

Writing as righting: Truth and reconciliation, poetics, and new geo-graphing in colonial Canada

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Key Messages

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls for new actions to address Canada's colonial history and colonial present; geographers are implicated in this call.
- Undertaking logical, linear, or even coherent work about colonial violence risks reproducing it by trying to make sense of and bring closure to something that should, for settler Canadians, remain raw and unsettled.
- Poetry offers a way of writing about colonial violence by opening new “language-spaces,” new geo-graphing possibilities, that refuse existing narratives about colonialism.

This paper is anchored in two recent and concurrent openings, openings that offer opportunities for geographers to consider new modes of engaging colonial violence. The first opening is the release, in Canada, of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report and calls to action. By demanding new types of settler-subject attention to Indigenous peoples and places, it opens new spaces for extending reflection about anti-Indigenous racism and colonial violence in Canadian consciousness. The second opening is geography's growing uptake of creative and humanities-informed theories and practices. These manifest in new knowledges and practices with consequent possibilities for addressing colonial violence. I consider these two openings first by proposing changes to conversations about settler-normalized violences lived by Indigenous peoples, and, second by engaging poets working to radically re/configure language and written expression. Specifically, the paper ends with a call for geographers—particularly non-Indigenous settler geographers—to rethink ways (and forms) by which we produce knowledge, especially about colonialism and Indigenous geographies and especially in and through writing practices. The paper is experimental in form, meant to disrupt easy uptake or digestion of ideas that must remain—for settler subjects—fundamentally ragged, upsetting, and always beyond conclusion, coherence, or closure.

Keywords: poetry, feminist anti-racist indigenous geographies, truth and reconciliation, geohumanities

L'écriture comme redressement : Vérité et réconciliation, poétique et nouvelle vision de la géographie dans le Canada colonial

Cet article est ancré dans deux « circonstances » récentes et concurrentes qui offrent aux géographes la possibilité d'envisager de nouvelles façons d'aborder la violence coloniale. La première circonstance est la publication, au Canada, du rapport final de la Commission de vérité et de réconciliation et ses appels à l'action. En demandant de nouveaux types d'attention colon-sujet aux lieux et aux peuples autochtones, elle ouvre de nouveaux espaces pour étendre la réflexion au sujet du racisme anti-autochtone et de la violence

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coloniale dans la conscience canadienne. La seconde circonstance est l'adoption croissante des théories et des pratiques issues des sciences humaines et créatives de la géographie. Celles-ci se manifestent dans de nouvelles connaissances et de nouvelles pratiques avec les possibilités conséquentes d'aborder la violence coloniale. J'examine ces deux circonstances d'abord en proposant des changements aux débats à propos des violences normalisées par les colons qui sont vécues par les Autochtones et, ensuite, en référence à des poètes qui s'efforcent de configurer ou reconfigurer radicalement la langue et l'expression écrite. Plus particulièrement, l'article se termine par un appel aux géographes, particulièrement les géographes des colons non autochtones, afin de repenser les façons (et les formes) grâce auxquelles nous produisons des connaissances, particulièrement au sujet du colonialisme et des géographies autochtones et particulièrement dans et à travers les pratiques d'écriture. Cet article est expérimental dans sa forme, il vise à perturber l'adoption ou la digestion facile d'idées qui doivent demeurer, pour les sujets coloniaux, fondamentalement dépenaillées, troublantes et toujours au-delà de la conclusion, de la cohérence ou de la fermeture.

Mots clés : poésie, géographies autochtones antiracistes féministes, vérité et réconciliation, sciences humaines de la géographie

The world is wrong. You can't put the past behind you. It's buried in you; it's turned your flesh into its own cupboard. Not everything remembered is useful but it all comes from the world to be stored in you. Who did what to whom on which day? Who said that? She said what? What did he just do? Did she really just say that? He said what? What did she do? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth?

Do you remember when you sighed?

Claudia Rankine (2014, 63)

Introduction

I never met Suzanne Mackenzie. I feel, however, as though I know her. In March 2016, at the kind invitation and organization of two women geographers (Fran Klodawsky and Jennifer Ridgley), I had the good fortune of visiting Carleton University. Between meetings with grad students and a guest lecture, I asked if I could get a cup of coffee. Fran took me into the Geography Department's lunchroom and there, amidst photos of former heads of departments—mostly White men, it must be noted—was a photo of Suzanne Mackenzie. Suzanne was never a head of department at Carleton, but her contributions were still transformative, as I learned from Fran, who I later also learned took the photo and who was a very dear friend of Suzanne's.

