

Archives Undone: Towards a Poethics of Feminist Archival Disruptions*

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ABSTRACT

This article uses archive theory and Joan Retallack's notion of the poethical wager to read Rachel Zolf's Janey's Arcadia as an interruption and disruption of the ongoing violences of settler-colonial forms of archival narrative. Specifically, I am interested in Rachel Zolf's poetic irruptions of the settler-colonial representations of Indigenous peoples and lands in her experimental feminist collection Janey's Arcadia: *Errant Adventures in Ultima Thule*.



“Come! Let us construct a national literature for Canada, neither British nor French nor Yankeeish, but the offspring and heir of the soil, borrowing lessons from all lands, but asserting its own title throughout all!” (Thomas D’Arcy McGee “A National Literature for Canada,” 1857)

“I think a stalwart peasant in a sheep-skin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality.” (Clifford Sifton, “Only Farmers’ Need Apply: The Immigrants Canada Wants,” 1922)

“Q: ‘Do you experience any dread of the Indigns?’

A: ‘I have no fear of Indigns, for I have never seen one.’” (Rachel Zolf, “What the Women Say of the Canadian North-West: The Indign Question?” *Janey’s Arcadia: Errant Adventures in Ultima Thule*, 2014)

This is an article about witnessing, about the ways that seeing is structured by institutions such as archives and their organization,¹ and about how disruption can, sometimes, focus our eyes on what has been remaindered —left out through acts of violent omission— of the archive. Specifically, this is an article that, as Ann Laura Stoler puts it, situates the archive as a product of colonial expectations and conjurings. Stoler suggests we can learn something important from colonial archives about “the nature of imperial rule and the dispositions it engendered from writerly forms through which it was managed, [and] how attentions were trained and selectively cast” (1). While Stoler’s focus is on the archives of Dutch civil servants, and mine is on the archival impulses evident in settler-colonial Canadian literature, her observations hold. What I am interested in, here, is first to think about how representations of Indigenous peoples in Canada got circulated, sedimented, and circumscribed in a White settler-colonial imaginary, and then to focus on how interruptions or, as Foucault calls them, *irruptions*, can productively cut into those seemingly immobile archives. Specifically, I am interested in Rachel Zolf’s poetic irruptions

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1 I am interested, here, in the useful slippages between the archive as institution (ie. Library and Archives Canada, the Glenbow Archives, etc.) and archives as *institutionalized* materials collected together.

of the settler-colonial representations of Indigenous peoples and lands in her experimental feminist collection *Janey’s Arcadia: Errant Adventures in Ultima Thule*. But perhaps I am getting ahead of myself.

A poet of experimentations and scholar of Classical texts and cultures, Anne Carson has written that she prefers to examine two things “by way of three” (*Eros the Bittersweet*). For Carson, this triangulated looking creates a geometric relationship that moves the eye from one term to another. If at first the relationship between the two terms is not revealed, then introducing a third term to the equation may, perhaps, sharpen the relationship in unexpected and illuminating ways. I like this strategy because it makes its limitations plain: if you are examining two things side by side, the introduction of a third is always supplementary, peripheral, blurred, remaindered. It is there, holding up the structure of relations, but you cannot look at it directly. Carson uses this strategy to crack open genres across time and space. I borrow her strategy to think about the ongoing violence of White settler-colonialism in Canada. Moreover, Carson’s “two things by way of three” bears significant resonance with a tactic Zolf employs in her earlier texts and her unpublished PhD dissertation. In an interview with Brian Teare, Zolf describes the process as introducing the notion of the “third” in which she asks how the “ethical two of the self-other relation get[s] interrupted by the three of the political? ... It is an impersonal third – or more. I think of it as multiplicity that interrupts ethics,” she writes. “So how politics interrupts ethics and destabilizes politics and destabilizes ethics” (Teare np). For Zolf, the impersonal third of the political is irruptive. It brings with it the possibility of displacing the I-you relationship of discursive modes of relating. In that displacement is the possibility of a radical refiguring of ethical engagement. I employ the methodology of the political “third” in Zolf’s parlance, or examining “two things by way of three” in Carson’s, from the outset of this article: I have opened with epigraphs from Thomas D’Arcy McGee, Clifford Sifton, and Rachel Zolf to try and sketch that triangle of witnessing, messy lines and all. From McGee, “Canada’s first nationalist,”² we see the narrowed and deliberate reach for an origin story. For McGee, a national literature whose aim is the telling of Canada, is a singular project. In “asserting its own title,” this national literature would work to literally cover its tracks.³ Neither British nor French nor Yankeeish. Neither Mi’kmaq, on whose territories I sit as I write, nor any other Indigenous perspective. From Sifton, Minister of the Interior credited with the aggressive push to bring immigrants to Western Canada, we get a narrative of the kinds of bodies the state desired in 1922. In his short

2 Richard Gwyn, *John A: The Man Who Made Us, Vol I*. Vintage Canada, 2008; pg. 217.

3 Terry Goldie’s explanation of how settler-colonials make themselves “native” to newly-colonized land works well here. Semiotic control, or the harnessing of certain narrative fictions—in this case, of belonging, ownership, and rootedness.

