

RETHINKING THE GREAT WHITE NORTH

Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies
of Whiteness in Canada

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and Audrey Kobayashi



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RETHINKING THE GREAT WHITE NORTH

Introduction

Where Is the Great White North? Spatializing History, Historicizing Whiteness

ANDREW BALDWIN, LAURA CAMERON,
AND AUDREY KOBAYASHI

Myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things.

– Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

Racisms also dehistoricize – translating historically specific structures into the timeless language of nature.

– Stuart Hall, *Race, Articulation and Societies
Structured in Dominance*

The Great White North is an enduring Canadian myth. It weaves history, geography, aesthetics, science, and even comedy into a national imaginary that invokes a metaphor of nature's purity to reinforce norms of racial purity. The double meaning of the word "white" parallels a double movement in our social and cultural history both to assert the dominance of whiteness as a cultural norm and to build a sense of national identity linked closely to nature and wilderness. Non-whites and Indigenous peoples have been excluded from that norm to one degree or another since the nation's inception. But whiteness also suggests innocence. According to Sherene Razack (2002b, 2), "a quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is, therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour."

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The physical North establishes a point of reference, meliorates cartographic anxiety, and founds Canada's spatial imaginary as both location and expanse. In both cartographic and mythical terms, the "North" is a mutating landscape whose horizons seem forever in retreat. Its meaning has shifted significantly over time. For much of our history, it was the locus of the long-sought Northwest Passage. During the Cold War, it was a hovering zone of danger that sent us scurrying to build the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line as a fortification against communism (Farish 2006). From the Canada First movement to John Diefenbaker's northern development rhetoric to the politics of diamond mining (Grace 2002), the North is invoked as an important source of economic value. In late modernity, melting polar ice has set off a cascade of environmental and geopolitical anxieties. Sometimes the "Great White North" refers in stolid and timeless terms to the snowy territory north of the Arctic Circle, spatially remote, ahistorical, pre-human; but at others, it is synonymous with the country as a whole, its people, and the values upon which the nation was built, a creation of a population forging a common destiny. But transcending its meaning as an economic and political frontier, the North draws together cultural value and identity to produce a metaphor of imperial grandeur, innocence, and sovereignty.

The late pianist Glenn Gould, surely an icon of Canadian arts and culture, is one example of a culture broker who has helped construct the myth of the Great White North. He addressed the link between the ideas of the North and Canadian identity in a 1968 one-hour Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio program titled "The Idea of North."¹ He interviews a nurse, a geographer, an anthropologist, a bureaucrat, and a surveyor – all inhabitants of the South who travelled to the North – about their personal experiences, setting their words together in a fugue-like discourse to achieve a social construction that he calls "contrapuntal." According to biographer B.W. Powe (1987, 164), "Typically, when he refers to Canada, it is his ground, mere space. 'The Idea of North' was for Gould an emptiness waiting for recreation: the North was a landscape of leaves, wind, water, elements to be managed by his (limitless?) electronic imagination."

Experimental and avant-garde as Gould's music and radio documentaries were, they capture what he believed to be the multiple threads that constitute a whole fabric. Gould believed that contrapuntal music, or any form of discourse including the radio interview, could be the basis for creating, or imagining, a state of existence by giving rhythm, a kind of life force or animation, to ideas that, although different in rhythm or voice, blend harmoniously when played together. Contrapuntal music, like social mythology and

like landscape, gains meaning and strength through simultaneous expression. Gould's rendition therefore displays the immense power of cultural iconography to construct meanings that run deeply through the national identity.

We seek to tell a different story in this collection, however, about both the mythical and physical qualities of the Great White North and its meaning for Canadian racialized identity. The shuddering absence of Inuit or First Nations voice in Gould's contrapuntalism baldly illustrates a point now well established in cultural analysis: meaning is generated as much through presence as absence, as much through what is said as through what remains unsaid and silenced. The resonant contrapuntalism that consolidates the North as a textured presence in Gould and in Canadian iconography is simultaneously sliced apart by effacement. The effect, though, is not to produce a discordant image that recuperates the aesthetic through asymmetric sound, but to leave the North open as a route into our vulnerability, as a route for thinking precariousness as a universal human condition whose power-geometries never fully come to rest.

We foreground the racial legacy that infuses northern narrative and aesthetic, practice and science, history and geography (Hulan 2002), not by recounting explicit acts of racial violence perpetrated against people of colour, nor by retelling the history of colonial violence, the forced settlement of the Inuit, or the routine denial of First Nations treaty rights, now such an entrenched element of Canadian political economy, although all these things are part of our national heritage. We focus, rather, on conceptualizing the Great White North through the category of whiteness, now a standard feature of contemporary race and racism analysis. Posing whiteness as a fundamental category in the northern imaginary instigates debate among the contributors on the myriad ways that the North articulates with, diverges from, abets, and intermingles with the related categories of race and nature as they conjugate across the Canadian landscape. In so doing, we draw inspiration from what has been called the "cultural politics of race and nature" (Moore, Kosek, and Pandian 2003, 6), an analytical mode that traces the genealogical, recursive, and performative ties that bind categories of "nature" and "race" in the exercise of white normativity and power. In short, we press theoretical advances in debates about race and racism into dialogue with a concurrent rethinking of nature now under way across the social sciences (see Cronon 1996b; Braun and Castree 1998; Whatmore 2002).

Notwithstanding the fact that since the adoption of a multiculturalism policy in 1971 there is at least nominal official recognition of Canada as a

diverse society, the normative vision of Canada as a white man's country is still pervasive. We believe that the power of collective imagination to give life to metaphors such as that of the Great White North provides one of the reasons that racialized norms are so difficult to shake free of their social moorings. We offer this volume, therefore, as a collection of critical analyses of this enduring metaphor.

Situating Whiteness Scholarship

By placing these essays together in a single volume, we make several assumptions about race, nature, and whiteness. First, and perhaps most important, race is a social construction. We do not wish to “re-ontologize race” in any biophysical sense (Saldanha 2006). Instead, we insist, emphatically so, that race and the meaning of race are constructed within broader social discourses that touch upon so many aspects of our lives – politics, economics, culture, education – in powerful ways. This means that specific kinds of skin carry all sorts of interrelated, contradictory meanings, some derogatory (black as dangerous) and some far more ambivalent (“Asian” as intelligent). It also means rejecting the deeply troubling assumption that the meanings of skin are rooted in biology, genetics, or culture. The ontology of race may be floating, its meanings contingent, but it remains fungible, and its effects are no less felt, embodied, and material. Meanings of skin are produced in relation and as integral to all manner of epistemologies (knowledge systems), including those of science, biology, genetics, and culture, and their attendant modes of power and social control. Moreover, race thinking is not simply a product of racial knowledge or outmoded racial hierarchy; it grounds the very production of knowledge, whether scientific (see Bocking, Chapter 2, this volume), geographical (Kobayashi 2003), literary (Coleman 2006), historical (Razack 2002b), legal (Mawani 2007; Razack 2008), or what have you. In spite of its constructedness, race remains an important analytical device for thinking about social relations both historically and in the present. Unlike liberal proponents of “post-racism” (Gordon and Newfield 1994), who espouse a rejection of the term “race” on the basis that race has no place in rational thought and practice, we believe that the persistence of racialized social relations – including the racialization of poverty (Galabuzi 2008), environmental racism (Pulido 2000), “white” neighbourhoods (Dwyer and Jones 2000), racist law (Razack 2008) and immigration policy, and racialized discourses (Goldberg 1993) – demands that the idea be retained. We say this because as an essentialism (which we do not espouse) it represents the historical product of social construction.

A second assumption at work in this text is that “whiteness” is a corollary to race. This is one of the formative insights of what has come to be called whiteness studies in Anglo-American social science (see, for example, Ignatiev and Garvey 1996; Saldanha 2007). The category “race,” at least in the so-called West, has historically been used to characterize difference. Early representations of race, current in the eighteenth century and persisting to the present, tended to associate race with putative biological difference. According to this mode of thinking, outward signs of biological differences, such as skin colour and hair texture, were signs of an inner or innate difference shared by all those with similar physical attributes. In the post-Second World War era, many argue that biological racism has been supplanted by cultural racism, in which one’s culture comes to signify one’s race (Henry and Tator 2010). One of the operative assumptions in whiteness studies is that both forms of race thinking – race as biological *difference* or race as cultural *difference* – are conceptualized against some assumed white norm. Moreover, both logics either explicitly or implicitly organize difference into a racialized hierarchy at the top of which sits white normativity. The more a so-called race of people was believed to differ – in morality, industry, or capacity for rational thought – from the presupposed superiority of the white person, the farther down it would be placed on the racial hierarchy. If we take these insights together, within the logic of race, whiteness is the standard against which all other races are measured or valued. Or, to put it in slightly different terms, whiteness is the norm against which constructed racial differences become meaningful. Race thinking is a system of power whose violence lies in its capacity to normalize whiteness (Kobayashi and Peake 2000).

