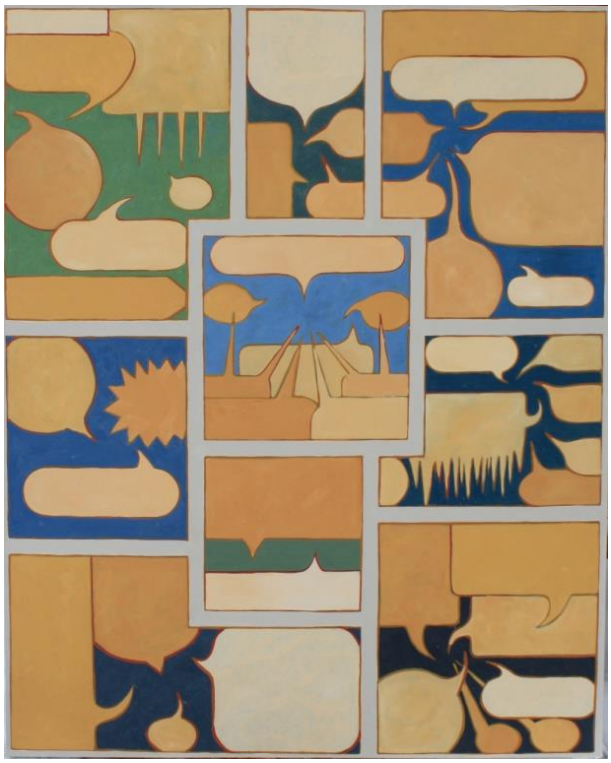
Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation:
Art, Curation, and Healing

[Book chapter published in: *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, editors. Wilfred Laurier University Press, Waterloo, ON. 2016. 21-41.]

David Garneau



"Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Meeting," David Garneau, (oil on canvas, 5' x 4', 2012).

The oil painting "Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Meeting" (2011) is an attempt to picture my memory of an event without violating the privacy of those who were there. The canvas is composed like a comic book page. However, the panels do not show people or scenes and do not follow a conventional narrative sequence. They are arranged circularly without a clear beginning or end and are only populated by empty speech bubbles and the coloured spaces between them. The bubbles have varying flesh tones and are meant to stand in for specific Indigenous persons. Knowing the conventions of comics and meetings, I hope viewers will read argument, agreement, frostiness, overlapping dialogue, shared and evolving ideas, and innumerable other things into these shapes and thereby get a sense of the scene. I also imagine that many will feel frustrated that their comprehension is restricted.

The painting is a mnemonic device. It reminds me of the relationships, exchanges and affect of a moment. Most importantly, it allows me to show what happened without giving anything away. I wanted to memorialize the fact that this event occurred, but I did not want to betray its full content. What I will now[1] explain is that the picture describes a crisis. During an Aboriginal Curatorial Collective symposium at the National Gallery in Ottawa in 2011, a non-Indigenous academic championed the art of an Indian Residential School survivor, Mohawk artist R. G. Miller-Lahiaaks. Some in the audience were uncomfortable from the start. Was it because the presenter was white and the artist absent? Perhaps, but it could also be that the crowd was sensitive to his lack of sensitivity. The talk peaked with a comparison of the effects of Indian Residential Schools with flesh eating disease, complete with photographs. It was offensive, particularly to the survivors present. Oblivious and confused, the man was ushered from the building. The event gathered Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks but following this incident a group of Indigenous people removed themselves to separate room to comfort a senior artist and survivor and to figure out what happened and should happen next. Later, the main room was cleansed with smudge and song and the symposium resumed.

There is no need to detail this incident further. It is only one example used to hint at the challenges of conciliation in the curatorial and academic arena.

One lesson: while decolonization and Indigenization is collective work it sometimes requires occasions of separation—moments where Indigenous people take space and time to work things out among themselves, and parallel moments when allies ought to do the same.

A second lesson: the professor in question, Neal Keating, is not a curator but an anthropologist who, perhaps out of a sense of justice, felt the need to play the part of a curator. Presumably, he determined that his need and interest, his compassion, was enough to qualify him to stride into this complex discourse. That he played a curator before an international gathering of Indigenous curators was audacious and symptomatic of larger concerns about white, colonial, professional privilege.

The colonial attitude is characterized not only by scopophilia, a drive to look, but also by an urge to penetrate, to traverse, to know, to translate, to own and exploit. The attitude assumes that everything should be accessible to those with the means and will to access them; everything is ultimately comprehensible, a potential commodity, resource or salvage. The academic branch of the enterprise collects and analyzes the experiences and things of others; transforms story into text and objects-in-relation into artefacts to be catalogued and stored or displayed. The primary sites of Indigenous resistance, then, are not the rare open battles between the colonized and the dominant but the everyday active refusals of complete engagement with agents of assimilation. This includes speaking with one's own in one's own way, refusing translation and full

[1] This essay is an elaboration of a talk delivered at *Reconciliation: works in progress symposium and artistic incubation* at the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre in Sault Ste Marie, Sept. 2012, at the invitation of Ashok Mathur and Jonathan Dewar. An earlier draft was published as "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation and Healing." *West Coast Line: Reconcile This!* Issue 74. 2012. p. 28-38. http://reworksinprogress.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/wcl74h.pdf
I am grateful for the help of Ayumi Goto and Keavy Martin whose editorial comments and questions helped guide the text toward greater clarity.

explanations, creating trade goods that imitate core culture without violating it, and refusing to be a Native informant.

