

Beneath Our Feet *Denise Ryner*

1 Lee Maracle, "Water," in *downstream: reimagining water*, ed. Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017, pp. 33–8.

I return to the Snauc'w, put my feet in the water like so many thousands of my ancestors have done, sing songs to her, recognize her, honour her, and offer up my respect.

Lee Maracle, "Water"¹

2 Irene Watson, "Buried Alive," *Law and Critique*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2002): pp. 253–69, here p. 254.

A civilising mission that veered southward to our old peoples' ruwi, to a place where they perceived their violent invasion would bring their 'evolved' spirit to a place free and open to 'discovery,' like a virgin awaiting their penetration. They came to a place where Nunga history, songs and stories of spirit-law, were always embodied in land, the greater natural world and universal order of things. The *krinkis* (invaders) imposed violence, in all its forms, rendering our life and our laws pre-historic, invisible, un-evolved in time, in presence *terra nullius*.

Irene Watson, "Buried Alive"²

3 Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," *boundary 2*, vol. 12, no. 3/vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring–Autumn 1984): pp. 19–70, here p. 28.

The order/chaos figuration of a physico-ontological principle of Sameness and Difference was the axiom about which the mode of cultural imagination, the status-organizing process, the aesthetic and the conceptual ordering rational world view of Christian Medieval world, was founded and represented as divinely caused/ordered. The lay knowledge of Natural Man of the human historical world belonged to the category of 'chaos' which defined the order as such an order.

Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found"³

4 Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overtturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extra-territoriality of (Self-)Cognition," in *Black Knowledge/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology*, ed. Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015, pp. 185–252, here p. 204.

Nor was this failure to 'find a ceremony' any less so in the case of the pre-Western-bourgeois order of the landed gentry of Great Britain, whose sociogenic replicator code of *autonomous Rational human nature* and *subjected Irrational sensory brute nature* had been also mapped onto the new 'space of otherness' complex of the ostensible divinely determined but naturally implemented Chain of Being *Line/Divide* between *Humans* and *Animals*.

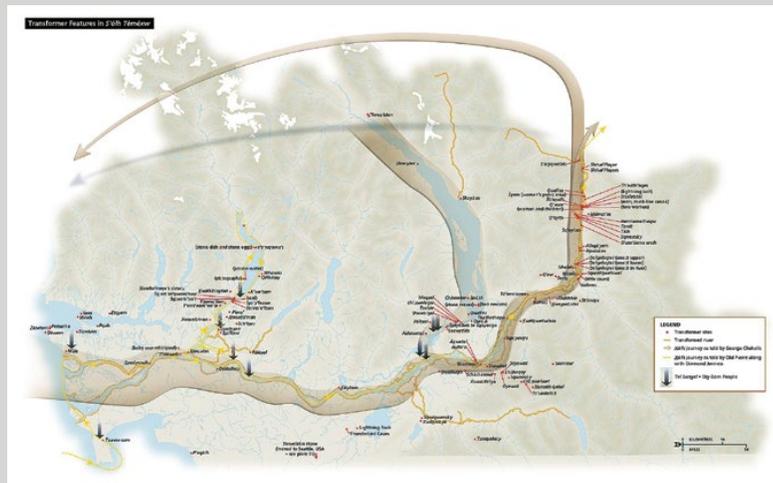
Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Found"⁴

5 Keith Carlson, Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, and David M. Schaepe, "Plate 1: Making the World Right through Transformations," in *A Stó:lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, 3rd ed., Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2016, p. 6.

6 One land-centric origin story talks of *Alhqá:yem*, which is known as a large rock in a river near an island, and as a Transformation site. *Alhqá:yem* both *is* and *is where* a "woman Indian doctor" challenged *Xá:ls*, who then transformed her into a serpent whose power derives from the rock and river site, a reminder of which appears when snakes sun themselves. Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, "Plate 45D: Halq'eméylem Place Names in Stó:lo Territory," in Carlson, McHalsie, and Schaepe, *A Stó:lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, p. 141.

