

**The Politics of Immobility in
Leonard Peltier's *Prison Writings* and Tomson Highway's *Rose***

by

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Abstract

My thesis examines themes of immobility in Anishinabe-Lakota activist Leonard Peltier's *Prison Writings* and Woods Cree author-playwright Tomson Highway's musical-drama *Rose*. I perform a cross-cultural, as well as cross-disciplinary, analysis of how these two texts critique the racial, spatial, and sexual politics that inhere in mobility and, in the case of automobiles, its frequent dependencies on petro-resource extraction. Rarely addressed as a project of ecological intervention, the numerous accounts of broken-down automobiles throughout *Prison Writings* present an indictment of both the immobilizing socio-economic dispossession of Indigenous communities and petro-dependency's particularly destructive impact on their traditional lands. By depicting the traumatic effects of intra-tribal gender violence on the women of Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve, *Rose* both highlights and critiques the various regimes of mobility continuing to inhere within both the Canadian reserve system as a settler-colonial project and Canada's broader adherence to international neoliberal policies, such as the trilateral North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Instead of appealing to dominant neoliberal narratives of unfettered mobility's emancipatory potential, I argue *Prison Writings* and *Rose* collectively address scenes of apparent immobility and restraint that undermine such fetishizations of the mobile.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Cameron Norman Paul.

Versions of chapter two have appeared in papers presented at several conferences: “‘I Wanted a Car, and Built One Out of Spare Parts’: ‘Yard Junk’ Activism and Auto/Textual Mobility in Leonard Peltier’s Prison Writings: My Life is My Sundance” at Natures 2014 (February 19, 2014); “‘Junk Cars’ and the Rhetoric of ‘Scrap’: Ecological Criticism in Leonard Peltier’s *Prison Writings*” at Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) 2014 (May 29, 2014), “Environmental Commentary in Leonard Peltier’s *Prison Writings*: Automobile as Ecological Protest” at the UBC Department of English Graduate Works in Progress Series (Feb. 25, 2015); “Vehicles of Intervention: Automobiles as Ecocritical Protest in Leonard Peltier’s *Prison Writings*” at Endnotes 2015, the University of British Columbia English Graduate Conference (May 16, 2015).

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Dedication

Dedicated to the water protectors of Standing Rock.

Chapter One: Introduction

My thesis examines themes of immobility in Anishinabe-Lakota activist Leonard Peltier's *Prison Writings* and Woods Cree author-playwright Tomson Highway's musical-drama *Rose*. I perform a cross-cultural, as well as cross-disciplinary, analysis of how these two texts critique the racial, spatial, and sexual politics that inhere in mobility and, in the case of automobiles, its frequent dependencies on petro-resource extraction. Responding to settler-colonial attempts to invasively "remodel[]" (86) Indigenous identities, Stoh:lo author Lee Maracle remarks how "[o]ur inability to move, to strive, is born of a great reluctance to be debauched slaves in your image. It is the source of our great strength" (86). Salvaging immobility from its often-negative connotations, Maracle underscores here the generative potential immobility can hold as a means of reasserting both Indigenous cultural traditions and communities. Racist pejoratives like "the lazy Indian," rather than indicative of a defeated, devolved, or immobile Indigenous presence, therefore become instead indicative of a continued, though often-disavowed, Indigenous resiliency, agency, and power to disrupt settler-colonial notions of forward-marching progress. Building from Judith Butler's provocative claim that "staying in place is precisely an act of resistance" (Butler and Athanasiou 21), my thesis intervenes at two disciplinary levels: first, by bridging Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives space, this cross-cultural approach offers new perspectives on the relationship between land and mobility under conditions of settler-colonialism; second, by foregrounding the experience of immobility, I reorient mobility studies away from its overwhelming focus on movements, flows, and migrations. Instead of appealing to dominant neoliberal narratives of unfettered mobility's emancipatory potential, I argue both *Prison Writings* and *Rose* outline scenes of apparent immobility and restraint that undermine such fetishizations of the mobile. In

sum, my thesis examines how, through their various depictions of apparent immobility, both these texts proffer counter-narratives that engage, subvert, and offer alternative geographies to dominant narratives of mobility accompanying settler-colonialism.

Though not the focal point of my project, the scene of the roadblock is a lingering presence throughout my various inquiries into the politics and regimes of mobility. Discussing the June 26, 1975 shootout with two FBI agents precipitating his later incarceration, Peltier offers a helpful example of the contradictory role roadblocks played during this pivotal event of the American Indian Movement.¹ More particularly, Peltier reminisces how, in the midst of fleeing gunfire at Oglala on the Pine Ridge Reservation, “Indian people from all over had gathered at the police roadblocks and cheered us on, blaring their car horns when we escaped. Shots were fired at random, confusing our pursuers as to our exact location” (133). This “gather[ing] at the police roadblocks” (*Prison* 133) described by Peltier underlines “roadblocks” (*Prison* 133) as contentious spaces – simultaneously open to occupation, contestation, and resistance. The roadblock ultimately maintains a complicated relationship to mobility: it feigns to represent a static site of disrupted mobility and curtailed accessibility, but it can also function as a site that collectively mobilizes dispersed activists into joining localized protest.

To many people, the personal automobile remains nearly-synonymous with the socio-geographic ascendancy of North America’s investment in a petro-dependent automobility that sees “oil [...] allied with happiness for North Americans, particularly those who most benefited

¹ Peter Matthiessen’s *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* offers a richly detailed overview of the gunfight on Pine Ridge Reservation, particularly in the chapters entitled “The Shoot-Out I: June 26, 1975” (*In the Spirit* 153-169) and “The Shoot-Out II: June 26, 1975” (*In the Spirit* 170-190).

from oil revenues and infrastructures” (LeMenager 66).² However, from burning tires to torched cars, the automobile’s material afterlives as discarded scrap highlight its malleable perseverance as both a threatening artifact of environmental refuse and a provocative tool for activist intervention. Whether it is the Mohawk nation’s repurposing of abandoned automobiles to block land development during 1990’s “Oka Crisis,” the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation’s occupation of Ontario provincial park land with parked vehicles during 1995’s Ipperwash Crisis, Six Nations protesters’ construction of a roadblock from scrap tires during 2006’s Grand River land dispute (Brown), or the torching of RCMP vehicles during the Elsipogtog First Nation’s roadblock opposition to the proposed fracking of shale gas (“RCMP”), each of these events recasts automobiles and their scrap as powerfully symbolic images that blur the role of petro-dependent mobility and automobiles within North America’s settler-colonial imaginary.³

One methodological question accompanying my choice of primary archive is how and why I divide my project’s focus between *Prison Writings* and *Rose*, published in the United States and Canada respectively. To say my project straddles the US-Canada border is not, however, meant to legitimize the dominance of North America’s settler-colonial border arrangements. While both *Prison Writings* and *Rose* are intimately engaged with nationally unique environmental politics and sovereignty debates, also significant is how each makes

² Erica Avila’s *The Folklore of the Freeway* offers a helpful account of this rise in North American car culture and the infrastructures upon which it relies.

³ Providing useful discussions of 1990’s “Oka Crisis” are both Abenaki documentarian Alanis Obomsawin’s film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* and a more recent anthology edited by Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) and Kiera L. Ladner, entitled *This is an Honour Song*. The Ipperwash Crisis is insightfully discussed throughout both Edward J. Hedican’s *Ipperwash* and Peter H. Russell’s article “Oka to Ipperwash: The Necessity of Flashpoint Events.”

distinct gestures towards cross-border movements that challenge the very settler-colonial authority of those borders. Tomson Highway's preceding play *The Rez Sisters* describes Emily's exodus from the Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve to join an all-female roaming motorcycle gang in California at the height of Red Power and, more so, her eventual return after the tragic loss of a lover, Rosabella (*The Rez Sisters* 50-51; 97). *Rose* therefore serves, in part, as a reflective epilogue to this cross-border trip and the traumatic loss that cuts it short. In *Prison Writings*, Peltier similarly recalls his cross-border escape to Canada and controversial extradition back to the United States for prosecution (*Prison* 133; 141-142). For Peltier, as he describes it, "I was now a fugitive. But there's many a nook and cranny in Indian country where a skin on the lam can find refuge. We can slip back and forth across the invisible but very real border between the United States and Great Turtle Island. You could say I escaped for those months to Turtle Island" (*Prison* 110).

To speak of border crossing is, therefore, to speak of the entwined regimes of mobility and sovereignty at the heart of settler-colonialism.⁴ By claiming "I escaped for those months to Great Turtle Island" (*Prison* 110), Peltier's cross-border transgression and his unwillingness to acknowledge either settler-colonial jurisdiction is exemplary of what Audra Simpson calls "*positive refusal*" (128, italics in source). As Simpson explains, "[i]f a refusal to recognize also involves using one's territory in a manner that is historically and philosophically consistent with what one knows, then it is an incident of failed consent and *positive refusal*" (128, italics in source). Peltier's act of cross-border border transgression is, therefore, a reaffirmation of those

⁴ Speaking on the hegemonic entwining of settler-colonial legalism and legitimations of select mobilities, Audra Simpson insightfully notes how, under such logics, "[p]olitical subjects are, to some extent, supposed to stay still, or to move with permission, according to one law: settler law that authorizes Canada or the United States to govern" (124).

Indigenous geographies discordant to settler-colonial state sovereignty. What Simpson's discussion above underscores is how to reaffirm both Indigenous presence and geographies is, therefore, to enact a distinctly Indigenous regime of mobility – one that refutes settler-colonial boundaries without inversely reinscribing their authority through such acts of transgression.

Rather than acknowledging those “various Canadas” (5) that adopting a “more difficult rhetoric of *both/and*” (5) might productively give rise to, Canadian poet-critic W.H. New notes how Canadian national discourse has instead sought coherence through the adoption of “border metaphors” (4). In Canada's search for a singularly bounded sense of national identity, New explains how “border metaphors” (4) have become an erroneous means of “isolat[ing] a subject, clarify[ing] issues, trac[ing] changes, and otherwise explain[ing] and theoriz[ing] the nature of nation, convention, position and power” (4).⁵ Yet, the interplay between the intra-state borders of reserves and settler-colonial cartographies of state jurisdiction complicate where and how such “border metaphors” (New 4) are to be situated. As Simpson describes, “the territory and the people of Ahkwesáhsne are crossed by four state and provincial boundaries and jurisdictions, as well as an international boundary line that bifurcates their territory” (128). Simpson's description of Ahkwesáhsne does not just underscore how a proliferation of borders complicates where and how “border metaphors” (New 4) take shape within a Canadian cultural imaginary; she also highlights how an Ahkwesáhsne sense of place and belonging has itself become deeply impacted

⁵ Describing his concept of “various Canadas” (5) in more detail, New argues “that the paradigms of boundary rhetoric construct Canada as a place that *includes*, a place that *excludes*, as a place *divided*, as a place that *distributes* resources and power, and as a place that embraces some ongoing principle of *boundary negotiation*” (5, italics in source).

through its negotiations and crossings of these variously intersecting geographies.⁶ More so, as Sarah Deer (Mvskoke) explains, Indigenous projects of “[c]ommunity activism, speak-outs, and public education ... are not limited to tribal lands; indeed, the Native antirape movement in the United States includes large populations of urban women and others who live outside of federally defined ‘Indian country’ (such as most villages in Alaska)” (164). Particularly important to my thesis are nevertheless the interpretative axes along which New claims these “border metaphors” (4) commonly operate: “[b]oodlines, time lines, power lines, pipelines” (4). It is at this palimpsestic meeting of the “biopolitical” (Foucault 243), historical, and energy-infrastructure narratives that my thesis ultimately positions its analyses of both *Rose* and *Prison Writings*.

Written by Leonard Peltier during incarceration, a key theme of *Prison Writings* is the survival and sociality that inhere in broken-down, seemingly “junk cars” (69). By framing these discussions as a form of ecocritical critique aimed at petrocapiatalism, my first chapter explores the automobile’s conflicting role as both a petro-dependent means of survival and powerful site of ecological intervention. Describing how “we [Indigenous peoples of Great Turtle Island] are now all prisoners” (63), Peltier draws clear parallels between settler-colonialism and confinement. “Without wheels out in the empty distances of the rez,” warns Peltier, “you’re utterly isolated” (69). Advocating “the higher mathematics of being poor” (69), Peltier laments “that hard-to-come-by and almost sacred commodity in Indian Country – transportation” (69). Yet, as Peltier’s description of his combined “auto-body shop” (89) and “half-way house for

⁶ Discussing the cross-border movement of Indigenous bodies, Simpson explains how, “[a]lthough Mohawks ... are border crossers, they are not border *transgressors*, because they have this unique temporal and rights-based relation to the nation-states of the United States and Canada ... it is also because of this temporal relationship to these settler regimes that the geopolitical boundary of the United States-Canada border actually transgresses *them*” (124, italics in source)

Indians in need” (89) details, even immobile, seemingly “junk cars” (69) can ultimately foster surrounding networks of kinship, support, and activism.

My second chapter explores how persistent depictions of intra-tribal gender violence throughout Tomson Highway’s *Rose* double as critiques of settler-colonialism, understood as an entwined project of immobility, dispossession, and confinement. Framing my discussion is the play’s depiction of how a group of Indigenous women repurposing a solarium garden into healing “hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64) ultimately allows for a transformed sense of place, space, and belonging. This “hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64), I argue, ultimately functions as a critique of both the confining strictures of the Canada’s domestic reserve system and the “slow violence” (Nixon 2) more widely accompanying the transnational flows of goods and labour, exemplified by neoliberal policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Highway 84).

Turning first to Leonard Peltier’s *Prison Writing*, the proceeding chapter begins by positioning his text as a project of ecological intervention into North American automobile culture and the petro-resource extraction upon which it relies. By focusing my chapter on Peltier’s various depictions of broken-down automobiles, I turn to *Prison Writings* as a productive entry point into discussions of neoliberal settler-colonialism and, in particular, the select regimes of mobility it enables. Situating *Prison Writings* as a critique of petrocapiatalism’s damaging impact on Indigenous lands, communities, and mobilities does not simply underline ecology as an important site of analysis for each of these issues; it also underscores, as my introduction has sought to do more broadly, how Peltier locates in the various immobilities felt by Indigenous communities an opportunity for resistance that subvert neoliberalism’s fetishizing of mobility.

Chapter Two: Automobiles as Ecocritical Protest in Leonard Peltier's *Prison Writings*

2.1 Introduction

From the illegal dumping of unwanted automobiles and their by-products on Indigenous reserves,⁷ to the commodity marketplace for recycled scrap metal ("US Scrap" 1641), automobiles are powerful signifiers of the selective ethical and material values assigned by mainstream North American consumer culture. In this chapter, I explore how narrative depictions of automobile and their scrap in Anishinabe-Lakota activist Leonard Peltier's *Prison Writings* reveal settler-colonialism and petroculturalism as entangled processes of dispossession particularly borne out within Indigenous communities. Although Peltier composed his text while incarcerated, *Prison Writings* is not just a text about prison; it is also an ecocritical statement. Peltier employs "junk cars" (*Prison* 69) as a powerful, ecocritically-engaged metaphor for the destructive capacity of petroculturalism. Peltier's interest in automobiles does not, however, stop there: *Prison Writings* just as importantly argues for the role these same automobiles can play in enabling and sustaining surrounding networks of kinship, as well as the mobility so-often needed to survive. If, as Paul Gilroy claims, "the car and car culture distill all the moral and political difficulties of consumerism into pure and potent forms" (87), then their narrative depictions can simultaneously encapsulate and contest consumerism's ethical, ecological, and economic appraisals of value – what is worth preserving and what is scrap. Scholars and activists alike

⁷ Environmental impacts of automobile-related waste products on Indigenous lands can range dramatically in scale, scope, and legibility. In this connection, it is useful to acknowledge both the presence of an "estimate[d] ... 850,000 tires" (Bruser A01) abandoned on Manitoulin Island in Southwestern Ontario (Bruser A01) as well as the compromised bodies and lands of Mohawk women in Akwesasne, who particularly bore a large share of the harm as a direct result of "approximately 823,000 cubic yards of PCB-contaminated materials" (LaDuke, "All Our" 12) remaining after the closure of a nearby General Motors manufacturing plant (LaDuke, "All Our" 12).

frequently invoke Peltier to address similar issues about environmental politics; however, too often, sustained analyses of Peltier's own ecocritical commentaries within *Prison Writings* remain absent. In this chapter, it is precisely this critical inattention to *Prison Writings* as an ecocritical commentary that I both address and supplement by focusing on the text's themes of automobile scrap, racial politics, and petrocapi-talism. Racialized incarceration rates (Janisch 160) and environmental degradation (LaDuke, "All Our" 2-3) represent two parts of a larger process of ongoing settler-colonialism. To discuss, however, either part without the other only further obscures and reinforces both forms of violence. My chapter's positioning of *Prison Writings* as both a prison text and ecocritical statement does not just highlight this intersection between racial and environmental violence; it also underscores *Prison Writings* as a project deeply critical of both North American settler-colonialism and the destructive impact of petrocapi-talist resource extraction on Indigenous lands, bodies, and communities.⁸

Works addressing Peltier and his *Prison Writings* primarily follow three thematic foci: legal-historical critiques exploring the institutional and juridical contexts that have led to and sustained his incarceration, most commonly through recourse to relevant details regarding his extradition, court case, and appeal proceedings (Messerschmidt, "The Trial;" Matthiessen, *In the Spirit*); rhetorical analyses of the various narrative strategies employed by the American Indian

⁸ See further Winona Laduke's *All Our Relations*, wherein she explores the various ways that "[w]hile Native peoples have been massacred and fought, cheated, and robbed of their historical lands, today their lands are subject to some of the most invasive industrial interventions imaginable" (2). Of particular interest is LaDuke's chapter "Akwesasne: Mohawk Mothers' Milk and PCBs" ("All Our" 11-23). Furthermore, Andrea Smith's *Conquest* argues that "[m]arginalized communities suffer the primary brunt of environmental destruction so that other communities can remain in denial about the effects of environmental degradation. The United Church of Christ's landmark study on environmental racism, *Toxic Wastes and Race*, found that race is consistently the most statistically significant variable in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities" (57).

Movement and Leonard Peltier (Knittel; Rich); and lastly, prisoner-rights critiques exploring the neoliberal ascendancy of a prison-industrial complex from social justice perspectives, most commonly through recourse to comparative readings of prison memoirs and sociological factors, such as incarceration rates (Day and Whitehorn). Though such a schematization is not all-encompassing, it highlights existing scholarship's oversight of the specifically ecocritical commentaries found in Peltier's *Prison Writings*. Consequently, my chapter proceeds as follows: first, I discuss Peltier's transnational uptake as an icon amongst activist movements; second, I outline what it means to engage Peltier's own *Prison Writings* as a project of ecocritical intervention; third, I examine Peltier's ongoing interventions into contemporary environmental politics through prison letters, particularly those containing statements relating to petro-energy resource developments; lastly, I offer a close-reading of key sections in *Prison Writings* to establish how its many narrative depictions of automobile scrap are indeed ecocritical interventions into both petrocapiatalism and settler-colonialism.

