Unsettling the Last Best West: Restorying Settler Imaginaries

By

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Abstract

My doctoral project is a study of how art was used in the promotion and dissemination of colonial ideologies and in the recruitment of settlers to Canada in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, specifically under the aegis of Clifford Sifton as Canada's Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905. My project interrogates the content and dissemination of immigration advertising, establishes its role in the cultural production of settler and national imaginaries, and appropriates its tactics to build creative strategies of decolonization in contemporary sites. To this end, my project operates in two, interrelated ways: first, by establishing the colonialist agenda of immigration advertising through an integrated interrogation of primary sources using critical visual and theoretical analysis, and second, by appropriating and subverting Sifton's tactics of visual communication to create a series of artworks that critically reactivate and reframe this material in such a way that its ideological thrust and colonialist underpinnings are made apparent.

My project develops through creative practice in four ways. It examines the potential for creative practice to disrupt the ongoing cultural performance of settler colonialism, to open the reproductive practices of settler colonialism to critical reflection, to recruit participation in decolonization, and to actively operate in creating strategies of reimagining and restorying. I develop this work through practice-based research methodology, self-reflexively, from my perspective as a settler, settler descendant, and treaty person, focusing on a settler audience to contribute to anticolonial dialogues and conciliation in contemporary sites.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

My doctoral project is a study of how art was used in the promotion and dissemination of colonial ideologies and in the recruitment of settlers to Canada in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. My project examines the foundations of national imaginaries and engages the potential for creative practice to disrupt the ongoing cultural performance of settler colonialism, to open the reproductive practices of settler colonialism to critical reflection, to recruit participation in decolonization, and to actively operate in creating strategies of reimagining and restorying. I develop this work through practice-based research methodology, self-reflexively, from my perspective as a settler, settler descendent, and treaty person, focusing on a settler audience to contribute to anticolonial dialogues and conciliation in contemporary sites.

I advance my project through a case study of colonial immigration advertising, specifically under the aegis of Clifford Sifton as Canada's Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905. As the Canadian government sought to populate the prairie west, Sifton's innovative methods recruited desirable immigrants—white people from Britain, the USA and Northern Europe. Sifton's successful ideological campaign employed an array of tactics, including travelling exhibits, installations, films, and the innovative design and distribution of printed materials. During Sifton’s tenure as Minister, which reached into the first decade of the twentieth century, the estimated number of immigrants was substantial, with over 1,500,000 people immigrating to Canada in the period from 1901 to 1911 alone. The significant increase in settler populations—the influx of so many people

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enticed by colonial imaginaries—points to the importance of this campaign in the formation of Canada's mainstream national imaginaries. And these foundational imaginaries slip into contemporary times, functioning uncritically in the ongoing maintenance of settler colonialism.

My doctoral project interrogates the content and dissemination of Sifton's immigration advertising, establishing its role in the cultural production of settler and national imaginaries and appropriating its tactics to build creative strategies of decolonization in contemporary sites. To this end, my project operates in two interrelated ways: first, by establishing the colonialist agenda of Sifton's campaign through an integrated interrogation of primary sources using critical visual and theoretical analysis, and second, by appropriating and subverting Sifton's tactics of visual communication so as to critically reactivate and reframe this material in such a way that its ideological thrust and colonialist underpinnings are made apparent. Together, these approaches provide the framework for my practice-based doctoral work.

In undertaking this work, I shape my creative research-based practice so as to incorporate theoretical inquiry and contemporary intermedia art—installation, media, performance, and dialogic practice. As a practicing artist working site-responsively through all these forms, I engage creatively and critically with this rich and varied source material across a range of media in an effort to appropriate the innovative drive that fueled the dynamic pulse of Sifton's campaigns.

This text describes my critical visual analysis of immigration advertising materials and dissemination strategies. It outlines my methods, details my conceptual and material research and interactions with early colonial advertising material in Canada, and
displays, discusses, and analyzes the artworks I have made as a result of these interactions. In this text, I describe my series of creative works, their conceptual and contextual underpinnings, my processes in developing these works, and my aims in bringing these works together in my doctoral project. This text is a story of these things at this time. At another time, this story would be different.

When I returned to live in my home province of Saskatchewan in 2006, it didn't take me long to pick up on the racial tensions. Friends, strangers, aunties, and friends of aunties told me about the bad neighbourhoods in Regina—stay away from that place, don't live there, it is dangerous to go downtown. People made comments on filth, drinking, and crime. When I mentioned I was from Regina, a woman in a bar in the small town of Val Marie asked me, "How do you like livin' in Indian town?"

Indian town? I started making a list of "things I hear because I'm white." I also started to think critically about who I am here as white, in this place, this settled country, this Turtle Island; about history and privilege; and about how I came to be here and what it means to be here now. These factors shape the impetus for my doctoral project—to be in this contemporary prairie place, understanding where I am and how I got here, standing next to the people who have always been here, working together on what happens next.

Métis artist and musician Cheryl L'Hirondelle describes her work as directed to "sounding into the environment and locating oneself."\(^2\) L'Hirondelle's words are particularly resonant to my project. As a Western Canadian settler, settler descendent,

\(^2\) Cheryl L'Hirondelle, "Cultural Translation—Transformative Space" (presentation, Shift: Dialogues of Migration in Contemporary Art, Regina, SK, April 8-10, 2011).
and treaty person, I embarked on this project in part as a way of coming to know my own history, and my place here and now. The origin stories that I was raised on and that exist as the dominant foundations of contemporary mainstream Canada are myths. Following Ariella Azoulay's work on the "archives of potential history," which deals with history as something that can be rewritten, I dig into dominant settler myths in an effort to find histories that can be rewritten. Developing this work through research-creation practice allows me to dig into the visual and performative strategies used to shape these colonial myths and offers opportunities for dissemination that open my inquiries to public engagement and discussion.

As a descendent of Europeans who migrated in the nineteenth century to settle in North America, I strive to contend with my own place within the contemporary legacies of settlement and displacement. This is a long and complicated story, so where do I start? I have to say that I don't really know my own stories, my own histories. I have childhood memories of delicious food that only my grandmother knew how to make. I have known the late-night sounds of false old-country accents while my uncles passed the bottle around. I don't know when and how my family first came to North America—my parents don't know when and how our family first came. But I do know we're not from here.

I could find out more. I could compile family trees, make charts, and tease ancestor histories from census data, land registries, and old shipping records. I could also visit archives and undertake a more dedicated search online. But really, what's the point? Canadian settler stories are always alive—we live these in the ongoing colonial narratives

of the everyday. These are the myths used to create, to fuel, to maintain, and to celebrate our fictions of national character. Irish tenants starved off soil-poor farms, Doukhobors beaten from their land, English remittance men shaping colonial aristocracy, and Scottish capitalists looking for profits—all were in search of peace, justice, freedom, democracy, and religious tolerance in an untouched land of golden opportunity—*terra nullius*.

*Terra nullius*—the myth of open available places, land that belongs to no one. The myth of *terra nullius* is the seed, the starting place on which all foundation myths depend. In these national creation tales, the first people of this continent are the local colour, an inconvenience, and there is just a bit of room in the colonial plan for some to be assimilated. In these fictions, the traumatic truths of contact, settlement, occupation, and colonization are hidden. According to sociologist Margot Francis, the historical traumas that are foundational to nation building haunt the Canadian imaginary—it is only selective memory that makes history usable. And usable history that maintains national creation tales and settler imaginaries is only part of the telling, just one kind of story.

The founding colonial myths that populate *terra nullius* extend beyond words, and those fictions slip into the present. Drawing from Michael Taussig, Francis describes a necessary and ongoing cultural negotiation with "public secrets," and argues that "the everyday iconography of Canadianness is itself a form of cultural work through which Anglo-Canadian settlers have engaged with the symbolic inheritance of these traumatic legacies." This cultural work is continuously performed through elaborate structures of material and relational engagement. Our present sites contain complex and comprehensive histories; they can be found all around us in the everyday. The label on

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my bag of coffee invokes the perception of an entrepreneurial spirit of European
"discovery" identified with the Kicking Horse Valley. I work and live in Regina, a city
named in honour of a British queen. I'll pay for the cheap wine I'll drink later tonight
using Canadian currency faced with a portrait of Canada's first prime minister, John A.
MacDonald. Going beyond the everyday iconography is my starting place for
intervention, for reimagining and restorying. My doctoral project is cultural work that
builds from critical engagement with founding myths to create artworks that displace the
everyday iconography Francis describes.

My doctoral project, and in fact all of my work, is strongly rooted in site-specific
practice. In making connections to site, I am influenced by curator and art historian
Miwon Kwon, who frames site-specificity “as the cultural mediation of broader social,
economic, and political processes.” Kwon's framework is particularly relevant to my
project, as the lens of site-specificity offers a view of the contemporary settler colonial
site that includes a wide range of influence and processes. Performance-studies theorist
Nick Kaye suggests that site-specificity works from "the proposition that the meanings of
utterances, actions and events are affected by their 'local position', by the situation of
which they are a part." As I explain in more detail later in this discussion, I engage this
conceptualization of site-specificity through practice-based research methodologies that
include and incorporate self-reflexivity—the situations of which I am a part. From this
perspective, site is indivisible from who and where and what I am—a settler, settler
descendant, treaty person, and part of a contemporary settler colonial place. Site involves

5. Miwon Kwon, One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity
6. Nick Kaye, Site-Specific Art : Performance, Place and Documentation (London; New
everyone here, the ways our histories intersect, and how we operate together through the present and into the future.

This text describes the conceptualization and realization of my doctoral project work. I begin by discussing my methods and processes as an intermedia artist, incorporating a range of media and disciplines to develop my site-responsive and site-reflexive project work. I then situate my project and processes (methods) in the context of current discussions and theorization of practice-based scholarship and research creation. Next, I discuss the historiography and context of my source material; I describe how my project operates to appropriate and subvert this material, and situate my project work in the context of contemporary settler colonial analysis and critique. I continue with a detailed discussion of my methods, processes, and outcomes in each of the five iterations that together make up my doctoral project work and how each iteration demonstrates different aspects of my engagement with practice-based research, and I describe the ways I will continue with this work beyond my doctoral project. I conclude with discussion of how my project probes the foundations of national imaginaries, engages the potential for creative practice to disrupt the ongoing cultural performance of settler colonialism, opens reproductive practices of settler colonialism to critical reflection, recruits participation in decolonization, and actively operates in creating strategies of reimagining and restorying.
Chapter 2: Methodology and Process

My research-based art practice operates at the intersection of theoretical inquiry and contemporary intermedia art—installation, media, sculpture, performance, and dialogic practice. I shape inquiries that incorporate material and theoretical research processes to engage the landscapes and foundations of contemporary society and culture. I develop this work site-responsively and self-reflexively, from my perspective in the context of my location.

My projects begin with inquiry and develop through process. Rather than working with a specific outcome in mind, I operate by knowing that the successful resolution of a project comes from involvement with process and from time spent in company with the work. That is, to get a project done properly, I get comfortable, set the stage, invite the work in, get to know it, and don't make plans to leave anytime soon.

I begin each project by choosing a theme, and to do that I consult my intuition: What do I respond to? And what is practical? Do I have a reasonable expectation of developing and resolving a project based on this theme? Will it sustain inquiry and my interest? These are important questions to answer at this initial stage, as I typically do not leave a project once I have started. When I run into a problem or a hurdle, I look for ways to find solutions within the work. My methods are structured around processes of creative problem solving. For me, this is how art is made.

My next step is to research, which plays out in various ways. Research involves examining artworks: What have others done on this or similar themes? How have those works been successful or unsuccessful? How do those artworks resonate for me? My research includes written works: What has been written on this theme? Who has written it
and why? How do these inquiries resonate with my own? Another part of my research process is ongoing consultation: How are similar questions being taken up in my various communities? How do my artist colleagues approach similar work? How can conversations with those who know me help to clarify my focus and methods? I consider the most appropriate form for the work. What medium or media can best articulate the concept? Will the final piece be performance, two dimensional, or something made out of ice? Material research is also key. Can I add rock salt to concrete? Will I be able to build a wall with books? What happens when I take a bath with this kind of paper? And so on.

I then determine my entry point, determining what specifically within my chosen theme will offer the best vehicle for my inquiry and process. Again, this approach is based on my intuition and on practicality. How can I apply my skills and expertise in making to develop an engaging process of inquiry? How can I develop this process to resonate in existing contexts and to propose unique lines of inquiry and outcome? Again, this development is indivisible from my processes of problem solving. Staying with a project and maintaining commitment to resolve issues as they arise offers opportunities for providing tension, an excitement or frisson that becomes embedded in the work.

In my creative process, developing and resolving an artwork unfolds through cyclical and concurrent processes of material inquiry, writing, research, conceptual development, and problem solving. For example, my research on cartography may lead me to working on paper. I try different kinds of paper—some light, some heavy. How does each kind of paper behave? What qualities are important to me in developing this inquiry? How does the curl of the paper or the way it lies flat resonate with my
developing knowledge of the work, and how can the quality of the material support my goals in the work?

Writing is a vital element of my working process. For me, the function of writing is to focus and to translate my inquiries. Exercising my inquiries textually offers insight, dimension, and coherence, and is a generative process of consultation. I have to be clear on what I say textually, and doing that contributes to clarity in my material work. Again, as at every stage, processes of problem solving are integral, incorporating inquiry and resolving the aesthetic, conceptual, material, and practical elements.

