

## ARTICLES

### Performing Monument: Future Warnings

Shalon Webber-Heffernan

*there is  
no linear time  
only strategic  
remembering<sup>1</sup>*

This article explores two disparate, yet similar case studies that both disrupt linear versions of history through temporal and performative counter-monument interventions. It traces how two public art works re-write particular historical scripts by intervening into public memory and through complicating historiographical national narratives. First, I examine a contemporary socially engaged land art installation at the US/México border entitled *Repellent Fence* (2015), which drew critical attention to the Indigeneity upon which borders and trade policies have been built in the first place. I examine the performance of this large-scale, short-term, two-mile-long collaborative monument erected by the interdisciplinary art collective Postcommodity, based in the United States Southwest.<sup>2</sup> Second, I highlight an even more recent monument intervention by Toronto-based comedy-art duo Life of a Craphead<sup>3</sup> and their performance action entitled *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River* (2017) which sent a simulated colonial monument of King Edward VII and his bronze horse floating down the Don River. Through a comparative analysis of these two case studies, and a discussion and contextualization of historical monuments more broadly, I examine the ways in which public monuments perform hemispherically,<sup>4</sup> and how interventionist performances create counter-narratives to dominant colonial histories, creating space for decolonial imagining.

Both monuments in this essay interact and perform with material expressions of colonial power manifesting in distinct geographic locations (US/México border; Toronto/India). I illustrate how the monuments in each case perform as “scriptive things”<sup>5</sup> of/for the nation, while also scripting human actions and beliefs about and around national narratives. The site-specific performance interventions in this article disrupt historical narratives via public monuments (both metaphorically and figuratively) and open up alternative discourses around the meanings and memories that make up and come to define the nation-state over time. Both examples problematize monuments which continue to memorialize violence and domination as well as ongoing colonial and imperial power. I also consider the ways in which these counter-monument interventions perform by producing traces of memory, circulating and documenting themselves within cultural memory, creating new ways to think of the future.

#### Hauntings

I begin by looking at monuments themselves to consider what possibilities they hold for future memory and for performance. Typically, monuments are statues, buildings, or other structures erected to commemorate famous or notable people, and events or sites that are of historical importance or interest. The term “monument” originally (etymologically) denoted a structure placed by, or over a grave in memory of the dead<sup>6</sup> (\*note: a memory of the *dead*). Interestingly,

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“monument” also has etymological links to the verbs “remind,” “advise” and “warn.”<sup>7</sup> This term is also popularly used to refer to something that is large in scale and importance as in “monumental”—something of extraordinary size and power. United States Library of Congress historian John Y. Cole wrote in his book on the architecture of the Thomas Jefferson Building in Washington, “a monument allows us to see the past thus helping us visualize what is to come in the future” (Cole and Reed 1997, 16). This is an interesting premise since so many monuments *continue* to celebrate and memorialize colonial figures (of the past). In this way, we do see one fragmented *piece* of the past circulating within the present, but we certainly do not see the whole historiographical story being memorialized or commemorated. Rather, a linear (colonial) story is remembered and perpetuated.

As for Cole’s next point, how do monuments allow us to visualize what is to come in the future? There is an element of prophecy in his statement which leads me to believe that to see what is to come we must truly consider the agency and implications that these monuments have, and what they represent. Let’s return to the early etymological root of the word “monument”: “to advise or to warn.” Could monuments be performing a warning for the future? How do we come to recognize these historical spectres, these things that as Derrida claims, “elude us as spectators, most of all because we believe that looking is sufficient?” (1994, 11). What if we consider the ghostly reverberations of colonial monuments, following Tuck and Ree’s understanding of haunting as the “relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society’s assurances of innocence and reconciliation” (2013, 642)? Haunting, they argue is “both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies” (642). How can we come to recognize these hauntings through the re-working of memories through interventionist performances with monuments?

Derrida writes that a spectre “is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*” evoking a practice of “being-with ghosts.” This “coming back” involves a politics of memory, inheritance, and generations that call for speaking of certain others who are not present nor presently living, in the name of a justice that exceeds the law. In this way, to be just is to be responsible “beyond the living present in general—and beyond its simple negative reversal” (Derrida 1994, xix). Likewise, Avery Gordon remarks that “ghosts are never innocent: the unhallowed dead of the modern project drag in the pathos of their loss and the violence of the force that made them, their sheets and chains” (2008, 22). What, why, and for whom do monuments perform? What stories do they tell us about the past, and how can relating to them (heeding their warnings) challenge linear historical narratives and future historiographies? Performances and rituals also occur *around* the objects/things/monuments which can become representational of colonial desires and hunger for particular knowledge;<sup>8</sup> these customs perform history’s colonial residues through celebrations and ribbon cuttings, and they generate energy, respect and honorary status to past relics. The monument then becomes a kind of de facto archive from which history is projected and perceived, but history according to whom?

