

Ni'kma'jtut Mawita'nej -My People Let Us Gather

Spirit in the Fringes: Reframing Through Relationality, Trans-conceptual Spaces, Creative Practice, and Intervention

by

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B.A., Laurentian University, 2009
PDPP., University of Victoria, 2010

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We acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Situated in my experience as an Indigenous educator, I have witnessed and experienced Indigenous people, knowledge, and relationships being systemically pushed to the fringes of Western education systems. Utilizing a specific circle framework which invites the reader into the role of witness, this thesis acts as a guide to understanding the Indigenous, art-based, research-creation (Loveless, 2019) methodologies and knowledges that were revealed to me over the period of four seasons. This research highlights how Indigenous, *trans-conceptual* (“The Bush Manifesto”, 2017) space in various emplaced locations of gathering and intervention, allows for the enactment of our natural agency (Maracle, 2021), where we are able to share our stories outside the grasp of the settler colonial systems we are in relationship with, but not of. In these spaces, we honour our laws, ways of knowing and being as Indigenous peoples who are away from our homelands, waters, and relatives. In these spaces, the sovereignty of host nations is affirmed. At the site of cross-cultural relationship, we bear witness to each other’s lives (Hunt & Holmes, 2015) and through the generation of shared knowledges, we are drawn closer to our own cultural locations. Creatively articulating and centering Indigenous freedom, hope and joy, and envisioning worlds outside the confines of colonialism and Western systems shifts perspective and allows for revisioning and reframing (Martineau 2014). Within these articulations, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the systems they work within but are not of, are reframed and self-determined Indigenous spaces are recuperated from the fringes, “allowing them to dance in a new light” (Hunt, 2021). Through this reframing of relationality and vision sharing, a particular, situated intervention into systemic racism can be had. This work is done in relationship with and recognizing the authority of *ləkʷəŋən* law, ancestors, wind, peoples, land, plants, animals, and waters, as well as my responsibility to them.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the lək'wəŋən, Mi'kmaq, Anishinaabeg and Dene shorelines where I have been held, shown unconditional love, and had knowledges revealed.

I acknowledge all my relations; ancestral, human, plant, animal, water, land, and wind, who continue to hold and make space for my spirit to be seen and belong.

In particular I raise my hands to Dr. Sarah Tłalilila'ogwa Hunt for their steadfast support and teachings. I acknowledge the integrity, humility, power, and importance of their work. Wela'lin for creating space within unsafe educational spaces for Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples to be seen, held, and feel freedom and joy. Gilakas'la.

And to the children and young ones,

You are Medicine.

~Msit No'kmaq

Preface

Opening the Circle

Kwe', Me' tal-wuleyn. Nina' mikamiwa j'aqtelusit Sarah Rhude. Tleyawi Gespe'gewa'gi. Telusit nkij Suzanne Rhude. Telusit niskamij Rene Bujold. Telusit nukumij Genevieve Bujold. Tulusit nukumij Gaetan Roy nina Algonquin. Hello, my name is Sarah Rhude, and I am Mi'kmaq from Gespe'gewa'gi through my mother Suzanne Rhude, my late grandfather Rene Bujold, and my great grandmother Genevieve Bujold, as well as French. My late grandmother Gaetan Roy, as far as I know, is of French and Algonquin ancestry. My father's paternal family are from England, Ireland, and France and have ties to Mi'kma'ki- Nova Scotia as settlers and later moved to Anishinabek territory in Northern Ontario where I was born. My grandmother on my father's side was adopted into an English family, and we have very little information regarding her birth family or ancestral connections. These are the stories I know of my family thus far. As a white- passing Indigenous person of mixed settler ancestry, I am continually examining the privilege and responsibilities this location holds, particularly within a settler colonial context. I have lived in ləkʷəŋən territory for 24 years, and for the last fifteen years I have worked professionally as an Indigenous educator. I am honoured to share my journey with you. I feel nervous to share all of the thoughts, feelings and the creations that follow, but I know this nervousness means I care deeply- and this is a gift. Holding an eagle feather and using my courage to speak with a big voice, in the way I have been taught by loving elders from these ləkʷəŋən lands on which these stories are rooted, I would like to open our circle by acknowledging the ləkʷəŋən ancestors, as well as my own who are present as we gather together in circle. I know that I am never alone because of this and to the best of my ability I

hope to honour these ones with the words and creations that follow, recognizing the authority of the lək^wəŋən peoples, ancestors, land, waters, plants, animals, winds, protocols, and laws.

Introduction

Recently I took a leave from my job as Indigenous Art and Culture facilitator for the Greater Victoria School District. This choice came out of my need to escape from the unhealthy and unsustainable place I found myself working as an Indigenous educator in the Western education system. I was burnt out, angry, overwhelmed, and physically ill. My spirit was hiding- I felt lost and could no longer hold all that I was carrying from working within the system. This leave provided me time and space to contemplate the circumstances that led me to this unhealthy place. I decided that I wanted to better understand the complexity and roots of settler colonial systems which steered me towards graduate studies where I have been thinking through how or if I can continue as an educator within the Western education system, and if it is possible to find safety and autonomy in relationship with them.

As an educator working on the traditional territory of the ləkʷəŋən speaking peoples I have been taught that fostering relationships between students and the land, water, non-human relations, and learning the language of the land is fundamental for being a good visitor (Elliot, 2016). Due to the impacts of colonization, many Indigenous students' first introduction to their Indigeneity is in the classroom yet bringing cultural practice and teachings into colonial education systems creates the potential for them to be colonized, altered, and destroyed. There is an ever-present danger of Indigenous ways of knowing being shapeshifted in a way that feels safe for the system but is harmful to our ancestors, communities, children, and cultural practices. Cultural safety frameworks and local Indigenous land-based pedagogies do exist (Mitchell, 2010, Claxton, 2020), yet it has been my experience that these frameworks and pedagogies often exist *in the fringes*, or outside of the formal educational spaces and school curriculum.

Over the course of 14 years, in my day-to-day movement through Greater Victoria School District schools, it was normal to see Indigenous youth sitting in hallways and outside the school buildings. *I came to frame this marginalization of Indigenous people, knowledge, and relationships as being systemically pushed to the fringes of Western education.* In order to address the lack of connection Indigenous students felt to the school community and curriculum, in my role, I collaboratively created Indigenous led and rooted programs (such as Indigenous theatre projects, on-the-land courses, circles with elders, drumming and art practices, transition programs), yet they were most often enacted outside the normal curriculum and school hours- disconnected from the greater school community. Indigenous students would often attend Indigenous led/rooted programs, yet still be absent from their regular scheduled or core curriculum classes.

Within my own teachings, it is in the fringes of our ribbon skirts, our regalia, that we catch spirit and medicines. When I walk through the bush, or forest, a field, an Indigenous plant garden- when I enter a ceremonial space such as a lodge, longhouse, or Mawiomi, the fringes of my regalia pick up and hold, as well as brush up against and share the spirit of the medicines that surround us. In this study, I have asked what strength comes from existing in the fringes of colonial systems, where we can bring in the beauty of ancestral ways of knowing and being, and where Indigenous peoples often find safety, community, and spirit. Meaningful support and the recognition of Indigenous peoples 'natural agency' (Maracle, 2021) to implement, control and maintain Indigenous pedagogy/frameworks is lacking in settler colonial institutions. I am interested in ideas that move these safe spaces out of the fringes and into the center of educational spaces. I wonder if a reframing of the relationship between Indigenous peoples- and the knowledges and laws they carry, with the school districts they work within would change

Indigenous employees' ability to perform their roles and responsibilities to the communities they serve. Indigenous-specific racism found throughout every level of Western educational and professional environments is both personally damaging, and career-limiting for Indigenous peoples working within the system (Lafond, Johnson, & Charles, 2021). This gap perpetuates the crisis of many Indigenous people's inability to exist, survive and thrive in education systems that are inhospitable to them. Interventions that counter the terminally slow pace at which systemic change happens are vital.

My Research Journey

As an interdisciplinary master's student, I presented a research proposal and course plan as part of my acceptance into the program. My original plan, line of inquiry and thesis questions were as follows:

Within the context of adopting a relational orientation that recognizes the fundamental interconnectedness and interdependence between public school districts and Indigenous employees working within the district, *what are Indigenous visions of freedom connected to education? What gives us hope?* These questions will be contextualized outside the parameters of scarcity, lack, or current systemic barriers. Through the act of gathering, and in the context of 'survivance,' which calls for an active sense of Indigenous presence, and the renunciation of "dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (Vizenor, 2010), I will facilitate discussion and the creation of an art installation/ intervention that will hold the hopes, stories, and solutions concerning Indigenous freedom in relation to the educational spaces in which Indigenous employees work and share space. Through autoethnography, creative, practice-based research

processes, immersive on land experiences, and Indigenous methodologies, this MA research will explore what it means to be lnu'sgw (Mi'kmaw woman) who is 'coming to know' and educate firmly rooted in land as pedagogy (Simpson, 2014) and grounded normativity (Coulthard, 2014), while still in relationship with the western education world.

My program plan was created based on my desire to learn how Indigenous political ecology, Indigenous politics, and land-based Indigenous pedagogies address the questions I carry. Through creative, art/practice-based (Leary, 2009), research-creation (Loveless, 2019), I wanted to work in relationship with Indigenous peoples and the land to create various cultural pieces that would hold the spirit, stories, and solutions we gathered together. I planned to share this communal learning through some form of Indigenous gathering. My hope was that the spirit and teachings we gathered would be felt and shared by all involved and that I would gain insight on how to move forward in my role as an educator.

What has been made evident to me during this last year of study and creation is that knowledge reveals itself to you over time and through relationships. Trying to force something to happen in spaces that are inhospitable does not work. I decided after I got accepted into my graduate program that I would put the assumptions and fixed ideas about what I thought should happen aside. I wanted to be in the moment and listen, learn, and see what was revealed to me. I didn't want to have a set path or come to any conclusions before I was in relationship with the knowledge, peoples, lands, waters, and spirits that would guide me through my inquiries.

Over the fall, winter, and spring I took classes from three Indigenous women scholars, and through the kinstellations (Murwin, 2021) of care and protection they provided me within the university setting, I learned about Indigenous methodologies, futurities, laws, politics, and

settler colonial systems. Within these Indigenous led and rooted courses I was able to respond to and research from a creative and land-based approach where knowledges were being revealed through methods such as song, drum making, gifting and language revitalization. After my coursework at UVIC ended, I continued my art-based research journey through an applied theater production entitled *Burying the Hatchet* (*Burying the Hatchet*, 2022), which included enactment of local coming ashore protocols and an art intervention into the lobby of a local theater company. In the spring through to the fall equinox I travelled to many territories, attending, and presenting at an Indigenous academic conference in Taa'an Kwächän and Kwanlin Dün territory in Whitehorse, Yukon, connecting to my Mi'kmaw lands, waters, and communities throughout Gespe'gewa'gi and Mi'kma'ki , and finally attending an on-the-land, Indigenous, creative practice course through Dechinta Center for Research and Learning in Denendeh on Great Slave Lake. These travels and the relationships that ensued informed my re-Search (Graveline, 2012), which ultimately asks the question of how I continue to serve and honour my community, ancestors and all my relations while maintaining my own wellness.

Prioritizing my own wellness is not something that has been forefront in my life. I have come to realize that 'taking care of self' is crucial and also illuminating when understanding how in turn to care for the relationships I hold dear. Of particular importance, through this deep healing and relational work, the knowledge and courage needed to go Home for the first time was revealed- home to Mi'kma'ki, the land I am connected to through my mother, my grandfather, and my ancestors- both Lnu' and settler. This yearning to go to Gespe'gewa'gi, a district of Mi'kma'ki, meaning 'the last land' as it is the furthest east district of the 7 Mi'kmaw districts (Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmawei Mawiomi, 2016), has held me for so long and yet it felt impossible to manifest- especially due to the disconnect and trauma in my family. I needed to

heal and return Home—to the land connected to my ancestors and to myself. This next passage is part of my journal recordings taken during my trip home to Gespe'gewa'gi.

July 27th, 2022- Saint Anne de Monts, Gespe'gewagi

We are in Gespe'gewa'gi. My spirit feels calm. I am very grateful to have met these beach rose relatives. They are so beautiful. When we got in last night, we walked to a pub called Pub Chez Bass to have a biere and Poutine. On our walk back along the boardwalk a recognizable sweet smell was in the air. 'Nu'luk/nephew, welima'qewe'l/sweetgrass, are you here already? I Cannot find you in this dark night, yet I know you are so close—holding vision for the future as our origin story tells and reminding me of the children and why we must continue to do what needs to be done'. This vision is unclear to me, but the smell of sweetness reminds me it is there even if I do not see it. In the land that my ancestors know so well, with these roses and grasses, the fireweed and medicines, and the seals with their adorable oval plump bodies balancing solo on boulders that mark the shoreline as if thrown like seeds by giants— here I am content to not know yet. To allow what knowledge wishes to be revealed to me in this journey. I have three eagle feathers left and four tobacco ties. There are knowledges and relations that will reveal themselves requiring these medicines and I await them, with a calm awareness, with the vision of Nuluk helping me and with a full, humble heart. I do not have my living human family to guide me, so I am trusting my plant relatives, my ancestors, and the spirit of this land - Gespe'gewa'gi to hold and guide me.

Msit no'kmaq- All my relations.

The relational/cultural work I do here in lək^wəŋən territory reminds me of my own ancestral lands/waters, peoples, and teachings where I am connected. While working on one of

the assignments for a course I took entitled *Justice at the Shoreline* (Hunt, 2022), myself and my lək̓ʷəŋən nmis Diane Sam received a healing song – *Həyšxʷqə Tikweneñ* which revealed knowledge and felt theory (Million, 2009), prompting my journey to Gespe'gewa'gi and through Mi'kma'ki, the land I am familiarly and ancestrally connected to. In the intimate space of friendship with each other and the Tikweneñ shoreline where Diane and I met, the felt theory of "bearing witness" to our personal narratives and lives was a powerful tool (Million, 2008, p. 267), for connecting us to each other and our cultural ways of knowing and being. Some stories cannot be put into particular academic discourse and come out as various creative expressions able to hold the emotions that academic discourse cannot. "The truth in the emotional content of this felt knowledge—colonialism as it is *felt* by those whose experience it" (Million, 2008, p. 272)—was made visible and through this bearing witness at the intimate level of our lives, and this work of decolonization that took place during one of my graduate courses resulted in a healing song being revealed to us (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). This relational experience then propelled me deeper into my own identity and a coming home to myself figuratively, via physical return to my homelands and waters. I will share more about this song and the relationships/stories they hold in the pages to come.

Circle/Thesis Structure

Circle as a pedagogical tool is not static, but a transportable space that creates an intervention into settler-colonial systems, structures, spaces, and classrooms. It reshapes these spaces with their sharp corners and edges and allows us to sit equally around a center. Simple, gentle, and powerful, the circle holds all our feelings, our ways of knowing and being, and our stories. When I first began my position as an Indigenous support teacher I decided I would as

much as possible teach within circle. Circle, a tool or methodology for gathering and sharing knowledge that is passed down from our ancestors, is able to hold and respect the laws of many Indigenous Nations. For example, when I open in circle on the West Coast of Turtle Island, I have been taught to pass the feather to the right and follow the direction of the moon. In this way I honour the protocols/teachings of these lands, though if I was back home I would go to the left and follow the direction of the sun. I have been taught through my own cultural teachings, as well as guidance from local Indigenous educators/knowledge keepers (Tenning, 2007, Dick, n.d., Conibear, n.d., Nelson, n.d.), that circle is opened with an acknowledgment of the host on whose land we are on. Those in circle then share cultural and familial connections and invite ancestors in- as I demonstrated in the preface. In following rounds of circle, knowledges and feelings are shared, and then the circle is closed with gratitude. Often, the feather is given to one person to share knowledge and teachings while others *listen* and *witness* this work.

The act of *listening* in circle is not passive, but active as Joanne Archibald (2008) says: “Listening requires the concomitant involvement of the auditory and visual senses, the emotions, the mind, and patience...I have heard Stó:lo and other First Nations storytellers say that we have ‘three ears to listen with, two on the sides of our head and one in our heart.’” (p. 76).

