

Introduction: *Counterclockwise*

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ABSTRACT

This special issue of *Canada and Beyond* addresses Canadian/Turtle Island cultural production and seeks non-linear temporalities, modes of kinship building, productive ways of witnessing, and anti-taxonomic frames for discussion and knowledge-building. It provides a critical view of a shifting field, with emphasis on discursive modes that build relationships while acknowledging difference and incommensurabilities at local and global scales.

This guest-edited special issue emerges in part from a conference held at The University of Toronto in May 2017 called *Mikinaakominis: Literature, Justice, Relation*. A collaboration between The Insurgent Architects' House for Creative Writing at the University of Calgary and the TransCanadas Project, the conference was chaired by Larissa Lai and Smaro Kamboureli, with the support of an organizing committee including Kit Dobson, James Ellis, Emily Gilbert, Kyle Kinaschuk, Suzette Mayr, Neil Surkan, Christina Turner, Christl Verduyn, Joshua Whitehead and Robert Zacharias, with the generous consultative support of Cheryl Suzack and Lee Maracle. Other elements of the this special issue had their early development in symposia held at The Insurgent Architects' House for Creative Writing at the University of Calgary, specifically Black Lives Out West, organized by Suzette Mayr and Larissa Lai in November 2017.

We begin our Introduction with the concept of “remembering the future” –a concept the poet and critic Roy Miki has been working with for some time, but which was recently taken up in October 2019, when Miki and his editor, Michael Barnholden, came to The Insurgent Architects' House for Creative Writing for an event called “Producing *Flow*.” The subject of that event was the collaborative production of Roy Miki's collected works, which includes within its covers a whole new poetry book entitled *Cloudy and Clear*. Joshua Whitehead observes that Miki's notion of “remembering the future” could frame this special issue as a whole. In one collage from *Flow*, we see Miki's family at the moment of internment in 1942 on a sugar beet farm in Ste. Agathe: his siblings, his mother, and, if we are willing to do a little imaginative labour, his unborn self, still nested in his mother's womb. He told us that people often ask, “Where is your father?” assuming the father had been separated from the family by the BC Security Commission, as so many JC fathers were through that terrible period. Miki's answer: “My father is the one taking the photo.”¹

Joshua notes that presence is neither strictly embodied or wholly ephemeral: there are a range of frames through which a body can exist. There are also a range of temporalities one might inhabit, though not all inhabitations are comfortable or nice. In Miki's collage, the “historical photograph” is superimposed over a photograph of contemporary downtown Vancouver, where the stories of the past breathe within the present. The camera's multiple apertures capture affects and bodies: the underlying muscle structure of our present day cities, which includes Japanese internment, Black slavery and exclusion, and all the genocidal acts against Indigenous peoples enacted by the nation-state we call Canada. These acts of violence haunt the stories of empires, which include the bodies of people

¹ Miki, Roy and Mike Barholden. “Producing *Flow*: A Conversation/ A Reading,” The Insurgent Architect's House for Creative Writing, Calgary, 15 October 2019.

like Miki and people like the three of us— Joshua Whitehead, Neil Surkan and Larissa Lai— even as violence and injustice are written out, written over, and erased. We –and our histories— remain present even as overtly racist policies give way to covertly racist ones.

Miki, when asked by Lai how he feels about the internment now, said he felt grateful. She was incredulous, and asked about all the pain and suffering he endured. Miki held onto gratitude, saying, “The internment gave me my world” (“*Flow*”). The violence into which he was born paradoxically gave him a self, communities, kin, families, histories. If there is no such thing as an original subject, every act of building is always already an act of rebuilding. In Miki's case, the rebuilding occurs in poetry, collage and criticism.

