

Care and Separation

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Care and Separation:

Thinking about care as a relational aesthetic
art practice within a colonial structure

But being an artist doesn't necessarily mean making drawings or paintings or sculpture, or even installations or videos. The desire to pursue a life in "fine art" simply means a desire to respond creatively to the present, just as the disciplines of "poetry" or "rock & roll" were ciphers for counter cultural lifestyles in other areas. *Chris Kraus*

Introduction

Canadian Minister of Parliament and activist Mumilaaq Qaqqaq spoke in the houses of parliament stating that, “Colonization is not over. It has a new name. Children are still being separated from their communities. Foster care is the new residential school system. The suicide epidemic is the new form of Indigenous genocide,”

Ruby was handed over to us when she was only hours old and her length of stay with us is undetermined.

We had very little information about Ruby before she came into our home. Early on when applying to become foster parents my partner and I, knowing how disturbingly over represented the Indigenous community is in the foster care system, had wondered as to how comfortable we felt about taking care of an Indigenous child since neither one of us were Indigenous nor felt that we were exposed culturally enough to offer what an Indigenous child might need.

If what Mumilaaq Qaqqaq says is true, and I believe it is, that “Colonization is not over”, then how then do we personally not add to these horrors? How do we constructively wrestle with the fact that we are operating within a colonial system that, by its structural nature, disables Indigenous peoples? So, my partner and I approach this with unease. We are faced first hand with results of cultural genocide and ongoing colonization. I, one of the most privileged occupants of this society, am holding an infant who in many ways is considered one of the least privileged.

After escaping enslavement by the Pharaoh, the Jews wandered in exile through the Egyptian desert. Yahweh, the God of the Jews, told Moses to lead his people to Canaan, the promised land which was flowing with milk and honey, “So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey.” (The Torah, Exodus 3:8). This is a well know story, one that I grew up with when I attended an evangelical church. I want to draw attention to this story to give not only personal context but also religious and cultural context. Sadly, the story of Exodus was and still is arrogantly adapted by many of the colonists to suit their belief that North America was the new Canaan. Many British settlers saw themselves as God’s chosen people, so whatever land they “discovered” was their land to take by divine right. Many believed in the Doctrine of Discovery which gave them ultimate authority over land, the non-Christian and the non-

white peoples. If one takes a bit of time to consider this strange doctrine that has roots in the Christian Church it isn't difficult to see how at odds it is with the very spirit of the one that Christians profess to follow. I look to decolonial activist and self-identified Settler Christian pastor Steve Heinrichs who speaks to this original spirit, he says, "(Jesus) was an Indigenous Palestinian born in occupied Jerusalem, was resisting and proclaiming liberation for the captives." This is an often overlooked point by many Christians whose internal justifications have been nothing less than genocidal.

In so many ways I am complacent in the spread of the "colonizer virus" which author and activist Edgar Villanueva describes as a disease where "at the core of this affliction is a sense of dividedness or separation.". In addition to this colonial virus much of my extra familial socialization has been heteronormative masculinity. Luckily, within my home, I experienced parents who did not demonstrate patriarchal norms and who did encourage generosity and inclusion. I credit this upbringing in being able to undertake this project. Culturally I have lineage to many (primarily men) who believed that they were justified to lay claim to land by displacing and destroying a people who already occupied it. Many years have passed since initial colonization occurred but the structure continues. Directly or indirectly, as a result of colonization we find ourselves with care, apprehended by the government, of a Indigenous child. This book is about my own education and investigation into what care

means. It is about my confrontation with the realities of a system that is both somehow deeply flawed and seemingly necessary. Most importantly it is about how as a family we develop a personal relationship with this child and her mother and what this relationship means as a social and artistic practice.

A note on Relational Aesthetics: In the late 1990's curator Nicolas Bourriaud saw this as a movement in which the artist acts more as a catalyst that constructs aesthetic experiences for and between viewers and less as a producer of art work. Relational Aesthetics considers that art is not independent from the viewer but instead requires some sort of relationship to occur. These relational activities have the intent of some sort of directed interaction and can happen both inside and outside the gallery space. I have intentionally aligned the thoughts in this book within this tradition and am also hoping to push this traditional to encompass more social practices as the opening quote by Chris Kraus notes. Nicolas Bourriaud published a book called *Relational Aesthetics* in 1998 in which he defined Relational Aesthetics as, "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."

It may help to think about this book as a personal reading journal or diary that takes place over the course of a year. The structure of my writing follows the chronology of Ruby's time with us. Apart from a

few rearrangements the order of the paragraphs are structured under various headings that reflect a particular time and space. The organization is not topical, as a result, the text does continually revisit ideas as the months go by. Often certain ideas come up reflecting the books or articles that I am reading at any given time. I have gone back a few times to insert quotes that seem applicable to earlier sections.

Also, and most importantly, Janet (Ruby's mom), my partner Jayne and our two kids Charlie and Ida, my extended family and community all share in the care of Ruby. This has been a journey where care has been possible and enriching because of the many who have generously taken part.

Settling down or walking

To *settle* is to come to a resolve- to reach an internal agreement. Be it people, places, or things settling refers to the idea that one has stopped looking. For example, we have settled on this house, or I have settled on that car, or I have settled on this relationship. The ladder in many ways often has a negative connotation. We may criticize someone for 'settling for someone' implying that they have given up looking or that they believe that this person they have settled on is the best they are going to do. Settler colonialists stopped where they stopped and settled in.

Their act of searching ceased when they settled. Those living years later come from a long lineage of settled thinkers. It is a psychological given that we are currently in a settled state which is one of contentment and predictability as the need to search is no longer required nor considered a noble pursuit. We are complacent about where and who we are. In our short pathetic history of settler colonialism we are shocked to consider that things could and should look different. Cuban American academic José Esteban Muñoz considers the queer utopian, he writes, “It is also about this temporal project that I align with queerness, a work shaped by its idealist trajectory; indeed it is the work of not settling for the present, of asking and looking beyond the here and now.” He talks about the “forward-dawning” which keeps our sights set on the future and keeps us from “present’s stultifying hold”. Unsettle and un-settle are necessities of a critical practice, otherwise, one gives in to the illusion that they have come to a conclusion or have retired. Both conclusion and retirement is believing in one’s personal accomplishments. More abstractly it is a personal cessation regardless of the current living Other and the future Other.

It may actually have been the case for the Jews wandering the desert looking for the promise land that there was no land of milk and honey desired but rather something more profound. Indeed it could have been the search for an unmediated relationship with the creator. Though a temple was eventually established I wonder if the pillar of smoke by day and fire by night

while walking in the desert wasn't less mediated than the use of the priest. The analogy of the museum as temple and the journey as art practice is apt. Venturing out into the desert is an archetypal theme, the heroes journey, the errant knight that considers intentional walking and journeying a practice. The shift from material production to immaterial action, which was brought about by the body's need for physical engagement, was a shift to consider art outside of the confines of a gallery. It is usually the case that material production that 'settled' in the galleries is bound or at least trapped. The Situationist's *derive*, the Dadists *déambulations* in the 1920's, and Hans Ulrich Obrist's *strollology*, only to name a few, saw walking as a form of art that freed art from the gallery. Settling removes the creativity from work/life and replaces it with the boredom and exploitation.

The ongoing engagement of touch through ones surroundings or the interaction caused by movement on the land fades for the settler. In walking, the human scale is reset. It is no wonder why when we protest we take to the street and walk arm in arm and engage face-to-face. In times of trouble we protest and in times of joy we parade. The settler on the other hand, is content and seduced with removing themselves from society seeking entertainment in solitude.

Placement

Jayne called to tell me that child services had an emergency apprehension of a new born who needed placement and because it was a long weekend, Monday being Canadian thanksgiving (Columbus day in the USA), there was very little known about this infant's case due to a shortage of staff. After a bit of hesitation we said yes knowing how uncertain things can be. Now in hindsight these two holidays took on an increasingly weighted meaning. In this region, some Indigenous groups first encountered European explorers and missionaries in the early 1700's. Canadian Thanksgiving was recognized as a holiday in 1879 and in 1885 Indigenous ceremonies were banned by the Canadian government. Missionaries viewed the ceremonies as evil and the government saw them as a threat to full assimilation. According to the colonizing institutions, showing gratitude by way of sharing went too far as sharing can't be traced nor taxed. Distributing wealth did not compliment the settler capitalist undertaking. Ramón Grosfoguel writes that the "...inferiority of the "Indians" below the line of the human was the modern capitalist argument that "Indians" have no sense of private property and no notion of markets because they produce through collective forms and distribute wealth through reciprocity."

Tattoo tallies

I started tattooing tally marks on my body, one for every week Ruby is with us and not with her mother. Over the past years there has been an increased blurring of traditions surrounding tattoos. Recently I was at a coffee shop where many of the baristas had beautifully executed tattoos covering their arms, chests, legs, and some even on their necks. The subject matter ranged from intricate abstraction to images of figures and animals. In line in front of me a customer, who had ordered a cappuccino, probably in his 30's was covered with tattoos. He had a shaved head which revealed a number of coloured snake like designs crawling up the back of his neck onto his head. I noticed that he was wearing a Hell's Angels vest. I commented on his tattoos out of principle, he nodded in thanks. He left the café enjoying his \$5 cappuccino. I wondered if he was aware of these strange worlds merging and if there was any lament on his part of the possible loss of cache the tattoo might be having. In the book *Carsick* by John Waters, his fictional self imagines himself being picked up while hitch hiking across the USA by a group of hipster carnies running a traveling circus. His character was then forced to work the freak show being billed as the freakish tattooless man. The audience marveled at his clean blank skin. I am taken with how artist David Wojnarowics describes a tattooed man in his book *Close To the Knives*, he writes, "The tattooed man came up

suddenly and sat down beside me in the rain like a ceramic figurine glazed with water running down the smooth colours of his shirtless chest. Huge fish fins were riding his shoulders and tattooed scales of komodo dragons, returned from the wilds of jungular Africa, twisting outlines and colours of clawed feet and tails smoothing over his aged biceps and the cool white of his of his head, shaved to permit tattoos of a mythological beast to lift around his neck like frescos of faded photographs...”. No doubt with my own minimal undertaking of tattoos I am presenting a fantastical record for others to see. Tattooing is theatrics, partly disingenuous and partly authentic with each playing into the other.

At Documenta 12, 2007 in Kassel Germany the design group vier5 developed font and signage for the 100 day exhibition. For the outer guiding the design firm stated:

The first work consists in white signs that can be seen everywhere in the city. The signs are meant to be in the way of the persons in the city or the city zone and restrict the usual “walking flow”. Like with the containers, “raw”, already existing material is used. The bases of the signs are made of coarse concrete blocks as they can also be found on building sites.

For the official logo vier5 used a traditional tally system of 12 ticks with 2 complete groups of 5 with

the traditional cross marking to indicate completion and an additional 2 to make it 12. This practice of counting is nearly universal. Popular mythology commonly connects the tally system to recording a time spent somewhere desperate like jail or an island. I think this is due mostly to its simplistic methodology of mark making. No knowledge of numbers is required as the marks are objects not symbols that mean something other than their mere physical existence and no specialized tool is needed to scrape out a mark. They are in a way anti-institutional indicators as they require no hierarchy or collective agreement to indicate meaning which may be why they are so ubiquitous in the documentation of time spent in a corrective institute or prison. The marks are immediate and basic. They reference a sense of not only time but place as they create a psychological connection to a specific individual making a mark on a specific object with a specific tool. A tally mark is a performative act that lends to the embodiment of a given practice. In 1955, Documenta's founder Arnold Bode wanted to "bring Germany back into dialogue with the rest of the world". This was in many ways a healing initiative that would allow for a conversation to be experienced by a wounded people, both internationally and nationally. Veir's use of tallies gives recognition to its original intent by breaking linguistic and institutional boundaries

It was at Documenta 12 where the Inuit artist Annie Pootoogook exhibited a series of drawings. She tragically died 9 years later. CBC reported: "The body

of Pootoogook, 47, was discovered in the Rideau River near Bordeleau Park on Sept. 19, 2016.” Her death and the subsequent investigation drew significant attention because of her status as “an internationally renowned artist” who was at the time of death living on the street. There were stories of collectors tracking her down to purchase drawings for next to nothing while she was in this vulnerable state. There was also controversy surrounding an Ottawa police forensic officer who posted racist comments about her death. He first stated on a facebook post: "could be a suicide, accidental, she got drunk and fell in the river and drowned, who knows.", and then in a second post, "much of the Aboriginal population in Canada is just satisfied being alcohol or drug abusers."

S.C.U.M

On the day my partner called about Ruby I had just finished reading about Chiara Fumai. A strange synchronistic occurrence. I took immediate notice to Fumai's work because it meant something imminent to me. It served as a primer and wake up call for the following year's practice I was about to undertake.

Author and activist Valerie Solanas shot and wounded Andy Warhol in 1968. An excerpt from her self-published S.C.U.M. manifesto reads:

A 'male artist' is a contradiction in terms. A degenerate can only produce degenerate 'art'. The true artist is every self-confident, healthy female, and in a female society the only Art, the only Culture, will be conceited, kooky, funky, females grooving on each other and on everything else in the universe.

Solana's text: A MALE ARTIST IS A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS serves as the backdrop to a video where the late Italian artist Chiara Fumai reads the S.C.U.M. Manifesto. I only recently came across this work by accident while superficially flipping through Art Forum magazine. In the reviews, Fumai's exhibition was being discussed. I had forgotten her connection to Warhol, and Fumai's work was totally unknown to me. Waterside Contemporary manages her archive and states that "Chiara Fumai lives and 'unworks' in Milan.". Fumai died at age 39 in 2017 from what seems to have been an overdose of prescription drugs. Pierre d'Alancaisez of Waterside Contemporary made a statement on Facebook: "I'm deeply saddened to hear of the sudden passing of Chiara Fumai. Chiara was an extraordinary force—committed to her practice and not afraid of its risks. It was a privilege to work with her at Waterside". Fumai's work is fearless, challenging, and continues to be relevant. So I asked myself if I have ever had to take risks? In my world of privilege what I have thought as challenges are mere bits of acute discomfort.

I had been skimming this issue of Art Forum magazine when Jayne called to ask if we would be willing to take in a baby. I was helping some friends find a piece of art for their dining room. They wanted to add to their art collection with a piece that would be an investment and a key aspect of their home. They were willing to spend accordingly and were also willing to put in the time and energy to find it. It isn't hard to see the bizarre position the Contemporary art magazine holds when one can both search for a collectible piece of art while also finding a review of Fumai's work. I have long thought that art schools have created a schizophrenic atmosphere, but here as well, the entire realm of publicized main stream Contemporary art is pathologically split with socially active practices living beside polished formalism. Maybe though this is a true reflection of society.

My friends mentioned that we should be concentrating on female artists, I agreed. They had had some framing done at a gallery and one of the owners was expressing how under represented female artists were in the art world. I know that this particular gallery has an impressive policy of male female parity. I began thinking more about what parity means in light of practice, especially how practice relates to care and art. Practice is sometimes addressed more directly within the Contemporary museum. Practice is a difficult thing for private galleries to take on because it is difficult to commodify. Exhibiting practice often becomes quite distorted though within the museum. The contemporary museum, possibly shifting for the better in some ways, still finds itself as a Eurocentric model

of power. Today's museum is finding it difficult to separate itself from corporate dependence which, although grateful for the financial support, is often at odds with the various practices exhibited. Paul B. Preciado writes, "In the realm of the baroque-financial museum, works of art are no longer thought of according to their ability to question our habitual modes of perceiving or knowing, but rather according to their infinite interchangeability." He then goes on to state that the museum should be referred to as a "necromuseum" which is "an archive of our own global destruction". This is a reminder to not fall under a false illusion of what art sometimes offers. Too often it can easily present itself as an altruistic force. The consumer capitalist structure of both publicizing and displaying art will hardly be challenged or changed in a profound way by merely having female male parity in a given stable of artists at any given gallery. As with the art magazine, a certain schizophrenia is hard to avoid. The act of art's traditional commodification by the gallery plays into the well established hierarchy. Maybe the gallery, while still maintaining commercial obligations, needs to creatively encourage the artists outside of this traditional mode (some do), easier said than done. Many gallery owners work tirelessly as it is to support their existing stable of artists. Analogously, affirmative action is essential, but is sometimes just another way to benefit from a larger work force without addressing systemic problems. This is the traditional capitalistic model renewed to reflect the market. Whether this is good or bad is a different question but let us not fall prey to mere catharsis in our

handling of deeply embedded systemic inequality, hierarchy and severely disparate power ratios. Let us not give in to the illusion that a painting on a wall will change the world. The wall itself should be in question. The German social theorist Lu Märten reminds us that, “In order to demand something with which to decorate the walls of this new life, we must first understand that we have to renew and change these walls themselves.”

I want to note that my use of the word capitalism reflects what the authors of *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treat 7* describe as a difference in world view between Aboriginal and Eurocentric peoples. Capital according to the Eurocentric world view is money, whereas capital according to the Aboriginal world view is nature. My use of the word in this book is referring to the Eurocentric world view.

