

# ONE

## HUNGRY LISTENING

When lawyer Peter Grant asked Chief Mary Johnson to sing a Gitksan song as an essential part of her evidence on the “Ayook,” the ancient but still effective Gitksan law, Judge McEachern objected. He said he did not want any “performance” in his court of law. “I can’t hear your Indian song, Mrs. Johnson, I’ve got a tin ear.”

Most of us non-Aboriginal Canadians also wear a tin ear. It seems natural because we have worn it all our lives. We are not even aware of the significant sound we cannot hear.

—Walt Taylor, *The Three Rivers Report*, July 15, 1987

Taylor’s description of Justice McEachern’s “tin ear”—his inability or willful refusal to hear Gitksan song as an Indigenous legal order that Gitksan people understand it to be—provides just one example of the many ways in which listening is guided by positionality as an intersection of perceptual habit, ability, and bias. In particular, this chapter examines formations of listening guided by settler and Indigenous positionality, and outlines strategies for resurgent and decolonial listening practices. It addresses the relative absence of scholarship on listening from Indigenous, settler colonial, and critical race studies perspectives in relation to the “whiteness of sound studies”<sup>1</sup> (Stadler 2015). It pursues this objective by proposing a number of non-totalizing conceptions for what different listening positionalities might encompass, and in doing so calls for further work on racialized and anti-colonial listening formations. I limit my focus here to a handful of Indigenous and settler listening practices including those shaped through processes of state subjectivation (official multiculturalism) and “educational reform” (missionization, residential schools, university music programs), and

those guided by Indigenous and Western ontologies of music through attunement to settler/xwelítém and Indigenous/xwélmexw auditory logics. Detailing these listening positionalities allows us to trace the unmarked normativity of listening but also reveals the ways in which the listening continuum has historically been consigned to a framework wherein one is listening well if one is able to capture the content of what is spoken, or the “fact” of musical form and structure. As this chapter will demonstrate, hungry listening prioritizes the capture and certainty of information over the affective feel, timbre, touch, and texture of sound. Attending to affect alongside normative listening habits and biases allows us to imagine (or audiate) otherwise—to develop strategies for different transformative politics of listening that are resurgent in their exploration of Indigenous epistemologies, foundations, languages, and sensory logics; or, ones that are decolonial in their ability to move us beyond settler listening fixations. The coming pages survey an array of Indigenous and settler listening formations: listening that emerges in relation with Indigenous ontologies of song, listening that is the result of settler colonial attempts to civilize attention and perception, and listening that is strategically flexible, agile, and responsive to the intersectional layering of positionality.

### The “Tin Ear” of Settler Colonialism

Any attempt to define what “settler listening positionality” entails must begin by unpacking the unwieldy and reifying term “settler.” Historically, the term describes those who first came to the United States and Canada with the intention to stay and make new lives, while more recently the term has become a statement of positionality that seeks to make visible the ways by which non-Indigenous people have benefitted from colonial policy such as Canada’s Indian Act and genocidal policies of Indian residential schools. More and more frequently used by non-Indigenous Canadians since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the Indian Residential Schools, the term “settler” has become a form of self-identification for those who were not, historically, the first settlers of the already occupied Indigenous lands now known as Canada but nevertheless understand their complicity in ongoing colonial policies that continue to constrain Indigenous rights and resurgence.

As an everyday form of political activism, then, identifying as a settler subject marks oneself as possessing a certain awareness of ongoing inequities faced by Indigenous peoples. Understood as a fixed identity category, however, the term “settler” risks reifying a cohesive and essentialist form of subjectivity that does not take into account subtle gradations of relationship, history, and experience—for example queer settler subjects (Morgenson 2011), immigrants, refugees, and diasporic subjects. Expanding the terms available to speak more precisely about multiple orientations of subjectivity allows increased potential to acknowledge one’s *particular* relationships, responsibilities, and complicity in the continued occupation of Indigenous territories. And yet, when offered as mere caveats, acknowledgments of positionality are what Sara Ahmed would call “non-performative” utterances (Ahmed 2004). In contrast to Austin’s performative utterance, non-performative utterances don’t accomplish what they say they accomplish; they perform a certain righteousness in one’s support for the project of decolonization or reconciliation without actualizing individual responsibility that moves beyond mere commitment to change. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang’s oft-quoted assertion that “decolonization is not a metaphor” holds us accountable not to forms of consciousness raising (Tuck and Yang 2012; Tuck 2018) but to examining what substantive action must be taken in the return of Indigenous lands, waterways, as well as the remediation of other “grounds” and the demolition of settler foundations.<sup>2</sup> Within this frame, what does gaining a nuanced understanding of our positionality accomplish? Positionality’s importance derives not from its prevalent use as confession or admission of guilt. Instead, its usefulness is predicated upon a step beyond the simple recognition of individual intersectional identity. That step involves understanding positionality not as a static construct, but as a process or state that fundamentally guides our actions and perception. Specifically, to shift from the reified construct of “settler” and toward forms of action that effect more than merely “unsettling” structures requires understanding how the “settling” of settler positionality functions. *Hungry Listening* asserts not only the need to consider the alignment of settler positionality with substantive action but to consider it as a stratified and intersectional *process*. One such way that settler positionality guides perception is by generating normative narratocracies (Panagia 2009) of experience, feeling, and the sensible. In

*The Political Life of Sensation*, Davide Panagia describes narratocracy as the privileging of narrative in rendering sensation readable:

Narratocracy refers both to the governance of narrative as a standard for the expression of ideas and to the rules that parse the perceptual field according to what is and is not valuable action, speech, or thought. . . . by insisting on their narrative qualities, we condition appearances within a system of visibility and sayability that insists on their capacity to make sense. (Panagia 2009, 12)

Narratocracy here guides everything from the inability to hear Indigenous song as a form of legal evidence in land claims to historical attempts at civilizing savage attention. It is to these forms of settler colonial narratocracy that we will turn to first in this chapter's larger discussion of listening positionality.

The overview of settler and Indigenous listening positionalities offered here provides a small cross-section of the ways in which such listening takes place,<sup>3</sup> beginning with a discussion of the ontological differences between Western and Indigenous conceptions of song, and then moving to a historical overview of listening as itself a form of "settlement." The latter focus on the intersection between listening and historical settlement does not begin, as one might expect, with the ways that early settlers listened to the new world and its inhabitants upon their arrival to Canada,<sup>4</sup> but instead with the ways in which a particular group of settlers—missionaries, residential school staff, music teachers—set about to reform the Indigenous engagements with listening, through the action of "settling" perception itself. The act of settling Indigenous listening here does not refer firstly to an occupation of the sound world audibly available to Indigenous people (though this certainly did take place in residential schools through the wholesale replacement of listening to voices and song of beloved siblings and kin with hymnody, English language, and bells). Instead, the colonial imposition of settling listening seeks to compel sensory engagement through practices of focusing attention that are "settled"—in the sense of coming to rest or becoming calm—and in doing so effect perceptual reform sought through the "civilizing mission" of missionaries and the Canadian state. Listening regimes imposed and implemented "fixed listening" strategies that are part of a larger reorientation toward Western categorizations of single-sense engagement, as well as toward Western ontologies of music

located in aesthetic appreciation. Such regimes often continue today in an entirely different way through structural listening practices taught to students in university programs, a discussion of which I will return to later in this chapter. Unifying these listening practices is the “civilizing” drive for selective attention that renders listening as a process of the ear rather than of the body.

As many of this book’s case studies demonstrate, foundational differences between Indigenous and settler modes of listening are guided by their respective ontologies of song and music. Western music is largely though not exclusively oriented toward aesthetic contemplation and for the affordances it provides: getting through our work days, setting and focusing moods, and creating a sense of home (DeNora 2000). Indigenous song, in contrast, serves strikingly different functions, including that of law and primary historical documentation. A striking example of this clash between Western aesthetic and Indigenous “functional” ontologies of song is apparent in *Delgamuukw v. the Queen* (1985), a land claim trial in which Gitxsan and Wet’suwet’en sought jurisdiction over their territories in northern British Columbia, Canada.

Several scholars have examined the complex history of this trial in detailed and nuanced ways (Mills 1994; Napoleon 2001; 2005), and to fully outline the case is beyond the aim of this chapter. Much oral history was recounted during the court case, and this aspect of the case has been of particular importance to writing on Indigenous legal traditions and customary law. For our purposes here, I will restrict my discussion to the contested inclusion of song<sup>5</sup> in the court proceedings, and in particular the moment when counsel for the plaintiffs directed Mary Johnson, Gitxsan hereditary chief Antgulilibix, to perform a limx oo’y (dirge song)<sup>6</sup> associated with her adaawk (formal, ancient, collectively owned oral history).<sup>7</sup> I quote the full exchange between Justice McEachern and the plaintiff’s council, Mr. Grant, for its clear demonstration of the differences between Indigenous and Western ontologies of song:

**Mr. Grant (Plaintiff’s Counsel):** The song is part of the history, and I am asking the witness to sing the song as part of the history, because I think in the song itself, invokes the history of the—of the particular adaawk to which she is referring.

