

**THE EMBODIED POLITICS OF
RELATIONAL INDIGENOUS DRAMATURGIES**

by

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Abstract

There has been an expansion of Indigenous theatre across Turtle Island in the last thirty years, as well as an emergence of research devoted to its various processes and manifestations. The central contribution of this dissertation is the redefining of dramaturgy to include processes that are more than new play development practices or highly intensive research obligations, processes that are to be understood as relational and inclusive of the people, places, ancestors and other beings involved in the work. This dissertation offers a three-part Relational Indigenous dramaturgical model of land-based, placed-based and community-engaged dramaturgies. Land-based, placed-based and community-engaged dramaturgies exemplify a flourishing of Indigenous presence, actions and knowledges through embodied and collaborative theatrical processes that are not confined within Western or traditional theatre practices, but that emanate, grow and shine within the bodies and hearts of Indigenous practitioners. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies explore how the artists I have worked with are informed by individual, nation-based or community-based knowledges, but whose practices express newfound contemporary approaches and stories.

I have played a sometimes central, sometimes peripheral role in the processes or events described in this dissertation, and these entry points allow me to analyze how the development processes connect to political and anticolonial theatre practices. In describing and analyzing theatrical events, gatherings and programs that I have been involved in, I offer a new approach to dramaturgy that is relational and community oriented. Throughout this dissertation, I link Indigenous dramaturgies to critical Indigenous theories of resurgence and self-recognition as elucidated primarily by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe) and Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene). The political undertones of self-representation and self-determination are present in the work that I analyze, and I argue that the Indigenous dramaturgical processes and events that I have been involved in celebrate Indigenous resistance through artistic embodied thought and action.

Lay Summary

The term *dramaturgy* is often used to mean the structure of a play or performance, but this dissertation expands dramaturgy to highlight the significance of dramaturgical process as an end in itself—the *process is the work*. In this dissertation, Relational Indigenous dramaturgies are understood as a theatrical practice of resurgence, regardless of the performance that may or may not emerge from them. The principal contribution of this study is my analysis of the tripartite concept of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies, specifically: land-based, place-based, and community-engaged dramaturgies. These three dramaturgical methods act as the organizing principle of the dissertation, with one chapter devoted to each model, however their applications often overlap. Further, this dissertation inquires whether Relational Indigenous dramaturgies differ from others because of the political and cultural realities that Indigenous practitioners inherently carry in our bodies and hearts. While answering this question I explore dramaturgical events and workshops in which I participated as sites for analysis.

Preface

The research for this thesis was conducted under BREB certificate #H16-01022. It is an original, unpublished, intellectual product of the author, Lindsay Lachance.

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Acknowledgements

I, Lindsay Lachance, of Algonquin Anishinaabe and mixed settler Canadian ancestry, am honoured to write this dissertation from the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətaʔł (Tsleil-Waututh) nations. I have been an uninvited guest on their beautiful homelands for five years and I am grateful for all that I've learned while being here. I have met many people who have taught me so much, had the privilege to swim in glacier fed waters, heard stories about the significance of the Salmon, and made relationships that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. The beauty of the land and waters is so omnipresent in my day-to-day life that it is impossible not to fall in love with them. With the natural beauty of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh and səliłwətaʔł nations' territories constantly energizing and surrounding me, I want to find ways to give back to the lands, and to the Indigenous caretakers of these lands, for the time that I have spent here.

While here, I have tried to give back to the community by marching and protesting in grassroots and Indigenous-led resistances, and by being an active member of the Indigenous theatre community. I also served as the Native Youth Program Manager at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in 2015. The Native Youth Program (NYP) is a summer program for urban Indigenous youth (ages 15-18) enrolled in secondary school in Vancouver. NYP is a paid program where six urban Indigenous youth receive interdisciplinary arts training and programming over the summer months. One of NYP's goals is to mentor and train the youth to give public tours of one of MOA's shows. As the NYP Manager, along with the program's research assistant, I developed an 8-week full time arts and cultural program of Indigenous-led workshops, speakers, day-trips and educational sessions. In 2015, the NYP youth gave tours of *čəsnaʔəm, the city before the city*, a show co-curated by Susan Rowley and Jordan Wilson (Musqueam). *čəsnaʔəm, the city before the city* was developed through "conversations, stories and experiences of the Musqueam community, with the hopes to share with its visitors that Vancouver is not a 'new' city, but one deep in cultural and spiritual meaning for the Indigenous peoples of the lands" ("Native Youth Program"). During the two months working with the youth at NYP, we focused our time thinking about ourselves in relationship to the land on which we all lived, and we worked towards developing a humble and relational understanding of how to live respectfully on these lands. This relational methodology is also

seen in my program choices. I looked to artists, curators and relations that I already had, and invited them to lead a workshop, give a lecture or share something with us.

This experience helped me to further understand my role as a non-invited guest on unceded xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətaʔł (Tsleil-Waututh) territories, and through developing the program, allowed me to build new or stronger relationships with Indigenous artists whom I admire and respect. I am still in contact with the six youth from the program, and have acted as a reference for their recent job applications. I recount this experience because it involved me as a participant and witness, similar to the role I play in most/all of the instances that make up the bulk of this dissertation. I also share this work to demonstrate how I am attempting to give back to the host nations for my time spent on their lands.

I would also like to thank the University of British Columbia's Department of Theatre and Film, University of Alberta's Department of Drama and SSHRC for funding this dissertation.

I offer many thanks to my supervisor Jerry Wasserman, and committee members Dory Nason, Sarah Hunt, and Ric Knowles for their support and guidance throughout the process. I have been working with Jerry and Dory for five years and their teachings have significantly influenced this work. Thank you to my family and friends for your endless resilience, love and support.

Dedication

This is an Honour Song.

I could not have written this dissertation without the love and labor of Women in the Indigenous theatre community. I still have a lot to learn, and there is always work to do, but I'm so thankful to have such amazing women to look up to. Margo Kane, Monique Mojica, Yvette Nolan, Jill Carter, Marie Clements; to you and all that you've done for me and for the Indigenous theatre community. You have claimed and continue to claim space for us to learn, work and see ourselves the way we deserve to be seen.

Chapter 1: Introductions.

My focus here is the transformative nature of the performance in terms of space. Witnessing [Rebecca] Belmore's performance was an extraordinarily meaningful experience in my life, one that I have thought of almost every day since it happened. During the performance I felt powerful, free, and inspired. I felt proud of who I am. Belmore drew me into a decolonizing space where my presence and attention became completely focused in a similar fashion to what happens during natural childbirth, or ceremony. I lost sense of time and space. I was transported into a world that Belmore as the artist/storyteller had envisioned—a world where Nishnaabeg flourished and where justice prevailed, a world where my voice and meanings mattered.

– Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 97

This dissertation is concerned with examining how Indigenous theatre artists are using dramaturgical processes to include and share political truths and cultural experiences. There has been an explosion of Indigenous theatre in the past thirty years, as well as an emergence of research devoted to the relational practices and political events that triggered the need for self-determination among Indigenous theatre artists. I have played a sometimes central, sometimes peripheral role in the processes or events described in this dissertation, and these entry points allow me to analyze how the development processes connect to political and anticolonial theatre practices. I question how dramaturgical processes are being developed to include artistic, spiritual and political moments of self-determination. What makes theatre a particularly dynamic platform to share Indigenous truths, stories, and politics? This dissertation inquires whether Indigenous dramaturgies differ from others because of the political and cultural realities that Indigenous practitioners inherently carry in our bodies and hearts. While answering this question I explore dramaturgical events and workshops in which I participated as sites for analysis. As a witness/active participant, my theories of land-based dramaturgy, place-based dramaturgy, and community-engaged dramaturgy are identified in this dissertation as three different dramaturgical processes with specific connections and relationships to Indigenous political and artistic practices that are distinct from other theatrical processes.

1.1 Relational Indigenous Dramaturgical Contributions

The central contribution of this dissertation is the redefining of dramaturgy to include processes that are more than new play development practices or highly intensive research obligations, processes that are to be understood as relational and inclusive of the people, places, spirits and other beings involved. In describing and analyzing theatrical events, gatherings and programs that I have been involved in, I offer a new approach to dramaturgy that is relational and community oriented. In this conceptualization of dramaturgy, getting to know self and others, activating spiritual experiences, community involvement and outreach are all considered significant parts of the artistic process. As discussed in the next chapter, I link Indigenous dramaturgies to critical Indigenous theories of resurgence and self-recognition as elucidated by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe) and Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene). The political undertones of self-representation and self-determination are present in the work that I analyze, and I argue that the Indigenous dramaturgical processes and events that I have been involved in celebrate Indigenous resistance through artistic embodied thought and action.

The term *dramaturgy* is often used to mean the structure of a play or performance, but this dissertation expands dramaturgy to highlight the significance of dramaturgical process as an end in itself—the *process is the work*. Indigenous dramaturgies are understood as a theatrical practice of resurgence, regardless of the performance that may or may not emerge from them. The principal contribution of this study is my offering and analysis of the tripartite concept of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies, specifically land-based, place-based, and community-engaged dramaturgies. These three dramaturgical methods act as the organizing principle of the dissertation, with one chapter devoted to each model. Within the body of this dissertation, I define each of these models and provide examples of how they function in various situations.

Relational Indigenous land-based, placed-based and community-engaged dramaturgies exemplify a flourishing of Indigenous presence, actions and knowledges through embodied and collaborative theatrical processes that are not confined to existing Western or traditional theatre practices, but that emanate, grow and shine within the bodies and hearts of Indigenous practitioners. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies explore how artists' work is informed by individual, nation-based or community-based knowledges, but whose practices express newfound contemporary approaches and narratives. Contemporary Indigenous theatre artists are gifting these Relational Indigenous practices to future generations of Indigenous theatre artists to develop their own self-determining dramaturgies.

The organization of this dissertation begins with land-based dramaturgy and introduces how nation and community-specific knowledges inform the artists' dramaturgical approaches. The Indigenous theatre community practices and develops in diverse and culturally specific ways, and this dissertation does not try to encapsulate or strictly define the wide range of methods, traditions and understandings of "all Indigenous theatre practitioners." However, there are many occurrences where Indigenous practitioners from different Nations collaborate in new play development, community outreach and rehearsal phases. Throughout this dissertation, I will identify each Indigenous practitioner by their Nation so as to respectfully acknowledge where they are from. With a focus on practitioners who engage with teachings from and work on their traditional territories, land-based dramaturgies reflect the cultural specificities of the artists involved and highlight their processes as diverse nation-based resurgences. Land-based dramaturgies categorize practitioners who work with, on, or are influenced by the land, who develop new work, re-connect with homelands and traditional territories, incorporate local languages and creation stories or give back to their communities. Land-based dramaturgies are understood as processes wherein theatre artists hold themselves accountable to their communities and ancestors (including human ancestors, but also land, animals and water ways) and create innovative and culturally appropriate ways to develop new work. As this dissertation explains, when working on community, as for example Debajehmujig does on their home reserve

Wikwemikong, Elders, children, creation stories, language, the land, the water and other community members and ancestors are included in their processes. This relational process varies each time it is created depending on who is involved and its geographical specificities.

The chapter on land-based dramaturgy moves from culturally specific interactions with the land through to a land-based dramaturgy where Indigenous practitioners from various nations collaborate and negotiate Indigenous contexts (knowledges, teachings, languages, values, gestures) for artistic purposes. In this chapter I begin with my own land, which allows me to locate myself in the work, and I then transition to talk about the land of other specific Nations as the basis for individual dramaturgical structures and processes. Through the work of Guna and Rappahannock artist/activist/theorist Monique Mojica and Choctaw novelist/playwright LeAnne Howe's dramaturgical work for *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*, land-based dramaturgies expand to include Indigenous theatre artists who re-connect with Mother Earth and water ways on lands that are not their traditional territories. Land-based dramaturgy is further developed in the chapter "Listening to The Voices Within: Land-based Dramaturgy".

Similarly, place-based dramaturgy is a relational model in which Indigenous peoples negotiate across different Indigenous practices and traditions to create culturally appropriate ways of working when the group is not necessarily grounded in any one Nation's physical lands but is (usually) gathering in urban locations. Place-based is concerned with the "land-less" spaces of urban Indigenous dramaturgies, and focuses on the embodied, felt and transportable experiences that manifest during these moments of collaboration. In the chapter "Feeling, Knowing, Sharing: Lateral Love and Presencing as Place-based Dramaturgy" I share some experiences working in Toronto and Vancouver with Indigenous artists from various geographies, social and cultural backgrounds. The use of "place-based" is not meant as an

extension of land-based or even to conjure the notion of a physical geographical place, but rather describes the felt, embodied intangibility of “place” that is realized when we gather to *do the work*. The notion of place in place-based dramaturgy specifically refers to a *meeting place*, where each person in the room brings their home “place” with them to the collaboration/negotiations. In these situations, individuals are able to activate or presence knowledges, histories, bloodlines, and intergenerational experiences even when working outside of their home territories, or when their homelands have been transformed into cities. Place-based dramaturgy is an Indigenous Nation to Nation process whereby Indigenous theatre artists create sovereign exchanges between, across and within different Nations.

Referring to Indigenous critical theorists Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe) and Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene), this dissertation argues that place-based dramaturgies are meeting places of intangible, felt, or embodied realities that can be considered acts of cultural resurgence. In the chapter “Feeling, Knowing, Sharing: Lateral Love and Presencing as Place-based Dramaturgy”, I share stories of working with urban Indigenous theatre companies Full Circle: First Nations Performance and Native Earth Performing Arts as examples of resurgence politics in action. Gathering to work with Indigenous people from other communities and Nations strengthens and puts into practice individual and familial relationship building.

Glen Coulthard’s analysis of self-recognition as a self-affirming process of reclaiming Indigenous identities, practices and politics is useful when considering Indigenous dramaturgies as relational methods. I argue that the works created and produced by Indigenous theatre artists with whom I have collaborated are powerful tools in cultural revitalization and decolonization. Place-based dramaturgies create sovereign artistic spaces where experiential politics and realities

are presenced and shared during creative and collaborative processes. The term *presencing* is used throughout this dissertation in an attempt to demonstrate the embodied, relational and portable particularities of Indigenous dramaturgies. I argue that Indigenous theatre is deeply rooted in the intangible spiritual and cultural knowledges of the Indigenous practitioners involved in the work. So when gathered together in artistic collaborations, Indigenous practitioners presence themselves (their homelands, languages, teachings, creation stories and other intangible cultural realities) in the room while they work. During these collaborative situations the work of gathering and sharing experiences, knowledges and worldviews becomes the basis for good, ethical and healthy practices. It instills Indigenous dramaturgies with a uniquely important purpose that honours getting to know oneself and the others in the room as an integral process of Indigenous theatrical collaboration. People, practices and places are presenced throughout this dissertation as a way to acknowledge and honour the mobility, resilience and love for cultural knowledges that Indigenous people carry within our hearts, minds and bodies. These intangible notions are embedded and activated throughout this work as I remember and name those I have collaborated with, events I have attended and gatherings I have witnessed and participated in. The term *presencing* is a way for me to articulate self-recognition in action.

Land-based and place-based dramaturgies are similar as they focus on processes being executed by Indigenous theatre artists. The third process, community-engaged dramaturgy, differs as it considers how non-Indigenous practitioners can develop relationships to work with Indigenous theatre communities. This dissertation travels from cultural specificity through to examples of Indigenous Nation to Nation relationships, and then shifts to a more expansive understanding of relationship building that involves non-Indigenous people. Non-Indigenous

productions of Indigenous plays are still being presented with, at times, little to no consultation with Indigenous people. My primary example of community-engaged dramaturgy discusses how a group that is not entirely or primarily Indigenous can responsibly and ethically work *with* Indigenous communities and develop appropriate relationships to do so.

Through my discussion of land-based, place-based and community-engaged Relational Indigenous dramaturgies, this dissertation centers on my own role as witness/participant to various stages of dramaturgical processes. I use these dramaturgical events and theatrical gatherings as points of analysis to illustrate what I, as an Indigenous theatre practitioner and scholar, believe to be the best ways to describe and understand the processes at work. This dissertation recognizes how individual, nation-based or community-based knowledges transform the work into examples of cultural resurgence in action.

1.2 Indigenous Dramaturgies: a Place of Self-Recognition

The structures and discourses that make up the field of Canadian theatre studies originate in Eurocentric traditions that do not necessarily consider Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing. Similarly, Canadian theatre historiography often overlooks the political, artistic, and cultural importance of the Native Theatre Movement of the 1970s. Indigenous theatre historiography is not clearly mapped or neatly summarized in a book somewhere. It is alive—it is shape-shifting and developing as we continue to learn, create, and share with one another. In this introduction, I briefly situate this thesis within the historical framework of Indigenous representation on Canadian theatre stages and identify the rise of Indigenous activism in the 1960s and 1970s as the primary catalyst for a shift towards Indigenous self-determination in theatrical practices. The examples discussed in this dissertation focus on the eras following the refusal of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's introduction of the 1969 White Paper, but to begin, I

look at the ways Indigenous identities were initially constructed by non-Indigenous expressions, and note the shift towards Indigenous self-recognition. This shift has triggered new ways of thinking, creating, making and doing Indigenous theatre that are primarily about relationship-building and process. Following that, I provide a chapter-by-chapter overview of the dissertation. This introduction is intended to provide the foundational elements for the chapters to follow, situating my project within the fields of Indigenous dramaturgy, Indigenous resurgence politics and Indigenous Theatre Studies.

In the introduction to *Developing Nation: New Play Creation in English-Speaking Canada*, editor Bruce Barton discusses dramaturgy's resistance to being easily, generally defined and its dependence on individual projects. Barton explains how "dramaturgy resists the mantle of stable definition and instead insists on perpetually redefining itself in relation to its context: the people, projects, and parameters it operates upon and within" (Barton v). Those "parameters it operates upon and within" are among the differences between Indigenous dramaturgies and other types because the Indigenous body has experiential, intergenerational and spiritual realities that differ from those of non-Indigenous Canadians. Therefore, it is necessary to carve out space to discuss the authority, values and knowledge embedded within Indigenous dramaturgies. Barton does not see dramaturgy as a "one-size-fits-all" approach, but rather argues that the dramaturgical practice is created out of the relationships performed by those involved in the process (Barton v). This allows dramaturgy to be a fluid and shape-shifting way of working, one that is predicated on the bodies, knowledge and experiences of those in the room, and how they work in relationship with each other. Dramaturgy as a relational process is central to my interest in using dramaturgical events as specific areas of analysis.

Barton's *Developing Nation* includes the work of people who have directly influenced my thinking and my practice, such as Yvette Nolan (Algonquin/Irish), Monique Mojica (Guna and Rappachannock), Jerry Wasserman, Ric Knowles and others. Although I greatly appreciate this text for including the voices of Indigenous women, and making space for artists like Debajehmujig Storytellers, I still call for Canadian theatre scholars to do more to identify the inherent political and spiritual differences that Indigenous theatre artists bring to their work. In his introduction, Barton explains how the collection was made possible due to SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) funding for a large-scale project entitled "Creative Spaces: New Play Development in English-Speaking Canada" (Barton vi). After describing what is meant by "Creative Spaces"—people, contexts, duration, processes, products and support—he mentions Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles' introduction to *Staging Coyote's Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English*.

In their introduction to *Staging Coyote's Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English* (Playwrights Canada press, 2003), editors Mojica and Ric Knowles assert that "Among the things that Native theatre artists must contend with that can 'contain' their work and limit the possible evolution of new forms are material conditions, economic, organizational, and cultural, that determine which types of work are produced and which are not" (viii). Without challenging or in any way attempting to diminish the formidable obstacles that Aboriginal dramatists and practitioners encounter on a daily basis, the "organizational, processual, and professional bottles into and out of which everything must be poured" (viii) are, to a significant degree, conditions encountered by virtually *all* playwrights attempting to work within the commercial theatre industry in Canada. (Barton vi – his emphasis)

Despite a caveat at the outset of his statement, Barton does in fact diminish the formidable everyday obstacles faced by Indigenous dramatists. That Mojica and Knowles' *Staging Coyote's Dream, Vols. I and II* are the only Indigenous anthologies of Canadian theatre demonstrates the paucity of publications in the field. Indigenous works are still largely categorized as "experimental" or as "other," reflecting a lack of knowledge from mainstream

Canadian audiences, reviewers and scholars on how to fully experience Indigenous works (Mojica and Knowles *passim*). Still, at gatherings such as the Industry Series at Full Circle: First Nations Performance's annual Talking Stick Festival, we make collective proposals and calls to action from funding and artistic agencies to help us see the results that we need to develop the Indigenous performance community.

Barton also manages to overlook the long history and contemporary experiences of violence towards Indigenous peoples through his equivalence of "all dramatists in Canada" with those who experience daily discrimination across a variety of intersectional vectors. In trying to universalize the difficulties of working in Canadian theatre, Barton denies Indigenous women, two-spirit people, and male practitioners their truths of being alienated, misrepresented and virtually invisible on Canadian theatre stages until the late 1980s. In response to the Indian Act, the legacy of Residential Schools, the 60s scoop, the suicide of too many Indigenous youth, and other forms of state-sanctioned colonial violence, Indigenous peoples have resisted over 500 years of settler colonialism. In this dissertation, I look to the Indigenous theatre community to highlight the ongoing resistance to settler colonial actions that I see integrated into artistic practices and theatrical events.

In June 2017, I curated "Experiencing Indigenous Works: Developing Critical Voices" at the National Arts Centre. This was a gathering that included Jill Carter (Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi), Sylvia Cloutier (Inuk), Margo Kane (Cree-Salteaux), Monique Mojica and Muriel Miguel (Guna/Rappahannock) with the goal of discussing how to develop critical responses to Indigenous theatre that are not reliant on emotional or taste-based reactions but rooted in a critical awareness of the social, political and spiritual realities embedded in the work's process and content. We held the circle to ask questions about how to self-educate, and introduced

notions about the relational responsibility of those who have experienced Indigenous works. Specifically, I wondered, after experiencing Indigenous theatre, how do we carry and share these newly acquired knowledges and responsibilities forward with us?

I ask these questions because I believe that thinking critically holds the spectators or witnesses responsible to what they have read or seen. I have been taught that experiencing or bearing witness to something comes with responsibilities. After witnessing a performance, it is the audience member's own responsibility to be accountable to what has been shared. Here, I am reminded of a passage from *The Edward Curtis Project* by Marie Clements (Métis-Dene), where she too is asking for her audiences to think critically about how Indigenous peoples are represented and how audiences carry these representations with them, especially when they rely on and perpetuate colonial stereotypes.

ANGELINE: I didn't write the whole story.

YISKA: You wrote the facts. You wrote what you were expected to write.

Pause.

ANGELINE: Did I? I didn't write the real story...

She doesn't wait for his response.

YISKA: Ange....

ANGELINE: I wrote that an Indian father was drunk and dropped his three kids in the snow....

YISKA: He did...

ANGELINE: Did he? Or did we drop him a long time ago? I should have written that the father of those children was so young, so poor... living in a house that was so contaminated it should have been torn down.... between cardboard walls with no food, no clean water, no phone, no heat, and the only reason he decided to go out into minus-thirty-eight weather was because one of his kids was sick.... He went to get help... Do you think it was all his fault? Or maybe we all should own a little piece of it? (45)

Here, Clements is signalling the lack of responsibility on the part of non-Indigenous Canadians to hold themselves accountable to the fact that they, too, are involved in “Indigenous issues.” Today, with major buzz words like “Reconciliation” circulating, it is necessary for all Canadians to “own a little piece” of Canada’s colonial histories in order for us all to move forward in a positive way. Indigenous peoples are still living traumas initiated by Canadian settler colonialism and it is up to everyone to hold themselves accountable to these realities. I suggest that we consider the phenomenological experience of attending theatre as a call and response: I see what's happening onstage and I think about how to give back to what I have experienced. And I consider what calls to action I can take to include this new knowledge in my day-to-day life. While attending Indigenous theatre, I might ask:

1. What biases or assumptions do I repeat without realizing?
2. What are the worldviews and tools that I carry with me and how can I utilize them in this situation?
3. How can I recognize and shift the gaze and the ears that I am using when attending theatre?
4. How can I develop the opportunity to listen, learn, and act in relationship to potential cultural differences?
5. How do I deal with refusals or cultural difference when I don't recognize or understand what I see onstage?
6. How can I be accountable to what I am experiencing and do the labour of self-educating when I don't fully understand the references being made?
7. For whose sake is the work being understood or categorized?

In *The Book of Jessica* by Métis activist/author Maria Campbell and actor Linda Griffiths, Campbell asks, “How could you be political without knowing your own stories?” (36). Here, Campbell calls for everyone to activate self-in-representation by knowing who they are and

how they fit into the larger complexities of Canada's colonial heritage. Canada's ongoing condition of settler colonialism does not exclusively belong to Indigenous peoples; it belongs to the entire country.

1.3 Four Waves of Indigenous Theatrical Representations: Settler-focused to Indigenous-focused

I see Indigenous theatrical representation on Turtle Island developing within a historical framework of four waves. Settler artists who represented and appropriated Indigenous realities to best serve settler ends dominated the first two waves, whereas the third and fourth waves saw Indigenous artists taking control of how Indigenous peoples are represented. This system is presented historically but the first two waves are not strictly confined to the past since non-native misrepresentations of Indigenous people and circumstances still appear in the third and fourth waves.

During the first wave, Indigenous peoples were depicted in ways that did not accurately represent—and often actively damaged—their cultures or worldviews. A very early example of this is Marc Lescarbot's *Le Théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle France*, written in 1606, which portrays Indigenous characters in stereotypical ways. Characters like "Indian" and "Second Indian" represent widespread clichés like the "Noble Savage" or the "Wise Elder," creating conditions for active misrecognitions (Kennedy 8). First wave theatre sought to develop a New World nationalism "indigenous" to the lives of the newly settled European communities and not to the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. Robert Rogers' 1766 play *Ponteach, Or The Savages of America: A Tragedy* was the first play published in Britain about North American life by someone born in the colonies. Rogers' play describes Pontiac's Rebellion from a Eurocentric

perspective and describes the Indigenous characters as naïve victims, “noble savages,” or violent warriors. Another example of a playtext dealing with wars over land and the emergence of indigenous New World identities is Charles Mair’s 1886 play *Tecumseh*. In a paper read at the 2017 PuSh Critical Ideas Series panel called “Home, Memory, Land,” Canadian theatre scholar Heather Davis-Fisch writes,

As the entity that became known as Canadian drama emerged, in the years immediately following Confederation, the relationship between performance and colonialism was textualized, moving—to varying extents—out of performers’ bodies and onto the printed page, which allowed colonial ideologies to circulate in new ways. One example of such a work is Charles Mair’s 1886 play *Tecumseh*, a poetic drama that sympathetically staged the life—and more importantly, the tragic death—of the Indigenous leader against the backdrop of the War of 1812. Like many plays of its time, *Tecumseh* represented its protagonist as a “noble savage” and staged his death as an unavoidable consequence of progress, suggesting Indigenous extinction was a foregone conclusion. Closer to home, we might look at a drama like 1906’s *The Birthright*, written by Constance Lindsay Skinner who was arguably one of Vancouver’s, or perhaps even BC’s, first playwrights whose work received professional production. The play’s mixed-race protagonist Precious Conroy, unaware of her ancestry, falls in love with the son of the missionary couple who has raised her. Although Precious delivers a scathing indictment of the hypocrisy of colonialism, she ends up being driven to kill her white lover and destined to return to her biological inheritance. (3)

Davis-Fisch acknowledges how Canadian theatre and performance history have participated in colonizing agendas through the ongoing reproduction of Indigenous stereotypes in the name of New World nation building. Robertson Davies’ 1948 play *Hope Deferred*—about Molière being banned in New France—has an Indigenous girl named Chimène as a main character. Chimène embodies the Indian Princess stereotype, she who is willing to give up her cultural identity and community relationships to be with her white-man lover. These stereotypes and misrecognitions continued to be used by playwrights for generations, leaving Indigenous characters to be fetishized by non-Indigenous creators. In Christy Stanlake’s *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective* she explains how the conflicts between Indigenous peoples and

the new national governments inspired misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples through various forms of media, including theatre. Stanlake writes,

In acts of imperialist nostalgia, Native people were honored as romantic, brave, and spiritual, but doomed to extinction because of their “non-progressive” worldviews. However, these Indians were also “crafty” and at any time could switch from noble creatures to savage killers slaying white women and children. The savage Indian was quite popular, owing to the need for the new countries to feel secure about their gross mistreatment of Native peoples. These stereotypes of Noble/Savage for men or Princess (ready-to-die-for-her-love-of-the-white-man)/Squaw (sexually ravenous savage) for women, weave throughout American history and, in so doing, persist in media representations of Native peoples, even today (Stanlake 4).

These stereotypes perpetuated violent and dismissive attempts at representing Indigenous realities on stage. Further, Stanlake acknowledges the direct attempt made by settlers to falsely represent Indigenous peoples in order to best serve their own interests of accumulating more land, and attempting to assimilate Indigenous peoples into New World cultural practices. Stanlake writes that in both the United States and Canada, “these stereotypical limitations created characters in a national story that white Americans and Canadians told themselves about the development of their countries” (Stanlake 4). These misrecognitions of Indigenous worldviews, practices and identities in printed and performed dramas, paired with government-issued policies regarding Indigenous peoples, helped with the creation of a national Anglo-Canadian narrative that did not consider Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy.

Discriminations worsened when Prime Minister John A. Macdonald’s government implemented the Indian Act in 1876. The Indian Act made it “illegal for us to speak our language, use our drums, sing our songs, practice our ceremonies, wear traditional clothing, change any policy legally and other restrictions. This remained the law for 71 years, until these provisions were removed in the Act in 1951” (“Anamikage”). Further, “In order to avoid

American annexation and to proclaim cultural and political independence from Britain, cultural nationalists argued that Canadians needed to develop a distinct cultural identity” (Davis-Fisch 4). Calls for “indigenous” Canadian culture were almost entirely separated from actual Indigenous peoples or cultures. The first wave is about “systematic government-enforced removal, isolation, eradication and assimilation of [Indigenous] cultures, so that white citizens could obtain more land, wealth and rights as the new countries grew” (Stanlake 4). First wave theatre portrayed Indigenous characters in non-progressive ways in order to control the discourse around nation-building identities. These values and stereotypes, created and performed by dominant Eurocentric discourses, normalized and perpetuated colonial relationships of power over Indigenous identities and bodies. Theatrical creations reproduced colonial relationships of power wherein Indigenous realities were minimized and manipulated into identities in which Indigenous peoples did not recognize themselves.

In the second wave, non-native scholars and artists began to research Indigenous identity, culture, and spirituality and started to reflect that research in their writing. The second wave is where post-colonial narratives emerge with non-Indigenous artists and scholars writing about Indigenous realities. The main critique leveled at second-wave writing is that authors distorted people or events in order to tell emotionally effective stories or to make political points, often leading to an overemphasis on victimization.

George Ryga’s *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967) epitomizes second-wave writing, reflecting non-Indigenous perceptions of Indigenous realities. Initial performances of this play included a few Indigenous actors (Chief Dan George, August Schellenberg, Margo Kane), but only Chief Dan George was briefly involved in character or plot development. *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* had the potential to stimulate critical thought about urban Indigenous social issues and

to expose the effects of settler colonialism, urbanization, and forced conversion of Indigenous peoples. Instead, by setting the bulk of the play in courtrooms and by having it culminate in Rita Joe's violent murder, Ryga perpetuates urban Indigenous stereotypes and themes of victimization that characterize second-wave writing. Theatre historians and scholars might reconsider Ryga's play today by contextualizing it in relation to the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls crisis, specifically considering Canada's insufficient judicial and political action in resolving this crisis, and in relation to the intergenerational effects of settler colonialism on Indigenous peoples.

In large part, second-wave writing can be understood as non-native writers speaking for and about Indigenous identities and circumstances. Non-natives writing about Indigenous events and realities are not limited to a distant past. As this dissertation later examines, non-Indigenous playwright Colleen Murphy wrote *Pig Girl* while working as playwright-in-residence at the University of Alberta between 2013 and 2015. Murphy's play is a violent telling of real-life events surrounding the murders of Indigenous women by pig farmer Robert Pickton. Murphy wrote this play without consulting friends and families of those affected by the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls crisis, anti-violence community organizers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, or organizations like the Walking With Our Sisters [WWOS] National Collective. I address later in this dissertation how, instead of connecting and working with Indigenous communities, Murphy felt she had artistic licence to represent these realities on behalf of Indigenous women and their families. Even though Indigenous communities reached out to the producing team and asked them to reconsider this production, they refused to listen. This highlights the need for community-specific Indigenous input during both the creation and rehearsal processes. Fortunately, Indigenous playwrights/activists/theorists like Margo Kane

(Cree-Salteaux), Monique Mojica (Guna and Rappahannock), Floyd Favel (Cree), Marie Clements (Dene-Métis), Yvette Nolan (Algonquin), and Kevin Loring (Nlaka'pamux) are challenging the stereotypes that linger from first- and second-wave writings. Indigenous theatre practitioners are “reclaiming identities, revising history, revisiting oral traditions, and healing Indigenous communities” (Stanlake 21). While first- and second-wave writings are essentially settler representations of Indigenous arts, cultures, and lives, third- and fourth-wave writings exemplify Indigenous self-representation and sovereignty. This, I argue, is particularly achieved through dramaturgical processes that are informed by Indigenous protocol, experiences, and worldviews.

In Glen Coulthard’s book *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* he articulates Canadian settler-colonialism as an ongoing structure that dispossesses “Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority” (Coulthard 25). He uses Martinique-born Afro-Caribbean revolutionary theorist Frantz Fanon to demonstrate how the power dynamics embedded in the colonial project are activated when the colonized people recognize themselves, either implicitly or explicitly, through the discourses of the colonizer instead of through their own interpretations of self (Coulthard 25). In the case of Canadian theatre, this is seen when Indigenous (or non-Indigenous) actors play stereotypical Indigenous characters, and embody the roles of victim or “noble savage” instead of having creative control and autonomy over the stories being told. The third wave initiates a shift from Indigenous artists playing roles written by non-Indigenous artists to a self-recognition where they begin to create a diverse body of theatrical training, pedagogy, processes and works. The third wave marks a shift where Indigenous theatre artists “challenge the normative value of the dominant, hierarchical ways in which recognition is conceived and performed, particularly those that privilege the state

as a recognising agent” (Balaton-Chrimes and Stead 2).

Coulthard’s book provides examples describing the “individual and collective acts of *self-recognition* that colonized populations often engage in to empower themselves, instead of relying too heavily on the colonial state and society to do this work for them” (Coulthard 131). This is the shift seen in the third wave where Indigenous artists and activists rise to create self-determining and autonomous theatrical frameworks and artistic expressions. In doing so, Indigenous theatre artists “purge themselves of the internalized effects of systemic racism and colonial violence by rejecting assimilation and instead affirm the worth of their own identity-related differences” (Coulthard 131). What I argue with this wave system is that the third and fourth waves are self-determining and political manifestations of Indigenous resistance through theatre. As Indigenous theatre artists become more involved in the creation processes, training, style and production of theatrical works, they create anti-colonial theatre structures that reflect self-affirmative practices of cultural resurgence. The third and fourth waves “create alternative forms of political relationality that do not privilege a healing relationship between colonised and coloniser, but instead seek to build solidarity within the subaltern group” (Balaton-Chrimes and Stead 2).

Examples of third-wave writing begin to appear in the early 1970s with the arrival of the politically charged Native Theatre Movement. Influenced by socio-political movements of that time, Indigenous artists began to use their bodies and voices to manifest the rise of an Indigenous political nationalism on contemporary stages. “In addition to reclaiming representations of Native peoples’ individual identities, many [Indigenous] plays revise history to honor the various ways Native people have survived European colonization of the Americas and international efforts to eradicate Native American cultures” (Stanlake 21). The connection between the arrival

of a professional Indigenous theatre in Canada and the Indigenous political movements in the United States and in Canada of the 1960s and 1970s is an area that has yet to be given proper scholarly attention. According to Stanlake,

Throughout Native American communities of the 1960s, this expression of Native identities derived largely from the Red Power Movement, in which intertribal organizations and activities worked both to reclaim Native representations and to draw public attention to issues affecting Native Americans. One of the most famous and audacious examples of this was the eighteen-month occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1969 by Native American activists whose demonstrations successfully educated the general public about federal government's treatment of Native peoples, while also visibly protesting US policies that had appropriated Native lands. (8)

Although Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism has been actively in play since initial contact, the late 1960s and 1970s marked a contemporary resurgence of Indigenous resilience across Turtle Island. Coulthard explains that “although Indigenous people and communities have always found ways to individually and collectively resist these oppressive policies and practices, it was not until the tumultuous political climate of Red Power activism in the 1960s and 70s that policies geared towards the recognition and so-called ‘reconciliation’ of Native land and political grievances with state sovereignty began to appear” (Coulthard 4). In the experimental theatre movements of the 1970s artists found alternative ways to express themselves performatively that distanced their work from various classical and modern western theatrical models. Combined with the political motivations born of the Indigenous realities of the time, I believe Indigenous activists and artists lent their experiences to theatre as a way to further resist settler colonialism and to reclaim Indigenous self-presentation through embodied action.

I am inspired to use the term Native Theatre Movement from reading Cree theatre practitioner and educator Carol Greyeyes’ article, “On the Trail of Native Theatre.” Greyeyes traces her own artistic journey alongside the emergence of Native theatre in Canada, framing the

theatrical movement as a political act of cultural resurgence: “At the time Canadian Native Theatre was beginning to emerge, the standard definition of theatre had become so codified that any type of cultural expression or performance that didn’t fit within those narrow parameters was not considered real theatre in the Eurocentric western tradition of theatre” (Greyeyes 99). Greyeyes points out that, although Indigenous characters appeared on stage in professional theatre productions throughout the twentieth century, it was not until the mid-1970s - early 1980s that Indigenous theatre practitioners were being cast in or creating those roles. The Native Theatre Movement initiated the shift to a “by us, for us” model. Greyeyes highlights its emergence alongside social and political movements led by Indigenous activists across Turtle Island. She connects the spiritual and cultural reclaiming being done by political activists with the need to self-represent within Indigenous artistic communities.