treatise, “The Immigrants Canada Wants,” Sifton writes on behalf of the Laurier government of the “appropriate” immigrants for Canada. “Appropriateness” and desirability meant, here, farmers and their wives who could add to the production of the country, solve the “railway problem,” and help pay the national debt. Rather than cover colonialism’s tracks, in this small excerpt we see Sifton trying to pay for those tracks and put them to use. Which brings us to Zolf’s question and answer. Both the question and the answer are instructive textual versions which can trace their origins to the Canadian Pacific Railway-issued pamphlet “What the Women Say of the Canadian North-West” (1886). Both question and answer are misreadings of the source document, which is intended as a pamphlet to encourage White settlers—and especially White women—to settle the prairies.⁴ The original pamphlet has been scanned and run through Optical Character Recognition Software (OCR), a software notorious in its early years for its glitch-ridden translation/transcription. The glitches that emerge in Zolf’s poetic text stand in for stories that have been erased and effaced by settler-colonial violence and projects of assimilation and annihilation of Indigenous peoples and cultures.⁵

The “glitch” as typographical and theoretical interruption offers a way of seeing what is taken as a given from another angle, and thus question its validity. *Janey’s Arcadia* is rife with glitches. Beginning with the cover image, which cites the cover of the 1930 issue of *Canada West—The New Homeland*, Zolf’s text signals its own glitch-ridden archival action. The cover image mirrors the immigration pamphlet that was distributed in Europe by the federal Department of Immigration and Colonization but makes some subtle and significant alterations. The small sticker used to indicate catalogue information is, upon examination, disruptive. It reads

SUE DIRE
Honour
CHAR STEW
ACTING SINISTER
OF IMMIGRA
N COLONIZA
EGA!
PUT IN
WA CAN



Fig. 1: Close-up of cover image glitch

Here, the language of cataloguing is itself displaced and glitched, allowing the sinister actions of the Ministry of Immigration and Colonization to rise to the fore. The opening poem, “Janey’s Invocation,” redoubles Zolf’s glitched settler-colonial archive. The poem hugs the left-hand margin and at first appears to adhere to the traditional conventions of lyric voice: “Infallible settlers say this is the latest season/ they have known.” The opening line of the poem, part invocation, part ecological lament, situates the settler-speaker as both infallible and in control of the narrative. Quickly, though, the human transmission of lyric voice falls apart:

An insidious, slow-moving process
is at work in the trees – one that spells from death
-car to drive more slowly unto drouth-world. The wine
of spring aflush on the face THE COPS- FIND- 2 J3<3
I H.^\\Hn is a Goad of Death Gourd of chanqts Takt
Life is totally totally lonely of Nature. Dearth is
the only reality we’ve got in out nicey-nicey-
clean-ice-cream-TV scraps, so we’d better worship
the long wall of skulls next to the ball park. (from “Janey’s Invocation,” 9)

Janey as lyric speaker is displaced by the glitched text which, as Heather Milne notes, forces the reader immediately into a position of reckoning over how hard to work to “read

4 The full title of the pamphlet, which was published by the Canadian Pacific Railway, is “What Women Say of the Canadian North-West: A Simple Statement of the Experience of Women Settled in All Parts of Manitoba and the North-West Territories.” Published in 1886 by Blackwell in London, the pamphlet was specifically targeted to White women readers considering immigration with their families. As Heather Milne argues, the presence of White women “was perceived as key to the ‘civilizing’ mission of colonization and Canadian nation-building—to reduce mixed-race marriages between White men and Indigenous women and to reduce rates of prostitution” (206).

5 Though it is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth considering the ways in which Zolf’s poetic form will be affected—as well as readings of it—as OCR technology gets better.

the unreadable glitch” (205). The infallibility of settlers is troubled by the “insidious and slow-moving process” that glitches not just lands, but lives. The glitch of colonial settlement is the foundation from which this text questions the archive.

Laurent Berlant has written that glitches can function as crucial and instructive scenes of activity. Milne, reading Berlant alongside Jacques Derrida, proposes that we might read the glitch as both a site of breakdown and, simultaneously, of meaning-making (204). Zolf’s glitches interrupt settler narratives and, in so doing, participate in the growing archive of what Gillian Roberts calls “alterations of literary representation” by non-Indigenous poets.⁶ In this epigraph taken from Zolf’s collection, the people about whom the question is asked —Indigns— are not there: they are a typo, a misrecognition, a glitch in the software of witness. Even the title, “What Women Say of the Canadian North-West: The Indign Question?,” with its superscripted question mark, undermines the attempt at a singular and holistic narrative. The question becomes a footnote within the text, an editorial pointer directing the reader elsewhere, outside of narrative totality. Taken together these triangulated epigraphs train our eyes to what gets left out in attempts to archive a national narrative. Take these epigraphs in lieu of an introduction. Take them instead as a poethical wager.

* * *

A wager is an attempt, and, as Joan Retallack writes, a wager is a kind of essay, if we remember that an essay, *essayer*, is also an attempt.⁷ “Essays, like poems and philosophical meditations, should elude our grasp,” Retallack writes. They should elude our grasp because “their business is to approach the liminal spectrum of near-unintelligibility/immediate experience complicating what we thought we knew” (48). In other words, an essay is a wager insofar as the writer risks being misunderstood. To be unintelligible, for Retallack, is itself a wager. Moreover, Retallack is interested in a *poethical* wager: a wager that risks unintelligibility through a fusion of ethics and poetics. What I am writing here is a wager that takes the form of an essay, and it is an essay that engages with the question of

6 Roberts points to settlement as a central focus of Anglo-Canadian literature beginning with writers such as Frances Brooke, John Richardson, Catharine Parr Traill, and Susanna Moodie. Her insightful argument goes on to demonstrate that there has been a notable shift in both Anglo-settler literary criticism (cf. Coleman, Fee, Razack, Mackey) and, most significantly for Roberts’ article, in Anglo-Canadian poetry. I’m indebted to her thinking here.

