

## CHAPTER NINE

CHARTING INDIGENOUS STORIES OF PLACE:  
AN ALTERNATE CARTOGRAPHY THROUGH  
THE VISUAL NARRATIVE OF JEFF THOMAS

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Over the past ten thousand years the City of Toronto, Canada has held and continues to hold Indigenous memories and stories of place. The site that now makes up the city has always been a significant space for Indigenous people. It is connected to the ancient North American trading routes, and specifically carries special meaning for the Anishinabek because of their spiritual relationship to the Toronto Islands and various sites within the city. Large proportions of Indigenous people reside in the City of Toronto<sup>1</sup> and the re-migration of Aboriginal people to the city is recent, thus the critical investigation of Toronto as a site that contains Indigenous memories and stories is relevant and timely. This chapter brings forth the concealed geographies of the City of Toronto through an examination of selected photographs by Haudenosaunee artist Jeff Thomas. In my past research I have argued that the work of Indigenous artists is representative of their embodied practices and knowledge (Nagam 2012), and it is their artwork and artistic practices that are intrinsically linked to their relationship to place. In other words, their artwork is an articulation of embodied knowledge expressed through their creative work, which narrates Indigenous stories of place. In this chapter I focus on a selection of Thomas's photographs that creatively demonstrate an alternative cartography that challenges and contradicts myths of settlement embedded in the colonial narratives of geography. I am interested in transforming Indigenous stories of place into the possibility to become something beyond a colonial or imperial space. I am hopeful that the narratives that are produced through Thomas's photographs create a space where Indigenous stories of place can be told. By visually recounting stories of place within Toronto, his photographs shed light on Indigenous peoples' relationship and experiences within cities.

I will begin by telling historical stories embedded in specific locations throughout the City of Toronto and it is these stories that will create a visual cartography of the terrain through each photograph. Within the context of these images I unpack the historical romantic notion of the "Indian" and underline Thomas's ability to re-write and re-create a visual narrative rooted in Indigenous stories of place. These stories are firmly located within concepts of Native space, which can be understood as a network of relationships akin to those traditionally navigated over waterways and across land. In this chapter, I show how Thomas uses stereotypical historical figurines to challenge settler ideologies in the colonial occupation of urban spaces such as the City of Toronto. Thomas's photographs confront settler constructs with whimsical self-representations of Aboriginal people that are both stuck in the archaic past and are visibly part of the present and future image of the city. I argue that Thomas's act of reclamation is not about returning to a pre-contact ideal, or about documenting the everyday life of Indigenous folks in the city, instead it is about creating this whimsical, fantastic, complicated image that is indisputably contemporary. I draw on the photographs from *Indians on Tour* (2005) and selected images from the artist's personal collection. This selection of artwork is situated in the street photographer aesthetic from an Aboriginal perspective (Thomas 2010) and is an artistic experiment within the medium of the camera. The images selected are photographed in various locations within the City of Toronto, and all of the images have a stereotypical Plains Indian plastic figurine in the forefront.

Within my past and current research I am interested in the intersectionality of creative, conceptual, and material geographies within art practices because geography is about knowledge and the ways we know, which is part of the powerful process of colonization, exploration, and conquest (McKittrick 2006, 61). Space is about place and each location has a particular set of histories and relationships. As Indigenous artist Jimmie Durham humorously articulates,

It is clearly obvious that Europe is a political entity, not in the least a geographical entity. That Europe has no geography was already obvious to me in the Americas, because the Americas are so obviously the best (that is, the worst) part of Europe. (The most successful elements of those factors of culture called "Europe", the most triumphant, the biggest.) (Durham 1998, 103)

Geographer Katherine McKittrick (2006, xii) argues geography can be understood as space, place and location in their physical materiality and imaginative configurations, and my analysis of Thomas's photographs

