

Transparency, Spectatorship, Accountability: Indigenous Families in Settler-State “Postdemocracies”

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T ransparency

“Take the picture! Take the picture if vanishing is so beautiful!” These words are spoken by a Métis journalist toward the end of Marie Clements’s new play, *The Edward Curtis Project*. She is looking up from her prone position at a distressed Edward S. Curtis, the nineteenth-century photographer of North American Indigenous peoples who saw himself as a documentarian capturing images of waning peoples for posterity. His appearance in Angeline’s present-day world is in the form of a living trace. He is the ghostly originator of a vein of representations that exerts power through its claims to transparency and that continues to do its work in Angeline’s twenty-first-century world where the effects of her intimate experience of the ongoing production of spectacles of Indigenous waning is diagnosed as clinical depression.¹ Clements’s play stages a complex unraveling of that ahistorical diagnosis through encounters with Curtis in which Angeline and other Indigenous characters speak back to the photographer and speak out from his fatalistic frames, which are themselves reframed by projec-

1 Clements’s play was staged at the Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa in April 2013. One of Edward Curtis’s early subjects was Princess Angeline, or Kickisomlo, daughter of Chief Seattle.

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tions from the contemporary Indigenous characters' family photograph albums, asserting another conception of the beautiful.

The event that is the ostensible catalyst for Angeline's descent into depression is the freezing death of three Indigenous children, which she has dutifully reported in her job as an Aboriginal affairs reporter, providing the facts that—she realizes too late—do not so much speak for themselves as trigger a set of narrative codes and discursive positions. These produce a socially distanced but empathetic spectatorship of Indigenous tragedy read as pathology: an alcoholic father has neglected his children. Never mind the father's having to struggle to raise children under conditions rendered unviable. Angeline knows these preconditions for tragedy, but up to this point she has not really noticed that her *métier* does not render them speakable. Nor has she noticed in herself the accumulated somatic strain of continually being a spectator to such freeze-frames of tragedy or the violence that their conception of a beautiful "vanishing" does to her. These journalistic freeze-frames, like Curtis's photographs, never imagine the Indigenous witness who, living on, may struggle to identify somehow, across the objectification, a subject position beyond the representation's ordering of "the perceptible" (Rancière 55). In Clements's play, this strain accumulates and settles in as a feeling of being cold and tired, a feeling that links Angeline metonymically to the frozen children.

Clements's play draws a parallel between the violence of decontextualized fact in journalistic coverage and the "notion of indexicality" from which Curtis's nineteenth-century photographs derived their power: as Wanda Nanibush has put it, this indexical code seems to assert that "because the camera was really there recording 'reality,' its products point to reality" (np). When the twenty-first-century Angeline challenges Curtis to capture her own suffering for the sake of its beauty—"Take the picture if vanishing is so beautiful!"—the audience of Clements's play is invited to consider what it means to be moved by a genre that requires some actual person's suffering. If Curtis's photographs, as Nanibush argues, offer a kind of aesthetically orchestrated affective relief through their transformation of settler-colonial guilt into nostalgia, what kind of affect, and what kind of spectator, is involved in the contemporary circulation of spectacles of broken Indigenous families?

The play's densely textured reflection on modes of making Indigenous lives visible condenses the issues that concern me in this article: interrelated technologies of transparency, renderings of spectacle and spectatorship around Indigenous families, "moral-affective publicness" (Berlant, "Epistemology" 49) and its place in contexts of impoverished

political engagement. In Canada in 2013, a play about the history and politics of claiming to represent Indigenous lives transparently resonates with a peculiar charge, especially (but certainly not exclusively) in the wake of media coverage of the 2011 crisis in living conditions in the northern Ontario community of Attawapiskat. That coverage included the attempt by national newspaper columnist, Jeffrey Simpson, to dismiss the “rhetoric surrounding [its] Chief” as being of the “dreamy, flamboyant variety, a mix of anti-capitalism and anti-colonialism, blended with mythology (blasted by the reality of what one actually sees on too many reserves).”² It is the “blast” of what passes for “reality,” the orchestration of “what one actually sees on too many reserves,” according to Simpson, that is my concern here, specifically insofar as it says something about the conjunction of Indigenous exemplarity, melodramatic spectatorship, and neoliberal sense-making in settler states.

The key term that holds those admittedly massive concerns together, at least for the space of this article, is transparency. What does the assurance that all has been exposed, whether it is with scientific accuracy or unimpeachable record-keeping or the unflinching capture of painful images, do to narrow, indeed to naturalize, the terms of political discussion? In making a connection between technologies of transparency, on the one hand, and foreclosure of challenges to the way the political public sphere is framed, on the other, I am borrowing from Jacques Rancière. His *Disagreement* makes a case for the necessity of political gestures that rupture the “partition of the perceptible”—the givenness of problems, allotted identities and speaking positions—shaping what can appear within political discussion (24). The specifically political gesture is the kind that performatively opens a dispute not even conceivable within the given configuration of players and positions. This narrow definition of political activity distinguishes it from participation, however well intentioned, in the activity of “policing” the social body through efforts to address the lacks and deficits

2 The rhetoric that Jeffrey Simpson is referring to somewhat obliquely here can only be the contemporaneous arguments and demonstrations mounted in December 2012 and January 2013 in localities across Canada under the banner of Idle No More, originally in protest against sections of Bills C-27, C-45, C-48, S-2, S-8, S-207, S-212 implying treaty violations, but then also in support of hunger-striking Chief Theresa Spence’s demand for a meeting with the prime minister and the Governor General to discuss treaty obligations on the basis of recognized Indigenous sovereignty—a signal instance of Rancière’s politics as the performative address to “an interlocutor who does not acknowledge the interlocutory situation” if there ever was one (89). For the Idle No More movement’s critique of the legislation, see Jessica Gordon, “INM Teach In Tool Kit” <http://idlenomore.ca/education>.

in its constituted, and unquestioned, parts, as if the sum of statistically observed subgroups, risk categories, identities organized around region, ethnicity, income level constituted a perfect and final “count” of the whole. In neoliberal “postdemocracies,” such “policing” activity, the monitoring of “places, powers and functions” in the social body in order to ensure the harmonious “coexistence of all and the optimal participation of each,” is increasingly being mistaken for politics (99, 96). There is a weakness, even a lack, of the kind of democratic mobilization that would call into question the settled, naturalized lots, jurisdictions, and terms of engagement. The argument is not just that there is always the need for aesthetic disruption and anticipatory manifestation, de-realizing and inventive gestures of “theatre” and “demonstration,” to challenge the “structure of the visible” and reconfigure the very “interlocutory situation” of politics (88, 103, 89). It is also that there is a particular historical urgency to this questioning of the field of the perceptible made available for problem-solving.

For Rancière, writing in France, this urgency stems from what he observes to be the way that the “triumph of democracy” has been hailed in Europe, in the last few decades, “as a corollary to the collapse of so-called totalitarian systems” (95). What has been able to entrench itself in the midst of this celebration, he argues, is a demotion of what counts as political practice to technocratic problem-solving and humanitarian intervention in the wake of the supposed achievement, once and for all, of liberal democracy. Whilst borrowing Rancière’s concepts here I will be suggesting that, in the contexts I am discussing, his diagnosis of the conditions of what he calls “postdemocracy” should be extended to encompass the uses to which the spectre of the interventionist welfare state is put in neoliberal political rhetoric. In particular, I raise the question of how postdemocracy is generated in neoliberalizing liberal-capitalist settler states in part through the mobilization of the Indigenous family as an example, a spectacular illustration of both the damage done by bloated, intrusive governments and of the developmental potential that can be unleashed when these governments retract.

