

Responses to Canada's Colonial Past (and Present):

*What You Carry and Surrender No. 40*

A Critical Engagement Paper

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## Abstract

This critical engagement paper is intended to accompany the play *What You Carry* and the solo performance text *Surrender No. 40*. Part one, the introduction, argues that both texts are intended to contribute to the process of reconciliation between descendants of settlers and Indigenous peoples in Canada, by telling the truth about this country's colonialist history and by making gestures towards reconciliation. Part two outlines the six methodologies employed while writing these two texts: writing and narrative inquiry, autobiography and/or autoethnography, new play development, historical research, walking-as-performance, and solo or autobiographical performance. Part three discusses two theoretical contexts of the two performance texts: trauma theory and truth and reconciliation. Trauma theory has helped me to understand how Joseph, one of the characters in *What You Carry*, has responded to the abuse he survived in residential school; it has also been useful in thinking about the family violence Gary and Walter experienced as well. While truth and reconciliation is not a recognized theoretical perspective, it was in my mind while I wrote both texts and during the *Muscle and Bone* performance. My hope is that, in some small way, these two texts can be part of the truth and reconciliation process in this country—that they might help other settler descendants understand something about Canada's ongoing colonialist history, as writing these texts has helped me to understand that history.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This critical engagement paper is intended as an accompaniment to, and reflection upon, *Surrender No. 40*, a solo lecture/performance about the relationship between settlers and Haudenosaunee in the Haldimand Tract in southwestern Ontario, and the performative walk I carried out in the Haldimand Tract in June 2016; and *What You Carry*, a play about a man in his 50s who discovers that his father, with whom he has had a difficult relationship, abused children in a residential school. The purpose of these performance texts is twofold: to engage an audience consisting primarily of the descendants of settlers in understanding the truth of Canada's ongoing colonialist history towards Indigenous peoples; and to become, in a small way, even as a mere gesture, an opportunity for that audience to consider what it might mean to begin a process of reconciliation. Reconciliation, according to the summary volume of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, means "establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country" (6-7). While there are valid critiques of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (see Garneau), both of these texts are intended to be responses to the challenges that work poses to the descendants of settlers in this country. They should be understood within the context of other texts by descendants of settlers that address issues of truth and reconciliation, such as Laurie D. Graham's *Settler Education*, a volume of poetry published in 2016. Truth and reconciliation will be central terms in this critical engagement paper.

The writing of *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* involved the use of six distinct methodologies: writing and narrative inquiry; autobiography and/or autoethnography; new play development; historical research; walking-as-performance; and solo performance. These methodologies together constitute a specific research practice, which has been employed in writing these two texts, and it is worth considering how artistic creation is a form of research. Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk discuss four ways to articulate the relationship between artistic creation and research: “research-for-creation,” where there is an “initial gathering together of material, ideas, concepts, collaborators, technologies, et cetera, in order to begin” (15); “research-from-creation,” in which art is a way to generate data for further research (16); creative presentations of research, such as autoethnographic poetry or performance; and, finally, “creation-as-research” (19). The last is “perhaps the most complex” of the categories Chapman and Sawchuk explore; it “involves the elaboration of projects where creation is required in order for research to emerge” (19). *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* employed research-for-creation, in that neither text could have been written without historical and other forms of research, but both are primarily examples of creation-as-research.

There are other ways of understanding the relationship between practice and research. In their essay on applied theatre, Jenny Hughes, Jenny Kidd, and Catherine McNamara discuss “the interweaving practices of research, theory and practice” (207). In this model of research, writing and narrative inquiry, autobiography and/or autoethnography, new play development, historical research, walking-as-performance, and solo performance

were among the methodologies used in conducting the research the two performance texts represent, and these practices were interwoven. Nevertheless, separating the methodological strands of a creative practice is useful if one is to understand what one has been doing.

As research, both *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* attempt to answer specific research questions. For *What You Carry*, one of those questions has to do with what made some people working in residential schools decide to become abusive. After all, despite the various encouragements to abuse the children, not all staff and teachers decided to become perpetrators. What, then, made the perpetrators of abuse in those institutions decide that they could behave that way? Judith Herman notes in her discussion of abuse perpetrators:

Little is known about the mind of the perpetrator. Since he is contemptuous of those who seek to understand him, he does not volunteer to be studied. Since he does not perceive that anything is wrong with him, he does not volunteer to seek help—unless he is in trouble with the law. His most consistent feature, in both the testimony of victims and the observations of psychologists, is his apparent normality. Ordinary concepts of psychopathology fail to define or comprehend him.

This idea is deeply disturbing to most people. How much more comforting it would be if the perpetrator were easily recognizable, obviously deviant or disturbed. (75)

Herman refers to Hannah Arendt's discussion of Adolf Eichmann in her description of

perpetrators of abuse: “The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him,” Arendt writes, “and that many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal” (276). Walter, the father in *What You Carry*, appears to be normal. He is neither a pervert nor a sadist; I imagine that he receives no sexual charge from his behaviour. However, he has abused the children in his care, both as a teacher and as a parent. *What You Carry* is, in part, an attempt at imagining why someone like Walter became a perpetrator; what made him decide to act that way. And, in the absence of data about perpetrators, I have tried to imagine what Walter might say, or understand, about his behaviour.

At the same time, both *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* are about what one does, as an individual, as a settler or descendant of settlers, with the knowledge of Canada’s colonialist treatment of Indigenous peoples. Settlers and their descendants are, if not responsible for, then implicated in and answerable for that history; they have inherited that legacy and the responsibility to address it. *Surrender No. 40* is about the experience of discovering and responding to the history of the Haldimand Tract; in contrast, *What You Carry* asks what Gary will do with his new knowledge about his father and, more broadly, the history of the colonial relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Both projects are situated in specific aesthetic contexts. *Surrender No. 40* draws on the aesthetic context of solo autobiographical performance, as practiced by performers such as the late American monologist Spalding Gray and perennial Fringe Festival favourite Rob Gee, an English performer known for his high-energy autobiographical



solo performances. The performative walk which inspired it drew on the context of walking-as-performance—a context that includes such artists as Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Carl Lavery, Phil Smith, Luis Carlos Sotelo, and Deidre Heddon. *What You Carry* draws on the context of (relatively) naturalistic theatre—although the second version of the play is much less naturalistic than its predecessor—of which there are too many examples to mention. For example, Arthur Miller’s 1968 play *The Price* lurks in the background of *What You Carry* because of its insistence that the past exerts a constant pressure on the present. Both performance texts are also situated within specific theoretical contexts as well; this paper will describe their relationship to trauma theory and situate them within truth and reconciliation as a theoretical rubric.

One last point before turning to the methodologies and theories that inform these two performance texts. I want to make it clear that my “position of enunciation,” to use Stuart Hall’s term (see Hall 222), is that of a settler descendent. Particularly in the wake of the scandal over Joseph Boyden’s claims to be an Indigenous writer (see “Indigenous Identity and the Case of Joseph Boyden”), it would be impossible for someone situated in that position of enunciation to claim to be making Indigenous art without risking accusations of “playing Indian,” of being a latter-day Grey Owl. Of course, an Indigenous community or nation can offer a settler some form of citizenship or ceremonial kinship, to use Kim Tallbear’s words (“Indigenous Identity and the Case of Joseph Boyden”), but I have not received such honours. I remain a descendent of settlers who came to Turtle Island looking for a better life for themselves. The effect they and others like them have had on the Indigenous people who lived here before their arrival is what I have decided to

write about, and I do so from the perspective of a descendent of settlers. Although our experiences of that ongoing history may have been very different, it is nonetheless a history that Indigenous peoples and the descendants of settlers share.

## Chapter Two: Methodologies Used in Creating the Texts

### 2.1 Writing and Narrative Inquiry

In the introduction to *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*, Natalie Goldberg says, “Learning to write is not a linear process. There is no logical A-to-B-to-C way to become a good writer. One neat truth about writing cannot answer it all. There are many truths” (3). There is no single answer to the questions posed by writing. There is no easy way to become a good writer. Learning the craft, the art, of writing is not a straightforward, logical, linear process.

