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Special Issue Editorial: 
Aesthetic Interventions: Implications for Social Justice Through Art and Performance

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What precisely are the implications for education and social justice when examined through the lens of art and performance? What are potential impacts that may result from these artistic and aesthetic interventions within our contemporary society? This special issue investigates a variety of questions concerning this theme and presents a collection of voices from contributors who attempt to grapple with complex questions, theories, methods, and practices, all the while examining the intersections of art, performance, and the ways that these topics speak to aspects of our ever rapidly changing world. In this issue, we strived to highlight a diversity of thought, theory, and subject matter, especially given that notions of art, performance, and aesthetic intervention are effectively enlivened when examined from a position of pluralism and multiplicity. For this reason, we have included a breadth of works that investigate various forms of aesthetic interventions and the diverse ways which these ideas can disrupt and deconstruct (or reconstruct) notions of hegemony.

Further, this issue takes into account some of the pedagogical considerations for learning and investigating potential avenues for social justice through art, aesthetics, and culture, and ways to integrate more profound questions on current discourses around knowledge, education, and social responsibility in our ever-evolving world. Each contributor brings a unique approach to the theme of this issue, while endeavoring to address different aspects of these questions. The authors take into consideration the critical ways which art, education, and scholarship are contributing to a growing discourse on the implications of art and aesthetics. Also, the authors underscore the impacts of art, aesthetics, and culture on contemporary society and the world as a whole.

This special issue begins with G. H. Greer’s article titled Who Needs the Undercommons? Refuge and Resistance in Public Schools. Greer’s article brings to the fore important discourse and insights on notions of the undercommons in relation to studies, curriculum, and inclusion. Drawing on theoretical ruminations of the commons and undercommons, namely Harney and Moten’s 2013 book entitled The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study, Greer teases out the nuance of concepts and terms such as inclusion and exclusion while investigating the impacts of these on space and resources. Unique to this argument, Greer posits that:

This paper is a theoretical discussion of The Undercommons as a contribution to critical education in public schools. The undercommons serves here as an epistemic device, or a way of seeing and knowing, in relation to public education. The function of this device is
to establish an appreciative view of student survival and activist behaviours and to center educational policy as a potential mechanism of student exclusion. (p. 6)

The second article, authored by Lana Parker, entitled Pursuing Freedom, Making Strange: Pedagogical Considerations for Art as an Other takes a closer look at the ways which arts-based pedagogy can help advance and promote more democratic and ethical spaces in the classroom. Specifically, Parker tackles philosophical questions of ethics and politics, drawing largely on theories by Levinas and Arendt, as a modality that disrupts dominant hegemonies, and how such interactions and ways of engaging through art can be employed as a means to create a more inclusive democracy. In the article, Parker explains that “in seeking to disrupt dominant hegemonies and in moving toward a more just and inclusive democracy, this work aims to establish an intersubjective relationship with the other as requisite to ethics and politics” (p. 20). Parker’s article brings to the forefront critical questions about the notion of how other-centered, arts-based pedagogy may be integrated in ways that “interrogate norms across curriculum” (p. 23).

The third article is titled Resisting Indifference Through the Brooch of Bergen Belsen. The author, Kate Greenway, explores a powerful aesthetic experience resulting from “an encounter with a small hand-made floral cloth brooch donated to the Holocaust Memorial Museum” (p. 32). Greenway examines complex ideas about what it means to create spaces of remembrance that responds to Simon’s (2004) “demand for non-indifference” (p. 32). Greenway’s article raises compelling questions about aesthetic interventions and questions the ways which people are able to connect to traumatic historical events such as the Holocaust without actually having any direct experience. Greenway examines these visceral questions through the applied lens of artist-scholar, using historiographic poiesis and art-making as a form of aesthetic inquiry to reflect on the impacts of emotional response to seeing and perceiving objects and sites of remembrance.