Neoliberalism’s dismantling of social entitlements and decomposition of publics to produce populations of individuals made responsible for their own, and certain others’, welfare has required profound shifts in the language of politics and the nature of social imaginaries. These discursive shifts have repositioned the stakes of equity and justice, or opportunity, to use the term by which these are now transcoded, around the individual. But when individual capabilities are all that one has with which to stand up against a world of naturalized risks, the nurturing work of the family

becomes magnified, and its bonds are sanctified in particular ways. Precisely to the extent that neoliberal governments devolve responsibility to the so-called private sphere of the family, the family takes centre stage in what registers as political discourse. Thus, a historically-contingent thematization of the family as an ecology of relationships and affective investments determining an individual's chances for healthy development and resilience in a risky world has come to be a progressive mantra across the political spectrum.³ As I argue here, contesting the self-evidence of this project, especially as the project that must now stand in for other versions of struggle, requires critical consideration, and connecting, of contemporary technologies of transparency.

There are, of course, different forms of transparency, and so in using transparency to hold together questions of neoliberal sense-making, spectacles and spectatorship, and Indigenous exemplarity—both negative and positive—I must account for these differences. More particularly, since my immediate reference point is Canada governed by a Conservative majority bent on redefining what counts as evidence for policymaking, I must account for shifting relations between forms of transparency. Most importantly for my purposes here, Canada is a place where, currently, there are contests over the deployment of the rhetoric of transparency, where the quantitative transparency of statistics on population—a historically contested knowledge—is being actively demoted by those with the resources to fund its production, and where, for not unrelated reasons, the emotional transparency of melodramatic evidence is being nudged to the foreground. Melodrama is a genre that locates problems and solutions in the “private” sphere of the family and that generates its incontestable knowledge through certainties identified with the subject position of the victim. As I argue here, it is a central technology of transparency in a context where there are concerted attempts to delegitimize statistical knowledge of population from above and, not unrelatedly, to make financial accountability the only test of what we already know through melodramatically generated certitude.

Thus, while my discussion of the 2010 documentary, *Third World Canada*, in the middle section of this article addresses the interplay of melodrama and statistics, in the final section I try to account for the new situation in Canada in which a federal government minister can proclaim that “We’re not governing on the basis of the latest statistics” (Justice

3 On this mantra, see Jennifer Henderson and Keith Denny, “The Resilient Child, Human Development, and the ‘Postdemocracy,’” *Culture Unbound* 5 (forthcoming 2013).

Minister Rob Nicholson, quoted in Chase, np). In the context of such a refutation of statistical evidence, I consider the risks and also the necessity of a political gesture that, in a way Rancière's politics could not predict, actually marshals statistical transparency in a bid to demand a recount of those who should count, politically, as well as a different way of imagining equality in relation to them. One of my goals here is to describe a legitimation of neoliberal restructuring organized through forms of spectacle and affective involvement that pivot on the Indigenous family; the other goal is to ask what kind of politics it is possible to enact on this ground of Indigenous exemplarity, what kinds of political gestures could seize it and twist it against the naturalized logics of both vanishing (now called "unviability") and market supremacy. Because my concerns necessarily engage issues of spectatorship, of knowledge production and legitimation, and of the politics of resistance in settler states, my argument ranges across multiple national sites and forms of discourse, from policy to documentary film, to newspaper commentary, to legal complaint.

Neoliberal doctrine, as is well known, defines itself in opposition to state interventionism and centralized planning, which an early neoliberal manifesto cast as threats to the "essential conditions of human dignity and freedom," declaring that the "position of the individual and the voluntary group are progressively undermined by extension of arbitrary power" (Mont Pelerin Society [1947] cited in Harvey 20). This anti-interventionist discursive strain operates across neoliberalizing contexts in conjunction with the promotion of the autonomous powers of those things constrained or damaged by paternalistic states and institutions, that is, individuals, families, and communities. In postcolonial settler states such as Canada and Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand, where there are histories of state policy targeting Indigenous families as sites in which the reproduction of Indigeneity could be disrupted and controlled, the neoliberal withdrawal of the state and the empowerment of the natural space of the family plays out in a particularly morally charged way. The withdrawal of the state can be represented as a turn against the paternalistic colonial state, one that demonstrated its abusive powers most spectacularly in its violation of what are framed as Indigenous private spheres.

Because treaty obligations were sometimes interpreted by colonial governments as opportunities to infantilize Indigenous populations, the latter are vulnerable to being framed, today, in neoliberal reformers' behaviourist rhetoric of "benefit dependency" which implies that "reduced personal responsibility" and a lack of work incentives (as well as their lack of modeling in the family) are the causes of present poverty (Cheyne, O'Brien, and

Belgrave 182). This characterization of dependency as the sad legacy of unenlightened times varies in tone in different contexts. Simpson's *Globe and Mail* opinion piece reminds readers that "Without a wage economy beyond ... 'traditional' ways, the path lies clear to dependence on money from somewhere else, namely government, which in turn leads to the lassitude and pathologies that plague too many aboriginal communities." Others make milder assertions that it is time for the outdated "rights-based activist approach" to give way to economic development (Coates). The common thread is that Indigenous people serve as the überexample of the psycho-social damage caused by the welfare state. Caring about Indigenous futures in these discourses entails the moral imperatives of creating market opportunities and incentives and returning responsibilities such as child welfare to their natural places.

In fact, strategies of neoliberal governance largely return the responsibility for the well-being of populations, briefly and in limited ways shared by liberal states for part of the twentieth century, to the family, thereby framing the responsibility for what feminists name "social reproduction"—the "daily and generational reproduction of the labour force" (Braedley and Luxton 14)—as the care performed by and amongst those who are bound together by ties of love, or duty, or blood. In the hegemonic narrative, the current re-privatization of responsibilities that were usurped by the Keynesian nanny state means that the family can once again take up its natural work, a work that is principally in relation to the child. The child in this narrative conveniently embodies a trajectory toward equality as (only) the end point of a process of development.⁴ This is a future equality that will be seized in the form of a level opportunity to compete on the basis of individual capacities which have been optimized through the nurturing and welfare provision of the well-functioning family.

As I move through three settler state contexts in this article, I try to demonstrate that neoliberal governance is not bound to any particular version of the family, as long as the family stands for a set of relations zoned as private and offering unpaid or at least privately-sourced caregiving and capacity-nurturing services. Canadian and Australian policy may fit the model described by Kate Bezanson in terms of the "disembedded market economy built upon a nostalgic vision of family life" (91), that is

4 Rancière differentiates between "go[ing] towards equality" and "start[ing] from equality," a key concept in his *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1981), in a 2009 interview with Lawrence Liang on the collective blog, Kafila. See "Interview with Jacques Rancière," <http://kafila.org/2009/02/12/interview-with-jacques-ranciere>.

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to say, the nucleated family, the married, one-earner couple. However, in Aotearoa New Zealand, the reprivatization of social welfare currently operates through a recognition of the cultural specificity—and the caring resources—of *whanau*, or Maori extended families. In each of these settler state contexts, one sees the wider conjoined phenomena of responsibility for welfare being delegated to a private zone coded as the natural space for the work of cultivating persons on their individualized trajectories toward equality.