7 For more on essays as attempts see Stephen Collis’s *Almost Islands* (2018); or, go back further, Michel de Montaigne has much to say on the essay as form, including that he indulged in the form as an exercise to apprehend his own mind (“Preface” *Essay* snp.).

unintelligibility and erasure. I will risk, for the moment, the possibility that those two things —unintelligibility and erasure— can co-exist. What I mean is, I wager that *unintelligibility* can be a poethical wager and not just a tool of alienation.

As I have mentioned, the system I focus on in this article is the archive.⁸ The text that trains our eyes and ears to some of the erasures enacted by colonial violence in both the past and the present is *Janey’s Arcadia* by Rachel Zolf. More specifically, I suggest we read Zolf’s irruption of the settler-colonial archive as a poethical wager —what Retallack suggests is a “thickening of poetics.” Here is how Retallack explains that evocative phrase. She writes, “Poetics without an h has primarily to do with questions of style. Style is the manner in which your experience has understood, assimilated, imprinted you” (49). Style can be understood as a kind of by-product of the archival imperative, what Ann Laura Stoler suggests is evident in colonial expectations and conjurings that the archive conceals (20). For example, think of the ways in which representations of Indigenous peoples in the earliest documents of European exploration and settlement function to create hierarchies of knowledge.⁹ This “style,” Stoler explains, shows up when we try to differentiate, in the archival documents of settler-colonials, between what is unwritten because it was common knowledge amongst people at the time, and what was unwritten because it was beyond the bounds of the articulable. In other words, what is unwritten because it was known to all, and what is unwritten because it was impossible under the weight of corrupt codes of “civility” requisite to the colonial project? These indecipherable “imperial dispositions,” as Stoler calls them, get naturalized. They become shorthand. They are indicative of a particular style of colonial praxis in a particular context and history.

In the context of reading and troubling the archives of settler-colonial narratives, how do we move from poetics to poethics? For Retallack, one’s poethical work commences “when you no longer wish to shape materials (words, visual elements, sounds) into legitimate progeny of your own poetics. When you are released from filling in the delimiting forms [...] If you persist, patterns in your work may become more flexible, permeable, conversational,

8 Several scholars have written compelling arguments on Zolf’s *Janey* that focus primarily on interruptions and glitches in the source text. In addition to the work of Gillian Roberts, I owe a debt of intellectual gratitude —beyond citation at the end of this paper— to the work of Heather Milne, Jane Boyes, and Max Karpinski. I’m sure by the time this is published I will owe more gratitude.

9 See for example Sugars & Moss, Goldie, Fee, Simpson, Vowel, and Hunt and Stevenson on narrative style, representation, and the instruments of settler-colonialism. Using specific examples these authors underscore the ways in which European explorers and settler-colonials employed technologies such as mapping alongside figurative language to translate strange experiences into tropes familiar to the readership at home in Europe.

exploratory” (38). In *Janey’s Arcadia*, Zolf enacts a thickened poetics. Though she draws on archival documents and systems of organizing and re-presenting information, she does not *simply* delimit or reproduce forms of representation. *Janey’s Arcadia* is also a porous text. It reveals its own messy engagement with histories and systems of oppression without laying claim on the poetic texts that emerge. The archives are—at least partially—undone.¹⁰

* * *

Archives are not stable entities. Instead, they represent a series of choices that are inextricably linked to access—or restricted access—to power. Carolyn Steedman reminds us that European archives were “created to solidify first monarchical and then state power” (67). Nothing happens in archives, Steedman writes. She does not mean to imply that there is no work done by archivists. The work of indexing, cataloguing, and so forth is the work of a kind of narrative-making that informs the curious “discovery” narratives of scholars in the archives. For Steedman it is the ways in which the materials get placed into narrative contexts which move beyond the archive that is of especial concern (65–66). In an adjacent manner, Jacques Derrida traces the origins of western archives to ancient Greece where he links their inception to the rule of law. More on this later. Michel Foucault describes the archive not as a “sum of all texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past,” but rather as “the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” (128–9). For Foucault, the concept of an archive is that which defines from its commencement what is sayable (enunciable). So, what if you’re not deemed “enunciable” by the system? What if, in other words, you are unintelligible? Illegible? What then?

Archives are troublesome for those of us who inhabit vectors rarely frequented by power. That is not to say that an archive itself is inherently problematic, but rather that an archive can be wielded as a tool of selective remembering at best, and oppression and erasure at worst, especially when considered in the formation of settler-colonial histories and narratives (or fantasies) of nation. Diana Taylor has written extensively about the negative effects of privileging a colonial archive that privileges the written word and the textual document over oral history, ritual, and performance:

¹⁰ Or, taking up the themes of this special issue, the archives re/presented in *Janey’s Arcadia* counter and are counter to dominant settler-colonial discourses of sovereignty that depend, as Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson writes, on the “death and so-called ‘disappearance’ of Indigenous women in order to secure [Canada’s] sovereignty” (2016).