Profanity

The catholic church is the largest non-governmental land holder in the world with untold billions in the bank. In Canada they were unable to raise \$25 million to compensate the residential school survivors, yet were able to pay for the new \$28.5 million Holy Family Cathedral outside Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The cathedral is named *Holy Family* which is more than insulting as it was the Indigenous families who

were destroyed by many Christian and Catholic missionaries. Profanity according to the catholic encyclopedia is: The desecration of something holy by using or treating a sacred person, place, or thing as though it were not sacred but merely secular or profane. Thus profanity in speech is the use of God's name or of one of the saints without due regard for its sacred character.

In reference to Walter Benjamin, Gabriel Levine speaks about profaning certain elements of traditional practices as an act that breaks down ritual and established separations. In Levine's beautiful book, entitled *Art and Tradition in a Time of Uprisings*, he examines notions of queering traditions and vernaculars in order to heal ourselves and the world. In profaning certain seemingly binary separations like the oppressed and the oppressor or the blessed and the cursed we are able to begin to see and experience our world differently. In my own reading of Levine I see and experience my world more naturally and less formally. I think of queering and profaning the child / parent separation, the child / foster child separation, foster parent / bio parent separation, the social worker / embodied art practice separation and the domestic / art making separation in order to better navigate the highly formal and rigid systems and institutions that are in place in our society. Elimination of these separations begins to reflect more of an Indigenous worldview and less of the dominant modern / colonial worldview. Wahinkpe Topa (Four Arrows) and Darcia Narvez in their bestselling book *Restoring the Kinship*

Worldview write that “Colonizers use explicate-order concepts that do not fit dynamic reality.” They go on to say that, “The idea of a static world full of separated objects has caused endless problems as experts isolate fragments of reality and take actions that do not account for their impact on the whole.” The kinship that Topa and Narvez speaks about is one that involves the entirety of nature. The queer view of the world is then one that encompasses all as one, including things that seem lifeless and other to the colonial eye. The queer understanding is one that is holistic and sees all as sentient and conscious, and non-hierarchical.

Although a limited comparison, gender parity among artist representation and parity within parenting, might be helpful. Practice should be considered as important if not more important as parity doesn't extend far enough. I say this as a white cis-male so I should be taken with caution. As a policy, parity risks stagnation and catharsis and may continue to contribute to simplified categories putting limitations on individuals without addressing systemic issues. Although parity can at times be prescriptive, it can at times be presented as too easy a solution because it usually is selective to what is being equalized. Usually only one of gender, race, or, sexuality is chosen at a time, not all at the same time, and not all aspects. Parity assumes an essentialist view of identity which for some is valid but it seems to be more constructive to have an increasingly fluid and intersecting approach to identity. Therefore to address all identities is impossible due to the near infinite amount of nuances

and varieties of existence. We do see an advancement at an institutional level with promotion of art works and practices by anyone and everyone regardless of identity as long as they critically approach and dismantle heteronormative tendencies. This simply may be the answer. The beauty here is the need for a constant wrestling of what practice actually means. Artists Leila Abdelrazaq states, "I'm constantly thinking about the function of every single aspect of what I'm creating- how it either intentionally reinforces or challenges assumption, systems, etc. Every choice we make either reinforces or challenges certain power structures, and I want to be intentional about which ones I'm using and which ones I'm intentionally defying." Concentrating on practice over identity is more inclusive and sets a different standard for all who see and participate. It opens the door for new ways of living and operating. Exposure to less normative practices may give a white cisgendered boy, for example, another model for living. With only parity, one can point to a list of names and feel falsely assured that they are properly representative, whereas, the examination into a particular practice becomes a much more rigorous and profound measure of progression. I find myself responding and reacting equally negatively to heteronormative practices regardless of who is performing them. As a crude example, I find it difficult to imagine gender parity for broadcasters on the sports channel leading to the demise of heteronormative masculine sports culture, or that girls wearing pink helmets at hockey practice does much to curb entrenched masculine violence in sports.

In both cases I feel that, although the performer may be of a less represented gender, the practice remains the same as the dominant gender. Parity in these cases only helps preserve the various institutions by reaching new audiences. I often disingenuously wonder what parity in straight pornography would do? I do, however, believe that individual arts funding should favor those who are underrepresented as they are usually oppressed in some manner by the dominate systemic norms at play. To counter this oppression requires us to go beyond mere parity and calls for a more proactive role on behalf of the administrators and those involved in arts organizations. It isn't enough to passively accept applications as this favors those who know the system. It requires administrators to venture out and search out those practices that need support and encourage practices that do not yet exist (I am also thinking of understanding new approaches to fostering children). If we apply this notion of practice over parity to parenting I believe that all caregivers regardless of their gender will be able to focus on learning from the historic and existing progressive feminist practices and apply it to their own practice of care.

Ruby is picked up for her first visit with Janet. It lasted for two hours. We send a communication book where both Ruby's mom Janet and we write letting each other know when Ruby has eaten, slept, or poohed last. In it Janet writes: Ruby's clothes smell strange. Janet is right, something did stink! It was the umbilical cord nub that smelt bad so we finally pulled it off. On the

second visit the book returned thanking us for taking care of her daughter.

Curating & Care

Everyone seems to be curating their lives in some sort of selective sense or another. This act or profession should not primarily exist merely to edit, stylize, prescribe, censor, select, or promote one's personal taste but rather exist in order to give care.

It is appropriate to consider curators as caregivers and caregivers as curators. Curators are often associated with the arts and caregivers with social welfare. The realm of art should be regarded equally with that of other social endeavors and be discerned using the same criteria. Sadly though, a hierarchy has been structured putting the curator in a superior position relative to that of a social worker. By regarding them equally, void of hierarchy, and asking for a higher standard from both when it comes to encounters they begin to merge into one. In both cases each occupation has ignored the very thing the other has been attentive to. The curator is attentive to the individual's need in providing proper context in order to best and most constructively for their work to be received. The caregiver is attentive to the continuity of comfort and security and helps maintain dignity in the face of potential struggle. The curator may have tendencies to

ignore the individual's security and dignity. The individual's security and dignity may be at the expense of the curator's own conceptual goals because the curator has producers, sponsors, and ultimately the market, yes even when it is entirely a public venture. The caregiver, on the other hand, may have tendencies to ignore the necessity of the individual's need to be received within relevant context. This is due not to neglect but rather to the institutional failing of proper holistic educational preparation of the caregiver and of course a lack of resources available to the caregiver.

At every level there are encounters. If a caregiver is there to help facilitate an individual's continuity they ultimately perform this facilitation through face-to-face encounters. The notion that they are caregivers of eternity places each individual at the centre of caring for one another's continuity. The creation stories that are at the heart of so many cultures exemplify our obligation to the Other. It is due to our encounters with the Other that allows for the creation of something new, which is in effect the continuity of ourselves. Without the Other our existence would cease. It would fade into a forgotten territory, void of both change and aesthetics. It would slip into some incomprehensible steady state.

Interlude: My god!

I heard a quiet prayer being said over Ruby while being held by an old family friend. I shuddered and wondered if I should have intervened. They said something to the effect of, “Jesus, watch over little Ruby, I hope she grows up to know you”. Personally, I remembered praying every night before falling asleep asking for forgiveness for my sins so I wouldn’t wake up in hell. Then, the friend’s husband said how glad he was that the mother decided to keep the baby and went ahead with the birth.

The debate provoked by the conquest of the Americas was about whether the “people without religion” found in Columbus’ voyages were “people with a soul or without a soul.” The logic of the argument was as follows: 1) if you do not have religion, you do not have a God; 2) if you do not have a God, then you do not have a soul; and 3) if you do not have a soul, you are not human but animal-like. *Ramón Grosfoguel*

By week three Ruby and Janet have had three different case workers, none of whom we have met. I don’t believe this is reflective of the level of concern or care

on the part of the individual worker but rather the sheer volume of cases needing to be dealt with.

Janet and her partner, who is not the biological father, both have skin in the game and regardless of their social evaluation they are on the front lines and want Ruby. They are the one's exposed and not the friends who prayed and were thankful that the baby wasn't aborted. They don't have skin in the game which of course lends to their abstracted version of the entire situation. As with most issues, those who have less skin in the game are quick to judge and live in a binary world. They are the ones who believe it is best to sober up first then deal with your problems as opposed to consider that the need to deal with pain relief is actually a life and death situation. Profaning life and death is key to encountering the realities of any social practice. The same way that it is said that the most effective way to be compassionate is to have boundaries. The most effective way to understand life is to be able to hold it within appropriate boundaries. This would be opposed to holding life at all cost like hard line pro-lifers. Life needs to be profaned in order to move beyond the existing models that might not be working.

I attended an evangelical church when I was young. Once a month we partook in communion passing trays up and down the rows sharing Welch's grape juice and Ritz crackers which represented the blood and body of Christ. Actually, the crackers varied, sometimes

regular saltines or something more hearty and whole wheat and sometimes Ritz. I don't think that they ever served the cheese Ritz Bits but I wished they would have. I believe that the decision to give little importance to the bread and wine as symbols was a subtle fuck you to the Catholic church of whom they made great efforts to be unlike. This attempt at counter identity seems always inauthentic and disingenuous, whereas, the act of queering and profaning is not about counter identity but rather creative identity even when anarchic. My grandmother was extremely wary of the Catholics and the Communists. Orwell realized while fighting in the Spanish civil war that each side was corrupt and problematic so, while initially involving himself with the process of counter identity, he ended up moving beyond and into creative anarchic identity. Maybe we need to start by countering something in order to move towards creativity.

Hans Ulrich Obrist in discussing artists Gilbert and George write, "They described their trajectory as 'a pilgrimage' and we discussed the invention of living sculpture." As a pilgrim, one is a foreigner who takes a journey into the unknown often for Holy purposes. For Gilbert and George the investigation and experience of life is manifested in making pictures. Their artwork is a result of a daily living pilgrimage -their practice. Understanding that part of one's daily practice is to venture into the unknown which is an exciting thing. To feel the opposite is to sink into the banality of life. Although the word Holy is loaded it is apt as part of the journey of profaning. Gilbert and George do this

quite beautifully and overt. The claim to living sculptures is a call to blur boundaries between art and life and all the other holy and unholy separations that we believe should be honoured.

Relational Aesthetics and Evangelicalism

In parenting and care giving a transformative process begins when de-centering. A delicate distancing that, through humility, creates clarity. De-centering is an act of removing oneself from their assumed space of occupation. It is also an exercise in relinquishment. At any given time the one who holds the greater power must work ceaselessly to equalize power in order for the relationship to make productive friction. This friction is analogous to the energy created when two physical objects rub against each other causing heat, a form of energy. In this analogy it is important to see how if one object is harder than the other it will wear the other down. A form of equality, not sameness, must be reached. For example, the harder object must first be made smaller than the softer one before any sort of friction occurs, or vice versa, the softer of the two must be made larger. It would be incorrect to state that only the same types of objects may produce friction. The energy that is formed between the two,

when there is a balance of power, is a relational aesthetic experience.

Evangelicalism is by nature is a prescriptive methodology. The tradition of sharing truth in a proactive manner or what could be considered evangelizing fails to mutually bring forth change and only serves the ego of the sharer. Truth, in the most creative sense, can only be created when relational activity is approached on the terms of the least powerful. This can be applied to the *relating to* and the *approach of* environments. Mutual impact and effect needs to be at the forefront of any endeavour outside of one's space or self. This can be extrapolated. It takes very little imagination to predict the effect of trampling blindly through a garden with no regard for where one steps. It takes considerably more imagination to understand the impact and effect of one's intrusion or approach into an other's culture or personhood. This is not to say that this should be avoided, not in the least, segregation has served us poorly. Segregation and isolation only serves to further entrench one's own biases. In fact, it is outright necessary in order to begin to right the many wrongs that exploits like colonialism have produced. Interaction with power balances will allow us to move away from a view point that is based on the authority of the very few conquerors and toward an understanding of plurality that truly describes our human experience. To approach another's culture or personhood calls for the fostering of imagination. Imagination is preparatory work and is a prerequisite

for all encounters. It reasons then that the encounters or relations that contain the greatest power imbalances require the greatest amount of imagination. It is not surprising to see how ineffectual foreign affairs and international relations are. Politicians for the most part are not known for their skills in imagination, yet, are asked to solve enormously complex cultural relational problems that are riddled with nuances. Fostering imagination is a difficult idea to layout. One of the major stumbling blocks to fostering imagination is time. It can be a remarkably slow and tedious development. For example, it can take generations to overcome certain cognitive biases. Imagination is profound yet an undervalued tool in too many areas.

Care and Marks

Our family has been exposed to a community of foster parents who are inspiring in there selfless approach to giving care when called on. These homes openly welcome the stranger. The agency we work with is small having about 10 foster families most of which have 2-3 beds each. It is important to note that there is no specific family model required. The family does not need to be a heteronormative couple nor does it require two individuals to make a home. Basic costs of care are covered and families are reimbursed according to the particular child's needs. There is also a per diem

that is paid depending on the child's age. For an infant it is a small amount that mostly covers added extra expenses incurred with a bit left over. I can see the benefits of both the model of being paid to care for a child, or doing it as purely volunteer work. I know of a foster mom who keeps four beds full in order for her to make enough money without another job. This mother is fantastic at what she does and I wish that she could be paid more. There is no question that at the end of the day she is ultimately saving the province money because of her consistent and concentrated care. The kids in her care come first, they are her family, and it is her full time job. On the other hand there are still horror stories where unchecked foster families are approaching care as primarily a money making venture with little regard for the care of the children. The children are left unattended, malnourished, and certainly not culturally fed. It is in these cases where further cultural genocide is being committed.

The increasing marks on my skin indicate time Ruby has spent with us, though now I am seeing the marks as her time trapped in the system. I purchased a tattoo gun online. It is a small rechargeable device that uses standard tattoo needles. I first practiced on fake skin, a synthetic product that receives the needle similar to that of skin.

Janet writes in the communication book that her visits with Ruby are good.

I want to have visual evidence that remembers Ruby and Janet. My slight discomfort when I give myself a mark is literally skin deep which I know pales in comparison to the mother's actual devastating pain. It's interesting to consider that the evidence left on my arm is socially acceptable and even admired, whereas the stigma of having your child taken away is often viewed as shameful. I learned Janet voluntarily admitted she was not able to care for Ruby at the time of birth. Regardless, if this was the right or wrong thing to admit to or whether or not it was even true, demonstrates Janet's self-reflection and care, but society has a difficult time understanding that. My mark in many ways is insulting to Janet, maybe all art insults reality is some way. The marks serve as a visual cue for those I encounter so I might tell them about Ruby and her mother. It is a line that places me in the present, a drawing that indicates something made strange. Am I showing off? Partly yes, I am proud which I am ashamed to admit, yet I am willing to wrestle with this duality. There is in no sense that what I am doing is restitution, in fact, there is something outright pathetic in this act. This is both an incomplete count and account and I am at risk of trying to claim ownership. Maggie Nelson writes in her inspiring book *The Argonauts*, "Annoying as it might be to hear a straight white guy talk about a book of his as queer (do you have to own everything?), in the end, it's probably for the better." I wrestle with the idea of it being 'better'. I will commit to the idea that it is better to wrestle than it is to disengage, as long as I am not taking someone's place, for it is better for me

to step aside and allow for the Other who is kept oppressed. It is not up to me to set new cultural practices. I am reminded of listening to a Black Lives Matter activist who stated that white men are not invited to their rallies. It wasn't that she felt that the white men's support wasn't good or desired, but rather, the continual act of easy appropriation, catharsis, and of course subtle ownership of a given cause by the white man is dangerous. The activist mentioned that if the white man truly believed in and wanted to support the issue, they would be more effective, for example, when at around the next family gathering to challenge a family member or guest who makes a racially charged comment or misogynistic remark. It is in these contexts that the white man often lets things slide. Like in the classic locker room scenario where there is a supposed sanctity among men and a vow of silence is expected.

I can't also hide the fact that I feel rewarded in giving myself a permanent mark. In saying this, the reward must be in constant check against the reality of the situation. How am I kept accountable? Through relationships with my family and community who are also deeply a part of Ruby's life and of course her mother Janet. What will she say if she asks what the marks are?

In a way I have become accountable to the marks themselves. I see them and I see how potentially hypocritical I can be which is something I can never overcome. I attempt to live up to the marked out

project that I have undertaken and to keep this tattoo authentic even though it is flawed. In other words, I have set out a criteria for this project which is made visible by the ongoing marks. I both want the reward of another one, and I want to draw it in good faith so my intentions remain constructive. The intention is to keep this little one safe and healthy and culturally aware with hope that she can return to her mother. This return would end the mark making. It may also never end.

Relational Aesthetics

The Mexican Liberation Theologist Jose Miranda who wrote, among other things, *Marx and the Bible* developed the idea that the existence of God occurs when there is Justice. This foundational state can be applied not only to the conceptual notion of God but also to the real experience the individual senses. Justice and differences are the reasons that Relational Aesthetics are present. Justice is the foundational impetus for relational activity because justice attempts to resolve power imbalances. Injustice could be defined as a power imbalance that is being acted upon or has been acted upon. Justice is the restitution of that particular power imbalance needs in order to regain the individual's continuity from its disrupted state- consider both Ruby and Janet. Relational

Aesthetics show evidence of such a course of action. It demonstrates to our senses and to our body that our unique continuity may once again be our potential. This is not to say that relational activity strictly exists because of injustice. It also is present because of our sheer existence due to difference. In other words, if all were the same there would be no distinction. It is difficult for us to distinguish individual difference from a difference in power. Many view difference as something to be overcome and overpowered when in fact difference is not only something not to be overcome, let alone overpowered, but is a preferable state and our existence at all levels depends on it. Difference has allowed for life to evolve and thrive not only at a biological level but also at a cosmological level. Difference is not only at the core of our existence it is what continually creates existence.

