Moving Unsettlement: Excursions into Public and Pedagogical Memory

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Abstract: This paper reflects upon my recent durational performance art work, *memoration #2: constituent parts*, which I undertook in Kingston, Ontario in response to the bicentenary celebrations of John A. Macdonald’s birth. The performance and its discussion in this paper invoke temporal and political through-lines from the colonial policies instituted by John A. Macdonald to contemporary structures of racial power and dominant settler mythologies that continue to shape mainstream Canadian imaginaries and spaces. I suggest that a strategic performance of the white settler body -- the embodiment of the exalted white subject, as articulated by Sunera Thobani -- can produce disturbances to the perpetuation of white settler dominance in the lands now known as Canada. *memoration #2* interferes with icons of material culture that imbue white settler emplacement and infiltrates civic space, university architectures, sites of memorialization and celebratory impulses that assume state and white settler primacy. Further, as an intervention into sites that are inscribed into daily life with disregard for their bonds to historical and ongoing colonial nation-building, the performance works to reveal the well-honed practices of biased amnesia that contribute to the maintenance of colonial beliefs, systems and values. By scrutinizing the embodied, symbolic and relational gestures of this performance, this paper considers the potential, complexities and limits of performative acts that aim to resist colonial power from a critical white settler positionality and invites reflection on non-colonial futures.

Keywords: Settler colonialism, whiteness, decolonization, performance art, counter-monument
Figure 2. memoration #2: constituent parts (Photo credit: Aric McBay).

Introduction

memoration #2: constituent parts was created for a performance art series curated by Métis curator Erin Sutherland in which five artists intervened in the 2015 John A. Macdonald bicentenary celebrations in Kingston, Ontario. Sited at Queen’s University’s Stauffer Library, the John A. Macdonald statue in Kingston’s City Park and points in between, this performance was carried out in three parts over the span of nine hours. The performance will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper, however the following offers a brief description of how it unfolded. In the first part I occupied the loggia of the Stauffer Library building seated motionless in a chair in the center of a canoe from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon. At hourly intervals throughout the day several actions were carried out with the help of pre-arranged accomplices. In the second part of the performance, accompanied by the audience, I dragged the canoe across campus and through City Park to the site of the John A. Macdonald statue. In the third and last part I systematically took apart the canoe on a small gravel road behind the John A. Macdonald Statue.

In responding to Sutherland’s curatorial premise of using the John A. Macdonald bicentenary celebrations as a catalyst for “foster(ing) critical investigations into Canadian nationalism, the celebration of historical "icons" and the erasure of Indigenous presence” (Sutherland, 2015) I chose to focus on everyday spaces, interactions and impulses as they manifest in the present. With this in mind, the performance encounters John A. Macdonald in three ways. First, the specter of Macdonald is enlisted as a symbol of the settler state, creating a counter-point to the ways in which the bicentenary celebrations symbolically invoke him as a founding father. Second, I align exercises in collective public memory, such as these celebrations, with other manifestations of selective remembrance and erasure encountered in daily life. Third, the performance alludes to the ways in which the residues of Macdonald’s policies, as foundational expressions of settler colonialism, are sutured into the fabric of life and consciousness in contemporary mainstream Anglo-Canadian society. While audience members may read references to Macdonald’s policies within the work -- just as they may notice other references that are specific to their knowledge and experience -- the performance and this paper are not intended to dwell on the specifics of policy. In a performance such as this, entry points of recognition are deliberately balanced with spaces of ambiguity to provoke the audience to think and feel without over-determining the meaning conveyed. Similarly, in this paper I am deliberate in my decisions about what I discuss and reveal about the performance and its underpinnings so as to afford the performance some latitude to speak for itself.

My interest in this paper is to tease out the ways in which a performance such as memoration #2: constituent parts can disturb localized manifestations of the “interconnected
global systems that secure white dominance through time, property and notions of self” (Byrd, 2012, xxiii). Aligning with the concerns of my art and research practice, **memoration #2:** *constituent parts* and its discussion herein place under scrutiny white settler subjectivity, settler colonial structures, and practices substantiating white dominance. As such, this work investigates normative categories and dominant social and political orders as a means to understand their production and maintenance and, importantly, theorize tactics for their subversion. In undertaking this work I am careful to implicate myself as a white settler artist/scholar, and therefore part of intersecting collectivities that inherently benefit from the theft of Indigenous lands and the enactment of race thinking, regardless of my actions as an individual. Although this performance is specifically focused on considering relations between Indigenous peoples/nations and white settlers/the state, its underpinnings and my analysis of it frame Canadian nation-building as a project in which settler colonial logics and racist ideologies converge to instate white dominance in multiple, intersectional forms. **memoration #2:** *constituent parts* endeavoured to render counter-colonial insights that interrupt and/or undermine power structures of whiteness articulated through colonially inflected histories, mythologies and habits within everyday spaces. In so doing, the performance reckoned with the intentional forgetting that is implicated not only in the construction and perpetuation of these dominating narratives and practices, but also in encounters with the spaces that they haunt.

In order to anchor this paper’s focused discussion of the performance, I will first attend to the underlying conditions relevant to its intent. I begin by situating the performance, as part of my ongoing art/research practice, in relation to the activation of resistance to the settler colonial status quo. I continue to lay a contextual groundwork by framing aspects of Canadian nation-building, notably touching on subject formation and the racialization of space. I end this section by considering the ways in which selectively constructed narratives and the elisions that mirror them influence mainstream Canadian self-conceptions; I also consider the role of iconic symbols in maintaining these beliefs. This discussion provides the background for a close reading of the performance, in which I reflect on the ways it intervenes into colonially inflected spaces, knowledges and impulses by tampering with iconic elements of Canadian visual culture. Rather than drawing hard and fast conclusions, my reflections consider how the interruptions this performance represents might bear influence upon the conditions of everyday life.