As I say, these processes are cyclical. As I move towards resolution in a project, material inquiry, writing, research, and problem solving operate concurrently. Once I have resolved a project, it still remains active and open in that the experience, knowledge, insight, and understanding I have developed in the process becomes part of my own capital. It informs and becomes a part of my future work.
Chapter 3: Practice-Based Research Creation

Variously identified as practice-based research, research creation, or practice-based scholarship, the practice of creative work in academic contexts has been extensively discussed and theorized. Although a number of terms are used almost interchangeably in my project and in this writing, practice-based research, research creation, or practice-based scholarship "prioritizes some property of experience arising through practice, over cognitive content arising from reflection on practice." In this section, I situate my own practice and processes within the context of my project-based doctoral work in Cultural Studies, and contextualize my project in current discussions and theorization of practice-based scholarship and research creation. I focus this discussion on methods and knowledge production in research creation as they apply to and operate in my doctoral project work. The research operates in concert with creative production, and while there is reflection throughout, it is in and of the work rather than about the work. These processes specify that "art practice is paramount as the subject matter, the method, the context, and the outcome of artistic research." In this model, art

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7. A discussion of issues associated with naming this kind of research is briefly outlined by Michael Biggs and Daniela Büchler in "Communities, Values, Conventions, and Actions," The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts, ed. Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 82-83.


practice is embedded in every facet of the work. This describes my approach to research creation in my doctoral project, as I incorporate research and material engagement at every stage.

Contemporary discussions of practice-based research make methodological distinctions between academic and creative research.\footnote{There are widespread discussions on distinctions between traditional academic and practice-based methodologies. Examples include Risa Horowitz, "Disciplining Art Practice: Work, Hobby, and Expertise in Practice-Based Scholarship," (PhD thesis, York University, 2012); Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances," Canadian Journal of Communication 37, no. 1 (2012); Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge, "Writing and the PhD in Fine Art,“ The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts, ed. Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 353-367.} In the dominant academic research framework, knowledge is produced through the development of critical and rigorous response to research questions. It is a potentially tidy model; questions initiate discussions that lead to research that supports conclusions and, in turn, to measureable and quantifiable advancement of knowledge. At least this is the ideal. However, creative inquiry is not clearly defined by distinct research questions. Although questioning is fundamental to creative process, motivating inquiries can involve a much wider focus, such as how best to visually express a seminal moment of betrayal (Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper), how to interrogate relationships between electricity and human physiology (Atsuko Tanaka's Electric Dress), or what happens if I use a lot of green? (most anyone who has some paint).

Whether or not da Vinci, Tanaka, or that kid in the community art class consider themselves researchers, their examples demonstrate that creative inquiry is often rhizomatic. Some questions can lead to more questions and offer varied possibilities for resolution. According to philosopher and creative researcher Michael Biggs, "arts
questions are capable of having more than one answer: this is perhaps one characteristic
difference between questions in the arts and questions in the sciences.12 This
characteristic multiplicity acknowledges both creative inquiry as initiated, developed, and
resolved by the maker or makers, and the wide prospective range of viewer perspectives
and interpretations. The potential for varied outcomes, for multiple resolutions to develop
independently of the artist/maker, is embedded in my approach to practice-based
production, as facilitating and generating viewer resonance is a goal in creating the work.

Again, using the example of the Last Supper, in addition to investigating the
illustration of narrative, da Vinci poses material questions by experimenting with oil
tempera on dry intonaco, advances compositional questions with his investigations on
linear perspective, and develops inquiries into relationships between site and the subject
matter of the artwork by situating the work in a refectory.13 The artist conducts these
inquiries and develops the artwork so as to generate and facilitate viewer resonance. Is it
necessary for every viewer to have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of all of
da Vinci's inquiries? Or will the Last Supper operate successfully as an artwork for a
range of viewers with a range of knowledge and expertise? And, how is "success"
measured in this particular context? Is there resonance in the experience of eating a meal
in the presence of a materially degrading artwork composed to include the viewer in a
seminal Biblical moment? And can viewers shape answers or interpretations of the work

12. Michael Biggs, "Learning from Experience: Approaches to the Experiential
Component of Practice-Based Research," in Forsking, Reflektion, Utveckling, ed. Henrik
328.
that would never have occurred to the artist? Absolutely.\(^\text{14}\)

Generating viewer resonance is central to my project work, as I dig into the visual and performative strategies used to shape colonial myths, engage critically with my source material, and shape strategies for dissemination that open my inquiries to public engagement and discussion. Viewer resonance is a site of knowledge production that is a part of practice-based research. As curator and artistic researcher Henk Slager describes, "the mostly trans- or interdisciplinary research of visuality conducted by artists is not really characterized by an objective, empirical approach…art does not strive for generalization, repeatability, and quantification. Rather, art is directed towards unique, qualitative, particular, and local knowledge."\(^\text{15}\) The production of such knowledge describes the aim of my project work, to operate within the site of viewer resonance—engaging critically with colonial myths that currently resonate to create strategies of reimagining and restorying.

In my doctoral project work, generating viewer resonance operates in concert with self-reflexivity. I situate myself as a settler, settler descendant, and treaty person engaging with the histories and legacies of settler colonialism and how they operate in mainstream national imaginaries. In this context, I identify with Slager, who describes "a continuous, self-reflexive movement questioning the situation and determining the artist's position with regard to the spaces of analysis. The result is not a fixed concept or a static point, but the indication of a zone, leaving unmarked room for the continuation of artistic


\(^{15}\) Slager, 52.
experiment." Connecting the continuation of experiment and knowledge from the self-reflexive maker through to the viewer establishes dynamic fields of discursivity. I am a self-reflexive artist/maker, developing public artworks that open discussion of anticolonial dialogues and conciliation in contemporary sites. And in this public self-reflexivity, I can be seen as a settler, settler descendent, and treaty person engaging with these issues, which in turn offers a discursive model to viewers. Shaping this discourse through practice-based research makes space for open-ended and critical engagement that resonates beyond the work itself. Discussing creative research practices, Henk Borgdorff suggests that "their persuasive quality lies in the performative power through which they broaden our aesthetic experience, invite us to fundamentally unfinished thinking, and prompt us towards a critical perspective on what there is." Borgdorff's understanding of practice-based research is in harmony with my project goal to open the reproductive practices of settler colonialism to critical reflection. My artworks are intended to displace the cultural performance of national imaginaries that are rooted in settler colonial ideologies, to resonate with viewers' individual experience, knowledge, and expertise, and in so doing to shape spaces for open-ended critique.

Engaging through forms of dissemination beyond the textual, practice-based research can operate simultaneously on a number of different fronts. In my own project, dissemination includes animation, video, performance, gallery exhibition, kinetic bookworks, as well as analytic writing. All of these iterations are developed through my creative research, and my impetus in doing so is twofold: first, to explore, reflect, echo, and subvert my source material, which also operates concurrently on a number of fronts,

17. Borgdorff, 47.
and second, to mine the wide potential for viewership through varied dissemination strategies. A digital animation can be distributed widely for screenings; I do not have to be with the piece, it travels without me. Its practical range extends beyond my own. When I do a performance, I am with the viewer; we can look into each other's eyes and feel each other's presence. Disseminating documentation of my performances in still images or video extends viewership. The range of dissemination available to me through my project work expands and deepens the potential for viewer experience.

My doctoral project work is rooted in my conviction that everyone learns visually, physically, and haptically all the time. Practice-based researchers have opportunities to name all the ways learning happens and model the potential in research that engages the experiential breadth of knowledge production. Processes of practice-based research that incorporate visual and haptic, physical and scholarly ways of knowing open opportunities and paths of inquiry that are not as readily accessible through text-based research. In my dance training for example, I learned movement patterns by translating from one part of the body to another: A gesture learned with the right hand could be translated and expressed with the foot, an elbow, or the spine. It is not necessary or efficient to express that linguistically, to mediate any of that through words or text. Similarly, my current investigations into the colonial site incorporate physical ways of knowing. For example, by tracing colonial maps, I can know the human hands that made them, in the lettering, the line weights, and the dangerous fictions of terra nullius and plentiful prairie streams. In my previous work as a cartographer, I have drawn this same land countless times, but

drawing the land with a critical mind and a creative hand opens to an expanded knowledge of the material I am researching. This delights and surprises me every day. Practice-based works offer wide opportunities to integrate scholarly and creative work in development, dissemination, and viewer resonance. My project focuses on how foundational colonial ideologies have been theorized, renewed, and disseminated across a range of media. These integrative processes and operations are what I aim to critically reflect, to appropriate, and to subvert. How better to do that than by echoing the same visual and haptic languages in which they were developed?
Chapter 4: Immigration Advertising: Curiosity into Commitment

Colonial settlers—the right kind of settlers—were the necessary building blocks, the bricks and mortar, in the construction of colonial societies. By focusing recruitment on those migrants judged most likely to harmonize and fall into step with colonial agendas, colonial governments worked to shape the character of their ideal societies. Of course, these ideal societies had to be imagined, shaped into participatory fictions, and sold to prospective migrants. Advertising is well-suited to shaping ideal societies and inviting participation in them (figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Historian David Ciarlo suggests that "visual provocations' such as advertisements do not merely reflect colonial ideology but in fact opportunistically created racialized visions of empire."19 The construction of colonial mythologies through the use of advertising satisfies two central goals: recruiting the settlers necessary to the development and maintenance of colonial societies, and shaping the mythological narratives, the national consciousness, that guides ongoing settler participation in the colonial project. Historian Laura Detre suggests that late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century advertising materials "produced by [Canada's] Immigration Branch of the Department of the Interior illustrate the ideal society envisioned by Canadian officials."20 These mythological narratives fill the settlement space, creating an active static that strives to obscure what the back stories might be, what might exist outside the fictions offered by colonial governments. White noise.

Figure 2. *Prosperity Follows Settlement in Western Canada* (pamphlet] (1905) University of Saskatchewan Library Special Collections, Shortt Library of Canadiana, accessed October 13, 2012,
http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/persuasion/search/search.php?ID=25691&field=subject&search=1&page=
There is a gap between colonial imaginaries and the realities on the ground in colonial sites. However, working to shape effective critique and intervention in colonial sites requires active engagement beyond merely noting the gap between reality and
fiction. Margot Francis writes that it is insufficient "simply to demystify the public secrets that shape a national consciousness." Instead she states that it is necessary "to engage in a drama of re-enchanting the world, or revealing a secret, but only through a "transgressive uncovering" of what is already "secretly familiar." I take up this challenge to re-enchant, reimagine, and restory the colonial site with my doctoral project works—five creative iterations that shape different aspects of my engagement with the source material. My doctoral project works engage across a range of media. Each of the five iterations operate in different ways, both in methods and process and also in the ways the works are and can be disseminated. By shaping my project simultaneously in a number of ways, I maximize the potential for an extended viewership, which in turn offers wide opportunities for my doctoral work to disrupt the ongoing cultural performance of settler colonialism, to open reproductive practices of settler colonialism to critical reflection, and to actively operate in creating strategies of reimagining and restorying. As I describe in more detail below, the five project iterations are my digital animation Leaf Forever, my performance works Unsettling and A Complicated Hole, my experimental cartographic works in Unmapping Assiniboia, and my kinetic bookwork, Unsettling the Last Best West.

Leaf Forever is a digital animation that I created using still images from Canada: The Granary of the World, a twenty-eight-page, settler-recruitment brochure published in 1903 by the Eastern and Western Land Corporation and distributed on behalf of the Canadian government to prospective settlers in the United States. As I explain in more detail later in this discussion, Granary is rife with ideals of colonial conquest, racism, and

22. Francis, 5-6.
misogyny. Contemporary viewers would probably recognize the racism and misogyny, and feel secure that attitudes have changed; and while on some levels that is true, it is also true that colonial ideologies slip into present times. But simply exposing the ways in which these colonial ideals continue to inform contemporary sites does very little, and as Francis proposes, "often threatens to distort the inner content of that which has been hidden and to appropriate its energy rather than to undertake a revelation that does it justice." In my project work, the important goal in taking up materials such as Granary is to delve deeper. How can I appropriate and subvert this source material in such a way as to provoke doubt? How can I make a gap between assumption and reality in which viewers may consider the ways these colonial ideologies have slipped into the present?

Unsettling is a performance work that appropriates the visual, material, and performative strategies of immigration advertising. Unsettling riffs off the idea that settler recruitment capitalized on the value of the personal touch. By shaping this iteration of my project work to include performance, I can re-enchant through personal connections, through the way I look at the viewer or use my body to connect physically. This iteration appropriates not just the source material, but viewer participation as well. By integrating personal connections with viewers into my performance, viewers are physically implicated and must necessarily situate themselves in the work. It has the potential to resonate with viewers well beyond the site of the performance itself.

23. Francis, 5.
24. "[The recruiters'] Personal contact did not simply take the form of lecturing to large groups; the agents also spent a great deal of time interviewing interested parties, in their own premises, at regional booking offices, and on their frequent trips to agricultural fairs and markets." (Marjory Harper, "Enticing the Emigrant: Canadian Agents in Ireland and Scotland, c.1870 - c. 1920," Scottish Historical Review 83, 1, no. 215 [04, 2004], 44).
A Complicated Hole is also a performance work, but one that I created as a site-specific, durational piece not involving live audience interaction. The performance site in southwestern Saskatchewan is on a 160-acre parcel of land, and I performed this piece on a hot and windy day in July 2014. During the performance, my only viewers were the videographer, the cameras, and the wide-open prairie skies. However, documentation of my performance is available to viewers, currently as still images and in the future as a video piece. This documentation shows me, ostensibly alone on the prairie, digging a hole. With A Complicated Hole, my goal is to situate myself and the labour I do in my project work, and in turn to model the hard work of anti-colonial practice, work that goes on even when no one is looking. Both literally and conceptually, this is the "transgressive uncovering" that Francis describes.

