

## see to see—

*The Well-Dressed Wound* by Derek McCormack (Semiotexte, 2015)

Stacey Ho

Fashion-forward ghouls continue to buttfuck the beloved icons of Americana in the third of Derek McCormack's haunted trilogy. Previous incarnations in this series were kind of like a country carnival held on queer Halloween, starring macabre historical caricatures of Elsa Schiaparelli, Hank Snow/Williams, Jimmie Rodgers, and Coco Chanel. This time around, however, McCormack's crisp prose and taste for pageantry are concentrated into something more brutal, minimal, and intense. A host of spirits led by avant-garde fashion designer-cum-devil Martin Margiela possess a seance held by Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln for their dead gay son Willie. The stage is set for a vaudevillian Civil War-tinged runway show where Willie and "Oh! Susanna" composer Stephen Foster are fucked and infected with AIDS in the name of fashion and faggotry. Our host Margiela succinctly sums up the situation: "When soldiers die, they're faggots; when faggots die, it's from AIDS; when faggots die from AIDS, whatever clothes they're wearing at the time of their deaths are mine—are Margiela!" (62)

There is something truly perverse in *The Well-Dressed Wound's* playful conflation of pearls with pustules, but then again fashion and death are old familiars. In the spirit of Benjamin and Baudelaire, McCormack's pastiche of signifiers from the American Civil War and the American AIDS epidemic does what fashion does best—resuscitates the old to make it new

again: the perpetuity of Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter cloaks the biological body, denying its drive toward entropy, its need to perish, die, and decompose. Every season, *à rebours*, the dead rise again. It's *unnatural*. *The Well-Dressed Wound* carries this contradiction to its extreme. Blood- and bacteria-soaked bandages become conceptual couture. Fashion and faggotry embrace the diseased and wounded body in an alternate universe from which the silenced, gay, dead masses are finally able to shriek.

The spirits who walk the runway in *The Well-Dressed Wound's* horror show sport:

"Used jeans, painted white." (27)

"Nylon stockings cut to the knee,  
painted white." (26)

"Wig worn as a wig, painted white." (28)

"Pair ankle boots, painted white." (26)

Significantly, jeans, stockings, wigs, and boots are not only cum-soaked, but literally whitewashed. Simultaneously the book invokes, through the American Civil War, the spectre of slavery. Recalling the "die-ins" staged in protest of the lack of black representation at the recent Art AIDS America exhibition at the Tacoma Art Museum, I can't help but tangentially imagine these gestures as a circuitous acknowledgement of an inability to give voice to significant and underrepresented black perspectives on the AIDS pandemic.

We are at an uneasy juncture, when the event of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is in the process of being both lived and historicized. Taking a cue from LGBTQ elders who fought against their own erasure, representation of "the AIDS crisis" must be problematized so that divergent experiences of this event are not left out of the narrative. *The Well-Dressed Wound* mocks this erasure and its maudlin historicization by

embracing the stigma of death-by-fucking while simultaneously reincarnating death's equivalents: a totalizing blankness, a roaring silence, the ever-fashionable void. As history tries to fill this absence, McCormack's book is a spell that conjures the harsh absurdity of accounting for all the words and all the spirits that are missing.

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**Dory Nason on Tekahionwake  
(E. Pauline Johnson) & Indigenous  
Feminist Performance**

*Jessica Hallenbeck*

It's early December and I'm standing outside the Western Front. A sandwich board propped up by the entrance announces tonight's Scrivener's Monthly event: *Tekahionwake (E. Pauline Johnson) & Indigenous Feminist Performance*, featuring a talk by Dr. Dory Nason (Anishinaabe, Leech Lake Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe), a conversation and film screening with filmmaker Elle-Máíjá Tailfeathers (Kainai First Nation, Blood Tribe, and Sámi), and a closing performance by JB the First Lady (Jerilynn Webster, Nuxalk & Onondaga). Inside, a large, excited crowd has gathered, and as a PhD candidate at UBC I recognize many students and colleagues. The excitement and care I can feel in the room is a testament to the deep connections that Nason and Tailfeathers nurture. I have personally benefited immensely from their friendship and guidance, and from their larger bodies of work within the context of Indigenous women's histories and Indigenous resurgence.<sup>1</sup>

Nason's writing theorizes, narrates, and enacts Indigenous women's resistance, survival, and love. In writing about, with, and alongside powerful women like

Tekahionwake, Anna Mae Aquash, Zitkala-Ša, Nancy Ward, Nan-ye-hi, Beloved Woman of the Cherokee Nation, and Sarah Winnemucca, Nason looks back in order to press into the present, reminding us that the work of Indigenous women is ongoing and unfinished. At the Western Front, Nason describes how contemporary Indigenous feminist protests and political actions arise from a long Indigenous feminist intellectual tradition rather than as a response to white feminism.