The emergence and development of Native theatre, the need to have “Indians onstage,” in many ways reflected the larger socio-political changes that were happening in the country and all across North America. Native Canadians were gaining more rights and freedoms and were no longer invisible, ignored, or shut away on reservations and in isolated communities. (100)

Motivations to develop the Native Theatre Movement include Indigenous peoples’ political resistance to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s 1969 attempt to implement The White Paper, the 1972 founding of the Association for Native Development in the Performing & Visual Arts (ANDPVA), and the 1974 creation of the Native Theatre School (“Center for Indigenous Theatre”). Within the third wave of Indigenous theatre, practitioners developed training facilities, performance spaces and organizations that fueled both political and artistic agendas for self-representation and self-determination. Plays written by Indigenous peoples in the 1970s include “*The Dress* (1970) by Nona Benedict (Mohawk), performed in high schools in the seventies;

Survival in the South by Minnie Aodla Freeman (Inuit), performed at the Dominion Drama Festival in 1971; and *Wasawkachack* by Duke Redbird (Ojibway), produced by Pendulum Theatre in Montreal in 1974” (Schafer 21).

The Native Theatre Movement emerged during the rise of Indigenous refusal initiated by the attempted delivery of the Trudeau/Chrétien 1969 White Paper. The White Paper proposed abolishing The Indian Act and at the same time sweeping aside Indian Status and Indigenous land rights in order to integrate Indigenous peoples into the Canadian Mosaic. The White Paper was recommended before the federal government made amendments to many discriminatory pieces of legislation like adding the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), Section 35, to the Constitution Act, or the Bill-C31 amendment to the Indian Act. It was also before they issued a formal apology to Indigenous people for the violence of the residential school system, and before initiating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In the late Secwepemc activist and leader Arthur Manuel’s book *Unsettling Canada* he acknowledges that although the National Indian Brotherhood, forerunner of the Assembly of First Nations, was founded in the 1950s, it was in the early 1970s that tighter organization and structure developed as Indigenous folks across Turtle Island were refusing this colonial legislation (Manuel *passim*). According to Manuel, the White Paper “threatened our lands, and our essence, significance and worth as Indigenous peoples” (Manuel 33). Coulthard explains,

Instead of serving as a bridge to passive assimilation, the White Paper inaugurated an unprecedented degree of pan-Indian assertiveness and political mobilization. The National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) issued the following response to the federal government’s proposed initiative: “We view this as a policy designed to divest us of our Aboriginal... rights. If we accept this policy, and in the process lose our rights and our lands, we become willing partners in cultural genocide. This we cannot do.” Although designed as a once-and-for-all solution to Canada’s so-called “Indian Problem”, the White Paper instead became a central catalyst around which the contemporary Indigenous self-determination movement coalesced, “launching it into

a determined [defense] of a unique cultural heritage and identity.” The sheer magnitude of First Nations’ resistance to the White Paper proposal forced the federal government to formally shelve the document on March 17, 1971. (5)

The White Paper was not only blocked by Indigenous resistance but was countered with the Red Paper. The Indian Association of Alberta, with Harold Cardinal (Cree) as a leading figure, publically rejected the White Paper in the creation of their document Citizens Plus, which became known as the Red Paper¹. The Red Paper demanded that no changes be made to the Indian Act without the consultation and consent of Indigenous people. The call for self-determination and self-governance was its agenda. The Red Paper is well known for the way it was delivered to the prime minister and the full cabinet. Arthur Manuel describes how the delivery was accompanied by drumming and singing, which was new to Parliament at the time (Manuel 34). In June 1970, representatives of The Indian Association of Alberta, and other Indigenous community members, Elders and Chiefs had created a counter-proposal for Trudeau and Chrétien but they were told that the White Paper was a done deal, and that Chrétien would not meet with them. The leaders went to one of their allies in the Ottawa bureaucracies, Walter Rudnicki. Rudnicki told the group that they could not meet with Trudeau because he was in New Zealand meeting with the Maori. After seeing images of Trudeau on the front pages of local Ottawa newspapers participating in ceremony with the Maori, Rudnicki contacted other ministers and members of parliament to probe them to get Trudeau to meet with this group of Indigenous community members. He asked them to consider how it would look if Trudeau was seen supporting and working with the Maori, and then coming back to Canada and refusing to meet with the Indigenous leaders and communities of this land. After speaking with various members

¹ Visit Harold Cardinal’s book *The Unjust Society* and the CBC Documentary *Red Paper/White Paper* for more information on the Red Paper. For the purpose of this chapter, I focus on the embodied politics seen in the refusal of the White Paper and the delivery of the Red Paper.

of Parliament, Trudeau agreed to a meeting (“Red Paper/White Paper”).

Rudnicki helped the group prepare for their meeting with Trudeau in suggesting that they “put on a show” (“Red Paper/White Paper”). He suggested that they fill the meeting room with community members, Chiefs and supporters— they ended up with about 500 people in the room. Norman Yellowbird (Cree) sang and drummed as a part of their presentation. The group was rehearsed. They compared the White Paper to the Red Paper in reading from the first and countering with the latter. The White Paper was refused and returned to Trudeau. Then, they presented Trudeau with the Red Paper, and he took it (“Red Paper/White Paper”).

There, at the most critical and powerful moment of Indigenous resistance—a performance happens. I’m connecting this moment to the third wave as I think about the planning, the dramaturgy, that went into deciding how the Red Paper would be delivered: which songs they would sing, and who would enter the action when. In this example, I am reminded of the ways performance is used to make political points, to claim space and to demand change.

Additionally, in “A History of Native American Drama” Christy Stanlake provides an excellent resource detailing the organizations and “events that created networks of Native American theatre artists who continue to shape Native drama today” (Stanlake 8). In the United States in 1962, the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) was founded in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for Indigenous students to receive a formal arts education inspired by and directly related to Indigenous creative practices and worldviews (Stanlake 8). Other influential companies and organizations were subsequently founded by Indigenous peoples from different nations who all carried the same political interest of self-determination through the arts. These include the Native American Theater Ensemble (NATE), Bruce King, Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa/Delaware), the American Indian Dance Theatre, and HOOP (Honoring Our Origins and

People through Native Theatre, Education and Community Development) (Stanlake 8-9).

During this same period, organizations devoted to developing Indigenous performative arts began to appear in Canada. 1972 marks the founding of the Association for Native Development in the Performing & Visual Arts (ANDPVA). ANDPVA, founded by the late James H. Buller, is the oldest Indigenous arts service organization supporting Indigenous artists across Canada. Later, “in 1974, James Buller founded the Native Theatre School. This original four-week program was created based on his belief that with a viable Aboriginal theatre school in place, Aboriginal actors, playwrights and directors would have a forum for exploration and exchange” (“About CIT”). The Native Theatre School eventually became the Centre for Indigenous Theatre (CIT) and still offers a three-year full-time training program. CIT develops “contemporary performance skills from a distinctively Indigenous cultural foundation” (“About CIT”). The students receive interdisciplinary training from experienced Indigenous artists and practitioners, “which allows students and working actors to train together, adding the all important mentoring component to the curriculum” (“About CIT”). Founding members included Shirley Cheechoo (Cree), Gary Farmer, Monique Mojica and Tomson and Rene Highway (Cree). Indigenous dramaturgies and theatrical training continue to gather Indigenous peoples together from different nations and communities to develop the complexities and beauty of contemporary Indigenous theatre.

Spiderwoman Theater, founded by Muriel Miguel (Guna and Rappahannock) in 1976, is a prime example of an Indigenous theatre collective whose form and content explore Indigenous identities, resistances and politics. Muriel Miguel along with her sisters, Gloria Miguel and Lisa Mayo (Guna and Rappahannock), have created and performed feminist-centered works that “came from a Native perspective and emphasized Native issues” (Schafer 49).

Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi scholar artist Jill Carter's PhD Dissertation, "Repairing the Web: Spiderwoman's Children Staging the New Human Being," focuses on Spiderwoman Theater's process of Storyweaving. Storyweaving is a method for translating the artist's personal experiences, dreams, and other embodied realities into threads for new play development. Muriel Miguel explains,

It was during the AIM [American Indian Movement] and I realized how angry I was and I tried to identify it. It was very hard trying to understand my anger that would snap out of nowhere. There was this kind of frustration in walking down the street and being angry at men. I really had to examine it or get killed before it killed me. (Carter "Repairing the Web" 68)

Spiderwoman Theater spoke openly about violence against Indigenous women in both domestic and political situations. Their processes activated their bodies and created spaces for self-recognition in their art making, while simultaneously making visible the political urgencies in the work of Indigenous female theatre practitioners. Carter's dissertation also traces Spiderwoman Theater's influence on Monique Mojica's theatrical practice. Mojica is the niece of Muriel Miguel and daughter of Gloria Miguel, and she has been living and working in Canada since the early 1980s. Her practices are discussed throughout this dissertation as examples of dramaturgical processes and methods that place Indigenous knowledges and experiences at the center of her work.

Indigenous theatre continued to develop throughout the 1970s and 1980s as Indigenous artists grouped together and made their self-affirming voices, stories, and practices heard. 1982 is a significant year for the Indigenous theatre community. In *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture*, Yvette Nolan compares the work of Métis activist/artist Maria Campbell in the play *Jessica* with the political vision of iconic Métis leader Louis Riel. She writes,

In 1982, ninety-seven years after Louis Riel famously said “My people shall sleep for a hundred years and when they awake it will be the artists who give them back their spirit,” the first version of *Jessica*, a play created by Maria Campbell, Linda Griffiths, and Paul Thompson was produced in Saskatoon at 25th Street Theatre. (21)

Nolan acknowledges this play as a significant moment in Indigenous theatre in many ways. *The Book of Jessica* reproduces selected conversations between Campbell and Griffiths about the difficulties in creating, developing and producing a play influenced by real life events in Campbell’s life. Their documented collaboration speaks to relationships around spirituality, protocol and politics embedded in Indigenous theatre-making and the challenges of trying to devise a way of working between non-Indigenous and Indigenous artists. *The Book of Jessica* also connects Indigenous politics and spirituality to theatre as Maria Campbell, a feminist Métis activist, looks to theatre to share her stories. This collaboration highlights the potential difficulties with Indigenous and non-Indigenous artistic collaborations if protocol and relationships are not respected.

Politically, between 1980 and 1982, Indigenous activists, led by George Manuel (Secwepemc), then president of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, were resisting the lack of recognition of Aboriginal rights in the planned patriation of the Canadian constitution by the Trudeau government (“Constitution Express”). Under Manuel’s leadership, people from the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Indigenous women, men, and Elders “chartered two trains from Vancouver that eventually carried approximately one thousand people to Ottawa to publicize concerns that Aboriginal rights would be abolished in the proposed Canadian Constitution” (“Constitution Express”). This peaceful act of resistance is known as the Constitution Express. The Constitution Express picked up Indigenous peoples along the way to Ottawa, many of whom left their jobs to stand for the cause, creating a stronger Indigenous political community and a

sense of Indigenous nationalism. “When this large-scale peaceful demonstration did not initially alter the Trudeau government’s position, delegations continued on to the United Nations in New York, and then to Europe to spread their message to an international audience” (“Constitution Express”). By 1982, “after extended negotiations with Aboriginal leaders, the federal government agreed to the demands of Aboriginal organizations. Section 35 was added to the Canadian Constitution to specifically recognize and affirm Aboriginal and treaty rights” (“Constitution Express”).

It was also in 1982 that Carol Greyeyes attended the World Assembly of First Nations. I see a connection between the political movement of the Constitution Express and the mirrored political gatherings for self-determination in theatre arts which are indicative of the third wave of Indigenous Theatre. In “On the Trail of Native Theatre” Greyeyes writes,

In the summer of 1982 the World Assembly of First Nations (WAFN) was held in Fort Qu’Appelle. This gathering of Indigenous people from across the planet, the largest event of its kind ever seen in the province, demonstrated this new visibility. Not only did it change perceptions of the general population, it had a powerful impact on the psyche of those, like me, who had never attended such an event. (100)

After the Constitution Express travelled to New York and to Europe, international attention was focused on the resilience of these Indigenous activists. Perhaps inspired by the grassroots movement of the Constitution Express, Indigenous people looked to the performing arts as a way to share their stories and experiences with other Indigenous people politically involved and aware of the Indigenous nationalist movement.

Playwright Drew Hayden Taylor from Curve Lake First Nation writes that Native Earth Performing Arts “was formed by a loose group of artistic friends, urban Indians who wanted to act. The company functioned as a collective... There was no overall structure to the company, no artistic director, no administer, no core funding, just a room at the Toronto Native Friendship

Centre and an occasional show” (Taylor 3). As described by Taylor, the original formation of Native Earth Performing Arts in the early 1980s, detailed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, was initiated on a grassroots level during a time when Indigenous activism was highly visible. Indigenous political agency standing up against settler colonialism fueled an Indigenous nationalism that radicalized a generation of artists. I see Indigenous theatre as a revitalization of Indigenous identities, complex ideas and cultural practices through creative performance projects that are largely influenced by the political activism of the 1970s and 1980s. Because of the groundwork laid by these founding artists, we see Indigenous practitioners consciously privilege and politicize Indigenous ways of knowing in contemporary theatre. The third wave is ongoing today and occurs in conjunction with the fourth wave. The primary difference between the two is that the fourth wave marks the arrival of Indigenous critical reflection on creative practice and performance.

Indigenous people are producing a tremendous amount of work, on urban and community stages, in public spaces and art galleries, which foregrounds and re-evaluates questions of aesthetics, performance, and reception. Simultaneously, in the fourth wave, Indigenous practitioners and scholars are expanding Indigenous theatre studies into a distinct critical field. This is clearly seen in Yvette Nolan’s book *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* and her anthology *Performing Indigeneity* (co-edited with Ric Knowles), which demonstrate the diverse ways in which Indigenous theatre practitioners have been reclaiming creative and spiritual practices in order to articulate culturally specific worldviews and discourses. The fourth wave is where I enter as a mixed Algonquin Anishinaabe with settler Canadian ancestry who is able to write a dissertation on Indigenous dramaturgies predominantly through my own experiences as a practitioner and scholar. Throughout this dissertation I speak about gatherings,

workshops and events that exemplify how we live out Indigenous values and knowledge systems in contemporary theatrical situations. Sitting in a circle to have conversations, instead of sitting in classroom rows and hearing a presentation, is a useful way to trigger dynamic and productive responses intended to create Indigenous-focused places. Through the various events and experiences that I describe in this dissertation, I argue that the Indigenous dramaturgical processes that I have been involved in differ from other theatrical or team building processes because they are rooted in principles of self-recognition and ways of thinking and doing Indigenous theatre focused on the process and sovereignty of the Indigenous peoples involved in the work. The fourth wave is currently flowing strong and this dissertation highlights some of the practices flourishing within it.

In developing this model in which I delineate four waves of Indigenous theatrical representation, I have demonstrated a distinct shift away from settler depictions of Indigenous characters and realities toward a politically charged arrival at Indigenous self-representation. Whereas first- and second-wave writings include little to no direct Indigenous consultation, third- and fourth-wave works epitomize autonomous modes of creation and expression controlled by Indigenous practitioners. The emergence of Indigenous dramaturgies is of particular importance because culturally specific dramaturgies allow writers to create fictional worlds that work in relationship with Indigenous knowledges, worldviews, experiences, and futures. With devotion to the creation and wider exposure of Native theatre, Indigenous artists have begun to generate works that they believe will better reflect their artistic goals and political interests.

1.4 Chapter Summaries. Collaboration *is* the Work

This dissertation is divided into six chapters – an introduction and conclusion, as well as one chapter describing key theories and methodology, one chapter discussing dramaturgy within the rehearsal process and two chapters focusing on relationship building that supports new play development. Within the three central chapters I share some of the work I do as a dramaturg and introduce the methods I am developing while doing so. The principal question that guides my research asks: do Indigenous dramaturgies differ from others because of the political and cultural realities that Indigenous practitioners carry in our bodies and hearts? While exploring this question, I also ask how the relationships between Indigenous worldviews and politics, and their manifestations in theatrical activities and theory, create models that can unprivilege Western theatrical structures. This may be achieved, I argue, through the creation and use of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies: land-based, place-based and community-engaged as anti-colonial dramaturgical strategies. Through my methodological framework of witnessing as research, I describe my involvement in selected dramaturgical workshops or gatherings to ask how Relational Indigenous Dramaturgies exemplify resurgence theories in practice.

In these relationship-based models, I suggest that Indigenous practitioners are creating theatrical works that are particular to their community's or nation's belief systems, and that this manifests itself in their work through the use of body, artistic processes, and connection to their awareness of self in relation to self, others and geographical places. When not everyone involved is Indigenous, the model necessarily shifts and bridges are built to support a new way of working. The definitions and details of these processes are still developing and grow with every project I complete. This dissertation focuses on land-based dramaturgy, place-based dramaturgy and community-engaged dramaturgy as examples of Relational Indigenous dramaturgical

strategies that acknowledge Indigenous politics, values and knowledge as essential tools for new play development and rehearsal processes. Although they are presented as separate models, I do believe that these methods overlap and work in relationship with one another.

The chapter “Listening to The Voices Within: Land-based Dramaturgy” looks at particular dramaturgical processes that enable practitioners to work in relationship with their homelands and with the lands they call home. In this chapter I discuss Kevin Loring’s (Nlaka’pamux) work with Savage Society’s Sounds of the Land project, Debajehmujig’s The Four Directions Creation Process and Monique Mojica (Guna and Rappahannock) and LeAnne Howe’s (Choctaw) dramaturgical process for the play *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*. I consider land-based dramaturgy as a theatre making process whereby individuals or communities look to the land for inspiration, and are directly influenced by experiences on the land, stories of the land, or knowledge derived from being on the land. Land-based dramaturgy offers tangible examples of how Indigenous practitioners are developing processes to keep them connected to natural laws and homelands.

In the next chapter, “Feeling, Knowing, Sharing: Lateral Love and Presencing as Place-based Dramaturgy,” I discuss my experiences working with urban Indigenous theatre companies Full Circle: First Nations Performance and Native Earth Performing Arts. In this chapter I provide illustrations of the training I received through Full Circle: First Nations Performance’s Ensemble Program. Through the relationships I developed working with Full Circle: First Nations Performance, I also had the opportunity to work as a dramaturg at Native Earth Performing Arts’ Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival in November 2016. Theoretically, this chapter expands Glen Coulthard’s ethical methodology of grounded normativity to acknowledge how Indigenous thought and worldview are grounded in the everyday political and artistic

actions of Indigenous peoples, thereby differing our modes of expression from non-Indigenous practices. I also speak to the artistic mobility present in collaborations that allow Indigenous practitioners to create nonlinear and boundary-blurring places while working together, where protocol, personal experiences, and knowledges carried in the body are shared with the collective, and then carried forward with all those involved. In this chapter I use the notions of presencing and Kippmoojikewin—“the things we carry with us”—to describe the various relationships I experienced while working at the Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival.

In the chapter “Community-engaged Dramaturgy: Simon Fraser University’s *An Encounter with The Unnatural and Accidental Women*,” I share my experiences working on Simon Fraser University’s 2015 mainstage student production of a slightly edited version of Marie Clements’ *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, featuring an all non-Indigenous student cast. I discuss the difficulties working on a university-level production with a non-Indigenous cast and director on a piece that is deeply rooted in Indigenous spirituality, socio-political realities and colonial violence. I argue that in developing a community-engaged dramaturgical process, we reconfigured the production from the potential of replicating second-wave narratives of victimization and white savior discourses into an encounter with a deeply politically nuanced and difficult text. Community-engaged dramaturgy is a useful process to consider when the cast and director, for example, are non-Indigenous. Specifically targeting training institutions that are interested in producing a play by an Indigenous playwright with a non-Indigenous cast, this chapter speaks to my experiences of relationship building with local Indigenous artists, scholars and community members who came in and out of the rehearsal process and describes how their presence ultimately changed the aesthetics of the production.

The conclusion summarizes the previous chapters and looks at Marie Clements' *The Edward Curtis Project* as an example that does not easily fit into one of the dramaturgical methods described throughout this dissertation. I acknowledge that these methods are not the only ways of working, but they have been useful in my experiences and I find them productive examples of how to elucidate the personal and fluidity of the fourth wave, or what I call Relational Indigenous dramaturgies.

I selected these particular examples to respect the relational particularities of the Indigenous research paradigm that provides the methodological framework of this dissertation: witnessing as research. I am able to speak to the work because I have been involved with or directly impacted by it. Here, my own experiences are central to this dissertation as I advocate for relationship-based dramaturgical models. As an ensemble member at Full Circle: First Nations Performance, I have relationships to uphold and maintain with my fellow ensemble members as well as the resources of seeing and working on Full Circle: First Nations Performance's projects. I want to give back to my relationship with Full Circle by including the work of the company in academic scholarship and sharing the information I've experienced and studied with the artistic Indigenous community with which I am directly in relation. Further, this allows for an embodied theoretical praxis as I will be describing and analyzing processes and performances with which I have been directly involved.

Chapter 2: Key Theories and Methods. Presencing the Ancestors is the Work

*This was not a protest. This was not a demonstration. This was a quiet, collective act of resurgence. It was a mobilization and it was political because it was a reminder. It was a reminder that although we are collectively unseen in the city of Peterborough, when we come together with one mind and one heart we can transform our land and our city into a decolonized space and place of resurgence, even if it is only for a brief amount of time. – Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 12*

In the introduction to their edited volume of plays, *Staging Coyote's Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English*, Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles explain that the notion of “staging Coyote’s dream” is an attempt to acknowledge the co-existence of the spirit world with the present and linear living world: “the title invokes the dream world, that realm of intangible reality in which the ethereal and the material coexist and are co-extensive” (Mojica and Knowles iii). Many Indigenous artists use Coyote, Nanabush, the trickster— this mythical figure— to reflect the complexities of what it means to be an Indigenous person in contemporary society. Knowles and Mojica go on to say, “Coyote’s dream opens up the realm of possibilities, gives permission to Native theatre artists themselves to dream, and to use theatre to materialize that dream—to envision, to give body and form to the unseeable and/or the differently seen” (Mojica and Knowles iii). Mojica and Knowles are speaking about theatre’s ability to create spaces of self-recognition and demonstrate the necessity for practitioners to embody spiritual situations and epistemologies through their contemporary artistic practices. They also acknowledge that the inherent cultural, spiritual and lived aspects of Indigenous dramaturgies are different from other forms of contemporary Canadian theatre practice. The authors advocate that this sense of theatrical autonomous self-recognition is “extraordinarily important, because so much of Native peoples’ experience today is devaluated and invalidated, to the degree that many Native people find it difficult not to invalidate themselves” (Mojica and Knowles iii).

Mojica and Knowles remind readers that in re-connecting with stories, and returning to cultural elements like language, memories and embodied experiences, Indigenous theatre practitioners are able to re-define how they see themselves. And not only re-define but live out realities that are not cognitively controlled by non-Indigenous worldview and ideology. In developing relationships, reconnecting with cultural knowledges, community building and outreach, Indigenous dramaturgies exert moments of Indigenous resurgence. Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe artist/activist/scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson concurs: “when resistance is defined solely as large-scale political mobilization, we miss much of what has kept our languages, cultures and systems of governance alive. We have those things today because our Ancestors often acted within the family unit to physically survive, to pass on what they could to their children, to occupy and use our lands as we always had. This, in and of itself, tells me a lot about how to build Indigenous renaissance and resurgence” (Simpson *Dancing* 16). Relational Indigenous dramaturgies are artistic processes that allow Indigenous theatre practitioners the space and time to articulate ways of working that best represent their artistic, cultural and political goals.

Simpson’s book *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back* politicizes Anishinaabeg thought and discusses how creation stories, language and traditional knowledges are being used in contemporary practices to create spaces for cultural resurgence. *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back* is an example of nation-culture based resurgence as she engages with Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe creation stories, dialect and geographical specificities. Simpson explains that she has been careful throughout the book not to define ‘resurgence’ as it is her hope that readers will “take the concepts and ideas presented in this book, return to their own communities, teachings, languages and elders or knowledge holders and to engage in a process where they figure out what

‘resurgence’ means to them, and to their collective communities” (Simpson *Dancing* 25). This allows for Anishinaabeg from different communities, urban Anishinaabeg and other Indigenous nations to look to *Dancing On Our Turtle’s Back* to build their own resurgence practices. I will be using the strategies and teachings proposed by Simpson in her book to discuss Relational Indigenous dramaturgies as resurgence. Specifically when speaking of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies, resurgence is seen in the deliberate acts of turning away from western or dominant theatre practices and instead, looks to Indigenous practices, structures and knowledges as starting points or artistic inspiration. Her exploration of the importance of embodied practice, and of living knowledges and teachings in order to fully understand them, is key to articulating the particularities of Relational Indigenous dramaturgical processes.

In the first chapter of her book, “Nishnaabeg Resurgence: Stories from Within,” Simpson describes an event in 2009 where she and other Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg walked through the streets of Peterborough, Ontario on National Aboriginal Day. Simpson describes the feeling of reclaiming the streets through the gathering of her community, walking, singing and drumming in “the city streets, streets where [they] had all indirectly, or directly, experienced the violence of colonialism, dispossession and desperation at one time or another” (Simpson 11). Simpson introduces the fundamental notion of resurgence as gathering with shared interest to better serve self and community. She explains,

But that day, we didn’t have any *want*. We were not seeking recognition or asking for rights. We were not trying to fit into Canada. We were celebrating our nation on our lands in the spirit of joy, exuberance and individual expression... This was not a protest. This was not a demonstration. This was a quiet, collective act of resurgence. It was a mobilization and it was political because it was a reminder. It was a reminder that although we are collectively unseen in the city of Peterborough, when we come together with one mind and one heart we can transform our land and our city into a decolonized space and place of resurgence, even if it is only for a brief amount of time. It was a reminder of everything good about our traditions, our culture, our songs, dances and

performances. It was a celebration of our resistance, a celebration that after everything, we are still here. (12)

Simpson's story expresses resurgence as both individual and collective acts of embodied mobilizations of Indigenous presence and sensibility. She describes this gathering, and this liminal or temporary space, as resurgence because it is focused on the Indigenous bodies, language and performative actions executed by those marching. As Simpson writes, "when we come together with one mind and one heart we can transform our land and our city into a decolonized space and a place of resurgence even if it is only for a brief amount a time" (Simpson *Dancing* 11). This is how I understand land-based, place-based and community-engaged dramaturgies to function, and where I see their purpose differing from other theatrical practices. These theatrical practices are political because we are now controlling and protecting our own cultural values through the work that we are doing. Throughout this dissertation I use the paradigm of resurgence to discuss how selected Indigenous theatre artists are overcoming the marginalization of their works and taking control over redefining the terms and futures of Indigenous theatre on Turtle Island.

2.1 Existence as Resistance: Relational Indigenous Dramaturgies as Resurgence Politics

As an Indigenous theatre scholar and practitioner, I have been propelled by my conviction that Indigenous theatre in Canada, and the scholarship that it collects, needs to look towards Indigenous authors and their practices to more fully understand Indigenous theatre-making and its analysis. This is done through creating space for suggestive, not prescriptive, ways to engage with contemporary Indigenous dramaturgies and their scholarship. Inspired by developments seen in other disciplines, particularly in literature, gender studies and political science, Indigenous scholars have created critical theories and approaches that derive from their

relationships with ancestral and community knowledge systems, languages, stories and connections to the land. Here, I am referring to resurgence theories like those of Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe artist/activist/scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, Yellowknives Dene activist scholar Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin White Masks*, Mohawk activist scholar Audra Simpson's book *Mohawk Interruptus* and various literary anthologies like Daniel Heath Justice's *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* and Craig S. Womack's *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*. Further, Lee Maracle's (Stó:lō) *I Am Woman* exemplifies an Indigenous feminist perspective that foregrounds the heart, mind and personal experience as a way to navigate academic spaces. Within these and other works, Indigenous scholars provide examples of how working within our cultures and histories, and with our authors, enriches the respective fields in which we work.

Resurgence theories are still very much rooted in political theory and do not look to art as much as they should. This dissertation locates my analysis at the intersection of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies and Indigenous resurgence politics. In this chapter, I introduce Indigenous resurgence theories that influence the thinking and development of the next three chapters of this dissertation and describe my methodological framework of witnessing as research. I argue that Indigenous theatre practitioners are currently working in ways that embody political iterations of self-recognition and resurgence. I identify key concepts articulated by artist/theorists Monique Mojica (Guna and Rappahannock) and Floyd Favel (Cree) and situate their dramaturgical processes, as well as my own, as examples of Indigenous resurgence theories in action. Mojica's processes exemplify Guna-specific aesthetics and relationships, but her models and ways of working are applicable to other Indigenous people interested in creating community-specific practices. This relational approach, which looks to Indigenous self and

knowledges for artistic starting points, is clearly articulated in Floyd Favel's theories on Native Performance Culture.

As elucidated in the previous chapter, Canadian theatre studies has been implicated in the creation of state-sanctioned national narratives and discourses around the victimization and dispossession of Indigenous peoples from our homelands in order to create new-world nation-building identities. I argue that Relational Indigenous dramaturgical processes are important sites for thinking through the very political iterations of Indigenous people re-connecting and gathering to practice theatre in spite of the historical exclusion of Indigenous voices, practices and criticism from the Canadian theatrical canon. This chapter seeks to unpack the rationale behind embodied Indigenous dramaturgies as resurgence politics that influence the theorizing in the next three chapters.

As the four waves of Indigenous theatrical representation suggest, the first and second wave included theatre that reproduced and re-enacted colonial attitudes and actions. "The creation of a 'national drama,' complete with a canon of dramatic texts, was critical in attempts to delineate and assert a national Canadian identity in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Davis-Fisch 4). Theatre in Canada has prominently contributed to nation-building discourses that created distinctive narratives of indigenous new world identities that did not accurately represent the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. These values and stereotypes, created and performed by dominant Eurocentric discourses, normalized and perpetuated colonial relationships of power over Indigenous identities and bodies. The Canadian theatre canon reproduced colonial relationships of power wherein Indigenous realities were minimized and manipulated into identities in which Indigenous peoples could not recognize themselves.

Working to undermine and resist these misrepresentations, diverse acts of Indigenous resurgence reorient Indigenous labour and practices away from colonial methods and requirements and instead shift towards Indigenous values, teachings and worldviews (Coulthard 154). Indigenous resurgence occurs when Indigenous people look within themselves, their ancestral and communal teachings and practices, to live in the ways that better represent who they are. I understand resurgence to be, as Coulthard explains, “an intellectual, social, political, and artistic movement geared toward the self-reflective revitalization” of beliefs, practices and other embodied experiences that best reflect Indigenous realities (Coulthard 156). Further, Coulthard argues that “resurgence, in this view, draws critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present” (Coulthard 157). Resurgence paradigms acknowledge the need for Indigenous self-representation within all disciplines, and the Indigenous theatre community is rising to the occasion.

For Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe), resurgence is “dancing on our turtle’s back; it is visioning and dancing new realities and worlds into existence” (Simpson *Dancing* 70). Some embodied and performative elements of resurgence theories easily lend themselves to dramaturgical practices. Simpson reminds us that “small things are important and can have major influences over the course of time... and that the desired outcomes are heavily influenced by the processes we engage in, our relationships, and how we live in this world” (Simpson *Dancing* 144). Resurgence extends to small or temporary acts of decolonization and is not restricted to public or extreme social movements with immediate visible outcomes. It is in creating relationships, pedagogies, and re-envisioning self-in-relation to others that resurgence manifests in contemporary and everyday situations. Resurgence is seen in Indigenous dramaturgical processes not just through watching the final performance, but perhaps

more importantly, in becoming aware of the relationships that went into creating those performances. In the chapter “Feeling, Knowing, Sharing: Lateral Love and Presencing as Place-based Dramaturgy,” I discuss my participation in workshops and events as an Aboriginal Ensemble Member at Full Circle: First Nations Performance. There, I argue that we demonstrate Indigenous resurgence practices not just in new play development or rehearsal phases, but in workshops and other community-building programming as well. When we gather as a community we are given the space to honour our individual realities of Indigeneity and have the ability to temporarily interrupt the ongoing effects of colonialism through Indigenous-centred theatrical practices.

2.2 Relational Indigenous Dramaturgies as Living, Re-imagining and Re-establishing Relationships with Self, Ancestors and Others

Contemporary dramaturgy in Canada takes many forms and is a theatrical process that resists a fixed definition. It is generally understood as new play development and/or highly intensive research processes, and has become synonymous with the totality of the performance-making process (Trencsenyi and Cochrane *passim*). Typically, it is concerned with the working process and considers how the meaning, the intentions, the form and the structure of a play arise. In the article “Dramaturgy as Ecology,” Peter Eckersall, Paul Monaghan and Melanie Beddie examine the development of dramaturgical practices in Australia over the last decade. They define the practice of dramaturgy as “a confluence of literary, spatial, kinaesthetic, and technical practices, worked and woven in the matrix of aesthetic and ideological forces” (Eckersall 19). They do not try to strictly define dramaturgy by forcing all practitioners into the same framework. Instead, they recognize the political, social and ideological contexts that inform the

complex purposes of dramaturgy. In this dissertation, the definitions of dramaturgy expand to consider more than just new play development practices or research-based responsibilities but include aspects of relationship building and community involvement. This alternative way of looking at dramaturgy demonstrates how Indigenous theatre practitioners are exemplifying Indigenous political theories of resurgence.

Indigenous theatre studies has been shaped by the critical work of Indigenous artist/theorists Yvette Nolan (Algonquin/Irish), Jill Carter (Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi), Monique Mojica (Guna Rappahannock) and Floyd Favel (Cree). Favel has been developing what he refers to as Native Performance Culture for over two decades. Favel's theories of Native Performance Culture suggest that tradition, process and theatre exist in equal relationship with each other, and demonstrate how they work together to develop techniques, methods and exercises based on Indigenous practices and social structures. Native Performance Culture is not just a theoretical concept; it is a notion that ignites a cultural spark in the bodies of the participants. Favel believes that the "rhythms of the land, the movements, the postures, and the sounds need to come onto the stage, not in their pure ritual form, but through a theatrical process" (Favel, "Poetry, Remnants and Ruins" 32). This theatrical process, which varies in every case, is the framework for Relational Indigenous dramaturgies. Common attributes include the nonlinear and disjointed use of time, place, and space, which embodies and exemplifies Indigenous protocol, spiritualities, and politics. Indigenous dramaturgies, furthermore, demonstrate how anti-colonial dramaturgical structures can contest and challenge the misrepresentations and misunderstandings of past and present Indigenous identities. Native Performance Culture is an ethical methodology that can be used in Indigenous Nation to Nation gatherings and workshops. Primarily because the specific techniques and the way they are practiced depend on the diversity of the individuals involved.

Native Performance Culture is activated when people return to their homelands and physically engage with their territories, or can be stimulated in urban friendship centers when learning to dance or make a drum. Native Performance Culture asks that we be aware and receptive to our Indigenous selves and find ways to manifest and transform our cultural specificities into theatrical starting points or processes. The starting point can differ for each participant, but any Indigenous participant can perform the practice of looking to self and cultural teachings.

Indigenous dramaturgies differ from other dramaturgical structures in that they are thematic rather than narrative or plot driven. This means that the content—Indigenous ideologies, worldviews, and protocol—manifests itself in *how* the story is told and holds meaning in terms of *why* it is told in such a way. Native Performance Culture acknowledges that the Indigenous theatrical process differs from other forms of theatre-making due to our relationships to time/place/space, Indigenous worldviews, and our socio-political realities. Some questions of dramaturgical analysis that influence this thinking are:

1. How could the playwright's use of non-linear dramaturgy allow readers to deeply engage with the specific themes of cosmology and spirituality that the play explores?
2. How can a witness (reader/viewer) look to the play's structure to better understand the fictional world's relationships to visions, dreams, and memories that allow theatre to connect audiences to the natural world, Indigenous protocol, and ways of life?
3. How can we witness the works as political acts of self-determination?

Influenced by Favel's work with Native Performance Culture, this dissertation expands dramaturgy to include the values embedded in the creative and community events associated with new play development and rehearsal processes. Self-determination, reciprocity and respect,

traditional knowledges, community benefit, and accountability are all part of this way of understanding and practicing dramaturgy. Some of the key features within Indigenous dramaturgies that I have found are relationships to the land, relationships to others working, and relationship to self in the context of a larger community or nation-based knowledge system. This dissertation questions if it is possible to declare one “best model” for Indigenous dramaturgies if, like Indigenous resurgence, the practice itself resists singular definition. To effectively think, write and practice Indigenous dramaturgies is to understand their fluidity and shape-shifting nature, and to speak from one’s own experiences and involvements. Individual, Nation, community and urban specific differences also need to be acknowledged as variants in the diversities of Indigenous dramaturgical models.

Favel’s theories on Native Performance Culture paired with Coulthard’s theory of “grounded normativity” exemplify how Indigenous theatre practitioners’ culturally specific dramaturgical processes create moments and circumstances of resurgence. Coulthard uses grounded normativity to describe a place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice as an example of Indigenous resurgence theory (Coulthard 13). He discusses grounded normativity as a paradigm and theoretical system that speaks to Indigenous peoples’ connections and relationships to land as sources of knowledge and resurgence mechanisms. Grounded normativity is described as a system that “informs and structures our ethical engagement with the world and our relationships with humans and nonhuman others over time” (Coulthard 13). The definition of grounded normativity suggests that it is not specific to any one Nation but is understood as a way to frame a set of culturally specific practices. Within this dissertation, I will be exploring how grounded normativity is enacted by me, as an urban Algonquin Anishinaabekwe, and other Indigenous theatre artists that I have worked with. I expand

Coulthard's use of grounded normativity from a land-specific method into an ethical methodology that is rooted in the body and thus travels with the individual off of their traditional territories and into their everyday practices and circumstances. I'm nuancing this concept in identifying how I carry and presence my various self-recognizable articulations of self with me into moments of theatrical collaborations and creations. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies are self-affirming practices that encourage us, as Indigenous people, to look to our own laws, practices, governance systems and worldviews to create alternative ways to make our art. Grounded normativity is further discussed in my chapter, "Feeling, Knowing, Sharing: Lateral Love and Presencing as Place-based Dramaturgy." Using Indigenous resurgence paradigms as a lens, this chapter places value in the political significance of small acts like gathering together, sharing food, storytelling, drum-making workshops, training sessions and other related events that are considered as instances of decolonization.

In *How Theatre Means*, scholar/dramaturg Ric Knowles approaches play and performance analysis with a particular emphasis on how meanings are encoded and decoded through one's personal process of recognition. Knowles categorizes theatrical languages and communication through the reading of aesthetic elements as "cultural texts" (Knowles *How Theatre Means* 9). This is a layered way of witnessing the performance or reading the play-text that is subjective to each individual and creates space for various interpretations depending on the cultural background and knowledge of each individual spectator. Knowles highlights this in explaining how "semiotics is concerned not with what a particular work means, but with how meaning is produced in the process of creating, viewing, analyzing and recording" (Knowles *How Theatre Means* 1). Knowles' scholarship complements the understanding of Indigenous dramaturgies as fluid and process-dependent, recognizing cultural and artistic variations in both

the creation and meaning-making processes.