begins from this standpoint. Further, she defines concealed geographies (non-white non-European mappings), as “rational spatial colonization and domination: the profitable erasure and objectification of subaltern subjectivities, stories, and lands” (x). The goal of this chapter is to bring forth the buried or hidden Indigenous stories of place within the selected artworks. The conquest and control of Indigenous peoples and their land is part of the social production of space. Practices of subjugation are spatial acts (x) and the way in which Indigenous people have been bound to colonialism and conquest confines their histories and relations to place. As French theorist Henri Lefebvre states that “if space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production. The ‘object’ of interest must be expected to shift from things in space to the actual production of space” (1974, 36–37). The object of interest here, then, is how do Indigenous artists such as Thomas (and others) narrate Indigenous stories of place within the socially produced colonial space. Lefebvre says, “social space subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and /or (relative) disorder” (73). People’s everyday actions are part of the land that surrounds us; it is the physical and metaphysical space that impacts our relationship to it. McKittrick argues “geography is not, however, secure and unwavering; we produce space, we produce its meanings, and we work very hard to make geography what it is” (2006, xi). This research focuses on the production of social space and postulates that a new relationship can be forged through re-mapping, re-imagining and re-thinking the material realities of concealed Indigenous stories of place. This chapter concentrates on ideas of place articulated in Thomas’s creative interventions, which I argue are grounded in the geo-political geographies of the City of Toronto.

### Writing Ourselves into the Visual Narrative

Historical images of Aboriginal people have kept us in a frame that renders us still and voiceless; this tradition of visual representation has had considerable long-term effects. Indigenous art historian Richard Hill articulates the devastating implications for Aboriginal people in this context, arguing that the colonial narrative has confined Aboriginal people to the dichotomies of civilized versus savage, heathen versus Christian and nature versus culture (2010, 99). The body of work I examine poses a contradiction to the above static binaries of Aboriginal visual representations. I argue that Thomas whimsically plays with these dichotomies by placing plastic figurines of stereotypical Plains Indians in the foreground of each

photograph, producing an image of Aboriginal people that initially seems to be consistent with archival photographs, which are bound to the Canadian master narrative. The figurines that Thomas uses in his photographs symbolize constructed images of an Indian statically frozen in time, recounting an entirely imaginary story of how the west was won. Thomas’ playful photographs re-appropriate these stereotypes by engaging the viewer head on with the absurdity of the constructed ideas, which becomes a whimsical self-representation. The placement of the plastic toys is an act of reclamation of constructed ideas that are grounded in romantic notions of the “Indian” that have become incorrect representations of Aboriginal people. Unfortunately Indigenous people are stuck with these images as both fictional and real representations because the North American cultural imagination is grounded in the ideology of romanticism. Indigenous cultural critic Paul Chaat Smith argues, “The discourse on Indian art or politics or culture, even among people of goodwill, is consistently frustrated by the distinctive type of racism that confronts Indians today: romanticism. Simply put, romanticism is a highly developed, deeply ideological system of racism towards Indians that encompass language, culture and history” (2009, 17). Thomas’s photographs take this system of racism head-on by appropriating negative or constructed images of Aboriginal people and bringing those images into the contemporary urban landscape, such as Toronto. Ironically his photographs represent Aboriginal people in the city, but in this collection of work they are represented in a constructed, static and romantic era of the past. In the book *Jeff Thomas: A Study of Indianness*, Hill explains

Thomas is conscious that the narratives he weaves around historical images be situated in the concerns of the present. He notes that historical portraits of Aboriginal people often excluded their immediate environment, leaving their subjects in stasis, floating in a placeless place. It is precisely the sense of immersion in an immediate, living world that he tries to capture in his own portraits. For him, contrary to the romantic notion, that world is an urban one. (Thomas and Hill 2004, 12)

Thomas’s photographs challenge romantic notions of an Aboriginal person donning a plains headdress, riding a horse bare-back in the open terrain precisely because his images are re-appropriating these stereotypes within the contemporary urban environment. Thomas is trying to make sense of the romantic constructed images that have placed Aboriginal people in the archaic past; he complicates this relationship by using stereotypical caricatures of “the Indian” in the foreground. It is this placement of the

figurine that puts Aboriginal people into the present and future image of the city, which directly contradicts the concepts surrounding the romantic notions of the "Indian" that are locked in the past.

