

CHAPTER 2

Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility

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We come to know the world through our senses. Our early memories are full of colour, texture, hue, and smell: skinned knees against pavement, a breeze of sun-warmed grass, pitch-covered hands. Our childhood memories are suffused with the materiality of wonder and disappointment, as well as violence and shock. Because they exist at the distance of childhood, some of these memories are less memories than imprecise textures—the feelings and impressions of past moments. We carry the spectral presence of the past in our bodies, and it is only when we encounter the likeness of the past in the present that the *thing* we have been carrying exits the body. This exit takes place through a shiver, tears, tenseness in our shoulders, smiles to ourselves. Often, an incidental cue—a passing voice, sound, or smell—can unearth a memory that exits, yet is still tethered to, the body. Tethered to memories that refuse to leave, our bodies experience sensations so powerful that they can often bring us back to moments we would rather forget. Such is the case in the memory of Barbara Johnson, who attended St. Michael’s Residential School in Alert Bay, on the northernmost tip of Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

I remember entering through the front doors, and the sound of those doors closing still haunts me when I go to places that look like ... that building ... when that door closes ... the fear and the hurt.... Those buildings that look like it and sound like it ... there’s nothing you can do once you’re ... once you’re there ... once the doors shut ... and you can’t do nothing about it.¹ (Barbara Johnson, Port Hardy TRC public testimony, Feb. 27, 2012)

Johnson’s testimony of arriving at St. Michael’s is one that returns to her unbidden. The trauma of her experience reverberates, sensorially, in her present life.

Sensory memory reverberates across time not only through the bodies of residential school survivors, but also through generations of families, through communities. As a direct result of the residential schools, I did not grow up in the community my mother's family is originally from at Sqwá in Stó:lō territory. The TRC has adopted the term "intergenerational survivor" to describe those within the families of survivors who have been affected by intergenerational legacies of the schools. I do not use this term myself, though I understand the intergenerational impact of the residential schools keenly through palpable absences. Such absences are unexceptional for colleagues and friends in my generation whose indirect experience of the schools has often been waged through battles with shame, and struggles to develop healthy relationships with our families and communities. I have witnessed a pace of telling at the TRC—voices halting, seared still by pain; the time of telling punctuated by shame—that has reanimated in my own memory a host of whispered allusions, and hushed tones of refusal to speak of memories that remain too painful to be expressed. I have seen the material presence of these memories of violence, alcoholism, and abuse experienced by family members exit my mother's and grandmother's bodies through tensing voices and abrupt evasion. These memories were not given voice around family tables or at the TRC, but they claim full presence nonetheless. These absences sit alongside other vibrant memories of my childhood: tsel lhemét sqá:la, qas tsel kw'étslexw qéx híkw te sqwóqwiyeł sp'áq'em.²

Criticism of the TRC's testimony-giving process has emphasized its orientation toward the "wound culture" (Seltzer) of consuming traumatic narrative and the Western religious model of confession (cf. David Garneau, this volume). Despite this orientation of the process toward certain expectations of performing victimry for a settler public, it is exceedingly important to note the ways by which survivors remade the TRC process as their own. In doing so we also honour the work of survivors who felt it important to share their experiences primarily with and among our families and communities. Rather than focusing on their own experiences while in the schools, a significant number of survivors used their time at TRC's national, regional, and community events to address the impacts of the schools upon their families, while affirming the current strength and vibrancy of their families in the face of this history.³ Intergenerational survivors often chose to speak about the impact their parents' residential school experience had, and continues to have, upon their lives. Likewise, many survivors used the time allotted to them to apologize to their children

for not being able to give them the love and support that they themselves were never given, and for the forms of abuse they continued to perpetuate within their families. At the Atlantic TRC event in Halifax, Mi'kmaw Elder Iris Nicholas explained how a significant part of the learning that took place at residential school was through the behaviour modelled by teachers there:

The Indian residential school had a tremendous effect on me. The temperament and behaviour of the nun in charge was a learned behaviour for me, the same harsh controlling behaviour they use, I use on my children. They can verify this for you. The guilt and shame I feel for the way I treated them is overwhelming at times. To overcome this feeling I remember my dad's words: "You did the best you could. Your children are here. They are good kids." (TRC public testimony, Oct. 27, 2011)

I open with these examples in order to set the stage for this chapter's focus on the centrality of sensory memory expressed by survivors at TRC events, the sensory paradigm shift former students experienced upon entering the schools, and the ways in which such memory is transmitted intergenerationally.