As I hold the feather and share the knowledges that have been revealed to me in my research, you are encouraged to allow the words to sink into your heart, for it is when we have an emotional response that deeper understanding is had (Nelson, n.d.). I invite into circle your ancestors and laws to be in relationship with the knowledges that are revealed here.

Witnessing, as I have been taught through various relationships while living in ləkʷəŋən territory and in relationship with kin from various Nations on the west coast of Turtle Island, is a method of knowledge dissemination that obligates witnesses to pay attention, respond to, and

avow what they have experienced. A witness must be prepared to be called upon to acknowledge and share this knowledge at any point in the future when asked. You are not interpreting what you have seen, but rather it is the duty of the witness to “recall what they have experienced from their own perspective in order to validate someone’s else’s actions, rights or stories” (Hunt, 2018, p. 286). Kwagu’l academic, activist and author Sarah Hunt (2018) shares from her Kwakwaka’wakw lens,

Therefore, in witnessing the stories, I am obligated to ensure they are not denied, ignored, or silenced. Further, if I see them being denied, it is my responsibility to recall both the truths of what I have witnessed and the way in which their erasure is being accomplished. In my own teachings, the responsibility of witnesses to recall what they have seen is particularly important when something is called into question, or at risk being lost (p. 288).

By witnessing this work, I hope to call into our circle a sense of relational responsibility whereby you allow space for the knowledges/stories/research that will be shared in the rounds/chapters to sink into your heart and foster an understanding of how we can reframe relationality and the power dynamics that are at play between Indigenous peoples and the Western education system. So often, Indigenous peoples and our worldviews are erased, disappeared, or co-opted within these systems. As reader/witness you are being called to action. In witnessing this work my hope is that when given opportunity or when you are called upon, you courageously speak truth to power, “Witnessing, then, might be understood as a methodology in which we are obligated, through a set of relational responsibilities, to ensure frameworks of representation allow for the lives that we have witnessed to be made visible” (Hunt, 2018, p. 284)

This thesis is organized into four rounds that follow the four seasons in which I was thinking, writing, relating, creating, and observing the ways Indigenous knowledge is expressed in the fringes of settler colonial spaces and institutions. I attempt to make obvious the knowledges that have been revealed to me through interrelated forms of knowledge such as: learning from Indigenous academics, Indigenous relations- including the natural world, enactment of protocol, intervention, creative practice, performance, ceremony and the reframing of relationships and power dynamics. Dismantling hierarchies of knowledge production, learning and ‘thinking through in public’ is a feminist way of sharing knowledge (Team, A. M. R., 2019), and has required me to be vulnerable, humble, and courageous- all important teachings. Rather than prioritizing standard Western academic research and thesis formats, each of the four rounds/chapters are represented through a methodology that best represents the knowledges that were revealed and honours the relationships that were involved. These art-based methodologies include cross curricular ways of expression such as song, poetry, photography, video, playwriting, and creative expressions such as bead work, regalia, medicines, dances, and performances. The written words in this thesis are an accompaniment to the artistic, experiential, land-based knowledges that were revealed and created over the last four seasons. These words do not stand alone but act as a guide for you the reader to enter into relationship with the creative practices, plant relations, peoples, languages, and the living earth that took place during my research.

My decision to share knowledges that were revealed through various creative-based methodologies honours and recognizes these knowledges as animate and with agency. This thesis creates a third space, between experiential ways of coming to know and passive learning (traditionally Western-based education). As you will learn, it was the kinstillation (Murwin

2021) of care that was provided to me by Indigenous peoples within the University of Victoria, including academics and *ləkʷəŋən* community/kin, that created the Indigenous *trans-conceptual* (“The Bush Manifesto”, 2017), space required for me to intervene into the status quo of what a thesis looks like. Here, my priority is sharing research within methodologies that reflect how knowledges are best revealed to the reader, not how the university prescribes knowledge be disseminated. The shift in formatting throughout is an indicator of the switch between methodologies. Often, as with art, I choose to leave the analysis within the piece itself. What knowledges are revealed to the reader depend on the knowledge itself and your connection to it. I am writing and creating from an Indigenous framework, and thus there may be some knowledges that are not revealed to some readers. There may be some knowledges that reveal themselves or pique your interest and trigger you to search for deeper understanding, as artistic expression is wont to do. Knowledge being animate and with agency is outside the ways of knowing and being of Western academia. Within this theoretical intervention, I make space for and enact this cultural tenet. In this space, I center the spirit in the fringes.

This work was a catalyst or turning point for me in terms of understanding who I am, how and where I belong, and what responsibilities these knowledges evoke. This special journey began when I was researching and thinking through how Indigenous peoples who are disconnected from their communities, cultures, and kin, (including non-human kin), develop and/or maintain ties to their ways of knowing and being- epistemologies, ontologies, cosmologies. These ideas are shared in the first round of our circle through a literature review that discusses how knowledge travels to us when we are away from our specific cultural worlds and peoples and elaborates on how *trans-conceptual* (“The Bush Manifesto”, 2017), space and

Indigenous gatherings, and the radical inclusivity¹ (Claus & Morin, 2020, L'Hirondelle, 2015), of host nations, fosters not only knowledge transfer and sharing but the creation of new worlds of layered and generative knowledges.

In the second round, these knowledges are put into practice through examining the intimate space of relationality between myself as an Lnu'swg visitor in lək'wəŋən lands, my nmis Diane Sam who is from these lək'wəŋən lands, and Tikweneñ- a lək'wəŋən shoreline where the aforementioned healing song comes to us. This round makes obvious the methodological approach and relationships that create the environment for cultural knowledge to be meaningfully shared, and in turn I am able to share this cultural knowledge in a way that feels safe for the song, my relations and myself within the Greater Victoria School District.

In the third round I share the art-based research that took shape during an applied theater production called *Burying the Hatchet*, (*Burying the Hatchet*, 2022). By enacting local coming ashore protocols before the show and creating an Indigenous art intervention into the lobby of a Western theater, ("Art exhibit transforms Belfry Theatre into healing space this weekend", 2022), I make obvious how meaningful relationships with local lək'wəŋən peoples, ways, and living earth, supports the sharing of knowledge/laws/protocols that facilitate and create the *Indigenous trans-conceptual* space needed to share our ways of knowing and being through creative practice, in a way that honours and protects these worldviews and relationships. The recognition of lək'wəŋən authority and intervention in the Western theater system enacts our natural agency (Maracle, 2021) to share our stories in our own specific ways. Originally, I had

¹ Radical inclusivity acknowledges the deep graciousness of the host yet allows room for reciprocity and participation from all parts.

wanted to do this protocol and creative intervention work within the local school district. Instead, it took place within a Western theatre company that I had a relationship with, as it became obvious to me that I did not have the trust and relationality required to create this space within the school district. The layered knowledges that led to the production of *Burying the Hatchet* revealed that this was the location for me to think through and reframe the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the systems they are in relationship with, but not of.

In the fourth round I share more art-based research from my time in Mi'kma'ki and Dechinta Center for Research in Denendeh (Northwest Territories) and summarize what has been revealed to me in my research. I close our circle with a round of gratitude and a creative expression that illustrates how the knowledges that has been revealed to me through these four seasons have wrapped me in love and belonging.

This thesis creatively articulates and centers Indigenous freedom, hope and joy. By envisioning worlds outside the confines of colonialism and western systems we shift perspective and allow for revisioning and reframing (Martineau, 2014). Within these visions, creations and enactments, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the systems they work within but are not of, are reframed. By thinking, creating and ultimately intervening, self-determined Indigenous spaces are recuperated from the fringes, “allowing them to dance in a new light” (Hunt, 2021). The knowledges that have been revealed show that reframing of relationality and vision sharing facilitates the creation of particular, situated interventions into systemic racism, and in this research we are working within protocols of the ɫə̀kʷə̀ŋə̀n Peoples and living earth. Through the enactment of local protocols to create *trans-conceptual* (“The Bush Manifesto”, 2017) space within settler spaces that are always on Indigenous lands, Indigenous peoples are ‘given the floor.’ Through the practices of self-representation, we tell of our presence, our

resistance, our survivance (Vizenor, 2010), and assert the right of Indigenous peoples to be seen on our own terms. It is neither a perfect solution, nor is it complete. These knowledges and relationships require care, maintenance, time, effort, and patience. This thesis is a creative and written representation of the last year of my coming to know and propels me into the future to continue the work of acknowledging and embodying the knowledges that are revealed from the relationships and contexts within which I exist.

**Round One: Indigenous Trans-Conceptual Space, Gathering and the Mobility of
Knowledge: Literature Review**

Fall/Winter

Trans-Conceptual

Across concept,
across abstract thought,
across theory,
across limitations.

Through concept,
through abstract thought,
through theory,
through limitations.

Beyond concept,
beyond abstract thought,
beyond theory,
beyond limitations.

Through the portal: I am embodied.

What can be
when we dream-drum-conjure-
gather into existence
New Worlds,
in generative treaty together...

Situated Knowledge- I am Lnu'sgw Wherever I Go

“Kepmite'tmnej ta'n teli l'nuwulti'kw -Let us greatly respect our being L'nu”

(First verse of the Mi'kmaq Honour Song by George Paul)

A few years ago, I heard the late, dearly missed, Mi'kmaw comedian and media personality Candy Palmater speak at an educational gathering. She started by saying that as

Mi'kmaq, we are told to always explain who we are before we share knowledge. This teaching I somehow understood but had never heard spoken from a Mi'kmaw person. She opened with her family's creation story that took us from her parents' birth, their meeting, courtship and marriage, her birth, and numerous stories leading up to who she was as the person standing on the stage in front of us. The context and situated knowledges that she embodied were made clear and transparent before she moved forward with her talk on Indigenous education. When she told stories of how she survived the education system, it was deeply understood where she was speaking from. Feminist researcher Donna Haraway asserts that we must blatantly situate our knowledges and embodiment of that knowledge so as to make our biases visible and create the context for which the knowledges we share have been formed (Haraway in Smith, 2021). In the spirit of honouring both these women whom I respect deeply, and the situated knowledges that I am in relationship with and embody, I will share some facets of who I am. I share this in the hopes that you, the reader/witness, can establish a context for why I am interested in acknowledging relationships as the foundation for knowledge creation, transmission and understanding. As well, I will elaborate on the term *trans-conceptual* ("The Bush Manifesto", 2017), and discuss gathering as an Indigenous methodology for maintaining, renewing, and enacting relationship and knowledge production/transmission. I hope to make clear why it is important for me to engage with how Indigenous knowledge travels, reveals itself, and is generated from emplaced sites of gathering. I feel deeply the words of Métis scholar, activist, and community worker Natalie Clark when she asserts that "Indigenous scholars no longer willing to leave spirit at the door have reminded us to situate ourselves in our writing, to start from our intentions, to answer the question: Who are you and why do you care?" (Clark, 2016).

I am a lnu'swg of mixed Irish, English and French ancestry. I have ties to Mi'kma'ki through both my Indigenous and settler ancestry. My Mi'kmaq ancestors are from Gespe'gewa'gi territory, from Gespeg First Nation through my Njij/mother, my Niskamij/grandfather, and his mother my Nukumij. I grew up in Anishinabek lands and I am disconnected from my family of origin and have little direct access to knowledge concerning my relatives, culture, or community. Paradoxically, amidst this disconnect, my relationship to my ancestors and culture is also how I stay connected to this world and feel a sense of belonging. It is through familial photographs/cultural pieces/regalia, memories, intuition, spirit, research, and studying Mi'kmaq songs, stories, language, art, and culture, and then practicing and engaging in cultural ceremony with my chosen kin here that I have formulated a sense of identity and belonging. Amidst the minimal contact I have had with my mother and late grandfather over the last thirty years, what stands out most and what I hold in my heart are occurrences of our practicing culture and sharing knowledge—learning to bead with my mom and elder Darlene Bebonang at her kitchen table in M'chigeeng, growing and canning food and medicine, being out in nature and on the water, and painting together. I remember clearly putting my leg in the armholes of many fur coats that my mother collected from thrift stores, to find ones that would fit my leg for mukluks. Through the ways of being and knowing my mother and I shared as we gathered to harvest/ prepare/process plant relatives, bead regalia, and paint what we saw in nature, I continue to find comfort and medicine in the continuation of these cultural ways of knowing and being.

Recently I received a pair of Mukluks in the mail with no note or return address. Amidst the deepening disconnect between my mother and myself, and through gifts of regalia such as these mukluks, I am reminded of our time together and the relationship she acknowledges

between myself and our Mi'kmaw culture. This is the only way she is currently able to express our love, our care, our ways. Through various forms of gathering that are rooted in relationship—from plant relatives to peoples—Indigenous peoples create spaces/locations for knowledge transfer that are founded in ethics of care, amidst the trauma colonization continually perpetuates in our intimate relationships. Though I am thousands of miles away and not in contact with my family, the gift of a pair of mukluks can put me into a deep memory, imbued with teachings and knowledges that carry on through my wearing, examining, and then recreating. How people who are disconnected from their communities, cultures, and kin, (including non-human kin), develop and maintain ties to their ways of knowing and being—epistemologies, ontologies, cosmologies—is of utmost interest and importance to me. The introduction to the Māori podcast *He Kākano Ahau* speaks in sound bite poetry to this notion of displacement and ancestral connection in a way that roots me.

Urban and Māori,

They had left everything that they knew and so they were stuck in these cities

Today 85 percent of us live in urban places

Something about Wellington draws me in

I am a city girl

They had to go to the city because they were shifted there

In this concrete jungle

In the urban sprawl-what is it that keeps us grounded?

My tupuna have been thriving here for many generations

I am Māori wherever I go

My name is Kahu Kutia and this He Kākano Ahau

Weaving together strands of connection for Māori in the city. (Kutia, 2022, 0:00-0:34)

The spiritual ties I have to my culture, the living earth around me and my desire to honour my ancestors are what keep me connected to the worlds I am in relationship with, as I perpetually navigate the disconnect and trauma that colonialism has imbued on my relationships and the damage it has done to my family.

Though my identity and sense of belonging at times feel frayed and challenged by my longing for direct connection and relationship with my relatives, to the best of my ability I live from an ethical framework of grounded normativity (Coulthard, 2014) as a lnu'swg following my Mi'kmaw land-based practices and knowledges, as well as those that have been shared with me in these lək'wəŋən territories. As a mother, grandmother, auntie, sister, educator, medicine maker, artist, student, and community member, I take care, create, share, educate, and learn from the perspective of land as pedagogy (Simpson, 2014). The deepest and most healing truths and knowledges have been revealed to me in my relationship with the land, plants, animals, water, and winds. Living in the traditional territories of the lək'wəŋən peoples- Songhees and Esquimalt, on the west coast of Turtle Island, I am: 3884 km away from the Anishinaabeg, Robinson- Huron treaty land I grew up in relationship with, 5475 km away from Gespe'gewa'gi- the territory of my Indigenous ancestors, and up to 8000 km away from Ireland, England, and France- the territories of my settler ancestors. To currently reside so far from the lands and waters where my ancestors and cultural ways of being and knowing are from is a direct result of imperialism and settler colonialism. It is through my relationship with and deep gratitude for lək'wəŋən land, water, plants, animals, peoples, ancestors, and winds that I can survive, create, make meaning, and form connections in the world. I have been a guest here for twenty-four years, and the relationships, friendships, and kinships that I have formed with lək'wəŋən place,

space, and people is a gift I am beyond grateful for, humbled by, and could never repay.

Through ongoing relationship with and responsibility to *ləkʷəŋən* relations, I attempt to show my appreciation for the gifts I have been given in this place. Similarly, I hold the same humility and gratitude to the Nuu-Chah-Nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw peoples who have also sustained, taught, and held me as I travel through and spend time with their territories and relations. Having spent most of my adult life here, I am aware that who I have become is a direct result of the relationships I have in this place and the gifts of cultural, spiritual, emotional, and practical knowledge that have been shared with me. These relations and gifts have kept me alive through times of deep sorrow and pain in connection with my family of origin, and my disconnection from culture and belonging. The teachings and shared knowledges I have gathered from my relationship with *ləkʷəŋən* knowledge systems and peoples have made me a better person. In this piece of writing, I speak to this knowledge and how I experience it, but never for the knowledge that is not mine to speak for (Wilson, 2022).