The fourth and fifth articles in this issue engage in notions of aesthetic renditions in theatrical representations. The fourth article titled Pig Girl: An Indigenous Woman’s Perspective Through Scriptive Things is authored by Lyn Trudeau. In the article, Trudeau examines the history of colonialism and its impact on Indigenous women, focusing on the ideation of violence through theatrical representation in Colleen Murphy’s play titled Pig Girl. Trudeau applies Robin Bernstein’s (2011) theory of scriptive things to interrogate the notion of dehumanization. In the article, Trudeau reminds readers that her “paper draws explicitly from Bernstein’s (2011) theory of scriptive things—which offers a novel approach ‘to analyze items of material culture’ (p. 80)—and links this notion to how audiences interpret and make meaning of non-human entities” (p. 51). Trudeau’s paper examines the aesthetics and representations of Indigenous experience and identity in the theatre, and the implications of reexamining the impacts of colonialism and violence in contemporary performance.

The fifth article in the issue is Sky Gilbert’s paper entitled Shakespearean Pedagogy and Copious Paradox. Gilbert broadens the theme of aesthetic intervention to include “queering the classroom” (p. 64) in ways that honour the histories of LGBT people, as represented in English literature—especially in the work of one of its icons, Shakespeare. Gilbert’s much needed aesthetic intervention is aimed at queering “Shakespeare’s work for the classroom through the lens of New Historicism” and focuses on “Venus and Adonis as an exemplary Early Modern queer poem” (p. 64). Gilbert’s contestation of normative interpretations of Shakespeare is timely given the privileged place of Shakespeare in high school English literature.
For Gilbert, the paradoxes available in Venus and Adonis provide fertile and robust grounds to indicate that “Shakespeare’s rhetoric suggests the opposite. Sexual activities and loving relationships were copious – many and varied – during Shakespeare’s time” (p. 72), providing justification for multiple readings, new readings, including queer readings of Shakespeare that reject the occlusion of non-normative/dominant gender relations and sexualities. Thus, as Gilbert argues, in “Venus and Adonis”–placing the woman in the position of relentless huntress, and the male in the position of passive object of a desiring gaze – exemplify the ‘queerness’ of Shakespeare’s poem” (p. 72). Oriented towards greater inclusion—honouring the histories of LGBTQ people and women’s sexuality, Gilbert’s paper offers a way for teachers to confidently queer Shakespeare in classrooms.

In the final article of the issue, John Hansen’s Cree Elders’ Perspectives on Land-Based Education presents a substantial, and much-needed contribution that defies normative colonial practices. Hansen centers the voiced insights of six Cree Elders of northern Manitoba about a topic bounded up with thousands of years of inherited knowledge on their lands. For these chiefs, education cannot be separated from the lands and people who give rise to it—hence the urgency to prioritize the articulation of a Cree Indigenous model of land-based education for the geographies of its provenance which may have powerful resonances with other Indigenous land-based education models in Canada and elsewhere.

Seeking to intervene and disrupt Western/European ideological hegemony over education, Hansen argues that in such an education system, “elders with [their] cultural knowledge do not have a primary role in educating students and consequently students are not taught to understand the land and its significance in Indigenous cultures” (p. 75). The author as well as the interviewed elders, are part of the burgeoning decolonial movement in elementary, secondary and tertiary education in Canada that seeks to “decenter Western interpretations of Indigenous education that often do not teach the values, culture, and language of Indigenous people” (p. 75). To interrupt this pattern, the Elders proposed land-based education—a reclamation perceived to be “crucial to Indigenous identity and culture” (p. 82). The interviewed Cree elders assigned high valence to a “spiritual connection to the land.” This is a compelling call to action during this time of truth-telling and reconciliation, and we are better off listening and responding to these Cree Elders because all that we are and can/will be is dependent on the land.

In conclusion, this special issue brings together a range of voices and authors who interrogate and reexamine complex concepts pertaining to aesthetic interventions, while bringing to the forefront critical and meaningful ways to engage with education, performance, and art. Finally, we wish to recognize and thank Erika A. Iserhoff for allowing us to feature her art, entitled Groundwater (2018), on the cover of this issue.