In encounters where power imbalances are considered and overcome the relational aesthetic that is manifested is fundamental. In other words, even though there are differences within the relationship, the thing that is created is what is similar in the relationship. It is the fundamental common ground. Think of the friction caused between two objects. Though they are different in many aspects the heat that is formed is evidence of the fact that they are fundamentally the same at a deep energetic level. The heat then is not only evidence but acts as a powerful impetuous for further creation. Relational Aesthetics are the expression of something fundamental. We

become the constructors of the fundamental through means of relational activity. The opposite is also true in that Exploitative Aesthetics are the expression of the destruction of the fundamental. Exploitative Aesthetics create an abstraction, a mere conceptual notion of things. This idea of the fundamental is what our experience of existence is based on. It is our link to the eternal because it allows for the continuation of constructing new possibilities.

Institution

I think it is important to think about what is meant by institution. Ruby, Janet, ourselves and many who are giving care are swimming in and through various institutions. Some are created in order to help and others exist only to self-preserve and of course many are a combination of the two.

What is meant by an institution? John Searle defines the institutional structure as the following; X counts for Y in the context of C. Simply put, X could be something or someone who has no function beyond their innate being. When X is then placed within a context, which has been usually agreed on by a collective, it is recognized not by its intrinsic value but by its extrinsic value. Searle uses the example of

currency. A piece of paper takes on value because of its political context. Without authority and agreement the money is only a worthless piece of paper. In the same way the president is a person who, without the political context, counts for no more than anyone else. Now place a piece of art for X in Searl's formula and notice how it becomes dependent on its context. The context being that of an institution. A formed piece of porcelain in a bathroom is a urinal whereas the same formed piece of porcelain in a museum is piece of art. A formed block in a construction yard is a brick and in a gallery a minimalist sculpture, and further, a group of placards on the street is a protest and in the gallery, as in Mark Wallinger's *State Britain*, is recontextualized as an art installation. The recontextualization of objects or people at best allows us to reconsider and challenge meaning by minimizing or altering the terms of reference, however, at worst runs the risk of losing function and meaning altogether.

Apply John Searl's description to the severely abstracted and rationally minimized Carle Andre's brick sculptures and let it reveal a deep and unrelenting fear of authority. The modernist approach is dependent on institutional acceptance by way of Duchamp's found objects- a straight forward linear progress from criticizing the institution to utter reliance on the institution. An art object begins by commenting on the state of art and then shifts to the art world commenting on Capitalism's ability to commodify anything and everything. Duchamp once

made a comment there “is no solution because there is no problem”. The problem though is alienation, Marx was right. The cold abstraction, the cold porcelain urinal (Duchamp) and the cold white light from fluorescent tubes (Flavin) tells us the body is not longer welcomed. Enchantment is inappropriate.

I find myself in amazement when I observe some of the other families working as foster parents. I know I don't see the daily grind nor the interpersonal conflicts that they work through- I know that they all have their demons. Though, why is it that I need to place my experience within some sort of artistic discourse? Why is it that I need to call what I do a “practice” when others seem to undertake their roles effortlessly. I suppose we all contextualize in order to give purpose and to sense grounding. In the same way one might feel it is God's calling to foster a child and another, who is an atheist, feel a calling by the rest of humankind. They place their vocation within some sort of humanist tradition rather than a religious one. We all call upon our specific combination of institutions in order to feel directed and supported.

Autotheory and practice

Lauren Fournier describes autotheory as being “tied to a politics of radical self-reflection, embodied knowledge, and sustained, literary nonfictional writing

through the self that has been, and continues to be, suppressed and repressed by certain patriarchal and colonial contexts.” Autotheory, as an embodied practice is one that has emerged and flourished in the feminist field partly due to the fact that women traditionally have been left with the bulk of ‘life’s’ work. This type of work in many ways revolve around care- care of the family and home. Though tremendously undervalued and unpaid it was less alienating than the factory, at least in terms of practice. The modern construct of the home is other ways very alienating. Modern domestic life is often socially alienating as it tends to isolate one from their community and extended family. Out of necessity women were living out theory through their daily work. Even if they were working in an artistic or academic field outside the home social pressures often forced them to take care of the home and children. There was very little room to sit back and dwell on their developed intellect like many of their male colleagues. For some, what emerged was a lived theoretical intuitive experience. A practice that emerged out of the division of labour and hierarchy. This practice was in part a refusal of the dominating structure created by patriarchy. This practice was and still is a refusal to adhere to identifying oneself as merely a performer of reproductive labour. Sara Ahmed points to a queer phenomenology when discussing the “labour of philosophy”. She writes that the “fantasy of paperless philosophy”, (I understand paperless as being that of a form of a feminist praxis as opposed to a patriarchal writing of philosophy) she

continues, “can be understood as crucial not only to the gendered nature of the occupation of philosophy but also to the disappearance of political economy, of the “materials” of philosophy as well as its dependence on forms of labour, both domestic and otherwise.” With this phenomenological approach, the consciousness is directed at the area of labour, in my case the domestic world. Ahmed discusses “work” which is what is involved in orientating ourselves in the world. It is through work that one counters, crosses, challenges certain “lines” such as “compulsory heterosexuality”. Compulsory heterosexuality is a dominating sociality that can and should be queered. This compulsory overbearing state promotes and is obsessed with straight reproductive lineages. These lineages are visible and felt everywhere but in particular within the domestic environment. Ahmed defines domestication as “making some object and not others available as what we “can” reach.” Happy family photographs, heirlooms, and wedding gifts stock the home providing evidence of the heterosexual reproductive lineage, and of course, the house itself- this private dwelling place, will be inherited by the children and their children’s children. Ahmed considers how the “queer body does not extend into such space” but argues that “queer desire “acts” by bringing other objects closer , those that would not be allowed “near” by straight ways of orientating the body.” My belief is that the individual’s firsthand experience and knowledge can be re-orientated, engaged, and un-alienated through lived personal labours of queer desire. This may be as

simple as caring for someone who does not fit within one's "straight" forms of lineage.

Fournier's "radical self-reflection" is reminiscent of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's discussion of Marcuse's 1955 text *Eros and Civilization*. Marcuse uses Narcissus to demonstrate the opposite of Prometheus's "performance principle". This performance principle, according to Marcuse "describes the conditions of alienated labour that modern man endures". Instead of Prometheus's repetitive torture where an eagle would daily eat out his liver, Narcissus finds himself in love with his own reflection. This love is a thing of radical self-reflection. It is also queer in that it is both a non-reproductive labour and non-productive labour. Muñoz, upon reflection of Marcuse's text, writes that the "Great Refusal" is queer because it is a "rejection of normal love that keeps a repressive social order in place", and goes on to say that "Queerness, as I am describing it here, is more than just sexuality. It is the great refusal of a performance principle that allows the human to feel and know not only our work and our pleasure but also ourselves and others." It may be a stretch to consider that the mirrors that we have in our domestic environment serve as some sort of reflecting pond similar to that of Narcissus's, however, I find it interesting that the mirror in the domestic environment is a constant fixture whose modern identity is primarily a feminine one. Narcissus, though depicted as male in the myth represents a rejection of

heteronormative behavior as he does not know that his reflection is himself but rather another male. Similarly, in the case of Oscar Wilde's depiction of the same story in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the character Dorian Gray is read as being quite feminine. The reflected flamboyant nature has been one that culturally is associated with feminine behavior which could be considered a type of queer self-reflection. One requires a mirror to 'do themselves up' if they want to be flamboyant. Though I may be feeding into some stereotypes I am wanting to give honour and personalize this representation and make a connection, especially historically within the modern home, to the domestic practice.

Yoko Ono desired that her work be about the expansion of the internal not the external. Her practice essentially was immaterial. The resulting objects are documents and stories of her practice. Both her work and the documentation were things of mindfulness. Her practice didn't necessarily require any product nor was her practice as a performer, like Joseph Beuys and others, not bound by market factors. The resulting stories pervade the viewers, and provoke a call to mindfulness. These are sacred texts. Care giving as a practice creates stories which are themselves sacred- 'the creators work'. The necessity of sharing stories within Indigenous culture is a sharp contrast to the non-Indigenous obsession with product over process. Such a preoccupation with how our attainment for things shape not only ourselves but rather our perception of how the other might see us is one more

reminder of our detachment from our internal existence and our alienation from others and nature. Care giving gives us nothing material outside of ourselves. Our documentation and stories are all we have.

In a strange semantic reversal it seems that socially we have attached a positive value on destructive practices because we believe that they may bring forth interesting art. This goes beyond the fact that certainly many artist, who have had difficult lives produce profound work, though, here as well, the emphasis on the produced work is a mistake. What is important is not the fact that they produced any work at all, but rather the fact that despite hardship they were able to develop a practice to 'do art'. The doing is more important than the making. Artists Adrian Piper makes this distinction when she develops the classification of "I do art". This is opposed to "I make art" or "I am making art" or "I am an artist". She describes this as "an intentional attitude towards my activity". It then is an attitude rather than a product or even an act. So, although it may sometimes seem that it is a destructive practice that produces art it is actually the attitude, and attitudes we are rarely privy to. A beautiful example of this attitude can be read in *The Weight of the Earth: The Tape Journals of David Wojnarowicz* where transcripts were made of Wojnarowicz's intimate audio journals between 1987-89. This group of writings demonstrate the raw intuitive approach to daily art making which comes from Wojnarowicz's purposeful and creative engagement in life. In a

conversation with Jonquet François, artists Gilbert and George tell him that “We don’t like happy artists, Van Gough couldn’t have cared less about himself, wasn’t preoccupied with his own little ego. Other artists paint simply to have friendly little meals, buy a house and have nice holidays. He was the opposite. He would destroy himself to paint a picture. Totally self destructive!”. Their reference to self destruction is not that of a destructive practice. Van Gough, despite all his troubles, used his intuition. This attitude existed independently of his paintings, however, it may be true that there was a positive feedback loop when the art work was actually physically manifested. This can be the case with any practice. Though, the opposite might be true in that the physical manifestation of art work may be commodified thus distract from the practice or intuition.

Interlude: The Creator

Jose Miranda suggests that God only exists where and when there is Justice. He states that the word or concept of justice is synonymous with almsgiving in the original Hebrew text. He flushes out the idea with a critique of private property and states that justice (almsgiving) is essentially a process of restitution that everyone must undertake. God's presence exists when restitution is taking place. God shifts from noun to

verb which is particularly interesting in that many indigenous languages reflect this understanding. Wilton Goodstiker writes in the book *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* that the “The First nations languages are verb-centered, while the English language is noun-centered.” and later in the same book that “Aboriginal languages (...) reflect an apprehension of the world that is in constant state of flux or change. Thus, there are very few fixed or rigid objects in the Aboriginal view.” This has been a well cited reason for mistranslations and misunderstandings between the settlers and the Indigenous peoples of North America. Pursuing and acquiring private property is the desire for a fixed state- a settled state. Miranda states that nothing is obtained without exploitation and that the state of exploitation must be amended. Our lives must become about the Other because it was from the Other that we acquired all things. If there is something outside of oneself, the Other, then is essential to act justly. Justice exists because of the Other and to encounter the Other is to be conscious. Justice relies entirely on otherness, in that justice only exists when a relational encounter takes place. It is then fair to say that relational activity brings into existence God. In this scenario God is the manifested aesthetic experience. So, justice (restitution) here is the giving back of private land. If this is the act of bringing God (the Creator) into existence then it could be considered that the pursuit of private land and property is the art of destroying God. Private property, the backbone of Capitalism, developed in numerous ways around the world at

different times. Slowly, a global definition of what private property meant was adapted by those in power and by those who owned property and wanted to keep it. This agreement is loosely held by a small powerful percentage of the world.

A Declaration of First Nations by the
Assembly of First Nations

We the Original Peoples of this land know the Creator put us here.

The Creator gave us laws that govern all our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind.

The Laws of the Creator defined our rights and responsibilities.

The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and a place on Mother Earth which provided us with all our needs.

We have maintained our Freedom, our Languages, and our Traditions from time immemorial.

We continue to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities and obligations given to us by the Creator for the land upon which we were placed.

The Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination.

The rights and responsibilities given to us by the Creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation.

Heterogeneous

A settler has the amazing ability to compartmentalize. I/they are able to view expansion as an act that is mutually exclusive of someone else's contraction. We ignore the fact that when land is acquired that it is actually taken from someone or something.

These are the only tattoos I have. In the past I used to take pride in the fact that I never fell into the increasing trend to get a tattoo. Currently, it is probably more progressive not have a tattoo as John Waters might claim. In being late to the trend I am more interested in the marks on other bodies and am fascinated by their reason. In many cases tattoos are whimsical gestures, however, the intentional act of permanent mark on ones skin is in itself a creative act. I have needed to tattoo tallies in bunches as I also donate blood. Canadian Blood services require one to wait a certain amount of time after a piercing or tattoo so I am tattooing sets of five immediately after I give blood. This means I am marking time that hasn't yet happened. This has exposed my dual feelings about having Ruby. On the one hand I want to fulfill the time that I have indicated on my tallies yet I also want Ruby to be reunited with Janet as soon as possible. This 'and' feeling isn't anything special as this is how we feel most of the time. We all occupy this dynamic heterogeneous space. The New Delhi arts groups,

Raqs Media Collective, describes heterogeneous as: “That which begins in many places, like the story of a person's life. Diverse, dispersed, distributed, as in the authorship of culture, and in the trajectories of people who come to a site. Interpretations and ideas embrace greater freedom only when they encompass heterogeneity. In this, they are like most intimacies and some kinds of fruitcake. The richer they are, the more layers they have.” Ruby, whether by choice or not, finds herself existing as such.

Abstraction removes heterogeneity and creates a form that is ideal and pure according to its own belief. The ‘and’ is wiped clean from the individual and replaced with ‘or’. The influential modernist sculptor Henry Moore believed that the material of a piece of art should reveal itself. If it looks like metal then it should be metal, if it is stone then the viewer should know it is stone. This ideology judged art work that was less pure in form and material as being of less value. There was very little room for the textured palimpsest and assemblage of existence. It isn't a stretch to see how this attitude toward art was similar to the idea of racial purity which of course was terribly exemplified by the Nazis during the same time Moore was working. Moore was in no way a Nazi sympathizer and I don't believe one can make a direct ideological link between abstraction and racism in fact, Hitler's hate and skepticism for abstraction was demonstrated in his mounting of the Degenerate art exhibit which targeted abstraction and claimed art that looked like this was made by sick minds. It is important to note that art as a

movement was primarily one of description and not of prescription. Moore was not out to demonstrate racial purity by creating materially pure forms, rather Moore described a modernist sentiment that was coming to a head.

There was a point shortly after art school where I consciously decided to compartmentalize my various pursuits. I did this in order to justify certain areas of production. For example, as I began to have some commercial success with my paintings I figured that my painting, as an area of production, was like my day job. Thinking this way reflected my insecurities surrounding how commercial my paintings were. Commercial success is not always highly regarded in the art community. I felt the need to explain that I also have more that viewers aren't seeing. For example, I write, draw and make books. How then is this all connected? My answer was that nothing really was connected. For whatever reason I came out of school with the notion that my art practice needed to be tight and seamless. I can't blame this notion on any teacher or philosophy the school pushed but rather I blame my own narrow mindedness. As I began to think more about art practices I realized that so much of what I produced, whether it was text or painting, was in some way or another documentation. Documentation in the broad sense of an act of doing and not a particular event. I look to weavers and other crafts people who traditionally were women and who also were taking care of children. These makers made items like clothing and rugs that were used by their family and in

their home. The work that they were producing did not directly reflect by way of subject matter their caring experience but rather was an art form developed out of necessity. I don't believe this devalues the work produced. What I began to understand and see was that I actually did have a practice and that practice was central to everything. It formed the basis from which I lived. From relating to others to producing art work—everything became blurred and radiated out from the center. Compartmentalization began to crumble and it continues to crumble. This crumbling is the most exciting part – the most creative part. I see now that many artist who I admire and find interesting are ones who have figured this out and pursue it relentlessly. Fostering Ruby became the singularity for my understanding of practice. It was the impetus for a new emergence. I grew up in a religion that emphasized testimonies. At a certain age you were encouraged to stand in front of your church community and tell the story of your conversion experience. I suppose that in a way this particular aspect of my practice is a testimony, a story that reflects emergence and my relationship to the world. Speaking about Lu Märten's work Jenny Nachtigall and Kerstin Stakemeier write that "Art enables a sensuous-aesthetic relation to one's material world (i.e., work) that once was socially comprehensive but that atrophied in industrial capitalism and was condemned to a degraded existence as art." In an end note in the chapter entitled *Community Building and Refusing Trauma Porn*, written by Dorian J. Frazer, Dayna Danger, and Adriende Huard give a short

explanation of praxis, as it relates to artist and activist Dayna Danger, it states that, “Praxis is described as action that exceeds philosophical or theoretical confinement. While theory is often behind action, praxis describes the action one can put into the world, an action that here, in the case of Dayna Danger’s combined community and art work, changes the world that it works upon.” Danger’s photographic art work often uses traditional formal elements. The photos often looked staged and highly produced. In many ways the photos can stand alone and have an intrinsic power both formally and conceptually. Danger’s *Big’ Uns* ongoing series “features antlers in place of where a leather harness would attach a dildo or other prosthetic to the wearer”. Those who are photographed are collabourators who face the camera and the viewer as empowered beings. Danger’s use of collabourators underscore the importance of an art work that does not merely end with the thing on the wall. Danger works not only with collabourators but with community where the line between art and activism is blurred and where a queering of kinship takes place. This blurring and queering seems to thrive within an Indigenous world view which has been and continually ignored by a colonial worldview. Wahinkpe Topa (Four Arrows) and Darcia Narvez describe the indigenous worldview as “not a matter of perception or conception alone, but of experiencing and being. It is more of a “world-sense” because it involves dozens of senses and a coordinated way of moving through the world.” Performance, making, building, community engagement, looking, listening, and collabourating is

what makes Danya Danger's practice a thing of creativity- it is a "coordinated way of moving through the world".