How Theatre Means devotes significant analysis to Knowles' collaboration with Monique Mojica on *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*. Their work creating *Chocolate Woman* acknowledges the cosmological specificities that underpin their process. Monique Mojica's process for *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way* is embedded in Guna-specific knowledges, specifically in finding ways to embody the original purposes of the mola (Guna women's textile art and clothing) (Mojica "Verbing Art" 27). Mojica explains, "the intent of both a mola's designs and the specific colours of the medicine dyes that were steeped into its fibres was to protect a woman's body, like a shield" (Mojica "Verbing Art" 27). In this situation, Mojica's starting point is specific to her Guna self and she develops a dramaturgy that works towards realising self-determination. Knowles explains, "in the case of *Chocolate Woman* it became apparent from our in-process semiotic analysis that both the molas and the pictographs embodied four central principles of Guna cosmology that would eventually inform the dramaturgy of our work" (Knowles *How Theatre Means* 164). Knowles affirms how Guna artistic practices and cosmological systems replaced linear western dramaturgical structures, and ultimately created space for Indigenous ways of working throughout their creation, rehearsal and performance processes. The molas become the "cultural texts" that served as the bases for *Chocolate Woman's* dramaturgy.

Knowles identifies "abstraction, metaphor, duality and repetition, and multidimensionality" as the four structures that informed the dramaturgical process of Monique Mojica's *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way* (Knowles *How Theatre Means* 164). In documenting its creation and rehearsal process Knowles goes on to say,

Structurally it became very clear that Guna art and the Guna world operate very differently from the taken-for-granted of western dramaturgy, which tend to rely on tripartite organizational principles: beginning, middle, and end; rising action, climax, and falling action; thesis, antithesis, synthesis; and cherished scene structures in which a third character provides the complication that moves that action forward. These structures, perhaps emerging from a Christian understanding of a three-part God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), embody an understanding of narrative as one of conflict, crisis and resolution. (165)

Knowles understands how Mojica is working in a culturally inherent way. She is creating a process that reflects Guna thought and ideology that is “counter to the influences of colonial hegemony” (Simpson *Dancing* 31). *Chocolote Woman*, for example, was very careful to be specific to the Guna side of Mojica’s culture. The method was generally intended to be applicable to other Nations, but not the specifics of the work with the molas. Mojica’s contributions to Indigenous theatre in Canada, and the United States, have played a significant role in the exposure and understanding of Indigenous dramaturgical practices. Her processes exemplify how to work in culturally specific ways and encourage others to look within themselves to do the same.

Monique Mojica has been actively involved in creating performance theories, dramaturgical structures, and methodologies rooted in Guna and Indigenous-centered ways of knowing since the early 1980s. In her article “In Plain Sight: Inscripted Earth and Invisible Realities,” Mojica provides phenomenological descriptions of her dramaturgical process for the play *Sideshow Freaks and Circus Injuns*. She describes her relational process with Leanne Howe (Choctaw), Chadwick Allen (Chickasaw) and the land. Her notions of Indigenous visibilities/invisibilities, and her emphasis on “embodied experiences” on the land as “realisms” are more thoroughly discussed in my chapter, “Listening to The Voices Within: Land-based Dramaturgy.” These concepts contribute to the articulation of contemporary Indigenous

dramaturgical models as fluid, project-dependent and relational. Mojica's practice is primarily concerned with braiding her creative processes with her own Indigeneity. She is a key contributor to this dissertation as she exemplifies how embodiment, Indigenous belief systems and relationships with the land guide her artistic practice.

2.3 Indigenous Women and Labours of Love

My engagement with the works of Monique Mojica, Margo Kane (Cree-Salteaux), Marie Clements (Métis-Dene), Jill Carter (Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi), and Yvette Nolan (Algonquin/Irish) lays the theoretical framework for the Indigenous feminist analysis, ethics and politics of this dissertation. My chapters are connected through an Indigenous feminist lens as I speak about my dramaturgical practice and the urban Indigenous theatre companies, Native Earth Performing Arts and Full Circle: First Nations Performance, which have both been significantly influenced by the love and labour of Indigenous women. Margo Kane founded and still runs Full Circle, and seven out of twelve artistic directors at Native Earth Performing Arts have been women. The chapters of this dissertation are connected through my involvement as a witness or active participant in various dramaturgical events, gatherings and processes. I argue that these experiences are tangible examples of Indigenous resurgence in action. Throughout the dissertation, Indigenous women are cited as individuals who have deeply impacted the thinking of this research.

One of these people is Jill Carter, the first Anishinaabekwe in Canada to receive her PhD in Theatre Studies and the leading published Indigenous scholar of Indigenous theatre in Canada. Carter's PhD dissertation, "Repairing the Web: Spiderwoman's Children Staging the New Human Being," focuses on Spiderwoman Theatre and its use of storyweaving as a "distinct

process that governs the dramaturgical structure and performed transmission of this company's play texts on the contemporary stage" (Carter "Repairing the Web" 2). Carter's scholarship claims space for woman-centred Indigenous theatre-making within dominant educational and artistic systems in revealing how Indigenous knowledges and cosmologies are used within Spiderwoman Theater's process of storyweaving. Carter's theatre scholarship also engages with Indigenous resurgence theories and other anticolonial research paradigms.

In her dissertation Carter writes that, "at every level, the project of decolonization is a creative project dedicated to transforming the chaos that defines our existence as colonized peoples into spaces wherein ordered existence is possible. And this is certainly a challenge that has become an integral part of the creative process for Native writers and artists seeking to serve their communities in a meaningful way through their works" (9). As an Anishinaabekwe theatre scholar and dramaturg, Carter attributes Indigenous dramaturgies with the power to transform and serve community through art. I engage with Carter throughout the dissertation, but predominantly in the chapter, "Feeling, Knowing, Sharing: Lateral Love and Presencing as Place-based Dramaturgy," as I speak about workshops and processes that I have been involved in where, as a group, we experienced moments of transformation and resurgence from being together.

Carter's essay "Sovereign Proclamations of the Twenty First Century: Scripting Survivance Through the Language of Soft Power" is particularly useful when considering Indigenous dramaturgies as moments of resurgence and labours of love. Carter explores how performing the Indigenous self is a sovereign act of resistance to the hard powers of settler-colonialism. She emphasizes that by using soft power (nurturing, loving, standing firm in personal beliefs), Indigenous peoples are finding ways to heal within the theatrical process.

Carter also cites Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in her work, establishing connections previously made between Indigenous dramaturgies and resurgence theories that extend beyond this dissertation. “Sovereign Proclamations of the Twenty First Century: Scripting Survivance Through the Language of Soft Power” discusses the importance of love, caring for others, building community and discovering/loving self as sovereign acts of resurgence. Carter and Simpson both acknowledge the strength in the individual, and the love that emanates when a community gathers together to create with one heart and one mind.

Carter looks to storytelling and the love embedded within the act of sharing oral stories intergenerationally. She quotes Simpson, explaining how, “for just a moment, they are complete in the absence of want—decolonizing one moment at a time. Indigenous thought can only be learned through the personal; this is because our greatest influence is on ourselves, and *because living in a good way is an incredible disruption of the colonial meta-narrative in and of itself*” (Simpson, *Dancing* 41; Carter’s emphasis). Carter reminds readers that love means many things including caring for the land, honouring Elders and “asserting Indigenous voice and agency within a dominant society governed by patriarchal powers” (Carter “Sovereign Proclamations” 49). This articulation of sovereignty as a process of love is useful when considering the processes and training gifted to the Full Circle Aboriginal Ensemble Program by leader Margo Kane. The intangible moments of resurgence are felt, honoured, and carried forward in ways that will benefit future experiences. This aspect of community particular to Indigenous dramaturgies differs from other theatrical processes because it is rooted in principles of self-recognition and processes that focus on creating space for Indigenous theatre practitioners to access, strengthen or re-invest in our own ways of being.

Further, my conceptualization of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies as shifting

processes that include and reclaim Indigenous contexts and ways of being is influenced by Jill Carter's use of the term "liminal people." She argues that dramaturgical processes create places where contemporary Indigenous peoples can re-establish identities and regenerate relationships that have been altered by years of settler colonialism. Carter explains that we are "perforce a liminal people, occupying the threshold between what was and what is. We collect and reconfigure the fragments, nurturing an intimacy with the ceremonies that remember and recreate creation and the cycles of life and death, with our ancestors, with our languages, stories and cultural praxis as we simultaneously mourn our separation from and loss of the knowledge systems and practices that made us who we were" ("Repairing the Web" 108). This notion of timeless peoples with timeless connections to ancestors helps to establish this dissertation's use of the term "presencing." Throughout this work, I use presencing to incorporate how the spirit world, blood memory, and cultural knowledges and teachings are at the foundation of my dramaturgical processes.

2.4 Presencing: Embodying the Gift of the Seven Generations Teachings

I have been taught that I am connected and accountable to my ancestors seven generations behind me, and to the seven generations of relations who are to come after me. This notion of connectivity leads me to understand that I am already in constant "collaboration" with my ancestors, homelands and other intangible gifts that I carry inside of me. This teaching, mixed with my experience as a theatre practitioner, propels me to consider how I access ancestral and cultural memories during workshops, rehearsals, and other Indigenous theatre-specific gatherings.

In “Stories from the Body: Blood Memory and Organic Texts,” Monique Mojica (Guna and Rappahannock) describes the process used by her then collaborators, Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble, Jani Lauzon and Michelle St-John. Mojica explains how their artistic process explores their personal experiences and knowledges, as well as the unconscious but embodied knowledge carried through their DNA as the heart of their dramaturgical approach. Mojica explains the difficulty in articulating this personal relationship to artistic creation because of its “relationship to the spirit world, its connection to the land, its emotional bond to place, and its link to the healing arts. [Mojica] is talking about the stories [she carries] because they have been passed on through [her] body, and encoded in [her] DNA” (Mojica “Stories from the Body” 97). Presencing is similar to Mojica’s understanding of Blood Memory. As Indigenous theatre practitioners, we are able to call upon ancestors, knowledges and experiences to help develop work, or to stand proudly and presence intangible support during awkward or potentially racist talkback sessions or Q&As.

Mojica describes Blood Memory as a relational process. Although she may not personally have had certain experiences, she is able to feel, embody and act on them because they are part of her. Mojica explains, “as a contemporary Native Theatre Artist I feel it is crucial that we acknowledge our experience as a valid worldview—something that has been consistently denied to us... This is our reality. And that reality is inclusive of worlds that are both seen and unseen” (99). Connecting with ancestors, cultural knowledges or experiences in theatrical practice are moments of resurgence as described by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. For Simpson, “decolonizing one moment at a time” is part of resurgence and lends itself to various individual and collective practices (Simpson *Dancing* 11). Presencing, as I offer it in this dissertation, is a practice that activates moments of resurgence through allowing heart, mind and

body to reconnect with ancestral and spiritual knowledges.

Co-edited by Algonquin theatre practitioner Yvette Nolan and scholar/dramaturg Ric Knowles, *Performing Indigeneity* is the first collection of Indigenous theatre criticism consisting solely of works by Indigenous theatre practitioners, artists and scholars. In that anthology multiple contributors, like Métis artist Jani Lauzon, write about using their practice and art as a means to re-connect with their ancestors. In “The Search for Spiritual Transformation in Contemporary Theatre Practice,” Lauzon describes her theatrical practice as a way to work through the ongoing effects of settler colonialism and intergenerational trauma. She reclaims her sovereignty by giving herself voice and finding spiritual transformation on the stage.

In this article Lauzon also describes elements of her dramaturgical process that speak to her lived realities and experiential knowledges, stating, “our bodies are our books” (92). This intervention marks one way that Indigenous dramaturgies are largely influenced by personal knowledges and experiences. Lauzon’s article discusses the inherent differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous dramaturgies, describing how her “body contained muscle and generational memory, all that [she] had gathered through oral culture as well as the art of observation” (Lauzon 92).

Experiential knowledge includes not only the lived experiences that I’ve had, but also the embodied and at times intangible knowledges that I carry with me. This echoes what Monique Mojica and Jani Lauzon have described when their bodies are activated through blood or body memory to inspire, remind and connect them to spiritual and ancestral knowledges. I use the term *presencing* as a way to articulate the notion of Kippmoojikewin as used by Marrie Mumford (Métis-Chippewa Cree) in her article for the *Performing Indigeneity* anthology. In Anishinaabemowin, Kippmoojikewin means, “the things we carry with us.” Kippmoojikewin is a

reminder that Indigenous peoples carry the knowledge of our ancestors, homelands, language and other realities with us in our bodies, and that they influence the way we interact with the world around us. As I describe in the chapter, “Feeling, Knowing, Sharing: Lateral Love and Presencing in Place-based Dramaturgy,” my understanding of presencing evokes a place, a spatial and liminal place, for Indigenous practitioners to gather and to share in the ancestral or spiritual knowledges that are being called upon. Presencing refers to the ability to call upon the intangible realities within our Indigenous selves at various moments of the artistic process. Presencing remembers the “love for [my] artistic ancestors, naming them and honouring them and their teachings” in a similar way to quoting or referencing someone (Nolan *Performing Indigeneity* 4). Throughout this dissertation I speak of presencing people’s work, presencing knowledges, and presencing relationships with other than human relations in my dramaturgical practice.

2.5 A Methodology of Presencing Self as Witness

As I’ve told you these stories from my body, Princess Naomi and the Manhattan Indians are remembered again. You’ve witnessed me naming the names of my predecessors. Now their names and our stories are part of your memory, and as long as they are remembered they live on. This is blood memory. This is where my work comes from. – Monique Mojica “Stories from the Body,” 109

Witnessing is the methodological framework for this dissertation as I speak to my role as an active participant in selected processes and performances. As Mojica states, once I witness something, I bear the responsibilities of carrying that knowledge forward. I use this dissertation as a way to share my experiences of witnessing and participating in selected Relational Indigenous dramaturgical events to expand the way theatre studies sees and understands Indigenous dramaturgies. I also presence and call upon the knowledges shared with me by my family, those in my circle of friends, Indigenous mentors and professors, other than human

relations, and the ones walking with me from the spirit world. I am proud to be able to use the notion of witnessing as research to claim space in theatre studies for alternative views and modes of Indigenous discourse.

As a PhD student with a solid grounding in dominant theatrical practices and predominantly Western-based research methods, I have become particularly interested in investigating the characteristics of Indigenous research methods and Indigenous critical theory. My methodology includes sharing conversations (or hosting interviews), describing the dramaturgical processes I have been involved in, and reading works by diverse Indigenous practitioners, including some who work collaboratively with other Indigenous artists, making visible the co-constitutive creation of dramaturgical structures that often goes unrecognized in the field. Witnessing as research serves as a paradigm for a particular approach that helps me to examine the most effective ways to talk about, write and share the processes I have been involved in. This dissertation uses dramaturgical events as textual analysis wherein I stop and look at particular moments of process to discuss how they worked for me and how I understand them in a more general sense.

Although this methodology section might read as a generic literature review that amalgamates various Indigenous Nations' approaches to research, ceremony and theatre, it encapsulates my interest in relational processes and ways of learning. The citations and examples used in this section are from people with whom I have relationships, such as Sarah Hunt (Kwagiulth), Quill Christie-Peters (Anishinaabe), and Margo Kane (Cree-Salteaux), or are from texts that people with whom I have relationships, such as Jill Carter (Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi) and Dory Nason (Anishinaabe), have suggested I reference. As an urban Algonquin Anishinaabekwe with mixed settler Canadian ancestry writing on the unceded territories of the

x^wməθk^{wə}yəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətaʔł (Tsleil-Waututh) nations, I gather and presence the voices and works of those who have been recommended to me by my various relations. I am driven to think about my own relationship to the spaces I exist within as an academic, as a theatre-practitioner and as an urban Algonquin Anishinaabekwe with mixed settler Canadian ancestry. I am attempting to account for my multi-layered kinship responsibilities as an urban Indigenous woman involved in both academic and Indigenous theatre communities. My family became land-less at the birth of my grandfather who was given “Unknown Parents/Parent Inconnus” on a Child Protective Services issued baptismal record in at the age of 8 in 1928. My methodology cannot be singularly inspired by Algonquin Anishinaabeg knowledges and traditions due to this state-sanctioned attempt of Indigenous erasure. Instead, I interrupt this colonial attempt to separate my family from our Indigeneity and look to my network of relationships to build a methodology of witnessing/ participation as research. Further, since this methodology section includes voices from nation-specific and Indigenous-centred perspectives I am able to develop a methodology that is most useful for processes described in this dissertation. The curation of these various methodologies and practices helps me to access my homelands, ancestors and blood memory through spiritual, emotional and love-filled processes.

Throughout this dissertation, I share details about myself and my practice that are necessary as I develop a methodology rooted in the acts of witnessing and participating. This approach abides by Indigenous protocol of self-location, and is used by many Indigenous feminists who self-locate in their artistic and academic practices. Here I am thinking of Cree/Métis scholar Kim Anderson in her book *A Recognition of Being*, which is divided into four

parts: “Setting Out,” “Looking Back: The Colonization of Native Womanhood,” “Resist” and “Reclaim.” In “Setting Out” Anderson spends time introducing herself and using her own journey of self-discovery as an urban Indigenous woman as the framework of her book. She speaks to how necessary she feels it is for her to incorporate Indigenous values, teachings and practices into all that she does, including her academic work.

Anderson explains how one of the driving “principles behind writing about Native women was to include the words, perspectives and insights of Native women themselves” (Anderson 40). As an urban Indigenous woman theatre practitioner and scholar, I find it necessary to write about the Indigenous women who have made it possible for me to do the academic work that I am doing, both by directly mentoring me and by the writing and theatrical works that they have created. Throughout this dissertation I privilege the voices of Margo Kane (Cree-Saulteaux), Monique Mojica (Guna and Rappahannock), Jill Carter (Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi) and Yvette Nolan (Algonquin/Irish). There are, of course, many other voices who influence and help shape my work, but the majority of my learning, both experienced and read, has been predominantly due to the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical labour of these four women. Throughout my dissertation I draw on personal experiences, collaborations, and conversations with Indigenous theatre practitioners to highlight how the practitioners in the community are also educating, theorizing and writing about the field itself. These women are both practitioners and the leading theorists and critics of the field, as they know the most about what they do from actually doing it. In her frequently cited book *Feminism and Theatre*, Sue-Ellen Case privileges the personal and subject “I” in academic writing as she believes that it “unmasks the invisible author and reveals her gender and her racial and class bias” (Case 3). In drawing from my own experiences working in the theatre as an urban Algonquin

Anishinaabekwe with mixed settler Canadian ancestors, I can expose the layers of personal experience that do not necessarily fit into other methodological frameworks encouraged for dissertation writing. Case sends out a call when writing:

As a feminist, I too, find the subjective voice to be a liberation from the impersonal, omniscient and seemingly objective voice patriarchal culture has used for centuries to render certain experiences invisible and to gain power through the printed word. I, too, hope feminists can discover a new, alternative voice. (3)

I can answer Case's call in responding that I use this dissertation to offer an Indigenous feminist methodology of witnessing as research. In articulating and developing this method, I am attempting to honour my own experiences as central to the research and to demonstrate how this form of researching involves self-determination and sharing. I am advocating a particular approach and methodology that I believe will help translate to the reader the spiritual, cultural and political knowledges present within the Indigenous dramaturgical processes that I have been involved in.

In looking at dramaturgical events, examples of works at different points of development, and gatherings of Indigenous theatre artists and scholars that I have attended, I am providing a different lens through which to consider Relational Indigenous dramaturgies, a lens that is rooted in, and emanates from, my own mind, body, heart and spirit as an Indigenous dramaturg. I use this dissertation to share what I have found to be the most effective ways to think about and do the work that I have been involved in. This also introduces my belief that Indigenous dramaturgies resist a fixed definition, existing instead as relational processes that shape-shift depending on who is involved, the time, the place and the budget of the work. As I describe in this dissertation, I understand Relational Indigenous dramaturgies as being relational to all in the project (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), relational to the inherent politics of being an

Indigenous person in this country, and relational to the spiritual and cultural knowledges that we carry within us as survivors of the ongoing structures of settler colonialism that continue to spill across Turtle Island.

Friend and colleague Anishinaabekwe artist scholar Quill Christie-Peters describes in her Master's thesis, "Anishinaabe art-making as falling in love: Reflections on artistic programming for urban Indigenous youth," her relational methodology emanating from her own experiences.

She writes,

My practice of self-location is rooted in Anishinaabe protocol and when this practice is situated within the academic realm, it is also an act of sovereignty that celebrates my own experiences as valid sources of knowledge. I bring forward experiential knowledge that includes spiritual, body and land-based knowledges that may be inaccessible and unreadable to some readers by virtue of the relational and consent-based nature of these knowledges. I find that visual representations can serve as the best trickster shape shifters, allowing some viewers access to certain knowledges while also having the ability to completely obscure and guard other knowledges. Importantly, by bringing forward my intimate experiential knowledge, I am celebrating the knowledges that live within my own body. At the heart of my project was the notion that we carry our homelands and the teachings of our ancestors within our bodies. As such, I rely heavily on *invisible* citations of body, citations of homeland and citations of ancestors and I have rejected the urge to insert academic citations where they truly did not inform my thinking on that matter. (5)

Inspired by the self-determining nature of Christie-Peters' work, I too find it necessary to ground my academic methodology in what my body knows as an Anishinaabekwe and to honour and respect those who have shared their knowledge, time and work with me. I believe witnessing as research is the best way of sharing my own experiences while also serving as a paradigm for my particular approach as an Indigenous dramaturg. Anchoring the methodological framework for this dissertation in myself, my experiences as a PhD student and as a dramaturg guides the reader through some of my lived experiences over the past three years.

2.6 Witnessing as Research

I use the term witnessing to echo Kwagiulth scholar Sarah Hunt's work. She describes witnessing as "part of a larger system of maintaining an oral culture where witnesses can then be called upon to verify what has taken place, particularly if any act of business or ceremony is called into question" (Hunt 1). In "Honouring The Oral: Traditions of My Ancestors Through Storytelling," Robina Anne Thomas Qwul'sih'yah'maht's (Snux'ney'muxw, Sto:olo and Lyackson) describes her use of storytelling as the methodology for her academic work. Thomas explains how storytelling is a tool for teaching, and how the gathering of families, friends and communities to tell stories is more than just "idle chat" but a way to preserve histories, relationships with ancestors, and knowledges (Thomas 237). Throughout the article, Thomas remembers teachings and stories from her family and describes them as being "cultural, traditional, educational, spiritual and political," as the re-telling of stories can ground those present in who and where they are, connecting them with their ancestors and providing tools to teach their future generations (Thomas 240). This article privileges the importance of subjective lived experiences as credible knowledges and ways of being in the world. When describing her methodology, Thomas explains how Indigenous peoples are "compelled to listen and document stories in the spirit of the ancestors. In other words, [she] feels that storytelling enables us to keep the teachings of our ancestors, culture, and tradition alive throughout the entire research process" (Thomas 242). In citing other Indigenous scholars who use storytelling as research, like Angela Cavender Wilson (Dakota) and Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Thomas emphasizes the significance of storytelling as an Indigenous-focused way of remembering, honouring, and sharing experiences and knowledges as a sovereign way of being. When Indigenous storytellers or authors use their own voices and reflect on their own experiences on

their own terms, we resist colonial legislation and policies that try to control Indigenous ways of preserving and expressing knowledges. Thomas explains,

Storytelling also taught us about resistance to colonialism—our people have resisted even when legislation attempted to assimilate our children. All stories have something to teach us. What is most important is to learn to listen, not simply hear, the words that storytellers have to share. (241)

Thomas' article helps to establish the witnessing research methodology that I apply in this dissertation. Thomas reminds me of the power that storytelling as research has, echoing the work of Sto:lo scholar Jo-Ann Archibald in her book *Indigenous Storywork* and Margaret Kovach (Plains Cree and Saulteaux) in *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Context*. These women and other Indigenous research scholars like Shawn Wilson (Cree) and Kathleen E Absolon (Anishinaabe) have allowed Indigenous research methods to be seen as academically acceptable ways of formatting our knowledge systems and conveying our work that are inherently reciprocal, rooted in language, inspired by our homelands, connected to the ancestors and hopeful for future generations.

Robina Anne Thomas and Sarah Hunt, both from coastal Nations that draw on witnessing from the potlatch culture, write about witnessing as a practice used in ceremony. Thomas writes about her naming ceremony where she was given the traditional name Qwul'sih'yah'maht. She explains how,

At the naming ceremony, we have a system of paying “witnesses,” representatives from different communities who are called upon to witness the event. Witnessing is a huge responsibility because you are asked to pay attention to all the details of the evening (what the name was, where it originated, and the protocol that was followed to ensure that I had the right to use this name, as well as other details). In the Big House, visitors are seated in sections according to the community they are from. Witnesses are selected from every community that is present. This way, the information is shared throughout Coast Salish territory. If there were concerns or questions about what took place, what my name was, or where it was from, we could ask any of the witnesses. They will know

this information because it was their responsibility to pay attention to all the details. This highly sophisticated process of witnessing continues to be central to our traditional ceremonies. (244)

Thomas underlines the responsibility of the witness to her community as a formal way of documenting events and gatherings. Witnessing is a form of documentation that highlights embodied and relational values instead of solely relying on the written archival form. Thomas suggests, “the level of complexity and sophistication in which major events were witnessed in [her] communities demands that these oral histories and stories be reconceptualized and viewed as primary sources. These events are our Department of Vital Statistics—they record births, marriages, and deaths, to name a few” (Thomas 244). The protocol of witnessing claims space for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination as it gives autonomy to Indigenous-centered ways of embodying and remembering knowledges.

In “Researching Within Relations of Violence: Witnessing as Kwagiulth Research Methodology,” Hunt explains witnessing through recounting her first potlatch ceremony at the age of seven. There, she learned “to dance among [her] aunties, cousins and other relations as [they] moved around the fire together” (Hunt 1). Hunt was told to watch her family and community move. She would learn the ceremony in following their lead. She explains,

At that potlatch, and every one I have attended since then, I have been part of a shared practice of learning, teaching, creating and continuing Kwagiulth cultural and socio-legal relations...During each potlatch, gifts are given to witnesses who are paid for remembering what they have seen. Their role, too, is dependent on them being present, watchful, and involved. Witnessing is part of a larger system of maintaining an oral culture, and just as the role of a dancer or singer is embodied, so too is the role of the witness. Sitting in the smoke-filled bighouse, hearing the songs being sung in Kwakwaka'wakw, watching the movement of the dancers as they sweep across the dirt floor, witnessing requires being fully engaged. Witnesses can then be called upon to verify what has taken place, particularly if any act of business or ceremony is called in to question. In this way, cultural knowledge is kept alive in the bodies, minds and spirits of everyone who makes up the potlatch, including witnesses. (2)

For Hunt the active and participatory nature of witnessing is an embodied and relational way to learn and share knowledges. She uses the notion of witnessing in her research on the contemporary realities of violence in Indigenous communities, explaining that her “role as a witness emerges within the individual stories that have been shared with [her], and the quiet moments [she] spent in close relation to women of all ages who have experienced some form of violence” (Hunt 8). Hunt establishes that the role of the witness is formed in relationship to those she is learning from and working with. There is a high level of respect being offered in witnessing as research and it establishes itself as an anticolonial project in addressing larger notions of Indigenous worldview and spirituality.

I experienced being called to witness during the 2017 Talking Stick Festival. Full Circle: First Nations Performance’s Artistic Director and annual Talking Stick Festival curator Margo Kane implemented the protocol of witnessing in the Kw’eykw’áystway Industry Series. Tsitsayxemaat Rebecca Duncan (Squamish and Musqueam) was invited to open and close the five-day series. In her opening she explained witnessing as a protocol where the selected witnesses listen to and honour the events that are happening before them, and then carry the knowledge of what they came to experience forward with them. Kane had pre-selected witnesses to actively engage in the events and then to relay the event proceedings back to the group at the end of each day. While witnessing, I was activated in a way that held me accountable to the knowledge and people at the gathering. As a witness I engage in relationship with the events and all those present in a way that shows me to be a reliable member of the community. I am honoured to have been called to witness the proceedings at the Talking Stick Festival’s Industry Series and I carry the teachings of witnessing forward with me as I write this dissertation. I am aware that the notion of witnessing as an audience of a theatrical process or performance is not

new to theatre studies. But my intervention aims to privilege my own knowledges and experiences in theatrical situations as a model to describe various Relational Indigenous dramaturgical processes and what I have found to be effective ways to think about, talk about and do Indigenous dramaturgical work.

This dissertation provides variations of witnessing where I have somehow been involved as a dramaturg, facilitator or witness. I apply witnessing as research to the process of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies as a mode of self-determination and maintaining Indigenous sovereignty against Canadian Theatre Studies. The methodological framework of witnessing as research for this dissertation emerges from my own experiences: my body, heart, mind and spirit. Working this way allows my responsibilities to the Indigenous theatre community to be upheld and reminds me that the work I am describing is not a distant theoretical or metaphorical theory, but is my lived and honest reality. I learn from sitting in circles with matriarchs, leaders and colleagues, and witnessing as research allows me to honour those experiences. The methodological framework for this dissertation is relational and rooted in my experiences sitting with, talking to and working within the Indigenous theatre community over the past several years. This dissertation is a continuation of my own personal relationship to theatre that is embedded within my continuous learning and coming to know as an urban Algonquin Anishinaabekwe practitioner and scholar.

Chapter 3: Listening to The Voices Within: Land-based Dramaturgies

In August 2015 I attended a gathering at Akikpautik, “which translates to ‘Pipe Bowl Falls’”, the land in the Ottawa Gatineau region known in English as Chaudière Falls, which is neighbour to Canada’s parliament buildings (Gehl 72). The gathering was a public event at which Algonquin Anishinaabe Elders, community members, protesters and environmentalists spoke to the significance of the Falls and the surrounding lands. Akikpautik is sacred Algonquin land on which the Windmill Development Group and Dream Unlimited Corp are developing a condominium complex and retail community. According to Algonquin Anishinaabekwe Lynn Gehl, the Chaudière Falls, Albert and Victoria Islands are “inscribed with deep spiritual meaning for Anishinaabeg” and are considered ancestral meeting places (Gehl 127). Gehl is an academic, artist, author, and activist for Anishinaabeg land, gender and political issues. She has had the privilege and honour of learning from the late “Algonquin Anishinaabe Elder, Grandfather William Commanda (1913 - 2011), who lived in Maniwaki, Québec and who was the last traditional keeper of three wampum belts, which serve to codify significant relationships” (Gehl 73). Currently, the sacred lands are constricted within the cement walls of a huge hydroelectric dam.

Algonquin Anishinaabeg live on both sides of Kiji Sibì (the Ottawa River) and “it must be appreciated that the river, Akikpautik, and the islands remain the jurisdiction of the larger Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation, as we have never ceded or extinguished our land and water rights” (Gehl 72). Land and waterways hold knowledges that educate and sustain Anishinaabeg communities. Many creation stories describe how Anishinaabeg were born from specific locations in our traditional territories and teach us how to live with love and respect our relations, our lands and ourselves. According to Algonquin Anishinaabe knowledge holders, Akikpautik is

a site that has been used and honoured since time immemorial. Gehl explains,

A central Anishinaabe figure and philosopher, Wisakedjàk (also known as Nanaboozo and Waynaboozhoo), the son of the Spirit of the West Wind and Mother Earth's first woman Winonah, had many responsibilities, two of which were naming all the beings and bringing forth colour to Mother Earth. Wisakedjàk is also credited for bringing forth a special gift from his father: the First Sacred Pipe...For Indigenous people, our land and waterscapes are inscribed with stories and beliefs. This is one of the ways in which we preserve important teachings and knowledge for future generations to come, because we want our descendants to embody and feel the love for the land and the gifts she provides. Chaudière Falls in the Ottawa River is one such place. (71-72)

Land and water hold spiritual beliefs, teachings, and knowledges that have been passed down from our ancestors, and need us to pass them down to our future generations. We must love and respect the land and share these teachings with our future generations so that they can provide love and protection for the land and share in the gifts it offers. Working with the land can unearth ancestral knowledges, spirituality and language.

I share this information to locate myself geographically in my homelands, and to begin to explain the significant ontological and cosmological relationships that I understand Algonquin Anishinaabeg hold with the land. I am attempting to articulate how knowing the stories embedded within one's traditional lands and territories can help theatre practitioners build sovereign Indigenous dramaturgical practices that influence the work being created on both spiritual and political levels. Our lands are holders of stories, histories and knowledges, as "the stories and cultural meanings embedded in our place names connect our people to the land spiritually. They link our children to both their future and our history, and to a time when our environment was intact" (qtd in Simpson "The PKOLS" 360). My relationship to land is political, ceremonial and spiritual. Personally, I am still finding my way back to the natural laws and land of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg. I am still building my own cultural understandings and relationships through participating in gatherings, and witnessing the words and expressions of

others. As an urban displaced mixed Indigenous woman, I have a lot of work to do to get back to the land. As I continue to learn, I am working towards understanding and conceptualizing how I can develop my own land-based dramaturgy for a future dream project on unceded Algonquin Anishinaabe territory. I turn to my involvement in the Indigenous theatre community to investigate how Indigenous theatre practitioners work, teach and train on the land as means of fostering and developing Indigenous spirituality, politics and protocol. In this chapter, I am particularly interested in how Relational Indigenous dramaturgies are characterized through both nation-specific and Indigenous-centered relationships with the land.

Land-based dramaturgy is a new play development methodology rooted in maintaining relationships and working directly with the land. As explained in this chapter, land-based dramaturgies may involve physical interaction with land and waters, they may be involved philosophically in developing the process' framework, and/or practitioners may look to creation stories and language as land-based resources. I consider land-based dramaturgy as a theatre-making process whereby individuals or communities re-invest in stories, images and practices to create theatrical works. In re-investing in the fostering and developing of these stories, communities are regenerating political and intellectual traditions, learning and articulating language systems, revisiting ceremonial and spiritual events, and creating and using artistic and performance-based traditions (Simpson *Dancing passim*). This chapter explores how Indigenous theatre practitioners are looking to the land, both urban and rural, as pedagogical and methodological starting points or influences during their Relational Indigenous dramaturgical processes. Relational Indigenous land-based dramaturgies explore the artistic vision of practitioners whose work is informed by nation-specific knowledges and practices, but whose expressions produce newfound contemporary methods.

This chapter contributes to my development as a dramaturg as I learn from those who are doing community-specific and Indigenous Nation to Nation land-based work. Relational Indigenous land-based dramaturgies include practitioners who work with, on, or are influenced by the land, and who re-connect with homelands, traditional territories, languages, creation stories and communities while doing so. This Relational Indigenous dramaturgical process activates ancestral connections while simultaneously creating contemporary and culturally appropriate ways to develop new work. My role as witness to the processes and productions described below is activated through conducting interviews, holding talking circles, and facilitating conversations. Researching and analyzing the land-based work that others are doing will equip me to return to my homelands and learn from the land, water and Elders. This chapter questions how relationships with the land, and the use of land as a cultural starting point to develop works, inform Indigenous dramaturgical practices and contribute to both the methodological and embodied approaches of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies. While considering Indigenous dramaturgies as relational processes, I have developed the notion of land-based dramaturgies to demonstrate how political, collective and spiritual knowledges can be activated during artistic collaborations with the land. Each of these dramaturgical variations reveals how the artists offer themselves to service the stories that the land wants to tell.

This chapter focuses on three instances of land-based dramaturgy. The first involves Nlakap'amux theatre practitioner Kevin Loring's Songs of the Land project, *Battle of the Birds*. With the Songs of the Land projects, Loring's theatre company, Savage Society, re-visits the Nlakap'amux language, stories and culture through new play development, collaboration and performance. *Battle of the Birds* works with the youth, families and elders of Lytton First Nation to develop performances based on the land as law, knowledge and spirituality. Then, I discuss

The Debajehmujig Creation Centre, located on Wikwemikong unceded territory, to elucidate how spiritual and cosmological relationships with the land are being paired with training and new play development programs. Lastly, I examine Guna and Rappahannock artist/activist/theorist Monique Mojica and Choctaw artist/activist/scholar LeAnne Howe's dramaturgical framework for the play *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* as methodological and political exchanges with the land. I explore how their process includes looking to the land for inspiration, impulses and aesthetics to develop new work. Throughout, I examine how the selected practitioners work with the land to inform their dramatic processes and structures.

3.1 Rethinking Relationships with Land for New Play Development Dramaturgies

Critical Indigenous Studies has had a recent surge of work devoted to land-based education, both theoretically through publications and practically in classroom settings. This influx of land-centered work and practices can be attributed to recent Indigenous social movements and activist interruptions. Particularly due to the waves created by the Idle No More Movement², and more recently the international attention brought on by the resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline, people seem to be more aware of the significance and meanings of the land and water preservation work led by Indigenous activists, and feel mobilized to join the resistance. The Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning is an example of contemporary land-based education training. Dechinta is a “northern-led initiative delivering land-based, University of Alberta and University of British Columbia-credited educational experiences led by northern leaders, experts, Elders and professors to engage northern and southern youth in a transformative curricula” (“In Community”). The students “learn about the environment, politics and history of

² For more information on Idle No More, see *The Winter We Danced*, edited by The Kino-nda-niimi Collective.

Denendeh / Northwest Territories from Indigenous experts, leading professors, local leaders and Elders in a co-teaching environment” (“In Community”). Glen Coulthard explains,

What Dechinta does is it works in collaboration with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and other Indigenous folks in the North to establish a post-secondary program of Indigenous land-based education, aimed at providing a model of education that promotes true self-determination and decolonization for Indigenous peoples in the North. It works with Elders from our community – and other community members and knowledge holders – in order to re-embed students in the social relations that are embodied by land and place, in order to provide that framework for decolonization. (Decolonization Journal)

Dechinta offers the opportunity for students to learn the territories’ teachings and to engage with the importance of land to the community. The courses have students working directly with Elders and teachers, who guide them through hunting, fishing, and other land-based practices. Programs like Dechinta help Indigenous students to reconnect with land-based practices and ways of being with and living off the land.

