

MUNDANE INTIMACIES AND EVERYDAY VIOLENCE
IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN COMICS

by

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that contemporary Canadian comics construct a sustained and critical gaze of the mundane and the everyday. Canadian artists are using the form of comics to reveal the structures of oppression and violence that are so familiar as to become mundane. My introduction lays out the theoretical framework of the everyday and argues that it is well-suited to the study of Canadian comics. The first chapter examines Kate Beaton's webcomics, which reveal the environmental, cultural, and economic damage of Canada's petroculture. I use Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence to argue that Beaton's mundane gaze brings nuance to her personal experiences with Canada's Tar Sands. In my second chapter, I read Emily Carroll's horror comics, Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki's graphic novel *Skim*, and the graphic novel *Will I See?* as examples of a new gothic girlhood graphic. Read together, these texts reveal that there is nothing mundane about girlhood. Everyday, girls are vulnerable to the intersecting violences of racism, colonialism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy. My third chapter takes up comics' potential as a spatial form through two comics about access to space, Ting Chak's graphic essay *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention* and Eric Kostiuk Williams's graphic novel *Condo Heartbreak Disco*. Both comics use the spatial dynamics of comics to trace oppression and resistance across what David Harvey conceptualizes as broad spatiotemporal scales. My fourth chapter argues that artist-activist Gord Hill produces comics that are pedagogical in content *and* form. I build on Dale Jacobson's concept of multimodal literacy to argue for Hill's attention to the imagery, rhetoric, and style of fascism and colonialism. Hill's comics argue that one must be able to read these oppressive movements if one is to undo them. I conclude by recognizing that the everyday is far from boring, and that mundanity can serve as a cover for persistent violence and abuse of power. Comics serve as a powerful form, as they work to reveal these structures of oppression, invite solidarity, and imagine paths of resistance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

At the first comics studies conference I attended, I introduced myself as a scholar of Canadian comics. Again and again, I received the same reaction, “I don’t think I know any Canadian comics.” But when I would list the cartoonists I was particularly interested in—Kate Beaton, Emily Carroll, Jillian Tamaki, Julie Doucet, and Kate Leth, among others—the other person would nod their head knowingly. For the most part, they recognized these artists by name, and had read, taught, or followed their work. And yet, they had no idea these artists had roots in Canada, or simply did not think of them as “Canadian” artists.

I started to reflect on the place of Canada and of Canadian-ness in the contemporary comics scene. Canada boasts some world-renowned comics artists. In addition to those listed above, there are many other notable Canadian cartoonists, including Chester Brown, Sarah Leavitt, Lynn Johnston, Jeff Lemire, Ryan North, Bryan Lee O’Malley, Seth, and Fiona Staples. Furthermore, one of the most successful and respected comics publishers in the world, Drawn & Quarterly, is based in Montréal. As Rifkind and Warley note in their introduction to *Canadian Graphic*, there is a “constellation of cartoonists, publishers, retailers, and critics suggests that Canadian alternative comics has arrived as a coherent field of cultural production” (7). In this dissertation, I go further, and suggest there is something *particular*—or perhaps there are a particular set of qualities—that, while heterogeneous, mark these comics as specifically Canadian.

And yet, the responses I received from other predominantly American comics scholars suggest that the work these artists are producing is not clearly, recognizably

Canadian.¹ So why did these comics *feel* Canadian to me, what is similar about their concerns or approaches, and why does their Canadian-ness matter to me? Was this just the belligerent ownership that many Canadians exhibit in the face of American imperialism, as they persistently insist on the national identity of famous Canadians? David Rakoff describes this phenomenon of claiming in a piece for *This American Life*, calling Canadians intensive knowledge of famous Canadians “chemical” (Rakoff n.p.). As a settler scholar, it is my responsibility to think critically about the Canadian state and Canadian national narratives which enable my settlement. Is this consciousness of Canada shaping how I read and categorize comics—that is, am I trained to read closely for Canadian settings, history, politics, and identity in comics? Or is there something innately Canadian about the artist I seek out, the artists that many (non-Canadian) scholars do not recognize as Canadian? Part of my work in this dissertation is to suggest that it is all of these things, and more. A major piece in the neglect of Canadian comics, or the lack of recognition of Canadian comics and artists, is the very muddiness of ‘Canadian’ as a category of identification and belonging. As Dominick Grace and Eric Hoffman observe in their collection *The Canadian Alternative: Cartoonists, Comics, and Graphic Novels from the North*, “The Canadianness of Canadian cartoonists... is often hard to discern” (xiv). After all, mainstream cartoonists such as *Spiderman* artist Todd McFarlane and

¹ Canadians have long suffered from an anxiety of influence in relation to the United States, our more powerful and established neighbour. The force of American culture has been seen as an obstacle to Canadian cultural growth. The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences found that “the literature of the United States... has acquired an increasing international reputation” which, they worried, “may be almost overpowering” for Canada’s own nascent national literature (Canada 226). The Commission reported that there were, in 1951, literary groups which “strive to defend Canadian literature against the deluge of less worthy American publications,” which “threaten our national values, corrupt our literary taste and endanger the livelihood of our writers” (Canada 226). As I note later in this introduction, Canada’s comics industry has evidently been overpowered by the mainstream comics publishers from the United States, which contributes to the lack of recognition of Canadian comics and the small field of Canadian comics studies.

Saga artist Fiona Staples are Canadian by birth, but work in the United States, for American publications, often on American-set stories. Do I only count comics as Canadian if both the creator's nationality and the story's setting are rooted in Canada? Or can I begin to identify certain tones, genres, or themes that are shared among many comics, and so become a hallmark of their Canadianness? Rifkind and Warley write that while they "do not wish to suggest that there is anything recognizably Canadian about graphic life narratives produced in Canada by Canadians—there is not distinctly Canadian style or theme, just as there is no singular Canadian identity—[they] do believe that it is important to recognize in our analyses elements of the texts that speak to Canadian differences" (8). In other words, Rifkind and Warley do not argue for a clear-cut Canadianness in comics created in Canada, but they do see the value in a more sustained study of comics as Canadian, reflecting, in many ways, Canadian history, politics, and values. My dissertation identifies and unpacks one of these elements of difference; I argue that the attention to the mundane and the quotidian is a hallmark of a large body of Canadian comics.

As I began to question what makes national identity in contemporary Canadian comics, a more facetious line of questioning came to mind: Canada, and in particular Canadian literature, has a reputation for being dull, boring, and mundane.² And, in some senses, these comics seem to bear this out, in certain curious and, I will argue, significant

² There have been several media discussions and controversies about the supposedly boring nature of Canadian Literature. In 2014, Russian-American author and Giller Prize juror Gary Shteyngart described his boredom with Canadian literature, which he suggested takes few risks; he later issued an apology ("The Huffington Post"). Writing about the lack of education around Canadian Literature, Michael LaPointe claims that "CanLit...makes us really boring," comparing it to the adventurous literature of Britain and the United States. Téa Mutonji friends' reasons for avoiding Canadian literature, which they consider "highbrow and boring." The CBC coverage of Nick Mount's literary history *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*, argue the book is a refutation to Canadian literature's reputation as boring (CBC Books; CBC Radio).

ways. I understand the mundane to signify narratives which are lacking in excitement or action, that which feels ordinary or banal. I relate this to the concept of the everyday or the quotidian: that which occur on a daily basis or regularly enough to feel unremarkable or to go unnoticed. Many comics I think of as Canadian have slow narratives and are low on action, such as Seth's meditative *It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken* (1996), or Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki's self-reflective *Skim* (2008). These comics are starkly realist in comparison to fantastical and supernatural mainstream comics from the United States. While Canada has not had a strong superhero comics scene since World War II, in the United States Marvel and DC—often referred to as the Big Two for their dominance of the comic book publishing industry—continue to churn out superhero comics. Smaller publishers (Image, Boom! Studios) are earning a place in the market as well, putting out comics packed with action, adventure, and fantasy (see series like *Lumberjanes* and *The Walking Dead*). Canada's best-known comics are rarely generically superheroic. In fact, I argue that Canadian cartoonists excel at realist character studies and memoirs. These include Seth's meditative graphic novels, Guy Delisle's travelogues, Julie Doucet's dream journals and life-writing, Jeff Lemire's meditative small-town fiction, and Chester Brown's biography and memoir. There has been sustained scholarly or critical attention on all of these artists (see Grace and Hoffman, Marrone, Moore, Rifkind and Warley). But beyond these well-recognized Canadians cartoonists, I see a new generation of Canadian artists who are taking up these same genres and tones, including Kate Beaton, Tings Chak, Gord Hill, and Jillian Tamaki. While American comics imagine the exciting adventures of supernaturally talented protagonists, Canadian comics seem overwhelmingly mundane, in comparison. They are mundane in both senses of the word:

of the earthly world (rather than of the spiritual or heavenly world, or worlds beyond) and lacking in excitement. The Canadian-ness in these comics *is* their realism and their dullness.

Of course, this line of thinking—Canada produces realist comics, the United States produces fantastical comics—overlooks the many other genres American comics explore, and it overlooks Canada’s contributions to action-packed and superhuman comics. After all, perhaps the most recognizably Canadian comics series is Bryan Lee O’Malley’s *Scott Pilgrim*, which includes supernatural, video-game style fight scenes *and* many identifiable Toronto landmarks.³ Brenna Clarke Gray describes the series as “self-consciously Canadian,” and “O’Malley’s love letter to Toronto” (“Border Studies” 6). But though O’Malley’s fantastical representation of contemporary Toronto has been incredibly successful with audiences beyond Canada, selling millions of copies and being adapted as a film, game, and app, this series is the exception. David Murphy calls *Scott Pilgrim* “a rare depiction of Canadian locality represented within an internationally produced transmedia franchise” (496). As Murphy notes, action comics with explicitly Canadian locales are *rare*. And while Calgarian-born Fiona Staples has made an immense contribution to science fiction and action comics as the artist for the space opera *Saga*, her best-known work is situated beyond a recognizable Earth, let alone a recognizable Canada. Suffice it say that while many Canadian artists make names for themselves in mainstream action comics, very few of them carry Canada into these mainstream stories. With the exception of O’Malley, Canada is visible in comics that are primarily non-

³ Though Brenna Clarke Gray echoes my experience in an anecdote shared on the podcast *Hazel & Katniss & Harry & Starr*, when she describes delivering a paper on *Scott Pilgrim*’s Canadian-ness at a conference in Britain, only to have the British audience express shock that the comic *is* Canadian (“Scott Pilgrim”).

fiction, life writing, and realist.

These are the genres and forms I take up in this dissertation—non-fiction, life-writing, and realism—and interrogate in terms of what they reveal about life, politics, and action in contemporary Canada. To this list, I add slice of life comics,⁴ a term used to describe comics which “explor[e] the way that characters live their everyday lives....they focus a great deal on the regular and the predictable, the details of how characters in comics live day by day” (Bramlett 246). With Canada as a broad, sometimes inadequate, frame, I explore how the mundane and the everyday operate in these comics, how they reveal intersections of power and oppression, and how they represent contemporary struggles of Canadian life. In each chapter, I consider the mundane through a particular social lens: outmigration, girlhood, access to space, and activism. As such, this dissertation straddles many different social and economic contexts. But all of the primary sources share the broad national context of contemporary Canada, and each chapter explores what the mundane reveals in its repetition and rendition of the everyday. I also unpack *why* these stories take the form of comics; what does the form of comics bring to representations of the Canadian tar sands, or Indigenous girlhood, or the Toronto housing crisis? Why does a form that is said to have reached its peak telling stories about superhuman fighters—the Golden Age of Comics began with and was defined by superheroes—also serve to represent the particular longing Kate Beaton feels for her Cape Breton home? And how does the slice-of-life comic speak to much broader social and

⁴ Bramlett notes that many daily or regular newspaper strips and webcomics are considered slice of life comics (247). Kunka argues that slice of life comics are a subgenre of autobiographical comics, but Bramlett’s example of the fictional webcomic *Questionable Content* contests this definition (99). Perhaps the best-known example of the slice of life comic is Harvey Pekar’s long-running autobiographical comic *American Splendor*, which, Charles Hatfield argues, “brought a radical appreciation of the mundane” (111) into comics.

economic concerns, even as it purports to share a simple anecdote from the artist's personal life? Such research questions require a theoretical scaffolding, scholarship and definitions that give shape to concepts of mundanity and the everyday. But first, let me situate my work in relation to Canadian comics as a whole.

Comics in Canada: A Brief History

Though the Canadian comics scene is relatively small in comparison to countries like the United States, Japan, and Belgium, Canada has a distinct history of comics shaped by economics, policy, nationalism, and bilingualism. A more thorough Canadian comics history can be found in John Bell's *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe*, but here I offer a concise comics history to contextualize my choice of primary sources and what I see as cultural trends in Canadian comics, drawing heavily on both Bell and Canadian comics scholar Brenna Clarke Gray.

Comics in Canada have long been tied up in notions of national identity, particularly the struggle to differentiate Canadian identity against British and American influences. This is explicit in Canada political cartoons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which Gray argues are the earliest iteration of comics in Canada. Gray describes the typical international dynamic at play in the cartoons of John Wilson Bengough and other cartoonists, in which "a young and beautiful Miss Canada, often cloaked in beaver fur and other images of Canada's natural resource-based riches...was forever falling under the spell of the wily Cousin Johnny, a personification of the American notion of manifest destiny. Miss Canada was aided in her desire to hold fast to her virtues by Mother Britannia, her guardian and adviser" (Gray, "Canadian Comics")

62) (see fig. 1).⁵ Such personifications of idealized or stereotyped nationhood were common tools in political cartooning at the time (and in fact, still are). Two early personifications of Canada, Johnny Canuck and Canada Jack, would be resurrected as superheroes by future generations of cartoonists, which indicates a legacy of heavy national symbolism from these early cartoons to twentieth century Canadian comic books.

While the comic book industry began in the United States in the 1930s, Canadian comic books did not emerge until the 1940s. Canadians imported their comic books from the United States. American companies were too established, too influential, and no Canadian company could compete. But the Second World War changed this, as new import laws created the conditions for Canada's Golden Age of Comics. Following the declaration of war on Germany, the Canadian government began to ration foreign currency. The War Exchange Conservation Act "was primarily designed to conserve American dollars by restricting the importation of non-essential goods" from the United States (Bell 43). This Act, established in December 1940, effectively banned the import of fiction periodicals including comic books. This left a major gap in the market, and Canadians were eager to fill it. Within a matter of months, Canadian publishers were putting out original comic books with new Canadian heroes. The best-remembered heroes were *Johnny Canuck*, *Nelvana of the Northern Lights*, and *Brok Windsor*. Under government protection, Canadian comic books enjoyed a decade of success. But, as Gray points out, "within a few years of the repeal of the War Exchange Conservation Act in 1951, the Canadian comic book industry had collapsed" ("Canadian Comics" 64).

⁵ For a more in-depth analysis of Bengough's work, see Christina Burr.

American comic books once again flooded the market.



A Pertinent Question.

Mrs. Britannia: "Is it possible, my dear, that you have ever given your cousin Jonathan any encouragement?"

Miss Canada: "Encouragement! Certainly not, Mamma. I have told him we can *never* be united."

Fig. 1: Britain, Canada, and the USA, 1869 ("A Pertinent Question")

This short-lived Canadian comics boom is worth discussing briefly, if only for its overt nationalism. The Canadian comics of the 1940s are often called the Canadian whites because, while they boasted full-colour covers, the comics inside were in black-and-white. And the Canadian whites, like their American counterparts, were deeply invested in the war effort and the nation's participation on the world stage. As such, the comic book heroes embodied ideal Canadian values. As Gray notes, the Second World War "marked the first time Canada entered into a declaration of war as an independent

state,” and “as such, the war was a significant assertion of Canadian independence and sovereignty” (“Canadian Comics” 63-64). Take for example, artist Leo Bachle, who, sixteen years old and hungry to join the war effort, created Johnny Canuck as a strong, brave Canadian hero (Bell 64). Johnny Canuck was “Canada’s answer to Nazi oppression,” and in his second issue, he punches Adolf Hitler square in the jaw (Bachle). In a series of truly aspirational moments, Hitler complains that it is “dot svine Canuck [who] goes on destroying our war machine.” When Johnny Canuck sneaks into Hitler’s office, Hitler recognizes Johnny Canuck in one glance. Through Canuck, teenage creator Bachle imagined Canada as a recognizable and feared representative of democracy on the world stage. Bachle lived vicariously through his own creation, simultaneously playing out his own war-time fantasy *and* Canada’s war-time fantasy as a force to be reckoned with. Unfortunately, none of these heroes survived into the next decade; when the American industry once again took over the Canadian market, Canadian publishers went out of business and their heroes went out of print.⁶

Arguably, the Canadian whites’ low quality worked against them as both desirable comics and national propaganda. In Mordecai Richler’s *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, a fictional representation of Montreal boyhood in the 1940s, enterprising young Duddy gets ahold of illegally imported war-time American comic books and rents them out to classmates. His business is successful because “Canadian comics, not even printed in color, were unreadable” (Richler 57). The American material seemed to be more appealing than the easily-available Canadian comics, if only for the full colour

⁶ *Nelvana of the Northern Lights* (Dingle), *Johnny Canuck* (Bachle et al.) and *Brok Windsor* (Stables) have only recently been brought back into print by Bedside Press and Maple Syrup Press. Until the publications of these collections in 2015 and 2017, these comics were mainly accessible only at Library and Archives Canada.

quality. While Captain America punched Hitler on a comic book cover, brightly branded in the American flag, Johnny Canuck punched Hitler in black-and-white, topless and sporting riding pants that were vaguely reminiscent of the Canadian Mountie uniform. Johnny Canuck works as a metaphor for the Canadian comic book industry: on the one hand, deeply aspirational, on the other hand, confusingly and unrecognizably Canadian in contrast to the bold, unmistakably American hero just a border away.

Gray describes the two decades after the end of the War Exchange Conservation Act as “one of complete absence of any Canadian voices in comics, whether mainstream or alternative” (“Canadian Comics” 64). But there are two important events in Canada in this period that are worth addressing. Firstly, Canada played a significant role in the backlash that led to the establishment of the Comics Code Authority in the United States, and Canada had a comics backlash and censorship policy of its own. Secondly, the 1950s saw the publication of arguably Canada’s first graphic novel, itself a culmination of a radical art tradition in Canada. I begin by addressing Canada’s comics backlash.

Though Canada did not have a significant comics industry of its own in the 1950s and ’60s, some Canadian publishing houses survived by reprinting and distributing American comics. In particular, they profited off of the boom of crime and horror comics. There has been much written about the popularity of horror comics in Cold War America, and the subsequent anti-comics movement (Hajdu, Nyberg, Wright). Suffice it to say that, as crime and horror comics became more and more popular, parent groups and conservative organizations became more and more nervous about content they deemed inappropriate for children. A crime in Canada served as a focal point for the debate around comics’ negative influence.

By the late 1940s, there was already broad pushback in Canada against crime comics, with Member of Parliament E. Davie Fulton emerging as a leader of the anti-comics movement. A murder in northern British Columbia led credence to Fulton's movement. Here is a description of the event by Bell:

In November 1948, two boys, age thirteen and eleven, stole a rifle and hid by the highway at Dawson Creek. Playing highwaymen, they eventually shot at a passing car. A passenger in the vehicle, James M. Watson, was fatally wounded. The senseless, random nature of this crime perpetrated by two young boys shocked the people of British Columbia, and the provincial Department of Health and Social Welfare launched an immediate investigation. It was soon discovered that both juveniles were avid readers of crime comic books. According to the authorities, the older boy read about fifty crime comics a week, while the younger devoured thirty. (94)

This tragedy was taken up by Fulton and his supporters, and led to the Fulton Bill, an act which "made it an offence to print, publish, distribute, or sell 'any magazine, periodical or book which exclusively or substantially comprises matter depicting pictorially the commission of crimes, real or fictitious'" (Bell 95). American psychologist Fredric Wertham included the Dawson Creek tragedy in his anti-comics book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). In the same year Wertham published his book, the Comics Code Authority was established as a means for the American comic book industry to self-censor.

There has been a great deal of scholarship on the anti-comics movement and the effects of censorship on the industry, but what is its relevance to a study of contemporary

Canadian comics, particularly if the comics being banned were not even Canadian-produced? I think the comics backlash—and Canada’s part in it—reveal significant aspects about the history of comics in Canada. For one, the experience of the Dawson Creek boys tells us just *how* popular comics were in Canada. Children were consuming them at a rate that many literally found alarming. Even in moments when Canadians were not producing and distributing their own comics, comics were being read all over Canada. Furthermore, the anxiety around comics raises significant questions about the potential and power of comics. Could they turn children into delinquents? Could they queer children?⁷ Wertham, Fulton, and many others thought so. Moreover, this anxiety over comics had to do with their proliferation in the lives of readers, and children in particular. Comics were a part of everyday life for many Canadians at this time. Comic books, in only a couple of decades, had found their way into Canada’s daily life, and many people were frightened by what that could mean.

While comic books were facing burnings, backlash, and censorship, a different form of comic was finding new life. A key example is Laurence Hyde’s *Southern Cross: A Novel of the South Seas* published in 1951.⁸ Though dubbed a novel, the book contained no words, only images created with woodblock prints. Through the images, Hyde told a story about nuclear testing in a South Pacific island, and its effects on the islanders. Bell calls it “the first English Canadian graphic novel” (103). Though radically different in tone and form, *Southern Cross* shared themes with the popular horror comics being published at the time. These themes hinged around Cold War anxieties around

⁷ Wertham wrote at length about the queerness of comic books, particularly *Batman* (via the hero’s relationship with Robin) and *Wonder Woman*, and he was concerned that these comics would encourage sexually deviant behaviour in children (34, 192).

⁸ *Southern Cross* was released in a new edition by Drawn & Quarterly in 2007.

nuclear warfare and the unpredictable power held by world leaders. Hyde's novel also critiqued the ongoing exploitation of non-Western peoples by Western powers. *Southern Cross* anticipated the genre's use as a form for social critique. David A. Beronä situates Hyde in a canon of wordless novels, and cites earlier artists working in this form (including Lynd Ward, who published many wordless novels during the Great Depression) as Hyde's major influences (213). Before *Southern Cross*, Hyde had a long history of radical prints, published in the pages of leftist periodicals like *New Frontier*⁹. Though he has not garnered much attention in the comics scene, or even in the Canadian comics scene, it's easy to see the similarities between his work and his politics and that of Gord Hill, a contemporary artist and activist working in radical print and politics and experimenting with similar styles. Hyde and Hill's work raises questions about the relevance of nation in studying comics: can there be a history of *Canadian* comics that includes Hyde and Hill's work without losing sight of their anti-imperialist and anti-colonialism? Or does the frame of 'Canadian' chafe against the anti-colonialist rhetoric of these comics, particularly the work of Hill? Though I recognize the potential problems of identifying Indigenous writing and art as *Canadian*, rather than through its national affiliation, I wonder about the cost of letting these radical critiques in comic form fall to the wayside, ceding space once again to nationalistic voices, which re-emerged a couple of decades after Hyde's graphic novel was published.

The 1970s saw a revival of comic books in Canada, including superhero comics like *Captain Canuck* and *Northern Lights*. The nationalist tone of these new comics was

⁹ *New Frontier* was a leftist literary magazine published out of Toronto from 1936 to 1937. In its pages, Canadian modernists argued for the importance of politically-engaged writing and art and kept abreast of the struggles against capitalism and fascism.

shaped by the prevailing nationalism of the era; Gray describes the 1960s as “a significant time for nation-building” which included Canada’s centennial, Expo 67, and the selection of a Canadian flag and anthem (“Canadian Comics” 65). Captain Canuck was the longest-lasting and most patriotic of these new heroes; his “red and white costume adorned with maple leaves signified his Canadianness, while his moralism, natural strength, and self-sacrificing persona reinforced conceptions of Canadians as polite, kind, moral, hero peacekeepers” (Edwardson 186). He recalled Miss Canada and Johnny Canuck of the early political cartoons, and his colourful, patriotic branding stood out, in contrast to the blandness of the 1940s Johnny Canuck. Since his creation in 1975, Captain Canuck has been relaunched several times. Edwardson describes the superhero as “an example of perpetual nation-building, an item of popular culture presenting national signifiers that, following its demise, was resurrected and recycle into a national signifier itself” (184-185). But most significantly for my purposes, *Captain Canuck* signaled a new era of Canadian comics publishing: “the production of *Captain Canuck* was in itself a nationalist statement, a claim to being a centre rather than a periphery of the comic book publishing industry” (Dittmer and Larsen 736). Through the popularity of *Captain Canuck* alone, Canada was once again contributing to the mainstream comics genre of the superhero. Further, Canada was once again hosting a small comic publishing industry of its own. The fact that *Captain Canuck* and its successor, *Alpha Flight*, have been widely studied, while Laurence Hyde’s early graphic novel is mostly forgotten, speaks to the centrality of the superhero genre and the power of Captain Canuck’s nationalism.

But though Hyde never received wide critical or scholarly attention, alternative comics which did not adhere to the superhero genre were beginning to take off in Canada,

and scholars and critics here and abroad took note. The 1970s and 80s saw the emergence of Canadian comics luminaries such as Chester Brown, Julie Doucet, and David Sim. In 1990, Chris Oliveros founded *Drawn & Quarterly*, staking a claim for Canada in the international comics scene; “being located in Montreal,” writes Gray, “means that *Drawn & Quarterly* exists in a space of intersection between European and North American comic arts traditions, allowing for a great deal of experimentation and play” (66). Since 1990, Canada has had a thriving independent comics scene, with Ad Astra Comix, Bedside Press,¹⁰ Conundrum Press, HighWater Press, Koyama Press and many others joining *Drawn & Quarterly*. There has also been a boom in comics produced by Indigenous artists, writers, and cartoonists. The recently published annotated bibliography of Indigenous comics and graphic novels outlines how the form of comics has been taken up by Indigenous creators in Canada and the United States, and the bibliography opens the door for more scholarship on the innovation and importance of these comics (Daigneault et al.).

Though Brown, Doucet, Seth and others are far from being considered mainstream—a term that in comics studies and fandom is often reserved for the Big Two, Marvel and DC—their long careers and the success of *Drawn & Quarterly*¹¹ has ensured they are widely read and widely studied, in Canada and in the United States. In fact, Rifkind and Warley refer to Brown, Doucet and Seth as “the trinity” of “the first generation of alternative Canadian cartoonists” (3). A few of the artists I study in this

¹⁰ At the time of writing, Bedside Press has recently shut down following founder Hope Nicholson’s sexual harassment of a colleague.

¹¹ Though I describe these cartoonists using terms like established and successful, I recognize that success in the Canadian comics industry is still quite small. Doucet’s decision to retire from making comics indicates that success, from a scholarly perspective, does not necessarily translate into financial or professional stability (Gomez et al. 68).

dissertation (Beaton, Hill, and Tamaki) are those who Rifkind and Warley identify as the “second-generation print and digital Canadian alternative cartoonists” (3). Other artists in this dissertation, particularly Tings Chak and Erik Kostiuk Williams, are even newer to the Canadian comics scene, and—as is clear in my fourth chapter—are expanding comics into exciting new forms and genres. For the most part, the cartoonists I analyse in this project are widely read—hence their name recognition among non-Canadian scholars—but not widely studied. Of course, many of these comics are very recent publications, and may not yet be represented in the slow world of academic publishing. But my contribution to the field of comics studies is to move beyond “the trinity” that Rifkind and Warley identify and so expand the scholarly conversation on Canadian comics (3). Though I recognize the influence of underground comix and alternative comics on the contemporary Canadian comics scene, I want to trace a different path of influence for the Canadian comics of the everyday than the well-circulate narrative of alternative comics. This path of influence follows my own path as a reader of comics.

For Better or For Worse

My own experience with comics began during my childhood in the 1990s and developed in that most everyday of ways: the daily newspaper comic strips, which I read over Rice Krispies or toast every morning before school. Comics were a part of my daily routine, but because they were such a mundane part of my life, I did not fully recognize myself as a comics reader until a decade later. Popular culture had taught me what comics were: they were floppy single-issue comic books, purchased in dark comic bookstores from nerdy men. They were about superheroes, and they were for serious fans who knew

the origin stories and narrative arcs meticulously. I grew up before nerd culture became more marketable, before Marvel and DC took over movie theatres and television networks. I knew what comic readers looked like, and they did not look like me. Comics were part of a daily routine (I even drew them with my friends, inventing my own characters and copying the styles of my favourite cartoonists), but because I was not reading about superheroes, and I was not seeking out comic books, I was not a *real* comic reader.

After several years working in comic studies, I finally recognize myself as a lifelong comics reader, regardless of what that reading practice looks like and what material I consume. And my research interests now mirror my childhood favourites: slice-of-life comics and realist comics. In fact, my favourite comic growing up just happens to be Canada's most successful comic strip, one that brought suburban Canadian life into the homes of thousands of North Americans every day:¹² Lynn Johnston's *For Better or For Worse*. Johnston's domestic comedy ran from 1978 to 2008 and followed the daily lives of the fictional Patterson family. Revisiting Johnston's strip now, on the tail end of writing my dissertation, I realize how much it informs many of the research questions I carried into this project. Furthermore, I recognize *For Better or For Worse* as a major precursor to the realist and slice-of-life comics that, I argue, dominate the contemporary Canadian comics scene.

For Better or For Worse has received scholarly attention for the ways Johnston's incorporated socially challenging subject matter. In 1993, one of the comic's

¹² *For Better or For Worse* is currently being reprinted in 1600 papers worldwide, which gives a sense of how massively it was circulated during its original run ("A Little About Lynn"). There are 30 print collections of the strip.

secondary characters, neighbour and friend Lawrence Poirier, came out as gay. Scholars have written about Johnston's inclusion of the coming out narrative, and the subsequent backlash from newspapers and readers (Dennis, Greyson, Lafky and Brennen). Others have unpacked the comic's handling of grief (Brabant) and Indigenous Canadian culture and characters (Schreyer). For the most part, the comic has garnered scholarly and critical attention for the narrative arcs that stand out—those narrative arcs that diverge from the typical lives of the comics' central characters, divergences like the queer life of Lawrence, or the conditions in a northern Indigenous community. But the typical *For Better or For Worse* comic foregrounds the Pattersons, a white, straight, middle-class family whose lives are occasionally difficult or sad but are overwhelmingly comfortable and humorous. The Pattersons seem to represent the 20th century settler-Canadian experience, particularly in the decades before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Idle No More, and land and water defenders pushed for a reckoning with colonial history and settler privilege. The Pattersons inhabit a comfortable settler ignorance, made further comfortable by their decidedly middle-class status. As such, *For Better or For Worse* represents a very normative, privileged version of everyday life in Canada.

But there are a few aspects of *For Better or For Worse* I find fascinating, and which inform my understanding of both the mundane and everyday. Firstly, I am interested in its domesticity, particularly in contrast to the fantastic comics that have come to dominate the form. Suzanne Covey's detailed study of sound effects in *For Better or For Worse* emphasizes that Johnston's represents the domestic space of the home as a site of action, interest, and humour: "Johnston's use of sound effects goes far beyond those found in action comics. Rather than limiting sounds to depictions of

violence, she employs them to render the dense soundscape of contemporary suburban life: lawn mowers, vacuum cleaners, computers, music, dogs charging through a house, children fighting and eating” (9). Rather than the violent “kapows” that Covey notes are a cliché of action and fantastic comics, Johnston’s sound effects highlight the details and texture of everyday life. *For Better or For Worse*’s success and longevity, on the newspaper page and beyond, speaks to the broad interest in this kind of domestic content. Johnston’s success as a chronicler of the domestic leads me to questions of *what* is interesting and worthy of attention, questions I carry into my analysis of Kate Beaton’s similarly domestic webcomic strips.

Secondly, I want to unpack the Canadian-ness of *For Better or For Worse*, which has already been analyzed in detail by Sam Hester in her comparative study of *For Better or For Worse* and the New Zealand writer Margaret Mahy. Hester’s argument recognizes my own comics conference conundrum: “For thousands of readers worldwide... ‘For Better or For Worse’ is synonymous with ‘Canada.’ Despite this recognition by readers, a national setting has not always featured prominently in... Johnston’s work” (1). After an analytic breakdown of markers of Canadianness in *For Better or For Worse*, Hester concludes that the comic becomes more recognizably Canadian in its later years, while “most of the early ‘For Better or For Worse’ strips provide readers with ‘no real clues’ that they are set in Canada” (7). But Hester notes that many phrases or features that might be recognizably Canadian to Canadian readers could easily slip under the radar of non-Canadian readers, such as references to the West Coast (Vancouver) and “up north” (Northern Ontario) (33). Arguably, *For Better or For Worse* is more Ontarian than Canadian (Hester 27). This once again speaks to the broadness, the vagueness of Canada—

if I am to explore a text's Canadianness, do I have to begin by asking 'where is here?',¹³ locating the text within the many regional, class, or racial categories that shape experiences and concepts of Canada?

I wonder, then, if the everyday serves as a useful lens for locating a text and unpacking its particular view of Canada. In the case of *For Better or For Worse*, the everyday experience is white. And in this, Johnston's work has much in common with her contemporary Canadian cartoonists; as Rifkind and Warley observe, "Canadian alternative comics has, until recently been largely dominated by white cartoonists...mostly white male artists" (4). But Rifkind and Warley argue that "we must be attentive to how race informs all graphic narratives, so that whiteness is no longer the invisible norm but a visible and contested category" (6). Here is where the lens of the everyday is revealing and constructive. It is in the everyday details of the Patterson's life that I see their whiteness, their heteronormativity, and their class status. Or, more accurately, it is in breaks with the mundane, divergences from the everyday, that I reflect clearly on what their 'normative' looks like. Lawrence's homosexuality is a rupture in their everyday lives, and thus reveals the heteronormativity of their world. Daughter Elizabeth's experiences teaching in the fictional northern community of Mtigwaki are a departure from her cultural and economic context; the difference of this Ojibwe community, with its relative poverty, illuminates the Pattersons' whiteness and economic comfort. Ultimately, by revisiting *For Better or For Worse* and performing a literature

¹³ This is a reference to Northrop Frye's influential statement in *The Bush Garden*, which I unpack in greater detail later in this introduction. Frye argues "that Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, as important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question of 'Who am I?' than by some such riddle as 'Where is here?'" (220).

review on the scholarship about the comic, I better understand how a focus on the everyday, including a focus on ruptures and breaks in the everyday, is a way into understanding difference within Canada and in understandings of Canada.

Finally, I want to reflect on the everyday-ness of newspaper comic strips, both in terms of readers' relationships to comics and in terms of the evolution of comics. For many readers, myself included, newspaper strips are or have been habitual. Charles Hatfield calls the newspaper strip "a ritualistic genre," and indeed, many readers engage with these comics and their characters on a daily basis (3). *For Better or For Worse* was fairly unique among newspaper strips for its continuity: each day's strip built upon the one before, part of a narrative that stretched through the characters' lives. Because of this, readers watched the characters grow up and came to know their lives intimately. After surveying readers of *For Better or For Worse*, Christine Shreyer notes that most readers related on a personal level to one of the characters, and/or related one of the Pattersons to a member of their own family. Through the regularity of the strips and their domestic detail, Johnston built an intimacy between readers and characters. I imagine that this intimacy made the comic's mundane content feel more interesting to longtime readers. This has been the case with Beaton's work: after years of reading her annual family comics, Beaton's audience was deeply moved by Beaton's sister Becky's cancer diagnosis. The large fundraiser for her medical expenses, as well as the heartfelt responses to Beaton's comics about Becky, serve as material proof of the care that has grown between Beaton and her readership. In my second chapter, I explore the intimate nature of mundanity in Kate Beaton's work, looking at the comics and strips Beaton posted in the years before Becky's illness.

But of course, Beaton does not have a syndicated comic strip; very few artists do these days, as newspapers go out of business at an alarming rate. On the one hand, the decrease in newspapers and newspaper comic strips suggests that people who read comics on a daily, habitual basis are increasingly in a position where they must seek out comics. On the other hand, comic strips are increasingly shifting online and into social media, such that they become a part of daily life in new and exciting ways. Beaton herself built her career through webcomics, as have many other Canadian artists (among them Joey Comeau, Kate Leth, Ryan North). Lately, comics are thriving on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, where their shareability ensures that they reach many viewers who would perhaps not consider themselves comic readers. The recent success of Nathan Pyle's "Strange Planet," published primarily on Instagram and Facebook, speaks to the reach of web-based comic strips. As Jessica Wind observes, Instagram in particular lends itself to a four-panel format that is very similar to the newspaper strip, and the ease with which users can follow artists ensures that they continue reading these strips with relative ease. Comics are still a part of daily life, just on a screen and in a feed rather than spread out on the kitchen table.

There is a lot to be said about the expansion of webcomics, and its impact on the readership of comics. However, though I speak briefly to the digital production and circulation of Beaton and Carroll's comics, my dissertation does not take up this fascinating new direction for comics. Rather, I am interested in Johnston's legacy in Canadian comics more generally. I contend that Johnston blazed a new trail for Canadian comics, after the Golden Age's short-lived foray into nationalistic and fantastic; she imagined that readers would be interested in following characters through the domestic,

the banal, the humourous, and the grief of everyday life. Four decades later, I argue that many Canadian artists have followed in her footsteps. I am curious how this recent work differs from Johnston's vaguely Canadian, deeply normative world, and why seemingly mundane content is still successful. In order to properly explore these questions, I turn now to define my terms and situate my work in the field of everyday studies.

The Mundane and the Everyday

“Comics are no longer a byword for banality,” write Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester in their introduction to *A Comic Studies Reader* (xi). This statement is part of Heer and Worcester's appeal for the academic and cultural legitimacy of comics. Heer and Worcester make a case for studying comics, a form that has previously been judged “unworthy of serious investigation” (xi). In this context, their use of the term *banality* speaks to the cultural and artistic value of comics: comics, they seem to claim, are no longer strictly low-brow, disposable, ephemeral, sub-literate. And yet, I pause on this word *banality* and its implications, particularly for the types of comics that interest me. In her study of the early twentieth century lifestyle magazine *The Western Home Monthly*, Hannah McGregor defines banality as “the quality of being conventional, commonplace, everyday” (258). McGregor also recognizes the value judgement inherent in the word, as she identifies these as “the characteristics that at once define *The Western Home Monthly* and doom it...to apparent historic irrelevance” (258). But McGregor recognizes seemingly banal texts like *The Western Home Monthly* as both sites of “women's intimate publics” and texts where colonial violence is reproduced and circulated (258). The banal and its associated categories—the commonplace, the everyday, the mundane—are rich sites

of cultural meaning, ideological process, and contradiction. McGregor close reads the advertisements in *The Western Home Monthly* and sees the ways these advertisements framed a Canada “Simultaneously being determined by the deliberate exclusions fundamental to the articulation of whiteness” (265). Content that appears banal can affirm a sense of settler entitlement to land and resources or circulate the violent logic of white supremacy. And so, unlike Heer and Worcester, I focus in on banality in comics, on mundane comics, and on the comics of the everyday. After all, there is a growing field of comics that fall into these categories: “In the last decades, contemporary comics have faced a shift from extraordinary to ordinary, adopting slice-of-life stories in which ‘nothing happens’” (Schneider 15). This shift is worth unpacking. Before I outline my chapters and introduce my primary texts, let me define the mundane and the everyday for the purposes of my project and situate myself in relation to the broad, interdisciplinary field of everyday studies.

In *The Everyday Life Reader*, editor Ben Highmore attempts to sketch the vague, unwieldy field of the everyday. Given the broadness of this field, which stretches from sociology to psychoanalysis to art history, I focus in on three aspects of the everyday that feel most urgent in relation to Canada and comics: 1) the question of *where* the everyday is located; 2) the everyday’s relationship to the unconscious and ideological; and 3) the everyday in contrast to the heroic. By walking through the existing scholarship on these three aspects of the everyday, I build the theoretical framework for my overall project. These three aspects of “everydayness” intersect along thematic lines that become the focus of my chapters: gender and femininity, space and mobility, normativity and resistance, and scales of time and space.

In his overview of everyday life studies, Highmore repeatedly comes up against the vagueness of this subject: “The problem with the everyday is that its contours might be so vague as to encompass almost everything” (4). The vagueness of the everyday, how it seems to expand beyond easy definition or delineation, reminds me of the concept of Canada, particularly in discussion of Canadian identity. Canada, too, is beset by the problem of definitional vagueness. Northrop Frye famously distills the problem of Canadian identity into a question:

It seems to me that Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, as important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question of ‘Who am I?’ than by some such riddle as ‘Where is here?’. (220)

The where of Canada, the where of the everyday: can these questions go hand in hand? Perhaps the everyday’s vagueness makes it an ideal lens for looking at the vagueness of Canada’s identity and culture. Like our subjective sense of Canadian-ness, the everyday is shaped by region, demographic, time, place—the everyday of a downtown Torontonian is radically different than the everyday of a rural Cape Bretoner, as are their understandings of themselves as Canadian. *Where is here* improves on the question *Who am I* by including social, political, cultural and geographic context. In its acknowledgement of place and space, it emphasizes relationality and specificity.

In my project, the vague spatiality of the everyday becomes a way to interrogate Canada, and to think beyond Canada without losing site of specificity within the nation. But Highmore also emphasizes the potential of the act of location: “The question of where to locate the everyday takes us in directions that are both local and global or, to put

it another way, both micro-cultural and macro-cultural” (14). Comics is a form constructed through the design of time and space, and as such comics have incredible potential for thinking and narrating *across* broad temporal and spatial scales. Scale becomes an important theoretical concept in my fourth and fifth chapters, as I examine how migrant detention, housing crises, fascism, and colonialism operate in ways that are simultaneously transnational and local, and how resistance to these oppressive phenomenon and ideologies must operate across scales as well.

In attempting to define the scope and shape of the of the everyday, Highmore also acknowledges movement and mobility: “To make claims for everyday life being in one place or another will avoid attending to the ‘movement of the daily,’ and it might be this movement, this continual drift of the daily that is most difficult and most productive to register” (17). Mobility becomes the focus of my third chapter, when I look at the girl protagonists in contemporary Canadian comics and find them moving across urban and suburban landscapes, moving in and out of normativity, with violence always close on their heels. The everyday of girlhood is perhaps ever in flux, and the restlessness of these flaneur protagonists speaks to girls' sheer potential to resist the mundane, the status quo, and the everyday.

There is a question, across the theoretical texts I have read, over whether or not we are conscious of the everyday, or whether it is that which is unconscious and/or unacknowledged. Anna Poletti writes that labelling everyday practices “‘mundane’ denotes a recognition that these are acts often practiced unthinkingly” (335). Alfie Brown echoes this, noting that when the everyday is linked to the habitual, it “suggests that the everyday is what we are unconscious of” (79). Brown also calls the everyday “the city’s

unconscious, something elusive and impossible to pin down but something under whose influence we live” (75). Brown’s definition of the everyday speaks to *what* is being unconsciously practiced in the mundane and habitual: ideological structures. Highmore argues “that ideologies reside precisely in those places where they are not perceived to be (or perceived at all)” (7). Those unconscious practices, those habits, those parts of life considered too mundane or banal to reflect on: that is where ideology is reproduced. The question of whether we are conscious or unconscious of the everyday also speaks to how conscious or unconscious we are of the ideologies we live under and the politics we practice. This is best expressed in Highmore’s evocation of subcultures and their contradictory relationship to the everyday: “Clearly subcultures exist *in* the everyday...yet subcultural activity might be seen as often setting its sights on the avoidance of anything that might smack of everydayness in its normative form” (12). I expand on this contradiction between conscious and unconscious everyday, between status quo and resistance, in my fourth and fifth chapters, as I look at queer figures whose everyday queerness is threatened by neoliberal greed and spread, and activists whose everyday *is* an effort to undo the totalizing forces of fascism and colonialism. Furthermore, my third chapter explores how the transitory state of girlhood challenges the unseen or simply unacknowledged normativity of heterosexuality and colonialism.

Finally, I am interested in how the everyday is defined through one of its opposites, the heroic. After all, comic studies is often divided along these very lines—the mainstream comics that are dominated and shaped by the superhero genre, and the alternative and independent comics that do not take up the heroic or take it up in subversive ways. Schneider posits that the non-heroic comic is essentially “depressive” or

“melancholic”: “In alternative comics, the superhero is replaced by an introverted heir of the romantic hero in a world where jumping from a skyscraper is more likely to be an act of suicide than the triumphant flight we have come to expect from a comic book protagonist” (53). But Schneider challenges this when she relates this melancholia to masculinity: “while masculine alternative comics are more likely to depict a romantic cult of the miserable, on the female side, the everyday is approached from a positive perspective” (55). Her gendering raises major questions: is a positive approach to the non-heroic essentially feminine? Does this make the everyday feminine? Many theorists seem to agree; Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross argue that everyday life is “an urgent issue” for feminism, “[f]or everyday life has always weighed heavily on the shoulders of women” (2-3). Michael Featherstone takes this much further, noting that if the heroic is notably masculine, “the sphere of danger, violence and the courting of risk,” then “everyday life is the sphere of women, reproduction and care” (59). My chapters challenge this gendered division in many ways. For example, the girl flaneurs of chapter three experience risk and danger through their femininity, their youth, and their race. Of course, while heroic men seek out risk, risk always finds young girls: in their schools, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, and in their bodies. When the everyday *is* dangerous, is there anything heroic about resistance? When resistance happens everyday, as it does in the Gord Hill comics I take up in chapter five, then is resistance mundane or heroic? Some violences are “mundane, taken for granted and ordinary,” to use the words of Featherstone (58), including the slow violence I read into Kate Beaton’s work in chapter two. To clarify how my concepts of the mundane and the everyday apply to these diverse texts, I will walk through the overarching structure of each chapter.

Chapter outlines

In chapter two, I work through the concepts of the mundane, the anecdotal, and the uninteresting through analyzing Kate Beaton's incredibly popular slice-of-life comics. Beaton is best-known for her comedic webcomic strips that draw on literary and historical figures, many of which have been republished in the print collections *Hark! A Vagrant* and *Step Aside, Pops*. But Beaton also has a large collection of personal webcomics, shared via Tumblr and Twitter. In her comic strips about visiting her family in Cape Breton and in her long-form memoir comics about working in Fort McMurray, Beaton eschews the common-knowledge content of *Hark! A Vagrant* for deeply personal narratives of Cape Breton out-migration. I use Sianne Ngai's theorizations of the aesthetic category of the "interesting" to examine the emotional weight and popularity of her family comic strips. Each comic strip, I argue, yearns for an everyday intimate mundanity that is out of reach for Beaton and other Atlantic Canadians forced to migrate for work. I examine how she draws distance, worry, and love into these comics. These comics both acknowledge the inevitable break-up of Cape Breton community, while foregrounding that community as something worthy of love, attention, and time, including the labour of creating comics and the attention of broad online audiences. The disparate Atlantic Canadian community is further explored in Beaton's long-form comics, "Ducks" and "Nightshift." Beaton's comics are unique petrocultural texts because they focus in on the details of resource extraction, exploring the nuance and complexity of benefiting from a violent system. I analyse these comics as examples of what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence," in this case the slow violence that resource extraction plays on

animals, humans, and landscapes.

Violence is also a major theme in chapter three, though it changes its shape and focus. No longer the slow violence of Beaton's emotional and geographic landscapes, this violence is acute, acting visibly on gendered, youthful bodies. Here, I explore how omnipresent violence is in the lives of girls. I close read examples of a growing field of girlhood comics; these are comics that foreground girl protagonist and the ways they navigate everyday life. I note the gothic overtones in a handful of these texts: Emily Carroll's webcomics, Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki's *Skim*, and David A. Robertson, GMB Chomichuk, Iskwé and Erin Leslie's *Will I See?* Girlhood comics blur the lines between imagined and real-life dangers, ultimately revealing that girls are rarely, if ever, safe, as their everyday is haunted by the violences of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and racism. I explore how these comics incorporate gothic elements into the everyday, suggesting that risk and violence are so ubiquitous as to be mundane parts of girls' lives in contemporary Canada.

In chapter four, I examine violence through restrictions on access to space in two Ontario-set comics: Tings Chak's *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention* and Eric Kostiuk Williams' *Condo Heartbreak Disco*. Chak renders visible the mundane infrastructure of migrant detention, and the everyday risk and pain migrants suffer within Canada. Williams represents the urban housing crisis through two superhuman figures whose lives are overturned by the mundane issue of eviction. Both artists are grappling with crises—the refugee crises and housing crises, respectively—that have global and local dimensions. I draw on David Harvey to argue that both artists act as “insurgent architects” who can translate urgent socio-political issue across broad temporal and

geographic scales. The comics form enables both artists to represent physical space in deliberate and disturbing ways. Furthermore, by writing in the superhuman genre, Williams brings in the non-human scale, and I analyse his characters in terms of Donna Haraway's critique of the Anthropocene, which Haraway critiques on many levels, including its emphasis on the actions and fate of humans to the exclusion of other species.

In my fifth chapter, I focus on Gord Hill's comic book histories. I argue that while Hill's primary aim is to teach the histories of fascism and anti-fascism, colonialism and decolonization, his comic books also serve to develop multimodal literacy. I draw on the literature of multimodal literacy to analyse how Hill evokes many different modes—visual, textual, cartographic, gestural, stylistic—to represent the multifaceted movements of fascism and colonialism, thus teaching readers how these movements are made and remade, and how they can be interpreted, critiqued, and resisted. After exploring multimodal literacy in depth in Hill's work, I analyse examples of multimodal literacy at work in more recent Canadian comics and graphic novels, suggesting that multimodality is a particularly powerful technique for artists critiquing the status quo.

In situating my work in relation to Canadian comic studies, I must first acknowledge the interdisciplinary nature of comics studies. Comics scholars are based in visual art studies, literary studies, bibliographic studies, journalism, pedagogy, library studies, and many other disciplines. Though I have drawn on interdisciplinary studies of comics in this project, particularly in my fifth chapter which takes up the pedagogical potential of comics, my approach is primarily literary. As such, I want to locate my project in relation to literary studies of Canada.

To date, many Canadian comics have been studied in relation to nation-building

and nationalism—which I discussed above in my brief history of Canadian comics—or they have been studied as life-writing. Life-writing, and autobiography in particular, has fairly dominated what Hatfield calls Alternative comics. In fact, Hatfield argues that the Underground Comix scene of the '70s and '80s marked a shift in comics from being understood as a mainstream form for formulaic content to being considered a form for self-expression (9). Hatfield argues that Harvey Pekar in particular, with his long-running autobiographical comic strips, “established a new mode in comics: the quotidian autobiographical series, focused on the events and textures of everyday existence” (109). Though not all the comics I take up in my dissertation are autobiographical, they certainly share Pekar’s “radical appreciation for the mundane” (Hatfield 111). Graphic life writing is a major field in comics and comic studies, and the comics I work with in this project are deeply influenced by this form.

Canada has a rich history of graphic life writing, which Rifkind and Warley take up in *Canadian Graphic: Picturing Life Narratives*. Rifkind and Warley locate Sylvie Rancourt’s autobiographic comic book series *Mélody* as a major text for Canadian graphic life narratives, “because it heralds a contemporary form of graphic storytelling in both French and English Canada that celebrates the intimate and challenges the conventional” (2). The editors describe the “long and varied history” of graphic life narratives in Canada (2). Many of these examples of graphic life writing, particularly Julie Doucet’s comic series *Dirty Plotte* and graphic memoir *My New York Diary*, and Chester Brown’s *Louis Riel: A Comic Strip Biography* and autobiographical works, have been well-read and analyzed by scholars in Canada and abroad (Engelmann, Gray “Border Studies”, Miller and Pratt, Moore, Oksman and O’Malley). Though I certainly

see the value in reading these texts as examples of life writing, and considering, as Rifkind and Warley do, the implications for the autobiographical pact in comics (9), I see a diversity of Canadian comics that do not fit within the life-writing field. As Rifkind and Warley note in their collection on life writing, many Indigenous artists in Canada are thriving in the “genres of fantasy, myth, and speculative fiction,” and other diverse writers, like Jillian Tamaki, “challeng[e] the expectation that writers and artists of colour only write autobiographically” (6). Though my dissertation begins in the life-writing of Kate Beaton, I take up many texts that are primarily fiction, and which raise different questions in terms of representation.

In her influential study of David Collier’s 2000 comic *Surviving Saskatoon*, Deena Rymhs writes: “Blending life writing with social commentary, Collier’s comics are interested in the dominant values that define particular settings and in individuals who do not fit the social norms of their environments” (75-76). Like Collier, many of the artists I focus on in my dissertation *do* blend life writing and social commentary: see the snippets of autobiography that appear in Tings Chak’s *Undocumented* and Gord Hill’s histories; see Fort McMurray and Cape Breton framed through Beaton’s personal experience. And within these comics, few of the protagonists, fictional or non-fictional, are particularly settled in their environments; rather, their lives are marked by slow violences or sudden aggressions, by sexual predators and capitalist and colonialist expansion. Ultimately, I argue that contemporary Canadian comics, in their realism, attention to the quotidian, and slowness, question the livability of contemporary Canada.

