

# Research–Creation Walking Methodologies and an Unsettling of Time

**Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman (2019)**

**Published in *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 12(1), p. 85-93**

Responding to Jonathan Wyatt's call to participate in a plenary panel at the 2017 International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, we shared a number of research-creation events organized by *WalkingLab*, which we codirect (Springgay & Truman, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). *WalkingLab* often works in collaboration with other artists and scholars on research-creation projects, and the online hub ([www.walkinglab.org](http://www.walkinglab.org)) archives these networked activities. Research-creation is the interrelated practices of art, theory, and research (Truman & Springgay, 2016). As a practice, the hyphenation of research-creation draws attention to the co-imbrication and necessary rigour of both artistic practice and research methods (Manning & Massumi, 2014). Research-creation events activated at *WalkingLab* invoke a 'queer temporality' through disrupting normative space-time delineations (Truman & Shannon, 2018, p. 62).

The research-creation events discussed in this article explore questions of sovereignty, borders, histories, and time through strategies of speculation, counter-cartographies, and anarchiving practices (Springgay & Truman, 2018). We draw from walking events that ask us to imagine a past, present, and future that are radically different from ongoing settler colonialism and White supremacy. Wyatt's proposal was to consider how our work responds to or has changed since the 'rise of the right'. However, our contention is that there is no 'rise'. White supremacy and settler colonization have formed the foundation of most modern nation states, and in particular Canada. This is reflected in the 'Canada 150' celebrations in 2017 that celebrated violence, genocide, and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples. One hundred fifty years marks the formation of settler colonies into the Canadian Confederation under the British North America Act of 1867. Critics of the 'Canada 150' national celebrations contend that this Euro-Western time-frame fails to account for the millennia that Indigenous peoples have been living on the land now named Canada and the ways that Confederacy confiscated lands, territories, and resources. Dominant celebratory narratives reflected in the official 'Canada 150' rhetoric reinforce the entanglement of settler colonialism and anti-blackness. These narratives describe Canada as a country committed to multiculturalism and benevolence, a nation that welcomes racialized others. This logic of goodwill, Katherine McKittrick (2007) argues, 'conceals and/or skews colonial practices, Aboriginal genocides and struggles, and Canada's implication in transatlantic slavery, racism, and racial intolerance' (p. 98). The production of Canada as a White state is indebted to the erasure of Blackness and Indigeneity.

The research-creation walking events that we focus on in this article are examined in more detail in our book *Walking Methodologies in a More-Than-Human World: WalkingLab* (Springgay & Truman, 2018). For this special issue, we consider how research-creation walking events can

unsettle colonial temporalities and how artistic research can participate in the processes and practices of decolonization.

## **Decolonization**

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) assert that decolonization is not a metaphor. Metaphor, they argue, re-centres whiteness and maintains settler futures. Decolonization, they contend, risks replicating colonial dispossession, particularly when it provides a measure of emotional relief to settlers and aims to produce a cooperative Indigenous subject. Tuck and Yang define settler moves to innocence as those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all. In fact, settler scholars may gain professional kudos or a boost in their reputations for being so sensitive or self-aware. (p. 10)

Decolonization, they contend, requires the repatriation of Indigenous Land and life. Dylan Miner (2016) states that the problem with decolonization is its transition from a verb into a noun. As a noun, or a thing, decolonization shifts from an active practice or a way of life to a knowable and ownable thing. David Garneau (2013) makes similar claims, stating that decolonization may in fact re-inscribe colonization. Decolonization will never be possible if it resembles colonization.

Recognizing that Land plays a central role in decolonization, Cheyanne Turions (2016) maintains that cultural forms and practices can also make significant contributions to decolonization. Turions argues that art can play an important role in undoing structures of dispossession through affective and discursive political gestures that focus on land, mobility, and access. Writing about affect and its relation to cultural decolonization, Garneau (2013) discusses the *extra-rational* potential of art. He writes: Art is the site of intolerable research, the laboratory of odd ideas, of sensual and intuitive study, and of production that exceeds the boundaries of conventional disciplines, protocols and imaginaries....It can be a way for the marginalized, refused, and repressed to return. (p. 16)

Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (2016) use the term *aesthetic action* to describe art works that have social and political impacts that are 'felt' (p. 2). Recognizing the Euro-Western history of aesthetics that has disavowed Indigenous art, Robinson and Martin find the affective, sensory, and bodily experiences of art to be a powerful means by which to address reconciliation. Aesthetic action is more than just political content in a work, it is also the affective dimensions that displace normative and hegemonic structures. Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes (2014) contend that decolonial aesthetics are a break from the humanist rational ideal of individualism and instead are grounded in collective practices which imagine a different world or perform, as Sylvia Wynter asserts, 'a rewriting of our present now globally institutionalized order of knowledge' (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 18).

