146). It is this context that likely compels Mitchell to harness the language of postcolonial and subaltern studies. Indeed, Mitchell writes, to ask pictures—a disempowered medium within the cultural lexicon—“what they really want” is to engage a “subaltern model of the picture”—one that deliberately shifts the terms of engagement “from power to desire, from the model of the dominant power to be opposed, to the model of the subaltern to interrogated or (better) to be invited to speak” (74). It is an intuitive reference; Gayatri Spivak’s seminal work on subaltern voice and agency voices a similar concern. The language of the subaltern, Spivak has argued, is untranslatable into the elite language of academic thought and western philosophy. The effort to hear, and amplify the subaltern, in such a context, Spivak argues, belies the further subjugation of the subaltern as they are forced to be represented not on their own terms but those power-laden terms of western interest.

Simultaneously, in likening the state of the pictorial to that of the subaltern, Mitchell invokes the power-laden and potentially fraught implications of recognizing liveliness (or, desire) in the first place. That Mitchell configures his appeal to the pictorial as somewhat charitable—an invitation to speak granted to the pictorial, the weaker of mediums—invokes the concerns of representation, particularly fielded by subaltern studies. As Spivak has cautioned, more than producing authentic subaltern voice, the invitation for the subaltern to speak (or, in Spivak’s work, be represented by western interests) yields insight into the power-laden dynamics of interpreting and representing the Other. These concerns arguably echo forth in Jacques Rancière’s response to Mitchell’s work. Given that a picture’s liveliness depends on viewer-recognition (and recognition in inherently a power-laden relationship), we might think of pictures in Mitchell’s framing as “a return of the repressed” (126). The image, Rancière notes, “is living precisely because it lacks life, because it needs us in order to be the organism of which it is still but the emaciated shadow” (126). Given these terms, and the ways in which recognizing pictorial liveliness invariably implicates the location of the viewer, the better question for the pictorial, Rancière suggests, is “do pictures really want to live?” (124). If anything, such debates affirm, as Rancière suggests, that parsing pictorial autonomy is a venture of “metaphysical exhaustion” (Rancière [125]).

It is, perhaps, the prospect of metaphysical exhaustion that compels approaches to pictorial autonomy that seek to, alternatively, re-emphasize the frame and archive. In the *Truth of Painting*, Jacques Derrida offers one means for avoiding the entrapment identified by Rancière by asserting the picture’s autonomy as contingent on its outside. For Derrida, the matter of the frame (or, the matter of context, or the surrounding archive) precedes the possibility of pictorial

autonomy. The frame, Derrida suggests, not only engulfs the painting, but directs its interpretation. Interrogating the relationship between the picture and the frame, therefore, is a prerequisite to engaging the notion of pictorial autonomy or pictorial *desire* at all. As Derrida cautions, “discourses on painting are perhaps destined to reproduce the limit which constitutes them, what they do and whatever they say: there is for them an inside and an outside of a work, as soon as there is a work” (*Painting* 11). For Derrida, Rosemary Hawkins identifies, considering the picture’s contingency on its outside context is an entry point into his ultimate concern for the inseparability of content and idiom. Indeed, Derrida’s thinking proves useful not only in unsettling the perhaps overly idealized possibility of aesthetic autonomy but illuminating how a phrase such as “Canadian art,” specifically, animates the potential impossibility of separating a painting from its frame. Julietta Singh’s work on desire, especially the production of desire through archives, potentially brings further specificity to this relationship. If, for Derrida, discourses on painting tacitly reproduce the painting’s wider context, then the mediation of desire—from wider archival contexts to singular contexts—is, for Singh, the site of transference between broader context (or archive) and object (or painting). As Singh argues, “There are at least two ways to understand the emergence of a desire”; one is through “a moment, when something shifts and the way you act and react, the way you turn things over, is fundamentally altered” and the other is through “accrual, how over time and repetition our histories draw us toward certain practices and ways of feeling and wanting” (19 *No Archive*). Desire produced by the archive, while “in reality, a long accrual,” Singh notes, tends to manifest as ostensibly spontaneous response, and thus, to be “imagine[d] ... as a single, solitary moment” (19).

In dialogue, Derrida and Singh lay the groundwork for the hefty task of interpreting Canadian art. If Canadian art is, perhaps, “destined to reproduce the limit which constitutes [it]”—namely, the nationalist imaginary it espouses—then exploring the nationalist parameters of the genre is worthwhile pursuit (Derrida 11). Similarly, if Canadian art tends to evoke Canadianness in a “single, solitary moment,” it is worth considering the “long accrual” and “histories [which] draw us toward certain ... ways of feeling and wanting” underlying such evocations (Singh 19). Ahmed has theorized the archive’s convergence of histories of accrual and sense of spontaneity through the quality of “stickiness”—a framework that proves useful, here. While archival development, or the process wherein “different ‘figures’ [or objects] get stuck together” through association (*Cultural Politics* 13), Ahmed argues, often presents as a natural union between the interpreter’s subjectivity (or desired associations) and externality, that “sticking is [actually] dependent on past histories of association that often ‘work’ through concealment” (13). As Ahmed writes, an “archive is an effect of multiple forms of contact, including institutional forms of contact...as well as everyday forms of contact” (14); these contacts produce “affective economies where feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation” (8). In the spirit of Ahmed’s framework, what follows is a broad attempt to map some of the circulations, institutional and everyday contacts underlying the predominant associations of “Canadian art.” Namely, of interest are the economic and historical conditions undergirding the “Group of Seven Painters and Emily Carr’s...very important role” in Canadian art in the present (Coates 140). Such is an effort to think through the genre’s contemporary apparentness and histories, and thus, the role of such figures, to Canadian art’s “collective [sense of] feeling” (Ahmed 5).

Atrium: “Building Permanent Collections: Settler Colonialism and the Canadian Image”

There is no shortage of scholarship on the painted Canadian image. The genre has been analyzed for its European inheritances (McKay) and simultaneous significance in defining an emerging

Canadian nationalism centered largely on defining depictions of wilderness (McKay; Brock; Hunt; Glickman). Indeed, that wilderness is central to Canadian art, is, perhaps, the genre's unequivocal aspect: The nation's enduring affinity with harsh landscapes (McGregor) recalls the particular indelibility of wilderness to Canadian art (Moray). Also central to scholarship on the genre is the indelibility of specific artists towards this motif. Due to the efforts of the Group of Seven, "the northern wilderness landscape ... are [seen as] images of national patrimony" (Moray 43); alternatively, "Carr's paintings [of Coast Salish life] ... produced an allegorical national landscape" in service to the nation's postcolonial reckoning (Linsley). Here, rather than further analyze Emily Carr and the Group of Seven's paintings—work that has been extensively undertaken—this section utilizes such scholarship towards a broader analysis of these artist's roles within the wider economic, institutional, industrial, and cultural work of colonial nation-making, and particularly, the significance of frontier motifs and ideology within that process. As this section proposes, the frontier has persistently functioned as a vital motif of Canadian art and its preeminent figures. For the Group of Seven, the frontier is evident in the threshold between the painter and the untapped wilderness portrayed (a wilderness so typically stark and uninhabited, Richard Brock suggests, it configured painters, such as Thompson, as stand-ins for masculine explorers, sojourning the path of civilization forward). Alternatively, scholars have argued, Emily Carr's relationship to the frontier is more ambiguous: Carr's inclusions of Indigeneity in the frame, and her self-positioning with a cultural frontier-zone between Coast Salish and settler communities, advanced a "comfortable cultural icon[ography]" (Moray 43) towards the colonial nation's postcolonial reckoning. Importantly, the Group and Carr's shared rendering of "Canada" as a contact zone—between artist and uninhabited wilderness, or artist and Indigenous peoples—offered apt accompaniment to the wider nationalist developments. Parsing the ways in which the Group and Carr's paintings, hence, sit on a longer scheme of settler colonial development and intent, mediated both through Canadian visual cultures and policy, invites a wider reckoning with the political nature of Canadian art, today. As I propose in the final section of this chapter, reading The Group and Carr within a wider context of settler colonial frontier representations, offers foundational insight into these artists' more recent, subversive uptake in contemporary art's anti-nationalist and anticolonial expressions.

Unsurprisingly, some of the most concise articulations of Canadian landscape aesthetics emphasize the genre's European allegiances. As Susan Glickman's study of the relationship between traditional landscape painting and Canadian poetry proposes, the Canadian landscape, as represented in paintings and poetry, coalesces around European aesthetic principles. In landscape-oriented art, language of the sublime (particularly, as advanced by Immanuel Kant) accompanied representations of "tumult, vastness, and obscurity, were usually northern or alpine, or occasionally coastal" (10). Alternatively, William Gilpin's theory of the picturesque, as a mediation between the sublime and the beautiful, functions as a travelling composition, whose sojourn across the Atlantic and the Americas mirrors European expansion, itself. Once representing Britain's Lake District in Wordsworth's poems, the picturesque, Glickman outlines, would soon find its way into early Canadian poetry, such as Thomas Cary's 1789 "Abram's Plains." Glickman's study, which largely centers on poetry, implicates the study of Canadian paintings; poetics of the early settlement era "organized according to techniques of [European] painterly composition" (9). This is a relationship reinforced by Marilyn Jay McKay, though through attention to Canadian landscape paintings, specifically. As McKay argues, the tendency to read Canadian landscape painting as a "nationalistic quest to define a particularly Canadian sensibility" (4) (particularly in late 20th century scholarship) overlooks Europe's fundamental bearing on Canadian art, and notably, the fact that "most artists who represented the Canadian

landscape made use of contemporary western modes of landscape representation as well as motifs that had long been part of western culture” (5). McKay’s genealogy of this relationship extends beyond the Romantics to consider the nomadic, Arcadian, Edenic, and sedentary aesthetic tropes animate in the Canadian settler art archive. As it reveals, the emerging genre of the Canadian painted landscape is best understood as not a “new” vernacular of emerging, colonial nationalism, but a set of aesthetic inheritances, coalescing in newfound “Canadian” identity. Indeed, McKay notes, “Canadian art” sits at the intersections of “Old” and “New World” tropes and aesthetic and geopolitical dynamics: “16th century French art-map makers relied on symbolic iconographies of the “unknown” aligned with the ancient Greeks and Romans; 17th century French artists represented “noble savages” in the spirit of Greco-Roman sculptures; early 19th century British artists maintained a “formulaic composition” akin to 17th century Europe, and patronized the aesthetic modes of the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque, outlined by 18th century British theorists” (5).

Importantly, Canada’s 18th and 19th Euro-settler landscape art, and emerging sense of a painted national identity, was didactic. Accompanying the production of paintings was the production of rhetoric; if painting’s aestheticized relationships to European composition, this relationship was further enshrined through art criticism—an emerging field of discourse codifying this relationship: “when late nineteenth-and twentieth century English Canadian art critics compared farmland on the Canadian prairies to the establishment of Rome by the Trojan hero Aeneas, or the Canadian wilderness to ‘a new Olympus,’ they believed their readers would make the right connections” (McKay 5). As McKay’s language suggests, through the genre of art criticism, Canadian landscape aesthetics, as sites of subjective ambiguity, were crystallized as sites of epistemological value. Through the guidance of art criticism, ordinary viewers, McKay notes, were encouraged to source and locate visual cues—cues which rewarded sightlines attuned to European aesthetic vestiges and principals. The work of art criticism, hence, proves a significant apparatus within the establishment of what Ramansy deems “empires of vision”: the “range of pictorial practices, image-making technologies, and vision-oriented subjectivities that have been cultivated, desired, and dispersed within the contexts of modern empire formation and decolonization” (1). Indeed, such relationships—akin, in many ways, to Edward Said’s theorizing of art’s role in propagating the “pleasures of imperialism” (Said 132)—were integral to the broader, global work of empire-building and its ordinary, affective zones of investment. Yet, these aesthetic modes had more specific relationships to Canadian settler colonial formations, too. As D.M.R. Bentley argues, European aesthetic theory provided vernaculars by which to codify settlement processes as aesthetic, pleasurable, and even beautiful undertakings. As Bentley describes, the “romantic aesthetics of settlement in 19th century Canada” rendered the material processes of settlement (such as mass deforestation) through the language of the sublime in early Canadian literature. In this relationship, he proposes, we might recognize colonial anthropocentrism, expansion, and possession were encoded, reframed, and imbued with affective attachment, through aesthetic attribution.

In dialogue, Glickman, McKay, and Bentley, glimpse the foundational circumstances wherein art criticism and “discourses on [Canadian art] are perhaps destined to reproduce the limit which constitutes them”—namely, the genre’s ties to the commonwealth (Derrida 11). Less explicitly, their scholarship indicates how gradual processes of colonial accumulation undergird ostensibly spontaneous experiences of feeling and aesthetic responsiveness. Bentley’s work, as it yokes the structural pursuits of colonial land acquisition and romantic aesthetics, glimpses how the subjective, aesthetic, and affective responses to Canadian art are tethered to the material work of colonial expansion. European imaging practices are hence notable when engaging the art of

“postcolonial Canada.” Indeed, the “separation of topographical and ideal landscape is never really possible, [and that] choosing a particular landscape to describe and a vantage point from which to view it implies an ideological agenda, conscious or not” (Glickman 7). Early settler Canadian art was not separate from, but emerged alongside, colonial investments. The relationship between art and colonial investment is particularly magnified in the case of real estate development. Ross Barrett’s work is significant in drawing attention to the intermingling of aesthetic forms and emerging real estate economies.¹⁷ Romantic landscape painting in the 18th and 19th century was a significant source of what Barrett terms “speculative landscapes”—scenes of generally rural and raw land that served as a vital reference for development prospectors. This relationship enabled artists to “involve themselves in every aspect of the real estate economy” (1) by producing significant referential images for the commodification of land: “Painting was a significant and persistent inquisitor of the crystallizing real estate economy, a cultural form that reckoned with that system in every stage of its development and tapped into the concerns that the business provoked as it spread into the continent’s borderlands and reconfigured established communities in ever more intensely remunerative fashion” (4).

Bentley’s correlation between Romantic landscape paintings and colonial prospecting identifies art’s complicity in the material processes of land acquisition and dispossession. Given the safeguarded separation between aesthetic and financial matters (Kim), Bentley’s framework bears a generative, international thrust. Indeed, Bentley’s assertions orient to other scholarship, more explicitly outlining the complicity of colonial landscape painting in the displacements, population, and demographic shifts of Indigenous communities. Andrea Bear Nichols’ work, for example, identifies the role of painting in mediating the colonial dynamics facing eastern-Canadian Indigenous communities, specifically the Maliseets, and their ancestral homelands along the St. John River, New Brunswick. As Nichols outlines, following the American Revolution there was an influx of American Loyalists (approximately 15,000) to the region—an abrupt population increase resulting in the vast depletion of local fish and game—and between the 1790s to the 1850s, a rapid decline in Maliseet presence, due to ensuing poverty and disease. Yet settler art at the turn of the 19th century, Nichols notes, remained staunchly committed to “keeping with the colonial project of clearing the wilderness, settling the land, and establishing a new civil authority” (29) and, hence, its modes relied on techniques of obfuscation. In contrast to the realities—depicting immense strain on resources and liveability, “Maliseets would ... be represented as consistently healthy and well-dressed”—depictions that ultimately sought to “convey the idea of supposedly cordial and successful colonization” (29). These picturesque “artistic misrepresentations,” Nichols argues, actively obscured the “ugly realities of suffering and hardship experience by Indigenous peoples at the hands of settler society” (29) and as such, were significant tools in simultaneously obscuring the “dispossession and displacement of Maliseets” in settler consciousness and materially advancing colonial ambitions (29).

These regional histories reflect the broader dynamics between violence and art, and particularly colonial expansion and picturesque aesthetics comprising Canada’s legacy of “pictorial colonialism” (Nichols 72). As Erin Morton succinctly asserts: “British colonizers clearing lands and British colonizer artists clearing canvasses were one and the same, and both processes derived from tactical military colonial violence” [15]). Yet, the picturesque accompanied more diverse and contemporary developments in settler Canadian art, too.

¹⁷ Barrett’s study takes the U.S. as its regional focus, however, could be applied to the Canadian context.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the compositional form found traction with the genre's depictions of industrial development. At the turn of the 20th century, shifting provincial borders brought the reallocation of land. In Ontario particularly, the acquisition of formerly federal land tracts (in 1889 and again in 1912) saw the province's assumption of the Precambrian Shield—a resource rich region, laden with iron, ore, copper, nickel, gold, and silver. As a result, the region became a site of rapidly accelerated industrial development. In this context, some of Canada's most prolific artists (and namely, the Group) would emerge as conduits for mediating this shift to extractivist industrialization, and importantly, promoting it to the public through commissions. These artistic representations of burgeoning extractivist industries and shifting landscape would, likewise, rely on a set of misrepresentations of both the region and its industrialization. As Paul Walton argues, tropes of natural plenitude would pervade these paintings—a compositional tendency that actively obscured the devastations of clear-cut logging and industrial complexes, and thus visually encouraged a “feverish mood of optimism” regarding “what seemed the prospect of almost unlimited growth and prosperity based on the natural resource of their province” (Walton 142). As Walton proposes, the use of picturesque conventions, blending “sublime panoramas, beautiful valleys, and picturesque details” with “modernist, ‘poster-esque’ style that ... evolved within the cultural processes of industrialized urban life” (143) introduced new, significant “patterns of form and feeling” to the Canadian public—patterns inclined to source console in the “myth about co-operative interdependence between cities and the health-preserving influence of nature” (143). Rather than solely advancing impressionistic images of wilderness, the Group's archive would hence prove significant in affirming the capacity of wilderness tropes to mediate industrial processes.

The Group of Seven, thus, would prove particularly significant to the Canadian painted archive of industrialization. As Rosemary Donegan argues, in contrast to the Group's popular association with scenes of uninhabited wilderness, and hence, “anti-modernism,” the Group's depictions of Ontario's industrial processes (particularly, at Copper Cliff and the Sudbury Basin) were fundamental in influencing Canada's “industrial imagination” (150). These landscapes, while rare in the Group's broader archive, functioned, Dawson argues, like “new forms of propaganda and advertising” (149). These images pointed to “Canada's industrial future” (149) and cultivated a spirit of public investment as well as anticipated “social and cultural problems that have yet to be resolved” (151). Yet, perhaps most significantly, the Group's aestheticization of Canada's extractivist, industrial economies illuminate the potentially propagandic nature of art. Indeed, if aesthetic analysis is, as Kim argues, enduringly privileged as outside fiscal economies, the Group's proximity to processes of industrialization and resource extraction troubles that distinction. As Walton proposes, the tropes of natural plenitude and the aesthetics of wilderness, as mediated through the Group's painted landscapes, did not depart from but closely accompanied processes of industrial development.

Recognizing the promotional value of art and its intimacy with wider economic interests illustrates the significance of artists to nation-building projects. In the case of the Group of Seven, these dynamics would take their most acute form post-WWII. As McKay outlines, following the war, Canada underwent a “crisis of identity,” one exemplified by its own “dilemma of uniqueness” as reflected in the art world (13). The growing desire for distinctly “Canadian” art coincided with advances in reproductive printing technologies—a synchronicity that was utilized, in 1927, by the National Gallery's print reproduction program. In collaboration with a variety of

printing houses,¹⁸ the National Gallery produced a series of “relatively inexpensive high-quality colour lithographs of art works” (Zemens 10) with the purpose of circulating and thus better establishing Canadian art as a unique genre. As Joyce Zemens writes, the “Gallery saw nation-building and the establishing of a common heritage for Canadian as key responsibilities” and its directors “saw their task as establishing the country’s patrimony by determining what was significant production in Canadian art and bestowing value upon it through acquisition and recognition” (11). The primary recipient of the campaign was Canadian schools, where the work of “providing information and education about the history of western art” and “validat[ing] Canadian art by locating it in its rightful context within that history” adhered somewhat naturally (11). However, the emphasis on Canadian schools was not merely pedagogical. The wide-ranging geography of schools enabled the campaign to expand geographically: “classrooms across Canada offered an ideal means of reaching the new generation of Canadians, including those in remote areas” (11). The program, which initially consisted of study guides and teaching materials, was soon supplemented with travelling artists lectures, marketing campaigns, and the transferal of print reproduction rights sold to other houses. Within ten years, the NAG’s print reproduction program would extend from Ontario classrooms to classrooms, libraries, and political offices across all provinces.

The NAG’s program would not only succeed in “significantly shap[ing] several generations’ understanding of Canadian art” but would do so through a selective streamlining of what “Canada art” entailed (Zemens 12). Within the vast campaign, the singular affinities of NAG Director, Eric Brown, would prove central to the campaign’s curatorial vision. Brown’s 1927 statement that the Group of Seven presented “the most significant thing about Canadian art today” (12) would anticipate the campaign’s developments: By 1928, 5,000 copies of Group of Seven member Tom Thompson’s “Jack Pine” were printed for dispersal and purchase nationwide (a number that repeated, in 1941, when 5000 more lithographic prints were ordered from the gallery at a larger scale). Thomson’s work, and the Group’s more generally, was indeed an intuitive focal point for the program’s ambitions. Known as the Algonquin school, the Group “rejected the European tradition that dominated the art world” offering “bold colours and expressionistic styles” (McKay 13) that embodied the notion that “Canada, a young country, required a new type of art” (Mackenzie 126). As Zemens proposes, for Brown, Thomson had “ushered in Canada’s epic period in which the heroism and vitality of its artists would contribute as much to the construction of national spirit as the labourers of its explorers, politicians and the giants of industry” (15). He was thus a key figure in propagating the perception of “the Group of Seven as the apex of Canadian artistic achievement and ... establish[ing] the pivotal role of the National Gallery in the minds of Canadians” (Zemens, *Establishing* 27). Brown’s curatorial affinities would uplift other artists, too. In 1927, Brown had undertaken a trip west and there encountered the work of Emily Carr. Yet, it was not until the 1940s that Carr’s work would be included in the National Gallery’s program. This was due, in large part, to its timely “fitting into an ideological slot available within an anxious Canadian nationalism in the years immediately preceding the Second World War” (Willems-Braun 208). Despite nearly thirty years of output, Carr’s work, at this moment, would introduce geographic diversity to a narrative of Canadian art which, with its centering of the Group of Seven’s depictions of eastern landscapes, was treading towards “inflated regionalism” (McKay 13). Indeed, Carr’s inclusion in the program would

¹⁸ Namely, Brigdens, Claudius Gregory Fine Art Prints, and The British Empire Art Company in Toronto.

encourage her work to be “discussed by critics as a Western Canadian counterpart to the Group of Seven” and thus contribute to the reproduction program’s sense of geographic scope and range (Willems-Braun 208). The program’s geographic expansions, sojourning by the inclusion of Carr, would translate, as well, to the program’s expansion of media and formats. In collaboration with printer Simpson-Matthews, the NAG’s wartimes series produced silkscreens of works to be dispatched to and displayed in military units and government offices, as well as in the program’s expanding network of schools, libraries, banks, and insurance companies. By 1943, Carr’s prints (particularly, the painting “White Church”) were hanging “in Eaton’s store windows from coast to coast” (Steedman and Sigvaldason 27), in the company of artists such as David Milne, Lawren Harris and A.Y. Jackson, Tom Thomson, J.W. Morrice and Clarence Gagnon.

Carr and Thompson’s ascent to the status of “fundamentally Canadian” is thus part of a narrative about economic, military, industrial, and institutional infrastructure. The fiscal conditions underling The Group of Seven and Carr’s sanctification as “Canadian art” hence necessitates consideration of where, and on what terms, aesthetics and politics overlap. Such is, perhaps, an unexpected affordance of the genre’s colonial regulation and history. If “nationalism does the work of “invent[ing] nations where they do not exist” (Anderson 6), then Canadian art’s major representatives provide an apt venue to consider art’s complicity in the process of displacement, dispossession, and occupation through which colonial nations, themselves, emerge. Indeed, Carr and Thompson’s hyper-visibility and “inflated regionalism,” has inspired the parsing of settler colonialism’s aesthetic nature; both The Group of Seven and Carr are central within postcolonial-aesthetic critique. Perhaps most commonly, The Group of Seven’s defining wilderness mythology, and depictions of “land [as] uninhabited...await[ing] exploration by the bravest of nomadic heroes” has inspired analysis of their patronization of the terra nullius colonial doctrine (McKay 13). As Richard Brock writes, “To gaze into a painting by Thomson, Harris, Lismer, Varley, Macdonald or Jackson is to be confronted by an icy, fore boarding and—crucially—silent world. ... In isolation, such representations of landscape guard their silent jealousy, burying the voices and histories of entire peoples in a static, atemporal moment that is seemingly as inhospitable to narrative as to the unequipped traveller” (50). For Brock, the Group of Seven’s typical images reveal an allegiance to the colonial gaze, necessitating an aesthetic analysis that contends with their colonial framing. As Brock argues, “charting the long history of complicity between landscape’s representation and the ideological and material apparatuses of colonialism and settlement, from the declaration of a terra nullius to legitimize initial settlement, to the emergence of a white settler national identity” means reading these landscapes attuned to context (50), or, through ekphrastic modes. Ekphrasis, Brock writes, or the “literary description of visual art objects” (51), in colonial contexts enables “radical critical engagement with visual modes of imperial representation ... lending the artwork a temporal dimension which liberates it from its frame and requires it to answer for itself in the discursive space beyond” (51). Given the ways in which such paintings are “replete with suppressed narratives of conquest and erasure” (50), Brock writes, unearthing the image’s colonial context, subtext, and paratext, is a vital means of “envoicing [the] silent objects” and dynamics within the frame (50).

The colonial inflections of Emily Carr’s work have likewise inspired postcolonial models of critique. Yet, unlike The Group of Seven’s tendency to write Indigenous life out of the frame entirely, Carr’s work invites a reckoning with the power-laden work of representation and recognition. In contrast to Thomson, Carr exhibited a keen interest in including Indigenous (namely, Coast Salish) life into her images. Postcolonial and anticolonial critiques of Carr’s work take up these representations, especially their fraught, often spectral, estranged, and alienating terms of inclusion. As Willems-Braun argues, while Carr included Indigenous life in her frame,

such inclusions asserted Indigeneity as separate from the forward-thrum of modernity. Centered on tropes of “a monumental, albeit vanishing, native culture, and a powerful, primeval nature” Carr’s work, Willems-Braun proposes, tacitly reveals, through its very act of Indigenous inclusions, a desire for colonial futurity (209). Sarah Hunt’s work extends analysis of Carr’s colonial complicities by considering her significance to the colonial, conceptual formations of the Pacific Northwest: “I am interested in the present-day settler identification with [Carr’s] legacy,” Hunt writes, “as part of the cultural and social life of settler spaces ... and the selective and purposeful deployment of Carr by people who shape Canadian and social life” (19). Both Willems-Braun and Hunt locate Carr’s work as a critical venue to interrogate how “the marginalization of Native peoples on their own traditional territories often appears to be a matter of ‘common-sense’ in both images of Canada and the nation’s settler economies of ownership (Willems-Braun, “Colonial Vestiges” 6). Notably, Willems-Braun and Hunt situate Carr within a wider contextual nexus—advancing a reading of her work that is not aesthetically autonomous but inflected by broader colonial structures and relationships. This intertextual and contextual mode of reading is most explicit apparent in Willems-Braun’s emphasis on Carr’s wide-ranging influences. Contrary to the notion that Carr presents an “unmediated vision”¹⁹ of the west coastal region—a perception that has nurtured her status as a rightful, regional representative—Carr’s work, Willems-Braun argues, is situated in a network of intertextual relationships. Carr’s relations with various artists such as the Group of Seven, Lauren Harris, and Georgia O’Keefe, affirms her location within a constellation of settler art producers. Moreover, the inflections of European art movements in her work (Fauvism, Expressionism and Cubism) affirm the intertextual nature of her canon. Indeed, Carr’s art is not an autonomously organic, aesthetic reflection of a region, but the product of influential relationships, spanning across time and space.

Postcolonial approaches to “Canadian art” advance methods for engaging art objects attuned to political context and subtext. These approaches offer generative means of circumventing the “untranslatability” of the visual (Derrida 5). As Brock writes (in preface to his advocacy of ekphrastic modes), to postcolonial concerns, visual art “poses a challenge of an altogether different order, owing to a far greater disjunct between the aesthetic and ideological. Rather than be allowed to proliferate as they do in a literary text, the underlying narratives of a visual art object are collapsed into an instantaneous moment of representation, their inherent temporality subsumed into the static, spatial plane of a painting” (Brock 52). Willems-Braun’s likening of the parallel “common-sense” of Carr’s compositions and the “common-sense” of colonial occupation itself, exemplifies such dilemmas. Given the archive’s tendency to nest histories of accumulation and yet, produce spontaneous feelings (Singh), and given the tendency for discourses on painting to reproduce their constraints and conditions (Derrida), there is value in interpreting Thomson and Carr’s “Canadian” aesthetics as the political conditions of “Canada” itself. Simultaneously, these subtextual and contextual readings present limitations. In utilizing ekphrastic and intertextual methods that prioritize context, these approaches potentially risk valuing “art ... for its ability to ‘reveal’” and justifying “aesthetics ... via the political” and hence, “confusing the proper role of both” (Maggio 353). Indeed, postcolonial theorists (such as Deepika Bahri) have cautioned against the discipline’s tendency to demote aesthetics to mere matters of political context; in doing so, theorists and scholars risk overlooking the intimacy between aesthetics and localized knowledge, embodied perspective, and the nature of subjectivity itself. Such concerns pervade the matter of Canadian art which, despite being analyzed within

¹⁹ With reference to Doris Shadbolt’s work.

nationalist frames, nonetheless persists as a site of differentiated feeling and subjectivity. Critiques such as Brock and Willems-Braun's inspire further lines of inquiry. Namely, can postcolonial analysis be animated through aesthetic terms alone? What horizons are there for postcolonial critique to engage the visual on the visual's terms? In what follows, I engage this line of questioning by turning to painting and visual artmaking.

East and West Wings: Kent Monkman, Sonny Assu, and the Art of Contrast

Here, I consider the interventional practices of contemporary visual artists Kent Monkman and Sonny Assu. There are several artists who could illustrate this study, but the work of Assu and Monkman complements this project for its investment in the scope and constraints of the genre of "Canadian art." Indeed, what ushers Monkman and Assu into comparative proximity and promotes their significance here is their use of, and references to, the Canadian art archive and its pre-eminent figures. Created from different regions and worldviews, both Assu and Monkman's corpuses utilize the generic expectations of "Canadian art" as a canvas onto which to visually build a sense of political contrast and juxtaposition. The result de-naturalizes "Canada" and its dominant aesthetic forms. Both Assu and Monkman produce a visual interplay that encourages the viewer to recognize the aesthetic registers of Canadian nationalism (and namely, its picturesque and impressionistic imagining of vast, empty landscape, or Indigenous settlements on the brink of antiquity). Simultaneously, through visual interventions, techniques of humor, irony, and contrast, and the introduction of scenes of Indigenous self-determination, resilience, and presence, Monkman and Assu outwardly reimagine such scenes through the realities of ongoing expansion, encounter, dispossession, possession, displacement, and resilience they outwardly obscure. The result, in each case, is a visual palimpsest—one that utilizes the tropes of "Canada" as its foundation and reimagines those tropes through their subtextual, paratextual, and historical truths. Indeed, if paintings of Canada risk reproducing the colonial myths and circumstances that enframe them, then Assu and Monkman's paintings actively reframe "Canada" itself. Rather than presenting paintings of unilateral desire and synchronized, generic expectation, Monkman and Assu, present "Canada" as a lively frontier zone—a perpetual site of encounter not between settlement and wilderness, but visions of and desires for colonial and decolonial futures. Under these pastoral representations of nature and Coast Salish villages on the brink of dilapidation, narratives of conquest, theft, possession, and resilience—both artists reveal—endure.

These broader alignments frame each artist's varied approaches and techniques. Trained in classical painting, Kent Monkman is defined, largely, by his "provocative interventions"²⁰; his "iconoclastic, playful, and disturbing portrayals" have earned him a place in the canon of subversive Canadian-Indigenous art (Rifkin 313). Monkman's training is evident in his work: his wide-scale landscapes and representations stylistically conjure European classicalism, and simultaneously, his scenes of Indigenous resilience, self-determination, and contemporary, anticolonial commentary subvert the continuities between classicalism and colonial nation-making, narrated through art. Monkman comments on the political significance of this stylistic approach himself in his discussion of transitioning from abstract to European classical painting: "I became very interested in European painting when I realized that there was an opportunity to paint Indigenous experience and histories ... and authorize [those histories] into art history" (Monkman). As Kate and Linda Morris affirm, "Monkman's paintings engage a multitude of

²⁰ As stated in the summary description of "Great Hall Commission: Mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

misrepresentations and myths about the opening of the North American continent” (266) by utilizing and taking “aim at the history of representation and at romanticism in particular” (268). Humor, irony, and parody are an undeniably central component of Monkman’s visual critiques—a comedic disposition Monkman sources in his Cree heritage. As he noted in a 2022 interview: “I’m Cree and our Creator is a trickster character, and so we have an inherent sense of humour in our way of looking at the world” (Buck). Indeed, the Trickster figure (and, their various subsets) is markedly adept at dismantling stereotypes with wry humor. Thomson Highway, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, and Danial David Moss’ discourse²¹ on the Trickster figure identifies this trait; whether in the form of Coyote of Weesageejak or Nanabush, or Raven or Glooscap, the Trickster, they write, is “as shifty and shiftless, as horny and greedy, as lucky, as funny, as human as any of us” (Moss 110). Importantly, the Trickster’s deft mirroring of human flaw, vulnerability, and desire, renders them an apt comic in storytelling. As Moss writes, in art, “the laughter of agreement the Trickster provokes in entertaining us helps us to recognize the familiar, the funny/ha-ha. The second purpose of storytelling, to educate” (110). The Trickster, hence, is an ideal candidate to assist viewers and listeners to “recognize the funny/strange” (110).

The Trickster embodies this reputation throughout Monkman’s work. This presence manifests through a general sense of misalignment and incongruence—often, with humorous results (Moss). Yet, if these paintings suggest Monkman’s embodiment of Trickster pedagogy as an artist, this relationship is actualized in the Trickster’s most apparent form: Miss Chief Eagle Testickle—a recurring character in Monkman’s work, and a figure bearing a strong likeness to Monkman himself. Monkman has confirmed this proxy-relationship. In his essay on the creative process for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Monkman writes: Miss Chief brings something to my practice that I didn’t have as just a painter. She allows me to be more playful in my work because she inhabits a sexiness and sassiness. She allows me to lighten how I treat sometimes very dark subject matter because I’m looking at effectively a genocide” (Monkman, “Miss Chief”). Miss Chief, like the Trickster, moves throughout the imagistic storytelling of Monkman’s archive, assuming the garb, attire, and candor of its broader scenes, and simultaneously (or, as such) providing comedic, insightful commentary on her surroundings. In “Stag Hunting (After Theodor de Bry)” (2018), for example, Miss Chief dons the skin and antlers of a stag, and intermingles, arrow-drawn, with a herd. The painting, modelled after de Bry’s 1655 engraving, “Indians Hunting Stags,” sees Miss Chief assuming a parodic relationship to the content of the original image. If de Bry’s piece presented a European ethnography of Indigenous hunting practices, Miss Chief’s re-occupation of the painting conducts an ethnography of the ethnographer himself: Miss Chief’s stealth adoption of the performance of hunting produces a metatextual and hyper-reflexive sense of rupture—one that makes the viewer aware of the image’s multiple degrees of performativity. Indeed, Miss Chief is both inside and

²¹ In his reflection on his collaboration with Tomson Highway and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, and their project, “The Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster,” Danial David Moss outlines the significance of the trickster across their Cree, Ojibway, and Iroquoian roots, and particularly, the Trickster’s relationship to humor: “How seriously,” Moss writes, “can you be taken as a human being or an artist if people think you are heroic or stoic or romantic or a problem? We want people besides ourselves to be dissatisfied with those stereotypes” (109). As Moss reflects, “Truth is stranger than stereotypes, than ignorance, stranger even than fiction—which does seem to be a problem with, or for, fiction ... Why not shift your fiction more strangely toward truth?” (109). The Trickster, Moss continues, asks: “Why take the funny seriously?” (110).

outside the paintings: her recognizability and frequency across and throughout Monkman's work estranges her from the individual painting's sense of hermetic specificity. As a contemporary, transcendent, and atemporal figure, Miss Chief's recurring presence produces a metatextual rupture within the painting. Miss Chief, a stealth, touring ethnographer of the history of art, is literally within, but also, external to, the painting, as she immerses within, and observes and comments on it. Miss Chief's infiltration of the scene, while positioning her as a notable outsider to the image, hence also initiates an interaction with it—one that ultimately reconfigures its emotional, aesthetic, and atmospheric disposition.

This dynamic is especially apparent in Monkman's work most aligned with European classicalism and its tropes. In this context, Miss Chief's furtive integration into scenes of religiosity and divinity, European exploration, expansion, trade, and colonial policymaking, produces a profound sense of juxtaposition. In these scenes, Miss Chief, positioned as an ethnographer of the project of European empire itself, creates often humorous dissonance as she visually comments on, and reflects back, the practices and customs she encounters. In Monkman's "The Mystery of Mistapew (After Carr, Haring and Picasso)" (2022) Miss Chief, dressed in Renaissance garb, floats like a celestial being in the spirit of Michelangelo's renderings next to a cubist figure and in impressionistic forest. If the scene reflects the elevation of certain style and artists—namely, Picasso and Carr—to holy status, the cubist and impressionistic caricatures she encounters prove crude and ill-defined in contrast to Miss Chief's realistic rendering. Indeed, rudimentary cave paintings enframe the bottom of the image, as if providing an ironic legend by which to interpret the esteemed "greats" Miss Chief encounters. In "The Pariah" (2020) and "A Country Wife" (2016) Miss Chief adopts the position of classic Victorian portraiture, sitting stiffly in restrictive dress against a backdrop of pastoral landscape. The effect is a sense of simultaneous mimicry and contrast: If Miss Chief—by nature of her recognizability—is a dissonant figure within these scenes, she also reveals how easily they might be inhabited, as she adopts the tropes, garbs, and visual expectations of her surroundings with ease. Miss Chief's trickster presence is perhaps most outwardly pronounced, however, in Monkman's explicit depictions of colonial contact. In "Miss Chief's Wet Dream" (2018) a scene of colonial-Indigenous trade and contact is reframed as sexual fantasy. If such scenes are enshrined as landmark moments in the formation of Canada, through Miss Chief's eyes, they are revisioned as erotic play. In "The Daddies" (2016), Miss Chief forgoes the frontier for the earnest echelons of colonial policymaking and bureaucracy. In the image, Miss Chief presents herself to a parliamentary room of interchangeable legislators and seems to be reveling in her own spectacle. In both paintings, Miss Chief's reduction of colonial conquest to scenes of sexual splendor is at once playful and profound. Miss Chief's reframing is, at one level, a humorous refusal of the earnestly glorifying gaze through which such encounters have been traditionally rendered in art history. Simultaneously, Miss Chief's eroticizing of these scenes illuminates their vital subtext: the conquest of "virgin" land, the fetishization of fantastical wilderness, and the overdetermination of colonial masculinity through which such ventures are encoded are, through Miss Chief's eyes, inextricable features of the painting.

Miss Chief's tour of foundations of Canadian art—the Edenic, pastoral, and picturesque contexts of European classicalism and portraiture—situates her character within the early, classical foundations of Canadian art, as outlined by McKay. Yet, Miss Chief is also present for the latter sojourning of "Canada" as a unique, national identity, mediated through impressionistic forms (McKay). This presence is primarily sourced in her relationship with the Group of Seven. In this context, Miss Chief, likewise, functions as an ethnographer—yet, this time, amidst a different iteration and development of art history. Indeed, Miss Chief's presence among scenes of

early, colonial exploration and contact anticipates her arrival in this more contemporary context. Brock's analysis of the Group of Seven's work—and its aesthetic accompaniment of the “bravest of nomadic heroes” (17)—articulates how earlier iterations of colonial masculinity take hold in Canada's more contemporary vantages on wilderness. Indeed, Miss Chief's presence in this more contemporary context is, likewise, subversive and essential in exposing the subtextual dynamics of colonial masculinity that undercut's The Group's prized impressionism. In Monkman's short film, *The Group of Seven Inches*, Miss Chief, modelled after Cher's “half-breed Cherokee costume” (Scott 296), lures two European men (“European #1 and #2”) from the treeline and entices them to her studio. As with “The Daddies,” Miss Chief's presence (and actions) illuminate the dynamics of conquest, fetishism, and desire manifest within the colonial gaze. As Brandon Lee Scott argues, *The Group of Seven Inches* is a film, ultimately, about desire—an analysis he develops by parsing, what he terms, the film's “pornoarchaeology” (298). Pornoarchaeology marks the “transmedial process of excavating the pornographic lure solicited by an artifact of any medium” (298). In the case of *The Group of Seven Inches*, Scott argues, Monkman's film unearths and simultaneously reverses the pornographic lure of The Group of Seven's canon. Indeed, “instead of an ethnographer studying Indigenous societies [and land], it is the expert Miss Chief who studies the wild and mysterious European male” (299). Yet, perhaps most importantly, Scott argues, Monkman's film—and its orchestration at the hands of Miss Chief—activates and animates the economy of desire underlying the Group of Seven's. *The Group of Seven Inches* is not only about desire, but “solicits desire in viewers” (298), implicating the viewer in a visceral negotiation of the economies of want, conquest, exploitation, underlying the “landscape and wilderness paintings [most] fundamental in the formation of an image of the new Canadian nation” (300).

