
ENDNOTES

1. Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1997): 8.
2. Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2020): 1, 37. While Robinson's text primarily examines listening from Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives as it relates to classical and popular music, his framing of "aural imagination" and the settler colonial "tin ear" that influences listening habits and biases is useful in thinking through positionality more broadly.
3. Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2018): xi.
4. Discovery is an inherently colonial conception, what Yusoff describes as "the progress narrative of Man as the agentic center and authority of power; cut with some European genius myth to rarefying the white male subject and his imperial intellectualism" (Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*: 39).
5. Yusoff, "Mine as Paradigm," in *e-flux Architecture* (Summer 2021), <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/survivance/381867/mine-as-paradigm/>. Accessed 28 January 2022.
6. The use of 'settling' here is inspired by Robinson's book *Hungry Listening*, in which he discusses how settler colonial logics have fixed, or settled, the ways in which non-Indigenous and Indigenous people enact listening. It also ties listening to extractive economies that drive settler desires for possession and ownership.
7. Robinson describes this type of listening as "listening within the strata of sound and historical context," which he "extend[s]...to include the additional stratified context of positionality" (Robinson, *Hungry Listening*: 59).
8. Robinson, *Hungry Listening*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2020), 75-6.
9. Dylan Robinson in conversation with Aruna D'Souza. <https://vimeo.com/465553646>. Accessed 1 February 2022.

STAYING WITH AND IN
THE DISPLACEMENT:
EROSION, POROSITY,
AND (IM)PERMANENCE IN
CONTINENTAL DRIFT

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Squat, undulating hills and pink-hued mounds of earth slide into view; a cloud of dust billows, dissipating languidly into a saturated sky. Static silence envelops the scene, punctuated here and there by tittering birds, buzzing insects, and the wind, its pitch sharpening as it is squeezed through narrow gullies. This is the visual and acoustic composition of the Alberta Badlands, so named by French colonialists who found its plateaus difficult to cross. For them, the land was *mauvaise terre*: literally ‘bad land’ for its perceived inability to feed the Euro-western agro-expansionist agenda. Situated near present-day Drumheller in the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika Nation, Kainai Nation-Blood Tribe, and Piikani Nation) and Stoney Nakoda and Tsuut’ina Nations, the Badlands are also home to hoodoos, grey-blue sage, dinosaur fossils, and coal—once the province’s main source of energy. A chorus of songbirds come and go with the wind and I am wistful, the music of the plains stretching my senses to their limit. I can almost smell the dry, desert air; feel the dust and dirt collecting around my ankles...

Except that the soundscape, like the landscape in Eva Kolcze’s video *Continental Drift* (2021), is, in many ways, a ghost—a haunted, “seething presence.”¹ Kolcze captured the Badlands’ wind-sculpted canyons with a silent 16-millimetre film camera. She sourced the sound composition from recordings made in similarly semi-arid places, including Jordan, Australia, and the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum. Sitting in the gallery space, immersed in Kolcze’s film, one might be inclined to audiate a fixed place untouched by the colonial forces that transformed this so-called *mauvaise terre* into fertile ground and accept this not as a fiction, but as a romantic truth—what Dylan Robinson calls an “aural imagination,” which is influenced by my white settler “tin ear.”² Understanding the source of *Continental Drift*’s soundscape, however, presents an opportunity to reorient the senses. In thinking through the geography of the Badlands—its colonial legacy, ongoing petro-politics, and sonic-spatial shifts—I am reminded of Kathryn Yusoff’s instruction to “[stay] with and in the displacement.”³ In our late-capitalist, settler colonial epoch where displacement is the norm, *Continental Drift* invokes different modalities to shift how we understand our relationship to erosion, porosity, and permanence.

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Kolcze has long been interested in troubling that which appears fixed and immovable. Her project *All That Is Solid* (2014) likewise utilized 16mm film to document three Brutalist buildings in Toronto: Robarts Library, The University of Toronto Scarborough campus, and the Ross building at York University. A signifier of stability, many universities, government buildings, courthouses, and police stations were designed in the Brutalist style, which is often anecdotally described as imposing, impenetrable, and unwelcoming. And yet, Brutalist buildings are primarily constructed with concrete, a material that includes large amounts of naturally porous limestone. To make the potential for permeability visible, Kolcze degraded the film by boiling and freezing it, or immersing it in bleach. As the camera traces the buildings’ contours liquids seep into the frame, distorting the structures and causing them to bubble, crack, and dissolve. Eventually, they slowly reconstitute themselves, the remnants of their undoing visible on their surfaces. *All That Is Solid* therefore implores us to question not only the perceived physical permanence of such structures, but also how we might engage with them differently.