Writing is a way of getting at the truth—however that truth might be defined or understood. It is “a dynamic creative process,” a way of conducting research (Richardson and St. Pierre 960), of collecting and analyzing data (Richardson and St. Pierre 970). As autoethnographers Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis write, “Viewed as a mode of inquiry, writing is a way of coming to know an experience better or differently” (68). What does the writing process look like? It is a practice, first of all. It is something that needs to be done continuously. Novelist Stephen King recommends that writers produce a thousand words a day, six days a week (Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis 69). That practice is recursive and iterative; it is a process of writing and revising and rewriting.

There are important differences between plays and other forms of writing. For one thing, as Clem Martini suggests, “[a] play is only a blueprint for production, ” and in “a

very real sense it doesn't truly exist until it is performed" (6). One of Martini's most important insights is that a play is like a conversation between the playwright and the audience. "Each play represents something the playwright has to say in this ongoing conversation," he writes. "If you want your audience to listen, then you will have to pay attention to the (until now) unwritten conventions of conversation" (14). For example, you need to make sure that you are adding something to the conversation—that you are bringing new information to the dialogue or that you are looking at old information in a new way. You cannot repeat yourself. You have to make sense and get to the point. You need to avoid lecturing the audience. You have to let the tone of your conversation be guided by the content of what you are saying as well as the person—the audience—you are addressing. And, most of all, you must not bore the audience (14), who are "true, active participants" in the play, "the polygraph test" (16) that determines its truth.

As a playwright, I am also a writer of stories. According to Thomas King, "Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous" (9). Their wonder and danger come from their power over our imaginations and the way they construct our identities. As King says of his stories of his father's abandonment of his family and his mother's struggles against sexism in the 1950s workforce, "there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live" (9). Harold Johnson agrees with King that stories are very powerful: "Storytelling is how we make sense out of our world," Johnson writes (104). For example, a placebo, Johnson argues, is a story, and if you believe that story, that the pill will cure you, then it can make you better. A nocebo, on the other hand, is a different

kind of story, and if you believe that story, that the pill is poisonous and will kill you, then you could die (104). “Everything is story,” Johnson writes. “I am story, you are story, the universe is story, and all these stories work together to create what we experience as reality” (104-05). I want the stories I tell in the play and lecture/performance I am submitting for this degree to be healing stories; I want those stories to do something good, to help their audiences understand the truth of the history of the way settlers have behaved towards Indigenous peoples, and to see that reconciliation is a possibility.

Since both of the written texts I am submitting along with this engagement paper are narratives, because both of them tell stories, it might be tempting to call what I am engaged in “narrative inquiry”—tempting, but only half correct. According to Susan E. Chase, narrative inquiry is a particular type of qualitative inquiry that involves “an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (651). Those biographical particulars are obtained by interviewing research subjects, and the stories those subjects tell are then retold by the researcher in different ways. Some researchers will focus on “the relationship between individuals’ life stories and the qualities of their lives, especially their psychosocial development” (Chase 658). Some will highlight the ways that subjects construct their identities within specific contexts (Chase 658). Others are interested in the process of storytelling itself (Chase 659), while still others engage in narrative ethnography (Chase 660) or autoethnography (Chase 661). It is possible for playwrights to engage in forms of narrative inquiry that involve interviewing people and then telling their stories; Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* is cited by Chase as an

example of narrative inquiry (671). Although I engaged in autoethnography in *Surrender No. 40*, I did not engage in narrative inquiry in writing *What You Carry*. It is a work of fiction, in which characters are made up; it is not derived from interviews or an ethnographic (or autoethnographic) engagement with a specific culture or community. For these reasons, *What You Carry* is not an example of narrative inquiry.

Research methods like narrative inquiry can be hard to relate to a discussion of a creative project, because artistic research is not a form of qualitative research in the social sciences. Artistic research accepts forms of data that are considered controversial in the social sciences. In her essay “Methodology in the Fold and the Irruption of Transgressive Data,” Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre describes the “transgressive data” that she discovered while engaged in a narrative ethnography of older, white women living in the small town in the southern U.S. where she grew up. That transgressive data included emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and what she calls “response data,” which refers to the feedback on her study that she received from research subjects and others (St. Pierre 180-85). These data lead her to use Gilles Deleuze’s image of the fold, an image which “disrupts our notion of interiority” (St. Pierre 178), the standard binary opposition between inside and outside, because it is both inside and outside simultaneously. “The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside *of* the outside,” Deleuze writes (*Foucault* 96-97). The inside, in other words, is “an operation of the outside” (Deleuze, *Foucault* 97). In the fold, there is no inside or outside; the boundary between these binaries is missing (St. Pierre 178). Instead,

according to Deleuze, “what always matters is folding, unfolding, refolding” (*The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* 137). The transgressive data she discovered, St. Pierre writes, as examples of the fold, break apart “humanist dualisms like inside/outside, self/other, identity/difference, and presence/absence” (178). Those data enable a deconstructive process through which “one might elude humanism’s attempts to order what can never be contained” (178).

And yet, for artists and writers, those forms of data are not necessarily transgressive. In writing *Surrender No. 40*, for example, I used emotional data (the feelings I experienced during the walk) and sense data (the scent of milkweed on the roadside, the feeling of sweat running into my eyes). And through the process of dramaturging both *Surrender No. 40* and *What You Carry*, I have made use of what St. Pierre calls response data: feedback from dramaturgs, cast members, audiences, and others. None of these data could be considered particularly controversial in an artistic or creative context. St. Pierre’s essay thus illustrates the differences between social science research and research-as-creation. The sense of restriction St. Pierre feels as a qualitative researcher simply does not apply to creative work—either that, or artistic creation exists in the fold Deleuze describes.

## 2.2 New Play Development

It would be unusual for a theatre in this country to commit to producing a new play unless it had been through a significant development process already. That is why

regional play development centres, like the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre, exist. Playwrights are expected to make use of the dramaturgical resources of those centres, to use the opportunities they offer for workshopping their plays, and to avail themselves of other potential development opportunities, such as those offered by the Banff Centre's Playwrights Colony. All of this activity can be described by the phrase "new play development."

In writing and revising *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40*, I have used new play development as a methodology. I have sought out dramaturgical feedback wherever possible, and the responses I have received from Dr. Mary Blackstone, Professor Kelly Handerek, Dr. Sandy Pool, Dr. Kathleen Irwin, and others have helped me to develop both *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40*. In May 2016, an earlier draft of *What You Carry* received a public reading as part of the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre's Spring Festival of New Plays, and the questions I received from the cast (Kent Allen as Walter, Jaron Francis as Gary, Arron Naytowhow as Joseph, and Abbey Thiessen as Margaret), the director (Roy Surette), and the festival dramaturg (Nina Lee Aquino), as well as the audience, were extremely helpful in identifying the play's strengths and weaknesses at that point in its development.

As a result of that reading, I completely rewrote the play and changed the title from *What We Carry Inside* to *What You Carry*. Professor Kelly Handerek suggested that, as an exploration, I write monologues from the perspectives of different characters in the play, and at a weekend retreat organized by the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild, the



retreat facilitator, Sandy Pool, suggested that I think about incorporating those monologues into the play, rather than considering them to be an exercise. Those suggestions were critical in pushing the play forward.

The new version was read at the Regina Playwrights Reading Circle in January 2017. Again, responses of the cast (Kathryn Bracht as Margaret, Lyndon Bray as Walter, Erroll Kinistino as Joseph, and Kenn McLeod as Gary), as well as the audience, were most helpful. *Surrender No. 40* has also received dramaturgical and directorial comment, and I have had opportunities to read it before audiences at the Department of English and the Lifelong Learning Centre, both at the University of Regina, and as part of Dr. Kathryn Ricketts's loft salon series. Nevertheless, I still consider both texts to be works in progress, and I intend to continue to pursue development opportunities. The goal of all of this activity, of course, is to develop the texts to a point where a theatre will take a chance on producing them.