My intent in this chapter is to examine three sites of sensory history and sense politics related to the history of the Indian residential schools and in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission activities. I am concerned here with three ways of understanding what I call "reconciliation's senses." First, I will consider those sensory memories expressed by residential school survivors both in written accounts and at TRC events. This partial history of residential school senses seeks to better understand the non-verbal, non-representational aspects of residential school education—an education that sought to "civilize" First Peoples through repetition and rote. This repetition was enacted through daily routine—a regimen of civilization—from the repetition of prayer to the regular sounding of bells to signal the change between students' daily activities. There was also the more violent repetition of straps across the hands, of cuffs against the ears—a repetition of abuse upon students' bodies where there was failure to learn. Where the repetition of physical abuse did not teach the lesson, there was sensory deprivation—spaces without food or light, where students were confined for long periods of punishment.⁴ Yet such sensory deprivation was merely the most extreme form of a new quotidian presence of absence, a systematic subtraction of those everyday moments of

singing, speaking, and touch between parents (and grandparents) and their children, and between siblings. Students were typically prohibited from interacting with their brothers and sisters who were attending the same school. Cut off from the touch of family, residential school survivors often recount an increasing sense of isolation. With the segregation between boys and girls, and between different ages, residential schools regulated contact and the haptic intimacy of touch between siblings, thus weakening bonds of kinship. The removal of daily acts of kinship and love were replaced with those of control, separation, and censorship.

Second, “reconciliation’s senses” refers to the role the senses play at TRC national events and community hearings. In this context, I am most interested in two kinds of sensory engagement. The first of these involves the many forms of sensory interaction between survivors, intergenerational survivors, and witnesses, including responses to survivor testimony, and in the interactions of support between survivors. In many cases, such sensory expressions can be said to take part in different forms of reclaiming “sensory agency.” To reclaim sensory agency, I argue, is to give material presence to memory previously too painful to speak of through modes of telling that both affirm cultural strength and assert an affective force upon those who are present. Witnesses, in turn, not only hear about residential school survivors’ experiences, but are subject to the affective impact of the voice, of language, and time of testimony. While such visceral impacts of telling and listening to certain expressions can offer a means for survivors and intergenerational survivors to heal from trauma, we must also be aware of their equal role in the *sublimation* of redress through forms of affective overidentification. Additionally, at numerous times expressions of settler Canadian obliviousness (of residential school history, about Indigenous people) take part in the ongoing production of sensory offence, as survivors experience the slaps and jabs of continuing ignorance, denial, and abdications of responsibility offered under the aegis of “reconciliation.”

While this form of oral/aural sensory experience takes place during testimony, a second kind of sensory engagement I address concerns how survivors and witnesses respond more broadly to cultural and artistic presentations that take place during TRC national events. I understand these responses to artistic events as taking part in an “aesthetics of reconciliation.” This understanding of aesthetics draws upon contemporary work in “social aesthetics” (Highmore, “Social Aes-

thetics”) and the “politics of aesthetics” (Panagia, Rancière) that seek to recuperate the term “aesthetics” from its fixation upon the sublime and beautiful aspects of the fine arts. Counter to the post-Kantian tradition of aesthetics, these perspectives are “primarily concerned with material experiences, with the way the sensual world greets the sensate body, and with the affective forces that are generated in such meetings” (Highmore, “Bitter After Taste” 121).

Third, “reconciliation’s senses” refers more generally to a collective or national “sense” of residential school history that settler Canadians have, and the ways in which such sense might be increased. I here conclude by examining the everyday lived understanding—a “common sense,” and lack thereof—that the settler Canadian public has of residential school histories and the impact these histories have upon First Peoples today. I will conclude this chapter with a proposal for ways by which the settler Canadian public might be compelled to exert a greater degree of what I call “intergenerational responsibility.” I argue here that different sensory interventions might take part in a direct address to this cross-section of the Canadian public, implicating them in the intergenerational legacy that residential schools have had upon Indigenous communities today.

Toward a Sensory History of Residential Schools

Extending from 1883 to 1996, the history of residential schools is nearly as old as Canada itself. Originally called “industrial schools,” the first three residential schools included Saskatchewan’s Qu’Appelle, High River, and Battleford schools, and were intended to provide students with training in a variety of trades. Nicholas Flood Davin, a key figure behind the establishment of the residential schools, noted that residential school education was essential to create citizens who would “welcome and facilitate, it would be hoped, the settlement of the country” (TRC, *They Came for the Children* [TCFIC] 10). These first schools in Saskatchewan, like the majority of those that came after, were also deliberately located a significant distance from reserves and Aboriginal communities. In an 1883 speech to the House of Commons, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald supported this decision by claiming that “[w]hen the school is on the reserve, the child lives with his parents who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode

of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read or write” (TCFTC 6). The decision to locate the residential schools at a distance from students’ home communities, then, was made with the intent not just to sever students from their cultural traditions viewed as “savage” by the church and state, but in effect to erode First Peoples’ connection to their worldviews and to sever the bond between students and their families. So successful was this aim that a significant number of survivors testify to returning from residential school to feel like a foreigner in their own community, unable to communicate with family in their languages, and feeling as though they did not belong in the very home they had waited so long to return to.

Survivor accounts often narrate a dual culture shock both upon their arrival at residential school and upon their return home. As Isabelle Knockwood recounts, upon entering the Shubenacadie residential school, “My worldview or paradigm shifted violently, suddenly, permanently” and the sensory shift that accompanied her return from Shubenacadie was equally as profound: “Everything now looks different than it did before Indian residential schooling. The air smells different, the food tastes different, the sounds are different. And my outlook, my perspective on the world has changed in *every* area of my life” (TRC public testimony, Oct. 27, 2011).

