

DECOLONIZING RECONCILIATION:
REFUSING SETTLER INNOCENCE THROUGH SOUND

by

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Abstract

My thesis examines the possibility for decolonization in the aftermath of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and proposes settler-shame as both generative and necessary to decolonizing and disrupting the patterns of ongoing colonial violence against Indigenous bodies.

I specifically focus on how sound and performance can be used to critically engage and educate on both historical and ongoing colonial violence prevalent in settler-colonial society. I elaborate on how my own performances are an embodied form of settler-shame and put forward a sound technique I've called time-stretched witnessing. I draw on encounters within my own practice as an electronic artist/producer as a means of addressing the degree to which it might be possible to create space for meaningful knowledge sharing, memorialization, social transformation, and decolonization.

To decolonize is to work towards a reconciliation that refuses 'reconciliation' as we have known it thus far, one that refuses settler innocence and encourages settler-shame, and centres Indigenous leadership, the return of land and an end to gender-based violence.

Preface

This thesis (including photographs) is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, S. Fratila.

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no history <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/57409>

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Dedication

For my family,

especially —

my parents: Carmen & Vasile Fratila

my grandparents: Buni, Bunu, Buni, Bunu.

my aunts: Cristina & Dana.

Prologue

This has not been easy to begin and each time I've tried to breach the surface, the surface has seemed to grow in size.

But, I am going to try and begin here: Over the last year, I have examined questions of settler-colonialism and decolonization, interrogating my own role as a Romanian-born settler studying on the traditional, ancestral, unceded and occupied land of the *hə́nqəmíñəm*-speaking *x^wməθk^wəyəm* (Musqueam) people. Although I have been working on this project — an alleged 'research paper' — for a year, all I really know for certain is that neither I nor this project have reached an end-point. If I've reached any conclusions, it is that the process of undertaking settler-shame is an ongoing one.

With this work, I really wanted to take apart the traditional 'structure' of a thesis as a way of drawing attention to the fact that the TRC's work is hardly finished and I hope that the non-linear format better represents the fact that the 'research' I am doing is also unfinished, that decolonization is an ongoing process itself and that academics cannot rely on neat structure or conclusions in order feel comfortable about this subject matter. I definitely do not offer (at least, in form) the kind of conclusion that a research paper tends to when it nears its end. As I've spent time with these ideas, I've realized that the neatness and tidiness are merely signifiers meant to meet an academic audience's demands and needs. By contrast, this is a nonconforming interpretation of a 'master's thesis,' reflecting back the messiness of decolonization — that takes time to reach 'answers,' moves carefully and slowly, and yet traces an experience of shame that is not *punctured* by metaphors.¹

As I have undertaken this project, I have worked through my positionality as a white settler woman through multiple mediums. It never felt honest to submit a traditionally structured thesis because my engagement with the topic has gone much further than a colonial setting like the 'classroom'. Furthermore, my research has been processed in a much more personal and substantive way than a traditionally structured thesis allows me to demonstrate.

It may be worth adding that I did initially try to write a 'proper' research paper, but the process felt both empty and constraining. I presented a version of this work (namely, on the relationship between transitional justice and education in the aftermath of the TRC) in Germany last summer, 2015. It was not devoid of a decolonizing approach, but was written for an audience with little to no knowledge about Indigenous politics in Canada. I felt uncomfortable submitting this kind of work back 'home.' I found that my research did not pull me in; instead, I read it as a hollow promise, separating my enacted and embodied shame from the topic, instead creating a comfortable distance where I could exist as a white settler woman speaking about Indigenous suffering. Furthermore, I felt that it would be

¹ A reference to "The answers are not fully in view and can't be as long as decolonization remains *punctuated* by metaphor:" Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization is not a metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. Vol. 1, No. 1, 2012, P. 35, italics added for emphasis.

unjust to submit an academic piece on issues that have so profoundly affected the lives of my Indigenous friends as well as the lives of their loved ones.

Carrying out a thesis in the traditional sense began to make such little sense to me that I began to feel it would be practically *shameless* to write a paper on the genocide of the peoples whose land I occupy, without bringing my own personal shame into the so-called 'research'. Therefore, I created a literary space where my experiences with settler-shame could co-exist with a very different kind of shame I have felt: 'survivor-shame'. This aspect of the project is, of course, more personal work and I do not expect it to necessarily be easy to read, especially if the reader has also experienced sexual or gender-based violence. I hope that this suffices as a warning.

While, of course, this *is* a master's thesis and you *are* reading it, I acknowledge that this is a piece that is not easily published or perhaps even read in an academic context. This thesis does not fit that context. In fact, it is supposed to and means to work against that system of thought.

This is a multi-media piece. There are segments which are academic in nature, or draw on critical thought and that engage with scholars. At the same time, I have included images that perhaps serve a less academic purpose, but are the more intimate evidence of my thought process around these issues. There is an audio component. I have also pieced together various notes, emails, and text messages with my fellow colleagues and friends on the topic in order to indicate a year of learning as well as document the process of my settler-shame as it has unfolded. In my presentation of this process, I hope to preserve some disorder in order to parallel the disorder of decolonization and convey an ethic of incommensurability.

Lastly, I hope this thesis shows that I have worked hard to shut out the very idea of settler innocence and, instead, have opened the door to the feeling of settler-shame. And I still keep it ajar.



Carpathian Mountains, Romania

This is where I am from.

My mother-tongue

My grandma asks me what I am writing about. I try to describe my ideas but I struggle even to find a way to explain *settler shame*, which is so central to my research.

I hear myself, “*Well the word for ‘shame in Romanian is...*” I think about it for a moment and then remember that the word is *ruşine* — which has the connotations of ‘disgrace’ or ‘humiliation’. Then again, we also have a saying that is very much like the word ‘shame,’ as South Africans say it: ‘*mare păcal*’ — which, directly translated, means *a great sin* — well, we say it like, ‘what a great misfortune that is.’

My grandma is staring at me, asking me how much milk I want in my coffee.