This essay examines Indigenous refusal, particularly why many Indian Residential School survivors do not participate in "Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey," and how this non-compliance signals the need for forms of representation outside of the current Reconciliation narrative. I will outline how Indigenous resistance to the reconciliatory gaze can inform the development of sovereign display territories. But this essay also looks to possibilities other than separatism; to the development of non-colonial, Indigenous/non-Indigenous curatorial projects, academic and artistic collaborations beyond the project currently known as Reconciliation.[2]

The sanctioned performance of Reconciliation is foundationally distorted. Testimony produced for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is constrained by non-Indigenous narratives of healing and closure;[3] by Western religious ideology (the Catholic rite of Reconciliation and Christian concepts of forgiveness); by an emphasis on individuals over communities; by the public display of victims but not perpetrators; and by the degrading and corrupting influence of cash-for-testimony. As a result, not all stories are welcome in these official sites and not everyone is interested in engaging this often-humiliating theatre. If artistic and curatorial practices that are critical of this structure or that emerge out of experiences and ways of working and being that cannot be accommodated or contained within the TRC's display mechanisms are to find room for expression those spaces must be articulated outside of an assimilationist frame of mind.

For reasons I will soon explain, we can begin by reframing the contemporary dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as one of *conciliation* rather than reconciliation. Thinking, making, collaborating and exhibiting within sites of perpetual conciliation has the potential to transform rather than contain. A goal of non-colonial curatorial and art practices is to make room for the production and reception of Indigenous experience and expression apart from the dominant discourse. De-, anti-, and post-colonial practices are reactive, they directly challenging colonization and racism. Non-colonial practices seek to recover and perpetuate pre-contact culture. Other forms of non-colonial practice struggle to describe or perform new ways of being that are cognizant that a return to pre-contact conditions is impossible and that total assimilation into the dominant ideology is unacceptable (cultural genocide). Recently, there are performative dialogues—for example, among First Nations artists and 'new' Canadian artists—that shift emphasis from themes of oppression and resistance to the production of generous moments of empathy and agreement beyond conventional Native/Settler binaries.[4] In each case,

---

[2] When the word 'Reconciliation' is capitalized in this essay it refers to the use and sense of the word proscribed by "Canada's Truth and Reconciliation" project. Among the several projects attempting to work past the TRC aesthetic limitations are Ashok Mathur's work at the Center for innovation in Culture and in the Arts in Canada, including gatherings of Indigenous/non-Indigenous artists to "Reconsidering Reconciliation": http://artistic-inquiry.ca/ Accessed August 20, 2013. Another related project is "Beyond Reconciliation: Indigenous Arts & Public Engagement after the TRC," a five year (2013-18) SSHRC project that includes Keavy Martin (principle researcher), Ashok Mathur, Jonathan Dewar, Dylan Robinson, Steve Loft, and myself.

[3] http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7 accessed August 21, 2013.

[4] An especially good example is the collaborative performances of Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-EhhdYC6Hg and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P3YM45GKVA

the goal is to resist and transform colonial ideology and behaviour. This change is not for the Indigenous alone. In environments of perpetual conciliation, non-Indigenous people struggle with their inheritance of privilege, also unlearn the colonial attitude, and work toward non-colonial practices.

Sacred/Things

In "Altars of Sacrifice: Re-membering Basquiat," bell hooks explains that the young African American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat's (1960-1988) paintings are like "a wall between him and the established art world." His works are "a barrier," "designed to be a closed door," and "like a secret chamber that can only be opened and entered by those who can decipher hidden codes." His art is closed to the "Eurocentric gaze"[5] and is only fully available to those who share like experiences with the works' creator. The codes are not just signifiers that can be read into denotative signs by a competent reader, though that is an important aspect. They also have empathetic undertones in tune with the felt relationships and wordless understandings shared by members of a culture.

Every culture circulates around a set of objects and spaces that are beyond property and trade. They are the national treasures, sacred sites and texts, symbols that are a community's gravitational center. The objects and their protection define the culture; hold its many parts in orbit. The colonial attitude, the state of mind required to assume control over the space, bodies, objects, trade, and imaginaries of others, begins by refusing the living, relational value of these entities.

This is done in one of two ways. Either the colonist refuses the sacred character of the object or site because it derives from a metaphysical system that it rejects in favour of its own cosmology. Or, in a recent and more sensitive version, materialist scholars recon the *semiotic* value of sacred objects but not experience their *symbolic* value. That is, they recognize the object's value *for believers* but not for themselves. Because of their objectivist creed and position as outsiders, materialist scholars do not *know* the essential, sacred qualities of these entities from within the believers lived experience. You can, for instance, read many wonderful books about Aboriginal art by non-Indigenous writers and receive anthropological insights, learn about the history, sociology, economics, political meanings, and occasionally the aesthetics of these works, but it is rare for such texts to include, for example, subjective engagement with an Indigenous object. Narratives about how one feels with these things, how one "was moved, touched, taken to another place, momentarily born again,"[6]are either not included because they are not experienced, or, more likely, excluded because such confessions lie outside of the objectivist discourse of these disciplined texts. Such writings keep the first person (author) at a distance from the First Nations artwork. hooks argues that if critics (in her Basquiat example) are "unmoved, they are unable to speak meaningfully about the work."[7] The "meanings" she alludes to are those felt values, communal affects and metaphysical knowing that lies beyond measure.