My series Unmapping Assiniboia works with the cartographic representation of colonial sites.25 Social-justice academic Sherene Razack writes: "The national mythologies of white settler societies are deeply spatialized stories." The origins of these stories are nowhere better expressed than in maps, the cartographic expressions/manifestations of colonial claiming. Maps figure prominently in immigration advertising—plentiful railways and broad rivers are shown coursing across expanses of gridded landscapes, each parcel of land holding nothing more than the glorious promise of prosperity for generations to come. Who wouldn't want that chance? Who could afford not to take it? The promise of prosperous land is the heart of settler imaginaries. Razack proposes processes of "unmapping," twinning identity to geography in a conceptual process of undoing. I exercise this concept literally with Unmapping Assiniboia, shaping

25. Assiniboia is the territory that predates the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.
expression through the physical processes of tracing and undoing; replication, translation, and erasure. I work from archival settlement maps to draw, reproduce, and then erase the colonial tracks, digging out the grid, the railways, and the names. This is a process, a ritual of unmapping. The pieces show the scars, the detritus of removal, but they imagine a possible decolonized land. According to historian and settler colonial scholar Lorenzo Veracini, "the decolonisation of settler colonial forms needs to be imagined before it is practised." Working from both Razack and Veracini, I put theory into form through my project work, unmapping to imagine a decolonized land.

The final iteration of my doctoral project work is *Unsettling the Last Best West*, a limited-edition series of bookworks that function simultaneously as art objects and as containers for my doctoral project writing and documentation. This iteration is based on the *Canadian Atlas: For Use in Schools*, which was published in 1901 by the Canadian Ministry of the Interior and distributed to children in British schools as a settler-recruitment strategy. *Unsettling the Last Best West* shapes a creative engagement specific to the site of my project, as a series of art objects independent of any specific exhibition venues. Like the *Atlas*, the books I make are small and portable; like the *Atlas*, my books travel to the viewer. With *Unsettling the Last Best West*, I appropriate the sophisticated recruitment strategy of the *Atlas* into the service of my doctoral project work.

In all of my doctoral project work, I examine the foundations of national imaginaries and engage the potential for creative practice to disrupt the ongoing cultural performance of settler colonialism. My aims in this work, which I describe in more detail below, are to open ongoing and reproductive practices of settler colonialism to critical

reflection, to recruit participation in decolonization, and to actively operate in creating strategies of reimagining and restorying. I develop this work site-responsively and self-reflexively, from my perspective as a settler, settler descendent, and treaty person, focusing on a settler audience to contribute to anticolonial dialogues and conciliation in contemporary sites.
Chapter 5: Project Work

Leaf Forever

Among the innovative strategies employed in Canada's immigration recruitment campaign was the use of film, a visual form in its infancy in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In its use of film, Canada's campaign was at the forefront of the new media of its time. That such new visual technology was employed to recruit immigrants is quite compelling—and clearly a subject worthy of further research. However, film is an unstable media, and beyond handbills advertising the presentations, none of these films or any visual records of them exist today. Information about these films is available, revealing who made them and when, the film titles, length etc., but nothing visual remains. The absence of material presents an interesting challenge—how is it possible to engage visually with invisible material? Filling the gaps created by its disappearance is an undertaking ideally suited to creative practice-based research.

The film footage used in Canada's immigrant recruitment campaign in 1902 was shot by James Freer in and around Winnipeg in 1887. In 1898, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) commissioned Freer to tour "Ten Years in Manitoba," his film and lecture program, throughout Britain to promote Canadian settlement. In 1902, Freer was commissioned by the Canadian government to again tour the film program in Britain.

Even though no visual record of Freer's films has survived, the existing descriptions of the works and the ways they were disseminated make clear connections to the ideologies and aims of Canadian colonial recruitment: the goal was to sell immigration—and to sell it to the right people. Working from that perspective, my methodological approach is to consider the elements of all media in Clifford Sifton's Canadian settler-recruitment campaign as interchangeable. Even though I can't work with the films because they no longer exist, I can use images that do exist in other immigration recruitment media to make new films.30

*Canada: The Granary of the World*, a twenty-eight-page, settler-recruitment brochure published in 1903 by the Eastern and Western Land Corporation is the perfect source material with which to begin this part of my project (fig. 6). First, as I explain in more detail later in this discussion, it is a prime example of colonial immigration advertising. Second, Queen's University's Lorne Pierce Archives owns a copy of the brochure, and I was able to work with it directly, as a material object.31 Third, and perhaps most importantly, the brochure is visually appealing, it has substance, narrative, context and complexity, and at the same time it is itself finite, with a clear start and end.

30. Many thanks to Dorit Naaman for giving me this excellent idea and all the wonderful possibilities it offers that I have yet to explore.
31. The Lorne Pierce Archives has expressed strong interest in supporting this project within their digital-initiatives mandate.
As an example of colonial settler-recruitment advertising, *Canada: The Granary of the World* disseminates colonial ideologies. Geared towards preferred potential emigrants in the United States, specifically former British and Northern European immigrants well placed to enjoy the advantages of settlement in Canada, the brochure consists of illustrations with short promotional texts on every facing page. It trumpets and exults in colonial utopian fictions of achieving unbridled prosperity through civilizing *terra nullius*. The brochure is at once racist, misogynist—and visually appealing. The contrast between the visual beauty of the images and the offensive perspectives they convey creates tension; as Sumathi Ramaswamy puts it, "although we may hate empire
and with a passion, we fall in love with its images.”

Practice-based research is well-positioned to intervene in those tensions to appropriate and subvert both the original material and contemporary responses to it, to remake, reframe and restory.

With three exceptions, all the figures in Granary are white and male. One exception is a First Nations figure, an abject man in a dusty tuxedo jacket and bedraggled hat topped by a drooping feather. His crotch is covered by a patch that reads "XXX FLOUR." The man stands next to a buffalo skull in the foreground of an industrial scene that shows trains and a factory puffing smoke. The caption at the bottom of the image reads:

"A COUNTRY WITH SWIFT CHANGES.
MAN WITH THAT TIRED FEELING "WAUGH!"
IMMIGRATION HEAP NO GOOD INJUNS
BEST HUNTING GROUNDS SIX MOONS
AGO JUST WHERE BIG RED TEPEE STANDS."

As historian Mark Anderson and art historian Carmen Robertson describe, the mainstream representation of "Aboriginals, when compared to white Canadians, exemplify three essentialized sets of characteristics—depravity, innate inferiority, and a stubborn resistance to progress." All three of these racist stereotypes are reproduced here. In this image, the Aboriginal man is depicted as abject, resistant, and tired, he cannot keep up—he can't "properly" describe the buildings behind him or comprehend

33. Eastern and Western Land Corporation, Canada: Granary of the World (Toronto, 1903), 7.
the amount of time they've been there. And the man's depravity is clear in the patch on his crotch. Why can't he just wear regular pants?

The other two exceptions to the brochure's dominance of white male representation are two female characters, examples of what art historian Jaleen Grove describes as "female classical allegories such as Columbia and Miss Canada [that] personify the United States and Canada respectively." These female characters are "pretty girls," idealized national symbols that are presented in the brochure as competing images, operating as "symbols and narratives that acted as currency in the trading-post transactions of negotiated national identity." And in the transactional imaginaries of the brochure, Miss Canada is the clear winner. Headed "The New Belle," an image shows Miss Columbia sitting alone at a ball, gazing wistfully at Miss Canada, who is surrounded by wealthy and prosperous men. Miss Columbia has been deserted, even by Uncle Sam, who stands behind Miss Canada's left shoulder, gazing lasciviously down her décolletage. Miss Columbia ruefully admits her own inferiority. The caption reads:

"MISS COLUMBIA - "SHE CERTAINLY IS ATTRACTING A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION, AND THOUGH I'M SORRY THEY'RE LEAVING ME, I DO ADMIRE MY FAIR COUSIN."

According to Grove, Miss Canada's sexuality is a factor in her image. This is particularly evident in her relationship with Uncle Sam, a perpetual 'push me/pull you' of flirtation and rejection that thrusts forward Miss Canada's desirability while at the same time

36. Grove, 47.
37. Grove, 110 and 30.
38. Canada: Granary of the World, 16.
stands on guard to maintain and protect her purity and moral capital. In the context of the settlement-recruitment brochure, the choice is clear: come north to reap bounty or stay in the depraved and exhausted south.

Page twenty-one in the brochure shows the words and music for "The Maple Leaf Forever"—"The National Song of Canada" (fig. 7). The facing page shows a group of singers, all men, being directed in song by a figure dressed in military khaki with the word "CANADA" stenciled across the top of his backside. Above each figure in the image is text that identifies him by his race or country of origin. The caption at the bottom of the image reads "Now then, all together!"

Figure 7. Canada: The Granary of the World, pp. 20-21.

In short, this image represents those who are included in the invitation to be "all together"—"Germans, Icelanders, Scotchmen, Englishmen, Americans, Frenchmen, Scandinavians, Belgians, Russians, Australians, Irishmen." There is an order of preference in how the races are presented within the image—top and bottom, foreground and background—and racial dominance within the group is emphasized by the two

figures—British and American—holding the "Maple Leaf Forever" songbook.\textsuperscript{41}

As in all settler-recruitment advertising, \textit{Granary} celebrates the map. I will describe just three examples. On page three, glossy and self-satisfied speculators hoist a load of colonial produce and traipse across the North American \textit{terra nullius}; according to this map, there is nothing to see but opportunity. The centrefold of the brochure is a map of Canada, showing wide rivers, plentiful railways, and easy sea routes to home and Empire. Colonial narratives of consumption and prosperity overlaid with connections between Canada and the home countries are wound up together in the beautiful cartographic fictions of \textit{Granary}. On page twenty-four, the geographic shapes of Ireland, Scotland, and England are personified as "Happy Customers" being spoon-fed by a stalwart Dominion son from a steaming bowl of mush labeled "Grown in Canada."\textsuperscript{42} A line of shadowy reinforcements mass in the background ready to step into place—there is no end to the steaming colonial bounty.

In making art, I have an understanding that coming to know a piece, and ultimately working to resolve it comes from time spent in its company. That is, to get it done properly, I must set the stage, get comfortable, invite the work in, and not make plans to leave it anytime soon. This approach to process is especially relevant in the context of my digital, stop-motion animation piece \textit{Leaf Forever}, in which I worked with and around the images in \textit{Canada: The Granary of the World}, juggling hate and love, and

\textsuperscript{41} The clear racial preference in this image is discussed by Laura Detre, "Immigration Advertising and the Canadian Government's Policy for Prairie Development, 1896 to 1918" (PhD thesis, University of Maine, 2004), 21, and Richard Fung, \textit{Dirty Laundry}, directed by Richard Fung (1996; Toronto, Vtape, 1996.), DVD.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Canada: Granary of the World}, 24.
many other thoughts and feelings in between.\textsuperscript{43} Stop-motion animation involves working with or creating a series of still images that are then shown in sequence to create moving images—or the illusion of moving images. This is involved, complex, and time consuming work. \textit{Leaf Forever} runs 4 minutes, 38 seconds; there are 29.47 frames, or still images, in each second of video, for a total of 7515 frames. For \textit{Leaf Forever}, I worked with each one of those frames. There are other ways of producing video: I can use a camera to shoot footage and edit it in longer clips; I can work at a day job to get money to pay someone else to edit my piece. However, to advance my project, to fully engage with and understand my source material and my own place in working with it, I require the full realization that comes from intense and intimate engagement. And that's exactly what I had access to in the process of making \textit{Leaf Forever}.

The soundtrack for \textit{Leaf Forever} is an archival recording I found of "The Maple Leaf Forever," the 'All together' song printed in \textit{Granary}. Sung by a group called Knickerbocker Quartet in 1914, the soundtrack recording echoes the dominant male chorus in the printed material.\textsuperscript{44} A group of men sing lustily about togetherness, planting flags, and King and country:

"In days of yore, from Britain's shore,
Wolfe, the dauntless hero came
And planted firm Britannia’s flag
On Canada's fair domain.
Long may it wave, our boast, our pride,
And joined in love together,

\textsuperscript{43} A DVD copy of \textit{Leaf Forever} is included with this text.
The thistle, shamrock, rose entwined,
The Maple Leaf forever!"  

The themes and narratives in the song echo the thrust of the brochure. The music provides structure to my piece, which has a set start and finish timed to the length of the recording. The music also provides a framework for me to invite viewers to sing along by following animated text and a bouncing ball, which in turn activates the music included in *Granary* (fig. 8). My bouncing-ball animation shapes the lyrics to visually indicate the rhythm in the music—"The Ma-ple Leaf For-e-ver." The written words are translated to movement—through song and rhythm, participation is physical. And the invitation to take part situates viewers in the material, because whether or not they sing along or move to the rhythm of the song, they become participants as soon as they are in the position of making that choice. By activating the words and music from the brochure in this way, my intent is to shape critique by engaging satirically with the source material, to appropriate the serious settler-recruitment strategy, subvert it into a game, and to invite viewer participation in that satirical engagement.  

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46. Examples of contemporary artists who engage with issues of colonialism through satire are Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco, Kent Monkman, Minerva Cuevas, Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, and Adrian Stimson.
The bouncing-ball, sing-along format that I employed with *Leaf Forever* connects to a through-line in my creative practice that seeks to involve the audience in physical ways that go beyond looking. This concept of viewer engagement plays a prominent role in my practice, and taken broadly, highlights the role and responsibility of the viewer in the discourse of creative engagement; in this approach, the viewer is not passive, but engaged. In the context of the specific site of my doctoral project, this invitation to involvement offers viewers opportunities to consider their own place in the context of the material.

*Leaf Forever* works inside the challenge of the beautiful, hateful images in *Granary*. The animation shows a Native man moving across the undeveloped prairie, waving repeatedly as two men in the foreground make a deal for "Homes for Millions in the Great Canadian West" (fig. 9). The two men shake on the deal as more settler men gather in song, two of them holding the songbook for "The Maple Leaf Forever." The Native man becomes obscured as the frame fills with settler men, singing that they will never yield their rights to stand and die for loved ones, home, and freedom. While present in the frame throughout, the Native man is entirely disregarded by the settler men, highlighting contradictions between the actions of settlement and settler mythologies as expressed in a song of rights and freedom.
*Leaf Forever* engages with Miss Canada's puritan, pretty-girl sexuality (fig. 10). A florid man in close attendance receives a saucy wink from Miss Canada, as the red maple leaf over her heart throbs and the Knickerbocker Quartet sings about joining in love together.