We have only one word for settler in my mother-tongue and it is *colonist*. I like that, because it at least acknowledges the entrenched colonialism in inhabiting a land that is not your own. When I hear ‘colonizer,’ I sense a trace of responsibility to the active occupation of Indigenous land. When I hear ‘settler,’ I sense an acceptance of the settler-colonial relationship and the settler-colonial state.

My grandma has walked away because I seem unable to articulate myself in my mother-tongue. I have no idea how to translate settler-colonialism into Romanian because it would just be *colonist-colonialism*. It doesn’t carry the same meaning.



SBZ —After landing.

I land at the feet of the Carpathians. For the first time, I really feel what it is like to be on land without also being a colonizer/settler/trespasser.

Giving in to shame: a settler unravels, grasp(s)in-wards

“Thus speaks one who understands:
Shame, shame, shame – that is the history of the human!”

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*²



“Colonialism pulls every string shamelessly.”

- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth*³



At first, to centre myself in any conversation regarding settler-colonialism and decolonization seemed against my better judgement. The words of Tuck and Yang were imprinted in my mind: “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.”⁴

At the same time, it became clear to me that shame has to come from within, that it must have everything to do with the Self in relation to the Other. I unearthed — and I arrived with my past: my first significant engagement with shame came after an experience of sexual violence. I try applying my framework of shame, of survivor-shame, not to enlarge my own innocence, but to better understand the lived experience of settler-shame. After all — shame, in any form, is deeply unsettling.



I start with who I am. I trace back and think about how I developed a space where I could open up room to love. Roxane Gay says, “There will always be a finger on the trigger. No matter how hard we try, there’s no way to step out of the line of fire.”⁵

It’s small things that remind me.

The hungry look in a man’s eyes staring at my necklace, moving downwards.

I feel sick.



² Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans. Graham Parkes. Oxford World Classics: 2005. P. 75

³ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. Grove Press: 1963. P. 158

⁴ Tuck and Yang, *Ibid*. P. 3. Italics added for emphasis.

⁵ Roxane Gay. *Bad Feminist*. “The Illusion of Safety/The Safety of Illusion.” Harper Perennial: 2014. P. 153.

In *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Kelly Oliver writes: “shame comes from becoming an object.”⁶ Both survivor-shame and settler-shame have the capacity to render the person feeling shame into an object.

I understand the process of settler-shame as one wherein settlers are able to understand and see themselves as *objects* in the destructive project of colonialism. There is a moment of critical shifting: a realization that one is an object of instrument in violence. There is a recognition, then, that to feel shame is to also have the power to define a subject vs. an object. These moments cannot be opted out of; this is the power of shame.

The shame I have experienced as a survivor of sexual assault is the kind of shame that swallows you whole: “it gets better until it doesn’t.”⁷

After making the connection between my shame as a violated woman and my shame as a settler, the work of Lisa Guenther exposed to me to another white woman who had drawn a similar parallel between shame as woman and shame as colonizer: Simone de Beauvoir.

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir shares the stories of various women feeling ashamed of their body for the first time. One woman portrays the moment like this: “I will never forget the shock I suddenly felt in seeing myself *seen*.”⁸

Through reading Guenther’s “Shame and the Temporality of Social Life,” I begin to see *The Second Sex* as a meditation on how becoming a woman is “an extended lesson in shame” and Simone de Beauvoir’s life as a step towards acknowledging her role as “a machinery of colonial violence.”⁹ Where survivor-shame weighs one down, settler-shame holds up a mirror to show one’s complicity in oppressing, in holding others down.



Until I was fifteen, I still felt like I could be safe.

Now I run into my fucking house.



A man asks if she’s been sexually assaulted: *is that why you talk about it like that?*

I am enraged: “Why do you feel like you have the right to know something like that? You wouldn’t ask, ‘Have you had to swallow your anger? Your fear? Your discomfort when you’ve been in danger or belittled? Those are the questions you should be asking.”

⁶ Kelly Oliver. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. University of Minnesota Press: 2001. P. 98.

⁷ Gay, *Ibid*. P. 148.

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. Alfred A. Knopf: 2009. P. 321.

⁹ Lisa Guenther. “Shame and the temporality of social life.” *Continental Philosophy Review*. Vol. 44. No. 1: 2011. P. 33.

I don't get to forget the answers.

I start again with who I am. I trace back and think of how I confronted the anxiety and fear that it will happen again to me, but still found room to love in my rage.



It is shame that, for so long, prevented me from disclosing that I had been sexually assaulted to my family. It is shame that makes me hesitant. It is shame that keeps me quiet.

Paulette Regan might refer to this as a learning process that entails working through “our own discomfort and vulnerability, opening ourselves to the kind of experiential learning that engages our whole being.”¹⁰ I lit the pathway towards settler-shame through the consideration and incorporation of a shame I was already familiar with.

I am learning to speak about *ruşine* as a *colonist*. Learning to apply my mother-tongue to settler-colonialism.

¹⁰ Paulette Regan. *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling and Reconciliation in Canada*. University of British Columbia Press: 2010. P. 237.



Lillooet Lake

Remember:

“Shame would not be possible if others did not matter to us; and because others matter, oppression is not the last word on shame but only one of its ambivalent possibilities.”¹¹

¹¹ I understand shame as a pathway for re-thinking relationships and as a political emotion that exists in the realm of both possibility and of futurity. In including the above quote by Guenther I mean to suggest that, when it comes to shame, the oppressor is aware the mirror can be turned around, and that shame concerning one’s role in active oppressing does not signify an end-point. I also mean to draw on the work of Juliane Okot Bitek, where she writes, “we must move on... *As if,*” in “A Chronology of Compassion, or Towards an Imperfect Future.” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*. Vol. 6, 2012. P. 403, italics added for emphasis. There is always ambivalence to shame because how we interpret our shame depends on who we are. The quote included above can be found in Guenther. “Shame and the temporality of social life,” *Ibid*. P. 38.