References

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Who Needs the Undercommons? Refuge and Resistance in Public High Schools

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Abstract

This paper is a theoretical discussion of The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study (Harney & Moten, 2013) as a contribution to critical education in public schools. The undercommons serves here as an epistemic device, or a way of seeing and knowing, in relation to public education. The function of this device is to establish an appreciative view of student survival and activist behaviours and to centre educational policy as a potential mechanism of student exclusion. I propose that the practice of inclusion in schools coexists with unacknowledged operations of exclusion. The undercommons is employed as a lens to make such mechanisms of disenfranchisement apparent. I advocate here for an extension of inclusive education which, in addition to targeted supports for particular demographic groups, must concern itself with more general practices of disenfranchisement.

Keywords: social justice; inclusion; undercommons; disenfranchised students; public schools

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The commons as a place of communal investment and benefit is a concept that has come in and out of popular imagination since the time of Aristotle and before. Ecologist and philosopher Garrett Hardin (2009) has expressed concern with the individual interests of people who share in the common good, while philosopher and sociologist Henri LeFebvre (1992) discusses common space as produced by the way people share resources. Uniquely, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Harney & Moten, 2013) describes a space found in the relationship between people who have been denied resources, and who are joined not by the common use or ownership of space, but by belonging within the community of those who have been excluded.

This paper is a theoretical discussion of *The Undercommons* as a contribution to critical education in public schools. The undercommons serves here as an epistemic device, or a way of seeing and knowing, in relation to public education. The function of this device is to establish an appreciative view of student survival and activist behaviours and to centre educational policy as a potential mechanism of student exclusion. I propose that the practice of inclusion in schools coexists with unacknowledged operations of exclusion. The undercommons is employed below as a lens to make such mechanisms of disenfranchisement apparent. I advocate here for an extension of inclusive education which, in addition to targeted supports for particular demographic groups, must concern itself with more general practices of disenfranchisement, which are described below.

For me, *The Undercommons* formed a link between personal experience as an outsider and educational policies, in which I am complicit, that create outsiders of students. In the following analyses, I attempt to transpose several key ideas from *The Undercommons* to a public school context in hopes of provoking a similar connection between readers and their students.

First, this writing progresses through a definition of terms, then to an outline of pertinent concepts from *The Undercommons*, and third, to a number of critical considerations related to inclusive education. In this third section, I pose questions intended to support dialogue in the local context of readers, not to provide data or teaching strategies. Readers in search of such resources will find some references to inclusive pedagogies in the second section under the headings *Study* and *Planning*. I conclude with a call to practice inclusion that not only supports disenfranchised individuals but also targets mechanisms of disenfranchisement in schools.

**Defining Inclusive Education (and its Exclusions)**

Inclusion, in Canada, began as a movement advocating for the full or partial integration of students with disabilities into mainstream classes (Carr, 2016), however it has recently been extended to refer to supports for diverse student and staff demographics in terms of racialization, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) status (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

The concept of inclusion has been criticized as inadequate to social justice concerns (de Oliveira Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt, 2015). Activist and legal scholar Dean Spade (2015), for example, calls for “more than legal recognition and inclusion, seeking instead to transform current logics of state, civil society security, and social equality” (p. 1). I argue that for inclusion to be relevant as a social justice movement it must be part of a transformative process. Inclusion must be accompanied by the recognition of existing inequity and rectifying action.

Broadly, the phrase social justice in this writing refers to advocacy for the equitable distribution of what Spade (2015) refers to as life chances. Life chances are factors which affect longevity: “housing, education, health care, identity documentation and records, employment, and public facilities, to name but a few” (Spade, 2015, p. xii).
Specifically, I employ the concept of social justice here to interrogate the complicity of public schools in the inequitable distribution of life chances. Systems of education are implicated, for example, in the predictive relationship between disciplinary expulsion from public schools and the later incarceration of students subjected to expulsion (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). Further inculpation occurs in the more frequent application of expulsion to black students when compared to non-black students who have committed similar offences (Edwards, 2016; Woodbury, 2016). This writing is concerned with the decisions that compose such patterns of injustice, and how it is possible that educators make quantitatively unjust decisions in the name of “fair school rules.” To this end, I engage with ideas from *The Undercommons*.

