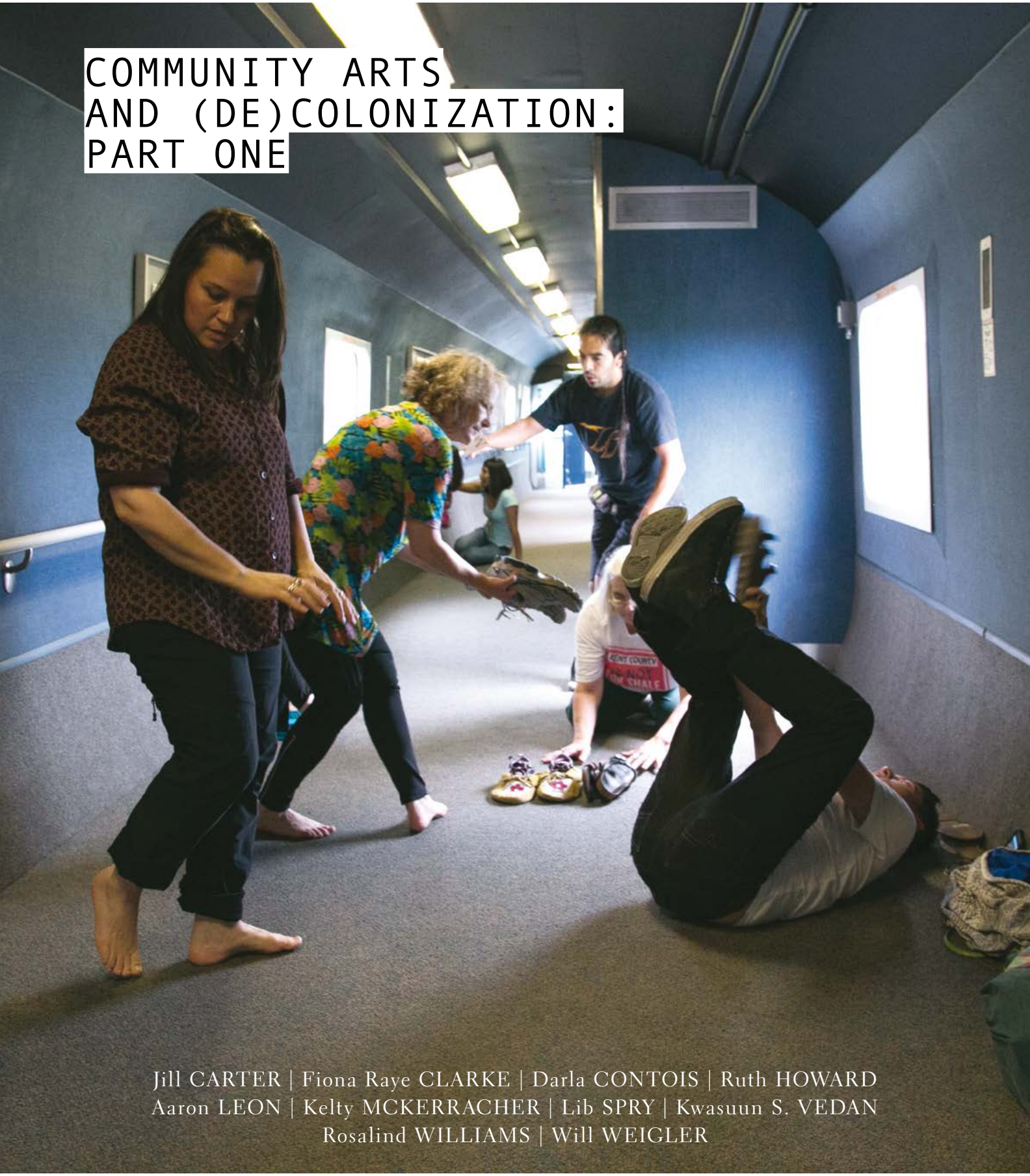
alt theatre
cultural diversity and the stage

VOL. 12 NO. 3 | $8 |

COMMUNITY ARTS AND (DE)COLONIZATION: PART ONE

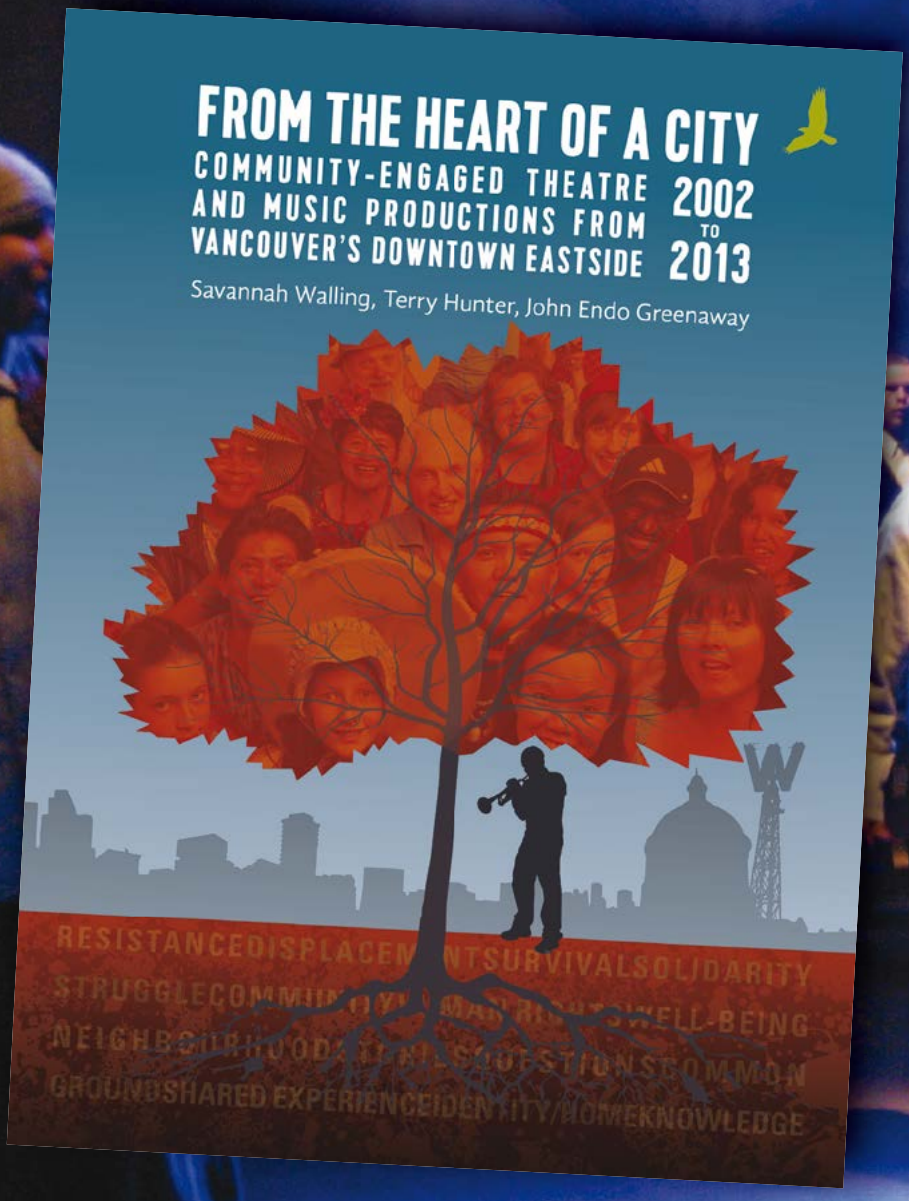


Jill CARTER | Fiona Raye CLARKE | Darla CONTOIS | Ruth HOWARD
Aaron LEON | Kelty MCKERRACHER | Lib SPRY | Kwasuun S. VEDAN
Rosalind WILLIAMS | Will WEIGLER

FROM THE HEART OF A CITY

A CELEBRATION AND GUIDE TO CREATING ART WITH, FOR AND ABOUT COMMUNITY

With practical strategies for navigating responsibilities involved in creating original art, in a spirit of collaboration, cooperation and respect for community needs.



"...an accessible, engaging and essential read for anyone interested in community arts and/or the Downtown Eastside...[for] students of community arts, for emerging and established artists in the field, and for potential community partners and funders."

— Edward Little, Professor of Theatre, Concordia University

This beautifully-illustrated anthology weaves together essays, reflections, lyrics and poems by thirty-six writers, including leading Canadian community play artists, Vancouver artists and community members from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Their writings shed light on ten transformative community-engaged theatre and music productions created for, with and about Vancouver's inner-city Downtown Eastside and their rippling impact on individuals, the community and BC and national art scenes.

The reader is introduced to the evolution of Vancouver Moving Theatre's pioneering, boundary-stretching art practice; the fierce creativity of residents of the often-misunderstood Downtown Eastside; cross-Canadian partnerships with Runaway Moon Theatre and Jumblies Theatre; the story of the Canadian community-play movement; and the global surge of interest in community-engaged arts.

$30 (plus GST/postage). Contact Terry Hunter, vancouvermovingtheatre@shaw.ca / 604-628-5682

CONTENTS 12.3

UPCOMING in alt.theatre

12.4: Community Arts and (De)Colonization, Part 2

ARTICLE Community artists Savannah Walling, Columpa Bobb, Sid Bobb, Penny Couchie, Lee Maracle, and Damara Jacobs-Morris discuss what they believe *protocol* to be, and how it does or does not function in their artistic work. **INTERVIEW** Iehente Foote talks to multidisciplinary artist Ange Loft about the large-scale play she is developing with and about their home community of Kahnawake. **DISPATCH** Eliza Knockwood reflects on her coast-to-coast project of collecting samples of and stories about bodies of water across the land.

alt.theatre
cultural diversity and the stage
Vol. 12 No. 3

alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage is Canada's only professional journal examining intersections between politics, cultural plurality, social activism, and the stage.

alt.theatre welcomes suggestions or proposals for interviews, news, pieces of self-reflection, analytical articles, and reviews of books, plays, and performances. Submissions to ***alt.theatre*** are vetted by at least two members of the editorial board as well as external reviewers where appropriate. Contributors retain copyright of their articles with the understanding that any subsequent publication will cite ***alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage*** as the original source. ***alt.theatre*** retains the right to distribute copies of published articles for educational and promotional purposes. Please query the editors before submitting any work for consideration: info@alttheatre.ca

Founded in 1998, ***alt.theatre*** is published quarterly by Teesri Duniya Theatre – an intercultural theatre company with a mandate to produce socially engaged theatre that reflects Canada's social and cultural diversity. ***alt.theatre*** is indexed in the MLA International Bibliography.

Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales Du Québéc/Library and Archives Canada ISSN 1481-0506

For more information, contact *alt.theatre* magazine at Teesri Duniya Theatre
460 St-Catherine W., Suite 916
Montreal QC H3B 1A7
Tel. 514-848-0238
email: info@alttheatre.ca
www.alttheatre.ca

facebook.com/alt.theatre
facebook.com/teesriduniyatheatre

twitter.com/alt_theatre
twitter.com/Teesri_Duniya

alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage
is published quarterly by

Teesri Duniya THEATRE

"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

COVER PHOTO
© Aaron Leon. Penny Couchie, Rachael van Fossen, Katrina Clair, Sid Bobb, Ann Pohl, and Braiden Houle in a movement workshop led by Penny Couchie aboard a VIA Rail train during the 2015 national community arts tour, Train of Thought.

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested $157 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country.

Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 157 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.

Conseil des arts et des lettres Québec
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE MONTRÉAL
Canada Council for the Arts
Conseil des Arts du Canada
TATA
FSC www.fsc.org MIXTE Papier issu de sources responsables FSC® C016245

CONTRIBUTORS 12.3

NIKKI SHAFFEEULLAH

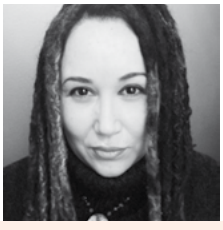
is an artist, activist, researcher, and the editor-in-chief of *alt.theatre*. She is artistic director of The AMY Project, an arts education company for young women, and assistant artistic director of the community arts company Jumblies Theatre. Her MFA research explored decolonial practices of theatre creation. Nikki has served as an executive of the Canadian Association for Theatre Research and has taught in the University of Alberta Department of Drama.

Editorial:
PAGE 8-9

KWASUUN *GIIWEDINANUNGKWE* SARAH VEDAN

(Cree, Anishnaabe, Secwepemc), member of the Neskonlith Indian Band, thankfully acknowledges the Coast Salish people for allowing her to live and work in their unceded Territories/Vancouver, British Columbia. In 2011, Kwasuun earned a BA in History & Drama at UBC. After graduation, she began training with Full Circle's Aboriginal Ensemble. Currently she is Full Circle's artistic associate and associate dramaturge, as well as the 2015/16 dramaturge with Urban Ink's BOLDSCRIPT writers group. Kwasuun is a founding board member of Raven Theatre.

