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Research Note

Excavating Toxic Colonial Violence and Resistance at the Dump: A Research Note On Sensory Method and Analysis

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Abstract

This research note offers some conceptual and methodological insights for studying atmospheres in the context of colonialism's slow violence and wasting practices. By exploring how the senses shape our understandings and experiences of wasting practices, we examine the toxic effects of white settler colonialism, traces of which can be revealed when we attend to the convergence of two overlapping forms of slow violence: the degradation of Winnipeg's land, and murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people (MMIWG2S+). While colonial systems exercise power through discarding and wasting (Liboiron, 2021), they may sometimes be threatened by the discarded things and people they produce (Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022). Consequently, an emerging sensory criminology should attend not only to the ongoing damage of colonialism in Canada, but also to resistance initiatives that refuse to accept people being treated like waste. This research note argues that sensory methods and forms of analysis that draw centrally, and sometimes metaphorically, on the senses have the potential to uncover new, critical insights on seemingly untouchable issues of injustice for Indigenous peoples. To illustrate the utility of a criminology fully attuned to atmospheres of control and resistance, we offer some observations on taking a sensory approach in an ongoing study of colonial violence and pollution in Winnipeg.

Keywords: Sensory criminology, colonialism, wasting, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, slow violence, toxicity

Introduction

In late 2022, the remains of Rebecca Contois, from the O-Chi-Chak-Ko-Sipi First Nation, were discovered in the Brady Road landfill in Winnipeg, Canada. At the same time, police suspected that the remains of an unidentified Indigenous woman, given the name *Mashkode Bizhiki'ikwe* (Buffalo Woman), were also located in the same landfill while two other Indigenous women, Morgan Harris and Marcedes Myran, both of the Long Plain First Nation, were dumped in the privately operated Prairie Green landfill northwest of the city (Gowriluk, 2022). Police allege that the four women are victims of white-supremacist serial killer Jeremy Skibicki, who was known to sexually exploit vulnerable women from Winnipeg's inner city (Brohman 2022). In April 2023, 33-year-old Linda Mary Beardy, originally from Lake St. Martin First Nation, was also discovered in the Brady Road landfill. In these instances, Winnipeg police and government authorities declined to further search the polluted grounds, citing high costs, low odds of finding the remains, and environmental dangers from toxic contaminants in the landfill that included carcinogens, like asbestos, and the decomposing remains of animal carcasses discarded by slaughterhouses and rendering plants (Crabb, 2023). In response, hundreds of protesters blocked traffic in downtown Winnipeg, chanting "we are not trash," and calling for authorities to shut down the landfill and perform a full search (Hoye, 2023). Despite public calls to search the landfill and recover the bodies of Harris and Myran, the then-governing Progressive Conservative (PC) Party took out a full-page advertisement in the *Winnipeg Free Press,* declaring their opposition to a landfill search. In the midst of a provincial election campaign, the PC Party claimed their government would "stand firm" against a search: "For health and safety reasons, the answer on the landfill dig just has to be no" (Kives, 2023a, para. 3). Conservative leaders politicized the fate of these latest victims of colonial violence, hoping to rally their base by presenting "Indigenous issues [as] a lightning rod to generate concern and to motivate their supporters" (Kives, 2023a, para. 22).

Callously discarded at dump sites by a serial killer and (ab)used again as a political tactic by a Premier dubbed "Heartless Heather" (Kives, 2023b), these women's bodies have been perpetually mired in atmospheres associated with settler colonialism. Emerging from a "geography of forgetfulness" (Driver, 2015, p. 86), where women's remains are not recovered, these atmospheres are inextricably entangled with the gendering of wasting, disposability, and colonial violence, which – as Razack (2016) argues – is most clearly revealed in the way the justice system fails to respond in cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. In life, Indigenous women "are likely to encounter … colonial forces of waste disposal most directly in circumstances involving sex" because in a settler colonial framework of disposability, their bodies are deemed available for sexually violent consumption and annihilation (Razack, 2016, p. 300). They become victims to men, often with histories of sexual violence. It is notable that Skibicki, the accused offender in this case, had allegedly threatened, raped, and violently assaulted his previous two partners – both of whom identify as Indigenous (Bergen, 2022). According to many sources, he was also known to frequent homeless shelters, such as the Indigenous-led N'Dinawemak, and soup kitchens in Winnipeg's inner city to meet vulnerable Indigenous women that he could take home to his apartment (Brohman, 2022). Three of the victims – Harris, Myran, and Contois – had used N'Dinawemak and other shelters in the area for meals and a warm place to sleep at night (Brohman, 2022). Characterized as part of a throwaway population, their homelessness in life, according to the settler colonial imagination (Razack, 2016, p. 299), might suggest to some that these Indigenous women were expendable, their bodies already "used up in colonialism."

In death, these women's bodies have not only been reduced to waste – that is, "shapeless matter to be disposed of" (Perera, 2016, p. 99) – through Skibicki's actions, but they have also been drawn into toxic political campaigns that attempt to tap deep-seated anti-Indigenous sentiment in segments of white settler society. By examining the convergence of environmental pollution, wasting, and colonial systems, we demonstrate how "toxic harm also maintains systems, including those that produce inequity and sacrifice" (Liboiron et al., 2018, p. 333). Buried under layers of toxic waste and decades of settler colonial violence and trauma, the four women lost in Winnipeg-area landfills are the latest victims in a city where more Indigenous people have gone missing than any other city in Canada (Lewis, 2016). In what follows, toxicity appears as part of a police justification for inaction, as well as a characteristic of contemporary "toxic politics" – that is, politics "pertaining to power focused on which forms of life are strained or extinguished while other forms reproduce and flourish" (Liboiron et al., 2018, p. 333).

