

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “STAND ON GUARD FOR THEE”?
DETUNING THE CANADIAN NATIONAL ANTHEM**

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A thesis submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

Faculty of Arts and Science
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

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Date of Defence: May 17, 2021

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DEDICATION

To all those who struggle to have their voices heard.

ABSTRACT

At their core, national anthems attempt to unite citizens of the nation through music. While “O Canada” might endeavour to unify the country in song, this research-creation project unsettles and detunes the anthem to consider both the content and context of its continuing lyrical and harmonic evolution, positioning the anthem as a contested site within the dance floor of discourse. I seek to challenge both myself and others to consider our positions within the ongoing structure of settler-colonialism in Canada, and to address our individual and collective responsibilities as Canadians. In this process of deconstructing the anthem, I question not just what it says, but what it *does* within Canadian society. Whether you sing along with the anthem, remain silent, take a knee, or engage in other actions, it is important for all Canadians to address *where they stand* in relation to “standing on guard for thee.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks first and foremost to my incredibly supportive and inspiring co-supervisors Kimberly Mair and Dana Cooley, who have been fantastic since before day one. Thanks also to Jackson Two Bears and Monique Giroux for endless encouragement and thoughtful feedback as my committee members, and to Shannon Murray for being a super-duper external. Massive gratitude for my Cess-Pit pals, especially Arturo Tejada Torres for always being willing to discuss ideology, and most sincerely to Miguelzinta Solís for being the best all-around pal both scholarly and socially, who came into my life right when I needed him. Thanks to all the MFA folks for welcoming me back into the art department like I actually belonged there, and to our rag-tag writing support group for keeping us all motivated not to quit; Harley Morman, Courtney McDermott, Anna Nikolova, Kate LaRocque, Michelle Sylvestre, and especially to Amber Morrison Fox for emphasizing the value of the ‘greased pig’ methodology. To all the great faculty members who helped me along the way: Suzanne Lenon, Sheila McManus, Jason Laurendeau, Muriel Mellow, Caroline Hodes, and Heather Ladd. Thanks to Chris Morris for studio access and support, and to Jacques Theberge for endless gear rental renewals. Immense gratitude to Courtney McDermott for recording and mixing the creative work, and never getting tired of my nonsensical studio vocabulary (perhaps even enjoying it). To Jane Edmundson for being the best pal and for helping with formatting stuff when I was ready to smash my computer to bits, and to Mary Greenshields for personalized librarian services, along with loaning me her amazing dog all the time. Finally, and most importantly, to Bre for providing infinite patience and support, and for being my most precious love.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I put my headphones on and start typing.

Tapping out the rhythms of my memory.

This introductory essay is an attempt to think through the way sound – music in particular – has made me who I am¹. How has sound played a role in constructing my own subjectivity? In what ways does sound formulate my subjective experience of the world? How does my subjective experience with music relate to larger social structures of sound?

I am sitting on the floor of my childhood home, in front of a glass cabinet with a record player and amplifier inside. Taking an LP from the side shelf, I gently run my hands over the surface of the cardboard jacket, examining the faces of The Beatles on the 1967-1970 ‘blue album’ compilation. I push the polished nickel button on the cabinet and the glass door springs open, an animal ready to leap from its cage. My mom shows me how to carefully handle the glossy vinyl disc inside, sliding it out and setting it gently on the platter like a sacred offering. I push the return button and the robotic arm magically begins to operate, setting the music into motion. “Strawberry Fields Forever” pours out from the speakers, both thrilling and unsettling me². The strange sounds of the mellotron warble around the living room, crawling along the carpet, tickling my earlobes, penetrating my impressionable young mind, burrowing deep into my brain. “*Let me take you down...*” A new world of sound suddenly opens to me from the living room floor.

Later the same year I receive a boombox-style CD player for Christmas that has *Much Dance Mix* ‘93 packaged along inside, with House of Pain urging me to “*jump up, jump up and*

¹ While it is not possible to embed the musical selections mentioned in this chapter, you can ‘listen along’ by accessing this playlist via Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5IwfsyxsAJpVIJu1BjCjIU?si=PYxRQ7V1REmNowx4lKYQYw>. It’s important to point out here that this playlist is dominated by male artists, highlighting the need for further analysis of music’s gendered aspects in my own research.

² Unsettling in the typical sense of the word, not in Paulette Regan’s definition – which I will return to later. The short film produced for this Beatles song is also considered to be one of the first music videos.

get down.” My uncle was apparently informed of this gift in advance and took it upon himself to ensure I was guided in the right direction by gifting me a cassette copy of The Black Crowes’ *Shake Your Money Maker*. While my Beatles infatuation remained, I was now struck by the sex appeal of rock ‘n’ roll, what the strut and swagger of being “Hard to Handle” could potentially mean³. This same uncle found his old guitar in the farmhouse attic, letting me fumble my way around the fretboard, picking and plunking until it was clear I had a serious interest and needed some lessons. My parents weren’t particularly musical people, but they saw the value of a musical education, starting guitar lessons for me, piano for my brother. I quickly graduated to a better instrument, with my uncle gifting me his much more functional Fender acoustic guitar – one of few items I still possess from my childhood.

This time also marks my transition from musical consumer to musical producer (simultaneous to my awkward pubescent transition as well). I gained a new voice, a new mode of sonic agency to express myself. As I began to learn the basics, my best friend also picked up the bass guitar, and I suddenly had a friend to jam with. Then my parents got divorced, Kurt Cobain died, and my confused musical emotions gained a whole new vocabulary of guttural screams, screeching feedback, *distortion*... Though the lyrics were often incomprehensible, I knew how this music *made me feel*. Everything as loud as possible, all at once, yelling at the top of my lungs that I “*gotta find a way, a better way...*”⁴ We grew our hair long, found a drummer, learned some songs, and wrote a few of our own. Of course, our first gig was at the middle school talent show, after which we graduated to the gymnasium of the church youth group. After that gig, girls wanted to talk to me. The connection was made – music makes you popular, or at least it seemed that way. As I made my way through high school, I discovered other musicians – and drugs –

³ It would be many years before I would learn that this song was originally written by Otis Redding, or that the band’s name was lifted from an Elmore James song – both Black men.

⁴ Nirvana, “Territorial Pissings,” *Nevermind*. DGC Records, 1991.

which broadened my perspectives on both what music and life could be. I joined a new band, less influenced by angst and testosterone. Instead, it was the mind-expanding properties of psychedelics and the music of The Grateful Dead,⁵ with endless basement jams pushing my musical competencies into a more conversational and relational approach. Jamming became a way to get to know someone by mixing my sound with theirs. How I listened, and how I *spoke* with my guitar, became a primary mode of interaction between friends. I learned how to give and take, how to support someone else's playing, how to pick up on subtle cues and harmonically integrate with the sounds of others. By the end of high school, music was the only thing that mattered. It now determined my choice of friends and activities as I turned away from sports in order to burrow my way into detailed liner notes and gear reviews, with music becoming more of a religion to me than an interest. We'd already begun touring around Saskatchewan, either faking our way into bar shows with scraggly beards and long hair, or playing skateparks, halls, or anywhere else people would pay us to show up. Then, as we were starting to talk with management companies and making bigger touring plans, our fearless bandleader, Bradley Zimmerman, suddenly passed away.

My reaction was to leave home and make a commitment to music in a different way. I moved to Nelson, BC, registered in music college to properly learn the language that I had only scratched the surface of understanding by that point. I began to comprehend the way music works – from a Western music theory perspective – how melody, rhythm, and harmonic structure can create feelings of tension, release, mystery, jubilation, and everything else in between. Partially, I was concerned with having Brad be proud of me, wherever he was watching from. He had been one of my best friends, and I had learned so much from being around him, that I felt the need to

⁵ The Dead also covered "Hard to Handle" on a regular basis during live shows.

take the next step so that his legacy would propel my pursuits, rather than letting this passion die with him. *“I know I’ll never lose affection, for people and things that went before...”*⁶

After music college, I toured across Canada and spent the next few years both teaching and gigging in Toronto, the centre of the Canadian music industry. Music had dictated my entire life path by this point. But how and why did I come to feel this intense propulsion from the power of music?⁷ In what other ways has music controlled my life, told me what to do? Did it all start with The Beatles or does it go deeper than that? After my first year of music college, I decided to mark the occasion with a tattoo in commemoration to Brad, choosing a peace sign overlaid on top of a maple leaf. Why did I choose this? As emblems of hippie music culture and my implicit Canadian identity, they seemed like rational choices – but why?

From pre-school to grade 12, I was enrolled in a French immersion education program. While I didn’t participate in a single music class I can recall during this whole time, I did receive a musical education by singing the national anthem in class. How many times did I sing “O Canada” during those years between grades one and eight?⁸ The act of singing the national anthem is essentially one of obedience, requiring you to stand at attention, be quiet, and sing the lyrics (or at the very least, not talk). The primary-level education experience could be said to also be mostly one of obedience: learn the basics, repeat them, absorb what your teachers tell you – but don’t question the system. The day is divided into rigid sections of classes, recess, and lunch. Follow this rhythmic structure, and everything will be okay, you won’t get in trouble. This rhythm, repeated over the course of those first eight years, then into high school (and to a certain

⁶ The Beatles, “In My Life,” *Rubber Soul*, EMI, 1965.

⁷ “For some of us, it might be that the most intense and important way we express or enact identity through the circulation of physical pleasure is in musical activity, and that our ‘sexual identity’ might be ‘musician’ more than it is ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ or ‘straight.’” Suzanne Cusick, “On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight,” in *Music and Identity Politics*, edited by Ian Biddle (London: Routledge, 2012), 22.

⁸ I can’t recall how often I sung it, but I do recall standing in class, singing the bilingual version until I began high school. It’s likely that we sung it daily. If this is true, I would have sung “O Canada” roughly 1,600 times during my grade school experience which, in some Canadian provinces, is a mandated practice. For example, see Government of Ontario, “Policy/Program Memorandum No. 108,” Ontario Ministry of Education. Accessed March 24, 2021. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/108.html>.

extent, the same rhythm continues into post-secondary education as well), becomes a disciplinary and conditioning meter, drumming a rigid structure into students year after year after year after year after year after year after year. Did I enjoy singing the anthem? How did it shape my musical perspectives? I can only recall the disciplinary obedience of singing “O Canada,” but not what it really felt like to sing it. In any case, one of my earliest musical education experiences was learning the structured rhythms of “O Canada.” But, if I think harder about it, I had already been primed by another kind of musical education happening on the weekend – in church.

My parents weren’t particularly religious people, but both grew up in God-fearing families. At first, I don’t think I minded it too much. It seemed like a safe enough place, and the stained-glass windows were nice to look at. Singing hymns would have been my first real exposure to live music, so to speak, with our medium-sized church holding maybe 100-200 parishioners on any given Sunday. I didn’t quite understand how the notes on the page worked, and following the lyrics was tricky, given the dated selection of hymns, but I remember how it *felt* to sing in church, *like my voice belonged there with everyone else’s*.⁹ The rich resonance of voices intermingling in the space, led by the pipe organ’s low notes rumbling through the floorboards made hymns the highlight of the experience. I didn’t question the obligatory obedience there either. You stood up to sing when you were told to, and once it was over, you could sit back down. Much like singing the national anthem in the classroom, church hymns were a disciplinary method rooted in musical performance. Any thoughts of resisting or refusing this conditioning weren’t yet formulated in my young mind. My formative musical experiences in the church and in the classroom taught me to stand and sing when told to – if you recite and repeat

⁹ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson emphasizes the importance of focusing on one’s own life’s experiences as part of academic research: “My body and my life are part of my research, and I use this knowledge to critique and analyze. I will not separate this from my engagement with academic literature, because in my life these things are not compartmentalized.” Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 31.

these lyrics properly your parents and teachers will be proud of you. This experience is not special in any way, rather it is typical of millions of other Canadians before, during, and after the time I underwent my own musical education. It is also important to note here, that this typical experience is one of being cisgender, white, and male – the normative orientation of my childhood communities growing up in western Canada – where there were very few Black, Indigenous, or other people of color that I interacted with on a regular basis.

While I learned the idea of musical conversation as a relational exchange later in high school through playing in bands, I first and foremost learned that music can be a tool for conformity and obedience to established social structures. But without this later ‘breaking away’ from music as a force for social cohesion, how would I now experience and interpret sound? And how have these two approaches intermingled and influenced each other within my own subjectivity? How does music both attempt to control and create the conditions for resistance? Do critical thinking skills accompany improvisational approaches to music?¹⁰ How do other people think about sound who have only experienced this ‘first stage’ of musical training?

Not only did church and school teach me how music can instruct citizens as to how they should behave, but other aspects of my family taught me implicit lessons as well. Both my parents came from farming families and lived outside the city until after high school ended, moving away for college on their own. I grew up thinking that farming was a noble vocation, to sow the fields and harvest food for your family (and the market) was a good, honest way to make a living in connection with the land. In many ways, it is. However, what I didn’t learn was exactly whose land this was before my grandparents settled upon it. How has my own family

¹⁰ In my opinion, musical improvisation requires as much listening as ‘speaking’ with one’s instrument, and being a critical thinker requires the same approach. However, if I find myself in a room full of ‘improvisers’ who fail to listen and keep ‘talking over’ me, the quality of the dialogue (whether musical or critical) will inevitably decline.

been part of the dispossession of Indigenous lands? How has settling the land through farming been framed as a productive, honourable vocation?¹¹

For me, there are many echoes between the structures of settler-colonialism and structures of sound in Canadian society. This research-creation thesis project seeks to unpack and understand my own life and relationship with music and sound, acting as a springboard to examine larger connections between sound and settler-colonialism, and how I myself have been interpellated into these structures. My aim is to bring dissonances forward in the mix so that the screeching feedback of settler-colonial actions isn't just heard (and squelched), but *listened to*, and more importantly, *action is taken to detune the sounds of settler-colonialism*. I take this action as my own commitment to decolonization, but also as an *offering up* of myself as an example of how other settler people might undergo their own unsettling, in an effort to lead by example so that others will follow, while avoiding any digressions into self-centred navel-gazing. My work seeks to speak to a broad general audience, but also specifically to settler people who might identify as allies, but have also perhaps 'sung without thinking,' and been part of the chorus of settler-colonial noise. I invite you, dear reader (and listener), to come along for this ride, to experience a narrative journey of unsettling. Ideally, you become as much performer as audience member, not just a passive consumer of academic content, but that you will make a similar commitment. In fact, as residents of the nation of Canada, it might be said that each of us are *always already* in a relationship with the music and lyrics of "O Canada," regardless if we sing it or remain silent.¹² Reconciliation, redress, and decolonization are not singular acts, but

¹¹ The *Dominion Lands Act* of 1872 encouraged prairie settlement, giving 160 acres of land for free to men over the age of 21, in exchange for agreeing to cultivate at least 25% of it. Eli Yarhi and T.D. Regehr, "Dominion Lands Act," The Canadian Encyclopedia. Accessed March 24, 2021. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/dominion-lands-policy>.

¹² Christopher Small's concept of "musicking" is helpful here, in which he says that "*to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance*," which can include everyone from the performers and audience, to the ticket-takers at the door and janitors who clean the venue afterwards. See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, CT: University Press of New England, 1998), 9.

must be based in a commitment to ongoing processual engagements with these concepts throughout one's life on this land. How have our voices sung the anthems of settler-colonialism? How have we been interpellated into the ideology "O Canada," and what should we do about that? Sound is something we are constantly immersed in, but typically pay little attention to – much like the ongoing structures of settler-colonialism that invisibly envelop us on a daily basis. By showing how sound has been employed within the nation-state, specifically through the national anthem, I hope to *open the ears* of Canadians, but also compel *action* towards addressing the ongoing harm settler-colonialism continues to perpetrate.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This research project broadly seeks to examine the role sound plays in the construction of subjectivity. More specifically, I am interested in how the discursive strategies enacted within the lyrics and music of “O Canada” seek to construct an idealized subject of the nation-state. How does the national anthem construct its subjects, through its lyrics, rhythms, and social performance? Which subjects are included and excluded within the national anthem? Which subject position is constructed as the *ideal Canadian* through the anthem’s lyrics? What does the singing of the national anthem *do*? What does it *mean* to sing “O Canada”? How does “O Canada” serve to sonically reinforce the ongoing structure of settler-colonialism? How might the messages within “O Canada” become subverted or *unsettled* – understood as a site of discursive struggle and tension, rather than a solid pillar of sound that speaks *unisonally*?¹³

The Canadian national anthem develops a national narrative that both *writes into being* and *sings into existence* an idealized subject within the lyrics and music of the anthem. These lyrics are repeatedly performed by Canadians from a very early age in public and educational contexts, as an expression of normative Canadian citizenship, in that citizens rise to attention and obey the anthem’s command, becoming hailed into the ideology of the nation-state’s embrace¹⁴. While these lyrics are absorbed and repeated, they are not often analyzed by the people singing them to understand what is actually being said. The repeated performance of the national anthem serves to continually assert its message – a message in which the ultimate intent is seemingly (in most cases) not fully understood (or is never questioned) by those who sing it. This serves to

¹³ The concept of “unisonality” comes from Benedict Richard Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 145.

¹⁴ The concepts of ideology and ‘hailing’ will be discussed in more detail as this thesis unfolds. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

surreptitiously formulate what an ideal Canadian should be without explicitly making this action clear, and functions to assert a particular vision of what Canada is. In this thesis, I will analyze which discursive strategies the anthem uses to construct its idealized subjects, and how the lyrics of the anthem have changed over time as an expression of how settler-colonialism itself continues to shift strategies in an effort to keep up with the times and adapt to changing political forces, yet remain in a dominant position of power. While the popular narrative of Canada is a nation of peacemakers rich with multicultural values,¹⁵ and which “has no history of colonialism,”¹⁶ Canada was founded upon the principles of *terra nullius* as a settler-colonial endeavor. Canada’s past, present, and – if colonialism continues – future, relies on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands. If the nation is to reckon with the ongoing process of settler-colonialism, this widely celebrated national anthem must itself be examined as a site of epistemic violence.

This thesis seeks to unsettle the narrative that “O Canada” presents, piercing the illusion of stability and security it discursively constructs through both lyrics and rhythm. While “O Canada” might seek to posit a homogenously idealized subject, rather than arguing that this song is hegemonic in its construction of subjectivity, I will show how the anthem is a site of struggle, resistance, and refusal – a narrative negotiation that each Canadian subject must resolve for themselves in the struggle of discourse. My approach to this research project is informed and motivated by Paulette Regan’s notion of “unsettling the settler within,”¹⁷ as well as Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang’s theorization of settler moves to innocence, “which problematically attempt to

¹⁵ See Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London: Routledge, 1999) for a detailed analysis of the Canadian peacemaker myth.

¹⁶ Canuck Politics, “The G20 saved the global economy: Canadian PM Harper,” YouTube. October 6, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqTMbSrAnxQ>

¹⁷ Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity.”¹⁸ By deconstructing the Canadian national anthem, I seek to show how this song is a discursive example of this move towards innocence, which repaints the blood-stained history of Canada in favour of a white-washed “settler nativism”¹⁹ that posits an idealized Canadian subject as the original keepers of this land. Part of my motivation for this particular research project is that I myself am a descendant of settlers, or “squatters” on this land.²⁰ With multiple generations of ancestors who farmed land on the prairies, my family history is one of occupying land that was dispossessed from its rightful Indigenous keepers. Growing up singing “O Canada” was an act that I participated in likely thousands of times before I became more aware of this country’s violent colonial history.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

A dear friend once told me that “to design a methodology is to decide why we write the way we write about our research.”²¹ In other words, *why* am I undertaking this project, and *how* am I justifying that it should be done at all?

Michael Giardina and Norman Denzin argue that within “the scholarly arena, it is not enough to simply understand any given reality. There is a need to transform it. Educators, as transformative intellectuals, must actively participate in this project.”²² Academics cannot sit idly by on the sidelines, thinking that their work is somehow separate from the material realities of daily life. From my perspective, there is a tendency by many academics to perceive themselves as detached observers of this real world, whereby their research becomes reflective, rather than

¹⁸ Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, No. 1 (2012), 3.

¹⁹ Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” 10-13.

²⁰ Jeff Cornthassel, Chaw-win-is, and T’lakwadzi, “Indigenous Storytelling, Truth Telling and Community Approaches to Reconciliation,” in *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (March 2009): 3.

²¹ Migueltzinta Solis, word document comment to author, 2019.