Prison Writings' narrative depictions of automobiles and automobile parts prompt readers to rethink both what constitutes scrap and scrap's own potential as a means of ecocritical protest. Mobility is an underlying theme throughout *Prison Writings*, with Peltier emphasizing, for instance, how the transportation enabled by functioning automobiles is a valuable, "almost sacred commodity in Indian Country" (*Prison* 69). Peltier is, however, also careful to acknowledge automobiles as far more than simply a fuel-reliant means of transportation. Situating automobiles at the very heart of petrocapiatalism, Paul Gilroy lends critical weight to Peltier's attention to all forms of automobiles, poignantly suggesting that it is "[c]ommercer in motor vehicles [that] ... constitutes the overheated core of unchecked and unsustainable

consumer capitalism” (81). For Gilroy, the often-abstracted social and environmental impacts of automobiles and their scrap cannot be overlooked. As he explains,

the motor car is far more than a mere product, an inert commodity or a neutral piece of innocent technology. It acquires a special force, and becomes a social and political actor that shapes the industrial and de-industrializing worlds through which it moves even as it damages both them and us. (86)⁹

As an impetus for drastic highway construction, automobiles hold a central role in the historic reshaping of the socio-economic geography of North America. More so, as a commodity, automobiles are public markers of both affluence and mobility, just as how to be seen driving is also, in part, to be seen consuming petroleum. Whether seen as an excess affluence, necessary means of survival, or source of unwanted pollution, automobiles unavoidably impact the human and non-human communities surrounding them in both expected and unexpected ways. It is in reference to all these considerations that Gilroy reframes automobiles as not just “inert commodity” (Gilroy 86) but as both “a social and political actor” (Gilroy 86). Reconsidering automobiles as both “social and political actor” (Gilroy 86) underscores more than just their role as markers of petrocapiatist consumerism; it also clarifies the automobile’s potential and meaningfulness as a site open to accommodating both ecocritical protest and intervention. Invoking the activist potential of the automobile, *Prison Writings* repeatedly depicts broken-down automobile scrap to reaffirm the enduring value of those objects, bodies, and spaces

⁹ Also helpful are Roland Barthes’ reflections on “The New Citroën” in *Mythologies* (169-171); Theodor W. Adorno’s reflections on automobiles in a section in “Do Not Knock” (40), from *Minima Moralia*; and several of Jean Baudrillard’s various reflections on automobiles in *The System of Objects* (62-64; 110-111; 117-118; 136-140). Offering an Indigenous perspective, Philip J. Deloria’s helpfully suggests that, for example, “the metaphoric linkages between Indians and nostalgic automobility easily extended to the physical form of the car itself” (166).

discarded by petrocapiatalism. Speaking to such affirmation, Peltier offers a poignant description of broken-down automobiles and their enduring value beyond petrocapiatalist consumption: “[t]hose old junkers can hold holy things in their rusted innards. Sort of like us Indians” (*Prison* 70). In short, I argue Peltier uses *Prison Writings* as a powerful vehicle for not only confronting readers with not just seemingly-abject “junk cars” (*Prison* 69) but also their own underlying ethical, ecological, and economic assumptions about what is valuable.

The socio-economic geographies of North American give automobiles a unique importance within Indigenous communities. Media interest in high-profile cases of violence along roadways, such as British Columbia, Canada’s Highway 16 – dubbed the “Highway of Tears” (“Highway”) – frequently highlight how a lack of access to automobile transportation can leave Indigenous bodies and their communities vulnerable to violence. Yet, automobiles can also represent far more than just violence within Indigenous communities; they have alternatively been taken up as a productive form of both cultural resistance *and* expression.¹⁰ For Indigenous communities in the United States facing ongoing jurisdictional partition and fracture of their traditional lands in the wake of the General Allotment Act of 1887 (Akhtar 402), Philip J. Deloria explains how “[t]he *auto* and the *mobility* that made up the word *automobile* pointed exactly to the ways in which mobility helped Indian people preserve and reimagine their own *autonomy* in the face of the reservation system” (153, italics in source). “Automotive mobility,” Deloria insists, actually “helped Indian people evade supervision and take possession of the

¹⁰ Arguing that “migration emerged as a survival tactic” (18), Julie L. Davis likewise suggests that “[t]he history of Indigenous people in America has always been a story of interaction, adaptation, and migration” (13). A contemporary example of the automobile uptake within Indigenous communities for activist purposes is Gladys Radek’s “war pony” van (qtd. in Griffiths), which she used to draw mainstream attention to the ongoing issue of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women in Canada.

landscape, helping make reservations into distinctly tribal spaces” (153). The very roadways and automobile travel by which settler-colonial governance continues to geographically carve up and define the relatively recent idea of “North America” also become powerful sites for staging expressions of Indigenous resistance and self-assertion. Rather than just a mode of transportation or commodity to be bought, sold, or discarded, Peltier’s *Prison Writings* illustrates for readers the resilient and social significance of automobiles and automobile scrap as an invaluable source of Indigenous activism – even if in the form of so-called “junk cars” (*Prison* 69). Focusing on both the cultural *and* economic value of automobiles for Indigenous communities allows Peltier to explore the values and assumptions that accompany petro-consumption and automobility, without, however, being entirely trapped within the logic of settler-colonial capitalism. Consequently, Peltier reframes automobiles and their scrap within an alternative conception of economy – both monetary and cultural – that is uniquely informed by an assertive expression of ongoing Indigenous presence and agency.

2.2 Activism – *Prison Writings* as Ecocritical Commentary

Prison Writings is an activist text. Emphasizing the activist qualities of *Prison Writings* stems not only from my desire to highlight its overlooked ecocritical commentaries but also from the unique role that works by “writer-activists” (Nixon 15) can perform as they encounter broader reading publics. As Deena Rymhs explains, “[w]ith its putative ability to make visible what is hidden from public view – to approximate the world of an abject other – the writing of incarcerated subjects represents that part of the social body that has been denied, the ‘excess’ that must be cast aside” (“Discursive” 563). Also informing my chapter’s interests in petrocapiatalism and automobile scrap as environmental issues is Rob Nixon’s concept of a “slow violence,” which he defines as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed

destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). One example of such “slow violence” (Nixon 2) is a ProPublica report’s conclusion that, “[o]ver the past several decades, U.S. industries have injected more than 30 trillion gallons of toxic liquid deep into the earth, using broad expanses of the nation’s geography as *an invisible dumping ground*” (qtd. in LaDuke “Unspeakable,” italics added). Yet, it precisely because of this abstracted impact of a visually imperceptible “slow violence” (2) that Nixon’s own work, like my chapter, turns to activist writing as an especially powerful form of public appeal and intervention. “The narrative imaginings of writer-activists,” Nixon explains, “may ... offer us a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen” (15). Though so-called activists texts are not unique in their ability to engender such “witnessing” (Nixon 15), the deeply politicized contexts under which they are so-often written and received lends a critical urgency to both their composition and public reception. Activist texts are, in other words, not just invested in moving their readers; they are, more particularly, aimed at moving their readers to political action. In the case of *Prison Writings*, its reflections on the socio-environmental impacts of petrocapiatalism and automobiles make legible Nixon’s concept of “slow violence” (2); however, it is, I argue, the text’s many depictions of automobiles that especially underlines how they and their scrap can represent malleable points of Indigenous kinship, connection, and activism.

Nixon deftly underlines the unique power of activist texts to clarify the social and environmental “slow violence” (2) of petrocapiatalism; however, it is Stephanie LeMenager’s concept of “petromelancholia” (102) that usefully illustrates petrocapiatalism’s own complicity in encouraging the production of these activist texts to begin with. What concerns LeMenager most is the dissonance underlying North America’s dedication to both “[l]oving oil” (102) and the

forms of activism to which its attendant “conditions of grief” (102) give rise. Petrocapitalism’s ethical, economic, and affective investments in oil are, in other words, complicated by oil’s conflicting roles as both a dwindling finite material resource and a near-ubiquitous source of energy. For LeMenager, a resulting cultural condition of “petromelancholia” (102) emerges, wherein these insecurities surrounding oil are manifested “both as a mode of preserving the happier affects of the U.S. twentieth century and as an incitement to activism” (102). LeMenager does not, in other words, allow contemporary activism to be seen as wholly divorced from petrocapiatalism, nor from the responsibilities and complicity stemming from this symbiotic relationship. I argue, therefore, that *Prison Writings*’ role as an activist text nevertheless represents a powerful example of the necessary flipside to mainstream North America’s fervent investment in petrocapiatalism. Activist texts like *Prison Writings* are not solely capable of offering such critiques of petrocapiatalism; however, the particularly politicized nature of Peltier’s text makes it a particularly useful site of analysis.

2.3 Activist Engagement with *Prison Writings* - Peltier as Transnational Icon

Environmental concerns figure prominently in many of the social causes for and by which references to Peltier have been mobilized; and yet, engaged, sustained analyses of the ecological commentaries specifically offered by Peltier’s *Prison Writings* remain almost entirely unaddressed or absent across these various conversations. In addition to Peltier’s well-known activist involvement in the American Indian Movement (hereafter abbreviated as AIM) during its apex in the United States during the 1970s, his subsequent trials and incarceration for the alleged murder of two FBI agents have since established him as an internationally iconic figure in his

own right.¹¹ Peltier's ascendancy to mainstream recognition has made him, suggests Robert Spillman, "*the* symbol of the ongoing injustices suffered by Native Americans" (260, italics in source). Repeatedly denied campaigns for presidential clemency (Moya-Smith; "Exclusive"), unsuccessful parole hearings (Matthiessen, "Tragedy;" Hancock; Petten 9), and overturned legal appeals (Matthiessen, "Tragedy;" Matthiessen, et al. "United States") have together bolstered Peltier's profile as a cause célèbre amongst the many artists, activists, academics, and politicians invested in the stakes of his imprisonment.¹² Peltier himself explains his ongoing imprisonment, stating that "I am in this prison as a statement by the corporation controlled government forces that want to say, 'Give up your resources, give up your freedom, don't stand against us'" (qtd. in Rickert, "Leonard Peltier"). To leave unaddressed how Peltier himself specifically engages with ecocritical concerns throughout *Prison Writings* ultimately risks tokenizing him as "merely" a convict, activist, or both.

Even a brief overview of sources attests to the various interests in Peltier as a public symbol. A vast array of labels have been applied by Peltier's commentators to explain his

¹¹ Jim Messerschmidt's *The Trial of Leonard Peltier* offers a detailed account of that trial, its controversies, and justification for Peltier's innocence.

¹² Michael Apted's documentary film *Incident at Oglala* is a prominent example of mainstream interest in the American Indian Movement and Leonard Peltier's case. For an example of ongoing celebrity support for Leonard Peltier's case, see Michael Enright's article "Robert Redford Renews Fight to Release Jailed AIM Activist Leonard Peltier." For more information on Peltier's advocates, The International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee (ILPDC) provides a detailed archive of his public support ("Statements;" "Archive: Statements"). As Jim Vander Wall explains, "the case of Leonard Peltier serves as a symbol – in both a positive and negative sense – to indigenous people everywhere who are struggling against illegal expropriation of their lands and destruction of their cultures. Peltier's uncompromising resistance fueled the growth of an international movement that had focused attention not only on his case, but on broader issues of indigenous land rights and political imprisonment in the United States" (306). Likewise, Jim Messerschmidt notes that "Peltier has become a symbol of movement struggle" ("Leonard Peltier's Struggle" 147).

importance: “political prisoner[.]” (Harnett, Wood, and McCann 340; Mallory 113),¹³ “indigenous eco-socialist[.]” (Blanco 157), “Native dissident[.]” (Ctd. in Perry 233), the embodiment of “a people, the Lakota” (Marcos), “a symbol for indigenous struggles” (Weaver 16), and even presidential candidate (“Leonard Peltier for President”). Outside Native American communities, Peltier has, for example, been prominently invoked in the United States by both African-American and Chicano public figures like Geronimo Pratt (206)¹⁴ and Raúl Salinas (Mendoza 12),¹⁵ alongside high-profile groups advocating for Peltier’s release, like Amnesty International USA (“Leonard Peltier;” “After 38;” “Amnesty”) and the International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee (ILPDC) (“About Us”).¹⁶ Not without his detractors, Peltier has provoked the ire of the No Parole Peltier Association (NPPA) (“Mission”) and the controversial ex-South Dakota Governor Bill Janklow (“S.D. Governor”).¹⁷ Meanwhile, international support

¹³ Declaring that “I am Obama’s political prisoner now,” Peltier discusses the issue of political prisoners in a 2009 statement: “In America, there can by definition be no political prisoners, only those duly judged guilty in a court of law. It is deemed too controversial to even publicly contemplate that the federal government might fabricate and suppress evidence to defeat those deemed political enemies. But it is a demonstrable fact at every stage of my case” (“I Am”).

¹⁴ Geronimo Pratt is also known as *geronimo ji Jaga*. Leonard Peltier has, for example, correspondingly expressed his support for imprisoned former-Black Panther Party member and imprisoned African American activist Mumia Abu-Jamal (“Statement of Solidarity”). For a comparison of prison writing by Mumia Abu-Jamal and Leonard Peltier, see Juda Bennett’s article “Writing into the Prison-Industrial Complex” (210).

¹⁵ For more on the contributions of Raúl Salinas to the American Indian Movement, the American Indian Movement Grand Council’s press release “re: ¡Raúl R. Salinas, Presente!” is particularly useful. Adopting the moniker *raúlsalinas* (Autmun Sun), Raúl Salinas explicitly discusses Leonard Peltier in two poems from his collection *Indio Trails*: “Peltier I” (32-33) and “Peltier II” (34-35).

¹⁶ Speaking in front of the United States Congress, Amnesty International has similarly voiced support for Leonard Peltier (“Congressional Briefing”).

¹⁷ In addition to being controversially disbarred for the alleged rape of a fifteen-year-old Indigenous woman named Jancinta Eagle Bear in 1967 (LaDuke, “Remembering”), Bill Janklow

has come from a sweeping range of prolific figures, such as Desmond Tutu (Tutu), Nelson Mandela (Hopkins), and Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos of Mexico's Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) (Marcos). What these international and domestic discourses speak to is the transnational scope of Peltier's presence amongst a wide range of sometimes seemingly disparate causes. Not only does the prominence of Peltier's case emphasize the figure of "Leonard Peltier" as a transnationally legible icon, but his extended, transnational influence also speaks to the malleable ways Peltier's iconicity as a contested political prisoner has been variously mobilized to sometimes competing ends within these differing or overlapping contexts.¹⁸ As Jim Vander Wall argues, it is "Peltier's uncompromising resistance [that] fueled the growth of an international movement that had focused attention not only on his case, but on broader issues of indigenous land rights and political imprisonment in the United States" (306). Vander Wall's linking of Peltier's iconicity to broader strands of activism both situates *Prison Writings*' relationship to environmental causes and begs a reconsideration of *Prison Writings* itself as project significantly invested in ecocritical issues.

There are, however, many explicitly environmentally-minded supporters of Peltier who have drawn upon his international profile. Even a cursory glance at several works makes clear how references to Peltier have often been deployed to the detriment of his own environmental

was the Attorney General (and later Governor) at the time of the shootout leading to Leonard Peltier being accused of the murder of two FBI agents. Even as late as 2001, Janklow publicly boasts of blocking Peltier's presidential pardon, describing Peltier as "a cold-blooded murderer" and going on record as stating "I am probably the one who's responsible for Leonard Peltier not getting out" (qtd. in "S.D. Governor"). Janklow's litigious stalling of the release of Peter Matthiessen's seminal biography of Peltier *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* for several years is outlined in Peter Matthiessen's article "The Tragedy of Leonard Peltier v. the US." Leonard Peltier's 2009 statement, entitled "I Am Obama's Prisoner Now," includes a rebuttal to Janklow.

¹⁸ Leonard Peltier's own commentary on the uses and misuses of his story can be found in, for example, "Leonard Peltier Statement on his 70th Birthday" (Zig Zag).

commentaries: both the American Indian Movement and the case of Leonard Peltier are, for instance, mobilized by prominent environmental activist and Greenpeace International co-founder Rex Weyler's text *Blood on the Land*; similarly, Jim Messerschmidt's book-length review of Peltier's case contains a concluding chapter wherein Peltier's case is mobilized to more broadly critique "how the judicial apparatus and procedures have been masking over and mystifying these plans [for corporate petro-resource extraction from Indigenous lands] by big business" ("Trial" 141); finally, even Juda Bennett's more recent analysis of *Prison Writings* as a prison text limits its ecocritical reading to the suggestion "Peltier's first-person account, like much writing by American Indians, refuses to separate the individual from the people and the people from the land" (211). Each of these treatments is too generalized and fails to offer a robust, close analysis of Peltier's own ecocritical commentaries in *Prison Writings* (whether by virtue of publication prior to *Prison Writings*, oversight by authors addressing *Prison Writings*, or both). In this chapter, I supplement these commentaries on Peltier by instead turning more closely to *Prison Writings* itself and, in particular, the ecocritical commentaries this text offers. What differentiates my own examination of Peltier from those above is more than a specific interest in *Prison Writings* itself as an ecocritical statement. Exploring *Prison Writings* from an explicitly ecocritical perspective highlights not just one more addition to the eclectic range of issues Peltier's text explores but also Peltier's ability to synthesize each of these concerns within a broader project of Indigenous activism.

2.4 Peltier's Prison Letters – The American Indian Movement (AIM) in Retrospect

Examining *Prison Writings* requires placing it in the context of AIM's activism against the entwined politics of settler-colonialism and environmental destruction, particularly regarding petro-energy developments. The historical relationship between AIM and environmental

activism is longstanding and has frequently been at odds with petro-energy development projects. Several examples of AIM's activism include their public opposition to the then-proposed Alaska Pipeline project ("Indians Threaten"), their protesting of the Mount Rushmore monument in South Dakota's energy-rich Black Hills ("A Different"), and their cross-country, automobile-assisted caravan protest of 1972's Trail of Broken Treaties.¹⁹ Though AIM's notoriety has dwindled since its peak in the 1970s, Peltier's ongoing prison letters are useful supplements to *Prison Writings* because they function as paratextual fragments variously capable of extending, revising, and historically contextualizing the evolving trajectory of his environmental activism.²⁰

Writing from prison in 2015, Peltier reflects upon the past and present states of environmental activism:

¹⁹ Environmental activism neither begins nor ends with the American Indian Movement. Steve Talbot's article "Free Alcatraz: The Culture of Native American Liberation" offers a brief overview of environmental activism by various Indigenous communities in the 1950s and 1960s, such as opposition to the Kinzua Dam project and various other energy initiatives (87). For an example of the United States government's response to AIM opposition to the Alaskan Pipeline project, see the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee's report, entitled *Revolutionary Activities within the United States: The American Indian Movement* (34-35). A helpful rhetorical analysis of the way Mt. Rushmore is presented to visiting tourists alongside surrounding controversies involving interventions by Indigenous activists is Teresa Bergman's chapter from *Exhibiting Patriotism*, entitled "Patriotism Carved in Stone: Mt. Rushmore's Evolution as National Symbol" (143-172). Jim Messerschmidt's *The Trial of Leonard Peltier* includes a lengthy discussion of the Black Hills and the encroachment of energy resource developments into that disputed region (172-174). Contemporary coverage devoted to events concerning the Trail of Broken Treaties are featured throughout an extensive collection of articles found in *Akwesasne Notes* (Volume 5, Number 1, January 1973). Peltier's *Prison Writings* also comments on the Trail of Broken Treaties (99-102).

²⁰ Examples of Peltier's paratextual commentaries on environmental politics extend beyond his prison letters. Prior to being sentenced in court, Peltier states, for example, that "the most important of all is to respect and preserve the Earth, who we consider to be our mother" (qtd. in Messerschmidt "The Trial" 172).