By exploring how the senses shape our understandings and experiences of wasting practices, this research note examines the toxic effects of white settler colonialism, traces of which can be revealed when we attend to the convergence of two overlapping forms of slow violence: the degradation of Winnipeg's land, and murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people (MMIWG2S+). While dominant political and colonial systems exercise power through discarding, wasting, and toxicity (Liboiron, 2021; Liboiron et al., 2018), they may sometimes be threatened by the toxic discards they produce (Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022). Consequently, an emerging sensory criminology should attend not only to the ongoing damage of colonialism in Canada, but also to resistance initiatives that refuse to accept people being treated like waste. This research note argues that sensory methods and forms of analysis that draw centrally, and sometimes metaphorically, on the senses have the potential to uncover new, critical insights on seemingly untouchable issues of injustice for Indigenous peoples. To illustrate the utility of a criminology fully attuned to atmospheres of control and resistance, we offer this research note with some initial observations from our[1] sensory study of colonial violence and pollution in Winnipeg.

In what follows, we explore these atmospheres in relation to colonial practices of wasting and toxicity – that is, practices that facilitate slow violence, and our forgetting of ongoing devaluations of land and people. Beginning from the premise that "the concept of atmosphere is good to think with" (Anderson, 2009, p. 80), we attune our senses to *feeling* the atmospheres that shape our daily lives. While some atmospheres may be immediately and starkly perceptible, multisensory gestalts, other atmospheres of control and resistance can be so taken for granted they remain invisible and silent, relegated to the background of everyday life. Even so, these atmospheres can press upon us as "a lived affect – a capacity to affect and to be affected that pushes a present into a composition" (Stewart, 2011, p. 452). To reflect on how the composition of the present is constantly being shaped by co-existing atmospheres of control and resistance, we first trace how the concept of atmosphere has been deployed in sensory criminology. We then unpack the slow violence of colonialism and environmental degradation by considering practices of devaluing and forgetting that underpin the placement of wasted people and things in landfills and other zones of sacrifice. We argue that resistance efforts aimed at countering slow colonial and environmental violence at the dump work directly through the senses by making visible and *sensible* what society would rather forget, drawing attention to the toxic political atmospheres that make this violence possible. Lastly, we describe our methods for sensing and analyzing an atmosphere of resistance in our ongoing study of slow colonial violence and wasting, highlighting both the potential value and representational challenge of engaging in sensory-based research. A sensory criminology that is capable of feeling atmospheres will push researchers to transcend detached description and engage in reflections requiring some personal vulnerability, moving them from observers to interlocutors, and bringing life to sensory representation.

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[1] We recognize that feelings and atmospheres sensed in places of Indigenous memorialization are necessarily products of our own personal histories and experiences as settlers on Indigenous lands. A sensory criminology must, therefore, include considered reflection about our own roles in the stories of injustice that we narrate.

Toward a Sensory Criminology

Mainstream criminology and allied (inter)disciplines, such as socio-legal studies, have traditionally privileged written accounts over other sensory approaches to analyzing issues of crime, law, and justice.[2] However, over the past decade criminologists have been repeatedly challenged to "rethink [the discipline's] relations with the ascendant power of the spectacle" (Carrabine 2012, p. 463; for visual criminology, see, e.g., Brown and Carrabine, 2017, 2019; McClanahan and Linneman, 2018; Rafter, 2014). Recognizing that "images organize our worlds" (Rafter and Brown, 2011, p. 5), Hayward (2010) argued that "there can be no other option but the development of a thoroughgoing *visual* criminology" (p. 2). While these developments in the discipline and beyond have helpfully opened up new domains of scholarly analysis, some critics have argued that embracing the visual alongside or even in place of written accounts of the social world merely entrench ocularcentrism within criminology, and the social sciences, more broadly. Similarly, the rise of visual legal studies (e.g. Wagner and Sherwin, 2014) might be viewed critically as reinforcing an epistemological preference in law for visual forms of evidence. While the power of the image is undeniable in late modernity (Hayward, 2010), there are growing calls to recognize that justice and injustice are experienced through rich sensory encounters that also encompass sound (e.g., Hayward, 2012; Hemsworth, 2016; Mopas, 2019; Russell and Carlton, 2020), taste (e.g., Lam, 2012; Franca and Carneiro, 2017), smell (e.g., Jochelson, 2009; Neocleous, 2016; Valverde, 2019), and touch (e.g., Brown, 2017; Lam, 2017). For example, Hayward's (2012: 458) provocative essay on the five spaces of cultural criminology advocates for the development of an "aural criminology" that can explore soundscapes and acoustic spaces. These ideas find further expression in Russell and Carlton's (2020) examination of how sound is used in prison protest movements as counter-carceral acoustemologies. Such projects investigate encounters between law, (criminal) justice, and the senses by foregrounding "the ways in which larger social power formations – such as urbanism, colonialism, modernity, racism, ableism, neoliberalism, capitalism, empire or surveillance – rely upon, evoke, (re)produce, commercialize, the human sensorium through legal(ized) modes" (Hamilton et al., 2017, pp. 13-14).