²² Michael Giardina and Norman Denzin, “Acts of activism ↔ politics of possibility: Toward a new performative cultural politics,” in *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 11, No. 4 (2011): 320.

reflexive. By this I mean that *we all have some skin in the game of life*, and to conduct academic research without implicating oneself in the material aspects of reality seems disingenuous at best, and potentially deadly, at worst. Instead, we might employ a “critical imagination” in scholarly work, which works toward “provoking conflict, curiosity, criticism, and reflection, and contributes to a public conversation” that can incite change within public discourse and encourage greater public participation within civic affairs, while simultaneously being aware of its own limitations.²³ I see the power and potential of what Denzin describes as a “radical democratic pedagogy,” where “citizens and citizen-scholars alike must be committed to taking risks, to be willing to act in situations where the outcome cannot be predicted in advance. In such situations, a politics of new possibilities can be imagined, if not made to happen by getting one’s hands dirty.”²⁴ The creative portion of my thesis, *Detuning the Anthem: A Choose-Your-Own Audio Adventure*, has been designed so that each participant will have a completely unique experience, based on their own motivations and decisions. The outcomes of this listening experience will be entirely dependent on the participants themselves, with a wide range of reactions that cannot be anticipated. Most importantly, I want to challenge participants to *get their ears dirty* by going out to explore their community and the sounds within it.

Kim Tallbear emphasizes the need for an “ethics of accountability in research” so that rather than focusing on “giving back” to marginalized or oppressed communities, the focus might instead be to “stand with” them.²⁵ Tallbear encourages scholars to adopt multi-disciplinary approaches that focus primarily on building relationships rather than gathering research, where the ultimate products become a “co-constitution of one’s own claims and the claims and acts of

²³ Not striving to ‘see all sides’ but be aware they exist. Giardina and Denzin, “Acts of activism ↔ politics of possibility,” 322.

²⁴ Giardina and Denzin, “Acts of activism ↔ politics of possibility,” 322.

²⁵ Kim Tallbear, “Standing with and speaking as faith: A feminist-Indigenous approach to inquiry,” in *Journal of Research Practice* 10, No. 2 (2014): 2.

the people(s) who one speaks in concert with.”²⁶ In my own research, I take up Tallbear’s challenge to “study across” disciplines to investigate the intersections of music, sound, and settler-colonialism, and look inward rather than outward, interrogating the dominant culture responsible for oppression (and from which I myself originate), rather than replicating historical patterns of ‘studying’ those cultures who have already suffered many harms.²⁷

I also take up Eve Tuck’s advice to avoid reproducing modes of “damage-centered research” that, while perhaps acting from a perspective that seeks to help others, only serves to reinflame past injuries in order to pursue reconciliation or reparations – something that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may have fallen prey to.²⁸ Rather than focusing on the traumas that settler-colonialism has caused (and continues to cause) to Indigenous communities (and settlers as well), I see an opportunity to act as an *amplifier* for the work of Indigenous artists and individuals who resist and refuse the colonial power dynamics to ‘build their own houses’²⁹ while also doing what I can to deflate and *detune* settler-colonial structures of sound – namely, the Canadian national anthem. In other words, while plenty of ink has been spilled searching for answers to the incorrectly-named “Indian problem,” I will instead devote my time to unpacking the more pertinent *settler problem*. In response to this, Eve Tuck might also helpfully remind me to ask myself: “What can research really do to improve this situation?”³⁰ This is not to say that learning about Canada’s hidden history around the settler-colonial destruction of Indigenous culture and dispossession of Indigenous lands is not worth knowing, but that *knowing is not enough*. Learning about settler-colonialism does not stop it from continuing. Tuck emphasizes

²⁶ Tallbear, “Standing with and speaking as faith,” 4.

²⁷ Tallbear, “Standing with and speaking as faith,” 4.

²⁸ Eve Tuck, “Suspending damage: A letter to communities,” in *Harvard Educational Review* 79, No. 3 (2009): 409-427.

²⁹ See Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011), 32; and Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984): 110- 114.

³⁰ Tuck, “Suspending damage,” 423.

that we must consider more than just *what* the research project is, but *how* the research is done, *who* participates in the research, and perhaps even question ‘*why research at all?*’ in order to “be sure that our actions make steps toward our purposes.”³¹ In other words, how do I take research actions that might invite others to also take action in their own lives, so that they might consider their role in the ongoing structure of settler-colonialism? For many years, I struggled with the idea of pursuing graduate-level studies at all, because I thought: *what’s the point in writing a thesis no one will ever read?* This lingering question has helped to turn my focus toward creating new forms of knowledge that do not simply reside in the written word, but in exploring “embodied ways of knowing,” given that “if new knowledge derived from our creative actions is to have any meaning at all, we have to be able to embody it, to live it, to discard knowledge if it is not livable.”³² These are some of the motivating factors that led me towards adopting the approaches of both critical discourse analysis, and research-creation, to develop the interactive listening experience for *Detuning the Anthem: A Choose Your-Own Audio Adventure*, which will be explained below in more detail.

2.3 METHODS

Thinking of methods as research *actions* is a helpful way for me to answer the question: what will this research project actually *do*?³³ In other words, what tools will I be using to complete this work and how will I operate them? For this job, there are two main tools that have presented themselves: critical discourse analysis and research-creation.

2.3.1 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

³¹ Tuck, “Suspending damage,” 423.

³² Karen Nicole Barbour, “Standing Center: Autoethnographic Writing and Solo Dance Performance,” in *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 12, no. 1 (February 2012): 70.

³³ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, “Critical Discourse Studies: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology,” in *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3rd ed, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, (London: Sage Publications Inc, 2015): 16.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is “neither a method nor is it a theory,” but rather, the manner in which I choose to orient my research actions for this project, sharing in a critical paradigm with other researchers that refuse to accept things as they are given.³⁴ In adopting the methodological framework of CDA for this research project, my critical orientation is influenced by Norman Fairclough’s description of critical research that is focused on “addressing the social ‘wrongs’ of the day ... by analysing their sources and causes, resistance to them and possibilities of overcoming them.”³⁵ In the process of filling my toolbox for this job, I have been keeping in mind Fairclough’s caution that it will never be possible to perfectly match the tools to the job itself.³⁶ However, at this stage I would describe my approach to CDA as being informed by the methods of Fairclough’s dialectical-relational approach, but theoretically informed by aspects of feminist post-structuralist CDA and (post)colonial CDA.

The (post)colonial aspect of my critical discourse analysis comes into play due to the fact that my subject matter is itself a discursive product of colonialism, and continues to contribute to discourses of Canadian national identity and citizenship. Following both Gayatri Spivak and Dipesh Chakrabarty, this research aims to examine which voices have been excluded or silenced from these discourses, so that instead of “O Canada” exerting uni-directional power relations upon its subjects, we might regard the anthem to be a site of “tension or disjuncture within colonial discourse.”³⁷ (Post)colonial critical discourse analysis has much in common with feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (FPDA) as well, which I will also be drawing from for this research project. However, I draw more from the post-structuralist, than the feminist angle, though this will come up again later. As Judith Baxter notes, all feminist-focused versions

³⁴ Caroline Hodes, “Gender, Race and Justification: The Value of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Contemporary Settler Colonial Contexts,” in *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 19, No. 3 (2018): 5.

³⁵ Norman Fairclough, “A Dialectical Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis in Social Research,” in *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3rd ed, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, (London: Sage Publications Inc, 2015): 88.

³⁶ Fairclough, “A Dialectical Relational Approach,” 90.

³⁷ Sara Mills, *Discourse*, 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 2004), 106.

of CDA “share a key principle: the discursive construction of subjectivity,” which is drawn from Judith Butler’s emphasis on the “performative (rather than essentialist or possessive) nature of speakers’ identities.”³⁸ The Canadian national anthem discursively constructs idealized subjects of the nation-state both in its lyrics and by its performative nature, but there is no simple binary here between good or bad subjects, there are many subjectivities to consider. Baxter’s conception of FPDA “challenges ways in which modernist thinking tends to structure thoughts in oppositional pairs, placing one term over the other”³⁹ and this resonates strongly with me as a useful tactic to apply in this research project. One might sing the anthem and agree with what it says, or sing it and disagree, sing it in another language as an act of protest, take a knee while others sing it, not sing it at all, or other options: so that the anthem does not present an either/or binary option, but instead scores within its sounds a wide range of potential responses.

The concept of discourse is critically important to my research project, so that in making clear what the anthem’s discursive intent seeks to achieve, those who might sing it will better understand the implications of their actions. My notion of discourse is one of constant negotiation, something that is never settled, but is always moving, shifting, in conversation and conflict with other actors within the arena of discourse.⁴⁰ We might think of this as the *dance floor of discourse*, where various actors attempt to control what is framed as normative practice within a given socially constructed arena at a particular time. I concur with Dorothy Smith’s definition that discourse is not something that is imposed upon us, but a participatory act that we are all *doing* constantly, as a metaphorical “vehicle which is used by subjects to work out interpersonal relationships.”⁴¹ Rather than think in vehicular metaphors, we can think again of

³⁸ Judith Baxter, “Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis—A New Theoretical and Methodological Approach,” in *Gender and Language Research Methodologies*, edited by Kate Harrington, Lia Litosseliti, Helen Sauntson, Jane Sunderland, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 2.

³⁹ Baxter, “Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis,” 3.

⁴⁰ Mills, “*Discourse*,” 12.

⁴¹ Mills, “*Discourse*,” 72-76.

discourse as a dance floor; where some might two-step, others might breakdance, rumba, or turn the dance floor into a mosh pit, but we're all participating in discourse as active agents, agreeing with certain movements, while turning away from others, or even refusing movement altogether (for example, standing still or remaining silent can also be discursive acts – doing nothing is always still a choice). This dance floor of discourse might be viewed akin to the *Soul Train* “dance line” where dancers take turns *putting their best foot forward* to impress the audience, making different moves with each turn through the line, much like the ongoing, processual engagement of discourse, which is never completed, and involves “constantly evaluating and considering one’s position and, inevitably, constantly shifting one’s perception of one’s position and the wider discourse as a whole.”⁴² In other words, on any given day I might decide to get skanking, turn a pirouette, do the mashed potato, or just take a seat and hang out at the back of the room.

My notion of discourse is also informed by Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia, “which always serves as a dialogizing background and resonator,” ensuring that language is never unitary; that context is of equal if not greater importance than the text itself; and that discourse becomes the arena where opposing centrifugal and centripetal forces stage “an intense interaction and struggle between one’s own and another’s word ... a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other.”⁴³ Each speech-act or “living utterance” therefore will always “brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads” to “become an active participant in social dialogue,” so that heteroglossia becomes a way of visualizing (or auralizing) the constant and ongoing intermingling of all discourses.⁴⁴ Bakhtin also points out the importance

⁴² Mills, “Discourse,” 87.

⁴³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, edited by Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 354-364.

⁴⁴ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 276.

of how “an independent, responsible and active discourse is *the* fundamental indicator of an ethical, legal and political human being.”⁴⁵ Without realizing one’s own discourse is, and must be, constantly in flux, one risks committing the fallacy of submitting to a world where meaning is fixed, when it is in fact constantly being comprehended, reshaped, reimagined, and redefined. In the struggle to locate one’s ever-shifting position, it is not a matter of simply being emplaced within discourse, it is also a matter of defining oneself and determining one’s own experience of reality and subjectivity. Negotiating the dance floor of discourse using whatever moves we choose to make (remembering that inaction is always still a choice), becomes a process of meaning-making within the world, a process that provides our sense of understanding about who and what we are as individuals.

2.3.2 RESEARCH-CREATION

Using a research-creation approach is important for this project, as, from my perspective, the deconstruction of a piece of music merits being done in more than just words on paper. The term research-creation has become quite popular in recent years but has seemingly failed to generate a common definition or understanding, until more recently through the work of Sophie Stévance and Serge Lacasse.⁴⁶ They argue that while “the term suggests a close (and reciprocal) relationship between (scholarly) research and the (artistic) creative process,” this leaves some clarity to be desired, as “these terms— which are often used interchangeably— usually refer to the specific kind of “research” inherent to any artistic activity, leading many to confuse the process of *scholarly* research with the kind of investigation essential to any form of artistic *practice*,” as it is easy to see that “most human activities involve *creativity* in *one form or*

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 350, emphasis in original.

⁴⁶ See also Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

another, including artistic creation and scholarly research.”⁴⁷ They define research-creation not as a discipline to be followed, but as an intermingling of the processes of conducting research and engaging in artistic practice, so that the two arrive at a reciprocal confluence – two rivers backing up at their union, introducing fresh waters and organisms into each other, in a sense, crossing streams – not seeking to infiltrate the other, but instead complementing each other. They clearly emphasize six descriptive factors of importance for research-creation, in that “research-creation should be considered as a methodological *approach* applied to individual or multiple-agent *projects* combining research *methods* and creative *practices* within a dynamic frame of causal *interaction*, and leading to both scholarly and artefactual *productions* (be they artistic or otherwise).”⁴⁸

Much like the toolbox of critical discourse analysis, Stévanec and Lacasse argue that research-creation should be considered a “methodological *approach*, rather than as an academic *discipline*,” that works toward “addressing a specific problem through a *project*.”⁴⁹ This means that research-creation will not always be an appropriate tool for every job, but with my own research focused on understanding what the discourse of “O Canada” is *doing*, a project-based focus feels natural to me. While this thesis project by definition must be an individual project that awards me an academic degree at its conclusion, it has certainly become a “multi-agent” project (thanks primarily to the cooperation and influence of Courtney McDermott contributing her talents as recording and mixing engineer on *Detuning the Anthem*), that uses multiple research methods and creative processes that “complement, inform and influence one another.”⁵⁰ This mutual influence between research and creation has resulted in both scholarly (this written thesis)

⁴⁷ Sophie Stévanec and Serge Lacasse, *Research-Creation in Music and the Arts: Towards a Collaborative Interdiscipline* (Milton Park, Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 1-3, emphasis in original.

⁴⁸ Stévanec and Lacasse, *Research-Creation in Music and the Arts*, 145, emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ Stévanec and Lacasse, *Research-Creation in Music and the Arts*, 123-124, emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Stévanec and Lacasse, *Research-Creation in Music and the Arts*, 124.

and creative (*Detuning the Anthem*) products, which have “reciprocally influence[d] each other in a dynamic and causal interaction” to in fact become “co-dependent.”⁵¹ As my theoretical research has continued to unfold, my approach to the creative product has shifted multiple times. Once I began composing and recording the creative product, it altered my thinking around aspects of the written thesis, and on and on the hermeneutic spiral continues to swirl as I complete these parallel projects – as it will surely continue to do after my thesis defense when I pivot to present this project in the public sphere.

Adopting research-creation for me has involved both the tactics of musical composition, as well as elements of new media practice, in that the presentation of the creative component of my thesis is delivered through a custom-built website. While I had been contemplating some sort of musical expression of my research for a while, I am once again greatly indebted to my friend and collaborator Miguelzinta Solís for introducing me to the idea of the dark ride, which can be explained most simply as a “mechanical storytelling machine” which employs “integrated, practical examples of immersive storytelling using a non-linear narrative.”⁵² Adapted from its predecessor, the ‘Tunnel of Love’ rides ubiquitously featured within amusement parks, dark rides employed emerging technologies to immerse audiences within dynamic narrative structures that audiences not only looked at while passing by on their motorized or electrified trolley cars, but often became active participants in the ride as well.⁵³ The creative portion of my thesis project, *Detuning the Anthem: A Choose-Your-Own Audio Adventure*, is in essence, a sonic dark ride of sorts. I am interested to create an experience that *takes the audience along for the ride*⁵⁴ and my approach in orchestrating a sonic adventure has largely been informed by this concept of the dark

⁵¹ Stévanec and Lacasse, *Research-Creation in Music and the Arts*, 125-126.

⁵² Joel Zika, “The Dark Ride: The Translation of Cinema into Spatial Experience,” MFA thesis, (Monash University, 2009), 50-51.

⁵³ Zika, “The Dark Ride,” 15-16.

⁵⁴ This idea of “taking the audience along for the ride” should be thought of more akin to “opening the door for them to participate” rather than any negative connotations associated with “being taken for a ride,” as I do not wish to deceive participants, but rather, invite them to undergo their own unsettling process.

ride. I also hope to disrupt the typical passive/active audience-performer relationship through this invitation to come along for the ride, where it is made clear that, as citizens of the nation-state, we are always already in a position of active participation, not passive observation. Joel Zika effectively explains this constant shifting between audience and participant roles within the dark ride structure where:

“the viewer’s position in the overall narrativity of the phantasmagorical environment is unstable: at one moment this might involve observing a scene or situation take place; at other times, becoming a participatory subject who is directly confronted, whose circulation through the space brings them ‘into’ the midst of the action. [...] The participant’s journey through these themes and spaces acts to link these episodes into a composite narrative experience. This moving experience offers a sequential ‘time code’ that propels the viewer through the narrative represented in the space, aware of immanent action yet uncertain of what will be waiting around the next corner. The role of the participant is constantly changing and this tension or estrangement is the Dark Ride’s unique feature.”⁵⁵

In more contemporary times, dark rides have expanded into digital formats, including augmented and virtual reality, and have also become easier to build through computer programs such as Planet Coaster, which allows users to create dark rides in a virtual environment and share their creations with other users, or as videos on YouTube.⁵⁶

The motivation to pursue the research-creation thesis option came from constant internal questions of: *What does my thesis do? For me? For the audience?* My desire was to affect some of change within Canadian society, so that people might reconsider not only *why things are the way they are*, but also *do they have to be this way?* I also wanted my thesis to *affect* people in a significant way, to make them *feel* something, rather than just create a written thesis that might prompt some deep critical thinking, but not necessarily generate any concrete actions in the real world. However, I also take heed of Dylan Robinson’s cautionary instruction not to confuse

⁵⁵ Zika, “The Dark Ride,” 17-18.

⁵⁶ The dark ride “Knots” by the user Pixelated was a particularly influential example for me as to the possibilities of the format. headhunter11. “Planet Coaster - Knots (Song by Watsky).” YouTube, August 11, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUgiHtNg04E>.

affect with reconciliation, as he criticizes musical performances “where audience members’ affective responses to music are experienced and described as felt forms of reconciliation”.⁵⁷ *Detuning the Anthem* does not seek to engender feelings of reconciliation at all, but rather, unsettle the listeners into realizing that in order for reconciliation to ever occur, many more actions must be taken beyond this affective listening experience. In fact, it is important to recognize that there will be many more mistakes and failures along the pathway to reconciliation, but that we should focus on “failing better” and learn from these mistakes, rather than be afraid to take action at all.⁵⁸

This thesis is focused on unsettling the self, a questioning of my own place, role, and actions within the ongoing structure of settler-colonialism: *how has sound shaped and positioned me within this system?* I have also considered how the artistic component of my thesis might become an offering up of myself as an example of how settler people (and others) might undertake this unsettling process. As mentioned above, I wish to avoid digressing into solipsistic navel-gazing, but rather, to lead by example so that others will follow. It is also important that this not be an experience designed solely for settler people – there are enough cultural events in Canada already that act as exclusionary technologies and I would not want to contribute in any way to that tradition. My aim is that all listeners might consider their own position within the interpellative mechanisms of the Canadian national imaginary, as Indigenous peoples and immigrants can of course also become complicit within systems of nationalism. What I hope this project offers to the audience is an experiential narrative journey of unsettling, which also implicates them in the process of unsettling, or *breaks the fourth wall* so that the audience might also become

⁵⁷ Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 204.

⁵⁸ For more on the concept of failure as learning see Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

performers within this experience. How do they actually *participate* in the presentation? How do they *unsettle themselves* during this experience?

These are the questions that led me to develop *Detuning the Anthem: A Choose-Your-Own Audio Guide Adventure*. This work is an interactive audio guide that provides both written/recorded invitations to the listener that will prompt a journey of critical reflection and self-education within (and possibly outside) their community. It consists of a number of orchestrated musical compositions based on the concept of *detuning* the anthem, and a series of narrated prompts designed to provoke critical thinking and discussion following each orchestrated musical section.⁵⁹ This project is both artistic and pedagogical in nature, seeking to provide a thought-provoking aesthetic (sonic) experience to the listener, with the narrated prompts inciting additional opportunities for reflection. My creative approach is heavily influenced by Dylan Robinson's notion of "aesthetic action," which emphasizes how affective, embodied, and sensory artistic experiences can move past a basic conceptualization of aesthetics, to unleash the "potential to assist us in viewing the structures that we are embedded in more clearly – perhaps revealing the ways in which public spaces and national discourses privilege certain bodies and contribute to the ongoing oppression of others."⁶⁰

I am aligned with Michel Foucault's concern in making clear the *functions* of discourse, as he has stated: "[p]eople know what they do, they frequently know why they do what they do, but what they don't know is what *what they do does*."⁶¹ As Paulette Regan notes, "as Canadian

⁵⁹ My notion of detuning is drawn from an oppositional reading of R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977), in which he argues we need to hear the resonances of the earth and become attuned to them. I believe we should instead focus on *detuning* the world, to dismantle the unjust social structures of settler-colonialism we have inherited, in addition to systems of neoliberalism, sexism, homo/transphobia, and the myriad other ways Eurocentric thought serves to oppress people around the world.