## Deep Time

Jill Lane’s understanding of deep time frames how historical formations are articulated through complex geometry and temporality across geographies. Deep time becomes a way to “make visible the competing tensions—moving on a north-south and east-west axis of imperial settlement, anticolonial struggle and neocolonial domination that inform the histories of nation, community and identity” (2010, 115) and a way to reduce the thick conditioning of linear, cartographic thinking.<sup>9</sup>

According to Lane, the Americas (or the hemispheric) “may be usefully engaged as a set of connected practices in deep time rather than as continental mass in uniform shape” (2010, 113). Reconnecting the Americas in this way reintegrates multiple national players into the neopolitical regimes of power and implicates Canada as well, since border crossing is the project of capital, labour, and imperialism.<sup>10</sup> Hemispheric thinking around counter-monuments challenges our perception of the geographies that underwrite both the historical and the present in the Americas; specifically, making visible the “competing tensions . . . of imperial settlement, anticolonial struggle and neocolonial domination that inform the histories of nation, community and identity in the Americas” (Lane 2010, 115). Ruth Phillips asserts that a monument is a “deposit of the historical possession of power” (2012, 340), but that its memory cannot maintain a stable form over time. Similar to my analysis of the two examples outlined below, Phillips is also interested in the processes of how meanings and narrations of history around monuments alter over time, examining the ways in which monumental works of art become focal points for Indigenous peoples’ contestations of settler narratives of history. Both counter-monument performances outlined below intervene in settler constructions of monument and memory by revising “specific Canadian historical discourses that have silenced Indigenous memory” (Phillips 2012, 340). I travel now into my first example, a socially engaged land art monument at the US/México border.

### **Postcommodity—Repellent Fence**

For three days in October 2015, the interdisciplinary arts collective Postcommodity launched their socially collaborative, temporary land art installation, *Repellent Fence* (*Valla Repelente* in Spanish). In collaboration with local communities on both sides of the border, institutional and government organizations, volunteers, and publics, the project culminated in the establishment of a fleeting, large-scale outdoor monument located near Douglas, Arizona and Agua Prieta, Sonora. The two-mile-long ephemeral monument perpendicularly crossed the US/ México border and highlighted the politics of the border’s division of Indigenous nations, illuminating the Indigeneity of many of the people who are crossing the border daily as well as those individuals whose lives have been informed by living and working in the borderland regions. The work now lives on through online photographs, interviews, articles, and conversations, and has been memorialized through Sam Wainwright Douglas’s documentary about the project, *Through the Repellent Fence*, which provides a glimpse into the arduous process behind creating and leading up to the three-day monument performance.<sup>11</sup> Border crossing projects have become more relevant and urgent than ever with the Trump Administration’s proposed wall, immigration policies, and legislation which forcibly separates migrant families caught attempting to cross the Southern border.<sup>12</sup>

*Repellent Fence* incorporated twenty-six giant scare-eye balloons (made of PVC), each ten feet in diameter, evenly spaced, filled with helium, hovering high in the sky, literally intercepting the contested Frontera—reaching one hundred feet above the desert floor, creating a two-mile-long visual link between Douglas, Arizona and Agua Prieta, Sonora. These scare-eye balloons are typically intended for the commercial purpose of repelling birds from fruit trees and gardens—usually inefficiently. The vibrant inflatable balloons were spherical and red, blue, yellow, black and white in color, emblazoned with an “open eye” in the centre. At Toronto’s Creative Time Summit<sup>13</sup> in 2017, members of Postcommodity discussed how the balloons represented Indigenous medicine colours and connoted an Indigenous iconography and consciousness that exists throughout the Americas—jokingly calling these balloons “consumer-product Indigenous ready-mades.” The *re*-appropriation of this orbic iconography visually demonstrated a more expansive historical interconnectedness of

Indigenous peoples throughout the hemisphere—from South America to Canada—that reached beneath and beyond the temporal limits of linear historical narratives of the hard, physical border which divides nation states. The scare-eye balloons visually and metaphorically indexed a deeper history at the particular border site and a “long view history of trade between Indigenous peoples” before European arrival (Chacon, Martínez, and Twist quoted in Irwin 2017, 6).