Shame as generative

In *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, Jean-Paul Sartre encourages his readers to read Frantz Fanon, referring to Marx's notion regarding shame as "a revolutionary sentiment."¹² In an earlier section, he states that colonialism is "our [the colonizer's] shame."¹³

In the context of settler-colonialism, shame is useful when it falls onto the settler. I understand shame as an emotion very different from guilt. Since so many settlers claim 'innocence' on account of not having 'directly' colonized the land or 'taken part' in the Indian residential school system, drawing a clear distinction between shame and guilt is necessary (especially since they are sometimes used interchangeably in the everyday).

On the one hand, guilt evokes a colonial judicial setting where one is pronounced *guilty* or *not guilty*. While one can be pronounced guilty for committing a crime, one cannot be pronounced *shameful*. It is useful to refer to a contemporary and collective application of guilt in order to demonstrate this. For instance, many Germans today do not see the relationship between Nazism and current-day racism against immigrants, migrant workers, and refugees. In this sense, collective guilt can do great harm to a society by freezing wrongdoing *into* the past.

On the other hand, I understand shame as something that cannot be enforced upon someone but something that has to come from within. Sara Ahmed addresses the aspect of embodiment which is so critical to shame when she says shame can be "an intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself, a self-feeling that is felt by and on the body."¹⁴ Shame is self-reflexive. Shame is about the self in that it involves looking inwards and feeling deeply pained and uncomfortable with oneself *in the face of another*. This, to me, speaks to the potential of shame as a generative force. Shame includes the 'Other' and gives the 'Other' the authority to judge one's actions and, in this sense, can be regarded as a collaborative approach to 'reconciliation.'

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre. *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. Trans. Steve Brewer, Azzedine Haddour, and Terry McWilliams. Routledge: 2001. P. 78.

¹³*Ibid.* P. 19.

¹⁴ Sara Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh University Press: 2014. P. 103.



Standing on the rock.

“Shame as an emotion requires a witness: even if a subject feels shame when she or he is alone, it is the imagined view of the other that is taken on by a subject in relation to herself or himself.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Sara Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. *Ibid.* P. 105.



YVR — Before landing.

De: Glen Coulthard <gscoulthard@gmail.com>

à: Stefana Fratila <stefana.fratila@gmail.com>

Date: 18 décembre 2014 à 13:57

Objet: Re: Hello!

I think memory is a great angle to approach settler shame from, however, I think it's fit with the Indigenous land-connected-ness is less clear, which comes not only from memory but embodied practice. It's normative force derives from it being a practical ethics - or perhaps a living memory of alternate life ways/worlds never destroyed but severely compromised by the effects of settler-colonialism.

Mirroring resentment

“I have spent enough time taking down the master’s house,
and now I want most of my energy to go into visioning and building our new house.”¹⁶

- Leanne Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*



Primo Levi describes memory as a gift, as well as a duty.¹⁷ My most integral evaluation or *re-evaluation* of historical memory came after reading *Red Skin, White Masks (RSWM)* by Glen Coulthard. Through this work, I began to make the connection between memory (a subject I have more familiarity and experience working with) and settler-shame.

I began to see settler-shame as my responsibility to undertake. While Indigenous peoples continue to work against the deeply rooted and deeply entrenched systems that aim to subjugate them, it becomes necessary for settlers to recognize and *respond* to the settler-colonial condition. The act is two-fold: on the one hand, settlers must recognize that there has always been resistance against the systems and structures of colonialism. On the other hand, settlers must respond through an embodiment of settler-shame.

Regarding recognition, settlers must become aware that in Canada we have been systematically taught to forget. The Canadian state has silenced and continues to silence Indigenous voices for the explicit purpose of making Indigenous persons less relatable and Indigenous bodies less grievable.¹⁸ However, full responsibility cannot be taken by the Canadian state alone because this would cast settlers into innocence — and to employ the language of bell hooks — spaces of resistance have taken form along the “margins” of society.¹⁹ In the words of Leanne Simpson, “Women have always been resisting and rebuilding” and this work has gone “outside” of “the bounds of the Indian Act” and organizations visible to the general (settler) public eye.²⁰ These margins have sometimes gone unnoticed and, at other times, been willfully ignored by settlers / settler viewership.

¹⁶ Leanne Simpson. *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Backs*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing: 2001. P. 32.

¹⁷ Primo Levi. *The Voice of Memory: Interviews, 1961- 1987*. Edit. Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon. The New Press: 2001. P. 145.

¹⁸ See: Judith Butler and George Yancy. “What’s Wrong With ‘All Lives Matter?’” *The New York Times*. Published 12 January 2015. Accessed 12 December 2015:

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/12/whats-wrong-with-all-lives-matter/>

¹⁹ bell hooks. “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness.” *Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. 1989. Accessed 12 December 2015:

<https://sachafrey.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/choosing-the-margin-as-a-space-of-radical-openness-ss-3301.pdf>

²⁰ Leanne Simpson. “Queering Resurgence: Taking on Heteropatriarchy in Indigenous Nation Building.” Published 1 June 2012. Accessed 12 December 2015:

<http://leannesimpson.ca/queering-resurgence-taking-on-heteropatriarchy-in-indigenous-nation-building>

Regarding an embodiment of settler shame, the duty to bear witness to the memories of this resistance must be carried out by settlers. On the other hand, it is necessary for Indigenous scholars to be given more space to *do*, to *lead* and to *decolonize* on their own terms — rather than on the terms of settlers.

In a review of *RSWM*, Kam'ayaam/Chachim'multhnii (Cliff Atleo, Jr.) notes that Coulthard demonstrates that “Decolonization is messy, disruptive, and necessarily uncomfortable for everyone.”²¹ Coulthard proposes resentment as one aspect of this discomfort: “Indigenous peoples’ anger and resentment can indicate a sign of moral protest and political outrage that we ought to at least take seriously, if not embrace as a sign of our critical consciousness.”²² A form of embracing, as I see it, is to mirror Indigenous resentment with settler-shame. To be clear: I do not use the term ‘mirror’ to suggest a subconscious imitation, but rather a conscious undertaking, an emotion that mirrors the potential and the desire for decolonization. This response is valid and serves to break down colonialism. Both of the emotions (resentment and shame) are warranted and necessary for a ‘future’ that is not on the settler’s terms.

