DRAG, DIRT, AND DEMONS: CENTERING INDIGENOUS THOUGHT IN CRITIQUES OF PRAIRIE QUEER SETTLER COLONIALISM

by

Brett Cassady Willes

A thesis submitted to the Department of Gender Studies
In conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
(June, 2017)

Copyright ©Brett Cassady Willes, 2017

Abstract

My thesis takes as its central question ongoing colonialism in white queer settler affective and discursive relationships to the prairies and to "home." I engage with the works of queer and feminist Indigenous theorists, poets, and arts by the likes of Gregory Scofield, Adrian Stimson, Erica Violet Lee, Zoe Todd, Billy-Ray Belcourt in order to fully articulate my critique of queer settler colonialism. I observe how white queer settlers experience their queerness as an obstacle to full and immediate participation in the settler colonial project, which hinges on cis and heteronormativity, and then recuperate their belonging through queer articulations of colonial claims to home on occupied Indigenous lands. Over the course of this project, I also notice how whiteness mobilizes both anti-Black racism and Indigenous dispossession. In order to investigate these white queer affective attachments to home, I work closely with cultural production made by white queer settlers from Edmonton and Calgary, specifically works by Darrin Hagen, Trevor Anderson, and Rae Spoon. I find it necessary to take these books, films, and music seriously as they are located within and reproduce larger systems of settler colonialism.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Scott Morgensen for your guidance in this project. Thank you for challenging me to think through tough questions and for sharing your experience, excitement, and expertise with me throughout this project. Your unwavering enthusiasm for this project and your confidence in me has helped make this thesis possible.

I am grateful to the members of my committee, Dr. Dylan Robinson, Dr. Jacquline Davies, and Dr. Samantha King, for their questions, suggestions, and for the thoughtfulness they brought to this project.

Thank you to everyone in the Department of Gender Studies who fosters space for generative conversations; especially to Terrie Easter-Sheen whose care and kindness has made my experience at Queen's and in Kingston so much more comfortable.

To Dr. Dylan Robinson and Dr. Katherine McKittrick, whose respective pedagogies, rigour, and generous engagements with students and texts have changed my thinking—within and outside of this project—in ways that I am profoundly thankful for.

Without Yaniya, Julia, Kara, Yasmine, and Roxanne this project would not have been possible. Not only have you worked through ideas with me, you have helped me to expand my understanding of friendship, and what it means to support and show up for your people. I would also like to thank all of my family and kin who supported me online, over the phone, and in person—I am so thankful for your care.

Finally, I am thankful to place; my relationships with the lands I have written about and researched on are bound by Treaty 6 and the First Nations who negotiated it, as well as Métis people.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iii
Chapter 1 Introduction 1
Chapter 2 In the Beginning: Edmonton's Queen History 10
Chapter 3 Dirt City Geographies 41
Chapter 4 My Prairie Home is Haunted: Colonial Ghosts, White Settler Guilt, and Indigenous Spectralization 66
Conclusion 93
Bibliography 96

Chapter 1

Introduction

My thesis is rooted in my own attachments to home and to the prairies, which I take as the plains provinces of Canada: Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. I question the ways that ongoing colonialism shapes white queer settler affective and discursive relationships to the prairies and to "home." I ask how white queer settlers claim home and belonging on the prairies in a way that both constitutes our queer identities and reconstitutes white settler colonialism. Following Sarah Hunt's and Cindy Holmes's collaborative essay, "Everyday Decolonization: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics," which calls for white settlers to commit to challenging racism and colonialism in queer and trans communities, my thesis takes up this work in relation to white queer and trans inhabitance on the prairies. My critical analysis takes seriously the possibilities for decolonial queer politics, engaging with processes and expressions of white queer settler prairie belonging both as effecting colonial violence and as possible sites for intervention. Methodologically, this demands centering Indigenous thinkers, while also engaging the white queer settler texts I take up somewhat sympathetically—seeking understanding from my position as insider-critic within this community, rather than simply dismissing these works.

My thesis investigates and interrogates white queer affective attachments to home on the prairies by closely reading cultural production made by white queer and trans settlers from Edmonton and Calgary. The texts chosen to reflect this geographic location span a range of media, from Darrin Hagen's narrative memoir to Trevor Anderson's short films to Rae Spoon's pop music and documentary. While narrating events from the 1980s to the present, these works also cross temporalities, from fantastic imaginings of the beginning of time in Hagen's work, to the early days of colonial settlement of Fort Edmonton in Anderson's film *Little Deputy*, to gestures towards a (perhaps naïve) post-colonial future in Spoon's song "Come on Forest Fire, Burn the Disco Down."

This project takes for granted that queer and trans people do exist in rural and prairie settings. As noted by Jack Halberstam, "metronormativity"—the conflation of urban and queer—holds that rural life is dangerous for queer people.[1] Counter to metronormativity, rural (and urban prairie) life can be queer; Halberstam observes, "many queers from rural or small towns move to the city of necessity, and then yearn to leave the urban area and return to their small towns; and many recount complicated stories of love, sex, and community in their small-town lives."[2] White queer settlers who make claims to home on the prairies may be responding to metronormativity, but this quality of their life practice is not my main concern. Rather, I am interested in the ways in which white queers articulating their own existence in the prairies make claims to land and to whiteness that reiterate and normalize settler colonialism.

I examine the participation of white queer settlers in reproducing settler title to Indigenous lands through what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls "white possession," which manifests in common knowledge and law, rationalizing land ownership by settler states.[3] In conversation with critical theories of race in Indigenous, Black, and postcolonial studies, Moreton-Robinson develops an analysis of whiteness that can explain, for Indigenous Australians and colonized Indigenous peoples, how "racialization is the process by which whiteness operates possessively to define and construct itself as the pinnacle of its own racial hierarchy."[4] Moreton-Robinson notably references the work of Cheryl Harris, who famously demonstrated in her essay "Whiteness as Property" that in a slave society—namely, the United States—the recognition of rights enjoyed by whites arises from its fundamental denial to Black people, whose status under slavery and post-slavery remains defined by possession by whites.[5] Harris explains that this condition produces not merely the legal conditions of white supremacy, but "a property interest in whiteness itself": recognition that whiteness *is* property, in that to possess it is to possess the exclusive property of a legally defensible subject.[6] As the very condition of self-ownership, whiteness thus communicates both the perpetual white possession of Black life and the perpetual denial to Black people of any recognizable self-possession under the law. George Lipsitz's concept "possessive investments in whiteness" is also useful here as white people continue to police, contain, subject, and erase blackness in order to sustain the racial boundary around their vested interests in whiteness under the conditions of post-slavery, post-race, and liberal multiculturalism.[7] Moreton-Robinson expands on the work of Harris and her admission that the property interest in whiteness emerges from the prior legal creation of white property from colonized Indigenous land. Specifically, Moreton-Robinson examines "how white property rights are connected to the internal territoriality of patriarchal white sovereignty in the form of the nation-state."[8] Moreton-Robinson thinks about whiteness in terms of its imperial and settler colonial formation, as tied specifically to territoriality. Her theoretical project, then, is inspired by and articulated with definitions of whiteness in Black studies, and also is distinct from it, in that Moreton-Robinson represents a definition of whiteness in Indigenous studies that pays close attention to territory. In this context, she illustrates white possession under conditions of settler colonialism as a colonial method for constructing racial hierarchies that subject Indigenous, Black diaspora, and racialized peoples by investing whiteness with possession of self, other, and place. My analysis of race, specifically whiteness, examines how the possession of white identity guarantees cultural and social wellbeing and perpetuates participation in possessive logics, which manifest in white queer settler communities in the prairies through affective narrations of home.

---

[1] J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Place in Time: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 37.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Alieen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xxi.
[4] Ibid., xx.
[5] Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993).

Throughout this project, I encounter settler colonialism and anti-blackness working together and find it necessary to name these moments as they appear in the white queer settler cultural production that I take up. As Iyko Day notes, refusing to mark one form of racial oppression as exceptional to others, "race and colonialism form the matrix of the settler colonial racial state."[9] In this trajectory, while white queer complicity in the ongoing settler occupation of Indigenous lands is of central concern in this thesis, I observe the ways anti-blackness and settler colonialism are relational. Anti-blackness in Canada works to absent the histories of Black people, Black geographies, and resistance, such that Black presence, where it appears, is always constituted as recent.[10] As Rinaldo Walcott writes in *Black Like Who*, "In a Canadian context, writing blackness is a scary scenario: we are an absented presence always under erasure."[11] Working against the absence of Blackness and anti-blackness within the Canadian political imaginary, I draw on the work of Walcott and other Black studies scholars throughout this project to give notice to moments where Canadian anti-blackness surfaces. As Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson notes, anti-blackness "is intrinsically linked to the genocide, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy and colonialism used to maintain the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from our homelands on Turtle Island and to erase our bodies from Canadian society."[12] Simpson further argues that the oppression of Indigenous and Black peoples are tied together, and so too are Black and Indigenous liberation and resistance. Following Simpson's gesture to the simultaneity of Indigenous and Black oppression and liberation, I point to the interconnectedness of anti-blackness, settler colonialism, and white supremacy within the creative work of white queer settlers.

---

[6] Ibid., 1713.
[7] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investments in Whiteness: how white people profit from identity politics*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2006), 22.
[8] Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, xix.

Theoretical Framework & Methodologies

It is necessary to center the Indigenous subject, as theorist, methodologist, and leader in any collective thinking about decoloniality on Indigenous territory, as is the case with this thesis project. The beneficiaries of settler colonialism cannot set the agenda for decolonial work without reiterating the violence of colonialism, which methodologically seeks to disempower Indigenous sovereignty and rights to self-determination. In working to center Indigenous thinkers, I turn to Daniel Heath Justice, who describes the importance of specificity in Indigenous methodology. As a literary critic, he emphasizes national and geographic specificity partly as a mode of reading that enables better understanding of Indigenous works, for example he observes how "the geographic and cultural specificity of Kitamaat village and its oolichan harvest shapes Eden Robinson's Haisla sensibility."[13] Moreover, national and geographic specificity recognizes the reality of Indigenous nationhoods and is a critical part of an anti-colonial critical approach:

---

[9] Iyko Day, "Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Antiblackness, and Settler Colonial Critique." *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2015) : 113.

[10] Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who: Writing Black Canada Second Revised Edition* (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003), 40.

[11] Ibid., 27.

[12] Leanne Simpson, "Indict the System: Indigenous & Black Connected Resistance," December 2014, https://www.leannesimpson.ca/writings/indict-the-system-indigenous-black-connected-resistance

> Native peoples are never just "Native": we are Cherokees, Creeks, Cherokee-Creeks, Mohawks, Eastern Miamis-Shawnees, and all distinctions and combinations between and beyond. Collapsing all these affiliations and relationships into a generic claim of between-the-worlds Native hybridity is yet another act of colonialist displacement that has, as its ultimate aim, the symbolic and physical erasure of Indigenous peoples from the very memory of the land.[14]

As Justice notes, the collapse of distinct nations into a single homogenous category serves to erase Indigenous peoples and nations, along with their unique languages, governance structures, epistemologies, and territories from the land. Attention to Indigenous national specificity enables a more complete understanding of the specific agreements that settler governments and Indigenous nations have formed as they might dictate the conditions for right relationship between Indigenous peoples, the land, and settlers. It is necessary then for non-Indigenous people, in particular white people, as those who benefit from the erasure of Indigenous title to this land, to think through territorial specificity in trying to be accountable to the specific people and nations whose lands we occupy. In my own experience, for example, continuing to learn about Treaty 6 is integral to understanding my relationship and obligations to the place I now live.

The critiques raised over the course of this thesis follow from the work of Indigenous artists, theorists, and writers. I have tried to hold the geographic specificity of the project in mind, following the works of people specifically from the prairies: Gregory Scofield, Métis with roots in Batoche; Adrian Stimson, Siksika from Southern Alberta; Erica Violet Lee, Nêhiyaw from inner-city Saskatoon; Zoe Todd, Métis from Edmonton; Billy-Ray Belcourt from Driftpile Cree Nation; and Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers from the Kainai First Nation (Blood Tribe, Blackfoot Confederacy) and Sámi. I take cue from these authors as their works are steeped in decolonial epistemologies and are rooted in place. Upholding the work of these Indigenous theorists and writers is an attempt at accounting for the violence of settler colonialism and whiteness that actually decenters the white subject. Rather than calling on whiteness to evaluate whiteness, I rely on the work of Indigenous theorists to build an analysis from which I read white queer cultural production, with the ultimate goal of holding white queer settlers accountable for our complicity in white supremacy and settler colonialism. Likewise, I rely on the works of Black Canadian scholars and cultural creators—such as Rinaldo Walcott, Katherine McKittrick, Dionne Brand, Roland Pemberton, and Afua Cooper—whose respective thinking on Black geographies and anti-blackness in Canada drive me to account for white queer settlers' complicity in anti-blackness. Throughout this project, I aim to be accountable to these Black thinkers, whose work allows me to observe the interrelatedness of anti-blackness and settler colonialism, as I work towards my larger project of holding white queer settlers responsible to Indigenous scholarship and sense of place.

---

[13] Daniel Heath Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 215.

[14] Ibid.

This is about building an intentional citation practice into this project: citation is not a disinterested side-effect of building knowledge; it is a political process that can reinforce or disrupt existing knowledge systems, or build new ones altogether. As Sara Ahmed writes,

> citation [is] a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies ... These citational structures can form what we call disciplines. … The reproduction of a discipline can be the reproduction of these techniques of selection, ways of making certain bodies and thematics core to the discipline, and others not even part.[15]

Following Ahmed, if through citation we reproduce the world around certain bodies (and not others) I find it necessary to centrally cite the works of Indigenous and Black thinkers—and, even more specifically, of queer and feminist Indigenous and Black thinkers—in a project that is committed to building white queer accountability to Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty. Scott Morgensen also models how white settler scholarship on settler colonialism should proceed by decentering the authority of white voices, in writings that enact a citation trail of works by Indigenous theorists and theorists of colour who are engaged in and at the centre of decolonial projects.[16] I proceed then by centering the works of Indigenous theorists who are guiding the work of Indigenous resurgence, both by following their critiques of settler colonialism and by supporting their decolonial praxis.

---

[15] Sara Ahmed, "Making Feminist Points," feministkilljoys, September 11, 2013, https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/

Working from within this theoretical framework, in which citational practice is both ethical imperative and methodology, my primary mode of study takes the form of close readings of cultural production created by white queer settlers. My close reading practice draws from literary analysis in order to examine whiteness and what Mark Rifkin calls "settler common sense" at play within the narrative structure of texts. In so doing, I seek to respond to Plains Cree and Salteaux scholar Margaret Kovach's description of how non-Indigenous peoples might take up her proposed Indigenous methodologies. According to Kovach, "It is about examining whiteness. It is about examining power. It is ongoing."[17] Thus, while examining whiteness as it works in queer prairie cultural production forms something like the primary text in my thesis, I centre the work of the Indigenous theorists and artists set out above and seek to decentre whiteness.

I take cues as well from Margot Francis, who reads Canadian art as it demonstrates and, at times, subverts investments in Canadian national identity.[18] My methodology seeks to uncover what my idiosyncratic white queer settler archive tells us about being white, queer, and from the prairies. White queer settlers are both subject to oppression and enact oppression, and I try to balance this subject-position throughout this project. Francis' reading of Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's performance *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, for example, holds the queer subversion of the performance in tension with the ways in which it hinges on the whiteness of national park spaces.[19] Francis models a crucial theoretical complexity that rests neither on uncritical acceptance nor too-easy dismissal of this white queer settler cultural production.

---

[16] Scott Morgensen, "Theorising Gender, Sexuality and Settler Colonialism: An Introduction" *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (2012); "White Settlers and Indigenous Solidarity: Confronting White Supremacy, Answering Decolonial Alliances," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society,* May 26, (2014).

[17] Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Research Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto, University of Toronto, 2010), 169.

[18] Margot Francis, *Creative Subversions: Whiteness, Indigeneity, and the National Imaginary* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011), 21.

The complexity of the oppressor-oppressed position so meaningfully navigated by Francis layers onto my own position within this research project, as both a critic and creator of an archive that expresses my own white prairie queer feelings. My own subject position thus reiterates the importance of a sincere engagement with the white queer texts I read. Dismissing these works outright would create a comfortable but deceptive distance between my position and that of these authors and artists. Instead, I read these works closely, seeking to understand the affective power they have in my own queer community. Rather than critical distance, my work attempts an intimate and reflexive analysis of the affective relationships of white queer settlers to the prairies, toward the goal of dismantling the colonialism that these affective relationships help to uphold.

Chapter Summary

In the next chapter I begin by examining the work of Gregory Scofield, a writer who models what Qwo-Li Driskill calls "sovereign identity," and the ways in which Scofield's work provides a frame for understanding ethical relationships with place.[20] I continue by providing a close reading of white assertions of mastery and ownership over place within Darrin Hagen's memoir *The Edmonton Queen*.

---

[19] Ibid., 113.

[20] Qwo-Li Driskill, "Call me Brother: Two-Spiritness, the Erotic, and Mixedblood Identity as Sites of Sovereignty and Resistance in Gregory Scofield's Poetry," in *Speak To Me Words: Essays on Contemporary Indian Poetry*, ed. Dean Rader and Janice Gould (Tucson: U of Arizona, 2003), 229.

Using Moreton-Robinson's observations on white possession, I connect Hagen's possessive claims to place to his violent treatment of Indigenous and Black queer people.

In the third chapter, following a theoretical groundwork set by Erica Violet Lee and Zoe Todd, I examine Edmonton's queer community as it deploys the city's nickname "Dirt City" to articulate a kind of prairie queer subjectivity. I turn also to the rap music of Cadence Weapon to think about the possibilities for Black geography held within Dirt City. Finally, interrogating *Little Deputy*, a short film by Trevor Anderson of Dirt City Films, I ask how white desires for queer acceptance reiterates and normalizes white settlement in Edmonton.

The fourth chapter critically examines the work of white trans signer-songwriter Rae Spoon, which I track as it moves back and forth between acknowledging and failing to acknowledge white settler colonialism. I find that Spoon is haunted by the legacy of settler colonialism and animates these feelings through the figure of a colonial ghost. Countering Spoon's guilt-ridden feelings of being haunted, I read Billy-Ray Belcourt's analysis of the queer Indigenous poltergeist alongside Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers's short film *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, where I observe that haunting can be a form of direct action. I conclude the thesis by reading Lee and Belcourt together, as they point to the violence of settler colonialism, and as they model and demand new worlds outside of it.

Chapter 2

In the Beginning: Edmonton's Queen History

A central goal of this chapter is to establish a starting point for understanding white queer settler relationships to place and space, specifically in Edmonton. In order to undertake this goal, I turn first to Gregory Scofield, who articulates possibilities for relationship with place through his poetry and prose. As a queer Métis writer, Scofield's work is inseparable from Métis epistemologies and his queer identity—they are woven together and flourish through each other. These aspects of his identity also inform the ways he writes about place. Rather than staking claim to place through ownership, Scofield's approach to place can be broadly characterized as entering into relationship with place. This approach varies according to his position in relationship to a particular place—indeed, Scofield does make a special claim to Batoche and his Métis homelands. Scofield's work leads me to theories for relating to place and space that prioritize care and communication over ownership. From my analysis of Scofield's work, I move to Darren Hagen's memoir *The Edmonton Queen*, and observe as he tries to map Edmonton's queer geography and stakes possessive claims to time, place, and drag culture. Calling on Aileen Moreton-Robinson's analysis of white possession, I read as Hagen assumes a Two-Spirit identity while telling the story of Edmonton's original drag queen, a Native drag queen. Then through Rinaldo Walcott's theorization of the absented presence of blackness in Canada and Marlon Bailey's description of Black and Latinx Ballroom culture, I observe the anti-blackness in Hagen's narration of Edmonton's drag scene. Ultimately, I propose that Hagen's mastery and possession over place and time enable this violence against Indigenous and Black people in the drag scene.

In the introduction to the second edition of Scofield's collection *Love Medicine and One Song*, Métis writer Warren Cariou notes that Scofield "has flouted the attempts of critics and reviewers to place hard boundaries around his identity."[21] By refusing simple identity descriptors like native poet and gay poet, and sometimes even refusing the title poet (preferring writer, instead) Scofield and his work exceed simple categorization.[22] As Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill notes, "Scofield's poetry cannot simply be seen as 'Native,' 'Queer,' 'urban,' 'Canadian,' or any of the other words one might want to use to describe it. His work must be understood within the complexities of overlapping identities."[23] Scofield's work proves an elaborate and multifaceted resistance to white settler colonialism, work that requires more than simple descriptors.

Scofield is the author of seven books of poetry and a memoir, all of which are steeped in his sovereign Métis identity, as they take up mourning, kinship, and sexuality. For Driskill this that means Scofield both "speaks from a specificity of Métis history" and "claims Métis identity as sovereign from both 'fullblood' and white contexts."[24] Driskill argues, in their essay "Call me Brother: Two-Spiritness, the Erotic, and Mixedblood Identity as Sites of Sovereignty and Resistance in Gregory Scofield's Poetry," that Scofield asserts Native sovereignty within his poetry by centering himself in Cree and Métis epistemologies.[25] Grounding himself in his Indigenous language and traditions as he takes up the erotic, Scofield displaces Western and colonial epistemologies of the erotic and in this way decolonizes sexuality and queerness.[26] Taking a similar turn, Métis scholar June Scudeler analyzes Scofield's use of Cree and Métis epistemologies, especially as expressed through Cree language, as they enable a complex articulation of Métis identity and queer Native sexuality that hinges on what Scudeler calls "self-acceptance."[27] Driskill praises Scofield's poetry as being "full of humor, rage, erotic power, and sovereign identity," all of which they note are necessary for surviving as Native peoples in the face of ongoing colonialism.[28] His sovereign Métis identity is integral to Scofield's articulation of queer desire and, as I develop in the next paragraphs, his articulation of his relationships to place.

