

CATR presentation draft, July 26

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Panel: Relation, Resilience, and Revitalization

I'm currently doing my doctoral work in Env studies at York, I'm also an activist and a theatre creator, primarily focused on physical and devised theatre. I am going to present on one component of my dissertation proposal, which is a research-creation project – I have just recently defended my proposal so the project is in its very early stages and I would love recommendations and feedback.

SLIDE 2

Scholars such as Edward Said, Diana Taylor and Leanne Simpson propose that performed narrative or story are key building blocks of the decolonial OR colonial landscape and so in a settler colonial context a return of Indigenous land is intricately connected to the *poetics* of the national imaginary. My research looks at the **gendered narratives of domestication that structure Canadian settler colonialism, how they manifested historically and how we (settlers) continue to embody them**. How can these narratives be “un-settled” through performances that call attention to their very construction?

While decolonization work may benefit from dialogue and collaboration, it also, writes David Garneau “sometimes requires occasions of separation—moments where Indigenous people take space and time to work things out among themselves, and parallel moments when allies ought to do the same” (Garneau in Robinson and Martin 23). My research is situated in this “parallel moment” of settler unsettling. My ethical framework revolves around these spaces of irreconcilability to unpack and explore narratives of innocence, complicity, and domestication from the embodied experience of the settler subject, who is herself already a messy and entangled creation, continuously constructed and reified in relation to Indigenous and racialized Others. Key to this practice is Dylan Robinson’s theory of intergenerational perpetration, which challenges what Tuck and Yang call “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck and Yang 2012) by understanding settler inaction and ignorance as a slow violence against Indigenous peoples, not a neutral blank slate needing only to be enlightened. Following the push for settler academics to take ownerships of their own stories (Carter, Recollet Robinson), my intervention is very specifically in the settler subject, her/my relation to colonized land, and her/my moves to innocence. If innocence is a pillar of ongoing colonial violence and land theft (see Tuck and Yang 2012; Fellows and Razack 1998), I posit that a self-reflexive analysis of cultural narratives of settler innocence is an important intervention for the creation of decolonial performance futures.

SILDE 3

My dissertation asks: *how might theatre and performance undermine the gendered narratives of innocence that create the Canadian settler colonial project?*

The central cultural narrative my research will explore is the idea of settler domestication (and thus expansion) as natural, apolitical and innocent. This will involve an interrogation into the role of white women in ongoing and historical colonization, and the way that the very categories of whiteness and woman-ness are constructed relationally with differently classed, racialized, abled, or gendered bodies (Mackenzie 8).

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This interrogation requires disrupting what Ruth Frankenburg calls the “structured invisibility” of whiteness, where white dominance and privilege is normalized and race is made into a structure that only applies to those who don’t currently qualify as white (6). The ways that the narratives which “structure invisibility” are continuously performed can be analyzed through Diana Taylor’s concept of *scenarios*, which are a key element of my methodology.

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Taylor defines scenarios as “meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes.” She demonstrates how scenarios function as “specific repertoires of cultural imaginings” (31) that are reified through their ongoing enactments. This is particularly relevant for my project as she draws heavily on the example of *scenarios of discovery*, which stem from the narrative of the West first “discovering” the Americas. It is now the normalization of these scenarios that make them so difficult to rupture.

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Taylor writes that:

The very scenario that numbs us with familiarity occludes the atrocious outcome. As a paradigmatic system of visibility, the scenario also assures invisibility...Scenarios such as [the scenario of discovery] have become so normalized as to transmit values and fantasies without calling attention to itself as a “conscious” performance (Taylor 54).

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In a settler colonial context, Lorenzo Veracini theorizes what he calls “transfers,” which are essentially about justifying settler sovereignty by simultaneously Indigenizing the settler and removing Indigenous peoples¹. Pairing Veracini and Taylor, I will explore the roles, rhetoric and narratives that through repetition and performance create Canada’s racialized and gendered *scenarios of transfer*. The performance piece I create will make visible the scenarios explored in my research in order to de-familiarize the familiar, calling attention to what is “(un)conscious performance” in the creation and maintenance of a settler society.

SLIDE 8 Scenarios of transfer are well summed up in this example: a 1917 text by a Reverend W.T. Gunn, writing on Home Missions in Canada, entitled “His Dominion” with one of his opening lines being “in the beginning God created Canada.” This narrative places Turtle Island as the project of a Christian God specifically created for Europeans.

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Many scholars have investigated the role of gender and domesticity in historic British imperial expansion (specifically how white British women became a key tool for settler colonies) and Kym Bird (2014, 2020) has further explored how 19th century women’s theatre and

performance was one of the tools used for this project in Canada. Today the most obvious aspects of gendered settler colonialism (women having to create permanency on the land for nomadic white male settlers) are arguably gone, but if settler colonialism is a structure and not an event than how have the gendered roles of settler colonialism manifested in the present moment?

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My research will explore how this historic colonial tactic of white female domesticity-as-innocent manifests *today*, particularly in the current era of #LandBack and #ShutDownCanada², and how an *embodied* exploration of this manifestation (using a practice of physical theatre creation) offers an epistemology not available in the archive.

If, as Resmaa Menakem writes, white supremacy as a structure lives in our bodies much more than our minds, then how might physical theatre creation as a methodology lend itself to an analysis of the white settler subject in Canada?

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My project starts with an analysis of historical texts that give insight into the cultural narratives around the gendered and racialized structure of settler colonialism: right now I'm exploring texts such as the 19th c fiction and non-fiction works giving guidance to female settlers

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(Catharine Parr Trail, Susannah Moodie, plays anthologized by Kym Bird such as *Laura Secord, The Heroine of 1812* (Sarah Ann Curzon) or *Slumberland Shadows* (Kate Simpson Hayes), or the journals and writing put out by the many female British emigration organizations of the time).

I will then put these texts in relation to opinion pieces and newspaper articles from the past thirty years authored by settler-Canadians on topics of land disputes and Indigenous land defence. These are the cases I felt most strongly and succinctly showcase modern expressions of *scenarios of transfer*, or white settlers' "innocent" right to land. I will pick several instances of Indigenous land defence against what John Burrows calls the "creeping" settler blockade (45) (for example, 1492 Land Back Lane, Oka Crisis, Burnt Church, Unist'ot'en, Sun Peaks Ski resort, or Elsipogtog) and source local settler newspaper articles and opinion pieces of that time.

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This will allow me to compare how historical rhetoric manifests in current texts concerning Indigenous land in order to explore in what ways the logics of land theft via domestication are still active today, refuting the idea that current liberal reconciliatory rhetoric has actually changed the structure of colonialism.

*This slide shows parallel images of the hetero nuclear family in Canada. Two are from the NFB's 1995 educational series called Early Life in Canada, the other two are from the websites of Losani and Ballantry Homes, the two companies looking to build a housing development on the site of the current land defence camp 1492 Land Back Lane at Six Nations.

I will work with these different texts through an embodied and kinesthetic exploration. Since my background as a performer is in clown and physical theatre, my process of creation starts from the embodiment of characters and interaction with the environment inspired from the texts I have researched.

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My research thus proposes an un-mapping of white settler subjectivity through a critical analysis of the nodes in which it is most heavily embedded in order to explore how settlers can engage in narratives and performance practices that subvert settler colonial hegemony and work in solidarity with Indigenous-led decolonization movements across Turtle Island.