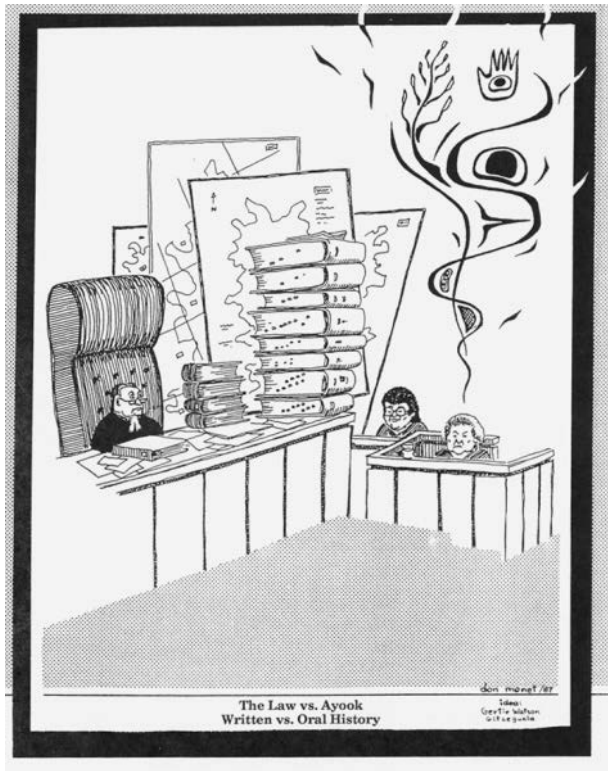
**Justice McEachern:** How long is it?

**Grant:** It’s not very long, it’s very short.

**McEachern:** Could it not be written out and asked if this is the wording? Really, we are on the verge of getting way off track here, Mr. Grant. Again, I don't want to be sceptical, but to have to witness singing songs in court is in my respectful view not the proper way to approach this problem.

**Grant:** My Lord, Mr. Jackson will make a submission to you with respect—

**McEachern:** No, no, that isn't necessary. If this has to be done, if you say as counsel this has to be done, I'm going to listen to it. I just say, with respect, I've never heard it happen before, I never thought it necessary, and I don't think it necessary now. But I'll be glad to hear what the witness says if you say this is what she has to do. It doesn't seem to me she has to sing it.



**Figure 2.** “The Law vs. Ayook / Written vs. Oral History” (1987) from *Colonialism on Trial* by Niis Biins (Don Monet) and Skanu’u (Ardythe Wilson) (New Society Publishers, 1992). Artwork by Don Monet.



Figure 3. "A Cultural Hearing Aid," reprinted from the Three Rivers Report, Wednesday, July 15, 1987, in *Colonialism on Trial* by Niis Biins (Don Monet) and Skanu'u (Ardythe Wilson) (New Society Publishers, 1992). Artwork by Don Monet.

**Grant:** Well, My Lord, with respect, the song is—is what one may refer to as a death song. It's a song which itself invokes the history and the depth of the history of what she is telling. And as counsel, it is—it is my submission that it is necessary for you to appreciate—

**McEachern:** I have a tin ear, Mr. Grant, so it's not going to do any good to sing it to me. (British Columbia Supreme Court 1985, 670–71)

Following Mary Johnson's singing of the limx oo'y, McEachern continued to demand explanation and justification of it:

**McEachern:** All right Mr. Grant, would you explain to me, because this may happen again, why you think it was necessary to sing the song? This is a trial, not a performance . . . It is not necessary in a



matter of this kind for that song to have been sung, and I think that I must say now that I ought not to have been exposed to it. I don't think it should happen again. I think I'm being imposed upon and I don't think that should happen in a trial like this . . .

Throughout the trial, Justice McEachern refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the *limx oo'y* as evidence, let alone as the equivalent documentation of law as upheld by the Gitxsan people. He conflates the song with "a performance" that can have no effect on pleasing his "tin ear." McEachern treats Johnson's singing as an attempt to win him over, either through the song's aesthetic beauty or the affective appeal of her voice. McEachern cannot hear what Mary Johnson shares as anything other than a song in the Western context of what songs are; or rather, he asserts willful ignorance that it can function as anything other than a song that might penetrate the armor of his "tin ear."

In contrast, it is useful to consider from a Gitxsan perspective what this song is, and the function it holds as an Indigenous legal order. As described by James Morrison (Txaaxwok) during the same trial, the *limx oo'y* has far more than an aesthetic function; it is far more than a song with the aesthetic powers to please the ear:

Well when, while they ever singing that song, that's memorial, that's today, when they are singing it and rattle, when they are singing it in a quiet way, while they are singing that song, I can feel it today that you can feel something in your life, it memories back to the past what's happened in the territory. This is why this song, this memorial song. While the chief is sitting there I can still feel it today while I am sitting here, I can hear the brook, I can hear the river runs. This is what the song is all about. You can feel the air of the mountain. This is what the memorial song is. To bring your memory back into that territory. This is why the song is sung, the song. And it goes on for many thousands of years ago. And that's why we are still doing it today. I can feel it. That's how they know the law of Indian people, as this goes on for many years. (Napoleon 2001, 169)

"I can feel it," says Morrison, "I can hear the brook, I can hear the river runs . . . the air of the mountain." Songs at their best serve this function of memory, they capture a time in our lives, they produce nostalgia. I want to refrain from categorizing Morrison's word here as a kind of nostalgia, however, given the way that songs, again, *as* law have a function,



and are more than representational. In this more-than-representational frame, the limx oo'y is not simply representing the place, speaking about a place, or making those who hear it remember this place; it acts *as* the "law of Indian people." It functions as a primary legal and living document with importance for conveying the embodied feeling of history "to the past [thousands of years of] what's happened in the territory." This embodiment, the literal emplacement of the listener back among sensual experience of place is thus a legal order that functions through embodiment. We must here distinguish between the Western form of law represented in the "The Law vs. Ayook" image (Figure 2) and the Gitxsan construction of law through the singing voice that brings listeners back into relationship with place not just through its hearing but through its feeling. In contrast with Western law, this Indigenous legal order is "felicitous" (Austin) or legitimate *only* because Morrison "can feel it," and by feeling it "that's how they know the law of Indian people."

In the second drawing by Monet we see Chief Mary Johnson attempting to open McEachern's tin ear with a can opener (Figure 3). In a newspaper article by Walt Taylor, a resident of Smithers, British Columbia—and written in response to Monet's drawing—Taylor notes, "the cartoon shows Chief Johnson using her can opener to overcome the cross-cultural deafness caused by the judicial tin ear. *Most of us non-Aboriginal Canadians also wear a tin ear. It seems natural because we have worn it all our lives. We are not even aware of the significant sounds we cannot hear*" (Taylor qtd. in Monet and Skanu'u 1992, 46). The title of this article, "A Cultural Hearing Aid," asks how might we need to reorient our practices of listening, first by recognizing that all of us have adopted settler colonial forms of perception, or "tin ears," that disallow us from understanding Indigenous song as both an aesthetic thing and as more-than-song.

Indigenous ontologies of song ask us to reorient what we think we are listening to and how we go about our practices of listening with responsibilities to listen differently, while also requiring us to examine how we have become fixated—how listening has in effect been "fixed"—in practices of aesthetic contemplation, as a pastime or entertainment, and through its various affordances. In reorienting our listening practices from normative settler and multicultural forms<sup>8</sup> to the agonistic and irreducibly sovereign forms of listening, we must also reconsider

what we think we are listening to. This is particularly the case for Indigenous song. Ontologically, many of our songs have their primary significance as law, history, teachings, or function as forms of doing. This is to say they are history, teaching, law that take the form of song, just as Western forms of law and history take the form of writing. Yet they cannot also be reduced to merely an alternative form of Western documentation—the exact equivalent to a book, or to written title of land. I have repeatedly been asked to account for the ways in which our songs serve as law, or how songs have life. At the heart of these questions has been a demand to explain how our songs fulfill the necessary and sufficient *Western* criteria that constitute a thing. To measure the “fit” of Indigenous processes by Western standards subjects them (and the Indigenous person who explains them) to epistemic violence, and reentrenches colonial principles and values.