Other accounts of arrival at residential school are equally as extreme. Raphael Ironstand’s first impressions of the Assiniboia school in Winnipeg were that “it smelled strongly of disinfectant, and our voices echoed when we spoke. The whole place looked cold and sterile; even the walls were covered with pictures of stern looking people in suits and stiff collars” (TCFTC 22). Ironstand’s description reflects his sense of isolation through sight and sound, an environment constituted by the absence of familial closeness and intimacy. The child calls out to the parent for love, support, and guidance, only to receive back the echo of his or her own voice. Survivors also recount how, shortly after arrival, they were brusquely stripped of their clothes, roughly bathed (in the same water used by other students who had recently arrived), and dressed in uniforms. While the girls had their hair cut to short bobs, the boys had their heads shaved. As the TRC’s historical document *They Came for the Children* details, children were assigned numbers that corresponded to their clothes, their bed, and their locker. In some schools students were also expected to line up according to their numbers. As one survivor notes, “We were called by our number all the time. The nuns used to call ‘39, 3 where are you?’ or ‘25, come here right now!’” (22–23).

During the TRC Campbell River community hearings, August Joseph Johnson similarly described what might be called an institutional sense of place. “I remember walking into that building,” he said, “... it was ... it was like the smell of the hospital. That’s the first thing that came to me was that smell of the school it was so.... It smelled like a hospital to me. That’s what my mind recorded” (March 2, 2011). We might consider these “institutional” sensory perceptions more comparable to perceptions of prisons and of hospitals than to the schools we are familiar with today. The analogy to prisons and hospitals here also demonstrates a strong correlation with the “correctional”: in one sense with the treatment of sickness, the other with the elimination of immoral or criminal behaviour.

TRC National and Community Events

As well as serving as a place for survivors to give both public and private testimony, TRC national and community events provided an opportunity for survivors, intergenerational survivors, and non-Native attendees to present and be audience members for contemporary and traditional performance. As Beverly Diamond’s and Byron Dueck’s chapters in this collection attest to, the range of popular and traditional musical genres presented at these events was exceedingly diverse, from popular music to new choral compositions such as that presented at the Atlantic National Event in October 2013, where the Camerata Xara Young Women’s Choir presented a staged version of Inuk residential survivor Margaret Pokiak-Fenton’s children’s book *Fatty Legs* about her residential school experience.

While such artistic presentations made up a significant component of TRC events, survivor testimony was the central focus of these gatherings. This testimony was witnessed by other survivors, intergenerational survivors, members of the non-Native Canadian public, and an international audience watching the event via live online streaming. Many statements were also gathered in private and in sharing circles. All of these statements are now housed at the National Research Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba, and those without privacy stipulations are available online to Canadian and global publics. A significant transition occurs when the context of engagement shifts from survivors sharing their experiences within forums that prioritized community and family support, to a context where those experiences are engaged with as objects within an

archive. While it would be problematic to privilege live testimony as somehow more authentic, present, or ethically engaged than its mediated form, the work such testimonies will do in their globally accessible state is important to consider, given the change of format that allows the viewer to pause, control, and select testimony through the ease of fast-forward and rewind. While these features may allow for deep engagement with what is viewed and re-viewed, they also place the viewer in full control of how he or she engages with the testimony. Consistently, the words spoken by survivors did not “fit” within the conventional understanding of what would commonly be identified as testimony. Their words exceeded the boundaries and norms that would constrict them as victims, as speakers of trauma, and as concerned mostly with abuse. Witnessing in the rooms I joined survivors in meant being present to what they needed to share, whatever that happened to be, and in whatever ways they deemed necessary. The expectations and implicit demands for the spectacle of abuse were often disrupted through the varied focus, time, and tenor through which survivors chose to articulate their experience. The aesthetic and rhetorical choices made by those who spoke enacted forms of sensory agency, demanding to a certain extent that survivors’ experiences be engaged with upon their time. If witnessing partially locates its efficacy and ethics through the spectator’s submission to the form and time of the other’s appeal, then how does witnessing alter when the time of viewing and preference for viewing certain kinds of testimony are within the control of the viewer, rather than the survivor? To what extent is the act of witnessing itself elided through the engagement with an audio-visual form of testimony that the viewer can play, rewind, replay, skip, and stop as he or she desires from the comfort of home?

The agency asserted by survivors through the ways they narrated their experiences—shifting between topics, tempo, and timbres of telling—in many instances resisted the desire to consume traumatic narrative. Similarly, frequent shifts of emotional tenor during the events worked to challenge any singular identification of survivors as “victims”; community hearings and national events were sites of shifting affect. Survivors’ happiness at being reunited with former school friends intermingled with anger at the continued ignorance of non-Native attendees and evasions of responsibility from the Canadian government. Sadness when giving testimony and upon hearing testimony from other survivors sat alongside the joyous affirmation of survivance in both testimony and in artistic presentations that occurred during

the event. In the truest understanding of the term “affect” as that which is between solid states of emotion, it was common for survivors to express both sadness and hope at the same time. The strength and pride of survivors’ and intergenerational survivors’ voices not only demonstrated their resilience but impressed itself upon the listener. Such was the case for me when listening to Ernest Puglas’s testimony at the Campbell River hearings in British Columbia. Ernest’s song was preceded by his father’s testimony in which his father apologized to his sons for the hurt and emotional abuse he felt he had inflicted upon them, and for discouraging them from learning Ligwilda’xw songs:

My two boys here, Andrew and Ernie, they come from a big family on their mom’s side, a strong culture. And as they were growing up I was so mean to them, because they ... they loved to sing and dance ... and drum. And I didn’t like it because I was brought up ... [begins to cry] I was told not to do that anymore, and then I took it out on my kids. “Quit drumming, you don’t need to do that stuff!” I said. My kid here can witness that, and my other boy Andrew. I’m glad they didn’t listen to me, because they are very strong in their culture.... I just want to apologize for how mean I was to them. I didn’t approve of it because how I was treated in residential school. (Campbell River Community Event, March 2, 2011)

His voice faltering and his breathing shallow from crying, Ernest’s response to his father does not employ the language of forgiveness. Characterizing it as such would validate his father’s treatment of him as abusive. Instead, Ernest expresses his unconditional love for his father and thankfulness for being able to hear the wider context of his father’s and other survivors’ stories during the hearings. Put most simply, Ernest noted, “It helps me come to an understanding” (March 2, 2012). Ernest’s understanding of the circumstances that contributed to his father’s anger is indeed an understanding that many First Peoples are coming to for the first time through participating in the TRC events and hearings as witnesses themselves. Shame resulting from sustained verbal abuse of residential school staff has led to a history of ongoing silence, a self-inflicted censorship of sensory expression through the felt abjection of our histories and cultural practices. At the behest of his brother, who was unable to attend the TRC community hearing, and as a means by which to give sensory agency to the unconditional love for the community and family gathered at the hearing, Ernest Puglas concluded his response by singing a love song written by his

brother for their father. At the close of the Campbell River hearing, Commissioner Marie Wilson aptly described the layering of emotions present in Ernest Puglas's response and song. She affirmed Puglas's courage by thanking him for giving the community a gift through the image of his singing. "The image you gave us," Wilson said, "shows us ... what it is like, what it looks like and what it sounds like to be able to sing through your tears. Because that's what we were given by Ernie, how to sing through your tears and I found myself wondering, isn't that exactly what we're trying to do. As individuals, as a family and as a country. We must learn to find our voices ... and to learn to sing through our tears" (March 2, 2012).

Tears at the events and hearings had a special role. Survivors and witnesses were asked to save the tissues used to dry their tears, and then place these tissues into marked bags. These tissues were then gathered and burned in a sacred fire that was present at each event.



Figure 2.1: Bag for tears, TRC Atlantic National Event. November 2, 2011. Photo by Dylan Robinson.

At the end of each event, the ashes from the sacred fire were gathered and taken to the next TRC event, thus symbolically joining all survivors, intergenerational survivors, and witnesses.

The activity of gathering and burning these tears was also intended as a symbolic cleansing of sadness experienced during TRC events. In contrast, the lack of parallel symbolic forms for dealing with other emotions, including anger and shame, demonstrates a hierarchy for acceptable and “productive” ways to process grief. Moreover, unlike sadness, anger and shame have no material “product” such as tears that might be “gathered” and then transformed. Yet this is not to say that such emotions lack the same material presence. Indeed, as Iris Nicholas’s testimony at the TRC Atlantic National Event in Halifax reveals, the expression of these emotions is vocalized:

I saw a little girl with her hands tied above her head to the bed because she had bloody noses night and day.... I saw children shivering in their beds because of the thin blankets. I saw girls forced to eat their own vomit. I saw children gagging on their food because they didn’t like it and they’d swallow it in fear of the nun’s mighty hand. I saw and heard children sobbing in the night. I saw children hanging onto windows from the top floor to use the bathroom so they wouldn’t wet their beds. I saw children lined up to show the crotch of their underwear for viewing by the nun in charge. I saw children scrambling for a slice of soggy bread that was thrown at them. I saw children sent to bed hungry and thirsty. I saw children eating out of garbage cans. I saw a young girl bleeding heavily in her bed for at least a week before they sent her to a hospital. (TRC public testimony, Oct. 27, 2011)

As witnesses to Nicholas’s testimony, we are confronted with her anger and resilience directly through the quality of her voice. The routine violence she witnessed is lucidly conveyed through the brutal repetition of the phrase “I saw *children*.” As with the return of sensory brutality in her experience, the strain in Nicholas’s voice re-enacts the tension of witnessing the unrelenting return of sensory abuse at Shubenacadie, while the impact of those memories for Nicholas is given equal rhythmic force by her voice. As we listen to Nicholas, each repetition of “children” lacerates aurally like a strap across the skin; a spectral measure of Nicholas’s experience is given material presence. Sensory memory, a kind of memory that often resonates through the subject’s body upon remembering, frequently has a material immateriality that can

also have an impact on the listener with its blunt force, a comforting caress, or convulsive shivers. In testimony like that given by Nicholas, the vocal expression of sensory memory is given a measure of material force. Her voice makes contact with our bodies as listener-witnesses.

