

*The Nomad and the Postcolonial Limits
of A Thousand Plateaus*

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When Chris McCandless' body was found in a Volkswagen just outside Denali National Park, his venture into the Alaskan wilderness would resonate with variance: a principled nomadism; the story of a White, university-educated, upper-class Virginian, and the "deadly allure of proving one's masculinity in the age of late capitalist conveniences"; both an "eco-hero out of place" and a modern-day Thoreau (Hogan, Pursel 78). McCandless' significations were dynamic and predictable. As Craig Medred profiled, McCandless was an archetypical drifter, one to purchase a gun, hunt, and fish on Alaskan parkland without a license, to traverse borders and

boundaries with an ease only granted to a particular subset of wanderers. The colonial imperialist conjuring of Medred's assertions—"that a young man like McCandless should pack up and start hitchhiking north to The Last Frontier [was] an all-too-familiar story"—would be affirmed in the postcolonial dialogue. As Lisa Korteweg and Jan Oakley argue, "McCandless was the ideal Western pure Euro-American eco-hero...well-read but imperviously ignorant of Indigenous knowledge" (136). In the spirit of narrative economies, however, dissenting critique situating McCandless within a colonial frontier-genealogy would be subsumed by Krakauer's 1996 best-selling account. *Into the Wild* would both utilize the frontier's tropes and mythically emancipate them from their power-laden history, consecrating, Medred would argue, McCandless' transition from "poacher to saint" in the settler imagination. In this more hospitable venue, McCandless' nomadism would be elevated beyond its particular bearings on parkland and positionality and rather occupy the unbounded journey from the West to the North, whose elusive lines of flight would cohere with his evasive signification: "Immediately after graduating," Krakauer prefaces, "McCandless' dropped out of sight. He changed his name, gave the savings of his account to charity...abandoned his car...burned all the cash in his wallet. And then he invented a new life for himself, taking up residence at the ragged margin of our society, wandering across North America in search of raw, transcendent experience" (13). Introduced to the

canon of vagabonds and wanderers, *Into the Wild* would become syllabi material across the U.S., spurring annual pilgrimages to the abandoned Volkswagen, some themselves proving fatal. If McCandless' story was all too familiar to some, the resonances of *Into the Wild* would affirm the merits of familiarity, assuring that nomadic frontier stories bear a genealogical lineage of captivation and signification in the contemporary settler imagination.

The significations of the settler-nomad, their wayward cartographies of the wild, affinity for open “uninhabited” land, and mythologized mediation of the frontier’s Beauty and Sublime, provokes, contests, and irritates the spatial-temporal assertions of “the postcolonial.” In an era whose prefix threatens to subsume its root (and is, hence, fraught with its own signifying dilemmas), McCandless’ mythical assemblages animate what Jodi Byrd has identified as the duplicity of “postcoloniality” itself, as an epochal title concealing the unexamined registers of the “late colonial” quotidian¹. McCandless’ simultaneous harkening the colonial frontier and animation

1 Jodi Byrd’s insights into the dynamic negotiations between poststructural and postcolonial theory are captured in her explorations of the quotidian aesthetics of late-colonialism, through the frontier-tropes of the Bioshock videogame (“Beast of America”). Moreover, Byrd’s *The Transit of Empire*, expands on the “quandries that poststructuralism has left us: the traces of indigenous savagery and ‘Indianness’ that stand a priori prior to theorizations of origin, history, freedom, constraint, and difference” (xvii).