⁶⁰ Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin "The Body is a Resonant Chamber," in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action In and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, edited by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016): 2-3.

⁶¹ Siegfried Jäger and Florentine Meyer, "Analysing Discourses and Dispositives: A Foucauldian Approach to Theory and Methodology," in *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3rd ed, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage Publications Inc, 2015): 118, emphasis added.

citizens, we are ultimately responsible for the past and present actions of our government. To those who say that we cannot change the past, I say that we can learn from it.”⁶² In addition to confronting the physical violence of colonialism, which still continues today, Regan urges us to unsettle the settler within, and consider how deconstructing Canadian identity and history can help us see how violence also occurs in other forms, which might cause us to consider how “O Canada” itself can be a more nuanced act of epistemic violence.⁶³ I make clear my own subject-position and motivations here, as a reminder that my own opinions and writings on this topic are also part of the discourse itself.⁶⁴ I am also an active participant within this struggle to (re)define normative practice as it relates to the Canadian national anthem. Will my family and friends be offended by my actions to critique and complicate the time-honoured tradition of singing the anthem? Will they resist, embrace, or simply be ambivalent about it? Does this project make me a *bad Canadian*? Might it in fact be a *good thing* to be a *bad Canadian* until this country can reckon with its past and ongoing violence against Indigenous peoples?

⁶² Regan, *Unsettling*, 4.

⁶³ Regan, *Unsettling*, 5.

⁶⁴ Jager and Meyer, “Analysing Discourses and Dispositives,” 119.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE SPECTRUM OF SONIC RELATIONS

Why is it so difficult for so many people to listen? Why do they start talking when there is something to hear? Do they have their ears not on the sides of their heads but situated inside their mouths so that when they hear something their first impulse is to start talking?

– John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a survey of perspectives on how ethical relations may be achieved through sound. Rather than thinking in binary oppositions of sound/silence, hearing/listening, producer/receiver, and speaker/audience, this essay will outline a spectrum of relations that might exist within the sonic sphere. What does it *mean* to listen? How might *being heard* serve to contain and control voices of dissent? What are the risks and responsibilities of listening? I ask these questions in order to understand how we might use sonic concepts to achieve more equitable social relations, but also to demonstrate the role sound plays within the ongoing structure of settler-colonialism in Canada.

3.2 HOW HEARING WORKS

The physical experience of sound is enacted through the mechanism of the ear, which absorbs and measures pressure waves felt (by humans) through the mediums of either air or water. The decibel, or dB (named for Alexander Graham Bell) is the standard unit of measurement to indicate an increase in pressure on the human ear drum, which we also take to indicate the volume of a sound (i.e. how loud it is). The louder the sound, the higher the pressure being experienced on your ear drum. However, the measurement of zero decibels (0 dB) does not indicate the absence of sound (or silence), but rather that 0 dB is the quietest sound the human ear can perceive. When a sound travels through the air, it moves in waves of pressure that oscillate

between peak and trough, with this oscillation indicating a pattern of cycles represented in the unit of measurement known as hertz (or Hz). The value of hertz indicates how many cycles (sets of peaks and troughs of pressure waves) reach the ear in one second, with 100Hz meaning that 100 cycles of waves reach the ear in one second. The average human ear can hear frequencies between 20Hz and 20,000Hz, with these physically-generated frequencies corresponding to the perceptual concept of pitch, or, in musical terms, low notes to high notes. Notes lower in pitch have correspondingly lower frequencies (think of the left-hand notes in piano, or the rumble of thunder), while high frequencies generate higher pitches (like screeching guitar feedback, a soprano opera singer, or nails on a chalkboard). This brief overview of how hearing works is not just to explain what your ears do, but also serves as a useful way to introduce how – just like the difference between the physics of frequencies, and the perception of pitch – there also exists a clear distinction between the physical act of hearing, and the psychological experience of listening.⁶⁵

3.3 FROM HEARING TO LISTENING

In one of the first volumes to emerge from the field that has come to be known as sound studies, Barry Truax's *Acoustic Communication* begins to provide some nuance on what might be seen as a spectrum of sonic relations. Truax describes a continuum of sound that increases in complexity as it goes from speech, to music, to the soundscape. As the continuum progresses, it relies on “longer-term relationships more than short-term ones for complete understanding.”⁶⁶ In other words, it is simpler to achieve understanding of a conversation with another person, than it is to comprehend the larger sonic messages contained within the entirety of the acoustic environment. It might also be helpful to reframe this idea in terms of hearing being a much less

⁶⁵ Roland Barthes, “Listening,” in *The Responsibility of Forms*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985): 245-260.

⁶⁶ Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication* (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing, 1984), 42. See also R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

demanding act than what the deeper process of listening would require, but also that it takes time and energy to truly develop ethical relations, whether through sound, or using all our other senses. All parts of this acoustic continuum are intertwined and rely on each other to exist, as Truax explains that “the health and survival of any one part depends on that of all the others. The continuum is both a human artifact *and* a human responsibility.”⁶⁷ While Truax’s focus is primarily on what might be variously termed acoustic ecology, environmental sound, or the soundscape, he brings to light the notion that there is an inherent *responsibility* to one’s existence within this acoustic continuum, which might also be applied in micro-relational contexts as well. When a person stomps on the gas pedal of their truck, they are responsible for the corresponding aural output that is distributed into their neighborhood. In contrast, listening to the sounds of bird calls throughout the seasons might provide particular local knowledge on migration patterns that can only be understood through sound. Our existence in the world of sound implicitly suggests that when an actor (human, or otherwise) says something to me, there is an inherent responsibility to go beyond hearing, to *listen and learn* from what this entity is saying to me.⁶⁸ Much like learning a musical instrument, developing proficiency with this type of listening is something that requires practice to develop and maintain over time.

Jean-Francois Augoyard defines the two specific and complementary auditory concepts of asyndeton and synecdoche to demonstrate how hearing is always an *intentional perceptual action*, rather than simply the passive *reception* of a sound.⁶⁹ While asyndeton allows the ear to *erase* portions of what is heard in order to remove extraneous information, synecdoche allows the ear to *fill in the blanks* of what is not heard – two processes that can often happen simultaneously

⁶⁷ Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 45.

⁶⁸ Sound entities can of course also be non-human. See Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), and Robinson, *Hungry Listening*.

⁶⁹ Jean Francois Augoyard, *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995).

to formulate coherent sonic processing. These processes of the ear, whereby “valorization of certain sounds necessitates partial or absolute deletion of other sounds,” means that a perceptual ordering takes place in the interpretation of sound, forming “the basis of the idea of the sonic effect itself.”⁷⁰ Augoyard concludes that to perceive a sound is therefore to determinedly *select* it, stating that “our intention to hear is decisive because we actually hear only what we want to hear.”⁷¹ The “cocktail effect”⁷² is an everyday example of this type of hearing/listening. In a room full of people, you might have someone speaking directly to you, but your ears can be attuned to another (perhaps more interesting) conversation across the room. However, these perceptual choices are perhaps sometimes less intentional than they are conditioned, as a result of personal factors of upbringing, class, race, gender, sexuality, age, and ability.

3.4 LISTENING BEYOND UNDERSTANDING

While Truax and Augoyard both conceive of hearing/listening within a framework of informational exchange, other conceptualizations of listening move away from self-interested or instrumental motivations, toward achieving a deeper field of possible relations through sound. As noted earlier, while “hearing is a physiological phenomenon; [and] listening is a psychological act,” it is important to also unpack what this psychological approach to listening really means, as Roland Barthes argues that “listening cannot be defined only by its object or, one might say, by its goal.”⁷³

I want to avoid presenting a dichotomized understanding of hearing-as-receiving and listening-as-understanding, when both of these acts might contain multiple levels of operation. Barthes argues that listening takes place within three levels: the first is simply an alert, where the

⁷⁰ Augoyard, *Sonic Experience*, 124.

⁷¹ Augoyard, *Sonic Experience*, 124.

⁷² Originally described by E. Colin Cherry, “Some Experiments on the Recognition of Speech, with One and with Two Ears,” *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 25, no. 1 (1953): 975–79.

⁷³ Barthes, “Listening,” 245.

attention is drawn to “*indices*,” which might also be posited as the simple form of hearing which receives the sound. One might hear a dog bark, and become startled in the awareness of hearing this sound. At the second level the task is that of deciphering, where the “ear attempts to intercept *signs*,” which might approach something more in the realm of understanding or interpreting the meaning of the sound.⁷⁴ Is the dog barking because it is angry or threatened, or is it simply saying hello? However, it is at what Barthes describes as the third level of listening where an “inter-subjective space” develops that is less interaction, and more reciprocal, “where ‘I am listening’ also means ‘listen to me.’”⁷⁵ Moving past hearing (receiving), and listening (interpreting), Barthes’ third level of inter-subjective listening abandons a communicational model of information exchange, and moves towards a deeper level of inter-relational significance. Perhaps the dog does not progress past the second level, but I, as the human listener, might contemplate questions such as: what are the dog’s desires? What does it think? Does it know I’m here? Does it care about me? And so forth...

Jean-Luc Nancy also contemplates these different levels of listening in his critiques of the philosophical drive for listening to become understanding, arguing that the ear of the philosopher strives toward a purportedly objective listening in order to capture the form of a sound and theorize its meaning.⁷⁶ This drive is rooted in a Western rational concept of the world, where documenting and categorizing information is of paramount concern. Rather than *feeling* the world, philosophical inquiry is primarily concerned with analyzing the world, which can mean that an important epistemological opportunity is abandoned by adopting by more rational approaches towards sound. Instead, Nancy proposes we might instead think of listening as an act of moving through the “sonorous,” which “outweighs form. It does not dissolve it, but rather

⁷⁴ Barthes, “Listening,” 245.

⁷⁵ Barthes, “Listening,” 246.

⁷⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy and Charlotte Mandell. *Listening*, 1st ed (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

enlarges it.”⁷⁷ The need for the eye to *make evident* and display knowledge is contrasted by how the ears *make resonant* the process of meaning-making, as sound is not simply *heard* but can also be *felt* throughout the entire body. Nancy asks how we might become immersed and formed by a type of listening that is invested in the sonority itself, rather than the message, so that listening is more of a *becoming*, questioning what it means “*to be* listening, *to be* all ears.”⁷⁸ Much in line with Barthes, Nancy examines divisions between different levels of sensory experience, discerning the “simple nature” of hearing with the “attentive” nature of listening.⁷⁹ Listening is not just an attempt to make meaning from the words of others, but to hear and understand ourselves in this process as well. Nancy also examines the affective nature of resonance, arguing that sound propagates the body in a way that visual input does not, and that silence might simply just be another “arrangement of resonance,” while also contemplating the idea of the “body as reverberation chamber, from end to end.”⁸⁰

In keeping with Nancy’s phenomenological understanding of listening, Lisbeth Lipari considers the potential for “*listening as a way of being*” which might foster an “ethics of attunement – an awareness of an attention to the harmonic interconnectivity of all beings and objects.”⁸¹ Listening moves beyond something that we *do*, to become something that we *are*, that encourages “both an ethical relation and a way of being in the world.”⁸² Lipari complicates the common understanding that speakers are active *producers* of sound and listeners are passive *receivers* of sound, to instead argue that speaking and listening are always simultaneous and intertwined, which she calls “interlistening,” in that “listening is itself a form of speaking that

⁷⁷ Nancy, *Listening*, 2.

⁷⁸ Nancy, *Listening*, 5.

⁷⁹ As well as elaborating on the simple/attentive natures of other sensory experiences such as “seeing and looking, smelling and sniffing or scenting, tasting and savoring, touching and feeling.” Nancy, *Listening*, 5.

⁸⁰ Nancy, *Listening*, 21-27. See also Robinson, “The Body is a Resonant Chamber,” 1-20.

⁸¹ Lisbeth Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement*, (Penn State Press, 2014), 2.

⁸² Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 3.

resonates with echoes of everything we have ever heard, thought, seen, touched, said, and read throughout our lives.”⁸³ In other words, everything we hear is affected by our cumulative life experiences, so that the way we hear things *says something* about our particular embodied position within the world. Lipari also emphasizes how listening is not solely a sonic process, but is something that uses the entire sensorium of the body and is an affective experience that activates the entire body as “one giant listening organ,” as she questions “what if we are, in some sense, all ears?”⁸⁴ Whether we are actively engaged in the sonic aspect of listening or not, during any given moment in the world “everything vibrates and everything resonates” so that “our bodies always are in touch with sound.”⁸⁵ Listening can then become much more than communicational exchange, but an inter-bodily mingling, a hosting of the speaker’s presence, a “kind of dwelling place from where we offer our hospitality to others and the world.”⁸⁶ This notion of hosting is not an attempt to understand or comprehend the information or emotions that are being shared, but Lipari argues that listening ought to be an act which “refuse[s] to control or master. It is to hold lightly, if to hold at all. Actually, it is not to hold, not to grasp. No grasping, no holding. Being.”⁸⁷

Lipari draws from phenomenologist Edmund Husserl’s notion of intersubjectivity, which is a concept that can “describe the space of shared understanding, or common ground, between persons, wherein people, as individual subjects, collaboratively create and share meaning.”⁸⁸ She also appears to draw upon Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia, as she argues that “all speakers and listeners are, without exception, always in conversation with past, present, and

⁸³ Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 9.

⁸⁴ Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 30.

⁸⁵ Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 43.

⁸⁶ Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 102. See also Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice* (New York: iUniverse, 2005).

⁸⁷ Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 105.

⁸⁸ Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 129.

future speakers and listeners.”⁸⁹ Lipari extends from these sources to develop her own concept of interlistening, which seeks to describe how “communicative interactions transcend boundaries around time, place, and person.”⁹⁰ Lipari here again positions interlistening not as something that might be *done*, or an “ideal toward which we should aspire” but rather a state of *being*, “a description of the multiplicitous phenomena that arise simultaneously when we listen, speak, and think. That is to say, listening, speaking, and thinking are an integrated plural, rather than a triplet of three seemingly independent processes occurring separately from each other.”⁹¹ To return to musical metaphors, interlistening might be viewed akin to the way a choir comprises both individual voices, and a collective voice listening and singing together; or how a blues guitarist might quote a riff from the past but imbue it with their own particular nuance; or how digital sampling can permit mash-ups which collage together various musical references into rich new tapestries of sound.

So far, I have been seeking to illuminate some concepts that might answer the question of *what listening can be* in contrast to the simplest models of hearing as a communicational exchange of information. However, to truly understand the complexities of what listening might entail, I must also ask questions about where listening occurs, how listening occurs, and most importantly – who is doing the listening.

3.5 CRITICAL LISTENING POSITIONALITY

Barthes makes clear that *what* we hear is always conditioned by *where* we hear, as sounds are always linked to the spaces in which they originate.⁹² This also means that listening helps to understand one’s place in the world, but that listening is also a process of filtering in/out what is

⁸⁹ Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 117. See also Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

⁹⁰ Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 157.

⁹¹ Lipari, *Listening Thinking Being*, 157.

⁹² Barthes, “Listening,” 247.

heard.⁹³ Barthes draws a link between listening and hermeneutics – as listening repeats, so does learning – meaning that listening can be considered as an epistemological approach to understanding the world.⁹⁴ Similarly, as outlined above, Barry Truax’s examination of acoustic communication focuses primarily on the relationship established not just between speaker and listener, but between the listener and their environment.⁹⁵ What is heard is affected by where it is heard, so that the meaning of this hearing is shaped by the surrounding context. Truax emphasizes that listening and location act as a “*system* of relationships, not as isolated entities. The listener is also a soundmaker, and even the sound of one’s own voice comes back to the ear coloured by the environment.”⁹⁶ How we hear, and how we make sound, is both influenced by, and exerts an influence upon, our social and spatial context – which can create either positive or negative relations within this field as the sonic relations of the human and natural world intermingle.

J.F. Augoyard and R. Murray Schafer have both lamented how the change in our urban architecture has altered our listening capabilities, whereby the density of urban construction limits not just our ability to see the horizon, but to *hear the horizon* as well.⁹⁷ This loss of our capacity for long-distance hearing represents a fundamental and historical shift in aurality, given that “the urban environment has compressed acoustic spaces and confused directionality, making it often difficult or impossible to locate sources.”⁹⁸ Augoyard notes two distinct factors in the reception of a “sound event,” with the first being the location of its production; and the second being the listener.⁹⁹ The significance of a sound cannot be isolated from the context in which it is

⁹³ Barthes, “Listening,” 248.

⁹⁴ Barthes, “Listening,” 249.

⁹⁵ Truax, *Acoustic Communication*.

⁹⁶ Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, xii.

⁹⁷ Augoyard, *Sonic Experience*, and Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*.

⁹⁸ Augoyard, *Sonic Experience*, xv.

⁹⁹ Augoyard, *Sonic Experience*, 4.

produced (for example, a scream *means* something different when heard in a dark alley, rather than being emitted from a TV screen), but the reception of a sound is also always “shaped subjectively, depending on the auditory capacity, the attitude, and the psychology and culture of the listener... every group, every culture listens its own way.”¹⁰⁰

As mentioned above, listening is not simply an act but a sensory aptitude which can either be strengthened – or not. Through the course of our lives, we learn to either hear or listen to sounds based upon our geographical, social, and cultural conditions. We might also think of this *development of the ears* as something that shapes one’s personal politics of listening; cultural factors determine how we orient ourselves towards certain sounds, and away from others, developing particular attitudes and relationships to sounds based on their origins of speaker, location, tone, timbre, language, etc.¹⁰¹ Studying Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the testimonies spoken there by Indian Residential School survivors, Beverly Diamond notes how listening in this context becomes a “diagnostic of diverse values and experiences, an act of commitment and respect (or not), and an ethics of response ability.”¹⁰² This nuanced perspective on “response ability” goes beyond a sense of duty or accountability, to consider how our *ability to respond* to another’s words might be shaped by our cultural conditioning. For example, Elder Sarah Anala explains that “the Euro-Western world hears with their ears. The Inuit world hears with their spirit and their heart.”¹⁰³ Anala’s perspective helps introduce the idea that while listening should ideally be rooted in ethical relations, it can also become a modality focused on extraction and consumption, a listening that devours the sounds it

¹⁰⁰ Augoyard, *Sonic Experience*, 4.

¹⁰¹ Beverly Diamond, “Resisting Containment: The Long Reach of Song at The Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools,” in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, edited by Dylan Robinson, and Keavy Martin (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016): 243-245. For more on the concept of orientation, see also Sara Ahmed, “Sexual Orientation,” in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 65-107.

¹⁰² Diamond, “Resisting Containment,” 257.

¹⁰³ Diamond, “Resisting Containment,” 257

encounters. Stó:lō sound studies scholar Dylan Robinson describes this as “hungry listening,” which points to more than just a mode of hearing, but also outlines a form of settler-colonial perceptual orientation:

“As a form of perception, “hungry listening” is derived from two Halq’eméylem words: shxwelítemelh (the adjective for settler or white person’s methods/things) and xwélalà:m (the word for listening). shxwelítemelh comes from the word xwelítem (white settler) and more precisely means “starving person.” [...] I use shxwelítemelh to refer to a form of perception: “a settler’s starving orientation.”¹⁰⁴

Hungry listening is however not simply “listening through whiteness,” but is instead an aural/oral reflection of the extractivist and assimilatory nature of settler colonialism.¹⁰⁵ Robinson examines how listening itself can replicate forms of “settlement,” if the motivation to listen originates from a “Western sense orientation in which we do not feel the need to be responsible to sound as we would another life.”¹⁰⁶ Listening that only seeks to capture information, establish ownership over facts, or focus one’s attention, ends up becoming a civilizing sensory paradigm which disciplines the ear into Eurocentric perspectives on the world, and ignores Indigenous cosmologies. Providing numerous musical and social examples, Robinson shows how hungry listening’s focus on *settling* ensures that “the listener orients teleologically toward progression and resolution, just as hunger drives toward satiation.”¹⁰⁷ School clocks, church bells, and the ban on speaking Indigenous languages within the Indian Residential School system can all be seen as attempts forcing Indigenous peoples to conform to Western standards of listening that result in a placated population. This pursuit of sonic conditioning through colonial institutions also takes place in other settings; for example, how the convention of singing “O Canada” in schools

¹⁰⁴ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 15. See also Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Old Saybrook, CT: Tantor Media, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 50. For more on the frequent teleological drive within Western music, see also Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

gradually inculcates a notion of patriotism upon impressionable young ears within the Canadian public school system.