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[2] Mainstream criminology may well be attuned to the senses in unacknowledged or unrecognized ways, but like all recently "discovered" criminologies, the sensory turn attempts to foreground overlooked analytic dimensions. We see value in understanding how sensory criminology has been positioned in the recent literature while grappling with concrete ways to make our research and representation of findings more fully attuned to the senses and sensory modes of analysis.

Echoing developments in sensori-legal studies (e.g., Howes, 2019), McClanahan and South (2020) have more recently called for the development of a sensory criminology, especially one "that employs sensory data as more than adjectives, instead allowing the senses (and the dynamics of sensory perception) to move from fodder for description to sites of meaningful analytical engagement" (p. 17). While Hibbitts (1995) considered law's primary, modal metaphors (i.e., metaphors that directly or indirectly evoke a specific mode of sensory experience; see also Manderson, 2000), an explicitly *sensory* criminology will be one that focuses on the interplay between modal metaphors and sensory modalities. It will examine how intersecting sensory metaphors and experiences can coalesce into atmospheres that powerfully shape encounters and environments (for more on empirically researching atmospheres, particularly affective atmospheres, see Michels, 2015). Conceived as "spatialized feeling[s]" (Fraser and Matthews, 2019, p. 2) or "embodied experience[s] of place" (Campbell, 2013, p. 35), atmospheres can condition and configure our meanings of crime, law, and justice. To attend to "the continuing significance of atmospheres of control in everyday life and their subversion or resistance" (Young, 2021, p. 986), Young (2019) suggests that we treat sensory artefacts as encounters – not objects – with affective implications.

For example, Young (2021) links the sensory to the affective in her analysis of the "sensory and spatial atmospheres" generated by COVID-19 lockdowns in Melbourne, Australia. These lockdowns produced "multiple shocks to the senses" (Young, 2021, p. 991), and these shocks played out in the absence and presence of sensory encounters. For example, the appearance of city spaces changed (streets were emptied of people and cars), and its soundscape was transformed by "less traffic noise, fewer jackhammers and drills and more birdsong and rustling leaves" (Young, 2021, p. 996). The tactile experience shifted as the public was advised to avoid interpersonal touch and frequently apply hand sanitizer. The loss of smell and taste were common symptoms of infection and a source of anxiety, while the omnipresent odor of alcohol-based hand sanitizer permeated many spaces of the city. At the same time, the nature of the virus made it an unseen, silent, odourless, and tasteless environmental danger, similar to some forms of pollution that cannot be easily sensed. Indeed, the virus could be added to the field of investigation of invisible harms, alongside other "invisible crimes" or "odourless" or "silent" environmental harms examined by a sensorial variant of green criminology (McClanahan and South, 2020).

Building on work done in the name of an emerging sensory criminology (e.g., Herrity et al., 2021; Millie, 2019), we offer some conceptual and methodological insights for studying atmospheres in the context of slow violence. Our insights are developed from a case study of the atmospheres of resistance associated with calls to search for the remains of Rebecca Contois, *Mashkode Bizhiki'ikwe* (Buffalo Woman), Morgan Harris, and Marcedes Myran, who are believed to be buried in two Winnipeg-area landfills. Created and sustained by colonial systems, these atmospheres emerge from particular practices and can be experienced through sensory encounters across a range of sites where slow violence persists. Slow violence, according to Nixon (2011), refers to "a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space," standing in stark contrast to the violence that "is customarily conceived as an [often singular] event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility" (p. 2). Given the representational challenges raised by slow violence's "long dyings – the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties, both human and ecological" (Nixon, 2011, p. 2), how might we document "slow-motion toxicity" (Nixon, 2011, p. 3) through a combination of sensory metaphors and experiences? Because slow violence might be invisible or so dispersed in time to be imperceptible, a productive sensory methodology should enable us to not only visualize the invisible and see the unseeable, it should engage all our senses when it comes to the task of *making sense* of things that we would otherwise (or rather) forget – in this case, the coinciding vulnerability of ecosystems and people who have long been treated as disposable by colonialism. To excavate toxic atmospheres created by colonialism's wasting practices, we attend in the next section to how the specific site of the landfill is connected to environmental slow violence, sensory containment, and capitalist-driven processes for mass consumption and mass wasting.

Excavating the Slow Violence of Colonialism at the Dump

Disposal, whether of things or people, entails a devaluation process whereby we bring an end to a connection we once had (Reno, 2016), by dumping that which we consider "dirty." In her seminal analysis of pollution, Mary Douglas (1966/2003: 36) conceptualizes dirt as "matter out of place," arguing that who or what we discard as "dirty" only makes sense in a particular system of ordering the world. Like the concept of dirt, toxicity is also bound up in power relations that reproduce "systems of colonialism, racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and other structures that require land and bodies as sacrifice zones" (Liboiron et al., 2018, p. 332). Métis scientist Max Liboiron (2021) builds on these insights, redefining "pollution as central to, rather than a by-product of [the order envisioned and produced by] colonialism" (p. 36). She argues that contemporary environmental contamination is enabled by "an old colonial system of land relations where the land is a Resource" (Liboiron, 2021, p. 39). Because such a colonial system is bound up in primitive systems of accumulation, involving not only the "gathering of 'natural' resources as assets but also the externalizing of the 'cost' of the accumulation in the form of contaminated water, disease, and other traumas to the […] 'Indigenous' world" (paperson, 2014, as cited in Liboiron, 2021, p. 40), the land, especially near Indigenous communities (Bharadwaj et al., 2006; Oyegunle and Thompson, 2018), becomes a sink or sacrifice zone for waste disposal. Repurposed as a dump site for unwanted and toxic discards, the land is profoundly reshaped by wasting practices.