of nomadic, anti-capitalist, environmentalist mythology, this paper contends, invokes political ambiguities and interpretive dilemmas symptomatic and descriptive of our “postcolonial” present. Indeed, if myth, as Roland Barthes suggests, is a form of naturalized and depoliticized storytelling, McCandless not only invokes how colonial significations manifest in what is ostensibly “post” colonial cultural production, but moreover, how such significations provoke the limits of postcolonialism’s traditionally structuralist interpretive modes of contending with them. Indeed, while McCandless’ trek to the Alaskan frontier signified, for some, a well-tread assemblage of colonial nostalgia, the pilgrims who followed invoke acts of re-encoding such assemblages into the cultural and geographic landscape, simultaneously. This relationship of mythologized mapping and tracing, muddling the bounds of “colonial” and “postcolonial” (or, perhaps, anticolonial), might generatively elaborate on what Sara Ahmed has deemed the postcolonial’s perpetual sense of “failed historicism” and ability to contend with it; or, alternatively, as Jodi Byrd observes, post-colonialism’s interpretive dilemmas amidst the “quandaries that poststructuralism has left us” (xvii). The mythologized settler nomad’s signifying intimacy with the colonial frontier bears opportunity to situate the nomad in their political and historical significance; to think beyond the nomad’s generally iconized celebration in poststructuralist thought, and towards, rather, their geopolitical contingencies. Such a turn, this paper posits, might invite new, aesthetically and politically oriented modes of contending with the nomad’s significations, today.

Indeed, if McCandless' incites anticolonial concern, he is, at least ostensibly, compatible with post-structuralist critique. "Always moving, never stopping," Deleuze and Guattari's un-stillable nomad in *A Thousand Plateaus* adopts unyielding mobility in the pursuit of freedom, or, rather, emancipation from the "imperialisms of the signifying regime" (23). As Deleuze and Guattari assert, it is a "nomadism rather than sedentarity," and specifically, the nomad's exploratory endeavor to "map instead of trac[e]," that renders the nomad antithetical to colonized semiotics and a motif of radical possibility (24)². Yet, if the nomad signifies unfettered possibility in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the nomad's unencumbered cartographies illicit a very different set of postcolonial significations. As Julie Wuthnow argues, in its endeavor to overtake the Rooted Reasonable Man, the Deleuzian nomad deploys the very imperialisms it seeks to destabilize: Semiotic deterritorializations in postcolonial settings, Wuthnow reminds, are notably proximate to the very histories of dispossession they seek to ameliorate. As Byrd asserts, amidst colonial histories and the fraught contemporary language of 'reconciliation,' "indigenous nationalisms

2 While nomadology is explicitly rendered as a mobility and experimentation central to the assemblages of 'Rhizome', nomadism is a critical feature of *A Thousand Plateaus* more broadly. In "The Geology of Morals" 'nomadic singularities' are equated to 'free intensities' (4), central to the restructuring and 'deterritorializing' theoretical project of "differential relations" (5): "Nomadic waves or flows of deterritorialization go from the central layer to the periphery, then from the new center to the new periphery, falling back to the old center and launching forth to the new" (53).

[continue] to depend on signifying regimes, normativities, and assertions of sovereignty grounded in the ability to include/exclude” (“Beast of America” 2018 , 16). Implicated in colonial cartographies and heralded within post-structural theories of relationality, the nomad thus enacts the stakes of iconized, semiotic freedom on land where economies of dispossession are themselves premised on colonial systems of “semiotic freedom” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987,15): the movements between “discovery” and conquest, decolonization and metaphor, emptiness and openness, that both condition and obscure the “postcolonial” genealogy and its constituents' collective sense of it.

The endeavor to situate the nomad, hence, necessitates the question of History and its registration. “Written from a sedentary point of view,” Deleuze and Guattari assert, history has “never comprehended nomadism”—a genealogical elision that renders the nomad generatively antithetical to History’s hierarchal, disciplined, and colonized regimes. “Nomadology” they deduce, “is the opposite of history” (23). And yet, colonial history is a testament to colonialism’s nomadic, rhizomatic capacities; that is, the ways in which the frontier has been pursued by those errantly mobile and exploratory. As Mary Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes* asserts, such mobilities have long engendered imperialist proceedings: “the signifying practices of travel writing encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire,” indicating how planetary and globally-minded conscience have dramatized the nomadic imagination and how the no-

madic imagination has dramatized empire itself (4). The characteristic indecipherability of the nomadic signifier in *A Thousand Plateaus*—a “fuzzy aggregate”³ (1987, 380)—too evokes imperialism’s racial modalities, as Whiteness, Ahmed argues, has always gained its currency and traction “by going unnoticed” (149). Through such a frame, the nomad’s semiotic “deterritorializations,” equated in *A Thousand Plateaus* with generative “differential relations,” evoke the geopolitical deterritorializations endemic to colonial histories of dispossession (5). To consider the positional stakes of the nomad in the postcolonial, it might be inferred, is thus to contend with the colonial-imperialist traces of wayward mobility, and “the long line of continuity between the past and the present that has not been disrupted despite the fact that the stories we tell may or may not acknowledge that continuity” (Byrd 2011, xiv).

