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"The future has an ancient heart"
CARLO LEVI

Perspectives

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Dualities



Treaty Partners

DONNA KENNEDY-GLANS and DON HILL

We are Canadians. And we live in a society that generally prides itself as *not* the United States with all its attendant woes. The outing of hundreds of unmarked graves on the grounds of government-sponsored and church-run boarding schools for aboriginal children is a horror Canadians would have never believed if it weren't true. The numbers are escalating: thousands, according to testimony, and possibly tens of thousands more bodies are waiting to be found. People are angry. Churches are being burned to the ground.

The road to residential school hell was paved with an objective to assimilate indigenous children. Good intentions aside, the cold-hearted reasoning was simple: if there were no longer any Indians per se, the federal government of Canada was no longer obliged to honour 19th century treaties made with First Nations. Hardly anyone today is happy about this turn of current events. Things are very tense. Polarized.

We believe it is possible to reimagine and restore the relationship originally envisioned for the *treaty partners* who signed off the ceded land where the authors live in the territory now called Alberta, located in western Canada (Treaties 6, 7 & 8).

In a prior article, we reflected on one of David Peat's ideas—*creative suspension*—which we concluded was kind of like a tango. And if you can imagine two partners, in this instance, settlers and indigenous peoples: rather than dancing at odds with one another, as they have for over a hundred years, what might a modern-day tango look like?

Dancing with a partner with sharp stiletto heels is dangerous. Yet skillfully executed and in balance—one partner neither dominant nor acquiescing to the other—both participants in a perpetual *creative suspension* can achieve a mutually satisfactory outcome. The glorious art of tango is the dance of *equals as opposites*. And it follows that an art of living well together as a couple—as *treaty partners*—*should* be a work in progress.

Indigenous peoples receiving treaty money, 1930





The glorious art of tango is the dance of equals as opposites



Former Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau with his eldest son Justin, future Canadian prime minister, during the seventh inning stretch at the Montreal Expos game in Montreal on April 20, 1987

Easier Said Than Done?

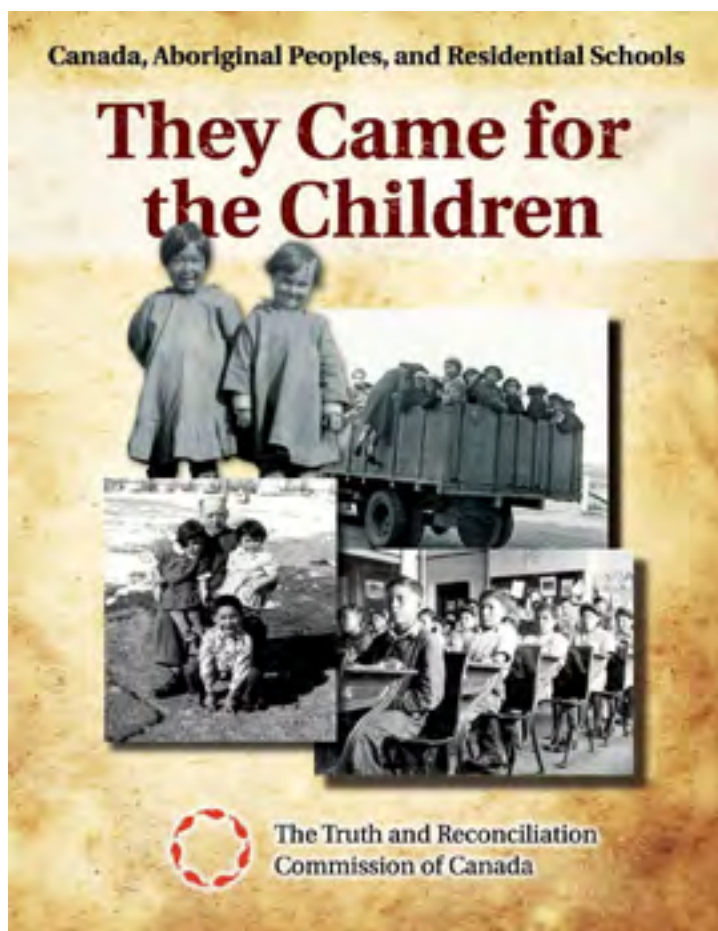
For international readers: the history of Canada's relationships (yes, plural) with immigrants, settlers, colonizers, adventurers, missionaries, entrepreneurs, engineers and social engineers, and the indigenous can be summed up in two words: *thoughtfully misguided*.