Though I have set aside the lens of life writing for this project, I recognize how much these comics owe to the graphic life writing that shaped Canadian comics. In

Autobiographical Comics, Andrew Kunka registers how traumatic graphic life writing has led the study of comics, citing the big three of graphic novels, Alison Bechdel, Marjane Satrapi, and Art Spiegelman (2). But he also notes that “many autobiographical comics also address the mundane, quotidian, often humorous experiences of daily life” (2). The work of Brown, Doucet, Rancourt and many others is mundane in its personal detail and dramatic in its confessional nature; it offered an intimacy that was at once boring and thrilling. So, too, is the representation of Canada across these comics: a nation built through violences, small and large, and sustained through acts of care and resistance.

I am not the first to analyse comics through the concepts of the mundane and the quotidian, and my work builds upon the scholarship of Greice Schneider in her book *What Happens When Nothing Happens: Boredom and Everyday Life in Contemporary Comics*, and Frank Bramlett’s “The Role of Culture in Comics of the Quotidian.” Schneider looks closely at form and rhythm in comics of the everyday, and she engages deeply with the affects of boredom and apathy, particularly as they shape or influence narrative structure. Her primary sources are the work of fairly canonical cartoonists (Adrian Tomine and Chris Ware). Bramlett’s article is specifically interested in how comics build an internal culture through everyday practices and language. He looks at quotidian practices in Jeph Jacques’ webcomic *Questionable Content* and Rutu Modan’s graphic novel *Exit Wounds*. I build on his analysis of trauma and the quotidian in comics in my third chapter.

Both of these studies take up comics outside of Canada, which may undermine my identification of mundanity as a particularly Canadian element or lens. Schneider

observes that “contemporary comics have faced a shift from extraordinary to ordinary, adopting slice-of-life stories in which ‘nothing happens’” (15). The comics I examine in this dissertation are part of a wider, international body of mundane graphic narratives. And yet, I argue that what is considered mundane or quotidian is determined, to some significant extent, by the national body in which one lives, and the particular social, economic, and political structures within that nation. As such, I have chosen comics by Canadian artists that are explicitly set in Canada¹⁴ and which call upon their readers to recognize the mundane suffering, struggle, and resistance that occur within (and often because of) Canada.

As Schneider and Bramlett’s scholarship attests, the theory of the everyday is productive. It allows us to interrogate many aspects of narrative and form. In the case of comics, it is an exceptionally useful theoretical lens because the form is so deeply influenced by the success of, and the turn away from, the mainstream superhero comics and other fantastic genres. In the chapters that follow, I contribute to what are the small but rapidly growing fields of Canadian comics studies and alternative comics studies.

¹⁴ With the exception, perhaps, of Carroll’s stories, which are set in a vague small-town, but which I argue are texts in conversation with the explicitly Canadian work of the Tamaki cousins and David R. Robertson et al.

Chapter 2:

Mundane Intimacy and Slow Violence:

Outmigration, Kinship, and Petroculture in Kate Beaton's Autobiographical Comics

In this dissertation, I argue that contemporary Canadian comics construct and deploy a sustained and critical gaze at the mundane, the everyday, and the anecdotal of life in Canada. In this chapter, I unpack my understanding of the mundane through an analysis of Kate Beaton's autobiographical webcomics. Beaton is one of the first cartoonists to find sustained success online. Her webcomic *Hark! A Vagrant* was self-published online from 2006 to 2018. During this period, it reached hundreds of thousands of readers. Her first print collection, the self-published *Never Learn Anything From History*, won the Doug Wright Award for Best Emerging Talent in 2009. She was then picked up by Canadian publishing house Drawn & Quarterly. Her subsequent collections, *Hark! A Vagrant* (2012) and *Step Aside, Pops* (2015), both topped the New York Times bestseller list. She is now also a successful children's author.

Beaton's career arc is important context for her autobiographical work. In fact, her career path—including moves to Fort McMurray to pay off student loans, stints in New York and Toronto to build her career, and her eventual return to Cape Breton—is a major focus of her personal comics, which often engage the emotional and economic impact of outmigration in Atlantic Canada. She is typical of her regional demographic, having moved west for financial reasons, but eventually her career as an artist enabled her to move back to Cape Breton permanently. In an interview with Chris Mautner, Beaton notes that her desire “to make art for a living” causes worry “because it's a risk. People

make fairly safe moves there [in Cape Breton], which is what happens when you're in an economically disadvantaged place. Risks are for privileged people with money to fall on their face if it doesn't work out." She describes the inevitability of outmigration for her community: "You grow up in Cape Breton and you have to leave. If you want to make a good living you have to leave." After several bestsellers, Beaton is the rare success story: her established career as an artist allowed her to move back to Mabou permanently in 2015.

The bulk of the scant scholarship on Beaton focuses on *Hark! a Vagrant*, either situating it within the field of webcomics (Carolan and Evain) or analyzing its engagement with canonical literature and history (Campbell, Han, Ross, Sillin). I take up Beaton's comics beyond *Hark! A Vagrant*, which include those published on her social media accounts, Tumblr and Twitter. These comics have not been published offline, but social media data and media coverage of Beaton indicate that these comics have been well-circulated. These comics are autobiographical in nature and come in two types: 1) long-form comics that depict a particular time in Beaton's life or memory from her past, and 2) short comic strips that depict brief moments in Beaton's travels, especially her trips home to Mabou, Cape Breton to visit her family.¹⁵ I begin by reading these short comic strips and using them to define the concept of the 'mundane' and to unpack its theoretical implications for this project. I read these comic strips as part of the literature of Atlantic Canadian outmigration. Beaton's long-form comic "Loss" acts as a bridge

¹⁵ Beaton's comic strips also closely follow the cancer diagnosis, treatment, and death of Beaton's sister, Becky. Becky's illness and death occurred while I wrote this chapter, and the bulk of Beaton's comics about Becky were posted after I completed my initial draft. I have chosen not to examine the comics about Becky, or to discuss Beaton's comics about grief and the subsequent lull in her work. I believe that if these comics are analyzed, they should be approached with compassion and sensitivity. I did not feel that I had the tools to analyze these comics meaningfully, particular while Beaton's loss is so fresh.

between my analysis of the comic strips, primarily set in Cape Breton, and Beaton's long-form comics, primarily set in the tar sands around Fort McMurray. I then read these long-form comics as part of the growing field of petroculture and note that their form as autobiographical comics sets them apart from the bulk of petrocultural texts.

Homecoming: Beaton's Family Comics

From 2012 to 2016, Kate Beaton posted regular comic strips about her family that coincide with her visits home to Mabou, Cape Breton. These comics appear most often at Christmas, and they represent moments Beaton shares with her family, including her parents and her three sisters. The stories Beaton shares in her strips are decidedly mundane—they are commonplace, dull, humdrum, day-to-day, lacking in interest or excitement. Beaton's comics are made of these mundane moments: a joke about a turnip, a misunderstanding between parents and children, a rude comment, a plugged toilet. These are not the fantastic, heroic comics of Marvel and DC. Nor are they the poignant memoirs that took the comics form to a whole new level, such as the works of Art Spiegelman, Marjane Satrapi, and Alison Bechdel. Beaton chooses to draw silly and banal moments, moments that would be quickly forgotten if Beaton had not chosen to capture them. These comics do not offer complex narratives; rather, they come across as anecdotal. But folded into the anecdotal form are more complex affects and narratives, including the narratives of economic strife and outmigration and affect of isolation.

In her article, "A Mundane Voice," Melissa Gregg uses the term *anecdote* to describe what she considers a necessary shift in cultural studies methodology. She praises theorist Meghan Morris's "use of anecdote," which she considers the "principal device to

voice the mundane” (366). Gregg writes: “anecdotes afford a refining mechanism...they bring down to a manageable level the complexity of culture, so that a specific point can be forwarded” (367). She continues: “Anecdotes figure a singular instance of how ‘**this**’ happens *here*, which does not preclude other experience, but acts as an example of ‘how the world can be said to be working’ in this context” (368, emphasis original). I read Gregg’s *this* as referring to the complex cultural concept that is rendered manageable in the anecdote. If Beaton’s comics have “a mundane voice,” then what is the concept being refined and forwarded through her anecdotes? And how does the graphic form contribute to this process? In this chapter, I argue that the complex “concept” at work in Beaton’s strips is outmigration; Beaton use of the comics form—specifically her use of space, her cartoonish characters, and her use of borderless panels—offers a deeply nuanced representation of outmigration and its affective, economic, and environmental consequences.

Each year’s batch of comic strips follows the same pattern: Beaton is welcomed back to Mabou, Cape Breton by her parents, and in turn helps welcome back some or all of her three sisters. The family shares jokes, meals, drinks, and insults for several strips. Interspersed among the humorous strips are sentimental ones, usually an exchange between Beaton and her mother that anticipates the children’s departure or acknowledges family and neighbours who have not managed to return home, even for a brief visit. Then Beaton and her sisters depart, usually with another moment or two of sentimentality. Each year’s batch of comics is bookended by migration, first into Cape Breton, but then always back out again. As such, there is a communal sense of loss and worry woven through the middle strips, even when the family is together. This sense of loss persists so

long as the family remains scattered by Atlantic outmigration, a consequence of what is sometimes called the Maritime diaspora.¹⁶

Cape Breton has experienced economically-motivated outmigration in the past few decades. The Cape Breton Regional Municipality [CBRM] recorded “a reduction in population of 13.2% in the years between 1996 and 2006” (Wray 148). Beaton herself moved to Fort McMurray around 2005, shortly after graduating from university. She belongs to the demographic hit hardest by out-migration: “Between the years 1991 and 2006 an extraordinary 37.7% of the population aged between 20 and 34 was lost, as those with skills, ambition, and ability left the CBRM to gain work elsewhere” (Wray 148). In interview, Beaton has reflected on the inevitability of outmigration: “You grow up in Cape Breton and you have to leave. If you want to make a good living you have to leave. And then there’s an immense sense of loss over generations as well—this weird, insanely ingrained sense of identity and place, and then you have to go make a living” (Mautner). She notes that in Cape Breton, there are “all kinds of songs about how much people miss home and how they had to go” (Mautner). Beaton and other Cape Bretoners are raised on a culture of anticipation, expectation, and mourning, with the economic necessity of outmigration always looming on the horizon.

Beaton’s broadest engagement with Cape Breton outmigration appears in her

¹⁶ In her work on outmigration from Newfoundland, Jennifer Delisle uses the term diaspora for how it “articulates the collective, affective experiences of Newfoundland outmigrants in relation to homeland and hostland” (10). There are issues with Delisle’s use of the term diaspora which I would like to flag at the outset: Paul Gilroy defines diaspora as displacements provoked through violence, and it is often theorized through ethnicity, whereas the people of Newfoundland are primarily white settlers who are migrating for economic reasons (123). Delisle addresses these problems at greater length in her book, *The Newfoundland Diaspora*, but I will not do more than flag those issues here. I will not use the concept of diaspora to describe Atlantic outmigration, but the term does come up when I quote and cite Delisle’s work, as I compare outmigration from Cape Breton and the Maritimes to Newfoundland outmigration.

long-form non-fiction comic entitled “Loss,” which was published on her Tumblr page in February of 2012. The piece is subtitled “I’ve Been to Your Cities, I Didn’t Stay Long,” a reference to The Rankin Family’s song “Fisherman’s Son.” The Rankin Family is a successful band from Beaton’s hometown of Mabou, Cape Breton, and their song “Fisherman’s Son” is sung from the perspective of a man who views “the sea [as his] lifeline, shore [as his] home.” Despite having travelled to many cities, the singer insists “that’s not for me, no I couldn’t stay” (The Rankin Family). Beaton describes this comic as “a tribute” to Kenzie Beaton, a young man from Mabou who was killed in Alberta, and his family. Mabou is the community that unites these three figures: the speaker in the song “Fisherman’s Son,” recently deceased Kenzie Beaton, and artist Kate Beaton. The comic is full of grief for a community shaped and, in some ways, undone by outmigration. Beaton’s Mabou is represented as a community that is socially and affectively close-knit but geographically vast and dispersed.

Jennifer Delisle describes a similar inevitable outmigration in Newfoundland: “While not every Newfoundlander’s reasons for leaving are the same, together they have formed a culture of out-migration, in which leaving is often expected or considered inevitable, and in which returning is a powerful but often unfulfilled dream” (3). Delisle’s description resonates with a section of “Loss,” when a variety of nameless characters in Beaton’s Cape Breton anticipate leaving and offer their unique reasons. One young man describes Cape Breton as a “shithole. / No jobs, no money // There’s nothing there.”¹⁷ A mother boasts that her partner “got a real good job” out west, while a father describes

¹⁷ Throughout this dissertation, when quoting from comics, I use a single forward slash (/) to indicate a paragraph break or break from one speech bubble to the next in source text. I use two forward slashes (//) to indicate a panel break.

how his children are doing so well out west that “two of them bought a house already.” He laments their absence but concedes that “they’re better off. That’s all there is” (“Loss”). A young woman justifies moving west because “I just know people there. // I mean no one’s here anymore anyway” (“Loss”). Their reasons for leaving and their feelings about it vary, but leaving is the default choice for many. Beaton struggles with the consequences of outmigration, particularly the physical distance between her and her community.

Even Beaton’s reflections on Cape Breton are from a distance, as she draws from whichever city she is living and working in at the time. The graphic form allows her to represent this distance in aesthetic and affectively moving ways. When she describes Kenzie Beaton as “a fisherman’s son,” the frame is filled with a detailed boat, its careful shading standing out against an amorphous background. Here, the boat is the dominant image. It is central in the frame because it represents the major point of connection between Beaton and her subject, Kenzie. The boat signifies their shared Maritime culture. Kenzie is the fisherman’s son, raised by the profit from fishing boats like this one, and Beaton was his neighbour, also raised in the context of a waning fishing industry. In the last frame of the comic, the boat appears again, but this time it is diminished: small, with minimal detail, and placed on the margin of the page (see fig. 2). Above the boat, Beaton writes: “My grieving community is far away. / I wish I knew him better. / But he was just a boy, when I left.” Both the boat and the Maritime community it represents are distanced. The boat is small, as if it is far away from the gaze of the artist and reader. And where the first boat filled the panel, this boat is marginalized, pushed to the side of the panel, no longer the sole focus. In fact, it looks to be sailing out of the panel entirely.

There are many types of distance at work in this panel. Firstly, the far-away perspective of the boat and empty space around it speak to the physical distance between Beaton and her community. Secondly, as the boat sails away, it emphasizes the emotional distance between Beaton and the deceased, Kenzie, who—as the fisherman’s son—is represented through the boat. They are emotionally distance because Beaton chose to—or had to—leave Cape Breton before they could get to know each other.

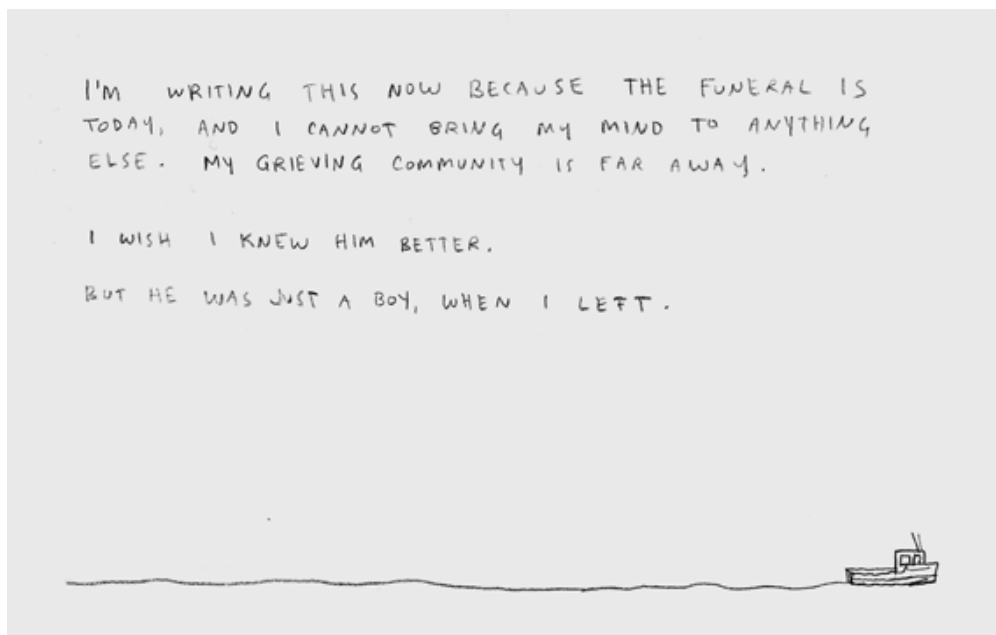


Fig. 2: Boat in “Loss”

This distance between Beaton and her community is difficult to come to terms with. “I never felt a thing so real as distance as I did in Alberta,” Beaton writes, “It was five thousand miles from the Atlantic Ocean and bursting with Atlantic Canadians” (“Loss”). Beaton’s drawings recreate the emotional effect of distance. Mid-comic, Beaton sketches a goodbye between her and her mother (see fig. 3). In the top half of Fig. 3, Beaton and her mother are close to each other and to the readerly gaze, filling the frame.



Fig. 3: Goodbye in “Loss”

But as Beaton leaves, they, like the boat, move to the margins of the panel: Beaton is a small figure walking to the right side of the panel and her mother is a small figure standing on the left side of the panel. The centre of the frame is just space. On either side of this empty space are Beaton and her mother, their expressions in tension. Beaton is smiling on the right, but her mother is frowning, her abstract face marked by worry lines. Beaton zooms out the perspective of the panel, switching from the close up of them hugging to the wide view of them bidding goodbye, and this shift in perspective emphasizes the distance at the heart of their relationship. The increased distance between them on the page speaks to the long-distance nature of their relationship. There is always space between them—provinces and kilometers that must be crossed in order for them to

enjoy their brief visits.

A significant detail in these panels is Beaton's mother's face, always marked by frowns and worry lines. Beaton's attention to her mother's face speaks to her attention to the *people* of Cape Breton, who are always central in her narratives. In the context of Atlantic Canadian literature, Beaton's work is remarkable for its detailed focus on people, to the exclusion of landscape. In their article "Surf's up! The Rising Tide of Atlantic-Canadian Literature," Herb Wyile and Jeanette Lynes cite two passages from Atlantic-Canadian texts, one by L.M. Montgomery and the other from Edward Riche's novel *Nine Planets*. Both are detailed descriptions of landscapes, rendered vivid through adjectives. "Saltwater synaesthesia," Wyile and Lynes call these passages, "Orgasmic pastoral" (5). But while Wyile and Lynes go on to analyze these passages in terms of a literary shift from idyllic to cynical, I am struck by the fact that they begin an essay on the state of Atlantic-Canadian literature with such a focus on the place of landscape. If the landscape is a preferred theme and trope in Atlantic Literature, then Beaton's work is a break with tradition. The single pastoral scene that opens "Loss" stands out because it is so rare in her work. Her comics foreground people, with settings and landscapes rendered very rarely. Even the boat is a representation of human interaction with the landscape, symbolic of the work that the people perform on the landscape—fishing—rather than simply representing the landscape itself. Though the people that populate her comics are drawn in a simple and abstract style, they are the primary content. Cape Breton is represented through relationships, faces, and interpersonal exchanges. Cape Breton is not made visible and meaningful as a physical space, but as a collection of bodies, rendered again and again across Beaton's panels.

Comics scholar Hillary Chute has written extensively about bodies and embodiment in comics. In her work on trauma in graphic narrative, she analyzes what it means for women cartoonists to represent their own trauma and their own bodies on the page. Chute is fascinated by the power of rendering both trauma and the creative/authoritative female body visible, again and again, in comics (*Graphic Women* 3). Building on her work, I am interested in Beaton's act of persistently drawing and re-drawing the bodies and faces of her family members. Across five years of holiday and family comics, she draws her family members hundreds of times. What is the weight of this act? Does it bring their faces and their personalities into Beaton's everyday life, even when she does not see them for months at a time?

Chute writes that "against a valorization of absence and aporia, graphic narrative asserts the value of presence, however complex and contingent" (*Graphic Women* 2). Beaton does not simply represent her family in her comics, she *re-presents* them, she renders them present, again and again. Writing about Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home*, Chute argues: "if as a child Bechdel felt cut off from touch, and was further, irrevocably cut off from her father because of his early death, drawing images of her father is a way to touch him and reencounter him, to be close to him" (*Why Comics* 381). Similarly, Beaton engages with her family regularly by drawing them over and over. This visual labour pushes against their absence, an absence that is ensured by Beaton's inevitable departures from Mabou. But these drawn figures—simple imitations of living bodies—must simultaneously highlight the ongoing separation of Beaton from her family, thus the "presence" these comics offer is always, as Chute writes, "contingent" (*Graphic Women* 2). Though they are (re)presented within the comics, they remain, for the most

part, physically absent from Beaton's daily life. Their presence in her comics is contingent on her visits and on her attention to these everyday moments of togetherness.

After reading dozens of these comics, I am struck by the affective force of Beaton's representation of her mother's face: two dots for eyes, an angular nose, a mouth and eyebrows that shape the emotion or tone of any given moment, always set against the deep worry lines below her eyes. The lines are always visible in strips when Beaton's mother expresses her worry about her daughters, suggesting that they are this worry worked into the body: out-migration has physically marked the mother's face.

Beaton sees these worry lines, she recognizes them, and she draws them, again and again. The repeated drawing of her loved ones, this labour of love, carries affective weight. Just as the mother's love is rendered visible on the face, Beaton's love for her family is rendered into each frame of each comic strip, no matter how mundane the narrative. Her loving depictions of her family undercut the mundane nature of these moments. Mundanity is assigned value through her affection and her care.

And here is where I want to turn back to the concept of the mundane and push against its associations with boredom or unimportance: these strips are mundane because of their simple, everyday narratives; they represent moments that are inconsequential in the run of things, stories that lack intense conflict or complex narrative structure. But in spite of this mundanity, Beaton has marked them as *interesting* through the very act of making them into comics and sharing them with the world. In her theorization of *interesting* as an aesthetic category, Sianne Ngai writes: "Judging something interesting—the mere act of singling it out as somehow worthy of everyone's attention—is often the first step in making it so" (47). That is, when one person judges something interesting,

their gesture towards the thing (in this case, the anecdote) brings it to other's attention, and invites others to spend time evaluating it and offering their own judgments. Beaton singles out all these mundane moments as worthy of graphic representation. Her act of drawing marks these moments as interesting, at least to her, and invites others to consume them and make their own evaluations. And these interestingly-mundane comic strips find an audience—a large one.¹⁸

I have arrived at a kind of tension, between graphic anecdotes that *I* have judged to be mundane, and that Beaton has judged as interesting and worthy of creative representation and circulation. How do they function as both? The answer is in how these mundane comics gesture towards a loving past—an idealized childhood, a past in which Beaton and her family were together on a daily basis—and a utopian future—a future in which they can live with and near each other again. I borrow this concept of a utopian future from José Esteban Muñoz. In his introduction to *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz writes that “utopia exists in the quotidian” (9). This statement follows an analysis of Frank O’Hara’s poem “Having a Coke with You,” in which, according to Muñoz, the “quotidian act” of sharing a coke with a same-sex lover “signifies a vast lifeworld of queer relationality, an encrypted sociality, and a utopian potentiality” (6). Muñoz argues that two queer men enjoying a coke together in public is both quotidian, an everyday thing, and also—potentially—utopian. This is because what is judged to be quotidian is not always, in the experiences of individuals living at the intersections of established and

¹⁸ Beaton publishes these comics on Tumblr and Twitter. Her Tumblr posts of family comics regularly receive between 3000 and 4000 notes (which include reblogs, likes, and responses). On twitter, where she has more than 137 000 followers, her family comics are usually favoured between 3000 and 4000 times. These numbers indicate the number of people who actively engage with these posts and does not account for the hundreds or thousands more who read these comics without actively liking or recirculating them.

oppressive systems, quotidian *at all*. Queer men cannot always engage in intimate-if-innocuous activities in public. What is every day or mundane for a heterosexual couple is perhaps risky and rare for a queer couple, and even when it ceases to be risky and starts to be mundane, this mundanity is hard-won. In Muñoz's analysis of O'Hara's poem, the quotidian is utopian in that it anticipates and previews a future in which such pleasurable normative acts are mundane, regardless of one's sexual orientation. Beaton's own comics represent an easy, familial camaraderie indicative of her happy childhood growing up with her sisters and parents, but they are contextualized within the experience of distance, or living apart. The mundanity that Beaton lovingly renders is not, in fact, quotidian anymore, at least not consistently in Beaton's life. Her brief visits home are just that, brief. The distance between Beaton and her family imposes limits on their mundane intimacy. But there is the unspoken potential of homecoming, of living with again, and this is where the utopian potentiality is at work in Beaton's mundane family comics.

The briefness of these visits, their ephemerality, is what lends meaning to their mundanity. I spoke earlier about how each batch of comics is framed by Beaton's transit to and from Mabou. Delisle writes that among the community dispersed by Newfoundland outmigration, "returning is a powerful but often unfulfilled dream" (3). For many years of Beaton's comics, the return is a temporary one, and so is the sense of mundanity that Beaton's comics celebrate. She does not get to be with her family every day, and so simple interactions and minor jokes take on more weight; they become interesting and worthy of time, attention, and representation. Out-migration has disrupted the mundane for Beaton and her family—her mother's every day is not joking with her family; it is deep concern and longing for her distant children. "[W]hen we attend to the

mundane,” Gregg writes, it brings out “local intensities” (368). Out-migration has been studied and discussed broadly, from the fields of geography (Hartt; Milward) and economics (Green et al.) to health (Nuttgens, Doyle & Change). But Beaton’s graphic gaze on the mundane joys of her visits with family, and the spectre of out-migration that weaves through these comics, shows how one family experiences a regional and generational phenomenon.

Comics of a “Complicated Place”

Beaton’s artistic interest in outmigration is not only focused on homecoming and leaving. She also takes up the experience of being away from home for work. Though the bulk of Beaton’s personal comics are set in her family home or around Mabou, she has spent many years living and working away from Cape Breton. She is one of the many to move away from Cape Breton for career and financial reasons, and like many other Atlantic-Canadians, she has spent time working in Alberta’s oil industry. She has written several comics about her time working and living in the camps around Fort McMurray, including “Night Shift” (2014), “Ducks” (2014), and “Cookies” (2010).

The Fort McMurray comics are Beaton’s longest comics, in length, to date. Beaton’s family comics are brief: three- or four-panel strips, the length of the average newspaper comic strip. Beaton became known for the comic strip form on her website, *Hark! A Vagrant*, which uses short strips to make jokes about historical and literary figures. In her analysis of Beaton’s comics about the Founding Fathers, Sarah Sillin describes the structure of these strips: “The first panel provides the set-up, giving readers

a moment to recognize [Benjamin] Franklin and observe him; the gutter serves as the beat where we can anticipate his reaction to this setting; and the second panel delivers the punch line as we witness his pleasure” (196). Beaton’s family comics follow this structure, with the first two or three panels setting up a humorous or emotional scenario, and the final panel delivering the punch, which is either humorous or sentimental, and more often than not rendered through the reaction of one character to another. There is little room for character growth, layered narrative, or nuance. This short form has been incredibly successful for Beaton. As her family comics attest, Beaton has found ways to adapt this comic strip form to carry heavier tones, such as worry and grief, as well as humour and joy. These strips are easily consumed and circulated: they are often found posted on doors and walls, in the slides of a PowerPoint presentation, or on social media feeds.

But Beaton’s Fort McMurray comics are much longer. The shortest, “Cookies,” contains 60 panels, and follows Beaton through multiple interactions with colleagues and family. The Longest, “Ducks,” contains five parts and an epilogue, and was originally published over the course of three weeks (March 20th to April 7th, 2014). These are long-form comics. I use the term *long-form* here to describe that vague form between a short comic strip and a full graphic novel. A long-form comic is comparable to a piece of long-form journalism (though not necessarily non-fiction). Beaton’s long-form comics could not stand on their own as a graphic novel, but they include more narrative development than the very short comic strips that made Beaton famous. They demand more time and attention from the reader, and the careful plotting and arrangement that holds these longer comics together speaks to thought and energy on the part of the creator. These formal

features are incredibly important for tackling stories about Fort McMurray.

The long-form offers space for more context and complexity, which these stories seem to demand. Beaton acknowledges the complexity of this subject matter in her cautious introductions to these comics. Alongside the first Fort McMurray comic, “Cookies,” she comments on Fort McMurray without even naming it: “It’s a place that’s hard to describe for anyone who hasn’t been.” Alongside “Night Shift,” she offers this context: “Some backstory, as some know, I worked for two years in the tar sands of Fort McMurray, in various mining sites. [...] Not everyone’s experiences there are the same, this was just a part of my own. It’s a complicated place that I think of every day, and there are scenes that never leave my mind.” Her commentary alongside “Ducks” further echoes this caution: “It is a complicated place, it is not the same for all, and these are only my own experiences there.” With each comic, she emphasizes that this is her *own* story of a “complicated place.”

Beaton’s cautious prefaces feel defensive or pre-emptive. She knows she is representing a deeply controversial work- and home-space. The Athabasca tar sands are often criticized by environmental groups, by Indigenous communities, and by other activists. Government and corporations alike come under fire for perpetuating destructive resource extraction through the tar sands, while many defend the tar sands as a vital source of employment, energy, and economic stimulation. Beaton’s careful comments suggest she knows her narrative will not satisfy everyone. Her comments work to acknowledge that her comics are limited: they offer only her perspective of the tar sands and can only *gesture* to the experiences of others in and around Fort McMurray. They are also limited in their length. Even with the longest piece, “Ducks,” she gives the sense that

the scope of these strips is insufficient for the level of narrative complexity Fort McMurray deserves, and she hints towards future work: “A larger work gets talked about from time to time.” In fact, she has announced a graphic novel that will be set in Fort McMurray (Corbett). Through all of her long-form comics, Beaton acknowledges the care and attention this content demands. And it is content she is drawn to again and again: from her first Fort McMurray comic, the 2010 piece “Cookies,” to her forthcoming graphic novel, Beaton has been publicly drawing about this place and her memories for almost a decade.

Her extended engagement with this subject matter of the tar sands is worth noting, especially when this effort and attention is read against her ‘it’s complicated’ caveats. I want to flag the term *complicated* and think through how it works to describe Fort McMurray, Beaton’s experiences, and her comics. Earlier, I cited Ngai’s theorization of the aesthetic category of *interesting*. I argued that the act of creating and circulating a comic—even one that is short, funny, and anecdotal—functions as a value judgment. This creative labour, and the time and attention it entails, marks the comic’s content (a conversation, an experience, a joke) as “interesting” and worthy of further attention. In the case of Beaton’s work, it is each comic’s readership who is invited to consume and judge the interesting ‘thing.’ Looking at Beaton’s long-form comics, I wonder if the term *complicated* functions in a similar way. Is *complicated* an aesthetic or value judgment that frames how an audience consumes and receives a culturally-produced object?

I contend that the term *complicated*, used as it is in the short captions or introductions adjacent to “Cookies,” “Night Shift,” and “Ducks,” functions as a placeholder. It signals Beaton’s awareness that this subject matter carries weight and

controversy, and that people come to stories about Fort McMurray and the tar sands with preconceived notions and opinions. In an interview, Beaton digs deeper into this tension between her own experiences and other's expectations, when she describes

the reaction [she] gets when asked about life in the oilsands [sic].

'People were always very concerned about what was happening environmentally, which is fine,' said Beaton. 'But they didn't seem to know or care about the human cost.'

Part of that cost, Beaton says, is struggling with one's own emotions.

'It's not black and white. People vilify the oilsands for a good reason a lot of the time, but for anybody who's there it's not that simple.' (Pottie)

This longer commentary untangles some of the strands behind the descriptor *complicated*: the tar sands impact on the environment, its human and emotional toll, and the tension between capitalizing on the tar sands while also recognizing its problems. But within the shorter introductions to her comics, Beaton leaves these complexities unspoken. She relies on the audience to interpret the vague descriptor of complicated, and so takes no firm stance on what many would consider a polemical subject.

There is also a sense in which Beaton is writing to a specific community: a community scattered via outmigration, brought (by economic necessity) into the controversial space of the tar sands, and expected to live there, if only for a while. It is the very community she depicted in "Loss," a kind of kinship community. The Oxford English Dictionary defines kinship as "the recognized ties of relationship, by descent, marriage, or ritual, that form the basis of social organization...the system of relationships traditionally accepted in a culture and the rights and obligations they involve"

("Kinship"). To return for a moment to "Loss," the comic in which Beaton grieves the death of a young man who she did not have a strong personal relationship with, but who she feels deeply connected to by virtue of family and home: he shared her name and lived in her community. Though kinship has been traditionally understood in terms of bloodlines and genetic relation, Janet Carsten notes a shift away from this in kinship studies more open understandings of "relatedness," such as the kinship felt in queer communities and chosen families (4). Though familial relationships are certainly a major focus in Beaton's comics, as discussed above, the kinship evoked in her Fort McMurray comics is broader, encompassing many who share her geographic and economic trajectory and her cultural context. That is, I imagine her kinship audience as predominantly white settler Canadians who have relocated temporarily or permanently to secure employment, or people who have stayed in their home communities but felt the loss of depopulation and outmigration. In their study of kinship and kindness in Newfoundland/Alberta migration, Craig Palmer, Emily Groom and Jordan Brandon found that culture both produced and maintained traditions and kinship obligations: young Newfoundlanders were raised on a culture of hospitality and kindness, such that these were major cultural values; Newfoundland culture reminded them of their kinship obligations, such that a man hearing a Newfoundland folk song in Fort McMurray was reminded of his father and the values his father taught him (97). To think about kinship as at work in Beaton's comics is to recognize the ways she is produced by and produces culture. Mabou-born musicians The Rankin Family write a song about the emotional toll of outmigration; Beaton invokes this song as she grieves the death, far from home, of someone she recognizes as kin; this comic is read and felt by those who share these

experiences; and finally, the comic itself becomes a cultural text that reflects kinship and perpetuates kinship. Just as The Rankin Family produced a song that could be heard and understood by a specific kinship community, Beaton produces comics that can be read and understood by her kinship community, rather than appealing to a wide swath of readers who bring their differing experiences of petroculture to their consumptions.

Producing comics of and for a particular kinship community *is* valuable cultural production, and despite the vague and cautious nature of her prefaces, Beaton is engaging in cultural and political dialogue about the tar sands simply by producing these comics. In *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*, Hillary Chute argues that graphic narratives take “the risk of representation” when they take on difficult subject matter; graphic narratives “have the potential to be powerful precisely because they intervene against a culture of invisibility” (5). Beaton’s Fort McMurray comics stand as contribution to an ongoing cultural conversation around the tar sands and the role of petroleum and resource extraction in Canada and its communities. Contextualizing “Ducks” and “Night Shift” within the field of cultural production about the tar sands reveals what graphic narrative—and Beaton’s unique style in particular—have to offer. What are they rendering visible that has remained largely invisible within existing dialogue and cultural production?

The interdisciplinary field of petroculture studies brings methodologies from literary and cultural studies, geography, environmental science, political science, and Indigenous studies, among others, to the analysis of cultures of oil production and consumption. As a petro-state—a state that profits from oil production and export—Canada has attracted the attention of many petroculture scholars. Communications scholar Geo

Takach analyses the discourse around Alberta's Athabasca oil fields near Fort McMurray. He calls this area the "bit-sands," but they are often referred to as the oil sands or (more controversially) the tar sands. Takach writes that the tar sands "ha[ve] become a focal point in the ongoing and polarizing debate over the costs and benefits of resource extraction," as well as "a site for contesting Alberta's identity and even Canada's identity" (9). Corporations, political parties, advocacy groups (environmental, labour, etc.), activists, media, and local communities all participate in the debate about the tar sands. Each of these players presents a certain narrative about the tar sands, and their impact on the adjacent communities, the environment, the economy, the province, and the nation.

Set within the work camps of the tar sands, "Ducks" and "Night Shift" are situated right in the centre of major and deeply polarizing debates around energy and consumption, economy and labour, Indigenous sovereignty and colonialism, and environmentalism and climate change, to name a few. As evidenced by her acknowledgements and caveats, Beaton treads this ground carefully. But she also draws an innovative narrative and visual path through a contested space, and in doing so she sidesteps narratives and strategies that have become well-worn tropes in the cultural and political dialogue around the tar sands. Beaton's tar sands narratives are unique in two major ways: their scope and their pluralism. Scope refers to Beaton's form and perspective: her comics, in comparison to other media about the tar sands, zoom in, focusing on people and objects rather than on place or landscape. By pluralism, I mean the very complexity that Beaton flags repeatedly in her introductions: within the comics themselves, Beaton takes up some of the contexts that make the tar sands so complicated.

She weaves multiple thematic threads together to comment on the nuance of the environmental, economic, and social space of the tar sands. Both her delineated scope and her multifaceted narrative allow her to avoid the “simple binary” that Takach sees at work in so much cultural production around the tar sands, a binary “popularly framed as an all-or-nothing conflict between economic development and environmental protection” (10, 3). Later in this chapter, I will untangle the many thematic threads of Beaton’s tar sands comics, and how they represent Atlantic outmigration and the tar sands as the intersection of many complex forces of oppression and violence at work in Canada. First, I will analyze Beaton’s scope in relation to other media and visual representations of the tar sands and look to the ways it uses the grammar of comics to represent what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence:” the forms of violence that occur incrementally, even indiscernibly, but take their toll nonetheless (2).

In his book *Tar Wars: Oil, Environment and Alberta’s Image*, Takach argues that images and visuals have become “a favourite weapon in the battle over the bit-sands” (10). His study of documentary and cinematic representations of the tar sands notes the frequent use of landscape shots, aerial views, and other wide, sweeping visuals. These are used both by those opposed to the tar sands and those hoping to bolster oil production. Edward Burtynsky’s photo-narrative “Oil” is frequently cited and analyzed by petroculture scholars (Burnham, Kover, Takach). In this photography project, Burtynsky sought to represent automobile culture, including the “raw material and refining process” behind the automobile (“Oil: Artist Statement”). This photo-narrative includes several vast aerial views of the Alberta tar sands. In one sense, these photographs present what Takach calls “scene[s] of spectacular, ecological apocalypse” (10), featuring swaths of

land devoid of natural growth and transformed by extraction. T.R. Kover wonders about the allegiance of Burtynsky's images, which he reads as an "industrial sublime" that risks "aestheticizing environmental destruction" (128). But regardless of their political and aesthetic effect, Burtynsky's photographs are just one prominent example in a trend in visual and narrative representations of the tar sands and Alberta's oil industry more generally.

Aerial views are featured in at least eight of the documentaries and marketing campaigns Takach analyzes, including panoramic views of refineries, deforestation, tailing ponds, reclaimed and cleaned up land, oil spills, and what Takach eventually calls "now-familiar aerial shots of open-pit mining" (106). There is no doubt that such images hold an impact, as they work hard to communicate the sheer scale of destruction wrought by human industry. In fact, Beaton uses an aerial photograph of an industrial landscape to begin "Night Shift," which suggests that she, too, is moved by such imagery, or recognizes its impact on her readership. But these images also contribute to the oversimplified binary I cited above. Takach writes that these vast images of devastation "provide a post-apocalyptic binary to the serene nirvana portrayed in the place-branding tradition" (127-28). The "serene nirvana" is most visible in marketing material put out by the Alberta government and Travel Alberta, which seek to brand Alberta as a site of natural beauty rather than industrial destruction. Takach argues that this "filmic binary...seems to leave little room for dialogue" (128). Working on a different visual scale entirely—that is, the human and animal scale of the offices, trucks, and in between spaces of the tar sands—Beaton's comics have more space for thinking across this binary. Rather than providing a vast, distant image of the tar sands that is either shocking or

serene, Beaton's comics zoom in on the details within the tar sands

Compared to the huge landscapes depicted in Burtynsky's image, "Night Shift" has a very narrow visual scope, such that panels generally only contain one or two faces. Landscapes and buildings are rarely represented in any detail. A stark difference between the trope of the panorama and Beaton's own work is colour: Burtynsky's aerial shots represent a landscape of browns and greys, with occasional bright colours clearly indicative of unnatural chemicals. But Beaton's comics are black and white. How does she communicate the effects of resource extraction in such small frames, and without the texture and sensational impact of colour?

This is where the form of comics comes into play. In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud situates comics style on a spectrum, which he calls the "iconic abstraction scale" (46). The left side of the scale is compared to the photograph, and is described as "complex," "realistic," "objective," and "specific" (McCloud 46). The right side of the scale is what McCloud calls the cartoon, and it is described as "simple," "iconic," "subjective" and "universal" (46). The farther to the right on the scale, the higher the level of abstraction. Beaton's faces do not contain much more detail than the cartoon: dots for eyes, simple lines for mouths and noses. The characters are always foregrounded, and the background objects and infrastructure are drawn in a simple, abstract style. Shapes are only vaguely recognizable as heavy machinery, fences, office equipment. All in all, Beaton's style in "Ducks" and "Night Shift" is located on the right side of the scale, characterized by simplicity and a lack of detail.

A simpler style has its own distinct effects, which are hinted at in McCloud's descriptors (universal, iconic). McCloud argues that the cartoon is more universal than

the photograph or the hyper-realist drawing (31). This universality is especially visible in Beaton's drawings of her coworkers. These men are barely distinguishable except for minor details: facial hair, glasses, or the shape of a nose. When they wear hardhats and safety glasses, they are even harder to distinguish. The vagueness of these representations of workers makes them relatable. McCloud argues for the cartoon's relatability: "the more cartoony a face is...the more people it could be said to *describe*" (31, emphasis original). A simple face with dotted-eyes and a hard hat offers space for projecting one's self or familiar faces.

Beaton's abstract style contributes to the meaning of her comics. McCloud writes: "When we *abstract* an image through *cartooning*, we're not so much eliminating details as we are *focusing* on specific details. By *stripping down* an image to its essential 'meaning,' an artist can *amplify* that meaning in a way that realistic art *can't*" (30, emphasis original). Whereas Burtynsky's photographs offer an aesthetic challenge by way of colour, texture, detail, and breadth, Beaton's comics zoom in, literally and figuratively, on moments and feelings within the workplace of the tar sands. The effect of this zooming in or stripping down is most clear in "Ducks," which includes eleven panels that lack borders entirely. Below, I close read the contents of some of these borderless panels and argue for what is meaning is being made and emphasized through these panels. But first, I want to unpack how these panels, through their difference in form, are read differently than the rest of the comic.

These panels stand out by the very fact that they break the sequence of rectangular frames. But they are also notably silent, lacking any kind of speech bubble or caption. Moreover, some of them contain more detail in the form of shading and line work.

McCloud argues that both borderless panels and silent panels “can take on a *timeless quality*” (102, emphasis original). This sense of timelessness has to do with the rhythm of the comic as a whole. The layout of “Ducks” is consistent: each panel is the same size, and a single column of panels presented in a long, vertical scroll, so that reading takes on a steady rhythm. There is no need to pause to take in a larger panel or navigate the reading pattern for a change in layout. Thierry Groensteen notes that with a regular layout comes a regular rhythm (138). Once a comic has established a consistent layout, as “Ducks” does, any irregularities disrupt the rhythm of the reading. The borderless panels are the only irregularities in “Ducks” layout, and as such, they disrupt the reader’s pace. Chute argues that “comics can slow time and thicken it through the rhythms it establishes in panel size, shape, and arrangement” (*Disaster Drawn* 37). A reader may note the sudden shift in “Ducks” regular layout and linger on these unusual panels, and, as McCloud suggests, the panels “may linger in the reader’s mind” (102). Through their unique structure, these panels stand out within the comic and in the reading experience.

The panels’ lack of border makes them feel timeless. By removing the border from the panel, Beaton removes a visual barrier for establishing time and space. Discussing the unique reading practices comics call for, McCloud notes, “In learning to read comics, we all learned to perceive time *spatially*, for in the world of comics, *time and space* are *one and the same*” (101, emphasis original). When space becomes a way to indicate time, limitations on space have implications for time. A bordered panel is a discrete moment: the border limits the amount of time this moment can occupy, as the border cedes physical space to the next panel, the next moment. Chute describes the visible border as invoking “visual efficacy *and* limitation” (*Disaster Drawn* 17, emphasis

original). But a borderless panel does not carry the same limitations: the panel and its given moment literally extend—up to the border of the adjacent panel, out to the margins of the page. Time and space become less controlled, less discrete. When this visual barrier to time is removed, the panel may demand more time (and attention) from the reader.

Given the timeless quality of these borderless panels, I want to spend some time analyzing their contents and unpacking the meaning that is emphasized through their formal difference. Why are they singled out? What bearing do they have on the story as a whole, such that they are structured so differently and rendered so noticeable? I contend that these borderless panels act as synecdoches for major narrative and ideological threads in Beaton’s comics. These threads are not unlike the fifteen “frames” Takach identifies in his analysis of representations of the tar sands. He argues: “When we frame something, we make meaning of it as we locate, perceive, identify and label it. We do this by connecting an activity to the body of our individual or social experience” (33). He goes on to walk through these fifteen frames, including money, environment, pride, progress, and greed, and he unpacks how they shape or push the discourse around the tar sands. These frames intersect and clash in fascinating and difficult ways. I want to avoid using the term *frame*, firstly because it is confusing in the visual context of comics, which have their own frames, and secondly because, in Takach’s use, it speaks to a persuasive or argumentative angle. I do argue that Beaton is returning to particular themes, issues, or perspectives, and that these *threads*—as I will call them—are rendered visible through the borderless panels. Each borderless panel contains an object, rather than a scene. These objects, contextualized by the stories told around them, stand in for larger issues that

collide within the tar sands, the threads that weave through Beaton’s experiences in the Fort McMurray, sometimes tangling in particularly difficult ways. I will not close read every borderless panel, but I will unpack a few of these unique panels and see how these objects act as symbols of what makes the tar sands so complicated.



Fig. 4: Saltines in “Ducks”

A pile of saltine crackers (see fig. 4), concludes Part Three of the comic, in which Beaton and her colleagues joke about the strange diets of their Newfoundlander coworkers. “You ever see Frank eat lunch?” asks a coworker, before describing it for Beaton: “He takes a whole sleeve of crackers and puts cheeze whiz on ‘em and he just *downs* them all – like everyday.” “What, saltines? Gross,” Beaton replies, and the two turn to watch Frank eat. The first coworker begins to make fun of the “Newfie” diet, but the Newfoundlander shakes off the criticism, slipping deep into his accent: “Nuttin wrong wit baloney / Newfie roundsteaks b’ye.” The saltines, which appear about a dozen panels later, recall this exchange. Frank’s saltines are contextualized as a regional taste, unique to Newfoundlanders and deemed “gross” by Beaton and laughably by her coworker. The crackers are a source of humour and even stereotyping, a staple of the large contingent of Newfoundlanders who work and live in the tar sands, and who have brought their

regional diet with them. Beaton, a Cape Bretoner, does not fully relate to the regionalisms of baloney and saltines, and can be irked or amused by these regionalisms, alongside the other non-Newfoundlanders. The whole exchange speaks to a wider culture of camaraderie within the camp, in which different regional groups collide. The camps serve as a site for teasing, judgment, and regional pride.

But the pile of saltines is not simply a lighthearted regionalism. Rather than situating this pile of saltines directly after this humorous exchange, Beaton includes the saltines much later, at the end of Part Three. The saltines are juxtaposed with a sequence of panels in which Beaton reads a shockingly short resume from an older Newfoundlander. The resume, not more than ten lines long, boasts his birthdate (4 November 1947), a Grade 8 education, and scant work experience: “1 year mail driver / 4 years mining / 28 years fish plant.” Most of the man’s work experience is in dying or troubled industries. His brief resume traces a narrative of economic collapse: first, he worked in the mining industry, which has been in decline in the Atlantic provinces for several decades; then, he worked in the fishing industry, which was decimated by overfishing and the 1992 fishing moratorium. His lack of education and transferable skills do not bode well for a man of his age; a CBC article that Beaton reads earlier in Part 3 is dated July 2008, which puts the man’s age at 60. At this age, he should ideally be thinking towards retirement, but instead he is attempting to break into a new industry in a new province. His limited skills and his background in dying or dead industries provides necessary context for his migration to Alberta. As Delisle argues, the economic context of the Atlantic provinces may act as a coercive force in outmigration: “For people struggling to support themselves and their families, the choice between unemployment and

outmigration is not much of a choice at all” (13). She describes how “this feeling of coercion was emphasized with CBC television coverage of the closure of another Newfoundland fish plant, and footage of a sobbing father shouting, ‘I’m the one that’s got to go to my kid and explain to him why his father’s got to leave and go to the mainland’” (13). Out-migration is a consequence of declining industries, economically depressed communities, and desperation wrought by widespread unemployment, all forces which shape the man’s scant resume. Beaton turns the resume over, hoping for more, but finds nothing. She holds the resume to her chest and frowns. The next panel is the pile of saltines.

When the reader pauses on this borderless panel, and is invited, by its formal irregularity, to linger, the saltines take on more nuanced meaning. They become entangled with reflections on class, poverty, community, and nostalgia. One can imagine that a man with no high school diploma, perhaps losing work from another fish plant closing, would depend on the cheapness of saltines and baloney. That these foods are beloved regional snacks speaks to how familiar Newfoundland is with poverty and financial precarity. The saltines may be a regional snack that Newfoundlanders bring with them across the country, but they are also symptoms of a province and region shaped by chronic and systemic economic depression. The saltines are introduced early in Part Three in casual conversation, but by the time they appear, borderless at the end of Pat Three, they have accumulated more significance and complexity.

These saltines, and the Newfoundland man’s resume, are both symptoms of slow violence. Nixon defines slow violence as “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional

violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Nixon draws attention to the violence that *escapes* general attention because it acts on environments, peoples, and animals so steadily and unspectacularly as to escape notice. In the examples of the saltines and the resume, the slow violence is the economic impact of ruthless resource extraction of the kind that occurred in the mining, fishing, and oil industries. These industries may give job opportunities in the short term, but in the long run, they leave communities and individuals in dire straits. The bust of the fishing and mining industries led to the dispersion of both Newfoundlanders and Maritimers. The economic need that drove Atlantic populations west also implicates many of them in the ecologically damaging oil industry. The slow violence of poverty forces many people to be dependent on, and to defend, an industry that is rightly challenged by local Indigenous communities and environmental activists. Below, I discuss the environmental impacts of slow violence, but first I want to further analyse the human toll, including the isolation caused by outmigration.

The tar sands’ slow violence also has an emotional toll on the people who work there, and—as seen in Beaton’s family comics—on the family they leave behind. Many of the borderless panels in “Ducks” recall the distance between the workers and their loved ones. In Part Three, Beaton lingers on the cell phone she uses to communicate with her family. In the phone conversation that precedes this borderless panel, Beaton asks about an event she has missed: “So it was nice? ... Well I’m sorry I couldn’t be there.” She speaks in some panels, but not in others; in there, I imagine her mother speaking, and can only make guesses about her mother’s words based on Beaton’s facial expressions. The conversation apparently ends when a sad Beaton says, “You worry too much Mom.” On

the other end of the phone, invisible to the reader, is Beaton's mother, worry lines etched into her face. On Beaton's end, both the character of Beaton and the reader are left with a cellphone—a sad, small tool that sustains their relationship over distance and time. This distance and longing are recalled in other borderless panels: a calendar page with “days off” circled in anticipation, a photograph of two parents with their children. These objects are emblems of the loneliness and isolation that the workers experience in the tar sands. The distance erodes their relationships, or perhaps simply their morale. The oil industry, in requiring a large, flexible labour force, inflicts damage on its workers.

Nixon argues for a need to engage and confront slow violence, even if it is not quite as sensational. He asks: “how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making?” (3). Beaton's “Ducks” does this work of engaging slow violence, or at least representing it. Her narrow focus—people, objects, and moments in a place that has been culturally narrated as vast and monstrous—enables the representation of the “incremental and accretive” nature of slow violence (Nixon 2). Her use of juxtaposition frames the oil sands as a site of intersecting forms of violence and oppression. While a Newfoundland man may be one of the actors of environmental destruction, he is brought to this destructive work through regional economic depression and a lack of education. While the saltines are a way of coping with the loss of home and community, they also become a staple of a community shaped by poverty. While the ducks are emotionally-moving victims, which catch the attention of those outside the tar sands, there are also workers losing their lives in this risky work. The violence of the tar sands is slow and widespread, working across generations, across borders, and across species.