It is important to note, however, that the object here is not to trouble nomadology through a causal relation to colonialism itself. Nor is it in the interest of this paper

3 As described in Deleuze and Guattari’s comparative discussion of the ‘nomad’ and the ‘migrant’: Whereas “the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain” the nomad “does not fulfill the function of the sedentary road” and thus, mobilizes and performs a “space without borders or enclosure” (380). Moving beyond the confines, maps and impositions of the previously enscribed, “the nomos is the consistency of a fuzzy aggregate: it is in this sense that it stands in oppositions to the laws of the polls” (380).

to disavow its affordances towards extensive networks of meaning. Indebted to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Braidotti's 'Nomad Theory' is explicit in its ethical imperatives: "nomadic connection offers at least the possibility of an ethical relation of an opening out toward an empowering connection to others" (3). Braidotti's use of nomad theory is mobilized in the interests of the European migrant crisis, "reconfigur[ing of] national identities" and "decentering Europe" (2) in solidarity with "exiles and refugees...uprooted and forced into dis-identifying with familiar identities" (2006, "Becoming Minoritarian of Europe " 9). Indeed, amidst imposed global mobilities, reconceptualizing bordered nationhood, or "becoming nomadic" anticipates positive transformation: "what is lost in the sense of fixed origins is gained in an increased desire to belong, in a multiple rhizomic manner that overcomes the bilateralism of binary identity formations" (9). Braidotti's 'decentering of Europe' evokes what Mimi Sheller describes as the "unjust power relations of uneven (im)mobilities" comprising the globalizing world, and what May Joseph identifies as its production of nomadic "inauthentic citizens" (3). Collectively, these voices articulate the obverse side of this paper's investment in nomadism's imperial registers, identifying nomadism's imposed states emerging through colonial-imperial expansion, dispossession, and the regulation of borders.

Simultaneously, while emphasizing imposed nomadic conditions, and hence, elucidating nomadism as a

generative frame for minoritarian politics, these voices importantly assert nomadism as a political spectrum. As Sheller writes, “modernity, progress, and privileged forms of white masculinity have long been associated in Western thought with mobility, while immobility, stasis, and sedentary states—or ‘bad,’ irrational mobilities such as a nomadism, wandering, or vagabondage—have been attributed to ‘backward’ societies or ‘primitive’ peoples” (41). Sheller’s simultaneous observation that “fantasies such as the open road, the inviting frontier...the conquest of wilderness, or the thrill of acceleration” give rise to configurations of White desirability speaks to the nomadism’s polyvalence—as both a site of subjection and appropriation. Importantly, Sheller invites us to take seriously the positional aesthetics of movement alongside structural critiques of mobility. For whom nomadism is imposed, and for whom it is desirable, is a positional politics necessarily undergirding any attempt to deconstruct nomadism’s significance, today. As such, investment in the nomad’s imperialisms and their aesthetic constitution is not a deviation from investment in nomadism as a frame for exile and regulation, such as Sheller’s, but rather, continued inquiry into the ‘kinopolitical’ continuum of the “present realities that waver between ‘freedom and unfreedom’” (17). As Sheller notes, the question of “who can ‘appropriate’ the potential for mobility (including the right to stay still, as well as to move)” is invariably political: “The iconic masculine figures of the explorer, the entrepreneur, and the frontiers-

man require implicit ‘others’ who do not exercise autonomous self-directed mobility: women, children, slaves, servants, bonded workers, lazy poor, and wild natives” (41).