There have been horrors of government bureaucracy and incompetence and wilful ignorance and outright cruelty in this country; all of it embedded in a historical record (much of it meticulously detailed). And in the instance of indigenous children and the government-sponsored residential schools with its mission to assimilate—a narrative repeated over and over and over in testimony to Canada's *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*—the terrible truth of that history was framed in the minds of many Canadians as a fiducial problem: pay the 'survivors' off and be done with it (the cost of doing business to build a country).

This movie has played before.

In 1969, when the current prime minister's father Pierre Elliott Trudeau was running the country, a federal government White Paper proposed a one-time payout to abolish the Indian Act (there is such a thing) and all treaties between indigenous peoples and Canada, eliminate Indian status and impose private property laws on reservations; in effect, the plan was to assimilate First Nations as an ethnic group equal to other Canadian citizens. The scheme sparked outrage and a clever rejoinder, *The Red Paper*, as it was called, forced Prime Minister Trudeau (the first) to back down and withdraw a year later in 1970.

Assimilation of a minority culture into the majority population is an ages-old strategy for 'solving' the challenge of integrating diverse cultures. China is in the midst of its own assimilation strategy. Canada has pushed away the melting-pot approach, preferring instead the mosaic or quilt metaphors. With all the talk of diversity, inclusion



and access in the zeitgeist, we could easily wade deep into this assimilation versus inclusion polarity in this article. Instead, we will focus our attention on the indigenous peoples/settler duality in Canada and ways to constructively engage this dynamic tension and build something better and more resilient.

Canada's *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) heard testimony about the unfair and arrogant treatment of indigenous peoples. How can we move forward together as *treaty partners*? Is it possible to create the conditions for forgiveness, fairness, justice and respect?

We have several ideas for consideration:

First, we believe the treaties will succeed if both parties can enjoy the relationship of equals. Think of a successful marriage or parenting: the partnership model goes out the window if equality is missing. The historic alliance between indigenous peoples and settlers in Canada was destined to fail because the spirit and intent of the treaties was never truly honoured; the unreserved agreements were to share the land (as one might share a life with your significant other).

Second, you cannot compel people to feel guilty. What we can ask is for all Canadians to recognize the treaty partnerships can work but it will take work; be compas-

sionate, yes, and right wrongs of the past, but also ensure that it's understood we're in this together and consequently have *obligations* to one another. Money will likely change hands. Compensation. But that can't be the end of it. It will take energy and trust and a sense for Canada as a genuine confederation worthy of a future—together.

Third, we must be more careful with the stories we tell each other. We're not suggesting a whitewash of history and the egregious missteps made (apologies and restitution are essential), but if we want to rise above the polarities, we'll need to figure out a better, more elegant way, to tell our stories. And it will require a move beyond rigid positioning and self-censoring legalistic frameworks, to more candidly explore ideas and possibilities for the future. The TRC created the space for this kind of exploration, and we all need to build on that.

Fourth, throwing money at a problem isn't going to make it go away. Merely creating a fund for this-and-that isn't a permanent fix to repair broken promises and bad behaviour that led to a breakdown.

A recent announcement, typical of government in Canada, kites \$50 million for a Day Scholars Revitalization Fund to support healing and linguistic and cultural reclamation for kids who attended residential schools (but didn't board at them). It sounds like a nice gesture but is this really all there is to be done? Canadians should avoid the temptation to wipe their hands and feel enough is enough. There must be a fair exchange of value—not just symbolic—a commitment to build a shared future.

Fifth, facts are tricky and complicated. Wrapping your head around a puzzle of laws and constitutional rules that apply to the relationship between *treaty partners* is daunting. And it will take serious effort to appreciate the



Vancouver Art Gallery community memorial to the 215 buried children discovered at Kamloops Residential School. The main memorial consists of 215 pairs of children's shoes, along with various accessories including teddy bears, books, images, and flowers

intent of the original agreements—obscured by partisan interpretation—facts that spell out an *aspiration* for success together as *treaty partners*. And should it be a roadmap, we must both understand the rules of the road ahead and our obligations to the future.

Sixth, the treaty partnership in our territory is about land and should appeal to the land itself. Neglected or forgotten wisdom, what it means to be *treaty partners* is embedded in the perception of the land. Simply put, Indigenous peoples tend to regard land as a living process—a verb not a noun or ‘thing,’ as settler culture might have it.

Perception.

An expanded appreciation for land—inclusive of its numinous qualities—will help guide our pathway forward, together.

Perceiving Differently

What is meant by perceiving *land* differently?

Elder Tom Crane Bear of the Siksika (Blackfoot) First Nation has shed much light on ways of knowing land. His insights on Buffalo Mountain (sometimes called Tunnel Mountain) in Banff, a Rocky Mountain resort town in Alberta, are revelatory.