Gender in the Workspace of the Tar Sands

Here are some of the narrative threads of slow violence that these borderless panels have helped me identify: environmental violence, outmigration, poverty, nostalgia. So far, Beaton has shared the emotional toll of the tar sands with her coworkers. But there are moments when she experiences the space differently than many of her coworkers: as a woman working in the camps, she is a minority. She is observed and treated in different ways within this male-dominated space. Her experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination do not play a major role in “Ducks,” but one of the borderless panels features a bathroom door marked with a stick-figure in a dress—the universal sign for a women’s bathroom (see fig. 5). That this door is given the space of the borderless panel speaks to its significance. Beaton’s attention to the door itself, a physical border separating the overwhelmingly male space of the camps from the uniquely female space of the bathroom, draws attention to the gendering of this workplace. Furthermore, it is one of the rare panels in the comic that does not contain Beaton’s face; instead, it contains the vaguely female shape of the stick-figure. The door’s symbol speaks to the ways Beaton’s coworkers understand her through her gender: in this storyline, a woman seems to be in trouble—or at least, deeply upset—and the men call on the nearest woman to help, regardless of the relationship between the two women, or Beaton’s (lack of) training.

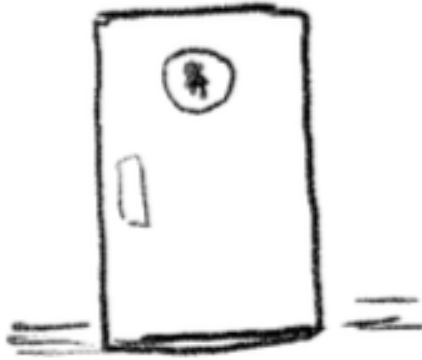


Fig. 5: Bathroom door in “Ducks”

The bathroom door concludes the only episode of “Ducks” in which gender is explicitly acknowledged. Throughout “Ducks,” Beaton interacts with primarily male colleagues. She only has one conversation with a visibly female coworker in the comic, though the efficacy of reading gender is deeply questionable, particularly given how the vague faces are further obscured through safety glasses and hardhats. In fact, faces are so obscured that even Beaton has trouble recognizing Corey, a young man who wakes her up in the middle of the night in Part 4. He explains the situation:

We were thinking you should um...help out with something // I guess this hooker got into the camp / Like I don't know, she was smuggled past security or something / Anyway she's high on crack or something, she's all fucked up / She's in the girl's bathroom, but there's just the one lady security guard with her / She just needs to be calmed down or something.

Beaton heads to the bathroom, where a crowd of men is gathered, holding drinks and talking. There, she finds a thin, worn-out looking woman resisting help from a female security guard. Beaton tentatively stands nearby; it appears as if she is uncertain about

even approaching the woman. She opens with an “Um,” which emphasizes her discomfort and uncertainty, and offers vague reassurances, “It’s ok – miss / It’s ok,” which the woman interrupts with exhortations to “go away.” The episode concludes with the image of the bathroom door, the stick-figure of a woman a simplified emblem of the gendered encounter occurring on the other side of the door.

This particular panel and the bathroom scene that precedes it allow us to think about gender and gendered labour within the camps. In this scene, three mostly unrelated women sit in a room, coping with a difficult situation. On the other side of the door, marked with a sticker-figure woman, stands a group of men. Beaton is called into the situation because of her gender, but even she is unclear on the meaning of her presence. Is she here because the men feel unable to enter the marked space of the women’s bathroom? Do they think she can perform some kind of care work for the panicked woman that they cannot? That is, do they think her gender qualifies her as a caregiver, or simply permits her access to the women-delineated space? The stick-figure symbol on the door, emphasized via the borderless panel, leaves lingering questions about gender, bodies, and space in the tar sands. The scene drives home how few women work and live in this place, and how women are perceived by their male coworkers: as service workers and caregivers. The expectation that Beaton will be better suited in a caretaking role is in itself a mundane form of patriarchy, which is further unpacked in the representation of emotional labour in “Night Shift.” Furthermore, in a work and living space dominated by men, bathrooms may be one the few—perhaps the only—spaces limited to women. Later in this chapter, I discuss Beaton’s experience of space and sexual harassment, as represented in “Night Shift.” But though, in “Ducks,” Beaton does not appear to be as explicitly

interested in her own experiences *as a woman* in the tar sands, this scene gestures towards the strangeness of being a gender minority in a largely-male workplace, and how this difference plays out.

Though the camp workers are overwhelmingly male, Beaton's long-form comics are autobiographical texts created by a woman, and Beaton centres her own body in the visual space of the comics. By appearing in almost every frame, her body and face are physical and visual reminders that woman can and do work in the tar sands. In fact, "Ducks" and the other Fort McMurray comics make visible three kinds of labour enacted by Beaton, which attend to Beaton's status as an individual and artist, and as a woman in the patriarchal workspace: Firstly, the labour of working in the tar sands, whether it is distributing tools, running errands, or doing office work. Secondly, the emotional labour Beaton does in the face of steady sexual harassment. And thirdly, the creative and physical labour of drawing. Hillary Chute writes that comics, like Beaton's, that are "rigorously handmade...call attention to their craftedness throughout, to their hand-drawn images and hand-framed moments" (*Graphic Women* 11). In the case of Beaton, her drawing and text are both done by hand, as are the frames: the frames of "Night Shift" are slightly shaky or wobbly, which suggests they were drawn by hand and not with a ruler or a computer. The shakiness of the frames is a mark of Beaton's process as an artist. Beaton is visibly present, visibly labouring, being rendered visible *through* her labour.

This visibility and repetition of Beaton's body and face are meaningful acts of representation, particularly in a predominantly male space. In *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*, Nirmal Puwar writes: "social spaces are not blank and open for any body to occupy. There is a connection between bodies and space, which is

built, repeated and contested over time” (8). If most narratives of the tar sands, and the trades more generally, represent male bodies at work, then “Ducks” contests the masculinization of this space through simple repetitive representation. The repetitive caricature of the woman-as-worker produced by the woman-as-artist holds disruptive potential.

But it is important to remember that the space she is disrupting is built to be a male space, and that part of her labour—the emotional component of her labour—is contending with this dominant masculinity. Beaton, like other women in industrial workplaces, is subject to harassment. She deals with this more directly in “Night Shift” and some shorter, one-off comic strips, but in “Ducks” it is only implied. In Part 2 of “Ducks,” the male coworker she is driving with asks her, “How are you liking being in that office?” She replies:

“Better than being in the tool crib.”

“Ah you have it pretty good now”

“People leave me alone.”

The acknowledgement that she is left alone in general, and that she was *not* left alone in the isolated space of the tool crib, is an oblique gesture to experiences of sexual harassment governed by space. The space of the office is “better” than the tool crib, because, in Beaton’s words, she is left alone; the implication is that the tool crib was less safe and less comfortable because of her regular interactions with male coworkers.

This conversation about workspace is book-ended by panels in which Beaton glimpses herself in the side mirror of the truck (see fig. 6). She gazes at herself while making this final comment, and the reader is left to wonder what she sees in her

reflection. Beaton's gaze into the mirror is typical of the genre of the graphic memoir; Michael Chaney has written about the prevalence of mirror scenes in comics: "Characters in comics are constantly playing Narcissus, particularly in autobiographies" (19). In the case of Beaton's work, her gaze into the mirror occurs at a moment when she is reflecting on her relationship to her coworkers. On the one hand, she may be recognizing her femininity in relation to the patriarchal space of the tar sands, while she also reflects on the way her male coworkers respond to it. On the other hand, *she* is the one gazing; for this moment, her gaze supersedes the male gaze that she has been subjected to. Just as she comments on being left alone, her image is isolated within the small frame of the mirror, and she is the only one to witness this image. Chaney argues, "Mirror scenes encapsulate how we come to be subjects in relation to other subjects, to ourselves, and to the tools that measure such relations" (46). In her own mirror scene, Beaton becomes the subject of her own gaze; she recognizes the femininity that makes her vulnerable and subject to harassment. And in gazing at herself in the mirror, she sees herself in isolation. Her face, framed within the mirror, speaks to her sense of isolation within the camp, whether she is literally and physically alone in the space of the office, or whether she is socially isolated by her gender. This isolation functions as another thread of slow violence.



Fig. 6: Looking in mirror, "Ducks"

When “Ducks” is read alongside “Night Shift,” it is clear that ongoing sexual harassment contributes to Beaton’s sense of isolation in the camps. “Night Shift” is set in the tool crib—the one she expresses relief at leaving in “Ducks”—and explicitly depicts a series of sexist micro-aggressions that Beaton experiences over the course of a single shift. The men make suggestions about what they would like her to do (“wash my truck in a bikini”), comment on her good fortune at being outnumbered (“You could have a face like an old sneaker and get a man here”), and imply that she uses her position to obtain sex (“You’re alone here on the night shift, you ever take anyone out back for a little you know”). In her case study of women’s experiences of employment in Fort McMurray, Bron argues that it is common for men to express hostility towards women coworkers: “Hostility can be expressed through suggestive or sexual language” (67). But she also notes that this hostility is played off as “being part of the workplace culture, part of a pattern of male-bonding which women may feel excluded from, and which may include joking and actions that make women feel extremely uncomfortable” (67). In keeping with this justification of sexual harassment as a “part of the workplace culture,” the last man to make a sexually suggestive remark follows it up with a story of “the girl that was here before [Beaton]”. When a man made a sexual proposition to the previous girl, the girl “got him fired right quick, boy. I mean it was a stupid fucking thing to say but like take a joke right.” The girl before Beaton was the target of the same harassment Beaton experiences, but her retaliation was seen as a failure to fit into the culture of the workplace. The next line acts as an implicit warning to Beaton: “Anyways you’re a nice girl, you wouldn’t do that eh.” The man leaves before Beaton can say anything else, and the next few panels linger on Beaton’s expression: a slight frown, almost a blank face

devised to have as little reaction as possible, or symptomatic of shock (see fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Reacting to harassment in “Night Shift”

Beaton’s expression paired with the man’s pseudo-warning speak to the difficulty of reacting to such harassment. Throughout “Night Shift,” Beaton reacts in many different ways: fake laughter, an expression of disgust, sarcasm, and redirection (she reminds a man that she’s “just paying student loans”). By the final man, her expression is neutral, and her verbal responses brief. His comments about taking a joke and being “a nice girl” expose a double-bind for Beaton: does she play along with these so-called jokes, tacitly agreeing to the sexist culture, or does she react, like the girl before her, in such a way that is viewed as *over*reacting, and so become a warning to the next girl? The variety of exchanges in “Night Shift” suggests that she uses many different tactics for navigating this steady stream of harassment, likely determined by the nature of the remark and her own comfort or energy in the moment. But just as she is gazed upon by the men, becoming the target of these remarks because her gender marks her as different, her reactions to harassment are more heavily observed than the actions of the harassers themselves. As the man says, the other coworker’s joke was “fucking stupid” but it was the girl’s reporting that is judged as wrong. Beaton, for the sake of her job and perhaps

her safety, is expected to be “a nice girl,” even when the men around her are far from nice, potentially even dangerous. She is expected to mediate her own emotions to maintain the comfort of the men around her.

Beaton’s reactions to the men’s inappropriate comments are a form of emotional labour. Arlie Hochschild introduced the term “emotional labour” to describe the management of one’s own feelings required by certain service jobs and jobs that require a great deal of interpersonal interaction. Emotional labour “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild 7). Society dictates that people abide by “feeling rules,” which are “standards used in emotional conversation to determine what is rightly owed and owing in the currency of the managing act” (Hochschild 18). In the case of “Night Shift,” the men feel owed a certain amount of—and a certain *kind* of—positive attention from Beaton, and from women in the camp in general. Hochschild notes that when we fail to abide by feeling rules, we face sanctions, including “cajoling, chiding, teasing, scolding, shunning... forms of ridicule or encouragement that lightly correct feeling and adjust it to convention” (58-9). By bringing up the last woman who reported on her colleague, Beaton’s coworker reminds her of the feeling rules that she is expected to follow. To be a “nice girl” is to abide by (and help sustain) the emotional conventions of the camp, including enduring sexual harassment without complaint.

Though Hochschild does not explicitly name workplace sexual harassment as a contributor to emotional labour, she does write that women perform disproportionately more emotional labour than men, both by virtue of the types of work women do and as a result of how they are treated in the workplace: “Of all *women* working, roughly one-half

have jobs that call for emotional labour” (11). Using her major example of flight attendants, she found that men in the field were treated with much more respect by passengers, as they were granted higher “status” by virtue of their gender. In contrast,

low-status categories—women, people of colour, children—lack a status shield against poorer treatment of their feelings. This simple fact has the power to utterly transform the content of a job. The job of flight attendant, for example, is not the *same job* for a woman as it is for a man. A day’s accumulation of passenger abuse for a woman differs from a day’s accumulation of it for a man. (Hochschild 174)

Over the course of Beaton’s nightshift, she accumulates harassment from her male colleagues, and the majority of this harassment is based around her gender. She performs emotional labour insofar as she manages her emotional reactions to this harassment, abiding by the “feeling rules” that are the norm in this male-dominated workplace.

Though Beaton’s reactions are measured when the harassment targets her, she is not as careful and controlled when she witnesses or anticipates the harassment of her sister, Becky. In a recent series of strips about Becky, Beaton represents two conversations that took place shortly after Becky arrived in Fort McMurray. In the first, a male coworker asks about her sister’s “story, she seeing anyone yet” (“Fresh”). Beaton responds swiftly and harshly:

“Her story is you can leave her the fuck alone.”

“Jesus—what’s your problem. You’re usually nice.”

“I’m not nice today” (“Fresh”)

Beaton’s protective instincts enable her to dispel with niceness; she will stand up for her sister, even if she chooses not to stand up for herself. Her decision to look out for Becky

is indicative of her own weariness with sexual harassment and male attention. In the next comic, Becky insists that she “can handle idiots.” Beaton refutes, “Yeah but can you handle a thousand of them? Cause I can’t” (“Burnout”). By expressing her concern for Becky, she is able to express her own discomfort and better recognize the cumulative effects of quotidian harassment. The thousand idiots who bother Beaton with mundane harassment operate as a form of slow patriarchal violence, which becomes more legible when she anticipates this violence enacted on her sister.

Her care for and defense of Becky speaks to another kind of kinship at work. Whereas above, I used kinship to describe Beaton’s regional and cultural community—those who share her family and geographical background, culture, and traditions—there is also a kinship among women who experience sexual harassment (also known as women full stop). While “Ducks” and “Loss” may resonate particularly with those who share experiences of outmigration, “Night Shift” likely resonates with those who endure the microaggressions of misogyny. Just as Beaton recognizes herself in Becky in the first days at camp, certain women readers might recognize themselves in Beaton as she literally faces down a shift’s worth of harassment. Sexual harassment is a part of outmigration and the tar sands that specifically affects more marginalized groups, women in particular.¹⁹

¹⁹ While I wrote this, I received (via a family member) some unpublished poems by a woman named Beverly Campbell. Campbell worked in and lived with the tar sands for most of her life and wrote about her experiences in a suite of poems called *Old and Me (She/Her)*. “Rig Cooks at Christmas (1985)” describes a drive across camp with a colleague: during the drive, he sexually assaults her, and in her attempt to stop him, she rolls the truck into the ditch:

She slides through a crack into the deep ditch
His hands are still reaching for her.

.....
She never reports that it ever happened
Never tells,
She needs the job.

The ongoing harassment is also an issue of safety and comfort, and this sense of danger is evident in Beaton's increased spatial awareness. Early in "Night Shift," she includes a sketched map of the tool crib, with her own name written in to indicate where she stands during her shift. This map gives a sense of space in the following exchanges: men come into the tiny small space in front of the service counter, and she is on display behind the counter. She is the only one working there, taking over for the woman before her. The map sets a tone of vulnerability—late at night, with no one else around, she is subjected to sexual remarks by men who occupy her small workspace. Katie James and Maria Paino note that "emotional exhaustion" and other forms of stress are consequences of the "excessive emotional demands" of certain workplaces, particularly those, like Beaton's, that require "working while interacting with others in [the] work environment" (141). It is no wonder that by the time period of "Ducks," she is glad to work in an office with another woman.

Sexual harassment is yet another way in which the tar sands are dangerous, even violent. These experiences of sexual harassment shift after shift, from "a thousand" idiots, are another form of slow violence. On their own, these remarks look mundane and can perhaps even be read as jokes. But as they accumulate, they become more harmful. Bron notes that, in these industrial workplaces, "sexual pressures or abuse is used as a weapon to restrict, dominate or punish women who are perceived as attempting to improve their position" (67). Her analysis relates to women seeking promotions, but harassment can also work to restrict women within their current positions or push them out of the workplace entirely. Like the story of the girl before Beaton, the girl who *no longer works there*, harassment reminds women that this is a workplace dominated by men, where men

set the terms of the culture and discourse.

Regular sexual harassment shapes the workplace as a space of discomfort for women. Puwar writes, “Some bodies are deemed as having a right to belong, while others are marked out as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually), circumscribed as being ‘out of place’” (8). Both Beaton and the fox are marked as trespassers, one on a masculine, misogynistic space, and the other on an industrial space that prioritizes human needs over environmental needs. When Beaton chases away the fox in an attempt to protect it from further harm, she recognizes that her workplace is a dangerous space.

Multispecies Storytelling

Beaton, worn out by loneliness and harassment, also feels kinship with the battered fox in “Night Shift.” The fox is introduced early in the comic as a pitiful creature, already missing a leg, that has been hanging around the work site. After the series of sexist interactions with her coworkers, Beaton encounters the fox outside the tool crib. After responding to the harassment with a neutral expression, she gets very worked up over the fox: her cheeks are flushed, and her hair is disheveled as she shouts at the fox. She is immediately angry at the fox for choosing to be in such a dangerous place: “Get out of here,” she yells, throwing snowballs to spook it, “...What do you think is going to happen?” She is warning it that the harm will continue, that it may not survive. When the fox leaves, she is left alone, still expressing anger at the fox. I read this anger as another projection; just as she sought to protect Becky from harm, she wants to protect the fox from harm, and she is frustrated with the fox—and with herself—for staying in this

hostile and dangerous space.

Animals are also present in “Ducks,” which concludes with a borderless panel containing a single duck. This panel is once again silent, and with fine, careful shading (see fig. 8). This duck is one of the comics’ eponymous ducks, a reference to an April 2008 incident when 1606 ducks landed on a Syncrude tailing pond and died (Christian). The deaths became public, such that in Beaton’s epilogue, she speaks to someone whose first association with the oil sands is the ducks’ deaths: “Oh wow—isn’t that where like a thousand ducks flew into a toxic lake.” Takach describes the incident of the ducks—and videos of their plight—as going “viral” (54), and the incident led to widespread public debate as well as action on the part of Syncrude, the government, and environmental activists such as Greenpeace.

The one thousand six hundred and six ducks, like Burtynsky’s and others panoramic shots of industrialized landscape, have had an impact. Perhaps it is once again a matter of scope: the sheer number of ducks that died in one incident is fairly shocking, especially as the number was originally estimated at five hundred, but eventually tripled. And yet, once again, Beaton resists the impact of a wide scope in favour of focus.



Fig. 8: Dying duck in “Ducks”

“Ducks” ends with an image of a single duck, and the details of this drawing are not sharp and clear. Is the duck weighed down and obscured by oily liquids? Its awkward position suggests that it is immobilized by the dark matter indicated by Beaton’s shading. Not even its eye is visible. As I linger on the panel, I wonder if it is becoming less and less animate—is life stripped away when detail is stripped away? McCloud argues that in comics, the icon of the human is relatable. He describes how the human “mind is *capable* of taking a *circle*, *two dots* and a *line* and turning them into a face” (31). That is, we ascribe life and humanity to any image vaguely reminiscent of the human face, and as such we relate to these objects and images. But in the case of the duck, does the simplified icon become less recognizable as a (once) living thing? And yet, the image is static—it is only by extending my focus that I make these assumptions and extend the narrative, which Beaton herself has left so open. McCloud argues that icons like cartoons “demand our participation to make them work. / There is no life here except what you give it” (59). By ending “Ducks” with a single duck, rendered in her own abstract and simple style, Beaton not only shifts focus from a startling number to a single creature, but gives the reader a moment to pause and participate in the making of meaning.

The shift from one thousand six hundred and six ducks in the news stories to a single duck in Beaton’s comic is a representation of slow violence. A single duck’s death is the kind of “attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2). The incident of the ducks, all one thousand six hundred and six of them, is a more conventional form of violence, which is “customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility” (Nixon 2). Nixon notes that “politically and emotionally, different

kinds of disasters possess unequal heft” (3). The death of the ducks—a single event, visible in videos and photographs, spectacular in its sheer scale—has political and emotional heft. It has “visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power” (Nixon 3); it is memorable. The death of one duck does not feel as violent, even if it is the consequence of the same processes and systems.

The fox’s presence in “Night Shift,” and the emphasis on the dead ducks in “Ducks,” are examples of what Donna Haraway calls “multispecies storytelling” in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. “Multispecies storytelling,” Haraway writes, “is about recuperation in complex histories that are full of dying as living, as full of endings, even genocides, as beginnings” (10). Though I will not dig deeply into Haraway’s concept here, I do want to unpack her definition of multispecies storytelling as a way of summing up my own analysis of Beaton’s comics.

Haraway describes the histories invoked in multispecies storytelling as “complex,” which echoes Beaton’s use of the word “complicated” to describe the tar sands and to introduce her comics. By ushering ducks and foxes into her own stories of the tar sands, Beaton gestures to the ways that non-human entities complicate human experience of place and memory and complicate humanity’s relationship to the planet. When animals experience the violence of petroculture, humans recognize that whatever benefits some people reap from this industry, the industry also impacts and harms other species. The ducks become a focal point for many outside of Fort McMurray, the tragic lens through which they see a place that has deeply shaped Beaton’s own life and her community. Though not ignoring the ducks’ deaths, Beaton brings them into narrative company with human experience of the tar sands: worker’s deaths, workplace health

risks, poverty, harassment, and loneliness. In Beaton's telling, the ducks do not eclipse the human suffering, nor does she prioritize human life over animal life. They co-exist in the complexity, the complication, of this place. Beaton narrates outmigration and environmental violence without allowing one to overpower the other, as is the case in much of the petrocultural discourse, which often takes either a pro-economy or pro-environment stance. By using multispecies storytelling, Beaton narrates a path between or beyond this binary, with her frameless-panels lingering on images that mark poverty and loneliness alongside environmental destruction and death.

Similarly, Beaton feels a sense of kinship with the fox in the complexity of staying in a hostile, unsafe space. They are both hurt, and likely to undergo further harm, but their continued presence is a kind of survival as well. The workspace of the tar sands is important for Beaton's success and survival: it permits her to pay off her student loans and this financial decision is a major factor in her ability to pursue a career as an artist. But it comes at a heavy price, one she has difficulties articulating within the emotionally regulated space of the workplace. The fox gives voice to her discomfort and emphasizes the lack of safety she feels in the camps.

The inevitability of continued harm is also a major part of Haraway's concept of multispecies storytelling; the complex histories she cites "are full of dying...full of endings, even genocides" (10). The ducks meet their own end, and their deaths are a small marker of the slow violence at work in the tar sands. The tar sands, and the industrial development that they are so essential to, are a major part of climate change. I will discuss climate change and the increasingly popular concept of the Anthropocene in my fourth chapter, but for now I invoke these terms briefly to acknowledge that we are

living in—and contributing to—a mass extinction event. The tar sands are the visible site of this development and its attendant violence. The tar sands are an ongoing history “full of dying” (Haraway 10). In “Ducks,” several human deaths are described, including the death “on site” of a colleague, Gerald, and the death of several Cape Bretoners in a car accident. Though the ducks’ deaths stand out to outsiders, to Beaton and her colleagues they are one among many violences in the tar sands, in which slow violence is ongoing, multifaceted, and mostly unacknowledged by either the companies profiting from this work or the wider world.

In fact, because petroculture is so integrated into social, political, and commercial life in Canada, the violence it perpetuates holds its own mundanity. Burtynsky’s photographs follow the cycle of car culture (and its attendant petroculture) from extraction at sites like the tar sands through to the very mundane, everyday act of driving on major highways and thoroughfares. Both petroculture and the violence it perpetuates are *everyday* in Canada, and thus hold what Rita Felski calls “a quality of taken-for-grantedness” (608). Felski describes the mundane as “events that unfold imperceptibly just below our field of vision” (608). While Canadians as an audience may perceive and react to the death of more than one thousand ducks, the other slow violences of petroculture unfold imperceptibly, and are so intrinsically tied to daily activities as to feel mundane rather than shocking.

But Beaton, by taking the everyday and the mundane as her subject matter, intervenes in what Felski calls the “taken-for-grantedness,” drawing attention to the many petrocultural violences that feel so mundane and what has become imperceptible (608). Felski argues that “aesthetic experience promotes a radically sensitized acuity of

perception that is the antithesis of everyday inattentiveness” (608). Just as Beaton made mundane moments with her family interesting and worthy of attention by taking the time to retell them as comics, by drawing the tar sands and her memories, she invites her readers to attend to the many violences which have been ignored. Her artistic attention merits readerly attention. When the mundane disguises violence, this artistic attention acts as a form of radical witnessing. In *Disaster Drawn*, Hillary Chute writes, “the act of witness gains power as witnessing the shock of shocking things passing from horror into banality; to witness is to arrest this transformation, even momentarily, in drawing” (30). As a witness to the slow, multispecies violence of the tar sands, Beaton seizes on the tension between shocking environmental violence and slow mundane violence.

Over the course of this chapter, I have introduced Beaton’s autobiographical comics as mundane, common-place, and uninteresting, before going on to theorize them as deeply insightful and layered texts. Rather than seeing these readings as contradictory, I conclude that mundanity is a powerful starting point for taking on large-scale issues. In her book *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart writes, “At once abstract and concrete, ordinary affects are more directly compelling than ideologies, as well as more fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings” (3). Beaton’s comics validate Stewart’s argument. Beaton starts in her everyday, her ordinary, but with her trademark care and an awareness of her limitations (offering but one perspective on complicated topics), her comics become explorations of living in, with, and through social, political, environmental, and economic systems.

Chapter 3:

Gothic Girlhood and the Mundanity of Violence in Canadian Comics

“A young girl’s body is the most dangerous place in the world, as it is the spot where violence is most likely to be enacted.” –Heather O’Neill, *The Lonely Hearts Hotel* (28)

In trying to define the mundane, the everyday, the quotidian, I inevitably catch glimpses of what might be considered mundanity’s opposite: that which is strange, uncanny, out of the ordinary, perhaps even *queer*. While reading Canadian comics in search of that which is so mundane as to go unnoticed, including the slow violences defined by Rob Nixon and represented by Kate Beaton, I come face to face with deviations from the everyday or the norm. Do I understand the mundane, the normative always in relation to their opposites—the fantastic, the unexpected, the deviant, the queer? How do artists build their own worlds and establish their own mundanities, and how does this leave room to critique established—even oppressive—norms? Perhaps mundanity, as a value judgment, is forever a site of tension, as it gestures to or leans on an expectation of its opposite.

Childhood studies—more specifically, girlhood studies—is a rich site for exploring the tension between mundanity and its opposite. As the editors of *Girls, Texts, Cultures* point out, girlhood is difficult to delineate: “there is no unitary state of being a girl” (Bradford and Reimer 8). Girls—like any other demographic—live at the intersection of various systems. Race, class, geography, gender identity, sexual orientation: all of these

shape the experience of girlhood, disrupting any coherent sense of what a typical girl with a mundane girlhood might resemble. Reflecting on the girls represented in my primary sources, I am struck by how the lives of these girls are at once mundane and fantastic, banal and unpredictable: girls may experience boring summer afternoons or interminably dull schooldays contrasted with the thrill and drama of parties, pop culture, and volatile female friendships; they may negotiate the instability of pubescent bodies; they may struggle with of the improbable shift from viewing boys as the spreaders of cooties, to potential boyfriends to be crushed on and flirted with. Girlhood is a terrifically turbulent period, in which the everyday is anything *but* mundane. Marked by so many bodily and social instabilities, the everyday of girlhood may feel at once terrifying, exciting, and banal.

In this chapter, I analyze four comics that centre Canadian girls' navigations of the everyday: Emily Carroll's webcomics "The Hole the Fox Did Make" (2014) and "The Groom" (2015); Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki's 2007 graphic novel *Skim*; and David A. Robertson, GMB Chomichuk, Iskwé, and Erin Leslie's 2017 graphic novel *Will I See?*. All four texts draw on gothic elements, such as guides, ghosts, and hauntings. The presence of these gothic elements suggests that there is an emerging literature of Canadian graphic girlhood, a field that exceeds the generic confines of (mundane) realism. Reading these texts together, I argue that the gothic is a central part of Canadian girlhood, and these gothic elements function in relation to these texts' major similarity: they all highlight girls' vulnerability. Risk and violence occupy these girls' lives, either as a constant threat or a sudden danger.

In this chapter, I use girlhood studies, comics studies, gothic studies, and queer

studies to interrogate the intersection of girlhood and mundanity. The following questions animate my study of these comics: What does the mundane or everyday look like during the periods of pubescence and pre-pubescence, when bodies and relationships may be unstable or fluctuating? How do girls negotiate sexual and romantic structures and impulses, such as compulsory heterosexuality and queer desire? How do adults act as either/both guardians and threats? What is the ‘site’ of girlhood, chronologically, culturally, or geographically? What does the form of comics bring to representations of girlhood? What role does the gothic and/or the uncanny play in girlhood? And how is girlhood impacted by the political context of the settler-colonial national project of Canada?

I raise these questions to address a growing field: Canadian comics creators are increasingly centering girls as protagonists for formally innovative and politically challenging stories. This is part of a broader trend identified by Chute: “In the graphic novel world, girls are the new superheroes. They are the action stars, the focal point, the figures whose backstories, ideas, inclinations, struggles, and triumphs are presented with detailed attention in autobiography and fiction alike” (*Why Comics* 275). Chute argues that American artists Alison Bechdel and Lynda Barry, and international artists Marjane Satrapi and Phoebe Gloeckner have produced “graphic novels for adults with girls at their centre,” emphasizing that the form’s “intimacy—its handwritteness—and its ability to layer moments of time” are particularly powerful for “narratives of growth, hybrid identities and developing selves” (*Why Comics* 280). My work dovetails with Chute’s in multiple ways. I build on Chute’s valuable theories on comics’ intimacy and comics’ representational power, especially in regard to trauma, and I apply her concepts and

methodologies within a Canadian context, in recognition of the specifically Canadian trend of narrating and representing girlhood as gothic and girlhood as risky. This body of literature is worthy of sustained analysis, and I hope to build on the limited scholarship on Carroll's work and *Will I See?*, and the broad scholarly attention *Skim* has received, to argue for an emerging literature that figures girls as negotiators of political and social risk in Canada.

In this chapter, I will argue that these four comics present girlhood as a negotiation with risk and vulnerability, which are so consistent throughout girlhood as to become mundane. Though I do not engage deeply with trauma studies in this chapter, I turn to a trauma scholar to help me define violence and risk in these texts. Mythili Rajiva theorizes "ordinary trauma" in autobiographical literature of girlhood, specifically a first-person account by a girl who witnessed her male teacher sexually assault a classmate. Rajiva notes that this story, titled "The Prop," "highlight[s] an absence in [trauma] literature on the question of ordinary trauma; in this case, the everyday experiences of sexual violence in many girls' lives" (141). Through her analysis of "ordinary trauma," Rajiva explores "how traumatic incidents work their way into the everyday lives of marginalized subjects, in this case, young gendered female bodies, creating the conditions for the formation of a subject who views violence of the possibility of violence as a 'normal' part of her reality" (143). Rajiva describes how girls' "lives are shaped by both societal discourses of fear and risk, as well as the very real existence of danger, as exemplified by the wealth of feminist research on violence against women" (138). The girl protagonists I take up in this chapter negotiate these two forms of vulnerability: firstly, the warnings and concerns of parents, teachers, and classmates who worry over

perceived or real threats; and secondly, vulnerability to real harm in the form of quotidian racism, homophobia, and sexual harassment as well as major incidents of assault and abuse. When I invoke ‘risk’ in this chapter, I am working through both—occasionally contradictory, occasionally overlapping—forms of vulnerability: the societal interpretation of girls as inevitable victims, and the girls’ tangible experiences of harm and violence. Like Rajiva, I am interested in how both forms of risk can be so ubiquitous as to become mundane, and so fall outside of common interpretations of violence and trauma

I carry forward my definition of the mundane from my introduction and second chapter: the mundane is the day-to-day, ordinary, uninteresting, and banal; the mundane is also that which “belong[s] to the earthly world,” a definition that serves as a useful contrast to the fantastical gothic elements of these texts (“mundane, adj. and n.”). I will begin by reading the gothic elements in Carroll’s “The Hole the Fox Did Make,” and then analyzing how her use of colour, layout, and rhythm heightens the sense of danger and of the uncanny. I will then discuss risk and vulnerability in *Skim*, in which a goth queer girl of colour navigates the surveillance and normativity of girlhood. *Skim* raises girlhood’s heteronormativity, and I will unpack heteronormativity in the gothic comic “The Groom” and in *Skim*. Furthermore, I contend that both narratives are queer for the ways they interrogate heteronormative structures and patterns, including how patriarchal figures are cast as uncanny in “The Groom,” and how queerness is erased in the social world of *Skim*. Though heteronormativity is oppressive and at times threatening, in the context of girlhood, queerness carries its own dangers. I will conclude by analyzing danger as a mundane condition of girlhood, specifically of Indigenous girlhood in the settler colonial state of Canada, through the graphic novel *Will I See?* In *Will I See?* protagonist May

moves through a threatening urban world, where monstrous men perform daily acts of colonial violence. I will begin with a short introduction to Emily Carroll's work.

Emily Carroll is a queer Canadian artist and writer who primarily works in the genres of horror and fairy tales. She is the author of one comics collection, *Through the Woods* (2014), and a successful illustrator in a variety of genres. Her comics are short, best compared to short stories rather than graphic novels or comic strips. She is well-known for her webcomics, which experiment with digital publishing by incorporating interactive elements. Her comics predominantly feature women or girl protagonists who experience horror within and around the body, the family, and the home (walls, bedrooms, basements, neighbouring houses, and backyard woods are the sites of horror and violence). Her narratives often end ambiguously, but are overwhelmingly negative, concluding with the protagonists in danger, dead, or committing extreme violence. Out of the roughly twenty fiction comics in Carroll's oeuvre, only one ends happily: "Anu-Anulan and Yir's Daughter," Carroll's 2011 romance between a goddess and a young woman. "Anu-Anulan and Yir's Daughter" also happens to be Carroll's most explicitly queer comic. Many of her stories explore heterosexual courtship and marriage, but none of these romances ends happily ever after. Rather, these mundanely heterosexual marriages and relationships are riddled with corpses, wounds, undead creatures, graves, blood, and sharp, gnashing teeth. The spouses and suitors are treacherous: beaming lovers in the daylight, but dangerous monsters in the darkness. Women in particular are haunted by the crimes and mysteries of their lovers: the women protagonists in "Out of Skin," "Margot's Room," "Beneath the Dead Oak Tree" and "A Lady's Hands Are Cold" all discover that their husbands or suitors are monsters or serial killers. The women,

discovering these brutal crimes, are destined to become either victims, perpetrators of defensive violence, or both. In short, Carroll has produced a body of gothic and horror comics, and the home—including its heterosexual dynamics—is the most frequent site of horror for her protagonists.

Carroll also works in the loosely-defined form of comics poetry. Comics poetry is an emerging field with few self-identified practitioners, but these practitioners, and the scholars who have begun to read comics through the lens of poetics, make a valuable argument about comics' potential as a poetic form and the benefits of interdisciplinary thinking between poetry and comics (Fusselman). Comics poets trace their influences back to visual artists and writers, primarily Joe Brainard (Fusselman). Comics poetry's roots in concrete poetry are best understood in terms of space; as Chute argues, comics "is a *site-specific medium*; it can't be re-flowed, re-jiggered on the page; hence, it is spatially located on the page the way that poetry often must be" ("Secret Labor" 379-80, emphasis original). In his self-proclaimed comics poetry manifesto, "What is Comics Poetry?", Alexander Rothman echoes Chute on the significance of spatial arrangement:

The cartoonist arranges every aspect of the page. Not just how many panels, but what shape they are, how they're drawn, how much space is between them. The size and shape of the page, the media and quality of the mark making, and on and on and on. All of these has enormous expressive potential, on their own or in relation to each other. (n.p.)

I will come back to the issues of space and arrangement as well as other aspects of comics poetry (rhythm and juxtaposition) in my close readings of Carroll's comics. For now, I want to highlight one of the things that makes Carroll's comics poetics possible:

the internet. Rather than being read as a potential comics poet, Carroll is often cited as an innovator in terms of comics and technology. In short, she is producing comics for digital space rather than the printed page, and this digital-oriented production expands how she can arrange space.

Carroll's work is the archetype of what Scott McCloud calls "the infinite canvas" (*Reinventing Comics* 222). In the early 2000s, McCloud argued that digital publishing and webcomics could move beyond some of the constraints of print publishing. The infinite canvas is a comics layout that extends beyond the typical (printed) page: by making use of horizontal and vertical scrolling, cartoonists would not need to split comics into pages or limit the size of panels, the order of panels, or the direction of sequence. Since McCloud first conceptualized the infinite canvas, many creators have begun making and publishing online. But though long vertical scrolls, like the kind emphasized on content management and digital publishing platforms like *Medium*, have become common in certain corners of webcomics,²⁰ many webcomics still follow the model of print books. Most webcomics are published page-by-page, either as a comic strip that consists of one row of three or four panels,²¹ or as a page layout, which consists of print-page sized grids of panels.²² The comic strip and page layout formats have many benefits: they both allow creators to post short, regular updates; the brevity of each update allows creators to structure their workload and reader expectations; the formats fit easily into many social networking sites like Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, allowing

²⁰ The comics journalism publication *The Nib* uses vertical scrolling to structure most of its comics and to provide a smooth reading experience.

²¹ This strip format has its roots in newspaper comic strips and is favoured by such webcomic heavyweights as *XKCD*'s Randall Munroe, *PhD Comics*' Jorge Cham, John Allison, and the artists behind *Nancy* (currently Olivia James).

²² For examples of the page layout, see webcomics such as Sarah Andersen's *Sarah's Scribbles*, Meredith Gran's *Octopus Pie*, and Ryan North's *Dinosaur Comics*.

for easy circulation;²³ and both formats are easily reproducible in print, which makes collecting webcomics for print or extending a story to print editions and volumes very easy.

But Carroll has produced comics that truly break out of these page-by-page layouts, and her comics exemplify what McCloud imagined when he theorized the infinite canvas (Murray 343). Carroll uses vertical and horizontal scrolling to create massive ‘screens.’ Often, her panels are centred on an immense black background that would be difficult to reproduce in the limited space of the printed page. She also integrates clicking and animation (in the form of simple, animated GIFs²⁴) into some of her comics, adding an interactivity that would be impossible in print. Because of this interactive element, her webcomics push the boundary between comics and video games.²⁵ Carroll is at the forefront of webcomics, experimenting with what is possible in a new digital era of content creation and distribution. The spatial potential of the infinite (digital) canvas has exciting possibilities for comics poetry, which, as Chute and Rothman argue, is defined by its deliberate use of space and arrangement. Studies of Carroll so far have been limited to her print comics (Doku, Kriebel), but there is much to be said about her webcomics in terms of technology and poetry. The massive black backgrounds that readers scroll through to read her stories are central to the gothic nature of Carroll’s comics, and her use of scrolling—a slow, participatory act by the reader—builds suspense and contributes to the experience of the comics as gothic and horror texts.

²³ Though the circulation of webcomics through social networking sites comes with its own set of problems, including plagiarism and modification.

²⁴ GIF stands for Graphics Interchange Format, a computer file format. The term GIF is also used to describe images saved in this format. As GIFs are able to store more than one image in a single file, they have been used to create animations of several images, referred to as animated GIFs.

²⁵ Carroll has also worked as a creator and artist on video games (*Gone Home*, *The Yawhg*).

Uncanny Mothers and Gothic Girlhood

Most of Carroll's comics have familiar fairy tale settings: they take place in a rural, pre-industrialized world, where characters live in cottages in small villages, or manors on the edge of mysterious woods. But four of her webcomics—"Some Other Animal's Meat," "When Darkness Presses," "The Hole the Fox Did Make" and "The Groom"—take place in the small town of Keeping (I will refer to these as the Keeping Comics). Keeping is a modern, familiar town: characters go to school and the mall and use modern technologies like telephones and cars. In this chapter, I close read two of Carroll's Keeping Comics: "The Hole the Fox Did Make" and "The Groom." These are the two Keeping Comics that feature young girl protagonists (Regan and Monica), and both comics resonate—thematically, generically, and formally—with *Skim* and *Will I See*. Through the characters of Regan and Monica, "The Hole the Fox Did Make" and "The Groom" explore how girls perceive and navigate both the spaces of daily life and the risks and pleasures of girlhood. The comics offer narrative and visual space for exploring queerness, risk, and the gothic in the context of girlhood.

In the first of Carroll's Keeping Comics, "The Hole the Fox Did Make," we meet Regan, a young girl (her age is never indicated) living in Keeping with her mother, Cheryl. Cheryl appears to be single, as she goes to work during the day and leaves Regan with a (negligent) babysitter, Mrs. Clarke. Throughout summer vacation, Regan has vivid dreams in which she is an aristocratic fox in a beautiful courtyard. Within the dream courtyard, Regan befriends a tall shadow of a man and a whispering woman. One night, the whispering woman tells Regan about a voice calling from the water. Upon waking,

Regan sets out to explore the nearest water to her house: a nameless creek that her mother has warned her away from. Cheryl insists that the creek is dangerous, and that people have drowned there; it is a space she has designated as unsafe, and her warning imposes a kind of border on Regan's daily life, limiting Regan's sphere to the house and other spaces recognized as appropriate for a child. But Regan does not heed Cheryl's warning, visiting the creek anyway. She does not seem to be frightened of drowning. Rather, she is "careful" because "[s]he didn't want to run into the teenagers who sometimes hung around there" (7). She sees traces of these teenagers in empty beer cans and liquor bottles. These objects serve as signs of adolescence, marking the space of the creek as too mature for Regan. The "traces" of teenagers that "linger among the tree roots and grasses" frighten Regan; they are beyond the realm of girlhood, and of the seemingly safe, playful sphere of her daily life (7). While Cheryl identifies one danger—the creek—Regan identifies another danger—teenagers and the unpredictability of adolescence. Despite these two dangers, and enticed by the whispering woman's suggestion, Regan visits the creek, exiting her safe sphere in order to prolong her contact with the exciting dream world. In choosing to visit the creek, Regan prioritizes the whispering woman's suggestion over her mother's command, and her desires for the dream world over her safety in the waking world.

In a later dream, the whispering woman tells Regan a story about Regan's father, "the Prince of Foxes," whom the whispering woman loved (16). The whispering woman's story is told in captions, but these captions are intermingled with panels that offer another, wordless layer of the story. In the wordless panels, two high school girls—Cheryl and a nameless friend—argue by the creek. They are fighting over the attention of a

man, a high-school teacher named Mr. Fox. The fight becomes violent, and Cheryl drowns her friend in the shallow creek. The whispering woman explains Cheryl's motive: "She really thought you would be true once I was gone. / Marry her. / Raise the baby" (18). In this moment, the whispering woman shifts from addressing Regan to addressing Mr. Fox. On this screen, the whispering woman's dream-world story mingles with the real-world story of Regan's mother (see fig. 10). To make sense of the story told through textual captions and the story told through wordless panels, the reader must collapse the real world and dream world. It is clear that the whispering woman is the drowned girl, Cheryl is her assailant, and Mr. Fox is the Prince of Foxes, Regan's father and the lover and teacher of the two teenage girls.

The whispering woman's revelatory story brings about the comic's violent end. The morning after this complicated and illuminating dream, Regan goes to the creek. There is a pair of open, inviting arms extending from the creek water. Regan walks into the arms, eager for the embrace. Cheryl, alerted to Regan's absence by the babysitter, rushes to the creek, but it is too late: Regan is floating face down in the water. Regan joins the whispering woman in the courtyard, and Cheryl is left reaching for her daughter's lifeless body.

This dark story with its tragic ending makes use of the gothic trope of the uncanny. The uncanny plays a huge role in Regan's life and death. Sigmund Freud defines the uncanny as "that species of frightening that goes back to what was one well known and had long been familiar" (124). He offers several examples of the uncanny, which I will return to in my analysis of "The Groom" and *Will I See?* For now, I want to emphasize the uncanny's relation to reality: "an uncanny effect often arises when the

boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, and so forth” (Freud 150-1). Regan’s dream world—the courtyard full of foxes, the tall man, and the whispering woman—are uncanny for the ways they impinge on her reality. In fact, in order to understand the story and its outcome, readers must collapse Regan’s dream world with the real world of *Keeping* and read the visual and textual evidence that link characters between these two worlds. Regan’s dreams are so real to her that they inform her daily (daylight) activities: she follows the whispering woman’s advice to go to the water, and she spends her waking days drawing the people she meets in the dream courtyard. The dreams are frequent, and one screen shows the passage of time with panels that alternate between Regan’s daily life as a girl and her dream life as a fox (15). In fact, the dream world becomes a part of her everyday life, something “well known and...familiar,” to re-cite Freud’s definition of the roots of the uncanny (124). The dream world becomes particularly uncanny through the figure of the whispering woman, who brings a strangeness into Regan’s waking world.

The whispering woman becomes so familiar to Regan that Regan eventually asks, “You’re my real mother, aren’t you?” (16). Identifying the whispering woman as a mother figure—as the *real* mother figure—signals that Regan has been fully caught up in the unhomely:

The term ‘uncanny,’ as Sigmund Freud defines it, is integrally linked to the paradox of home and ‘unhomeliness’—those moments when familiarity of home (or what *should* be familiarity of home) is infected by unhomeliness and elicits an

‘uncanny’ or unsettling experience. Instances of this effect include scenes where the distinction between past and present, real and spectral, civilized and primitive, is tenuous and disjunctive. (Sugars and Turcotte ix)

Regan’s identification with the whispering woman and the dream world invokes this kind of paradox: her real home, her real mother, are unsettled by this other, increasingly familiar world. Her distinction between real and spectral has indeed become tenuous. Regan’s reality is unsettlingly blurred. But as the whispering woman becomes more familiar and real to her, she also becomes the epitome of uncanny to us, the reader. Carroll uses a deliberate interruption to the comics’ layout and rhythm to emphasize the whispering woman’s unsettling invasion of the safe, the homely, and the real.

In “The Hole the Fox Did Make,” Carroll establishes a rhythm, primarily through panel layout, and the whispering woman acts as a disruption to this rhythm. The first sixteen screens of the comic share an identical layout: four equal-sized panels, laid out horizontally. With each panel the same size, styled with the same black-and-white palette, and containing roughly the same amount of dialogue and detail, the comic takes on a steady rhythm. Chute argues that it is rhythm “that provides a way to think about the shared preoccupation of poetry and comics. For comics is *nothing* if not...the rhythms set up between successive panels, between words and images, between blank space and the plenitude of framed moments of time” (“Secret Labor” 380). When I use the word *rhythm* here, I am speaking primarily about the rhythm established by the shape, size, and arrangement of panels. This rhythm is related to reading pace: how much time does a reader allot each panel, each screen, and the narrative action therein. Greice Schneider identifies several different strategies for regulating reading pace and rhythm, including

“how actions are fragmented in various panels,” such that some actions may be stretched out for a longer duration (88). An action that takes place over several panels, such as Regan walking to the creek, elicits slow but steady attention from the reader. An action that occurs in one panel, such as Cheryl drowning the other girl, occupies little time and attention, as the reader is drawn on to the subsequent panel. But panel size also impacts reading pace: a long or large panel demands a longer look—a pause, even—in contrast to the attention paid to a small panel. And finally, rhythm is shaped by “the dynamics of repetition and difference...two interdependent forces that can only exist in relation to each other” (91). That is, repetition— of size, shape, image, colour, structure—establishes a steady rhythm, and difference—deviation from the familiar, the established, the repeated—disrupts this rhythm, whether jarring the reader out of the established rhythm, or decelerating or accelerating the rhythm. For the first sixteen screens of “The Hole the Fox Did Make”, no panel requires significantly more attention than the others. By establishing a consistent layout, Carroll sets up an unspoken expectation that this layout will continue. Readers fall into a rhythm. On screen seventeen, the layout changes—if only slightly—but



Fig. 9: Whispering Woman looms over Regan (Carroll 17)

after prolonged repetition, this deviation is likely to affect the reading pace. Screen seventeen has only one long horizontal panel that features the whispering woman floating

over Regan's bed, where Regan is sleeping (see fig. 9). By virtue of layout alone, it is a jarring screen. This single panel occupies the physical space previously divided between four panels; it occupies more space and also more of the reader's attention.

The whispering woman quite literally looms large on the screen, as her long image transgresses the unspoken rhythm and layout of the comic thus far. But she is also transgressing between worlds, and between the real and the unreal. This panel is revelatory for how it situates the whispering woman *in* the real world. She is not confined to the dream world after all, but has a presence—if only visual—in Regan's waking world. While Regan has been making nightly trips to the dream world of the courtyard, it appears as though the whispering woman is able to make trips into the real world of Keeping and of Regan's home. Seeing her there, in the home, is unhomely, uncanny, and unsettling. It shakes the reader's sense of reality, of spatiality, and of the familiar.

On the subsequent screen (18), there is an even more radical shift in both layout and style, which coincides with a radical shift from a third-person narrator to the whispering woman's narration. The whispering woman, taking over as narrator, disrupts an established layout and reading pace to tell a story *within* the overarching story of the comic. Her story has its own distinct layout. Screen eighteen is longer, with many more panels: five rows by four columns of identically-sized panels, eventually shifting into a single horizontal column of panels (see fig. 10). These smaller panels, arranged more closely together, accelerate the rhythm of the comic. This acceleration suits the sudden burst of action that occurs on this screen: a dramatic fight by the creek and a teenage girl's death. Layout feeds rhythm, and rhythm works with content to make meaning. As so much of the comic's tension and meaning emerges from visual links and shifts in

rhythm, Carroll's comics rely heavily on poetics, not simply narrative.



Fig. 10: Break in layout in “The Hole the Fox Did Make” (Carroll 18)

This narrative shift is further emphasized through the use of colour. For the first time in the comic, there *is* colour: bright-red panels with white words, panels bordered in bright red, and bright-red silhouettes and shadows without borders. Writing about the cinematic thriller *Don't Look Now*, which also uses red as a rare but significant colour, Andrew Patch argues that colour has the potential to disrupt and “dra[w] the eye” and can also remain “unobserved due to its normalcy” (72). Up to this point in “The Hole the Fox Did Make,” black and white have been the norm, and as such, have drawn little attention. The monochromatic colour palette has established “an aesthetic verisimilitude that consolidates the reality” of the comic (Patch 72). But red disrupts this reality. Suddenly, red is the dominant colour, shifting the aesthetic tone of the comic. Red is a rich colour with equally rich associations: blood, anger, passion, and love, among others. Here, the colour red highlights the violent fight between the two teenage girls, a fight over a love triangle that has emerged between them and their teacher.

Carroll uses red to emphasize elements and moments, and to help readers build connections across panels. Patch argues that, once an artist has established the chromatic unity of the story, colour “enables us to identify and highlight moments of chromatic interest” (72). Once red has become familiar to the reader’s eyes, used for bright text, border panels, and images, black becomes the sparsely used colour. Reading the signification of colour in Hergé’s *TinTin* comics, Jan Baetens writes that “color is used to establish visual rhymes between the panels” (117). Colours used more sparsely and deliberately “enabl[e] the reader to link elements across the limits of the panel” (Baetens 118). In the final panels of screen eighteen, the colour black acts as a visual link between several elements: the black-and-white photo of the teenage girl, the black shadow that

floats around the red-illustrated creek, and the dripping black cloak of the whispering woman in the final panel. Against a red backdrop, Carroll uses black to create a visual relationship, relating the drowned teenage girl, the dark shadow, and the whispering woman to one another. Bridged by the colour black, I understand that the whispering woman is the haunting presence of the murdered girl: she exists in both the waking and dream worlds, in different but ultimately related forms. The whispering woman's story of love and violence, rendered in dramatic red, is haunted by black elements. These black elements are the whispering woman herself, a haunting presence in Regan's life. Carroll builds a predominantly red space and then deliberately uses black to make this chromatic connection clear.