At stake in this process of “refamilialization” is the penalization of low-income families and women (those natural caregivers), the “steep social and specifically gender stratification that is the legacy of neoliberal experiments worldwide” (Bezanson 100, 92). A perhaps less obvious stake is the meritocratic redefinition of equality around the figure of the developmental self, the child whose future, according to a logic blending knowledges of finance and developmental psychology, becomes the reference point for (necessarily postponed) evaluations of the justice of present arrangements. The developmental self—the child as a figure of potentiality, of future returns on early investments of the kind that only families and communities can provide, investments that manifest their interest later in maximized human capital—is the pivot in this redefinition of equality. Thus in what Rancière calls the “idyll” of postdemocratic consensus, where a “realism” that “sticks to observable realities” also adjudicates what it is possible to demand, there are huge stakes in the way that the child is made visible (102, 132). In settler states, furthermore, a peculiar burden of exemplifying the “observable reality” of substandard parenting and children lacking the necessary investments in their developmental trajectories toward equality of opportunity is currently placed on Indigenous families.

I do not want to dismiss the terrain of “moral-affective publicness” that is called reconciliation in settler states today; rather, my purpose is to underline the danger of this terrain being constituted as one of “indigenous neoliberalism” (Stringer np) with non-Indigenous people located as approving spectators. Indigenous pasts and futures sometimes serve as the stage on which neoliberal campaigns to effect profound cultural changes in the broader relationship between states and citizens are fought, and this can be the case when Indigenous lives are represented in the name of very sincere engagements with the rubric and goals of reconciliation. This is more apt to be the case when representations work naively within genres that produce effects of transparency and irrefutability instead of challenging the very terms through which Indigenous lives are assigned their places in the dominant “partition of the perceptible.” Perhaps the

projects of postcolonial reconciliation in Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand—as varied, multifaceted, and mobile as they may be—cannot but resonate in some part with the claims of neoliberalism with regard to the dark past of big government. Many versions of reconciliation centre on healing or renewing the Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationship, but it is important to ask how this encounter is coloured by the socio-political imaginary of neoliberalism which, as John Hinkson has argued, has only served to deepen the “naive unknowing” of settlers, insofar as their societies can “seem only to be composed of individuals” (290). “From this naive settler standpoint,” Hinkson writes, “all Indigenous people need to do is accept the terms of settler society and assimilate to it: *just like any other individual*” (290).

The possibilities for renewal of relationship are surely constrained by the modes in which Indigenous people are made visible as condensations of the problems of dependency, lack of incentives, ruined families, or artificially sustained, remote, unviable, or failed communities. In 2007, non-Indigenous Australians were made to witness the disaster of child abuse as the basis for a moral imperative to support the Howard government’s intervention in seventy-three Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territories, an intervention which has been criticized for “diminish[ing] or eclips[ing] the land rights and negotiating powers of Indigenous organisations” by privatizing lands, corporatizing governance, and disciplining labour (Stringer np). In November and December 2011, non-Indigenous Canadians were offered the spectacle of Attawapiskat, the northern Ontario community whose Chief declared a state of emergency and called for Red Cross assistance to deal with a severe housing shortage. In national newspapers and television coverage, Attawapiskat was played out as public melodrama as the attempt to draw attention to chronic underfunding by the state was spun as exposure of community dysfunction. The Chief’s invocation of a “third world situation” (Brennan) to describe the outrageous conditions endured by the Cree community was answered by the federal government’s moves to place community finances under third-party management, to reintroduce a First Nations Financial Transparency bill in Parliament, and, more widely, by discussions in certain national newspapers of the ways in which, as Mark Milke of the Fraser Institute put it, “Reserves like Attawapiskat run against the grain of [individual] opportunity” (quoted in Galloway 2011).

In these two cases Indigenous communities are made objects of a popular interest that is both statistical and melodramatic in its modes of apprehension. Together these genres work to produce mutually support-

ing senses of transparency and irrefutability. In the process, the settled lots and terms of public life are reaffirmed. As Raimond Gaita has written of the intervention in the Northern Territories, the release of the report of Australia's Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, entitled *Little Children Are Sacred*, and the media discussions around it, produced forms of sincere concern and good intentions; what matters, however, is how these responses were shaped in relation to "the children of a denigrated people" (299). Non-Aboriginal spectators' compassion was underpinned by an incapacity to recognize the basic imperative of a duty to consult with Aboriginal communities. The compassion was felt in relation to people in need, a population segment requiring more police attention; compassion did not carry with it an ability to hear the demands of a group with inherent collective rights. Population statistics is one of the technologies of transparency functioning to obscure the appearance of Indigenous peoples as peoples here.

The production of a statistically knowable population, an object assumed to be positivistically available and objectively knowable through statistical reduction and prediction, is not new, but the media powers to circulate the image of an "empirical population carved up exactly into its parts" are arguably unprecedented (Rancière 105). This means that political discussion risks being reduced to questions of how the parts of the population can be improved, how to identify the lacks, inefficiencies, and failures of optimization that are made visible through cross-sectional and longitudinal population surveys or aggregations of administrative and clinical data. Although the writers of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report asked that their data not be interpreted as requiring coercive solutions to be imposed by the commonwealth (federal) government, this recommendation was famously ignored. The package of coercive measures imposed demonstrates the exacerbated vulnerability of Indigenous people to being made objects of policing, both in the wider sense in which Rancière uses the term and in the narrower sense of surveillance by law-enforcers. This exacerbated vulnerability is connected to a long history of being allowed to count only as a bureaucratic problem with needs instead of as political communities with collective rights.⁵

In Australia the public melodrama of child abuse has allowed some of the goodwill associated with reconciliation to be channeled into the

5 On needs versus rights, see Roger Maaka and Augie Fleras, *The Politics of Indigeneity: Challenging the State in Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2005).

delivery of a humanitarian intervention. For Rancière (and others including Slavoj Žižek), it is symptomatic of our “postdemocratic” moment that the model of the human subject to which neoliberal governments pretend to make themselves answerable in certain actions is the subject of humanitarian aid, who is by definition without a voice, without the ability to make him or herself count as a political being and thus the object of an “anti-political politics” of “preventing suffering” (Žižek 11). In the case of the Northern Territories intervention, the humanitarian subject was the sexually abused Aboriginal child, demonstrated by *Little Children Are Sacred* to be at a statistically higher risk of child abuse and positioned by the Howard government as the victim in whose name it was forced to implement a set of reforms.⁶ These reforms were designed to transform what the Minister for Indigenous Affairs called “failed societies” into “normal suburbs,” by forcing concerns with custom, kin, and land to give way to individualistic aspirations (Brough quoted in Stringer np). The counterpart of the pre-political humanitarian subject, in this instance the voiceless child victim, may be said to be another pre-political figure, prominent in rationalizations of state action today: economic man, the subject of rationally-calculating individual self-interest. What links the humanitarian subject of need to economic man is the logic of human development which has been given a reference point in international law since the 1980s through the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development.⁷ Human rights can now be realized in the form of opportunities to develop *into* the subject of rational self-interest, envisaged on the ground as the person who improves his or her potential through participation in a wider socio-economic advancement toward the ideal of liberated market forces. In this context, advocacy for human rights can become confused with advocacy for development, with the notion of development protected from politicization because it is associated with optimizing human capabilities. We are back to the postdemocratic question of the individual and his or her chances in a risky world and, hence, back to the *family* as the natural space in which human optimization should be cultivated.

6 The Inquiry collected qualitative evidence through interviews and submissions.

However, chapters 7 and 8 of its report are devoted to the quantitative assessment of child abuse prevalence, based on the use of child welfare, criminal justice, and health system statistics.