The song presented by Mary Johnson as a Gitksan legal order is what some might refer to as a “traditional” song, as a song that has existed for many generations. Some may be inclined to draw a line between the capacity of “traditional” Indigenous songs to function as law, medicine, teachings, and primary historical documentation, while understanding more recently created Indigenous songs in contemporary popular genres as not holding such functions. I am hesitant, however, to draw such a sharp line between these categories. For this assertion would imply that Indigenous music composed today, and in contemporary genres, carries less of the teachings, histories, and laws that our older music does. While it may be the case that Indigenous contemporary music does not explicitly claim to enact law, provide healing, or convey knowledge (locations and practices for hunting, for example), my belief is that this knowledge is still present to varying degrees even when not made explicit.

Keeping this context of Indigenous ontology at the forefront of my examination of inclusionary performance and Indigenous+classical music is key for understanding the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous musical and performance encounters. Within the context of Indigenous resurgence, this context holds even greater importance for Indigenous composers and artists as a provocation to reclaim the actions that our songs take part in. Yet to re-claim song as holding a function beyond the aesthetic aspect is little more than a leap of imagi-

nation unless we define ways in which we, as listeners, also consider the ways in which listening affirms and legitimates these actions. How does listening serve as an affirmation or legitimation of law? What is listening as a responsibility in documenting our histories (to the extent and level of detail that a book does so)? Reorienting our ears toward Indigenous ontologies of song requires us to return to the place that musicologist Susan McClary found herself nearly thirty years ago. In 1991 McClary, advancing new models for feminist music analysis, noted that in considering the intersections of gender, sexuality, and music, we might reach a point of production un-knowing, where we are “no longer sure of what MUSIC is” (McClary 1991, 19). Decolonizing musical practice involves becoming no longer sure what LISTENING is.

### Hungry Listening

As xwélmexw, as a Stó:lō cis-gendered man whose family was displaced from their home community through the legacy of the Indian residential schools, I understand the word “settler” as imprecise in its ability to name both historical relationships between xwélmexw and newcomers to Solh temexw (Stó:lō territory), and current settler subjectivities.<sup>9</sup> Indigenous languages here go well beyond providing an equivalent term or translation for “settler.” Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel provides just a few instances of the specific knowledge that comes from Indigenous terms for newcomers: “Yonega is a Tsalagi (Cherokee) term for white settlers, which connotes ‘foam of the water; moved by wind and without its own direction; clings to everything that’s solid.’ Wasicu is a Dakota term for settlers, which means ‘taker of fat’” (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel 2014, 16). These terms do not only provide names for newcomers to Indigenous territories but also contain historical relationships and descriptions of settler states of being. Working from these states of being, we can learn much about forms of perception, and paths toward perceptual decolonization. Such is the case with the Halq'eméylem term for settler.

From a xwélmexw perspective, settler subjectivity emerges out of a state of consumption, as discussed in the Introduction. This is not simply a generalization regarding colonization but instead is derived from the historical and contemporary relationships Stó:lō people have had

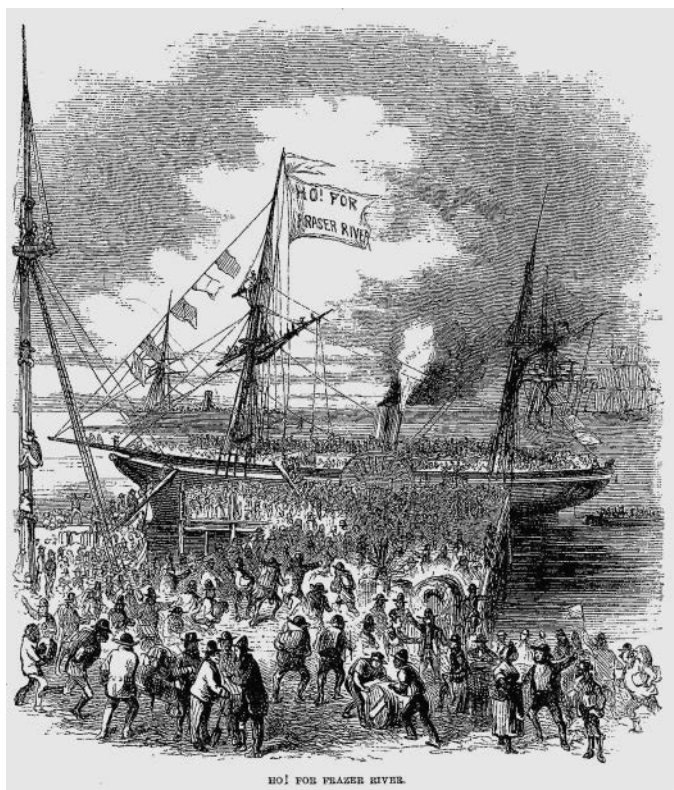


Figure 4. Ho! For Fraser River. *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, December 1860.

with non-Indigenous people in our territories, experience that is embedded in the Halq'eméylem word Stó:lō people use for non-Indigenous settlers: "xwelítem" ("xwunítum" in Hulqumínum). These words are much more than equivalent terms for "settler"; more accurately they mean "starving person." As I understand it, the words came into use with the first significant influx of settlers to our territories who arrived in two states of starvation. The first of these was bodily—starving very literally for basic sustenance; the second was a starvation for gold. As Keith Carlson has documented:

In the summer of 1857 less than a hundred non-native men (almost all of whom were associated with the Hudson's Bay Company) lived along the lower Fraser River. Then, between April and July 1858, no less than

30,000 “Starving Ones” arrived in Stó:lō territory seeking the new “El Dorado.” (Carlson 2010, 161)

It is an understatement to say that this hunger for resources has not abated with time. *xwelítem* hunger may have begun with gold, but it quickly extended to forests, the water, and of course the land itself. In the twentieth century the hunger has grown for Indigenous artistic practice. Much has been written since the first uses of the word “appropriation” to define one form of this hunger for Indigenous art and culture, most notably in the foundational work of Indigenous scholars Marcia Crosby (1991) and Loretta Todd (1990). Much has been written on the extraction of Indigenous culture by modernist painters from Emily Carr (Moray 2001) to Jack Shadbolt (Halpin 1986).<sup>10</sup> Yet the extraction of Indigenous song, story, and culture is not merely a product of the past; artists and authors continue to mine Indigenous experience and, as with the previous discussion of Keillor, at times blatantly describe Indigenous culture as a resource that is there to be mined. Such is the case with Joseph Boyden, a writer whose questionable Indigenous descent has been further mirrored in the ways he has described his relationship to an Indigenous community through the language of extraction:

Boyden left Moosonee with a book in his head; he felt that it might make him successful. Much later, he would tell an interviewer: “I’ve felt like I discovered a gold mine, and I realized quickly, ‘Oh my gosh, no one has written about the Cree of Mushkegowuk before,’ and how lucky am I as a writer to have this incredibly rich territory to mine creatively.” (Andrew-Gee 2017)

In comparison to debates on appropriation in the visual arts, literature, and film, however, music scholarship has largely refrained from any substantive examination of Canadian composers’ appropriation of Indigenous song, a context we will turn to in chapters 4 and 5.

Settler hunger does not merely extend to appropriation of Indigenous song, however. In the realm of inclusionary music between Western art music and Indigenous cultural practices, and particularly in the post-Truth and Reconciliation context, there has been increasing hunger for particular, and we could also say “more easily digestible,” forms of Indigenous culture and narratives. The Canadian media continues to offer a steady diet of damage-centered narratives, stories of trauma,

and the resultant accounts of healing and transformation. This progression from trauma to healing initiates a circular pattern of consumption that has sustained the public's appetite for a norm (or supposed fact) of "Indigenous lack" and a paternalistically narrated overcoming of such lack. In classical and new music performance, by contrast, palatable cultural expression has been privileged over explicitly political work; friendly forms of coming together have been privileged over agonistic forms of dialogue; and that which is recognizably Indigenous has been privileged over the everyday or urban; and the aesthetic beauty of Indigenous songs has been privileged over recognizing their ontological difference—as forms of law, medicine, and history—to Western music.

In general, hungry listening privileges a recognition of palatable narratives of difference, while in a more specific Western art music context, hungry listening takes part in content-locating practices that orient the ear toward identifying standardized features and types. This is primarily, though not exclusively, the case for audiences encountering tonal repertoire from the Western art music canon that comprises a significant part of the orchestral, operatic, choral, and chamber music ensemble. Audiences with formal music training are taught to identify musical conventions for genre and harmonic progression, or a work's innovative departure from such conventions just enough not to destabilize the generic fit entirely. For those with the opportunity to be disciplined through formal education in Western art music, the ear is thus "civilized" into "higher listening" forms of recognition and identification. Within contexts of informal music education (in preconcert talks and program notes, for example), this identification tends to take place on a programmatic and representational level, as listeners are told to "listen for the x," where "x" may be an animal, or story, or an emotion. Although those without formal music training are often not taught to follow harmonic progressions, this function still occurs at the basic level of recognizing harmonic tension and resolution. Yet in both cases—with and one without formal musical training—the listener orients teleologically toward progression and resolution, just as hunger drives toward satiation. Similarly, for both categories of listener, listening is oriented toward recognition, whether that be the recognition of formal structures, generic features, or particular musical representations and characterization.<sup>11</sup> For both, this "listening for" satiates through famil-



ilarity (to feel pleasure from the satisfaction of identification and recognition) but also through certainty (to feel pleasure from finding the “fit” of content within a predetermined framework). Hungry listening is hungry for the felt confirmations of square pegs in square holes, for the satisfactory fit as sound knowledge slides into its appropriate place.