Robinson frames sonic relations in terms of “critical listening positionalities” which comprise a continuum that “involves a self-reflexive questioning of how race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and cultural background intersect and influence the way we are able to hear sound, music, and the world around us.”¹⁰⁸ By examining one’s own privileges, biases, and abilities, it is possible to not only understand one’s own critical listening position, but also to become aware of how listening plays a role in the ideological interpellation of citizens within structures of the nation-state; for example, how listening to “O Canada” might generate feelings of national pride.¹⁰⁹ However, a simple acknowledgement of one’s own listening positionality is not enough, as this risks becoming what Sara Ahmed terms a non-performative utterance – the self-righteous declaration of support for a cause, that then intentionally fails to take any substantive action.¹¹⁰ Robinson makes clear that to interrogate one’s critical listening position, one “cannot simply select and add noncolonial, feminist, queer, or black listening filters in order to listen otherwise” like selecting Instagram filters – as to “uncritically apply other cultural perspectives on listening would itself be another act of appropriation.”¹¹¹ Critical listening positionality considers how there are many layers *within ourselves* that intersect, which determine how we listen not just as a relation between speaker and listener, but takes into account our own internally stratified layers as well.¹¹² Robinson argues that instead of seeing critical listening positions as something to be *applied*, we should instead understand this as a process of internal *oscillation* that seeks to “find greater levels of relationship between the strata of

¹⁰⁸ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 10.

¹⁰⁹ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 10-11. See also Althusser, “Ideology.”

¹¹⁰ Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 116-138.

¹¹¹ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 51.

¹¹² Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 58.

positionality” and self-reflexively considers how each of these various layers either invite or inhibit different ways of comprehending the world through our ears.¹¹³

Just as Robinson considers how “normative listening orientations”¹¹⁴ are determined by listening habits influenced by race, gender and ability, Jennifer Stoever formulates the sonic color line and the listening ear as theoretical frameworks for demonstrating how sound is shaped by racial distinctions. Stoever describes the sonic color line as both a process and a product, in that the *process* of constructing racialized bodies through expectations of how they should sound, leads to the *production* of an unmarked boundary which divides the proper, normative, and invisible sounds of whiteness, from the unnatural, improper, or primitive sounds of so-called Others.¹¹⁵ The sonic color line is made possible by what Stoever calls the listening ear, a representation of how the listening practices of a dominant culture become a disciplinary tool requiring obedience to established associations between the purported civility of whiteness and allegedly primitive nature of Black sounds.¹¹⁶ Stoever examines historical literature and media reports of Black performers to demonstrate “how listening became a racialized body discipline” that “offered white elites a new method of grounding racial abjection in the body while cultivating white listening practices as critical, discerning, and delicate and, above all, as the standard of citizenship and personhood.”¹¹⁷ The sonic color line essentially *draws a line in the sound* to police sonic differences between white and Black people, marking Black sounds as Other, while whiteness is rendered sonically invisible, with white male Americans being socialized to perceive their own aurality as “the keynote of American identity.”¹¹⁸ This line not only marks the speech of Others as improper, but also as a threat to the civility and order of

¹¹³ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 61.

¹¹⁴ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 60.

¹¹⁵ Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 7.

¹¹⁶ Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, 7-8.

¹¹⁷ Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, 4-5.

¹¹⁸ Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line*, 12.

American society, where the accents and slang of Others (particularly Black people, in American culture) poses a risk of infection to the purity of American standards. What Stoeveer calls the listening ear becomes the ideological scaffolding to construct the sonic color line, allowing certain sounds to be coded Black (rap music, for example), while other sounds are coded white (classical music, for example). While Stoeveer's focus is on discourses of sound within African-American history from the US Civil War to the Jim Crow era in the 1950s, her theory resonates with other modalities of sonic separation established between Western rationalism, and Indigenous aural perspectives (among others). These same concepts can be applied within Indigenous-settler relations in Canada, particularly in how Canadian composers have coded Indigenous sounds into their orchestrations, creating cultural signifiers and sonic stereotypes through the use of sliding pitches, grace notes, minor tonalities, and other musical markers.¹¹⁹

Fundamentally, listening is a process with relations of power embedded within it, an embodied experience that is affected not just by race, but gender, ability, and age; as well as an *emplaced* experience that takes into account the *body* of the listener but also the *time and space* in which listening occurs.¹²⁰ Our formative experiences, along with the political, social, and cultural climates in which we exist, determine *what* is heard when the process of listening occurs. Taking into account this concept of embodied or emplaced listening also helps remind us that hearing does not only happen through the ears, but is a multi-faceted experience that “emphasizes the entanglement of mind, body, and space.”¹²¹ This embodied concept of listening must also take into account the multi-sensory nature of the human body. Evelyn Glennie is one of the world's leading percussionists, and explains her perspective on the interconnected nature of touch and

¹¹⁹ Mary I. Ingraham, “Assimilation, integration and individuation: the evolution of first nations musical citizenship in Canadian opera,” in *Opera Indigene: Re/representing first nations and indigenous cultures*, edited by Pamela Karantonis, and Dylan Robinson (Ashgate Publishing Ltd: Farnham, England, 2010): 222-228.

¹²⁰ For more on the concept of emplacement, see Kimberly Mair, *Guerilla Aesthetics: Art, Memory, and the West German Urban Guerilla* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 9-18.

¹²¹ Mair, *Guerilla Aesthetics*, 9.

hearing as it relates to her musicianship, given that she is profoundly deaf. Glennie argues that being deaf is a largely misunderstood experience, dispelling any notions that “deaf people live in a world of silence” and uses the example of a large truck passing by to illustrate how we don’t either hear or feel the vibration, but that both occur simultaneously – meaning that “hearing is basically a specialized form of touch.”¹²² Glennie explains that “deafness does not mean that you can’t hear, only that there is something wrong with the ears. Even someone who is totally deaf can still hear/feel sounds.”¹²³ Whether a person is deaf or not, the process of listening takes into account much more than a simple model of information exchange, as Glennie argues that even two people without deafness will not hear the same sound, since their individual senses will generate different sonic results within their consciousness – much in line with Bakhtin’s theories of heteroglossia and polyphony.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Considering a wide range of sensory affect, personal politics, historical context, geographical reverberations, and embodied experiences helps us understand listening as a highly negotiated and profoundly complicated aspect of human experience. This complex negotiation of sound is particularly important when applied to our rights and responsibilities as citizens within a nation-state, and how we respond to the sounds of the national anthem hailing us into the body politic of the country. Without considering *how* we listen, we cannot fully grasp how this listening shapes *who* we are – an important consideration to make within a lyrical and rhythmic analysis of the Canadian national anthem.

¹²² Evelyn Glennie, “Hearing Essay,” Teach the World to Listen, January 1, 2015. <https://www.evelyn.co.uk/hearing-essay/>.

¹²³ Glennie, “Hearing Essay.”

CHAPTER 4: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “STAND ON GUARD FOR THEE”? –

ANALYZING THE ANTHEM

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Canadian national anthem plays a role in socially constructing idealized Canadian subjects through its lyrical, musical, and performative elements. Through repeated performances across time and generations, the anthem creates a narrative that surreptitiously instructs its singers what an ideal Canadian citizen should do, without explicitly making this disciplinary imperative clear to those who sing it. In this chapter, I develop an approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to identify which discursive strategies are used in the various versions of the anthem, and how these strategies have related to the time and context in which the anthem lyrics were written. I show how these discursive strategies have shifted through each subsequent version of the anthem, moving from the original 1880 French version (never revised), to the first English version of 1908, through its subsequent revisions in 1913 and 1968, and its codification as the official anthem in 1980, leading up to the most recent 2018 gender-neutral version. I conclude that changes to the anthem’s lyrics, in combination with its rhythmic structure, can be read as parallel expressions of how settler-colonialism itself continues to shift strategies in an effort to keep up with the times and adapt to changing political forces, but remain in a dominant position of power using this *theme song for colonialism* to instruct Canadian citizens. However, while this may be what “O Canada” seeks to do, does it always accomplish this goal?

In order to deconstruct and analyze the anthem, I have employed the process of coding drawn from critical discourse analysis. Johnny Saldaña describes this not as a “precise science; [but] primarily an interpretive act,” that involves both *decoding* to “reflect on a passage of data to decipher its core meaning” as well as *encoding*, to “determine its appropriate code and label it,” generally taken together to understand coding as “the transitional process between data collection

and more extensive data analysis.”¹²⁴ This “analytic tactic” of coding provides the basis for further interpretive development of a research project: analysis of data leads towards new ideas in an interpretive chain – codes lead to categories, categories to themes/concepts, which ultimately lead to the development of theory.¹²⁵ In particular, some of the coding strategies I have used include coding for frequency to examine how lyrics and rhythmic phrases have been repeated; descriptive coding to understand the topics and themes that arise from the language within the anthems; and values coding to understand how the anthem ideologically hails listeners/singers into the anthems refrains.¹²⁶ Through the process of coding, I identified a number of themes for further analysis, including ideas of *subjectivity, religion, time, embodiment, protection, truth, land, existence, inclusion, rigidity, structure, and sustain*.

4.2 CONTEXT OF THE FRENCH LYRICS

The original version of the Canadian national anthem was written in 1880, with the music composed by Calixa Lavallée and the lyrics written by Adolphe-Basile Routhier. Whatever comes to mind when thinking of the anthem today, it’s important to recall that it was “written in French for French Canadians” and arises from the long-simmering tensions between the French and English cultures who competed for the dominant role in the settler-colonial foray into what we now call Canada.¹²⁷ Following the French loss in battle on the Plains of Abraham in 1759, France relinquished its conquered territory in North America to the English through the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Over the next hundred-odd years, tensions between French and English continued to simmer during the creation of Upper and Lower Canada in 1791, and in the various rebellions during the 1830s. These conflicts can also be seen to exist within the greater context of the

¹²⁴ Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (London: Sage, 2009), 4.

¹²⁵ Saldaña, *The Coding Manual*, 7-8.

¹²⁶ Althusser, “Ideology.”

¹²⁷ Robert Harris, *Song of a nation: The extraordinary life and times of Calixa Lavallée, the man who wrote O Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2019), 4.

American Revolution taking place from 1775-1783. Robert Harris posits that while the English may have tried to assimilate the French during these years, they elected not to, perhaps in order “to provide a bulwark against American colonies asserting their independence,” as tensions across the border between Union and Confederate states were beginning to mount.¹²⁸ Placating the French as a stable minority within the English culture would be of benefit to slowly strengthening a truly “Canadian” identity yet to fully formulate itself. Later, as the American Civil War raged between 1861-1865, these events may have catalyzed debates on Confederation (creating Canada as a nation in 1867), speeding its process in order to create a unified nation in the face of potential American expansionism. However, this drive towards unity was coming from an overwhelmingly English rather than French perspective.

Returning to the composition of the anthem itself, its context can be seen as one of struggle and tension between French and English cultures in this newly founded nation of Canada. Rather than being written as a celebration of this new unity, “O Canada” was written “precisely to celebrate that imperilled culture and to protect Quebec from future political despoliation,” an anthem not for all Canadians, but for *les Canadiens* – a “passionate French Canadian hymn to the glories of the past and the future of *la patrie*.”¹²⁹ It is a stroke of irony that the music and lyrics of “O Canada” were composed by two men who were in stark opposition to the creation of the country which, in contemporary times, their composition now represents.¹³⁰ While “O Canada” is now officially enshrined in the *National Anthem Act*¹³¹ as Canada’s official song, its composition did not arise from any such form of governmentality. In fact, it may have

¹²⁸ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 16. One might also argue that the English in Canada were more focused on dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their lands, rather than assimilating their own white-skinned French counterparts. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 and subsequent treaty making with Indigenous peoples quickly turned from peace and friendship (debatable of course) to land surrender.

¹²⁹ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 77.

¹³⁰ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 84.

¹³¹ Government of Canada, “Consolidated Federal Laws of Canada, National Anthem Act,” Government of Canada; Legislative Services Branch, March 18, 2021. <https://lois-laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-2/page-1.html>.

arisen directly in response to early English attempts to create a national anthem such as “Dominion Hymn.”¹³² As Harris argues, “none of this maneuvering towards the creation of an imperialistic national hymn for the country sat well with the ultramontane, suspicious, conservative nationalist forces in Quebec ... with its frank declarations of English domination and British imperialism.”¹³³ As English-Canadian nationalist sentiment begins to swell in the late 19th Century, so does French-*Canadien* in turn. In fact, it was in 1880 that the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste was holding an international conference with an expected attendance of 40,000 that became the impetus for “O Canada,” where “in keeping with the renewed interest in Quebec nationalism of the time, the organizers of the conference decided to use its prominence and significance to create and premiere a “national hymn” for Quebec, an anthem for French Canada.”¹³⁴ In summary, “O Canada” was not originally written to celebrate the unity of the nation, but rather was commissioned by an organization dedicated to “the defense of the people from New France, called *Canadiens*, then French-Canadians, that now today form the heart of the nation of Quebec.”¹³⁵

4.3 EXAMINING THE SONGWRITING TEAM

While the social, historical, and political context in which “O Canada” was written is important, an examination of the people responsible for its composition must also be explored in more depth. While Calixa Lavallée was a gifted young musician who left rural Québec to develop his skills under private patronage in Montréal, his opportunities for financial success there were limited – leading him to depart Canada in the fall of 1859 to become a blackface minstrel.¹³⁶

¹³² Co-written by Sir Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert & Sullivan fame) and the Marquis of Lorne (John Campbell, Canada’s fourth Governor General, in March 1880. See Harris, *Song of a nation*, 119.

¹³³ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 121.

¹³⁴ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 123.

¹³⁵ Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, “À Propos De La SSJB,” Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste Montreal. Accessed March 24, 2021. <https://ssjb.com/a-propos/>. Author’s own translation, emphasis added.

¹³⁶ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 22.

Lavallée took to this profession for the next decade of his life, becoming “a leading musician on the minstrel circuit in the United States” as well as bandleader, director, composer, and arranger; finishing his career in blackface with one of the most famous groups in America, the San Francisco Minstrels.¹³⁷ Harris argues that this experience “showed him the power of music to rouse a people and define a culture,” but when Lavallée returned permanently to Montreal in 1873, he was sure to erase any and all mentions to his career as a minstrel.¹³⁸ I will also point out here that, unsurprisingly, none of Lavallée’s history as a blackface minstrel is mentioned anywhere in the Government of Canada’s official history of “The People Behind the Anthem.”¹³⁹

The anthem’s lyrics were supplied by Adolphe-Basile Routhier, described by Robert Harris as “a leading conservative thinker and judge,” but also a self-styled poet, who, after hearing Lavallée’s musical composition for the first time, “that very night, in a burst of inspiration, Routhier composed all the words to the anthem, all four verses.”¹⁴⁰ If Routhier is to be considered a poet, one must take into account that his poetry was primarily an aestheticization of his religious and political views, rather than a creative calling. Harris describes Routhier as “a fiercely conservative voice in the politics of post-Confederation Quebec, as well as an ultramontane writer of considerable skill, often courting controversy for his deeply religious and anti-modern views.”¹⁴¹ While Harris glosses over the influencing factor of ultramontanism at the time, I will highlight the strong connection between Catholicism and French-Canadian national identity, which still lingers today.¹⁴² Routhier was a leading proponent of ultramontane views that demanded Catholicism remain untainted by modern thinking, and insisted upon the “supremacy

¹³⁷ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 23.

¹³⁸ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 95. Whether this was motivated by shame and embarrassment by this overtly racist practice, or in order to develop his CV as a more ‘serious’ musician is unclear – likely a mixture of the two.

¹³⁹ Government of Canada, “The people behind the anthem,” Government of Canada; Canadian Heritage, August 2, 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/anthems-canada/people-behind-anthem.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 124.

¹⁴¹ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 126.

¹⁴² See the ongoing debates in Quebec regarding secularism, especially in relation to Bill 21. National Assembly of Quebec, “An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State,” Province of Quebec, June 16, 2019, <https://canlii.ca/t/53mg1>

of religious over civil society.”¹⁴³ Once again, the Government of Canada website has little to say here regarding Routhier’s strictly conservative politics, as the only personal information given about him – besides the many awards he received during his lifetime – is an assertion that he was “better known as a poet than as a judge.”¹⁴⁴ Lavallée’s music and Routhier’s lyrics were together published as “O Canada” in April 1880, becoming “a statement of pride and a somewhat-defensive belligerency which was the essence of the ultramontane view of Quebec’s place in the world.”¹⁴⁵

4.4 ANALYZING THE FRENCH LYRICS

In coding the French anthem, I drew out the themes of *time, embodiment, religion, protection and subjectivity*. The notion of “Je me souviens” (I remember), is a powerful idea in the Québécois national imaginary, recalling the defeat of French forces in battle on the Plains of Abraham. The narrative of the French lyrics emplaces Canada in the past, describing the celebrated embodiment of the nation through its previous actions, a history of valor that will protect “us,” its citizens (see Appendix 1 for comprehensive lyrics sheet).

These lyrics assert Canada as the “terre de nos aïeux” (land of our ancestors), situating a historical territorial possession since time immemorial, whose body is “ceint de fleurons glorieux” (adorned with beautiful flowers), alluding to past achievements. Further reinforcing this *past tense* is Canada’s past actions in both “porter l’épée” and “porter la croix” (carrying the sword and the cross), but the French lyrics’ strongest assertion of historical dominance is that “ton histoire est une épopée, des plus brillants exploits” – an epic history of the most brilliant exploits. Finally, Canada’s “valeur, de foi trempée” (valor, steeped in faith) invokes the

¹⁴³ N. Voisine, “Ultramontanism,” The Canadian Encyclopedia. Accessed March 24, 2021.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ultramontanism>.

¹⁴⁴ Government of Canada, “The people behind the anthem.”

¹⁴⁵ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 126.

compounding density of this past-tense timeframe, like the rich color of a mug of tea, left to accumulate flavour over time. Canada here is no mere abstract concept of the nation-state, but an *embodied figure* whose “front” (crown, brow, or face) is adorned with glorious flowers, and its arms demonstrate obvious strength in their capacity to simultaneously carry both sword and cross.¹⁴⁶ This past-tense, embodied figure is also a *religious figure*, which not only carries the cross, but whose aforementioned valor is richly imbued in faith-based acclaim. This brings me to the twice-repeated closing lines. Now that Canada has been established as a *historically embodied religious figure*, its past *actions* demonstrate that it can be trusted to use the sword and cross it carries to “protégera nos foyers et nos droits” (protect our homes and our rights), with the implication being, of course, that these “homes” must have been standing for some time now. It is not just Canada that is established as a figure here, but also that the *subjectivity* of “us” as Canadians begins to take shape as well in the French lyrics. In this short song of 51 words, it should be noted that nine of these words (18%) are pronouns, with “nos, ton, ta” constructing the anthem as a dialogue between Canada, as the recipient of its citizens’ affections, and “us” as its (French-Canadian) subjects, in need of protection – from whom or what, it is not made clear. This final line is also the only instance of clear repetition in the lyrics, reinforcing the conclusion that above all else, Canada is “our” protector. The French lyrics construct a collective “we” who deserve to have our homes and rights protected by the *historically embodied religious figure that is Canada*. But questions remain around *who exactly “we” are and who “we” are not*.¹⁴⁷

4.5 INTERLUDE: THE ANTHEM UNHEARD

¹⁴⁶ I am indebted to Caroline Hodes for pointing the historical connection between these lyrics of “the sword and the cross” with further historical connections to colonial imagery: from the crusades, to the Spanish conquest of the Americas, as well as the French “Croix de Guerre” given to French and Allied soldiers during WWI and WWII.

¹⁴⁷ The three additional verses of French lyrics venture even further into explicit religious imagery, while the additional English lyrics mostly centre on landscape imagery, but also insert God into the fourth verse. For the full lyrics of additional verses, see The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “O Canada,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 11, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/O-Canada>.

While the anthem was slated to premiere at an outdoor celebration for Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day (June 24, 1880), it was apparently bumped, and only played that date for a smaller indoor audience without Routhier's lyrics.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps even more fittingly however, its first full performance took place three days later, during Catholic Mass at Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church in Montréal.¹⁴⁹ From there, "O Canada" seems to have completely disappeared from any realm of importance, making little to no impact upon French-Canadian culture and society. A few short months later, Lavallée left Montréal for Boston, never to return for more than a few days, expressing his frustration in a letter written shortly before his departure that "an artist is not meant to rot in an obscure place and especially not in an even more obscure country."¹⁵⁰ Lavallée's allegiance was never to the greater Canadian nation-state of contemporary times, but to his fellow *Canadiens* in late 19th Century French-Catholic Canada. In the end, "O Canada" seems to have been so unimportant to its co-writers that neither Lavallée's 1891 obituary, nor Routhier's 1898 biography make mention of it whatsoever.¹⁵¹

4.6 CONTEXT OF THE ENGLISH LYRICS

There is little documentation to trace the movement of "O Canada" from 1880 until 1901, when it was apparently sung by schoolchildren "for the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall (later King George V and Queen Mary) when they toured Canada."¹⁵² In 1906, the lyrics received a direct literal translation into English by Dr. Thomas Bedford, resulting in awkward prose such as the closing line of "Defend our rights, forfend this nation's thrall."¹⁵³ While a competition to write new lyrics launched by *Collier's Weekly* magazine in 1908 helped push the issue of a

¹⁴⁸ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 129.