### 2.3 Autobiography and/or Autoethnography

Autobiography, according to Susanna Egan, emerges out of an unsolved crisis, an unstable condition that seeks change (4-5). *What You Carry* is not an autobiography, but it draws on my experience, and the experiences of members of my family, for character details and narrative events; in addition, while I was writing *Surrender No. 40*, I was thinking of that text as a form of autobiography. Both texts, but particularly *Surrender No. 40*, are reactions to the kind of unsolved crisis Egan is discussing; in fact, *Surrender*

*No. 40* repeatedly reflects on the crisis that my discovery of the story the Haudeonsaunee tell about their experiences with settlers occasioned for me. Gary's crisis after he learns of his father's behaviour at the residential school is related to my reaction to that discovery.

Autobiography is a deceptively simple term. The French critic Philippe Lejeune begins his attempt at a definition of autobiography by explaining the difficulties he had refining and clarifying that definition (3). Eventually Lejeune arrived at a definition with which he was relatively satisfied: "*Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality*" (4) (italics in original). This definition, Lejeune acknowledges, excludes other forms of potentially autobiographical writing, including journals or diaries, autobiographical poetry, memoirs, and personal novels (4). This definition therefore excludes a primarily fictional text that uses autobiographical sources, like *What You Carry*, and a memoir (an autobiography covering one experience in the narrator's life) like *Surrender No. 40*. Lejeune then critiques his own definition, searching for prose narrative autobiographies that his definition excludes for a variety of reasons. In the end, he reframes his definition entirely, conceding that autobiography is neither "grounded on a relationship . . . between the extratextual [the events of the author's life, for instance] and the text," nor "on an internal analysis of the functioning of the text, of the structure, of or aspects of the published text" (29). Instead, Lejeune continues, autobiography is defined by "the implicit or explicit contract proposed by the *author* to the *reader*, a contract which determines the mode of reading of the text and engenders the effects

which, attributed to the text, seem to us to define it as autobiography” (29).

Lejeune’s struggle to define autobiography has been used as the starting point to this discussion, because the literature on autobiography calls our commonsense notions of that term into question—particularly those texts on autobiography written since the postmodern turn in the humanities. For instance, Paul John Eakin writes,

We tend to think of autobiography as a literature of the first person, but the subject of autobiography to which the pronoun “I” refers is neither singular nor first, and we do well to demystify its claims. Why do we so easily forget that the first person of autobiography is truly plural in its origins and subsequent formation? Because autobiography promotes an illusion of self-determination: *I write my story; I say who I am; I create my self.* (“Relational Selves” 63)

That sense of personal autonomy, Eakin writes, is a mythology. Instead, he argues, all identity is relational, formed in relation to rather than isolation from others, and narrative is the primary way in which “relational identity is formed and transacted” (“Relational Selves” 63). And yet, Eakin acknowledges, we live as if we have a coherent self; he cites Paul Smith, who writes, “None of us lives without a reference to an imaginary singularity which we call our ‘self’” (Smith 6). That sense of self, Eakin acknowledges, is “an existential necessity” (“Relational Selves” 65), although it ignores the intersubjective dimension of individuation (“Relational Selves” 67). Moreover, Eakin also argues that the act of writing an autobiographical narrative is an act of self-invention, a term that “refers not only to the creation of self in autobiography but also to the idea that the self or selves [writers of autobiography] seek to reconstruct in art are not given but made in the

course of human development” (*Fictions in Autobiography* 8). “[T]he writing of autobiography,” Eakin argues, “is properly understood as an integral part of a lifelong process of identity formation in which acts of self-narration play a major part” (*How Our Lives Become Stories* 101). And, because those acts of self-narration are representations of the self, they are, in a sense, fictional.

While writing *Surrender No. 40*, however, I was caught up in Smith’s “imaginary singularity,” as I always am; I might, like Walt Whitman, “contain multitudes” (Whitman 34), but I rarely feel their presence within me. Nor was I aware of any attempt to construct an identity or create a self as I wrote; rather, I was simply trying to remember and to record what happened to me as I walked through the Haldimand Tract. And I was not considering that self-representation to be a kind of fiction; I was committed to grounding that self-representation in what actually happened during my walk, in what Lejeune dismisses as the “extratextual,” and constrained by that reportorial impulse. But I was doing more than that: I was also writing about the cultural and historical context of that walk—the history of the Haldimand Tract and the relationship, both past and present, between settlers and Haudenosaunee in that part of Turtle Island. By bringing my own story together in those contexts, it could be argued that, without intending to do so, I was engaged in autoethnography rather than autobiography.

As with autobiography, there is a vast literature about autoethnography, and many different definitions of what autoethnography might be. One definition can be found in “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject,” an essay by Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner:

*Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal and the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.” (739) (italics in original)*

Another, much shorter definition comes from Deborah E. Reed-Danahay, who acknowledges that the term has multiple meanings (4) before offering her own working definition: autoethnography is “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (9). According to Tami Spry, autoethnography is “a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (710). It is “both a method and a text of diverse interdisciplinary praxes” (710): as a text, it “emerges from the researcher’s bodily standpoint as she is continually recognizing and interpreting the residue traces of culture inscribed upon her hide from interacting with others in contexts” (711); as a method, autoethnography has allowed Spry, she writes, “to position myself as active agent with narrative authority over many hegemonizing dominant cultural myths that restricted my social freedom and personal development, also causing me to realize how my Whiteness and class membership can restrict the social freedom and personal development of others” (711). Spry’s definition is particularly appropriate to *Surrender No. 40*, because it refers to “Whiteness”—my status as a descendant of settlers—and the way that as a descendant of settlers I have, without intending to, restricted “the social

freedom and personal development of others.” It also references the body—in this case, my own body, which walked, blistering its feet and straining its muscles, through the Haldimand Tract. In addition, like Spry, Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, agree that autoethnography is politically engaged: that it disrupts taboos, breaks silences, reclaims lost and disregarded voices, and by disrupting canonical narratives, writes against hegemonic beliefs and practices (40-41).

Because *Surrender No. 40* is overtly political, because it displays its author’s vulnerable self as it unfolds, and because it moves back and forth between my personal experience of walking through the Haldimand Tract and the larger social, historical, and cultural issues related to the relationship between settlers, their descendants, and the Haudenosaunee, that lecture/performance could be considered to be an autoethnography. However, writing autoethnography was not my intention and my performance was not structured like an autoethnographic research study (see Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, especially chapter 3, for suggestions about designing an autoethnographic research project). Nevertheless, despite that lack of intention, *Surrender No. 40* can be understood as an example of autoethnography.

Both autoethnography and autobiography necessitate making a truth claim: that what is written about in the text actually happened. After the postmodern turn, many critics are uncomfortable with statements about truth. For example, in a discussion of the autobiographical novel she wrote as part of her Ph.D. dissertation, Gaylene Perry suggests that the boundaries between fiction and autobiography are unstable (37). For Laurel Richardson, like Lejeune, the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is merely

a rhetorical one:

The difference is not whether the text really is fiction or nonfiction; rather the difference is the claim that the author makes for the text. Declaring that one's work is fiction is a different rhetorical move than is declaring that one's work is social science. The two genres bring in different audiences and have different impacts on publics and politics—and on how one's "truth claims" are to be evaluated. (961)

And yet, as Susanna Egan points out, contradicting Lejeune, "autobiography is not an autonomous work of art but is securely grounded in empirical reality" (174). Philippe Grimbert calls his book, *Memory*, a novel even though it is clearly autobiography; that is because, given the gaps in his family's history, he was forced to imagine, to fictionalize, and as a result he believed he could not call his book an autobiography (Grimbert, "Questions for the Author" n.p.). Despite Lejeune's and Richardson's contention that the question of whether a piece of writing is fact or fiction is essentially a rhetorical one, I would argue that autoethnography is in fact grounded in empirical reality in the same way that Egan argues autobiography is. While I was writing *Surrender No. 40*, I found myself constantly constrained by the need to stick to the facts of my walking experience, on the one hand, and of the relationship between settlers and the Haudenosaunee, as I understand them, on the other. I found myself reminded of an anecdote James Clifford tells in his discussion of partial truths and fiction in ethnography. Ethnographers, Clifford suggests, are like the Cree hunter who went to Montreal to testify in court about the effect on Cree hunting territory of the James Bay hydroelectric project. The hunter is said to

have hesitated at the court's requirement to speak under oath. "I'm not sure I can tell the truth," he said. 'I can only tell what I know' (Clifford 8). Like that hunter, perhaps, I found myself writing what I knew, and hoping that it was the truth—or, at least, a partial truth.