Both accessed August 25, 2013.

[5] bell hooks, "Altars of Sacrifice: Re-membering Basquiat" (1993). In *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*. (New York: The New Press, 1995) 35-48.

[6] hooks, 35.

[7] Ibid.

If the metaphysical qualities of these things are not recognized as essential properties, as facts, then they suddenly become available for appropriation. Desacralized, the medicine bundle, mask, song, story, territory, etc., become mere real things that have ascertainable market value or academic worth. However, this reconceptualization only works if in the background lurks an authority backed by the threat of force. Through the alchemy of the colonial imagination, combined with brute power, sacred and cultural objects are transmogrified into commodities, melted for their gold-value or collected for their artefact or art-value. (By 'art' I mean the recent, Modernist, Western sense of objects having 'universal', and therefore no longer local, value; creations that are expressions of humans and therefore belong to all of humankind—though only collected and administered by those who are properly trained in the correct, Humanist, tradition.) The desire of the colonist is not just directed at appropriating these material things, but to displacing their local symbolic value. This decontexualization erodes the culture by removing the gravitational center. The same operation happens when Indigenous lands are converted by colonists from a sacred and eternal relationship with the people into property separable from the people.[8]

In response to voracious traders, Indigenous cultures have since contact devised ingenious ways to protect their sacred things from appropriation through the use of screen objects. In Freudian psychoanalysis, screen memories[9] are seemingly insignificant and incomplete memories that both suggest and conceal meaningful but repressed content. In order to satiate Settler cravings for their sacred objects, Maori, Haida, all Indigenous people, produced—and continue to produce—trade goods. Screen objects resemble the sacred things they imitate but do not include their animation. These sculptures, masks and garments have the patina of the originals but none of the meaning, ritual or context. They are cultural artefakes, reasonable facsimiles designed for others and to give nothing essential away. The hope is that colonizers might settle for the appearance and leave the essential undisturbed. My favourite example comes from the Haida who carved argillite to look like authentic ceremonial pipes; only the holes in the bowl and stem did not meet. Visitors bought signifiers of Haida culture but could not enjoy full use.[10]

Irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality

"Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Meeting" is part of a series of paintings that visualize Indigenous intellectual spaces that exist apart from a non-Indigenous gaze and interlocution. The idea is to signal to non-Indigenous spectators the fact that intellectual activity is occurring without their knowledge; that is, 'without their knowledge', as in without their being aware and, 'without their knowledge' in the sense of intellectual activities based on Native rather than Western epistemologies. I think of these as irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality.

[8] Discussions of Indigenous anything must always consider the colonial interest in the land as property. While very early colonization of Turtle Island sought the labour of Indigenous peoples, this was soon abandoned for a concentration on the settlement and mass exploitation of natural resources. As a result, the disposition of much thinking about Aboriginal people and their things is coloured by property concepts.
[9] Sigmund Freud. "Screen Memories." *The Uncanny*. (New York: Penguin, 2003). 3-22.
[10] I am indebted to Carol Sheehan's exhibition *pipes that won't smoke, coal that won't burn*, 1983.

Irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality are gatherings, ceremony, nêhiyawak (Cree)-only discussions, kitchen-table conversations, email exchanges, etc., in which Blackfootness, Métisness, and so on, are performed without Settler attendance. It is not a show for others but a site where people simply are, where they express and celebrate their continuity and figure themselves to, for and with each other without the sense that they are being witnessed by people who are not equal participants. When Indigenous folks (anyone, really) know they are being surveyed by non-members the nature of their ways of being and becoming alters. Whether the onlookers are conscious agents of colonization or not their shaping gaze can trigger a Reserve-response; an inhibition or a conformation to Settler expectations.

Anthropologist Audra Simpson argues that racialization attempts to turn Indigenous people into knowable subjects for white Settlers who themselves are less knowable. Individual Mohawks, however, described to her a much less settled sense of themselves: "There seemed rather to be a tripleness, a quadrupleness, to consciousness and an endless play, and it went something like this: 'I am me, I am what you think I am and I am who this person to the right of me thinks I am and you are all full of shit and then maybe I will tell you to your face.' There was a definite core that seemed to reveal itself at the point of refusal and that refusal was arrived at, of course, at the very limit of the discourse."[11] The racializing project assumes that Indigenous persons can be recognized, identified, described and contained, that they are complete and can therefore report identity facts to an ethnographer because they know themselves. However, in real life, people, including Indigenous persons, experience themselves less as fixed subjects and more as having multiple and flexible identities—that is, when asked to identify only as themselves.