I see today the traditionalists were correct and AIM People were right when we took it up as a rallying cry to the world. Still, when we [AIM] spoke out against the destruction of Mother Earth, we were called a bunch of nuts. Well, today, it is called climate change, and there are now millions of us crying out against the destruction of out [sic] Mother Earth. Amazing, huh? (qtd in. Rickert, “Leonard Peltier’s Message,” italics in source)

Peltier’s passage offers a sweeping indictment of both ongoing environmental neglect and dismissive opposition to environmental reform initiatives, particularly when attached to questions concerning Indigenous rights, land, and activism.²¹ His language subtly proposes, for instance, a public recognition of AIM’s pioneering efforts in environmental activism, for which today “*there are now millions of us crying out*” (qtd in. Rickert, “Leonard Peltier’s Message,” italics in source). Centring AIM in his commentaries on the politics of environmental activism

²¹ Events surrounding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) exemplify the hesitancy by settler-colonial states to meaningfully address Indigenous rights and activism. Despite the Declaration passing the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia – all former colonies – were unique in their initial refusal to support the Declaration (Cheadle). Lending a particularly environmental slant to the issue, Kim Mackrael argues “Canada initially voted against the UN declaration along with the United States, New Zealand and Australia, saying that resource rights and other claims in the document’s text could clash with the country’s constitution.” Even the United Kingdom, a signatory when the Declaration first passed, further exemplifies a persistent reluctance towards meaningful addresses and acknowledgements of Indigenous activist concerns. As the United Nations original press release outlines in 2007, “[w]ith the exception of the right to self-determination, the United Kingdom did not accept the concept of collective human rights in international law” (“General”). Soon, however, the release details the United Kingdom’s caveat regarding Indigenous rights: “[s]he [Karen Pierce, Deputy Permanent Representative and Ambassador for the United Kingdom] emphasized that the Declaration was non-legally binding and did not propose to have any retroactive application on historical episodes. National minority groups and other ethnic groups within the territory of the United Kingdom and its overseas territories did not fall within the scope of the indigenous peoples to which the Declaration applied. The United Kingdom had, however, long provided political and financial support to the socio-economic and political development of indigenous peoples around the world” (“General”). For more about the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, see Mark Rifkin’s article “On the (Geo)Politics of Belonging: Agamben and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”

allows Peltier to simultaneously emphasize AIM's entangled histories as both an Indigenous and environmental activist movement. In short, AIM's historical role in bringing about a stronger Indigenous presence within North American environmental reforms is more than a contextual or biographical backdrop for Peltier's own public statements in *Prison Writings*. Peltier's activism, like AIM, bridges Indigenous and environmental issues and, in doing, positions his *Prison Writings* as an important intersection between these two fields of activism.

While any mention of the American Indian Movement unavoidably calls up images of its sustained occupation of a small town on the Pine Ridge Reservation during 1973's Wounded Knee Incident, Pine Ridge Reservation itself also maintains an ongoing legacy of opposing the same petro-energy developments influencing Peltier's environmental politics. Perhaps most exemplary of this ongoing legacy is the Pine Ridge Reservation's regional opposition to the now-rejected Keystone XL pipeline ("Keystone Blockade," Woodard).²² Again, in a 2014 letter from prison, Peltier too speaks out against the negative impacts of oil pipeline construction:

When people set off explosions underneath the Earth, this Earth we call our Mother, when they make poisons and radiation and other deadly things and put them within our mother, then they cause birth defects for all of nature, including man ... We must convince them [corporations], in whatever way we can, to respect our Earth and to respect us, and not allow them to destroy our Mother the Earth with fracking and oil-

²² Public opposition to Keystone XL pipeline project and its eventual rejection by President Barack Obama is outlined in the article "Barack Obama Rejects Keystone XL Pipeline Citing 'National Interest.'" Two articles offer particularly helpful discussions of the various Indigenous and non-Indigenous parties involved in debates over the Keystone XL pipeline proposal: "Native Americans, Landowners Protest Keystone XL Pipeline in South Dakota" and Peter Moskowitz's "Plains Bedfellows." For more about the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline proposal, see Amanda Holpuch's "South Dakota Sioux Tribe Calls Keystone XL Pipeline Approval 'Act of War'" and Aldo Seoane's "House Vote in Favor of the Keystone XL Pipeline an Act of War."

filled pipelines crossing the land, and steel platforms in the ocean that spill oil, or pesticides that kill the bees and destroy the food chain of the birds ... Right now in various part of the United States and Canada there are people of all ages and all races trying to stop these oil pipelines that will carry sludge, and this fracking that sets off explosions under the Earth which also causes earth tremors and quakes. This is an immediate danger; it is very real, and you can do something about it. (qtd. in Rickert, “Leonard Peltier”)

In addition to drawing attention to the Keystone XL’s shared routing across both Canada and the United States (“Keystone XL”), Peltier describes the presence of a correspondingly transnational activist network spanning across both “the United States and Canada” (qtd. in Rickert, “Leonard Peltier”) in response. More than a space abstracted onto a map, Peltier draws attention to how, like the automobiles and highway infrastructure it would sustain, even the proposed route of the Keystone XL pipeline offers a social conduit capable of both supporting and challenging petrocapitalism.²³ Readers are, therefore, forced to consider a transnational reinterpretation of both environmental activism and petrocapitalism. Peltier draws heavily, for example, on the

²³ This point is partly influenced by Timothy Mitchell *Carbon Democracy*. Mitchell, citing both Gavin Bridge and Michael Callon, argues that, when talking about the socio-economic impact of oil, it is important to recognize that “[t]he carbon itself must be transformed, beginning with the work done by those who bring it out of the ground. The transformations involve establishing connections and building alliances – connections and alliances that do not respect any divide between material and ideal, economic and political, natural and social, human and nonhuman, or violence and representation. The connections make it possible to translate one form of power into another. Understanding the interconnections between using fossil fuels and making democratic claims requires tracing how these connections are built, the vulnerabilities and opportunities they create, and the narrow points of passage where control is particularly effective” (7). The formation of activist communities along the Keystone XL pipeline’s proposed route, even prior to its actual construction, would seem indicative of the link Mitchell draws here between the formation of oil infrastructure as social endeavours and the formation of surrounding “democratic claims” (7) within these specific spaces.

second-person pronoun to directly urge action from his readers, exclaiming how “*you* can do something about it” (qtd. in Rickert, “Leonard Peltier,” italics added). By explaining that Keystone XL activists are “people of all ages and all races” (qtd. in Rickert, “Leonard Peltier”), Peltier not only highlights the shared “danger” (qtd. in Rickert, “Leonard Peltier”) posed by the environmental destruction of “*our* Mother the Earth” (qtd. in Rickert, “Leonard Peltier,” italics added); his recognition of non-Indigenous activists also suggests that, despite AIM’s history of activism grounded in Indigenous identity politics, it must not be Indigenous peoples who solely bear the brunt of environmental activism. Rather than a sign of relinquishing Indigenous sovereignty over traditional lands of North American, Peltier’s letter instead is a call to action that reframes this environmental struggle within the larger context of settler-colonialism.

2.5 ‘Termination’ – Automobiles, Highways, and Urban Indigeneity

Prison Writings’ narrative use of seemingly abject “scraps” (Peltier, *Prison* xxv) and “spare parts” (Peltier, *Prison* 79) compels readers to rethink their own ethical, ecological, and economic appraisals of value. By making use of seemingly useless elements, Peltier’s text both re-activates their value and underlines the potential they hold as sites of activism. The ethical project underlying Peltier’s depictions of the seemingly broken down and abject mirrors that of Steven J. Jackson, who argues “the contributions that *broken world thinking* and a *repair-centered ethics* might make to the project of defining an appropriate moral and practice stance” (226, italics added). For Jackson, “repair” is best understood not as a return to an established or idealized form but rather as “the subtle acts of care by which order and meaning in complex sociotechnical systems are maintained and transformed, human value is preserved and extended, and the complicated work of fitting to the varied circumstances of organizations, systems, and lives is accomplished” (222). “Above all,” Jackson goes on to explain, “repair occupies and

constitutes an *aftermath* growing at the margins, breakpoints, and interstices of complex sociotechnical systems as they creak, flex, and bend their way through time” (223, italics in source). Perhaps most succinctly, he specifies how,

[i]f Marxism seeks to disrupt the commodity fiction of the object by connecting it backward to moments of origin, discovering the congealed forms of human labor, power and interests that are built into objects at their moment of production, broken world thinking draws our attention around the sociality of objects forward, into the ongoing forms of labor, power, and interest – neither dead nor congealed – that underpin the ongoing survival of things as objects in the world. In doing so, it may hold up a clear and revealing light to the relations of value and order that are sometimes made invisible under the smooth functioning of complex sociotechnical systems. (Jackson 230-231)

The jarring experience of reading Peltier’s disjointed, non-linear narrative in *Prison Writings* reveals it too to be anything but “smooth operating” (Jackson 231). What stands out in *Prison Writings* are instead the cracks, fissures, and breakdowns arising as Peltier weaves together a sweeping range of topics, times, and places. Expanding Nixon’s claim that “writer-activists” (15) can reveal “sights unseen” (15), Jackson emphasizes how “the world-disclosing properties of breakdown” (230) can similarly “hold up a clear and revealing light to the relations of value and order that are sometimes made invisible” (230-231).²⁴ Peltier’s use of “scraps” (*Prison* xxv) and “spare parts” (*Prison* 79) to express what I am calling here his environmental ethics therefore

²⁴ Jackson helpfully expands on his idea of “the world-disclosing properties of breakdown” (230) in a series of prompting questions: “Can breakdown, maintenance, and repair confer special epistemic advantage in our thinking about technology? Can the fixer know and see different things – indeed, different worlds – than the better-known figures of ‘designer’ or ‘user’? Following on the claims of Hegelian, Marxian, and feminist theorists, can we identify anything like a standpoint epistemology of repair?” (229).

allows his narrative to perform exactly the kinds of revelatory “broken world thinking and ... repair-centered ethics” (226) described by Jackson. Whereas Jackson does not directly address North America’s settler-colonial context, one factor ultimately distinguishing Peltier is his insistent foregrounding of settler-colonialism as a constitutive, unavoidable concern for his environmental commentaries.²⁵

Traci Brynne Voyles’ theory of “*wastelanding*” (9, italics in source) powerfully illustrates the importance of Peltier situating settler-colonialism as primary concern underlying his depictions of “scraps” (*Prison* xxv) and “spare parts” (*Prison* 79).²⁶ What, in short, makes “*wastelanding*” (Voyles 9, italics in source) particularly useful for my chapter’s discussion of *Prison Writings* is the link Voyles draws between environmental, bodily, and discursive forms of violence collectively rooted in a settler-colonial value system. “Wastelanding,” explains Voyles, “reifies – it makes real, material, lived – what might otherwise be only discursive” (10) and, more so, functions “as a racial and spatial process of signification that makes extreme environmental degradation possible” (11). Connecting environmental and racial dispossession as entangled processes, Voyles argues that, “[j]ust as race is embodied, often violently, despite being in essence strictly a discourse ... , ‘wastelanding’ is a discourse-made-material through the degradations of targeted environments and their human and nonhuman denizens” (15). Simply put, “*wastelanding*” (Voyles 9, italics in source) emphasizes how settler-colonial understandings

²⁵ Exemplifying Jackson’s indirectness, he highlights his approach’s interdisciplinary and/or cross-cultural potential with the explanation that “recentering maintenance and repair may help with the necessary project of building bridges to new and adjacent fields whose methods, insights, and modes of work hold great promise to complement and enrich our own (and vice versa)” (235).

²⁶ Regarding the conceptual roots of her own theory of “*wastelanding*” (9, italics in source), Voyles clarifies (8) that its indebtedness to Valerie Kuletz’s earlier work on so-called “wastelands” (qtd. in 9).

and valuations of select bodies, spaces, and cultures as expendable are deeply mediated through an evaluative perspective rooted in resource extraction. Clarifying, for example, “that colonial epistemologies do not just look on deserts as wastelands” (10), Voyles additionally emphasizes how “wastelands of many kinds are constituted through racial and spatial politics that render certain bodies and landscapes pollutable” (Voyles 10). Worth noting then is Peltier’s own turn to the trope of “wasteland” (*Prison* 44) to describe the destructive conflation of Indigenous bodies and land by settler-colonial authorities: “[t]hey callously pushed us onto remote reservations on what they thought was worthless wasteland, trying to sweep us under the rug of history” (*Prison* 44). Peltier’s discussion of “worthless wasteland” (*Prison* 44) does not just call attention to the material dispossession of Indigenous bodies and land. More so, Peltier inverts the idiomatic refrain “garbage heap of history” (qtd. in Safire) to clarify how, under conditions of settler-colonialism, “the rug of history” (*Prison* 44) instead operates as a veil of apparent civility obscuring the destructive dispossession of those Indigenous communities and ways-of-knowing deemed filth.²⁷ Yet, however obscured under this “rug” (*Prison* 44) of a settler-colonial worldview, Peltier also identifies Indigenous communities’ insistent presence and resilience: despite bring “swe[pt] ... under the rug of history” (*Prison* 44), Peltier’s image of dust remaining hidden under a carpet sees him identifying a continued presence for those Indigenous

²⁷ For more about Leon Trotsky’s use of the phrase “garbage heap of history” (qtd. in Safire) and its various translations, as well as Augustine Birrell’s own notion of a “great dust heap called ‘history’” (qtd. in Safire), see William Safire’s article “On Language; Dust Heaps of History.” Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (253-264) is notable for its discussion of “an angel” (257) who, with “face ... turned towards the past ... sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet” (257). Steven J. Jackson’s article “Rethinking Repair” insightfully discusses “broken world thinking” (14) in relation to this passage by Walter Benjamin (14-15).

communities that, like this buried dust, both exceeds and undergirds settler-colonial's fragile notions of whiteness.

Prison Writings' examination of urban spaces of mid-century America is also significant, least of all because of the historically synchronous policy initiatives of Termination and nationwide Interstate Highway development that took place in this period. Examining Eisenhower-era domestic policies aimed at Indigenous communities, Julie L. Davis bluntly summarizes "the federal policies of the 1950s: compensation, termination, and relocation" (22). Exemplified by the Indian Relocation Act of 1956 (Glenn 57-58), these Termination-era policies notably coincided with dramatic transformations of urban spaces and with the rapid expansions of the Interstate Highway system following the Interstate and Highway Defense Act of 1956 (Avila 21). A wide range of critical attention – notably by Eric Avila, Michael Bennett, David Theo Goldberg, and Cotten Seiler²⁸ – explores the socio-economic impacts of this mid-century boom in highway construction, particularly emphasizing both the rise in personal automobile use and the material coding of existing racial segregations into these transforming city spaces. "One might argue," explains Michael Bennett, "that it was precisely because racism went underground – or, more accurately, *into* the ground through the spatialization of race – that it became invisible and in some ways more pernicious" (174). For the many Indigenous communities faced with Termination-era policies, as Deena Rymhs clarifies, there arose devastating environmental consequences as Termination cleared the way for expanding petrocapiatlist investments:

²⁸ More particularly, several key works are worth consideration: Eric Avila's *The Folklore of the Freeway*, particularly its chapter "The Master's Plan: The Rise and Fall of the Modernist City" (17-52); Michael Bennett's article "Manufacturing the Ghetto: Anti-Urbanism and the Spatialization of Race;" David Theo Goldberg's "'Polluting the Body Politic': Race and Urban Location;" and Cotten Seiler's *Republic of Drivers*, particularly its chapter "'So That We as a Race Might Have Something Authentic to Travel By': African American Automobility and Midcentury Liberalism" (105-128).

“[p]romoted as a way of fostering the self-determination of Native Americans, the legislation exacerbated the existing poverty of many tribal people by reclaiming huge expanses of territory for industry and non-Native enterprises” (“Discursive” 569). Furthermore, Julie L. Davis emphasizes how housing crises brought about by Termination policies also arose because of booming Interstate Highway construction: “[h]ousing availability shrank further in the late 1960s because of urban renewal and freeway construction projects that destroyed thousands of low-income units. Within this tight housing market, landlords practiced both overt and covert discrimination against Native people” (25). Eric Avila perhaps most poignantly sums up such racialized dispossession brought about automobiles and highway construction with the blunt statement that “[t]he highways that stand in today’s cities are not innocent spaces” (50).

Prison Writings lambasts both the social and environmental forms of violence accompanying 1950s-era Termination policies, which Peltier describes as emblemizing “the most important, the most feared, words in our vocabulary: ‘termination’ and ‘relocation’” (*Prison* 80). A core concern for Peltier’s discussion of Termination is the violent impact of resource extraction on both Indigenous land and communities. “Our lands,” Peltier stresses, “were being leased right out from under us by white ranchers and mining interests, or annexed by the U.S. government” (*Prison* 81). For his own family, Peltier bitterly describes how resulting housing shortages left them displaced as “sometimes we shuttled between relatives, sometimes we slept in the car” (*Prison* 81). Both the automobile and the mobility it provides take on mixed valences here as Peltier’s family are forced into becoming migrants on their own land. On the one hand, the automobile takes on the dual role of being both a means of finding shelter and itself a temporary home for the family – representing, in other words, a defiant symbol of their refusal to be wholly displaced from their Indigenous land and cultural ties. This power of

automobiles to function as assertions of both Indigenous presence and resilience highlights their activist potential, particularly when considered in light of both Deloria's explanation that "[a]utomotive mobility helped Indian people evade supervision and take possession of the landscape" (153) and Davis' suggestion that repeatedly "migration emerged as a survival tactic" (18). On the other hand, Peltier's passage also sees the automobile and the mobility it provides take on less agentic associations as well. Forced to find shelter, the passage highlights how Peltier's family is compelled to increase their reliance on petro-enabled mobility as they continually must travel in search of temporary shelter. Displaced by petrocapiatalism's need for expanding energy markets, the family is also, cyclically, forced to fall back on fuel as a means of both repeatedly seeking new shelter and asserting their continued presence. Though Peltier notably fails to address this second aspect of his family's displacement, this passage ultimately emphasizes his personal connection to Termination-era discrimination and, more importantly, the socio-economic impact of those environmental injustices that accompanied it.

Prison Writings employs abject imagery of scrapyards and garbage to indict these Termination policies and their dramatic impact on both urban spaces and urban Indigeneity. "The government," Peltier explains, "for much of the latter half of the twentieth century had tried to get rid of us by dumping us into the multicolored racial refuse heaps of the inner cities, but the unintended result was that relocation created a new current of ideas between the outside world and the isolated reservations" (*Prison* 92). Peltier, in part, offers an account of the resiliency of Indigenous communities disrupted by government relocation policies; however, he also emphasizes that these same urban spaces thought capable of containing, assimilating, and obscuring an ongoing Indigenous presence in fact gave birth to vibrant new forms of Indigenous identity.

Arguing that “relocation created a new current of ideas between the outside world and the isolated reservations” (*Prison* 92), Peltier explains how urban spaces represented vibrant sites of connection wherein affected Indigenous city dwellers individually and collectively became “politically *streetwise*” (*Prison* 94, italics added). Out of these urban spaces arose, therefore, a transforming social and spatial geography for displaced Indigenous individuals. This social-spatial geography not only transformed what constituted urban space but also transformed how Indigeneity was defined and understood in these urban spaces. Alluding to the resulting rise of urban friendship centres (Talbot 92) and AIM’s own roots in the urban spaces of the American Midwest (Bonney 212-213), Peltier defiantly summarizes how, even within the United States’ rapidly transforming urban landscapes, “[i]nstead of disappearing, dissolving as a people, as we were expected to do, we found a new social consciousness and a new sense of ourselves in the human cauldron of the cities” (*Prison* 93-94).²⁹ These “multicolored racial refuse heaps” (Peltier, *Prison* 92) become, in short, important sites of cultural maintenance and construction from which Indigenous activism emerged.