Relationship and Gathering as Indigenous Research Paradigm

“Ni'kma'jtut mawita'nej -My people let us gather”

(Second verse of the Mi'kmaq Honour Song by George Paul)

I recently listened to an online lecture through University of British Columbia where Cree scholar and the author of *Research is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson (2022) spoke about how engaging in relationships generates knowledge. More relationships create more knowledge- “It's the relationships between things that give it its' strength”. At a base level, Western science tells the story of the relationship between protons, neurons, and electrons, which make up an atom- the basis for all matter. Relationships between energies grow and get more complex as they develop into all the living beings we see around us. Knowledge formation is based on

relationships that are rooted in ethics of care. Hawaiian scholar Dr. Manu Alulu Meyer sees the basic principle of Indigenous epistemology as love of land and care of oceans. She breaks down the term epistemology by asking- what is the difference between knowledge, knowing and understanding? What is intelligence? “Knowledge is the noun, knowing is the verb, and understanding is the liberating process” (Meyer, cited in Keyele, 2010). The work of creating and maintaining deep relationships forms a basis for knowledge creation. Knowledges compound as our relationality reaches out in constellations to all that is around us. When relationships are formed and founded on generative cultural principles, then knowledge is expansive (Starblanket, 2022). Indigenous methodologies around deepening cultural and intimate relationships involve gatherings, sometimes intercultural, to share in ceremonies, storytelling, protocols, ethics of care and concern, cultural performance, enactment of ritual and laws, gifting, and enjoying each other's company. In these spaces of Indigenous cultural gathering, we witness and participate in communal knowledge production through; creative and cultural practice, performance, watching, listening and taking care of one another, and sharing, preparing, and partaking in foods and medicines (Tribal Journeys 2017, Nelson Potlatch 2018, Smith Potlatch 2019, A.N.S.W.E.R. Potlatch 2021, Sacred Circle 2016-2018, Carving Apprenticeship 2020).² This gathering and enactment of culture, governance and knowledge sharing is fostered by the radical inclusivity (Claus & Morin, 2020, L’Hirondelle, 2015) of the host and based on the hosts and guests' deep connection to all that is around them on the living earth and the interactions, connections,

² I chose to cite specific sites of gathering and relationality where knowledge sharing, production and creation has occurred for me. These sites inform my knowledge on gathering as methodology. This citational choice is deliberate and makes visible the authority of these sites as deserving of citational consideration and acknowledgement on part with other forms of knowledge sharing we generally see in works cited. These spaces of gathering hold knowledges I am speaking to and informed by in this round of our circle and throughout this thesis.

understandings and treaties between them. At cultural gatherings relationships are renewed and knowledge creation, sharing and understanding deepens.

Through cultural gathering, we find out more about our realities. Stories, art, and ceremonies that are rooted in connection and relationship with the living earth and human/non-human beings are a mainstay of Indigenous ways of coming to know including what we now call research methodologies. In contrast, compartmentalization of subjects in the search for ‘objectivity’ is a premise of Western research. Mayan scholar Carlos Cordero (2015, as cited in Wilson, 2008), discusses the separation of “those areas called science from art and religion” by western thinkers while Indigenous worldviews integrate those areas of knowledge so that science is both spiritual and aesthetic. While the Western tradition of values approaches knowledge through the use of the intellect, for Indigenous people, knowledge is also approached through the senses and intuition (p. 55). The idea that we, as deeply feeling beings who are guided by our emotions, can create emotionless, unsituated, objective, intellectual research through compartmentalizing and cutting off parts of our beings- the spiritual, emotional, and that we can reach meaningful conclusions that are based on transactions with strangers both human and non-human, is in fact “a goddamn lie” (Hampton, 1995, cited in Wilson, 2008). Trying to understand the world and create meaning without acknowledging our relationality with all that is around us ignores our intuitiveness, our situated knowledge, and realities (Haraway, 1988, cited in Smith, 2012). Situated knowledge urges us to:

Embrace First Voice as Methodology.

Only those who Are Aboriginal

Can speak about Being Aboriginal.

Can understand with any Depth

Our Meanings within a “Native perspective”

“Don’t talk about what you don’t know” cautions Elders.

As Metis woman, scholar, activist, teacher, and healer

I enact First Voice as pedagogy and methodology. (Graveline, 2010, p. 362)

Western research has a history of telling people to “amputate a part of themselves to be able to fit something that’s rigid, and not built for them in the first place” (Tofoya, 1995, cited in Wilson, 2008, p. 56). Indigenous peoples know knowledge to be relational. Expressions of this knowledge and relationality are expressed and witnessed in our various emplaced sites of gathering where we share, relate, enact governance through our specific and cultural practices.

Knowledge Has Agency

“Kepmite'tmnej ta'n wettapeksulti'k -Let us greatly respect our native roots”

(Third verse of the Mi'kmaq Honour Song by George Paul)

While gathering is an Indigenous methodology where knowledge transfer occurs, the methods of gathering at specific locations are shaped and molded by the host nation's way of being and knowing, which is always connected and coming from the land they are responsible and related to. Indigenous nations have distinct ways of gathering that acknowledge the protocols of the land and make room for the revealing, emergence and sharing of knowledges. These methods of gathering are rooted in an ethic of care that in turn fosters the relationships that knowledge production is based upon. In contrast, having spent a lot of my life in settler-colonial spaces of knowledge production, as a student and educator, I experience Western education systems to be focused on the individual, the objectives, the ‘discovery’ of knowledge. I have come to understand that the Western method of knowledge ‘creation’ or meaning making

believes that without being in relationship to the ‘thing’ *one* wishes to understand, *one* can be master over and understand the ‘focus of study’ through transactional engagement and distanced observation. Knowledge is seen as being individual in nature, which is vastly different from an Indigenous worldview where knowledge is seen as belonging to the “cosmos of which we are part and where researchers are only the interpreters of this knowledge” (Wilson, 2008, p. 38).

The Western way of being does not account for the natural agency of knowledge:

Because knowledge is emergent, then knowledge itself has agency. The land has agency... knowledge needs to be treated not as something I am a master over, or be seen as I am the only animate thing, so that it [knowledge] has no rights. Everything has agency. Therefore, knowledge has agency. Agency is emergent as well. How it reveals itself is a demonstration of its agency.” (Wilson, 2022)

There are many locations of gathering in which knowledge reveals itself. More intimate locations include that of friendship, mentorship, connection to our ancestors and the cultural materials that hold our specific knowledges. In the various Indigenous ways of knowing and being I have been invited into, including my own Mi’kmaw worldview, regalia, masks, drums, and cultural materials are known to be alive and imbued with spirit. Anishinaabe academic and artist Celeste Pedris-Spade explains her worldview on the agency of knowledge that travels through/between spiritual and physical worlds when she exerts that “*we wear our teachings, we live our knowledge*” (Pedris-Spade, 2017). In a personal communication that Celeste Pedris-Spade (2017) had with Kitchi-anishinaabekwe Wanda Baxter, she describes the relationships that occur between the spirit and physical world; “Our regalia has a spiritual life. It already existed before someone made it. When you make it, you are bringing it here (to this world) to help you and to help others. This is why we look after it so well. This is why we feast it” (p. 139). Pedris-

Spade goes on to say; “when we dance our regalia, we are honouring the connection we have to our ancestors, and we are carrying out our responsibility as the people who are looking after the regalia and are inextricably linked to all the relationships that went into its production” (p. 140). Cultural practices, such as regalia making, make visible our relationships, including those with our ancestors and the spirit world, and in turn how knowledge is shared through these relationships.

Cultural practices make Indigenous freedom, hope, and joy accessible, and tell stories outside the narrative of Indigenous peoples being bound up in colonial domination, a practice in which dominant cultures seek to control the telling of Indigenous stories (Dion & Salamanca, 2014). An assertion from my own cultural practice of exerting Indigenous freedom through creations is seen in Ancestor Mask that I carved into being. Intervening into colonial conceptions of time and space through kinship ties with my artistic community, my ancestors, and my Self, and by engaging with familial photographs of my Mi’kmaq/Algonquin/Indigenous/European grandmothers, my mother, my Self, grandmother cedar tree, carving tools, and the relational connection between our carving mentor Kwakwaka’wakw artist Rande Cook (lessLIE & Cook, 2014, *Rande Cook—Works*, n.d., Thomson, 2014, “Vatican Mask”, 2013), and fellow carver, Mohawk artist Lindsay Delaronde (Belle, 2020, “Bury the Hatchet”, n.d., Delaronde, n.d., News, 2018, “Supernova”, n.d.), *Ancestor* mask was brought into being. *Ancestor* embodies the essence of all these humans and non-humans and our kinship connects through the spirit and physical world, and liminal spaces in between. Through the folding of time, *Ancestor* is here in the present with me moving into the future.

Figure 1*Ancestor- Liminal Space*

Note. [Photograph], by Ancestor, 2022.

When I put Ancestor mask on, time folds creating a portal for Ancestor and my Self to inhabit both future and past. Outside colonial constructs of time and space, I am no longer dislocated (from my family, homelands, my Self). I am embodied.

Figure 2*Ancestor in the Studio*

Note. Photo taken in Atikameksheng Anishinabek territory, Sudbury ON. [Photograph], by Rachelle Bergeron & Sarah Rhude, 2021.

Indigenous freedom is felt by Ancestor—free to be in safe spaces in the city, a location not available to them in the colonial time frame.

Figure 3

Ancestor in the Wanapitei River



Note. Wanapitei First Nation [Photograph], Christine W. Grant & Sarah Rhude, 2021.

Indigenous freedom is felt by my Self—free to swim in pristine rivers, a location not available to me in my colonial time frame.

This connection is not tethered to the trauma of colonization and is bonded through unconditional love. This felt theory and the unconditional love that is brought forth in the relationship between myself and *Ancestor* is not accessible to me in my current relationship to my family of origin. Through the creation and enactment of *Ancestor*, and as an Indigenous artist of mixed ancestry who is cut-off from her family of origin, I dance between the trans-conceptual spaces of method, medium, spirit/physical world, to create work that is informed by the past and

of use in understanding my Indigenous self in the present. In this context of ‘survivance,’ which calls for an active sense of Indigenous presence, and the renunciation of “dominance, tragedy, and victimry,” survivance subtly reduces the power of the destroyer (Vizenor, 2010, in Dion & Salamanca, 2014, p. 164). I can take my own story, identity, and ideas of kinship from the grasp of the settler-colonial paradigm. Actively participating in the ways Indigenous identities, cultures, and presence are constructed and reconstructed, embodies a sense of renewal needed for our own sovereignty of self (Dion & Salamanca, 2014). Through the practices of self-representation, we tell of our presence, our resistance, and our survivance. (Vizenor, 2010, cited in Dion & Salamanca, 2014). This is protection medicine for *Ancestor*. The demand “to be seen on our own terms” reflects the work of the many Indigenous artists and is not asking for, nor wanting a response from the non-Indigenous world. However, Indigenous artistic practice can offer a reframing of our relationships: “The invitation to engage is not about non-Indigenous people having control of the conversation, it is an assertion of the right of Indigenous people to be seen— to reflect their experiences and perspectives. It can also be an invitation to gain from Indigenous art a critical understanding of what life is like for us” (Dion & Salamanca, 2014, p.166).

Thoughts on Transnational Knowledge Systems, and Trans-conceptual Space

Ni'kma'jtut apoqnmaltinej - My people let us help one another

(Fourth verse of the Mi'kmaq Honour Song by George Paul)

It is a gift to witness culture. There are protocols of respect and sovereignty over knowledges that is sacred and specific to their lands and peoples. And yet, there are spaces in which these knowledges are enacted and shared between specific Indigenous worldviews.

Maskikow (Swampy Cree) academic and hide tanner, Mande McDonald, talks about the 'transnational knowledge system' that she witnesses and takes part in during her time at traditional hide tanning camps (McDonald, 2022). While this term 'transnational knowledge systems' pushes back on the term Pan-Indianism, it acknowledges that many of us carry multiple cultures and teachings. For example, McDonald "works in Dene, is Swampy Cree, but grew up in Churchill " (McDonald, 2022). Pressure in Indigenous studies to articulate knowledge so specific to a Nation is hard to articulate when such "knowledge is generated through international relations and knowledge sharing". McDonald asked the question- "What happens when we open up ideas of kinship and realities that do not feel tethered to political constructs of nationhood" (McDonald, 2022)? I recognize these questions in my own relationship with the communities and peoples I am responsible to and respect the courage it takes to acknowledge this amidst the need to hold culturally specific practice close, away from the grasp of settler-colonialism. As an Indigenous person of mixed ancestry who is far from my community, how I come to understand who I am is through means such as inter-tribal gatherings, the internet, songs, stories, videos, Mi'kmaw language dictionaries, memory, travel, dreams, relationships with ancestors, human and non-human relatives, ceremony, and cultural practice. Knowledge travels in many ways to me here in lək'wəŋən territory, through the physical and the spirit world. Gathering, whether it be people, art, ideas, or knowledges is an Indigenous methodological approach to research, is something we have always done, and continues to evolve, as we do. Trans-conceptual space, from a generative Indigenous centered lens, can be a model for shifting relationality and knowledge generation between worldviews that differ. In *The Bush Manifesto* (2017), a manifesto written for BUSH Gallery by Indigenous artists; Tania Willard (mixed Secwépemc and settler artist/curator/academic), Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill (Métis artist and

writer), Peter Morin (Tahltan artist/curator) , and Secwépemc land influence, trans-conceptual a space for “dialogue, experimental practice and community engaged work that contributes to an understanding of how systems and art mediums might be transfigured, translated and transformed by Indigenous knowledges, traditions, aesthetics, performance and land use systems" (p. 6). Can the methodology of Indigenous gathering and trans-conceptual space that I am taking up be utilized to reframe the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Western systems of knowledge? Further, can this reframing pull the spirit of our ways of knowing and being in from the fringes of Western educational systems and provide the space and autonomy required for the sharing of authentic Indigenous teachings, methodologies, and protocols—not ‘woven through’, usurped or transformed for the convenience and maintenance of settler colonial systems?

I am struck with awe at the way Indigenous knowledges- acknowledging the relationships that hold them together, including the laws, teachings or protocols that protect and care for those knowledges- are shared and cared for. It has been my experience working with and on the land of the Island Nations of the Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka’wakw peoples, that the basis for understanding and knowledge is rooted in relationships over time. In various roles on these lands, I have been invited into spaces of gathering to develop relationships, collaborate and practice culture. *The Sacred Circle* by Kwakwaka’wakw Chief Wedlidi Speck, a piece of writing that I have been deeply engaged in understanding and using as a tool for collaboration (with permission), the creator gathers all the animals, from each of the four directions to meet and discuss how we “welcome our new relatives with the courage to be ourselves, to be different, yet be as one” (Speck, circa 2012), *The Sacred Circle* asks the question—how do we maintain our cultural values and worldview while inviting others in to witness and participate? As a Inu’sgw, I

do not speak for or on behalf of the knowledges present at the gatherings I attend in these territories, nor do I have the right to do this. I am speaking to my relationships and the knowledge that they have produced, and I embody. These shared knowledges affect who I am and how I relate to the world. I am speaking as someone who has been invited into relationship with the knowledge of this place, respects that we can be connected “be different, yet still be as one” (Speck, circa 2012, n.p.). In the article *STL’UL NUP: Legal Landscapes of the HUL’QUMI’NUM MUSTIMUHW*, written by Cowichan scholar Su-taxwiye/Sarah Morales (2015), Cowichan elder Luschiim (Arvid Charlie) shares stories that are woven with Cowichan law, ways of being and knowing:

Su-taxwiye: So during these visits, who’s laws did we follow? Did we follow our own snuw’uyulh or would we respect the laws of the communities who we were visiting?

Luschiim: For me, I need to respect the people and the place that I am visiting. So, for me, if I was hunting in another people’s territory, I use my ways, but I also have to respect their ways for treating that animal that I just caught. I try to use both teachings.

I’ll do the things I have to do, but I’ll visibly show the people I’m visiting that I am using and respecting their ways also. (p. 121)

In Luschiim stories, as well as *The Sacred Circle* we are shown that Indigenous law enacts how we can be from different nations/cultures yet be in good relationship with each other- holding up each other's laws, yet always visibly showing our respect for the land and people where we are.