---

[21] Warren Cariou, introduction to *Love Medicine and One song*, ed. Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm (Cape Croker First Nation: Kegedonce Press, 2009), vii.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Qwo-Li Driskill, "Call me Brother: Two-Spiritness, the Erotic, and Mixedblood Identity as Sites of Sovereignty and Resistance in Gregory Scofield's Poetry," in *Speak to Me Words: Essays on Contemporary Indian Poetry*, ed. Dean Rader and Janice Gould (Tucson: U of Arizona, 2003), 223.
[24] Ibid., 233.
[25] Ibid., 229.
[26] Ibid., 228.

In "The Dissertation" Scofield notices the academic "prodding and jotting, / jotting and prodding" at his poetry.[29] The academic overtakes his work and "like a landlord, / rented him a room in his life."[30] The relationship between academic and poet is nice at first, "a coexistence of sorts," and then turns more violent as she "arrived [with] the microscope."[31] I use Scofield's work as theory with caution and anticipating the unsteadiness with which my analysis is bound to tread. "The Dissertation" is a reminder that as readers arrive to texts (perhaps with microscope in hand) we are entering into relationships with authors. These relationships can be violent, as demonstrated in the poem when the researcher "slipped into his skin." I open with "The Dissertation" precisely because Scofield's call to me, the academic interpreter to note my "prodding and jotting" challenges me to displace the methodologies of settler colonialism that could lead me to perform mastery over his work or to take ownership over it. Rather than alienating the author, or in this case Scofield specifically from his work, I attend instead to my relationships with the text and author from within ongoing settler colonialism, and read for Scofield's Métis epistemologies as they gesture outside of settler colonial conceptions of relating to land and place.

Relationship to Place in the Work of Gregory Scofield

---

[27] June Scudeler, "Gifts of *Maskihkîy*: Gregory Scofield's Cree Métis Stories of Self-Acceptance," in *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, ed. Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen (Tucson: U of Arizona Press, 2009), 206.
[28] Driskill, "Call me Brother," 228.
[29] Gregory Scofield, "The Dissertation" in *Kipochikân* (Gibons: Nightwood Editions, 2009), 125.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

Scofield's memoir *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis* Childhood takes readers through different places and people; ultimately articulating Métis nationhood through homecoming. As he writes in the foreword, "The houses, hotels, shacks, and apartments where I grew up are too numerous to count."[32] Scofield does find comfort in the company of diverse Indigenous peoples though his experiences with their traditions and his time spent in their homes. However, he does not find a personal sense of home until he arrives in Métis homeland. In a chapter called "Pekewe, Pekewe (Come Home, Come Home)," a friend and mentor of Scofield takes him to Back to Batoche Days, an annual festival to celebrate Métis history and culture. Prior to attending this festival, Scofield is resistant to claiming Métis heritage, expressing a desire to be a "true and pure Indian."[33] However, on reaching Métis homeland Scofield is overwhelmed by the uniqueness (read: sovereignty) of Métis culture and tradition:

> A surprising new feeling had awoken within me. I looked around ... and saw my people.
>
> As we left Batoche I felt my heart sink into the very landscape, my spirit joining those of our ancestors in the empty ravines and coulees. I had searched for a land of belonging and now I had found it. The importance I had once placed on being Cree — a true and pure Indian — seemed to disappear with the sinking sun. Suddenly the colour of my eyes, hair, and skin seemed to belong to me, perfectly matching the prairie landscape that held such a dignified history.[34]

The alienation Scofield had felt because of the incompatibility of his body with the mythology of "true Indianness" is soothed by locating his embodiment through and in the land. Moreover, this is not an individualized moment of self-recognition; it a recognition of national belonging and sovereignty. Scofield locates himself within "my people," a Métis nation identified through a "dignified history" of armed sovereign resistance and a relationship to territory, "our ancestors in the empty ravines and coulees." At Batoche, on Métis homeland, Scofield recognizes and takes joy in the particularities of his

---

[32] Gregory Scofield, *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1999), xiii.
[33] Ibid., 166.
[34] Ibid.

Métis nation: such as the history of 1885 Northwest Resistance and culturally specific forms of music, dance, clothing, and art. Land is tied to nationhood, and in finding his Indigenous identity Scofield also finds home.

While Scofield names his profound relationality to place through nation-based ties to Batoche, I take special interest in the ways in which he also addresses relationality while living in, and leaving Edmonton. In commentary on the poem "Prayer for the House," both of which appear in his collection *Singing Home the Bones*, Scofield explicitly notes that "The house that inspired this prayer is a small wartime house in a working-class neighbourhood in Edmonton, Alberta."[35] In contrast with Scofield's account of Batoche above, he does not refer to Edmonton as his homeland and the house is never called home through the entirety of the poem; nevertheless, Scofield in the poem inhabits the house comfortably and establishes a meaningful relationship with this place that is not his home. The poem's location in the final section of *Singing Home the Bones*, "Conversations with the Living"—following the prior sections "Conversations with the Dead" and "Conversations with the Missing"—signals a conversational relationship with place, in which the house is living and is engaged in conversation.

The subtitle of "Prayer for a House"—"*(We are leaving)*"—describes the event that prompts the prayer.[36] The prayer is doing the work of both notifying the house of the couple's departure and thanking it for housing them. The prayer begins with "â-haw, kinanâkomitin good house," and throughout the prayer Scofield repeats "kinanâkomitin good house."[37] In the poem's margins, he translates kinanâkomitin to mean "I give thanks."[38] By beginning the poem in Cree, Scofield addresses the house in his own Indigenous language, and speaks to it first in one of the Indigenous languages of the land where the house itself is built, thereby grounding his representation of the house in Cree and Métis epistemologies. As Driskill observes, Scofield's use of Cree, and sometimes other Indigenous languages

---

[35] Gregory Scofield, *Singing Home the Bones* (Vancouver: Polestar, 2005), 109.
[36] Ibid., 72.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

> asserts a Native identity that is sovereign from both colonial governments and from other Native people. … The use of our languages is a radical act, especially considering the violent history that means many of our languages are endangered or not spoken at all.[39]

Possessive pronouns are absent altogether from the prayer and from the note on the poem. Although the content of the poem makes it apparent that Scofield and his partner have been living there, instead of a phrase such as "our house" the house is referred to as "good house." What defines the couple's relationship to the house is not a possessive pronoun but the experiential "good" of being housed within it: a point emphasized by the repetition of this phrase, which also appears in Cree, "miyo-wâskahikan."[40]

The house responds when told that the couple is leaving. Interrupting the patterns and flow of the prayer, good house's response is marked in italics: "*tânte-ê-wi-tohteyin, / tânte-ê-wi-tohteyin?*"[41] Translated as "where are you going," good house engages in conversation with the couple, as the collection's section heading promised.[42] When the house responds to the couple, asking them where they are leaving to, it becomes clear that they are tied to the house not through ownership but through relationship because the poet includes as an interlocutor. The fact that the house has a voice in the poem is evidence that, from the perspective of the writer, the house is not merely an object to be owned or rented. Their relationship to the house, as distinctly not possessive (evidenced by the writer's pronoun choices), is reemphasized through the house's desire and willingness to talk back to the couple. Perhaps both sad and curious, the house wants to know where the couple is off to. It is worth noting the house responds in Cree, one of the Indigenous languages of the land the house is built on. While the poem has no evidence to suggest so, it might follow that if the inhabitants of the house have a conversational relationship with it, so too does the house with the land it inhabits.

---

[39] Driskill, "Call Me Brother," 223.
[40] Scofield, "Prayer for the House," in *Singing Home the Bones* (Vancouver: Polestar, 2005), 72.
[41] Ibid., 73.
[42] Ibid.

The note Scofield appends to the poem, in which he recalls the history of this house, provides further evidence that relationships with place can be dynamic and not defined through ownership. Scofield relates that he moved into the house when it was "in sad condition, having seen numerous careless renters over the years."[43] The house required care after having housed "careless renters" who presumably did not have a good relationship with it. Scofield describes how he and his partner begin this care work not as a form of home renovation, but rather as listening: "It was like visiting an old story-teller. We listened in silence, bringing life back to the walls, the floors, and rooms."[44] Describing the house as an "old story-teller" evidences the house's need for listeners: storytelling consists in a relationship between teller and audience; storytelling is a relational form and cannot occur in isolation. The house as storyteller needs the couple's attentive audience to "bring life" back to it. In return for their listening and caring, the house cares for them, becoming a healing space:

> The house had returned our gift of love: it had brought my partner and me closer together and I learned to keep my feet quiet and still. I learned the habits of flowers in the yard and how to move through the seasons of my own cranky bones. But now the house has new people. Perhaps it will tell them about us, about the poems that were made there.[45]

This return of love, parallel to the return of listening then speaking, or telling then responding, highlights the relationship between Scofield, his partner, and the house. Conversation, after all, is a back and forth. Here, Scofield mentions "the habits of the flowers in the yard" and "the seasons" making reference to the larger frame of the land on which the house is situated. In this way, part of the house's "gift of love" imparts Scofield with knowledge of place that extends beyond the boundaries of the house itself. Entering into a relationship with the house is connected to a wider relationship with land. Scofield imagines his and his partner's relationship with the house outlasting their stay if, as Scofield hopes, the house tells its new residents about them and their work. In this way, their relationship with the house and with place is not temporary: it is sustained through future conversations between the house and people yet to arrive.

---

[43] Ibid., 109.
[44] Ibid., 110.
[45] Ibid.

Scofield's "Prayer for a House" models a profoundly relational mode of being with place. Place may be inhabited without feeling ownership over it. Moreover, place is agentive: a living being with whom inhabitants enter conversational relationship. Most importantly, perhaps, relationships with place can be generative both for people and for the places themselves: relationality is based in reciprocity and mutual care. Even though they are not mentioned in the poem at all and only very briefly in Scofield's notes, the "careless renters" remain in my mind as people who denied or bore a bad relationship with place. Scofield does not speculate on the wellbeing or morality of these careless renters, although we know that the house became unhappy because of their stay. Whether or not the careless renters acknowledged it, they were entering into a relationship with the house and their failure to engage conversationally in that relationship damaged the house. Dwayne Donald proposes that the failure of settlers to acknowledge their relationship with Indigenous peoples is colonialism.[46] Donald emphasizes that colonialism is a shared condition, and thus the work of decolonization should be shared among both colonizers and colonized.[47] Following this logic, and given that land ownership and occupation are central ways through which settler colonialism operates, refusing a relationship with place under such conditions is primed to be complicit in or to enact a form of colonialism.

Holding Scofield's words closely, I turn to the work of white queer settlers in Edmonton with the intention of examining the ways we perpetrate the violences I have invoked. I approach Darrin Hagen's memoir, *The Edmonton Queen: not a riverboat story*, by attempting to expose the racial and colonial desires of white queer settlers who claim Edmonton as their home. After first observing Hagen's assertion of mastery over both place and time, I then think through the ways in which his possession of whiteness enables these forms of mastery as well as the violences that they commit against both place and people, which express in particular through linked forms of Indigenous genocide and anti-blackness. Led by Scofield's poetry, I conclude by imagining how white settler queers from Edmonton might enact responsible relations to place as well as people that acknowledge their enactment of multiple racial and colonial violence as the inheritors white settler colonialism on the prairies.

---

[46] Dwayne Donald, "Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts," *First Nations Perspectives* 2, no. 1 (2009) : 3.
[47] Ibid., 5.

Mastery of Place in Darren Hagen's Drag Memoir

The Edmonton Queen: not a riverboat story is Hagen's memoir of Edmonton's drag scene between 1982 and 1993. Intimately connected to Edmonton's "Underground," as Hagen calls terms the drag scene, this work captures an often unrecognized queer and trans geography. The memoir concerns the Edmonton Queens, their lives and drag politics as they vie for the title of Mz. Flashback, the highest honour attainable in the drag scene in 1980's Edmonton. Readers are welcomed into, and later witness the closure of Club Flashback, a gay bar where The Edmonton Queens regularly performed, as well as Walla Walla West, the residence of a collective of queens. Throughout the story we are introduced to many queens through the recollections of our interlocutor Gloria Hole, Hagen's drag persona, who appears most of the time as a white queen in genderfuck drag. With a consistent touch of drama that verges on magical realism, *The Edmonton Queen* straddles genres: it is a memoir that readers are only half sure they can trust.

Hagen activates queer genre by writing camp. As a book not just written about queens, but written by one, *The Edmonton Queen* enacts camp sensibility in its narrative style and content. The narration is playful and dramatic, and the truths get lost somewhere in between—nothing is safe from queenly exaggeration. Inhabiting the convergence of glamour and humor, Hagen (Gloria Hole) is a queen of camp. As Esther Newton observes in *Mother Camp,* her 1972 ethnography of mostly white drag queens in New York City: "Camp is not a thing. Most broadly it signifies a *relationship between* things, people, and activities or qualities."[48] Newton's relational description of camp ultimately gets at the ways camp is theatrical, always requiring both a performer and an audience.[49] She further observes that these relationships are playful; put simply, "Camp is for fun."[50] Newton's work centres a normatively white subject who maintains power within marginalized queer and trans spaces and whose centering excludes queens of colour. At once, and precisely for this reason, her analysis of drag proves useful for understanding Hagen's use of camp, which is also normatively white. Camp makes Hagen's text slippery. The genre itself is one that teases and blurs the lines between fact and fiction:

> These stories are true. Mostly.
> The really bizarre stuff is true.
> Actually its *all* true. All I had to do was remember.
> Like I could forget.[51]

Near the beginning of the text, Hagen prepares readers for the variability in the text's truthfulness by clearly entering them into a playful, performative relationship. Immediately after declaring the truth of his stories, Hagen adds the caveat, "Mostly," and then massages "Mostly" by assuring us once more that the weirdest moments of the text are certainly true. This constant movement back and forth between perceived truth or fiction iterates the text's camp style. In the last two sentences of this excerpt, Hagen draws attention to his own memory. With the use of "Like I could forget," he both marks the book's contents as unforgettable and reminds us of the precarity of his own memory. In this way, Hagen's memoir is subject to slipping and sliding because of its campiness, effectively skewing the genre of memoir. As I explore below, while this generic slipperiness makes Hagen's work resistant to interpretation, it also becomes a playful means of asserting dominance over place and time.

---

[48] Darrin Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen: not a riverboat story* (Edmonton: Slipstream Press, 1997), 105.
[49] Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1972), 107.
[50] Ibid., 109.
[51] Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen*, 12.

Mapping Drag

Hagen's story begins as he leaves Rocky Mountain House, a small town linked to Edmonton by the North Saskatchewan River. The text moves us along the same route as would be taken by the Greyhound bus, by naming each town lying between Rocky Mountain House and Edmonton: "Alhambra, Leslieville, Benalto, Eckville, Sylvan Lake, and Red Deer."[52] This traveling from small town Greyhound rest stop to small town Greyhound rest stop contextualizes Rocky Mountain House, as it emphasizes the distance between the big queer prairie city and the smaller town south-west of it. By tracking the arrival of Hagen and his queens' movement from rural to urban space, the text mirrors metronormative understandings of queer and trans life and liberation as urban, even though the text later complicates its own framing of the queens' relationships to the prairies.[53]

The book maintains a cartographic hold on the prairies generally, and an even tighter hold on Edmonton specifically. After moving to Edmonton, known within the book as the Big Onion, Hagen orients readers to his queer space, the Underground.[54] The center of Hagen's drag map is Club Flashback: for him, all other queer spaces emerge from here. One might go so far as to say Flashback serves in this book as the center of the city, representing all queer possibility. The reader encounters the geography of

---

[52] Ibid., 10.

[53] J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Place in Time: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 37.

[54] Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen*, 19.

Flashback as a performance space: the pit, where queens get ready; the stage where their performances begin; and the bar atop which they present a grand finale. Flashback also appears in the narrative as a work space, when Hagen appears behind the bar or cleaning bathroom stalls. Flashback leaks out into domestic spaces such as Walla Walla West, a communal house of queens that comes into existence through kinship ties built within Flashback. The queens and the culture created in Flashback exceed its walls.

The queens are also christened in a field in Tofield, drawing them back to rurality for one night a year.[55] It is through this rural ritual that Hagen reveals that queerness is not a distinctly urban phenomenon, but one that oscillates back and forth, claiming spaces both in the city and outside of it. Regardless of how strange the return to rurality may be, even to the queens themselves, it is through a sense of tradition that they normalize their movement. Like Hagen explains, "You may want to pause and picture a convoy of wildly adorned she-males racing East to a rural setting to do the wildest drag show around. Legends abounded, tied together by traditions that went back to the house of Millicent herself."[56] This annual rural excursion is further normalized through land ownership, as Hagen makes note of the farm's owners, "Rhoda B. and two lesbians."[57] The queer ownership of the land where the gathering takes place is what enables queer and trans performance on the farm without fear of rural conservatism. This rural christening iterates the importance of land, even to queers who boast the need for urban centres to actualize their queer desires.[58]

---

[55] Ibid., 44.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Scott Morgensen, "Back and Forth to the Land: Negotiating Rural and Urban Sexuality Among the Radical Faeries," in *Out in Public: Reinventing Lesbian/Gay Anthropology in a Globalizing World*, ed. E. Lewin and W. L. Leap, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 159.

Flashback closes and the drag residents of Walla Walla West end their tenancy long before the book is published. Consequently, *The Edmonton Queen* is Hagen's mapping and reanimation of queer and trans spaces that do not exist anymore, and readers of the book are made to feel that this queer geography would be lost without him. In addition to the narrative map Hagen builds in the book, people familiar with Edmonton queer and trans scenes know Hagen as the director of the annual Queer Edmonton History Bus Tour. The tour takes place during Edmonton's pride season, when a group of people board a bus and listen as Hagen directs and describes significant landmarks of Edmonton's queer history. Access to lost queer geographies is what makes this book enticing for those with an interest in queer history.

The physical address of Flashback corresponds with an area of Edmonton that historically experienced disproportionate degrees of urban poverty.[59] Following the City of Edmonton's most recent revitalization project, which has included a new hockey arena, establishments like gay bars, homeless shelters, and low income housing have been and are being pushed out of this area of the city.[60] In this way, the glimpses of now-hidden queer maps available in Hagen's writing and on his tour might be useful starting points for understanding the relationship of queer and trans spaces to Edmonton's current context of gentrification. While beyond the scope of this project, this kind of geographic analysis gestures towards the value of queer historical memoir, such as Hagen's, however troubling they sometimes may be. Critics of the economic and sexual exclusions produced by gentrification could even perceive Hagen's writing as body of evidence worth mobilizing within radical queer critique. Yet as my close textual analysis of the text attempts to portray, the memories recorded by the rhetoric of the book write prairie queer desire into existence by enacting the possessive logics of settler colonialism.

---

[59] Kara Granzow and Amber Dean, "Revanchism in the Canadian West: Gentrification and Resettlement in a Prairie City" *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies 18*, (2007) : 91.

[60] Ibid.

Narrative Mastery in *The Edmonton Queen*

Hagen represents himself as having mastery over both time and place throughout his narrative, and it through this master narrative that queer history is being communicated to white queer and trans audiences who read this book as a part of their history. *The Edmonton Queen*, as a mapping project, at once documents and preserves queer and trans spaces in Edmonton. By containing his project to a specific timeline (1982-1993) and to specific spaces that no longer exist, Hagen creates a relic, untouchable and uncontestable. His narrative form exerts mastery of the Underground by containing place and time in a manner that limits the possibilities for alternative queer geographies—especially as he marks himself as one of the few remaining queens from said era. Hagen's mastery over his designated timeline and queer Edmonton is at odds with queer possibilities for geographies of Edmonton.[61] As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner write in "Sex in Public," if we understand queer culture as a world-making project, then it

> necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright. The queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematised lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies.[62]

Queer geographies are necessarily uncontained and unmanageable (unmappable!) because queer worlds are always proliferating possibilities for understanding place, intimacy, and kinship: especially if queer is a shifting category, always adjusting to accommodate those being made abject. In contrast, Hagen's memoir is managed and contained through his memories of and expertise within specific gay spaces that, in his narrative, maintain normative whiteness.

---

[61] In the second edition of *The Edmonton Queen*, Hagen connects with some of the queens described in the original book to ask what they thought of his representation of their Flashback days, thus relinquishing some of this mastery over this narrative by exposing the limits of this voice.
[62] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public" *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998) : 558.

The confines of Hagen's drag geography are exemplified through his handling of the intersection of drag and sex work. Hagen's drag mother Lulu LaRude is a sex worker, in drag, before she ever engages in the Flashback drag scene. The way Hagen frames it, Lulu's work on "the Strip" is distinct from the performances that she and Hagen are a part of within the gay club. The narrative arc of Lulu's drag career within Flashback begins with "Lulu needed to get a real job (hooker didn't look good on an application form for Empress)"[63] and ends with her move away from sex work, when following Lulu's crowing as Empress IX, Hagen remarks "Outside … the hookers, not all of them women, stood on the corner of boredom and desperation, unaware that inside, one of their own had transcended all that pain and reached the top."[64] Even within the queered and sexualized space of the drag scene, Hagen determines what kinds of sex are deemed acceptable within his memoir and while paid sex exists at the peripheries of it (as clues to other queer worlds) there is no space made for it within Hagen's geography.