Later, as adoring men surround Miss Canada and as Miss Columbia gazes enviously from across a sparkling ballroom, a top-hat stamped with the words "Canadian Beaver" rolls in from the prairie. Miss Canada obligingly lifts her skirts to accommodate the rolling beaver hat.
My video picks up on some of the brochure's numerous openings for manipulating the cartographic references it contains. The happy personifications of England, Ireland, and Scotland join hands and dance delightedly across the empty top of the North American continent. The red shape of Canada emerges as the home countries leap up and down in ecstasy, conjuring the nation. A creaky train pokes its way westward along the southern margin of the newly conjured country as the smiling moon rises in the west. A stalwart Canadian in a chef's hat feeds the home country steaming spoonfuls of Canadian mush. Meanwhile, on the prairie, men drive cartfuls of dead beavers through abundant fields of grain, and Johnny Canuck ignores a waving Indigenous man as he concludes a land deal with a settler. The final frames in Leaf Forever show a busy, prosperous harbour. I include my own hopeful ending, in that the sun does set on the British Empire.

*Leaf Forever* was the first piece I completed in my doctoral project work, and it offered some insights into my strategies for other project iterations. The vocabulary that developed in the process of making this piece, the creaky motion that is so often a feature of stop-motion animation, guided me to pick up on and reflect the underlying tension in the source material. Translating those tensions into the awkward motion in *Leaf Forever* parodies *Granary'*s portrayal of the smooth progress of settlement. It provides an illuminating example of how something unintentional—or perhaps unconscious—in practice-based research can tease out and highlight nuances in source material.
When James Freer toured Britain in 1899 with "Ten Years in Manitoba," his presentations included both screenings and lectures. Similarly, many of my screenings of Leaf Forever have also included talks dealing with the context and development of the piece, as I have presented this work at various conferences and artist talks. Supporting screenings of Leaf Forever with artist talks resonates strongly with colonial recruitment strategies that responded to public enthusiasm for "illustrated lectures." In my experience to date, screening Leaf Forever together with presentations on the context of the piece and my project work has opened to generative discussions with viewers. When I screened Leaf Forever as part of my guest-artist talk to a first-year class at University of Regina for example, the discussion involved the connections the students could see between originating settler imaginaries and their contemporary settler-Indigenous relationships.

Although presenting Leaf Forever as part of a lecture is a useful way to open discussions of contemporary colonialism, dissemination of this piece also extends beyond my physical range. Leaf Forever is currently distributed through Video Pool in Winnipeg. It is part of the collection at Queen's University Stauffer Library and has most recently been screened at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary as part of the 2014 Sled Island Festival. While I continue to pursue opportunities to personally present Leaf Forever,

47. Peter Morris, 31.
48. Conference presentations include "Dispelling Utopia: Rethinking and Restorying" (presentation, Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference, Saskatoon, SK June 13-15, 2013); "Unsettling the Last Best West" (presentation, Undisciplined: Queen's Cultural Studies Graduate Symposium, Kingston, September, 2012); "Unsettling the Last Best West" (presentation, Imagining Canada's Future: A First Nations, Métis & Inuit Research Showcase, Regina, March 24-28, 2014). "Unsettling the Last Best West" (artist talk and presentation, University of Regina, October 28, 2013).
50. My artist talk to the Art 100 class at University of Regina, 24 October 2013.
these additional screening opportunities widen and enhance my dissemination of the work.
Exhibition wagons have fascinated me since the moment I began my research, even before I began my PhD (fig. 11). In the early years of the twentieth century, immigration agents and their horse-drawn exhibition wagons filled with promotional materials and samples of agricultural produce travelled the countrysides of the United
Kingdom, visiting farms and villages as part of the Canadian recruitment campaign.\textsuperscript{51} Painted a striking vermillion red, these wagons were designed to be noticed. I think about these vermillion wagons, wheat stocks arranged decoratively into twelve-foot pinwheels, dozens of glass jars filled with samples of produce and grains, rattling down the road behind the plodding horse, travelling from place to place, from farm to farm.\textsuperscript{52} It must have been noisy. Did the recruiter/land agent/driver worry about the glass jars breaking? Where would he keep the replacements? Or did the wheat pinwheels cushion the glass jars when the sides of the wagon were down? Did the driver pack each jar carefully for safe transportation between exhibition stops? What went through his mind as he drove the wagon from place to place?

The agent, a recruiter must have had a map, a roster of speaking engagements, plans for the day. He may have read in the newspaper about a farm auction, a family being turned off their lease, with nowhere to turn—prospective settlers ripe for the picking. Or perhaps he knew of a prosperous farmer who might be persuaded to relocate his resources to capitalize on colonial land. Whatever the recruiter's plans, wherever he went, he spoke directly to people, often one on one. He presented the beautiful grains, the delicious produce, the promising seeds packed with potential that could be theirs. He showed them posters with images of bountiful fields and well-kempt houses. He gave them pamphlets with facts and numbers—and promises of future prosperity. The agent recruited people one by one, and he was paid by the head.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51} Harper, 4.
\textsuperscript{52} This description is my own from reading the archival photograph. I have estimated the size of the twelve-foot pinwheels by scaling the image.
\textsuperscript{53} Marjory Harper and Stephen Consantine, \textit{Migration and Empire} (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 297.
As I say, this recruitment strategy has always caught my heart. The vermilion-coloured wagons, echoing the British red that spanned the globe, recruited settlers to fill the map of Empire.\footnote{Among the many references to the use of red to symbolize the domination of Empire, the English poet G.K. Chesterton wrote:
"The earth is a place on which England is found,
And you find it however you twirl the globe round;
For the spots are all red and the rest is all grey,
And that is the meaning of Empire Day."
G.K. Chesterton, Songs of Education: II Geography, accessed June 29, 2015, http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/Songs_of_Education125.html.} Maybe my great-great uncle was recruited this way. Maybe not. Either way, exhibition wagons resonate with me as an artist. I have always recognized them as mobile, site-responsive performance installations. Looking carefully at the archival image, I can see that the jars of grains and seeds are arranged according to texture and colour; the pinwheels of wheat are handcrafted and compositionally arranged. These are aesthetic works performed responsively to site. They highlight the personal human connections in settler recruitment: settler colonists were made day by day and one at a time. This has led me to understand that settler colonialism must be undone the same way—aesthetically, site-responsively, day by day, and one person at a time.

Based on my response to exhibition wagons, I began to shape my performance piece Unsettling as part of my doctoral project work. I started working on this piece in 2011 and performed it for the first time at Fifth Parallel Gallery in Regina on May 17, 2015. I made significant changes and revisions to the piece over the four years, drafting and testing various designs and elements. The processes and development of this iteration, more than any other in my project work, demonstrate the cyclical and concurrent processes of material inquiry, writing, research, conceptual development, and problem solving that are central to my approach to research-creation.
My first conceptualization of this piece was to remake the exhibition wagon as a mobile, interactive, intermedia installation. I developed plans to create *Unsettling* as a portable curiosity cabinet, *le boîte mobile*, designed to move from site to site, to show in various public spaces. Moving the piece, setting it up and taking it down, would be a part of the exhibition, my performance specific to each site. Viewers would be invited to discover the piece's sound, video, photographs, film, maps and objects by actively investigating the boxes, cupboards and drawers. The site specificity of this version of the piece echoed the site specificity of settler recruitment, as the exhibition wagons travelled from site to site. My draft proposal sketches of this first version of *Unsettling* are included below (fig.12).

![Unsettling - closed](image1) ![Unsettling - open](image2)

*Figure 12. Barbara Meneley, Unsettling: proposal sketches #1, digital image, 2012.*

While I believe that it is important to keep creative processes open to all possibilities, I am very aware that it is also very important to work within what is possible. This version of *Unsettling*, while potentially beautiful, would be impractical to complete. The
materials would be expensive, the construction complex, and the transportation difficult. My research on the size and weight of this proposed piece indicated that I would need a specialized vehicle to move it from place to place. It seems as if those colonists knew what they were doing when they used a horse and wagon.

Before going ahead with *Unsettling* in that first configuration, it made the most sense for me to explore other options, to be clear on what would be necessary for successful resolution of this piece. My second conceptualization of *Unsettling* was to scale down, to interpret the exhibition wagon as a costume I would create to wear in my performance. I felt that this version would more strongly exercise the potential in one-on-one interaction and would have greater access to personal connections with viewers. It would also be considerably more portable and would be something that I would be able to make largely on my own.

My plan for this version of the piece was to create a vermillion-coloured costume with layers of garments, each layer with multiple pockets and various nooks and crannies. While I was wearing the costume, viewers would be invited to search through my clothing for various samples of colonial booty—or subversions thereof—including small video projections inside the costume. This intimate and personal performance, necessitating close physical interactions between the viewer, the source material, and the appropriator/subverter/maker/me, would echo the one-on-one connections between land agents and potential immigrants and appropriate the capital in the personal touch.

There is precedent for the use of costumes in colonial settler recruitment. In 1907, the Canadian Government agent in Exeter, England, costumed a woman for a parade to advertise Canadian prosperity (fig. 13).
It was briefly tempting to adopt and adapt a costume like this for my project. Mimicking the "Girl from Canada" would get me noticed. But wearing a costume that would be almost clown-like, I would run the risk of either alienating viewers or being too easily dismissed. Coming back to my goal of using creative work to disrupt the ongoing maintenance of settler colonialism, to open ongoing practices of settler colonialism to critical reflection, and to actively operate in strategies of reimagining and restorying, I
had to consider what kind of costume would infiltrate most effectively into contemporary sites. What kind of clothing is noticeable, powerful, and respected? What kind of clothing would both carry authority and allow me to get close to people? And what kind of costume would support me in all of those things in the specific site of my doctoral project work on the campus of Queen's University? Based on these considerations, I chose to create my costume for Unsettling by incorporating the power and gravity of contemporary business wear and making reference to both the vermillion-coloured exhibition wagons and connections to red in the symbolism of the Empire (fig. 14).

Figure 14. Barbara Meneley, Unsettling: proposal sketches #2, digital image, 2014.
Although I needed to make tests to know how the technology would operate in this context, my working plan was to project my sing-along video animation Leaf Forever within the costume. To explore options for shaping the costume to accommodate video projection, I developed a research relationship with David Holman, a PhD candidate in the School of Computing at Queen's University. I worked with David to explore possible miniature, portable, and accessible projection technologies. Together, we were able to identify specific equipment and a provisional design for this part of the costume. However, at the time, we were unable to find any equipment in Kingston to use in the necessary testing. To gain access to other sources of equipment and expertise, I made a proposal to conduct a Media Arts Residency at the Banff Centre in spring, 2013; unfortunately, Banff Centre was unable to offer a residency that would fit with my project scheduling, so I needed to explore other options. As Artist in Residence in Visual Arts at the University of Regina from 2014 to 2015, I was able to work with Creative Technologies professor Dr. Rebecca Caines to complete the necessary equipment testing.

From the beginning of developing Unsettling it had been my plan to incorporate media projection to make material and conceptual connections between Sifton's use of media (i.e. film and image projections) and contemporary new media (i.e., miniature, portable, and accessible projection technologies). However, as I worked through the other elements—costume, prop piece, choreography, and performance venue—the piece became more and more resolved. Once I had a chance to work directly with the projection equipment, quite far into my project work in September 2014, it became clear to me that including miniature projection in Unsettling was unnecessary, so I made the choice not to include it in this piece. Experimentation and revision of this sort is common
to most artists and is an important part of creative process. This is the back end, the work inside, the labour that is not easily seen in a finished piece—although it is there.

As I say, throughout this time I had also been actively developing other elements of the piece—specifically, the materials that might be contained in the costume for viewers to find. Because printed materials were central to colonial recruitment campaigns, I began considering how archival materials such as posters, flyers, and newspaper ads could be appropriated and subverted to operate in Unsettling. I also continued to consider the contents of the glass jars on exhibition wagons—produce and grains—and the ways these materials symbolize(d) the rewards of settlement and colonial occupation. And more specifically, I wanted to make reference to the importance of land as the central focus of settlement. To support that reference, I decided to incorporate soil samples into the composition and performance of Unsettling.

I set up a system for collecting soil samples based on comparisons between colonial settlement maps and contemporary maps of the prairies and to explore contemporary relationships to colonially settled land. I overlaid and cross-referenced colonial and contemporary maps to create a new map that shows contemporary places named and established in the colonial settlement of Assiniboia and that are currently still populated.\(^5\) I also compiled a list of these locations and developed a framework and system for collecting soil samples from each place to use in Unsettling. I collected many of the soil samples myself through 2014-2015 on various drives around the province, and

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\(^5\) The choice of Assiniboia—the territory that predates the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan—has personal resonance for me as it is where my family settled in the 1800s. Because I have done significant research on maps of Assiniboia, and it is the land on which I am currently situated—Treaty 4 territory in present-day southern Saskatchewan—I made the choice to work with Assiniboia.
if I knew someone who was going to be in a place that I knew I could not easily reach, I asked them to bring me back a bag or bags of dirt. In the end, I was able to collect samples from 145 sites on my map (fig. 15). Each sample is coded according to location, and each vial in the piece described below is also coded.56

Figure 15. Barbara Meneley, Assiniboia: 2014, digital map, 2014.

Echoing the glass jars used in colonial exhibition wagons, I decided to use small glass vials to contain my collected soil samples. I chose the size of the vials—based on availability and portability—2 1/2" long x 5/8” diameter; the small size also allowed me to work in greater multiples, reflecting the multiple sites located on the map. There are 160 soil samples included in Unsettling; as I discuss elsewhere in this text, the number

56 See Appendix for a coded list of sample sites. Although the lids of the vials in the prop piece are glued on, it is possible to identify the source location of each sample, as I have written the location code numbers on the inside of each lid.
refers to the 160-acre parcel of land that is central to the free-homestead system of prairie colonial settlement.