The undercommons is a conceptual space composed of people who have been excluded from the commons, as explained above, and its entailed rights and privileges. I use the word “disenfranchised” throughout this paper to refer to both the inhabitants of the undercommons and analogous groups of students. Halberstam (2013) details the membership of the undercommons as “black people, indigenous peoples, queers and poor people” (p. 6).

It is important to acknowledge the experiences of particular demographics; however, it is crucial not to limit consideration of students here. As noted by Crenshaw (1991, 2012), the reality of intersecting identities is not reducible. Additionally, heterogeneous public school contexts may support or target any of a variety of vulnerable populations. Therefore, disenfranchisement in this writing refers primarily to the characteristic of being excluded from the common good; demographic attributions used to explain such exclusions are secondary.

Rather than focusing on and defining populations of concern, this writing attempts to focus on mechanisms of definition. That is to say that more can be learned about the mechanics of injustice from investigations of administrative systems than from examinations of vulnerable populations. Excessive disciplinary expulsion applied inequitably to black students, discussed above, is one example of unjust definition and exclusion. *The Undercommons* suggests that this problem originates in administrative action, not in black children. As such, attempts to “fix” the behaviour of students does nothing to address the issue, and in fact exacerbates the effects of prejudice.

Several concepts from *The Undercommons* are detailed below. I do not suggest that educators attempt to re-create the undercommons in schools. Rather this writing encourages an appreciative view of the undercommons with the dual goals of: recognizing intelligences of survival and activism among students; and targeting administrative mechanisms of exclusion.

**Undercommons: A Way in and What can be Found There**

The ideas in this section have made my teaching practice more responsive to the needs of students by drawing attention to the logics of student behaviour and making explicit the construction of fugitivity by administrative policy.

**Enter the Undercommons**

What is this conceptual space? And how does one enter it? I explicate a passage from *The Undercommons* here with the goal of clarifying these logistic concerns. Harney and Moten (2013) describe the Black Panther Party for Self Defense that organized neighbourhood patrols during the 1960s to protect community members from police brutality: “Against the law because they were generating law, they practiced an ongoing planning to be possessed, hopelessly and optimistically and incessantly indebted, given to unfinished, contrapuntal study of, and in, the common wealth”
(p. 18) This quotation is exceptional because it simultaneously conveys seemingly contradictory meanings.

The phrase “against the law because they are generating law” begins the double narrative by describing the Panthers as both illegal and as lawmakers, because policy was enacted to suppress their activities. The varied definitions of three words in the rest of this quotation articulate at least two distinct meanings: “possessed” may mean “something owned, occupied, or controlled” (Possession [Def. 2], 2018) like a slave, or “domination by something (such as an evil spirit, a passion, or an idea)” (Possession [Def. 3], 2018); “indebted” may mean “owing money” (Indebted [Def. 2], 2018), or “owing gratitude or recognition” (Indebted [Def. 1], 2018); and “common wealth” sounds like one word meaning “nation” (Commonwealth [Def. 2], 2018) particularly colonial states which traded in slaves, but is written as two words meaning wealth held in common. Using the first set of definitions, the quote can be paraphrased roughly as: the Black Panthers were illegal and they planned to be slaves who owe money because of studying in formerly slave-owning states. Using the second set of definitions: the Panthers make their own laws and plan as though they are dominated by the passion of owing gratitude and recognition caused by the study of shared wealth. The first of these meanings is acceptable to forces of oppression. The second is a call to liberation. These possible meanings are made visible by the adjectives: “hopelessly” for the first interpretation, and “optimistically” for the second. Further, the word “contrapuntal” describes a song with two or more melodies, like this double narrative.

The two pertinent qualities of this quotation are: first, it may enable or disable multiple messages; and second, the content of these messages is directly related to the lived experience of the reader. Word play is used like the map hidden in a freedom song. You have to know where it is going in order to read how to get there, and the readers’ relationship to emancipation determines the interpretation. Clarification is unnecessary and in fact undesirable. To use plain language would be to invite guards to a jailbreak. Giroux (1992) explores a similar line of thinking in relation to languages of academic complexity by stating “that the call for clarity suppresses difference and multiplicity” (p. 220).