In *Land Education: Rethinking pedagogies of place from Indigenous, postcolonial, and decolonizing perspectives*, editors Eve Tuck, Kate McCoy and Marcia McKenzie identify “Land and settler colonialism”, “Land and Indigenous cosmologies”, “Land and agency: Indigenous land rights and social movements” and “The Significance of naming: language, thought, and land” as primary topics within the pedagogies of land and place (McCoy 6-11). There are many reasons why, and ways in which, the land is important to Indigenous peoples, depending on individual or community knowledge, unceded or treaty relationships, and other social and political alignments. In this chapter I adopt McCoy, Tuck and McKenzie’s categories “Land and settler colonialism” and “Land and Indigenous cosmologies” as lenses through which to rethink and articulate how Indigenous theatre practitioners are working with the land to create and

develop theatrical material, and how these relationships embody spiritual and political knowledges. In the introduction to *Land Education*, “settler colonialism” is defined as

a form of colonization in which outsiders come to land inhabited by Indigenous peoples and claim it as their own new home. Subsequent generations of settlers come to the settler nation-state for many reasons, under many circumstances—but at the heart of all of those rationales is the need for space and land. This form is distinct from the exploitation colonialism that has been so deeply theorized in post-colonial studies, because, in settler colonialism, settlers come to the new land seeking land and resources, not (necessarily) labor. (6)

In reviewing this passage, I am reminded of the political agency behind land-based dramaturgies. Settler colonialism has attempted, and failed, to control Indigenous agency and resistance for centuries. It is an ongoing process that Indigenous peoples are challenging politically, socially and artistically. In this chapter land-based dramaturgies challenge settler colonialism by having theatre practitioners work directly with and learn from the land.

In *Land Education*, “Land and Indigenous cosmologies” is also considered a significant element in land education and land-based processes. Indigenous relationships to the land contribute to Indigenous holism and our “all my relations” philosophies. This philosophy emphasizes the relationships that Indigenous peoples have with all living entities: other humans, land, water, spiritual beings, and cultural figures. Reciprocal relationships are created with any living entity, as well as with the spirit world and with the land. I understand that these relationships are maintained through our embodied actions. In living the laws, customs and teachings from our creation stories and oral traditions we maintain good relationships with others. According to Algonquin Anishinaabekwe scholar Lynn Gehl, “our water and landscapes are very much storied as this is one way that we preserve important sacred beliefs, teachings, and knowledge for future generations to come” (Gehl 72). Gehl reminds me of the significance of re-connecting with my homelands to ground myself in the knowledge of my ancestors who have

come before me, and with future generations who will come after me. Land-based relationships are formed through community and nation-specific knowledges, as well as through various land-based programs where I can embody Indigenous political cultures and philosophies, even if not on my personal territory (participating in Dechinta on Dene Territory, for example).

The land is instilled with knowledge, love, and relationships that can be “considered as a teacher and conduit of memory, in that it both remembers life and its loss, and serves itself as a mnemonic device that triggers the ethics of relationality with the sacred geographies that constitute Indigenous peoples’ histories” (McCoy 9). Reciprocity is a significant aspect of Indigenous worldviews as it creates one’s internal sense of connection to the universe. Self in relationship to others, to the land and to the spirit world is personal, familial and intergenerational; it is one’s personal connection to a higher being, humanity or the environment (qtd in Wilson 91). Reciprocal relationships with the land are created and honoured in land-based dramaturgies which vary with each process and establish particular relationships and aesthetics. Central to the relationship between the land and dramaturgical processes is the notion that the land carries particular values, knowledges and stories that are only fully realized through physical interactions with the land (qtd in Stanlake 41). In this chapter I write about selected practitioners’ relationships with the land as a primary tool for new play development to demonstrate that the process itself, the manifestation of the artists’ relationship with the land, is as important as the final product. Land-based dramaturgies overspill physical geographical borders and place Indigenous bodies into relationships with political, cultural and spiritual knowledges and experiences.

3.2 Savage Society's Songs of the Land Project

On January 8, 2017 I met with Nlakap'amux actor, director, playwright and newly appointed Artistic Director of Indigenous Theatre at the National Arts Center, Kevin Loring, in his studio in East Vancouver. It was pouring rain that Sunday and I took the bus south on Commercial Drive. Loring's studio is in a strip mall on Victoria Drive beside a comic book shop. Inside were velvet chairs from an old theatre space, some cozy mismatched couches, and an electric heat lamp. Loring made us some coffee and explained that he shared the space with Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre, but that no one had been around for a while, and apologized for the cold. It was cold, but the coffee and heat lamp helped. I share these details of my meeting with Loring as a way to honour my personal experiences and knowledges as a part of my witness-methodology.

We spoke generally at first, as I had met Kevin Loring before but only briefly, so I took the time to re-introduce myself. Eventually, Loring asked me what I thought of the staged reading of his play in-progress, *Thanks for Giving*. *Thanks for Giving* was part of the Arts Club Theatre Company's 2017 ReACT: New Plays in Progress, and was given its premiere production at the Arts Club in October 2017. ReACT hosts public readings of in-progress and new works the Arts Club commissions to be developed into full-length pieces. On October 29, 2016, I attended the ReACT reading of *Thanks for Giving*. This play is about a mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous family that gathers for Thanksgiving dinner where topics around Indigenous social issues, economic status, intergenerational trauma and the ultimate power of familial love are shared. *Thanks for Giving* creates the familiar awkward family dinner scenario where relations gather after not seeing one another for a while, new partners are dragged along, and

family drama rises to the surface. It was politically nuanced through passionate and loveable characters.

I was sitting with two friends, a Cree woman and a Métis woman, and at the reading's intermission we were laughing and teasing about how real the situation is for us. I told Kevin about the interaction with my friends at intermission. I told him how we could all relate to the play's story and how the experiences were relevant to our personal lives. Sharing this with Loring helped us to get to know one another better and to activate my role as witness for the reading of his play.

Before asking Loring any questions for research purposes, I gave him a braid of Sweetgrass. Sweetgrass is one of the four sacred medicines, along with Tobacco, Sage and Cedar. Although Tobacco is normally offered to human and other-than-human relations when seeking knowledge or guidance, I had braids of Sweetgrass at home that my parents had sent from Ontario, and thought that they would be happy to know I offered him one. This offering is a way for me to honour Indigenous protocol. In order to build a good relationship with Loring—one of trust, honesty, and appreciation—I offered him this braid in gratitude for his time, knowledge and kindness towards me.

At the 2016 annual Talking Stick Festival I attended the performance of *Battle of the Birds* created by Kevin Loring's company, Savage Society. Loring founded Savage Society so that his community could create, produce and perform their own stories as, and with other, practicing Indigenous artists and performers. Loring chose the name in an attempt to challenge the negative connotations that follow the word "savage." In his Artistic Director's statements Loring explains,

The word Savage carries a negative connotation in western society which has historically abhorred the natural state of the world, endeavoring to dominate, confine and exploit it rather than to live with or in support of it:

The Little Oxford Dictionary describes Savage in these terms:

1. adjective: uncivilized, in primitive state; fierce, cruel; angry.
2. noun: member of a savage tribe; brutal or barbarous person.
3. verb: to attack fiercely.

We see Savage as meaning humanity in its natural state, humanity in nature. Savages are angry that the modern society is in fact brutal and barbarous, with a history of fiercely attacking The People as we seek to live in our natural state. The Savage Society seeks to attack fiercely ignorant and preconceived notions directed towards aboriginal people. To show our historical and personal struggles, as human struggles, by acknowledging our shared histories, challenging stereotypes, by sharing our hearts, minds, and spirits through our craft, to expose the stereotype as a construct of ignorance, to show that behind the social façade we are all savages. We are all people in nature.

Savages are strong, at home in their environment; unafraid of the animals or the elements, indeed we recognize them as allies, relations and gifts. This is also true of urban Savages. Savages are cunning and quick to adapt to new environments, we are survivors, warriors, hunters and nurturers. Savages succeed by living in relationship with our dynamic world. In our natural state, regardless of race, wealth or status, we are equally human; we are all a part of The Savage Society. (“Savage Society”)

Savage Society is a contemporary Indigenous collective that exemplifies processes of self-recognition and Relational Indigenous fourth wave dramaturgical processes. As Loring explains in his Artistic Director notes, he wishes to develop an artistic lens through which to defy stereotypes, affirm Indigenous rights and share these artistic sovereign creations with audiences. They strive to create an “aboriginal voice, telling [their] own stories; endeavoring to positively affect awareness of the contemporary aboriginal perspective by carrying on the tradition of Aboriginal storytelling through contemporary mediums of expression” (“Savage Society”). Although Savage Society collaborates with other production companies like Full Circle: First Nations Performance and ITSAZOO Theatre, the Songs of the Land projects are deeply rooted in Nlakap’amux land, language and stories. Songs of the Land is about revisiting stories specific to the Nlakap’amux/Thompson River community, involving them in the work, and sharing their

efforts with both community and urban audiences through touring. *Battle of the Birds* is an example of using a traditional Nlakap'amux story as a dramaturgical starting point, as the play's process upholds and honours relationships with the nation's laws, language and stories.

3.3 *Battle of the Birds*

Referencing the themes presented in *Land Education: Rethinking pedagogies of place from Indigenous, postcolonial, and decolonizing perspectives*, Savage Society's *Battle of the Birds* fits into the "Land and Indigenous cosmologies" and "The Significance of naming: language, thought, and land" categories (McCoy 6-11). Loring's process is described below as one that highlights community engagement and community knowledge in an attempt to embody and honour Nlakap'amux cosmology, language and land-based teachings. Many of the Nlakap'amux community's songs and creation stories were recorded in their language on wax cylinders by Scottish ethnographer James Teit. Teit ended up marrying into the community and "was fluent in the language. He learned all of the customs and was a secretary to the government who tirelessly advocated for Aboriginal rights" (Derdeyn). Loring explains how Teit acted as an ally to the community, learned the language, translated for the Chief and never tried to speak for the community. He just "held them up" (Loring).

Before starting work on any of the recorded creation stories, Loring held a week-long symposium in his community in 2012 at which *Battle of the Birds* would eventually be created. Loring explains how they left the gathering open for anyone to attend. They invited community members and other local Indigenous communities, had advertisements sent out through arts organizations and sent personal invitations. This was a community gathering, and engaged in protocol of respectful and relational accountability.



Image 1 Photo from savagesociety.ca

The feast was open for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to share food and to witness what the process of work was going to be. Loring describes this initial process:

James Teit recorded my community at the turn of the last century on an Edison Wax cylinder recorder and he's got like thousands of recordings from all over BC but a lot of them were actually from Lytton. So we wanted to study these songs and stories that were recorded. And I wanted to ask the community—should we be looking at this material as source material for art. Should we? Can we? Can we open this or should we leave it as is and find our own way? One of the wax cylinder recordings is a medicine man's song—do we have license to use this in a theatrical production? Or should we not go near it? There was an over three-hour discussion about that very subject. We had all four dialects of the language represented in the room, cultural heavyweights of the nation sitting together and not arguing but discussing constructively about how to approach the language and the stories. There was a four-hour debate about one syllable from one word from one song written over 120 years ago that had to determine at what part of the river the singer came from!

Elders from all four regions, the four dialects of the nation came, we had university professors, MLAs, Chiefs... a lot of people checked out what we were doing. At first, some people were a bit stand-offish and very protective of the language and their knowledge, but once they knew what people were doing they were invested. For the five-day symposium we had about 250-300 people but for the working days in the community hall there were more than 50 people on a regular basis. Food was shared, peoples' voices were heard, they would share songs and have jam nights so people could come play songs—sharing songs and stories—asking

people ‘what do you sing and what do you do?’ We’d come around a table and talk about protocol. Talk about story protocol, song protocol and whether or not we should go near the material or just create our own material and use the recordings as source—as a jumping off point, but not to take them and use them for our own purposes. We had a very intense and beautiful week before we went anywhere near the recordings. (Loring)

In Tsimshian scholar Mique’l Dangeli’s PhD dissertation, “Dancing Sovereignty: Protocol and Politics in Northwest Coast First Nations Dance,” she defines “dancing sovereignty as self-determination carried out through the creation of performances (oratory, songs, and dances) that both adhere to and expand upon protocol in ways that affirm hereditary privileges (ancestral histories and associated ownership of songs, dances, crests, masks, headdresses, etc.) and territorial rights to both land and waterways among diverse audiences and collaborators” (Dangeli 4). Dangeli’s work as a scholar, and as co-leader of the Git Hayetsk dance group, has been helpful to me when discussing the intangible political, social and sacred relationships embedded within Indigenous artistic and performative practices. Dangeli acknowledges how the protocol that protects Indigenous oral culture and practices not only makes our performance practices different than Western forms of artistic performance, but connects the work with political, artistic and respectful relationships among community members. This is why Loring made an effort to get permission to use the stories, and created space for anyone in the community to speak to the topic. Dangeli explains:

Protocol is an umbrella term used by Northwest Coast First Nations people to refer to the laws of their Nations. It is common to hear them use the word *law* and *protocol* interchangeably in their work in potlatches, feasts, with dance groups, on tribal canoe journeys, and in other contexts where specific procedures around song, dance, and ceremony are required. The relationship between protocol and Northwest Coast First Nations dance practices is immensely complex... The fundamental connection between protocol and First Nations dance on the Northwest Coast is that protocol governs not only the right to perform songs and dances but also the way performances occur. These rights, which are primarily hereditary in this region, are expressed in terms of ownership and permission. Inherited rights to songs, dances, and associated ceremonial beings (masks,

headdresses, robes, and so on) are vehemently guarded as they are not only integral to individual and collective identity but also define ownership of territories (both land and waterways). Protocol governing rights to songs and dances is entrenched in local politics—family, clan, community, and Nation—and informs how their performance engages with wider provincial, national, and international politics. (2)

The stories that ethnographer James Teit recorded carry protocol rooted in local politics, relationships with the land, and gaining permission or community consent. In Dangeli's terms, it was necessary for Loring to get permission to use the stories so as to respectfully honour his community and their collective identities. In abiding by protocol and gaining the respect of his community, Loring successfully took Nlakap'amux stories out of an archival form and transformed them back into their living culture.

The next step of *Battle of the Bird's* process was a week-long retreat at which they discussed how law and language are incorporated in traditional stories. Anishinaabe scholar John Borrows writes the introduction for, and is the guest editor of, a special issue of the University of Windsor's journal *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice on Indigenous Legal Traditions*, titled "Indigenous Law, Lands and Literature." Borrows' introduction summarizes the "authors' experiences of working with Indigenous legal traditions through stories. Indigenous legal orders encourage the use of stories to examine regulatory and dispute resolution issues from a grounded perspective. While abstract theories and linear philosophical arguments can be used to discuss Indigenous peoples' law, the articles in [that] volume reveal another set of intellectual traditions at work" (Borrows v). The other sets of intellectual traditions at work are stories. The orality, sharing, and living out of stories embody familial and community teachings and ways of being. Borrows describes them as being told from a grounded perspective, specific to the lands and waterways of each nation. Stories as law teach Indigenous peoples how to live by their nations' particular customs and practices, and ultimately help to ensure that the community is happy and

healthy. Loring explained how Nlakap'amux laws are encased within their creation stories and how the retelling of these stories helps to extract values, protocol and community engagement that are particular to their nation (Loring). When listening to the cylinders, they identified a number of stories that they thought were important and showcased their laws and their values. Loring had teamed up with Child and Family Services so when it came time to choose which story to work from, they decided to work with one that discussed community and domestic violence.

They chose to develop *Battle of the Birds*. This story deals with power abuse, domestic violence and the ways the community handles these issues. The play is “set in the Bird Nation, in this mythical time, this legendary time, when animals were like people. And so in the Bird Nation, Eagle is hosting a slahal game, a gambling game which is also known as the bone game. He’s being really abusive to his wife in front of everybody, and so Golden Eagle gets all the other birds together to rescue Eagle’s wife, and they steal her away to Golden Eagle’s house” (Varty). Eagle is insulted and furious with Golden Eagle’s action. His anger compels him to challenge all the birds to a battle to the death to reclaim his dignity and his wife.



Image 2 Photo of Kevin Loring and Red Hawk from the 2015 performance of *Battle of the Birds* from newpathwaystogold.ca

Through song, and both English and Nlakap'amux languages, the audience witnesses the Bird Nation die, one by one, at the talons of this mean, angry Eagle. Eventually, Eagle defeats all the birds. Then at the very end, this little Red Hawk comes in, sees the devastation that has been done to his community, challenges Eagle, and defeats him. And then “he sings his medicine song, which heals all the birds—except for Eagle, whose head he leaves completely white, to remind him to be humble and kind to his wife” (Varty). *Battle of the Birds* is a play about strength and resilience, and really highlights the love and power necessary to live through violent circumstances. In continuing to tell our stories, in knowing the theory and law embedded within them, we are able to honour the teachings and be held accountable to our relationships with the land: offering tobacco, giving medicine to the water, and thanking our ancestors for the teachings they have shared. One of Loring's goals with *Battle of the Birds* was to take the story off the wax cylinder and give it back to his community members.

Since the 2012 symposium, Loring has been given permission from the community and its Elders to take the material and work with it. He is a Nlakap'amux storyteller. The Elders gave

Loring permission and the responsibility to work with their stories, to help enable the life and future life of his community's culture. Creation stories, as the word "creation" suggests, mark the beginning of something. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe) believes creation stories to be a "theoretical framework" or to provide an "ontological context from within which [Indigenous peoples] can interpret other stories, teachings and experiences" (Simpson *Dancing* 32). Simpson explains how "storytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives" (Simpson *Dancing* 34). Gathering to tell stories "reinforces the web of relationships that stitch our communities together" (Simpson *Dancing* 34). Loring's process is grounded in the stories, laws and beliefs of his community. He literally used the story of *Battle of the Birds* as a theoretical frame to work with his community.

A major aspect of Loring's work with *Battle of the Birds* involved grounding the process in teachings, relationship building and lateral love. Working with community members aged 2 to 92, and with local Indigenous artists, created a space of artistic sovereignty as they envisioned and remembered the stories, languages and teachings that lived inside their bodies and on their lands. The community transformed themselves into birds, land and water spirits from the story. Throughout the process, the group learned new words in their language; one was the name for Golden Eagle (Loring). This process of re-learning was dependent on the Elders for assistance and guidance, helping to build and support relational learning and love. Loring explained that the Elders don't get asked questions about language and stories that often, so this process put youth, families and Elders in a position where everyone is learning and remembering. The conceptualization of Relational Indigenous land-based dramaturgy emphasizes getting to know

self and others, activating spiritual experiences, community involvement and nation-specific revitalization throughout the artistic process.

Loring's process built the Elders integrally into the ensemble. They are the ones who say whether or not he has permission to do something or remind him when he's negligent of something (Loring). In *Battle of the Birds* two Elders act as narrators, one speaking English and the other her own language. This gives the language life, awakening the stories from their archival states. The bilingual text is great for teaching or learning. It could be used as a language study tool, it could be either read or listened to, and includes the immediate English translation. Loring explained how his auntie, who did the narration in their language, and all the rest of the Elders involved in the project are residential school survivors. So speaking the language into a microphone in a professional theatre with 300 people watching is revolutionary for them. Loring exemplifies Glen Coulthard's theory of grounded normativity through centering his relationship with homelands, creation stories and community as the dramaturgical framework for *Battle of the Birds*. This process is rooted in nation-specific teachings and ways of knowing that privilege and honour Nlakap'amux law and kinship. Rooting the work in nation-specific kinship and protocol while exploring contemporary theatrical and artistic practices, speaks to the transformative nature of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies. Savage Society is largely informed by Nlakap'amux stories, language and worldview, and it is through projects like *Battle of the Birds* that traditions are being renewed, embodied and preserved for future generations.

Loring had never done a community project of this scope and scale before *Battle of the Birds*. The process had an open door policy. Anybody was welcome and invited to participate and witness. Loring emphasized that the only rule was that you couldn't be intoxicated. Everyone was to be sober because they were working with children and Elders and wanted the

work to be done in a good way (Loring). The stories are written down in synopsis form using archival materials and documentations from Teit and years of being studied by scholars and universities. Loring takes the synopsis and develops it into a script. He worked on the script for about five days before he began the workshops with the community. He explains:

We began with workshops with the community where we did some really rudimentary theatre games and then we just started riffing on that and building off that, and they picked it up really quick. We started with a hand drum and they did some choral movement, then choral speaking, flocking—things we eventually used in the show itself. Flocking was a big one as the play is about birds and we had to figure out how to move them in space and time together as a group.

Renae Morrisseau (Cree and Saulteaux), Sandy Scofield (Saulteaux and Cree), and Ronnie Dean Harris (Stō:lo/St'át'imc/Nlaka'pamux) all contributed. We had 35 participants in *Battle of the Birds*. The professionals were able to hold the posts and the groups that worked with those professionals shadowed them. So it's not 35 people trying to be moved by one person, they have their teams. That helped a lot and breaks it up. We started with really simple theatre games and built on that for the four weeks that we were working together. Eventually we integrated the text and we built the music throughout. We put it all together in the final week. It's a bit crazy but it's a lot of fun. (Loring)

During my interview with Loring, we watched a film version of *The Boy who was Abandoned*.

This was the summer 2016 Songs of The Land project, the second to follow *Battle of the Birds*.

The most recent creation is the summer 2017 production of *The Words of Our Chiefs*, which was created and performed at the Lytton River Festival in August 2017. I mention it here to demonstrate Loring's commitment to the Songs of the Land projects and to working with his community. The filmed version of *The Boy who was Abandoned* was recorded in Lytton and had both community and Vancouver-based Indigenous actors including Sam Bob (Snaw-Naw-As/Coast Salish), Nyla Carpentier (Tahltan/Kaska) and Taran Kootenayoo (Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Dene and Stoney) performing. The joy in both the performers and the witnesses is clearly visible on film. While watching the filmed performance, Loring and I talked about it and he elaborated:

In Summer 2016 when we were at community and did *The Boy Who was Abandoned*, there was a huge fire for weeks and the entire background had been burning. The night before we were supposed to perform, it rained and wiped the fire out. And the day of the performance was the best weather we had all summer. No smoke or anything. Just before we started the show, two eagles visited and flew right overhead and then took off right as we were to begin. There was no wind. Lytton is in the Fraser canyon and is always windy. The Valley made space for us. There was a lot of magic in this work, and the community really responds to that. They love it. (Loring)

The magic that Loring speaks of can be understood as the land and non-human relations giving back to the community for their good work with the project. Relationships with the land are reciprocal and sometimes the land presences her gratitude.

I asked Loring what happens to the work once it leaves the community, the land on which the stories are generated and by which they are informed. He explained that once you take it from community, surrounded by friends and family, and you put it into a theatre, it becomes immediately more presentational. This is predominantly due to the proscenium audience and the expectation of a certain style of lighting, sound, and staging. The performance of *Battle of the Birds* was more natural, Loring felt, when it was floating in the round, out in the park (Loring). Although both performances, on the land and on the stage, are directed, Loring does feel a difference between the two. Yukon choreographer and artist Michelle Olson discusses how “our society sees most of its theatre and dance through the frame of a proscenium. The rules of power are deeply embedded in its structure and informed by the historical context it was birthed from. It is a space constructed on unspoken assumptions and unseen, but imposing power structures” (Olson 273). The proscenium acts like a palace, says Olson, and when Indigenous works are being performed they are seen under the “oppressor’s gaze” (274). The point that she is trying to make is that we must consider where the performance is taking place and who is in the audience.

Loring agrees that there is something different about performing on the land and for the community that is from those lands.

Battle of the Birds (2015), *The Boy Who Was Abandoned* (2016), and *The Words of Our Chiefs* (2017) are all projects created with Nlakap'amux community members on Nlakap'amux territory. As Loring continues to work with his community and their stories and language, he considers how to disseminate their process and experiences on the projects. Savage Society has videos of the performance and written copies of the play text, and Loring is considering what to do with the material so that the stories can continue to be told. We discussed the possibilities of sharing with other communities, so they might have a guide for the kind of work he has done, or with schools or Indigenous youth and family services. Loring wholeheartedly believes in *Songs of the Land* as something that gives back to the community in ways that make him proud.

He shared that one of the young people in the cast of *Battle of the Birds* was a youth living in high-risk situations, who had gone through major family trauma, and when the person first started, they didn't move much and couldn't speak above a whisper (Loring). He explained how by the end of the process the youth was fierce and a totally different person. He attributes the transformation to the process and work that the youth put into the play. Loring sees and wants to maintain the transformative power of theatre for the youth in his community. This is the power of Indigenous storytelling: putting yourself, as an Indigenous person, into the theory and framework of the story. Further, the community gains recognition and a sense of importance from being the ones onstage and telling their own stories. Loring explains how his community gets a lot of pride from doing that. "Some members hardly ever go to Vancouver, let alone to be in a theatre, to present one of their creation stories, and speak their language" (Loring). In the contexts of Indigenous paradigms of resurgence, Loring's work with the *Songs of the Land*

project demonstrates sites of artistic self-determination and self-recognition where the participants embody their own cultural values, beliefs and practices.

Talking with Loring about the process for *Battle of the Birds* was a good reminder of how creation stories, worldviews, and languages connect Indigenous peoples to the land, and how traditional stories contain Indigenous law and values. Learning about this process and the work that Loring does with his community is a very important model for me as I develop as a dramaturg. Loring reminds me of the power of stories, community and natural law, and how the core of this work embodies accountability, relationality and love. Love for ourselves, our communities and for Mother Earth as our original mother. In focusing on the land as a knowledge holder and investing in community-oriented projects, Loring developed a self-recognizing and community-affirming process of cultural revitalization and decolonization.

3.4 The Debajehmujig Creation Centre

The Debajehmujig Creation Centre is located on Wikwemikong unceded territory where they have been creating, training, and teaching since the mid-1980s. They are the only professional theatre company located on a Reserve in Canada. “The organization was founded by Shirley Cheechoo, Blake Debassige and a group of like-minded colleagues in the summer of 1984 in West Bay (M'Chigeeng First Nation) Manitoulin Island, Ontario. In August of 1989, the company moved to Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, where its headquarters remains to this day” (Debajehmujig). Wikwemikong Unceded territory is on the eastern end of Manitoulin Island and meets the shorelines of Georgian Bay. As described in Shannon Hengen’s *Where Stories Meet: An Oral History of De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre*³, that was where Larry Lewis began

³ Now called Debajehmujig Storytellers at the Debajehmujig Creation Centre

his career, and it was also where the first reading of Tomson Highway's legendary play *The Rez Sisters* was performed. Debajehmujig Storytellers revisit and share traditional Anishnaabek/Chippewa Nation stories and worldview through theatre training, collaborations and performance. Their mandate is clearly oriented towards benefitting their community, and those involved in the training programs, through the preservation and celebration of Anishinaabek values. Although established in the 1980s, it was not until 2002 that Debajehmujig was recognized by "Canadian Heritage as a site of a national arts training program, joining the ranks of such other organizations as the National Theatre School and the Banff Centre" (Hengen "Making Stories" 132). Debajehmujig engages with teachings *from*, and works *on* their traditional territory, reflecting the cultural specificities their processes as nation-based resurgence practices.

Hengen's *Where Stories Meet: An Oral History of De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre* is an edited volume of conversations with the company's past and current artistic leaders. I met current artistic director Joe Osawabine in 2012 when we both participated in *Les Arts performatifs et spectaculaires des Premières Nations de l'est du Canada*, hosted by l'université Paris 8's theatre department and the Laboratoire d'Ethnoscénologie (EA1573) in partnership with l'Observatoire des nouvelles pratiques symboliques (Onoups) from Ottawa University. The symposium was centered on Powwows and Indigenous theatre as its two major themes. I was there presenting a paper on Floyd Favel's work with Native Performance Culture, while others were there to perform. Mohawk choreographer/performer and founder of Kaha:wi Dance Theatre Santee Smith performed a solo piece and Huron-Wendat practitioner Sylvie-Anne Sioui-Trudel performed *Apparitions d'Aataentsic*. Joe Osawabine, Bruce Naokwegijig, Jessica Wilde Peltier and Joshua Peltier performed *An 1800 Year Animated Oral History of the Indigenous People of*

Turtle Island Aka North America in 90 Minutes or Less, directed by Ron Berti. In the talkback after their performance, they spoke about Debajehmujig's creation and training processes and how their work is inherently braided with Anishinaabek worldview and practices. This section considers how relationships with homelands and land-based teachings, specifically with reference to The Foundation Teachings, influence the works created at Debajehmujig Creation Centre.

When speaking about the early stages of the company with Shannon Hengen, Cree interdisciplinary artist and one of Debajehmujig's founders, Shirley Cheechoo, talks about the significance of community involvement in Debajehmujig's work. She says, "usually every time we did some kind of workshop or even if it was in writing we would do a reading just to show the community what we were doing. We always wanted to show the community exactly what the theatre was developing at the time so that when we asked for their support, they knew what they were supporting" (Hengen *Where Stories Meet* 5). Building respectful community relationships is a major part of the work done at Debajehmujig. The community's feedback and support of Debajehmujig's work validates the company's commitment to and expression of Anishinaabek values and philosophies, creating sovereign and self-affirming processes.

Under current Artistic Producer Ron Berti's guidance, "in 1995, the theatre developed the Four Directions creative process that moved the company's management style and method of script development beyond what he calls a European model: that is, an Artistic Director at the helm who sifts through manuscripts, chooses a season and works within the typical three-week rehearsal time per production" (Hengen "Making Stories" 132). Debajehmujig's creative and managerial style is similar to the principles of the Medicine Wheel, an epistemological circle, to recognize the cultural specificity as well as its adaptation in contemporary Indigenous contexts.

This creation model “shifts focus away from the final products and towards the artist whose whole person—intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical—is believed to be engaged in making the show (Hengen “Making Stories” 132). Hengen explains,

4D is a unique process for creating new works developed by Debajehmujig Theatre Group over a span of four years (1996-2000). Holistic in nature, 4D is a culturally and socially specific process that identifies the artists as the creation, and performance as the celebration. 4D recognizes that as humans we create with our entire being—physical, emotional, intellectual, and our spiritual selves, and therefore it accepts and specifically supports the artist in all four of these areas. 4D is adapted to oral tradition, it is a process that nurtures honesty more than accuracy, and sharing more than starring, and it is a process that consciously uses personal resources, physical—like a skill, emotional—like a memory, spiritual—like an experience, and intellectual—like an object, as the key to personal and group creation. (97)

The idea behind this approach is that the creative process is closely aligned to the artist’s own self-discovery and relational accountability. It is therefore essential to mentor and support the creating artist in order to allow her to create with her whole being. “Her whole being” is a reflection of the Four Directions of the medicine wheel: spiritual, physical, emotional and mental. This creation process aims to help the artist find the balance among these four dimensions of being in her work.

In scholar Dalie Giroux’s article “Geste artistique, mémoire et connaissance dans les arts de la scène autochtones contemporains dans l’est du Canada,” Giroux interviews Debajehmujig’s artistic director Joe Osawabine about the philosophical and political agency embedded in the Four Directions Creation Process. Osawabine gives an example of how the process is designed to support all basic needs of the participant. He explains how the workshop and rehearsal participants are encouraged to share any emotional difficulties they encounter in their lives to use as a creative starting point as opposed to allowing them to create a gap between the emotional dimension and the other dimensions of their life (Giroux 48). This teaches participants to

consider themselves as active agents in the process and helps them to negotiate relationships between cultural practices and artistic creation. In this process, “one’s own and one’s peoples’ stories are told and retold so that both the people and the stories gain new direction” (Hengen “Making Stories” 134). Indigenous worldviews and philosophies govern and inform their theatrical process, and inculcate the work with higher spiritual and political implications.

Using the Medicine Wheel as a philosophical framework transmits teachings and knowledges through the use of the body and dialogue. The Medicine Wheel represents the teachings of the four directions, the four stages of life, the four medicines and other interpretations. This is what makes the Four Directions Creation Process a successful guide and framework for community building and theatrical collaboration. It allows entry for any Indigenous practitioner who is open and receptive to this Indigenous-centred way of working. “This process embraces traditional wisdom and teaching—company elders form an integral part of it—and is illustrated by company members as a kind of organism’ (Hengen “Making Stories” 133). The Four Directions Creation Process grounds the participants in a relational process where they engage in stories, language and teachings that re-connect them with the land. Debajehmujig is able to put Anishinaabek relations at the core of their creation and training models, and this is particularly seen through their work with the Foundation Teachings.

3.5 The Foundation Teachings

At the 2017 Talking Stick Festival’s Industry Series, Joe Osawabine spoke about the creation processes at Debajehmujig Creation Centre and how they work with the petroglyph teachings as the framework for new play development. “The Foundation Teachings are specific teachings that were actually carved in stone [petroglyphs] to be passed on as a way of life” (Hengen *Where Stories Meet* 86). The knowledge embedded in the petroglyphs represents

collective values and the importance of establishing and honouring good relationships with self, extended family, clan, community and Nation. Debajemujig demonstrates how maintaining meaningful relationships with their community helps to ground their work in the land, language, teachings and values. Below, I consider how the Foundation Teachings are used as frameworks to develop new work and how this iteration of land-based dramaturgy is involved in creating a theatrical process that fosters the love and honouring of Anishinaabek realities.

My knowledge of the Foundation Teachings as frameworks for new play development came from my witnessing of Joe Osawabine discussing them during a panel that I curated and facilitated at the 2017 Talking Stick Festival. In the panel, titled *Digesting Indigenous Works*, Osawabine (Odawa Anishinaabe), Margo Kane (Cree/Salteaux), Ed Bourgeois (Mohawk) and Lisa C. Ravensbergen (Ojibwe/Swampy Cree and English/Irish) engaged in discussions around the creation and reception of new works. Osawabine discussed the significance of land in Debajemujig's work as he introduced the symbols inscribed on the Stoney Lake petroglyphs of Peterborough. Encased in Petroglyph Park are over 1000 teachings on the rock. New play development at Debajemujig's Four Directions Creation Centre is grounded in The Foundation Teachings found on the Peterborough petroglyphs as interpreted by Elder Eddie King, one of Debajemujig's cultural and spiritual advisors. Among these petroglyphs, six figures correspond to the fundamental teachings that guide the artistic practice of the company: "Time, Freedom, Life, The Four Axes, Ceremony, and the Preservation of Humanity" (Hengen *Where Stories Meet* 86). The Foundation Teachings, as explained by Osawabine, are there to "teach us how to live a better way of life, a way of life that we as a people seem to have strayed off from" (Hengen *Where Stories Meet* 86).

When speaking at the 2017 Talking Stick Festival, Osawabine described how each of the carvings is a reminder or a teaching. Osawabine spent time explaining what each of the themes mean and spoke to the many teachings that go with them:

Time has three natural times: night and day, 28 days from full moon to full moon being another measurement of time, and then the four seasons.

Freedom is the symbol of a bird, and the bird has two legs, it's a reminder of the two types of freedom. Freedom from something, and freedom to something.

Life is shaped like an arrowhead. It is a reminder of life. Teaching us to only create an arrowhead to take a life, in order to sustain our own life, but that arrow head... that diamond symbol is a good teaching tool as well—it reminds us that we all have an emotional side, a physical side, a spiritual side and a mind, a heart and a soul. It reminds us to try and keep these things in line, in balance. It represents the basic needs of a person—what does every person need? Clean air, clean water, good food and safe shelter.

The Four Axes represent the things that every individual should know how to do to sustain their own life and individuality- plant, build (clothing, shelter, ceremonial objects) hunt.

Ceremony represents the celebration of spirituality.

The Preservation of Humanity is ultimately the intended impact of our work. We do the work we do to ensure the preservation of humanity. The symbol is of an outer circle, or the sun, and the inner circle, or the moon. The outer circle is also man and the inner circle is woman. But we all sit in that circle together and we all have the need to contribute to the preservation of humanity based on those values- they change from nation to nation but the values are inherently the same. They are love, honesty, respect, trust, truth, compassion, and patience. (Osawabine "The Foundation Teachings")

The Foundation Teachings are engaged in an active relationship with the petroglyphs on which they are carved, and with the artists who engage with them. As a witness to Osawabine sharing these teachings and values, I understood him to be embodying the importance of community. At the Talking Stick Festival, we were all sitting in a circle while he spoke, and had been gathering together in this way for the four days of the Industry Series. We had developed into our own community, meeting new friends and colleagues or seeing familiar faces after spending time apart. When talking about *The Preservation of Humanity*, we as relations sitting together in that

circle were impacted by the reminder of how powerful a community can be when working with shared values. In sharing the teachings and their meanings with us, Osawabine embodied the values he spoke of (love, honesty, respect, trust, truth, compassion, and patience) as he wanted us to feel like involved and knowledgeable community members. Our gathering was transformed into a place where we came together with one heart and one mind, to honour the good work happening at the Debajehmujig Creation Centre.

Using The Foundation Teachings to create new work and to train practitioners is an example of Indigenous political resurgence in action, as its process emphasizes Indigenous values, and communities gathering under a collective purpose. The entire self—physical, mental, spiritual and emotional—is stimulated and engaged in a process that reconnects the body with the land and all of its knowledge. Homelands, ancestors and blood memories are being honoured as the Foundation Teachings are being activated and remembered during the creative process. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* Leanne Betasamosake Simpson uses teachings from the land, Anishinaabemowin and lived experiences to describe Nishnabeg theoretical frameworks and resurgence paradigms. She emphasizes the significance of land-based knowledges and experiences to her understanding of self, and self in relationship to community. When speaking of artistic practice as resurgence, Simpson writes that “building diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences means significantly re-investing in our own ways of being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal systems; language learning; ceremonial and spiritual pursuits; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions” (Simpson *Dancing* 18). The Foundation Teachings as a paradigm for new play development constitutes a Relational Indigenous land-based dramaturgy, as Osawabine explains,

Our ancestors have literally carved these teachings in stone. Teachings for us to live our everyday lives by, so it's about going back to those ideas and looking at them first and making sure that everything in the production is centered and grounded in those teachings. The idea of freedom—we all have the freedom to create, and we all have the freedom not to create as well, so it really leaves a choice for us to decide if we want to do this or not, and we decided that we do. (qtd in Hengen *Where Stories Meet* 87)

At Debajehmujig, land is connected to the philosophical, educational and spiritual realities of the ones creating the work. This artistic process transmits cultural and traditional knowledge through the use of the body by experimenting with spiritual and land-based knowledges. The Four Directions Creation Process lets The Foundation Teachings live with and through each of the participants. This relational process for developing new works validates the “traditions of orality, integrating foundation teachings, observational and operational learning” and trains practitioners in culturally and socially specific ways (Hengen *Where Stories Meet* 90).