Scheduling Drag

Throughout *The Edmonton Queen*, the dated chapters and closed timeline demonstrate the control Hagen exerts over Edmonton's drag scene by way of temporality. The carefully curated eleven-year timeline of the book begins when Hagen leaves his hometown and arrives in Edmonton, and later ends as he cuts ties with the underground drag scene to pursue theater. Hagen's timeline evolves almost entirely around his own drag timeline and not, for example, around the timeline of the Hole family drag dynasty, a history in the Edmonton drag scene that both precedes and follows him. Almost every chapter is dated, assigning its events to a particular month, year, or set of years within Hagen's own drag trajectory. As subheadings to most of the chapter titles, the dates offer a specificity and exactitude that is at odds with the playful, campy narrative voice.

---

[63] Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen*, 30.
[64] Ibid., 62.

Hagen does play with drag time, a queer temporality, when he describes the queens' weekend schedule, "the itinerary regimented."[65] In an almost militant schedule spanning three pages, although anticipating its own interruption, Hagen lists every activity a queen will do from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. Contra to a normative disciplinary schedule, Hagen's drag itinerary aims to accomplish a freakshow, as the text itself notes: "As freaks, we *were* the show."[66] This itinerary schedules failure: the first two items are "2:00 p.m. Awake" and "4:00 p.m. Awake again. Get up"; after buying cigarettes and applying some makeup, we encounter it again, "7:30 p.m. Awake. The cigarette has burned a hole in the couch." The joke here is that the habits and patterns the queens follow every weekend are at odds with a formalized schedule and yet are predictable enough to schedule. The schedule is both specific and vague, reminding us once more that we are steeped in camp. According to Jack Halberstam, "Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproductions, and death."[67] Through the disavowal of normative cis, hetero notions of success, queer time enables creative possibilities for the present, when queer futurity is limited. Hagen's schedule articulates a version of queer time, as he disregards respectability and revels in childish partying. Yet beyond playfulness, the alterity of queer time also allows Hagen to assert control over time within the narrative. When read next to the dates assigned to certain chapters, for example, his queer schedule reveals the inconsistency of Hagen's alternative temporalities. Through the selective use of queer time—as an alternative, slippery temporal mode he knows so well—Hagen becomes the executive director of queer Edmonton's timeline. That is, he leverages alterity to assert his own mastery over time. After all, the narrative arc of *The Edmonton Queen* revolves entirely around Hagen's own drag evolution ending in 1993 as Hagen embarks onto his career in theater, founded on his drag experience. Indeed, Hagen's schedule articulates the playfulness of queer time, but within the scope of his narrative it is used to further express his mastery over to Edmonton's drag scene.

---

[65] Ibid., 20.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Halberstam, *In a Queer Place in Time*, 2.

Finding a Home for Drag

As he asserts mastery over his narrative through the use of queer time, Hagen also asserts mastery over spaces through his desire to claim a queer home. Hagen's claims to time and to home reflect possessive logics that are threaded through *The Edmonton Queen*. Hagen stakes a firm claim on Flashback, the club at the centre of the book. There are domestic spaces and homes throughout the book, but none of them are as important or permanent as Flashback. It is not surprising, then, that Hagen literally declares it his home:

> Home.
> This was where Family could take root, be fruitful, and multiply.
> Home.[68]

Through the paternal trope of home building and familial legacy, Hagen ironically names Flashback the space for his drag dynasty. Making home in a gay bar is at odds with the normative, biblical family building that Hagen invokes when he deploys the rhetoric of "take root, be fruitful, and multiply." To continue the biblical intonation, while sodomites do not multiply in the gestational way, Hagen's drag family does indeed grow. Despite the irony, the line breaks force us to consider the importance of home. Here Hagen declares the importance of home and the queer possibilities it holds—the bar is a public space that enables queer and trans kinship.

---

[68] Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen*, 23. Line breaks, original.

Hagen's bold assertion to home in Flashback exists in stark contrast to Scofield's poetics of place. In "Prayer for the House," Scofield demonstrates a deep accountability to a house and land as a visitor without ever claiming it as a home. Even with the absence of the word home, Scofield manages to create a space for queer kinship to flourish. By building a relationship with the house itself, Scofield articulates an alternative possibility for queer family space that does not rely on declarations of ownership. As he transforms my understanding of home and relationship with place, Scofield also transforms the ways I read and interact with *The Edmonton Queen*. Read next to "Prayer for the House," Hagen's relationship to Flashback is revealed to be defined solely through ownership. His claim on Flashback as home works towards his own ends as a drag pa/matriarch. Not ever considering the implications of declaring ownership over the club once more asserts mastery over place.

Flashback is made into a domestic space "where Family could take root," and also where domestic labour is done. Describing his paid labour at the club, Hagen notes cleaning toilets "was how we subsidized our drag habit: commercial sanitary engineers. Hardly glamourous, but essentially we got paid for cleaning up our own mess."[69] Cleaning the bathrooms at Flashback is tolerable because the space belongs to him—he is cleaning his own toilets and his own mess. Flashback is a space Hagen exerts ownership over through labour. He performs domestic tasks to earn a wage and then uses this work to articulate his felt sense of ownership over the bar. Hagen enters into a relationship with the space insofar as he feels like he owns it; Flashback is only important because it enables his own fun. Having read Scofield, how does Flashback feel about its relationship with Hagen? How might our sense of responsibility to place and the people we share it with actually transform by reconceptualising relationality and ownership?

---

[69] Ibid., 59.

Of Gloria and her drag mother Lulu Hagen writes, “We treated Flashback like our own private playground. It was simple: no one ever said no.”[70] Once more Flashback, though called home, is nothing more than an arena for their own fun. Ownership may prompt care to maintain the utility of the space, but this self-interested posture does not obligate care for the other people occupying the space, or the space itself for its own sake. There is a clear assertion of their right to the space here, mentioned briefly in Hagen’s description of the party scene at Flashback. Hagen’s mastery over Flashback can go without saying because as drag matriarch his right to ownership is taken for granted. Hagen’s undeclared entitlement to Flashback is explained by what Mark Rifkin calls “settler common sense,” in that his claim to the entirety of this queer and trans space is made possible through the materiality of white settler colonialism.[71] Enabled by white possession, Hagen easily claims Flashback towards his own queer ends; the memoir forces us not to be concerned with the racial and colonial acquisition of territoriality but with the sheer miracle that queer and trans people have found space at all.

A claim to Flashback is, for Hagen, a claim to all of the drag community in Edmonton: “As long as we controlled the Flashback stage, the Big Onion queens would be answerable to us.”[72] His reign over Flashback, when it did exist, makes him the last word on Edmonton’s drag history between 1982 and 1993. Hagen maintains this control through the careful curation of Edmonton’s queer history, containing it within time and space over which he feels mastery. And, as he says here, control over Flashback means control over the whole city. It is through his possession of these carefully contained queer spaces, grounded in place and territoriality, that Hagen enacts the violence of queer settler colonialism. Asserting relationship with place through ownership, as a white queer settler, Hagen both participates in and normalizes settler occupation of Indigenous lands. Hagen's failure to enter into a relationship with Flashback beyond as a container for his own fun enables his disregard for the space itself and for the people who share the space with him: specifically, his normalization of violence against Black and Indigenous people within the club space.

---

[70] Ibid., 41.

[71] Mark Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense: Queerness and Everyday Colonialism in the American Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 28.

[72] Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen*, 59.

Possessive White Queens

Hagen's possession of whiteness enables his purported possession of Flashback and queer Edmonton. According to Alieen Moreton-Robinson, white settler nation-states like Canada are maintained through possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty that continuously stake claim to Indigenous lands.[73] Examining whiteness under conditions of settler colonialism through the framework of possessive logics exposes whiteness as something to be possessed and as something that enables possession, "to be able to assert 'this is mine.'"[74] Following the work of Cheryl Harris, Moreton-Robinson theorizes whiteness as it becomes property through the white settler nation-state. Following their work, in the white settler societies of North America, the white nation-state enacts possession through the dispossession and occupation of Indigenous lands and through enslavement, another form of possession, of Black people on these Indigenous lands.[75] Whiteness then characterizes itself, as human and citizen, through the epistemological possession of blackness.[76] Put another way, the possession of whiteness that grants full humanity, full citizenship, and right to ownership within the white nation-state, and that protects the personhood and interests of the possessor of whiteness, is founded on the perpetual dispossession of Indigenous peoples and eviction of blackness from humanity. Hagen's mastery over place is an assertion of ownership that is empowered by his hold on whiteness. Through his whiteness, Hagen normalizes the appropriation of Native lands and takes possession of his imagined proximity to nativeness as he writes a legend of the first Native drag queen.

---

[73] Alieen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xi.
[74] Ibid., 49.
[75] Ibid., 53.
[76] Ibid., 46.

Mythologizing Drag

In a chapter all on its own, "In the Beginning," Hagen tells the origin story of the Hole drag dynasty, which begins with the Native queen Millicent. From the start of this chapter, Hagen does what Philip Deloria calls "playing Indian," building an imagined Indian persona through his own white writing: "It all began many moons ago when an Indian Princess planted her heel in the earth and declared herself Queen."[77] Purporting to tell the story of Edmonton's first queen, in one of only a few narratives falling outside of the book's 1982-1993 timeline, Hagen animates Millicent's story through his white queer settler imaginary, which is invested in the colonial object of the Indian princess.[78] By locating his drag ancestry in the tale of a Native drag queen, Hagen creates his own roots within and fulfills his desire for proximity to indigeneity, ultimately justifying his claim to space. In her examination of Bill Clinton's possessive and faulty claim to Cherokee kin, Moreton-Robinson observes how white settler claims to indigeneity serve to erase indigeneity as a racialized category, despite the centrality of race and racism to dispossession. Clinton's whiteness allows him to imagine proximity to indigeneity because, as Moreton-Robinson writes, "there is no threat to his investment in his white identity."[79] In a similar gesture to Clinton, Hagen makes a possessive claim to indigeneity when he invents an origin story for his drag empire that begins with a Native queen. By creating this legend Hagen obfuscates indigeneity as a relevant racial category, imagines his own inheritance, and builds a narrative about his own rightful inheritance.

---

[77] Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 36; Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen*, 55.
[78] Janice Acoose, *Iskwewak Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2016), 32.
[79] Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 56.

When Hagen creates the drag Indian Princess as an object of Native sexuality, one that only exists in his white settler imaginary, the entirety of Edmonton's drag scene and the title of Mz. Flashback become the rightful inheritance of white queens from the original Native queen. By creating imagined Native roots in this story of inheritance, the white queens possess the drag kingdom through repression of their complicity in settler colonialism. Scott Morgensen diagnoses how the investments of white queers in indigeneity and in settler constructions of Indigenous queerness manifest in their stories about the berdache, a colonial fantasy of Indigenous sexuality and gender that imagined "a gender-transitive and homosexual subject, defined by male embodiment, who received social recognition in Native American societies."[80] In such stories, berdache is effectively misread as Indigenous culture by white queer settler subjects and this misreading and its political deployment define their sense of sexual personhood.[81] Tracing conversations among white gay and lesbian anthropologists, Morgensen notices how scientists turned the colonial object berdache into a tool for social change by presenting it as proof that gender and sexual diversity can be affirmed and accepted.[82]

These conversations are not reserved to non-Native anthropologists, however, but are abundant as well among those whom Morgensen calls gay and lesbian counterculturalists. Reading *RFD*, a journal by and for rural gay men, Morgensen reveals white investments in proximity to indigeneity.[83] Gay rural men in the 1970s interacted with the idea of berdache differently than many anthropologists, as their artwork and discussions of spirituality cathected their desires for Native spirituality and sexuality. Read alongside

---

[80] Scott Morgensen, *Space Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011), 55.
[81] Ibid., 67.
[82] Ibid., 65.
[83] Ibid.

Moreton-Robinson's framework of white possession, these anthropologists and counterculturalists use queerness to express their own possession of whiteness, when they assert ownership over berdache in order to repress their complicity in Native dispossession and gain proximity to indigeneity. When white queer settlers animate Native sexuality through their own imaginaries and desires, by way of berdache and the originary Native, they "re[write] their lives on stolen Native land as somehow being a return to kinship with their own."[84]

Animating Millicent through his white queer settler imaginary, Hagen continues to play Indian by way of overwhelming nature metaphors: "She breezed through every front door with the ease of a mountain wind, as familiar as sunlight," for example.[85] This style makes a mockery of Native people and reveals Hagen's ideas about indigeneity. In this sentence, indigeneity is inevitably linked to land, to which Hagen also asserts a claim. Hagen overtakes Millicent's story and occupies her story with his own desires as his first step in attempting to possess indigeneity.

While it is fraught to try to imagine Millicent's story freed from Hagen's colonial investments in retelling it, I turn to the alternative narratives emergent in the work of Adrian Stimson and his alter ego Buffalo Boy as a possible articulations of queer Native sovereignty—manifest as one's right to telling their own story. In his Master's thesis "Buffalo Boy's Heart On," Stimson writes a Two-Spirit origin story for Buffalo Boy, a multi-gender trickster and campy play on Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show. The section "In the beginning," coincidently sharing a title with Hagen's chapter, is an introduction to Buffalo Boy.[86] This origin story is not locked into the past, and instead reveals Buffalo Boy as "a construction and fusion of all times in the present."[87] Quite simply, Buffalo Boy's timeline is undefinable, existing both before and after settler arrival. He is a product of the land, born from a buffalo, and rewrites Cher lyrics to best articulate his anti-colonial sentiments.[88]

---

[84] Ibid., 63.

[85] Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen*, 53.

[86] Adrian Stimson, "Buffalo Boy's Heart On: Buffalo Boy's 100 years of wearing his heart on his sleeve" (master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2005), 2.

[87] Ibid., iii.

Unlike the origin story that Hagen writes, Stimson's account of Buffalo Boy does not end. Buffalo Boy does not leave an inheritance to white settlers but instead proceeds in her work as a trickster: turning back time and rearranging colonial histories.[89] In "Gambling the Prairie Winnings," a project that plays on Saskatoon's Western Development Museum's centennial theme "Winning the Prairie Gamble," Stimson discusses his arrangements of prose and pictures as used to create different histories.[90] Interlaying contemporary photos of Buffalo Boy with historical photos, he builds a history that represents Native queer life and does not forget colonial violence. Stimson writes, "In arranging the narrative, images and artifacts, I have created a story that mimics the colonial narrative yet fragments its purpose. It is another layer or fragment of history that re-signifies the colonial project."[91] By playing with and rewriting colonial stories, Stimson makes non-linear, Two-Spirit Blackfoot histories. The histories held within "Gambling the Prairie Winnings" linger in the relationship between white settlers and Indigenous peoples without reiterating colonial epistemologies. As Stimson argues, "Centennials are a western construction intended to re-enforce and expand colonial history; the passing of time is replayed in order to reinforce colonial space in this time and place."[92] Stimson reminds us here that colonial tellings of history and constructions of linear time work to normalize settler occupation. As a history that aims to reiterate and normalize the settler colonialism, Hagen retells Millie's story as one in which she relinquishes her power as a founder of Edmonton drag culture. Stimson and Buffalo Boy, however, demonstrate the violence of these histories. Were Millie able to tell her own story, perhaps it would read as expansively as

---

[88] Ibid., 3.
[89] Ibid., 5.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 22.
[92] Ibid., 23.

Buffalo Boy's: not ending, but continuing to haunt Hagen and his colonial account of Edmonton's drag scene.

Nearing the end of the chapter, Millicent shows Hagen a picture of herself in her youth and out of drag. It is through this act of looking that Hagen completely takes hold of Millicent. Hagen describes her:

> Some men don't need to wear makeup to unleash their feminine side. I saw a proud, arrogant sideways glance at the camera, a tilt of the head, high sharp cheekbones, the hands placed just so. The attitude dripped off the image.
>
> The Indians have a term for that: "two-spirited."
>
> I recognized the look: I had seen it many times in my own mirror as I tried to discover what I was. I realized the only thing separating us was a few thousand bottles of rye.[93]

Hagen subsumes within himself Two-Spirit, which he understands as a feminine essence he has noticed "many times" in his own reflection. Here he portrays himself as the youthful image of Millicent; he possesses Millicent's two-spiritedness. He imagines there is nothing separating them besides Millicent's impending death. Hagen is invested in her eventual disappearance, through which he can assert his ownership over the entire drag scene, gifted to him by the original Native drag queen. This rendering of Millicent is an attempt at possessing indigeneity, at rewriting white queer settler land occupation as inheritance rather than colonial violence.

Appropriating Drag

The possessive hold of this white settler queer origin story hinging on the Native drag queen is intertwined with the anti-blackness of Hagen's Edmonton drag scene. Describing his mistreatment of Millicent, Hagen writes "we never missed a chance to make fun of Diana Ross, Millie's idol."[94] In this short sentence, he reveals that settler colonialism and anti-blackness are deeply connected. Hagen and the other white queens weaponize Diana Ross in their ongoing racism directed at Millicent. Both evicted from the possession of whiteness, indigeneity and blackness are tied together. Within Flashback, a space on occupied land that he has claimed for his own, Hagen takes possession of his own invented Native queer mythology and of drag culture in part by impersonating Black pop divas, without citing the drag histories of Black and Latinx communities as inventors of Ball culture.[95]

---

[93] Ibid., 54.

[94] Ibid., 55.

Hagen's drag history narrative is fraught with explicit moments of anti-black racism. This drag history cannot be separated out from white supremacy: Hagen's first drag performance, where he discovers his love for drag and for "the Applause" (sic.), is a performance in blackface.[96] This formative moment reveals how anti-black racism undergirds Hagen's drag experience. Immediately after disclosing his participation in "black drag," Hagen defends himself and the other white queens: "Before the politically correct amongst you fly off the handle, let me explain most of the world's best drag music was sung by Black women."[97] Even in retrospect, Hagen cannot admit to the violence of blackface and instead defends his right, as a white queen, to represent it. Hagen is afforded this position as a function of his social position—as a white cis queen, he never feels the violence of blackface and can dismiss its violence rather than deal with the discomfort of accountability. His statement that these acts of blackface will only upset the politically correct reader most likely assumes a white reader and tries to quell the 'angry' racialized reader. In a similar gesture later in the book, Hagen continues to poke fun at the language of political correctness by renaming blackface "cross-racial crossdressing" with the caveat that "(in the old days it was just called black chick drag)."[98] By using the phrase "cross-racial crossdressing," meant to sound both superfluous and ambiguous, Hagen undercuts the importance of non-violent language as though its only purpose is to make things unclear. Next to the redundancy of his invented politically correct language, Hagen recreates the "old days" as better and more relaxed. Ultimately, Hagen dismisses "political correctness" to preserve the violence of his queer geographies.

---

[95] Marlon Bailey, *Butch Queens up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Michigan: The University if Michigan Press, 2013), 4.
[96] Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen*, 31.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid., 78.

Hagen further justifies his drag scene's anti-blackness because it was done with the best intentions. Continuing to explain blackface in Edmonton's drag culture, Hagen writes:

> We relived the lives of these tormented divas through their amazing music: pumps planted on the stage gospel-inspired vocals tearing through our souls… So for us to do a whole show in black drag was the biggest gift we could give back to these ladies who had given us so much. Not to mention it was a lot of work, and black panstick was expensive.[99]

According to Hagen, the way for him and other white queens to acknowledge and appreciate Black women's creative, intellectual, and physical labour is to impersonate them. Hagen emphasizes that donning black drag is "a lot of work" and "expensive" because it is through the commitment of labour and money that he can frame his characterization of Black women as respectful. The labour of donning blackface becomes the justification for the practice. In "'The Seeming Counterfeit': Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy," Eric Lott observes that the practice of blackface, beginning with minstrelsy, is deeply embedded in the expropriation of Black people from their own cultural representation, noting that this cannot be understood outside of the economics of slavery.[100] Hagen's performance of blackface and his description of the labour of applying black panstick exists within a framework of economics, as he posits labour as an equivalence and justification for the impersonations of Black women's performances. On this point of economics, Cheryl Harris outlines the tension between property and humanity caused by slavery, as exemplified by "the law's use of Blackwomen's [sic] bodies as a means of reproducing property."[101] Black people, especially Black women, are "propertized" and refused the property of whiteness, the condition for self-ownership.[102] In this way, Hagen's reference to the expensive panstick as a defence of his blackface performance couples the propertization of Black women with the liberal notion of taking ownership through labour and payment, characterizing the taking of Black women's bodies as a justifiable economic transaction. Lott notes the product of blackface is not Black culture, but the white imaginary of a racial difference absolutely exiled from, yet still possessed by, whiteness. Ultimately, according to Lott, blackface worked to minimize the difference between upper-class whites and working-class whites by reconstituting a racial difference. Because of Hagen's and the other white queens' investments in and possession of whiteness, they can adorn themselves in their imaginings of blackness without threat to the structural power granted to them through race.

---

[99] Ibid.

[100] Eric Lott, "'The Seeming Counterfeit': Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy," *American Quarterly 43*, no. 2 (1991): 226.

[101] Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993) : 1719.

The performance of blackface within this Edmonton context must also be thought through its specific geography. As Rinaldo Walcott observes in "'A Tough Geography': Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada," blackness in Canada is an absented presence, always being rendered outside of national narratives. Walcott posits, "National historical narratives render ... racial geographies invisible, and many people continue to believe that any black presence in Canada is a recent and urban one spawned by black Caribbean, and now continental African, migration."[103] The imagined possibilities of Black geography and Black existence in Canada are restricted. It is within this national context that the Black and Latinx roots of drag and Ball culture get erased. Brought into mainstream media by way of Jennie Livingston's 1990 film *Paris is Burning*, Ballroom culture—and its accompanied rituals and dances, like voguing—originates in New York, among Black and Latinx queer and trans youth.[104] Canada's national imaginaries permeate white queer and trans settler communities. Blackface in the Edmonton drag scene is justified because blackness is an absented presence: the white Canadian queen imagines that Black queens do not and will not exist here anyways, leaving him to take their place by inhabiting a white imaginary of blackness. Through this erasure of Black presence, white queer and trans settlers dismiss or remain ignorant of the Black and Latinx roots of drag culture while taking possession of it.