Within the frame of individualism and race, this argument makes sense, but the phenomenon is less evident when culture and colonialism are considered. Colonizers construct race as a means of producing a hierarchy of humans of which the colonizer's own 'race' is deemed to be at the top and the colonized beneath them. This ideological tool is then is used as justification for the 'superior' beings to invade, own, exploit and cultivate. While race is fluid and can be enacted nearly anywhere, colonization is bound, like the people it threatens to overwhelm, to specific bodies, and lands. While people are as unsettled as Simpson describes, when interrogated as individuals, in the moments when they recognize themselves as independent beings nevertheless also bound within kinship groups, connected worldviews, histories and territories, they participate in a more settled shared identity. There is an individual "definite core" that hardens in the face of interrogation, but there is also a collective "definite core" that emerges when people perform themselves as a group.

This is not to imply that in these spaces our identities are suddenly resolved and constant. These are sites of epistemological debate. In the exchange of stories, gestures, touches, thoughts, tears, and laughter the nature of, say, Métisness, is subtly tested, reconsidered, provisionally confirmed or gently reconfigured, composed, and played in rehearsal. Participants engage in a continuous assessment of their status and other meanings, but these negotiations are performed in relation to like others. The codes are different than the mainstream and people are not 'Other' in these spaces. When people gather *as a people* they act not only as individuals but as part of that

[11] Simpson, Audra. "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship." *Junctures*, 9. Dec. 2007. 67-80. Thank you to Keavy Martin for this reference.

group—they are, there, Ojibway, or Indigenous artists, or whatever, differently than what they are when they perform themselves for dominant others. The absence of Settlers acting as Settlers make these spaces less a matter of race than of culture, less about Indianness than being, for example, Anishinabeg.

This is a delicate matter. Non-Indigenous friends, colleagues, and collaborators who have long worked to raise awareness, to create opportunities, to re-think art and exhibitions, the academy and ideas of Canada, and are themselves Other-wise, are essential to these struggles. They are front-runners who risk a great deal to be allies and work toward justice and fundamental change. However, they know that the lived complexity of Indigeneity exists beyond their presence as surely as the inhabitation of white privilege, or Koreanness, or Swedish immigrantness, is incompletely available to Native people.

That said, these boundaries are not absolute but a matter of degree. Surely a second generation Canadian of Korean ancestry who lives in Nunavut and speaks fluent Inuktitut can be said to participate in Inuit life in a more engaged way than the catch-all words 'Settler' or 'non-Indigenous' imposes. A purpose of anti-racist work is for Settlers to learn more about their hosts and hosts to know more about their guests, to move through proximity, listening, empathy, cooperative inquiry, and action to a state of racial confusion. Settlers who become unsettled—who are aware of their inheritance and implication in the colonial matrix, who comprehend their unearned privileges and seek ways past racism—are Settlers no longer. It is not that these folks have 'gone Native' (though inter-cultural adoption and honorary citizenships are traditional possibilities!), but they have become respectful guests, which in turn allows Indigenous peoples to be graceful hosts.

Among the subjects shared in irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality are aspects of the Indian Residential School legacy that are discouraged from disclosure in TRC events such as: rage; the refusal to forgive; the naming of names; the details of intergenerational effects; the use of Indigenous people in these schools to oppress their own; the (de)formation of masculinity there: talking about what happened to the pay out money and how it distorts individuals, families, and communities; the role of public schools in the program of aggressive assimilation; the Métis who were also subjects of these places; and so on.

Many residential school survivors will not tell their stories to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[12] Some have not and will never speak of such things even within the safety of autonomous Indigenous spaces. As Alex Janvier writes on the back of his painting "Blood Tears" (2001): "Many, many died of broken bodies. Many, many died of twisted conflicting mental difference. Most died with "broken spirit." Some lived to tell about it. The rest [ ] permanently, "live in fear." The rest will take their silence to their graves as many have to this day." [13]

[12] Neither I nor members of my immediate family went to Indian Residential School. I am Métis from Edmonton, and descend from there, St. Paul des Métis, and Red River. Relations may have gone to the Residential School built at St Paul in 1898. If they did, it wasn't for long. It was burned to the ground—by some of the attendees, I'm told—in 1905.

[13] Alex Janvier, "Blood Tears" (painting). In *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*. (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008). Plate 1, page xi.

For some, the trauma visited upon their young minds and bodies are a private matter or, rather, these profound dislocations and violations created an impenetrable private space, a "twisted conflicting mental difference."[14] It made of their minds an asocial space of shame and despair, a disassociation seemingly beyond both Indigenous and dominant culture community. For others, hints of these experiences are shared in irreconcilable moments; that is, not as confessions designed to be reconciled in the sense of being smoothed over or brought into public agreement. They are open wounds shared with intimates for complex and inconclusive reasons. They are not for general consumption; they are not subjects of analysis. Their listeners are not only witnesses but are often intergenerational co-survivors of Indian Residential Schools and other forms of aggressive assimilation. All this lies behind the play of representations circulated in the theatre of national Reconciliation.