For my music colleagues reading this now, I want to make clear that this is not an argument to eliminate formal analysis or understanding generic conventions. To name the ways in which hungry listening atomizes parts from the whole in service of recognizing their fit within conventional musical structures and forms is not an argument against close reading. Rather, it is a call to understand the ways in which, following from the previous section’s recontextualization of song as more-than-aesthetic, an ethics of listening to Indigenous song and Indigenous+art music is premised upon a more holistic form of “feeling the history,” as James Morrison said. I turn here to Stó:lō siyám Jo-ann Archibald, who notes how Elders emphasize the importance of listening with “three ears: two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart” (Archibald 2008, 8). How, then, does this listening as a form of “feeling the history” from heart and ears together take place? I have returned to this question repeatedly over the past years as a visitor on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe lands on which I now live, to ask myself how I might listen as a respectful guest, and in ways that do not seek to extract and apply a particular Haudenosaunee or Anishinaabe listening practice, but nonetheless listen in relation with their knowledge systems. To define new forms of listening-in-relation does not entail simply applying an alternative configuration of listening at will. Unlike iPhone photo filters, one cannot simply select and add noncolonial, feminist, queer, or black listening filters in order to listen otherwise. This reductive approach essentializes critical listening positionality as something that might simply be applied by choice, and fails to recognize that to apply a form of Indigenous listening would also constitute appropriation.

What I want to emphasize in the coming example is how critical listening positionality emerges through an intersection of sqwálewel (thinking-feeling)<sup>12</sup> between two Indigenous forms of attentiveness, one that is brought from “home” (in my case S’olh temexw, and xwélméx experience), the other from the lands on which I am a guest. At Indigenous events held at Queen’s University, Mohawk Elders enact protocol



for welcoming guests to their territory through the “Thanksgiving Address” or “the words that come before all else.” In this practice of welcome, the speaker addresses the different realms of our other-than-human relations, reminding us that humans are one life among many, noting the original instructions the Creator gave to all beings. Thanks is given to the waters, from the largest bodies like oceans and lakes to the small creeks and streams and aquifers. Thanks is given to all the plant life and the grasses that grow, to all the medicine plants, to all the berries, and to the trees growing all around us, who, as we breathe out, breathe back in. Regardless of what time of year this is spoken in, the address takes into account how the life is changing and transforming from awakening in the spring or sleeping in the winter. Thanks is given to the four-legged creatures and to the winged creatures that fly around. If it is the summer, thanks is given to the thunder beings that bring the rains and the replenishing of the water. Thanks is given to the winds that blow over our earth, to the sun, the moon, the stars. Thanks is given to the spiritual people that guide us and help us, for the stories that they bring, and the insight that they bring. Thanks is given to the Creator. And finally, thanks is given to all that has been forgotten or left unsaid.

This process of listening to “the words that come before all else” sustains a moment of heightened presence derived not only from the content that compels me to consider my relations, but from the time, rhythm, and repetition of the words themselves that connect me to a sense of place that is not my own, and slows down the pace of listening to that which comes next. Critical listening positionality is here an intersection between *xwélalà:m*—the Halq'eméylem word used for listening but better understood as “witness attentiveness” that is called for in longhouse work—and the address of “the words that come before all else” that itself demands another form of attention. In *xwélalà:m*, witnesses are asked to document the knowledge and history being shared in the equivalent amount of detail to a book, and through the detail of feeling beyond fact. As with Morrison's description of the *limx oo'y*, this form of longhouse perception involves a holistic documentation of history that includes the feeling of that history's telling. The words that come before all else, whether they are given in Kanien'kehá:ka, English, or a mix of both, intersect with *xwélalà:m* to effect the temporality of my listening. Indeed, the pace of listening is in direct correlation

with the starving attitude of settler colonial perception. To be starving is to be overcome with hunger in such a way that one loses the sense of relationality and reflexivity in the drive to satisfy that hunger. Hungry listening consumes without awareness of how the consumption acts in relationship with those people, the lands, the waters who provide sustenance. Moving beyond hungry listening toward anticolonial listening practices requires that the “fevered” pace of consumption for knowledge resources be placed aside in favor of new temporalities of wonder disoriented from antirelational and nonsituated settler colonial positions of certainty.

The critical listening positionality described above might further be described as a practice of guest listening, which treats the act of listening as entering into a *sound territory*. Here, as with James Morrison’s understanding of the *limx oo’y*, listeners enter Indigenous territory through listening that allows them to “hear the brook . . . hear the river runs . . . feel the air of the mountain.” Or not. For non-Gitxsan, and indeed for Justice McEachern himself, this listening positionality entails an inability to hear and sense the land through song. In effect, McEachern’s inability to hear Gitxsan legal orders is an important statement of the incommensurability of Western and Gitxsan sovereignty. To ask the question “how do we (anyone) hear Gitxsan legal orders in song?” is to subject it to the same hungry listening determined to render all knowledge accessible to the ear. Critical listening positionality thus understands that in entering Indigenous sound territories as guests, those who are not members of the Indigenous community from which these legal orders derive may always be unable to hear these specific assertions of Indigenous sovereignty, which is not to be understood as lack that needs to be remedied but merely an incommensurability that needs to be recognized. It is also important to note that such felt history encoded in the *limx oo’y* for Gitxsan people, the words that come before all else for *Kanien’kehá:ka*, and practicing *xwélalà:m* for *xwélmexw*, are forms of connecting back to our lands. Listening is perhaps always a listening through, or in relation with land. Sound territory is not constituted through static boundaries of settlement—a stasis Indigenous people are asked to replicate through the state exclusivity of the treaty process and exclusive borders. Instead, it is constituted through lived experience of movement across our lands that came with hunting, travel to winter

and summer village sites, intercommunity trade, winter dances, and potlatch. It is not only that land-based knowledge from this movement is encoded within songs including the *limx oo'y*, but that Indigenous sovereignties of *sqwálewel*, of knowing-feeling place are reconstituted through the actions of singing and listening. In the next section we will consider how Indigenous mobility hindered settlers' attempts to civilize Indigenous perception into a temporality of productivity. Indigenous mobility was often equated with unproductive use of land and an inability to sustain attention, a perceived lack of focus that missionaries and residential schools alike sought to reform.

### Fixing Attention, Fixed Listening

In 1837 Anna Jameson, in her travel narrative *Sketches in Canada, and Rambles among the Red Men*, recounts the words of Ojibway missionary Charlotte Johnston: "She says all the Indians are passionately fond of music and that it is a very effective means of interesting and fixing their attention" (Jameson 1852, 255). "Fixing Indians' attention" is in fact an accurate way to characterize the sensory paradigm shift that early missionaries across Canada sought to effect. "Fixing," of course in the sense Jameson uses it, refers to keeping Indigenous peoples' focus on the word of God rather than on their own cultural practices. As Jameson notes of Charlotte Johnston, wife of William McMurray, an Anglican missionary and Indian agent based in Sault Ste. Marie from 1830 to 1838, Johnston was able to convert the Indians by leading them in hymns with "her good voice and correct ear" (255). In comparison with Charlotte Johnston's missionized ears, it is the Indians' "incorrect ears" and lack of focused attention that keeps them from their civilization:

The difficulty is to keep them together for any time sufficient to make a permanent impression: their wild, restless habits prevail; and even their necessities interfere against the efforts of their teachers; they go off to their winter hunting-rounds for weeks together, and when they return, the task of instruction has to begin again. (256)

This settler colonial reading of an Indigenous lack of attention in missionary accounts understands Indigenous forms of attention to the world as "the wild, restless habits" rather than a purposeful agility in

attention through Indigenous mobility and proprioception. To missionaries, these wild restless habits are a detriment to the new temporality of learning and living civilized lives. Missionaries thus recognized that new ways of focusing attention were needed. Hymn singing became one of these, with hymns translated into Indigenous languages, where the homophonic ideal of voices moving together was a corrective to the unruly voices of Indigenous people. Yet in order to implement a full sensory paradigm shift toward civilized attention more substantive change was necessary. And so new regimes for the surveillance and limitations of movement would shortly be introduced through government, the principle of these being the Indian agent charged with implementing government restrictions on Indigenous communities, the Indian Act's "potlatch ban" (1884–1951) that curtailed Indigenous legal orders and historical documentation, the pass system that confined Indigenous peoples to reserves, and of course residential schools that tore Indigenous children away from their families, culture, and ways of life. All of these forms of control over the movement of Indigenous bodies did not just limit mobility, but fundamentally restricted the range, flexibility, and time of attention more generally, by restricting Indigenous proprioceptive agency within (and in relation to) our lands.