**Placing white settler response-ability**

In contemporary Canada, long established patterns of white dominance continue to be maintained, in which race-based ideologies and settler colonial logics enfold into self-replicating systems of dis/possession. These systems, although remarkably persistent, have been subject to Indigenous resistance described by Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagig Nishnaabe) as “the longest running resistance movement in Canadian history… that predates the formation of Canada itself” (Simpson, 2008, 13). Moreover, well-developed visions for alternative social and political orders have been duly theorized and articulated from a multitude of Indigenous viewpoints. This continuum of resistance and resurgence includes a robust lineage of Indigenous artists and cultural workers who have challenged the dominance of white settler society and its institutions by foregrounding Indigenous knowledges, while confronting stereotypes, revealing colonial histories, and proposing transformed futures. In recent years, Indigenous and allied non-Indigenous theorists and activists have issued increasingly nuanced and intensified calls for the mobilization of meaningful engagement in decolonizing struggles on the part of white settlers and racialized non-Indigenous peoples (Alfred, 2005; Simpson, 2008; Regan, 2010; Freeman and
Christian, 2010; Byrd 2011; Cannon and Sunseri, 2011; Walia, 2012; Simpson, 2008; Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel, 2014). Urging self-reflexive activation across subjectivities, Chickasaw scholar Jodi A. Byrd suggests that settler, native and arrivant each acknowledge their own positions within empire and then reconceptualize space and history to make visible what imperialism and its resultant settler colonialisms and diasporas have sought to obscure (Byrd, 2011 xxx).

In the spirit of Byrd’s assertion, my interest in this performance, was to contribute to movements that aim to challenge, resist and/or surpass colonial forms by intervening (self-reflexively) into the social topographies in which racist and colonial systems are naturalized and unquestioned.

Of particular significance to my research and art production is the manner in which appeals for settler-driven unsettling are articulated in the context of creative production (Dewer & Goto, 2012; Garneau, 2012; Mathur, 2011; Stimson: quoted in Sandals, 2013). Métis artist, curator, and writer David Garneau advocates for discrete Indigenous spaces and conversations as “irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality” that are not translated or made visible to dominant culture. Yet he also asserts a role for non-Indigenous cultural workers, describing active allies as critical to Indigenous struggles (2012, 33). In this way, Garneau advocates for both parallel and intersecting Indigenous and settler practices. In considering the relationship among anti-colonial efforts carried out by diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, it is crucial to make a distinction between Indigenous artists who may be approaching such work as a practice of “survivance,”1 and white settler artists such as myself whose decision to commit to such work is a choice marked by privilege. With this in mind -- and in keeping with the conscious embodiment of my positionality as a white settler woman within the performance -- this text engages a critically self-reflexive lens to consider both the construction and interruption of colonial nation-building as manifested within the everyday.

**Making national storylines through the imperative of strategic forgetting**

A confluence of Western modernist ideologies, including capitalism, liberalism, and technological determinism, shape the Canadian nation-state and its social, political, economic, and cultural spheres around the substantiation of white dominance. In this context, the seminal aim of the settler colonial project is to cause the Indigenous inhabitants and societies to disappear and to bestow the status of origin on the white European settler. The dispossession of Indigenous land and the replacement of Indigenous peoples and nations with settler society is enacted through mechanisms that include, but are not limited to, forced and coerced assimilation, containment, isolation, criminalization of peoples and cultural practices, theft of land, denial of sovereignty and land rights, and genocide. Such mechanisms form the foundations of policies associated with John A. Macdonald as one of Canada’s fathers of confederation.

John A. Macdonald was responsible for exerting overwhelming state control over Indigenous life and politics through the introduction of the Gradual Civilizations Act of 1858 and the 1869 Indian Act, which is still in effect today. The Indian Act conflated sovereign Indigenous nations into a single racialized category while instating a system of governance that usurped well-established Indigenous political systems. In this way the Indian Act negated cultural and political specificities and laid the groundwork for formalizing discriminatory treatment that extends to the present. Designed to erode Indigenous collectivities and populations in line with

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1 See: Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Post-Indian Warriors of Survivance* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan)
the ethos of replacement, the Indian Act assumed control over Indigenous self-determination by restricting status designation in ways that disproportionately impact women (Palmater, 2011). The 1880s treaty negotiations that propelled Indigenous dispossession of land in the west were coerced by policies that Macdonald intentionally introduced to starve the Plains nations (Daschuk, 2013). Subsequently, the Reserve and Pass systems worked to control both Indigenous people’s movement and access to goods, confining them to radically diminished land bases and accommodating western expansion of white settlement. The Indian Residential School (IRS) system -- advanced by Macdonald as a punitive measure to suppress Indigenous insurgence after the Métis uprising in 1885 -- separated Indigenous families, robbed generations of Indigenous children of their culture, and exposed children to multiple forms of violence. Now recognised as a mechanism of cultural genocide,² the IRS system continues to impact contemporary Indigenous life through the reverberations of its inter-generational effects. That the IRS system in and of itself (not to mention aspects of other policies described above) fits the definition of genocide detailed in the Genocide Convention³ only reinforces the degree to which Macdonald’s policies asserted white supremacy within early Canadian nation building. Through their profound influence on foundational conceptions of Canadian national identity, such policies continue to condition dominant perceptions of what it means to be Canadian. Furthermore, this brief description of some of Macdonald’s policies with respect to Indigenous peoples and nations illustrates the degree to which his reification in mainstream Canadian culture relies on selective forgetting, or what Margot Francis refers to as the “regime of the open secret” (2011, 5).