Further, decolonial aesthetics do not simply insert artwork by Indigenous, Black, queer, and trans artists into an already existing art canon or structure but become strategies for dismantling settler colonialism and White supremacy, including the ways that dispossession has excluded artists from mainstream art institutions. However, for art to have a role in decolonization, it must be 'Indigenous-led and self-determined with non-Indigenous allies playing a supporting role, not the other way around' (Gray, 2017, p. 16). As queer White settler artists and researchers, we recognize these tensions. Our interest at *WalkingLab* has been to work collaboratively with Black, Indigenous, queer, trans, and people of colour artists to develop research-creation methodologies that unsettle structural racism and White supremacy in the academy.

One of the ways that artists create spaces for decolonization is by unsettling time and temporality. Time plays a central role in how we think about endurance, rhythm, movement, relationality, collectivity, disruption, and futurity. Chronological or linear time segments and orders the past, present, and future. Here time is sequential and progressive. Time determines the ways that we live, work, and produce. It is an instrument of power dictating the rhythm and flow of life. This is the 'Canada 150' time that converts historical asymmetries of power into seemingly ordinary tempos and rhythms. Narratives of progress and change normalize time and organize the value and meaning of time according to Euro-Western settler logics. Indigenous time, what occurred prior to 150 years of settler colonization, becomes unthought, vanished, and erased. Further, the racialization of geological or stratified time, Kathryn Yusoff (2017) argues, is figured in the production of Blackness as an exclusion. Humanity, she asserts, is racially constituted and how this is inscribed in time reinforces global divisions.

Using walking as a method of inquiry, Dylan Miner and Camille Turner's research-creation events disrupt such linear, progressive models of time. Time, in their two projects, *To the Landless* and *Miss Canadiana's Heritage and Cultural Walking Tour: The Grange*, interrupts colonial continuity by reconfiguring and restructuring temporality in multiple ways. In both projects, time is not recuperated from the past into the present but is unhinged to create new trajectories of resistance.

In the next section of the article, we describe these two research-creation events very briefly. You will find a more robust analysis in relation to borders, remapping, and archives in our *Walking Methodologies* book. In the final section of this article, we discuss these research-creation events in relation to time.

### **Walking Methodologies**

*To the Landless*, by Métis artist Dylan Miner, borrowed its title from words spoken by anarchist Lucia Gonzáles Parsons (commonly known as Lucy Parsons) at the founding convention of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). As a woman of African, Mexican, and Indigenous ancestry, Parsons employed feminist intersectional, anti-state, and anti-capitalist activism throughout her life. In her writing and in her organizing, Parsons was often at odds with better-known anarchist Emma Goldman. *To the Landless* asked people to join together on a walk through Chinatown and Kensington Market in Toronto and pause in front of Goldman's former house on Spadina Avenue. During the walk, participants read from Goldman's and Parsons' writings and imagined Parsons joining Goldman, who died in Toronto in 1940, for dinner near her house. Unable to separate history from the present and future, Miner asked participants to walk with and converse with these two contentious and important activists and thinkers. Conversations incited by the walk focused on the politics of settler colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, labour, and immigration. *Miss*

*Canadiana's Heritage and Cultural Walking Tour: The Grange* by Camille Turner is a walking tour that examined the Black history of Toronto mapped through Afrofuturist hauntings and places. Miss Canadiana is Turner's performance persona who leads the walking tours. Miss Canadiana wears a red beauty pageant dress, a tiara, and a pageant sash. The performance persona contradicts dominant Canadian myths that Blackness is foreign and that Blackness is not a representative of national beauty. *Miss Canadiana's Heritage and Cultural Walking Tour: The Grange* exposed the intra-connectedness and entanglement among slavery, racialized bodies, colonial historical narratives, and land. The walk explored the complexities of slavery in Canada between 1793, when the act to limit the importation of slaves was passed, which enabled American slaves to cross into Canada and become free, and 1833, when slavery was abolished.