On the Northwest coast in particular, prior to these policies, Indigenous families and communities traveled widely to summer and winter locations for seasonal harvesting, hunting, and fishing, and traveled significant distances between different villages across the Northwest coast for potlatches and winter dances—gatherings at which important history was orally documented and sovereignty was affirmed. As historian Paige Raibmon has documented, "Potlatches, or rather the mobility they required, also impeded the implementation of colonial policies. Potlatch gatherings frequently foiled agents' attempts to inspect their Aboriginal 'charges.' Agents made arduous canoe trips to villages only to find the site deserted and the population dispersed" (Raibmon 2005, 25). In part because of such "wild restless habits" and their hindrance of the state's ongoing civilization project, the potlatch ban not only censored Northwest coast First Nations from our most important form of oral history transfer—conveyed through singing and dancing that also conveyed our histories—but also worked to reorient sensory knowledge of connection to mobility across First Peoples' lands and waterways.

This is not to say that the ban was wholly successful at curtailing the potlatch and mobility—as the subversive incorporation of potlatch with Christmas celebrations demonstrates—but the enforcement of this sensory regime had a particular felt impact and worked to further delimit and confine sensory experience that is concomitant with the “fixing” of attention. Not only did the potlatch ban seek to eradicate potlatch and winter dances as an important form of oral history and knowledge transfer, it also curtailed the forms of attention we use in such gatherings. For xwélmexw/Stó:lō people, xwélałà:m legitimates oral history through heightened perception that the closest English words would translate as “listening” and “witnessing.” In all the longhouse work Stó:lō people do—from law-making to historical documentation—being called as an honored witness means that you have been chosen to be the equivalent to the Western forms that hold law and history; you are called to be “the living book” for this knowledge. When Canada’s Indian Act prohibited the potlatch and winter dances from taking place for sixty-seven years, it was essentially the equivalent to banning books that document law and history, and also lessened opportunities to exercise xwélałà:m, a heightened form of perception resulting in richly detailed memory.

The Indian Act’s increased and sustained limitation on Indigenous mobility was further extended with the residential schools’ enforcement of mandatory attendance for Indigenous children between the ages of seven and fifteen. In many instances children were sent to schools located great distances away from their home communities, making it impossible for them to return to their families and for family members to visit them during the summertime. This decision to locate the residential schools at a distance from students’ home communities was made with the intent not just to sever students from their cultural traditions viewed as “savage” by the church and state, but in effect to erode First Peoples’ connection to their worldviews and to sever the bonds between students and their families. The deprivation of kinship effected by the schools was part of a new quotidian presence of absence, a systematic subtraction of those everyday moments of singing, speaking, and touch between parents (and grandparents) and their children, and between siblings. Students were most often segregated by gender and age, a form of prohibiting interaction with their brothers and sisters who were at-

tending the same school. The removal of these daily acts of kinship and love were replaced with those of control, separation, and censorship. So successful was this separation from culture and kin that a significant number of survivors testify to returning from residential school to feel like foreigners in their own communities, unable to communicate with family in their languages, and feeling as though they did not belong in the very home they had waited so long to return to.

Survivor accounts often narrate a dual culture shock both on their arrival at residential school and on their return home. As Isabelle Knockwood recounts, on entering the Shubenacadie residential school, “My worldview or paradigm shifted violently, suddenly, permanently,” and the sensory shift that accompanied her return from Shubenacadie was equally as profound: “Everything now looks different than it did before Indian residential schooling. The air smells different, the food tastes different, the sounds are different. And my outlook, my perspective on the world has changed in *every* area of my life” (Truth and Reconciliation Committee public testimony, October 27, 2011). Aurally, the disciplining of Indigenous bodies in Canadian Indian residential schools and U.S. Indian boarding schools—“to tattoo authority on colonized bodies via the ears,” as Mark M. Smith has written—often took place through “the sound of clock-defined time” (M. Smith 2007, 56). Historian Sara Keyes has documented how, in U.S. Indian boarding schools, “Bells ordered students’ lives, dictating when to sleep, rise, learn, pray, and eat. On their way to the dining hall, students marched in time to the sound of a bell. Upon their arrival, two bells rang; one to direct students to pull out their chairs and the other to indicate that they could sit down” (Keyes 2009, 36). Similarly, the regimentation of activity at residential schools was instituted through the use of bells to organize daily activity. In the memory of one residential school survivor from Shingwauk residential school in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, this regimentation is remembered as an unrelenting demand that Indigenous childrens’ bodies conform with clock-defined time:

On week days the rising bell rings at six o’clock; at six-thirty another bell calls bigger girls to help with the work in the kitchen and dining-room, and the bigger boys to help with the work at the barn; at seven o’clock the bell is rung again to call all to breakfast, and at seven-thirty prayers are conducted. . . . At eight forty-five the warning bell for

classroom work is rung, and at nine o'clock all who have not been assigned to some special duties enter their respective classrooms. Bells are rung again at recess, at noon, and at various times in the afternoon, each ring having a definite meaning, well understood by all, until the final bells of the day are rung for evening study, choir practice, lights out, and go-to-bed. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 518–19)

We will return to this demand to conform to the settler temporality of Western clock-defined time in chapters 4 and 5, both of which examine inclusionary music that requires Indigenous performers to master “being completely on and totally reliable and perfect every time” (Jean Lamon, quoted in Cloutier et al. 2005). For the remainder of this chapter, however, we will shift our focus toward forms of repair and redress that might reenact flexible practices of hetero-audition.

### Toward Listening in Redress

Redressing forms of hungry listening—both the “fixing” of listening and listening that fixates upon the resources provided by musical content—requires some ontological reorientation of what we believe we are listening to when we listen to Indigenous music and Indigenous+Western art music. But resisting forms of hungry listening also entails dislocating the fixity and goal-oriented teleology of listening with more flexible listening practices that—like the intersection of attentiveness described between *xwélalà:m* and the process of “the words that come before all else”—situate listening as a relational action that occurs not merely between listener and listened-to, but between the layers of our individual positionalities.

Martin Daughtry, in his article “Acoustic Palimpsests and the Politics of Listening,” sets out to understand what such a layered listening would entail through the metaphor of the palimpsest. The palimpsest is a manuscript written on papyrus or vellum in the Middle Ages that was washed off and then rewritten over, but where faint traces of the previous writing remain. Daughtry uses the palimpsest as a metaphor to envision listening to layered histories and agencies in soundscapes, including faint sound-traces that may be less discernable, or not audibly present at all. Drawing on the structure of the palimpsest, Daughtry



asks that we engage with the “*scriptio inferior*” of music that can be considered a haunting of the manuscript by its earlier layers:

Over the centuries, as the result of oxidation and other natural processes, the original texts often began to reappear beneath the newer writing. This fact made it possible for scholars of the palimpsest to engage in a kind of textual archaeology: ignoring the most recent layer, they peered back into the past, straining to read the words that had been effectively buried. In Latin these faint textual ghosts were called the *scriptio inferior* (underwriting) or *scriptio anterior* (former writing). (Daughtry 2013, 5)

In Daughtry’s politics of listening, listening to the *scriptio inferior* would “[consist] of the multiple contexts and complicated networks that precede, surround, and are brought into being by a song’s performance. It would . . . allow us to listen to history itself. It would enable a panacoustic politics of listening, with all the granularity and dynamism that term implies” (22). This panacoustic politics, like the process of intersection between *xwélalà:m* and the temporality of the words that come before all else, involves listening within the strata of sound and historical context, which I am extending here to include the additional stratified context of positionality.

In Daughtry’s use, the palimpsest metaphor prompts an ethics of listening that somewhat paradoxically seeks to hear the indiscernible and the absent. To illustrate this, late in the essay Daughtry offers a “patently impossible” thought experiment where he imagines what an infinitely layered recording of war might sound like, as an acoustic palimpsest—one similar to Jorge Luis Borges’s impossible one-to-one map of an ancient empire—that would capture the war

in all of its troubling acoustic richness. . . . [T]his impossible recording would capture every breath of wind and every whistled melody within the Afghan theater of operations. We would hear all of the sounds of vehicles and weapons, mountains and cities, the sounds of soldiers and civilians, perpetrators and victims, and bystanders. We would hear the sounds of the displaced, of the dying, and of the dead. (Daughtry 2013, 22)

While Daughtry focuses on the infinite layers of sounds themselves, I would add that such an ethics of listening must also allow positionality

to enter into this picture so that this panacoustic politics of listening includes listening *as* soldiers and civilians, perpetrators and victims, settlers and migrants, displaced people, and across these positionalities that we occupy.