I then needed to solve the problem of how to incorporate 160 vials of soil into my costume and performance. I consulted with Cathy Mearns, a costume designer on faculty with the Theatre Department at the University of Regina, to explore options for developing my costume. Although we determined that it would definitely be possible to construct a costume that could contain 160 glass vials of soil, in the end it made best sense in the context of the work to find a way to show the soil samples all together. I had begun filling the glass vials with the soil samples and could see that showing the soil samples together would have visual impact and presence, as well as conceptual strength, so I decided to create a separate prop piece to hold the 160 vials of soil.

Again in reference to the vermilion-coloured wagons and to red in the symbolism of the British Empire, I decided to create a prop piece by attaching the vials of soil samples to a length of red stroud cloth. In addition to colour, red stroud cloth is appropriate to this piece for two reasons. First, its material properties—its weight and thickness—would provide a structure strong enough to support 160 glass vials of soil, while at the same time being flexible and pliable enough to support a range of movement and manipulation in my performance. Second, as an important trade material between Europeans and Indigenous people on this continent from the eighteenth century onwards, stroud cloth has conceptual relevance to my project.

After a series of studio workshops and rehearsals to determine the material and movement potential of the prop element, I developed the final design: a 14" x 14' length of red stroud, doubly thick, and bound at the edges with black piping. I worked with
Métis artist and curator Katherine Boyer to construct this part of the piece (fig. 16). This element of *Unsettling* also makes material and conceptual reference to historical contexts of diplomatic exchange and agreement represented by wampum belts, described by art historians Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips as "woven belts of shell wampum beads . . . made for diplomatic exchange during the early contact period in the Northeast and Great Lakes." As Berlo and Phillips explain, "[wampum belts] were given to outsiders and some remained in their communities, passed on from generation to generation along with their detailed meanings, in order to maintain a record of important diplomatic agreements." My prop piece is long and narrow, echoing the proportions of wampum belts. The glass vials of soil sewn onto my prop piece make reference to the beads used to create wampum belts; the beads were originally made from shell, then after European contact glass trade beads were used. The reflective quality of the glass vials echoes that of both shell and glass beads, and the composition of the 160 individual pieces to create a design resonates with the use of beads to create designs on wampum belts. Finally, there is resonance between the weight and movement of glass attached to cloth and that of beads woven into wampum belts—the soil-filled glass vials sewn together on my piece are heavy; as I manipulate the piece in performance, the vials move against one another and make sound. While the final design of my prop piece is a significant abstraction of the wampum belt, the material and conceptual elements, along with the diplomatic principles of connection, parallel coexistence, and cooperation actively resonate in *Unsettling* and are central to my project goals.

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57 In the time-honoured tradition of trading labour between artists, I drew a series of maps for Katherine for her to use in her own creative work.
Once the stroud piece was complete, I worked with it in my studio to attach the glass vials containing the soil samples (fig. 17). Because of my preliminary testing and rehearsals, I knew that one of my goals was to use the prop piece as actively as possible in my performance so I needed to be sure the soil samples were securely attached to the stroud. After some research on adhesives, I made the choice to both sew and glue the vials onto the stroud cloth (fig. 18).
Figure 17. Barbara Meneley, *Unsettling* prop piece, detail #1 in progress, 2015.

Figure 18. Barbara Meneley, *Unsettling* prop piece, detail #2 in progress, 2015.
As well as incorporating reference to the wampum in developing this prop piece, the design of the glass vials on the stroud also incorporates reference to colonial railways, both in plan as depicted on the colonial map of Assiniboia and in the abstracted representation of railway ties. It also, and this is something I discovered and developed through physical movement research in my studio rehearsals, makes reference to vertebrae and spine. This connection of the soil, the land itself, to the bones of my body, my settler body, exercises the self-reflexivity in my methodology and my approach to creative research. I make physical connections between land and bone to situate myself—my body, my presence here as a settler, settler descendent, and treaty person—in a contemporary settler colonial place. Mexican American artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña describes the performing body as "a tiny model for humankind . . . and at the same time a metaphor for the larger sociopolitical body." He continues: "If we are capable of establishing all these connections in front of an audience, hopefully others will recognize them in their own bodies."59 Gómez-Peña's word resonate for me in Unsettling, as I view my performing body as a conduit that literally and conceptually connects settled land to contemporary settler presence and as something that opens those connections to critical reflection.

During the time I had been working on the Unsettling prop piece, I had also been developing my costume for the performance. This required time and research because I found out quite easily that decent-quality women's business wear is not comfortably within the budget of a doctoral creative researcher. I was fortunate to find something

appropriate within my budget that could be altered to suit my needs for the performance—a red wool dress and jacket set.

From the beginning, my plan for this piece was to perform it site-responsively, at Queen's University in Kingston as part of my doctoral defense in 2015. While the exact site for this performance is to be determined, I have always envisioned it taking place in the foyer of Queen's Stauffer library. The concrete architecture in this open interior space makes physical and conceptual connections with two of main elements in *Unsettling*, land and soil. The Stauffer library is also a busy public space, which will maximize the potential for viewership. In order to have documentation of the performance to include in this text, as well as to extend dissemination of this work beyond the site of Queen's, I made a successful proposal to the Fifth Parallel Gallery in Regina to perform the piece in May 2015. I chose this site specifically because the interior concrete space of the gallery echoes my planned performance site at Queen's.

In the weeks leading up to the Regina performance, I developed the choreography and rehearsed the piece in the dance studio at the University of Regina Theatre Department.\(^6\) For this kind of process—especially in a piece where the choreographer is the performer—it is vital to work in a dance studio with a mirror so that the work can be recorded and workshopped (fig. 19).

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\(^6\) The going rate for dance studio rental is $35/hour, so I am grateful for the support of Dr. Kathleen Irwin and the University of Regina Theatre Department for allowing me to work in their dance studio free of charge.
I developed the performance elements of *Unsettling* by working back and forth between physical exploration with the prop piece and reviewing the video footage of my studio work. The completed composition runs between twelve to fifteen minutes in performance, and the choreography is comprised of twenty-four steps.

1. I enter the performance space, in costume and carrying a suitcase containing my prop piece.
2. I walk through the space, silently greeting the viewers. *Unsettling* is performed 'in the round,' which means that the audience surrounds the performance space.
3. Moving around the perimeter of the space, I place twelve vials of soil on the floor at regular intervals. My goal is to contain the audience within the perimeter I have set with the vials (fig. 20).
4. I come inside the perimeter and set down the suitcase. I remove my coat, put it on the floor, and sit on my knees beside the suitcase.
5. I open the suitcase, remove the rolled-up prop piece and hold it briefly in my arms.
6. I place the prop piece on the floor and begin to unroll it, following it along the floor on my hands and knees. As I unroll the prop piece, I caress both the fabric and the vials with my hands (fig. 21).

7. Once the prop piece is completely unrolled to its length of fourteen feet, I get up and walk back along it, measuring it with my feet.

8. Back at the starting end, I get down to the floor and measure the piece again, this time moving my body along the floor like an inchworm.

9. After reaching the end of the prop piece, I rest on my knees on the floor. I move my hands along the line of the vials and up onto my body along my spine to my head. I repeat this action several times.

10. Still on my knees on the floor, I lift the end of the prop piece up over my head and hold it there for a moment, with the vials facing outward (fig. 22).

11. I bring the cloth over my left shoulder, with the end on my heart. I stand up as I hold the cloth in place with my left hand.

12. Dragging the prop piece, I walk around the perimeter of the space inside the vials I have placed but, ideally, on the outside of the viewers. I make a full circle of the space.

13. I drag the prop piece back into the centre of the space and lay it on the floor, placing one end of the piece beside the open suitcase.

14. On my hands and knees, I crawl the length of the prop piece, being careful to touch only the cloth. I do this slowly (fig. 23).

15. Upon reaching the end, I move my hand beyond the cloth and suspend it for a long moment before I lay my hand on the floor.

16. Allowing that hand to guide me, I begin to crawl along the floor on my hands and knees, dragging the prop piece with my other hand along the floor behind me as I move. The quality of my movement shows this as a demanding task. I pull the cloth several times, showing increasing difficulty.

17. I stop. Still on the floor, I sit on my knees and turn to face the prop piece. I pull the end of the cloth up on my knees, and rest both of my hands palms upwards on the cloth.

18. I breathe deeply, while moving my gaze slowly along the vials, one by one, from the furthest to nearest.

19. When my gaze reaches vial closest to me, I place my left hand on my heart and hold for a moment (fig. 24).

20. I slowly begin to roll up the prop piece, following it as I roll, stretching my body out to lie face down on the floor.

21. Keeping my hands on the cloth, I get to my feet. Bending from the waist, I continue to roll up the cloth along the floor.
22. When the prop piece is completely rolled up, I pick it up into my arms. I hold it like a child or a lover, taking time with that.

23. I move back beside the open suitcase, and still holding the rolled-up prop piece, I sit down on my knees. I rock gently three times, take a long breath, and then place the prop piece back into the suitcase.

24. I close and fasten the suitcase, pick it and my coat up, and leave the performance space.

My first performance of Unsettling was on May 17, 2015 at the Fifth Parallel Gallery in Regina (figs. 20-24). I performed for an invited audience of about fifteen people and was pleased and honoured to receive excellent feedback on the piece. It was extremely helpful to both perform the work and to have a post-performance discussion with viewers. And as is always the case, performing the piece in front of a live audience revealed elements of the work that I had not already known, and could not know in the same way on my own.

Something I discovered in the performance was how I could work with the physical proximity between myself and the viewers. As I moved around the performance space, first placing the vials of soil and then dragging the prop piece, my intent was to encircle the viewers, to physically and symbolically place all of us within the boundaries of colonized land. However, as is so often the case, it is hard to count on a viewer behaving in a particular way. I found that I had to get very close to people to move them, and that after I passed by, they moved back outside the boundaries of the vials.

Consequently, I took this as an opportunity to get even closer to the viewers on my second pass around the room, to touch each person with my body or the prop piece as I moved past. My decision in the moment of performance was that if I could not encircle the viewers with the soil samples, I could at least connect each person through close proximity and/or physical touch.
Figure 20. Barbara Meneley, *Unsettling*, Fifth Parallel Gallery, 2015; photo: Risa Horowitz.

Figure 21. Barbara Meneley, *Unsettling*, Fifth Parallel Gallery, 2015; photo: Larisa Tardiff
Figure 22. Barbara Meneley, *Unsettling*, Fifth Parallel Gallery, 2015; photo: Risa Horowitz.

Figure 23. Barbara Meneley, *Unsettling*, Fifth Parallel Gallery, 2015; photo: Larisa Tardiff.
In the interest of maximizing the potential of *Unsettling*, my ongoing engagement with this project includes developing more opportunities to perform this work as well as disseminating documentation of my performances. With any performance, or in fact with artwork of any kind, there is always an experiential difference between live performance/viewership and disseminating/viewing documentation. There is substance in live experience, a presence in performance, as suggested by archeologist Michael Shanks and performance theorists Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye:

[Live performance] not only invites consideration of individual experience, perception and consciousness, but also directs attention outside the self into the social and the spatial, toward the enactment of 'co-presence' as well as perceptions and habitations of place. Presence implies temporality, too—
a fulcrum of presence is tense and the relationship between past and present.\textsuperscript{61}

In addition to temporal presence, both in the immediacy of experience and in individual connections to past as well as future moments, there is also a site of experience that contains clear communication between viewers and the performer(s). As I discuss earlier in reference to my practices of research creation, acts of viewership are necessary elements in creative works. Viewership is unquestionably present in my live performances of \textit{Unsettling}.

While viewership is less immediate when a performance is viewed as documentation, there is still significant potential for resonance and resolution. Experiencing a work through documentation offers "articulations of presence through mechanisms of trace and remainder invested in performance itself, where the ephemerality of the event, and its claim to the present tense, finds paradoxical relationships with signs of distance, absence, and the past."\textsuperscript{62} In fact, viewing documentation offers experience(s) that live viewership does not. As I know through the context of viewing the source material for \textit{Unsettling}—the archival photographs of exhibition wagons—the experience of viewership through documentation can open a range of possibilities. In the case of my performance of \textit{Unsettling}, I have chosen and arranged—\textit{curated}—all of the documentation that I present; in this way, I extend my presence as a maker. I can also discuss the work through text in ways that I cannot in a performance situation. The acts of viewership that were present in the original

\textsuperscript{62} Giannachi, Kaye, and Shanks, 195.
performance—the necessary elements in creative production—become embedded in the work, as the documentation contains both my performance and the audience's presence. Disseminating *Unsettling* through documentation as well as live performance offers much wider potential for viewership—the images and video I produce can travel digitally and virtually beyond my physical reach as a performer. In addition to performing *Unsettling* as part of my doctoral project work at Queen's, I will continue to develop more opportunities to present this work through both documentation and live performance.
A Complicated Hole

A Complicated Hole is a durational performance in which I dig into the prairie for as long as I can. The performance takes place on non-native prairie land: that is, a place that has been settled and claimed. The performance site in southwestern Saskatchewan is on a 160-acre parcel of land originally granted to colonial settlers in the early twentieth century. I performed and documented this piece on a hot and windy day in July 2014 (figs. 25, 26, 27, 28). My goal was to dig down to what the Queen owns: the land below the surface that, in Canada, is the property of the Crown.