Place-mapping under colonial modernity struck at the core of non-European imaginaries through its declaration of space as chaos in connection with order-stabilizing/order-legitimizing visual and linguistic structures. To counter this, contemporary Indigenous cultural strategies have sought to rework the instruments of othering: maps, museums, and other colonial institutions into practices of survivance and futurity. An example of this is the collaboratively produced *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, which uses standard geographical mapping and data-visualization software to present and clarify Transformer sites. (Fig. 1) Such sites are illustrated in the *Atlas* as locations both within Stó:lo territory and within cultural knowledge, where supernatural beings—or *Stl'áleqem*—have been fixed into, imprinted on, or are otherwise eternally present in, specific land formations and waterways.⁵ Their transformations were acts of creation by *Xexá:ls*, multiple but powerful *sky-born* beings who, following contact between the Stó:lo and Christianity, were eventually re-characterized in the singular as *Xá:ls*: the world-making being.⁶

Fig. 1: Jan Perrier, "Map of Transformer Features," in Carlson, McHalsie, and Schaepe "Plate 1: Making the World Right through Transformations," in Carlson, McHalsie, and Schaepe, *A Stó:lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, Third Edition, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2016, pp. 6-7.



7 Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," p. 22.

8 Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, "Plate 2: Stl'áleqem Sites, Spiritually Potent Places in S'ólh Téméxw," in Carlson, McHalsie, and Schaepe, *A Stó:lo-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, p. 8. From Wynter, "The Ceremony Found": "Each such story thereby functions at the same time as the imperative boundary of *psycho-affective closure* defining of each such referent *We/Us* as over against the *They/not-Us*," p. 220.

The combination of European/Settler-derived cartographic visualizations with Stó:lo storytelling are examples of what Jamaican writer Sylvia Wynter identifies as the "ordering epistemes" that shift and set the codes of "Sameness and Difference" used to formulate ourselves and the respective spaces where we're located as an I/We.⁷ The knowledge of "Stl'áleqem" functions as these auto-instituting "ordering epistemes," and this can be seen in Stó:lo historian Naxaxalhts'i Albert "Sonny" Jules McHalsie's comments on the maps of Transformation sites in *Atlas*: "Stl'áleqem' is the word the Old People use to categorize certain spiritual beings inhabiting parts of S'ólh Téméxw. The spiritual potency of these beings affords them a significant place in Stó:lo culture, yet they are difficult to describe or explain to people raised outside of the culture."⁸ The transmission of knowledge about the land (S'ólh Téméxw) and the spiritual beings *Stl'áleqem* is inseparable. These cosmogonies begin with origin stories of land transformed, setting the basis for all boundaries, kinship relations, and ecological care work that will follow in that place.

Storytelling as an auto-instituting strategy is also used to invent and perform colonial settler states as distinct identities. Its use of cartography, classification, and language to boundary the known from unknown or chaos from wilderness are a form of origin myth and othering of Indigenous place and presence. These modes of group self-narration—or *Homo narrans*—both undertake the work of proliferating colonial violence, land theft, and genocide under capitalist modernity, and of affirming Indigenous survival through the resurgence of traditional methods

of keeping and transmitting knowledge, in addition to claiming agency through the appropriation of colonial instruments such as counter-mapping, bringing land claim cases to court, or taking on political roles in settler-state governments. What is actually called for, according to Wynter, is not only of ceremony to breach the *Line/Divide* and the *I/We*, but a Turn/Overturn, bridging continuity with the pre-rational, predating modernity's (re)ordering and forms of relating:

The cap and bells of Bakhtin's parodic figures was to transform the modes of projection/figuration of Self/Group self and, therefore, of the mode of Not-The-Self, the entropic Chaos to the order of the dominant model of Being. They were, then, to refigure the aesthetic order, expanding the limits of the boundary-maintaining system of the We, and its new spatial extracultural space. In this way they were performing an aesthetic function analogous to that of the original humanists, who, in turning to the *auctoritas* of their pagan legacy to legitimate the heresy of the study of profane letters which no longer found its sanction system in theology, but rather in what Spanish humanist, Sepúlveda, called the purely 'literary,' were to transform the mode of functioning of human cognitive mechanism: our aesthetemes, to coin a phrase, and our epistemes.⁹

9 Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," p. 33.

This ordering and overrepresentation of the dominant, individualized being presented a paradox in the continued undertaking of Indigenous and Black resistance and restitution within colonial knowledge systems, legibility, and law. Without the complete disavowal of capitalist modernity (including the property form) scholars such as Robert Nichols have shown how the engagement of land claims in legal systems based on colonial logics of property ownership invites epistemological concessions on the part of the Indigenous claimants.¹⁰

10 Robert Nichols, *Theft Is Property! Dispossession and Critical Theory*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

What should be understood about modernity's institutions—which Sylvia Wynter links to *Rational Human Nature*—is that, not unlike the Stó:lo cosmogony of land-being transformation, colonial modernity's cosmogony also stems from a transformation of land and beings, a separation or *Line/Divide* out of which, as Léopold Senghor clarifies, emerged a European humanism of alienated and propertied individuals:

11 Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Le problème de la culture," in *Liberté I: Négritude et Humanisme*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964, p. 93, quoted in Sylvia Wynter, *We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk About a Little Culture: Decolonising Essays 1967–1984*, ed. Demetrius L. Eudell, Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2022, p. 295.