¹⁴⁹ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 130.

¹⁵⁰ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 132.

¹⁵¹ Government of Canada, "Full history of 'O Canada'," Government of Canada; Canadian Heritage, October 24, 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/anthems-canada/history-o-canada.html>.

¹⁵² Government of Canada, "Full history of 'O Canada'."

¹⁵³ Government of Canada, "Full history of 'O Canada'."

national anthem into the popular consciousness, it was lawyer and judge Robert Stanley Weir who wrote the lyrics that would stick.¹⁵⁴ Before further tracing the anthem's evolution in English, it's important to first outline the English-Canadian socio-historical context.

After the *British North America Act* of 1867 established Canada as a nation, these new powers were quickly put to use in dispossessing Indigenous peoples from East to West. Section 91(24) of the BNA Act made the federal government responsible for "Indians and Lands reserved for Indians," leading to the first Numbered Treaties which opened "the lands of the Northwest Territories up to agricultural settlement, the construction of the railway linking British Columbia to Ontario, and solidifying Canada's claim on the lands north of the border with the United States," in addition to the 1876 *Indian Act* which would not only "come to control and influence nearly all aspects of daily life for Aboriginal peoples in Canada," but also "permitted the evolution of Canada as we know it."¹⁵⁵ As the westward expansion continued, the final numbered treaties were made to "secure and facilitate access to the vast and rich natural resources of Northern Canada," at the same time the remaining Western provinces and territories were consolidated under Confederation (Yukon in 1898, Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905).¹⁵⁶ During this 50-odd year period Canada begins to formulate an independent cultural identity and loosen the attachment to its British origins. Paulette Regan notes that it is during this same time period that the "peacemaker myth" emerges, which positions Canada as a benevolent nation expanding westward without conflict, using legislation such as the BNA Act, the Indian Act, and

¹⁵⁴ Government of Canada, "Full history of 'O Canada'." Yes, that is correct – both French and English lyrics were written by judges. Another analysis of the relationship between justice and nationalism could fit here nicely, if time permitted.

¹⁵⁵ Government of Canada, "A History of Treaty-Making in Canada," Government of Canada; Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, September 2, 2011. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1314977704533/1544620451420>. Numbered Treaties 1-7 were made between 1871-1877.

¹⁵⁶ Government of Canada, "A History of Treaty-Making in Canada." Numbered Treaties 8-11 were made 1899-1921.

the numbered treaties to develop a narrative of the Canadian ‘Mild West’ in the public imagination.¹⁵⁷ What better way to solidify the nation’s identity than through a song?

4.7 ANALYZING THE ENGLISH LYRICS

In applying the methods of coding to the English lyrics, the main themes that arose were *subjectivity, land, truth, protection, and existence*. I will begin my analysis with Robert Weir’s original text from 1908 (see Appendix 1 for reference), and then trace the English lyrics’ evolution through time. While the current-day lyrics deliver a more complex narrative, the original text from 1908 tells a much simpler tale which can seem shockingly dull in contrast. As the dominant culture governing this new territory, English-Canada in the 1800s was very much concerned with constructing an identity for itself, perhaps in contrast to its British roots. Rather than evoking its past history, the narrative of the English lyrics to “O Canada” are primarily concerned with a present-tense act of simply reinforcing the truth of the existence of Canada itself, and pledging one’s obedience to guard the future-facing imaginary of this new nation.

Similar to the French lyrics, “O Canada” begins by recognizing *Canada-as-land*. However, in this case it is not the land of our ancestors, but instead our “home and native land,” making an assertion that it is, and always has been “ours.”¹⁵⁸ This “dear land” is also seen to be “rising,” an act that occurs in the present tense, yet faces the future – a land that has not yet reached its full potential. Most importantly though, the use of the word *Canada* is itself an assertion of territory. As the Government of Canada website explains, this word originates from the Huron-Iroquois *Kanata* to indicate village or settlement, its first recorded use being when “two Aboriginal youths told French explorer Jacques Cartier about the route to Kanata.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Regan, *Unsettling*, 14. Standing in contrast to the “Wild West” of the USA.

¹⁵⁸ I refer the reader again to Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” 10-13, for more on the concept of settler nativism.

¹⁵⁹ Government of Canada, “Origin of the name Canada,” Government of Canada; Canadian Heritage, June 8, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/origin-name-canada.html>.

However, as Jeff Corntassel explains, it is perhaps a little more complicated than that, since “the word Canada is derived from a Kanien’kehaka term, Kanatiens, which means ‘they sit in our village.’ A contemporary translation of this term would be ‘squatter.’”¹⁶⁰ Not only does “O Canada” seek to assert settler-colonial dominance over the land, it also simultaneously asserts a similar ownership of the word *Canada* itself. This cannibalization of the word’s Indigenous roots is an act of settler nativism, an assertion of the word *Canada* to simply mean, for English-Canadians, *land*. Unlike the French lyrics, which only use the word Canada once at the beginning, the English version repeats the word six times (representing a total of 10% of the 60 words used in the English lyrics). Looking at lines of prose, rather than word count, “O Canada” occupies five of the nine lines of text – a significant portion of the verbal real estate.

In another example of the repetitious nature of the original English lyrics, the lyrics emphasize the urgency for this land to be *protected*. While it is first a sense of “true patriot love” that Canada “dost in us command,” it is primarily the need to “stand on guard for thee” that is drummed into the listener (and singer) of the anthem. But whom exactly is being commanded here? This brings me back to a focus on the theme of *subjectivity*, as the construction of a collective Canadian “we” is at the heart of the lyrics in the English version as well. While “Canada” is the most prominently repeated word in the anthem (6/60 words = 10%), this notion of “we” is equally important, with the pronouns we/our/us accounting for an equal proportion of lyrical real estate (6/60 words = 10%). Both “we” and “Canada” are *hailed into being* through the lyrics of “O Canada” to form both the subject and the object of a promise. This promise to protect the nation is repeated in four of nine lines of verse, which introduces the themes of *truth* and *existence* within these lyrics. Canada both commands in us a “true patriot love” but is itself also

¹⁶⁰ Corntassel, “Indigenous Storytelling,” 3.

the “True North,” in an assertion that, *yes – it is true that Canada exists! It really is so!*¹⁶¹ This concept of truth also relates to the notion of purity. The simplicity of these lyrics makes “O Canada” less of a song, and more of an exercise in recitation, or an act of catechism, repeating one’s “Hail Marys” to the nation in a pledge of faith. Singing the anthem becomes an act of self-purification, asserting the singer’s devotion to the nation, striving for an unsullied state of virginal perfection. What the original English lyrics do above all else is to *assert the present-tense existence of Canada-as-nation (the object) by repeatedly invoking its name in a promise (by its subjects) to protect its future possibilities*. As I will show in later sections of lyrical analysis, the discursive strategies of “O Canada” begin to evolve as the nation itself grows and matures as a colonial power.

4.8 RHYTHMS OF THE ANTHEM

“O Canada” is of course not simply a set of lyrics, it is a musical composition. While words can inspire contemplation, music can provoke *feeling* in ways that lyrics cannot, privileging affective experience over analytical reasoning. One can think of the difference between the American “Pledge of Allegiance” to the flag – a monotone recitation of servitude to the nation – and compare this act to singing “The Star Spangled Banner.” While the former might be a useful tool for nationalistic conditioning, the latter has a much greater influence and impact both socially and culturally.¹⁶²

First, a brief primer on rhythmic notation, for those who don’t ‘speak this language.’ “O Canada” is written in 4/4 time, meaning that each bar of music (also known as a measure, a convenient way to organize ‘sentence structures’ of music) contains four beats, indicated in this

¹⁶¹ Althusser, “Ideology.” Althusser explains that ideology “hails” us into existence as subjects – much like being hailed on the street by a police officer shouting “hey you!” – something I will go into more detail below.

¹⁶² The performative aspect of the anthem is an important aspect of its power, which is not explored in great detail here. See Judith Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990).

4/4 designation. 4/4 time is both the most common musical time signature (in Western musics), as well as the most evenly structured time signature (in comparison to others such as 3/4, 5/4, or 7/8 for example). “O Canada” relies on three basic rhythmic figures, which – much like the English lyrics, but to an even greater effect – are repeated consistently throughout the composition. These three figures can be illustrated and sounded out (try for yourself!) using the first line of the lyrics, which then fit themselves together across the entire composition, with a few slight variations in their deployment (see Figure 1):

1. Rhythm Figure #1 (RF#1): Long-short-long (“Caaa–na–daaa”)
2. Rhythm Figure #2 (RF#2): Even short notes (“home–and–na–tive)
3. Rhythm Figure #3 (RF#3): Long sustained note (“laaaaaaaand”)

Just as the lyrics were analyzed using coding strategies to examine their contents and see various themes begin to emerge, I coded the rhythms of “O Canada” in the same way, revealing themes of *structure*, *rigidity*, and *sustain*. Through coding and analysis of rhythmic patterns, the lyrics and rhythmic figures can be seen to work together and reinforce each other. The first example of RF#1 is used 10 times throughout the song, but also coincides with the lyric “Ca–na–da” on four of those occasions (see measures 1, 14, 21, and 25. Using the 1908 lyrics, this lyrical/rhythmic connection actually occurs in all six instances that the word Canada appears). RF#1 provides a bit of a galloping effect, or puts a skip in the step of the singer (so to speak), giving the word “Canada” an uplifting or celebratory feeling.¹⁶³ The same strategy of mutual reinforcement is used in regard to the lyric “stand on guard” in measures 15, 22, and 26, where the lyric and RF#2 echo each other. RF#2 here provides a steady, structured rhythm that pounds

¹⁶³ This same rhythmic (and melodic) pattern is used by CBC Radio as part of its station ID played at the top of every hour, as well as serving as the closing ‘kicker’ in television ads for the Government of Canada.

the message “stand-on-guard” into the listener/singer, in a similar way the audience of a political rally might chant “four-more-years,” or, depending on the crowd, “lock-her-up.”¹⁶⁴

National Anthem | Hymne National

O CANADA | Ô CANADA

Calixa Lavallée
RF#3

RF#1 RF#2



 Canadian Heritage Patrimoine canadien
 

FIGURE 1: Rhythmic Analysis of “O Canada”

¹⁶⁴ Infamously deployed by POTUS 45. Whether conservative, liberal, democrat, socialist, republican, or otherwise – it is important to note that these types of discursive strategies are used by people on all sides of the political spectrum.

Finally, RF#3 does just the same thing, repeating either the word “thee” or “free” on 40% of its appearances. RF#3 is the pacifying rhythm of the piece, which also closes out each and every one of the seven lines of music.

Not only do these rhythmic figures work as independent units, these three figures are then also combined into other repetitive formulas, such as the mirroring of lines 1/2, lines 3/4, and lines 6/7. These three rhythmic building blocks comprise a very simple, rigid, sustained structure, coding a rhythmic narrative into the anthem much like the ongoing structure of processes that constitutes settler-colonialism itself. Patrick Wolfe argues that “settler colonialism strives to eliminate,” and points out that this is not an isolated event, but a pursuit that becomes a “structuring principle of settler-colonial society across time.”¹⁶⁵ This settler-colonial logic of elimination is very much at play in the recent and ongoing disputes surrounding unwanted pipelines being built through Wet’suwet’en territory, and the racist attacks on Mi’kmaq people asserting their rights to sustenance fishing, as just two examples. We can now see that by combining this rhythmic analysis with the analysis of the 1908 English lyrics, that “O Canada” seeks to *assert the present-tense existence of Canada-as-nation, by repeatedly invoking its name in a promise to protect its future possibilities, using the rigid, sustained (rhythmic) structure of processes that constitutes settler-colonialism.*

4.9 EVOLUTION OF THE ANTHEM

Structures require maintenance. Both the anthem and settler-colonialism have adapted themselves throughout the years in order to reflect social changes, while simultaneously seeking to remain in a position of hegemony. Here, I will quickly trace historical changes in the anthem’s

¹⁶⁵ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” in *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 396-399.

lyrics and the possible influencing context of each time period in which these changes occurred.¹⁶⁶

The first noted change (see Appendix 1) was in 1913, which relates to the gendering of the nation's subjects, in the "command" given to observe "true patriot love" being changed from "thou dost in us" to "in all thy sons." There is now a direct gendering of nation-subjects as "sons," rather than an open-ended "us," so that the construction of the national "we" is explicitly male. One easy conclusion for this change might be the approach of World War I and the need to instill a sense of bravery in the young men being asked to no longer abstractly "stand on guard for thee," but now be ready to give their lives for the nation. However, an impending war would have been hard to ascertain at that time, so another possible influence would have been the rise of the suffragette movement fighting for women's rights. This lyrical revision may therefore have been an effort to assert patriarchal dominance within Canadian society in response to the continued strive of women towards more equal power relations. In the second stanza, "we" do not simply "see thee rising fair, dear land" but now do so "with glowing hearts." While the nation's subjects were previously devoid of description, as in the original, "we" are now "sons" with "glowing hearts," who are ready to defend a nation that has become "glorious and free." The implication here is that Canada is perhaps not only a more God-fearing nation, but also richer in (male-centred) history, ready to assert its freedom.

The circumstances in which the 1913 lyrical revisions were made is unclear, but the next recorded change was made by parliamentary committee in 1968.¹⁶⁷ Coming just after Canada's centennial in 1967, these changes coincide with the first concerted efforts to legislate "O Canada" as the official national anthem (more to come on this later). This round of revisions reduced some

¹⁶⁶ I am greatly indebted to Shannon Murray for providing additional perspective and feedback on my very surface-level historical analysis in this section.

¹⁶⁷ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 188. It's unclear who served on this committee, why it formed, or what the motivations were for these revisions.

of the stubborn lyrical repetition to once again widen the conception of both who “we” are, but also increase and strengthen the religious alignment of the nation. Gone is the first of four promises to “stand on guard for thee” (though still leaving three repetitions) by replacing the first line of the third stanza to indicate that “we” now come “from far and wide.” By 1968, Newfoundland and Labrador had been admitted to the Confederation, so a solidified territorial unity could then be formally presented in song. This serves to reinforce the theme of *land*, by widening the definition of Canada-as-land to everything “far and wide.” I will return to Patrick Wolfe’s examination of how settler-colonialism strives for elimination, as he argues that “land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be— indeed, often are— contests for life.”¹⁶⁸ Wolfe demonstrates how “territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element... settler colonialism destroys to replace,”¹⁶⁹ and the physical actions of Indigenous dispossession are very much mirrored in the language of “O Canada.” The first line of the fifth stanza also drops one of the five “O Canada” lyrics to include a new participant in the dialogue between the Canada and its subjects – that of “God” to “keep our land.” It is important to recall the context of the time, with the rising counter-culture movement and LGBT+ activism, the US Civil Rights movement, and the beginnings of the Red Power movement for Indigenous rights. In addition to these factors, the ongoing Quiet Revolution of 1960s Quebec and the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (which ran from 1963-1965 and eventually led to the 1969 *Official Languages Act*, making Canada a bilingual nation) indicate ongoing tensions between English and French cultures. The insertion of “God” into the lyrics may have been an attempt to appease the burgeoning Quebecois secessionist movement of the time. Up until this exact point in the anthem’s dialogizing process, this has been a love song *from* Canada’s subjects

¹⁶⁸ Wolfe, “Settler colonialism,” 387.

¹⁶⁹ Wolfe, “Settler colonialism,” 388.

to Canada as the object of “our” affections. Now, a new character enters the narrative (no longer implied, but explicitly inserting the theme of *religion*, just as the French lyrics do), as it is “God” whom “we” call upon to reinforce “our” own promise to “stand on guard,” as He can assist “us” in this endeavour. Taking these lyrical revisions into account, the 1968 lyrics to “O Canada” seek to *assert the present-tense existence of Canada-as-nation, by repeatedly invoking its name (by its male subjects, along with the help of God in a promise to protect its future possibilities), using the rigid, sustained (rhythmic) structure of processes that constitutes settler-colonialism.*

4.10 LEGISLATING THE ANTHEM

It must be noted here that during this trajectory of lyrical revisions, “O Canada” remained an unofficial anthem. It wasn’t necessarily even the most popular unofficial anthem either, as “Dominion Hymn,” “The Maple Leaf Forever,” and “God Save The Queen” all occupied prominent roles in the national consciousness during the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁷⁰ Robert Harris notes that it wasn’t until 1927 that “O Canada” was first officially published by the Government of Canada to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Confederation – the same year the Peace Tower carillon was installed in the Parliament buildings, ringing out “O Canada” as its first song – signaling the first sonic movements away from Canada’s parental ties to England.¹⁷¹ It was when Canada approached the centennial of Confederation in 1967, that previously popular anthems begin to fade away, as their British roots showed a little too prominently for newer generations who saw themselves more as Canadians proper, and less as the diasporic offspring of the Queen Mother. Between 1962 and 1980 a dozen failed legislative attempts were made before the *National Anthem Act* was finally passed in 1980, which designated the words and music of

¹⁷⁰ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 169.

¹⁷¹ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 180.

“O Canada” as the Canada’s official anthem.¹⁷² After nearly two decades of legislative attempts, what were the conditions in 1980 for “O Canada” to finally become adopted?

Harris examines the role that the 1980 referendum on Québec sovereignty played in the approval of “O Canada” as national anthem, arguing that it was the televised concession speech of Parti-Québécois leader René Levesque which became the catalyzing moment for legislative progress.¹⁷³ While the mandate to “negotiate a new constitutional agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations” (Hudon, 2017) was rejected in a vote of 40% in favor and 60% against, Levesque ended his speech by reminding his fellow Quebecers they must continue to live together, even though large divisions remain. Levesque asks the crowd if they might close the evening by singing “en chantons *pour tout-le-monde*, ce qui reste la plus belle chanson Québécoise” (singing, for everyone, the best Québécois song of all time), folk singer Gilles Vigneault’s “Gens du pays” (a cultural anthem in its own right). Video footage captures this moment,¹⁷⁴ in which the thousands in attendance joined their voices together and “rose in a swelling wave through the space, crystallizing a feeling, an emotion, a political movement.”¹⁷⁵ This example of how “television is a marker of an affective Canadian national space”¹⁷⁶ provoked a legislative response *the very next day*, when Conservative MP Roch Joliette “introduced an emergency motion calling on the government to make “O Canada” the national anthem as soon as possible... [which] passed instantly and unanimously.”¹⁷⁷ While parliamentarians had spent more than a decade failing to reach a consensus on approving “O

¹⁷² Harris, *Song of a nation*, 183-193.

¹⁷³ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 191.

¹⁷⁴ A. Gagné, *Référendum Québec 1980 - Discours De René Lévesque* (YouTube, 2010) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lru4grpq3Rc>.

¹⁷⁵ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 191.

¹⁷⁶ Marusya Bociurkiw, *Feeling Canadian: Television, Nationalism, and Affect* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁷⁷ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 192. See also Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*, (London: Routledge, 1999), who points to the official policy of multiculturalism being a reactionary measure.

Canada” as the national anthem, the reactionary power of oppositional nationalism was the unifying force they had been waiting for.

No longer just a song, “O Canada” was legislated as Canada’s official anthem within weeks (receiving royal assent on July 1, 1980), its French lyrics unchanged since 1880, and with the 1968 revisions standing as the authoritative English lyrics. This brings me to the most recent (legislated) lyrical revision in 2018, which finally hails “all of us” into its command, not just “all thy sons.” Much like the legislative approval of the anthem itself, this gender-neutralizing revision did not occur suddenly either, with more than a dozen attempts beginning in 1985 until its official assent in 2018.¹⁷⁸ It is the Liberal government of now-current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who may take credit for finally passing this revision, whose father, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, was the sitting Prime Minister when the anthem was officially legislated back in 1980. Trudeau “Jr.” has repeatedly stated a commitment to feminism, from tweets posted before he had ever held an elected position,¹⁷⁹ to his infamously snappy response to the question of why a gender-balanced cabinet was so important to him: “Because it’s 2015.”¹⁸⁰ This 2018 lyrical revision brings the theme of *inclusion* into my analysis. While making the lyrics of “O Canada” gender-neutral can be celebrated from one perspective, this revision still deserves critical scrutiny. Jasbir Puar describes these effects as “the appeal of white liberalism, the underpinnings of the ascendancy of whiteness, which is not a conservative, racist formation bent on extermination, but rather an insidious liberal one proffering an innocuous inclusion into life.”¹⁸¹ Liberal multiculturalism can be seen to ally itself with settler colonialism, when inclusion is only

¹⁷⁸ Harris, *Song of a nation*, 191-198.

¹⁷⁹ Justin Trudeau, “I Am a Feminist. I’m Proud to Be a Feminist. #Upfordebate,” Twitter, September 21, 2015. <https://twitter.com/JustinTrudeau/status/646103864454713344>.