Ultimately, Daughtry's essay is invested in an ethics of listening that certain ideologies of the finished product of recording and music making occlude: "we might say that the task of the palimpsestuous listener is to discern both the things that a recording encourages us to remember and the things it urges us to forget, the things that are insistently audible and the things that have long been silenced" (22). Daughtry's work prompts further consideration of what it might mean for listening subjects to recognize our listening privilege and habits, and the responsibility of listening self-reflexively for our various—settler colonial, heteronormative, patriarchal—tin ears. The foundation of critical listening positionality requires becoming aware of normative listening orientations across a range of gendered and racial formations, and developing self-reflexivity around how these are guided by their own specific forms of hunger, starvation, and drive toward knowledge fixity. Developing an awareness of listening positionality here holds potential for listening otherwise, yet the question remains of how—or the extent to which—we might orchestrate such stratified positional listening toward intersectional antiracist, decolonial, queer, and feminist listening practices.

Indeed, an awareness or relationship between such positional strata might lead counterproductively to potential incapacitation through perceptual overload. Focusing on such layers may result in an overvigilance that threatens to elide our relationship with the very song, Indigenous+art music, or inclusionary performance that we seek to hear. Consequently, what Daughtry proposes as a heightened listening mobility through what he calls contrapuntal perception (hearing simultaneous contextual layers), I would reorient as a practice of oscillation (moving between layers of positionality) that seeks not to apply other critical listening positionalities but instead to find greater levels of relationship between the strata of positionality. How this greater relationship of listening oscillation comes into practice will vary from individual to individual, but might begin through detailing specific aspects of one's positionality and then identifying the ways in which those aspects allow or foreclose upon certain ways of looking, kinds of touch, or lis-

tening hunger/fixity. This is challenging and detailed self-work to undertake, though the process itself might advance from the simple creation of a list of positionality aspects linked to listening ability, privilege, and habit.

Finding processes for oscillating between layers of listening positionality is not limited to the listener. Strategies for listening otherwise might also be activated by interventions in the unmarked rituals of music performance and forms of composition themselves. The program note, the darkened auditorium with singular focus on the stage, the pre-concert talk—all of these concert rituals can effectively be challenged in ways that open up new layers of listening, as will be illustrated in the event score “*qimmit katajjaq / sqwélqwel tl’ sqwmá:y*” that follows chapter 4. Intervening in the space of the concert hall also means intervening in the particular kind of normative focus that such spaces assert. Whether the white cube of the gallery, the proscenium stage–concert hall, the outdoor festival stage, or the black box, each site urges us to think and listen to music in particular ways that may not be conducive to the kinds of listening otherwise we might hope to advance. What happens when we change these sites of listening to include intimate spaces of one-on-one listening, spaces in relation with the land, spaces where audience members are not bound by the particular kinds of attention these spaces assert?<sup>13</sup> New formats allow for a politics of listening that encourages listeners to hear inclusionary music through a critical engagement with the histories, epistemologies, and cosmologies often elided in the inclusionary music examples this book covers. Strategies for de- and re-formatting concert norms afford the potential to question how venues for performance structure hungry listening.

Daughtry concludes his speculation into the politics of listening with an appositely layered auto-critique of the weaknesses of the palimpsest metaphor, including the fact that the palimpsest

*presumes a privileged vantage point from which all sounds can be heard.*

To imagine an acoustic palimpsest is to adopt something akin to an omniscient stance. While this stance is relatively common in music scholarship, it obscures the radical situatedness of sounds and of listening. “Listening to the palimpsest” is an imagined activity, and thus is not representative of any individual’s actual listening experience. (Daughtry 2013, 29; italics in the original)

Keeping in mind the materiality of the palimpsest is of great importance in order that we not colonize one ontology in service of decolonizing another. Yet, in weighing Daughtry's critique through the palimpsest's historical and material specificity as a document in layers, in which previous layers are only faintly visible, we see that no such visual omniscience exists. To look at a palimpsest is never to see all the layers as equally readable but instead to sense faint traces, some words and symbols more present than others, sometimes below the threshold of recognition as words and symbols, that allow only the knowledge that something beneath lingers. As such, an omniscient view of layers does not exist, just as an omni-audible listening practice is both infeasible and undesirable. To take the metaphor of the palimpsest at its most material means understanding a palimpsestous listening to be similarly oriented toward aural traces of history: echoes, whispers, and voices that become audible momentarily, ones that may productively haunt our listening as significantly as ghosts that linger. Like Daughtry's conception of the palimpsest's layers as ghosts of the manuscript, a decolonial practice of critical listening positionality actively seeks out (or allows itself) to become haunted. Thinking materially from the situation of concert practice, we might even use such haunting as a very literal strategy for whispered interventions to take place during inclusionary works, or between their movements. With advances in directional speaker technology that allow sound to be heard only by individuals within a narrow "beam," decolonial intervention within inclusionary music might then mean composing a counterorchestra of whispers that enacts acoustic haunting. As the aural equivalent of a spotlight, directional speakers make possible individual address within audiences and a potentially insurgent form of aural redress.

### Resurgent and Sovereign Listening

So far we have considered forms of listening bias and habit that constitute settler colonialism's tin ear, how settler listeners might learn to identify aspects of—and then improvise with—their listening positionality, and how listeners might be impelled to listen otherwise through interventions in concert ritual, site, and format. But what about Indigenous listeners? What politics of listening might we Indigenous listeners

reorient ourselves toward to affirm our political aims and center our epistemological and cosmological frameworks? How might Indigenous people effect resurgent listening? In many instances, scholarly focus has been directed toward resurgent work (performance, artwork, text) that acts as an *index* of sovereignty. It is easier to point, gesture, and listen toward such sovereign “things” that have a certain amount of stability in their objecthood and that paradoxically allow for forms of examination and analysis that are atomizing and extractive. Perception, in contrast, remains much more ephemeral, and though there are various ways to study forms of perception, no sustained engagement with resurgent perception has yet to be offered. What does it mean to engage in resurgent forms of reading, looking, and listening from our various Indigenous perspectives? In this next section we will address forms of listening resurgence and its relation to Indigenous sovereignty.

An increasing amount of writing by Indigenous artists, curators, and scholars over the past twenty years has addressed how Indigenous art and cultural practices do the work of sovereignty by asserting and affirming Indigenous legal orders and protocol visually, aurally, kinetically, materially, and rhetorically, or a combination of these. Here we can include Jolene Rickard’s foundational writing on visual sovereignty and Michelle Raheja’s examination of visual sovereignty in film, Robert Warrior’s examination of intellectual sovereignty, Beverly Singer’s description of cultural sovereignty, and Miquel Dangelí’s scholarship on dancing sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> While much of this writing has located sovereignty within specific “works” (artwork, film, writing, dance), each writer to a certain extent emphasizes the processual and relational aspects of creation and production over a static sense of objecthood. And yet, while this list demonstrates a movement away from measuring sovereignty against Western legal definitions, Rickard’s 2011 critique that “many Native scholars caught in a system of Western validation have not embraced a more fluid and diverse interpretation of sovereignty” remains important (Rickard 2011, 470). This is not to say that we should be unconcerned with juridical and legal frameworks of sovereignty but instead note that Indigenous practices of sovereignty operate through Indigenous legal logics embedded within song and cultural practice. To date, scholarship on Indigenous artistic sovereignty has tended to treat Indigenous artworks as representations of sovereignty rather than

to assess how such works express legal orders that hold equivalence to Western markers of sovereignty. Along similar lines, Indigenous artworks that represent sovereignty are understood as if the sovereignty represented therein is affectively perceived as such by all who experience them. To mark a distinction between how Indigenous sovereignty is expressed and felt is not to say that such works do not assert sovereignty through their form, content, and structure but instead to resist the overgeneralization that indices of sovereignty (wampum belts, coppers, contemporary Indigenous artworks, oration, songs) are necessarily perceived as such by Indigenous and settler viewers alike. To do so is to understand that “visual sovereignty” as a thing or object taking visual-material form is different than the action of sovereign sight or seeing. Sovereign speech does not necessarily provoke specific forms of sovereign listening. And sovereign writing does not guarantee that the reader will engage in an act of sovereign reading. By decoupling the deterministic relationship between sovereign object and reception, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous and settler forms of sensory experience that extend beyond the overly reifying subject positions of “Indigenous” and “settler.” Doing so allows us to question the difference between listening to an object’s expression of sovereignty and listening through sovereignty.