Osawabine describes how all of Debajehmujig's work relates to The Foundation Teachings, and to creating and maintaining relationships with the land. One project he spoke about at the 2017 Talking Stick Festival is *Global Savages*. Originally called *An 1800 Year Animated Oral History of the Indigenous People of Turtle Island Aka North America in 90 Minutes or Less*, it was first performed at the Talking Stick Festival in 2011 and then traveled overseas. I witnessed a performance at the 2012 *Arts performatifs et spectaculaires des Premières Nations de l'est du Canada* symposium in Paris. The performance took place in a room with very high ceilings, the stage floor on one side and raked bleachers where the attendants sat on the other. There was minimal tech support, a general wash flooded the performance space, and the only set pieces were the props held and manipulated by the actors. The ensemble wore regalia and animal hide. They directly addressed the audience. Osawabine explained how they learnt very quickly that the show never felt right being performed on a

conventional stage because it was a storytelling piece. He explained how the relationship to the performance is different when they are “outside, on the ground, in relationship to the sky, to the water, and to the land” (Osawabine “The Foundation Teachings”).

Osawabine also spoke to the significance of performing on the land, and gave examples of what happens when you perform on land that is not your homeland. While travelling and performing *Global Savages*, the group realized that they were always performing on someone else’s territory. Osawabine explains how they built relationships with the hosts before the performance and always integrated aspects of the territory’s story into their performance (Osawabine “The Foundation Teachings”). So every time they performed *Global Savages* they argued that it was a new creation, because for them it was. Working with protocol, teachings or stories to make a new creation is a significant aspect of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies. It was a new story every time as their relationships to the land and the hosts differed with each performance. With each showing they performed in relationship with the different lands they were on. Relational Indigenous dramaturgical processes like these work with what the mind, body, heart and spirit know, and connect them for new artistic expressions.

The group would contact the hosts of the production a month or so in advance of their performance and ask to be connected with local community members. They would speak in advance and get to know each other so that when they arrived it was like they were arriving to see friends (Osawabine “The Foundation Teachings”). Part of performing *Global Savages* involved the cast going out into the community in character. In 2011, *Global Savages* was performed at The Talking Stick Festival in Vancouver and below is an image of the group on Commercial Drive talking to people and inviting them to attend the performance. Osawabine

believes that most of their audiences would never have witnessed their shows if the cast wasn't out gathering people.



GLOBAL SAVAGES

Image 3 Photo from debaj.ca

In addition to meeting people from the territory on which they were performing, the Debajehmujig team also performed a sunrise ceremony to honour each of the lands on which they performed. They invited anyone to join as they crossed over a significant body of water singing a Water Song and offering prayers and food to the water (Osawabine “The Foundation Teachings”). They greeted the sun from every territory they worked from. At the 2017 Talking Stick Festival, Osawabine explained how this was a very important part of their process. They held the ceremony regardless of when the sun rose. Osawabine laughed as he told us that while in Scotland, one of the hosts asked, ‘Do you realize the sun rises at 4 am here?’ And he replied by saying, ‘Well, I guess we will see you at 3:30 am!’ We all laughed. But I understood the significance of actively participating in the sunrise ceremony as a way to honour relationships

with the land and to build community with the show's presenters. Debajehmujig works in a way that honours and respects Anishinaabek teachings and worldviews to create new relationships and shared stories. Debajehmujig expresses Relational Indigenous dramaturgies through the honoring of their nation-specific practices while simultaneously creating new ways to perform them.

The Four Directions Creation Process is a useful model when considering Relational Indigenous land-based dramaturgies. The land and The Foundation Teachings hold knowledges, values, and worldview referenced in all of Debajehmujig's work. The teachings are specific to their nation and home territories, but in weaving the teachings into their artistic practices, they are able to carry it all with them as they travel. Further, as a dramaturgical framework, it introduces other Indigenous communities to Indigenous-centered practices and ways of working. It is a decolonized way of making theatre, inherently connected to Anishinaabek laws, worldviews and customs. Debajehmujig hold themselves accountable to their community and ancestors (including human ancestors, but also land, animals and water ways) and create innovative and culturally appropriate ways to develop new work.

3.6 Land-based Dramaturgy in *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*

My interest in developing land-based dramaturgies is largely inspired by Monique Mojica's theatrical legacy. Mojica is actively involved in creating performance theories, dramaturgical structures, and methodologies rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing as seen in her work with Spiderwoman Theatre, Native Earth Performing Arts, the Turtle Gal Performance Ensemble, her collaborations with Floyd Favel (Cree) and Native Performance Culture, and currently with Chocolate Woman Collective. As stated on Chocolate Woman Collective's website,

Chocolate Woman Collective is comprised of senior Indigenous artists, artist/scholars and their collaborators, and was formed in 2007 to research and create the theatrical performance, *Chocolate Woman Dreams the Milky Way*. These accomplished artists are brought together by our shared interest in research, exploration and practical application of Indigenous aesthetic principles in all areas of the dramatic arts, in theory, process and practice. Chocolate Woman Collective is inter-disciplinary, cross-cultural and inter-generational. We are pushing the parameters of our respective art forms as we devise culturally specific dramaturgies from which to build Indigenous performance.

Chocolate Woman Collective is dedicated to the rigorous application of a creative process that privileges Indigenous Knowledges, cultural aesthetics and performance principles. Our artistic practice integrates theory, practice-based research (both archival and field) and embodied studio work in the creation of new work that dislodges colonialism from the body. Our mandate is to create collaborative, inter-disciplinary, cross-cultural and inter-generational Indigenous theatrical performances and to tour them hemispherically and throughout the world. The performances created from this practice serve, for our audiences, as interventions that shift cultural paradigms and contribute to a larger project of cultural/historical reclamation.

Chocolate Woman Collective works to ‘dislodge colonialism from the body’. This part of their mandate makes clear that Indigenous sovereignty is included in all aspects of their work. According to Mojica, the land becomes their archive and they work to develop embodied relationships with the land that “help to re-define Indigenous identities, history, science, cosmology, literature — and their performance” (“SSF&CI Synopsis”).

Mojica, Floyd Favel, Erika Iserhoff (Cree) and Candace Brunette (Cree) created the *Omushkego Cree Water Stories* project, described in detail in Brunette’s MA thesis, “Returning Home Through Stories: a Decolonizing Approach to Omushkego Cree Theatre Through the Methodological Practices of Native Performance Culture (NPC).” One of the primary goals of Brunette’s thesis is to demonstrate how Native Performance Culture breaks away from familiar Anglo-Euro-Canadian theatre practices and models, and instead focuses on creating theatrical techniques that reflect Indigenous worldviews and relationships with the land (Brunette 15). Revisiting Indigenous embodied practices and relationships to cultural knowledges is the

principal focus of Native Performance Culture.

Floyd Favel, a Cree theatre practitioner from the Poundmaker community in Saskatchewan, is an interdisciplinary artist whose theatrical career spans over 30 years. I have met with Favel a couple of times in Ottawa and Montréal to discuss his work and to share our understandings of Indigenous dramaturgies. I've learned a lot from witnessing Favel work and am very grateful for the conversations and experiences we've shared. Favel connects his theatrical practice to his daily life as he develops approaches that use Indigenous knowledges as theatrical starting points and facilitates a process towards the creation of a theatrical performance. Favel is aware of the parallel spiritual realities that Indigenous peoples live in our daily lives and how we can incorporate them into the theatrical process. Favel's work is spiritual and interconnected with Indigenous realities that are shifting, expanding and filled with intangibles presences.

Native Performance Culture is a non-fixed dramaturgical process that develops and transforms land-based knowledges, spiritual relationships and artistic acts of cultural resurgence into theatrical devices. The theory relies primarily on having the artist research self-in-representation to self and to others, and then translates selected relationships into embodied actions. The embodied actions are reflections of one's relationship to the land, familial or community knowledges, and their transformation into the dramaturgical process. The process then becomes braided with Indigenous concepts of time, space, place, blood memory, and relationships to land-based teachings and knowledges. Favel's methods inspire those who use them to revisit their relationships with the land, communities and artistic practices.

In a conversation I had with Favel in February 2012, he emphasized that the most important aspect of Native Performance Culture is the "process." This process is personal to each

artist. Favel suggests studying and examining Indigenous “dances, songs, weaving, myths and ceremonies and, from there, identifying theatrical principles and using these principles as starting points for contemporary works” (Favel, “Poetry, Remnants, and Ruins” 34). This process then becomes the structural base from which to create a performance, develop a script or construct a set. The process goes on silently and tacitly inside each person’s body, varying with their own understandings or connections to the particular cultural starting point. This approach differs from other forms of theatre, as its process and result are dependent on the relationship that each participant has with her culture. Theoretically, it is in honouring particular cultural practices and relationships that this method may attain its goals and fulfill its functions.

Favel describes Native Performance Culture as the “development of techniques, methods and exercises based on Aboriginal ritual and social structures” (Favel, “Poetry, Remnants, and Ruins” 34). This process is about finding ways to incorporate and physicalize Indigenous relationships with land, water, spirituality and communities and to include their manifestations as starting points for the creation of contemporary theatre. Favel’s contributions help to explain how the physical experience of performing Indigenous dances or singing songs can help students or practitioners to learn about embodied awareness, movement patterns in the body and theatrical presence specific to Indigenous cultures. Monique Mojica has worked with Favel on various projects and their shared interest in embodied practices propels my consideration of land-based dramaturgies into a deeper analysis of the body’s relationship to the land when developing theatrical works.

Guna and Rappahannock artist/activist/theorist Monique Mojica practices new play development dramaturgies that involve her physically interacting with lands and waters. Her physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual self is activated in working in relationship with the

physical land and intangible energies that make up her surroundings. Mojica and LeAnne Howe's dramaturgical framework for the play *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* solidifies Indigenous relationships to the land and places its performative abilities at the center of their artistic practice (Mojica "In Plain Sight" 220). Mojica, Howe, and other collaborators interact with earth works, sacred locations and effigy mounds through listening, speaking to, being silent with, and responding to the land as inspiration for creative development. Earth works and mounds, scattered throughout Turtle Island and beyond, are understood as imprints in the Earth created by Indigenous relations that have come before us. They come in various shapes and sizes: some resemble animals, some hold spiritual importance, and some function as burial mounds.

Chickasaw scholar Chadwick Allen has been involved in the dramaturgical development of *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* since 2011. Allen explains,

In the North American context, thousands of earthen mounds, embankments and enclosures remain extant, though often obscured, eroded, desecrated, sometimes partially or wholly destroyed, and occasionally reconstructed. The compound noun *earthworks* evokes the collective presence of these remarkable structures, their remnants and the traces of their memory. Moreover, the word's juxtaposition—grounded *earth*, dynamic *works*—indicates these structures' synthesis of artistry and engineering: projects in applied science staged as ceremonial complex, social forum, sports or civic arena, busy marketplace, artistic workshop, open air theatre in the round, square or octagonal. Constructed across a large expanse of the continent over a period of thousands of years, these sites of 'worked' earth suggest the multiplicity of their original functions, and they suggest the extent, purposefulness and complexity of Indigenous interactions with land and engagements with technology, sometimes singularly and within remarkably short intervals of time, but also cooperatively among diverse nations and over multiple generations. The ongoing presence of these works—massive, well engineered, aesthetically exquisite structures, intricately planned, mathematically and geometrically encoded, and multiply aligned with waterways, with ridges and other natural features of the landscape, and with the visible patterns of the moving cosmos above—reveals the false premises that undergird settler fantasies of a primeval world untouched by human hands or human minds. ("Earthworks" 82)

Mojica and Howe's dramaturgy is relational and political as it acknowledges the invisibilities of these sites and re-allocates power and significance to the land's presence. For Mojica, the mounds "track an ancestral imprint that holds for us the ancestors' profound understanding of architecture, astronomy, ceremonial space, and the human relationship and responsibility to them all" (Mojica "In Plain Sight" 218). Mojica and Howe "seek to transpose story narratives and literary structures of these ancient earthworks and apply them to scriptwriting and performance in order to reanimate Indigenous ways of knowing and make visible that which has been made invisible" ("SSF&CI Synopsis"). Together, Mojica and Howe are resisting the effects of settler colonialism by visiting, remembering and honouring the spiritual, historical and political significance of the lands that they experience.

Engaging with earthworks as artistic inspiration re-animates the mounds, moving them away from their archeological description as prehistoric sites and fueling them with contemporary agency and purpose. The dramaturgical process for *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* examines how "earthworks might be understood as forms of Indigenous *writing* still relevant in the present and perhaps key to Indigenous futures" (Allen "Earthworks" 84). The methodological framework of this project returns Mojica to the land where she physically engages with and is inspired by the Earth. As Allen suggests, the earthworks should not only be considered as Indigenous writings "*on* the land, but literally *through the medium* of the land itself" (Allen "Earthworks" 85, his emphasis). Mojica, Howe and their collaborators respectfully look to the land as a source of knowledge and as inspiration for new play development. They actively engage their bodies with the contours, dips and intangible presences still living on the earthworks. The artists embody and translate their experiences, the stories, and the beauty gifted from the earth into material for their performance.

Monique Mojica's article "In Plain Sight: Inscripted Earth and Invisible Realities" is published in Roberta Barker and Kim Solga's edited anthology, *New Essays in Canadian Theatre Volume 2: New Canadian Realisms*. The anthology gathers writings that question what "realism" means for selected contemporary Canadian theatre practitioners. The discourse created in this anthology explores the layers and complexities of social, political and gendered realities within Canadian theatrical communities. The volume looks at the realities of contemporary theatre-makers in Canada and how their worldviews are reflected in their practice. At the beginning of Mojica's article she explains,

I am engaged in artistic research (field, archival, and studio), into Indigenous aesthetics and performance principles in theory, process, and practice, and in the practical application of these investigations and principles as the structural base from which to construct a performance, design a set, or dramaturge a script. Through these investigations I practice an Indigenous artistic research methodology that speaks to the embodiment of place. The land is our archive. (219)

Mojica's reality is rooted in a powerful relationship between her Indigenous body's ways of knowing and the land. In saying that "the land is our archive" Mojica is giving authority to the Earth for carrying knowledge, stories and languages that can inform her practice. She states:

It regenerates my creative source by placing me on the life-giving land in an embodied research process that requires me to walk on, touch, feel, smell, and absorb the stories, forms, and structures of effigy mounds and earth works, to connect to the ancestors who built them and to the peoples who still inhabit the region. Simultaneous to this sacred work, I am challenged to "talk back" to colonial erasure, to peel away that veil, to refocus my lens. (Mojica "In Plain Sight" 220)

Mojica, LeAnne Howe, and their collaborators visited more than sixteen Earth mounds and historical sites from Toronto to Ohio and beyond North America, and her article "In Plain Sight: Inscripted Earth and Invisible Realities" provides first-hand accounts of her embodied experiences at particular mounds. In these accounts Mojica pays special attention to the signs posted at each site. Some acknowledge the territory as sacred Indigenous lands, like Indian

Mounds Park in St. Paul, Minnesota, whose sign reads, “Please Respect Indian Burial Sites Keep Off Thank you” (Mojica “In Plain Sight” 225). High Park in Toronto does not mention the Indigeneity of the land as its sign reads, “Forest Regeneration Zone. Area Closed. Help us protect this area by keeping out” (Mojica “In Plain Sight” 223). The reference to these signs speaks to the challenges that Indigenous peoples face due to the ongoing effects of settler colonialism on our lands and body. Mojica’s article describes the difficulties in actually locating some of the mounds. The team’s process acknowledges the continuous Indigenous displacement that unfolds on these lands. The earthworks stand as reminders that there were families, communities and nations that made a life on those territories before parks, cities, or other crown-related agencies appeared. Mojica and her collaborators listen to the stories that rise up from the land and offer their bodies to voice what the land cannot.

In Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson’s article “Welcoming Sovereignty,” he provides a thought-provoking analysis of the visibilities/invisibilities of Indigenous representations in cities. Robinson urges the reader to question how one can acknowledge their responsibilities as a guest on Indigenous territory that may be “unwelcomed (or the fact that the role of guest has been assumed)” (Robinson 32). Mojica and Howe try to presence the mounds by looking beyond the signs and by reconnecting with the Indigenous histories that exist in the land. Robinson states that “to walk down any city street or into parks and public plazas across Canada and the United states is to be reminded that civic amnesia operates through the visual normalization of colonial signs: street signs named after a city’s ‘founders’, statues of famous statesmen and explorers, and buildings named after companies who profit from resource extraction in Indigenous territories” (23). His use of the term *civic amnesia* relates to Mojica and Howe’s process. They assert that the mounds, while hard to locate, still stand as resilient Indigenous sacred sites. The mounds that

the practitioners visit are signs in and of themselves, marking “places of abundance or spiritual power,” and fueling Mojica’s creative process (Robinson 24).

The creation process for *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* involves reconciling and strengthening relationships between the land and body. This site-specific work has been in development for over six years, and will be performed at “various mound sites and earth works across Turtle Island, beginning at sites within the Greater Toronto Area. The (re) conciliatory action this work reanimates is between [their] bodies and the land” (“SSF&CI Synopsis”). This land-based dramaturgy is political; it refuses to forget and wear the blinders of civic amnesia. Instead, “Mojica’s embodied research into mounds and earthworks and their literary structure as a dramaturgical framework ignites new growth in the playwright’s long-term artistic pursuit of developing Indigenous dramaturgies. Through these investigations, [they] practice the embodiment of place” (“SSF&CI Synopsis”). Dylan Robinson’s discussion of ‘civic amnesia’ reminds us how the themes of fighting to be seen, challenging attempted colonial erasure, and rewriting Indigenous stereotypes are ongoing characteristics of Indigenous theatre-making. Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism is being incorporated into theatrical works in ways that connect bodies, sociopolitical realities, and aesthetics with processes that mark our resilient and ongoing presence on the land. “Indigenous peoples, like the presence of the effigy mounds and earthworks, are ‘hidden in plain sight’” (SSF&CI Synopsis). This project’s uncovering and reconnecting with the land creates new relationships and methods that are specific to Relational Indigenous dramaturgies. The artists of this process are exploring how their bodies and the land connect to express newfound stories and movements. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies speak to the implications of kinship, connection and permanent transformation during artistic processes.

In Chadwick Allen's "Performing Serpent Mound: A Trans-Indigenous Meditation" he describes the process for *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* as a Trans-Indigenous relationship, in positioning the mounds and earthworks themselves as active Indigenous collaborators in this process. Mojica and Howe's ethical approach to working with the mounds and earthworks treats the land in respectful and culturally appropriate ways, abiding by personal and territorial protocol. Allen explains how "Mojica and Howe's methodology is based in the idea of an 'embodied research': approaching earthworks in an appropriately respectful manner, spending significant time with their forms, walking their contours, making physical contact, engaging the full range of the human body's senses to listen and feel for song, story, and movement contained within the bodies and remains of earthworks" (Allen "Performing Serpent Mound" 398). The embodiment of place in this process extends to include the interpreted embodiment of those who are traditionally *from* that land. Mojica and Howe's process uses the land to actively connect their human bodies "to earthworks as sign systems and encoded knowledge by imagining one's way *into* the lives that have been lived at and through the mounds—that is, the lives of 'the ancestors who built them' and of 'the peoples who still inhabit the region'" (Allen "Performing Serpent Mound" 399). Mojica and Howe are *in relationship* with the land, as they record and document the land with their bodies (Allen "Performing Serpent Mound" 399). This process looks to the mounds as storykeepers, and to the performers' bodies as the tools to retrieve their stories and embody them back to life. The development of *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* exemplifies Relational Indigenous land-based dramaturgy: informed by the ancestral mounds but governed by a contemporary embodied and female-centric process.

3.7 Witnessing *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*

In April 2017, producer Sue Balint asked if I would be interested in working on the upcoming workshops of *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*. After several workshops, the piece was scheduled to go into production in August 2017, to be performed outdoors near a mound site (either High Park or Magwood Park, near the Humber River) in a 'circus tent-esque' longhouse tipi structure. The creators were looking to fill a dramaturg/assistant director position that would work closely with co-creators Monique Mojica and LeAnne Howe. The collective wanted badly to have this role filled by a female artist. In previous workshops, the dramaturg/assistant director was Tara Beagan (Ntlakap'amux/Irish). Beagan had since moved out west and could not commit to such a long time back in Toronto that summer. I had a Skype call with producer Sue Balint and Monique Mojica to hear more about the project and its history from Mojica herself, and to share more about my previous theatrical experiences and myself. I could not believe that I was being offered this opportunity, and that it was happening at the same time that I was writing this chapter and teaching about Monique Mojica in my Introduction to Indigenous Dramaturgies course at Simon Fraser University's School of Contemporary Arts.

We had the Skype conversation, which was nerve-wracking, exciting, informative and monumental all at once. Afterwards, they sent me a project and plot summary outlining in more detail the dramaturgical principles for *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*. At that time their proposal reads:⁴

Chocolate Woman Collective's team has identified 4 principles to use as the bones of the dramaturgical framework for *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*. They represent the first intersection between the literary structure of effigy mounds and earthworks and their

⁴ Monique Mojica has given me permission to cite her project proposal, but has also mentioned that things have changed since writing it.

re-activation and re-animation in an embodied process of text generation and performance:

1. Duration — the ‘deep time’ of mounds
2. Alignment & Frequency — their geographical/geophysical/cosmological placement
3. Convergence — the vibrational frequency created by that relationship
4. Integration — the human cultural/performative interaction

I was extremely interested to read about a process that is first and foremost rooted in the artists’ embodied relationship to the mounds and earthworks, and the spiritual relationships connecting their bodies to said locations. Their process description honours their physical interactions with and on the land. After thinking about the opportunity to work with these amazing artists on such an epic piece, I was, again, nervous, excited, scared and eager all at once. After talking the offer over with mentors, family and friends, I had to turn it down due to my academic commitment to completing my PhD dissertation. In any event, I traveled to Toronto in August 2017 to witness a workshop performance of Chocolate Woman Collective’s *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*.

On Monday, August 14, 2017, I attended the in-development Open Studio showing of *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*. While August 2017 was the scheduled world premiere of the show, City of Toronto permits to perform in either High Park or Magwood Park were not awarded to the collective. Being refused permission to perform on the land is another manifestation of ‘civic amnesia’. It is my understanding that the collective is working to premiere *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* in one of these parks next summer. Meanwhile, the studio showing took place at the Centre for Indigenous Theatre in Toronto, and was followed by a feast wherein everyone was asked to bring an item to share. Sharing food after the showing produced a deeper sense of involvement in those of us invited, as we were held accountable to contribute to the gathering.

The performance took place in room #209 in one of the Centre for Indigenous Theatre classrooms. After offering my salad and a braid of Sweetgrass to producer Sue Balint, I entered the studio where the six performers were sitting in a semi-circle behind their music stands. Long red curtains covered the windows with two yellow circus banners hanging over top. One advertised “Panther Woman!” and had a picture of a black panther with a beautiful woman’s face on it, and the other advertised “Invisible Woman” with a print of a skeleton body. Around each performer and their stand were some props, some rattles, a coat and hat for the Invisible Woman played by Monique Mojica, and cat ears and a tail for Panther Girl played by LeAnne Howe.



Image 4 Photo of me in front of the Invisible Woman banner after the showing, by Lily Mengesha

I considered the four principles identified by Chocolate Woman Collective-- duration, alignment & frequency, convergence, and integration--while witnessing the performance. *Side*

Show Freaks and Circus Injuns was structured in seven portals. Each portal was energetically performed and included stories, songs, commercial jingles, kazoos and flutes being played, dances or projections. The portals introduced the world of the cosmos and spirituality, violence against Indigenous bodies and lands, intergenerational and familial love, and the recognition of blood memory as power and knowledge. The Duration principle, the ‘deep time’ and memories of the mounds, is explored in each portal through various spatial and geopolitical contexts. “*You got to go down to go up*” and “*my eyes never saw, but I know.*” I identify the Duration principle in these lines, as they include non-linear understandings of time and space. “*You got to go down to go up*” and “*my eyes never saw, but I know*” signal to me the translation process that transforms working with the land into theatrical dialogue. This language upholds and maintains the artists’ relationship with their process and presences their own chain of relationships during the moments of performance. The Duration principle manifests the various relationships at work simultaneously, including the imagined stories of the earthworks and the stories the performers carry with them in their bodies. The dramaturgical principles Alignment & Frequency and Convergence were made visible to me through the repetition of these lines, as I was reminded of how the artists traveled to many geographical locations and spent many hours aligning themselves and tuning into the frequencies emanating from the lands. “*You got to go down to go up*” and “*my eyes never saw, but I know.*” These phrases are artistic interpretations of some of the experiences the collaborators had while working with and on the earthworks. They speak to the colonial violence and ‘civic amnesia’ that the artists had to combat, and act as a model for Indigenous practitioners working in artistic relationship with the land.

In the Q&A after the performance, someone asked what Buddy Holly’s image and name was doing in their work. LeAnne Howe spoke of how Buddy Holly as a name, and a person

whose Indigenous heritage was overlooked by mainstream media, came to them during a visit to an earthworks site. She said that they did not know why he was there, but connections to him kept returning, so they kept working with it and are still teasing it out. The invisibility of land and Indigenous presence on the land are major points of interest to Chocolate Woman Collective in this work. They demonstrate how their relational dramaturgy involves embodying the stories that they felt, and trying to use those experiences to create a play. They include experiences they had at the mounds, dreams, memories, and projections of families like Monique Mojica's mother Gloria Miguel. Chocolate Woman Collective's process can be understood as relational and political in its attempt to reconnect with the land, focus on Indigenous women's bodies and honour the subjective and spiritual connections that occur during their process.

Following the performance, members of Chocolate Woman Collective walked the audience to the table where the feast was set up. LeAnne Howe and Monique Mojica burnt Sweetgrass, thanked everyone for bringing food, and thanked the creator for allowing us to gather together that evening. Sharing the food gave both the performers and the witnesses the opportunity to speak casually and in some cases reconnect with people whom we hadn't seen in a while. People were gathered in the studio who have, at various points, been involved with *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*, including Jill Carter, PJ Prudat, Chadwick Allen and others.

Chocolate Woman Collective is not the only Indigenous group that works with relational and embodied dramaturgies, and whose works present "collaborative creations built upon the stories and improvisations of its members" (Carter "Repairing the Web" 81). Jill Carter writes that Spiderwoman Theater's working methodologies allow that every perspective be honoured and included (Carter "Repairing the Web" 82). Chocolate Woman Collective's dramaturgical work to develop *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* is a collaborative process that not only

allows for the artists' voices to be shared but also highlights the land as a major contributor to the development of their work. Including the land as a source of knowledge, and as a collaborator, makes this Relational Indigenous land based dramaturgical process political and dependent on the safe preservation of the land.

3.8 Land-Based Dramaturgies Conclusions

Relational Indigenous land-based dramaturgies can be understood as political acts of artistic sovereignty and resurgence as they methodologically, structurally and spiritually highlight Indigenous worldviews and land-based practices. Monique Mojica, LeAnne Howe, Kevin Loring, Joe Osawabine and other Indigenous theatre artists are rethinking the social, political, and educational structures commonly associated with new play development. This chapter uses the categories “Land and settler colonialism” and “Land and Indigenous cosmologies” from the introduction to *Land Education: Rethinking pedagogies of place from Indigenous, postcolonial, and decolonizing perspectives*, edited by Kate McCoy, Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, to focus my analysis on how storytelling, protocol, community and resurgence politics are embedded in land-based Relational Indigenous dramaturgies.

The artistic leaders discussed in this chapter are creating theatre aesthetics, dramaturgical structures, and methodologies rooted in epistemological and ontological ways of knowing specific to their Indigenous communities. These practitioners are not the only Indigenous artists working from land-based dramaturgies. Aanmitaagzi (He/She Speaks), for example, is another company whose process and work is deeply rooted in their relationships to their homelands. Formed in 2010, Aanmitaagzi is a community-based performing arts company in Nipissing First Nation. “Located on the shore of Lake Nipissing near North Bay, Ontario, Aanmitaagzi is an interdisciplinary company that works in visual, dance, music, theatre and dramaturgical

activities” (“Big Medicine Studio”). Under the direction of Penny Couchie (Anishinaabe) and Sid Bobb (Sto:lo), they have hosted “mentorships in story weaving, new play development workshops and hosted many traditional ceremonies for the community of Nipissing First Nation, and surrounding areas” (“Big Medicine Studio”).

These practitioners are creating artistic and political works that are forcing reviewers, scholars and researchers to develop alternative analytical tools with which to critique the practice, creation, and process that make up the play’s whole. The works of these contemporary Indigenous practitioners are unveiling relationships that they have with identity, time, space, land and traditions, and demonstrating how their artistic processes create new ways to work with those relationships. In the next chapter, I introduce place-based dramaturgy as a relational dramaturgical model where Indigenous peoples negotiate across different Indigenous practices and traditions to create culturally appropriate ways of working when the group is not necessarily grounded in any one Nation's stories or protocol. Place-based dramaturgies concentrate on the embodied, felt and transportable experiences that manifest during moments of Indigenous collaborations.

Chapter 4: Feeling, Knowing, Sharing: Lateral Love and Presencing as Place-based Dramaturgy

In Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi artist scholar Jill Carter's article, "Chocolate Woman Visions an Organic Dramaturgy: Blocking Notation for the Indigenous Soul," she describes her involvement in an "investigation-in-progress" involving Monique Mojica (Guna-Rappahannock), Floyd Favel (Cree) and Oswaldo DeLeon Kanulte (Guna) (Carter "Chocolate Woman" 2). At the beginning of this article Carter describes a moment that motivated my conceptualization of place-based dramaturgy as a theatrical practice devoted to fulfilling relationships with self and with others. Place-based dramaturgy focuses on certain moments within the process, whether in workshops, new play development processes or rehearsal phases, as embodied mobilizations of resurgence. Further, place-based dramaturgy acknowledges the mobility of embodying these experiences (movements, languages, hearing stories, collaborating with other Indigenous practitioners) across different Indigenous Nations, and the power that carrying them forward has to transform personal attitudes in everyday life. Carter describes a moment in their dramaturgical investigation that is concerned with both negotiating different Nations' protocol to create a process that satisfies everyone involved, and presencing personal and community knowledges. This description really resonates with me and continues to drive my curiosity towards the intangible, but felt, places that are created and honoured during Indigenous theatrical collaboration. Carter writes,

Monique Mojica experimented with positioning as she articulated Sky Woman's suspended free fall from within the folds of the hammock, while below, collaborator Oswaldo DeLeon Kantule carefully constructed an unbroken circle of cacao beans on the gallery floor around the hammock and Mojica supported within.

When Kantule had completed his work and stepped away, Mojica's Sky Woman lightly "touched down" inside the circle and then delicately stepped over it to enter another "layer" of her narrative mola. Director Floyd Favel watched intently, saying nothing for the moment. As

Mojica paused in rehearsal to capture her thoughts and consider the discoveries she had made, Favel asked if it would be possible to create a “doorway” within the circle, so as to allow Mojica to move in and out of the space without having to step over the cacao- a liminal signifier heightening the spiritual significance of the hammock and the narrative unfolding thereon and distinguishing its space from the more prosaic, flexible space in which the other layers of the artists’ performed investigations would be made manifest.

For Favel, a Cree man from the Poundmaker Reserve in Saskatchewan, it is unthinkable, in a traditional context, to step over people or objects. For Kantule, a Kuna artist and traditional practitioner from Panama, this was not a concern. He explained to us that the cacao were “sleeping;” furthermore, he had asked that Mojica be permitted to step freely in and out of the circle, since this is what she needed to do to properly tell the story. In Kuna tradition, he informed us, creating one door in the circle would disrupt its symmetry and mar its perfection. But Favel was still uncomfortable. Finally, Kantule suggested that cacao be removed from four cardinal points in the circle to create a door for each direction; this, he said, would not breach his own aesthetic or traditional sensibilities, nor would it breach Favel’s. Moreover, it would provide the contemporary performer with not only the freedom to move in and out of the circle at will but also with a choice of doorways and directions through which to access or take leave in the space. (“Chocolate Woman” 2)

As elucidated here, Relational Indigenous dramaturgies consider the complexities involved and the negotiations required in creating safe spaces for artists from different nations to come together to collaborate, develop and rehearse works. I am very interested in the investigations, negotiations and agreements that go into Indigenous rehearsal processes where exchanges between peoples from different nations occur.

Algonquin theatre practitioner Yvette Nolan has a similar way of working. Nolan’s initial workshop for the play *Death of a Chief* began with negotiations among the company members about the ceremonial elements of performance in their various nations’ traditions. Nolan explains this process:

When you put people in a room together, you end up with a discussion of what those traditions are, and who they’ve learned them from, and what they bring into the room. All of those people bring all of their traditions to the room and then we have a negotiation, and we agree on the things that we can agree on, and it works just like it says in the stories that it works, in that we sit and discuss it until we figure out what everyone can live with. (Nolan qtd in Knowles *theatre & interculturalism*, 66)

A constant of my process as a dramaturg is making space for the significance of relationship building, lateral love and self-love necessary in workshoping, collaborating and other gatherings such as talkbacks and cultural workshops like drum-making that better develop skills and self-awareness for collaborative processes where negotiations and protocol are involved. In discussing examples of workshops and work in development that I have been involved in, I describe the mechanisms within place-based dramaturgy necessary for the method to function. I conceptualize the relational nuances of place-based dramaturgy alongside the diplomacy and protocol of the Wampum as used by the Algonquin Anishinaabeg and other Indigenous Nations like the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Looking to and honouring the Wampum as a guiding principle in theorizing this method respects Algonquin knowledge systems and natural laws. The Wampum is a beaded or woven materialization of physical and embodied relationships, agreements or messages. They serve an important purpose of honouring land, water, humans and other than-human relationships. In *Fractured Homeland: Federal Recognition and Algonquin Identity in Ontario*, Bonita Lawrence explains,

No diplomacy could take place without it, and the acceptance or rejection of Wampum signified the making or breaking of treaties. At treaty negotiations, orators could not address the group without first presenting strings of Wampum. The strings were the simplest of offering in diplomacy; for significant treaties, woven belts were given, with intricate patterns that symbolized the meaning of the treaty. (Lawrence 32)

The Wampum embodies respectful Nation to Nation relationships (between nation-state and Indigenous nations, but also relationships with the sky-world, with the four legged, with the land and with the waterways). The Two Row Wampum represents treaty relationships between “the Dutch and the Iroquois Confederacy to represent how the European and Indigenous nations would share the land, with respect and friendship, but with non-interference in each other’s

affairs” (Lawrence 33). The Wampum reminds me how the Algonquin Anishinaabeg engage in respectful relationships with the land, the waters, other Indigenous Nations and the Crown.

In the foreword to Paula Sherman’s (Algonquin) *Dishonour of the Crown: The Ontario Resource Regime in the Valley of the Kiji Sibi*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson speaks to the relationships between the Mississauga and the Omàmiwinini (Algonquin Anishinaabeg) and the Omàmiwinini and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Simpson writes,

The Omàmiwinini have a long history of engaging in relationships that promote Pimaatisiwin, the good life, and that promote environmental sustainability. In precolonial times, the Omàmiwinini had an ongoing relationship with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which the Omàmiwinini called “Our Dish” or Gdoo-naaganinaa. The agreement was designed to protect the areas of Omàmiwinini they share with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy by acknowledging each other’s separate jurisdiction over a shared territory and emphasising that both nations had and continue to have responsibility to maintain and protect the ecological integrity of the territory, or Our Dish. (12)

I look to the Wampum to establish how place-based dramaturgy is rooted in the diplomacy of respect and relationship building that honours individual, community and nation-specific knowledges and practices while also considering how the choices impact those I am collaborating with. The Wampum “acknowledged and continues to acknowledge the nationhood and sovereignty of the Omàmiwinini (Algonquin Anishinaabeg). It acknowledges the spiritual nature of the relationship the Omàmiwinini have to their land, and it reminds the Omàmiwinini of the responsibility that they have to protect the land, the people and the health and welfare of the plants and animals that encompass the Omàmiwinini’s web of life.” (Simpson “Foreword” 11). Like the Wampum, place-based dramaturgy considers relationships with animal, spiritual and other than human nations, as well as other Indigenous Nations, to create a place of Nation to Nation collaborations and negotiations. Looking to the Wampum helps me to conceptualize place-based dramaturgy as a process involving people from different Nations who come together

with a common goal to take care of each other and the art being done. The gathering together of different Nations in a shared place with a common goal (to develop a play text) draws parallels to the Wampum.

Place-based dramaturgy is what I offer as a model of Indigenous theories that weave cultural discourses with theatrical and embodied practices, providing an example of resurgence in practice that is specific to Indigenous theatre studies. This is an original contribution in that it includes activities outside of new play development or rehearsal processes as valuable characteristics of Relational Indigenous dramaturgy. Place-based dramaturgy refers to new play development processes and negotiations but also encompasses training and community-building practices as examples of transformative processes. The essence of place-based dramaturgy is claiming space for relationship-building and honouring the process whereby spaces of transformation are created that stay with the Indigenous bodies even after the workshop, rehearsal or performance is over. It is in building relationships and presencing *the things we carry with us* that anti-colonial dramaturgies and moments of Indigenous-focused resurgence materialize.

Resurgence in place-based dramaturgy happens through respectful and reciprocal artistic, spiritual and cultural relationships that the participants carry inside them and that are reproduced while and after working together. I consider place-based dramaturgy to occur when Indigenous artists from various nations come together, from their home territories or from wherever they call home, to negotiate, create and define a way of working based on the cultural knowledges, protocol and experiences present in the room. This Indigenous-focused place creates a context where like-minded practitioners are working through a process by which we live who we are (self and relational accountability is activated), and build an Indigenous theatre community

together. Through my own experiences as an Aboriginal Ensemble member at Full Circle: First Nations Performance, my work at Native Earth Performing Arts' Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival 29, contract work and personal interviews, I am aware that Indigenous artists incorporate and share community knowledges, stories and skills in their practice.

4.1 What does Place-based Mean and How is it Applied to Relational Indigenous Dramaturgies?

I look to Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman's book, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, to justify my choice of the term *place-based dramaturgy* instead of space or location or collaborative dramaturgy. *Mark My Words* "charts women's efforts to define themselves and their communities by interrogating the possibilities of spatial interventions" and discusses the labour of Indigenous artists and scholars who '(re)map' the "communities they write within and about... to generate new possibilities" (Goeman 3). I consider place to include a flow or fluidity that extends to the intangible and spiritual notions embedded in Indigenous dramaturgical practices. For Goeman, "'place' has the permeability to be considered as 'meeting place'" (Goeman 109). Place-based dramaturgy is in and of itself a meeting place of intangible, felt, or embodied realities that get translated into theatrical expression or action. In fact, place-based dramaturgy also generates 'new possibilities'. As seen in Carter's example at the beginning of this chapter, respectful Indigenous Nation to Nation exchanges are negotiated during rehearsal and pre-creation processes, where people learn, share and develop new relationships with each other. The physical gathering of people from different geographies, practices, traditions, sexualities and genders allows for place-based dramaturgies to be created outside of one's home territory and creates places where respectful negotiations among different cultural values and knowledges are curated and experienced so that new possibilities are

manifested in the mind, hearts and bodies of the Indigenous practitioners.

