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PRACTICES AND CURATIONS

On Not Traveling Up Tod Inlet (SṈITȻEŁ)

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Fish
fowl
flood
Water lily mud

—Lorine Niedecker (2002), "Paean to Place"

In a sense, SṈITȻEŁ is a womb of WSÁNEĆ people.

—John Elliott (2014)

PRELUDE

This essay is structured as a paean for the multiplicity of Tod Inlet (SṈITȻEŁ), on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, and for what lived and lives in and around it. The piece explores the social and cultural geography, the history, and the cultural significance of a geographic place that has experienced profound changes since colonization. The creative form is meant to respond to and converse with the various voices still present in SṈITȻEŁ's past and present.

ICE

Tod Inlet, on Vancouver Island, British Columbia—which stretches like an inverted comma running south then east from Saanich Inlet's Brentwood Bay to the mud bottom, piling-scattered calm of its inner bay—isn't frozen all winter. Freshwater ice forms on the surface of its narrow, two-kilometer marine reach only during its annual or biannual cold spells, spells that do not affect neighborhoods as close as Brentwood Bay, just a kilometer to the east. In January 2017, I explored the inlet during one of its winter periods, searching for understanding of the strangeness and complex history that shrouds its geography.

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Tod's microclimate (Arney 2014, 9) is created by the heights of the Malahat mountains and Willis Point's Partridge Hills, Finlayson Arm to the west, and the District of the Highlands hills to the south. The hills and mountains support a dry, coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem, with arbutus, big-leaf maple, Douglas, and grand fir. California quail, violet-green swallows, and great-horned owls frequent their heights (British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks 1999; Nightingale and Copley 2012). Finlayson Arm and Tod Inlet are extensions of Saanich Inlet; they wrap around Willis Point in an embrace. Each waterway's lengths are steep, studded with volcanic and metamorphic rock formations, and until the recent die-off, with sea stars. In the summer, the slightest touch of the water activates phosphorescent dinoflagellates; they light up like a galaxy when summer swimming across its narrow mouth. In winter, though, when the rest of the south island is hit with snow that melts within the day, the Partridge Hills get a foot of powder; the whole inlet can freeze from the inner bay out to its green navigation entrance marker. In the Hills, there are often ditches full with waning snow a month later. Tod's freezing is an event undergone by almost no other body of ocean water on the south coast (Nanaimo Harbor last froze in 1876; Nanaimo Museum 2014); Tod is a land of four seasons in the midst of the south island's gentle temperatures.

An academic answer as to why the area sees the fluctuations of weather unseen in lowland regions of the South Island isn't forthcoming. Geologist Christ Yorath (2005) noted that "a bedrock sill at the north end [of the inlet] restricts water circulation, resulting in poorly oxygenated bottom waters in the deeper parts of the inlet" (153); could the lack of circulation also result in colder winter waters? The Partridge Hills receive the benefit of weather that has first passed over the 600-meter peaks of the Sooke Hills, and this air, dried and cooled, might influence the 240-meter summit of the Partridge Hills and their surroundings as though they were much farther from the ocean. The Partridge Hills in turn provide deep shade to Tod Inlet and form one half of the funnel-like channel that swivels a westerly wind into a southeasterly gale as it exits the inlet, cooling as it goes.

It was this wind that blew for a week in early January, and helped freeze the inlet solid, a skiff of snow lying on the three-inch-thick surface as it rose and fell with the tide. While the inlet was frozen, I couldn't access further than its mouth, by boat. Under the ice, the normally clear winter water grew cloudy, opaque. The ice was too thick to row through, too thin to walk on. I could trace the shores of its inner bay by foot, using the Gowlland Tod Provincial Park trail that connects the bay to nearby Wallace Drive, but the only trail through the Partridge Hills leaves the shoreline, winding away from water up into the reaches of the hills. Thus the areas of the inlet I explored were those affected most by human history: the entrance, with its small flotilla of liveaboards, and the inlet's inner reaches. The middle was inaccessible, impeded by first ice, and then by a subsequent snowfall, which blanketed the area with more than fifty centimeters. While the snow lasted, the high ridge trails, too, became difficult to access by foot. It came to seem fitting that my explorations occurred during these weather events. During my research, the freeze, the snow, and the curtailed access came to represent larger ideas about the inlet itself—those of inaccessibility, of beauty, and of sorrow.