A Many Storied Land:
PAGE 14-19



WILL WEIGLER

is a Victoria-based theatre director, playwright, and producer who often collaborates with community members to co-create plays about the issues that matter to them. His book *From the Heart: How 100 Canadians Created an Unconventional Theatre Performance about Reconciliation* was released in 2015. Will's next book, provisionally titled *The Alchemy of Aesthetic Arrest: Engaging the Power of the Theatrical Event*, will launch this summer. To learn more, visit willweigler.com and from-the-heart.ca

A Many Storied Land:
PAGE 14-19

FIONA RAYE CLARKE

is the editor of *Basodee* and the forthcoming anthology *Black Like We*. She leads the youth oral history theatre project *Intergeneracial* funded by ArtReach and the Toronto Arts Council and is expanding her ten-minute play, *Broken Windows*, with the support of Obsidian Theatre Company and the Ontario Arts Council Theatre Creators' Reserve. An artist-facilitator at Jumblies Theatre, she holds an LLM from Osgoode Hall Law School.

Unsettling Ancestry:
PAGE 10-13

KELTY MCKERRACHER

is originally from Tk'emlúps/Kamloops, and now lives in Vancouver, Coast Salish Territories. Her community practice is nurtured by her love for flamenco dance and song. Since 2009 Kelty has worked on a number of community-engaged projects with Vancouver Moving Theatre and the Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival. Kelty holds an MA in Expressive Arts Therapy. She works at the PHS Drug Users Resource Centre and the Community Arts Council of Vancouver.

Becoming a Person with Memory:
PAGE 20-23

ROSALIND WILLIAMS

was schooled by The Elders of the Splatsin; she listened and recorded them, becoming the conduit for the passage of stories, cultural practice, language, and song. Today, Rosalind transmits these teachings to the young of the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn Teaching Center she helped found and construct in 1991. Working in community theatre with Runaway Moon has become another platform to share these teachings.

What to Pack:
PAGE 24-28

AARON LEON

grew up in Armstrong/ Enderby, in rural British Columbia, and is a proud member of the Splatsin Band. Leon graduated from Concordia University in 2013 with a BFA, majoring in photography. Leon focuses on two separate trains of thought in his work: the first is exploring his identity and Splatsin First Nations background, and the second is through explorations of perception and colour.

What to Pack:
PAGE 24-28

LIB SPRY

has been a director, writer, teacher, performer, producer, and translator for fifty years. She works mainly in nontraditional theatre: popular, community, site-specific, physical theatre and TYA. She is presently doing a PhD at Queens University, focusing on developing nontraditional theatrical methods to initiate settler discussion about the impact of colonialism in Canada.

Settlers' Statement:
PAGE 33-34

DARLA CONTOIS

(Cree) is from Grand Rapids Cree Nation in Manitoba. She studied theatre at Manitoba Theatre for Young People, University of Manitoba, and is an esteemed graduate of a three-year professional training program at the Centre for Indigenous Theatre. Darla has appeared most recently in *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* (Dir.: Herbie Barnes, CIT/Helen Gardiner Phelan Playhouse) and *White Buffalo Calf Woman* (Dir.: Jim Warren, CIT/Helen Gardiner Phelan Playhouse).

White Man's Indian:
PAGE 29-30

JILL CARTER

(Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi) is a Toronto-based theatre practitioner and assistant professor with the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies; the Aboriginal Studies Program; and the Transitional Year Programme at the University of Toronto. Her research and praxis are based in the mechanics of story creation (devising and dramaturgy), the processes of delivery (performance on the stage and on the page), and the mechanics of affect.

Medicine Shows:
PAGE 35-38

RUTH HOWARD

is the founding artistic director of Jumblies Theatre, a Toronto-based company that makes art in ordinary and extraordinary places with, for, and about the people and stories found there. She also has years of experience in theatre design, interdisciplinary creation, and teaching in diverse contexts, and has won various awards and distinctions for her work.

An Imaginary Real World:
PAGE 31-32

Editorial

COMMUNITY ARTS AND (DE)COLONIZATION

BY NIKKI SHAFFEEULLAH

Early in 2015, as I was slowly making a move from Edmonton back to my home city of Toronto, my friend and collaborator Bruce Sinclair phoned me with an encouragement: "You need to get on the Train of Thought." I did not immediately register that this invitation, from a man who often speaks in both pun and metaphor, was to board a literal train.

Bruce explained that he was helping to organize events in Edmonton and Saskatoon for a travelling community-arts project called Train of Thought, and was seeking my collaboration in hosting when the train stopped in Edmonton. He suggested I connect with Ruth Howard at Jumblies Theatre next time I was in Toronto to talk about the project; and within a few weeks, I was in deep—preparing both to receive travellers in Edmonton and to jump on as a travelling artist. I came to understand what Train of Thought was: a coming together of artists who are using or are seeking to use their work to build connections across cultural difference—across the multitude of colonially imposed barriers that keep communities, particularly Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, from knowing each other.

It's difficult to describe Train of Thought without using imperfect binaries like "Indigenous and non-Indigenous," but knowing that this project intentionally brought people together in this way is key. "The silence between us has been legislated," Train of Thought traveller Columpa Bobb said at one point on the tour; Train of Thought was about listening to each other. The travellers were to be an evolving and shifting group, ranging in age from teen to seniors; the stops would be anywhere from a few hours to several days. At the stops, hosts, some of whom doubled as travellers, would program activities for the travellers and local folks to meet each other. They would share what artists there were up to through however they chose to host: multi-day arts conferences in Vancouver and in Winnipeg; collaborative performance creation process in Nipissing First Nation and in Halifax; Cree language lessons and cabarets featuring local artists in Edmonton and Saskatoon; a laid back group dinner in Six Nations; and so on. Beyond the hosts' curation of the stops, artists carried out personal projects individually and in small groups as we traversed the land, as well as the implicit project of the tour—that is, to bring people together. While Jumblies Theatre was the spearheader of the tour, Train of Thought's vast array of artists, communities, organizations, activists, and others took it, intentionally, out of any one person's or group's hands.

I've chosen to conclude that the most valuable part of Train of Thought was its function as a laboratory for conflict. The project brought people together in an explicitly high-stakes way. Train of Thought was at its halfway point in June 2015 when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report; the journey and its aftermath is taking place at a point in time when the Canadian mainstream is slowly but finally beginning to confront the history and ongoing reality of the colonization of this land and its first peoples. High stakes—to enter into (re)conciliation through art and art-making, more than through simple conversation, inspires hope that meaningful change might actually be possible. I recall artist Ange Loft saying many times on the tour that "it's not enough to reconcile; we have to *make things together*." Making things together, imagining new possibilities together, *getting your hands dirty* and *making things with others and their dirty hands*, is hard. Sharing space is hard. To put into practice the various ideals about intercultural (and intergenerational, interdisciplinary, interregional . . .) collaboration and social change that one might think about or talk about or put into grant applications – to really put those ideals to the test – is hard. Questions emerge that are difficult to answer at all, and more difficult to answer together: How much time should we allocate to doing things, to making things, to processing what has happened? Who can or should lead the making? What does *collaboration* look like? Train of Thought was a laboratory for conflict in that it gave people across the land a chance to feel in their bones the discomfort that comes from trying something new and scary and important and potentially transformative.

At the same time, I moved through the project with trepidation. I wondered why are we taking a train—does taking a "counter-colonial" route (west to east) mitigate the reality that Canada's transnational railway played a lead role in colonizing the land, and that it was built through the exploitation of migrant labour? Will this project challenge exisiting hierarchies or reinforce them? Will people and organizations who hold power ultimately share or release that power in the moments where it is most difficult and most important? Or—heaven forbid—might Train of Thought become or be co-opted and remembered as a sparkly, state-celebrating joy ride? For some of the hundreds involved in this project, I suppose that may have been their experience; and others still may have wished for that kind of experience, although to me it's a neoliberal nightmare. Would Train of Thought become something very capital-C Canadian, drenched in the kind of capital-M Multiculturalism that contains difference through "diversity"; the kind that uses metaphors of mosaics to invisibilize the genocide upon which Canada was built; the kind that sanitizes the state and, with expert covertness, upholds the Eurocentric, white supremacist, settler-colonial status quo? Hopefully not, for if the consciousness of the country is indeed shifting, we're collectively developing increased capacity to recognize such traps, as well as increased commitment to avoid them. We must learn to engage with conflict: to not conceive of conflict as a problem to solve, but as an ongoing, evolving, healthy, and necessary part of intentionally existing together.

It was apt that I connected to Train of Thought through Bruce. He and I first met in 2010 at the Prismatic Arts Festival and conference (a Halifax-based summer event that features Aboriginal and culturally diverse artists), and in 2014 began a collaboration that brings artists from racialized communities and artists from First Nations and Metis communities together in conversations about what we know about each other, in part by hosting talking circles with colleagues and friends in various locales. Bruce is Metis and I'm the daughter of Indo-Guyanese immigrants, and we each have a variety of reasons why our collaboration is important to us. Bruce and I share a love of theatre, improv, wordplay, community building, music from the sixties, and nomadism, but in most other ways are pretty dissimilar, which is certainly related to us being from different generations, cultures, geographic regions, life experiences, and more. And that's part of what makes the collaboration work: we get to test out whatever it is we want to invite others into by first navigating our own collaborator relationship. The conflict we experience is so central to how we work—it's difficult, but it's generative, and we root it in a place of risk-taking and trust. The art is in the conflict. The art *is* the conflict, and the conflict is a necessary condition for growth.

The unanswered questions, ongoing conversations, evolving relationships, and other conflicts that inspired and were inspired by Train of Thought all resonate with urgency, and are all deeply relevant to *alt.theatre*'s focus on the intersections of politics, cultural diversity, social activism, and the performing arts. This is the first of a two-part *alt.theatre* special issue entitled "Community Arts and (De) Colonization" that invites you into Train of Thought and into the legacy of work and discourse coming out of it that ripples from coast to coast.

Train of Thought was produced by Jumblies Theatre in collaboration with hundreds of artists and over ninety organizations, including: From The Heart, Vancouver Moving Theatre, Vancouver Parks Board, Round House Community Centre, Runaway Moon Theatre, Splatsin First Nation, Ground Zero Productions, Rising Sun Theatre Society, Common Weal Community Arts, ACI Manitoba, Urban Indigenous Theatre, The Ortona Armoury Arts Building, Arts Hub, Kenora Association For Community Living, Community Arts and Heritage Education Project, Municipality Of Sioux Lookout, Myths And Mirrors Community Arts, Thinking Rock Community Arts, Mississaugi First Nation, Debajehmujig Storymakers , Aanmitaagzi, White Water Gallery, AlgomaTrad, Jumblies Theatre, Arts4All, MABELLEarts, Making Room, Community Arts Guild, Cedar Ridge Creative Centre, Arts Council Windsor and Region, Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, Makers and Shakers Society, Canada's Magnetic North Festival, Ottawa Valley Creative Arts Open Studio, Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, Concordia University Theatre and Development Program, Contactivity Seniors Centre, NDG Senior Citizens Council, RECCA, Art Hives / Ruches d'Art, Halifax Circus, The Deanery Project, Abegweit First Nation, Rock Barra Retreat, and others. It was supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Trillium Foundation, The J.W. McConnell Foundation, Inspirit Foundation, Metcalf Foundation, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, VIA Rail Canada, B.C. Arts Council and other local and provincial funders.

The route, roughly (since some stops happened simultaneously), was[1]: Victoria, unceded Coast Salish territories → Vancouver, unceded Coast Salish territories → Enderby and Splatsin First Nation, unceded Secwepemc territories → Edmonton/amiskaciwaskahikan, Treaty 6 territory → Saskatoon/saskwaton, Treaty 6 territory → Winnipeg, Treaty 1 territory → Kenora, Treaty 3 territory → Sioux Lookout and Lac Seul First Nation, Treaty 3 territory → Thunder Bay, Robinson Superior Treaty → Nipissing First Nation and North Bay, Robinson Huron Treaty → Wikwemikong First Nation and Manitowaning, unceded Anishinabek territory → Blind River and Mississaugi First Nation, Robinson Huron Treaty → Sudbury, Robinson Huron Treaty → Toronto, Treaty 13 Territory → Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation → Six Nations of the Grand River → Windsor → Kingston, Upper Canada Treaties → Ottawa, unceded Algonquin territories → Killaloe and Pikwakanagan First Nation → Kahnawake Mohawk territory → Montreal/Tiotia:ke, Mohawk Territory→ unceded Wabanaki territories → Halifax/K'jipuktuk, unceded Mi'kmaq territories → Ship Harbour, unceded Mi'kmaq territories → Abegweit First Nation → Rock Barra, unceded Mi'kmaq territories

NOTE

1 In listing the stops of the Train of Thought route, I have used a combination of colonial place names, Indigenous territory names, and treaty names for places where treaties have been made. I acknowledge that this list is imperfect in its organization. I thank the many teachers, elders, and community members who have helped me in my education of Indigenous place names and of treaty history, in particular those who were part of Train of Thought. I thank Sasha Tate-Howarth for her great assistance in charting these learnings onto this Train of Thought stop list.

