Approaching Anxiety: Reading Eden Robinson in an Era of Reconciliation

By

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This project seeks to account for the ways in which Anglo-settler anxiety has influenced the construction of the mythos of a benevolent Canadian national identity. I argue that settler anxiety toward Indigeneity is the underlying affective condition of Canadian Anglo-settler society, and continues to inform contemporary reconciliation politics. My thesis proceeds by questioning the role that this collective feeling of anxiety has played in the construction of Canada’s reconciliatory politics. To what extent has this anxiety motivated Canada’s reconciliation project? How does the current structure of the reconciliation process alleviate this anxiety rather than confront it? My thesis will wager that the provocation of settler anxieties by Indigenous artists — and the mobilization of those anxieties in popular discourse—has the potential to reveal the inadequacies of dominant understandings of a teleological reconciliation project in Canada and thereby re-politicize the reconciliation process. Specifically, I look to Haisla writer Eden Robinson’s fiction to examine how Robinson’s novel *Monkey Beach* and her short story “Terminal Avenue” exemplify an alternative approach to Canada’s reconciliation project through their provocation and textual representations of settler anxiety.
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Introduction

My thesis is a navigation. It is an act of tracing, of following, of stepping back, of circulating. It is on the move. I seek to trace an affect that has, since its early theorizations, remained elusive yet ever-present. I look to disentangle anxiety from Western discourses of pathologization that undercut the colonial attitude informed by what Métis scholar David Garneau calls “an urge to penetrate, to traverse, to know” (“Imaginary Spaces” 29). What might the liberation of anxiety look like? And how might such liberation serve genuinely decolonizing objectives? For me, these questions arise out of a recognition of the affective work that Canada’s current politics of reconciliation requires of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. Currently, there is a disproportionate division of emotional labour that continues to characterize much of the work being done, as survivors – both intergenerational and those with lived experience of the Indian Residential School System – have taken up reconciliation’s call to speak to the enormous physical, emotional, and cultural harms both they and their families endured as a result of Canada’s unrelenting efforts to “kill the Indian inside the child” (TRC 131). Stó: lō scholar Dylan Robinson has noted the presence of a hierarchy of affect at the national Truth and Reconciliation events held from June 2010 to September of 2013, calling attention to the uneasiness with which emotions like anger and shame are acknowledged by settler Canadians, as some emotions are thought to be “productive” and “acceptable” ways to process grief, whereas others, what we might call the “negative affects”, are deemed unacceptable (“Intergenerational Sense” 53). Importantly, the affective responses being evaluated are almost always those of Indigenous participants -- some of whom might not have testified, yet nonetheless whose bodies have been subject to the surveillance apparatus of the state throughout these events. The ways in which the TRC events are structured have proved troubling for many critics of reconciliation. In
particular, Robinson has called the TRC’s Commissioners Sharing Panel a “compromised space” that attempts to regulate the emotive responses of its Indigenous participants by adhering to a confessional model of reconciliation (“Reconciliation Relations” 60). Through its privileging of testimonial suffering, Robinson continues, this model expects Indigenous survivors to “purge negative emotions in the service of moving toward a certain strand of reconciliation…. more commonly understood as forgiveness toward past wrongs” (61). Robinson’s comments highlight how reconciliation has been implemented in the advancement of a teleological narrative of Canadian society wherein Indigenous survivors’ ability to forgive (and, by extension, reconcile) is positioned as the next step toward Canada’s progressive future. Other critics of reconciliation note that the bureaucratic decision to maintain perpetrators’ anonymity throughout these proceedings results in a fundamental barrier to reconciliation’s progress as survivors are unable to directly confront those institutions and individuals that sanctioned the violent treatment of Indigenous children within the residential school system.

Consider Sara Ahmed’s work on national moods, wherein she posits that the national body becomes such through the injunction to feel (“Mood” 21), and that this injunction creates what she terms “affect aliens”: those whose affective responses have rendered them incompatible with the affects that have been nationally sanctioned and actively encouraged. In much the same way that Ahmed refers to multiculturalism as an example of a British injunction to love one’s nation by loving and thus promoting the nation’s multiculturalist values,¹ I consider how reconciliation functions as an injunction for settler society to feel what Taiaiake Alfred, along with many others, deem “white guilt” (“Restitution” 182). Other critics of reconciliation have denied altogether its ability to produce any form of feeling from Canadian settler society and instead call attention to the ways in which the TRC events encourage the performance of feeling
by its non-Indigenous participants through the promotion of “wound culture” and victimry, which once again emphasize Indigenous response rather than encourage affective participation from non-Indigenous actors (Robinson 44). Though Ahmed rightfully goes onto explore the political potential of these “affect aliens”, my work focuses not on the bodies of those rendered “alien” but rather on the presence of anxious settler bodies within reconciliatory spaces, arguing that anxiety characterizes settler orientations toward reconciliation as a national objective, and that this anxiety can be mobilized to interrogate and re-politicize the reconciliatory spaces within which it circulates. I wonder if these spaces might act as microcosmic sites within a nation in which anxieties surrounding Indigenous presence have manifested historically in oppressive policy and unqualified dispossession. Settler anxiety has not just manifested materially; I argue that it also acts as an underlying affective condition of Canadian colonial society through its foundational role in the construction of a national peacemaker myth that works to obfuscate the continued unjust treatment of Indigenous peoples by the Canadian government and its settler citizens. In his foreword to settler scholar Paulette Regan’s Unsettling the Settler Within (2010), Taiaiake Alfred rightfully observes that this myth forms the basis of settler identity in Canada (“Foreword” x). I posit that the persistence of this myth is motivated, in part, by the collective repression of a felt anxiety over what Warren Cariou (Métis) refers to as “the legitimacy of [settler] claims to belonging on what they call ‘their’ land” (“Haunted Prairie” 727); Cariou goes on to attribute the proliferation of Indigenous spectral figures in Canadian literature to a “growing anxiety” rooted in settler feelings of foreignness (728). My project proceeds by questioning the role that this collective feeling of anxiety has played in the construction of Canada’s reconciliatory politics. To what extent has this anxiety motivated Canada’s reconciliation project? How does the current structure of the reconciliation process alleviate this
anxiety rather than confront it? If anxiety is always already in existence as the basis of the collective settler psyche, how might a critical investigation of reconciliation’s promises, structure, and mandate unearth and subsequently address this anxiety? And, most importantly, how can this unearthing actually aid in the reconceptualization of reconciliation as a process whereby non-Indigenous participants must confront their own complicity in the myths that have contributed to the erasure of an Indigenous presence from Canadian narratives of progress?

I ask these questions as an Anglo-settler Canadian working in the field of Indigenous Literary Studies. My investigation of the impact of a collectively felt anxiety is also, for the purposes of this project, directed toward Anglo-Canadian society in particular; the particular dynamics of settler colonialism among Franco-Canadian society warrant an independent study. Importantly, I aspire in this project toward allyship with Indigenous critics and communities alongside whom I hope to work in this thesis beyond. However, I recognize aspirational allyship to be a nexus of commitments and actions, not an identity; it is not for me to determine but rather I need to be alert to opportunities to make my work of value to Indigenous Peoples. This means acknowledging how my own anxieties as an Anglo-settler literary critic impact my research, my learning, and my own forms of meaning-making. Settler-scholar Sam McKeegney notes that there exists “tremendous anxiety among non-Native scholars” working in the field of Indigenous literary studies (“Strategies for Ethical Engagement” 80-81) and warns that the critical consciousness that is required from settler-scholars of Indigenous texts should not equate to critical distancing. What I hope to accomplish with this project, then, is not to carve out a niche in which I can comfortably study Indigenous texts; rather, I hope to bring forth what is, at its core, an uncomfortable feeling of anxiety into my studies so as to understand and to interrogate its effects in shaping Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations within Canada.
If we understand reconciliation as “the establishment and maintenance of respectful relationships” (TRC 7), settler Canadians must be made to bear witness to these ugly manifestations in order for reconciliation to be made possible. And yet, I am not convinced that a national objective of reconciliation is not in fact another menacing materialization of settlers’ attempts to alleviate our anxiety over Indigenous presence and, by extension, sovereignty. Regan’s discussion of the persistence of “symbolic and subtle violence” speaks to how this violence, or menace, is “embedded in the seductive language of healing and reconciliation” (116), and while I agree that it is necessary to recognize how reconciliatory discourse risks perpetuating colonial relations and systemic violence, it is equally relevant to acknowledge anxiety’s polemic possibilities if we decide neither to repress nor remedy it and to instead confront its phantasmic proximity as a welcome sign of conflict. What might incorporating anxiety into the discursive space of reconciliation look like? And how might its incorporation counteract the disproportionate division of emotional labour placed on both Indigenous individuals, families, communities, and nations within the Canadian discourse of reconciliation?

If, as Robinson argues, reconciliation is a “return to good feelings” (“Intergenerational Sense” 286), how does Ahmed’s assertion that political discourses “transform feeling by giving that feeling an object or target” (“Mood” 22) further complicate the anxious modalities of settler Canadians toward Indigeneity? In both Robinson and Ahmed’s respective polemics of affect, who benefits from these returns to and transformations of feeling? My thesis will wager that the provocation of settler anxieties by Indigenous artists—and the mobilization of those anxieties in popular discourse—has the potential to reveal the inadequacies of dominant understandings of a teleological reconciliation project in Canada and thereby re-politicize the reconciliation process. I posit that anxiety has an enormous amount of ethical potential within the context of
reconciliation, and that this potential might be further realized and subsequently mobilized if Canada’s history of colonialism is recognized as what Dian Million refers to as “a felt, affective relationship” (Therapeutic Nations 46). Thinking about colonialism as a felt relationship is a conceptual move that looks to account for the ways in which the affective attitudes of a national public can be manipulated so as to promote particular political agendas. The continued marginalization of certain groups and the privileging of others rests on the naturalization of these social disparities. One of the ways in which this naturalization occurs is through the recitation of “comfortable knowledges” about Indigenous populations in Canada, including the myths that portray Indigenous peoples as inherently lazy or prone to alcoholism (Million 83). Framing this “knowledge” as comfortable highlights how colonialism’s structures of power are maintained both through the naturalization and mobilization of public affect. As a response, I propose anxiety as an “undoing” of this comfortable knowledge through my reconceptualization of the affect’s uneasiness as its source of political productivity. The realization of what I will term “anxious de-coloniality” by settler society thus depends upon a relinquishing of this comfortable knowledge about who the “Indian” is and the cultivation of understanding how this kind of knowledge has perpetuated the dispossession of Indigenous nations. This comfortable knowledge also comprises and sustains the imagined benevolence and peacemaker myths that function as foundational narratives for an “official history” of Canada. This project asks to what extent reconciliation is currently being mobilized as a national remedy for an anxious public and, furthermore, how might a critical reorientation serve to disassociate reconciliation from the myths that have allowed public discourses to remain “comfortable” with their uncritical erasure of Indigenous peoples from discursive and geographical Canadian landscapes.
My emphasis on the embeddedness of affect in processes of reconciliation is of course not new, as many Indigenous and Settler scholars have contributed to a dialogue that addresses the “sociality of affect” (*Therapeutic Nations* 47) as it pertains to Canada’s expansive legacy of cultural genocide. Million notes that “affect has transformative power wherein building intensities electrify moments of potential, as affect has no ‘natural’ projects; thus, affect might be imperceptible or incite or mobilize intensities of any possibility in any situation” (49). Drawing on sociologist Nick Crossley in her theorization of the “therapeutic nation”, Million argues that “in a moment when social suffering is highly medicalized, Crossley poses affective sociality as ‘open to manipulation by the various psychotherapeutic technologies and markets in which they operate’” (49) and calls attention to neoliberalism’s own investment in the kind of pathologization of affect that these technologies then undertake.