Since the Conquest, colonial epistemology has privileged writing to the extent that nonscripted forms of knowing have been equated with disappearance[...] The ethnographer’s aim, both in the 16th and early 20th centuries, was to make visible—through writing—the ways of life that had disappeared from view, went unremarked when there was no writing. (“Performance and/as History” 72)

That is to say that written forms of knowledge were celebrated and stored as archivable documents, whereas nonscripted forms of knowledge were left out of the settler-colonial archiving practice. This reification of written text has had significant effects on both literary archives and cultural memory archives in places like Canada. Smaro Kamboureli has written extensively of the multifaceted effects of narrativizing a singular national identity. Kamboureli’s work demonstrates some of the ways that Canadian Literature has expanded to consider “those relationships between literature and the body politic that have been rendered invisible or contained, and thus suppressed” (3). Taking a similar subject from a different angle, Himani Bannerji calls into question the ways in which diasporic subjects—mainly women—have been represented in narratives of nation under the auspices of multicultural policy.¹¹ So, as Julie Rak, Hannah McGregor, and I suggest in *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, “writing in Canada—the kinds we might consider literary, as well as other kinds of writing, such as narratives by explorers, diaries by farm women, works about geology or botany, school textbooks, and settler advice manuals—has always been tied to a colonial project of nationhood. And so, when we talk about writing in Canada, and CanLit especially, we are also always talking about the legacy of colonialism here on these lands” (19). These legacies, we argue, are pernicious. Rather than develop half-lives, many of these legacies permeate national imaginaries. While much compelling work has been done to consider the effects of these colonial narratives as hauntings, as fantasies, and as civilities, I think there is an additional use to considering their archival qualities, as well.¹²

Working to “disinter the ways in which History has shaped Memory,” Carolyn Steedman proffers that the archive is a good place to focus our thinking (66). While the archive has enjoyed a theoretical turn,¹³ Steedman focuses instead on the material objects of the archive as such:

¹¹ For a sustained and detailed analysis of this subject, see Eva Darias-Beautell’s *Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts: Narratives of English Canada*. 2018.

¹² An exhaustive list is beyond the scope of a footnote. See for example work by Cynthia Sugars, Gerry Turcotte et al, Laura Moss, Christine Kim, Sophie McCall, and Melinda Baum Singer, Sherene Razack, M. NourbeSe Philip, and Daniel Coleman.

¹³ See, for example, Derrida, Foucault, Cvetkovitch and in the Canadian context Antwi, Morra and Schagerl, and Vernon.

The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past *and* from the mad fragments that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there [...] And *nothing happens to this stuff, in the archive*. It is indexed and catalogued —though some of it is unindexed and uncatalogued, and parts of it are lost. But as stuff, it just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativized. (67 *italics in original*)

Steedman's point —that the textual matter of an archive needs people to use or story it— dovetails with Stoler's observations about specifically colonial archives. "The pulse of the archive and the forms of governance that it belies are in the finished reports and in the process of their making," writes Stoler (19). By looking at archival forms we can begin to apprehend "deeply epistemic anxieties" in the colonial ordering of things (*ibid*). Moreover, as Linda Morra writes, archives and archival systems are especially complicated for women, people of colour, and all those who are unintelligible to the state. "The visibility of female citizens is dependent upon the preservation of their socio-political and cultural traces," writes Morra. "Since there are multiple ways of connecting with the state, these traces determine the kind of visibility a citizen might assume" (3). Morra differentiates between what she calls arrested and unarrested archives. Drawing out Foucault's assertion that archives set the terms for what is sayable, and by whom, Morra then turns to Derrida's framing of the archive as commencement and commandment. Derrida articulates it this way: the meaning of 'archive' comes from "the Greek *arkeion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons* who commanded" (2). The key, as Morra points out, is the association between those who held "signified political power" and, in so holding, had the "right to make or to represent the law. It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place" (2). Archives are paradoxical as both a concept and a concrete object; the archive is action in the same moment that it is a container, "commencement, as well as [...] commandment" (2). An arrested archive, in Morra's framing, is thus an archive that

sanctions and renders visible certain individuals, but also vigilantly controls those records with which individuals are associated. A second meaning of the word carries negative valences and is conjured up by the first: to 'capture, seize, lay hold upon, or apprehend by legal authority' either papers or persons. The contradiction embedded in this practice is related to the fact that the place of privilege from which legal power emanates was associated with confinement and even criminality; the same place that therefore empowers male subjects is also the one to which family members

and servants, but particularly women, had been habitually consigned —the private sphere. (10)

If we agree —and I do— with Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, who writes that Canada "requires the death and so-called disappearance of Indigenous women in order to secure its sovereignty," then we would do well to carefully scrutinize who is rendered visible in the settler-colonial archives of Canada.