---

[102] Ibid., 1720.

[103] Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who: Writing Black Canada Second Revised Edition* (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003), 43.

[104] Bailey, *Butch Queens up in Pumps*, 4.

The culture described in *The Edmonton Queen* is not an exact replica of Ballroom culture, although it is similar to it, as the Edmonton Queens form families and compete for the Mz. Flashback title. Ballroom culture is constituted by the kinship structure of houses and by balls, events that involve competitive ritualized performances within various non-normative gendered categories.[105] The histories of Ballroom culture are often attributed to 1960s Harlem, and were and continue to be indelibly shaped by racial geographies. On this point, Marlon Bailey thinks alongside Tim'm T. West who describes Ballroom houses as reflective of one's geography and thus as spaces that facilitates coming into one's Blackness and gayness in tandem.[106] Bailey furthers, "Much of what constitutes the cultural labor of Ballroom reflects the realities of the world in which its members live in the everyday."[107] Ballroom culture, then, is always contingent on its geographic rootedness in poor, working class Black and Latinx queer and trans communities and their histories. Hagen's failure to connect his own drag scene to those of Black and Latinx queer and trans people is foregrounded by his own geography, specifically the absented presence of Blackness within Canada. Furthermore, as made clear by Madonna in her 1990 music video *Vogue*, there is precedent for the failure to attribute the creation of Ballroom culture and its corresponding dances, vernacular, and rituals to Black and Latinx queer and trans people and their creative labour.[108]

---

[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 7.
[107] Ibid.
[108] bell hooks, "Is Paris Burning?," *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 161.

Hagen's possession of whiteness, like Madonna's, enables unquestioned claim to the labour of people who do not possess it.

The imagined absence of Black queens is linked to the imagined disappearance of Native peoples within Hagen's Edmonton drag history. The presumptive white possession of drag culture, now white property, takes place on top of occupied Native lands and alongside white settler desires for Native queer roots. Whiteness leverages anti-blackness and fantasies of indigeneity to reinforce white possession. Indigeneity and Blackness are weaponized against each other, while whiteness takes hold and asserts mastery over land and cultures that do not belong to it and that it cannot truly possess.

Reimaging a Home for Drag

In *The Edmonton Queen*, I observe the ways in which whiteness takes ownership over place and culture. Hagen's assertion of ownership is a violent denial of relation between himself and place, and enables his violence towards Black and Indigenous queens. As a possible version of the conclusion to this chapter I imagine a conversation with Flashback, in which the bar talks and reveals its disdain for Hagen and the other white queers who tried mercilessly to claim this place they called home. Flashback might continue on, intermixing stories of queer parties and its own understanding of the history that took place there, wanting mostly for good company and someone to listen. While this imagined conversation would be my attempt at engaging in a relationship with Flashback to ease the harm perpetrated by Hagen and other white queens, it would do more to alleviate my discomfort with this difficult history than to mend it. This fantasy of a white queer settler remedying white queer settler wrongs would reiterate the violence perpetrated by Hagen through an attempt to take control of a story that is not my own. I do not have a sustained relationship with Flashback, and I cannot undo the wrongs perpetrated by Hagen. Rather than conclude with this fantasy through a framework borrowed from Scofield, I turn instead to the works of

Scofield and Stimson for their own sake, observing how these works enact ethical relationality and sovereign storytelling.

Scofield and Stimson both draw my attention to the ways in which queer Indigeneities articulate complex relationalities across both place and time. Scofield models an ethical mode of relating to place, grounded in care, listening, and conversation. This offers an alternative approach to relating to sites of queer and trans community and belonging than the violence of Hagen's relationship to Flashback. For white queers, conversing with or listening to place requires first that one relinquish one's possessive claim to space, adopting a posture of reciprocity rather than ownership. Put another way, conversation undoes notions of ownership. Scofield's work suggests that relationship to place is both necessary and potentially nourishing, as he notes the vitality of the house itself. These relationships with place are ongoing, and our modes of relating to place have a lasting impact on us and the places themselves. Stimson and his alter ego Buffalo Boy offer another manifestation of queer Native sovereignty, in which movements across time and rewritten Cher songs are abundant. Stimson's work demands consideration for our relationships to time and legacies of colonialism as he places the present and the past next to each other, generating new meaning. As a starting point for understanding white queer settler relationships to place and space in Edmonton, Hagen's narrative of temporal and geographic mastery creates a queer origin story through white possession that facilitates and perpetuates violence against Black and Indigenous queer and trans people. Stimson's anticolonial timeline and Scofield's caring relationships with place are expressions of thriving queer Native sovereignty that expose the limits of Hagen's claims to mastery over time and space.

Chapter 3

Dirt City Geographies

Led by Indigenous feminist theorists from the prairies, in this chapter I attempt to articulate white queer settler complicity in language and naming practices that perpetuate the violence of settler colonialism in Edmonton. I foreground the work of Nêhiyaw philosopher Erica Violet Lee and the writing of Métis scholar Zoe Todd, whose critique of "Dirt City," as a moniker for Edmonton used by white settlers to ironically degrade place, motivates this chapter. I also examine the rap music of Roland Pemberton, whose Black diaspora methodologies articulate Dirt City with geographies that extend beyond those enforced by white settler states and name the unevenness of cities for the Black diaspora. Finally, I offer a close reading of Edmonton filmmaker Trevor Anderson's short-film *Little Deputy*, a depiction of queer identity formation that crosses through Edmonton's past and the present to explore the entanglement of queerness, place and settler colonialism. I argue that white queer and hip settler uses of Dirt City invoke geography within self-definition to ultimately constitute us as tough, gritty and maybe a little dirty. Associated with perverse sexualities, dirt is indeed queer and it is this connection between dirt and queerness that reveals white queer investment in the processes of ongoing settler colonialism in Edmonton.

Wastelands theory

Erica Violet Lee writes wastelands theory, exposing the complexities of urban, inner city geography and describing Indigenous survival in these spaces. In her essay "In Defense of the Wastelands: A Survival Guide," she observes how settler states create and maintain inner city spaces that are disproportionately affected by poverty and by lack of resources (such as grocery stores and recreational facilities) which in turn create the conditions for wastelands.[109] She notes, "There are borders constructed between urban spaces built for rich white people and urban spaces meant to contain the rest of us."[110] In this way, wastelands concern not only physical space but also the ways in which physical space is always also a project of racialization, inflected through settler colonialism. Wastelands, Lee describes, are places and people marked for death:

> Spaces that are considered not simply unworthy of defence, but deserving of devastation, are named "wastelands." Wastelands are places where no medicines grow, only plants called "weeds." A wasteland is a place where, we are taught, there is nothing and no one salvageable. A wasteland is a person denied safe haven because she is full of the chemicals that make survival less painful. Wastelands are spaces deemed unworthy of healing because of the scale and amount of devastation that has occurred there.
>
> Wastelands are named wastelands by the ones responsible for their devastation.[111]

While Lee observes the ways in which colonial violence fabricates wastelands, which are enacted upon land and people, she does not give up on wastelands. She accounts for the ways in which wastelands are built for the demise of people living there and also are an arena capable of sustaining Indigenous survival. She makes clear that wastelands are worth protecting. Though surviving in wastelands is painful, wastelands nonetheless can enable survival; indeed, for some people, wastelands are the only places where survival is possible. Caring for and protecting the wastelands is anti-colonial praxis, as doing so defaces colonial geographies by asserting that these places and people are valuable and lovable when colonialism has tried to evict them of value. On this point, Lee writes: "For those of us in the wastelands—for those of us who are the wastelands—caring for each other … is refusing a definition of worthiness that will never include us."[112]

---

[109] Erica Violet Lee, "In Defense of Wastelands: A Survival Guide," *GUTS Canadian Feminist Magazine*, November 30, 2016, http://gutsmagazine.ca/wastelands/.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

Wastelands theory is in conversation with other Indigenous feminist theories, discourses, and modes of resistance. This conversation is made apparent by Lee's citation trail, where she makes explicit reference to Sylvia McAdam (Saysewahum), nêhiyawak scholar, author of *Nationhood Interrupted: Revitalizing nêhiyaw Legal Systems* and one of the founders of Idle No More. Calling on McAdam is to cite knowledge that is specific to Lee's own Indigenous nation and territory. In other work, Lee has explicitly named her reading practice as being steeped in Indigenous feminisms.[113] Lee's theorization of wastelands also complements the works of other Indigenous feminist scholars; for instance, Sarah Hunt draws attention to the naturalization of reserves as "Indian space" and cities as white space, noting "We easily forget the city as a site of dispossession."[114] Here, Lee's wastelands theory synergizes with Hunt's observations and furthers them by articulating a complex geography of racialization and Indigeneity within urban spaces. Thinking with Lee's work alongside and within Indigenous feminist conversations illuminates the depth and reach of, wastelands theory as a complement to Indigenous feminist writing on missing and murdered Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people (MMIW2S), sex work, environmental defense, and harm reduction, as well as the various paths to resistance within each of these issues. Read alongside these larger Indigenous feminist conversations, Lee's work further affirms community knowledges that are not derivative of a single person's writing and work—as Western philosophies would have us understand knowledge—but are based in the work, ideas, care, and conversations across communities.

Lee's wastelands theory is in conversation with the artwork of Erin Marie Konsmo, who is self-described as "a self-taught, community-engaged, visual multimedia Indigenous artist."[115] Both act in defense of the Indigenous land and people, who have been called wastelands and been deemed unworthy of defense by systems of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and misogyny. Together their works further illuminate the radical possibilities of Indigenous care and resistance as they are connected to both land and body sovereignty. Konsmo's piece *Discovery Is Toxic: Indigenous Women on the Frontline of Environmental and Reproductive Justice* portrays a woman or femme wearing a biohazard mask around her neck and earrings bearing the symbol for radioactivity.[116] Behind them, on one side a ship appears with a towering cross onboard, presumably ready to "discover" (as though these lands are not already inhabited) and on the other side stand oil refineries. Equipped with a mask, the figure is prepared to enter and defend the wasteland marked by discovery and resource extraction, even as their earrings show that they also bear its traces of toxicity. This artwork resonates with wastelands theory, reflecting Lee's words: "When we make a home in lands and bodies considered wastelands, we attest that these places are worthy of healing and that we are worthy of life beyond survival."[117] The person in this piece asserts the importance of the wastelands by gearing up to protect them.

---

[113] Erica Violet Lee, "Land, Language, and Decolonial Love." *Red Rising Magazine*. November 7, 2016. http://redrisingmagazine.ca/land-language-decolonial-love/.

[114] Sarah Hunt, Amy Piedalue, and Cindy Holmes, "Violence, Colonialism, and Space: Towards a Decolonizing Dialogue," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, no. 2 (2014) : 550.

Lee directly references Konsmo's piece *The Land is Ceremony* in one of the photographs she chooses to accompany her presentation of wastelands theory.[118] In the photograph, Lee takes the same pose as the person portrayed in the Konsmo's piece, crouched with her hand planted firmly on the ground. Captioning the photograph "askiy: ceremony in plaid and my most sacred short-shorts," Lee notes the sacredness of self-determination and bodily autonomy by choosing an outfit that has been sexualized and dismissed as redundantly feminine.[119] Much like wastelands theory, Konsmo's *The Land is Ceremony* does not abandon cityscapes as unworthy of love or ceremony. Here, the central figure of the piece wears a hoodie low and crouches with a hand on the ground. Above the person are the words "The Land is Ceremony," with a series of high rise buildings on one side of them and trees on the other. In Konsmo's piece, regardless of what is happening on or to it, the land is ceremony. In an assertion of bodily autonomy, the figure's hoodie, like Lee's "most sacred short-shorts," demonstrates that even while wearing mundane, casual, or "non-traditional" clothing, Indigenous people can participate in and create their own ceremonies. Alex Wilson notes the ways in which clothing can be used to perpetuate colonial violence in relation to gender and body sovereignty, writing "'Skirt-shaming,' excluding, policing or shaming trans, two-spirit people and women because they are not wearing long dresses in ceremonial settings, is increasingly common and is a continuation of the continuum of violence."[120] The assertions of body sovereignty and gender self-determination through clothing in Lee's photograph and Konsmo's art reject settler colonialism and its frequent enactment through bodily control and rigid gender discipline.[121] Lee and Konsmo extinguish binary notions of sex and gender. Their works respond to attacks on women, trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people by demonstrating and asserting body sovereignty and gender freedom. Wastelands theory concerns itself with gender because gender is an axis through which colonial violence is enacted. Lee and Konsmo imagine and build worlds in which self-determination outweighs gender discipline.

---

[115] Erin Marie Konsmo, and PJ Lilley, "'Art Through a Birch Bark Heart': An Illustrated Interview with Erin Marie Konsmo," *Radical Criminology* 2, (2013) : 69.

[116] Erin Marie Konsmo, *Discovery Is Toxic: Indigenous Women on the Frontline of Environmental and Reproductive Justice*. https://artist-and-model.tumblr.com/post/104113849640/erin-konsmo-discovery-is-toxic-indigenous-women

[117] Lee, "In Defense of Wastelands."

[118] Erin Marie Konsmo, *The Land is Ceremony*

As made clear by this gesture to clothing and bodily autonomy, Lee and the Indigenous feminists with whom she is in dialogue—like Konsmo, McAdam, Hunt, Zoe Todd, and Naomi Sayers, among others—address colonialism as a gendered project, the weight of which Indigenous women feel disproportionately. Lee makes clear that wastelands are a gendered project when she describes her conversations with other young women:

---

[119] Lee, "In Defense of Wastelands."

[120] Alex Wilson, "Two-Spirit People, Body Sovereignty and Gender Self-Determination," *Red Rising Magazine,* September 21, 2015, http://redrisingmagazine.ca/two-spirit-people-body-sovereignty-and-gender-self-determination/.

[121] Hunt, "Decolonizing Dialogue," 549.

> We share rage at being told to sit quietly while brutal boys seize leadership positions, invited to meetings on golf courses to talk about pipelines with industry executives. They believe they are giving consent to the state on our behalf, failing to see that no man can consent to the devastation of fish and streams and trees and women.[122]

Social systems that rely on white settler cis heteropatriarchy undermine nêhiyaw law, legal doctrines in which women are the keepers of land.[123] Patriarchal systems perpetuate themselves by lending power to Indigenous cis men and ultimately working towards the ends of colonizers. Given the connections to the land carried by Indigenous women, and specifically in this case nêhiyawak women, colonialism is invested in Indigenous women's disempowerment. Hunt notes the importance of observing both the pervasiveness of colonial gender-based violence, and the strengths and the everyday acts of resistance of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. She centres Indigenous Two-Spirit people and women in thinking towards decolonization: "Principles of Indigenous self-determination might be a starting point for sorting out this mess of colonial violence in the lives of Indigenous Two-Spirit people, girls and women, as well as our families and communities more broadly."[124]

Bringing Lee's wastelands theory to illuminate the geographic specificity of my project, I turn to Zoe Todd as she calls for the dismantling of the structural workings of whiteness and settler colonialism in Edmonton's arts scene. Ultimately, in "A manifesto for the (white) Edmonton arts scene," Todd challenges participants in the scene to interrupt their own complicity in these "harmful behaviours" and dare to dream other worlds that foster difference, rather than the current one that "actively suppresses Indigenous legal and art praxis."[125] In the manifesto Todd lists some of the ways the scene has perpetuated systems of white supremacy and settler colonialism and continues to do so. In this list Todd discusses Dirt City, the moniker for Edmonton used by white art scene participants and, I would add, by white queer participants. Todd expresses her exhaustion at being constantly "Resigned to hearing people call this place that was violently dispossessed by settler colonialism Dirt City."[126] "Dirt City," Todd writes, captures white settler "ennuie and disaffection with faux-apathy and lazy irony" with regards to their relationship to Edmonton.[127] As Lee makes clear, wastelands are intentional, brought into being by being named wastelands and by white settler disregard for place; wastelands are not incidental. Dirt City is one such naming practice, recreating Edmonton as a wasteland—and expressing settler disregard and lack of care in relationship to place—while at the same time articulating a claim of settler ownership over the city.

---

[122] Lee, "In Defense of Wastelands."
[123] Sharon Venne, "Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective" in *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equity, and Respect for Difference* edited by Michael Asch (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 192.
[124] Hunt, "Decolonizing Dialogue," 557.

Describing Dirty City

White settlers who invoke "Dirt City" are attempting to articulate the geographical specificity of Edmonton as a city in the prairies that is always calling itself into question. Edmonton is not Toronto, Vancouver, or Montreal, but it is nonetheless urban. The city feels like an oxymoron: a big city acting like a small town. As the provincial capital, Edmonton signals blue collar wealth, recognized as such on a national level, because of its proximity to resource extraction. The appellation Dirt City then rehearses rhetoric of the western frontier at the intersection of oil rich, new money, and wide-open skies. This economic and material geography has social implications: unavoidable interactions with white cis men, newly minted with their first rig paycheck, or the more mundane inescapability of small town sensibility where everyone knows everyone. For instance, speaking of Edmonton, Lucas Crawford notes the "way in which rural accountability permeates our semi-urban space."[128] "Dirt City" tries to name the complications of class and success; as in, we do not have an excess of brick buildings and private country clubs, but we do have trucks.[129] That is, Edmonton—Dirt City—does not know how to do wealth: it does money. "Dirt City" manages to capture the essence of a city that endured as its hockey team lost for twenty-five consecutive years before relinquishing its title as "the city of champions."[130] The slogan has now been given up and the hockey team is still losing.

---

[125] Zoe Todd, "A manifesto for the (white) Edmonton arts scene," *Zoe and the City* (blog), June 6, 2015, https://zoeandthecity.wordpress.com/2015/06/06/a-manifesto-for-the-edmonton-arts-scene-boycottyegarts/.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.

Articulating the in-betweeness of blue collar rich and semi-urban-feeling capital city is especially important to artists who are asserting their commitment to a place that seems hostile to the arts. For example, the collaborative photo project *Still in Edmonton* depicts this love/hate relationship with Edmonton by asking contributors to submit photos taken within the city limits depicting either their most or least favorite things about the city. The project's website is filled with pictures of empty lots, exteriors of buildings in China Town, and the river. At the bottom of the web page are three sentences encapsulating the project—sentences that persist no matter how far you scroll through the photos: "We love it. We hate it. We're still here."[131] In an interview the creator of *Still in Edmonton*, who chooses to remain anonymous, observes that "Edmonton sort of gets a bad rap, not just from outside people but even internally. There's this 'ugh' feeling, … This is where you make your money, and then bank out and go live somewhere cool."[132] Some of the project's contributors note similar but slightly cheerier feelings towards the city. In the same article, Matt Simpson says,

---

[128] Lucas Crawford, "Transgender Without Organs? Mobilizing a Geo-Affective Theory of Gender Modification," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3, (2008) 134.

[129] Graham Hicks, "Pickups far and away top-selling vehicle in Alberta," *Edmonton Sun*, February 8, 2013.

[130] Gordon Kent, "City of Champions no more: After more than a decade of gnashing its teeth, Edmonton ditches outdated slogan," *National Post*, April 29, 2015.

[131] stillinedmonton.com

> Edmonton is filled with beautiful people constantly building this city into something better, but when it comes down to it, you still have to endure 9 months of winter and 12 months of brutalist architecture. It's not for everyone. But it's home. And it's hard to leave.[133]

Like the phrase "still in Edmonton," relating to Edmonton through the name Dirt City is also often accompanied by an "it sucks but I live here anyway" attitude, as a Dirt City sensibility tries to get at the northern, prairie grit necessary for surviving here. This survival is many-fold, at once referencing the difficulty of this environment for creative workers and also referencing the difficulty of the physical environment, northern, frozen, then filthy once the snow melts. The driving distance between Edmonton and Fort McMurray is almost the same as that between Edmonton and Banff. This is the contradiction of Edmonton, environmentally: easy access to both preserved mountain parks and oil. Edmonton is caught in contradictions, even physically between natural beauty and oil extraction.

The survival tone of Dirt City holds perhaps even more appeal to those of us who are queer and gritty enough to survive the prairie. In addition to the difficulties mentioned, we must survive settler heteronormativity, a heteronormativity imagined by queers to be more powerful here than in cities that qualify as properly metropolitan. Dirt City nonetheless maintains its allure through the promise of (queer) dirt; like Mel Y. Chen writes in *Animacies*, "toxicity does not repel but propels queer loves."[134] Under conditions of heteronormativity, queerness itself is constituted as a kind of threat. Yet Chen holds that "the toxicity of the queer to the heterosexual collective or individual body, the toxicity of the dirty subjects to the hygienic State … none of these segregations perfectly succeeds."[135] Chen also exposes toxicity as connected to race: "the synedochal attribution of toxicity … applies to an exterior, vulnerable body that renders it so."[136] Drawing on Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks,* she observes that "skin" for Fanon "stand[s] in for the colonial racialized visualities that render blackness toxic to a white collective."[137] The toxic threat of queerness is always relational to the toxic threat of race. The queer appeal of Edmonton then is embedded into the city's geography by way of dirt. And dirt and toxicity—all composites of wastelands—cannot be removed from the projects of racialization and racial geographies.

---

[132] Leah Collins, "Still in Edmonton? Photo project probes mixed emotions about being 'left behind.'" *CBC Arts*, August 21, 2015.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 211.