The Group of Seven Inches is not Miss Chief's only interaction with the Group. Monkman's earliest response to the Group was in the 2001 watercolour painting, “Jack Pine”—a direct reference to Thomson's 1916 work of the same name. In this case, Monkman's image is a close replica—a watercolour painting that mimics the composition of Thomson's original painting. Yet, overlayed onto the scene are Monkman's notable interventions. In the bottom left corner, a cowboy and a figure we might assume is Miss Chief engage in a sexual act; across the painting as whole, written in capital letters, are splayed the text of an old western pulp novel. If Thompson's iconic work has long endured in the Canadian canon for its placid tranquility, Monkman overtly renders it a scene of struggle. As Shirley Madill notes, “their ambiguous embrace implies both a struggle and a sexual act, and the land is the focus of the encounter.” (Madill). The amendments to the original are, at once, disorienting and intuitive. The ethos of masculine conquest—a cultural nexus that weds the violence of the western pulp to the uninhabited, tranquil objectification of Thomson's landscape renderings—is, here, at once overtly rendered and forced (or, willing concedes) to a state of submission. As an intervention, Monkman's use of Jack Pine signals a reckoning with how masculine, colonial power that permeates the painted landscape. As scholars have proposed, the Group's attachment to the agrarian settler myth is a discernible quality of their work: Their paintings reveal an attachment to a vision of landscape wherein “the ‘virgin’ lands of the newly settled nation are constructed as feminine-gendered vessels of fertility for the exploitation and sustenance of the masculine-gendered pioneer-settler” (Brock 54). Indeed, Brock writes, in the Group's corpus, we can see this myth enacted through a “two-way ‘interacting system’ whereby the landscape is seen as a body but also the body is regarded as landscape” (54). In introducing a cowboy on his knees, Monkman disorients the visual expectations of Jack Pine, but even more so, visually unearths its subtext of gendered conquest, offering it to the viewer for their political examination.

Miss Chief's ironizing and queering of space thus productively unearths and exposes the tacit ways in which the colonial gaze and the heterosexist gaze mutually reinforce forms of aesthetic objectification. This vantage is vital, postcolonial art scholars have proposed, towards parsing how the genre of Canadian art indeed, nests its own diversity of perspectives and power-laden conditions. As Anthony Purtuluese notes, alongside the Group, other esteemed contributors to canon, brought their own, notably different sightlines to the canon. Comparing these sightlines, Portluese argues, reveals the politically gradient and varied identity coordinates within a broad category such as "Canadian art." Most notable, for Portuluese's purposes, is the comparatively different approaches of Emily Carr, an artist who, in contrast to the Group, depicted the landscape not through absence, but rather, complex representation. These compositional differences reveal their own, metatextual dynamics not between the canon and those rendered external, but within the canon itself. Alongside the gender politics of representation and selection at the time of NAG, Carr's work, Portuluese notes, likely gained less recognition for its very tendency to, contrary to the Group, "offer Indigenous peoples a central position in her art." In contrast to Thomson's scenes of northern wilderness, Carr's emphasis on Indigenous representation, and thus, the nation's "grim postcolonial history" presented a sightline ultimately misaligned with the ideological envisioning of the emerging Canadian nation.

The nuances of Carr's positioning within the genre of Canadian art are an entry-point into Sonny Assu's work. While lesser known than Monkman, Assu's work likewise takes the subject of Canadian art as a primary theme. In the case of his 2016 *Interventions on the Imaginary* series—a series heavily utilizing and referencing Carr's work—Carr's positioning within the gendered dynamics of the canon is a significant focal point. As Assu writes in his artist statement, contrary to the Group of Seven who "erased the Indigenous presence from the land" Emily Carr "fought against the aesthetic and gendered bounds of the Group of Seven. Moreover, he writes, Carr painted 'Indian' life and territory into her work, oddly working both within and outside of the salvage paradigm" (Assu, "Interventions"). Yet, Carr's complicity within the colonial gaze is also reflected in Assu's series. Consisting of twenty-one standalone pieces, each entry in *Interventions* features a well-known piece of Canadian art as its canvas. Superimposed onto the work of AY Jackson, Paul Kane, and most prominently, Carr, these addenda primarily take the form of bright Coast Salish symbols and motifs (such as ovoid and s-shapes) and are positioned to interact with the original painting in signifying, politically astute ways. Sometimes the symbols hover over the original painting's landscape scenes like UFOs; at others, they function like graffiti, splayed across the original work, as if defacing property. Indeed, amidst the varied placement, scale, and form of these symbols is their shared capacity to visually comment on the original painting's tacit politics of colonial encounter, encroachment, and ownership. Through the suggested narratives of alien encounter, the significations of graffiti, and the visual juxtaposition of digital chroma imposed onto the original paintings, Assu unearths, at both the level of style and content, the archive's innate sense of conflict. As Assu, himself, summarizes: "These interventions, as digital interventions onto works that contain the colonial gaze" present a "remix culture" that "participate in the growing discourse of decolonization, acting as 'tags' to challenging the colonial fantasy of terra nullius and confronting the dominant colonial culture's continued portrayal of Indigenous peoples as a vanishing race."

The significance of Carr to this project is assured through volume alone; amidst the array of Canadian paintings Assu utilizes, Carr's work is the most prevalent. At one level, Carr's quantitative significance to such a project is intuitive. Carr's archive, like the Group of Seven's own inflated regionalism, has come to represent Canada, generally, by way of her association with the northwest coast. As with the Group of Seven's allocation to the permanent collection at

the AGO, the Vancouver Art Gallery's only permanent collection is devoted to Carr—an institutional affirmation of “the metonymic relation between ‘Carr’ and the ‘West Coast’ within Canadian culture” (Braun 208). Carr's work, hence, and its institutionally inscribed significance, “plays an exemplary pedagogical role in Canadian culture, educating Canadians on how properly to ‘see’ Northwest Coast landscapes, and how to see them as ‘properly’ Canadian” (Braun 207). Like other artists who have utilized Carr's work as a site of postcolonial study²² *Interventions* utilizes Carr as a means of acknowledging the “central place accorded Carr's work in Canadian culture” and simultaneously, challenging “assumptions about its political neutrality” by “provocatively identif[y]...[its] complicit[y] with colonial power” (Braun 205). As Assu's scenes of terrestrial contact and visual gestures of graffiti imply, Carr's paintings—as cherished property of Canada—are laden with the nation's colonial dynamics of encounter.

Simultaneously, if Carr's work presents an intuitive venue to interrogate the complicity of Canadian art with colonial infrastructure, it is also useful, Assu's work suggests, to interrogate the nuances and positionalities within dominant colonial art culture itself. In rendering the salvage paradigm a lens through which to view Carr's archive, Assu illuminates how representations of Coast Salish landscapes are inflected by paternalism and ethnographic interest, hence, provoking consideration of their politics of inclusion. Indeed, Assu's use of the anthropological term invites a reckoning with Carr's work that looks beyond her paintings' objects of interest, and towards, rather, the power-laden nature of ethnographic interest itself. Carr's representations of Coast Salish life, Assu suggests, are poised ambiguously. At once, Carr's representations subvert and counteract the Group's overt practices of Indigenous erasure and nullification through landscape rendering; simultaneously, Carr's very mode of Indigenous presencing animates the colonial politics of representing, and hence, producing, the Other. As Tsimshian-Haida curator and art historian Maria Crosby has argued, Carr's work articulates the nuances of colonial, representational desire. Indeed, Assu's *Interventions on the Imaginary* series is a reference to Crosby's analysis of Carr's archive, and notably, its construction of what Crosby terms the “Imaginary Indian.” Carr's work, Crosby argues, illuminates how recognition of, and interest in the Other, reflects not a break from colonial expungement but its ideological continuity. Observing the conscious shift away from the Eurocentric model, both in academia and the art world, Crosby identifies the emergent “postmodern center/margin cartography” as both illusory and colonizing in its effects. As Crosby writes:

Increasingly, we as First Nations people assert our national and cultural differences against the homogenizing effect of academic discourse, mass culture, and government legislation...Despite the West's recent self-critique of its historical depiction of ‘the other,’ I am not entirely convinced that this is not just another form of the West's curious interest in its other; or more specifically, the ultimate colonization of “the Indian” into the spaces of the West's postmodern centre/margin cartography (“Invention” 267).

“Curious interest” in the Other—as an academic or artistic mode—Crosby identifies, nests various political agenda; it is, thus, not the representation, but the nature of representation, that warrants aesthetic-political consideration.

Crosby's analysis offers a significant counterpoint to advocations of Carr's work, such as Purtuluse's, as an archive ultimately portraying the nation's “grim, postcolonial history.” Through Crosby's frame, Carr's representations of Coast Salish life mark not a break from, but

²² Braun's study references artist and painter Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's response to Carr's work.

continuity and extension, of various colonial visual regimes. Crosby's work finds resonance in scholarship, likewise, attuned to the colonial politics of inclusion in art. Like Crosby's unsettling of the merits of the "postmodern center/margin cartography," Kwame Appiah has written on the limitations of postmodern integration schemes in the art world, generally. As he argues, given the ways in which "aesthetic value is bound up with market value" (138), perspectives in the art world and gallery spaces endorse the notion that "justice turns out to reside, unexcitingly, in the institutionalization of pluralism" fall short (141). He furthers, "postcoloniality is the conditions of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery" (149). In other words, if art proves a rich space to trace the emergence of postcolonial consciousness, it is also a rich space to parse the power-laden schemes of integration that do not necessarily alter center-periphery dynamics but reinstate them. This is a crucial component of Jolene Rickard's theorization of, what Rickard deems, an "aesthetics of violence." "The manic pace of globalization," Rickard writes, "has almost made the revolutionary re-imagining of the Western 'master narrative' and uptake of postcolonial methods seem trivial" (58). As Rickard proposes, it is essential to look beyond recalibrations of margin and center (that indeed, oftentimes reinstate the western-oriented "intelligentsia") and rather, towards the aesthetic vernaculars and expressions themselves. We might ask, Rickard proposes: "what is the intersection between Indigenous art and the field of art history whose underpinnings are based in European philosophy?" (58). Most importantly, Rickard prompts, "what are the methodological strategies" then, on the part of viewers, "that are needed to recognize an artists' intent?" (58).

In a project intervening into emblematic Canadian paintings, Assu's reference to Crosby's work (and its resonances with other scholarship) is somewhat counterintuitive. If, as Crosby argues, the "postmodern center/margin cartography" is an insufficient device for recognizing and transforming colonial order, the *Interventions* series, as it undertakes a series of postmodern "remixes" to visually shift the locus of power in Carr's work, seemingly utilizes this very framework. Despite outwardly referencing Crosby's problematizing of the "center/margin cartography," *Interventions* stages a "re-imagining of the Western 'master narrative'" through a visual critique of Canada's most preeminent art works, ostensibly manifesting the very framework against which Crosby cautions. Yet *Interventions* invites a more thorough consideration of Crosby's work (and its implications) too. Assu's addenda, as an interjection of Coast Salish art, marks an reoccupation and reclamation of Carr's paintings. Yet, while symbolic, these motifs also function at the level of the aesthetic: the introduction of heightened chroma, digital media, and opaque tones onto Carr's oeuvre of earthly north coastal hues introduces this political negotiation of center and periphery, initially and immediately, through matters of colour, texture, and style. Indeed, prior to provoking the colonial context of Carr's work, Assu's *Interventions* series invites viewers to recognize how this context becomes enfolded into spontaneous perceptions of aesthetic difference. While at the level of content, viewers are encouraged to perceive the displaced and now recuperated *in-placeness* of Assu's Coast Salish art, they also, invariably, contend—at least initially—with the striking *out-of-placeness* they visually provoke within the aesthetic context of Carr's work. Which is to say, prior to engaging Assu's political commentary on colonial difference, viewers are confronted with Assu's use of striking visual difference: the collision of digital impositions onto oil and watercolour mediums, the encounters between bright, neon chroma onto Carr's naturalist palette, and the abrupt imposition of Assu's graffiti-like typography onto Carr's honed impressionism. The apparentness of this contrast insists upon its own analysis—one that is not peripheralized in favor of a contextual reading of Assu's work but rather as its own segue into Assu's political commentary.

Indeed, in the pronounced contrasting modes of *Interventions*, Assu prompts aesthetically oriented strategies through which to begin to “recognize the artists’ intent” (Rickard 58).

Significant to this interpretation is the nature of Assu’s overlays. Prior to interpreting the colonial-Indigenous dynamics of Carr and Assu’s encounter, viewers are confronted with Assu’s evocations of graffiti. The boldest visual element of the work, Assu’s symbols, which are splashed across the original, evoke graffiti through both style and interactive disposition (a dynamic that is reiterated in Assu’s own descriptive use of “tags”²³). The colourfully loud and defacing qualities of these interventions creates a palimpsestic reading of the work, one that foregrounds Assu’s additions as of a different time and mode than Carr’s visuals. This visual depth, produced by the added overlay of graffiti, bespeaks its own relation to property and space. A “largely outlawed art form...perceived by many as out-of-place” (Lesh 309), graffiti, and Assu’s emulation of graffiti—content aside—bears its own interventional significance. Graffiti, it has been theorized, is primarily, the work of “writers on the fringes of public, legal, and disciplinary conceptions of writing” and therefore, as a medium, innately comments on the margin-periphery dynamics of public space, and most significantly, how such dynamics are reiterated through rights to ownership (Jaworski and Thurlow 15). These dynamics undergird graffiti’s stylistic disposition. Spray cans—used quickly, surreptitiously, and as subterfuge under policed, outlawed conditions—produce typographies that stand in contrast to the gradually assembled architectural conditions of legislated urban spaces. Graffiti, hence, is a defacement of property, but also a visualization of the power-laden encounters between fast and slow, illegal and legal time, and fugitivity and ownership undergirding public space. Indeed, despite the diversity of hand styles (each inviting their own analysis) graffiti is always innately tied to “forbiddenness and transgression” (Heyd 11). As a signifying mode, “graffiti writing [both comments on] and produces spaces” (Lesh 15) calling forth “visions of different rhetorical relationship[s] [to the space] ... distinct from those spaces reflective of longstanding segregation, [and] the preservation of [particular] historical and education legacy” (Lesh 18). Assu’s use of graffiti, as it introduces an innate sense of depth and contrast, transforms Carr’s work from a site of singular authorship to one of dual authorship, where the dynamics and thresholds between art and property are visually signalled. Like graffiti inscribing a city scape to reveal its aesthetic-political zone of expectations, Assu’s interventions animate the significant question: “How have different visual practices framed the Northwest Coast as a landscape of fantasy and desire, and with what effects?” (Braun 207). In tagging Carr’s work, Assu creates a sense of stylistic juxtaposition that not only denaturalizes Carr’s visuals but reveals how Carr’s vernaculars have been essential to the colonial place-making and propertization in—and of—Canada and specifically the west coast.

Assu’s use of colour alone provokes further analysis. While evocative of graffiti, the chromatic contrast between Assu’s palette and Carr’s produces its own commentary. Assu’s contrasting visual palette conjures the racial politics of colour itself, and the history of chroma’s weaponization within colonial logic and desire. Indeed, “discourses around colour have been used to legitimize and validate the oppression of racial and ethnic groups by creating assumptions about aesthetic deviancy, color pathology, and taste”; the “same discourses around color and taste have been used as tools to regulate and police color and aesthetics” (Calvo-Quirós 80). As William Calvo-Quirós proposes, we might trace the genealogy of the “racialized chromatic ethos” to the era of European expansion—a “period where a unique set of aesthetic ethos about

²³ See Assu’s *Interventions* artist statement (from Assu’s website).

the Other are simultaneously manufactured and enacted, in order to secure the epistemic perpetuity of European economic, religious, and aesthetic dominance” (81). These histories provided the “raw material for the development of our modernist myth of nation-states” (81). As C. Riley Snorton and Hentyle Yap elucidate, colour’s simultaneous proximity to Enlightenment interests and the colonial stratification of taste, situates it at a laden axis of postcolonial concern. Sir Isaac Newton’s theory of “primitive colors and his proposal for organizing color in relation to a ‘wheel’ incited much debate among his European contemporaries” (3)—perhaps, most notably, the “centrality of whiteness to Newton’s visual theory” and its “parallels [to] an understanding of race as peripheral to whiteness in Western thought” (4). Newton’s work be utilized towards racist and colonial interests in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s 1810 *Theory of Colours*—a text that weaponized colour towards racist theorizing.²⁴ As Calvo-Quirós asserts, Goethe’s text, written shortly after the age of Discovery, “ratified and consolidated an imaginary geo-chromatic world, where bright colors exemplify the deviant, or the savage nature of non-Western subjects” (86). Yet simultaneously, while chroma is laden with histories of colonial weaponization, chroma and saturation are also “what is sold [as] and continues to sell modernity” (Taussig 36). Indeed, scholarship on techno-orientalism (March), the relationship between neon and futurity (Kane), and the intimacy between heavy saturation and digital modes (Hurst), all affirm chroma’s vested sense of futurity. Which is to say, Assu’s interjection of bold, chromatic graffiti carries multifaceted implications. It actively pronounces the historical context of chromophobia underlying the image, illuminating the colonial politics of sensibility underlying Canadian art’s visual spectrum. And, most importantly, Assu intervenes into Carr’s work by asserting Indigeneity into the future, as a visual presence that need not be salvaged.

In dialogue, Monkman and Assu present immersive encounters with Canadian art. Their work compels readings of the national genre’s expectations through not textual analysis, but subversive intervention into the genre’s anticipated structures of feeling, earnest and humorous cadences, and expression. The result is the viewer’s own reflection on the painting’s affective-aesthetic qualities—its capacity for humor, brightness, contrast, and dissonance—and instigation of the viewer’s own subjective responsiveness. Indeed, rather than a genre to be parsed through socio-economic and historical analysis alone, “Canadian art,” in Monkman and Assu’s framing, is a lively site of encounter, where viewers are invited to read their own relationship to the aesthetics of the nation by contending with Monkman and Assu’s simultaneous reiteration and subversion of aesthetic expectation. While the nation, then, may subsist through and be comprised of collective feelings, Assu and Monkman’s work illuminates the divergences, malleability, and potential of those feelings—their capacity for friction, spontaneity, deviancy, errancy, and surprise. Through these visual cadences, honed through contrast, “Canadian art” proves a generative space for interrogating, rethinking, and indeed, looking past the nation itself.

²⁴ As Goethe writes: “men in a state of nature ... have a great fondness for colours in their utmost brightness” [55] (Calvo-Quirós 86).

Chapter 2: Discovery Heroes, Eco-Heroes, and the Environmentalist Frontier of the Pacific Northwest

In an 1889 issue of *Washington Magazine* settler historian and botanist Edward S. Meany made a bold claim: Puget Sound had “no literature” but “plenty of real estate, timber, coal, iron, and fish.” It was a typical account for the time from someone such as Meany. The northwest coast’s natural plenitude was a well-established trope in the U.S. and recently formed Canadian governments’ campaigns for westward expansion.²⁵ That these marketed tropes would resound in accounts such as Meany’s arguably reflects the enduring power of 19th century “American and Canadian immigrant guides” and their exploita[ion of] the rhetoric of advertising” (Lape 365). Yet, Meany’s sightline onto Puget Sound—imagined as a space at once resource-laden and culturally devoid—evokes more general tropes of colonial narratives, spanning the era of “Discovery” to “Westward Expansion,” too. In his negation of the presence of stories and their circulation, Meany fused the landscape he encountered with the age-old trope of terra nullius—“the paradigmatic uninscribed ... convenient colonial construct that maintained lands were empty of meaning, of language, of presence, and of history” (Byrd 64). That Meany would not only utilize this trope but populate it with a localized account of nature²⁶ reflects an imaginative

²⁵ Fariah Shaikh summarizes the general ethos of booster literature as such: “Emigration literature employs a rhetoric of nation-building, where emigrants are expected to be loyal to Britain, but also to the new country of settlement. The trajectories within emigrant narratives inevitably point to a future where success is inevitable: everyone can make it in the colonies, as long as they are prepared to work hard and undergo initial privation” (6). More specifically, in both Canada and the U.S., policy actively encouraged this mobility. In the U.S., the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railway Act, both in 1862, each endorsed mobility through the circulation of leaflets and pamphlets. As Douglas Francis writes, in relation to the marketing of Canadian westward settlement in the 19th century, Henry Youle Hind’s rendering of the northwestern region “the great fertile belt,” has been popularly “remembered for [its] optimistic assessment of the Northwest for agricultural settlement” as part of these campaigns (180).

²⁶ The term “nature” bears innate ambiguity. Moreover, in a chapter heavily centered on analyzing cultural interpretations, documentations, and representations of nature (and utilizing culturally inflected terminology such as “wilderness” and “landscape” and the genre of “nature-writing”) and simultaneously, nature’s regional, material ecologies, the term necessitates clarification. Kate Soper’s rich elaboration of the concept in *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* is useful here. As Soper proposes, nature has been generally understood through two fundamental perspectives. We see “nature-endorsing” views through the work of environmentalism and environmental thinking that emphasize nature as an independent reality—a school of thought Soper defines as “ecology.” Simultaneously, nature, Soper observes, is perceived through postmodern, “nature-skeptical” views that emphasize not nature’s innate qualities, but cultural construction (and particularly, the power-laden schemes through which the concept has been deployed, negotiated, and mobilized). Soper proposes that nature is comprised of both elements. They also argue that nature’s ecology-school must become more invested in the material bearing of postmodern understandings, and that postmodern, nature-skeptical views benefit from recognizing nature’s material significance, fragility, and resilience. Rather than resign to an ecology-oriented or postmodern perception of nature, this chapter is primarily

nimbleness that renders his account provocative to matters of postcolonial and decolonial concern. Indeed, despite harnessing the broad rhetorical tropes of colonial expansion utilized in Canada, the U.S, and Britain, Meany's account simultaneously produced an image of landscape that would prove, enduringly, *Pacific Northwestern*. As "organizing schema, Canadian and US stereotypes, ... branding campaigns, ... and the dominant rhetoric[s] of the region" suggest, a "reverential naturalism" or ultimate prioritizing of wilderness shapes the region's contemporary identity (Bramadat 24). These dynamics, configuring wilderness as both central to contemporary Pacific Northwestern identity and yet indirectly complicit with the region's histories of Indigenous dispossession and colonial acquisition, would, in some ways, be anticipated by the 19th century botanist himself. Settlers were too busy, Meany concluded, being on the land (albeit, in the effort to trade, acquire, commercialize, and capitalize upon it) to be preoccupied with art of storytelling.

This chapter is concerned with two interrelated ideas: Firstly, this chapter asks how literature, as an imaginative project of representation, responds to the material environment of the Pacific Northwest. Secondly, this chapter asks how literature materially shapes the Pacific Northwestern environment by inviting ways of seeing, acting upon, and governing it. While not this chapter's ultimate concern, Meany's account is demonstrative here as it performs how accounts of natural space materially and culturally inscribe land with the hallmarks of the frontier. Indeed, Meany renders Puget Sound an anticipatory horizon for commercial and economic interests. The swapping of land for "real estate," old growth for "timber," and modification of "plenty" to the life and minerals observed accommodates, at the level of text, the colonial-capitalist regimes swiftly encroaching on the northwest coast. Simultaneously though less directly, Meany's account invokes not only the region's burgeoning extractive regimes but general literary and aesthetic horizon. Meany's emphasis on the region's dearth of literary production ironically proves pertinent to debates on the nature of Pacific Northwest literatures occurring today. The proposition that only in recent decades have Pacific Northwest literatures coalesced into a "genre of distinction" and "come of age" affirms Meany's claim of its pre-19th century absence (Simonson 81; see also Findlay). More significantly, Meany's account, as it subtly relays a dialectic between the environment's natural state and capitalist inscription and does so at the expense of questions of "literature" itself, anticipates more specific dynamics of the genre. Susan Kollin's assertion Pacific Northwest literatures today are defined by a "conservationist consciousness" indirectly affirms Meany's sentiments (57): nature's material presence, both seem to suggest—either as an abundant resource tempting exploitation, or a depleting presence, in want of protection—is the region's defining motif and ultimate literary concern.²⁷

concerned with what the transferences between these poles reveals both about the ways in which ecology and ideological ways of seeing inflect one another.

²⁷ Meany's literary relationship to the present is reinforced elsewhere. As Harold Simonson more directly suggests, despite observing a literary dearth in his surroundings, Meany was poised on the threshold of the region's literary becoming. Had Meany "waited a few more years" he may not have lamented the region's literary dearth so resolutely (148). Writers such as Frederic Homer Blach and Eva Emery Dye, Simonson notes, were soon to emerge, staking out "the Northwest as their cultural resource for novels [and] poetry," calcifying the region's spirit of literary conservatism (148).

At stake in this chapter, then, is the nature of a region's literary emergence, and particularly the political and aesthetic dimensions of that process. Theorizations of today's Pacific Northwest literatures have emphasized the conservationist spirit defining the region's literary tendencies, a framing that naturally aligns the region's ascendance into a recognizable literary genre with the ascendance of the environmental movement itself. These discourses, despite harkening the material infrastructures undergirding environmentalism—such as species decline, extractive infrastructures, and shifting ecologies—invoke Romantic tendencies to render literary concerns with nature separate from the material and economic work of commercial and colonial development. As Jason Findlay vaguely proposes, there must be “something in the soil” that has compelled literary transplants of the last forty years to the Pacific Northwest region to take nature so unanimously as their theme (1). At one level, Findlay's suggestion is intuitive: if literature is always a reflection of the environment²⁸ then the prevailing of a “conservationist consciousness” of Pacific Northwest literatures surely harkens the general environmentalist spirit that has captured the region since the 1960s.²⁹

Certainly, there is a notable parallel between the imaginative, amorphous territory of “Pacific Northwest literatures” and the political, cultural, geographic, undeniably *green*, and somewhat ambiguous territory of the region referred to as “Cascadia.” As Nick Janos and Corina Mckendry assert, if “Cascadia” is popularly understood as the “rich, wet, and spectacularly mountainous region [of] ... Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia” it is also a geo-social concept, arising from the “literal greenness situated in the [region's] vibrant biomes” giving way to its defining “green urbanism and environmental governance” (3). The tendency to read the Pacific Northwest through its “reverential naturalism” (Bramadat 24) at one level, then, illuminates how regional politics and literary dispositions might naturally converge in overarching, and yet, somewhat ambiguous conservationist dictums, like “keep the northwest wild.”³⁰ In that sense, Meany's account, as it observes the shifting nature of the landscape, seems to naturally anticipate the region's environmental and therefore literary concerns, too.

Yet, as a settler exercising a willful unseeing of Indigenous land and life, Meany's account also reveals the power-laden work of observation and accounting itself. To render the emergence of Pacific Northwest literatures an organic process of environmental response would be to overlook the abrupt, oftentimes violent, forms of dispossession shaping the environment.

²⁸ As Milton Albrecht argued, given literature's capacity to reflect socio-cultural trends, literature presented an underutilized index to sociologists. As he notes, “the idea that literature reflects society is at least as old as Plato's concept of imitation” (425). As he goes on to assert, “one can formulate the proposition that, if literature reflects, then it also confirms and strengthens cultural norms, attitudes, and beliefs” (431).

²⁹ Alongside the general momentum and popularization of the environmental movement, several events have contributed to the movement's expression in the Pacific Northwest, specifically: The formation of Greenpeace in 1971 in B.C. in opposition to the U.S. nuclear testing occurring on Amchitka Island in Alaska and, what Clayton Dumont claimed, in 1996, as the “current crisis in the Pacific Northwest” (278) regarding the logging of 10% remaining old growth forest. This crisis has engendered several notable moments of civil disobedience and activism: the 1993 anti-logging protests at Clayoquot Sound (otherwise known as the “War in the Woods”) and the ongoing protests at Fairy Creek, “Canada's largest act of civil disobedience” (CBC).

³⁰ The slogan for Conservation Northwest, an organization founded in Bellingham, Washington, whose scope spans from the Washington Coast to the Rockies of British Columbia.

Meany's account, while ostensibly a claim about what was and was not observable in Puget Sound, was also tethered to the broader system of colonial land claims that legitimized the very tropes of absence it deployed. The hauntological presence of *terra nullius* necessitates a different reading of Meany's claim about Puget Sound and its literatures—one that orients not to the “natural” but *impositional* nature of such claims. As Margery Fee has argued, any determination of a national (but also, presumably, regional) literature, “constitutes a land claim” (1). Fee's statement presents an alternate, distinctively decolonial framework³¹ for interpreting Meany's account—one that advocates a reading of regional literature and Meany's claim to it, as outwardly enmeshed with the jurisdictions and governmentality alongside which it circulated. Meany, Fee's frame suggests, was not poised on the threshold of a natural union between the region's literary expression and environmental consciousness, but as he claimed a kind of literary *terra nullius*, and thus forged a land claim, he participated in the work of imposing that very narrative. As this chapter proposes, considering a statement such as Meany's as simultaneously tethered to the region's conservationist spirit and legacy of colonial land claims might illuminate how literary expressions of regional cultural absence and natural abundance have shaped the storying of the Pacific Northwest over time. Perhaps most importantly, such a reading might elucidate the “mutual silences between postcolonial and environmental concern” undergirding the genre itself (Nixon 52).³²

This chapter tends to this relationship in parts. In the first section, I outline the broad conditions that have shaped Pacific Northwest literatures and the political dynamics and constraints of its literary shape. As I propose, the region's historical identity, as the “last frontier in the European imagination” (Murphay and Black 7) has engendered a particular emphasis on the region's oft-perceived relatively “unscathed wilderness” and sentimental attachments to it—an emphasis that obscures the coloniality of the landscape and its ensuing forms of conservation, but also the colonial construction of “wilderness” itself. In the second section, I substantiate this argument by giving historical context. Turning to James Cook's 1776 cartographic account of the northwest coast and Pacific in *Voyages III*, I argue that Cook's accounts anticipate the tensions pertaining to Pacific Northwest literature's reigning “wilderness” motif. Cook's account, thus, necessitates a more robust and protracted understanding of the evolution of the genre—one that directly contends with the potential colonial underpinnings of its conservationist consciousness. Simultaneously, reading Cook's cartographic account as a work of Pacific Northwest literature brings its aesthetic and narrative qualities to the fore, looking beyond the sole contents of the account itself and instead highlighting the literary tropes and techniques it utilizes. Reading

³¹ This is a distinctively postcolonial approach to literature in that it forgoes an aesthetic priority in favour of the “complicated politics of representation” (qtd. in Bahri 10).

³² Sheelan McLean likewise elaborates this relationship through examinations pertaining to environmental education programs in Canadian schools. Observing and resisting the tendency to assume “all outdoor environmental education programs are a decolonizing intervention,” McLean instead highlights the ways in which such models of education “reproduce and extend structures of whiteness” (355). While centered on the school institution, McLean's work expresses a similar understanding to Nixon's, in that they both interrogate the “post-racial context” and assumptions often projected and cast onto environmentalist agenda and endeavours. On the contrary, McLean argues, institutionally sanctioned visions of environmentalism (and particularly, its attachments to “wilderness as an essentialized, empty space” [355]) tend to reiterate “white middle class subjectivities” (357).

Voyages III as a work of literature, I propose, illuminates the text's strategic aggrandizing of the northwest coastal landscape and dramatization of Cook's "heroic" status in relation to it. In the third section, I reveal how this archetypal dynamic persists as a trope of current Pacific Northwest literatures. Turning to John Vaillant's Governor General prize-winning account of northwest coastal forest politics, and profile of environmental activist, Grant Hadwin, I trace the continuities between the figure of the colonial "Discovery Hero" and the trope of the "Eco-Hero"³³ to reveal a generic formation of "wilderness" that has endured despite these texts outward ideological differences.

As I propose, these generic expectations reveal a storied continuity that perpetually endorses forms of settler-colonial land claiming, both to the material landscape of the Pacific Northwest and the more elusive Pacific Northwestern identity. In this chapter's final section, I turn to thinkers and artists for whom the colonial underpinnings of the notion of "wilderness" are already assumed, and the certitude of Pacific Northwest literatures, therefore, already precarious. Importantly, these are figures who look past and disassemble colonial wilderness constructs. Here, Eve Tuck's framing of the Alaskan landscape as a power-laden negotiation between vertical surface and subsurface qualities, ostensibly "returned" land and corporate mining rights, offers a counterpoint to the region's popular envisioning as the last great wilderness frontier.³⁴ Tuck's encouragement to look past the image of "pure" wilderness and towards the political constraints underlying its scene offers a frame through which to consider the work of artists likewise responding to regional motifs. Through this lens, the poetry of Nora Dauenhauer and the mixed-media visual art of Hazel Wilson offer a remapping of the region—one that reimagines "wilderness" as not an entity to be conserved, but an entry point into the fictions and realities of the Pacific Northwest itself.

This chapter, then, might best understood as an extensive elaboration of the late Stó:lō writer and activist Lee Maracle's vital assertion: the "Pacific Northwest" is nothing but a story built on fictions—namely, the "arbitrary decisions made by colonial map makers" (61) that have ensured that Indigenous communities are both "in and out of place" within the region's prevailing systems of governance, generic formations, and expectations (2). Nonetheless, despite being a fiction, the "Pacific Northwest" holds fast: As "the result of [these] European land claims," Maracle furthers, "these settler colonial states cannot be deconstructed, even in our imagination" (61). Maracle's statements resound in striking contrast to Meany's. Indeed, if Meany is perceived and self-positions, as standing on a literary terra nullius, then Maracle suggests that Meany was already occupying a site of rife imagination. Prior to Meany, Cook had exhibited similarly

³³ This terminology was developed by Lisa Korteweg and Jan Oakley in the essay, "Eco-Heroes out of Place and Relations." As they describe, the "eco-hero" is a figure populating much of the popular literature that takes the Pacific Northwest region and radical environmentalism as its subject. As they summarize, the "eco-hero" is the figure at the helm of "eco-heroic quests for environmental communion [who] continue to be represented, mediated, and glorified through film and media narratives" (131). Typically, they further argue, "these heroes are cultural symbols of urban and societal alienation who find their redemptions and deaths by acting out their fantasies of 'wilderness'" (133). Given its allegiance to "wilderness" this trope persists as a postcolonial concern—endorsing the veneration of characters typically "imperviously ignorant of an Indigenous worldview" (136) despite enacting their dramas of solitude on established landscapes shaped by Indigenous cultural, epistemological, and custodial presence and history.

³⁴ As described in the work of Kollin, Horgan, Korteweg and Oakley.

creative, willful forms of unseeing—exercising rhetorical and observational modes that would strategically occupy spaces through narrative conventions that assured their cultural emptiness. Maracle’s work, in other words, affirms the political significance of deconstructing the story of the “Pacific Northwest,” or at least considering the narrative structures that have enabled its indelible sense of apparentness, today. Indeed, Maracle’s assertion is, if anything, a claim the power of the literary and the material expressions of that power. Stories, Maracle asserts, *do things*, and “those who are keen on re-establishing jurisdiction need to remember that diction is about voice and authority is about authoring or creating story” (53).

The “Pacific Northwest”

There is some disagreement about what constitutes “the Pacific Northwest.” Some borders are drawn trans-nationally, as a vertical swath from Alaska to California, and others follow the fault-lines of the Columbia River basin. Some borders trace the stretch of temperate rainforest running from northern California to south-central Alaska, and others, the “spiritual secularism” and environmentalist tenor of the border-defying milieu, “Cascadia” (Douglas). Some maps reiterate the nation, converging Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, and rendering Canada a gaping lacuna, and others conjoin British Columbia and the Yukon, as if the westward and northward land does not exist. The region might be demarcated by colonial cartography, drawn from the legislatures of the Oregon Treaty (1846), the Alaska Purchase Act (1867), or miscellaneous assemblages such as “spotted owls and logging disputes, microbreweries and gortex, majestic mountains, glaciers, forests, rivers, salmon” Kollin 414). Yet, unlike “the Prairies” distinctly conjuring the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, or the “Midwest” and “Great Plains,” conjuring regions decisively south of the border, the natural features of the “Pacific Northwest” consistently evade the boundaries of the nation.³⁵ The relative ambiguity of the Pacific Northwest, hence, renders it fertile territory for analyzing how frontier aesthetics exceed the bounds of singular settler nationalism, coalescing instead around specific regional imaginaries of space.

This potential is apparent in Harold Simonson’s 1980 treatise on the region’s literary identity. The recent emergence of Pacific Northwest literature, Simonson argued, was due to its fulfilling of a paradox (a paradox, he argues, central to any “regional literature”): a regional literature only becomes such once it is no longer sanctioned through state, provincial or federal lines, but rather, a defining sense of “imagination and spirit” (147). In other words, if “Pacific Northwest” literatures are the product of the arbitrary lines “made by colonial map makers” (Maracle 61), in Simonson’s view, its “coming of age” marked its transcendence of those very conditions. This transcendence, he asserted, was the culmination of three distinct phases. The phase of the region’s literary becoming, he suggests, consists of settler-colonial observation—the

³⁵ As Audra Simpson’s *Mohawk Interruptus* suggests, while this traversing of nationhood may be notable for the purposes of rendering the “Pacific Northwest,” such negotiations are persistently part of Indigenous experience under colonialism. As Simpson asserts, state, provincial and federal borders comprise the “day-to-day arenas of recognition” (117). As such, for the Mohawks of Kahnawa:ke—people who “insist on being and acting as peoples who belong to a nation other than the United States and Canada (2) and who have moved across and between New York and Quebec—“transnationalism” across the U.S./Canadian border is only significant due to the institution of such borders in the first place.

work of writers such as James Swan, Arthur Denny, Ella Higginson and others “who came specifically to the Northwest [and] wrote firsthand accounts of what they saw and did” (145). These accounts, largely devoid of aesthetic definition or excess, Simonson suggests, do not qualify as “Pacific Northwest literatures” (presumably because they lacked “imagination and spirit”) but laid significant groundwork. In the second phase, Simonson argues, a growing “effort to understand the raw details of the first” is apparent (146). In this phase, Simonson reasons, we come to associate regions with voices, such as “Allis McKay with the apple orchards of central Washington, ... Betty MacDonald with the Olympic Peninsula...[, and] Archie Binns with Puget Sound” (148). In the region’s final literary “coming of age,” Simonson proposes, “the accent falls on the noun”: *literature* (148). Authors like as H.L. Davis and James Stevens, Simonson argues, induct this phase, by advancing a regional prose suggesting not a circumstantial or new relationship to the land, but rather, an innate one. Whether Davis, who “knew the land ... and represented nearly every calling that existed in Oregon” or Stevens, who worked the land, “on the green chain in Washington and Oregon” (148), the prose of both men suggests that they “had the Northwest in their bones from the beginning” (149).

As Tiffany Lethabo King argues, maps are spatial accounts, but also expressions of a geography’s “dreams and aspirations” (80). In the context of North America, tending not to the map’s outward contents but its tacit and subtextual assumptions offers one means of disrupting “discourses of settlement and settler colonialism that attempt to disavow White conquest and violence” (King 84). Simonson’s map of Pacific Northwestern settler nature writing renders visible a canon of authorship, and yet as such, deploys its own logics of inclusion and disavowal. Like any map, it is a carving out of territory. If the “Pacific Northwest’s” literary “coming of age” is initiated in the sense that it has been “in [its author’s] bones from the beginning,” Simonson’s map of settler nature writing operationalizes a form of historical forgetting that obscures the “beginning” to which it refers. Davis’s and Steven’s claims to the genre, through their apparently innate union with the land, advance by obscuring the processes of displacement that have accompanied their occupation in the first place. It is a dynamic anticipated by Maracle’s investment in the interplays between voice and authority, stories and governance. It is also a dynamic elaborated by the direct role of wilderness in obscuring, and hence facilitating, settler colonialism. As Eve Tuck writes, “settler moves to innocence” are perpetual “strategies to remove involvement in and culpability for systems of domination” and thus, to maintain systems as is (9). For Tuck, these moves manifest as efforts to “deflect settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land” (11); to engender a sense of right, by creating a “settler adoption fantasy” wherein settlers “become without becoming” Indigenous (14). Tuck’s assertions find expression in Simonson’s own proposition that Davis and Stevens ostensibly innate relation to land facilitates their claim to the “Pacific Northwest.” Yet, it’s also a framework that illuminates Simonson’s own self-positioning as an authority on the matter to begin with. Writing of the fir tree in his neighborhood, and his son’s tearful reaction when it was logged, Simonson renders the experience akin to what, as he imagines, Indigenous communities felt while observing what “spiritless intruders were doing to...sacred land” (49). What “informs our finest Pacific Northwest literatures and gives it its name” Simonson writes, drawing upon his own experience, is how our “sense of belonging ... informs [our] deepest consciousness” (50)—one in strident discord with logics of “freeways and bulldozers” (49).

Simonson’s literary map is useful, here, as a self-conscious and intentional expression of “Pacific Northwestern” voice and authority. As a cartographer of the region’s literatures, Simonson’s sense of authority—both in the writers he deems regionally representative, and his own authority—seemingly derives from his exhibition and embodiment of conservationist

sentiment. It is a dynamic that renders his work indelible to more recent theorizations—notably, those asserting the region’s prevailing conservationist consciousness (Kollin)—but also, more subtle assertions. Writing approximately twenty-five years later, Findlay’s assertion that the past twenty-five years had ushered “the Pacific Northwest” into a genre of distinction would affirm Simonson’s timeline, and simultaneously, deploy a similar logic of its becoming. The “maturation of northwest literature,” Findlay argues, proceeds as “as generally a lengthy process of authors first rooting firmly in the region’s soil and then having their literary ideas sprout and blossom” (179). Findlay’s survey bears a striking resemblance to Simonson’s, not for its contents, but its operative logics. His conclusion that there must be “something in the soil” compelling writers to center natural landscapes as their theme, while figurative, also affirms the very literal function of nature in authorizing settler occupation of the “Pacific Northwest.” Given how land organically engenders a Pacific Northwestern literature, he reasons, one must always consider, “exotic as well as native species” (179).