²¹ Kam'ayaam/Chachim'multhnii (Cliff Atleo, Jr.). “Red skin, white masks: A review.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. Vol. 3, No. 2: 2014. P. 190.

²² Glen Coulthard. *Red Skin White Masks*. University of Minnesota Press: 2014. P. 23, 126.



enacting poetics of space

“Being does not see itself. Perhaps it listens to itself.”²³

²³ Gaston Bachelard. *Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press: 1994. P. 215.

Sound as generative

Art is one conduit I feel able to express settler-shame as well as bear witness to/through. When the artist takes the responsibility of pushing boundaries, the toxic intersection between art and capitalism is taken apart. However, I struggled (and still struggle) with co-opting decolonization. I am weary of defining what a future ‘ought’ to look like. I am uncomfortable reducing settler-shame to metaphor — something which is easily done if committing the great error of defining the story of how it was, how it is, and how it will be.²⁴ In other words, I do not want to take on something that is *not* mine to take on. However, the responsibility of settler-shame is mine to take on. Or, at the very least, I believe all settlers must open the door to settler-shame in order to *behave* differently and allow Indigenous peoples to dictate the terms of our behaviour. Rachel Flowers makes a critical point in addressing the risk of allyship in “Refusal to forgive: Indigenous women’s love and rage,” when she says, “what affords settlers privilege is the ability to implicitly set the terms of what a shared future is, without realizing they are asymmetrically dictating the terms of this discussion.”²⁵ In order for me (and other settlers) to show solidarity in a willingness to un-do the harm of our roles as settlers, we must inhabit spaces of resistance without setting the terms. Flowers reminds us that “solidarity means de-centering ourselves, in order to engage productively in the unknown and ‘in-between’ spaces of resistance, and confronting the impulse to claim to know or have authority over a struggle.”²⁶

In working with sound, I feel that I am casting myself into a peripheral role of ‘producer’ of sound and ‘performer’ of settler-shame, instead of a central role of leadership (which I strongly believe is a role that I do not have any right to).²⁷ In performing, I believe my role is secondary — but useful for the wider project of decolonization. While I am taking the spotlight in a literal sense, I do not feel that I am dictating what a future ought to look like through my performances. Based on conversations with my audience members, it seems that putting myself into a position of performance where other settlers see me *embodying* shame on stage can be powerful because it forces the audience to reflect back on themselves in a public space. This, I believe, is meaningful because it problematizes a space that is seen by settlers as neutral, or apolitical, into one that is contentious.

Sound alters memory. In enacting settler-shame, public space is altered into one wherein settlers feel like trespassers. I would qualify this as the kind of interruption that unsettles

²⁴ A reference to Hannah Arendt, when she says: “storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it” in *Men in Dark Times*. “Isak Dinesen: 1885 – 1963.” Mariner Books: 2001.

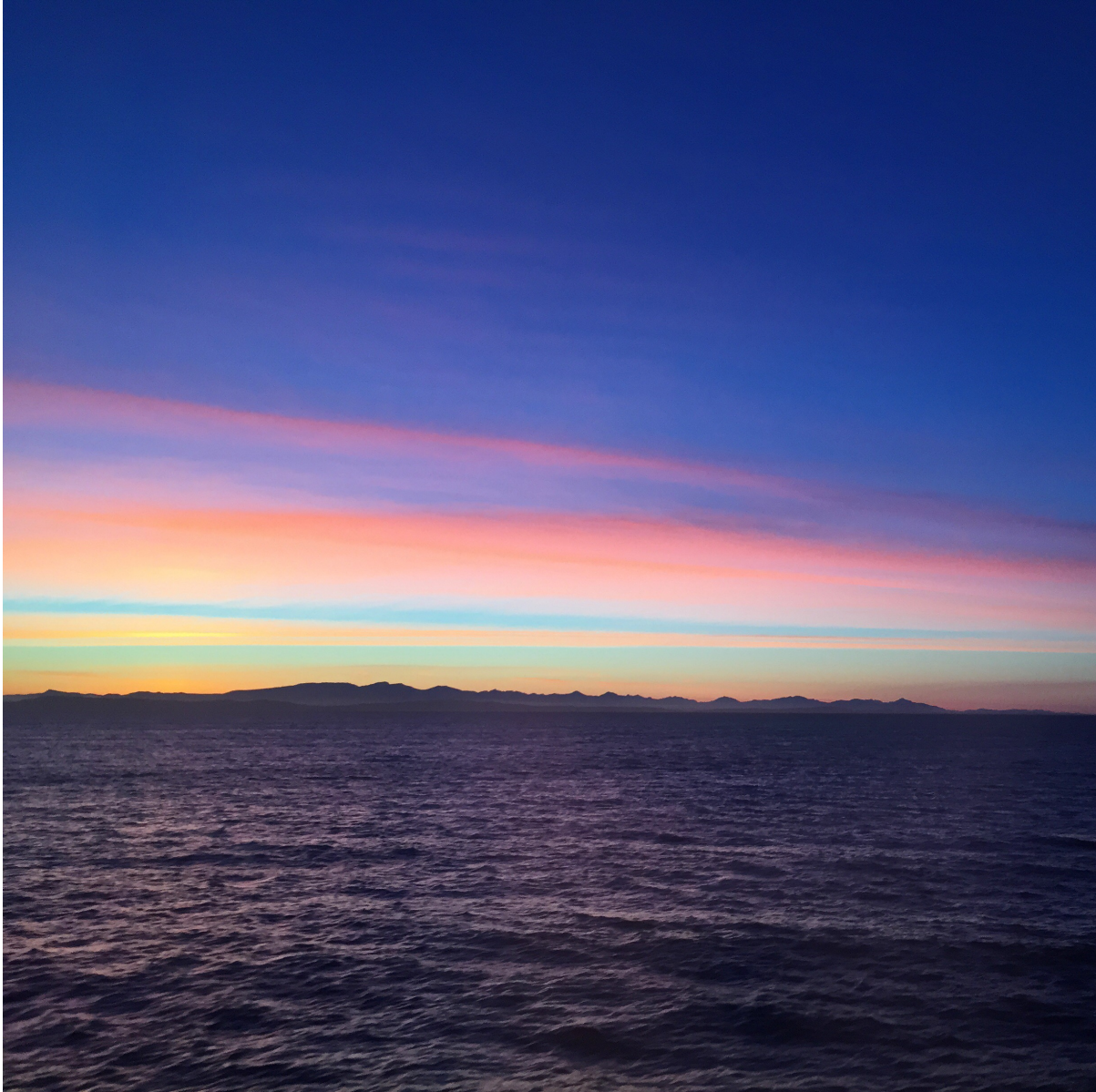
²⁵ Rachel Flowers. “Refusal to forgive: Indigenous women’s love and rage.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. Vol. 4. No. 2. P. 35.