But with the discovery of the New World and its vast exploitable lands, that process which has been termed the 'reduction of Man to Labour and of Nature to Land' had its large-scale beginning. From this moment on, Western Man saw himself as 'the lord and possessor of Nature.'¹¹

He continues:

The one-way transformation of Nature had begun. Since man is a part of Nature, a process of dehumanization and alienation was set in train. In old societies with traditional values based on the old relation, it was possible to resist the dominance of the new dehumanizing system. In new societies like ours, created for the market, there seemed at first to be no possibility of such a tradition.¹²

12 Ibid.

To take this new dehumanizing system of labor and land as part of a nexus of reason versus irrationality is to play into the hands of capital, or what Wynter terms the market. Legitimizing life and land according to dichotomies of redemption that select reason over irrationality and productive territory over wilderness underpins the genocidal and social deaths that precede land dispossession and the enslavement of labor. The colonizers' possession of so-called "reason"—articulated through

Christian origin myths of Sameness/Difference—established the boundary-maintaining systems of dehumanization and labor extraction:

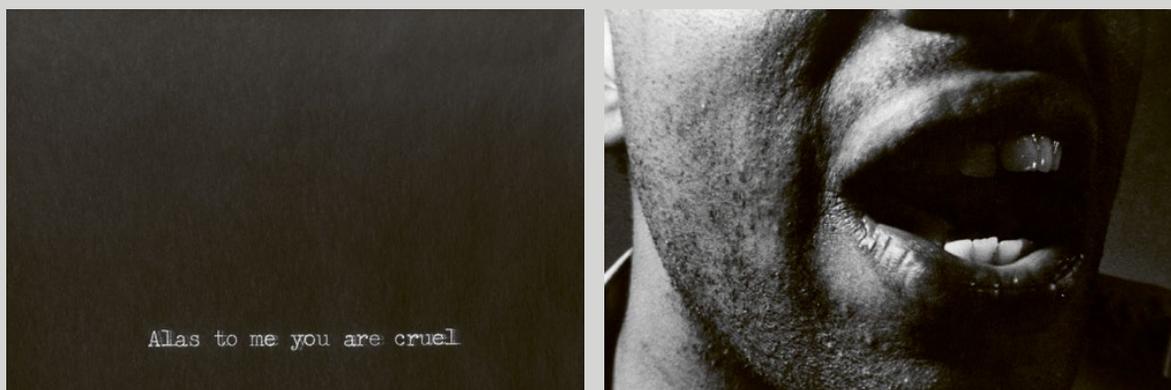
The internment of the New World peoples would be followed by that of the African lineage groups, homogenized under the commercial trade name of ‘negro.’ This objectification of the human was justified at first in religious terms as divinely caused by the Curse placed on Ham. Soon the shift would be made to the humanist concept of Natural Causality, of a by/nature determined difference of reason, in which the African mode of cultural reason was seen as a non-reason; and his internment in the plantation system as slave labor, as being carried out for the purpose of rationalizing him/her as an inferior mode of being in need of rational human baptism.¹³

13 Wynter, “The Ceremony Must Be Found,” p. 35.

With these transformations and thingifications of the Other under modernity complete, the overrepresented white-settler individual could stake a claim to mastery over both land and the colonized human Other, both now merged into a single subjugated property form. Examining Sylvia Wynter’s observations of the human, Katherine McKittrick expands this process into a gradual transformation of embodied and spatialized chaos into fixed, legible domains, constructed through classificatory ordering linked to geographic space, writing:

Post-1492, what the uninhabitable tells us, then, is that populations who occupy the ‘nonexistent’ are *living* in what has been previously conceptualized as the unlivable and unimaginable. If identity and place are mutually constructed, the uninhabitable spatializes a human Other category of the unimaginable/native/black.¹⁴

14 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, p. 130.



Figs. 2.1–2.2: Stan Douglas, *Deux Devises: Breath and Mime*, 1983, slide installation, sound, 7 min.