After this extreme disruption in style, colour, and layout, Carroll shifts back to the four-panel structure and to Regan's waking life. Now, the house where she lives, steadily depicted in black and white uniform panels, appears dull. The only living creature left in the house is the sleeping form of her babysitter, Mrs. Clark, inanimate in dull black and white. After submersion in the visually compelling world of the dream, and the revelation of the creek scene, the house—and its associated reality—feel mundane. This shift in colour and layout builds this contrast between the two realities and makes the dream world that much more enticing. Carroll's deliberate use of colour does not just entice the reader: it ultimately entices Regan to cross over from the dull world of her daily life into the compelling dream world.

This seductive haunting begins in the safety of her home and bed, where she dreams the whispering woman's world, and ends with Regan's body floating face down in the creek. To make sense of this ending, I turn to Shelley Kulperger's theorization of

the feminist postcolonial Gothic in Canada. Kulperger argues that “the female body” is “routinely and increasingly understood as gothic space” (98). Kulperger’s argument that female bodies are physical spaces of gothic tropes—including haunting, darkness, violence, monstrosity—echoes my epigraph from Heather O’Neill, who writes, in her novel *The Lonely Hearts Hotel*, “A young girl’s body is the most dangerous place in the world, as it is the spot where violence is most likely to be enacted” (28). Like the gothic house, the gothic female body is a likely site of pain and violence. “The Hole the Fox Did Make” is a feminist Gothic text, as it visualizes, “materialize[s] and familiarize[s] motifs of trauma and haunting...by focusing on the hidden stories of women as objects of fear, violence, trauma” (Kulperger 98). Every woman/girl’s body in this text is subject to violence. Cheryl and the unnamed girl are violated by their predatory teacher, the unnamed girl is violently drowned, Regan is drowned, and Cheryl loses her child. The violence upon bodies gendered female is repetitive and recurring.

And yet, the whispering woman’s haunting presence forces this mundane violence to the surface. Though Mr. Fox’s inappropriate sexual relationship with one or both of the teenage girls was the catalyst for such violence, his behavior seems to be erased. Mrs. Clarke laughs off the idea that someone would drown in the creek, suggesting that the girl’s murder is either unknown or has been forgotten within the small town of Keeping. And Mr. Fox’s photo in the yearbook is aggressively crossed-out, rendering him unrecognizable. The so-called Prince of Foxes is described in the dream world, but never seen. Sugars and Turcotte note that “gothic discourse is used to mediate forgotten histories, and, in some instances, initiate forms of cultural mourning” (xi). The whispering woman, by crossing over into Regan’s world, uncovers this forgotten violence

and trauma. Though her body may be forgotten, she re-initiates grief by killing Regan, forcing Cheryl to contend with death in the creek after all.

“The Hole the Fox Did Make” is ultimately a story about the vulnerability of girls. Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall write about the enduring trope of “girls in crisis:” “It often seems that girlhood has congealed into a single sad story in which imperiled girls await rescue, with limited hope or success” (“Girls in Crisis” 667). The creek and the home are both risky and vulnerable spaces, but risk pervades other spaces as well. The yearbook photos, featuring Cheryl, her nameless romantic rival, and the crossed-out image of Mr. Fox, speak to the high school as another site where girls are at risk. The predatory Mr. Fox used the space of the school to pursue the girls. The girls in “The Hole the Fox Did Make” are examples of what Gilmore and Marshall call “the permanently vulnerable girl,” pursued, threatened, or seduced in every space they occupy (“Girls in Crisis” 667). The town of Keeping is a gothic landscape where girls’ bodies are perpetually at risk.

Queer Girlhood in *Skim*

The spatial politics of “The Hole the Fox Did Make” echo those of Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki’s graphic novel *Skim*, where the school, the creek, and the home are all spaces where a teenage girl protagonist negotiates issues of vulnerability. I first introduce the Tamakis and their work and walk through *Skim*’s narrative. I then analyze how *Skim* engages very similar dynamics of girlhood and vulnerability that I discussed in relation to “The Hole the Fox Did Make,” but with a queer, Japanese-Canadian protagonist, who navigates a different intersection of risks.

Skim is the first book collaboratively created by Canadian cousins Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki. Jillian Tamaki is an artist and cartoonist whose illustrations and comics regularly appear in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *Hazlitt*. She has produced several comics collections, including the quirky and queer *SuperMutant Magic Academy* (2015). Jillian Tamaki has a strong interest in cultural trends and their relationships to our identity and sociality. In her 2017 collection *Boundless*, she playfully invents cultural texts—a Sci-Fi franchise, a sitcom, a social media site, even a viral audio track—and examines how they figure in the lives of her characters. Across most of her comics, she favours first-person narrators over dialogue, and most of the text is in the form of monologic captions rather than word balloons; Jacqueline Berndt notes “the absence of ‘talking heads’” in *Skim* (264), though it should be noted that Mariko Tamaki wrote *Skim* and is the source of what Jillian Tamaki calls its “minimalist” text (Randle 1). *Boundless* also includes some pieces that read like comics poetry, and that, like Carroll’s work, push the limits of the conventional comics page and break familiar comics structures. Jillian Tamaki also experiments with paratext, including comics poems on the back cover and end pages of *Boundless*. *Skim* follows a more typical structure than Jillian Tamaki’s more recent work, with most pages including a comics grid and gutters.

Mariko Tamaki is an artist and author. She has published several YA novels, including *(You) Set Me on Fire* (2012) and *Saving Montgomery Sole* (2016). Like *Skim*, many of her novels focus on girls and teenagers who are navigating friendships, burgeoning queer desire, and heteronormativity. Mariko Tamaki works as a comics writer for DC and Marvel on Supergirl and She-Hulk, respectively. Together, Jillian and Mariko Tamaki’s interests demonstrate an ongoing engagement with girlhood, queerness, and

visual and graphic narrative.

Skim tells the story of Kimberly Keiko Cameron, aka Skim, a Japanese-Canadian high school student living in Toronto in 1993. *Skim* is narrated mostly through Skim's diary entries, which record a school-year's worth of emotions and events (and leave out so much more). Skim lives with her mother, who is cynical after her separation from Skim's father. She shares an interest in Wicca and tarot with her best friend, a white blonde girl named Lisa. Despite their shared interests, it is a difficult friendship, as both girls seem scared to express genuine enthusiasm or appear too vulnerable or eager in front of the other. Skim is generally a loner at her high school, but this anonymity is challenged by the death of a local teen. John Reddear, a boy from a nearby school, breaks up with Skim's popular classmate Katie Matthews, and ends his life a week later. Though Skim never knew John, the fallout from his death brings her under scrutiny, as her interest in Wicca and her adjacency to goth culture mark her as at-risk in the eyes of teachers, counsellors, parents, and popular kids.

Over the course of the year, Skim has a falling out with Lisa, learns that John was struggling with his queer feelings for another boy, recalls instances of racism and bullying from the white girls at her school, and strikes up a friendship with Katie Matthews, who finds herself drifting away from her bubbly friends in the wake of John's death. Most notably, Skim has an affair with her English and Drama teacher, the eccentric Ms. Archer. Their romance occurs primarily in the ravine next to the school, where the two sit by the creek and talk, smoke, and kiss. Skim keeps her feelings for Ms. Archer a secret, but when Ms. Archer leaves suddenly, Skim's distress is mistaken for depression and at-risk behavior. The diary tracks her struggles to work through her own feelings,

including her queerness and visible racial difference, while also avoiding the predatory care of those around her. For Skim, there does not seem to be an ‘everyday,’ her body, family, social relationships, and school life are all in flux, and the diary records her negotiation of these changes over the course of a particularly turbulent year.

Skim is perceived as vulnerable by those around her. Carol Anaid Díax Cano reads *Skim* through Michel Foucault’s theory of the panopticon: “adult figures like [the guidance counsellor] and the woman from the teenage problems institute constantly supervise the students, who are made to follow these ‘self-love exercises’ that do not directly address the causes of depression or teenage suicide” (41). Skim is particularly targeted for the adult figures’ anxious surveillance. After John’s death, every student in his grade is called to meet with the guidance counsellor, Mrs. Hornet. But Skim is singled out as singularly at risk: “Mrs. Hornet said she’s particularly concerned about people like me, because people like me are prone to depression and depressing stimuli. / Mrs. Hornet says students who are members of ‘gothic’ culture (i.e. ME) are very fragile” (22). The words “like me” are striking in this context, as Skim is so unlike her classmates: not white, not thin, not cheerful, not boy-crazy. When asked why she is called “Skim,” she replies, “Because I’m not” (27). It is not clear who bestowed this nickname, but Skim’s acceptance of it reveals her hyper-awareness of her visible difference: not white, not thin. It does not appear that Lisa, who is both white and thin, but shares Skim’s interest in “‘gothic’ culture,” is subject to the same concern. As Skim points out in her diary, she did not know John, and they had little in common. While she is a social outcast and wannabe Wiccan, he was a popular athlete. She wonders why the school’s athletes are not being singled out as “very fragile,” as they share John’s social context and pressures (22). The

social reading of Skim as at-risk thus draws attention to the many ways in which she is other, and to the school's inability to differentiate individuality from vulnerability.

The school counsellor, Mrs. Hornet, identifies Skim as a “member of ‘gothic’ culture” (22), but it is not clear if Skim identifies herself as a goth girl, or if this is simply a label that her fellow students and her teachers have applied to her. Ross Haenfler writes that goth culture has a specific aesthetic: “Goths are perhaps most known for their dark, grim style characterized by black clothing, black hair, and black eyeliner” (85). Skim's black hair is more a feature of her Japanese heritage than an aesthetic choice. Her dark clothing is a part of the Catholic school uniform, not a deliberate style. Skim does favour the typical goth symbol of the pentagram, drawing it on her cheek once and featuring it prominently on the cast she wears over a broken arm, but overall her aesthetic is more of what Ballantyne calls “goth lite,” as she seems casually interested in the dark aesthetics and the spiritualism of goth culture, but does not seem to dig into the cultural aspects of goth culture (332).

Rather, the reading of Skim-as-goth seems to have more to do with her pastimes and her difference from the school athletes and student leaders. Haenfler writes that “Goth's distinguishing feature is its focus on death and the macabre (ghastly, ghoulish)... In the Western cultures in which goth is most prominent, death is a taboo subject to be feared and avoided. The goth scene is a space where participants can safely play with death and have fun with the darker sides of human existence” (84). Skim and Lisa are interested in death—at one point, they attempt to contact the spirit of John Reddear—but this interest is a form of play, and perhaps a form of coping or processing, rather than a depressive or suicidal interest. In the wake of John's death, Skim's

classmates commit to a cheery denial, founding the Girls Celebrate Life Club and decorating a bulletin board with positive and uplifting messages. In contrast to this cheeriness, Skim's more solemn and reflective demeanour appear dark. Brooke Ballantyne notes that "Goth girls represent a darker, alternative perspective on what it means to be a girl. Rejecting the bright, bubbly stereotype of the female image, goth girls steer clear of pink clothes, hair ribbons, charming laughs, and fluttering eyelashes" (331). Skim's non-conventional girlhood singles her out, and her deviance from the norm is read as risky and worrying. As such, she is subjected to the patronizing gaze of teachers, counsellors, parents, and popular kids.

Eventually, rumors reach Skim that John was queer and that he harbored feelings for a fellow athlete. The memorial to him in the school hallway is defaced, with a homophobic slur scrawled across his face. In light of this rumor, the guidance counsellor's concern about Skim takes on new depth. Perhaps Skim and John were both experiencing queer desire. Perhaps those who worry over Skim recognize that she, like John, is queer, whether they recognize her homosexual interest in her teacher or simply see her as queer in a more general sense as strange or odd. Marina Gornick argues that

the 'at risk' designation poses certain problematic limitations on understanding the experiences of Queer youth. As a highly racialized and classed discourse, 'at risk' is often used as a euphemism for talking about social fears and anxieties that are projected onto young people of colour...It is also used as a rationale for increased adult surveillance and regulation of marginalized youth. (127)

Cano builds on the concern over surveillance, writing that surveillance is a tool through which "disciplining institutions exert their power specifically on those who are most

vulnerable” (46). She notes that “while surveillance works on everyone, it is especially intense on the individuals who do not fit into the model of normalcy” (46). As a queer subject, Skim is especially impacted by this disciplining surveillance. Those around Skim see her strangeness, her queerness, as risky and worth monitoring, perhaps even of disciplining, whether they are able to see its sexual and romantic dimensions or not.

The perception of Skim as at-risk also has racial dimensions. After a memorial for John, Mrs. Hornet and Julie both single out Skim for uncomfortable (and non-consensual) hugs. Julie insists on inviting Skim to the Girls Celebrate Life Club, a group established to choose positivity in the face of suicide. There is an aggressiveness to the women’s offers of help, a performativity that does not serve Skim. In fact, Skim notes that Julie laughs at her when she drops something in public, “Thus confirming my suspicion that despite all this touchy-feely stuff, the girls at my school are still jerks” (71). More tellingly, she recounts Julie’s seventh-grade birthday party, a sleepover that ended early for Skim when the girls chased her and Vietnamese classmate Hien out of the house and into the dark. Marty Fink notes the visible difference between the party hosts and their victims: “The skinny White feminized bodies of the party’s exalted attendees are framed against the Asian nonconforming bodies of Skim and her classmate Hein, who are forcibly removed from the birthday celebration” (136). Within the space of the birthday party where a normative girl—with her white, thin body and heterosexual desires—are literally celebrated, Skim is visibly non-normative. She and Hein are disciplined by the normative girls, pushed out to maintain an acceptable space of girlhood. Skim recalls walking home alone, feeling safer in the dark deserted streets than the white girls’ party.

The anecdote of the birthday party sets up a troubling dynamic in Skim’s life: she

is perceived as vulnerable in certain ways, and offered certain kinds of help, but other dangers go entirely unnoticed. In fact, Skim is perhaps most vulnerable when she is in places believed to be safe: while she finds comfort walking the streets alone at night, she is bullied in a classmate's house and preyed upon in the classroom by Ms. Archer. Just as nobody's parents realize that the two girls have been pushed out of the house in the middle of the night, none of the adults carefully watching Skim for signs of depression notice the predatory relationship between her and her teacher. I read their failure to recognize Skim's vulnerability as symptomatic of two aspects of girlhood: 1) the totalizing force of heteronormativity, that erases queer desire, including desire that might be predatory or abusive; and 2) the mundane danger of girlhood, in which girls' bodies are inherently at risk, especially to sexual violence. I will speak first to how heteronormativity figures in girlhood, and in *Skim* and Emily Carroll's "The Groom," before returning to concepts of girlhood-as-danger, or danger as mundanely inherent to girlhood.

Girlhood Heteronormativity

In western societies, heterosexuality has long been accepted as the norm, as what is natural and expected. This expectation is oppressive to those who do not wish to engage in heterosexual practices. Adrienne Rich calls this form of oppression "compulsory heterosexuality," and in her 1980 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," she argues that heterosexuality "needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution*" (637, emphasis original). She describes how the "lie" of compulsory heterosexuality operates in many different traditions, including social

sciences, where the lie

asserts that primary love between the sexes is ‘normal;’ that women *need* men as social and economic protectors, for adult sexuality, and for psychological completion; that the heterosexually constituted family is the basic social unit; that women who do not attach their primary intensity to men must be, in functional terms, condemned to an even more devastating outsiderhood than their outsiderhood as women. (657)

Rich’s work “enabled feminists to understand heterosexuality as a political institution operating insidiously and coercively” (Taylor 93). Given that heterosexuality is enforced as normative, natural, and inevitable, it becomes a mundane institution, akin to capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism.

In fact, Indigenous scholars contend that heteronormativity is a structure of colonialism; heterosexuality is not normative in many cultures but has been imposed on said cultures by Eurocentrism and European colonialism. María Lugones argues that “[g]ender does not need to organize social arrangements...[and] gender arrangements need not be either heterosexual or patriarchal” (190). Heterosexual and patriarchal arrangements are “features of the...modern/colonial gender system,” and through the processes of colonization, these features and “gender differentials were introduced where there were none” (Lugones 196). In *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Andrea Smith describes the ways that colonizers assimilated (or attempted to assimilate) Indigenous peoples into the patriarchal order, recognizing that “in order to colonize a people whose society was not hierarchical, colonizers must first naturalize hierarchy through instituting patriarchy” (23). Smith goes on to unpack how colonization

relied on and functioned through the enforcement of gender-based violence.

Heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality are tied up in colonization and white supremacy, and arguably heterosexuality functions as a norm when whiteness is also the norm, as is the case in *Skim*. Within the predominantly white and predominantly heterosexual space of the high school, *Skim* is doubly different.

Heterosexuality has also dominated the cultural discourse around girlhood.

Gonick signals girlhood's heteronormativity when she poses the question: "Are queer girls, girls?" (122). "Far too often," writes Gonick, "when the category 'girl' is named, in the media, in feminist research, in education, sociology and psychology, discourses, and in popular culture among other sites, it is white, middle class and heterosexual girls whose experiences are referenced" (122). On the one hand, the heteronormativity of childhood may relate back to the myth of childhood's lack of sexuality, or pre-sexual nature. In the introduction to *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*, editors Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh suggest that "preclusion of sexuality" is one of the major delimiters of girlhood (xxiv). Sarah Chinn notes that the phrase "I was a lesbian child...seem[s] oxymoronic, in that 'lesbian' signifies a self-conscious alignment with a set of sexual desires and practices" (121). On the other hand, it is not that children—and girls—are precluded from sexual discourse and desire altogether: instead, they are ushered into heterosexuality, and heterosexual desires and practices are socially established as the norm, against which queerness functions as deviant. In fact, heterosexuality is such the norm in girlhood that *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia* includes "Compulsory Heterosexuality" among its entries. Kelly Maura argues that "compulsory heterosexuality permeates girl culture by dictating the ways in which girls behave" (243). Compulsory

heterosexuality operates within the lives of girls, and (attempts) to delimit girlhood as heteronormative. Comics about girls and girlhood offer narratives of coming into—and out of—compulsory heterosexuality.

Though increased visibility and activism have combatted heteronormativity, making way in present day Canada for more queer experiences of childhood and girlhood, *Skim* is set in 1993, contextualizing Skim in a pre-internet era where queer community is difficult to come by. Skim is not pictured seeking out queer community, whether in person or through culture—she is not pictured reading queer or feminist zines or other subcultural texts (though she does read up on Wiccan culture and seek out a Wiccan group that she is disappointed to find is more of a recovery group). As such, I read Skim as having limited tools and support for combatting heteronormativity. At Julie’s birthday party, the girls swoon over a local lifeguard who reminds them of a handsome celebrity (83). When Skim’s father asks about her life, he jumps straight to questions of hetero-romance: “Any teen drama I should know about? Any boyfriends?” (65). The swiftness of his second question leaves little room for her to confide the teen drama she *is* experiencing: queer desire for her teacher, a tense friendship, and the social and emotional fallout of a (potentially gay) boy’s suicide. Skim is mostly passive in the face of these heteronormative practices and inquiries. But she vocally resists heterosexuality’s dominance in the classroom, where her class is reading *Romeo and Juliet*: “But it’s like, why is it so important, that a boy falls in love with a girl?” (27). When the school holds a Girls Celebrate Life dance, Skim reluctantly agrees to go on a double date with Lisa and two twin boys. The double date exposes that she and Lisa are drifting apart: Lisa is more interested in boys and in attending social functions. The gap

between them widens, with Lisa leaving Skim alone at the dance to flirt with a boy, and eventually becoming too preoccupied with her boyfriend to spend time with Skim or study hard. Skim is happy for Lisa but sits passively through the date and leaves the dance early. She is not interested in heteronormative high school rituals, and engages with them reluctantly, if at all.

The scenes in the high school hallways and the gym where the dance occurs have a constraining feel, which Alyson King notices: “Jillian Tamaki’s drawings...evoke the hothouse, claustrophobic sense of high school...In the narrow hallways lined with lockers, the everyday personal dramas of hundreds of girls, all dressed in uniform and all eyeing each other in the halls, is played out in front of all the students and teachers” (76). Heterosexuality is not just pervasive; it is performative and spectated. Everyone witnesses Katie’s grief after what Skim calls “LE BIG DUMP” (Tamaki and Tamaki 11). The broken hearts drawn on Katie’s hands and the posse of girls who follow her around denote the all-important spectacle of heterosexual romance.

In contrast, Skim’s queer desire and the fizzling of her relationship with Ms. Archer go virtually unnoticed in the social spaces of school and home. Ariel Kahn notes that, while heteronormativity is situated in the panopticon of the high school, Skim repeatedly retreats to outdoor spaces where she can experience queer desire: “Heteronormative values are presented as repressive, restrictive and reductive, in contrast with the more expansive outdoor scenes in which Skim explores her own attitude to signification, inscribing her loss on the landscape, which has become a symbol of her freedom to desire” (342). Many critics close read a full-page image where Skim paces her feelings in huge letters in the snow: “I HATE YOU EVERYTHIN” (89). Marni Stanley

writes that Skim's cross-outs "offer insight into the young girl's thought processes, as well as inner emotional life" (193). Skim's *you* is painstakingly written in footsteps and then erased in favour of a broader (if incomplete) *everythin[g]*. Skim's sprawling message is juxtaposed against a small inset photo of John Reddear, his image defaced by a homophobic slur. The inset image adds a queer lens to Skim's ambiguous message of hate: does she hate the heteronormativity that repressed John's queerness, the homophobia that targets him even in death, the social order that she does not belong in? Does she hate the *you* of Ms. Archer, who has rejected her, or the *you* of Julie Peters and other surveilling pressures, or even the *you* of herself, as she is the primary audience for the message in this quiet, solitary field?

The ambiguity and openness of Skim's message in the snow speak to the potential of queerness, in contrast to the restriction and regulation of heteronormativity. In his book *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon*, Alexander Doty offers a list of six ways that the term "queer" is defined and used in popular culture studies. Though most of the definitions and uses explicitly invoke LGBTQ+ identities and presentations, number five invokes the term queer "To describe non-straight things that are not clearly marked as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, or transgendered, but that seem to suggest or allude to one or more of these categories, often in a vague, confusing, or incoherent manner" (7). In *Skim* and the comics of Emily Carroll, queerness presents as this vague non-straightness. I use this definition of queer to extend queerness beyond sexuality and sexual practice; *queer* alludes to deviations from heterosexuality and critiques of the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. Skim is read as queer, different, non-normative by the people around her, and though this reading is tied up in many aspects of her

identity—her race, her body shape, her queer desire and passive attitude towards heterosexuality—it is attributed to her interest in gothic subculture. “Goth” is the label placed on her non-normativity and becomes the excuse for over-surveillance and concern trolling²⁶ that seeks to discipline Skim back into normativity.²⁷

While I have critiqued the way Skim is perceived as at risk, King reads Skim as legitimately depressed, suggesting that the concerned adults in Skim’s life are recognizing genuine signs of illness and danger, even if they do not address the depression in any effective ways. King asserts that Skim “is clearly suffering from some degree of depression” and points to the “danger signs” in Skim’s behaviour: “skipping class to smoke, sleeping during the day, suffering from insomnia at night, and feeling cut off from others” (80). Michelle Miller disagrees: “What King reads as clear signs of pathological emotional experience—‘skipping class to smoke, sleeping during the day, suffering from insomnia at night, and feeling cut off from others’—I read...as common, ordinary, and even healthful reactions to the difficult emotional terrain of adolescence” (86). The difficulty of correctly interpreting Skim’s emotional state comes back to the turbulent mundanity of girlhood: if girlhood, and adolescence most especially, is a time of change, growth, learning, new desire and new pain, then does the mundane even exist? If girlhood *is* a time of risk, and the girl’s body a site of danger, then how do others recognize risk and offer support? These are questions that extend beyond the scope of this particular analysis, but they are questions that inevitably emerge as I witness Skim,

²⁶ Lauren Cagle defines concern trolling as “giving unsolicited advice and criticism supposedly out of concern for the message's recipient” (75). This is a fairly new term, often used to describe fatphobia presenting itself as concern for fat people’s health.

²⁷ It is worth noting that there is a queerness to goth subcultures. Amy Wilkins argues that young goth men often engage in “queer play” (343) and Paul Hodkinson and Jon Garland note that many goths are subject to homophobic abuse and harassment related to their queer appearance or deviation from gendered norms (549). The identification of Skim as goth may also be an acknowledgement of her queerness.

Regan, Monica, and later May struggle through the dangerous, and at times very isolating, terrain of girlhood.

Though I cannot say for certain whether Skim depressed in a medical sense or simply experiencing some of the emotional fallout of adolescence, I argue that heteronormativity shapes the ways that she is offered help or left unsupported. Writing about the sexualization of girlhood, Danielle Egan emphasizes the cultural inability to recognize queerness in the controversial discourse around girls and sexuality:

Girls do not seek out, and seemingly cannot seek out, the female gaze, search for female sexual partners, or identify with queer women in popular culture. Because sexualization is equated with hyper-heterosexualization, the possibility that queer girls could be sexualized or suffer its consequences is nowhere within the literature. (62-63)

Though Skim's best friend, Lisa, lashes out at Skim with the accurate barb "Why don't you go make out with Ms. Archer?" she is the only one to recognize that Skim and Ms. Archer's relationship has crossed a line (34). The world around Skim sees girls as heterosexual or not-yet sexual, and her inappropriate relationship passes unnoticed during a time when the school is a space of intense surveillance.

Though Skim and Ms. Archer, to the best of the reader's knowledge, never have sex, their relationship is inappropriate, like Mr. Fox's relationships with his high school students. And yet, because Skim's desire is queer, no one seems to see her as in danger in this relationship, including critics. Mariko Tamaki is quoted as being "surprised by the lack of attention reviewers have paid to the kiss scene—she expected readers to be more shocked" (King 84). Stanley and Marty Fink both describe Skim's desire for Ms. Archer

as “unrequited” (191; 144). Scholar Monica Chiu reads Ms. Archer and Skim as “two women...kissing,” and “a girl falling in love with a girl” (39). Chiu suggests Skim imagines the kiss, as it takes place in image only, and is not acknowledged in the book’s text (34). Chiu’s reading undermines the authority of the visual, and I take issue with how Chiu reads the image of Skim and Ms. Archer kissing as unreliable but does not extend the same suspicion or doubt to any other images in the graphic novel. Miller is the only scholar to address Ms. Archer’s desire and choices, and their consequences for Skim: “Ms. Archer turns away from her, leaving her to deal with the aftermath of their erotic encounter on her own” (96). Though Ms. Archer responsibly distances herself from Skim after their kiss, she is still a potentially dangerous actor when it comes to sexual desire, and her attention to Skim still hurts the teenage girl. She uses her power to sweep Skim into a complicated and hurtful situation, and she leaves without directly addressing Skim’s feelings or her part in encouraging them. This relationship is queer, but it is still dangerous, operating across an unequal power dynamic. Heteronormativity plays a part in hiding this abuse, rendering queerness invisible, even when it is potentially abusive.

In “The Hole the Fox Did Make” and “The Groom,” gothic elements offer a critique of heteronormativity: figures and objects that are haunting and uncanny emphasize the dangers and violence of heterosexual relationships. Above, I analyzed how the uncanny mother figure of the whispering woman uncovered a dangerous history of heterosexual relationships, and seduced Regan out of the real world and into a gothic and ultimately deadly dream world. Now, I will turn to Carroll’s comic “The Groom,” which offers another narrative of gothic girlhood and the haunting shadow of heteronormativity.

In “The Groom,” Regan reappears, this time the best friend of protagonist Monica,

who also lives in the town of Keeping. The two friends have found a dollhouse—really, a one room box—that depicts a wedding scene. They decide to share the dollhouse, alternating nights with it. They add missing pieces to the dollhouse, making it more complete, and they invent stories about its inhabitants. The dollhouse is missing a camera for the cameraman, which Monica builds out of popsicle sticks, and a groom, whom Regan builds out of pipe cleaners.

Regan and Monica’s play is initially focused on creating a desirable groom for a wedding ritual. This sort of play seems to emerge from compulsory heterosexuality. Rich describes how compulsory heterosexuality ushers women into marriage, “because heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment” (654). The other dolls appear to be German bisque dolls, a type of doll famous for their “mimetic capacity,” and which returned to popularity “as ornaments of girls’ live in the 1980s” (Peers 26). But despite their realism, the girls ignore these dolls in favour of the groom. The girls are deeply engaged in his character: they dress him up in a handmade cape and bowtie, they name him for their favourite musician, and they assign him the career of pilot.²⁸ Like good little heteronormative girls, they use the playful space of the dollhouse to imagine themselves through the “great female adventure” of marriage (Rich 654). The groom is the linchpin in this marital play: they cannot imagine a wedding scene without a male groom, and they create an awkward and out-of-place male creature to make the wedding scene function, even leaning the looped head of the pipe cleaner groom in to kiss the pale face of the bride doll.

But the heteronormativity in their play soon goes awry, as they find other, queerer

²⁸ “My mom said my dad was a pilot,” says Regan, though we know, from “The Hole the Fox Did Make,” that her father was a high school teacher.

ways to play with the scene, and the groom in particular. Frances Armstrong notes that from early on in the history of dollhouses,

most girls were able to regard dollhouses as their own ludic spaces, places dedicated to their own play, rather than as site for training in compliance.

Showing flexibility and individuality, they interspersed reassuring enactment of routine with humorous or subversive innovation and readily improvised both narratives and accessories. (24)

Monica and Regan improvise the pieces and players necessary to play out a wedding, but they move beyond simply playing out heterosexual romance. They initially explain the groom's gangly pipe cleaner limbs as the result of an accident, and soon they gleefully put him through tortures and trials that further explain his weird body. He suffers a car crash, breaks all his bones, needs to have his bones broken again. He is drowned in a cup of water. He is fleeing the police, and must go into "hiding," which leads them to bury his bride and daughters in the snow. Their play shifts from romantic to morbid. Armstrong notes that girls were known to "pla[y] at death" by burying dolls (36).²⁹ The girls' abuse of the groom also suggests a turn away from or against the girlhood script of heteronormativity: though they are initially fascinated with the groom as a romantic figure, they find more pleasure in imagining his pain than imagining romance. Armstrong observes that male dolls were particularly vulnerable to more violent play: "male dolls tend to get mislaid or maimed...The disappearance of male dolls could also reflect antagonism toward men or simply a child's desire to mirror more accurately the daytime household as she knew it, with its preponderance of women" (44-5). Regan and Monica

²⁹ A major pop cultural example is in the film *Meet Me In St. Louis* (1944): the youngest child, Tootie, kills her dolls off with rare illnesses, and buries them in her backyard.

do, in fact, live in a predominantly female world, and there are no adult men directly engaged with the girls in the comic. The absence of men, and their antagonism towards the groom, speaks to the uncanny nature of male presence in the girls' lives.

The groom, though a romantic creation of the girls, becomes a frightening presence in Monica's life. Her delight at pretending to drown the groom is interrupted by a gurgle of bubbles, seeming to come from the pipe cleaner groom himself. That night, she is woken by a snapping sound, and finds the camera she built has broken. Monica reacts out of fear: "Monica balled the groom up so tightly that he was nothing but a ball of wire, until he had no limbs, no head, no hooks-for-hands, and then she threw him into the darkness beneath her bed." Disturbingly, Regan presents the groom the next day, unmangled. She tells Monica: "I must've accidentally taken him home yesterday! / I found him on the floor of my room this morning!" Monica does not correct Regan or mention that she attempted to destroy and hide the groom the night before. During their next play session, the groom pricks Monica's thumb, drawing blood, and the panel zooms in on the frayed wires of the groom's "arm," which have the uncanny appearance of an actual hand (see fig. 11).

Shortly after, Regan gives Monica the dollhouse to keep, because Regan's mother finds it too creepy. The comic ends soon after, when Monica and her grandmother move away from Keeping. After their departure, Regan finds the dollhouse "splintered and crushed, damp at the bottom of the ravine." Regan never finds the other dolls—the bride and daughters—that she and Monica buried. There is no indication of what happened to the pipe cleaner groom: was he left in the ravine with the abandoned dollhouse? Was he buried in the ground with the other dolls? Did Monica take him with her, or destroy him

in some more permanent way? The comic has an ambiguous ending. In one sense, this mimics the ways that children abandon fantasies, stories, and toys, with no sense of closure. In another sense, the ambiguous departure of Monica and the disappearance of the creepy groom mirrors another disappearance in the comic: that of the Dolans.

The Dolans appear in the secondary storyline of “The Groom.” The Dolans are a family who used to live nearby but are now gone. The family includes the father, Paul Dolan, his unnamed wife, and their daughter Lauren, a classmate of Monica and Regan. The Dolans are introduced through an offhand comment: Regan worries that whoever lost the dollhouse will want it back, but Monica explains that she found it “behind the Dolan house, so...” She trails off as Regan whispers, “oh...yeah.” This exchange introduces the Dolans as an uncomfortable topic: the girls know that none of them will be coming back for the dollhouse, wherever they have gone. Beyond this, information about the Dolans is vague, as most of the details are gleaned from overheard phone conversations between Monica’s grandmother and her friend Gloria.

Through the grandmother’s conversations, we learn that the Dolan house is for sale, but is unlikely to be purchased: “The only reason to buy that place would be to tear it down.” A longer exchange reveals the grandmother’s anger towards the patriarch, Paul Dolan, who is dead:

Do you know what she asked me tonight?

She said...Grandma...Are ghosts real?

It’s because of that mess up the block...

I had to tell her that house isn’t HAUNTED... that Lauren’s father was just an UNHAPPY MAN...

What? 'Breaks my heart' NOTHING.

It makes me FURIOUS.

I could KILL Paul Dolan.

That coward.

Could just dig the son of a bitch up and—
sigh

Yeah... I know, Gloria.

You're right. We will when the lease is up...

Paul Dolan has done something, something unforgivable, and is now dead. The “mess up the block” is enough to upset Monica, who worries about hauntings. But Monica, and the reader alongside her, do not know the whole story. Did Paul Dolan kill himself? His family? The act itself is ambiguous. Monica is a naïve narrator; the narrative she offers is unreliable and incomplete, because she is not mature enough to be told the whole story, and not experienced enough to draw conclusions on her own. She must pull together half-explanations from one-sided conversations. But as a child, she brings a strong imagination to the narrative, which brings depth to her naïve, incomplete understanding of the events. She also draws on her own memories of the Dolans, and her memory is delineated from the present-day narrative through a stark change in colour.

The black-and-white comic shifts to brilliant colour in a flashback to the summer before. Monica and Regan stop on their way home to visit Lauren Dolan and give her the homework she has missed. No one answers the door, and Regan draws Monica's attention to the window next to the door. The colour switches back to black and white and a shadowy figure is pictured standing in the window. The panel zooms in on shadowy

eyes staring out at the girls. The girls leave, wondering “Was that Mr Dolan? [...] Why didn’t he answer the door?” (see fig. 12). Lauren or her mother are never seen; the only visible presence of the Dolans is the staring, speechless father. He is a patriarchal spectre, eclipsing his wife and daughter in both this moment and in Monica’s memory. The shadowy Paul Dolan, paired with Monica’s grandmother’s angry phone conversations, give the impression of a frightening patriarchal figure. And yet, when the girls play with the dollhouse, their play focuses mainly on the patriarchal figure of the groom. Both patriarchs, the groom and Mr. Dolan, are drawn in similar manners: the groom’s pipe-cleaner limbs are drawn through hatching, a series of close parallel lines indicating the individual fibers of the pipe cleaner, and Mr. Dolans shadow is a long, dark hatched shape behind the glass of the window. The two characters are related through this visual similarity and through their role as patriarchs in their respective family units.

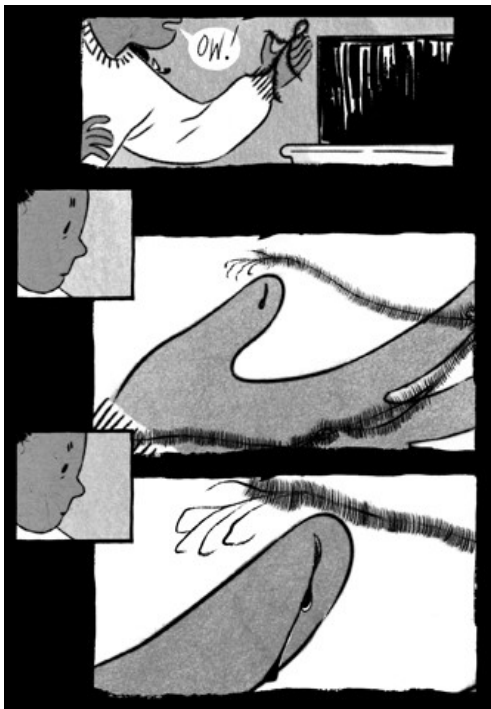


Fig. 11: Groom’s finger pricks Monica’s finger in “The Groom”



Fig. 12: Monica glimpses Mr. Dolan in “The Groom”

As established above, the girls initially focus their play on developing a romantic male figure in their handmade groom, but they soon shift to subjecting the groom to violent fantasies. These girls have active imaginations, but their play is also informed by their context. Just as Monica’s imagination shaped her feelings about the Dolans’ (haunted) house, the Dolans’ disappearance finds its way into the girls’ play. Was Paul Dolan injured or suffering, like their mangled groom? Did he commit a crime, like the groom who is being pursued by the police? Did his issues, whatever they were, result in the burying of his wife and daughter? Regan’s favourite detail of the dollhouse is “the church spire painted [in the window], because she recognized it– (Knox Presbyterian on St. David) / which meant that the scene took place in the town they lived in, a place called KEEPING.” This detail situates the dollhouse firmly in the town of Keeping, making resonances between the world of the dollhouse and the world of Regan and

Monica even more believable. Monica's imagination creates elisions: between the gangly black groom and the shadowy silhouette of Paul Dolan; between the dollhouse—dismissed by Regan's mother as “creepy”—and the haunted Dolan house; and between the missing Dolan women and the groom's buried wife and daughters.

Neither Regan nor Monica comes from a nuclear family. Monica lives with her grandmother, and Regan lives with her mother, and describes her father only in hypotheticals: “My Mom said my dad was a pilot.” There is a queerness to their daily lives, which are structured around and organized by women, not structured around a heterosexual relationship or a patriarchal figure. Their lack of male father figures is a motive for their fascination with the groom. But the groom becomes less a romantic figure and more a site of violence and even haunting. Monica seems frightened of the groom, as he hurts her, wakes her during the night, and reappears after she tries to destroy him. Monica is also haunted by the house down the street, with its tall, shadowy male figure. Grooms and patriarchs are exciting but also sinister. They can be hurt, and they harm others. They are haunting and threatening and ultimately uncanny figures in the lives of these girls. Patriarchal figures, and the heteronormative fabric they perpetuate, are a source of danger, fear, and risk in Monica and Reagan's girlhood.

Ungrievable Bodies and Perpetual Mourning: Indigenous Girlhood

Writing about the “omission of queer sexuality” from the discourse around sexuality and girlhood, Egan also describes a “nostalgia” for a “pre-sexualized (read innocent)” counterpart to the sexualized girl (75). But pre-sexualization, and the innocence invested in it, is a privilege experienced primarily by white girls. In the

Canadian context, there is a damaging history of sexualizing Indigenous girls, and the stereotype of the sexually available Indigenous girl has been a source of horrific violence against girls and women across Canada. This history of trauma and violence, and its impact on the lived experience of present-day Indigenous girls, is the focus of the short graphic novel *Will I See?*

Will I See? is a graphic novel based on a story by Cree/Dene singer IsKwé and artist Erin Leslie and is written by Swampy Cree graphic novelist David Alexander Robertson and illustrated by artist GMB Chomichuk. The graphic novel follows May, a young Cree girl, as she walks home through a Canadian city. She meets a cat, who becomes her companion on her journey. The cat finds a series of objects, abandoned or lost by their owners, but clearly meaningful. May collects these objects and becomes increasingly nervous the more objects she accumulates. In fact, the objects are haunted by violence: as she discovers each one, there are flashes in the background of the panels, silhouettes of men taking women, hurting women, pursuing women. Each object recalls its moment of loss, a moment when an Indigenous girl or woman was lost as well.

Eventually, May makes it home to her Nohkom (grandmother). Her Nohkom decides they can keep the cat, whom May names Chípiy (ghost). May shows her Nohkom the objects, and her Nohkom expresses how worried she was that it took May so long to get home. She uses the objects to make a necklace for May, and the two discuss the thousands of Indigenous girls and women who are missing or murdered. Nohkom tells a story to soothe May, and she falls asleep happy, but is soon awakened by violent nightmares. She joins her Nohkom in bed and falls back asleep.

The next day, May and Chípiy leave early, and almost immediately encounter a

creepy white man. He forces May into a car and brings her to the woods. She runs away, but he catches up with her. The two fight, until Chípiy intervenes and pushes the man off a cliff. The man dies as he hits the ground. In the moments after the fight, the first object Chípiy and May found—an egg—hatches, letting out a beautiful bird. The spirits of the lost girls and women are represented as animals who dance before going their separate ways. May and Chípiy return home, where Nohkom greets May, and they grieve for the missing and murdered women.

This graphic novel features a great deal of violence and trauma. In acknowledgement of this, it begins with a trigger warning, preparing the reader to consume a narrative about “violence against women” (3). But the novel deals specifically with violence against Indigenous women, and the dedications contextualize it within a larger discourse of grief and resistance. IsKwé dedicates the book to “each of the women we’ve lost,” and Chomichuk expands this in his dedication to “the seen and the unseen. For the forgotten and the remembered” (4). Robertson is more specific, dedicating the book to “the over four thousand women and girls we have lost and for my daughters, that they grow up strong, and in a safer place” (4). Robertson’s dedication, in its use of a number, acknowledges the vast impact of colonial violence, and the sheer number of lives it has claimed. His dedication also links the four thousand missing to his own daughters, a reminder that this ongoing threat is a part of contemporary Indigenous girlhood in Canada. The graphic novel is set in “The present,” a descriptor that is both vague and immediate, even urgent (5). Given the persistence of settler-colonial violence in Canada, one can imagine this novel sustaining its urgency and relevance, as girls and women like May continue to move through a world that is always haunted and dangerous. In fact,

Robertson has been writing about missing and murdered women and girls for years; his 2008 graphic novel *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne* told the true story of a young Cree woman brutally murdered in Manitoba in 1971. Gendered colonial violence has menaced generations of Indigenous girls and women, surely shaping the experience of Indigenous girlhood.

Sandrina de Finney and Johanne Saraceno have done community-based research on Indigenous girlhood on Canada's west coast. The girls who participated in de Finney and Saraceno's studies described how they are constantly contesting "colonial constructions of Indigenous girlhood such as 'Indian princess,' 'dirty squaw,' 'drunken Indian,' and vanished race" (117). Negotiating these damaging racist stereotypes is part of the girls' everyday life. To be an Indigenous girl is to be subject to racism, sexualization, and violence on a regular basis.

As a nation founded on and built through settler-colonial violence, Canada accepts and even relies on colonial violence as a mundane mechanism of the national project, as an everyday condition of occupying this land. As such, dominant discourses of the settler notion construct Indigenous girls as disposable. De Finney asks, "How do we challenge the persistent construction of Indigenous girls' bodies as insignificant, dispensable, and irrevocably broken?" (9-10). Citing Judith Butler, she argues that "colonial trauma make[s] girls into particular kinds of 'ungrievable bodies'—bodies without hope and without capacity, victim bodies, disenfranchised bodies" (de Finney 10). On the day that I write this—decades into ceaseless activism by Indigenous peoples and their allies, and two years into the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls—Métis author and public intellectual Chelsea Vowel speaks to the carelessness with which

Canada, including the media and the justice system, address violence against Indigenous women: “When Indigenous women are murdered, it is hardly a blip on Canada’s radar. It’s a short news item, soon forgotten” (@âpitawikosisân). Gendered colonial violence is mundane in Canada, at least to the majority, and to many of those in power. Narratives of Indigenous girlhood have the potential to contest this, finding ways to represent the ongoing trauma and fear girls experience, and the many ways they navigate and resist this context of omnipresent violence.

From its dedications to its conclusions, *Will I See?* takes time to grieve Indigenous girls, whose lives de Finney worries settler society sees as “dispensable” and “ungrievable” (10). May and her Nohkom take the time to discuss the missing girls: “Our women and girls, our lost ones, they leave us in one way, but they are not gone to us” says Nohkom, resisting the erasure of settler-colonial violence (32). May and her Nohkom relate the missing women to the flowers that grow in their neighbourhood: “They create flower blooms with every step they take. They leave flowers everywhere. And when we pick them, they share their spirit with us” (31). The flowers, according to May, are “everywhere,” and she brings some as a gift for her Nohkom (54). By recognizing these flowers as a trace of the missing girls, May and Nohkom pay homage to the girls who are largely erased.

The flowers’ beauty, their value within May and Nohkom’s relationship, and their ubiquity in May’s neighbourhood all function as a form of what de Finney calls “presencing” (8). Presencing, according to de Finney, is a strategy of Indigenous girlhood: “Girls enact presence when they contest their positioning as invisible by physically, spiritually, and symbolically (re)occupying the places that hold their ancestral

connections as First Peoples” (18). By investing meaning and memory into the flowers, May and her Nohkom enact presence for the girls who have been rendered absent by colonial violence. This presencing is both a part of their grief work and a part of decolonization; citing Poka Laenui, de Finney writes “that decolonization involves mourning as much it does recovery, action, and dreaming” (20). *Will I See?* models two Indigenous people, an old woman and a young girl, performing decolonization through mourning, storytelling, and caring for each other. As such, the graphic novel offers a resistant and loving narrative of Indigenous girlhood.

May’s own experience of girlhood—specifically the spatiality of her girlhood—shifts drastically throughout the short novel. Though she initially seems to be a carefree child (her age is never made clear), taking her time on her walk home, her discovery of the objects and the violent memories they carry makes her fearful. Her nightmare after her long walk home presents a cityscape marked by danger, particularly a creepy, tentacled shadow of herself reaching out to pull her into darkness (34). The urban space she is used to moving through has now become a dangerous space, in which her race, gender, and youth mark her as particularly vulnerable. May is experiencing “the spatiality of the racial order in which we [as Canadians] live” (Razack 6). By following May as she moves through the city, the creators of *Will I See?* “engage in a complex historical mapping of space and bodies *in relation*,” which Sherene Razack argues involves “trackin[g] multiple systems of domination and the ways in which they come into existence in and through each other” (15, emphasis original). May’s increasingly dangerous movements reveal the many systems—racism, colonialism, sexism—that intersect and render her vulnerable.

While May begins the story as a kind of *flâneuse*, one who increasingly doubts her access to the privilege of mobility, Chípiy is the interrogator of space, helping May to excavate the violent histories of spaces that appear mundane. Razack writes: “To question how spaces come to be, and to trace what they produce as well as what produces them, is to unsettle familiar everyday notions” (7). She notes that “space seems to be empty,” but it is full of the racial and institutional relations that structure our lives (Razack 7). In *Will I See?*, this metaphor is made concrete: Chípiy digs up the spirits that dwell in the seemingly empty spaces of the playground or the street. These spaces, though appearing mundane, are the settings of colonial violence, which itself is so pervasive as to be part of the everyday. Pamela Downe argues that “Aboriginal girls today are connected to historical patterns of uprootedness and violence every time they hear these secretive stories of [missing and murdered girls and women]” (10). Chípiy and May, working together to interrogate the urban space, engage in their own work of presentencing; they recall each of these violent disappearances into the present moment, revealing that the colonial violence of the past is part of the fabric of “The present” in which May moves, and in which the novel is set (5).

But by the end of the novel, May, her Nohkom and Chípiy have revised the urban space to make it a space of mourning and love, rather than a space of only fear and violence. The flowers that May sees “everywhere” are the presence of the lost girls and women (54). Now, these women are present with her as she moves through the city, recalling IsKwé’s dedication: “For each of the women we’ve lost, together we stand as one” (4). The meaning of the flowers, and their ubiquity in May’s neighbourhood, make the acknowledgement and mourning of the girls and women a part of May and Nohkom’s

everyday. The presencing of these women's spirits in the flowers fills the urban space, shifting the way May moves through the city; now, she sees the city and knows she is not alone.

Visual Violence and Monstrous Men

Like "The Hole the Fox Did Make," *Will I See?* is primarily drawn in black and white, with red used sparsely and deliberately. But overall, Chomichuk's style is much less consistent than that of Carroll or Jillian Tamaki: he employs a variety of techniques across the short graphic novel, and each page is a richly-layered landscape of shadows and silhouettes, skylines and cityscapes, languages, and characters. In this section, I examine how Chomichuk uses the arrangement of panels, colours, and shapes to reproduce the spatial politics of a Canadian city and represent a girl's vulnerable mobility. I will also analyze the use of gothic elements in this graphic novel, and how they are contextualized within a colonial framework. *Will I See?* is experimental and innovative in its style and arrangement, and this innovation serves its urgent decolonial message.

Chomichuk does not relegate colonial violence to the gutter; in fact, in *Will I See?*, the gutter is a permeable space. Bodies and objects often travel across gutters, occupying many panels at once (for examples see pages 5, 9, 17, and 30). The permeability of the gutters structures a steady narrative pace; the gutters rarely act as staccato pauses, because the figures sprawling or moving across multiple panels tug the reader onward. The ways in which bodies and objects stretch across gutters also serve to collapse time. On the first page of the novel, May takes a step across four panels

simultaneously, and as her single movement occupies the multiple physical and temporal spaces of the panels, there is a sense of her journey: the ground covered, the time spent moving (see fig. 13). Later, a smear of red spreads across five panels. It touches spaces and bodies, casting a red lens on a woman's silhouette and concluding at May's body (17) (see fig. 14). On the subsequent page, she finds a ring, which itself is touched by a blood-red streak that creates a jagged gutter between two panels. The red streak marks yet another site of violence, and drags through the dangerous space, the body of the taken woman, the vulnerable body of May, and the ring that has been left behind. The pages of *Will I See?* are not neatly structured by clear gutters and temporally distinct panels; rather, gutters are porous, and bodies and objects move across them to collapse larger temporal periods into a viewable present.



Fig. 13: May walks through the city in *Will I See?* (Robertson et al. 5)



Fig. 14: Red spreads across the panels in *Will I See?* (Robertson et al. 17)

Speaking to a very conventional style of comics, Scott McCloud argues that gutters, the space between comics' panels, is a space where readers must make sense of the action across two distinctly separated panels: "in the *limbo* of the gutter, *human imagination* takes two separate images and *transforms* them into a single idea" (66, emphasis McCloud's). The gutter, argues McCloud, calls for readers' complicity in the action of the story: by filling in the gaps, they become complicit in telling the story. His prime example of this complicity is a scene of violence (see fig. 15) (68). To the left of the gutter, a man is threatened by someone holding an axe. To the right, there is an onomatopoeic scream. By concluding, across these two panels, that the man has been attacked, the reader becomes complicit in the act of violence. It is never directly depicted,

but the reader realizes it through their imagination, working with the imaginative and incomplete space of the gutter.



Fig. 15: The complicity of the gutter in *Understanding Comics* (McCloud 68)

Elizabeth Marshall and Leigh Gilmore criticize the displacement of violence to the gutter in their comparative reading of two graphic novels: Robert Innocenti's *The Girl in Red* and Phoebe Gloeckner's *A Child's Life and Other Stories*. Both narratives involve a man raping a girl. But while Innocenti situates the sexual violence itself to the invisible space of the gutter, choosing instead to imply sexual violence and allow the reader to make assumptions, Gloeckner's semi-autobiographical graphic novel represents rape directly. And while Innocenti's text was widely lauded, Gloeckner's text was received as "disturbing" and removed from school libraries ("Girlhood in the Gutter" 108, 103). Marshall and Gilmore take issue with the strategy of "hiding violence in the gutter," arguing that by coding sexual violence as unspeakable and unrepresentable, artists are "agreeing upon its invisibility in the everyday space of families" ("Girlhood in the Gutter" 109). Marshall and Gilmore's analysis emphasizes the ethical task of both telling and showing narratives of sexual violence: "images are not neutral. They do not merely

document; instead, they materialize in visual form the social fact of girlhood and violence” (“Girlhood in the Gutter” 95). All the creators behind *Will I See?*, but especially illustrator Chomichuk, take on the heavy responsibility of representing sexual violence and trauma in a graphic novel that may be consumed by those in Canada who view Indigenous girls as disposable, and those who are constantly mourning and resisting colonial violence.