Suzanne is smiling in that photo. Smiling in a full and utterly open fashion, an incredible glint of intelligence and happiness in her eyes. It is a smile

emblematic of every story I have ever heard about Suzanne Mackenzie—stories, I might add, told to me over many years by luminary critical feminist, anti-racist, activist-oriented women geographers in the discipline who I am conjuring today, women like Audrey Kobayashi, Damaris Rose, Pamela Moss, Linda McDowell, Fran Klodawsky, Sallie Marston, Gerry Pratt, Linda Peake, Valerie Preston, and Jody Decker. Stories about Suzanne Mackenzie have also circulated in Canadian Women and Geography meetings between a younger generation of geographers, women like Deborah Thien, Sarah Hunt, Ranu Basu, Ebru Ustundag, Sophie Tamas, Julia Christensen, Sara Koopman, Catherine Nolin, Jennifer Hyndman, Heather Castleden, Kate Parizeau, Vanessa Sloan Morgan, Juanita Sundberg, Caroline Desbiens, and Emilie Cameron. These are all women I am now honoured to call my colleagues and friends. All of them have worked in some way to produce space in the discipline for other feminist geographers, like

myself, who are interested in social justice as a geographic project. Without these women, each of whom are also in some way connected to Suzanne Mackenzie through storylines and story-lineages, I would not have achieved much of anything as a scholar or writer—roles in which storytelling is central.

It is, in other words, because of stories that I feel I know Suzanne Mackenzie. The stories by which I know Suzanne are published as love letters and letters of open grief in *Gender, Place & Culture* (see Tributes to Suzanne Mackenzie 1999). The stories appear as homages framed by fragments of poetry (Klodawsky and Mackenzie 1999). They are stories that have pushed beyond boundaries of traditional academic or scholarly writing, stories meant to pay tribute, to move, to affect, and to inspire. They are stories written in many different forms. Some have circulated in introductions to Suzanne Mackenzie Memorial Lectures given over the past decade and a half and in the subsequent publications of these lectures (e.g., Hyndman 2001; Rose 2010; Peake 2015). Importantly, they are stories full of women's everyday lives embedded in the body of work Suzanne herself published (e.g., Mackenzie 1999), a body of work credited with bringing for the first time "the active human subject into space, into the landscape of geography," and, through its use of feminist methods and methodologies, introducing "a new conceptual language" that pushed the discipline beyond positivism and empiricism into realizations that "material environments are also metaphorical" (Hayford 2010).

The focus of this paper is stories. I understand stories in the broadest of ways, as narratives or accounts, either true or fictitious, recounted in modes that span prose (including academic or research prose) to poetry, designed to hold the interest of a listener or reader. This paper, then, is also story—what I will in places call a "geo-graphing." Geo-graphing of course references geography's literal translation as "earth (geo) writing." Given that the literal meaning of the word "graph" is "a written symbol," geo-graphing also reinforces that writing (including writing by geographers) can never be understood as a faithful duplication of an external reality (Barnes and Duncan 2013). Writing is ultimately a formation of structures, comprised of symbols, a geography beyond exact copying or precise representation, which is nevertheless an eminently material means of re-mediating the world and our orientations to it.

Because stories fundamentally involve language—language *formed* in different ways—this paper is focused on form and language, sometimes at the scale of individual letters (symbol/graph), in stories and storytelling. Finally, because this paper is written, I focus most specifically on writing and written stories, as opposed to spoken or orated stories. I focus, in other words, on the geographies and "text-scapes"—created by graphing—that appear upon the page (paper or electronic). I also focus on words and the physical relationship between words—a relationship that involves not only space and scale and letter-interaction and structure, but also includes the *form(s)* and typographies and geographies of writing and written language—in this case, English. It goes without saying that many others—including geographers—have thought about forming language and words, about the politics of word-relationships and the ways texts and textuality are inherently modes of ontological and epistemological power (see Heyman 2004; Barnes and Duncan 2013). Derrida, for instance, noted that "language . . . the words themselves, are [our] first mediating institution" (1997, 42; see also Derrida 1978).

Where this paper's concern with stories and language expands existing inquiries into geography's writing, however, is that it is specifically anchored in two recent and concurrent openings, openings that offer opportunities for geographers to consider new modes of engaging colonial violence. The first opening is the release, in Canada, of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) final report and calls to action. Read in dialogue with a number of failed national inquiries about Indigenous rights in Canada that relied on rhetoric as opposed to action (Corntassel and Holder 2008; Waterstone and de Leeuw 2010; Lightfoot 2015), the TRC's work is part of a long and contested history. Despite potential limitations of the TRC's report and process, however, I suggest that by demanding new types of settler subject attention to Indigenous peoples and places, the TRC report and calls to action open new spaces for pushing reflection about anti-Indigenous racism and colonial violence to a different place in Canadian consciousness. The second opening is geography's growing uptake of creative and humanities-informed theories and practices. While this creative turn also has a long history, it manifests recently in new knowledges and practices that have consequent possibilities with reference to colonial violence.