This space of the “nonexistent” human Other of the European man can be read into the two-part slide installation of Stan Douglas’s *Deux Devises* (1983). We hear, but don’t see the vocal source of a romantic male operatic performance of “Ô ma belle rebelle,” by the nineteenth-century French composer Charles Gounod. (Figs. 2.1–2.2) Subtitled lyrics from the musical excerpt and a grayish, fog-filled frame comprise part one, entitled *Breath*. Though unseen, *Breath* embodies the leisure and fully human agency—expressed as desire—that capitalist modernity affords the select few. The lover is a member of the Parisian bourgeoisie, gaining mobility and wealth through the exploitation of labor and land, deference to his agency and articulation of his desire corresponds with Wynter’s overrepresented individual. Aligning with Wynter’s identification of the singular sound of the African American musician Louis Armstrong’s “subversive sounds of the lumpen-poetics of the Blues” as equivalent to the ontologically re-figuring event of Galileo peering through his

15 Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found," p. 55.

16 Lyrics from Robert Johnson's song "Preachin' Blues." See *Genius*: <https://genius.com/Robert-johnson-preachin-blues-lyrics>, accessed September 18, 2022.

17 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, London: Verso, 2002, p. 110.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

19 David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021, p. 158.

20 *Ibid.* p. 159.

21 Wynter, "The Ceremony Found," p. 204.

22 Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, p. 6.

telescope.¹⁵ The voice of African American blues legend Robert Johnson punctuates as the second half of Douglas's work *Mime* starts. It features still images of the artist mouthing abstracted phonemes, which are synced to the rhythm of Johnson's 1936 "Preachin' Blues." The visibility of the Blues-singing mouth in *Mime* reduces the singer to a single, operating body part in the midst of lament. He is encountered as McKittrick's *unimaginable/native/black*, a subjugated non-human emptied of agency, no longer a man but the "blues walkin' like a man."¹⁶

Wynter's observation of a *Natural Man* given over to "chaos" was erased through the colonial concept of *terra nullius*, a land and nature deemed unproductive and therefore a non-space in capital's tabulation. In her examinations of the origins of capitalism, economic theorist Ellen Meiksins Wood considers the impact of this configuration between *terra nullius* and the concept of labor as an "improvement," in the interest of making something profitable. Referencing John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, Meiksins Wood traces the Western belief that private property is a "God-given" and natural right of the individual, and that this right is also expanded and established through the improvement or profit-making labor undertaken by one's own hand or body.¹⁷ Setting the ground for othering through a construction of humanness tied to propertied individualism that enact desires as deemed productive. Returning to Locke, Meiksins Wood writes: "So, he argues, a natural right of property is established when a man 'mixes his labour' with something, when, that is, by means of his labour he removes it from its natural state or changes its natural condition."¹⁸

The transformation of land into the property form is configured as the originary story of the cosmological logic of modernity, and as a result, property is imbued with a transformative power when it comes to the construction of the human. In an examination of anthropologist James Woodburn's writing on Pygmy societies, David Graeber and David Wengrow note that individual property rights indeed existed in pre-colonized Indigenous societies, where knowledge of ritual or other cultural information was protected as sacred property.¹⁹ They compare this to object-centered ownership as an extension of the human individual in contemporary society:

To recognize the close parallels between private property and notions of the sacred is also to recognize what is so historically odd about European social thought. Which is that—quite unlike free societies—we take this absolute, sacred quality in private property as a paradigm for *all* human rights and freedoms.²⁰

However, Brenna Bhandar also reminds us that Locke's natural right of property was foreclosed to those who were already "mapped onto the new 'space of otherness.'"²¹ Building on Fanon's writing on the role of property ownership for the ontology of the settler, Bhandar outlines the role of property ownership for modernity: "Being an owner and having the capacity to appropriate have long been considered prerequisites for attaining the status of the proper subject of modern law, a fully individuated citizen-subject. In the colonies specifically, one had to be in possession of certain properties or traits, determined by racial identity and gender, to own property."²²

Pierre Vallières's narration of Quebecois history in Joyce Wieland's 1972 work (named after the Quebecois writer and militant) shifts within the hierarchies in colonial space, mapping Meiksins Wood's matrix of land, labor, and production onto the classificatory and ordering logic of the Canadian settler state. (Fig. 3) Vallières's description of Quebecois and Black subject groups through the perspective of Anglo-American neoliberal industrialists also illustrates Bhandar's description of colonial modernity's *Line/Divide* along racial and gender axes to understand