The mountain doesn’t speak Blackfoot or English, he suggests, but it does have something to say for itself. And important stories to tell—especially now.

From a magazine article:

‘The way it speaks to you,’ Crane Bear pauses once more before gesturing with his hand toward the other magnificent peaks that encircle the Banff townsite, is ‘by the way of the contour of the mountain. Yes—some have different ridges, valleys, peaks. So these have a meaning.’ He stops again for another moment, smiles and gently [says] ‘It all has meaning to the person that wants to understand.’

This sets in motion David Peat’s counsel to apply *gentle action* to defuse polarities. What could possibly be gentler than listening to the landscape and heeding its advice?

No Quick Fix

An obligation not felt is not an obligation. Hold that thought.

In 2021, there are far more people identifying as First Nations living in the territory called Alberta than when



Top: Summit of Buffalo Mountain, Banff, Alberta

Above: Elder Tom Crane Bear

the treaties were originally signed. Over a century of ill intent and ill regard for the treaties exemplified by a federal policy of neglect and a system-designed-to-fail has failed. Hold that thought too.

Waves of settlers to this territory brought with them an engineering mindset to break and bend the land to whatever purpose they had in mind. And whether it was railway engineers or petroleum engineers or the social engineering of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the prairie, foothills and mountains that we live with have been continuously refashioned. And to this day, engineers retain the motto they live by: Break it, fix it.

What if land is not broken?

Indigenous peoples have continuously pointed out blind spots to the dominant settler culture. That the engineer-



Canadian Pacific Railway [ca. 1890-1897]

Moving Forward Together

As David Peat's *gentle action* envisions, we have an opportunity to demonstrate through deed and humble intent, the 'felt' obligation to achieve a meaningful relationship with land in this territory presently called Alberta.

We don't need to imagine what a treaty partnership can look like. It's already been spelled out over a century ago in the agreements our ancestors signed. By obliging ourselves to accomplish what clearly is the *spirit of treaty*, we can move forward together, and in a wholesome way.

ing way (as the only way of knowing the land) is the problem that needs to be remedied. And the fix—understanding some things were never broken—has been lost on the very people who should know better.

The Reform movement comes to mind. It was a federal political party birthed in Calgary and the logic of the city's engineering culture, which swore it should and could fix the country. The Reform Party believed Canada was broken. However, people in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces thought otherwise—three times—in consequential elections. Canada works just fine for them. It doesn't need fixing.

Given our propensities in Alberta, it's important to consider how we design space capable of containing this engineering 'break it, fix it' settler mindset *in creative suspension* with indigenous peoples grieving for generations of children and churches lost to fire.

Transcending dualities requires us all to have the will and conviction to hold the space—a breathing space or plenum—for dualities to co-exist and the patience to create the conditions for something new to emerge. It is a *very* emotional time right now and feeling the pain of both the victim and the perpetrator is intimidating but we know that a container to receive, hold and help digest and hopefully transcend these deep emotions is what's needed. Describing that space as one of *treaty partnership* may give us the room needed to transform the emotions of pain and anger and sadness and loss on the part of Indigenous peoples, and the frustration, guilt, shame and denial of the non-indigenous into something better.





DONNA KENNEDY-GLANS

Crossing boundaries is Donna's 'thing.' Born into a farming family in southern Ontario, Donna went to law school then moved to the western prairies where she jumped into the global energy business with two feet, working on projects in more than thirty-five countries. Donna's been elected as a politician and appointed to a ministerial portfolio responsible for electricity and renewable energy; published on a range of topics from corporate integrity to gender equality; founded a capacity building non-profit to support female leaders in Yemen that now works on First Nations reserves in Alberta. Presently, she serves on the board of The Banff Centre for Arts & Creativity and otherwise does whatever it takes to bring together good ideas and good people to do good work.

DON HILL

He's that bald, yes. And he's a sound designer/artist, writer, broadcaster, and interactive digital media producer. Don's television programmes have been screened around the world. A former host of *Tapestry*, CBC Radio's national programme on religious life and ontologies, he's also presented numerous documentaries on CBC Radio in Canada. Don's investigation of psychoacoustics of 'place' inspired his augmented history app *Edmonton Soundwalks*, a 3D audio guide for mobile phones. *Special Places: Writing-On-Stone* is an immersive 360 video presentation that scales from full-dome screens to VR (virtual reality) headsets. In residency with the UK's renowned *Blast Theory*, he recently made WRGO, a surreal 3D audio narrative. Presently, he's a science podcaster with Genome Canada (Alberta).