In providing a forum for survivors to voice their experience of the schools and the effects of this experience upon their lives as adults, the TRC gave survivors the opportunity to reclaim sensorial agency. That this platform allowed for survivors to speak of *any* experience either positive and negative (as well as the celebrations of cultural practices in the artistic components of the events) was significant considering the censorship of culture and language and forms of expression. In its openness toward all experience and all forms of telling, the TRC attempted to provide a counterbalance to the desensitization and silence that children experienced at residential schools.⁵

Yet in some instances, sensory memory is marked by the absence of sense in the present and the past. After recounting a memory of sexual abuse, and his subsequent experiences of blacking out after this abuse and indeed throughout his life, August Joseph Johnson, at the Campbell River community event, noted how his body “learned how to shut down pain. I learned how not to feel.... This happened to me a number of times where I started to feel nothing, I started to care for nothing” (March 1, 2012).

Abuse at the hands of residential school workers here resulted in a lack of sense—a numbness that survivors felt, and often continue to feel. This numbness also extends to a lack of sensory memory. At the Atlantic National Event, Mi’kmaw Elder Isabelle Knockwood noted, “I can tell you that in the first of five years of Indian residential schooling I do not remember talking, feeling, crying or even growing” (Oct. 27, 2011). Such responses of inaccessible memories or consciously repressed ones are also prevalent in literary biography. In Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, a semi-autobiographical novel based upon Highway’s and his brother’s residential school experiences, he describes the character Jeremiah’s response to sexual abuse:

Jeremiah opened his mouth and moved his tongue, but his throat went dry. No sound came except a ringing in his ears. Had this really happened before? Or had it not? But some chamber deep inside his mind permanently slammed shut. It had happened to *nobody*. He had not seen what he was seeing. (80)

In some cases strategies for sensory containment are used as a tactic of survival—a way to live with the constant ringing in one’s ears and the spectral impact upon one’s body. In the writings of Mi’kmaw survivor Rita Joe, she describes her choice not to use her voice to give expression to certain experiences of residential school, but to consciously shelve the material immaterial objects of memory:

It’s hard for me to describe what it was like when I was little. Words sometimes will not come to me. It’s as if they’re stuck inside. Some of the hurt was too great, so I just bundled it up and put the little bundles away. Those bundles are still on the shelf today and I cannot open some of them. If I open them, I will cry, I will get hurt. So that’s why I leave the bundles alone. It’s hard enough to survive knowing that they are there. (qtd. in Sam McKegney, *Magic Weapons*, 117–18)

Joe here describes her choice to put the bundles of hurting words away. She knows where they are but chooses not to open them. The choice here speaks to Joe’s larger determination not to let those memories dominate her life, and to her larger aim to acknowledge the moments of goodness and happiness in her residential school experience. As scholar of Indigenous literature Sam McKegney has compellingly argued in his book *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community After Residential Schools*, it is important not to read Joe’s choice here as a denial of the negative, but instead as a refusal to self-identify as a victim.

Expressions of Reconciliation

In addition to the survivor testimony, time at each event was given for what the TRC called “expressions of reconciliation.” These expressions were made by government and church officials, the RCMP, and other organizations that sought to take part in the process of making public the history and impact of the residential schools, and in helping survivors heal from this experience. At the Atlantic National Event David Barnard, president of the University of Manitoba, gave a statement of reconciliation acknowledging that

[o]ur institution failed to recognize or challenge the forced assimilation of Aboriginal peoples and the subsequent loss of their language, culture and traditions. That was a grave mistake.

It is our responsibility.... The University of Manitoba educated and mentored individuals who became clergy, teachers, social workers, civil servants and politicians. They carried out assimilation policies aimed at the Aboriginal peoples of Manitoba.⁶

Alongside these verbal expressions of reconciliation, material offerings associated with those expressions were often given. These symbolic objects were offered as part of the apology and were placed along with a copy of the written expression into the bentwood box, designed by the Chemainus Coast Salish carver Luke Marsten. Of particular interest to me in these expressions of reconciliation was the proprioceptive process involved in making such offerings. Here the TRC commissioners joined with those who offered their object expressions to place the material into the bentwood box. The often awkward physical negotiation that resulted was often unintentionally amusing. Negotiating how to do this seemingly simple action of placing an object in a box was rendered precarious by the small size of an object, its shape, and the navigation toward and positioning around the box. To manoeuvre around a podium with eight people each trying to maintain hold of a small carving and then together lower the object into a box on the floor is an exceptional challenge of coordination. At the risk of making a symbolic mountain out of a molehill, these proprioceptive and kinesthetic negotiations provided an apt image of the challenges faced in negotiating reconciliation itself. These symbolic material and kinetic expressions of reconciliation are just some of many symbolic expressions that occurred at TRC events described by the contributors to this volume. Another primary site of sensory engagement was through artistic presentations organized by the TRC.

The Art(s) of Truth and Reconciliation

Cultural and artistic presentations constituted a significant aspect of the TRC's activities, both at the national events and in the gathering of survivor testimony more generally. National events involved a series of public performances by prominent Indigenous and non-Indigenous singers and musicians.