The subtext of Simonson and Findlay’s theorizing—that nature *naturalizes* settler occupation—is perhaps unsurprising. Given how “wilderness is conceptually tethered to colonial notions of empty land, primitivism, and patronization of the Nature/Culture divide, there is good reason “to question the ability of wilderness discourse to critically confront [its] colonial foundations” (Ferdinand 184). This foundation, Jodi Byrd argues, dictates the nature of “wilderness” itself: wilderness is not a neutral entity but a parallax through which center-periphery dynamics are instilled. Wilderness, Byrd argues, will consistently reinforce settlement as an aspirational horizon, leaving the question “what is wild to the American Indian?” resoundingly unanswered (“Beasts of” 600). With the caveat that nature and wilderness are not synonymous, these insights undeniably bear on Pacific Northwest literatures and its central motifs. Indeed, if nature, as Simonson and Findlay suggest, tends to neutralize colonial foundations, inviting transplants to adopt and be adopted by the “Pacific Northwest,” then Byrd’s framing disrupts this process. Yet, if Byrd’s work emphasizes the coloniality of wilderness as a concept, these concerns pertain to the materiality of “Pacific Northwestern” wilderness too. As “one of the last places on the planet to be mapped by into the European imagination” (Murphay and Black 321), Pacific Northwest nature has been vested with a sense of being “relatively unscathed” (Piper and Sandlos 8). Yet, as the region’s legacy of colonial policy affirms, wilderness is central to the region’s history of colonial encroachment. In Canada, British Columbia “was the only part of Canada the British [formally] treated as *terra nullius* ... [and thus] did not acquire land by treaty. Rather, as in Australia, the government simply allocated the land to settlers without obtaining the consent of its previous occupants” (Banner 195).³⁶ The

³⁶ Scott Richard Lyon’s work on the “X Mark” offers contextualization for this language of “consent.” As Lyon writes of the treaty process and the X-Marks left on its documents by Indigenous leaders, rather than signifying consent marked a semiotics of constraint and coercion, and ascent to, and within, unequal conditions. As Lyons writes: “An x-mark is a treaty signature ... An x-mark also signified coercion. As everyone knows, treaties were made under conditions that were generally unfavourable to Indians, and as a result they were often accompanied by protest ... An x-mark is a sign of consent in a context of coercion; it is the agreement one makes when there appears to be little choice in the matter. To the extent that little choice isn’t quite the same thing as no choice, it signifies Indian agency. To the extent that little choice isn’t exactly what is meant by the word liberty, it signifies the political realities of the treaty era (and perhaps, the realities of our own complicated age as well) (1).

relatively unmediated and unregulated nature of land theft on the northwest coast inspires consideration of “wilderness” and its function not as an antithesis but accompaniment to colonial development. As Liz Piper and John Sandlos identify, the fundamental differences in colonial settlement processes in Canada’s northwest and eastern regions necessitates different ways of reading nature in these spaces. Unlike in the east, where “the simultaneous progression of colonization and environmental change occurred ... along a [relatively] single line of advance,” northwestern Canada saw “a series of sporadic and limited changes on [an]] uneven border” (763). As their work implies, reading wilderness as a hold out against colonial development fails to recognize the specifically regional ways in which these entities are entwined.

Perhaps the most fitting venue for these considerations is the region’s abundance of park space. The number of protected wilderness zones in Alaska, the Yukon, British Columbia, and Washington (alongside neighboring California) is another, material dimension of the landscape, encouraging perceptions of unscathed nature. Yet, while often conceived as a hold-out against development, park space was a central product of colonial westward expansion and the tides of environmental capitalism it ushered. As Laura Eichler and David Baumeister outline, the closing of the American frontier (and its socio-cultural permeations north of the border) engendered a nostalgic impulse to preserve the sense of uncultivated wilderness that had sojourned westward “discovery” (229). This context haunts the present as well. The “myth of untrammelled wilderness” and its “ongoing disavowal of originary, anti-Indigenous violence,” they assert, not only underlies the very concept of “wild” park space but many of the conservation movements that ideate it today (210). These insights are granted greater definition when localized to particular regions. As Bruce Braun’s analysis of British Columbia’s predominant forestry politics argues, the prevailing negotiations between extractivism and conservationism that have shaped the region have created a delusion of a two-way negotiation. The banner of conservation, Braun argues—readily posited as the only antithesis to environmental capitalism and mass extraction—sidelines alternative, ongoing, and more relational forms of environmental stewardship. Contrary to conservation’s self-likening to restorative wilding, the ability to organize the temperate rainforest, Braun argues, into “discrete and separate objects of aesthetic reflection, scientific inquiry, and economic and political calculation” is an “aftereffect” of colonialism’s representational modes (25).

Which is to say, if wilderness is a laden subject, the “Pacific Northwest” is fertile ground not only to interrogate *it*, but also its role in shaping notions of regional, and relatedly, environmentalist, identity. As I propose in the following section, Cook’s accounting of the Pacific Northwest offers an early, significant advent into the production of Pacific Northwest literature and production of the Pacific Northwest itself as a commercial, colonial zone. *Voyages* offers an account of the Pacific Northwest that haunts its continued negotiations of its regional literature, and particularly, the ways in which the generic formations of being “in and out of place” came to be calcified through the process of writing the Pacific Northwest, and those who traversed it, into being. Reading this history in this way allows the contemporary figure of the “environmentalist” to resound in Cook and the figure of the colonizer to resound in the environmentalist, and thus to reveal a line of continuity wherein the popular tropes of the region both obscure the continuities between the past and the present, but also, might be utilized towards illuminating them.

Discovery Heroes of the “Pacific Northwest”

In 1780, when news of James Cook's death reached London, Anna Seward's poem, "Elegy on Captain Cook," was published. In the spirit of other commemoratives,³⁷ the poem lionized the navigator's encounters in the Pacific. Yet Seward's investment in the Pacific's northern reaches, despite Cook's relatively short foray into them, renders "Elegy" indicative not solely of Cook's popular characterization as a "discovery hero" (Currie) but the role of northwest coast in accentuating that characterization. If Cook, as Seward writes, "pour'd his fame along a thousand shores" (110) from "The scorch'd Equator, and th' Arctic wave" (30), then the "bleak gale[s]" (5) of the northwest coast, with its "realm of frost, where icy mountains rise" (33) and "dark mists with hideous bellowing roars" (99) proved essential to that characterization (33). Indeed, despite Cook's endeavour being one of relative failure (from the perspective of the British monarchy, that is—Cook never located the Northwest Passage as he was dispatched to do—Seward's poem, in its aggrandizing of the region's natural elements, nonetheless inaugurates Cook's apparent resilience and aptitude. The Cook Seward conjures overcomes the "Huge rocks of ice" (99) and the "elemental war" (156) through, apparently, individual capacity alone: "Furling the sails with numbed hands," Seward writes, "Firm on the deck the great Adventurer stands" (87-88). As a piece of popular newspaper writing, "Elegy" indexes Britain's public spirit surrounding Cook, but also, inextricably, the "Pacific Northwest." If, as Gananath Obeyesekere asserts, Cook's mythologization as "one of the greatest navigators of all time" (7) overrode his cartographic failures in the European imagination, Seward's poem indicates how the aggrandizing of the Pacific Northwest's natural features was central to that process. Indeed, "Elegy" affirms Noel Currie's assertion that the Pacific Northwest was central to propagating Cook's significance as not only a colonial cartographer, facilitating the Pacific northwest coast's colonial commercialization and settlement, but a literary hero, claiming and animating the region in readers' imaginations. As Currie argues, *Voyages* (specifically, *Voyages III*) as a documentation of Cook's encounters in the "Pacific Northwest," would not only colonize space through cartography, but render Cook and the "Pacific Northwest" indelible to the emerging generic tropes of the Discovery Narrative, and the "Discovery hero," typically at its helm. In other words, *Voyages* is a significant account of the Pacific Northwest, perhaps most notably as an account actively bridging geopolitical investments and outcomes and, to borrow Edward Said's phrasing, the "pleasures of imperialism"³⁸ accompanying those investments and outcomes. As Currie's work outlines, the relationship between Cook and the "Pacific Northwest" was geopolitical and literary, imagined and real and, importantly, dialogic: "If Cook constructed the Pacific Northwest," Currie argues, then "the Pacific Northwest constructed Cook" (41); it was a mutually afflicting relationship that, more than anything, reminds that alongside policy and

³⁷ See also Gerald Fitzgerald's "The Injured Islanders" (1779).

³⁸ Said's phrase denotes the ways in which "the process of imperialism occurred beyond the level of the economic laws and political decisions, and—by predisposition, by the authority of recognizable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation with education, literature, and the visual and musical arts—were manifested at another very significant level, that of the national culture, which we have tended to sanitize as a realm of unchanging intellectual monuments" (13). Yet, Said also traces this phenomenon's more specific form as he turns to specific imperialists and their literatures as mediators of these wider dynamics. As Said writes of Kipling's *Kim*, he traces the liveliness and consequences of these pleasures through the observation that the author "was blinded by his own insights about India, confusing the realities that he saw with such color and ingenuity, with the notion that they were permanent and essential" (162).

material occupation, “speech act[s] can appropriate a [real and imagined] territory according to European imperial culture” and character archetypes, alongside material populations, can come to occupy that territory (12).

Scholarship attendant to Cook’s mythologized and literary significance thus affirms that there is good reason to read *Voyages* as not merely an account of the Pacific Northwest but an early advent into its aesthetic aggrandization. Yet, *Voyages* also allows for thinking through intersections between the region’s colonial and environmental tenors. Cook’s ascendance to the literary stature of “Discovery Hero” correlated with the emergence of the discovery genre, but also with the turn to natural sciences that would increasingly shape European perceptions of colonialism. The natural sciences occupied the British imagination in the late 18th and early 19th century, engendering the perception that “unlike the Renaissance Age of Discovery, the Second Great Age of Discovery ... was less about conquest, colonization, and exploitation, and more about obtaining information, gathering knowledge and advancing science” (Braun 239). As the product of Cook’s accounting, but also, his editor, John Douglass’ intuition, and the hyper-realistic illustrations of John Webber and William Wade Ellis, *Voyages* performs the generic and ideological perceptions of the scientific turn. Yet, the multifaceted production of *Voyages* also animates how the account potentially mediated, embodied, and capitalized on these perceptions. Rather than conquests, Cook’s voyages were heralded as scientific missions, cast in relation to the model of empirical exploration³⁹ and the Enlightenment dictum that “the pursuit of knowledge and travel to distant worlds were inextricably linked” (Braun 239)—a perception that was encouraged in the text of *Voyages* I, II, and III. Cook’s ship was relayed as “a floating laboratory, featuring astronomers, botanists, and taxonomists” (Obeyesekere 5) and Cook himself, as a “gentleman scientist” heralding a “new spirit of discovery”—one that was thought “peaceably conjoin science, exploration, and discovery” (Currie 21). *Voyages*’ tenor thus aligned with its work—the work of translating the “Pacific Northwest” from a series of “blank spaces denoting unknown, uncharted territory to a display case rapidly being filled with distinctive specimens” (Currie 24). It was, arguably, this holistic aesthetic and political embodiment of colonial expansion, the natural sciences, and the spirit of “discovery” that enabled *Voyages* to ascend to an “international bestseller” shortly following its publication (Braun 242).⁴⁰

Voyages, in other words, is perhaps one of the earliest examples of the confluences of colonial and conservationist spirit still found at the heart of “Pacific Northwest literatures.” If “Pacific Northwest literatures” and their contemporary “conservationist consciousness” provoke the “mutually constitutive silences between environmental and postcolonial concern” (Nixon), the Scientific Turn, upholding Cook’s significance, likewise and more outwardly, hosts these dynamics. That the scientific turn, or the “Second Great Age of Discovery” as it was heralded was, indeed, less about conquest and more about obtaining information has been thoroughly disputed. As Mary Pratt’s work on the colonial turn to natural sciences reveals, scientific exploration was highly present in the contact zone, or the “space of colonial encounters” and the

³⁹ As noted by Currie (63).

⁴⁰ As Braun details, appearing first in London in 1784, *Voyages* comprised three volumes and 1617 pages, and despite its “relatively high price of (pounds) 4, 14s, 6d, ... quickly sold out.” As and “within weeks, numerous subsequent editions, abridged versions, collections, and even children’s books followed” (Braun 243). It appeared in periodicals, such as *Gentlemen’s Magazine* and the *Critical Review*, and, prior to 1800, had been translated into French, German, Dutch, Swedish, and Italian.

typical practices of “coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” enacted in such spaces (6). As Vanessa Alayrac-Fielding argues, more specifically, the practices of the natural sciences were not obfuscations of colonial power, but their very instruments: the “collecting, classifying, and displaying imperial instruments to measure the New World and try to understand it” (393) outwardly “answered colonial purpose, as the generalisation of knowledge increased power over other nations” (394). These contingencies between colonialism’s outward conquests and valences of scientific knowledge-building, manifest in the general tenor of *Voyages*, but also, in Cook’s own performativity, both as an individual and a literary subject. Cook was a keen transplanter—a practice that accompanied him on his global missions. Indeed, Cook’s journals “abound in remarks about bringing live cattle on board the ships with a view of leaving them in New Zealand, the Society Islands and the Friendly Islands” (Alayrac-Fielding 400). For his third voyage to the Pacific Northwest in pursuit of the Northwest Passage, Cook departed with plants and animals provided by King George and acquired more in the Cape of Good Hope. The bounty of specimens aboard the *Resolution* was so diverse the ship was described as “the Ark” (Alayrac-Fielding 402). While this personal affinity was perhaps most effective in endowing Cook with the marketable perception of a “gentleman scientist,” Cook’s interest in ecology would have material consequences (Currie 21). The presence of Tahitian breadfruit in Jamaica today—a legacy of Cook’s transplantations—affirms the “environmental considerations in colonial agendas” (Alayrac-Fielding 403) and nature’s fundamental role “in building the imperial project of European nations” (397).

Voyages thus reveals how environmental interest and colonialism potentially coincide, but how they might mutually reinforce one another. Alongside their material form, these collisions also manifest in *Voyages*’ aesthetic expression. As a text produced in the interest of European expansion, *Voyages* reveals how the expressive descriptions of environmental interest—the keen detailing of landscape and diverse species—would simultaneously displace the signs of Indigenous presence and cultivation Cook encountered. *Voyages*, in the spirit of its neighboring colonial accounts, cast “original inhabitants ... as natural products of the land rather than as human producers of culture” to render the landscape “unknown territory” and, ostensibly, available territory (Currie 6). As Cook writes in one of his earliest descriptions of the region: “We were now so far advanced to the Northward and Eastward as to have reached that void space in our maps, which is marked as a country unknown ... We saw no plantations which exhibited the least trace of knowledge in the cultivation of the earth; all seemed to remain in a pure state of nature” (*Voyages* 215). It is an introduction to the region that actively conflates the map’s “unknown territory” with an almost pre-determined vision of nature—a maneuver revealing, perhaps, *Voyages*’ own subconscious awareness of how the language of “discovery” was at odds with signs of cultivation. Simultaneously, the northwest coast’s fundamentally different terrain from the South Pacific (where Cook had, prior, spent majority of his time) would necessitate a reworking of these broad, generic adherences. As Douglas Cole and Maria Tippet write, “18th century maritime explorers saw the Northwest Coast as one would expect them to see it: through eyes conditioned by the aesthetic ideas of their age” (7). Yet, British Columbia, and the “the more northerly coast, lacking the requirements for beauty and picturesqueness” that had largely informed “the New World’s” Edenic encoding “had to be seen in terms of sublimity” (5). Cole and Tippet argue that the northwest coast brought about the expansion of European aesthetic ideals, ushering in new ways accommodating the characteristics of the temperate rainforest. As they propose, “pleasing diversity and sublime desolation,” is the aesthetic model that best captures “the 18th century British perception of Northwest Coast” through the eyes of explorers (1).

In dialogue with *Voyages*, Cole and Tippet's work reminds that while *terra nullius* espoused emptiness, it also was malleable and replete with life. This is evident in Cook's journals, which, despite adhering to the expectations of an "uncultivated" landscape, nonetheless populate it with dramatic and lively accounts of nature. Notably, *Voyages* illustrates how nature did not merely accompany but was integral to Cook's mode of seeing. In his prose, the forces of inclement weather and wild animals literally subsume the already fleeting and fragile presence of human life, revealing how nature functioned within the ideological workings of the text. As Cook writes, "On the 22d, we came again in sight of land ... covered with snow and abounding with trees of an immense height; as we neared it, we observed several smokes far up the country; but before we reached the shore, a sudden storm came on, more violent than any we had yet met with on this tempestuous coast" (212). The signs of smoke, at odds with the region's "uncultivated" topography, function strategically in the image: both affirming its tenor of observational accuracy and simultaneously swiftly relegated to the periphery of the scene by the force of natural elements. The passage is representative of Cook's own tendencies as a writer to enact a "a way of seeing ... premised on not seeing" (Currie 45). While the Nuu-chah-nulth are seldom present (despite Cook's heavy reliance upon their community) *Voyages*' logs are dominated by "heavy squalls," "heavy rains," "strong gales" (211), a growing sense of both magnitude ("the land" he notes, is "high and mountainous" [211]), and natural life: an uncultivated space "covered with sea-fowl ... the skirts of the woods with land birds of various kinds" where the "howlings of wild beasts" can be heard, distantly, in the treeline (211).

There is, thus, good reason to read *Voyages* as not only a cartographic account but a work of literary imagination. Most importantly, *Voyages* exemplifies the political consequences of that literary imagination. Cook's vivid accounts of elemental warfare, and the ideological sightlines those accounts encouraged, invoke the imaginative work of the colonial "discovery narrative" and its role in constructing the "Pacific Northwest." Yet, reading *Voyages* as fiction risks overlooking the material effects of that construction. As Daniel Clayton argues, *Voyages* projected European ways of seeing, but also formed a tangible cartographic "baseline of Western knowledge and understanding that others built on" (332). Cook's cartographic disavowal of Indigenous presence—his tendency to both economically describe "his dealings with the people of Nootka Sound" and leave "few signs of Native life on his map of the northwest coast of America"—presented a "forked system of representation that would offer a "rarefied, cartographic way of seeing and dealing with distant lands [that] endured" (Clayton 332). As the rubric for the British Cabinet's approach to the region, Cook's vision of the Northwest Coast would offer a blueprint for events such as the Nootka Sound crisis of 1790 and the Oregon Treaty of 1846 and, importantly, bring "the Pacific Northwest into commercial and political circulation"—rendering it, and its resources, a site of international interest (Clayton 331). Cook's account, in other words, if a highly imaginative one, would nonetheless prove inextricable from the borders and transoceanic negotiations that would flood the region in pursuit of otter, then lumber, and then oil.

Voyages' aesthetics of nature offer an entry point to think about the colonial, capitalist, and commercial underpinnings of the "Pacific Northwest." While the bestseller status of *Voyages* was essential to the mythologization of Cook as a "discovery hero" and "celebrity cartographer," it was also essential to "alert[ing] a vast reading public, both in Europe and the young USA, to the commercial opportunities emerging from the exploitation of these resources" (Braun 238). Within ten years of *Voyages*' publication, news of the profitability of the sea otter skin trade had traveled from London to, among other places, Dublin, Paris, Rotterdam, Turin, Berlin, Anspach, Philadelphia, Worcester, New York, and Boston" (244). As Braun's comparative study on the

many reprints of *Voyages* observes, despite the alterations that the text would incur over time, with each republication the sea otter's detailed presence remained steadfast. Indeed, it is arguably because of Cook's prominence as a celebrity figure—both in the world of circumnavigation and foreign affairs and general reading publics—that the sea otter trade erupted as it did. North coastal waters had been traversed, and the sea otter documented, by outsiders prior to Cook; on the Russian Second Kamchatka Expedition naturalists Georg Willhelm Steller and Gerhard Friedrich Miller had likewise accounted for the animal.⁴¹ Yet “it was not until the “the latest encroachment of the English and their celebrity navigator Captain James Cook, [that] the Russian imperial magistrates felt they needed to validate their claims and inform a greatest European public about their discoveries in the Aleut Islands and Alaska” (Braun 242). The popular storying of the “Pacific Northwest” that rendered both Cook and the sea otter inextricable characters would prove central to the systemic exploitations of the “pleasing diversity” *Voyages* accounted for. As John Vaillant would write in 2005, in his own bestselling account of the region, *The Golden Spruce*: “It may be the sea otter that brought them, but the timber is why they stayed” (97).

“Eco-Heroes” In and Out of Place

Read as both a historical account and an aesthetic expression, *Voyages* unsettles the ostensible recency of “Pacific Northwest literatures” and, perhaps, the overdetermined distinctions between the colonial account and popular literature. In *Voyages*, nature is an aggrandized venue serving the mutual characterizations of setting and “hero,” and a commercial index, signalling the wealth of resources to be exploited. *Voyages*, in that sense, is both a work, to recall Simonson's metrics, of literary “imagination and spirit,” and a geopolitical effort—an expression giving rise to tangible federal and provincial jurisdictions, the material decline of oceanic populations and resources, and the projection of western sovereignty across the northwest coast. Read as a multifaceted enterprise, the text, and its “rarified way of seeing” (Clayton), affirms that cartographic blueprints were also aesthetic blueprints: Cook's wilderness—abundant and empty, “desolate and sublime” (Cole and Tippit 1)—emerges not in excess to the work's investment in European expansion, but strategically entangled with it. *Voyages* thus disorients interpretive practices invested in reading the “Pacific Northwest” in isolation from its historical conditions; the region's geopolitical history is, *Voyages* suggests, a literary history, too. Specifically, *Voyages*' glimpses some of the ways in which colonial and conservationist spirit converge and find each other in this aesthetic-political legacy. Amidst the dramatic opposition between extraction and conservation, profitable and pristine wilderness, *Voyages*' reveals, are sites of mutual interest. Cook's affinities for natural transplantation, transport, and preservation, and investments in the extensive biome he toured, emphasize not Cook's sole allegiance to environmental capitalism and commercialization, but how a reverence for nature—in its raw, pure, and sublime state—anticipated such exploits. Importantly, *Voyages* glimpses the role of the “hero” as a mediator of these significant, yet relatively undisclosed, relationships.

There are many texts in the category of “Pacific Northwest literatures” offering rich terrain to extend these aesthetic-political reading practices into the present. John Vaillant's *The Golden Spruce* is the text I analyze here for several reasons. The recipient of the 2005 Governor General's award for nonfiction, *The Golden Spruce*, like *Voyages*, is an international bestseller that takes Canada's northwest coast as its subject. In the spirit of Cook's text, *The Golden Spruce*

⁴¹ On the Second Kamchatka Expedition (1741-1743).

thus not only introduces northwest coastal forest to global literary imaginations but does so in the spirit of facticity, utilizing the vernaculars of science and a sense of historical situatedness. The northwest coastal forest Vaillant conjures is both materially shaped by colonial encroachment (Cook is a strong presence in the “wild west” of early trading Vaillant details [57]) and a temperate biome, whose accounting for is both “still in its infancy” and yet is known to be “seething with life ... [wherein a single] square meter of temperate forest soil can contain as many as two million creatures representing a thousand species” (Vaillant 14). It is, thus, not only *The Golden Spruce*’s subject but its representational mode as well that brings it into *Voyages*’ proximity. If *Voyages*’ account of Britain’s “last frontier,” was entrusted to its “celebrity cartographer” and “gentlemen scientist,” then Vaillant’s description of a last, old growth wilderness frontier has, likewise, earned accolades for its “ambitiously researched” (*Seattle Times*) scopic vantage, as “sharply focussed summary of forest politics” (*Georgia Straight*). A striking similarity between these works, then, is not their shared setting or use of scientific vernaculars but capacity to construct a “hero” within these constraints. Like *Voyages*, Vaillant’s account of the northwest coast primarily orbits a central character: Grant Hadwin—an environmental activist whose act of eco-terrorism would inspire reckoning with B.C. forest politics Vaillant takes up. Therein lies the general impetus for comparison, at least, as this chapter sees it; *Voyages* and *The Golden Spruce*, despite self-situating as factual accounts of the northwest coast each engender an aggrandized and heavily narrativized account of the region that would result in lasting impressions, both of its literary and material form. As one reviewer would note, Vaillant’s account would continue the “Canadian tradition of mythologizing nature” and invite “one ‘heroic’ logger by the name of Grant Hadwin” to enter it (Guichon 93).

Reading *The Golden Spruce* in the spirit of *Voyages*, attuned to the aesthetics of the nonfictional account, might illuminate the relationship between the “Pacific Northwest” and the figure who traverses it. Perhaps most importantly, a comparative approach might reveal the shifting and continuous terms of that relationship across these work’s temporal and ideological discrepancies. As Isabella Miere argues, while “hero images transform over time ... the hero archetype itself does not change” (37). This assertion resonates when one considers the tropes of Cook’s heroism, and their allegiance to the emergent “discovery hero” during Europe’s era of colonial expansion, and the more ambiguous “hero” stature of a figure such as Hadwin, whose status as a well-intentioned eco-terrorist suggests a more fraught dynamic with both the state and popular culture. Yet, Miere’s framework is pertinent here, both in its definition of the hero’s enduring archetype and the cultural shifts that have altered its appearance over time. The hero, Miere writes, is a figure who “departs from his common world into a strange region full of magic wonders”—a world wherein they will be challenged, aided, and ultimately, emerge transformed (Miere 41). In short, “the archetypal hero receives a call and sets off into the unknown” (42). While this archetype endures, the desire for moral purity has shifted. “Today,” Miere writes, “the classical hero has become the banished hero and the negative hero”—a shift revealing how the “edges of good and evil have blurred” as the classical hero proves no longer “sufficiently credible” as the moral compass of storytelling (46). Miere’s insights elaborate the shifting nature of Cook and Hadwin’s “heroism.” Yet Miere’s work also emphasizes how that shifting relationship reveals the steadfastness of another vital trope: the “unknown” terrain through which the hero moves. Indeed, read comparatively *The Golden Spruce* and *Voyages* perhaps most concisely reveal how, if the hero’s valences have shifted over time, the “unknown wilderness” of the “Pacific Northwest” has proven consistently fertile ground for their enactments.

Indeed, despite their formal parallels, *Voyages* and *The Golden Spruce* bear outwardly different investments and “heroic” journeys. If *Voyages* documented the northwest coast as a last

commercial frontier of British expansion, then *The Golden Spruce*, an “elegy for Northwest resources and livelihoods disappearing at a terrifying rate” (Seattle Intelligence), renders it a wilderness frontier on a disparaged planet amidst ever-encroaching extraction—a landscape, in other words, existing in the wake of such reckless exploits. It is a relationship conjured in Vaillant’s use of frontier signification to capture a waning world: B.C.’s coast, Vaillant writes, is a “perilous netherworld” (5), boasting a simultaneously “rapidly vanishing frontier era” of reckless resource industry management (89) and a sense of biodiversity, integral to planetary wellbeing. These differences pertain to the text’s central protagonists. Unlike *Voyages*’ advancing of an intuitive “hero”—a colonial cartographer to usher the text’s narrative of “discovery”—Vaillant grants the role to a less likely figure. *The Golden Spruce* tells the story of logger-turned-environmentalist Grant Hadwin, and Hadwin’s felling of a Sitka spruce in the Haida Gwaii archipelago in 1996 in an act of environmental protest. The counterintuitive choice to fell old growth, as an environmental activist, is one Vaillant elaborates closely. At the time, Vaillant details, the “west coast logging bonanza” had reached its peak (42), and Hadwin, a man who had long stood on the frontlines of such work, was entering a radically altered consciousness. These tensions culminated when Hadwin took a trip to Haida Gwaii and encountered the “golden spruce” for the first time. A genetic anomaly, distinguishable by its bright, yellow boughs, the spruce had become a staple of the region’s eco-tourism economies, with hotels and restaurants taking its name. The tree thus encapsulated the region’s “vortex of conflicting hopes, dreams, and ambitions,” at least, as Hadwin saw them: “The golden spruce and its environs embod[ied] the collision between the ideal of “Haida Gwaii”: a true rainforest paradise ... and its industrial alter ego, “the Charlottes, an offshore timber warehouse employing vertical storage” (239). “More than most people,” Vaillant writes, Hadwin “would have been struck by the contrast between ... the town mascot and the free-range saw log farm that surrounded it. To a person who knew the woods as well as Hadwin it would have been as insulting and ludicrous as an albino buffalo on a putting green” (148). Hadwin’s decision to fell the tree, *The Golden Spruce* suggests, emerged (ironically) from conservationist conviction. It is a framing that proved convincing. As one reviewer suggested, *The Golden Spruce* and its unlikely protagonist, dared to ask: “Who does more harm, the man who cuts down the tree, or the society who destroys the forest?” (*Los Angeles Times*).

Which is to say, the theme of environmental conservationism dominates readings of *The Golden Spruce* and Hadwin himself. This context renders Hadwin’s unlikely stature as a “hero” somewhat intuitive. If *The Golden Spruce* engendered public fascination with Hadwin’s contradictory character,⁴² that fascination reflected a regional preoccupation with contradictory forestry politics themselves. Shaped by the dramatically oppositional forces of extraction and conservation, B.C. forests maintain a dualism as simultaneously the primary national lumber exporter and wilderness hold-out (Braun). As one reviewer argued, *The Golden Spruce* and its titular “hero” aptly reflected “B.C.’s conflicted soul” (Gavin). Despite Hadwin’s arguable encapsulation of B.C.’s own contradictory environmental landscape, Hadwin’s act would have consequences beyond his environmentalist purview—consequences that likewise preoccupy Vaillant’s account. The tree, Vaillant details, was indispensable to the Haida, the Nation that had stewarded the unceded land upon which it had grown for hundreds of years. In this context, the

⁴² Sasha Snow’s 2015 award-winning docudrama, *Hadwin’s Judgement*, is arguably a testament to this fascination, as are the many opinion pieces on the subject as read in venues such as *NPR*, *CBC*, *The Toronto Star*, *The Vancouver Sun*, *The Tyee*, *Northern Woodlands Magazine*, etc.

golden spruce, or Kiidk'yaas as it is called, was not only an integral biological agent of the temperate ecosystem, but the local socio-cultural ecosystem, where it functioned as motif in storytelling, pedagogy, and forms of intergenerational cultural wealth. In this setting, Hadwin's decision to fell the tree exceeded being a statement on B.C.'s forestry industry; in this context, Vaillant details, Hadwin's act was "akin to murder" (37). (These consequences, Vaillant outlines, were genuinely unanticipated by Hadwin, who considered himself in good relation with the community). This dynamic is not only accounted for in the book but fundamentally bears upon its trajectory. By the account's end, Hadwin's speculated disappearance to Alaska is driven by his effort to evade multiple legal systems: Both the coast guards and his court date in Haida Gwaii are in close pursuit of the logger-turned-conservationist who had initiated a region-wide reckoning with a single tree.

If Hadwin emerges as a flawed hero—an "environmental activist" at best, and a "good man driven mad by environmental devastation" at worst—the Haida Nation's presence in *The Golden Spruce* complicates this relationship (*Seattle Times*). The Haida's relationship to Kid'kiyaas necessitates a reckoning with the multifaceted ideological qualities and material consequences of Hadwin's gaze—namely, what is sidelined by its steadfast fixation on environmental capitalist and conservationist struggle. Given the tendency to read Hadwin as a radical (albeit flawed) environmentalist, this dynamic also necessitates reckoning with the sightlines of the book itself. Hadwin's popular rendering, as a figure responding to the urgencies of present-day deforestation and not inhabiting a continuum of colonial, willful unseeing, is a dynamic of Vaillant's account revealing its potential for reading the gaps, dissonances, and sightlines of postcolonial and environmental critique. Importantly, it is a relationship that, in the spirit of *Voyages*, necessitates interrogation not solely of the events, but the aesthetics of the account that shape the ideological nature of its characterizations. That Vaillant's prose would account for Hadwin's act and its consequences within the Haida community, and yet nonetheless compel a popular inclination to read Hadwin through the frame of environmental activism, points to the potential dissonance between the work's content and sentiments. Like Cook, whose simultaneous failure to locate the Northwest Passage and popular mythologization has motivated a literary deconstruction of his "heroism" (Obeyesekere; Currie), Vaillant's capacity to account for Hadwin's transgressions of Indigenous land, life, and sovereignty, and endorse Hadwin's environmental "heroism" inspires similar considerations. While *The Golden Spruce* may account for Hadwin's lack of legal right to claim the tree, its popular reception complicates this outward disposition of the text. As one reviewer noted, in the wake of Vaillant's work, "no tree is more associated with Haida Gwaii than the golden spruce, and no person more associated with it than Grant Hadwin" (Kett).

Which is to say, like *Voyages*, Hadwin's "heroism" seemingly derives not from the facts of the account so much as his characterization within it. Here, Currie's analysis of *Voyages*, and insight into the dramatized interplay between Cook and the landscape, as the literary infrastructure of Cook's "heroism," extends a useful framework. It is an especially compelling framework when one considers the distinctly parallel representations of landscape these works employ and, moreover, the parallel sightlines of their protagonists. The Pacific Northwest, Vaillant introduces, is "perilous netherworld" (5); stretching from "Alaska south through British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon to Mendocino Country, California," the land, he writes, is "perfectly designed to support life on a grand scale" [18]. It is "a world unto itself," he elaborates, "separated from the rest of North America by ... the infinity of mountains" [4]. Of the rainforest, he particularly observes, it is "an awesome place to behold: huge, holy, and eternal-feeling, like a branched and needled Notre Dame" (10). It is sublime and desolate—a place where

“small things are hard to find” (14) that “exudes an overwhelming power to diminish all who move across it” (12). “You can be twenty paces from a road or a beach,” he notes, “and become totally disoriented; once inside, there is no future and no past, only the sodden, twilit now” (10). It is a landscape rendering that warrants comparison to Cook’s work, not solely for its not for its visual parallels (indeed, given the shared physical settings of *Voyages* and *The Golden Spruce* such an analysis risks restating the obvious) but the potentially shared, ideological subtext of these texts’ similar treatments of land. Given Currie’s analysis of Cook’s way of seeing (that is, “consist[ing] of not seeing that which was alien to [him]” [42]) we might consider *The Golden Spruce*’s own deployment of wilderness towards such ideological horizons. The unanticipated colonial consequences of Hadwin’s act (and his own, inability to foresee them) ushers a similar line of inquiry: What are the implications of a forest yet to be discovered—a “netherworld,” where “there is no future and no past”?

That the aesthetics of wilderness carry ideological dimensions and political consequences is, on one level, expressed by Vaillant’s prose itself. Vaillant’s framing of the logging industry and mass-extractive forestry practices Hadwin would initially partake in self-consciously elaborates the political pitfalls of its own scene of infinite, untrammelled wilderness. “In a geography of this magnitude,” Vaillant empathizes, “one can imagine how it might have been possible to believe that the West Coast [logging] bonanza would never end” (50). It is a fleeting statement with strong implications. Vaillant’s description of the sublime, ostensibly limitless forest, seemingly cautions to the very aesthetic tropes the prose utilizes. There is a perilous short-sightedness, Vaillant’s prose implies, in the myth of “sublime desolation”; the trope of northwest coastal magnitude is inextricable from its horizon of environmental degradation. Yet, as such, Vaillant’s aesthetics of wilderness bear more concrete implications for Hadwin’s “heroism.” If Hadwin had built his livelihood off the extractive industries he would later oppose, this dynamic seemingly dissolves into the pardonable offence of interpreting wilderness as limitless in the first place. Indeed, while Vaillant’s prose implies a wariness of its own aesthetics, it simultaneously invites such aesthetics to frame and motivate the actions and events accounted for in *The Golden Spruce*. Most importantly, Vaillant’s introduction to the forest and its industries establishes an aesthetic-political landscape wherein untrammelled and devastated wilderness, accompanied by conservationist stewardship and capitalist degradation, are seemingly the only political forces in operation. Braun’s assertion that this dialectic has defined the “Pacific Northwest,” at the expense of other, buried, and more ambivalent epistemologies, resounds in Vaillant’s rendering. Indeed, initially Hadwin’s investment in capitalist decimation is assumed by the ostensibly infinite aesthetics of the forest itself, and Hadwin’s later felling the tree, it is implied, is a natural response in a landscape shaped by the binary oppositions of extractive and conservationist impulses.

Simultaneously, *The Golden Spruce* emulates *Voyages* configuring of the “hero” more concretely. The dramatic wilderness frontier Currie deems indelible to *Voyages*’ literary power, and the construction of Cook’s character, is alive in Vaillant’s configurations. It is evident in Vaillant’s explicit use of the wilderness frontier itself, as a means of situating Hadwin and his earlier work in the forestry: “Old-growth loggers are latter-day frontiersmen letting the light into the last dark corners of the country; we don’t see them because they are pushing deep into places where the bulk of the population wouldn’t last for twenty-four hours” (121). In the spirit of Seward’s poem, and its rendering of Cook’s circumnavigation, logging, in Vaillant’s framing, is a scene of endurance: “The work of removing rainforest timber is not only wet to the point of amphibiousness, it is also hazardous in the extreme” (26); “the odds that a logger will be killed on the job are approximately thirty times greater than those of the average North American

worker” (26). Indeed, Vaillant writes, the region is “scientifically designed to crush limbs and puncture bodies” (37)—sometimes “the forest would simply swallow a man whole” (34). “Even now,” Vaillant notes, “loggers must sometimes carry their dead partners out of the woods like sacks of flour” (35). The intensified dualism between Hadwin and his environment conjured through his work—a dualism ultimately emboldening his resilient (and the landscape’s inhospitable) characterizations—accompanies Hadwin as he transitions into environmental activism. Hadwin’s journey across Hecate Strait, to Haida Gwaii, to fell the tree, and then later to Alaska to evade authorities is likewise narrated through an emboldening landscape. Hecate Strait, the body of water bridging mainland B.C. and Haida Gwaii is rendered “one of the most diabolically hostile environments that wind, sea, and land are capable of conjuring up” (197). It is a characterization that services Vaillant’s later framing of Hadwin’s journeying across it as an endeavour against all odds: “It would have been so dark that even white-capped waves would have been barely visible. The temperature was just above freezing, but the windchill factor would have driven it down to minus twenty; under these circumstances, an ordinary person would be at risk for frostbite within half an hour. Hadwin was wearing only a slicker and dishwashing gloves ... it was unlikely that he could have survived a night in such weather. And yet, somehow, he did” (298).

The dramatized nature of the Pacific Northwest, in other words, proves inextricable from Hadwin’s characterization as a man exceptionally adept at traversing it; Hadwin’s “frontiersman’s capacity for excess and risk” derives from the aesthetic-political nature of the frontier (Vaillant 88). Indeed, the hostility of the landscape arguably serves an essential function legitimizing the cumulative tenor of the account, and its elaboration of Hadwin’s seemingly innate relationship to the land. He was a “skilled outdoorsman who could ‘survive on nuts and berries for six weeks at a time’” (318), Vaillant writes, and maintained an “unmeasurably, non-intellectual awareness—what some call ‘bush sense’” (159) that allowed him to “thrive on nature in her rawest form” (97). *The Golden Spruce’s* account of B.C. forests, and Hadwin’s act of eco-terrorism within them, affirm that Hadwin’s eco-heroism was out of place within a context of Haida law, stewardship, and sovereignty; B.C. forests, the account outwardly asserts, are historical archives, where events are always situated in a wider context of colonial and Indigenous negotiation. Indeed, Hadwin, the facts of *The Golden Spruce* affirm, entered into relation with the tree as the result of the tides of mass settlement, environmental capitalism, and the sightlines of the settler colonial state, as a man whose parents grandparents travelled across the prairies out of “hunger for opportunity” (53) and had built a forestry career when the forests of the “Northwest were being treated like an inexhaustible golden goose” (93). Yet the aesthetic maneuvering and characterizing of Hadwin simultaneously reorients from these structural, ordinary conditions, peripheralizing them in a dynamic account—or story—of a man exceptionally adept at circumnavigating the hostile landscape of the “Pacific Northwest.” If *The Golden Spruce* presents an account that elaborates Hadwin’s lack of right to claim the tree—for environmentalist causes, or let alone, at all—the account’s aesthetic dimensions lay groundwork for the tree to be claimed by Hadwin, nonetheless. As Vaillant writes, “The tree was one in a billion, but so was Grant Hadwin” (317).

Negotiating “Wilderness”: (Re)mapping the “Pacific Northwest”

Reading *The Golden Spruce* as a work of aesthetic imagination illuminates conditions that have enabled Hadwin to claim the spruce and the “Pacific Northwest,” despite Vaillant outwardly acknowledging the violations of that claim. In dialogue with *Voyages*, and its own aggrandizing of Cook’s regional claim, *The Golden Spruce* indicates an ongoing practice of storying—one

wherein land claims are imbricated with the literary, particularly the storying of the “Pacific Northwest.” These texts thus testify to a generic formation of landscape that adheres, despite their apparently different ideological investments and positioning on the timeline of Pacific Northwest literatures. This comparative relationship, invoking the frontier mythologies alive in both works, offers a framework through which to consider the enduring presence of *terra nullius* as an aesthetic phenomenon accompanying the genre’s bestselling texts. Indeed, such a comparative reading orients not only to these texts’ shared aesthetics of landscape, but how these aesthetic formations of the “Pacific Northwest” evoke ideological expectations. Both *the Golden Spruce* and *Voyages* demonstrate how forms of willful unseeing persist through the sightlines of Cook and Hadwin, and notably, the contingency and mutually reiterative relationship between those sightlines and the landscape they render. As shared forays into the genre of Pacific Northwest literatures, then, this continuity reveals the potential nature of generic formations themselves. While densely power-laden, these scenes of the “Pacific Northwest”—reiterated across time—are also highly reductive. The apparitions of Cook’s landscape in Vaillant’s conservationist literature, and the shared modes of seeing these landscapes compel, while reflecting the aesthetic adaptability of *terra nullius* and the complex ideological nexus of these works, also reflects a homogenous view of nature, and with it, a relatively homogenous set of narrative tropes and expectations.

The notion that *Voyages* and *The Golden Spruce*’s parallel aesthetics might appeal to shared ideologies—ideologies that position the land’s original custodians as “in and out of place” within it (Maracle)—is well established in the region’s broader popular narrative. As Kwakwaka’wakw scholar Sarah Hunt observes, “the story of the Northwest Coast ... constructed via Euro-western and settler imaginaries today” (3) perpetually frames the region as a “frontier zone-untouched wilderness, surrounded by [its] vast beauty” (6). Hunt’s analysis of the colonial underpinnings of the region’s reigning aesthetics manifests especially in its interrogation of Emily Carr’s work. As Hunt writes: “The vision of nature being celebrated today via Carr’s legacy is, of course, a nature without us” (7). Hunt’s work is significant as it gestures toward the nexus between “voice and authority” and matters of jurisdiction at the heart of Maracle’s concern. Indeed, that Emily Carr’s work is rendered indelible to the “spirit of the Pacific Northwest” animates Hunt’s assertion that Carr’s very aesthetics are an entry point into the regional politics of race-making and exclusion. Yet the similarities between *The Golden Spruce* and *Voyages* transport Hunt’s observations into less explicitly aesthetic projects of regional representation. Analyzing the tropological relationship of these works necessitates an interdisciplinary framework attuned to the politics of storying and the storying of environmental politics. Sarah Whatmore elaborates on this overlap. As Whatmore argues, homogenous nature—that is, generic ideal of nature—is a site of colonial and environmentalist entanglement. Valuing Nature based on its “distance from humankind” and “according to the magnetic poles of the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural’ ... [or] built...and ‘natural environments’” (266) anticipates how “environmentalist rhetoric is also complicit in the purification of the spaces” that has accompanied colonial expansion (266). Whatmore’s framing usefully anticipates the compatibility between scenes of homogenous natures (such as those aligned with Cook and Hadwin’s shared “heroic” stake in a “frontier zone [of] untouched wilderness” [Hunt 6]) and the concept of literary genre itself. If genre is a zone of expectations,⁴³ then Whatmore’s work implies how homogenous views of nature prove especially compatible with the innately

⁴³ In reference to Lauren Berlant’s description of genre elaborated in *Cruel Optimism*.

constrained mode of interpreting stories. Recalling Maracle's assertion that the myth of the "Pacific Northwest" cannot "be deconstructed, even in our imagination" (13), it is then worth attending to how geographies (such as the Pacific Northwest) *become* genres—and hence, how they become lodged into imagination, in the first place.