As a technique of power within systems that must "rid themselves of people, places, and things that actually or potentially threaten the continuity of those systems" (Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022, p. 3), wasting is tied to creating an atmosphere of control, especially when it comes to solid waste management. Every Canadian produces on average nearly 673 kilograms of waste per year (Sevunts, 2019), meaning Canada produces more municipal solid waste per capita than any other country on earth (CBC, 2013), the bulk of which ends up in landfills (Government of Canada, 2022). Many Canadian landfills "stink; some leak chemicals and heavy metals into the ground and water table; some are prone to rats, some to fires; most create unwelcome truck traffic and dust" (Wilkins, 2017, para. 21). When at the landfill, visitors and workers encounter a "world of soaring garbage, mountains and valleys, trucks and roads with its own distinct smell and soundscape; a place that organizes and frames things *as* waste" (Hawkins, 2006, p. 71). However, landfills are regularly sealed off from the public by both physical means – fences, gates, and limited road access – and regulatory means such as exclusionary zoning and environmental licensing. Consequently, access to these areas of waste disposal are heavily controlled, so that its enveloping atmosphere can become an object of government manipulation and intervention.

Despite serving as "infamous landmarks of recent environmental sins," landfills exist "out of sight and out of mind" (Idies, 2021, p. 137) for most people because they are often situated far away from most city centres and middle-class residential neighbourhoods. Like prisons sited in peripheral locations,[3] landfills spatially lock up people and things that threaten society "both now and in an uncertain future… figuratively, one could also understand the landfill as an imprisonment of cast-out matter, a relationship by which the centre manages what it rejects" (Idies, 2021, pp. 139-140). In addition to managing cast-out matter, landfills also serve as sites of sensory containment – that is, their peripheral location is meant to "lock up" offensive smells and sights, albeit with varying degrees of success (e.g., Santin, 2015), and keep unpleasant, sensory reminders of trash away from most residents. With such sensory containment, colonial and capitalist systems can continue to facilitate mass consumption and mass wasting. Unsurprisingly, then, landfills allow these systems to generate new kinds of easy disposability (Reno, 2016) and memory loss. Strikingly, landfills in Western societies are – in the words of Hird (2013) – "sites of forgetting made possible through legislative decision, regulative decree, risk models, community accession, and engineering practice" (p. 105). As a result, they allow us to forget the things we once wanted and valued, and now no longer want or value, as well as the things we never wanted or valued. As importantly, landfills allow most people to forget that they are sites of ongoing environmental degradation and toxic buildup. However, this forgetting is sharply disrupted when landfills become high-profile crime scenes.

Calls to search Winnipeg-area landfills have been growing louder ever since news broke of the missing and murdered Indigenous women who have been discarded like trash by Jeremy Skibicki. Between March and May 2022, Skibicki[4] murdered and dumped the bodies of four Indigenous female victims in the garbage. The partial remains of Rebecca Contois were recovered from the Brady Road landfill in June 2022 (CBC, 2022), while the body of Linda Mary Beardy was discovered in the same landfill in April 2023. According to Cindy Woodhouse, regional chief for Manitoba with the Assembly of First Nations, "[m]any people call [the Brady Road landfill] a graveyard and [yet] we continue to put garbage there" (quoted in Bergen, 2023a). Despite a national social media campaign to #Search-TheLandfill (Lewis, 2023b), the bodies of Morgan Harris and Marcedes Myran remain lost in the privately operated Prairie Green landfill. Even as Indigenous communities "want [their] sisters dug up from the most inappropriate burial site you can think of" (Val Vint, quoted in Kim, 2023), the outgoing PC government of Manitoba refused to touch the Prairie Green landfill, citing safety concerns for those who would come into contact with the dangerous trash (e.g., animal remains, asbestos, hazardous materials, and toxic gases such as ammonia). Based on a feasibility report that suggested a three-year landfill search could cost up to $184 million, the Manitoba government concluded that it "cannot knowingly risk Manitoba workers' health and safety for a search without a guarantee" of finding the victims' bodies (Gowriluk and Ferstl, 2023). In framing the search as a *waste* of taxpayer money and time, the rhetoric of the former PC government demonstrated the way capitalist and colonial systems exert power: they construe some types of waste as avoidable and abhorrent (e.g., time, money, resources) while other wasted people, lands, and things are deemed inevitable and necessary to maintain the system. They ultimately externalize the costs of accumulated toxicity – in the form of actual waste and treating people as though they were trash – to Indigenous communities.

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[3] Sometimes, the prison is sited across the road from existing dump sites (e.g., Bernd et al., 2017). Conceived as "undesirable facilities" (Mata, 1993), both prisons and landfills are part of a shared landscape where contamination and toxic pollution abound (e.g., for prisons, see Bradshaw, 2018; Toman, 2022). Both can be linked to state-produced environmental injustices, which have been created through interlocking systems of settler colonialism and racial capitalism (Kojola and Pellow, 2021).