A good many whiteness studies in the Anglo-American tradition of social sciences trace the genealogy of whiteness as a category of social identification (Du Bois 1966). Much of this work is found in American labour history, perhaps not surprisingly given how profoundly the history and abolition of slavery have shaped all manner of American identifications. (We note that pre-Confederation Canada is similarly marked by a history of slavery, although one all too often erased from official accounts.) Of these historical accounts, several stand out. In 1935, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote one of the most comprehensive histories of black America’s contribution to post-Civil War reconstruction. Du Bois presented what is now a formative idea in contemporary whiteness studies: whiteness is a designation granted to the American working class as a form of psychological compensation for its low social status. It designates white privilege as a form of economic self-investment,

or currency. The 1990s saw a profusion of texts that traced the historical origins of such privilege. Perhaps most notable is David Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* (1991). Roediger's principal argument is that from the early nineteenth century, the white American working class struggled to differentiate itself from black slavery for fear of lapsing into conditions of white slavery. This was a fear of attenuated freedom and autonomy resulting in the diminished capacity of white workers to identify with the principles of the American Revolution: freedom from indirect taxation (or rule) and individual liberty. At stake in the whiteness of nineteenth-century America was access to American identity, specifically workers' capacity to represent the revolutionary republican ideal. Of course, the paradox of this psychological wage is that the primary beneficiary of the American Revolution was the bourgeoisie, not the working class, which would by definition remain in the thrall of the American bourgeoisie and capital. Another account of the historicity of whiteness is Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (1995), in which he argues that American working-class Irish were not always thought of as white; the English, for instance, commonly associated Irishness with negritude well into the twentieth century. Ignatiev suggests that the Irish were accepted into the fold of white privilege through their denigration of and active dissociation from blackness. Helen Marrow (2009) has suggested that a similar political distancing is repeated in contemporary America where newly arrived Latino immigrants in North Carolina distance themselves from the experience of African Americans.

To frame whiteness as just a historical artifact tethered to class politics, however, forecloses geography and geographical imaginaries as integral to the consolidation and circulation of white normativity. Following the French philosopher of space Henri Lefebvre (1991, 44), we contend that if whiteness is above all else a complex system of contradictory and converging values, then the stability of such values is not pre-given, but is instead guaranteed through some corresponding "discourse upon social space." Moreover, if white normativity is integral to the formulation of historical and contemporary forms of racism, its power lies in its unequal capacity to naturalize its geography. This is not to suggest that white normativity has a singular geography or history. We have no interest in privileging a white meta-narrative. It is, however, to argue that whiteness in all its historical-geographic variability is fundamentally concerned with spatializing racial difference in ways that allow for its spatial practices to pass unquestioned. This observation leads us back to Stuart Hall's (1980) germinal insight that racisms are historically situated phenomena whose contours shift and

change in response to specific social histories. We would like to renovate Hall's insight by suggesting that racisms are not simply historical, but historical-geographic.

If the capacity to naturalize one's geography is integral to the exercise of white normativity and the maintenance of white privilege, our argument points to the idea that nature is an important resource in the articulation of whiteness. Such a view parallels a series of related social sciences interventions, not least in geography, about the naturalness – or rather the unnaturalness – of nature (Braun and Castree 1998, 2001). Common across these interventions is the idea that “nature,” though conjuring up notions of innocence, aesthetic beauty, and the absence of human folly, is actually a deeply fraught term instrumental in maintaining all manner of oppressive social relations. There is not scope to develop this idea in any detail here, but the gist of these debates is that nature is a social construct used to maintain hegemonic social relations across a number of epistemological sites, from colonialism (Braun 2002) to capitalism (N. Smith 1984) to racism (Kobayashi 2003). Our motive in compiling these essays into a single collection stems from an interest in historicizing nature in the Canadian context and teasing out how white normativity in Canada is contingent upon historical geographies of nature. In this sense, we consider this collection an opening, a point of departure for subsequent debate and theorizing on the historical-geographic relations between nature, whiteness, and the discipline of geography in Canada.

Such an interest is in keeping with what Donald Moore, Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian (2003, 3) insist is “the historical specificity of particular racisms and naturalisms.” For them, “the political stakes of race and nature lie in the ways they become *articulated* together in particular historical moments” (ibid., emphasis in original). And as Hall (1980) reminds us, the nation provides perhaps the most important site for considering the historical situatedness of racisms. Racism and naturalism emerge out of specific national historical contexts and discourses. Given that such narrations are spatialized (they always are), we are most interested in exploring a historical geography of race, nature, and whiteness in this text. Nonetheless, by interrogating race, nature, and whiteness through the site of the nation, we do not mean to privilege the nation-state as the exclusive formation through which race, nature, and whiteness articulate; national discourses find spatial expression in a host of other historical geographies – the urban, the rural, landscape, place. This book therefore addresses national discourses in these sites, too.

Only in recent years, with the rise of awareness that the Canadian nation, past and present, is thoroughly racialized, have scholars been in a position to question the complicated process through which metaphors of national identity circulate. This growing area of research has only just scratched the surface of Canadian experience, and scant attention has been paid to how it might usefully inform our understanding of Canada, Canadian identity, and Canadian geography. This is a significant oversight for a number of reasons.

Canada is routinely constructed in liberal democratic discourse as a tolerant multicultural state, lending Canadians a degree of innocence when compared to more overtly intolerant national cultures; however, as a number of critical scholars now argue (Brown 2006; Thobani 2007), multiculturalism, along with the principle of tolerance that underwrites it, can be a profoundly depoliticizing ideal. On the one hand, tolerance poses as a discourse of justice, especially when used in conjunction with political liberalism (Brown 2006). For instance, in the aftermath of the Second World War's eugenic atrocities, tolerance talk emerged as one of the post-war principles that would modernize international relations as a means of bringing justice to an otherwise genocidal twentieth century (United Nations 1948; UNESCO 1956). Such a discourse was recapitulated in Canadian nationalist multiculturalism, perhaps most closely associated with Pierre Elliott Trudeau (Thobani 2007). Multiculturalism would mark a new beginning in so-called race relations, replacing denigration with toleration as the dominant value deployed to manage difference in the public domain. And yet, on the other hand, it is precisely the use of tolerance as a political tactic that calls attention to its depoliticizing effects (Kobayashi 1993; Brown 2006). While tolerance appears to correct historical injustices by offering the marginalized an entry into the dominant social order, it simultaneously depoliticizes by denying that the marginalized are constituted by history and power. The marginalized are simply objects to be tolerated, but their marginality never requires explanation.

The limits of tolerance are confirmed, however, when one confronts Canada's colonial legacy and the historical geographies of dispossession and displacement that continue to mark the experience of non-white and Aboriginal people in Canada. So, despite liberal assurances to the contrary, Canada is a polity whose juridical-political structure, history, spatial arrangements, and social relations are thoroughly racialized and marked by racist ideology. This may come as a bold, even shocking, statement to some readers, so let us clarify our position here. We are not saying that Canada

is full of neo-Nazi groups and routinely the site of physical violence that targets people of colour, although we need to be clear that extreme forms of xenophobia are alive and well in Canada, as they are in all polities. Rather, racism is about much more than simply overt forms of hatred; it is an elemental part of all systems of representation, whether academic, scientific, aesthetic, or national. What this means is that the struggle to challenge and undermine “race thinking” (Arendt 1973, as used by Razack 2008) extends beyond merely identifying and prosecuting acts of racial hatred or even marginalization, as important as these are. It also extends beyond the cozy edification afforded by multiculturalism and tolerance talk. Such a politics means taking stock of the ways that race thinking infuses systems of representation, permeates the symbolic register, organizes the production of knowledge, and provides a foundation for conceptualizing difference or sameness; in other words, it thoroughly conditions the always discursive relations between citizens. In the Canadian context, this means that in order to gain a fulsome appreciation for how race thinking organizes both iconic and mundane forms of life, we must interrogate the spatial production of national symbolism and knowledge, and the sites in which race is foundational as opposed to merely peripheral, accidental, or irrational. Such a project necessarily means attending to all manner of natures that symbolize Canada, “wilderness” and “North” being perhaps two of the most obvious. It is perhaps the contrapuntal quality of these expressions of race thinking, the simultaneous recitation of ideas and images that in themselves are banal but speaking together create a symphonic harmony, that gives the movement of race thinking its animation and strength. The essays in this book trace this relation across several sites, not only the Arctic, but other landscapes both “wild” and cultivated, including urban landscapes and tourist parkland.