While Postcommodity’s counter-monument was temporary, the project itself was more long-lasting and processual (ten years in the making)—given the geopolitical site specificity and complexity of *Repellent Fence*, many individuals were involved in manifesting the project. It included the participation of “borderlands stakeholders, across diversity and interests, in generative conversations—as a means of broadcasting complex approximations about the complexity of movement (peoples, cultures, ideologies and capital) of U.S./México trans border systems” (Postmodernity 2017) and knowledges. *Repellent Fence* highlighted discourses of race and immigration beyond the logic of partisanship, illuminating how both Canada and US political-economic nation-states are settler colonial societies premised upon Indigenous genocide, imperialism, and immigrant labour. As a counter-monument, *Repellent Fence* performed shared, complex remembering across time—it became a harbinger of the memories and dreams of others, signalling the approach of a future. Bring to mind now the meditative, dreamlike quality of the large, luminous wavering scare eye balloons drifting high in the warm desert breeze, dancing in the wind, traversing the border: at once their own ghost-like apparitions and autonomous objects imbued with culturally specific meanings and memories. Viewers were asked to deeply listen to (and to *feel*) what teachings these transitory objects were offering. The tethered balloons exerted their independence while rebelling against utilitarian instrumentalization. They did not signify a border-as-usual politic but rather a transcendent and complex reimagining of national narratives, histories, and belongings.

This ephemeral monument temporarily resisted contemporary spells of genesis amnesia—the systematic forgetting of colonial and imperial histories—and attempted to complicate geopolitical discourses beyond the logics of divisive us-and-them politics. Through *Repellent Fence*, Postcommodity performed what they have termed an “Indigenous reimagined ceremony”<sup>14</sup> meant to temporarily reindigenize the borderlands and complicate discourses between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Irwin 2017, 6). The land in this ceremony<sup>15</sup> became a mediator and a means for re-building public memory and recovering knowledge in a trans-border context. Postcommodity’s performed border line functioned through an Indigenous lens<sup>16</sup> to probe hemispheric questions of the global market, as well as public perceptions and individual actions that “comprise the ever-expanding, multinational, multiracial and multiethnic colonizing force that is defining the 21<sup>st</sup> Century through ever increasing velocities and complex forms of violence” (Postcommodity 2017). The goal of this project, the group has stated, was to:

shift trans border discourses away from dehumanizing and polarizing constructs of nationalism and globalization, and to reposition discourses into a dialogue that is respectful of the Indigeneity upon which borders and trade policies have been fabricated using the borderlands as a metaphor to acknowledge and honor the Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere—both those who are experiencing diaspora, and those who are coping with the militarization of their ancestral homelands. (Postcommodity 2017)

The group asserts that *Repellent Fence* “recognizes all Indigenous peoples that are intermeshed in the theater of the contemporary immigration crisis of the Americas” (Postcommodity 2017). It bi-

directionally reached across the US/Mexico border—symbolically demonstrating the “interconnectedness of the Western Hemisphere by recognizing the land, indigenous peoples, history, relationships, movement and communication” (Postcommodity 2017). This metaphoric gesture demonstrated how hemispheric understandings of time and history might complicate linearly constructed knowledge assumptions about cultures, languages, and communities in the area and gave voice to the land and people who exist and live within the borderland regions.

*Repellent Fence* performed a metaphoric border crossing, symbolically stitching together the US and México, encouraging discourse that challenges the political and economic processes that are destabilizing local communities and geographies at the frontier. It asked: How have Indigenous people living on their ancestral territories become “illegal aliens” in their own homelands, unrecognized by the state? It challenged viewers to consider the monuments (and monumental remains)<sup>17</sup> of colonialism *beyond and beneath* official statues and erected memorials and how these colonial phantoms may inform the future. In her book *Mohawk Interruptus: A Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (2014), Audra Simpson writes about border crossing from the perspective of the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke (part of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacies) who live on either side of the Canada-US border. Simpson illuminates how Iroquois crossers perceive themselves as members of a sovereign nation while the state and settler law do not. Simpson makes clear that not all border crossers are “transgressors” because of their temporal and rights-based relationship to the nation-states of the United States and Canada (2014, 124). She clarifies that these relations are “temporal because the Haudenosaunee predate both political regimes” and, in fact, the “geopolitical boundary of the United States-Canada border actually transgresses *them*” (124). Similarly, *Repellent Fence* haunted and intercepted the ongoing colonial present by illuminating the systemic erasure of Indigenous peoples while simultaneously inscribing a different historical narrative upon the land, as well as memories and stories around the México/US border. In this new instance, the group created a temporary bridge of interconnectedness between nations within the Americas versus a “hard” line that divides.