Thomas's images engage in a dialogue with the urban environment, compelling the viewer to become aware of the colonial city that is built on the ideology of conquest and ownership. He is gently asking the viewer to become aware of the politics of existing settler ideologies. An example of these ideologies is the settler colony's recurring narrative that it is rightfully the proprietor of the supposedly newly found land. This narrative is foundational in the construction of urban spaces such as Toronto and plays a pivotal role in the recorded history of the city. These settler ideologies represent a part of what Smith explains to be the rationale behind the invasion and destruction of the complex Indigenous societies of the Americas: "Indians have been erased from the master narrative of this country and replaced by cartoon images that all of us know and most of us believe. At different times the narrative has said we didn't exist and the land was empty; then it was mostly empty and populated by fearsome savages; then populated by noble savages who couldn't get with the program; and on and on" (2009, 20). Thomas's photographs reflect this complex colonial relationship, asking the viewer to contemplate how these interpretations of historical narratives impact Aboriginal peoples' relationships to urban space. I argue that Thomas's images provoke the observer to engage with their specific historical locations and to question the missing Indigenous histories of these urban spaces. His photographs challenge historical narratives by using the re-representation of the romantic and noble Indian to disrupt the colonial occupation of the cityscape.

The kinds of narratives that photographs produce are not bound by the same responsibility as an official document that contains the "historical truth." As Indigenous art historian Jolene Rickard argues in the context of the exhibition *HIDE* (The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian–New York, 2010), "Overall, the category of photography had been highly problematic in its visualization and representation of Native people" (2010, 82). Photographs can create multiple versions of stories through different codes of transmission. In many historical photographs the lines of communication between the viewer and photographer are strained because of the viewer's (in)ability to decipher whether the image is an official photographic document or a created scenario. Thomas's photographs are easily deciphered as constructed scenarios by the use of the figurine in the foreground. His images are versions of stories of place that reveal the historical relationship between colonizer and the colonized.

He creates this dialogue by using the geographic location of the city and the stereotypical Plains Indian figurine.

Art historian Anna Hudson explains that Thomas's idea of storytelling is "an engagement with time and place. The storyteller is the conduit of generational connection; the story creates and preserves culture" (2008, 14). Storytelling brings to the table a living and transformative history therefore allowing for different kinds of knowledges to be communicated. Thomas considers himself a photographic storyteller and his medium is the camera. His photographs engage the viewer, asking them to visually decipher the story. Storytelling is a particular skill that Hudson argues is a "tradition of talking about the world in a way that bridges the personal and collective. To engage the listener enough so he or she would retell it from his/her point of view is the goal. And so ideas are shared and develop and shape cultural perspective" (12). Thomas's artwork is a whimsical engagement with historical memory and the archival history of the representation of Aboriginal peoples because he bridges the divide between images of Aboriginal people in archives and museums with the cultural imagination of the public. Thomas inserts his own experience into the historical image. He postulates the potential for the "historical image [to be a] catalyst for telling new stories, stories that really deal with the contemporary world we are part of" (11). The stories told in Thomas's photographs help to explain how the colonial contemporary world is rife with contradictions, complications, and tensions.

Each photograph has a different story to tell. Thomas's Indigenous stories of place produce an alternative cartography through the visual image because the artist carefully selects the geographic location of each photograph. On top of Fort York, the noble chief stands in the photograph *Peace Chief in Toronto, Ontario, CNE Tower*. This image demonstrates the power of representation and complicates the historical narratives of both the noble savage and romantic ideas of the Indian. In the image below, the plastic figurine greets the viewer while standing on top of Fort York with the CN tower erected in the background. The dominant settler narrative tells the story of the city as a modern invention of the west, a cultural and architectural marvel. Thomas challenges this narrative and complicates the historical binary of nature versus culture by constructing an image that engages critically with ideas of romanticism. He uses the figurine as a romantic and noble savage linked to nature, while the background of the image is covered in high-rises and the CN Tower, which represents the civilized settler living in modern western culture. This image obscures the idea of civilized settler because the plastic peace chief is prominently standing in the center of the image with the

skyscrapers and buildings of the city resigned to the background. The image tells the story of a fictional Indian chief who is marking this territory as a Native space while the cityscape is pushed to the background.



Fig. 1 Jeff Thomas, *Peace Chief in Toronto, Ontario CNE Tower*, 2002. Courtesy of the artist

For the City of Toronto, the CN tower represents its self-image and dominant geography as a thriving cosmopolitan space that continues to be at the cutting edge of architecture and creative capital. Thomas places the plastic peace chief in the forefront to contrast the tower in the background and at the same time attempts to visual write Aboriginal people into the constructed narrative of western modernity.