By renaming Edmonton "Dirt City," white queer settler artists and other white settlers articulate their difference from people in large metropolitan places, recreating themselves in the fantastical image of settler toughness on the last frontier. "Dirt City" may simply be a nickname for place, but this does not diminish its importance; it reflects the ways that the people who use it feel about the city. In this way, it helps to constitute an understanding of the white queer settler life that flourishes here, as they/we use this nickname towards their/our own self-definitions.

To illustrate how white queer settler artists enact and inform Edmonton imaginaries, I turn to the work of writer-director Trevor Anderson and his film production company Dirt City Films. Though Anderson has not explicitly addressed the name of his production company, the name is perhaps obviously informed by his allegiance to and desire to represent Edmonton. Anderson's work is particularly fitting to examine here: he is deeply steeped in Edmonton's (white) arts community, and his work is engaged in a self-referential conversation with other artists who have structural and institutional power within the city. His films tell stories of white queer settler subjectivity that are entangled with

---

[135] Ibid., 210.
[136] Ibid., 201.
[137] Ibid.

Edmonton's geography; Edmonton landmarks, for example, are crucial to his films. As curator Alex Rogalski writes,

> Trevor Anderson has become an artistic ambassador for his hometown of Edmonton (self-proclaimed City of Champions. Or Dirt City. You decide.) His multi-faceted hybrid documentary work connects gay identity to specific geographies eschewing queer video tropes for tongue-in-cheek monologues and cinematic references.[138]

Here, Rogalski notes the importance of geography in Anderson's work and places him within the community whose behaviour Todd addresses in her manifesto. The slogan of Dirt City Films is, "Be careful what stories you tell: they become true and they become you."[139] I take this phrase as an invitation to read Anderson's films as though they have become true and representative of him. While this slogan is a cautionary note to other storytellers, I imagine that Anderson heeds his own advice. Anderson brings himself into being through the name of his production company, and through the narrative stories in his films. That is, Anderson tells white queer settler stories that are inseparable from him as a white queer settler.

Many of Anderson's films deal with queer subjects. In the short film *The Man Who Got Away* (2012) Anderson creates a musical based on the rumoured family history of a late queer uncle. In another Dirt City film, *Rock Pockets* (2007), Anderson narrates his outrage, as a ten year-old kid attending Edmonton's Exhibition at the impossibility of imagining a queer future for himself at the fair. Desperately wanting a boyfriend, Anderson knows that even if he had one they would not be able to walk with their hands in each other's back pockets like the straight hot rocker couples do. For the purpose of this chapter, I am most interested in examining the autobiographical short film *Little Deputy* as a project concerning queer identity formation and the depiction of both the past and the present of Edmonton.

---

[138] Alex Rogalski, "Fantastic Realities – The Documentary Films of Trevor Anderson," *Give Me Some Truth*, November 4, 2016, http://gimmesometruth.ca/fantastic-realities-documentary-films-trevor-anderson.

[139] dirtcityfilms.com

Little Deputy opens with the main character, named Trevor, being forced into a form of straight white settler prairie masculinity by his father, as the two have their picture taken at "one of those old timey, fakey, western portrait parlors" in West Edmonton Mall.[140] The photographer offers the young Trevor a sparkly red dress to wear for the photo and, though tempted, he responds "I'm a boy," aiming not to disappoint his father.[141] The photographer then dresses father and son as sheriff and deputy. Once the photo is taken, the film returns to the present when an adult Trevor laments not having worn the red dress and imagines getting the photo the way he originally wanted it. His mother encourages him, saying "you set up the photoshoot and I'll bring your father."[142] In a queer historical turn, the film takes us back in time to an early settlement era, the imagined wild west. Adult Trevor disembarks from a train in a red dress, complete with full makeup, corset, and ringlets. Trevor crosses the road, entering a scene replete with local references for viewers familiar with Edmonton—including a cameo by the city's then-current Mayor Don Iveson—which is clearly shot in Fort Edmonton Park, Edmonton's settlement theme park. Once in the portrait parlor, Trevor's mother passes an urn with which he has his photo taken. The film ends as the camera pans towards the original photograph of sheriff and deputy.

The opening scene of *Little Deputy* is a series of lingering establishing shots of West Edmonton Mall. Before viewers are even introduced to characters, we are thoroughly familiarized with this famous landmark. The narrator introduces us to "the largest indoor shopping centre in the world," touring us through its bizarre attractions—a roller coaster, a skating rink, a wave pool, a water slide, and a flock of flamingos, among others—building a sort of layered topography of this emblem of Edmonton in the 1980s.[143] The film's introduction to the mall emphasizes the importance of place in relationship to the narrative: place literally precedes people in the film. The mall, in all of its gaudy, superfluous spectacle, foregrounds the relationship between the people whom viewers are about to meet. Through this elaborate introduction to the setting, Anderson as the filmmaker builds Dirt City into the film. If Dirt City is indeed a nickname informed by Edmonton's relationship to resource extraction and the oil industry, the mall too is implicated as almost a by-product of Dirt City. Construction of the mall began in the 1980s during an economic oil boom, and the success of the mall continues to be correlated to the oil economy.[144] That is, West Edmonton Mall is enabled by and can only happen within the economic context of resource extraction that also renders Edmonton as Dirt City. The mall is also an object incorporated into what Todd refers to as "white settler ennuie": hip white settlers love to hate the mall as the pinnacle of the ways Edmonton is always striving towards metropolitanism and never exactly achieving it.

---

[140] Trevor Anderson, *Little Deputy*, (2015; Edmonton: Dirt City Films). https://vimeo.com/107961972.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid. See also Geoffrey Simmins and Loraine Fowlow, "West Edmonton Mall," In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, January 30, 2012. www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/west-edmonton-mall/

The establishing shots of the mall's exterior and the entire mall section of the film, are taken with a home movie camera. This effect creates an immediate intimacy with viewers; we feel like we are about to be let in on a family story.[145] At the same time, the home movie camera emphasizes the spectacle of the mall—it is after all a tourist attraction—which is meant to be looked at and documented by anyone who visits. Following the tour-like sequence of mall attractions, the narrator warns us that none of the mall's many attractions are as rare as Trevor and his father spending a day together. *Little Deputy* thus straddles the intimacy of a family video while also capturing the public industry of tourism, ultimately accounting for the ways Dirt City geography informs masculinity.

None of the pastiche embedded within the material culture of the mall (and there is plenty) reproduces an imaginary of Edmonton itself. Instead, the mall structure references other metropolitan centres, with strips like Bourbon Street as New Orleans or Europa Boulevard named "after charming streets of old European cities."[146] The mall never aspires to recreate imagery of Edmonton, either in the mode of the city's now-defunct sports legacy or in the mode of the historic wild west. Regardless of the mall's unwillingness to reflect an image of Edmonton, it is a defining feature of the city, and in this way it captures an essence of Dirt City—wanting desperately of elsewhere and yet unable to leave. Through this elaborate introduction, *Little Deputy* builds into and relies on Dirt City as a foundation from which Anderson then may expose white settler prairie masculinity thwarting queer expressions of gender, while creating a path for recovering from his feelings of rejection.

---

[144] Rob Shields, "Social Spatialization and the Built Environment: the West Edmonton Mall," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 7 (1989) : 149.
[145] Anderson, *Little Deputy*.

Dirty City/Diaspora

Edmonton's geography extends outside of the mall, of course, and beyond the disaffection of white settlers and our use of Dirt City. The city of Edmonton is a racial geography, and there are complex articulations and mappings of its unevenness. Thinking on Black geographies, Katherine McKittrick writes "If [old and new social] hierarchies are spatial expressions of racism and sexism, the interrogations and remappings provided by Black diaspora populations can incite new, or different, and perhaps more just geographic stories."[147] Following McKittrick, I examine how Edmonton is mapped differently through the works of rapper Cadence Weapon, in the hope of expanding possibilities for Dirt City geographies.

Cadence Weapon, also known as Roland Pemberton, was Edmonton's first Black poet laureate. Weapon's artistic works deploy Dirt City to articulate the unevenness of the city produced by racialization, immigration, and poverty: qualities I read productively in conjunction with Lee's wastelands theory. While Dirt City, as invoked by Weapon, may retain some of its hip white characteristics, it also takes on new meaning as he articulates a Black geography of Edmonton, inflected methodologically through Black diasporic musical forms. At the level of lyrical and written response, not even considering his sampling and beat practice, Pemberton's work is influenced by other rappers. Connecting himself to the Public Enemy emcee, for example, Pemberton notes that "Chuck D once described rap as being 'the ghetto CNN.' I wanted my poetry to be the CBC for young Edmontonians."[148] Pemberton writes, "I wanted to transmit Edmontonian stories to the rest of the world, trading the ghetto parables and hood fables of New York rap for the youthful diaspora and High Level Bridge anxiety of Edmonton."[149] Here, Pemberton's commitment to tell Edmonton stories through rap methodologies places his work in relation to Black thought across national boundaries. Insisting on conversation among Black cultural creators ultimately collapses nation-state borders set by colonial white supremacist nation-states.

---

[146] "Europa Boulevard," www.wem.ca/shop/theme-streets/europa-boulevard
[147] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xix.

In his song "Hope in Dirt City," Weapon asserts a Black presence in Edmonton that is often absented both within Edmonton and within Canada's national narratives. Rinaldo Walcott observes that when Blackness in Canada is present, it is always imagined as a recent presence. This act erases histories of violence against Black people (and Black resistance) while containing Black people within Canadian benevolence. Africadian histories and claims to land (to invoke George Elliott Clarke's term) upset simple stories of Canadian colonialism and domination; as Walcott writes, their "presence—the places and spaces it occupies—makes a lie of many national myths (or raises too many questions) concerning the Canadian nation-state."[150] Weapon's insistence on creating and disseminating Black geographies, then, happens within this context of erasure. In "Hope in Dirt City" he rhymes, "I will not be afraid of my habitation / Life on the Avenue of Nations."[151] Weapon refers to the specific streets—107th Avenue, between 95th Street and 116th Street—which have been named "the Avenue of Nations" by the city of Edmonton because many immigrants live there. By invoking "the Avenue of Nations," Weapon references a "recent" Black presence that contrasts with the characterization within popular media of Pemberton's own Black identity as longstanding.[152] Following his nomination as poet laureate, major media outlets insisted on describing Pemberton's connection to Edmonton through family history. Asserting himself within the Avenue of Nations through habitation, Pemberton uses his Blackness—one legitimized through historical connection to place—to draw attention to this recent blackness. It is through his insistence on representing a plurality of Black life in Edmonton that Weapon's work fits within Walcott's theorization of Black Canada. Weapon remaps the city, reorienting it to account for various kinds of Black life, old and new, effectively interrupting the prairie erasure of Black life.

---

[148] Ibid.

[149] Douglas Barbour, *Writing the City: Poets Laureate of Edmonton, 2005-2013* (Edmonton: Edmonton Arts Council, 2012), 42.

[150] Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who: Writing Black Canada Second Revised Edition* (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003), 46.

In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Dionne Brand writes, "A city is not a place of origins. It is a place of transmigrations and transmogrifications. Cities collect people, stray and lost and deliberate arrivants. Origins are rehabilitated and rebuilt here."[153] For Brand the city is a site where identity is remapped. While Weapon does not enter into the details of rehabilitation and rebuilding, he directs attention to the ways cities collect people within specific spaces designated for arrivants.[154] Like Brand, Weapon calls attention to the city as a site of rehabilitated origins. Over the course of the book, Brand repeats "Too much has been made of origins," and Weapon follows by locating himself within a particular site where origins are washed away; he brings us to the Avenue of Nations, not the avenue, street, or road of a particular nation.[155] The Avenue of Nations is what happens after Canadian cities have collected migrant and diasporic people. While Afro and Caribbean grocery stores are well represented here, so too are pawn shops and "revitalization initiatives."[156] This area of the city reflects some of the inequities of Edmonton's urban space. Through this attention to the difficult terrain of urban geographies, Weapon's invocation of Dirt City resonates with Lee's wastelands theory. Weapon brings certain parts of the city—parts made less livable—into focus and tells this story of Edmonton through diasporic methodologies. Weapon makes clear that there is more to Dirt City than white possession and degradation. The unequal geographies of the city are made difficult for Indigenous and Black people and for people of colour, and read together Lee and Weapon expose the production of these tough geographies.[157]

---

[151] Cadence Weapon, "Hope in Dirt City," Upper Class Recordings, 2012. Lyrics accessed on genius.com

[152] Brett Cassady Willes, "Black Prairie Geographies: Understanding Edmonton Through the works of Rollie Pemberton," Gender Studies 810: Black/Geographies/Liberation, April, 2016.

[153] Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001), 62.

[154] Arrivant, here used by Brand, is a word that Jodi Byrd cites to Kamau Brathwaite to mean those "forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe." Jodi Byrd, *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xix.

The Intersection of Wastelands and Dirt City

The white settler evocation of Dirt City is a way of bringing wastelands into being. As Lee writes: "Wastelands are named wastelands by the ones responsible for their devastation."[158] In the Edmonton context, white settlers mobilize deprecating language to refer to a city that is indelibly shaped by resource extraction, expansion, and revitalization, all towards their own white possession. Disparaging what they inhabit, and their own desire to inhabit it—but without relinquishing their intent to belong and to stay—white settlers' ironic invocations of Dirt City disingenuously manifest and enact white possession. Dirt City approximates wasteland in language, but unlike Lee's use of wasteland it is not accompanied by an analysis of unequal resource distribution and care: rather, it is one of the ways in which white settlers impose wastelands, conceptually, onto Edmonton. Even as white settlers try to articulate the particularities of their geography through this moniker, Todd and Lee make clear that Dirt City exposes white settlers' investments in dispossession and land devastation. Land devastation is always felt unequally by white settlers and by the people who live in the wastelands and do not have outward mobility. Reading Lee's wastelands theory together with Todd's manifesto, it becomes clear that prairie city geographies are sites of fierce Indigenous resistance, despite the settler state's investment in producing and maintaining wastelands and marginalized urban geographies. Furthermore, listening to Weapon's use of Dirt City alongside Lee's and Todd's work makes clear that prairie cities are sites of Black diaspora geographies and not only sites of white settler identity development through naming place.

---

[155] Ibid.

[156] "Avenue Initiative Revitalization," www.edmonton.ca/projects_plans/communities_neighbourhoods/avenue-initiative-revitalization.aspx

[157] Walcott, *Black Like Who*, 46.

[158] Lee, "In Defense of Wastelands."

By way of contrast, neither the West Edmonton Mall nor the Fort Edmonton represented in *Little Deputy* are wastelands. Wastelands theory accounts for the ways in which specific peoples' mobility and resources are restricted. As such, the entire city of Edmonton is not and cannot be considered a wasteland. In fact, wastelands are absent from the film, left outside the scope of Anderson's camera. Their presence, however, is still felt. Wastelands are a corollary of the settler spectacle that we do witness in the film. The mall's excess demands and perpetuates an unequal distribution of the city's resources, as it brings tourism and economic activity, requires economic stimulation from the resource extraction economy, and requires city resources and attention in order to continue these cycles.

In Anderson's film we are presented only with the absurd extravagance of the mall, and not its effects. Likewise, in the fort scene we are witness to Trevor as she descends from the train and walks into the portrait parlour, crossing white drunks and dapper white men on the way. But we do not see Indigenous people, whose work trapping and trading presumably enable the fort's economy, because they have been disappeared to the peripheries of the fort or perhaps are imagined to have disappeared entirely.

Although the literal representation of wastelands is absent from the film, their existence is evoked by the name of the production company, Dirt City Films. Thus, the traces of wastelands are observable at least twice in the film: first, through absented presence, as the other side of the settler spectacles featured within the film; and second, through Anderson's naming of the production, which dialectically brings wastelands into being and calls on wastelands to establish the filmmaker in Edmonton's geography and in the masculinist sensibility required to survive here. Despite animating wastelands through naming, Anderson does not have proximity to wastelands unless he chooses to enter and leave at will, a mobility that reveals that he is not forced into them. Unlike Konsmo's work, which depicts life and ceremony in the wasteland, wastelands are absented from *Little Deputy* and yet they still underpin it: wastelands are required to make the world imagined and represented in the film possible.

Alongside wastelands theory, the work of Kent Monkman also helps to illuminate the people and landscapes that have been left outside of the scope of Anderson's self-representation. In a series of works that appear to mimic white nineteenth-century paintings, realized as queer and Indigenous, Monkman takes white settler art from which Indigenous peoples are absented and places Indigenous life back into these works as creative counterpoints to the genre in which they appear. Monkman also portrays in the works the white settler artists whose authorship normally would be left outside the frame, thereby pointedly revealing their presence and the deliberately exclusionary nature of their vision.

Monkman's 2008 painting *The Treason of Images* helps to illuminate some of what is at stake in Anderson's fantasies of settlement. Set in front of a scenic waterfall, a white photographer and two Native queens appear in the foreground with their backs towards the viewer.[159] In the background, a naked white settler Adonis figure with his legs spread in a strong lunge faces the viewer with a spear held above his head, presumably before launching it into the waterfall. The photographer raises an umbrella above his head in a gesture instructing the model how to pose, as he appears to be willfully ignoring the presence of Native queens. The Native queens, however, are always watching. The painting reveals the performance and image creation of white settler masculinity and sexuality. The Native queens—one of whom is seated in a relaxed, lounging position, the other standing with one hand on their hip and a pipe in the other—witness the building of this image of a settler fantasy in which there are no Native people, only strong, competent, and sexual white men. The queens' body language is relaxed, perhaps because they are so accustomed to this settler project.

---

[159] Kent Monkman, *The Treason of Images.* www.kentmonkman.com/painting/2008/the-treason-of-images

Commenting on the ways in which white settler photographers like Edward S. Curtis would pose Native peoples to create images that matched white ideas of authentic Indians, Monkman reveals the ways settlers are also always posing and figuring themselves too. Monkman's work here provides a framework from which to understand Anderson's self-representation. In *Little Deputy*, Anderson is both the photographer and the white settler Adonis, creating an image of himself through his own desires. At once, Anderson depicts himself first as a young boy wanting and not being able to wear a red dress in West Edmonton Mall in the late 1980s, who later transforms into someone fully capable of donning a red dress in Fort Edmonton in the 1890s. In this way, Anderson's coming out narrative collapses the past and present, a temporal move that manifests settler colonialism as an ongoing reality that enables his own becoming in this place.

In *Little Deputy*, after posing for the photograph of father and son in the mall, the film locates the subsequent portrait parlor in an imagined past enabled by Fort Edmonton Park. Thus the portrait parlors create a parallel West Edmonton Mall and Fort Edmonton in the film. Aside from a brief portrayal of an anonymous bathroom sink and mirror, the mall and Fort Edmonton are the only locations to appear in the film. They also are pitted against each other. The mall, beginning with our introduction to its excessive attractions, appears markedly artificial. While contained within the city and named for it, the mall is always striving to be other than Edmonton—and sometimes literally, as in the mall's built-in hotel, Fantasyland.[160] Trevor is forced into a faulty masculinity in the "fakey" portrait parlour at the mall. Set next to it, Fort Edmonton is positioned as authentic. Fort Edmonton is the original city, the place where it all began, the truest essence of Edmonton. Trevor is no longer at the "old timey, fakey" portrait parlor but at the real thing. Fort Edmonton is the place where Trevor can have the photo taken the way he originally wanted, true to his gender. Adding to the sense of reality of the imagined settlement past, Trevor's appearance in it is present-moment time travel, for Trevor's father is deceased. Even though the Fort Edmonton scene is imaginary, it is not fantastical enough to reanimate Trevor's father, which though bizarre, authenticates this world in contrast to the fantasy world of West Edmonton Mall. That is, Fort Edmonton is so real that gender can be rewritten, but death cannot be imagined away. Settlement is immediately accessible to white settlers in the present and realizes Patrick Wolfe's statement that "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure, not an event."[161] Anderson embraces and owns that sentiment by positively valuing a collapsing of temporal difference between the moment of prime settlement and his coming out in the present.

White settler fantasy of settlement allows West Edmonton Mall and Fort Edmonton to be set in binary opposition. In the most straightforward way, they are both fantasy worlds. Although not named explicitly in the film, the settlement scene is shot at Fort Edmonton Park, a historical re-enactment theme park. Like West Edmonton Mall, one of Fort Edmonton Park's central purposes is entertainment. While Fort Edmonton desires to be a historical replica of Fort Edmonton, it is not. Founded in 1967, Fort

---

[160] "Fantasyland Hotel," www.wem.ca/store-directory-maps/fantasyland-hotel
[161] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006) : 388.

Edmonton Park is not at the actual location of any of the forts that were used in the settlement era.[162] In a literal way, then, if West Edmonton Mall is bizarre and excessive, so too is Fort Edmonton Park. Fort Edmonton Park is a settler fantasy that is not very different from the "hyper-real" fantasy of the mall. As the film does illuminate, the mall and the fort are both important to an understanding of Edmonton. Settlement is one of the ways through which Dirt City becomes Dirt City. In this way, Fort Edmonton and West Edmonton Mall are not opposites because they rely on settler land occupation and are fueled through resource extraction economies. The film does not necessarily expose itself as being set in a park; it aspires to represent a historical past, not the imitation of one. However, the film is directed towards people who have geographical familiarity with Edmonton and who will understand the excessiveness of West Edmonton Mall; a consequence of this is that these same people will be likely to be able to identify Fort Edmonton Park. Through Anderson's rendering of Edmonton's geography in *Little Deputy*, the spectacle of West Edmonton Mall and the obvious fantasy of its photo parlour is set in opposition to the Fort Edmonton Park photo parlour as a space of personal gender authenticity. An audience familiar with Edmonton will recognize them as fantasy worlds; this claim to fantasy both obscures their very real basis in settler colonialism and resource extraction, and enables their ongoing role in settler colonialism as they become Anderson's own fantastical geography, a spectacle of settlement absent of Indigenous peoples and full of freedom for his own gender expression.