But even the phrase "a partial truth" could be considered an equivocation. In *Against Theory*, Terry Eagleton takes a position against postmodernists who argue that claims about absolute truth are dogmatic or hierarchical or authoritarian. In fact, Eagleton suggests, there are statements that are absolutely true, "without being in any sense lofty or superior" (104). Take, for example, the statement, "This fish tastes a bit off":

That truths of this kind are absolute is of no great moment. It simply means that if a statement is true, then the opposite of it can't be true at the same time, or true from some other point of view. It can't be the case that the fish is both a bit off and not a bit off. It can't be fresh for you and putrid for me, even if putrid is the way I like it. Maybe I am not sure whether the fish is off or not. But if I'm not sure, it is absolutely true that I am not sure. I can't be sure and not sure at the same time. It can't be that I am sure from my point of view but not from yours. Maybe the fish was fine two hours ago and is now distinctly dubious. In that case, what was absolutely true two hours ago is no longer true now. And the fact that it is not true now is just as absolute. (104-05)

In fact, Eagleton continues, one could drop the word "absolute," and simply use the word true, "were it not for the need to argue against relativists who insist, as their name implies, that truth is relative" (105). And truth is important: "it belongs to our dignity as



moderately rational creatures to know the truth,” Eagleton writes. “And that includes knowing the truth about the truth. It is best not to be deceived if we can possibly help it” (109).

The question of truth is important for both *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40*. Uncovering the truth about Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples—that residential schools were abusive instruments of cultural genocide, and that land in the Haldimand Tract and elsewhere was stolen from its rightful inhabitants by a settler state that abrogated treaties as it saw fit—is not simply a question of the rhetorical status of such statements. Following Eagleton’s argument, if those statements are true, then the opposite of those statements cannot also be true: arguments, for instance, that the abuse, both systemic and individual, that took place in residential schools is overblown and exaggerated, or that the land transfers in the Haldimand Tract (and in other places) were legal and fair and legitimate. Both *Surrender No. 40* and *What You Carry* make a political statement about these histories. They take sides: they argue that the perspective of Indigenous peoples on those histories is the correct, truthful one, and that the perspective of settlers who would prefer to minimize or downplay the colonialism of the Canadian settler state is at best ill-informed and at worst dishonest. My intention is that, in performance, this uncompromising truth will be communicated to audiences.

## 2.4 Historical Research

Since to some extent *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* are about events in

the past—a past that is, nevertheless, part of an ongoing history—historical research, using secondary sources, has been an important methodology for this project. Because I did not attend a residential school and I was not alive when the land in the Haldimand Tract was being stolen from the Six Nations, I lack firsthand knowledge of those institutions and events. For that reason, I have had to rely primarily on historians and their analysis of events. And, because it underpins conventional historical research, the archive has been central to that method: much of the history I have read relies on archival sources as interpreted by historians.

In their introduction to historical research, Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris differentiate between primary and secondary sources. A primary source “is a piece of evidence written or created during the period under investigation” by “contemporaries who participated in, witnessed, or commented on the events you are studying” (140). A secondary source, on the other hand, “is an account of the period in question written after the events have taken place” (140). Secondary sources are “[o]ften”—I would have said usually—“based on primary sources,” such as documents and artifacts (140).

Archival research is central to conventional historiography. Furay and Salevouris admit that there is a gap “between events and how they are remembered and narrated” in archival documents but conclude, “whatever the imperfections in the evidence, such documents along with other surviving artifacts are all we have. They are the basic raw materials of history” (139-40). Historians must determine what is relevant and what is irrelevant in archival records. “Equally daunting,” Furay and Salevouris write, “is the task of coaxing the truth from the sources” (142). Historians need to determine if a source

is authentic and then “establish the meaning and believability of the contents,” using “external criticism” to authenticate the source and “internal criticism” to interpret it (143-44). Internal criticism “requires a healthy skepticism” about these questions (144). In other words, archival documents cannot be taken at face value. Reliance on secondary sources means trusting their authors, hoping that they have approached the archive with an appropriate degree of skepticism.

Relying on historical research as a methodology leads to potential problems. As Maggie B. Gale and Ann Featherstone write, the archive “as concept, as resource, as location, as site of power relations, as signifier of the historical and cultural division and ownership of information and knowledge” has become “the subject of much debate, largely centred on questions of who creates the archive, for whom it is created and how it is used” (17). Moreover, much gets excluded from the archive, including oral history and performance. Luckily for these projects, however, many survivors of residential schools are still with us, and their oral testimony is available in volumes such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) book *The Survivors Speak*, which I have used as part of my research into what residential schools were like. My visits to the former Mohawk Institute building, and the conversations I have had with elders, have also contributed to my understanding of those institutions.

Despite all of these potential problems, histories about residential schools have been invaluable sources of information. For example, the detail about a teacher beating students with belts was taken from J.R. Miller’s *Shingwauk’s Vision*. A male supervisor at St. Philip’s school in Saskatchewan would collect five belts belonging to the

children—according to Miller, “those with metal studs [were] preferred” (327)—and beat a child with them. “It was not at all uncommon for this punishment to leave scabs that stuck to clothing and left scars,” Miller writes (327). Like those children, Joseph’s back is scarred because of the way Walter beat him with a belt some 50 years before.

Still, the entire truth about residential schools does not exist in written histories or archival documents. A complete truth about those institutions would be impossible: each child who was incarcerated at one of those schools would have had his or her own story to tell, and many of those stories have been lost, either because the child did not survive, or because the survivor remained silent about the experience—a common response to trauma. Neither is the entire truth about the Haldimand Tract located in the historical texts I have consulted. Those historical texts leave out the phenomenological reality of that part of Turtle Island—the summer heat, the sound of wind through the pines—as well as the relationship between the Haudenosaunee and that land. And yet, out of necessity, this project has drawn upon secondary historical sources, despite their limitations. It is not the only way to understand the past, but it is an important way to arrive at that knowledge and to get at the truth of what happened then.

## 2.5 Walking-as-Performance

The walk *Surrender No. 40* narrates was a 335-kilometre site-specific performance: *Muscle and Bone*, a performative walk through the Haldimand Tract in

June 2016. Nick Kaye suggests that site-specificity is about the exchanges that take place “between the work of art and the places in which its meanings are defined” (Kaye 1), and walking-as-performance is a term that suggests that the primary characteristic of the performance involves walking. As a site-specific performative walk, then, *Muscle and Bone* was an engagement with a particular site, the Haldimand Tract, an engagement defined by walking through that site. Therefore, one of the methodologies that underlies *Surrender No. 40*, as a text about the experience of making of *Muscle and Bone*, is site-specific walking-as-performance.

The history of walking-as-performance began early in the past century, and a complete list of theatrical and site-specific performance works that have involved or focused on walking would be extremely long. Theatre or performance works based on walking include such diverse works as Carl Lavery’s *Mourning Walk* (Lavery 27-56); Phil Smith’s *The Crab Walks, Crab Steps Aside* (Smith 59-140), and *In Search of Pontiflunk* (Wilkie, *Performance, Transport and Mobility* 28-29); Deirdre Heddon’s *Tree: A Studio Performance* (Heddon 143-76) and *Turning 40* (Wilkie, *Performance, Transport and Mobility* 23); Mike Pearson’s *Bubbling Tom* (Pearson, *In Comes I* 21-29); and Luis Carlos Sotelo’s *Hacer Memoria al Andar (Making Memory While Walking)* (Sotelo 59-69). The point of this lengthy yet incomplete catalogue is to give some sense of the rich history of walking-as-performance. Because walking was the primary feature of *Muscle and Bone*, it can be situated within this history.