Work ethic and practice

Jesus saw some little ones nursing. He said to his disciples, "These little ones who are nursing resemble those who enter the kingdom." They said to him, "So shall we enter the kingdom by being little ones?" Jesus said to them, "When you make the two one and make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below, and that you might make the male and the female be one and the same, so that the male might not be male nor the female be female, when you make eyes in place of an eye and a hand in place of a hand and a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image - then you will enter [the kingdom]." Gospel of Thomas

Reducing life to its productions in order to find meaning is limiting and misleading. Products can be reduced but practice can't. Practice is the organizational property of one's existence. The

organizational property is the method by which the whole becomes greater than the parts. It is where domains merge and emerge into new systems. It is the reason that the addict can still be an addict and at the same time might be able to raise a family and work. A developed practice does not *exorcise* one's demons but instead *exercises* them in order for them to add to the whole. Nietzsche's notion of shame and guilt is an accurate observation of a dead practice. Shame is a result of a belief that one should rid themselves of certain evil aspects but in actuality cannot. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains, "The forms taken by shame are not distinct "toxic" parts of a group or individual identity that can be excised; they are instead integral to and residual in the process by which identity itself is formed." Often it is the case that if one attempts to rid these demons all one loses is their particular story. Using one's demons is shadow work—the labour on the self in order to make the self high functioning. The intuitive attitude that the embodied artistic practice seeks is the countering of the dulling of senses. The dulling of the senses could be the greatest problem that we face today. Practice in terms of artistic intuition recontextualizes and disrupts us out of our complacent existence. Our eyes become open and we relate to the world. The relationship between things become more important than the things themselves. Curator Nicolas Bourriaud describes it as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space." And as Lu Marten

describes as the “alliance that the artist, as a socially engaged worker, wants, and is able, to achieve in this context: namely, to use his work as it relates to the entire breadth of society to restore to labour the content that has been stripped from it by machines.” Here Marten does refer to physical machines, however, I believe ‘machines’ can also be extended to systems of administration, organization, and practice. No one understands the tediousness and dull nature of the system more than those like Ruby’s mom Janet who are at the bottom of the hierarchy. Those at the bottom are ground down by the machine of the system. In many ways an artistic practice is a highly democratizing thing- an egalitarian option for the existence of any individual and has the potential to bring the senses back in operational mode and help raise those at the bottom into a fuller existence.

In addition to demons, who cause shame and guilt and are impossible to eradicate, we have the ever present settler colonist’s protestant work ethic. It is common to hear the lament from the oil and gas sector that “we offered them jobs yet they still can’t make it work”. “Them” referring to Indigenous people usually in northern communities that sometimes successfully handle contracts and sometimes could care less about the alienating work they are handed. It is questionable what lasting effects a job has on a community. A job, though sometimes beneficial, in no way begins to counter the effects of physical and cultural genocide. This ‘work ethic’ is disturbingly still pervasive. It is derived from the colonial self-conception of a hard

worker. Hard work means progress and ‘hard work’ is classified by the settler. George Simpson, governor of the Hudson Bay in 1825 stated that the “indians” were “indolent and lazy to the extreme”. This observation is proof that they had a tremendously narrow and limited understanding of what practice was. The European could only reduce the observable parts of production and contrast the Indigenous peoples to themselves. In 2008, then Conservative MP, Pierre Poilievre commented in an interview that, “My view is that we need to engender the values of hard work and independence and self-reliance. That's the solution in the long run — more money will not solve it,”. Poilievre’s statement came only hours before Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper was to make an official apology to residential school survivors. The ‘work’ that these Indigenous people did was an embodied practice that threatened colonial progress. Herbert Marcus’s description of practice relates more to what the Europeans most likely observed: “Such a practice involves a break from the familiar, the ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a non-aggressive, non-exploitative world.” It would be inaccurate and idealizing to say that the people who the colonizers encountered where without violence, however, the state of practice pre 1482 was primarily non-exploitative. The Indigenous attitude toward the world was and continues to be holistic, it sees potential forms such as Marcus describes. Joseph Epes Brown in speaking with Black Elk lamented that he “naively wished that he (Black Elk) would begin to talk about

religious matters, until I finally realized that he was, in fact, explaining his religion. The values I sought were to be found precisely in his stories and accounts of the bison, eagle, trees, flowers, mountains and winds.” The filter of the protestant work ethic still blinds us to the profundity of these stories and practices of kinship in its entirety.

Gender specified realms

Mary Kelly's *Post Partum Document* 1973-79:

“There are three things that came together to make *Post Partum Document* possible. One was historical - it so happened that 1969 was the beginning of the women's movement and I was involved with groups who were trying to question and understand gender and sexuality. At the same time I was also an artist who was interested in the conceptual movement and language theory, and I did a lot of film work before I started *Post Partum Document*, so I tried to bring notions of real time and durational qualities to the piece. And the third, more fortuitous thing was that I was having a child myself. So with all the discussion about domestic labour at the time...well, I really wanted to understand this

process of socialization, the division of labour in the home, and the relationships of women with their children.”

Many, mostly women, have engaged in a critical discussion over the last half decade about domestic practices. Questions of what it means to be both a caregiver / parent and an artist. The domestic continues to be a gender specified realm. Though shifting slightly there remains entrenched traditions and labour division. Psychologically, women are still carrying the bulk of domestic concerns even if they are now working full time out of the home. Obviously this looks different in non heteronormative family models, however, the dominating model still exists as husband & wife and the market still places the bulk of its resources to enable this model. Still, the notion to view domestic life void of its gender stereotypes is difficult when one is operating in traditional circles. The man who is at the grocery store with his two children is praised when the woman in the same circumstance is ignored. Carol Schneeman states, “To deal with actual lived experiences- that’s a heroic position for a male and a trivial exposure for a woman. (...) A woman exploring lived experience occupies an area that men want to denigrate as domestic, to encapsulate as erotic, arousing, or supporting their own position.” (I want to make special reference to Lauren Fournier’s informative book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art , Writing, and Criticism* where I was exposed to this quote by Schneeman). Society in general has both lowered its expectations

for men in the domestic field while raising absurdly high expectations on the productive labour front. Both cause damage. Firstly men, due to traditional roles, have been unable to feel and experience the acute pains of domesticity and thus not grow and secondly, within productive labour men are expected to act as sociopaths in order to meet expectations. Turning to Paul B. Preciado's observation of the position of men after transitioning from female to male, he writes, "What characteristics the position of men in our techno-patriarchal and heterocentric societies is that masculine sovereignty is defined by the legitimate use of techniques of violence (against women, against children, against non-white men and women, against animals, against the planet as a whole.(...) On the contrary, within this political epistemology, feminine sovereignty is linked to the capacity of women to give birth. Women are sexually and socially subjugated. Only mothers are sovereign. Within this regime, masculinity is defined bio-politically (by men's right to be put to death) while femininity is defined biopolitically (by women's obligation to give life)." Arrested development for the heteronormative masculine created no positive counterpart to like the feminist. It only created a bifurcation of practice. One destructive branch (masculinity) and one constructive branch (feminism). I am referring to the gender performance not identity. Bellacasa writes that "care sounds charged to the feminist-attuned not only because of the material practices it signifies but also because they tend to ask critical questions such as who will do something, how and for whom."

Anarchy and Domesticity

It was an act of intuition when Carol Schneeman unraveled the interior scroll from her vagina. She stated, "Trusting intuition, that makes me seem crazy. But it's everything you know that you know, people! Intuition is not some weird little fuzzy female place." Many times while parenting / giving care I have pushed my intuition aside in order to get something done that is often non-essential and usually meaningless. Usually there is a frenzied approach as I begin to juggle, ineffectively and ungracefully, my personal expectations for the day and what basic needs the children have. If I am honest and stop to feel my intuition I know that I am not being creative. Basic needs are not only subjective but they are also inhumane. Subjective in that who is to say, for example, to what degree of health should a child have? Or, how many clothes should they have on their back? Or, exactly how big should that roof be over their head? And, inhumane because no human can thrive on the basics. Nature is not basic, there is no basic amount of love, and no basic amount of beauty. Creativity is in many ways the antithesis of basic and at the same time totally essential.

When social changes happen, I am immediately gripped by a passion for building, and I think that in this way I can

anticipate or accelerate the transformation of life, at least in the form of a sketch. *Gerhard Richter*

The domestic life, no matter who occupies it or how it is occupied, is the working studio or workshop for the caregiver. Domestic life should be far from basic. This should not be confused with any notion that domestic life needs to be a certain structure or look a certain way or contain specific types of relationships within. It requires the individual to feel that their intuition has a place to thrive like in the studio. An example where it is common to see a domestic situation where intuition is unable to thrive is the common debt ridden household. The household that is operating beyond their financial means and thus whose stress level is unmanageable. The bulk of the household's energy is occupied with managing this financial stress. This is an obvious example but clearly as a society we have not learned as our personal debt levels continue to be out of control. Or take for example a domestic life where one's sexuality is kept hidden and is coerced to act a certain way. I suppose the point here is that anything that comes in the way of the intuitive drive should be severely questioned. Easier said than done as often the nature of oppression can be internally blinding and traumatic. This is why that the action of queering is so important. As C.B. Daring, J. Rogue, Deric Shannon, and Abby Volcano describe in their introduction of *Queering Anarchism, Addressing and Undressing Power and Desire*: write, "Queer can be seen as a relationship, as a context-defined antagonism

to the normal.” Without this relationship we are doomed to stagger throughout life in a complacent and oblivious manner.

Artistic practices and giving care have within their primary motives a sense of seeing or experiencing the world in a new way. It is easy to see this in the arts but less obvious with care giving. The point is to help the other live in continuity, to assist with their existence. Whether a child, the elderly, or disabled, much attention is given to the other’s abilities in order to overcome their inabilities or weakness. In many ways it is the practice of encouragement and highly attuned direction. It is about creatively bringing about the other’s actualized self.

I acknowledge it has taken me too long to personally understand and appreciate the inseparability of colonialism with capitalism. The separation that these mutually inclusive forces have caused is part of our national psyche. Separation between labour (productive/reproductive), the creation and separation of gender and sexuality, separation of economy and domesticity, separation of land and people, animal and human, nature and industry, and of course the separation of parent from child. Ruby has opened my eyes to these separations. What we so yearn for is purpose and when we live in separation, when we have been compartmentalized, when we feel alienated, our purpose is lost. Billy-Ray Belcourt writes “...we are beholden to the work of feminist mother and fathering to repair what has been done and to bring about boys

and men who answer the call of democratizing the labour of care.”

In *Peace and Good Order*, Cree author and lawyer Harold R. Johnson talks about his experience attending law school at Harvard. Struggling with the complexities of the program a classmate who was also Indigenous gave him the advice to think like a white man. All of a sudden colonial law for Johnson became simple. So much of law is based on private property and land ownership- a colonial practice. This is a constructed law that leaves those who are not privy to its tradition in the dust. Domesticity is from the Latin *domesticus* meaning belonging to the house. First, understanding anything as ‘belonging’ is problematic when notions of families are still understood within a traditional model where children have their origins in their biological parents or with adoptive situations where there is a legal belonging of the child to family- a recognized guardianship. Secondly, a home in our settler colonial capitalist system means ownership. To own a home is seen as a step toward maturity, social progress, and upward mobility. Traditionally the anarchic critic of capitalism involves the dissolution of private property. The notion that one individual can claim to own a piece of land is a strange idea. The Indigenous knew this well as kinship involved a deep and intimate relationship with the land. Another anarchic critique is how capitalism severely divided productive labour and reproductive labour. This division created increasingly contentious domestic life. Men were pulled away from the home to labour in

factories and women were made to stay home to birth and raise children. This separation of labour was just one in a number of separations to be encouraged during the birth of modern capitalism. Taking the notion of profaning in which separation is magnified and then destroyed creates a fresh understanding of domestic life, “democratizing the labour of care”. The act of fostering potentially lends to the destruction of separation as the once compartmentalized worlds collide. Not only the economical world, as fostering is considered a job, but also historically and socially in that one is faced with in real time our colonial past and present. The domestic life is no longer one that is isolated from productive labour nor is limited to reproductive labour. I would like to go so far as to believe that fostering *can* be an act of anarchism and should be approached as such.

Body and Soul

Billy-Ray Belcourt writes that “An NDN is the soul of a country. Racism, then, is a kind of moral death drive, an ethical desertion inflected on oneself.” Another separation- body and soul. Many have understood that to measure the health of a country one should look to see how their Indigenous communities are doing. They are the real indicators of how the whole are doing. I

wonder how I am both killing the soul and how much am I searching the soul. If the NDN (Belcourt's usage) is the soul then what am I? Am I the mind or the body who is struggling against the soul or I am a tumor? My hope is that we can still have access to this soul as long as we keep working on building relationships regardless of how complex they are.

Belcourt has to say about me. He writes, "What's more, to hear this story of compromised living, to lives in the bodies of those who reap the spoils of colonialism, as something more than a "simple" account of singular life, is to undergo a process of resubjectification, one that requires the abolition of the position of the enemy, the vampire, the one who describes, the settler. You need to read, to listen, and to write from someplace else, from another social locus, a less sovereign one, a less hungry one." What are the spoils am I reaping? I thought originally I was part of the zombies but a vampire is more apt. To again read Maggie Nelson, "Annoying as it might be to hear a straight white guy talk about a book of his as queer (do you have to own everything?), in the end, it's probably for the better." Do I have to own everything- sucking everyone's blood? Am I merely unconsciously acting out my role as a settler capitalist and justifying it by contextualizing it within citations and references and claiming it is art? Maggie Nelson generously and optimistically states that it is for the better. Is it? Belcourt's above quote was in response to a review of one of his books of poetry. The reviewer referred to Belcourt's writing as "simple". Although

the review gives praise to Belcourt's book the use of the word simple is reflective of the complex and utterly nuanced inappropriate representation of Indigenous people within culture. Bram Stoker's Dracula is a charismatic and even slightly appealing vampire who spreads a disease among those he bites. The vampire is much more a simple representation than its victims. Vampires are un-dead and have no shadow, and most disturbingly have no reflection- no self-reflection. Their soul is trapped in some dark abyss. Simplicity is a form of abstraction and abstraction attempts to make things easily understood when in fact, like everyone, individual Indigenous representation is about the particular. Indeed, as recently pointed out to me the word Indigenous is a colonial construct. Mexican artist and curator Francisco Guevara writes, "most terms used to explain the social, cultural, and political complexity in Americas are inventions, including 'indigenous' and 'indigeneity (also a term to racialise time and space)."

What spoils am I reaping? Most obviously being if I were to somehow commodify anything produced from this experience of care and relationship and keep for my own. Secondly, and more insidious, is to gain some cultural cache for the act of fostering and documenting. It is hard not to check off the restitution box in my brain. This then allows me to turn around and freely criticize those I see not contributing to the solution. It's amazing how simple I am able to make this. Belcourt's words again ring true. I do take part in

simplification. I am simplifying my own innocence? Is this what I am searching for? I am able to plead innocence for the initial offense of the first colonizers, however, as emphasized by Patrick Wolfe colonialism is a structure even though many of us as settlers believe it to be an event. Here is where my innocence ends and my complacency and implication with current social and government structures is highly problematic. Although we want to give Ruby a safe and loving home, the fact that we are willing to take Ruby into our home somehow implies our support of her apprehension at birth.

Time

Yesterday we had a meeting with child services and our case worker. My optimism was drained. History became very real. The evident mistrust between all parties demonstrated how the first victims will again be the child and the mother. The Janet's Band and child services are at odds and although I believe they both want the best for Ruby the political baggage and differing motivations turns Ruby into a political object. Janet is surrounded by trauma and abuse. She is at the centre of past and ongoing traumas. And time moves slow. So slow, there doesn't seem to be a quick solution for Ruby. As simple and obvious as it is, the

only thing I can do is hope that when and if Ruby leaves our home each day spent with us is a constructive one with no anger, no harm, and only love demonstrated by care. She will not experience raised voices or physical violence of any kind. She will receive patience and openness to their culture. The increasing tallies on my arm seem to be less about the time Ruby is with us and more about how long we are all trapped within this broken system together. We are currently pushing to have contact with Janet. This has to be part of healing.