While many of the artistic contributions to TRC events offered important opportunities for engagement with residential school history, healing, and demonstrations of Indigenous resurgence, it is important not to position all artistic practice at the TRC as simply the enrichment of reconciliation. While pleasurable affective experience



Figure 2.2: The Gettin' Higher Choir. Photo by Lisa Kurytnik, 2012.

of art and performance can lead to deeper desire to engage with the historical and current social and political realities of Aboriginal people, the aestheticization of reconciliation enacted through the spectacle of intercultural performance can also engender a sanitization of history. Such a critique might indeed be given in response to the Gettin' Higher Choir's performance of Inuk singer Susan Aglukark's song "O Siem" at the TRC's 2012 regional event in Victoria, British Columbia. After a full day of listening to testimony from survivors and intergenerational survivors, I sat listening in disbelief as fifty singers repeated the chorus, "O Siem, we are all family. O Siem, we're all the same," at me. As I watched the faces of the choir their belief in the feeling of alliance was palpable. Their song was offered with the intention to lift people's spirits after a day of intense testimony from residential school survivors and intergenerational survivors, and it may have done this for some. But to sing this song after three days where a history of inhumanity was overwhelmingly present felt both inappropriate and offensive. The irony of this song is, of course, that the history of abuse and cultural oppression in residential schools is anything but "the same" as the education received by settler Canadians, nor are the present realities of Aboriginal communities and the settler Canadian public "the same." Non-Native Canadians were not

taken from their parents and forced into schools where they were beaten when they spoke English. For these reasons, Canadians do not battle with feelings of shame at being Canadian. And so, while the song may have allowed some to feel uplifted, more importantly, its message of universality unwittingly afforded non-Native participants a sense of what Berthold Brecht would call “crude empathy”: “a feeling for another based on the assimilation of the other’s experience to the self” (qtd. in Bennett, *Empathic Vision* 10). In order to transform crude empathy’s “vicarious suffering” into something that goes beyond mere witnessing as a form of “wound culture’s”⁷ image consumption, it is essential to question how music and other artistic practices might instead impel audiences to action of some kind, and disrupt the value of reconciliation as friendship formation.⁸

Other artistic practices are more adept at moving beyond the simplistic narration of reconciliation in the above example. As the range of contributions to this collection demonstrates, there is a growing body of work by Indigenous artists that represents residential school histories and enacts nation- and community-specific forms of resurgence. Yet to what extent does the audience’s engagement with such work—occurring primarily within the space of the concert hall, the cinema, and the gallery—act as a situational sanitization of this work’s social and political efficacy? The aesthetics, spatialization, and protocols of such legitimate spaces of artistic display and performance impose, through the unspoken normative codes of perception they enforce, a settler logic that can subjugate Indigenous sensory agency. Moreover, by situating artistic engagements with residential school history at a safe distance from survivors and Indigenous communities, do audiences avoid the face-to-face encounter and its potential to resist a reduction to sameness and refuse a form of reconciliation based in consensus? Although engaging with artistic work in these spaces can be an emotional experience, such spaces infrequently require settler spectators to take part in the difficult witnessing and interaction *with* survivors.

Senses-in-Common: From Reconciliation to Redress

To ask what “sense of reconciliation” the settler Canadian public has of residential school history (or lack thereof) and of the TRC’s process and mandate is to question how intergenerational responsibility is felt by the settler Canadian public.

A central image used frequently in the TRC's media shows a mother carrying her child on her back. The child peeks out from behind her mother and both look directly, intently, at the viewer. Below mother and child two short sentences address us: "For the child taken. For the parent left behind." In an effort to foster a greater level of public investment in learning about the history of residential schools in Canada, the TRC has used this image extensively in its media. The image identifies the TRC's focus of supporting survivors as they share their experiences of residential schools. The emphasis here is on the TRC as process "for" First Peoples—to offer survivors the opportunity to address experiences of being taken and feelings of isolation (in residential schools, but often also upon return to a community that they felt alienated from).

And yet this media image is also "for" the non-Native public. The TRC's media image here creates a tension, an ambivalence between the closeness and intimacy of parent and child depicted visually in the photograph, and the distance evoked textually by the short phrases. The sensory tension engendered between word and image seeks what Dominic LaCapra calls "empathic unsettlement," which "places in jeopardy harmonizing of spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit (for example, unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to endure any adversity with dignity and nobility)" (41–42). Most importantly, it asks members of the public to imagine themselves as parents whose children have been taken, or imagine the feeling of being "left behind" as a child. In sum, the image seeks to effect the public's emotional investment with the subjects of the image, and consequently, with their history. Despite the power of this image to elicit empathy for those who attended residential schools, the low rate of settler attendance at many TRC events points toward the work still to be done in engendering public education of Indigenous histories.



Figure 2.3: Truth and Reconciliation Commission media image.