Despite “a new current of ideas” (*Prison* 92), Peltier’s language underscores the negative intentions of Termination’s seemingly benevolent ambitions for urban inclusivity. The positive emergence of “new currents of ideas” (*Prison* 92) between Indigenous communities occurred, Peltier implies, in *spite* of Termination policies and not simply *because* of them. Just as white populations funneled out of large cities into the emerging sprawl of suburbia (Avila 49), Termination policies saw Indigenous populations being relocated into these same cities for the

²⁹ As Rachel A. Bonney notes, AIM itself was borne of urban Indigenous communities (212-213). Similarly, Steve Talbot more broadly explains of Indigenous activism how “[p]art of the Alcatraz movement, as well as Ft. Lawton, was the establishment of urban cultural centers” (92) that also served as “spiritual centers” (92).

explicit purpose of effecting their cultural assimilation. Curiously, the United States government, as a response to Cold War fears of nuclear aggression, deemed these population-dense urban spaces as likely targets in the case of nuclear strikes (ctd. in Avila 27). Both “white flight” (Avila 48) and the rise of highway-enabled suburbs arose, in part, as a direct response to, and spatial expression of, “decentralization” (ctd. in Avila 27). This convergence of historical events lends necessary context to Peltier’s passage: those very urban spaces into which he describes Indigenous populations finding themselves funneled into were, at the very same time, being more widely written off and reimagined as dangerous, abject, and expendable spaces. Like David Theo Goldberg’s theory of a colonial “sanitation syndrome” (190) still playing out today in the residual fears and ghettoizing impulses responding to a perceived “pollution by blacks of urban space” (190), Peltier’s passage emphasizes how such “sanitation syndrome” (190) found alternative expression in the treatment of Indigenous communities under Termination policies: unlike attempts to segregate “urban space” (190) as white spaces of value, Cold War anxieties see the city instead recoded as a space now in distinct need of being filled with non-White bodies. For Peltier, these spaces themselves become, in part, consigned to the role of scrapyards – the annexed “multicolored racial refuse heaps” (*Prison* 92) in which settler-colonial anxieties and values find expression.

By characterizing Termination’s displacement of Indigenous communities as forceful acts of “dumping us into the multicolored racial refuse heaps of the inner cities” (*Prison* 92), Peltier pointedly frames the government’s historical treatment of Native American communities as analogous to that of garbage – with Indigenous bodies and traditions treated as disposable and valueless. For the dense urban spaces Peltier discusses, undesirable questions of what to do with garbage have historically been particularly exacerbated in struggles to manage waste. As Heather

Rogers explains, “[t]he spatial and temporal characteristics of city living crucially shaped the nature of garbage” (50) because just “[a]s industry developed, burdensome domestic chores eased, consumerism began, and so too did modern waste” (51). “Garbage as we know it today is,” in other words, “one outcome of a fully realized capitalist system” (Rogers 50). Put simply, as relationships to consumer waste transformed, understandings of urban spaces themselves were reciprocally transformed as well. Peltier use of language like “*dumping*” (*Prison* 92, italics added) and “multicolored racial *refuse heaps*” (*Prison* 92, italics added) invokes the entangled histories of garbage and urbanity; however, it notably does so to rebuke the assimilationist ambitions behind Termination as it moved Indigenous into these urban spaces.³⁰ Racial, economic, and environment forms of dispossession are therefore foregrounded by Peltier as conjoined effects of settler-colonialism. Peltier’s use of garbage-laden language challenges readers to not only confront histories of environmentally destructive consumer waste as a byproduct of capitalism; his language also demands readers to recognize these ongoing settler-histories of environmental, spatial, and economic dispossession as particularly aimed at Indigenous communities.

Peltier underlines the close links among themes of cultural resistance, automobiles and urban Indigeneity by recalling for readers his own biographical relationship to vehicle repair.³¹

³⁰ Garbage is not, however, exclusive to urban spaces. “Exporting municipal solid waste (MSW) to less densely populated areas has,” explains Forbes Lipschitz, “become the norm for metropolitan regions like New York City” (7). Lipschitz offers a helpful overview of rural-urban garbage management practices in his article “Not in My City: Rural America as Urban Dumping Ground” (6-9).

³¹ In a longer project, it would be worthwhile considering here how Peltier inverts settler-colonial mythologizing of a “Native supermechanic” (Deloria 164) that “carries its own form of natural and technological masculinity” (Deloria 164-165).

Largely overlooked by critics,³² I argue that Peltier's brief account of being "part-owner of an auto-body shop" (*Prison* 89) in fact demands his readers reconsider the kinds of market-oriented logics underlying neoliberal interpretations of value – whether that be economic, social, or environmental value. Peltier's passage passionately recollects this formative point in his growth as an Indigenous and environmental activist:

I worked for a time at a construction job and then became part-owner of an auto-body shop. We used the second floor, above the garage, as a half-way house for Indians in need – and there were always plenty of those. We started doing repair jobs for friends for next to nothing, and before long we got so deep into debt that we had to close the shop. My one attempt at capitalism was over, scuttled by that old Indian weakness: *sharing* with others. It's a practice that means we're rich as a people, but poor as individuals (*Prison* 89, italics in source).

Peltier's passage displays his willingness to directly challenge and subvert market-oriented forms of value and exchange. Such subversion appears when, in spite of framing his commercial venture into automobile maintenance as a failed "attempt at capitalism" (*Prison* 89), Peltier inserts a disruptive irony beneath the blame he seemingly places on "Indian weakness" (*Prison* 89). Peltier's irony here acts as an incisive form of cultural critique that speaks back to the settler-colonial stereotyping and underestimation of Indigenous peoples. Important, for instance, is Peltier's portrayal of "*sharing* with others" (*Prison* 89, italics in source) as a culturally-informed "practice" (*Prison* 89) – one that, as he puts it, "means we're rich as a people, but poor as individuals" (*Prison* 89). Both Peltier's philanthropic dedication to "doing repair jobs for

³² One notable exception is Deena Rymhs's similar discussion of this scene in her article, entitled "Kent Monkman's *The Big Four* as Automobiography" (6).

friends for next to nothing” (*Prison 89*) and his commitment to “*sharing with others*” (*Prison 89*, italics in source) are, I argue, economic forms of Indigenous cultural resiliency. By placing emphasis on how “we’re rich as a people, but poor as individuals” (*Prison 89*), Peltier pays keen attention here to the interplay between individualism and community that reflects Henri Lefebvre’s own suggestion that “[c]apital kills social richness. It produces private riches, just as it pushes the private individual to the fore, despite it being a public monster” (63). Rather than a strictly leftist or Eurocentric rebuttal to neoliberalism, Peltier’s critique instead draws strength from his own culturally-situated perspective as an Indigenous activist living under the conditions of settler-colonialism. In short, Peltier’s passage clarifies the potential for his low-cost shop to assist the surrounding Indigenous community in the real-world struggle of maintaining a working automobile while poor; however, on a deeper level, his passage also emphasizes how, out of the shared hardship of urban living, Peltier’s philanthropic car repair extends beyond simply easing economic hardships to simultaneously reinforce and maintain “*sharing with others*” as a collective Indigenous cultural “practice” (*Prison 89*, italics in source).

Suggesting that Peltier’s discussion of his automotive repair shop is only concerned with economics would be overlooking his emphasis on this space’s repurposing as an adjoined “half-way house for Indians in need” (*Prison 89*). More than ironic, Peltier’s narrative reflection on his “one failed attempt at capitalism” (*Prison 89*) is also exemplary of what Jack Halberstam calls a “queer art of failure” (88). It is through and out of this “failed attempt at capitalism” (*Prison 89*) that Peltier’s passage draws readers’ attention to the overriding importance this space holds by enabling both automotive *and* personal care.³³ Careful to acknowledge that “failure certainly

³³ In their introduction to *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam also addresses questions of relationality and activism: “[a]cademics, activists, artists, and cartoon characters have long been on a quest to articulate an alternative vision of life, love, and labor and to put such a vision into

comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair” (3), Halberstam undercuts familiar, culturally-loaded narratives of success by instead exploring “failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique” (88).³⁴ Halberstam’s position is especially helpful because it emphasizes the numerous counter-hegemonic and ideological ruptures that can potentially – and, in many cases, unexpectedly – arise from “failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing [that] may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2-3). Like Halberstam’s conception of a “queer art of failure” (88), Peltier compels his readers to themselves rethink the kinds of normative assumptions they apply when judging him for his “failed attempt at capitalism” (*Prison* 89). Instead, Peltier’s “failed attempt at capitalism” (*Prison* 89) is indicative of Halberstam’s position that such failure can nevertheless be transformational points of reflection whereby “in losing it [failure] imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” (Halberstam 88).³⁵ Peltier’s discussion of his so-called failure may be a statement on neoliberal economics; however, it also represents his firm commitment to his “half-way house for Indians in need” (*Prison* 89). Whereas his readers may be tempted to view his automotive repair shop as a “failed attempt at

practice. Through the use of manifestoes, a range of political tactics, and new technologies of representation, radical utopians continue to search for different ways of being in the world and being in relation to one another than those already prescribed for the liberal and consumer subject” (2).

³⁴ Exemplary of these familiar, culturally-loaded narratives of success is automobiles themselves. As Paul Gilroy insightfully explains, “[c]ommerce in motor vehicles still constitutes the overheated core of unchecked and unsustainable consumer capitalism, but the impact of car culture extends far beyond those buoyant commercial processes” (81).

³⁵ One challenge in rereading Peltier’s chapter through the lens of Halberstam’s “queer art of failure” (88) may be the risk of imposing redemptive or apologist narratives that downplay the material insecurities and urban poverty described by Peltier.

capitalism” (*Prison* 89), Peltier’s passage importantly shifts emphasis onto the success of his shop’s supportive role within its surrounding urban Indigenous community.

Peltier’s emphasis on “*sharing with others*” (*Prison* 89, italics in source) as an Indigenous cultural “practice” (*Prison* 89) takes on particular importance when examined more closely in the particular context of kinship relationships.³⁶ Consider, for instance, Peltier’s spatial repurposing of his “auto-body shop” (*Prison* 89) to accommodate the addition of his adjoining “half-way house for Indians in need” (*Prison* 89): by offering this source of community support within an urban setting, Peltier highlights how, beyond just providing geographic mobility, the wreckage of abject automobiles can nevertheless be revalued and repurposed with a larger social role and significance not solely driven by economies of either scrap recycling or petro-consumption.³⁷ Rather than an expression of, for instance, the more abstracted form of sociality

³⁶ Daniel Heath Justice’s essay “Go Away Water!: Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative” offers an extended critical discussion of kinship relations and its importance for various Indigenous ways-of-knowing. A notable book-length exploration of cultural connection and space is, for example, Renya K. Ramirez’s *Native Hubs*. Though different in both cultural and theoretical context, Steven R. Jackson similarly underlines “an ethics of mutual care and responsibility” (231) with the argument that “moving maintenance and repair back to the center of thinking around media and technology may help to develop deeper and richer stories of relationality to the technological artifacts and systems that surround us, positioning the world of things as an active component and partner in the ongoing project of building more humane, just, and sustainable collectives” (235).

³⁷ Peltier’s exploration of automobiles scrap’s centrality to kinship relations is not without parallels within analogous works by contemporary Indigenous authors and artists. Prominent examples of these parallels include: brotherly relations growing through the wrecking and recovery of an automobile in Louise Erdrich’s chapter, entitled “The Red Convertible” (181-193), from *Love Medicine*; the woven-over car art of annie ross’ multimedia installation *Forest One* (Ross); depictions of automobiles and road spaces in Swampy Cree artist Kent Monkman’s *The Big Four* multimedia installation; and a recent joint exhibition broadly focused on themes of “rez cars” (Johnson) and “transportation” (Johnson), entitled “InterNations/InterSections” and featuring works by Kelly Greene, Kent Monkman, Kevin Lamure, and Double Smarch Jr. Of all these, Kent Monkman’s *The Big Four* most directly takes inspiration from Peltier’s work in *Prison Writings* – a connection Monkman himself attests to publicly (Volmers). For more about annie ross’ *Forest One* installation, see Laurence Robin’s article “Artist annie ross Builds

expressed in Bruno Latour's claim that "Boeing-747s do not fly, airlines fly" ("Technical Mediation" 46), Peltier's narrative linking of automobile scrap and kinship relations performs a far more culturally-situated means of supporting Indigenous community and ways-of-knowing.³⁸ Rather than offering readers abject portrayals of automobile scrap or "junk cars" (Peltier, *Prison* 69) as the irreparable byproduct of petrocapiatalism, Peltier's passage instead foregrounds how this same wreckage can actually inspire acts of sociality, kinship, and resistance within their surrounding Indigenous communities. Peltier outlines, for example, the auto-body shop's own complex function as a space of simultaneous social recovery and automotive reconstruction. His shop operates as a space where urban Indigenous community can come to find connection, growth, and acceptance alongside more material acts of automotive repair. In short, I argue Peltier's shop description represents a key passage in *Prison Writings* because it sees him

Vehicle for Ideas." For more about Kent Monkman's *The Big Four*, see Gallery West's exhibition profile, entitled "'The Big Four': Kent Monkman." Falen Johnson's article "'Rez Cars Get High Art Treatment'" provides helpful information about the "InterNations/InterSections" exhibition. One notable response by a Canadian environmentalist publication to Kent Monkman's "The Big Four," including its depiction of automobiles, is Drew Anderson's review "Kent Monkman: The Big Four." Alternatively, prominent non-Indigenous interrogations of scrap automobiles include, for example, American Sculptor John Chamberlain's automobile scrap installations ("John Chamberlain"), British author J.G. Ballard's eroticized automobile destruction in *Crash*, Mexican painter Diego Rivera's depictions of the laboriously social world of automobile assembly in his *Detroit Industry Murals* ("In Detroit's"), and even Australian director-writer George Miller's wreckage-infused portrayals of dystopic automobile conflicts in his film *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

³⁸ This paragraph builds from, and is indebted to, Zoe Todd's critique of Bruno Latour and others in "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' is Just Another Word for Colonialism." Bruno Latour argues, for example, how "modern societies cannot be described without recognizing them as having a fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary character that is never captured by the notions of levels, layers, territories, spheres, categories, structures, systems. It aims at explaining the effects accounted for by those traditional words without having to buy the ontology, topology and politics that go with them. ("On Actor-Network" 370). Bruno Latour's offers several useful reflections on his theoretical approach, such as his articles "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications" and "On Technical Mediation – Philosophy, Sociology, Genealogy."

underling the dual role this space can play: the restorative maintenance of the automotive shop can both mirror and facilitate the restorative maintenance of social bonds and connection taking place in its adjoined half-way house. The restoration and maintenance of car bodies both mirrors and enhances the social restoration and maintenance of Indigenous bodies within the half-way house.

Peltier's own narrative, like the functional automobiles he frequently describes, traverses between urban and non-urban spaces. Another key scene for considering *Prison Writings* as an ecocritical text is Peltier's account of a non-Indigenous family's judgmental gaze while travelling through a reservation. Deena Rymhs discusses many points similar to my own in her insightful analysis of this scene ("Kent" 4-6); however, whereas she uses this encounter to illustrate the performative and autobiographical potential of these wrecked automobiles, I focus here on the ecocritical implications also at play in Peltier's passage. Using his narrative to voice the often-unspoken prejudices of these passing onlookers, Peltier powerfully recollects how "[p]eople drive through a reservation and see half a dozen junk cars in some Indian family's front yard and they shake their heads, saying 'These dirty Indians, how can they live like that? Why don't they get rid of those junkers?'" (*Prison* 69). These wrecked automobiles are, however, important narrative points used by Peltier to reaffirm both the value of these so-called "junk cars" (*Prison* 69), as well as the Indigenous bodies and communities amongst which they are situated. Peltier goes so far as to highlight how "there's often some old auntie who sleeps, even lives, in those old wrecks" (*Prison* 70). Employing such imagery enables Peltier to compel his non-Indigenous readers to confront this roadside scene from an Indigenous perspective. Peltier's narrative, in other words, powerfully inverts the automobile commuter's gaze – instead turning it back upon the prevalent values and assumptions of a settler-colonial culture from

which they find acceptance. Peltier rhetorically amplifies the affective impact of his passage with a series of jarring comparisons: between “junk cars” (*Prison* 69) and “dirty Indians” (*Prison* 69); “old wrecks” (*Prison* 70) and elderly “aunties” (*Prison* 70); makeshift automobile dwellings and domestic home residency; and, finally, inert industrial wreckage and resilient cultural practices. Peltier sums up by directly appealing to his readers with the blunt statement that “old junkers can hold holy things in their rusted innards. Sort of like us Indians” (*Prison* 70). This scene, put simply, represents a crucial point within *Prison Writings*. Perhaps more than anywhere else in his text, Peltier confronts readers here with the full force of his intersecting commentaries on both racial and environmental dispossession.

Alternatively, Peltier’s own narrative might seem at first to itself be objectifying Indigenous bodies. Some readers may be tempted to criticize Peltier’s willingness to draw analogies between Indigenous bodies and abject material refuse, particularly when encountering comparative statements like “[t]hose old junkers can hold holy things in their rusted innards. Sort of like us Indians” (*Prison* 70). Rather than feeding into a settler-colonial objectification of Indigenous bodies, Peltier’s likening of “Indians” (*Prison* 70) to “old junkers” (*Prison* 70) simultaneously appropriates and, in doing so, subverts assumptions regarding the disposability of Indigenous bodies and spaces. Peltier’s statement, in other words, simultaneously assigns value to those very objects deemed valueless under petrocapiatalism – whether Indigenous bodies, wrecked car bodies, or both. Issues of material waste and racial dispossession become, therefore, also entangled issues of ecocritical importance here for Peltier. He wistfully explains, for example, that “[t]here’s a poetry in those junkyards” (Peltier, *Prison* 70) and, more so, “if you open the trunk or the glove compartment, you’ll often see lovingly stacked rows of Indian corn and beans, sage, and sweetgrass, arranged in their like fine jewels” (Peltier, *Prison* 70). By

conflating “poetry” (*Prison* 70) and “junkyards” (*Prison* 70), “sage” (*Prison* 70), and “fine jewels” (*Prison* 70), Peltier challenges the prevalent hierarchical perception of value that get assigned to such objects and spaces. Peltier’s description of “Indian corn and beans, sage, and sweetgrass” (*Prison* 70) as “holy things” (*Prison* 70) confronts his non-Indigenous readers with an alternative set of values to be found and respected in these objects. Challenging the dominant value-system of a settler-colonialism that would disregard the spiritual import of these objects consequently confronts readers with their own complicities in the kinds of racial, spatial, and environmental dispossessions his scene describes. Peltier’s conflation here of sacred and abject space ultimately sees him defending not just the value of Indigenous bodies or “junk cars” (*Prison* 69) but also the ongoing value of Indigenous cultural practice and traditions as capable of adaptively thriving even within “junkyards” (*Prison* 70).

Lastly, another key scene from *Prison Writings* is Peltier’s retelling of his arrest for taking fuel from a government “army reserve truck” (*Prison* 84). With the fuel intended for “heating [his] grandmother’s freezing house” (*Prison* 84) and “trying to keep my family from freezing” (*Prison* 84), Peltier expresses the dire circumstances that drove him to steal as a necessary act of survival and the unfortunate consequence of being “*trucked* off to jail” (qtd. in Matthiessen, *In the Spirit* 46, italics added). Peltier writes about his arrest in *Prison Writings*:

When I was also arrested that winter for siphoning some diesel fuel from an army reserve truck to heat my grandmother’s freezing house, I was arrested again and spent a couple of weeks in jail. That was my first stretch of hard time. So trying to keep my family from freezing was my third crime, the third strike against me. (*Prison* 84)³⁹

³⁹ Peltier’s own *Prison Writings* is not, however, his first time recollecting this scene. Peter Matthiessen’s *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* includes an earlier, elaborated version that is often detailed through interspersed quotes from Peltier himself (46).