The group claims that this temporary monument acted “as a suture that stitches the peoples of the Americas together” (Postcommodity 2017), a mission I connect to Lane’s understanding of hemispheric deep time as outlined above. *Repellent Fence* sharpened and brought into focus the “deep and textured relationships and practices” (Lane 2010, 113) that have sewn the Americas together, providing a temporal experience that exceeds the lineament of European monochronic temporality. It brought those who encountered the zigzagging monument into a dizzying understanding of the physical geographic boundary and the implications and complex histories that lay beneath the material structure. *Repellent Fence* temporarily and visually integrated deep time into a geopolitically contested, militarized area within the western hemisphere by acknowledging the Indigeneity of the people who are crossing the border to recover memory of the land at the border which divides “nations.” Relatedly, Tracy Davis has troubled ideas of linear time (past, present, future—or chrononormativity) by examining performative time’s ability to traverse one’s relation to time, space, and place—allowing us to understand the world in different ways.<sup>18</sup>

## Archiving Memory

Performance is often described as that which disappears—the ephemeral—only to occur or be experienced once.<sup>19</sup> In thinking through monument as performance, what does it mean for these objects to act in ways that extend beyond memorialization? What are their deeper meanings when

they act autonomously and how do individuals come to attach themselves relationally, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually to these monumental things? Because *Repellent Fence* was a fleeting and short-lived installation—ephemeral—it too disappeared. But it did not disappear for those who encountered it as it lives on in memory, in ideas, in writing, in conversations. It left traces and residual imprints for all who were involved with its dissolvable existence and provided a temporary, imaginative alternative to linear thinking and being, offering a hemispheric way to relate to space and time. *Repellent Fence* temporarily exceeded the limits of “fact” as well as colonial and imperial histories by offering a moment to dream alternative realities, demonstrating the deeper interconnectedness of the hemisphere. Postcommodity momentarily interrupted the particular methods by which the colonial world-system maintains power through the “structures of identity, ethnicity, race, experience, and knowledge production while directing attention to the ways in which border people live outside of the confines of the nation-state” (Irwin 2017, 6).

The veritable act of “disappearing” troubles the notion that performance can be only once occurring—that it is lost, un-archivable, vanished.<sup>20</sup> Performance is the antithesis of disappearance—it is the sensorial impressions, memories, traumas, and spirit that hold a more profound and holistic understanding of the past, present, and future. Sherene Razack has stated that we must “uncover the hierarchies that are protected and the violence that is hidden when we believe such spatial relations and subjects to be naturally occurring” (2000, 128). Referring to the case of Pamela George, an Indigenous woman who was beaten to death by two white university students in Canada, Razack states, “race, social position, and . . . gender were indeed made to disappear” (2000, 155). Systemic forces perform these invisible actions constantly through repeated patterns—we cannot necessarily *see* the law functioning, or always visualize structural violence while it occurs, but we know these structural repetitions inform daily life, leaving residual traces. What does it mean (as an individual or as a nation) to not be able to remember—or even know for that matter the legacies of imperialism and colonial violence? If the monument is “what remains,” what is the legacy of the disappeared? The affective remains of these unimaginably violent colonial disappearances—through an assaultive failure to care and even death—transmit a larger more troubling knowledge: that of systemic erasure.

Rebecca Schneider troubles the idea that performance is destined for disappearance. From the Greek definition of “archive,” we can understand that the word/tool is linked to the “achron” (head of state)—one who represents the law and upholds “system of its enunciability” (Schneider 2011, 97). It is precisely *forgetting* that the representative powers of the archive would have us *remember*: that colonialism is a historical issue. To continually remember/embody/know threatens archival and systemic forgetting. Embodied knowledge transmissions haunt the colonial present and refuse an overlooking of the disappearance of Indigenous histories. As an ephemeral monument, *Repellent Fence* performed an act of transfer (see Taylor 2007); physicalizing the spirits of past injustices while creating a space for sharing embodied knowledge situated within a living archive.<sup>21</sup>

In considering new materialist relationality to/with objects, Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy suggest that focusing on the agency of the object “trouble[s] traditional Western hierarchies that place humans at the top of a ‘great chain of being by insisting on the dynamic collaborations that occur daily between nonhuman and human entities’” (2014, 5). The agential force in these monuments is inherent in their ability to challenge and make porous dominant national scripts as “activated objects.” Likewise, Erin Hurley explains how thing theory and new materialism consider the relational ways matter and objects can and do (inter)act as active participants with a lively, “performative force,” rather than being “inert and determined” (2017, 265). This is significant for a monument’s status as an agential object enables its ability to “do” things—as actants with the

potential to affect human and nonhuman worlds (Schweitzer and Zerdy 2014, 2–4) and help formulate human subjectivity. It is important not to overlook that Indigenous communities and worldviews have considered the nonhierarchical relationality with nonhuman entities long before the creation of “new materialism” as a “field” of knowledge. I navigate north now to a different monument performance that took place in Toronto, Canada in 2017, which similarly renegotiated the ways in which stories are told within geospatially contested histories.