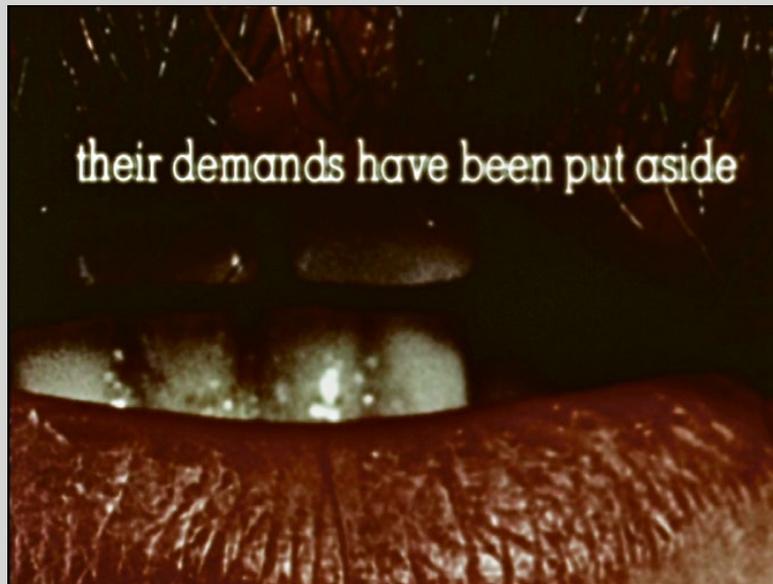


Fig. 3: Joyce Wieland, *Pierre Vallières*, 1972, 16 mm, 33 min.

whiteness as property. Vallières implies this loss of whiteness in his description of an explicit shift for the Quebecois from colonizers to colonized. Vallières, who by this point had renounced Quebecois nationalism, still engages with a White mythopoesis, enunciating everything in a working-class French *joual*, his moustache and mouth filling the frame as he describes the racialization of the Quebecois within the modern colonial order of the Americas: “We are not, for the English Canadian bourgeoisie human beings like others. We are lazy, backward, uneducated, we have no talent for economics, we have no manners. After the English Canadians conquered us, they spread the same prejudices about us as those spread by white Americans about Blacks: their culture is poor...” Following Vallières’s lectures, Wieland adds a few minutes of footage of the snowy countryside outside and the film concludes.

Wieland’s transition from Vallières’s *Homo narrans* to the snowy, Quebecois terrain is a reminder of the capacity of the landscape genre to engage the Line/Divide and Locke’s concept of improvement as a visual practice, through which a projection of Wynter’s “systemic-enacting of (neo)Liberal-humanist secular *Man(2)*’s sociogenic replicator code of symbolic life/death...”²³ can take place.

The art historian Charmaine Nelson examines how the land/human which is transformed through the picturesque in landscape paintings at the height of European self-differentiation through representations of slave and plantation economies in the Caribbean and Canada:

these books and their landscape prints reveal the pleasure whites experienced in their ability to watch and orchestrate (often from afar) the activity of black bodies. Beckford wrote of the “picturesque and various attitudes” of black slaves engaged in clearing land, expanding that “as the different clumps of vegetation begin to fall around them, the light is gradually induced, and shines in *playful reflections* upon their *naked* bodies and clothes; and which oppositions of black and white make a very singular, and very far from an unpleasing appearance.”²⁴

The symbolically dead, in Beckford’s account, are pleasing through their being the “naturally dysselected humanity” tied to the land on which they labor and with which they share the status of object or property, and in their observation by propertyed or “selected humanity.”

23 Wynter, “The Ceremony Found,” p. 243.

24 Charmaine Nelson, *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica*, New York: Routledge, 2019, p. 202. The Beckford quotation is taken from *A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica*, vol. 1, London: T. and J. Egerton, 1790, pp. 254–5, italics are added by Nelson.



Figs. 4.1–4.12: Will Kwan, *The Racket* (Automatons), *Herd edit*, 2021, video, 13 min.