The cultural politics of nature, race, and whiteness bear importantly on Canada in another way: Canada is often recognized both for its stunning natural beauty and its expansive reserves of natural resources. Official Canadian national culture celebrates both facets, often in very contradictory ways. Yet rarely do we ask whose histories are called upon to understand Canada as a “natural” space or a storehouse of natural resources. Nor do we ask whose histories are elided when Canada is imagined in such idealized, naturalized terms. Two examples illustrate what we mean in this respect. The first comes from *Globe and Mail* columnist Margaret Wente, a conservative feminist with a reputation for seizing on the racial angle of issues current in the mainstream media. In a recent polemic over Canadianness,

wilderness, and sexuality, Wenté recounts her own efforts to connect with Canadianness via wilderness canoe trips. It's a pointless anecdote until, in closing, she remarks that she's had sex in a canoe and worries over whether the children of Pakistani and Chinese immigrants will think to do the same. The implication is that somehow Canada might become less Canadian unless measures are taken to ensure that immigrants are taught the j-stroke. This is citational history at its most insidious. Wenté's intervention was inspired by Pierre Berton, like Gould a Canadian cultural icon, whose alleged comment linking Canadianness and making love in a canoe has had far-reaching implications.² Against a backdrop of imagined wilderness, it privileges the universality of Canadian canoe culture, marginalizes dark-skinned bodies as peripheral to national origins, and positions white heterosexual procreation in a canoe as the highest achievement of national identity. Tongue-in-cheek or not, it resonates deeply with the constructed meaning of the nation.

Historian Ian McKay (2008, 350, 351, 354) recounts an equally stark positioning of whiteness at the core of early-twentieth-century Canadian identity possessed by white settlers:

Their Canada was in essence a White settler society, and the nationalism of the majority of its population was a British nationalism. This Canada was, if the term is taken in its fullest cultural sense, a grand experiment in 'whiteness,' an imagined community founded upon the British occupation of the northern section of North America ... To be a true Canadian was to be White, English-speaking, and Protestant – with some allowance made for French-Canadian Catholics, provided they were deferential to the Empire ... Whiteness in Canada was an expression of confidence in British geopolitical might and cultural pre-eminence – and haunted by an ambient dread that both might be lost in the twinkling of an eye. It was both anti-modern, based upon notions of blood, soil and military valour, and ultra-modern, mobilizing up to date technology and drawing, so it was thought, upon the latest word in evolutionary theory. It gloried in the steel rails and steamships that bound the Empire together, and visualized a future in which the backward and benighted peoples of the world would be redeemed and reordered through their exposure to their racial and cultural superiors.

McKay's point is that the standard "railroads and wheat" story of Canada is better understood as a white imperial project authored by the British and

carried out by their white territorial minions. This observation reinforces the contention that both nature and whiteness are social constructions, the result of specific human actions, taken both by choice and without reflection as part of an assumed normative identity.

Why This Text?

The essays gathered here are intended as resources to help understand and frame complex issues that are deeply rooted in specific past geographies but that frequently burst through in everyday instances of incomprehension and violence. *Rethinking the Great White North* is organized in four parts, each of which explores an important historical geography of race, nature, and whiteness in Canada. These four geographies – identity and knowledge, city spaces, Arctic journeys, and Native land – represent both commonplace and critical entry points to urgently needed discussions in society today. The organization reflects our desire to make this volume accessible to the wider public and teachers of, for example, urban geography, Indigenous studies, Canada’s North, and tourism studies, who seek to engage students in these vital issues.

Part 1, “Identity and Knowledge,” begins by confronting the spatial logic of race head-on, exploring how whiteness in Canada works as the standard against which all other “races” are valued. In Chapter 1, Bruce Erickson examines the life and legacy of early-twentieth-century conservationist Archibald Belaney, who adopted the First Nations identity of Grey Owl to authorize his concerns for the vanishing Canadian wilderness. Erickson argues that Grey Owl’s popularity allows us insight into how whiteness as a master signifier is produced through the visual coding of bodies and space, here via the codification of “wilderness as a national white space” (22). Science, a *mélange* of relatively well-respected and funded practices in the North, is often (mis)understood to be a producer of neutral and objective knowledge of nature, floating free in universal space. In Chapter 2, drawing upon situated histories of northern science, Stephen Bocking charts the changing status of Indigenous knowledge for scientific endeavour. He reveals how whiteness “maintains an analogical relationship with science”: both whiteness and science “assert their status as unmarked or as objective,” and both enjoy and exercise the power that this status allows (42-43). Bocking’s argument throws in stark geographical relief a key distinction between science and Indigenous knowledge: science, “in asserting an absence of racial identity, tacitly affirms its whiteness,” whereas Indigenous knowledge “asserts an identity defined in terms of both race and place” (43). In

Chapter 3, Catriona Sandilands critically examines Cape Breton Highlands National Park and highlights the permanent removal of the Acadian community of Cap Rouge in the making of this national domain. She underscores the ways in which increasing *ecologization* of parks has facilitated erasures of human presence and activity: excising the social to create natural sites of nature's functioning renders places timeless and outside of history. She argues that the whiteness of parks is "so universal that it appears to be written in nature itself" (81).

How have politics of nature and whiteness shaped Canadian cities and the lives of southerners? In Part 2, "City Spaces," Phillip Mackintosh begins Chapter 4, his study of transcendentalism and the park-planning impulse in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Toronto, by asking, "Did 'white' haute bourgeois reformers use 'transcendentalized' parks to transform immigrants into 'higher forms' of citizens?" (86). In answering this question, Mackintosh investigates the ways that nature, in the form of parks and playgrounds, was positioned by Toronto's city planners not only to beautify the city but also as a method to erase immigrant identity and to racially sanitize immigrant neighbourhoods. In Chapter 5, figuring nature not as "cleanser" but as "contagion," Claire Major and Roger Keil explore a different nexus of nature-race politics in twenty-first-century Toronto. The 2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) was a harrowing crisis for the city as a whole. It also exposed "the fault lines of racialization" (107). As Major and Keil argue, workers of colour, including nurses, hotel housekeepers, and live-in caregivers, were affected disproportionately by the outbreak of the disease and the subsequent racialization of community relations. Chapter 6, the final essay in this section, by Luis Aguiar and Tina Marten, moves west to the smaller urban centre of Kelowna, British Columbia, to examine how white privilege was secured in the hinterland and how it continues to play out in recruitment policies and settlement campaigns today. Registering alarm at how racialization continues to manifest in Kelowna, the authors urge a close examination and discussion not only of racist labour practices but of the history and geography of the white privilege that sustains inequality.

In Part 3, "Arctic Journeys," we present a complementary pair of essays that address an archetypal Canadian journey to the North but work to different critical ends. The journey is that of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) explorer Samuel Hearne, who in 1771 travelled more than two thousand miles with his Chipewyan Dene guides, from Prince of Wales's Fort to the Coppermine River, near present-day Kugluktuk, Nunavut. The story has

been retold countless times since, but its first appearance in written form was as Hearne's own narration, *A Journey to the Northern Ocean*. The Canadian Museum of Civilization frames this iconic Arctic story as one of benign intention and mutuality with the Arctic's inhabitants, but in Chapter 7, Richard Milligan and Tyler McCreary interrogate Hearne's text and the racial motivations that justified and ennobled the ensuing violent dispossession of land and power. Their discursive analysis highlights *A Journey's* "stabilizing posture of innocence that was a necessary precedent for white dominance to attain the status of powerful invisibility" (148). Milligan and McCreary argue that any retelling of the story must aim "not to erase the violent intrusion of whiteness in the semiotics of space, but to expose the toxicity of its grammar and rhetoric" (165). Chapter 8, Emilie Cameron's engagement with Hearne, proceeds with a similar sense of gravity and responsibility. Tackling the material geography of story itself, Cameron posits that stories that anchor geographies of the Arctic are important "not only because of their imaginative force, but also because of their influence over the material conditions of life in the region" (170). She invokes actor-network theory as she approaches one of the key episodes in *A Journey*, the Bloody Falls massacre story, as a "material ordering practice" (172) and begins to follow a particular "natural" (183) material central to the narrative: copper. Finding that actor-network theory works best in tension with critical whiteness studies, Cameron suggests that alternative stories help us to "remember otherwise" (190) but adds that more work must be done to make these other stories matter.

The final section, Part 4, addresses the theme of "Native Land," a phrase boldly emblematic of white Canadian identity, with three chapters that focus on the implications of colonial injustice for Canada today. In Chapter 9, Jocelyn Thorpe interrogates the wilderness tourist destination of Ontario's Temagami, showing how travel writing, racialization, and the social construction of nature combined "to make Temagami appear 'naturally' as a wilderness space for white men to visit" (208-9). In creating this pre-eminent site of wild "national" nature, travel writers simultaneously expunged the Teme-Augama Anishnabai and their claim to land. Next, in Chapter 10's careful contextualization of the "Indian land question," Brian Egan contends that recent attempts to reconcile Indigenous peoples' claims to the territory of British Columbia with those of the state and private landowners are seeking to *stabilize* the normative view of BC as a white province governed by white sovereignty. In Chapter 11, Jessica Dempsey, Kevin Gould, and Juanita Sundberg approach the question of race, rights, and land by identifying the

reproduction of racialized subjectivity in the insidious rhetoric of neo-liberal private property rights. For Dempsey, Gould, and Sundberg, this rhetoric reconstitutes Aboriginal subjectivity through a language of economic citizenship akin to the ideal typical values of Canadian white subjectivity: autonomous, landowning, self-sufficient, and industrious.