7 On the recasting of human rights in terms of a program for development, see Joseph R. Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham UP, 2007), especially chapter 4.

Spectatorship

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As I have observed, transparency may take the form of the indexicality of the nineteenth-century ethnologist's stage-managed photographs, the blast of journalistic fact, or the quantitative transparency of statistics. It may also work through what Lauren Berlant has called the "moral transparency" of melodrama ("Epistemology" 54).⁸ The genre of melodrama, as Berlant argues, generates moral outrage as it tells the stories of victims, but it has a way of channeling the clarity and certainty of that moral outrage into affirmation of normative positions, the privatization of political participation as empathetic spectatorship, and the suspicion that any nuancing propositions must be lacking in humanity. Berlant is here describing the dynamics of melodramatic representations in general, but melodrama's means of generating moral certitude as a film genre, in particular, may be further specified. First, film melodrama is by definition centred on the family, its universe in fact constituted by the "displacement" that renders the domestic context the arena for articulating and resolving social problems (Mercer and Shingler 25). The family is an "autonomous human community" in the classic mid-century melodramas of Hollywood cinema: both the source of narrative conflict and, paradoxically (but necessarily, since the family is the sum total of the "existing social structure"), the place within which resolution of that conflict must be found (Schatz 153, 154). Second, in the family melodrama, the protagonist is a victim and "almost never a father," since the figure of the dominating father, most unsympathetic "when absent or deceased," is pivotal to the psychological torment at the centre of the genre (Mercer and Shingler 13). Third, because the earliest film melodramas were transpositions from the stage to the silent screen, melodrama developed as a film genre in which "pictures them-

⁸ The context for Berlant's discussion of melodrama's generation of compassionate feeling is the United States, and so there are factors that should complicate any attempt to transpose her discussion to the Canadian context. The former National Citizens' Coalition leader's characterization of Canada as "a Northern European welfare state in the worst sense of the term, and very proud of it" in a 1997 speech before the United States Council for National Policy provides an indication of what sort of Canada the Conservative government at least believes itself to be acting upon (Stephen Harper, quoted in Bezanson 95). The Canadian context is also made different by a popular, though uneven, consciousness of a history of collectively shared risk in healthcare and pensions. There is also the fact that the rhetorical traditions of American exceptionalism and the central place of racialized slavery in left-liberal U.S. histories have to a large degree proven to be impediments to a U.S. national self-conception as a settler state that involves an ongoing relationship with Indigenous peoples.

selves speak” (Lang 24). Dialogue is characteristically demoted in favour of the explanatory resources of *mise-en-scène* so that there is peculiar a “synthesis of narrative and spectacle” (Lang 24). Less important than what characters say, in other words, is what their situation and their gestures and expressions emote.

Third World Canada folds these melodramatic conventions into the frame of a documentary expose about the deplorable living conditions in the northern Ontario community of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, its title mirroring Chief Theresa Spence’s use of the same rubric of a “third world situation” to describe her own reserve’s experience of the effects of decades of underserviced infrastructure (Brennan). The documentary frame for the melodrama in *Third World Canada* adds the elements of voice-over and the reflexive awareness of the documentarian’s camera-eye to the *mise-en-scène* of psychological suffering. The film represents a sincere attempt to stir its imagined audience of non-Indigenous Canadians to care about substandard living conditions and, particularly, about the fates of a family of Anishinabek children living within them. The film has toured as part of a public pedagogy and fundraising project billed as a joint initiative between director Andrée Cazabon’s production company and members of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug.⁹ (Young members of the community, “the K.I. Drum Group,” some of whom feature in the film, travel with the tour to play the drum in a ceremony after screenings and to answer questions alongside the director.) Since the screenings are promoted as attempts to “engage mainstream Canadians in the challenges First Nations face,” it is important to ask how spectatorship is being conceived as the non-Indigenous part of reconciliation in the case of this initiative (*3rd World Canada Tour*). Because of the film’s deployment of spectacle to configure a spectatorship in relation to the troubled Indigenous family and the question of the needs of its children, it is unclear whether engagement can survive the moment of feeling compassionate and even empathetic to be converted into political solidarity.

Berlant’s observations about the nature of compassionate involvement are relevant to the form of spectatorship structured by the film. *Third World Canada* seems designed to generate convulsions of outrage and sympathy that might even permit viewers to feel fleetingly political; however, the sense of being stirred emotionally ultimately may be in the name of spectators’ reprivatization and corresponding sense of longing for

9 I saw the film first at a screening for medical students at the University of Ottawa in 2010, then again two years later at a screening organized by a repertory cinema in my middle-class Ottawa neighbourhood.

the reconsolidation of nurturing family around the children on the screen. The formula for justice here is located within melodrama's autonomous social world of the family. The restoration of conditions for the nurturing of future generations, instead of requiring spectators to call their representative institutions to account, requires them to rehearse a faith in the family once it has been released from the absent or deceased figure of a dominating father, gestured at here in the form of the paternalistic colonial state. This is where classical melodrama's family, scarred by a dominating father but finding the resources for survival within its rigorously circumscribed family frame, is put in the service of a dangerously naive argument. This argument substitutes harm to the family for a structural conception of injustice, locating problems and solutions within the Indigenous family, whose autonomy is the primary stake. As the chair of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation—the source of the first voice-over segment—declares, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug is one of many Indigenous communities that colonialism has rendered “inordinately and tragically dependent upon the church and the government.” The problem is that autonomy is a concept currently mobilized in the legitimizing of neoliberal settler states' downloading of historical and legal obligations so as to relocate the risks attendant upon survival in spheres which are zoned as private.¹⁰

The shocking title of *Third World Canada* announces an expedition to the hidden seams of comfortable, developed Canada. Viewers are then oriented to Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug in the manner of early anthropologists, via on-screen text placed over a map of Canada that describes it as “one of 30 isolated and remote Native communities above the 50th parallel in the ‘Forgotten North’ of Ontario.” The third world conditions that the film exposes, however, have to do with what one reviewer describes as the “social and psychological fabric” of the community (Hampson), that is, the pathological intergenerational relations condensed in the situation of a group of eight children orphaned by the recent suicides of two adults. In spite of the film's inclusion of interviews with a chief who critiques the process through which consent to Treaty 9 was secured, and the director of a child protection agency who marshals comparative statistics on Indigenous and non-Indigenous quality of life, in fact calling on “southern Ontarians” to “ask ... questions at their dinner table [such as] Why should

10 As Fiona MacDonald observes, “Group rights claims are often couched in the language of privacy, and this discourse has been co-opted by the state” (185). On alternative ways of conceiving of autonomy, see *Property, Territory, Globalization: Struggles over Autonomy*, ed. William D. Coleman (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

people have to live like this in a rich country?," it is the suicides and their emotional aftermath that are presented as the occasion for the film and its point of focus. No doubt in spite of the filmmaker's best intentions, it is not the violence of colonialism or the scandalous discrepancy in living conditions that *Third World Canada* makes most visible, as the filmmaker and her crew fly into the reserve in order to film the funeral, interviews, and a re-enactment. Rather, it is the suffering attendant on a failure to nurture. This failure comes into relief against the capacity for feeling that is presumed in the spectator who is invited to observe unflinchingly alongside Cazabon.