The classification of humanity and bodies in the space of the plantation persists into the era of late-stage capitalism. The New York Stock Exchange's (NYSE) podium is the site of the ritualized ringing of the opening bell that marks the start of each trading day. To produce *The Racket* (2021), Will Kwan archived the video clips of these daily opening scenes, which are posted by the NYSE on YouTube. Each clip features a rotating cast of jubilant executives in groups of about twelve to fifteen, with a designate who performs the bell-ringing and a few thumps of the gavel before a round of self-congratulatory applause and possibly a fist pump from the balcony. Particularly in the United States, the self-mythologizing of the corporate executive as a "wealth and job creator" overseeing resource extraction, commodity production, and consumer markets well beyond their own geographical location has fulfilled Locke's proposition of a natural right to property as justification of unfettered levels of wealth generation, tied to the exploitation of land and labor. Kwan arranges these clips, spanning the weeks prior to and at the start of the 2020 pandemic in the United States. (Figs. 4.1–4.12) About halfway through Kwan's video, the cheering executives start to appear only via video link, projected onto the wall behind the balcony. The corporate and administrative workers represented in Kwan's film continued to celebrate profit and sustainability benchmarks while working from the safety of their tech-assisted social distancing bubbles. Generations of American segregationist policies and wage theft have perpetuated race-based Otherness, forming almost identical economic and labor divisions between these workers, reflected in the division between the mostly white corporate leadership as pictured in Kwan's NYSE clips, while the majority of their racialized workers are consigned to precarious positions on delivery routes or the retail and factory floor. The first wave of the pandemic was especially deadly for these factory, gig, and delivery workers; lower-paid workforces that are disproportionately made up of racialized and immigrant workers, who suffered the highest infection and death rates, as they were forced to continue working without the protective measures afforded to others.²⁵

The hierarchies of agency and vulnerability are almost direct continuations of those observed in the early nineteenth-century plantation

25 Saijel Kishan and Michael Hirtzer "Tyson to Conduct Racial Audit After Outcry Over Workers," *Bloomberg* (2021), online <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-10/tyson-agrees-to-perform-racial-audit-after-outcry-over-workers>, accessed September 14, 2022; Office for National Statistics, "COVID-19 Deaths by Job Sector," (2020), online <https://tinyurl.com/yc4fwnee>, accessed September 14, 2022.

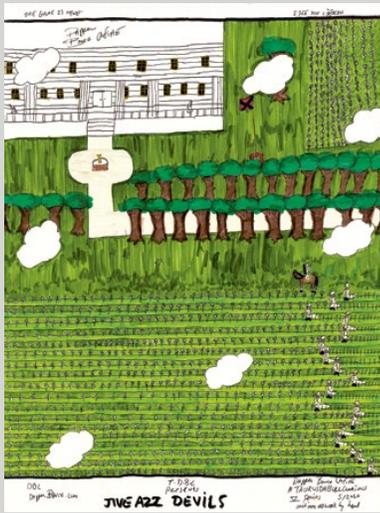


Fig. 5: Dapper Bruce Lafitte, *Jive Azz Devils*, 2022, Archival ink and Faber-Castell markers on acid-free paper, original artwork by hand, 61.5 × 45 cm

26 Nelson, *Slavery, Geography and Empire*, p. 209.

ecologies described by Nelson and observed as symbolically dead by Wynter. Compare her descriptions of the joy of the plantation owners in seeing their enslaved workforce toil in the landscape with that of the executives celebrating the exchange value produced through the continued labor and risk that have been pressed upon a marginalized class of workers through economic necessity during the pandemic, and Kwan's grid of executive overseers corresponds with Dapper Bruce Lafitte's plantation drawing of land and body, geometrically fixed as non-human resource. (Fig. 5)

It's worth returning to Nelson's examination of modernity's distancing and ordering as illustrated in the landscape to consider the construction of the humanist-era artist-individual who, similar to Gounod's lover in Douglas's work, has the privilege of self-projection:

Equally as important is Marshall's discussion of the type of people who could adopt the picturesque mode of vision, the conditions thereof and the outcomes. Marshall argued that the picturesque stemmed from the projection of the self and was dependent upon distance and separation from the very land being viewed. This visual discipline resulted in landscapes, but also in the objectification of humans in the land in relation to the nature being observed. Thus, I would argue that the self most capable of such projection, distance, and separation was, like Beckford, white, male, and upper-class.²⁶

Engaging the role of picturesque landscapes in the representation of Indigenous land as a *terra nullius*, onto which "selected humanity" projects their mastery into the space of the Other, artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun's corrective landscapes employ a Dalí-like grotesque to make apparent colonial modernity's ordering over the agency of Indigenous land as an unsettling and speculatively unsettled process. (Fig. 6) Yuxweluptun, a member of the Cowichan/Syilx First Nations, employs a flattening palette of solid colors—a departure from the muted shades of Romantic-era landscapes crafted with a Claude glass—rendering everything from trees, rolling hills, and cloud formations with traditional Coast Salish form-line and ovoids. His landscapes neither erase nor diminish Indigenous or other presences. In *Blood Moon* (2019) Yuxweluptun's spiritual beings encounter each other in the wilderness, and in his other works smokestacks appear as alien forms in the

Fig. 6 (left): Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, *Blood Moon*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 182.88 × 121.92 cm

Fig. 7 (right): John Constable, *The Hay Wain*, 1821, oil on canvas, 130.2 × 185.4 cm



landscape, representing struggles against ecocide, disorder, and a failure to overcome chaos.