Nason's direct, driven, angry, loving, and beautifully fluid writing challenges her readers "to never forget how violence operates in the daily lives of Indigenous peoples."<sup>2</sup> In writing about the many forms of gendered settler colonial violence, Nason weaves together the work of Indigenous feminists with critiques of the prison system, the child welfare system, reconciliation, and the Montreal massacre. Her work importantly envisions an end to such violence, a "better relationship built in the wake of violence but not beholden to it" (ibid.). This vision situates the writings, performances, and labor of Indigenous women as core teachings for Indigenous resurgence, demonstrating both historically and contemporarily the "profound love that Indigenous women have for the future stability and health of their families, their land and their nations."<sup>3</sup> In reading Johnson's work into a larger canon of Indigenous feminist intellectual thought, Nason narrates a past and a future of Indigenous resurgence that radically shifts the conversation away from identity politics, destabilizes settler colonial conceptualizations of land and territory, and questions the consequences of exclusively land-based decolonial practices.<sup>4</sup>

Elle-Máíjá Tailfeathers is an award-winning filmmaker, writer, actor, youth mentor, teacher, and climate justice activist.<sup>5</sup>

Her films tell emotional, raw, impactful stories about connections between family (*Bibttöš, Mavericks*), land (*Bloodland*), women (*A Red Girl's Reasoning, Mavericks*, and *Hurry Up, You Stupid Cripple*, co-directed with Terreane Derrick, Gitxsan), and the violent machinations of the settler colonial state (*State of the Nations, The Right Thing To Do*, and *Colonial Gaze: Sámi Artists' Collective* with Marja Bal Nango [Sámi]). At the Western Front, Tailfeathers screens her 2012 film *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, named after the E. Pauline Johnson short story of the same title. She introduces the film by speaking about the fetishization of Indigenous bodies and other forms of suffering caused by white settlers. Her discussion of white settler fetishization, guilt, and consumption of trauma draws parallels Nason's critique of all-too-familiar descriptions of Johnson as the quintessential "Indian Princess." We sit together in the Western Front's Grand Luxe Hall and watch *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, a film about violence against Indigenous women, the failure of the justice system, and the power of an Indigenous woman to directly take on her attackers. It is a revenge fantasy for both Johnson and contemporary Indigenous audiences.

Through their own voices as scholars, filmmakers, and badass Indigenous feminists, Nason's and Tailfeathers' work, conversation, and presence remind us that Indigenous women's resistance is generational and takes many forms.

1 I'd like to thank May Farrales, Dory Nason, and Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers for their comments on an earlier draft of this piece. I'd also like to thank Nason and Tailfeathers for their permission to write this piece.

2 Dory Nason, "Violence is Not a Given" (2013), originally published on the *Indigenous*

*Nationhood Movement* website and now available at [thelanguagualberta.tumblr.com/post/70303498248/violence-is-not-a-given-indigenous-nationhood](http://thelanguagualberta.tumblr.com/post/70303498248/violence-is-not-a-given-indigenous-nationhood).

3 Dory Nason, "We Hold Our Hands Up" (12 Feb. 2013), blog entry on *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* ([decolonization.wordpress.com](http://decolonization.wordpress.com)).

4 For a discussion of gender-based discrimination in the Indian Act and the consequences that this has had for generations of Indigenous women, see Bonita Lawrence, *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (U of Nebraska P, 2004).

## Insurgency & Use-Value: Notes after Fred Moten's visit to Vancouver

Amy De'Ath and Sean O'Brien

From 23–25 October 2015, Fred Moten visited Vancouver to give a reading, a talk, and two seminars. Below is a short response to the second seminar held at The Capilano Review's offices, for which we read Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman's *Architecture after Revolution alongside Amiri Baraka's "A Contract (For the Destruction and Rebuilding of Paterson)." Huge thanks to Fred for the generosity and easy precision with which he shared his thoughts, even and especially because we don't yet fully understand where they could take us.*