This paper follows the nomad (and particularly, the mythologized, settler nomad, today) in an attempt to render visible the kinopolitical dynamics of their “postcolonial” mythologization. In tracing the nomad’s lines of flight and colonial traces, this paper turns to spaces where the nomad’s colonial and poststructuralist ventures intersect: at the frontier, holding and writing the map, on the road, and in videogames. Each of these venues, in different ways, testify to the nomad’s duplicitous signification, as both a mediator of colonial-imperialist encroachment and spatialities, and a mapper of poststructuralist theories of relationality seeking to transcend and redefine those very spaces and legacies. More than evoking dualisms, therefore, the nomad’s trace testifies to the colonialist trace as, itself, a duplicitous line of flight, evoking the proximities between the colonial deterritorialization and post-structuralist stylistics of unencumbered expansion, proliferation, and movement. To follow the nomad, this paper contends, is to reckon with significance of the frontier—as a signifier of the unknown—and the perspectival, “postcolonial” contingencies between occupied and unoccupied, uninhabited and open, freedom and unfreedom, it incites.

While the frontier in *A Thousand Plateaus* is tied to nomadic mobility (“an ever-receding limit” of “shifting and displaced frontiers” [19]), the frontier, itself, bears a long, situated lineage within settler nomadic imagination. There were Jack Kerouac’s Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, whose lines of flight down the open road would encounter the settler frontier spaces of 1950s America: jazz bars in the US, and a limitless sense of possibility (“nothing behind me, everything ahead,” Sal narrates). There was Edward Abbey, whose *Desert Solitaire* would render the Moab Desert a place of such quiet emptiness it elided specificity: “I would rather go hungry in the West” Abbey wrote, “then flourish and flatten in the Siberian East ” (1968, 41)..” Abbey’s affinity for the “empty” and “uncultivated” would adopt new meaning in his anti-immigration stance—a relationship dynamically rendered by Rob Nixon, and anecdotally capturing the political aesthetics, here, at question. There was Richard Proneke’s *Alone in the Wilderness* (2011) and Grant Hadwin, who, in 1997, swam across the Yakoun River with a chainsaw and cut down the sacred Golden Spruce in the Haida Gwaii archipelago. Hadwin’s kayak, later found north of Prince Rupert, would leave many to suspect that his death was faked—that the man, known for his wilderness survival, remained out there in the wild (a narrative so saturated in myth and speculation that John Valiant’s “The Golden Bough,” *The Golden Spruce*, and the 2015 documentary, *Hadwin’s Judgement: Environmentalism, Obsession, Myth*, were destined to succeed). There was

Timothy Treadwell, the New York native who lived and died among the Alaskan grizzlies, immortalized in Warner Herzog's documentary, *Grizzly Man* (2005). Amidst this nexus of frontier mythos, McCandless' adventure marked an addition to a well-established genre of nomadic settler wilderness encounters. Under the directorial gaze of Sean Penn, the acting of Emile Hirsch, and the acoustics of Eddie Vedder, the 2007 film would subsume whatever political apprehensions lingered about McCandless' venture and scatter them into a collage of literary pastiche (passages from Thoreau and London), "leather-tramp" masculinity, and visual immersion into the Alaskan Sublime. At the height of such powers, we see Hirsch standing atop the abandoned Volkswagen, having just arrived at the Alaskan frontier. His ecstasy is palpable as he addresses the panorama: "Is there anybody here?" (Penn, 2008). We hear the reverberating silence, see the expansive mountain ranges—are sonically and visually cued that the question is a rhetorical one.

Given the scene's premising on aesthetic "emptiness" and openness, it is fitting that McCandless' frontier-venture would be divisive. The frontier is genealogically bound to its contestability and conflict—a site, for historians, where powers were spatialized and expanded, and for postcolonialists, wherein narratives of "discovery" and histories of conquest coincide. In the realm of semantics, "frontiers" simultaneous scrutinization for its signifying of colonial, celebratory connotations and de-