²⁶ Flowers, *Ibid*.

²⁷ In the music industry, the role of the ‘producer’ is conventionally understood as a peripheral one. This is because production largely happens ‘behind-the-scenes’ and is, therefore, not in the public eye. The producer receives far less public acknowledgement and the ‘star’ remains the artist. In my case, I envisioned Tagaq as the star because she interrupts the colonial project of Harper and I merely serve to place them in conversation with one another.

innocence and recognizes incommensurability, which Tuck and Yang encourage.²⁸ The section that follows will describe the framework of my performance, sound, and work itself.

²⁸ This is in reference to the same article cited on page 6, an article which hugely impacted the direction of this thesis: Tuck and Yang, *Ibid.* P. 4.



Ocean

*I won't use the Master's tools,
Bring my own instead.*

“no history”: a piece in time-stretched witnessing

Context for Creation

I performed “no history” at Skylight Gallery on April 10th 2015 in Vancouver, on the occupied, unceded, traditional, and ancestral territories belonging to the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. I specifically wanted to disrupt a public space through an act of witnessing. In the end, I decided that because I am an electronic artist/producer, I would attempt to bear witness through sound. The purpose of the performance was to bear witness to the ongoing dispossession and violence of Indigenous peoples and enact settler-shame in a public space.

Choice of Venue

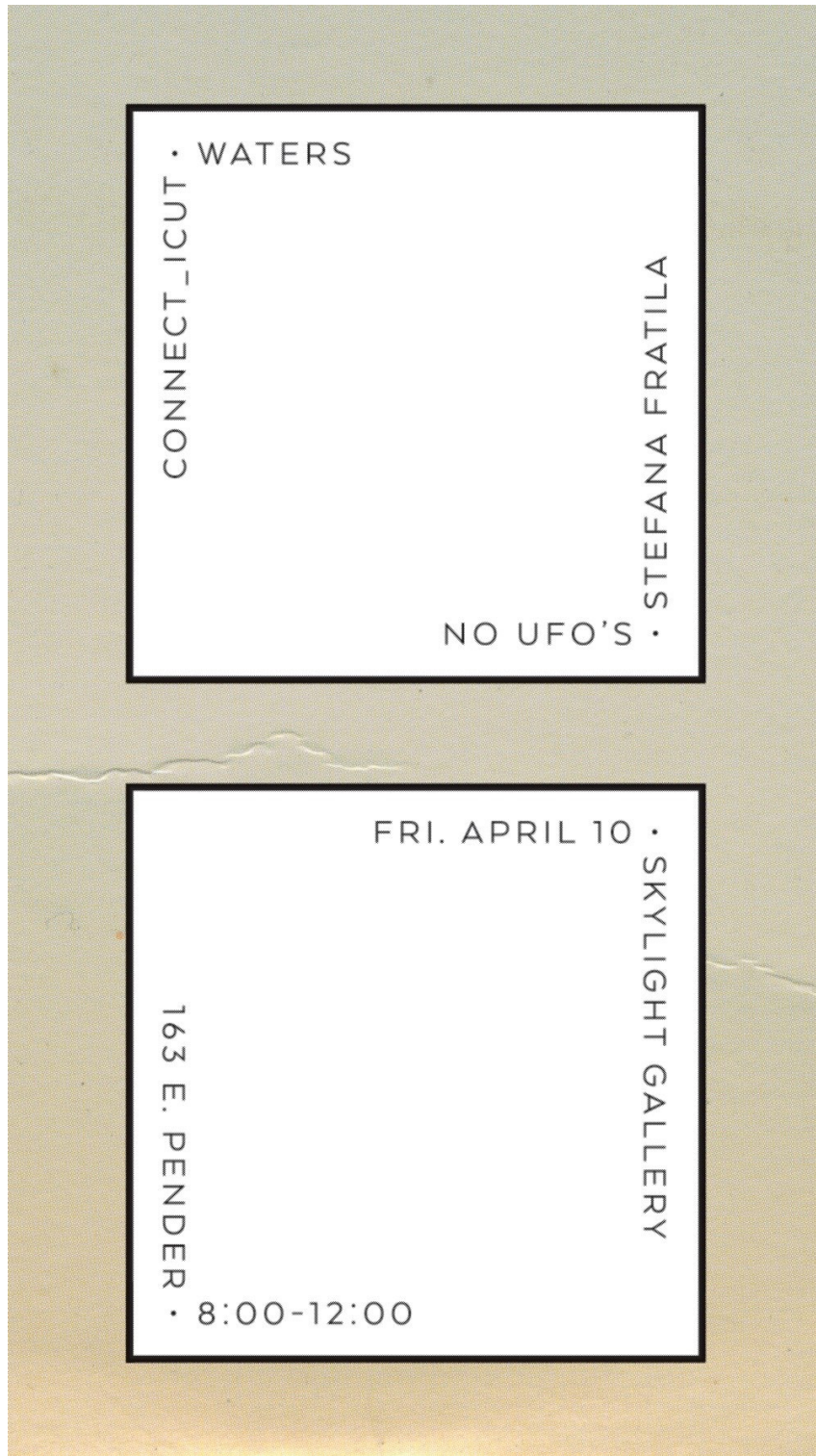
I decided to write a piece and then perform it at an underground space/art gallery called Skylight Gallery in Chinatown, Vancouver where I supposed the audience would be willing to engage with the piece, but would not be expecting a piece of such political weight since the space is largely used for after-hours dance parties that predominantly white people of socio-economic privilege attend. I have spoken out against the exclusive nature of these shows, particularly as Skylight is one of the many trendy venues in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and Chinatown that do not make efforts to engage with the neighbourhood’s residents. I believe Skylight is a good example of a space that partakes in the uncomfortable colonization of the neighbourhood, what has also been called ‘gentrification.’ In other words, I wanted to make a point of politicizing a space that has often felt purposefully apolitical. On this particular evening, the second-storey gallery was cleared out and rearranged for an earlier show (10:30pm – 1am) of ambient and experimental music. I was one of four artists on the bill and each performer’s gear was set up before the show started; the following page displays the show’s poster and the image on page 25 shows the set-up of the show.