In deliberating below some *forms of writing* (written language/geo-graphing) used to tell stories, I am first proposing changes to mainstream conversations, including those by geographers, about settler-normalized violences lived by Indigenous peoples. Secondly, and in part building upon geography's creative re-turn and turn to humanities (Hawkins 2013; Marston and de Leeuw 2013; Madge 2014), I argue that poets and creative writers, who are working to radically re/configure language and written expression, can offer insights about ways of writing (and thinking and talking) anew about colonial violence. My turning to the radical and productive possibility of poetics is neither new nor without reference to work of other geographers and social scientists: geographers well-known to the discipline for their theoretical contributions have recently begun both to publish books of poetry and consider ways that poetry and geography might productively inform each other (see Cresswell 2013, 2014, 2015). Geographers have long seen poetics and literary arts as the "soul" of our discipline (see Watson 1983) while other social scientists (for instance, anthropologists) have long been concerned with the ontological and epistemological consequences of writing, urging academic writers to *evoke* rather than represent (e.g., Geertz 1988, 1994; Pratt 1991, 2007; Marcus and Fischer 1999). Situated within this context, then, the paper ends with a call for geographers—particularly non-Indigenous settler geographers—to rethink the ways (and importantly the *forms*) by which we produce knowledge, especially about colonialism and Indigenous geographies and especially in and through our writing practices. I am interested in the *reformation* of writing—demonstrated in part throughout the paper as "interludes"—as one possible way of righting settler relationships to and understandings about colonial violence. The paper is purposely experimental in form, meant to disrupt easy uptake or digestion of ideas that must, ultimately, remain—particularly for settler subjects—fundamentally ragged, upsetting, and always beyond conclusion, coherence, or closure.

Interlude. Break.

Pause. Break broken break. What to say. What? Thick. Pause. Gob sob stuck in gut, in throat. Language. Fails. Leave a hotel room. For breakfast.

St. Eugene's Golf, Resort and Casino. 7777 (say seven, say seven, say seven) Mission Road, Cranbrook British Columbia. The Kootenays. Or ~~Ktunaxa or Kootenai or Kutenai~~ (because we erase strike through I do we do so many of us do. Strike. Through.). St. Eugene's. St. Eugene's. Go on. Enter the foyer with me. Up the stairs. One. Two. Eight. Ten. Stone. A portrait of Elder Mary Paul. In 1994 she states, "Since it was within that building that the culture of the Kootenay Indian was taken away, then it should be within that building it is returned." Eat breakfast. Do not distance yourself from ~~the couple~~ (you are them too) sitting behind you, what they are. Saying. You have no right to claim rarity. Ascendancy from your history. Your. Feet. Too. On. This. Ground. Why are there so many Indians here? What's the story of this place? What the hell are all those pictures of Indian kids? Breakfast. Toast. Golf course. Edged by cemetery. Graves of children. Golf course. Graves. Golf. Course. Grave. Child. Why are there so many Indians here? A residential school transformed into resort. Sun. Sun. Also, this story, a residential school ~~reclaimed~~.

Geographies in a time after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report

On Tuesday December 15th 2015, Justice Murray Sinclair released the final TRC report. The six-volume report, each volume weighing about 25 pounds, was more than a half-decade in the making. It is thousands of pages long, and centres on documenting and honouring statements made by more than 6,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people impacted by the "physical, biological and cultural genocide ...

Break. Break.

Did you? Did your eyes? Did your eyes? Did? Your?
Eyes? Just? Gloss?

Over?

Genocide?

Did? You? Genocide Gen(oh)cide Oh. Genocide Genoc(i)de.

Gen. Oh. Sigh. I. Feel. I. Feel. Cide. Feel. Sick. Feel. Gen. Oh. Sigh. Uncertain. Stopped.

Uncertain. Stop. Feel. Think. Sigh. Anew. Think. What can I write? How can I write,

right? Write. Right. After genocide? Write right. Right. Sigh.

Do you remember when you sighed?

Geographies in a time after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report (cont. . . .)

. . . at the core of residential schooling in Canada" (TRC 2015a, 1).

Remember. Genocide. Remember. A member. Of
genocide.

It is not right to write easily through this. This.
This genocide.

Do you remember when you sighed?

The Commission worked for six years, following both a class action lawsuit brought forward by residential school survivors and, in 2007, an apology from the federal government about residential schools, which has also received criticism from geographers (Waterstone and de Leeuw 2010). The TRC follows a long lineage of federal inquiries into the inequalities lived by Indigenous peoples in Canada, including most recently the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. As critics have observed, however, these lengthy, involved inquiries and commissions, often evoking ideas of recognition, rarely result in substantive actions that alleviate disparities lived by Indigenous peoples—or, for that matter, to fundamentally destabilize supremacy of colonial power and rule (Coulthard 2007).

These types of limitations might be expected given that the commissions and reports are products of an ongoing system that privileges colonial power. However, despite the very legitimate critiques of the TRC's report and findings, its clear call for non-Indigenous settlers to take action toward reconciliation is a step in the right direction. The TRC report outlines ten principles of reconciliation, specifying it is the responsibility of "[a]ll Canadians, as Treaty peoples . . . [to establish and maintain] mutually respectful relationships" (Principle 6, TRC 2015a, 4) and emphasizing that "[r]econciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal peoples' education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare,

the administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity" (Principle 4, TRC 2015a, 3). Indeed, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians must be a focused mutual process, a process that rests in great part on settler subjects unsettling our comfortable ignorance and reorienting ourselves to the awareness that this comfort is built on a legacy of colonial violence.