Our case worker asked one of the elders, a partner with the foster organization, how we should be addressing certain cultural practices. They told us to be sure to find out what the mother wanted and what sort of cultural influences she is comfortable with. The elder is wise. It was a glimpse into the desired self-rule that made sense as opposed to mere adherence to oversimplified cultural measures. Self rule is the piece that is missing. Self rule is a danger to those in power. It can be considered a virus that has the potential to spread to those who once have been coerced into submission and who are now seeing domination for what it is. Self rule is a danger to the structure of colonialism and capitalism for clear reasons but even more so when scaled back to the community and family life as self rule challenges all preconceived established norms.

Tuck and Yang

One of the most cited papers I have come across in my readings about colonization is by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. Tuck and Yang, in their challenging 2012 paper: *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, criticize the increasing use of the word Decolonization as it relates to practices and proposals that have little or nothing to do with actual decolonization. They argue that the misuse of claiming decolonization is really just an attempt at “settler innocence” and the promotion of “settler futurity”. Actual decolonization, according to Tuck and Yang, is the process of returning land to those who it belonged to. They discuss six “moves to innocence” that regardless of one’s position on how decolonization looks need to be considered.

Settler nativism: Whereby settlers “locate or invent a long-lost ancestor who is rumored to have had ‘Indian blood’. By making this ancestral connection the settler can claim some sort of Indigenous identity ultimately leaving them blameless.

Fantasizing adoption: Whereby the settler fantasizes about becoming Indigenous by way of adopting traditions, practices, and knowledge. Ultimately by becoming one with Indigenous people the fantasy

includes the settler's inheritance of their land thus relieving the guilt of theft.

Colonial equivocation: Whereby incorrectly using and applying language of colonization and decolonization. By doing so risks "homogenizing of various experiences of oppression as colonization". This applies to what an elder explained once to me saying that although 'we are all colonized' not all of us are settlers. These are not mutually exclusive terms. In other words, although my distant relatives may have been subject to colonizers, at no point does that resolve my complacent and present actions in upholding current structures of colonization.

Conscientization: Whereby the promotion of developing a "critical consciousness" is in itself not a negative thing but can risk being a stand in for actual decolonization. The settler may be blinded by their own enlightenment or feel a cathartic release from important action.

At risking / Asterisk-ing Indigenous peoples: According to the authors, Indigenous are "rendered visible" in two prominent ways: "at risk" and as asterisk peoples. Indigenous are seen primarily in terms of people who are on the "verge of extinction" (at risk) or "presented by an asterisk" in larger data sets. Both are simple abstracted representations of individuals.

Re-occupation and urban homesteading: Whereby the pursuit of workers and minorities push for re-occupation as see in the various occupy movements. This notion assumes all land is occupiable either by the 1% or the 99%. Either group is taking part in colonial actions.

In addition to simple abstraction it is also interesting to read Tuck and Yang's notion of "At risking / Asterisk-ing" in light of Judith Butler's notion of vulnerability. She writes, "The criticism is now well know that the discourse of "vulnerability groups" reproduces paternalistic power and gives authority to regulatory agencies with interests and constraints of their own." She then goes on to understand this criticism in a different way, "To avow vulnerability not as an attribute of the subject, but as a feature of social relations, does not imply vulnerability as an identity, a category, or a ground for political action. Rather, persistence in a condition of vulnerability proves to be its own kind of strength, distinguished from one that champions strength as the achievement of invulnerability." Butler creates a difficult concept of vulnerability. By asterisk-ing a group in order to indicate vulnerability the existing dominate power again places them in the position of submission and both implicitly and explicitly demands that they turn from vulnerability to invulnerability in order to succeed in the existing constructed society. It is curious to layer one more text over this. In the best seller, *The Dawn of Everything*, David Graeber and David Wengrow discuss questions of freedom and

slavery in a more nuanced manner. Graeber and Wengrow discuss that the word freedom comes from the word friend, meaning that to have freedom means to have social connections, whereas, to be in slavery is to be alone and stripped from family and friends. Slavery is not merely having the lack of choice to leave one's position of labour but also about having one's social connection jeopardized. Of course there will always be various degrees of this type of stripping, but one can see that the more interconnected one is the more freedom one feels. Now, take Ruby's mother, historically she has been stripped of her culture and has been placed under the paternal master of the colonial courts and country. She is deemed vulnerable and thus, according to dominate social norms, is required to become invulnerable in order to obtain a part of her freedom, namely her child- her social connection. This vicious cycle of living daily with the trauma of having her child taken away is a form of ongoing slavery that negatively loops. For her to reunite with her child she must do as the court requires which is to be more invulnerable, however, as seen through Butler's lens of vulnerability, this then becomes a loss of identity- a further loss of political power. I might understand this in too simple of terms but I feel that Butler is asking us to see vulnerability as part of what it means to be human whereas invulnerability is a loss of our humanity.

Tuck and Yang's words are challenging. Challenging because their words are direct and imminent and require action. As I read more and more relating to

these topics I have had to relinquish a reactionary opinion and adopt a humble attitude to the various and complex expressions of decolonization.

Capitalism and art

In Noam Chomsky and Mary Waterson's book *Consequences of Capitalism* they challenge the notion of common sense. Consent has been created to make a particular way of thinking and acting seem common, normal, and natural. For example, the way we work, the way we see dominance, the way we educate ourselves, the way we consume, the way we construct our social lives, or the way we see others. Chomsky speaks of how the simple and accepted fact that we are employed or have a job which places ourselves under a boss is a relatively modern notion whereas historically it was more normal to work for oneself. Of course, this is part of alienation and our body is a thing to be sold into labour. The point being that this is what our society hopes for our children. We stress the importance of formal education in order to go to the right schools and get a good job. A friend showed me a post from an acquaintance who lamented over the fact that her son in preschool will not have a normal childhood like herself due to various COVID related

mandates. Common sense might say we can see her point but it doesn't take much to see that this 'normal' childhood she imagines is one of exceptionality. Both historically and internationally this version of normalcy is an anomaly. Harold R. Johnson in his book *Peace and Good Order* speaks to the failure of the Canadian educational and justice system to bring about real justice for Indigenous people. The institutional methods that educate lawyers and the system in which they practice is ruled by a constructed common sense, a common sense created by the colonial male. This is difficult to change especially from within. Even the critical process is entrenched and created by the institutions themselves. I am often reminded of a book that my ex-brother in law, an evangelical youth pastor, was reading years ago. It was titled: *Preaching to the Postmodern*. The title says it all, the language, process, and methodology is intrinsically at odds with the thing that needs to be addressed. Preaching is the last thing a postmodern youth wants to hear regardless of content. The question of effective institutional critique from within is not black and white. Certainly there are those who initiate change at an institutional level while existing and operating within the institution and of course there are those who operate outside the institution who promote change and pressure those in power to make change. Personally, our implicit upholding of child apprehension by the government by being available to care for those children makes us accomplices to systems of dominance, however, closing our doors will do nothing to change it. What

creative profaning needs to take place? If the system desires separation then it is our duty as caregivers to breakdown separation, both Ruby's separation from her mother and our separation from her mother.

Belcourt points to the reader, the white settler reader and tells them (me) that "I need to read, to listen, and to write from someplace else, from another social locus, a less sovereign one, a less hungry one." In one definition of sovereignty, socially I hold 'supreme' power. This is far from an intrinsic power but this is not what Belcourt is referring to. I come from and in many ways continue to adhere to the insatiable hunger of extreme consumerism. Much of my sovereignty and hunger is a result of my being born into and out of this form of capitalism. This is not to excuse, rather, it is to recognize the waters I willfully am drowning in so I can find land to crawl onto and, more importantly, not to drag others into this murky deep.

I visited a number of commercial galleries with my friend whom I am helping find art work. I don't usually visit galleries as a buyer. I was shocked at how bored I was with the many paintings we saw. We both commented on how dull the entire experience was. I looked at artists who I had seen many times before and thought about their practice. What lies underneath these dull manifestations and what else are these artists making or doing that is never seen in the gallery? Although my friend found most of the work dull they admitted that they struggled with having work in their

home that was less dull but that was more challenging. The classic sentiment that although they are able to appreciate and even like some of the more challenging work they admitted that living with it and having family and friends see it would be difficult. Cynically I feel we have been indoctrinated to see certain forms as appropriate in order to maintain value. Most people buy art in galleries where traditional forms are upheld and have a more direct connection to a market, contrived as it might be, the work is obvious and comfortable. There is a lot of good, even great work I have seen in galleries. It is the existence of these markets that help justify prices and allow for quick and easy categorization. This must be a reflection of our compartmentalized lives and our failure to pursue holistic life/art practices. These easy categories help us feel comfortable and connected to other creative individuals without mediation, without a market, dealer, or cultural gatekeeper. In the traditions of critical autotheory, embodied practices, performance art, women traditionally have led the way. Out of necessity the non white / non male hasn't had the luxury to bask in their thoughts for long periods without some sort of manual labour or social stress. Heteronormative masculinity has called upon the male to perform, to be "hungry" as Belcourt puts it, in markets. The emphasis on male formalist painters and sculpture far dominate the commercial art market. The stereotype of an isolated and undisturbed lofty studio practice is where the meditation on colour choices is believed to be some sort of exalted transcendent activity. This type of studio rigor is replaced by street

and domestic rigor. For non white males this rigor is about survival often brought about by racism and sexism. Although many galleries today have a stable that is far more diversely representative, the work itself still feels very white and formal which is what ends up in most homes.

Personal practice

Ruby is a calm baby though maybe my perspective is different but I don't mind the night time feeds nearly as much as when my other kids were younger. She sleeps well and is beginning to laugh a lot. Last night she struggled throughout the night with a bad cold. Lauren Fournier, author of, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, looks to bell hooks "call(s) for a socially engaged feminist theory grounded in practice." It is a "means of making 'sense of everyday life experiences.'" I have struggled with reading comprehension my whole life. When I attended art school I scarcely could get my head around theory and later when in grad school I attempted to force theory I barely understood onto my art work. I read with the belief that I would be able to regurgitate so I could argue my point with others but my ability to remember and refer to authors is weak. This weakness was compounded when my emotions

would take over in an argument. It wasn't until years after graduating that I shifted my reason for reading. I have tried to argue less and I gave up trying to back my position with theory. I decided that the only reason why I should read is to better understand how to live and navigate the world. I allowed the texts that I read to seep into me and land where they needed to land, possibly never to be called in for a discussion but knowing that they affect me somehow. Caring for Ruby is an impetus to feed myself in order to live and, like with my other two children, I am reminded of the need to "make sense of everyday life."

Treaty 7

I live on and in Treaty 7. Ruby was born here as well but Janet, her mom is Treaty 8. Treaty 7 was signed in 1877 between the Crown and by five First Nations: the Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), Piikani (Peigan), Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina (Sarcee). The Crown was unable to honour various legal obligations which led to much of the elimination of Indigenous land titles which paved the way for greater colonial expansion. During the time of signing the Indigenous population was experiencing a shortage of hunting, an increase of smallpox and greater threats of settlement and conflict. This perfect storm was brought on by the colonizers.

In many ways, due to language, cultural differences, declining health, and declining food supplies, those who signed had no choice. They were forced to make this treaty in order to survive. It was seen by the nations primary as a peace treaty whereas the government saw this as a land surrender. Only two years after signing the treaty, a local Catholic priest, who had encouraged the nations to sign a treaty, described in a letter to politician David Laird the Indigenous people's extreme poverty, he wrote, "I have never seen them so depressed as they are now; I have never seen them before in want of food... They have suffered fearfully from hunger." He went on to argue that, as to the question of whether the Treaty 7 nations understood "the real nature of the treaty" — land surrender — "my answer to this question is unhesitatingly negative." There was, and remains, widespread feeling that the government has not lived up to its promises or dealt fairly with those who occupied this land.

It was on Treaty 7 territory that Ruby was apprehended by the province. We have decided, the governmental agencies along with our complacent approval, what decisions a mother can and cannot make. On the one hand, the decision to care for Ruby was taken away from Janet when the child was apprehended as she was deemed unfit and the safety of the child was seen at risk and on the other hand, we honour the mother's decision to withhold contact with Ruby's Nation. Child services needs 'consent' from

the mother to allow for contact. Can consent be controlled? Is any talk of consent disingenuous post-apprehension?

A number of Indigenous writers and speakers have spoken about the true spirit that an agreement like a treaty originally entailed. In many ways this was a treaty of peace and relationship. In fact entering into an agreement was considered an act of kinship. Elizabeth Carlson- Manatha, writing in her book *Living In Indigenous Sovereignty* states that, “Treaties are important agreements around the relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples. Indigenous perspectives on Treaty relationships provide guidance towards framing these relationships around kinship.” She emphasizes that this is not only about politics “but also enacted within many Treaties is the making of relatives.” She stresses that these “kinship bonds must be carefully nurtured”. This is a profound way of not only understanding our dramatic historic failure but also to understand our individual potential to enact a form of decolonization by way of relationship building. As our family moves forward, regardless of the outcome of Ruby’s guardian status it is utterly essential to develop a relationship with Mom, her family, and her nation. As I am coming to realize this relationship cannot wait for or be developed by governmental agencies because separation, whether out of ill intent or not, is the result of governmental agencies.

Masculinity

The fear that plagues the white male may have changed its face slightly in recent years but is still evident. It is the fear that the Other who men have attempted by means of violence and coercion to control may rise up. What have they to say? I am a white male taking part in the settler project. I despise the masculinity that is rampant, relentless, and threatens all, including me. I look to the feminist traditions and the queer for guidance. I see that those who are not busy dominating have something to say. The fact that those who are marginalized and oppressed continue to build and maintain communities is a fact worth examining. I am only beginning to appreciate that the body and mind is affected through work and care and I am understanding just how much heteronormative masculinity has negatively affected emotional and constructive responses.

What would it look like to use Tuck and Yang's six moves to innocence as criteria and guidance for de-masculinization. I acknowledge that I am risking devaluing the importance and imperative of decolonization and may be performing a type of colonial equivocation and commensurability. I am not comparing decolonization with de-masculinization but rather applying the six moves to innocence as a methodology. I am also wanting to consider that de-

masculinization might be a first step towards decolonization for many. It is important to understand these following six points as false ‘moves to innocence’, as to falsely relieve oneself of action and place oneself free of responsibility and implication.

Settler nativism: Analogously, a search for some non-heteronormative masculine impulse or past action. For example; one could say they once were really drunk at a party and made out with another guy. Or, one might state that they had a dream once where they were fucking another man. Or, one might openly admit how another man is attractive. Although, all of these may be true informative experiences they do not allow a heteronormative male off the hook when it comes to their continuation of their participation of the heteronormative masculine structure, which, as one could easily argue be required in the maintenance of colonial structure.

Fantasizing adoption: A man may very well take on feminist practices and participate in feminist actions but it is impossible to ever understand the pain of another’s oppression. To join a women’s rally as a cismale is a compartmentalized act. It may be fine to do this, I can’t judge one’s motives, but lest we forget that once the man leaves that rally and walks home he is safe. It is a world that has enabled them that they freely and fearlessly walk through. The woman who leaves that rally ventures into a hostile world that still sees them as an object, a thing, and a lesser being.

Colonial equivocation: To feel like one might understand because they (the white male) have been through an oppressive situation. A true and disturbing example: An acquaintance, a very privileged white male who owns an oil and gas company equated their sense of being discriminated against as a ‘dirty oil producer’ to what those in LGBTQIA2S+ communities must feel. They said they could now understand what it feels like to be discriminated against. The illusion that one can understand another is a masculine fallacy brought about in order to easily categorize and ultimately control the other.

Conscientization: The development of ‘critical consciousness’ is meaningless if not followed by action. Examples are endless in how one might, at an intellectual level, appreciate the oppression and marginalization of the non-heteronormative person yet emotionally act otherwise in a domestic environment. Inequality in the home and domestic abuse remains rampant. This is a curious point that might be addressed by Feminist Affect theory where one might understand the desperate divide between traditional unaffected masculinity and the emotionally healthy feminist understanding of how the world works. I carefully quote the Christian bible: “faith without works is dead”, because of how true that statement is and yet in many ways how the conscientization by the colonial male Christian missionary couldn’t have been more vacant and hypocritical.

At risking / Asterisk-ing Indigenous peoples: This may be as simple as seeing those outside of the heteronormative masculine construct as being at risk because they are weak and dissolving and it is up to them, the strong man, to carry them. I wonder if this partly justifies the belief in a trickle down economic model.

Re-occupation and urban homesteading: Is this move to innocence a move towards claiming and owning everything. A cultural appropriation of non-heteronormative masculine ideas in order to reap both financial and social benefits. There are many examples of 'Faux-feminism' in advertising where companies present progressive feminist ideas in their advertising while their corporate culture is still rooted in white male supremacy.