Thomas articulates Indigenous stories of place in his photographs and these images provide new stories that produce new narratives to the dominant settler narrative by asserting his own his own relationship to site. As Haudenosaunee art curator and cultural critic Ryan Rice argues,

Our contemporary reality continues to be informed by a constant reinterpretation and recovery of Iroquoian philosophies, a process that continues to show that our existence resonates beyond nations, beliefs and time. Iroquoian artists draw upon those historical, cultural and political Haudenosaunee relationships that contribute to making sense of their contemporary identity and experience, and allow them to contribute new meaning to concepts of memory, reality and responsibility. (Rice 2008, 59)

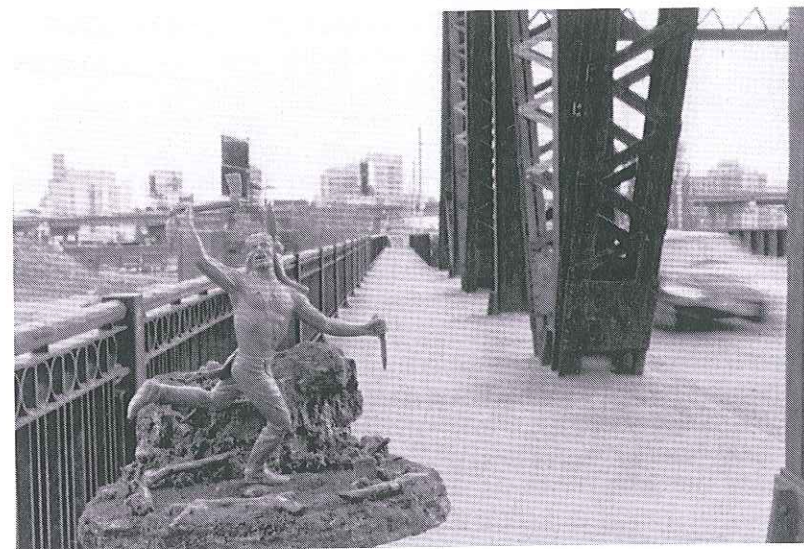


Fig. 2 *Buffalo Dancer at Bathurst Street*. Thomas, Jeff. Courtesy of the artist

Thomas begins to assert his own meaning of Indigenous relationships to space and place which is informed by his Haudenosaunee worldview. He unbinds Aboriginal people from the archaic notions of the past, frozen in time, by placing a figurine in the forefront of this image, and this figurine signifies an archaic, non-modern, silent, imagined idea of what Aboriginal people are. This act places both himself and Aboriginal people into the present because the figurine in the photograph acts as a self-representation. Hill argues that "Thomas models an Indigenous form of agency that not only insists on self representation, but insists on self

representation from within the very discourses that have overwritten our identities" (2004, 19). These self-representations are whimsical confrontations of settler ideologies in occupation of space and Thomas tries to complicate the static monolithic notions of the Indian. Thomas' photographs are representing Aboriginal people in the history of settlement by telling stories of place through self-representation of his Haudenosaunee worldviews and bringing to the surface the concealed geographies of Indigenous people in urban spaces, such as Toronto.

The photograph *Buffalo Dancer at Bathurst Street Bridge* provides the context for the absent Indigenous historical knowledge at the military site of Fort York. Thomas created a dialogue with this site by strategically placing the figurine to overlook and lead the viewer to the location of Fort York. The photograph stands in for his frustration that a great deal of Indigenous history has been ignored, including the important record of the Anishinaabeg warriors that fought off the Americans in the War of 1812. Fort York plays a part in the long and complex history of the creation of Canada. Thomas attempts to bring some of this history to the surface within the two above photographs<sup>2</sup> because Fort York is where the peace chief stands, and it is the direction that the buffalo dancer motions towards. Fort Toronto was the first French Fort (but at the Humber River location) in the area that was settled into the City of York and later renamed back to its Indigenous place name, Toronto. This fort was erected at the same time as the English Fort Niagara and the fort in The Bay of Quinte. In the same time period, during the mid-1700s, the Anishinaabeg peoples had built villages at the mouth of Etobicoke Creek, Sixteen Mile Creek, Bronte Creek, Credit River, Rouge River and the Humber (Toronto) River. The original Fort Toronto was structurally weak, so a new fort was built on the current exhibition grounds. It was officially named Fort Rouille but commonly referred to as Fort Toronto.<sup>3</sup> The exhibition grounds are the location of the photographs and where visitors and local Torontonians understand Fort Toronto to have been located. The fort was strategically moved to the east of the Humber River because of the closer proximity to the newly developing core of the city. This location was situated in a resource-rich area that was accessible via a massive body of water (Lake Ontario) and was intentionally situated within a short distance to the newly-formed United States of America and their forts surrounding the Great Lakes. This was an excellent location to protect the city from an impending war or acts of aggression from the United States, which was considered a serious threat up to the war of 1812. The buffalo dancer is bringing this space to life by referencing the past and at the same

time exploring current Indigenous relationships to the space by the obvious modern attributes such as the cars, bridge, steel beams and etc.