The works that most influenced *Muscle and Bone* included the walks of visual artist Richard Long, although Long considers his work to be sculpture rather than

performance (Long, *Selected Statements and Interviews* 67). As Rudi Fuchs suggests in a book on Long's work, typically the form of Long's walks "is precise and identified in various types of measurement: by length in distance or in time, by form, by start and finish, by passing points along the way—or by any combination of these characteristics" (72). *Muscle and Bone* was precisely defined, as a walk through the Haldimand Tract from north to south. Long's solo, unsupported walks require discipline and courage to perform, and the way he often documents his progress with objects, such as stones, left at the site, is fascinating. Other influences included *The Lovers: the Great Wall Walk*, which Marina Abramovic and her then partner, Ulay, made in 1988 to mark the end of their relationship (see Abramovic and Ulay), and Louis Carlos Sotelo's walk in the mountains above Bogotá, Colombia, which brought Indigenous people and settlers together to walk on a trail that has been used since before the arrival of Spanish colonists (see Sotelo). If *Muscle and Bone* was an example of walking-as-performance, then *Surrender No. 40*, as a text about that performance, draws on walking-as-performance as a methodology. Walking-as-performance is the enabling condition of *Surrender No. 40*; that performance text would not exist without the earlier *Muscle and Bone* site-specific performative walk as research.

Documentation of *Muscle and Bone* exists in the form of text and photographs on the blog I kept during the walk. That blog remains online at [muscleandboneblog.wordpress.com](http://muscleandboneblog.wordpress.com). *Surrender No. 40* is based on that documentation, as well as memories of the performance and additional research. Readers of this critical engagement paper interested in more information about *Muscle and Bone* should consult

that documentation for further information.

## 2.6 Solo and Autographical Performance

In the preface to *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*, Jo Bonney recalls the kind of “idiosyncratic, boundary-breaking solo performance” she would go out to see when she first moved to New York in 1979: “Not standup comedy, not cabaret, not one-character play, not lecture or reading or poetry—although bits and pieces of all of these were in there somewhere” (xi). In a variety of venues, Bonney writes, “I, along with a small but enthusiastic audience, loved the energy and originality of this new solo work” (xi). “In presenting their personal observations, convictions and fears,” Bonney continues, solo performers, as storytellers, “share an intimacy with their audience, built purely from their live presence and their words” (xii). As a solo performance, *Surrender No. 40* is related to the work Bonney includes in her anthology.

There is a long history of solo performance. The authors of *Creating Solo Performance* begin their survey of the history of the form with Will Kemp, whose performance *The Nine Days’ Wonder*, a dance between London and Norwich, took place in 1600 (Bruno and Dixon 1). Their history also includes David Blaine, Marina Abramovic, Chris Harris, Roy Dotrice, Alan Bennett, Henry Woolf, David Benson, Dario Fo, Annie Sprinkle, Lois Weaver, Heathcote Williams, Steven Berkoff, and Quentin Crisp (2-6), and their brief case studies of performers include Emma Cooper (58), Pat

Holden (59), Charles Dickens (89), Simon Callow (89), Joshua Sofaer (93), Eric Bogosian (173), Laurie Anderson (173), and Gemma Whelan (232). In *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*, Bonney includes texts by Jackie “Moms” Mabley, Lenny Bruce, Andy Kaufman, Anna Deavere Smith, Whoopi Goldberg, John Leguizamo, Deb Margolin, and Marga Gomez (see Bonney). *Surrender No. 40* can be situated within this rich context.

As Jenn Stephenson points out, solo performances are common in Canadian theatre, and “the form experiences a resurgence in Canada in the mid to late 1970s” (“Introduction” vii). Because solo performances are popular at Fringe Festivals as well, this popularity may stem from the fact that having only one cast member reduces costs (Usmani 10). Stephenson writes, “The growth of solo performance in Canada has been persistently attributed to economic pressures and decreasing resources” (vii), although Bonney says such concerns have always been cited as a way of explaining the popularity of solo performance (xiv). Perhaps that budgetary reality leads to the creation of bad theatre. “Over the past few years, I have developed an interest in the phenomena of solo performance, much of which I find particularly tedious,” writes Anne Wilson. “Solo performances are often excruciatingly boring because they involve a simplistic sense of theatre, evident in their production of subjectivity in the theatre” (Wilson). What causes this lack of engagement? In solo performance—“auto-performance” is Wilson’s preferred term—conflates “the identity of the performer with that of the character because the actor stages himself through the use of the pronoun ‘I’” (Wilson). Because of its resulting confessional quality, solo performance is typically not unlike talk therapy, except that the



audience pays, Wilson says, rather than is paid to listen (Wilson). But theatre, she continues, is not a mode of confession. “Rather,” she writes, “theatre is the assertion of the self when faced with the haunting spectre of death which threatens to obliterate completely the self” (Wilson). In other words, theatre is a game played for higher stakes than mere confession.

What really bothers Wilson about solo performance is its reliance on “a terribly simplistic notion of human identity” based in ideas of presence and authenticity, and the way that performers often strive for that authenticity through modes of confession:

I think when I am bored by auto-performance, I am not terribly engaged with the performer’s sense of her own identity; or I am terribly embarrassed that someone is so unwittingly revealing the gaps and evasions [in their story and the construction of their self] to total strangers with the naïve sense that what is being presented is some sort of coherent self (Wilson).

The solo performances that interest her, however, are those in which the performer is self-conscious about “producing his identity in the context of a wide range of social forces” which disrupt “the notion of a coherent self which can be told in a story”; they are the performances in which

there is a constant alterity creating the other against which the self . . . defines itself so that identity involves an interactive process with a range of social forces. The stories are told, but with an awareness that the very act of telling involves alterity, as if the alienation within the self which prompts the telling—which

probably always prompts the telling of any story—is a constituent aspect of identity. (Wilson)

“Even as these solo performances try to master that sense of alienation,” Wilson concludes, “they acknowledge the impossibility of the project, for the self is always incomplete, fragmented, an effect of social technologies which refuse wholeness” (Wilson).

Wilson’s critique of solo performance leaves me wondering about *Surrender No. 40*. Does it acknowledge the impossibility of constructing a coherent self? Is it based in naïve notions of authenticity and presence? My aims when I was writing the text were admittedly untheoretical: to tell the truth about my experience, as well as the truth about the ongoing colonial relationship between settlers and the Haudenosaunee in the Haldimand Tract (and elsewhere). As Ric Knowles and Jennifer Harvie point out, much of Canadian autobiographical monodrama (including *Surrender No. 40*) is confessional in nature, which makes constructing the kind of dialogic text in which they (and, perhaps, Wilson) are interested difficult, except in the cases of monologues where subjectivity is destabilized, and where the conflation of performer and character creates a “theatrical *frisson*” which “can be both powerfully effective and representationally confusing” (Harvie and Knowles 51). They suggest that George Seremba’s *Come Good Rain*, Ken Garnhum’s *Pants on Fire*, Daniel MacIvor’s *House*, Margaret Hollingsworth’s *The Apple in the Eye* and *Diving*, and Sharon Pollock’s *Getting It Straight*, among others, are examples of solo performance works that create such a *frisson* (51-55).

While in solo performance, the performer is alone onstage, the performer is in a

relationship with the audience. “Most performers create a mode of address that acknowledges the spectator’s presence,” Deidre Heddon writes. “If autobiographical performance is a potentially powerful tool of resistance, intervention and/or reinvention, then it must be so for the spectator as much as for the performer” (5). *Surrender No. 40* does acknowledge the spectator’s presence through asides and warnings; it is intended to be a story told (or read, since I am not yet off book) to an audience, and it is also intended to enlist its audience’s engagement in a specific political project: reconciliation.

*Surrender No. 40* might best be considered as an example of what Knowles and Harvie describe as “a sub-genre of ‘lecture/plays,’” such as John Palmer’s *Henrik Ibsen on the Necessity of Producing Norwegian Drama*, and Daniel Brooks and Guillermo Verdecchia’s *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* (49). In *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*, for example, Brooks and Verdecchia self-consciously construct a “monologic dialogue” by incorporating contradictions, disagreements, and fragments from different genres (49). Since *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* is a dialogue, rather than a monologue, that kind of dialogism is easier to construct. *Surrender No. 40* is quite different. Instead of two speakers, the single speaker tells two parallel stories: one the story of a walk through the Haldimand Tract, and the other the story of the relationship between Canada and the Haudenosaunee in the Haldimand Tract. Ideally, audiences would experience those two stories as being in a dialogue.