Childhood

When I first floated on the waters of Saanich, then Tod Inlet, I was six weeks old. My father probably pushed the point, eager to show me off to the sailboat I had been named after. My mother was probably anxious and cold. She was fresh from her first cesarean section, twenty-

eight years old, and may already have begun to hate the 25' Maalea and the rules of sailing my father insisted they follow: only mud bottom anchorages (of which Tod was one); no night traveling; proper radio etiquette when calling marinas on the VHF. I don't know where we went next. Likely to Sidney Spit or back to Annette Inlet, where they'd rode out a hurricane together four months before. It would have been early July, that six-week-old trip, the sea like thick wine and the wind vanished for the summer. Maybe he forgot to tie the halyards down, and they chimed, all night, as we three were rocked to sleep at anchor.

SNITĆEŁ (SNEET KWULTH OR SNGEET KWITH)

The entirety of Saanich Inlet, including Tod Inlet, is a glacial fjord, carved during "multiple glacial advances of the Wisconsinan Stage of Pleistocene glaciation" (Yorath 2005, 153). The ice receded approximately 13,000 years ago, exposing deposits of limestone in Tod's inner bay and by the Malahat's Bamberton, sediments of silt and clay in the inlet itself, and surrounding sediments of glacial till (on the Saanich Peninsula) and fractured volcanic, chert, limestone, and argillite formations in the Partridge Hills. As the glaciers receded, the inlet transformed into a hospitable oasis, now a protected marine park that forms part of the 1,280-hectare Gowlland Tod Provincial Park. In Tsartlip Saanich (WSÁNEĆ) culture, Tod Inlet's name is SNITĆEŁ, which translates into "Place of the Blue Grouse" (D. Elliott 1983, 23). For more than 2,000 years before the arrival of European colonists, WSÁNEĆ peoples inhabited the inner bay of SNITĆEŁ, creating several year-round village sites; remains of shell middens attest to the rich food resource the inlet provided, including salmon, shellfish, herring, and deer. As oral historian Elder Dave Elliott says, the inlet and its surrounding Garry oak meadows, coastal Douglas-fir and deciduous forests was a place for warriors to train, to "practice survival, fasting and self-renewal" (J. Elliott, Guilar and Swallow 2009, 107), as well as a "doorway" to winter hunting grounds and "deer hunting grounds" (110). It was also the beginning place of Saanich humans themselves, an origin landscape. In WSÁNEĆ oral literature, the creator placed the first human on a rainy night in a meadow at the head of SNITĆEŁ. His name was XÁLS, rain, and in learning about the world, he came to understand that "at that time, everything could communicate and was connected, whole. Everything was human—animals, birds, plants, even large boulders" (J. Elliott, Guilar, and Swallow 2009, 107). The meadows where he arrived were Garry oak ecosystems, which were eventually divided and allotted to WSÁNEĆ families and used for the harvest of camas and other bulbs for carbohydrate needs, as well as a place for treaty signings, and a place to bury their dead. Meadows were passed down matrilineally; they were one of the most valuable ecosystems in Coast Salish territory (Acker 2012, 48); it seems no accident that XÁLS's life began at SNITĆEŁ.

Habitation of SNITĆEŁ continued until approximately 500 years ago, when a Haida raid drove the WSÁNEĆ from the area (Arney 2014, 4). Eventually, the site was reclaimed as a winter village; in summers, the WSÁNEĆ would travel to neighboring gulf islands to gather berries and attend the sockeye salmon run (4). In 1904, however, the WSÁNEĆ returned to find their village site "had been replaced by the buildings, machines and smokestacks of a developing cement quarry" constructed by John and Jennie Butchart, of the world famous Butchart's Gardens (4). The Butcharts constructed the factory—as with so much south island development of that period—on the inner bay's shoreline, directly on the top of the village site and its surrounding Garry oak meadows.