There are two points in particular here that this project takes up. The first is the imperceptibility that both Million and Crossley claim characterizes affect, and the second is Million’s observation of Western neoliberal desires to pathologize and therefore “know” various affects. Anxiety is an untethered affect because of its transformative capacity and was theorized by object-relations theorist Melanie Klein as a “transformative affect” that possessed the ability to transcend and develop from other “negative” affects like anger and rage. It might be fruitful to consider anxiety as imperceptible, then, precisely because it is so often used to point toward other affects. Alternatively, one of the impediments we must overcome in order to realize anxiety’s potential as an ethical force is our tendency to view affects as being either positive or negative. In her work *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed notes that “bad feelings are seen as oriented toward the past; as a kind of stubbornness that ‘stops’ the subject from embracing the future,” whereas good feelings are assumed to uplift us, or help us “get out” of whatever state a
negative affect has confined us to (135). But anxiety’s earliest theorizations are less qualitative in their analyses, and instead they emphasize its capacity for change, for movement, and for development. Reconciliation, as a social promise, must be an anxious endeavour, but it must also always evade the language I have just found myself using, as “endeavour” anticipates the completion of its task. In her analysis of Robert Arthur Alexie’s novel *Porcupines and China Dolls*, critic Keavy Martin argues that the text enacts a powerful narrative of Indigenous survivance because it refuses the kind of closure that, to quote Martin, “not only governs novels like Alexie’s, but also national discourses on Aboriginal issues” (“Truth, Reconciliation, Amnesia” 49). She continues: “while healing and reconciliation are certainly desirable occurrences, these concepts can entail a fixation upon resolution that is not only premature but problematic in its correlation with forgetting” (50). Similarly, scholar Sophie McCall warns of the dangers of a “state-imposed discourse of reconciliation” motivated by desires for certainty, clarity, and resolution regarding Indigenous-settler relations (“Politics of Recognition” 58).

In thinking about the role of indeterminacy in discussions of reconciliation, I am reminded of Garneau’s renouncement of the colonial attitude that “is based on the belief that everything should be accessible, is ultimately comprehensible, and a potential commodity” (“Imaginary Spaces” 29). Reconciliation itself has been charged with a kind of incomprehensibility stemming from unclear and sometimes competing definitions. In its Final Report, the TRC acknowledges the ambiguity surrounding reconciliation, admitting it is at a “crossroads” with competing definitions over what this process entails, and who should be doing the work. In his study on North American reconciliation projects and the ways in which they diverge from earlier models enacted by emerging democratic nations, settler scholar Joseph Weiss notes that Canada’s reconciliation project “becomes an index that presumes its own
Referent, symbolically constituting truth and reconciliation as being underway in Canada without necessitating further action” (“Challenging Reconciliation” 33). Weiss’s comments effectively characterize both “truth” and “reconciliation” as discursive symbols that fail to necessitate any kind corresponding ethical or moral action. While Weiss criticizes the absence of a “specific” and “holistic” definition of reconciliation in relation which participants might act, Martin hypothesizes that the ambiguity surrounding reconciliation is precisely the source of the concept’s broad appeal (Martin 52):

What precisely is required for reconciliation to occur? And what will this happy state look like? In public discourse, the precise details tend to be omitted -- perhaps because they are too difficult to determine, too contentious to declare, or because they may detract from the rhetorical power of the performance. (53)

Still, Martin worries that “the multiplicity of interpretations may in fact work to prohibit the very commonality that the term tries to evoke” (53). In response, I suggest that reconciliation’s ambiguity might also serve as the source of its political potential, working to unhinge settler’s expectations of reconciliation as an act of resolution by playing an integral role in what postcolonial critic Peter Hulme cites as the decolonial project of “disengag[ing] with the whole colonial syndrome” (“Including America” 125). In both McCall and Martin’s work, novels like Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Alexie’s *Porcupines and China Dolls* are envisioned as counter narratives to a national mythology that perpetuates Eva Mackey’s aptly termed “imagined benevolence” of Canadians toward those indigenous to Turtle Island (*House of Difference* 2). Importantly, these counter narratives must be situated within and alongside a collective body that is affectively cognizant of the ways in which our own affective responses to
Indigeneity might never be reconciled with the promise put forth by capital “R” reconciliation. It might be possible to recognize the impossibility of reconciliation without abandoning the anxiety that this recognition will surely produce.

My thesis considers Haisla-Heiltsuk writer Eden Robinson’s novel *Monkey Beach* (2000), in addition to her lesser-known short story “Terminal Avenue”, as texts that actively provoke settler anxiety through their textual, tonal, and thematic representations of anxiety. Both *Monkey Beach* and “Terminal Avenue” refuse to adhere to the kind of linear conclusivity that Western literary traditions privilege and engages in the successful derailment of the teleological narratives that I argue reconciliation facilitates in its current and multiple formulations. My first chapter on *Monkey Beach* provides an alternative interpretive strategy for reading an Indigenous text that includes, and works parallel to, both the text’s own anxious tonality and the anxiety that I argue exists within the majority of the text’s criticism. I argue that tracing the ways in which the text produces and represents anxiety can ultimately render new reading practices that place less emphasis on reconciling textual conflict and instead consider these sites of conflict as textual spaces that can foreground socio-politically productive reading practices that can in turn be applied to public discourses of reconciliation. My second chapter looks to “Terminal Avenue”, a dystopian short story that depicts a future filled with hyperbolic representations of pre-existing prejudices, policies, and systemic injustices toward Canada’s Indigenous populations. Robinson’s text is an example of what Canada’s future might look like if the collectively felt anxiety that underpins settlers’ attitudes toward Indigenous presence remains unchecked. By looking to “Terminal Avenue” I also account for how the genre of speculative fiction itself takes up indeterminacy as its ideology and, furthermore, how the genre’s indeterminate condition is facilitated by its construction as a paradoxical discursive space in which competing ideas,
principles, and concepts are continuously being re-negotiated. Robinson teases out the productive relationship that I argue exists between indeterminacy and anxiety by demonstrating how indeterminacy can facilitate an anxious response and, crucially, how this response can be further interrogated to reveal the cultural and political complexities of this relationship as it functions in an Indigenous text when it is read by a non-Indigenous reader. My project considers how an anxious indeterminacy might also constitute reconciliation’s discursive reality, and, ultimately, to pose the question of whether an ambiguous affect like anxiety can intervene in the Canadian desire for certainty in an indeterminate future that must take seriously the nation-to-nation paradigm of its de-colonial future.
Temporality Revisited: Deferral and Anticipation in Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*

“But that kind of gift, she makes people nervous, hey?”
- From Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*

This chapter begins by responding to political scientist Glen Coulthard's (Dene) invocation of Franz Fanon's call to understand the transformative potential of negative emotions within colonial contexts rather than condemn them. The assertion that Indigenous affective reactions to settler colonialism have the potential to lead to various forms of anticolonial resistance is framed by Coulthard as an answer to Fanon's twentieth century demand that the negative emotions of anger and resentment be "understood, that their transformative potential be harnessed, and that their structural referent be identified and uprooted" (Coulthard 112). For Coulthard, this structural referent is the psycho-affective structure of settler colonialism, understood as "a relationship... where power has been structured into a relatively secure set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority" (6-7). Settler colonialism is not maintained solely through the exploitative economics of capitalism -- which coincides with the expansive project of colonialism more generally – but also through the regulation of settler society's emotional responses to marginalized communities. Studies concerning the ways in which settler colonialism is reinforced affectively, focus mainly on the colonized subjects, noting that colonialism’s structures are held in place partially by the coerced internalization and naturalization of these structures within the colonized themselves. “Internalized colonialism”, as explained in the preface to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, functions similarly to a neurosis within the colonized, as conceptions of self come to mirror those of the colonizer, whose
assumptions of Indigenous racial and cultural inferiority become adopted by the colonized through repeated forms of coercion, both nonviolent and violent, non-discursive and discursive.

My site of study deviates slightly from the work of Fanon and Coulthard, as I look to the collective settler psyche within the settler colonial context of contemporary Canada in order to tease out the ways in which this psyche is comprised of an anxiety over an Indigenous presence in Canada that refuses to disappear. In a manner akin to the White Paper Act of 1969, I argue, alongside many other non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples, that the current reconciliation process constitutes another attempt to assimilate Indigenous peoples’ experiences into the teleological narrative of Canadian progress. Reconciliation has become synonymous with the discourses of healing and forgiveness that by and large ignore the responsibility of settler society to confront its own complicity in the continued dispossession of Indigenous peoples. If not seriously interrogated, reconciliation can act as another regulatory facet of settler colonial rule that is designed to monitor the emotional responses of Indigenous survivors of the residential school system to ensure they are in accordance with the narrative of progress that Canadian society has constructed for itself. Indigenous peoples’ willingness to “forgive” through their participation in the TRC’s channels of “healing” is constructed as a final step in Canada’s journey toward the consolidation of a conciliatory state. What then, is the role of the settler who has benefitted from the “psycho-affective attachments to colonialism” in the process of reconciliation? If Indigenous peoples must forgive, what affective work must settlers complete in order for reconciliation to occur? And, more to the point of this project, what particular emotions can be brought into the conversation so as to render reconciliatory discourse a more meaningful discussion that militates against the persistent violence of the settler colonial regimes under which Canada exists?
Reconciliation is an emotional endeavour that, so far, calls upon its Indigenous participants in its excavation of emotionally charged experiences, while nullifying the need for the same kind of emotional engagement of its settler witnesses. Paulette Regan remarks that “for settlers, coming to grips with the Indian Residential School System experience involves thinking about and working through the different emotions associated with the various ways in which we are complicit” (176). Regan’s comments remind us that the reconciliation process, though built upon the principles of reciprocity and mutual respect (TRC 18), requires a foundational understanding of the historic injustices that have led our society to this moment. So, how might settlers come to know how these instances of oppression and the corresponding acts of Indigenous resistance are characteristic of Indigenous experience? For a literary scholar, this question often points toward the potential political, moral, and ethical work of which Canadian and/or Indigenous literature might be capable. In the fields of Indigenous literature and criticism, questions of appropriation, ethical reading, and the perceived inherent political nature of Indigenous literature, specifically, are at the forefront of any critical debate. One ethical approach that has been relatively accepted as a starting point for any non-Indigenous scholar of Indigenous literature requires that the scholar come to terms with her “outsider” status -- a status that renders her unable to fully know or understand the ways that these policies, ideologies, and institutions have informed the Indigenous experiences portrayed within a given text. This approach is also fully applicable, I argue, to the non-Indigenous participant of the reconciliation process. I consider Renate Eigenbrod’s influential work *Travelling Knowledge: Positioning the Im/migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada* wherein she thoughtfully considers what it means to be a non-Indigenous reader of Indigenous literature by reconsidering the ethics of scholarship itself. Eigenbrod asserts that “the only ethical way of writing and studying about
Aboriginal culture in its varied expressions” is by approaching the studying and writing of a particular culture in a way that “clearly marks it as re-presentation: viewed from the outside” (44, emphasis mine).