Is the refugee also a fugitive? Surely so. Both descriptions translate to the same word in German, *Flüchtling*, an irony perhaps not lost on Angela Merkel in the context of the current so-called "refugee crisis" unfolding across the beleaguered Eurozone. But fleeing a bad situation and fleeing the law have always been the same line of flight. As Fred says, "what's at stake is fugitive movement in and out of the frame, bar, or whatever

externally imposed social logic—a movement of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said, since it inheres in every closed circle, to break every enclosure.”<sup>1</sup> Insurgent social life has a pre-existence to that which would seek to destroy it, and though it is always being both accumulated and destroyed, it is this insurgency against which power defines itself: workplace discipline responds to the workers, as Foucault noticed in Marx, or as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, “resistance is actually prior to power.”<sup>2</sup> *They react to what we do*. In this way, it is the relation between persistence and resistance—where the capacity for the former founds the possibility for the latter—that constitutes the object under attack, and this is why Fred’s analysis encourages us to shift our view to the practice *preceding* the moment at which the pigs show up. Incursion here is refigured as daily life, and as a form of self-defense, which is to say there’s something worth defending, as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense reminds us.

Fred introduced us to Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman’s *Architecture after Revolution* (Sternberg Press, 2013), a book that grew out of the Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency in Beit Sahour (Palestine Occupied Territories). Petti, Hilal, and Weizman argue that the “inherent schizophrenia of colonialism” produces the conditions of “an underlying negation.”<sup>3</sup> This negation subtends, following Fred and Stefano Harney, “beneath and beyond” the settler fort, in “the surround,” a space populated by an exiled insurgent life that exceeds the enclosure.<sup>4</sup> The fugitive figure of the refugee constitutes an existential threat to the foundations of settler society, and as Petti, Hilal, and Weizman note, “What makes refugee life a potentially powerful agent of decolonization is that the ongoing

desire for return is the strongest possible challenge to the sovereign power of the state” (44). And so we can easily recognize the IDF’s biopolitical calculation and regulation of Palestinian caloric intake as an attempt to undermine Palestinian capacity building<sup>5</sup>—that is, the possibility of return through the cultivation of collective social life—in direct response to the threat that the figure of the refugee poses as the insurgent life that surrounds the colonial settlement.

How should we think of “return”? Petti, Hilal, and Weizman invoke Agamben’s term “profanation,” the strategy of returning things to their common use, and yet are careful to distinguish “return” from a simple reversal of the trajectory of time, writing instead of “returns” in the plural as a concept entangled with (through?) decolonization and emerging twofold as *extraterritoriality* (“the endless present of homelessness”) and *present return* (“a nostalgic utopia”) (18-39).

But their talk of uses—“the old uses are gone, the new uses not yet defined” (13)—made us think of the historical and contradictory view of use-value as an “innocent” category—one that would persist after the abolition of capitalist exchange-value, as if the meaning of use-value did not in fact depend on its relation to exchange-value.<sup>6</sup> This is a view perhaps left intact in much Marxist-feminist thinking, in Silvia Federici’s work for example, where a notion of the reproductive commons, as Federici sees it emerge from the structures of subsistence societies especially, is posited as grounds for a post-capitalist future. It’s also a point laterally engaged by Petti, Hilal, and Weizman when they describe “destruction” and “reuse” as two contradictory desires in decolonizing architecture. They reject both routes:

The impulse of destruction seeks to turn time backward. It seeks to reverse development to its virgin nature, a tabula rasa on which a set of new beginnings might be articulated. However, time and its processes of transformation can never be simply reversed. (20)

The other impulse, to reuse, seeks to impose political continuity and order under a new system of control. [...] The reuse of Israeli colonial architecture could establish a sense of continuity rather than rupture and change. (20-1)

Instead, Petti, Hilal, and Weizman propose the notion of subversion, a “repurposing...for other ends,” noting that “even the most horrifying structures of domination can yield themselves to new forms of life” (21). But isn’t subversion still a form of reuse? As Roswitha Scholz notes, “the suffering resulting from capitalism emerges from its very formal relations, of which private property is merely one of many results,”<sup>7</sup> and if Petti, Hilal and Weizman see the revolution of return as “fundamentally a revolution in relation to property” (59), then insisting on the mutually-constitutive relation between use-value and exchange-value is not merely an abstract, theoretical issue. Doesn’t *Architecture After Revolution*, in some ways arguably close to “commonizing” politics such as Federici’s, propose collective forms of social reproduction that might easily be co-opted by a capitalist State (or equally, a State to come)? In other words, if *use* ever did detach itself from use-value, how could it survive for more than a brief moment in a world still crushed by the value-form?