Night

In August, the stars in Tod Inlet invert and fall into the sea, reborn as millions of pulsing, gauzy meteors. Moon jellyfish, Aurelia Aurita, are bridal white medusae with a flower-petal patterned center, into which their long cilia filter and gather plankton, mollusks and other medusa into their body for digestion. Moon jellyfish carpet the sea from July onward, multidimensional, bumping up against oars and hulls, stranding themselves on the shorelines, so thick that at night, with their glowing mounds kissing the surface, it seems you could walk on their round bodies out to the boats at anchor. The sea as a silver-stoned field.

TOD INLET

The Tod Inlet cement factory quarried limestone and created cement from 1905 until the 1920s. To operate, the Butcharts hired foreign laborers, including more than 200 Sikhs from the Punjab and Chinese, many of whom came after completion of the construction of the Trans-Canada Railway left them jobless (Gray 2014a). The whites working at the factory lived in company-built houses and brought their families with them, but the Indian and Chinese immigrants were restricted by the immigrant Head Tax of the early 1900s, and lived in "male-only" shantytown shacks they built themselves, with outdoor cooking and plumbing facilities that often led to sickness, death from exposure, and the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis and typhus (Gray 2014a). Asian workers were not accounted for in census records of the time; archival work is just beginning to uncover the difficult history of the Sikh and Chinese workers, who were paid half as much as Butchart's white employees. Records mostly exist in a smattering of photographs and on the site itself, where artifacts—including glass jars, pottery, handmade shoes, ivory toothbrushes, and cooking implements—are still being uncovered today. After the limestone was mined from the area, the Butcharts dismantled the factory and turned their spent quarry into the famous sunken gardens that attract millions of visitors each year (Gray 2014a). Surviving Chinese and Sikh immigrants eventually brought their families over (once the Head Tax and the 1923 Exclusion Act were eliminated in 1947), and settled into Victoria's community (Gray 2014b). The surrounding lands were eventually sold to the Province of British Columbia for parkland in 1994. Restoration of Tod's native ecosystems, undertaken by SeaChange and other organizations, began in 2006 and continues to this day (Arney 2014, 5; Acker 2017). Ironically, volunteers often use the old cement foundations of company houses to delineate plantings of red-flowering currant, ocean spray, Indian plum, and snowberry. Near the shoreline, others are reconstructing a Garry oak meadow ecosystem.

Winter

The moon jellyfish persist past their usual summer period. I lean over the gunnel of the rowboat and their bodies stretch as deep as the winter water allows me to see—twenty-five, sometimes thirty feet. "They are late," I say to Paul, of the thirty-seven-foot farrow cement sailboat moored next to mine. The Aliban *has two deflated zodiacs listing at its side; a rain tarp hangs in the water amidships. "They're in this inlet all year round," he corrects me. How would I know? I remember them from Montague Harbour on Galiano Island, leaning over my father's zodiac and*

watching their constellations as we rowed from dock to anchor in summer's long twilight. These days, Tod Inlet, or rather, the small thumbprint that etches out a protected nook at its entrance, has only been my summer haunt; come winter, I abandon the boat to its community and the storms they endure and settle for anxiety that rises with the wind, and lowers with cursory checks from shore come morning.

PLACE

Place has a long history in the context of geography. Since the 1970s, when geographers began to give it particular attention, place has come to be understood as intricately tied to cultural and natural history; it is shaped by location, locale, emotional connection, meaning, "fields of care," and ideas of geographical identity (Tuan 1974, 4). What we build has an affect on a landscape, which in turn affects how we understand a place. Similarly, undifferentiated space *becomes* place through our experiential perspective, our understanding of "the unique combination of physical and cultural attributes that [mark] one place off from another" (Cresswell 2009, 172).

Layers of history in a place affect not only its terra, flora, and fauna—changing the contours of a bay, adding pilings, cement, ceramic, and glass—but also its feel. Tod Inlet differs from entrance to inner sanctum; it was a difference I had not previously put a name to, but its feeling is something akin to nostalgia heightened by sorrow, a kind of melancholic discomfort that only occurs when one reaches the inner bay, either by walking the path through coastal Douglas fir and deciduous forest from Wallace Drive, or by rowing up the inlet from its steep-sided entrance (when it's not frozen). It should feel like a remote, untouched place: There is no road access and you must walk or boat in. The steep reaches of the Partridge Hills hide the sun by midafternoon and the west half of the inlet is blue with shaded trees and dark basalt, creating a sheltered marine cirque. To take the path to the inner bay is to tread on more than 100 years of industry, on the memories of factory workers who succumbed, without their wives or families, to disease or exposure; it is to enter a place where loneliness feels predominant. Broken crockery pokes through the dirt; cement washing pools harbor ferns and moss; a cleat for steamships, its snub metal nose still intact, languishes at the water's edge; cement paths wobble and heave through the forest; next to the pier sit the fragments of rail lines used to move limestone; and over top of every relic, mounds of invasive blackberry, sweet pea, broom, ivy, and spurge laurel creep backward up the path, greeting visitors as ardently as the native pink trilliums that appear in April in the first forested minutes after leaving Wallace Drive.