* * *

In the case of the archives Zolf re/presents in *Janey's Arcadia* it is White settler women who are, at first glance, rendered "visible." In the collection, which employs some of the tactics of conceptual poetry, Janey Canuck is the reader's settler-colonial interlocutor.¹⁴ She can be confusing. As one reviewer wrote, "by the end of *Janey's Arcadia* (especially after the six pages of end notes written by Zolf), I wonder why the book even needs 'Janey.' I understand the distancing of the author from the lyric 'I' that Janey offers, but, in a project about racism, colonization, and settlement where the writer, Rachel Zolf, is so integral to the problems the book investigates, what real purpose does Janey-as-persona serve?" (Rhodes *np.*). I think, though, this review demonstrates an important misrecognition that is central to Zolf's poethical wager. The purpose Janey serves is not as a mask for Zolf, but rather as a reminder of the intersectional reverberations of colonial and patriarchal violence.

Janey is, in Zolf's words, a "savage, fleshy rendezvous between Janey Canuck that plucky White-supremacist settler concocted by Emily Murphy, and punk pirate Kathy Acker's guerilla icon Janey Smith" (*Janey's Arcadia* 117). Murphy's Janey is a mask behind which to speak her own hyper-racist visions of eugenics on the one hand, while lobbying for certain women (read White and with access to certain kinds of legible agency such as capital) to be legally recognized as Persons by the state, on the other.¹⁵ Yet, while some recuperative scholarship has been done to cast light on Murphy's violent colonialist politics, she is undoubtedly one of those individuals rendered visible by the state. Her

¹⁴ Zolf has said of her poetics that while she is influenced by conceptualism she resists its categorization because it is so often a poetic form that divests itself from a relationship to politics. Zolf writes, "normally I'd never want to be part of a group that would have me as a member but on reflection...I do see resonances [in conceptual writing] with my own practice...So, while I haven't been attracted to the structuralist statements of a certain spokesman for the Conceptual Writing Phenomenon...one could say ragpicker Zolf thinks in excessive correspondences and practices as an impure post-conceptualism" ("untitled note" 440)

¹⁵ See, for example in addition to Milne and Roberts, work by Devereaux and Henderson.

memorialization, along with Nellie McClung, on the Canadian fifty-dollar bill makes this plain. By contrast, Acker's Janey Smith is a ten-year-old narrator who has been sold into the sex trade by her ex-boyfriend, who is also her father. Janey has been fucked up by the system and she knows it. In her pillaging, plundering, and plagiarizing of other texts she revels in revealing the fakery of safe and totemic systems. This Janey's archive is, in Morra's language, an unarrested one. Neither private nor subordinate, Acker's Janey bucks every stereotype and gives the double finger to the patriarchal systems that tried to enslave her in the first place.

The result is our interlocutor of the text: "Janey Settler-Invasion, a fracked-up, mutant possibly cyborg squatter progeny, slouching not towards Bethlehem, but towards the Red River Colony aka 'Britain's One Utopia,' in the company of 'white slave' traders" (*Janey's Arcadia* 117). A hybrid creation borne of two White women writers, Janey is two things by way of three, and in that triangulation a story is told of witnessing and the failures of the colonial archiving system. The result of who is rendered "visible" in *Janey's Arcadia*, then, is not so straightforward. Janey Settler-Invasion is a discomfiting narrativization created from both colonial archives and twentieth-century narrativizations of their legacies. Importantly, as Heather Milne observes, in creating Janey, Zolf has written a character who borrows, pillages, and irrupts into specifically colonial archival texts. Thus, in her interlocutor Zolf has bricolaged an archiviolithic force (Janey) who troubles her presence on lands that aren't hers, while calling attention to the violences enacted against indigenous bodies by colonial legacies, as well as the always-present spectre of gendered violence against women.

Let me unpack this by turning to one section of *Janey's Arcadia* and thinking through it in three ways. "What Women Say of the Canadian North West" was a pamphlet published by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1896. The cover page is followed by a brief introduction, and then a series of questions and answers, which are organized into sections.

The pamphlet announces its mandate as helping to answer the question "Would you recommend an emigrant to bring his wife and family with him om [sic] the old country until he has made a home leady [sic] for them?" Actually, it doesn't *quite* say that. Those typos are what happens when I cut and paste from an OCR-scanned document into a Word document. The glitches that appear in my text leave traces of the original. What you don't necessarily see (unless you look) is what has been left out through technological shifts in the processes of archiving. What does OCR do to these texts and the fact that they are available on the internet, conceptually speaking? And how do we engage with the poethical frame situated, as it is, alongside the mash-up of Janey Canuck and Janey the Pirate as interlocutor? As Roberts suggests, the "various forms of anachronism allow [Zolf's text] to



Fig. 2 "What Women Say of the Canadian North West," Canadian Pacific Railway 1846

speak simultaneously about past and present" (75). The glitches, I wager, perform a kind of archiviolence that calls attention not just to the historical violences of colonial archival practices, but also to present and future violences.

Derrida describes the archiviolithic as "mute [...] It is at work, but since it always operates in silence, it never leaves any archive of its own[...] It works *to destroy its own archive*" (*Archive Fever* 10, italics in original). An archiviolithic force is an unmarked force, one that exists outside the archive, silent insofar as it is unscripted. Poetic language, performance, and other enactments such as ritual (Taylor 67) are all rife with archiviolithic potential. Their very function is to destroy—or, at the very least, trouble—the monolithic archive as a symbol of truth. After all, though archival theorists remind us that the archive itself is neither whole nor stable, the risk of stability comes in the ways those disparate pieces and partialities get narrativized. In crafting a poetic text foraged from the glitch-ridden renderings of new archival practices, Zolf has revealed the archiviolith within the archive, and in so doing demonstrates one example of how the material stuff of archives gets re/presented in colonial narratives.