¹⁸⁰ The Canadian Press, “‘Because It’s 2015’: Justin Trudeau on Gender-Balanced Cabinet,” YouTube, November 6, 2015. <https://youtu.be/o8OOIU7xQrk?t=9>.

¹⁸¹ Jasbir Puar, “Introduction: Homonationalism and Biopolitics,” in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 31.

being offered as method to silence dissenting voices, “rather than allow institutions like feminism and the nation-state to be radically transformed by differing perspectives and goals.”¹⁸² While “O Canada” has primarily focused on a masculine conceptualization of its subjects, this new inclusion of “all of us” into the national imaginary might be an example of how Othered voices are not listened to, but rather *given a hearing*, which can result in the *illusion of inclusion* since it is actually an attempt to pacify, rather than empower. While Pierre Trudeau began Canada’s process towards a multiculturalism policy in 1971 and Justin Trudeau created the Multiculturalism Branch within Canadian Heritage in 2018, these actions elide more meaningful steps towards the real decolonization and Indigenization of colonial power structures.

In an example of the difference between what the anthem says and how it is enacted, I will turn to the section regarding “Timing and Etiquette for Anthem Use” on the “Anthems of Canada” webpage.¹⁸³ While the anthem’s lyrics command true patriot love in “all of us,” the forms in which the expression of this love should be expressed apparently differ according to its instructions for performance. Though it is a “matter of respect and tradition” that all people stand for the anthem, only “civilian men” are instructed to remove their hats, while “women and children do not remove their hats on such occasions.”¹⁸⁴ This demonstrates a clearly gendered contradiction, in that while “all of us” are commanded by the anthem’s lyrics, there are still heavily entrenched traditional gender roles corresponding to how these commands are doled out, with men being positioned as active producers, and women and children positioned as passive receivers within the nation. We can now see that “O Canada” seeks to *assert the present-tense existence of Canada-as-nation, by repeatedly invoking its name (by including subjects of “all”*

¹⁸² Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, “Decolonizing feminism: Challenging connections between settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy,” *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (2013): 17.

¹⁸³ Government of Canada, “Anthems of Canada,” Government of Canada; Canadian Heritage, December 31, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/anthems-canada.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Government of Canada, “Anthems of Canada.”

genders, along with the help of God) in a promise to protect its future possibilities, using the rigid, sustained (rhythmic) structure of processes that constitutes settler-colonialism.

4.11 CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the French lyrics, the English lyrics (with their subsequent revisions), and the rhythms of the musical composition, I have drawn out a number of themes corresponding to each text. In the French lyrics, themes included: *subjectivity, religion, time, embodiment, and protection*, while in the English lyrics added the themes of *truth, land, existence, and inclusion*. Rhythmic analysis of the musical composition revealed themes of *rigidity, structure, and sustain*. The anthem doesn't *do what it does* simply through its lyrics, so any analysis of the anthem must also consider the interdiscursive nature of linguistic, lyrical and rhythmic discourses, given that each discourse "is always inscribed and inflected with traces of other[s]."¹⁸⁵ By synthesizing these themes, overlapping connections might turn the focus to larger concepts of obedience and ideology.

Louis Althusser argues that rather than taking a Marxist perspective that sees ideology as a container to fill with an "imaginary assemblage (*bricolage*)" of beliefs and attitudes, that we should instead see that "*ideology is eternal*," as something that we are born into, so that "*ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects*."¹⁸⁶ In other words, subjects do not exist outside of ideology – we exist within ideology *as subjects*, so that "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals ... or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects ... by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing."¹⁸⁷ Althusser argues that "the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing," so that being hailed, is in

¹⁸⁵ Baxter, "Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis," 2.

¹⁸⁶ Althusser, "Ideology," 159-171.

¹⁸⁷ Althusser, "Ideology," 174.

essence, to be invited into ideology.¹⁸⁸ Althusser gives the example of a police officer shouting “hey you” to hail a citizen on the street, with this act essentially bringing the subject into self-recognition – making them aware that they are the subject of the officer’s hail. Given this understanding of ideology, how might we view “O Canada” and its ideological interpellation of individuals as subjects? How does listening to “O Canada” hail Canadian subjects into existence?

“O Canada” seeks to *bring into being* the existence of Canada as a dominant ideological concept, by both *asserting itself as a nation* and *asserting its subjects as its possessions*, declaring that Canada is “native land” that “all of us” must “stand on guard for.” The anthem seeks to *include* subjects within its domain, in order to enlist them in its pursuit as the hegemonic ideological structure. It hails “all of us” into being as subjects of the nation, as long as “we” identify with its ideological premises of the pre-ordained possession of the land now known as “Canada” and, with the help of “God,” to “keep our land glorious and free,” we promise to “stand on guard for thee.” As listeners and singers are interpellated into the narrative of “O Canada,” the ideology of the nation becomes ‘native’ to the subjects of the nation-state. “O Canada” seeks to ideologically interpellate its subjects in what Benedict Anderson calls “unisonality,” which becomes the idealized sound of the nation so that “no matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity ... Singing [national anthems] provides occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community.”¹⁸⁹

It is important to note that this is what the anthem *seeks to accomplish*, but it does not necessarily achieve these ends. When someone sings “O Canada,” do they actually bring this idea of Canada into existence? While the anthem attempts to authoritatively *say one thing* to its

¹⁸⁸ Althusser, “Ideology,” 175.

¹⁸⁹ Anderson, *Imagined communities*, 145.

subjects; it *means many things* to many people. “O Canada” exists within the resonating chamber of heteroglossia, that brings all voices together in polyphonic discourse.¹⁹⁰ While “O Canada” seeks a state of unisonality, Bakhtin’s writings show that in the constant state of social heteroglossia, “language – like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives – is never unitary.”¹⁹¹ “O Canada” always speaks in many voices: of struggles between French and English, of settler-colonial dispossession of Indigenous lands, of gender inequality, of the struggles between religion and secularism in the public sphere, Franco and Anglo-settler colonial dominance; and the many other dialogizing threads that are interwoven between its lyrics and music. If “O Canada” seeks to ideologically interpellate its subjects, welcoming them into the settler-colonial mindset, this prompts an important question – does it work? The creative component of my thesis, *Detuning the Anthem: A Choose-Your-Own Audio Guide* Adventure, asserts that every person must answer this question for themselves. Should I refuse to sing it? Do I oblige? Might there be a different reading? How and why does “O Canada” *mean* different things to different people? How do people *explain* the anthem to themselves? What does singing “O Canada” *mean* in the face of the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? When the anthem *hails* you, how do you respond?

Paulette Regan highlights the important point that if settler-colonialism is to be confronted, “each of us must answer fundamental questions” for ourselves, and that reconciliation must be a specifically individual journey that we all undertake in our own ways.¹⁹² Regan describes her own “difficult process of learning how to listen differently to these stories [of TRC witnesses]”¹⁹³ and it is my hope that Canadians might learn to listen to the command of

¹⁹⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 364.

¹⁹¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 288.

¹⁹² Regan, *Unsettling*, 17.

¹⁹³ Regan, *Unsettling*, 18.

“O Canada” with differently tuned ears as well, hearing not an obfuscating history of peaceful relations, but a terrorizing tale of cultural genocide and territorial dispossession celebrated in song. TRC Call to Action 45(i) makes the call to “Repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius”¹⁹⁴ and reconsidering the role “O Canada” plays in the continuing process of settler-colonialism might be one way to respond to this call.

These ideas are what motivated the development of *Detuning the Anthem: A Choose-Your-Own Audio Guide Adventure*, which explores the anthem’s potential for collective affectivity. The anthem’s power to hail us as subjects does not occur simply through the lyrics and music, as it is crucial to remember the public contexts in which individuals encounter “O Canada.” In *Feeling Canadian*, Marusya Bociurkiw examines how “certain notions of Canadian nationalism... that we are a peacekeeping nation, that we value ethnic and racial diversity – have gained the status of truth, making nationalistic sentiment an acceptable practice,” and it is the shared social performance of the anthem that affectively reinforces these so-called ‘truths.’¹⁹⁵ “O Canada” is a theme song to be sung and experienced as the collective “we” that the lyrics describe, so that the affective experience of the anthem can lead to the “idea of collective belonging – the interconnectedness of body, culture, and emotion.”¹⁹⁶ As Mikhail Bakhtin argues, “*who* speaks and under what condition he speaks: this is what determines the word’s actual meaning,” which means that further analysis of the social conditions in which “O Canada” is performed is necessary to understand how collective affect resonates to ideologically interpellate Canadian citizens as subjects of the nation-state.¹⁹⁷ These aspects of collective social affect are at

¹⁹⁴ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (Winnipeg, MN: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 5.

¹⁹⁵ Bociurkiw, *Feeling Canadian*, 12.

¹⁹⁶ Bociurkiw, *Feeling Canadian*, 24.

¹⁹⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 401, emphasis in original.

the heart of the participatory listening experience within *Detuning the Anthem*, which I explain in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: *DETUNING THE ANTHEM:* *A CHOOSE-YOUR-OWN AUDIO ADVENTURE*

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This web-based artwork is an interactive audio guide that encourages a process of critical reflection and self-education about the role the Canadian national anthem plays in our society. A mix of orchestrated musical compositions, along with a series of instructions and reflection questions guide the participant along a sonic journey within (and possibly outside) the participant's community. At its core, a national anthem is an attempt to unify the citizens of the nation through sound, more specifically, using music. While "O Canada" might seek to present itself as an example of "unisonality" that provides "the echoed physical realization of the imagined community,"¹⁹⁸ it is in fact always already heteroglossic and polyphonic in nature.¹⁹⁹ Within this experimental sonic adventure, the anthem is deconstructed to consider both the content and the context of "O Canada," putting this song into conversation with government speeches, policies, and actions that show the anthem as a contested site within the dance floor of discourse. This deconstruction and unsettling of the anthem seeks a more just presentation of Canadian history which occurs through a process of harmonically and inter-discursively *detuning* it, moving from an examination of how my own voice has been complicit in upholding settler-

¹⁹⁸ Anderson, *Imagined communities*, 145.

¹⁹⁹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

colonialism, to a re-orchestration that examines the inter-discursive elements which resonate around the anthem.

Jeff Corntassel explains that “the nation-state of Canada offers a very different version of history than those of Indigenous nations—one that glosses over the colonial legacies of removing Indigenous peoples from their families and homelands when enforcing assimilationist policies, all of which were intended to eradicate Indigenous nations.”²⁰⁰ If this official history of Canada is one written and repeated primarily by settler people, then it is the responsibility of settler people to consider how our repeated recitation of this history serves to continue harming Indigenous peoples and culture. As noted earlier, Paulette Regan argues that while we may not have been personally involved in this past history, “we can learn from it.”²⁰¹ However, learning is not enough. Taking action to change the present and future of Indigenous-settler relations must be our ultimate objective. Regan emphasizes that “we must work as Indigenous allies to ‘restory’ the dominant-culture version of history; that is, we must make decolonizing space for Indigenous history – counter-narratives of diplomacy, law, and peacemaking practices – as told by Indigenous peoples themselves.”²⁰² This process of restorying must also reconsider all forms of violence committed against Indigenous peoples.²⁰³ While land theft, Indian Residential Schools, and the Potlatch ban are obvious forms of violence, is it not also possible to see “O Canada” as a form of sonic and epistemic violence committed against Indigenous peoples? Corntassel importantly points out that “processes of restorying and truth-telling are not effective without some larger community-centred, decolonizing actions behind them,”²⁰⁴ and these words have helped inspire the creation of *Detuning the Anthem*. While “a restorying process for Indigenous

²⁰⁰ Corntassel, “Indigenous Storytelling,” 2.

²⁰¹ Regan, *Unsettling*, 4.

²⁰² Regan, *Unsettling*, 6.

²⁰³ Regan, *Unsettling*, 5.

²⁰⁴ Corntassel, “Indigenous Storytelling,” 3.

peoples entails questioning the imposition of colonial histories on our communities,”²⁰⁵ what does a restorying process look (or sound) like for settler people? For starters, we might look at the primary audio artifact of Canadian history – our national anthem – and consider how singing this song serves to not only uphold an official history that excludes and injures Indigenous peoples, but might also be considered as an ongoing act of sonic violence against them. Settler people might participate in restorying the anthem itself, changing this keynote song of settler-colonial Canadian society from a story that presents an innocent heritage bereft of responsibility, to reveal its role as a theme song for ongoing colonial dispossession that must be confronted by every person who might decide to sing “O Canada.”

Membership within a nation-state (either by birth or by choice) comes with both rights and responsibilities. Through the unique and interactive listening experience within *Detuning the Anthem: A Choose-Your-Own Audio Adventure*, participants are challenged to consider their own position within the ongoing structure of settler-colonialism in Canada, and to address both their individual and collective responsibilities as Canadians. In this process of unsettling the anthem, participants are encouraged to question not just what it says, but what it *does* within Canadian society. Whether you sing along with the anthem, remain silent, take a knee, or take other actions, it is important for all Canadians to address *where they stand* in regard to “standing on guard for thee.”

5.2 FORMAT CONSIDERATIONS

My first instinct was to present this project as a multi-channel audio installation for a gallery space. My thought was that delivering a piece of musical composition that would simply be experienced via headphones would be affectively uninteresting, and not be ‘significant enough’

²⁰⁵ Corntassel, “Indigenous Storytelling,” 3.

as a final product. I have realized this to be a faulty way of thinking, and rather than seeing the current uncertainties of a physical installation/presentation format as a negative constraint, given ongoing concerns related to the COVID-19 global health pandemic, I might instead recognize that creating an audio guide experience might, in fact, greatly augment the overall impact of my creative work. Creating a participatory work that extends into the public sphere has the potential to generate a more affective experience, both individually and collectively. The idea of developing directional and listening invitations within *Detuning the Anthem*, along with the questions for reflections, were inspired by Dylan Robinson's encouragement to "move away from the use of 'aesthetics' as exclusive domain of artistic practice, and instead explore the structures of daily experience – how forms determine the ways in which we move through and understand the world."²⁰⁶ Affect can reinforce and strengthen the meaning-making process, so enabling a collective participatory listening experience might be a much more powerful option than a traditional gallery presentation. Participants choose their own listening locations and decide the depth of their own experience based on their personal motivations, resulting in a more unique and personalized affective experience.

Currently, I have developed this audio adventure as a purely sonic experience, but I am considering how the narrated invitations and reflections that bracket each orchestrated musical track might be revised for future presentations. While these narrated sections are minimally 'orchestrated' in terms of having additional audio material beyond just the voice, I am considering other methods in which these could be presented, and how this would affect the overall experience. It could be beneficial to have multiple versions, one as a purely sonic or aesthetic version, and another pedagogical version where the invitations/reflections are presented

²⁰⁶ Robinson, "The Body is a Resonant Chamber," 9.

in text format as well. One version might be more suited for presentation in an art gallery/museum for adult participants, while the other might be better formatted for teachers to use with their students in a group setting. I've considered how this future pedagogical version might also include response boxes within the web-based platform (or this could be done on paper as well) where participants can submit answers/thoughts on these questions, either via text or as a voice message, so that this information might inform revisions to this project, or inform future projects.

Part of the desire to pursue a multi-method delivery of this experience is also based on the fact that for those who are deaf or hearing impaired, a fully aesthetic treatment developed purely as an audio guide would not be accessible. Creating a work that is multi-faceted in terms of sonic and written content would allow for parallel experiences, something that Miguelzinta Solis and I recently pursued in another multi-format essay, which we described as such:

“The result has taken shape in dual outputs of both sound and text, each form containing affective and sensorial elements not found in the other, creating parallel yet distinct ‘texts.’ While this is an imperfect strategy for those who experience sight/hearing related disabilities, we also recognize that some sensorial experiences are untranslatable into the language of the other senses. We hope that we have encoded each experience of sound and text with enough richness for them to be enjoyed individually, and we invite those who can, to experience how the two forms play off of each other.”²⁰⁷

Rather than falling into the trap of an either/or dichotomy of pedagogy and art, I have come to realize that a both/and approach might provide many options for future presentations. For the purposes of my thesis project, given my limited resources and timeframe, I have opted to present a solely audio-based experience. Of course, the potential still exists to remix this creative work for other formats at a later time.

²⁰⁷ Tyler Stewart and Miguelzinta Solis, “‘Having Walked Alongside You’: A Conversational Exchange on Territory and Sound in Motion,” *Intonations* 1, no.1 (2021) <https://doi.org/10.29173/inton64>.

5.3 COMPOSITIONAL OUTLINE

Detuning the Anthem consists of five distinct musical compositions (noted here as Sections A-E), each of which are preceded by a set of directional and listening invitations, and then followed by a set of reflection questions which are designed to prompt further thoughts about each musical track.

Section A is conceptually anchored in the notion of examining my own complicity within the settler-colonial structure of Canada, and how my own performance of the anthem has served as a sonic reinforcement of this harmful and destructive history.²⁰⁸ While my written analysis of the anthem deconstructed the lyrics and rhythm of “O Canada,” it does so from a somewhat detached and objective perspective. The first section of this composition inserts and implicates my own voice and musicianship within the anthem’s refrains. What is sonically present in this first section, is a performance of Calixa Lavalée’s original 1880 piano score – titled “Chant National” in its first publication – along with Lavalée’s original five-part vocal arrangement of the French lyrics written by Judge Adolphe Routhier. In addition, I have also recorded myself singing the lyrics to the four versions of the English lyrics (1908, 1913, 1968, 2018), with the revisions to the original 1908 English lyrics appearing as chronological fragments that pop into the mix as the song moves along. This creates the effect of constructing “a nation of Tylers,”²⁰⁹ in both the mechanical and harmonic reproduction of the lyrics – a figurative and literal implication of my own voice within the settler-colonial structure of Canada.

In preparation for recording these piano and vocal parts, I kept a journal detailing my thoughts, feelings, reactions, and musings on these rehearsal and recording sessions. As I’ve written previously, I’ve likely sung “O Canada” hundreds, if not thousands, of times in my life,

²⁰⁸ Complicity is a suggested starting point by both Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor” and Ahmed, *On Being Included*.

²⁰⁹ Thanks again to Miguelzinta for never tiring of my requests for feedback on my work.

and the last thing I want to do now is force myself to sing it again. However, this process of re-conditioning myself to learn to perform the anthem on piano and voice (I have previous training for both, but my skills in reading piano sheet music have never been particularly strong) allows for interesting self-reflexive criticism. I have captured many thoughts and audio recordings documenting this process, some of which are included within the audio guide, and some of which are included as appendices to the thesis documentation.²¹⁰

I cannot recall ever attempting to previously learn the anthem in this way; it is just something that I absorbed through socialization and the education system. Some music educators have in fact asserted that school children's abilities to accurately sing the anthem are "unacceptably low," and that schools should "increase the number of times the anthem is used during the school year and that music teachers play a leadership role in these occasions by teaching and encouraging all students to sing the anthem," because "all students in Canadian schools should be capable of executing both sets of words from memory."²¹¹ This concept that Canadian citizens indeed should be taught to better sing the anthem to encourage social cohesion and musical ability disturbingly connects to my own process of focused learning of the anthem. This site of internal struggle also brings into question the primacy of Western music theory and its "white racial frame" as a tool of colonialism itself.²¹² By using Western music theory in my work, am I helping to reinforce ongoing structures of settler-colonialism?

Section A attempts to demonstrate what the anthem says by reproducing the original piano score and all official lyric versions, and to demonstrate that my own voice has been complicit in parroting the messages it contains, which I have described as a theme song for

²¹⁰ See Appendix 3: Documentation.

²¹¹ Mary Copland Kennedy and Susan Carol Guerrini, "Patriotism, Nationalism, and National Identity in Music Education: 'O Canada,' How Well Do We Know Thee?" in *International Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 1 (February 2013): 78-90.

²¹² Philip A. Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," in *Music Theory Online* 26, No. 2 (September 2020).

settler-colonialism. From here, I begin to shift my focus onto the anthem's inter-discursive connections with other official speech acts (as well as "non-performative speech acts")²¹³ issued by our current and former prime ministers. This shift is not merely conceptual, but musical as well. Section A (re)presents Calixa Lavallée's original 1880 piano score, written in the key of G major, with a tempo marking that it should be played "Maestoso è risoluto," which, loosely translated, means that it should be played "majestically until the end." In terms of a metronome tempo mark, I chose 100 beats per minute while recording this section to reflect this strive for majesty.