The extraordinary people who do share their Indian Residential School experiences with Canadians as part of the TRC sessions do so for many reasons: to speak the truth, to witness, to heal. I do not wish to offend these folks, but I do want to discuss a peculiar aspect of the display mechanisms they are caught up in.

Conciliation or Reconciliation

Conciliation is "the action of bringing into harmony." It is an extra-judicial process that is a "conversion of a state of hostility or distrust; the promotion of good will by kind and considerate measures" and "peaceable or friendly union."[15] The word calls to mind the meeting of two previously separate parties into an amicable process. Reconciliation is a seeming synonym with a difference. *Re*-conciliation refers to the repair of a previously existing harmonious relationship.[16] This word choice imposes the fiction that equanimity was the status quo between Indigenous people and Canada. It is true that for many generations after contact the Indigenous majority had good trading relationships with some Europeans as individuals rather than nations. The serious troubles began when the visitors decided to become Settlers, when traders were replaced by ever increasing waves of colonists, when invading nations decided they would rather own the well rather than just share the water, and they reached a crescendo when these territories became Rupert's Land and then Canada without consultation with the original inhabitants.

The problem with the choice of the word reconciliation over conciliation is that it presses into our minds a false understanding of our past and constricts our collective sense of the future. The word suggests that there was a time of general conciliation between First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and Canada, that this peace was tragically disrupted by Indian Residential Schools and will be painfully restored through the current process of Re-conciliation. This imagined conciliation before Re-conciliation probably does not refer to the moments of cooperation scattered here and there over several centuries after contact but to the post-Confederation 'numbered' Treaties between the Crown and many First Nations. However, while extensive,

[14] Janvier.
[15] Oxford English Dictionary.
[16] "To bring (a person) again into friendly relations *to* or *with* (oneself or another) after an estrangement." Also, "to purify (a church, etc.) by a special service after a profanation." "Reconcile," Oxford English Dictionary.

these agreements do not include everyone. Most of British Columbia, Quebec, Eastern and North Eastern Canada are not covered by Treaty, and Métis are not Treaty people.

Treaties are very important, but their uneven nature and their continuous violation trouble any notion of a prior universal resolution between Indigenous people and Canada. The constant repetition of the word 'reconciliation' creates a screen for the content conciliation, which is a present wish that there truly was a past comprehensive settlement in order that the future can be bearable. The actual settlement was not an agreement between First Nations and Canada, it was not the Treaties and was not conciliatory, but it was universal, it was the imposition of the Indian act (1876).

The first line of the TRC website "Mandate" page reads: "There is an emerging and compelling desire to put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future."[17] The text does not explain whose desire this is. If read as colonial desire, then Reconciliation is a continuation of the settlement narrative. The word conjures images of halcyon moments of conciliation before things went wrong as the seamless source of harmonious national origin. This imaginary constructs the Indian Residential School era as an unfortunate deviation rather than just another element of the ongoing colonial struggle to contain and control Native people, territories and resources. The present colonial "desire" is to "put the events of the past behind us" and reconcile Indigenous people with this narrative.

Anti- and non-colonial cultural workers, however, ought to reconsider the Reconciliation project. Rather than accept the idea that there was a prior period of conciliation, we recognize the fact that the need for conciliation is perpetual. Conciliation is an ongoing process, a seeking rather than the restoration of an imagined agreement. The imaginary produced within Reconciliation emphasizes post-contact narratives: the moment of conciliation settled as if it were a thing rather than a continuous relationship. This construction anesthetises knowledge of the existence of pre-contact Native sovereignties and creates in the minds of many the sense that Indigenous people are simply a minority interest group rather than partners who make Canada possible, or peoples who want independence from the colonial nation that has been imposed upon them.

Especially from the point of view of the Indigenous leaders who signed them in good faith, Treaties were Nation to Nations conciliations. Treaties recognize the pre-existing and ongoing sovereignty of the conciliating parties. This understanding is eloquently figured in the two row treaty wampum belts[18]: two boats—for example a British ship and an Iroquois canoe—go down the river of life together but do not touch, do not try to steer each other's vessel. Two communities live parallel to each other, trade, but do not violate each other's space and customs. Two states, acting as states can establish a neutral space of negotiation between their communities in which treaties are established as living agreements, relationships that do not compromise each other's core spaces. Conciliation is not the erasure of difference or sovereignty. Conciliation is not assimilation. However, because Treaties were not entered into in good faith by the colonizers but were conceived as non-violent means to subdue Indigenous

[17] Establishment, Powers, Duties and Procedures of the TR Commission: http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7 accessed August 21, 2013.
[18] Accessed April 2, 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Row_Wampum_Treaty

people in order to occupy their land, we ought to reconsider their conceptual value as the firm or only basis for present relations. The Treaties are historical facts, but honouring of them requires a continuous relationship, which includes interpretation, re-interpretation and renegotiation. This is a perpetual conciliation. My argument is that the present Reconciliation narrative should be recast as a continued struggle for conciliation rather that for the restoration of something lost (that never quite was).

Re-conciliation implies a very different imaginary than conciliation, one that carries such profound affective and historical meanings that it seems a deliberate tactic in the ongoing assimilationist strategy of the Canadian empire.[19] Whether the choice of this word is an accidental inheritance or not, it is ironic, if not sinister, that survivors of religious residential schools, especially Catholic ones, are asked to participate in a ritual that so closely resembles that which abused them.