fense, for its colonial-historical descriptive utility (Klein), offers apt representation of its broader, “postcolonial” semiotic economies. As Tuck and Yang’s critique of decolonization’s metaphorical co-option asserts, the “empty signifier” marks a modality of colonial economies, performing language’s contingencies within a regime where contradictory decolonial desires can be equivocated through the “empty signifier...filled by any track towards liberation” (7). Tuck and Yang’s wariness evokes the proximate dynamics of no-madic signification, and its relationship to the settler state. As Leanne Simpson asserts, government-sanctioned decolonial gestures, from the TRC to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, present both a “mechanism for account for past injustices” and simultaneously perform how “Indigenous grief can be managed, exploited and used by the state to placate Indigenous resistance” (238). Simpson’s critique extends the bearings of the empty signifier beyond semantic linguistics to an apparatus of late-colonialism itself, echoing Glen Coulthard’s assertions into the recognition paradigm, as colonialism’s liberal pluralist valence, re-inscribing the settler-state through a “conciliatory set[s] of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize [Indigenous] accommodation” (6). These voices emphasize the stakes of the “postcolonial” signifier, as operative in an economy of de-signifying and re-signifying, wherein colonization occurs both through outward dispossession and semiotic regimes. As Ann Laura Stoler affirms, the col-

ony is a place of “violent circulation... not a place but a principle of managed mobilities, mobilizing and immobilizing populations according to a set of changing rules and hierarchies that orders social kinds...” (41). The frontier’s morphologies—from an overt signifier of colonial cartographies and geopolitics to an imagined space of nomadic attachment—is but one method of contending with colonialism’s “violent circulation” in myth’s ostensibly depoliticized realm.

Hirsch’s victorious performance, as an aesthetic-affective relation to the Alaskan frontier, thus performs the frontier’s signifying intimacy with both “postcolonial” nomadic errancy and harkening of colonial trope. In that sense, the scene invokes the frontier’s broader negotiations in historical and anticolonial scholarship. Associated with the meta-narratives of colonial encounter, the ‘frontier’ (or, the “F word”) Kerwin Lee Klein argued, testified, generatively, to its own colonialist trace. Equating eradication of colonial signifiers with the perils of exoneration, Klein rendered terminological siege of frontier, in burgeoning anticolonial semantics, both a futile and misguided attempt to depart from colonial and imperialist registers. Not only was the choice of New Western Regionalists to “replace ‘frontier’ with [the ‘Orientalist’] ‘West,’ more than faintly ironic,” Klein asserted, it overlooked the persistence of the ‘frontier’ in the contemporary imagination (182). Frederic Jackson Turner’s 1893 assertions into the “Significance of the

Frontier” and its “white, male, midwestern, heterosexual, middle-class” assemblages, Klein argued, perpetually animated “constructions of group identities [bound in] in historical consciousness” and too, contemporary spatial-temporal assertions” (200). Turner’s ‘frontier,’ which “did not empty Native America of people but placed it in the past” was a historical meta-narrative, Klein’s work implied, resonating in contemporary semiotic economies, and thus, a crucial signifier in tracing persistent colonial imagination in the “postcolonial” epoch (186).

Klein’s defense of “frontier” sits at the juncture of post-structuralist and decolonial thought, both advocating the utility of the meta-narrative signifying regimes to which nomadology is antithetically positioned, and simultaneously emphasizing the descriptive inaccuracies of the “postcolonial”. Klein’s meta-narrative assertion could, indeed, be critiqued from a Deleuzian vantage—an endeavor that would likely yield generative emphasis on the utility of colonial ‘meta-narrative’ to-wards the often-bigoted tendencies of its contemporary “free speech” resonances. Yet, in his assertion that non-genealogical geographic abstraction is, itself, symptomatic of Western history, Klein’s position bears proximity to decolonial critiques of nomadic, de-signifying practice—a seemingly paradoxical relationship gesturing the complexity of the signifying regime nomadology seeks to disrupt. The colonialist trace, Byrd argues, as a signifying trail of late-colonialism, is too a marker of the