Zolf's "What Women Say of the Canadian North-West: The Indign Question?" redoubles the archiviolence of the whole source text. There are additions made to the glitched list of [predominantly White] Women Settlers *saying* things of the Canadian North-West. Interspersed between the reproduced and glitched names and answers are names that appear in greyscale rather than automatic colour.

These names, inserted alphabetically into the original list, are reproductions of the hand-scripted names of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls who irrupt throughout the entire text. In Zolf's disruption of the source document the names of these women and girls are crossed out, while the text occupying the "answers" column is comprised of poetic renderings of these women's bodily erasures. The crossed-out text witnesses erasure without reproducing it. Here's Anne Carson again, this time reflecting on the effect of the textual cross-out:

Cross-outs are something you rarely see in published texts. They are like death: by a simple stroke—all is lost, yet still there. For death *although utterly unlike life* shares a skin with it. Death lines every moment of ordinary time. Death hides right inside every shining sentence we grasped and had no grasp of. (Carson *Men in the Off Hours* 166, italics in original)

The crossed-out names and their poetic medical examiner reports pull the reader back to some of the glitches of national narratives and belonging that form the cultural imaginary

41

WHAT WOMEN SAY OF THE CANADIAN NORTH-WEST.

The question asked was : "Do you experience any dread of the Indians?"

"No" or "NONE" is the simple answer of EIGHTY-ONE women.

"No, never did," "NOT A BIT," "NOT IN THE LEAST," "NONE WHATEVER," are the replies of ONE HUNDRED AND SEVEN.

The other replies are as follows :—

Name.	Answer.
Adshead, Mrs. Rachael	No ; no Indians around here.
Alexander, Mrs. J. P. ...	No ; they are perfectly quiet and harmless.
Allison, Mrs. George ...	No ; have not seen any Indians.
Anderson, Mrs. A. H. ...	No ; have not seen an Indian for months.
Anderson, Mrs. M. G. ...	No ; there are a few Indians who excite pity and compassion, but no dread.
Armstrong, Mrs. J. ...	We do not experience any dread of the Indians.
Ballantyne, Mrs. S. ...	None whatever, the Indians are quiet here.
Bartley, Mrs. N. ...	No, none whatever.
Begg, Mrs. K. S. ...	We have no dread of the Indians, they are a very harmless people if well treated.
Bell, Mrs. Allan ...	None whatever ; I have visited these here in their tents.
Bell, Mrs. H. ...	I have had, but not now.
Bethune, Mrs. A. ...	Poor things, no. I often like to feed them when they come around. I hope the different Churches will soon have them christianised.
Blythe, Mrs. R. ...	No, not any, and live close near an Indian reserve.
Blythe, Mrs. J. M. ...	None whatever ; about as much as gipsies.
Bowman, Mrs. T. ...	None whatever ; they are hundreds of miles away.
Broadquest, Mrs. E. ...	None whatever. Have only seen two in the last five years.
Brooks, Mrs. R. L. ...	The Indians call in. but are very friendly.

Fig. 3 Canadian Pacific Railway 1846, page 41

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WHAT WOMEN SAY OF THE CANADIAN NORTH-WEST:
THE INDIGN QUESTION?



Adshead, Mrs. Rachael	No ; no Indign.4 around here.
Alexander, Mrs. J. P. ..	No ; they are perfectly quiet and harmless.
Allison, Mrs. George . .	No ; have not seen any Indigns.
Anderson, Mrs. A. H. . .	No ; have not seen tin Indign for months.
Anderson, Mrs. M. G. . .	Near the water treatment plant.
Anderson, Mrs. M. Q. . .	No ; there are a few who excite pity and compasiou, but no dread.
Armstrong, Mrs. J. . . .	We do not experience any dread of the Indigns.
Arndt, Mrs. J. . . .	Right cheek near eye - heart tautology.
Ballantyne, Mrs. S. . . .	None whatever, the Indigns are (quiet here.
Ballantyne, Mrs. S. . . .	On the way to bingo.
Ballantyne, Mrs. S. . . .	Abandoned vesicle on Fear Tree Bay.
Bartley, Mrs. N. . . .	Near the CNR 'Rivers' scapula.
Bartley, Mrs. N. . . .	Last seen by her Unix Smokie.
Bartley, Mrs. N.	No, none whatever.
Bartley, Mrs. N.	Spectre in a can of luncheon meat.
Beaulieu, Mrs. N.	A blue to the stone.
Begg, Mrs. K. S.	They are a very harmlois people if well treated.
Beggs, Mrs. K. S.	Falling to provide the necessities of life.
Bell, Mrs. Allan	None whatever; I have visited these here in their tents.
Bell, Mrs. H.	I have had, but not now.
Bethune, Mrs. A.	Poor things, no. I often like to feed them when they come around. I hope the different Churches will soon have them Ohritianised.
Blythe, Mrs. R.	A Manitoba father has been changed.
Blackburn, Mrs. R.	A foul odour in the ally for wickets.
Blythe, Mrs. R.	No, Not any, and live close near an Indignant res-rve.
Blythe, Mrs. J. M.	None whate'er ; about as much as gipsies.
Bone-Spencer, Mrs. M.	At high rite of belief exploited.
Bone-Spencer, Mrs. M.	BOON uses a canticle to walk.
Bone-Spencer, Mrs. M.	No injury available at this time.