Which is to say, the stakes of Cook and Hadwin's "heroism" seemingly necessitates a reckoning with genre itself. Whatmore's work is significant here in not only elaborating this relationship, but its postcolonial and environmental dimensions. While homogenous natures, Whatmore's work suggests, reduced to stark binaries between nature and culture (inferably, to be traversed by heroes) lend themselves readily to the generic formations, they also exist in relation to their opposite: "heterogenous natures" (268). In this concept, Whatmore's tacit contract with literary theory emerges. Like homogenous natures, heterogeneous nature anticipates the politics of storying and the concept of genre that gives it form. Yet, heterogeneous natures—the "more intimate, lively and promiscuous geographies than these quarantined fragments" (268)—ensure more proliferative, unexpected, ambivalent, and ambiguous relations, and hence stories. As Whatmore asserts, heterogenous natures invite a "radical re-cognition of the intimate, sensible and hectic bonds through which people, organisms, machines and elements make and hold their shape in relation to each other in the business of everyday living" (270). Heterogenous natures thus potentially offer a framework by which to not only contrast and assess the generic formations of *Voyages* and *The Golden Spruce* but engage the scenes of nature advanced by the thinkers and artists not appealing to but rather interrogating the homogenous narrative expectations of the "Pacific Northwest" itself.

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If Alaska proved the "last frontier" for both Cook and Hadwin—the foil to Cook's cartographic ambitions and the speculated end to Hadwin's journey—their narratives reflect broader generic conventions. Lisa Korteweg and Jan Oakley's analysis of the "eco-hero's" prevalence across popular texts and media emphasizes the significance of Alaska as a final frontier within narrative trends, namely, "eco-quests in the Alaskan 'wilderness'" (131). As they elaborate, the drama of such quests turns on a particular image of the region—one "cleansed of human tragedy and historical contamination to be recast as a place full of sunlight, pristine nature, and new promise" (132). Their assertion finds resonance elsewhere. Maureen Horgan extends that regional analysis into a gendered analysis, highlighting how Alaska's broader cultural significance in the U.S. has illuminated how "narratives of frontier wilderness are intrinsically tied up with an Alaskan identity, specifically a masculine identity" (63) and hence, the ironically heightened compatibility between "wilderness" and "white American popular culture in an age of late capitalism" (65). Susan Kollin's work on Alaska's significance as the "wild, wild, north" considers the "meanings and values assigned to Alaska" in popular culture, suggesting the region has functioned to "reopen the western American frontier that Frederick Jackson Turner declared closed" (43). In dialogue, these insights affirm Alaska's well-established generic formation in popular culture and hence, the well-established cultural terrain of Cook and Hadwin's "heroic" journeys into the unknown.

The role of the Alaskan wilderness in settler sentimental attachment is secondary to Eve Tuck's analysis of the region. Tuck orients not to Alaska's wilderness landscape, but policy shifts and modern treaty negotiations undercutting its over-saturated image. For Tuck, it is not environmentalist ideology but the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) that grants the most productive entryway into Alaska's politics of landscape. Tuck's commentary on

the ANCSA, the largest land settlement act in United States history, illuminates the contingencies of land reparation in settler colonial regimes. The act, ostensibly the returning of land to the region's Indigenous communities was, moreover, a "makeover of Indigenous land and life" (241). That the ANCSA was "informed by neoliberalism, not Alaska Native conceptualizations of land" (241) is evident in the model of landscape imposed by the settlement—one that eclipsed systems-based and Indigenous conceptions of land in favour of sequestered, bounded, and commoditized organizing logics. Through the ANCSA, the "returned" land was carved vertically, with its surface title being allocated to Indigenous Alaskan communities and with subsurface rights granted to corporations in pursuit of minerals and resources. As Tuck reveals, this contingency transforms the nature of ANCSA itself. Framed as a policy oriented towards reconciliatory and decolonial futurity, ANCSA's clauses calcified settler colonial jurisdiction: "The invention of subsurface estates is a remaking of terra nullius...[and] re-creation of doctrine of discovery where there were/are already people" (Tuck 252). Yet, the presence of subsurface estates, while literally opening the 44 million acres of land to corporate invasion, also opened the future of the land to colonial invasion. As Tuck outlines, in exchange for the surface rights, Indigenous leaders and Elders at the forefront of the deal were required to not make any land claims in the future.

ANCSA, as a land return shaped by settler colonial subtext and contingencies, necessitates contending with the subtext of Alaska's "wilderness" and the environmentalism that idolizes it. Indeed, Tuck's use of the ANCSA, as a representation of ongoing regional land relations, historicizes the landscape and the settler-colonial desires it has inspired. If Alaska today is a horizon of desire in the contemporary eco-quest, the act of "wanting Alaska" (251), Tuck writes, has a concrete history in settler-colonial foreign relations and policy.⁴⁴ With mounting Russian interest to acquire the land on the horizon, political pressure to absorb Alaska as the 49th state in the U.S. was eventually fulfilled in 1867. As Tuck reveals, "wanting Alaska" also has its origins in the 1890 discovery of gold—a discovery would usher an influx of white prospectors to the region and fundamentally alter its composition. This want was also reiterated when, in 1968, oil was discovered in the Kenai Peninsula. This discovery would inspire the U.S. government's desire to resolve the region's Indigenous land claims swiftly, in order to solidify land rights and ensure extraction was efficiently underway.

Tuck's work, in other words, actively situates the popular environmental modus of "wanting Alaska" in a legacy of extractive pursuit. In that sense, Tuck's analysis animates, and offers regional specificity, Axelle Germanaz's et al.'s broader exploration of extractivism's "sentimental economies," where, as they assert, "ideological uses of the sentimental often run on a form of denial of the violence extractivism causes, at home and elsewhere, and attempt to obscure its larger consequences" (17). Indeed, underlying emergence of Alaska as a sentimental "wilderness" frontier, Tuck suggests, are the legacies of extractivism that have shaped that attachment in the first place. These legacies not only haunt but materially persist in the subsurface realities of Alaskan soil, where the perpetual discovery and extraction of resources continues and invariably transforms the nature of the surface itself. Indeed, "corporate structures are inherently at odds with structures of Indigeneity" (Tuck 256) and the ANCSA, and the

⁴⁴ Broadly, these relations were defined by, firstly, Russia's partial colonization of the Aleutian Islands and Alaskan Peninsula, as well as its first permanent settlement in 1748, to the US purchasing 586, 400 square miles of the land from Russia for \$7.2 million in 1867 prior to integrating it into the U.S.

livelihoods it ushered, “put immense pressure on Alaska Native peoples to learn corporate structures and adopt corporate conceptualizations of land and value” (250). ANSCA, thus, would seismically shift cultures of livelihood above and below ground. Below the image of Alaskan “returned” acreage, “cleansed of human tragedy and historical contamination” (Korteweg and Oakley), Tuck reveals, anthropocentric capitalist forces are underway, encouraging a colonial makeover of land and life.⁴⁵ Tuck’s work not only disrupts sentimentalized attachments to Alaska’s “wilderness” frontier, but reveals how such attachments ironically nest within them, and deliberately obscure, the processes of contamination they ostensibly seek to counter.

In contrast to the abstract concept of “wilderness,” Tuck’s framework is powerfully literal, orienting to how the landscape’s very roots and minerals—that is, its foundation and matter—remain under siege. Yet, Tuck offers a more conceptual, literary hermeneutic too. Tuck’s surface and subsurface distinction provides a framework for approaching the region and the works rendering it—works likewise wary of how the construct of Alaskan “wilderness” has blanketed and obscured the region’s colonial realities, perpetually underfoot yet out of view. Written seventeen years following the ANCSA, Tlingit poet Nora Dauenhauer’s *The Droning Shaman* (1988) animates this framework by advancing a poetics parsing the hauntology of Alaska. Dauenhauer’s collection provides a map of Alaska, and briefly, the South Pacific, attuned to these regions’ surface appearances and subsurface realities. In the poem “Juneau School Inservice” these tensions are rendered acutely: “T’aawchan reads / how it feels to be / a Tlingit in the system” Dauenhauer writes, “While a gauze of snow / Winds past the windows / As if to cover up the problem” (31). The poem is rich despite its spare word count. Outwardly, it animates the obfuscating force of nature’s images. The snow—an iconic feature of the Alaskan landscape—threatens to visually distract from “the problem” of “the system” at the poem’s center, and yet, as such, threatens to subsume the very nature, or thematic thrust, of the poem itself. Indeed, in contrast to the poem’s central meditation on an ambiguous colonial dynamic—one wherein testimonial and institutional gestures are mobilized towards reconciliatory efforts to “cover up the problem”⁴⁶—the snow enters the poem with a visual assuredness, colonizing the senses and redirecting the reader’s attention outside. The visual force of the snow—a kind of “gauze” that invites a willful form of unseeing and visual reorientation—functions materially and metaphorically. The motif animates the poem’s mediation on subsurface realities and surface solutions, simultaneously performing the land’s capacity to subsume such themes in its own image. “Juneau Inservice” thus seemingly renders nature complicitous in the colonial dynamics it reflects—refusing a narrative wherein the land is “cleansed of human tragedy and historical contamination” by orienting to nature’s role in distracting from that history and genuine efforts to contend with it (Korteweg and Oakley 132).

These dynamics gain momentum in Dauenhauer’s turn to Alaska’s protected park space. In the poem, “Denali National Park, September 1982,” Dauenhauer contrasts the park’s expectations, as a protected “wilderness” zone, with the fragility of its zoning. The image of “six

⁴⁵ Tuck turns to Scott Richard Lyon’s *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Ascent* to contextualize and describe this dynamic. See footnote 10.

⁴⁶ Eve Tuck and K. Yang’s significant essay, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” interrogates these dynamics through the realm of policy and pedagogical analysis in and of the university institution, directly. As they argue, the language of decolonization can be converted into an “empty signifier” when deployed by institutional power disinterested in genuine anticolonial redress (11).

million acres of wild land” comprised of “solitude, tranquility, and wilderness”⁴⁷ described on the Park’s official website stand in contrast to the scene Dauenhauer conjures. Denali Park, in Dauenhauer’s prose, is “consumed/By fire” (2-3) where the “falling snow becomes ashes over embers” (6). It is a climate rendering its protected wildlife spectral, under anthropocentric siege:

Grizzlies seem to glisten
Over the glowing embers
Their paws hardly touching the ground
We listen to the sandhill cranes
Fading away. (8-13)

The imagery, recalling a wildfire, is ripe for historical analysis. The poem potentially harkens the colonial politics of controlled forest burning—a practice that was long exercised by Alaskan Indigenous communities (and many other Indigenous communities) to prevent forest fires, was widely banned by settler governments in the early 19th century, and today, has received renewed attention as a viable, if not integral, practice to quelling the exponential rise of seasonal fires. Indeed, as a poem written at a time when global warming and ozone depletion were rising in public consciousness, the imagery of the fire, encroaching on the park’s regulated, zones, and monitored protected “wilderness” invites a historical reckoning with the circular colonial politics of environmental management in the Anthropocene.⁴⁸ In the images of the protected grizzly and cranes, succumbing to an unruly blaze, the accumulated and counterintuitive realities and effects of environmental mismanagement and hyper-management, converge. Yet the poem also inspires a more conceptual reading. Whether the poem is denoting beauty or horror, renewal or death is an uncertainty Dauenhauer’s work exploits; whether the “embers” signal anthropocentric accumulation and combustion or autumnal transitions is unclear. “Denali Park,” in Dauenhauer’s framing, perhaps more than anything, invites interrogation of its own perception, advancing an image of wilderness that is at once illusive and literal, both a construct and a site of material flourishing and degradation.

Cook’s presence haunts these pieces. Like the smoke on the periphery of Cook’s scene of the northern Pacific coastline, Dauenhauer’s language invites interrogation of the construct of “wilderness” and the forms of unseeing it compels. This dynamic manifests outwardly in poems such as “Ice Floes at Cook’s Inlet,” which elaborates the tension between Cook’s homogenous sightlines and the heterogenous natures they fail to account for. The title renders Cook’s claim of colonial possession an enduringly static feature of the landscape. This stasis is amplified through Dauenhauer’s juxtaposition of the geographic space the name represents; in relation to the multidirectional flows of water circulating through the inlet, Cook’s presence, established as a colonial namesake or land claim, stands in stark discord to the sense of movement and change encapsulated by the process of ice forming, moving, and melting. In the juxtaposition, the imposition of Cook’s “arbitrary lines” and their incapacity to “be deconstructed” (recalling Maracle) are cast in relation to the fluid and ever-changing nature of the inlet itself. Yet, Dauenhauer alludes to Cook’s journey, and its enduring presence on the west coast, in more

⁴⁷ As stated on the National Park Service webpage for Denali Park.

⁴⁸ These dynamics were detailed in the CBC article from June 29, 2022, “Indigenous fire keepers and ecologists say it’s time to light a careful fire to calm wildfires.” As the article briefly outlines, Indigenous burning practices were banned in B.C. when early settlers arrived in the early 19th century. Today, their utility and significance in combatting the growing intensity of seasonal fires is being reassessed.

subtle ways too. While largely concentrated in Alaska, *The Droning Shaman* also journeys southward, tracing Cook's final voyage to eventually arrive at its final destination of the Pacific Islands and Hawaii. In Hawaii, as with Alaska, Dauenhauer's poems turn to sites of conserved "wilderness" not to revel in its experience, but rather, observe the tensions between the manufactured spectacle of "wilderness" and the shifting ecology onto which this paradigm has been imposed. In "Snorkelling at Hunama Bay" Dauenhauer renders this relationship vividly, contrasting the protected ecology of Oahu's prized marine park with a scene of mass tourism and commodified nature:

The fish seem to have dried out
The bay, swimming around ladies
Casting bread crumbs, shattering
The sea flipping for crumbs, then
Transparent blue as they pull past me
In panorama. I wonder
Going down with my mask
How much per pound they are sold for. (67)

Like Denali Park, Hanauma Bay is seemingly under siege by the very wilderness logics that protect it today. As the poem suggests, the intensified pressures on the park to perform "wilderness" cannot hold—the breadcrumbs, like the embers of Denali, threaten to erode the overstated boundaries between nature and culture to which the park itself appeals. Indeed, the contrast between the "ladies ... shattering the sea" and the "fish ... dried out" suggests the conflation of nature's protection with its consumption, as a spectacle and experience to be sold. Despite relocating to a different region of the Pacific, Dauenhauer's poem nonetheless invokes the "Pacific Northwest's" generic concerns, as it alludes to the terse boundary between nature's conservation and depletion, and Cook's significance to that relationship. Perhaps most importantly, "Snorkelling at Hanauma Bay" incites the matter of value and worth undergirding this broad geographic nexus. As the narrator slips below the water's surface, the poem's question of value buoys upward, inviting multiple interpretations. On the one hand, the closing line orients toward the commodification of nature at the heart of the poem. On the other, the prospect of quantifiable, monetized value also inspires a more literal reading. Evoking the selling and trade of fish as an edible resource and source of livelihood, the narrator's question disrupts Hanauma Bay's value as wilderness "outside" the flows of consumer economies by inviting more heterogeneous models of interspecies relationships to enter the scene.

"Hanauma Bay's" meditation on value is amplified when read in relation to its neighboring poem, "Wealth." In this poem, Dauenhauer glimpses an alternate economy of marine life, and details its significance: "Slime squishing / Through gold and silver bracelets / women slicing salmon" (55). The scene, centered on the salmon and connoting a more northern region, places an alternate frame onto "Hanauma Bay." The poem contrasts gold—a commodity whose economic history transformed Tlingit territory—with the salmon, an ancient source of Tlingit wealth and livelihood. Rather than weighing these motifs equally, the poem's structure emphasizes the latter. The salmon being sliced, in other words, viscerally comingles with the poem's central action and its symbols of accumulated wealth. If the fish of Hanauma Bay, Dauenhauer's piece suggests, are succumbing to the economies of spectacle even though they are protected, the fish in this latter scene are circulating—living and dying—in community. Elsewhere, Dauenhauer has elaborated the Tlingit concept of *at.óow* and its centrality to her

work. Describing “tangible and intangible property,” the word describes “real estate and partly to rights to use emblems, songs, names, and spirits,” but ultimately, articulates “a larger context of reciprocity or ‘balance’” (43). *At.óow*, while literally translating to “an owned or purchased thing or object” (45), signifies a wide range of things, and is therefore a vital concept when reading the shifting attachments and perspectives a heterogenous ecology involves. If Cook’s map of the northwest coastal “wilderness” appealed to the predetermined expansionist desires of the British Crown, then Dauenhauer’s collection reveals how values of balance, reciprocity, and heterogeneity potentially interject into and proliferate the governing, reductionist views of nature left in *Voyages*’ wake. As *The Droning Shaman* suggests, outside the ostensibly magnetic poles of environmental extractivism and conservationism prevailing over the landscape’s popular conceptions and governance, more ambivalent and integrated systems of interspecies relations, and models of recognition, persist.

This intervention takes its most assertive form in the poem “Genocide.” Here, Daunhauer renders the colonial inheritances of environmental conservationism acutely. As the poem reads:

Picketing the Eskimo
Whaling Commission
An over-fed English girl
Stands with a sign
“Let the Whales Live” (26)

Written in the wake of Greenpeace’s founding in Vancouver, the poem conjures the organization’s anti-whaling campaign between 1975 and 1982—one that actively confronted Soviet whaling fleets in the North Pacific and, less overtly, targeted the traditional whaling practices of northern Indigenous and Inuit communities.⁴⁹ Yet the poem’s political thrust lies in the imagery; the “overfed English girl”—a signifying gesture—embodies the swollen accumulations of colonial capital. That these accumulations are relatively illegible in comparison to the certitude of her sign suggests the poem’s stake in the equivocal nature of colonial avowal. Indeed, the poem reveals its awareness of how “colonial power, far from monolithic, seizes upon, enlists, and combines a range of discourses, knowledges, and signifying practices ... which are not formally or ideologically aligned with colonial administration” (Braun 4).⁵⁰ Simultaneously, if the poem reflects environmentalism’s susceptibility to colonial discourses, it also refuses dwelling in the ambiguity of that relation. The title, “Genocide,” explicitly invokes the political dynamics at stake—dynamics wherein a reckoning with colonial genocide is occluded by a reckoning with a whale “genocide”—a narrative distortion that renders Indigenous communities and their relations with northwest coastal marine life not the subjects but rather the perpetrators of ongoing violence. Read in the spirit of Tuck’s work, this campaign—on the surface, one of

⁴⁹ As Ryan Tucker Jones outlines, Greenpeace’s anti-whaling campaign engendered schisms between environmentalists and Indigenous communities in the region. As Jones argues, the “history of whaling in the Pacific” offers significant insight into the conditions under which “the modern environmentalist movement and Indigenous peoples part[ed] ways” (81).

⁵⁰ Tlingit poet Robert Davis’s collection *Ravensong* likewise captures these relations, as they pertain to the Alaskan landscape. However, rather than environmentalists, Davis’ work largely focuses on the parallels and shared encroachments of missionaries, colonial explorers, and forestry workers (see “Saginaw Bay”).

environmental activism—is also a re-enactment of colonial foreign relations that have perpetually staked claim to, and displaced, forms of Alaskan Indigenous life and livelihood.⁵¹

In dialogue with Tuck's work, Dauenhauer reconceptualizes the northern region of the "Pacific Northwest"—interrogating the "wilderness" that popularly defines it and the reigning ideologies that strive to protect it. Together, their work offers a response to the prevailing conservationist tendency to render wilderness "a discrete and separate object of aesthetic reflection, scientific inquiry, and economic and political calculation at particular sites and specific historical moments" (Braun 5). At the interstices of these discrete categories and modes of interpretation, their work suggests, are glimpses into ambivalent, constrained, ongoing, and power-laden realities, whose acknowledgement inspires envisioning of not only more accurate but equitable conceptions of colonized and decolonizing landscapes. In resisting the generic force of "wilderness" as a governing motif, as well as language and significance of the "Pacific Northwest," their work thus advances new modes of reading the genre—modes enriched not by the rubric of the nature/culture divide, but the value of heterogeneity, historicity, contamination, and ethical possibility. "Wilderness," in their work, is not the endpoint—or the "last frontier"—at which to arrive, but the very start of deconstruction: a fiction whose parsing yields insight into the entanglements of extraction and sentimentality, colonialism and environmental conservationism. That is, their visions of wilderness illuminate the paradoxical dynamics enabling the realities of the ongoing treaty era and the constructed artifice of *terra nullius* manufacturing scenes of ostensibly pure nature. Indeed, in indirect response to the impetus to "keep the northwest wild," Tuck and Dauenhauer present scenes of drying, malnourished fish, mined and corporatized subsurface land, and grizzlies alight, conjuring a sense of atmospheric pressure that cannot hold. Rather, sites of ambivalence and environmental heterogeneity—women slicing salmon, political ascent under conditions of constraint, waning species amidst traditional forms of Indigenous livelihood—in their work, invite our deepest considerations and forms of attention. Indeed, in contrast to a dictum such as "keep the northwest wild," Tuck and Dauenhauer invite consideration of nature of "wildness" itself, and hence what, precisely, is being kept and conserved.

In 2016, the late Haida artist Jut-ke-Nay's (Hazel Wilson) installation, *The Story of K'iid K'iyas: Hazel Wilson and the Golden Spruce*, invited the public to take up this consideration. Featured at the Marion Scott Gallery in Vancouver, the installation consisted of seventeen textile panels (originally created in 2005), each in the style of traditional Haida beadwork, and each part of a greater story. Presented eleven years following the publication of Vaillant's *The Golden Spruce*, and twenty years after the tree's felling, the installation offered an alternate genealogy for

⁵¹ Maracle's meditation on the region's marine life in "Whale Watching, Salish Style," echoes Donnahuer's on settler whale protectionism, albeit from a different vantage. Writing, rather, from the vantage of whale ecotourism, Maracle meditates on the varying degrees of intimacy and distance facilitated by the contrasting paradigms of whales-as-spectacle and whales-as-kin. As Maracle suggests, contrary to the commercial ethos of whale watching, that renders the animal a sight to be consumed, undertaking the practice from a Stolo perspective encourages experimentation with how to transcend these structures of estrangement. Of her own experience undertaking this experience, as a whale watcher, Maracle writes, "the wall between us is now gossamer thin" ("Whale Watching" 2).

the tree whose narrative had accrued widespread significance.⁵² Unlike *the Golden Spruce*, which orients to the relatively recent forestry practices and the eco-activism they compel, Wilson's story is at once ancient and contemporary. "The Story K'iid K'iyas," which translates to "Old Tree" in Haida, chronicles the tree's life and death, as understood in Haida epistemology and legend. And unlike Vaillant's story that rendered the beginning the moment a seedling fell one autumn around 1700, the origin of K'iid K'iyas is inextricably tethered to the end of another story—that of Hiilang Jaat.⁵³ "K'iid K'iyas grew out of another golden spruce—one that lived at that same site for 800 years. Approximately half of Wilson's panels reflect the story of Hiilang Jaat, the original golden spruce that, according to legend, was originally a woman who had been transformed into a tree. The panels visualizing this portion of the story reveal a set of images where a tree is embodied by a woman, and a woman embodied by a tree, synchronized, as they grow older together. The latter half of the panels portray the life of K'iid K'iyas—Jaat's nephew, who, following Jaat's death, comes to inherit the tree's form. As with the depictions of Jaat, K'iid K'iyas is represented across panels each reflecting the synchronized aging of K'iid K'iyas and the spruce he inhabits.

Wilson's story visually and conceptually refuses a perception of the spruce as outside the circulations of Haida intergenerational meaning. As old growth, the spruce undeniably nourished ecology in the temperate rainforest—indeed, the nutrient rich properties of its decomposing matter are what enable new growth to arise from its very site. Yet the tree in Wilson's rendering is not reducible to either valuable temperate biomatter or extractable resource. As old growth or an ancient community member, the tree was also, Wilson reveals, a bastion of memories and a keeper of stories, and therefore not only an archive, but a generator of cultural wealth. In rendering the tree's value as contingent on other values—namely, the values of intergenerational and cultural continuity—Wilson's work invites a reckoning with the stories that have laid popular claim to B.C. In contrast to *the Golden Spruce*—a story that saw Hadwin's very spirit of conservation arise from the resounding absence of the clear cut and its scars of capitalist accumulation—the *Story of K'iid K'iyas* advances a reading of nature that is bound to less immediate, more ambivalent, circulations of life, death, composition and renewal. These circulations, *the Story of K'iid K'iyas* assures, well precede the swelling tides of capitalist accumulation, its rapid degradation of nature, and resulting sense of conservationist urgency—tides that have swiftly ushered figures such as Hadwin into public consciousness. Indeed, unlike Hadwin's perception of the tree—a spruce whose death symbolized the death of old growth en masse—Wilson's exhibit offers generative, and ultimately, less finite interpretations: nature (which, through Wilson's frame, is to say culture) is lively—so much so that even as it decomposes, dies, and is killed, it may animate and impart knowledge, if we let it. Indeed, more than a story about the mass destruction of forests, *The Story of K'iid K'iyas* is a story about quieter forms of continuity. It is, after all, a story about listening to elders—old growth and previous generations, alike.

⁵² Vaillant's account also includes reference to Wilson's (under the name Hazel Simeon). Vaillant describes Wilson as a "Haida artist and maker of button blankets" (425). Vaillant likewise outlines the story that Hazel's representations have narrated. As he writes, "Time and events are clearly elastic in this version of the story, but it is still tempting to ask if such miracles could occur; they certainly do in the Bible, a text which most Haida storytellers of the past century are familiar" (429).

⁵³ As outlined on the Marion Scott Gallery website.

Importantly, in the spirit of Maracle's assertions, Wilson's work not only advances a different story but asserts the political and material significance of stories themselves. Stories, Wilson's exhibit affirms, *do things*. In Wilson's exhibit, the journey of K'iid K'iyas is bookended by panels that situate the journey of K'iid K'iyas in reflection on the dynamics of storytelling, itself. In the story's preceding panel, titled "A Long Time Ago," Wilson depicts her younger self and her grandmother, looking across the Yakoun River at the spruce. In the scene, her grandmother gestures, as if revealing the tree's significance to Wilson's younger self. The scene tethers the story of K'iid K'iyas—and Wilson's own impetus to tell it—to a moment of conversational transference, sharing and listening. The scene, functioning as a kind of preface, offers a visual citation reminding that the story shared with the public in 2016 relied on the passing of knowledge, a particular moment in time, and the strength of a specific, intergenerational relationship. This panel proves significant in relation to the latter three panels, following the central story of K'iid K'iyas, that document the tree's death at the hands of Hadwin. These closing panels, functioning as a kind of epilogue, present the abrupt, colonizing force of a different story—one wherein the stakes of rapid mass logging old growth had ushered a rash act of violence. In the panel, "Falling" we see the intergenerational legacy Wilson has shared collapse with the swift, symbolic severing of a single tree. In documenting the death of K'iid K'iyas Wilson invites two stories to collide and ultimately, gestures the death of one—the Story of K'iid K'iyas—at the hands of *The Golden Spruce*. Nonetheless, while affirming the material power of stories, this scene of death, Wilson also suggests, is also one of regrowth and renewal. The second last panel, titled "Tears of Haida Gwaii," reveals a community in mourning. The final panel, "New Hope," reveals the possibility of life after death. In the imagery of spirits, Wilson conjures a scene wherein—while the tree's singular materiality may be ephemeral—stories, potentially, live on.

Chapter 3: “Girls Gone Wild”⁵⁴: Staking a Claim at the Ontario Wilderness Frontier

In August 2022, amidst praise for the Showtime, Emmy-winning series, *Yellowjackets*, the show’s distortions of the Ontario wilderness came to the fore. Panoramic views of western Canada’s snow-capped Rockies, ferns, and other flora, seemingly immune to seasonal changes, compelled some Reddit commenters to note that everything just seemed “off.”⁵⁵ One particular scene inspired discussion. On a *Yellowjackets* Reddit forum titled “there are no grizzly bears in Ontario,” commenters noted the presence of this particular species, killed by one of the show’s teenage protagonists. In a series aligned with the “feminist horror tradition”⁵⁶ the killing of the apex predator at the hands of quiet Lottie was symbolic. It was also improbable: Grizzly bears, due to overhunting and overfishing, have been extinct in eastern Canada since approximately 1900. Tacit within this dialogue on ecological realism was the sense that an American production company had transgressed national borders and re-imagined Canadian wilderness to its liking as a site of feminist spectacle and becoming. As one Reddit user put it (as if defending the border and addressing those south of it) “Canadians care about interprovincial differences.” These distortions, however, were easily subsumed by the show’s louder, and much lauded, feminist claim to the survival genre. Centering a New Jersey girls’ soccer team, *Yellowjackets* depicts a group of young women who, when their plane crashes in the Ontario wilderness, are forced to, as one survivor puts it, “starve, scavenge, and pray until they [were] finally [found].” Filled with violent wolves and a foreboding forest, *Yellowjackets* harnessed the “sinister gothic overtones” of Canadian wilderness to say something timely about gender (McDonald 5). The show, a “feminist update of William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*” (Gaber), not only inverted the masculine ethos of its predecessor but the wider “gender crisis in survival horror,” revealing the genre’s typical “collusion [with] ... normative gender roles” (Nae 43). If *Yellowjackets*’ homage to horror invoked the grisliness of Golding’s story, the addition of menstrual blood and abortion recast these tropes via the female body, the current climate of #MeToo, and anti-abortion legislature, suturing the genre’s aesthetics of survival to feminist concerns of today.

Yellowjackets and its discourse animates feminism’s dynamic performance at the wilderness frontier, and importantly, for the purposes of this chapter, the ambivalence of that relationship. As the influx of feminist survival television⁵⁷ suggests, the wilderness frontier is fecund terrain for subversive, feminist signification. Indeed, *Yellowjacket* animates the effectiveness of occupying Golding’s original work: the supplanting of Oxbridge boys with a girls’ soccer team not only gestures how a masculine gaze has colonized the genre of “wilderness

⁵⁴ As stated in Dana Feldman’s article, “Girls Gone Wild: Showtime’s *Yellowjackets* Represents the Complete Destruction of Society.”

⁵⁵ As user Storm-Sufficient comments in the Reddit *Yellowjackets* fan-forum, r/*Yellowjackets*, “There are no grizzly bears in Ontario.” They proceed to speculate: “Maybe the crash location is just wrong, but something is off about it. There are no grizzly bears anywhere in Ontario. And the flora seems off. Like, ferns don’t do that when the weather gets cold. They just wilt. They don’t stay nice and puffy but just change to brown. The leaves on the trees are also unusual.”

⁵⁶ *Yellowjacket*’s patronization of this tradition is outlined by Lauren Bruce, in the essay “Hell is a Teenage Girl: *Yellowjackets* and the Monstrous Feminine.”

⁵⁷ *Yellowjackets*, *The Wilds*, *Keep Breathing*, *Outlast*, and *Alone* are examples of shows in recent years that have been celebrated from introducing an overtly feminist frame onto the genre of wilderness survival.

survival” in the Euro-Western canon, but how feminist performance might strikingly inhabit, and hence, subvert such expectations. Simultaneously, as *Yellowjackets*’ liberal reimagining of the Ontario landscape affirms, despite its subversion of the “dominant visual regime of white heterosexual masculinity” (Rose 170), such practices of spectacle-making are not immune to their wider visual politics of colonial anthropocentrism. As Alan Bewell suggests, the work of “translating nature” into the interests of its interpreter is an ongoing practice of empire; that Nature, “is primarily marketed as an ‘event’ or ‘experience’ for consumers” speaks to continuities between the anthropocentric visualities of the era of colonial expansion and the present (4). Indeed, visibility “is not simple observation, but, rather, is a sophisticated ideological device” (Rose 172). Given that the misplaced grizzly in *Yellowjackets*’ vision of Ontario, more than mere error, perhaps signposts feminism’s complex relationship to the wilderness frontier—one both overtly bound in gendered, subversive signifying technique, and, perhaps more subtly, the anthropocentric and potentially ecocentric and posthumanist horizons of that image of encounter. Reading the bear as a deliberate translation (or perhaps a mistranslation) of the Ontario wilderness calls for a more robust reading of feminist wilderness spectacle-making, one attendant not only to the gendered politics of the image, but the politics of and terms of citizenship for non-human life in its frame.

The concerns of this chapter are twofold: on the one hand, this chapter is invested in how popular feminist media today utilizes the generic expectations of the wilderness frontier to claim cultural territory and space. As the frontier’s generic proximity to heteropatriarchal imaginaries affirms, the frontier is rich terrain for subversive feminist techniques. Indeed, feminism’s claim to the frontier initiates productive consideration of the relationship between gender and genre, and the negotiation of that relationship through subversive, signifying practice. As Lidia Curti suggests, genre and gender are mutually reinforcing categories that not only elucidate each other’s strictures, but emancipate them from one another as well: “the boundaries between genres [are] constantly redefined through the endless play of repetition and difference, [that leaves] the boundar[ies of gender] forever open and constantly deferred” (Curti 152). Simultaneously, this chapter is concerned with the ways in which feminist preoccupation with the wilderness frontier—while seeking to unsettle its gendered generic expectations—puts such subversive practices into intimate relation to the underlying logics of the frontier itself. Given that “anthropocentrism is the anchor of speciesism, capitalism, and settler colonialism,” feminism’s relationship to the frontier advances direct contention with the relations between feminist subversive play and the representational politics of non-human life (Belcourt, “Indigenous critique” 21). As this project sees it, tending to the representation of landscape (and its non-human inhabitants) in the feminist frame is a vital component of situating and theorizing feminism today. As numerous Indigenous feminist scholars assert, underlying feminism’s broader claim to gendered and sexual liberty is its by-no-means settled relation to the colonial politics of land. This chapter, therefore, at its most broad, is an inquiry into how feminist representations of wilderness address (or do not address) that relationship.

The texts comprising this study engage this query in various ways, and are united by a shared location in the real and imagined space of “Ontario wilderness” and shared concern with feminism’s relation to it. Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), Leanne Simpson’s *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* (2021), and *Yellowjackets* (2021), are read here intertextually and palimpsestically, as different layers on a shared landscape. Moodie’s account of colonial emigration to Canada during the Settler Revolution asserts a sense of gendered difference through its oppositional stance on boosterism, the popular emigrant propaganda circulating at the time. As *Roughing It* reveals, boosterism’s generic, panoramic gaze excluded

settler women's domestic positioning within frontier life. Moodie's prose reveals how settler feminism found expression by subverting generic representation of the Canadian wilderness frontier, but as such, how such gendered expressions of frontier settlement naturalized colonial anthropocentrism—a dynamic permeating Moodie's enduring significance today as a figure “honored by many as an early feminist and literary pioneer” (Second Story Press).

If these dynamics are buried under *Roughing It's* gendered landscapes, Simpson's response to Moodie unearths them. In conjuring a vastly different image of the same wilderness—one, alternatively, comprised of lively multispecies networks of contingency, precarity, and care—Simpson not only reveals the enmeshment of Moodie's feminist, colonial, and anthropocentric assumptions, but glimpses a horizon wherein “wilderness” does not reinforce human mastery, but undoes it. In dialogue, Moodie and Simpson reveal the various ways in which feminism incorporates non-human life into its spectacle-making, and particularly, feminism's shifting relationship to anthropocentric and, to borrow Julietta Singh's term, *dehumanist* horizons. A critical subset of posthumanist thinking, “dehumanism” for Singh, bears the “promises of vulnerability with the aim of forming less masterful subjectivities” and thus presents a key opportunity to rethink and disassemble the logics of the Anthropocene (6). Dehumanism, with its privileging of the work of “imagining otherwise and dwelling elsewhere” potentially invites “new life forms and conceptualizations of agency” to become envisioned (6). The various ways in which Moodie and Simpson's work recognizes non-human liveliness and relationships, hence, reflects their various stakes in anthropocentric and dehumanist worlding.

Whereas the outwardly subversive dynamic between *Roughing It* and *Noopiming* renders their ideological differences somewhat apparent, *Yellowjackets* negotiates these anthropocentric and dehumanist horizons more ambivalently. Reading *Yellowjackets* alongside Moodie and Simpson's dialogue, I argue, moves beyond celebrating its feminist “success” based solely on its subversive reclaiming of masculinist and heterosexist frontier tropes alone. Rather, Simpson's work inspires analysis of the show's capacity to also respond to the anthropocentric conditions laid out by colonial frontier advancement. In one sense, *Yellowjackets*' reiteration of human mastery, the subordination of non-human life, and the exacerbated tensions and differences between “wilderness” and the human that animate its frontier suggest a failure to contend with the ways in which “wilderness” has been mobilized within colonial ideology. Indeed, in that sense, *Yellowjackets* might occupy a continuum with Moodie's work—one that productively illuminates how settler feminisms and feminism itself rely on colonial frontier tropes to claim space in popular culture. Simultaneously, *Yellowjackets* glimpses dehumanist possibilities throughout—integrating moments of uncertainty and disorientation where the firmly-held distinctions between life forms and hierarchy collapse and dissolve and, in their wake, new understandings of survival as a constellated and codependent project emerge.

Non-human life is hence a vital feature of this study. Methodologically, I attend to the treatment of non-human life in these texts as a means of considering the terms of citizenship that life holds in their varying, feminist fields of vision. With the caveat that, as Alexis Shotwell argues, claims about indicator species reiterate the logics of mastery undergirding the Anthropocene⁵⁸ this chapter explores how the treatment of non-human life in the aforementioned

⁵⁸ In *Against Purity*, Shotwell discusses the use of amphibians as indicators of degrees of toxicity and pollution, writing “Amphibians function here as indicator species is not only human-centric (and putting them in an instrumental relation); it to a certain extent ignores that they are their own

texts plays ambivalently with both the anthropocentric and dehumanist undercurrents of the surveyed texts and media. Trees structure this analysis, resonating as symbols, old friends, lumber, vessels for syrup, and in the resounding absence of the clear-cut. Rivers run through this study, as arteries of wealth and exports, mineral deposits, and self-reflective narrators. Non-human animals such as bears and wolves meander and circulate as symbols of fear and veneration, perpetrators and victims of violence, and as pedagogical agents, sounding the lessons the texts impart. The ways in which these lives and lifeways emerge amidst these works' subversive claims to "frontier genres" tethers this project's feminist, anthropocentric, and dehumanist concerns and affirms their inseparability.

Staking a Claim at (and the Stakes of Claiming) the Frontier

Granted that frontier genres emerge through the narrativization of geopolitical advancement and dispossession, feminism's claim to "the frontier" produces a tension. On the one hand, the gendered associations of the frontier genre render it ripe for subversive use. Moodie's relation to the genre of boosterism, Simpson's relation to Moodie's enshrinement in Canadian Literature, and *Yellowjackets*' relation to *Lord of the Flies*, all reveal not only how gender is encoded in the works they respond to but is reframed and proliferated through their responses. Yet, given that the frontier in Canada is, as Belcourt asserts, a boundary tethered perhaps to gender but undeniably anthropocentrism, reliance on the frontier as an efficient, assertive form of subversive signification invariably contends with the slow, quiet violence of the Anthropocene. As this project sees it, feminist and anthropocentric horizons converge in the generic ways images of "wilderness" have serviced colonial advancement. As Charles Blattenburg and Gaile McDonald have argued, contrary to the US, where the "frontier" implied an Edenic horizon of transformation (or, as Blattenburg argues, a "dotted line") the frontier in Canada, and sites such as Ontario, particularly, marked a stark border: a "line between civilization and the wild [that British settlers sought to maintain] as they advanced across the country" (Blattenburg 374). This bifurcation of "human" from "nature" and its maintenance was and is a crucial mechanic of the frontier's imaginary relationship to material processes of Indigenous dispossession: "The frontier was traditionally conceived as the line where Civilization meets Wilderness, the latter as yet untamed by the former, so the concept is inseparable from imperialism" (Lyons 16). Feminism's stake in frontier genres, and signifying reliance on that line, thus potentially lapses into reiterating the anthropocentric-imperialist function of it. As Jodi Byrd cautions, "There is a fine line, between deconstructing a process of signification and reinscribing the discourses that continue to justify the codification of knowledge production that orders the native as colonized" (*Transit* 51).

In other words, feminist claims to the imagined space of "frontier genres" exist in relation to the material processes of colonial theft, extraction, and expropriation through which the settler-colonial frontier advanced, and their images of "wilderness"—inanimate yet threatening, "full, [yet rendered] empty" (Nelson)—legitimize these processes. In that sense, a feminist stake in and claim to frontier genres contends with the multifaceted significance of staking a claim itself, as a gesture tied to territorial acquisition. As Hannah Tollefson distinguishes, while to "*stake a claim* is to signify a relationship of possession or to declare a right to something" and thus "often used figuratively" the expression emerged out of gold rushes in the mid-nineteenth century. Prospectors "registered claims to a plot of land and the minerals contained within it by marking it with stakes" (Tollefson). Prospecting, "is both a practice and a form of rationality, where

beings with their own worlds, differentially taking in the toxic load we create and distribute" (83).

extractive and possessive logics of colonialism fuse with projective and accumulative operations of capital.” Staking a claim to the imagined space of “frontier genres”—sites, laden with the cultural capital of generic accumulation—is, as this chapter asserts, intimately entangled with the ongoing practices of colonial claim-staking that have persistently occupied and laid claim to land, to “Ontario,” and the myriad forms of life upon it.