An example of Indigenous trans-conceptual space where so many are “invited into circle” is the coastal Tribal Journeys. As I write about my experience of witnessing the gathering and protocols that take place during Tribal Journeys and look over pictures of the Tribal Journey

gathering at Wei Wai Kum in Campbell River (Tribal Journeys, 2017), I am immediately brought back into that Indigenous space, and the warmth and deep joy I felt when I was there.

Figure 4

Tribal Journeys in Wei Wai Kum/Campbell River with my Family



The connection to other worlds beyond the physical, the electricity in my body and spirit, as well as the feeling of being wholly present in multiple realms of being is immediately invoked. These spaces of Indigeneity and enactment exist outside colonial timescapes, as we are at once deeply in the past, present, and future, and ancient knowledge folds over into the current space, time, and place. Here, space is created for us to either witness as guests, or for those ancestrally connected to the songs, dances, and communions being shared, their cultural practice displays the laws of the living earth, their ancestors, and knowledges. “You could say that the specific rituals that make up the ceremony are designed to get the participants into a state of mind that will allow for the extraordinary to take place” (Wilson, 2005, p. 68). At the shoreline when the host nation gives consent to come ashore, but most notably- after the host nation performs their

protocols, the floor is opened up for each nation that has hooked up their canoe to practice their protocols of gratitude, enact their laws, ceremonies, dances, the sharing of knowledge and gifts, and then they ask for permission to unhook their canoes. This beautiful display of inviting others into cultural space, collaborating, and honouring each other's protocols, supports the generation of deeper relationships and futurities moving forward (Cranmor, 1997, Noisecat, 2017). Again, Wilson's stories in *Research is Ceremony* ring in my ears, "As one Elder explained it to me: if it is possible to get every single person in a room thinking about the exact same thing for only two seconds, then a miracle will happen. It is fitting that we view research in the same way-as a means of raising our consciousness" (Wilson, 2005, p. 68).

Embodiment of the Mi'kmaq Honour Song

Apoqmatultinej ta'n Kisu'lkw teli ika'luksi'kw wla wskitqamu- 'Let us help one another
as Creator intended when he put us on the earth.'

(Fifth verse of the Mi'kmaq Honour Song by George Paul)

When we gather in Indigenous trans-conceptual spaces, we share knowledge yet maintain our own ways of knowing and being. Tribal journeys, pow wows, Indigenous treaties, intertribal gatherings, circles, ceremonies, and relationship building are ways that we can enact our Indigenous laws that reinforce who we are when we are mobile, in transit, learning, and living away from our homelands. "We may wander far and wide, but our journeys generally take their orientation from an older sense of our place in the world" (Borrows, 2009, p. 404). Cultural gatherings allow Indigenous peoples who are away from home to have the space to enact the Indigenous laws that they carry with them. As lək'wəŋən elder Dr. Skip Dick explains, "it is a way for us to make sure the ones on the other side know we are ok, and how we let our families know

that we are ok” (Dick, 2021). Practicing culture, with permission from local ləkʷəŋən elders and kin, fosters my understanding of who I am as a lnu’sgw. This understanding flows from the shadow of my ancestors, cast by Niskam- grandfather sun, through my spirit, and shows up in my expressions and convictions (Augustine, 2006). “Indigenous peoples are constantly in a state of settled flux. Our perpetual motion co-exists with a persistent and enduring permanence” (Borrows, 2009, p. 404). This state of settled flux, motion and permanence is exemplified at the shorelines where we meet, exert laws of consent and welcome and are welcomed to share in ethics of care (Hunt, 2018). It is at the graciousness of host nations that visitors can practice their protocols or teachings. At another visit, Dr. Skip Dick has let me know that when I practice my ways of knowing and being, I am teaching my kin here how to be when they visit my homelands (Dick, 2022). *Within Indigenous trans-conceptual spaces there is no need to extract or coopt ways of knowing and being. Here, we are in relationship, enacting the laws we carry from our own worldviews, with permission, invitation and within the context of the cultural protocols and laws of host nations.* There is deep connection and reciprocity in our ceremonies and sharing of space, songs, knowledges, and care. Being able to show this depth of caring is a gift for both the hosts and the guests. We share food, space, customs, and knowledges, but more importantly we lift each other up, founded in a deep love for each other, being Indigenous, the living earth, and all our relations. This ethic of care is proclaimed in the lines of the Mi’kmaq Honour Song that frame each portion of this body of words.

Kepmite'tmnej ta'n teli l'nuwulti'kw -Let us greatly respect our being L'nu

Ni'kma'jtut mawita'nej -My people let us gather

Kepmite'tmnej ta'n wettapeksulti'k -Let us greatly respect our native roots

Ni'kma'jtut apoqmatultinej - My people let us help one another

Apoqmatultinej ta'n Kisu'lkw teli ika'luksi'kw wla wskitqamu- Let us help one another as Creator intended when he put us on the earth. (Mi'kmaw Culture, 2016)

For Indigenous peoples, gathering is a fundamental way of being, and allows for the emergence, revealing, formation and dissemination of knowledges. In the Mi'kmaq Honour Song, we are reminded over and over through repetition in verse that who we are and how we understand this comes from gathering and relationality- as we have always done (Simpson, 2017).

As Lnu', the methodology of sharing our ontology and epistemology, for coming to know, knowing, and understanding is through gathering and forming relationships, or constellations of care, across many realms including the spirit and physical world, and amongst all our relations- *Msit No'kmaq*. Our laws are generated from generational and ancestral knowledge and are based on relationality (Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmawei Mawiomi, 2016). Using methodologies that are performative, artistic and the various cultural modes of representing research, helps bring the relational aspect of our knowledge sharing into view. From this approach, research is about gathering in a good way and bringing people together (Pedris-Spade, 2016). From an Indigenous research paradigm, gathering, art/cultural practice can be the methodology, the method, and the result—any or all these parts of 'coming to know' (Simpson, 2014).

The teachings from this song highlight that a mainstay and methodological practice is to gather and take care of each other or lift each other up as is our purpose. As we recognize the folding nature of time from an Indigenous perspective, we know that this song is steeped and rooted in ways that we have known to be true since time immemorial: "Past tapping on the shoulder of the present, present shouting hey holdup, our ancestors and teachers are here to light the way. Convergence of what has been, is and will be" (Pedris-Spade, 2016). The traditions

enacted at cultural gatherings, like our Indigeneity, are “*rooted and routed*, moving, evolving and gesturing toward its past and its horizon” (Teves, 2015, p. 262). The work of people like George Paul in revitalizing Mi’kmaw songs, has brought about a resurgence of knowledge dissemination through cultural practice.

It is Time to Share the Floor

We need to let it go. There is knowledge outside these institutions. We need to open the doors and invite all knowledge in. Universities need to humble themselves to the existence of knowledge in other people. Move over, create space and time to accomplish this universality of knowledge. (Maracle, 2015, p. 127)

After Candy Palmeter finished her presentation, I and a few of my drum sisters went backstage to honour Candy with a song. I shared with Candy that we had wanted to honour her with a Mi’kmaq welcome song before she spoke, and though this had not been possible, we still wanted to welcome her, make her feel connected, and honour her knowledge sharing. After we sang the song, she expressed how nice it was to hear her language so far from Mi’kma’ki. She shared a story about what she experienced at a gathering in Aotearoa. She said that while the men did most of the speaking at the gathering, it was the woman who affirmed what they said afterwards through song. What she witnessed and was told was that if the women agreed with what had been said, then they would avow this with a song. She thanked us for singing to her after her keynote, and for reminding her of this way of being. She said it felt like we were affirming what she had said and shared, and in fact we were doing this. While the customs of the land we were on in lək^wəŋən territory, our Mi’kmaw ways, and the governance that she had witnessed in Aotearoa were specific and grounded in the knowledges of the lands we are

individually from or in relationship with, the sharing of knowledge and meaning making that comes from gathering and witnessing each other's Indigenous laws and teachings deepens our relationality between each other and our own cultures. What we shared and enacted for Candy awakened the laws of three different Indigenous nations embodied in our cultural practice and paid tribute to each of these. This trans-conceptual space does not aim to usurp, speak for, or claim the knowledge of each other's specific cultural laws. This space honours, lifts and reminds us of the ways in which we are connected through our teachings, that come from the living earth, that at once situates us in our specific locations, and ties us all together in relationship to each other's locations and relationality with the earth. This is the spirit of *Msit No'kmaq*- All My Relations, a shared teaching amongst Indigenous peoples. When we imagine outside of the colonial definitions of tradition, kinship, culture, and identity, the expansiveness of knowledge becomes tangible. From this trans-conceptual space, we can integrate, create, and share new knowledge systems, with respect for diverse ways of knowing and being.

The next three rounds/chapters of the circle are built on the knowledges shared in this first round/chapter. These knowledge's are put into practice across three seasons, and various sites and methodologies across Turtle Island. We begin in relationship with a shoreline in *lək^wəŋən* territory- Tikweneñ, in the spring.

Round Two: Həyšx'qə *Tikweneñ*- A Healing Song: Methodology

Spring

Figure 5

Schwakwa, Tikweneñ Selfie



*Note. [photograph] Sarah Rhude and Diane Swa'alayok Sam at *Tikweneñ*³, 2022*

Recently, I have been reading, feeling through, and thinking about the intimate spaces of relationships, kinships, and friendships, in particular those cross-cultural in nature, as trans-conceptual spaces of decolonial love, empowerment- a site where we attempt to keep each other safe, and bear witness to our lives (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, Simpson, 2015). The sacred space and

³ For the purpose of this round/chapter, *lək'əŋən* words will be in bold, Mi'kmaq words will be underlined. I am doing this in order to make clear the different cultural languages and worldviews that Diane and I embody, and to honour our own autonomy, authorities, and Indigenous laws. There are also some words that are in the Indigenous languages of other players in this piece and those words are in italics.

ethic of care enacted in these locations promote well-being, growth and knowledge generation that allows for the creation of shared and layered understanding between various Indigenous worldviews, while drawing us individually closer to our own locations and cosmologies. Living as a visitor on **lək'wəḡən** land calls me to develop relationship with and actively engage in my responsibility to this place, and all the beings related to it. In particular, the act of sharing **lək'wəḡən** Protocols, language, and ways of understanding the world around me by my nmis (older sister) Diane **Swa'alayok** Sam, deepens my understanding and recognition of **lək'wəḡən** authority and allows me to share my own language and cultural practice in **lək'wəḡən** territory, in a way that honours and makes evident my respect and gratitude for the land and peoples here, while drawing me closer in to who I am as lnu'sgw who is far from her home and family.

In this round/chapter, I am thinking through my methods, methodological approach and the knowledge that was shared and generated between **Swa'alayok**, **Tikweneñ** and myself and make this evident through use of the framework created in Celeste Pedris Spade's (2016) piece *"The Drum Is Your Document"- Decolonizing Research Through Anishinabe Song and Story*. Utilizing their performance methodology for sharing knowledge—that of a play with roles, acts and settings, allows me to share and make sense of my research journey in alignment with the methods in which we gathered to generate knowledge and enact the laws and languages of our ancestors and the living earth, while sharing the healing medicine of our songs and cultural ways. Drawing on the freedom and directness of performance and personal storytelling to share/show rather than just tell, I am able to “reflect the knowledge that we have always shared with every being, place, thing, and spirit” (Pedris-Spade, 2016, p. 395). I make visible the ways in which myself, my Indigenous relations, and allies create shared knowledges that are in relationship with, yet outside, the realm of the Western academic epistemology. By writing in conversation

and centering relationships across differences in Indigenous knowledges, I hope to present my research in a way that is accessible and honours Indigenous forms of knowledge generation through relationality (Driskell et al, 2011).

(Auto)ethnography is a term I've only heard used within Western methodological practice, yet this way of sharing knowledge through story, personal realization, and cultural practice, as it denotes, has not been wholly accepted as valuable in mainstream methodologies within my Western university contextual experience (Pedris-Spade, 2016). Leavy (2020) agrees that the academy deems what we call storytelling and reflection, autoethnography, to be anti-intellectual- "Innovative qualitative methods, such as autoethnography...(are) relegated to a lower or "experimental" status" (pg. ix). Yet, it is exactly this, the "prohibitive jargon and limiting structures that characterize much traditional research practice " (Leavy, 2009, pg. ix) that leaves academic theory, from the creation to the understanding of, outside the grasp of those not in the academy, and or those who are being researched. Some of the core graduate departments have yet to include/center decolonial methodologies despite the tireless efforts of many Indigenous students, academics, and educators. During my graduate studies and engagement with western researchers I witness, and experience push back, gaslighting, undermining, criticism, and dismissal when attempts are made to center research in decolonial methodologies and Indigenous ways of knowing and being. While some Indigenous and ally professors encourage and embolden students to use Indigenous ways of knowing and being—for example, storytelling and cultural practice as knowledge generation and dissemination, much anguish and labour is necessary to potentially and not always create the space and safety necessary for these ways to be seen as valid and important, held with respect, or even be used outside Indigenous/ally constellations of care. This reality is mirrored in my experience working

within the Western public school system. Articulating “a creative Indigenous methodology is about doing good work” (Pedris-Spade, 2016, p. 385), yet work that is centered on cultural practice, or “dances between worlds” (Hunt, 2014, p. 28), creates a tension as it is “knowledge that an academic system of value cannot account for” (Hunt, 2022). Through writing our story of bringing to life the song *Həyšxʷqə a Tikweneñ* using Pedris-Spade’s model of performance, song, art, and story as a medium for knowledge sharing, Indigenous ways of being and knowing are centered within my current Western educational space. This method of knowledge sharing is an intervention into the status quo of Western methodologies. With encouragement from Indigenous academics to record my individual research journey within the research itself, this presencing of Indigeneity may help future researchers (Hunt, 2022, Pedris-Spade, 2016, Smith, 2021) in the same way Pedris-Spade’s model has helped me feel comfortable expressing myself within this academic context.

Note:

This chapter/round is not uploaded in its entirety as a part of my thesis. I have included the introduction above, as it explains the chapter/round ‘*Həyšxʷqə Tikweneñ*- A Healing Song: Methodology’, as well as the Epilogue below, yet the actual ‘play’ part of the chapter/round and the actual song is not posted. While I had permission to include the language for the purpose of the song, and the original thesis up until my defence, I am following instructions from my **ləkʷəŋən** nmis Diane Sam as to how to respectfully protect and follow protocols and instructions in terms of **ləkʷəŋən** language. Therefore, this portion cannot be uploaded for general public viewing or as a part of UVIC’s knowledge space. **ləkʷəŋən** is an Indigenous language that has one fluent speaker left-

Dr. Elmer George. The **łəkʷəŋən** Language used in this piece is from Swa'alaoyok/Diane. During our meetings at Tikweneñ she brought along her handwritten language notebooks from the **łəkʷəŋən** language group. All the words that are in the full chapter as well as the song *Həyšxʷqə a Tikweneñ* came from Diane and her books directly and reflect the knowledge she has shared with me, with permissions. If you would like to discuss accessing this chapter in its entirety, please contact me at sarahrhude@gmail.com.

Epilogue

Sarah Speaking: What came from our time gathering at **Tikweneñ**, that honoured relationality between kin and the land, was not only a healing song, but the sacred creations that were attached to it. I was able to bring into being a gift for each member of our circle here, (see list of players), as well as my son who was there to witness the gifting of the song in ceremony. Permission to sing the song was gifted to IACE at UVIC, *Tłalitila'ogwa*/Sarah, and Jen. They were gifted the words to the song, a recording, and the promise that I will teach the song in person. *Tłalitila'ogwa*/Sarah, and Jen were also gifted a rattle. The song was gifted outright to **łəkʷəŋən** /Songhees Nation and the **łəkʷəŋən** Language group, with a rattle, the words, a recording, and the promise that I will come teach the song in person. The song was gifted outright to **Ləxixələq**, and he was given a drum with the story of *Həyšxʷqə Tikweneñ* painted on it, the words to the song, and a recording of the song. Diane was gifted a drum with the story of *Həyšxʷqə Tikweneñ* painted on it. All these were gifted in two ceremonies which took place at the First Peoples House at UVIC.