At the same time the *Buffalo Dancer at Bathurst Street Bridge* is directly linked to the Garrison Creek because the bridge in the image marks the spot where the filled in creek flowed into Lake Ontario. This connection to the waterway demonstrates the relational networks of water and land, which further enforces Thomas's desire to tell Indigenous stories of place. Bringing these connections to the forefront challenges the grid system constructed by settler culture that has over-written Indigenous mappings of the cityscape. This builds on the scholarship of Indigenous scholar Mishuana Goeman, who argues,

Understanding Native space as a set of connections from time immemorial thus counters the spatializing power of Western patriarchal law. Our ability to understand the connections between stories, place, landscape, clan systems, and Native Nations means the difference between loss and continuity. Stories in all their forms continue to bind these fragile, complex, and important relationships to each other. (Goeman 2008, 300)

Stories of place illuminate Indigenous histories and relations to the land in the city of Toronto and, as Goeman argues, these stories and relations are fragile and complex, as they reflect the power relations between different Indigenous nations, settlers, and new immigrants. Indigenous stories are bound by particular histories of conquest, capitalism and colonialism. It is the connections between stories, place, landscape and nations that create the conditions of Native space. I assert the potential of space, in particular ideas of Native space, to challenge the concepts behind traditional cartography. I argue that Thomas's images chart a new route, an alternative cartography grounded in creative, conceptual, and material understandings of geography, which deals with place, space, and location. Thomas's selected images narrate Indigenous stories of place and these stories explain the colonization of space, Indigenous embodied knowledges, and the relationship to land. This can be seen through the relationship formed between the figurine and the cityscape, which references modern progress, industrialization, capitalism, and colonialism. The two above photographs show the viewer a thriving metropolis that is growing and expanding with the ebbs and flows of capital, with both the peace chief and the buffalo dancer guiding this dialogue.

### Locating the Histor(ies) of Place in a Native Space

“All histories have a history, and one is incomplete without the other” (Smith 2009, 53). Indigenous stories of place contain multiple histories that contribute to and challenge settler narratives. Goeman argues, “the land acts as mnemonic device in many ways, by being the site of stories, which create cohesive understandings of longing and belonging” (2008, 25). Throughout this chapter I argue that Thomas’s photographs hold Indigenous histories that are translated into a visual narrative of his own relationship to particular spaces. He selects specific locations and extracts little fragments of historical knowledge to re-construct Indigenous stories of the past, simultaneously placing Indigenous people into the present and future image of urban spaces such as Toronto. Smith writes, “History promises to explain why things are and how they came to be this way...a history is always about who is telling the stories and to whom the storyteller is speaking, and how both understand their present circumstances” (2009, 53). I argue that Thomas articulates Indigenous stories of place within his images because he informs the viewer of the complex relationships within colonial circumstances, demonstrating there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding the different histories that belong to each geographic place.



Fig. 3 *The Delegate Stops at the Junction*. Thomas, Jeff. Courtesy of the artist

I want to continue telling Indigenous stories of place in the west end of the City of Toronto, beginning with the image, *The Delegate Stops at the Junction*. Similarly, Thomas has expressed a curiosity about the stories, history and lack of monuments marking the area of the Humber (Toronto) River Valley. He has visited the Humber River and Baby Point looking for the plaque memorializing the Toronto Carrying Place and wants to locate the Indigenous historical relationship to this geographic location (Thomas 2010). The Carrying Place is a lifeline between two major bodies of water that were rich with life up until the end of the fur trade era. During this period, the portage from Lake Ontario/Humber River and Lake Simcoe was heavily used. The Carrying Place is located within the area of Baby Point, which includes a park around the Humber River, a nationally-designated heritage river that runs into Lake Ontario. One of the major reasons for the need to secure the Toronto Purchase<sup>4</sup> was based on Northwest Company’s use of the Carrying Place, in order to ensure the passage would continue to be profitable by moving goods safely. This area was home to over five thousand Seneca Erie/Neutral peoples in a village named Teieiagon, which was named for the low point on the river where white pines or trees would be laid across to move over the water. In addition to this large community there were Anishinaabeg summer and winter villages at the mouth of the river. As part of a major water system, the Humber River was used as an important route for Indigenous peoples, traders, and settlers. The Carrying Place trail has been used for thousands of years and the only evidence that marks this space—and this is what Thomas was searching for—is a tiny plaque on the ground, written in English and French. This plaque is accurately described by Goeman’s (2008, 300) idea of *Colonial Spacing*, which is the process whereby colonial markers and monuments are erected in spaces that only disclose the colonial versions of histories and stories of the land. The Carrying Place is a prime example of colonial spacing because this site is rife with conflict and competing stories that mark its long history.