A long history of changing use in Tod Inlet affects how I think of it, how I feel in it and how it resides in both my memories and in the present. The inner bay confronts one flagrantly with the past, despite being within the confines of a park. The experience is very different from that of walking through the second growth forest found in the Partridge Hills, which fringe the middle of the inlet. Although they are also a postindustrial, logged landscape, in fifty years their flora has healed so thoroughly that they seem to eschew nostalgia. In the inner bay, one is instead witness to a past that will not dissolve. The peculiar constancy of cement takes the rich canvas of the world and repaints it, permanently. As an analogy, one might imagine finding Bachelard's house in a clearing—built, rather than residing in the imagination—and built, moreover, with little thought to nests, shells, or doorways.

WATER

If the inner bay's past is mostly silent, the outer bay's vanishing culture isn't going quietly. Accompanying it are the rumble of generators, the bleat of a goat, kept with collar and lifejacket on the narrow deck of a rotting motor cruiser, and the languid conversations held by mostly men in tenders and zodiacs, sailboats, and barges. Security guards, marine mechanics, disability pensioners, farmers from Quebec, hermits: All have stories, all depend on the reliable fresh water cascading from the Partridge Hills. Many consider my dinghy a community vessel, which means that it isn't always in its place, but that when its painter is cut by irate landowners who dislike the liveaboard community, someone always rescues it as it drifts out into the bay.

Liveaboards

Fred's truck is at the end of the lane when I arrive, late in January. Last night the winds gusted to 90 km/h and this morning, everyone is checking their boat, or helping someone whose vessel has dragged. A spring tide has risen to the earthen banks that ring the sand and rock shoreline; the bay's collection of abandoned and shore-tied dinghies are floating, pulling at their tethers, and mine is in nearly two feet of water. I fit the oars, row out and check the sights on Bird. *It's hard to tell if she has moved. The cement mooring weights, visible in thirty feet of clear winter water, have stretched into an elongated triangle; their chains stretch away from the southeast wind funnel of Tod Inlet's reaches. My position between neighboring boats, however, is about the same; if I've dragged, we've all dragged. On the south side of the bay a metal sheathed boathouse has been blown 300 meters and lies within the ecological no anchor zone, marked by yellow and white buoys. Fred, in his red and white barge with overhanging aft cabin and rectangular front ramp, guns his engine on the other side of the bay, pushing a trio of boats back into place, dragging their 5,000-pound mooring across the ocean floor, idling while they resecure the stern-tie shoreline. "Not so fucking far," he shouts, as they clamber over rocks and under overhanging arbutus, "Fuck, don't you understand where you need to be?" Three weeks ago, he dropped my new mooring with the same mixture of big-hearted aggression, complaining the whole way, then offering hot chocolate after the job was done. John, the owner of the trio of boats, looks up from shore and waves. He's in sweatpants and a parka. His hat is askew. He laughs as my dog leaps off the bow to chase a harbor seal.*

FLOW

Tod Inlet is salt water, but it is fed significantly in winter by Heal, Durrance, and Wray Creeks, as well as by smaller streams from the Partridge Hills. The three creeks feed first into Tod Creek, which itself helps to drain both Maltby and Durrance Lakes, and then into the inner bay of the inlet. There are fourteen subdrainage areas in the Tod Creek watershed, including Maltby, Spotts, Osbourne, Wallace, Holt, Fraser, Wray, and Killarney, names of European settlers to the area (Friends of the Tod Creek Watershed Society 2003). None of the streams or areas bear First Nations names. The streams that cascade from the hills into the outer bay are clear and clean; armed with droppers of iodine, the liveaboard community uses them as a drinking water source. The creeks that empty into the inner bay, however, are in various states of decline, thanks