In an education context, similarly, polyvocal communication occurs among students in the form of slang language, styles of dress, locations of congregation, and body language. Such signs are only partially visible, if at all, to teachers. A cryptic phrase between students may affirm friendship as an inside joke or be part of a campaign of harassment. The effects of these communications may be apparent to educators while precise meanings remain mysterious. Entrances to the undercommons are enabled by this kind of intertextuality, distinguishing the in-group from outsiders on the basis of reference comprehension.

In terms of the lived experiences of those who compose the undercommons, both in and outside of educational contexts, they are outsiders. Art education scholar David Pariser (2009) refers to “a device for distinguishing one in-group member from another” (p. 4) as a shibboleth, a term with biblical origins. A shibboleth marks individuals included in a group, while the undercommons is a kind of anti-shibboleth: distinguishing those who have been excluded. The undercommons is formed when these excluded individuals engage each other in the social activity that Harney and Moten (2013) describe as study.

**Study**

Study according to *The Undercommons* is the spontaneous sociality of lived experience: “study is already going on, including when you walk into a classroom and before you think you start a
class, by the way” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 112). Reserves of compassion, willingness to risk, capacity for expression, engagement with culture, and accented voices, all emerge from this kind of study.

I have yet to encounter a completely analogous concept in the field of education, however some similarity to study in the undercommons may be found in non-hierarchical modes of learning such as informal learning defined by Livingstone (2006); the pedagogy of Rancière’s Ignorant Schoolmaster (1991); and Freire’s (2005) Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Like informal learning study may include: “any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge, or skill that occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria” (Livingstone, 2006, p. 206). Harney and Moten might also agree with Rancière’s (1991) statement that frames explanation as a way of subjugating learners: “the child who is explained to will devote his intelligence to the work of grieving: to understanding, that is to say, to understanding that he doesn’t understand unless he is explained to” (p. 8). Unlike these approaches, however, study in the undercommons is not necessarily intentional and is always social.

Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed is most similar to study in the undercommons because of its social nature and standpoint outside of power. However, there is a nuanced distinction: Freire’s pedagogy is intentional and emancipatory, while study in the undercommons is commonplace and unpredictable. Freire’s approach may be categorized more appropriately as a component of planning, which is discussed below.

Social justice educators familiar with the concept of prior learning or knowledge may see similarities between acknowledging study in the undercommons and considering learners’ “multiple social identities, interests, expectations, needs, prior experiences, lived realities, and learning preferences” (Adams, Bell, Goodman, & Joshi, 2016, p. 57). The important difference between prior learning and study is that the former works in service of present classroom instruction, while study is its own outcome.

In the undercommons, Harney and Moten (2013) state that:

... [S]tudy is what you do with other people. It’s talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice... The point of calling it ‘study’ is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present. (p. 110)

The use of the word study radically democratizes the idea of learning; it is a challenge to perceptions of curricular education as a monopoly of knowing.

Over, beyond, and around curricular learning, study from the undercommons takes note of social dynamics. Survival in the broadest sense of the term motivates study. In a less hostile environment survival can be joyful: the “notion of a rehearsal – being in a kind of workshop, playing in a band, in a jam session, or old men sitting on a porch, or people working together in a factory” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 110). However, students in the undercommons experience the hostility of being “different” in a public school context. They know when visibility is against their best interests. Gifted students may pretend not to know answers while illiteracy is deftly covered with bathroom breaks. These are also expressions of study. Study is a relentless experimentation, incessantly discovering accomplices and employing protective daydreams.

I do not advocate here for public school pedagogy in the style of the undercommons; rather I propose an appreciative view of study as a form of refuge. Seeing and knowing through the undercommons may allow teachers to recognize intelligence in forms of study that act in service of joy and resilience. Methods such as critical culture sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014), strengths-based pedagogy (Galloway, Reynolds, & Williamson, 2016), and culturally responsive
teaching (Gay, 2013) may help educators recognize and support study among our students, lest survival skills be mistaken for misbehaviour.