In the above images Thomas places each of the figurines in specific locations to call attention to historical narratives while simultaneously questioning the lack of Indigenous representation within settler histories. Richard William Hill argues, “Monuments function in a particular way in public spaces, their presence being both highly visible and so entrenched, so much a part of the urban landscape, that they often recede from visibility right under our noses. From this oddly covert position, monuments instruct us on the ideology of the state” (Thomas and Hill 2004, 13). Thomas is compelled by the absence of monuments such as the plaque that marks the Carrying Place and the (in)visibility of monuments

that freeze Aboriginal people into inaccurate historical stereotypes or leave them out entirely. He seeks out Indigenous presence in these spaces, bringing an Indigenous perspective to the settler narrative. Thomas's photographs begin to document an Indigenous presence in these colonial spaces, which challenges settler ideologies of ownership. In Hill's words,

Thomas's trick is to turn an absence into a presence, to find himself and his history in the world. He is able to do this because he has found places where he can engage with history on his own terms. They seem to be the most unlikely places, the most impenetrable. But he finds his way because he understands image and the story and he uses them as Aboriginal forms of knowledge, or more precisely, as processes of knowledge making. This is based on an understanding of how history actually functions. (Thomas and Hill 2004, 13)

Thomas created the above photograph to question the absence of Indigenous histories to inform the importance of the Toronto Carrying Place. By placing the plastic and still figurine into the image he clandestinely documents the significance of the Carrying Place, the thousands of years of knowledge that are embodied in the land and Indigenous people's relationship to this space. Thomas (2010) advocates for a historical intervention at this site, to mark the space with these histories instead of a tiny bronze monument written in French and English.

Thomas (2010) longs to continue connecting images to the areas of Baby Point and the Junction as he feels they hold important stories and Indigenous knowledge. This is demonstrated in his desire for his photographs to display the tensions of industrialization and its ties to our colonial history. The photograph, *The Delegate Stops at the Junction* proposes a conflict between the industrial grid lines of the settler city and Indigenous concepts of land and water tied to Native space. Thomas communicates to the viewer how the land has been surveyed by a capitalist state by centering the delegate in the middle of the image behind the railway, the first gridline of the city and the country. When settlers arrived they were given allotments of land and if there was any indication that "their" land would be profitable in minerals, able to facilitate a mill site, or have logging potential or a prospective harbour, the settler would have to inform the Crown. Then the settler would be given a different allotment of land because the Crown reserved the right to this land (Fraser 1921, 26). The accumulation of capital in Canada has been based on timber and the mining of metals, and this was made possible through the Crown's ability to legalize their authority over the land regardless of who occupied the space. The sale of timber could be made without affecting the

ownership of the land (26). The first mill site on the Humber River was built to supply wood for settler homes in the newly formed capital of York (Hayes 2008, 24). The Junction<sup>5</sup> later became the centre of all these activities with the railway running right along Dundas Street. This area contained the working class population of the city, which included many Indigenous people because of the proximity of the Humber River. The Junction was an industrial hub in Toronto's capitalist endeavours and today it is a thriving neighbourhood that does not recognize the working people that helped to create it or how Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their land.