In contextualizing its 94 *Calls to Action* and the over 500-page *Summary of the Final Report*, the TRC defines reconciliation as "an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships" (TRC 2015b 121), and opens space for new, even creative, means for non-Indigenous settler-colonial subjects to re/form knowledges about colonial violences of the past, present, and future. Critical human geographers, particularly feminist and anti-racist geographers, have a role to play in this process, especially in a time when we are increasingly asking ourselves about social justice and activism as an expressly geographic project (e.g., Kobayashi et al. 2014).

The power and pervasive nature of colonial violence—at scales ranging from the intimacy of individual bodies and homes through to communities, populations, territories, and nation states—has for some time been a central concern of critical human geographers and other social scientists (see de Leeuw 2016). Many seek to decolonize process and practices, or call upon anti-colonial methodologies with the intention of interrogating White settler supremacy and recalibrating relationships between settler and Indigenous peoples (Morgensen 2011). In geography this takes multiple forms, from writing about decolonizing the geographical episteme (Johnson et al. 2007) to working with new research methods that try to account for Indigenous communities and Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Sloan Morgan et al. 2014); from participating in activist practices to gesturing toward the need for more space to celebrate Indigenous voices, places, and ontologies (Barker and Pickerill 2012). Still, we must acknowledge the limitations of what we are increasingly referring to as "decolonization": the majority of geographers are non-Indigenous and, in Canada, we live and work in geographies grounded in and perpetuating colonial violence.

Much of the work that claims or aims to be decolonizing or anti-colonial, then, either falls short in its good but misplaced intentions, or fails to fully comprehend the (virtual) impossibility of truly

decolonizing/anti-colonial work: that is, giving back the Indigenous land/resources/culture/language/family/nation that have already been destroyed, or are still (permanently) occupied and can never be given back (Tuck and Yang 2012). Even if we acknowledge and accept the limitations of what we call decolonizing or anti-colonial work, scholars have noted that neither tidily wraps up or finishes with an unsettling of colonial power (Wolfe 2006; Cameron 2015). Still—if we are to be hopeful and optimistic about the work of decolonization and anti-colonialism (and, for that matter, reconciliation or reaching toward even a partial truth about colonial violence)—we might see in these concepts a set of ideals to work toward. Anti- and decolonizing practices, when used cautiously and with recognition that both must always be adaptive and unfixed, may *begin* work towards disassembling (especially White) settler supremacy. When enacted, these practices would decentre and dismantle colonial institutions, modalities, systems, structures, and ways of knowing and being that continue to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands, families, homes, languages, and rights. In particular, anti-colonial and decolonizing work must be deeply committed to understanding, valuing, and defending Indigenous lives, traditions, knowledges, and futures—especially those outside and beyond the purview of settler subjects.

There are already many connections between the TRC report and work by critical geographers and other social scientists. We exist in a time and space of overlap between, on the one hand, calls by the TRC for shared responsibility in establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships between settler and Indigenous subjects in Canada and, on the other hand, expanding efforts by scholars and activists to reimagine and enact different ways of knowing and being about colonial violence and its consequences. To work in ways that are decolonizing (or that really genuinely attempt to be), both sets of work must account for the impossibility of fixedness, for completion, for a tidy conclusion that will signal—especially to settler-colonial subjects who might desperately desire some kind of resolution or tidy closure—an end to colonial violence. Reconciliation and the search for truth do not (and cannot and should not) minimize or rationalize the depth or extent of colonialism. Rather, we must, as McKittrick (2016, 5) writes, invest in “undoing the deadly yet normalized workings” of

colonialism and White supremacy, while also recognizing, as Wolfe (2006) insists, that settler colonialism has never been a single event; it is, rather, a system, a structure—a naturalized sense that settler colonialism itself is normal, intrinsic, and unshakeable.

If reconciliation requires “action to address the ongoing legacies of colonialism,” then it also needs languages to articulate that action—mechanisms and forms (or re/form/ations) of language, for instance, that can seize settler-subject attention and direct it toward unsettling the taken-for-granted colonial violence of missing and murdered Indigenous women, or the remarkable silence about unprecedented rates of child apprehensions from Indigenous families that continue to destabilize Indigenous communities in ways that rival the residential schooling project (de Leeuw 2016). Murdered women and girls, apprehended children, First Nations disrupted by hydroelectric dam projects, Indigenous peoples in prisons, communities ravaged by suicide, toxic industrial dumping, lack of clean drinking water—these Indigenous realities must never be normalized or glossed over, especially by non-Indigenous settler-subjects. Likewise, the remarkable strengths and humours and happinesses and resiliences and strong sets of laws and protocols that exist in some form in almost every Indigenous person, family, and community from coast to coast to coast, but are not celebrated or normalized or talked much about in non-Indigenous circles: these too must be unsettled. But what might geographers do, aside from hand-wringing? How to open new spaces, tell new stories, write in new ways to begin what may be a never-ending process of (at least making an attempt at) unsettling and righting colonial violence?