This special issue, which we have titled *Counterclockwise*, recognizes and grapples with the difficult conversations, questions and critiques that unfolded during *Mikinaakominis*. Though some conversations were more dramatic than others, the event had many parallel sessions. Through those parallel sessions, this special issue of *Canada and Beyond*, a special issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, and a forthcoming book tentatively entitled *Re-Storying Land*, we discover that the temporalities and conversations attached to that conference were multiple and emergent. We all left with criticisms turned gifts, our hearts heavy but emboldened to work through the tensions between justice and relation in the critical analysis, poetry, fiction and photo essay you will find here. We think about Miki, who, along with Smaro Kamboureli, was one of the founders of the TransCanadas project, as we attempt to “remember the future” by animating past presences and ghosting them into our now, letting harm be a holistic measure of returning to our relations. As a nêhiyaw nâpew, a white settler, and a Chinese Canadian, our understanding of counterclockwise movement is complex and varied. Joshua understands temporalities as oralities. In his world view time never eddies straight, it meanders in loops, by which he means baskets. Time encases us like a starblanket. For Neil, who just became a father, present-time feels tight, tender, and short-lived, like an ice cube melting faster the longer it sits on skin. And yet, just as meltwater never really disappears –rivering, rising invisibly as vapour, shading us from light, raining down, refreezing— so our ominous contemporary moment still brims with generative stories of courage, of transformation, of forgiveness. Therefore, he strives, as a parent, scholar, and poet, to model a present-mindedness that wades rather than drowns, while being quiet enough, in the words of Lisa Robertson, “to hear the culverts trickling.” For Larissa, who has been working with the Tao in general and the I Ching in particular, time is cyclical, or rather, it spirals. Each moment emerges in response to the previous, and each moment is pregnant with a range of possible next steps. She understands her own Chinese diasporic movements as having two possible

directions in which to move— one clockwise, in parallel with the violent movements of colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, and the other, counterclockwise, in the direction of earth knowledges, geomancy, relationships and the flow of the Tao. Unable to fully break the power of clockwise movement, she swims counterclockwise whenever possible. She hopes that this collection does counterclockwise work, in harmony with and in support of what Lee Maracle in *Memory Serves* has called rematriation. Larissa recognizes the I Ching as a turtle oracle, engaged by the geomancers of Shang Dynasty China as a way to speak to the future and so bring it into being in the way it is meant to come.

An elder taught Joshua once that when we step onto a piece of land upon our turtle's back, we simultaneously exist in past(s), present(s), and future(s). Furthermore, the act of moving counterclockwise is one we deploy in ceremonies: upon entering a sweatlodge, we move around the circle of the lodge to sit until we return to the entrance, renewed and refreshed, having sweated out the toxicities embedded in our pores and move into the licking, medicinal wind of daybreak. To move counterclockwise is a radical act, to move against the straightened measure of progress, and queer the edge of what we may consider our preordained modes of being set by and from the machinations of settler colonialism, capitalism, and empire —and aren't all edges ready to fray? We remember the future by peeking into loopholes, a circularity of time that isn't straight, but rather sits like tipi rings, an entrance that never closes: elderhood and childhood, past and present, harm and healing, kin and communities all in such close proximity that they nearly kiss. And in this recuperating round dance we have collected here, we move counterclockwise, together, hands cupped like buttons, and sit together so as to pool the sweat smoke of grandfather rocks over our beautifully wounded bodies.

This special issue intentionally focuses, at least in part, on the work of graduate students and newer scholars. In foregrounding emerging voices, we intend to foreground emerging issues, or emerging forms of older issues.

We begin the collection with an important piece by Madeleine Reddon entitled "Indigenous Modernism: Dehabituating Reading Practices," in which Reddon argues against the dangers of taxonomic classifications in literature. She is particularly concerned about the ways in which taxonomies implicitly drive the work of "purification," foreclosing the recuperation and production of kinships and relations we say we want. Importantly, Reddon sees the work of literary canonization as evacuating relational knowledge of its potentialities and difference. It is, thus, a colonial form. Through what she calls an anti-colonial taxonomy, she proposes an alternate set of psychic and political attachments, while acknowledging that counter-taxonomies are also limited because as taxonomies they

retain the tendency to foreclose. For this reason, she argues, the category "Indigenous modernism" cannot cohere a field. As we begin to disrupt the predetermined (ir)reality that periodization implicitly sets up, we see alternate temporalities and ways of knowing that erupt at sites of racialized knowledge. Reddon proposes the production of experimental taxonomies not for the purposes of canon production but contingently, and warns us to be attentive to those moments when they begin to reproduce colonial normativity.