Planning

While study in the undercommons is a sociality that provides refuge, joy, and resilience, planning is the ongoing process of resistance which protects study. In the terms of complexity theory, planning creates the conditions for study to emerge. Planning defends study, for example, by attending to methods, when economic forces are oriented toward outcomes. In such a case, study thrives in the fascination required to build a car from scratch but is extinguished by a production line. Planning may then take the form of activism against the process of de-skilling workers. Generally, study is in trouble where labour is detached from purpose, discovery, and agency; and planning poses resistance to such divisions. Resistance may take a passive form like absenteeism or an active form like student strikes; it is an ongoing social experiment.

The subjects of difference who inhabit the undercommons initiate planning in support of further difference: “planning in the undercommons is not an activity, not fishing or dancing or teaching or loving, but the ceaseless experiment with the future presence of the forms of life that make such activities possible” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 74). Importantly, “[p]lanning is self-sufficiency at the social level, and it reproduces in its experiment not just what it needs, life, but what it wants, life in difference…” (p. 76). Planning resists the austerity of conformity.

Difference may bring the concept of diversity to mind for social justice educators. There are a number of distinctions between the difference that propels planning in the undercommons and diversity as it is understood in the field of education. Social justice education organized around diversity involves “eliminating the injustice created when differences are sorted and ranked in a hierarchy that unequally confers power…” (Adams, Bell, Goodman, & Joshi, 2016, p. 3, emphasis in original). In this sense, equitable diversity is an end goal that is, significantly, often supported by the implementation of policy. Planning, on the other hand, is a process, rather than an outcome, that resists policy, as explained below.

Planning appears distorted, if at all, from the commons where the rules are made: “Because from the perspective of policy it is too dark in there, in the black heart of the undercommons, to see” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 79). Planning may become invisible or appear criminal in the light. Historical examples of such distortions are plentiful. The Freedom Riders were planning in 1961, boarding buses into their own brutalization to desegregate the southern United States; in the light of curricular history, Freedom Riders disappear and are replaced by parliamentary motions. There was planning at the Stonewall Riots in June of 1969 when homeless queer kids led by trans women of colour revolted against police brutality; the political necessity of Stonewall disappears in the parade lights of Pride every year on its own anniversary. Planning made visible but distorted is apparent in current events in the criminalization of self-preservation: from immigration (Ackerman & Furman, 2013), to activism (Matthews & Cyril, 2017; Alonso, Barcena, & Gorostidi, 2013), to panhandling (Chesnay, 2013).

Educators who wish to see the planning of the undercommons, or to make it visible to students, must research to discover the exclusions of curriculum. When we include stories like the Stonewall Riots or the Freedom Riders in our teaching, we offer a connection to students who see their lives reflected therein. Stories of resistance to injustice, particular to local contexts, are important educational resources. In addition to these, pedagogical models which support the development and scholastic direction, of planning skills among students include: problem-based learning
Policy

From the perspective of the undercommons, policy inevitably conflicts with the forms of study and planning described above. Policy is the instrument of efficiency; it seeks measurable, predictable outcomes. The immeasurable social experiments and emerging differences of planning and study cannot be reconciled with administrative control as exercised through policy.

Policy from the perspective of the undercommons operates under three rules. First, it diagnoses planners as problematic and prescribes itself as the solution; “This is the first rule of policy. It fixes others” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 78). Second, policy requires the participation of planners in the fixing of themselves; “Participating in change is the second rule of policy.” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 80). In this way, participants implicate themselves in order to fulfill the third rule of policy: that “wrong participation” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 81) provokes all manner of crises. If there is no crisis then the participant is fixed and may be deputised in order to fix others. More commonly, any crisis at all proves that policy was right about the planners all along; and of course, they were bound to fail. The circular logic of policy as viewed from the undercommons reflects what Spade (2015) calls administrative violence.