What the film and the publicity around it thematize as much as the situation of the children is the moral work of witnessing conducted by the camera eye. This is most memorably demonstrated in a scene within the first ten minutes of the film that observes in excruciating close-up one of the orphaned boys re-enacting his stepfather's recent suicide, silently imitating a strangled body suspended from a rope. The theme is ostensibly that we are being called to witness what the boy had to experience and now must compulsively act out, but what the scene achieves is the affirmation of a received medico-moral frame on the Aboriginal family and its dysfunctions. The boy's re-enactment is intercut with exterior shots of the decrepit house staged as if on the fateful snow-blown night, as well as the recollections of an older sister, a police officer, and a social worker. The becoming orphaned of the eight children is the central event in the diegesis; the event in the scene of spectation is the feeling of compassion. But the stated hope that distant southern spectators will begin to ask critical questions about inequities in Canada is threatened, rather than supported, by this emotional experience, because what the film actually stages for its imagined spectator is a convulsion of compassion followed by a sense of relief. The relief hinges on a reflexive awareness of the rightness of one's emotional response. The ability to measure the horror of the situation on screen with an appropriate sense of being moved means that any unease can be quelled, almost immediately, by differentiation and distancing. The children on screen, the exhausted adults around them, are numb with pain; however, spectators have been given evidence of their own undamaged caring and empathetic capacities, and the best part of themselves can only wish for these capacities to be restored in the people on screen. Restored or, rather, fostered, since interviewees observe that "as parents we lack in different areas" and the children "need to learn how to love."

The deployment of melodramatic codes within a filmic text that claims to document reality means that melodrama's autonomous social world of

the family is affirmed as a complete picture. *Third World Canada* affirms the private nature of what is at stake, not just for spectators but also for the residents of Kitchenuunmaykoosib Inninuwug, by joining the resolution it proposes—resources for the strengthening of families—to the freeing of the community from its status as a paternalistically controlled reserve. The promotional literature surrounding the film promises to take the spectator to a “remote Native community, bound by reserve laws in the forgotten North of Ontario,” to encounter a “proud Nation deeply impoverished in 3rd world conditions bound by Treaty laws signed by their non-English speaking ancestors.”¹¹ The repetition of the figure of oppressive boundedness in this publicity renders explicit what the film leaves the spectator to compute: that reforming the culture of parenting and child-rearing will be a process conjoined with the necessary liberation of the community from cycles of dependency, out of the sphere of binding reserve laws and the paternalistic state, into the sphere of autonomy and presumably the associated private property regime. The conflation of Indian Act regulations with rights flowing from treaty that is implied in the strange slippage between “reserve laws” and “Treaty laws” at least risks suggesting that the revitalization of the family as private sphere is contingent upon the implementation of the program of private property that the Conservative government has in store for First Nations on reserve.¹²

Melodrama’s production of a sense of moral necessity through affectively experienced truths and its peculiar play of compassion for and distancing from objectified others gives it a special prominence in public discourses that attempt to reckon with a colonial past in a neoliberalizing context. The genre’s heightened emotionalism and sentimentality, its tropes of the pure villainy of institutionalized power on the one hand and innocent victims experiencing extreme emotional duress on the other, function to make the purported minimalism of the state in the face of the restored family and the unleashed powers of individuals feel morally right. Melodramatic participation does not just reaffirm the naïveté of settlers, it also delivers a more particular form of reassurance stemming from the sense of one’s relative protection in a risky world: wanting this protection for others might feel progressive, yet it may also be a way of wishing for them to join in with one’s own pursuit of security and protection through the promise of the family.

11 See the website for the film, www.thirdworldcanada.ca/about.

12 See the Parliamentary Relations section of the AFN website for information on legislation in the pipelines: www.afn.ca/index.php/en/policy-areas/parliamentary-relations.

As part of the developmental future that *Third World Canada* imagines for Kitchenuunmaykoosib Inninuwug, the film endorses a specific solution to the problems of the Aboriginal family, and that is child and family services devolved to culturally specific agencies, run by Aboriginal people in their own communities. Toward the end of the film, we learn that the Atkinson Charitable Foundation has given a prestigious award to the Tikanagan child protection and service agency serving First Nations communities in northern Ontario. Given the film's assumption of the transparency of its medico-moral framing of the Aboriginal family, it is not surprising that it imagines devolved child welfare as a straightforward resolution. But once again the feeling of moral certainty necessitates a bracketing of the broader context of neoliberal governance. It would be much harder to ask in what ways the devolution of accountability for welfare service delivery might in fact function as a poisonous gift, introducing new measures of surveillance along with the newly magnified terrain of responsibility. As Fiona MacDonald cautions in her examination of the delegation of child welfare services in Manitoba to First Nations agencies under the banner of "returning" responsibility to its "rightful, 'natural' place," that is to say "the private jurisdiction of First Nations groups," the process can entail a state manipulation of progressive discourses in order to remove issues from the public, political domain, "reregulate" through more indirect means, and produce a fragmentation and "individualization" of some of the most difficult caseloads (185).

A comparable illustration of the contradictions of neoliberal autonomy can be drawn from the social policy initiative in Aotearoa New Zealand called *Whanau Ora*, or "family well-being" (*whanau*, the Maori word for family, means an extended sense of family that embraces a wider kin network). The social policy initiative reflects the common ground that has been found between Maori Party demands for tribal recognition and control and the governing National Party's framing of the continued devolution of state responsibility for health, welfare, and educational services in terms of "consumer sovereignty" or rights to choice, autonomy, and treatment on the basis of cultural preference (Belgrave np).¹³ Although

13 As Michael Belgrave has observed, the trend to contract out to tribal organizations responsibility for improving Maori social conditions has been accompanied by the gradual marginalization of broader rights claims referencing the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. During the period of neoliberal restructuring under Labour and National governments since the 1980s, "the gulf between Maori poverty and non-Maori affluence" has widened; responses to demands for tribal recognition, Belgrave argues, have "diverted attention" from this "uncomfortable" fact (np).

the *Whanau Ora* policy is framed in terms of postcolonial restoration of *whanau* functioning—locating and unleashing the resources within extended Maori families—there is a process of “neoliberalization” going on here: the social service delivery program actually lays out a prescribed set of goals for families, relating quite blatantly to adaptation to dominant norms of work and family life, that include “living healthy lifestyles; participating fully in society; [... becoming] economically secure and successfully involved in wealth creation; and [operating in ways that are] cohesive, resilient and nurturing.”¹⁴ The pursuit of economic security through involvement in wealth creation is not always likely to permit living healthily and nurturally, but that contradiction is mediated through the moral pedagogy of the program, which makes sacrifices “for the sake of *whanau*” part of an explicit scheme of expectations. Participation in paid work at any cost as a way of attaining freedom from dependency on state benefits is one of the key ways in which parents are supposed to model “confidence, aspiration, and motivation” for their children. Leaning on this theme of sacrifice, *Whanau Ora* participates in the neoliberal logic that situates “the promise of familial love,” and especially the promise of a better future for the children, as the “utopian horizon” of present struggles to get by (Berlant, “Nearly Utopian” 284).