deflective inclinations of poststructuralist “flattening” which, in occluding colonial genealogy, is too occlusive of Indigenous resistance, determination, and signifying practice: “every time flow or a line of flight approaches, touches, or encounters Indianness, it also confronts the colonialist project that has made that flow possible. The choice is to either confront that colonialism or deflect it” (17). Byrd’s assertions trouble notions of “decolonization” as a terminological, theoretical, or disciplinary practice of de-signifying and re-signifying, invoking the utility of the colonial signifier as an index to the late-colonial present. These traces, Byrd asserts, “are vitally important to understanding how power and domination have been articulated and practiced by empire” (xvii). As Alex Young’s discussion of transformations in the field of Postwestern studies suggests, the field has been marked by notable shift from Klein’s frontier-based attention to “transnational processes of European settler conquests of indigenous peoples” and towards a “post-modern resistance to historical meta-narratives” methodologically deploying the ‘rhizomatic’s west’s’ re-spatializing, non-genealogical utility (115). As Young argues, such turns invoke a new set of concerns, namely, the “strategic essentialism” of the “reproduction [of] frontier tropes” of west-ward expansion that inform and yet, simultaneously, elide, historical deconstruction (119).

If *Into the Wild*’s iconic scene performs the frontier’s duplicity, at the juncture of colonial historicity and post-

colonial mythmaking, these relations find more specific enunciation in relation to the map. The film's portrayal of McCandless' forgoing the map in favor of spontaneous roaming and practice of retrospectively carving representations of visited places into his leather belt, affirm McCandless' nomadic spirit and broader post-structuralist cartographies. "Always a map and never a tracing," Deleuze and Guattari's unstillable nomad's forgoing of the map, and rather, practice of creating the map, is a crucial emblem of the cartographic politics of *A Thousand Plateaus* (13). As Deleuze and Guattari assert, it is through the maps' disavowal—that is, the practicing of "acentered, nonhierarchal, non-signifying system[s]" of movement and relations that "centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchal modes of communication and pre-established paths" might become undone (21). This imperative echoes throughout McCandless' forgoing of map-tracing and practice of spontaneous map-making. Yet, as Peta Mitchell's work suggests, while antithetically stylized, these maps—one traditionally cartographic, one improvised—are not opposite, but continuations: "Just as the map metaphor underwent a revision in the later twentieth century, the subject has similarly been reconfigured, as not a traditional cartographer who delimits space, but as a nomad who traverses it" (2008, 77). It is, Wuthnow's work elaborates, the Deleuzian aversion to a "politics of location" (2002, 183), engendering a "politics of disappearance of local or indigenous knowledge systems" (185) that renders

the rhizomatic map so proximate to the very imperialist cartographies it seeks to transcend. Wuthnow's claims gesture a dialectic tending to the maps' broader political imagination. While mapping "was a historically contingent process" its "profusion of geographic metaphors" have rendered its associations more interpretively daunting than the map itself: "very little scholarly attention has interrogated the geographic imaginations behind these metaphors, that made possible the variety and durability of knowledge production and power structures" (15).

Yet, imperialist stylistics have not evaded scrutiny. As Pratt describes, traveler's accounts, spanning 18th century European writings to the 1980s postcolonial "consisted of converting local knowledges (discourses) into European national and continental knowledges associated with European forms" (1992, 198). Indeed, imperialist mapping bore an "implicit reproduction of a universalized western subject and its delegitimization of 'experience' and 'local knowledge'" that sought to "explain 'the natives' both to the West and Indigenous peoples themselves" (Wuthnow 2002, 183). In considering geographic imaginations behind these travelers' accounts, a hasty, consumptive interpretation is conjured, both in its broad reach and scope and in its acts of 'translation' and distortions of scale. Through Pratt and Wuthnow's frames, the rhizome motifs of "Indians without ancestry" and "ever-receding limit" invoke a particular aesthetic politics, inseparable from the project

of empire (Deleuze and Guattari). As Young asserts, the

...rhetoric of US empire often privileges expansivity and openness over ‘inward-looking, root-ed containment...While the rhizomatic lines of flight opened by the deterritorializing process of settler colonial expansion in the western United States might have opened up new freedoms for settlers...[they] surely did not offer an ‘alternative to’ or ‘escape from’ the sovereign powers of the settler state for indigenous people (123).