Questions of decolonization, destruction, reuse, and subversion open onto an assertion made in anti-capitalist currents

of Indigenous studies that affirm the ongoing existence of a pre-capitalist mode of social relations that would exist beyond capital’s abolition (and all that that implies). Indigeneity seems a crucial category in thinking about the politics of abolition because it both includes and exceeds, or is distinct from, questions of racial ascription. That is to say, race is a construct, Indigeneity is not (or not only), so it resists many of the forms of critique that can tell us so much about “race.” How do Indigenous resurgence and abolition relate? How might the way Petti, Hilal, and Weizman understand decolonization as *return*, as “a return to and a return of,” acquire another meaningful dimension if we think of it in the context of the Coast Salish Territories on which we in Vancouver live?

1 See “Do Black Lives Matter: Robin D.G. Kelly and Fred Moten in Conversation” (vimeo.com/116111740).

2 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000), 260.

3 Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture After Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 82.

4 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2013), 17.

5 See Amira Hass, “2,279 Calories per Person: How Israel Made Sure Gaza Didn’t Starve” (17 Oct. 2012), *Haaretz*.

6 On the mutually constitutive relation of use-value and exchange-value, see Bruno Astarian, “Crisis Activity and Communitisation.”

7 Roswitha Scholz, “Patriarchy and Commodity Society: Gender with the Body,” *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, ed. Neil Larsen et al (Chicago: MCM Publishing, 2014), 127.

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**Field Notes for the Alpine Tundra by  
Elena Johnson (Gaspereau Press,  
2015)**

**Elee Kraljii Gardiner**

Slim book, just forty poems. Caribou printed under French flaps. Photo wrapping the book was taken by the author. The bas relief of scree, scrub, and animal holds the eye: the more you look, the more you see.

Time span of Johnson's mission: one month in 2008. Summer. Endless daytime.

Johnson's book is a backpack. This world of poems is reduced to the scope of what we need, what the eye needs. On the Ruby Range in the Yukon, where she spent time recording bio-stats, Johnson measures the environment within and without. She relays peculiar shifts in perspective of both abundance and time.

Wildflowers one knuckle high.  
Mammals the width of a hand  
gather bouquets in their mouths,  
pile them in havens under stones.  
("Tallest Objects" 15)

People are alien here, or just ill-suited animals.

A kilometer above sea level,  
we are the tallest objects  
bent by the wind. ("Tallest Objects" 15)

Researchers hunch, huddle, withstand. Time is measured in the droplets of rain soaking undrying laundry. Communication is lunar. Away from camp one is away, gone—as in this poem, a tundra-like nosegay:

Alone at the Base

The 'door' of the cook-tent  
unzipped. It blows open,  
blows closed.

The other tents  
flap, flap, flap. No one  
is ever coming back.

And what are these people doing so far away from human exchange? Mapping inscrutables such as untraceable creeks, marking days with the repetition of dry-pack foods, cross-tallying toponomies while "the weather can't be counted. The moss, the mist, the hours" ("Time" 23).

These poem-notes are spare and tidy, aggregating a landscape too diffuse to wax on and on about. Johnson avoids the personification of the landscape by hewing to a scientific eye. Sometimes she does this with a lightly comedic tone, as when she relays the researchers coming under study of the inhabitants of the tundra:

Hoary Marmots: Study

We lure them with urine, cage them.  
Measure their length, weight,  
skull-width as they scabble  
in the cloth bag. We snip off  
a piece of the left ear,  
band the right. Pierced,  
they speed away looking hip,  
like they're headed for Whitehorse  
looking for a city-savvy mate.

*Year six of study:  
Local marmots display  
opportunistic behaviour.*

They eye our backpacks,  
steal a sandwich. Chew our boots  
while we nap in the moss.

When we return to camp they pose  
on rocks beside the food bins,  
up to nothing. They slip out  
from under tent platforms,  
whistle the alert. (25)

Diagrams crop up among poems to graph hours, tally tasks, and situate remote areas. One submission excuses the lack of data due to “hands too cold” (24).

Gaspereau’s excellent typography lends itself to the Spartan beauty of the texts. The poems have space, wind whistles through; we have a vista. The graphs, like cairns, are the raw material breaking up the sightlines. Johnson’s notes form a diary condensed into salient memories. Have I travelled to this terrain before? No. Yes. Now I am equipped.

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***The Astonishment Tapes* by Robin Blaser, ed. Miriam Nichols (U of Alabama P, 2015)**

***Soma Feldmar***

The publication of *The Astonishment Tapes*, nearly forty-two years after Robin Blaser gave the talks, is ultimately a collaboration between Blaser and Miriam Nichols, his editor, biographer, and longtime friend. What Nichols has done in editing the transcribed talks down, or in half as she has said, is to offer us the narrative of poetry and autobiography that Blaser himself was most interested in. To mine the more than eight hundred pages of text for the coal-that’s-almost-diamond of Blaser’s poetic and autobiographical work, as Nichols did, is a work of love.