Break. Interlude. Being Broken.

No. I have no. I have. I have no idea.

Where to start. Starting. An impossibility. Start an impossibility.

Don't start. But. Do not. Stop. Chair. Table. Lectern. White

table cloth

Chandelier. PowerPoint slides.

Acknowledgements. “We are on the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation” (who is listening who is this for who is listening listen listen who).

Woman speaking. About her home. Down the highway.
Photo. Bridge. Tributary of the Skeena River.

Her father. She says: do you see the line?
The shadow? Do you see? In the photo.
Her father is non-status. (indian not indian indian
not indian indian
shadow of the indian act act indian belong
shadow
indian bridge water shadow indian).

Her mother, status.

Her own status (indian act math, indian, indian
status. of. indian. status. river on river status) lesser
status.

She can fish above a line in the water.

Her mother can fish above a line in the water.

Shadow cast by bridge, bridge shadow status
family line/age line shadow. Her father. Below.

The woman is pregnant. With an expired status card.
Also. Married to a White Man. She tells me I can tell
you this story. Tell it. Indian. Tell it. Indian. Shadow
line, fishing line, status line, line, status line blood
line. Blood. Blood. River. Blood. River.

Her baby will be born with no status. Tell it.
Tell the story. Tell. Fish. Fish below the line. Below
the blood. Line. Indian. Indian blood line, line line
line line line line lie line lie line lie lie blood lie
shadow line

Some radical geo-graphing languages of poets

Poet and essayist M. NourbeSe Philip begins the final
essay in her book of poetry *Zong!*, a breath-taking/
breath-shattering work (of erasure gap chant silence
shout space space space counter-text juxtaposition
scattering sound non-word listing) about the mass
murder of 133 enslaved Africans by the crew of the
Dutch slave ship *Zong* in 1781, with the statement
“There is no telling this story” (Philip 2008, 196). The
sentiment is echoed by McKittrick (2016, 8) who,
before turning to Philip’s poetry, stresses “that the
reader . . . ask not how we describe and get over the
awfulness and brutality, but rather how we live with
our world, differently, right now and engender new
critical interventions.” The story Philip tells (refuses
to tell) does, indeed, elude being told, presented as
ripped unmanageable broken-worded impossibility
and, thus, offering insight both into being differently
(graphing differently) in the world and into engaging
in new critical interventions through writing:

um & the lo ss in o
s in u
s in i us the s hip veers to t
he west e ver what d
o the bones say ru
th the r eed the ree d us [...]
are the ser mon tie
the fee t se w the ey es sh
up it i s do ne cap
tain d
rap e the tor
so the li mbs wi th li
nen in my e

(Philip 2008, 143).

Philip extends and amplifies both her poetics
and her statement into an essayed interrogation
broadly focused on the means and ways which
stories that *cannot* ever, fully, be told—not just
the/this story of *Zong*—end up *being* told. Particu-
larly on “the page.” Documented. Committed to
textual structure and form. What Philip writes
implicates all of us who work with language as a
tool. Her words, however, have resonance in this
particular time, just after the release in Canada of
recommendations by the TRC, which expressly call
for new ways of telling and understanding the
story of colonial violence in the country, and in a
time when geographers and other social scientists
are increasingly working with and through stories
(Cameron 2012; Christensen 2012). Philip (2008,
197) writes:

I deeply distrust this tool I work with – language.... I
distrust its order, which hides disorder; its logic
hiding illogic and its rationality, which is simulta-
neously irrational. However, if language is to what it
must do, which is communicate these qualities –
order, logic, rationality – the rules of grammar must
be present. Exceptions to these requirements exist
in...puns, parables, and, of course, poetry. In...these...
humans push against the boundary of language by
engaging in language that often is neither rational,
logical, predictable or ordered. It is sometimes even
noncomprehensible...[p]oetry comes the closest to
this latter type of communication...pushing against
the boundaries of language.... So....the imperative for
me [as a poet] was to move beyond representation....
[which] would have meant ordering an experience
which was disordered (and can never be ordered)
irrational illogical and unpredictable; it would have

meant doing a second violence, this time to the memory of an already violent experience.

In *Zong!*, then, Philip works at the intimate micro-site of each word, broken down as letter—as symbol/graph—to extend the spacing of a line, forcing it never to be taken for granted as a traditionally formed sentence. She embeds social critique into her words, the building blocks of her stories, told as poems, and refuses neutral or normative relationships between, for instance, digestible or arched narrative, line (lineation), and meaning. Readers are not given the luxury of comprehension, an easily digestible representation, which would be a second violence to a story beyond telling. Interactions between sound, letter, words, and space are shat/tered/sha/shatter/ed: readers are forced to inhale (be moved) at the scale of the line. Punctuation surprises. Re read. Bcse. No/thing is (neu)tral.