Unsettling Ancestry in Artistic Spaces

BY

FIONA RAYE CLARKE

Who is a settler? This was a key question of Train of Thought, the west-to-east, two-month-long travelling community arts journey from Victoria to PEI produced by Jumblies Theatre and dozens of other partners in 2015. For Train of Thought, I worked both as an organizer in Toronto and as a traveller, visiting the stops in Kingston, Ottawa, and Montreal. During my brief time on the tour, I experienced some of the key aspects of Train of Thought: enjoying cross-cultural collaboration with Indigenous artists and communities in spontaneous creations, workshops, feasts, and song, and spending concerted time contemplating Indigenous historical, political, and current realities. What makes my time on the Train of Thought unique is that I experienced it as a conscious person of colour—one of the few non-white, non-Indigenous travellers.

As a Black Trinidadian-Canadian on the Train of Thought, I found myself asking: What is the role of people of colour in the settler colonial project? Moreover, how can people of colour enter the decolonization conversation if space is not made for our distinct points of view? In this article—through consideration of academic debate, interviews conducted with travellers post-tour, and my personal reflections—I attempt to address these questions as they manifested on Train of Thought.

— Settler as White

In recent debates on the role of non-Indigenous people of colour within the settler colonial project, three main views emerge. Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, in their 2005 essay "Decolonizing Antiracism," admonish people of colour specifically, naming them as settlers who do not acknowledge their role in the continuing colonization of Indigenous peoples. Responding to this view in 2009, Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright, in "Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States," argue that people of colour should not be called "settlers," as such a view inevitably leads to neo-racist narratives in which all "foreigners" are necessarily unwelcome. And finally, Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel present a third view in their 2014 essay "Unsettling Settler Colonialism," in which people of colour are settlers but are a different sort of settler from their white counterparts.

Personally, I favour the third view: people of colour, being non-Native, are settlers to Canada and therefore complicit in the settler colonial project. However, I think it is also necessary to note that the privileges afforded to white settlers surpass those of non-white settlers, as all are not created equal in colonialism. Moreover, being people of colour, our relationship to colonialism is layered, as many of us are also likely to come from a background of being colonized. As one traveller of colour stated in a post-tour interview,[1] "I was surprised at my feelings that arose especially before Toronto when I was really grappling with what it means to be a settler–personally what it means to be a settler as a person from a colonized ancestry that's differently colonized."[2]

This duality within settlers of colour is not commonly addressed in mainstream conversations about reconciliation and Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships, nor was it addressed during the Train of Thought. Instead, within the scope of the tour, the term "settler" was effectively constructed as white. More than there being a lack of non-Indigenous people of colour present on the tour, which there was, there was no sense of the experience of such conflict: that is, the

© Aaron Leon. The Treaty Canoe, an art project by Windsor artists Alex McKay and Tory James

While one could respond that conversations about decolonization in Canada are not about non-white, non-Indigenous persons, but instead—and rightly—focus on Indigenous perspectives, there are, nevertheless, more histories and peoples in Canada than those of white European-descended settlers.

dual experience of being colonial and colonized. Instead, the tour only seemed to recognize white settler colonials and those who are presently colonized: Indigenous travellers. As one interviewee observed, this created an feeling of isolation among non-Indigenous travellers of colour: "It was a kind of isolation being the only non-white, non-Indigenous person for my first leg of the trip. I guess—that's stuff I thought about before but I was surprised by how much it shook me."[3] Moreover, for people of colour, including myself, there is a strong desire to be excluded from such a classification as settler, because of resistance to being subsumed into whiteness. One traveller told me:

> There was this cyclical experience of feeling annoyed at that sort of binary that was emerging and that I was sort of being de facto—in the TofT culture—classified as white in that way—because that's not true. And then I was confronted with feelings of: Why is this bothering me so much? Is it because it's a legitimate thing—and it is—or is it also because of some kind of settler guilt, and maybe it's that too.[4]

Opportunities for people of colour to share, and the space to investigate their dual experience as colonial and colonized, were keenly missed.

While one could respond that conversations about decolonization in Canada are not about non-white, non-Indigenous persons, but instead—and rightly—focus on Indigenous perspectives, there are, nevertheless, more histories

and peoples in Canada than those of white European-descended settlers. Thus, spaces—artistic, academic, or otherwise—that focus exclusively on whiteness and Indigeneity as a binary fail to address the full scope of colonization, particularly as it operates in Canada. If this is the case, we can then ask whether spaces like Train of Thought dismantle colonial structures for non-Indigenous people of colour, or reinforce them.

— Complicating Ancestry

Rather than constructing settler colonialism as a binary, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang construct settler colonialism as a triad, one that includes not only European colonial settlers and colonized Indigenous peoples, but also the chattel and domestic slavery, indentureship, and migration for exploitative labour that were essential to the colonial project.

© Don Bouzek. An art-based workshop on Indigenous history that took place during the Ottawa Train of Thought stop on unceded Algonquin territories in June 2015.

This privileging of ancestry as a key entry point to decolonization was similarly isolating to people on the tour with different relationships to their ancestry, particularly those who were adopted and those from queer families.

decolonization first came to my attention during a workshop in Ottawa. At this point of the tour, the larger group had split off into three factions, so it was a smaller contingent of Train of Thought travellers, including myself, attending this workshop. As part of the introduction, our facilitator, who was of Indigenous ancestry, asked us to name our ancestry. This was not particularly triggering—that is, until she insisted that we name the exact countries that our ancestors came from.

The naming and describing of one's ancestral history emerged as a central protocol on Train of Thought. As one travelling artist observed, "Knowing your name, it's a place of power."[5] It was clear that that the power of naming one's ancestry, and witnessing such naming, were significant parts of what made Train of Thought an extremely relevant and important community arts project. What made the tour complex and unsettling, however, was the lack of acknowledgement for those whose ancestries are not as easily named due to factors beyond their control.

To begin, there is my complicated ancestry: my family is from Trinidad, a country colonized by the British that received independence in the 1960s; my ethnicity is black mixed with other races, as my family is Creole; before Trinidad, my African-descended ancestors were from Barbados; and before that, my ancestry is unknown, as our history, our names, our language, and our culture were stolen by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Thus, the insistence by the facilitator in the Ottawa workshop that I must necessarily fit either the white European settler or the Indigenous binary triggered feelings of anxiety pertaining to being a descendant of enslaved persons who were victimized in a very specific way. I felt extremely silenced by her insistence, because I did not know where to begin to explain my ancestry, and the exercise did not give space for people who are not able to name the countries from which they came. Despite the fact that this facilitator and I seemed to have a parallel ancestral history—that of being colonized by the British—she did not understand that there could be other kinds of experiences of colonialism.

This privileging of ancestry as a key entry point to decolonization was similarly isolating to people on the tour with different relationships to their ancestry, particularly those who were adopted and those from queer families. In the context of Train of Thought, being a person who was adopted into a family became a plane of marginalization. One traveller said,

> I'm adopted and so I don't have my own blood lineage ancestry. I have my adopted ancestries. And so it always opens that space of dislocation within me 'cause I do not know who my people are. And so, yeah, it plummets me into a very vulnerable place.[6]

Another travelling artist, one who was the child of queer parents, described a similar isolation:

> [I was] uncomfortable with the number of times that, while on Train of Thought, I was asked about where the hell I was from or anything like that, 'cause as someone who's the child of queer parents, that alone is a trigger, and that's not really culturally specific. I feel like any child of queer parents would have an issue with [it]. Or not even queer parents, but people who don't necessarily know who their parents are for whatever reason.[7]

Train of Thought's ancestry framework thus failed to adequately engage participating artists who were from differently colonized ancestries or were not from a heteronormative, biological family lineage in conversations about decolonization.

— Ancestries Unfriendly to the Train (of Thought)

Lastly, I will call attention to the experience of one traveller whose heritage is a mix of British and Chinese-Canadian, the latter ancestral history being part of the legacy of migrant labour—specifically, the exploitation by white

settler Canadians of Chinese workers in building the Canadian railroad. Her (visibly racialized) family's multigenerational history is in effect questioned when she is asked about her ancestry. In her words:"My family has been here for four generations, but we're still newcomers."[8]

Moreover, the tour failed to adequately address the history of the train as a tool of colonization in Canada. The tour offered a thematic idea that by travelling west to east—instead of the more Eurocentric east-to-west route—we were taking a counter-colonial direction. This theme only began to address the destructive history the Canadian railway had on the Indigenous people of this land, and did not at all address the violence the train's construction had on Chinese-Canadian labourers. As this traveller said, "The train . . . murdered so many of my . . . community and then, essentially, left them stranded in Canada and tried to kill them off." Since the train was such a large part of the tour, I feel space should have been given for this perspective to be acknowledged publicly as an important piece of colonial history, especially since the tour did go by the original site of the Chinese railway workers' death and sacrifice in the west coast.

These particular experiences of colonialism, while present on the tour, were never invited into the main conversations, activities, or art-making projects. In fact, I only found out about this story when speaking to this traveller weeks after the tour's end. While it affirmed to me unsettling feelings I had while on the tour, I came very close to not knowing her perspective despite having worked together for months on Train of Thought.

— Conclusion

While it was definitely not possible for every issue that came up on the Train of Thought to be discussed in detail with the entire group, the tour seemed to operate from two very specific points of view: (heteronormative) white settlerism and Indigeneity. The few of us who did not belong to either of these two perspectives could not help but feel a bit inhibited while engaging with the tour. As a result, the Train of Thought missed the opportunity for a multi-layered conversation around colonization that included other experiences of colonization.

Overall, I do believe Train of Thought was an incredible once-in-a-lifetime experience that opened a lot of people up to realities they had never contemplated before. The project created many connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and artists—in some cases, where there had been few or none before. It forged many paths.

But did Train of Thought help me reflect on or figure out my role as a person of colour within the settler colonial project? Not entirely. However, it did encourage me, in the quiet moments, to start my own conversations. Train of Thought forced me to reflect on the ways in which I, as a person of colour, am not part of the (inherently racist) colonial project, and the ways in which I, due to my ambiguous settlerism, am not a part of the conversation about decolonization in Canada. If we had had the opportunity, space, energy, and forethought to realize the gap this would create in the tour's contents, we could have had these conversations with the wider group and created new opportunities for solidarity between people of colour and Indigenous people. But the tour was constrained by time, funds, energy, and interest; and so, as many of us find ourselves saying coming out of Train of Thought and reflecting on its enormous task, such will have to happen on the next Train of Thought.

© Don Bouzek.

NOTES

1 I was part of a team at Jumblies Theatre that conducted one-on-one evaluation interviews about Train of Thought, at the Ground Floor, Toronto, Ontario, in 2015. The comments in this article are from that process.

2 Interview with author, 29 July 2015, Toronto, Ontario.

3 Interview with author, 29 July 2015, Toronto, Ontario.

4 Interview with author, 29 July 2015, Toronto, Ontario.

5 Telephone interview with author, 17 July 2015, Toronto, Ontario.

6 Telephone interview with author, 17 July 2015, Toronto, Ontario.

7 Interview with author, 20 August 2015, Toronto. Ontario.

8 Interview with author, 13 July 2015, Toronto, Ontario.

WORKS CITED

Lawrence, Bonita, and Enakshi Dua. "Decolonizing Antiracism." *Social Justice* 32.4 (2005): 120-43.

Sharma, Nandita, and Cynthia Wright. "Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States." *Social Justice* 35.3 (2009): 120-38.

Snelgrove, Corey, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel. "Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3.2 (2014): 1-32.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1.1 (2012): 1-40.

© Columpa C. Bobb. Cathy Stubington and Rosalind Williams at the site of an outdoor scene from a Runaway Moon Theatre community play in Enderby, BC on unceded Secwepemc territory.

A MANY STORIED LAND

Reflections from TRACKS: Community Play & Arts Symposium

BY
KWASUUN S. VEDAN AND
WILL WEIGLER

TRACKS: Community Play & Arts Symposium was a six-day national symposium in May 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. The event organizers—Vancouver Moving Theatre, the Roundhouse, Vancouver Park Board, Runaway Moon Theatre and Jumblies Theatre—acknowledge that the event took place on the ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməəθkʷəəy̓əəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səəlilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations and Secwepemul'ecw.

TRACKS doubled as the launching event for the cross-country Train of Thought community arts tour that took place from May to June 2015. Kwasuun Vedan, artistic associate at Full Circle: First Nations Performance, and Will Weigler, community-based theatre director, producer, and playwright, were invited to serve as the symposium's two rapporteurs.

In this article, Vedan and Weigler both speak to their shared role of rapporteur. In Vedan's words,

> These two independent and stand-alone reports unite with the intent to create a more accurate, holistic, and illuminative picture of what took place and what was accomplished over the course of this portion of the symposium. Will and I are both human beings and so we are connected; we are one heart, one mind. Additionally, we are different, adding variety and complexity in how we both experience the world and this work . . . Our reports document and relay the convergence that took place; they work to capture the "story" of the symposium and do so in our own way.