[4] Skibicki is currently facing four first-degree murder charges for the deaths of Rebecca Contois, Morgan Harris, Marcedes Myran, and Buffalo Woman.

With these calculations, outgoing Manitoba Premier Heather Stefanson declared her government would not pay for a search of the Prairie Green landfill (Bergen, 2023b). In response, the Assembly of First Nations "slam[med] Manitoba's opposition to [the] landfill search," by voting unanimously to denounce it (Lewis, 2023a), and then-Federal Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Marc Miller called the provincial government's decision "heartless" (Kives, 2023b). Flying a flag with the phrase "Heartless Heather" painted in black letters (Bernhardt, 2023), protestors have since tried, through various tactics, to generate an atmosphere of resistance. In contrast to the atmosphere of control created by various government interventions – from siting and land management strategies to limiting access to landfill sites – activists generate an atmosphere to counter the institutional "heartlessness" that has written off Indigenous women in a "pitilessly instrumental" as well as "bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner" (Nixon, 2011, p. 17). They demonstrate their resistance through practices of memorialization, drawing attention to the people and places that have been deliberately forgotten. By setting up blockades at landfills that effectively hinder the city's ability to carry out everyday wasting practices (Hirschfield, 2023), they seek to make visible and *sensible* what society would rather leave unsensed. Through protests, landfill blockades, and encampments named in memory of Marcedes Myran and Morgan Harris, activists have mobilized against memory loss, declaring that "we are not trash" (Hoye, 2023). In the next section, we offer some preliminary observations on how to sense this atmosphere of resistance, paying close attention to how protestors refuse to forget the ongoing tragedies of MMIWG2S+.

Sensing and Representing an Atmosphere of Resistance

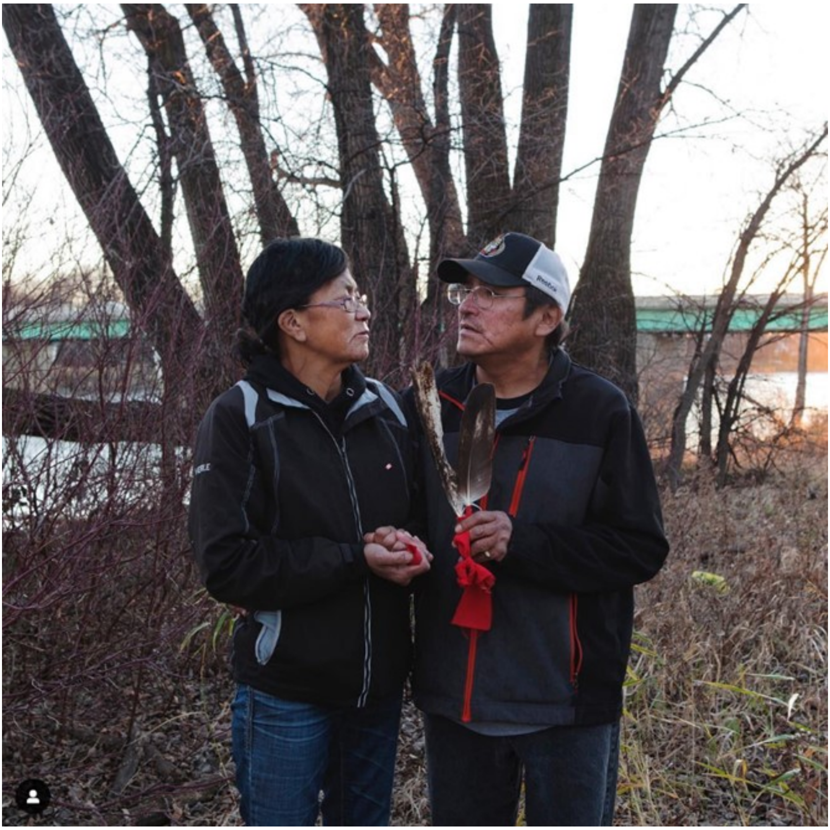
Since the power to waste and render toxic is bound up in dominant colonial and economic systems, a productive way to analyze these systems is to study "rejected elements… what and how they reject, abject, and oppress" (Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022, p. 77). Despite exercising power through discarding and wasting, these systems may sometimes be threatened by the discards they produce (Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022, p. 79). For example, the global capitalist order, with its mass consumption and mass wasting, has generated an existential threat in the form of anthropogenic climate change, while societies rooted in racial inequality must work to keep racialized bodies in place through tactics such as oppressive policing (Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022, p. 85). Systems must continually devise strategies to keep discarded matter and people in place and out of sight – waste contained in landfills and colonized people relegated to the periphery – while activists work to draw attention to these strategies "to create threats to power, or at least mitigate oppression" (Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022, p. 95). Thus, to counter the slow and invisible nature of much pollution and colonial violence, activists work to generate sensory events that draw attention to the wasting processes they resist (Liboiron et al., 2018). Criminologists would be well-advised to focus analytic attention on the multisensory experiences at play in these events. Taken together, these events coalesce into an atmosphere of resistance, disrupting what are often seen as intractable, untouchable forces of historical inertia that continue to harm Indigenous peoples through wasting practices that relegate their lives and environments to toxic imprisonment.