Macdonald’s race-based policies were not restricted to the subjugation of Indigenous bodies and communities. The Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, a categorically racist policy spearheaded by Macdonald, illustrates that the settler state’s biopolitical management of peoples in the aggressive settlement of Indigenous land does not operate strictly through a binary of Indigenous and white settler identity (Byrd, 2011; Dua and Lawrence, 2011; Morgensen, 2011; Smith, 2012; Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014; Veracini, 2010). Considerations of the construction of human subjects in Canada must account for the imposition of differential locations within the nation-state by the “interactive” logics of colonialism and racialization, as well as by intersectional forms of power such as gender, sexuality, class, and disability (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2). Sunera Thobani suggests that the formation of national identities in Canada is an evolving process of racialization that entrenches inequitable social relations by formulating white “nationals,” racialized “outsiders,” and Indigenous peoples as distinct and relational subjects (2007). In this formation, the “exalted (white) subject,” as the privileged national, perpetuates itself and is perpetuated by dominating (settler colonial) state power and structurally embedded racial hierarchies. Thus, in consort with the state, this national subject determines relative inclusion for all other subjects (ibid).

White dominance is an historical and systemic feature prevailing in the present. Hence, exaltation, or whiteness, can be understood as a “downward push on all … non-whites” (FitzMaurice, 2010, 354) that implicates all whites in controlling the limits of access and belonging. Byrd suggests that in striving for the full benefits of citizenship in the settler nation

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state, racialized subjects (as with other minoritized groups) become implicated in colonial conditions because such “recognitions are predicated on the very systems that propagate and maintain the dispossession of Indigenous peoples” (2011, xix). Rita Dhamoon states that when it comes to dispossession, settler colonialism “implicates us all … however differently located” (2014, 7). Clearly, just as limits of inclusion are not uniformly exerted, nor universally experienced across race, complicity in dispossession also is not monolithic. For instance, the history and contemporary implications of the transatlantic slave trade position Black people in Canada differently than Asian migrant workers vis-à-vis both global capitalist social orders and the contemporary settler colonial state. Furthermore, although non-Indigenous racialized peoples may be understood as being variously implicated in Indigenous dispossession, this does not generally translate to the same benefits afforded the white settler. While understanding the conditions underlying positionalities is crucial to parsing variants of oppression and complicity, defining static subject positions can be counter-productive. Byrd argues the imperative should be to consider:

how we can place the arrivals of peoples through choice and by force into historical relationship with indigenous peoples and theorize those arrivals in ways that are legible but still attuned to the conditions of settler colonialism (xxvi).

As Kobayashi, Cameron & Baldwin (2011) assert, “race thinking is a system of power whose violence lies in its capacity to normalize whiteness” (5). Through articulations of power, privilege, and entitlement, and the implicit and explicit (and differential) regulation of Black, Asian, Indigenous, and other racialized bodies, whiteness is imbricated within all spheres of society. According to Sherene Razack (2002), both space and bodies within spaces are regulated by the reiteration of normalized whiteness such that the white subject, as the assumptive center, accurses ascendant capacity for both psychological and physical movement. In this way, free of a restrictive racial categorization, the white subject is afforded unfettered transit in negotiating all manner of spatial and other systems. The white subject retains the option to exercise tacit and overt disavowal of, or disregard for pervasive racialization and their own privileged (and complicit) positions within its material manifestations. Life-long conditioning by this fundamental sense of white superiority/innocence instills a spatialized and relational state of denial and colonial elision and perpetuates narratives of nation-building that serve the interests of the state and dominant society.

Writer Thomas King (2003) maintains that we know ourselves, and each other through the stories we tell. As stories that are told and retold, the network of intersecting and interlocking myths and narratives supporting dominant visions of the nation-state in Canada are intrinsically raced and coded towards both white settler dominance and presumptions of innocence. The reiteration of these meta-narratives within daily life produces a powerfully repetitious cycle that inculcates their messages as the norm. Such stories have significant influence in social and political spheres. Moreover, through the mediation of what is kept in view and what is expunged, these stories satiate an appetite for the status quo as a fixed and preeminent state of not-knowing. Kingston’s historically based tourism and its 2015 bicentenary celebrations demonstrate that the unqualified reification of figures such as John A. Macdonald bolster foundational national mythologies in ways that continue to inform political directions and, thus, everyday life. Rather than illustrating history in a manner that accounts for multiple experiences and perspectives, cultural expressions such as these are crowded with deliberate voids.

A settler state and society know what not to know. The habits of intentional forgetting that condition official histories of Canadian nation-building and its contemporary manifestation
erase or qualify the violence of colonial invasion and dispossession, as well as the persistence of settler colonial dynamics. Thus, sustained patterns of erasure enacted by dominant society and the state substantiate the present practice of “claiming of space and place” by negating aspects of the past (Snelgrove, in Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 20). Quoting Altman and Belt in his discussion of Tsalagi concepts of the relationship between history and the present, Jeff Corntassel states:

A Tsalagi saying, “Live in a longer ‘now’— learn your history and culture and understand it is what you are now,” urges us to consider that notions of time are fluid and flexible (Altman and Belt, 2012, p. 232, quoted in Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 19).

Casting colonial misdeeds as only occurring in the past also forecloses on the recognition of contemporary complicity and thereby undermines the activation of accountability. In tandem with the elisions construed in official accounts, the collective and individual complacency conditioned through whiteness perpetuates a whitewashing of historical and current nation-building practices. Profoundly ingrained habits of (un)knowing thus solidify a disregard for the often brutal histories enfolded into everyday spaces. Moreover, they mask the way contemporary systems and institutions regulate bodies within these spaces (differently) in accordance with structures of racial and colonial hierarchies (Razack, 2002).