Both colonization and masculinization are verbs and not forms of identity, even if fleeting. They are both structures and not events, and to that extent, they are structures that are intimately intertwined. I grew up within an evangelical Christian culture that believed in an existential threat of emasculation and stressed that our entire western culture was terrorized by feminists. This recent history is described by Kristin Kobes Du Mez's in her book, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. She writes, referring to the various Christian cultural organizations, "To be sure, singing about one's testicles and landing blows to the head for Christ represent the more radical expressions of militant

Christian masculinity, but GodMen and Xtreme Ministries only amplified trends that were becoming increasingly common in the post-9/11 era. As militant masculinity took hold across evangelicalism, it helped bind together those on the fringes of the movement with those closer to the center, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish the margins from the mainstream.” In these highly quotable sentences Du Mez assures us that the structure of masculinity has not crumbled. Obviously, we understand this but often in my privileged bubble I forget. This entwining of masculinity and the process of decolonization or ‘Land Back’ is discussed in the Yellowhead Institute’s *Land Back Red Paper*, stating, “our colleagues framed alienation from the land and water in terms that were decidedly more spiritual. They spoke of assimilation and how patriarchy and greed have infected our communities, taking us away from more authentic ways of relating to the land and each other.” and, “Land and water alienation must also be understood through gender dynamics, which are instrumental to how land loss and dispossession unfold and impact people’s lives. Gender is also critical to the ways in which the right to consent is denied to Indigenous peoples. Women, transgender, queer, and Two-Spirit people were never the intended beneficiaries of new distributions of power introduced through colonization. Rather, they were targeted and disempowered with the intention of removing them from leadership and minimizing any confrontation or challenge they posed to the patriarchy of Western systems of governance.”

Care and Treatment

Marie Puig de la Bellacas, in her complicated and challenging book *Matters of Care* considers, among other things, what it means to care for things or objects and to consider them not as “matters of fact” but rather as “matters of concern”. By shifting fact into concern we need to approach matters with a greater deal of intuition and care. She thinks of the assemblage of the things in question as political and ultimately understands how nonhuman and human things are not much different. It isn’t a stretch to see how individuals become objects. Beyond mere objectification, humans become political objects to be used or manipulated, like in the case of Ruby. I am stretching what Bellacasa is writing about but in many ways when she says, “This means that to effectively care for a thing we cannot cut off from the composition of its political ecology those we disagree with but who are nevertheless concerned by the thing and the issues it brings to matter.” I can’t help but think of Ruby’s mother. As she transforms into an object in the system, how is she cared for, and how both child and mother are brought to matter. We are all assemblages where facts don’t effectively apply and it where it would be much more appropriate to consider all as things as “concern”. Ruby’s mother is a matter of concern that is not isolated or “cut off from the composition of (her) political ecology.”

Only a number of blocks from where we live is a residential treatment program. This type of program has been one of the requirements by the courts for Janet in order for her to prove that she is capable of care. Many studies indicate the ineffectiveness of these programs due to the isolation and new traumas they cause. The director of this particular program was open to being flexible about visits with Ruby as normally a 30 day isolation period is recommended. The director saw that we are open to being integrated into the process and a main part of mom's support group. In many ways we have overstepped our bounds in a normative way in speaking to the director. Traditionally these conversations are done by the Mom's social worker. Bellacas sees care as a "transformative ethos" as opposed to "normative ethics". It might be a stretch to consider this small act as being transformative, however, I couldn't help but think that as I walked from our house through the neighborhood to the treatment centre that I was taking part in some sort of transformative activity. I had originally gone to the centre to meet with the director in order to discuss unrelated volunteer work. Jayne told me to mention Ruby's mom and the potential of her participation within the program. Can this be considered building queer relationships? To walk from our house to the program's house and speak face-to-face with the director is one of transformation not only for Janet and Ruby but ourselves. The streets surrounding the treatment centre is quickly being rebuilt with infills. The program is housed in three

1960's fourplexes and is increasingly looking very much at odds with the rest of the street. It is hard to imagine this centre gaining approval now within this community.

Unrealized Project

The curator and writer Hans Ulrich Obrist likes to ask the countless artists and architects he interviews about their unrealized project. *The Agency of Unrealized Projects* or the *AUP* was created by Obrist along with Julia Peyton-Jones, Julieta Aranda and Anton Vidokle in order to draw attention to those projects that were never made or have not been made yet. If I were to walk from my home to where the Ruby's nation resides it would take more than two weeks. Settler walls are difficult to walk through. This unrealized project turns away from the walls that contain the couch and screen and transverse a stretch of land that has been taken and divided. It may sound a bit flippant or even idealistic to discuss a project that is unrealized and most likely unrealizable, however, there is about a dream of abundance. Abundance is what a dream creates. At least a dream will spur on a question and possibly lead to something realizable and previously unimaginable. I want to return to Bellacasa's "Matters of Care" when she speaks of our individual involvement into permaculture as particular and practical. Permaculture is a whole-system approach to growth. It is an

integrated and involved process to regeneration and ultimately a practical way to both heal the land while healing ourselves. Bellacas states: “Admittedly the aim is not modest, or self-sacrificial. It is not even sustainability. It is abundance. In the same way, the affect cultivated in Earth activist training is not despondency in the face of the impossible but joy of acting for possibility.” The possibility of walking Ruby to her Nation brings about joy, indeed even thinking about it brings joy. To train for such a reunification is participating in holistic care. These dreams are an addition to the layering and decompartmentalization of practice.

Interlude: Relational Aesthetics on Texture and Humility

Texture in relation to history can be the thought of as the physical and psychological act of layering. Preservation becomes a method of relating history and if done generously a Relational Aesthetic arises. To be generous in this interaction is when one's intention or the intention of a group is to continually relate with new perspectives while denying nostalgic pitfalls. It is never enough to merely preserve texture for its own sake but instead seek proper contextualization. This

may require new positions to be taken be them physical and or psychological, all the while there should never be adaption. Adaption turns to humiliation quickly. Adaption for its own sake is exploitative which manifests an aesthetic that is unsustainable. On the other hand to humbly approach history is a process that first considers the Other (what happened in another time) and leaves the self to contend or to relate. Humiliation to the Other may also occur when there is an attempt to justify ones present existence through a false reconciliation to the past. Justification attempts to smooth out texture so that the past is softened and made comfortable. The smoothing out of history is an act that lacks consent. It degrades it. Today, many museums are making efforts to contextualize more accurately their artifacts. This may even include the historical exploitative acts of acquisitions. The artifacts providence is sometimes allowed to be criticized by victims of theft or for the sake of a more accurate understanding. Though this lends to the process of reconciliation, there still remains countless artifacts trapped behind glass, in boxes and on shelves around the world. In addition, some of the demands made by various institutions on communities as criteria for the return of their artifacts are in themselves an extension of colonialism. Some museums are requesting standards of archiving for the returned pieces that the communities they belong to either are unable or unwilling to meet. Unable as the resources are not there and, more importantly, unwilling because in many situations the artifacts in question were never meant to be housed in a museum.

There is an abundance of texture in the life we create where lines radiate away from consciousness. Texture becomes visible when navigating the streets. It is through layers that it becomes enchanting. There is no formal structure but there is something innate flowing in and out of the texture's existence. It both maintains what we are accustomed to and challenges our notion of comfort because it is evidence of what we all created but still its specificity is a mystery. It may be that this created texture is the environment where the greatest potential exists in order to fully relate. The texture is formed slowly and if left to build, it becomes the foundation for all relational activities. Not only for activities but relation itself be it within one's own nature or more specifically a place where it could spark eternity. We can feel this in the old worn streets of cities where the young now set up their new cafes in old spaces or where artists perform dances through ruins.

The one who approaches the relationship holding greater power must understand that it is merely by their approach and even through their observation that change of the Other will occur. The assumption that no effect will occur by means of approach and observation by the observer is an illusion. An observer's presence is power and effects greatly. The notion that one can merely observe, even with good intentions, plays into one of the Modernist's projects of observation in order for classification. A seemingly innocent idea, however, as we continually feel the

repercussions of this we understand just how corrupted this venture is. Relationships are quickly an arena for control. Other's actions are judged to be in line or out of line dependent on those who are holding the power. What develops then is an Anti-Relational Aesthetic. I think about the tourists often disregard for the nature of traditions. Consider the Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead) in Mexico. This tradition is one that is about remembering those who have died. Many make alters in their home or on the street in order to give offerings to their loved ones. I have been to towns in Mexico during this time and have seen how quiet and somber the local inhabitants are. I know that my mere presence has an effect so I act consciously and hopefully relate humbly. I have also observed in these same towns the tourists who have come to party in the midst of these traditions. They have painted their faces and hold bottles of beer. They are clueless and exude pride.

Humility, from the Latin 'humus' meaning ground, 'humilis' meaning lowly, humble, being close to the ground. Within the context of religious Latin it becomes synonymous with meekness. To humiliate is the act of making another low. The ground is a fine place to be when we choose to move there, and in fact the ground is the place where we have our origins. This is a form of de-centering. Humility obviously conveys the willful movement toward the ground. It is within one's power to do so, whereas, humiliation states the opposite. It grounds someone down in order to raise another above. It subjugates and uses positions

of power to affix the power imbalance. Humiliation uses fantasy by the one humiliating onto the one being humiliated. Never justified, never equal, always destructive yet satisfying on so many levels for humiliator who is concerned only with self-pleasure. To use the example of certain forms of pornography, masturbatory pleasure is obtained from the visual presentation of humiliated actors, women usually. What is created is an exploited aesthetic that begets a negative feedback loop for the viewer and those who benefit. The fantasy gives rise to newer forms of humiliation that further dehumanize both the one being humiliated and the humiliator.

Individuality and Violence

Judith Butler asks where the notion of the self ends when we are considering the use of certain 'self-defensive' actions in response to violence and how we justify the use of violence in order to protect. In the apprehension Ruby (a violent act regardless of necessity) a decision was made on the part of the government that the Baby's 'self' was in jeopardy and that it was needing protection and preservation. According to our settler tradition / fantasy the self-made man who stands on the frontier is a mythical image, a fantasy of self-sufficiency. This person confronts nature on their own and is ready to fight for

their place as an individual. Butler examines this fantasy as a scene narrated and created in order to justify our present actions. She writes, “One rather remarkable feature of this state of nature fantasy, which is regularly invoked as a “foundation”, is that, in the beginning, apparently, there is a man and he is an adult and he is on his own, self-sufficient. So let’s take notice that this story begins not at the origin but in the middle of history that is not about to be told:...” and that he was “without relations, but equipped with anger and desire” and “that an annihilation has taken place prior to the narrated scene, that an annihilation inaugurates the scene everyone else is excluded, negated, and from the start?”. In the scene the man’s self is contained to his own body and his own mind and everything external, everything outside him that is laid out in front of him is either there as an opportunity or a threat, bounty or monster. This fantasy describes not a “tabula rasa, but a slate *wiped clean*” which, for the settler, is the promised land. Ruby, like any baby, relies on the care of others. Their self spills out and over for the sake of survival. Although far from the fantasy described, the infant enters into this white settler world and is expected to grow into an individual and to make something of themselves- to eventually be self-sufficient. Ruby’s self, without question, extends and encompasses her mom, her culture, her kin, so when the state apprehends it is to remove one from themselves. This is the beginning of a schizophrenic and compartmental understanding of one’s self.

In art, the tradition of Relational Aesthetics challenge the concept of the individual by recognizing that is through a relational activity with the Other that brings forth the 'aesthetic'. Ruby's self extends to her mom and now extends to us, her caregivers, and their present community. So, myself now has been extended to Ruby. Acknowledging this very complex and nuanced shift in the self begins to breakdown certain ingrained schizophrenia. So, Butler's slate wiped clean is a disturbing genocidal acknowledgment. The attempt to wipe clean an entire place of its people is a near impossible task as the self who is executing the wiping has now been extended, whether they like it or not, into the thing they are wiping and thus the settler begins to destroy themselves.

This upcoming weekend Ruby's mom is taking her to her first Pow Wow. This will be the first exposure outside of the home with her mom to her culture. We are not invited, understandably, but we hope to be some day. This is the first feeling of protection I have had- to have Ruby in the hands of others without us.

The radical act post apprehension is the commitment to care. This in no way justifies the apprehension or makes it less severe. Even if premeditated, care that is, the struggle remains between the violence of taking a child away from their parents and that of caring for the child. This commitment to care is the practice referred to earlier which is fully based on relationality. Neither the wiped slate nor the tabula rasa is possible- nothing is clean and nothing is without prior imprint. A

commitment to filling in the story- correctly telling the story is what care consists of.

Functionality and Greivabilty

I have been reading about various individual's experiences within the deeply flawed child services system. Sometimes the writers will make definitive statements using the words "always" and "all" when referring to the destructive foster system. I know that these writers are speaking from an experience within a structure of violence and pain. I couldn't help reacting when I read a statement that foster parents are *all* abusive. I reacted, thinking we are not abusive, how dare they make this statement- we are doing our best to take care of this small child. So far every member of this family that Ruby is exposed to accepts and encourages her and her cultural heritage. I was very upset- I wanted to invite the author to come to our home to observe then make that claim. I calmed down and was able to recognize the complexity of my privileged situation. It occurred to me that I have nothing to consider when I visit the cafe with Ruby and tell others that we are foster parents. As I tell them our story I am praised regularly, then it struck me that I can't lose. Be it explicit abuse that the author is speaking about or implicit structural abuse it is very true that the system is abusive. Whether I like it or not,

I am not merely a player in this system, I am a winner. If I were to wake up tomorrow and decide that taking care of Ruby was too much for me, gave her to child services, then went to the same cafe and spoke to the same people and told them it was just too much for me, I believe that their response would be highly sympathetic. They would praise me for at least trying. They would express how sorry they were for my loss. This is where I am speaking from. This is how I live- my privilege protects me from failure. Butler requires us to critique the notion of the individual when discussing violence. She asks us to examine where we decide where the self ends. Within the white settler tradition the self often ends with my immediate family and often even sooner with my own skin. Because of this view of the self I take what these writers who speak about abusive foster parents personally, though it is not personal. I am not abusive if I only consider myself as a self sufficient individual, but as Butler points out I am not, and I don't want to be. Myself is extended- it extends beyond my skin, beyond my family, and into all parts of the world and, as we know, parts of this world are abusive.

Pulling back to our current experience I can never understand someone's ultimate intentions, maybe not even mine. Those who are 'on' Ruby's case, the childcare worker, our liaison with the foster organization and our driver/visit supervisor all want to see some form of reunification. They have never spoken negatively of Janet and all have wanted her to succeed. Of course this is all fine and well if the

system was not historically and presently flawed and if we didn't exist in settler colonial structures but we do. These individuals are doing what they can, they visibly care for Janet and Ruby and in this particular situation they want Ruby's future to be with her mom, involved and thriving in their culture. In no way am I under the illusion that this is the case throughout the system. I know and hear of stories that involve horrible abuse and cultural ignorance.

If we think of ourselves as a team (the above mentioned workers working on Ruby's reunification) then we must keep ourselves in check against a complacent sense and form of 'settler nativism' whereby, because of our involvement at a relational level, we can think we are able to temporarily avail ourselves of guilt. Instead, we need to feel responsibility that is both urgent and historically partly linear (our lineage, our current and ongoing participation in settler activities). This team is always in danger of pride and casting judgment on those who aren't participating in what we perceive as some form of reconstruction or reconciliation.

Grievability

Judith Butler wonders about the grievability of life. She considers that lives can be placed in three categories. First, those that are ungrievable. These would be lives

that we believe, for some reason or another, violence is allowed to be directed toward because the loss of their life matters little or nothing to us. This category would represent extreme inequality. Second, there are lives that when lost or destroyed are grievable. These would be lives that there has been little care for while living yet we perform and feel some sort of grief when we are faced with their death. Thirdly, there are anticipatory grievable lives. These are lives that while living we sustain and care for. Of course these categories are not clearly delineated in our hearts or minds. They may even shift and change with time and context. Butler poses the ideal as the third category as being in line with non-violence. Butler writes: "... we might reaproach equality and cohabitation on new terms, starting from the presumption that all lives are equally grievable and trying to see how that matters both in death and in life, for in life the potentially grievable life is one that deserves a future, a future whose form cannot be predicted and prescribed in advance. To safeguard the future of a life is not to impose the form that such a life will take, the path that such a life will follow: it is a way of holding open the contingent and unpredictable forms that lives may take." If then we believe that a life is worth safeguarding then this means that we also believe it should be sovereign. This is a complicated freedom. In my darker thoughts I placed Ruby's mother in the second category. In many ways I saw her as only grievable after death and wondered if it would be better off for everyone involved if she wasn't around even if to relieve her pain. It is a disturbing thought to

admit and flies in the face of Butlers notion that a life deserves a 'future whose form cannot be predicted and prescribed in advance'. It has been a slow shift into the third category. Slower than I would like because there still exists too much separation (at the time of this specific writing we have not yet met Janet face to face). The queering hasn't happened, the profaning still is a dream, an unrealized project. This second category is, to varying degrees, our current system. We grieve when violence occurs and lives are lost yet we are missing the mark in how to sustain current living lives and care for them in real time.