Peltier's decision to steal fuel points not just to the insecurities brought about by an everyday dependency on petro-energy but also to how Indigenous communities have been disproportionately impacted by such conditions of scarcity. Peltier's theft of fuel unfortunately fails, however, to offer any kind of escape from the economies of petro-dependency. His theft, in fact, only further underlines for readers the basic reality that both the house heating and automobile here nevertheless *need* fuel to work properly. Meanwhile, what Peltier's forced act of survival ultimately emphasizes is not just the recollection of an arrest, but also a statement on the ways Indigenous communities have more broadly found themselves disproportionately faced with material scarcities imposed by both petroc capitalism and settler-colonialism.

On one level, Peltier's actions represent an attempt to keep his family safe and warm through the winter. On another level, for Indigenous communities living under settler-colonialism's imposed conditions of scarcity, these necessary acts of survival take on an added political significance. If the dispossession imposed upon Indigenous communities can be politicized as an expression of settler-colonial value systems, then individual responses to that poverty, no matter how necessary they may be, acquire similarly political importance. For Peltier, we see such a response to material scarcity in his willingness to risk arrest "trying to keep my family from freezing" (*Prison* 84). Under such conditions, survival and the acts necessary to ensure that survival perhaps themselves become powerfully political statements.

Despite the immediate demands of survival, it is worth noting that Peltier chooses a government vehicle from which to steal fuel and, more importantly, makes that choice explicit for readers of *Prison Writings*. In addition to explicitly stating how he targeted "an army reserve truck" (*Prison* 84), Peltier's continuing adherence to otherwise sparse prose throughout his passage amplifies this detailing of the vehicle. Peltier leaves, for example, almost entirely

ambiguous the specifics of what led to his proceeding arrest. Readers are offered merely a blunt admission that “I was “arrested again” (Peltier, *Prison* 84) sitting alongside a similarly vague summation of his “three weeks in jail” (Peltier, *Prison* 84) as “hard time” (Peltier, *Prison* 84). Much more than a trivial side note, Peltier’s specific mention of “an army reserve truck” (*Prison* 84) as the target for his theft sets up this vehicle’s importance a material and symbolic expression of settler-colonial state authority.

In a more abstract sense, Peltier theft of government-owned vehicle’s fuel rebuts governmental complicity in acts of resource extraction on Indigenous land. In addition to being a necessary act of survival, Peltier’s theft of fuel takes on the secondary importance of being both an assertion of Indigenous presence and act of material reclamation. Fuel, conceivably borne of traditionally Indigenous lands, becomes symbolically appropriated from the government for the purposes of Indigenous survival. No longer is the vehicle a functioning expression of imposed settler-colonial state authority and mobility; instead, the body of the vehicle itself becomes a site of social interaction between Peltier in his effort to provide survival to his loved ones and the settler-colonial state’s own investment in safeguarding its authority. In a way similar to the sociality brought about by restoring automobiles in his car repair shop, Peltier’s arrest identifies here an alternative sociality between Peltier and the state – alternative also because this time such sociality is brought about instead by the *immobilization* of a vehicle rather than its repair. More so, that Peltier’s theft of fuel should presumably immobilize this government vehicle serves also as a powerful statement on the fragile convergence between settler-colonial state authority and its own reliance on fuel. Such an example of “[b]reakdown,” as Jackson explains, “disturbs and sets in motion worlds of possibility that disappear under the stable or accomplished form of the artifact” (230). Peltier’s arrest may see him ultimately failing in his stated goal of

“keep[ing] [his] family from freezing” (*Prison* 84); however, his act of appropriating fuel nevertheless underscores how even this, a forced act of necessary survival, carries within it political potency.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I reexamine Peltier’s discussions of automobiles to highlight *Prison Writings*’ often-overlooked ecocritical commentaries. One of my primary goals has been to open up this often-looked text to explore its various ecocritical interventions into contemporary petrocapiatalism. I have argued that Peltier rhetorically appropriates the value-laden language of scrap and scrapyards to confront readers with their own cultural stigmatization and devaluation of the so-called disposable. Employing “junk cars” (Peltier, *Prison* 69) as a powerful metaphor for the destructive capacities of petrocapiatalism and settler-colonialism, *Prison Writings* ultimately highlights how such seemingly abject “junk” (Peltier, *Prison* 69) can in fact offer resistant focal points for the maintenance of kinship, support, and connection for those Indigenous communities displaced along the sinewy sprawl of North America’s highways.

Chapter Three: Immobility and the Indigenizing of Space in Tomson Highway's *Rose*

3.1 Introduction

Published in 2003 after roughly a decade of work put towards it, lackluster responses to Woods Cree author-playwright Tomson Highway's musical-drama *Rose* have left this work largely overlooked by critics.⁴⁰ Discussions of *Rose* have primarily focused on just two elements of its fraught production history: either the play's roots in a theatrically ambitious, complex script that subsequently failed to be adopted for mainstream production (Hauck; Taylor; Wagner) or, alternatively, the politics of racial representation brought about by the play's robust casting requirements and Highway's subsequent call for the inclusion of allied non-Indigenous actors ("Should Only"). Instead, with an eye to the play's entwined themes of immobility and reimagining spaces away from the limits of strictly settler-colonial interpretations, this chapter will reexamine this underappreciated work. Largely confined to Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve for its setting, *Rose* vividly recounts the brutal impacts of gender violence and socio-economic exclusion on, in particular, the community's Indigenous women. Politically active and yet largely excluded, these women experience the space of the reserve become increasingly constraining as Indigenous men, like Big Joey, violently push through approval for casino gambling. Borne of this conflict and its insidious recodifications of overlapping social, economic, and gendered space is my chapter's core concern: how and why, when faced with the entwined constrictions of gender violence and the settler-colonial reserve system, might the women of *Rose* turn to and empower both immobility and confinement as means of resistance?

⁴⁰ As late as 1994, Highway is publicly discussing *Rose* as a work-in-progress. One exemplary instance of Highway discussing *Rose* is the published interview "'Twenty-One Women on Motorcycles': An Interview with Tomson Highway."

What, in other words, does immobility – forced or otherwise – offer these women as a means of redefining an Indigenous sense of place, space, and belonging?

Migrating from the local to global and back again, my chapter traverses these various scales to examine how the various immobilities and spatial understandings wrought by settler-colonialism are interrogated throughout *Rose*. The first half of my chapter draws connections between traumatic gender violence against Indigenous women and an ongoing settler-colonial politics of regimented mobility.⁴¹ Drawing from theories of “precaritization” (Butler and Athanasiou 43) and “displacement without moving” (Nixon 19), I argue that, for the women of *Rose*, the often-imperceptible traumas wrought by gender violence work as part of a larger project of confining and disenfranchising Indigenous communities within the strictures of the reserve system. More important is, however, the underlying question of how and why the women of *Rose* work together to creatively challenge and subvert the social, geographic, and economic forms of confinement facing them. My chapter’s second half, therefore, examines how the women work to imaginatively transform a solarium garden from colonial symbol into an Indigenous space of collective healing – what they label a “hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64). Building outwards from my reading of this solarium garden’s transformation, I trace the wandering routes along which *Rose* variously explores themes of flow and mobility: from the women’s moving forward from their intra-personal antagonisms over Rosetta’s miscarriage to the more-abstracted flows of capital and Indigenous labor explored throughout the play’s depictions of both avocados and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

⁴¹ Outlining the ideological link between settler-colonialism and gender violence is Andrea Smith, who states “sexual violence [i]s a tool of genocide and colonialism” (139). Positioning “attacks on Native women’s status [as] themselves attacks on Native sovereignty” (138), Smith importantly argues that “[i]t has,” furthermore, “been precisely through gender violence that we have lost our lands in the first place” (137).

3.2 Gendered Violence – On ‘Slow Violence’ and ‘Precaritization’

Resulting from more than just the materially destructive transformation of land, for the many Indigenous communities living under settler-colonialisms it is the related bodily and spiritual scars, traumas, and fractures of social violence that contribute to and emblemize what Nixon calls “displacement without moving” (19). “[I]nstead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging,” Nixon explains how such “displacement without moving” in fact “refers ... to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable” (19). “[D]isplacement without moving” (Nixon 19) is, therefore, a productive way of conceptually linking themes of immobility, spatial imaginings, and affective attachments to place so central to Highway’s *Rose*. What Nixon’s theory demands is, therefore, a reconceptualization of “moving” (Nixon 19) – one that sees mobility divorced from physical acts of travel. Nixon vivifies more than just the malleability of both “place” (Nixon 19) and space as sites of ecological struggle and adaptation; he also underscores how such reinterpretations of “place” (Nixon 19) correspondingly alter perceptions, strategies, and definitions of what it means to “mov[e]” (Nixon 19).

Building on Nixon, I argue that the dislocating effects of violence can play out socially, as well as materially – or, more accurately, in tandem with each other. My own argument is consequently indebted, in part, to Judith Butler’s theory of “precaritization” (Butler and Athanasiou 43). Defining “precaritization” (Butler and Athanasiou 43) as a “process of acclimatizing a population to insecurity” (Butler and Athanasiou 43), Butler details this condition’s materially and socially destructive capacity for “producing poverty and insecurity about an economic future, but also interpellating that population as expendable, if not fully

abandoned” (Butler and Athanasiou 43).⁴² For settler-colonial states, “colonial violence,” she explains, “can work both ways, by depriving an indigenous population of their land, and yet restricting the mobility of that population to the very land they no longer own” (Butler and Athanasiou 23). Under such social conditions, “staying in place is precisely an act of resistance” (Butler and Athanasiou 21).⁴³ Discussed at length later in my chapter, Butler and Athanasiou spur important questions concerning *Rose*: how do the women of Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve transform their own sense of immobility and, in doing so, subvert the pervasive settler-colonial logics of dispossessive space and gendered violence under which they live?

Undergirding *Rose*’s concern with immobility is the reality of lived experience, namely that forced geographic confinement and curtailed mobility are both hallmarks of Canada’s ongoing history of reserves for Indigenous communities. Perhaps most exemplary of the reserve system’s roots as a project of racial confinement is the forced immobility historically imposed throughout Western Canada, known more particularly as “pass law” (“Indian Act”). This practice of “pass law” (“Indian Act”) severely curtailed and mediated both Indigenous personal mobility and inter-tribal community-building,⁴⁴ least of all because “[a] Native had to have a permit

⁴² A particularly helpful discussion of “precarity” – and, in particular its relationship to violence – can be found in Judith Butler’s “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics” (i-xiii). As Butler explains, “[p]recarity is, of course, directly linked with gender norms, since we know that those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence” (“Performativity” ii). In a 2015 interview, entitled “Demonstrating Precarity: Vulnerability, Embodiment, and Resistance,” Butler helpfully discusses “precarity” in the broader context of its related activism.

⁴³ Worth further consideration here might be, however, Athena Athanasiou’s suggestion that “staying in place may require some movements, or displacement” on account of the fact “[i]t is an act of ascribing a place to oneself within the social” (22).

⁴⁴ More particularly, “The pass law wasn’t a law at all, but a departmental policy to prevent Natives from joining the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. It soon became a way of preventing Natives from organizing to fight for treaty rights, discouraging parents from visiting residential

signed by the Indian agent to leave the reserve” (“Indian Act”). In logic similar to Leonard Peltier’s claim that “[o]ur sacred land is under occupation, and we are now *all* prisoners” (Peltier 63, italics in source),⁴⁵ Alex Williams describes how, through this “pass system” (Benjoe), Canada too produced a system wherein “[r]eserves were open-air prisons” (qtd. in Benjoe). “It was,” Williams bluntly derides, “segregation” (qtd. in Benjoe). As Kerry Benjoe outlines, “[t]he pass system was implemented shortly after the North West Rebellion of 1885 and remained in place until 1941 when it was replaced by the permit system which remained in place until the 1960s.” Canadian notions of national sovereignty became, in other words, deeply invested in and bound to the anxious policing of Indigenous bodies and their relationship to space. In such a context, any transgression of the reserve system’s limits on mobility becomes a direct challenge to the self-supposed authority of Canada as a sovereign settler-colonial state. More broadly, however, settler-colonial barriers to geographic mobility were correspondingly paired with economic restrictions on Indigenous social mobility as well. Indigenous communities were forcefully sequestered from the commercial opportunities of Canada’s emerging national and international economies, particularly by Indian Agents legally empowered to control local Indigenous industry (“Indian Act”).⁴⁶ Divorcing Indigenous communities from their traditional

schools and stopping Natives from attending ceremonies and dances on distant reserves” (“Indian Act”).

⁴⁵ Drawing analogies between the boarding school and prison systems, Peltier states elsewhere that “I consider my years at Wahpeton my first imprisonment, and it was for the same as all the others: being an Indian” (78).

⁴⁶ More specific to Manitoulin Island, upon which both *Rose* and *The Rez Sisters* are set, is that space’s own historical legacy of settler-colonial confinement. As Peter S. Schmalz outlines, Manitoulin Island was, for some 19th century colonial administrators, the proposed site for an isolated Ojibwe community – a space intended to ensure local Indigenous peoples remained segregated from the surrounding Euro-Canadian settler-colonies of Southwestern Ontario (162-164). Although Schmalz notes how this proposed “Manitoulin Island Project” (162) ultimately

lands and stripping them of their right to own reserve land under settler-colonial property law (“Indian Act”), the Indian Act’s ongoing histories contextualize my discussions here of “displacement without moving” (Nixon 19) as a cultural, spatial, and material process of dispossession.

Gender and sexual violence that is directed against Indigenous women is, I argue, a bodily extension of the reservation system’s use of spatial and economic confinement.⁴⁷ One way of framing mobility and trauma as conjoined issues is through a brief discussion of “[t]onic immobility” (Suarez and Gallup 315).⁴⁸ Present amongst both humans and non-humans (ctd. in Suarez and Gallup), tonic immobility, like “rape-induced paralysis” (Suarez and Gallup 319), is a “peritraumatic” (ctd. in Rizvi, et al.) condition characterized by “an unlearned state of profound motor inhibition produced by restraint” (Suarez and Gallup 315). Since the condition is especially “sensitive to changes in fear” (Suarez and Gallup 316), one recurrent theme

failed to formally materialize, it nevertheless underscores the historical impulse towards confinement underlying the reserve system.

⁴⁷ My turn to discussing trauma and gender violence here is, in part, an attempt to take up Rob Nixon call for a “need to account for how the temporal dispersion of slow violence affects the way we perceive and respond to a variety of social afflictions – from domestic abuse to posttraumatic stress and, in particular, environmental calamities” (3).

⁴⁸ In addition, Adriana Cavarero’s discussion of what she labels “horrorism” (3) is similarly helpful. Reflecting upon, for example, instances where “[t]here is no question of evading death” (8), Cavarero draws upon the Greek myth of Medusa to explain how, “[i]n contrast to what occurs with terror, in horror there is no instinctive movement of flight in order to survive, much less the contagious turmoil of panic. Rather, movement is blocked in total paralysis, and each victim is affected on its own. Gripped by revulsion in the face of a form of violence that appears more inadmissible than death, the body reacts as if nailed to the spot, hair standing on end” (8). Cavarero is, in other words, focusing on an acute immobility brought on by one’s sudden awareness of an impending “violence that, not content merely to kill because killing would be too little, aims to destroy the uniqueness of the body, tearing at its constitutive vulnerability” (8). What limits Cavarero’s applicability to my discussion here is, as noted above, its reliance upon certain death. Nevertheless notable is, however, the central role of the traumatized body as a site of contestation and mediation for broader politics of mobility and spatial awareness.

throughout discourses of tonic immobility is its relationship to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Rocha-Rego, et al.; Rizvi, et al.).⁴⁹ Taken a step further, tonic immobility helpfully exemplifies how a politics of mobility is played out upon, by, and through the traumatized body, particularly for those individuals living under persistent threats and awareness of gendered violence. Most relevant to my discussions here is how, extending beyond just the physical harm directed towards a survivor's body, tonic immobility also speaks to how residual traumas borne of gender violence can correspondingly alter a survivor's own spatial imaginary – their own entangled sense of space, body, and mobility. In short, settler-colonial violence does not simply limit itself to segregating geographic spaces along racial lines, for example through a system of reserves; nor does it simply limit itself to policing the physical movement of select bodies across and within these spaces, as seen in “[t]he pass system” (Benjoe). What tonic immobility makes particularly legible is the deeply psychosomatic way settler-colonial violence also works to intimately discipline and confine the movements of select bodies within these space as well.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Similarly, also worth examining is how “the case could be made that the subjective experience of peritraumatic dissociation may not be accessible in the moment and may only be understood or recognized after the immediate danger or threat is passed” (Ozer, et al. 69).

⁵⁰ My use here of the word “discipline” intentionally alludes to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment*, particularly his detailed section entitled “Docile bodies” (*Discipline* 135-169). Stemming from his position that “discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space” (*Discipline* 141), Foucault broadly articulates how power relations have functioned even more insidiously since the advent of “[t]he human body ... entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it” (*Discipline* 138). The centrality of the body as a site at through which contested power relations are negotiated is perhaps made most explicit in Foucault's statement that “discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (*Discipline* 138). This centrality of the body reappears, for instance, in Foucault's later work *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. Foucault discusses, for example the simultaneous “prohibition” (*History* 41) and fascination that institutions (presumably European) have historically had concerning childhood sexuality: “[i]n appearance we are dealing with a barrier system; but in fact, all around the child, indefinite *lines of penetration* were disposed” (*History* 42, italics in source). Lastly, themes of confinement are importantly prominent in Foucault's analysis of

Like the invisible impact of “slow violence” (Nixon 2) on bodies, even pervasive *threats* of violence can invisibly restructure perceptions of both space and mobility in exclusionary ways.⁵¹

In the case of *Rose*, Highway crucially stresses that his play addresses not “just grief” (“Twenty-One” 26); it also wrestles with difficult questions arising from “coming to terms *with* grief” (“Twenty-One” 26, italics added).⁵² Foregoing the limits of exploring “just grief” (“Twenty-One” 26), Highway’s turn instead to questions of “coming to terms with grief” (“Twenty-One” 26) underlines the themes of movement and moving past so prominent throughout the play. For Highway, *Rose*’s interest in themes of “coming to terms with grief” (“Twenty-One” 26) is tied to a wider political project of challenging violence against Indigenous women. *Rose* both exposes and challenges the everyday lived conditions of the entangled domestic and intra-tribal forms of violence Highway sees being levelled against Indigenous women “on reserves all across Canada right now” (“Twenty-One” 26). Confirming “that one of

“‘docile’ bodies” (*Discipline* 138). Foucault discusses, for instance, how body is negotiated in relation to “*enclosure*” (*Discipline* 141, italics added) as both a “protected place of disciplinary monotony” (141) and “heterogeneous to all others and closed in on itself” (*Discipline* 141). Alex Williams’ claim that “[r]eserves were open-air prisons” (qtd. in Benjoe) and Leonard Peltier’s statement that “we are now *all* prisoners” (Peltier 63, italics in source) both reflect settler-colonialism’s historical reliance upon, in Foucault’s terms, “the disciplinary space [a]s always, basically, cellular” (*Discipline* 143).

⁵¹ Discussing J. L. Austen, Judith Butler helpfully outlines how, for instance, “To be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are ... To be addressed injuriously is not only to be open to an unknown future, but not to know the time and place of injury, and to suffer the disorientation of one’s situation as the effect of such speech. Exposed at the moment of such a shattering is precisely the volatility of one’s ‘place’ within the community of speakers; one can be ‘put in one’s place’ by such speech, but such a place may no place” (*Excitable* 4).