Solo performance may not always be autobiographical, but autobiographical performance tends to be the province of solo performers, which leads to a conflation between performer and character, according to Jenn Stephenson. Unlike Ann Wilson,

Stephenson sees this conflation as potentially productive. Autobiographical performance, she writes, “produces a singularity:

Instead of overwhelming the fictional persona, autobiographical performance takes a different tack. A singular impression of the real is achieved by blending the actual and fictional so that they become virtually indistinguishable. The performer is “me” and the character is also “me.” To some extent this too is illusive, since there are definite and unavoidable performance elements which mark the performance persona as fictive. As in the calculus, autobiographical performance approaches a “zero” point where the actual and fictional personae are equivalent, but never attain perfect identity. (“Portrait of the Artist” 178)

Stephenson’s observations challenge or complicate my sense that, in *Surrender No. 40*, I am partially telling a story about a walk I undertook through the Haldimand Tract. Of course, I am doing that, but in doing so, I am also constructing a representation of that experience, and therefore a fictional persona. After all, autobiography always constructs a representation of the self, and therefore it creates a type of fiction. The fictional persona and the author never do actually meet.

And yet, there is no question about autobiography’s centrality to solo performance. The American and British performers Deidre Heddon lists in the introduction to her book on autobiographical performance are people who prefer to work alone. They also tend to be, in Heddon’s phrase, “marginalised subjects” (2). The exception, she notes, is Spalding Gray, the sole straight, white male on her list. Otherwise, she writes, “many of these performers are lesbian, gay and/or black and/or

transgender, and their work also addresses explicitly their particular locations(s) and the experiences that are inscribed there” (*Autobiography and Performance 2*). The appeal of autobiographical performance to people who have been marginalized is not coincidental, Heddon argues:

Autobiographical performances can capitalise on theatre’s unique temporality, its here and nowness, and on its ability to respond to and engage with the present, while always keeping an eye on the future. In particular, autobiographical performance can engage with the pressing matters of the present which relate to equality, to justice, to citizenship, to human rights. (*Autobiography and Performance 2*)

Heddon concludes, “I want (and need) to believe that performance can be a transformational act, contributing to a network of political activity” (*Autobiography and Performance 3*).

*Surrender No. 40* is intended to be a “transformational act” that contributes to “a network of political activity,” although in a different way than Heddon envisions. Like Spalding Gray, I am a straight, white, cisgendered male, and as a result I can hardly claim to be a marginalized subject in Heddon’s terms. Yet to some extent I am on the outside of the story I tell in *Surrender No. 40*. I am on the inside of that story, of course, as a descendant of settlers who was raised in the Haldimand Tract—as the kind of Canadian whom the Canadian settler state privileges, and as the one who performed the walk which is the subject of the performance text. At the same time, however, I am on the outside of

that story as well. Prior to telling the stories of that walk and the relationship between settlers and Haudenosaunee in the Haldimand Tract, I have had to reject the “national collective myth” (Episkenew 70) of the Canadian settler state, leaving me on the outside of that collective mythology, which defines the settler experience, without giving me an alternative collective story in which I can situate myself. As a settler, I am also outside of the Haudenosaunee community (although by being invited to pray by offering tobacco to the Creator, I was invited into that community in a way that was very important to me). For that reason, I am in the fold, both inside and outside of the story I tell in *Surrender No. 40*. More importantly, however, as an exercise in telling the truth about Canada’s ongoing colonialist history in the Haldimand Tract and elsewhere, *Surrender No. 40* invites other descendants of settlers to question the country’s “national collective myth,” and in doing so, to begin to consider attending to the voices and truths of those who have been brutalized by that myth, as I have begun to do.

## Chapter Three: Theoretical Contexts

### 3.1 Theories of Trauma as Theoretical Context

Trauma theory constitutes the primary theoretical context of *What You Carry*. These theories also inform *Surrender No. 40*, although in a more indirect way. As Cathy Caruth, one of the pioneers of trauma theory in literary studies, suggests, there is a “vast academic literature on trauma” (175). Moreover, that literature has “expanded into an extraordinary number of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences” (116). In addition, that literature is hardly uniform or univocal in its exploration of trauma; for example, Caruth spends much of the afterword to the 20th anniversary edition of her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, to settling accounts with scholars who have disagreed with her understanding of trauma. Clearly, there are disagreements and divisions within the field.

Given the size and complexity of trauma theory, what I can offer here only scratches its surface. Despite the different understandings of trauma in the literature on the subject, there is some common ground within trauma theory. That common ground exists because much of contemporary trauma theory derives in some way from Freud’s essay “Mourning and Melancholia.” For Freud, mourning is a normal reaction “to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (243). Melancholia, on the other hand, is pathological (243), despite the similarity between its symptoms and mourning (244).

Melancholia, Freud argues, “is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious” (245). According to Freud, the path through which the libido detaches from the lost object, which proceeds from the unconscious to consciousness, is blocked in melancholia (257). The idea that traumatic experiences remain locked in the unconscious, that because of their force they cannot be processed by the conscious mind, is central to theories of trauma.

For example, in her discussion of trauma, Judith Herman suggests that the ordinary response people have to atrocities is “to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*” (1). And yet, Herman continues, atrocities “refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work” (1). “The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud,” Herman argues, “is the central dialectic of psychological trauma” (1). People who have survived these horrible events need to tell their stories, even if they will tend to do so “in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner” (1); should secrecy, the alternative to this witnessing or testimony, prevail, then “the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom” (1). Those symptoms, Herman argues, include hyperarousal, “the persistent expectation of danger” (35); intrusion, “floods of intense, overwhelming feeling,” including dreams about and flashbacks to the traumatic event (47); and constriction, “the numbing response of surrender” (35), which is accomplished either through spontaneous dissociation or by



using alcohol or drugs (44). In her account of literary representations of trauma, Caruth agrees with Herman's description: trauma, she suggests, is an event that is "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations or other intrusive phenomena" (11-12). Trauma is, according to Caruth, "always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (4). Herman and Caruth have different disciplinary backgrounds (Herman is a psychologist, and Caruth an English professor) and different goals (Herman wants to understand the impact of trauma on people, while Caruth sets out to understand its coded representation in literary and philosophical texts). Nevertheless, both understand trauma as an experience that overwhelms the traumatized subject, that cannot be managed or narrativized by that subject easily, and that results in an oscillation between a desire to tell the story of the event and a conflicting desire to keep that story secret.

According to Gabriele Schwab, drawing on the work of psychoanalyst Nicolas Abraham, the silence trauma engenders is the silence of the crypt, a site "in which people bury unspeakable events or unbearable, if not disavowed, losses or injuries incurred during violent histories" (1). The crypt is a place of memories that cannot be remembered, of stories that cannot be told. It is, Schwab continues, is a "psychic tomb" which harbours "an undead ghost" (1). As Dori Laub suggests, survivors of trauma often

prefer silence: it is “a fated exile, yet also a home,” both “a sanctuary and . . . a place of bondage” (58). The haunting this silence, burial, or encryption engenders, Schwab argues, is the result of a refusal to mourn the losses caused by the experience of violence. The resulting ghosts, she writes, remain “psychically alive” (2), and the haunting that follows is the experience of trauma: “While we can foreclose mourning by burying the dead in our psyche, those dead will return as ghosts. Violent histories have a haunting quality even before their legacy is passed on to the next generation” (2).

Schwab’s argument that trauma’s haunting is passed on to subsequent generations is important. We normally think of the intergenerational transmission of the trauma caused by the experience of residential schools, for example, as a question of victims of abuse becoming perpetrators, and of people who, because they were removed from their parents at a young age and dumped in a dangerous and emotionally sterile environment, never learned to care for children in a loving way. However, for Schwab trauma passes between generations through silence, as a function of the crypt, of unmentioned experiences that nevertheless exist as “unthought knowledge” (7). The term “unthought knowledge” comes from the work of psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas. According to Schwab, “‘unthought knowledge’ constitutes a dimension of the unconscious that emerges from experiences that have been lived but never fully known,” and she uses this idea to think about traumatic experiences (7). “Much of the transgenerational transmission of trauma,” Schwab argues,

operates at the level of such unthought knowledge. That is why, in order to make trauma accessible, a form needs to be found that translates into language or

symbolic expression an experience that is only unconsciously registered and left as a mere trace of the affective and corporeal levels. (8)

In other words, to make traumatic experiences something conscious, instead of unconscious and encrypted, to turn them into something manageable, they need to be translated into language, into narrative, or into some form of artistic or aesthetic expression.