Weigler states,

> Kwasuun and I are, of course, both shaped by our respective cultural heritage, our gender, and other layers, but hers should not be seen simply as "the First Nations' perspective" or "the woman's perspective" any more than mine should be seen simply as "the settlers' perspective" or "the man's perspective." Writing from our individual perspectives as two caring human beings, as writers, and as professional theatre artists, Kwasuun and I will offer you what it was that stood out for each of us at the symposium according to what had meaning for us personally.

* * *

WILL WEIGLER If I were asked to find one single word in English that embodied all of what was shown and seen, spoken, sung, and heard over the course of the TRACKS symposium, that word would undoubtedly be "relationship." What is our relationship to each other as Indigenous peoples from different nations and non-Indigenous peoples from diverse cultural backgrounds? What is our respective and collective relationship to the land, to our separate and mutual histories, and to our future together? Everything that emerged followed from questions like these.

~

KWASUUN VEDAN We are going through a social shift in this country, led in great part by our senior artistic leaders with their hindsight and experience, and fueled by the fresh drive of established and emerging artists hungry to contribute to the momentum of the vital journeys necessary in our move toward decolonization. I believe the great Metis leader, Louis Riel, predicted this exact shift when he said in the late nineteenth century, "My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back." What I witnessed during the TRACKS symposium was the active call for the return of this "spirit."

© Keith Martin. Peter Morin and Ayumi Goto in *honouring that which remains hidden underneath*, a performance intervention at TRACKS Symposium

This symposium at its core was about contending with the nature of our relationships as neighbours, families, and friends in the land we are fortunate and thankful to all call home; we are trying to understand honestly how our relationships have developed and how to improve them. The relationships between Aboriginal peoples and Settler/Immigrants has historically been one dictated by imperialism and solidified through colonialism: an unhealthy ideology/system/process with the foundation of racism and inequality that considers Aboriginal peoples as inferiors on all levels compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. This process has tried to crush Aboriginal people's spirit. I speak from my own family experience when I say it has been very effective and has left many casualties along the way.

We are still in a time of struggle; art reflects that reality and can be used furthermore as a tool of navigation. The shift we are experiencing in the arts at this moment coincides with the Truth and Reconciliation initiative that has further underlined the need for meaningful action, including the acknowledgment of harm done to Aboriginal peoples and their communities. The purpose of contending with hard questions about colonialism, its history, and how it is still with us today is to try and move forward together in a good way and not repeat the offences of the past.

~

W W Panelist Sharon Kallis shared with us a Squamish word that she herself had only recently learned from Rebecca Duncan. For the Squamish people, Rebecca told her, the

word *eslhélha7kwhiws* expresses who we are together—how our lines touch and are connected to each other, to the land, to the plants, and to our ancestors who were here before us. The entire TRACKS symposium was grounded in an intention by the artists and cultural workers who were there to make a sincere effort, with humility and determination, to nurture our collective understanding of what *eslhélha7kwhiws* represents.[1] Over the course of several days, this is some of what I witnessed and learned.

Sandy Cameron's prose poem "One Hundred Years of Struggle" is about the people's history of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. It closes with the line, "Memory is the mother of community." Leith Harris read these evocative words at the Big House.[2] They were repeated and discussed several times during the symposium, perhaps because many of us recognize the truth they hold. In our work we have seen how community is built and strengthened when individuals learn about and feel connected to the lives of those who have come before them. We have seen how people make their own individual and collective memories in the very act of working, playing, and creating art together. These memories serve to build and strengthen a sense of a shared community. When I hear the words "Memory is the mother of community," I can't help but think of someone else's line, a second century Roman philosopher who wrote, "Truth is the daughter of time."[3] One truth heard at the symposium again and again was that time is one of the most important requirements for building relationships between people across cultural lines, and building relationships with the land, the water, and other living creatures.

~

K V Throughout the symposium, traditional Protocol was enacted. Mique'l Dangeli taught us:

> Protocol has baggage and [often] puts non-First Nations out of place [as many are unfamiliar with Indigenous Protocol]. We must be mindful of whose territory we are in and that each Protocol has different meanings depending from Nation to Nation. Protocol is about relationship to land and communities. Protocols are about responsibility.
>
> . . . What is rarely reciprocated is non-First Nations taking the time to get to know us before starting the process of creating art. This is partially due [to the fact that today] we live in a time of Immediacy; everything needs to happen right now, but Protocol, like being on the land, takes slowing down.[4]

~

W W Dancers/choreographers Karen Jamieson and Margaret Grenier have both come to understand that "only time builds trust; only time can change your mind." When Karen, a settler Canadian artist, tried to characterize her own experience of slowly coming to grasp Indigenous ways of understanding, she described her mind as gradually "creaking open" over time. Margaret, who is Gitxsan and Cree, describes her deep relationship with time: "Time periods of thousands of years that go back and through these practices have led me to where I am here today . . . I always feel that I am accompanied by this process and how it has transformed through time."

~

K V Susan Rowley said, "One big challenge is timelines; what works for communities, what works for museums." Advisor Leona Sparrow often pointed out that "This is not how communities function." In many ways, things like opening dates could be seen as an imposition. Susan underlines what has already been pointed out: We need to take the time to do things in a good way and sometimes deadlines stop us from doing that.[5]

Sharon Kallis also remarked, "I am interested in healing the land and deepening that connection with the land." Sharon

© Ilya Stavitsky. Jumblies Theatre's Art of Community workshop at the Train of Thought stop in Victoria, BC, on Lekwungen territory.

says that she and her partner Tracy Williams deal constantly with timelines coming from the land itself.[6]

~

W W The thread that runs through all of these experiences is that if we are willing to allow ourselves to be changed by our encounters, we must be willing to take the requisite amount of time for that change to affect us. Symposium delegates heard from jil weaving about her definition on the nature of community arts. Like many of us, she believes that if a project looks at the end just as we imagined it would at the start, then it's not community arts. Authentic engagement between artists and communities means that a project will be shaped by the learning that happens along the way and that it will change through the process.

What emerged from the conversations at this symposium was an affirmation that there is a link between this change and what is called *decolonization*. It's not simply that the end product—the performance or the artwork—is different from the original plan, but more significantly that our very perceptions have changed as we have worked on it. Savannah Walling affirmed that over years of collaborating with Indigenous artists and cultural teachers such as Renae Morriseau, participating in the Uts'am Witness Project, learning from other teachings from First Nations, and observing the collaborations between Runaway Moon and the Splatsin community, her own personal understanding and her professional practice at Vancouver Moving theatre have been profoundly influenced.

The effort to take the time required to allow for speaking and hearing and witnessing was a thread woven through the entire conference. At the Big House community gathering and cultural feast, each day brought guests and presenters together with opportunities that allowed time to celebrate both the cultural histories and the living and breathing cultural present of everyone in the room. Throughout the symposium, at post-presentation audience talkbacks, around intimate discussion tables and large dialogue circles, and at the invitations to reflect as witnesses, there were opportunities to be with one another, to share, and to connect.

~

K V jil weaving spoke to the source of the tensions, misunderstandings and anger that erupted during the *Granddaughters Mural* [7]project:

> These are complex issues, colonialism, and what it is, and how we are still in it, it's a shadow; but we are slowly slogging through it. It's not gone. They are complex issues that are now just becoming widely known, not well understood by the general community . . . I think this was a very timely issue for us to talk about . . . We need to recognize that we are on a journey together. We don't know exactly know where it's going but we know what we are looking for. But we have a road ahead that isn't entirely clear.

Artist and facilitator Krystal Cook stated," There will be times when we come together, but there will be times when we need our own sacred space apart to heal, to recover, to decolonize." She described Indigenous reality as being like "two Ferris wheels of reality going on because the trauma and the tragedies are still happening today in many of our communities — suicides, and addiction. Abuse is still happening. So we didn't want things to be viewed as just happening in the past; it's very real and it's happening today."[8]

Sid Bobb and Penny Couchie, co-artistic directors of Aanmitaagzi, referring to how they came to understand how large-scale trauma can fracture a people, be it "residential school[s], or the Relocation Act that formed reservations, or any large-scale trauma like that," spoke about the fractures in their own community. They explained that their community play *Dances of Resistance* was "an opportunity to eat, harvest, celebrate, dance and, of course, grapple with colonialism."[9]

~

W W Over the course of several days, symposium delegates heard variations on a valuable and practical means of actively decolonizing our relationships, our lives, and our work as non-Indigenous artists. Very simply, it involves how the names we use for things either support or contest the legacy of colonialism.

As I have already mentioned, I am writing this report from my perspective as a Settler Canadian. The term "Settler" is considered contentious to some non-Indigenous people who feel that Canada is their home: their family's home. Perhaps it has been their family's home for generations and they reject the premise that they are not of this place. To me, the term Settler can enfold both the feeling that this is my home while simultaneously acknowledging that my presence here is in relation to the people who are indigenous to this place. When I think of myself simply as "Canadian," the issue of my relationship with First Peoples doesn't necessarily come up. But when I choose to name myself as a Settler, the very act of that naming affects how I think about the place I call home. For example, it leads me down the path of wanting to know the stories of this place.

~

K V Kamala Todd talked about how she grew up surrounded by the stories of dominant culture; surrounded by the mythologies of an "empty land," the mythologies of this city as being made by the "Great White Fathers," the origin stories of Vancouver being a "very young city." She acknowledges that it was through the generosity of Coast Salish People and through the radical mindset of her parents that she was able to learn and come to understand that "of course, there's a much deeper history here." She asserted that there are many more stories here as this is "a many storied land," and argued that it is important to recognize those "empty land" mythologies because they create a surface that conceals layers and depth of the richness of story and history in this place. She reminded us that the people of this land have continuity, living here since "time out of mind." She said she began to realize and question the following: How do we address that invisibility? How do we address that erasure? How do we undo this injustice of being written out of the story? Of the Indigenous people on their own land being written out of the story?

Kamala quoted Wendy Grant John's words, "Musqueam stories, people who live here, those stories are your stories too,

know that those stories are your stories, and to know that history. To know the stories of where you live is essential; if you live here you need to know this place." Kamala posed the questions: How do we begin to know the stories of this land? What stories do we know of where we live? How can we learn more? Listen more? Share more?

Ruth Howard spoke about when she first connected with Penny Couchie and Sid Bobb: "I was looking for guidance in Toronto because we wanted to be more effectively doing what we say we do as a company, which is representing the people, places and stories held in the land where we live and not knowing, in the context of community arts, how to do that adequately in relation to First Nations history." Kamala Todd expressed how telling stories and creating together can help to bridge that divide and build relationships.

When Cathy Stubington, artistic director of Runaway Moon Theater in Enderby, began looking for stories of the land, she said it was difficult to ask the question: What stories am I looking for? She gathered many interesting stories from Enderby, but she hadn't come across any stories from the local First Nations. She knew that for a community play to be a success, the First Nation stories were a necessary component. Otherwise, this work she was doing would be meaningless.[10]

~

W W It is clear when you talk with Cathy that she has a very personal love of the place where she lives and works—the land and the water, the plants, and the creatures that share the place she calls home.

Her current projects with Runaway Moon reaffirm community arts as a conduit through which one makes a deeper connection to the place where one lives. Partly through her collaborations with Rosalind Williams and other members of the Splatsin Band, she has, over the years, expanded her definition of what community arts looks like. During the storytelling and musical tour of Enderby/Splatsin nation sites, where collaborative projects have taken place since 1998, she told us about Runaway Moon's Calendario project: "a local calendar based on the timing of events that take place around us, rather than on numerical dates." Runaway Moon welcomes people from all around the area to contribute to the creation of an actual calendar that implicitly invites them to re-imagine how they think about time. For example, as she explains, when you notice that the first daffodils are blooming, that means it's time to pick nettles. The process of noticing and gathering observations as part of collectively creating the Calendario reconfigures the ways in which many of us in the twenty-first century have become accustomed to marking the passage of time over the course of a year. And it is based on *re-naming*.

Historians have a term for this. It's called "periodization." When writing about history, they choose to chronicle eras according to markers that are actually quite arbitrary: the beginnings and ends of wars for example, or the reigns of monarchs, or the terms of office for Prime Ministers. These choices establish a lens through which we are encouraged to think about our past, present, and future in a particular way, perhaps without even realizing we're doing it. We "naturally" think about the year in terms of twelve months, or fifty-two weeks, four seasons, or indeed even a solstice and an equinox. The Calendario is an arts-based project that gently reorders our perception of time according to indicators that are intimately tied to Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing.

Surely this is the strength of theatre performance, song, and visual art: to enable those who see and hear it to perceive what they feel they already know in a new way, in a fresh light. In this context, being conscious about the names we use for places, animals, activities, and concepts builds an active stance of Indigenization into our work.