Moreover, if, as Young asserts, there is “something about the US west...that makes it especially rhizomatic” for Deleuze and Guattari, that affinity is, palpable in rhizome’s stylistics, and their “remarkable alliance with [Kerouac’s] poetics” (Abel 2002, 228). In this broader exploration of nomadic aesthetic imperialisms, these poetics warrant a quick detour. In an exploration of speed in *On the Road*, Eftychia Mikelli identifies Kerouac’s iconic “speedy typing” (without “room for editing”) as both a symbolic rejection of “1950s materialistic culture” (the “homogenization suggested by the uniformity of typed characters”) and, in his run-on sentences, a stylistic departure from the “slow, deliberate sentences of the dominant modernist tradition” (142). These deviations from dominant style, Mikelli asserts, conditioned *On the Road*’s thematic pacing—a novel whose characters traversed the land without “time for reflective or substantial understanding of their environment” (142). Speed in

the novel hence “initiates a new manner of perception, whereby conventional definitions of place are substituted by the annihilation of territorial space” (144). Yet, simultaneously, *On the Road*’s pacing betrays a “fascination with acceleration in motion” typical of 1950s America (145). Mikelli’s assertions invite broader consideration of *On the Road*’s context: the Cold War, the Korean War, the military eclipsing of Britain in the Middle East, but also, the proliferation of American capital (Hollywood and cars), keeping tempo with Sal and Dean’s rebelliously fast lines of flight. As Abel and Young assert, these political-aesthetics would extend their influence to *A Thousand Plateaus* thirty years later—an assertion affirmed in ‘nomadology’s’ restless, ever-outward ever-onward ontology, and heralding of “nomadism as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification)” (159). These aesthetic phenomenologies, hence, complicate Deleuze and Guattari’s anti-imperial semiotics, indicating how motifs such as the “ever receding limit” and “always moving” oppose, but also, emerge through, global contexts of imperial relations. Movement “is both a political economy, which is distributed unevenly between others, and an affective economy, which leaves its impressions, affecting those bodies that are subject to its address” (Ahmed 2007, 161). Joseph’s *Nomadic Identities* captures this relationship saliently, observing how “within globalizing discourses of transnational exchange, the seductive metaphors of heightened mobility, advanced at

the expense of the political, generated anxiety around the local” (8).

If imperialist cartographies—their affinity for speed and anxieties around the local—are alive in the signifying relations between Kerouac, and Deleuzian and Guattarian aesthetics, their presence amidst decolonial pursuits indicates how nomadic anti-imperialisms might reproduce the very imperialisms they seek to transcend. As Sarah Leeuw and Sarah Hunt’s study of decolonial geography suggests, motions to decolonize cartographies and spatial theory are nonetheless laden with the colonial legacies they seek to ameliorate: “decolonizing efforts across disciplinary boundaries continue to grapple with the tensions inherent to a project always at risk of reproducing its own imperial authority” (Leeuw and Hunt 2018, 10). Decolonizing geography, they assert, necessitates introspection; “decolonial geographers often continue to engage concepts of indigeneity rather than Indigenous peoples themselves, their scholarship, their lived experience, and knowledge contributions” (6) risking “normalizing non-Indigenous ways of knowing and being and perpetuating colonial power” (3). The nomadic imperialist imagination, their work suggests, persists in the de-signifying inclinations of decolonial geographies, fraught with its enduring anxiety about the local. “Indigenous peoples are facing mass arrests in Standing Rock North Dakota [and, more recently, Wet’suwet’en]...to not acknowledge these contexts risks per-petuating the idea

that writing and knowledge is not produced in places, many of which are forged in ongoing colonial violence” (2). Leeuw and Hunt’s critique asserts the imperialism of “abstract geography” and the potentials of decolonial mapping beyond de-centered or non-signifying approaches. Leanne Simpson’s “maps of loss” offers one, concrete enactment of this, and emerges from an inter-generational collaborative process of writing directly on the colonial map itself. The “over lays” Simpson reflects, “showed decade after decade of loss. They showed the why...” (15). Likewise, Angie Morrill, Eve Tuck, and the Super Futures Haunt Collective paradigm of the “aching archive” imagines mapping beyond remapping, tending, rather, to the ‘postcolonial’s’ cartographic wake: “cartographies of struggle...cartographies of dispossession—the kinds that rip away, distances, alienates” (4). Collectively, these frameworks gesture the function of the colonialist trace in postcolonial theories of space. As Morrill, Tuck et. al assert, the “opposite of dispossession” is not re-spatializing but “unforgetting” (2).