Figure 6

Həyšxʷqə Tikweneñ.



Note. Acrylic on 16" dyed Elk hide drum.

Figure 7

Həyšxʷqə Tikweneñ. ləkʷəjən territory.



Note. Acrylic on dyed elk hide rattles.

Scholarly/Indigenous Community: “Stories have spirit and power and come to us as small gifts of wisdom, but they only have power if the ones that hear those stories, embody them and act. Stories are about responsibility and action in Indigenous cultures. They carry the resistance and strength of our ancestors. They hold our truths. And when we tell them on our own terms to an engaged audience, they carry a tremendous responsibility to transform” (Simpson, in Hall, p. 112).

Voice of the ancestors through Diane: I hope your heart is happy. Love you and seriously that song came out of the love for the land and kinship.

Sarah Speaking: Kesalul (I love you). A big takeaway for me was how I was constantly reinforced within these intimate relationships to just be me. To embrace who I am, to have humble confidence in the work I am doing, and to trust my relations who hold me up and have faith in me.

Diane: *Schwakwa*, this is your work. I’m not going to doubt the decisions you make. You do what you have to.

Jen: *Cha-chu*, I respect the boundaries I heard you express, and I am proud of you for expressing them.

Sarah: Wela’lin. Jen, I was looking up trying to find the word sister in your *Nlaka’pamux* language and realized that you are Interior Salish. This realization adds another level of depth to our work together as I thought about the relationships, ties, and shared ways of knowing and being that your ancestors would have with the Coast Salish peoples here on the island as they gathered in their seasonal travels up the Fraser River. Working together now, as we did at

Tikweneñ, to sing, share knowledge and learn the language of this **lək'wəŋən** place, affirms these relationships and laws. How proud your ancestors must be!

Jen: This thought came to me at the First Peoples house when we were in ceremony. I feel so deeply connected to this work!

Tlalilila'ogwa, Sarah: *Wak'wagila*, you're enacting the very kinds of changes you seek to do in centering Indigenous ways of being and knowing within educational spaces.

Sarah: Wela'lioq. Msit No'kmaq. Our relationality protects and creates the freedom and space needed to enact our laws and cultural practices in a good way- which has led to much joy.

Acknowledgements: I am deeply grateful to the **lək'wəŋən** land, peoples, ancestors, water, plants, and animals. As well, I want to say Wela'lioq (thank-you) to **Tikweneñ**,

Swa'alayok/Diane, Tlalilila'ogwa /Sarah, Ləx'xələq, Jen, Lilly, Audrey, Linda, lək'wəŋən language group, Dallas, Ted and all my drum sisters.

Link to watch and listen to *Həyšx'qə Tikweneñ* healing song. Video is of Sarah teaching Jen the song at the **Tikweneñ** shoreline: <https://youtu.be/Vm1C8ANMDxs>

Round Three: Spirit in the Fringes

Spring/Summer

Art/Community-Based Research

The process of bringing the Cultural performance *Burying the Hatchet (BTH)*, (“Burying the Hatchet”, n.d.), to life began in the winter but took on full speed in the spring and culminated in a performance right before the summer Solstice in June at a local theater called The Belfry.

BTH was the fourth cultural presentation of this type directed and held by Indigenous story weaver Lindsay Delaronde, (Belle, 2020, “Bury the Hatchet”, n.d., Delaronde, n.d., News, 2018, *Supernova*, n.d.). I participated as a cast member in two of the shows and for this fourth occurrence Lindsay asked me to be on the creative team. The format for these shows is that of an Indigenous showcase where community/cast members think through a particular theme and then connect to the theme through individual or group performances. These cultural presentations are all done from an applied theater framework. Applied theater refers to,

The practice of using theater-based techniques as tools to discover and learn, to explore issues of concern to communities, to identify problems and actively rehearse solutions, and to provoke and shape social change. The techniques offer the opportunity to develop new perspectives and imagine new approaches to issues and actions. (Center for Applied Theater, n.d.)

‘Peace Circles’ were facilitated throughout our process by Lauren Jerke, a Metis applied theater practitioner. Themes and stories such as: the ‘Great Law of Peace’ of the Haudenosaunee, war, and conflict, *ləkʷəŋən* culture and connection to the Douglas Treaties, Indigenous treaty relations, Indigenous law, and land back, were discussed weekly over zoom, and all members of *BTH* from cast to producers were invited to attend. Guest speakers including academics,

community members, storytellers, elders, educators and artists, shared stories and knowledges concerning these themes, catalyzing our individual and group journey on what it means to ‘come to peace’.

What came forth for me was multifaceted as it connected my graduate work, my role as cultural advisor, and my own artistic practice. From an academic perspective, the work I did in *BTH* utilized the methodological tools of art-based research (ABR)⁴. These emerging tools adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address research questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practice are intertwined (Leavy, 2009, p. ix). ABR allows researchers to sensitively portray the complexity of lived experience, promote empathy and reflection, forge micro and macro connections (from our own lived experience to the larger context in which we live our lives), disrupt stereotypes or dominant ideologies, and contribute to public scholarship (Leavy, 2020). Art has the ability to reach people on deep personal levels, to resonate, to make people reflect on their own lives, and raise awareness about social issues. ABR gives voice to those who don’t always have a voice in certain spaces and places.

Another methodological term and approach that feels descriptive of the practices that came through my research is *research-creation*. In *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*, Loveless (2019), draws on feminist theory and her own experience to argue for research-creation as an innovative methodology that transforms pedagogy and research. Through experimental and artistically driven methods of researching, research-creation creates a more sustainable and responsive methodological approach to daily

⁴ While I use the term art-based research, over the course of my research I came to realize that there are times when the term ‘creative practice’ better suits the ways in which we/I bring particular Indigenous knowledges into being.

life in the academy, and issues of social and ecological justice. Indeed, the methodological choices of reframing through artistic intervention fall in line with Loveless's manifesto:

As a strategy of resistance to the resignation that surrounds me daily in the arts and humanities wings of the university, I look to research-creation, even as it is being commodified right under our feet, as a site of generative recrafting: a touchstone and orienting point that might help render daily life in the academy more pedagogically, politically, and affectively sustainable. That said, the research-creational struggle that animates this book is not for acknowledgment (a seat at the table: "Look! Now artists can be researchers too!"). It is for the insertion of voices and practices into the academic everyday that work to trouble disciplinary relays of knowledge/ power, allowing for more creative, sensually attuned modes of inhabiting the university as a vibrant location of pedagogical mattering (p.3)

The following cultural protocol work, curation, artistic representation, and performance is an important part of my research on thinking through how interventions into settler colonial systems, worlds and constructs can create space to share Indigenous law, stories, and ways of knowing and being in safe, sovereign, respectful and accessible ways. Through my roles as: Cultural Facilitator for the coming ashore protocols before the performance, curator, and artistic contributor in *Spirit in the Fringes*- an intervention (*Spirit in the Fringes*, 2022), into the lobby of The Belfry Theater, ("Art exhibit transforms Belfry Theatre into healing space this weekend", 2022), and co-creator and performer of a piece entitled *The Venom Dance* in *BTH* (*The Venom Dance*, 2022), I was able to provide key aspects that helped to reshape the Belfry into Indigenous space. These contributions were deeply influenced and created with the generative and layered knowledges that I witnessed, came to understand, and embodied from the courses I have taken

this year in Indigenous Political Ecology, Political Science, and Governance classes, my own cultural practices, witnessing and upholding local protocols, Indigenous gatherings, ceremony and most importantly the relationships I foster and hold dear. In particular, thinking through the shoreline as a liminal space, a meeting place between worlds where generative treaty, Indigenous law, consent, and gathering takes place was represented in the coming ashore protocols (Hunt, 2018), which opened the floor for us all to be able to share our stories, cultural practices, and witness these in a good way.

The relationship I hold with the shorelines that I have shared in this circle/thesis, as well as the countless shorelines I have been so grateful to spend time with and learn from, are precious and a place of medicine and healing. I still return back to Algonquin and Anishinaabeg lakes every year to swim, fish, canoe, and be in good relation. The laws held between the worlds of the land and water, and their deep interconnectedness which is tied together at the shoreline, have been enacted by humans and non-humans since time immemorial. As a visitor on Vancouver Island, I have learned much about specific laws of these shorelines from Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka'wakw peoples, in particular through gatherings such as Tribal Journeys. As well, teachings held at the shoreline have revealed themselves to me these last four seasons throughout my course work at UVIC, at the shoreline of the Yukon River in Ta'an Kwach'an and Kwanlin Dun territory of Whitehorse, my time at the shoreline in Gespe'gewa'gi and throughout Mi'kma'ki, on Mackenzie Island on Great Slave Lake in Denendeh through the Dechinta Centre for Research, and my close connection to the Tikweneñ shoreline in Victoria where I've done much ceremony and connecting.

The art intervention *Spirit in the Fringes* (*Spirit in the Fringes*, 2022) was originally supposed to take place as part of my research within the school district. While I was working on

BTH within community, I realized that in fact the intervention was to take place not inside the school district, which still felt inhospitable and unsafe for me, but within a Western theater framework. A large contributor to this knowledge revealing itself had to do with being in good relations with The Belfry Theater company and their willingness to acknowledge the natural agency and the sovereign creative practice we hold as Indigenous artists. The Belfry is a professional, adult, not-for-profit theatre company and resides in a former Baptist Church built between 1887 and 1892. They:

Produce contemporary plays, with an emphasis on Canadian work, and promote artistic, cultural, and educational events in the Greater Victoria Region...The Belfry's mission is to produce theatre that generates ideas and dialogue, and that makes the audience see the world a little differently. (The Belfry Theatre, 2023)

While working for the Greater Victoria School District on an Indigenous, applied theatre program and performance called *The Sacred Circle*, I formed many relationships with the theatre and arts community in Greater Victoria including The Belfry. I would bring students to see plays, talk with employees and attend workshops. As well, being a board member of the not-for-profit, Indigenous arts organization—The Culture Den Society, and performing in various plays at the Belfry has also fostered our relationship. While I was not working with Indigenous educators within the walls of the Western school system during this research, I was able to understand and experience how artistic and cultural intervention into a settler colonial framework can reframe the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Western systems.

Protocols, Interventions and Performance

The following curatorial statement gives an overview of the three facets of the cultural event that took place at The Belfry Theater:

Figure 8

Curatorial Statement



Note. Art by Sarah Rhude, [photograph] by Ted Grant, Graphic Design by KTOK Designs, 2022

Coming Ashore Protocols

Coming ashore protocols took place in Fernwood square, which is located outside the Belfry Theatre, and were enacted every performance before the doors to The Belfry Theater were opened. Members of each Canoe Family lined up with their chosen speaker at the front. In front of the four canoes were two representatives of the ɫəkʷəŋən People— Diane Sam, and Danica Sam. Each of the four speakers introduced where they were from, who was in their canoe, why they had come and asked permission to hook up their canoes and come ashore. The four canoes consisted of the following families: The Belfry Theatre, the cast of *Burying the Hatchet*, the creative team of *BTH*, and The Culture Den Society—the producers of *BTH*. Speakers asked permission to share their songs, dances, stories, and ways of knowing and being in ɫəkʷəŋən territory. We were welcomed by the ɫəkʷəŋən representatives before each show to come ashore and hook up our canoes. This work made visible and publicly upheld the sovereignty of the ɫəkʷəŋən Nation. It reminded us that we are always on ɫəkʷəŋən land, even when colonialsapes (Hunt, 2014) such as cement, colonial buildings (Belfry Theater being an old church), and Western theatre frameworks are projected on top. As well, these local protocols intervened into the status quo of a Belfry Theatre performance, and for the time we were there, it created, enacted, and embodied Indigenous space.

In the protocols of Tribal Journeys that were elaborated on in the first round of this thesis/circle, the host nation welcomes the canoes from different nations ashore, invites them into their longhouse to witness local protocols, be fed and relate with one another. After this work is done, the floor is given to the guests to perform their own cultural ways, shows of gratitude, and then eventually the guests ask to unhook their canoe. This method provides space for those who are away from their homelands to be Indigenous- to practice the laws they carry with them. It

first acknowledges the sovereignty of the host nation, follows protocols, and then creates the sacred environment necessary to share stories in a way that honours Indigenous ways of knowing and being. In this art-based research, the Belfry became ‘the floor’ in which we were invited by local peoples to share our stories, laws, and rituals. As urban Indigenous peoples, and in the case of *BTH*, BIPOC peoples, this method of gathering and connecting allowed us, as Elder Skip Dick says, to let those on the other side as well as our relatives know we are ok and shows others how to be when they are in our lands (Dick, 2022). In this particular situation, this cultural intervention into the Western theater system provided a reframing of the relationship our Indigenous theater creative team and cast had with The Belfry Theatre. We were no longer seen as players within the Western theater system, but distinct peoples with the agency to tell our stories in our methods, in our ways, while being in relationship with the systems, *but not of the system*. This reality—the agency of Indigenous peoples and our sovereign creative practices, witnessed by onlookers, participants, and audience members—was continually emphasized throughout the experience.

Figure 9*Coming Ashore Protocols*

Note. Cast members of *Burying the Hatchet* during coming ashore protocols.

Figure 10*Coming Ashore Protocols*

Note. Diane Sam and Danica Sam welcoming the cast, creative team, Culture Den Society and The Belfry Theatre canoe families to ləkʷəŋən territory.

Spirit in the Fringes Art Intervention

It was only after the completion of the coming ashore protocols that the doors to The Belfry Theater were opened, and guests were invited to enter. During a regular season show, the lobby of The Belfry would hold people quietly mingling around a bar and in a spacious, fairly empty room having drinks and chatting while waiting to go into the theater. For the duration of *BTH* we transformed The Belfry lobby into *our* house, re-creating Indigenous space within the Western theater setting. Through curating an art exhibition filled with regalia, sculptures, paintings, photographs, videos, and various mixed media, the space was embodied with the spirit of each member of the cast and connected to the stories in the performance to come. Upon entering the front door, guests were brushed off with cedar, and walked through a fringed installation that presenced the spirit and knowledges of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. While ‘brushed off’ is a local cultural practice, many Indigenous nations, including my Mi’kmaq teachings, hold the medicine of clearing our spirits and bodies of unwanted or unneeded energy through plant and smoke medicines. My vision for this piece, was that guests would be brushed off by cedar and ribbon fringes and enter into a space where Indigenous—in particular local and 2 Spirit/Indigiqueer stories, creations, joy, and hope were centered and presenced. By centering these knowledges that often live in the fringes, are rendered invisible, or erased—I hoped to create a level of safety and presence that many in the margins rarely experience in settler colonial spaces, as well as community spaces where due to the effects of colonization we are made to or often feel unsafe.

Projected onto the wall of the lobby were *ləkʷəŋən* and *SENĆOTEN* translations of the Vancouver Island (Douglas) Treaties. The treaties were purposefully projected in the languages of the land and peoples here, and not English, to trouble the English-speaking viewer, aiming to

elicit an understanding of the violence and manipulation that took place when the First Peoples of this land were made to enter into treaty as non-English speaking peoples. It is important to note that Curator of Indigenous Art and Engagement for the Legacy Art Gallery, Lorilee Wastasecoot of the Cree Nation (Peguis First Nation), was originally a co-curator. Due to a family emergency she had to withdraw from the intervention, but to the best of my ability I tried to represent some of the visions she had. In the early stages of curation, Lorilee and I had discussions about somehow exhibiting two of the Vancouver Island Douglas Treaties, and in the end I chose to project them onto the wall of the lobby.

Every performance had a piece represented within the exhibit giving the audience access to a deeper understanding of the spirit and complexity of the stories they would witness. As well, on loan from the Legacy Art Gallery collection were five prints that I chose in order to center the stories and creations of 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigiqueer, and women relatives. This choice recognized that in ‘coming to peace’ we must unearth, reclaim, and center knowledges, roles, and ways of being and knowing that have been disappeared, silenced, and muted by colonialism, patriarchy, Christianity, and capitalism. It is notable, and unfortunately not surprising, that there were only ten pieces given to me to choose from in the entire collection that fit this requirement, further emphasizing the need to lift up and center these often-marginalized voices and stories. Again, it is important to note that The Legacy Gallery, especially Gillian Booth, Curator of Academic and Community Programs, continued to support this work when Lorilee was unable, through facilitating the loan of the five prints I chose from their collection, providing labels and installing the prints in the lobby. As well, The Legacy Art Gallery paid the artist fees for the artists whose prints were exhibited. This generosity deepens my conviction that relationality is a

site of decolonial practice as support from peoples such as Lorilee and Gillian made some of the pivotal elements of this research-creation intervention possible.