In the third chapter of Jill Carter's PhD dissertation, "Towards a Poetics of Decolonization: Becoming (and then Staging) The New Human Being," she critiques contemporary Western theatre scholarship's assertion that theatre is an ephemeral experience and that its effects on space, performer or spectator are impermanent (Carter "Repairing the Web" 107). Carter is addressing the debate between theatre and performance studies scholarship about the liminoid phenomenon and the liminal event. Referring to the works of Richard Schechner and Jill Dolan, Carter establishes their perception of theatrical performances as the liminoid phenomenon—attending theatre is a "voluntary" and fleeting experience, where audiences leave the "real world" behind during the moments of performance, and have to "come back to life" once the show is over (Carter "Repairing the Web" 107). She then contrasts the liminoid phenomenon with the liminal in explaining the latter as being a socially mandatory event understood to "effect the permanent transformation of the community in which it unfolds", consisting of ritual and social gatherings like coming of age ceremonies or marriage that can permanently change people or a community (Carter "Repairing the Web" 107). Carter is critical of the distinction between the liminoid and liminal because she believes that Indigenous theatre, specifically the work of Spiderwoman Theater, distorts the distinctions between artistic practice and ceremony in hopes that the work might result in permanent transformation, or as she writes, "permanent decolonization" (Carter "Repairing the Web" 109). Carter's critique of the liminoid and the liminal probes me to ask, what, then, is this *place* that provides permanent transformation within the Indigenous theatre practitioner?

Carter recognizes that Indigenous theatre can create permanent decolonial attitudes within the Indigenous practitioner, and I believe this can be actualized through presencing self

and relationship-building with others. I build on Carter's critique and refer to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's theories of resurgence as being learned and embodied actions during which Indigenous people look away from colonial expectations and forms and instead look back at, or to, Indigenous-centered practices and worldviews.

When gathered together in artistic collaborations, workshops and other community-building activities, Indigenous practitioners presence themselves (their homelands, languages, teachings, protocol, creation stories and other intangible cultural realities) in the room while they gather. During these circumstances, the reality of gathering and sharing experiences, knowledges and worldviews becomes the basis for good, ethical and healthy practices that honour getting to know oneself and the others in the room as an essential process of Indigenous dramaturgies. For Simpson, resurgence was activated in gathering as a community and marching down the streets of Peterborough. For me, resurgence is activated when gathering with fellow Aboriginal Ensemble Members to make drums and hear Anishinaabemowin spoken. Gathering, and creating place, is a form of resurgence, as Simpson affirms: the power of individuals or collectives that "come together with one mind and one heart" to transform themselves and their practices into decolonized resistances (Simpson *Dancing* 11).

My explorations of place-based dramaturgies originate from my own experiences working with other Indigenous practitioners. To uphold the responsibilities I carry as a witness to these dramaturgical events, I share some of the experiences I've had as a dramaturg and workshop participant. In this chapter I introduce Cree/Salteaux Margo Kane's interdisciplinary performing arts company Full Circle: First Nations Performance and its Aboriginal Ensemble Program. I also presence the relational teachings of the Wampum to highlight the mobility of ethical methodologies and knowledges I carry in my body and relationship-building practices

found in my experiences working in the Indigenous theatre community.

As a member of the Aboriginal Ensemble Program, I speak of the training, networking, and development opportunities with which the program provided me and describe how certain theatrical activities produced by Full Circle: First Nations Performance and Native Earth Performing Arts, specifically my experiences as a dramaturg/director at Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival 29, qualify as examples of place-based dramaturgies. I further explore place-based dramaturgy as a Relational Indigenous paradigm to discuss how resurgence appears in these theatrical programs and processes like training (improv) and cultural (drum making) workshops. With the training provided at Full Circle's Aboriginal Ensemble Program, we learn how to build relationships and community with other Indigenous theatre practitioners.

4.2 Full Circle: First Nations Performance

Margo Kane is a Cree/Salteaux interdisciplinary artist whose legacy has changed the lives of many emerging Indigenous artists and practitioners, myself included. Kane was born in Edmonton in 1951, and was adopted into a non-Indigenous family. She grew up displaced from her traditional lands, disconnected from her family, community and language. Her experiences are not unique. Children across Canada and the United States have been stolen, adopted, displaced and disconnected from their Indigenous families, cultures and lifestyles.

This separation did not stop Kane from finding her Indigeneity, from seeking to reconnect with her culture through dance, acting and playwriting. Margo Kane studied at Edmonton's Grant MacEwan College for Performing Arts, the Banff School of Fine Arts and Circle in the Square Theater in New York City. Her career spans over forty-five years. Recent performance credits include the Arts Club Theatre Company's premiere of Kevin Loring's new play, *Thanks for Giving* (2017), Simon Fraser University, Vancouver Moving Theatre and Full

Circle: First Nations Performance's *Bah! Humbug!* (2016), and Gateway Theatre's *For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again* (2015). Kane is an actor, playwright, facilitator, producer, teacher, mentor and administrator. She sits on many advisory boards, leads Vancouver's Aboriginal Arts programming for the Canada 150+ celebrations, and is a core founder of the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance. In 2015, Kane was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters degree from the University of Fraser Valley for her ongoing leadership and immense contributions in the performing arts.

In 1992 Margo Kane established Full Circle: First Nations Performance, a major presenter of contemporary Indigenous performance on Turtle Island. Full Circle is a non-profit society and interdisciplinary performance company based on the territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔl (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. As an urban Indigenous company, Full Circle is accountable to the lands, histories and waters on which they work as they help to tell stories that make audiences aware of where they live and the complexities of living on unceded territories. Kane has devoted her artistic career to training and mentoring emerging Indigenous artists and developing new and multidisciplinary Indigenous work. For her, it is less about the final product and more about the process of Indigenous artists working and creating together, expressing Indigenous realities and experiences. She explains,

I want us to find our own voice, our own way, our own forms. I don't want to write a well-written play. I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in, as Indigenous people, what is inspiration for the work and what does that form look like. It's not a proscenium stage where we all sit in the dark and the actors are on the stage. (qtd in La Flamme "BC Aboriginal Theatre" 106)

Through the Aboriginal Ensemble Program, Kane provides Indigenous theatre practitioners the opportunity to look to their Indigeneity to find the contexts and tools to create places and moments of permanent transformation.

4.3 The Aboriginal Ensemble Program: Building Permanent Transformations

Dr. Mique'l Dangeli (Tsimshian), another trailblazing Indigenous artist/scholar, introduced me to Margo Kane in May 2015. Dr. Dangeli and I had recently both participated in the 7th TRACKS: Community Play & Arts Symposium, a six-day national symposium (May 10 – 15, 2015) that brought together “community-engaged Indigenous and settler/immigrant artists, arts producers and cultural thinkers who collaborate to create art with, for and about community” (*Tracks Symposium*). Dr. Dangeli witnessed me co-facilitating a session at the Track Symposium with Jill Baird (Curator, Education/Public Programs at the UBC Museum of Anthropology), dealing with a challenging conversation on Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaboration. As a departing ensemble member herself, Dr. Dangeli initiated my entry into the ensemble based on my theatrical and academic experiences and my work as a facilitator at artistic and youth-oriented events. I became an ensemble member in the spring of 2015. Through Kane’s mentorship and guidance I continue to meet and work with new people, gain new practical skills and have the opportunity to practice and grow as a dramaturg.

According to Full Circle’s website, the company’s mandate is to “make a profound contribution to the development of Indigenous performance in Canada. In accordance with Full Circle’s vision, [the] organization aims to train a wide variety of Indigenous artists, create a range of performance opportunities for those artists, educate the Canadian public on Indigenous arts as well as engage audiences of all ages and backgrounds” (“Ensemble Program”). Training, networking, performing and transferring knowledge are at the core of Full Circle’s work.

Margo Kane created the Aboriginal Ensemble Training Program at Full Circle: First Nations Performance in 2002 with funding by the National Arts Training Contribution Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage. The Aboriginal Ensemble Training Program fosters

Indigenous artists who “wish to develop and practice their art in a way that appreciates cultural traditions” (“Ensemble Program”). The Aboriginal Ensemble Program is an Indigenous-focused place that is making space for Indigenous-specific works in mainstream programming, and developing a community of up-and-coming Indigenous theatre practitioners. Previous Aboriginal Ensemble members include Kevin Loring (Nlaka’pamux), Corey Payette (Oji-Cree), Kim Harvey (Tshilqot’in, Sylix, Kutenai, Dakelh), and Lisa Ravensbergen (Ojibwe/ Swampy Cree and English/ Irish). Full Circle’s Aboriginal Ensemble Program is the only all-Indigenous theatre training program in Vancouver, hosting workshops by visual, dance, theatre and performance artists. As described on Full Circle’s website, the program focuses on three primary streams.

Initiation Projects which utilize community workshops and seek to introduce and excite individuals in the community to participate in the performing arts and to see it as a vehicle for both their personal development and the development of their community...

Professional Performance Projects whose goal is to provide committed members of previous training sessions and programs with an experience of professional performance creation. They will become Core Ensemble Members and will be invited to collaborate alongside community artist-mentors through a phase development process of focused research, development and creation, pre-production and production...

Partnership Projects whose focus is to develop relationships with other Aboriginal artist creators...the training involves a variety of disciplines, methods, and forms, with activities ranging from learning traditional chanting, storytelling and dancing from different nations, to field trips that involve hands-on traditional life skills’ experience, to behind the scenes experience in production, to cutting edge techniques in physical training, voice, movement, and creation. (“Ensemble Program”)

The Ensemble has provided me with opportunities to develop my skills and to gain experience working with other emerging and more established artists. I share information about Full Circle to advocate for the importance of process and training in our communities. Gathering together to train, workshop plays or hold a circle to do work is an effective way for members of

the Indigenous theatre community to enter into relationship with each other through approaches and paradigms specific to the Indigenous peoples involved in each process. Métis-Chippewa Cree artist educator Marrie Mumford's article "Kippmoojikwein: The Things We Carry With Us" exemplifies how we carry so much in our bodies, minds and hearts. *The things we carry with us* are what inspire and fuel the uniqueness and fluidity of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies during workshop or training sessions and in collaboration. This notion of place is one that activates the bodies and voices of the artists as well as other "bodies" and other "voices." The energies of those who walk with us, and the timeless blending of various layers of the physical, the intangible and the spiritual worlds, are all activated during these moments. In that regard, the values seen in the creation and rehearsal processes are just as important as the final product those processes create. This training program is created out of holistic and reciprocal principles based on creating and strengthening a community of Indigenous performing artists through self-governing forms.

Place-based dramaturgy as Relational Indigenous artistic and performance-based resurgence does not just involve the specific play development process or the rehearsal room in which place-based dramaturgy manifests itself, but also encompasses subsidiary activities like workshops, talkbacks, classes and initiatives in the community. Glen Coulthard describes grounded normativity as a standard for discussing ethical and reciprocal "relationships between people, relationships between humans and their environment, and relationships between individuals and institutions of authority (whether economic or political)" (Coulthard 62). Coulthard offers grounded normativity as a framework for thinking about "how we might establish political and economic relations both within our own communities and with Canada based on principles of reciprocity and mutual obligations" (Coulthard 62). Similar to my

understanding of the Wampum, grounded normativity is an ethical methodology that speaks to maintaining honorable and reciprocal Indigenous-focused relationships to self and to others. I advocate that the methods and training provided by Margo Kane and Full Circle constitute fundamental features that allow us to conduct ourselves in accordance with certain values, protocol and knowledges that materialize Indigenous-focused artistic communities.

Initiation projects are mentorship and creation-based initiatives that lead to self-development and growth. The Ensemble gathers to participate in various workshops, artist talks, training and cultural activities. One example was a three-day improvisation intensive workshop with Rob Vestal. The improv intensive was held from October 23 to 25, 2016 at Full Circle's office in Vancouver. Rob Vestal is an Indigenous actor currently residing in Los Angeles. Kane set up the improv workshop so that the ensemble could focus on finding our impulses, intuition and agency in performance making. She explained how improv training would be an excellent tool for us as an ensemble because it would allow us to navigate our vulnerability, completely trusting that everyone in the group would be non-judgmental, caring and gentle towards one another.

In Jill Carter's article "Sovereign Proclamations of the Twenty-First Century," she asks readers to consider the "soft powers" embedded in Indigenous sovereignty and politics. By soft power, she refers to the power of love (loving and being loved) necessary to heal, reconnect or transform people and places. In learning how to love ourselves, and how to be loved in theatrical processes, we as Indigenous theatre artists are resisting iterations of settler colonial domination and instead creating a place where we love who we are and build trusting and honest relationships with others in the workshop. As established in the Four Waves of Indigenous theatrical representations model outlined in the introductory chapter of this dissertation,

Indigenous theatre artists have to undo the work of misrecognition and stereotypical representations in order to fully recognize self in theatrical works. The Aboriginal Ensemble Program provides its members the chance to work together to undo the misrecognitions imposed upon us by the ongoing structures of settler-colonialism as we work towards seeing each other and honouring each other for who we really are.

Rob Vestal's improv workshop also helped to prepare us for the ensemble's 2016 contribution to the Talking Stick Festival. In 2016, the Aboriginal Ensemble Program teamed up with local Indigenous artists to create, rehearse and perform a 10-minute piece with only 10 hours in the studio. The performance was called "Indian Acts." The local Indigenous artists who participated are established members of the Indigenous performing arts community in Canada. Margo Kane paired established with emerging artists and matched up artists from different disciplines to help further develop and push their artistic boundaries. Ensemble member Jeanette Kotowich, a Métis performer, was paired with Sharon Jinkerson Brass (Key First Nations), who works predominantly in film, with Deanna Peters as their outside eye/director. Peters was also the outside eye for actor and ensemble member Taran Kootenhayoo (Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Dene and Stoney) and musician Tiffany Moses (Fort Smith). Another pairing was actor and ensemble member Tai Grauman (Métis/Iroquois) and actor Jennifer Brousseau (Ojibway) with Kathleen Duborg as their outside eye. I was the MC and facilitated a talkback after the performances. These collaborations trained us to work from impulse, and to develop collaborative and new play development skills. "Indian Acts" also presented ensemble members with a platform on which to perform alongside established artists and in front of a sizeable audience. Kane has successfully created an Indigenous-centered artistic community where self-determination, reciprocity, respect and love are activated. Through processes such as these, we

acquire the tools necessary to work in self-determining ways and are able to self-recognize our gifts and talents in front of Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences.

As an ensemble we also deliver theatre workshops for youth and community members, as a way to give back to the host nations on whose territories we live and work. In July and August 2016, the ensemble went to the səlilwətaʔl (Tsleil-Waututh) community to run theatre programming for their Takaya Summer Day Camp. Former ensemble coordinator Kwasuun Vedan (Cree, Saulteaux, Ojibwa, and Secwepemc) reached out to Tsleil-Waututh Nation in North Vancouver and asked if Full Circle could offer theatre workshops as part of their summer day camp programming. Some of the ensemble worked with the youth three times, two full days in July and one in August. We developed theatre games, character development activities and abstract embodied exercises. The youth, aged 6-15, at times were gathered in smaller age-specific groups, and for other activities the older youth helped to guide and work with the younger campers.

The programming at the Takaya Summer Day Camp helped establish the ensemble members as mentors and teachers and provided us with the opportunity to inspire and share our love for theatre with Indigenous youth. Creating and offering workshops for the youth whose traditional territories we work on allows us at Full Circle to respectfully acknowledge and give back to the host nations in ways that directly include their community members. At Full Circle we are reminded to value the notion of community over personal importance, and hold ourselves accountable to the relationships and knowledges that we acquire during our training. In gathering and working together as a community, the members of the Aboriginal Ensemble Program honour and reproduce our embodied memories by presencing them through various artistic forms and situations. In the training program at Full Circle, where we gather from

different territories and presence different embodied memories, processes like place-based dramaturgy create an autonomous community where we live out our obligations to the other people involved, our ancestors and the natural world as a whole.

Participation in cultural activities is also a priority of the ensemble program. We have had the opportunity to gather and share in talking circles, learn traditional songs and dances, and participate in a group canoe paddle. On May 30, 2016 Deneh Cho' Thompson (Dene), Jeanette Kotowich (Métis), Taran Kootenhayoo (Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Dene and Stoney), Tai Grauman (Métis/Iroquois) and I participated in a drum-making workshop facilitated by Greg Anderson (Anishinaabe).



Image 5 Lindsay Lachance, Deneh Cho' Thompson, Jeanette Kotowich, Taran Kootenhayoo, Tai Grauman, photo by Greg Anderson

With Anderson's guidance we each made an Elk Hide Drum. The drum was made of cedar and we were taught how to weave the hide to properly make and support the back of the drum. The weaving of the drum handle created a quadrant, and we spoke about the four cardinal directions, the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual, and about art and the community that we find ourselves in. It was so empowering to be with each other and to feel safe within our community.

Anishinaabe facilitator Greg Anderson was telling stories and sharing songs with us. That day, I felt powerful, free and motivated. I truly felt proud of who I am. The drum-making workshop drew me into a transformational place where I felt connected to myself (seven generations behind and seven generations to come were presenced) and connected to the others in the process. For the duration of that drum-making workshop we transformed into a place of resurgence, of love and of accountability to ourselves and to the process. Now when I use my drum, I activate that place of resurgence and re-live those moments of love, power and Indigenous sovereignty.

I share these details of collaboration, community-building and the respect I have for those I work with because we learn from sitting in a circle, making work together and trusting the process. The process is part of the work. Getting to know each other and building relationships is part of the anticolonial work that we do within our theatre communities. In situations like these, the ensemble program gifts us teachings and knowledge that are harder to access while living away from our own families and communities. Our individual experiences and knowledges that are presenced during these workshops are central to the ethics and relationships valued in the Indigenous theatre community. *The process is the work.*

Margo Kane's ensemble program has presented me with many artistic, professional, and community-oriented volunteer and employment opportunities. I am very grateful for all of these experiences and believe them to have been crucial in preparing me for my work at the 29th Native Earth Performing Arts Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival in November 2016.

4.4 Native Earth Performing Arts: New/Native/Now

I am further developing my articulation of place-based dramaturgy from what Glen Coulthard describes as grounded normativity, a place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial

thought and practice (Coulthard 13). I look to grounded normativity to assert that Indigenous belief systems, artistic traditions, spiritualities and protocol are distinct from others. Grounded normativity acknowledges that Indigenous communities create and maintain different cognitive and spiritual relationships and calls for us to refocus our work from an attempt to transform the colonial outside into an exploration, understanding and renewal of the Indigenous inside. We have to live out, honour and embody these relationships in order to maintain and uphold their existence. Grounded normativity is an ethical methodology that I have expanded to move beyond land-specific notions of being “grounded” in a geographical place. Instead, I assert that our bodies “ground” our abilities to achieve self-recognition and to embody our culturally specific relationships and knowledges even when we are away from our homelands and traditional territories. Developing and achieving self-recognition through artistic and dramaturgical practices can happen when one is not on their home territories. This section looks to Monique Mojica’s use of Blood Memory and Marrie Mumford’s notion of Kippmoojikewin to focus on how the body remembers, carries, presences and recovers ancestral experiences and knowledges. In theatre, especially when people come together from different lands and territories or have been displaced from their physical lands, water, resources and languages, place-based dramaturgy creates contemporary anti-colonial theatre-making communities that allow participants to feel grounded and safe in our own cultural realities. This propels me to consider the Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival as an Indigenous-focused place that invests, nurtures and mobilizes Indigenous stories, voices and talent through artistic processes that are negotiated within individual production processes.

Native Earth attracts Indigenous artists from across Turtle Island and beyond, in a city where a place-based Indigenous community is created. This allows participants to re-activate,

and add to, both cultural and artistic teachings. Place-based dramaturgy is a way to describe what happens when my body is activated by a particular way of working—it is a way for Indigenous bodies to remember, stimulate and share the relationships living inside of us.

Native Earth Performing Arts (Native Earth) is the oldest professional Indigenous theatre company in Canada. It was founded in 1982 and is located in Tkarón:to (Toronto) in the territory that covers The Dish with One Spoon Wampum between the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinabeg. Jennifer Preston's article "Weesageechak Begins to Dance: Native Earth Performing Arts Inc.," published in *The Drama Review* in 1992, surveys the lineage of Native Earth and the Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival. In 1977 Cree theatre practitioner James Buller, the founder of the Association for Native Development of Performing and Visual Arts, took George Kenny (Ojibwe) and Denis Lacroix's play *October Stranger* to the sixth International Theatre Festival in Monaco (Preston 137). While there, Buller discovered that their work did not easily fit into a specific festival category. Instead, they were making work unique to the aesthetics, experiences, languages and lands of contemporary Indigeneity in Canada. This breakthrough "led Buller to found the World Indigenous Theatre Festival, first held in 1980 and again in 1982, at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario" (Preston 137). The World Indigenous Theatre Festival gathered together Indigenous artists who would make long-lasting and reciprocal relationships, especially between members from Spiderwoman Theatre of Brooklyn, New York and "other groups from all over the globe. Sadly, James Buller died just before the second festival in 1982" (Preston 137). Buller's contributions to the development of Indigenous theatre in Canada in the 1970s and early 1980s gathered people together who believed that theatre was a part of the revolution. Preston continues:

In the spring of 1982 a new gallery, the Centre for Indian Art, was scheduled to open at the National Exhibition Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario. A local company, Kam Theatre Lab, was approached to put together a production for the opening. Kam Lab wanted to do a show about Native art, but because of a lack of knowledge on the subject they approached Jim Buller who in turn referred them to Denis Lacroix. Lacroix and Bunny Sicard, calling themselves Native Earth, wrote and directed *Native Images in Transition* with a mainly Native cast, as a coproduction with Kam Theatre Lab. The show was based on a painting at the National Arts Centre entitled *The Indian in Transition* by [Odawa-Potawatomi] artist Daphne Odjig. Through the use of masks and large cut-out figures, among other things, the performance explored Native art and culture and the effect Europeans have had on both...This was the unofficial beginning of Native Earth. (137)

Through these gatherings, Indigenous artists and practitioners began to act on their thirst for self-representation and sovereignty through art and performance making. Indigenous artists from different nations gathered to develop and build a community to stand for political and artistic recognition. These interdisciplinary and Indigenous Nation to Nation collaborations appear in urban centers like Tkarón:to where “activists and artists for the most part work within a pantribal framework, envisioning identities that cut across geographical distances and tribal affiliations” (Hundorf 292). This is how Native Earth still runs, with people from different Nations working for the company, and people from various Nations or communities coming together to make the work. “These intertribal gatherings necessitate a negotiation of protocol. Different nations have different practices, different rules” (Nolan *Medicine Shows* 76). Current Artistic Director Keith Barker is Métis, but not everyone involved in the organization and the productions is Métis. This extends the company beyond community territories and creates a place where production-specific protocol is created and traditional and contemporary negotiations are lived out.

Later in 1982, Lacroix and Sicard hosted a gathering to see if there was interest in establishing a professional urban Indigenous theatre company. In reaching out to other Indigenous artists, colleagues, community members and activists, they found people interested in

creating an Indigenous-focused company. “The name Native Earth was extended to Native Earth Performing Arts rather than Native Earth Theatre Company because they wanted to stress a broader performance scope. The company was to encompass dance and music as well as theatre” (Preston 137-38). The genealogy and transformation of Native Earth is excellently documented in Preston’s article and in the work of others like Carol Greyeyes’ “On the Trail of Native Theatre,” Marrie Mumford’s “Kippmoojikewin,” and Yvette Nolan’s book *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture*, so this chapter will not go into much more detail about the company’s development.

What is significant for this chapter is Native Earth’s interest in and commitment to new play development. From 1982 to 1986, the plays they created were collective creations. Few plays had been written by Indigenous practitioners, so there was a necessity and desire for people to create together. According to Yvette Nolan, “many of the early shows created by these communities of artists examined the way Native people were seen, or not seen, in society” (Nolan *Medicine Shows* 75). Works were created based on shared experiences, issues and politics that had faced individuals and their families for centuries. People from different nations and skill levels collaborated with dancers, visual artists and community members, generating a real hub to create and disseminate works. “From the beginning, the making of art created community” (Nolan *Medicine Shows* 75). Indigenous theatre seems to have always been about mentorship, training, honouring relationships and social justice. Place-based dramaturgy considers community to include both the physical gathering of peoples in one place and the intangible gathering of ancestors, relationships and future generations that walk with us. The power of the intangible present in theatrical pedagogy, dramaturgy and movement cannot be overlooked.

Being based in Tkarón:to allows for Native Earth's works to be seen by larger and more mainstream audiences, but also allows the Indigenous artists to build and expand their networks and urban communities. There are, unfortunately, many of us who have been disconnected from our communities and who are not connected to traditional and familial knowledges. The intergenerational effects of settler colonialism do contribute to the production of contemporary Indigenous identities and individuals "who do not have ties to non-urban Indigenous communities [and who] can face challenges in defining and asserting [their] Indigenous identity" (Peters and Anderson 1). Yvette Nolan speaks to the diasporic nature of contemporary Indigenous theatre communities. She mentions how many Indigenous theatre artists relate to being displaced, removed, or estranged from their traditional communities.

Many are urban artists who have little or no connection to the communities where their people may have been settled. Those communities, in most cases, have little in the way of economies or educational opportunities, and so young people who leave to pursue education in urban centers often look back at their home communities and see with more clarity the lack of opportunity, relative to the city. Moreover, much of the work for the stage must be done in the urban centers, where there is a larger pool of trained practitioners and a larger potential audience. Ergo, Indigenous artists from all over Turtle Island find themselves in the cities in "pan-Indian" circumstances. (74)

Nolan acknowledges that this is not always the case. She uses the example of Debajehmujig Theatre on Wikwemikong unceded territory (Manitoulin Island). What Nolan describes as "Pan-Indian circumstances" is what place-based dramaturgy is interested in unraveling. When Indigenous theatre practitioners come together they are exchanging, documenting, negotiating and re-envisioning cultural expression that creates a multilayered place. This place is a dramaturgical process wherein those involved remember and activate a dynamic community that extends beyond territorial and temporal borders. My experiences working at the Weesageechak

Begins to Dance Festival provided me the opportunity to create and live out diplomacy relationships while working with Indigenous theatre practitioners from other Nations.

4.5 Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival: Presencing the Intangible

The Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival develops and nurtures new works by Indigenous playwrights, actors, dramaturgs, and choreographers. Every season, Native Earth Performing Arts selects dance, theatre and interdisciplinary works reflecting Indigenous performing arts from Canada and internationally to receive developmental support and a staged reading during the two-week festival. Established at the end of the 1988-89 season, this new play development festival has since become an annual part of Native Earth's seasons. Award-winning and popular works that have been developed at the Weesageechak Festival include Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Bootlegger Blues*, Margo Kane's *Moonlodge*, Daniel David Moses' *Almighty Voice and His Wife* and many others. Originally created as a "script festival" to create pieces written by and for Indigenous Canadian practitioners, Weesageechak has developed to include new dance creations and international theatre work as seen in the Weesageechak 29 Festival with Australian playwright William McPherson's play *Cuz*.

Tomson Highway (Cree), Artistic Director of Native Earth in 1990, writes in that season's Weesageechak program, "The work these writers are undertaking is vital not only to Native Earth but to themselves and their community. Artists give voice to the stories, dreams, obstacles, and hopes of a nation. Some of these voices are just beginning and some are now speaking strongly" (qtd in Preston 156). Although Highway's statement is from 27 years ago, it still rings true to the work done at Weesageechak today. Ojibwe actor Samantha Brown, who has

participated at Weesageechak Begins to Dance for several years, shared with me some of her thoughts on the significance of new work development festivals.

New play development is key to the evolution of theatre to maintain its existence. Evolution in art is inevitable and to give a platform to that development only enhances new ideas and gives life to more artists. Again, to reiterate the importance of festivals, we give a voice and platform for stories that may have never been heard or explored. This gives opportunity for growth and development from different communities to inform and lift pieces of work that may have otherwise been forgotten or unheard.

Speaking to hurt, chaos, challenges, joys, and triumphs within our communities keeps the culture alive. Telling stories and revealing our truths is what prompts change, it ignites us and inspires us to move forward in our communities. Part of healing is revealing the hurt and celebrating what we have become and what we have always been, we are still here and remain creating and telling stories. We are here and our art is a strong connection, which is why theatre and storytelling is so important to our community. It is a part of us and when it is harvested we grow. (Brown)

I am so honoured to have met, worked with and learned from so many people at Weesageechak Begins to Dance 29 in November 2016. While there, I collaborated with playwright Frances Koncan from Couchiching First Nation on her piece *Zahgidiwin/Love* and on Dene playwright Deneh Cho' Thompson's *The Girl Who Was Raised by Wolverine*. While working on these shows we talked about the protocol, politics and responsibilities of coming together to make new work and, below, I reflect on how individual and community teachings combine in relationship with urban artistic mentorship and training.

The Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival hosts Indigenous practitioners from different nations, communities and territories to form a place where “they broaden the parameters of Native identities and experiences as they deal with political issues, such as feminism, that extend beyond tribal boundaries” (Hundorf 188). Indigenous Nation to Nation theatre negotiations and collaborations foster how “Native people creatively enact spatial practices that keep their connections with their communities, even as they establish new ones in

urban areas” (Goeman 104). Discussing and rehearsing works that deal with the spirit world, trickster figures, sociopolitical realities, and Indigenous languages allow the participants to remember and honour their communities’ teachings and protocol. It becomes a place where memories turn into ancestral guidance, and nostalgia turns into power and wisdom. The room transforms into a place where relationships are renewed and knowledges are incorporated into contemporary practice. I am not proposing that there are specific place-based dramaturgical techniques that can be suited for all individual processes. Rather, I recall some of my experiences my body *felt* while embodying the place we created. I hope to enable people to see how the discourses and relationships are difficult to articulate, as I have not yet found the language to fully share it. Relational Indigenous place-based dramaturgy recognizes that those in the room make a new space in a new way every time. Place-based dramaturgy is a community practice rooted in the practices that each of us brings, and it is through creating safe spaces to work together that meaningful exchanges and relationships can be made.

As a witness/participant to these types of collaborative practices, I suggest that through the inclusive nature of place-based dramaturgies a process is created where cultural and spiritual negotiations are initiated and can ground the participants in culturally specific ways of working. In Andréa Ledding’s article “Bringing Forth the Sacred, Speaking for the Spirits,” she considers the differences between theatre as entertainment and theatre as practice. For Ledding, “theatre as practice is something else entirely” (Ledding 143). The intangible is at work. Theatre as practice “elevates the everyday into a public act of consecration whereby people and words and objects are transformed into Something More Than They Were” (Ledding 143). Spiritual and sacred actions are not necessarily central to contemporary Indigenous theatre but they do overlap. At the first Weesageechak rehearsals, we smudge together. This cleanses our bodies and the studio we

work in. Smudging prepares us for the work we are about to do. The medicine from the smudge activates our bodies and reminds us of personal and collective teachings. The place shifts and opens up for us to presence our bodies and all that we carry with us.

Negotiations and community building could be seen during the rehearsals for Dene playwright Deneh Cho' Thompson's *The Girl Who Was Raised by Wolverine*, a play about identity politics and a young mixed Indigenous woman's struggle to choose one cultural identity over the other. Thompson has created a fictional world that includes the play's post-apocalyptic present, past time where the characters revisit familial memories and experiences, and a spiritual time where the Wolverine trickster characters weave in and out of the play's temporal and physical dimensions. The rehearsal process included three actors, the playwright and I. We were five Indigenous people, all from different Nations, with different cultural and community backgrounds.



Image 6 Garret C. Smith, Samantha Brown and Chelsea Rose Tucker, photo by Lindsay Lachance

The actors Samantha Brown (Ojibwe), Garret C. Smith (Blackfoot) and Chelsea Rose Tucker (Cree-Métis) were curious to learn about the Wolverine as a trickster figure in Dene storytelling.

We began to share our understandings of and relationships with our nations' trickster characters, Nanabush, Nanabozho, Weesageechak and darker, more cannibalistic trickster types like the Wendigo and the Rugaru. In the Daniels Spectrum building at 585 Dundas Street East, in downtown Tkarón:to, we were creating a place where our community and urban Indigenous knowledges, experiences and artistic training honoured an Indigenous-focused rehearsal process. Place-based dramaturgy is about understanding self through artistic practices, learning from others in the room and being accountable to new experiences and relationships. Gathering together from different cultural and geopolitical backgrounds with different understandings of Indigeneity, we were working within a place of artistic sovereignty. This sovereign artistic place allows for the rehearsal process to focus on building theatrical communities to preserve and share stories and experiences. While workshopping *The Girl Who Was Raised by Wolverine*, we shared many conversations about the fictional world of the play. As a group we discussed and developed our understandings of the physical and tangible spaces of the play, like the lab, the jails and other locations. But we also collectively discussed the intangible spaces like the presence of the Wolverine characters, the references to the spirit world and the web of relations mentioned in the text.

Relational Indigenous dramaturgies consider how the past, present and future connect in the body and in place. This disrupts linear notions of time, place and space, and focuses on the relationships carried in the bodies and how those relationships play out among participants within the collaborative places. Here, I consider the notion of "Blood Memory" from Guna and Rappahannock artist Monique Mojica. Mojica describes Blood Memory as a relational process. In her article "Stories from the Body: Blood Memory and Organic Texts," she explains how knowledge is carried with her through her bloodlines, so although she may not have physically

had these experiences, she is able to feel, embody and act on them because they are a part of her.

Mojica describes her work with Blood Memory as being lived, passed on, dreamt, remembered or dormant. She doesn't try to offer any "scientific proof" (Mojica "Stories from the Body" 97).

Mojica explains:

Creating an organic text from blood memory sometimes occurs when there is something my body is experiencing that I can't quite put my finger on—there's maybe a certain quality of light and I think, "I've been here before" when I know I haven't. As a contemporary Indigenous theatre artist I feel it is crucial that we acknowledge our experience as a valid worldview—something that has been consistently denied us. (97)

Mojica's description of Blood Memory allocates particular emphasis to the power of self-reflection, and to self-in-relationship to others. She emphasizes that the relationality of Blood Memory is up to the individual to rediscover. We must explore and look to ourselves to discover *the things we carry with us*. Mojica speaks about Blood Memory in a non-linear way. She is presencing relational connections to past, present and future realities while honouring the artistic process. Blood Memory exists as a liminal place open for us to enter as we look to ourselves and our extended web of relations during artistic creation and collaborations.

Blood Memory was the foundation for *The Girl Who Was Raised by Wolverine's* rehearsal process at Weesageechak. It was a way to presence and embody the relationships, knowledges and experiences that the cast carry with them. *The things we carry with us*. Place-based dramaturgy includes both the seen and the unseen. The intangible relationships, knowledges and spirituality that Indigenous artists use as source material for artistic practice travel with us to urban locations, and as Mojica describes, travel with us in our DNA. Blood Memory is an intertextual practice that includes layering various times and experiences at once, and creating a place where self-in-relationship to cultural and spiritual realities is activated. Jill Carter believes that embodied story making and theatrical practices involve the participant's

body, as well as the body's intangible living texts (memories, dreams, and sensory experiences) that influence and speak to one's actions and ability to create (Carter "Chocolate Woman" 12). In trying to better understand the fictional world of *The Girl Who Was Raised by Wolverine*, we considered, analyzed and embodied its spatial and temporal structures.

The Girl Who Was Raised by Wolverine presents various layers of time. The play's real time is matched with spiritual time as embodied by the Wolverine characters, memory time as seen in the flashback scenes, and absent time through the playwright's decision to write in a non-linear structure. As a group we discussed the following themes:

1. Physical Spaces (*the lab, the jail*) vs. Intangible Spaces (*spirit world, the web, Wolverine Spaces*)
2. Indoor Spaces vs. Outdoor Spaces
3. Real Time vs. Spiritual Time
4. Wolverine Time vs. Memory Time

Then we pulled themes, or words that came to us from these discussions, like *Trickster*, *Weesageechak*, *Wendigo*, *Waiting*, *Purgatory*, *Spirit*, *Trapped*, *Web*, *Connect*, *Earth*, *Real* and *Absent*. Using Mojica's work with *Blood Memory*, we were gathering and sharing our understanding of the play through self-in-relationship to our own knowledges. In order to embody these words and these understandings of *the things we carry with us*, we then tried to visualize and embody these themes. Using our bodies, we moved around the room and presenced the different times and spaces we identified in the playtext. Through both individual and group movements and positions we materialized our relationships and understanding of the themes, locations, sounds and tones of the play, making new connections and relationships between us.

After our first table reading of Frances Koncan's *Zahgidiwin/Love*, during the Weesageechak Festival, I asked the cast to write down three images, four words and two

questions that they had for the play. We all wrote responses to these prompts and shared our choices. Some similar images materialized: dark and light, movement and weaving, strength and weakness. Some of the words were *power, displacement, unite, feminine, destructor/nurturer*. The discovery of these similar words led our conversations towards Indigenous women in our lives and communities, and in theatre. We created back-stories for the women in the play and really focused our energies on them. We spoke kind words to them and for them; we thanked them for their courage. We honoured Namid and Missing Girl 20461 (female characters in the play) in sharing stories, dreams, questions and feelings about contemporary issues of female Indigeneity. During our conversations the place shifted as our energies, bodies and thoughts continued to honour these and other Indigenous women. One of the cast members calmly asked at one moment, “Do you all feel the arrival of this warm energy?” Our place presenced and remembered other “bodies.” Other spiritual, mental, and emotional visitors arrived in our gathering place. In opening up, sharing, dreaming and presencing others, we made manifest new relationships with each other and with the relationships that we carry with us.

What I choose to share from my experiences working at Weesageechak is not explicitly about the specific choices or changes made to the script, to the reading or to the staging, but is rather about the dramaturging of relationships and place. A lot of what I experienced occurred in my body and in relationship with other members of the Indigenous theatre community. I focus on how it takes time to build relationships and to create meaningful exchanges. These exchanges are based in community practices, like my understanding of living out healthy relationships as seen with the Wampum. Such Relational Indigenous place-based dramaturgies reveal how we can work ethically and respectfully as a community made up of people from various communities, practices and backgrounds.