⁵² Discussing trauma, Dori Laub similarly discusses how “[w]hat matters in all processes of witnessing, spasmodic and continuous, conscious and unconscious, is not simply the information, the establishment of the facts, but the experience itself of *living through* testimony, of giving testimony” (Felman and Laub 85, italics in source).

the things that prompted [him] to write ‘Rose’ was [his] disgust with the sexual violence against women” (“Twenty-One” 22), Highway responds by emphasizing the many “tableaux in the play of women living in abusive relationships with men” (“Twenty-One” 28). Particularly relevant for my chapter is Highway’s foregrounding of his concerns for the residual and resulting traumas of gendered violence. Highway explains, “I have a lot of girlfriends who are not in easy relationships with their men: not necessarily just physical abuse in relationships, but emotional abuse, psychological abuse, and I can hardly watch” (“Twenty-One” 23). In other words, the social ramifications of traumas related to gender violence are a core concern for the play’s critiques of settler-colonialism. Nevertheless, despite the play’s predominant focus on themes of both “grief” (“Twenty-One” 26) and “coming to terms with grief” (“Twenty-One” 26), *Rose* is far from an elegiac project. Rather, *Rose* is exemplary of how, as Judith Butler outlines, “[t]o grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself” (*Precarious* 30). Highway’s statements on “coming to terms with grief” (“Twenty-One” 26) not only map out the extent to which issues of gender violence and its attendant traumas are narratively explored within *Rose*; they similarly remap the many-layered geographies upon which a sedimented politics of confinement and immobility are ultimately imposed, resisted, and negotiated under conditions of settler-colonial and its violences.⁵³

More specifically, *Rose* explores the residual traumas resulting from both a motorcycle death and a miscarriage. Also present, however, are numerous depictions of bodily and spiritual

⁵³ My discussions here of remapping and alternative geographies are, in part, indebted to Mark Rifkin’s discussions in *The Erotics of Sovereignty*. I am particularly drawn to Rifkin’s attention to the productive interplay between works by Indigenous authors and those “dynamics of Indigenous sociality and spatiality that are not recognized as sovereignty within the administrative grid that shapes the meaning of self-determination under settler rule” (4).

violence perpetrated against Indigenous women, often by their fellow Indigenous community members. The play portrays, in other words, how conditions of gendered intra-tribal violence create – or, to say the very least, add to – a decidedly inhospitable environment for the women of Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve. Criticizing the “seven rapes on this island in the past year alone” (Highway, *Rose* 137) in an extended monologue that honours each of these women by listing their names, Emily testifies to the pervasive social conditions enabling those “[m]en beating up their wives with hammers, setting them on fire, pouring acid on them” (Highway, *Rose* 137). Additionally, Highway’s stage directions detail, for example, the “*silhouette of five men beating PHILOMENA with sticks, stones and fists, kicking her as one destroys the headdress completely*” (*Rose* 85, italics in source). Meanwhile, Emily vividly decries “Pussy Commanda ... get[ting] gang banged by a bunch of [Big Joey’s] goons, hung up like a slab of meat at a slaughterhouse” (Highway, *Rose* 138). Unlike the play’s own frank willingness to discuss such gendered violence itself, Emily underlines how, when it comes to the women of Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve, “[n]obody talks about it around here, nobody stops [Big Joey], everybody just turns the other way and pretends it isn’t happening, they just let him keep doing it over and over and over again” (Highway, *Rose* 137). The very social community that Chief Big Rose has been entrusted to protect and preside over has, in effect, been fractured, divided, and alienated by the effects of intra-tribal gendered violence – one might even say *immobilized*.

3.3 The ‘Solarium’ – Historical Context and Symbolism

Working within the confining geographies of capital, the reserve, and gendered violence, the women of *Rose* nevertheless carve out a space from and in which they begin to reassert a sense of agentive belonging. Their imaginative transformation of a domestic solarium into a “hilarium” facilitates their attempts to collectively heal the lingering traumas of gender violence;

even more, it sees these women using this space as a means of speaking back to those larger settler-colonial legacies of geographic and economic confinement from which gender violence extends. The newly-formed “hilarium” space allows Emily and Gazelle to confront the outside threat of violence from Big Joey and other men in their immediate community, but it also, perhaps more importantly, represents a space where the women come together to process and overcome the immobilizing impact of Rosetta’s death. Through this reimagined space of “the hilarium,” Emily and Gazelle are, in other words, able to confront and move forward from the social deadlock of their longstanding feud. Yet, in addition mending relationships within their immediate community, the transformation of the solarium into “hilarium” more broadly challenges those histories of physical, geographic, and economic confinement so endemic to Canada’s reserve system. In sum, the women’s imaginative transformation of the solarium into a “hilarium” ultimately reasserts and empowers this space as distinctly Indigenous.

The solarium represents a historically loaded space that is worth unpacking. Though *Rose* recasts the solarium as a distinctly Indigenous cultural space, the solarium scene is unavoidably tinged with this architectural space’s historical entanglements with settler-colonial discourses. Whether intentional or not, Highway’s portrayal of a solarium conservatory in *Rose* invokes, for instance, a European tradition ideologically long-invested in these seemingly benign spaces as symbolic of ecology, imperialism, and modernity as conjoined projects. Reflecting upon 1851’s architectural landmark, the Crystal Palace in London’s Hyde Park, Susan Buck-Morss explains, for instance, how this profoundly influential, glass-encased exhibition space “blended together old nature and new nature – palms as well as pumps and pistons – in a fantasy world that entered the imagination of an entire generation of Europeans” (qtd. in Cutler 67). Even before such solarium conservatory architecture emerged, Bruce R. Smith details how, for British thinkers like

Francis Bacon, it was “the design of gardens in Renaissance England [that] kept primeval memories alive, but in perspective, at a safe distance” (54). Even in our current moment, as Clare Cooper Marcus and Naomi A. Sacha exemplify, there remains a popular expectation that “a glass-enclosed atrium, solarium, or conservatory” (133) can provide peaceful, healing benefits for its occupants: “[b]right, natural light is beneficial to health, and the conservatory space can provide a setting for socializing and horticultural therapy” (133). Whether aimed at imperial industry, affirming modernity, or “horticultural therapy” (Marcus and Sacha 133), the solarium is hardly just a garden space and, more so, hardly just a space of leisurely respite. Popular notions of the solarium remain, in short, closely bound to this space’s Eurocentric cultural roots and the ideological presumptions from which it historically emerged.

As a prominent setting employed throughout *Rose*, one consequence of Chief Big Rose’s transformation of “the solarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64) into “hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64) is a simultaneous adaption and rejection of this European ecological tradition. Highway foregrounds an Indigenous-influenced perspective, one that notably links questions of ecological ethics and shared trauma alongside ongoing violence and politics of reconciliation. Detailing “how very political gardens are,” Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko suggests that they are, in fact, “the most political thing of all – how you grow your food, whether you eat, the fact that the plant collectors followed the Conquistadors” (3). “You have,” cautions Silko, “the Conquistadors, the missionaries, and right with them were the plant collectors” (3).⁵⁴ In *Rose*, audiences are

⁵⁴ An interesting supplemental reading here is Londa Schiebinger’s *Plants and Empire*. “While much literature on colonial science has focused on how knowledge is made and moved between continents and heterodox traditions,” Schiebinger explains, “I explore ... instances of the *nontransfer* of important bodies of knowledge from the New World into Europe” (3, italics in source). The particularly notable aspect of Schiebinger’s discussion is her linking of transnational gender politics, settler-colonialism, and ecology with her emphasis on how “it [the peacock flower] was a highly political plant, deployed in the struggle against slavery throughout

similarly reminded of the connections between settler-colonialism and notions of ecology both within and by the space of the solarium. Speaking of her son Tom who has moved to Toronto, Chief Big Rose explains, for instance, the cultural distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous interpretations of the solarium space: “[y]ou know what they call this kind of room down there [in Toronto]? A solarium. Tom tells me it makes vegetation flourish and the human mind expand but all it’s done is kill every seed I’ve planted ... I’m cancelling the solarium and turning it into: a hilarium!” (Highway, *Rose* 64). A play on the word “hilarious,” Highway uses the term “hilarium” (*Rose* 64) to underline the dark irony of this seemingly-dead solarium garden that “kill[s] every seed I’ve planted” (*Rose* 64) – highlighting how this space alternatively lends life to a growing sense of solidarity amongst the women who use it as a space to joke together. Chief Big Rose’s “cancelling [of] the solarium” in favour of “a hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64) not only indigenizes this space, but it also rejects the ongoing socio-political impacts of a settler-colonialism within which commonplace notions of “solarium” as a European project remain entrenched.

The recognizably Judeo-Christian overtones associated with gardens underscores the solarium garden as an important setting for the women to explore the politics and healing potential of their “hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64). Himself the survivor of a Catholic residential school (Ostroff), Highway’s deep familiarity with Judeo-Christianity is widely acknowledged throughout his works, perhaps most notably in *Comparing Mythologies*.⁵⁵ In his public

the eighteenth century by slave women who used it to abort offspring who would otherwise be born into bondage” (4).

⁵⁵ The predominantly critical examination of Christianity throughout Highway’s oeuvre is underscored by Raymond Lalonde, his long-time partner, who bluntly suggests “Tom is so anti-Catholic he is almost anti-morality” (qtd. in Steed D1). Though Highway controversially claims there were positive social outcomes from his time spent at a Catholic residential school (Ostroff),

commentaries (*Comparing* 27; 31; 38; 44; 45; 47), as well as in his specific discussions of Cree humour (“Why Cree” 163-165), Highway persistently references the biblical story of the Garden of Eden to distinguish alternatively Indigenous ways-of-knowing. Discussing Indigenous concepts of humour, Highway explains, for instance, how, “[i]n Cree, there is no gate blocking the entrance to – or the exit from – the garden ... We are allowed into that garden of joy, that garden of beauty, to gambol about as much as we want to” (“Why Cree” 165). Elsewhere, alongside an early discussion of *Rose* as his next project, Highway lambasts the negative impact that imposed Christianity has had on the surrounding environments, existing cultural practices, and traditional gender politics of Indigenous communities:

[b]asically it’s ravaged the earth and colonised people and shoved down their throats the irrevocable fact that there is only one God and that God is a male, which kind of leaves women and the rest of creation in a very secondary and a very powerless position. What more potent way to colonise the spirit of everybody else mostly, and not the least, the women. (“Twenty-One” 16)

In contrast to Eve, who is cast out of the garden for so-called original sin, the women of *Rose* are shown actively asserting not just their female and, in the case of Emily, queer presence, but also their presence as Indigenous women.⁵⁶ Chief Big Rose’s decision to transform this solarium garden into a healing space – into a “hilarium” – rooted in Indigenous cultural practices dramatizes for audiences an effort to decolonize the legacy inherited from a biblical theology

an openly critical stance towards Christian doctrine and evangelism remains consistent throughout his various works.

⁵⁶ In *Comparing* Mythologies, Highway specifically comments on the misogyny of Christianity’s concept of the Garden of Eden and “the narrative of eviction from a garden, because of a woman’s stupidity” (*Comparing* 31).

grounded in stories like the Garden of Eden.⁵⁷ Rather than be cast out from their solarium garden, the women of *Rose* embrace it as a site of collective strength, healing, and negotiation – as their “hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64).

Yet, the solarium garden of *Rose* is distinctly *not* green, *not* verdant, *not* quiet, and certainly *not* serene; it appears, in other words, to defy a whole range of clichés traditionally associated with the healing potentials of presumably lush, tranquil, and regimented solarium garden spaces. Even if one ignores comparisons to a mythically plentiful Garden of Eden, the women’s solarium garden remains anything but bountiful. Rather, as Chief Big Rose frankly explains to the other women, “all it’s done is kill every seed I’ve planted ... I’m cancelling the solarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64). Unlike Marcus and Sacha’s call for “ample room for plants, seating, and perhaps a small water feature and/or aviary” (133) as a therapeutic ideal, Highway’s “hilarium” (*Rose* 64) does away with these robust, arguably classed, ornamentations. Shrugging off her inability to match settler-colonial assumptions that the solarium garden must “make[] vegetation flourish and the human mind expand” (Highway, *Rose* 64), Big Chief Rose is instead interested in the alternatively healing potential of this space when reimagined as “a hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 68). What *Rose* ultimately offers audiences is more than simply a different sensibility for regarding this space within existing ideals regarding solariums; it also offers a distinctly Indigenous reimagining of, resistance to, and decolonization of this space’s settler-colonial legacy as solarium garden.

⁵⁷ In his article (“Why Cree” 159-168), Highway similarly transforms the Judeo-Christianity story of the Garden of Eden through storytelling of an alternatively Indigenous perspective (“Why Cree” 165-168).

Interspersed throughout this solarium scene are numerous unexplained references to avocados. In addition to a full-on dance number performed by these avocados (Highway, *Rose* 66), the play variously discusses “avocado plants” (Highway, *Rose* 64), “avocado hearts” (Highway, *Rose* 64), and “avocado heaven” (Highway, *Rose* 64). Completely foreign to the climate of Southwestern Ontario, it is easy to overlook or discount these appearances and mentions of avocado plants throughout the solarium scene. Highway’s consistent inclusion of avocados is, however, striking for several reasons: first is their history as a fruit closely related to Indigenous culture; second, their uniquely female-oriented reproductive biology; third their prevalence as a commodity violently extracted for international export; and lastly, their own agentive presence within the solarium scene itself. A brief discussion here of each of these qualities associated with avocados is helpful for understanding why and how this fruit is symbolically incorporated into *Rose*.

First, avocados are a “new world” plant closely associated with Indigenous cultures and have since become highly desirable within both European and settler-colonial culinary cultures. As Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat explains, despite “the avocado remain[ing] almost unknown to Europeans in the Old World until after the Second World War,” and in addition to its history of being “highly esteemed by the Mayas and Aztecs,” the avocado fruit has since quickly become coveted by “colonists [who] appreciated its nutritional value” (613). Emphasizing more than just the international appropriation and flow of food and peoples accompanying settler-colonial contact, the avocado’s appearance in *Rose* is thus, in part, a material expression of how lasting legacies of cross-cultural interaction have been intimately consumed and embodied through relationships to the environment.

Second, though avocados may at first appear entirely unrelated to broader gender and sexual politics at large, it is the fruit's unique reproductive properties that make its inclusion within the "hilarium" (*Rose* 64) scene a subtle extension of these issues. As Toussaint-Samat cheekily clarifies, "the avocado has a curious method of fertilization. The female organ, or pistil, comes to maturity first. Next day the male organs or stamens unfold . . . who says that punctuality is a specifically masculine virtue?" (613). Highway explores elsewhere how, for instance, "God, even though she may be female in shape biologically in the context of Aboriginal mythology, is both male *and* female simultaneously, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually" (*Comparing* 41, italics in source). Relating this Indigenous worldview to themes of both religion and environment, Highway emphasizes how this gender neutral conception extends to include even, for example, "trees a[s] he/she" (40). The avocado's inclusion, therefore, takes the form of a tongue-in-cheek reference in light of this fruit's own biological reversal of male-initiated reproduction. Highway's symbolic use of the avocado in *Rose* playfully undermines the presumed "naturalness" of the phallogentric, Judeo-Christian creation myths he describes elsewhere as predicated on "a God who, first of all, was male, and male entirely, one, moreover, who had seemingly no need of partnership or collaboration with a female to give birth, by himself, to the universe" (*Comparing* 29).⁵⁸ That it is specifically the avocado plant subtly appearing throughout a scene composed almost entirely of women, and even more within a play predominantly focusing on the agency of women, is significant because of the fruit's own female-oriented reproductive properties.

⁵⁸ Highway directly critiques Judeo-Christian for its phallogentric worldview, arguing an Indigenous "circle of matriarchy was punctured by the straight line of patriarchy, the circle of the womb, was punctured, most brutally, by the straight line of the phallus" (*Comparing* 47).

Third, set in 1992, the events of *Rose* occur contemporaneously to public debates concerning the then-proposed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) among Canada, the United States, and Mexico. NAFTA, in other words, offers an important political context necessary for examining the contents of *Rose* as political statement, especially regarding Indigenous land rights, resources, and sovereignty. *Rose* is not, for instance, averse to commenting directly on the negative reception of NAFTA amongst many of Canada's Indigenous communities, with Philemona openly deriding "the Free Trade Agreement whereby Brian Mulroney might as well have signed the province of Ontario over to George Bush and the Americans" (Highway, *Rose* 84). Condemning NAFTA as "a grave danger to Na[t]ive [sic] land rights," Powhatan-Renape/Delaware-Lenape scholar Jack D. Forbes outlines in 1994 the expected detrimental impact of NAFTA on Indigenous lands and communities: "NAFTA fails [to] preserve the basic rights for indigenous peoples granted by these national governments" at the same time as both "ignor[ing] the unique legal status of indigenous tribes and fail[ing] to recognize tribal governments or reservations" (Forbes). While each signatory country maintains unique relationships between state and Indigenous communities, perceived threats by NAFTA are an important social context within which to place *Rose* as, in part, a political statement.⁵⁹

Like all natural resources under capitalist market economies, the avocado too is implicated in transnational circuits and movements of fluctuating capital, as well as the corresponding structures of inequality that arise out of these movements. The specific appearances and mentions of avocados within the scene of the "hilarium" may underscore

⁵⁹ Highlighting the difference in relationships between North American states and Indigenous communities, Forbes emphasizes how "NAFTA also presents a grave danger to Na[t]ive [sic] land rights, especially in Mexico, where most Native Americans do not have specific reservations but instead live on traditional communal lands recognized for centuries by [S]panish [sic] and Mexican law."

NAFTA as an important political context for *Rose*; however, such references to avocados more specifically connect the play to broader Indigenous activism relating to NAFTA. Discussing avocados in the context of Indigenous communities within Mexico, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) discusses the violence this seemingly benign fruit represents under settler-colonialism:

Chiapas loses blood through many veins: through oil and gas ducts, electric lines, railways, through bank accounts, trucks, vans, boats and planes, through clandestine paths, gaps and forest trails. This land continues to pay tribute to the imperialists: petroleum, electricity, cattle, money, coffee, banana, honey, corn, cacao, tobacco, sugar, soy, melon, sorghum, mamey, mango, tamarind, *avocado*, and Chiapaneco blood flows as a result of the thousand teeth sunk into the throat of the Mexican Southeast. (qtd. in Conant 65, italics added)

For Marcos, the extraction of avocados is as much indicative of the exploitative, violent incursion of “imperialists” (qtd. in Conant 65) upon the Indigenous communities of Chiapas as are other more traditionally legible examples, such as environmentally destructive extractions of energy-commodities like “petroleum” (qtd. in Conant 65) and “electricity” (qtd. in Conant 65). Marcos’ vivid description of “avocado ... and Chiapaneco blood flow[ing] as a result of the thousand teeth sunk into the throat of the Mexican Southeast” (qtd. in Conant 65) not only alludes to Karl Marx’s well-known formulation of “[c]apital” (342) as “vampire-like” (342) in its reliance on “sucking living labour” (342); Marcos’ allusions to bodily intrusion and violence emphasize the obscured violence imposed upon Indigenous communities that underlies the flow of avocados as a commodity so fervently desired by international consumers.