In some ways, the etymology of “staking a claim” is elaborated by *Yellowjackets* itself: Taissa’s early assertion that “she is not a cartographer” (despite her efforts to map a water source) implies the show’s own critical relationship to the histories of colonial prospecting haunting its image of wilderness, as a landscape yet to be discovered. Yet, notably, Taissa’s assertion also invokes feminism’s subversive relation to that generic construct. Indeed, in some sense, Taissa’s assertion is accurate: Colonial practices of cartography, prospecting, and surveying in Canada are gendered, in ways both imagined and real. Scottish explorer and fur trader Alexander McKenzie’s “stoic masculinity” has likened him the “ultimate hero” in Euro western narrative conventions (MacLulich); James Cook’s ability to withstand Canada’s “unfavourable wilderness” established him as the original “discovery hero” for British reading publics (Currie). These figures animate Mimi Sheller’s broader assertion that “white masculinity has long been associated with mobility” and “iconic masculine figures” such as the “explorer...[and] frontiersman” comparatively render others—notably, women, slaves, and ‘wild natives’—who do not exercise self-directed mobility” (41). Taissa’s assertion that she is not a cartographer, as she assumes that very role, is thus not so much inaccurate as attentive to the gendered inscriptions of the landscape she inhabits, the colonial mobilities that have shaped it, and the ways in which those histories collude with structures of expectation “positioning men as active bearers” that have rendered it (Rice et. al 640).

Yet, while the frontier bears a masculinist encoding it is even more, arguably, a general fantasy of becoming. Jodi Byrd’s analysis of the *Bioshock* videogame reveals that while the wilderness frontier, as a generic venue in popular gaming, is tethered to an ethos of “white heteropatriarchal toxic masculinity” (601) and “circuits of masculinist power” (600) these tropes bespeak wider “relationship[s] to the wild and to the nonhuman within larger contexts of settler colonialism” (602). Amidst the well-worn tropes of mobile masculinity, “swaying gun sights, gut-wrenching leaps through the sky, and daring confrontations with progressively larger and larger enemies” is the “hidden code” of anthropocentric subtext (603). As Byrd’s analysis reveals, while cultural texts such as *Bioshock* invoke how “the wilderness frontier” has aesthetically sedimented into generic expectation, it is simultaneously a process of movement, transgressing, becoming, and initiating worlds to come. Byrd’s assertions finds resonance in Elizabeth Povinelli’s more general distinction between “the frontier” and the “horizon.” As Povinelli elaborates, whereas the frontier “maintains a specific linguistic and social etiology,” moving from “the abutting edges of sovereign lands” to, later (in Anglo-diasporic discourse) “the contested space between civilized and uncivilized natures,” the horizon is less fixed. Notably, if “the frontier” marks the co-option of image-making for the purposes of expansion, the horizon “is a mechanism by which a specific violent history of some men is kept from ever landing”—a perpetual “*toward-which* the spirit of a certain kind of man soars” (Povinelli.). While scholarship has affirmed the frontier’s generic reiteration of whiteness and masculinity, its significance as an *anthropocentric investment* that advances a horizon of settler environmental capital and control puts subversive relations to the frontier in dialogue not only with its gendered aesthetics, but their horizontal alignment with terms for life and living.

One way this chapter attempts to bridge consideration of feminist, subversive claims to the frontier and anthropocentric and dehumanist horizons, is through erranding. The “errand,”

Julietta Singh reminds, “is a reason, a pretense for going somewhere and doing something” and thus offers a useful paradigm for not only interpreting present encounters with the wild but anticipating where they are headed (568). Erranding is motional and laden with intent, and thus, speaks not to the stasis of the image but the relationships actively nurtured, cultivated, and violently foreclosed within it. Erranding, in Singh’s framework, occupies a spectrum of encounters with the wild, but occupies the breadth of two distinct poles. The “colonial errand” marks the endeavour to “[enter] the wilderness in order to convert.” This errand marks the process of eradicating “all that is ‘wild’ in wilderness” and “rel[ying] on the use and abuse of all life-forms that are constructed as belonging to a thing called ‘the wilderness’” (569). The “decolonial errand,” alternatively, marks an “ethico-communal style of refusing colonial paradigms” (Errands 570). In other words, if the colonial errand subsists through staking a claim in wilderness towards converting it into settler-colonial profit, the decolonial errand subsists through maintaining a horizon where wilderness is not subsumed by anthropocentric regimes, but disorients, or, wilds, them.

Tending to the directionality of feminist erranding puts feminism in productive dialogue with the colonial realities of the Anthropocene today. As Indigenous feminist scholars have emphasized, in sites such as “Canada,” feminism has a long history of maintaining its stake in colonial land claims. As such, “attending to the links between heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism is intellectually and politically imperative” (Arvin et. al 9). Maile Arvin et al assert that feminism’s tendency to leave colonialism uninterrogated means that in its frame, “Justice is often put in terms that coincide with the expansion of the settler state” and moreover, “the consideration of Indigenous people remains rooted in understanding colonialism ... as an historical point in time away from which our society has progressed” (10). While not contending with frontier genres directly, Arvin’s call to decolonize feminism and the ways in which colonial “arrival” factors into its purview nonetheless affirms how broader concerns manifest in this chapter’s particular point of interest. As Arvin asserts, “settler colonialism comes laden with connotations ... that link settlers to representations of intrepid white men who bravely conquered the Wild West” (12). Arvin’s use of the frontier’s tropes evokes how settler colonial logics are reified through cultural mythologies. It also anticipates this chapter’s particular concern with how feminism’s subversive relation to such tropes of “intrepid men” potentially leaves the matter of “conquering” and the implications of “wild” uninterrogated. As Nancy Marie Mithlo’s survey of Indigenous feminist artistic practice asserts, Indigenous feminism typically “challenge[s] the standard binaries that manifest in much of feminist dialogues” of “male control, female subordination” (311). Mithlo’s work reveals how the universalizing impulses of settler feminism and whiteness leave much unattended to—a dynamic pronounced when cast in relation to the matter of land, and its terms of occupation. As Zoe Todd asserts, amidst today’s catch-all narrativity of “the Anthropocene,” “query[ing] which humans or human systems are driving the environmental change the Anthropocene is meant to describe” is essential towards any comprehensive notion of justice (244). Scholarship emphasizing the colonial-anthropocentric tendencies of feminism motivates this chapter’s investment in feminism’s anthropocentric subtext.

Unsettling ostensibly subversive feminist claims to the frontier hence opens generative space to think about alignments and horizons beyond the politics of solely gender. Indeed, while *Yellowjackets* actively harkens and inverts the gender politics of *Lord of the Flies*, tending to its anthropocentric and post-anthropocentric undercurrents opens space to consider different genealogies, and see (despite the show’s own reflexive anti-cartographic, anti-colonial assertions) different relations, beyond its overt subversion of “intrepid white men” particularly (Arvin 12).

Indeed, approximately two hundred years prior to the show's release, Susanna Moodie would likewise find herself in Eastern Canada, aboard the *Anne*, drifting along the St. Lawrence River. Like the teenagers of *Yellowjackets*, albeit in a very different context, Moodie, subject to her husband's decision to leave Britain, found herself encountering this foreign landscape somewhat unwillfully. Moodie's impulse to deem foreign species on the river's banks British botanicals ("wildings of nature" she misrecognized as "the fillagree, with its narrow, dark, glossy green leave; the privet, with its modest white blossoms and purple berries" [12])⁵⁹ is an early moment in *Roughing It* when Moodie's "feminist settler poetics" and colonial visual ideologies overlap in her claim to the frontier's material and imagined space. Yet despite actively affirming Bewell's insights into how (mis)translating nature endorses colonial claims to it, Moodie's tendency to take "proud ownership" of her surroundings has inspired scholarship largely inattentive to Moodie's colonial synchronicities, instead focused on gendered difference. Moodie's misrecognitions, while indicative of Moodie's negotiation of limited narrative authority in a male-dominated book market, also reveal how anthropocentrism and feminism are intertwined.

Reading continuity between *Roughing It* and *Yellowjackets*, recalling the misplaced fillagree of the former and the misplaced grizzly of the latter, is not to overinflate brief moments of ecological misrecognition. Rather, such a reading might productively emphasize the shifting continuities of feminism as it engages in the power-laden work of representing landscape, and particularly the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee region that came over time to be called by many, "Ontario." As this chapter argues, this moment of synchronicity, linking two temporally estranged claims to the frontier, emphasizes a political undercurrent that is, perhaps ironically, backgrounded in their various depictions of Ontario as a *gendered landscape*. This reading of anthropocentric and dehumanist subtext, in many ways, takes its inspiration from Leanne Simpson's *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies*. As a response to *Roughing It*, Simpson's techniques of subversion are vastly different from both Moodie and *Yellowjackets*; they consist not of inhabiting the tropes of wilderness, but actively transforming them, and hence reveal the political aesthetics of displacement and colonization wilderness assumes. Unlike *Roughing It*, which reveals the wild through the prism of British Loyalism, residual Romanticism, and shifting British sensibility, *Noopiming* is situated in Anishinaabe epistemologies. Simpson's resituating Moodie's landscape in Anishinaabe context both illuminates Moodie's colonial premise but also, importantly, mobilizes an "indigenous-centric approach to critical theory" (Byrd Transit xxxiv). Simpson's work invites, in its call to "white ladies," a reading of "feminism" beyond a series of "vertical interactions [that] continually foreground the arrival of Europeans as the defining event within settler societies" and "the Manichean allegories that define oppression" (xxxv). As Byrd argues, Indigenous critical theory thrives when centering itself "within indigenous epistemologies and the specificities of the communities and cultures from which it emerges and then look[ing] outward to engage European philosophical, legal, and cultural traditions in order to build upon all the allied tools available" (xxx). As *Noopiming* suggests, the "cure" for "white women" is not to abandon their cause, but to recognize kin beyond the borders of the human and nonhuman,

⁵⁹ Kate Turner and Bill Freedman's survey of nature in Canadian Literature focuses on Moodie's misrecognition of plants, noting how "Moodie happily observes plants that seem familiar to her (although, in actuality, most were species she had never before seen)." As they suggest, this early scene is indicative of Moodie's "double-minded attitude" towards Canadian wilderness, as simultaneously strange and off-putting, and ultimately, a venue onto which to project Romantic, Wordsworthian aesthetics (80).

“civilization” and “wilderness,” and within wider networks of decolonial justice. In *Noopiming’s* “response” to Moodie, “the bush” is not a site to claim, but a pedagogical opportunity, advancing a “post-anthropocentric feminist ethics” by which to read Moodie’s representations back to her (Hoppe).

Gendered Expressions of Settlement

The plants on the banks of St. Lawrence River were not the only objects of Moodie’s misrecognitions in *Roughing It*. Moodie’s reference to the lake nearby their home in Belleville as “Stony Lake,” rather than its Chippewa name, Bessikakoon, affirms Moodie’s tendency to take “proud ownership over her surroundings” (Shaikh 109). This “ownership” is, in Fariha Shaikh’s analysis, multifaceted: “Renaming the landscape was an act of colonial dominance ... But this was also a gendered inscription: [Moodie was] acutely aware of the fact that [she] saw the environment through female eyes, experienced it through the female body, and wrote about it through the female pen” (115). Shaikh’s analysis captures a crucial dynamic of *Roughing It*, and its resonance with feminist discourses of today. Moodie’s instinct to reveal the Canadian bush through the domestic, sketch form, the social minutia of neighbourly relations, and mundane, household labour, marked a rejection of the “panoramic” visual ideologies and “masculinist propaganda” of much of frontier literature at the time (112). This subversive relationship to the genre of frontier writing—manifest, overtly, in Moodie’s introductory remarks and in *Roughing It’s* general content and form—has nurtured the widely-held perception that Moodie advanced a distinctly gendered account of Canadian frontier life—one that captured settler women’s unaccounted for role in emigration narratives. The notion that *Roughing It* advanced a “gendered landscape” (Shaikh 117) is reiterated through focused attention to the ways in which Moodie’s “rough” and “authentic” depictions of wilderness (Lape 389) reveal the microphysics of power within the colony, the nature of “the domestic and those confined to it” (Dean 17), and general “hardships of a genteel woman resettling across the empire” (Godeanu-Kenworthy 372). As Shaikh argues, Moodie depicted “the difficulties of making bread, making a house a home, raising children in foreign places—and not on account of the soil or climate—and thus spoke to the ‘truth’ of a woman’s experience of emigration” (99). Moodie’s account, hence, glimpses a horizon wherein the realities of gendered labour come to inflect the frontier’s more generic landscapes.

The aim of this chapter is to unsettle the ways in which feminism’s subversive relation to the wilderness frontier, as a genre, naturalizes colonial and anthropocentric logics. Tending to how Moodie cultivates a sense of gendered difference in *Roughing It*, and how that difference has resonated in scholarship, illuminates the mechanics of this relationship as it endures in the Canadian literary imagination. *Roughing It* emerged at a time when print cultures of British settler emigration were “associated with male characters, again in line with positive cultural associations between masculinity and mobility” and “such conventional gendered models prevailed in mainstream settler emigration genres” (Piesse 112). As Jude Piesse asserts, in this context feminist and protofeminist settler literature “articulated settler emigrant’s interactions with domesticity to empowering effects and made counter cultural links between female emigration and concepts of dynamic female mobility, independence, and work.” Women’s settler emigration writing thus opened a “whole range of new spatial, economic, and social freedom for women” (112) and played a “key role in the development of a Victorian feminist imaginary” (113). The contingencies of Moodie’s gendered “freedom” on colonial expansion is an obvious, and yet, in many ways, quelled aspect of Moodie’s cultural significance. As a “feminist pioneer” (Sugars.), Moodie’s *Roughing It* has been deemed an “inaugural text for launching feminist

works and lives in Canadian literature” (Ferrari.). Margaret Atwood’s poetry collection, the *Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), affirms Moodie’s feminist perspective by “portraying the experience of the frontier as distinctly gendered” (Smith 76) and rendering it a site of recuperative, eco-feminist potential (Jennings). Moreover, Atwood’s choice to inhabit Moodie’s perspective on landscape—a perspective, whose disjointedness Atwood likens it to a “national illness”—has enlivened readings of Moodie since. Gail McGregor’s theorizing of “the wacousta syndrome,” or the enduring view of Canadian wilderness as especially harsh and inhospitable, draws from Moodie and Atwood’s reading of Moodie. In short, Moodie is a central figure for thinking not only about feminism’s stake in anthropocentric-colonial land relations, but how feminist literary interpretation contends with (or, perhaps, does not contend with) that stake.

If Atwood’s fascination with Moodie arises, as Erin Smith suggests, by virtue of Moodie being a woman writer, such positioning is elaborated in Moodie’s own prose. Early in *Roughing It*, Moodie contextualizes the terms of her and her husband’s departure for Canada. The Moodies’ friend, Tom Wilson—returned from the Australian colonies—invites her husband to a lecture on emigration. “You need not expect me home to dinner to-day,” John Moodie informs her, “I am going with my friend Wilson to Y—, to hear Mr. C— lecture upon emigration to Canada. He has just returned from the North American provinces, and his lectures are attended by vast numbers of persons who are anxious to obtain information on the subject.” When they return, Wilson is himself convinced to emigrate. When Mr. Moodie presses him—“do you think that you are at all qualified for a life of toil and hardship?”—Wilson responds: “You expect by going to Canada, to make your fortune, or, at least, to secure a comfortable independence. I expect no such results.” Unlike the Moodies, whose “unfortunate literary propensities” will make them “an object of mistrust ... and will be a constant source of [self] mortification and disappointment,” Wilson has nothing to lose. In the colonies—whether New South Wales or Canada, he reveals, “[his] prospects are better than [theirs].” Tom’s speech entices John Moodie, and shortly thereafter, reassured that “youth and hope were on [their] side,” he “determined to emigrate to Canada” (35).

Moodie’s early staging nurtures the tendency to read *Roughing It* through the frame of the domestic and its relationship to gender. These depictions of pre-departure establish the power-dynamics of the Moodie household, and moreover, how the colonial project is circulated through them. Moodie’s seemingly stagnant positioning, tethered to the domestic sphere as John Moodie and Tom Wilson move through it, bearing stories of the colonies and their prospects, situates Moodie’s narrative within the gendered economies of mobility and simultaneously render British colonial expansion “out there.” These gendered dynamics are calcified by John Moodie’s “determination.” The choice to emigrate, Moodie suggests, is not democratic—a notion affirmed, shortly following, as Moodie expresses her outright reluctance: “How dark and heavily did that frightful anticipation lay upon my heart!” she confides. “To leave England at all was dreadful ... Dear, dear England! Why was I forced by a stern necessity to leave you? What heinous crime had I committed, that I, who adored you, should be torn from your sacred bosom, to pine out my joyless existence in your foreign clime!” The language of “necessity” and “crime,” conflating the state and her husband, conjures a gendered political atmosphere, but importantly, affirms that Moodie was “a reluctant emigrant” (MacDonald 48). In nineteenth-century Britain, “married women were almost always considered an accessory to their husband’s initiatives and schemes” (Shiak 117). These introductory moments, elaborating Moodie’s sense of suspended agency, echo in Moodie’s ostensibly unwilling relationship to emigration. Christine Thomas argues that “perhaps one reason we cannot get Susanna out of our collective imagination is that her experience anticipates that of modern times, in which “exile is certainly the most fully theorized and poeticized concept, having become nothing short of a symbol of modern culture itself” (9).

More specifically, Moodie's expression of unwillingness encourages perceived estrangement from the colonial project in which she is implicated—one that ultimately solicits sympathy. Indeed, the likening of Moodie's emigration to a state of exile affirms the tendency "forged in nationalist and feminist literary criticism that identifies the metaphorically colonized position of the nineteenth-century woman with the position of Canada as a British colony" (Henderson 4). Most notably, then, Moodie's expression of suspended agency reveals how Moodie produces a gendered experience of the frontier even before arriving at it, reorienting from the structural, willful work of colonial occupation and towards the constraints of her own, gendered positioning.

Yet, perhaps most revealing of Moodie's disposition is the fact that Moodie's expression of reluctance to emigrate is almost immediately eclipsed by an expression of patriotic sentiment. "Ah these vain outbursts of feeling," she admonishes herself, before pivoting: "Canada! Thou art a noble, free, and rising country—the great fostering mother of the orphans of civilization. The offspring of Britain, thou must be great, and I will and do love thee, land of my adoption" (36). This moment performs Moodie's sense of inhibited subservience, revealing a correlation between emotional regulation, and seemingly, ingenuine expressions of colonial nationalism. Moodie's introduction, hence, ultimately reveals the complex and dynamic ways in which Moodie relays her own psychology, regulation of behavior and sentiment, and hence, relation to the colonial project. Moodie's introduction thus animates the conditions of Jennifer Henderson's assertion that "in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the mutual reinforcement of the categories of 'colony' and 'woman writer' resulted not in an organic unfolding of national identity, but rather in exclusionary assertions that 'we are a people'" (5). Indeed, Moodie's inner dialogue reveals interplays between gendered expressions of descent and swift appeal to the potential of the new, Canadian nation to dissolve those gendered, political differences into unity.

Scholarship engaging with Moodie largely tends to this unfolding—an attention centering Moodie's oppositional relation to frontier genres, and notably, boosterism. If Moodie's early chapters betray the tacit ways in which patriarchal power is negotiated, Moodie's stance on boosterism marked a clear intervention into the fantasy of frontier genres, at the time. As James Belich's work on media in the Settler Revolution asserts, boosterism functioned as advertising for British expansion, connecting "the emigration decision to a vague yet powerful pre-existing package of hopes" (155). Despite functioning as a form of marketing, it was also a source of pleasure to the British reading public; at one point, boosterism marked "one of the largest genres in nineteenth-century English literature" (153). Under the valence of emigrant information, boosterism was didactic, maintaining "a paradise complex ... that encouraged people prone to seek promised lands to look outward for them—to the settler newlands" (154). The infrastructure of this abstract "package of hopes," was, however, decisively economic. As a marketing technique for the project of British expansion, boosterism manipulated notions of individual risk and gain: "Boom-time rates of return on investments in newlands were often higher than those prevailing in the oldlands, and this was played up. So were the risks, and this was played down" (155). Yet, aside from boosterism encoding the frontier in notions of exponential financial gain, as an appeal to the economic household, boosterism was also "male-driven emigration propaganda" (Shiak 123). As a genre, therefore, boosterism overtly advanced a fantasy of Canadian frontier life and in unspoken ways appealed to the gendered-political make-up of the prospective settler-emigrant household.

Moodie's stance on boosterism appears in the third edition of *Roughing It*. As Moodie writes, "The general interest [in settlement], once excited, was industriously kept alive by pamphlets, published by interested parties, which prominently set forth all the good to be derived from a settlement in the Backwoods of Canada; while they carefully concealed the toil and

hardship to be endured in order to secure these advantages" (2). Moodie's closing words restates these sentiments: "If these sketches should prove the means of deterring on family from sinking their property, and shipwrecking all their hopes, by going to reside in the backwoods of Canada, I shall consider myself amply repaid for revealing the secrets of the prison-house, and felt that I have not toiled and suffered in the wilderness in vain" (265). As bookends, Moodies' sentiments justify the tendency to read *Roughing It* as subversive. As Noreen Lape suggests, *Roughing It*, was produced as "a reaction to [Moodie's] frontier experiences with profit-seeking exterior boosters," and the work's tenor arises from Moodie's sense of moral duty to disabuse the British public of their illusions (373). This framing of Moodie's work as an oppositional or subversive response to the prevailing genre of Canadian frontier life reads Moodie's prose as uniformly subversive. As Lape observes, the tonal differences between Moodie account and boosterism of the day reveal a shift away from Romanticism and towards a "metarealism," where the prevailing of authenticity over fantasy, and the common place over the spectacular, performed a rejection of the "mono-vocal tenor of the British imperial booster literature of the age" (Godeanu-Kenworthy 371).

Aside from peddling economic myths, boosterism coerced settler investment through abundant, plentiful, and romantic images of landscape. The speaker that Moodie and Wilson heard on that first night, Cattermole, was well-established on the booster circuit; as a persuasive representative of life in the colonies, he "claimed to have directly influenced the decision of over 6,000 people to emigrate" (Shiak 99). Cattermole's pamphlet, *Emigration: The Advantages of Emigration to Canada* (1831) outwardly refuted an image of Canada as a "country covered with eternal snows, and scarcely fit for the habitation of a civilized being" using scenes of natural profusion: "climate, soil, and capacity for an advantageous settlement, it is not exceeded, if equalled by any country in the world" and moreover, "it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to find in any other region of the globe, a tract of country of the same magnitude, with so many natural advantages..." In Canada, he proceeded, "deer abound in the woods, [and] lakes teem with white fish" (qtd. in Shiak 99), drawing, as Shiak argues, "a careful veil over the gloom of the forests, the lack of an established social order, and the amount of hard labour needed to maintain an emigrant settlement" (99). As Shaikh affirms, boosterism walked a "fine line between providing authentic facts and selling fantastical tales" (33).

Moodie's prose subverts boosterism by replacing its tropes of paradisaical abundance with scenes of domestic scarcity. As Moodie cautions, "to the poor, industrious working man, it presents many advantages; to the poor gentleman, none! ... The gentleman can neither work so hard, live so coarsely, nor endure...as his poorer, more fortunate neighbour" (265). These sentiments are rooted in Moodie's particular accounts of day-to-day life. Upon settling in Belleville, Moodie finds herself contending with the "borrowing economy." This method of neighborly exchange (one, Moodie deems, of "unprincipled people ... living upon neighbours" [49]) functions, duplicitously, in Moodie's view, as an economy that "does not involve the penalty of stealing" [49] thus absolving its perpetrators ("they can keep the goods without the unpleasant necessity of returning them or feeling the moral obligation of being grateful for their use" [49]). The Moodies quickly became entangled in this economy: Betty Fye develops an affinity for Moodie's apples (50). The Yankees, squatting nearby, are perpetually entering the Moodies' home ("I can scarcely time to put my house in order before his family commenced borrowing or stealing from me," Moodie writes [52]). Another neighbor regularly feeds the Moodie's cows so that they stray to her property, and "in return for these little attentions, they suffered themselves to be milked before they returned to their respective owners" (54). Their landlord's affinity for "borrowing" is such that it hinders the Moodies' harvest: "the very day our

new plough came home, the father ... came over to borrow it ... the consequence was that the borrowed implement came home unfit for use, just at the very time that we wanted to plough for fall wheat" (49).

Moodie's rumination on the borrowing economy starkly illustrates the tendency to "put [justice] in terms that coincide with the expansion of the settler state" (Tuck 10). Importantly, it emphasizes how that tendency emerges through Moodie's depictions of the domestic—a purview that has engendered Moodie's subversive feminist status. The descriptions of ill-meaning neighbors and the social minutia of these scenes indicates how Moodie's prose authenticates a gendered reading, and as such, refuses the "masculinist propaganda" of the frontier's panoramic image of inflated abundance. Yet it also displays how the very matter of land itself functions peripherally in such configurations. The structural, colonial politics of the land that the Moodie's have assumed as rightful property—land therefore viewed as an extension of the Moodie home—is subsumed by the socially-minute politics of "unprincipled borrowing." Indeed, Moodie's rumination on "borrowing" has inspired analysis of Moodie's anxieties about herself being colonized. To Moodie, "the domestic transgression epitomized in the practice of borrowing finds its political and national correspondent in contemporaneous colonial fears of territorial annexation by the US" (Godeanu-Kenworthy 375). Alternatively, such scenes of quotidian, domestic sociality animate more general analysis of Moodie's form. As Misao Dean argues, Moodie's structuring of narrative through social anecdote (a structure Shiak deems "fragmentary aesthetics" [95]) marks Moodie's "practising femininity": Moodie's "structure of non-structure, of gossip and personal anecdote ... implies the importance of the details of day-to-day domestic and social life ... and so empowers the domestic sphere and those confined to it" (41). As Dean argues, Moodie's emulation of gossip, rather than submitting to tropes of gender, is an exercise in maintaining authority when women's narrative authority was scarce and contingent: "By conforming to the 'rules' of femininity (as Moodie called them) women were enabled to use the limited authority which those rules granted" in British readership (34).

Scholarship on *Roughing It* affirms how Moodie's feminist voice unsettles the fantasy of the frontier by advancing an authentic or "metarealist" perspective on frontier life. Simultaneously, scholarship affirms how Moodie's feminist response to the frontier naturalizes colonial expansion by rendering it peripheral. If Moodie's prose emphasizes the "domestic sphere and those confined to it," such emphasis manifests its own politics of displacement. Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, in some ways, attempts to reconcile this dynamic. Writing in the 1970s, Atwood's poetics are cognizant of the Anthropocene, and moreover, how Moodie's role in settler colonial expansion tethered to the swelling environmental decimation. *Journals* is thus a subversive work that is also recuperative. As Jennings argues, Atwood's investment in Moodie's is an investment in rethinking feminism through "a postcolonial, ecocritical stance... atten[dant] to the ways in which the present realities of the Anthropocene are entangled in the history of European imperialist conquests" (132). Yet, Erin Smith's assertion that Atwood's poetic reimagining of Moodie in *Journals* "portray[s] the experience of the frontier as distinctly gendered" is also true (75). These readings of *Journals* arguably converge in Atwood's rendering of John Moodie. Unlike Susanna Moodie, whom Atwood endows with posthumanist and ecocentric possibility, Moodie's husband, in his scant appearances, serves as a bastion of colonial-anthropocentric significance. As Atwood writes in "Further Arrivals," Moodie's "shadowy husband, hears / malice in the tree's whispers" (13). In "The Planters," John Moodie's anthropocentric ideals are announced directly: "my husband, a neighbor, another man / weeding the few rows ... They deny the ground they stand on / Pretend this dirt is the future" (16). *Journals*, thus, presents an effort to reimagine settler feminism through geopolitical

realities, and yet, in doing so, seemingly reiterates Moodie's own tendency to obscure imperialist conquests using gendered positionality. Rather than foregrounding Moodie's colonialist underpinnings, Atwood's reiteration poetically emancipates her from any responsibility to account for them. As a work itself penned by a "feminist icon" of the CanLit genre, Atwood's *Journals* animates the political uncertainty of feminist relations to wilderness—an uncertainty the following section seeks to unravel further.

Considering the cultural impact of Atwood's adaption, Susan Johnston cautions: "So powerful is Atwood's reconstruction that most interpretations of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, but many independent discussions of *Roughing It in the Bush* as well, have succumbed to its lure. A new reading of this literary relation seems called for, one which considers Atwood's response to Moodie in terms of the creative relation Moodie achieved, by accepting and resisting inherited European aesthetics, with the wilderness landscape of colonial Canada" (81). As Johnston proposes, Atwood's creative response to Moodie "tells us more about Atwood" than it does about Moodie (79), leaving, despite Atwood's eco-feminist reimagining, *Moodie's relation to land* unacknowledged. In emphasizing the quiet and largely uninterrogated ways in which Moodie's frontier landscape adheres to a European aesthetics, Johnston foregrounds the anthropocentric subtext of Moodie work, specifically noting how, amidst *Roughing It's* louder, oppositional stance to boosterism, an investment in land as profitable and vested with its economic promises, persists. Johnston's encouragement to study Moodie's aesthetics of wilderness and, particularly, consider the work those aesthetics do, motivates the next section and its proposition that Moodie's "domestic realist" response to frontier genres was not subversive so much as reiterative. As this section reveals, in focalizing the domestic, the bounds of the Moodie's property, and everyday scenes of social life, Moodie did not oppose boosterism's panoramic endorsement of colonial expansion, so much as invite it into the home.

Kinship and Extraction on the Wilderness Frontier

A more recent recall of Moodie's work than Atwood's, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies* (2021) animates and transforms Johnston's concerns. *Noopiming* unsettles Moodie's image of "wilderness" not by deconstructing its anthropocentrism but looking past it, towards alternate, dehumanist horizons. Like Atwood's *Journals*, *Noopiming* is cognizant of how, as a figure, Moodie haunts gender politics in the settler state. Self-situating as a "response" to Moodie's work, and actively harkening "white women," *Noopiming* marks a preoccupation with the enduring relevance of Moodie's relation to feminist identity, and thus, the schisms between feminist and decolonial thought. Yet, unlike Atwood's work, *Noopiming* does not attempt to subvert *Roughing It* by inhabiting or amending Moodie's gaze. *Noopiming* is a polyvocal narrative, told through a multispecies assemblage of humans, plants, animals, and disembodied voices. In other words, rather than amending or altering the Ontario "bush" Moodie depicted, *Noopiming* rather invests in illuminating the landscape and terrain that Moodie failed to see—an ecosystem of lively, interdependent relations, whose presence temporally preceded and exceed Moodie's rendering. Most importantly, *Noopiming*, the Anishinaabemowin word for "bush," is situated in Anishinaabe intelligence and language systems that are at less adherent to gendered binaries and more descriptive of various degrees of non-human agency than Moodie's settler viewpoint. This epistemological grounding is exercised through the novel's economy of characters and relationships. In *Noopiming*, the "bush" is not a static entity or threshold to be surpassed, but a constellation of life forms each with their own needs, desires, contingencies, and relationships, and each representing parts of the whole. Mashkawaji is a disembodied character, situated in both time immemorial and the present. Their narration binds the novel, and it is

through their narration that we meet the other characters, each of whom represent a crucial appendage of Mashkawaji's being. Akiwenzii, the old man, who represents the narrator's will; Adik, the caribou, who represents their nervous system; Ninaatig, the maple tree, who represents their lungs; Mindimooyenh, the elder woman, who represents their conscience; Asin, the human, who represents their eyes and ears; Lucy, another human, who represents their brain; and Sabe, the giant, who represents their marrow.

The differences in structure between *Noopiming* and *Roughing It* are immediately apparent and instructive. The innately codependent narrative structure of *Noopiming* makes settlement difficult for any reader striving to land with one character, extract a single story, or privilege one point of view. *Noopiming* thus responds to *Roughing It* by outwardly stalling possibilities for extractive forms of narrative mastery by immersing the reader in a series of contingent, mutually affecting relationships. The effect is an elucidation of the anthropocentric horizon of Moodie's streamlined vantage—emphasizing how Moodie's envisioning of the wilderness as a threshold to be surpassed maintains a myopic view of human conquest and victory. However, *Noopiming*'s illumination of *Roughing It*'s anthropocentric horizons manifest in Simpson's more active, imagistic conjuring of the Anthropocene, too. In the present world of *Noopiming*, the effects of the Settler Revolution and its ideals of rapid expansion haunt the landscape in scenes of contamination and degradation. If "the bush," for Moodie was a stark, natural border bearing the promises of resources and development, in the present world, "the bush" is a porous site, perpetually inflected by the cumulative effects of the anthropogenic output: The "bush" Simpson conjures sits on the periphery of IKEA parking lots and has "100 million tonnes of polyethylene resins ... produced annually" moving through it (126). No longer a site of boundary of untapped potential wilderness (as implied in Moodie's view), "the bush," now integrated into anthropocentric life, is an "enactment of ongoing colonial relations to Land" (Liboiron 6) bearing the "aftereffects that have changed, and frequently harmed, ecosystems and biospheres" (Shotwell 9). Indeed, anthropocentrism looms large in *Noopiming*—a work which, rather than directly engaging with Moodie, engages with the realities Moodie's perceptions of "the bush" anticipated: A "new order built on shortcuts and self-interest" (*Noopiming* 244). In this "new order," anthropocentric solutions are proposed in response to mounting anthropogenic effects. As Ninaatig observes: "There are only forty hectares of trees left in this park ... more recently the tree cops have taken an interest in "managing" the forest ... charging a ransom to hike the trail, and pruning" (97). As Mashkawaji notes, "scientists put ... samples in Ziploc bags and use sharpies to write coordinates. The scientists send them back to the lab. The results are always the same: they were right and there is nothing to be done because. There is an important difference between testing and caring" (181).

Perhaps the most significant difference between *Roughing It* and *Noopiming*'s perspectives is the fact *Noopiming* is voiced by Mashkawaji, or the land, itself. Elsewhere, Simpson has elaborated on Nishnaabeg intelligence via the overarching principle of "land is pedagogy." In relation to *Roughing It*, read, primarily through Moodie's importation and projection of British Victorian ideals onto Canadian frontier life, *Noopiming*'s framing of Mashkawaji, as simultaneously the landscape and first narrator, exemplifies the schisms, alienation, and sense of dissonance plaguing Moodie's account. Indeed, if friction and discord undergird Moodie's experience of "roughing it" on the land, Mashkawaji's intimacy with *Noopiming*'s composites and characters comparatively conjures an atmosphere of fluidity and symbiosis. In contrast to *Roughing It*, where "the bush" is rendered through the projections and hard-learned inaccuracies of European settler theories about the land (namely, in the form of booster literature), theory in *Noopiming* is not a separate entity to be proven or disproven, but

comes from the land itself. Indeed, Simpson asserts, “theory works a little differently within Nishnaabeg thought.” Theory “is generated and regenerated continually ... it is woven within kinetics ... it is contextual and relational ... [and notably] is generated from the ground up” (“Land as” 8). In rendering “the bush” the producer of theory rather than a receptacle for it through Mashkawaji’s presence, *Noopiming* hence advances an image of “Ontario” that is diametrically different than Moodie’s renderings: not a site onto which to project theory or expectation, but rather the story’s own driving force of knowledge.

Which is to say, at the level of composition, structure, and, relatedly, atmosphere, *Noopiming* advances a vastly different sense of shared terrain—one that is more entangled, immersive, and indeed, alive. Yet, if *Noopiming* enacts these differences in animacy at the level of structure and characterization, it also emphasizes these differences in its particularities of language. The presence of Anishinaabemowin throughout *Noopiming* conjures a linguistic ethos “constructed around an Anishinaabe worldview” (Noodin xvi). Anishinaabemowin “is a language that depends on word construction more than sentence construction to create meaning” and at “the center of construction is the verb” (87). This prioritizing of action over subject, and emphasis on the verb’s directional resonance, manifests “a shared belief among speakers of Anishinaabemowin that one must ‘look in all directions’” (87). As Margaret Noodin asserts, this multifocal orientation—and its implications for decentering the human—is not symbolic. In Anishinaabemowin “relations to the earth are not fuzzy indefinite secrets. They are real sensations” recognized by grammatical and syntactical structures (94). In *Noopiming*, the presence of Anishinaabemowin motivates and signposts directionality, movement, and economies of recognition. The mobilities of Ninaatig, the maple tree, are in discord with the anthropocentric assumptions of trees as *objects* of a gaze, and moreover, reliably rooted, passive features of a landscape. Yet, as Mashkawaji narrates, while Ninaatig “spend[s] *most* of their nights on the right side of Rosedale Valley road ... lately, they have been heading down to Tommy Thompson park” (110). Ninaatig’s mobility, in its context of Nishnaabeg intelligence is not metaphoric for non-human animacy but a material sensation, that mirrors the material, action-oriented economies of Anishinaabemowin. As Mashkawaji elaborates, “Ninaatig’s children, grandchildren and great grandchildren feel Ninaatig’s absence ... Ninaatig can feel them moving their roots out of the ways as they stretch into the soil” (96). The presence of Peter Wohlleben’s *The Hidden Life of Trees* at Ninaatig’s base (one of Ninaatig’s “special things”) is perhaps a signifier, to the skeptical reader, of the genuine material reality of these movements. It is, simultaneously, perhaps, a signifier of how Indigenous knowledge and intelligence is repackaged as contemporary bestsellers, and “legitimized” through western science. Regardless, Mashkawaji narrates, Ninaatig “like[s] to have a measure of where human thinking is of them, so they know what is coming next” (93).

In utilizing Anishinaabemowin to structure “the bush,” hence, *Noopiming* invites a rereading of Moodie’s *Roughing It* attuned to the politics of (mis)translation. When “the bush” is translated into “noopiming,” “the bush” comes to life. Yet, these politics of translation exceed the subject of the land itself and permeate the question of gender, particularly central to Moodie’s work. Indeed, amidst *Noopiming*’s wider project of translation, the title’s active recall of “white ladies” invokes how the gender binary, central to Moodie’s work, implodes. This implosion is at once linguistic and conceptual. Grammatically, gender is constructed differently in Anishinaabemowin, which “requires use of one of...four verb forms, each with potential exponential variation based on a combination with seven pronouns” (Noodin 87). This profusion of gender manifests in *Noopiming*’s characters’ pronouns—some of which are binary, some of which are non-binary, and some of which do not occupy a spectrum at all. Yet the subversion of

Roughing It's reigning emphasis on gender takes on a greater significance when one considers the correlations between gender and colonialism. As Simpson, elsewhere, has written:

colonialism ... has imposed an artificial gender binary in my nation. This imposed colonial gender binary sets out two very clear genders: male and female and it lays out two very clear sets of rigidly defined roles based on colonial conceptions of femininity and masculinity... we've always had more than two genders in our nation and we've also always practiced a fluidity around gender in general. ... (Anishinaabeg) were encouraged to show a broad range of emotions, express their gender and sexuality in a way that was true to their own being, as a matter of both principle and survival. (Verso)

From an Anishinaabe view, gendered binaries—enforced by the Indian Act, the church, and anthropologists—emerge as a symptom of colonial violence and “system of control” (*As We* 126). As Simpson writes, queer and Two Spirit identities, “and the knowledge and practices those bodies house as Indigenous political orders [thus] pose a threat to settler society ... and the project of colonialism” (*As We* 126). In Simpson's framing, heteropatriarchy is a form of gendered control, but also, an attempt “to break the network of intelligent relationships housed in Indigenous bodies in order to prevent the replication of Indigenous freedom, in order to get land.” This, Simpson asserts, “is one way heteropatriarchy dispossesses” (*As We* 127). In other words, the politics of gender in Anishinaabe intelligence are inextricable from the politics of land. As Simpson asserts, “Naming the gender binary as colonial is important because ... it is at odds with the practice of life in the bush because it restricts and prevents relationships, productivity, and, in many aspects, survival” (*As We* 128).

Which is to say, *Noopiming* and *Roughing It* present vastly different perspectives on a shared terrain. Simultaneously, the impulse to compare these works derives from more than their shared, material landscapes. Simpson's subtle techniques of mimicry are critical in soliciting a dialogue with Moodie's work—ones that do not utilize its tropes but invite the reader to tend closely to these text's points of overlap and divergence. Indeed, alongside dispelling Moodie's ideological vantage, Simpson's work adheres to some of the narrative arcs of Moodie's telling, encouraging the reader to utilize these overlaps as comparative entry points. These techniques are apparent in *Noopiming*'s introduction. *Noopiming* begins with water, a panoramic introduction to landscape, and a journey west. As Mashkawaji narrates: “Once you move through cold, there is pacific. Once you move through the pacific, there is placid. Once you move through placid, there is a condition of expanse. And it was that condition of expanse that held me” (1-6). Yet, alongside mirroring the scope and directional nature of Moodie's own, initial journey across the Pacific, this parallel is also a telling point of departure. In contrast to Moodie, whose journey ends with her descriptive and moralizing observations and the coastal landscape of Grosse Isle, Mashkawaji, in *Noopiming* proceeds by narrating their relationships to the other characters on the horizon: Ninaatig, the maple tree, “is my lungs” (24), Lucy, the human, “is my brain,” “Sabe is marrow,” and “Adik” they assert, “is my nervous system” (26-27). Most notably, even if appearing omniscient, Mashkawaji refuses any claims to authority: “I believe everything [they] say,” they assert, “because ice distorts perception, and trust replaces critique, examination and interrogation” (30); “I believe everything [they] say / even though / their truths are their own / not mine” (32). Mashkawaji's introduction to “the bush” is therefore instructive, offering not only a scene, but an ethic by which to proceed, suggesting, that it is only through the principal of “look[ing] in all directions” that the reader might access the novel's very centre (Noodin 87).

Moodie likewise begins *Roughing It* with water, a journey west across the Pacific, and an instructive introduction to the landscape. Arriving at the shore of Grosse Isle and finding a

landscape shrouded in clouds, she turns to the scene before her: a shoreline ravaged with cholera, where the peopled bustle of everyday life “sull[ies] the purity of the air and water with contaminating sights and sounds” [12]). Moodie expresses disappointment: “Alas! That man’s stern spirit e’er should mar A scene so pure—so exquisite as this” (6). Yet, when the clouds part, Moodie is enlightened to the “grandeur of the scene ... [which rises] majestically before [her]” (9). Observing the mountains, “sublime” and “rising like Titans,” Moodie exclaims: “Nature had lavished all her noblest features in producing that enchanting scene” (9). Johnston’s investments in Moodie’s subtle commitment to Romanticism resonates here, as Moodie’s preference for an “unsullied” and “sublime” Nature affirms a Wordsworthian ideal. While such panoramic imagery is infrequent in the broader scheme of *Roughing It*, this introduction reflects Moodie’s investments in boosterism, as a genre viewing landscape through the prism of “return.” Indeed, Moodie’s appreciation for the land is contingent on its ability to reveal the aesthetic expectations with which she arrives. This investment in “return” becomes more apparent (and outwardly economic) as the scene progresses. As Moodie refocuses closer scenes of nature—the banks of the river in front of her, and along the shoreline—her aesthetics shift. Down the river, where signs of settlement disappear—where the “more remote regions, where the forest has never yet echoed to the woodman’s axe, or received the impress of civilization”—the forest exudes a “melancholy awe” (10). Deprived of the sublime’s duress, this forest seemingly unsettles Moodie by revealing a landscape that is too close to settlement to be “unsullied” and yet very existence proclaims the limits of the expansion, and thus, the project with which she aligns.