Despite their obvious differences, badlands and Brutalist buildings share a surprising, material similarity: comprised of loosely packed sediments, primarily limestone, bentonite clay, and shale, badlands are likewise vulnerable to water induced erosion (the Alberta’s Badlands alone erode at a rate of approximately one centimeter per year). The geologic and atmospheric shifts that formed the planet are therefore easily visible in badlands across the globe—planetary deep time etched onto gently sloping hills in alternating bands of brown, black, and mauve. Though coalmining prompted early settlement and development in the Alberta Badlands, it was the ability to conduct geologic research along with the “discovery” of large fossil deposits that enabled the province to successfully rebrand the area once coal was no longer profitable.⁴ Yusoff contends that this “way of producing space” positions place and its matter as “deadened until it is worked by Euro-Western centers, which in turn [accord] geologic agency—or, geopower—to those centers.”⁵ Unlike Brutalism, the Badlands’ landscape is naturally occurring. And yet, through settler colonial geopolitics, it is arguably as ‘produced’ as any urban built environment.

In response, Kolcze highlights erosion’s latent ability to elude these configurations. Rather than

document the Badlands with a Cartesian eye, she presents the landscape from an embodied perspective, subverting the colonial gaze that encodes space as legible and thus consumable. Though common practice with silent cameras, the soundscape’s blend of different geographies troubles our relationship to place and reminds us that listening, like observing, is not a neutral act. Throughout the video, spectral sunspots dissolve the landscape, which re-emerges, differently, in the next scene—a technique *Continental Drift* shares with *All That Is Solid*, but rather than manually manipulate the film, in *Drift* Kolcze allowed the sun to naturally degrade the celluloid as it was removed from the camera. Her inclusion of these seeping flickers and flares, alongside quotidian shifts in the breeze, atmosphere, and acoustic ecology present a land and soundscape in flux, disrupting the geopolitical project that would fix the Badlands as a “settled” resource to be acquired, categorized, and extracted.⁶ Erosion, therefore, reminds us that space is slippery: as the Badlands transfigure over time they form new amalgamations outside of human timescales and efforts, troubling their imposed borders.

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In *Hungry Listening* (2020), Robinson creates a series of “event scores” that explore listening otherwise. His “Event Score For Guest Listening” enacts stratified listening⁷ to explore the author’s fraught relationship to his current home of Kingston, Ontario:

These charming limestone walls—this charming city—built from quarries
Quarried from the lands of Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek
Built from the lands of the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabek
Structured by colonial design
to allay anxieties of impermanence

And

I am trying to hear the seepage of water through stone
I am trying to hear the labor of quarry, cut and chisel
I am trying to hear these walls as still the land
I am trying not to hear these walls declare their immovability⁸

Reflecting on this event score in a subsequent interview, Robinson adds an additional layer: it is “the mortar in the grid” and not necessarily the

limestone itself that produces the city’s colonial affects—its ‘immovability’.⁹ Indeed, it is limestone’s porosity, ‘the seepage of water through stone’, that enables Robinson to envision a different relationship to these colonial structures. This ‘mortar’ is present in the Badlands also, lurking just beyond and below *Continental Drift*’s frame. Once sensed, it is impossible to ignore the ways in which the Badlands continue to be produced as a space for extraction—of material such as coal, certainly, but also geopower, which seeks to establish dominance over the landscape and its life forms. And yet, if we attune ourselves to this landscape differently, what do we see and hear instead? Documenting the Badlands from the level of the body disrupts normative viewing habits that place audiences at a distance from the events taking place on screen. In positioning the viewer as another layer of strata within the wider geopolitical project, *Continental Drift* implores us to consider our own porosity, and how we might use it to imagine these spaces otherwise.

And what of that word, drift? Continents drift, certainly, as evidenced in the Badlands themselves, which record the earth’s movements across millennia, its receding glaciers and ancient riverbeds. To drift is also to slip into dreaming, to imagine places and sounds that elide past, present, and future. Indeed, to drift is to move where the wind takes you, creating new amalgams along the way.