Within the film, Trevor's childhood takes place in the recent past—the mall in late 1980s Edmonton—and Trevor's adulthood is reimagined in the distance past—settlement Edmonton. As a white queer settler, Trevor seeks wholeness through an imagined past that he is entirely in control of. Anderson uses his mobility across time, ultimately seeking to absolve himself of his hurtful experiences with cis heteronormativity by reaching back in time. His uncomfortable experience with gender are rooted in what

---

[162] "About Fort Edmonton Part," fortedmontonpark.ca

Scott Morgensen calls “settler sexuality: a white and national heteronormativity formed by regulating Native sexuality and gender while appearing to supplant them with the sexual modernity of settlers.”[163] Anderson is disciplined into a normative gender expression, a form of regulation that is produced by and produces settler colonialism working specifically towards the discipline of racialized people. Anderson’s experience of gender regulation in the film, then, must be located in the larger history of land occupation and attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples. Anderson’s gender and sexual expression are made queer through their proximal relationship to race and consequently, his experience of gendered discipline is connected to the frameworks of white settler colonialism. In trying to recuperate his childhood discomfort Anderson claims proximity to the original colonial whiteness by way of a fantastical past. Anderson works to recuperate settlement—remaking settler colonialism as newly gender-accepting. Rather than rearticulating settler colonialism, which relies on cis heteronormative white reproductive futures, Anderson creates his own vision of the past. The death of his father, an embodiment of settler sexuality, enables an imaginary world in which Trevor can be his *truest* gender. Were he conforming to the norms of settler sexuality, Trevor would necessarily continue to try to appease and earn the approval of his father.

The way that Anderson responds to his experience of gender policing by reimagining a settlement past to accommodate his gender, then, is not simply a reiteration of settler colonialism. His insistence on a queer past is disruptive to the norms of settler sexuality and creates another form of settler violence where white queer life is possible. Anderson’s settler past is queer and nonetheless based in white possession as he takes settler land occupation for granted. Through this imagined past, Anderson demonstrates a white queer investment in recovering itself rather than rejecting the institutions that disenfranchise it. He stakes a claim on this specific time in the past because of settlement; a past prior to the fort does not have space for Anderson in it. Anderson's revisionary history is a queer articulation of settler colonialism as he fantasizes a place for his non-normative gender within settlement. This queerly imagined past, as it makes room for queerness within and normalizes settlement, and compounded through Anderson's investment in Dirt City, demonstrates the ways that white queers are complicit in continuously creating queer manifestations of settler colonialism.

---

[163] Scott Morgensen, *Space Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 31.

I interpret Anderson's rewritten colonial fiction, produced by Dirt City Films, following the production company's slogan "Be careful what stories you tell: they become true and they become you." Anderson's Dirt City reiterates what Todd diagnoses as "ennuie and disaffection with faux-apathy and lazy irony." Through *Little Deputy*, Anderson conjures and reinforces the hip white settler use of Dirt City, in part to tell his own prairie queer story. Anderson's willingness to claim Dirt City, and consequently wastelands as foundations on which he crafts and claims his own self-definition—even while leaving them out of the scope of *Little Deputy*—demonstrates the ways in which white queer settlers claim urban space at the same time that Indigenous and Black peoples must fight for survival in the same spaces. White queer settlers are granted mobility—from rural to urban, and back again if they so choose—through their whiteness, which ultimately allows for possessive claims on land and space. This is not possible for many urban Indigenous, Black, and racialized people, for whom the city is not a metropolitan haven but a bordered and policed zone of depleted resources, as well as a site of survival and resistance.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have detailed the ways in which white queer settlers in Edmonton use place, and in particular Dirt City as the signifier for prairie toughness, towards self-representation. My investigation of these white queer settler investments in place leads me to consider the ways white queer settlers choose to conform to settler citizenship in queer ways. Following an ejection from white settler sexuality because of gender and sexuality that exceeds it, white queer settlers request re-entrance into settler normativity by way of their whiteness. In seeking comfort from the harm of cis and hetero normativity, white settler queers find comfort in whiteness. This process of white queer settler colonialism happens within Anderson's articulation of Dirt City within the film, where he uses both West Edmonton Mall and Fort Edmonton Park as the backdrop for his own queer becoming.

Indigenous feminist theories of place, specifically of the urban prairies, reveal the ways in which settler colonialism works through geography. Together Erica Violet Lee, Zoe Todd, and Erin Marie Konsmo defend spaces that have been marked for destruction by settler colonialism. The defense of wastelands is simultaneously a defense of Indigenous women, queer, and Two-Spirit peoples' rights to self-determination. Cadence Weapon's Black Edmonton geographies read alongside these urban Indigenous feminist geographies shows how wastelands are felt by diasporas too: Pemberton's lyric, "I will not be afraid of my habitation / Life on the Avenue of Nations" is an expression of a wasteland geography that marginalizes Black, Indigenous, and people of colour in urban space through unequal resource distribution and an affective regime of fear. At the same time, Pemberton's work expresses Black resistance and diasporic thriving in this wasteland, "Hope in Dirt City."[164] These Black and Indigenous geographies work both as a critique—revealing white settler investments in Dirt City, wastelands, and the erasure of Black and Indigenous presence—and as a love letter to place.

---

[164] Cadence Weapon, "Hope in Dirt City," Upper Class Recordings, 2012. Lyrics accessed on genius.com

Chapter 4

My Prairie Home is Haunted: Colonial Ghosts, White Settler Guilt, and Indigenous Spectralization

Sherman Alexie exposes the function of "the Indian" in American literature in the last two lines of 1996 his poem "How to Write the Great American Indian Novel."[165] The poem playfully works through predominant tropes within settler colonial literature of Indigenous savagery, sexuality, and tragedy. The concluding stanza reads: "In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, / all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts." Here Alexie succinctly highlights the twinned qualities of white settler colonial narrative: the erasure of Indigenous peoples and their replacement by white people as rightful inheritors of Indigenous lands.[166] The Indian ghost is a perennial figure of haunting for white audiences, and analysis of its various manifestations offers insight into the affective relationships of white settlers to indigeneity.

Like Alexie, Renée Bergland is interested in the figure of Indian ghosts in American literature. In *The National Uncanny*, she writes that "the ghosting of Indians is a technique of removal."[167] Speaking of "ghosting," she continues by saying it "also draws ideological power from the sense of *fait accompli* (the Indians are already gone), and from reinforcing the intractable otherness of Indians (they are so other that they are otherworldly)."[168] At the same time, Bergland observes that these ghosts call the foundations of settler states into question: "When ghostly Indian figures haunt the white American imagination, they serve as constant reminders of the fragility of national identity."[169] Reading works of authors from Philip Freneau to Stephen King, Bergland tracks two hundred years of white settler writing about Indian ghosts and theorizes their double-function as reinforcing and calling into question settler nationalism. Bergland names the "spectralization" of Indigenous peoples as a key part of white settler nation making projects.

---

[165] Sherman Alexie, "How to Write the Great American Indian Novel," *The Summer of Black Widows*, (New York: Hanging Loose Press, 1996), 95.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Renée Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2000), 4.
[168] Ibid., 5.

Reading Bergland alongside Jean O'Brien's *Firsting and Lasting* clarifies that white settler investments in narrating the disappearance of Indigenous peoples pervade settler society, not only through literary invocations of ghosts but also in commemorative speeches, rituals, monuments, and other testimony to the founding of their nation.[170] Asking "how non-Indians in southern New England convinced themselves that Indians there had become extinct even though they remained as Indian peoples—and do so to this day," O'Brien demonstrates the ways in which the imagined vanishing of Indigenous people is crucial to settler nation building.[171] O'Brien theorizes the rhetorical strategies used by New Englanders to reaffirm imagined Native disappearance: "firsting," the assertion "that non-Indians were the first people to erect the proper institutions of social order worthy of notice"[172]; and "lasting," the refusal to recognize Indigenous people as being modern in order to assert settler claims to modernity.[173] Both O'Brien and Bergland work from texts rooted in New England, which they position as an origin point for U.S. colonization, even as both authors make gestures outwards, explaining that while these phenomena are specific to place, they also echo across settler states.[174]

Thinking about another form of the undead, queer and trans singer-songwriter Rae Spoon in their song "Come on Forest Fire Burn the Disco Down" tells listeners to "ask the colonial ghosts if they live in your bones."[175] The lyrics tie the past to white queer settlers' present lived experience, through embodiment. We are complicit, yes, and as Spoon sings, our bodies are intertwined with colonial ghosts. Our white settler bones are haunted by our ancestors. These ghosts are inseparable from our bodies and from ourselves. Spoon's colonial ghost does not represent the spectralization of Native peoples. Instead, Spoon raises another ghost produced through the violence of settler colonialism. I am persuaded by Spoon's lyrics as they set colonialism and embodiment together and call white queer settlers to account for their relationship to land. And yet, I am still unsure of the figure of the colonial ghost. If, as Eve Tuck and C. Ree note in "A Glossary of Haunting," haunting occurs in response to "erasure and defacement," then what do colonial ghosts want as the perpetrators of this erasure and defacement?[176] This chapter is an attempt at holding a séance to ask what a colonial ghost is and what it wants.

---

[169] Ibid.
[170] Jean O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xiii.
[171] Ibid., xii.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid., 107.
[174] Ibid., xiv; Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 20.

Of course, any thinking on haunting is indebted to Black studies, and the work of Avery Gordon and her germinal book *Ghostly Matters*, in which she calls for social analyses that attend to the ways "life is complicated."[177] While I take seriously Gordon's claim that "to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects," and learn from her reading of the repressions, disappearances, and absences in literature and modern history, I focus on theories and representations of Indigenous haunting as they help me to understand and trouble Spoon's colonial ghost.[178] Certainly, the shadow of enslavement is present in the work I take up in this chapter, though within the scope of this chapter I have chosen to gesture only briefly to it.

---

[175] Rae Spoon, "Come on Forest Fire Burn the Disco Down," on *superioryouareinferior,* Coax Records, 2008.

[176] Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," in *Handbook of Autoethnography,* ed. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013), 643.

[177] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1.

[178] Ibid., 190.

Fitting into my larger project, Rae Spoon is a white queer and trans settler from Calgary and their articulation of colonial ghosts comes through white prairie queer cultural production and is similarly rooted in the geographical specificity of this project. They are a musician, having released eight solo albums, and author, having published two books, *First Spring Grass Fire* and *Gender Failure*. Spoon is the subject of a documentary-musical *My Prairie Home* directed by Chelsea McMullan and produced by the National Film Board, for which Spoon composed the score. Spoon's body of work is reflective of their own experiences as a queer trans person on the prairies, and their work gets taken up by prairie queers themselves as if it is emblematic of *the* prairie queer experience. As I explain later in this chapter, an analysis of Spoon's work is necessary to my project precisely because it is so well loved by white queers from the prairies. I think about settlers' feelings of being haunted, which are manifest in both Indian ghosts as well as the colonial ghost. I am drawn to Rae Spoon's description of "colonial ghosts." While persuaded by their use of ghosts to describe the embodiment of settler colonialism, I interrogate Spoon's account of haunting, which accounts for guilt, even as colonialism disappears altogether from their work. Then I turn to Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers's short film *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, as it conjures histories of Indigenous women's resistance to colonialism and seeks revenge on behalf of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Premised on revenge, the film demonstrates the actual possible material horrors of haunting. Articulating Spoon with current works in Indigenous studies, this chapter brings the ghost to my analysis of white queer settler colonialism. In a way, this entire project thus far has been haunted—not necessarily by ghosts, but by queer Indigenous resistance. I have no doubt that Darrin Hagen is threatened by Native queers like Buffalo Boy, or that Trevor Anderson feels the works of Kent Monkman just outside of his work.

Encounters with Rae Spoon and Colonial Ghosts

Taken from their 2008 album *superioryouareinferior*, Spoon recognizes "Come on Forest Fire Burn the Disco Down" as their most requested song.[179] The song itself is catchy folk-pop, lending itself to sing-alongs, which likely explains part of its popularity. However, the song's lyrical content cannot be disconnected from fans' attachments to it. Drawing on my own experience, for example, I recall attending a show where Spoon, during stage banter, made the song's content explicit by reminding white queer settlers in the audience of our complicity in colonialism. This stage banter serves as a reminder to listeners to pay attention to the song's content. I read this song as having been written by and for white settlers because only white non-Natives have to be prompted to ask these questions: we have a particular investment in forgetting about land theft and occupation. Put another way, Spoon assumes a white listener. What does it mean, then, for people to gather around a song that tries to remind white listeners of their own complicity in settler colonialism and land occupation?[180] In trying to answer this question, I want to suggest that this song has become an affective gathering place through which white queer settlers are invited to feel our guilt collectively.

Spoon's entire body of work is entrenched in white queer settler feelings. That is, Spoon's work gets cathected with the desires and feelings of people who feel they have a shared stake in Spoon's identity and place. In this way, Spoon's own work exceeds itself by taking on lives, meanings, and feelings beyond those it initially set out to describe. Spoon is a musician, author of two books, and the subject of a documentary-musical. In this chapter, I try to describe the feelings and investments that my communities of white queer settlers from the prairies invest in Spoon as a person and in their body of work. Rather than continuing to list aspects of their identity and public works, I want you to know how we feel about them.

---

[179] Rae Spoon, Facebook post. October 27, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/raespoonpage/posts/10153304091422620

[180] We might also ask what is at stake in Spoon naming the song's popularity, but I'm most interested in thinking collectively here.

Rae Spoon is one of my queer icons, and in this regard, I am not unlike most other white settler dykes on the prairie. Almost always playing in small venues, basements, and music festivals, Spoon is sure to bring in a crowd of queer women and trans masculine people, young and old, all wearing their best denim and plaid outfits. Maybe it's these small venues that foster feelings of intimacy with their work. Spoon is cool and crush-worthy, and beyond their look, we've all fallen for their lyrics. Spoon writes about a prairie queer existence that we feel we understand—even though, more than likely, those of us who are cis dykes probably do not. Spoon and their work has been cathected with prairie queer affect to the point that they are the emblem of prairie queer for so many of us. In reading Spoon's work closely, I am doing a close reading of an aspect of an entire queer community's affective life.

In the song Spoon sings, "ask the colonial ghosts what they took/ and they'll tell you that/ you're dancing on it."[181] Not only are the colonial ghosts embodied, and relational—we can ask them questions—but we cannot remove ourselves from what they have stolen because we are standing on it. Settler colonialism is inseparable from the land. What we're dancing on, the land, is a space of interaction for ourselves, our bones, and our ancestors. The specific ground being danced upon is probably the disco mentioned both in the song's name and in the refrain. Our contemporary engagements with each other, and even with Spoon's music take place on the land. Stolen land enables Spoon's music as well as their movements through gender, place, and identity. Through both song and banter Spoon is intent on reminding those in the audience, specifically those who are primed to forgetting it, of our ongoing colonial inheritance.

---

[181] Spoon, "Come on Forest Fire Burn the Disco Down."

Spoon's song is about colonial ghosts, not the ghosts of people unrested, wronged, and made killable through the establishment of white supremacy and colonial logics on stolen land.[182] Unlike the Indian ghosts Bergland observes in literature, in which white settler writing acts to vanish Indigenous peoples, Spoon's colonial ghost mirrors and constitutes white settlers' own subject positions. When Bergland does observe white ghosts in literature, they are not written by whites but rather by Native authors. William Apess, for example, uses white ghosts to articulate what is truly terrifying about the settler nation, and at other times he uses them for comic relief.[183] In the works of Leslie Marmon Silko, white ghosts are removed of agency.[184] Spoon's colonial ghosts do not work in these ways, nor do they reiterate the trope of Indian ghosts. Counter to the usual white settler approach to being haunted, which seeks an end to the haunting, in "Come on Forest Fire" Spoon does not try to resolve haunting; they mention only the presence of the ghosts, not methods to vanquish them.

The song's refrain, "Come on forest fire burn the disco down," might be read as an incantation for the end of colonialism: a request that natural forces destroy buildings erected in the name of land theft. In this way, the song is not a call to action—not encouraging listeners to burn systems of oppression down—but rather is an expression of hope that someone or something else might. The only action incited by the song is to ask questions of colonial ghosts. Taken seriously, in-depth explorations into our own families' complicity with and histories of settler occupation can be starting points for decolonization. Cindy Holmes, for example, locates this uncomfortable learning about our own colonial histories and the complication of settler-forgetting within a practice of what Holmes and Sarah Hunt together call "everyday practices of decolonization."[185] In talking to colonial ghosts, then, settlers might have to linger in the feelings of being haunted by our own ancestors whose acts of violence give rise to our current material conditions, and whose legacies we continue to live, may yet be lived in a way that is generative for allyship and anti-colonial projects. The song encourages listeners to have conversations with colonial ghosts, but we do not know that these conversations will or have happened; they have only been encouraged and are outside the confines of the song. Prompting listeners to "ask the colonial ghosts" does not resolve the song's passivity in "burning the disco down," not demanding listeners take responsibility for it but asking forest fires to do it.

---

[182] Tuck and Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," 649.
[183] Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 125 and 140.
[184] Ibid., 163.
[185] Sarah Hunt and Cindy Holmes, "Everyday Decolonization: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 19 (2015) : 166.

In trying to connect contemporary listeners' colonial inheritance through to a moment of settler arrival, Spoon sings "We're all standing on our parents' shoulders/ boats across the ocean." Explorers and settlers did arrive by boat, but so too did enslaved Black people. As Afua Cooper makes clear, Canada's participation in the transatlantic slave trade is not merely coincidental—by way of economic complicity in building slave ships and sending goods like fish to feed enslaved people in exchange for molasses and rum—but intentional, institutionalized, and legislated.[186] For example, Cooper points to the 47th article of the Capitulation of Montreal 1760, an agreement that finalized Britain's conquest of New France, which "recognized the French colonists' rights to keep in bondage their black and aboriginal slaves."[187] The formation of Canada as we know it hinges on the institutionalized subjugation of Black and Indigenous peoples. As I have attempted to do throughout this thesis, I want to draw attention to the erasure of Black presence and histories of slavery in what is now called Canada as it articulates this white settler attempt at recognizing settler colonialism. This disappearing of Canada's history of slavery is another entry point into thinking about the ways Spoon's work (and the nation as a whole) is haunted—not only by Indigenous ghosts, but by Black ghosts as well. Returning once more to Rinaldo Walcott, the Canadian nation-state characterizes its relationship to slavery solely through the underground railroad, recreating itself as a saviour nation and erasing the particularities of its own histories of slavery and anti-black racism.[188] The whiteness at play in the colonial inheritance referenced in Spoon's song must be named as being constituted both through the ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands and through opposition to Blackness. Without naming the particular white subject Spoon calls to account for colonialism, they play into the erasure of Black people in Canada and reify the normative binary opposition of the categories of settler and Indigenous, thereby obfuscating racialized subject positions that are not easily contained within them.

---

[186] Afua Cooper, "The invisible history of the slave trade," *The Toronto Star*, March 25, 2007.
[187] Ibid.

Introduction to My Prairie Home

While Spoon's colonial ghosts originate in a single track, my analysis seeks this figure in Spoon's larger body of work. Following *superioryouareinferior*, Spoon's position as a queer prairie icon solidified both through their work with queer youth in Edmonton and Calgary and through institutional recognition such as their public role as grand marshal of the Calgary Pride parade. I now seek the spectral traces of the colonial ghost by engaging with these aspects of Spoon's cultural production.

The documentary film *My Prairie Home* is a homecoming story, tracking Rae Spoon's movement across both place and gender. The film, one of Rae Spoon's most widely spread works, tells the story of life growing up as a queer trans person from an Evangelical family in Calgary. The film was best received in LGBT and western Canadian audiences. In 2014 it was an official selection at the Sundance Film Festival, it was awarded best documentary at the Milan International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, and it won best documentary in the Vancouver Film Critics Circle.[189] *My Prairie Home* is very much a story of place. For Spoon fans, the documentary felt like a motion picture version of *First Spring Grass Fire*, Spoon's collection of autobiographical short stories, has been combined with their music that we already loved so passionately. *My Prairie Home* is filled with contradictions, at once reiterating a fear of the prairies where Spoon is "afraid of being beaten up or worse," and expressing Spoon's deep longing for the prairies.[190] These contradictions are exemplary of the affective and discursive lives of queer white settlers on the prairies.

---

[188] Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who: Writing Black Canada Second Revised Edition* (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003), 35.

[189] Rae Spoon, "biography," *raespoon.com*.

Billed as a "musical-documentary," *My Prairie Home* queers genre. It promises both the flamboyance of the quintessentially gay musical and the authenticity and substance of a documentary. *My Prairie Home* is thus caught in the tension between queer as indeterminate and documentary as determinate. In an interview, director Chelsea McMullan discusses her aspirations to make a documentary about gender, saying "Gender is the last frontier and Rae is out there, on the Prairie, a real pioneer."[191] McMullan's language enthusiastically embraces the prairies as a frontier and readily redeploys this metaphor for trans liberation. It bears reminding that McMullan's understanding of transness indelibly shapes the film, which ultimately reflects McMullan's direction not Spoon's own self-representation. Describing the difficulty of interviewing Spoon, McMullan says that

> Rae is hunted in so many ways. I felt like I was hunting them the whole time. We would joke about how Rae is like a deer, constantly aware of the surroundings, because they have to be. It's a matter of survival. And so this deer is constantly weaving and dodging and not letting their guard down.[192]

Using this deer-hunter metaphor, McMullan gets at the power imbalance between herself, the cis director and narrative-creator, and Spoon, the documentary's trans subject. While playful in nature and rather unnoticeable in the film between heart-felt gender statements and musical dance numbers, I want to hold on to this deer-hunter metaphor, a kind of mundane violence, as part of the film's creation. As a hunter, McMullan is the mediator of Spoon's story. I make note of this not to displace Spoon's responsibility for the film's content, but to reiterate once more that Spoon's work is their own and is also always enwrapped with others' ideas and feelings about them as an emblem of prairie queerness.