This attempt to keep chaos at bay was projected in the (re)ordering of plantations as picturesque, and made the representation of visual and formal harmony paramount for the Romantic-era landscape genre. John Constable's depictions of the English countryside dispenses with representations of the wilderness and embraced industrial-era fixtures that slowly invaded their landscapes as harmonious, pastoral presences, locked with nature in producing the aesthetics that naturalized capitalist modernity's *Lines/Divisions* as all-encompassing orders. (Fig. 7) An examination of Constable's *The Hay Wain* (1821) reveals figures unfixed from the geometry of the field, unlike Lafitte's image of the cotton plantation. Constable's figures are part of a rural domestic scene while they converse near a peaceful homestead. The inclusion of workhorses and at least one dog endows the workers with the status of mastery and separation from nature and land. Ronald Rees writes of Constable's conception of nature and landscape that:

Except for his cloud and plant studies, Constable painted only manmade landscapes, not natural ones. He preferred canals to mountain streams and mill dams to waterfalls. When a piece of common land near his childhood home was enclosed, he showed no sentimental regret but recorded its first ploughing. He rejected nature unmodified by man as wilderness and extended his censure to gentle downland and even to gentlemen's parks, because unproductive, they were 'not nature.'²⁷

27 Ronald Rees, "Constable, Turner, and Views of Nature in the Nineteenth Century," *Geographical Review*, vol. 72, no. 3 (1982): p. 261.



Figs. 8.1-8.2: Rachel O'Reilly with Pa.La.C.E (Valle Medina & Benjamin Reynolds) & Rodrigo Hernandez, *Drawing Rights* as part of *The Gas Imaginary*, 2018, HD video, 17 min.

28 Ibid.

Having only remained in England, there were no reasons to fix the racialized *unimaginable/native/black* to land, and so "his landscapes were the expression of a social vision whose core was a productive, well-organized countryside. He excluded beggars and laborers bent with toil."²⁸

Given the importance of the aesthetics of harmony in the naturalization of capitalist modernity's cosmological transformations and hierarchal divisions, the leveraging of dis-harmony is used by artist Raymond Boisjoly to counter the instrumentalization and internalization of colonized language and linguistic coherence in the subsumption of Indigenous knowledge systems and colonial modernity's chaos and othering. His work *Disharm-onious* (2022) incorporates written text and grid structures, which are often associated with systems of ordering. He uses these devices to undermine perception, apprehension, and mastery through strategies of unruliness and disassembly that deny a surface of legibility.

Rachel O'Reilly's video *Drawing Rights* asserts that it is this flattening to a surface of legibility that is so central to colonial capital modernity's (re)ordering of the world. She traces the development of the Torrens Title land registry system, which erased any Indigenous

and presence-based connection to place. O'Reilly's video takes on the didactic form of the presentation of evidence, in the style of the artistic research group and investigative methodology *Forensic Architecture*, to highlight this system as a centuries-long crime in progress, (Figs. 8.1–8.2) developed in Australia and then exported to other colonial settler states, favoured for its efficiency in completing modernity's transformation of land into a commodified property form, exchanged and abstracted into mobile deeds that deny beings or past presences below the surface, engineered as a system that produces land without memory.

Engaging geology to work at the foreclosed depths of place as the location of modernity's human Other, writer Kathryn Yusoff returns us to Wynter's appeal for ceremony and a refiguring of the "boundary-maintaining systems" for the unburial of those made non-human and non-existent through capital's cosmogonical transformation of land: "The biopolitical category of nonbeing is established through slaves being exchanged for and as gold. Slavery was a geologic axiom of the inhuman in which nonbeing was made, reproduced, and circulated as flesh."²⁹