The Body

And so, what we do, there's a feedback loop continually, it's two way. It's not just, you know, mind controls body, but embodied action and embodied experience shape the mind by shaping and rewriting the brain. The brain is more like the interface between consciousness and embodiment. And so, we do this- you start changing how you move and how you sense, how you relate to the world embody yourself in the world. And you are, altering your consciousness and developing new capacities. *Nick Walker*

As experienced with Schneeman and many other performance artists the body is what undertakes the conceptual action. The idea is not merely made manifest- a product, but rather the body undergoes change each time the performance takes place. The act itself is self informing and self teaching. Jacoby Ballard speaks about our disembodiment in their book: *A Queer Dharma*. The white male especially has managed to alienate himself from his own physical daily practice. My understanding is that Ballard considers that somatic acts, such as yoga, serve as ways of queering. The practice itself (Ballard considers practice much more than mere yogic positions) is a holistic one that involves one's social responsibility- the relationship to the other. The cliché that practice no longer makes perfect but instead makes progress applies to the notion that somehow our journey throughout life is one that includes growth and change. Here, within the yogic tradition, growth does not mean financial. Though, like so many non-western practices, yoga has been co-opted by consumer based capitalism in order to further its cause. Other practices like micro dosing psilocybin or considering Christianity as the 'prosperity gospel' looses what I believe the spirit of those particular practices. I am a believer that taking proper doses of psilocybin combined with constructive intentions can have beneficial and profound effects. In much the same way many religions offer at their core a path to spiritual enlightenment. Many authors have lamented to this bizarre and destructive adaption of often ancient and

Indigenous practices. The somatic practice that yoga offers whereby one becomes in touch with their body may not necessarily imply one gains empathy but it seems that as soon as one recognizes the fact one has a body their recognition of the body extends to others. For example, if I can experience pain then I recognize that you also may experience pain. In many ways physical care of an infant draws attention to this extension. The obvious being that of the nursing mother, but beyond that, the mere holding of a baby who cannot support themselves, who needs help with their body, gives the care giver pause to consider their own bodily practice.

Ruby's visit with her mom was canceled. It has been canceled a number of times before with reasons ranging from Janet traveling to unforeseen appointments. This time was because Janet had ended up leaving for a shelter after a domestic dispute between her and her partner. Police were called but neither wanted to press charges. The police drove her to a shelter where she is now residing. My partner received a text from Janet asking how Ruby was doing and that she missed her. Jayne asked if she wanted to arrange a time to chat over video which they ended up doing. This was first time we saw Janet or heard her voice. This meeting was a contact that we had been wanting to make for a long time. It was good to witness Janet interact with her child. She asked what Jayne thought about a black spot on Ruby's gums. It had been there since birth and possibly was some sort of birth mark. Janet thought it might have something to

do with her brother- a possible reincarnation. A year ago Janet's brother shot himself in his mouth.

Conform

I have chosen to look to those who I believe and hope lead to a futurity that models a world more interesting, more inclusive, and more caring. Sadly, I exist as a bullet whose shape and appearance due partly to my lineage, fits the gun that has done the most ruthless damage to our world. For this reason I want to queer my perspective and my being in order to jam the barrel. I am looking to those on the margin to see how to live. I am looking at feminists who have struggled and laboured for actualization, and to those who have devoted themselves to queer theory both out of necessity and interest, these are the ones who light the way. Writer, activist, and educator bell hooks invokes Romans 12:2 “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” I grew up with this scripture but never realized its potential. This world I live in is so often lacks imagination. Less do I want to conform to those processes and structures that destroy culture, environment, and relationships, instead I want to be transformed by renewing my mind to the openness that becomes apparent through looking at the world in a

queer way, new to me but to many tried and true traditional intuitive way that favors inclusion over exclusion. A queer practice transforms through its critique, and at times, anarchic approach. This transformation is in many ways considers sex as politics. Ever since the mythical fall of ‘man’ where Adam and Eve’s eyes were open and saw themselves as naked it becomes necessary for sex to occupy a political position. One can no longer be without knowing. As the self is extended beyond the body—past reproductive coupling, beyond only biological children and into a broad notion of kinship, sex is forced to be more self-aware, a more intuitive practice that both informs and is informed. As a practice of care brought about by Ruby, the daily reminder of care continues to queer my relationship to the ‘typical’, realizing that regardless of my own self-identification, my relationship to others (made anew by a queer approach) can be a form of political action. As Paul B. Preciado urges us in suggesting that, “The body is not property, but relationship. Identity (sexual, gender, national or racial) is not essential, but relational.” and urges us to “Assign value to what others consider useless. Admire what other consider ugly. Try to be invisible. Try not to be represented. No animal will sleep in a bed made industrially. Change the object of your libido. Decenter genital pleasure. Orgasm from anything that goes beyond the lies of your body. Let Gaia penetrate you.” Preciado pushes to consider sex and gender not only as an intentional undertaking that has political implications but also to consider a much more creative move toward relations. As he documents

his own transition from female to male he reflects on how the external state reacts through its various individual players be them border guards or administrative officials. I believe that even a cisgendered individual can queer their outlook by politically refuting the norms that are handed to them and by considering their existence as a devised bullet that fits a constructed gun and actively disarm it by reshaping their being in order to jam the barrel.

Interlude: The Seven Works of Mercy (mostly #6)

I first saw Caravaggio's painting *Seven Works of Mercy* in book when I was younger. For some reason I became fixated with it.

The seven corporal works of mercy are:

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give water to the thirsty
3. Cloth the naked
4. Give shelter to the homeless
5. Visit the sick
6. Visit those who are imprisoned
7. Bury the dead

The seven spiritual works of mercy are:

1. Instruct the ignorant
2. Give counsel to those who are in doubt
3. Admonish the sinners
4. Be patient with those who have wronged us
5. Forgive those who have wronged us
6. Give comfort to the afflicted
7. Pray for the living and the dead

Caravaggio's *Seven Works of Mercy*, 1607, depicts the corporal works of mercy not the spiritual. The painting hangs as an altarpiece, its original setting in the church of Pio Monte della Misericordia in Naples. In many ways Caravaggio's depiction of the corporal acts and not the spiritual reflects his interest in earthly over heavenly matters. He rarely painted the other realm. His naturalism was both literal and physical. However, in this particular painting we do see a winged figure, Mary, in the top of the painting surrounded by what looks to be otherworldly bodies. Originally, like other depictions of these acts, the work was to be divided up into separate panels, one for each act but Caravaggio placed all seven in one crowded image.

It is the last two acts that concern me most. Hunger, thirst, shelter, warmth, and sickness are primary concerns of the body and are evident with an infant like Ruby or anybody no matter where they are, be it alone in nature or in the middle of a city. Whereas, imprisonment and being buried are both a result of some sort of institutional construction. In Caravaggio's depiction of these acts, visiting the imprisoned is

shown by way of the woman giving her breast to the man to suckle from and the burial of the dead is shown by way of the two men carrying a man whose feet we only see. The depiction of the young woman giving the older man milk from her breast originates from the ancient Roman story of Pero, the daughter, feeding her father Cimon in prison in order to keep him from starvation. It was considered an act of extreme charity that has its historical connection to Juno feeding Hercules. The depiction of burial is seen in the care of a body by two men, a priest who holds a torch and a gravedigger who carries the body. This act is based on the story of Tobias, found in the Apocryphal book of Tobit or Tobias, about a devout Jew who took the care to bury slain exiled Israelites.

The queer lens works to look beyond the shallow and often repulsive contemporary response to what many a viewer may see as a sexual act between the old man and the young woman. History tells us that this clearly is an incorrect reading as the breast and the act of nursing was not sexually loaded in antiquity as it is now. The queer lens rather shows us the use of the body as an extension of the self in order to explore intimate relations beyond traditional norms. Queering this painting allows for a stranger and even profane understanding of relationships, though, in actual fact the act of queering in this case may bring us closer to the actual intent of Caravaggio. It is often the case that anarchic and queer shifts in perspective returns us to the original spirit and intent. This particular act of mercy is one that responds not directly to the body in

nature but responds to the body in the context and as a result of institutional structure- the prison. The prison does not exist outside of human construction and thus, an ‘unnatural’ act like that of breast feeding one’s father is deemed necessary to profane, to counter the separation caused by the institution. Not unlike the effective profaning of Catherine Opie’s photograph *Self Portrait / Nursing*, 2004, where Opie is photographed breastfeeding her child. This highly referenced work of Opie’s places the notion of mothering in a strange context. A new and different sense of beauty that harkens back to numerous historic depictions of Mary nursing the Christ child. We see the word ‘pervert’ scared onto Opie’s chest which, if one allows, creates a new context for charity. Both Caravaggio and Opie works can be read as sex as politics which allows for a retelling of the mothering story.

Ruby’s mother is in many ways imprisoned by the settler colonial system. Caravaggio ran from Rome to avoid a death sentence handed to him for the murder of Ranuccio Tomassoni. No longer could Caravaggio be protected from the legal effects of his volatile actions so he fled to Naples arriving the same year he painted the *Seven Works*. Knowing people in power usually kept Caravaggio relatively free from punishment. In the past when in prison the ecclesiastical forces who liked Caravaggio made sure of his release. The word prison has its origins in the Latin- pris or prize. Prize, as in something taken. It is common practice for a settler, colonialist, invader, even a seemingly innocent

visitor or tourist to take prizes. It proves that one was 'there' and that the exotic was achieved. The imprisonment of Ruby's mother can be imagined as following: She is indirectly held by the system by having her baby held hostage, and or, her Baby was taken as a prize by a settler colonial system, and or, her full liberty as been put on hold by a foreign power. Here, the current authority decides the fate of both the mother and child.

It was a philanthropic association called Pio Monte della Misericordia that had commissioned Caravaggio to paint the *Seven Works of Mercy*. Interestingly, this association had obtained a certain degree of freedom from the religious oversight which allowed them to work as they pleased. This autonomy allowed for Caravaggio to paint a picture that was much more progressive in nature. Both the association and Caravaggio were operating free from censorship, unlike with some of his other commission in which his progressive use of subject matter was at times rejected by the church. A famous example being his use of a prostitute, possibly his lover, as a model for the *Death of the Virgin*, 1602. This was an intentional act of profanity as Caravaggio's own beliefs about Mary were an affront to the leaders of the church at that time.

A prison could be understood as a representation of all human institutions. Institutions are often considered in our society as both a human construct and somehow intrinsic to human evolution. A prison forces the

examination of these two extreme positions. In a sense the body is held and restricted yet the mind is free to think however and whatever it wants. I feel at times that the institutions that keep me are privileged places of protection where restrictions, though utterly constructed and arbitrary at times, serve as boundaries. Admittedly the boundaries I personally face are bearable which of course is a reflection of my privileged location. The prison that I am referring to is not the administration who controls and pressures the guards to keep me here but rather the present space and time I operate in. José Esteban Muñoz writes that “the future is queerness’s domain. Queerness is a structuring and educating mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house.” A future world outside the prison is one that contains queer relationships. In so many ways the visitor who comes to feed me is Ruby and now her Mom. These are the relational opportunities that can queer the prison walls and make strange the other prisoners and guards. This is the labour of the ‘fallen’ constructed society- the work of dismantling the interior of these prisons in order to make a new place to live. Though our mythological curse has been to become toilers we can choose what to toil. Being both the visitor and visited, a reciprocity of work duties emerge as does our mutual march toward freedom.

Self-sufficiency

In reading *Living In Indigenous Sovereignty* by Elizabeth Carlson-Manathara with Gladys Rowe I have found a guidebook in understanding an approach to existing within this present history of colonialism as a white settler. The book is directed at non-Indigenous people and discusses what it means to take part in anti-colonial movements and ways of life- to resist the current structure of colonialism which, according to the authors and many of their sources, not only destroys those who are colonized but the ones who are doing the colonizing. In addition to the soul crushing act of perpetrating violence against people I as a white settler am participating in the social and environmental exploitation that will crush us all.

Sovereignty is not the same as self-sufficiency. It is important to stress this point as I have heard the argument that if somehow given sovereignty then how will a nation exist on their own. This denies the sheer and obvious fact that we live together globally, and that our world, both environmentally and socially, is intimately effected by one another. At points in history, it may have been possible for groups of people to live in isolation from one another but even that was rare, it is now impossible. Sovereignty is compatible with relationships, both internal and external. Sovereignty is possible with value alignment and

intercourse. Often living in sovereignty requires creativity in wrestling with difficult pasts and presents where power structures are the norm in delegating truths and proper ways of existing. There are multiple places of self-determination in that with any giving place, sovereign groups can live within each other and be self-determined and even within those groups there can exist individual self-determination. The argument that this leads to chaos and anarchy is one that centers on the belief that most humans only care for themselves and ultimately want to be self-sufficient. This is a reflection of the fantasy of the frontiersman who finally can conquer the land on their own. History has demonstrate over and over that this is not the case. People want community, they want to live in peace and in relation with their neighbor. I believe, and I suppose that it remains an un-provable belief, that the promotion of self-determination will lead to better relational activity. Of course when speaking about Nations within Nations and promoting sovereignty to groups that have had their self-determination violently oppressed we need to expect and prepare for difficult and disturbing change- the status quo will no longer be. A new model will arise along with its challenging growing pains.

Mom

We finally met Janet. Jayne arranged with her to meet at the treatment centre where she had begun her addiction program. Meeting Janet in person for the first time at the residential treatment centre shed light on an absurd reoccurring question I had been thinking about. I had wondered who and when am I going to rebuke another white settler for their insensitive, racially charged, ignorant comment about Indigenous people? It occurred to me as we spent time at the treatment center surrounded by Indigenous workers and clients while watching Ruby and Janet interact in the most sincere way that this question was one that was based on fantasy. I had created a fantasy in which I was going to be presented with some sort of overt racism whereby I could counter it heroically with my limited experience with Ruby. This fantasy included me being the enlightened fully decolonized hero. I fantasized about something clear and present, a dramatic confrontation. I was wrong, the reality is not about what is present, rather, it is about what is absent. Absent from my life are the influences of those whose lives and land have been exploited in order to give me the excesses I experience. This is my ignorance and my comfort that I have both consciously and unconsciously protected. Indigenous people are absent from my life because I ignore them and am separate from them.

Jayne pushed for us to facilitate a visit on the weekend without direct supervision since Janet's treatment only allows for Saturday visits. Child services were unable to organize a weekend driver and supervisor so we facilitated it ourselves. It seems obvious that the foster parents should do this but the system is one that plays it dangerously safe at the expense of relationships. Ruby's mother is amazing and I believe that they should be reunited. It has become increasingly obvious to us that it should be required in order to foster, those giving care need to seek out a relationship with the biological parent(s) unless obvious safety is a concern, especially when there are non-Indigenous care givers caring for Indigenous children. This means an increase in vetting and cultural education to those signing up for care. I asked Janet what words she was saying to her child when she spoke to her. I asked about her language. She told me that the care givers of her other two children only want them to speak English stating that its mom's language and not theirs.

Janet joked to us that her aunty wanted to teach Ruby to scream in order to give her foster parents a hard time. We laughed with Janet. It felt great to share this bit of humor. She told us again about reincarnation, Ruby's spot on her gums reminded her of her brother who shot himself in the mouth and her niece, who was born with a faint red ring around her neck, indicating her grandfather who hung himself.

There has been more recent discussion about treaty, as a working relationship, where coexistence was historically the intent, at least with the intent on the part of the Indigenous people as opposed to treaty making as transaction- a receipt made in exchange for Indigenous sovereignty.

During a breakfast with Janet, her ex-partner arrived. Janet had contacted him and told him to bring her a couple of things- some photos and her moccasins. He seemed gentle and touched her on the back and said he loved her. She leaned away and told him not to touch her. As he walked away she told us how amazing it is that those gentle hands can also cause bruises. She told us that she isn't going back to him. After, in the car ride to the treatment center she handed me the A.A.'s Big Book and told us to read the resentment prayer:

"If you have a resentment you want to be free of, if you will pray for that person or the thing that you resent, you will be free. If you will ask in prayer for everything you want for yourself to be given to them, you will be free. Ask for their health, their prosperity, their happiness, and you will be free."