---

[190] *My Prairie Home*, directed by Chelsea McMullan (National Film Board of Canada, 2013).
[191] Katherine Monk, "Chelsea McMullan Bends Genre, Gender in Musical-Documentary about Rae Spoon," *Postmedia News*, Sep 30, 2013.
[192] Ibid.

Spoon's lyrics play into the opening image of farmland and the western frontier. In the opening song of *My Prairie Home*, Spoon sings: "I wanted you to think I was a cowboy, / So I told you where I was from."[193] With desire to enact a queer masculinity, Spoon makes a link between home, where they are from, and cowboys. Conjuring the cowboy, a particular form of prairie masculinity, outside of its context (rural space, Alberta) does not require performance or feats of strength: conjuring the cowboy simply requires reference to place. To become a cowboy, an icon of settling the west, Spoon simply invokes place. The cowboy imaginary Spoon alludes to is inseparable from place. Spoon continues, "But all I ever did was run from trucks / And I've never held a gun," revealing a rupture in this smooth flow between place and identity.[194] While cowboy connects easily to place, embodying the cowboy requires particular actions that Spoon does not claim. Through these lyrics, Spoon repositions themself as a wannabe cowboy and troubles their connection to place. Queer failure to conform to cis masculinity, as discussed in the work of Trevor Anderson, can give way to queer articulations of both masculinity and settler colonialism. In this scene, Spoon conjures the cowboy as an appealing and yet unattainable subject-position, while disappearing the other half of the frontier trope, the Indian.

Later in the film, Spoon waits in the line of a fast food restaurant next to a man in a cowboy hat. This is an encounter with a real cowboy. Spoon notices the cowboy, and cannot help but to peek once more. He catches Spoon staring and returns Spoon's gaze. Then the cowboy glances backwards towards the camera with a perplexed expression, suggesting that the cowboy is confused by Spoon's gender.[195] He knows what prairie masculinity looks like—he is after all its epitome—and what Spoon is doing is not it. Next to this man, Spoon is clearly not a cowboy. The scene implies that only a person from outside of Alberta would fall for Spoon's trick of invoking prairie masculinity through naming place. We learn from these sequences that Spoon's self-making is both enabled and limited by place. Paradoxically, when they are outside of Alberta their place enables a claim to prairie masculinity, while within Alberta this subjectivity is inaccessible. Place, physical proximity to the cowboy, marks Spoon's failure. Shifting the trope of "cowboys and Indians" to "cowboys and queer-wannabe cowboys" absents Indigenous peoples while maintaining the prairies as a mythologized frontier. Read alongside an understanding of haunting—especially given that Spoon themself uses ghostly imagery to think about settler colonialism—the film appears to be haunted both by vanished Indians and colonial ghosts.

---

[193] Rae Spoon, "Cowboy," on *My Prairie Home* (album), Coax Records, 2013.
[194] Ibid.

Reading Colonial Ghosts back into My Prairie Home

Setting Spoon's colonial ghost lyrics next to *My Prairie Home* complicates both works. Settler colonialism is knowable in song and in public, as when applied to a group of people, but settler colonialism remains unknowable in the intimacies of Spoon's personal life and sense of place. Over the course of the film's portrayal of Spoon's life and return home, Spoon does not manage the same critique they advanced in "Come on Forest Fire," a song issued prior to the film. The slip between these two works—one recognizing settler colonialism and the other one leaving it unrecognized—demonstrates how easily whiteness can move between these positions of divestment from and investment in its own power. White people are not wholly committed to naming whiteness. Our survival, as white queer settlers, does not hinge on dismantling whiteness; instead our survival is made easier when leveraging our whiteness.

---

[195] *My Prairie Home*, directed by Chelsea McMullan.

This shift from named settler colonialism to unnamed settler colonialism exposes the impermanence and tentativeness of the critique articulated in “Come on Forest Fire.” That is, Spoon’s critique works in song, but it does not shift the foundations of their work or force them to reconsider the ways they think about land. As a white settler, Spoon can choose when to make this critique and when to leave settler colonialism unnamed. They can move between noticing and not noticing.

By offering these evaluations I do not suggest that announcing the presence of settler colonialism would make Spoon’s work safe from critique or make them a “good settler.”[196] Making this a requirement for creative works would be instituting empty signifiers and rituals onto works without demanding sincere engagement or care for what ongoing settler colonialism might actually mean to the artist. Rather, I am interested in the ways that the song does not prompt a change in behaviour or thinking for Spoon or their audiences. Within the larger context of their creative work, “Come on Forest Fire” might be understood, to use Sara Ahmed’s term, as a “non-performative speech act.” In singing about colonial ghosts, Spoon speaks their commitment to interrogating settler colonialism, but this speech act does not extend into actions; the song is the entirety of the action taken. In Ahmed’s words, “sayings are not always doings, or to put it more strongly, … the investment in saying as if saying was doing can actually extend rather than challenge racism.”[197] While Ahmed is concerned with institutional so-called anti-racist policies, her concept of non-performative speech is useful to understanding Spoon’s colonial ghost, as both a doing—performing the good settler and encouraging other settlers to ask about their histories—and a not doing—avoiding continued engagement with their colonial inheritance.

---

[196] Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, “Unsettling settler colonialism: The discourse and politics of settlers, and solidarity with Indigenous nations,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2, (2014) : 5.

[197] Sarah Ahmed, “The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism,” Paper presentation at *Text and Terrain: Legal Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, University of Kent, September 25, 2004. 4. https://www.kent.ac.uk/clgs/documents/pdfs/Ahmed_sarah_clgscolloq25-09-04.pdf

In addition to being a non-performative incantation, I want to suggest that Spoon's ghost is another permutation of Bergland's theorization of the Indian, rather than its opposite. As Bergland demonstrates through her reading of Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*, white settler writers conjure Indian ghosts in response to real and ongoing Indigenous resistance.[198] Written sometime during the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy nations' land claim agreement with the U.S. government in Maine (1979-82) *Pet Sematary* revolves around an Indian burial ground in the Maine woods.[199] The novel is both a story of terror, evoking "white anxieties about Indian possession and repossession of land," and a method of erasure in that King, who lives in Maine, removes the realities of the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy nations in exchange for his own Indian ghost fantasies.[200] King's use of the Indian ghost is an articulation of guilt and settler anxiety as he processes the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty taking place in his physical proximity. In a similar way, the colonial ghost is a figure called on to help white settlers process their affective relationship to colonialism, but the colonial ghost is born out of a different national and political context, an era of reconciliation.

In *Therapeutic Nations,* Dian Million marks the shift between the Royal Proclamation of Aboriginal Peoples report in 1996 and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as "moving the focus from one of political self-determination to one where self-determination becomes intertwined with state-determined biopolitical programs for emotional and psychological self-care informed by trauma."[201] Locating Spoon's colonial ghost within this larger shift in the conversation between Indigenous nations and the Canadian settler state helps to explain why Spoon repents for the wrongs committed by the colonial ghost rather than reiterating the same spectralization of Indigenous resistance as King. Much like

---

[198] Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 165.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid., 166.
[201] Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 6.

King's ghosts, Spoon is grappling with guilt in a framework set out by the settler nation-state. But the connection between King's Indian ghosts and Spoon's colonial ghosts can be understood as reflecting different state-imposed frameworks, as elucidated by Million's analysis of the shift from Indigenous political self-determination to state-determined healing in the era of Truth and Reconciliation. Million explains that the "Truth commissions operate within an economy of crisis, disclosure, and catharsis."[202] Neoliberal Canada holds that victims of state violence must reveal their traumas and be witnessed by those complicit in the violence of the state towards a "reconciled national history."[203] Within the framework of Truth and Reconciliation, settlers are asked to reframe their thinking on colonialism to one that fits into an individualized victim-perpetrator relationship.[204] The colonial ghost is a non-performative articulation of colonial guilt insofar as the ghost serves to voice guilt and express the settler feeling of being haunted. Aided by Million's periodization of Canadian affective relationships to Indigenous nations' resistance, Bergland's analysis of spectralization can accommodate the colonial ghost as a figure that reflects settler feelings of being haunted—a form of witnessing and catharsis—in the era of Truth and Reconciliation. In Bergland's account, Indian ghosts function as representations of national guilt.[205] Functionally, Spoon's colonial ghosts are no different; they both conjure guilt and create a collective gathering place for settlers to feel haunted.

Molly Swain and Chelsea Vowel discuss white guilt and Indian ghosts in the inaugural episode of their podcast *otipêyimsiw-iskwêwak kihci-kîsikohk* (Métis in Space). In this episode, they review *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s thanksgiving episode "Pangs," in which the demon of the week is an unrested Chumash spirit.[206] In Swain and Vowel's discussion of "Pangs," they note the show's continual reiteration of the extermination and extinction of Chumash people—this is untrue and Chumash nations continue to thrive. But, the episode hinges on the imagined extinction of Indigenous people, which enables the Indian ghost. This episode of *Buffy* centers around a confrontation of two opposing white settler points of view: Willow, the "heart-broken, white liberal progressive guilty settler," and Giles, "British imperialist."[207] Our white hero Buffy exists somewhere in the middle, negotiating the inconvenience of spirit, learning to feel guilt, and listening to these two supposedly opposing voices. In the podcast, Vowel asks Swain "so who do you hate most?" to which Swain responds instantly: "Willow."[208] In discussing why, they describe her complicity. Her guilt is annoying and she still behaves poorly; as Swain says, "White bleeding heart liberal guilt, at best offensive, at worst on par with the problem itself."[209]

---

[202] Ibid., 3.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., 17.
[205] Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 166.

Here, Swain and Vowel uncover guilt as functionless; simply, if Willow's speeches about giving the land back do not result in giving the land back, then they are not useful. "Come on Forest Fire" does encourage and enable white settlers to ruminate on our positions and link them to larger histories of settler colonialism, but Spoon mirrors Willow's position insofar as their song stops at the expression of settler guilt and does not continue into uncomfortable conversations or actions towards concrete disruptive change. To invoke Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's analysis of settler moves to innocence, decolonization in Spoon's song is reduced to a hopeful forest fire and thus becomes a metaphor. Making decolonization into a metaphor is violent insofar as it erases tangible actions towards Indigenous sovereignty and futurity, and works to soothe settler feelings of discomfort with such change.[210] As Tuck and Yang write,

---

[206] Molly Swain and Chelsea Vowel, *Métis in Space Episode #1-Buffy "Pangs."* Podcast audio. Accessed March 30, 2017, http://www.metisinspace.com/episodes/2016/4/2/mtis-in-space-ep1-buffy-pangs.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1, (2012) : 3.

"When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future."[211] Reiterating one's own felt guilt, as Spoon does and encourages others to do too, surely is easier than having difficult conversations about relationship and responsibility, or giving up land and power.[212]

Land Acknowledgements and Queer of Colour Demands for White Accountability

In September 2016 Spoon was given the title of grand marshal at the Calgary Pride march. Agreeing to the position, Spoon walked with a sign that read "Pride on SIKSIKA, PIIKANI, KAINAI, TSUU T'INA, AND STONEY LAND."[213] This gesture follows both the song and the film, marking a return of the colonial ghost. Spoon's sign acts as a form of territorial acknowledgement for the course of the pride parade, as they gesture to the ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands and ask others to think about it. According to Chelsea Vowel, context is necessary to thinking about the effectiveness of land acknowledgements. As Vowel explains,

> they can be transformative acts that to some extent undo Indigenous erasure … as long as these acknowledgments discomfort both those speaking and hearing the words. The fact of Indigenous presence should force non-Indigenous peoples to confront their own place on these lands."[214]

Without knowing how pride spectators or organizers felt upon witnessing Spoon's sign, I do know that Spoon is not new to thinking about settler colonialism, based on the colonial ghost, which gives me reason to believe that this level of acknowledgement is comfortable for them. If through repetition territorial acknowledgements can lose their disruptive potential, like Vowel proposes, then perhaps Spoon's performative acknowledgements are no longer disruptive. As an alternative to repetitive non-disruptive land acknowledgements, Vowel directs settlers towards actions for concrete and disruptive change:

---

[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid., 9.
[213] Rae Spoon, Facebook post, September 4, 2016. https://www.facebook.com/raespoonpage/photos/a.10150172424562620.314282.185167257619/10154010491937620/?type=3&theater
[214] Chelsea Vowel, "Beyond Territorial Acknowledgements," September 23, 2015, *âpihtawikosisân law, language, life: A Plains Cree speaking Métis woman in Montreal* (blog). http://apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments/.

> Perhaps you understand the tension of your presence as illegitimate, but don't know how to deal with it beyond naming it. Maybe now it is time to start learning about your obligations as a guest in this territory. What are the Indigenous protocols involved in being a guest, what are your responsibilities?[215]

Vowel continues, "we need to start imagining a constellation of relationships that must be entered into beyond territorial acknowledgments."[216] The question that Spoon might enter into, then, could be about their relationships and responsibilities are towards Indigenous peoples generally, and maybe specifically queer Indigenous people from the nations named on their sign. With regards to their role in pride, Spoon maintains their position of power and does not refuse the position altogether. In this way, Indigenous presence may be named on the sign, but remains absented from Spoon's section of the parade.

Spoon's thoughts on racism and colonialism surface once more in Vivek Shraya's book of poetry *even this page is white*. In the book, Shraya holds a forum with her white friends in a piece she calls "conversation with white friends: sara quin, amber dawn, rae spoon, dannielle owens-reid."[217] In the poetry before and after this conversation, Shraya grapples with the intersections of white supremacy, anti-black racism, and colonialism from her position as a trans woman of colour. The conversation piece interrupts that flow of individual thinking, but as the subtitle explains this conversation has a role in this collection "because i still believe in the value of dialogue and because white people listen to white people."[218] The piece is structured around Shraya's questions for her friends on their experiences of whiteness and also about their commitments to ending racism. In response to the question "how do you reconcile being white with the history of colonization by white people in north america?" Spoon answers:

---

[215] Vowel, "Beyond Territorial Acknowledgements."
[216] Ibid.
[217] Vivek Shraya, *even this page is white*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016), 57.
[218] Ibid.

> the final report of the truth and reconciliation commission defines reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. reading that really impacted me because of my own history with being the victim of abuse. it raised my awareness of the fact that i am approaching relationships with indigenous people in canada from the side of the abusers and the people who benefit from that cultural genocide. it means that i don't get to decide how reconciliation happens and i am responsible for being informed and supporting self-determination for indigenous people as well as calls to action.[219]

Shraya's question demands Spoon reposition themself within the networks of power that benefit them. Much like white queers before them, Spoon is held to account for their white colonial inheritance by queers of colour, like Shraya and Elisha Lim.[220] In Adrienne Rich's essay "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia," for example, Rich makes herself accountable to Black women such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Pat Robinson, and The Combahee River Collective who prompt, enable, and teach her about the racism she writes about and benefits from.[221] Spoon's engagement with racism and settler colonialism is ongoing and changing in a way that forecloses marking their work as either successful or unsuccessful at enacting the solidarity it attempts. Put another way, their engagement with racism and settler colonialism is literally brought into existence through their relationships. In this way, marking their work as unsuccessful does not acknowledge the labour of queers of colour who continue to teach and uphold Spoon's learning on racism and settler colonialism. Nonetheless, Spoon's noticeable shifts in thinking do not undo the violence of erasure in *My Prairie Home*, nor do they expand the limits of territorial acknowledgements. These shifts in thinking—which do not progress linearly, but rather fold back on themselves, from acknowledgements to lack thereof and back again—demonstrate dynamism in Spoon's engagement with racism and settler colonialism. Spoon is a complex figure whose engagement with racism, settler colonialism, and their own complicity in these systems is complicated and contradictory. In recognizing and engaging with these changes in, I want to insist that responsible relationships are ongoing and require more than one-off actions to actualize this responsibility.

---

[219] Ibid., 60.

[220] In Shraya's piece, Spoon describes a moment where Elisha Lim, a queer trans person of colour, had to explain to Spoon that an article released by a popular media outlet about Spoon's gender queer identity absented queer and trans people of colour. A full conversation between Spoon and Elisha Lim about queer identity and racism can be read here http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/elisha-lim-and-rae-spoon-talking-shop/

[221] Adrienne Rich, "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia," in *Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, New York: Norton 1979, 275.

Vengeful Ghosts (Ghosts settlers should be scared of)

I turn now to Indigenous criticism that transforms the conversation around haunting into one, not of guilt and inaction, but of terror—articulating the terrors of settler colonialism while also terrorizing settlers. The Indian ghost is refused and refigured by Indigenous writers, filmmakers, and theorists. At the end of *The National Uncanny*, Bergland draws on the writings of William Apess and Leslie Marmon Silko, two Native authors writing across centuries, as their works contest and refigure the spectralization of Indigenous peoples. Through her reading of these authors, Bergland observes how Indigenous representation of Indigenous ghosts "transforms the discourses of Indian spectralization into those of affirmation and empowerment."[222] I find it necessary to pay attention to the ways haunting, as described by Indigenous theorists, activates modes of Indigenous resistance that image decolonial futures while effacing the settler colonial present.

Billy-Ray Belcourt's "A Poltergeist Manifesto" is an exorcism, an imaging of decolonial futures, and a mapping of borderlands. In this essay, Belcourt raises the queer Indigenous poltergeist, "the feral monster in the horror story of decolonization."[223] Queer Indigenous poltergeists linger in savagery, refusing settler sovereignty and the category of human, “modes of being-in-the-world that narrate themselves as the only options.”[224] Moving across time, unable and unwanting to heal, unable and unwilling to forget, bleeding out, Belcourt’s poltergeist does not reconcile, abolishing “settler colonialism’s happiness regime.”[225]

---

[222] Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 164.
[223] Billy-Ray Belcourt, "A Poltergeist Manifesto," *Feral Feminism* issue 6 (2016) : 25.

Unlike other ghosts, the queer Indigenous poltergeist is animated through being queered: “those who are differently queered and gendered … haunt waywardly and in ways that cannot be easily predicted.”[226] For Belcourt’s poltergeist, queerness is at once an origin story—its becoming spectral is a queer becoming—and a trajectory that cannot be mapped. He writes, “indigeneity’s queerness is saturated with the trauma of colonialism’s becoming-structure.”[227] Belcourt’s poltergeist is not simply a ghostly presence (though it is that too) but a mode of being, a starting point for decolonization. The queer Indigenous poltergeist is “a killjoy that refuses to let go of the past, that kills the happiness of settlers by making things awkward, that points out moments of colonial violence, that points out our murders.”[228] Awkwardness, here, is no small threat—it arises in recognition of “murders” and has the capacity to “kill”—Belcourt’s language points to the affective power of the poltergeist as a retributive force.

The protagonist of Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers’s film *A Red Girl’s Reasoning*, Delia, is an Indigenous woman in the “business of revenge.”[229] Appearing at a bar next to a white man, Delia orders a whiskey, neat. The man, Brian, looks her up and down and tries a few pick-up lines. Then after announcing a trip to the bathroom, he whispers, his lips having moved close to her ear, “Don’t disappear, maybe I’ll buy you a drink.” The extreme close-up shot allows the viewer to notice as Delia side-eyes his moving lips and then looks straight ahead, unthreatened and unmoved by his comments. Unbeknownst to him, Delia is targeting him with the intention of attaining justice on behalf of her client, an Indigenous woman who survived his assaults.

---

[224] Ibid., 24.
[225] Ibid., 30.
[226] Ibid., 25.
[227] Ibid., 27.
[228] Ibid., 30.
[229] *A Red Girl’s Reasoning*, directed by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers (2012).

I read Delia as a cinematographic manifestation of the queer Indigenous poltergeist. She poses a literal threat to heteronormativity—white straight cis men and the systems that normalize violence against Indigenous women, queer, trans, and Two-Spirit people—and by way of revenge she takes justice into her own hands, refusing the paths to accountability offered by settler colonialism. And Delia is haunting insofar as haunting is a form of revenge. As Tuck and Ree write, "Unruly, full of desire, unsettling, around the edges of haunting whispers revenge."[230] Delia's invocation of the supernatural in her own work—"This business of revenge is both a calling and a curse"—enables somewhat of a spooky reading.[231] Described as a "neo-noir action/thriller," *A Red Girl's Reasoning* certainly meets the cinematic requirements of action, complete with a motorcycle chase montage and no-holds-barred fight scenes.[232] Without erasing the power and importance of thinking this film through such genres, I read it is as a horror movie because, like Belcourt's queer Indigenous poltergeist, Delia and her co-conspirators reveal starting points for decolonization. Rather than disappearing Delia by making her into a ghost, I mean to think about her "business of revenge" as a form of haunting.

Brian's utterance, "Don't disappear," is a threat, the first signal that this is a horror story. Brian's words play on the trope of the disappearing Indian, imagined gone by colonizers who wish to stake uncontested claim to the land while also imagining themselves outside of the violence of colonialism. Activating this trope, Brian's leering whisper is also a reminder of the reality of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Tailfeathers exposes the danger of mundane white men and rests their fate in the capable hands of Delia. On Indigenous horror films, Nêhiyaw filmmaker Ariel Smith notes that Indigenous filmmakers

---

[230] Tuck and Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," 651.
[231] *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, directed by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers.
[232] *Cinema Politica*. www.cinemapolitica.org/film/red-girls-reasoning

> do not need to think up imagined incidents of vicious, macabre torture. The horror, the terror: it's all around us. Terror and violence are in the very foundation that colonial states are built upon and colonial violence continues to manifest today against Indigenous bodies.[233]

In this way, *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, as an Indigenous horror film, reflects the lived realities of Indigenous women's experiences with colonial gender-based violence.