to 150 years of channeling, farming, industry, residential septic contamination, and changes to drainage in Tod Flats, a set of seasonally flooding fields southeast of the Inlet. Tod Creek used to support a chum salmon run before European colonization (Friends of the Tod Creek Watershed Society 2003). Stories contributed by the University of Victoria's community mapping project for Saanich Inlet tell of sixty-five-pound salmon, caught during Cowichan Bay's annual derby, and catches of "27 big salmon in a day" off Willis Point (Coastal Stewardship Community Mapping | UVic Community Mapping Collaboratory n.d.); most of the stories, including Jen Elliott's of spearing herring and dogfish in the upper reaches of Tod Inlet, are from the 1960s or before (Coastal Stewardship Community Mapping | UVic Community Mapping Collaboratory n.d.). No one now seems to talk of return of the salmon, although protection societies for Tod Inlet itself, and for many of its feeding creeks, have outlined restoration plans that include the rewilding of Tod Creek Flats, protection of Killarney Creek from nearby Hartland Landfill leachate, and the reintroduction of trout (Friends of the Tod Creek Watershed Society 2003).

Land-based development has changed the water courses; water-centered life has its own impacts. At its entrance, Tod is ringed with boats, as though festooned by the detritus of a British Columbia more of Spit Delaney's era than of today's (Hodgins 2011). Tighter federal regulations, implemented over recent decades, limit or prohibit the discharge of marine heads (toilets that empty with a through hull into the water; Ministry of Environment n.d.) but many, myself included, don't follow the rules. Organizations like the Saanich Inlet Protection Society, SeaChange, and Saanich Inlet Shorekeepers are lobbying for changes to foreshore and anchoring regulations, which would allow local government to begin enforcing maximum anchoring times, restrict mooring installations, enforce holding tank regulations, and prevent boaters from living aboard even if regulations are followed (Hopper 2012). It is this last point that has been particularly contentious; as property values rise, new, wealthier owners are less inclined to appreciate a bay full of boats in various states of upkeep. Occasionally, a vessel will break free of its mooring and drift (as mine did last fall) or sink under the weight of a heavy snow. Most vessels are occupied, however, by a community that has chosen a simpler lifestyle, hauling water and fuel, driving to work in vehicles parked in increasingly rare unrestricted parking areas, or collecting disability and talking to visitors of the old days, days that harken back to *Woodsmen of the West*, to Relic, in *The Beachcombers*, or to the myriad characters I grew up with on the docks and anchorages of the Inside Passage (Pardey and Pardey 1999; Pagh 2001). They smell like diesel, smoke, oil, the damp —some of the most comforting smells in the world. They are an eye in the cove, keeping watch on adjacent vessels; they are a scourge on the landscape. They are independent, amateur naturalists, who can tell you exactly how many kingfishers nested last summer; they are polluters and shiftless thieves. In the entrance to Tod Inlet, Orlando and Duke Senior's camaraderie continues; the sea is our last Arden.

LIVEABOARD VOICES

Paul: Yes, marine engineer, navigator for over thirty years. Soon as I fix the engine, do a little work on the cabin top, I'm doing the offshore passage, going south. God damn coastguard, they come on my boat I just lift up the shotgun, smile and ask them how they'd like a lead letter, delivered quick. Same with marine shops that don't do like they should, same with bad rum, bad beer, those characters down the way: boaters that call themselves mariners. What are you doing

there? That line not coming loose? Stuck? You'll want a rope wrench for that. What they call a knife on the sea.

Fred: Paul's a jackass. Marine engineer? He told you that? A hobo, living on a zinc-less hulk that fouls my anchor chain. Look at the rust stains, the buckets of bolts, the hull's a fucking pottery teapot. Idiot. Yah, I helped him during the storm. They all call me in the middle of the night because I have the barge; I don't come 'til morning but it makes them feel better, while they're careening all over the harbor. People who live on boats that call themselves mariners. Huh.