NOTES

1 For readers unfamiliar with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), the symbol or glyph used to indicate a glottal stop (as in the English "uh-oh") looks like a question mark with no dot at the bottom. Since many typographical fonts do not have this character, the number 7 is often used in its place.

2 The Big House: Memory is the Mother of Community, 9 May 2016.

3 The philosopher was Aulus Gellius, who was recalling the words of a poet considered ancient in his lifetime. Francis Bacon later referenced Gellius when he wrote, "Truth is the daughter of time, not authority."

4 This and all other quotes from the symposium are from various panels of TRACKS 2015.

5 Sue spoke about her experience as co-curator of *c̓əsnaʔəm: the city before the city* that consisted of three separate exhibitions at three different venues: 1) the Musqueam Cultural Museum and Resource Centre, 2) Museum of Vancouver and 3) the Museum of Anthropology (MOA). All three exhibitions opened in January 2015.

6 Sharon and partner Tracy Williams began to work together in 2013 when they shared their plant material inquiries and gathering knowledge in collaboration with community. Since 2014, they have worked on *Urban Cloth: Terroir*, a community-engaged project that weaves together First Nations gathering traditions, early Settler agricultural methods and contemporary environmental art practices through shared investigations for urban cloth production.

7 *The Granddaughters Mural* was created by artists Melanie Schambach, Chrystal Sparrow, Rachel George, Senaqwila Wyss, and Mutya Macatumpag, in consultation with three local Indigenous Elders. The stories and images speak to the land and waters and complex history of the Stanley Park area. The artists met some resistance from the Stanley Park Ecology Society when they included images and words referencing aspects of the local Coast Salish peoples' colonial experience, such as residential schools. Stanley Park Board Coordinator of Arts and Culture and Engagement jil weaving stated during the TRACKS 2015 panel discussion that "these kinds of ideas the Ecology Centre staff wasn't prepared or able to handle." After much discussion, the Stanley Park Ecology Society decided the mural would not be displayed on the Stanley Park Nature House, as originally intended.

8 In 2013 Krystal Cook co-facilitated with Will Weigler an immersive theatre production in Victoria called *From the Heart: enter into the journey of reconciliation*, a project bringing together a large culturally diverse, inter-generational ensemble to create and perform an unconventional theatre production about 'Settler' Canadians' relationship with Indigenous people. The project was produced in partnership with Inter-Cultural Association and VIDEA: A BC-based International Education Association.

9 Aanmitaagzi and Jumblies have a long-standing and much-valued relationship that started when Penny Couchie and Sid Bobb joined the core artistic team of the Jumblies 2007 *Bridge of One Hair* (Penny as choreographer, and Sid as historical researcher and performer). In the middle of this production, Penny and Sid moved to Nipissing First Nation and founded their own community-based arts company. Since then, much collaboration has taken place: mentorship, internships, learning in directions, professional development and community-engaged workshops, conference presentations, youth and artist exchanges, and major productions, including Jumblies' *Like An Old Tale* (Scarborough 2011), and Aanmitaagzi's *Dances of Resistance* (Nipissing First Nation 2014).

10 In 2014, the original team of Rosalind Williams, James Fagan Tait and Cathy Stubington wrote *Tuwitames*, a community play based on Secwepemc stories/ history to the present day. Directed by James Fagan Tait, it was rehearsed, built and performed at Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn Centre with a cast of all ages.

BECOMING A PERSON WITH A MEMORY:

Reflections on Gift Giving and Stories from an Emerging Community- Engaged Artist

© Aaron Leon. A dance rehearsal at Aanmitaagzi's Big Medicine Studio, Nipissing First Nation, in May 2015.

BY
KELTY MCKERRACHER

Vancouver, Unceded Coast Salish Territories

Train of Thought's west-to-east journey across Turtle Island was, for me, both professional development and personal quest. It was an opportunity to cover vast territory, engaging with the complex questions of how to live, work, and make art on this land in the context of colonialism and the legacy of genocide of Indigenous peoples. The learning that took place continues to evolve and deepen, and I will attempt to speak to some of it in this essay. It includes a deepening sense of response-ability to the agreements that were made between Indigenous and settler peoples; a growing understanding of stories as gifts; and how accessing and sharing cultural memory through storytelling could be a much-needed gesture of reciprocity in a country that has been marked by colonial forgetting.

I was fortunate to travel on a BC Arts Council Professional Development Grant and mentor with Savannah Walling, artistic director of Vancouver Moving Theatre, and Ruth Howard, artistic director of both Jumblies Theatre and the Train of Thought project. My stated intent was to learn about the aesthetics, ethics, and logistics of intercultural community-engaged arts practice. In addition, the personal development and self-inquiry that took place stands out as important preparation to do professional work in this field. As such, I embark on this essay as a younger settler artist seeking guidance as to how to enter the work of intercultural community-engaged arts in a way that is both ethical and useful. Making myself, my questions, and my vulnerabilities visible at this time may be the most genuine offering I can make.

Over the last year, my understanding of this country has become considerably more nuanced. I have begun to understand it, as Mi'kmaw scholar Pamela Palmater succinctly pointed out in a 2015 lecture at the SFU Institute for the Humanities, not as a nation but as a territory of many nations. In light of this, I try to imagine a different Canada, one based on the respectful renewal of international agreements. I reflect on how I show up in relationship with this land and with my hosts here, and I long for principles to guide me in these relationships. I am grateful to live in territories governed by Indigenous protocol that I can learn from. I find that the language of protocol has been helpful in finding my place physically and spiritually on this land, and I sense that this is a place from which community work of value could come. Mique'l Dangeli, a Tsimshian scholar, in a speech at the 2015 Talking Stick Festival said that in collaboration, protocol is the basis and framework for creating meaningful art. She expressed surprise that so many non-Indigenous people find protocol unapproachable, and responded that "protocol *is* the approach." From this, I understood protocol as a living entity. It embodies a willingness to make agreements according to the laws of the territory one is standing in. It speaks to a willingness to share.

The story of Coyote and the Salmon that I recently learned from the Splats'in people of Interior BC speaks to this notion of collective sharing. It tells us that when we fail to share wealth, we are not worthy to receive gifts. No salmon come to the shores of those who are stingy and greedy. Canada was founded on corporate and imperial takeover of land from Indigenous peoples. It is a heritage weighted with not-sharing. As Pam Palmater clearly sets out, Canada has sought to acquire land and resources from Indigenous peoples, to reduce its financial responsibility for those acquisitions, and to assimilate and eradicate Indigenous peoples (2015). The narratives were rewritten to erase history. Now, as a product of these narratives, I continue to profit from a system that refuses to share power and actively oppresses its own original hosts. Part of my professional development as a community-engaged artist, then, is to begin to perturb these narratives within myself: to remember the past, to learn to share, to be a guest, to give and receive in a balanced way.

In an interview for Jumblies' Talking Treaties project, author Lee Maracle speaks to the past and the future. She says that without a rootedness in your own history, you become a person without a memory. She believes that we need the memory of the world to come together; that "it's only when we start to discuss our common history and our common memory, and our different histories and our different memories, that we can start to look for solutions to what exists here." As I grapple with this idea, I reflect that settler communities have for the most part forgotten the agreements that we made that provided the basis for our presence here on Turtle Island. Those stories were not passed down, certainly not in my experience. By forgetting our agreements, I argue that in the process we forgot ourselves. Personally speaking, waking up to these agreements initiates me into a different remembrance of my own family and cultural history. It is an invitation to learn how to become a person with a memory that extends back further than my small self, and step into a level of accountability to relationship that is as much about reclaiming my own human inheritance as it is about doing the right thing.

As we travelled east on the Train journey, stepping into memories and into stories, I sensed that the travellers were entering into a liminal space within which we could imagine possible ways of being together. Within this liminality, there was a longing to take relational risks that would not seem as possible outside the container of the journey. We had a rare opportunity for dialogue, for give and take, and the chance to ask difficult questions that so often, to me, have felt out of reach. We also had the opportunity to relax and enjoy each other's company. The cultural gifting at each of our stops in the form of food, story, and ceremony struck me as deeply human and humanizing gestures. Something as informal as open-mic nights, where Train travellers and community members had the opportunity to share a performance or story, gave us all the opportunity to honour each other's different gifts. In addition, each community welcomed us with hospitality and sent us on our way with songs of blessing. Who could forget the train arriving several hours late to Edmonton, and our hosts receiving us in the wee hours with drums and food? We were taken care of, and in turn we tried to take care of our relationships with each other and our hosts.

In this process of taking care, I was made aware of an imbalance in cultural gift-giving playing out at times in the overall Train of Thought. Indigenous artists and communities consistently shared stories, teachings, and songs. I heard many stories that were powerful, even life-changing. These stories were clearly gifts rooted in culture, and I knew this viscerally because I felt fuller and richer for having heard them. In response, I asked myself: *What gifts can I share in return, from my own cultural*

Part of my professional development as a community-engaged artist, then, is to begin to perturb these narratives within myself: to remember the past, to learn to share, to be a guest, to give and receive in a balanced way.

tradition? It was not easy to face the reality that I felt I had little to offer my hosts. I questioned my value in a process of intercultural sharing. I wondered if listening respectfully to Indigenous stories was enough, or if this was reproducing a colonial "taking" relation. I began to wonder if the things I thought I had to give—my desire to be of service, my ideas for community art, my education, my leadership—were as valuable as simply having a story to tell, to share with my hosts something about who I am and where I come from.

Driving through Northern Ontario/Anishnaabe territory, speaking about this with Columpa Bobb of Winnipeg's Urban Indigenous Theatre Company, a memory came to me. I remembered years before I'd taken part in a storytelling workshop with Naomi Steinberg, a Vancouver storyteller. Our task was to choose a traditional story and get to know it intimately. In our telling of it, we were to try not to perform it, but rather to let the story come through as unembellished as possible. After all, the story was older and wiser than we were. I had chosen a Selkie story, a traditional story from Scotland about the shape-shifting seal people. My maternal grandfather had come from Scotland and both grandparents on my paternal side have ancestral links to Scotland as well. Learning the Selkie story was a way to connect with this heritage, and the story became a part of me, held in my body. Yet over the years, for lack of telling, I'd all but forgotten about it. As soon as I remembered the story, I realized that I wanted to tell it again, as a gesture of reciprocity that I longed to give.

The story follows a lonely fisherman's discovery one night of a group of Selkie people dancing on a beach under the light of the full moon. He falls instantly in love with one of the women and steals her sealskin, without which she cannot return to the sea with the rest of her people. He entreats her to marry him and promises that in one year, if she still desires to return to the sea, he will give back her skin. She agrees, yet after one year, when the Selkie woman reminds her husband of his promise, he can't bring himself to let her go and continues to hide the skin. She bears him children, but eventually the fisherman loses his love back to the sea when she is led to her sealskin by her youngest child.

The opportunity to tell the story arrived at the final sharing night hosted by Jumblies Theatre in Toronto, which also happened to be my last night on the Train journey. A violinist who had been traveling with us, Arie, had agreed to play fiddle quietly underneath the story. I had also remembered a Gaelic song, a melancholy, haunting tune about a mother who comes back from the other world to visit her children, which I decided to sing throughout the story. When the time came to step forward, I was nervous. I began to speak, and the fiddle began and I stumbled, thrown off, forgetting my words. I looked at Arie sheepishly and began again.

There once lived a lonely fisherman at the edge of the sea…

Then the strangest thing happened: the story told itself. I experienced what it was like not to perform it, but simply to allow it to arrive with all of its quiet power. I remember sensing a vast silence in the room, textured by the melody of the violin and the Gaelic tune, and being moved nearly to tears myself when the Selkie woman presses her sealskin to her body and runs back to the ocean, leaving her child on the beach. I felt utterly filled by the story. I realize now that by giving the gift of the story, I received a gift in return: the story strengthened me with its profound coherence and painful beauty.

Listening to Indigenous artists and elders across Turtle Island, as well as mentoring with two artistic directors, has better taught me to recognize the richness of story in this land that I call home, and how vital storytelling can be as a way of knowing ourselves and each other. I begin to appreciate how storytelling is also a part of my cultural heritage as a descendant of settlers, who came here with their own traditions and cosmologies, although the stories have often been mislaid. By being courageous enough to enter this imaginal place of memory and share from it, perhaps I begin to have value to those I seek to build relationship with. In addition, I earn my own respect as an artist and cultural partner.

This journey obviously will not look the same for everyone. Connecting to culture of origin can be painful and sometimes may not be what is needed. And telling a traditional story does not suddenly mean I've learned how to do intercultural work well. Rather, it is a clue, an opening into a possibility for relationship and for self-remembrance. I sense that the spirit of reciprocity and gift-giving will influence the community artistic work I do in the future and that I will continue developing these understandings throughout my practice and career. The Train of Thought gave me hope that the arts and storytelling can help us, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, to exchange gifts: taking responsibility for remembering ourselves and our agreements, listening deeply, dreaming a new possible future.