In Canada, listening through sovereignty might further entail disambiguating the physical act of hearing guided by the official multicultural politics of recognition (Taylor 1992) and a listening practice that does not—seeks not to—know what it hears. In the former, hearing serves as an act of recognition, where the listener identifies more than one cultural practice at play and where the content of this cultural difference is heard as multicultural enrichment to Canadian national identity (Mackey 2002). Such content neither disrupts what it means to listen nor unsettles the logics of listening. To contrast this with sovereign listening, we must paradoxically engage a listening that does not reduce what is heard to the knowable, that resists a multicultural categorization of one cultural sound among many, that understands sound in its irreducible alterity, and that moves beyond our recognition of normative musical or performance protocols. Such listening would understand that not all sound can be translated to equivalent analogies, in the way that Richard Rath has described resisting wampum’s analogization:

Much of the academic understanding of wampum comes from the use of visual analogies: wampum is “like money,” “like writing,” “like a gift,” or “like a book,” to name a few. This is a useful approach, rendering the unfamiliar in terms familiar to the assumed readers. Analogies, however, take us only part of the way and in the process constrain the historical imaginary. Once a certain threshold is passed, the discussion becomes more and more about the thing wampum is like—money, gifts, writing, or book—than about wampum. Analogy tends to make the indigenous practices appear to be never more than a subset of the thing they are compared to, a pale shadow regardless of the capaciousness of the containing ideas. (Rath 2014, 295)

To listen from a sovereign position might be understood both as a Canadian state sovereignty enacted through the previously described forms of official multicultural listening and enrichment-based listening or, alternatively, through frameworks of Indigenous resurgence that refuse the presupposition of settler logic by not beginning in refusal but instead through Indigenous logics. In order to further detail one instance of this form, albeit not in the genre of classical music but in performance action, I turn to my involvement with Tahltan artist Peter Morin in a performance art work in London, England, and Morin’s subsequent writing about the collective action he initiated there.

In October 2013, Morin arrived in London (UK), where he was to stage an action inside and outside of Saint Olave’s Church, where the first captured Indigenous infant from the new world was buried. In 1577 Martin Frobisher took captive an Inuit man, woman, and infant from Baffin Island. Whereas the man and woman died shortly after arriving in Bristol, the infant was taken to London, where Queen Elizabeth I was keen to claim him as a royal subject. In considering this history, Morin saw connections with the much longer history of First Nations children being taken from their families to Indian residential schools and decided to create a participatory work that would make this history present through a public intervention at Saint Olave’s in London. Morin began by approaching the church to discuss the work. After we had much conversation and attempted negotiation with an increasingly anxious Anglican minister who denied that there was proof that the infant was actually buried there, Morin asked the minister, “*what would you allow us to do in the church in order to honor this child?*”



To this, the minister responded, “you are welcome to have a ceremony in your head.”

Rather than considering this a defeat, Morin responded to the minister’s steadfast refusal of all “pagan” as well as all artistic proposals to honor the child by creating a silent ceremony. For this intervention, Morin gathered together a small group of people to honor the captured infant by holding a procession toward Saint Olave’s Church. Morin led the way, silently drumming, allowing each beat of his drumstick to stop just before it hit the drum. Yet as we walked, these visual beats carried just as much resonance, if not more, than if they were aurally present, perhaps because of their sonic censorship. Morin asked us to follow behind him and take turns singing or speaking messages for the infant into a jar of devil’s club tea—again nearly silencing our songs and messages, yet having an even more palpable resonance individually as we individually felt the resonance of our voices filling the jar. Before we entered the church individually, Morin asked that we each take some of the devil’s club tea into the church, take a moment to remember this child, or “have a silent ceremony in our heads,” and then leave the tea somewhere in the church. To conclude the performance, Morin took the remaining tea and washed the exterior wall of the church with it. Immediately following the performance, Morin wrote about the experience of the work:

today. singing. singing to this baby. remembering this inuit baby. remembering and respecting all of our stolen babies. sitting in silence in the church. holding the medicine of our land. an important collaborator. seeing the baby. holding the baby. reminding the baby we have not forgotten. we do not forget. we love you. we are holding you. crying. laughing. dancing. heart singing. heart drum beats. holding medicine. we are working together. thank you to all of our collaborators. here in london. and there on the land. thank you medicine. you are a powerful force. and then. washing the church with our medicine tea. the words. even a buried heart is still a beating heart. thank you all for helping to remember this still a beating heart.

We could describe Morin’s action as sovereign because it asserts a form of responsibility—as a contemporary performance action—that draws on Indigenous logics of honoring our ancestors, and of performance as “doing work”<sup>15</sup> that operates within but outside of the sovereign stric-

tures of the church. We could also identify Morin's subsequent writing as sovereign in its Tahltan emphasis of a rhythm at odds with standardized art-critical modes of writing, and its disruption of syntax and Western structures of argument and ordering of thought. This disruption prompts readers to reorient their mode of knowledge acquisition by slowing down the act of reading and hungry consumption of content. Most importantly, however, both Morin's action and writing enact a mode of sovereignty through their oratorical and performative claim to documenting Indigenous history. Morin's work does so as an oral/aural practice that is legitimated through the presence of honored witnesses (both those Morin invited to join in the action and the larger community he shared the action with via Facebook) who were given thanks for participating in that role following the work. Morin's contemporary form of oral documentation, arising from a Tahltan-specific epistemology of oral documentation—one also shared by other Northwest coast First Nations people through potlatch and winter dances—marks injustice and enacts the collective action of healing. Through its action and form, Morin's work is defined by a logic not explicitly oriented toward, defensive against, or responsive to the work of settler colonial sovereignty. Morin's action is doing sovereignty. Of course no action can live completely outside of some relationship with the state. Morin's work does not begin from this place; it does not do the work of confronting or resisting—and in doing so *centering*—settler colonialism and state institutional structures. Instead, Morin's work is offered primarily for the Inuit infant, for ancestors, and for the different Indigenous artistic, scholarly, and home communities he is part of. To return to the context of sovereign perception, Indigenous participants in the event and online readers—particularly, but not exclusively those from nations within the Northwest coast and northern British Columbia regions—sense the structures (or what I have been calling the “logics”) of oral documentation and of honoring through song, through the viscerally silent strike of drum and through the calling for honored witnesses. Through these structures, we participate in *sensate sovereignty*.

Yet while Morin's action on the streets of London and his post-action writing are indifferent to being recognized by settler listeners/readers, this is not to say they are not also seen, heard, and reflected upon by non-Indigenous or settler audiences. It is important to note that some of the

participants in the action and honored witnesses were settler colleagues and friends. Morin's work may equally have had some impact on any readers/viewers as a disorientation or redistribution of the sensible (Rancière 2010, 139) as much as it may have engendered a consumptive mode of reading, or be subsumed within the reader's own system of understanding (perhaps as "bad writing" or a "weird artist-thing"). Settler forms of everyday, normative sensory perception are also sovereign, in as much as they operate from an unmarked positionality settlers have come to be interpellated into by national curricula, government policy, and media.

Disambiguating sovereign structures of a performance (or object) and the sovereign reception of the listener or viewer allows us to imagine the many ways in which perception, as a sovereign force, comes into relationship with works that express different sovereignties. This is to say, a sovereign listening may hear differently the soundscape of the territory we are from as a soundscape of subsistence (hunting) rather than one of leisure (with pleasant birdsong and quiet nature), while a sovereign sense of touch for Indigenous material culture (for instance a raven rattle) might be understood as intercorporeal (that is, between human and other-than-human relations) and interrelational rather than as a singular touch upon a nonacting object. To name everyday sensory perception as sovereign marks it as bearing some relation to both the values of settler colonialism and Indigenous nationhood.

### **xwlálám, síwél**

Understanding practices of Indigenous listening resurgence necessitates more than gaining a mere awareness of the diverse cultural contexts and cultural protocol of Indigenous communities. To gain even partial understanding of these practices requires developing relationships with Indigenous artists, singers, and knowledge keepers. Modes of Indigenous listening resurgence do not find Indigenous song familiar; they do not feed xwelítem hunger. They are indigestible. We might consider their indigestibility similar to the indigestibility of seeds that create new life once the berries have fed us. The desire for the familiarity of Indigenous songs, music, or the recognizability of other elements such as rhythm and instrumentation, is the demand that difference present itself in a form that accommodates settler recognition. It is the desire for

frameworks of display that serve the colonial palate and satiate hunger for content.