Whanau Ora is being promoted as a culturally anchored approach to the provision of services and opportunities, but, at the same time, the Key government has insisted that it is universally applicable, that it is for everyone in need across New Zealand. This claim suggests a strategy of valorizing and mobilizing for wider application an ostensibly Maori understanding of family responsibility (as well as a need to placate National party supporters suspicious of special treatment for Maori). Indigenous exemplarity in neoliberal settler states often takes a negative form, but it is crucial to observe that the flexibility and adaptability of neoliberal discourse also allows this exemplarity to assume a positive form, when convenient, clearly requiring approaches to resistance to be equally adaptable. Thus, the lessons we can draw from the *Whanau Ora* policy, when set against what I have said about Canada and Australia, are about: one, the current seizing on Indigenous families for forms of negative or positive exemplarity in neoliberalizing settler states, where the postdemocratic thematization of the problem of how to survive in a risky world fixes repeatedly on the moral necessities that can be conveyed through repre-

14 See the “fact sheet” on the *Whanau Ora* website, www.tpk.govt.nz/en/in-print/our-publications/fact-sheets/whanau-ora-factsheet/page/1.

sentations of Indigenous families; two, taking a comparative perspective as I have done here allows one to see, additionally, how positive exemplarity might be turned into stigmatization at the flick of a switch—the cultural difference of the extended Maori family that is officially recognized in the *Whanau Ora* program is vulnerable to the kind of pathologization of the Indigenous family that was seen in the representations justifying the Northern Territories Intervention in Australia; and three, there is also a broader lesson about the flexibility of neoliberalism in relation to different histories of Indigenous policy: in Aotearoa New Zealand, perhaps because of a recent history in which Maori were able to position themselves as the bearers of *rights* guaranteed in a de facto constitution, what carries the edge of the new and untried right now is the recognition of Maori cultural difference in a program like *Whanau Ora*. In Canada and Australia, because of the historical positioning of Indigenous peoples as bureaucratically administered populations with needs rather than rights, neoliberalism is more apt to be retained by the state (as it has been by the Howard and Harper governments) in terms of mainstreaming, especially accessing the property rights enjoyed by non-Indigenous people.

The lessons are multiple, but what runs through them is a caution about reconciliatory projects in the context of neoliberal settler states and how they need to be scrutinized from a perspective cognizant of the adaptive, recuperative, flexible powers of neoliberalism and the genres of discourse which render those powers effective. My discussion of the film, *Third World Canada*, has attempted to suggest that the socio-political imaginary of neoliberalism has already served to deepen the “unknowing” of settlers. The genres of statistics and melodrama are instrumental to this deepening insofar as they produce interanimating forms of objectification. Statistical knowledge of population, the knowledge form that underpins administrative projects most explicitly, produces the wide aggregate view, the effect of seeing all, instantaneously and reliably, confirming assumptions about the facticity of population and its natural segments. The plots, positions, and sensibility of melodrama produce the effect of the zoom in, the extreme close-up that connects and reaffirms as the most authentic form of being, our private, intimate selves. Statistics assure us that our compassionate feelings are reliable; the feelings stirred by a boy re-enacting his father’s suicide lend moral certainty to dry statistics. Together, these modes of apprehension do the work of converting potentially political questions into matters of improved policing, offering too-easy passages from spectatorial feeling better to the imagined betterment of others.

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Accountability

Melodrama and statistics, as Berlant has argued, may be seen as dialectically related moral and rational epistemologies. As she argues, in the history of moments of heightened state-orchestrated emotionalism in the U.S. these epistemologies are sometimes fused in a “paradoxical political style” and at other times explicitly pitted against one another (“Epistemology” 63). Melodramatic affect can coexist with “the message of state rationality or coolness,” but it also can be summoned suddenly, especially when some evasive source of counter-hegemonic dissent is being searched out. In these latter moments, it is as if the usual modes of state knowing (rational enumeration, collection of census data) were suddenly insufficient and only a “hyperbolic state emotionalism” would suffice to identify and root out threats (63, 65). In such moments, Berlant writes, U.S. citizens have been advised to “leave the knowing to the state,” with the explanation that “the state acts rationally when it can but assumes the moral and political right to trump counterarguments with emotional clarities and law with enigmatic policies in order to defeat the ... spreading anti-American forces” (68).

This sort of advice will sound familiar to those who paid attention to the way Canada’s Justice Minister’s declaration that his regime does not govern “on the basis of the latest statistics” continued: the sentence finished with the assurance that, instead, his government is “governing on the basis of what’s right to better protect victims and law-abiding Canadians” (Nicholson quoted in Chase, np). The declaration might be seen as an instance of the rhetorical pitting of state emotionalism against quantitatively supported reasoning, one that in its reference to responsibility to “victims” in particular calls upon melodrama’s means of generating “visceral excess in the spectator” (Singer 40). It is useful to recall that as classical melodrama was transferred from the stage to the screen, what remained constant was the triggering of a specific “agitation that comes from observing [the] extreme moral injustice” of “vicious power victimizing the weak” (40). If we are at that point in Berlant’s dialectic of moral and rational epistemologies where the melodramatic is performatively summoned against the dryness of facts and numbers, then it is statistics that is embodying vicious power in the Justice Minister’s formulation.

In 2010 the Harper government canceled Canada’s long-form census, which had been in place for forty years and had become “foundational to the saturation of public discourses with quantitative knowledges” (Denny np). What is required to villainize detailed census-making and the pro-

duction of related forms of quantitative knowledge about the conditions of the Canadian population, knowledges which are joined together by their enabling of comparisons through mathematical equivalency, is the orchestration of a turn in the political public sphere against certain kinds of knowledge producers, one that sets them against the victims of melodramatic stories. Marian Sawer and David Laycock identify the particular rhetoric employed by neoliberalizing governments and their allies in Canada and Australia in the last several decades as a “market populism” that pivots on resentment of “welfare state elites” and special interests whose exaggerated and self-interested social critiques and equity projects incur public spending and thus produce big government at the expense of taxpayers and their common sense (1). There is an additional element to this resentment that turns on the perceived monopoly by specialized knowledge-bearing elites on claims to being concerned with “moral issues”: “non-elected judges,” in this argument, sit in moral judgment of those talk-radio-listening taxpayers who wind up having to pay liberal knowledge-producing elites for the privilege of being disrespected (6, 14). The disrespected have their own version of morality and the melodramatic turn announces that this version’s time has come. Sawer and Laycock’s analysis of the rhetorical shifts behind this anti-elitism designed to make popular sense of rising inequality would go some way to explaining the strategy behind the Canadian prime minister’s recent quip that “Now is not the time to commit sociology” (Siekierski), where sociology stands for any form of critical research documenting systemic injustices, research that the imagined audience for the quip would decode as expensive obfuscation of the realities of hard-working taxpayers and families victimized by cumbersome bureaucracies and their knowledge apparatuses.

In light of the cancelation of the long-form census and the various legal challenges underway to the cancelation’s undermining of reliable population data collection, it is important to recall that the practice of census-making, in Canada and elsewhere, first had to come to be understood as an assertion of “the state’s sovereign authority to configure and represent social relations,” although not an uncontested one (Curtis 5). In Canada, historically, many First Nations communities refused to participate in the national census, forbidding enumerators to enter reserves, for the very reason that being counted by the state had proven to be a means of becoming governable according to settler concepts and agendas. With each census, however, more and more groups (ethnic, religious, more recently Indigenous) became persuaded of the value of publicly available census data, and of systematic social observation displaying regularities

and disparities more generally, insofar as it could be mobilized to make evidence-based claims.¹⁵ Statistical knowledge may enable “hegemonic groups and social classes to impose identifications on others against their struggles of resistance”; however, statistical knowledge may be mobilized “in pursuit of projects not anticipated” by those who generate these models in the first place (Curtis 311, 310; also Denny 2011). An instance of such a mobilization was the creation, in 2006, of the First Nations Statistical Institute, a Crown corporation that would advise the federal government and co-operate with Statistics Canada while ensuring that it was responsive to the needs of First Nations. The creation of the FNSI, as well as a myriad of other statistics-related initiatives pertaining to and often driven by First Nations from the late 1990s, serves as a reminder of the ways in which statistical knowledge can be mobilized by various actors. Some of these actors may wager, based on a reading of what kind of knowledge enjoys legitimacy in a particular context, that collaborating in the process through which “population” becomes the fixed and naturalized substitute for a shifting field of political actors (what Rancière calls “the people”¹⁶) in negotiations with the state, is a tactic worth the risk.