Section B begins the detuning process away from majesty, both harmonically by key-changing down one whole tone from G major to F major (the key of the official published version of "O Canada" currently available on the Government of Canada website), as well as slowing the tempo from 100bpm to 80bpm. This detuning of both harmony and meter is also reflected conceptually, as I begin the discursive deconstruction of the anthem by introducing elements from official speech acts issued by Government of Canada officials (Justin Trudeau and Stephen Harper). Section B in its musical arrangement remains relatively simple, based on the sheet music currently published on the Government of Canada website. It is unclear why this official sheet music is in the key of F, rather than the original key of G, but perhaps this is due to vocal range limitations. As we will see later when this detuning continues to the key of E-flat, most orchestral arrangements of "O Canada" are in the key of E-flat, as this is a key that allows for easier transposition for brass instruments, which often play in a relative B-flat or E-flat key.²¹⁴ What is added in this section is further instrumentation beyond just the piano. This aesthetic choice is made to introduce the slow instrumental shift that takes place overall, gradually moving

²¹³ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 117-119.

²¹⁴ For a brief overview on the "how and why" of transposing instruments, see OpenCurriculum, "Transposing Instruments," OpenCurriculum.org. Accessed March 24, 2021. <https://opencurriculum.org/5567/transposing-instruments/>.

away from acoustic sounds to electric tones/palettes. The melody line is played on piano and acoustic guitar, but as this section progresses, a polytonal melody played on electric guitar begins to creep into the mix as well. Polytonality – literally, using more than one tonality in a given piece of music – introduces the idea that *something's not quite right*, which progressively increases as the composition moves along. The percussive layer of marching boots (recorded using my own repertoire of footwear) reinforces the idea of both the obedience that the anthem seeks to convey, but also the teleological drive of the anthem towards its final resolution.

In terms of spoken content, Section B contains Stephen Harper's 2008 apology to the victims of the Indian Residential School system, and Justin Trudeau's 2017 apology to Innu, Inuit and NunatuKavut people who were survivors of provincially-operated residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador.²¹⁵ The anthem's lyrics are replaced by a corresponding inter-textual element, with these inter-textual elements being aligned with lyrics in their specific word choices. For example, where "true north strong and free" once was, the words "truth and reconciliation" are placed instead, making connections between the lyrics and the apologies evident. With these tactics, I am seeking to examine and interrogate the interdiscursivity between the anthem and these apologies, aligning word choices in the apologies with the lyrics of the anthem. Placing Harper and Trudeau in conversation with each other and with "O Canada," allows the listener to hear how the promises of the nation contained in the anthem *speak to* the promises of Trudeau and Harper not to repeat these horrible colonial harms perpetrated upon Indigenous peoples. However, these apologies in effect might just become another refrain of the anthem itself. An apology means nothing without taking some kind of action to substantially address these harms,

²¹⁵ For more background on why Stephen Harper's 2008 apology failed to recognize Innu, Inuit and NunatuKavut survivors of the Indian Residential Schools system within Newfoundland and Labrador, see Catherine McIntyre, "Read Justin Trudeau's Apology to Residential School Survivors in Newfoundland," Macleans.ca, November 24, 2017. <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/read-justin-trudeaus-apology-to-residential-school-survivors-in-newfoundland/>.

and by hearing the anthem in conversation with these apologies, we hear how “O Canada” – as a dominant cultural text of Canadian national identity – contradicts the words spoken in their apologies. These apologies can be seen in Sara Ahmed’s terms as “non-performative speech acts,” words that explicitly do not seek to achieve the intentions they state, where “the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, *but is actually what the speech act is doing.*”²¹⁶ In other words, it is much easier for these Prime Ministers to *say* they are sorry, and then *do* nothing, than it is to actually *follow through* on the many promises made to Indigenous peoples in these apologies. My intention is for this juxtaposition to deflate and lay bare the hollowness of their apologies, given their lack of subsequent actions, and the overarching national narrative that the anthem *speaks* in contrast to their statements.

Section C begins by detuning the anthem one more whole step down to the key of E-flat and also slows the tempo to around 60bpm, taking a plodding, sludgy, distorted harmonic approach, that is achieved through multiple tracks of guitar, bass, piano, and percussion. This digression and deconstruction of meter is an investigation into the possibility of subverting the disciplinary technology of settler-imposed conceptions of time.²¹⁷ Section C becomes the end point of this progressive stretching of the orderly meter presented in Calixa Lavallée’s original score. In section B, the original score’s 16th notes became 8th notes, and in Section C, these 8th notes have become quarter notes – a possible reflection of the durational aspects of settler colonialism, as well as the long wait Indigenous peoples have endured to receive official apologies from the Government of Canada. Some musical citations are included here as well, compositional remnants which reference Lavallée’s original score. For example, the pedal bass section in the middle 8 bars of music from Section A (heard as the repeated left hand piano

²¹⁶ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 117-119

²¹⁷ For more analysis on “settler time,” see Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2017), and Robinson, *Hungry Listening*.

quarter notes on an octave of D), adds additional layers to this repeated rhythmic figure, with multiple guitars, piano and bass all hammering on this rhythmic figure.²¹⁸ As well as stretching the meter, the melody here is sparser than the proper score, with numerous melody notes simply not being played or missed completely. This stretching of time is also pushed further by playing in multiple time signatures. Rather than the score being seven tidy lines of four bars each, all in 4/4 time (as in the original); we now hear multiple bars of 5/4 or 2/4 time, elongating certain chords and providing a dislocating or disorienting effect to certain rhythmic passages – rendering them almost unrecognizable. I think of this tactic not as an experimental or avant-garde approach, but rather, more in the vein of the digital *glitch*, or something akin to *putting a bug in the system* of the anthem’s rhythmic order. My hope is that these time signature variations and simplified melodies create a disorienting or confusing buffering effect to suggest that the ongoing structure of settler-colonialism is itself a virus, infecting the institution of the nation-state.

As noted earlier, the key of E-flat is also the key in which most arrangements of “O Canada” are situated, being a more convenient key for the performance of brass instruments. The key of E-flat also happens to have other musical relevancy; for example, Jimi Hendrix almost exclusively tuned his guitar to E-flat, rather than the standard E – a musician famous for his “blasphemous” interpretation of the American national anthem.²¹⁹ Detuning the electric guitar allows for both a deeper-sounding tone, but also makes it easier to bend the strings, permitting the type of impressive sonic aerobatics that Hendrix was widely known for. This detuned guitar approach is also a feature of many heavy metal bands, most notably developed by guitarist Tony Iommi of the UK group Black Sabbath. As a result of an accident in which he lost the tips of his middle and ring fingers on his fretting hand (the hand which presses down on the strings), he

²¹⁸ A rhythmic figure that Robert Harris describes as “obsessive, almost hysterical.” Harris, *Song of a nation*, 136.

²¹⁹ When questioned on the Dick Cavett show in 1969 whether it was blasphemous, Hendrix responded that he “thought it was beautiful.” It is often forgotten that Hendrix also served in the US military’s 101st Airborne Division, where he met bassist Billy Cox.

began detuning his guitar to make the strings looser which allowed him both to press them down more easily, but also led to a darker and deeper guitar tone. Furthermore, the E-flat minor triad also happens to be the pitch of the CPR train whistle, which is one of many sound effects inserted into the overall audio guide, which features a variety of *social sounds* drawn from local field recordings.

The melody is played here using the harmonic technique of polytonality, which is, in essence, a composition which uses two separate keys at the same time. This technique can result in varying degrees of tension within a composition, to challenge the listener's expectation of what they think they are hearing, due to the two separate musical tonalities being used simultaneously. The further down the circle of fifths one plays the melody over the harmony, the more dissonant this polytonal approach can become.²²⁰ For example, playing one step away from the root can lead to a jazzy-sounding melody and this technique is often employed in many jazz recordings and improvisational approaches. I essentially took an approach of *investigating with the ear* to determine my approach in using polytonality for this composition. While the harmonic chord structure of this section is located in the key of E-flat, the melody is played in the key of F. This is equivalent to taking two steps along the circle of fifths away from the E-flat root, so that in key sections of the melody, this polytonal melody actually creates an augmented fourth/diminished fifth (commonly known as a tritone, and colloquially known as the devil's interval) that stands out dissonantly. Towards the end of this musical section, two other polytonal melodies are inserted into the mix, in the keys of D and E as well, which are both one half-step up and down from the tonal centre of E-flat, resulting in an immense amount of tension due to the multiple pitches all just slightly out of tune with each other. These polytonal melodies are played

²²⁰ The circle of fifths is a visual ordering tool for the 12 notes of the chromatic scale. For an overview, see OpenCurriculum, "The Circle of Fifths," OpenCurriculum.org. Accessed March 24, 2021. <https://opencurriculum.org/5584/the-circle-of-fifths/>.

on the electric guitar, with vibrato added as another reference point to the traditional technique of operatic singers' heavy use of this effect in classical music. With these tactics, I am seeking to sonically configure the anthem as a site of struggle between competing forces: classical music traditions and contemporary musical practices, Indigenous voices and settler histories, harmony and dissonance.

The inter-textual elements for Section C are comprised of speech clips solely from Indigenous voices, which are derived from the responses made by Indigenous people following the two apologies made by Harper and Trudeau. This approach of *speaking back* to the anthem and the government's apologies is influenced by the notion of "the Empire writes back,"²²¹ being applied sonically here to consider this dialogue between what the anthem and apologies say, and how those sounds are received by Indigenous peoples. These responses, spoken directly after each of these two apologies (2008 and 2017) are important because they have been overshadowed within the discourse around the apologies, but these responses are perhaps even more important than the apologies themselves. These responses are critical reminders to settler society that an apology does not mean automatic forgiveness or reconciliation, but that the responsibility is on settler people to follow these apologies with actions that redress colonial destruction and dispossession – something that has been sorely lacking since the Harper apology over a decade ago. In fact, many of these speakers specifically note that this apology is not enough, but to many settler people, there is a belief that these apologies represent a turning point in Canadian history, that Indigenous peoples "should be happy now" and "quit complaining"

²²¹ See Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary homelands: essays and criticism, 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1989).

since an apology was given. Using these speech clips in response to the apologies is an assertion that when one seeks forgiveness, asking for it is an unacceptably disingenuous tactic.²²²

This composition also resists the teleological drive for finality, avoiding presenting any kind of solution to the problem that the anthem presents. Musically, the teleological climax of “O Canada” is subverted, with the leading tone of the major 7th note in the scale left hanging, unresolved, to slowly digress into extended feedback. This unresolved melody therefore sonically suggests the question: *what exactly is it that we are supposed to be standing on guard for?* With this approach, I want to leave the question to the listener in terms of *what to do* about the anthem – suggesting that in order to resolve this final note of the melody, each singer or citizen must decide for themselves what action to take.²²³ There is both an individual and collective responsibility for settlers to address their own complicity and participation in the ongoing structure of settler-colonialism in Canada, and the dominant cultural text of “O Canada” is a fruitful site to examine this topic.

Section D contains a variety of Indigenous-language versions of the anthem, mixed in the style of an evolving conversation. After having detuned the anthem from the original G major, down to F major, then to E-flat, this section outlines the possibility for Indigenous voices to restore the anthem, along with Canadian society itself. My suggestion is that it is only through careful listening to Indigenous voices, and then taking action in response to what is heard, that the nation of Canada might be reconciled with its past and ongoing actions to suppress Indigenous culture and dispossess First Nations from their lands. That said, it is also important to critically examine what the effects and motivations of these Indigenous interpretations of the anthem are. Glen Coulthard convincingly argues in favour of refusing and turning away from the

²²² For a more detailed discussion on the concept of forgiveness, and that it might be altogether impossible to forgive anything but the unforgivable, see Jacques Derrida, “On Forgiveness,” in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001).

²²³ This ‘neutering’ of the musical climax is conceptually influenced by McClary, *Feminine Endings*.

type of recognition that these anthems might be seeking, as it is the structures of both the Canadian government, and the sporting events in which the majority of these versions were sung, that legitimizes their value.²²⁴ They are, after all, still singing the *Canadian* national anthem. Dylan Robinson might also argue that these anthems are part of what he describes as “inclusionary music,” which co-opts and/or appropriates Indigenous practices in servitude of the nation, becoming resources to be extracted that are taken from Indigenous peoples, and serve to settle forms of music-making in service of the nation-state.²²⁵ Are these singers seeking to belong within the Canadian national framework, by being ‘good’ citizens and sustaining the collective affect that “O Canada” circulates amongst the populace? Taking an Althusserian perspective on ideology, it might also be said that these versions are simply examples of Indigenous interpellation within the structures of Canadian identity.

I believe these performances might be viewed in all these ways, but can they also be seen as *positively* directed performance as well? These anthems, first and foremost, are assertions of the power and presence of Indigenous languages – languages which the Canadian government sought to extinguish through horrific programs such as the Indian Residential School system’s restrictions. While these anthems are occasionally Indigenous languages blended with English/French, they nevertheless provide what might be thought of as a form of “sovereign listening,” which narrates an alternative account of the anthem that is incomprehensible to listeners who do not speak Cree, Ojibwe, Mi’kmaq, or Tutchone.²²⁶ These anthems might also speak to the idea of Canada being “our land” (as in Indigenous land), that the Creator (not God) is the one whom “keeps our land glorious and free” and, perhaps, that Indigenous people “stand on guard” for different reasons than settlers – to protect this land through Indigenous practices of

²²⁴ Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Vancouver, BC: Langara College, 2017).

²²⁵ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 6.

²²⁶ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 64.

resurgence and refusal, fighting against dispossession, maintaining and strengthening their cultural and spiritual practices, and preventing the exploitation of natural resources without their consent (or not allowing these practices whatsoever).²²⁷ However, English speakers might still access this potential sovereign listening space, given their knowledge of the English lyrics and their ability to mentally superimpose those sounds over their listening of the Indigenous language versions. I don't believe it is for me, as a white, cis-gendered, settler male, to decide which is the correct interpretation of these Indigenous-language versions of the anthem. However, I do believe these voices should be listened to and respected. The harmonic structure of Section D plays with notions of gathering and intermingling voices, putting the discursive concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia into the mix, while still ensuring each voice retains a sense of distinctness and sovereignty within the overall composition. There is no correct way to interpret the anthem, but rather a diverse range of options – sing along, take a knee, sing it in your own language, don't sing it at all, remain silent. All are valid options, but I suggest that we must all figure out *where we stand* in relation to “standing on guard for thee.”

Section E is a composition based on the notion of *sculpting silence*, with no lyrics being sung but simply the breathing cadence of the anthem being performed. The suggestion here to the listener is that settler people must “bear witness” to what colonial governments have done in their names and be cognizant of the benefits they/we have received from these actions.²²⁸ How does your body, your breath, your voice, give life to the anthem and become a wind that powers the Canadian flag flying over our colonial institutions? Contemplating these questions requires

²²⁷ Conversely, the discourse of “This Land is Our Land” is a powerfully repeated message in American culture as well, including Jennifer Lopez's recent performance of this Woody Guthrie song at the Biden/Harris presidential inauguration in January 2021.

²²⁸ See David Gaertner, “Aboriginal Principles of Witnessing and The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,” in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action In and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, edited by Dylan Robinson, and Keavy Martin (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016): 143; discussed in further detail below.

sitting with the sounds of settler-colonialism and reflecting upon the impact of the anthem in their own lives, and the force it has had to disenfranchise Indigenous peoples over the past 140 years.

Samantha Nock outlines the concept of witnessing from an Indigenous perspective as something that goes beyond listening, so that not only does the witness receive and believe information, but also accepts the responsibility to respond to what the speaker says. Witnessing therefore means that:

“...we are not only present physically, but emotionally and spiritually, to hold this story in our hearts. When someone tells us their story, that story becomes a part of us. When you witness someone's story, be it a comedy or a tragedy, you are carrying a part of that person with you now. You have entered a very specific and powerful relationship that exists between the storyteller and the witness.”²²⁹

Dylan Robinson has also asserted that we must focus on the relationships created through listening to understand “the space of sonic encounter as a space of subject–subject relation” that considers sound itself as a living entity with a subjective agency that should be respected.²³⁰ Rather than the unidirectional exchange of settled listening, Robinson argues in favor of an *affective* approach to listening that might open up sovereign spaces of sonority, encouraging a “transformative politics of listening that are resurgent in their exploration of Indigenous epistemologies, foundations, languages, and sensory logics; or, ones that are decolonial in their ability to move us beyond settler listening fixations.”²³¹ Through case studies of both Canadian jurisprudence and musical compositions/performances, Robinson shows how Indigenous song has been understood only as an aesthetic object, rather than as an ontological proposition that might carry the same weight as Western legal orders. Oral history for Stó:lō people is a heightened form of perception that transcends English conceptions of listening or witnessing,

²²⁹ Samantha Nock, “Being a Witness: The Importance of Protecting Indigenous Women's Stories,” *rabble.ca*, September 5, 2014. <https://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/samantha-nock/2014/09/being-witness-importance-protecting-indigenous-womens-stories>.

²³⁰ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 15.

²³¹ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 38.

where “being called as an honored witness means that you have been chosen to be the equivalent to the Western forms that hold law and history; you are called to be ‘the living book’ for this knowledge.”²³² Robinson explains that the Sto:lo concept of *xwélalà:m* involves a collective approach to listening, witnessing, and the cultural work of the longhouse which comprises a “form of attention” that operates in “non-goal-oriented ways,” but clarifies that this does not mean the work of listening occurs “without intention, but rather that the work of listening is not predicated on use-value or the drive to accumulate knowledge.”²³³

While settlers perhaps cannot and should not seek to appropriate Indigenous concepts of witnessing such as *xwélalà:m* themselves, I am interested to consider how these ideas might play into the experiences of *Detuning the Anthem* participants. It is my hope that, regardless of their cultural background, they will listen attentively, without the desire to necessarily understand or know exactly what they have listened to, but instead let these sounds move through their whole being to enact an affective “listening otherwise.”²³⁴ For example, the final orchestrated section might be silent in its *audio*, but very loud in its *affect*. This is also the motivation with the narrated invitations/reflections between each orchestrated musical section – an opportunity to consider what is heard, how it is heard, and why it is heard that way. Can listening otherwise to the anthem become a form of bearing witness to the colonial history of Canada?

David Gaertner has examined how Indigenous principles of witnessing – not just as acts of observing and listening, but as holding a sacred bond between speaker and listener – were used in Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).²³⁵ Indigenous principles of witnessing shift the focus from a witness-who-testifies, to a witness-who-listens, meaning that the weight of

²³² Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 56.

²³³ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 71-72.

²³⁴ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 10-15.

²³⁵ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) operated for six years to document and publicly discuss the Indian Residential School system. For an overview of what this work entailed, see National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, “Truth and Reconciliation Web Archive,” National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Accessed March 24, 2021. <https://nctr.ca/archives-pages.php#truth>

traumatic experiences can be partially relieved from TRC survivors and shared with these witnesses-who-listen, who then have a responsibility to carry this testimony with them.²³⁶

Gaertner also points to the associated risks related to these principles of witnessing, for both the speaker and the listener. Survivors of residential school abuse are “not simply ‘bearing’ witness, or testifying to their experiences in an objective manner, but rather ‘*baring*’ witness: exposing themselves to a scopophilic gaze driven by the colonial desire to know and own.”²³⁷ It can be seen how the TRC’s processes placed undue burden on survivors to recount their trauma in a pain-for-pay paradigm, rather than forcing the perpetrators of abuse to testify to their own actions and take individual responsibility. It is this sense of responsibility I wish to impart upon participants of *Detuning the Anthem* – a responsibility to address how they have become complicit in Canada’s colonial history through repeated performances of “O Canada,” and, especially for settler singers, how they might prevent causing further harms to Indigenous peoples, and carry this responsibility forward to future generations.

²³⁶ Gaertner, “Aboriginal Principles of Witnessing,” 139.

²³⁷ Gaertner, “Aboriginal Principles of Witnessing,” 143.

CHAPTER 6: THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF LISTENING

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to emphasize the importance of listening in order to build more ethical relationships, but more specifically, to improve Indigenous-settler relations in Canada. We are constantly immersed in a world of sound, but we often pay very little attention to what we hear, bombarded with the constant cacophony of public discourse. We must activate attentive and ethical listening practices as a methodology towards improving our world, through honouring the voices of those who have often been marginalized and oppressed. This also means that listening is not enough – we must take action in response to the sounds of injustice, in order to prevent them from continuing.

Membership within a nation-state (either by birth or by choice) comes with both rights and responsibilities, but one cannot avoid either of these. My challenge is for all Canadians to address both their individual and collective responsibilities within the nation-state. Writing during the Nuremberg Trials following World War II, Hannah Arendt explored the difference between guilt and responsibility as it applied to the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their supporters, making a distinction between “political (collective) responsibility, on one side, and moral and/or legal (personal) guilt, on the other.”²³⁸ For Arendt, collective responsibility exists when two conditions are present: when an actor must be held responsible for an act they have not personally committed; and when the reason for holding that actor responsible is their

²³⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Random House, 2003), 150-151.