Below are photographs and artist statements accompanying each of the pieces that I co-created and shared within the intervention. The artist statements attached to each video or image tells the story of how I was ‘coming to peace’ within this process. For me this was a very personal and inward journey connected to identity, community care, collaboration, and the questions and knowledges that have been revealed during my graduate studies. As you witness the work below, you are being given a window into an Indigenous, trans-conceptual space that shares particular ways of knowing and being. I invite you to slow down and imagine, with all your senses, how it would feel to be brushed by the cedar boughs and ribbon fringes or hear/feel the sound of the drum and many voices raised in song. I have provided links for you the reader/witness to watch the *Embodied* video as well as *the Venom Dance* performance so that you are able to further witness this work. Picture yourself walking inside the ancestral portal. What it is you need to let go of in order to come to peace? Write it down and hang it on the hook surrounding the snake on the walls of the portal. This is a reminder to embrace the work of witnessing the knowledges and creations to come. Allow these knowledges to sink deeper into an understanding Indigenous experiences and stories, catalyzing the work of decolonization in your own worlds.

Figure 11*2SLGBTQIA+ Fringe*

2SLGBTQIA+ Fringe, 2022

Satin ribbon, round wood pole

Sarah Rhude

Lnu'sgw tleyawi Gespe'gewa'gi, Irish, French, English

Contributor:

Pam Russ, Fringe construction and collaboration

Nisga'a

Artist Statement:

Pjila'si-Welcome. Upon entering this Indigenous space, you are first brushed off by grandmother cedar. As you move through the ribbon fringe, the medicine, spirit, and beauty of 2SLGBTQIA+ and Indigiqueer peoples are presented. Msit no'kmaq- all my relations.

Figure 12

Douglas Treaty Projection and Five Prints



Note: The chosen Douglas Treaties were projected on the in SENĆOŦEN and ɫəkwəŋən and were on a scrolling loop so the audience could view them in their entirety.

Figure 13*Douglas Treaty Labels*

A Translation of two of the Vancouver Island (Douglas) Treaties in Lekwungen, 2017

Projected words on white wall

Dr. Elmer George

Songhees Elder

For presentation to the Royal British Columbia Museum at the Joint University of Victoria-Songhees Conference: First Nations, Land, and James Douglas: Indigenous Treaty Rights in the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, 1849-1864. Songhees Wellness Centre. Victoria, B.C.

An Interpretation of the Vancouver Island (Douglas) Treaties with the Saanich Peoples in SENĆOTEN, 2017

Projected words on white wall

J,SINTEN, John Elliott Sr.

Tsartlip Elder

For presentation to the Royal British Columbia Museum at the Joint University of Victoria-Songhees Conference: First Nations, Land, and James Douglas: Indigenous Treaty Rights in the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, 1849-1864. Songhees Wellness Centre. Victoria, B.C. (BC Archives n.d.)

Figure 14*Curation of Selected Prints from UVIC Legacy Gallery*

Note: Print labels below are in sequence with the photo above.

Curation of Selected Prints from UVIC Legacy Gallery Collection, 2022

Sarah Rhude

Lnu'sgw tleyawi Gespe'gewa'gi, Irish, French, English

Lorilee Wastasecoot

Cree from Peguis First Nation

Curatorial Statement:

The five prints that are on loan from the Legacy Gallery Collection were chosen to center the stories and creations of @SLGBTQIA+, Indigiqueer, and women relatives. In 'coming to peace' we recognize that we must unearth, reclaim, and center knowledges, roles, and ways of

being and knowing that have been disappeared, silenced, and muted by colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, Christianity, and capitalism.

Connection, 1998
Serigraph

Francis Dick

Musgá'makw Dzawadá'enuxw, Kwakwaka'wakw

Courtesy of the Legacy Art Gallery Collection

Elapsed Time, 2019
Screen Print on paper

Margaret August

Shíshálh, Coast Salish

Courtesy of the Legacy Art Gallery Collection

French Exit, 2021
Charcoal on paper

Rain Cabana-Boucher

Michif, British Settler

Courtesy of the Legacy Art Gallery Collection

I am Creation, 2018
Woodblock print on paper

Marika Echachis Swan

Tla-o-qui-aht, Nuuchah-nulth

Courtesy of the Legacy Art Gallery Collection

Untitled (Woman Teaching Children), 1988
Serigraph

Daphne Odjig
Anishinaabe (Ojibwe)

Courtesy of the Legacy Art Gallery Collection

Figure 15

Wapikwaniwin ᐱᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅ Sipu. It is Blooming. It has Flowers. River



Wapikwaniwin ᐱᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅ Sipu. It is Blooming. It has Flowers.

River, 2022

Buffalo Hide dyed with mixed berries (blackberries, blueberries, loganberries, Oregon grape berries) and sacred medicines, maple wood round, acrylic paint, yellow cedar stand, red cedar rope handles

Alysha Brown

Misipawistik Cree Nation, English

Sarah Rhude

Lnu'sgw tleyawi Gespe'gewa'gi, Irish, French, English

Contributor:

Ross Prevost, Construction of drum stand

French, Scottish, English, Polish Settler

Kai Barker, Bringing Wapikwaniwin ᐱᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅ Sipu to life

Mestiza, Pangasinan, English

Community Support:

Dallas Rhude, Ted Grant, Terry Loeppky, Sharon Hawke, Dorothy Rich

Many hands⁵ and spirits from community brought Wapikwaniwin ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ Sipu, to life. The word Wapikwaniwin ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ is a Cree word meaning ‘it is blooming/ it has flowers’. This drum was created with the intention of honouring our plant relatives from this territory and beyond: the fireweed, the camas, the wild roses, the fawn lilies, the blueberries, strawberries, and salmon berries, to name a few. In doing so, we acknowledge that we’re all different, that we all have unique purpose and beauty, and that we all belong.

The word Sipu, which means river in Mi’kmaw, represents the medicine and movement that rivers bring, honouring the fluidity of 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigiqueer relatives. For the two days of Spirit in the Fringes, the chairs and drumsticks that circle Wapikwaniwin ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ Sipu are reserved for 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigiqueer, and women, a space they are often excluded from.

In the process of bringing Wapikwaniwin ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ Sipu to life, we honour the intimate spaces of relationships, kinships, and friendships, those cross-cultural in nature, as locations of decolonial love. The sacred space and ethic of care enacted in these locations promote well-being and knowledge generation which allows for the creation of shared and layered understanding between various worldviews while drawing us individually closer to our own locations and understandings.

⁵ Within the labels for the pieces, I chose to include the ancestry of all contributors, not just Indigenous peoples. This choice centers the worldview of identifying who you are, where you come from and who you are responsible to, which many Indigenous ways of knowing and being embrace. As well, within settler colonial systems, Indigenous peoples are constantly under scrutiny and asked to identify explain and qualify who they are in proximity to whiteness. Non-Indigenous or non-POC artists generally do not have to qualify who they are in terms of their cultural identity. Including the ancestry of all contributors on the labels intervenes into the status quo of settler colonial systems of othering. As well it makes obvious that all settlers are not Indigenous to this place colonially known as Canada, and more locally within this context, ləkʷəŋən territory, colonially known as Victoria.

Figure 16*Ancestral Portal***Ancestral Portal, 2022**

Blankets and Panels: Cotton printed fabric, acrylic paint, variety of beads, abalone buttons, mother of pearl buttons, Merino wool fringe, kilt pins

Hoop: Irrigation pipe, ribbons, artificial sinew

Sarah Rhude

Lnu'sgw tleyawi Gespe'gewa'gi, Irish, French, English

Contributor:

Pam Russ, Sewing/construction of blanket and panels, dome collaborator.

Nisga'a

Community Support

Anita Roberts, Lindsay Katsitsakaste Delaronde, B.A. Lampman, Ted Grant, Tim Wilson Hoey, Indigenous Nouveau

Figure 17

Outside of Ancestral Portal



Note. Meteteskewey -“the rattling plant” or Golden Rod and Fireweed.

Artist Statement:

When we gather in circle, we create an ancestral portal; we open the circle, invite our ancestors in, share knowledges and feelings, and then close the circle. This portal is not static, but a transportable space that creates an intervention into settler-colonial systems, structures, spaces, and classrooms. It reshapes these spaces with their sharp corners and edges and allows us

to sit equally around a center. Simple, gentle, and powerful, the circle holds all our feelings, our ways of knowing and being, and our stories. Sitting in circle creates a forcefield of ancestors, a dome of protection, and gives us freedom and space to exist in systems that are often inhospitable. It allows us to gather and center the spirit in the fringes.

Meteteskewey - ‘the rattling plant’ or Golden Rod that is painted/beaded on the outside of the dome, honours an ancient Mi’kmaw serpent dance that has informed the venom dance you will see performed this evening. The fireweed surrounding the Meteteskewey is a plant that grows after a forest fire- after a trauma. Through dancing, ceremony, and the bond between Indigenous relations/ancestors and the audience, the venom dance purges, transforms, and aids in moving through the trauma of imposed systems of power that oppress us all. Msit No’kmaq- All my relations.

The creation of this Ancestral portal is for you the viewer to interact directly within Indigenous space, and to witness and participate in the ceremony of the venom dance. If you are willing, please enter the portal and courageously write down what it is you need to let go of in order to ‘come to peace’. What venom inside needs to be expelled or transformed into medicine? You are invited to then hang it on one of the pins surrounding the snake. Msit no’kmaq- all my relations.

Figure 18*Ancestor (Grandmothers) Mask*

Note. [photograph], by Rachelle Bergeron and Sarah Rhude.

Ancestor (Grandmothers) Mask, 2020

Red cedar, acrylic gauche, carved copper, sweetgrass, horsehair

Sarah Rhude

Lnu'sgw tleyawi Gespe'gewa'gi, Irish, French, English

Figure 19*Embodied*

Embodied, 2021

Edited videos and photo stills

6:38 minutes

Link to watch video: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=nH1WVEQ-ByA&si=EnSIkaIECMiOmarE>

Sarah Rhude

Lnu'sgw tleyawi Gespe'gewa'gi, Irish, French, English

Contributors:

Sophie De Rosney, Creator/editor of the movie (video and stills)
French, Mauritian, Canadian settler ancestry

Rachelle Bergeron, Hand-held still photos, studio photos, video
French settler ancestry

Christine Grant, Handheld still photos, video
Irish, German settler ancestry

Alysha Brown, Video
Swampy Cree, English

Artist Statement:

By engaging with familial photographs of my Mi'kmaq/Algonquin/Indigenous/European grandmothers, my mother, grandmother cedar tree, my carving tools, and the relational connection between mentor Kwakwaka'wakw artist Rande Cook (Fazakas, 2023, Kordovski 2014, Richardson, 2013, Thomson, 2014), and fellow carver, Mohawk artist Lindsay Katsitsakaste Delaronde, (Dance West Network, 2023, Art Openings, 2022, Wilson, 2018, <https://www.belfry.bc.ca/supernova>), Ancestor mask was carved into being. When I put Ancestor mask on time folds, the ancient and contemporary are interwoven, and a portal for Ancestor and my Self to inhabit both future and past is created. Outside colonial constructs of time and space, I

am no longer dislocated, (from my family, homelands, my Self)- I am embodied. Ancestor is free to be safe in the city spaces, and Self is free to swim in pristine rivers- both locations not available to us within the colonial time frame.

This connection is bonded through unconditional love- not tethered to colonial trauma. Through the creation and enactment of Ancestor, and as an Indigenous artist of mixed ancestry who is cut-off from her family of origin, I dance between the trans-conceptual space of method/medium, spirit/physical world, to create work that is informed by the past and of use in understanding my Indigenous self in the present. Ancestor mask is a protector and partner in coming to peace within myself, while in relationship with the Western world.

Each of the pieces that I shared in *Spirit in the Fringes* was a co-creation or involved a collective of people's support acknowledging the felt and intellectual understanding that we come to when we are in relationship. It opposes the notion of individualistic, objective research that the academy centers, in particular in terms of how Indigenous peoples have been/are researched or studied within Western worldviews. Collaborating fostered a generation of shared and layered knowledges, yet Indigenous stories, practices and theories were always centered. Many members of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community helped to bring to life these tangible expressions of law, culture, spirit, and beauty, and it was my deep intention that members of my community and the community at large spend time with me creating such as beading, sewing, pulling the hide for the big drum, collecting medicines, and helping with details such as the artist labels. A call out on social media for berries to dye the buffalo hide for the big drum provided me not only the plant relatives I needed, but elicited stories and connections that drew community into the theater to witness the work. In this way, non-Indigenous allies were invited into our circle. As well, I encouraged collaboration and artistic input in the creation of

the *Embodied* video, and had students and educators help with construction of the drum stand. Through all these relations I prompted conversation about what it was I was thinking through with this intervention. Members of the audience and community were invited to contribute in a meaningful yet bounded way. From the creation, curation through to the witnessing of performance, the audience and community were invited into our space to appropriately participate, witness, and potentially gain a deeper understanding of our lives, our natural agency and Indigenous creative/cultural practice. In this way, Indigenous joy, hope, love, experiences and survivance was presented. Indigenous spirit often found in the fringes was centered. In particular the 2SLGBTQIA+ knowledge and spirit were held as the fringes welcomed and brushed all who entered with the medicine our worlds and stories hold. Quite literally the center of the room was being held by *Wapikwaniwin* ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ *Sipu*, the big drum, who was making space for those 2 spirits, Indigiqueer, women folks who are often excluded from such spaces.

Figure 20*Drumming Together in Reclaimed Spaces*

Note. [Photograph], by Darryl Whetung

The Venom Dance- Performance

Enacting *The Venom Dance*, (*The Venom Dance*, 2022), was very meaningful for me. While some would call it a contemporary performance, for me, it tied together in ceremony and performative artistic expression so much of what I was feeling and trying to express through my graduate studies but couldn't put this felt theory into words. The origins of the dance/ceremony stems from a conflict that occurred during the process of bringing *BTH* to life. After having a healing circle in order to address a conflict that involved a non-Indigenous member of the creative team, Lindsay Delaronde and myself were debriefing. At the same time, I had just read the article *Refusal to forgive: Indigenous women's love and rage*, by Rachel Flowers (2015) regarding:

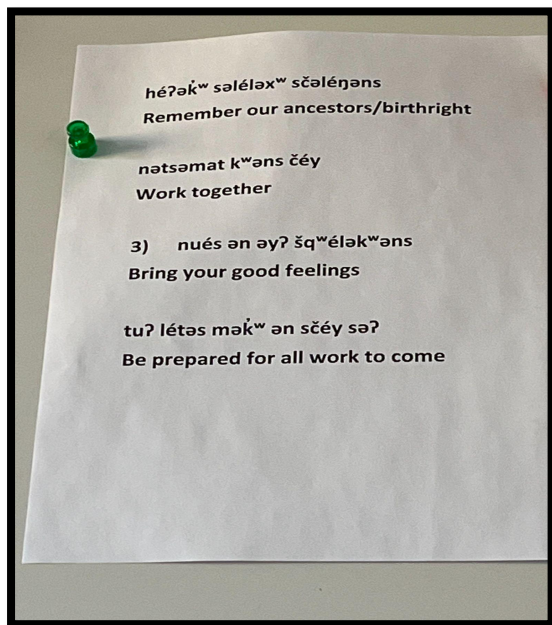
the rising tendency to describe Indigenous women's resistance to colonization and modes of solidarity with settler society in terms of love. This propensity ultimately suppresses the voices and struggles of Indigenous women and denies not only the validity of other decolonial emotional responses such as sadness, resentment, or anger, but also their transformative potential. (p. 32)

In line with the feelings expressed by Flowers, deeply feeling the need to get out the anger and vitriol we were feeling, Lindsay said, "how do we get this venom out!". We talked about the cultural tools of ceremony, dance, ritual, regalia making, and we decided to create a performance piece entitled *The Venom Dance*. We would expel this venom through ceremony. Thinking about the many ways in which Indigenous peoples deal with constant micro-aggressions, ignorance, and racism while existing within Western systems, this ceremonial dance became a method for us to draw out these poisons and transform them.