Nadine Chambers, in "Sometimes Clocks Turn Back for Us to Move Forward: Reflections on Black and Indigenous Geographies," takes up precisely the taxonomic purification issues that concern Reddon. Chambers embraces an experimental hybrid form in which she addresses continuity in the movement of aluminum from her Jamaica home to Haisla territory on the west coast of Turtle Island in the Canadian province known as British Columbia. She powerfully traces the path of corporate and colonial destruction that has affected lands, peoples and relationships in both locations, and forged a new set of Black/Indigenous relations in so doing. She illustrates her own difficult path through a number of universities, where she's attempted to do necessary alliance/kinship work, and found herself bumping up against the kinds of colonial and anti-colonial taxonomies that Reddon describes. Chambers's language itself manifests the difficulty of such labour under a neocolonial system not designed to make connections from one marginalized people to another.

Lindsay Diehl's "'Want to be a superior man?': The Production of Chinese Canadian Masculinities in Paul Yee's Writing" pivots from the Black/Indigenous axis set up so far with an argument about Chinese Canadian complicities in the colonial project, paradoxically and heartbreakingly enacted through fraught attempts at self-empowerment. Though the project of Chinese Canadian literature imagined as such begins in the 1960s (or the late 19th century, recuperatively speaking), Diehl addresses a specific move embraced by some Chinese Canadian male writers in the 1980s to frame Chinese men as heroic in a nation-building sense, to parallel the figure of the white male pioneer. Such a frame, of course, is aimed at generating acceptance for Chinese Canadians into the white Canadian nation-state while supporting its myths of masculinity. Diehl argues that by attempting this strategy of re-masculinization in order to overthrow stereotypes of Chinese men as effeminate and untrustworthy, authors also wound up perpetuating exclusionary practices that diminished the experiences of women and Indigenous peoples. She highlights earlier novels by Paul Yee that exemplify this productive, yet problematic, anti-racist strategy before examining his latest novel which, she argues, breaks from a white settler nation-building mythology in order to articulate Chinese-Canadian masculinity anew and, importantly, in relation to

Indigenous peoples. Diehl emphasizes the importance of such a turn toward portrayals of co-presence and interracial interaction, but also points out where even Yee's latest re-characterizations fall short—which serves to remind us that there is still much work to be done.

Next, drawing together the questions of relation taken up from discrete perspectives in the first three essays, Tavleen Purewal wades into the multi-layered and uneven relationships that occur around Vancouver's port in "Port Rupture(s) and Cross-Racial Kinships in Dionne Brand and Lee Maracle." Purewal examines the way work by Dionne Brand and Lee Maracle can lead us to read Vancouver's port as a site of kinships among racialized communities. In order to examine literary encounters between Indigenous, Black, and Asian subjects whose intimacies exceed and disrupt the port's coloniality, she homes in on moments of interracial contact in Dionne Brand's non-fiction and Lee Maracle's poetry where fraught connections among Indigenous, Black and Asian figures occur. In turn, her essay confronts the affective power of these historical events by reimagining them as rupture points from which kinships originated—even though they were predicated on racism and colonial impositions. She highlights the two writers' stubbornly shared view that kinship among racialized subjects can emerge despite and beyond the frameworks of the nation-state, and that such kinship can undermine the nation's exclusionary laws and architectures. Such kinships, born from fugitive intimacies and accomplice work around the state-controlled entryway, lay the groundwork for more intimate kinships to emerge in the future. Such a configuration of the port as a rupture point, or Door of No Return, echoes the connections Nadine Chambers draws between aluminum mining in Jamaica and aluminum smelting in Kitimat in her essay.

Erin Wunker's "Archives Undone: Towards a Poethics of Feminist Archival Disruptions" braids together the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Rachel Zolf to position the reader as witness. She opens with a recognition of the archive as product of curation, one that edits history as it creates it, to foreground and reproduce colonial power while positing orality and Indigeneity as inaccessible, unknowable and therefore fungible. Wunker asks us to think on the possibilities of interruptions to such sites of power through the Foucauldian concept of irruption. She asks us to "train our eyes to what gets left out." She holds up the idea of "the glitch" as it is engaged in Rachel Zolf's *Janey's Arcadia*, with a specific focus on "What Women Say of the Canadian North-West: The Indign Question." She is specifically concerned with the spectrality of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Wunker sees it as the poet's "response-ability" to take gambles that turn theory to practical and political purposes. She illustrates how Zolf does this by bringing her

"poethic agency" into the archive, specifically, the Canadian Museum of Human Rights—to call out the names of Manitoba's Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls in a poly-vocal performance alongside readings from *Janey's Arcadia* and "White Girl Don't," a poem by the Menominee poet, Chrystos. Wunker's essay, through its deployment of poethics and the disruptive power of glitches, asks us to consider how moving against archival hegemony invites opportunities to reinscribe and reconfigure that which has been made spectral or ghastly, with a particular emphasis on the re-presencing of Indigeneity.