The collection ends with contributions from two prominent feminist anti-racist scholars: Kay Anderson and Sherene Razack. Considering our project from different places and positionalities, their pieces re-emphasize particular threads of the book's arguments and provide openings for further discussion. Together they call attention to an emergent methodological tension in the study of race and racism in the social sciences, between, on the one hand, a representational approach to the study of race and racism (Razack) and, on the other, post-humanism (Anderson).

Why Now?

These essays and closing interlocations draw out the historical geographical dimensions of white normativity in Canada by recounting genealogies of nature and whiteness. Yet as essential as historical context is to our analytical approach, we recognize the importance of reflecting on just what this project entails. Although nature is a key resource in the articulation of whiteness and white identity, it is often elevated by white people as a national universal, and with it the exalted white subjectivity by which it is constituted. Paradoxically, however, we note, following Robyn Wiegman (1999), that disaffiliation from universal signifiers that connote whiteness and promote white hegemony, such as some sacrosanct form of ahistorical or pre-historical nature, is also a common feature of white discourse. Disaffiliation is the practice by which white people distance themselves from the economy of signs that frame white hegemony. Its effect is profound: it allows the liberal majority to assert that racialization is something that *used* to occur but that no longer does, while the everyday embodiment of whiteness is simply absorbed into normative discourse, a part of nature. The discourse of white disaffiliation effectively places "white anti-racism" in a minority position, while giving white anti-racists the appearance of having transcended their whiteness, and indeed, having transcended race. In Canadian national discourse, multiculturalism is an important technology through which white disaffiliation is sustained because it allows white Canadians to believe that racism is no longer a structural feature of their political culture.

Perhaps more controversially, however, we note that the social construction of nature – now a standard feature of academic geography – provides a

broad methodology through which white disaffiliation might be said to occur. This body of scholarship is important because it situates discourses of nature centrally within broader questions about hegemony; however, in quite another sense, it is a potentially dangerous intellectual project because it can treat questions about race as merely peripheral, not central. Indeed, as increasing numbers of white scholars distance themselves from the universals of nature in the interest of social, gender, or racial justice, we might begin to see more clearly how white hegemony operates through recourse to a new particularity. The danger here lies in the belief that newly forged particular solidarities between, say, white academics and individuals and groups racialized as non-white have somehow overcome colonialism or racism, when in fact they are contingent on the mobility of white subjectivity, the ability of white subjects to disavow prior claims to universality. This mobility is a defining feature of contemporary white privilege. Failure to recognize it risks reproducing white supremacy under the guise of a socially just particularism. There is no direct line of flight out of this troubling paradox.

Rethinking the Great White North provides a vocabulary for thinking about whiteness, nature, and Canada. To be white in Canada signifies all manner of values, some consistent with Canadian myth, some that directly contradict hegemonic Canadian values. On one level, this text helps navigate what it means to be white in Canada. It reminds us that being white is as much about innocence as it is about violent domination, as much about purity as about the imposition of order, as much about guilt and obsession with “goodness” (Ahmed 2004) as about absolution. It also draws our attention to the anxious desire to recuperate the meaning of whiteness – to find some way of being white in Canada that allows “white” Canadians to sit comfortably with the psychic scars that mark the skin of white identity. But perhaps above all, it reminds us of the fluidity of whiteness, its irreducibility, its shifting terms, and its extraordinary capacity to endure.

PART 1

IDENTITY AND KNOWLEDGE

1

“A Phantasy in White in a World That Is Dead”

Grey Owl and the Whiteness of Surrogacy

BRUCE ERICKSON

It is not hard to see that racial discourses affect, and are constructed through, bodies. How we make sense of racialized bodies, however, depends upon a variety of features, including the spaces those bodies inhabit. By looking at the discourse of wilderness in the writing and life of the popular naturalist Grey Owl, this chapter examines how wilderness has become enmeshed in the racial coding of bodies in Canada. Grey Owl's wilderness shows an investment in whiteness as a foundational category of being. His story, and the celebration of wilderness that follows it, is made legible by accepting whiteness as the privileged modern (Canadian) subject position. This suggestion pushes analyses of whiteness that focus on merely the unequal social relations that are a consequence of racial discourse.

Take George Lipsitz's (1998, 233) claim that “the problem with white people is not our whiteness, but our possessive investment in it.” This notion indicates a common sentiment across whiteness studies – that it is not the physical properties of race that are problematic but the social relationships that have made those physical characteristics meaningful.¹ For Lipsitz, such relationships are clearly a matter of economics. His book documents various ways in which whiteness names a specific economic relationship, from property rates to employment opportunities. By documenting what he calls the “possessive investment in whiteness,” Lipsitz (*ibid.*) details the profits received through strategies of racial differentiation and concludes that whiteness “has more to do with property than with pigment.”

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Lipsitz's argument is effective, especially through his empirical examples from the past fifty years. Yet throughout his analysis, he assumes that whiteness, or simply "white," is a pre-existing racial category at work within the framework of property capitalism. This assumption needs careful investigation, for despite the fact that the economic function of race is readily exposed with a little careful thought, race continues to be naturalized outside of the economic sphere. Thus, one consequence of an analytical focus on the economic investment in whiteness is that it can lead to a short-sighted counter-politics (McWhorter 2005). A privileged reading of the economic sphere of whiteness ignores the question of the subject's relationship to race and whiteness. When this occurs, whiteness studies run the risk of merely finding "ways of being white, (or of ceasing to be white) that purify individuals of racial complicity or guilt" (ibid., 551). The question then emerges: How does skin pigmentation eclipse its function in accumulating property?

Ladelle McWhorter (2005) states that the danger here stems from an analytical approach that characterizes the power of whiteness as a "power over" others. This view of power as juridical-political not only leaves whiteness studies in the precarious position of desiring its own innocence through, for instance, a divestiture of power, it also curtails the possibility of serious political action in relation to whiteness by non-white subjects. This is a fault not only of looking at race as an economic relationship but of any theory of whiteness as a set of privileges possessed, exercised, or enjoyed by individuals. To avoid this dangerous path, McWhorter suggests we illustrate the ways in which whiteness works through relations of power to create the subject of race itself. The economic analysis of whiteness illustrates how whiteness has been mobilized for economic gain, but McWhorter asks us to go further by considering how we come to recognize whiteness as a category. How is it, she asks, that we have been conditioned to accept race as part of a subject's being? This line of questioning views whiteness as a classifying logic that enables the larger system of racial differentiation in which whiteness is thought of as the founding principle of race rather than just a privileged actor within it.² I argue that this perspective works in tandem with the economic analysis of race by showing how capitalism is embedded within conceptions of what it means to be a subject. Borrowing from Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2000), I argue that whiteness is the master signifier of race, to use a term from Lacanian psychoanalysis, which "quilts" together various racial practices that, in turn, come to structure social organization (see also Winnubst 2006). Whiteness does so by establishing a

specific visual field, most commonly understood as the marks of the body, as significant to social relations, attempting to assert a pre-discursive origin for race in anatomy. As a master signifier that guides our way of looking and our processes of assigning value, whiteness affects more than just our understanding of white people and their "others"; it also helps us understand property capitalism. I want to extend this claim by arguing that whiteness also helps us understand the concept of wilderness in Canada.

The relationship between capital and whiteness has long been a part of race relations in Canada, as Kristin Lozanski (2007, 224) points out: "In Canada, whiteness is synonymous with colonialism inasmuch as the liberal, bourgeois, propertied self is literally founded upon Indigeneity. Any memorializing of colonial legacies in Canada is deeply embedded in a capitalist economic system wherein ownership of property and resources is mapped onto the annexation of land from Indigenous peoples, who continue to seek to carve out self-determination from a federalist system of government." Lozanski argues that, in Canada, the necessary connection between whiteness and indigeneity comes from the juridical classification of bodies. But she also states that this connection is formed out of a psychic investment in the idea that race is a necessary marker of one's being. European colonialism relied upon the logic of whiteness to establish the difference between self and other, a feat that inevitably tied the ontology of white subjects to the ability to materially control First Nations bodies.³ Yet it is not merely control *over* bodies that is fundamental to the colonial production of whiteness in Canada, as Lozanski clearly shows, but also the production and control of *space*. Such control over space is abundantly evident in Canada in the memorializing of specific wilderness legacies, such as the idea of North (Shields 1991; Grace 2002; Hulan 2002) or the Group of Seven (MacHardy 1999; Jessup 2002). Although much has been written on these legacies, I want to examine the production of wilderness through the life of Archibald Belaney, better known as Grey Owl, an early-twentieth-century Canadian writer who achieved national notoriety in the 1930s as a proponent of wilderness conservation. Grey Owl is an important, yet paradoxical, figure in this respect. He provides a vivid example of how wilderness is coded through the figure of the Imaginary Indian (Francis 1992), yet we know his portrayal to be fraudulent. The use and acceptance of Indian surrogacy in Belaney's life and legacy to help us understand and preserve wilderness connects the discourse of whiteness, and the field of visibility that race relies upon, to the iconic wilderness of Canada. This image of wilderness is not only a matter of

preserving “nature”; it is also complicit in preserving the whiteness of the nation.