Pervasive aspects of visual and material culture play a significant role in mobilizing and circulating the excisions and projections that inhere within foundational nationalist narratives. The everydayness of cultural symbols, images, and icons does not preclude them from acting as powerful artifacts of nationalist identity (Francis, D, 2011; Francis, M, 2011; Mackey, 1999). As these icons are ubiquitous in the everyday, so too do their omissions become part of the unconscious within day-to-day life. In this way, the highly visible images and icons that surround us become so common-place and, on the surface, drained of historical specificities that they effectively and subconsciously condition what is or is not told, heard or learned. Yet just as icons and emblems are profoundly influential in determining and replicating dominant mythologies of national identity, they also prove powerful when subverted. Their prevalence and cultural meaning in the popular consciousness make such icons and images, and their attending mythologies ripe for artistic interventions. As Margot Francis (2011) suggests, artists “storying in and against colonial legacies” (6) can harness these prominent visual triggers to compel the viewer into self-reflection and the reassessment of entrenched beliefs. Drawing on, interfering with, and redeploying the social histories and contemporary connotations of such emblems can work to displace normative national attachments, animate that which is hidden, and project the possibility of transformed futures.

**Mobilizing sited (un)making**

Situated within architectures haunted by colonial legacies and their elision, *memoration #2: constituent parts* confronted the normalizing and amnesic forces underpinning colonial nation-building and did so through embodied, symbolic and relational acts. In order to examine these dynamics and consider the possibilities of their disruption, I enlisted iconic elements of visual culture that are instrumental in forming the bedrock of the dominant Canadian nationalist imaginary. Deliberate gestures enacted through my own body, and those of predetermined and spontaneous accomplices, strategically re/deployed these images and objects in considered acts of disturbance. By tampering with these highly influential properties of colonial desire, the work
intended to expose their genealogies and shift normative meaning, and thereby disturb calcified habits formed through “everyday embodiments of whiteness” and coloniality. (Kobayashi, Cameron & Baldwin, 14).

Throughout the performance, several iconic symbols play key roles, although the canoe, as a de facto colonial subject, occupies a prominent position as the second “body” -- a reciprocal echo of my own. In Canadian dominant culture, the canoe as an icon, and the mythologies that surround it glide effortlessly into substantiating the partial or selective histories of white entitlement. During formative stages of colonial invasion the canoe was an implement of geographical expansion and a tool of resource exploitation. Contrasting this reality with invocations of innocence, dominant mythologies surrounding the canoe often characterize it as a site of cooperation between Indigenous and white people in early stages of colonization, or as a gift from Indigenous peoples (Erickson, 2013). Yet the assimilation of the canoe into Canadian life illustrates the ways in which the appropriation of Indigenous cultural forms erases originary and ongoing colonial violence, obscures contemporary indigeneity, and emplaces white settlers on stolen land.

Long after its time of use as a mode of transport for exploration and trade, the canoe as a vessel of leisure continues to powerfully signify colonial settlement by creating a fundamental proprietary link between the wilderness and Canadian national identity. As Bruce Erickson (2013) suggests, “the canoe facilitates the identification between space (wilderness) and social positions (Canadian)” (26). As a vessel that connects the idealized (white) Canadian subject to the (contested) land, now largely through recreation, the canoe reiterates colonial claims of naturalized belonging and white entitlement. Like many Canadians, my personal associations with the canoe are entangled with such colonially saturated desires, born of stories and experiences that are deeply habituated into dominant Canadian national identity as a taken-for-granted “heritage.” Indeed, the canoe is so seamlessly integrated into this identity that author Pierre Berton famously characterized a Canadian as “somebody who knows how to make love in a canoe.”

Such associations informed my development of this performance and accompanied its enactment as the normative meanings it sought to disturb.

The first part of memoration #2: constituent parts took place in the loggia of the Stauffer Library building at Queen’s University, where I was installed from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon. The significance of intervening in this space is multi-faceted. I was familiar with the building given that, at the time of the performance, I was a PhD candidate and teaching fellow at Queen’s. As a university library, this building speaks to the ascendance of Western knowledge and to the perpetuation of white dominance within the public university and the broader settler state. The metaphoric and literal architectures of academic institutions are coded with white, Eurocentric, and heteropatriarchal social orders, knowledge, and pedagogy, such that whiteness is inculcated “as what is worth knowing” (Schick, 2002, 101). As a “site of white dominion” the university is encumbered by unequal access instated by racist and colonial structures and beliefs (ibid, 102). Completed in 1994, the Stauffer library building was designed to bridge the gap between the traditional technologies of the static printed page and the interactivity of digital technology, beckoning a future that is now firmly rooted. This invocation connects the past, present and future within a lineage of dominant forms of knowledge transmission that place a higher value on Eurocentric knowledges and marginalize those falling

outside dominant paradigms. As the building’s consciously “contemporary interpretation of collegiate architecture” embeds aesthetically within the historical apparatus of the academy, intellectual and pedagogical structures of power link it to the histories of colonial and race thinking that spawned this nation.

I occupied the loggia as a thoroughfare with the intention of invoking suspended transit: an extended pause that might call for intellectual, relational, affective, and embodied attention. A loggia is an architectural form that interweaves interior and exterior space. Traditionally it is a porch, often covered but still open to the elements on its sides. The loggia of this building conveys this essence of the interstitial through the use of towering windows that take the place of what traditionally would be open walls. It functions primarily as a space of transit, with three oversized sets of doors funnelling students into an expansive hallway that in turn leads to the library and the student art gallery. During much of the year the Stauffer Library loggia also is a place of pause where students often congregate to socialize and study or to highlight various causes through informational displays, petition signing, and fundraising. At the time of year when the performance took place, towards the end of final exams when the library never closes, the space shifts in character by taking on a decidedly urgent affect. On the day of the performance, students streamed into the building with intention; over three hundred entered in the first two hours and likely close to one thousand did so over the course of the performance. Inserting embodied stasis into this space injected a rippling disturbance into the flow of traffic, and offered a corporeal presence that infiltrated the university as a site of “abstraction and objectivity,” all too often presumed to be free of the messiness of embodiment (Schick, 2002, 101).