Proceeding from this standpoint, we were confronted with several practical, methodological questions about how to sense and represent such an atmosphere of resistance. What is suitable sensory data for an analysis of resistance to colonial violence and practices of wasting? How can sensory data be analyzed in ways that stay true to McClanahan and South's (2020) call to move the dynamics of sensory perception "from fodder for description to sites of meaningful analytical engagement" (p. 17)? Can the strictures of a traditional scholarly journal article adequately represent the results of such an analysis, or does this only further entrench the ocularcentric tendencies of criminology? By reporting on our efforts to incorporate methods attuned to the full range of senses, we offer in this section a few observations that could begin to suggest answers to these questions. In explaining our approach to sensory data collection and analysis, we aim to initiate a longer conversation about how sensory criminology might learn from our research experiences to *feel* atmospheres of resistance – those very important atmospheres that materialize in the face of injustice. When we attune our senses to feeling such an atmosphere, we become sensitized to something *else* coming into existence. In the case of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, an atmosphere of resistance emerges from practices related to memorialization. To feel the presence of an atmosphere centred around not-forgetting, we focus on when "the sense of something happening becomes *tactile* and palpable" (Stewart, 2011, p. 445; our emphasis added) – that is, when resistance efforts become so tangible that we can touch them, and they can physically or affectively touch us. In what follows, we briefly discuss two methods for sensing resistance "in the air" – both online through social media documentation, and while walking around physical sites of remembrance.

Detecting Resistance "In the Air" Online

Our interest in studying an atmosphere of resistance led us first to consider the everyday representation of sensory events around MMIWG2S+ in local news media and social media. News reports, opinion columns, and other traditional forms of media coverage provide a first source of data that tap into broader structures of feeling in a community. Several decades ago, Katz (1987) argued that crime news provides a collective, shared emotional experience that unites communities in opposition to crime. Today, in a media landscape restructured by digital media logic, online social media serve a similar function by providing a participatory venue to focus community outrage at a variety of perceived injustices (Hier, 2019; for environmental protests on social media, see, e.g., Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson, 2021; Di Ronco et al., 2019). Thus, drawing on social media and local news media was a first step to gather tangible data on an atmosphere of resistance. The organizational logic of social media provides a ready archive of data organized thematically, for example, by hashtags such as #SearchTheLandfill, #CampMorgan and #CampMarcedes. Many social media posts offer personal and affective reactions to events, thus providing a *touching* and multisensory encounter with the protests. While media sources might, on the surface, appear to privilege an ocularcentric analysis of images and text, they can also highlight the interconnectedness of the senses through the body. We not only see with our bodies, we also feel with and through them. For example, the documentary project *What Brings Us Here* uses the pared-down framework of Instagram to allow audiences to fill the spaces in-between images and limited text with their own bodily experiences. By carefully framing each image with a brief caption, the Instagram stories capture an embodied and touching "sense of place – one related, but not restricted, to Winnipeg as a site of racist violence and oppression"; audiences also encounter "the city as a prominent site of Indigenous activism and social-justice work" (Doucet, 2017, para. 4) when they meet ordinary Indigenous citizens who have been united in tragedy (see Figure 1). By addressing the issue of MMIWG2S+ in a "quieter, more reflective way" (Lewis, 2016), audiences feel the impact of changing seasons across 86 "discreet" posts, as family members and community members continue to walk in search of missing loved ones, even when the trees have turned bare with the coming of winter. By connecting sound, sight, and emotions felt through the body, social media data provide an entry point into a full sensory analysis of atmospheres of resistance. However, these data, along with traditional news reports, offer an incomplete picture that must be supplemented by other forms of sensory data.

Figure 1: ***What Brings Us Here***



“We often search just the two of us. We do a lot of walking, here in the city. […] Last winter we decided that we wanted to raise some money, to buy a boat and search for him on the water ourselves. We walked from Poplar River to Winnipeg. It took six days, seven nights. It was cold…” (Bradley Bushie, quoted in the Instagram documentary project *What Brings Us Here*, 18 November 2016).

Walking as Sensory, Bodyful Fieldwork

We supplemented our media data with sensory fieldwork at some of Winnipeg's key sites involving remembrance of MMIWG2S+ and resistance to colonial forces of wasting and toxicity. If an atmosphere of control is animated by forms of detachment (e.g., physical and affective detachment from waste), then an affectively-charged atmosphere of resistance is entangled with forms of attachment. When resistance takes the form of remembrance, it counters the heartlessness associated with the particular atmosphere of control generated by Stefanson's administration. "Heartlessness" connotes a lack of feeling, or denotes a "callous cruelty" (*Oxford English Dictionary*), both of which can manifest as an inability to genuinely appreciate the suffering of others. Such emotional coldness can be countered by resistance efforts directed toward creating an emotional and affective connection to victims by seeing, witnessing, and remembering those harmed by colonial violence and erased by wasting strategies. After all, to remember is to keep people and things alive in our hearts because we cannot bear to part with them. To feel these kinds of attachments both physically and affectively in a research encounter, we engaged in multisensorial walks (e.g. Pink, 2009) near memorials for MMIWG2S+ in Winnipeg. Walking allows "attunement with the earth" and is experienced spiritually, intellectually, physically, emotionally, and imaginatively (Lyle, Latremouille, and Jardine, 2021, p. 4). Indeed, walking is a uniquely sensory experience that opens up spaces "not only to mindfulness, but bodyfulness" (Lyle and Snowber, 2021, p. 6). We experience the places we walk in ways that resonate through our bodies, minds, and spirits. Using this approach in our fieldwork, we attempted to feel the atmospheres permeating official and unofficial sites of remembrance of colonial violence. Walking allowed us to be both mindful and "bodyful" of the atmospheric and sensory elements that hold potential to disrupt or subvert colonial wasting.