Speaking to this lack of public engagement during a TRC community hearing in Nova Scotia, Isabelle Knockwood has noted the inequity of what is asked of survivors and what has been asked of the settler Canadian public. As Knockwood sees it, although those who give expressions of reconciliation often offer apology for their institutions' roles in the residential schools, such statements do not necessarily evidence the complex emotions of the past in a similar way to those survivors retelling their experiences. In testimony given at a community event, Knockwood confronted the difference in emotional labour of witnesses and survivors:

The church members haven't told us about *their* experiences. The pedophiles, the clergy of pedophiles haven't told us *their* experiences. The abusers, the ones that punished us so severely, they didn't tell us how *they* feel when they were punishing us. The government is not telling us how *they* felt when they put us on Indian reservations and how happy they were to build Indian residential schools in order to kill the Indian in the child. When are they going to tell us how that felt like? (video presentation, Oct. 27, 2011)

Despite the fact that TRC events took place over a five-year span from June 2010 to June 2015, a significant proportion of the settler Canadian public chose not to attend. During this same time, I repeatedly encountered a near-complete lack of knowledge in conversations with students and in daily conversations with non-Indigenous members of the Canadian public.⁹ Through the maintenance of such ignorance, settler Canadians continue to abrogate their responsibility to understand this history as their own. As the fallacious argument would have it, since settler Canadians are not themselves the perpetrators of past injustices of the state, why should they make any effort to engage in learning about this history, or to support social change in communities affected by intergenerational trauma? A large portion of the settler Canadian public remains aggressively indifferent toward acknowledging the history of colonization upon which their contemporary privilege rests. In part, the civic distance the non-Native public feels toward the TRC's processes has been mirrored in the literal distance at which these events take place. With the exception of the Winnipeg event, the TRC proceedings have taken place in convention centres (Halifax, Victoria, Montreal), on exhibition grounds (Saskatoon), and in a former residential school (Inuvik), at a safe distance from those public

spaces where the TRC's activities might be encountered by the non-Aboriginal public, and where they may take part as witnesses and even participants. One part of this may be rationalized through the need to create spaces where survivors and their families feel empowered and safe to share their experience. Another part may be rationalized by the necessary logistics of planning, for instance that winter events are not suited to be held outdoors.

In Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak's *Who Sings the Nation State?* Butler relates a story of illegal immigrants amassing on the street in Los Angeles to sing the U.S. national anthem in Spanish. Singing "Nuestro Himno" ("Our Anthem") on the street, Butler emphasizes, "gives voice and visibility to those populations that are regularly disavowed as part of the nation, and in this way, the singing exposes the modes of disavowal through which the nation constitutes itself. In other words, the singing exposes and opposes those modes of exclusion through which the nation imagines and enforces its own unity." Butler suggests that political theorists have yet to develop the language by which to theorize this particular act of singing. To do so, "would also involve rethinking certain ideas of sensate democracy, of aesthetic articulation within the political sphere, and the relationship between song and what is called the 'public'" (62–63). Drawing on Butler's example, we might similarly consider what Indigenous sensate sovereignty would look like when enacted in the public sphere. Although there are a multitude of ways in which this might take place, I'd like here to focus upon two ways in particular by which to increase the sense-in-common of Indigenous histories among the settler Canadian public.

First, I suggest the necessity of increased public expression of sovereignty in artistic activism. As in Butler's example, the sensory qualities of the arts here hold immense potential to disrupt the normative felt experience of national belonging and spatial sovereignty. The group Ogimaa Mikana, for example, visually reinscribes sovereignty upon the landscape in work that renames street signs and historical plaques in Toronto with Indigenous histories of place. This work, taking place outside of sanctioned protocols of the state, redresses the elision of Indigenous histories in public space while directly addressing the public through signage that asks: "Welcome to our community. How do you recognize it?" Through this address, the readers are asked not *whether* they recognize Anishinaabe sovereignty and history of the location, but rather *how* they do. Similarly, in *Gego gbazaagwenmishiken pii wii Anishinaabemyin*, Ogimaa Mikana speaks exclusively to

those who can read Anishinaabemowin through the untranslated sign that filled the space of a billboard in Barrie, Ontario, in August 2014 with black text on a white background. The translation refused by the sign is “*Don’t be shy to speak Anishinaabemowin when it’s time.*” In speaking exclusively to Anishinaabemowin speakers, Ogimaa Mikana inhabits a space of sovereign public speech, supporting the community of language speakers and learners, many of whom have inherited shame from not speaking their language as part of the intergenerational effects of the linguistic genocide that the residential schools carried out.

Second, we might reconceive the language by which we address the non-Native Canadian public. As in the case of the sonic materiality of testimony discussed earlier, and in the case of the visual materiality of Ogimaa Mikana’s works, the words we use when writing and speaking of redress have great sensory import, and to acknowledge this means to harness the sensory force of a different kind of language we use when speaking of reconciliation. A first step, then, as many critics of the TRC—like David Garneau in this volume—have noted, is to move beyond the term “reconciliation” itself, and the sense of closure that the term implies. There is a great distance we must cover in addressing the histories of colonial injustice in our communities, and the contemporary impacts of such histories. This distance cannot be covered by a single process called “Truth and Reconciliation,” or by a national project that seeks only to enact forms of “reconciliation.”