Drawing from Tuck and Ree in their "Glossary of Haunting," film representations of haunting uncover structural thinking about colonialism.[234] Under the term "American horror, as depicted in film," Tuck and Ree observe that the plots of horror films in the U.S. revolve around the containment of monsters and ghosts, ultimately working to solve the haunting problem.[235] The protagonists in these films appear innocent, and the haunting they experience "is underserved, even random."[236] Tuck and Ree read these films next to Japanese horror films, in which the protagonist does not try to resolve haunting or prove their innocence, and instead "because the depth of injustice that begat the monster or ghost is acknowledged, the hero does not think herself to be innocent."[237] U.S. horror then parallels North American settler moves to innocence. The desire to resolve haunting mimics the white desire for reconciliation, forgetting, and the ends of racism and unhappiness.

Read through this framework, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is a sort of reverse horror film, in which the protagonist seeks revenge on Brian, the character who would normally be cast as the "innocent hero."

---

[233] Ariel Smith, "Indigenous Cinema and the Horrific Reality of Colonial Violence," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. February 13, 2015. https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2015/02/13/indigenous-cinema-and-the-horrific-reality-of-colonial-violence/

[234] Tuck and Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," 643.

[235] Ibid., 641.

[236] Ibid.

[237] Ibid.

Rather than working from the perspective of the person being haunted, Tailfeathers concerns us with the haunting presence, which in this case comprises not only Delia but also her clients and her collaborators. In doing this, Tailfeathers does not allow Brian to appear innocent nor does she allow him to propose "a solution to the problem set of injustice."[238] Instead she demonstrates the violent foundation that motivates Delia: injustice that "produces a haunting based on revenge."[239]

In the film's introductory sequence, Delia says "I've been on this war path for six long lonely years, but white boys have been having their way with Indian girls since contact," locating her work within a long legacy of Indigenous women subject to and resisting the violence of white men.[240] Her stated trajectory of revenge mirrors Tuck and Ree's explanation for haunting: "Erasure and defacement concoct ghosts; I don't want to haunt you, but I will."[241] The film itself is a specter of E. Pauline Johnson's short story of the same name and in this way, Tailfeathers's *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is a sort of séance. Published in 1913, Johnson grapples with the relationship between white men and Indigenous women, asserting very clearly that "neither church, nor law, nor even … nor even love can make a slave of a red girl."[242] In Johnson's story, the protagonist Christine responds to her white settler husband's Eurocentrism by refusing to recognize their own marriage in the church as legitimate. At the end of the story, Christine metaphorically kills him by insisting on her refusal to return to him; as she says, "Not murderers alone know the agony of a death sentence."[243] In referencing Johnson's short story, Tailfeathers relocates justice outside of colonial law and back into the hands of Indigenous women.

---

[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid., 652.
[240] *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, directed by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers.
[241] Tuck and Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," 643.
[242] E. Pauline Johnson, "A Red Girl's Reasoning," *Canadian Literature* (March 2013) : 12.
[243] Ibid.

Returning once more to Smith's thinking on Indigenous horror, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is rooted in the violence faced by Indigenous women. As Smith writes,

> We don't need to look any further for an example of this than the abhorrent systemic violence of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). When Native filmmakers address themes of violence against our women it resonates deeply with Indigenous audiences by tapping into our collective pain and anger, providing us with visual allegory for our rage.[244]

While Tailfeathers' work reflects the terror of this material violence, it also reflects power and resistance of the grassroots activism of Indigenous women, their families, and their communities. In terrorizing white settler cis heteropatriarchy, Delia becomes a manifestation of the queer Indigenous poltergeist, who in Belcourt's words is "a killjoy that refuses to let go of the past, that kills the happiness of settlers by making things awkward, that points out moments of colonial violence, that points out our murders."[245] Not only does Delia point out murders, she takes justice into her own hands.

Conclusion (or Haunting as Direct Action)

A Red Girl's Reasoning offers an account of haunting that has direct consequences for those being haunted, for perpetrators. Tailfeathers draws on the horror of gender-based violence perpetrated against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirits and then enacts a possible response to this violence; revenge can be a form of direct action. In his book *Red Skin White Masks*, Glen Coulthard writes "Five Theses on Indigenous Resurgence and Decolonization." The first thesis, "On the Necessity of Direct Action," proposes that there are approaches to defending Indigenous rights that are deemed legitimate within Canadian law and culture—those that are not disruptive, are peacefully symbolic, and that abide by the law—and those deemed illegitimate.[246] Coulthard argues that the illegitimate approaches—those described as “militant, threatening, disruptive, and violent”—should be named direct action.[247] According to Coulthard these “disruptive and violent” approaches to defending Indigenous rights should be considered direct action because

---

[244] Smith, "Indigenous Cinema and the Horrific Reality of Colonial Violence."
[245] Belcourt "A Poltergeist Manifesto," 30.
[246] Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014),165.

> first, the practices are directly undertaken by the subjects of colonial oppression themselves and seek to produce an immediate power effect; second, they are undertaken in a way that indicates a loosening of internalized colonialism, which is itself a precondition for any meaningful change; and third, they are prefigurative in the sense that they build the skills and social relationships (including those with the land) that are required within and among Indigenous communities to construct alternatives to the colonial relationship in the long run.[248]

The actions undertaken in *A Red Girl’s Reasoning* fit easily into this list. As in the first reason, the actions are taken directly by and on behalf of Indigenous women, “subjects of colonial oppression,” claiming power. It is important to note here that the women in the film are not only subjects of colonial oppression writ large, but are subjected to colonial gender-based oppression. To the second point, in asserting the inherent value of Indigenous women, their rights to their bodies, and most fundamentally their right to not being subject to rape and colonial violence, Delia and her co-conspirators disregard internalized colonialism. And third, Delia’s work is deeply relational; she serves a network of women seeking justice and she is aided by Indigenous women in enacting this justice.

If *A Red Girl’s Reasoning* presents an alarming or discomforting vision of direct action, this too is anticipated by Coulthard’s analysis of direct action. He notes,

> Land has been stolen, and significant amounts of it must be returned. Power and authority have been unjustly appropriated, and much of it will have to be reinstated. This will inevitably be very upsetting to some; it will be incredibly inconvenient to others.[249]

Indeed, Delia’s enforcement of justice onto the white men in the film may be “very upsetting to some.” Her direct actions, however, work towards a future where violence against Indigenous women is intolerable. Tailfeathers provides an alternate story in which Indigenous women team-up and protect each other against the real threat of white men, who literally want to disappear them. Continuing to think of *A Red Girl's Reasoning* as a reverse horror film, it is not the story of the lone protagonist surviving the wrath of a ghost, but rather the story of a lone protagonist's painful death at the hand of an Indigenous woman in the business of revenge; this is a horror story that white settlers, especially white settler rapists, should be terrified of. Tailfeathers' film is a threat. While Spoon asks a forest fire to "burn the disco down," Delia—a manifestation of the queer Indigenous poltergeist—literally lights a man on fire, executing in a way that the song never does. Decolonization for Delia is not a metaphor; it is enacted literally through revenge.

---

[247] Ibid., 166.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., 168.

Conclusion

"HERE I AM. IN EDMONTON, ALBERTA. WHAT A DUMP!"

—Christopher Peterson impersonating Shirley Maclean channelling Bette Davis[250]

Ending back at the beginning, I turn to the epigraph of *The Edmonton Queen*, which provides a bold summation of the white queer settler problematics identified in this thesis. The first third of Christopher Peterson's phrase, "HERE I AM" sounds much like Rae Spoon's homecoming narrative in *My Prairie Home*; this is the assertion of white queer presence in the prairies, intent on claiming space despite cis supremacy and heteronormativity. The last third of the phrase, like Dirt City, names and makes Edmonton into a wasteland. Taken as a whole, the phrase reiterates white queer insistence on claiming space within a place that we have decided is kind of dirty but we like it anyway. While of all the white queer settler work I have interrogated in this project, Darrin Hagen's is perhaps the most explicit in its racism, it manages to anticipate the white queer settler affective relationships to place that I subsequently examined. Hagen's epigraph reminds me that white queer settlers, across the short timeline I have presented, shared desires for place and actualized those desires by leveraging their holds on whiteness and freely claiming home and place in the prairies. Another way, my story of the white possession taken up by white queers is not the story of a linear progression from racist to less-racist, but rather a story of one mode of white possession proceeding into another.

A central aim of this project has been to learn from and think alongside the works of queer and feminist Indigenous thinkers, writers, theorists, directors, and philosophers from the prairies. In the first chapter, I interpreted the works of Gregory Scofield and Adrian Stimson as they demonstrate forms of relationality that do not hinge on ownership. The second chapter is grounded in Erica Violet Lee's wasteland theory, Erin Marie Konsmo's creative work, and Zoe Todd's critique of Edmonton's white art scene. The third chapter ends with Billy-Ray Belcourt's queer Indigenous poltergeist informing my reading of Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers' rape-revenge direct action film *A Red Girl's Reasoning*. Throughout each of these chapters I have also called on the work of Black studies scholars and creative workers—such as Rinaldo Walcott, Katherine McKittrick, Dionne Brand, Roland Pemberton, and Afua Cooper—to articulate the ways blackness is an absented presence in Canada, and furthermore how anti-blackness and settler colonialism function together. By centering the works of queer and feminist Indigenous thinkers, I have tried to create a framework for white queer settlers to think and act accountability to Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty. White queer settlers can and should learn to undo the violence we perpetuate against Indigenous, Black, and racialized queers by taking seriously the relationality laid out by these feminist and queer Indigenous theorists and artists.

---

[250] Darrin Hagen, *The Edmonton Queen: not a riverboat story* (Edmonton: Slipstream Press, 1997), vii.

In closing, I want to return to the theoretical frameworks offered by both Erica Violet Lee and Billy-Ray Belcourt. "The heart of wastelands theory," Lee explains, "is simple. Here, we understand that there is nothing and no one beyond healing. So we return again and again to the discards, gathering scraps for our bundles, and we tend to the devastation with destabilizing gentleness, carefulness, softness."[251] Though wastelands have been vacated of value—literally and figuratively—by settler colonialism, Lee insists on caring for them. These acts of care are about ensuring survival, and also are acts of resistance to settler colonialism insofar as they recalibrate patriarchal colonial systems that assign value to certain people and vacate value from others. Lee writes, "For those of us in the wastelands—for those of us who are the wastelands—caring for each other in this way is refusing a definition of worthiness that will never include us."[252] In a similar move, Belcourt observes, "Settler colonialism purges excessive forms of indigeneity that trouble its rubrics for sensing out the human and the nonhuman."[253] He continues, "In other words, settler colonialism works up modes of being-in-the-world that narrate themselves as the only options we have," thereby rejecting colonialism's ontological violence.[254]

---

[251] Erica Violet Lee, "In Defense of Wastelands: A Survival Guide," *GUTS Canadian Feminist Magazine*, November 30, 2016, http://gutsmagazine.ca/wastelands/.

Both Lee and Belcourt point to the "modes of being-in-the-world" created by settler colonialism and refuse them. Lee comes to the defense of wastelands and Belcourt holds a séance for queer Indigenous poltergeists. Through these different approaches, both insist on the value and the decolonial potential of the places and people who have been ejected from what settler colonialism holds as categorically valuable. Their projects, though different, are connected through their reevaluations of worthiness, which disrupt "mode of being-in-the-world" that don't include and center queer Indigenous people and Indigenous women. Lee and Belcourt respond differently to their encounters with the colonial categories that are set on evicting people. Lee proposes resistance through care, and Belcourt proposes a feral becoming as a starting point for decolonization. I want to hold both of these methods closely, as they model and demand work to build new worlds.

---

[252] Ibid.
[253] Billy-Ray Belcourt, "A Poltergeist Manifesto," *Feral Feminism* issue 6 (2016) : 24.
[254] Ibid.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. “The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism.” Paper presentation at *Text and Terrain: Legal Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, University of Kent, September 25, 2004. https://www.kent.ac.uk/clgs/documents/pdfs/Ahmed_sarah_clgscolloq25-09-04.pdf

—. “Making Feminist Points.” *feministkilljoys.* September 11, 2013, https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/

Alexie, Sherman. “How to Write the Great American Indian Novel” in *The Summer of Black Widows*. New York: Hanging Loose Press, 1996.

Anderson, Trevor. *Little Deputy*. Directed by Trevor Anderson. 2015. Edmonton: Dirt City Films.

Bailey, Marlon. *Butch Queens up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013.

Barbour, Douglas. *Writing Edmonton: Poets Laureate of Edmonton 2005-2013*. Edmonton: Edmonton Arts Council, 2012.

Belcourt, Billy-Ray. “A Poltergeist Manifesto.” *Feral Feminisms* issue 6 (2016) : 22-32.

Bergland, Renée. *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2000.

Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. “Sex in Public.” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998) : 547-566.

Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001.

Cariou, Warren. Introduction to *Love Medicine and One song / Sâkihtowin-Maskihkiy* *êkwa Pêyak-Nikamowin*, edited by Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm. Cape Croker First Nation: Kegedonce Press, 2009.

Collins, Leah. "Still in Edmonton? Photo project probes mixed emotions about being 'left behind.'" *CBC Arts*. August 21, 2015.

Cooper, Afua. "The invisible history of the slave trade," *The Toronto Star*, March 25, 2007.

Crawford, Lucas. "Transgender Without Organs? Mobilizing a Geo-Affective Theory of Gender Modification." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2008) : 127-143.

Donald, Dwayne. "Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts." *First Nations Perspectives* 2, no. 1 (2009) : 1-24.

Driskill, Qwo-Li. "Call Me Brother: Two-Spiritness, the Erotic, and Mixedblood Identity As Sites of Sovereignty and Resistance in Gregory Scofield's Poetry." *Speak To Me Words: Essays on Contemporary Indian Poetry*, edited by Dean Rader and Janice Gould, 222-234. Tucson: U of Arizona Press, 2003.

Francis, Margot. *Creative Subversions: Whiteness, Indigeneity, and the National Imaginary*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.

Granzow, Kara and Amber Dean. "Revanchism in the Canadian West: Gentrification and Resettlement in a Prairie City." *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies 18*, (2007) : 89-106.

Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Hagen, Darrin. *The Edmonton Queen: not a riverboat story*. Edmonton: Slipstream Press, 1997.

Halberstam, J. Jack. *In a Queer Place in Time: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: NYU Press, 2005.

Hicks, Graham. "Pickups far and away top-selling vehicle in Alberta." *Edmonton Sun*, (Edmonton, Alberta), February 8, 2013.

Hunt, Sarah, Amy Piedalue, and Cindy Holmes. "Violence, Colonialism, and Space: Towards a Decolonizing Dialogue." *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, no. 2 (2014) : 539-570.

Hunt, Sarah and Cindy Holmes. "Everyday Decolonization: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 19 (2015) : 154-172.

Johnson, E. Pauline. "A Red Girl's Reasoning." *Canadian Literature* (March 2013) : 1-13. (Vancouver, BC). Orignially published in *Dominion Illustrated* (Montreal), February 1893, 19–28.

Justice, Daniel Heath. *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Kent, Gordon. "City of Champions no more: After more than a decade of gnashing its teeth, Edmonton ditches outdated slogan." *National Post*, April 29, 2015.

Konsmo, Erin Marie. *The Land is Ceremony*.

Konsmo, Erin Marie. *Discovery Is Toxic: Indigenous Women on the Frontline of Environmental and Reproductive Justice*.

Konsmo, Erin Marie, and PJ Lilley. "'Art Through a Birch Bark Heart': An Illustrated

Interview with Erin Marie Konsmo." *Radical Criminology* 2, (2013) : 69-102.

Kovach, Margaret. *Indigenous Research Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 2010.

Lee, Erica Violet. "In Defense of Wastelands: A Survival Guide." *GUTS Canadian Feminist Magazine*. November 30, 2016. http://gutsmagazine.ca/wastelands/

—. "Land, Language, and Decolonial Love." *Red Rising Magazine*. November 7, 2016. http://redrisingmagazine.ca/land-language-decolonial-love/.

Lott, Eric. "'The Seeming Counterfeit': Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy." *American Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1991) : 223-254.

McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

McAdam, Sylvia (Saysewahum). *Nationhood Interrupted: Revitalizing nêhiyaw Legal Systems*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2015.

Million, Dian. *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2013.

Monk, Katherine. "Chelsea McMullan Bends Genre, Gender in Musical-Documentary about Rae Spoon." *Postmedia News*, Sep 30, 2013.

Morgensen, Scott. *Space Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011.

—. "Back and Forth to the Land: Negotiating Rural and Urban Sexuality Among the Radical Faeries." In *Out in Public: Reinventing Lesbian/Gay Anthropology in a Globalizing World*, edited by E. Lewin and W. L. Leap, 143-163. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

—. “White Settlers and Indigenous Solidarity: Confronting White Supremacy, Answering Decolonial Alliances.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society.* May 26, 2014.

Moreton-Robinson, Alieen. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

My Prairie Home. Directed by Chelsea McMullan. National Film Board of Canada. 2013.

Newton, Esther. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1972.

O’Brien, Jean. *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Rich, Adrienne. “Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia.” in *Lies, Secrets, and Silence* New York: Norton Press (1979) : 275-310.

Rifkin, Mark. *Settler Common Sense: Queerness and Everyday Colonialism in the American Renaissance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Rogalski, Alex. “Fantastic Realities – The Documentary Films of Trevor Anderson.” *Give Me Some Truth*. November 4, 2016. http://gimmesometruth.ca/fantastic-realities-documentary-films-trevor-anderson.

Scofield, Gregory. *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood.* Toronto: Harper Collins, 1999.

—. “Prayer for the House.” in *Singing Home the Bones*, 72. Vancouver: Polestar, 2005.

—. “The Dissertation.” in *Kipochikân*, 125. Gibons: Nightwood Editions, 2009.

Scudeler, June. “Gifts of *Maskihkîy*: Gregory Scofield’s Cree Métis Stories of Self-Acceptance.” *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, edited by Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen,190-210. Tucson: U of Arizona Press, 2009.

Simmins, Geoffrey and Loraine Fowlow. “West Edmonton Mall.” In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. January 30, 2012.

Simpson, Leanne. “Indict the System: Indigenous & Black Connected Resistance.” December 2014. https://www.leannesimpson.ca/writings/indict-the-system-indigenous-black-connected-resistance

Shraya, Vivek. *even this page is white.* Vancouver: Arsenal Press, 2016.

Sheilds, R. “Social Spatialization and the Built Environment: the West Edmonton Mall.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 7 (1989) : 147-164.

Smith, Ariel. “Indigenous Cinema and the Horrific Reality of Colonial Violence.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. February 13, 2015.

Snelgrove, Corey, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel. “Unsettling settler colonialism: The discourse and politics of settlers, and solidarity with Indigenous nations.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3 no. 2 (2014) : 1-32.

Spoon, Rae. “Come on Forest Fire Burn the Disco Down.” On *superioryouareinferior,* Coax Records, 2008.

—. “Cowboy.” On *My Prarie Home*, Coax Records, 2013.

—. Facebook post. October 27, 2015.

https://www.facebook.com/raespoonpage/posts/10153304091422620

—. “biography.” *raespoon.com*.

Stimson, Adrian. “Buffalo Boy’s Heart On: Buffalo Boy’s 100 years of wearing his heart on his sleeve.” Master’s Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2005.

Swain, Molly and Chelsea Vowel. *Métis in Space Episode #1-Buffy “Pangs.”* Podcast audio. Accessed March 30, 2017, http://www.metisinspace.com/episodes/2016/4/2/mtis-in-space-ep1-buffy-pangs.

Swerve. “Rae Spoon talks about being the Grand Marshal for this year's Pride Parade: ‘It’s like the ending of an American movie.’” *Calgary Herald*, September 1, 2016. http://calgaryherald.com/life/swerve/rae-spoon-talks-about-being-the-grand-marshal-for-this-years-pride-parade-its-like-the-ending-of-an-american-movie

Tailfeathers, Elle-Máijá (Director). *A Red Girl’s Reasoning*, 2012.

Todd, Zoe. “A manifesto for the (white) Edmonton arts scene.” *Zoe and the City* (blog). June 6, 2015. https://zoeandthecity.wordpress.com/2015/06/06/a-manifesto-for-the-edmonton-arts-scene-boycottyegarts/

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization is not a metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012) : 1-40.

Tuck, Eve and C. Ree. “A Glossary of Haunting.” In *Handbook of Autoethnography,* edited by Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, 639–658. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013.

Venne, Sharon. “Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective.” *Aboriginal and*

Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equity, and Respect for Difference, edited by Michael Asch, 173-207. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997.

Vowel, Chelsea. "Beyond Territorial Acknowledgments." September 23, 2015, *âpihtawikosisân law, language, life: A Plains Cree speaking Métis woman in Montreal* (blog). http://apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments/.

Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black Like Who: Writing Black Canada Second Revised Edition*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003.

Weapon, Cadence. "Hope in Dirt City." On *Hope in Dirt City*. Upper Class Recordings, 2012.

Willes, Brett Cassady. "Black Prairie Geographies: Understanding Edmonton Through the works of Rollie Pemberton." Gender Studies 810: Black/Geographies/Liberation, April, 2016.

Wilson, Alex. "Two-Spirit People, Body Sovereignty and Gender Self-Determination." *Red Rising Magazine.* September 21, 2015. http://redrisingmagazine.ca/two-spirit-people-body-sovereignty-and-gender-self-determination/

Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006) : 387-409.