For the seven hours I was installed in the loggia I sat at its centre in a canoe on a plain oak chair. Such a chair might recall convention, utility, and restraint. Outdated but still familiar,

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it evokes the ordinary of a recent past. In a university building this chair might seem only slightly out of place; however, set within a canoe it is discordant. Seated on the chair, I was once removed from the canoe-body itself while being soundly rooted within it. Setting my arms and legs at right angles implied the formality of statuary, a posture ill-suited to the task of paddling were I to have had a paddle at my disposal. In its stead, placed in front of me on the floor of the canoe were the provisions of my performance: a box of charcoal, a stack of paper, and a selection of tools wrapped in a towel. Outside of the canoe, a bucket of water filled with stones sourced from the waters near Kingston Penitentiary also awaited activation. Despite the chair, my gender, and the unorthodox collection of objects, the scene might have brought to mind figures attached to dominant ideas of Canadian identity and nation-building, such as the explorer making incursions into “unclaimed empty” land, the surveyor occupying through cartography, the fur-trader stoking the economic engine of invasion, the wilderness painter designing identity, or the virile prime minister in touch with his land.

Whereas these apparitions functioned as part of an implicit colonial genealogy associated with the canoe as national identity, the brand of canoe in which I sat is notable for its explicit display of racialized colonial iconography. In addition to the clumsily stylized birch bark motif imprinted throughout its exterior, the logo on its bow features the brand name and the image of an “Indian” man in profile replete with a version of Plains headdress. Just as the canoe is part of a “Canadian ontology” (Erickson, 2013, 19), the racialized category “Indian” and suggestions of “Indianness” are deeply relevant to both policy and subject formations within Canada as a settler state. The creation of a national identity that legitimates white settler presence and dominance invests significantly in cultural constructions of the “imaginary Indian,” whether objectified in photographs, brought to life in films, or co-opted in branding all manner of products from foods and medicines to sports teams and cars (Francis, D, 2011). The racialized categorization of the Indian is deployed to erase the existence of sovereign Indigenous nations.
and their ontological and epistemological specificities while governing those categorized with racializing policies such as the Indian Act. As Byrd (2011) suggests, “well established tropes of Indianess” have long been used “to facilitate the ordering of peoples into imperial landscapes that would be mapped and owned through the logics of colonialism” (28). The racial category of Indian and its powerfully reductive manifestations in visual culture not only influence various subject formations but also profoundly shape the policies and practices of the settler state (Byrd, 2011; D Francis, 2011; Thobani, 2007).

In the context of this performance, the presence of the Indian image must be understood in conversation with the representation of its counterpart, the cowboy, which is a trope also tirelessly propagated in popular and consumer culture. The cowboy enters this performance as an image on my t-shirt. Conflating personal and national narratives -- at once a familial memento and a multi-layered emblem -- the shirt acts as a symbol of white settler location that speaks of colonial stakes and the cultural conditioning of identity. A souvenir of the 1978 Kinistino rodeo, it harkens to my maternal line⁶ and recalls the settling of the plains. In doing so it marks my white settler identity and my colonizer status through individual and collective references. Its front features the image of a cowboy on a bucking bronco, a rendering of colonial emplacement that asserts hard-working, rugged masculinity as demonstrative of surpassing the “wildness” that nature can dish out by sticking in the saddle. This image is surrounded by the phrase, “Let’s All Go To Kinistino” and is accompanied by musical notes suggesting a lighthearted tuneful inflection. Kinistino is a small town in north central Saskatchewan in the heart of farm country, the mythical “bread-basket” of the nation. An identifiably Indigenous word, “Kinistino” in an internet search will turn up a number of theories regarding its etymology, replete with the miscommunications, misspellings, evolutions, and Anglicizations wrought by the indifference of colonial appropriation and consumption.⁷ Similarly to many other place names modified from Indigenous words, Kinistino has been rendered “Canadian” through unequivocally proprietary exercises of scribing, mapping, and enunciation. Thus, on the t-shirt in the company of the cowboy, the word is claimed as Canadian in no uncertain terms.

The Indian and cowboy as spectral images in this performance meet their counterpoint in the crown. As a design feature within the architecture of the Stauffer building, the crown highlights spatial, ontological, and epistemological affinities with both imperial legacies and the modern nation-state. In the center of the loggia, the floor is embellished with an x pattern surrounded by a square rendered in shades of grey. At each corner of the square, and midway along each side, the image of a crown is etched into the otherwise smooth surface of the stone floor. These crowns undoubtedly serve as an emblem of this particular university, which was incorporated by an Imperial Royal Charter in 1841 and named for Queen Victoria. On the Queen’s campus the image of the crown is repeated on all manner of official and branded materials. However, as an icon it also serves a purpose larger than that of identifying

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⁶ My maternal grandfather owned the general store in Kinistino from 1942 to 1983. My mother was raised there until the age of 13.