Fig. 4 Zolf's Janey's Arcadia

of settler-colonial Canada. The original question in the CPR document asks, “Do you experience any dread of the Indians?” to which a Mrs. George Allison replies, “I have no fear of Indians, for I have never seen one” (np.). In Zolf’s text the questions and answers become increasingly uncanny:

Q: Do you experience any dread of the Indians?

A: I have no fear of Indians, for I have never seen one.

...

Allison, Mrs. George. . . . No ; have not seen any Indians.

Why has Mrs. George Allison never seen an Indigenous person? Where has she (not) been looking? What glaring absences, what “open” prairies, glitched by colonial assimilation and annihilation policies, has she misread? What damaging narratives have her archived answers perpetuated? More and less legible, the glitched text draws attention to a failure of what Karen Barad refers to as “response-ability.”

Agency is about response-ability, about the possibilities of mutual response, which is not to deny but to attend to power imbalances. Agency is about possibilities for worldly re-configurings. So agency is not something possessed by humans, or non-humans for that matter. It is an enactment. (Dolphijn and van der Turin np.)

Crucially, Barad underscores that agency “enlists ‘non-humans’ as well as ‘humans.’” For her, response-ability indicates the possibility of intervention or irruption of power imbalances, where the action need not be only human. Barad’s sense of response-ability locates agency in multiple potential places. I suggest, then, that what Zolf’s multiple glitched versions of the original archival document perform, as well as the scripted addition of grievable names, is an example of response-ability. These women’s names, written with care by others who can, line every moment of ordinary time the archive attempts to control.

Zolf’s text does not simply trouble the White-supremacist colonial archive using its own tools. Instead, I read in *Janey’s Arcadia* a sustained engagement with embodied affect as well as textual history. For Diana Taylor, from whom I borrow the concept of the repertoire, disciplines are constructed and defined in their particular relationship to their object of study (68). This becomes an additional problem for the archive when it comes to unscripted or unmarked ways of knowing. Taylor differentiates between the archive, which stores concrete textual material, and the repertoire. The repertoire, which is composed of all these objects-in-the-world in an enactment of “embodied memory,” pulls into the present all those performances and events generally understood to be contextual and

transitory. The repertoire bodies forth its ghosts, and interaction with the repertoire requires that the reader, critic, and poet refocus her looking and bear witness with these ghosts that have been remaindered by the White hetero-colonial archive. Taylor’s suggestion that the repertoire has the potential to body forth ghosts from the past reminds me of Derrida’s notion of justice to come. Indeed, the sections of hand scripted names of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls are each titled “Justice to Come.” Derrida explains the concept this way: “no justice [...] seems possible without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of oppressions of the forms of totalitarianism” (*Spectres of Marx*, xviii). This repertoire performance, this witnessing, happens in Zolf’s text through the disruptive sections entitled “Justice to Come.” These names are some of the names of Indigenous women who have gone missing or been murdered in the part of Turtle Island called Canada. The hand-scripted names refuse OCR (for the most part) and require that the reader pause over the differing handwriting, the different writing implements. These names were not written by the women themselves. Instead, they were inscribed by people who answered a call to write on behalf of the women. The “Justice to Come” sections are not auto-graphing, nor are they a reinscription of an authorial function. This is not a speaking for or an appropriation of voice, I don’t think. Rather, because of the manner in which this action was undertaken—in collaboration and consultation, and with permission—this is something powerfully different that exceeds and irrupts the flow of the settler-colonial archive.¹⁶ The names of the missing women and girls disrupt the glitchy flow of the typeset text. They demand that the reader pause. The names, I wager, are an enactment of response-ability and embodied memory that refuses the hegemonic tools of archiving while calling those tools into question.

* * *

If *Janey’s Arcadia* enacts archival disruption on the page, its extra-textual actions work to disrupt colonial ways of knowing and remembering *outside* the page as well. While Zolf has organized several extra-textual enactments of portions of *Janey’s Arcadia*, I want to close by thinking about a poly-vocal site specific action that was performed outside the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) in 2014. The action, which included reading aloud the names of Missing and Murdered Woman and Girls, took place only a few months

¹⁶ Zolf further explains in the notes section of *Janey* that the inscriptions were done by relations of the missing women and girls.

after the body of 15-year-old Tina Fontaine of Sagkeeng First Nation was recovered from the Red River, not far from the CMHR. This poly-vocal action moves from page to place, and in so doing works to disrupt space as well as memory in the colonial context.