### **Life of a Craphead—King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River**

Through their performance action, Life of a Craphead literally (and metaphorically) floated a symbolic colonial relic down Toronto’s Don River while viewers watched a performed version of history drift away (and at times outright sink). The performance art pair created a life-sized replica of a real King Edward VII equestrian statue that is currently situated in Toronto’s Queen’s Park, pulled it upstream by kayak, and floated it back down. This anti-monument performance series, lovingly entitled *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River*, was performed during four Sundays between October 29 and November 19, 2017. It could be seen by walking along the Lower Don Trail in Toronto and was designed to float as if the statue had been toppled. This performance series emerged around the same time as the controversies and protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, around the removal of Confederate statues.



Life of a Craphead, *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River* (2017). Image: Chris Helgren.

In the wake of Canada’s supposed 150<sup>th</sup> birthday, Life of a Craphead’s performance series actively asked viewers to question Canada’s colonial past and further, to consider why Canada, and Toronto more specifically, is so intent on celebrating its intimate colonial/imperial ties. The performance

raises the rather strange question of why Toronto would want to continue to celebrate a discarded and outright rejected relic of *India's* colonial history—a monument already been removed in another national historical and colonial context. India no longer wanted to house this continuing symbol of British Empire; yet, Toronto accepted it, giving it new life as a public monument to be remounted and to live on again in a public park—it even still bears a plaque reading “The Emperor of India.” Life of a Craphead’s performance highlights Canada’s complicity in its own violent colonial histories, its desire to mask, and hemispheric and transoceanic imperial connections via South Asia. It brings attention to the often-violent translational global flow of material circulation and appropriation required to produce such works and transcontinental flows of uneven systems of exchange. The performance created a counter-historical narrative bringing to light another side of Canada as not simply a friendly, multicultural, refugee-accepting nation. It highlighted the uneasy settler Canadian relationship to the nation-state.

On their website, the duo explains that this project intended to explore the histories and decisions that continue to shape Toronto’s public space and public art, and they wanted to create the illusion that the statue had been toppled, “dumped” and discarded into the Don River. The Don River became a stage. The site-specific project addressed the “persistence of power as it manifests in public art and public monuments—symbols that are often preserved in perpetuity, even when the stories we want to celebrate change” (Life of a Craphead 2017). The actual King Edward VII statue was originally erected in Delhi, India, in 1922 to commemorate King Edward VII’s historic role as the Emperor of India. After independence, the British imperial symbol was cast off and set to be destroyed—a memory of colonial rule no longer desired by India’s people. Years later, however, a prominent Toronto resident and art collector brought the statue to Toronto in appreciation of its craftsmanship.<sup>22</sup> After being shipped across the Atlantic, it was placed in Queen’s Park in 1969 despite public outcry and criticism (Warkentin 2010, 77). The performance tackled the ongoing glorification of colonial genocide through public monuments, and does so at a moment when the relevance of such monuments is being called into question.<sup>23</sup> The group state that they use humour as a methodology<sup>24</sup> to examine how abuses of power and authority are used in culture and society. They started planning for this public piece before the protests and violent events of Charlottesville occurred around the removal of Confederate monuments<sup>25</sup> (also known as the “Unite the Right” rally). It became clear to the pair that the project would have new, unanticipated resonance given the contemporary political context surrounding historical monuments.

The artist-dyad’s employment of site specificity on/in the Don River is an important consideration here. The performance location was central in drawing attention to another time—1958—when Princess Margaret was visiting Toronto, nearing the end of an extensive Royal Tour of Canada. The city was determined to show off the beauty and wonder of Toronto; however, at the time, the Don River was “heavily polluted and laden with scum, its banks littered with all varieties of filth, and the whole sending up foul odours” (MacGregor 2017). With Princess Margaret’s fast approaching visit, the city panicked over the putrid smell and allegedly decided to mask the stench by dumping chlorine and gallons of perfume into the river (MacGregor 2017). I take note of this funny historical anecdote because of the city’s eager action to “cover,” and I consider the ways in which certain national monuments continue to “cover” or “mask” ongoing colonial truths in Canada. Again, we might ask: Whose histories are we celebrating with these colonial monuments, and whose histories are actively erased in these memorializing commemorations? Life of Craphead’s performance gesture keeps the colonial monument intact (the original statue can still be found mounted in Queen’s Park, Toronto) while unsettling its historiographical, imperial journey through the performance.