My argument is built upon two central claims. First, Belaney’s performance as Grey Owl reflects the dominant use of “playing Indian” (Deloria 1998) as a prosthetic to the desires of the European nation. That is, it attempts to heal the wounds of colonialism without admitting responsibility. Second, the use of surrogacy to promote wilderness conservation established a connection between the visual codes of “Indian” (as exemplified by Grey Owl) and the generic vision of wilderness that Belaney portrays in his writing. For example, though knowing the danger of his masquerade, Margaret Atwood (1995, 60) asserts an important place for Grey Owl precisely because of his care for wilderness (which is necessarily mobilized through his masquerade): “If White Canadians would adopt a more traditionally Native attitude towards the natural world, a less exploitative and more respectful attitude, they might be able to reverse the galloping environmental carnage of the late twentieth century and salvage for themselves some of that wilderness they keep saying they identify with and need. Perhaps we should not become less like Grey Owl, but more like [him].” Grey Owl’s direct connection to conservation discourses, in distinction to other wilderness legacies in Canada, makes his production of wilderness important to interrogate; the authority offered to conservation by Grey Owl rests upon the investment in whiteness manifest in the performance of surrogacy. This argument leads me to conclude that Grey Owl’s popularity provides an example of how the logic of whiteness as a master signifier is established through the visual codification of both bodies and space, including the coding of wilderness as a national white space.

A Phantasy in White

The obsession with incorporation, assimilation, and death that has accompanied much writing on the Indian in North America is played out in a passage of Grey Owl’s first book, *The Men of the Last Frontier* (Grey Owl 1931).⁴ Originally published in 1931, the book was an ode to Grey Owl’s life as a trapper and a guide before he became a conservation figure in the Canadian public. He describes the eerie beauty of the forest in winter, where the diffused light plays tricks on the eyes and reveals the witchery of the wilderness: “Athwart the shafts of moonlight, from out the shadows, move soundless forms with baleful gleaming eyes, wraiths that flicker before the vision for a moment and are gone. The Canada lynx, great grey ghost of

the northland; the huge white Labrador wolf; white rabbits, white weasels, the silvery ptarmigan: pale phantoms of the white silence. A phantasy in white in a world that is dead" (ibid., 39).

Earle Birney (1990) once described Canada as haunted by its *lack* of ghosts. In contrast, Grey Owl's image of Canadian wilderness holds ghosts almost everywhere he looks, as the past dominates his view of life in the woods. The wilderness is a vanishing frontier; trappers, guides, and fire rangers are men of days long forgotten; and characters are often seen disappearing into the wild. Yet, as a British Canadian representing a fictional way of life that he saw as already almost dead, surely Grey Owl himself, whose fantasy of living as an Indian anchored his concern for the dying Canadian wilderness, is the "phantasy in white in a world that is dead."

Grey Owl became a national success not only because he presented a bygone life but also because he was keenly aware of what the public was looking for in the "dead world" of the Canadian wilderness. Before taking on the moniker "Grey Owl," he began life as Archie Belaney. He spent his early years living with his two aunts in Hastings, England, where he dreamed of leaving the confines of Victorian life for a life in the woods of North America (D. Smith 1990).⁵ The stories of North American Indians, which he picked up by reading Ernest Thompson Seton and James Fenimore Cooper, played a formative role in his boyhood imagination. A friend would recall that "[Archie] absolutely worshipped the outlook and behavior of the North American Indians" (George McCormick, quoted in ibid., 20). After convincing his aunts to let him leave Hastings for North America, Belaney made his way to Toronto and by autumn 1906 found himself, at the age of eighteen, in Temagami, a district of central Ontario, where he started living out his childhood dream (D. Smith 1990).⁶

The pattern of his life over the next twenty years consisted of escaping to the wilderness and away from multiple failed relationships. During this time, he lived in Temagami, where his earnings from winter trapping (a skill learned from his close association with an Ojibway family from the Tem-Augama Anishnabai, including his first wife, Angele Egwuna) were supplemented by a monthly pension from his aunts back in England. His first job, however, was as a member of the cleaning staff at the Temagami Inn, and it was here that Belaney began to obscure his family history, claiming to be from the American southwest, part of an Apache family that had travelled with the Buffalo Bill Show (ibid.). Leaving Angele and their daughter after two years of trapping with them, Belaney made his way west to Bicotasing,

Ontario, where he worked as a fire ranger and a trapper. He left Bicotasing (and a second pregnant girlfriend) in 1915, enlisted in the Canadian Army, and fought as a sniper in the First World War. His return to Canada in 1918 (after being injured in the war and married a second time) found him back in Bicotasing, alienated from his first two wives and his two children. He returned to his life as a trapper and fire ranger, gained a reputation for drinking (he distilled his own moonshine during Ontario's Prohibition), and befriended Alex Espaniel, the son of an Ojibway Hudson's Bay Company manager (*ibid.*). Clearly, like that of many celebrities, Belaney's life was complicated and contained its share of less honourable moments, and though remarking on them may seem a little trite, they are important because despite a very public record of these failings, he is still celebrated as a conservationist. Much like his Indian surrogacy, his drinking and failed relationships are overlooked or forgiven in modern tales of his success (see Atwood 1995; Attenborough 1999; Jackson 2000).⁷

Despite being immersed for much of this time in the lives of Ojibway, Cree, and Métis, Belaney was reluctant to abandon the images he had formed as a child, including that of First Nations dancing. As Donald Smith (1990, 73) writes, "Archie gave special attention to his 'Indian war dance' which he introduced at Bisco. His war dance surprised the local Ojibway and Cree, for, as fur buyer Jack Level put it, 'the Bisco Indians didn't know his brand of Indian lore.' Archie's inspiration came, of course, from his boyhood reading of Fenimore Cooper and Longfellow. His boyhood acquaintance at the Hastings Grammar School, Con Foster, recalled an earlier version of it." Belaney claimed authenticity for these performances via his creation of fictional parents, a Scottish trapping father and an Apache mother. His biographer notes that he altered his appearance to bolster his claim to genuineness, growing his hair long, dyeing it black, hennaing his skin, and practising "Indian-looking expressions" in the mirror (*ibid.*).

It was during his time, while living with his third wife, Gertrude Bernard (better known in Grey Owl's writing as Anahareo), that Belaney gave up beaver trapping, which hitherto had been his primary occupation and identity. Influenced by Bernard, he rescued two orphaned beaver kits and raised them in their trapping cabin. These beavers were the start of a dream for Belaney, which he describes in *Pilgrims of the Wild* (Grey Owl 1934, 256): "Instead of persecuting [beavers] further I would study them, see just what there really was to them. I could perhaps start a colony of my own; these animals could not be permitted to pass completely from the face of this

wilderness ... There was nothing simple about it. I had first to discover a family of beaver not already claimed by some other hunter, tame them; so far an unheard of proceeding, but I had faith in the crazy scheme, and was convinced by what I knew of our little fellows that this was possible."

Not knowing how to support himself while populating the country with beavers, Belaney made a series of moves across Ontario and Quebec, and finally chose to devote himself to beaver conservation through writing and public speaking. After writing several articles for *Country Life* and *Forest and Outdoors* (the Canadian Forestry Association magazine) he accepted a job with the National Parks Branch as a spokesman and moved west to Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba in 1931 and Prince Albert National Park in Saskatchewan in 1932.

It is important to note that Belaney's public life justified and furthered his Indian surrogacy.⁸ His first articles focused on the non-Indian trappers with whom he identified, distinguishing them from "Indians." His pen name, Grey Owl, emerged only after his articles were enthusiastically received, and interestingly he initially toyed with the name White Owl (D. Smith 1990). It seems plausible that changing his name from Belaney to Grey Owl was consciously intended to promote his conservation message; he could have believed that, without being an "authentic Indian," he might not be as successful in presenting his message (ibid.; Francis 1992; Loo 2006). Certainly, this is one narrative of his transformation, as demonstrated in Anahareo's (1972) story of his preparation for a lecture tour of England. He asked her to make a fancy hunting shirt, with beadwork and tassels, to which she replied that there was no time, "and besides, all that fancy stuff would make him look sissified" (ibid., 173).⁹ Their difference in opinion came about because Belaney strived to appear as "the Indian they expect me to be," not the bushman Anahareo knew him to be. Grey Owl had to be dressed up for his audience because, as he explained, he would "do anything, and I mean *anything*, if I thought it would make people listen to what I've got to say" (Belaney, quoted in ibid., emphasis in original).