Style of Music

The piece begins with a haunting segment of time-stretched audio and then builds into a more House-influenced and beat-driven piece, held together by live vocal loops and shimmering synth.

Stretching Sound

Time-stretching is a method of splicing up sound into very small segments. The sound is reassembled through a technical process called granulation, where sound is split into very tiny pieces so that the pitch remains the same. In this sense, the speed itself does not change



Show poster

The austere appearance of the poster does not indicate a political act, yet speaks to the minimalist aesthetic so favoured by settlers in the gentrification of the neighbourhood.

since the pitch is kept the same but the reassembling of sounds gives the listener the illusion that the sound has been *stretched*.

When audio is time-stretched we are, in fact, hearing the very same sounds that were contained in the original audio, yet they sound completely different to our ears. It comes across as if the audio was literally drawn out to reveal sounds that were (seemingly) inaudible to begin with but that were actually there the entire time. In this way, this manipulation produces a different effect upon the listener than the original sound might have otherwise.

I came across this effect while listening to Ludwig van Beethoven's 9th Symphony stretched to last twenty-four hours. Listening to Beethoven's symphony in its time-stretched form impacted me in a completely different way than the original; it had meditative qualities and I felt like I was hearing the piece 'for the first time.' Of course, I had inadvertently heard the music many times before; firstly, because it is so well known but, secondly, because I had *intentionally* played and practiced "Ode to Joy" many times as a young girl learning piano. Yet, in its time-stretched form it became unrecognizable to me.

In an interview, Leif Inge (who performs a 24-hour rendition of Beethoven's 9th Symphony) stated that time-stretching is more than just stretching sound — that it is stretching music history, adding that though the 9th Symphony is a piece of music that is already "engrained in our consciousness," it is made "alien again" and proposes a physical understanding and engagement within the listener.²⁹

I had a similar sentiment in composing my piece, though instead of stretching music history, I was thinking about how we remember history and how I might apply the technical aspect of time-stretching towards a political act — I asked myself, how can I stretch a moment of bearing witness? How can I make my audience bear witness to colonial violence in a physical way — i.e. through the act of listening?

Stretched Witnessing

My idea in time-stretching an act of witnessing was to apply the same logic one might apply when time-stretching sound. With my piece "no history," I am 'stretching' on a number of levels: I am stretching the sound itself, stretching the moment of listening to the sound, stretching the moment of bearing witnessing to what the sound is made up of and, finally, stretching that moment of reflection that the sounds evokes in the listener.

The piece is an exercise in 'time-stretched witnessing' because sounds from a colonial reality are extended so that they are heard more deeply and clearly. As a gesture towards bearing witness to on-going colonial violence in particular, I chose to sample Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2008 "apology" for the Indian Residential School system, his G20 speech only a year later (where he stated off-script, in candid denial, that Canada has "no history of

²⁹ Leif Inge. AV Festival 12: Leif Inge Interview". YouTube. Uploaded 8 April 2013. Accessed 12 December 2015: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kL7_DFQvLo

colonialism").³⁰ I set these samples within the piece so Harper's voice would have to engage, or 'converse', with time-stretched excerpts of Tanya Tagaq's "Ancestors" (who is a throat-singer from Ikaluktutiak and one of approximately 150,000 Indigenous children who attended a residential school in Canada). In a sense, the sounds become *more audible* in this format; we have more opportunity to consider or question Harper's words in this sound space than we might just by watching the playback of Harper's speeches online.

These sounds — of contested historical memories — are put in conversation with one another within my piece. Tanya Tagaq's throat singing counter-balances Harper's apology throughout the first part, her voice is highlighted and circles around the listener, protesting Harper's erasure of Indigenous voices. As Harper's reading of the apology is presented alongside Tanya Tagaq's interjecting vocalizations while a sample of Harper's later statement ("no history of colonialism") eerily protruding from a corner, the listener is meant to feel disturbed. Harper's contradicting statements are present throughout the piece both in their unaltered sampled forms and also pitched up and pitched down. I was hoping to make the listener deeply uncomfortable and consider the degree of silencing that is going on at the upmost level of Canadian government. After the performance, a few audience members made it clear to me that — in this regard — my presentation of Harper's empty words succeeded in pushing listeners to contemplate how conversations regarding Canada's TRC and the Indian Residential School system have played out.

In this sense, the government's ulterior motives come to surface and the colonial trajectory of settler-indigenous relations were illuminated. At least, this was the case for some listeners. I hoped that the idea of this government silencing would feel heavy and uneasy to the listener who, at this point in the performance, is surrounded, by loud sounds that have such deep political implications. I also felt very strongly that it was necessary for Tanya Tagaq's time-stretched vocals to ultimately dominate the song, in an unquestionable overpowering of Harper's impertinent denial and silencing.