“membership in a group (a collective) which no voluntary act of mine can dissolve.”²³⁹ While I may not be personally guilty of dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their lands, I am still responsible for those past actions committed in the name of the nation-state of Canada, of which I am a member. I cannot escape this responsibility unless I decide to leave this country, and even if I did, I would still have responsibilities to whatever other community I decide to relocate to.²⁴⁰ Much like the impossibility of disavowing membership within the community of the nation-state, it is equally impossible to avoid confronting the sound of the national anthem as a member of the national community. I would like to suggest that when a person hears their national anthem ring out, this is an opportunity to confront one’s own individual and collective responsibilities as a member of the nation-state.

Vanessa Sloan Morgan builds upon Arendt’s arguments to interrogate what responsibilities exist for settler people in Canada, arguing that “processes of reconciliation require settlers to address their complicity in and to the settler state.”²⁴¹ While Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission published a report describing 94 Calls to Action in order to repair Indigenous-settler relations, these all centered on institutions, rather than individuals. It is important to realize that “the state itself cannot achieve reconciliation,” as it is a matter of all Canadians becoming involved in processes of reconciliation on both individual and collective levels, as a focus solely on institutions risks “re-inscribing colonial violence upon Indigenous peoples.”²⁴² Can confronting the anthem itself become a call to action for Canadians, both individually and together as a collective? Sloan Morgan argues that those who have a “‘heightened awareness’ about their occupation of Indigenous lands may create ‘heightened

²³⁹ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 149.

²⁴⁰ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 149-150.

²⁴¹ Vanessa Sloan Morgan, “Moving from rights to responsibilities: extending Hannah Arendt’s critique of collective responsibility to the settler colonial context of Canada,” in *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 3 (2018): 334.

²⁴² Sloan Morgan, “Moving from rights to responsibilities,” 334.

responsibilities’ to support those within a group that maintain willful ignorance.”²⁴³ This is the drive with *Detuning the Anthem* – to encourage those who are unaware (either blindly or willfully) of how their privileges as Canadian citizens come at the expense of Indigenous peoples being dispossessed of land and culture, to confront their responsibilities to this ongoing history. Learning and listening does not stop settler-colonialism from continuing – actions are required. It is my individual responsibility to support other settlers in our collective responsibility to address and rectify the ongoing harms that settler-colonial structures continue to perpetuate, including the epistemic violence committed by the Canadian national anthem. Too often, Indigenous peoples are asked to ‘educate’ settlers on their own privileges, and this simply places further burdens on Indigenous peoples who might otherwise use this time to focus on the restrengthening and resurgence of their own vital cultural practices. It is up to settler people to educate ourselves and take action in order to pursue the goals of truth and reconciliation, and build a more ethical society in Canada.

While the TRC’s structure resulted in Indigenous voices being *given a hearing*, David Garneau argues that this is not enough for settler people to assume that reconciliation has been accomplished. He explores the need for ongoing action while also drawing a clear distinction between reconciliation and conciliation, challenging the idea that reconciliation can actually occur, as a state of *conciliation* has never been achieved in the first place. Settlers and their “hosts” (First Nations) must work together to each learn about one other, “to move through proximity, listening, empathy, cooperative inquiry, and action to a state of racial confusion.”²⁴⁴ It is only through this ongoing process that any sense of conciliation might be achieved. Garneau

²⁴³ Sloan Morgan, “Moving from rights to responsibilities,” 341.

²⁴⁴ David Garneau, “Imaginary spaces of conciliation and reconciliation: art, curation, and healing,” in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, edited by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016): 29.

explains that through this commitment to action, “settlers who become unsettled – who are aware of their inheritance and implication in the colonial matrix, who comprehend their unearned privileges and seek ways past racism – are settlers no longer.”²⁴⁵ He emphasizes that achieving conciliation requires perpetual effort, that it must be “an ongoing process, a seeking rather than the restoration of an imagined agreement,” which cultural workers (artists, curators, administrators, etc) must commit themselves to upholding.²⁴⁶ Just as the original Treaties were written to be living documents requiring both parties to maintain in a continuing relationship that involves “interpretation, reinterpretation, and renegotiation,” Garneau argues that “the present Reconciliation narrative should be recast as a continued struggle for conciliation rather than for the restoration of something lost (that never quite was).”²⁴⁷

As the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre describes, a life of good intentions, well-meaning thoughts, hopes, dreams, and prayers all amount to nothing, as “there is no reality except in action.”²⁴⁸ If we are ashamed of Canada’s horrible history, we must do something to change its present and future. Feeling guilty about the past accomplishes nothing – but admitting one’s individual and collective responsibility to this past and the benefits it has bestowed upon settler people is the first of many actions that must be taken. The anthem is a performative space where further actions might be taken. I don’t want to insist that to sing “O Canada” means to necessarily be racist, misogynist, or nationalistic by default, but that it is important for all Canadians to address *where they stand* in regard to “standing on guard for thee” – whether it is in agreement, in conflict, or in opposition to the anthem – perhaps even a mix of all three. One might even admire Canada’s colonial history, but there is a responsibility to be clear about this.

²⁴⁵ Garneau, “Imaginary spaces of conciliation and reconciliation,” 27.

²⁴⁶ Garneau, “Imaginary spaces of conciliation and reconciliation,” 31.

²⁴⁷ Garneau, “Imaginary spaces of conciliation and reconciliation,” 32.

²⁴⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Citadel Press/Kensington Publishing, 1957/1985), 32.

To stand and sit idly by while the anthem plays and attempt to simply ignore what is happening feels like a different mode of eschewing one's responsibility. However, it might be possible to use the anthem's refrain in another mode, as a silent protest of sorts. To take this moment as an opportunity for reflection on Canada's history, rather than as a celebration of it. Versions of the anthem sung in other languages for example, by Indigenous voices, might be a modality of *re-appropriation* of this anthem to mean something different, or *re-storying* this anthem to narrate an alternate history (or future). While some sports leagues have recently taken to the practice of making an Indigenous land acknowledgment prior to the anthem being sung, perhaps the anthem could not be sung at all, in favor of a moment of silence to reflect upon the responsibilities of Canadian citizenship instead. Finally, it is of course possible to refuse the anthem altogether, or to adopt a stance of dissent, as in recent protests against the American anthem led by Colin Kaepernick (and others). What is important is that we must all choose where we stand in terms of both the anthem and the ongoing structure of settler-colonialism, as there is always a choice, "but what is not possible is not to choose. I can always choose, but I ought to know that if I do not choose, I am still choosing."²⁴⁹ Making this choice, whatever the decision might be, is one of our most important responsibilities as Canadians.

²⁴⁹ Sartre, *Existentialism*, 41.

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Appendix 1: Comprehensive “O Canada” Lyrics and Revisions

“O Canada” lyrical revisions indicated in each version through italics.

1880

Ô Canada!
Terre de nos aïeux,
Ton front est ceint
de fleurons glorieux!

Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.

Et ta valeur,
de foi trempée,
Protégera nos foyers et nos droits.
Protégera nos foyers et nos droits.

1908

O Canada!
Our home and native land!
True patriot love
thou dost in us command.

We see thee rising fair, dear land
The True North strong and free;
and stand on guard, O Canada,
we stand on guard for thee.

O Canada!
O Canada!
O Canada! we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada! we stand on guard for thee.

1913

O Canada!
Our home and native land!
True patriot love,

in all thy sons command.

*With glowing hearts, we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free;
and stand on guard, O Canada,
we stand on guard for thee.*

1968

O Canada!
Our home and native land!
True patriot love,
in all thy sons command.

With glowing hearts, we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,

O Canada!
Glorious and free!
O Canada! we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada! we stand on guard for thee.

we stand on guard for thee.

God keep our land,
glorious and free!
O Canada! we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada! we stand on guard for thee.
2018

O Canada!
Our home and native land!
True patriot love,
in all *of us* command.

With glowing hearts, we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
we stand on guard for thee.

God keep our land,
glorious and free!
O Canada! we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada! we stand on guard for thee.

Appendix 2: Credits for *Detuning the Anthem: A “Choose-Your-Own” Audio Adventure*

Tracks 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20

Written by Tyler J Stewart, narrated by Tyler J Stewart, Bre Day, and Miguelzinta Solis.
Recorded and mixed by Tyler J Stewart.

Track 3

“O Canada” composed and arranged by Calixa Lavallée, 1880. French lyrics written by Adolphe-Basile Routhier, 1880. English lyrics written by Robert Stanley Weir, 1908 (with 1913, 1968, 2018 revised lyrics also included). Arranged by Tyler J Stewart. Piano and vocals performed by Tyler J Stewart. Recorded and mixed by Courtney McDermott, in Studio One at the University of Lethbridge.

Track 7

“O Canada” composed by Calixa Lavallée, 1880. Arranged by Tyler J Stewart. Piano and acoustic guitars performed by Tyler J Stewart. Recorded and mixed by Courtney McDermott, in Studio One at the University of Lethbridge. Speech samples from Prime Minister Stephen Harper, June 11, 2008; and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, November 24, 2017.

Track 11

“O Canada” composed by Calixa Lavallée, 1880. Arranged by Tyler J Stewart. Piano, acoustic guitars, electric guitars, and electric bass performed by Tyler J Stewart. Recorded and mixed by Courtney McDermott, in Studio One at the University of Lethbridge. Speech samples from Phil Fontaine, Beverly Jacobs, Clem Chartier, Patrick Brazeau, Mary Simon, June 11, 2008; and Toby Abed, November 24, 2017.

Track 15

“O Canada” composed by Calixa Lavallée, 1880. Arranged and mixed by Tyler J Stewart. Vocal performance samples from Kiya Bruno, June 21, 2019; Akina Shirt, February 3, 2007; The Riverbend School's Strong Warrior Girls Anishinaabe Singers, January 17, 2020; Kalolin Johnson, January 9, 2010; Dolores Sand, 2015; Daniel Tlen, February 13, 1988.

Track 19

“O Canada” composed by Calixa Lavallée, 1880. Arranged, performed, recorded and mixed by Tyler J Stewart.

FULL REFERENCES FOR SPEECH AND VOCAL SAMPLES

Track 7

Harper, Stephen. “HoC Sitting No. 110.” ParlVu, House of Commons of Canada, June 11, 2008. <https://parlvu.parl.gc.ca/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20080611/-1/24250>.

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Track 11

Phil Fontaine, Beverly Jacobs, Clem Chartier, Patrick Brazeau, Mary Simon. “HoC Sitting No. 110.” ParlVu, House of Commons of Canada, June 11, 2008. <https://parlvu.parl.gc.ca/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20080611/-1/24250>.

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Track 15

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Appendix 3: Documentation

October 28, 2020 recording session (Studio One, University of Lethbridge)

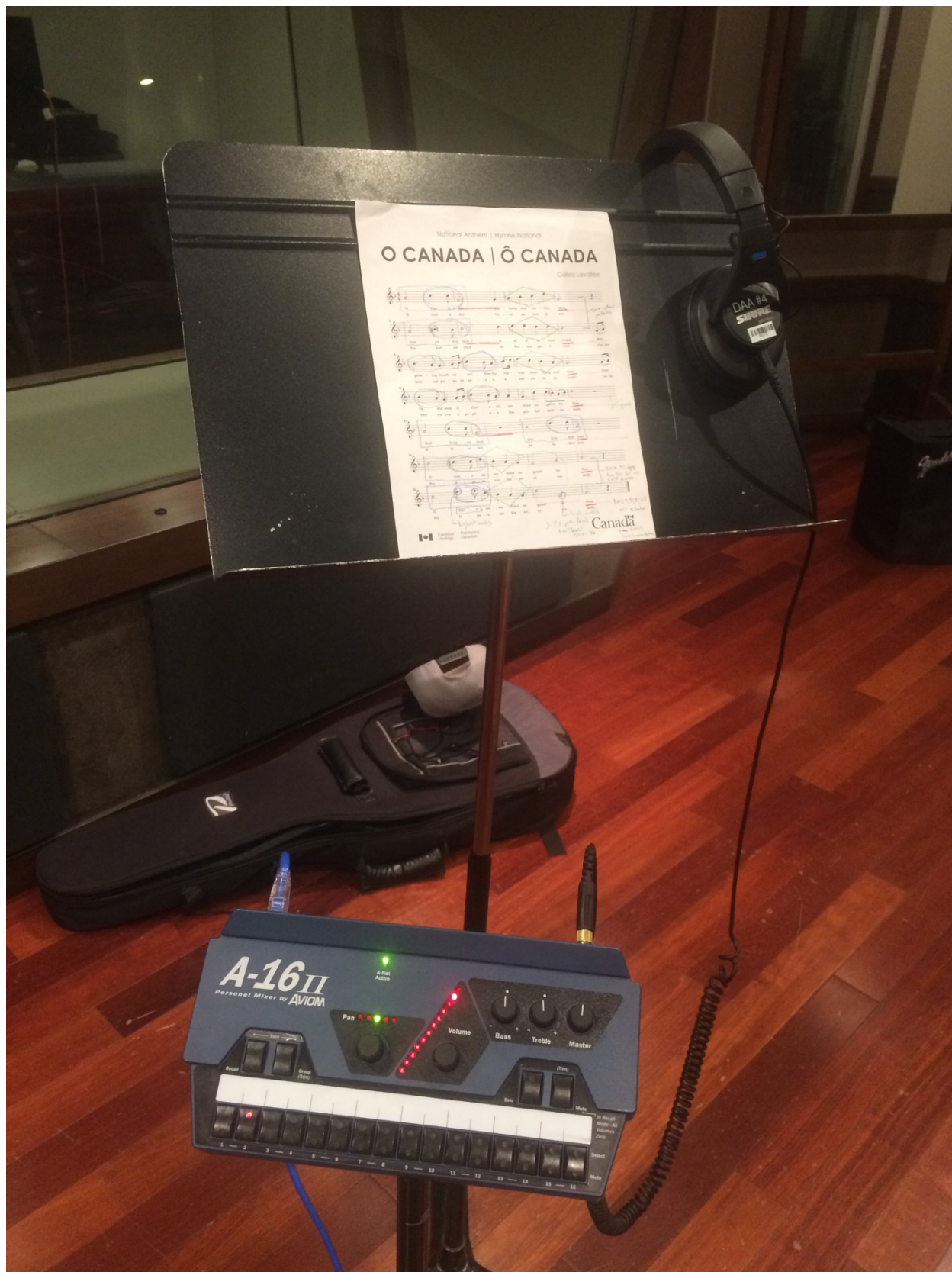






Nov 18, 2020 recording session (Studio One, University of Lethbridge)















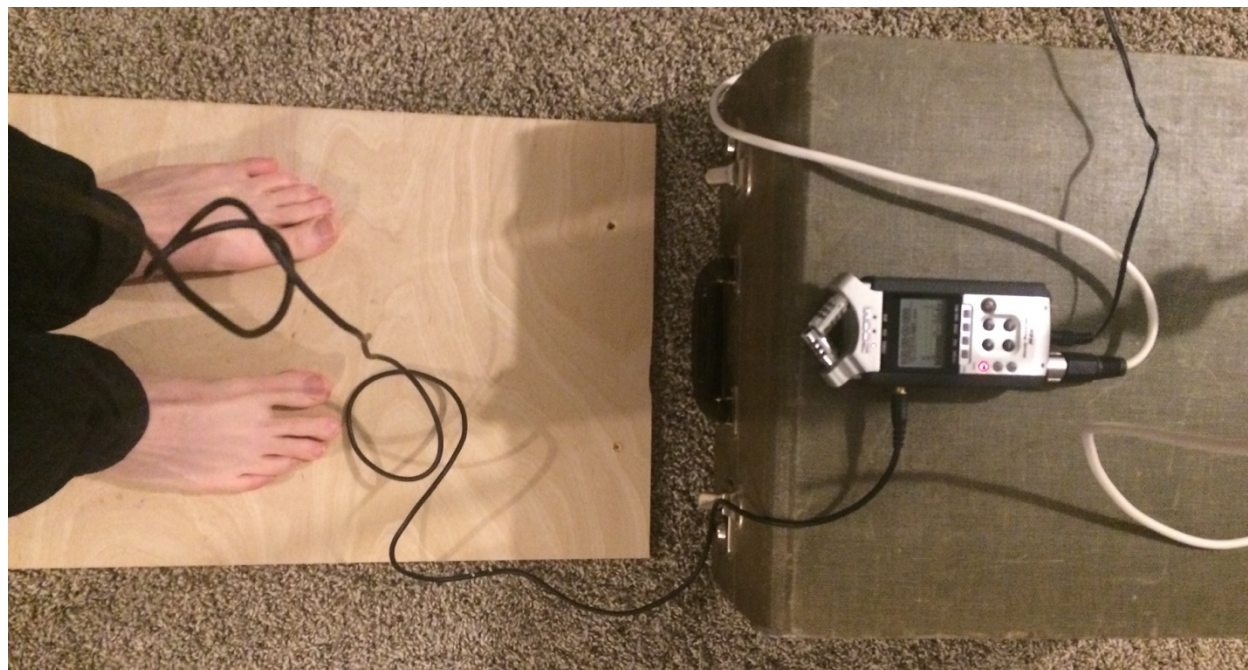


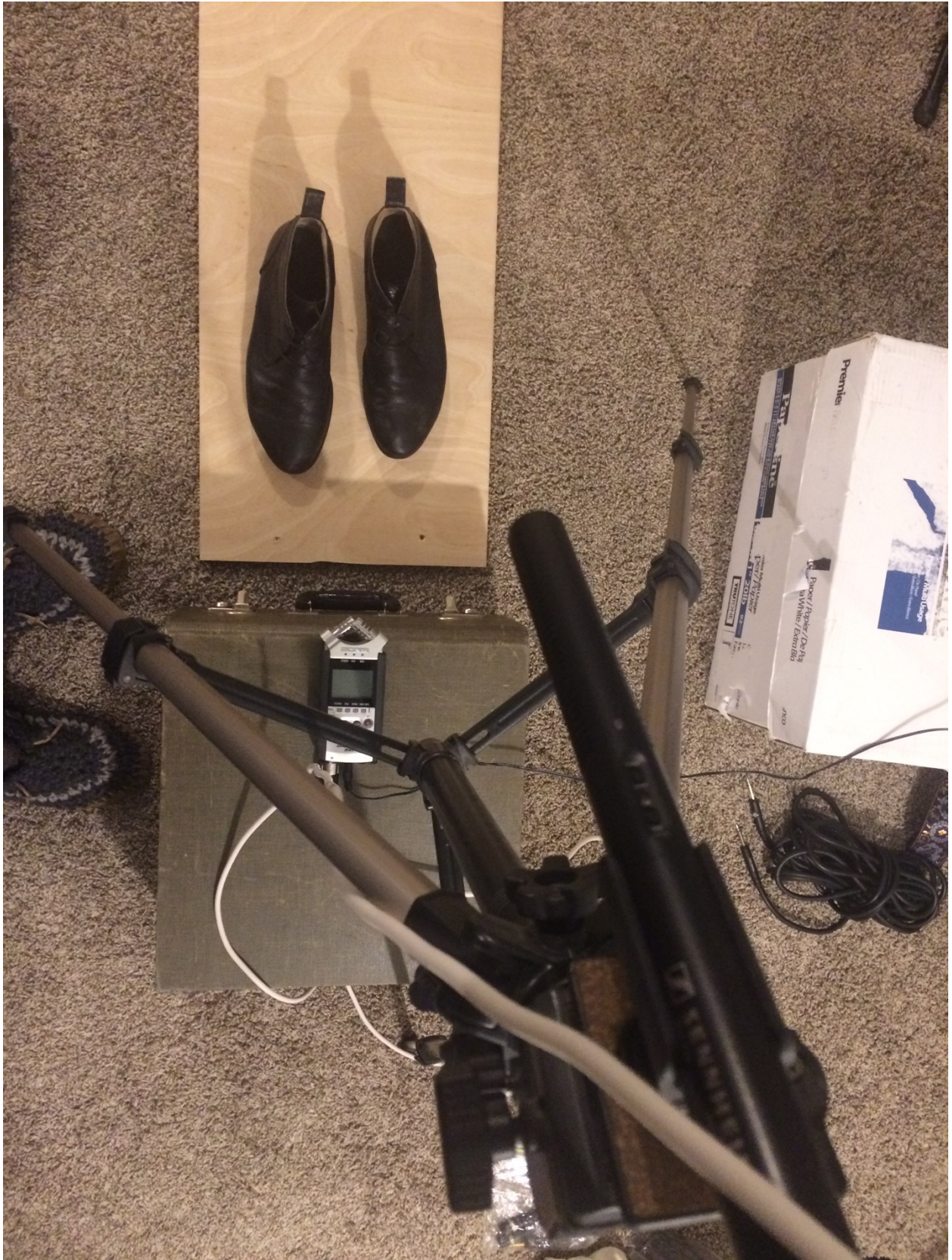
Nov 18, 2020 photos by Courtney McDermott (Studio One, University of Lethbridge)





December 9, 2020 recording session – marching boots (at home)











Jan-April 2021 recording sessions (narrations)