Thank you to my official mentors, Savannah Walling and Ruth Howard, and to those I met on the journey who in particular inspired my thinking for this essay: Columpa Bobb, Lee Maracle, Sid Bobb, Penny Couchie, Rosalind Williams, Cathy Stubington. Thank you to the BC Arts Council for making my participation possible.

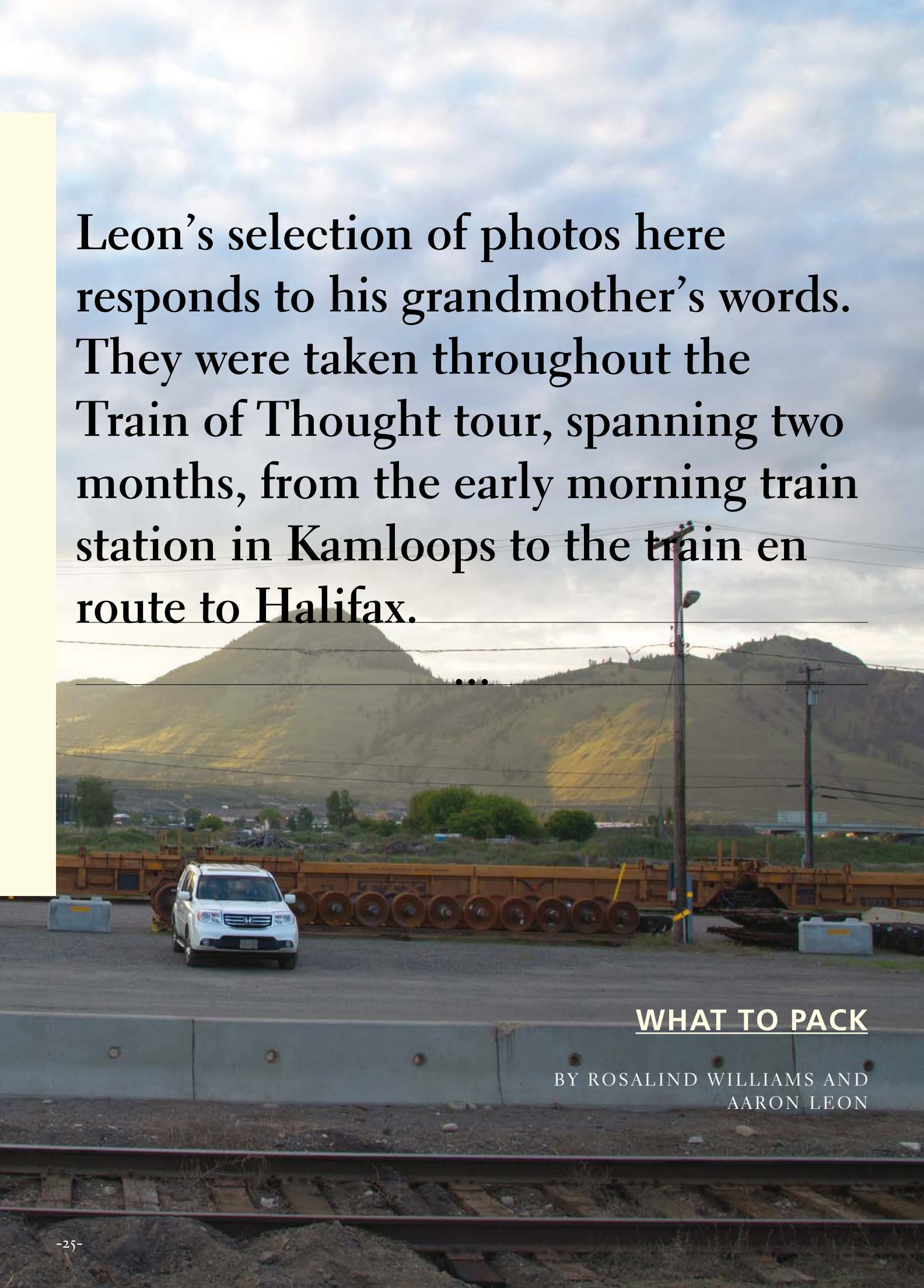
I began to wonder if the things I thought I had to give—my desire to be of service, my ideas for community art, my education, my leadership—were as valuable as simply having a story to tell, to share with my hosts something about who I am and where I come from.

WORK CITED

P. Palmater. *Indigenous Nationhood: Empowering Grassroots Citizens.* Halifax: Fernwood, 2015.

© Aaron Leon. A dance rehearsal at Aanmitaagzi's Big Medicine Studio, Nipissing First Nation, in May 2015.

On May 18th—the last day of the Train of Thought stop in Edmonton—Rosalind Williams, a community leader and artist, offered these words to her grandson, photographer Aaron Leon, as she returned to their home in Splatsin First Nation and he continued on the tour.



Leon's selection of photos here responds to his grandmother's words. They were taken throughout the Train of Thought tour, spanning two months, from the early morning train station in Kamloops to the train en route to Halifax.

...

WHAT TO PACK

BY ROSALIND WILLIAMS AND AARON LEON

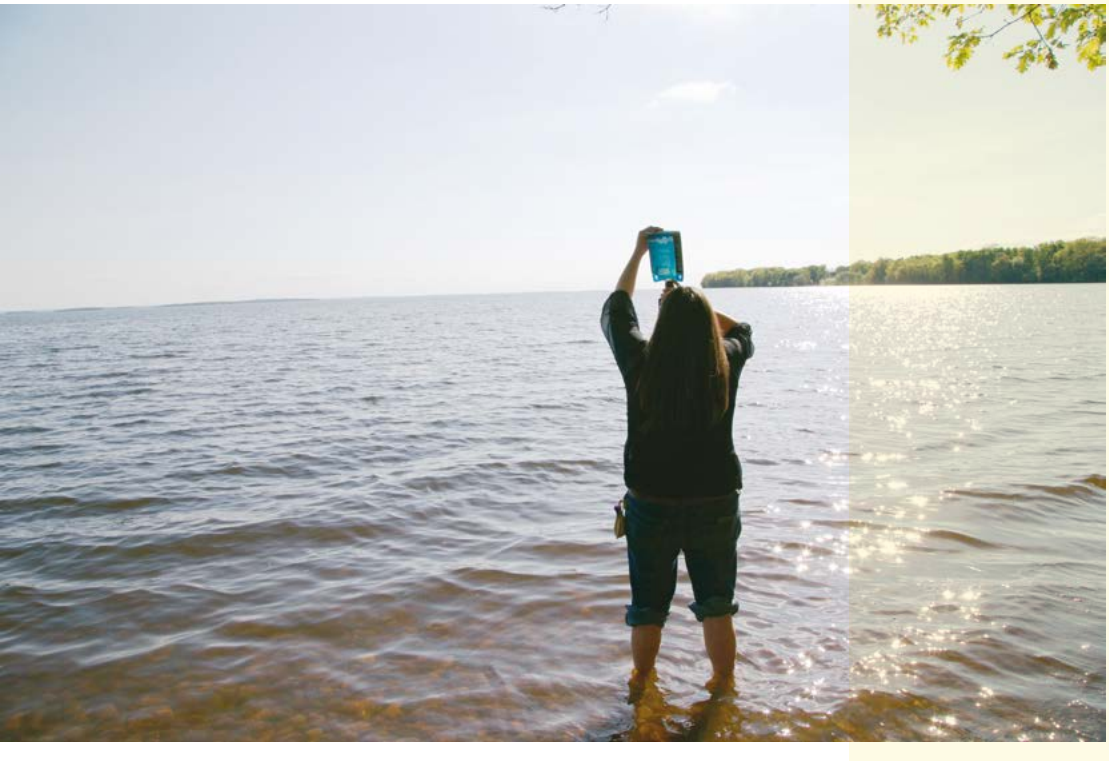
Here's the suitcase
that you are going to
take with you when
you go *atsxa*.[1]
In there I would like
to pack for you—

Your moccasins,
the spirit of the land,
a little bit of our ancestors

1 *atsxa*: Spiritual training or when you look to find your guardian spirit. Traditionally, you would go to the mountains, but nowadays people go to contemporary settings because that's the world in which they have to function. Before, it was necessary to know the mountains and the animals and the plants; now you have to know the cities and the systems.

Our music, some of the water.

I give this to you my grandchild. You're going to have to take this with you when you go *atsxa* in the world. Hopefully we've put everything in here that you're going to need so that you don't have to back track to find out who you are and what it is you have to do.



It's full of everything we think that you're going to need and we hope we haven't missed anything out.

Travel well

White Man's Indian–Script Excerpts

BY DARLA CONTOIS

The first moment I read this monologue out loud I knew it was powerful—a power I'd never had the experience of offering before. In a solo playwriting class, my teacher asked me to write about something personal, something I hadn't had the courage to say before. At first, nothing came to mind when I thought about my voice and what I had to offer. Suddenly, the feeling became so clear: how uncomfortable I'd been in my own skin for years, how I'd never felt like I knew who I was. An Indian. A Cree Indian.

The whole room will often go silent when the truth is heard. It's a sound I'm familiar with after performing this monologue, and it happens every time. This monologue sparked an entire one-woman show named after a phrase I heard my dad say once: "White Man's Indian." The phrase stuck with me for a long time and left me asking question after question about my identity. The show developed from there and is about a young woman in her last year of high school who moves into the city for the first time. Struggling with repressed memories of her past, making new friends, and her own identity, Eva finds herself caught between more than just herself.

This second monologue, for me, was about getting to the point; admitting that it was fear standing in the way of finding out who I was. It's a very real moment in time that I'm sure many people struggling to find their identity feel. It comes very early in the show, when Eva meets a new friend.

I read both of these monologues on the Train of Thought tour because it's always been in my nature to share. I didn't realize what my voice was worth when I was growing up, so I'll take advantage of any opportunity I see to offer a small view into the realities of my existence and struggles. Sharing the monologues has been very life changing for me and for others who experience them for the first time.

Does it make me less of an Indian for not knowing my traditions?

Am I supposed to be your idea of an Indian? I've lost something, something I never had in the first place. Sure, I grew up on the reserve surrounded by other kids just like me. Does that make me Indian?

I went to a school that taught me how to speak English and read books, to learn through words rather than songs or stories. But I'm Indian. I'm supposed to be proud of who I am, but all I am is confused.

I come from a people who used to be beautiful and proud to celebrate their traditions, to show them to the world! Now we sit in hospitals and bars furious with what we've become and all we can do is blame the white man.

I blame the white man sometimes; hell I sometimes blame my own ancestors. If we were so proud and strong how could we let this happen? I refuse to believe we just sat by and let them rip our whole lives apart. There has to have been at least one, at least one of us who felt it wasn't right.

White people make me feel stupid when they say we fed them and helped them survive. Are Indians stupid? Are we the loving girlfriend who sticks by their side even though they kick the shit out of us? Fuck.

I don't know.

I can't speak Cree.

I can't tan hides or make you a dream catcher.

I can't build you a tipi and keep you warm with the pelt of a buffalo. I can't build a sweat lodge. I can't give out Indian names.

Instead, I can read and write. I can budget money. I can do a really great job interview. I can live the rest of my life and never take another step onto a reserve.

I'm a white man's Indian. My dad said that.

The truth is, I'm afraid

Is there an Indian inside crying to get out?

Confused, an endless state it seems

I am the white man's Indian

Red on the inside and white on the outside

Or white on the inside and red on the outside?

I don't know who I am

Confused, an endless state it seems

Then I get angry

Why can't I figure this out?

Is it supposed to be this hard?

Fuck you. I fucking hate you.

Or I hate me.

Confused, an endless state it seems

I miss my family, the only place I feel I truly belong

Have you ever been so uncomfortable in your own skin

you wish you were never born?

It hurts, makes you sad

Forget about it, it's not real

Confused, an endless state it seems

How did I get here?

Where do I go?

It's blank. I'm lost.

The truth is I'm afraid there's no Indian here anymore.

© Don Bouzek. Darla Contois in a workshop co-produced by Community Arts and Heritage Education Project and Train of Thought in Thunder Bay, Ontario, on Anishinabek Territory.

White Man's Indian was developed through the Animikiig Playwright's Program at Native Earth Performing Arts. It premiered at Native Earth Performing Arts' annual festival, Weesageechak Begins to Dance, in November 2015.

AN IMAGINARY REAL WORLD: MUSINGS ON PERFORMANCE, THEATRE AND TRAIN OF THOUGHT

RUTH HOWARD

For funding proposals and publicity leading up to Train of Thought, I was in the habit of writing, "Train of Thought is a real and imaginary journey to collect and share stories; exploring the land we live on, as it was, as it is, as it might have been, as it could be; merging fiction and fact, whimsy and serious intent . . ."