Fig. 4 *The Delegate at Baby Point*. Thomas, Jeff. Courtesy of the artist

*The Delegate at Baby Point* is taken at the site of the Old Mill on Humber River, which during its heyday was one of the largest mill operations in the city. There are many stories surrounding the area where the photograph was taken, and Thomas uses his image to tell the stories of the historical tensions and the competing histories of this space. According to Indigenous architect William Woodworth, local Indigenous historian

David Redwolf and the City of Toronto's Chief archaeologist Ron Williamson, there were Seneca villages situated along the mouth of each of the six major rivers that entered into Lake Ontario. Each of the villages contained a minimum of five thousand Seneca people with additional representation of individuals from the Five Nations. However, the two main villages that made it onto French maps were the communities of Ganatsekwyagon at the mouth of the Rouge River and Teieiagon on the Humber River. By 1687, both villages of Ganatsekwyagon and Teieiagon<sup>6</sup> were deserted or the inhabitants were chased out by the knowledge of the advancing French General Douville.<sup>7</sup> General Douville was also responsible for the burning and destroying of many Seneca villages in upstate New York. Additionally, documentation suggests that the Anishinaabeg people aided in these attacks because of their French alliances (Freeman 2010). The controversy surrounding the site lies in the impossibility of confirming either story—on the one hand, that the French general destroyed the village Teieiagon, and on the other, that the Seneca left because they knew the general was on his way. Both Woodworth and Redwolf feel that the Seneca people were attacked and the village was burned because they can sense the ancestors who were murdered there. They describe the space as haunted with souls of the dead. To date, there is no written documentation because the French general did not indicate in his journal that he destroyed the village, as he had done with the previous destruction of other Seneca villages.

The two above images communicate the specific interest in the Indigenous histories of the Humber and Junction, which Thomas indicates through the central placement of the delegate in the images. He renders the visible connection Indigenous people have to this area, while bringing to light the importance of the space and its hidden geographies. These stories are impossible to grasp unless the viewer is already aware of this knowledge and history. However, this photograph has the potential to tell the stories of place if viewers can recognize the presence of Indigenous knowledges, because it can open up the possibility of space to be something beyond a colonial space. Thomas's photographs compel the viewer to (re)map and (re)imagine space because he challenges settler ideologies about power, knowledge and control and part of his confrontation is linked to the concepts of imagined geographies. McKittrick explains,

One is to insist that the imagined geographies that the imposition of transparent space attempts to subdue may simply never be conquered; they may remain as an imaginative resource with which to challenge territorialization. Another mode of critique, often inspired by

deconstructionist tactics argues that transparency has within it "a kind of self-alienating limit": its internal need for something outside itself against which it can define itself is a contradiction that always subverts the ability of transparent space to become completely hegemonic. Just as imperialist history depends on those outside its assumption of progress to render itself meaningful, so imperialist geography requires something beyond transparent space to render its territorial conquests important. (McKittrick 2006, 15)

The images of the delegate at the Humber River and the Junction characterize McKittrick's concept of territory as holding the possibility of another kind of dreaming that could include conflicting histories and stories. The figurine symbolizes the connection to land and body and tells the viewer of the concealed geographies of the space. The photograph contains a plastic replica of a fictional Indigenous person in order to dismantle the settler ideologies of the occupation of space. The Indigenous figurine is taken from the constructed and fabricated idea of the Indian into the forefront of the image to challenge our absence. Thomas (2010) explains, "You have to identify the world you live in. It is about what you see. When you look at archival material, photographs and documents, you only see how white people saw Indians you don't see how they viewed or saw white people." Our own imperialist history is confronted with the plastic figurine and Thomas's ability to map Indigenous stories of place through the photograph. Thomas's response defies settler ideas of territorialization by telling the concealed geographies of particular spaces in the City of Toronto.

### Charting a New Route Inside Our Urban Canoe

Toronto is a replica of the imperial heart where you can still hear the faint beats of Indigenous memory throughout the city. The embodied knowledge of many Indigenous people within the cityscape is part of their ability to read or see the terrain. The memory of the land and the peoples that were a part of that land can be felt and embodied. Imagining the space in different historical narratives allows for a more nuanced view of and relationship to the contested landscape in the occupation of space. With an understanding of the history of conquest, colonialism and capitalism, a person can open their mind to different possibilities of space and place. Otherwise, entrenched in the dominant narrative, an individual can only witness what Fanon argues is the divide between colonizers and colonized. Once the histories of Aboriginal people are erased, the only memory left is the imperial view of discovery and ownership. This memory underlies the



current political climate in Canada, perpetuating the colonial hold on the landscape. Thomas's photographs are markers of a resistance to the dominant settler narrative. His photographs take the viewer throughout different locations in the urban space to convey the message of decolonization and to (re)claim the land as a Native space. Over time new stories are created in the same locations, allowing for growth and change within Indigenous stories of place. The accessibility of both the new and the old stories are based on an individual viewer's ability to read the photograph. In each of the images, some of the stories are there for a particular viewer who can read the visual terrain through Indigenous connections to place and objects. At the same time, the artist reveals many of the stories to the general public in order to visually write Aboriginal people into the mainstream narrative. A key element to Indigenous stories of place is to keep Indigenous memories and knowledges alive through the living and embodied archive.