Our walk began at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers at The Forks in downtown Winnipeg. Situated on a well-kept grassy lawn overlooking these two rivers, the state-sanctioned memorial, dedicated to all MMIWG2S+, was a notably curved structure made of polished and rough granite. On our visit, the abstract shape looked cold and somewhat formal, but the stone surface was warm to the touch on that summer afternoon. Placed in a site of leisure and consumption, the area was steeped in savory smells of food from the adjacent public market. Located near other public works of stone and metal art, the official memorial blended into the background – aesthetically pleasing and at home among the other curated landscaping elements, but in danger of being over*looked* as a formal memorial to MMIWG2S+.

A short walk from this area, near the Canadian Museum of Human Rights (CMHR), Indigenous protestors had settled into Camp Marcedes and were not seeking to disappear into the background. In response to a court-ordered injunction that required protestors to end their blockade of the Brady Road landfill, Camp Marcedes was formed in July 2023 to keep Marcedes' name and spirit alive until a landfill search could be done. Occupying the space near the CMHR, which is listed as one of Winnipeg's must-*see* attractions, enabled protestors to gain visibility for their message. As Marcedes' sister, Jorden, explained,

> [t]his is a place where there's lots of people coming by, right? It's in a place where there's lots of public, and it's not as far as the Brady landfill. So we're hoping to get a lot more eyes and a lot more, you know, voices out here (quoted in Bergen, 2023b).

On our visit, the air at Camp Marcedes was fragrant with sweet wood smoke from a sacred fire. The smoke hung low in the air, occasionally stinging the eyes. Red handprints on stone flower pots, hand painted signs and banners, and colorful murals on the cement path elicited an interested response from passersby on the busy walkway, some of whom stopped to take a selfie. As deeply personal moments were being shared publicly with strangers, it felt "heartless" to us to not stop and reflect; yet many walkers and bikers transited through the area without appearing outwardly affected. The sounds of cars passing and horns honking from the nearby busy roadway reinforced a feeling that this was out of the ordinary in downtown Winnipeg, and out of place within the colonial wasting order. Regardless of the visible reactions of passersby, the protest was organized in a way that made an encounter with its atmosphere unavoidable sensorially, offering a direct challenge to the legal and regulatory strategies that attempt to lock up discarded people and things in peripheral zones of abjection.

While walking enabled us to register, through the totality of our senses, how an atmosphere of resistance had been cultivated and choreographed in downtown Winnipeg, the resulting sensory experiences were difficult to capture and re-present to readers in ways that would also engage all of their senses. Although we could examine Camp Marcedes, for instance, by writing small scenes selected out of countless other moments that could be described otherwise, we chose to collect data in ways that would deliberately disrupt the primacy of the visual. Instead of relying on videography to capture the experience, we sparingly employed still photographs of significant objects or experiences, and made detailed audio memos at these sites. The purpose of the audio memos was to deemphasize the visual, and to force the analyst to focus instead on the overall atmosphere that was sensed at particular places. As a result, the memos were verbal narrations describing how all the senses were engaged in the moment, including smell, touch, sight, sound, and overall feeling.[5] Ambient noise was captured, along with verbal commentary. The sounds of wind, birdsong, rustling leaves, traffic, and squealing train wheels were made more prominent, while the affective encounter with place was more fully verbalized and articulated in these personalized audio recordings (see Figure 2).

Following the walks and site visits, sensory data were revisited. As "memory functions multisensorially" (Marks, 2000: 22), sensory memories of embodied and emplaced research encounters were evoked through our review of photographs and audio recordings. This review not only drew other sensory data into sharper focus, but it also offered an important occasion to reflect on our own positions in the atmospheres that we sensed, and the stories we chose to narrate in our research. The voice memos and photographs were then edited together in a narrated slide show, providing perhaps an illusory sense of continuity to events. And while this admittedly constructed artefact could not fully capture the smell of sweet wood smoke from the sacred fire burning at Camp Marcedes, nor could it capture the feeling

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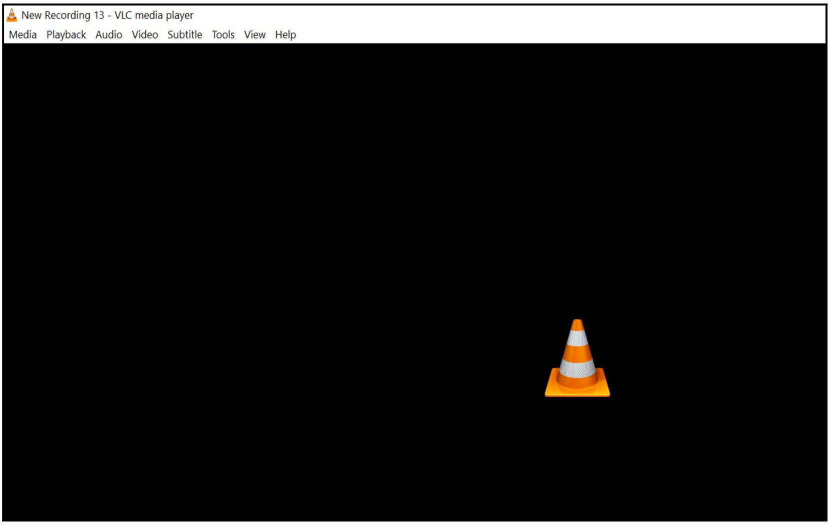
[5] Curiously, taste was the only sense not explicitly encountered during these walks and site visits.