As someone raised Catholic—my uncle is a Bishop, my aunt is a nun working in inner-city Edmonton, and my step-father was a former Jesuit priest—I cannot help but notice an ironic religious nuance in the choice of the word 'reconciliation' rather than 'conciliation' in "Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey."[20] In its religious context, Reconciliation is "the reunion of a person to a church."[21] Reconciliation is a sacrament of the Catholic Church. It follows Confession and Penance. According the Vatican, "Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labours for their conversion."[22] This text is found in "The Sacraments of Healing" section of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church.* Reconciliation here, as in the secular colonial version, ignores pre-Catholic or pre-contact Indigenous states. It instead focuses on conversion as the site of Native origin. In sinning—or, it seems in this case, in being sinned upon!—the penitent is separated from God and the Church. Only by telling their secret to an agent of the Church and engaging in penance can harmony, through atonement, be restored and the individual and Church/State reconciled. Reconciliation assumes that the parties were once in harmony (through the contracts of Baptism, Confirmation and Communion) and only through Reconciliation can the proper stasis be restored. Beyond the pale of Reconciliation is the possibility that the Church could be wrong. Individuals are faulty and in need of reformation, never the Church. The Church is a static archetype; people are imperfect beings who variously move toward or away from that perfect, Platonic universal.

This imaginary informs the secular version of "Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey." The relationship is individual to State, rather than the Nation to Nations or person to person negotiations of a Conciliation or Treaty model. The system requires the spectacle of individual accounts (confessions) and healing narratives (forgiveness and penance). It prefers to lay blame on its individual (mostly dead and certainly absent) members; and even then, does not

[19] Canada is a modern empire in that it rules over a vast geography comprised of numerous ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse (First, Inuit, and Métis) Nations.
[20] This is a reference to the image used in the title of an Aboriginal Healing Foundation Book: *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey*.
[21] Oxford English Dictionary.
[22] Accessed April 2, 2012. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c2a4.htm

willingly present them for public confession and atonement. While it acknowledges that the abuses were the result of (past) systemic policy, Canada does not do anything that would risk the integrity of current dominant structures. Because the system is premised on the eventual elimination of the Indigenous, it is cautious about recognizing that it is in a perpetual relationship with First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and so it imposes a time limit on 'healing'. It pays off individuals rather than recognize that harms were done not only to persons but collective wholes. The imagined end of this restoration project— is "*Canada's* Truth and Reconciliation." Truths are told, the destroyed are mourned, the broken repaired, individual Natives reconciled with Canada, order restored, and the national identity endures.

You can imagine that those removed from their culture, language and spiritual traditions and who were indoctrinated by religious Indian Residential Schools would slide rather easily into the similar confessional narratives of a Truth and Reconciliation system. And that those who retained or regained their cultural and spiritual practices are likely to be suspicious of the homology, and resist.

Cree artist, poet, oral historian and theorist, Neal McLeod explains that there is no equivalent in the nêhiyawak (Cree) language for the Western notion of an apology. The closest phrase to "I am sorry" is *nimihtatân*, which means 'I regret something'. McLeod explains that the word used in reference to the Indian Residential School experience is *ê-kiskakwêyehk*, which means "we wear it."[23] This is a profound difference. It is visceral rather than abstract. It describes a recognition and acceptance worn on the body. The experience is not given the intangibility of a Truth but the concrete reality of a fact.

At the Montreal TRC event (2013), Indian Residential School survivors were encouraged to "tell your truth." This format allows for the presentation of experience as it was lived rather than having such descriptions regulated by the constraints of legal evidence. Nevertheless, there were legal restrictions. Truth-telling was not to include the naming of individuals and institutions associated with wrongdoing "unless such findings or information has already been established through legal proceedings."[24] Truths were to be accounts of subjective experience, feelings and perceptions, rather than the relating of facts. This may seem a subtle distinction but in performance it means that recorded testimonies threaten to become literature rather than evidence. That is, the testimonies have no legal standing; claims will not to be followed up by investigations and convictions. They are legacy documents that will be emotionally moving to some future readers, and material for academics. That is the design, anyway. Who knows what creative folks might yet do with them.

To be fair, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and especially the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, has developed into a complex and responsive organism that has permitted multiple anti- and non-colonial possibilities—for as long as the government entertains them. Both organizations have established numerous sites apart from state monitoring. And the public airing of the outlines of these facts, the government apology and the work of the Commission have encouraged many to discuss things that they might not have otherwise. Questions remain,

[23] Neal McLeod. Poetry reading, Saskatchewan Writer's Guild, Regina, SK. May 4, 2012.
[24] Establishment, Powers, Duties and Procedures of the TR Commission: http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7 accessed August 21, 2013.

however: How are we to change sites of Reconciliation into sites of conciliation? How do we prevent Reconciliation from being primarily a spectacle of individual pain for Settler consumption and Aboriginal shame? How are artists and curators to contribute to the conciliation process?