Rationality and grammar, good grammar, (and even taken-for-granted connections between letters and sounds) are eschewed in Philip's poetics. The visual work that words and letters do on the page is materially gesturing towards the violent content, the terrible (impossible) meaning of the story told (or refusing to be told). A new geography of (non) representation is formed, a form of righting and writing that insists the rethinking/making of violences beyond telling or even knowability.

That poetry is one form by and through which the boundaries of language can be pushed does not, as Philip makes clear, exonerate poets from critiques about their own poetics being implicated in perpetuating problematic representations, something other poets also address. For instance, translator, editor, and experimental poet Anna Moschovakis, whose recent award-winning text *You and three others are approaching a lake* tackles global capitalism, commodity culture, greed, lust, and human violence (issues also important to critical feminist geographers), writes:

It began:

- 1: Life is not fair.
- 2: How can I be happy while others suffer
- 3: How can I not be happy while others suffer...

I have been attracted to the idea that naming is a form of violence but does that mean we should go around calling everyone *Hey You*

which seems like another sort of violence even though it is a way of recognizing the other as other

What can be said on this point?

(Moschovakis 2011, 35)

The impossibility of language as a tool—its ultimate failure and disappointment, especially when confronting terrors of global capitalism and commodity culture, which brutalize and reduce humans and non-humans in ways Moschovakis refuses as normal or forgettable—must then always be made visible through the tool itself, through the act of graphing and forming language as written expression. The very ways that stories are told, at the scale of letters (symbol/graphing) and words, especially through writing, can open up (or conversely risk closing down) spaces through which to make and convey new meanings that may inspire new critical modes of actions or even ways of thinking about action. For instance, Cole, an Indigenous academic who refuses to write as a writer—especially as a scholarly academic writer vested in writing academic stories in writerly ways—transforms language into motion, into an on-the-page canoe journey through sound and lineation, into physical strokes across page-space, writing of his own writing: “welcome to the sound of running water ideo morphic ortho graphies.../it would be advisable that while we are in motion/that you not stand up as we journey” (Cole 2002, 447). He closes his 14-page article (published in the decidedly academic *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*), written in the form of a long poem: “I speak with the assembled tree nations to a particular tree/asking permission to use part of its clothing its body its spirit/as a vehicle for my journey of words ideas intentions actions feeling/as a companion/paddle paddle paddle/ swoooooooosshhh” (Cole 2002, 459).

How to reform language, poetically, as action, as a means of conveying new kinds of meaning, refusing it as a tool to convey logic and rationality about violence and erasures, geographies that should not be rationalized or normalized? Boundary-expanding poet and performer Wayde Compton also takes this question up, drawing on Mary Louise Pratt's (1991) “contact zone”—a concept of messiness and collaboration—to produce word/sound/poetry/

calls focusing on Black cultures and communities in Western Canada. These geographies, argues Compton, particularly when poetically interpreted in ways defying easy translation and smooth consumption by especially White non-Indigenous settler subjects, have unique values because they allow “oblique forms of blackness” on the margins to incite and demand new stories and, importantly, new forms of telling those stories (Compton 2010, 13). By re/forming (re-tooling) language so it confronts racism and settler colonialism, Compton’s *The Contact Zone Crew* (a hip-hop sound poetry project) directly responds to Pratt’s call for “pedagogical arts of the contact zone [including] ... ways to move *into and out of* rhetorics of authenticity; ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the all-important concept of *cultural mediation*” (Pratt 1991, 40, emphasis in original).

Similar to Cole, Philip, and Moschovakis, Compton’s stories/poetry formally disrupt smooth comprehension, using abstracted lineation, absence, silence, repetition (nothing, nothing), and juxtaposed rhyme (balled, lo/crisscrossed) to unsettle—both as sound poetry, on the page, and through writing/graphing—the erasure, or (equally problematic) the White settler naivety, about Black presence(s) in colonial Canadian cities:

When_____ take_____ pictures of _____,
 there are no people there;
 the decay will speak for itself. Nothing
 in the city is older than space. Nothing
 closer than time. Muted. Eight
 balled, lo,
 crisscrossed
 and fameless, half-named,
 enghosted: False
 Creek to
 _____? (Compton 2004, 113)

Broken Breaking Interlude. Break.

Put these. In your my your my your. Mouth. In your my your mind. If you cannot say them, is it because we have made them ~~unsayable~~? If you cannot remember them, is it because we have rendered them not worth ~~remembering~~? Let this. Let this. Let this. Hurt. It will always hurt less for you me you me. Than for those who live. The hurt. Gitwink-sihlkw, Kitwanga, Gitlaxt’aamiks, Laxgalts’ap, Wet’suwet’en, Gitsegukla, Skidegate, Metlakatla,

Gingolx, Chindemash, Kleanza, Kitselas, Kispiox, Lheidli T’enneh, Hagwilget. Hold. These in. Your mouth. On my tongue. These are places with beauty. Beyond. Telling. They will not break. We have tried. We try. And now. Try this: Ramona William. Ramona. Ramona. Gloria Moody. Lana Derrick. Lana Derrick. Tamara Chipman. Rebecca Guno, Nisga’a First Nation. Olivia William. Born in Burns Lake from the Lake Babine First Nation. Alberta Williams. Found 37km east of Prince Rupert near the Tye Overpass, s/t/r/a/n/g/l/e/d (no let your eyes pass easily over that word) and sexually assaulted (inhale, hurt, inhale, hurt). Aielah Saric Auger. Age 14. Found dead (what if this was you me our child mother sister us?) in a ditch on Highway 16 near Tabor Mountain, 20 km east of Prince George.