On the walking tour, Miss Canadiana recounts various narratives and stories, much like one would hear on a conventional historic walking tour. However, Miss Canadiana tells stories of a host of characters from the Grange area in Toronto (adjacent and interconnected to Kensington where Miner's walk took place), including Peggy Pompadour, a Black woman who was jailed in 1806 for resisting slavery. To create the characters, Turner pieced together fragments that existed of Black history in Toronto. Because there is very little 'official' documentation in the archives, alternative methods, including creating composite fictions, needed to be used. For example, to create the Peggy Pompadour character that walkers encounter on the tour, Turner used the newspaper report of Peggy Pompadour running away, text from her bill of sale, historical pictures and information on the jail, the living conditions of the poor in the Grange area at the time, songs passed down from generation to generation, and snippets of conversations with contemporary Black residents of the Grange neighbourhood. Using memory and affect, Turner combines elements with science fiction and fantasy to reimagine a past that is not a past. A similar project commissioned by *WalkingLab*, called *BlackGrange*, incorporates Afrofuturism, ritual, and performance to counter chronological time (Springgay & Truman, in press).

### **Unsettling Time**

Both Miner and Turner's projects resist linear conceptualizations of time that retrieve the past and unveil it in the present. Unhinging time in *To the Landless*, Miner speculatively brings together Parsons and Goldman, along with the walking participants, for a conversation in Toronto. This conversation brings together fragments of archives, memories, oral stories, songs, marginal ephemera, and affects. The walking-with conversation is situated in an imaginary space of shifting and interlocking temporalities, where disparate events, people, and ideas inform actions in the past, present, and future simultaneously. Instead of excavating a history that was buried in a past waiting to be revealed or recuperated, the walk was a strategy and site of critical exchange about history, place, community, and activism. In-between the anarchists' writings of Parsons and Goldman that were read aloud and the walk through the former garment district of Toronto emerges an indeterminate space-time that intervenes and disrupts ongoing practices of settler colonization and capitalism. Time becomes outside itself, or in excess.

Zakiyyah Jackson (2016), writing about the affirmative politics of speculative fiction, argues that writers and artists use speculation as an intervention into colonial time. Time is destabilized and problematized, its codes and conventions, legibility, and organization unsettled. Treva C. Ellison (2017) writes about time as being flexible. Flexibility, Ellison writes, 'focuses on process, practice, conjuring, tarrying, cracking and hacking as ways of approaching Blackness and Black embodiment' (p. 29).

Turner's walking tours question the mechanisms that enable the ongoing erasure of Blackness from the Canadian landscape. McKittrick (2007) states that while Canada's mythology has been shaped by the idea of fugitive American slaves finding freedom and refuge in Canada, Black feminism and Black resistance are 'unexpected and concealed' (p. 98). Black people arrived in Canada via multiple means, not just as a passage into 'freedom', and as Turner's walking tour makes explicitly clear, Canada also legalized the enslavement of Black people.

Turner's walking tour 'refuses a unitary, linear, or nationalist celebratory story of black pride and/or white/Canadian paternalism' (McKittrick, 2007, p. 107). The persona of Miss Canadiana, Peggy Pompadour's story, and the sites visited on the walking tour become departure points for the unsettling of time that the walking tour enacts. In composing the character Peggy Pompadour and creating a 'new' oral history of her life – a speculative one – Turner's research-creation resists revictimizing and commodifying Peggy's story. In shaping the past as a past that is not completed and one that stretches infinitely into a different future, Turner's walk refuses a colonized understanding of time. Centering Blackness, Turner's walks disrupt linear and progressive conceptualizations of time. If 'the past that is not the past appears in the present', then Turner's walks remap Black worlds and futures. Walking with Miss Canadiana and Peggy Pompadour, Emma Goldman, and Lucy Parsons asks how these figures and those who walk with them are co-composed in the past, present, and speculative future. Time becomes out of joint.

Jonathan Wyatt's provocation asked us as qualitative researchers and educators to consider how in the current political moment our practices are responding, becoming response-able to, and potentially changing. For *WalkingLab*, stepping 'out of time' has important implications for the kinds of research-creation events that it germinates. Chronological time is so pervasive and powerful that we as qualitative researchers are often caught up in its neoliberal progress narrative. Working-with, walking-with, and thinking-with scholars and artists who refuse time's organization and the fixing or preservation of state narratives disrupt colonial legibility and the repeated imposition of the normative order. Unsettling time become models for research and education that are outside colonial, neoliberal, and dominant ideologies. To unsettle something is to open it up to possibility.