## Monumental Opposition

The *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue* performance also had its protestors—illuminating the blurry demarcation between performance art interventions and live protest. Canadian Conservative commentator and recent Toronto mayoral candidate Faith Goldy interviewed George Hutcheson, Director of Students for Western Civilisation (SWC)<sup>26</sup> in Toronto who, with a couple of other members of the group, were thought to have been present at one of the *Life of a Craphead* performances to “peacefully protest.”<sup>27</sup> Throughout the interview Goldy and Hutcheson reveal that they are both invested in protecting “European heritage” by exposing what they call “ethnocide” via the supposed “erasure of our culture whether it be prime ministers off our banknotes, our founding father of confederation off of our public schools, his statue being defaced and what have you” (Goldy 2017). They share the belief that there is a deliberate destruction of European culture happening in Canada vis-à-vis multiculturalism and through the removal of historical Canadian monuments. It is fascinating that these two are so intent on “exposing” this supposed destruction of European culture and people with zero acknowledgements of the histories of ongoing cultural destruction and genocide of Indigenous people of Canada, or the criminal and racist logic of dispossession imposed upon these communities by the Canadian nation-state. SWC’s website states that the group closely identifies its cause of white nationalism with the glorification of local colonial monuments, and their latest eerie poster campaign shows white men standing next to three Toronto statues juxtaposed with the slogans “Europa Forever” and “Europa Eternal,” among others.<sup>28</sup>



Armed police surround a Confederate monument during a protest to remove the “Silent Sam” statue at the University of North Carolina (2017). Image: Chuck Liddy.

In Canada, colonial monuments celebrating the first Canadian prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, abound, and artists “talking back” to statues is not new.<sup>29</sup> Macdonald is revered in the Canadian national imaginary, but not often remembered for his role in the systematic erasure of Indigenous peoples.<sup>30</sup> Métis writer and performance artist David Garneau<sup>31</sup> has performed a piece

entitled *Dear John, Louis David Riel* in Kingston, Ontario in which Garneau, performing as Riel, holds a silent conversation with the statue of John A. Macdonald. In an interview, Garneau claims, “there’s a recent tradition with a number of artists, Indigenous artists . . . who have been working with statues” (CBC News 2017). He continues, “Indigenous folks do believe that material objects actually have spirits, have some sense of communion. And it’s not just Indigenous people—non-Indigenous people erected this statue because they believe the same thing, that there’s something there. It’s not just a hunk of metal” (CBC News 2017). Garneau is reflecting the power of monument interventions in unsettling historical narratives. Through live artistic intervention, these monuments become concerned with the symbolic realm and with reshaping our individual and collective imaginaries, helping envisage futures beyond colonial commemoration.

This relates to Biljana Jancic’s statement that through “shifting the monument’s traditional signification of historical continuity and permanence, to a temporality favouring contemporary ideas around immediacy and ‘presentness,’ the artist allow[s] the inscriptions accrued on [the] monument to be in a constant state of renewal.”<sup>32</sup> Jancic (2010) states that “monumentalisation of social interventions interferes with the incessant mobility of contemporary life and places a question mark before the habitual stream of everyday consciousness.” Monument interventions provide a moment of rupture in otherwise structured, linear historical narratives and in this way are a “welcome derailment that can cause conflicting feelings of discomfort because they require a readjustment within an otherwise structured, familiar situation” (Jancic 2010).

### Heeding Future Warnings

Contemporary renewal of subjective historical meanings has occurred with both *Repellent Fence* and *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River*. Through these works, we learn that the meanings of monuments are not fixed: both interventions allow a glimpse of the past while engendering visions of new futures. Onlookers who engaged with either of these counter-monument performances were summoned into a temporal experience outside of the given historical narrative or the formulaic arrangement of linear time. Through both of these monument performances, viewers were gifted the opportunity to reflect on the past, asked to be curious about the present, and prompted to wonder about the future; they were asked to remember, and to listen to different stories—perhaps in a new way.