In the Spring of 1974, over ten evenings at the home of UBC Professor Warren Tallman, Robin Blaser spoke to a small group of friends and poets about his life as a poet and his working poetics. The way Blaser thinks about and approaches language, the world, experience, self, other, and the origin of being, or ontology, is something that we don’t see much anymore. It’s also something that is difficult; it goes against most of our

cultural, philosophical, poetic, academic, and social assumptions. In the order in which they appear, including Nichols’ chapter titles, here are some of the almost-diamonds:

“I would say that’s the first love affair. I mean, I’m nine years old and this guy named Cleo Adams who’s twenty-four.... He would wait for me to go on walks.... But he told stories mainly about stones” (“Chapter 1: Out of Idaho” 18-19).

“I know no way to think, to speak, to feel, without someone else’s hand in mine and the two greatest of those people are Jack and Olson. Those people are companions.... Duncan I have such debts to, and I am going to give all that out now” (“Chapter 2: Berkeley: Astonishments” 66).

“Curiously it’s Kantorowicz.... suddenly I had a man who knew that the poetry was noetic, that its task is knowledge, that it is always the re-centering of the origin of the world, that it is always the beginning again and the dwelling of the nature of the world, of man and the world” (“Chapter 3: Ernst Kantorowicz: Falling into History” 80-81).

“[Dante’s] poetics will finally teach me that poetically I must also be able to enter the language on as many levels as my intelligence will allow me to do and the work I do and the care I take... where I then may enter the language and speak right and be sane” (“Chapter 4: Dante and the Metaphysics of Light” 145).

“To begin a life is to think. The feeling is held in the medium as a suddenness, image, a movement, and gathering out of the imageless. The form is the vital movement of image out of the imageless. Language is itself a first movement of

form, a binding *rhythmos* or form of the mind" ("Chapter 5: Moderns and Contemporaries: The Knowledge of the Poet" 184).

And so the *Tapes* reveal a huge, ranging territory, not only of Blaser's thoughts on poetics but also of his own history, his way of being with others, his natural speech patterns, and so much more of the human that was Robin Blaser than anything else we have. Within the first few moments of the first session, Blaser announces that he wants to call them, all of them, once they're done, "Astonishment." He says, "if they're going to be all put together, astonishment is the whole thing we're talking about" (11). He gets his idea of astonishment from Ernst Bloch, who writes: "Astonishment is the very source or origin of the world itself, ever at work and ever hidden away within the darkness of the lived instant" (4). In this book, Nichols and Blaser offer us a chance to look at the world differently, to remember our history in thought and language, and, perhaps most importantly, to be astonished ourselves.

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**Patti Smith and her band, *Horses*  
40th Anniversary Tour (The Moore  
Theatre, Seattle, 01-04-2016)**

**Erica Holt**

*Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine...*

The congregation inhales. In this room already heavy with the *chronos* of an entire city, the masses await redemption yet again out of the blood and dust and reverberation. Forgotten spectres remain here, or so it goes, faint with mildew in the air, complacent in the certainty of decay and recovery. Murmurs erupt into praise. We are raised. A sermon has begun. We can feel it, skin is breaking.

(Children Go Where I Send You. "How shall I send you?")

Ms. Simone, *Nina* if we deserved to know her, pauses in song to address her audience. "Have you ever been to a revival meeting...? I bet you don't even know what I'm talkin' 'bout.

Well, you in one right now.")

*It is* that we are present, as one with each other as in some holy geist, caught together in a moment of surrender. We are brought forth whether we recognize it or not, bred inside of this *now*, to be humiliated and affirmed in simultaneity. Shaman doo-wop. *We are not human*. We witness our ancestors as Patti invokes her peers in an Elegie.

*Jimi...Jim...Robert...*

*Patti* conjures visions. She coaxes new interpretations from known fictions, new ways to seek our independence from the falseness. We witness her contend with some vast idea, offer biblical grandeur with hypobolic wit. The performance *is* Patti—transcendent, genius—but also undone and undoing, eccentric, unaffected, a long and continuous act of defiance, all this the substance of her life.

We go forward and retreat as we are led, struggling and succumbing. We have completed this pilgrimage to confront ourselves, delivered back unto us. We must improvise. You are human, you are not human. That's the fucking joke, isn't it, the crux? Yet here we are, returned together.

Patti slowly wrestles each electrified string out of her guitar one by one in a gesture that reminds us to fake it. If *life is filled with holes* there must be endless ways of (en)countering the void. What might appear if we shattered our mirrors?