Throughout the book, different temporalities are treated as layers on the page, which can all be viewed at once. When May finds an earring, the earring is foregrounded against an image of May and Chípiy walking, while the backdrop presents silhouettes of a man strangling a woman wearing the brightly coloured earring (12). This technique is repeated with each object and each missing woman. Red often acts as another layer that marks a moment of violence, and the semi-transparent layers of red mute the figures engaged in violence (14, 15). *Will I See?* also features layers of Cree syllabics, drawn in semi-transparent white, drifting over or behind the characters on the page. The syllabics are often blurry and crowded, and as they mingle with other shadows, colours, and figures, they seem barely legible. All these layers bring a great deal of depth to each page, and make the spaces May walks through feel busy, crowded with memory, action, and story. These narrative layers are themselves a gothic trope: Julia Round writes that “layered stories” are part of a “gothic formula of stories within stories” (19). The layering of stories plays with temporality, bringing attacks from the past into May’s present. Round notes that “temporality in comics is not straight-forward,” and that when comics are used to tell gothic stories, the mixed temporality of the comics page can be used as a “metaphor for haunting” (57). By creating layers within each panel, with different

foregrounds, middle grounds, and backgrounds, Chomichuk blends different temporal periods in the story, allowing events from the past to haunt May in the present.

May and the other characters are drawn quite simply, particularly in contrast to the busy, layered page-space behind them. Chomichuk is employing the masking effect, an effect that involves drawing abstract, cartoonish characters against realistic, detailed backgrounds. McCloud claims that cartoonish, abstract characters are more universal, and as such more relatable (*Understanding Comics* 31). Setting a cartoonish character against an intricate and detailed background enables readers “to *mask* themselves in a character and safely enter a sensually stimulating world” (*Understanding Comics* 43, emphasis original). By keeping May’s appearance simple, Chomichuk allows many girls to identify themselves with May, and to imagine themselves navigating this complex and violent world alongside her.

The other cartoonish character in *Will I See?* is May’s attacker. He first appears in a cloud or red, half hidden behind a tree, his face frozen in a malicious grin (37). This exact same rendering of him, grinning in red, appears three more times in various sizes and locations (38, 40, 41). The man has no identifying features beyond his pale white skin. In this context, the accessibility of the cartoon face is disturbing. Perhaps any man reading this novel can imagine himself in the attacker’s shoes or can see his behavior fitting within a tragic narrative of misogyny, racism, and colonial violence.

The man’s appearance lends a gothic tone to the text: with his fixed grin and red hue, he looks like a demon that has watched and seized May. His identical appearance across several pages is unsettling and uncanny. The man is also uncanny as the materialization of May’s fears. Writing about Indigenous girls in Canada, Downe

wonders “how or to what extent they experience the vulnerability to various forms of violence” (2). May, having heard the warnings and stories from her Nohkom, knows that such men exist, and that they prey on girls like her. But until now, this threat has been relegated to stories and nightmares. The man’s physical presence is uncanny in Freud’s sense, as he writes that “an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary” (150-1). Though the lost objects and missing women have not been *imaginary*, the man is May’s first encounter with the physical, active manifestation of colonial violence. By moving from stories, nightmares and warnings into reality, the man is an uncanny figure.

But though the man appears uncanny, demonic, even monstrous, he is a human with a human capacity for violence, and as such acts as a kind of subversion of gothic tropes. May’s Nohkom insists to May, “these monsters that scare you, remember they are just people” (32). *Will I See?* insists on the monstrous attacker’s humanity. *Will I See?* is an example the “postcolonial feminist Gothic” (Kulperger 98). In May’s narrative, Indigenous girls’ fears are “accepted as mundane, daily, banal, and domestic” (Kulperger 116). By demonstrating the monstrosity of the average white man in Canada, or the humanity of the monsters behind gendered violence, Robertson et al. situate the terror of colonial violence “as internal rather than an external force” in present-day Canada (Kulperger 116). The monsters to be reckoned with are a part of the everyday, and the violence they perpetuate is part of the fabric of society.

Ultimately, girlhood and adolescence are turbulent periods during which the quotidian is fraught with upheaval and change. Furthermore, girls in Canada are subject

to many forms of violence, including abuse by adults, the disciplining norms of compulsory heterosexuality, and settler colonial violence, which takes the form of gendered violence and racism. As such, girlhood can be a traumatic period, or a period in which traumas are more likely to occur. In his analysis of the quotidian in comics, Frank Bramlett writes, “The day-to-day lives of characters in comics very often change substantially after a traumatic experience, and frequently that shift is indeed from one constellation of the quotidian to a new one” (253). He describes how characters are likely to “orient themselves” in new ways after experiencing a trauma (257). Skim and May both orient themselves after dangerous and upsetting experience. For Skim, she ends a toxic friendship, lets go of a dangerous crush, and makes a new friend who shares her sense of exclusion. In the case of May, with the help of her Nohkom she tells a particular story about the flowers in her city, thus making mourning and celebrating the lives of Indigenous women and girls a part of her everyday movements.

Emily Carroll’s girl protagonists, Regan and Monica, face more violent and ambiguous conclusions. Regan drowns, literally submitting herself to a gothic version of her life and leaving the mundane world behind her. Monica leaves the town of Keeping and both sites of patriarchal danger—the dollhouse and the Dolan house. Neither character is given the narrative opportunity to re-orient themselves and to find ways to cope with the mundane violences of girlhood.

Yet I believe that by reading these texts together, I have argued that there is an emerging field of Canadian comics concerned with girlhood, and that this graphic literature of girlhood turns to gothic tropes to highlight the vulnerability of girls. I am

eager to see how this literature develops, and how it is studied within the fields of comics studies and Canadian studies.

Chapter 4:

Dismantling Detainment and Displacement Through Comics:

The Work of Tings Chak and Eric Kostiuk Williams

In this chapter, I take up the question of space and its representation in comics. I am specifically concerned with access to space: who is granted access to which spaces, who is denied access to spaces, who is confined to some spaces or pushed out of other spaces. Access to space is a mundane and quotidian issue. Condo developments slowly replace affordable housing, and though the development itself is visible, it is more difficult to see the displacement such development requires. Immigrants, particularly those without secure legal status, experience the fear of detainment and deportation on a quotidian basis. In the case of comics, I wonder how issues of access to space are navigated and represented in a form predicated on spatial representation. The texts I examine here consider very different spaces, at least at first glance. In Eric Kostiuk Williams' 2017 graphic novel *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, the space in question is the Parkdale neighbourhood in Toronto, where gentrification and mass eviction are pushing certain populations out, and where space is being remade and appropriated through capitalist development. In Tings Chak's 2014 graphic essay *Undocumented: The Architect of Migrant Detention*, the Canadian government polices mobility across borders and builds spaces specifically to detain and incarcerate migrants. The grammar of comics (panels, gutters, abstraction, narration, etc.) translates these spatio-political issues from the global to the local. Comics' deliberate spatial arrangement—the creative possibilities inherent in using panels to fragment space, allowing figures to transgress frames and gutters, and artists' attention to scale within panels and pages—contributes to Williams'

and Chak's insurgent representations of space.³⁰ Chak and Williams use comics to elucidate how space is produced—particularly to serve those in power—and how it is experienced by marginalized populations on a daily basis. This chapter analyzes how Williams and Chak explore the oppressive control and appropriation of space by capitalist infrastructure and postulates about what hope these comics offer for reimagining, remaking, or reclaiming these spaces within Canada.

Human access to physical and political space is an ongoing issue, arguable an increasingly quotidian issue, as more of the human population is displaced during refugee crises resulting from war, famine, and climate disaster. In 1996, anthropologist Liisa Malkki wrote: “Massive displacements of people due to political violence and the sight—on television and in newspapers—of refugees as a miserable ‘sea of humanity’ have come to seem more and more common” (377). Twenty-three years later, displacements feel even more ubiquitous. Social media allows access to more images and narratives of displacement than ever before. Humanity is grappling with ever-worsening crises that exacerbate displacement: climate change and its attendant natural disasters, a new rise in fascist ideals and governments, and xenophobic policies around immigration and travel. In 2017, the same year Williams published *Condo Disco Heartbreak*, the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR) reported that “the world’s forcibly displaced population remained yet again at a record high” (2). As of March 2019, we are daily inundated with stories of displacement, migration, and exclusion: caravans of migrants move across the borders of Central America, headed north; President Donald Trump continues to push for a wall to keep such migrants out of the United States; children are

³⁰ The term “insurgent” pays homage to David Harvey’s thinking about “insurgent architects.” I attend to his thinking at length in this chapter.

taken from their parents at the border, while many within the United States fear deportation more than ever; and advocacy groups report the violence against minority populations in Chechnya and Myanmar, and work towards their passage to safer spaces.

It does not escape my attention that, for the most part, I cite happenings in the United States. Canada has had its own fair share of migration news, including refugees crossing borders on cold winter nights, and the fierce fight to keep Abdoul Abdi from deportation. But I opened with a quote from Malkki about the *sight* of refugees—the images of human displacement that are created, circulated and consumed. And for the most part, the resounding images are set outside of Canada’s borders: photographs of family separation and detention, of large groups of migrants walking north together, and of a small boy’s body washed up on a beach.³¹ Can we *see* human displacement in Canada?³² Do Canadians recognize the ways our state restricts access to space? With few shared borders, with the expanse of ocean around us, with the surplus of space, does Canada ever *appear* as the (dramatic) site of migration, displacement, and exclusion?

Canada is a settler colonial state with a long history of weaponizing access to space. When I ask for images or narratives of displacement and confinement in Canada,

³¹ I refer here to the photograph of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, who drowned while fleeing Syria and was found washed up on a beach in September 2015. Journalist Nilüfer Demir photographed Kurdi’s body. The photographs had a huge impact on global perception of and action regarding the Syrian refugee crisis. In Canada, where an election campaign was underway, the photograph impacted public interest in the crisis, and political parties and candidates made statements and promises regarding Canada’s refugee policy.

³² As I edit this dissertation for submission, I regularly consume updates from the Unist’ot’en Solidarity Brigade on the RCMP occupation of Wet’suwet’en Territory, and the solidarity blockades that are limiting the flow of people and goods across Canada. These actions are a reminder of the many Indigenous nations that exist alongside, within, or in tension with the nation of Canada, and the struggles over space that are still playing out in this colonized land.

readers quite rightly might conjure images of children in residential schools, their hair, uniforms, and thin bodies visible markers of the cultural and physical genocide in process. There are many stories of the traumatic removal of children from their families, communities, and nations, and settler Canadians were called upon by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to bear witness to these narratives (*Truth and Reconciliation*). Though Canada does not have migrant caravans moving towards its borders (at least not yet), the state does have a history of taking and taking territory until Indigenous nations were restricted to relatively small reserves (Mccue). And there are textual and visual identity-granting documents that stand as symbols of this violent restriction of space: passes approved by Indian Agents permitting Indigenous peoples to leave their reserve for a day or maybe more. In this chapter, I primarily consider access to space through discourses of immigration and eviction; I take up colonialism and anti-colonialism in my fifth chapter. But I hope not to lose sight of settler colonial control of space, and its ongoing effects on Indigenous peoples who quite literally had their land and access to space taken away in the construction of Canada.³³

Thus, returning to my questions—whether Canadians recognize human displacement when it occurs within Canada, or recognize the ways that our state restricts access to space, particularly for refugees arriving at our borders—I wonder if settler Canadians recognize their state as a site of rejection and detention of immigrants? *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention* offers striking images of Canada’s often harmful and shocking approach to immigrants and refugees. Though the

³³ For more on this, see Chelsea Vowel’s 2016 book *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada*, which includes sections on treaty-making and the reserve system.

migration infrastructure of the United States is more and more visible, mostly through the efforts of the media and grassroots advocacy,³⁴ Chak's work suggests that Canada's migration infrastructure is deliberately hidden, such that visual representations of detention and deportation in Canada rarely circulate. *Undocumented* is an intervention, seeking to render visible the everyday and ongoing detention of migrants in Ontario and the spatial realities of incarceration in Canada more generally. Detention and incarceration are yet another form of slow violence, this time enacted on the bodies and lives of migrants and inmates. *Undocumented* serves as an urgent reminder that Canada is a part of this global refugee crisis, and that our government, and our people, are participating in the management, incarceration, and exclusion of many people. Chak writes, "As the world has become borderless to 'flows' of capital, the movement of migrant bodies is restricted as never before" (1). Canada is not a safe and accessible space.³⁵ While migrants' access to space is restricted, so too is the general public's access to the sites of their detainment, such that many people rarely *see* the mechanizations of detention in progress. By representing Ontario's detention facilities in the visual form of comics, Chak's text offers limited but rare access to the geographical spaces of detainment, spaces that are tightly restricted.

While Chak's work responds to a global displacement crisis, displacement is also a problem locally, with evictions, gentrification, and insecure housing in major Canadian cities, including Toronto. In her "Year in Review 2018," *Now Toronto* journalist

³⁴ See the ongoing digital humanities project *Torn Apart/Separados*, which responded to the news of families being separated by Immigration Law Enforcement (ICE) by mapping data on migration, detention, deportation, and ICE infrastructure.

³⁵ An example of Canada's inaccessibility is the Safe Third Country agreement, which "allows Canadian border officials to immediately return asylum seekers to a U.S. port of entry if those asylum seekers arrived in the United States first" (Falconer 2).

Samantha Edwards presents a bleak vision of “Toronto’s Housing Crisis”: “The city’s vacancy rate is at a near historic low (0.5 per cent), while the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$2,360. What does that look like? In two words, unsustainable and dangerous.” Edwards goes on to explain that, given the inflated average, an affordable one-bedroom apartment—which, as defined by the city of Toronto, is “80 per cent of market rent”—“isn’t actually for the most vulnerable” (“Year in Review”). Edwards warns that under current Ontario premier Doug Ford’s government and policies, the housing crisis will only get worse, and concludes that tenants have to fend for themselves: “Although the city and province is culpable for the current housing crisis, tenants are realizing its only through grassroots organizing that they can protect their rights” (“Year in Review”). In Parkdale, the Toronto neighbourhood featured in *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, there are already many examples of tenants fighting back.

The Toronto neighbourhood of Parkdale has a long history of tenant activism. There have been at least five large-scale rent strikes in Parkdale since 1988, when nearly 1,000 renters stopped paying rent to a landlord who failed to complete repairs and maintain buildings (Israelson). This was followed by a 13-month rent strike concluding in 1991 (Deverell), and a multi-family rent strike in 2013 (Florito). In 2017, “[o]rganizers declared victory” after a three and a half month rent strike by around 300 tenants against landlord MetCap Living Management Inc (Warren). This successful strike inspired another in 2018, when “more than 50 tenants in a Parkdale high rise [withheld] their rent cheques to protest what [they called] an unfair above guideline rent increase” (Edwards “Parkdale”). The residents of Parkdale have a history of mobilizing solidarity and direct action in dealing with property management companies and exploitative landlords.

Parkdale and the ongoing housing crises are the focus of *Condo Heartbreak Disco*. The novel follows two supernatural friends and housemates, Komio and Braid, who have settled in Parkdale after centuries of nomadic living. Their lives are disrupted when they and most of their neighbours are evicted to make way for upscale high-rise condos. The housing crisis brings the neighbourhood together in mutual solidarity and care (as seems to be the case in non-fictional version of Parkdale) but it also leads to the undoing of the housemates' ancient friendship. Ultimately, Williams' conclusion, like Edwards' year in review, is bleak: even supernaturally-powerful immortal beings cannot find secure housing in Toronto, and they are unable to help the activists, artists, and working-class families of Parkdale. Though *Condo Heartbreak Disco* features superhuman characters and supernatural conspiracies, it is a story about the very real housing crisis of a very real neighbourhood. Williams' uses the visual space and grid of the comic to represent a rapidly changing city and to emphasize who is pushed out of spaces. Like Chak, Williams is concerned with human displacement, and *Condo Heartbreak Disco* spins the potentially mundane subject of the housing crisis into a fantastical and engrossing narrative.

To unpack the significance of using the form of comics to tell these stories, I turn to David Harvey's spatial theory. In *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey argues that human life is organized as a "nestled hierarchy of spatial scales" (75). These scales—their distinction, their positioning—function as a kind of obstacle to organizing and coalition-building: "What appears significant or makes sense at one scale does not automatically register at another" (75). As such, a problem at the level of a neighbourhood takes on a different dimension than a continental problem; how does one organize against evictions while

simultaneously organizing against free-trade? Harvey calls this “the scale problem” (82). But large-scale, effective change relies on “linking the personal to the local to the regional, the national, and ultimately the international” (Harvey 49-50). Harvey insists “that real political change arises out of simultaneous and loosely coordinated shifts in both thinking and action across several scales” (234). Shifting to the metaphor of “theatres,” Harvey pushes for

several different ‘theatres’ of thought and action on some ‘long frontier’ of ‘insurgent’ political practices. Advances in one theatre get ultimately stymied or even rolled back unless supported by advances elsewhere. No one theatre is particularly privileged even though some of us may be more able, expert, and suited to act in one rather than another.... Insurgent political practices must occur in all theaters on this long frontier. A generalized insurgency that changes the shape and direction of social life requires collaborative and coordinating actions in all of them. (234)

Ultimately, Harvey proposes the figure of “the insurgent architect” who can work to address “the scale problem” (234, 82). The insurgent architect “must be able to translate political aspirations” across different scales (244). I argue that as comics creators, Williams and Chak act as insurgent architects. Their comics tackle issues regarding access to space across several different spatiotemporal scales, and using the visual and textual form of comics, they translate politics across these scales. Throughout this chapter, I examine spatiotemporal scales as they figure within these comics: the span of centuries in relation to a matter of weeks; what Harvey calls “the microspace of the body” alongside the “macrospace” of global incarceration and migration (49); the eviction of

two roommates in Toronto in relation to profit-oriented housing development across China. These are two examples of the different theatres where access to space is at issue. Rather than looking at characters or places in a vacuum or prioritizing one particular issue to the exclusion or disadvantage of others, Chak and Williams think, work, write, and draw laterally, thus translating political issues and aspirations for their readers in a way that fosters connections. Thierry Groensteen argues that “comics is an art of space and an art of time” (12). In this chapter, I argue for the power of comics in presenting narrators of power and resistance *across* space and time.

My analysis will primarily rely on Harvey’s concept of spatiotemporal scales and the figure of the insurgent architect, though later in this chapter I also engage with Harvey’s theorization of the body in relation to globalization, space, and capital. Instead, I build on Doreen Massey’s conception of “space as the product of interrelations, as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of corporate consumption of the global to the intimately tiny” (9). This conception of space is useful to my argument insofar as it relates to Harvey’s problem of scale; I see Williams and Chak as thinking across the immense and the tiny, the global and the intimate, to translate how space is produced across these vast but related scales. My analysis draws on de Certeau’s readings of the city, and the flaneur-like figure in *The Practice of Everyday Life* who gazes on New York City informs my own readings of Toronto and southern Ontario in *Condo Heartbreak Disco* and *Undocumented*. I also engage with the concept of the Anthropocene, as Williams’ non-human characters provide a unique perspective on humanity in the Anthropocene, the present geological era in which humanity has severely altered the climate of the planet. I use Donna Haraway’s concepts of the Capitalocene and

Cthulucene to analyse how Williams' protagonists live *outside* of and beyond humanity, and how their superpowers and immortality allows them to choose how to handle the potential destruction of humanity.

The work of Harvey makes up the bulk of my theoretical framework, with support from de Certeau, but my work builds on existing spatial theory by applying this theory to comic studies. This is not an entirely new approach; in *Comics and the City*, editors Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling argue that comics (unlike film, with which it shares many techniques) is “a purely spatial medium” (3). Though I certainly build on the valuable work in this collection, my comics are concerned with space across many scales, not just the urban, including the detention cell, the home, the neighbourhood, the nation, and rural space as well as urban space. My work is similar to that of Dominic Davies, who writes,

Infrastructures are not static, banal, depoliticized objects, but rather highly charged material actors that allow some forms of social life to exist while prohibiting others. Built from a formal architecture of their own—graphic narrative relies on an *infrastructure* of grids, gutters and panels—and capable of multi-scalar, perspectival agility, urban comics are able to unpick the lingering vibrations of different sociopolitical movements and histories as they are solidified, like a sediment or residue, into infrastructure's material form.

(6)

While Davies focuses on comics about major cities in the global south, I focus solely on comics set in Canada, but we both recognize the formal potential of comics of/about the city and built space. In deviation from spatial theorists who work in (textual) literature, film, sociology, and human geography, my primary source is the comic itself, and I will

also consider the space of the page, panel, border, and gutter.

As I bring spatial theory into comics studies, I am also interested in reading across genres of comics. Historically, comics studies have analyzed non-fiction (life writing or memoir, what Gillian Whitlock calls “autographics”) apart from fiction (966). The term ‘graphic novel’ confounds this distinction, as it is used to describe both fiction and non-fiction. But a separation remains between studies of fiction and non-fiction; many book-length studies interested primarily in life writing, while fictional comics are often studied according to genre (horror, superhero, detective, etc.). To this point, my dissertation has followed suit, with a chapter analyzing Kate Beaton’s life writing, and another chapter taking up fictional comics about girlhood. But my fourth chapter eschews this division in the interest of asking questions across the fictional/non-fictional divide. Kate Polak, in her study of historical fiction comics, questions the legitimization of autographics to the exclusion of (and perhaps, at the expense of) fictional comics: “Alongside autographics is another genre that deserves an investment of curiosity, a genre that incorporates both fiction and fact and comments on the construction of both” (4). As I look for representations of space in Canadian comics, I see the need to read across genre.

Generically, my primary sources are very different. *Condo Heartbreak Disco* is a fantasy graphic novel, with ‘novel’ properly signifying its fictional nature, in contrast to non-fictional comics like *Undocumented*, *Fun Home*, and *Persepolis*, which are often called graphic novels but tell stories primarily based in fact and lived experience. *Undocumented* is an experimental and scholarly exploration of detainment that uses a variety of techniques, drawn from visual art, architecture, comics, and activism, to discuss real-world problems. But both texts are rooted in clearly identified geographical

spaces in the province of Ontario. Furthermore, at their heart, they are both stories about the ongoing vulnerability of certain populations in these geographical spaces, which Chak and Williams then link to global patterns of gentrification, displacement, and detainment. Both are clearly and deliberately set in real-life spaces. Chak charts the carceral landscape of southern Ontario, while Williams' fictional characters navigate the non-fictional neighbourhood of Parkdale, Toronto. Komio and Braid are regulars at The Beaver, a real-life "lesbian-owned bar" (Gorman-Murray and Nash 798); they go out dancing in the club district at Portland St. and King St. (Williams 8); they interact with former Toronto mayor Rob Ford (Williams 18). Williams uses fantastical, larger-than-life protagonists to tell a very real and urgent story about displacement and development, and I am interested in how he uses similar strategies to Chak, but also how he uses the imaginative space of fiction to do the kind of translation and scale-conscious work Harvey argues is so essential.

In this chapter, I use comics studies, spatial theory, and the interdisciplinary fields of migration, gentrification, and prison abolition to analyse geographically-specific comics as an effective form to critique capitalism and incarceration. I begin by walking through the short but incredibly varied *Undocumented* and analyzing the visual and textual strategies of critique, the complicity of the reader, and Chak's use of the form of comics for advocacy. I use Harvey's concept of spatiotemporal scales to structure my analysis. I first look at how maps, panoramas, and skylines translate across scales in my primary texts, before reading time in these texts, from the vast lifetimes of immortal characters to the experience of time in incarceration. I then focus in on *Undocumented*, and Chak's strategy of fragmentation: she breaks down the experiences of incarcerated

individuals in such a way that builds empathy, and she breaks down the materiality of detention centres in such a way that highlights their deliberate production and hopes for their remaking or even destruction. I then turn to the small-scale space of the community, as represented in *Condo Heartbreak Disco*. Williams presents a community threatened by development but also strengthened by resistance, as well as thinking through the ways artists, developers, activists, and queer folks participate in the production of space in complicit or insurgent ways. But first, I provide a detailed summary of each comic, which will function as the foundation of my deeper readings.

Condo Heartbreak Disco tells the story of Komio and The Willendorf Braid (often referred to as Braid), two ancient beings who, as Komio explains, “had been doing the nomadic thing for a few lifetimes before finally landing in Toronto” (Williams 15). There, they settle into the neighbourhood of Parkdale, where they share an apartment with Jane, a “writer and community organizer” (15). Their settled life offers many perks: they are on friendly terms with the servers at the local restaurant, enjoy the queer dance parties at the local bar, and share food and stories with their roommate. But it also comes with costs: “This city’s *spensy*,” Komio notes, when Braid laments that they now have to charge for their services (14). As for their services, the two make a modest income out of their powers; Komio is hired to enact “vengeance and retribution,” mostly on men, mostly by their ex-lovers. Braid’s powers are not as clear, as she has become less in-demand of late, but Komio describes her as offering “guidance and solace,” and being the yin to Komio’s yang, suggesting her powers are more pleasant and comforting than the violent revenge fantasies Komio plays out (14). Komio pays most of the rent, and the comic opens with her describing her job the night before, when a group of women

watched as she tortured an ambitious and narcissistic man.

I should note that Komio and Braid are noticeably non-human, though the people around them are not surprised by their appearances. Komio is a smooth, white, mannequin figure with pronounced lips and eyelashes, and she wears many accessories (wigs, hats, etc.). She also has a kind of shapeshifting ability, where her face comes apart in ribbons, revealing a hungry and monstrous interior. Braid is literally a braid on legs, usually wearing only leggings and heels, but sometimes wearing tops that give her the appearance of having a torso (in fact, her braid body may be able to take the shape of a torso or of a squatter body—the mechanics of her body are not totally clear). They are not the most unusual creatures around: early in the book they interact with a rude mother and child, and the child is revealed to be an animated coffee cup, an example of the newest trend that everyone with means is seeking to purchase. But Braid and Komio are still noticeably non-human characters, and Braid in particular has an impressive backstory.

The Willendorf Braid is based on an ancient limestone carving, *The Venus of Willendorf*; or, within the world of the graphic novel, the statue is based on *her* (more on that below). The statue “was discovered in 1908 near the village of Willendorf in Austria and is estimated to have been made 30,000 years ago” (Shafkind 57). The statue is a representation of a woman, and is, in many ways, a celebration of femininity: she is fat, featuring ample breasts, hips, and stomach; she “has the most carefully and exquisitely carved realistic vulva in the entire European Upper Paleolithic” (McDermott 260); and she has an elaborate hairstyle that was common during the Upper Paleolithic period when the carving is believed to have been made. LeRoy McDermott describes how the hairstyle fills the head and overhangs a nonexistent face. This coiffure consists of long,

twined or plaited braids coiled around the head. The zigzag abstraction of twining is the same as that found on the Willendorf figurine's bracelets, and collars as far east as the Russian Plain [...] the coiffure was a major, shared marker of mature females. (260)

Just as her name suggests, the Willendorf Braid is the statue's hairstyle come to life. Her head, like that of the statue, has no visible facial features, though occasionally the braids part to suggest a mouth. She dresses in a very feminine style, in high heels and patterned leggings, tights, and underwear. And, like the statue, it is implied that she has genitalia: when the friends take in their evicted neighbours and end up sharing a room, Komio bends to perform oral sex on Braid, leaning between Braid's shapely legs and wide hips (30).

Physically and stylistically, Braid is feminine, like the statue that Williams implies is based on her. A flashback features her being summoned or created when a group of women insert the statue into a stone formation (45). In the next flashback, Komio teases Braid about the statue being exhibited at the Royal Ontario Museum, while Braid cringes about "the old matriarchs" work going on display: "Is this how celebrities feel when their embarrassing childhood photos leak?" (45). Komio insists, "You were a living goddess to those people!" (45). Tens of thousands of years later, Braid walks through Toronto, still flaunting feminine style and body, and still possessing superhuman powers. In fact, her powers are also stereotypically feminine. She provides "guidance and solace," and in one flashback is seen tenderly carrying someone to safety against the large caption "I can help you escape this" (14; 13). Her superpowers recall the emotional labour that has predominantly been performed for women for years. Unsurprisingly, her

services are valued less than Komio's violent revenge, and she is unable to support herself and Komio solely by charging for the comfort she provides. Braid is an ancient being who recalls a time when feminine characteristics—fat, curvy bodies; vulvas, hairstyles; and the gendered work of emotional labour—were highly valued by a matriarchal society. She endures into a time where there is more value placed on revenge, represented by Komio, and on ambition, represented by the cutthroat C.E.O. behind their eviction.

After they are evicted, Braid and Komio learn of another supernatural being in Toronto: the C.E.O. of a real estate company, who has succeeded in her plan of buying out Parkdale, evicting all the tenants, and building condos that will remain mostly empty. The company sets its sites on Parkdale after an opportunistic young artist exploits the neighbourhood's residents through his Instagram, thus making the neighbourhood appealing to an artsy, affluent demographic. When Braid, Komio, and their housemate Jane learn about the rash of evictions, Braid uses her powers to tap into the company's plot and Komio goes to confront the C.E.O. Instead, the C.E.O. explains her plan to create a world of expensive, and consequently empty, condo buildings, leaving whole human populations homeless. The C.E.O. invites Komio into the plot, inviting Komio to consume her whole "and help [her] reset the *whole world*" (Williams 37). Komio joins with the C.E.O. Meanwhile, a distressed Braid searches the city for her missing friend, while she and Jane lead a large group of evicted neighbours from squat to squat. Eventually, Komio returns and Braid confronts her. Komio insists that the two have grown apart, and that she is committed to spreading "the planetary *fever*-- / -- designed to flush out the old...to facilitate a *fresh start*" (49, ellipses and emphasis original). Their

separation, which I will discuss in more detail below, is the result of their differing natures: one a creature of vengeance, the other a creature of care. Braid insists that humans are worth saving, but Komio challenges her to prove it. The two part ways, and Braid ends a night of partying by confronting the Instagram artist who set off the gentrification process. The novel ends on an image of Toronto's skyline, doubly distorted in the waters of Lake Ontario. The dominance of skyscrapers, which Komio calls the "symptoms" of "the planetary fever," acts as a disheartening counterpoint to Braid's hopeful conclusion (49).

While *Condo Heartbreak Disco* concerns itself with rapid urban development, *Undocumented*³⁶ slows down the process of development through an architectural interrogation of detention centres, thus giving space to reflect on the decisions behind architecture. *Undocumented* emerged from Tings Chak's Master's thesis in Architecture, and the text critiques Canada's migrant detention practices and prison industrial complex through the lens of architecture.³⁷ Chak is a "multidisciplinary artist and migrant justice organizer" who works primarily with *No One Is Illegal – Toronto and the End*

³⁶ *Undocumented* is often described as a graphic novel, but Chak sees this term as "a misnomer...because she sees it more as a work of non-fiction and a tool for organizing" (qtd. in Shen 31). Carrie Dawson calls the text a "graphic essay" (137), a term that acknowledges its academic roots, the research behind it, and its persuasive nature. Urman Mustaq calls *Undocumented* an "example of migrant justice alt-media" (Buclakoti and Mustaq 31). In fact, *Undocumented* evades classification, challenging the already blurry categories of comic books and graphic novels. It includes maps, diagrams, graphs, interviews, and photographs as well as more recognizable comics sequences. Ultimately, I consider it as part of the emerging form or genre of comics journalism, which often finds visual ways to incorporate citation, statistics, and data, and which often crosses over into advocacy and activism in its persuasive tones and compassionate approach.

³⁷ Throughout this chapter, I shift between the terms detention centre and prison, detainee and inmate, detainment and incarceration. I will try to use the most accurate word in each context, but as detainees are often housed in prison buildings, these terms become blurry. People move through these two systems, which overlap in significant ways. Chak draws on sources about migrant detention—including first person stories and policy documents from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security—and incarceration, including interviews with inmates and federal and provincial data on prison facilities, in recognition of this overlap.

Immigration Detention Network (Chak 131). From interviews and her website, it is clear that *Undocumented* is just one piece of her activism, as she also organizes and attends rallies and offers direct support for migrants and detainees. The 2017 edition of *Undocumented* includes an interview between Chak and Martin (his surname is omitted), a detainee and leader in the 2013 hunger strike at the Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay, Ontario. This expanded edition is a result of Chak's continued involvement in migrant advocacy.³⁸ In Chak's other artwork, she is also deeply concerned with issues of space, mobility, human rights, and migration. In a 2016 exhibit at the Oasis Gallery in Hong Kong, her piece *Suitable Accommodation* featured "scale drawings based on [migrant domestic workers'] descriptions of their living conditions" (Jones 61). In 2017, her installation *His house*:

describes an imagined architectural draft of [the home of a Chinese indentured worker for the Canadian Pacific Railway] with black masking tape on a gallery wall, accompanied by written and drawn artifacts. Rendered at human scale, the diagram exposes the modest footprint of such a humble dwelling, and the [accompanying] documents are a testament to the fraught conception of 'home' for the Chinese migrant worker. (Chak "His House")

These pieces, alongside the 2014 and 2017 editions of *Undocumented* and her engagement in activist work, speak to her sustained interest in making visible the

³⁸ Small comics publisher Ad Astra Comix put out the second edition of *Undocumented* in 2017, using the proceeds from a crowdfunding campaign, to widen the work's circulation. The publishers announced this new edition in 2016: "First published by an academic architecture publisher in 2014 in a limited run, we are excited to bring 'Undocumented' to a wider audience." The new edition has more back matter, including an interview with a migrant detainee and organizer called 'Martin' and an epilogue by organizer Syed Hussan.

conditions of migrant work, the consistent violation of human rights in the name of global capitalism, and the spatial experience of migrants.

Like Chak, *Undocumented* approaches detainment and incarceration from several different angles, including citation of multimedia work on incarceration in Israel and Palestine, visualizations built around data on Canadian migration and border management, and first-person stories from individuals detained in southern Ontario. Though *Undocumented* is a brief text—the extended special edition only runs 131 pages—and Chak makes ample use of whitespace, it is a text with a great deal of depth and nuance, thinking and working at the intersections of the prison industrial complex, displacement and forced migration, solidarity and anti-capitalism, mental and physical health, architecture, visual arts, and comics. This is a lot to take on, and Chak emphasizes upfront that this text contains “an incomplete view...of migrant detention in Canada” (1). The text is always self-conscious of its limits, with each of Chak’s citations offering another path for readers to continue learning (and unlearning).

Chak’s sparse narration guides the reader through a system of detainment that has been made deliberately invisible to the average Canadian who lives with the privilege of stable citizenship. Chak’s tells stories of detainment while simultaneously representing sites of detainment visually, and geographically locating them in the recognizable world of the reader. Michel de Certeau argues that “stories...carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places” (118). In *Undocumented*, Chak uses stories to transform a stable *place* of detainment into a relational, situated, mobilized *space*, just as, de Certeau writes, “the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers” (117). In fact, Chak narrative does not simply

transform detention centres from places into spaces; she makes visible the processes that created the institutionalized, obscured places of detainment, tells stories that activate these centres as visible, relational spaces in the eyes and minds of readers, and so gestures towards the human-built architecture of detainment and human's potential to maintain or dismantle it.

Undocumented opens with a brief introductory text by Chak, which she begins by listing some activities that put undocumented peoples at risk of recognition and detainment: registering a child in school, fleeing an abusive relationship, visiting a food bank or a medical clinic. Chak writes, "For undocumented people in a city, simply carrying out one's daily life is a challenge to borders that everyday threaten detention and deportation" (1). These words—"daily life," "everyday"—resonate with my overall research project. Chak is centering people for whom the everyday is permeated by vigilance and risk, and for whom seemingly mundane or simple tasks can carry life-altering consequences.

Later in the graphic essay, she offers some representations of what the everyday is like for those detained and incarcerated, and I will discuss this further below. But returning to Chak's preface: "We live in an era of unprecedented human migration," she notes, and points to a horrifying double-standard, "As the world has become borderless to 'flows' of capital, the movement of migrant bodies is restricted as never before" (1). While money, products, and corporations move across borders with increasing ease, human movement is much more dangerous. And the humans who have moved across borders in unofficial, unsanctioned ways live lives shaped by precarity, as demonstrated by the daily tasks that might lead to their detainment.

Chak goes on to offer this graphic novel as an intervention to simplified narratives of migration: “Migrants’ journeys are commonly portrayed as linear progressions from home to host nations, but in reality, they are replete with interruptions and discontinuities, occupying spaces of hiding waiting, diversion, escape, settlement, and return—spaces which are largely invisible to the public” (1). The well-told Canadian immigrant story, of flight and enthusiastic reception by a benevolent state, eclipses the many more complex, violent, traumatic stories. In her critical reading of former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada Jason Kenney’s repeated comments likening “detention facilities used to house an increasing number of asylum seekers and non-status migrants to hotels,” Carrie Dawson critiques Canada’s tendency to present itself as a hospitable and welcoming country: “References to Canadian hospitality and benevolence abound in policy documents, but they are also prevalent in the media and in advertising campaigns because they are flattering, self-serving” (“Refugee Hotels” 826, 839). Citing a *Globe and Mail* story on the *Sun Sea* asylum seekers,³⁹ she notes that “such stories instead focus on the figure of the pitiable and explicitly thankful victim. In so doing, they invite readers to see themselves as would-be ‘saviours,’ beneficent gatekeepers of a benign and manifestly multicultural nation” (837). This strategy—of circulating stories of ideal, grateful refugees—flatters Canadians but also distracts them from the ugly truth that Canada incarcerates and ultimately “criminaliz[es] asylum seekers” (Dawson 837). Narratives of detention and deportation have little voice against the dominant narrative of

³⁹ The *Sun Sea* was a ship of Sri Lankan refugees that “arrived on Vancouver Island” in 2010 (Dawson “Refugee Hotels” 836). Dawson notes that, “with the exception of a few children, all passengers were put in prisons – including the maximum security Fraser Regional Correctional Centre – and allegations of terrorism flew fast and furious” (836).

Canada as welcoming and refugees as grateful.⁴⁰

Refugee activist Francisco-Fernando Granados works against the narrative of the grateful refugees, but “became increasingly frustrat[ed] as it became obvious that their [media outlets like Global News and the *Vancouver Sun*] interest in our stories had less to do with creating some kind of discussion around our work in the community and more to do with repeating an idealized version of Canadian multiculturalism” (31). He describes how the “frameworks for representation these outlets provided were too rigid, too predetermined, too small. Refugees are meant to be grateful and talking about the struggles of institutionalized discrimination or the brutalizing refugee certification process would not fit into these frames” (31). Granados argues that “the frameworks of representation need to be transformed in order to go beyond the problematic of this one-directional way of looking” (31). His article argues for “Reciprocal Gazing,” in which refugees are not only seen, viewed, and *consumed* by a Canadian audience hungry for affirmation, but where refugees can look back, critically, and describe what they see in this country that has received or rejected them.

As Granados found, refugees receive few options for unfettered storytelling. Storytelling is one of the tasks rendered risky by their undocumented status. Chak notes: “The stories are borrowed from lived experiences of anonymous individuals and all

⁴⁰ Just as refugees who are not granted refuge struggle to be heard, so do Indigenous peoples who have prior, and ongoing, claim to the space that Canada occupies. The narrative of Canada as a welcoming people full of generous hosts succeeds in undercut criticisms of Canada’s legitimacy. As occupiers of a land not freely given, do settler Canadians have any right to consider themselves hosts? Do settler Canadians and a settler government have the right to determine who is and is not welcomed into this space? There is a great deal to be said about how a narrative of generosity serves to erase the violence at the root of our nation, as well as smooth over ongoing violences committed against Indigenous peoples and immigrants.

figures are taken from official sources” (1). This dual citation lends the graphic novel some authority—Chak has done her research, found the numbers—but also speaks to the difficulty of telling such stories. Detainment is a form of slow violence “that occurs gradually and out of sight” (Nixon 2). Furthermore, Nixon notes that “people lacking resources...are the principle casualties of slow violence” (4). Immigrants who are at risk of detention or deportation lack many of the resources to fight back or even speak out. The undocumented subjects and sources who Chak consults in *Undocumented* must remain anonymous. Chak functions as an intermediary, a trained and safely documented artist who can listen and witness, and who beckons readers into this shadowy but critical conversation.

Scaling up: Maps, Skylines, and Panoramas

As translators of spatiotemporal scale, Williams and Chak play with scale in their comics. Comics as a form offer countless chances to play with scale;⁴¹ with each page or panel, creators make a decision anew on how much to show the reader. Creators can zoom in, focusing on a particular emotion, or revealing a level of detail that is important to following the plot or argument of the comic. Creators can zoom out, revealing a broader context for a particular scene or moment. As I have argued in previous chapters, the size and arrangement of panels create patterns of reading, with larger panels eliciting more time and attention from a viewer, or an established layout setting a readerly pace, which can be interrupted for effect. Scale—whether it refers to the size of panels, or the

⁴¹ This potentiality of comics recalls Jeff Derksen’s concept of “scalar poetics.” Derksen identifies emerging “critical cultural practices that carry a strain of anti-neoliberalism and anti-capitalism,” including a practice which is “spatialized, engagingly with particular globalized contests or localized struggles at the scale of the nation and below” (99)

relative perspective within the panel (close up, medium shot, wide shot)—functions in a similar way to panel size and arrangement. Creators can establish patterns to certain effect and interrupt or shift those patterns at critical moments. Both Chak and Williams make careful use of scale and perspective. And by opening their comics with panoramas, they establish a broad spatiotemporal scale from which they can zoom out and zoom in. The inclusion of both panoramas and close ups acknowledges that representations of space are strategies: artists chose what level to include and when, and these representational choices have consequences for readers’ understanding of space. Neither Chak or Williams is offering authoritative or wholly accurate images of southern Ontario cities, neighbourhoods, and towns, and their representational choices are useful for interrogating other representations of space, such as those found in cartography.

In *How to Lie with Maps*, Mark Monmonier argues that “many otherwise educated people are graphically and cartographically illiterate” (3). He contrasts this with the more general sense of literacy: “everyone is familiar with verbal lies, nefarious as well as white, and is wary about how words can be manipulated” (3). But, and here is the misunderstanding his book seeks to correct, “Map users seldom, if ever, question these authorities [cartographers], and they often fail to appreciate the map’s power as a tool of deliberate falsification or subtle propaganda” (1). In subsequent chapters, he breaks down the ways that maps lie, necessarily and (sometimes) inadvertently, in the hopes of encouraging more critical reading of maps.

I use the term “graphic literacy,” building on Monmonier’s description of the “graphically and cartographically illiterate” (3), to describe the ways we learn to read diagrams, maps, graphs, and other visually-based tools of representation and

communication. Graphic literacy has two implications: 1) that graphics and maps are not the direct and objective representation of fact, rather, they are subject to their creators' choices, and they require some degree of interpretation on the part of the reader; 2) that reading and interpreting graphics is a skill, and one that must be built. To this first point, Monmonier contends that "maps, like speeches and paintings, are *authored* collections of information" (2, emphasis mine). His use of the term authored recalls my use of the term built, in reference to the detention centres and prisons that Chak seeks to—quite literally—put on the map. Like the maps that appear objective and authoritative, the detention centres are authored, designed, and built by people, and are "subject to...ignorance, greed, ideological blindness, or malice" (Monmonier 2).

Postcolonial geographers contend that maps have worked as "instruments of colonial power" (Hunt and Stevenson 375). Dallas Hunt and Shaun Stevenson argue that maps can "displace Indigenous knowledge systems and seek to manage Indigenous presence on newly settled lands" (375). They write: "Far from objective illustrations of space, maps and mapping processes *produce* space – space that is seemingly abstracted from the lived experiences of those who actually occupy it, inculcated with imperial power-knowledge, and ultimately commodified" (Hunt and Stevenson 376, emphasis original). In the case of migrant detainment, maps contribute to the violence of producing, securing, and restricting borders. Maps are a vital technology for restricting people's mobility, marking areas where people are *illegal* or *undocumented*. Maps can enforce and circulate power, structuring space according to those in power, and effacing the spatial experiences of others.

Importantly, Monmonier, Hunt, and Stevenson all see the radical potential for

mapping. Hunt and Stevenson cite practitioners who perform “counter-mapping or resistive mapping,” particularly of contested spaces (373). Monmonier anticipates the work of Chak, suggesting that his

book’s insights can be especially useful for those who might more effectively use maps in their work or as citizens fighting environmental deterioration or social ills. The informed skeptic becomes a perceptive map author, better able to describe locational characters and explain geographic relationships as well as better equipped to recognize and counter the self-serving arguments of biased or dishonest mapmakers. (3)

As a trained architect and a savvy reader and writer of space, I argue that Chak makes use of maps and other diagrams to render these detention centres visible and then readable within the contexts of both Canadian settler colonialism and global migration.

The first section of *Undocumented* is made up of eleven panoramas, line drawings of streetscapes from across Southern Ontario (see fig. 16). Chak’s introduces these places, offering basic information in the bottom left corner: population, date of establishment, location, and significance. These panoramas also introduce ten detention centres. Like a diagram, simple dotted lines indicate where a detention centre is located in each suburban panorama. In insets, Chak includes an aerial photograph of the detention centre and its basic information, including how many migrant detainees are held there, the facility type (nine out of ten are provincial prisons), typical detention timeframe, and security level. Dominic Davies reads these panoramas as “apparently mundane streetscapes [that] are disoriented by the insertion of...a circular photograph of the otherwise overlooked detention centre” (261). Chak’s panoramas situate the detention

centres in a broader landscape that is mundane, familiar, inhabited and well-traveled by non-detained citizens. The cars passing through the streets in these drawings indicate the quotidian use of these spaces—while Canadians move easily past these centres, there are people imprisoned inside.

TORONTO IMMIGRATION HOLDING CENTRE

DETAINEES: 125 (2011)

FACILITY TYPE: MIGRANT DETENTION CENTRE

DETENTION TIMEFRAME: LONG-TERM

SECURITY: SECURE

SEGREGATION: MALES, FEMALES, MINORS

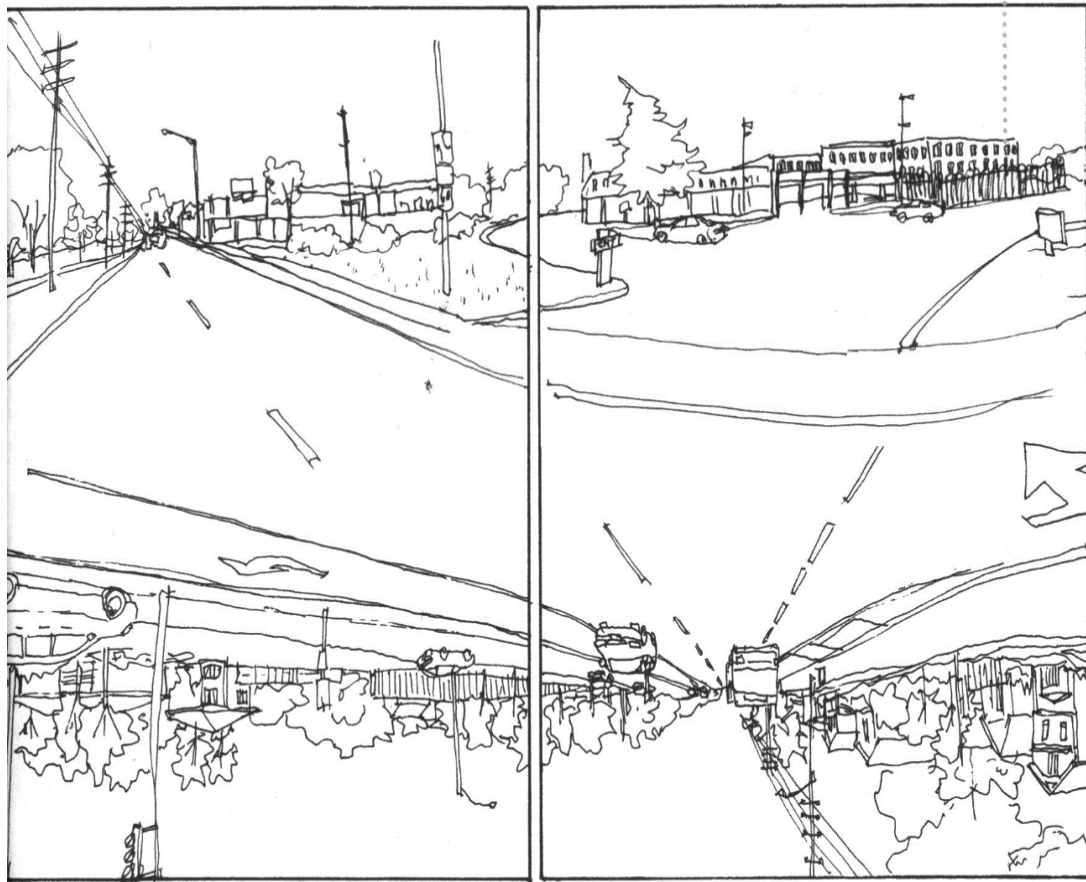
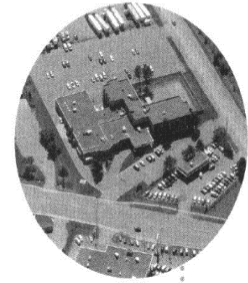


Fig. 16: Streetscape from *Undocumented* (Chak 15)

This collection of panoramas accomplishes two things: 1) it provides a glimpse into Ontario's ever-growing prison industrial complex, and 2) it situates detention centres

in geographical relation to lived-in Ontario towns, cities, and communities, which I will discuss below. The term “prison industrial complex” emerged “because of the extent to which prison building and operation began to attract vast amounts of capital—from the construction industry to food and health care provision—in a way that recalled the emergence of the military industrial complex” (Davis 12). As a case study of this immense industry, Angela Davis offers a “brief narrative of the prisonization of the California landscape,” where, up until the late 1970s, there were only nine prisons, two camps, and a rehabilitation centre (14, 12). The number of prisons had doubled by 1989, and by 2003, when Davis published *Are Prisons Obsolete?* there were “thirty-three prisons, thirty-eight camps, sixteen community correctional facilities, and five tiny prisoner mother facilities in California” (12). California’s prison system has expanded at a shocking rate. Ontario has a similar recent history of what Davis calls “prisonization,”⁴² (12).

There are currently at least thirty-four prisons, jails, detention centres, and correctional centres in operation in Ontario (seven of those are federal institutions) (“Correctional Services,” “Institutional Profiles”).⁴³ Half of these opened in the last fifty years, with a visible boom in prison construction during the 1970s. And though their data is not entirely up to date, the Global Detention Project reports that thirty-three of these

⁴² Davis is studying a California prison system rooted in histories of slavery, while Ontario’s prison system is arguable more rooted in the ongoing displacement and detainment of Indigenous peoples.

⁴³ Though there has been an increase in prisons and correctional centres over the last fifty years, Indigenous people in Canada have long experienced incarceration and detainment, through the prison system but also through schooling (residential schools), child welfare services, and the health care system. Canada has enacted colonialism through many types of carceral spaces. It is important to note that Indigenous people are overrepresented in Canada’s prison system. The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) reports that “while Indigenous people represent approximately four per cent of the Canadian adult population, almost 23 per cent of federally sentenced offenders are Indigenous” (“Indigenous Corrections”).

facilities have been used to detain migrants in the last decade (“Canada”). The pages and pages of panoramas in *Undocumented* offer representations of less than a third of the migrant detention facilities in Ontario, echoing Chak’s caveat that this text offers “an incomplete view...of migrant detention in Canada” (1). And yet, in her minimalist style, Chak’s mapping of these facilities is a forceful reminder of the steady prisonization of Ontario.

Rather than centering the facilities themselves, Chak’s represents them as just some of many buildings found on typical Ontario streets. In Chak’s line drawings, the facilities are situated on tree-lined streets, unremarkable next to houses and power lines. The inset photos elaborate on buildings that might otherwise go unnoticed. By drawing these facilities as simple buildings in familiar landscapes, Chak demonstrates their unremarkable presence in the everyday life of Ontario. Migrants are detained in dozens of neighbourhoods, in buildings one might drive past every day, within sight of houses and trees. Detainment is incorporated into Canada’s landscape, as it is incorporated in Canada’s operations as a state: Canadians live in neighbourhoods, cities, and provinces where migrants are detained. Detainment is built into the spaces where Canadians live, work, and play, a planned part of everyday Canadian existence. In *Architecture from the Outside*, Elizabeth Grosz writes, “One cannot be outside everything, always outside: to be outside something is always to be inside something else” (xv). Though Canada is outside the dramatic images of mass human displacement—removed from refugee camps and migrant caravans—it is still a part of the migrant crisis. And though many Canadians have never entered the system of migrant detention, they still live *with* it, geographically and ethically. Panoramas help to situate these detention centres in their environment, and

in *our* environment.