As shared introductions to “the bush,” the parallels between Moodie and Mashkawaji’s representations resound for their pedagogical differences. Mashkawaji’s introduction outwardly invests in multispecies relations and, importantly, their own limits to fully capture or represent those relations—a privileging of humility they invite the reader to assume. Moodie’s introduction, alternatively, affirms settlement as the prevailing prism through which nature is mediated; “the bush” is introduced for its ability to reveal the expectations with which Moodie arrived, and hence, serves to reinstate Moodie’s narrative authority. It is a staging that anticipates the frictions and discord that define Moodie’s experience of “roughing it”—an interplay affirming that, indeed, “the settler subject can never be in more than fleeting harmony with the Canadian environment until it has been modified in accordance with settler goals and ambitions” (Bentley 69). These different outlooks are pronounced when cast in relation to the water, running through both scenes. Mashkawaji, as a disembodied voice frozen in the ice, is herself of the water. Their ontology, hence, undergirds their epistemology: Their status as the narrator or “guide” to the landscape of Noopiming, it is inferred, derives from their crucially networked centrality, as a vital life force, for all its beings. It is, likewise, the water’s connective force that Moodie recognizes and values—albeit, in different ways. Moodie’s comparative introduction to the St. Lawrence, in the context of Mashkawaji’s characterization, is revealing: “that king of streams,” Moodie pronounces, “that great artery flowing from the heart of the world, through the length and breadth of the land, carrying wealth and fertility in its course, and transporting from town to town along its beautiful shores the riches and produce of a thousand distant climes” (16). In the case of Moodie’s framing, the St. Lawrence’s networked expanse is not pedagogical—one that renders a river ecologically necessary, as a networked, vital life force—but one that renders it especially significant towards the economic project of trade.

If, as Mashkawaji asserts, “Ninaatig is their lungs,” Moodie’s economic veneration of the St. Lawrence hints at violence to come. Indeed, Moodie’s interpretation of the river’s networked trade routes invokes the lumber industry, dominating the exports of 19th century settler Upper and Lower Canada, and the profitable mass conversion of forest into timber, transported along the

coast. Yet, Moodie's investment in the extractable value of resources is confirmed more explicitly, as well. Later, her descriptions of land clearing in Cobourg reiterate the extractivist logics of her account. Moodie's depiction of the treeline renders it an obstacle to expansion and profitable settlement, and hence, a source of despair: "The roots spread along the uneven surface of the ground so thickly that they seemed to form a vast network, and apparently covered the greater part of the surface of the ground. The task of clearing such a labyrinth seemed utterly hopeless. My heart almost sickened at the prospect of clearing such land, and I was greatly confirmed in my resolution of buying a farm cleared to my hand" (120).⁶⁰ If the root networks function in *Noopiming* as a system of relations—connecting Ninatiig to their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, as well as Mashkawaji themselves—Moodie's interpretation of this "dense network" is not its thickness of relations, but labour-inducing hindrance. Moodie expresses joy, years later, when she returns to Cobourg and observes the landscape's transformation: "The trees were gone, the tangled roots were gone, and the cedar-swamp was converted in a fair grassy meadow, as smooth as a bowling-green" (121). Years following, she notes the area was "covered with stone and brick houses and one portion of it was occupied by a large manufactory ... with steam-engines, spinning jennies." "This is civilisation!" she exclaims. "This is freedom!" (121). *Noopiming*, through its central character of the tree, Ninaatig, provokes the inverse of Moodie's emotional trajectory; Moodie's pronouncement of freedom, *Noopiming* reminds, is at the expense of other life forms.

Indeed, Moodie's descriptions of settler advancement—even in the localized study of a treeline—reveal an optics of erasure and non-recognition. This optic is especially apparent in Moodie's domestic purview and relationship to her property in Belleville. Just past their house, Moodie relays, is a "dry cedar-swamp, not far from the house, by the lake shore" that had been the "usual place of encampment" for Indigenous communities "for many years. The whole block of land was almost entirely covered with maple trees and had been an Indian sugar-bush" but "their favourite spot had now passed into the hands of strangers" (153). It is a brief musing, affirming how Indigenous dispossession is encoded in Moodie's fleeting ruminations on domestic life. Yet, the colonized sugar bush haunts Moodie's prose more acutely as well. Like Moodie's failed endeavour to make bread, Moodie's attempts to source maple sugar likewise animate the domestic turbulences of "roughing it"—a dynamic that becomes especially pronounced in the winter of 1833. As Moodie writes, "the rigour of the climate subdued my proud, independent, English spirit, and I actually shamed my womanhood and cried at the cold" (75). She continues, "the prospect of the maple sugar relieved the dullness occasioned" (80). Moodie observes her farmhand undergo the preparations: "I felt a little curious about this far-famed maple sugar," she writes "and asked a thousand questions about the use to which the troughs were to be applied; how the trees were to be tapped, the sugar made" (80). Yet, the process proves cumbersome and unrewarding ("This is a tedious piece of business," thought I" [80]). In the morning, Moodie finds "a hard, black substance, which very much resembled pitch" (81) and deduces, "I have never tasted anything more nauseous" (81) and is informed by her farmhand that they had "bad luck."

Moodie's failed encounters with sugar arguably exceed matters of luck (or lack thereof) and invoke a more substantial reckoning with the nonconsensual ethos of *Roughing It*—that is,

⁶⁰ For more on the representations of land clearing in settler poetry and literature (and, particularly, on the shifts in aesthetic vernaculars that represented the process of land clearing) see Bentley's work.

the anthropocentric relationships and colonial possessions and Indigenous dispossessions that occupy its narrative periphery. Indeed, sugar-harvesting looks very different in *Noopiming*, as do its outcomes. In *Noopiming*, sugar-harvesting is a process narrated by Ninaatig, the maple tree, and described not through the language of extraction but ceremony (a process, Ninaatig notes, that “can last a full month at least, although now it is sometimes even longer with all the stopping and starting of climate change” [89]). Ceremony, in this case, is a multispecies affair. The process “required a luxurious reliance on Ninaatig’s friends and neighbours ... [the trees] made sure Ninaatig stayed hydrated by taking less water out of the soil. They caressed Ninaatig’s skin during the drilling. They whispered beautiful things when the sun made the sap flow hard” (89). When Lucy and Sabe (the humans) are boiling, Adik, the caribou, likes to join (“They liked being with Sabe and Lucy for long hours with a common goal” [161]). As a response to *Roughing It*, *Noopiming*’s scenes of sugar-making have twofold implications. In detailing the community necessary for the extraction of syrup (notably, Ninaatig’s fellow, surrounding trees) *Noopiming* signals Moodie’s endorsement of clear-cutting and disdain for the dense network of arboreal roots—situating Moodie’s ostensibly individual case of “bad luck” on a longer continuum of fraught ecological relationships. Importantly, thus, *Noopiming* elaborates how anthropocentrism itself is the underlying force of Moodie’s unrewarding and unyielding encounters with the Canadian wilderness.

When situated in an ethics of consent, *Noopiming* reveals, maple sugar harvesting not only yields differently, but is atmospherically different, too. In Simpson’s writing on Nishnaabeg intelligence, and particularly, land as pedagogy, the Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg story of Kwezens’s discovery of maple sugar is central. It is a story outwardly about sugar harvesting, and more significantly about reciprocity on and with the land. In a Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg context, the story of Kwezens, Simpson asserts, is significantly pedagogical because it animates the ways in which ecology is pedagogical: Kwezens discovers the possibility of extracting sugar by observing a squirrel and then amending and mimicking its practice. She then shares her discovery with her family, and in turn, learns how to use the sap to boil deer meat. Kwezens “then takes her Elders to the tree already trusting that she will be believed, that her knowledge and discovery will be cherished, and that she will be heard” (7). Kwezens’s discovery, in other words, is a story rendering the success of syrup extraction as contingent on good relations. In the context of *Noopiming*’s locus of Nishnaabeg intelligence, the failure to make-kin with the land and life on the land, undeniably underwrites Moodie’s “rough,” alienating, and lonely experience of it. If, as McGregor argues, Moodie’s *Roughing It* affirms that “regardless of actual measurable temperature and snowfall, the Canadian winter was experienced as unbearably harsh and especially long” (48) and moreover, that “Canadian writers seemingly do not even like to look upon the face of wilderness” (49), then *Noopiming* reveals the fundamentally different experience of “the bush” when one strives to look upon it, directly.

Feminism, Dehumanism, and Response-Ability

As a response to *Roughing It*, *Noopiming* reveals the anthropocentric undercurrents of Moodie’s gendered landscape. Simpson accomplishes this not by inhabiting Moodie’s tropes but by advancing comparative landscape where feminism and environmental stewardship co-invest in a shared horizon. By revealing “the Ontario bush” to be a multispecies community, where reciprocal relations have always already existed, Simpson holds *Roughing It* accountable to a dehumanist outlook, or, perhaps more specifically, what Katharina Hoppe deems a “post-anthropocentric feminist ethics” of interpretation (126). Indeed, in reframing “the bush” as a world contending with anthropocentric accumulation and shaped by an Anishinaabe worldview,

Simpson invites a re-reading of *Roughing It* attuned not to Moodie's subversive relation to the gendered nature of the frontier, but capacity to respond to "the question of how to learn to be able to respond in the expansive times of now, with its complex material entanglements" (Hoppe 126). At the heart of "post-anthropocentric feminist ethics" Hoppe asserts, is the matter of response-ability. Given the Anthropocene's increasing climatic pressure, feminism, she asserts, must "go beyond individualizing notions of responsibility in addressing the multiple, never fully graspable interdependencies of the present condition" (127). Moodie's failure to respond to "the bush" as a pedagogical entity (and inability to transform or transcend an anthropocentric way of seeing), *Noopiming* suggests, undergirds Moodie's "rough" experience of it. Yet, such failures also, it is implied, undergird the text's broader complicity in materially advancing anthropogenic worlds and settler-colonial investments.

As this final section argues, Simpson and Moodie's dialectic bears a productive framework by which to read today's popular feminist wilderness survival media. Reading feminism's ongoing claim to the genre of "Canadian wilderness" attuned to the possibilities of dehumanism and horizons of post-anthropocentric feminist ethics ushers a productive rethinking of the relations between gender and genre, but also, how such relationships are implicated in questions of environmental response-ability. As a series centering the real and imagined space of "Ontario wilderness," *Yellowjackets* is a convenient subject for this analysis. *Yellowjackets* is part of a wider assemblage of feminist storytelling centered on wilderness survivalism. Netflix's *Keep Breathing* (2022) depicts a female lawyer who, following a plane crash near Nunavut, struggles to survive alone in the northern Canadian wilderness. In *The Wilds* (2020), a plane crash likewise incites the survivalist drama to unfold. In this case, it is a group of teenage girls, enroute to a corporate feminist retreat, who, unbeknownst to them, are part of an experiment seeking to prove women's survivability skills in the wild. *The Wilds* is thus similar to *Yellowjackets* in terms of its plot and metatextual, somewhat cautious relationship to its frontier genre. In advancing a meta-premise conflating feminist "success" with the capacity to play settler, the show (in the spirit of Taissa's own anti-cartographic assertion) signals its wariness of its own premising of female empowerment on the colonial imagery of wilderness domination. For obvious reasons, thus, *Yellowjackets* and *The Wilds* have been widely compared; the "parallel structure" of these shows, their mutual depictions of "what castaway fictions get wrong," and offering of "a fresh twist on a familiar genre" are points of similarity (St. Felix). Critics have also observed differences between the two: "[*Yellowjackets*] is darker and more violent than *The Wilds*, a teen drama geared to young adults," and *The Wilds* is "less intense and disturbing than *Yellowjackets*" (Fiaz). Indeed, it has been proposed, *The Wilds*, whose violence is tempered, functions as "the YA version of *Yellowjackets*" (Julian). Despite their subversive relationships to the survival genre, thus, both shows have been largely measured by their relation to it.

The tendency to read *Yellowjackets* through its proximity and relation to the survival horror genre inspires this final section's investment in the show's treatment of non-human life. Reading *Roughing It* through *Noopiming* reveals how Moodie's gendered "domestic realist" disassembling of the frontier fantasy peripheralizes, and yet quietly subsists through, anthropocentric violence. Reading *Yellowjackets* through Simpson and Moodie's dialectic, alternatively, I propose, calls for a rethinking of violence that is overtly loud; as criticism suggests, *Yellowjackets*' subversive feminism is inextricable from its homage to the survival horror genre, and its violent and disturbing imagery. Yet, while adhering to generic convention, the show implies a wariness of the very tropes of "survival horror" it utilizes. As Van and Taissa's conversation proceeds: "If this was a horror movie, you'd be the first to die," says Van, to which Taissa queries, "because I'm Black?" and Van responds, "no because you're the skeptical one." It

is an early exchange suggesting the show's uneasy relationship to the generic expectations it occupies, and moreover, cognizance of how expectations are implicated in wider regimes of racialization and erasure. As this final section suggests, Van and Taissa's exchange suggests *Yellowjackets'* own awareness of the relationship between colonial and anthropocentric processes of animalization and racialization that have inscribed the "wilderness" in spaces such as Ontario. Allowing this exchange to inflect interpretation of the show calls for a rethinking of the relations between feminism, genre, and the image of wilderness it outwardly conjures.

Yellowjackets' cautious relationship to the genre of survival horror orients to the show's depiction of, non-human life; indeed, non-human animals closely accompany many of the show's violent and disturbing hallmarks. In the third episode, the girls encounter a dead bear that has been brutalized by a larger animal. When Coach explains it was a pack of wolves ("wolves," he states, "can kill anything if the pack's big enough") it serves as an ominous declaration of encounters to come. When a small group is dispatched to leave camp and find a town, they are descended upon by a wolf pack that nearly kills Van, leaving her face scarred. Like the mangled bear, Van's bloodshot eye and exposed skull affirms the wolves' violent capacity. In a later episode, induced by psilocybin, the girls literally hunt their male fellow-survivor, chasing Travis through the forest with knives. The scene, which recalls the violence of girl's own experience of being hunted by wolves, pronounces a feminist claim to the genre. If the wolf is, initially, an animal that contours the wilderness with fear and malign, raising the (horrifying) stakes of survivability, the girl's *becoming wolf* suggests the transgressing of this boundary—a becoming "the monster" they had initially feared. *Yellowjacket's* ethos of "going wild" culminates in its opening and closing images: the girls, now covered in animal skins, hunt each other. These imagistic sequences, hinting at cannibalism, respond to and affirm the show's repeated question: "what really happened out there?"

In other words, the wolf is integral to *Yellowjackets'* feminist claim to the survival horror genre: It contours the wilderness with fear and a sign of malign, perpetuating an image of wilderness as an entity to be survived and overcome. Despite its feminist subversion of Golding's work, *Yellowjackets* thus, in one sense, tethers itself to its predecessor. *Lord of the Flies* is likewise laden with the hallmarks of survival horror and manifests that horror through the prospects of animal violence and "becoming animal." Golding's trope of the "unknown monster" in the woods, driving the boys' explanation for the corpse they encounter, endows the wilderness with fear and, as such, raises the stakes of survivability. As with *Yellowjackets*, however, animals (or, as the boys refer to them, "beasts") not only animate the threat of the wild, but the threat of the permeable boundary between the wild and "civilization." If the girls becoming animal—howling at the moon and hunting Travis—signifies *Yellowjackets'* feminist call for "the complete destruction of society" (Feldman), the boys becoming animal in Golding's work expedites the text's broader meditation on society, law, and ethics. That the group endeavours to survive by hunting wild pigs, and that Piggy is the most socially ostracized and scapegoated member of the group, evokes the novel's wider context of a fictional world war, and historical context, written shortly after WWII. Piggy's question, "What are? Humans? Or animals" bears existential tenor, affirming the tenuous boundary between a perceived "lawless wild" and the law of ethics that bullying, war, and crimes against humanity supposedly transgress (113).

Yellowjackets and *Lord of the Flies* thus both utilize non-human life to advance an image of society—whether it be in the context of fascism, war, or patriarchy—wherein non-human animals symbolically and literally either threaten law and order or tempt abandoning it all together. Critiques of Golding's work, attendant to not its overt context of war but its colonial subtext likewise implicate *Yellowjackets*. Golding's work was written in the wake of World War

II, amidst growing Independence and global anticolonial sentiment. As Stefan Hawlin argues, alongside Golding's stated anti-war consciousness is a more ambiguous politics of signification. As Hawlin posits, in the context of a global, fictional war, Golding's dispatching of Oxbridge boys to an ostensibly empty South Pacific island conjures the British legislators on the frontlines of the "legal" work of colonial expansion in Africa and the Global South, particularly. In this imagistic interplay, we might read not a critique of empire but a melancholic relation to its waning—a subtext, Hawlin argues, that gains momentum in Golding's particular treatment of non-human animals. Written during the Mau Mau Rebellion of 1952, *Lord of Flies*, Hawlin argues, suggestively endorses Britain's investment in implying the failures of the Kenyan nation to instill law and order, on the verge of its independence. Golding's text, in other words, endorses the British media's investment in rendering the rebellion's proponents "irrational rebels against the colonial regime who were out to murder white settler in terrible ways ... and even kill and torture livestock and animals" (131). This interplay, Hawlin argues, affirms how underneath *Lord of the Flies*' overt, antiwar sentiments lies an ambiguous "version of Conrad's Africa," which, at best, failed to "understand either the imperialist framework on which it is predicated or the image of colonialism that it evokes" (128).

Hawlin's critique unsettles the innate merits of "going wild" as a feminist politic, or a trope of "societal rejection." As Hawlin reveals, the imagery of "going wild" does not necessarily depart from, but potentially reifies, colonialism's distorted structures of law and order. Indeed, on one level, in its deployment of wolves, *Yellowjackets* invokes a world where "law and order" fail women and thus a feminist horizon that looks beyond it. Yet in doing so *Yellowjackets* also recalls the particular relations between wolves and colonial imaging in sites such as Ontario. As Stephanie Rutherford's study of the wolf within Canadian nationhood asserts, the wolf is a key figure in teaching and symbolizing "how people [and in Rutherford's study, primarily settlers] engaged what they perceived to be a hostile landscape" (5). The range of affects invoked by the wolf's howl, and the associations produced by those affects, reveals how non-human life becomes symbolically co-opted into projects of the settler-colonial state. During the Settler Revolution, wolves invoked strong fear in settlers, and as such, were subject to the logics of purging. Part of this construction was an overemphasis of the wolf's cannibalistic nature. As Rutherford asserts, given that "cannibalism as a shorthand for monstrosity has a long history in Western thought" the wolf's tendency to occasionally cannibalize their kin "catapults them to a whole new level of degradation and irredeemability" (35). Yet, more generally, the nomadic nature of wolves meant they were "seen as wildness out of place" (17). Wolves, as such, were actively configured as "biopolitical threats to the emergence of the nation white settlers were attempting to make" and as such, the "only response to their brazen presence on the landscape was annihilation" (17). As Rutherford's work reveals, the perception of wolves as an "invading presence" but also a malicious one, was central to the racial and anthropocentric settler-colonial logics of annihilation, regulation, and the domination of land and people (11).

The wolf's embellished impulse to turn humans into prey dramatizes the stakes of *Yellowjackets*, but also, *Roughing It* too. Like *Yellowjackets*, Moodie's writing endows the wolf with an exaggerated malign, rendering it symbolic of the harsh, untamed wilderness just beyond the home. Upon "hearing the howls of these formidable beasts" Moodie worries for her husband who was "abroad amid their haunts," and then for herself, "should [they] break through the frail window, or come down the long wide chimney, and rob me of my child" (96). Moodie affirms Rutherford's assertions of the wolf's perceived "invading presence," and does so by ushering the wolf directly into her distinctly domestic purview. Notably, in the context of Rutherford's assertions, Moodie's gendered investment in the home functions as not a departure from the

colonial encoding of wilderness “out there,” but an endorsement of it, as a differently spatialized elaboration of the wolf’s hyper-predatory nature. As Rutherford asserts, “white settlers seemed convulsed by a fear of being consumed ... that wolves would eat them [and moreover, each other] alive,” and indeed, Moodie’s text affirms this disposition as not only a literary trope, but a means of advancing the systemic logics of colonialism through, ostensibly, her singular endeavour to merely survive, within her home (23). It is a moment revealing how Moodie’s domestic realism extends itself to wider discourses of “wilderness” that enable material processes of land control and colonial development. Indeed, Moodie’s depictions of wolves, encroaching on the home, serve to “legitimize” the logics of purging that manifest in later moments of *Roughing It*. In this scene, the character of “Mat Y—” regales Moodie with his “an ugly adventure with a wolf” who “uttered a long howl, which was answered by the cries of a large pack of the dirty brutes from the wood” (183). As Mat relays, because of his instinct--“Fire your guns!” he yells—the “thievish varmints instantly fled away into the bush.” As he relays, “I never felt the least fear of wolves until that night,” cautioning Moodie to act assertively in such situations: “If you meet with one wolf, you may be certain that the whole pack are at no great distance” (183).

Moodie’s depictions of wolves affirm that the presence of animal life in the frame, or narrative, does not necessarily decenter the human but potentially “[becomes a] vehicle for settler colonial continuity” (Belcourt 21). As Belcourt writes, “Because of the metaphysical closeness of race and animality, the ongoing plundering of Indigenous land in settler states around the globe, and the attendant destruction of the earth ... there is a social stake” to considering the terms by which animal life is portrayed and valued (19). In *Roughing It*’s representations of violent wolves, the logics of anthropocentric domination are both veiled and obvious. The stakes of Moodie’s narrative of “feminist survival,” in other words, relies heavily, if not entirely, on what Belcourt deems a “colonial politics of animal recognition” wherein animal life is recognized only as a “site of settler promise” and as affirmation of “the settler state as the sole arbiter of being in the world” (Belcourt 22). In the context of Rutherford’s work, Moodie’s exaggerated fear is inextricable from the logics of purging. Moodie’s depictions of wolves through colonial significations animates what Rutherford’s cautions as “the hazards of the symbol” (182). The semiotic function of wolves, with a Canadian context of settler-colonial violence affirms that “there is a violence in making something a symbol” and particularly, “there are stakes to seeing wolves as symbols” (182).

Belcourt and Rutherford, in various ways, encourage a reading of animals that moves past their symbolic affirmation of a narrative and towards their terms of citizenship within it. Amidst *Yellowjackets*’ generic utilization of wolves as symbols of malice and “becoming animal,” the show’s own struggle with genre, and invitation to the viewer to likewise be skeptical of genre also implicates the wolf. Taissa’s gesture towards the racialized tropes of survival horror, and the colonial histories of the show’s very landscape, invites the viewer to read beyond the generic politics of animal recognition that have dominated the narratives of settler-colonial Canada. As Rutherford writes, while the howl of wolves has been symbolically colonized to cue an “invading presence,” the “the howling of wolves is [nonetheless] a complicated sound” bearing the potential to evoke a range of affects (1). As Belcourt affirms, while animal life has been subject to a colonial politics of recognition, Indigenous cosmologies offer “more radical alternatives to normative ways of thinking about the politics of animals” (21). In contrast to the anthropocentric terms of animal citizenship in settler-colonial worlds, a decolonial politics of recognition would “conceptualize animals as kin who co-produce a way of life that engenders care rather than and contra to suffering” (25). In the survivalist horror genre, where suffering is paramount, Taissa’s

resistance to the genre is an invitation to consider the wolf's howl, and resonance, beyond its stoking of fear.

Importantly, reading *Yellowjackets* against the tropes of survival horror changes the nature of animal encounter within it. The bloodied bear carcass, and Coach's assertion that "wolves can take anything" if hunting in a pack, echoes outwardly in the wolf attack and the girls' hunting of Travis in the scenes to come. Yet, the wolf's association with blood, and their powerful synchronicity, also evokes "more radical alternatives" for thinking through human and other-than-human interaction. Blood in *Yellowjackets* materializes not solely through moments of violence, but collectivism and coordination, too. In Episode 4, "Bear Down," the girls acquire their first kill. The deer carcass brings renewed hope, and the scene of the girls together bleeding it out and butchering it endows blood with not the associations of "survival horror," but survival itself. Blood, and its linkage to collective survival, re-emerges in the following episode, as the girl's menstrual cycles synchronize, and they, themselves, bleed out. The image of the girls in the same formation as when they butchered the deer, washing soiled pads ("disgusting" Travis remarks), render blood not only a symbolic link between the girls and the ecosystem they inhabit, but materially shared matter that runs between them and it.

This quieter imagistic interplay of blood—easily subsumed by blood's more overt deployment in the gory conventions of horror—animates not violent confrontations with and across the boundary of wilderness and "civilization," but the disorientation of it, entirely. It is this disorienting quality of blood—as abject, internal, and as matter linking and regenerating myriad forms of life—that renders it a dehumanist motif. Observing her own mother's used menstrual pad, Julietta Singh recalls anticipating how "Her blood-as-trash would ... interact with other organic and inorganic materials, with other human-made things and other human waste, but also with other natural elements" (49). As Singh recalls, the moment affirmed how the capacity to "reproduce life signalled by [her] menstruating mother was not merely about the reproduction of human life but also the unexpected, strange capacity to make other forms of life and living possible" ("Disposable" 49). For Singh, the dehumanist significance of the bloodied menstrual pad lies in its generative strangeness, as it puzzles and transgresses the safeguarded codification of "the human" and in that, "promisingly disorient[s] ... our habits of interpreting and acting in the world" (49).

Indeed, blood is a central motif of *Yellowjackets* "wilderness survival horror" but also its dehumanist undercurrents, where humans, animals, and the land enter relations that defy legibility and disorient habits of interpretation. In Episode 7, "No Compass," a small group, led by Taissa, departs from the larger group in the hope of finding a town, armed only with a compass and Taissa's convictions ("if we just walk, we will find something"). Hours into their journey, they come across a stream running blood red. The imagery is unsettling, especially given that Lottie had dreamed of a "river of blood" the night before. That the compass ceases to work at the river exacerbates their anxiety (as Van notes, "It is pretty strange that Lottie dreamed of this river, and now the compass isn't working"). A debate ensues, with the majority wanting to turn back; Lottie's cryptic assertion "that the woods don't want [them]" is raised as reason to do so, and is rebutted by Taissa: "do you know how insane that sounds? ... There is a solution for everything. An explanation for everything." Misty offers the explanation that mineral deposits, such as iron, can change the water's colour, and Taissa hastily agrees: "I'm sure that's what it is then. ... The iron must be messing with the compass ... it will probably work again when we get away from this water." The group proceeds.

The scene reiterates the significance of blood as a signifier of both the genre, but also a disorienting force engendering new kinds of relations with, and means of interpreting, the land.

The river, in the spirit of Simpson's own representations of landscape, bears a palpable animacy that fundamentally shapes the girls' sense of their surroundings, and thus, sense of codependency. Yet, in the spirit of Simpson's aesthetics, these relations—despite their sometimes-ineffable manifestations—are not “fuzzy indefinite secrets” (Noodin). Amid the shifts in iron that render the river red, and the shifts in bodily iron accompanying menstruation, is a material relationship underlying the sense of synchronicity that inspires pause and uncertainty. Indeed, perhaps the most notable aspect of the scene is how these material and yet indescribable dynamics come into conflict with, and ultimately cede to, the rhetorical maneuvers of mastery and Reason. The synchronicities between the river, Lottie's dream, and the girls themselves undeniably exist, and yet, defy the rubric of “clear explanation” and deductive reasoning that prevails. That Taissa herself struggles to reason, and that the compass struggles to maintain its function, reveals the tenuousness of the reason produced, even if it triumphs nonetheless. In other words, if the scene animates the dehumanist relations running through it, it also affirms how such networks are diametrically opposed to, and yet subsumed by, the project of mastery (49). If dehumanism is “the unexpected practice of recuperation, of recovering forms of life and living outside the proper realm of Man,” mastery, in its hastiness to know relations, and disavowal of those it cannot know, “becomes a form of self-maiming” through its “denial of the master's own dependence on other bodies” (9). The stakes of these dynamics resound in the following scene. Descended upon by a pack of wolves, Van is bloodied to a state of near death. The overflow of blood, from one scene to another, is telling. As Van is physically maimed, and Taissa emotionally maimed with guilt, the collective intuition the girls felt at the river and disregarded, resounds. The violent attack, on one level, affirms the harsh and foreboding wilderness that girls must survive, yet it also affirms a series of synchronicities and pedagogical frequencies persisting in the show since the wolf pack first entered the frame.

Years later, now a politician on the campaign trail, Taissa contends not only with her trauma but public pressure to speak to its events. One morning, the words “spill” emblazon her garage in bright red ink. The lettering, conjuring blood, evokes the violence that transpired (and the public speculation that indeed, the girls were involved in immoral behavior during their time in the Ontario forest). Yet, to viewers of the show, the imagery is also a direct recall to the dehumanist networks—between the deer, the wolves, the land, and the girls, and thus, the various forms kinship, pedagogy, and interspecies contingency and intelligence—that enabled the girls' survival at all. In this context of multi-signification, Taissa's response to the graffitied provocation (and the mounting pressure to reveal “what really happened out there”) assumes metatextual significance. Both a statement about what happened, but also, a statement on genre (and particularly, the violence assumed by the genre of wilderness survivalism in which Taissa and arguably *Yellowjackets* itself is entrapped), Taissa's response captures *Yellowjackets*' own cautionary relationship to the frontier genre the show inhabits: “I knew when I started this campaign,” Taissa states, “that I was getting into a bloody business ... Here's what I will say about my time spent in the wilderness: it's not sensational, but it is the truth. In life sometimes we encounter obstacles that are so enormous we can only face them with the help of our community.” Taissa's appeal to the press functions as an appeal to the viewer. Nested within the show's depictions of an inhospitable wilderness—animated through blood, horror, and at the very least, the rough project of endurance—is an ethic of survivability that is not extraordinary, nor premised on exceptionalism, but humility.

As a closing sentiment in the series, Taissa's emphasis on community relations invokes a contrast with the show's initial display of spectacularly violent imagery and independently hard-won victory. If *Yellowjackets*' indebtedness to colonial frontier imaginary initially oriented itself

in part via misrecognitions (such as misplaced grizzlies) toward displays of human mastery (such as Lottie's), then Taissa's statement affirms the show's dehumanist horizons too. Indeed, if Taissa's remarks—unsensational and community-oriented—stand in tension with *Yellowjacket's* scenes of domination and targeted violence they also affirm the show's ambivalent treatment of the “feminist wilderness frontier.” As the political spokesperson for the municipality of New Jersey, but also, arguably, *Yellowjackets* itself (and the show's development and maturation), Taissa gestures a feminist horizon that lies not in surviving the wilderness, but rather, surviving alongside it.

Chapter 4: North of the Western: A Genre's Archaeologies and New Frontiers

The last decade has affirmed that “the western is alive and kicking, and it is everywhere” (Mayer and Rochel). From 2000 to 2009, Hollywood made 23 movies categorized as westerns, and between 2010 and 2019 that number nearly doubled.⁶¹ These numbers alone suggest that the western, once primarily associated with dime novels, B-movies, and Hollywood’s romanticization of the old west is today a site of exponentially diverse cultural production. Indeed, the “old west is new again” (Goldberg). While the genre, some scholars have argued, has always maintained its variability,⁶² today’s westerns, critics suggest, are especially malleable.⁶³ In other words, if we’re having a “cowboy moment” (Goldberg) who gets to be a cowboy is increasingly less determined. From Beyoncé’s 2024 album, *Cowboy Carter*, and its “reclaiming of country music,”⁶⁴ to popular neo, anti, and revisionist western films like *The Harder They Fall*, *Tokyo Cowboy*, *A Strange Way of Life*, *Power of the Dog*, and *God’s Country*, today’s western proves politically capacious—a genre that does not simply reiterate but potentially reflects on and subverts its own generic expectations, historical legacies, and representational limits. Moreover, if the political disposition of the contemporary western is increasingly self-reflective and inclusive, where precisely the western occurs is, too, an ever-expanding question. Once primarily associated with the badlands, tumbleweed, sagebrush, and peaks and valleys of the American West, today’s westerns span diverse terrain. HBO’s *Westworld* proved that the western’s traditional landscapes of New Mexico and Arizona’s Monument Valley are easily replicable within a futuristic world of artificial intelligence. The most recent installment of the *True Detective* franchise both credits the neo-western as its primary influence and exchanges the genre’s typical arid south-western canyons for the fictional “night country” of Ennis, Alaska, and

⁶¹ As cited in Watson’s article for the *Wall Street Journal*, “Between 2010 and 2019, Hollywood released 49 films domestically classified as Westerns, modern Westerns (also known as neo-Westerns) or as sci-fi, fantasy Westerns, compared with 23 between 2000 and 2009, according to Comscore box-office analyst Paul Dergarabedia.”

⁶² Helena Bacon and Mark Jancovich argue that, more than homogeneity, the western genre has always held variance and diversity at its centre: “The western...does not offer one essential narrative of US identity (just as US culture does not actually generate one homogenous reading of the western genre) but many; the western has instead been appropriated in different ways, at different times and with very different purposes throughout history, a mode that will no doubt continue as the genre and its diverse constituent elements continue” (99).

⁶³ Reviewing Jordan Peele’s 2022 western, *Nope*, Nylah Burton writes: “Nope updates the story of the west and who it belongs to.” As Burton argues, Peele’s exploration of the racial tokenization and commodification of landscapes and people, endemic to the western genre, participations in contemporary moves towards reclamation. Burton’s sentiments are not isolated: The swell of revisionist westerns in recent years have spawned critical analysis of how films have reflected and interrogated the genre’s colonial, racial, gendered, and heterosexist and heteronormative constraints. For example, writing of the work of Chloe Zhao and Kelly Reinhardt, Jordan Kisner’s article in the *Atlantic* notes that “A new cohort of directors, all women, is exploring the death wish that infuses the genre—and proposing visions of repair.”

⁶⁴ As the Associated Press’ review in *MPR News* asserts, amidst the “stereotypical associations of the [western and country] genre with whiteness” Beyoncé’s newest album “reinforces her dedication to Black reclamation.”

the real, snow-crested features of Iceland. Martin McDongue's Academy Award-winning Irish-western *The Banshees of Inishirín* succeeded at both occupying the lush highlands of Northern Ireland and evoking traditional "western inspired imagery" that stoked comparison to John Ford's classic, *The Searchers*.⁶⁵ If the western has long rooted itself in the iconographies of the American western frontier and the colonial ideologies through which it sojourned, today's western, seemingly, transcends that spatiality, and potentially its political baggage too. Indeed, the "wild west" of the western, it seems, is once again, truly wild—up for grabs by anyone, anywhere.

Perhaps the western's contemporary renewal, cosmopolitanism, and relevance comes as no surprise. With its tendency towards sentimentalism and ongoing history of mass-production (first, in the form of dime and pulp novels, then B-movies, and then classic Hollywood-style epics) the western has long enlivened the intersections of nostalgia and mass manufacturing. Frederic Jameson deemed intrinsic to late capitalist cultural production and its proximate category of "the popular."⁶⁶ Given that "the peculiar chronicities of late capitalism, pastiche and nostalgia are central modes of image production and reception" (Appadurai 30), the western, with its predictable (and hence easily reproduced) yearning for the historic frontier has perhaps ensured its own success as one of the most globally recognized genres of the 20th and 21st centuries. Beyond the western's nostalgic proclivities, the genre's ties to Hollywood monopolies likely undergirds its prevalence in the global imagination, too.

Genres, Lauren Berlant argues, are not unlike franchises; they mutate in accord with late-capitalist production, growing and adapting, yet maintaining a lucrative set of consumer expectations.⁶⁷ In that sense, the proliferating, transnational genre of today's western is perhaps no more noteworthy than the "ineffable McDonaldization of the world" or the global wellspring of Disneylands—cultural signposts which, in their generic ubiquity, affirm the correspondences between prevailing cultural referents and U.S. global power (Appadurai 29). Indeed, while some scholars have utilized the western's global significance to argue for the genre's transcendental aesthetic virtues—it has been called the "essence of cinema" (Andre 41) and exemplary of "universal qualities" (Pippin)—scholarship has also likened its transnational prominence to that of U.S. imperialism. If the western is a transnational genre, Mayer and Roche propose, it is because of the imperial nature of American cultural production: "As a master narrative of Western imperialism, the Western exceeds the bounds of US cultural and national identity and resonates across a wide (and sometimes even wild) range of contexts" (1). The genre's relevance

⁶⁵ Jazz Tangcay's article for *Variety*, "How John Ford Westerns Inspired 'Banshees of Inisherin' Cinematography," parses the similarities between Ford's corpus (and, specifically, *The Searchers*) and Martin McDongue's newest film.

⁶⁶ This process is one Jameson describes through "the rise of aesthetic populism" and its correlation to the prevalence of multinational capitalism (*Postmodernism* 54). As Jameson writes, "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation" (56).

⁶⁷ This framework emerges through Berlant's examination of "the good life" as a genre of living that is invariably linked to capitalist production. As Berlant writes, "what we call 'the good life' which is for so many a bad life that wears out the subject who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it" (27).

thus “lie[s] in the narrative of US imperialism itself, which acquires ‘universal’ and/or local relevance through allegory” (13). If the west can be anywhere and claimed by anyone, this broad economy of opportunity is arguably tethered to the U.S.’s own wide-ranging relationship to global capital.

This chapter is partly interested in the western’s imperialist sense of universality, and particularly the expected and unexpected outcomes of that global posture. On the one hand, the western’s global range and universal reach has engendered diverse subversive expressions that counteract the genre’s history of colonial romanticism via broad-ranging forms of anticolonial expression. Australia’s surge of Australian-westerns—such as the Netflix series, *Territory* (2024), *High Ground* (2020), and *The Nightingale* (2018)—in various ways (and, to various degrees) utilize the genre’s expected proximity to heterosexist colonial ideology to interrogate the country’s legacy of racial and gendered oppression. On the other hand, such case studies, while affirming the political might of the western’s neo, anti, and revisionist suffixes, also evoke the complex economies and limitations of subversion itself. If contemporary cinema displays an aptitude for subverting the western, it also illuminates how such expressions reiteratively usher the western’s generic expectations into popular view. Indeed, subversive art forms “depend on [their] viewers being generically literate” (Grant 21), “for only when audiences are widely familiar with the conventions of particular works or a genre can they be parodied effectively” (35). If the western bears a long intimacy with the sightlines of John Ford, the expressionism of John Wayne,⁶⁸ the landscapes of Monument Valley, and a generally cinematic possessiveness and territoriality that has long orbited the white settler figure (Hearne), then those qualities invariably accompany the western’s renewed aptitude for self-interrogation today. Indeed, Beyonce’s much-lauded *Cowboy Carter* album—and its tribute to the “long history of Texas’ Black cowboy culture” (Brown)—utilizes the western’s tropes towards the album’s significations and world-building. The album’s references to John Wayne signal a simultaneous reliance on and subversion of the genre’s traditions.⁶⁹ Within the album’s interrogation of the racial politics of country music, Wayne’s stronghold on the genre is utilized towards a mediation on the territorial dynamics of periphery and center, generally. Like the “wild west”—surveyed and sojourned by a select, recognizable few—the music industry, *Cowboy Carter* suggests, is encoded by structures of possession and dispossession, visibility and invisibility, hyper-represented and underrepresented stories.

Cowboy Carter is not alone in its re-habitation of the western; other popular media utilizes the western’s tropes towards its revision, too. McDough’s *Banshees of Inishirin*, for example, likewise signifies the western’s close association with the work of Wayne and John Ford. Set during the 1923 Irish Civil War, McDough’s “Irish-western” implies an inversion of the western’s ties to colonial expansion in a postcolonial Irish mode that resituates the Western explicitly in a context critical of the British empire. This revision is broadly undertaken through

⁶⁸ Ford’s enmeshment in the genre (John Ford (1894–1973) received a record four Academy Awards for best director, and two of his World War II documentaries won Oscars for the US Navy. He directed 136 films in a career that lasted from the early silent era through the late 1960s. In 2008, *The Searchers* was named the “greatest of all time” by the American film institute.

⁶⁹ Archival audio footage of Linda Martell introduces Beyonce’s rap track on the otherwise country album: “Genres are a funny little concept, aren’t they? ... In theory they have a simple definition that’s easy to understand. But in practice ... some may feel confined.”

cinematically mimicking Ford's "west" (particularly, as depicted in *The Searchers*⁷⁰) using vast, wide-angle shots of land. Simultaneously, the film actively displaces Ford's typical preoccupation with epic, territorial disputes through a narrative about two friends who have simply grown tired of one another. In McDough's film, the effect is a palimpsest; the film's ostensibly trivial social dynamics resound through the western's epic scale, reorienting towards quieter, yet nonetheless profound, studies of power and dispossession. As with *Cowboy Carter*, *Banshees* affirms the effectiveness of utilizing the western towards the work of reimagining it when viewed through a globalized, anticolonial, and anti-imperial perspective.

However, the nagging rootedness of the western in the material landscapes of the southwestern U.S., and the Indigenous, colonial, and socio-economic histories of those landscapes, simultaneously preoccupy this chapter. Given the western's traditional stake in the colonial frontier myth, there is perhaps a risk in over-idealizing the genre's transitory and wide-ranging aptitude for reinvention. As Jodi Byrd has extensively elaborated, if empire assumes a transitory nature, it is due to the materially situated nature of Indigenous land dispossession on which it depends. In relation to western cinema, specifically, scholars such as Joanna Hearne have illustrated how the imaginary, fantastical, and romanced tropes of the western (invariably, the tropes that uphold the genre's recognizable, and hence, "universal qualities" [Pippin])—bespeak the material, *situated* histories of Indigenous dispossession. The "landscape of the American West," Hearne reminds, "is a made thing" and tending to the nature of that making introduces vital contingencies to the genre's universal, proliferating, and rhizomatic stature (117). Postcolonial, Indigenous, and eco-critical engagement with the possessive sightlines of western filmmaking (Hearne), the racialized labour economies of Hollywood (Raheja), and ecological shifts wrought by colonialism in the southwest U.S. (Carmichael) refute the western's supposedly universal and therefore *placeless* status. This status, the above processes reveal, depends on historical erasure and forgetting in which the western genre has long been complicit.