This chapter takes seriously Armand Ruffo’s assertion that the outsider (or non-Indigenous) reader is always reading culturally “coded material” that is not fully available to them. Ruffo’s claim rings true when considering the body of criticism on *Monkey Beach*, as the majority of critics have applied colonial frameworks that inadequately account for the Haisla knowledge systems out of which the text is produced. Multiple critics have used the conventions of the Canadian gothic genre in an attempt to understand the spectral figures that haunt the novel’s protagonist, Lisamarie, a young Haisla woman whose gift allows her to transcend the boundaries between the world of the living and the land of the dead. In her article “Learning to Talk with Ghosts: Canadian Gothic and the Poetics of Haunting in Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach,*” settler scholar Jodey Castricano asks what the gothic can tell readers about modern Haisla culture and warns that “the point of being an outsider… has critical implications for thinking of the novel in gothic terms” (10). She characterizes the role of gothic literature in Western culture as a genre that deals in “what is often barred from consciousness” (3) and whose conventions express a collectively felt anxiety about “meaning” or interpretation within an ideological system that “pretends to totality”9. However, if we are to extend this logic to *Monkey Beach*, we must acknowledge that the text provides its own cultural hermeneutics for understanding, or coming to terms with, the anxiety that Lisamarie experiences whenever she encounters the spirit of the little man, a figure whose presence acts as a warning to Lisamarie of imminent tragedy. While the gothic might play a crucial role in uncovering and confronting the anxieties that Enlightenment and materialist traditions have produced through their “eradication
of superstition”¹⁰, I wonder if we are ignoring other frameworks that help us navigate the supernatural terrain that the gothic has since monopolized in literary criticism. Castricano’s is a carefully crafted analysis of how *Monkey Beach* reconfigures the phenomenology of settler gothic through the juxtaposition of conventional readings of the spirit world with those of the Haisla. The gothic itself, Castricano argues, becomes “defamiliarized” and explains that “what goes bump in the night in one context is the dissonant sound of a paradigm clash in another…. But it is through this dissonance that we understand that *Monkey Beach* as resistant to the spectral phenomenology of the gothic tradition” (9). Yet, the anxieties that these spectral intrusions simultaneously produce and represent are still being addressed through the problematically colonial lens of Western Gothicism. Additionally, it is not that, by taking into consideration the ways in which Haisla culture value, respond to, and acknowledge “the supernatural”, Lisa’s anxiety toward her gift is somehow alleviated. This approach also fails to provide readers with a better understanding of the role of the dead within the novel, as Lisamarie never fully harnesses her gift, telling the ghost of her Ma-ma-oo “I still don’t understand” 7(371). While many critics interpret the inclusion of traditional Haisla stories and cultural practices -- from Ma-ma-oo’s lessons in picking the dangerous berry *oxasuli* (151), to the novel’s didactic interventions of a third person narrator on how to contact the dead (138) -- as evidence of Lisa’s return to her cultural roots and the successful derailment of settler colonial attempts to suppress them, I argue that these interpretations tells us less about the novel and more about the critical anxiety of settler readers over a text that refuses to essentialize Lisamarie’s experience as a continuous struggle to embrace her Haisla heritage in the wake of attempted cultural genocide.

Lisamarie’s struggle is often read as a metonymic representation of the larger community’s struggle to maintain a connection to their traditional Haisla knowledges and
practices. Anja Mrak claims that through telling her story, Lisa consequently tells the story of the Haisla community of Kitamaat, and that “the personal trauma of the protagonist reveals a much larger issue -- the legacy of the residential school system” (“Trauma and Memory” par. 11). Laura Moss characterizes this kind of critique as a “fractal misreading” of Indigenous fiction which problematically interprets the story of one character as a representation of a whole community based on the ethnicity of the story’s author (“Between Fractals and Rainbows” 20-21). Jennifer Andrews also reads the ending as a moment of “peace” for Lisamarie (“Native Canadian Gothic Refigured” 19), while David Gaertner interprets Lisamarie’s final encounter with the spirit world as one in which she “finally finds herself at home with her ‘ghosts’ and the connections to Haisla culture and the knowledge that represent for her,” arguing that the ending itself “closes a plot circle introduced by Robinson in the very first lines” (“‘Something in Between’: Monkey Beach and the Haisla Return of the Return of the Repressed” 47).

The novel’s criticism seems uncomfortable with the unresolved status of Lisamarie’s relationship to both her culture and her gift by constructing various didactic resolutions to the perceived problem of Lisamarie’s estrangement from her heritage. Thus, criticism has tended to impose a kind of narrative conclusivity on both Lisamarie and the larger narrative by suggesting two things: first, that Lisamarie’s flashbacks to her childhood and her attempts to navigate her ability are inextricably linked to the present-day search for her lost-at-sea brother, Jimmy, and second, that Lisamarie does in fact successfully interpret and subsequently utilize her gift to locate Jimmy. But these conclusions are far too linear for a novel that oscillates fluidly among temporalities, spirit worlds, and character focalizations. Lisamarie’s flashbacks do not signal a “looking back” to her past for explanation of her present; there is a fluidity with which the narrative weaves between past and present that makes this understanding of the novel
underwhelming and oversimplified. Moreover, reading Lisamarie’s experience as a metonymy of Indigenous experiences of settler colonialism problematically confines Robinson’s text to settler expectations that situate all Indigenous fiction as textual sites of traumatic repression, expression, and recovery. These interpretations reveal that settlers still employ a distinctly colonial set of expectations toward Indigenous literature by encouraging Indigenous authors to contribute to the “discourses of healing” that uncritically position Indigenous peoples as perpetual victims of settler colonialism. Castricano rightfully asks, when it comes to reading Monkey Beach, whose past is being invoked? (3): what are we looking for when we read Lisamarie’s flashbacks? Are we diagnosing her? Are we looking for clues that will help us “solve” the novel’s multiple mysteries? Are we even reading anymore? Or are we merely participating in an over determined treasure hunt for ready-made signs of trauma that will ultimately reinforce a politics of recognition that Coulthard identifies as a field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained (17).

How can we read Robinson’s text as something other than a neo-gothic trauma narrative? How might the text’s spectrality be read in terms of settler anxiety? And how can this re-reading reveal the productive role of the anxious settler psyche in the field of Indigenous literature and beyond? If anxiety forms the basis of the settler colonial psyche, can it also stimulate affective processes through which we might trace the insidious mutations of settler colonialism in its bid to maintain Indigenous subjugation through the regulation of affective forces? I will demonstrate that Robinson’s novel can function as the site of this affective excavation and, furthermore, that this excavation works as a reminder that settler colonialism is still alive and well today, and that it therefore serves to reorient discussions of reconciliation toward the radical reformation of present-day colonial structures. This chapter is structured as a
close reading of *Monkey Beach* alongside critical investigations of settler interpretations of the text, which, I argue, both manifest collectively felt anxiety and betray settler desires to alleviate that anxiety by absorbing it into Canada’s current political discourse of reconciliation. I also lay out some of the groundwork for my theoretical assumptions about anxiety and demonstrate how conceptualizations of anxiety as a negative, ambivalent, and temporally oscillating affect can be used as a lens for reading Robinson’s own temporally shifting narrative. This chapter provides an alternative interpretive strategy for reading an Indigenous text that includes, and works parallel to, both the text’s own anxious tonality and the anxiety that I argue exists within the majority of the text’s criticism. Tracing the ways in which the text produces and represents anxiety can ultimately render new reading practices that place less emphasis on reconciling textual conflict and instead consider these sites of conflict as textual spaces that can foreground socio-politically productive reading practices that can in turn be applied to public discourses of reconciliation.

Robinson’s text is particularly charged with anxiety in its presentation of real ghosts alongside the spectre of the residential school system that lingers throughout Lisamarie’s Haisla community. The residential school system haunts Lisamarie’s family; we learn that her Uncle Mick and Aunt Trudy were sent to one of the schools by their mother, Lisa’s Ma-ma-oo, when they were young. In one of her flashbacks, Lisamarie is away with her family on a fishing trip to Kemano and stays in an old cabin that she believes “must be haunted” (103). However, Lisamarie does not encounter any ghosts in the cabin and instead is awoke by a dream later that night:

> I dreamed I was at the docks watching Jimmy dive off the breakwater logs. I waited and waited for him to surface but the water was still and dark. I woke,
heart hammering. I heard groans. I pulled the blankets tighter. The moaning was soft at first, then got louder.


Lisamarie soon recognizes her uncle’s voice and realizes Mick is making the noises she believed were ghosts. The next morning, Mick and her Aunt Edith and Uncle Geordie get into a fight over their mother’s decision to send Mick away to residential school -- a fight prompted by Mick’s nightmares the night before (109). Robinson carefully interweaves Lisamarie’s ghosts with those of her family’s in this scene, blurring the boundaries between Mick’s psychological unrest with Lisa’s affective response to her ghostly encounters. In doing so, Robinson manages to add further credence to both Mick and Lisamarie's sources of anxiety and avoids trivializing Lisamarie's despite her misidentification of Mick’s screams as those of unwanted spectres.

The ending of *Monkey Beach* has proved to garner the most attention from both readers and literary critics, as many critics have disagreed on whether or not the last line “In the distance, I hear the sound of a speedboat” (374) signals Lisamarie’s survival after her encounter with the spirit world leaves her wading in the waters of Monkey Beach. The line is repeated throughout the novel, appearing twice before the final scene: once at the news of Jimmy’s disappearance and again at Uncle Mick’s death (2, 135). Interestingly, although each of these scenes centres around a tragedy involving the waters off the Kitamaat coast, the causes and events of each of these tragedies are never explicitly revealed, and readers are left wondering about the details of Uncle Mick’s and Jimmy’s respective deaths. Lisamarie is aware of the significance the water holds for her family and its continuous presence throughout the Hills’ most tragic moments: as she reflects during her journey to Monkey Beach, “Ah, irony. We’re all out on the water. The whole family is together” (165). The ocean represents a kind of inaccessibility for Lisamarie that doubly
reflects her inability to “know” the extent of her spiritual gift. While Lisamarie recognizes the ocean’s significance, she is unable to determine its function as both a symbolic and affecting force throughout her life. Robinson uses the enduring and unsettling images of deep water to connect the novel’s multiple temporalities; the ocean marks important events in Lisamarie's life and represents the temporal and spatial distance Lisamarie must travel in order to decode their meaning in her search for Jimmy. Like the spirits that follow her, however, the water is also a source of anxiety and ambiguous significance. Lisamarie is repeatedly struck by images of floating objects in the water that she consistently misidentifies. In dreams and scenes from her memory, these images are always accompanied by other ambiguously significant figures like the crows Jimmy feeds every morning, or the anonymous group of carnivorous seals (356). The book also opens by marking an explicit connection among Lisamarie's gift, the ocean, and the plot of Jimmy’s disappearance when Lisa hears the crows outside her window speak to her Haisla:

“La’es -- Go down to the bottom of the ocean… For the last week, I have been dreaming about the ocean -- lapping softly against the hull of a boat, hissing as it rolls gravel up a beach, ocean swells hammering the shore, lifting off the rocks in an ethereal spray before the waves make a grumbling retreat” (1-2).