Tanya Tagaq's vocals lead into the second half of the song, where the listener is left to contemplate the uncomfortable political implications of the first section. Here, I build the atmosphere with a flourishing synth, intensifying beats, samples and looped vocals singing the lyrics ("My whole life has changed" / "Since you came in"), re-interpreted from Ginuwine's well-known 2001 R&B song "Differences". I decided to do this because I thought it would be meaningful to re-appropriate lyrics from mainstream pop culture, from within our colonial world, and then apply them a context where we might understand the lyrics differently. The historically problematic manner in which R&B and Hip-Hop music has been re-appropriated, commodified and consumed by white audiences was something I also felt was important to bring into the piece. I made an effort to apply the lyrics of a genre (which white audiences have historically regarded as common, ordinary, and low-class) to a piece so wrought in pedagogical purpose: "no history" is partially written as a gesture of

³⁰ Derrick O'Keefe. "Harper in denial at G20: Canada has 'no history of colonialism.'" *Rabble*. Published 28 September 2009. Accessed 21 December 2015: <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/derrick/2009/09/harper-denial-g20-canada-has-no-history-colonialism>

witnessing, but also performed to disrupt the ‘settler’s night out,’ pushing settler audiences to further educate themselves on their surroundings and interrogate their roles as colonizers.

Finally, I hoped that this piece would act as a means of retracing memory, that the moment of bearing witness would also be longer, more moving and more meaningful through an experience of time-stretched sound.

In *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard states: “If we multiplied images, taking them in the domains of lights and sounds, of heat and cold, we should prepare a slow ontology, but doubtless one that is more certain than the ontology that reposes upon geometrical images.”³¹ I understand a slow ontology to be a messy ontology, but one which involves the self and our senses towards feelings that reflect back the very sentiment of being. Bachelard points towards poetry, for ‘inviting’ us into “experiences of intimacy” and “‘escapades’ of imagination.”³² This reminded me of a line in Leanne Simpson’s *Islands of Decolonial Love*: “to feel joy, you have to escape.”³³

I envisioned “no history” as a performance that would, through the intimate escape of art, bring us into existence itself. Open the door. Show us (settlers) where we are wrong.

³¹ Bachelard, *Ibid.* P. 215.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Leanne Simpson. *Islands of Decolonial Love*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing. 2013. P. 59.



skylight

There were four performances that evening; in this image, each artist's set-up/gear is visible. I played my piece in the far left-corner with just four pieces of equipment: a laptop, an op-1 synth, an audio interface, and a microphone.

Creating spaces of settler shame

The necessity to create spaces of settler shame became apparent to me because of the TRC. I saw that shame and education needed to encounter one another.

Even though on September 25th 2009, Canada's Prime Minister apologized for Canada's Indian Residential Schools system, he then stated only a year later that Canada has "no history of colonialism."³⁴ This is *indicative* of a system *unable to move beyond a colonial mentality* that renders Indigenous knowledge and persons invisible.

The greatest limitation of the TRC was that it tried to apply a transitional justice formula upon a society that is not in transition *per se* — that is to say, the TRC historicized colonial violence as something of the past — yet, colonial violence is not something of the past. Coulthard makes a critical point when he says, "Indigenous peoples tend to view their resurgent practices of cultural self-recognition and empowerment as permanent features of our decolonial political projects, not transitional ones."³⁵ Canada's TRC and its education models are not transformative and allow for segregation and animosity to continue between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples.

In my view, the greatest failure of the TRC was that it did not decolonize. It, instead, historicized colonialism and further entrenched a misunderstanding between settlers and Indigenous peoples because it did not contextualize.

To acknowledge the connection between past colonial violence and ongoing colonial violence leads to a complete dismantling of the capitalist state system in Canada. It means giving land back. All roads lead back to land when it comes to Indigenous politics in Canada. It is really important for settlers to understand this — and shame, at its most politically emotive, might carry that understanding inwards.

Up until very recently, the Canadian government's, refused to call for a national inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).³⁶ For many years, this has been the kind of 'recognition' the settler-state has given the friends and families of those who have been taken away from them, despite the fact that there are now over 1200 reported cases of MMIWG and that pressure from various international organizations, including the United Nations, was mounting.³⁷

³⁴ Brian Beaton. "Colonialism Denial by Canada's prime minister ignores First Nation history and current reality". Published 30 September 2009. Accessed 30 March 2015: <http://media.knet.ca/node/7336>

³⁵ Coulthard, *Ibid.* P. 23.

³⁶ Max Paris. "Missing and murdered aboriginal women inquiry a must, report says". CBC News. Published 26 February 2015. Accessed 30 March 2015: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/missing-and-murdered-aboriginal-women-inquiry-a-must-report-says-1.2973890>

³⁷ Sonya Fatah. "Canada failing to investigate murdered women". Al-Jazeera News. Published 22 September 2014. Accessed 30 March 2015: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/09/canada-failing-investigate-murdered-women-201492281281161.html>

Ahmed argues that, “we need to think about what shame does to the bodies whose surfaces burn with the apparent immediacy of its affect before we can think about what it means for nations and international civil society to give shame an ‘official reality’ in acts of speech.”³⁸ Furthermore, Simpson writes that gender-based violence “is central to our on-going dispossession, occupation and erasure.”³⁹ After the TRC, settlers are still not equipped to understand this — they are ignorant, they feel removed from the history and they also do not have the tools to put into context their own roles, their own privileges in relation to ongoing colonial violence.

The TRC did not educate or put present colonial violence into context with the past.

I am not convinced the TRC could have even accomplished this because, typically, traditional transitional justice formulas have not been applied in the context of on-going colonialism — therefore, decolonization is not built into transitional justice formulas.

³⁸ Ahmed. P. 112.