Angela Failler suggests that we understand the possibility of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights as something that holds the potential for “hope without consolation.” She writes

Consolatory hope works both to defend against, and smooth over, painful or frustrating experiences of learning in order to produce something that can be counted as a “positive learning outcome” or, in venues like museums, a “positive visitor experience.” [...] Underneath hope’s idealization, then, is a wish for “bad affect” to disappear and “good affect” to take its place. But at what cost? What parts of human rights struggle are missed or foreclosed when people or museums are under pressure to convert feelings of despair into hope? (Failler 236)

If an institution such as the CMHR is to make meaningful change in the present, it must grapple with the failures and violences of the present in the present. In Failler’s careful analysis, the CMHR must be read as an institution that, in its aim to offer “hope for a changed world,” ultimately fails its own mission statement (CMHR 2014f). For, in stripping away any meaningful engagement with Canada’s history of violence against Indigenous peoples, it is a site that aims for consolatory hope rather than one that grapples with “difficult knowledge” in service of both the present and a better future (Britzman and Pitt).¹⁷

We might understand the cost of wishing for bad affect to disappear, in this case, as a reinscription of erasure. The museum’s failures are made manifold when we consider, following Amber Dean, the significance of the location of this edifice. Located at The Forks—the confluences of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers—the CMHR sits where Indigenous peoples have gathered for thousands of years. Despite the historical and continued significance of the site, as well as the CMHR’s mandate to “explore the subject of human rights, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, in order to enhance the public’s understanding of human rights, to promote respect for others, and to encourage reflection and dialogue,” (CMHR 2014a) the museum has been critiqued both for its silencing of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples in the past rather than critiquing it as ongoing

17 Both Failler and Amber Dean, who I draw upon imminently, utilize the concepts of “difficult knowledge” and “lovely knowledge” conceptualized by educational theorists Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt. As Failler explains, “difficult knowledge goes beyond just learning the terrible fact” of historical or ongoing violence to “the problem of *what to do* with such knowledge when it triggers our fears, confusion, aggression and/or hopelessness, bringing us up against the limits of what we may be willing or capable of understanding” (234).

in the present. While the CMHR itself remains on the whole an institution built on “lovely knowledge” rather than one dealing directly and continually with “difficult knowledge,” there is potential to disrupt its narrative. Failler offers examples of positive disruption in the form of artistic responses to the CMHR. Here, I want to add to these examples of positive disruption Zolf’s polyvocal site-specific poethical wager.

The hand-scripted names of the “Justice to Come” sections are a central focus of this poethical wager. In winter of 2014 Zolf, Katherena Vermette, Heather Milne, Colin Smith, and Ko’ona Cochrane gathered in front of the Winnipeg Museum of Human Rights simultaneously as what I will call a collective act of response-ability. This iteration of “Justice to Come” was a community project organized in 2014. Rachel Zolf explains in the endnotes that for the textual iteration, Indigenous community members in the Winnipeg area found most of the scribes to write the names of the missing and murdered Indigenous women from Manitoba. A mixture of Indigenous and ally settler folks responded to the call to inscribe names. The poly-vocal performance, filmed by Erika Macpherson with sound by Leah Decter, calls attention to and refuses the hegemony of another kind of archival process—the museum, which, as some critics have noted, leaves the impression that the museum sees a hierarchy of human suffering.¹⁸ Standing outside, on a freezing winter day, these readers push against that archival impulse with their bodies, voices, texts, and performance. After a smudging ceremony and a prayer, the performers stand in a circle facing outwards, their shoulders touching. They read simultaneously—some read the names of the missing and murdered, others read sections of “What the Women Say,” others read the excerpts from Chrystos’s work. On her website Zolf details the voices and their texts as such:

Voices: Ko’ona Cochrane, reading the names of missing and murdered Indigenous women from Manitoba, Canada, as listed in the poem “What the Women Say of the Canadian Northwest” from *Janey’s Arcadia*; Colin Smith and Rachel Zolf reading other voices from “What Women Say of the Canadian Northwest”; Katherena Vermette, reading a poem by Chrystos, “White Girl Don’t” (from the book *Not Vanishing*, Press Gang, 1988), which she has adapted in parts to apply to Winnipeg; and Heather Milne reading the poem “Vocabulary to Come” from *Janey’s Arcadia*. (“*Janey’s Arcadia* Performance”)

18 In addition to Failler’s and Dean’s analysis, other critics of the CMHR posit that the museum does not frame the Canadian treatment of Indigenous peoples as a human rights violation. Or, as Lubomyr Luciuk, a leader of a boycott movement, put it, the museum presents “an elite Olympics of genocide” (qtd. in Brean np.).

In the recording it is possible to hear both the articulations of Zolf's poetic glitches, and the grievable names of those who have been taken. Chrystos's poetry, which Vermette has adapted to address the specificity of their location in Winnipeg, moves between names and glitches, binding the two together: they are difficult knowledges bodied forth into the present and made unavoidable. Here again are two things by way of the third. Here, solidarity and shared articulation speak difficult knowledge, ongoing violence, and poetic possibility into the air and the earth of The Forks. Shoulder to shoulder the performers hold one another up, their bodies small and soft and significant against the backdrop of the CMHR. Their smallness, their fallibility as some stumble over words, their breath all disrupt erasure and forgetting, if only for the time of their enactment. This poethical wager matters, I think. It matters, the performers matter, and together they make something happen.

What is a poethical wager if it is not an exercise in response-ability? Zolf's poethical wager, undertaken in community as well as on the page, attempts to critique singular or homogenous settler-colonial narratives of nation that are reproduced in the present. Harnessing the disruptive power of glitches in order to break from the drive towards singular narratives invites other kinds of readings, writings, inscriptions, and performances—Barad's "intra-actions," perhaps. *Janey's Arcadia* does not let the reader go forth in forgetfulness. The multiple iterations and irruptions, both within and outside the text, in many hands and many voices, invite constant reconfigurations and triangulated dialectics. These enactments are imperative and disruptive ethical engagements.

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