Skepticism toward the Western's potential in this regard likewise pervades popular culture and its critical discourses. Amidst wide-praise for *Cowboy Carter*, Andre Gee, for example, parsed these dynamics in an analysis of the album's imagery: Beyonce as a cow-girl wielding the American flag, he notes, at once conjures "a 'reclamation' of the flag's symbolism ... [by evoking] Texas's Black Cowboys and Rodeo Culture," and simultaneously, "America's history of racism and imperialism"—imagery, he notes, "particularly fraught with the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza." That the western at once offers rich, subversive fodder and is prone to reproducing the colonial myopia that has long defined it is a subtle yet profound tension within Gee's analysis. *Banshees* provokes similar concerns. As Joy Porter argues, *Banshees*' sidelining of its colonial context in favor of centering the "futile" disputes of its protagonists undertakes not an interrogation but "elision and ridiculing" of its geopolitical circumstances. In rendering the war peripheral to the "senseless quibble" of its characters, Porter argues, McDough's film deliberately invites the colonial precedents of the Irish Civil War—the gradual land grabs by Scottish and English settlers, Britain's disregard for treaties with Ireland, and "mass settlement of migrants from elsewhere within the empire with the deliberate aim of entrenching the empire's purchase within [the] sovereign nation"—to recede into the background. More than reimagining the western, Porter argues, *Banshees* adheres to the erasure of historical circumstance and "dangerous mythmaking" that has long guided the genre.

⁷⁰ As Jazz Tangcay notes, *Banshees of Inishirin*'s cinematographer, Ban Davis, looked to Ford's *The Searchers* for visual inspiration.

This chapter, outwardly, is not preoccupied with Beyonce's album nor McDough's film. Yet, it is concerned with the provocations laid out by each. Both revisionist in their own right, *Banshees* and *Cowboy Carter* illuminate the possibilities and constraints of a genre that is so sedimented in expectation that it has become malleable, transitory, and fluid. These cultural objects are some of a vast many in circulation today reflecting the western's innate tensions, as a genre both indebted to the particular colonial histories of the American southwest and one that proves ever-mobile, universal, and placeless. The western, with its wide-ranging popularity and generic recognizability, offers a conveniently *established* venue to parse the nuances of the dynamics between its historically situated and mythologized nature, and particularly, and the notions of place and placelessness that mutually underwrite it. This undertaking I pursue in the following section, "A Transitory and Rooted West(ern)." There, I consider both the western's transitory and rooted dynamics and, importantly, their mutually afflicting relationship. While "the west," I propose, has been invaluable elucidated as an amorphous entity (namely, by scholars articulating its relationship to de-centralized global capital and invisible, regulatory circulations of power) it also is a concept that has accumulated a distinctly regionalized association—one whose magnetic pull towards specific geographic imagery, motifs, and tropes invites analysis of the sites where these broad circulations of western capital come in contact with the aesthetic and narrative features of the western genre itself. Sites such as Arizona's Monument Park (a recurring venue across western cinema), the films of John Ford, the repetitious appearance of John Wayne, and the recurring themes of nomadism, the frontier, and the land, all provide access points for this analysis, revealing how distinct histories of colonial accumulation become enfolded into the western's universally recognized spectacle. As I seek to reveal, the western presents a counterintuitive space—one that is ostensibly driven by a regional focus and yet dissolves its regional, historical, and political specificity into a form of mythologized universality. Indeed, as the prevailing aesthetics, motifs, and associations of the western reveal, while it is outwardly a genre *about* place, the "west" of the western transcends its own political geographies.

If parsing the western's transitoriness and rootedness implies a circular pursuit, it is one I seek to ground in closer consideration of global western cinema today. In the final section of this chapter, I turn to the work of Inuk filmmaker, Zacharias Kunuk, and his film *Malighlutit* (2016). A reimagining of John Ford's 1956 film *The Searchers*, Kunuk's film at once invokes the western and looks past it to alternate horizons. Aside from generally mirroring Ford's original plot, Kunuk's "remake" is (as many reviews have noted) at least outwardly, an act of estrangement: Set in the Inuit territory of the Arctic north, spoken in Inuktitut, and featuring a narrative centered exclusively on Inuit community and conflict, Kunuk's film forgoes *The Searcher's* (and, the classic western's) glorification of the American west, over-reliance on racial difference, and plot of settler-Indigenous frontier encounter in favor of depictions of northern Indigenous life. In doing so, Kunuk magnifies the border-defying effects of colonialism alongside the subversive nature of Indigenous representational sovereignty within the western's generic landscape. While *Malighlutit's* geographic and narrative amendments compel decolonial perspectives on the genre alone, it is what I term Kunuk's "aesthetics of authenticity" that advance *Malighlutit's* most notable intervention. While the film's documentary-style aesthetics have been noted, the tendency to conflate Kunuk's stylistic approaches with genuine ethnographic intent arguably overlook a deliberate element of Kunuk's subversive, aesthetic mode. In relation to *The Searcher's* expansively cinematic approaches, *Malighlutit's* pared-down aesthetics invoke a comparative reading at the level of not content but filmmaking—one attuned to how power and difference, authenticity and artifice, are conjured through cinematographic techniques of framing, location, and composition. Kunuk thus re-situates and reimagines the western, yet he also,

importantly, casts a lens back on it, piercing the veil of colonial mythology in which Ford's work is enshrouded and emphasizing the politics of place, labour, and representation through which the western has always sojourned, but in deeply mythologized and dematerialized ways.

A Transitory and Rooted West(ern)

In the introduction to *Caribbean Discourse*, Edouard Glissant conjures an image of "the west" through a broad sketch of the global arena. Writing of Martinique, Glissant outlines a set of political presumptions—namely, pertaining to the island's apparent lack of synchronicity with modernity and ensuing subjection to foreign, paternalistic sentiment and development schemes. These perceptions, while "loosely linked with reality"⁷¹ do not reveal Martinique itself. Rather, such sentiments glimpse the workings of "western modernity" (1) and its "intellectual effort" towards the "ideal of transparent universality" (2) that has reductively essentialized spaces such as Martinique in the global imagination. Martinique's identity, Glissant writes, as one of many global-southern spaces comprised of marginalized people living "in past centuries" (1), reflects the west's tendency to define itself through imposed projections of difference: the "repetitive thrusts" of the west's "demands for formulation" (2) render the "anxiety [of others] to have a full existence [merely] part of the universal drama of cultural transformation" (2). Despite his outward subject of Martinique, however, Glissant's introductory writings to *Caribbean Discourse* elucidate the framing device of "the west" itself. As Glissant asserts in his crucial footnote, unlike Martinique (with its erroneous touristic conflations with Polynesia and associations of "pleasure and poverty" [3]) "the west" is a "a project, and not place" (2).

In the context of Glissant's study on the deterritorialized global capital, he elaborates his claim about the west's non-placeness in a footnote. As *Caribbean Discourse* elucidates, "the west" derives its broad, often indiscernible appearance, from constellated economic structures developed over time. Yet, in other contexts (such as this one) Glissant's footnote bears profound implications, worthy of further analysis. The "west" that, in 1989, Glissant located as a power-laden, ambiguous non-place, had also, with the advancement of Europe's colonial frontier into the Americas, acquired distinct geographic associations. By the late 19th century, the "west's" shifting semiotic associations and definitions revealed this process of geographic association, as "frontier" shifted from its ambiguous "borderland" definition towards the iconographies of the American West, particularly.⁷² Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 Frontier Thesis was critical to this process; as a treatise on the nature of the expanding colonial borderland, Jackson's writing endowed "frontier" with a specifically U.S. nationalist context and rendered the "west" the horizon and articulation of such formations. As Magdalena Naum argues, if "borderlands and frontiers are ambiguous landscapes" (101) (perhaps the most ambiguous of all) Jackson's work brought profound specificity to these landscapes. "Frontier" in Jackson's work, was a "sparsely

⁷¹ Glissant asserts that the persistent "structures of economic domination ... between the metropole and its colony" [5] alienating countries from economic growth is a perceptible fact.

⁷² Fulmer Mood speculates that "Frederick Jackson Turner's essay of 1893 has probably had some influence increasing the currency of the word among writers of books during the last half century. Between 1894 and 1920, a period of twenty-seven years, the term was used as an element in the titles of 59 books. In 1920 Turner published his volume of essays, *The Frontier in American History*, which carried his idea and interpretations to a broader public of readers. Thereafter the word frontier enjoyed an enhanced popularity. Between 1921 and 1942, the word was used 157 times in titles, thus: 1921-1929, 45 titles; 1930-1942, 112 titles" (83).

populated zone located between the metropolitan center on one side and the wilderness on the other ... [that was] not only advancing in a geographical sense but also in social, cultural, and ideological terms” (102), and was distinctly situated within the project of U.S. settler expansion. While “the west,” hence, was always changing—“In the late sixteenth century, the west was New Jersey and New Mexico; in the early nineteenth, Illinois and Texas” (Klein 180)—Jackson’s work firmly rooted it in White settler expansion in the U.S., and the images of land through which that project sojourned. Turner’s thesis would have “a profound impact on the early studies of the frontier in the Americas as well as Europe” and scholarship today (Naum 103). As Kerwin Klein argues, Western and New Western Regional Studies perpetually contend with Turner’s ideological aggrandization of regional space and identity: “New Western Regionalists contend that only the arid, trans-Mississippi West is really ‘The’ West, and historians using the label for any place back east or using the ‘F word’ anywhere at all are voting for [Turner’s view of] Manifest Destiny” (181). The effects of Turner’s regionalizing the “western frontier” would also distinctly inflect American Studies, where the concept would take root as a central node. As Martin Parker argues, “the idea of the frontier is not one that is unique to the USA but ... it is there that it finds its most culturally developed form,” serving as “a metaphor for the character and destiny of a people ... [and] stage setting for a wide variety of forms of consumption” (347).

Which is to say, while “the west” may be a project, not a place, an effect of that project is the reconfiguring and over-determination of places (and namely, the American West, itself). This analysis is in accord with Glissant’s own claims: Martinique’s identity at the juncture of tourist and paternalistic desire is a testament to this process of spatial essentialization. Yet, the over-determination of the “west” as an American frontier space is notable in that it presents a geographic location for the west’s non-place. Indeed, the signifying relation between American western geography and the west’s non place—“an imaginary zone for linking personal migration and maturation to national progress” (Wolfe 302)—is evident in their mutual contamination. As Brenden Rensink notes, the encroachment of Turner’s frontier ideology on American identity is evident in political pop culture and right-wing populism: Donald Trump’s use of “nineteenth century frontier imagery and mythology” (xvii) and “tired frontier tropes” (xviii) in his 2020 State of the Union address affirms the longstanding endurance of this relationship. Moreover, Rensink argues, it illustrates a disconnect between scholarship and public discourse. Evidently, he notes, “revisions and updates to western scholarship have either failed to enter national consciousness or are being intentionally ignored” (xviii). To disregard the bearing of Turner’s frontier ideology on the political psyche, today, Rensink argues, is to ignore the political undercurrents of the present.

Simultaneously, it is precisely “the west’s” overdetermined relationship to the U.S. that renders it, in other scholarly frameworks, a site of political potential. As Neil Campbell argues, the capacity for “the west” to conjure distinctly American iconography renders it not necessarily reiterative but potentially unsettling of the “inward-looking” settler colonial cadences of Turner’s frontier (3). We can read “the west” as “sedimented in historiography through the Turner thesis” (2), Campbell writes, but more significantly as a rhizomatic constellation: “the art of Birstadt and Russell, the western novels of Wister or Grey, the western films of John Ford, the photographic epics of Ansel Adams, the fashion iconography of Ralph Lauren, and the advertising of Marlboro” are all “interrelated aspects of a westward creation story” (2). Considering the “overcoded west” hence “not as a single region but as a mutating multiplicity” (9) encourages readings that do not simply “sustain established myths or confirm regional or international debates but rather spill over and beyond those boundaries” (55). Theorizations of the American west, Campbell argues, from Turner’s treatise to contemporary scholarship (whether critically or

celebratorily) have erred towards an “inward-looking and emotive vision” (3). Yet, “to think of the American West more as fluid graffiti and less like a determined ‘rooted body that grows, lives, dies,’” he asserts, “is to open it more sharply as ‘constructed and disputed historicity, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction’” (50). Like Deleuze’s “Rhizome” to which it refers, Campbell’s framing the west as a “travelling, mobile discourse” (1) proposes an alternative to, and potential circumventing, of its colonial genealogies and ideological hold. In “deterritorializing” the west from its Turnerian holding patterns and orienting it outward towards its new horizons, we might glimpse a “west,” Campbell argues, that is, indeed, “postregional and postwestern” (44).

Campbell’s work holds dynamic implications for postcolonial frameworks. In one sense, Campbell emphasizes the merits of anti-genealogical approaches to “the west.” That the west is a site of disputed historicity, tethered to histories of displacement, closely aligns with postcolonial knowledge. Simultaneously, in advocating anti-genealogical approaches, Campbell’s framework enlivens the various “quandaries” poststructuralism poses to postcolonial concern (Byrd *Transit* xvii). Indeed, Campbell’s “redefinition of regionalism that refuses to get to the border ... and turn back, to simply close up on itself in some homely and familiar act of territorialization” (44) in its loosely expansionist evocations, illuminates how such antigenealogical approaches invested in collective emancipation are simultaneously potential encroachments on Indigenous rights and titles. As Byrd has argued (in relation to Deleuze) the intimacies and slippages between rhizomatic models (or “nomad thought”) and colonial myopia are alive in poststructuralist tropes: Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s motif of “Indians without ancestry”⁷³ animates the tendency for poststructuralist motifs of rhizomatic transitoriness to indirectly endorse settler colonial processes. In such configurations, Byrd writes, “Indians ... remain as lamentable causalities of national progress who haunt the United States on the cusp of empire and are destined to disappear with the frontier itself” (Byrd “Beasts of” xx). As Mimi Sheller affirms, the embeddedness “of manifest destiny and the opening of the frontier” as one “of the cultural touchstones which define the West as mobile and expansionist” (41), necessitates that we parse the tropes of mobility, fluidity, and movement through which “the west” itself is illustrated. The “iconic masculine figure of the explorer ... the frontiersman” (41), Sheller notes, finds its convenient, diametrical opposite in the “stasis” imposed onto Indigeneity in such frameworks. “The west” thus, as it is articulated through motifs of expansion (and hence, movement is associated with progress), is defined, more substantially, by its kinopolitical spectrum⁷⁴ of “freedom and unfreedom” (17). In dialogue, Byrd and Sheller emphasize the colonial horizons underlying ostensibly decolonial propositions such as Campbell’s. If decolonizing “the west” relies on acts of deterritorialization and expansion, we must probe the terms of its mobility: “By failing to historicize the concept of mobility and its links to concrete practices of colonization, models of subjectivity that embrace

⁷³ In Deleuze and Guattari’s formulations of “Rhizome,” this trope is essential to their ideation of “the west” as an ahistorical site of infinite possibility. As they write, “But there is the rhizomatic West, with its Indians without ancestry, its ever-receding limit, its shifting and displaced frontiers” (“Rhizome” 19).

⁷⁴ Sheller defines “kinopolitics” as the “ontological basis of present realities that waver between ‘freedom and unfreedom.’” A “comparative study of kinopolitics” Sheller writes, therefore necessarily addresses “differing political cultures and ‘mobility regimes’ governing gender, sexual, and racial differences in (im)mobilities around the world yet to be written” (17).

nomad thought bring very problematic political baggage along for the ride” (Wuthnow 186).⁷⁵ It is, in other words, not simply “the west” but its accompanying tropes and motifs of movement that propel colonial power forward.

The notion of the “rhizomatic west,” considered alongside the Western, has implications for postcolonial thought. With its own affinity for nomads, vast, empty plains, ever-expanding horizons, and the “iconic masculine figure of the [cowboy] frontiersman,” the western consolidates these dynamics of colonial-nomadic mobility into filmic, literary, narrative, and aesthetic form (Sheller 41). Indeed, that the western functions analogously to the political concerns of the American west itself, is well-established in scholarship. As a genre typically “set in the American West” and depicting the “spirit, the struggle, and the demise of the new frontier” (American Film Institute) the western is understood, broadly, through its preoccupation with the “relationship between a myth-constructed past and nationalism characterized by interdependence” (Michael *Nationalism* 149).

Simultaneously, in the spirit of “the west,” the western—despite its increased internationalism—is uneasily, and somewhat anxiously, associatively tethered to distinct landscapes. Traditionally, westerns are restricted to the spatial coordinates of the southwestern U.S. (particularly, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico), the distinctions of the “Old West” and “Wild West” (as bookended by the California Gold Rush of 1849 to the closing of the frontier in 1890)⁷⁶, and the ecologies of this temporality—a “stereotypical sagebrush setting (Carmichael 1) and “stunning majesty of Monument Valley” (5). Indeed, that land—and *particular* land—is vital to the western is undeniable: “without a natural world in the American West that can support cattle, sheep, and crops, there would be no conflict over land use—no opportunity for the showdowns exciting film audiences over the decades” (Carmichael 4). Suffice it to say, “without the [western’s preoccupation with] land, [its preoccupation with] American national mythmaking would not exist” (Carmichael 1). As Deborah Carmichael argues, this distinct relationship to the material landscapes of the American southwest reiterates the genre’s ties to Turner’s vision. Turner’s “western expansion and the conquest of western land remains embedded in our national myth”; Turner “formulated the American psyche ... as an identification with a vast natural world” (3). Simultaneously, despite being tethered to distinct, regional landscapes and their specific materialities, the western’s popularity and hyper-recognizability as a generic convention transcends regionalism. More than a representation of colonial historicity or geography, the western in film scholarship is largely interrogated by way of myth. The genre of the western, it has been argued, stages the encounters between “civilization and wilderness” generally; this, Stiglegger argues, is the “myth ... at the heart of the American western cinema (141). As McMahon and Cskai assert, the western reflects the symbiosis between the American west and myth itself: “the perennial appeal of the American West is anchored in myth, a myth whose power persists in large part because it finds expression, among other places, in the literary and cinematic genre known as the western” (“Philosophy and the Western” 1). The western’s placeless significance is, perhaps, most pronounced in Robert Pippin’s work, where the genre parsed through its aspirations to a form of “mythic universality” (21). In this context, the western

⁷⁵ Wuthnow’s examination of the postcolonial implications of Deleuze’s fascination with nomadism argues that such tropes “disallow [for] the possibility of effective Indigenous politics through [a] lack of accountability to a ‘politics of location,’ [an] implicit reproduction of a universalized western subject, and [the] delegitimation of experience and local knowledge” (183).

⁷⁶As dictated on the Wikipedia entry for the “Western (genre).”

is likened “not [to] the universality of scientific law or generalization but a universality consistent with the ineliminability of the first-person perspective, the universality of a common experience of a basic human problem, the political problem” (21).

Postcolonial interventions into western cinema are less inclined to cede the western to universal mythology. Here, the hauntological presence of Turner’s frontier thesis, and its rendering of Indigenous absence a precursor to American nationalism is not a secondary but prior condition of the genre. Michelle Raheja’s survey of western cinema, from its silent era to classic Hollywood reiterations, renders Turner’s thesis as a significant rubric to not only the western’s production but interpretation. In the spirit of Turner’s vision typical westerns “feature Native Americans living outside of their historical, geographical, and cultural context, situated in the past with no viable future” (x). These sightlines, Raheja illustrates, echo forth in the genre’s ideological and pedagogical inflections: “Certainly, one of the most insidious effects of Hollywood’s racial optics regime was that, despite intentional and unintentional inaccuracies, the films served as pedagogy and knowledge production for spectators” (x). Given the western’s significance as an educational device for settlers adapting to the U.S. in the early 20th century, Raheja notes, these effects are especially notable. Indeed, Raheja asserts, the western has long forged a contract with viewers that has “render[ed] genocide natural and inevitable” (46). This perspective finds enunciation through more focussed analysis of the western’s stylistic traits and directorial motifs. For example, Armando Jose Prats has emphasized the western’s generic usage of on and off-screen space as a reiteration of the dynamics of possession and dispossession, expansion, and encroachment the genre at once references and obscures. Common western motifs, Pratts argued, such as arrows shot from off-screen, function as “synecdochical signs” that perpetuate Indigenous invisibility through the illusion of presence. Joanna Hearne’s work likewise deconstructs the western’s perspective and renders it reflective of colonial conditions. The western’s indebtedness to “the vision of the colonizing figure ... upon the New World landscape” (90) Hearne argues, presents itself through the genre’s conventional sightlines. Indeed, if the western’s affinity for visual technology (namely, binoculars and rifle gunsights) suggests the genre’s investment in the power of perspective, its tendency to marry the white settler’s “lines of site to the territoriality of [his] putative location” reveal, Hearne argues, its political unconscious. The effect, Hearne writes, is the genre’s “remake[ing] that human vision [into] a form of domination, empowered with settler colonial force” (97-98). Through Hearne’s frame, western cinema is not only a colonial representation of Indigenous lands, but a mechanism and assertion of colonial power itself.

That the western is not only a genre about territory but potentially complicit in territorial relationships, affirms the genre’s rootedness in place. This contingency between the western and the political geographies of the American west, itself, is apparent in the history of the genre, and its ascent. The emergence of the western, from its original dime novel form to, today, a “dominant film genre, if there ever was one” (Hearne 39), is itself a story of territorial encroachment, acquisition, accumulation, and dispossession. At the turn of the 20th century, the desire on the part of film production companies to relocate from New York to California (and evade the eastern monopoly of Motion Pictures Studios) saw the industry’s own westward migration. The year-round stable climate offered optimal shooting conditions and the relatively cheap labour and land allowed “incoming film companies ... to buy large tracts on which to build their studios for interior shooting” (Grant 7). This initial, economic advantage brought exponential benefits; by the 1930s “Hollywood studios had achieved vertical integration,

controlling the distribution and exhibition as well as production” (Grant 8).⁷⁷ Hollywood’s lifeblood of colonial-capitalist power is notable especially in the case of the western.⁷⁸ The economic momentum yielded from these land-grabs became especially pronounced with the advent of genre filmmaking: “genre filmmaking developed early, with producers seeking maximum acceptance at the box office through the repetition and variation of commercial successful formulas” (Grant 7). With over 7,000 westerns made today, the current broad reach and popularity of the western testifies this interwoven history of colonial accumulation and circulation of generic forms. Indeed, if genre movies use “repetition and variation” (Grant 1) to “engag[e] viewers through an implicit contract” (21), one that “allow[s] for an economy of expression through convention and iconography” (8), then the western’s conventions crystallized aesthetically and economically around a settler economy of looking. Indeed, the repetitious, generic presence of John Ford and John Wayne across the genre—a recurrence very much in the interest of box office optimization—would render such figures emblematic of the genre itself: “John Wayne had such a strong iconographic presence as the rugged American individualist and western hero” that the death of his character, Will Anderson, in *The Cowboys* (1972) “become a statement about the death of the classic western hero,” itself (Grant 20).

The profitable land-grabs undergirding and spurring the western’s popular ascent reveals the contingency of the genre’s presumed “universal mythology” (Pippin 19). If John Wayne, having “personified for millions the nation’s frontier heritage” (Davis), is today metonymic of the western as a whole, his figure necessitates consideration of the financial economies underlying the genre’s ascent to myth—the racialized labour laws and constraints of Hollywood, the designation of “leading men,” and the financed economies of representation. These dynamics pervaded the western’s defining generic landscapes too, which likewise bore a distorted economy of representation. As Mary Lea Bandy and Kevin Steohr write, “no breed of film developed as rich and universally popular an appreciation for regional or national geography as did the Western” (79); through the genre, “American west was perceived as wilderness, rich in natural monuments and awesome in scale” (78). Indeed, as “landscape-oriented movies” westerns might be considered “‘filmscape[s]’ in the sense of the ‘wedding’ of filmmaker and region” (81). We might recognize this dynamic, they assert, notably, in the union between “Ford and Monument Valley” (82). Like Wayne’s performances and Ford’s filmmaking, Monument Valley is a reigning motif of the genre. Located on the Arizona Utah Border on the Navajo Reservation, the park would first be utilized in the genre in John Ford’s *Stagecoach* (1939)—a film that would render the valley a central feature (it is the encompassing landscape through which the loan

⁷⁷ This growth was such that by 1948, it was determined that Hollywood held an aggressive monopoly—an insight inspiring the 1948 Paramount Decision on the part of the US Supreme Court, ruling that Hollywood producers had to divest their exhibition chains—a ruling that gradually put more emphasis on television

⁷⁸ As Glen Coulthard asserts (with reference to the work of Patrick Wolfe), if “territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” then that element reiterates the inextricability of capitalist and settler colonial regimes via primitive accumulation: “Marx’s historical excavation of the birth of the capitalist mode of production identifies a host of colonial-like state practices that served to violently strip ... noncapitalist producers, communities, and societies from their means of production and subsistence” (7). Coulthard’s framing is particularly useful in elaborating the relationship between Hollywood as a global monopoly and colonial acquisition.

stagecoach, containing Ford's motley cast of characters [including Wayne, as outlaw Ringo Kid] passes).

Yet, as Bandy and Stoehr assert, the western's fascination with filmscapes would also counterintuitively obscure (by reimagining) the real places they depicted: "The expansionist movement that opened the American continent to settlement by colonists ... concluded around the time of the birth of the motion picture in America. The Western spaces created or found by the filmmakers, inside the studio or on location in particular landscapes, repeatedly combined artificial, contrived, and natural forms in ways that were deliberate" (80). Indeed, the western's generic investment in landscape was, arguably, so pronounced that it compelled a forgoing of geographic reality in favour of aestheticization. While many westerns were shot on location, many others were shot in studio, and there, the painted landscapes, serving as backgrounds, sought to mimic both the geography of the western U.S. and the compositional practices "of European Romantic painters" (80). Yet, if the western's aesthetic distortions and obfuscations of material landscape harken back to the genre's early, in-studio filmmaking practices, they also are a symptom of the western's later, popularized ascent to "universal mythology." By the latter-half of Ford's career, Monument Valley was so enshrined as a western motif it was no longer playing itself: By the time of Ford's *The Searchers* in 1956, the region, no longer a depiction of Arizona but rather the general "western landscape" itself, was playing Texas—endowed (much like Wayne himself) with the hyper-recognizable, mutable capacity to play anyone, anywhere. Today, Monument Valley reigns as a hazy motif in the western's reimagining: Its appearance in the Cohen Brother's western, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018) and visual reference in Anderson's 2023 *Android City's* "Monument Valley-adjacent desert setting"⁷⁹ serves as a vital throughline of the western's revisioning.

If Monument Valley's (Tse'Bii'Ndziszgaii [Dine]) rigged peaks, sagebrush, and tumbleweed recall the western genre so acutely the region need not play itself, such features also recall the region's material processes of expansion, displacement, and transformation, too. "Each wave of settlers—intentionally or not—brought increasing numbers of foreign biological and cultural menageries in the form of flora, fauna (including domesticated beasts of burden, beetles and other insects, parasites), disease, religion, colonialism, capitalism, and industrialization" (Dixon 188) that "generated relatively sudden landscape transformations" (189). Indeed, "Icons of the recent natural history of the American West, horses and tumble mustard (tumbleweeds), represent only two of the vast numbers of fauna and flora introduced during the last several centuries" (189). The transitory, mutable imagery of the western landscape is therefore tethered to the colonial "archaeologies of capitalism" (198)—the gradual, abrupt, and enforced processes of transformation underlying landscape's present apparentness.

Scholarship has elaborated how these archaeologies undergird the Navajo region of Monument Valley, specifically. In the mid 19th century, the Mexican American war and the 1848 signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo saw the U.S. expanding into the western territory that, prior, had been largely occupied by Spanish presence. The result of this transition was the forced displacement of the Navajo between 1863 and 1866. This Navajo displacement from ancestral lands and relocation to the Bosque Redondo Reservation—a process known as the Long Walk—would leave the Monument Valley region open and accessible to US jurisdiction. Today,

⁷⁹As noted on media site, *Superatomovision*, *Asteroid City* (while filmed in Spain) "lies in the US Southwest, home of nuclear testing, Monument Valley-like landscapes, and an Americana that exists in the imagination of the era."

this history of displacement haunts collective memory in the region as an enduring “landscape of power” (Powell 11).⁸⁰ “Landscapes of power,” Dana Powell writes are a central heuristic for “engaging struggles over energy infrastructure, sustainability, and sovereignty in the Navajo Nation” resounding the wake of forced displacement (11).⁸¹ Powell’s study of the Desert Rock Energy Project, and its more general elucidation of the continuities between historical displacement, colonial encroachment, and resource management, today, resonates outward. As Andrew Curley argues, the Long Walk’s enforced absences resound in colonial infrastructural projects (particularly, at the coal-energy-water nexus). These projects of the present are accumulations and reiterations of the past; they are “colonial beachheads”—“temporal encroachment on Indigenous lands and livelihoods, [which] over time ... overwhelm Indigenous nations and curtail certain possibilities” (Curley 388).

The history of Navajo displacement, thus, not only haunts the western’s affinity for “vast, notably empty landscapes” (Bandy and Stoeck 76) but the materiality of the landscape’s very surface. While the western has readily absorbed sites, such as Monument Park, into its sense of “universal myth” (Pippin 21), “landscapes are not mere planar surfaces for human drama. They are, rather, the vibrant, material interface of human and nonhuman interaction ... sites and processes of struggle over material infrastructure, as well as meaning and memory” (Powell 14). The tension between landscape’s aesthetic distortion and mythologizing, and materially inscribed colonial histories, pervades the western, extending well beyond the Navajo territory or Monument Valley. The government of California’s list of “Motion Picture Locations” identified as particularly “great for western, period, desert, contemporary films and background scenery shots” includes many sites scarred by colonial, industrial change. The badlands of Malakoff Diggins Historical Park—a region aptly representing the western’s general affinity for badland topography (as illustrated by western films such as *Badland* [2019] and *Into the Badlands* [1991]), animates the contingencies between capitalist archaeologies and western landscape motifs. Produced by hydraulic mining ventures, these landscapes are the result of a “capital enterprise known for drastically restricting landscapes in the foothills of northern California’s western Sierra Nevada” (193). Like Monument Park, the Malakoff Diggins, then both a symbolically and materially implicated in the Western’s aesthetic imagery, at once signifying the western’s “universally mythologized” landscape and, simultaneously, signaling the genre’s longstanding intimacy with the region’s entangled processes of colonial encroachment and anthropocentric transformation. Sites such as Monument Valley and Malakoff Diggins affirm that, while the west may “be a project, not a place” (Glissant), the “west” of the western is, indeed, “a made thing” (Hearne 117) and one perpetually remade through western filmmaking.

⁸⁰ In her essay, Laura Toh considers the Long Walk from a variety of angles, including its erasure in U.S. historical curriculum and textbooks, and simultaneous vitality, as a memory passed through generations of Navajo storytelling. As Toh writes, “these are the kinds of stories that were omitted in the textbooks, but the older people remembered how violent and dangerous that era was” (80).

⁸¹ Particularly, Powell elaborates “landscapes of power” through the relationship between the 1922 Colorado River Compact, Arizona’s 1960s campaign for the Central Arizona Project, and the recent Indian water settlements between Arizona and the Navajo Nation.” In dialogue, she writes, these infrastructural relations evidence how colonial accumulations permeate contemporary resource management (387).

In the following section, I turn to the filmmaking of Zacharias Kunuk and consider its relationship to the western's generic conventions, particularly those established by Ford's work. As an Indigenous, Canadian, revisionist, and "northern western," *Maliglutit* bears many prefixes—each suggesting the film's estrangement from and negotiation of the western's popular and prevailing generic (and geographic) associations. Yet, as I seek to reveal, *Maliglutit*'s subversive assertions exceed maneuvers at the level of content, geography, or outward representational politics alone. By conjuring a documentarian ethos, and particularly, advancing an aesthetics of authenticity (one that has been, I detail, largely misread as a genuine authenticity, or, ethnographic transparency), Kunuk not only subverts the mythologizing tendencies of Ford's ethos of heightened, cinematic representation, but illuminates how the politics authenticity and artifice permeate the western, and particularly, its relationship to (and hence viewer expectations of) racial representation. Kunuk's remake and revisioning of *The Searchers*, hence, provokes consideration of what makes an authentic western, and moreover, how authenticity is recognized (and perhaps, misrecognized) in the western genre at all. The implications of Kunuk's work, thus, are extensive, inviting broader consideration of contemporary western revisionism (and neighboring films such as Alejandro Iñárritu's 2016 film, *The Revenant*) and the more general project of establishing cinematic authenticity and political specificity in a genre long-bent on mythologization.

Zacharias Kunuk: On Race, Authenticity, and Outlaws

In 2016, when Alejandro Iñárritu's western, *The Revenant*, was released to wide acclaim, it seemingly responded to two, simultaneous, desires: Both the desire to witness Leonardo DiCaprio "finally win that Oscar" (Rich) and to witness a "dedication to authenticity" in a genre increasingly recognized as devoid of it (Wente). *The Revenant*, a contemporary western featuring DiCaprio as fur trapper Hugh Glass, which "uses of First Nations languages" throughout, seemed poised to satisfy both (Wente). Alongside DiCaprio's performance, the film's scope of Indigenous casting and keen attention to the politics of location was an oft-cited aspect of the film.⁸² These qualities implied Iñárritu's more authentic, revisionist approach to the genre; the film's foregoing the genre's romanticism of the colonial frontier in favor of its "grim realities," reviews suggested, positioned Iñárritu's film firmly within the antiwestern tradition.⁸³

Yet others disputed the genuine integrity of *The Revenant*'s revisionist spirit. Ato Quayson's interrogation of "what lies beneath" *The Revenant*'s politicized veneer commented on the film's subtext; in "giving [Glass] a Native American son," Quayson argued, "Iñárritu adds a more meaningful plot twist than anything we find in the novel" and yet grants "subtle justification" to Glass's "credentials" and, hence, settler colonialism itself. "Underneath" *The Revenant*'s revisionist appearance, Quayson argues, is the western's enduring, generic assertion: "the uncharted territory that was North America was harsh and unforgiving and required a particular form of robust masculinity to be successfully tamed." Jesse Wente echoed these concerns in a consideration of the relationship between authenticity and race in the genre more generally. *The Revenant*'s ostensibly authentic, racial representations, Wente argues, foreground the genre's enduringly fraught representational infrastructure. Wente writes (citing Pratts): "For all that it insists on the Indian's virtual absence ... the Western requires him—not because it needs to depict one more moment in the relentless course of empire, but because the Western

⁸² See Murphy, "The Man Who Made Sure 'The Revenant' Got Indigenous Characters Right."

⁸³ As identified on CBR's list, "10 Best Anti-Western Movies, Ranked."

functions primarily as a source of national self-identification.” In other words, *The Revenant*’s racial representations (and particularly Indigenous visibility), Wente asserts, echoing Quayson, do not absolve the film from the genre’s tradition of racial othering but affirms its very “fail[ure] to escape genre.” Quayson and Wente’s critiques invoke a significant line of inquiry, namely, can a western ever escape the racial mythologies that shape its generic conventions? If a western were to be decolonized, would it still be a western? Is a decolonized western still a western?

The same year that *The Revenant* captivated filmgoers, Zacharias Kunuk’s *Maliglutit* (*The Searchers*) premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, seemingly poised as a response to this line of questioning. A reference to John Ford’s 1956 film, *The Searchers*, Kunuk’s film asserted an explicit relationship to the genre that *The Revenant* had, outwardly, sought to avoid. Whereas Iñárritu’s film signalled a rebuttal to the genre’s coloniality, Kunuk’s film actively recalled the western’s fraught disposition by referencing the genre’s most famous (and arguably its most politically and racially contentious) film. Set in Texas in 1868, Ford’s *The Searchers* takes the tensions between White settlers and Comanche Native Americans as its primary subject. In the film’s early scenes, a Comanche raid, led by Chief Scar, descends on the homestead of the extended family of Ethan Edwards, leaving his brother, sister-in-law and nephew dead, and his nieces, Debbie and Lucy, abducted into the hills. Edwards’ ensuing quest into Comanche territory in pursuit of his remaining family heavily utilizes the western’s generic expectations: a white man in pursuit of vigilante justice, whose characterization echoes the relationship between “robust masculinity” and the frontier Quayson critiques. Indeed, Kunuk’s source material epitomizes the western’s generic features: *The Searchers* was directed by John Ford, featured John Wayne as Edwards, and was shot in Monument Valley.

Simultaneously, however, *The Searchers* potentially bears subversive qualities. Film scholars have identified it as Ford’s most famous western (if not “the best of the classical-era Westerns” [Sickels 220]) and Ford’s most authentic interrogation of the genre; it is a “film that illustrates American race and gender inequity more directly and honestly than most Westerns of its time” (220). As Robert Sickels argues, Edward’s racism, expressed throughout the film, introduces a deliberate point of discomfort that subtly estranges his character both from the western’s cherished outlaw archetype and from audiences themselves. *The Searchers* thus potentially invites viewers to grapple with the genre’s ideological underpinnings and, potentially, their own willingness (or unwillingness) to contend with it. As Roy Shwarzman concisely argues, Ford’s film presents a complex meditation on the western genre’s own complicity in the process of racist indoctrination in the U.S.⁸⁴ *The Searchers*, as a simultaneously “classic” western and

⁸⁴ As Roy Schwarzman argues, this subversive racial consciousness manifests in the film’s attempts to illuminate the western’s own racist way of seeing. As Schwarman argues, in Ford’s film, “Both Native American characters—Look and Scar—bear names that call attention to their visual markings as a cultural Other” (514). For Pippin, this consciousness manifests in the fact that in *The Searchers*, “there is a direct confrontation with the fact that the origin of the territorial U.S. rested on a virulent racism and genocidal war against aboriginal peoples, a war that would not have been possible and perhaps would not have been won without the racist hatred of characters like the John Wayne character” (227). The film’s advancement of an anti-hero, hence, proves significant. As Pippin argues, Ford’s choice to use John Wayne, and the archetype of the outlaw, ultimately sought to implicate the genre’s racism and compel reflection. Ford, Pippin writes, “is inviting us at the beginning of the film to take Ethan as the John Wayne character, an immensely competent, tough loner of great integrity and heroic capacity. This assumption is so

potentially politically subversive film, is therefore somewhat ambiguous in its relation to the mythology of the western. As film critic Steven Rose recently queried, “you could argue *The Searchers* is more a study of racism than a racist movie. But is that good enough?”

In signaling Ford’s film, Kunuk’s 2016 *Maliglutit* actively situates itself in a politically charged zone of expectation. These expectations are, in many ways, fulfilled: Kunuk’s story of revenge, vigilante justice, and gendered, sexual violence, not only reiterates the central themes of Ford’s film but mirrors Ford’s original plot, and in that, invites comparison. Set in Arctic Inuit territory, in the year 1913,⁸⁵ Kunuk’s film likewise begins with an act of violence that mobilizes the events that follow. In *Maliglutit*’s opening scenes, a group of Inuit men are banished from their community because of their immoral conduct. These men, one commentator reveals, have failed to uphold their social contract to the community. They are individualistic—consuming more than their share of rations—disrespectful, and (as evidenced from their behavior at the community gathering) pose a predatory threat to the community’s women. This scene of community-driven justice is, however, soon followed by an act of brutal violence. In the following sequence, Kuanana (Benjamin Kunuk) and his son, Siku, go hunting, and in their absence, the banished men return, proceeding to murder Kuanana and Siku’s male family members and abducting their female kin. As with *The Searchers*, the ensuing central narrative of *Maliglutit* is the story of its two male protagonists, Kuanana and Siku, venturing beyond the settlement in pursuit of justice and reuniting with their family. It is a parallel structure that is, outwardly, so pronounced it encourages a reading of *Maliglutit* as an homage to Ford’s source material.

The strong narrative parallels of these films are buffered by aesthetic and stylistic similarities. As one reviewer observed, “there are parallels in the cinematography, including one shot of ice-covered rocks that looks like Arizona’s Monument Valley if it were given a liberal coat of vanilla frosting” (Knight). Indeed, the film’s similar treatments of landscape, as a reigning, visual spectacle, has likewise ushered comparison: Kunuk’s wide-angle shots and panoramic skies, rendering the human subject a relatively minor feature, conjure Ford’s own “visual homage to the breathtaking landscape of Monument Valley” [Shwarzman 513]). These affirmative and reiterative relationships are alluded to in Kunuk’s own contextualizing, affirming the significance of Ford’s work to his own. In his discussion of *Maliglutit* Kunuk describes watching Ford’s film and encountering his own desire to “make a story like that.”⁸⁶

In one sense, then, *Maliglutit*, affirms that the western has always been comprised of “diverse constituent elements” (Bacon and Jancovich 99) and indeed “never been told from one viewpoint” (98). Kunuk’s film, as it extends Ford’s work into an Arctic Inuit context, and the language of Inuktitut, animates the western’s transitory and mutable capacities. Yet *Maliglutit* also differentiates itself from Ford’s film in ways that compel more nuanced consideration than

strong that I would venture the guess that many, perhaps most, of the film’s viewers simply glide over the fact that Ethan is such a vicious racist and are able to keep ignoring this until he finally rescues Debbie and this presumption can finally seem confirmed” (243). As Schwarzman seems to confirm: “*The Searchers* problematizes the racism that informs both the traditional western hero and the expansion of the western frontier” (513), offering a critical take on westerns through “stripping the romanticism from the American frontier and prompting a search for vestiges of racism lurking within ourselves” (513).

⁸⁵ As suggested in SFI’s summary of *Maliglutit*.

⁸⁶ As stated in Kunuk’s interview on *Maliglutit* for the TIFF Originals Series.

comparison permits. Amongst these films similarities are their resoundingly different treatments of race and, notably, Kunuk's outward elision of racial difference altogether. Whereas *The Searchers*' dramatization of settler and Comanche encounter renders the frontier a racialized site of encounter, Kunuk's western solely orbits Inuit conflict and community. There are, perhaps, practical reasons for this difference: The 1868 "west" that *The Searchers* depicts was more substantially populated with settlers than the Inuit territory Kunuk represents. Yet, historical accuracy aside, Kunuk's elimination of racial conflict generated profound effects on *Maliglutit*'s interpretation.