Put. These. Put these. Put put put these in our mouths. Do not. Take. For granted. This. Must. Change.

Geohumanities and our creative re/turn: How to re/present re/form geographic writing

While critical anti-colonial geographers are actively involved in thinking through decolonization and colonial violence, geography is also in the midst of a creative re-turn, a re-turn that questions the very forms and structures by and through which we make geographic meaning, knowledge, or create the geographies in which we live (Hawkins 2013; Marston and de Leeuw 2013). As noted by Last (2012), geographers engage in experimental political geographies that distance themselves from “reductive forms of testing” (707) and are instead marked by pushing “the limitations of current conventions of representation and knowledge-making” (708). These include “embedding new forms of citizen involvement in institutional processes [and] questioning disciplinary boundaries through the use of [for instance] poetry in academic writing” (Last 2012, 707). Geographers, then, are searching for “new ways of approaching the vital ... ‘livingness’ of the world, in a context of which the modality of life is politically and technologically molten” (Whatmore 2006, 600). As public discussion about reconciliation in Canada grows, as mainstream media and various civic structures express concern about anti-Indigenous racism and colonial violence

(Galloway 2016; Mas 2016), relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous settlers constitute a molten modality of life, one that requires new forms of representation and knowledge-making practices—which, in turn for geographers, might be informed and driven by creative practices.

As geographers, we are also fundamentally writers. Writing, or practices of geo-graphing are thus at the centre of the creative turn in our discipline. The creative re-turn may provide space for us to realize/unleash the potential of a new geohumanities that celebrates disciplinary border crossings. Geohumanities and the creative re-turn provide opportunities for a myriad of creative artists to produce work about space and place, reinforcing for geographers that our work is historically embedded in a discipline that has long understood studies of the geo (earth) as always embracing traditions outside and beyond strict disciplinary constructs (Cresswell et al. 2015; Dear 2015). With this in mind, geographers are increasingly documenting that words and texts, as ontological phenomena themselves, can evoke experience and affective attunements, can “enable readers to feel the texture...of encounters...on their pulse and their nervous systems” (Harriet and Straughan 2015, 114).

In this way, geographers are expanding the kinds of stories we tell. We are paying renewed attention to ways those stories are told, and we are *producing* creative literary work instead of simply using or drawing from it. Increasingly, we are arguing for a refocusing on the craft of writing as a means of expressing affective and deeply felt orientations to places, landscapes, and the spaces of our lives (Wylie 2009; Lorimer and Parr 2014). And in producing poetry (see Cresswell 2013, 2015; de Leeuw 2013, 2015; Magrane and Cokinos 2016) or visual and sound art (Driver et al. 2002; Foster and Lorimer 2007; Hawkins 2013; Kanngieser 2015), or curating and co-producing with artists (Driver 2012), geographers are also responding to a long lineage of geographers (e.g., Meinig 1983; Watson 1983; Cosgrove 1978) who have called for geographers to become artists, to produce creative expressions, to acknowledge that “life [itself] will reside in poetry” (Hawkins and Straughan 2015, 96). This is a concept dating back decades in geography, when Watson (1983, 391–392) observed that “geography without [poetic] passion is about as alive as a body without blood—ready for the gravediggers ... We ought to say ... not only—this is what it looks like, but, this is

how I feel it ... [It is] the poet who gets to the real issues [of geography], because [s]he is of them. [S]he voices them as prime experience.”

Still, while there is admittedly a growing amount of poetic work at play in geography, almost none of the creative geographic writing circulating within geohumanities or the creative re-turn tackles the ways that writing might work to not tell, to un-tell, or to break the traditions of telling so as to narrate and undertake geo-graphing in radically and new critical ways, including ways that open new spaces through which to consider colonial violence in a moment—in Canada, in particular—of truth and reconciliation (remember here not forget truth, reaching for some kind of truth, it is about truth and reconciliation, truth—writing truth, truths, and perhaps there can never be a truth, singular). Indeed, despite evidence about the power of (especially colonial) stories to order violence, to make sense and transmit understandings of the world that legitimate, produce, and solidify colonial power and geographies (Cameron 2015), geographers have yet to creatively rework or re/form, in any sustained fashion, the ways we tell our (especially academic and scholarly) stories about colonialism and colonial violence. In other words, geographers have not pushed the boundaries of our own story-language, our own predisposition for order and logic, either structurally at the scale of letters and individual words and sentences or through sound or lineation or repetition or rhythm and rhyme or formalities of poetry, or by engaging language that is neither rational, logical, predictable, or ordered. Geographers have yet to produce a geo-graphing scholarship about colonial violence that, as Philip (2008) calls for, moves beyond linear “sensical” representation: a scholarship or writing that ceases seeking to make sense, that reaches for representational modes that are *not* rational, logical, or predictable, that stops trying to order the experience of colonial violence that was and is disordered (and can never be ordered).