⁷ See: http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/kinistino_first_nation.html
http://lin.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/2012-CPB-Kinistino%20SK%5B1%5D.pdf
http://www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC1XTKH_town-of-kinistino-paci-09
https://books.google.ca/books?id=GKQXBAAAQBAJ&pg=PA493&lpg=PA493&dq=kinistino+cre&w=onepage&g=kinistino+cre&f=false
http://www.aitc.sk.ca/saskschools/sask/sknames.html
this particular institution. Implicating the monarchy and the Canadian state, the crown signals the origins of colonial power in these lands and their inheritance through practice and policy that far predates John A. Macdonald and stretches firmly into the present. “The crown” is the signatory to the treaties with First Nations, which remain in contention today. As a descriptor within the Canadian lexicon -- “crown land” as owned by the state; “the crown” as the legal representation for the state -- the crown also points to land dis/possession and the imposition of European legal structures. Moreover, it is the crown that instituted the racial categorization “Indian” in contrast to both the exalted white national and the racialized outsider identified by Thobani as subjects differentially positioned within the colonial landscape. Within the Stauffer building the crowns recede into the architecture underfoot, conveying an absence/presence that, much like everyday systems of dis/possession, normativity, and differential regulation, go largely unnoticed by those who are privileged to be disencumbered by them.

Prior to the performance, I had arranged for seven people to assist me with crucial components of its first part. Every hour on the hour, one of these accomplices entered the loggia

\[Figure 5.\] memoration # 2: constituent parts (Photo credit: Aric McBay).
and approached the canoe to perform two tasks. I first handed the person a piece of paper and charcoal from my provisions. With these materials each person in turn rendered a rubbing of the crown, duplicating it on paper. Lifting this representation from the ground plane where it was generally overlooked, they then handed the paper back to me.

*Figure 6. *memoration # 2: constituent parts (Photo credit: Mickayla Pike).

*Figure 7. *memoration # 2: constituent parts (Photo credit: Aric McBay).
The second task also was one of marking. Holding the bow, the accomplice turned the canoe on a central axis so that it pointed to the next crown in rotation. Over the course of the day a full circle was completed, in a circumnavigation recalling Western measures of time and space that echo both an analog clock face and the points of a compass. This journey thus exposed for scrutiny and disturbance the geographic and temporal armatures of colonial conditions in the contemporary settler state. Moreover, spinning incrementally from a central nexus gestured to the centering of whiteness within the resulting conditions.

Figure 8. memoration # 2: constituent parts (Photo credit: Mickayla Pike).
Once each turn was completed I held the paper crown rubbing to my chest and wiped the charcoal on the front of my shirt, thereby defacing each crown in turn. Through the repetition of these actions the Kinistino cowboy was progressively disfigured and a set of obscured crowns was created. After each wiping the sullied pages were returned to the stack in the canoe and I returned to a state of stasis. The accomplices acted as agents of movement and marking and, as such, were integral to the subtle disturbance of the flow within this space, and to the interruption of the concretized whiteness embedded in both the crown and the image on my shirt. Furthermore, they fulfilled a role as witnesses by remaining present for as long as they chose to experience and corroborate responses both to the comings and goings and to the stillness. The gestures of co-memoration enacted here foreshadowed my requests for participation in the second and third parts of the performance, and prepared a fluid autonomous zone in which those present could accept an invitation or self select to act.

After the final turn I exited the canoe and carried it out of the building with the assistance of the audience members gathered. Part two of *memoration #2: constituent parts* began as I proceeded to drag the canoe across the Queen’s campus to Kingston’s city park where the John A. Macdonald statue is situated. Members of the audience helped carry provisions and, on occasion, assisted in dragging the canoe. As we negotiated sidewalks and roads and traversed the lawns of city park the audience became part of the performance, and barriers between artist and viewer, artifice and the real were diminished. This collective passage reiterated the imperative of both individual and collective responsibility within the everyday. As we walked, the canoe scraped along the sidewalk, its keel marking the route with a faintly etched line and a persistent grating sound. As well as linking artist and viewer, the ground, covered and marked in this way, coupled city and campus, educational institution and site of reification, commemorations of the past and experiences in the present: all time-spaces breathing a white normativity that seeks to erase the contestations of and for this land.
The John A. Macdonald statue in Kingston’s city park towers over a site of multiple forms of memorial, which include small plaques in memory of family members, statuary commemorating wars and their dead, and a marker from the geological survey of Canada that expresses Western territorial memory through colonial mapping. Before the third part of the performance began at the Macdonald statue, those present gathered on a green space adjacent to the statue. At this site, redolent with markings of emplacement and conquest, there is no reference to the existence of the Indigenous villages that predate contact, nor to the continuing and contemporary presence of Indigenous peoples. Here, Métis curator Erin Sutherland and I together acknowledged the (unmarked) Indigenous history, present, and future of this place, invoking our cultural locations through the offering of tobacco and the placing of stones respectively.
The majority of the third part of the performance took place on a small gravel road directly behind the John A. Macdonald statue. This location suggests the imperative of working independently from official state discourses that are deeply invested in strategic forgetting. However, in an effort to also confront Macdonald as a symbol of the state, I placed the oak chair with my t-shirt slipped over its back in front of the statue as a proxy that would face him directly while I carried out my work “behind his back.” I situated the canoe behind the statue so that, with the chair in front, the canoe created a line bisecting Macdonald and pointing to the site of co-memoration that Erin and I had marked just prior.

*Figure 12. memorial # 2: constituent parts  (Photo credit: Kristen Maracle)*
In preparation for my actions, the audience was enlisted once again as I offered the charcoal crown rubbings to a number of them to hold in front of their chests while I worked. In this way, through activated embodiment, audience members were enlisted to support and witness my task of dismantling the canoe. Considering the canoe as a body, the act of (un)making evoked by its dismantling gestured to both the preparation of game and the dissection of a cadaver. Dissection is an exacting exercise that seeks new information through the experiential application of accumulated knowledge. On the scale of this performance, dissection was a particularly embodied and laboured exercise. Likewise, preparing game for consumption requires care and forethought and relies on physical proficiency that draws upon a rigourous knowledge base. Both of these endeavours are true acts of transformative (un)making: dissection as a disassembling that produces new information, and game preparation as a reworking of death into sustenance. Recalling these practices, the canoe dismantling was a transformative exercise of careful de(con)struction that held the potential to be disruptive, exploratory and generative.