Condo Heartbreak Disco also begins with panoramas, representing the development of the city over time. Four panoramas illustrate Toronto's skyline from the perspective of Lake Ontario. At first, the skyline is a few short buildings mostly obscured by ships. Over the next three panoramas, the buildings accumulate and grow taller (see fig. 17). The final panorama is crowded with high-rises, curving around the skyline in strangely modern shapes. In each panorama, the sun has shifted, such that when the panoramas are read in order, the sun is traveling across the sky in a tidy arc. The shifting sun suggests that each panorama could be part of the same day, though the buildings speak to decades, even centuries of development. The sun's travel collapses the long period of development into a single day, a single page. This technique brings a sense of urgency to the text, right from the beginning: Toronto is developing at breakneck speed.

I return to *Condo Heartbreak Disco* to first analyse the other representations of the Toronto skyline. Mid-way through *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, Komio goes to confront the C.E.O. behind the evictions. The C.E.O. works at the top of a skyscraper in the sleek downtown core. Instead of being surprised by Komio's arrival, the C.E.O. has been expecting her, greeting her from the moment the elevator doors begin to open: "Here she comes" (32). While Komio goes on the attack, the C.E.O. is unfazed, and instead leads Komio to the window: "I'm curious to hear, and I'd like you to be *honest*. / What do you think of the view?" (32). The next panel occupies half a page,

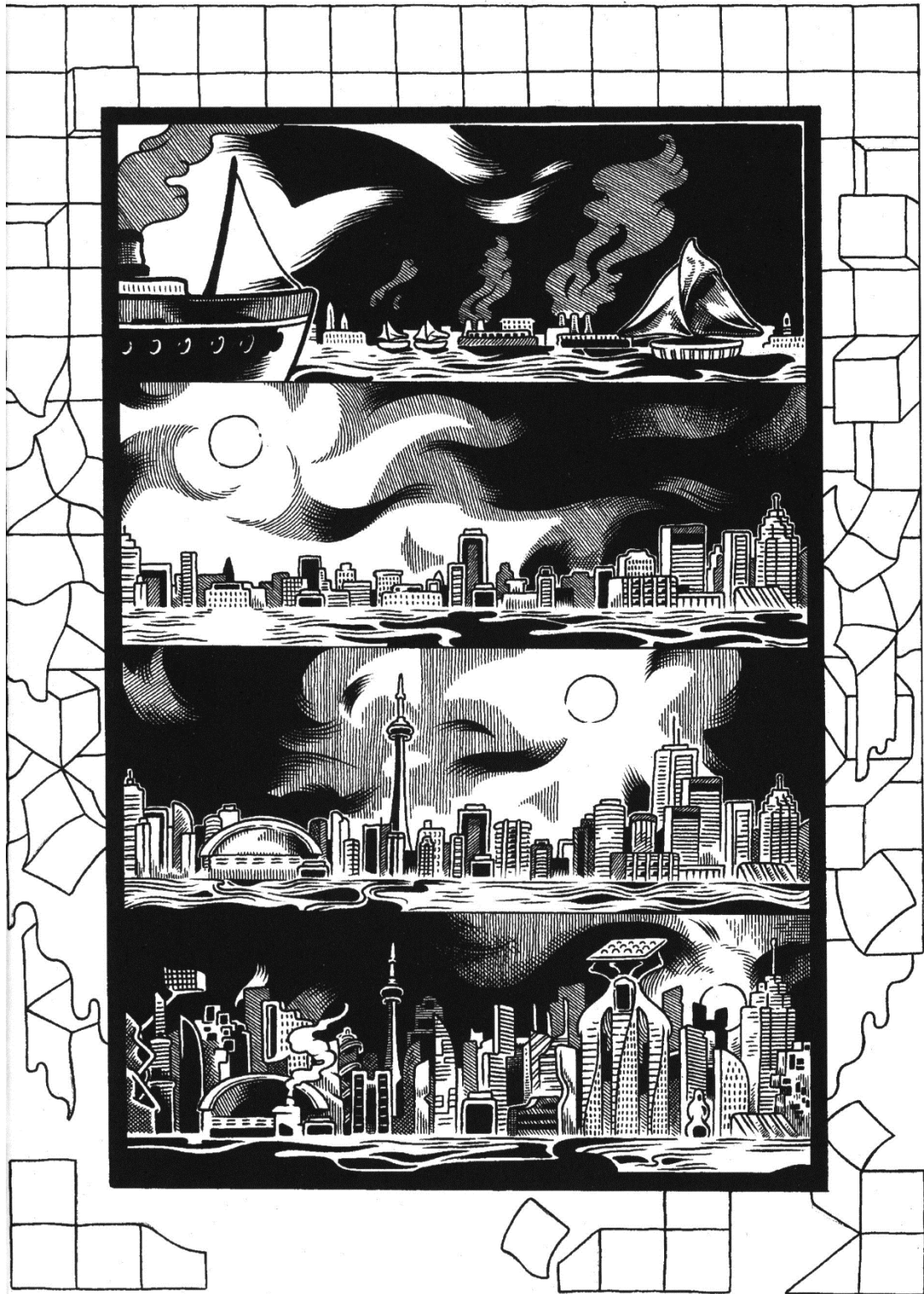


Fig. 17: Opening skylines in *Condo Heartbreak Disco* (Williams 5)

and offers a wide view of the city, in which the sky is crowded out by endless skyscrapers. Komio's shock exceeds any kind of word balloon; instead, the words "JESUS FUCK" appear in 3D, transparent letters (33) (see fig. 18). These huge letters speak to Komio's shock and anger at the transformed city, but their transparency ensures that they do not block out any of the view; the scale of production is bigger, stronger, perhaps, than Komio's anger.

The next panel turns away from this view and centres Komio's anger: a long, short panel, in which Komio's head and mouth morph and expand with her emotion, and her word balloons are drawn in squiggly, shaky lines that attest to the force of her delivery: "What do I **THINK?! / I'm thinking I've never been witness to something so cold, monstrous... / ...and how-awful tacky**" (33, bold and ellipses original). Komio takes issue with the practicality of these new buildings: "Who do you even expect to live in all these fucking things?" (33). Here, the C.E.O. explains her plan: Toronto is the next in a series of "ghost cities...over a *hundred* of them, built in quick succession, with hardly *anyone* taking up residence" (34). While most view the ghost cities "as clunky failures," the C.E.O. calls them her "prototypes, [her] *babies*," part of a form of "redevelopment" that is really a form of "cleansing" (34, 35). Though the C.E.O. explains that some people see the ghost cities as "the dystopia conclusion of development for its own sake," they are central to the C.E.O.'s apocalyptic plan: to build cities that are unaffordable and ultimately un-livable, to force people out of their homes until there is nowhere left to go. After a brief argument over whether humanity is worth saving, Komio is on board with the C.E.O.'s plan. In a huge panel, she opens up and consumes the C.E.O. whole (38). In the next panels, skyscrapers morph and grow, literally penetrating

and ultimately consuming the old house Komio shared with Braid and Jane (39). This time in a smaller panel, skyscrapers crowd out sky, appearing to twist and bend in impossible directions (39). Just as Komio consumes the C.E.O., acquiescing to her apocalyptic plan, development consumes Komio and Braid's home, and the community around it.



Fig. 18: Komio reacts to development in *Condo Heartbreak Disco* (Williams 33)

Komio's sudden change of heart is hard to understand. She arrives to the C.E.O.'s office full of righteous energy, but soon redirects her energy to the wholesale destruction-via-production of the life she has chosen and the community she belongs to. I see Komio's abrupt betrayal as posing questions about power and relationality. Komio and Braid are both supernatural beings, but they come to Parkdale with very different powers.

The nature of these powers, and the perspective each character carries, impact their actions during a pivotal moment for their community.

During her confrontation with the C.E.O., Komio literally sees the city from a new perspective. The C.E.O.'s penthouse office offers a view that is truly unique in its breadth, particularly in contrast to the narrow view from the crowds below. Previously, Komio has seen the city from the ground, blissfully unable to grasp the full extent of development. But from the C.E.O.'s office, she sees it all. Though her initial reaction is one of anger, this view has an effect on Komio. Writing about the view from the World Trade Centre in New York City, Michel de Certeau attributes extreme feelings to such a perspective, citing the "ecstasy of reading such a cosmos" (92). Komio, too, experiences a kind of ecstasy, and one that re-positions her in relation to the city. She is now outside the city, *above* the city. There is a sense of power or prestige that comes with such a view. De Certeau writes of a reluctance to leave this view: "Must one finally fall back into the dark space where crowds move back and forth, crowds that, though visible from on high, are themselves unable to see down below?" (92). Komio has long been an outsider to humanity, only recently settling into a community and a home alongside Jane and Braid. But this view affirms her outsider status and grants it a power and status. Rather than being seen, Komio sees everyone and everything. Rather than being subject to capitalism's whims, Komio is the director of development. The panoramic view makes visible a kind of power and prestige that Komio ultimately accepts.

Komio's decision to work towards the apocalypse rather than fight for her community is foreshadowed by her acts of revenge earlier in the graphic novel. The C.E.O. recognizes Komio as a likely ally because Komio is already a wielder of great

power: “Instead of persisting with the fuss of fighting me, you could be by my side,” offers the C.E.O., “embracing your true nature.... // ...and helping me to reset the whole world” (37). Komio’s “true nature” is as a vengeance deity, called upon to exact revenge on unfaithful lovers and corrupt politicians. Though she initially does this work to pay the bills, she happily blows off a night of dancing with Braid in order to avenge someone who ultimately realizes that revenge is not what they need (24). When Komio prioritizes revenge over friendship, Braid is upset, calling her an “opportunistic little so-and-so” (22). Earlier in the graphic novel, Komio excitedly reports on her revenge work. The overall picture is of a powerful being who does violent, angry work for income, but also takes pleasure in her work, and is willing to prioritize vengeance over community. The C.E.O. recognizes Komio’s potential for violence and destruction and capitalizes on it. When the C.E.O. states that she hates humans, Komio is barely able to protest: “...meh. An acquired taste, but they’re okay” (36). The C.E.O. challenges this weak reply, insisting that Komio is “a creature of vengeance,” and offering a plan that fully harnesses Komio’s power (36).

Komio’s betrayal of Braid, the Parkdale community, and humanity in general is part of a text-long engagement with what effective protest work looks like, and what affect sustains or destroys social movements. Komio and Braid share an ancient but unlikely friendship; one enacts gleeful and brutal vengeance, and the other performs care work and offers “guidance and solace” (14). If Komio operates through anger, and Braid operates through care, then can their personalities and actions be reconciled? Though Komio insists they offer a balance, “a real cute yin/yang thing,” the eviction crisis brings out the tension in their contradictory approaches (14). While Komio is able to leave

behind her community without a second thought, consuming the C.E.O. and devoting herself to her new work without even returning to say goodbye to Braid, Braid's community expands, as she offers care to the others impacted by the eviction crisis. Braid is seen performing a grocery run for a community of squatters, offering care even in her own moment of grief over losing Komio (44). And while Komio is swiftly flattered by the C.E.O.'s admiration and promises, Braid feels inadequate, worrying that she's "really no substitute for what [Komio'd] be doing to help," and wondering if her "best" could ever be enough (44).

A small panel situates Braid's moment of self-doubt in Komio and the C.E.O.'S ever-developing infrastructure : Braid and Jane sit on the floor of a hallway, while behind them a crowd of faceless people distribute stolen groceries. Williams zooms out the gaze enough to see that this hallway is part of a larger condo or apartment building. This panel is a window, part of its own grid of windows in an expanding grid of buildings. Reading this panel alongside the panoramas that Komio sees from the C.E.O.'s office, it is clear that the "ecstasy" described by de Certeau and experienced by Komio is incomplete; though Komio can see the whole city, she cannot see the thousands of lives happening within it. Braid's window is just one lost in "the dark space [of] crowds" (de Certeau 92). Komio's view from the window is all-encompassing with a catch: she can see everything, so long as she does not care about the details of what she sees. Komio's lack of care is the catch in her relationship to Braid and to humanity. While Braid *is* care, Komio is a collection of more negative affects. And when Komio is separated from Braid, from the being she cares for the most and the being who cares so much, Komio's power is essentially negative.

There is a lesson here, about how to mobilize negative affect to resist oppression and violence. Vengeance without care seems to just be violence, here manifested as the displacement of countless people from their homes. In fact, as the C.E.O.'s plan comes to fruition, the eviction crisis extends beyond Parkdale. A television screen in a young woman's condo displays news coverage of "a mass exodus, the likes of which this city has *never* seen" (45, emphasis original). The television shows a highway crowded with moving vans and cars piled high with furniture. Rather than call this a housing crisis, the news audio describes it as "the condo boom" (45). The condo-dweller, ironically wearing a t-shirt reading "Toronto-vs-everybody," describes the plus side of this housing crisis: "I've got like *no* neighbours...so I can be as loud as I want" (45, emphasis original). With Toronto emptied of (almost) everybody but her, she excitedly purchases a coffee cup baby, a monstrous animate baby-sized coffee cup. Hugging her new possession/pet/child, she confidently declares, "I don't need anybody" (46). With her new coffee cup baby to care for, the privileged condo-dweller does not need to care for her neighbours and their displacement from their homes. She is the ideal capitalist subject, content in her luxurious solitude and easily distracted from the humanitarian crises around her by the latest trend.

While the condo-dweller is an example of consumption without care, Braid continues to care deeply for those around her, and to find ways to mobilize that care. Though the oppressive development and mass displacement lend a despairing tone to the final pages of the graphic novel, the final scene focuses on Braid reminding someone of the role of care in their work. Braid is leaving The Beaver's "party to end all parties" after an unsatisfying confrontation with Komio when she stumbles upon an artist she recognizes from the social media platform Instagram (46). The Instagram artist played a

key role in the C.E.O.'s expansion. His Instagram account features photographs of Parkdale resident, surreptitiously taken without the residents' knowledge or consent. He first appears early in the novel, when his photo of a man racks up 98 likes in 12 seconds (16). His success continues, as he garners likes for photos of street dwellers, children, and women wearing hijabs (18-19).

Instagram is an image-based social media platform with a huge audience. Within 3 years of its initial launch, it boasted 130 million registered users (Hochman and Manovich). Like Reddit and Tumblr, Instagram is a common place to find accounts circulating what Lauren Cagle calls "strangershots...photographs taken of strangers without their knowledge or consent and then shared online, where they become powerful actants in digital networks" (68). The Instagram artist produces this kind of content, photographing Parkdale residents without their consent and gaining attention and audience by circulating these images. Cagle defines strangershots through their role in shaming and denigrating "non-normative people," which suggests that the Instagram artist's work does not quite belong to this category (69). And yet, though his work is not as explicitly denigratory like the examples Cagle provides (the classist and fatphobic website "People of Walmart" or the transphobic incident involving a photograph of Balpreet Kaur), the Instagram artist's work is certainly exploitative.

Moreover, the artist's work is location-based: he takes photographs in Parkdale and Instagram marks each photograph with its location. His work draws attention to a particular geographic area and simultaneously dehumanizes the residents of that area. His work paves the road for gentrification, marking a particular area as interesting and desirable to an affluent, artistically-minded audience while simultaneously diminishing

the agency of that area's occupants. His account attracts the attention of the C.E.O.'s company. In a meeting, a corporate developer describes how the Instagram artist

is close to the apex of regional micro-celebrity, with the vast majority of geo-tagged photos positioning his collection within a *very* concentrated proximity....The artist has *always* been our finest tool in scouting out new fertile areas. (19)

By capitalizing on the work of the local artist, the developers are taking part in a recognizable phenomenon. In a recent article in *Cities: The International Journal of Urban Policy and Planning*, researchers propose this exact process. They propose using Location Based Social Networks (LBSNs) like Instagram (their case study uses AirBNB, FourSquare, Twitter, and Google Places) to source “up-to-date [spatial] data” and identify “opportunity spaces for urban regeneration” (Martí, García-Mayor and Serrano-Estrada 191). They call this data sourced from social networks “non-volunteered geographic information,” as network and app users are not consciously contributing this information for use by companies or other organizations. And yet, like the C.E.O.'s company, they monitor social network activity to identify areas ripe for urban renewal, a process that is often experienced as gentrification and displacement by existing and disempowered residents. Williams fictionalizes the process that the urban planning scholars enthusiastically propose: the Instagram artist leads the developers to Parkdale, as his art makes an argument that Parkdale is a desirable neighbourhood, highly viable for gentrification and capitalization.

Once this development is underway, the Instagram artist attempts to photograph the evictions, and is interrupted by an enraged Komio. Still later, the Instagram artist

complains about being exploited by the developers, only to be confronted by a group of Parkdale residents: “You think someone like me wouldn’t have a data plan? // You think we’re *material* for you to use?” accuses one of his photograph subjects (41, emphasis original). She then articulates his complicity in the evictions: “Parkdale was one of the *last* places for us downtown, / and *you* helped them onto our trail” (41, emphasis original). The Instagram artist has played an integral part in gentrification and displacement, a well-documented phenomenon. Michelle Veitch has studied the ways the “creative classes” and local, low-income residents often have “conflicting needs”: “the ‘creative classes’ bring cultural value and capital into economically depressed city districts, [then] property managers bring economic value and capital by investing in real estate markets....Corporate investors brand neighbourhood districts as hip and trendy to entire urban elites into downtown cores. However, the resulting inflation of property values forces out low-income residents” (26). This is the very process that Williams documents in *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, with the Instagram artist unwittingly enabling evictions of Parkdale residents.

But the Instagram artist is not let off the hook for being naive, nor does Williams leave us with the impression that art is at odds with social justice. When Braid finds the Instagram artist, he is still processing his own complicity: “I feel *awful*. / I keep thinking about what those neighbourhood people said to me... // Am I just a complete shit?” (50). Braid is not here to soothe the Instagram artist, agreeing “kinda, yeah,” to his negative self-evaluation; instead, she offers an alternative: “But maybe you don’t have to be” (50). This is the last line for the graphic novel, delivered with a hopeful smile by Braid. Given that Braid is a goddess of care, solace, and guidance, I conclude that Braid is going to

offer the Instagram artist a path forward in which he imbues his work with care. In their final conversation, Braid gestures to an artistic practice that is full of care rather than ambition and imagines artists who are careful with their power and influence rather than their brand. The Instagram artist has created exploitative art for consumption and lamented the powerful developers who consumed it. But with an ethic of care, an artist interested in a particular space or neighbourhood can contribute to and support that community, just as Braid has throughout her time in Parkdale.

Temporal Scales

Braid's choice to care for humanity, and Komio's choice to turn away from and against humanity, are definitive moments when the beings mark their affiliation after centuries of living on the peripheries of human existence. In fact, Komio and Braid's engagement with humans, whose short lives are just moments in Komio and Braid's long existence, disrupts the hierarchy of scales described by Harvey. Throughout *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, temporal scales are collapsing and overlapping. Above, I close read the opening page's panoramas in terms of rapid development. Williams' condenses centuries worth of urban growth into four images, depicting Toronto's (relatively) long history as just a series of moments. This compressed pacing foreshadows the C.E.O.'S overhaul of Parkdale, which truly *is* rapid, with evictions, demolitions, and construction occurring in just a few days. But the opening page's acceleration of Toronto's history also establishes the clash in temporal scales that plays out throughout the graphic novel: ancient beings Komio and Braid settle into the relatively brief and ephemeral community of Parkdale and befriend mortal humans. Having lived beyond and outside the spatial and

temporal scales of human existence for so long, Braid and Komio's experience of eviction is an experience of uncontrollable change.

Williams represents the bizarre pacing of Braid and Komio's life through montages. In one, he depicts "Komio & the Willendorf Braid's best looks" across time, presenting Komio and Braid in Renaissance Europe, 1950s London, and 1970s New York across half a page (12). Mere pages later, Williams' draws a typical week in the lives of Komio and Braid: Monday and Tuesday they promote their business, Wednesday they do chores, Thursday they harass Rob Ford ("Vengeance is Public Service," reads the caption), and Friday they take in some art (18). Decades and days: each are granted equal panel space in the Williams' comics. These two different temporal scales are compressed in identical ways, suggesting that, within an endless life, temporal scales do not function through a hierarchy.

Komio and Braid experience time differently than their human counterparts. This difference is subtly called upon by references to finality and forever. Impatiently waiting on Komio to finish a job, Braid is encouraged by a bartender to dance her cares away, "Could you imagine if this was your *last chance* at a good night and you wasted it?" (22, emphasis original). Braid shakes off this reference to finality: "You're *sweet*, junior. / But I've been around pretty much forever, so I don't see that happening" (22, emphasis original). Her diminutive nickname for the bartender subtly acknowledges the massive age gap, and she is confident that she has time left—after all, she has so much time behind her. For Braid and Komio, time is endless. And yet they have settled in a human community with a human roommate, attending human events and providing services to human clients. They are suddenly subject to human time, and the eviction crisis forces

them to confront this fact. By settling in the neighbourhood of Parkdale, they made themselves vulnerable to being unsettled and displaced by the violent chaos and inequities of humanity. In fact, Braid's confident dismissal of a "last chance" to party is compromised when her local bar is evicted, and throws "the party to end all parties" in a nearby construction site (22, 46). As she passes by the party, the music hits her in the face with the very real fact of finality: "there's noo future / noo future / noo future for you," croons the singer, the lyrics drifting in large, wobbly letters past construction fences and over a literal garbage fire (47). By embracing human community, Braid has subjected herself to human scales of time, and such scales include things coming to an end.

This tension that Braid experiences, between the seemingly infinite time of her lifetime and the finite time of humanity, recalls the tension between geological time and human history addressed by the concept of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene refers to the present geological era, one defined by humanity's impact on the earth, climate, and atmosphere. In 2000, scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer proposed the term in the newsletter of the International Geosphere Biosphere Programme, though both scientists had been using the term since the 1980s. They noted the "astounding...expansion of mankind, both in numbers and per capita exploitation of Earth's resources" (Crutzen and Stoermer 17). The Anthropocene is so named for human (*Anthropos*) impact: "Now that humans—thanks to our numbers, the burning of fossil fuels, and other related activities—have become a geological agent of the planet," the term Anthropocene "recognize[s] the beginning of a new geological era, one in which humans act as the main detriment of the environment of the planet" (Chakrabarty 208-9). Crutzen and Stoermer initially dated the beginning of the Anthropocene to the Industrial

Revolution, but more recently, the “Anthropocene Working Group proposes locating the Anthropocene’s lower boundary in the mid-twentieth century” (574). Regardless of its exact beginning, the Anthropocene is an era marked by human development, including the extraction of resources, the production of goods, and the consumption and disposal of goods. The kind of development depicted in *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, of massive but sparsely inhabited condo buildings, is a huge part of what makes humans agents of geological change.

The concept of the Anthropocene asks us to think across scales; in fact, in their argument for the need for such a term, Crutzen and Stoermer write about the “growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere...at all, including global, scales” (17). Donna Haraway calls the Anthropocene “time-space-global thinking,” which helps us think around “a Big Thing called Globalization” (44-5). Humans, though perhaps acting and thinking on local scales, or on one scale at a time, have a devastating impact across scales of space and time. Furthermore, the Anthropocene brings human history—a relatively brief time—into direct relation with deep, long, immense geological time. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty notes that, in most humanities discourse, “Geological time and the chronology of human histories remained unrelated,” but climate change makes this separation impossible: “This distance between the two calendars [geological and human] ...is what climate scientists now claim has collapsed” (208). By employing the concept of the Anthropocene, scientists, artists, and humanists act as Harvey’s “insurgent architects,” translating political urgencies across temporal and spatial scales (244).

How does this relate back to *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, a fictional text that does not use the term ‘Anthropocene’ or explicitly discuss climate change? The answer lies in

Condo Heartbreak Disco's perspective on humanity. Williams tells a story of capitalist development and the decline of humanity through non-human characters. Komio and Braid pre-exist the Anthropocene, and human development in general. Their lifespan is perhaps closer to geological time. After all, the *Venus of Willendorf* statue, which Williams describes as modelled after Braid, is 30 000 years old. And yet, by choosing to make a home in humanity, and then coming up against the destructive plan of the C.E.O., Komio and Braid confront what it means to either live *with* humans or live *beyond* them. The planet they have inhabited for millennia is now being totally transformed by capitalist development and consumption. In turn, the Anthropocene is transforming the ways that humans live. Komio and Braid have lived through many things, but now they must choose how to live in, and perhaps through, the Anthropocene.

As non-human creatures, does the Anthropocene mean anything to them? Donna Haraway is critical of the term Anthropocene for many reasons. Firstly, the term Anthropocene elides the role of capitalism in the current crises: "the Anthropos did not do this fracking thing and he should not name this double-death-loving epoch [...] if we have only one word for these SF⁴⁴ times, surely it must be the Capitalocene" (47). In *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, capitalism effaces the human, as development is driven by the non-human C.E.O. and seeks to eradicate humanity. The C.E.O. describes humanity as "a virus. A plague set upon the world" (37). Her dialogue is set alongside panels picturing humanity at its worst: a screaming mouth, a tank backed by warplanes, an explosion, and a crowd of stock market traders (37). These images give the impression of humanity as

⁴⁴ In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway uses SF to gesture to a great many terms and concepts, including speculative fabulation, string figuring, and science fiction (2-3).

violent, greedy, and destructive. The C.E.O. is certain that humanity is headed for annihilation: “their fate isn’t a question / But I *am* here to speed it along” (37, emphasis original). Her plan to redevelop cities into ghost cities, to evict everyone until there is nowhere left to go, is aimed at accelerating human extinction and resetting “the whole world” (37). Ultimately, the C.E.O. wants to end the Anthropocene by ending humanity and seeks assistance from Komio, another non-human creature.

The perspective of non-human characters in *Condo Heartbreak Disco* recalls Haraway’s second critique of the Anthropocene: that this era involves more than human. “These times called the Anthropocene are times of multispecies [...] urgency,” Haraway writes, and she proposes yet another term: the Chthulucene (35). Haraway argues: “unlike either the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene, the Chthulucene is made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen–yet” (55). The Chthulucene not only acknowledges the non-human lives that are at stake, but opens up the possibility of multispecies resistance, and emphasizes that relationality is essential to our (and others) survival. Haraway argues that “[t]he Capitalocene was relationally made [...] The Capitalocene must be relationally unmade” (50). The significance of relationality in Haraway’s hopeful reading of the current era is exemplified in Braid, a figure of care who sticks with her community—even building new community—in the midst of crisis. In fact, Braid is an apt example of what Haraway calls a “Chthonic one” (2). Like Chthonic beings, Braid is “both ancient and up-to-the-minute ... [a] monste[r] in the best sense” (Haraway 2). Haraway literally imagines Chthonic ones with Braid’s primary feature, “very unruly hair” (2). In the face of crisis, Braid makes kin with the

people of Parkdale, bearing out Haraway's primary tenet of the Chthulucene: "We are at stake to each other" (55). Finding food and shelter for her neighbours, chatting with the gentrifying condo dweller, and reaching out to the Instagram artist, Braid chooses relationality and care in the face of destruction and violence. Set deep in the Anthropocene, but wary, too, that this is the Capitalocene and the Chthulucene, *Condo Heartbreak Disco*'s extra-human characters cast a judgmental eye on humans' destructive nature and are forced to decide if humans are worth saving.

Discipline and Cellular Space

The Anthropocene is not only visible on the large scales of the earth and climate, or over long periods of time. Scholar Vybarr Cregan-Reid argues that the Anthropocene has altered the human body: "while we have been making this world, it has also been remaking us" (2). Tracing the Anthropocene back to the Industrial Revolution, Cregan-Reid unpacks how new forms of labour, those central to the industrial development that has so profoundly altered the earth, have reshaped the human body. Bodies have been broken and shaped to adapt to new labour conditions. Without losing sight of the global, geological scales of the Anthropocene, Cregan-Reid's "ecology of labour" offers a way to comprehend the Anthropocene on a much smaller scale (2).

Similarly, David Harvey tries to bring the discourse of the body and the discourse of globalization together. In fact, he resists a separation between these two discourses: "I deny that we make a choice between particularity or universality in our mode of thinking and argumentation" (16). Like Harvey, Chak looks at the particularity of the detained individuals while still holding space for the discussions around mass displacement. And,

of course, mass displacement is increasingly a product of climate change. As famines and natural disasters push populations from their homes, large populations migrate across an increasingly unstable planet in search of new homes. These same migrants, the victims of a centuries-long process of extraction, emission, and pollution, end up detained in small cells in facilities across southern Ontario. Though Chak's graphic essay does not explicitly engage with the effects of climate change on migration, the detainment it represents operates within the context and effects of globalization, climate change and the Anthropocene. But Chak's represents the effects of mass displacement on a micro scale, by centralizing the minor individuals who are confined to small, largely hidden spaces.

It is shocking to note—as Chak does—that systems of detention and incarceration remain largely hidden, while—as Davis argues in her narrative of prisonization—the prison industrial complex is still expanding. To make sense of this tension between what is hidden and what is increasingly taking up space (and bodies), I turn to Michel Foucault's history of the prison. Foucault observes that, by the mid-nineteenth century, “punishment had gradually ceased to be a spectacle” (9). Whereas executions, torture, and other forms of physical punishment used to be fairly public, at least in European societies, punishment progressively became “the most hidden part of the penal process” (Foucault 9). But Foucault notes two important aspects of this shift away from a spectacle of punishment. Firstly, as punishment becomes invisible, it becomes less imaginable and even thinkable for the un-incarcerated citizen. Secondly, though there is no longer a spectacle of torture, and torture in most forms has been vehemently opposed and phased out, the body is still central to the process of punishment.

Addressing this first point, Foucault argues that punishment's gradual invisibility

means it also “leaves the domain of more or less everyday perception and enters that of abstract consciousness” (9). When the general public does not *see* punishment, including the incarceration of people who have been found in violation of laws, they cease to think about punishment in any regular or meaningful way. Do most people believe that incarceration is an adequate form of punishment? Do they know what modern incarceration involves, and what toll it takes on bodies, psyches, families, and communities? Angela Davis is concerned about this shift, arguing that while “it is difficult to imagine life without [prisons]... At the same time, there is a reluctance to face the realities hidden within them, a fear of thinking about what happens inside them” (15). Davis describes how “the prison is present in our lives and, at the same time, it is absent from our lives” (15). This tension—between knowing that people go to prison and that prisons exist, but not seeing these systems physically or reflecting on their social consequences—is the very tension that *Undocumented* addresses, as I have discussed above. Migrant detention centres, including those integrated into federal and provincial prisons, are a part of Canadian’s physical landscape and political system. But do Canadians agree with these centres and their purpose? Can they see the work these centres do, the harm they do, the power they enforce? Davis notes that for many, prison abolition “is simply unthinkable and implausible,” but this tension between knowing that prisons and detention centres exist, and knowing *how* they work and how they fail to live up to our personal or national values, suggests that in our current system, prison is already ‘unthinkable’ (Davis 9).

Secondly, Foucault notes that by ceasing to treat punishment as a spectacle, we have not necessarily made it more humane, especially as it concerns the body. After

describing the movement against the torture of criminals, Foucault writes, “From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights” (11). Incarceration is a suspension of rights, and it is a suspension of rights that acts on and through the body: the body is deprived, contained, and manipulated. Noting incarceration’s effect on the body, Foucault argues that “there remains...a trace of ‘torture’ in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice” (16). Though the body is not physically harmed, it is restricted, and this restriction is experienced as harm.

In *Undocumented*, Chak represents this containment and restriction of the body by visualizing the space granted to an incarcerated individual. Chak writes,

The penitentiary was born of a modern desire for more efficient punishment, likewise modern housing was defined by functionalism. Existenzminimum (subsistence dwelling) became a design sensibility that sought the highest comfort through the most efficient means. Since then, the logic of minimum has permeated the design of our work. The bare minimum becomes a regulation. It is standardized, measured in time, dollars, material, and energy. (99)

The pages that follow are broken down into cells, each giving information on the “bare minimum [of] what is ‘habitable’” in different contexts (Chak 101). Across two pages, each panel contains a 3D and 2D drawing of a minimum cellular space, each labeled with its designation—“prison single occupancy,” “emergency camp,” “prison dormitory”—and its minimums—minimum area per person, minimum vertical space per person, minimum natural light per person, etc. (100-101).

Across six pages and four different techniques, Chak illustrates how the

architecture of incarceration has been planned around what Harvey calls “the microspace of the body” (49). The body, says architecture and planning, needs this at a minimum, and the body, says the architecture of incarceration, has been granted this minimum space. Foucault writes that within the historically humane punishment of confinement, though it may “not make use of violent or bloody punishment...it is always the body that is at issue—the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission” (25). By repeating the figure of the body, situated within equally repetitious cells and panels, Chak invites readers to give their attention to the body in confinement and to reflect on the establishment of this standard of proportions and space and its consequences.

Such sustained attention intervenes in the tension I raised above, one raised by both Davis and Foucault: society considers prisons and incarceration as essential, but non-incarcerated people do not possess regular, sustained knowledge of what occurs in these prisons. Through repetitive representations of the microspace of the body subjected to the microspace of the cell, Chak directs attention to the lived conditions of incarceration, not just for those sentenced through the justice system but also for those detained during the process of immigration or deportation. The comics’ page, typically divided into small, similarly-sized panels, is an ideal place for showcasing the confinement of the body to spaces that are, perhaps, *technically* livable.

The prison cell is the culmination of a long disciplinary history, as outlined by Foucault. Foucault writes that the eighteenth century involved many “projects of docility,” with more deliberate organization in education, the military, healthcare, and the penal system (136). During the shift away from spectacles of torture, discipline began to

function though “the distribution of individuals in space” (Foucault 141). Cells are an ideal technology for such distribution, and they are an essential feature of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, the institutional space that Foucault’s analyzes as “the perfect disciplinary apparatus” (173). With each inmate (or student, patient, worker, etc.) confined to a cell, and each cell visible from the central watchtower, discipline operates through the conviction that one is always being surveilled and judged.

Though neither *Condo Heartbreak Disco* nor *Undocumented* offer examples of a true Panopticon, in both instances power relies on some of the Panopticon’s disciplinary functions. In *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, Komio and the C.E.O. take in a wide, sweeping view of the city from the downtown penthouse. Writing about the “structuring gaze” of comics, Jörn Ahrens and Arno Meteling argue, “the depiction of such a gaze always includes political implications, for example, in the division of the gaze between a pedestrian watching the sky and a superhero looking down on the city” (7). Komio has the gaze of the superhero, or perhaps the super villain, and such a gaze is related to her power. Like the disciplinary guard in the Panopticon’s watchtower, Komio is called upon to both survey and judge the (human) citizens of Toronto. While Foucault notes that the Panopticon operates through a “normalizing judgement,” which observes and ensures that each cellular occupant behaves in a disciplined fashion (184), Komio observes the city and judges whether its occupants are worth fighting for. Komio first offers a lukewarm judgement that “meh [...] they’re okay,” before abandoning them altogether (Williams 36). In both cases, liberty—to live and act freely—is denied by the normalizing judgement of the observer.

Meanwhile, Braid and Jane are pictured in a cellular space, viewed through the

window of a high-rise condo building where they are squatting with other evicted community members. The zoom out from one panel to the next reveals their window to be one among countless others, locating them in a cellular grid that is radically different than the cozy home they had in Parkdale (see fig. 19). Nearby, one of the new Parkdale residents lives alone in her new condo, happily occupying her own cellular space. When read through a Foucauldian lens, it is clear that the C.E.O. is building a world that is cellular, where humans are distributed evenly in a way that limits their freedom, or they are wholly displaced. The condo operates as an expensive and exclusive cellular technology. Even those that are evicted from their homes end up confined: either squatting in the cellular spaces of empty apartment buildings or fleeing in the cellular spaces of cars that crowd the highway. The combined effects of displacement (for the less privileged) and cellular distribution (for those still able to afford housing) result in isolation and the breakdown of community. Braid and her fellow squatters band together, attempting to maintain community in the face of displacement. But even this effort leaves them in the cellular space of the condo window, increasingly hopeless in the face of displacement.



Fig. 19: Cellular space in *Condo Heartbreak Disco* (Williams 44)

Though *Undocumented* describes cellular grids that are not quite as orderly as the condos, they are, like the cells of the Panopticon, subject to constant surveillance. Before unpacking the microspace of the body and its relation to the cellular space, Chak walks the reader through a detention centre. From pages 36 to 51, 56 to 71, and 76 to 85, each page contains a single large panel depicting a room within the detention centre. Chak walks readers through the centre one at a time, each image (with the exception of the one-doored cells) showing the door or hallway that is passed through to reach the next room/image. In every image, on every page, in every room, there is a camera. Dominic Davies writes that in “these pages, the camera’s eye returns the readerly gaze, subjecting viewers to a cold disciplinary surveillance” (261). The cameras stand out in Chak’s stark, uncluttered line drawings. They are a detail that cannot be missed. They are omnipresent, revealing the extent of surveillance in this place. Like the inmates of the Panopticon, detainees live with the knowledge that they might be watched at any time.

And though they know that every inch of space is surveilled, the detainees themselves experience the detention centre as “a sequence of fragments” (90). In a series of panels depicting the inside of a detention centre, Chak writes, “You can never fully grasp it [the space]. // Inside, you lose your spatial bearings and markings, // you lose your identity... / and subjecthood” (90). The page itself is ambiguously fragmented: is each row one long panel, in which the real walls of the detention centre interrupt the panel as vertical lines, or is each row a series of smaller panels divided by borders and gutters? This ambiguity imitates, on a much smaller scale, the disorientation of the cellular detention centre (see fig. 20). On the next page, the space (and subsequently, the

bodies and identities of the detainees) are further fragmented. There is a zoom in on smaller details: a camera, a section of barbed wire, someone's hands being cuffed, a metal detector being used to search a person's waist (91). At this level of scale and detail, identity and context are lost. It is not clear, from panel to panel, where the viewer is in the detention centre, or the faces of the detainees or guards. The clearest elements, pictured almost in their entirety, are those that mark surveillance: a camera, two television monitors showing surveillance footage, and a watchtower. Though the bodies of the detainees are under constant observation, the detainees' identities are erased or obscured through fragmentation and containment.

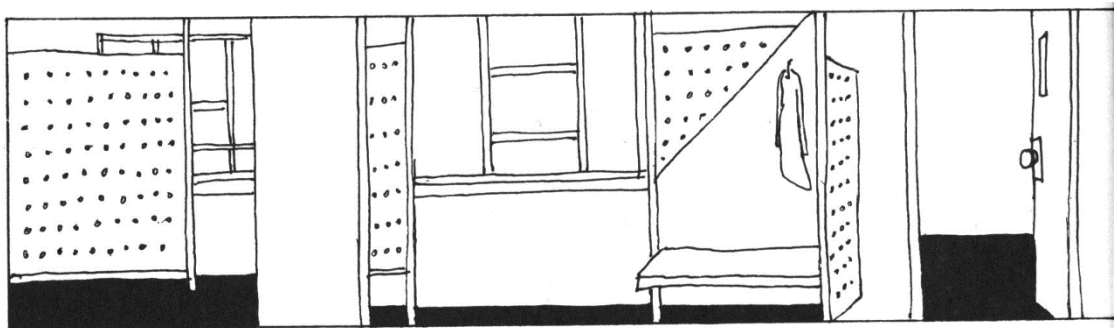


Fig. 20: Cellular space in *Undocumented*

Incarcerated Time

The erasure of detainees happens over time, and *Undocumented* also includes representations of the time spent in incarceration. Incarceration becomes the inmates' everyday, and the mundanity of incarceration in their lives is its own kind of tragedy. "Each morning," writes Chak, "a school bus drives up to the detention centre. // Behind barbed wire and a security gate, children board the bus. // It becomes a ritual that spells

trauma” (93).⁴⁵ The school bus ride, a quotidian experience in the lives of Canadian children, becomes traumatic when it involves the space of incarceration. Davies calls this “the comic’s most harrowing sequence” (262). Chak draws the school bus pulling up to the centre and driving away, alongside panels that gradually zoom in on the eyes of a young child. There is a sense of foreboding and fear in the child’s expression, perhaps as the child gazes at the carceral space that is also home, that they can leave (temporarily) but their family cannot. The school bus story, both in text and image, is a heart wrenching example of how incarceration can be part of a child’s everyday experience in Canada.

Another detainee, Amin Mjasiri, marks the everyday moments with his family that he misses during “28 months in a maximum security prison without charge or trial,” including three of his son’s birthdays and three anniversaries (94). “I am a father and a husband,” he insists, though he is physically absent from this role during his incarceration (94). Chak accompanies his story with images of his family. His son blows out birthday candles in three panels, the time marked by the number of candles and the size of the boy. His wife performs everyday activities alone: eating dinner, lying in bed, sitting on the couch. Chak marks the place where Mjasiri would be with dotted lines, his absence appearing as a ghostly figure (see fig. 21). Mjasiri experiences time as something missed or lost: he loses time with his family and misses both important and mundane moments. He also experiences the endless time of solitary confinement, “euphemistically called ‘administrative segregation’”: “up to 23 hours a day” of isolation (95). Segregation has temporal and spatial dimensions, and prisoners described “the feeling of merging with the

⁴⁵ This anecdote comes from an interview with MacDonald Scott, and immigration legal consultant working in Ontario, and as such speaks to real experiences of children in detention in Canada.

walls. // Where the distinction between an individual’s body and self becomes indistinguishable from the individual cell itself” (95). Once again, Chak uses dotted lines to illustrate this experience of erasure: a body, half dissolved into the white space of wall (95) (see fig. 22).

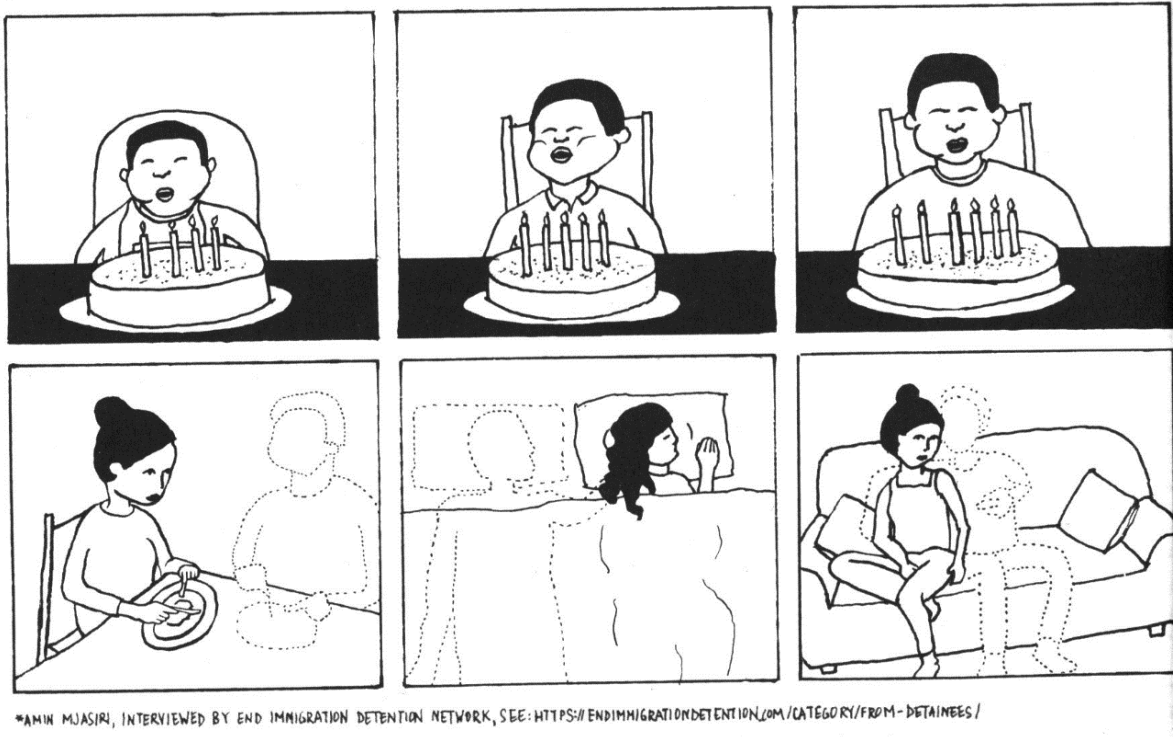


Fig. 21: Missing domestic time in *Undocumented* (Chak 94)

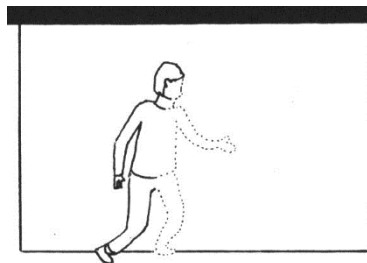


Fig. 22: Dissolving into erasure in *Undocumented* (Chak 95)

The spatial and temporal elements of incarceration are exemplified in another anecdote, this one of a “prisoner who walked from Minnesota to Boston inside his cell” (109). Gregory McMaster calculated the distance by miles and then by footsteps and paced it out, an accomplishment that fills time and also pushes against the spatial limitations of the cell. In incarceration, time is both lost and filled: it disappears when inmates think of the life outside that they are not living, and it stretches as they are constrained by their environment. The cellular space is almost entirely filled by its structuring referent, the body. And this small space denies and extends time in punishing ways. The confinement of the body is, as Foucault argues, a form of torture, and these stories belie a modern criminal justice system—and, for *Undocumented*, more specifically, immigration system—that claims its humanity through its lack of physical violence.

Dismantling the Disciplinary Space

Foucault’s history of the prison describes where the modern prison system came from, and such histories are essential for understanding that these systems have been deliberately built. *Undocumented* interrogates the work, logic, and choices behind immigrant detention, one off-shoot of the prison system. Detention centres, and the system they serve, are *built*. The passive voice is deliberately open here: built by whom? Built by the country Canadians belong to, by the governments Canadians elect, with the taxes Canadians pay? Built by *somebody*, or, to be more accurate, many people. This is where Chak employs an architectural reading of these spaces of detainment. My term ‘architectural reading’ draws on Harvey’s description of the extensive skillset of the architect:

The architect has to imagine spaces, orderings, materials, aesthetic effects, relations to environments, and deal at the same time with more mundane issues of plumbing, heating, electric cables, lighting, and the like. The process of ‘doing architecture’ entails all these complications. ‘Doing architecture’ is embedded, spatiotemporal practice. (204)

As a trained architect, Chak is aware of this process, of the factors, and of the decisions involved in producing the space of a building. Chak’s architectural reading of these sites makes visible the decision-making, agency, ongoing willfulness behind the building and sustaining of Canada’s system of detainment and incarceration. Davis criticizes the widespread attitude that prisons are “an inevitable and permanent feature of our social lives,” an attitude that dismisses prison abolition as impossible (9). Like prisons, detention centres are not the inevitable or permanent, nor are they something that just *happened*.

Undocumented literally interrogates the people behind detention centres, as it includes text from an interview with an architect of detention centres. The text in *Undocumented* is adapted from “Playing a Role,” a 2014 film by Nir Evron, which sets footage of the Nahal Raviv detention facility against text from an interview with an unnamed architect who designed Israeli detention centres where African immigrants are detained. Chak transcribes the text and places it alongside drawings of a detention centre. Evron is accusatory early in the interview, asking “how do you sleep at night?” (Chak 40). The architect is unfazed, responding “I sleep well, my conscience is quiet” (42). The answers to Evron’s questions are fairly vague, situating the detention centre projects as just one form of work, informed by “client’s demands [and] regulations and budgetary

constraints” (50). Ultimately, the architect insists that they “do the best possible job under the constraints” (64). When Evron asks about “the architect’s role in shaping society,” the architect is modest, answering that “a good architect has to be a part of the orchestra in which everyone has a part that they need to play. [...] and [cannot] be concerned with ideals” (64-70). The architect underplays their role, which Harvey conceptualizes as a metaphor for hopeful action in the face of serious economic, social, and environment crises. This architect is not concerned with politics, though they design a centre that explicitly serves certain political groups. The architect’s “best possible job” is someone else’s site of trauma, a trauma that, I have argued, is shaped and perpetuated by purposefully built carceral spaces. Chak puts this defense of architecture in direct dialogue with traumatic stories of incarceration. The detainees’ experiences unravel the architect’s framing of their work as apolitical, casting the architect as complicit in perpetuating violent and traumatic systems. The detainment centres are not inevitable: they are the product of deliberate design.

Chak also critiques the inevitability of detention centres and prisons through a catalogue of their materiality. Drawing on the “Design Standards for Immigration and Customs Enforcement” from U.S. Immigration and Customs, she breaks down the different areas of a detention centre into their component parts. According to these standards, each area has a minimum size. Each area is made up of materials, mostly hollow metal, sealed concrete, and gypsum board (35). Each area contains different features: recessed fluorescent lighting, exhaust systems, bullet resistant glazing, and a communications system (35). Chak is meticulous in her cataloguing of these standards, with each description matched to a floor plan and a surveillance image and mapped onto

a 3D diagram of the centre. In resistance to the absence of prisons from everyday consciousness as described by Davis, or the re-location of punishment from spectacle to “abstract consciousness” as argued by Foucault, Chak wants her readers to *see* and *understand* what sites of detention and incarceration look like. The catalogue of material components attests to the fact that detention centres were consciously built and can be consciously dismantled. This is system that we, as a society, have responsibility for. By breaking down the material construction of this system of incarceration, Chak interrupts the slow violence and issues a call for resistance.

Chak’s dismantling of the detention system also works through the form of comics. She often uses the structure of panels to fragment spaces, bodies, and processes. Incarceration distributes “individuals in space” (Foucault 141), leading to a fractured experience of space and time that is damaging to the individual’s sense of self and humanity. But by using the grid structure of comics, Chak fragments the overwhelmingly large system(s) of detainment and incarceration into distinct images, as well as distinct components, materials, processes, and decisions. The form of the comics is her tool as she translates across scales: from the large scales of global, national, or provincial incarceration, to the local scale of communities who live with the responsibility of these violent systems, to the micro scale of the built cell and the human body that occupies it. Comics are a unique tool of translation, and Chak, perhaps Harvey’s ideal insurgent architect, makes use of them to critique a system that has long been relatively ignored and unconsciously accepted.

Williams also uses the form of comics to ask particular questions about agency and action. In the first half of *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, Komio and Braid are not

confined to the borders of panels. Rather, they stretch across panels and gutters. This mobility speaks to their nonhuman powers and their unique relationship to space and time. Though they have settled in a human community, they do not live fully within the constraints of human society. And yet, the more settled they become, the more restrictions and obstacles they face. In order to pay rent in one of the most expensive cities in Canada, they begin charging for their services. Braid in particular must promote herself so that she can profit off of her powers as a caregiver. Their eviction from their home is indicative of the constraints of living in human society: they are subjected to the marginalization and oppression of those they have chosen to settle with. And while Komio eventually chooses to live outside of (and in opposition to) human society, Braid becomes more and more constrained, a process culminating in the image of her framed in the window of the condo building where she is squatting with her displaced neighbours.

The fragmentation of page space into panels emphasizes the fragmentation of the community into cell-like spaces. Braid, witnessing the evictions, feels the violence of this distribution of people: “something horrific is underway. / It’s an eruption, after years of grating and unsustainable tension. / Collective, yet hopelessly *fragmented*— /—Their [the displaced peoples] anxiety, concerning that invisible, closing choke hold” (Williams 29, emphasis original). Like incarceration and detainment, the evictions are experienced as fragmentation and constraint. The community, when redistributed into condos, shelters, other cities or towns, or squats, is less powerful. Braid is central to keeping her large group of squatters housed and fed, and this care sustains a small but significant community in the face of fragmentation. The grammar of comics, particularly of panels and borders, emphasizes a narrative in which communities are fragmented and

disempowered.

Conclusion: Complicity vs. Care

Condo Heartbreak Disco's overall plot is certainly demoralizing, but it is Braid, and not Komio or the C.E.O., who is granted the last word. As I argued above, in her final conversation with the Instagram artist she offers care as an alternative to complicity, suggesting that the artist can change from someone who exploits others and contributes to gentrification to someone who cares for the communities he lives and works with. Through this conversation, and through the breakup of Komio and Braid, *Condo Heartbreak Disco* poses questions about how individuals, whether citizens, artists, or people who hold privilege (itself a form of power, though not supernatural) carry responsibility. This is the same question raised by Chak in *Undocumented*; she presents in great detail a system of detainment that is both global and local, functioning across many borders but also in recognizable Ontario communities. And though this system is massive, it is also something that is willfully built and maintained. Readers are called upon to bear witness to this system and to question their own acceptance of it or resistance to it. Do readers, like the Israeli architect, “sleep well” knowing what they know now? Finishing *Undocumented*, I recall Thomas King's central statement in his lecture series *The Truth About Stories*: “But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. / You've heard it now.” (60). These comics, set in my current Anthropocentric era and spatially proximate to the spaces many readers live and work, seem to invite readers to decide: Do we follow in the footsteps of Chak and Williams, who use art and knowledge to reframe political oppression and violence? Are we insurgent architects or apathetic architects? Are we

supernatural caregivers or vengeance demons? Across genres and the fictional/factual divide, these comics end on the same imperative: when we bear witness to restrictions on mobility and violent displacements, like the Instagram artist or the non-incarcerated, legally secure citizen, how do we respond?