The photographs of Thomas discussed throughout the chapter bring forth the Indigenous histories of the past, present and future by (re)marking and (re)claiming space in an urban setting, which is a part of creating an alternative cartography of the land. Hudson argues that for Thomas "stories not maps, remain his tool for relating to place" (2008, 12). Thomas addresses the history of colonialization through his photographs by unbinding the colonial relationship and inviting the viewer to dream of something beyond a colonial space. The stories within the photographs allow for the viewer to see past the settler narrative and witness something outside of a colonial space that is no longer tied to the binaries of civilized/savage, culture/nature and Christian /heathen. Each photograph playfully shatters the above dichotomies by bringing forth the concealed geographies and at the same time rupturing the romantic notions of the Indian through Thomas's ability to create images that are framed through his own ironic representation of the self in his photographs. Thomas's photographs are creative interventions that dispute traditional cartographies because his images visually narrative Indigenous stories of place. He situates Indigenous knowledge of the land and draws on this knowledge to begin a new way of mapping. He maps the world by telling stories through the camera lens, imagining the space as an embodiment of something other than an imperialist geography. Thomas visually maps a narrative that brings to light the historical contradictions of settler ideologies in the occupation of space. The ways in which history has been constructed and told impact Indigenous people, because in most cases we were written out of that narrative. Each one of Thomas's photographs playful places Indigenous people back into urban spaces, creating images

that are a "dynamic re-viewing, or re-visioning of dominant pictorial and discursive narratives about First Nations people and places here in Canada and elsewhere in the world" (Walsh 2008, 30). These images become part of the larger collective memory of Canada, challenging the stereotypical pictorial politics that have followed Indigenous people for centuries. Thomas' act of reclamation is not about returning to a pre-contact ideal, but is about creating this whimsical, fantastic, complicated image that is unquestionably contemporary. His photographs re-write and re-imagine these narratives differently by visually recording multiple histories and at the same time telling Indigenous stories of place through his camera.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to data from Statistics Canada (2008), over half of the Aboriginal population in Canada lives in urban centres.

<sup>2</sup> In both of these photographs, an argument could be made that Thomas is referencing the Humber (Toronto) River Valley area because the first fur trading post was located on the Humber River, named Fort Toronto, which was built around 1720. But the celebrated placement of Fort Toronto is at the location of both of the above photographs.

<sup>3</sup> Much of the fort's history, and Indigenous relationships to it, can be found in Benn 2006, Freeman 2010, and Warren 2009.

<sup>4</sup> The Toronto Purchase was the treaty agreement between the Crown and the Mississaugas of New Credit. This transaction took place multiple times to secure the land but the process began in 1787 and still continues to be a source of contention.

<sup>5</sup> An excellent source for the industrial history of this area is covered in the West Toronto Junction Historical Society publication, *Leader Recorder History Of The Junction*.

<sup>6</sup> Both villages are indicated on various maps of this time period, and can be seen in Hayes 2008.

<sup>7</sup> There is no consistent spelling of the General's name; I have selected this one.

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations .....	vii
Acknowledgements .....	viii
Introduction .....	1
Diverse Spaces in Canadian Public Culture Susan L.T. Ashley	
<b>Part One: Contested and Exclusionary Places</b>	
Chapter One.....	16
The Process of Chop Suey: Rethinking Multicultural Nationalism at the Royal Alberta Museum Caitlin Gordon-Walker	
Chapter Two .....	39
The Underground Railroad Monument and its Position within a Visible Multicultural Discourse Brittney Anne Bos	
Chapter Three .....	61
From Object Base to Multicultural Place to Digital Space: The Toronto Museum Project Andrea Terry	
Chapter Four .....	75
(Re)inscribing Mi'kmaq Presence through Public Petition, Performance and Art Laura-Lee Kearns & Nancy Peters	
Chapter Five .....	100
Grounds for Exclusion: Canada's Pier 21 and its Shadow Archive Jay Dolmage	