Once the canoe was dismantled, my primary focus turned to its “skin” and “head” as those parts encumbered with the markings of colonial and racist meta-narratives. Using the rocks I had gathered from the lake, I vigorously rubbed the aluminum exterior of the canoe, degrading the simulated birch bark motif and at the same time imprinting it with the texture of the gravel road beneath. I then cleaned the skin with lake water, although this task was compounded by the fact that I had inadvertently cut my hand on the jagged aluminum and was bleeding rather profusely.

Figure 13: memoration # 2: constituent parts (Photo credit: Aric McBay).
Figure 14. memoration # 2: constituent parts (Photo credit: Dorit Naaman, Aric McBay).
Separated from the body but left intact, the head of the canoe was a particularly vexing figure. As a metonym of presences and absences embedded in Canadian nation-building, it also was reminiscent of a trophy -- the enduring evidence of a “conquest” that presents a visceral reminder of the deed. In this way, the head served to inscribe me, in no uncertain terms, as complicit within collectivities that benefit from the dis/possession and structures of whiteness at play in the settler state. Unlike the birch bark, the cowboy, or the crown, the image of the Indian on the head of the canoe was one I chose not to disfigure but, rather, to let stand, largely unaltered, as a reminder of the persistent forces of colonial and racist systems in the present and of my inherent implication therein.

My final action in this performance was to burn one of the paper crowns. I once again called on the people assembled; upon my invitation to do as they wished with the paper crowns they had held throughout the performance, they followed suit. Thus, over the three parts of *memoration* #2, the crown image was lifted and marred, transported, reflected, and dispatched through the work of my own hands and those who were asked and who offered to co-memorate. The crown was pointedly and repeatedly marked as part of institutional architectures that surreptitiously proclaim dominant Western pedagogical ideologies and the preeminence of the settler state. It was simultaneously disfigured, and used to disfigure the cowboy as a stain that bound the actions of the state and the individual. It was transported as the baggage that crosses between spaces and territories, connecting institutions that educate, reify, regulate, remember, own, and occupy in the name civilizational superiority. Distributed to create a networked armour.
held by the audience as I worked on the canoe, it engaged as it implicated through the relational bonds of those present. And finally, it was collectively reduced to the carbon of its making with its residue remaining as a mark of activated agency. In this way the performance concluded with a gesture toward the importance and potential of both individual and collective agency enacted consciously within everyday spaces.

Figure 16. memoration #2: constituent parts (Photo credit: Aric McBay).

Concluding thoughts

This text is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of *memoration #2: constituent parts* as a performance. Rather, this discussion aims to use its elaboration to consider the potential for interventions into whiteness and coloniality to be enacted through performance art methods from my positionality as a white settler woman. It is clear that such undertakings hold as much potential to reinscribe whiteness and the colonial frame as they do to disquiet such conditions. Although interventions articulated through the embodied methodologies of performance art hold a potential to illuminate one’s position and complicity, for the white artist they also risk (re)centering whiteness even while trying to unseat it, and this performance, on some level is no
exception. Furthermore, if such work is understood as being totalizing, or singly authoritative, it risks overshadowing Indigenous thought, resistance, and experience -- as well as the varied relationships of non-Indigenous racialized people to white settler colonialism, white settler self-criticism, and Indigenous solidarity -- while, if focused only on disturbing colonial mythologies and revealing colonial elisions, it can fail to attend to the potential of transformed futures (Macoun & Strakosch, 2013). Nonetheless, for a white settler such as myself, retreating from the responsibility to scrutinize the power in which one is implicated, and from the responsibility to hold oneself and one’s communities to account and to taking action also is untenable. The foreclosure of white settler dissent can be commensurate with the evasion of responsibility and the perpetuation of dis/possession. As Macoun & Strakosch (2013) point out,

If every settler action is framed as always already colonizing, then individuals are excused from anti-colonial action in the present and indigenous people are destined to be victims of an unstoppable colonizing state. (435)

Therefore, rather than acting as a paralyzing influence, I understand that my consideration of these risks should summon the imperative of a

informed, self-reflexive, activated, relational, and accountable practice: one that dovetails with continuing conversations that are enacted critically from multiple perspectives. As such, memoration #2: constituent parts can be understood as one incursion within a continuum of production and exploration projected through not only my art and research practice, but also in the broader context in which it is situated. For instance, in context of cultural production interrogating the canoe, memoration #2: constituent parts enters into dialogue with the work of artists such as Nadia Myre (Portrait in Motion, 2002), Keesic Douglas (Trade Me, 2010), and Micheal Farnan (Dance for the Narrows, 2016), who are among those who have intervened in the canoe’s position as Canadian icon by harnessing its personal and cultural meaning⁸. memoration #2: constituent parts also is deeply informed by collaborative canoe explorations within my own recent works, which include the extended performance research project ‘Performing Canada’ (2014) undertaken in collaboration with Peter Morin and Ayumi Goto, and the performance video ‘Founder,’ a collaboration with Cheryl L’Hirondelle (2015).⁹