It becomes clear, then, that Belaney's Indian masquerade intensified the more he spoke on behalf of the land and the beaver. It has consequences not just for the racial ideas held within the identity and writings of Grey Owl but also for the *space* that he was trying to save.¹⁰ Atwood's (1995) celebration of Grey Owl follows this line, privileging Belaney's moral message about space over his racial transformation. Yet, just as the image of the Indian that Grey Owl came to represent was itself a fantasy, so too was the space that Belaney

sought to produce. It was, in effect, a white space. To clarify this dynamic, let me explain the role of whiteness in performances of Native masquerade *and* in the production of wilderness in Canada.

Indian Surrogacy

In her genealogy of the adoption of “Indian practices” into American culture, Shari Huhndorf (2001, 14) argues, “Going Native in its modern manifestations originates in the relations between two simultaneous late-nineteenth-century events: the rise of industrial capitalism, with its associated notions of linear historical progress; and the completion of the military conquest of Native America.” Americans have often turned to constructed images of the Indian as a means of creating a specific American identity (Deloria 1998; Huhndorf 2001; Smith-Rosenberg 2004), such as Frederick Jackson Turner’s reliance on encounters with savages in his frontier thesis, or the Boy Scouts’ image of the ecological Indian. Through their use of an evolutionary model of history, in which contemporary Western civilization is seen as the end point of history, these performances situate the white North American subject as the legitimate heir to the legacy of a dying Indian race.

Grey Owl, writing in Canada, depended upon a similar set of historical and intellectual conditions for his popularity. Drawing on a form of savagery heavily influenced by Ernest Thompson Seton, another English immigrant to Canada, Grey Owl’s message signalled a need to incorporate the past, symbolized by the Indian way of life, into a modern life that has forgotten what the world was once made of. Exemplifying the linear model of history, *The Men of the Last Frontier* (Grey Owl 1931, 7-8) romantically describes the disappearing way of life of the trapper, associating Grey Owl’s own life with the “urge that drove Champlain, Raleigh, Livingstone, and Cook into the four corners of the earth; the unquenchable ambition to conquer new territory, to pass where never yet tromp the foot of man.” The trapper, being pushed “further and further towards the North into the far flung reaches where are only desolation and bareness, must, like the forest that evolved him, bow his head to the inevitable and perish with it ... And with him will go his friend the Indian to a memory of days and a life that are past beyond recall” (ibid., 26). This path mimicked the disappearance of the frontier in Frederick Jackson Turner’s (1975) discourse. The inevitable disappearance is heralded by modern capitalism, and the phantasy in white in a dead world – the creatures of wilderness and the night – were ghosts created by the advance of capitalism. Grey Owl’s literature invites his audience to ingest

those ghosts and adopt them as their own, and thus begin to feel better about the changing nature of the world around them (along with their role in benefiting from that change). The popularity of Grey Owl's symbolism, and the elevation of a primitive way of life, draws on the anti-modernist movement. Most noticeable as a "a recoil from an 'over-civilized' modern existence" (Lears 1981, xv), anti-modernism developed in the face of the changing economic and social structures, including increased consumerism, immigration and racial diversification in urban environments, and the rationalization of the workforce. Nostalgically looking to the past, Indian masquerade imagines the possibilities of life for the white subject outside these constraints.

The second aspect of Huhndorf's (2001) argument – the idea that practise of Native masquerade was shaped fundamentally by the military conquest of North America – suggests that white audiences desired a form of savagery without having to encounter the perceived danger of that savagery. Indeed, "the living performance of 'playing Indian' by non-Indian peoples depends upon the physical and psychological removal, even the death, of real Indians" (Green 1988, 31). This palliative effect enables such performances to act as a form of surrogacy, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (2004) argues, for surrogacy requires the replacement of a loss. In this case, it is possible to see the loss and surrogacy as mutually constitutive; white North American subjects acted in place of the disappearing Indian (both symbolically and geographically, as Aboriginal people were moved onto reserve land) and helped legitimize that disappearance. The act of surrogacy acknowledges the wounds of loss with the hope of establishing something that can replace the item that was lost: "In this way, surrogacy works to suture the wounds [that] change gashes open" (ibid., 1329). The relationship between First Nations and Europeans in North America was one of both accommodation and annihilation, in which the latter, in various forms, took precedence (White 1991). For a newly developing country, once the physical threat to the "European" nation was minimized, it was possible for that nation to dictate the modes of both annihilation and accommodation. Indian surrogacy was one form in which the European nation saw room for accommodation, but it was not necessarily the only place. Yet, partially because of the primacy of images of the Indian promoted by surrogate practices, the political agency of Aboriginal people, or even their actual presence, was muted, as illustrated by some of Grey Owl's interactions with them.

For instance, in 1936, Belaney met Johnny Tootoosis by chance in an Ottawa breakfast café (D. Smith 1990). Tootoosis, a representative of the

League of Indians of Western Canada, whose grandfather stood alongside Louis Riel in the second North West Rebellion, was in town arguing for greater religious and cultural freedoms on reserves and in residential schools. Belaney was in town seeking support for his film about the old-time trappers and river men of the Missisauqui River. As Donald Smith (*ibid.*, 161) points out, whereas Tootoosis and the League of Indians of Western Canada spoke about the contemporary political landscape of First Nations within the Canadian government, “in contrast, Grey Owl championed their old way of life and their beliefs.” The two men represented two different approaches to the incorporation of First Nations communities into Canada’s nascent political culture. Tootoosis saw the potential for accommodation by the government for Aboriginal political agency, but Grey Owl saw Native culture as a life in the past at odds with modern Canadian life. Grey Owl’s form of surrogacy acts to legitimize a colonial relationship by objectifying the other and removing its subjective agency. In surrogacy, “the colonized other, denied the basic characteristics of subjectivity, not only gives up its essence to the colonizer; it is transformed into a mirror that reflects and confirms the colonizer’s power” (Smith-Rosenberg 2004, 1331). Grey Owl, as a performer of an imagined past, rather than a political figure for the future, was reflecting the desire of the European nation to suture the gash of colonial change.

In contrast, some may argue that given Grey Owl’s identification with First Nations communities, his work *was* asserting a place for Native peoples in Canadian life. For example, he sometimes used his mastery of language to argue in court for Native hunting rights in the face of white trappers’ interference (D. Smith 1990). In addition, his children’s book *The Adventures of Sajo and the Beaver People* (1935) hinges on the undeserved mistrust a new outpost clerk has for Native people; refusing to give an advance to Sajo’s father, as was the custom of many outposts, he leaves the main protagonist’s family without any provisions for the winter. These and other aspects of Grey Owl’s writings inspire Joe Sheridan (2001, 422, 423) to argue that “Grey Owl abandoned colonial paradigms in favour of an Indigenous cultural perspective, learning the narrative qualities of his adopted landscape,” and that he “grew to understand the epistemological rootedness of ecological interconnection.” Accordingly, this learning allowed Belaney to counter the imperial project of “manufacturing homogenized space through agriculture and development at the expense of cultural and natural diversity” (*ibid.*, 434).

Yet, despite his personal actions, Grey Owl's masquerade was integral to the construction and popularity of a new regime of white space that inevitably envisioned the Canadian wilderness without a First Nations presence. Grey Owl's story in the production of Canadian wilderness is important because his was among the most popular conservation messages in the early twentieth century. In opposition to Sheridan's (2001) understanding of Grey Owl's wilderness as essentially place-based, I see Grey Owl's conservation efforts as key to establishing a monolithic and homogeneous wilderness, and as part and parcel of an homogenizing imperial geography. Alongside his generic brand of Indian imagery, Grey Owl's narrative of disappearing wilderness life flattened the diversity of both natural and cultural life in Canada's North by attaching itself to a state-sponsored discourse of wilderness preservation. Important historical events prior to his entry into public life, including the hanging of Louis Riel for treason and the legal ban on significant Native cultural and religious practices such as the potlatch and the sun dance, reflected a European confidence in the military conquest over Native land. To cite Huhndorf (2001), this suggests that Archie Belaney's performance as Grey Owl depended upon the conquest and disappearance of actual Native people, and the conservation ethic he left in his wake mimics this evacuation and acts as a continuation of a colonial spatial conquest. The production of wilderness in Grey Owl's texts and the popular representations of his life and work are drawn from the myth of the vanishing Indian, and it was his performance of this trope that ensured that wilderness remained enmeshed in the visible codes of whiteness. As the colonial other, Grey Owl embodied a perspective that English Canadians could easily recognize, adopt, and protect while at the same time deferring concern for any contemporary First Nations issues. Wilderness became a backdrop to understanding the space of Canada as a white space.