4.6 Place-based Dramaturgy Conclusions

As this chapter discusses, there are significant spiritual, ontological and aesthetic choices braided into theatrical workshops, new play development and rehearsal processes that speak directly to Indigenous knowledges, experiences and practices. The process of developing Indigenous works is meaningful in part because of the place that is created while working together. The grouping and collaborating of Indigenous theatre artists unveils the difficulties and beauty in Indigenous Nation to Nation theatre making. It is challenging to write critically about the works being created and performed as they are embedded in Indigenous protocol and spirituality that are not always visible on the page or the stage.

Place-based dramaturgy begins to describe what happens in the moments of creation, collaboration and performance amongst a group of Indigenous practitioners. My interest in developing place-based dramaturgy is heavily influenced by the works of Jill Carter and Monique Mojica. In Carter's article "*Chocolate Woman* Visions an Organic Dramaturgy: Blocking-Notation for the Indigenous Soul," she writes "that the team continues to set as the objective of its processual investigations the creation of new internal structures—'new buildings' constructed upon the foundations of Indigenous tradition" (Carter 13). Carter's work acknowledges how process collects and carries knowledges and cultural practices with it to build and create performances. The "new buildings" that Carter discusses are holding spaces for Indigenous knowledges and practices within theatre studies. They allow me to contribute to her investigations in attempting to articulate the particular place-based atmosphere and relational layers that are created when doing this work.

In this chapter I have combined Jill Carter and Monique Mojica's theatrical theories with Indigenous resurgence theories by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Glen Coulthard. I also

consider my own work as a dramaturg to help discuss how place is activated and emerges within instances of theatrical training and dramaturgical processes. In Jill Carter's article "Discarding Sympathy, Disrupting Catharsis: The Mortification of Indigenous Flesh as Survivance-Intervention," she discusses some of the process she witnessed between Leanne Howe and Monique Mojica in a 2014 developmental workshop for *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns*. Carter explains:

This collaboration has not emerged simply out of the consciousness of shared familial and personal histories. Rather, it is in the "collision" of Grief, which inhabits the person of Mojica (even as it is personified by the characters with which she inhabits the world of *Side Show Freaks*), with Rage, which specifically disaffects Howe, that the alchemy of healing can occur. *Side Show Freaks and Circus Injuns* is a survivance-intervention in both the process of its creation and ultimate manifestation; it is an active and mindful recovery of "wholeness," its artists actively seeking to dislodge colonization from their bodies and unpack the mechanics of the enfreakment of Indigenous people, to reverse its ill effects, and to intervene in excessive grief and immoderate rage, excising the psycho-spiritual scars that unbalance and endanger the artists: 'Come with me my wounded sister,/ And gently place your hand in mine,/ I know the shadows that can fester,/ Poultice will draw and ease our minds.' (430)

Carter is describing a meeting place. The "collision" that she mentions is the activation of a process that considers self-in-relationship to the others in the process, and self-in-relationship to intangible and non-linear realities. Community is once again at the forefront of the work being created. Something that needs to be further explored is how reviews, critical and academic writing can be made more aware of the relational realities embedded in Indigenous dramaturgies.

Place-based dramaturgy is a process that activates community and ancestral knowledges that may be shared through stories, songs, languages or artistic expressions. In this chapter, I have articulated place-based dramaturgy as a (re)contextualizing of self through artistic practice, learning from others in the room, and being accountable to new knowledges and relationships. The third process, community-engaged dramaturgy, differs as it considers how non-Indigenous

practitioners can develop relationships to work with Indigenous theatre communities. In the following chapter, Relational Indigenous dramaturgies enlarge to introduce a community-engaged method that depicts an Indigenous and non-Indigenous theatrical collaboration.

Chapter 5: Community-Engaged Dramaturgy for Simon Fraser University's An Encounter with The Unnatural and Accidental Women

Thank you for choosing to read this work. Please note that there is violent subject and content described below. I ask that you read with care, and I apologize to those who are triggered by these realities.

In 2015, Simon Fraser University's School of Contemporary Arts' Mainstage theatre produced *An Encounter with The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. With a slightly edited version of Marie Clements' *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and a student cast, this production opened in February 2015. It coincided with the meeting of Indigenous, provincial, territorial and federal leaders gathered in Ottawa for a National Roundtable on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women (MMIW) in Canada, which concluded with the Canadian government taking no immediate action. For decades, Indigenous women and girls in Canada have been vanishing and dying violently at disturbing rates. "An unprecedented RCMP report, released in 2014, found there were 1,181 police-reported cases of homicides and long-term disappearances involving Indigenous women and girls between 1980 and 2012" (Baum).

This chapter focuses on Simon Fraser University's 2015 Mainstage production of *An Encounter with The Unnatural and Accidental Women* wherein I argue that:

- 1) Using the rehearsal process to embody a community-engaged dramaturgy represents the play's time/place/space in unique ways. Specifically, I refer to the ways the actors' bodies were used to manipulate the cityscape installations instead of focusing on mimetic character representation, and the involvement of Indigenous community members and guests as community building during the rehearsal process.
- 2) Using community-engaged dramaturgy helped to develop a relationship between the aesthetics of the staging and the absent Indigenous women's bodies onstage through

choosing to read the stage directions, present a table reading, and create installations to distance the students from mimetic acting styles.

- 3) Using community-engaged dramaturgy encourages the students and the play's witnesses to critically engage with the subject matter and motivates them to take action. This is seen in the inclusion of nightly talkbacks and the exposure to organizations, peoples and places directly involved with the MMIW crises.

This chapter considers my work developing and implementing community-engaged dramaturgy as the framework for Simon Fraser University's *An Encounter with The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. As a witness who was actively involved in this process, I focus on sharing some of my choices and experiences as a dramaturg and introduce the methods I have been developing while doing so. My experiences and practice provide alternative ways of seeing how Relational Indigenous dramaturgical concepts function, both on the page and in lived time and space.

A community-engaged dramaturgical process provides a model for non-Indigenous theatre practitioners who are interested in producing plays by Indigenous playwrights, and whose casts are non-Indigenous or mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The key features of this method include reaching out and building relationships with host nations on which the institution is located, building relationships with the local Indigenous arts community, and being open to trust and reciprocate the knowledge that might be shared. I begin this chapter by discussing the rehearsal processes of the University of British Columbia's 2007 student production of Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters*, and Colleen Murphy's Edmonton premier of *Pig Girl*. I use *Pig Girl* as a counter-model to which community-engaged dramaturgy could be understood as a response.

5.1 Witnessing as Self-in-Relation to This Process

I was seventeen when I saw Marie Clements' *Copper Thunderbird* at Ottawa's National Arts Center. Margo Kane (Cree-Saulteaux), Michelle St. John (Wampanoag), Kevin Loring (Nlaka'pamux) and Billy Merasty (Cree), to name a few, executed a performance text that taught audiences about the life and passion of Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau. The colours, the sounds, the stilts, the laughs—I had never seen anything like it. I loved it. I saw it two more times.

I grew up in Ottawa as an urban/displaced/mixed Algonquin Anishinaabe and settler Canadian kid, and that is also where I completed both my undergraduate and MA programs. I saw a lot of shows there, at the Ottawa Little Theatre, Fringe Festival, the Great Canadian Theatre Company, friendship centres, community centres and, of course, at the National Art Centre (NAC). I will not go into the history of the NAC but I will say that I am grateful for the significant amount of Indigenous-directed and -acted works that were staged there during Peter Hinton's appointment as artistic director. I witnessed *Copper Thunderbird*, *Death of a Chief*, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, *Agokwe*, *For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again*, *King Lear* and more between 2008 and 2012. Being exposed to these performances, combined with the work I was doing at the University of Ottawa, I began to question the pragmatics of Indigenous theatre in Canada. *What is it? Who is it for? How did it get here?* What I know and love about Indigenous theatre are the political undercurrents and grassroots strengths that sing out of its *by us, for us* model.

I reflect on my experiences at the NAC and the influence that seeing these shows had on me as I continue to grapple with identity politics surrounding what or who makes theatre Indigenous. A key feature of the majority of works deemed "Indigenous theatre" is the

Indigenous body: reclaiming, working, and participating in the work, translating and transforming how knowledges, practices and beliefs move from the body to the stage. As Christy Stanlake explains, it is “a separate field of theatre with a distinctive dramaturgy calling for critical understanding based particularly upon Native ways of knowing” (Stanlake 25). This alludes to the fact that the particularities of Indigenous dramaturgies and performance are not always tangible or articulated but are presenced in the individual bodies and styles of each practitioner. Complexities surrounding what Indigenous theatre *is* include these questions: What does it look like? What does it sound like? Who is involved and who is not?

When guest lecturing or teaching a course, I always begin by asking: Which Indigenous plays have you read? Which Indigenous productions have you seen? What were some expectations about what you were going to see or feel? How do you define Indigenous theatre? The responses always vary but the most popular responses have to do with seeing Indigenous bodies onstage. In her article “On the Path of Native Theatre,” Cree practitioner Carol Greyeyes shares an experience she had in the early 1980s:

Then the time came, at some theatre conference or similar event that I had been asked to attend, when the question was invariably asked: “So what exactly *is* Native Theatre?” I remember a long silence as we, the designated practitioners and representatives for Native theatre (a label put *on* us, but not *by* us), tried to figure out what to answer. Finally someone in our group blurted out that Native theatre was “Indians on stage.” We all laughed. But after the laughter, heads nodded. That would work, for the time being. (Greyeyes 99)

As elucidated by Greyeyes, the struggle to get Indigenous bodies on Canadian stages was political, and is tangled up in the wide range of events in Canada’s colonial past and present that continue to affect the lives of Indigenous peoples. There has yet to be a fixed definition of Indigenous Theatre on Turtle Island. However, as Greyeyes and the four waves of Indigenous theatrical representations model indicate, the formal arrival of Indigenous theatre in Canada has

been marked by the inclusion of Indigenous theatre practitioners in the creation, development and performance of theatrical works. But what makes something “Indigenous” enough? Is a certain percentage of bodies needed? Is it the playwright? Director? Actors? Was *Copper Thunderbird* really “Native” if its director was not? When and how does something *become* Indigenous theatre? I ask these questions because in 2015 I worked on Marie Clements’ *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* with a completely non-Indigenous student cast at Simon Fraser University.

The majority of productions of Indigenous plays by non-Indigenous groups take place at colleges and universities, largely due to the fact that educational facilities have more room to experiment within their rehearsal processes, are places where students go to learn, and have lower costs. Directed by non-Indigenous practitioner Johnna Wright, the University of British Columbia’s Department of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing produced *The Rez Sisters* at the Frederic Wood Theatre in November 2007. Out of a cast of seven women, two were Indigenous and the role of Nanabush was played by Indigenous actor Tracy Olson.



Image 7 Photos are copyright © Theatre at UBC

Actors: (L-R) Yoshi Bancroft, Sarah Afful, Hilary Fillier, Cecile Roslin, Maura Halloran, Kate Hilderman and Kim Harvey (TOP) Tracy Olson Photo: Tim Matheson

Peter Birnie's review in the *Vancouver Sun* describes how Wright "sought First Nations input at every stage of creation, with cultural adviser Alannah Earl Young" (Birnie). Earl Young also appeared onstage to provide drumming accompaniment in the scenes where Nanabush performed. The reviews, and conversations held with faculty involved in the production, acknowledged not only its successes in maintaining both the humorous and serious elements of the text, but also its sociopolitical and spiritual realities. The Department was in constant consultation with UBC's First Nations House of Learning, and held a public forum organized and moderated by Michelle La Flamme (Métis/Creek). UBC's *The Rez Sisters* is a dramaturgical model wherein teachings, additional workshops and other relationships contextualized the production in order to better understand and manage the politics involved in performing an Indigenous play.

In 2011 at Toronto's Factory Theatre, Ken Gass directed a professional remount of Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters*. Gass, a non-Indigenous man, retained complete creative control of the show, and the creative team was also non-Native. The production featured a culturally diverse cast with predominantly non-Indigenous women in the roles. In an interview with *The Globe and Mail*, Gass says, "[they] simply had an open casting call" (Nestruck). Gass' decision to cast actors from a variety of backgrounds stemmed from his interest in better representing Toronto and its culturally diverse population. Kelly Nestruck's article explains that with a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant, Gass staged two readings of *The Rez Sisters*, one with an entirely Indigenous cast and another with a mixed cast. Gass explains, "the question of actors playing characters of races other than their own is less about cultural appropriation than about employment opportunity" (Nestruck). Gass chose to highlight his ability to employ other underutilized actors by opening up this production to people from various

cultural backgrounds. However, there is potential danger in eliminating the cultural, political and spiritual aspects of this piece because the socio-political issues in the text (alcoholism, poverty, addiction, fetal alcohol syndrome, sexual violence, and inter-generational trauma) are realities that Indigenous communities are still facing due to the ongoing effects of settler colonialism on our lands and bodies. Taking the focus off the impacts of settler-colonialism within Indigenous communities creates the illusion that all has been reconciled when Indigenous struggles, joys, and cultural specificities are still being negotiated between Indigenous nations and Canada at large. Gass' production at Factory Theatre also reduced the opportunity for professional Indigenous actors to be cast. Unlike student productions with non-professional performers in these roles, professional Indigenous women were being overlooked for work.

In Highway's article, "Should Only Native Actors Have the Right to Play Native Roles?" published in a 2001 issue of *Prairie Fire* magazine he demonstrates concerns that his plays, and other Indigenous play texts, were not being produced because non-Indigenous practitioners were being too politically correct to pick them up. Highway explains:

When it dawned on me, one cloudy day, that my career as a playwright had been destroyed by political correctness, I just about died. I wanted to throw myself under a subway train and just call it a day. I was horrified! After all that work? After all those years of struggle and of hope and of prayer and of pain and of tears and of more struggle, against odds that were impossible to begin with? (Highway 20)

Throughout, Highway explains how only casting Indigenous actors in his plays inhibit directors and production companies from taking them on due to fear of cultural appropriation. And he comments on the apparent shortage of professional Indigenous actors in Canada. Highway's position throughout the article is that people are people, and actors are trained practitioners who should be able to embody all roles they are cast in. This article surfaced during a multi-year break between professional productions of *The Rez Sisters*.

Interestingly, Highway's 1987 article "On Native Mythology" takes a drastically different approach to categorizing who should perform and produce Indigenous theatre. He states that "by 'Native Theatre,' I mean theatre that is written, performed and produced by Native people themselves and theatre that speaks out on the culture and the lives of this country's Native people" (Highway "Mythology" 1). Highway's goals appear to have changed from developing and fostering Indigenous theatre as a unique cultural entity to focusing more on individual productions.

An instance where I believe a community-engaged dramaturgy would have changed the outcome of a theatrical production is described in Nehiyaw scholar Tracy Bear's PhD dissertation, "Power in My Blood: Corporeal Sovereignty through the Praxis of an Indigenous Eroticanalysis." Bear writes about Theatre Network's Edmonton premier of Colleen Murphy's *Pig Girl*. Non-Indigenous playwright Murphy wrote *Pig Girl* while playwright-in-residence at the University of Alberta. She was inspired to write this play from "outrage born of the failure of a criminal justice system to protect the numerous women (90 percent of whom were Aboriginal) brutally murdered by Robert Pickton, of police negligence, and of the failure of the system to apprehend him sooner" (Bear 83). Bear writes,

I received an email from Theatre Network shortly before their new play was slated to begin its two-week run in Edmonton. Due to my involvement with Walking With Our Sisters, they invited me to speak in a talk-back session after the play (one week into its scheduled run) to "discuss one initiative [WWOS] that brought hope and respect to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women" (personal phone conversation). After discussing this with the WWOS National Collective, and on their advice, I requested access to the screenplay. Designed to disturb and unsettle viewers, the screenplay did not disappoint in that regard. The play was offensive, and I felt that Colleen Murphy, as a non-Indigenous person, used her privileged colonial position to tell a story that was not hers to tell. Murphy, an outraged citizen seeing a need for justice, I felt, had positioned herself as the "white saviour" of all the victimized Aboriginal women. (83)

Inviting Indigenous peoples to speak at talkbacks once the play is already up and running is not

an adequately responsible approach to respectful and reciprocal relationship building. Bear does not believe that theatre artists, as trained practitioners, can tell any story, but rather, as stated above, she believes that Murphy was trying to tell a story that was not hers to tell. Murphy's play reproduces colonial narratives of Indigenous misrecognition as elucidated in the first and second waves of Indigenous theatre introduced in this dissertation. Written and performed by non-Indigenous theatre practitioners, *Pig Girl* is not a site of Indigenous self-recognition or resurgence.

Bear quotes a review by Trevor Greyeyes from the Peguis First Nation about the physical and mental violence that was performed onstage by the non-Indigenous actors. She argues that even if you don't see the play, the title and poster are not only violent but discriminating and stereotypical. She "imagined friends and families of the Missing and Murdered being re-traumatized by the entire event" (Bear 83). Bear declined to speak at the talkback, and the play's director remained unable to find any Indigenous person to participate.

What is most shocking to me is that instead of connecting and working with Indigenous communities, Murphy felt she had artistic licence to represent these realities on behalf of Indigenous women and their families. Even though Indigenous communities reached out to the producing team and asked them to reconsider this production, they refused to listen. *Pig Girl* exemplifies the breadth of power at play in Murphy's colonial relationships with the subject matter. Bear explains,

Prior to the play's opening night, a group comprised of ten Aboriginal people (including family members of two women whose DNA and body parts were found on the pig farm) – Elders, artists, theatre people, and social activists – all gathered to meet with the playwright, actors, and director to discuss our perspectives on the play. We sat in a talking circle, and with sweetgrass burning we each got a turn to explain why the play's name and visuals were profoundly offensive and disrespectful to Aboriginal people. The director was the play's only representative; nobody else connected with the play accepted

our invitation to talk. The director explained that the purpose of the name and the visuals was to provoke conversation and bring light to the injustice of it. This provocation, in turn, he said, would open up a forum to inform the public of these atrocities and bring awareness to these larger social issues. In tears, quiet voices shaking with emotion, many members of the Aboriginal group tried to communicate the vulgarity and foulness that the poster and play represented to the families of these women and the re-traumatization felt by the victim's families. The meeting ended abruptly, with the director walking out and refusing to discuss any of the possibilities that the group brought forth. As the director stormed out, we were left wondering if he even heard what we had come to relate. (87)

Relational Indigenous community-engaged dramaturgy is about relationship-building, consultation and respect for Indigenous experiences, knowledges and representations. "Non-Indigenous creations like the play *Pig Girl* allow the narration of our social realities without any cultural context, thereby continuing to legitimize the dominant colonial discourse and colonial violence against women, particularly Indigenous women" (Bear 88). From Bear's accounts, the production team was neither working in relationship with nor was accountable to the Indigenous community they were trying to represent. Without reaching out to grassroots and Indigenous-led organizations, friends and families affected by the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls crisis, or anti-violence community organizers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside as a starting point, *Pig Girl* became a text of cultural appropriation and excessive violence. Murphy's play and Gass' production reproduce settler perceptions of Indigenous women as victims and did not create space for Indigenous self-recognition in the outreach, creation, development or rehearsing of these playtexts. In contrast, a Relational Indigenous community-engaged dramaturgy allows for instances of Indigenous self-recognition within various stages of the artistic process.

For the purposes of this chapter, Relational Indigenous community-engaged dramaturgy is essentially considered to be the way the meaning, the intentions, the form and the aesthetics of a play arise during the working process when Indigenous guests from outside of the cast and

crew are invited in. In this dramaturgical variation, I describe how I applied community-engaged dramaturgy during the rehearsal process of SFU's *An Encounter with Marie Clements' The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. In inviting guests into the rehearsal space, we focused the process on the embodied, reciprocal and artistic relationships involved in Indigenous artistic collaborations.

5.2 *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*

Métis/Dene playwright, actor and director Marie Clements was born in Vancouver. In the 1980s she worked as a radio news reporter, developing her interest in research and social justice. She is an interdisciplinary practitioner who, like any trickster, takes on many roles: actor, director, playwright, screenwriter, mother, researcher, friend, auntie and role model. She is the founding Artistic Director of Urban Ink Productions, which has been running since 2001, and she has curated a screenplay and playwriting style that beautifully blends historical and fictional characters and events with a politically charged aesthetic. Her love for the worlds she creates makes the readers and viewers love them too, and makes it hard to forget about them once the performance is over. Clements writes, develops, directs and produces both theatre and film. For the purposes of this chapter, Clements' work as a theatre practitioner will remain my focus. She has written more than thirteen plays, including *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, *Burning Vision*, *Copper Thunderbird* and the multimedia, award-winning musical, and now National Film Board documentary, *The Road Forward*. Marie Clements' work is taught in classrooms, performed on international stages and critically discussed in various anthologies, books and journals.

Clements weaves together nuanced and poetic moments to create texts that are deeply rooted in the particulars of place, time and history. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* premiered at the Firehall Arts Centre in Vancouver in November 2000, two years before the arrest of Robert Pickton in connection with the cases of more than 65 murdered and missing women (most of them Indigenous) from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (Dickinson "Review"). That is also the neighbourhood where Simon Fraser University's School of Contemporary Arts stands and where its theatre students attend classes. Clements' play is a dramatization of the lives of several Indigenous women preyed upon by another real-life serial killer in the Downtown Eastside, Gilbert Paul Jordan, a barber implicated in the alcohol poisoning deaths of at least ten women between the mid-1960s and 1980s (Dickinson "Review"). Although he eventually served six years for manslaughter, Jordan was never convicted of murder.

In December 2014, I was invited to a meeting at Simon Fraser University's (SFU) School of Contemporary Arts in the Woodward's building in the Downtown Eastside (DTES), hosted by the head of First Nations Studies, Deanna Reder (Cree-Métis). Along with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous SFU faculty, invited scholars, artists and community members working in Indigenous art, literature and theatre, we were told that SFU's FPA 450 class would be presenting Marie Clements' *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* as their Mainstage Production in February 2015. Throughout the play, Clements has Indigenous characters from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside share their last memories before their deaths: Aunt Shadie, Verna, Mavis, Valerie and Violet. The women are mothers struggling to pay bills, young women trying to phone home, displaced women trying to reconnect in various ways with their families. Rebecca, a mixed Indigenous character who lives in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood, wants to find out what happened to her mother and hopes to learn about her own identity at the

same time. The play takes place in the past as the story unfolds in hotel rooms across the DTES, in the present as Rebecca searches for her missing mother, and in an indistinguishable spiritual present as all the women, living and dead, band together to save future generations from falling victim to similar acts of violence. At that gathering, Reder also explained that the cast and director of this production would be non-Indigenous.

Surprisingly to me, Marie Clements herself was at the table. I had corresponded with Clements a few times via email, and we had spoken on the phone once while I was conducting research for my Master's thesis in 2011. But this was the first time I would actually meet her. We went around the table and introduced ourselves, explaining what each of us does, and many of us spoke to how much we loved Clements' work or how we had interacted with it in the past. The purpose of this meeting was to find out why *this* play? And perhaps more importantly, *how* this play would be done with a full cast of non-Indigenous actors? How could this group of people relate to these issues of gendered violence and the effects of settler colonialism when they are a part of the lineage that enables these forms of violence?

When asked why *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, director Steven Hill explained how he wanted to explore something that would challenge the students and the audience to think critically about where SFU Woodward's is, about the community that surrounds the daily activities of this institution, and how theatre can politically intervene in these issues. Hill explained, "Initially, I had hoped to do the piece so that, as a group, the collaborators and I would grapple with the very fraught relationships in the neighbourhood of the university and the colonial history of the city. The University had recently moved to the Downtown Eastside—an area known for, among other things, the horrific series of murders and disappearances of Indigenous women" (Hill).

In “Honoring Elsie: Was she just a dream?” an article written by Elsie Jones Sebastian’s daughter, Ann-Marie Livingston, and their friend, Kwagiulth activist scholar Sarah Hunt, the women acknowledge how in 2007 “the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women rose to international attention as a serial killer was convicted of the murder of six women, after the remains or DNA of thirty-three women were found on his rural farm in British Columbia. Yet many more women were suspected to have met their death on this property—Elsie Jones Sebastian was one of them” (Livingston and Hunt 2). The article identifies Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside as a prominent area where “the missing and murdered women” were victims of targeted violence in neighbourhoods where “poverty, drug use, sex work and homelessness were commonplace” (Livingston and Hunt 3). This article is critical of the judicial, political and legal systems involved in these ongoing investigations. Clements explicitly comments on the lack of support from federal and police investigations in her play title and in the use of projected slides throughout the text.

The published text of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* offers excerpts from various Vancouver newspapers with accounts by several different coroners that violently describe how some of the actual murdered women’s bodies were found. “She was found lying nude on her bed and had recent bruises on her scalp, nose, lips and chin... there was no evidence of violence, or suspicion of foul play,’ noted Coroner Glen McDonald”; and “To get the blood-alcohol reading that — had at the time of her death, experts say she would have had to drink about 40 ounces of hard liquor all at once. The mother of four died at Jordan’s barbershop... Coroner Mary Lou Glazier concluded —‘s death was ‘unnatural and accidental’” (Clements 8). Clements’ intervention indicates her refusal to accept these deaths as unnatural and accidental. The public information released by these coroners speaks to similar concerns of Livingston and Hunt that

the police forces involved in these cases are not doing enough to end this national crisis.

Throughout the text Clements calls for “SLIDES” to be projected. The information shared on the slides varies, at times with titles like “***SLIDE: THE UNNATURAL AND ACCIDENTAL WOMEN***” (Clements *Unnatural and Accidental* 9). Other slides include titles and place names like “***SLIDE: FOUR DAYS: DAY 1- Glenaird Hotel***” or slides reading “***I’M SCARED TO DIE I***” (Clements *Unnatural and Accidental* 21). Structurally, the slides help to connect the fragmented scenes in providing specific details as to where and when the action is taking place. The slides also project the name, date of death and blood alcohol level of each of the murdered women. These slides contain publically accessible information from various coroner reports. “Though Clements has constructed fictional characters, she uses real data about the real victims and real data about the coroners’ reports to create this series of slides. In this respect, Clements refuses to simply end the play with the horrific murders of the Aboriginal women while simultaneously finding a way to foreground the murders in the performance” (La Flamme 229). The use of slides is a less corporeal way of indicating the violence inflicted on these women while still foregrounding the sense of unjust violence and incomplete political and judicial support. For example, one name slide reads, ***SLIDE: Rita Louise James, 52, died November 10, 1978 with a 0.12 blood-alcohol reading. No coroner’s report issued***” (Clements *Unnatural and Accidental* 9).



Image 8 *An Encounter with Unnatural And Accidental* production photo by Malena Meneses-Skoda

The text itself reveals the harsh reality of physical, mental, sexual and spiritual abuse that Indigenous women across Canada experience at the hands of settler colonial violence. The text ensures that we are aware of the overt ignorance and dismissive discourses of pathology and deficiency that naturalize risk as inherent to Indigenous women, masking the source of risk in colonialism that the nation has exhibited in failing to combat the violence inflicted on Indigenous women and girls. Fifteen years after its premiere, the realities discussed in the play remain socially and politically relevant today.

Livingston and Hunt's work urges Canadians to consider how the legacy of colonial violence towards Indigenous women affects the families and loved ones of those who are categorized as "missing." Clements uses a similar plot structure as she has Rebecca out searching for her "missing" mother. It is only through Rebecca's journey that the audience learns of the numerous victims the barber has targeted and the fear and pain he has inflicted in the communities and within the families destroyed by these violent acts. Livingston and Hunt's major criticism is that "experts" are leading funding projects and legal investigations without

considering the voices, needs, and legacies of the families involved. Livingston and Hunt explain:

Federally-funded organizations like the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), along with individual consultants and other "experts" have become known as the voice for "the missing and murdered women," while the voices of individual family members as well as community advocates in the DTES and along the Highway of Tears and other communities, have largely been overlooked. Ann-Marie, the co-author of this paper, has been told by some professional consultants about invitations they received to speak nationally or internationally about this "issue", yet these same consultants fail to ask Ann-Marie for consent to speak about her mother's case or invite her to speak alongside them. (4)

Concerns over having "experts," in this case theatre students, telling someone else's story was Deanna Reder's primary motivation for interrupting the production of this play. Although the producing group included trained theatre professionals and students in the midst of their professional training, they were not "experts" when it came to the play's content and therefore were not following respectful protocol for how to approach this reality. Further, if Indigenous theatre is about having Indigenous bodies onstage, then what would this performance be?

This idea of "experts" telling Indigenous stories and taking up space that should be taken up by Indigenous bodies is unfortunately not new to the field of theatre studies. But it does raise questions of identity politics. Who should produce—or be allowed to produce—plays by Indigenous playwrights, or plays that include Indigenous characters? At the 2015 gathering, Marie Clements explained why she believes schools and institutions are acceptable spaces for Indigenous issues to be discussed and worked out by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people: she considers training facilities and institutions places of learning, studying and growing. Clements acknowledged that this wasn't a professional theatre production, and jobs were not being taken away from Indigenous actors who could have been cast to play these roles. Instead, students were being presented with a contemporary and localized issue that they would have to

try to negotiate. Clements agreed to its production because, like Tomson Highway, she wanted her play to have another life and fears her work will never be produced due to casting issues.

Throughout the gathering organized by Deanna Reder, there was much talk about how to “Indigenize” this production. One idea was to invite non-trained Indigenous students from other departments to act in the show. This option was not favoured by the theatre department because their students were being graded for their work. But some Indigenous people also objected that this option would create situations of micro-aggression and alienation for the Indigenous students involved. They would not only be the only untrained students in the production, but also the only Indigenous people. Suggestions, including a heavy push to have the production cancelled, continued to be shared with no mention of the rehearsal process. Everyone was involved in the discussion of the performance, yet no one considered how it might be done.

5.3 Community-Engaged Dramaturgy: deconstructing power and privilege in the rehearsal process

The conversations continued and after the meeting I was asked to come on as dramaturg. I wasn’t sure how I felt about it, and did not want to be *that one* Indigenous symbol, the one voice of cultural reference when I also was not an “expert” on the subject. I struggled with trying to understand how we could preserve the representational sovereignty that Indigenous theatre practitioners have fought to establish for our field. Would I be adding to the discomfort of the situation by sharing my Indigeneity with the group or would it help to alleviate potential acts of violence through trying to guide aesthetic choices away from being sites of misappropriation, stereotypes and labels? After conversations with friends, colleagues and mentors I decided to accept with the condition that this would not be a theatrical performance or final production of Clements’ text but rather an encounter with the work, and that our process and struggles with the

text needed to somehow translate onstage.

In my experience witnessing and working on this production, I acted as a curator and a facilitator who helped establish respectful negotiations between different cultural values, and supported the interweaving of various artistic systems and methodologies. The major artistic system involved here was acting style. This process was deeply engaged in trying to find ways to represent the realities around the crisis of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, but not to falsely embody or represent female Indigeneity. To help develop the students' relationships with and understanding of the realities of Vancouver's DTES, we developed a community-engaged dramaturgy that included having conversations, sharing food, learning songs, and being present in our surroundings.

Steven Hill's class had spent the previous months researching the realities of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, two-spirit, trans people and men, the politics behind the location where they went to school, and Canada as a colonizing power. With only a few months before opening, the rehearsal process became the focus. We created lists of local Indigenous and non-indigenous artists, scholars, students, friends and community members to come in and out throughout the rehearsals to meet, work with and build relationships with the cast and crew. This was the first step in creating a community-engaged Relational Indigenous dramaturgy. Engaging with these guests gave the students the opportunity to witness teachings and stories that held them accountable to the particularities of what it means to work within Indigenous frameworks of time, place and space—a major theme in the play.

Throughout the process guests would come in, share stories, songs, dances, articles, readings, and in return the cast and crew would share food, their experiences of working on the show and of living or studying in the DTES. This was not always easy for the student cast and

crew as they had never been in a rehearsal process where memorizing lines, repeating their blocking and developing their characters were not the focus. The students were there to act, they wanted to exercise their chops, but instead they were being offered an entirely different creative framework. One rehearsal was particularly challenging as a few of the students were struggling with how to represent their characters—particularly how to represent them as either “dead” or “alive,” a binary which was not the way we wanted the students to understand the women. The character of Rose for example, is a switchboard operator, one who links the women literally in connecting their phone calls, and figuratively through time and space. The main thing I noticed was how challenging it was for everyone to get out of the assumption that they could physically embody the characters—that they had authority over the bodies of these women. The students were struggling to comprehend the spiritual and non-linear realities at work, and to come to terms with the idea that playing “dead” or “alive” was not the goal of this process. It was a challenge to break the students out of their comfort zones in that respect. But in general, the problem was their reluctance to be significantly challenged in how they would perform and what they could perform.

In order for the play to be performed with respect for the lives of the women presented in the text, the students had to understand that they were not being asked to embody the characters on a physical or psychological level, but rather to experience the challenges of being a settler in a place where targeted violence, racism and intergenerational effects of settler colonialism exist around them. The people who came in during rehearsals were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks whose lives and work are involved in the social and political realities of the DTES. The production team also participated in the annual Women’s Memorial March on February 14, 2015. Taking the students out of the rehearsal room and into the streets

surrounding their institution reminded them of the direct realities discussed in Clements' play.

5.4 Time/Place/Space in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*

My biggest challenge in this process was articulating and trying to explain the various meanings and significance of Indigenous relationships with time, place and space, and how they manifest in the play. A predominant area of performance analysis involves the spectators critically considering how what is seen onstage shapes the fictional world of the production. The fictional world of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* includes both the physical space of the performance and the spiritual realms which unite the play's real, or secular, time with the time and place of the spirit or nonhuman other world.

Time and space play significant roles in many contemporary Indigenous play and performance texts. Time is always considered to be moving, but in a cyclical as opposed to a linear fashion. As plays progress in real time their events also unfold in the time of the fictional play text, and in the spirit world. The performer is aware of how their embodied actions work in relationship with the spirit world; the witnesses, then, by extension, attain the possibility to form or privilege spiritual relationships of their own (Favel, "Younger Brother": *passim*). Cree theatre practitioner Floyd Favel believes in the power of theatre to create and maintain relationships between human and non-human characters. In "Waskawewin," Favel explores how the body remembers and utilizes cultural teachings within the moment of performance. *Waskawewin*, which he explains means "movement" in Cree, is how he understands the Indigenous body performing in time, place, and space. This idea of bodies always in motion, always transcending different times and different worlds, is a technique Clements uses in her text. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* contains characters that travel from the spirit world to the living world in order to guide, witness and tease Rebecca. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies consider how the

past, present and future work together to form and structure the process. Community-engaged dramaturgies consider how new relationships and processes form based on past, present and future knowledges and realities carried by everyone involved.

In Michelle LaFlamme's article "(Re)animating the (Un)dead," she explores artistic expressions and contemporary events such as the annual Women's Memorial March every February 14th, *The REDress Project*, *Walking with Our Sisters* installation, and *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* to "analyze how these spaces and artists imaginatively animate a sense of the disappeared and the deceased" (La Flamme 214). La Flamme is a Métis/Creek scholar, professor and storyteller who has been critically working with literature and social justice for over two decades. In her article, she theorizes that the witnessing of such events contributes to social justice, empowerment and resistance by "having the spectators critically consider their own visceral existence in relationship to the abject murdered Indigenous women's bodies" (La Flamme 245).

Throughout the process I constantly reminded the actors to do as La Flamme suggests: to critically consider their own visceral existence in relationship to the Indigenous women's bodies of the text, and to the absent Indigenous bodies in their class. I persistently worked with the group to help animate an existence/a presence of the non-present. We did a great deal of work to break the cast out of their comfort zones, and to introduce them to the web of spirituality and kinship relationships built into the text. We sat in circles and collectively read articles like Floyd Favel's "Waskawewin" and "Theatre: Younger Brother of Tradition" as textual descriptions of non-linear and Indigenous-centered notions of time and space. In order to reach the cast on a more personal level, we did a lot of embodied work to presence our own relations or family members in the room. Whether they were with us in this world, or the spirit world, we worked to

presence and store our individual collections of memories, moments and stories within us in attempts to find ways to hold ourselves accountable to our ancestors and communities. The specifics of the process are dependent on who is in the room and therefore will differ with each use. In focusing on ourselves as individuals working to connect to our own non-present families and communities, I believed the students would begin to see why we were critical of *how* they would perform the characters and what they *could* perform. We honoured the non-present by focusing on the particular use of time/place/space in the text.

The particular use of time/place/space in *Unnatural and Accidental Women* is said to offer “a vision of corporeality and the spirit world that suggests that murdered women have an influence on the present in ways that extend beyond the point of their murder” (La Flamme 228). Here, the bending and blending of the living and non-living worlds become fluid and overlap with one another, making it difficult to distinguish which characters are “dead” and which are “alive”. As Favel argues in “Waskawewin,” where he attempts to describe the constant presence of Indigenous cosmology, the spirit world and the living world exist simultaneously within Indigenous performance culture. As a playwright, Clements braids a world where memories, the spirit world and the living world co-exist as a way to embody cultural and spiritual knowledges. Indigenous worldviews presuppose a fundamental link among humans, spiritual figures and the earth—an “all my relations” philosophy that Clements incorporates into her work. Somewhere in the spirit world, at times within the last memories of the missing women, and at others in their spiritual present, they gather together and mobilize against targeted patriarchal and colonial violence. Livingston and Hunt’s article “Honoring Elsie: was she just a dream?” calls for readers to remember the work, pain, struggle and agency of the family members; to consider their complex experiences of dealing with, coping with and honouring the lives of their loved ones in

terms that do not isolate them as “missing,” “murdered” or “dead.” Considering characters like Aunt Shadie, Violet and Rose as spirits allowed for conversation to be shared in rehearsals about Indigenous cosmologies and belief systems, and for an honouring of the legacy of the women whose stories were being presented.