While the initial impetus for this work was the 2015 Macdonald celebrations (as filtered through Sutherland’s curatorial premise) as well as the symbol of Macdonald himself, other elements of nationalist iconography became prominent within the performance. The canoe, in particular played a vital role as a resonant icon for critically considering and unravelling Canadian nation-building. In her discussion of the canoe as methodology, Métis/Anishnawbe artist and scholar Julie Nagam (2014) evokes the work of Stl’atl’imx theorist Peter Cole when she asserts

the canoe is not simply a rich cultural object but a process and an infinite set of relations … a living cultural artifact that records, retains and communicates stories from the land, people and creatures … continually mark(ing) Indigenous people into the landscape. (71)

At the same time, as a nationalist icon, the canoe serves the goals of the settler colonial state. As

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sk16LCHJMrQ
⁹ See: http://leahdecter.com/Leahdecter/performing_canada.html
http://leahdecter.com/Leahdecter/Founder.html
Nagam maintains, “The conflicting narratives embodied by the canoe also mark out a potential meeting place” (73). Through its complex genealogy and its grip on the Canadian psyche, the canoe is enmeshed with dominant visions of the nation while, as Erickson (2013) suggests, also holding the potential to challenge such a vision. Miseo Dean (2013) echoes this proposition, stating: “If the way that canoeing is signified in Canada hides my implication in genocide, it may also reveal it” (21). Nagam extends this notion by contending that “while the canoe’s genesis is in Indigenous protocols it can be a middle ground for multiple dialogues and transformative actions.” (72). Read in conversation, Negam’s and Cole’s assertions of the canoe’s resonances with Indigenous knowledge, and Erickson and Dean’s invocations of the canoe’s capacity to reveal and challenge colonial power, suggest that through rigorous critical interrogation and action the canoe (and, by extension, other nationalist icons) can be transformed from a “distancing metaphor” that enables denial (Francis, M, 11) to a tool of critical (un)making that embraces responsibility and accountability.

Performance methodology provides the opportunity to disquiet the unexamined measures of being within a given space. When deploying performance as a deliberate habitation of spaces in which whiteness is firmly centered -- where whiteness sets the standard by which all else is measured -- opportunities open to reveal and disturb everyday perpetuations of whiteness. In *memoration #2: constituent parts*, the disturbance focused on everyday habits of passive and active denial that presume and normalize white emplacement within structures, languages, pedagogies, and landscapes. The resonance of the body in performance as an interposition into public space offers an opportunity to incite fissures in the smooth flow of accustomed ways of being and thinking. Through performative stasis, the body can function as a corporeal barricade, a metaphoric barrier to denial that, by enacting or even inferring physical impediment, provokes a pause. Within such a moment of reflection, buttressed by the specter of the performative uncanny, a space is created in which the viewer can (re)consider what is being witnessed, their relationship to it, and the larger questions imbedded therein. Through movement, the body animates agency, speaks to and demonstrates the possible, and conveys the labour entailed in transformational change. *memoration #2: constituent parts* directed calculated mobilizations of my body as interventions into the normalized whiteness conditioning spatial regulation and relations. These acts aimed to highlight the complicity and disregard structured within these spaces by whiteness, while also configuring a potential for subversive agency. Activation of preplanned and spontaneous participatory engagement stressed the importance of collectivity and carefully nurtured connective commitments. The strategy of engagement and encounter -- of activating the viewer or audience -- ran fundamentally throughout the performance. These relational and participatory tactics invite a potentially shared standpoint for critiquing white settlers’ reception of colonial truths and acceptance of their own complicities (Huygens, 2011). Inter/activating my body in stasis and movement with spatial particularities, cultural icons, and other bodies, *memoration #2: constituent parts* undertook measured actions to disturb pervasive currents of colonial entitlement that acts of selective remembering and intentional forgetting instill within the everyday.

Notably, performing at the site of the John A. Macdonald statue evoked the man as a symbol of colonial power, and the bicentennial celebrations as implicated in maintaining Macdonald’s iconic status. As sites and activations of public memory, the status and celebrations both circulate the state’s “preferred memory” and reiterate dominant narratives of the nation (Lehrer & Milton, 2011, 3). By scripting public memory with simplified and expedient versions of history, the monument and its celebratory counterpart help to relieve the public of the burden
of complex “memory work” (Young, 2002, 94). Implicating the statue through proximity and the bicentenary events through Sutherland’s curatorial premise, the performance functioned as an activated counter-monument that engaged the audience in considering alternative stories. The intentional limits of my interactions with the statue and my spatial orientation onsite refused Macdonald’s dominance within the physical and social spaces he occupies in Canada. Set against the statue’s monolithic everyday presence and the bicentenary celebration’s exceptional impact upon the Canadian cultural landscape, this refusal called for careful attention to what might hidden behind the myths and beliefs that inhabit everyday experience.

Accompanied by the canoe, the crown, the Indian, the cowboy, and John A. Macdonald as icons that instill settler emplacement and white dominance in different ways my body infiltrated architectures of colonial power, knowledge production, and reification to consider how we learn and might consciously and actively unlearn. Sited and embodied activation of the icons in memoration #2: constituent parts wrought connective tissue between the ubiquity of spatialized whiteness, willfully uncritical celebratory impulses and knowledge production, and the pervasive intentional forgetting of the violent histories (and their consequent present conditions) embedded in everyday spaces. The performance harnessed the critical and generative capacity in the icons through embodied, spatial, and relational animation. In this way the entrenched meanings associated with their histories and contemporary connotations were manipulated to generate the possibility of “new modes of being” and understandings of ourselves as subjects in relation (Erickson, 17). Through specifically located, embodied interactions and the manipulation of symbols of white superiority in a settler colonial context, memoration #2: constituent parts enacted a layering of narrative possibilities that sought to confront forces of erasure, interrupt systemic conditions of whiteness, and call into question patterns of colonial power so as to consider and enact the potential for a future that surpasses the colonial.

References