Commissioner Murray Sinclair has consistently stated when speaking to non-Indigenous audiences,

At the same time that aboriginal children were being taken from their families and locked up in those institutions—sometimes for years at a time—and being told that their cultures were irrelevant, that their stories and their languages were not worthy of being kept and maintained and shared with all others, at the same time that it was being done to those young aboriginal students in those schools, the very same messaging was being given to all of you [the Canadian public], and to all of your ancestors, to your grandmothers, to your grandfathers, to all of the leaders of this country who have come to take over authority. (“Shared Perspectives”)

To redress the current “common sense” of Canadian history will necessitate a stronger language of sensory implication and redress that, like the work of Ogimaa Mikana, renames the lands settler Cana-

dians occupy and refuses inherited histories of ignorance. The TRC has employed the term “intergenerational survivor” to describe those who experience the intergenerational impacts of residential schools within their families and communities today. To recognize the mis-education of the settler Canadian public, however, requires a different set of terms, terms that effect different forms of felt critical reflection of their implication for the settler subject. In the previous chapter, David Garneau proposes that we begin to think of conciliation, rather than reconciliation. However, in order to begin to discuss what conciliation might entail requires a much larger reconsideration of what words settler Canadians might use to acknowledge their *intergenerational responsibility*. It requires words that speak of the public’s national and civic responsibility to respond in the present to a history that few have direct experience with. Most importantly, I suggest settler Canadians we might consider using a phrase that names the continued ignorance of Indigenous histories and the lack of civic responsibility for what it is: *intergenerational perpetration*. As Israeli scholar Ariella Azoulay has written in the context of Israel, “The time has come for the second generation of perpetrators—descendants of those who expelled Palestinians from their homeland—to claim *our* right, *our* fundamental and inalienable human right: *the right not to be perpetrators*” (emphasis in original).¹⁰ Like the negative affective impact of the term “post-colonial” (see introduction) and the feel-good tone of “reconciliation,” the sharpness of “intergenerational perpetration” might give the reader or other listener pause for thought. Perpetration is characterized by immediate activity by one who commits a crime; it conveys a sense of violence. Google suggests completing “perpetrator of” with the actions “abuse,” “violence,” and “bullying.” To reconceive settler Canadians as perpetrators of intergenerational irresponsibility is to shift the framework of perpetration from action to inaction. Such a shift is less exceptional when we consider the continuance of settler inactivity to redress the long history and multiple forms of “slow violence” constituted by the Canadian government’s failure to address issues of murdered and missing Aboriginal women and girls in Canada, lack of drinking water and housing infrastructure in reserve communities, and lack of support for Aboriginal education, to name just a few issues among many. Yet, as the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* notes, concerted actions must be taken in order to continue the necessarily long-term process of redress that is not just the responsibility of the Canadian government. The TRC’s calls to action call upon a large number of parties, including

federal and provincial governments, post-secondary institutions, the Federation of Law Societies of Canada, law schools in Canada, medical and nursing schools in Canada, all religious denominations and faith groups, all chief coroners and provincial vital statistics agencies, Library and Archives Canada, Canada Council for the Arts, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, and the corporate sector in Canada, to be responsible for a number of changes that, taken together, may begin to redress the legacy of residential schools. While this multi-organizational approach reflects the fact that redress is not simply contingent upon the federal and provincial governments, it also deflects the responsibilities of individuals. In the absence of individual calls for action, the document elides the potential and necessity for redress as an individual act.

As I have argued, forms of individual intergenerational responsibility can be productively made known and felt by settler Canadians through sensory calls to action. Such calls to individuals expressed through everyday public encounters with Ogimaa Mikana's work ask the public to recognize Indigenous histories of place, while changing the language we use in the work of redress asks individuals to recognize and change their perpetration of irresponsibility constituted by ignorance. To visually and aurally recognize these facts in public—by naming them in our writing and saying them aloud—extends their sensory and affective resonance. Like the time and terms survivors and intergenerational survivors demand of the witness of testimony, so too do we need to make new aesthetic and sensory choices that challenge the ease of alliance and friendship formation that exists at the heart of reconciliation.

Notes

- 1 All testimony referred to in the paper can be viewed at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation online archive, University of Manitoba.
- 2 These memories remain purposely untranslated from Halq'emeylem.
- 3 This includes the closing Ottawa event in 2015, in addition to national events in Winnipeg, Manitoba (2010); Inuvik, Northwest Territories (2011); Halifax, Nova Scotia (2011); Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (2012); Montreal, Quebec (2013); Vancouver, B.C. (2013); and Edmonton, Alberta (2014), as well as a regional event in Victoria, B.C. (2012) and numerous community events across the country.
- 4 It is important to note that although the vast majority of survivor accounts include sensory memories oriented toward negative experiences,

this is not the case with all testimony. Some residential school students have positive sensory memories, including playing in brass bands, taking part in plays, and playing hockey, to name only a few examples.

- 5 In fact, testimony ranged widely from challenges to the proposed Enbridge pipeline, to statements on the funding cuts and appeals for the continuance of social services for Aboriginal at-risk youth. See Robinson, "Reconciliation Relations."
- 6 See the full statement at <http://umanitoba.ca/about/media/StatementOfApology.pdf>.
- 7 Cf. Seltzer.
- 8 For a more detailed examination of this performance, see Robinson, "Feeling Reconciliation, Remaining Settled."
- 9 Such was the case particularly as I moved in 2015 to Kingston, Ontario, and encountered both students and members of the general public who were oblivious to the details of the TRC and residential school history.
- 10 My thanks to Jessica Jacobsen-Konefall for drawing this statement to my attention.