I was serious about the "imaginary and real" part. It was always envisioned as an evolving creative enactment as well as a mobile conversation. Earlier on, I had thought that we would come up with a unifying narrative, which we could inhabit and develop from coast to coast—an apt story that someone would offer, as has often occurred on other projects. However, as the time approached, this simply didn't happen. I came up with a science-fiction-fantasy-type scenario—about a quest to shift historical tracks, with the train being a magical vehicle for entering alternative possible worlds, so that each time we stepped off it, we would experience a slightly altered reality, as enacted by travellers and hosts. It soon became clear to me, however, that this notion was not equally appealing to all our partners, for all sorts of reasons (personal, cultural, regional), and that it wouldn't be appropriate or even possible to impose an overarching imaginative concept. And so I gave it up and decided that any fictions accompanying the journey would arise or not along the way. This was both a disappointment and a huge relief; I wrote shortly before our departure:

> *Our product is the journey, not what we're taking to present or make happen . . . It's like a tour without the play, and so all the emphasis can go into the trip. It's about the art of the trip: what we pack, how many pairs of underwear, what sort of coolers containing what sort of food, what we drink or don't—adding another person or modifying another route rather than adding or modifying a prop—all the end rather than the means.*

Looking back at the trip there was, nonetheless, a plentiful amount of *performance* and *theatre*, in more traditional and expanded senses: from improvisational workshops, to variety showcases, to meals with performed and ceremonial elements, to on-board choreography, puppet shows and interactive installations, to games with small paper people, to participatory storytelling, to recitals of names, territories and ancestors, to giving of gifts, to weaving of Runaway Moon's giant vegetable ribbons with 48 participants, to water-gathering ceremonies at each stop (and finally releasing all the collected waters into the ocean on the red beach of Abegweit, PEI), to train station greetings (including aerial acrobatics by Halifax Circus in the last train station), to one full-fledged rapidly created mainstage performance with Aanmitaagzi, complete with story, choreography, music, masks, puppets, costumes, poetry, lighting and projections, at North Bay's Capitol Centre.

All of this enactment spanned a wide spectrum of meanings of *performance* and *theatre*: participatory and presentational, rehearsed and improvised, for an audience and for those who were doing it, prescribed ceremony and improvised scene.

We were as often as not in the (sometimes controversial) borderlands of ceremony/ritual and contemporary theatre and performing arts. I have an anthropologist friend who likes to oppose *innovation* and *ritual*, and she and I like to argue about that. However, during Train of Thought we experienced already-established protocols, and also invented and improvised formal performances (of arrivals, acknowledgements and introductions), which we then repeated and re-invented as we journeyed on.

Sewing together the trip was a thread of theatricality implied in the premise, and colouring the daily details of this *real and imaginary* journey. We were set up to perform as ourselves in slightly heightened and altered manners. My journal entries trace some of this interfusion of reality and make-believe.

It's happening . . . very strange feeling . . . stepping into our plans and spreadsheets—feeling like a work of art while doing something that (for me) is relatively normal (travelling places, taking planes) . . . Everyone at the office clapped as we got into our taxi. It felt quite festive—quite ceremonial, although we didn't actually do anything ceremonial (except for the photos and the clapping).

We ARE creating a parallel world. How will it be when I go back to life where no one greets me at the station with a smudge and a song and a cheer and hug of welcome? What will it be like when people don't introduce themselves with the territory where they live and the Treaty number, where Annie isn't weaving boots, and Eliza and Cassondra aren't collecting water and we don't sing our song every day, and Ange isn't laying out the food, and we aren't crossing the country on (at least) two different maps?

Halfway through the journey, in Nipissing—North Bay. It just struck me that, as our group switched from travelling by train to a convoy of mini-vans) the "Train of Thought" shifted from being a journey to a frame of mind . . . The fiction that changes you if you step into it . . . has been created through what is happening: through people responding to the invitation—through feasts, forums for conversation, participatory art, gifts, water and earth, ceremony and ritual . . . clumsy, tentative, elegant, new, deep-rooted . . . creating an imaginary real world.

One thing, among others, that I am taking stock of is how my thwarted desire for a fantasy fiction plot was fulfilled—how I didn't actually even have to say, "Let's pretend we're in a parallel universe—where First Nations rituals greet us when we get off trains, where talking circles and welcoming feasts are a matter of course, where officials are Aboriginal elders. Let's imagine how our society might be if history had gone . . . on a different track, let's inhabit that imagining—and then it really will be like that! And then we'll arrive back into a slightly shifted world." Well, that happened, surprisingly . . . We needed no outward symbols, tokens, costumes, gestures or potions. We sang our song, but people could take it as just a song. Everyone might think we were just inhabiting our normal universe. I was wearing a mini-train pendant, but nobody knew it had power. Now that magic time is over, but the world we stepped back into wasn't the same. While travelling, the final TRC session and report had happened. We arrived back in Toronto to explore and express Toronto's treaty history through our Talking Treaties event, and to rename the Don River with Juliet's Singing River project.[1] The Pan Am games were on, naming the Mississaugas of the New Credit their official host, and lighting three sacred fires in Toronto—one on Toronto Island—where I live. Perhaps the tracks really did change the slightest bit as we travelled.

© Photo by Liam Coo. The Halifax Circus welcomes Train of Thought to Halifax, Mi'kmaq Territory, at the VIA Rail Station.

1 Talking Treaties is a multi-year partnership between Jumblies Theatre and First Story Toronto, led by Ange Loft. Singing River was a Pan Am Path Art Relay event produced by Urbanvessel in collaboration with Aanmitaagzi and other partners.

SETTLERS' STATEMENT

LIB SPRY
with
WENDY LUELLA PERKINS
REBECCA BENSON
and AARON FRANKS

Based on questions answered by the settler members of our group, and the teachings of Haudenosaunee Elder Betty Carr-Briant and Anishinaabe Elder Morris Blanchard

The Train of Thought visited Kingston, Ontario, from June 11 to 12, 2015. Wendy Luella Perkins proposed that we write a settlers' statement as part of our greeting ceremony for when the train arrived. She gave us the first three lines, and also led the exercise that created the rest of the content. We asked two questions: What do we as settlers and immigrants want to share? What do we as settlers and immigrants need to acknowledge? All the settlers involved wrote three answers for each. I then took all the ideas expressed by the group and, using Wendy's introductory lines as a starting point, wrote the statement. I was also influenced by what our two Elders, Betty Carr-Briant and Morris Blanchard, had told us. Rebecca Benson and Aaron Franks, who read out the statement during the greeting ceremony, made a couple of adjustments. It was a real ensemble effort.

* * *

We, or our ancestors, come from many different parts of this world.

We travelled over oceans, across the earth, and through the air.

We came to this place in search of a new life.

We left plenty. Or famine.

We left peace. Or war.

We left family. We left friends.

We left our former homes

To make our lives in new homes.

A new world for us,

But for the First Peoples of Turtle Island,

An old, familiar land, an old familiar home.

We came with hope.

The majority of us came not knowing

How this land had been taken, cultures broken, languages lost.

We acknowledge that we bear the legacy of those who came before us carrying with them

A belief in their superiority:

That the colour of their skin was better;

That their religion was the only true one;

That their "civilization" was the answer to everything;

That the "Indian" should be driven out of children.

And there are still governments and many people in this country called Canada who continue to believe this.

We acknowledge that the broken promises, greed, and injustice then and now have made the space for us to make the homes we live in.

But we want you to know:

We want to find ways to honour your ways;

We want to find ways to honour our ways.

Land can be loved in many ways.

We too love this land. Its beauty and brilliance.

We want to find a way to travel together on the river of life:

Responsible, Respectful, Active.

Looking, listening, learning, living, loving,

Side by side, imposing nothing on the other,

Sharing in the richness of this earth,

Protecting this beautiful earth that cradles all of us

Whose poetry we feel beneath our feet.

© Liberty Drummers greet Train of Thought at the Kingston, ON train station on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Territory.

BOOK REVIEW

BY
JILL CARTER

MEDICINE SHOWS: INDIGENOUS PERFORMANCE CULTURE. BY YVETTE NOLAN. TORONTO: PLAYWRIGHTS CANADA PRESS, 2015. 169 PP.

Algonquin playwright/director Yvette Nolan, in her latest book, *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture*, issues a timely call for a more informed and rigorous critical discourse around Indigenous performance than has hitherto been manifested in Canada. This is a call that comes from Indigenous theatre workers themselves, who have, in recent years, identified "more critical work," "more Indigenous scholars, more writers, more people thinking about the work," and "more public discussions about the work" as paramount desiderata (132).

While we have seen some growth in this area, relatively little scholarship exists around Indigenous performance in Canada and the United States. (Indeed, amongst a plethora of exciting working groups that meet each year at the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Theatre Research, there has not—in recent history, if ever—been a working group that concerned itself with Indigenous theatre/performance; this alone is a powerful gauge of just how little attention this area of study receives.) Much of the work that does exist has been undertaken by non-Native critics and scholars, and apart from some very few notable exceptions, product and process are too often misunderstood and misrepresented across popular and scholarly media. Further, little serious interrogation of Indigenous creative processes (outside of a few dialogues and reflections by Indigenous arts workers) exists in publically accessible formats to aid audiences as they receive the work and to minister to artistic development by bringing the artists into deeper conversation with each other and with the various communities they serve.

Nolan presents us with an eminently readable study that is accessible to scholars, artists, and audiences—and that is sure to challenge and engage all. Eschewing scholarly jargon and a linear narrative, Nolan has chosen to "write in an Indigenous way" (3): her study unfolds within a spiralling structure, as if she were casting stones upon the waters and "watching the ripples move outward from the point of entry" (4). She presents an invitation, rather than argument, opening up a space in which the "medicines" concocted by Indigenous theatre workers can realize themselves as catalysts of reconciliation to heal the relational rupture that has sprung up

between the peoples who now share these lands. As *Medicine Shows* invites us to consider a series of public curing rites devised for the contemporary stage (illuminating the social conditions that render them necessary and the unique characteristics that render them efficacious), Nolan's narrative spiral ripples out from the centre—the root of communal dysfunction and the works that expose, combat, and subdue this dis-ease—to the larger "abyss between [Indigenous and settler] understandings" (109), so that both groups may chart a path towards reconciliation (21).

The symptoms of this dysfunction manifest themselves in a tangled web that Nolan painstakingly navigates to render its root causes eminently discernible. As a playwright, dramaturg, and director whose tenure as artistic director of Toronto's Native Earth Performing Arts ran from 2003 to 2011, Nolan writes from an organic place of experience and profound engagement with the obstacles she identifies: the dearth of Canadian audiences, who seem to fear having their complacency shaken by the hard truths unearthed in Indigenous performance (18); "purposefully obtuse" (107) and/or outright racist reviews; the "centuries of [Indigenous] invisibility" (117) that have engineered a disconnect between mainstream Canadians who have been taught to imagine that their concerns are vastly removed from the concerns of their Indigenous neighbours; the exigencies of trying to produce within an infrastructure that affords little to no cultural control to the Indigenous artist; and a troubling paucity of critical discourse that emerges from any place of cultural awareness.

But Nolan's purpose is not simply to highlight or linger on the problems. This is a hopeful book that positions Indigenous plays as medicine, that unpacks the good effects of this medicine, and that envisions how this medicine can work to foster reconciliation between the original peoples of these lands and Canadians. "Indigenous theatre artists," she tells us, "make medicine by reconnecting through ceremony, through the act of remembering, through building community, and by negotiating solidarities across communities" (3). For Nolan, the Indigenous theatre worker is a "conduit between the past and the future" who crafts "Ceremony" for the contemporary stage that re-ignites memory, unites a scattered body politic into community, and fosters survivance (3).

Nolan casts her first stone into the waters of heuristic self-examination, inviting us to consider several difficult (and controversial) works by artists whose project of communal healing begins with a performance of communal dysfunction and a brutal excision of its root causes. As she meticulously unpacks Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1989), Ian Ross's *fareWel* (1996), and Kevin Loring's *Where the Blood Mixes* (2006), Nolan's path ripples outward, making manifest the connections between these singular snapshots of particular communities all afflicted by the same poison—the terrible legacy of the residential school system and the divisions that have sprung up between male and female as a result of colonial imposition. These plays work to perform a curing for Indigenous people by first exposing the poison that has sickened us.

But Nolan demonstrates that the efficacy of the cure can extend and *should* extend far beyond the afflicted communities themselves. The symptoms of this poison may show themselves with greater transparency within our communities, and the marks they have left may stand out in greater relief on Indigenous flesh, but Canada's soul is also scored by signs of morbidity; it too is afflicted by the rupture. Mainstream audiences, by and large, stay away, eschewing the "dark cloud of Native theatre" (18) because they do not want to feel the pangs of that morbidity—accountability and guilt. And the plays that do attract significant numbers of Canadian viewers are, in the main, those that have been curated by non-Indigenous producers, directors, and artistic directors who continue to telegraph the same message: "First Nations are damaged, and even within [their] own communities, [they] cannot heal" (19).