Mike: We came free around midnight, during Friday's storm, god it tunnels out the inlet like a banshee. Spent the whole night drifting, fending all three boats off whatever we were running into—we even hit the ferry dock. Yah, all the way on the other side. I called Fred round 2 a.m. He's just towed the mooring back in. We're okay now. Shore line was what did it—wasn't secure enough. Under a rock now. Should be fine. We need to get rid of that third boat—the sailboat is too much weight. Beautiful day today. That dog of yours always swim that well?

Rowing

A decade ago, when we first got the boat, I bought a fiberglass tender from a fourteen-year-old boy who used it with an electric motor to fish with on Spectacle Lake. It leaked immediately, but slowly, and a sponge in the bottom kept our feet dry. We went rowing one evening soon after with a pair of curved, cedar ten-foot oars my friend Jim, the pirate, gave me. He never told me where he found them; I never asked. We rowed up the inlet in August's blue, long-lasting dusk. The trees were sapphire, the boat's inner hull was pale, the surface of the sea, as we glided in with the rising tide, was robin's egg and raven's wing. A kilometer in, talking of books or the movements of the boat or something amusing someone had said, I looked up from the pull and realized we were midjourney—there was no view of the inner bay, no glimpse of the outer. Above us loomed the hills we lived in, emerald second-growth, right to the water's edge. The gardens were invisible behind a fringe of trees. Saturday night fireworks had ended for the season and no other boats jostled for room. There was nothing visible that had been built. There was no memory and no unraveling future. We had a bottle of wine and a camera and all the photos are blurred and ecstatic.

LANDSCAPE AND DWELLING

The pinnacle moment to examine when attempting to understand Tod Inlet/SṈITC̓EŁ might be that 1905 Fall, when the WSÁNEĆ returned from their summer salmon grounds (likely scattered throughout the Gulf Islands or even as far as the mouth of the Fraser River) to find their village gone, buried under pilings, railway tracks, a multistory factory, and its accompanying shacks, houses, and sundry buildings. Ingold, in *The Perception of the Environment*, argued that "telling a story is not like weaving a tapestry to *cover up* the world … Far from dressing up a plain reality with layers of metaphor, or representing it, map-like, in the imagination, songs, stories and designs serve to conduct the attention of performers *into* the world" (Ingold 2000, 56). Moving into SṈITC̓EŁ's inner reaches, however, meant not a conversation but a takeover by Tod Inlet's new owners, a covering up of the old with no regard for its stories or songs. The loss of a landscape, a winter village, a place that had sustained thousands of years of cultural history,

not only left a mark on the culture and memory of WSÁNEĆ peoples. The absence of stories, and the tangled, difficult stories of displacement and temporality that followed, disrupted what geographer John Wylie described as the life that is embedded "*within* lived-through landscapes" (Wylie 2012, 8). SṈITȻEŁ became the site of a present absence, permanently marked in concrete by loss. Worse, the cover-up was accomplished using men from two additional severed cultures—Chinese and Indian workers separated from their families, lives, and stories. The acute but dissipated sadness that is particularly palpable at the head of Tod Inlet is the result of that severing of performers from their worlds, of the lifeline that is not just a way-finding but a "wayfaring" a "world-composing" (9). An interruption of this composition stops the song or story midtale, leaving the unsung to linger in the air as the pilings from the factory still stand in the bay.

Complicating this story is the second, also disappearing history of Tod's entrance's community, a ramshackle group of people like that of Mike, in M. Wylie Blanchet's narrative *The Curve of Time*, who buys or preempts "wild little Melanie Cove" to "'Go off somewhere by [himself] to think it out'" (Blanchet 2011, 66). These days, Desolation Sound's Melanie Cove is a bustling destination for Canadian and U.S. megayacht owners, as Brentwood Bay has become a retirement mecca where multimillion-dollar, oversized houses are quickly replacing turn-of-the-century cottages; every bay now has a quantifiable resource value. Willis Point only gained two-wheel-drive access in the 1970s; the coast as hideout or as an end of the world "Deloume Road" refuge is fading (Hooton 2010), but its past is recent and the remnants remain. We can place purple martin swallow boxes on the pilings of the inner bay, legislate an end to liveaboards, or even invite WSÁNEĆ peoples to collaborate on ideas for the restoration of SṈITȻEŁ. This will protect our created ideal of the present; we have not yet found or acknowledged a home for the past and its displacements.

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