The legacies of the postcolonial, settler-nomad—their history of movement, of mapping, and spatializing—thus ensures a nomadism that is necessarily bound to its positional dilemmas. Val Plumwood’s 1995 account of nearly being prey to an alligator is framed by the postcolonial contingencies of nomadic inclination: the traversing of boundaries (“I had never been one for timidity...so I decided to explore further a clear, deep channel closer

to the river” [Plumwood, 1995, 29]) and simultaneously, “the indigenous Gagadgu owners of Kakadu, whose advice and permission to come [there she] had not sought” (30). Rob Nixon’s account of white, South African lion hunters conjures a nomadic hunger for ‘wild Africa’ (160)—one of “authenticity that couldn’t be bought elsewhere” (161) whose satiation is contingent on the park’s “racial and temporal enclave” outside of Black, South African empowerment, functioning “inimically to political transformation” (160). Julietta Singh’s description of the Canadian cut-block conjures the nomadic ethos of tree planting—a ‘rite of passage’ and “subculture comprised of mostly young, white urbanites” (154)—as too, culturally contingent on its ‘postcolonial’ enclave: “The hardest work, the wildest parties, the closest to nature... unfurled alongside—and because of—environmental destruction...undertaken on unceded indigenous territory, with indigenous communities having scarce (if any) input about or benefit from the destruction of their lands”—a dynamic ‘unbeknownst’ to many planters (156). These accounts invoke return to the ‘frontier,’ testifying to the perseverance of a Turnerian “frontier synthesis” in the nomadic imagination, one of wild and civilized dichotomies, where ‘uncultivated emptiness’ reifies a “fetishization of a frontier mythos” and tacitly, Indigenous erasure (Byrd 2018, 611). Yet too, these accounts, critically and consciously, invoke the potentials of the colonialist trace in mapping the nomad’s frontier affinities, treating the residues of the colonial imperial-

ist vantage as introspective sites of nomad-ic complicity, pervading questions of positionality, aesthetics, imagination, and desire—a praxis Singh deems, of cultivating discomfort. Singh’s phrase is useful for its wayward semiotics. Signifying both the fetishized discomforts of the nomadic planter (“the bodies return to uncultivated states were extraordinary badges of honour” [Singh, 2017,156]) and their elusive modes of complicity, Singh differentiates nomadic aesthetics from their decolonial, de-signifying, or non-hierarchal imperative.

Let us, then, return to the ecstasy of the image. While McCandless (it was speculated) would starve in the Alaskan wilderness, his initial encounter at the frontier would suggest his hunger for ‘raw, transcendent experience’ was satiated. If the nomad has a duplicitous relation to the postcolonial’s imperialist residue, the scene’s mediation of Beauty and the Sublime testifies to the outwardly colonizing force of aesthetics themselves (“History is Painted by the Victors,” Kent Monkman’s 2013 painting’s title asserts). Indebted to the colonization of aesthetic (sense) Aesthetic Theory, Walter Mignolo and Rinaldo Vazquez argue, inherently performs the dynamics of imperial power. Beginning with Kantian, transcendentalist conflations of the singular and the universal, the “regulation [of the] sensing of the beautiful and the sublime” and finally, the “regulation [of the] global capability to ‘sense’ the beautiful and the sublime,” Aesthetic Theory signals the everyday residues of colonial vantage

(Mignolo and Vazquez, 2013, 203). In the context of what Mignolo terms ‘decolonial aesthesis’ (critical examination of how mega-categories such as ‘beauty’ or ‘representation’ have come to dominate aesthetic valuation), McCandless’ nomadic pursuit of the frontier’s uncultivated and empty expanse does not seem a venture into the wild but affirmation of the signifier’s domestication within the late-colonial regime. In the paintings of Monkman, alternatively, the ‘nomad’s lines of flight are rendered palpable and pre-dictable: the well-established assemblages of cowboys, rangers, and icons of an unlawful the wild west. Monkman aesthetically affirms what this paper, in a roundabout way, has striven to assert: the post-structural nomad’s occupation is not the opposite of colonial imperial history, but is a testament to its style.

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