Figure 2: New Recording 13


New Recording 13 - VLC media player
Media Playback Audio Video Subtitle Tools View Help

There is nothing to see in this image because the file is an audio recording of a voice memo captured during a multisensory walk. Using audio recordings disrupts the primacy of the visual, while also presenting challenges in re-presenting the data in scholarly publications.

of the wind and the warmth of the sun while standing in contemplation by an official memorial for unnamed MMIWG2S+, its representation of sensory data could nevertheless be archived and made available as a multisensory counterpoint to the written word and out-of-context images characteristic of scholarly publishing. In the same way that filmmakers strive for an embodied and affective encounter with their art, we think that scholars fully committed to a sensory approach to crime and justice can paint a similarly compelling portrait using multiple forms of data to evoke a sensory and atmospheric experience for readers. However, this will necessarily depend on the analyst's ability and willingness to transcend detached description and engage in reflections that require some personal vulnerability. By laying bare their own feelings and sensory experiences in the moment, the analyst must move from observer to interlocutor in order to bring life to sensory representation. Many criminologists might not be willing to take this position, given how strongly the discipline's sensibility has been shaped by an adherence to scientific objectivity.

To the extent that scientific objectivity has been deeply associated with the ability to observe and describe the world with detachment, and through "objective" senses such as vision (Lam, 2012), this kind of objectivity has become a form of "blind sight" (Daston and Galison, 2007). When objective knowledge is defined as that which bears no traces of the knower, acts of interpretation and sensory immersion challenge criminology's habitual research practices, especially when sensory observations are represented in personalized, audiovisual media that can potentially remove the anonymity of the researcher in the double-blind peer review process.

Conclusion

In this research note, we argued that an explicitly *sensory* criminology must attend to intersecting sensory metaphors and experiences because they powerfully shape encounters and environments, as well as coalesce into atmospheres. Using examples from our exploratory research on slow colonial violence, wasting practices, and environmental degradation in Winnipeg, Canada, we highlighted our sensory encounters with a particular atmosphere of resistance that was being generated by activists and family members of MMIWG2S+. We began writing this research note as a provincial election campaign was underway in Manitoba. The search for the remains of MMIWG2S+ in Winnipeg-area landfills sadly became a central feature of a toxic brand of politics employed by the Progressive Conservative (PC) campaign in a failed attempt to reverse their flagging fortunes. "Heartless Heather" and the governing PC party were defeated in October 2023, yet traces of their racist campaign messaging remain, just as the toxic effects of colonialism and environmental destruction remain in lands that have become sinks and sacrifice zones for colonial discards. We argued that excavating the wasted lives and the wasting practices of settler colonialism can be greatly assisted by sensory research strategies attuned to atmospheres of control and resistance. While governments attempt to contain the stench, noise, and visual blight of landfills, a sensory analysis works by making the hidden features of slow environmental violence tangible. Similarly, our approach attempts to make the odious features of colonial violence and toxic politics sensible, while also shedding light on efforts to resist the wasting practices fostered by settler colonialism (Liboiron, 2021).

Motivated in part by concern that recent efforts to develop visual, aural, and sensory criminologies still rely almost entirely on the written word to convey research findings, we offered this research note as a creative attempt to think through some of the practical challenges of undertaking sensory analyses of pressing issues of injustice. In presenting observations from our ongoing sensory study of colonial violence and pollution in Winnipeg, we could only offer tentative conclusions knowing that others may disagree and some may even find our approach unscholarly. However, we have reached these conclusions by way of some trial and error, and after an earnest attempt to answer McClanahan and South's (2020) call for a truly sensory approach to criminology. It is only with the totality of our senses that we can fully appreciate and grasp how wasting, toxicity, and slow violence continue to disproportionately harm Indigenous communities today. We invite criminologists and interdisciplinary justice scholars to consider adapting our methods to their own studies, where atmospheres of crime, control, and resistance beg for sensory engagement beyond that afforded by traditional modes of research and scholarship. We think that engaging in sensory analysis also holds the potential to disrupt the justice-based (inter)disciplines by drawing attention to the discards of scholarly work – our own embodied feelings as we engage with sites of justice and resistance. By recognizing the entanglement of our own bodies in the process of calling attention to injustice, sensory methods can push qualitative researchers further, especially in research encounters that will increasingly involve reflections on our own positions and roles in research. As a starting point for developing a sensory approach to interdisciplinary justice research, we present this research note as an invitation to fully sense, wildly imagine, and ultimately disrupt standard and habitual ways of studying crime, control, and resistance.

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