Naturally, each viewer’s affective reactions toward each “new” monument would differ significantly based on subject positionality (race, class, gender), ideology, historical beliefs, and political viewpoints; however, both *Repellent Fence* and *King Edward VII* accomplish a temporary disruption in linear stories. These in-the-moment, live interventions of/with performance monuments challenge the habitual stream of everyday historiographical consciousness and perform temporal fissures for spectators by challenging the chrononormative organization of serial time, reframing the cultural and historical meaning of the monument in question. The performances in this article both created alternative and decolonial imaginings for disrupting chronological norms and challenged certain bodies of knowledge and fixed temporalities of heteronormative, colonial, capitalist narratives (Ahmed 2013) through creating new and different temporal ontologies. For the various publics who engaged with these monument performances there was a kind of temporal and embodied (un)learning on offer that occurred in the moment of encounter; or, at the very least, there was an embodied experience. Considering relationality as a temporal practice means cultivating relations between everything around us (human and non) and ourselves. Considering temporary monuments

as having power to queer linear temporalities can reject enforced normative social “truths” and singular narratives of time and history.

In moving forward and perhaps heeding monumental warning, let us consider the “implications” of multiple histories that move across, beyond, and through time, which undergird the messy relationship between colonialism and its monuments. With Donald Trump’s recent announcement of the proposed political removal of two environmentally and culturally significant national land monuments in southeastern Utah—Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante<sup>33</sup>—as well as ongoing tensions and mounting controversies surrounding the removal of historical monuments throughout the Americas, it becomes clear that now more than ever, we need to continue to “talk back.” We need new methods for “doing” political transgression that consider the body as a location for epistemological discovery and as a site of knowledge, creating new metaphors and spaces for new political memory. Beyond talking back, we also need to learn to listen and struggle to truly hear and to heed the warnings that monuments offer by broadening understandings and complicating historiographical narratives. Perhaps we might begin to let monuments remind us of the past and advise us of new futures. Both site-specific public monument performances discussed in this article opened space and time for rethinking and reimagining cartographies of power and alternate, longer, deeper trajectories of history. Both works encouraged a hemispheric *re*-thinking of monuments and inspired ongoing reflections on similar colonial monuments across the Americas through the temporal unveiling of the unsettling colonial legacies that bind us.

## Notes

1. Excerpt of poem by Gean Moreno and Postcommodity in *Art in America* artist feature (2017).
2. Postcommodity currently consists of two members: Cristóbal Martínez, and Kade L. Twist. The creation of *Repellent Fence* included a third and previous member of the collective, Raven Chacon. Their website states that their art functions as a shared Indigenous lens and voice to engage with the multiple and complex forces of twenty-first century violence.
3. *Life of a Craphead* consists of collaborators Amy Lam and Jon McCurley, both currently based in Toronto, Ontario. Their work spans performance art, film, and curation.
4. Jill Lane proposes that hemispheric approaches to performance studies challenge scholars to re-conceptualize geographies that underwrite histories and geographies of performance in the Americas by delineating shared historical experiences (2010, 114).
5. Robin Bernstein considers a “scriptive thing” an object that “like a play-script, broadly structures a performance while allowing for agency and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable” (12).
6. Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “monument.”
7. Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “monument.”
8. I am thinking of Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson’s use of the word “xwelitem” as a term used to describe settlers who have colonized the traditional territory of the Stó:lō people. This word, as Robinson notes, has deeper etymological meanings when we consider that it also means “the hungry ones.” To situate a conversation about colonial monuments within the context of the violence of literal settler/colonial consumption of land sets up space for truly considering what it *means* to accept and take responsibility for the past (and present, ongoing colonialism).