Aboriginal Sovereign Display Territories

I am a long-time Alex Janvier fan, but my interest was primarily formal. I love his designs and appreciate his ability to create a unique synthesis of Western and Aboriginal styles. Then, in 1995, the Glenbow Museum hosted a travelling solo exhibition curated by Lee-Ann Martin, *The Art of Alex Janvier: His First Thirty Years, 1960-1990*.[25] Instead of the usual artist talk and slide show, Janvier toured a small group of us through the exhibition. He spent over an hour and a half explaining every picture. The biggest revelation was that many of these seemingly non-objective works were in fact maps. In one, he pointed out where he lived relative to his Kokum, and where the good fishing and hunting spots were. That he invented a way to record his physical, relational and spiritual territory in a format that could be mistaken for Modernist art was a great lesson. I love the idea that this hidden knowledge has infiltrated non-Indigenous spaces and waits patiently for its Native knowledge, the "secret chamber" to be revealed.

Janvier slowed at the end of the tour, and the group had whittled to a handful. He spent a long time in front of his most recent paintings. They were about his experience in Indian Residential School. They contained recognizable figures, buildings and landscapes. Here, he did not want to abstract his messages. They were addressed beyond the space of irreconcilable Aboriginality. Even so, until he explained them, until he talked them into life, they remained oblique hints. It is the combination of visual art, embodied knowledge, and a gathering of engaged participants that made the experience significant, made it exceed the colonial container.

Exhibitions of Indigenous art shown within a dominant culture space are always informed by the worldviews of the managers of those spaces. Reconciliation exhibitions held in these institutions are also likely to be designed within the colonial narrative: reconciliation rather than conciliation; the theory that public display of private (Native) pain leads to individual and national healing; text over speech; etc. If display spaces are to be potential sites of conciliation, they should not meet the dominant culture viewer halfway, in their space in their way. The non-Indigenous viewer who seeks conciliation ought to enter Aboriginal sovereign display territories as guests.

Imagine a keeping house located on reserve land (including urban reserves) that is managed by Indigenous people and only open to Native people of that territory. That would be an irreconcilable space of Indigeneity. Now, picture the same space, but open to any respectful person. That would be an Indigenous sovereign display territory[26] that could also be a space of conciliation. The first gallery would be directed to the people of the community by members of the community—a keeping house or ceremonial space. If the culture was oral, perhaps there

[25] April 22 - June 17, 1995, at the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.
[26] David Garneau, "Indian to Indigenous: Temporary Pavilions to Sovereign Display Territories." Keynote speech: Aboriginal Curatorial Conference, (*Revisioning the Indians of Canada Pavilion: Ahzhekewada [Let us look back] A colloquium for Aboriginal curators, artists, critics, historians and scholars*), Ontario College of Art and Design University. Toronto, ON. Oct 15, 2011.

would be no written signs or catalogues; your experience would be guided by knowledge keepers. Sovereign display territories might be nearly identical, but they would make some concessions to outsiders. The degree of inclusion would be part of what would make these spaces interesting. These Native-managed spaces would include languages of the visitors. Many items would not be available to all visitors, but clever screen objects would be (photographs, models, replicas, etc.), so they would have a sense of the real without violating it. The theme of some of these spaces might be less a revelation of 'authentic' Aboriginality and more a working through of how Indigenous people have changed and adapted within contact.

I imagine that such safe spaces would encourage Indigenous people to make work that not only spoke to their own people, but also to visitors. It would probably value (local) meaning over Western notions of (universal) quality and blur the boundary between art and artefact. However, because it is engaged with the larger world, rather than being primarily a keeping house that preserves objects and encourages customary practices, it would also function as a cultural lab where artists would struggle creatively with the contemporary world as well as traditional forms.

Some people might not want to share their experiences of Indian Residential School because the sites of Reconciliation administered by the TRC are temporary. Knowing that an Indigenous sovereign display territory was permanent and includes visual and tactile objects that are activated by embodied knowledge (their makers and others talking about them)[27] would encourage a slow unfolding of truths. Capital 'T' Truth in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation is a Platonic form designed not to be achieved in this veil of tears. These sites, like the Holocaust Museums, have a more modest goal. Because no master narrative could contain these events their designers elect to make room for both the facts and the many truths to find their form and audiences. There is no definitive story and no conclusion; there must be room, over time, for everything and everyone.

The government apology and the work of the TRC are important, but the deeper work of conciliation will be among individuals who re-cognize themselves as also other than agents of the State. Settlers visiting these permanent sites of conciliation do so as individuals who are conscious that their institutions perpetrated systematic abuses designed to assimilate or destroy Aboriginal people so they could take their land. To use the Catholic metaphor, forced assimilation is the Original sin that made Canada possible. This is the Settler's inheritance and the immigrant's burden. And here is where I lose my faith, or at least stretch the metaphor until it snaps. Colonialism is not a singular historical event but an ongoing legacy—the colonizer and has not left. The sin cannot be expiated. There is no Redeemer in this situation. An apology and cash payments will not absolve the stain. The Government's frantic race to a post-historical space of reconciliation, rather than submission to a permanent state of negotiation, of Treaty, is short-sighted.