For Schwab, borrowing from Bollas again, the linguistic or symbolic or, I would add, narrative expression of trauma becomes a transformational object (8). For Bollas, a transformational object is an experience or process that is experientially identified by the subject “with processes that alter self experience” (Bollas 14). In infancy, the transformational object is typically the mother, who is able to drastically change the child’s environmental and somatic experiences. “Therefore,” Bollas continues, “the mother is experienced as a process of transformation, and this feature of early existence lives on in certain forms of object-seeking in adult life, when the object is sought for its function as a signifier of transformation” (14). Such experiences in adulthood, according to Bollas, can be religious or aesthetic. Any experience, he writes, that leads to a feeling of a deep subjective rapport with an object, or an experience of an uncanny fusion with an object, “re-evokes an ego state that prevailed during early psychic life” (16). Such experiences “evoke a psychosomatic sense of fusion that is the subject’s recollection of the transformational object” (16). Schwab borrows this term and uses it to describe the powerful effect art or literature can have on the encrypted experience of traumatic knowledge. “Literature and the arts can become transformational objects in the sense that

they endow this knowledge with a symbolic form of expression and thereby not only change its status but also make it indirectly accessible to others,” Schwab writes (8).

The symbolic form of expression that most interests me is narrative. As Jo-Ann Episkenew’s summary of healing from traumatic experiences suggests:

Traumatic events from our past can be our constant companion if we are unable to process those events and let them go. Converting the residual pain of traumatic events first into language and subsequently into text enables us to distance ourselves from the trauma. We can then examine the text of the traumatic event to understand the emotions it triggers, a process that allows us to diminish its negative effects. (69-70)

For Episkenew, both writing about one’s own experience and reading about the traumatic experiences of others can be part of this process. “When readers identify with a narrative that describes trauma, they often re-experience many of the feelings they had when they experienced a similar traumatic event,” she writes. “However, during the process of reading, they are able to organized their feelings in their own time in a safe environment” (74). Such readers are comforted by the knowledge that they are not alone, that others have suffered similar experiences and overcome them (74).

One expects the children of survivors of trauma to be affected by the transgenerational transmission of traumatic experience. However, Schwab argues that traumatic experiences are transmitted to the children of perpetrators of horrific actions as well. Schwab grew up in Germany after the Second World War, and this experience provides the context of her argument. “The German people after the war had become

hardened to a point where they were unable to mourn not only the loss of the six million lives in the camps they had caused,” she writes. “They were equally unable properly to mourn and acknowledge their own losses” (75). As a result,

The very process of mourning was thwarted and distorted if not preempted altogether by guilt and shame and an irrevocable sense that as a German you deserved all your losses and more, or indeed were complicit in them. This is a psychic condition that can render one virtually insane with impossible mourning. The conflicted feelings were too intolerable to be processed in the open, let alone publicly. But since one couldn't make them disappear either, they were repressed, split off, and pushed into the cultural unconscious. (75-76)

The result was secrecy, silence, and traumatic amnesia (79), and those collective emotions are the reason she is writing her book.

The only cure for this collective trauma, according to Schwab, is a process similar to that which addresses individual trauma:

Only a process of breaking traumatic silence and revealing a buried secret can exorcise its ghostly alien presence from the inner world. Such a process entails one's taking responsibility for one's actions, working through guilt and shame, and mourning unbearable loss. It also requires that one face the effects of unspeakable violence. (80)

However, Schwab continues,

the dynamic changes if the acts of perpetration are not your own but belong to the generation of your parents. This makes facing one's historical legacy both easier

and more difficult: easier because the guilt is not a personal guilt, and more difficult because you need to face a legacy that has been passed down in complicated, subliminal, and, to a large extent, entirely unconscious ways. Facing historical facts reveals only the tip of an iceberg. Facing the psychic effects of the legacy of violence, guilt, shame, and (impossible) mourning as it has been passed down to the next generation is an excruciatingly complicated process. (80)

The descendants of settlers in Canada who discover the hidden history of this country's colonialist past (and present), who realize the extent of their parents' or grandparents' racist complicity in the attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples here, might, like the Germans in Schwab's example, experience some degree of trauma. Such a realization means abandoning what Episkenew calls "the national collective myth" of Canada (70), a move that is a prerequisite for change. She writes, "Colonialism is a pathological condition, a sickness that requires a cure, and taking the shared truths of the Indigenous people to the settler population comprises a component of that cure" (72). But that healing process is nevertheless, to some extent, a process of dealing with a repressed trauma. The feelings of anger and shame I experienced when I discovered the true history of the Haldimand Tract and when I began to understand what had happened in places like the Mohawk Institute, feelings which motivated *Muscle and Bone*, were to an extent an reaction to this buried trauma. A silence had been broken, a secret revealed. That process has been the motivation behind *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* as well. As Schwab points out, "Finding a voice—whether it is speaking up or writing a narrative, a poem, or a memoir or simply telling one's story—is crucial in this culture of memory and

testimony” (81): the culture that must replace the traumatic culture of silence, secrets, and shame.

Witnessing and testimony are key terms in trauma theory. These terms tend to be treated as synonyms in the literature; they describe the process through which survivors of trauma construct narratives of their experience, especially when they are narrated publicly, before an audience—even if that audience consists of a single therapist. According to psychoanalyst Dori Laub, witnessing actually produces knowledge about the traumatic event, because “trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction” (57). As a result, even if historical evidence about the traumatic event is abundant, because of the “overwhelming shock” that event creates in the minds of its survivors, it has yet to be witnessed. As a result, Laub argues,

The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the “knowing” of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. (57)

The therapeutic process, Laub suggests, is

a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of *re-externalizing* the event. This re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to

another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside. Telling thus entails a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim. (69)

It is difficult to become a witness to this testimony, Laub suggests: “the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself” (57). One of the questions that arises, therefore, is whether the person who hears the survivor’s testimony will have, in Jorge Semprun’s words, “the necessary patience, passion, compassion, and fortitude” to understand it (Semprun 14). And yet it is crucial for survivors to tell their stories in order to move the traumatic memory from the unconscious into consciousness and thereby gain some degree of control over it.

Both *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* are informed, in different ways, by these notions of trauma. Trauma seemed to surround the production of *Muscle and Bone*. One of the questions I had trouble answering when I applied to the university’s Research Ethics Board for permission to talk to people at Six Nations was how I would manage the possibility that conversations about stolen land would retraumatize people there. Discovering the truth of Canadian colonialism in the Haldimand Tract was, in its own way, traumatic, and throughout the walk I experienced feelings of guilt and shame regarding the ongoing history I had discovered. *What You Carry*, however, thematizes trauma much more directly. Even without the physical abuse he suffered at Walter’s hands, Joseph’s experience in residential school would have been traumatic. The basic features of the residential school experience—having one’s name replaced with a



number, having one's hair cut and one's clothing taken away—were part of a denial of subjectivity, of a process of turning those children from subjects into objects. It is not by accident that people entering Nazi concentration camps experienced similar procedures, which were intended to turn them from human beings into things (Egan 165-66). This erasure of subjectivity in residential schools helped to create an environment where horrific abuse could take place.

The abuse Joseph experienced in residential school—the beatings he received from Walter, as well as the treatment he received from others—was clearly traumatic. So too, in a different way, were the beatings Gary received from his father. (One could even argue that Walter is abusive because of his own traumatic childhood experiences.) I am not trying to equate their experiences. Gary's experience of White privilege (see McIntosh) is very different from Joseph's experience of racism and the colonialism of the Canadian settler state. As Episkenew suggests, the loss of land and the pressure to assimilate are experienced by Indigenous peoples as traumatic (8-9). "Perhaps the most accurate term to describe Indigenous peoples' responses to long-term historical trauma would be 'postcolonial traumatic stress response,'" she writes (9). Gary, of course, knows nothing of Walter's residential school experience, a sign of the way that his abusive behaviour there has become encrypted within the family dynamic.