The blanket regalia that Ancestor/mySelf wore in this dance was directly tied to the *Ancestral Portal* shown above. The *Ancestral Portal* was made up of two panels and a blanket. Before each show began, I removed the blanket from the dome in order to wear it in *The Venom Dance*. For this piece, Ancestor/mySelf carried the weight of all of the venom that the audience, *BTH* cast, and Belfry Theatre staff had written on the tags provided in the Ancestral dome and hung onto the blanket surrounding the serpent. As seen in the write up and photographs of the Ancestral dome above, these tags held the weights people needed to let go of to 'come to peace'. The idea of inviting the audience into ceremony in this way stemmed from our desire to safely invite others into our circle and was an acknowledgement and honouring of the protocols/teachings of 'leaving what we don't need at the door before we enter' that have been shared with us here in lək^wəŋən territory.

Say if you are going home after a bad day's work, leave it on a bush, leave it at the door... I think of Uncle Skip and how he says you hang your job title, your prominent figure in society, because in general, in the ceremonial hall there is no person better than the other, we are all the same... When you are cooking, you put your good feelings into cooking. If you are in a bad mood, you're probably gonna burn your food! Bring your good feelings- number 3. (See image below). (Sam, 2022)

Figure 21
lak^wəŋən Laws



Note. Picture taken in Diane Sam's Office and references in above quote.

When I began thinking about what this piece would look like in all its facets, (regalia, structure, sculpture, dance), I wondered what types of stories or cultural practice existed in Mi'kma'ki concerning serpents, snake dances and stories. I began to read about *The Serpent Dance* or *Snake Dance*, and again the importance and existence of cross-cultural knowledge sharing is highlighted:

Dances were also exchanged between different cultural groups, making it a cross-cultural form of communication and a way to honour and give to others...Dances were seen as a form of gift-giving...Vaughen Doucette of Eskasoni was told that the snake dance (or serpent dance) was given to the Mohawk at the Great Council of 1749. In return, the Mohawk gave the Mi'kmaq the thanksgiving chant, "I'ko" (Doucette, personal communication 1995 in Sable & Francis, 2012).

The knowledges that were revealed included two spirit ontology connected to *Jipija'm*- a supernatural two-horned serpent in Mi'kma'ki and connection to a *Meteteskewey*, the "most mighty of medicines" (Sable 334), a powerful medicine plant that rattled in the wind like a serpent. In Figure 42 you can see *Meteteskewey* painted on the medicine side of the ancestral dome and blanket in between the fireweed. This dance was also connected to the "turning over" of the season and to the stars (Sable & Francis 2018, p.88). I created a rattle that was used by snake in the performance to draw *Ancestor*, the venom, and the medicine out from the other side. This rattle, which was made from a horn and elk hide with a painting of *Meteteskewey* on it, honoured and held the Mi'kmaw cultural knowledge that went into this ceremony/performance piece.

Figure 22

Rattle honouring the knowledges of Jipija'm and Meteteskewey



This Mi'kmaw knowledge affirmed that I was on the right path and really solidified our intentions with this cross-cultural dance as Mi'kmaq and Mohawk performers and peoples, especially given the context of a serpent dance existing in connection to each of our cultural knowledge bases.

As I go through the performance with the pictures below, it is important to note that our experiences as Indigenous peoples in relationship with settler colonial systems and my research informed the regalia, *Ancestral Dome* installation, and *The Venom Dance* performance/ ceremony. The line between ceremony and performance is still something that I wrestle with and something we discuss within the Indigenous theater community⁶ (Lachance, 2018). While we have agency as cultural peoples to create and perform, the line for me is that we do not share what is sacred and only meant for particular times, peoples, places.

Link to a recording of a dress rehearsal of The Venom Dance: <https://youtu.be/IKCfpa-xqEc>

⁶ It is important to note the legacy and enduring presence of Indigenous theatre and scholars from this field. See Yvette Nolan, Reneltha Arluk Margo Kane, Maria Campbell, Marie Clements, Tomson Highway, Drew Hayden Taylor, to name a few, and theatre companies such as Native earth performing arts.

Figure 23*Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 1*

Note. The opening meeting of snake and ancestor. ‘Weights’ hanging off side of blanket.

[Photograph], by Darryl Whetung.

Figure 24*Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 2*

Note. Snake rattling and guiding ancestor who is wearing the weights of the audience on their back. [Photograph], by Darryl Whetung.

Figure 25

Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 3



Note. Ancestor wide open and lifting up all the weights right before snake bites them.

[Photograph], by Darryl Whetung

Figure 26

Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 4



Note. Ancestry and snake transforming. Not seen here is the portion where Ancestor pulls venom out of their body. [Photograph], by Darryl Whetung.

Figure 27*Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 5*

Note. Snake cutting off the ‘weights’ from Ancestors back. [Photograph], by Darryl Whetung.

Figure 28*Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 6*

Note. Snake carrying the weights to place in Ancestors Birch and Quill basket for safe keeping.
[Photograph], by Darryl Whetung.

Figure 29

Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 7



Note. Ancestor and Snake dancing to activate and honour of the work that has been done.

[Photograph], by Darryl Whetung.

Figure 30

Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 8



Note. Unveiling the medicine side of the blanket. [Photograph], by Darryl Whetung.

Figure 31*Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 9*

Note. Snake brushing off Ancestor acknowledging the teachings of The Great Law of Peace.

[Photograph], by Darryl Whetung.

Figure 32*Ancestor and Snake in The Venom Dance 10*

Note. Ancestor lovingly taking the basket of weights away from Snake. [Photograph], by Darryl Whetung.

After all the performances finished and we did the work of wrapping up the show, the ceremony was brought to a close by burning all of the weights people had hung on the Ancestor shawl during the performances. As seen in figure 57, snake hands the basket of weights to ancestor to take with them gently and respectfully. Myself and my Nisga'a sister who co-created the blanket regalia that held the weights, spent an evening in the forest reading aloud each of the tags containing what people were letting go of and then placing them in the fire according to the teachings we each carry, and in honour of the trauma, loss, and pain that people had the courage to write and let go of. That is all I will say about the details of this ritual or ceremony.

As well, there are other occurrences that happened during the two days we were given the floor within the walls of The Belfry Theater, and on the land of the *lək^hwəŋən* peoples, that deeply affected my thoughts around moving forward with this type of reframing of the relationship and power dynamic between us and The Belfry. There is some knowledge and ceremony that are not for writing in this thesis, but I acknowledge that the work that was done manifests in the way our relationship continues to grow. Within the trans-conceptual space that was created through protocols with *lək^hwəŋən* relatives, we were able to honour *lək^hwəŋən* governance when dealing with a particular circumstance that arose. While we did this work under the guidance of *lək^hwəŋən* relatives, our ability then, and my choice now to keep this information outside the gaze or purview of those it is not for, speaks to the ways in which we can honour and protect Indigenous knowledges and laws while being in relationship with the settler colonial systems. What I can say is that through the relationships that were fostered, and the respect and courage that some members of the leadership displayed, we were able to work through conscious and unconscious power imbalances, confusion and the oppression that living in a settler colonial world precipitate. Letting go of the power and control that comes to those who benefit within white supremacist

systems isn't easy or sometimes obvious. Walking with humility and confidence, while being kind but firm, as Lillooet elder Lorna Williams (n.d.) once told me, is vital. This work has required me to heal, be self-reflexive and acknowledge my own trauma.

Round Four: Conclusion and Closing the Circle Summer/fall

The Knowledges that have Wrapped Me

Trans-conceptual space as research looks at Indigenous spaces and gathering as sites where knowledges are shared and enacted in a generative way. Within these spaces, creative practice allows us to access knowledge from worlds beyond the physical realm and builds shared knowledge systems that stem from and are rooted in the distinct cultural worldviews of the hosts and guests. *The paradox between situated and shared knowledges is one that creates a liminal space for knowledge evolution, treaty processes and deep relationality.* Cultural spaces where visitors take the floor as invited guests to share their knowledges inside the basket of the land and peoples who are hosting and holding them, exemplifies how relationality between diverse peoples can be differentiated to create trans-conceptual spaces that respect each other's self-determination and autonomy, while reaching towards the goal of layered and generative sites of knowledge sharing and creation (Starblanket, 2022). In these spaces, one way of being does not eclipse the other. Multiple worldviews are held with respect, and from witnessing each other's laws and knowledges we become more connected and are open to a new and deeper understanding of ourselves and each other. We care for each other and work from an ethic of love. Treaties between knowledges are affirmed while creating shared space and interwoven, intertribal, Indigenous futurities that are generative.

From an Anishinaabeg perspective, creative practice is not just the making of aesthetic or skill-based artworks or activities, but rather a blurred spectrum of creation that involves building our futures in alignment with all our relations. Creative practice is world-building because it is the way we communicate non-literal, non-didactic, and spiritual knowledge with our communities. (Peters, 2022, n.p.)

As an intervention into the colonial system, art, and creative practices, in all their facets, provides space for the work of decolonization. When I sing the Mi'kmaq Honour Song, the words, melody, and drumbeat are integrated and embodied. Every cell of my being knows them to be true. I am connected to my relations and spirit and physical worlds are embodied in the raising of our voices, and the beating of our drums. I feel the earth under my feet as I dance—we are connected, and as I perform this ceremony I honour the earth through the re-enactment and assertion of our ways of knowing and being. As a lnu'sgw, singing the Honour Song in the context of the colonial world I am in relationship with, gives voice to decolonial ideas in part by presencing my Indigeneity, “against colonial erasure, Indigenous art marks the space of a returned and enduring presence” (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014, p. 1).

Tania Willard (2018), Secwepemc artist, academic and curator, says on the power of art to decolonize:

Art can give voice to decolonization and it can be part of a process of decolonizing, but I don't think it itself is only, or exactly, a form of decolonization. I think art can be an initiator, an instigator, and inspiration but it needs to be a part of a community and other ways that are building and challenging existing ways with inspired revolutionary methods. Art can't be separate from community for it to be decolonizing. I think of it like ceremonial ways, where something might work on you without you even knowing it. (p. 224)

The deeply intuitive, spiritual way that art can affect one has the potential of shifting the perspective of the onlooker without their knowing. Indigenous cultural practice and art allow for portals into differing modalities of understanding for those witnessing. From a place that is paradoxically removed from direct confrontation, the witness is invited to confront their own

embodiments of colonialism, and this makes the sharing and witnessing of Indigenous art and cultural practice such an important and accessible catalyst for the work of decolonization.

The ability of creative and artistic practice to shift perspective, support relationality and heal is exemplified in a story I heard recently by queer, singer, song writer, storyteller Jake Wesley Rogers (Wesley Rogers, cited in Brown 2021):

...a couple of months ago, I got this message from this person, and he heard my song "Jacob from the Bible ", I think just on Spotify or something. I'm paraphrasing, but he basically said, "I heard your song on a playlist. I thought it was a beautiful song, and then I listened to it again later and I realized it was a gay love story", and he was currently in the fundamental Christian mindset. I'll never forget what he said. He said, "It made me ask the question: how could something so beautiful be so evil?" And yeah, I still get chills when I think about it, because that person, before he heard that song, literally thought I was evil, and I never made that song for someone like him. But it reached him, and it made me think of these cages that we put ourselves in. I was in the closet, I was in that cage, this person was in their religious cage, and I think it's kind of the job of the artist to just drop keys, just leave a key. That's what I feel like I am trying to do, you don't have to pick it up. You don't even have to acknowledge it, but if you want it, it's there. And I'm still trying to figure out what cage I'm in because I am still in one. I know I am; we all are. (11:07-12:15)

The role of artists as perspective shifters, unlocking cages we have either put ourselves in or been put in, resonates within the work that I have been a part of over the last year. The catharsis that comes from experiencing the embodiment of art/music/ceremony isn't solely the healing, but it can be a portal to the work that needs to be done (Brown, 2021). Art creates points of

access. Creative practice, ceremony, gathering to connect and the witnessing of these, are ways that we can elicit perspective shifts. Indigenous art and creative practice reflect our stories and a story that this thesis exemplifies is one of recuperating from and speaking back to the violence of colonization against ourselves, our communities, and institutional spaces including art institutions, and schools (Igloliorte, 2012, cited in Dion & Salamanca, 2014). Sovereign creative practices make Indigenous freedom, hope and joy accessible, and tells stories outside the narrative of Indigenous peoples being bound up in colonial domination, a practice in which dominant cultures seek to control the telling of Indigenous stories (Dion & Salamanca, 2014).

The ‘keys’ we drop through sharing our Indigeneity within settler colonial systems are important for the survival of Indigenous peoples in relationship with these systems as this sharing creates a path that can guide us through. This work of ‘dropping keys’ must be done in a way that acknowledges our natural agency and protects our personal, community and cultural well-being—sometimes liberation is not possible, but survival and quality of life are (Hersey, 2022). Yet, I continue to ask: is this enough? How do we remain steadfast in our work while we are in relationship with systems that make us invisible in so many painful ways?

Over the last four seasons, the knowledges revealed have shown that Indigenous methodologies such as following protocols of the land, gathering, sharing/generating knowledges through creative practices, and intervening with these practices into colonial systems that we are in relationship with but not of, creates space for Indigenous peoples to assert our natural agency. In these spaces we are able to share cultural law and practices within settler colonial systems that are inhospitable to us. This thesis, from the knowledges revealed to the Indigenous framework utilized to format and share these knowledges, is itself an intervention. Throughout my graduate studies, I have been wrapped and protected through the kinstellations (Murwin, 2021) of care

from Indigenous woman, queers, elders, peoples, and allies within the academic world. The trans-conceptual spaces they have created and courageously steward have provided me with the framework, confidence, and knowledges necessary to use Indigenous research methodologies such as witnessing, sovereign creative practice, gathering, and relationality to appropriately hold and share written and creative responses to my research questions. I feel successful, seen, celebrated and proud of the research and creativity that has come through me- feelings that have been usurped or remain absent from my experiences outside these kinstitutions within Western education systems. Spaces such as CIRCLE- Centre for Indigenous Research and Community-Led Engagement, The First Peoples House, Indigenous classrooms/courses, Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, NAISA North conference in Whitehorse, and within interpersonal relationships with Indigenous professors and educational employees, where we take care of each other, have been pivotal in my success and survival. In these spaces I feel joy and hope as an Indigenous student and educator in relationship with the Western academic system.

In my research, trans-conceptual spaces of intervention required the deep relationality that I foster and maintain with specific people; local *łəkʷəŋən* and Indigenous community, and allies within Western systems. This modality does not aim, and is not concerned with, making systemic change at a policy or systemic level. The relationships that I hold and foster at the intimate, community, and non-human levels, are sites of decolonial practice where we can make interventions into settler colonial systems and ‘drop keys. Our relationality protects and creates the freedom and space needed to enact our laws and culture outside the terms of settler colonial systems. At these sites, Indigenous laws, and ways of knowing and being are centered. Indigenous peoples, educators, and students can share knowledges and practices in a way that is honouring and generative. Here we grow closer and deepen our understanding of each other’s

cultures while being drawn back and into our own specific cultural ways of knowing and being. In these spaces, self-confidence, self-esteem, pride in our Indigeneity and generosity of spirit is fostered. In turn, the hope is that these qualities and relationships can help create the resilience and protection needed to navigate the Western, settler colonial, education system when needed. Intervention into the system to create Indigenous space for knowledge sharing reframes the discourse of reconciliation and Indigenization of educational spaces and has led me to believe that the best way to share our ways of knowing and being is through these Indigenous interventions. By honouring and enacting local Indigenous protocols and relationships, we are given the floor to then do the work of sharing cultural knowledge and law. This reframing of the way in which we interact with the system is not looking to weave Indigenous cultural practices throughout the system but creates authentic spaces for Indigenous knowledge dissemination and cultural practice. Here, we are not Indigenizing or reconciling, but rather we are creating space for the natural agency we possess, as Stó:lō writer and educator Lee Maracle said,

I believe that the knowledge of Indigenous people- resurrected, fleshed out and reconsidered in our new context- has a valuable role to play. I believe that, granted access and authority over space, we could rebuild our nations without anyone's assistance. I believe we are all personally responsible for resurrecting, reclaiming, and reshaping the very notions of time and space that will invite the knowledge of others into our fields of study, so that a genuine sharing can occur. (Maracle 2015, p. 127)

In my research, at the intimate and personal level of relationality with certain peoples within the Western public education and post-secondary institutions, there was space for intervention. This was seen in round two- *Həyšx'wǰə Tikweneñ*, when a trusted Indigenous music teacher at a school within Greater Victoria School District created the space needed for

knowledge sharing and cultural practice in a way that honoured these lands, peoples, and myself to occur. These interventions are meaningful, and as Diane Sam says “being able to share that bit of knowledge, I think even if it's just a little bit at a time, is a big step. That's a good step” (Sam, 2022). Going beyond a “policy or a program model or strategy or whatever term institutions like to use” (Hunt, 2022), this intimate site of knowledge generation, felt theory, and care allows for us to share Indigenous culture and ways of knowing in a meaningful way, creating avenues for protection while being in relationship with the Western education system.