Taking up questions of dialogue in the form of listening, speech acts, and narrative, Gage Diabo's "Refusing to Listen and Listening to Refusal: Dialogue, Healing, and Rupture in *Green Grass, Running Water*" closes the essay section of the special issue. Detailing the asymmetries of power relations inherent within a nationalist framework of "CanLit" and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Diabo engages with the problem of what is "sayable" and "unsayable" on the public record. Taking up the work of Glen Coulthard, Thomas King, Audra Simpson, and Leanne Simpson, Diabo's essay makes contemporary the problem of who can and who cannot speak and asks how specifically embodied speech can or cannot be heard. Here he asks: "how can we achieve a more reciprocal basis for listening?" He answers this question through a series of poignant close readings of the dialogues in King's novel. Deploying both Simpsons (Audra and Leanne), Diabo attends to the work of refusal in the dance of speaking and listening. The essay specifically attends to the strategy of refusing to respond to the terms of the question as a way of refusing reinscriptions of hegemonic power so often implicit in the ways questions are asked. Turning the terms of the question affirms "something else." It denies the conversational trajectory that the patriarchal and/or colonial speaker is attempting to lay on the marginalized speaker. Diabo argues that refusal and reframing gives agency to the responder, though often only to deploy a different hegemony. However, it extends to us alternative models of listening and speaking where the exchange of words is just as much about power as it is conversation. Diabo asks us to consider the "Four Old Indians" in King's text to think about circular power relations over top-bottom hierarchies. There are other ways of being in conversation, ways that can be more reciprocal. The sharing of stories with mutual consent might be one way. We need to think of dialogue as truly interactive and engage the living possibilities of power as webbed.

In addition to the critical essays in this issue, which the three of us selected and edited, Joshua Whitehead and Neil Surkan curated a creative writing section that includes a photo-essay and a series of poems by some of the most exciting writers and artists who are active in our current moment in Canada and, indeed, beyond, including: Rehab Nazzal, Gwen

Benaway, Julia Polyck-O'Neill, Trynne Delaney, Suzette Mayr, Ryan Fitzpatrick, Gregory Betts and Noor Naga. Each of these selections highlights and complicates the foci of their critical counterparts while turning us toward other times and places. On the closing panel of the *Mikinaakominis* conference, the poet and translator Erin Moure likened her approach to translating to the act of sticking her forearm in a swinging door: no matter how many times her arm gets slammed, what matters is an unwavering commitment to keeping the door ajar —a steadfast rejection of neat closure. Across their productively disparate themes and notably contrasting approaches to form and genre, the voices in these selections similarly risk themselves as they open a connection with the reader. As they struggle to find, reclaim, or feel their way home, whether they are gliding across the country in a rail car, jostling through flashy city streets, flickering in and out of social media, echoing through archives, documenting destroyed landscapes, or loving across oceans, all generously bewilder, challenge, and inspire us. All open us to that which is counter, both, and neither.

Indigenous Modernism: Dehabituating Reading Practices

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ABSTRACT

This paper experiments with formal style as a way of working through the literary discipline's lacunae regarding aesthetic value, race, and coloniality. Using a "counter taxonomy" as an example of academic dissent, this paper considers the limits of this form of dissenting speech within "public discourse" (Fraser; Habermas) by demonstrating a persistent occlusion in the literary discipline related to this mode of speech, which concerns the "primitive" subject. I define a term to unsettle a series of categorical terms long-held as guiding frameworks in our discipline: modernism, Native and Harlem renaissances, etc. This term is "Indigenous modernism," a category that is a contradiction in terms because it announces its inclusion of the original term's constitutive exclusion, ie. the primitive within the modern, through the language producing its erasure. Through this experiment, I argue for the necessity of a different kind of dissent, specifically a more capacious form of literary critique that interrogates the problems of holding a discourse in common and the specific needs of anti-colonial work. As a pedagogical exercise that models the benefits of failure, I suggest that this intervention requires us to think about how we represent truth through critique.