Of all the inquiries I have developed with this project, A Complicated Hole is, so far, the most open ended. This iteration has been prompted largely by instinct—I have definitely followed my nose on this one, acting on my impulse to dig a hole. Although it is firmly situated in the context of my doctoral project work, it differs from my other project engagements in that it does not directly reflect or echo any of the immigration advertising strategies that I have been in the process of appropriating and subverting. Rather, A Complicated Hole connects to self-reflexivity in practice-based work. With this piece, I aim to visualize, to make real, to enact, and to experience the heart of my project. With this work, I am digging into what it means to be a settler in this place at this time.

By digging into a parcel of land that was granted to settlers as part of the Canadian government's drive to populate the prairies, I connect to the original colonial settlers, self-reflexively as a contemporary settler, settler descendent, and treaty person, digging into the foundations of national imaginaries. I trace back to the actions of the first settler, breaking the prairie to cultivate the land: I stand in the same place and excavate the same ground. I connect the enormity of the settler's task of breaking that ground to
my own task of disrupting the reproductive practices of settler colonialism. However, unlike that first settler, I fill in the hole I have made, leaving the land as close as possible to the state it was in when I began my action. The site shows both the marks of my intervention and my labour in working to restore the land, expressing my critical engagement with founding myths and the production of artworks that displace the cultural performance of settler colonialism to participate in reimagining and restorying contemporary settled sites.

Figure 25. Barbara Meneley, A Complicated Hole, Cherry Lake Saskatchewan, 2014; photo: Larisa Tardiff.
Figure 26. Barbara Meneley, *A Complicated Hole*, Cherry Lake Saskatchewan, 2014; photo: Larisa Tardiff.

Figure 27. Barbara Meneley, *A Complicated Hole*, Cherry Lake Saskatchewan, 2014; photo: Larisa Tardiff.
I discovered a couple of interesting things in the process of making this piece. First, most landowners are not comfortable having someone come onto their land and dig a hole. It took me over two years to find a prairie landowner who would agree to this project. This was surprising to me, as I have strong connections to several landowners: I frequently conduct projects in rural areas and have good working relationships with a number of people in small and rural communities. But for almost everyone I approached, having me dig a hole on their land was a no go. In the end, I was able to make arrangements with a group of families who collectively own a parcel of land at Cherry Lake, outside the town of Indian Head in southern Saskatchewan. However, they were very careful to make sure that they understood what I proposed to do and why, and they requested a formal proposal (Appendix A). My proposal involved both digging and filling in the hole; leaving the site as close as possible to the state in which I had found it.
Why was it so difficult to find a landowner to agree to this project? This question offers insight into the importance, the resonance, of land as capital, both real and symbolic.

A second thing that became very clear to me is just how difficult it is to dig a hole in the prairie. Under hot sun in desiccating wind, it is hard, grimy, grisly work. And this revelation, more than anything else, drove home to me the power of land. I worked hard for as long as I could and only managed to get down about three feet. Whatever else I have taken from this piece so far, I am dead certain I that would never like to dig a grave.

The hard grinding labour of working physically to dig, to intervene, and to shift the soil resonates with my labour of digging into maps in my cartographic series Unmapping Assiniboia. I connect my work in both of these iterations to durational performance art, which I define as a performative engagement over a sustained period. In this, I reference performance artists such as Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci, who perform the physical process of making art independent of any interaction with audience.63 Additionally for me, in both Unmapping Assiniboia, as I describe below, and A Complicated Hole, the demanding physical work of excavating, sometimes seemingly pointless and at best showing minimal progress, symbolizes my labour as a participant in decolonization, in anti-colonial work—or what I have come to know as conciliation.

My next step for A Complicated Hole will be to edit the video footage. At this point, my aim is to work towards a video piece that runs in real time: that is, the entire length of time I was digging, approximately three hours. Ideally, this would be screened as an ambient piece, playing somewhere in the background of other things going on.

However, as has been my experience with this piece so far, I can't say for sure where it is heading. But I do know it is going somewhere.
Unmapping Assiniboia

Looking out my eighth-floor apartment window in Regina, I can see beyond the edge of the city to flat prairie. From the roof of my apartment building in Regina, the view extends as far as the flat prairie on all sides, even as far as the fracking fields one town over in Pense. To the south of my building, I can see Wascana Park, a human-made park and lake created in 1911, mostly to give this city...well, something. Before that, Regina was just a woeful, windy stop on the rail line beside a sometimes creek; it was marked at this spot on the map because of the Canadian Pacific Railway and some shady land dealings by the Lieutenant-Governor of the Northwest Territories. Before the Europeans came here, this was never a place where people stayed. Regina is a planned city, a place on the straight rail line mapped by people who imposed their priorities and their imaginaries on this site. This city exists in this place because of colonial mapping.

It is difficult to overestimate the power of maps as visual tools, as necessary collaborators in colonial claiming. Maps, as Sumathi Ramaswami describes, "frequently preceded the messy fact of empire, as maps were first used to claim lands and resources on parchment and paper for European powers well before they were effectively occupied by colonizing bodies and presences." As beachheads of claiming, maps impose the colonial imaginary—straight lines on land where the only previous line had been the flat prairie horizon. As Ramaswami describes, mapping is central to the conceptualization, implementation, and development of colonial sites:

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64. Edgar Dewdney, first Indian Commissioner for the Northwest Territories and subsequently Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories.
65. Ramaswamy, 33.
The visual regime of colonization . . . is the triangulation of three processes . . . "calibration," "obliteration," and "symbolization" or aestheticization." Through such processes, land was measured, mapped, and "ordered"; the natives rendered invisible; and the whole then incorporated into the very English idiom of "the picturesque," which was then deployed back in the metropole in pretty pictures used to persuade white settlers to move out to distant places.67

Calibration brings the mapped land into global systems of measurement, and in so doing renders it all the same in the web of Empire—the North American prairie is taken up into the same system as the African Rift Valley and the Indian subcontinent. These systems of measurement have very little to do with the actual places being mapped because they disregard everything from animal migration to the rhythms of land and seasons to existing human presence. The land becomes terra nullius. Translated into beautiful drawings rendered in soft pastels, the measured land becomes "Free Farms for the Million." And most especially after Confederation in 1867, prairie settlement, along with the completion of the transcontinental railroad, was considered by the Canadian government and Canadian nationalists to be unifying elements vital to the federation.68

The power of maps and their potency in shaping, presenting, and promoting colonial imaginaries as fact offers numerous points of entry for creative research and intervention. A significant element of my doctoral project involves working with the maps—which I identify as 'land catalogues'—that were produced and distributed through settler-recruitment campaigns engineered by Canada's Department of the Interior. I operate from the perspective that these maps, designed and published in Canada and distributed abroad, were carried back to this country by settlers. These maps are artifacts,

67. Ramaswamy, 35.
physical objects that can be understood as containing and transmitting their own histories: "artifacts with a fascinating history in their own right." 69

With this iteration, physical engagement is my key methodology. I begin by researching and sourcing archival maps, then work directly with and from these artifacts, variously scanning, photographing, drawing, and retracing them. 70 After reproducing the settlement maps, I intervene with the cartographic information they contain. With some iterations I work to erase the colonial traces, physically digging out the surveyed borders, the grid, the railways, and the place names. In other most recent cycles of this work, I abstract the original cartography to create new works that offer alternate fictions of land. These creative processes operate through direct physical, material, and conceptual interruption; they appropriate and subvert colonial claiming to reframe and restory cartography.

Working with these maps is important. But my methodology, or more appropriately my process, is not simply about mapping; it is about mapping as creative engagement. This is an important distinction. In this engagement it is vital to outline the difference between drawing maps as an artist and drawing maps as a cartographer. I know something about the difference—cartography was my day job for twenty years. As a cartographer, I was tasked with communicating visual information, synthesizing a variety of source materials to visually support the communication of a specific idea. Someone decides how some place should be represented and the cartographer makes it

70. So far, I have worked with directly with archival sources at Queen's University's Stauffer Map Library and Lorne Pierce Archives and with the University of Saskatchewan Archives and Special Collections.
so. Of course, mapmaking is based on necessary fictions. "To portray meaningful relationships for a complex, three-dimensional world on a flat sheet of paper . . . a map must distort reality." Cartographers and map readers agree that a single line represents a river, a slightly thicker line represents a rushing river, a dashed line indicates where a homeowner can build a fence or even signifies the point at which invasion can begin. And even though cartographic lines can be at the heart of immense disputes, everyone can still agree to the distortion of reality presented by a map.

Sometimes fictions become incorporated into maps simply through happenstance. As a mining-industry cartographer in the late 1970s, I was working with a geologist to build a base map for an exploration property in Alberta. Compiled using information from the Geological Survey of Canada along with various collected field data, base maps form the constant visual ground by which all other property data is presented and interpreted: Base maps are understood as fact. Pulling together the information from these various sources, I ran across an unnamed lake. Because the geologist I was working with had walked that ground, I checked with him to see if he knew the name. He told me it was Bob Lake, so I inked that onto the base map. A little while later, I came across another unnamed lake and checked with him again. Coincidentally, that was also named Bob Lake. It wasn't until I inked in the second name, and to be honest perhaps one or two more, that I finally clued into the fact that the geologist, Bob, was having a go at me. We all had a good laugh—well mostly Bob did. But I never erased those names from that map. There are still several lakes named 'Bob,' and that is a fact.

Whereas cartography works through the suspension of disbelief to create an end product that can be agreed to as fact, my creative engagement with colonial immigration cartography operates through *processes* of making to shape research and discovery. Although my research is firmly situated within my expertise as a cartographer, these creative engagements extend my understanding of the material. By re-arranging the process of mapmaking to explore its constituent elements, I engage with the material in ways I never did and probably never could have as a cartographer. These investigations reveal the many nuances of how cartography is/was used to support colonial agendas and ideologies and to build national imaginaries. Perhaps more importantly, these investigations reveal how intervening with that material offers opportunities for restorying. I'll give some examples.

As I said, one of the ways I approach this work is to begin by physically tracing archival maps. Up until very recently, this is how most maps were made—as hand-drawn copies and compilations of existing information. And while on one level it could be assumed that part of the cartographer's skill lies in her/his ability to make exact copies, the truth is that every single trace is a translation: something changes every time. The close and careful visual and haptic examinations I make by tracing reveal the hand of the original cartographers, and I know that these original maps are also translations. There are things that I can learn only by tracing these maps and by doing that with openness and intention of discovery. I can sense the pressure of someone's hand as I trace a thinning contour, feel the original maker's motion as I imitate a quick hook at the end of a line. By catching the human hand of the original maker, I am empowered. I know that individuals
made these cartographic fictions and that I, as an individual, can participate in changing them.

As Sherene Razack describes, "Just as mapping colonized lands enabled Europeans to imagine and legally claim that they had discovered and therefore owned the lands of the 'New World,' unmapping is intended to undermine the idea of white settler innocence . . . and to uncover the ideologies and practices of conquest and domination." 72

In my cartographic series *Unmapping Assiniboia*, I build literally on Razack's concept, working from the archival maps I trace to make new cartographic pieces that show only what remains when the colonial marks are removed. In this series, I erase the colonial cartography, digging out the grid, the names, and the railways. This is a process, a symbolic action, a ritual of undoing. My pieces show the scars, the detritus of removal, but they offer an alternate imaginary, a decolonized land. My cartographic processes of erasure and excavation resonate with my digging action in *A Complicated Hole*. In *Unmapping Assiniboia*, my excavations of colonial cartography express my critical engagement with founding myths to participate in reimagining and restorying contemporary settled sites.

One collection of pieces in this series is called *Without Grid*. These works focus on the Dominion Land Survey, the grid system that parcelled the expanse of prairie land, dividing "200 million acres of land into 1.25 million homestead-sized quarter sections." 73

In theory, each parcel is the same as the next—the only difference is how it is numbered. This is an angular regime (fig. 29).

73. LaDow, 18.
The grid works for nearly everyone—as I discuss, it is a perfect ploy, simultaneously asserting concepts of *terra nullius* that are central to taking the land and facilitating systems of settlement that are in lock step with global structures of power and control. Anything that does not fit within the frame of the grid does not exist. The imposition of the grid is an ideal system of claiming and control.

What happens when the frame is disrupted? Obviously, removing the grid alone cannot remove the frame—these cartographic representations of land correspond to the
global systems that are deeply rooted in contemporary conceptions of place. Love it or hate it, the grid is in us all. But this intimacy, this inside conception and connection, opens to sites for intervention/subversion. The ways and places the grid lives within me are where I begin to intervene. In this series I work from a 1901 map of Assiniboia (fig. 30). As I discuss in my section on Unsettling, I have strong connections to this territory. Assiniboia is where my family settled in the 1800s and it is where I currently live—Treaty 4 territory in present day southern Saskatchewan.

Something that stands out in a close examination of the grid is that the system of "quadrilateral Townships containing thirty-six sections of one mile square in each" almost constantly conflicts with the shape of our round planet (fig. 31). This map shows the struggle as the grid strives to contain the curve of the earth. Awkward triangular parcels and necessary correction lines huddle together, almost shamefully, squeezed into place along lines of longitude and latitude.

Figure 31. Detail of "Assiniboia, NWT" showing grid corrections.

Working with these maps, I consider the tensions between the grid and the shapes of the land. I begin each piece by making an ink tracing of the grid from an archival map. In my

74. LaDow, 16.
drawing angles masquerading as straight lines. The lines are straight, but every few centimeters I have to adjust my line. Tracing this grid involves constant shifting, constant adjustment. With every shift, the distance between the imposed grid and the true curve of the land becomes more evident. In drawing, it is possible to understand—to feel—the difference, the gap, between the land and the illusion of the grid.75

Once I have drawn a grid map I overlay it with a sheet of thick, white, watercolour paper and following my grid lines, I punch small, individual holes in the white paper with a handmade awl (fig. 32). The ghosts of the grid are what transfer to the white paper, creating a new map with the small holes that clearly show my human hand in each excavation.76 With this marking, I have chosen to show each excavation emerging from, rather than going down into the paper. This allows me to show the detritus around each individual hole I make, which implies that the land itself is expelling the grid.