Alongside this violent global flow of avocados is a corresponding global flow of migrant workers, both legal and illegal. Seth M. Holmes details, for instances, how Mexican farm laborers working illegally in the United States, much like the women of *Rose*, find themselves caught in the immobilizing effects of capital – an immobilization that is social, spatial, and bodily in nature. Describing how “my Triqui companions experience their labor migration as anything but voluntary” (17), Holmes underscores how even acts of apparent physical movement can inversely represent for migrants a process of constraint and immobility as they become ensnared and excluded within this migratory flow of labor and capital.⁶⁰ In addition to the dangerous cross-border migration of illegal immigrants seeking work in the United States (8-9), Holmes pays special attention to the bodily repercussions of those employed in the United States as undocumented, subsistence farm laborers toiling under “labor camp conditions” (5). As he puts it, in the case of migrant farm laborers, bodily “pains are examples of the structural violence of social hierarchies becoming embodied in the form of suffering and sickness” (Holmes 89). Working alongside the labourers, Holmes variously details the destructive impact of the repetitious, circuitous picking season on the bodies of workers as they laboriously traverse the demarcated space of the farm (93-94). Holmes’ accounts of migrant labor add another critical layer to the many wider issues of the agricultural industry and its powerful lobbying in the

⁶⁰ More specifically, Holmes puts it elsewhere, “the reality of survival for my Triqui companions shows that it would be riskier to stay in San Miguel without work, money, food, or education. In this original context, crossing the border is not a choice to engage in a risk behavior but rather a process necessary to survive, to make life *less* risky” (21, italics in source). Holmes’ paraphrased recollection of a Mexican migrant laborer’s account further underscores these points: “[m]oving from place to place allows the for the most earnings to be saved ... At the same time, this ongoing movement leads to periods of homelessness, fear of apprehension and deportation, uprooting of connections and relationships outside of the migration circuit, and loss of productive studies and continuity for children. Moving from state to state also functionally disqualifies workers, including pregnant women and recent mothers, from social and health services for which they would otherwise be eligible” (92).

United States (Pollan); more particularly, however, they are significant for addressing the ways situated agricultural produce, such as avocados, are bound up in questions of labor and economic mobility that span and blur the global and local. Just as the taxing journeys of migrant laborers highlights their ensnarement in the global flows of capital and its demands, so too does the localized task of farm work highlight workers ensnared in their laborious movements across fields of produce, all the while still under the threat of arrest and deportation that pervades overshadows even those brief excursions away from the fields (Holmes 37). However, even for those Mexican avocado farmers who forego emigration, like those of Michoacán, there remains the challenge of cartel extortion rackets aimed at profiting from their valuable produce (Córdoba; Grillo). Described by Raul Benitez as “blood avocados” (qtd. in Córdoba) and more commonly as “green gold” (Córdoba), this valuable export is at the heart of a violent struggle between cartel gangsters and armed farmers – called “*autodefensas*” (Grillo, italics in source) – who have, for instance, been forced set up roadside inspections (Córdoba). Like the women of *Rose*, who themselves are confronted with the crime and violence of corruption and mobsters, these Mexican avocado farmers also find economic and geographic mobility a core concern for their quality of life. Avocados function, therefore, as a metonymy for a whole transnational politics of economic and geographic mobility that both incorporates and extends beyond the product itself.

Lastly, in a way similar to how Rosetta’s (re)birth on stage dramatizes human “[e]xistence in the universe [a]s merely one endless circle of birth and life and dead and re-birth” (Highway *Comparing* 44), the seemingly bizarre portrayal of “[s]even avocado plants com[ing] dancing on” (Highway, *Rose* 66, italics in source) stage extends this cyclical worldview to also include seemingly inanimate object as well. Equating “animism” (*Comparing* 42) with the

“pantheism” (*Comparing* 42) of a Cree spiritual ontology, Highway explains how, within this worldview, “all of nature – from leaves to soil to water to the cat in your living room to the heart inside your body to the woman, or man, in your life – virtually pulsates with divinity” (*Comparing* 42). Reflecting his ecological attention to “leaves” (*Comparing* 42) and “soil” (*Comparing* 42), Highway’s stage directions for *Rose* outline this frenetic scene in detail:

Seven avocado plants come dancing on in classic Ukrainian-Cossack kick-line fashion and proceed to put on a show from hell – or rather from heaven for that’s who they are, all those avocado plants who’ve died and gone to avocado heaven ‘there to dance their little avocado hearts to eternity,’ as CHIEF BIG ROSE imagines, and describes, them. At one point – just as LIZ and PUSSY enter and stand there watching amazed – the plants grab EMILY and GAZELLE and dance with them. (Rose 66, italics in source)

Rather than responding with fear or confusion, Emily openly welcomes this turn of events by exclaiming “(*Shreiking* [sic] *with glee*) I can’t believe it! I’m dancing with an avocado plant!” (Highway, *Rose* 66, italics in source). Rather than assigning agency solely to the women in the scene, Highway’s stage directions instead emphasize the assertive role played by the avocado plants as well. It is, after all, “*the plants grab[ing] EMILY and GAZELLE and danc[ing] with them*” (Highway, *Rose* 66, italics in source) – not solely the other way around. Rather than objectifying these plants as lifeless things by writing “what,” Highway instead recognizes in the avocados a degree of subjectivity insofar as he states “*that’s who they are*” (*Rose* 66, italics in source). Despite the surreal absurdity of this spectacle, that it is apparently dead “*avocado plants*” (Highway, *Rose* 65, italics in source) coming to life dancing dramatizes for audiences the

interplay – more accurately, the kinship⁶¹ – between both the human and non-human elements depicted on stage. Just as the spiritual presences of Rosetta and Rosabella hold agency alongside the women’s efforts to process their trauma, so too do the spiritual presences of these seemingly inanimate plants. Highway’s portrayal of processing trauma as a collective process, therefore, ultimately extends beyond a strictly anthropocentric focus on this group of women.

3.4 The ‘Hilarium’ – A Space for Collective Healing

In the case of Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve, Chief Big Rose’s solarium – or, rather, “hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64) – represents for the women a space for encountering, processing, and negotiating traumas resulting from the gendered violences of the reserve. The deep-rooted conflict between Emily and Gazelle is a prime example of this space as one of collective healing. Audiences learn here, for instance, of Emily’s prior miscarriage of Rosetta after being kicked by Gazelle in the stomach – an attack motivated by jealousy over Big Joey. Turning to Gazelle, Emily divulges the severity of these events by announcing how it was “[y]ou jealous, self-centered, heartless . . . you kicked my belly. You killed my Rosetta, killed her in my belly five years ago” (Highway, *Rose* 71). Emily’s indictment of Gazelle offers a vivid recollection of violence inflicted against Indigenous women while also highlighting a residual trauma brought about by an intra-tribal violence occurring between even these Indigenous women themselves. Despite the women’s own discussions of Emily’s miscarriage, the spiritual presence of Rosetta, the miscarried child, is nevertheless present throughout this scene. Feeling an uneasy sense of Rosetta’s presence, Emily calls upon her unborn child’s spirit to “[s]t . . . st . . . stop . . . stop it! Rosetta? Don’t do this to me. Please? Rosetta? You are dead, you were *not* born, you were . . .”

⁶¹ Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice’s article ““Go Away Water!: Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative” helpfully provides an extended discussion of kinship relations.

(Highway, *Rose* 71, italics in source). Similarly, the spirit of Rosabella Baez assisting these interventions by Rosetta throughout this scene. Highway's stage directions describe, for instance, "*ROSABELLA watching [ROSETTA] from above, as if guiding her.* (*Rose* 71, italics in source). One notable detail here is how *Rose* presents this space of the "hilarium" (Highway, *Rose* 64) as distinctly collective in nature: audiences witness how all these women, living and spiritual, coalesce here.

Though Rosabella does not appear on stage in Highway's *The Rez Sisters*, the traumatic impact of her death on Emily establishes a crucial backdrop for her spiritual presence throughout *Rose*. Having left her abusive husband Henry Dadzinanare and made her way to San Francisco (Highway *The Rez Sisters* 50-51), this earlier play sees Emily recollecting how she went on to join an all-female motorcycle group called "the Rez Sisters" (Highway *The Rez Sisters* 97). It is here, amongst these mobile women, that Emily finds herself free to enter a relationship with a self-identified "Indian woman" (Highway *The Rez Sisters* 97) named "Rosabella Baez, leader of the pack" (Highway *The Rez Sisters* 97). Proudly lamenting that "I loved her like no man's ever loved a woman" (Highway *The Rez Sisters* 97), Emily vividly details the shattering effect that Rosabella's subsequent death in a highway accident on her: "Big 18-wheeler come along real fast and me and Pussy Commanda get out of the way. But not Rose. She stayed in the middle. Went head-on into that truck like a fly splat against a windshield" (Highway *The Rez Sisters* 97). Left ultimately ambiguous is whether Rosabella's death was an intentional suicide or unfortunate accident. The appearance of Rosabella throughout *Rose* not only speaks, therefore, to the longstanding extent of Emily's own trauma as she continues to process this suicide-death; more so, it sees Rosabella herself, even after death, freed now to play a part in helping Emily move past this burdensome trauma.

In *Rose*'s "hilarium" scene, Emily confronts and works through an additional trauma: a miscarriage brought on by a kick to the stomach from Gazelle. More than simply providing another setting, events surrounding this confrontation between Emily and Gazelle in the "hilarium" (Highway, *Rose* 64) collectively function as a kind of play-within-a-play. Though each character retains their name and personalities, the scene represents a distinctly contained enactment and dramatization of trauma and the healing potentials of humour and laughter. In addition to psychologically "*re-liv[ing]*" (Highway, *Rose* 71, italics in source) the traumas associated with Emily's miscarriage, the processing and recollection of these memories are dramatized on stage both for theatre audiences and the women of the hilarium. Highway's stage directions detail the tense confrontation between Emily and Gazelle, describing how

now it is as if EMILY and GAZELLE are in a time warp. The lullaby from the song, 'When Children Sleep,' snaps, huge, symphonic, as EMILY and GAZELLE re-live ROSETTA's death, EMILY screaming, falling to the ground, GAZELLE kicking her belly, over and over. All the while ROSETTA runs around EMILY and GAZELLE, screaming at them – ROSABELLA watching her from above, as if guiding her. (Rose 71, italics in source)

This theme of dramatically "*re-liv[ing]*" (Highway, *Rose* 71, italics in source) the trauma of "*ROSETTA's death*" (Highway, *Rose* 71, italics in source) through performance is visually emphasized for audiences both in the repetitive way that "[a]ll the while *ROSETTA runs around EMILY*" (Highway, *Rose* 71, italics in source) and that "*GAZELLE kick[s] her belly, over and over*" (Highway, *Rose* 71, italics in source). Such repetition not only highlights themes of immobility and the reoccurring impacts of traumatic gender violence on the lives of these women; it also sees the women forming a sense of shared solidarity as they collectively "re-live"

(Highway, *Rose* 71, italics in source), process, and work through this sense of immobility together.

While the majority of *Rose*'s plot proceeds in a relatively linear fashion, the solarium scene instead playfully manipulates the dramatic timing of its performers. Emphasized is thus *Rose*'s performative exploration of both time and perception. In contrast to earlier descriptions of "*the place ... exploding with a manic, 'toontown' energy*" (64, italics in source), Emily and Gazelle's subsequent "*re-liv[ing] [of] ROSETTA's death*" (Highway, *Rose* 71, italics in source) begins a marked shift in the scene's theatrical pacing. Underlining his concern for performative timing and audience perception, Highway's stage directions even goes so far as to explain how, for example, "*now it is as if EMILY and GAZELLE are in a time warp*" (*Rose* 71, italics in source). Furthermore, audiences are soon confronted with a visual depiction of the scene's performative manipulations of time as, "*in heartbreaking slow motion*" (Highway, *Rose* 72, italics in source), they witness "*EMILY giv[ing] birth, ROSETTA crawling out from beneath her thighs*" (Highway, *Rose* 72, italics in source). Emily and Gazelle may be "*re-liv[ing]* ROSETTA's *death*" (Highway, *Rose* 71, italics in source), but audiences are unavoidably learning of and encountering these events for the first time. The radically slowed-down pacing of the scene's performance, therefore, aesthetically highlights the weighty impact of the miscarriage on both women; however, it also emphasizes how their shared trauma continues to linger and persist on an ambiguous, imperceptible temporal scale. The "*heartbreaking slow motion*" (Highway, *Rose* 72, italics in source) of this scene functions, in short, as both a reminder and dramatization of trauma's persistent, weighty, and sometimes-immobilizing presence on the individual and collective lives of these women.

Rose's performative manipulation of time is exemplary of how Highway explores and dramatizes trauma as a form of "slow violence" (Nixon 2). As Nixon explains, "slow violence" (2) refers to more than just detrimental repercussions of "a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" (2); properly acknowledging "slow violence" (2), he adds, requires both a perceptual and ethical shift in relations to a "contemporary politics of speed" (11) that obscures the "incremental and accretive" (2) under conditions of "turbo-capitalism" (8). In other words, acknowledging "slow violence" demands, as Nixon explains, "rendering [often imperceptible threats] apprehensible to the senses through the work of scientific and imaginative testimony" (14). For *Rose*, the performance's shift to "*heartbreaking slow motion*" (Highway, *Rose* 72, italics in source) makes legible Nixon's emphasis on violence as capable of occurring at both "glacial" (Nixon 13) and "instant[ly] sensational" (Nixon 2) rates. "From a narrative perspective" (6), Nixon suggests that "slow violence" (2) underlines an "invisible, mutagenic theatre [that] is slow paced and open ended, eluding the tidy closure, the containment, imposed by the visual orthodoxies of victory and defeat" (6). As seen in the example above, *Rose* similarly utilizes the performative properties of the theatre stage to establish a kind of perceptual lens for audiences—a space variously capable of speeding up and slowing down, not just audience perceptions of narrative time, but also visually theatrical performances of that narrative time on stage.

Rosabella and Rosetta's presence as spiritual interlopers within the "hilarium" (Highway, *Rose* 64) represents another way in which *Rose* playfully explores alternative understandings and perceptions of temporality. Rather than a traumatic miscarriage marked by total loss, audiences witness Rosetta's ongoing influence as a spiritual presence assisting the women to overcome her miscarriage. Highway's stage directions emphasize the powerful role these spiritual interlopers

play in assisting healing: “‘[d]irected’ by ROSABELLA from above, ROSETTA tickles EMILY, then GAZELLE, until both are in stitches, holding on to each other like sisters. Having hit rock bottom in her grief, EMILY has survived, is now capable of unbelievable human feats, including forgiving her most hated enemy, GAZELLE” (Rose 72, italics in source). In terms of performance, audiences are offered here visual confirmations of a spiritual presence the other women can only at times sense. Lending insight into an Indigenous cultural belief system underlying the active involvement of spirits in this scene and its connections to temporality, Highway broadly explains how

[e]xistence in the universe is merely one endless circle of birth and life and death and re-birth and life and death and re-birth and life and death so that those who lived in times before us – our mothers, our grandmothers, our great-great-grandmothers, those children of our who have died, those loved one – they live here with us, still, today, in the very air we breathe, in the shimmer of a leaf on that old oak tree, in that slant of sunlight that falls in through your window and lands on your wrist. They are here. Tears of sorrow are to be shed, yes, but tears of joy as well, tears of rampant of celebration. (*Comparing* 44)⁶²

Blurring human and non-human, Highway highlights an intergenerational concept of time that subverts settler-colonial understandings of “time function[ing] according to the principle and structure of one straight line” (*Comparing* 31). The women are not, therefore, merely

⁶² Similarly, Rosabella, who is speaking within the “hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64), states “(To Chief Big Rose) . . . it’s true what they say, the Elders, the medicine people, there is no death. Only a going away, to another world, another dimension of this same old . . . Earth. We are still here, we will be here forever. Sixty thousand years, thirty thousand generations of us. They can kill us and they can rape us and shoot us and set our bodies on fire but we are still here, we will always be here, will never go away. Look all around you, we are here, all of us . . .” (Highway, *Rose* 135, italics in source).

indigenizing the space of the solarium; they are also indigenizing understandings of what it means to move, move within it, and move beyond its strictures. Highway's portrayals of these agentive spiritual interlopers similarly challenges the way the women relate to each other and, more so, their surrounding environment. As Nixon explains, "imposed official landscapes typically discount spiritualized vernacular landscapes, severing webs of accumulated cultural meaning and treating the landscape as if it were uninhabited by the living, the unborn, and the animate deceased" (17). Not only do Rosetta and Rosabella act as spiritual interlopers force the women to adopt an Indigenous worldview regarding their place within the surrounding environment, but the presence of these women as agentive spirits similarly alters how they conceive of what it means to move about and socialize within that environment as well.

3.5 Humour – Highway and Cross-Cultural Comedy

Countering the immobilizing effects of a settler-colonial discourse that too-often invalidates, excludes, and alienates Indigenous voices is the women's own use of humour. Humour allows the women to confront, subvert, and transform the traumas and dispossessions of settler-colonialism. In short, humour is the means by which the women of *Rose* break free of the discursive confines and impasse of a settler-colonialism that rejects them.

Dramatized throughout depictions of what Chief Big Rose calls the "hilarium" is, for instance, an ethics of conflict resolution – or, at the very least, conflict management – wherein humour plays a key role in healing.⁶³ A central conflict explored in this space is the longstanding

⁶³ When it comes to humour, a great deal of attention to its socio-political functions appears within the European academic "tradition," with prominent examples including: Sigmund Freud's inquiry into the social and psychoanalytic dimensions of humour in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* [1905]; Slavoj Žižek's 2015 comments on the possibilities of using inappropriate jokes as a means of breaking "political correctness" as an ideological impasse ("Political Correctness Solidifies;" "Political Correctness is a More"); and finally, Sara Ahmed's

feud between Emily and Gazelle – arising from Emily’s traumatic miscarriage after being violently assaulted by Gazelle out of jealousy. Both women appear at first to be caught in a deadlock of intra-tribal violence and distrust. Yet, despite this ongoing feud, Highway details, for instance, how the “hilarium” serves as a space wherein, “[s]o charmed by the CHIEF’s ridiculous behaviour are GAZELLE and EMILY they soon forget the tension between them, at least for the moment” (Rose 64, italics in source). Highway takes here the familiar Judeo-Christian proverb “[a] cheerful heart is a good medicine, / but a downcast spirit dries up the bones” (*Revised Standard*) and replaces it with a distinctly Indigenous perspective on humour’s healing potential.⁶⁴ Within the space of the “hilarium” (Highway, Rose 64), humour offers the women a way of collectively addressing a wide range of spoken and unspoken concerns relating to trauma, such as loss, grief, survival, abuse, resiliency, and forgiveness. Humour, in other words, opens up an imaginative space in and through which the women can confront and move past the impasses of disagreement and trauma.

Highway’s public statements clarify how his use, advocacy, and depiction of humour’s healing potential in *Rose* is most strongly influenced by his own Cree worldview. Though audience receptions of humour inevitably vary, analyzing how *Rose* uses and critiques humour’s socio-political potential requires first acknowledging Highway’s own interpretation of it within Indigenous ways-of-knowing.⁶⁵ Perhaps most importantly, Highway argues there exists a cross-

subsequent critique of the limits to be found in Žižek’s position on humour. These critics collectively fail to explore the non-Eurocentric ways that humour has been traditionally employed outside those traditions, particularly by North American Indigenous communities living under conditions of settler-colonialism.

⁶⁴ Proverbs 17:22 (*Revised Standard*).

⁶⁵ Highway is not, of course, the only Indigenous performer to turn to comedic performance as a means of social critique and expression. Other examples of prominent Indigenous investments in

cultural (un)translatability of humour between Cree and other languages, particularly English.⁶⁶

Commenting specifically on the gender politics underlying Cree's relationship to humour,

Highway explains how

Cree, my mother tongue, is neither a language of the mind nor a language of the senses. It is a language of the flesh. A physical language. It lives in the human body not above the neck, as English does, not between the neck and the waist, as French does, but one step lower: between the waist and the thighs. Cree lives in the groin, in the sex organs.”