In “The. Women. The Subject(s) of The Unnatural and Accidental Women and Unnatural and Accidental,” Erin Wunker compares how the women are represented in Clements’ playtext to how they are represented in Carl Bessai’s film adaptation *Unnatural and Accidental*. Using Derridean politics of hauntology and references to Freudian analyses of a “melancholic patient”, Wunker’s analysis reads as a victim narrative that focuses on “ghosts” haunting Rebecca instead of kin and aunties protecting her from the barber, or propelling her to a state of recognition (166). Wunker writes,

Rebecca’s search for her mother is an attempt to travel back into memory, history and time, in order to meet a ghost. This ghost is an absent referent, whose violent translation into spectre is under erasure; she is both viscerally connected to her and separate from her quotidian existence. Like the Freudian unconscious that is never directly accessible, Rebecca’s absent mother has haunted her for two decades...I hesitate to suggest that the play is an analysis of a melancholic patient, but it bears some important similarities to Freud’s claim that the cure for melancholia is a literal storying of the self. (166)

Wunker’s article relies on Euro-centric analysis that highlights a second-wave victimization narrative. I find the theoretical analysis and comparisons in this article problematic, as they do not consider Indigenous worldviews or Indigenous interpretations of time/place/space. Wunker exemplifies second-wave writing in excluding consideration of Indigenous kinship, spirituality or relational politics. Similarly, Karen Bamford’s article “Romance, Recognition and Revenge in Marie Clements’ *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*” compares *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* to “European traditions of drama and folk narrative, and especially its relation to the genres of revenge tragedy and romance” (Bamford 143). Bamford too, I argue, relies on a

comparison that does not include Indigenous-focused realities or analysis and instead, chooses to compare the play's dramaturgy to those found in the classical English-speaking Western canon. Although there is quite a bit of critical commentary on *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, I choose to cite only an Indigenous scholar, Michelle La Flamme. This choice is made to privilege an Indigenous creative and scholarly voice whose analysis is innately Indigenous-focused. This places my analysis into the fourth wave, removing it from the second-wave where non-native voices speak for and about Indigenous theatre and its analysis.

In an attempt to demonstrate the various manifestations of time/place/space in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, I created a scene breakdown to help the cast identify the multiple layers of the fictional world. Below is one of my breakdowns illustrating how to understand the world's time/place/space mechanisms.

ACT 1 SCENE 1 (9-14)

PLACE: Beacon Hotel

SPACE: Real World and Spirit World in Dialogue (Aunt Shadie and Rose)

TIME: Present Fictional time and Spiritual Time

ACT 1 SCENE 2 (14-18)

PLACE: Reception—Switchboard⁵

SPACE: Real world—flashback of Younger Aunt Shadie

TIME: Past of play's fictional world

ACT 1 SCENE 3 (18-21)

PLACE: Memory World/Flashbacks of Aunt Shadie, Rose and Rebecca

SPACE: Spirit World (A.S.) interweaving with Rebecca's world of nostalgic reminiscing

TIME: Time includes the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of Rebecca's being: her memory is in the present but she is physically/mentally/spiritually and emotionally embodied/standing with A.S. and Rose

⁵ What is Rose's role as "connector," as "linker"? Is it temporal/spatial?

ACT 1 SCENE 4 (21-24)

PLACE: Glenaird Hotel

SPACE: Mavis is a character connected to the spirit world- she, like the other women, are isolated to their separate rooms because they are the taken ones. Rose acts as their connector... she is in the spirit world trying to make links with the living world

TIME: First “Rhythms of a drinking room appears on page 21”→ the Glenaird Hotel may be where Mavis physically is/was but it establishes a re-occurring and repetitive notion that this has/will happened before to Indigenous women who are in this space

ACT 1 SCENE 5 (24-25)

PLACE: Hastings Street

SPACE: Rebecca’s Memory World as she recalls her experience

TIME: Real world

ACT 1 SCENE 6 (25-26)

PLACE: BARBERSHOP

SPACE: Embodied Memory of The Barber’s Women

TIME: Real Time and space of Audience and fictional world but also of the past 30 years

ACT 1 SCENE 7 (26-31)

PLACE: CLIFTON HOTEL

SPACE: Valerie’s Memory World- her solitude in her hotel room

TIME: Past of Play’s fictional world/ Valerie’s mind

ACT 1 SCENE 8 (26-31)

PLACE: Glenaird Hotel

SPACE: Cultural Memory—Spirit world sharing a story

TIME: Storytelling or spiritual time that is accessible through the telling of this deer’s story

ACT 1 SCENE 9 (32-36)

PLACE: The connecting/ spatial area where Mavis tries to connect with living world but is intercepted by Rose

SPACE: Dialogue between Mavis and Rose→ Mavis trying to connect to the living world but not fully knowing how to access

TIME: Spiritual and continuous time

ACT 1 SCENE (36-37)

PLACE: Hasting’s Street

SPACE: Rebecca’s Memory World and the Spirit world with A.S.’s arrival

TIME: Present time/ Memory World / Spiritual time

ACT 1 SCENE 10 (37-41)

PLACE: Switchboard/ Reception

SPACE: Spirit world attempting to connect with real world/ cultural commentary/ sharing space

TIME: Spiritual time

ACT 1 SCENE 11 (41-45)

PLACE: Glenaird Hotel

SPACE: Spirit world/connection space between Mavis and Rose⁶

TIME: Spiritual/ omnipresent time that re-occurs: trying to connect with living world

ACT 1 SCENE 12 (45-46)

PLACE: BARBERSHOP

SPACE: Liminal space of past/present/future situations that happen to these women (repetitive scene)

TIME: Past/present/future, spiritual and fictional time

ACT 1 SCENE 13 (46)

PLACE: Hastings Street

SPACE: Rebecca's mind/body/ spirit → Memory World

TIME: Real time and Spiritual time with A.S.'s presence

ACT 1 SCENE 14 (46-47)

PLACE: Balmoral Hotel

SPACE: Verna's mind/body/spirit being alone in the hotel room → Memory World

TIME: Past time of Play's fictional world

Act 1 SCENE 15 (47-51)

PLACE: Clifton Hotel

SPACE: Valerie's mind/body/spirit while alone in her hotel room → Memory World

TIME: Spirit time that reflects on time spent in the hotel when she was in the living world

ACT 1 SCENE 16 (51-53)

PLACE: GLENAIRD HOTEL

SPACE: Spirit world

TIME: Spiritual time and real time

ACT 1 SCENE 17 (53)

PLACE: Barber Shop

SPACE: Liminal space of past/present/future situations that happen to these women (repetitive scene)

TIME: Past/present/future, spiritual and fictional time

ACT 1 SCENE 18 (53-54)

PLACE: Hastings Street

SPACE: Rebecca's mind/body/spirit

TIME: Real time and Spiritual Time as A.S.'s presence is mentioned

⁶ Recurring "Spiritual interlude" before all of Mavis/rose scenes

ACT 1 SCENE 19 (54-55)

PLACE: Balmoral Hotel

SPACE: Verna's Memory World (altered by loneliness of being in hotel/ alcohol/ and now being in the spirit world)

TIME: Spiritual time looking back at events from the fictional world of the play

ACT 1 SCENE 20 (55-57)

PLACE: Glenaird Hotel

SPACE: Mavis' Memory World (altered by loneliness of being in hotel/ alcohol/ and now being in the spirit world)

TIME: Spiritual time looking back at events from fictional world of the play

ACT 1 SCENE 21 (57)

PLACE: Hastings Street

SPACE: Rebecca's mind/body/spirit→ Memory World

TIME: Real time and as she exists A.S. enters interweaving spiritual time

ACT 1 SCENE 22 (57-59)

PLACE: Barber Shop

SPACE: Spiritual and collective memory of the women

TIME: Spiritual and Real time: past/present/future

ACT 1 SCENE 23 (59-60)

PLACE: Niagra Hotel

SPACE: Violet's mind/ body/spirit→ Memory World

TIME: Spiritual Time

ACT 1 SCENE 24 (60-65)

PLACE: GLENAIRD HOTEL

SPACE: Women gathering together in the spirit world

TIME: Spiritual time

ACT 2 SCENE 1 (66-71)

PLACE: Rebecca's apartment

SPACE: Women from the spirit world interweaved with Rebecca's apt in living world

TIME: Real time and spiritual time

ACT 2 SCENE 2 (71-77)

PLACE: Rebecca's bedroom

SPACE: Rebecca's bedroom with the omnipresent awareness that the women are present/watching

TIME: Real time and spiritual time

ACT 2 SCENE 3 (77-78)

PLACE: Rebecca's kitchen

SPACE: Rebecca's kitchen with spiritual characters gathered together

TIME: Spiritual Time

This textual analysis, one version of the time/place/space breakdown, was used by the cast and discussed and modified throughout the process with the other people who participated.

Relational Indigenous dramaturgies strive to foreground and focus on Indigenous knowledges and practices within the artistic processes and to build new relationships and practices while doing so. The process' focus on time/place/space and Indigenous interpretations of past, present and future connecting in various moments of this play reconnected the Indigenous participants to culturally-specific beliefs and practices, and introduced some to these significances for the first time. The particularities of time/place/space in *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* are also clearly and beautifully articulated in Clements' stage directions.

5.5 Showing the Process Onstage: Reading the Stage Directions

The stage directions became another focus of the encounter. To show the use of time/place/space as a theme throughout the text, and to further distance the students from attempting to embody Indigeneity, I chose to have the stage directions read out loud. This ultimately led the process to manifest as a staged reading. The actors introduced themselves and the character(s) they were reading and then sat at a table for most of the production unless they were doing the physical labour of setting up one of the installations.



Image 9 *An Encounter with Unnatural And Accidental* production photo by Malena Meneses-Skoda

Salteaux and Cree interdisciplinary artist and social justice worker Renae Morriveau joined the process and ultimately performed with the cast every night as a storyteller who read stage directions, played a hand drum and shared songs in an attempt to appropriately deal with the violent subject matter at hand. At each performance Morriveau would read, drum and sing a prayer and healing song. The second reader alternated every night. One way to include Indigenous bodies onstage was to invite those who participated in the rehearsal process to read stage directions during the show. “The readers took turns reciting the stage directions, with some of the described actions and sound effects materializing on the raised platforms encircling the audience, and others, being left to their imaginations” (Dickinson “Review”). This made manifest the relationships that were created throughout the process and further expand the performance from realistic acting and staging styles.



Image 10 *An Encounter with Unnatural And Accidental* production photo by Malena Meneses-Skoda

Design choices, including aesthetics and acting styles, were particularly important to this production. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* does call for mimetic and realistic choices, for example, when acknowledging the seriousness of MMIW and the socio-political realities that exist within the DTES. Therefore, an expectation of mimetic resemblance is necessary when producing Marie Clements' work. Nevertheless, in this case it would not be presented through realistic embodied acting styles.

In the first week of rehearsal Steven Hill was still attempting to stage the first act while honouring Clements' stage directions. Moments before they would meet their murderer, the women appear in their hotel rooms and speak directly to the audience. The young actresses had worked so hard at finding what they could to imagine the circumstance of another—as one does in the theatre. “So often we talk about believability in the theatre—that theatre or at least realism is about suspension of disbelief. It’s what we say so often, that a performance or performer was particularly believable. But what is that? Belief—isn’t that also a kind of erasure—that we might be lost in the unity of character, action and event?” (Hill). We had invited Deanna Reder and

artist activist Gabrielle Hill (Métis) to watch a stumble-through of the first act, and never was this attempt at believability more troubled, more uncomfortable. I witnessed a failed attempt. I asked director Steven Hill to speak to that moment in the process, and he explains,

This theatre failed, this gap, this chasm of experience was in itself a repetition of an erasure of history and difference, and remarkably I think it had little to do with the skill level of the performer and in fact a more seasoned, accomplished actor would only succeed more proficiently in the erasure. How could an actor presume to know the experience of others—across this divide? Emmanuel Levinas the ethical philosopher wrote that knowledge was violence—to know the other is to consume the other. A kind of cannibalism. Turning your experience into mine. Is representation in the theatre a kind of knowing? Seeing the young women—not all white, but settlers, perform trapped, cornered isolated, Indigenous Women for an audience of Indigenous women was immediately an impossibility.

Gabrielle questioned why we (I) was interested in doing this. Rightly so. What was I willing to give up. Is it only more attempt to perform innocence—another theft, in the history of thievery. And why not include a cast of aboriginal women? Yes, why not? This is likely been a mistake to undertake and should have been a partnership, not another white man offering bright ideas to placate his own ancestral guilt, and all too modern impotence. (Cowardice?)

So on this faulty path—Lindsay suggested the students read the play...Follow this way students—the first act would be read. Scene by scene we went through the play asking what words could the actors speak and what was the action of placing the book down and claiming the words as one's own. This would be the play. The presence of the playwright would remain in the room, her words from the page. The play would be un-reconciled and unbelievable.

I appreciate having Hill's voice and reflections in this chapter, as it was his choice to take this project on. As a witness reflecting on this process, I am reminded that this was not an easy process and that it affected the lives of all who participated. Relatedly, in *The Book of Jessica*, Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell (Métis) share their collaborative attempt at creating the play *Jessica*, providing an excellent resource when considering the deep difficulties of intercultural performance-making involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators. Griffiths and Campbell share over 50 pages of conversations around "Spiritual Things" and how the majority of their differences during their artistic process was due to the disconnect in their spiritual relationships. As director Steven Hill mentions above, there can be a kind of cannibalism of non-

Indigenous peoples wanting, demanding, needing to take Indigenous knowledges or identity and make them their own. This cannibalism is consuming, and as Griffiths and Campbell write, it enables non-Indigenous actors to take on Indigenous characters without understanding the complex realities of being an Indigenous woman in Canada. Campbell also describes her struggles with the non-Indigenous, patriarchal presence and power of director/dramaturg Paul Thompson in the making of *Jessica*.

When referring to Linda Griffiths performing as Jessica in certain scenes, Campbell uses the term “Wolverine” to describe aspects of her behavior and actions during some moments of rehearsal (Griffiths Campbell 39). In her commentary preceding the playtext in their book, Campbell describes Griffiths’ hunger to become Jessica and the fear that this consumption brought to the rehearsal process. Wolverine also becomes a character in *Jessica*. The character is described as one who “Will tear an animal three times its size to pieces. Dark. Vicious. Bloody. Desires Revenge. Wolverine transforms to Bob, a white lawyer on his way to the top. Until he meets Jessica. Not an unattractive man” (Griffiths Campbell 114). Here, I understand Wolverine to stand as a thematic reminder of the potential danger of overconsumption and of the hunger of wanting to transform into another as manifestations of ongoing settler colonialism in Canada.

Throughout their collaboration, Maria Campbell encourages Linda Griffiths to know herself, know her ancestors, know her own stories before she can know others. The anxiety described in *The Book of Jessica* speaks to both women’s realization of how difficult and ultimately impossible it was for Griffiths to legitimately play an Indigenous woman. Griffiths explains,

In rehearsals, once more, I felt judgment. ‘She can’t do it, she can’t understand us, it’s impossible.’ I became jealous of Maria and Tantoo [Cardinal], of their blood relationship that reached back so far, so deep. They laughed together in conversations and I felt it was

at me. In *Halfbreed* Maria describes going into town as a child with her Métis clan, watching the adults walk automatically with their heads down, ashamed around whites who so clearly thought them inferior. Now I walked with my head down around Native people. I felt ashamed, I felt them watching my skin. (49)

Griffiths' unease speaks to Steven Hill's comments on representing someone/something instead of knowing someone/something. Campbell acknowledges the actor's hunger to play any role in any situation, but maybe there is also danger in consuming someone's story that is not yours to tell. This exemplifies the self-determining nature and political significance of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies as being rooted in individual, community and nation-specific knowledges and practices that influence contemporary Indigenous theatrical forms, and in doing so, create new processes, relationships, and moments of artistic decolonization that are shared with all (including humans, animals, and ancestors as beings with agency) involved in the process. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies include individual and collective acts of self-recognition that empower the Indigenous artists involved and allow for a flourishing and revitalization of Indigenous love and culture to manifest. Relationships and collaborations with non-Indigenous theatre artists certainly can be made, as long as the Indigenous participants maintain their autonomy, self-determination, and ability to refuse their labour.

In "Realisms of Redress: Alameda Theatre and The Formation of a Latina/O-Canadian Theatre and Politics," Latina-Canadian theatre practitioner and professor Natalie Alvarez questions the social, cultural and political consequences of embodying a race other than one's own and considers what is at stake once that culture is theorized and re-interpreted in front of an audience. Alvarez is critical of theatrical realism's functions within dominant culture's expectation of resemblance. "Its likeness serves to summon into the onlookers' imagination the idea of a similar object and as a consequence the icon always carries with it an idea or an

assertion that draws upon a socialized knowledge to be recognized” (Alvarez 154). With the decision to read the stage directions out loud and to show the community-engaged dramaturgy onstage, we created a performance style that unsettled normative constructions of race, cultural representations and aesthetics that realist performance otherwise conceals. Diverging from realistic staging and naturalistic acting styles allows for the slippage of worlds also to be highlighted. We hoped that the constant transitions between time/place/space would seem more fluid and attainable if linear and realistic aesthetic choices were minimized. Having the stage directions read out loud explicitly reminded audiences that this was a piece of theatre, created distance for the student actors from physically trying to embody the roles of the women, and encouraged the spectators to acknowledge that there is a space between representer and represented – a space that is formed within inequitable and often violent settler colonial power relations.

The first act of *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* is comprised of a series of non-linear episodic scenes focusing on the increasing isolation of several women immediately preceding their deaths. The actors, having first introduced themselves and the roles they would be playing, largely read directly from the text while seated at a long table in the middle of the studio stage. Instead of having a proscenium configuration we chose to work in the round. There was little movement. Instead, the actors who were not in the present scene would create and manipulate installations of cityscapes, the interior of hotel rooms, the barbershop and bars.



Image 11 *An Encounter with Unnatural And Accidental* production photo by Malena Meneses-Skoda

These installations were developed out of the stories and activities shared during the rehearsal process. One of the tasks I gave the cast was to respond to the guests by offering them something in return. Words, hugs, food and movement pieces were offered but so were drawings and small paper crafts. Many of the actors would take pages from their scripts and offer small frames or boxes and speak to how they would carry the guests' words and experiences with them. We took this idea, developed the instinct to create boxes or vessels that housed the guests' stories and experiences, and incorporated that into the nightly performances. These became larger pieces that were used onstage. We performed with the boxes to claim space for the guests and to honour their stories and experiences. It was also a way to symbolize their presence and acknowledge how they impacted our rehearsal process by sharing with us their truths. This was an attempt to make manifest the relationships inherent in witnessing protocol. The student cast were witness to the stories and knowledge shared by those who came into their rehearsals and I wanted to presense that. Gratitude and space were offered to presense the patience, love and

respect shared by all those involved, physically and spiritually, in this process. This is particular to our Relational Indigenous community-engaged dramaturgical process.



Image 12 *An Encounter with Unnatural And Accidental* production photo by Malena Meneses-Skoda



Image 13 *An Encounter with Unnatural And Accidental* production photo by Malena Meneses-Skoda



Image 14 *An Encounter with Unnatural And Accidental* production photo by Malena Meneses-Skoda



Image 15 *An Encounter with Unnatural And Accidental* production photo by Malena Meneses-Skoda

These installations were built up, taken down, and re-installed above or behind the audience, on a circle of raised platforms. This staging choice forced the spectators to physically

move, to make the choice to look and see what was going on around them. Making the bodies move to have to experience the action around them causes a transformation, shifting the onlookers from audience into witnesses. Organizing the seating in a non-proscenium style, and forcing the spectators to move to see the action, puts the public in relationship with what is happening around them. They are engaging in a type of invisible contract that signals they are invested in following the story and actions of the play. In “She Begins to Move,” Yukon choreographer Michelle Olson compares the consuming proscenium gaze as opposed to being in a circle. Olson writes,

Our society sees most of its theatre and dance through the frame of a proscenium. The rules of power are deeply embedded in its structure and informed by the historical context it was birthed from. It is a space constructed on unspoken assumptions and unseen but imposing power structures. When one steps into this space as a performer or views it as an audience member, one has entered the arena of consumption and the ruling aesthetic. (273)

Reading the stage directions, breaking the proscenium gaze, and visibly manipulating the installations interrupts the “unspoken assumptions and unseen but imposing power structures” Olson describes (273). Instead of attempting to conceal the representation issues at the core of this production, the non-proscenium staging and non-naturalistic acting style created a space that implicated the audiences in the action of the play as they could see one another across, in front of and behind one another. The production calls on active witnesses, not on passive audiences, to experience cathartic or empathetic releases. The choices to read stage directions out loud and to distance the actors from realistic acting styles were also made to avoid staging the scenes with physical and verbal violence.

Clements shows only one murder onstage, the murder of Gilbert Paul Jordan. Instead of staging the murder of the women, Clements uses monologues and flashbacks of their last

memories and includes slides to represent their entry into the spirit world. In “(Re)Animating the (Un)dead” Michelle La Flamme speaks to the power and beauty in Clements’ choice not to stage the deaths of the women, but instead to let them tell their stories, and remember their final moments.

A second consequence of Clements not representing the murders of the women onstage is related to how their stories are presented. In this play we see the women in the last few moments of their lives before they were killed, and the small hotel rooms in which we see them offer a number of different dynamics for the audience. Most obviously, we gain insight into their backstories, which are filled with personal moments, hopes, and dreams. This in turn brings the audience into a deeper empathetic relationship to the characters and (ideally) the original victims. By staging their stories this way, Clements presents the women as more than corpses or statistics and emphasizes their individuality and humanity. (La Flamme 229)

As La Flamme and Livingston and Hunt point out, it is necessary to honour the legacy of the women and to find ways to acknowledge them as humans with families, passions and interests, not as mere statistics. Furthermore, SFU’s production was careful not to bring the audience into “a deeper empathetic relationship to the characters” but rather to mobilize critical thought and action. The living and spiritual bodies in Clements’ various time/place/space configurations gather in the play’s second act. The women are called together by the sound of the drum and a song to represent how cultural practices keep the living world and the spirit world together. In the second act the living world and spirit world weave in and out of each other as though the women are walking side by side. The play becomes a vessel for worldviews, relationships and knowledges to be shared with witnesses, readers and artists. Through the community-engaged dramaturgical process, SFU’s *An Encounter with The Unnatural and Accidental Women* transformed into a gathering that grappled with identity politics, cross-cultural casting, geopolitical social issues and traditional knowledges. Notably, this staging also put an

Indigenous woman (myself) at the center of shaping a process of bringing actors and witnesses into closer proximity and relationship to stories of murdered Indigenous women.

5.6 Upholding Relationships Through Nightly Talkbacks

The significance of a relational witnessing space was also highlighted in our nightly talkbacks. The goal of the talkback was an attempt to acknowledge that we as theatre makers were not experts, and that the stories and legacies of these women did not end when the play finished. We hoped that providing space after every show would allow the audience/witnesses to take time to learn more about the social and political realities of the DTES, and to hear from those who live in the community. Within the conversations at the talkback, women from the community spoke up. Almost on a nightly basis Indigenous women shared what it felt like to hear Clements' words being spoken to them, and with both positive and negative reactions Indigenous women from the DTES shared their thoughts on the work. Most notably, the women from the community were thankful to attend and witness an event that included their presence and did not overlook their joys, struggles and hopes. At the talkback on closing night, Dorothy Christian (Secwepemc–Syilx) asked the cast and the director: So you have done work here—you have drawn an audience—What will you do now? I also carry this question with me as I remain hopeful of theatre as a space of political mobilization and permanent transformations. Christian's question sums up my hopes that the actors have experienced a process of meaningful interactions and are propelled to stay critically engaged.

5.7 Community-Engaged Dramaturgy Conclusions

The primary purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain the community-engaged Relational Indigenous dramaturgical process that I initiated during Simon Fraser University's 2015 Mainstage production of *An Encounter With The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. The

role of a dramaturg is heavily tied to conducting research and collaborating with designers and other production members to ensure that the fictional world of the play and performance is honoured and properly presented. A community-engaged dramaturgy must also include relationship building and the inclusion of Indigenous people to help guide the production team towards respectful and community-approved aesthetic choices. In building relationships with local Indigenous artists, elders and community members, the production team can avoid misrecognitions in both contextual and aesthetic choices.

In building these relationships, the production team can escape taking on the role of “experts,” as Livingston and Hunt suggest. In “Honoring Elsie: Was she just a dream?” they remind the reader that too often government organizations, juridical rulings, or un-invested police task forces take on the role of “expert” in situations involving targeted violence towards Indigenous women. After the February 2015 gathering of the National Roundtable on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women in Ottawa, not until September 2016 would the Canadian government officially launch its inquiry. The commission’s mandates are to look at the systematic causes of these deaths, and attempt to articulate how a large and inconsistent number of Indigenous women and children, ranging somewhere between 1,000 and 4,000, can be missing without receiving proper attention. The report has the intention of investigating “the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child-welfare system, racism, sexism, inadequate on-reserve housing and education opportunities, poverty, addiction, sexual exploitation, domestic violence and insufficient public transit, including along the ‘highway of tears’ in northern British Columbia, where numerous women have been killed or disappeared in recent decades. Inevitably, the inquiry will also consider the impact of the residential school system, the Sixties Scoop, the Indian Act and colonialism” (Baum). Yet many Indigenous

families and MMIW advocates have remained uncertain how and whether the inquiry will achieve these goals, particularly as the degree of attention on police conduct is uncertain.

Finally, in July 2017, a CBC article reports how “police conduct will now be reviewed as part of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. After the inquiry was pressured by the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls to look at police actions in such cases, a news release said staff have assembled a forensic team that is currently reviewing police files” (Glowacki). Only recently, has some attention been devoted to identifying systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls potentially caused by inappropriate police conduct. Even still, advocates have yet to receive information about the composition of the forensic team, the progress it is making or other details about the exact nature of the inquiry’s examination of policing practices.

If plays by Indigenous playwrights are going to be produced in universities, colleges and training programs, it is necessary for those overseeing the production to know how to shift the rehearsal process to include community-specific and culturally-specific Indigenous input for guidance. In opening the rehearsal process to include a community-engaged dramaturgy, the production team creates opportunities for collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in allowing for spaces of learning and sharing to form.

A major difference between SFU’s *An Encounter with The Unnatural and Accidental Women* and UBC’s *The Rez Sisters* on the one hand, and Factory Theatre’s 2011 production of *The Rez Sisters* and Colleen Murphy’s *Pig Girl* on the other, is that student cast productions are not economically the same as professional theatre and do not take employment opportunities away from professional Indigenous actors. Additionally, mixed casting opportunities in university or post-secondary settings allow for spaces of learning and communication to occur.

This can be done through a commitment to work in relationship with host nations, local communities and Indigenous artists. Deeper consideration of how to restructure the rehearsal processes, such as establishing Indigenous mentorship within both dramaturgical and rehearsal processes, may also help ensure that respectful and appropriate choices are made.

The process of Relational Indigenous community-engaged dramaturgy allows for settlers to work with local Indigenous community members and host nations, and for the communities to deepen relationships of solidarity with the settler communities. Ultimately, the community-engaged dramaturgy for Simon Fraser University's *An Encounter with The Unnatural and Accidental Women* attempted to expose students, community members and Vancouverites in general to the ongoing targeted violence against Indigenous women happening in our communities and to bring them into deeper accountability to the Indigenous women they live alongside.

Much more can be said about this process and production, especially from the perspective of the actors, the witnesses and the community who participated. Personally, as a witness, I continue to think about my experiences with this process. I recognize that this work created a space for settler students to become aware of the ongoing violence inflicted on Indigenous women in the areas surrounding their institution. They participated in a Relational Indigenous community-engaged dramaturgy that unsettled traditional rehearsal processes and were gifted the opportunity to mobilize their newly acquired knowledge. The experience of this process allowed the production team to reconsider who is deemed “experts” and to re-examine their position when collaborating theatrically as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Director Steven Hill and I continue to reflect on this process and I know it will inform my work going forward as I deepen my own contributions to fourth wave practices.

Chapter 6: Conclusions.

This dissertation is a personal offering of my experiences working as a mixed settler Canadian and urban Algonquin Anishinaabekwe dramaturg and theatre scholar during what I call the fourth wave of Indigenous theatrical representations. My major contribution in this project has been to describe my own involvement as a witness/ active participant in various dramaturgical events and gatherings over the last three years, and to analyze how these experiences exemplify an alternative way of understanding and doing dramaturgy in Indigenous performance contexts. The tripartite Relational Indigenous dramaturgical model of land-based, place-based and community-engaged dramaturgies categorizes some of the work that I have been involved in through culturally specific lenses: my own as an urban Algonquin Anishinaabekwe scholar and dramaturg, and an Indigenous Nation to Nation lens where I describe some experiences and exchanges between myself and selected members of the Indigenous theatre community I work within (made up of Indigenous artists from various nations and communities). Lastly, from a more expansive understanding of relationship building, I share experiences working with non-Indigenous people on a student cast production of Marie Clements' *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*.

This dissertation concentrates on what I have called the third and fourth waves of Indigenous theatrical representations. Within I exemplify a shift towards Indigenous self-representation and sovereignty through theatrical practices. This, I argue, is principally achieved through dramaturgical processes that are informed by individual, community-specific, nation-specific and Indigenous Nation to Nation protocol, experiences, and practices. Examples of third-wave writing begin to appear in the early 1970s with the arrival of the Native Theatre Movement. Influenced by socio-political movements of that time, Indigenous artists began to use

their bodies and voices to manifest the rise of an Indigenous political nationalism on contemporary stages. The third wave acknowledges the shift from Indigenous artists taking roles written by non-Indigenous artists to a practice of self-recognition whereby Indigenous artists themselves take on the development, creation and performance of Indigenous content. I argue that the four wave system sees the third and fourth waves as instances of self-determination and cultural resurgence paradigms in action. The fourth wave is an extension of the third, in that it acknowledges the significant amount of work seen in Indigenous theatre in the past thirty years, as well as the emergence of research and critical studies dedicated to the field.

The central contribution of this dissertation is an example of fourth wave Relational Indigenous theatre criticism as I redefine dramaturgy to make the term mean more than new play development methods or intensive research requirements. I offer a new approach to dramaturgy that is relational and community oriented. Through Relational Indigenous dramaturgies—land-based, place-based, and community-engaged—I categorize the work being done by selected Indigenous theatre artists as examples of critical Indigenous theories of resurgence and self-recognition. In presencing and analyzing theatrical events, gatherings and workshops that I have participated in, I consider a broad range of experiences, including getting to know self and others, activating spiritual experiences, and community involvement and outreach, as significant parts of the dramaturgical process.

The various methods discussed in this dissertation emphasize the personal and subjective nature of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies due to the diverse connections at work during each individual process. I argue that Indigenous practitioners presence themselves (their homelands, languages, teachings, creation stories and other intangible cultural realities) while creating the work. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies explore how artists' works are informed by individual,

nation-based or community-based knowledges, and at the same time whose practices express newfound contemporary approaches and narratives.

In *Claiming Anishinaabe*, Algonquin Anishinaabekwe activist and scholar Lynn Gehl advocates that “one’s truth is inclusive of both mind knowledge and heart knowledge” (Gehl 55). Gehl writes that heart knowledge has the ability to “collapse time into one single moment, even intergenerationally passed time.” This relates to the embodied and felt particularities of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies that can transform places, transcend notions of time, and strengthen relationships. Gehl uses the word “debwewin,” which translates to “a personal truth that is rooted in one’s heart,” and through her book shares her own Debwewin Journey, her personal “process of completing mind knowledge and connecting it to heart knowledge” (Gehl 55). She explains that this process is “actualized, expressed, and thus articulated differently for each person according to one’s gifts and subsequent subjectivities, and, further it is also dependent on what it is that one wants to produce” (Gehl 65). Like the Relational Indigenous dramaturgical methods described in this dissertation, the process varies with each gathering and collaborative workshop. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies are processes that allow the participants to embody, feel and mobilize decolonial moments of their true selves. Although I have articulated these three ways of working I do not argue that these are the *only* ways of working. I offer land-based, place-based and community-engaged dramaturgies as Relational Indigenous dramaturgical models, but do not expect them to categorize all Indigenous-focused processes. Although they are explained in separate chapters throughout, I do think their uses overlap and that they are not mutually exclusive.

Marie Clements’ *The Edward Curtis Project* is an example that would not easily fit into one of the dramaturgical processes I have offered in this dissertation. I would argue that *The*

Edward Curtis Project represents a mix of all three processes, and the published text exemplifies that. Originally commissioned by Presentation House Theatre in Vancouver, Clements was asked to “stage the issues raised by Curtis’s monumental but controversial achievements – to dramatize not only the creation of his twenty-volume photographic and ethnographic epic and the enormous commitment, unwavering vision, sacrifice, poverty, and ultimate disappointment it represented for the photographer, but also the devastating legacy that his often misrepresentative vision had on the lives of the people he touched” (Clements *The Edward Curtis Project* 1). Critically researching and creating this fictional world can be considered an example of fourth wave writing, one that is aware of the damage done in the first and second, which contemporary Indigenous artists are working to re-write. Clements teamed up with photojournalist Rita Leistner and they constructed their own process to “create a parallel photographic investigation of Curtis’s endeavour—to question the practice of documentary photography with the very medium under scrutiny” (Clements *The Edward Curtis Project* 1). For more than two years, Clements and Leistner re-traced Curtis’ steps and travelled to Indigenous communities and sacred lands and waterways. Clements and Leistner’s process included land-based work as they visited communities across Turtle Island, community-engaged practices as they built relationships to meet, talk with and photograph peoples from various communities, and place-based dramaturgy as they presenced themselves in collaborative situations that thrived from developing shared protocol and practices to achieve a common goal. Clements explains,

It was liberating because we were engaged in something other than light and dark, Aboriginal or white, vanishing or surviving. We were making our own pictures out of our own beliefs and they were adding up. We were inside the lies and beauty of history, of gender, and of class, we were making a case for the future, but first we had to see everything, we had to listen across land and nations. So we moved across worlds in small cars, large trucks, planes boats, and dog sled—a process of getting somewhere. (*The Edward Curtis Project* 5)

Clements describes her process as relational, new, community-oriented and full of love. She writes that she “will be forever affected by what [she] saw on [their] ‘Edward Curtis field trips,’” and this speaks to the permanent transformative power that Relational Indigenous dramaturgies have to affect those involved (Clements *The Edward Curtis Project* 5).

I developed land-based, place-based and community-engaged dramaturgies to help articulate and better understand some of the ways I work as a dramaturg, and to begin to create language to conceptualize how selected Indigenous practitioners work in their practices. For this reason, much of this dissertation has focused on describing the practices – the steps, decisions, practical tools and processes – that shaped each of the works I discuss, as well as the decolonial rationale behind them. These models can be used by other Indigenous theatre artists or scholars wishing to further expand the language and resources readily available to discuss Indigenous dramaturgies as relational and shifting ways of working.

Relational Indigenous dramaturgies contribute to the field of Critical Indigenous Studies as they provide examples of embodied and sovereign relational politics through theatrical collaborations. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies offer spaces of transformation for both the performers and the audience. In my own experiences collaborating with other Indigenous theatre artists, I feel challenged and motivated. During collaborations, stories are remembered, ancestors are honoured, language is sung, and Mother Earth grows stronger and healthier. By gathering to write and perform ourselves in ways that honour who we are and where we come from, we resist the violent, ongoing effects of settler-colonialism and allow ourselves to celebrate Indigenous resilience through artistic embodied thought and action. We become the stories that our lands hold, that our Elders carry, and that our bodies always knew.

Fourth wave Relational Indigenous dramaturgies also have the ability to transform

audiences. Witnessing the love, labor, and autonomy of Indigenous theatre artists who share stories, for example, of the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women crisis or the intergenerational traumas of residential school survivors contributes to filling a gap in understanding. Indigenous theatre is political and reflects the lives of the artists making the work. Still newer, resurgent Indigenous processes and forms will be created that will benefit both the Indigenous artists and the audiences. The political undertones of self-representation and self-determination are present in this dissertation's analysis of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies, demonstrating how resurgence theories can be directly linked to artistic practice and collaboration. In Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's 2017 book *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, she includes a chapter called "Embodied Resurgent Practice and Coded Disruption" (191). After beginning by speaking of how decolonization can appear in everyday acts of resurgence, she refers to artistic practices as "coded articulations" of Indigenous resurgence (198). Under "Indigenous Aesthetics: Coded Disruption and Affirmative Refusal," Simpson writes about witnessing Monique Mojica speak at Nozhem Theatre in Peterborough, Ontario. Simpson repeats what Mojica shared from her process, "*repetition, duality, multidimensionality, and abstraction,*" and affirms that she too uses these principles in her practice (*Always Done* 200). Simpson goes to say how Indigenous art and performance creates physical "presence" that intervenes and disrupts settler colonial reality. Simpson also writes of Rebecca Belmore's performance work, of which she states, "Rebecca Belmore is presence."

Simpson's interpretations of Indigenous performance practices are similar to the ways Relational Indigenous dramaturgies are explained in this dissertation. Relational Indigenous dramaturgies create spaces where past/present/future are presented at once, where ancestors and

homelands are remembered and where those involved can experience permanent transformation. A political transition to the arts is also seen with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's movement into poetry with *Islands of Decolonial Love* and *This Incident of Being Lost*, and into music with her album *f(l)light*. Moving into embodied and artistic mediums activates relationships that make others feel more invested, more connected with issues that they often don't get through writing/scholarship. The embodied forms of Relational Indigenous land-based, place-based and community engaged dramaturgies place people in relationship with others (land, bodies, ancestors, stories, languages) and express newfound contemporary approaches and narratives in hopes of mobilizing permanent change.

I am hopeful for the possibilities and further developments of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies at places like The National Arts Centre (NAC). In June 2017, Kevin Loring was announced the first Artistic Director of Indigenous Theatre at the NAC. This in and of itself indicates an extension of the fourth wave, or perhaps the initiation of a fifth wave. Indigenous Theatre at the NAC denotes that there will be a new paradigm established for creating new work, teaching larger audiences and developing new relationships. This program will be designed, controlled and executed by Indigenous artists, which exemplifies the self-determining political and creative aspects of Relational Indigenous dramaturgies. I'm honoured to be joining the National Arts Centre as the first Artistic Associate of Indigenous Theatre. I will help to create the program's new paradigm in mobilizing new possibilities and ways of working within the Indigenous theatre community. The Indigenous Theatre program at the NAC brings self-governing Indigenous artists together with a major non-Indigenous performance institution for the first time. This marks the beginning of what is likely to be many new relationships that can

look to Relational Indigenous dramaturgical methods as ways to imagine alternative possibilities of building, creating and performing theatre.

As I come to the end of this dissertation, I feel full thinking about how much love, energy, determination and talent exist in the people, work, places and memories that I have presenced throughout these pages. This work is not over; it is just a beginning.

Creating an organic text from blood memory sometimes occurs when there is something my body is experiencing that I can't quite put my finger on—there's maybe a certain quality of light and I think, "I've been here before" when I know I haven't. – Monique Mojica, Stories from the Body: Blood Memory and Organic Texts, 97

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