Chapter 5:

Multimodal Literacy and Social Change in Gord Hill's Comics

In a viral tweet posted in August 2019, writer and editor Joanna Schroeder warned parents about a phenomena she had observed through her teenage sons' online interactions: "I've been watching my boys' online behavior & noticed that social media and bloggers are actively laying groundwork in white teens to turn them into alt-right/white supremacists" (@iprosethis, "Do you have"). Her subsequent thread described the techniques she saw white supremacists using to target and teach white teenage boys, including memes, jokes, and the deliberate use of terms ('triggered' and 'sensitive' among them). Her thread and its subsequent popularity and circulation speak to the increased voice and presence of fascist and extreme right groups. But more significantly, it speaks to the susceptibility of a certain demographic to radicalization by these groups, and how this radicalization happens at the levels of ephemeral and visual digital texts, including memes and social media posts. This demographic, she argues, is vulnerable to radicalization by white supremacist groups: "Being kids," Schroeder argued, "they don't see the nuance [in these memes] & [they] repeat/share" (@iprosethis "It's a system"). The radicalization phenomenon that Schroeder describes, and which anti-fascists activists, de-radicalized former neo-Nazis, and psychologists confirm in a *Washington Post* article about Schroeder's thread, speaks to the importance of multimodal literacy in critical consumption of contemporary culture (Gibson).⁴⁶ That is, people of all ages need to develop the skills to read across visual,

⁴⁶ This process of radicalization to white supremacy through memes, online jokes, and "irony poisoning" has also been described and documented by former neo-Nazi S.G. (Somos).

linguistic, and other modes, and to recognize the meaning that is being made in seemingly simplistic or ephemeral visual texts. But how is multimodal literacy taught, *and* how is it taught and used in the context of extreme political ideologies and large-scale social and political systems? These are the questions I explore in this chapter, as I look at comic books that employ various modes to tell narratives, and in doing so provide an opportunity for readers to develop multimodal literacy that will serve them as they encounter the politics of fascism and colonialism in their everyday life.

While Eric Kostiuk Williams engages with gentrification and late-capitalism through fictional comics, and Tings Chak adapts her training as an architect to art and advocacy work, Gord Hill synthesizes pedagogy and artistic production. Hill has been an active artist, writer, and activist for decades, and has produced a substantial body of political visual art, comic strips, and comic books. His work is explicitly pedagogical, aimed at educating readers about mechanisms of oppression such that they, too, can join in protest movements. In the forewords and prefaces to his comic books, Hill and his collaborators clearly state their goals: expanding knowledge of resistance movements and encouraging contemporary Indigenous people and others to see their place in long traditions of activism. In this sense, Hill's work can best be read within growing traditions of graphic history and comics journalism and as part of a long tradition of propaganda work and educational/political print culture. I am interested in analyzing the techniques he uses to make his work pedagogical, including style, paratext, citation, and the inclusion of maps, flags, and symbols that reach beyond the work to teach readers about the histories and contexts of social struggles.

In this chapter, I argue that Gord Hill's comics not only teach about social justice

movements and marginalized histories but encourage the development of multimodal literacy. Dale Jacobs defines multimodal literacy as “the ability to create meaning with and from texts that operate not only in alphabetical form, but also in some combination of visual, audio, and spatial forms as well” (3). In his book *Graphic Encounters: Comics and the Sponsorship of Multimodal Literacy*, Jacobs argues that comics are especially well-suited to teaching multimodal literacy as they are one of the first sites where many of us “lear[n] how to make meaning from the convergence of text and image” (3).

Building on Jacobs’ work on comics and multimodal literacy, I argue that Hill’s comics teach readers the visual and textual language of social justice movements and systems of oppression, such that readers can better recognize how oppression and resistance operate in the world around them. Hill deliberately includes other modes of expression in his comics, including slogans, flags, banners, and maps, which stand as the visual markers of oppressive systems, hate groups, and resistance groups. By teaching readers to recognize these discursive modes in the context of his historical overviews, Hill encourages readers to learn how to read the world around them, and to recognize and think critically about the modes they encounter in their daily lives.

I argue that Hill’s comics, with their interest in teaching history and multimodal literacy, are at the forefront of a new sub-genre of Canadian comics. Many other artists, writers, publishers, historians, and activists are using the multimodal form of the comic to teach social justice history (Buhle, Fedrau and Michaels, *Graphic History Collective*, Lester). The comic form enables readers to simultaneously learn particular histories and learn to read the various modes through which we communicate. Through developing multimodal literacy, these comics enable the development of critical readers and makers

of meaning, who recognize the gestures, visuals, and words through which colonization, capitalism, and fascism function, and use these modes in their resistance.

Though I primarily use Hill's work to argue for the potential of comics to promote and develop multimodal literacy, I see Hill as an early practitioner of this multimodal storytelling, pedagogy and activism. Later in this chapter, I close read multimodality in other Canadian and Indigenous texts, particularly the 2015 graphic novel *The Outside Circle*, written by Métis researcher Patti LaBoucane-Benson and illustrated by settler artist Kelly Mellings. *The Outside Circle* is a fictional story that incorporates LaBoucane-Benson's extensive research on and experience with programming for incarcerated Indigenous men. I explore how LaBoucane-Benson and Mellings use various modes of expression to integrate research and historical context into a compelling narrative, and how they use the spatiotemporal mode of the visual to represent the effects of colonization on a personal level. I see *The Outside Circle*, in its incorporation of specialized research into comics, as building on Hill's contributions to radical pedagogical comics. But first, I will introduce Gord Hill and his body of work.

Gord Hill is a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation. He lives and works in northern British Columbia, though his work often focuses on protest movements across the Americas and Europe. He is the editor of *Warrior Publications*, a website that aims to be "an historical archive of Indigenous anti-colonial struggles and resistance, and to provide analysis of these struggles" ("About"). He often publishes under the pseudonym Zig Zag, and his writing, art, and comics appear in many periodicals, including *Red Rising Magazine*, *Broken Pencil*, and *Briarpatch*. He has published three comic books, *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* (2010), *The Anti-Capitalist Resistance Comic*

Book (2012), and *The Antifa Comic Book* (2018).

Though not identical in style or technique, Hill's three comic books share similar formats. Each serves as a graphic history of a particular movement—anti-colonization, anti-capitalism, and anti-fascism respectively. In these books, Hill introduces the ideology or system that is being resisted (colonization, capitalism, fascism), and then offers a series of brief graphic summaries of moments and movements of resistance to said systems. These three books are subdivided into sections that introduce and explain a particular event (e.g. 1680 Pueblo Revolt, the Battle of Cable Street), group (e.g. “Apache: Guerrillas of the Southwest!”, The Ku Klux Klan), or movement (e.g. the anti-Olympics movement centred in Vancouver in the 2000s). Hill is the sole author and artist of these comic books, though they each feature a foreword and/or preface by another writer-activist—paratextual elements I discuss in greater depth below. These books are explicitly educational, aimed at providing readers a surface or working knowledge of the histories of these movements, and supplementing the arguably inadequate education around resistance to colonization, capitalism, and fascism provided by “the educational system and corporate entertainment industry” (Hill, *500 Years* 5). The comic books are meant to politicize their readers and invite readers into existing resistance movements by offering the tools and background to understand these movements.

Like Chak and Williams, Hill uses comics to explore questions of oppression and resistance across different temporal and geographic scales. The movements of anti-colonization, anti-capitalism, and anti-fascism are quite broad, with resistance enacted both locally and globally. Hill mobilizes comics as a site of radical pedagogy⁴⁷ and

⁴⁷ I draw here on the fields of radical pedagogy and critical pedagogy. Mark Coté, Richard J.F. Day and Greig De Peuter build on the influential work of radical pedagogue Paulo Freire when they write that

educates readers on the vast temporal and geographical scales of social justice and resistance movements. His comic books are at once histories and calls to action. They offer historical accounts of anti-fascist movements, Indigenous resistance to colonization, and anti-capitalist organizing, respectively, but with significant attention to the work of these movements in the last three decades. This attention to the contemporary, paired with each book's introductions and prefaces provided by other activists, speaks to the ongoing need for sustained resistance across multiple scales.

I argue that Hill encourages the development of a multimodal literacy that serves activism. In what follows, I walk through the different modes that appear in Hill's comic books: paratexts, primarily written by Hill's collaborators, which frame how readers should approach these comics; maps—a visual mode with a complex relationship to authority and colonialism—which situate the comics' events in proximity to readers; banners, slogans, and flags, which hail certain historical and ideological groups, and indicate solidarity and affiliation across various temporal and geographic scales; and ephemeral print culture, a subset of the linguistic mode. But first, I introduce the concept of multimodal literacy through/in comics and define anti-oppressive multimodal literacy in the context of Hill's work.

Multimodal Literacy

The concept of multimodal literacy emerges from the New London Group's work on *multiliteracies*. The New London Group, a group of scholars working in the realm of

“radical pedagogy strives to draw out and examine links between the structures of domination... Positioning students and teachers as active subjects in, rather than objects of, the world” (7). Coté et al. relate radical pedagogy to anarchist traditions of unlearning, which Hill gestures to when he claims, in his preface to *500 Years*, that mainstream education offers a false account of colonization and Indigenous resistance.

pedagogy and literacy, propose “a pedagogy of Multiliteracies” that “focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone,” and in doing so, accounts for our contemporary “multiplicity of communications channels and media...[and] the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity” (Cope and Kalantzis 5). The New London Group argues that literacy educators have to account for developments in communication and modes of meaning-making. They identify six modes involved in “the meaning-making process,” including “Linguistic Meaning, Visual Meaning, Audio Meaning, Gestural Meaning, Spatial Meaning, and the Multimodal patterns of meaning that relate the first five modes of meaning to each other” (Cope and Kalantzis 7). Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis argue that in order to “find our way around this emerging world of meaning [we require] a new, multimodal literacy” (6). Culture and communication are no longer made through the written word alone (though truly, they never were), and pedagogical practices need to account for the many modes at work if students are to be prepared to make meaning from the world around them.

Dale Jacobs builds on the New London Group’s work by presenting comics as a site for recognizing and developing multimodal literacy. Echoing the New London Groups’ six modes, Jacobs writes that “our literacies operate not only in the alphabetic realm, but in the visual, audio, gestural, and spatial realms as well” (8). He cites the long-held stigma of comics: that they are sub-literate, or, more generously (though no less limiting), “simply an intermediary step to more complex word-based texts” (Jacobs 17).⁴⁸ He argues that reading comics involves both reading across and through various modes.

⁴⁸ There are many discussions in comics studies on the stigma around comics as low-brow culture (Worden), and there is an ongoing debate on the value of claiming comics are art and/or literature (Meskin). McCloud, in his influential work *Understanding Comics*, describes his initial belief that comic “were usually *crude, poorly-drawn, semiliterate, cheap, disposable kiddie fare*” (3, emphasis original).

Furthermore, comics can “sponsor multimodal literacy” by encouraging readers to make meaning across modes, better preparing them to “encounter, process, and use” the multimodal texts that make up their world (3).

I want to highlight four pieces of the discourse on multimodal literacy and multiliteracies: 1) how multimodal literacy destabilizes literary canons and the primacy of the written word in radical and necessary ways; 2) the relationship between multimodal literacy and scale, both geographical and temporal; 3) how multiliteracy scholars situate multimodal literacy as a part of the everyday and the future; and 4) how multimodal literacy enables us to become *makers* of meaning, in multiple senses of the word. I will walk through these four components of multimodal literacy in order to build the case for Gord Hill’s multimodal literacy, beginning with the destabilization of colonial literary canons.

Speaking to the importance of including comics in curricula, James Bucky Carter compares “critical literacy” with “cultural literacy” (55). Advocates of cultural literacy are invested in a literary canon that educates readers in a shared, recognizable set of histories, ideas, and values. In contrast, “[c]ritical literacy advocates,” Carter argues, “are much more open to non-traditional ideas of literacy that embrace home cultures and skill sets and focus more on creating and critiquing knowledge and discourse rather than finding it in a given set of texts or sources” (55). Rather than accepting or enforcing a literary canon, “critical literacy proponents might call for an expansion of what makes a text suitable for study” (Carter 55). As such, a critical literacy approach is more likely to result in comic books and other visual or multimodal texts finding their way into syllabi and classrooms. Such inclusions also challenge the significance of literary canons, which

are widely critiqued for excluding the voices of marginalized artists and thinkers (I use marginalized here to refer to non-white, non-male, non-cis, non-straight, disabled, lower or working class, etc.).

Rocco Versaci expands on the significance of destabilizing the canon in literacy instruction, noting such destabilizations encourage student-readers to:

...take a more active role in their literary education. With every non reflective presentation of canonical literature, we indirectly encourage student passivity and, perhaps, resentment. As teachers of literature, we should not strive to get students to accept without question our own (or others') judgments of what constitutes literary merit because such an acceptance inevitably places students in the position of seeing literature as a 'medicine' that will somehow make them better people, if only they learn to appreciate it.... Instead, teachers need to address the very issue of literary merit, for the resulting dialogue can help shape and legitimize the students' own voices in articulating their literary judgments—something that is necessary if one is to become a lifelong reader. (106)

Versaci argues that, by enforcing and re-circulating the canon, literacy educators present literary value as externally determined or established. By offering texts outside of the canon, or actively critiquing it, educators encourage students to determine value themselves, and to recognize the many ways in which literature can have value. Comics, which have historically been considered low-brow, non-literary, and non-canonical, in fact present an opportunity for critical literacy education and for broad discussions on what meaningful or valuable literature looks like and who creates it.

Multimodal literacy and comics have a part to play in critiquing the authority of

the canon and the written word. As an Indigenous activist and artist, Hill works in a tradition of storytelling and meaning-making that precedes and exceeds the written word. Moreover, Indigenous literature, whether oral or written, has long been excluded from literary canons shaped by Eurocentrism. There is still a great deal to be said about comics relationship to the literary canon and to the written word, and how this form serves Indigenous cultures and languages that have been marginalized by both the literary canon and the dominance of written knowledge. Jessica Langston has begun to take up this work and argues “the graphic novel serves as a key contemporary complement to orator—not intended to replace the oral tradition, but rather to supplement and support it” (114). She sees comics and oral tradition aligning in several significant ways. Firstly, she sees comics, often collaborative in their production, as functioning as a form of collective knowledge and storytelling, like the oral tradition. Secondly, she highlights the pedagogical function of both oral traditions and Indigenous comic books, as they are both used “to educate younger generations” (117). Finally, she notes the nuanced temporality of both oral tradition and comics: oral stories “work to make the past alive for the present. Time is not divided, history not hermetically sealed off. Oral tradition works to demonstrated that history is continually relevant, influential, and impacts the present in numerous ways,” which she sees as similar to how “in sequential art...both the past and future are real and visible around us” (118). Langston draws attention to the boom of Indigenous comics, and suggests that the form’s marginality, its stigma “as a product of low culture,” is appealing to Indigenous creators whose own cultures have been “sidelined” (115). Langston’s analysis of the productive similarities between oratory and comics attests to comics’ potential for decolonial and anti-colonial storytelling. By

choosing the comics form to tell his histories, particularly histories of anti-colonialism and Indigenous resistance, Hill embraces a form that is inherently multimodal and historically marginalized.

When arguing for multimodal literacy, Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis situate literacy education in an increasingly globalized world that always still includes the local: “we have to negotiate differences every day, in our local communications and in our increasingly globally interconnected working and community lives” (6). The *differences* they speak to here are differences in language, communication, and meaning making, what they often call “language diversity”: “The globalization of communications and labour markets makes language diversity an even more critical local issue...Effective citizenship and productive work now require that we interact effectively using multiple languages, multiple Englishes, and communication patterns that more frequently cross cultural, community, and national boundaries” (6). In conceptualizing a pedagogy of multiliteracies, Cope and Kalantzis are thinking *across scales*, speaking of global and local in the same breath, unwilling to lose sight of how interdependent these two scales are. In my last chapter, I used David Harvey’s concept of the “insurgent architect,” a figure who is tasked with the “dilemma of integrating struggles at different spatial scales” (244, 51). The insurgent architect “must be able to translate political aspirations,” resisting the organization of spatiotemporal scales into hierarchies (Harvey 244). Cope and Kalantzis, using the scalar terms *global* and *local*, offer multimodal literacy as a strategy for combatting Harvey’s dilemma of translation, integration, and meaning-making across scales. The linguistic mode does not function seamlessly across global communities divided by language difference—in fact, linguistic difference increasingly

exists within local communities, fed by increasing globalization. Both global and local communities think and work in multiple modes, and translation across scale happens through the visual, gestural, audio, and spatial, particularly when the linguistic fails. Hill's comics tackle large-scale movements (anti-colonization, anti-fascism, and anti-capitalism) and use local instances and events, such as the anti-Olympics movement in Vancouver leading up to 2010 and the 1990 Oka Crisis, to depict and describe global ideologies. Below, I unpack how he makes meaning across multiple modes and how this enables meaning making across multiple scales.

Besides the geographic or spatial scales of the global and local, Cope and Kalantzis also see multimodal literacy functioning in the temporal scales of the everyday and the future. They argue that “we negotiate differences [in meaning making] every day,” and that multimodal literacy enables us to negotiate these differences. Similarly, Jacobs notes that multimodal literacy carries over out of the classroom and into students' daily lives, where “they engage critically with ways of making meaning that exist all around them since multimodal texts include most of the content on the television, film...and many other texts in our contemporary society” (9). To recognize that the everyday world operates through multiple modes is to be faced with the consequences of multimodal illiteracy. If there are multimodal texts all around us, and we do not know how to read them, what are the implications? Are we missing meaning entirely? Perhaps even worse, are we passively receiving meaning, when we could be interpreting it critically?

And what does multimodal literacy (and illiteracy) mean for the future? Cope and Kalantzis emphasize “social futures” in their collection on multiliteracies: “literacy

educators and students must see themselves as active participants in social change; as learners and students who can be active designers—makers—of social futures” (7). They view an agency in multimodal literacy: multimodal literacy allows us to make meaning in the sense of reading and interpreting, but also to make meaning in the sense of communicating across modes. Here is the crux of my argument regarding Hill’s work: through his comic books, he does not only offer a history of sociopolitical movements; he does not only teach us to read sociopolitical movements and oppressive movements, and how they function across various modes; he offers us the tools to become the *makers of meaning* in a world already, perpetually shaped by these movements. Multimodal literacy thus enables us to be active makers of meaning. Large spatial scale poses a challenge: how do individuals situate themselves in global movements, when they often work and act locally? Temporal scale presents a similar challenge: how do individuals recognize the history of these movements, how these movements are playing out in the present every day, and how they will continue into the future? How do individuals recognize themselves as participants in these movements, whether passively or actively? Hill uses multimodal storytelling to collapse these scales, and to encourage readers to find ways to read across scales and recognize their place within them.

Paratext

To consider how Hill’s comics encourage the development of multimodal literacy, I now want to unpack how readers are ushered into these comics. The comics’ paratextual elements prepare the reader for the comics’ contents. They also argue for the value of these texts; in the paratextual prose, Hill and his collaborators directly justify the use of

the comics form, and indirectly argue for their multimodality as a vital part of the comics' work.

G rard Genette coined the term "paratext" to describe a text's "accompanying productions":

th[e] text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced by and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form...of a book. (1)

In the case of Hill's comic books, paratext takes the form of cover images, titles, the author's name, table of contents, cover descriptions, and prefaces, introductions, and forewords. It is these last three that do the bulk of the work in terms of situating these texts as pedagogical and multimodal. While many of the elements of paratext are "piece[s] of sheer *information*," the forewords, prefaces, and introductions (what I will refer to together as the paratextual prose) "make known an *intention*, or an *interpretation* by the author and/or publisher" (Genette 11). In the paratextual prose, Hill and his collaborators signal the comics' intentions to educate readers about the history of anti-colonization, anti-capitalism, and anti-fascism. For example, Hill writes in his preface to *500 Years*, "The purpose of *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* is to raise the levels of historical understanding and warrior spirit among Indigenous peoples and others" (6).

As well as signaling this pedagogical intent, the paratextual prose justifies the use of the comics form to accomplish this pedagogy.

Firstly, this pedagogical mission hinges on an acknowledgement that many are ignorant of these histories as a result of willful omission by mainstream education, culture, and media. In his preface to *500 Years*, Hill establishes his aim as filling a gap:

In order to understand the world we live in today, it is vital to know our history. Unfortunately, the history we are taught through the educational system and corporate entertainment industry is false, particularly its depiction of European colonization as inevitable (or even justified) and Indigenous peoples as helpless victims (or even willing participants). The story of our ancestors' resistance is minimized, at best, or erased entirely. This strategy has been used to impose capitalist ideology on people, to pacify them, and to portray their struggle as doomed to failure. (5)

Hill contends that readers may be uneducated on the history of colonial violence and Indigenous resistance, and that this lack of education has been deliberate on the part of colonial culture. His use of the first-person plural voice—"our history," "our people," "we will be better able to fight"—indicates he is addressing this book primarily to an Indigenous readership (6). He does acknowledge that the book's purpose "is to raise the levels of historical understanding and warrior spirit among Indigenous peoples *and others*," thus including settler readers in his imagined audience (6, emphasis mine). But his pronoun use—we and our—centres Indigenous peoples, inviting them to learn more about their histories and inviting them to identify with the warrior tradition Hill celebrates. Non-Indigenous readers like myself must locate themselves within the comic,

as they are not included in this first-person pronoun, and more often than not they will recognize themselves in the figures of colonizers and oppressors. This centering of Indigenous readers, and de-centering of settler readers, is itself a reversal of the mainstream model often offered in media and education systems.

Hill's claim that many lack knowledges of Indigenous history is backed up by Ward Churchill in his introduction to *500 Years*. Churchill tells a story about his time participating in the Yellow Thunder occupation,⁴⁹ where he learned a lesson from Mathew King, an Oglala Lakota headman and spiritual leader (14). King, observing the many young warriors participating in the occupation, expressed his sadness that the warriors lacked direction and clear purpose. This came back to one truth, according to King:

...you don't know where you're been. What I'm saying is that, other than little dribs and drabs, maybe, you don't know your history. You don't know where you're coming from. So you don't know how things were or how they got to be the way they are. That means you can't truly understand the situation you're in, not even the real nature of who and what you think you're fighting against. Since you don't really know your enemy, you can't see what must be done to defeat him or heal the pain he's caused. (Churchill 17)

King helped Churchill understand that his lack of knowledge of his own people's history was a weakness, and as a result, Churchill has "been deeply immersed in the learning of

⁴⁹ The Yellow Thunder occupation was named for Raymond Yellow Thunder, a Sioux man murdered by white men in 1972. The Dakota branch of American Indian Movement began the occupation in 1981, in the Black Hills, near the community of Pine Ridge. The occupation was part of ongoing disputes between the Sioux and the United States government over the rights to the Black Hills. Though the occupation lasted for several years, there were no major incidents, and Edward Lazarus argues it had little impact on the struggle for land. The camp disbanded after the "courts...upheld the government's denial of AIM's permit request" to build permanent structures on the occupied land (Lazarus 411-12).

history ever since” (17). Churchill echoes Hill’s intention to fill the educational gap regarding Indigenous resistance, and Churchill uses anecdote to emphasize the significance of this undertaking. He has chosen to learn his history, and the reader is invited to take up this task as well. Genette describes the paratext as “a *threshold*, or... a ‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back” (2, emphasis original). In their paratextual prose, Hill and Churchill invite the reader to partake in their pedagogical project, framing the comic book as a lesson in Indigenous history. Indigenous resistance has been active and effective in the past and is just as important in the present.

I want to linger on this term *present* as it applies to narratives of Indigenous resistance. Genette emphasizes paratext’s role in presenting text, how it serves “to *make present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world” (1, emphasis original). Hill uses his preface to speak to *500 Years* significance in a culture that has ignored and often denied Indigenous agency. But it is not simply that mainstream North American culture has denied Indigenous agency; it has erased Indigenous presence entirely, particularly by circulating the myth of the ‘vanishing Indian’,⁵⁰ and the colonial argument that Indigenous people are a relic of the past, not a political and social body in the present. In his book *Native Americans in Comic Books*, Michael Sheyahshe (Caddo Nation) analyzes a huge body of North American comic books and concludes that stories with Indigenous

⁵⁰ In the 19th century, many settler artists (Edward Curtis, Paul Kane) set out to document and ‘preserve’ the image of Indigenous people, working on the “conviction that the Native people were doomed to disappear” (Francis 23). Daniel Francis notes that artists like Kane were typical of their time in their belief that Indigenous people “would not be around to see much of the twentieth [century]...Some believed that it was the Indian’s traditional culture that was being eradicated by the spread of white settlement, while other believed the Indians themselves literally to be doing out” (23). Mita Bannerjee writes that the myth of the ‘vanishing Indian’ endures to the present day and serves colonialism, “Each new Indian is on the verge of extinction...colonialism is thus nostalgic for what it has killed off, or what it will soon succeed in killing off once again” (213).

characters are frequently “set in historical times” (35). He observes this again and again: “Natives characters are portrayed as remnants of the historical past” (41); “one might say that the Indigenous people are an extinct race, people who existed when horses, not automobiles, reigned supreme” (44); “They are presented as historical figures only, with no hope of their continuing presence into modern times” (94). He argues that there is “a real need to portray Indigenous people in modern times and locations” (35). By representing Indigenous characters only in the past, mainstream comic book creators have avoided recognizing contemporary Indigenous presence and perpetuated a mode of oppression and erasure that can trace its roots back to artists like photographer Edward Curtis. Curtis built a career around documenting people and cultures that were supposedly vanishing, and as such erased his subjects’ agency for self-representation and upholding the narrative that Indigenous people had no future, securing a less complicated future for colonial subjects.⁵¹

500 Years takes on this omission, not only recognizing present-day Indigenous culture and agency, but writing Indigenous present-day—and presence—as the culmination of a long history of struggle. Resistance, Hill and Churchill contend in their paratextual prose, is *ongoing*. Both men have participated in recent resistance movements and moments—“protests, occupations and blockades” since 1988, in the case of Hill, and Dakota’s American Indian Movement in the 1980s, in the case of Churchill (5, 8). By naming these contemporary actions in the paratext, Hill and Churchill emphasize the contemporaneity of Indigenous resistance, emphasizing that actions of protest, occupation, and even warfare have a place in the present-day Americas.

⁵¹ For more on Curtis’ work, see *The Edward Curtis Project* by Marie Clements and Rita Leistner.

Paratext also serves to make present—to emphasize the contemporaneity of—fascism and anti-fascism in *The Antifa Comic Book*, and this presencing is accomplished through the use of various modes. Below, I will expand on these modes one by one. For now, I want to gesture to *The Antifa Comic Book*'s cover image as a deeply nuanced, multimodal paratextual element. In the cover image, Hill uses recognizable clothing and accessories and visual labeling to allude to multiple fascist movements. He also captures a moment of action that evokes contemporary anti-fascist action and comic book's history of anti-fascism. A masked protestor⁵² is pictured punching Adolf Hitler in the face (see fig. 23), and the punch is an allusion to both reality and fiction. As an allusion to reality, the image recalls the anonymous but real-life “black-clad anti-Fascist [who] socked the prominent white supremacist Richard Spencer” the day of Donald Trump's presidential inauguration, on January 20th, 2017 (Bray 7). This event, caught on news cameras, has been cut and re-cut, transformed into an animated gif, and well-circulated by a delighted public who recognizes the very real threat of fascism.⁵³ The image alludes to fiction insofar as it mimics the cover of *Captain America Comics #1* (1941), in which Captain America is pictured punching Hitler in the face (see fig. 24) (Kirby and Simon).

⁵² This protestor appears to be a Black Bloc protestor, based on their head-to-toe black outfit. Jeffrey Juris writes that the Black Bloc is “not an organization, or a network, but rather a specific set of tactics enacted by groups of young militants during protests. Although repertoires vary with each action, they often include destruction of private property, usually banks and transnational storefronts, ritualized confrontation with police and a series of more specific practices, such as ‘de-arrests,’ marching in small, compact groups with elbows linked or jail solidarity. These tactics are connected to a broader militant style, including the use of black pants and jumpers, combat boots, and black masks or bandanas to cover the face...Masks are worn for instrumental reasons—to protect identities for personal security—but also serve certain iconic functions, such as expressing collective solidarity through anonymity or portraying archetypal images of youth rebellion” (420-421).

⁵³ Mike Wendling writes about the reaction to this punch: “The video of Richard Spencer being punched on Inauguration Day became instant internet art. It was set to hip-hop and Springsteen, mashed up with the *Bee Movie* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. An earnest conversation began about the morals of violence in an age of extremism...A hastily coded video game riffed on the theme. Players could use a computer in conjunction with a smartphone to simulate hitting Spencer, before moving on to further bouts, culminating in a climactic fight with Adolf Hitler” (12)

This image, emblematic of the Golden Age of Comics (which I discuss in greater detail below), evokes a fantasy in which figures with superpowers take on fascism and, ideally, defeat the racist and genocidal leaders of fascist movements. In Hill's cover image, fantastical anti-fascism and real anti-fascism are collapsed, as the superhuman patriotic Captain American is conflated with and replaced by the anonymous masked protestor, and Adolf Hitler, the undeniable fascist leader, takes the place of Richard Spencer. The cover works as a paratextual element of interpretation and intention: by conflating two moments involving two different pairs of men, the cover foreshadows the comic book's goal of showing how fascism has carried on into the present moment, and of making anti-fascism a realistic set of actions for the contemporary reader, rather than the purview of superheroes.

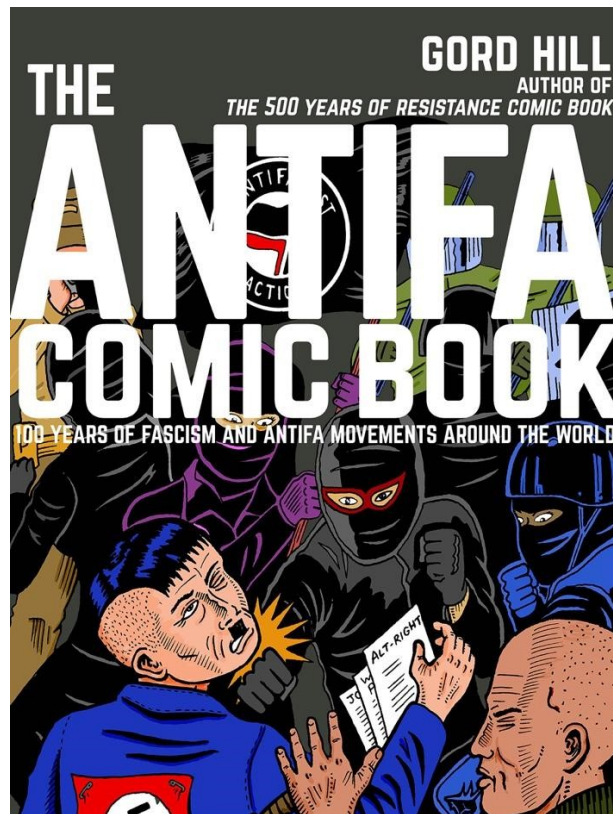


Fig. 23: The cover of *The Antifa Comic Book*



Fig. 24: The cover of the first issue of *Captain America*

To unpack the significance of this cover image, let me first walk through the Golden Age of Comics and the role of anti-fascism in popular comic books. The Golden Age of Comics refers to the rise of comics book during and after World War II, approximately 1938 to 1952. This was a ‘golden age’ both because of the extraordinary popularity of comic books at this time, and because it was a period of extreme innovation: “this is when the language of comic books was formed, when they started to differentiate themselves—in style and content—from newspapers strips” (Kaplan 44). Arie Kaplan notes that as well as developing stylistically, comics expanded generically during this period, as comic book creators took on the genres of “humour, adventure, romance, western, science fiction, horror, fantasy, and, of course, superhero” (44). For most of the 1930s, comic books were reprints of newspaper strips. But comic book publishers were

looking for original content, and in 1938, *Action Comics* appeared, introducing a character named Superman.

From there, comic books, especially the superhero genre, exploded in popularity, and their success was tied to both the war effort and patriotism. As populations were expected to fight, work, and pay for their state's war effort, patriotic superheroes appeared as rallying symbols. "The national superhero," writes John Bell, "overtly symbolized America's identity and pride" (59). There were many national superheroes, but perhaps the most successful was Captain America. Named for his nation and clad in the colours and symbols of the American flag, Captain America fiercely fought Nazis and other fascists on behalf of ordinary Americans. Captain America sold "one million copies a month" during the war (Strömberg 155). He was the perfect soldier and the ideal American.

And yet, Captain America entered the war before his nation did. *Captain America Comics* #1 was dated March 1941, and many scholars note that it appeared six months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. But Richard J. Stevens notes that, given that periodicals were "often dated forward to allow newsstands and resellers to gauge when the publication may be removed," it is more likely that Captain America punched Hitler "twelve months before America declared war on the Axis powers" (21). Though Stevens argues that "superhero narratives generally maintain the status quo, and Captain America is no exception," Captain America's anti-fascist aggression began many months before the United States had entered the war (11). By punching his way into the comic book market, Captain America demonstrated comic books' anti-fascist potential.

In fact, Captain America was the result of Jewish artists and writers leveraging

patriotism against fascism, at a time of heightened anti-Semitism in the United States and abroad. The majority of cultural workers in the comic book industry were Jewish men, such that “a list of major accomplishments of Jewish comics professionals during the comics’ Golden Age reads like a list of the major accomplishments of the comics *industry* during this period” (Kaplan 27). Kaplan writes that this representation was a result of the industry’s lack of discrimination: the comic book industry was one of the few creative industries open to Jewish workers (28). While advertising, magazines, and newspapers had unwritten policies against hiring Jewish employees, the comic-book business did not discriminate” (Kaplan 29).⁵⁴ And so, going into the 1940s, a group of Jewish men had incredible cultural capital, and used it to create superhuman figures who not only acknowledged fascism but actively mobilized against it. And so, when Captain America punched Hitler in 1941, he was not only fighting on behalf of America, but on behalf of the many Jewish people who were already living in fear of Hitler’s power and of the broader fascist movement.

To date, my history of the Golden Age of Comics is rooted in American industry and culture, while this is purportedly a chapter about a Canadian comic book artist. I have focused on the United States thus far for several reasons. Firstly, Gord Hill makes overt references to American comics (Captain America, Tonto), and as such I want to read his work in the context in which he locates himself. Secondly, Hill works primarily as an Indigenous creator, and rarely limits himself and his work to Canadianness. It is worth noting that Canada had its own Golden Age of Comics, which occurred within very different socioeconomic circumstances, and which did not result in a sustained tradition

⁵⁴ It should be noted that, though the comic-book industry hired Jewish workers, the industry was deeply exploitative, and many of these creators lost rights to, and significant profits from, their creations.

of comic books. I will not embark on an explanation of Canada's Golden Age of Comics here, but John Bell offers a thorough history of the period in his book *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe*.

However different Canada's war-time comics were, it is important to note that Canada had its own Nazi-punching heroes. Canada's patriotic comic book hero, Johnny Canuck, punched Hitler in his second appearance in comics, a 1942 issue of *Dime Comics* (see fig. 25). (Bachle et al.). Though Hill could certainly be alluding to Johnny Canuck's punch in his cover of *The Antifa Comic Book*, the choreography of his image more clearly mimics *Captain America Comics #1*. But Johnny Canuck is an obscure, short-lived hero, in contrast to Captain America's decades-long fame, and Johnny Canuck's punch is tucked inside the issue, while Captain America's is colourfully visible on the 1941 comic book cover. As such, Captain America is a much more likely and significant reference. Hill's paratext clearly engages with the Captain America cover and the popular, historical anti-fascism this fictional character represented. But what does this allusion serve?

This allusion is analyzed and interpreted in *The Antifa Comic Book's* other paratextual elements, mainly Mark Bray's introduction. Bray writes,

Comic books were made for Nazi punching. The industry that Superman built in the 1930s became intimately interwoven into American war propaganda during World War II. As Wonder Woman and Batman supported the war effort, they were joined by the wildly popular Captain America, who punched Hitler amid a hail of bullets on his first cover. Beyond this history, however, comics *feel* like they were made for Nazi punching, as their pages pulse with larger-than-life

heroes combating the dastardliest of villains. (7)

In this passage, Bray situates *The Antifa Comic Book* as part of a long history of anti-fascist comic books, suggesting that the form is well-suited to the subject matter. Comic books developed and thrived in a rare moment when mass culture and anti-fascism overlapped. Furthermore, comic books, especially superhero comic books, often work through a black vs white, good vs evil dichotomy that is well-suited to stories of people resisting fascism, particularly in a wartime setting when fascism is a clear and definable enemy of the nation.



Fig. 25: Johnny Canuck punches Hitler in *Dime Comics*

But regardless of comics' early interest in anti-fascism, the Golden Age of Comics coincided with wartime. After the end of World War II, Captain America was no longer punching Nazis. Richard Stevens notes that superheroes are often adapted to fit their

historical circumstance: “Because heroes act as agents of the status quo, they tend to redefine themselves continually in terms of the society around them...even as the status quo changes” (5). When the American public shifted from fearing Nazis to fearing Communists, Captain America shifted with them. For mass culture at least, the need to fight fascism was over, and Nazi-punching was an activity best suited to the past. This perspective—that fascism is no longer a threat, and certainly not one worthy of violent, or even active, resistance—is what Hill’s cover image takes on directly, and his message is clear: fascism is alive in the present, in many forms, and it must be confronted, forcefully.

Fascism has simplistically been understood as a political movement that rose in the 1920s and 30s and was defeated in 1945, with the conclusion of World War II, though fascism has since taken many forms in countries and communities around the world. Though Hill pays homage to the superhero comics and their Golden Age in his cover image, he also invokes more recent forms of fascism and anti-fascism than the patriotic Captain American punching the fascist-villain Adolf Hitler. The visual reference to the 2017 protestor speaks to present day forms of fascism and anti-fascism. Bray views this project—of sketching a longer, larger history of anti-fascism—as central to Hill’s book: “By linking past and present resistance to white supremacy and fascism, *The Antifa Comic Book* smashes the implicit liberal presumption that fascism and the Holocaust were mere irregularities in the continuous upward ascent of ‘Western Civilization’” (8). Hill’s cover image is both an homage to a famous moment in comic book history, and a push to recognize a more nuanced history of fascism and acknowledge the ongoing work of anti-fascists. It grounds itself in the canonical fascist and comic book symbols (Hitler and Captain America, respectively), but calls in the wider history of fascist movements and

the wider potential of comic books.

By replacing Captain America with an anonymous protestor, Hill situates anti-fascism across time, across eras, and into the present. This collapse of eras in the cover image is due to the unique organization of the visual mode. Gunther Kress writes,

The organization of writing—still leaning on the logics of speech—is governed by the logic of time, and by the logic of sequence of its elements in time, in temporally governed arrangements. The organization of image, by contrast, is governed by the logic of space, and by the logic of simultaneity of its visual/depicted elements in spatially organized arrangements. (1-2)

By arranging his cover according to space, rather than time, juxtaposition rather than sequence, Hill is able to represent across temporal scale. And, at the centre, visually emphasized, is the protestor who recalls Spencer's contemporaneous attacker, a present-day anti-fascist. As Bray writes, the anti-fascists featured in Hill's book "are not *superheroes*" (11). Rather, Bray argues, Hill's *Antifa Comic Book* "crafts a visual hymn to the everyday heroes who put their bodies on the line" to fight fascism (12). The protestor on Hill's cover is not endowed with superpowers or enlisted in a temporally-delineated, nationally-sanctioned war; they are someone who has made anti-fascism a part of their daily life. They recognize that fascism is a part of everyday life, and that resistance is ongoing.⁵⁵ *The Antifa Comic Book* backs up this visual claim, cataloguing a slew of Antifascist struggles across continents, decades, and centuries.

⁵⁵ *The Antifa Comic Book* recalls the *Real Heroes* comic series published in the United States during World War II. The first issue, released in September 1941, introduced itself on the cover as "A new 'comic' magazine not about impossible supermen, but about real-life heroes and heroines who have made and are making history!" Each issue included short graphic biographies of individuals. Though many of the subjects were historical figures, the comic also celebrated contemporary people engaged in the fight against fascism.

As a multimodal, paratextual element, the cover speaks to how fascism operates across institutions and subcultures, paving the way for *The Antifa Comic Book*'s broader argument about the contemporaneity and prominence of fascism. In this image, Hill assembles multiple figures who are arguably participants in the perpetuation of fascist ideology, each alluded to through the visual and gestural modes of fashion, uniform, and style: Hitler, a skinhead, and two riot cops.⁵⁶ Fascism, the image suggests, does not look like one thing; it takes many forms, and operates on many levels, from the legitimized authority of the police to the self-organized movements of skinheads and other white supremacist groups (gestured to in the patch safety pinned to Hitler's jacket). The linguistic mode operates in just a few half-legible words: a bundle of papers is shuffled in the struggle; the top sheet reads "alt-right," and the sheet below offers just a glimpse of a W and a P, hinting at the words "white power." These papers remind readers of the many words and names used to describe fascist ideology, many of them deliberately crafted to dismiss critiques from anti-fascists. Hitler is not holding a recognizable weapon; instead, he is holding papers, literature that supports his ideology. By including these papers, Hill acknowledges that literature, too, is a site of violence, a tool for fascist ideology. I look more closely at the work of literature in these comic books below. But first, I turn to a visual mode of expression that has a long a history of influence and power: the cartographic mode.

Mapping as a Visual Mode

Though long-running debate over comics' literary merit or low brow status

⁵⁶ The riot cops are wearing olive green uniforms that resemble the anti-riot gear worn by Sûreté du Québec, Quebec's provincial police (Nakonechny). I will expand more on this below, when I discuss the Oka Crisis.

indicates a widespread doubt of the legitimacy of the visual mode, particularly against the unquestioned authority of the written word, one visual mode has long been trusted: the map. In my previous chapter, I wrote at length about the colonial history of the map, and the ways that maps can exert power *because* readers might fail to recognize their limits and manipulations or take for granted their accuracy and authority. Gord Hill uses many maps in his comic books, with twenty maps included in *500 Years* alone. A close reading of his maps reveals that they are not objective or authoritative in their communication of knowledge. Rather, they are one visual mode through which meaning is made and are subject to critical readings and rewritings.

In *500 Years*, maps often appear early in a chapter, geographically situating this particular episode of invasion or resistance. Hill labels place names and battle sites, drawing attention to locations that are mentioned in the subsequent panels. Just like the dates that pepper these pages, the maps serve to orient readers, allowing them to situate this event or group in relation to the recognizable geography of the Americas and/or in relation to contemporary borders and place names. It is typical to use maps in comics in order to orient readers. Comics journalists like Joe Sacco use maps “to inform the reader” of the setting of the article (Holland 88). But maps are more than just information; they act as evidence and as narrative, though these meanings rely on the active and critical eye of the reader.

Hans-Martin Rall and Wibke Weber describe maps as a form of “documentary evidence” that shore up the authority of comics journalists (389). Comics journalism, they argue, “uses a combination of visual and verbal signs—images and texts—in order to cover fact-based news” (379). In order to accept comics journalism as communicating

fact, readers require evidence, and maps, argue Rall and Weber, function as evidence alongside other journalistic elements such as infographics, quotations, and photographs. The ubiquity and accessibility of maps, particularly in the digital age, seems to have little effect on reader trust in them as evidence of research and factuality. Hill appears to hand-draw some of his maps and borrow others from unknown sources. But regardless of their method of creation, they serve as proof that the events described *did occur*, and occurred in the geographic space of South America, of the southwestern United States, of Vancouver Island, etc. The presence of the maps also attests to Hill's research: he has taken the time to learn *where* these events happened and to situate these events for the sake of his readers. Ultimately, the maps attest to a process of research and interpretation that Hill has completed, and this shores up the claims Hill makes and the stories he tells.

But the maps are not just evidence serving Hill's storytelling: they are a part of his storytelling. Writing again about Sacco's comics journalism, Edward Holland argues that maps are "a narrative technique...Sacco's use of maps simultaneously reproduces their traditional function and form while also allowing for a more critical interpretation of the experience and consequences of conflict" (88). That is, Sacco's maps serve to orient readers and situate events, but they are also a site of meaning making for Sacco and for the reader, as maps offer a visual space for acknowledging how conflict changes our world. Like Hill, Sacco writes and draws predominantly about warfare. War changes maps, shifting borders, altering place names, erasing communities in favour of new settlements or in recognition of new powers. In this sense, a map tells a particular story about a particular space, shaped by the time at which it is created, the time it describes, and the allegiance of the person who draws it. Maps are not necessarily an objective

authority, offering an indisputable representation of a place, but they do *reflect* authority, indicating which places are valued, which language is used, what information is considered necessary to orient yourself to the space being mapped and the people who dwell in it. A single map can tell a story about power; many maps together tell stories of invasion, conquering, and resistance.

Throughout *500 Years*, Hill uses maps to illustrate the arrival of Europeans on Indigenous territory and their gradual encroachment. An early map uses arrows to indicate which regions of the Americas were invaded by which European power (33) (see fig. 26). Another map of most of the Americas indicates European presence with stripes, a narrow border of occupation outlining the large, dark continents. The caption explains that, from 1492-1700, “Europeans were *limited* to mostly coastal regions...by *factors* such as *terrain*, *weather* (in the north), disease (in the south) and *resistance*” (37, emphasis original).⁵⁷ Two maps use a dotted line to mark a vertical boundary through North America, the “*western boundary* for all settlers” which was the result of the 1763 Royal Proclamation, declaring where Europeans could and could not trade and settle (33, 45, emphasis original). Later maps indicate the violation of this boundary, marking battle sites and Forts across the Midwest and southwest of North America. Together, the maps tell a story of steady encroachment, with Anglo names renaming the land to fit a new culture, and boundaries and borders dividing the land to deliberately serve the ends of colonization, settlement, and trade.

⁵⁷ Hill, like many other comics artists, bolds many words in his text. I have chosen to reproduce this bolding through italics, which I believe reflect Hill’s emphasis but are easier to read.

Fig. 26: Map of colonial invasion using unexplained shading (Hill *500 Years* 33)

Hill's maps do not only illustrate European invasion. They also mark important sites of Indigenous resistance, and in his design of these maps, he pushes back at the spatial dominance of European/settlers over time. A map of Mapuche territory in southern Chile appears alongside a Mapuche symbol (40) (see fig. 27). The symbol and map each occupy half the panel, given equal space in Hill's narrative. The symbol attests to the Mapuche people's self-representation, even when their small territory is situated within European place names and boundaries (Chile, Santiago, Peru). A similar map depicts the northwest coastline of North America (52) (see fig. 28). Labels indicate the territory of different Indigenous groups, including the Salish, Haisla, Tlingit, etc. Three

European settlements are labelled in markedly smaller handwriting (Fort Rupert, Fort Victoria, and Seattle), as if these labels are less important. In the empty spaces of the map, Hill has included drawings: an animal head, a lightning bolt, and a knife with a carved handle. These seem to be symbols and artefacts of the Indigenous peoples of the territory and speak to the region's art style and values. Once again, Indigenous cultural symbols occupy valuable page space, speaking to Indigenous culture and presence in this particular geographic region.

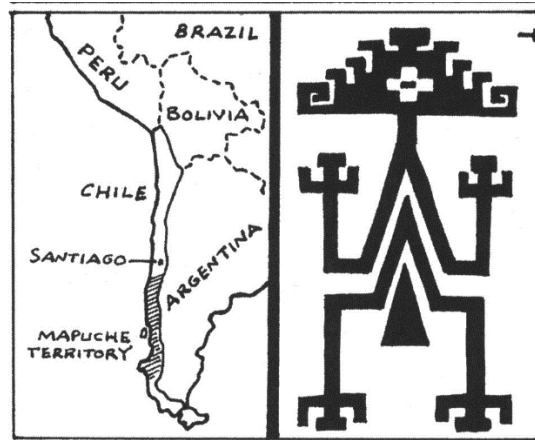


Fig. 27: Map in *500 Years* featuring Mapuche symbol (Hill 40)



Fig. 28: Map in *500 Years* highlighting Haida culture (Hill 52)

Yet, looking closely at Hill's maps, I notice that they are inconsistent in their production. Many appear hand-drawn, with names written in the same handwritten font of the comic's captions. But others have typewritten names and labels in a variety of fonts. It seems that Hill has taken maps from various sources and cropped or annotated them for use in his comic. A map of the Great Lakes region includes a scale, but it is the only map to include one (41). The map of the world that indicates which European powers invaded which regions, features the countries of the world coloured in various shades of gray (31) (see fig. 26). There is no legend to explain these colours and what they might communicate about these countries. Hill has likely repurposed the map without fully stripping away its previous information.

I do not point out these inconsistencies simply to criticize Hill for a lack of attention to detail or a lack of effort. Rather, I think these inconsistencies, intentionally or not, contribute to the development of multimodal literacy. By noting the differences across these maps—the information they offer, the format or design of that information, the context that is provided—readers may reflect more consciously on how maps operate. In regard to Sacco's comic book maps, Edward Holland argues that maps are “necessarily selective in their representation” (88). By recognizing the inconsistencies between different representations of a region, readers have the opportunity to think about the selective nature of every map and reflect on the logic—or ideology—of selection. Gord Hill's selective representations reflect his project of chronicling invasion and resistance. Which logics or ideologies shape other maps?

Hill does not use as many maps in his more recent comics, but I would like to turn to two maps in *The Antifa Comic Book* that are working in very different ways than the

maps in *500 Years*. There are only three maps in *The Antifa Comic Book*, and two are integrated into the comics' scenes; that is, the maps are objects that the comic's characters interact with, rather than standalone panels. In one panel, Hitler and a Nazi associate (his allegiance clearly marked by a swastika arm band) stand in front of a colourful map of eastern Europe (49). The Nazi is pointing towards Poland and speaking to Hitler. In *500 Years*, the maps usually situate the chapter as a whole, and are not deeply related to the nearest captions. But this image and its included map communicate in tandem with the captions:

Another [Nazi belief] was the need for *Lebensraum* ("living space"), which required the *invasion* of other countries in order to gain *resources* and *territory*.

The Nazis targeted *East Europe* as lands that could be *colonized* by Germanic peoples. The *Slavic* peoples of this region were considered inferior "*subhumans*" and were to be *exterminated*. (49, emphasis original)

This caption contextualizes the Nazi's gesture and speech. He and Hitler are discussing how Poland can be usurped and occupied for the Aryan race, and they are likely planning the invasion that will secure their *Lebensraum*. In this scene, maps are used to plan and execute violence and warfare. The map is an accessory, perhaps even a weapon, serving racist and colonial intent.

Similarly, the next map is a table map of Spain (64). A group of soldiers stand around the map, pointing to different regions. Their uniforms mark their allegiance: in the centre stands a Nazi soldier in a grey uniform featuring the Nazi symbols of the iron cross and the imperial eagle. Around him stand Spanish soldiers who are clearly fascists as they

speak and plan with a Nazi.⁵⁸ Once again, the captions aid readers in interpreting this image and its map: “The nationalist coup *failed*,” the caption explains, “with over *half* the country remaining in *Republican* hands” (64, emphasis original). This brings context to the two different colours appearing on the map, likely indicating Republican and fascist-controlled areas. The presence of the Nazi is also explained further through the captions: “*Internationally*, the war was seen as a *fight* between *democratic* forces and *fascism*. Nazi Germany and fascist Italy rallied in *support* of the Nationalists” (64, emphasis original). The Nazi soldier visually represents this international support for the Nationalist side, and his presence at the map suggests that Nazis aided in the strategizing and direction of the Nationalist war effort.

Both of these maps are placed in the action of the comic book, working within the images rather than alongside them. That is, they are content operating within the mode of the visual, but they are not operating as a mode unto themselves. Still, they speak to the value of maps in wielding power and committing violence. It is worth noting that both these maps are being used by fascists rather than by resistance fighters. Though it is only two instances, this representation of maps as a tool of fascism speaks to two important things. Firstly, fascist movements strategize and plan violence. Fascist movements do not just stumble into power, but actively invade spaces and occupy territory, with horrific consequences for the people who live in these areas. Secondly, maps have long been a tool of oppression and violence. Whereas Hill includes many maps in *500 Years* that are resistant in their naming and design, the maps in *The Antifa Comic Book* serve fascism rather than resisting it. Above, I asked which ideologies shape maps and the knowledge

⁵⁸ The soldiers are likely from the Spanish foreign legion, as they were green gorillos (a kind of hat) with yellow piping and tassels.

they impart. Having examined maps in the hands of Hill's fascist soldiers, I wonder how maps function as a tool of violence, and if they can or should be re-appropriated for resistant ends.