In this way, geographers may be at risk of doing a second violence to the memory and contemporary reality of an already violent experience (see again Philip 2008). While geographers are certainly producing and working with creative work to extend the boundaries of geographic knowledge, while we are producing myriad literary and visual arts to explore different ways of representing the geo and the molten livingness of the world, our academic

and scholarly geographic stories about colonial violence (especially when written about by non-Indigenous geographers) seem to slip into stories that are ordered, rational, logical—and ultimately predictable. For notable exceptions of geographers experimenting with *forms of stories*, beyond geo/poets cited above, see also Tamas (2009). For remarkable embodied story-scholarship produced by Indigenous geographers in Canada, see Hunt (2014).

What, then, does it mean to break the formalities of academic and scholarly writing, in part by evoking poetic traditions, so that language/word/sentence (space silence gap between words) become tools unto themselves for unsettling the very means by which we (especially non-Indigenous settler geographers) produce knowledge about colonial violence? How do geographers—particularly Canadian geographers in a post-TRC time and place—re/form the stories that need to be told and untold and told/not-told about decolonization, anti-colonialism, colonial violence, reconciliation, and truth?

Break. Break. Breaking.

If I say LeJac. If I say Rose Prince. If I say Angel Tea, please conjure her smoke voice telling me about the sweet tea milky cloud ivory, the tea made by the mother of the hitchhiking woman I pick up on the side of the highway. If I say daughter sister niece cousin aunty. If I say child. If I say (read this out loud, say this, words in your body, out of your body say them) if I say Salmon Berry and Slide Alder and Engelmann Spruce and if I say down at your local Walmart and if I say at the Ford and Dodge dealership, if I say at the Gas Station, if I say a child with hands clinging to a fridge handle, being removed for his good, if I say moose hide and Costco, if I say found in a gravel pit and if I say Red Cedar next to serial killer, and if I say raven and oolican and I say headwaters and if I say grandmother and if I say friend and if I say bear and Indian Reserve and quad and fiddlehead and lily root and if I say nothing and if I say who I love and if I say there are boys hanging themselves with bright green garden hoses and if I say songs and drums and if I say soapberry and if I say I have no idea and if I say everywhere and if I say elderberry bright red and if I say blood line and if I say houses and artists and blankets and cans of soup and white baseball socks at a potlatch and if I say nothing and if there is ocean and river and forest and if we are

impossible like wind like sharp never ending hurt like what we have in our gut a bite, like sorrow, like current tide sky a shift, the shore a shift a shaking shift, fumbling, if I say a shift how do I say, how do I say write shift write shift shift, how do we write right?

Some (un)conclusions (and poetics)

Broad agreement exists between social scientists (including geographers) and Indigenous activists, communities, and scholars about the need to think and be differently in geographies that continue to privilege colonial systems and, consequently, enable violences against Indigenous peoples (Shaw et al. 2006; Johnson et al. 2007; Sundberg 2014). As activist critical feminist, queer, anti-racist scholars—including Indigenous scholars who take up radical questions of intersectionality and violence in Indigenous communities—have long called for, and are continuing to call for, we need new and different stories (new moves and movements) about colonial violence in Canada and all that White heteronormative patriarchal settler colonialism privileges and, consequently sublimates and violates (Walia and Smith 2013; Hunt 2014; Hunt and Holmes 2015). We need new forms of stories, we need re-formed writing, writing that works to right, writing that refuses the very forms, the graphings, that have assisted in building the colonial violence pervading so many geographies, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

We need these new forms of geo-graphing the same way that early feminist geographers like Suzanne Mackenzie needed new methods and methodologies that moved beyond quantitative positivist geographies devoid of women, bereft of women's everyday lives and voices. We need, I think, to ask ourselves about the writing we make, as geographers invested in geographic ways of understanding the world. This is not to say we must do away with established ways of writing, nor is it to say that all geographers must suddenly take up a modality of poetry—indeed, as other geographer-poets have observed, it is no easy task to become as good at poetry as we might be at scholarly academic writing (see Cresswell 2014). We Canadian geographers exist in a post-Truth and Reconciliation time and space: we simultaneously exist in spaces of ongoing colonial violence. We have been called to take responsibility, to think about the truths of

colonial violence, to commit to reconciliation. We might thus need, perhaps more than ever, new ways of telling—telling through stories and telling in ways beyond stories and telling stories that work differently—that both refuse and intervene into existing storied structures and that open new spaces for ways of knowing and being that re-word and re-form, that undertake a new form of geographing reaching toward an always open-ended reconciling world.

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