Audiences of pieces that have been thusly curated are able to witness Indigenous affliction from a safe point of remove without feeling themselves in any way connected or complicit (19). As she considers a mounting national preoccupation with the project of reconciliation in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's inquiry into this country's residential school system, Nolan offers a bleak diagnosis of the present state of affairs: the possibilities for fruitful, generative dialogue between Canadians and Indigenous people that present themselves in Indigenous performance have remained largely unrealized because Canadian audiences have not availed themselves of the opportunity to enter the conversation by taking a seat at the tables our artists have prepared (18).

Nolan's next chapter, "Survivance," traces the history of the "survivor's narrative," weaving this study into an introduction of what she terms the "eighth fire production"—a production that brings settler artists into conversation and collaboration with Indigenous artists "in an attempt to create understanding and forge a new and healthy way forward together" (21). Positioning the ill-starred 1986 collaboration between the late Linda Griffiths and Métis artist/activist/educator Maria Campbell as "a manifestation of the heartbreak of Native theatre in this country" (22), Nolan assures us that despite the painful process that underscored the making of *Jessica*, this piece constitutes "the beginning of an Indigenous theatre in this country" (21): Campbell not only survived the experience but also thrived as a theatre-maker and activist in Canada and has gone on to facilitate the voices of many other Indigenous survivors. Without Campbell's decision to open herself and her story up to the mediation of non-Native collaborative-powers, Nolan surmises, spaces might not have opened up for Shirley Cheechoo's *Path with No Moccasins* (1991), Darrel Dennis's *Tales of an Urban Indian* (2001), Cliff Cardinal's *Huff* (2012), or the numerous Indigenous resistance-narratives that have been crafted in the decades that have followed *Jessica*'s premiere on Canada's professional stages (31).

With the next three sections, "Remembrance," "Ceremony," and "The Drum," Nolan's narrative gains momentum, charting an ever-widening spiral through the exploration of works that take on communal-fracture and disaffection in the displacement and destruction of Indigenous women. "Remembrance" begins by ushering

the reader into an examination of works that recover the humanity of the thousands of Indigenous women who have been murdered or gone missing in Canada over the past four decades. These works attest to the value of lives interrupted and indict this nation for the historical inactivity and enervation that have characterized its response to decades of mounting violence against Indigenous mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends. Nolan, here, illuminates the restorative affects of Marie Clements's *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*; Keith Barker's *The Hours that Remain*; and two works by Turtle Gals Ensemble: *The Triple Truth* and *The Only Good Indian*. She presents these performed histories as re-creation stories: works that rebuild communities through their eschewment of the "solo protagonist" (41), widening the circle of community and drawing Canadian audiences into communitas—that liminal space wherein each witness is connected to and implicated in the story unfolding before her. Commenting upon the second (of two) Mohawk ironworker scenes in Turtle Gals' *The Triple Truth*—a scene that communicates the responses of actual Mohawk ironworkers who were close enough to feel the wind produced by the planes that rushed by them into the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001—Nolan explains, "The 'stone-age Indians' are the builders of the twentieth-century skyscrapers, which are brought down in a twenty-first century attack by a people who want to destroy the symbols of a culture. One culture has tried and failed to eradicate another, and in turn is attacked by another" (45).

All of these plays (and many more that have not found their way into Nolan's discussion) function as ceremony. And ceremony, as Nolan points out in her chapter of the same name, "is integral to our lives as Indigenous people" (55). A key challenge with which Indigenous theatre workers grapple is an alchemical one: how do we retain the efficacy of the ceremonial encounter without violating the ceremony itself and the community out of which it emerges? With "Ceremony" and "The Drum," Nolan carries us through a series of brief case studies—Margo Kane's *Moonlodge*; Waawaate Fobister's *Medicine Boy* and *Agokwe*; Turtle Gals' *The Scrubbing Project* and *The Triple Truth*; Daniel David Moses's *Almighty Voice*; and performance events created by digital media artists Archer Pechawis and Kent Monkman. Whether a piece is framed by ceremony (i.e., moontime ceremonies for Anishinaabe women or a feast for the dead) or whether ceremonial elements are integral to the action (i.e., the medicines, the drum, or prayer), Nolan shows us the very specific methods employed by Indigenous theatre workers to abstract ceremonial elements, translating them into actions that may unfold upon a public stage while retaining their efficacy, so that audiences may still "apprehend at a visceral level the ceremony inherent in the moment" (61). More importantly, Nolan answers her own challenge, offering glimpses of the critical engagement she has been calling for, as she delves into a cogent process analysis that documents the mechanics of translating rite into efficacious dramatic action through the application of theatrical method (see, for example, 60, 61, 66).

With the two sections that follow—"Making Community" and "Trickster, Rougarou, Mahigan, and the Weeping Forest"—Nolan's narrative spirals back to the projects of recovery and reconnection, inviting us to consider the monumental burden that faces Indigenous artists who have been "deracinated" and who may have "little or no connection to the communities where their people settled" (74). Faced with the task of building a functional and effective pan- Indigenous community in the urban centres where we do theatre, how do we make art that speaks powerfully to very specific communities and how do we negotiate the various rules and protocols with which we all come together to make that work? Nolan recounts the challenges she encountered and the discoveries she made, working as the director of a multi-[First]-National group on the creation of *Death of a Chief*. The lush, multi-disciplinary production that arose from this encounter utilizes Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* as a framing device for a performative intervention into the reconstruction of a fictional First Nations community fractured by the colonial imposition of a corrupted system of governance. Concluding this section with an explication of her own *The Unplugging* and a revelation of her feelings and objectives as she wrote this piece, Nolan paints a poignant picture of the hopeful energy that motivates such projects of recovery and the mourning that must accompany such an exercise when the "distance . . . between where we are as Aboriginal people . . . and where we need to be" (82) is brought into such sharp relief. One recollects that "the core values of women, consensus, generosity, elder respect, and connection to the land all formed the base" (92) of a world that is really not so far removed from us today. Still, one cannot help but wonder if the medicine we are making will be strong enough to call that world back into being.

Nolan's focus on human disconnection and communal fracture gracefully arcs out and away from the socio-political task of restoring traditional value systems through which to (re)build our human communities to a consideration of the wider project of repairing the severed connections between humans and their biotas. For Nolan, this project begins with the retelling of old tales—with conscious articulation, in this historical moment, of timeless truths that "lead their characters [and their audiences] to some understanding of their place in the world" (Highway, cited in Nolan 106). The rougarous of *A Very Polite Genocide* (Melanie J. Murray) and *Annie Mae's Movement* (Nolan); the weeping forest of *Giiwedin* (Spy Dénommé Welch); the silenced Horse People in *Horse* (Archer Pechawis); and the trembling poplars of *Réunir* (P. J. Prudat) all testify to the "unnatural and accidental" lacuna that has sprung up between humans and the rest of creation. Such works, Nolan suggests, chart a way back for Indigenous peoples to self (104). We recover identity—re-racinating the de-racinated self—by first remembering our connections to the physical and metaphysical worlds, by next remembering the traumatic histories that led to our forgetting, and finally by committing ourselves to a conscientious, quotidian performance of embodied action designed for the continued maintenance of those connections. As she concludes this section on the manifestation of the unseen world in Indigenous performance and the transformative possibilities such manifestations hold, Nolan's narrative most clearly explicates the orbicular structure that frames Indigenous thought, narrative, and lifeway: this brand of performative medicine leads artist and audience alike to "truths we

have not been able to face, and in facing them we are able to move forward in our lives, in our deaths, and into the great continuum that is our history" (106).

With the final three sections of *Medicine Shows*, Nolan returns us to the central question of this work. If, as she has inarguably demonstrated, Indigenous theatre workers make medicine of the performative[1] event—medicine that powerfully intervenes upon the dis-ease of colonization, that transforms the Indigenous witness, and that engenders communitas—how, then, might that medicine work itself efficaciously upon the broken relationships between the citizens of a fledging nation-state and the original stewards of these lands? Reflecting first upon where we are as disconnected peoples often speaking at cross purposes in "Bad Medicine," Nolan next presents us with a vision of where we could be in "The Eighth Fire," ultimately concluding her book with a map of "The Way Forward" into fruitful dialogue and eventual reconciliation.

Stepping away from the intimacies of creating and presenting, Nolan examines the power structure that undergirds the dissemination of the work, that influences its reception, and that dramaturges the dialogue between Indigenous theatre workers and Canadian audiences. Issuing a bold call to reviewers to educate themselves as they engage with Indigenous works, to adopt humility and question their own assumptions, and to enter into dialogue with "what is actually [being] presented" and not with what they would prefer to see (108), Nolan indicts many of these "gatekeepers" for their failure to comprehend, for their racism, and/or for malicious intent (109). Such critical interventions—undertaken from a place of careless disregard, fear, or bad faith—she warns us, "are retarding the reconnection process that Indigenous artists are undertaking" (109). She calls upon artistic directors across Canada to support the development of Indigenous work and to support its dissemination by including this work in each season, pointing to the initiatives undertaken by larger companies like the National Arts Centre and by smaller companies such as MT Space in Kitchener-Waterloo that have made cultural diversity and inclusion central to their mandate. Finally, she calls upon Indigenous artists themselves to move forward with hope, humility, patience, and grace. "If we are going to move forward," Nolan tells us, "we have to go together"(129).

Throughout *Medicine Shows*, Nolan has been painstakingly preparing the ground for that way forward; she has diagnosed the dis-ease that characterizes the ruptured relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians. She has chronicled the dark history that engendered and continues to feed this dis-ease. And through rigorous analysis that speaks to both the production and the reception of a body of Indigenous works that spans three decades of performance history in Canada, she has opened up the possibility for future conversations undertaken in the spirit of respect from a place of mutual understanding. In keeping with the hopeful spirit of her study, Nolan offers, for our consideration, the "prescriptions for healthy Indigenous communities everywhere" (139)—a collectively devised vision that came out of rehearsals for *Death of a Chief* (Appendix One). An impressive, living (and ever-growing) catalogue that came out of The 2014 Summit—an annual gathering of Indigenous theatre practitioners—immediately follows (Appendix Two). This community-authored catalogue chronicles thirty years of Indigenous presence on the national stage. A wonderful resource for researchers, theatre professionals or interested audience members who wish to begin (or to continue) a dialogue with Indigenous works and their creators, this living document is also an invaluable gift to Indigenous artists who live and work today or who are yet to come. True to its author's stated intention, *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* initiates a conversation "'about becoming'" (135) that is yet to be completed. Casting her "small medicine bundle" (135) upon enervated waters and following the path of its ripples ever outward, Nolan issues a cogent invitation to all who call Canada home—artist, scholar, layperson, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous alike—to enter into dialogue and to (w)rite into history "'what this place is going to become when our stories become visible'" (135).

NOTE

1 Whenever Indigenous people express their identity publicly in this country, this is a performative event. To speak one's language in public, to wear traditional regalia (or a modern creation containing traditional design elements), to dance, to tell a story, to utter belief, or to declare nationhood is more than an expression of identity (which is still a subversive act, as it resists the state's continuing project of assimilation through legislation); it also serves to *construct* identity—aiding the Indigenous "performer" and witness alike to become more comfortable with and more proficient in ancestral language, to deepen familiarity with Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and to strengthen relationships between flesh and spirit across temporal zones, linking the ancestor to descendant through the performing body in the present moment and deepening the connections between that body and the creation.

Now Available! *Canadian Theatre Review* at Kobo's Digital Newsstand

Photo by Chris Randle

You can now browse, buy, and read the *Canadian Theatre Review* directly on your Kobo device or in the free Kobo app. **Visit bit.ly/CTRkobonewsstand**

The *Canadian Theatre Review* features award-winning, thought-provoking plays and articles on current issues and trends in Canadian theatre. *CTR* provides the Canadian theatre community with in-depth feature articles, manifestos, slideshows, videos, design portfolios, photo essays, and other documents that reflect the challenging forms that theatre takes in the contemporary Canadian arts scene.

You can also access *CTR* on the various online platforms below.

CTR Online (http://bit.ly/CTRONLINE)
Project MUSE (http://bit.ly/ctrPMUSE)
CTR on YouTube (http://bit.ly/ctrYTUBEVIDEOS)
Website (www.canadiantheatrereview.com)
Facebook (http://bit.ly/CTRFaceBook)

For more information about the *Canadian Theatre Review*, please contact us at Tel: (416) 667-7810 or email: journals@utpress.utoronto.ca.

ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Canada

Conseil des arts du Canada | Canada Council for the Arts

University of Toronto Press - Journals Division
5201 Dufferin Street, Toronto, ON Canada M3H 5T8
Tel: (416)667-7810 Fax: (416)667-7881
Email: journals@utpress.utoronto.ca
www.canadiantheatrereview.com

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS
Journals

UNIVERSITÉ Concordia UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF FINE ARTS

Department of Theatre

STUDY THEATRE

CONCORDIA.CA/THEATRE

DESIGN · DIRECTING
DRAMATURGY · ACTING
PLAYWRITING · TECHNOLOGY
SOCIALLY-ENGAGED
PERFORMANCE CREATION

T15 25397