During the Indigenous intervention at the Belfry Theater, we were given the floor to share our stories from within the basket of local *lak^wəŋən* protocols thus changing the terms in which the center is created. Outside the terms of Western systems, whom we are in relationship with but not of, our self-determination is activated and the power dynamic and relationship we have with colonial institutions is reframed. There is strength in existing in self-determined spaces in the fringes of settler colonial systems where we are not seeking recognition or visibility from the system, but we remake these spaces through reframing the relations on which they are built.

Challenges to the status quo occurred when perspectives were shifted and understanding of the knowledges that were revealed happened over time and through relationship. Having an ally and person of colour in a position of power within the Belfry Theatre leadership team willing to disrupt the regular programming of the system was crucial. I felt comfortable enough in our relationship that we would be able to carry out the work, amidst mistakes made, and come to a place of understanding within this trans-conceptual space. This research speaks to the necessity for Indigenous, Black people, people of colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ and other folks who challenge the status quo to be in positions of power and decision making in systems for movement at a systemic level to occur.

How can we best move through Western schools as Indigenous peoples? Fostering relationships with Indigenous employees and allies and creating kinstellations (Murwin, 2021), of care while working within the education system is a key. Within these relationships we create trans-conceptual spaces that allow us to keep each other safe, bear witness to each other's lives and allows for knowledges to be revealed. Through relationship development and enacting Indigenous protocols of the living earth, peoples, and ancestors on whose land these settler colonial educational spaces are projected upon, we create the sacred space needed to share and practice our own ways of being and knowing. In these spaces the relationship with the system is reframed and our ways are centered- not 'woven through' or added on as an afterthought, or when convenient. Creating Indigenous programs and spaces; including buildings, rooms, and spaces for cultural practice, within Western education systems that are in relationship with local Indigenous laws and peoples, provides the trans-conceptual space needed to work from within our own Indigenous laws and practices. When educational spaces are rooted in Indigenous worldviews and frameworks, where Indigenous employees and students do not have to perpetually filter through or navigate the terms of settler colonial education systems—where the spirit of our teachings, laws, creative practices, and selves can get lost or shapeshifted, we are better able to teach and learn from our own worldviews. Western education systems are rooted in Western worldviews, pedagogy, and curriculums, thus centering peoples and students from this worldview. Indigenous peoples deserve the same level of educational consideration and so do our teachings/pedagogies and worldviews/epistemologies.

Closing the Circle with Gratitude

One of the biggest gifts of my lifetime, with which I hold so much gratitude, was in receiving and caring for the song *Həyšxʷqə Tikweneñ* which in turn catalyzed my journey to Gespe'gewa'gi, the home of my ancestors.

Figure 33

Beaded Gespeg Patch



Note. Plant ancestor Mugwort, Fireweed and Valerian created by Sarah Rhude

The beaded patch in Figure 58 holds stories/knowledges that were revealed to me as I traveled through Gespe'gewa'gi. For years in these *ləkʷəŋən* lands, I have been in a reciprocal relationship with plant relatives through stewarding, growing, taking care, and learning from each other. There are relatives I was drawn to and planted, while others have shown up in my yard on the wind and through various other methods with which plants transport themselves to

where they want to live. Learning and living in relationship with plant relatives has helped move me through grief and pain, providing me with healing and medicine. They have shown and taught me unconditional love.

When I began my journey driving through Gespe'gewa'gi I first noticed fireweed, then beach roses, elderberry, and goldenrod, the sweet smell of sweetgrass and the mellow green of mugwort, the fields of tall flowing valerian and low purple hues on hills from self-heal. Plant relatives that I have been in relationship with so far away in lək'wəŋən lands, were here, in Gespe'gewa'gi, connecting me back to the land of my ancestors, amidst the disconnect in my own family. As my journey home unfolded, I kept a journal record of the knowledges that were revealed to me to aid in the embodiment of these teachings and memories.

July 30, 2022, Percy, Gespe'gewa'gi

We keep driving and pull over at an art boutique. There seems to now be giant fields of fireweed and a white flowering plant that I am unsure of. I think it may be a relative of cow parsnip- hogweed, which can be toxic to touch. I stand beside the plant for a minute and look at them deeply. I know this plant well from my garden back home. I am in shock as I realize that what I am standing in is a field of wild valerian! I have never seen this sweet plant relative in the wild. I did not know it was growing wild in these ancestral lands. I'm so moved to see it growing and existing so freely and everywhere!! Here it is not being culled, or in a small, controlled space. It fills entire fields, mixed in good company with fireweed. Both plants give us medicine to calm our nervous systems. Help with trauma, anxiety and induce sleep and calm. Here standing beside their energy and looking at their home I feel this peaceful medicine so strongly. The plants have taught me that when you are where you belong, you thrive. Back in my west coast home I am so

connected to these plants, having no idea they were so deeply rooted in the land of my ancestors. The plants, the land, my ancestors are always there, taking care of me even when I was unaware.

The realization that my ancestors and these plant ancestors have been surrounding me and taking care of me throughout my life was a life changing moment. I realize that in order for me to work in relationship with settler colonial systems, I need to understand myself, my roles and responsibilities and continuously work through the trauma of my life, knowing that I am never alone. I am surrounded by relatives and ancestors. Msit No'kmaq- All my relations. As Tricia Hersey (2022), the author of *Rest is Resistance* and creator of *The Nap Ministry* says, saving our own lives from the exhaustion of racism, poverty and sexism makes space for all, no matter their race, to also begin the dismantling these systems.

Moving forward, I know that there is more knowledge to be revealed in my research. I would love to honour all of the cultural materials that were brought to life over these four seasons by putting them in a room together and seeing what knowledges are revealed when they are in conversation with each other. I dream of facilitating and participating in (through good relations) the creation of creative, cultural, and land-based programs that are grounded in normative cultural practice in relationship with the lək'wəŋən peoples, lands, and waters to which I am now, have been and will continue to be in relationship. I am inspired by the generative worlds and trans-conceptual spaces that are being created by Dechinta Center for Research and Learning in the North, where the authority and cultural practice of the Dene peoples and other northern Nations are centered, while space is created and welcomed for learners to practice and share our own ways of knowing and being while we are away from our own worlds. Through my graduate studies I was able to witness and participate in an amazing conference in Taa'an

Kwächän and the Kwanlin Dün territory in Whitehorse/Yukon, that centered elders, women, Indigiqueer, POC and land/art-based practices. I was welcomed to the shorelines of Mackenzie Island on Great Slave Lake- where students were shown radical inclusivity (Claus & Morin, 2020; L'Hirondelle, 2015), and invited into the fish camp of the Dene elders/bush professors. Here my understanding of Glen Coulthard's (2014) term 'grounded normativity' was understood not just from an intellectual place, but through experiential practice and felt theory as we learned from and were cared for by the Dene land, peoples, water, non-humans, and shorelines. My time at Dechinta has deepened my understanding of how through sovereign, Indigenous, creative practice, such as beading, medicine making, drum making, painting, storytelling, carving, multi-medium creating, and developing relationships with local peoples, and the living earth in the trans-conceptual spaces in which I live, travel, and gather, I also embody the ethical framework of grounded normativity.

As I close this circle I wish to express my gratitude for the Indigenous knowledges and laws that have been revealed and shared with me on Anishinaabeg, Dene, Mi'kmaw, lək'wəŋən, and other Indigenous shorelines. I am grateful for the unconditional love the land, water and wind has shown me as a lnu'sgw of mixed ancestry who is disconnected from their family of origin. Wela'lin to my chosen relations who continue to hold me make space for me. I am grateful to you dear reader/witness for your time and presence. The following creative representations of my love and gratitude—a poem, blanket, and video—share some of the many sentiments that have been woven throughout our time together in circle and is my closing epilogue.

Msit No'kmaq- All My Relations.

Figure 34*Blanket with sisters at the Tikweneñ sesu***Blanket Movie, 2022**

Edited videos and photo stills

6:04 minutes

Link to watch video: <https://youtu.be/PQdTMRHPDbo>

Sarah Rhude

Lnu'sgw tleyawi Gespe'gewa'gi, Irish, French, English

Co-Creators:

Tania Willard, cyanotype workshop, photography, and videography from Mackenzie Island, (Willard, 2022)

Dallas Rhude, piano and mixing of soundtrack

Sophie De Rosney, Creator/editor of the movie (video and stills)

Lindsay Delaronde, Videography, and photography from Tikweneñ shoreline

Diane Sam, Alysha Brown, Tikweneñ shoreline, Dene elders, professors, students, and

Blanket, 2022

Cyanotype cloth, acrylic paint, various beads, mirrors

Sarah Rhude

Lnu'sgw tleyawi Gespe'gewa'gi, Irish, French, English

Co-Creators:

Tania Willard

Secwépemc, [settler] (Willard, 2022)

Pam Russ

Nisga'a

The sun, land, water, plants on Mackenzie Island in Denendeh

Artist Statement:

Blanket is a multi-media co-creation between myself and many relations, human and non-human, on the shorelines of Mackenzie Island on Great Slave Lake in Chief Drygeese territory where I visited, Tikweneñ in ləkʷəŋən territory where I live, and Gespe'gewa'gi where I am connected ancestrally. Knowledges and creations that have been revealed over the last year of thinking through and creating trans-conceptual spaces of gathering where Indigenous worldviews and sovereign creative practices are centred and presented are 'wrapped up' in this piece. Gathering as Indigenous methodology affirms and strengthens relationships creating trans-conceptual spaces for knowledges that are layered and generative to be revealed and has been happening since time immemorial.

In the piece, I am blanketed by my relations on the shoreline in ləkʷəŋən territory where I live, with a cultural co-creation, Blanket, that holds the stories we shared and gathered during our time in Denendeh at Dechinta Center for research. Ancestor, presented by the carved mask of my Mi'kmaq/Algonquin/Indigenous/European grandmothers is with me on both shorelines and awakens the type of felt theory (Million, 2009), and understanding that can only be had through

experience and embodied practice, “An experience that can be talked about through writing but only understood from physically witnessing and experiencing the action” (LeSage, 2022, p. 173). Blanket Movie creates a third, liminal space of ‘coming to know’ (Simpson, 2009), by embodying the specific role of ‘in-between’ exemplified by the shoreline. Through video containing multi-media, the witness/viewer is given a site-specific view into knowledges that have been revealed by way of gathering, recognition of protocols, caring for one another, and sharing in cultural/creative practice. Blanket asserts the natural agency of Indigenous peoples to be seen on our own terms – to reflect our experiences and perspectives outside the narratives of settler colonialism.

Blanket is an expression of gratitude for the Indigenous knowledges and laws that have been revealed and shared with me on Dene, Mi’kmaw, and lək^wəŋən shorelines. The unconditional love I have been shown by the land, water, and wind in these locations as a lnu’sgw of mixed ancestry who is disconnected from their family of origin is expressed through this co-creative process and engages the responsibility that comes with this care. Wela’lin to my chosen relations who continue to hold and make space for me.

Blanket

Here, at the Tikweneñ sesu,

I close my eyes....

I am on a rocky shore in Denendeh

I see

water, sky, islands,

I hear

The wind, a generator and distant happy voices from the camp.

My mind is streaming with stories of violence and loss.

“Here a shoreline, there a shoreline

Everywhere a shoreline”

pennies gathered,

used as currency,

exchanged between beings with no connection,

no relationship,

no love for these liminal spaces between worlds-

The meeting place of life, law, consent.

How do I wash the poison out from behind my eyes

so I can see the beauty and peace,

embody the balance and reflection,

without thinking about all that is lost,

the past causing depressions on the future,

anxious of what will be left,

who will be left.

“There is enough arsenic under that mine to kill every person on earth twice over”.

We go farther,

Farther,

Farther away...

We drive past spruce, birch and fireweed.

We ride past islands of ancestors and young eagles learning to fly.

We arrive at fish camp,

Where elders continue

As they have always done,

and we follow

and listen

and learn,

As we have always done.

Fishing Whitefish and Conny

Pickerel and Jackfish longer than my arm.

Beading,

smoked tanned hide,

fish scale art.

Hunting duck, rabbit, wolverine,

“Always moose”

poems translated on the wind. (Willard, 2022)

Tiny birch bark canoes and medicine pouches,

rat root and sage,

dry fish, dry meat, duck soup,

and passing the tobacco round

at the opening,

at the closing,

As they have always done.

These worlds evolve regardless of sciences
constructions, constraints, and definitions.

New ways melded with old ways,
bringing them back to a state of recognition and love,
instead of exploitation and loneliness-
never being seen or connected.

New ways melded with old ways-
Saws all blades ground into traditional knives
“Dey do dis where you’re from?” (Mackenzie, 2022)
Cocreating regalia with the sun and water and the rocks.
Burning images into blankets
And feeding the fire,
As they/we have always done.

Crow, bear, juniper and cran berries,
Wild raspberry and strawberry, rosehips,
And always,
everywhere,
Labrador tea.
Collecting together, laughing and talking.

Becoming familiar with each other's ways

Making medicine,

Healing our joint pains,

In relationship with these Dene plant relatives, we know from our own

Secwépemc, Mi'kmaw, Anishinaabeg, Cree, Sauteaux plant relations,

who teach us unconditional love,

As they have always done.

New ways remember old ways-

Duck bones filed into needles,

Hold sinew from caribou leg bone.

That we weave through factory cotton to make tea bags big enough

to hold pots of medicine (Willard, 2022),

for the new worlds we are creating.

Brewed in ceremony,

balanced on the equinox,

the rocks,

the warm winds,

on the shore in the darkness.

In the light of headlamps,

the sound of camping cups clinking as

gently warmed tea crosses my lips,

the opening into my spirit,

reminding me I am never alone.

We are always connected.

Msit No'kmaq

Northern lights,

Dancing to the sound of nails clicking,

Laughing as we foolishly try to capture this beauty in our iPhones.

Whispers from a sweet Dene elder to the Whiskey Jacks

asking them to tell the caribou to return,

to come south again. (Lockhart, 2022)

We are always connected.

Drums and high voices acknowledging these old ones,

bringing the smoke

up,

up,

up,

past 'in between spaces' to other worlds, other sides, the creator.

Signs of the cross

And languages I will never understand-

Horizons filled with knowledge that is just

Beyond my reach,

But always there so beautiful and shifting,

As it has always done

As it has always done.

In cities full of

busyness,

noise,

judgment,

Walls

And endless ways to feel alone,

Western pills, liquids, medicines keep me alive,

amidst all the chaos of people and places and things.

Without the land there is no understanding (Coulthard in LeSage et al., 2022)

Families,

Our families,

My family

hurt(s)

and tear(s)

and twist(s)

and break(s)

and through it all

the land holds us,

the water holds us,

the winds wrap us,
in unconditional love.

How do I reconcile the

Joy

Pain

Paradox I feel with this understanding,

With this unconditional love

I have never felt from you.

Eyes open.

Here, at the Tikweneñ sesu, I feel connected and loved.

Site/ation (Willard, 2021)

Figure 35

Site/ation, from the Shoreline



Note. These are visual representations of the site-specific knowledge keepers mentioned in the above poem Blankets and is utilizing an Indigenous methodology of referencing by Secwépemc artist and scholar Tania Willard. (Willard, 2022)

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