When Lisa tells her parents about her recurring dreams, her mother dismisses them as “clearly a sign, Lisa… that you need Prozac” (3). Her parents’ dismissal of these visions is nothing new. Her mother, Gladys, refuses to indulge her daughter and instead explains away Lisa’s nightmares with personal anecdotes; Lisa remembers, “Mom had always told me she always dreamed of earthquakes if she ate too much lasagna” (132). Lisamarie attempts to internalize her mother’s disbelief by trying to convince herself that “the little man was a dream brought on my eating
“dinner too late” (132) but still recognizes that the little man— a leprechaun-like figure from old Haisla stories (153) -- as a comforting figure. When she is little, Lisa learns from her Ma-ma-oo that her gift is hereditary, and that her mother is also plagued by her ability to speak to the spirit world. While they are picking oxasuli, Ma-ma-oo explains to Lisa that the little man “is a guide, but not a reliable one. Never trust the spirit world too much. They think different from the living” (153). She then goes on to compare Lisamarie gift to the oxasuli berries, calling both “powerful medicine”, but warns that “there’s good medicine and bad. Best not to deal with it at all if you don’t know what you’re doing” (154). Ma-ma-oo’s metaphor proves important for Lisamarie at the end of the novel when she attempts to locate Jimmy by calling upon the spirits to at Monkey Beach. Offering up her blood in exchange for some answers, she demands that they tell her where Jimmy is (369) and is pulled into their world as the narrative shifts focalizations, giving reader’s access to the moment the Queen of the North begins to sink, and Jimmy enacts his revenge on Josh for raping his girlfriend, Karaoke (370). As the narrative returns to Lisamarie still stuck in the land of the dead, Ma-ma-oo appears and guides her granddaughter back to the land of the living and reiterates her cautionary lesson against using magic she has yet to fully understand (371). So, while the novel encourages readers to make a connection between Haisla magic and Jimmy’s disappearance, Ma-ma-oo’s metaphor reminds us that the spiritual power that permeates the novel extends beyond Lisamarie’s attempts to control it and therefore holds a purpose that surpasses Jimmy’s narrative.

The novel’s objective remains unclear, as Ma-ma-oo tells Lisamarie to “Never mind about [Jimmy] now. Go back” (375), leaving both Lisa and the novel’s readership with unanswered questions about the meaning of either Lisamarie's gift or the flashbacks that comprise the majority of the narrative. However, the novel’s temporally diverse structure does
not leave us “trapped in time as a result of an unresolved traumatic past” (Mrak par. 22.); rather, the non-linear narrative allows readers to re-evaluate the predetermined expectations they have initially placed upon the text. In her discussion on the complexities of ethical reading in a postcolonial era, Critic Lydia Roupakia considers how *Monkey Beach* “alerts the attentive reader against the pitfalls of approaching [the text] through inherited interpretive templates” (280). Frameworks like the Canadian or European gothic, or the narrative of past trauma are examples of interpretive templates that Castricano argues can perform "the work of empire” (7) by rejecting the text’s own internal cultural knowledge systems and inserting the cognitive legacies of colonialism. Roupakia asks, “how easy is it for Western readers of contemporary Native literature to suspend their goal-oriented consciousness when approaching Native ‘otherness’?” (279). *Monkey Beach* frustrates this goal-oriented consciousness which desires the seamless convergence of its two identifiable plotlines. The text suggests that, though Lisamarie’s struggle to comprehend her relation to the spirits can perhaps inform, or be understood alongside, what happened to her brother, neither circumstance rectifies the other by the end of the novel. This irresolution renders the purpose of Lisamarie's flashbacks unclear: if they do not provide her with a retrospective lesson on how to mobilize her gift to save her brother, and if she does not in fact succeed in controlling its parameters, what can we glean from the shifts in the text’s temporalities? In discussing the ethics involved in reading Indigenous texts, Moss identifies four fallacies or misreadings that critics of Indigenous literature tend to perform when they attempt to locate the political potential of a given text; the third type of fallacy misreads formal experimentation with temporality and narration as always reflecting collectively felt trauma of forced dislocation of a particular cultural community (22). I will unpack an existing critical analysis that reads the novel’s fragmented temporal structure as a reflecting the fragmentary
nature of traumatic experience to demonstrate how this critical position performs Moss’s misreading of how temporality functions within the text, and offer an alternative approach that reads *Monkey Beach*’s fragmented temporality as functioning to defer the fulfillment of readers’ expectations, and how a deferral is characteristically anxious.

In her article “Trauma and Memory as Magical Realism: Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* as Trauma Narrative”, literary scholar Anja Mrak frames *Monkey Beach* as a trauma narrative that utilizes the literary techniques of magical realism to represent the “unrepresentability” of unprocessed traumatic experience (par. 2). Mrak considers the story of Lisamarie and her recollections of early childhood to be representative of the lasting effects of the residential school system on her Haisla community, and argues that these effects are enunciated by magical realism’s “irreducible element: shifts between first and second person narrator, a non-linear plot structure, and mixing of discourses” (par. 3). Thus, the temporal disruption that shapes the narrative is understood as solving a representational problem -- that is, representing traumatic experience accurately in the hopes of confronting and subsequently remediying the effects of its supposed repression. This interpretation is once again focused on finding a purpose for Lisamarie’s flashbacks, and argues that this purpose is situated in the psychological discourses of trauma, repression, and recovery. Though Mrak contextualizes magical realism as a literary device that “re-evaluates hegemonic discourse in order to accommodate marginalized perspectives… rendering it a powerful tool for postcolonial interrogation” (par. 2), Mrak’s psychoanalytic discourse of trauma constructs a problematic correlation between the fragmented temporal structure that frames Lisamarie’s flashbacks and the fragmentary structure of traumatic memory, thereby reducing Lisamarie’s personal memories to sites of unprocessed traumatic experience that Mrak further interprets as representative of the collective traumatic memory of...
the Haisla people (pars. 9-11). Mrak’s analysis is an example of reading fractally -- a metaphor Moss uses to describe recent trends in criticism of stories by Indigenous writers -- where an author’s ethnicity is used extensively in a critic’s reading of a particular character’s development or of a text’s recurrent tropes (Moss 20). Whereas synecdochal readings consider characters, symbols, or themes to be a part that stands in for the whole, fractal readings interpret these parts as the whole. Mrak’s fractal misreading of Lisamarie’s memories extends to the disappearance of Jimmy when she writes “Jimmy’s death is only the latest in the string of misery and misfortune that the Haisla people suffer” (par. 23). Her argument that the end of the novel presents Lisamarie as “no longer a passive conduit for the spirits” whose maturation “ultimately signals a return of the Haisla heritage and traditional ways” (par. 15) suggests that Lisamarie's personal attempt to reclaim some spiritual agency prompts the reclamation of an entire culture. This is an unwarranted declaration of causality that derives from critical expectations of socially transformative outcomes. Though my work still considers *Monkey Beach* politically productive, the text’s socially transformative potential is not a consequence of Lisamarie’s supposed ability to navigate the cultural terrain of her heritage; rather the sociopolitical potential of Robinson’s novel derives from anxious sites between the readerly expectations that are instigated by her use of foreshadowing during Lisamarie’s flashbacks, and the realization of these expectations remaining unmet at the novel’s conclusion.

Lisamarie’s flashbacks are expected to foreshadow their own relevance that is then expected to manifest in the present-day narrative. The repeated presence of seals, crows, and dreams of the ocean arrive in both Lisamarie’s memories and the present-day, suggesting that these symbolic figures will prove significant in the search for Jimmy. Lisamarie replicates readers’ desire to makes these connections, thinking “God knows what the crows are trying to
say…. I used to think that if I could talk to the spirit world, I’d get some answers. Ha bloody ha” (17). Though somewhat ambivalent about the spirit world’s ability to provide her with practical answers, by the end of the novel Lisa chooses to listen in order to find Jimmy:

I know I should leave. If I stay any longer, I’ll be at Namu tomorrow morning and Mom and Dad will worry. But if the things in the trees can help me, maybe Jimmy can keep his happy ending. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad, just this once. I reach into my bag and dig around until I find my knife. When I pull it out, the voices hiss into silence. A crow begins to caw….

“I don’t have any meat. But I have blood.”

I wait, but nothing answers. (360-361)

Lisamarie puts herself in serious dangerous since, as the ghost of her Ma-ma-oo explains, “unless you know how to use [your gift] it will kill you” (371). Some critics have argued that the return of Ma-ma-oo and Mick represent Lisa’s embrace of her culture, noting that even though their advice is spoken in Haisla, “[Lisamarie] can understand the words” (Robinson 373). However, the ancestral intervention by Ma-ma-oo and Mick, whose conflicting advice is to either “go home and make me some grandkids” or “go out there and give ‘em hell! Red power!” (373), can also be read to represent the equally equivocal meaning behind Lisamarie’s hazardous journey to the spirit world. In another flashback, Lisamarie recalls feeling uneasy as she watches Mick dive into the water while she and her mother sit on the nearby beach:

‘What’re you looking for, Monster?’ he said, coming up and dripping on me. I couldn’t explain the feeling I had and didn’t want to ruin his newly restored good mood.

“Seals.” (119)
This moment foreshadows Uncle Mick’s death, when he is eaten alive by seals after falling into the water during a routine net check (134). In a subsequent flashback, Lisamarie remembers that her father “had pulled Mick’s corpse from the net and wrapped him in a tarp. Mick’s face, right arm, and part of his left leg had been eaten off by seals and crabs” (148). Lisa’s flashbacks continue to provide “hints in the form of symbols” that “foreshadow future tragedy” (Mrak par. 22). Mrak’s language underscores the anticipatory quality generated by the novel’s temporally divergent structure. In my reading of the text, this anticipation goes unfulfilled, rendering Lisa’s flashbacks sites of anxious deferral. The question becomes how to approach a text that wades comfortably in the uneasy waters of the Kitamaat coast?