(“Why Cree” 160)

Because gendered and sexual violence are acts directed at bodies, it is significant that Highway turns to Cree – a language “liv[ing] in the body” (“Why Cree” 160) and, more particularly, “in the sex organs” (“Why Cree” 160) – as a site of intervention. Additionally, Highway is, in other words, emphasizing how humour plays a complex role within the settler-colonial context of Canada: on the one hand, humour acts as a relatable bridge between the country's different cultures and traditions; on the other hand, it is emblematic of the unavoidable cultural disconnections also arising when differing linguistic and cultural worldviews intersect. *Rose's* investments in using and exploring humour situate it at this intersection between Indigenous and

humour include, for instance, Cree comedian Howie Miller (Barde), Cree comedian Don Burnstick (Simons), and Anishinaabe/Métis comedian and podcaster Ryan McMahon (“Ryan McMahon's”). For a book-length exploration of different Indigenous perspectives on humour, see Drew Hayden Taylor's compilation *Me Funny*.

⁶⁶ Highway explains this interpretive disconnect between Cree and English linguistic worldviews by presenting a question: “Now I ask you: Is that sentence funny in English? As a fluent English-speaker, permit me to answer the question for you: it is *not* funny, not in the least. Nothing inside you laughs for even a fraction of a second. But in Cree, the sentence is not only funny, it is hysterical; one might even say there is a cartoonish quality to it. It is as if Porky Pig or Bugs Bunny or Elmer Fudd is about to enter through that door. And that is the visceral reality of the Cree language” (“Why Cree” 163, italics in source).

non-Indigenous audiences, as well as their various cultural perspectives. The play's thematic and performative depictions of humour thus function as both an expression of this cross-cultural intersection and a hopeful way of meaningfully bridging its daunting limitations.

Described as taking place from "March 1992 to October 1992" (Highway, *Rose* 11), *Rose*'s narrative is contemporaneous with both post-Oka Crisis (1990) debates over Indigenous land sovereignty and the contentious Mulroney-era constitutional reform initiatives culminating in the failed Charlottetown Accord (1992). Whether intended or not, *Rose* therefore functions, in part, as a dramatic extension of both these political events and their underlying repercussions for Indigenous land rights, sovereignty, and well-being. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the "hilarium" should offer a space for the women of *Rose* to reimagine and reinforce their political outlook on both politicians and the political institutions of Canada. In addition to transforming the solarium as a settler-colonial space, the humor explored in this newly-formed "hilarium" open up a discursive space capable of turning the state's austere sense of self-certain modernity against itself. To undermine the classed discourse of "civility" accompanying settler-colonial state violence is, by extension, to underline the tragic seriousness with which it undertook destructively racist policies, such as residential schools.

Contrary to the dire seriousness of Big Joey's repeatedly violent challenges to her role as the community's female leader, Chief Big Rose alternatively outlines how humour serves a necessary function in the political lives of both tribal and national government: "(*Speaks/sings.*) You see, my dears, as Chief of the People / The way I see it is this: / The world takes itself too seriously. / Too seriously. Way too serious; / Biz-ness, for instance, the world of politics, / Law, religion, you name it, it's always / Men who run these things, ain't that too bad?" (Highway, *Rose* 64, italics in source). In addition to decrying the gender bias she sees plaguing the political

system, Chief Big Rose's speech humorously employs the declarative tone of a political debate or speech as a means of satire. Going on to lambast the provincial politician Bob Rae, then-Premier of Ontario, Chief Big Rose rejects the seriousness of official titles and decorum by unceremoniously referring to him as both "Premier Bob" (Highway, *Rose* 65) and "Serious Premier Bob" (Highway, *Rose* 65). Next, Chief Big Rose turns to a discussion of Brian Mulroney, then-Prime Minister, over the issue of land rights. As Chief Big Rose explains, "[w]e'll sign the treaty, I'll shake his hand, / Give him his headdress, then bring him in / Here and tickle him here and tickle him / There and jiggle him here and jiggle him there" (Highway, *Rose* 67). All of this, she soon qualifies, will take place "[u]ntil he's laughing with animal gusto / He's bent over double and inches from death" (Highway, *Rose* 67). Laughter and humour may appear to take on an almost torturous appeal for Chief Big Rose here as she imagines negotiations with Prime Minister Mulroney that leave him "bent over double and inches from death" (Highway, *Rose* 67); however, an alternative reading is that it puts forward a different form of power politics – a politics of humour – distinct from Big Joey's repeatedly heavy-handed threats of overt physical violence. Consequently, it is no small thing that Chief Big Rose calls into question the parliamentary norms of Canada's federal government as a settler-colonial institution. "Politicians, hmph!" (Highway, *Rose* 65), she exclaims, "That's what they / Need is a chamber to chuckle, a chamber to / Chortle, a chamber to giggle, a chamber to / Jiggle and laugh" (Highway, *Rose* 65). These repeated references to "chamber" (Highway, *Rose* 65) do not just satirize Canada's legislative House of Commons (who meet in the Commons Chamber); ultimately, they underline the decolonizing role Chief Big Rose sees in humour as a transformative force, one capable of redefining even this internationally recognized space of Canadian governmental authority to "a chamber to giggle" (Highway, *Rose* 65). Whether

fanciful or serious, the political perspectives Chief Big Rose shares in the solarium/“hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 73) nevertheless show the women’s willingness to question, express, and reimagine political power within and through an Indigenous conception of humour. In short, humour allows the women a sense of self-empowerment. Though in many ways immobilized within the structures of the reserve and settler-colonial state at large, the women of *Rose* are able to use humour as a means of opening up an imaginative and discursive space for imagining norms of “civilized” governance outside those acknowledged by the state.

Rose’s portrayal of humour’s healing, mobilizing potential may erode some social taboos surrounding public discussions of violence and trauma; however, this relatively positive outlook on the ability for humour to mediate transformative social change without confrontational negativity does not come without possible limitations. Anishinaabe scholar Dory Nason argues, for instance, “Indigenous women’s love is powerful.”⁶⁷ “It is,” she explains, “a love that can inspire a whole world to sing and dance and be in ceremony for the people. This has always been so.” What makes Nason’s point helpful here is the way she also tempers any romanticizing or idealizing impulses that may arise from an overly positive interpretation of such “love” within hostile settler-colonial contexts. There is, Nason cautions, a painful underbelly to the laborious task of undertaking acts of “love” because “this love has also made Indigenous women targets,” as seen in the innumerable ways that “love is countered in patriarchal settler colonialist societies – with epidemic levels of violence, sexual assault, imprisonment and cultural and political disempowerment.” Settler-colonial assaults on Indigenous women are, in other words, not only assaults aimed at the presence of racialized or sexualized bodies; they are also assaults aimed at the far less tangible – and, therefore, the often far more intimidating – spiritual capacity of

⁶⁷ For a similar discussion, see Lee Maracle’s chapter, entitled “Isn’t Love a Given?” (20-30), in *I Am Woman*.

“Indigenous women’s love” (Nason) to positively disrupt, connect, and lend agentive strength to the wider movements and mobility of Indigenous cultural resistance. That very sense of positive collective healing, support, and political will which strengthens Indigenous communities is, in Nason’s account, met with a further incitement to violence and suppression in response. Because it invites a bodily response, such as a cringe or laughter, humour is deeply mediated by and invested in both the bodily and discursive. Similarly, as Nason outlines, settler-colonialism too is heavily invested in policing the bodily and discursive – concerning itself, for example, with immobilizing the socio-political capacities of both Indigenous bodies and cultures. In a way similar to Nason’s depiction of “love,” the women of *Rose* highlight how humour too is a powerful tool for decolonization. Humour becomes both a means of reclaiming the body and its affects from settler-colonial narratives, as well as a means of subversively lambasting the cultural norms and assumptions from which that settler-colonialism presumes to derive its legitimacy. Humour is, in other words, a powerful means of mobilizing and asserting Indigenous presence both within and against the settler-colonial state.

Lastly, though *Rose* frequently explores the political and social usefulness of humour, it is perhaps difficult to overlook the decidedly violent nature of Big Joey’s castration. Though devoid of humour, this scene is not merely depicting violent revenge. On the one hand, this gruesome scene of castration is expressive of the women’s collective will to fight back against gendered violence; however, on the other hand, it raises the questions of the extent to which this act of violence simply reinforces a self-destructive cycle of harm and trauma within the community.⁶⁸ The narrative structuring of *Rose* makes clear the scene’s deep ties to other points

⁶⁸ I am, in part, drawing upon René Girard’s theory of the “scapegoat” (84). Describing “[t]he mechanism of reciprocal violence ... as a vicious circle” (86), Girard offers an extended discussion of both “*surrogate victim*” (84, italics in source) and “scapegoat” (84) in his text

of violence throughout the play. Visually mirroring the earlier abuse of Pussy Commanda, Highway's stage directions describe how, prior to Big Joey's castration, "[t]hey [*HERA, VERONIQUE, PHILOMENA, and ANNIE*] help *LIZ strip BIG JOEY naked and then hang him by the wrists on the two 'chains' where PUSSY was found hanging earlier, BIG JOEY's back to the audience*" (Rose 141, italics in source). Furthermore, Highway explains how "*EMILY takes out a meat cleaver*" (Rose 141, italics in source). More so, Joey's castration with "*a meat cleaver*" (Rose 141, italics in source) is foreshadowed throughout several of the play's allusions to knives and cutting: first, faced with an assault on her home by roaming men, Highway describes the knife's repurposing as a weapon when "[*VERONIQUE*] *resurfaces with a gun and a meat cleaver*" (Rose 82, italics in source); second, responding to Big Joey's unwanted sexual advancements and innuendo's about the size of his penis, Liz exclaims, for instance, how "I work in a slaughter house and after a while, meat becomes, well, just . . . meat" (Rose 48); lastly, Highway's portrayal of "*Zachary's Kitchen Rhythm Band*" (Rose 101, italics in source) as "*a pathetically small group of men who are banging pots and pans, cheese graters, and whisks, butcher knives and cleavers, etc., to the rhythm of the beat*" (Rose 101, italics in source) sees the knife again repurposed as a symbolic, expressive means of challenging dominant narratives of masculinity that would disapprove of a man wielding domestic kitchenware and "*wear[ing] a white chef's hat and frilly pink apron*" (Rose 101). What ultimately distinguishes the women's act of castration from the play's earlier violent assaults by men is the relative care and humility

Violence and the Sacred (81-87). Defining his theory of "scapegoat" (84), Girard most specifically explains how "any community that has fallen prey to violence or has been stricken by some overwhelming catastrophe hurls itself blindly into the search for a scapegoat. Its members instinctively seek an immediate and violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of" (84).

with which they undertake the procedure. As Highway explains, “*HERA prepares a herbal poultice as the other women prepare a basin, rolls of gauze, towels, etc. and place them on the floor at his feet, as in a ceremony*” (Rose 141, italics in source). This emphasis on both a spiritual sense of mindful “*ceremony*” (Highway, Rose 141, italics in source) and the other life-saving measures the women prepare beforehand prompt questions about the ethical limits at which violence becomes necessary and/or socially accepted. What remains unclear is, however, whether the women’s ultimate decision to violently castrate Big Joey is necessary; this uncertainty suggests how *Rose* might explore possible limitations for humour’s healing potential and, more so, whether this overtly public scene of castration is antithetical to the kinds of imperceptible harm emphasized by “slow violence” (Nixon 2). Nevertheless, the women ultimately transform this act of violence into an expression of both their resilient presence as an agentive force and their own movement past the self-destructive, immobilizing logics of intra-tribal, gendered violence.

3.6 Conclusion

Focusing on the entwined constrictions of gender violence and the settler-colonial reserve system, my second chapter has explored how the women of *Rose* turn to and empower both immobility and confinement as a means of resisting settler-colonialism. Shifting between the local and global, I have explored how the women of *Rose* imaginatively transform the colonial space of the solarium into a “hilarium” capable of helping them move beyond the various immobilities and traumas brought on by gendered violence. Though Peltier fails to address gendered violence against Indigenous women in a meaningful way, *Prison Writings* shares *Rose*’s interest in exploring themes of immobility. “Without wheels out in the empty distances of the rez,” warns Peltier, “you’re utterly isolated” (*Prison* 69). Where *Prison Writings* most

tellingly mirrors *Rose*'s explorations of immobility is, for example, in Peltier's description of being "part-owner of an auto-body shop" (*Prison* 89) and "half-way house for Indians in need" (*Prison* 89). Much like how the women of *Rose* use their "hilarium" as a space for subverting prevalent feelings of immobility on their reserve, the repair shop similarly represents for Peltier a space that sees immobilized, non-functioning "junk cars" (*Prison* 69) and that mobilizes surrounding networks of kinship and healing that defy the socio-economic challenges of petrocapitalist urbanity. Binding *Rose* and *Prison Writings* is, therefore, their shared interrogation of how immobility can, just like mobility, variously function as a means of resisting neoliberal settler-colonialism.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

By examining themes of immobility in *Prison Writings* and *Rose*, my thesis has sought to outline how each text's treatment of this theme collectively unsettles both settler-colonial and neoliberal regimes of mobility. Each text shares with the other more than just a thematic attention to immobility; they collectively open up a space for inciting broader discussions of the multiple roles that immobility can in fact play under conditions of neoliberal settler-colonialism – both as a means of its reinforcement and, alternatively, of its subversion. Immobility, in other words, offers a critically neglected perspective through which to examine both the politics of mobility and a reclamation of the seemingly-immobile from defeatist readings.

Predominant throughout neoliberal discourses of globalization is a fetishizing of unfettered mobility. Whether concretized in the bodies of migrant labour forces or abstracted into the flows of international global finance, neoliberalism assumes for itself a motive capacity to constitute alternative global geographies that both allow and foreclose regimes of mobility.⁶⁹ As Seth M. Holmes' work on Mexican migrant farm labourers outlines, how these regimes of mobility operate are, however, fraught with deep inequalities too-often borne out both upon and through the migrant body (89) – even in the case of illegal immigrants who, to a certain extent, might seem to operate outside the purview of direct economic supervision by the state, such as taxation and citizenship. Describing the dramatic “transformations in the spatial and temporal coordinates of the labour market” (169) wrought by neoliberalism, David Harvey argues that one

⁶⁹ Defining “[n]eoliberal globalization [a]s both process and project,” Henk Overbeek argues “[g]lobalization entails a qualitative transformation in the political, economic, cultural, strategic, and technological worlds around us” that has led to “the compression of time and space, the rise of a market-oriented neoliberal politico-economic order, and the transition in world politics from the bipolar cold war order of system rivalry to the present unipolar NATO-American order” (75). Furthermore, Overbeek identifies a “deepening commodification” (76) taking place via “the transnationalization of production, the globalization of financial markets, and the tendential emergence of a global labor market” (76).

defining feature of neoliberalism is “the geographical mobility of capital permit[ting] it to dominate a global labour force whose own geographical mobility is constrained” (168-169). Harvey’s identification of the interplay between ultra-mobile flows of “capital” (168) and the “constrained” (169) conditions the “global labour force” (168) find themselves living under is particularly helpful for rethinking through the constitutive roles of immobility can play in both supporting and, more important for my thesis, resisting neoliberalism. As “[f]lexible labour markets are established” (168), states Harvey, “[t]he individualized and relatively powerless worker ... confronts a labour market in which only short-term contracts are offered on a customized basis” (168). Meanwhile, the entangled distinction between abstracted flows of global financial capital and localized points of investment becomes important to acknowledge as well. Noting how “for [Karl] Marx the *mobility of capital* is inherently global” (ctd. in 1104, italics added), Hepzibah Munoz Martinez and Thomas Marois reiterate how, according to David Harvey, “the *accumulation of money capital* necessarily involves *momentary fixity* in order to appropriate labour power and use nature in the production and realisation of surplus value as profit (ctd. in 1104, italics added). In other words, despite neoliberalism’s appeals to an ethos of unencumbered movement and flow, its productive capacity nevertheless remains deeply mediated at and by points of non-movement.⁷⁰ More so, instead of wholly unfettered mobility,

⁷⁰ Similarly, Henk Overbeek identifies a “paradox entail[ing] no contradiction” (75) at the heart of neoliberalism as a globalizing endeavour: “The zeal with which the free movements of goods is pursued through the World Trade Organization (WTO), or the free movement of capital promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is contrasted by the hostility of most governments and international organizations toward the free movement of labor” (75). More so, “[t]he globalization project,” according to Overbeek, “is about the freedom of capital to maximize its accumulation potential, not about libertarian ideals” (75).

what each of these accounts above underscore is how neoliberalism advocates for, and depends upon, decidedly particularized forms of movement. Immobility, in other words, represents the constitutive underbelly of predominant neoliberal fetishizations of the mobile.

My chapter on *Prison Writings* explored the ecological threads binding together North American automobile culture and neoliberal settler-colonialism as entangled regimes of mobility. Writing from the regimented confines of prison, Peltier's various commentaries on the ecological dimensions of automobiles and dispossession explores the grounded ways that a politics of mobility is materially mediated both by and through select bodies and spaces. In light of Paul Gilroy claim that "[c]ommerce in motor vehicles still constitutes the overheated core of unchecked and unsustainable consumer capitalism" (81), I explored *Prison Writings*' various representations of automobiles and their narrative reframing as both a social and environmental critique of petrocapiatalism. A core concern of mine was Peltier's attention to immobile "junk cars" (*Prison* 69) and the surrounding opportunities for Indigenous community-building and resistance he presents these seemingly-abject objects offering. My thesis' exploration of *Prison Writings* as a project of environmental commentary ultimately does more than simply fill an oversight within much of the scholarship addressing Peltier; it also aims to open up a broader discussion of how the cast-off detritus of petrocapiatalist consumerism, such as "junk cars" (Peltier, *Prison* 69), can be repurposed as a means of both environmental and cultural intervention into broader regimes of mobility.

Focusing on the gendered politics of mobility, my chapter on *Rose* explored the play's various depictions of intra-tribal gender violence's constraining effects on Indigenous women. For the women of *Rose*, it is their embodied sense of immobility that becomes the site from which they challenge dominant logics of spatial confinement and gendered violence. By

indigenizing the space of the solarium into a “hilarium” (Highway, *Rose* 64), I argued the women simultaneously subvert and indigenize a broader politics of constrained mobility on Wasaychigan Hill Indian Reserve. One key interest of mine was situating *Rose*’s inclusions of both avocados and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as critiques of the violent processes – the “slow violence” (Nixon 2) – underlying transnational flows of both capital and Indigenous labour. It remains helpful to address *Rose* as deeply critical of Canada’s reserve system and the constitutive role it continues to play in Canada’s larger project of settler-colonial nation-building; however, my examination of the play’s simultaneous critiques of Canada’s commitments to international neoliberal policies, such as the trilateral North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), also aims to open *Rose* up to transnationally-minded readings of immobility.

Ultimately, my thesis has examined how these texts collectively incorporate and depict immobility to stage broader critiques of neoliberal notions of mobility and its destructive impact on Indigenous communities living under settler-colonialism, both at the local and global scales. Scenes of apparent immobility across both texts do not just speak to alternative ways of relating to neoliberalism’s temporal and spatial geographies; their attending reconceptualizations of spatial movements and belonging correspondingly work towards rebuking ongoing settler-colonial histories of confinement and regimented mobility.⁷¹ Rather than legitimize or downplay the destructiveness that immobilization can have on Indigenous individuals and communities, it is my hope that my thesis’ focus on the productive forms of resistance still possible under conditions of immobility can challenge defeatist readings that would foreclose any form of agency for afflicted Indigenous communities. Though *Prison Writings* and *Rose* both outline the

⁷¹ David Harvey describes, for example, how neoliberalism “entails transformations in the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of the labour market” (168).

damaging impacts of constrained mobility on Indigenous communities, they collectively offer up a range of scenes exploring immobility that ultimately work together to support broader assertions of Indigenous understandings of space, place, and mobility.

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