And yet I would argue that Joseph is recovering from his trauma while Gary is not. Joseph has quit drinking (Herman, remember, uses the word "constriction" to describe the use of alcohol to numb the pain of trauma). He is working to recover his culture; he says that he is going to sweat lodge ceremonies and talking to an elder about

his experience. These activities will bring him into contact with others who have experienced trauma, leading, perhaps, to a sharing of stories. Certainly the advice he has received from the elder he has consulted—to tell his story and thereby let the poison out—is a call to go through a process of testimony or witnessing. Using his Common Experience Payment to start a business is, I would suggest, another sign of recovery; Joseph is looking ahead to the future instead of remaining frozen in the past. Gary, however, seems to be stuck, despite the suggestion that he has been seeing a therapist. He remains tied to his father, as abused children often are; Herman suggests that such pathological attachments are common in survivors of family abuse (98). He seems to be overwhelmed by his discovery of Walter's abusive behaviour at the residential school; his poetic monologue on winter ends includes the words, "I don't think spring is coming," which to me suggests something of his despair. Joseph's monologue, in contrast, is about spring, about the possibility of hope. None of this is intended to suggest that Gary's experience would be inherently more difficult to overcome, just that Joseph has found ways of healing, including becoming integrated within a specific community, that Gary has yet to discover. That is the reason Joseph is able to confront Walter, to speak his truth, and to break his silence before the man who abused him. Without the work he did prior to that meeting, without previously being able to bear witness to his traumatic experience, I doubt he would be able to do any of these things when he meets Walter. Instead, that encounter would have been the occasion for more trauma for Joseph, and he likely would have remained silent before his abuser. For Gary's part, the end of the play suggests a beginning for him, a gesture towards the truth and towards reconciliation.

### 3.2 Truth and Reconciliation as Theoretical Context

Trauma theory might be the primary theoretical context of *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40*, but all the time I was writing those two texts, and while I was planning and carrying out *Muscle and Bone*, I was thinking of truth and reconciliation as a kind of theoretical context. The term “truth,” in this context, is clear: it is about the truth of Canada’s behaviour towards Indigenous peoples. In the summary volume of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s final report, that behaviour is described as “cultural genocide” (1):

States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next. (1)

“In its dealing with Aboriginal people,” the report continues, “Canada did all these things” (1). Truth, then, means acknowledging this history: refusing to hide from it, refusing to deny it, refusing to minimize it.

Reconciliation, on the other hand, is about what happens now and in the future between Indigenous peoples and settlers and the descendants of settlers. “To the

Commission,” the authors of the summary volume of the TRC report write,

Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour. (6-7)

“We are not there yet,” the authors continue. “The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is not a mutually respectful one. But, we believe we can get there, and we believe we can maintain it” (7). The ambition of the authors of the report “is to show how we can do that” (7).

I have thought a lot about these two terms—truth on the one hand, and reconciliation on the other—since I began writing *What You Carry* and since I began thinking about the performance that became *Muscle and Bone*. I wanted these projects, along with *Surrender No. 40*, to become gestures towards reconciliation. I believe that the mutually respectful relationship the TRC report’s authors are describing is possible, and I would like my work to play a role in the process through which this country achieves such a relationship.

There are those who are skeptical of the work of the TRC, and of the terms “truth” and “reconciliation” themselves. Reading their arguments has complicated, and therefore enriched, my sense of what the term “reconciliation” might mean. For example, David Garneau writes, “I remain convinced that the official Truth and Reconciliation is primarily a non-Indigenous project designed to reconcile settlers with their dark history in

order that they might live in this territory more comfortably and exploit these lands more thoroughly” (74). He continues:

“Re-conciliation” assumes that Indigenous peoples and settlers once had a conciliatory relationship; that all that is needed is Indigenous absolution for harmony to be restored. But there is no halcyon moment to recover, only the ongoing colonial condition to become conscious of and resist. This cannot occur in the TRC bubble of structured empathy, where the pressure on survivors to forgive is enormous. . . . it places the onus on survivors of these internment institutions to forgive both their absent abusers and the abstract state. Following the familiar colonial script, these people are narrated as obstacles that must be overcome if we are all to move forward “towards a stronger and healthier future.” The TRC’s emotionalist structure negates resistance, reason, and discourse. (74-75)

In fact, Garneau continues, “The federal focus on Indian Residential Schools is an effort to personalize, cauterize, and distract notice away from larger issues. It aims to direct attention to the display of individual Indigenous suffering bodies, rather than the collective wholes that were betrayed. It attempts to pay off and/or ‘heal’ these folks rather than negotiate with their nations. And it is designed to distract both Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks from larger ongoing issues of Canadian colonization and land (ab)use” (75).

Garneau might be right about the way the TRC process tended to downplay issues other than residential schools, and both *Surrender No. 40* and *What You Carry* link those schools to other issues. It is also possible that the implied demand that survivors of

residential schools forgive their abusers is structured into the TRC process, although it is also true that witnessing and testimony are important aspects of recovering from traumatic experiences. But parts of Garneau's argument are anticipated by the authors of the TRC report. They write,

To some people, *reconciliation* is the re-establishment of a conciliatory state. However, this is a state that many Aboriginal people assert never has existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. To others, reconciliation, in the context of Indian residential schools, is similar to dealing with a situation of family violence. It's about coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people, going forward. It is in the latter context that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has approached the question of reconciliation. (6)

The analogy to family violence might be offensive to some, but it reminds me of the Cree word Harold Johnson uses to describe settlers, a word I have given Gary to speak (albeit with bitterness and disbelief at the way settlers have behaved towards Indigenous peoples) in *What You Carry: kiciwamanawak*, or "our cousins" (Johnson 167). After all, we share this place. People like me, the descendants of settlers, have nowhere else to go, nowhere else to call home. While I respect Garneau's call for "resistance, reason, and discourse," I also would hope that the end result of that resistance, reason, and discourse would be the mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous people and settlers and their descendants for which the TRC report is calling. Is there any other way to bring

what Garneau describes as “the on-going colonial condition” to an end? *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* have been written towards this goal. However, I am a hopeful pessimist, as Thomas King describes himself and his friend, the late Louis Owens: “That is, we wrote knowing that none of the stories we told would change the world,” King writes. “But we wrote in the hope that they would” (92). As do I.

## Chapter Four: Conclusion

As a reflection on the work I did in order to write *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40*, this engagement paper has discussed the methodologies I employed as well as the theoretical contexts I considered as part of the creative process. I wrote and, to a limited degree, engaged in narrative inquiry. I drew on my own experience in writing both texts; however, while I self-consciously thought about autobiography while writing *Surrender No. 40*, I was actually doing autoethnography when I was writing that text. I have made use of practices of new play development for both texts; the presentation of both *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* in front of an audience will be a further step in that development process. I have carried out historical research as well, and although that research has been limited to secondary sources, it was invaluable. During *Muscle and Bone*, the precursor to *Surrender No. 40*, I employed walking-as-performance as a methodology, and when I perform *Surrender No. 40* before an audience I will be engaged in solo performance. These are the six methodologies I made use of when writing the two texts I am presenting for this MFA degree. One could write a book on each of them—and in fact others have done so. Because of space concerns, what is presented here is very much an abbreviated version of each of these methodologies.

All of this work took place within two theoretical contexts: I made use of trauma theory in thinking about Joseph's experience (as well as Gary's and Walter's); and I treated truth and reconciliation as a kind of theoretical construct. I can see how *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* could be seen within other theoretical paradigms as well—



for example, within post-colonial theory—but space considerations prevent me from examining that body of work, and I was not consciously considering post-colonial theory as a context while I was writing the two performance texts. Nevertheless, as with the methodological aspect of this paper, one could write much more as a way to situate *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* both within the two theoretical contexts I have selected, and within others as well. And, as with the methodologies I have discussed here, one could write entire books about these theoretical constructs, and many others have done so.

All of this thought and reflection and research, however, only has value to the extent that *What You Carry* and *Surrender No. 40* have value in performance. I would like to think they might have an effect on an audience, that they might help the settlers in that audience rethink the history of this country. I know that the process of researching and writing those two texts has changed me. I think about Canada differently now. My hope is that they would affect audiences in the same way.

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