The recent turn of events in Canada, in which the Conservative government has withdrawn funding from a host of data-gathering projects including the FNSI,¹⁷ may signal that this government has come to recognize the ways in which population data can be mobilized against the state and used to make uncomfortable demonstrations of inequities. In Canada in the foreseeable future it is likely to become more and more difficult for non-state actors to marshal statistics on disparities in living conditions and health outcomes, perhaps especially when those who would marshal the statistics are identified with the population segments that might have been targeted for ameliorative interventions on the basis of statistical indicators in an earlier model of government. Likely the means of reproducing post-

15 See the Statistics Canada report, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006*, especially “Comparing Aboriginal census data over time,” 9, at www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hlt-fst/pd-pl/Notes-eng.cfm. On the decrease in incompletely enumerated reserves between 2006 and 2011 censuses, see www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hlt-fst/pd-pl/Notes-eng.cfm.

16 See chapter 1 of *Disagreement*, “The Beginning of Politics,” where Rancière draws on Aristotle’s *Politics* and *The Nichomachean Ethics* to find a ground for recalling a non-utilitarian conception of democratic activity. It is important to note that there is no claim being made, either in Rancière himself or in the way I am deploying him, for these classical sources as the essential political tradition.

17 See Steven Loft (2012), who lists the Aboriginal organizations that have had their funding cut or canceled recently.

democracy in Canada will be something other than the process through which the state and civil society partners co-operate around biopolitical problematizations of deficits in well-being in target populations, the means that Rancière seems to have in mind in his account of the “reigning idyll” of depoliticized consensus (102). It seems more likely that that a “moral-affective tendency” bolstered by an authoritarianism linked to a highly specialized knowledge of the economy will work to simplify population parts, perhaps along the lines of viable and unviable communities, with the latter said to be no longer supportable by taxpayer dollars secured through special interest forms of legitimation.

As Elizabeth Povinelli observes, in neoliberalizing contexts those vulnerable to being labeled remote tend to be left to bear a disproportionate exposure to the precariousness of life organized around market imperatives. Remoteness is a deictic indicator of geographical distance from the place where it makes sense to expect to be able to live, and in settler-state contexts it can also function as a measurement of distance from specific norms of modernity or development, registering in the dual keys of free market economics and, I might add, developmental psychology. As I have argued, Indigenous families in these contexts are vulnerable to being made to serve as spectacles of the failings constructed as such (as behavioural problems, parenting deficits) in relation to the specifically neoliberal, normative project of raising competitive and self-reliant persons, persons on their way to a future equality. Rendering these spectacles, even when it is with the best of intentions, for example with the intention of exposing the pain of others and educating viewers into caring about it, risks offering what Povinelli calls contemporary “justifications for belonging and abandonment” (19). Caring about the pain of others can be indistinguishable from abandonment in its effects, if that caring is navigated through a route that ultimately holds these remote others accountable, indeed holds them to account for their suffering. Caring and abandonment are conflated when the moment of compassionate feeling resolves itself in the hope that these others will one day attain, through the exercise of properly private means which have nothing to do with us, our own standards of normalcy, thereby seeing their privacy restored.

In December 2012, Chief Theresa Spence of the Attawapiskat First Nation began her hunger strike near Parliament Hill in Ottawa, demanding a meeting with the prime minister and the Governor General to discuss Canada’s treaty relationship with First Nations, a symbolic action designed to recall that, as she put it, “a treaty is a document upon which we were supposed to build our future together and trust and honour each other”

The displacement of politics into either a demand for financial transparency or melodramatic speculation of suffering is precisely what another recent documentary, this one about Attawapiskat, refuses to engender.

(Smith). In January 2013, in the midst of rising attention to the hunger strike and the growing grassroots mobilization under the banner of Idle No More against federal legislation seen to violate treaty rights and the duty to consult First Nations (imposing, among other things, processes facilitating the surrender of reserve lands for private development) the federal government released a critical audit of the Attawapiskat First Nation's finances (Stueck). The timing of its release (the audit had been completed four months beforehand) appeared to suggest a strategy designed to counter and redirect the mounting public attention to questions of the government's political accountability to First Nations (Stueck). Through such a strategy of redirection, the critical attention roused by Chief Spence's symbolic action might be turned back on the Chief herself, in the form of a suspicion of that narrower form of unaccountability, non-transparent spending and bookkeeping practices.

Demanding transparency of finances from First Nations is one of the key manoeuvres through which the majority Conservative government, claiming to modernize Aboriginal governance, is unburdening itself of responsibilities: controlling the meanings of accountability to mean transparent accounting practices is one way of warding off demands for democratically and legally accountable government. Thus, in March 2013, the Financial Accountability of First Nations Act became law. The Act requires disclosure of audited financial statements and salaries and expenses which are already, in many cases, reported to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development but which now, according to the Act, must be posted on the internet for ten years (Vongdouangchanh). The response of the Assembly of First Nations to the passage of the bill, which was to insist that the government failed to "consult First Nations on the bill to begin with, but also did not listen to First Nations testimony during the committee process," demonstrates how a competing understanding of accountability, as the result produced by a genuinely consultative, democratically answerable process, is at stake in such manoeuvres (Vongdouangchanh). Performing the demand for transparency understood specifically as spending and bookkeeping practices that can withstand popular scrutiny within a context of suspicion becomes a way of nudging this alternate understanding of transparency and accountability into the background.

The displacement of politics into either a demand for financial transparency or melodramatic speculation of suffering is precisely what another recent documentary, this one about Attawapiskat, refuses to engender. Alanis Obomsawin's *The People of the Kattawapiskak River* was released

in early 2013 in the midst of Chief Theresa Spence's hunger strike, Idle No More demonstrations, and the response to this mobilization in the form of the media circulation of suspicions of financial mismanagement on the part of the Attawapiskak band council. The film insists on a narrative that is poised against the self-evidence of transparent bookkeeping and against the melodramatic evidence of suffering which, as I have argued, pivots on the genre's characteristic demotion of the speaking subject in favour of expressive gesture and emotional display. This is a narrative of treaty violation, private-sector wealth extraction from natural resources without returns for the community, systematic underfunding of infrastructure, and infantilizing market-populist media representations, together creating the conditions of so-called unviability. It is a narrative conveyed through the testimony of Attawapiskat residents who are framed as articulate and competent occupants of rotting, unheated, fire-damaged homes which they show to the documentarian, as they visibly care for their children without being reduced to subject positions defined by these parent-child relations. The film's reconfiguration of the politically perceptible is achieved through a problematization of the "notion of indexicality" (Nanibush) which, as I have argued, joins the brave seeing staged by the camera in *Third World Canada*, the violence of journalistic fact, and Edward Curtis's nineteenth-century photographs and structurally precludes the Indigenous spectator or only makes her, like Marie Clements's Angeline, cold and tired. *The People of the Kattawapiskak River* cites and reframes specific media representations through the verbal testimony of residents, thematizing representation itself as an arena of conflict and struggle. Perhaps most importantly, the film concludes with an epilogue that makes the spectator a witness to a scene of legal contestation, as the camera moves into Federal Court to observe a judicial review of the federal government's imposition of third party financial management on Attawapiskat, following Spence's declaration of a housing emergency. The August 2012 decision in this case, sparsely covered by the mainstream media, was that the government's action was indeed illegal.