Living Apology

[27] These spaces would not simply be containers for dead things but sites of living exchange. Indigenous aesthetics are inseparable from pedagogy and other aspects of life. The objects are not to be separated from use and relegated to the eye; they are part of a circuit of object, maker and participant. This includes touch and the unfolding of the work's meanings by either the artist or someone she or he has gifted with this responsibility.

So, what roles can non-Indigenous cultural workers and Indigenous people who did not go to Indian Residential School play in conciliation projects? The fact and impact of Indian Residential Schools is not only an Indigenous issue but a Canadian issue. We all have a part to play in understanding how our lives and privileges emerge from colonialism and how we might live conciliation. Living apology requires that two parties come together in full agreement of the facts. In this case, the center of our work is to create space and opportunity for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people to work in as many ways as they see fit, over as long a period as they require. This activity should not be cast primarily in terms of healing. More often than not, such work opens wounds rather than heals them. Curators, and others who facilitate the production and exhibition of this sort of work, must be cautious not to replicate a Truth and Reconciliation model or models of quality framed by standards of colonialism and whiteness. We must be certain that those we work with are agents and not subjects. We must especially watch that our creative partners are not participating due to economic deprivation: selling the final commodity the dominant culture is interested in accumulating, their stories.

Government ideology and funding has created a spectacle of the Indian Residential School experience as a means to distract from larger issues—primarily the environment. The public theatre of individual Indigenous people in distress is a familiar dominant culture trope designed to humiliate and contain all Indigenous people. Unlike the South African Truth and Reconciliation process that counter-balanced victim presentations with scenes of individual perpetrators confessing, apologizing, and accepting punishment for their crimes, the Canadian (white and colonial) psyche could not bear such intimate exposures and the broader implications. By focusing on Indian Residential Schools, the government has reduced colonialism to a soluble problem: 'the schools are closed; the victims are paid off; problem solved. Now, shut up. Let us "put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future." We need to challenge this narrative.

The core of post-TRC aesthetic practice should be the enabling of Indigenous artists to produce works that relate their individual and collective experience of colonialism and their imaginative projections into the future. This is an alternative to the confessional and instrumentalist narrative strategies of the historical, sociological and legal/compensation systems that make up the current system. Our role is to create safe, fluid spaces where novel means of production can occur. In these spaces, Indigenous artists learn from each other; share common experiences, artistic methods and develop collaborations, but also to support these artists to make whatever they damn well wish as sovereign creative people, not as people always defined by colonialism.

The natural participants in our project would seem to be Indian Residential School survivors. But, more often than not, their needs are more basic than those satisfied by exhibition art. Because the primary survivors are often so damaged, as Janvier explains, or were disenfranchised from the means of intellectual and artistic production, few are able or willing to do this work in public. More likely, it will be the generations who continue to bear this acidic legacy, intergenerational survivors[28] who may have more emotional and educational resources to

[28] Acknowledging that the effects of Residential Schools extend far beyond those who attended them, TRC documents include numerous references to the "legacy" of Residential Schools. However, this fact is not acknowledged by the compensation agreements, which exclude intergenerational survivors.

do this work, make this history. Some will have difficulty articulating or aestheticizing their experience and others will simply be appalled by the idea that they should be asked to do so. The shift in attention concentrates less on what happened at Indian Residential Schools than on what happened as a result of them. This casts the facts in the embodied present.

A second project emerges from the first and can occur simultaneously, as long as the facts of Indigenous experience and the truths about Canadian colonial history are first seen, heard, and agreed upon to the reasonable satisfaction of the Indigenous collaborators. Such work should not be *about* Indigenous people, but a study *with* Indigenous people. Allies must understand the historical and embodied facts to the satisfaction of the First Peoples they hope to work *with*. However, even before such engagements, non-Aboriginal people should first examine—among themselves—their motives and be able to explain their need to engage this work.

I think we should not be in such a rush to let our words imagine a reconciled, healed future. Our focus should be on creating the conditions that engender the sharing of facts in forms that cannot be as easily appropriated, measured, and contained. I feel that this work will be its own reward, that people will be transformed by the process. Not only will new relationships and knowledge be forged, but new works will also be produced: performances, texts, works of art that will all require decoding and resist decoding, and that in future such readings will engender further personal transformations.

Art is not healing in itself, but it can be in relation. Art is a stimulant and a balm when taken internally, but dangerous is mistaken for experience. There is a profound difference between reading signs and being engaged by a symbol. Sharing in a discourse about histories, responsibility and transformation among art works and with other human beings is a corrective to the colonial desire for settlement.

The paintings at the start of this essay, “Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Meeting” and “Aboriginal Advisory Circle Meeting,” try to picture irreconcilable spaces of Indigeneity without giving away any content. I want to signal that something interesting is going on beyond the colonial gaze. At the same time, by using dominant culture vernacular, I want to show that what happens in these spaces is very like what happens in similar spaces but with different people. While the core of Indigeneity is incompletely available to non-Native people, those who come to spaces of conciliation not to repair “Indians” but to heal themselves, who come not as colonizers but with a conciliatory attitude to learn and share as equals, may be transformed.