Anxiety, as one of Bloch’s “expectant emotions” whose desire aims “less at a specific object… than at the configuration of the world in general” (qtd. in Ngai 210), resonates within discussions concerning the effects of formal experimentations with temporality. I refer here to Sianne Ngai’s study *Ugly Feelings* (2004) --- wherein she attempts to recuperate negative emotions for their critical productivity (Ngai 3) since, she argues, “negative affects have endured in a way that other feelings once widely in circulation have not, acquiring a colloquial status that broads the range of sociohistorical dilemmas they can be used to interpret” (7) -- and apply these theorizations of anxiety in my reading of Robinson’s text in order to generate alternative understandings of its multifarious temporalities. Both the literary device of foreshadowing and the affect of anxiety have an anticipatory character that renders them future-oriented. Foreshadowing can also be the product of an established mood or atmosphere of a text\(^\text{17}\). However, it can also play an active role in the establishment of a text’s mood, or tone -- understood here as a text’s “organizing affect, its general disposition or orientation toward its audience and the world” (Ngai 28). *Monkey Beach* is an anxious text whose tone results from the
corresponding effects of foreshadowing and the deferral of expectations that are underscored by the text’s shifting temporalities. As an affect “intimately aligned with the temporal dynamics of deferral and anticipation” (Ngai 210), anxiety can inspire a new critical reading of the novel’s temporal disjunctures that have so far been understood as either moments of traumatic repression or as signalling the perpetuation of colonial violence upon Lisamarie’s Haisla community\textsuperscript{18}.

Understood as \textit{Monkey Beach}’s “organizing affect”, anxiety has the potential to rectify the problematic reading practice of confining Indigenous narratives into Western templates that emphasize the cyclicality of colonial violence and fail to account for alternative affective dimensions of a text that might prove politically agentive. The novel’s relation to anxiety is multifaceted, producing a critical anxiety evidenced by a collective tendency by literary critics to consolidate Lisamarie’s relationship with, or “return” to, her Haisla culture by way of her culturally inflected gift whose powers ultimately remain a mystery. This critically felt anxiety also manifests through fractal misreadings which problematically position Lisamarie as a cultural informant whose personal story is inferred as the story of an entire cultural community. And yet, the perpetually felt presence of anxiety also exists outside of the text’s anxious body of criticism in the form of what Ngai refers to as “objectified emotion, or unfelt but perceived feeling that presents itself most forcefully in the aesthetic concept of tone” (28-29). In this way, \textit{Monkey Beach} is a literary work whose felt effects are also always already part of the thematic thread of the narrative. This construction mimics the ways in which anxiety functions as both the foundation of the collective settler psyche and the affective process through which we can potentially address its lingering effects on the fraught relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state that continues to inform reconciliation discussions. Put differently, anxiety is, at present, already part of Canada’s reconciliation project as the underlying affective
force out of which settlers' orientations toward reconciliation specifically, and toward Indigeneity more generally, are constructed. As a future-oriented affect, anxiety has the potential to address reconciliation’s problematic incorporation into teleological narratives that obfuscate the present-day workings of settler colonialism in Canada. As Warren Cariou remarks, “it may be argued that all action begins with unease, but if so, that unease must not only direct us back into the past, but must also situate us squarely within the problems and opportunities of the present” (“Haunted Prairie” 731). Robinson's text asks settler readers to sit with our anxiety rather than look for ways to alleviate. Thus, sustaining anxiety becomes a methodological choice that liberates criticism from the goal-oriented mastery that currently plagues the majority of literary study. Additionally, acknowledging anxiety’s role within the reconciliation process and subsequently mobilizing its inherent futurity is a present-day opportunity that, if seized, can aid in the project of bringing forth the de-colonial future that reconciliation continues to promise.
This chapter looks to Robinson’s short story “Terminal Avenue” as a literary example of what Canada’s future might look like if the collectively felt anxiety that underpins settler society remains unchecked. The potential of anxiety to address how the fraught relationship between settler Canadians and Indigenous peoples is informed by a legacy of willful forgetting is contingent upon an acknowledgment of the ways in which anxiety is also implicated in, to borrow from Taiaiake Alfred, “a conspiracy of ignorance” (“Foreword” x). Read through this framework, “Terminal Avenue” becomes an exercise in imagining a future wherein the anxieties that stem from settler society’s responses to, and conceptions, of Indigenous peoples have been mobilized in the construction of a hyper oppressive society, complete with demarcated urban reserves, identity cards, and Purity Laws (212) that reinforce the segregation policies that have come to govern Canadian society in the wake of an event known as “the Adjustment” (211). The story’s main character, a Haisla man named Wil, remembers his brother at Oka on August 16 “when the bombs rained down and the last Canadian reserve was Adjusted” and then when Kevin came back as a Peace Officer (211). The Oka “Crisis” is framed within “Terminal Avenue” as the catalyst for the Adjustment, as Wil remarks before he is beaten by Peace Officers: “after the Uprisings, that it was only a matter of time before someone decided to solve the Indian problem once and for all” (213). Settler scholar Jeffrey Monaghan’s examination of correspondence records dating back to 1886 demonstrates how the so-called “Indian problem” is a fabrication woven by the Canadian government in an effort to gain public support for westward expansion. Monaghan writes:
viewing Indians as irrational and dangerous gives rise to anxieties within settler communities…. These anxieties produced by constant perceptions and imaginations of Indigenous danger elicits a call for further law and order, which results in more circulations and efforts to survey and regulate Indigenous peoples (“Myths of Settler Colonial Policing” 135).

Monaghan’s uncovering of the recorded tactics enacted by the North-West Mounted Police towards Indigenous peoples demonstrates how settler anxieties participate in discursive modes of domination. Demarcations of space, Monaghan writes, “contribute to the ways and means of governing Indigenous populations” noting that the construction of the “Indian” is also central to settler colonial management strategies (“Myths of Policing” 125). The anxieties that propagate Robinson’s fictional dystopic Vancouver are deeply entrenched in Canadian history and make “Terminal Avenue” an important text to consider in understanding how reconciliation can and must reveal the anxieties that inform its discursive and non-discursive spaces. Demonstrating how these anxieties continue to inform our present can also work to address the TRC’s problematic relegation of the harms of settler colonialism to the past. Ultimately, incorporating anxiety into Canada’s reconciliatory discourse may reveal the inadequacies of its current structure; however, this chapter wagers that the uneasy task of confronting settler anxieties is a necessary one in the re-politicization of reconciliation. One way of re-politicizing reconciliation is by exploring the inconsistencies that currently exist in public imaginaries of what reconciliation entails, what it means, and how it can be achieved. Coulthard has identified three distinct yet interrelated understandings of reconciliation in Canada: the first conception refers to a set of “individual or collective practices that Indigenous people undertake to re-establish a positive ‘relation-to-self’ in situations where this relation has been damaged by… symbolic or
structural violence” (106-107); the second refers to the act of “restoring damaged social and political relationships” (107); while the third notion renders reconciliation as “a process by which things are brought to agreement, concord, or harmony; the fact of being made consistent or compatible”\(^{21}\). While Indigenous perspectives argue that land claims and self-determination should be the driving forces behind Canada’s reconciliatory efforts, Coulthard’s list of three exemplifies how reconciliatory rhetoric has been de-territorialized regardless of the reality that each of these issues remains inextricably rooted in the land\(^{22}\). The discrepancies between non-Indigenous and Indigenous understandings of reconciliation are not immobilizing, however, as Regan has argued that these fissures can enable settlers and Indigenous participants to reflect on their varying roles within the process, and “open up a dynamic space of debate concerning legacies and futures in Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations” (Regan qtd. in McCall 60).

Following Regan’s assertions, I want to suggest that these discrepancies reflect a larger indeterminacy that exists within reconciliatory spaces.

This chapter analyses “Terminal Avenue” as a work of speculative fiction to investigate how the genre takes up indeterminacy as its ideology, and how the genre’s indeterminate condition is facilitated by its construction as a paradoxical discursive space in which competing ideas, principles, and concepts area continuously being re-negotiated. This process of continuous negotiation results in the rejection of the singularity of meaning, and it is through this disavowal of singularity that establishes the genre as a discursive space of excessive – yet irretrievable – meaning. The shift in the usage of ‘science’ to ‘speculative’ is itself a response to the genre’s propensity for imprecise, incomplete, and multiple meanings within a given text. Proponents of this shift argue that the former is an inadequate demarcation of the genre’s loose characterization as a space in which multiple meanings and competing discourses can be worked through rather
than resolved. There have been numerous attempts to account for speculative fiction’s lack of –
or resistance against – essentialism, with Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic assemblage as one of
the most successful models to date. What each approach has in common is its recognition of
speculative fiction as dynamic and indeterminable; most importantly, the texts that occupy the
speculative space of fiction assume their significance through a meaning-making relationship
between reader and author that also embodies the genre’s dynamic indeterminacy. Similarly, by
viewing the competing discourses, definitions, and conceptions of reconciliation as productively
indeterminate, it might be possible to recuperate reconciliation from teleological projects that
perpetuate harmful settler colonial mentalities toward Indigenous peoples. Indeterminacy
functions within “Terminal Avenue” in two ways, constituting two different spaces in which Wil
is able to explore his identity as an oppressed but ultimately autonomous Indigenous man
through the re-discovery and re-claiming of his own agency. The first is the interior space of
Wil’s memory which embodies indeterminacy, as memory itself is necessarily indeterminable,
inarticulable, and unrepresentable. The second space is the external, social space of Terminal
Avenue, wherein Wil actually performs indeterminacy through his engagement with BDSM sex
play, and this performance is powerfully liberatory and agentive for Wil. I will demonstrate that
these two spaces are agentive, and that this agency is rooted in the indeterminacy these spaces
represent, perform, and embody. The ways in which Robinson’s text exemplifies how
indeterminate spaces can act as sites of political productivity can act as a model for how the
indeterminacy that I argue exists within reconciliatory spaces can also be productive rather than
immobilizing.

Robinson’s dystopia blurs the boundaries between historical past and present-day crisis
and works to complicate our understanding of how past events have already implicated us within
an immediate future. Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon, whose anthology *Walking the Clouds* has traced the relatively recent emergence of indigenous science fiction, remarks that one of the most difficult tasks in reading “Terminal Avenue” is determining the degree of hyperbole in Wil’s memories of banned potlatches, violent abuses of power by police, and the segregation of indigenous communities within urban areas (Dillon “Miindiwig” n. page). Thus, while Robinson employs the conventional science fiction technique of blending uncanny futures with the familiar present, she does so as a means of, to literary critic Jessica Langer, “representing the continuation of historical and contemporary oppression rather than its genesis at some point” (Langer *Postcolonial Science Fiction* 49, emphasis mine). Settler-scholar David M. Higgins’s assertion that the ‘science’ of science fiction looks drastically different from an Indigenous perspective can easily be extended to include the term ‘dystopia’\(^2\), as Dillon notes that “if contemplated seriously, [the Native apocalypse] has already taken place” (*Walking the Clouds* 8). Much of the criticism of “Terminal Avenue” is clear in its categorization of the story as dystopic fiction. The story takes place in a futuristic Vancouver wherein Wil conjures up the memory of his deceased brother Kevin, while standing on the Surrey Sky train platform as he is confronted by “the uniforms of five advancing Peace Officers” (207) and prepares for their impending assault. In his article “Indigenous Place and Time”, settler scholar Conrad Scott characterizes “Terminal Avenue’s” setting as dystopic and “in an on-going state of crisis” (Scott 73). But whereas Scott characterizes the crisis Wil faces as overwhelmingly environmental, arguing for the “healing of relationships with nature through a process of return” (74), I argue that Robinson does not actually present the past as the solution to Wil’s dystopic present, and that this is partially because she is also implicating the genre itself in her structural and thematic use of indeterminacy. In his discussion of dystopic literature as the “sociopolitical subgenre of
science fiction”, literary critic Patrick Murphy notes that numerous dystopian authors rarely make any effort to have their novels appear as “anything other than fictions” (Murphy 28), and yet, Robinson’s decision to introduce her story’s setting with a very real, and socially shared event such as the Oka “Crisis”, destabilizes readers’ ability to relegate Terminal Avenue to the world of fiction alone. Settler scholar Andy Duncan emphasizes Robinson’s frustration of the boundaries between fiction and reality, noting that alternative narratives of Indigenous/settler relations “often have well-known cataclysms” (“Alternate Histories” 217). So, while Robinson’s invocation of Oka situates the story as occurring afterwards, we remain unsure of whether or not Wil’s present is also ours. The imprecise moment of “Terminal Avenue” is reinforced by its narratology that implements Wil’s memories as the vehicle by which his story comes into view, however impartially. In her article “Literary Representations of Memory”, settler scholar Birgit Neumann remarks that “the constitutive character of all fictions of memory is therefore their operating with co-present time perspectives” noting that the “multi-temporal levels of the past and the present intermingle in manifold and complex ways” (336). These “complexities” arise from the socio-political underpinnings of Wil’s memories that are intentionally emphasized by the narrative structure.