This unburial and recognition of what's beneath the surface, waiting to be re-made as human, is reminiscent of Christina Sharpe's highlighting of *wake work* as collective work after loss, trauma, and tragedy. This comes to mind when viewing Tania Willard's podium banners, which reference the intersection of colonial-settler and traditional Indigenous forms knowledge transmission and erasure.³⁰ (Figs. 9.1–9.3) The floral emblem illustrates what is known as *Cypripedium montanum*, which translates to "Mountain Lady's Slipper," and is more generally known as "Pink Lady's Slipper" where it is found in the cooler climates of Europe and the Americas. The same plant is also known colloquially as the Mocassin Flower amongst Indigenous communities, according to Willard's research. A species of orchid, these flowers' unusual coloring, shape, and their rhizomatic pattern have inspired myths in Aztec, Amazon, Ojibwe, and Christian cultures where themes of loss, searching, and sacrifice emerge. Naturally, the mocassin flower's Latinized scientific classification represents itself differently than the land-based genesis of Indigenous social auto-instituting stories. Willard also references Latin to denote the destructive role of the church in the genocide of Indigenous communities through the Indian residential school system across what is now called Canada. The residential school system attempted to erase and rupture the intergenerational transmission of traditional stories, language, and memory, removing and re-educating children away from Indigenous communities as part of a totalizing process of land dispossession across North America. Willard's op-art-like, lined patterns replicate the sonic waves of the ground-penetrating radar that in recent years confirmed the unmarked burial sites of thousands of Indigenous children who never returned from residential schools in places such as Kamloops, a town located in Willard's Secwépemc First Nation.

The ceremony may not yet be found, but the possibility of future transformations away from capitalist modernity's cosmogonic ordering also endures in the capacity for burial. The works of Willard, O'Reilly, LaFitte, Yuxweluptun, and others in *Ceremony (Burial of an Undead World)*, illustrate that the land is a literal crime scene witness to theft, enslavement, genocide, and ecological degradation. Yet this land also remains a site of resistance. In Wynter's early writing, the dichotomy of the land for enslaved Africans in the Americas as plantation and plot was generative:

For African peasants transplanted to the plot all of the structure of values that had been created by traditional societies of Africa; the land remained the Earth—and the Earth was a goddess; man used

29 Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019, p. 5.

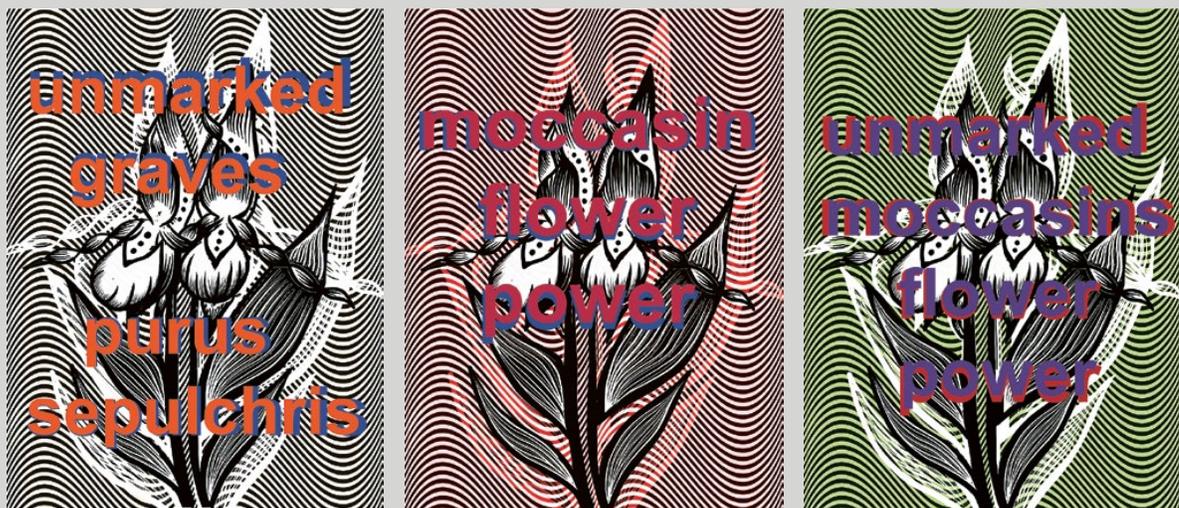
30 This can be explored in Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

31 Wynter, *We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk About a Little Culture*, p. 295.

the land to feed himself and to offer first fruits to the Earth; his funeral was the mystical reunion with the earth. Because of this traditional concept, the social order remained primary. Around the growing of yam, of food for survival, he created on the plot a folk culture—the basis of a social order—in three hundred years.³¹

32 Wynter, “The Ceremony Found,” p. 216

Land as the site of restitution, knowledge, sustenance and transtemporal relation in Black liberatory practices and Indigenous resurgence engages what Wynter terms the “ecumenically human.”³² In other words, the heavens are beneath our feet.



Figs. 9.1–9.3: Tania Willard, digital draft of *Ground Truthing*, 2022, vinyl banner, wooden dowel, satin ribbon, 129.54 × 276.86 cm