Obomsawin's film, then, stages an alternative to the approving spectatorship of Indigenous neoliberalism—one of the remotely operated means of producing postdemocratic consensus in settler states today. Instead of invoking the settler state (in its bypassed welfare state guise) as the source of unfreedom and of encroachment on the natural responsibilities of First Nations families and communities, Obomsawin's documentary makes the state visible as the purported representative institution that can be held democratically and legally accountable by speaking, political sub-

jects. I will end with one more example of political activity that seems to make its intervention in full cognizance of the ideological and discursive context I have been describing: even though it has to do with Indigenous children, it takes a stand in the name of “juridical validity” rather than “moral transparency,” to borrow Berlant’s terms (“Epistemology” 54), and it reconfigures spectatorship as a practice of witnessing that binds the observer to a responsibility to argue publicly about what is wrong with the existing, common-sense understanding of equality as the end point of a natural developmental trajectory that is only disturbed by parenting deficits and their corollary, the nanny state.

In 2007 the Assembly of First Nations and the First Nations Family and Caring Society of Canada together filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission against the department now called Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, aiming to hold the federal government accountable for discrimination according to the Canadian Human Rights Act.¹⁸ The still-active complaint alleges that “glaring inequality” is produced by “inequitable levels of child welfare funding provided to First Nations children and families on reserve,” compared to the funding “otherwise available to Canadian children” (Joseph and Blackstock 3). Marshaling population statistics on numbers of children placed in provincial child welfare care, the complaint frames a demand for equitably funded child and family services, especially the “statutory range of services” known as “least disruptive services,” as a human right (1). The complaint points to “substantial evidence spanning over ten years” of discriminatory funding for on-reserve child and family services and argues that this lower funding drives the “over-representation of Status First Nations children” in provincial child welfare care, that is to say, children removed from their families (1). Population statistics are marshaled in support of the complaint,¹⁹

18 The discrimination, the complaint charges, is on the grounds of the “race and national ethnic origin [of on-reserve Status children] as compared to non-Aboriginal children” (3). It thus rejects the state’s rationale for unequal funding, based on the different zoning of First Nations children on reserve that puts the services relating to them under federal rather than provincial jurisdiction. The complaint interprets this zoning for differential funding as an expression of systemic discrimination. The full text of the 2007 complaint, as well as the texts of decisions, appeals, and news releases related to it since that time, are posted on the “I am a witness” section of the FNCFCS website, www.fncfcsociety.ca/i-am-witness-timeline-and-documents.

19 Specifically, INAC statistics on Aboriginal children in provincial child welfare care, the 2000 *Joint National Policy Review on First Child and Family Services* by the AFN and INAC, and a separate three-volume FNCFCS study, the *Wen:de* reports.

but the text of the complaint also critiques the authoritative diagnostic knowledge that is often used to interpret such statistics. It argues that the “mass removals of First Nations children from their communities” occurs because diagnoses of parental neglect are repeatedly made on the basis of signs (“poverty, substance abuse, poor housing”) that should be read as indications of some of the effects of radically under-resourced local family support services (2). The demand for equitably funded services for First Nations children in spaces zoned for federal funding, framed as a *right*, noticeably refuses to engage on the terms of such problematizations as Indigenous dependency or lack of development. Rather, it transcodes signs of neglect as symptoms of systemic injustice. The Indigenous child is not represented as an object for compassion but rather as a rights claimant, embedded in the family but as a representative of its right to access least disruptive support services locally.

Clearly, there is a wager here. There is a wager on the extent to which population statistics might be used to support a “breaking and entering” into “police logic” by a very different “egalitarian logic” (Rancière 31). In other words, statistics demonstrating disproportionate levels of First Nations child removal following diagnoses of neglect are being used to make a demand for equal resourcing, a demand that implies the children and their families are also something beyond their statistical categorization. It is a wager on the institutions of liberal democracy and, at least implicitly, on the discourse of citizenship itself, since the sharp edge of the human rights complaint is the demonstration of inequities between First Nations children and “other children in Canada” (3). But in this wager, citizenship is, importantly, not a static property of individuals; rather, it “occurs” as a disruptive principle (Rancière 31), by means of a strategic occupation of space, a strategic identification with “other children in Canada” that serves to point up the illegitimacy of a supposedly representative democracy based on a conception of the people that would exclude children on reserve. This is not in the service of non-consultative attempts to dismantle the Indian Act; instead, it is a deployment of democracy, an appeal to, and an insistence upon, the fundamental equality that should be the starting point, not the imagined future end point, of political deliberations. The complaint is launched from the place of a “heterogenous assumption” (heterogenous to the existing allocation of zones and identities for the purposes of administration), the assumption that First Nations children should count among those who might hold representative institutions accountable (30). The complaint says that the matter of different policy jurisdictions for the sake of administration will

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rights’ claimant.

not do as an excuse for the systematic perpetuation of inequity, and it argues that this inequity, interpreted as signs of neglect, regularly serves as the grounds for removing First Nations children.

The wager on rights and the principle of equality as a starting point is risky indeed in a context where considerable resources are being put behind the circulation of the commonsense argument that the time for the “rights-based activist approach” to improving the lives of Indigenous peoples has passed, that this approach has been superseded by a “new practical, results-oriented approach” based on “incremental co-operation” and “strategies to engage indigenous peoples in the economy in ways of their choosing” (Coates). In order to attenuate the risk that the AFN/FNFCs human rights complaint will be made to appear outdated in such a practical environment, the complaint is accompanied by a campaign to configure a public sphere around concepts of right and legal obligation and the sense of a space shared by treaty peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who together practice a vigilant witnessing. The “I am a witness” campaign conducted on the FNFCs website asks people to sign on as witnesses to the proceedings around the complaint and explains that “By being a witness you are making a commitment to follow the case” as well to “alert your local media sources.”²⁰ Witnesses are urged to wear a button announcing their self-identification as vigilant observers, to be counted as one of the names displayed publicly as witnesses on the site, to attend court hearings, to write local members of parliament—all in a collective effort to make visible a contest over the right to equality as a starting point, a confrontation of egalitarian and police logics. There is a responsibility framed here that is quite different from inhabiting the position of a compassionate spectator reconfirmed in her inhabitation of a protected private space that she hopes Indigenous individuals will one day be able to occupy themselves, once—as the former Aboriginal Affairs Minister put it, marking “National Aboriginal Day” in June 2012—an “ambitious legislative agenda and significant investments will [have] help[ed] enable First Nations communities to overcome the obstacles of poverty and dependency” (Duncan 35).

It may seem like a too-fine distinction I am making, between *Third World Canada’s* invitation to applaud the Tikinagan agency and witnessing this human rights complaint about discriminatory funding of the First Nations child and family service agencies operating on reserves. But what makes one a case of feeling concerned about the well-being of a target population and the other political activity is that the film offers an oppor-

20 See www.fncaresociety.com/fnwitness/about-being-a-witness.

tunity to feel good about ourselves for being moved by the spectacle of the children while castigating the paternalistic colonial state, while actively witnessing the AFN/FNFCS complaint mobilizes the commonality of the people supposedly represented democratically in liberal-democratic institutions to say that the representation is incomplete. There is a part not getting its fair share, and since witnesses are involved in, are in fact are party to, that distribution of shares, they are implicated in this situation of inequity.

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