“Terminal Avenue” is explicit in its use of Wil’s memory as the story’s main narrative structure, and the story immediately positions the text “in his memory” (207) and continues to oscillate between past, present, and future conditional verb form. Scott argues that the memories of Monkey Beach “cast [Wil] back to… a desirable utopian construction of the past” (Scott 74), and yet, Wil’s flashbacks do not depict a past absolved of the dangers of his present. Wil remembers setting up camouflage nets around the beach in order to avoid the surveillance planes that fly overhead (213), which challenges Scott’s depiction of a utopian past. In fact, Robinson
refrains from idealizing the past as a space that is both culturally rich and inherently liberatory by emphasizing Wil’s discomfort with and disconnection from his own Haisla culture. When he recalls his father singing on the boat, Wil “doesn’t understand the words, couldn’t pronounce them if he tried” (214) and is embarrassed and wishes his father were more reserved when he begins to dance (214). These memories are interspersed with reflections on his job at Terminal Avenue where they “do things that aren’t sanctioned by the Purity Laws” (212). Wil’s memories are never fully articulated and always fragmentary, and although this representation aligns with dominant Western postulations that regard memory as “sensory fragmentations”, I want to suggest that Robinson is redirecting our attention not to the memories themselves, but rather how they are organized within the story.

Robinson’s depiction of memory as means of informing readers of a fictional past that bears a striking resemblance to our present exemplifies the kind of relationship between memory and history that both scholars’ works encourage. Though Western historians still struggle to consider memory as a generative source of historical knowledge, the Haisla and Heiltsuk cultures of Northern British Columbia have viewed memory and history as mutually constitutive of one another for thousands of years. Their concepts of sqwelqwel (roughly translated as “true news”) and sxwoxwiyam (or, “myth-age stories”) respectively are used as methods of determining historical legitimacy; however, this legitimacy is not dependent upon processes of verification. Sqwelqwel narratives represent a body of historical knowledge that derives from memories passed down from the orator’s family, whereas sxwoxwiyam narratives are comprised of knowledge that explains the relationship among land, people, and other nations historically.25 One narrative is not thought to be more reliable – rather, the methods are used to present different forms of knowledge that have their basis in history. In both Haisla and Heiltsuk
culture, memory is agentive in its formulation as a producer of knowledge.

Wil’s memory enacts Hulme’s decolonial project of “disengage[ing] with the whole colonial syndrome” (“Including America” 125). His memories provide a space in which Wil is able to disengage from his dystopic surroundings and perform meaningful engagement through an embodied sovereignty rooted in self-reflection. Young notes that “the organization of memory is important in understanding the meaning that is being given to these events” (Young “Between Memory and History n. pag). And so, while it is tempting to sit Wil on the proverbial couch and psychoanalyse the effects of a history marked by the violence of settler colonialism, Robinson’s implementation of memory here answers Emberley’s question: “what if memories also spoke to a longing for something different than seeing one’s self as a victim?” (Emberley 128, emphasis mine). Robinson is not using memory as a means of explaining the past, nor is she suggesting that within this past lay the clues to restructuring the dystopic future; what Robinson is doing is refusing to mark memory “exclusively in terms of suffering”, as theorist Andreas Huyssen warns against, thus freeing Wil’s memory of its limited role as a vehicle of victimry and by extension, of colonial logic. Despite Robinson’s use of memory as a way to inform readers of Wil’s past, she is content to leave Wil’s memories in a state of indeterminacy by refusing to provide clear cut interpretations of their meaning or significance, and instead, opting to enact the principle of “indirect discourse” – a term that Indigenous scholar Kimberley Roppolo observes as a didactic method used by indigenous storytellers to hint at or allude to a story’s significance without directly stating it (“Intertribal Rhetoric” n. pag). We never know why Wil’s brother becomes a Peace Officer, how he died, or even the fate of Wil himself, as the story ends with the Peace Officer’s club “flatten[ing] Wil to the Surrey Central tiles” while he “holds himself there” in the memory of his family (214). Young’s notion of “uncanny history-telling” is also relevant here,
defined as “an anti-redemptory narrative that works through, yet never actually bridges the gap, between memory and historical narrative” (Young n. pag). Critically and creatively, Young and Robinson respectively posit that the process of remembering does not relinquish an individual’s agency but rather proves an opportunity to exert it. Moreover, by invoking memory as a way of rejecting the narrative of victimhood, Robinson subverts ways in which memory is so often used by colonial powers to pathologize indigenous experience and limit their claims to self-determinacy.

Still, there is a way in which Robinson’s text privileges Wil’s memory as the source of his agency despite the club’s potentially liberatory role as a subversive space. Robinson places an expiration date on Terminal Avenue, as Wil “knows he is a novelty item… that is why his prices are so inflated. He knows there will come a time when he is yesterday’s condom” (212). The commodification of Wil’s racial identity exemplifies how Terminal Avenue is dependent upon the socio-affective reality of the colonial state. In other words, it is the desires of Terminal Avenue’s settler customers that dictate Wil’s continued participation in the BDSM scene. Memory proves to be the only space in which Wil becomes fully autonomous. The story ends with Wil being “flatten[ed] to the Surrey central tiles” by the five Peace Officers that have encircled him by the middle of the narrative (212, 214). Wil’s response is difficult to discern because, at first glance, it seems somewhat unresponsive, immobile, and indifferent, as “he holds himself there, in the boat with his brother, his father, his mother” (214) with the narrative ending as he feels “the boat’s spray… cool against his skin” (214). But Robinson makes clear that Wil’s decision to situate himself in the memory of his family’s final trip to Monkey Beach is, in fact, a deliberate choice, writing “this is the moment he chooses to be in, the place he goes to when the club flattens him to the Surrey central tiles” (214, emphasis mine). Upon further analysis, the
term “club” can also be read as a homonym, representing both the club “Terminal Avenue” and the club of the incoming Peace Officer, textually marking a connection between the violence of the Peace Officers and the performative violence of Terminal Avenue. Dillon reads Wil’s decision to stay in the memory of Monkey Beach as a “choice to be transported to a parallel world of ceremonial tradition” that “far outweigh[s] any pretenses of other-government-specified ‘sovereignty’” (Dillon 207), echoing many Indigenous scholars that note conflicting concepts of sovereignty between Western and various Indigenous nations. Art historian Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora Nation) reflects on her experience curating an exhibit on Haudenosaunee culture for the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), noting “sovereignty within the Haudenosaunee communities has always been more than a manifestation of Western law; instead it is a concept that embodies our philosophical, political, and renewal strategies” (“Visualizing Sovereignty” 467). Similarly, the embodied sovereignty that Wil achieves at the end of the story through his memory remains ungoverned by the dystopic society he is able to transcend.

From the beginning of the story, Wil keeps his reflections both secret and separate from the world of Terminal Avenue: “she raises her arms to sweep her hair from her face. Her breasts lift. In the cool morning air, her nipples harden to knobby raspberries. Her eyes are widening in indignation: he once saw that shade of blue in a dragonfly’s wing, but this is another thing he will keep secret” (207). This passage raises a several questions which I think are relevant in discerning how both Wil and Robinson set up memory as the more politically agentive space in the story: what is the priestess indignant about? How does Wil respond to what he recognizes as a moment of indignation? And, lastly, how does Wil’s response demonstrate his autonomy? The narrative structure of this particular passage can provide some insight as to why the priestess feels some kind of indignation toward Wil, as the opening of this passage situates Wil “in his
memory” reflecting on the shade of blue of the mountain Gabiswa, noting that it “is the shame shade of blue as his lover’s veins” (207). The narrative quickly cuts to the moment between the priestess and Wil in which his remembering takes place. Arguably, then, the priestess’s indignant attitude stems from her recognition of Wil’s dissociative acts of reflection from which she is excluded. Her exclusion is necessary in order for Wil’s memory to function as an autonomous space; but it is also Wil’s ability to erect this barrier that demonstrates the kind of embodied sovereignty that the indiscernible space of memory provides. Wil is able to identify the priestess’s feelings of indignation in her eyes and goes on to further reflect that he “once saw that blue in a dragonfly’s wings, but this is another thing he will keep secret” (207). His response to her indignation is to retain his reflections by keeping them “secret” and denying her access.

Wil’s ability to exert his autonomy is formulated by Robinson as the source of his lover’s indignation, understood as “anger at what is regarded as what is wrongful” or “the wrath of a superior” (OED “indignation” n. emphasis mine) and yet, her indignant response also marks the attainment of this autonomy. Wil’s memories are therefore the more privileged sites of agency in “Terminal Avenue”, as they represent a space in which Wil is able to retain his autonomy through the process of remembering.