Land

The vast majority of the world's population does not own land. Private ownership of land is an unsustainable model to hold onto, a destructive fantasy. I own a house and the land that it sits on is mine according to the Government. My partner's grandparents purchased 20 acres over 60 years ago and I use it often. What do I do with these things? Many of the thinkers that have cited Tuck and Yang's *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor* have acknowledged ownership of land and discuss the complexity of what it means to give it up. I don't have an answer. Many people in the world still understand that unless one lives in harmony with the land our future looks increasingly bleak. Bleak as the European settlers leaching entire fields of nutrients and minerals by unsustainable farming techniques so that within generations the land was useless. Bleak as the systematic removal of buffalo in the prairies that took place in order to starve the Indigenous population so that they were forced into unfair treaties and the land began to lay wasted. There is a fundamental shift in our attitudes about the land if we see a future that contains a constructive relationship with the Indigenous population around the world. Carlson-Manathara and Rowe quotes John Stuart Mills when discussing the necessity of engagement with the land in a new way. Mill's states, "a (rooted) way of

understanding the earth...and one's relationship to and within it...(is) available not only to Indigenous people, but everyone on Mikinaakominis (Turtle Island)", and Carlson-Manathara and Rowe continue to write that, "Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous law are relational, emphasizing kinship with not only humans, but earth and the non-human beings of the Earth. If we are to fit into Indigenous law and orient to Indigenous sovereignty, as settlers we must begin to learn a new way of relating to land." Most white settlers have been socialized to believe that mortgage is good debt, that my house is the most secure investment I can make in life, and that a good job is when I can work most of my life for someone in order to make mortgage payments. This is a sad and destructive life. If the Indigenous worldview understands the land as their mother then one should not seek to own their mother let alone profit from her. This shift in understanding for the white settler is one of queering as it opens up the possibility and potential of having two or more mothers. For Ruby, their mother exists in both a biological sense, a caring sense, and a natural sense. All of these mothers are there as some sort of kinship. This moves away from an essentialist view of who occupies what role and toward a blurring of boundaries for the sake of care. There is a push and pull of identity and acceptance of blurred roles. Carlson-Manathara writes that, "labour of settlers should be to imagine alternative ways to be in relation with Indigenous peoples." Carlson-Manathara then states, "Therefore, it is crucial that white settlers engage in the hard work of becoming safer, better humans with

which Indigenous Peoples may choose to engage. It is typical for many white settlers to have the view that they are kind and benevolent people without having gone through the painstaking process of identifying their colonial socialization and ways of relating.”

Fear

The treatment centre notified Janet that Ruby's uncle was registered to start at the centre but assured her that she would be finished by the time he started. This is the brother of Ruby's dad who has no contact with Janet. Treatment centre is no camp experience. Janet invited us to attend her Family Support Sharing Circle. This was an honour, a clear step toward trust. My Jayne attended the sharing circle. It began with a smudging ceremony followed by sharing by all those who attended. Only 2 out of the 10 clients had support that arrived. When we last had coffee with Janet we asked what she would like us to refer to each other around Ruby. She paused and told us that she wanted us to be called mom and dad. She told us that even if Ruby was going to be returned to her that we would always be a part of their life.

I was thankful that Janet phoned in the evening after a nearly failed meet up with the driver of Ruby at the

Calgary Stampede. Janet had expressed interest in attending this event as she had never been. We were uneasy about this plan for many reasons. First, the logistics of trying to meet up with someone else in crowds of thousands of people is difficult at best but nearly impossible when one does not have a phone and secondly having Janet immersed in this toxic environment of masculinity, alcohol, and pro-white settlerism was more than worrisome. She ended up only seeing Ruby for twenty minutes outside at one of the transit stations- they never made it in. She called because she was sad at feeling rushed and feeling stressed in trying to find the driver. We talked for a few minutes, I think she was okay. Only three days prior I took our two kids and their cousins to the Stampede. It is a strange place, a place where a macho masculinity is rampant, the glorious settler narrative is propagated, and animal cruelty is made acceptable through false traditional practices. I don't know what Janet thinks of any of this. It was a couple of weeks ago that she told us about her run in with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who also have a presence at the stampede as heroic protectors of our past. Mom though, baffling to me, saw a plywood cutout photo opp where one could place their head on a cartoonish RCMP. She held Ruby for us to take a photo. As I waited for my kids to finish up a ride I heard an announcer in a tent behind me describing the heavy horse pull light weight division (4500 lbs) which was about to take place later that day. He said that these heavy work horses, gentle giants, literally "settled" the prairies. I couldn't help but think of this representation

of the horse as the same type of tautology as authors Travis Wysote and Erin Morten wrote about in discussing the image of the plough. In the opening chapter of *Unsettling Canadian Art History*. Wysote and Morten write, “Oxen and plough work in parallel to enact seemingly placid actions (cultivating soil) and yet they are actually violent examples of what Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson terms “the white possessive”: white settler tautologies that naturalize and normalize the owning of land as property, enslaved people as property, and Indigenous people as propertyless.”

The following day Janet texted Jayne saying she had relapsed. The relapse would have happened shortly after I spoke with her the night before. She attended an evening AA meeting where she described to us that she sat for about 30 min then left for the liquor store. Her ex-partner, the father of her other two children who are currently in the custody of the father’s parents, brought papers for her to sign that would give up her parental rights. She has told us numerous times that this is something that she does not want to do. Signing away parental rights would cause anyone distress and with the addition of bringing up past traumas of apprehension and abuse. What would most do when they are in a place that separates one from relationship and a sense of home and are under severe stress? Most would leave to find relief. The residential treatment model is highly unsuccessful as it focuses on the symptomatic elements of the problem. Many times Jayne and I would be walking with Ruby on a

beautiful day wishing that Janet could be with us, but she wasn't allowed, no exceptions, no special treatment. She has called us numerous times over the last two days since leaving admitting that she is currently drinking. We can tell by her voice and at times her incomprehensibly that her drinking was increasing. She doesn't want her child to hear or see her like this so we will wait until she is ready. Leaving treatment will not look well for her court appearance, but at least we can now bypass the treatment centre's rules and have a more consistent and organic relationship.

Janet called and didn't want to speak to Ruby. She had been drinking and told me she wasn't doing well. We chatted for awhile. She told us that she wants to sign her parental rights over to us, she wants us to be the main care givers. She trusts us and believes Ruby will be safe. When Ruby was first apprehended Janet lost most of her ability to make decisions for her child. She thinks she will lose her in court which will result in permanent guardianship of Ruby by the province. For Ruby to be placed in kinship I fear for a second apprehension of Ruby against Janet's will and ours-another trauma. Janet knows that if we have her child we will guarantee a relationship with her and that we will be advocates for her culture and live to the best of our ability. I know that we won't be able to do nearly as good of a job on the cultural front as someone from her nation but this is now what Janet wants. We are living with a disrupted past and now we need to move in a direction that is best for the Ruby and Janet. This

is about restitution which is ultimately about relationship and not about principle.

I became overwhelmed by the uncertainty that both Ruby and her mom face after speaking with the social worker. It became disturbingly obvious that Ruby's future is determined less by her mom's desire, and more by the push and pull by the resulting forces of colonialism. It has become shockingly real to me. It kills me to imagine Ruby being taken out of our home, away from her biological Mom and us, and placed with someone who Ruby doesn't know, who, at night and in the morning wakes to see a strangers face. How is this helpful? I know my pain and distress pales in comparison to those thousands upon thousands who lost family members to the various machinations of colonialism, but how does this make it right? For the first time I felt the desire to ring the neck of the settler signatories of the treaties- those money and land driven assholes who took part knowingly in the thievery and deception of the Indigenous peoples.

Janet texted us, "I'm just done. Can't do it anymore. Tired of courts and everything."

The system seems to work if you don't care but once you start caring you see the many cracks. We don't *want* Ruby, though we deeply care for her and Janet and if Janet feels that it would be best for both her and Ruby for us to have permanent care then we would be both honoured and excited for the opportunity. This scenario, though, doesn't seem possible. The province

has taken the choice away from her and Janet's Nation (Band) along with a judge will most likely have the last say in where Ruby ends up. In some ways it reassures me that the nation has this much power, however, I am deeply disturbed that this power comes at the expense of Janet's choice. She left her nation because of the many traumas she experienced. The traumas of course developed due to the colonial system of imprisoning her people on a reserve. Although in some ways it seems like progress with the nation having the power over Ruby I can't help wonder if this is just a further act of colonialism in which Ruby is forced back on to a reserve by a broken system. This child is not a piece of property. We have spoken many times to Janet about her culture and how Ruby needs to be a part of it. Janet is willing but hesitant because of her history. I believe it is essential to have this cultural piece of Ruby's life in order and we are working on it.

Parking Lot

Finally, after nearly 11 months in care under an emergency apprehension order Janet appeared in court to find out about the future of her parental rights. Prior to this date I contacted a number of friends who were connected in some way to the legal and social service system asking for advice. I was put in contact with

various social workers and organizations both Indigenous and non-indigenous. In some form or another the advice came back the same which was to ask that Janet retain her parental rights. Jayne and I wrote a letter to the social worker to be shared as information for the court that reflected what we felt and the advice given to us.

On _____ Janet, Ruby's biological mother will be attending court. Children's Services is seeking a Permanent Guardianship Order. We are concerned that Janet's voice will not be heard. She has expressed multiple times to both of us and her social worker her interest in us maintaining care of Ruby. We feel the need to express our concern for a PGO at this time. We hope that this would be reconsidered and changed to a TGO as we believe that Janet needs to maintain as much of her parental rights as possible. We ultimately think some sort of reunification is possible with the correct supports for Janet. Supports we are willing and desire to be a part of. We understand that the system generally wants to work toward permanency within a specific timeline. We are asking the court to delve into the particulars of Janet and Ruby's situation and consider not making any permanent decisions at this time.

Over the last few months we have developed a healthy and mutually supportive relationship

with Janet with Ruby as the common focus. We understand that Children's Services and Janet's nation will gain more input as to permanent placement if PGO is granted. We understand and want to honour the Nation's input and develop a relationship with them as we believe that Ruby and Janet need a connection to their heritage and culture. Janet has no interest in moving back to her Reserve at this time as there are too many traumatic associations. She believes that Ruby will not be safe. Janet also knows how difficult it will be to remain in contact with Ruby if she is living on the Reserve 10+ hours away.

Janet has maintained great contact through daily texts, calls, video chats and meet ups in person. She is always fully engaged and attentive to Ruby, feeding her and changing her diaper, reading and playing with her. Janet has always acted in an appropriate manner. She is a natural in her parenting and clearly loves Ruby very much. Janet has good insight and doesn't want Ruby to see or hear her when she is under the influence. Janet is very open about her addictions and she has proven that she is highly self-reflective and knows her limitations when it comes to caring for Ruby. She understands the impact of the various and numerous traumas on her life and wants to be sure that Ruby does not relive

them through her. Janet knows that if we maintain care of her child we would make it a priority for Janet to be involved as much as she is capable of. Janet has already been teaching us her language and giving us direction as to cultural education.

Developing a relationship with both Ruby and Janet has been a beautiful experience for our entire family. Over the last year we have immersed ourselves in reading and researching about issues, both current and historic, surrounding Indigenous/non-indigenous relations and care. We have been learning about both the events of colonization and the ongoing structures of colonization. The words of Mumilaaq Qaqqaa, Minister of Parliament and activist, are real to us and challenge us daily. Mumilaaq Qaqqaa spoke in the houses of parliament stating that, “Colonization is not over. It has a new name. Children are still being separated from their communities. Foster care is the new residential school system. The suicide epidemic is the new form of Indigenous genocide”. Our family, including our extended family, is in full support of developing our relationship with Janet and her nation however that looks in order help construct a better future for Ruby, Janet, and our own family.

We fully acknowledge that we are ultimately unable to provide Ruby with an immersive cultural upbringing. We are able to try and be open to whatever is needed. Ruby has thrived in our family. Our two older children love and care for her deeply. My parents, who live next to us, fully embrace Ruby and are open and supportive to what our future with both Janet and Ruby might be. We believe that Janet and Ruby are a part of our family and that we are a part of Janet's family and we believe that Janet has as much to offer Ruby as we do. Janet is a good person who struggles with an addiction and trauma and we are proud to be part of her support network.

It is important for our family to stress that it is not our intent to take Ruby away from her mother or her Nation. Our intention fostering has always been reunification. We were not seeking to add to our family when we began our foster care-giving journey. We are very much willing to care for Ruby for as long as needed and strongly believe that it will be good for both Janet and Ruby for Ruby to remain in our home at this time. Ruby has been a part of our family since she was 1 day old. We love Ruby and feel that maintaining continuity of care is best for her development and attachment. We are open to creating a care plan that would involve us facilitating

regular visits to her Nation up north and actively pursuing cultural and language education. We understand that to claim what is best for Ruby or Janet is not our place, however, we have become a key part of Janet's support network and we consider her family and she knows this. Our care for Ruby extends to Janet. It is vital that Janet's health is considered in where and with whom Ruby is placed.

*A number of Indigenous writers and speakers have spoken about the true spirit of the Treaties. In many ways Treaties were about peace and relationship. In fact entering into an agreement was considered an act of kinship. Elizabeth Carlson- Manatha, writing in her book *Living In Indigenous Sovereignty* states that, "Treaties are important agreements around the relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples. Indigenous perspectives on Treaty relationships provide guidance towards framing these relationships around kinship." She emphasizes that this is not only about politics "but also enacted within many Treaties is the making of relatives." She stresses that these "kinship bonds must be carefully nurtured". This is a profound way of not only understanding our dramatic historic failure but also to understand our individual potential to enact forms of decolonization by way of*

relationship building. Carlson-Manatha quotes Sylvia McAdam Saysewahum, activist and co-founder of the Idle no more movement, saying, "During the Treaty 6 making process, the nehiyakwak understood it was adoption of the Queen and her descendants, binding the two nations together for all time. We became relatives". Our family believes this to be true and we need to work toward a relationship with the Nation for the sake of Janet, Ruby, and ourselves.

(letter has been edited for privacy)

Three days prior to the court date Janet was involved in another domestic dispute with her ex at his place. I picked her up and took her to the room she was renting. We dropped her things off then I took her downtown where she needed to run some errands and give a friend a jacket that she had borrowed. We had a quick lunch and I dropped her off knowing that she might struggle. Over the next few days we tried to meet up but she wasn't doing well. She hadn't returned to her room the day I left her and for the next three days she drank and did various drugs living out on the street. The night before the court date I received a call from her. She was heavily under the influence and wasn't able to get herself home. I picked her up in a parking lot far from her place and drove her home. She kept repeating to me that she wanted to go home but she didn't know where or what home was. She had lost both her parents to alcohol and drugs and her brother

to suicide, both her mother and brother died that previous year. She spoke of how easy it would be to end her own life as no one would really care. We arrived at her house where she rented a single room. Before leaving she tried to give me some photos of her parents. I told her she needed them to watch of her that night, she agreed.

We were very surprised to hear from Janet the next morning. She was asking for a ride to court so we picked her up. She was hung over but felt good enough to attend the hearing. Our request to change the application from Permanent Guardianship to Temporary Guardianship was not accepted. Janet had a quick meeting with her lawyer prior to the hearing as this was the first time they had met. Jayne and I were asked to join the meeting as Janet was feeling overwhelmed and admitted that much of what the lawyer was saying was “going in one ear and out the other”. Her lawyer showed compassion and was patient with us all. He explained that Janet was going to lose her rights regardless of how hard he fought. We all believed that he was being honest and knew how the system worked. We also saw the binder full of police reports, failed treatments, and past history of trauma. He explained that a legal clause allowed her to appeal the PGO over the next couple years at which point the court would examine, among other things, how today’s court appearance went. Janet admitted at this current time she was in no state to care for her child and that she believed that her child was currently safe with us. The lawyer explained that by consenting

and showing up for court that day she has shown a tremendous amount of responsibility and that this would be seen positively. Janet understood this and agreed to consent to the PGO application. In the hearing the judge, a kind older woman, addressed Janet and told her that she was indeed brave for attending and commended her for consenting and this did indeed show care and responsibility. The judge commented on Janet's support group and told her that the village did come together. Janet commented afterward that she thought the judge was kind as she was expecting to be reprimanded like she often is.

Although this court appearance was one that was in many ways was a positive experience I have no doubt that it still remains a tool of colonialism. It may be a necessary evil where good and well intentioned people work and do their job in the best way they can, similar to Jayne and I. As foster parents we work within a broken and violent structure where we hope that we are willing and able to act self-reflexively to de-center ourselves, but we fail often.

Birthday and Thanksgiving

A year has passed. For Ruby's birthday we met Janet for swimming then burgers after. Everyone was happy and Janet seemed to be doing very well. The following

day was Canadian Thanksgiving so we invited her to come over and have dinner with us and our extended family. She came and met some cousins, my in-laws and some other siblings. I was feeling anxious about the evening being unsure how comfortable she would be with a group of strangers who all have become quite familiar with her situation. The evening was good with a lot of laughter. Janet seemed to enjoy herself and even ended up sleeping over.

I have made 52 tallies on my arm and I continue to add. I am not sure how many more will be added but I suspect it won't end soon, in fact I wonder if they will ever end which is alright. Janet finally asked about the marks on my arm. I told her what they were and she liked them. I have noticed that she has a number of scars on her arm from cutting but I wasn't sure if she had any tattoos so I asked. She said she didn't but later she asked me about maybe doing one for her to remember her kids.

I remember at art school in a teacher during a lecturer pulling out one of those massive foam hands that are used at sporting events. The hand is supposed to indicate '#1' with the index finger out and the rest in a fist. The teacher used it to point to something on the slide that they wanted to draw attention to. This bit of theatrics was to demonstrate that it was not only what was being pointed at but also who, how, and what was doing the pointing that needed reflection. I want to draw attention again to Sara Ahmed's "double turn" in that the "task of the white subject" is "to stay

implicated in what they critique, but in turning towards their role and responsibility in these histories...as histories of this present, to turn away from themselves and towards others.” And as Decter and Taunton go on to say that “For the white settler subjects staying implicated necessitates a practice of self-reflection, an inward turn that is both critical and unflinching.” Regardless of what I have written or what sort of care we have given I am still implicated and will always be so. I see this implication as not shame or guilt but rather an impetus to relate better.

Personal reading and reference list (probably incomplete and in no particular order)

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