To understand how the relationship between surrogacy and preservation works in the production of white wilderness space, it is important to consider the role surrogacy played (and continues to play) in the production of difference and whiteness. Smith-Rosenberg (2004) describes the imitation of Native practices as surrogacy to show that the identification made by the subjects in the performances depends for its meaning upon absolute difference between cultures. In the modern enactment of playing Indian, whether it be Grey Owl, the use of Indian names at summer camps (Wall 2005), or in professional sport cultures (Black 2002), the surrogate Indian, rather than illustrating a common bond between cultures, works to provide

a distinction between white and Native. For example, Ernest Thompson Seton, a key figure in the development of the Boy Scouts of America and the summer youth camp movement in North America, encouraged young boys and girls to play “primitive” as part of the construction of a balanced modern identity (Huhndorf 2001). While playing Indian, white youth would learn skills that they could take away and fold into their modern lives. Importantly, however, not just anyone could transfer these skills from camp to city life. Rather, this transferral had to be carefully guided by self-declared Indian experts such as Seton himself (*ibid.*). The fact that, in a modern world, the white surrogates could utilize the strength attributed to Native resilience was what elevated them above their invented Indians. Drawn from a linear history, this practice of Indian masquerade in Canada was built upon the implied belief that Indigenous people were not able to adapt to modern life; thus, it was up to men like Seton to draw these lessons out. Key to understanding the signifier “Indian” in these cases was the difference it articulated between white and Indian, modern and primitive.

Had the articulation of an absolute difference between Native and European not anchored Grey Owl’s performance, his creation of a fraudulent identity would have been unnecessary: he was not merely someone who had learned to live like an Indian; he *was* an Indian (Francis 1992). Even after his fraud was exposed, he “evoked a capitulation to an idealized image of Native difference. He rewarded an audience desirous of a peaceable kingdom by offering them an image of themselves as the benevolent subjects of a beneficent nation-state” (Dawson 1998, 123). In Belaney’s success as “the first Indian that really looked like an Indian” (Lloyd Roberts, quoted in Francis 1992, 131), wilderness was central to his costume, and a primitive life, the forest, the lakes, and the beaver (whom he often called “little Indians”) were understood as the necessary authentic aspects of Native life that could not have been adopted by a white man. Opposed to the reality of modern First Nations life that articulated itself in, against, and beyond the imposition of European society on its land, Grey Owl performed a clear demarcation of the difference between Indian and white by remaining in the past. This distinction came through in his writing, but it was most visceral when he brought the visible markers of difference of his wilderness life to the public; his cabins, his canoe, and his costumes helped him remain as a ghost in the land. This ghost, though, was a fantasy of the white imaginary, whose function was to construct a difference predicated on the perceived baseline of life, the white subject.

Surrogacy and the Production of Wilderness

Central to Grey Owl's performance was the image of wilderness that comes from his writing. *The Men of the Last Frontier* describes this wilderness: "Side by side with the modern Canada there lies the last battle-ground in the long-drawn-out, bitter struggle between the primeval and civilization" (Grey Owl 1931, 29). This battleground exists in "uncharted" territories "where civilization has left no mark and opened no trails," beyond the "picturesque territories" of tourist wilderness (ibid.). More specifically, "this 'Backbone of Canada' so called, sometimes known as the Haute Terre, stretches across the full breadth of the continent, East and West, dividing the waters that run south from those that run north to the Arctic Sea. In like manner it forms a line of demarcation between the prosaic realities of a land of everyday affairs, and the enchantment of a realm of high adventure, unconquered, almost unknown, and unpeopled except by a few scattered bands of Indians and wandering trappers" (ibid., 30).

This image of the "virgin wilderness" sets the scene for the description of life that Grey Owl has observed. Until he began writing, his travels were limited to the areas in Ontario surrounding Temagami and Bicotsasing, and to the Ontario-Quebec border. Although he had spent two years with his first two pet beavers in the Gaspé region of Quebec, his knowledge of "uncharted" wilderness was confined to his experience of these areas. And yet his writing and desire for conservation speak of a more wide-ranging wilderness, extending from the Gaspé to the lower reaches of the Northwest Territories and west to the Rockies. We know from his life that the image of a "dark, forbidding panorama of continuous forest" (ibid.) is based on second-hand knowledge, not what he had personally experienced to that point. Given the first-person perspective in his writing and the intimacy with which he portrays the landscape, this reliance upon second-hand information is perhaps a little surprising; it suggests that the landscape he writes about, and perhaps even his experience of that space, is produced in conversation with already existing myths about the forests of Canada. These myths of nature in Canada, as the Canada First movement and the formation of the Group of Seven demonstrate, have a genealogy with close connections to nationalist and imperialist sentiments (Mackey 2002). Grey Owl's (1931, 29) assumption of a continual unbroken land, "a veritable sportsman's paradise, untouched except by the passing hunter, or explorer," builds upon the national imagination of the northern forest as Canada's strength.

It is important to recognize how the Canadian boreal forest, as Grey Owl's virgin wilderness is now known, became an object within the Canadian political and social field. In 1908, writing as the first dean of forestry at the University of Toronto, Bernhard Eduard Fernow championed forest conservation as a strategy to maintain Canada's growing international clout in the years to come (A. Baldwin 2003, 2004). Fernow's "rhetoric gathered up the forest on a national scale and pressed this national forest into the service of Canada ... assigning to it a moral duty" (A. Baldwin 2004, 190). His intention was to rationalize the Canadian forest, a project that ultimately resulted in a forest classification system in 1937, which was the first scientific classification of the forest area that Grey Owl spoke about. It is true, as Sheridan (2001) asserts, that Grey Owl's writing argued for a view of nature that stood outside the regime of rational scientific discourse; indeed, his stories of beavers and trees exceeded the language of scientific forestry. For Grey Owl, however, just as for Fernow and the rationalized discourse of conservation, wilderness existed not simply as a space outside the civilized nation, but as the foundation upon which the nation itself was created. Thus, conservation is not just about the provision of wilderness space, but is also to some extent about maintaining the "real" of the nation, which means that wilderness space is at once both material and symbolic.¹¹

The wilderness in Belaney's narratives exists abstracted from the histories of colonial and economic production, and is redefined in terms of its relation to the growing nation. In this redefinition, Grey Owl disavows the specificity of the land by establishing it as an idea rather than a place. Despite his warnings against the development of the North, his texts present the North as commodity, something to be desired by the sportsman for vacations and by the nation for its economic possibilities. He explains that, "as a woman's hair is – or was – her chief adornment, so Canada's crowning glory is her forests, or what remains of them. With her timber gone, the potential wealth of the dominion would be halved, and her industries cut down by one-third" (Grey Owl 1931, 165). Although eloquent descriptions of moose, bears, beaver, and Indian life thread through Grey Owl's stories, what hooks us into them is the concern for a specific image of the nation, one laced with a racial, gendered, and sexual identity. The wilderness Belaney describes fulfils the desires of the ideal white national subject. Citizens of this developing nation are encouraged to practise their identification with the nation by consuming an abstract wilderness. Through his cabins in Prince Albert and Riding Mountain National Parks, still open to the public, the federal government created an incentive for citizens and

visitors to inhabit this national subject position. We can also note that Pierre Elliott Trudeau's iconic image canoeing in a buckskin jacket owes much to Grey Owl's popularity and national message.

It is relevant here to consider how this regime of wilderness production through conservation discourse was a part of the ever-expanding reach of economic relationships of capitalism. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991) argues that capitalist relationships require us to conceive of space in the model of the commodity form. Where Marx proposed that a commodity be reconsidered as a fetish whose abstract value replaces the social relations required for its production, Lefebvre (*ibid.*, 89-90) suggests that, in terms of space,

a comparable approach is called for today, an approach which would analyze not things in space but space itself, with a view to uncovering the social relationships embedded in it. The dominant tendency fragments space and cuts it up into pieces. It enumerates the things, the various objects, that space contains ... Thus, instead of uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in spaces, instead of concentrating our attention on the production of space and the social relationships inherent to it ... we fall into the trap of treating space as space "in itself" as space as such.

Whereas the commodity fetish requires the value of the product to be determined as a thing "in itself," a spatial fetish removes the social histories that shaped our understanding of space. The production of space as "abstract space" (*ibid.*, 49) – that is, space that follows the logic of the commodity fetish – gives value to space through the ideological use the space fulfils. Specifically, space reflects the values of certain actors, mirroring their identity through the values attached to it. Lefebvre describes this in relation to the production of twentieth-century urban space in France. His analysis demonstrates that urban middle-class space legitimized the authority of *both* the middle class and an inherently unequal economic system. Yet this vision of space as a "mirror of [middle class] 'reality'" (*ibid.*, 309) conceals a history of class conflict, alienation, and the normalization of middle-class desires. Rather than reflecting reality, space hides the production of social inequalities. In Canada, wilderness serves a similar function for the white English Canadian by naturalizing colonialism and the ever-expanding reach of capital (through the production of the forest as a commodity).

Lefebvre's analysis illustrates the expanding role of production under capitalism, showing us that urban space can no longer be simply understood as a place of residence, but must be perceived as part of a broader pattern of capital accumulation. Wilderness can no longer be seen as merely a natural part of the nation, but as a way of naturalizing and legitimizing the nation. Although Lefebvre concentrated on the production of economic relations, framing his analysis through class, we should be clear that the production of other relationships of identity, such as gender and race, work through this process and are themselves usefully understood to work hand-in-hand with the production of a capitalist state. Thus, the wilderness space that Grey Owl's conservation efforts worked to create was used to establish the model rational forest of Fernow's dreams and the reflection of a caring and compassionate colonial nation that some find in Belaney's writing (Dawson 1998).