What Robinson’s text proffers is an exploration of what Indigenous agency might look like under dystopic conditions; however, in making this statement, I want to once again remember critic Grace Dillon’s (Anishinaabe) remark that “the Native Apocalypse, if contemplated seriously, has already taken place” (Walking the Clouds 8). Robinson implicates the indeterminable condition of speculative fiction within her own dystopic text to reveal that the powerful social agents that created this dystopic Vancouver are themselves never pre-determined and importantly contingent. Robinson’s reconfiguration of agency as permeating both the
internal space of memory, as well as the external, erotic place of Terminal Avenue reveals that indeterminacy, as a condition of our discursive reality, is a source of productive liberation. Wil’s re-membering takes place outside of the colonial dystopia constructed by Robinson. Though Wil is depicted as being “lost in his memories” and “living inside his head” (212), the negative connotations associated with each of these have been inherited from a colonial logic that privileges rationality at the expense of rumination and imagination. When Wil is “lost” in his memories, he performs Hulme’s disengagement with the colonial syndrome and denies colonialism’s demands to contribute as subjects our fully active and ever-present bodies. Memory is therefore disarticulated from what Emberley refers to as the “epistemic violence of rationality” (Emberley 128) and, through its disengagement, memory is reformulated by Robinson as an agentive force. Moreover, the space of Terminal Avenue exposes the mutability of the power structures that the BDSM scenes deconstruct through their erotic and parodic performances. Wil feels free when he steps into the club (212), embodying what Langer refers to as “an ironic juxtaposition of freedom with punishment” (*Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* 50). Wil’s performances imbue him with an agency that is rooted in the revelation of socially constructed, contingent, and wholly indeterminable power structures that he is able to confront, subvert, and re-enact in the deviant space of Terminal Avenue. But although both memory and BDSM, through their embodiment and performance of indeterminacy, represent spaces in which agency can be potentially extracted and mobilized by Wil, memory is ultimately privileged as the more autonomous space of “Terminal Avenue”. Wil’s ability to govern the exclusionary space of his reflections from both his lover and the Peace Officers at the story’s end reveals memory’s politically productive role as an agentive site in which Wil’s sovereignty is realized despite the dystopic conditions that seek to deny him his right to self-determination. Though the BDSM
performances represent a space in which the social hierarchies of settler colonialism are de-naturalized, their subversive potential is still problematically dependent upon settlers’ desires.

Robinson’s mobilization of the political potential of indeterminate space can act as a model for the ways in which reconciliatory discourse can marshal its own indeterminate condition as a means of realizing its decolonial potential. Current efforts to consolidate the concept’s inconsistencies impede the realization of reconciliation’s decolonial potential, and these efforts work to assuage settler anxieties toward the Indigenous perspectives of reconciliation that undermine settlers’ claims to territory. “Terminal Avenue” also reveals that Wil’s realization of agency through remembering is also a source of anxiety for the main settler character, the High Priestess. Whereas Wil derives his agency from the condition of indeterminacy, this same condition provokes anxiety, expressed as indignation, for the settler subject. Indigenous autonomy threatens the social hierarchies that govern Wil’s dystopic society -- the hierarchies that would otherwise continue to conceal and reinforce the anxieties that aided in their construction. Wil’s exclusionary form of agency challenges settlers’ perceived supremacy over the Indigenous subject, and this supremacy is predicated upon the notion that this agency is inaccessible, given the social relations that govern Robinson’s dystopia. The logic of this society is confronted through Wil’s exertion of autonomy; power, agency, and the right to self-determination become unfixed, and their allocation indeterminable. “Terminal Avenue” suggests that the derailment of this dystopic future lay in its indeterminable conditions which are simultaneously constructed by settler anxieties, and remain the source of anxiety for its settler subjects. By recognizing indeterminacy as the source of anxiety we can recuperate and mobilize this anxiety to challenge the assumptions that render settler colonial power relations as fixed. The settler anxieties that have contributed to the construction of this dystopia can be mobilized in
constructing an alternative future. Their deployment, however, depends upon acknowledging the relationship between indeterminacy and anxiety, and recognizing the political potentiality of their dynamic exchange.
Conclusion

The last two chapters have demonstrated how Indigenous works of fiction can envision a re-politicized reconciliation project through the incorporation of settler anxieties toward Indigeneity into the discursive space of reconciliation, thereby detaching the project from national mythologies of benevolence that obfuscate the continued injustices of settler colonialism toward Indigenous peoples. In a bid to accelerate colonial control over territory and Indigenous populations (Monaghan 123), settler colonial powers have sought to reaffirm rather than alleviate settler anxieties over Indigenous peoples through the construction of “Indian” subjectivities that “translated generalized anxieties about Indigenous dangers into particularized ‘Indian’ threats” (Monaghan 124). The mythos of a tolerant, benevolent, and peaceful Canada is “an epitomizing characteristic of Canadian national identity and history” (Regan 34) that is incompatible with our nation’s history of violent dispossession through oppressive policies, cultural genocide, and the cultivation and circulation of prejudicial “knowledges” about those Indigenous to Turtle Island. Canada’s reconciliation project needs to reflect a discourse that acknowledges and subsequently engages with these inconsistencies to trace the ways in which these myths continue to gain traction within the public imaginary. Importantly, official narratives of progress, tolerance, and peacemaking are slowly being undermined by counter narratives that highlight the historical injustices that continue to manifest presently. Still, the production of “comfortable knowledges” about “who the Indian is” (Million 83) has played an enormous role in “viewing the ‘Indian’ as irrational and dangerous”, giving rise to “anxieties within settler communities [that are] produced by… imagined threats of Indigenous danger” (Monaghan 142). Undoing this comfortable knowledge about Indigenous peoples means confronting the anxious responses that have come to characterize centuries of settler-Indigenous relations. The persistence of settler colonialism in
Canada requires constant vigilance, interrogation, and ceaseless self-reflection from those that have benefitted from its logic; as postcolonial scholar Patrick Wolfe reminds us, “as complex social formation and its continuity through time… settler colonization is a structure rather than an event” (“Elimination” 390). There needs to be a radical reorganization of reconciliation’s relationship to time in general, since its current formulations appear to “go out of its way to fabricate a sharp divide between Canada’s unscrupulous ‘past’ and the unfortunate legacy this past has produced for Indigenous communities in the present” (Coulthard 121). In addition, Taiaiake Alfred remarks that reconciliatory efforts “try to fit [Indigenous peoples] into the colonial legacy rather than confront and defeat it” (“Restitution” 180), underscoring the need to readjust reconciliation’s approach to the past, present, and future relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. If reconciliation is to be effective in mending these relationships, it cannot participate in the problematic language of “healing” that seems to consistently relegate the responsibility onto Indigenous subjects to either forgive, move forward from, or come to terms with, the past: Coulthard rightfully remarks that “rather than addressing structural issues, state policy has instead focused its reconciliation efforts on repairing the psychologically injured or damaged status of Indigenous peoples themselves” (121).

De-pathologizing the reconciliation process is a twofold process: on the one hand, it requires that the focus of Canada’s reconciliatory efforts resides firmly on diagnosing and dismantling the sociopolitical structures and economies of settler colonialism; on the other hand, this de-pathologizing approach cannot be misinterpreted as abandoning the affective dimensions of colonialism that have been instrumental in the reproduction of colonial relations and power structures. I have argued that Heiltsuk-Haisla writer Eden Robinson’s novel *Monkey Beach* and short story “Terminal Avenue” exemplify an alternative approach to Canada’s reconciliation
project through their provocation and textual representations of settler anxiety. Incorporating anxiety into reconciliatory discourse undoes the benevolent self-image that Canada has constructed for itself by revealing the different affective motivations behind the nation’s treatment of its Indigenous populations. Anxiety is one such motivation whose effects remain relatively overlooked in postcolonial, Indigenous, and Canadian literary studies despite its crucial role in constructing and maintaining Canada’s settler colonial structure. Dian Million’s work reminds us that the segregation and subjugation of Indigenous populations occurred not just geographically on reserves, but by “a deep seated social distancing that was neither hidden nor apologetic” (Therapeutic Nations 82). This unapologetic attitude is reinforced by the narrative of benevolence that underwrites Canadian national identity, offering a “narrative of nationhood” dependent upon the symbolic and literal erasure of the settler state’s unjust treatment of Indigenous peoples that would otherwise expose the hypocrisy of such narratives.  

It is important, then, to investigate how these attitudes and narratives interacted with one another in carving out these geological, social, and affective divides between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, as settler scholar Mackey asserts that “it is only through problematizing dominant categories -- which are often invisible yet powerfully normative -- that we can begin to understand how they are invented and reproduced” (House of Difference 3). I have argued that settler anxiety toward Indigenous presence operates as the dominant affective dimension of settler colonialism in Canada by informing and participating in the production and circulation of “comfortable knowledges” about Indigenous peoples that function as ideological justifications for their continued suppression by the colonial state. Robinson’s work demonstrates that anxiety can manifest within certain Canadian discourses, texts, and responses in various ways; in Monkey Beach anxiety functions dualistically as the text’s organizing affect and as the primary
affective attitude of critical interpretations of the novel’s formal experimentations with temporality and of Robinson’s refusal to conform to readerly expectations of what an “Indigenous” text should portray. Anxiety’s particular aptness for temporally dynamic conditions can be instrumentalized as a kind of anxious reading practice for *Monkey Beach* that understands the text’s oscillating temporalities as being generated by the deferral of the expectations that Robinson’s use of foreshadowing creates. These moments of deferred expectations correspond to moments of anticipated resolution that Robinson ultimately refuses to indulge. Anxiety therefore acts as both the process through which readers can interrogate their own expectations and also as the foundational tone of *Monkey Beach*, mimicking the dual function anxiety has as both the foundation of the collective settler psyche and the affective process through which we can potentially address its lingering effects on Canadian society. Reconceptualized as Canada’s affective ideologeme, anxiety’s aptness for ambiguous irresolution marks it as an important facet in the project of unHINGing settlers’ expectations of reconciliation as an act of resolution while simultaneously revealing settlers’ anxious orientations toward Indigeneity, and how this affective orientation informs their perspectives on reconciliation.

As Robinson’s lesser known foray into speculative fiction, “Terminal Avenue” depicts a dystopian Canada wherein settler anxieties toward Indigeneity have been mobilized in the construction of an extremely oppressive society. The text is an important exercise in imagining what Canada might look like if reconciliatory efforts continue to evade doing the kind of groundwork that is required in restructuring a settler colonial Canada. I have demonstrated that indeterminacy, as the ideology of speculative fiction, is generated by its construction as a paradoxical discursive space in which conflicting definitions, concepts, and ideologies are constantly being re-negotiated, and, furthermore, that this indeterminate condition also
characterizes reconciliatory spaces. The indeterminacy that constitutes discussions concerning reconciliation’s objective, methodology, and definition can actually function as the source of the project’s political productivity by viewing these competing perspectives as sites of engagement rather than ideological impasses. Negotiating the different responsibilities and perspectives that settler Canadians and Indigenous peoples have toward the process of reconciliation can reveal the inadequacies of reconciliation’s current consolidatory structure; in addition, adopting indeterminacy as a condition of reconciliation’s discursive reality can also point toward the anxieties that this indeterminacy might provoke, and how the affect can be harmfully mobilized in colonial attempts to allay these anxieties. “Terminal Avenue” suggests that the derailment of this dystopic future depends upon disengaging with and deconstructing the power structures that settler colonialism attempts to naturalize and formulate as fixed. The indeterminate spaces of the BDSM club and of Wil’s memory are reconfigured as sites of agentive political potential wherein Wil is able to disengage from his colonial reality through the inarticulable and exclusionary process of remembering, and expose the indeterminacy upon which the social hierarchies of this society rest through the subversive BDSM performances of Terminal Avenue. But although BDSM provides Wil with an opportunity to subvert the colonial power relations that seek to deny him agency, the text ultimately privileges Wil’s memory as the more liberatory space. Wil’s memory is not governed by the settler anxieties that have contributed to the construction of this hyper oppressive state. Wil’s settler lover, the High Priestess, responds indignantly to Wil’s exertion of autonomy, as she is denied access to the memories that enable him to self-reflect and disengage from their colonial reality. This indignation can be read as a sort of anxious response to Wil’s agentive remembering, revealing that Indigenous agency is also a source of settler anxiety. Wil’s ability to exert agency despite his dystopic conditions reveals
that the power relations that deny Wil his right to self-determination are socially constructed and subject to change. The logic of this society is confronted through Wil’s exertion of autonomy; power, agency, and the right to self-determination become unfixed, and their allocation indeterminable. “Terminal Avenue” suggests that the derailment of this dystopic future lay in its indeterminable conditions which are simultaneously constructed by settler anxieties, and remain the source of anxiety for its settler subjects. The text becomes an important exercise in reimagining the political potential of Canada’s reconciliation project as anxious indeterminate.