³⁹ Leanne Simpson. “Not Murdered and Not Missing”. Nations Rising. Published 5 March 2014. Accessed 30 March 2015: <http://nationsrising.org/not-murdered-and-not-missing/>



Galiano Island

We learn through intimacy with a subject as concept; the details reveal themselves.

Education as redress

I titled this project *Decolonizing Reconciliation* because decolonizing the processes of reconciliation is exactly what must happen in Canada. We must refuse the politics of reconciliation as they are. After all, to reconcile is impossible if settlers are unwilling to admit or unable to understand (having been uneducated or mis-educated to the point of non-understanding) their roles as colonizers. Settlers must feel ashamed for how they enact and *re-enact* the role of a colonizer every day.

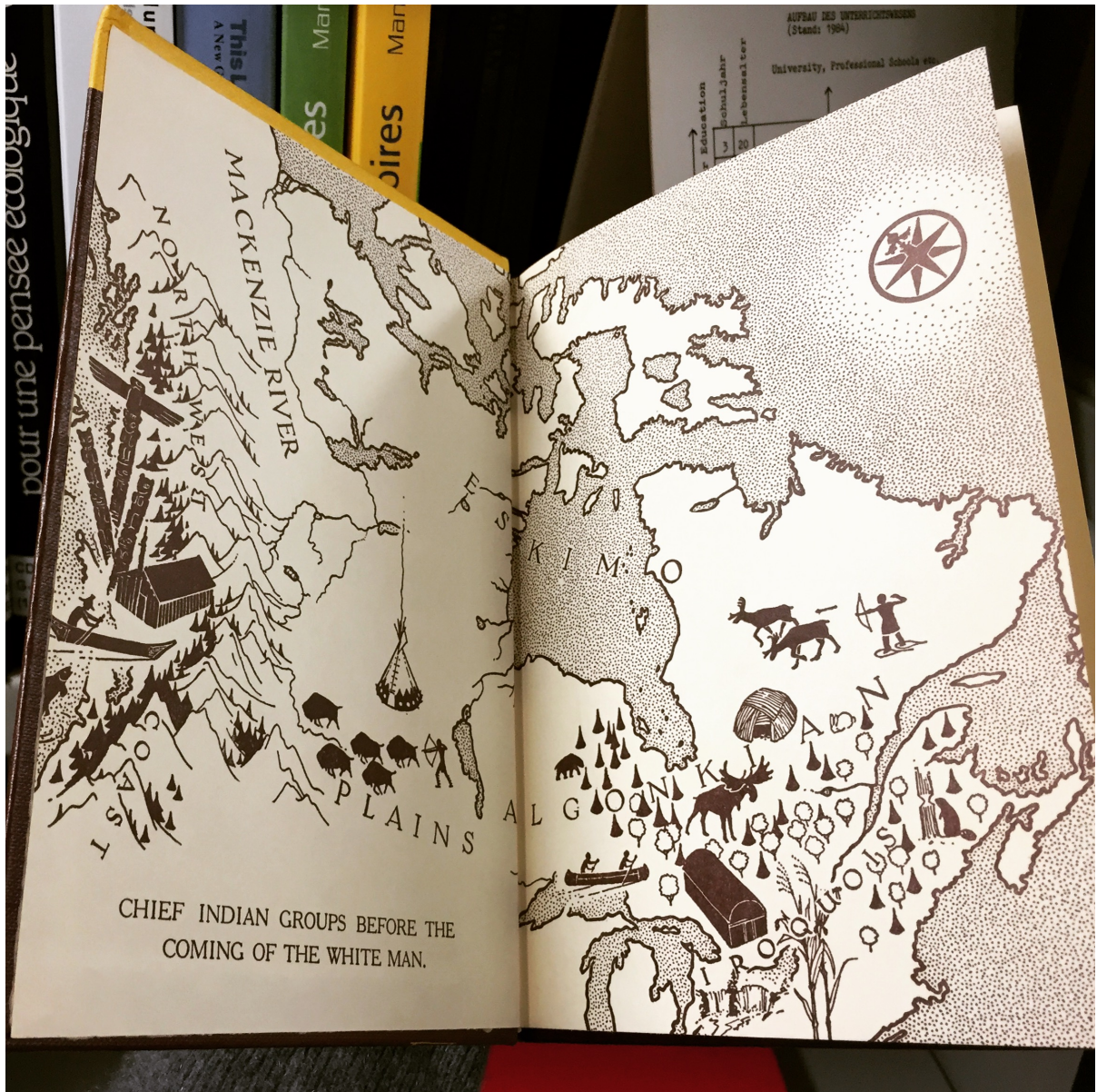
Settler-shame in connection with education is the entry point to changing the colonial mentality of settlers and for empowering Indigenous peoples beyond the harrowing psychological effects, subjugation, and the internalization of colonialism and its white gaze.

I now face the challenge of envisioning how to apply a shame that must come from *within*, across an entire system of settler-colonial institutions and structures which work so hard against settlers feeling shame. The further access-point seems education — namely, arts-based and land-based education. Moving forward, these forms of education remain for the project to further process.



Textbook

I found this old Canadian textbook found in Germany at the Georg-Eckert-Institute for International Textbook Research.



Hotel room

June, 2015: The same piles of the same books have had me anxious since December. This is taking me too long.

Reconciliation that refuses ‘reconciliation’

Transitional justice as well as education initiatives in Canada continue to uphold settlers in a comfortable space or state of innocence. For my part, I believe decolonizing reconciliation means creating spaces for settler-shame and encouraging settler shame on an individual level as a direct response to settler-colonial violence. This means self-reflexivity on the part of the colonizer inside and outside of the classroom and within the public space.

Reconciliation, in the context of Canada really means a full overhaul, a dismantling of the state, a reconciliation that *refuses* ‘reconciliation’ in the way that we have known it thus far — one that, instead, includes: a return of land, Indigenous sovereignty, centring Indigenous leaders, an end to gendered colonial violence and embodied settler-shame.



My room

December, 2016: The books are no longer piled and they no longer make me anxious. Here is an image of the process, as it continues to unfold.

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