Whiteness as a Regime of Visibility

The power of Grey Owl's production of space comes from the way in which visual codes of space mask the historical circumstances that established those same visual codes. Considering the role played by visibility in the production of wilderness through surrogacy can help us understand the place that whiteness has in the meaning of wilderness in Canada. Anchoring their authority through the discourse of wilderness and Indian masquerade, Belaney's preservation aims relied upon the visual field to ensure success. Both the Indian and the wilderness exist as visual codes within Canadian society (perhaps most easily seen in their perpetual use in advertisements from the turn of the century onward), and both are made legible by racial discourses of civilization.¹² The dominant image of Canadian wilderness at the turn of the century was "of a primitive way of life, a primordial world, doomed to disappear in the face of advancing white settlement and technology" (Jasen 1995, 81). In such narratives, wilderness and race are understood in relation to their distance from modernity; wild spaces and the Indian are placed outside of the modern, whereas the urban and the white subject are folded into modernity as *the very embodiment* of modernity. Given this, racial discourses of space depend upon making the differences between white and Indian, urban and wild, legible within the public imagination, enabling symbolic hierarchies that help to naturalize structural inequalities. These differences are articulated through a politics of looking, and as Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2000, 19) argues, to understand race we need to understand how we "reproduce the visibility of race as our daily common sense, the means by which we 'tell people apart.'" Shannon

Winnubst (2006, 61, emphasis in original) reminds us that the power of race comes from the fact that "political values are enacted upon the basis of *how bodies look*." In my discussion of wilderness as a code of racial visibility, I argue that bodies are read in tandem with the spaces around them. Both Winnubst and Seshadri-Crooks draw their lessons from Jacques Lacan's explanation of the split subject, one whose bodily coherence (and the image of itself as a subject) is put in doubt by the necessary mediation through which the subject can encounter that body.¹³

Briefly, Lacan's (2002) theory of the subject suggests that individuals become aware of their own subjectivity through a misrecognition of an outside object as internal to themselves (such as their own image in the mirror). This development establishes a relationship between self and other as necessary; the self (in its initial experience of wholeness as experienced through the mirror image) sets up a fictional relationship whereby the other sustains the unity of the self. One place in which the subject negotiates its identification with the other is through the structures of language. Language provides the subject with a set of pre-existing groups through which identifications work. The most powerful of these structures, such as family, gender, sexuality, and race, are presented as natural and ahistorical forms of community, and the misrecognition of the mirror stage, the fundamentally flawed perception of self, embeds a strong unconscious need for subjects to make these identifications.¹⁴

Race exists within this transformation as an ahistorical structure of signification. Exhibited and naturalized on the visible marks of the body, race offers subjects a position within the social body, mimicking the misrecognition of the mirror stage and giving a semblance of coherence and completeness to the subject. The organizing principle of this set of identifications is the signifier of whiteness. Constructed as the pure form of being, "whiteness" is the ideal position to which all other signifiers of race are compared. What the Lacanian framework suggests is that whiteness engenders a series of cultural practices and discourses that make up our understanding of race. Perhaps this is easiest to comprehend by examining the claim that whiteness is an "invisible" race. If invisible, whiteness is not marked as race. Difference from whiteness becomes the identifying feature that gets coded as a racial marker. Whiteness then exists as the pure form of being, and all other races are tainted replicas of this origin. As an unconscious investment in being, racial being is not simply a matter of identifying with race (through the coded identifying features) but is an attempt to overcome difference from the pure being – an ideal promised by whiteness. As Seshadri-Crooks (2000,

21) explains, “this is what it means to desire whiteness: not a desire to become Caucasian (!) but, to put it redundantly, it is an ‘insatiable desire’ on the part of all raced subjects to overcome difference.”¹⁵ In this way, whiteness functions as a master signifier, the idealized point upon which the other signifiers within that discourse (in this case, racial discourse) depend for meaning, for location.¹⁶ Whiteness, as Winnubst explains (2006, 14-15, emphasis in original), is “the ‘master’ signifier around which all other [racial] signifiers and practices are oriented – it shapes the ways they do and do not interact, the blind spots they do and do not perpetuate, the entities, acts, and desires they do and do not proclaim meaningful and thereby valuable. As an effect of these cultural practices and discourses, ‘whiteness’ is sedimented by repetition into a pattern that *appears* as solid, as ‘natural,’ posing as a prediscursive, a-historical, ontological given.” Thus, within the regime of whiteness, race becomes a necessary marker of being, with wholeness ascribed to the mythical marker of whiteness, the solid state of non-difference. The closer a subject comes to the states of whiteness, the more authority that subject has within this regime of visibility. Thus, a subject has authority through the disavowal of difference from this imagined origin.

If the space of non-difference offers authority, one of the key factors in establishing power relationships is the production of difference. It is here that we can see Grey Owl’s connection to the master signifier of whiteness. Although he was not attempting to be white, his surrogacy nonetheless embodied the difference necessary for the smooth functioning of racial discourse (in Seshadri-Crooks’ formula, even as he dressed Native, he was desiring whiteness as the master signifier of race). By maintaining a clear distinction between white and Indian, Grey Owl naturalized the legitimacy of white conceptions of race. Located in the visual marks of the body, these racial differences are naturalized as categories of being (again, the reason why Belaney could not just be a white man living in the wilderness). Attempts to locate empirical evidence of race outside of the visual realm, from the Comte de Buffon (DiPiero 2002) to the Human Genome Project (Haraway 1997), have failed simply because it is through the act of looking that race is identified. As Seshadri-Crooks (2000) reminds us, seeing is a skill that demands training, a skill that is acquired as one becomes a subject; as we learn language, we also learn the patterns of visibility and the spatial patterns that encompass language. Yet, if racial classification were viewed solely as a learned behaviour, the power of race would long ago have been diffused; if it is to maintain its status as a master signifier, whiteness must be made to appear outside of its historical construction as the founding point of race.

Visible difference allows race to be naturalized in the space of the body, thereby giving race an ahistorical appearance. A Lacanian framework is essential here: whiteness works unconsciously to disavow history by presenting itself as a nodal point for all forms of racial difference.

Indian surrogacy works within this logic to promote difference as an inescapable part of the triumph of Canada as a nation. Grey Owl's ability to look his part naturalized the difference between "his people" and the white audience. By relying upon visual codes of wilderness, including a log cabin, lakes, his canoe, the beavers, and their land, he established a set of ahistorical differences. Highlighted by the ghost of a dead way of life, this regime of visibility maintained colonialism's conclusion that the real Indian needs to die off. Grey Owl, as Indian surrogate, established codes of difference by drawing upon visual markers that naturalized the identities of the Canadian nation. His legacy, then, falls within the folds of whiteness, and by considering the role of whiteness within the production of the Indian surrogate, we can also see that the legacy of wilderness that Grey Owl drew from and helped to promote is connected to the regime of whiteness. In Belaney's masquerade, dominant white Canadian codes of wilderness are drawn into the establishment of the racial order, such that wilderness as an ideal is given meaning through the master signifier of whiteness.

Perhaps the role of whiteness in his performance is most apparent, and most important to see, in the way that contemporary representations of Grey Owl view his surrogacy as incidental to the real goal of his life – the conservation of the land of the beaver. As illustrated earlier, Joe Sheridan (2001) perceives Belaney's relationship with the land as evidence of his respect for First Nations. More widely recognized representations of Grey Owl find his masquerade compelling because they believed it allowed him greater access to a disappearing way of life and more authority to speak about it. Richard Attenborough's 1999 movie *Grey Owl* uses this logic to allow the viewers' identification with a fraud. The controversy of the imposture is dealt with in the movie by the reporter Cyrus Finney, who discovers it two years before Grey Owl's death. Upon hearing Grey Owl's public performance, Finney decides not to reveal his true identity, remarking, "I knew that what he was saying was far more important than who he really was" (Attenborough 1999). Like Atwood, who suggests that we be more like Grey Owl, Attenborough, Sheridan, and many others see the space Grey Owl inhabits as part of a moral message that speaks to the heart of the nation of Canada. Indeed, this message helps justify Belaney's complete transformation into Grey Owl. In these celebrations, the wilderness he produced

becomes a necessary part of Canadian life. Its meaning depends upon the same logic of race embedded within Indian surrogacy, where Canadians look to it as a palliative space against the destabilizing effects of capitalism. Like Grey Owl's cabins, wilderness exists as a vacation spot to reflect back the whiteness of the nation to itself. Given the increased use of the recreational value of wilderness in contemporary environmental activism (through groups such as Mountain Equipment Co-op, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and the David Suzuki Foundation), we should be cautious about how whiteness has come to inflect attempts to preserve Canadian wilderness.

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