75. My studio notes, November 8, 2014.
76. An original of Without Grid is included in this text.
As I do this work I see and feel how much grid there is to excavate and erase. I write in my studio notes that "starting out, the enormity of the task of digging and excavating is clear. Did people in the past look at this great expanse of land and think the same thing about getting it settled?"77 Did the nineteenth-century surveyors, hunkered down through monstrous prairie storms, fear that they would never get the grid onto the land? Did colonial bureaucrats and politicians contemplate the vast expanse of unsettled land and despair?

My symbolic removal of the colonial tracks is slow and painstaking work. It is tough to pierce the thick watercolour paper, one hole at a time—and it hurts. Each small

77. My studio notes, October 14, 2014.
piece, like the one included in this book takes several hours to complete, and I am not physically able to make more than one each day. In this kind of work, I connect to durational performance art that challenges the "culturally determined and disciplined body." Here in this place, as a settler, settler descendant and treaty person my "culturally determined" body contains the grid, and that is what I challenge through symbolic processes of unmapping, as I shape rituals of undoing.

One issue that has come up for me in the process of erasing the grid is whether or not to erase the boundaries of reserve lands, the small parcels of land allocated by the Canadian government for Aboriginal communities within the colonial grid system. In the prairie colonial maps with which I have so far been working, there are very few interruptions to the grid: just the Métis settlements around the Red River, and the reserve lands themselves. In the self-reflexive process of conducting this work as a settler, settler descendant, and treaty person, I can understand the act of intervening to remove the settlement grid; however, I am much less certain about what it means for me to remove reserve boundaries. I presented this question for discussion in a workshop I co-presented with Mimi Gellman, "Indigenous/Settler Engagement: Dialogues on Writing the Land," at the Symposium on Decolonial Aesthetics from the Americas at University of Toronto in October 2013 (fig. 33). The focus of our workshop was to engage participation in shaping alternative cartographies and to explore how collaborative relationships to land might contribute to decolonizing settler imaginaries.


By all accounts, the workshop was engaging and productive for the participants; however, our discussions on the question I posed were inconclusive. Based on those discussions and on similar discussions with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colleagues in my wider community, I made the choice to interrupt the grid but not to remove the reserve boundaries in my *Without Grid* series (fig. 34). However, my choice whether or not to erase the colonially imposed boundaries of reserve lands remains an open question as I continue to expand my iterations of this body of work.
Another way I shape rituals of undoing in *Unmapping Assiniboia* is in the series *Without Words*. With these pieces, I continue to engage through methods of redrawing and excavation, this time working with colonial claiming through naming. Terry Smith writes: "[T]he visual regimes of colonization practices in settler colonies . . . [is] a structure consisting of three components—practices of calibration, obliteration, and symbolization." Calibration is evident through the surveying and imposing of the grid. Naming and renaming land and its places is an effective strategy in both symbolization and obliteration. The symbolization of settler imaginaries is clear in the place names on the 1901 settlement map of Assiniboia—Belle Plaine, Gainsborough, Hazel Cliffe, New

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80. An original of *Without Words* is included in this text.
81. Terry Smith, 268.
Finland, and Cannington Manor.

In *Without Words*, I begin by digitally extracting the place names from the 1901 settlement map of Assiniboia (fig. 30). As I work with the names on the archival map, I consider how text takes precedence over the representation of topography in cartographic form—that is, the name given to a place is shown in front of the lines describing its physical shape (fig. 35). This is something I know very well from my work as a cartographer; it is a technical tactic in visual communication that facilitates the reading of a map. However, considering this convention in the context of creative research, it is clear that there is a privileging of some kinds of information over others; in this case, the colonial naming takes precedence over geographical representation. The act of mapping, of translating the reality of land into two-dimensional and readable information, is based on necessary obliterations.

Once I have digitally extracted the place names, I magnify the words and recompose them within the boundaries of Assiniboia. I then trace the place names by hand and in ink (fig. 36). As I trace the names, I pick up the gestures of the original mapmaker; I see and feel the variations in line and each letter's height; I notice the incorrect accent on the word "coulee."

Figure 36. Barbara Meneley, *Unmapping Assiniboia: Without Words*, bookworks, studio in-progress detail, 2014

As in *Without Grid*, once I have drawn these new works, I overlay them with thick watercolour paper and cut out the names by hand, letter by letter to create new cartographic works that show an imagined representation of the land freed from colonial naming (fig. 37). By tracing these names I make my own translations; and by recomposing the maps, I appropriate these names and shift their meaning. By cutting out
each letter by hand, I incorporate an additional layer of translation. I increasingly appropriate, subvert, and abstract with each layer of translation. Again, this is physical and painstaking work. This process of "unnaming" is slow and offers time for thought and reflection. I think about the labour in mapmaking and the labour in critically engaging with founding myths to unmap. I connect this to the labour of creating artworks that exist in cultural space to displace the ongoing performance of settler colonialism, and to participate in reimagining and restorying contemporary settled sites.

Figure 37. Barbara Meneley, *Unmapping Assiniboia: Without Words & Without Grid*, bookworks, studio in-progress detail, 2014.

While the in-progress images included in this text are part of the bookwork pieces that are included as original works in this book, as part of my doctoral project work I
have also completed a series of *Unmapping Assiniboia* for gallery exhibition. These larger, framed works were completed in 2014 and include *Without Grid*, *Without Rails*, and *Without Words* (fig. 38). As in *Without Words* and *Without Grid*, *Without Rails* contains excavation; in this piece I excavate the railways from the 1901 map of Assiniboia. My process in making *Without Rails* was to draw the railways in thick black lines, then cut them out of several layers of heavy, watercolour paper. The lines of the railways are still connected to the map, in some places, but in other places can be seen falling away from the map. Again, my piece shows the scars of removal, but offers an alternate imaginary, a decolonized land (fig. 39). These iterations of *Without Words*, *Without Rails*, and *Without Grid* were first shown at Plain Red Gallery in the Indian Fine Arts Faculty Show at Nations University of Canada in Regina, March 4 to April 11, 2014 (fig. 40). I will continue to develop more opportunities to present this work in gallery exhibitions.
Figure 38. Barbara Meneley, *Unmapping Assiniboia: Without Words*, arches paper, 20" x 29" framed, 2014.

Figure 40. Barbara Meneley, *Unmapping Assiniboia: Without Words, Without Rails, Without Grid*, arches paper, each 20" x 29" framed, Plain Red Gallery, 2014.
Unsettling the Last Best West

As Canada's Minister of the Interior, one of Clifford Sifton's particularly effective settler-recruitment tactics was to sponsor an essay-writing contest for British school children, based on the *Canadian Atlas: For Use in Schools*. This was a popular contest: there were 90,000 participants in 1900-01.82 "The best essayist from each school would be awarded a specially minted bronze medallion, and the grand-prize winner would receive assisted passage for his or her family to Canada and a free homestead."83 I have a particular attraction to this complex strategy, which operates simultaneously in a number of complementary and interconnected ways—through the books, their free distribution to British school children, their subsequent infiltration into family homes, and the dissemination of colonial propaganda through the essay-writing contest. This sophisticated strategy presents many points of entry. My preliminary proposal for this part of my project included designing and distributing print materials, composing interactive online exhibitions, and designing a viewer-response project. However, in order to know the best way or ways to approach this part of my project, I needed to get my hands on a *Canadian Atlas*.

Although I had found images of the *Canadian Atlas* online, I needed to see one in person, to be with it physically to get a sense of how to approach working with it. Working with an original atlas was important for three reasons. First, because there is no other complete source of the *Canadian Atlas*’s full-colour map images. Second, I needed to engage with the materiality of one of these books, unmediated by photography;

83. Murray, 56.
regardless of all best intentions and practices, photography is a process of translation.\footnote{84} Finally, continuing with the premise that all of the primary research materials in my project exist as artifacts, the \textit{Atlas} is also a physical object that can be understood as containing and transmitting its own history. I had anticipated that I would need to travel to an archive to work with a \textit{Canadian Atlas} but was surprised and delighted when I was able to obtain an archival copy through Interlibrary Loan at the University of Regina.

When holding a \textit{Canadian Atlas}, it is immediately apparent that there are contradictions between its stated purpose as a children's book and its true purpose as a settler-recruitment tool. The \textit{Atlas} is small, a child-sized 6" x 7" and 32 pages. However, although this is a book that was distributed to children, the information it contains is geared to adults. This was a deliberate strategy to catch the interest of parents who might consider immigrating, by insinuating invitations to share the colonial bounty onto tables where there might not be enough food.\footnote{85} The photographic images contained in the \textit{Atlas} are similar and in some cases identical to those contained in other promotional brochures: well-dressed settlers gather leisurely on the groomed lawns of palatial homes; leafy trees shade a prairie road; a single cowboy herds glossy cattle so plentiful that they overflow the frame. This government publication is geared entirely towards settler recruitment. At the bottom of the Index on the first page one finds:

\begin{center}
ISSUED BY THE DIRECTION OF HONORABLE CLIFFORD SIFTON MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR, OTTAWA, CANADA.
\end{center}

\footnote{\textit{84}. Translation in photographic processes include compositional choices and colour settings, both in the photography and in the reproduction. \textit{85}. Murray, 57.}
The inside back cover of each atlas is headed:

"INFORMATION
As to the advantages offered by Western Canada can be had by
writing any of the following, and thus securing a set
of pamphlets issued by the government."\(^{87}\)

All of the names listed on this page are Canadian government immigration
representatives or their land agents in the United States or the United Kingdom.

The contrast between a book for children and a settler-recruitment strategy is
immediately evident. There is no textual introduction, no set up, no overt explanation of
the purpose of the book—it plunges straight into the language of facts, not sentences:

Industries of the country chiefly agricultural and pastoral. Chief agricultural
districts: Valleys of the Red, Athabasca, Saskatchewan, and Peace rivers, and
extensive areas in British Columbia and Eastern Canada. Area of occupied
land, 1891, 60,287,730 acres; improved, 28,537,242; under crop,
19,904,826; gardens and orchards, 464,462. Wheat produced, 1891, 42, 144,
779 bushels; oats, 82,515, 413; barley, 17, 148, 198; corn 10,675,886;
potatoes, 52,653,704; turnips, etc. 49,555,902; peas and beans, 15,514,836
; buckwheat, 4,886,122; hops, 1,126,230 pounds; tobacco, 4,277,986.\(^{88}\)

Almost impenetrably dense with statistics, each of the sixteen pages of text is faced with
a page showing a full-colour map. There is a distinct contrast between the density of the
text and the visual simplicity of the pastel-coloured maps. And while the text refers
exclusively to the Dominion of Canada, the Atlas includes maps of Belgium, Denmark,

\(^{86}\) Canada, Dept. of the Interior, *Atlas of Western Canada Showing Maps of the
Provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba,
British Columbia*. Ottawa, Can.: [s.n.] (1901), 1.

\(^{87}\) *Atlas of Western Canada*, 33.

\(^{88}\) *Atlas of Western Canada*, 2.
England, Europe, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, Wales, and the World. The strategy here is clear—to make visual and conceptual connections between preferred countries of origin and settlement opportunities in Canada.

The first map shown on page three of the *Atlas* is a Mercator projection world map (fig. 41).

![Mercator Projection World Map](image)

Figure 41. "World Map: Mercator Projection Atlas," *Atlas of Western Canada* (1901), 3.

Critiques of Mercator projections describe the bias inherent in this cartographic view, which depicts northern global features as disproportionally large, presenting "a distorted world view that diminish[es] the significance of tropical areas to the advantage of not
only Canada and Siberia, but Western Europe and the United States as well." The Atlas's representational privileging of northern lands is one way that visual relationships are made between Northern European countries and Canada. At a time when colonial governments, including Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, were competing for immigrants, the Mercator projection shows Canada at a distinct advantage. The world map shows latitude and longitude as well as major cities, but no countries are named or national borders indicated. Again, this is a clear strategic choice to make visual relationships between places on the map. The economy of representation in the Mercator projection promotes visual focus on the east/west lines of latitude. In effect, these lines act as direct connectors between cities in Europe and cities in the Dominion of Canada, thus highlighting the similarities in latitudes between Canadian and Northern European cities and making visual and conceptual relationships between the two continents.

This conceptualization of Canada as similar to Europe was central to the success of the colonial recruitment project as "it would be easier to attract prospective immigrants if the immense prairies were reduced to something not all that different from the comfortable landscapes people were being asked to leave behind." There are countless examples in immigration advertising of settlement lands being framed—fictitiously and fancifully—as similar to home countries, in images of prairie homesteads with expansive and gentile lawns, or in innumerable assurances that colonial lands are "close to home."


90. Discussing colonial settler recruitment in the United Kingdom, Marjory Harper describes the "competition from rival destinations. The government-funded free passages offered by Queensland [Australia] and New Zealand, and the pre-paid passages by which the majority of Irish emigrants reached the United States . . . " ("Enticing the Emigrant: Canadian Agents in Ireland and Scotland, c.1870 - c. 1920." Scottish Historical Review 83, 1, no. 215 [04, 2004], 49).

91. Jeffrey Murray, 51.
The connections between preferred countries of origin in Europe and land in Canada are further underlined in the Atlas through the use of colour. Comforting closeness is implied and underlined by use of a limited range of soft and soothing pastels: Ontario is the same colour as Denmark, Russia, and Sweden; New Brunswick, the Northwest Territories, and Assiniboia are the same colour as Germany.

As I mentioned, there are many points of entry for creative engagement with the Atlas and the way it operates as a settler-recruitment strategy. As a small book, the Atlas is portable, and at the same time it is an effective tool for settler recruitment and the dissemination of colonial ideologies—all together, the Atlas is a complex container. With this in mind, I chose to recraft the book as both an art object and a container for my doctoral project writing and documentation. Making my own books shapes creative engagement specific to the site of my project—as a series of art objects independent of any specific exhibition venues. Like the Canadian Atlas, the books I make are small and portable; like the Atlas, my books travel to the viewer.