Indeed, if Ford's film enduringly affirms the ways in which the western "feed[s] political ideology" (CBC, "From Buffalo Bill"), Kunuk's choice to sideline racial conflict seemingly motivates the film's general perception as relatively apolitical.⁸⁷ Reviews suggest that Kunuk's eradication of outward racial conflict renders *Maliglutit*'s relationship to Ford's film unclear. As Chris Knight summarizes: *Maliglutit*, despite its outward referencing of Ford's work, is "not a remake. Whereas Ford examined tensions between First Nations and European settlers, Kunuk's is strictly about the Inuit" (Knight). Kunuk's elision of racial conflict has inspired more nuanced consideration of *Maliglutit*'s unique investment in cultural ethnographies of Inuit life. As Alois Sieben notes, in focalizing matters of authentic representation, *Maliglutit* foregrounds the potential of cinema itself, "as mechanism for documentation and preservation." Knight affirms this reading through his own observations: "As much ethnography as drama, *Maliglutit* ... spends a good deal of time illustrating the customs and rhythms of the Inuit." He proposes that we might think of the film—which forgoes western tropes for localized acts of cinematic cultural preservation—as a genre unto itself: not a western, but a "northern" (Knight).

If the western has always been comprised of "diverse constituent elements" (99), *Maliglutit* and its general reception affirms not the diversity of those elements but reveals to the audience the constraints and expectations they carry. *Maliglutit* exhibits the western's geographic and cultural nimbleness—its capacity to be enacted and interpreted elsewhere. Simultaneously, it animates how racial difference continues to guide the genre's expectations, subversive or otherwise; as *The Searcher*'s longstanding relevance to scholarly debate and film criticism affirms, the western's racism has long served as the genre's throughline. In the absence of this throughline, *Maliglutit* presents not a meditation on genre but rather, a meditation on place; not a western but a "northern," *Maliglutit* takes the Arctic and its occupants as its primary ethnographic subject. Given the western's tradition of "featur[ing] Indigenous communities] as living outside of their historical, geographical, and cultural context, situated in the past with no viable future" (Rahaja x), Kunuk's appeal to authentic Inuit representation is arguably a critical engagement with the genre.

⁸⁷ As Alois Sieben notes, "Through this much more subtle evocation of contact, *Maliglutit* leaves many reviewers of the film in a state of confusion as to the exact nature of its political commentary on Ford's film. Despite being an Indigenous remake of a problematic Western, reviewer Cian Cruise notes how it curiously removes "the racial conflict at the core of Ford's film"; Jay Kuehner similarly states that *Maliglutit* is "conspicuous for its absence of an Other, the axis upon which Ford's (ambiguous) moral tale is hinged"; Chris Knight echoes these thoughts with his description of Kunuk's film as being "strictly about the Inuit" and not "tensions between the First Nations and European settlers." As these reviews collectively suggest, Kunuk's elimination of explicitly racial conflict appears to disorient the film's political message.

Nonetheless, there is also a risk in centering the ethnographic authenticity of Kunuk's representations, in that such a reading reproduces a framing of Indigenous art as an informational window into "authentic" culture rather than an imaginative and aesthetically complex creation. Conflating *Maliglutit*'s apparent authenticity with authenticity itself—as an innately documentarian, filmic disposition—potentially overlooks how *Maliglutit*'s sense of authenticity is strategically produced through artful, cinematic techniques. Hearne's work is notable here in that it emphasizes the stakes of perceiving the western beyond matters of content. The western has long staked its claim to territory and asserted ideology through the perspectives, techniques, and angles of cinematography. Which is to say, considering the cinematographic nature of perspective in Ford and Kunuk's work—namely, how composition, staging, and framing configure perspective—potentially yields alternative avenues for comparing the two films. Most importantly, centering analysis not on content or story but *filmmaking* reframes *Maliglutit*'s apparent ethos of authenticity as not a natural by-product of the film's content but an actively produced aesthetic commentary on its source material. Reading Kunuk's aesthetics of authenticity as a strategic response to Ford's work potentially glimpses how, despite *Maliglutit*'s elision of racial difference, Kunuk illuminates how race, perspective, and the western converge.

Indeed, aside from overt narrative parallels, *Maliglutit* is laden with subtle, compositional and cinematographic gestures to Ford's film. These gestures are apparent in the film's earliest scenes. In *The Searchers*, the first shot we see is of Ethan's sister-in-law, Martha. In the image, she stands in the doorway of her home, looking out to the vast "Texas" landscape beyond. Shot from behind Martha, the scene renders her a silhouette against the landscape's bright and exposed scenery. As an establishing shot, the image reveals much about *The Searchers* and its relationship to the western genre. In a film about settler property—its protection and transgressions—and the violation and protection of kin, Martha's hedging of the home's domestic and external spheres materializes the film's jealous concern for boundaries and thresholds. Indeed, equally notable is that when Martha spots her brother-in-law, Ethan Edwards, on the horizon, she does not leave the porch to greet him. Unlike her husband, Aaron, who rushes outside, Martha stays perched on the property, awaiting their arrival. Given *The Searcher*'s preoccupation with women and property as interchangeable sites of violation, abduction, and recuperation, Martha's stasis embodies the film's prevalent themes.

Yet Martha's stasis also reflects the western's gendering of space more generally: As Justin Joyce argues, the western's "ubiquitous trope" and scene transition, "*meanwhile, back on the ranch*," traditionally reigns as the technique for "bringing the viewer back to check in on [the home] space"—one "rendered vulnerable, defenseless, because the men are elsewhere" (149). As Hearne likewise aptly summarizes of the genre, "Westerns [traditionally] portrayed the frontier as a proving ground where white women, threatened or taken captive by Indians, were the objects of spectacular rescues by white men" ("Cross Heart" 182). Perhaps most significantly, however, the shot reflects how Ford not only genders space but compels viewer-alignment with this perspective. That the viewer, in this opening shot, is positioned inside the home behind Martha, establishes an intimate synchronicity between the viewer, Martha's character (and, hence, the family), and the enclosure separating the ranch from the wilderness beyond. Positioned intimately from within the home, and likewise looking out, the viewer is hence primed to experience the violence that follows as a transgression and an oppositional encroachment of and onto one's rightful, peaceful space. In other words, *The Searchers*' establishing shots are essential to cultivating perspective, and namely, a perspective on violence as rash and individuated, rather than tethered to the processes of colonial encroachment, at the film's tacit center.

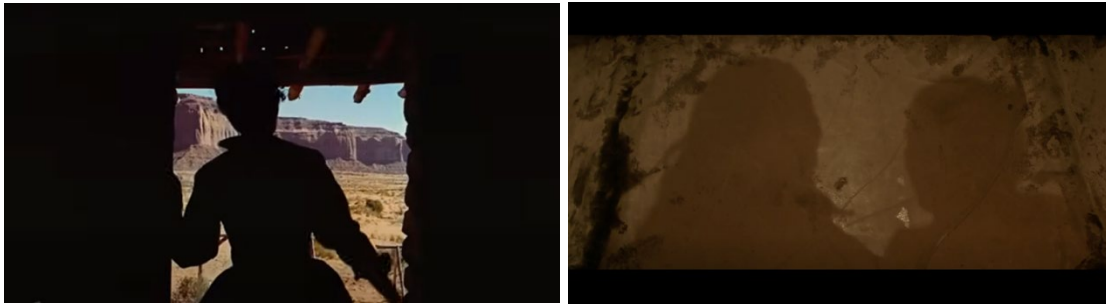


Figure 1: Opening shot to Ford's *The Searchers*; Figure 2: Opening shot to Kunuk's *Maliglutit*

Maliglutit's opening sequence affirms its keen attention to *The Searcher*'s perspectival dynamics. Like *The Searchers*, *Maliglutit* begins with silhouetted female characters situated within the home. Yet, in the case of Kunuk's film, the camera is positioned outside the tent: Lit from within, the women are shadows within a space from which the viewer is excluded. Moreover, whereas Martha stands idly, surveying in the landscape outside, the women in this scene are mobile. They face each other and sway, moving back and forth in time to the sounds of throat singing (which, presumably, they emit)—puffs of air ascending from their mouths to the ceiling. As an establishing shot, the scene reveals much about Kunuk's film and its relationship to Ford's material. Given the subject matter of both films, Kunuk's choice to likewise begin *Maliglutit* with silhouetted, female characters suggests consciousness of how the imbrication of gender and property suffuse both films. It is a gesture, perhaps, to the genre to which they aspire. These scenes embody the notion that, "as the purview of women, the home in the Western is by definition a vulnerable place" (Joyce 149). Indeed, despite (or perhaps because of) the two films' central concern with gender-based violence, women in each function as vulnerable, relatively static caricatures—a dynamic visual captured by their status as two-dimensional shadows. Yet, these outward similarities, foregrounding *Maliglutit* and *The Searchers*' mutual claim to the genre's gendered expectations are also points of departure. Whereas Ford's opening shot aligns the viewer with the Edwards family, Kunuk's frame, shot from outside the home, situates the viewer as an outsider looking in. In contrast to Ford's cultivation of perspectival alignment, Kunuk's lens hence produces a sense of estrangement. As a viewer, the terms of looking in *Maliglutit*'s introductory scene are ambiguous: whether these women know that they are being watched is uncertain—an uncertainty that is exacerbated by the fact that *Maliglutit* is, primarily, a film about the violations of women and the home. Rather than homage, Kunuk's establishing shot hence bears an uneasy relation to Ford's—one that both stokes comparison and yet actively distances itself from Ford's perspective. The effect of Kunuk's reframing is a shot that does not orient the viewer to the subject so much as emphasize the perspectival politics of looking themselves.

In the spirit of establishing shots, *Maliglutit*'s opening images offer a guiding rubric for the film. Indeed, Kunuk's establishing emphasis on the perspectival politics of insiders and outsiders offers an interpretive framework to engage *Maliglutit*'s (and Ford's) broader engagement with the western's themes of the law, lawlessness, justice, and revenge. The western, Joyce argues, presents "an emotional or rhetorical thinking-through, an anxious reification, of a specific set of interconnected conflicts and inconsistencies in American legal paradigms" (37). Indeed, the genre "worr[ies] quite anxiously about how to define the parameters of justifiable

homicide and murder when one is forced, as it were, to act outside ‘the law’” (39). Kunuk’s strategic magnification of the perspectival natures of outsiders and insiders is, then, significant. Amidst the western’s thematic interest in law and lawlessness, Joyce argues, is its deliberate obfuscations of the perspectival nature of such themes: While the western and its fictional setting of the “wild west,” has long maintained a connotation of being lawless, and hence “anti-law,” it has actually long supplemented the “American legal system in our collective envisioning of conceptions of vengeance and justice” and its correlation to systemic power (40). Indeed, “the Western’s narrative justifications for the resort to gun violence—race, gender, and property—have much in common with the justifications of personal gun violence found in American self-defence doctrine and the jurisprudence associated with gun rights” (Joyce 43).⁸⁸ The western’s incongruencies, as a genre touting “lawlessness” and yet closely entangled with endorsing hegemonic state-sanctioned forms of violence, might be observed in the gun market, itself. The marketing of “guns dedicated to John Wayne, the most recognizable western icon of all” (133) embodies the western’s fraught misunderstanding of itself. That is, the genre’s homage to the “moral outlaw” figure, Joyce elaborates, yields not an elucidation of the legal structures of oppression and marginalization in settler-colonial worlds, but a reiteration of the spaces wherein gun violence and white, settler masculinity coningle.

Which is to say, amidst *Maliglutit* and *The Searcher*’s shared themes of law and justice, Kunuk’s introductory emphasis on perspective illuminates how such themes are invariably inflected by one’s positioning. If, as Joyce argues, the western has long masqueraded as “anti-law” or, “lawless” (but has, in actuality, long supplemented hegemonic distributions of racial and gendered power) this contradiction finds footing in Ford’s work, and particularly its ongoing fascination with the outlaw figure. A character tasked with enacting justice when the law fails, the western outlaw, Martin Parker argues, is at once outside the law and intimately inside the western as the genre’s central moral compass. Indeed, the outlaw’s defining trait is that despite being a legal outsider, they are readily deemed better equipped to deliver justice than those formally and legally prescribed to. It is this positioning that renders the outlaw such an apt figure to herald the western’s investment in the political landscapes and tensions of the “west,” particularly in the second half of the 19th century the western typically depicts. The moral outlaw presents an effective candidate through which to interrogate “the routine abuses perpetuated by large employers [and] the corruption of local politicians” (Parker 358). This figure thus demonstrated how legal power “was often easily (and often currently) equated with self-interest” (358). Amidst the abuse of justice the western typically depicts, Parker concludes, “the good law man often gets to look rather like the outlaw” (359).

Parker’s analysis resonates in the archive of Ford’s classical westerns. In Ford’s *Stagecoach*—a meditation, unto itself, on morality and societal archetypes—the moral character of its outlaw, Ringo Kid, proves an unlikely foil to the fraudulent banker. In the case of *The Searchers*, outlaw figure Ethan Edwards is morally fraught, yet wears the outlaw’s tropes: Ford’s cinematographic introductory and concluding shots of Edwards exhibit an investment in associating his character with the “out there.” In the film’s beginning, Edwards seemingly apparates on the horizon. In the film’s closing, shot again from within the home, Edwards disappears back into this space: Framed by the doorway, Edwards status as an outsider is

⁸⁸ As Joyce observes, “Western iconography is a prominent feature of gun manufacturing and sales. Drawn from history, legend, or even the purely fictional frames of Hollywood, the ‘West’ has a special resonance in the American gun market” (128).

reiterated as he turns his back on the home and sojourns out, towards the horizon, from where he came. Yet, if Ford conjures Edwards' outlaw-association visually, Edwards' alignment with this characterization is also reiterated in the narrative itself. Despite presenting as a morally dubious character, Edwards is, ultimately, the initiator and overseer of "justice" (at least, within the film's scope on the word).



Figure 3: At the beginning of Ford's *The Searchers*, Ethan Edwards arrives at the settlement on horseback; Figure 4: At the end of the film, Edwards declines to re-enter the home with the family, instead, returning to the landscape from which came.

Indeed, the western's elaboration of the moral-outlaw-hero of the "wild west" is troubled by Indigenous and postcolonial critique. Elsewhere, Hearne has articulated the fraught legal paradigms of colonial law that undergirded and dictated the lawless perceptions of the "west." If the "wild west" was a site of unregulated land grabs, forced displacements, abrupt migrations, and rapidly changing legal regimes, such was not outside but nestled comfortably within the scope and ambitions of colonial law. Early westerns "were produced during a time when federal Indian policy encouraged both assimilation and removal from the land" (Hearne "Cross Heart" 181). During this silent era of filmmaking (namely, spanning the turn of the century through to the 1920s) "physical acts of displacement and replacement [were] hallmarks of U.S. American Indian policy, from Indian Removal and the Indian Wars through the slow erosion of reservation lands in the twentieth century" (181). These policies, Hearne writes, were sanctioned through mandated government boarding schools for children and the Federal Allotment Act (1887)—the latter, a strategic initiative towards settler land acquisition. The Allotment Act "broke up Indian reservations by allocating a specific acreage to each individual tribal member, with the 'surplus' land made available to 'actual settlers' ... By the early 1930s, more than 65 percent (90 million acres) of Indian land had been transferred to white ownership under the allotment system" (184). As Hearne argues, the laden ambiguity of federal Indian policy—at once "granting" reserves as a means of acquiring land, initiating "education" as a means of inducing intergenerational cultural alienation and assimilation policies—is manifest in the western's own ambiguous relationship to the political landscape it depicts. Hearne writes (referencing the work of Pierre Bourdieu) that the anthropological linkage "between romantic 'impulses' and socioeconomic institutions" offers a "model for understanding the connection between ... early Westerns and the historical context from which such representations emerged" (183). Focussed on silent era westerns, Hearne's study is nonetheless useful in parsing these dynamics in the genre's later iterations. The genre's romancing of the settler outlaw, likewise, suggests a "narrative strategy" for at once reflecting and obscuring the law's racial and colonial posture (181). In *The Searchers*—a film set in 1868,

prior to these federal Indian Policies—Edwards’ outlaw ethos invariably distracts from his legal privileging within public policy. As Hearne writes, “ambivalence [is] inherent [to] the Western’s unstable system of representation” (183).

If the law in *The Searchers* is a hazy force, then Kunuk’s film renders the law and its parameters explicit. The men’s terms of banishment are outwardly outlined, as are the terms of community inclusion and exclusion to which they are subject. At a gathering in *Maliglutit*’s opening scenes, an Elder stands, as if having a vision or epiphany, and addresses the soon-to-be-exiled men: “There is a secret hidden, a murder,” the Elder states. “A murder is near. You, Kupack, are the cause of all this.” His wife then rises too, to join the conversation: “You asshole! You don’t share food.” Another community member joins in: “Aulla, move over there,” he says, gesturing for another man to join Kupack on the other side of the room. “You are murderers. You keep food to yourselves. You’re having sex with our women. You have to leave our camp. Get out of here!” The men do as they are instructed, exiting the tent as community members continue to voice their grievances: “He never hunts and he thinks that he is a leader!” As the scene suggests, the Elder’s premonition of murder at the hands of Kupack (which shortly comes true) is supplemented and validated by community grievance. The men’s banishment turns on the credibility of the Elder, as a community member and a judge of character, as well as the general observations of many. In other words, if Ford’s film casts outlaw Edwards as the initiator of justice in the “wild west”—the character enacting the western’s “proving ground” as a venue for “spectacular rescues by white men” (Hearne 182) —then Kunuk’s film forgoes such tropes in favour of socio-political context. Indeed, more than characterization, it is the crimes (and their punishment) that assume focus in *Maliglutit*; the process of the community coming to a verdict over the verdict, itself.



Figure 5: At the beginning of Kunuk’s *Maliglutit*, the community undertakes the collective decision to exile a group of men on the basis of their conduct; Figure 6: The scene is followed by a shot depicting the men leaving the gathering, and heading out, banished, onto the land.

One might then argue that Kunuk’s comparative representations of the law and lawlessness mark a subversive investment in transparency. Given the western’s tendency to displace the realities of colonial law in favor of mythical characterizations (such as the white-settler-outlaw-hero trope), Kunuk’s scene of transparent, community-centered dispute offers a rebuttal to these generic formations. Indeed, what is too easily perceived as *Maliglutit*’s cultural authenticity might rather be a segue into how Kunuk aesthetically responds to Ford’s film by supplanting its mythological, “lawless,” wild west veneer with an ethos of legal transparency. This dynamic, evident at the level of narrative, is also evident in the film’s comparative

soundscapes. The different uses of sound in *The Searchers* and *Maliglutit* reveal significant differences in each film's relationship to artifice and transparency. Whereas Ford's film utilizes non-diegetic, cinematic orchestral music to cue *The Searchers*' emotional ambience, Kunuk's film is marked by relative sonic sparsity. Other than the sounds of wind and breathing, the only added sounds are those of throat singing throughout, particularly the voice of Inuit singer Tanya Tagaq. On one level, Kunuk's soundscape, as a literal amplification of Inuit voices, appeals to interpretations centered on authenticity and ethnography; Kunuk's use of sparse, consistent sounds that all align with the local context suggests an investment in accuracy of content. Yet, as with Kunuk's cinematography, *Maliglutit* invites a more nuanced analysis of the film's strategic, compositional recall of Ford's work. If the romanticized themes of the law and lawlessness pervade Ford's westerns, *Maliglutit*'s soundtrack also subverts these generic conventions. Kunuk's deployment of throat singing is also a sonic interjection that invites attention to the force of colonial law and Indigenous resilience, directly into the frame. In the early 1900s throat singing was outlawed under colonial law. The practice was prohibited by European Christian missionaries based on its presumed "satanic" cultural associations—a prohibition that was sanctioned by federal law in the early 20th century (Young and McMahon). These legal constraints—reiterated through institutions such as the Residential School System—would mark some of the many assimilationist policies of Canada, as a relatively new colonial nation. Throat singing would only be legally re-sanctioned in the 1980s.

Kunuk's soundscapes, thus, advance powerful cultural representations as interventions into the western's notoriously "unstable system of representation" (Hearne 183). In foregrounding Inuit representation through an aesthetics of authenticity, *Maliglutit* advances a reckoning with the inauthentic fabrications of the western genre as a whole, and notably, the mythologization of lawlessness and elision of legal conditions that perpetually uphold its colonial worlding. Indeed, *Maliglutit*'s aesthetics of authenticity establish a dialectic with Ford's film that initiates a reflection on authenticity in the western in general. In contrast to Kunuk's localized perspective on the Inuit Arctic, *The Searchers*' fictional setting of Texas and filming location in Monument Valley is a maneuver laden with colonial implications, namely that the film imaginatively overrides the region's history of Navajo displacement under federal colonial policy through a fictionalized account of Comanche encroachment on settler life. Film is a medium celebrating the suspension of disbelief, yet Kunuk's remake necessitates reckoning with the degree (and purpose) of Ford's suspensions. In dialogue with *Maliglutit*'s resolutely localized representational practices, viewers are compelled to weigh the political thresholds and allegiances of Ford's cinematic imagination. Aside from its accuracy of location, Kunuk's use of an Inuit cast likewise invites a re-engagement with *The Searchers*' meta-interrogation of the western's racial politics.

The efforts to illuminate the western's politics of racial othering have been well-noted. As Roy Shwarzman argues, Ford's choice to have "both Native American characters [in *The Searchers*]*—*Look and Scar*—*bear names that call attention to their visual markings not only as a cultural Other" signals the film's deep self-consciousness of the genre (514). Yet, that the film nonetheless utilizes the well-worn trope of casting white, Hollywood actors in Indigenous roles (namely, the casting of German actor Henry Brandon as Comanche chief, Scar) poses an innate, metatextual tension, seldom integrated into this analysis. *The Searchers*' reliance on Hollywood's racist economies of representation towards its authentic interrogation of race in the western, affirms a fundamental discontent between the Searcher's filmic imagery and sentiment and the conditions of its production. *Maliglutit*'s aesthetics of authenticity, hence, has the effect of illustrating the limits of Ford's own imagination—one that ultimately fails to reimagine the

western as not solely a work of filmic representation, but one undeniably tethered to the very land and histories it depicts. That is to say, if *The Searchers* presents an authentic western—one that “embodies all the ideals, aesthetics and genre notes of the Western: a loner hero consumed by moral right, the unyielding suffering of the open plains”—then *Maliglutit* illuminates the contradictory terms of authenticity that perpetually shape, and uphold, western-style filmmaking (“Why John Ford’s”).

More than a “northern,” then, *Maliglutit* presents a western that ushers new perspectives onto the latter genre’s inner workings. If *Maliglutit*’s aesthetics of authenticity and investment in the specificity of place renders it a less authentic western, then its insights into the genre are profound. In simultaneously deterritorializing Ford’s western and revealing its colonial archaeologies, *Maliglutit* promotes new sightlines into the genre—ways of seeing that do not repatronize or reiterate the mythologized “west” but “open it more sharply as [a site of] ‘constructed and disputed historicity ... displacement, interference, and interaction’” (Campbell 50). Kunuk’s elision of the genre’s typical ways of seeing necessitates that viewers consider the western’s interplays between mythology and authenticity, placelessness and place. Particularly, *Maliglutit* compels viewers to recognize the genre’s racial politics beyond the perpetual reiteration of racial difference, and to engage the western’s politics of place through cinematic frames of not mythology or abstraction, but diligent, localized attention. Which is to say, rather than bringing us further from Ford’s western, Kunuk’s “northern-western” arguably brings us much closer to it, inviting viewers to unearth the politics of its images, before then looking elsewhere, anew.

Conclusion: Returning to/Turning from the Frontier

This project has studied some of the ways in which aesthetic assemblages, or *genres*, provide a deposit for colonial histories, imaginaries, and material and economic forms of accumulation. The notion that aesthetic analysis presents a potential entry point for engaging the mythological and material nature of colonial holding patterns and envisioning decolonial horizons is a key assertion of this project. Yet even if the prospect that postcolonial and aesthetic concern might share a mutually beneficial outlook is not an original assertion, it is one that this dissertation has sought to undertake in original ways. Amidst the general axiom that postcolonial and aesthetic theory do not always get along—and that the very “ideology of aesthetics may have been a prime component of the marginalization of postcolonial literatures” and cultural production (Ashcroft 12)—scholars of both fields have cautioned against overstating this antagonism. Commentators on postcolonial studies have convincingly argued that aesthetic experience might orient towards situated, localized, and embodied sensory experiences, and thus productively recalibrate the ways in which scholarly authority potentially reinscribes the Eurocentricity postcolonial thought’s aversion to aesthetics seeks to undo.⁸⁹ Others have pointed out the ways in which visual cultures serve as a record and archive of Empire’s inner workings.⁹⁰ Within the field of aesthetics, the movement from aesthetic philosophy to aesthetically-oriented cultural theory (which draws from affect theory, visual culture, and sound studies) responds to the ways in which the discipline’s historically disembodied pronouncements risk reinscribing colonial divisions between knowledge and experience, cognition and embodiment, and aesthetic judgement and sensation (Mignolo). In this context, terms like “distributions of the sensible” (Ranciere) and descriptions of aesthetics’ innately “asymmetrical relations” (Fuller and Weizman 12), and frameworks such as “empires of vision” (Jay and Ramaswamy) gesture toward horizons

⁸⁹ Deepika Bahri’s discussion of “native intelligence” closes the gap between aesthetic and postcolonial theory by emphasizing the significance of aesthetics in circumventing the “native informant” trope that informs scholarly interpretation of postcolonial literature in the global market. For Bahri, aesthetic theory grants authority to the “unknowable” elements of postcolonial texts (*Native* 9) by gesturing a dimension of the text that exceeds “informancy” (20) and orienting to a “mode of perception relevant in its own context (20). Fred Moten’s discussion of aesthetics (and particularly, in the context of the Black Radical Tradition) in *In the Break* assumes a similar premise, albeit through a seemingly inverse framing. Whereas Bahri emphasizes the localized positioning and embodied forms of intelligence that aesthetics reveal, for Moten, aesthetics denote a productive *appositionality*—the release of the “very idea of worldview” and a “step back or away from the kind of thinking that produces worldviews” (186). In Moten’s work, this appositionality is essential in articulating Moten’s effort to undermine the logics of discipline in favour of the epistemological possibilities of improvisation.

⁹⁰ In *Saturation: Race, Art, and the Circulation of Value*, C. Riley Snorton and Hentyle Yapp yolk colour theory to anticolonial thought, through emphasis on the power-laden, aesthetic concept of saturation. Saturation, they propose, as a concept that at once invokes the racial and colonial histories of colour theory (recalling Isaac Newton’s framework and the centrality of whiteness within it) but also a distinctly postcolonial framework, attuned to the ways “institutions but also racialized subjects reach and exceed saturation points.” Saturation, they propose, enables examination of the ways in which particular “bodies become oversaturated by navigating and existing within the institutions we invest in and critique” (4).

wherein the aesthetic is not divorced from the materiality of its content but a site of cultural, archaeological, and forensic potential for postcolonial studies. Scholarship occupying and mediating the frontier zone of postcolonial and aesthetic theory has been indelible to the work undertaken here.

The arguments this dissertation has, perhaps, more concretely advanced involve the utility of the frontier as a particularly fecund material and imaginary geography for examining this cross-disciplinary relationship. A shifting spatial and ideological border, the frontier tangibly indexes the land-based structures of colonial encroachment, occupation, possession, and accumulation at the heart of postcolonial concern. Simultaneously, the frontier is an aesthetically encoded, narrative, imagistic, and figurative form. As surveyed by this project, it can be directly experienced and felt in a range of genres. It is often caricatured in the media attendant to its colonial histories and therefore invites interpretations that disorient the tendency within postcolonial studies to read the frontier as simply a reiteration of coloniality.

Frontier genres nest processes of transfer. As exemplified by the western, they extend localized histories of colonial encroachment into common generic tropes. Moreover, this project pointed to processes of transfer between the postcolonial and aesthetic that might soften the harder edges of postcolonial methods—a field described as operating in a general mode of “citation, reinscription, [and] rerouting the historical” (Spivak, *Outside* 217). It might also politically sharpen the innate “ambiguity of aesthetic value” (Shusterman 101). As the frontier venues presented in this study have sought to reveal, frontier genres are both structurally apparent and perspectival; they are malleable entities that at once recall their material conditions of possibility in histories of conquest and generate imaginative and mythological forms. The analyses collected in this project demonstrate that the frontier is best made legible through the cross-pollination of, on the one hand, postcolonialism’s power-oriented hermeneutics—what Bahri calls the field’s “conventional divisory formulations” (“Once More” 61)—and, on the other, the aesthetic’s invitation for disinterested contemplation.

Yet positioning the frontier as an innately productive site of analysis also raises concerns. That the frontier is a recursive concept whose very deconstruction invites return to the colonial foundations of its making has been this project’s uneasy throughline. This project’s structure and methods suggest that parsing the frontier’s subversive and decolonial potential is contingent on parsing (and, hence, to some degree, reiterating) its colonial structures of oppression. This tension underlies the field of postcolonial studies itself; “admittedly, it is difficult to escape a conception of postcoloniality as integrally tied to European imperialism,” as Bahri argues (“Once More” 56). Nonetheless, the frontier’s overt intimacy with colonial ideologies comprises a substantial portion of this work—a proportional dynamic perhaps indicative of the frontier’s laden status as a colonial cultural signifier. The writings of Frederick Jackson Turner, the racial othering of John Ford’s cinema, the ideological underpinnings of the western genre generally, and the various ways in which terra nullius is sanctified through art, environmental accounting, and the recurring concept of wilderness all reflect the frontier’s hyperactivity in animating the relationship between the “popular” (as an evocation of cultural majoritarianism) and settler colonial homogeneity. Indeed, the frontier, as much of the scholarship utilized in the dissertation has affirmed, sits centrally within the prevailing concerns of Settler Colonial Studies itself—the latter, a field which, while adjacent to and supplementary to postcolonial studies, “often sits uncomfortably alongside [it]” (Russell 153). Lynette Russell’s analysis of Australia’s shift to the political right in recent decades, and the conjunction of such shifts with the rising advent of Settler Colonial Studies, invokes the capacity for scholarly inquiries into colonial complicity to reiterate the very margin-periphery dynamics they claim to undermine. Even so, in our current

historical moment during which frontier genres seemingly abound in popular culture—and moreover, when colonizing Canada, Greenland, and the Panama Canal are casually entering American political discourse,⁹¹ when technocratic “space cowboys” are espousing the colonization of Mars,⁹² and the west’s funding of Israeli arms and military amidst a genocide in Gaza reiterates colonial and imperial investments in resource-rich territories overseas—parsing the power-laden nature of frontier genres is arguably more necessary than ever.

If there is an obvious or culturally apparent correlation between frontier imagery and colonial power, this renders it a particularly generative space to engage colonialism as not only structure but an atmosphere as well. At the same time that scholars in the fields of postcolonial studies have cautioned against the potentially reiterative nature of settler colonial studies, scholars of decolonial and Indigenous studies have emphasized the need for a hermeneutics attendant to colonialism’s atmospheric and climatological states. Max Liboiron’s reminder that “colonialism [and] capitalism ... do not have settled relationships or forms” (14) and resultant likening of colonialism to pollution, reflects such a call. While Liboiron is adamantly clear that colonialism is about material land relations,⁹³ pollution, they argue, manifests the atmospheric “violence of [those] colonial land relations” (Liboiron 7). In Liboiron’s work, hence, pollution—discrete (or invisible) and omnipresent—assumes a reiterative kinship with colonial power: “Colonial land relations are inherited as common sense, even as good ideas” and pollution persists as the tacitly forceful manifestation of those ideas (12). Situated in the study of microplastics and decolonial scientific methods, Liboiron’s work is not particularly concerned with postcolonial aesthetics, let alone the frontier. Yet, it is difficult to ignore the parallels between Liboiron’s framing and theorizations of genre likewise emphasizing questions of atmosphere. Genres, Andrea Andiloro writes, are “sense-making frameworks” in that “through genre, producers of a text tell us what matters, why, how it should matter to us and so on” (561). Yet Andiloro also emphasizes that genres are “atmospheric assemblages” which, through immersive encounters with image, sound, and characterization, immerse their subjects in a “wholistic affective and embodied experience” of association (560). As Liboiron and Andiloro’s work implies, the structural elements of colonialism and genre—that is, its sense-making framework—is easily obscured by its atmospheric output, and simultaneously, lives through it.

Frontier genres, then, might offer one focused way of exploring how the common sense of colonial land politics is distributed amidst the present’s popular cultural, atmospheric, and climatological conditions. Yet, if frontier genres’ analytical potential lies in their capacity to render visible the colonial politics of land, an equally important aspect of their potential is their intimacy with subversive expression. The recognition of subversion relies on a context of generic literacy to begin with; to recognize subversive, signifying expression is to recognize one’s own intimacy with generic convention. The elucidatory potential of this dynamic—its illustration of

⁹¹ As Scott Neuman describes in *NPR*’s article, “Is Trump’s Rhetoric on Greenland, Canada, and Panama Canal a ‘Madman Strategy?’” Trump’s “undiplomatic talk in recent days of reclaiming the Panama Canal—and annexing Greenland and even Canada—have left world leaders scrambling to respond.”

⁹² In reference to the *Forbes*’ Instagram video, titled “Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, and Other Billionaire Space Cowboys,” as featured on the *Forbes* website.

⁹³ As Liboiron asserts, “western culture—the heritage of social norms, beliefs, ethical values, political systems ... is not synonymous with colonialism”; “colonialism, first and foremost, and always, is about Land” [10])

how genre harnesses ordinary patterns of complicitous attention, common sense, and identification *with*—has been central to this project. In the case of frontier genres, the recognition of subversive play, experimentation, and signification on and with the frontier's tropes and generic expectations invites introspective attention to one's own degree of familiarity with (and expectation of) colonial holding patterns within popular culture. Subversion at the frontier, hence, illustrates the frontier's complex political significance as both an ordinary reinstatement of colonial mythologies—of land, people, relationships, and dynamics of encounter—and simultaneously, a laden site of reckoning and reworlding where engagements with the atmospheric conditions of colonial politics transpire. Importantly, subversive signifying practice at the frontier, in engendering new sightlines, historical commentaries, and perspectives onto that generic space, wrests the frontier from its safeguarding *as* a genre (and thus a form of majoritarian, cultural common sense) and reanimates it as a lively, present site of encounter and negotiation. A series of encounters have here been presented in an effort to interpret the frontier's aesthetic-political liveliness: these include encounters that weather at the sticky nationalist binding of “Canadian” art, that reimagine feminist “wilderness” through decolonized frames, that respond to regionally-celebrated narratives of “eco-heroism,” and that subvert the western's mythological artifice. Through these retellings and reimaginings, the frontier's narrative contract and generic form, I have suggested, becomes at once less certain and more evident.

There is, then, perhaps no better way to conclude this dissertation than with the frontier-oriented poetics of Nisga'a poet Jordan Abel. In 2014, Abel published the collection, *Un/inhabited*, and then, in 2016, the collection *Injun*. Published as separate works, Abel's books enact a conversation: both collections utilize the same source material—western pulp novels, freely available online—and undertake similar methodologies. Each collection utilizes the source material of ninety-one western novels found on either Project Gutenberg or the public domain and manipulates them. The collection uses redaction, repetition of key words and phrases, and sometimes visually reconfigures the original text into the shape of land masses and cartographic imagery. The effect in the case of each collection is the unearthing, recentering, and exposure of colonial land politics—the material dynamics of possession and dispossession—that undergird the western's generic, literary atmosphere.

In a longer dissertation, Abel's methodologies would warrant a chapter alone. Abel's use of the western novel's online, public archive is a significant maneuver—one that provokes the transferences between historical material processes, myth, and genre that have preoccupied this project as a whole. As Abel's source list reveals, the vast majority of western novels utilized in both collections were published prior to 1900, a timeline that correlates the source material of both *Un/Inhabited* and *Injun* with the literary subgenre of the western dime novel.⁹⁴ Mass

⁹⁴ Western dime novels were the most popular novel of their time (1860-1920) and the bestselling genre of dime novels, by far, were westerns: “These stories, patriotic and nationalistic in character, gave a picturesque view of the hardships and struggles of early western life. The story line followed a simple formula: frontier setting, moral hero, rugged individualism, crafty villain, helpless heroine, bold-spirited struggle, and a happy ending” (Chilacoat 66). The formulaic nature of the western rendered it vastly popular, and hence, if not perceived as quality literature, a significant form of cultural production, even during its heyday. This dynamic is best captured by critic W.H. Bishop 1879 assertion in the *Atlantic Monthly*, that the dime novel presented an “an enormous field of mental activity, the greatest literary movement, in bulk of the age and worthy of very serious consideration for itself. Disdained as it may be by the highly cultivated for its

printed, mass distributed, and markedly repetitious and generic, the historical western dime novel affirms the contingency of the western's broad, cultural significance on concrete, historically monopolistic economies (namely, in the case of the dime novel, the capacity of publishing houses of Beadle & Adams and Smith & Street to recognize its potential for efficiency and optimization as a generic literary form). As Christine Bold argues, the western dime novel subgenre epitomizes the innate "sense of commerce" that assured the western's significance as a dominant generic form (41): The western's "conventions and contracts" were solidified through the dime novel's affordable manufacturing and mass dissemination (13). Abel's use of this archive—one that so acutely recalls the economic conditions of the wider genre's manufacturing—thus, at one level, encourages reader recognition of the western's historical and material underpinnings. Simultaneously, Abel's use of the dime's digital presence and public accessibility today invokes the dramatic processes of transference underlying the western's enduring, cultural significance. If the western emerged amid the profitable establishment and management of literary conventions and contracts, today it seemingly transcends the conditions of its own making. Amidst the present's digital ether the western floats freely, outside of copyright law. In some cases, as with Abel's reconfiguration of the genre, even the specificity of authorship—more of an atmosphere than an entity—becomes available for anyone's use, engagement, and reimagining.

If Abel's archive reflects the western's transference from a monetized set of conventions to a freely accessible atmosphere, his poetics elucidate the freedoms and constraints posed by this context. Abel prefaces each work with a methodological discussion of the relationship between archives, technological affordances, chance, and desire through which his poetics emerged. In the case of *Un/Inhabited*, the CTRL+F function was used to search "the document in its totality for words that relate to the political and social aspects of land, territory, and ownership." From there Abel asked: "How was this word deployed? What surrounded it? What is left over once that word is removed?" In the case of *Injun*, CTRL+F "searched the source text for the word 'Injun,' a query that returned 509 results." From those findings, Abel states, "I separate[ed] out each of the sentences that contained the word" ending up "with 26 print pages. I then cut up each page into a section of a long poem. Sometimes I would cut up a page into three-to five-word clusters ... Sometimes I would rearrange the pieces until something sounded right. Sometimes I would just write down how the pieces fell together. *Injun* and the accompanying materials" he writes, "are the result of these methods" (83). Abel's descriptions of using CTRL+F encapsulate tensions posed by the western and popular genre itself. As Abel's methods reveal, while the western is today free to be mined and utilized by readers searching the internet, those readers are still bound

character, the phenomenon cannot be overlooked" (384). Christine Bold's work, however, is especially useful in illustrating how the broad-reaching scope and generic conventions of the western dime were grounded in, and aligned with, economic structures. As Bold writes, "since enthusiasm for the West coincided with the technological innovations which made these forms of commercial publishing possible. Hacks were hired by dime novel, and later, pulp magazine firms to churn out formulaic Westerns to their employers' stipulations" (29). Indeed, "writers spent as much time praising modern business methods and gamesmanship as talking about the wild West" (46). As such, as Bold argues, "Pulp magazines established the anonymous publishing voice as a permanent note. When it invited the audience to participate in production, it meant the offer literally. The audience's contribution was as codified as the author's; thus it was shown for a second time that to comply with the publishing apparatus was inevitably to become part of the mechanism" (46).

by the conventions through which the western emerged. Indeed, the western's generic expectations compel approaches to it; Abel's anticipation and pursuit of the genre's racist terminological throughline results in a high yield. As Abel's discussion suggests, it is impossible to engage the western outside of its atmospheric hold: While CTRL+F enables selective explorations of the genre (and new pathways through it) it does not emancipate the western from its context. In order to yield politically illustrative search results within the western, Abel suggests, one must be knowledgeable and wary of (and hence, engaged with) how land, racism, and ownership function within it.

Yet, while Abel's methods elaborate a context of generic constraint, Abel's poetics reveal this context to be, simultaneously, a venue for expansive signifying acts. In *Un/Inhabited*, the poem "Frontier" uses redaction to alter the dime novel's original prose. The effect is the pronounced significance of the word to the narrative; the centrality of "frontier" to the western is elucidated by its recurring absence. The poem reads like a novel, consisting of pages of frontier-oriented descriptions, each marked by their absent keyword. In this context, the multivalent significance of frontier is affirmed. It appears as geography: "San Antonio at this time was a [blank] village, with a mixed population" (1-2); "Not necessarily born to the soil, as a boy the guardian of the [blank] was expert in the use of firearms and in the saddle a tireless rider" (18-22); "this was a new country, only yesterday it had been the [blank]" (34-35)." Yet, it is also a lifestyle and a source of identity: "Interesting as this [blank] life was to the young man, he prepared for his final destination" (13-16); "There was a charm in the [blank] that held men captive" (7-9 p.89); "the turbid life of the [blank] with all its dash and vigor" (37-38). However, while Abel's survey of the frontier's presence in the western ostensibly highlights its dynamic multifacetedness, its emphasized recurrence ultimately has the opposite effect. Despite its variety of contexts and characterizations, the frontier, Abel's poetics reveal, consistently upholds the work of advancing settler colonial worlds. Abel's work thus advances a central line of inquiry: What do we do with motifs that promise the drama of transformation while simultaneously reinstating the unidirectionality of settler colonial ambition? In the case of hallmarks like "the frontier," *Un/Inhabited* suggests, we might return to matters of context and ask, "what [words] surrounded it?" Also, what alternative rearrangements are possible, and where might they lead?

This project has sought to ask these questions too. That the frontier, seemingly, begets its own reiteration as a device of settler-colonial worlding has likewise been a constraint within this project. Yet the frontier's capacity to render visible the cultural sites where histories of land dispossession and possession assume generic form has also guided the project's sense of possibility. Indeed, frontier genres present a concrete, cultural gauge on colonialism's contemporary atmospheric pressures. Importantly, frontier genres orient toward active, ongoing sites of cultural encounter, negotiation, and territorial conflict—venues where the subversive work of holding genre accountable to historical truth, reckoning, and imagining otherwise, are undertaken.

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