## References

Ellison, T. C. (2017). Flex, conjure, crack: Flexibility and the uncertainty of Blackness. *C Magazine*, 132, 28–33.

Garneau, D. (2013). Extra-rational aesthetic action and cultural decolonization. *FUSE Magazine*, 36(4), 14–21.

Gray, J. (2017). Wood Land School: A brief report. *C Magazine*, 133, 12–18.

Jackson, Z. I. (2016). Sense of things. *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, 2(2), 1–48. doi:10.28968/cftt.v2i2.28801

Manning, E., & Massumi, B. (2014). *Thought in the act: Passages in the ecology of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Martineau, J., & Ritskes, E. (2014). Fugitive indigeneity: Reclaiming the terrain of decolonial struggle through Indigenous art. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(1), I–XII.

McKittrick, K. (2007). Freedom is a secret. In K. McKittrick & C. Woods (Eds.), *Black geographies and the politics of place* (pp. 97–114). Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Miner, D. (2016). Practicing descolonización: A few thoughts from Wallmapu. Retrieved from <https://justseeds.org/practicing-descolonizacion-a-few-thoughts-from-territorio-mapuche/>

Robinson, D., & Martin, K. (2016). Introduction: 'The body is a resonant chamber'. In D. Robinson & K. Martin (Eds.), *Arts of engagement: Taking aesthetic action in and beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (pp. 1–20). Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

Springgay, S., & Truman, S. E. (2017a). A transmaterial approach to walking methodologies: Embodiment, affect, and a sonic art performance. *Body & Society*, 23(4), 27–58. doi:10.1177/1357034X17732626

Springgay, S., & Truman, S. E. (2017b). On the need for methods beyond proceduralism: Speculative middles, (in)tensions, and response-ability in research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24, 203–214. doi:10.1177/1077800417704464

Springgay, S., & Truman, S. E. (2017c). Stone Walks: Inhuman animacies and queer archives of feeling. *Discourse*, 38, 851–863. doi:10.1080/01596306.2016.1226777

Springgay, S., & Truman, S. E. (2018). *Walking methodologies in a more-than-human world*. London, England: Routledge.

Springgay, S. & Truman, S. E. (in press). Queering temporalities, activating QTBIPOC subjectivities and world-makings: Walking research-creation. *MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture*.

Truman, S. E., & Shannon, D. B. (2018). Queer sonic cultures: An affective walking-composing project. *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*, 1(3), 58–77. doi:10.22387/CAP2018.19

Truman, S. E., & Springgay, S. (2016). Propositions for walking research. In P. Burnard, E. Mackinlay, & K. Powell (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook for intercultural arts research* (pp. 259–267). New York, NY: Routledge.

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.

Turions, C. (2016, March 23). Decolonization, reconciliation, and the extra-rational potential of the arts. Retrieved from <http://artseverywhere.ca/2016/03/23/1218/>

Wynter, S., & McKittrick, K. (2015). Unparalleled catastrophe for our species? Or, to give humanness a different future: Conversations. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis* (pp. 9–89). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Yusoff, K. (2017). *Towards a thousand black anthropocenes*. Conference presentation at the New Materialism Conference, Paris, France.

### **About the Authors**

Stephanie Springgay is an associate professor at the University of Toronto. She is a leader in research-creation, with a particular interest in theories of matter, movement, and affect. With Sarah E. Truman she co-directs *WalkingLab*. Her research-creation projects are documented at [www.thepedagogicalimpulse.com](http://www.thepedagogicalimpulse.com), [www.walkinglab.org](http://www.walkinglab.org), and [www.artistsoupkitchen.com](http://www.artistsoupkitchen.com). Stephanie has published widely in academic journals and is the co-editor of *M/othering a Bodied Curriculum: Emplacement, Desire, Affect*; coeditor of *Curriculum and the Cultural Body*; and author of *Body Knowledge and Curriculum: Pedagogies of Touch in Youth and Visual Culture*.

Sarah E. Truman is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Melbourne, where she researches English literary education with a specific focus on QT & BIPOC speculative fiction. Truman is co-author of *Walking Methodologies in More-than-Human World: WalkingLab* (Routledge, 2018); co-editor of *Pedagogical Matters: New Materialism and Curriculum Studies* (Peter Lang, 2016). She co-directs *WalkingLab* and is one half of the electronic music duo *Oblique Curiosities*. [www.sarahetruman.com](http://www.sarahetruman.com).