Such a desire operates equally within the logic of the gallery and museum, where objects are served up for the eye upon white walls, displayed with clear vitrines distinctly illuminated under lighting that removes all shadow. Like the voracious hunger of *xwelítem*, museum display of Indigenous belongings is similarly oriented to accumulation—the cornucopia of ethnographic salvage. Such display culture removes the other senses from engagement with the belonging—a removal so that the eye can consume uninterrupted. No touch is permitted by the vitrine and glass, as the being and ancestor—for example, a raven rattle—and its life are kept “supported” by this display, removed from touch, removed from sound, removed from land, and positioned for settler gaze. In exhibitions including those such as *‘c̓asnaɫəm, the city before the city* at the Museum of Anthropology, curated by Jordan Wilson (Musqueam/*xʷməθkʷəy̓əm*) and Sue Rowley, the hunger of museum display culture is upended by the decision to de-privilege objects on display and fill rooms with *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* voices and *hənq̓əminəm* language. In Wilson and Rowley’s exhibition about the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* city that formerly occupied the place now called Vancouver, no actual historical objects were used in the museum exhibition. Instead, media-rich stories of *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* history—and in particular a room devoted to an audio conversation between members of the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* nation—dominated the space habitually occupied by objects. Conceived of by Wilson, this surround-sound audio installation called “*sq̓əq̓ip—gathered together*,” consisted of a darkened room featuring a single table covered by an oilcloth tablecloth with several photos, surrounded by eight chairs, and filled with conversation, laughter, and sharing of memories amongst *si:yəm*: respected leaders of the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* community. “They conversed for two and a half hours, of their childhood, of shrinking reserve boundaries, of their grandparents and great aunts and uncles, and of their concerns regarding the future of our community,” noted Wilson, which was then condensed to twenty-five minutes for the audio installation (Wilson 2016, 485).

Returning to the single-sense privileging of the typical museum display, where belongings are removed from touch, sound, and full sensory engagement, I suggest that “*sq̓əq̓ip—gathered together*” effects a

xwélmexw counterpoint to normative museum experience. That is, although intended for listening, “sq̓q̓ip” sets what it means to listen in a space that attempts to convey the humor, as well as the “quality of warmth and comfort, [that are] qualities challenging to describe” and are “seldom found in public representations, likely because they are challenging to convey well—they are not easily captured in text format” (Wilson 2016, 484). This warmth and comfort should not merely be understood as an aspect of making the space inviting and comfortable, but instead as an aspect of connection and relationship through the touch of the table and oilcloth, through the darkness of the room, through the presence of the voices situated around the listener and filling the space, through the look of the teapots and cups, the way the voices of these si:yém move, share conversation, and listen to one other. This situation of listening in this particular environment cannot be separated into a purely aural experience of listening. Indeed, such a situation shares much in common with larger principles of witnessing in the work of Morin, the work our communities do in the longhouse, and as we gather around various tables in our communities. Wilson cogently describes the role of witnessing in community events and its connection to listening:

Witnesses can be called upon at any point in the future to provide an account of what they observed at a particular gathering. Witnessing is one example in demonstrating how in our community (and in our neighbouring communities), knowledge, history, life narratives are dispersed amongst many. Thus gathering together as individuals is akin to bringing together components of a history. Spending time with this group underscored the importance of listening, not simply by virtue of us listening to them, but in how they listened to each other. When one person was speaking, the rest of the group listened respectfully—as opposed to waiting for their turn to talk. When the next person shared their thoughts with the group, they would respond in-depth, speaking not only to their own experiences and perspectives, but also to those they just heard. This aspect of the conversation demonstrated how well these individuals listened to one another, retaining what they’d heard and incorporating it into how they perceived the topic at hand. As they made clear about their own learning experiences, active listening was a formative aspect to their growing up in the Musqueam community. This mode of learning, of listening



Figure 5. *sq̓əq̓ip—gathered together*, installation view at the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, 2015. Curated by Jordan Wilson and Sue Rowley. Photograph by Reese Muntean.

to knowledgeable adults in conversation with one another was echoed throughout our interviews with community members. . . . Howard E. Grant remembers, “Dinner table talk is how I learned who I was. I listened to my grandparents, my grand-uncles, aunts and uncles, and mother. They would gather, have a sit down dinner, and you’d hear them talk. You’d hear them reminisce. You’d hear them talk about what it was, and how it was.” . . . In these contexts, listening is as critical as speaking. (Wilson 2015, 22–23)

This understanding of witnessing is not grounded in the visual, as it is in Western conceptions of the eyewitness, but in the aural. It is also evidenced in Salishan languages.<sup>16</sup> As previously mentioned, the Halq̓em̓éylem word “xw̓lálám” means to witness and to listen. “xw̓lálám-chexw” means “you are called to witness” and is used in a formal context of longhouse work. “xw̓lálámaltha,” less formally, means “let’s listen.” xw̓lálà:m (listening), as a shxwelméxwelh form of attention, is a practice decidedly opposed to hungry listening, which gathers and instrumentalizes content that is heard. Instead, xw̓lálà:m might better be understood as a practice of gathering that takes place in non-goal-oriented

ways. This, however, does not mean that we listen without intention, but rather that the work of listening is not predicated on use-value or the drive to accumulate knowledge. These shxwelméxwelh xwélalà:m, or Indigenous forms of listening, are just one form of many diverse resurgent practices that exist for Indigenous peoples. In a similar way to how James Morrison describes Gitksan listening to the limx oo'y, xwélmexw listening moves beyond the single sense of listening and involves a practice of síwél, "to become attentive to something, or to prick one's ears." This listening does not isolate the ear as we sense shxwélí resounding land. xwélalà:m is a form of attention in which we are attentive not just to sound but to the fullest range of sensory experience that connects us to place.

## Conclusion

To decolonize perception in general, and listening in particular, requires different strategies for settler and Indigenous listeners. While it is important for Indigenous listeners to understand and practice forms of resurgent perception based in our individual nations and communities' cultural logics, for settler listeners decolonial strategies may at times be necessarily agonistic, as encounters between nation-to-nation sound sources and perception predicated upon the rough edges of a conception of democracy based in dissensus. They may, moreover, require new frames for listening that do not treat listening as a single-sense activity, while resisting the hunger to consume alterity and Indigenous content. At the very least, returning to Susan McClary, it requires us to suspend our belief in the certainty of knowing what the act of listening is (McClary 1991, 19). To effect a decolonial crisis in the act of listening—to ask listeners to become "no longer sure of what listening is"—cannot simply entail a willful approach to kick colonial listening habits. Instead, it means shifting the places, models, and structures of how we listen. At times, it may also mean an approach led by artists, composers, curators, and musicians to impose new listening impasses through their work. Such forms of impasse may in fact seem contrary to an idea of decolonial listening based in listening better or removing settler colonial perceptual filters. One example of such an impasse has already been given in written, aesthetic, or sensory blockades discussed at the end of the



Introduction and effected in the previous section for Indigenous readers only. Further examples will be presented in the event score that concludes chapter 4, and in the perceptual impasse of allied artists like visual artist Jin-Me Yoon discussed in the Conclusion. As these examples will demonstrate, unlike the “tin ear” as a willful refusal against listening otherwise, the aesthetic impasse acts to block listening’s voracious accumulation of content. Like Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, the listening impasse sends perception off in other directions and slows hungry listening’s ravenous appetite in service of increased self-reflection toward one’s listening habits, privilege, and biases.

*This page intentionally left blank*

## EVENT SCORE FOR GUEST LISTENING I

I am sitting in a room  
Limestone walls surround  
Limestone lines  
inside and outside of the structure I sit within  
This building, this house, this room,  
is one of many in which I am living

I am living in a city—“often called the Limestone City”—says the City  
of Kingston  
I am spending my days in limestone buildings  
I sit inside many “of the many charming limestone buildings”—  
says the City,  
“many of which help tell the story of Canada”

These charming limestone walls—this charming city—built from  
quarries  
Quarried from the lands of Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek  
Built from the lands of the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabek  
Structured by colonial design  
to allay anxieties of impermanence

I am sitting in a limestone room that hums  
with the subfrequency of colonial quarry and cut  
This audible-inaudible sound  
resonates my body  
My body—xwélmexw body, swíyeqe & yes xwelítem starving person’s  
body—  
in this room, these buildings, that resonate the story of Canada

I am listening in a limestone building,  
trying not to feel the story of Canada  
resonate through my body  
shiver through

I am trying to hear the seepage of water through stone  
I am trying to hear the labor of quarry, cut and chisel  
I am trying to hear these walls as still the land  
I am trying not to hear these walls declare their immovability,  
declare their charming structure, their necessary structure  
I am trying to hear their structure burn down  
while dwelling and shelter remain