Symbols

Though *500 Years* uses many maps, *The Antifa Comic Book* incorporates another visual mode: political and social symbols. Throughout the comic book, characters carry flags and banners that signal their affiliations and political position. Hill's repeated inclusion of these symbols, and their material form in graffiti, flags, banners, signs, and patches, enables readers to develop a particular form of visual literacy. By the end of the comic book, readers are familiar with fascist and anti-fascist symbology and prepared to recognize these symbols and their variations in the material world outside the comic book.

The chapter "What is Antifa?" begins with an inset panel of the logo of Antifaschistische Aktion, the German political group at the root of anti-fascist action "originally set up by the *German Communist Party* in 1932 to oppose the *Nazis*" (17, emphasis original). In the larger panel, a group of black-clad protestors carry a banner and a flag, both featuring the double-flag symbol of Antifaschistische Aktion, though designed and coloured differently. Hill explains, "In the *1980s*, the *Antifaschistische Aktion* was revived by *autonomists* and *anarchists* in *West Germany* to counter a *growing* far right, with no connection to the original communist party organization. Today, *many* groups use variations of the *original Antifa* logo designed by Max Keilson & Max Gebhard" (17, emphasis original). Hill's caption points to the nuance in the Antifa logo:

it has changed since its initial use, likely in order to register a new direction for the movement (away from the Communist party). The logo is used widely and shifts in colour and arrangement can serve different groups with varied politics or directions, though still working under the broader Antifa banner.

Throughout the rest of the comic book, the Antifa logo appears alongside other logos, flags, and names, signaling different coalitions within the anti-fascist movement. One of the hallmarks of the comics' form is juxtaposition: the deliberate arrangement of words and images in relation to each other. Readers build meaning through interpreting this arrangement and interpreting narrative relationships between the juxtaposed elements. In *The Antifa Comic Book*, readers build meaning between symbols, inferring their relationships and affiliations even when Hill does not explicitly explain them. In the chapter "What is Antifa," the three Antifa logos appear above three more symbols: an inverted red triangle against a yellow background, a swastika on a man's red shirt, and an emblem of a white circle with a red dot in its centre, surrounded by black lines (see fig. 29). The red triangle's juxtaposition with the words "Anti fascist Action" registers it as another symbol of the anti-fascist movement. The swastika is likely recognizable to most readers, as basic information about the Nazi party is part of general knowledge. But the man wearing the Swastika stands alongside—in visible relationship to and affiliation with—the person sporting the white circle emblem, and this signals that the white circle emblem is affiliated with fascism. In just one page, Hill has used the juxtapositional nature of the comic to introduce four symbols, such that readers can now recognize them throughout the comic and know the affiliations of the people who bear these symbols.



Fig. 29: Antifa protestor confronts white supremacist group (Hill *The Antifa Comic Book 17*)

But the visual mode of affiliation extends beyond logos, into fashion and style, and this too is communicated through juxtaposition. While the crowd of protestors under the inverted red triangle are varied in appearance and clothing, the protestors carrying the Antifa flag are uniformly clad in head-to-toe black, including gloves, helmets, and masks that only reveal their eyes. Though Hill's captions do not acknowledge or explain this uniform, the black-clad protestors under and behind the Antifa logo suggest that this is an Antifa uniform, at least for segments of the anti-fascist movement. In the page's final panel, one of the black clad protestors punches an opponent in the face. The opponent wears the white circle emblem, but he also wears the white hood and cloak of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The KKK member is flanked by two others: one wearing the Swastika

on his chest and sporting a shaved head. Each visual element of this panel speaks to a network of affiliations and oppositions: black-clad folks are part of Antifa, and they fight KKK members, who have some kind of alliance with Nazis and Skinheads. Hill explains this affiliation and opposition in his text, writing that, “Antifa *mobilizes* against not only *fascist* and *neo-Nazi* groups but also far right movements that share many of the same *goals* as fascists (such as *Ku Klux Klan*, for example)” (17, emphasis original). But his caption only accomplishes a fraction of the work. The text tells who these groups are and whether they fight each other or work together, but the visual language of symbols, emblems, and fashion make these groups recognizable.

By emphasizing the meaning behind various emblems, logos, and fashions, *The Antifa Comic Book* enables readers to become critical readers of these visual indicators. Sandra Heinen argues that comics are well-suited to “reader activation,” and often “present themselves not as autonomous works of art but as engaged, political interventions” (111). She notes that this reader activation might function differently across fictional and non-fictional narratives: “texts regarded as fictional are more likely to take the reader out of their immediate surroundings into a state of ‘transportation’ or ‘immersion’” (112-113). *The Antifa Comic Book* is history rather than narrative, and it jumps swiftly from historical period to historical period to cover as much ground as possible rather than building a compelling narrative that seizes the reader’s attention. But the heavy use of visual symbol and fashion activates the reader in a different way: “non-fictional narratives trigger a referential mode of reading, encouraging the reader to draw connections between the textual and actual worlds” (Heinen 17). A reader who already recognizes the white hood of the KKK and the Nazi symbol of the Swastika can interpret

unfamiliar visuals through familiar ones: the white circle that is likely associated with the KKK; the black mask worn by anti-fascists willing to engage in violence (see fig. 29). Furthermore, curious readers may switch into this “referential mode” as Heinen calls it, following up on the histories of the symbols Hill does not explain (112).⁵⁹

Hill’s use of symbols and fashion in the juxtapositional form of the comic builds visual literacy in several ways. Firstly, Hill introduces and explains major symbols of the fascist and anti-fascist movements, making them recognizable to readers. Secondly, symbols and fashions that are not explicitly explained are shown in visual relationships to recognizable symbols, such that readers can infer to which side of the anti/fascist conflict they are affiliated, and perhaps some of the nuance within that affiliation. Thirdly, Hill’s images provide enough basic information that readers are able to search for more. That is, readers have the tools to reference sources outside the comic book if they want to learn more about a particular symbol. Finally, readers leave the comic book with a new visual lexicon and are better able to read and recognize anti/fascist groups in the real world, and recognize affiliation between individuals and groups, even when it is not explicitly declared.

Visual Metaphors

Though I see Hill as at the forefront of multimodal literacy in Canadian comics, other Indigenous artists are further developing multimodality in comics to critique settler colonialism. In *The Outside Circle*, illustrator Kelly Mellings also includes a visual

⁵⁹ With the context Hill’s images provide, I turned to the internet to learn that the red inverted triangle was worn in Nazi camps by political prisoners, including those who identified with various left-wing ideologies and parties (Narotzky and Moreno 291).

symbol: a stylized TW, the logo of the fictional street gang The Tribal Warriors. Whereas Hill's incorporation of various symbols into his comics serves to prepare readers to recognize these symbols and their allegiances out in the world, Mellings and LaBoucane-Benson juxtaposes The Tribal Warriors' symbol with information on the settler-colonial operations of the Canadian state, thus drawing a powerful comparison between the acute violence of gang life with the slow violence of settler-colonialism. Protagonist Pete is a member of the gang, but his life is disrupted when he has a deadly fight with his mother's violent boyfriend. Pete ends up in prison for manslaughter, and his younger brother Joey is taken by child welfare services and put in a group home. The graphic novel follows Pete's journey through the prison system, until he ends up in the Stan Daniel Healing Centre, a real institution in Edmonton. There, he participates in the Warrior Program, a culturally-specific program that teaches him about colonization, inter-generational trauma, and recovery. The gang follows Pete and Joey, trying to draw them back into a more dangerous and violent life, even as they work hard to build up their lives.

The Tribal Warriors symbol appears in a kind of ceremony. Pete's fellow gang members are pleased with his work collecting from low-level drug dealers, and they celebrate his birthday and his good work with an initiation ritual. First, they hand over a gun, the very gun Pete will use to kill his mother's boyfriend. Then, they tattoo the TW onto his bicep, while professing their loyalty to him: "We got your back from now on. / Just like family." They promise protection even as they make him bleed and offer him the weapon that will be his undoing.

The tattoo marks Pete as the member of the fictional gang, but Mellings and LaBoucane-Benson use the symbol as a bridge from the fictional narrative of the graphic

novel to the non-fictional historical context that shapes Pete's life. A splash page shows Pete's upper arm as the fresh Tribal Warriors tattoo bleeds down his bicep (see fig. 30). The blood trails form red banners around his arm, and these banners feature the names of major moments in the colonization of Canada: "1867 Indian Act;" "Residential Schools;" "60s Scoop." There are several ways to read this splash page. Firstly, the blood trails look like a root system, with the TW symbol sprouting from the top, as if the gang itself has grown from these acts of colonization. Secondly, these banners are Pete's blood, and it is as if his bloodline—his family—has been shaped by these acts of colonization. Though he was not alive to experience any of these policies, colonization is in him, a part of his inheritance. Finally, these colonial policies—many of them acts of law, enacted through words and paperwork—are written in blood, an indication of their violence and the harm they did to Pete's community. Once again, this violence is *slow*, disguised, perhaps, by the banality of paperwork and policy. The trail of blood along Pete's arm serves as an interruption to this slow violence, emphasizing that it *is* indeed violence. The blood makes the violence of these policies more "visceral, eye-catching," that sense of spectacle that Nixon argues is missing from slow violence (3). In this image, the meaning is shaped by juxtaposition: the tattooed symbol bleeds into and grows out of these bloody colonial policies. The reader is invited to read the colonial system and the street gang alongside each other, to understand that they inform each other and that they both harm Pete.

This ceremony is not the first time the Tribal Warriors symbol appears. Before this initiation ceremony, Pete spends the evening with his younger brother Joey. Joey gives him a hand drawn birthday card: the words "Happy Birthday" frame a drawing of Pete with his arm around Joey, both brothers smiling (see fig. 31). Behind Joey's head,

the stylized TW of the Tribal Warriors looms large. There is an ominous quality to the

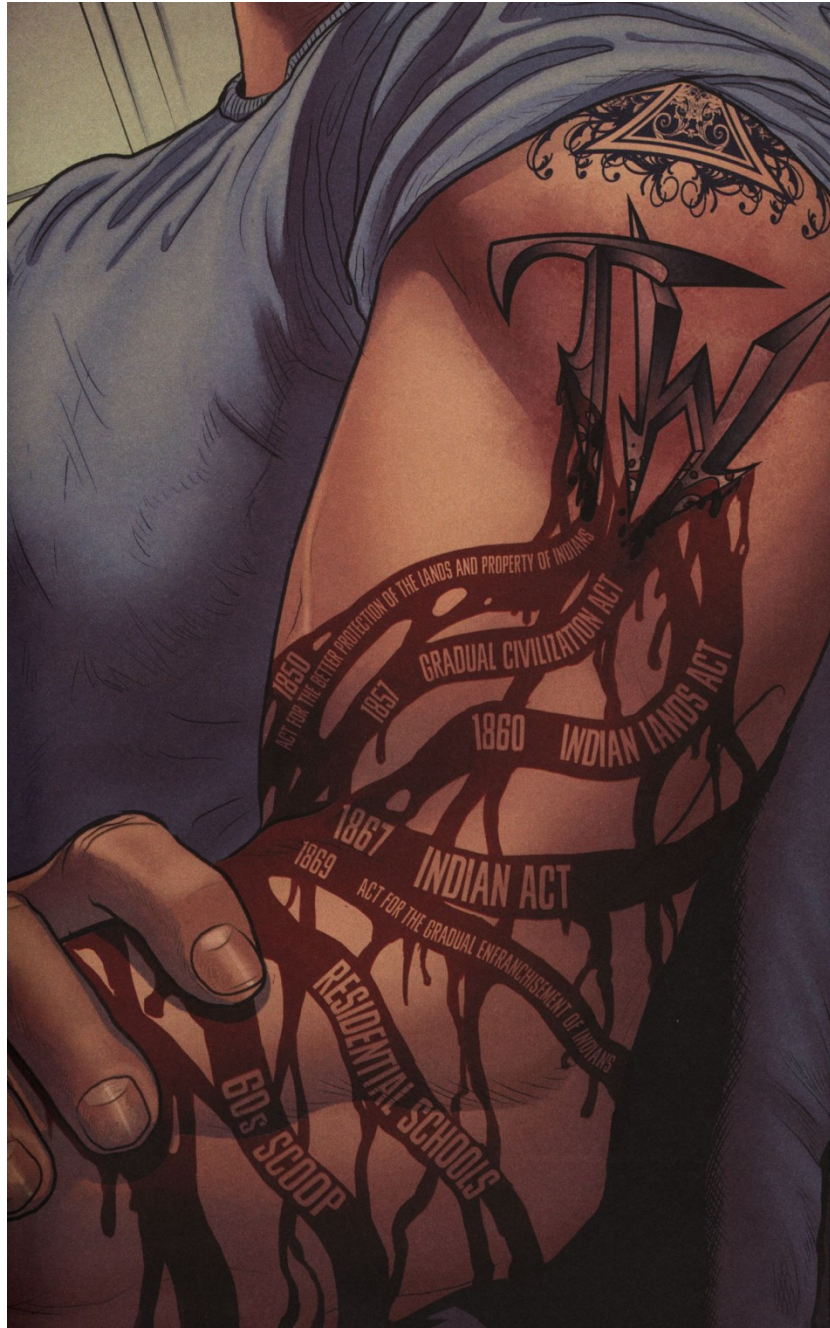


Fig. 30: Tattooed arm in *The Outside Circle*

symbol, as it appears like a spectre over the brothers' relationship. The card tells us a lot about Joey and Pete's relationship. Joey clearly looks up to his older brother; the drawing has Pete looking at the viewer, but Joey gazing up at Pete. Joey is also familiar enough

with the Tribal Warriors symbol to recreate it accurately, suggesting that Pete has not kept his gang life separate from his home life. Joey's decision to include the symbol on the card suggests a few things: that the gang is an intrinsic part of Pete's identity and of how Joey understands Pete; that Joey imagines himself, too, affiliated with this symbol, perhaps thinking that he will follow Pete's footsteps. Ultimately, the card shows that the gang is a huge part of both brothers' lives. And it is not surprising: the gang offers money and camaraderie, while Pete and Joey's home is sparse and unwelcoming. The brothers sleep on the floor in a bare apartment. No parent emerges to celebrate Pete's birthday or tuck Joey into bed. The brothers seem to have nothing but each other, and the gang offers a wider support system, even if it comes with a bloody tattoo and a gun.



Fig. 31: Gang sign on birthday card in *The Outside Circle*

But the Tribal Warriors symbol's adjacency to the mechanizations of colonization—referenced through the bloody banners running down Pete's arm—sets up a parallel between the inherently violent system of the gang and the inherently violent

systems of the government. Using the meaning-making relationship of juxtaposition, LaBoucane-Benson and Mellings set up other significant parallels in the graphic novel, particularly a parallel between the punitive prison system and the arguably well-intentioned child welfare system. Two pages are divided into two rows of long, vertical panels (see figs. 32 and 33). The top four panels follow Joey into a group home, while the bottom four panels follow Pete into a prison. The action in the top row mirrors the action in the bottom row, starting with an establishing shot of the ominous-looking buildings that now house the brothers. Pete and Joey share similar postures and facial expressions, and endure similar experiences, including hearing authority figures state that they will be here for a while and feeling socially isolated from the other inmates and residents. In the final panels, Joey and Pete lie in their beds, identical expressions of hopelessness on their faces.

These mirrored panels argue for a parallel between the experience of serving a prison sentence and the experience of being taken by child welfare services and held in a group home. Like Pete, Joey is experiencing a form of incarceration: limited in his mobility, removed from his community, subject to rules and dangerous social dynamics. The carceral tone of Joey's experience is emphasized in the panel after the mirroring ends: Joey stands behind a tall fence, gazing outward, his fingers wrapped around the wire links (see fig. 34). He is trapped in the group home and in the child welfare system. The visuals argue that Joey, like many other Indigenous people, is experiencing a form of incarceration and control implemented by the Canadian government.



Fig. 32: Joey and enter institutions in *The Outside Circle*



Fig. 33: Joey and Pete experience parallels struggles in *The Outside Circle*



Fig. 34: Joey leans on fence in *The Outside Circle*

Mellings and LaBoucane-Benson use the visual mode, including the paralleling accomplished through juxtaposition, to communicate two individuals' fictional experiences of colonial incarceration. But they use the mode of the language to contextualize these experiences within a broader, non-fictional history. Immediately before the mirrored pages, a splash page shows Joey and Pete's mother, Bernice, signing over guardianship of Joey to the government of Alberta (see fig. 35). The splash page focuses on the document itself, with Bernice's face partially visible and her hands holding the pen and the paper. The document is centred, the focus of the page. It begins typically: "Permanent Guardianship Order" is the title of the document, followed by a short opening statement: "I, Bernice Carver understand that I release all parental authority over my child Joey Carver to the Government of Alberta. This is a pattern of history that began in 1840 and continues today." The last sentence of this statement is jarring, signaling a switch out of the fictional, personal voice and into a narrative that describes the history of child apprehension. The document goes on to cite the Bagot Commission that led the Residential school system, the conditions of these schools, the 60s Scoop, and ends in the present day: "The Aboriginal child welfare case load

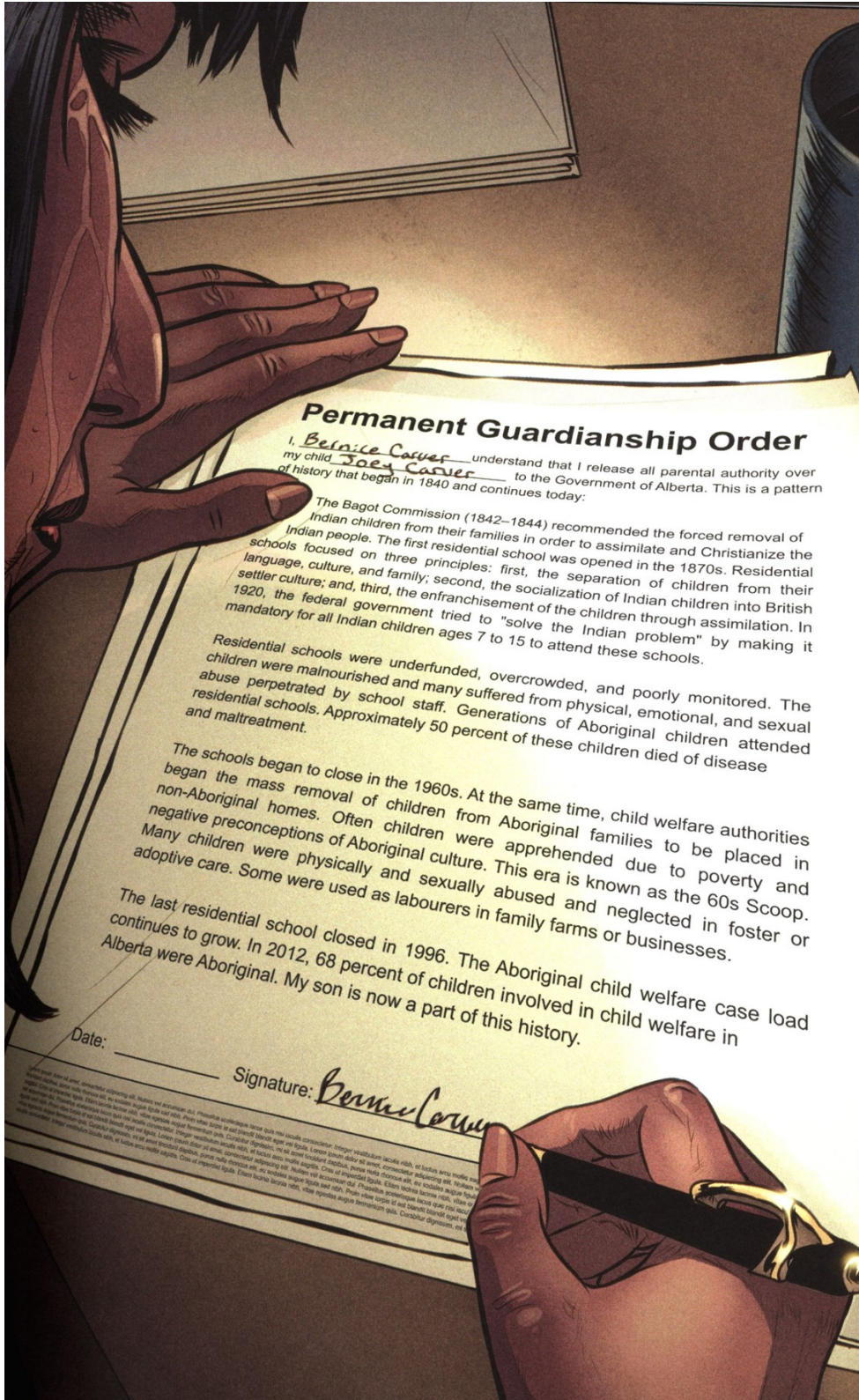


Fig. 35: Contract describes Indigenous presence in child welfare services

continues to grow. In 2012, 68 percent of children involved in child welfare in Alberta were Aboriginal. My son is now a part of this history.” The document concludes with Bernice’s signature. Beside it, the date field stays empty, suggesting a reluctance on the writers’ parts to situate Bernice and Joey’s experience in a particular time period. Rather, Joey’s apprehension floats in a vague present, pushing the reader to recognize that their time may very well be a present in which Indigenous children continue to be taken away and subjected to carceral systems.

Once again, meaning is made through juxtaposition, this time between the expressive mode of the visual images and the authoritative mode of textual paperwork. Working across these two modes, Mellings and LaBoucane-Benson build meaningful relationships between social systems ostensibly designed to protect children and punitive systems of incarceration, and between modern child welfare services and colonial systems designed to assimilate and destroy Indigenous cultures through violence against children. These relationships function across modes but also across the scales of time—the 1840s Bagot Commission and the vaguely modern present-day of the graphic novel—and space—the small spaces of Joey’s bed and Pete’s cell, and the large space of Canada. *The Outside Circle* derives and also conveys its meaning through building connections across these scales and as such recognizing the personal and systemic experiences of colonization within the history and land of Canada.

The visual parallelism that makes these connections possible is typical of postcolonial comics; Mellings and LaBoucane-Benson are likely influenced by the work of major Indigenous comics writer David Alexander Robertson. In the comic series *7 Generations: A Plains Cree Saga*, Robertson and artist-collaborator Scott B. Henderson

set up a visual parallel between modern protagonist Edwin and his ancestor, Stone. Across four pages, Edwin is hospitalized after a suicide attempt and Stone loses his brother in a battle (see fig. 36). Like in *The Outside Circle*, their actions, postures, and facial expressions mirror each other. The parallelism is further emphasized through the identical layouts of each page. In *7 Generations*, the parallels between Edwin and Stone's experiences speak to their relationship: Edwin is living with the consequences of hundreds of years of colonization—the slow violence of settler colonialism, the slow violence through which Canada was built—and Edwin must strive for Stone's strength and sense of community if he is to survive the intergenerational trauma he is experiencing. Though also a fictional story, *7 Generations* uses visual juxtaposition and mirroring to make meaning across the large temporal scale of Indigenous community and colonization. *The Outside Circle* builds on the visual techniques modelled in this influential comic but bring in the non-fictional modes of textual documentation to implicate the legal and structural history of colonization. Like Hill's cover for *The Antifa Comic Book*, both *The Outside Circle* and *7 Generations* use the juxtapositional space of comics to collapse temporal and spatial scales and trace how settler colonialism operates over time and space. The parallels between Edwin and Stone, between Joey and Pete, between Captain America punching Hitler and the antifa protestor punching Richard Spencer: these are valuable uses of juxtaposition to translate oppression across spatiotemporal scales. Like Harvey's "insurgent architect," Hill, Robertson and Henderson, and Laboucane-Benson and Mellings are thinking "strategically and tactically" about how to understand and effectively resist fascism and settler-colonialism.



Fig. 36: Parallel form in *7 Generations* (Henderson and Robertson 18-19)

Print Culture As Visual/Linguistic Mode

Whereas *The Outside Circle* incorporates the single document of the Permanent Guardianship Order to great effect, Hill's characters in *The Antifa Comic Book* are often pictured holding leaflets, periodicals, books, and other materials of print culture. Each instance offers an example of how print culture serves movements of oppression or resistance.

In a few examples, characters clutch newspapers, as if upset by their contents. Firstly, a man clutches an issue of *World News* that announces, "Revolution in Russia... World revolution predicted by Lenin" (16). Hill's caption explains that "the

Russian revolution caused *fear* among the *ruling class*” (16, emphasis original). The man, whose clothes distinguish him as a wealthy person, is red-faced, and his tense hands speak to his anger over the news of revolution. In a similar panel, Benito Mussolini clutches a crumpled issue of a newspaper called *Avanti*, suggesting he disagrees with the paper’s contents.

Other newspapers and books are reproduced in great detail, and as such serve as visual references for the history Hill provides. In the chapter “Nazi Germany,” Hill reproduces the front page of *The New York Herald*, with headlines describing political upheaval in Germany. The articles themselves are illegible, but the newspaper’s image acts as a reliable source for Hill’s description of the political events. Similarly, Hill reproduces the covers of two controversial books, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and *The Turner Diaries*, influential books for anti-Semites and white supremacists, respectively. By reproducing the covers, Hill emphasizes the physical existence of these books, their material reality in a society that routinely underplays anti-Semitic and white supremacist movements.⁶⁰

In several instances, Hill shows print materials being distributed, either by fascists or anti-fascists. In these situations, Hill uses the context of the distribution to communicate whether the print material is fascist literature that perpetuates violence or anti-fascist literature that brings about coalitions and social change. In two examples, skinheads attempt to hand out newspapers, *National Front News* and *The Flag*, but are met with hostility: a hooded figure punches a skinhead who holds an issue of *National*

⁶⁰ Visual citation is a common way that cartoonists incorporate citation into comics, rather than the citation styles common to academic writing. The book covers, like the newspaper, function as evidence of Hill’s research, and offer referential paths for readers curious to learn more.

Front News (74); an identical-looking skinhead holds copies of *The Flag*, clearly hoping to distribute them, but is halted by the glares of two counter protesters (80). In contrast, anti-fascists distribute leaflets to friendly, receptive passersby (79, 121). The inclusion of these scenes—distributing anti-fascist print materials and halting the distribution of fascist print materials—speaks to the significance of print in these movements. By limiting the circulation of fascist literature, anti-fascist groups can control the spread of these violent views, and perhaps intimidate fascists into silence. But this attention paid to fascist print materials indicates the political potential of ideological literature, hence the anti-fascists’ use of print materials to circulate information and encourage action.

There is one particularly unique appearance of print culture in the comic book: the example of the anti-Nazi groups White Rose and the Edelweiss Pirates. The White Rose was a group of students who “made anti-Nazi *leaflets* and *graffiti* during 1942-43” (54, emphasis original). Hill explains that many members of these groups were “arrested, tortured, and *executed* by the *Gestapo*” (55, emphasis original). He devotes more than half a page to images of white sheets of paper, which feature quotes from the groups’ literature (55). In these quotes, the Edelweiss Pirates and the White Rose describe the atrocities being committed by the Nazis, and encourage resistance, hope, and action. Hill reproduces the simple, direct literature that incited anti-fascist dissent at the height of Nazi rule. These examples of volatile print materials appear alongside images of anti-fascists being arrested, and alongside an image of Hitler narrowly avoiding death by explosion. Hill writes, “In July 1944, high-ranking German *officers* attempted to *assassinate* Hitler with a bomb but failed” (55, emphasis original). The attempted assassination, juxtaposed with the anti-Nazi literature, posits that people at all levels of

power are susceptible to the influence of political literature.

Though newspapers, leaflets, and books are part of the linguistic mode, they blur with the visual mode when used as visual citation in Hill's comic book. Furthermore, they operate alongside other materials that blur the visual/linguistic line, including the banners and flags described above, but also the strangely ephemeral and public text of graffiti.

There are several images of graffiti in *The Antifa Comic Book*, almost exclusively graffiti done by anti-fascists. Anti-fascists are shown surreptitiously crossing out Swastikas and painting anti-fascist messages, like "Down with Hitler" and "Black + White Unite / Smash the N.F."⁶¹ (54, 78, 72). Hill explains that this is a strategy of "no platform" adopted by anti-fascist groups, "which meant *shutting down* fascist rallies, meetings, and paper sales, *eradicating* their posters and stickers from the street, etc." (78, emphasis original). Public walls also display the symbols and acronyms of anti-fascist affiliated groups, like the hammer and sickle of the communists (96).

The comic book's final example of graffiti is its most contemporary; after arguing that Donald Trump's presidential campaign "saw the emergence of an *energized & emboldened* racist right wing across [the United States]," Hill pictures a concrete wall where someone has painted the words "Make America White Again" around a Swastika (122, emphasis original). A man stands in front of the wall, wearing the notorious red "Make America Great Again" hat (122). The graffiti and the hat act as material evidence of the emerging and vocal fascist movement in the country. The hat and the graffiti make this movement visible and supports the demand for a strong anti-fascist movement to

⁶¹ National Front, a British white supremacist political party

resist them.

Multimodality and De-platforming

By introducing readers to the varied visual culture (logos, emblems, flags, fashion, acronyms) that make up the fascist and anti-fascist movements, Hill recognizes that multimodal literacy plays a vital role in countering fascism. In order to de-platform white supremacists and other fascist figures, one has to be able to recognize the nuanced ways newer groups mark their affiliation with historically recognizable fascist groups. The juxtapositional layout of the comic emphasizes these relationships and sets readers up to read these affiliations across broad temporal and geographic scales. Once fascism is recognizable, Hill argues, it can be shut down.

In fact, the comic begins and ends with visual references to the Antifa attack on Richard Spencer, and the attack's consequences for Spencer's voice and influence. The cover page, discussed above, does not include Spencer but alludes to him, by picturing a black-clad protestor visually similar to Spencer's attacker punching Hitler in the face. Hitler's hairstyle is not accurately represented: the sides of his head are shaved, so that he—like Spencer—has an undercut. Furthermore, the punch causes Hitler to lose his grip on the papers he carries, the topmost of which is titled "Alt-right." Alt-right is an abbreviation of alternative right, a term that goes back to Spencer, who founded the website *The Alternative Right* in 2010. Spencer's website became "the first thrust at defining the alt-right" (Wendling 20). Through the black-clad assailant, the hairstyle, and the papers, Hitler and Spencer are conflated, recognizing the similarities in their politics. So, while Spencer is not visibly present on the comic's cover, he is visually referenced,

and his politics and the violent reaction against them are part of the comic's primary paratext.

Spencer himself appears on last page of the comic: adjusting his tie, he says, "This isn't fun anymore..." while a black-clad arm ending in a fist and labelled "Antifa" reaches forward to punch him in the face (127) (see fig. 38). The caption provides context for Spencer's words: "Days later, after speaking to a small crowd of about a dozen people at Michigan State University, Spencer *cancelled* a planned speaking tour across the U.S. / He went on to state that '*Antifa is winning*' and that his rallies, which saw violent clashes, '*aren't fun*' anymore" (127, emphasis original). Spencer's real-life words, juxtaposed with Hill's cartoonish Antifa fist, are directly related to the ongoing resistance work of Antifa, including violence against fascists. Spencer's decision to cancel speaking engagements indicate that anti-fascists have been successful in their attempts to de-platform him. They recognized his ideology as a fascist one, and used many strategies, including violence, to stop him from spreading his views.



Fig. 37: Richard Spencer is punched in *The Antifa Comic Book* (Hill 127)

The comic is book-ended by these visuals that reference anti-fascist violence against Richard Spencer, but the final image of the comic book speaks to broader forms of resistance and violence. A circular panel shows a Swastika being mangled by the force of a pen, which lands on the Swastika with a red starburst⁶² indicating impact, force, and damage (127) (see fig. 39). Like the punches aimed at Hitler and Spencer, the image alludes to violence wrought by anti-fascists against fascists. But instead of a fist, this violence is done with a pen. Hill's weaponization of the pen speaks to his belief in the power of anti-fascist literature. The accompanying captions speak to the continued presence of fascist groups, and the need for anti-fascists "to remain *vigilant & continue to use a diversity of tactics in confronting* fascist movements while building a *broad-based anti-fascist resistance movement*" (127, emphasis original). Multimodal literacy, and its potential for recognizing ideology as it takes many new and unfamiliar forms, plays a role in maintaining anti-fascists vigilance. Hill represents the "diversity of tactics" through the pen and the punch, indicating that both literature and physical protest can be effectively used to resist fascism (127).

Visual and Activist Violence

The violence of this final page—the fist approaching Spencer's face and the pen mangling the Swastika—is just a small portion of the violence depicted in *The Antifa Comic Book* and in Hill's other comic books. Though in this final page, Hill writes that anti-fascism requires "a diversity of tactics," he favours stories of violent resistance

⁶² A starburst is the star-like shape indicating where a punch or hit lands. These are used often in action comics. Occasionally, they extend from speed or motion lines that indicate the path and movement of a hit (see Figure 24). Starbursts are often red, orange, or yellow—bright, loud colours that highlight the impact of the hit.

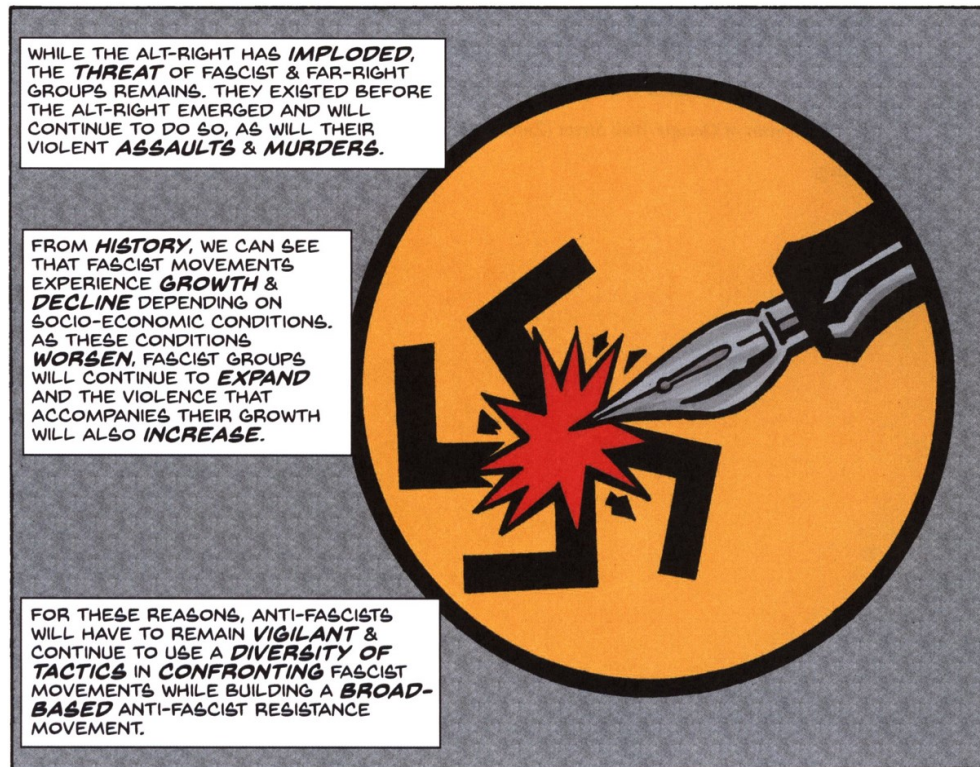


Fig. 38: Final panel of *The Antifa Comic Book* (Hill 127)

(127). In fact, violence is Hill’s main subject matter, and it is worth reflecting on what it means to write histories of protest movements that centre on violent resistance.

On the one hand, Hill’s emphasis on violence is a symptom of his subject matter. Colonialism and fascism are violent ideologies and practices, and a historical overview of them needs to acknowledge this violence. In the graphic form, violence is both linguistically described and visually depicted. This multimodal representation can make the violence feel more visceral, shocking, or real than it is in a straightforward prose representation. The full-colour nature of *The Antifa Comic Book* means that violence is further emphasized through bright colours: the yellow and orange starbursts of punches, gunshots, and explosions, and the grisly red of blood. It is difficult to imagine covering five hundred years of colonization from the Indigenous perspective without

acknowledging—in this case, in a visual form—the violence that took place. And, in fact, Hill’s detailed representation has the power of making this violence visible and present to readers who may not have learned about it before or may have seen it minimized in mainstream education and media.

But there are ways in which Hill particularly emphasizes violence, both in his techniques and in his narrative, have consequences for the ways readers are activated—or perhaps alienated—by his stirring histories. Firstly, violence and comics technique: Hill’s comic books are fast-paced and relentless. That is, he tends to fill the page with densely-drawn panels and detailed captions, leaving little empty space in his panels or his pages. His dense layouts ensure that there are few, if any, silences in his work. By silence, I mean both visually empty space (page space without images, or images with sparse or bare backgrounds) and wordless space (panels or pages without captions, dialogue, labels, or other forms of text). In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud argues that silence, visual or textual, in comics can serve the purpose of disrupting reading rhythm or pace. He calls panels without words “‘pause’ panels,” and argues that within a sequence where most panels include words, a silent panel can feel like a pause in the narrative and the action (100). Silent panels can be made to feel longer when they are larger and/or when they bleed into the margins. *The Outside Circle* features many panels that, through virtue of their silence, size, or bleed, feel slower and drawn-out. Hill does not employ these techniques; neither *500 Years* nor *The Antifa Comic Book* include splash pages, and he rarely lets an image sit without some kind of narrative caption. As such, his comic books feel fast and loud, with few opportunities to pause or linger. His consistently dense, narrated panels invoke a momentum that carries the reader from one instance of violence

to the next.

To understand the impact of Hill's pace and density, I want to turn to some analysis of comics journalism, which often negotiates the responsibility of representing real-world violence in a visual form. Georgiana Banita notes that many comics journalists use silence in their work and that these silences impact the way readers experience the comics' visual violence: "in comics reportage the interruption occasioned by a quiet panel or page is even more arresting because it stops both the deafening roar of war zones and the psychic adrenaline we bring to the vicarious experience of violence" (50). Banita's analysis suggests that silence in comics can function as a counterbalance to the heavy subject matter. By choosing not to employ visual or narrative silence, Hill provides little to no space within the comic book itself to pause and reflect on the violence the reader is witnessing. Perhaps he wishes to activate readers through what Banita calls "the psychic adrenaline" of witnessing violence, even representations of it (50).

But, as reviewers note, Hill also chooses to consistently represent violence, often to the exclusion of other forms of resistance. Reviewing *500 Years*, historian Sean Carleton argues that

Hill chooses to exclude the important political movements fighting for land and dignity through legal channels. One reason for this choice could be that the logistics of legal battles do not lend themselves as easily to the graphic artist as do the events of blockades and occupation. Nevertheless, Hill's work could have also discussed such tactics and strategies to render a more nuanced picture of ongoing indigenous [sic] resistance to colonialism. (122)

Carleton allows that the physical protests of blockades and occupation are more exciting

to draw and perhaps to read, and they are the kind of action many readers might expect to find in a comic book, as opposed to the slower, less dramatic resistance done in courts and paperwork. Lisa Meyers critiques Hill on this front:

While Hill's project focuses on a particular version of resistance, it overlooks the multiplicity of stories that depart from the warrior persona. Acts of resistance like the retention of Indigenous languages in the face of punishment and trauma, or Anishinaabe women peacefully protesting against a dump site to prevent the pollution of ground water, all have a 'fighting spirit' and take courage and sometimes kindness to achieve the desired outcome. (41)

She notes that Hill's emphasis on violence and physical resistance overlooks—and perhaps dismisses—many other forms of resistance and favours some types of protestors and activists over others.

I want to linger on Meyers' phrasing when she writes that Hill "overlooks the multiplicity of stories that depart from the warrior persona" (41). "Warrior" is a term that Hill and LaBoucane-Benson both emphasize in their comics, but with a multiplicity of meanings. Hill ends *500 Years* on a long horizontal image of someone's eyes, just visible through the slit in a black mask (87). The caption below declares "Long live the *warrior!*", and the caption's juxtaposition to the masked figure suggests that this is Hill's imagined warrior, or the warrior figure he wishes to emphasize as he draws his comic to a close (87, emphasis original). Reading across Hill's work, it is easy to relate this black-masked figure to the black-clad Antifa militants in *The Antifa Comic Book*, protestors known for using their fists to counter fascism. And this masked figure is just one of many militant warriors represented on the last page of *500 Years*. Describing Indigenous

resistance movements across the Americas, Hill shows masked protestors fighting back by wielding slingshots, throwing rocks, and burning tires. As such, he leaves the reader with a particular image of the warrior: masked and violent in their resistance, ready and willing to put their bodies on the line for their beliefs.

These masked warriors, many of them wearing camouflage and other militaristic garb, echo a common trope in comics. Michael Sheyahshe writes, “While perhaps not a specifically *negative* stereotype, it is interesting that Native American comic book characters, especially the male ones, are oftentimes cast into militaristic roles. Perhaps this idea stems from the idea of the Native as warrior” (157). This trope, common to comic books, especially those written by settlers, also emerges in media coverage of Indigenous resistance movements, as noted by Gail Guthrie Valaskakis in her essay collection *Indian Country*: “For the media, there has always been one dominant image of Indian struggle, one dominant narrative of Indian confrontation: warrior and the militant stories they tell” (39). Valaskakis sees this image as “[g]rounded in the military masculine,” and notes that it “circulates among Natives” as well as mainstream media (44). I want to highlight that both Sheyahshe and Valaskakis use gendered terms to describe the warrior; warriors, particularly the militant ones pictured in Hill’s comics, are associated with masculinity. This raises questions about Hill’s work, and his preference for the warrior figure as central to resistance: Is the warrior an inherently masculine figure? Where do Indigenous people of other genders figure into resistance movements? Is the work of the warrior always violent, militant, or physical?

Of course, *The Outside Circle* offers two radically different versions of the warrior and sheds some nuance on this figure as imagined and experienced by Indigenous

men in Canada. The term warrior is used by the street gang the Tribal Warriors, a group that sells drugs and enforces their trade with violence, including violence against their own members. The members of the Tribal Warriors are pictured wearing masks, whose exaggerated features emphasize their anger while also keeping the men's real expressions and real emotions out of sight. The masks act as a visual metaphor for the hyper-masculine practice of emotional repression: men are allowed to express anger, but not pain, sadness, vulnerability. Anger becomes a mundane emotion, masking the nuanced emotional experience of trauma and slow violence. The ubiquity of these masks reveals the quotidian nature of anger for Pete and his fellow Tribal Warriors: they reach for anger so regularly that it rules them. It becomes a barrier between themselves and others and between themselves and true emotional expression. When anger is the only permissible public emotion, violence is inevitable, as it allows men to physically express anger while also providing some kind of outlet for their repressed emotions and the associated pain.

LaBoucane-Benson and Mellings illustrate the masking work of anger when Pete struggles with his estrangement from his family. During an activity in the Healing Centre, Pete is asked to draw his family tree. The facilitator, Violet, draws a large, detailed family tree that occupies a two-page spread and is further explained through detailed narrative captions. In contrast, Pete's family tree is sparse: he is connected to his brother and to his mom, who is connected to three other circles that simply hold question marks. Pete explains that he knows nothing about his family and responds to Violet's probing questions with angry and expletive-laden speech. As his anger grows, the mask grows on his face, until it is whole, hiding his real expression behind an exaggerated scowl marked by blood-red tears. On the next page, Violet thanks Pete for his presentation and begins a

smudging ceremony, and the smoke dissolves Pete's mask until the reader sees his own expression of sadness.

The mask is initially associated with the Tribal Warriors, as Pete previously wore it alongside his fellow masked gang members and after a phone conversation with a gang associate. But now, it appears at a moment when he is forced to confront the isolation that has resulted from colonial violence. It emerges in a moment of intense emotion and works to hide his pain from the outside world. Violet helps Pete to dissolve the mask and confront both the emotions it hides and the colonial systems at the root of those emotions. This is part of her work as the facilitator of the Warrior Program. Throughout the program, Pete is offered new definitions of what it means to be a warrior, many of them based in responsibility, vulnerability, and communication. When he completes the program, he is no longer estranged from his family, but he feels alienated from the Tribal Warriors, and ultimately rejects them. The Tribal Warriors offered a kind of support system when Pete and Joey needed one, but it is a support system based on anger and violence. Pete learns to grow a new support system that has a broader definition of warrior-hood, and that recognizes the many non-violent but no less valuable ways Pete must resist colonialism in his daily life.

Conclusion

Just as *The Outside Circle* recognizes the forms colonialism takes in Pete's day-to-day life, and the support he needs to survive and resist it, Gord Hill's oeuvre has documented ongoing oppression and resistance. His comics are multimodal, and their multimodality is key to their pedagogical mission. Though comics in general are

considered multimodal, Hill's comics build on this: they do not only incorporate the broad modes of the visual and the linguistic, they also familiarize readers with the visual modes of symbols, fashion, and maps. Hill's comics argue for the real-world potential and danger of the linguistic mode through references to the ephemeral forms of leaflets, newspapers, and graffiti. Through reading his comic books, readers develop a multimodal literacy that prepares them to recognize fascism and colonialism as represented in the world around them, and to recognize the ways they can make meaning and make change. Hill makes use of the juxtapositional nature of comics to build meaning across the scales of space and time, and this translation across scale is vital given the large-scale histories he seeks to represent. *The Outside Circle* is an example of a graphic novel that develops on Hill's multimodal model to tell a more personalized and local story that still keeps large-scale colonization in its sights. Through invoking this fictional but research-driven graphic novel, I have gestured to how multimodal literacy can be further developed to do the valuable spatiotemporal translation of Harvey's "insurgent architect" (244). Gord Hill and the team of Patti LaBoucane-Benson and Kelly Mellings are part of an exciting new trend in social justice-oriented comics that see the vast potential of comics to communicate knowledge.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I began this dissertation with a series of questions about comics and their relationship to the Canada. I wondered if there was anything essentially *Canadian* about the many comics being produced by contemporary cartoonists working and living in Canada. Can comics be labeled ‘Canadian’ based on the nationality of their cartoonists, or based on the setting and content of the comic itself? Is ‘Canadian comics’ a distinct cultural category? In addition to these questions of nation in relation to artistic production (which are familiar and nearly canonical in and of themselves), I set out to explore what I felt was a generic trend in contemporary Canadian comics: I have identified this trend as the ‘quotidian’ and ‘mundane.’ The American comics scene is often recognized through the mainstream action and superhero comics that established the comics industry. Canadian comics favour more realist and even mundane categories which include slice-of-life, memoir, and non-fiction comics that dwell in the quotidian lives of their characters. I found that, yes, the quotidian and mundane are important foci in Canadian comics. These are important because they draw out the social, economic, and political struggles of contemporary Canadian life. Mundanity functions as a lens through which to scrutinize the tensions of everyday life, including the ways Canadians grapple with the lived consequences of settler-colonialism, petroculture, fascism, and displacement, among others.

What I did not expect was that all these comics draw on elements of what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence,” the “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight,” that is “incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2). Something curious emerged through the course of my research and

writing; though I initially draw on slow violence to describe the effects of petroculture in Kate Beaton's comics, the concept of slow violence, as defined by Nixon, is productively relevant to the other theoretical concepts that shape my close readings. In my second and third chapters, I outline how patriarchy functions as a form of slow violence, as harassment and gender and sexual norms impact characters, including Beaton, Skim, Regan, and May, over time. In close reading the comics of Tings Chak, Eric Kostiuk Williams, and Gord Hill, I analyze how slow violence occurs across the broad temporal and, arguably, geographic scales that Harvey describes. Like the system of migrant detainment, slow violence functions out of sight of the general population. Like the development and displacement represented in *Condo Heartbreak Disco*, slow violence occurs gradually but has immense consequences. When Haraway critiques the anthropocentric concept of the Anthropocene and proposes the terms Capitalocene and Chthulucene, she is advocating that such violence as climate change must be confronted with an eye to both the economic systems that drive industrial development and the many species impacted by this damaging process. And finally, Hill's long histories of anti-colonialism and anti-fascism acknowledge that fascism and colonialism can sometimes be so gradual as to feel banal and unimportant, but such systems grow in violent ways and must be fought on a quotidian basis. Over the course of my writing and reading, I have been struck by how each cartoonist I take up uses comics to linger on a particular social issue or personal struggle, and in doing so teases out the slow violence that the mundane and the quotidian disguise.

While I unpack the banality and violence of these texts, I have also engaged with the role of form. In short, I work with the question posed by the title of Hillary Chute's

most recent monograph: *Why Comics?* What does the form of comics contribute bring to these stories? Across these varied texts, the comics form has served to emphasize particular affects and experiences, to linger on the material objects and spaces that structure violence, and to collapse the past and present in the layered space of the panel. Comics' malleability facilitates presence and absence in Beaton's comics, an aesthetic of haunting and danger in comics of girlhood, visual representations of the materiality of detainment and displacement, and multimodal unpackings of how fascism and settler colonialism operate. In chapter two, Beaton's minimalist comic strips and long-form comics call attention to the human experience of outmigration and linger on the minor but meaningful details of petroculture. The various artists featured in chapter three use gothic tropes in their content but also their form, using black to create a sense of danger or haunting, and emphasizing moments of violence with the colour red. In both *Skim* and "The Hole the Fox Did Make," layouts are tweaked to speed up action and narrative or to linger on key moments. While in *Will I See?*, the foreground, middle ground, and background are layered to provoke a feeling of haunting and to collapse the past and present. In chapter four, I argue that Chak's austere style draws attention to the physical space of detention, and she shifts her form to accommodate various perspectives on detention. Williams, too, is conscious of the physical space of the page and how it can represent the changing infrastructure of a rapidly developing city. In chapter five, I contend that Hill's fast-paced and detailed histories bring in many modes: fashion, gesture, symbols, maps, and print culture are all incorporated to emphasize the ways that systems of fascism and colonialism are built, promoted, and maintained, and the many modes in which they must be confronted. Ultimately, though all these cartoonists employ

the general form of the comic, using panels, gutters, captions, and characters to produce a narrative, their formal choices are tailored to the particular needs of their story and, particularly in the cases of Chak and Hill, their pedagogical and activist aims.

Though, like Rifkind and Warley, I have not argued for a “distinctly Canadian style or theme” across these texts, I contend there is a value in exploring how Canada is pictured in these comics (8). I believe that these are not stories that take the nation for granted—in choosing Canadian cities and spaces as the setting for their narratives, these cartoonists have critiqued the Canadian nation and state in productive and provocative ways. In choosing to analyse these comics, I have learned a great deal about what violence and resistance look like in my country, from the quotidian danger of settler-colonialism for Indigenous girls to the housing crises that may be experienced on a community level but have global contexts and consequences. Comics have the capacity to build narratives that work through juxtaposition—in contrast to the sequence-based logic of prose—and as such, comics represent how affect, action, and resistance occur across various temporal and geographic scales simultaneously.

I have interrogated the cultural category of ‘Canadian’ and advanced that thinking through Canada’s role in contemporary comics is vital as I continue to live and work under a settler-colonial government that perpetuates resource extraction in this contested geographical space. Given the scope of this project, there are many analytical and theoretical paths untaken. I have not read Beaton’s work and *Skim* as diary comics. I have drawn on McCloud’s theory of iconicity without engaging with valuable critiques of McCloud’s claims of universality. I have not read *Will I See?* as an example of Indigenous Gothic or put it into conversation and context with other Indigenous Gothic

texts (see the work of Weshoyot Alvitre, Jeff Barnaby, Elizabeth LaPensée, Eden Robinson, and Richard Van Camp, among others). There is more analysis to be done on the interactivity of digital comics and the impact of the digital medium on comics, as well as the visual style and auteurist aesthetics of many of these artists. I am left wondering about the following: how could my analysis of access to space can be expanded to include a more nuanced analysis of settler-colonial occupation and Indigenous land claims? How would further research into feminist studies and cultural studies expand my understandings of the mundane and the everyday? Would trauma studies add nuance to my interpretation of mundane violence in girlhood, and how might I build an analysis of these girlhood comics that is more intersectional? How does care function across all of these comics, particularly in relation to resistance on an everyday basis and acknowledgements of slow violence?

I began this project with an enthusiasm for the comics I saw being created and read in Canada, many of which had not been taking up in scholarly work. Though this has been a project of identifying and unpacking various forms of violence and oppression, I have also learned about the urgency and vibrancy of resistance. Comics present valuable narratives of how Canada is experienced as an economic, geographic, and political space. Furthermore, Canadian comics offer hope and possibility in the face of a complicated and often perilous nation. I hope my research contributes to this small but exciting field.

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