9. I link this also to Leanne Simpson's explanation of "transmotion" in *Dancing on our Turtles Back* (2011), 87–104. Transmotion is described as "pre-colonial movement patterns, wherein 'movement, change and fluidity were a reality' for Nishnaabeg people." In her discussion of transmotion, Heather Davis-Fisch elaborates that transmotion addresses "not only physical movement across the land but also the cultural, political, and spiritual implications of these patterns" (2017, 11).
10. Additionally, controversies currently surround Canada's "Smart Border Action Program" which requires that refugee claimants request refugee protection in the first safe country they arrive in—but under Canadian law, the United States is the only country designated as a safe third country.
11. I have only experienced *Repellent Fence* through images, videos, texts, and in-person artist talks delivered by members of Postcommodity.
12. Since April 2018, the Trump administration has adopted a "zero tolerance" policy and decreed that border-crossers should be criminally prosecuted. Criminal defendants cannot have children with them in jail, so parents and children are separated. Trump made it a political issue in the November 6, 2018, midterm congressional election, threatened to cut off regional aid, close the US/México border, and deploy troops there if México failed to halt migrants entering the US.
13. The Creative Time Summit is a US-based arts organization that supports and promotes politically engaged art.
14. The group stated this during their talk at Creative Time Summit 2017.
15. In Agua Prieta during the launch of the balloons, participants shared stories and prayers around each balloon, Martínez said, resulting in an unexpectedly emotional and spiritual event (Irwin 2017).
16. Postcommodity are careful in distinguishing that their work applies an Indigenous *lens*, rather than a focus on Indigenous *people*.
17. Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider (2011) has suggested that remains (through disappearance), too, perform their materiality. Schneider resists the temporal logic of the once occurring.
18. In problematizing this mostly unconscious process of making sense of the self through a historical past, Tracy Davis applies Judith Butler's description of performativity as "the forcible reiteration of norms, which links us to the past yet also enables inauthenticity, masquerade, and parody" (Davis 2010, 144).
19. Peggy Phelan has written about performance as that which occurs always "at the vanishing point" or that which "cannot be saved, recorded, or documented" and is always and only in the present. See Phelan (1993), 146.
20. I am certainly not the first to take issue with the idea that a performance can only be once occurring. Other scholars such as Diana Taylor, José Esteban Muñoz, Joseph Roach, Rebecca Schneider, and Julie Nagam (to name a few) have troubled this theory as well.
21. Julie Nagam refers to the "living archive" in her discussion of Christi Belcourt's project *Walking with Our Sisters*. Nagam acknowledges "forms of knowledge that reside in individual bodies, in communities, and in the spaces that they daily inhabit" (2017, 119). She states, there are "ways of knowing that have a much longer history and are significantly bound to Indigenous geographies, concepts of space, and stories of place" (117).

22. This was an affluent Toronto citizen and former MP for Rosedale named Henry Jackman. Jackman acquired the equestrian statue from the Government of India for \$10,000 and also paid for it to be shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to Toronto. See Warkentin (2010), 76–78.
23. I am referring here to protests over monuments being removed in Charlottesville, Virginia, and in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia, where a statue of British military officer Edward Cornwallis was taken down. In Halifax, members of the alt-right group known as the “Proud Boys” interrupted a Mi’kmaw ceremony during the protests. On Facebook, the group describes itself as “a fraternal organization of Western Chauvinists who will no longer apologize for creating the modern world.” Most recently, protestors on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill forcibly pulled down a bronze statue of Confederate soldier “Silent Sam.” In New Orleans, Louisiana monuments of Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard have been removed as well as a monument honouring the White League, a Reconstruction-era organization of racial militants.
24. [https://video.vice.com/en\\_ca/video/this-comedy-art-duo-dumped-a-controversial-statue-in-a-river/](https://video.vice.com/en_ca/video/this-comedy-art-duo-dumped-a-controversial-statue-in-a-river/).
25. Charlottesville, Virginia, saw an outburst of protests in the summer of 2017 by white nationalists spurred by the removal of a statue memorializing Robert E. Lee from Emancipation Park. The protests were initially led by far-right leader and white supremacist Richard Spencer. The “Unite the Right” rally was attended by protesters including white supremacists, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, and Klansmen. Marchers chanted racist and anti-Semitic slogans and carried rifles, Confederate battle flags, and anti-Muslim banners. The rally was also attended by hundreds of counter-protesters. During the protest a vehicle drove into a crowd of counter-protesters marching through the downtown area before speeding away, resulting in one death and leaving more than a dozen others injured.
26. <https://www.facebook.com/StudentsForWesternCiv/>.
27. “White Supremacists Target Anti-Monument Performance.” *Canadian Art*, November 15, 2017.
28. <http://studentsforwesterncivilization.com>.
29. In 2015 in Kingston, Ontario (traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory) a performance series took place entitled *Talkin’ Back to Johnny Mac* in which Métis curator Erin Sutherland invited artists to respond to the Canadian celebration of European settler history and nationalism. Artists included Leah Decter, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Peter Morin, David Garneau, and Adrian Stimson.
30. Macdonald introduced the Indian Act in 1867, making Indigenous people wards of the Canadian state. He is also responsible for introducing residential schools.
31. Garneau also performed in *Talkin’ Back to Johnny Mac*.
32. Jancic is referring here to Sydney-based artist Astra Howard’s 2007 series *Action Research / Performance Project*.
33. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-modifying-bears-ears-national-monument/>.

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