The choice to make books as art objects as part of my doctoral project work connects to my methods or processes of creative problem solving, which, as I discuss elsewhere in this text, are central to my practice. In the context of my doctoral project work, one problem was how best to create artwork that would appropriately reflect my range of engagement with the source material and that would be accessible for viewing by my supervisor, committee members, and the external examiner. One option could have been to explore exhibition opportunities in or near the site of Queen's University in Kingston at a time near to when I might expect to defend. However, there are a lot of potential difficulties in such a plan: we don't know when my defense would fall, and
galleries schedule exhibitions years in advance; there are only a few potential exhibition venues in Kingston, and they would very likely be challenging to schedule; and because I have been conducting all of my project work in my Saskatchewan studio, shipping artworks to Kingston would be a significant expense. More important, in reflecting my source material—immigration advertising—I see much stronger conceptual connections to site-responsive artwork. Especially in recruitment strategies involving objects such as the *Atlas*, the seduction of settlers extended beyond public venues into private spaces; I wanted to echo that kind of infiltration in my project work. So instead of an exhibition, producing a series of books as part of my project work ticked a lot of boxes.

The next problem I needed to solve was to learn how to make books. I have never received any training in making books nor had I made books before I began this project. However, it is important to know that although I am a beginner *bookmaker*, I am not a beginner maker. By my rough calculations, I have logged at least 25,000 hours of studio time directly involved in material making. I know how materials work, I know how to learn about new materials and processes, and as I have mentioned, I am a problem solver.

So I set out to learn how to make books. I consulted with colleagues and printing professionals. I read books and journal articles. I consulted a number of instructional videos. And before I decided to commit to making books for this project, I spent many


93 Instructional videos consulted include: Sea Lemon, "How to Make a Text Block," *YouTube*, accessed July 14, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGQ5P8QVH5g; DamaskLove,
hours in my studio doing tests. I had specific ideas of how I wanted the books to look: to reflect my source material, they needed to be hard bound with cloth covers and not look handmade. I needed to know if I could make books to look like that, and if so, I needed to practice doing it—just as I practice performance to get it right. One thing I know from my experience of making is that everything looks better with practice. Once I had gone through all the advice, tips, testing, and tutorials, I made some test books (fig. 42). I consulted with experienced book artists and print professionals for suggestions and feedback. I have been practicing making these books, and know I can get them to do what I want.

I situate this iteration of my doctoral project work in the context of artists' books:
"books or book-like objects, over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high
degree of control, where the book is intended as a work of art itself." Each of the twenty
books in this handmade, limited edition is unique. While all the books have the same
number of pages and identical printed/written content, each also contains two original
cartographic artworks from my series *Unmapping Assiniboia*. Each cartographic artwork
shows my hand as maker, and each piece represents a unique physical and conceptual
translation of the source material.

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Books can be archival, and paper is still the most stable information media. On the other hand, as art objects, books can also be seen as kinetic works—works that can be held and manipulated by the viewer and that rely on motion to operate—for example, the turning of pages. While it is not necessary or necessarily appropriate to conceptually frame all books in this way, kinetic operation is an element to be explored and engaged when situating the book as a creative work. Working with a book as a kinetic art object, I consider the physical interaction of the viewer. Who is the viewer and how will that person see the book? Where will it be opened for the first time? How will the viewer hold the book and turn the pages? Obviously, any of this is impossible to know for sure, but consideration of these kinds of questions is a part of the work I do. As I discuss, consideration of viewer experience is an important element of my creative practice. In my approach to artmaking, not only is the interaction of viewership a requirement for an artwork to be complete, but I also incorporate chance outcomes for viewer interaction into the conceptualization, design, and operation of the artworks. In this approach to artmaking, the work is not immediately presented as complete, a done deal, fit only for viewing. Rather, the artist sets the field of play in the concept, design, and materiality of the work, inviting viewers to participate and trusting in the outcomes that result.


96. Chance outcomes in art incorporate the concept of indeterminacy, first established by John Cage and taken up by many artists across disciplines. "Indeterminacy created the preconditions for a work of art (or a performance) to be arranged by an artist without knowing exactly how it would turn out." (Jula Robinson, 'The Sculpture of Indeterminacy: Alison Knowles' Beans and Variations, in Chance, ed. Margaret Iversen [London and Cambridge, Mass: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2010], 103).
The context, or the "site," of a physical book as an art object offers opportunities for engaging with potential changes in material state. In the context of my project, the iteration of books as kinetic art objects questions and engages with the permanence/impermanence of text and, by extension, ways of experiencing the written word and the authority of the written word. As I say, each book in this series contains handmade cartographic artworks, as well as printed images and words. Each book also contains loose text, which cascades out, over, and around the viewer when the book is opened, especially for the first time (figs. 43, 44). This kinetic operation physically engages the viewer—the work is interactive and, as media theorist Ryszard Kluszczynski writes, shapes "an area of activity for the viewers, whose interactive actions bring to life an artwork-event . . . An interactive artwork finds its final formation only as a result of participative behaviour of the viewers."97 By opening the book, the viewer becomes a participant in her/his own unique interaction of experiencing—and in fact collaborating in making or at least in completing—the art object.

In his 1973 bookwork, Glue Gun, Keith Godard proposes similar viewer collaboration in resolving the work. "Two blobs of Dow Corning silicone adhesive on cover, and other pages glued together; it is requested that the intentionally glued together pages not be separated until this Book has its ultimate owner. Then if the owner wishes, torn designs can be created by pulling the pages apart, thus completing this Book's concept—note glued to title-page verso."98 With Glue Gun, Godard invites viewer collaboration on a number of levels: the viewer participates by acquiring the work, by

deciding whether or not to rip it open, and possibly by ripping the book open, completing Godard's concept. With the books I create for this project, there is no advance invitation—participation begins when the first person opens each book. This interaction expands experience of the text, both materially and conceptually because embodied involvement and site-responsive engagement offers the viewer opportunities to consider her/his own place in the context of the material.

Figure 43. Barbara Meneley, *Unsettling the Last Best West: Loose Text #1*, studio shot in progress, 2014.
Media and creative researchers Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuck write that "research creation may act as an innovative form of cultural analysis that troubles the book, the written essay, or the thesis, as the only valid means to express ideas, concepts and the results of experiments." My bookworks take up this proposition in two ways: materially, in their existence as books within the academy; and conceptually, in referencing—even appropriating—the book as a goal of production for "traditional" academic work. In these ways, my bookworks function as art objects specific to the site of creative production within the academy.

My bookworks incorporate multiple references to both my source material and my academic site of production. Like the *Atlas*, my books are hard, or case bound, with cloth covers. They are slightly larger than the *Atlas*—seven inches by eight inches—but their size is proportionate and designed to echo the portability of the *Atlas*. My books contain a total of 160 pages, in reference to the 160-acre parcel of land central to the free-homestead system of prairie colonial settlement.

My goal in the design and construction of the books is to mimic manufactured or machine-made books as closely as possible. My intention is to highlight the materiality of books, to interrogate the ways that while the writing that books contain may be valued, the value of books as objects may be under acknowledged in academic production. By striving to reproduce a book indistinguishable to many from those produced by machines, I assert my expertise in making and my agency as a maker. I appropriate the book as a container of knowledge and re-present it as an artists' book—an art object—and as a container for my doctoral project writing and documentation.

As I discuss, I create the books as artworks specific to the site of my doctoral project. This limited edition series consists of twenty books. One book has been gifted to my supervisor and each of my committee members, one to my external examiner, and one book to Queen's University. Most of the remaining books will be given to other people and organizations in my various communities who have supported my project through consultation and mentoring. As art objects, these books offer wide opportunities for dissemination, ongoing engagement, and discussion.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

One of the biggest challenges for me in this project has been to stop making the artwork long enough to write about it. I like writing. I see it as a necessary element in all of my creative work. As I describe in this text, writing is a generative process of reflection that focuses my inquiries and supports me to develop my creative work with insight, dimension, and coherence. But as this project has gone on, I find myself more and more defaulting to visual engagement with and expression of my ideas. For example, in the process of shaping a written visual analysis of the maps in the Canadian Atlas: For Use in Schools, I found that it made more sense to make a piece about it, so I started making But One Empire, a cartographic work that abstracts and recomposes all of the maps in the Canadian Atlas. Contending with the task of writing this paper, I made a short, stop-motion animation piece of me wrangling the pile of books I have been using for reference. These works are all now in progress and need to be completed. The more I write and research this project, the more ideas I have for creative engagement. Now I have to end my doctoral project so I can get on with resolving these creative works.

As I outlined in my introduction, this text is a story about my creative project work at this time. I have researched and developed five bodies of creative work: my animated video Leaf Forever, my performance Unsettling, my site-specific performance A Complicated Hole, my cartographic project Unmapping Assiniboia, and my kinetic bookworks Unsettling the Last Best West. My research has opened numerous lines of inquiry and creative engagements that are ongoing, shifting, and evolving, and that extend beyond my doctoral project. There are at least four more tracks I intend to follow. I plan to make a piece based on the archival film footage of the Canadian Wheat Arch in
Whitehall, London (fig. 4, 5).\(^{100}\) For the last two years, I have been collecting images for a series comparing contemporary prairie landscapes with utopian portrayals of the land in immigration advertising. And I have a great deal of unfinished work with mapping, a body of work I have begun to define as experimental cartography; this work is already well underway. My next project, *Unmapping the Last Best West*, will include a series of cartographic and video works based on and continuing from my doctoral work. I currently have two confirmed exhibitions for this work and have received funding from the Saskatchewan Arts Board to begin developing this project in September 2015.\(^{101}\)

As I describe, my doctoral project examines the foundations of national imaginaries and engages the potential for creative practice to disrupt the ongoing cultural performance of settler colonialism. My project opens reproductive practices of settler colonialism to critical reflection, recruits participation in decolonization, and actively participates in creating strategies of reimagining and restorying. I have appropriated and subverted the visual and disseminative strategies of early colonial Canadian immigration advertising to create contemporary artworks that operate through critical engagement with settler/national imaginaries. My creative projects are cultural works that exist in the same space as national/settler mythologies; they have the power and potential to displace the cultural performance of national imaginaries.

By advancing this work through practice-based research creation, I engage with processes of inquiry that are self-reflexive and generate dynamic fields of discursivity. I


conduct my work site-responsively as a settler, settler descendent, and treaty person in a contemporary settler-colonial site. My inquiries are intended to stimulate viewer resonance and create a zone of qualitative discourse. And they do. Through conference presentations, artist talks, exhibitions, and screenings, my doctoral research and my project works have so far been widely disseminated. My contemporary artworks exist in cultural spaces—they operate in the same sites as colonial imaginaries but offer alternate narratives. My project works open colonial imaginaries to creative critical reflection in public discourse with viewers.

In 2002, contemporary artist Francis Alýs gathered five hundred volunteers, provided them with shovels, and had them to form a line at the base of a sand dune outside Lima, Peru. Alýs writes that working together "this human comb pushed a certain quantity of sand a certain distance, thereby moving a 1600-foot-long sand dune about 4 inches from its original position."102 Developed in response to the social and political tensions in Peru that led up to the collapse of the Fujimori dictatorship, Alýs's *When Faith Moves Mountains* shapes public engagement in the site of public imaginaries. It "attempts to translate social tensions into narratives that in turn intervene in the imaginal landscape of a place. The action is meant to infiltrate the local history and mythology of Peruvian society . . . to insert another rumour into its narratives."103 *When Faith Moves Mountains* operates site responsively to model public engagement with what seems futile and impossible: to reimagine and restory.

103. Alýs, 39.
On some levels it might seem that working to intervene in the site of settler colonial imaginaries is futile and impossible. But if the maintenance of colonial imaginaries is dependent on ongoing cultural work performed through complex structures of material and relational engagement, then interrupting that cultural work, offering alternative actions and understanding, operates to intervene in colonial imaginaries. It can be tough to move a mountain. But this is the imagination that comes before practice. This imaginative restorying takes material shape in my practice-based doctoral project. And this work is ongoing.
References

Advertising for immigration to Canada. Photograph, 1905. Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN no. 3401984.


Rombout, Melissa K. and Ellen Scheinberg. "Projecting Images of the Nation: the Immigration Program and its use of Lantern Slides." Library and Archives Canada,


Appendix A: Video Shoot Site Proposal for A *Complicated Hole*

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**Digging:** video shoot site proposal - summer, 2014.

This proposal is for a site to make a video of myself digging a hole in non-native prairie. The size and shape of the hole will be what I, a middle-aged woman, will be able to dig on my own in a few hours. The video will be shot from a single perspective, ideally giving some indication that I am digging myself into the hole. I will fill in the hole at the end of our video shoot that day.

When:
- sometime in July, 2014
- (September, 2014 - or anytime before the snow this year is also possible)
- one day for a site visit, one day for shooting

Who:
- myself and one videographer

What:
- to dig a hole, by myself, with a single shovel and to video that action

Where:
- ideally, non-native prairie, someplace that has formerly been cultivated, but is no longer in cultivation
- a place where we can get a shot of me digging with no buildings in the background

Why:

This video - *Digging* - is part of my project-based PhD in Cultural Studies at Queen's University in Kingston. My project, *Unsettling the Last Best West*, examines how art was used in the promotion and dissemination of colonial ideologies and the recruitment of settlers to Canada in the early twentieth century. As a practicing intermedia artist working site responsively through media, installation, performance, and dialogic practice, I work to appropriate and subvert the images that contribute to colonial imaginaries. In this, my goal is to engage the potential of creative practice to activate strategies of reimagining and restorying.

www.barbarameneley.com
Appendix B: Assiniboia 1901/2011 Soil Sample Sites for *Unsettling*

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