This project has also begun the process of tracing the dynamic relationship between anxiety and time in order to argue that this relationship has the potential to disrupt dominant teleological understandings of reconciliation. The majority of my theoretical readings of anxiety have stemmed from literary theorist Sianne Ngai’s exposition of the critical potential of negative affects in her work *Ugly Feelings* (2004). Ngai’s conceptualization of anxiety as a “non-cathartic” affect have influenced my renderings of anxiety as participating in the necessary work of de-pathologizing the reconciliatory process in Canada. “Offering no satisfactions of virtue, nor any therapeutic or purifying release” (Ngai 6), anxiety’s incorporation into reconciliatory discourse does not risk the same kind of self-indulgence that settler responses of guilt can engender. As a past-oriented affect, guilt threatens reconciliation’s ability to address the present-day persistence of settler colonialism in Canada by reinforcing the bifurcation of past/present. As a future-oriented affect, anxiety has the potential to play an integral role in constructing a decolonial future while working to bridge the divide that currently exists between past histories of colonial injustice and the ongoing effects and re-enactments of these same abuses. Ngai notes that expectant emotions like anxiety “aim less at some specific object as the fetish of their desire than at the configuration of the world in general, or at the future disposition of the self” (209),
highlighting anxiety’s inherent propensity to participate in the fashioning alternative futures that are at present de-familiar or altogether unrealized. Recognizing and understanding anxiety’s motivational role in Canada’s unconscionable history of Indigenous oppression compels us to also consider the ways in which it can be recuperated from this violent history and mobilized in creating a more honest, transparent, and respectful relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians. Working toward this type of relationship means recognizing how settler anxieties toward Indigenous claims to territory, self-determination, and self-governance have so far been marshalled in the advancement of colonial enterprises such as forced assimilation and involuntary dispossession, to name a few. Thus, I have explored the ways in which anxiety has been mobilized socio-historically while also proposing it as an affective site of decolonial praxis in order to address reconciliation’s faulty temporal focus on the past. This project has attempted to initiate further dialogue on the polemic potential of anxiety with the express purpose of exploring how this potential is rooted in the temporal dynamism implicit in anxiety’s futurity. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report closes by calling for individuated, communal, and national action in the realization of reconciliation’s promise of establishing ethical relationships between the settler colonial nation state and Indigenous nations (TRC “Introduction” 7). Although they call for change across law, policy, education, and thinking, they fail to acknowledge the necessary mobilization of affect in the actualization of “ensur[ing] that Canada is a country where our children and grandchildren can thrive” (TRC “Reconciliation” 221). This de-colonial future depends upon the re-politicization of the reconciliation process through the recuperation of anxiety as an affective force for political intervention.
Works Cited


Mrak, Anja. “Trauma and Memory in Magical Realism: Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* as Trauma Narrative” *Literature and Culture* vol. 7, no. 1, 2016, http://dx.doi.org/10.15291/sic.2.3.1c.3


Ruffo, Armand Garnet. “Inside Looking Out. Reading Tracks from a Native Perspective”


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1 Some examples of these values include diversity, tolerance, democracy, equality, which I also extend to Canada’s claims to promoting a multiculturalist national identity.

2 Regan remarks that “the peacemaker myth first appeared in a segment titled “Pioneers Head West: Can Ottawa Settle the Frontier without Bloodshed?” that describes Canada’s strategy to settle the West as the “develop[ment] of good relations with the natives” to ensure to “peace and order” (104).

3 The erasure of Indigenous peoples from Canadian narratives of progress is inextricably linked to the physical, geographical erasure of Indigenous communities by the Canadian government. Thus, this erasure functions both discursively, within the colonial imaginary, and materially, through the active dispossession of Indigenous nations.

4 In the section entitled “Reconciliation at a crossroads”, the TRC notes that, for some, the process is the “reestablishment of a conciliatory state” while others consider reconciliation as a “coming to terms with the events of the past” (“Introduction” 5). Both of these interpretations forgo state responsibility, placing the burden on Indigenous nations to “come to terms” with the past in service of “re-establishing a conciliatory state”.

5 Coulthard, in his chapter entitled “ Seeing Red” quotes Fanon extensively in his explanation of internalized colonialism, linking Fanon’s assessment of the colonial world as “compartmentalized, Manichaean, and petrified” to Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s theory of “coercion and consent” as the two main processes by which colonial hegemony is maintained in order to demonstrate his larger argument that Canadian settler colonialism is maintained because of colonialism’s ability to “modify itself” from a structure once solely maintained through the violent suppression of Indigenous populations to one that relies upon more “seemingly conciliatory” sets of discourses, practices, legislation, and ideologies (6).

6 See Harold Cardinal’s book The Unjust Society wherein he calls the white paper a “thinly disguised programme of assimilation through extermination” (3). Many Indigenous people were
outraged at the government’s complete disregard for the concerns raised by communities during the consultation process and saw the act as an outright refusal by Trudeau and his cabinet to acknowledge Canada’s longstanding oppressive stance toward its Indigenous populations.

7 Regan extends this logic by stating that “the very concept of healing has become analogous with decolonization” (Unsettling the Settler 175).

8 See Taiaiake Alfred’s foreword to Coulthard’s Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition (xi).

9 Castricano cites Anne Williams who notes that our collective anxiety over meaning is often a result of the gothic genre’s ability to make sense of those instances or experiences that, in the system of ordinary experience, are completely irrational. The intrusion of the supernatural into ordinary, or “rational” experience is, for Williams, the gothic’s epistemology (Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic 67). An example of these intrusions might be one of the many instances in which Lisamarie interacts with a supernatural being or the ghost of a relative.

10 Castricano borrows this phrase from Terry Castle’s “Phantasmagoria and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie” (30).

11 Sam McKegney argues that the 1990s saw an increased public interest in the “discourses of healing” and that these discourses contributed to public policies that focused less on reforming “systems of acculturative violence” and more on Indigenous peoples themselves (“From Trickster Poetics to Transgressive Politics” 85). I argue that these discourses still characterize the majority of public reconciliatory discourse today, and that these trends continue to shape our expectations of Indigenous fiction. I also want to make note of Dian Million’s Therapeutic Nations wherein she identifies a shift in how Canadian society and government perceived their “Indian problem” between the end of WWII and its profound effect on human rights discourse, and the development of criminology in the 1970s. She argues that Canadians went from conceptualizing the “Indian” as anomic -- viewing their circumstances as the result of their natural, racialized inability to adapt to white society -- to victims of the neocolonial state of Canada (88).

12 I take my wording from Coulthard’s similarly emotional infected call for Indigenous peoples to hold onto their anger and resentment, arguing that these affective dimensions signal a critical consciousness that colonialism is still alive and well (126, 128).

13 I borrow the term “cognitive legacies” from James Sákêj Youngblood Henderson, who reverses Western pathological traditions of diagnosing Indigenous populations by charging eurocentrism as colonialism’s long standing cognitive legacy (“Diagnosing European Colonialism” 170).

14 Mrak cites Maggie-Ann Bowers’ Magic(al) Realism (2004) that argues magical realism “creates a site where the unrepresentable can be expressed” (77).

15 Moss specifically identifies Robinson as an author whose work is subject to fractal readings. She cites Robinson’s collection of short stories, Traplines (1998), as subverting both readerly and critical expectations of how a character’s story should unfold based on their cultural identity (“Between Fractals and Rainbows” 26).

16 Moss asks, “what compels us to sort out the cultural identity of the characters of Robinson’s stories…. The answer lies with a linking of critical expectations based on authorial identity and the expectation of socially transformative outcomes” (26).


18 Furthering her argument that the novel’s temporally fragmented structure mirrors the disjointedness of traumatic memory, Mrak writes that the repetition of the line “In the distance”
contributes to “the fragmentation of linear time and the notion of the interconnectedness of events, and gives way to the idea of history repeating itself, of violence perpetuating” (par. 22).

In his chapter “Seeing Red: Reconciliation and Resentment” Coulthard notes that the events at Oka were largely covered by corporate media who represented it as “a law and order issue fundamentally undermined by Indigenous peoples’ uncontrollable anger and resentment” (116). Coulthard goes on to argue that while Oka was dubbed a “national crisis” for many non-Indigenous viewers, the events were seen “for many Indigenous people and their supporters… as the inevitable culmination of a near decade-long escalation of Native frustration with a colonial state” (116).

Coulthard defines settler colonialism as a particular form of domination wherein interrelated discursive and non-discursive forms of power are structured in a set of social relations that facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority (“Introduction” 6-7).

Coulthard cites political philosopher Dale Turner (Anishinaabe) in his assessment of the third way in which reconciliation is invoked in Canada (107), writing “Dale Turner’s recent work reminds us that this third form of reconciliation -- the act of rendering things consistent -- is the one that lies at the core of Canada’s legal and political understanding of the term” (107).

I take up Patrick Wolfe’s assertion that territory, rather than race, is settler colonialism’s irreducible element, as access to land continues to be the primary motive for elimination (“Elimination of the Native” 388).

Another prominent approach is from Brian Attebery’s Strategy of Fantasy (2002) which takes up the mathematical principle of the “fuzzy set” to argue sf is undefinable through its accommodation of competing pluralities.

See Higgins’s article “Survivance in Indigenous Science Fictions” (54).


The space of Wil’s memory can also be read as what Garneau refers to as “an irreconcilable space of Aboriginality” wherein intellectual activity exists apart from the non-Indigenous gaze: “these spaces are irreconcilable in the sense that their function depends upon a difference from Settlers. It is axiomatic that their contents are not candidates for reconciliatory discourse” (Garneau “Imaginary Spaces” 34). The agency that Wil derives from remembering is therefore dependent upon the exclusion of the priestess.

I borrow the phrase “narrative of nationhood” from Mackey’s The House of Difference (2002), a cultural anthropological study in debunking Canadian narratives of tolerance and benevolence in service of understanding the role of Western projects of identity construction within the contexts of culture and power. Mackey writes that “the Canadian myth of tolerance has gained great authority throughout the nation’s history, offering a ‘narrative of nationhood’... [that] misrepresent[s] the encounter between cultures and the brutal history of conquest and cultural genocide that Canada is founded upon” (2).

Ngai defines ideologeme as “a complex” that can take shape in the form of a “value system”, or as “a concept that becomes the site and stake of various kinds of symbolic struggle” (29).

The OED defines guilt as “the fact of having committed or of being guilty of some specified or implied offence” (“guilt” emphasis mine).