Spade (2015) details a story which I relate here to clarify the operations of policy. Bianca, a trans girl, was sent home from her high school in 1999 for wearing clothing that affirmed her gender. She was not allowed to return to her classes. Bianca’s parents called the school and received no response. Spade met Bianca in 2002 when she was homeless, unemployed, and attempting to leave an abusive relationship. Bianca had enrolled in a welfare work program but was outed as a trans woman by her male identification (ID). She was subsequently harassed and forced to quit, losing her income and making her ineligible for Medicaid. She became homeless, and because of her male ID she was barred from women’s shelters and fearful of further abuse at shelters for men. Without an address, medical benefits, or an income Bianca was unable to complete the process to correct her ID and could not afford the hormone treatments that allowed her to maintain a feminine appearance. Bianca’s ability to pass as a cisgender woman protected her on the street from further harassment by both the public and the police. In order to afford hormone injections, Bianca engaged in sex work. The injections were not regulated because they had to be obtained illegally which placed Bianca at increased risk of infection by HIV, hepatitis, and other diseases.

Although Bianca’s story is not recent, the factors that contributed to her difficulties are relevant: transgender youth are still significantly over-represented in groups of early school leavers, homeless youth, and survivors of violence (Morton et al., 2018; Keuroghlian, Shtasel, & Bassuk, 2014).

In the language of the undercommons Bianca planned to survive by expressing her gender, but this plan was subverted by school policy, causing her not to graduate and significantly reducing her prospects for employment. Following the first rule of policy according to the undercommons, Bianca’s school would not accept her attendance until she fixed her gender. Bianca then followed the second rule of policy and made attempts to become a participant. She tried to stay at shelters and enrolled in a social welfare work program. In each of these cases, she experienced the crisis of harassment. Following the third rule of policy, these crises were framed as the result of Bianca’s
wrong participation: she did not have the right identification. For survival, Bianca must then become a fugitive by engaging in criminalized activity: sex work and the illegal procurement of hormones.

In an educational context, considering policy, according to The Undercommons, pushes educators to ask how the rules in our schools create, rather than respond to, fugitivity among students.

**Fugitivity**

Being a fugitive according to The Undercommons means being marked as an outsider. Fugitivity happens to people when: first they act, and second policy outlaws those actions. But fugitivity must also be embraced. Those who refuse the rules of policy, as outlined above, become fugitive. Fugitives will not be fixed, refuse to participate, and deny responsibility for the crises that befall them. Fugitivity recognises systemic racism, classism, ableism, and cis/heteronormativity in the disallowance of demographic-specific behaviour. It is fugitive sociality that composes the undercommons in order to provide refuge and resistance.

In high schools, the undercommons provides social refuge in the form of patient listening and covert smiles to: hat wearing, cell phone texting, hall running, affection displaying, fugitive students; and granola bar giving, grade fudging, student failing, smiling before Christmas, fugitive teachers. These now-fugitive activities are planning behaviours, they sustain study for those that commit them. These things have been happening since before policy determined that education is a predictable and measurable thing. Fugitive planners generate study with unforeseeable ends and immeasurable learning. Turning planners into fugitives has some effects: ease of administration and evaluation is one; the reinforcement of unjust hierarchies is another.

Working for the equitable distribution of life chances in schools means understanding that policy which bans particular kinds of head covers, sports jerseys, shoes, and other indicators of community membership, make fugitives of the students who wear them. To maintain equitable education—rather than hierarchies of ability, racialization, and income—it is vital that educators deeply question whether school rules disproportionately affect vulnerable people. People who predominantly do not experience prejudice and who wish to support those who do must listen for coded language like ‘urban’ to mean black, ‘artistic’ to mean gay, and the names of geographic locations which mean poor. To be for social justice requires resistance to unjust policy which creates fugitives, intentionally or not, of vulnerable school community members.

**Antagonism**

The Undercommons describes a sense of “general antagonism” which arises in resistance to unjust policy. General antagonism is a “sense of dispossession, and possession by the dispossessed” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 109). This refers to the dispossession one experiences as an outsider to a dominant group and the subsequent experience of being possessed or claimed as a fellow outsider by those who are similarly dispossessed. The general antagonism occurs when disenfranchised people find each other and allow the differences between them to propel planning.

The general antagonism is a site of experimentation. As a queer person, I am often obliged to experiment with antagonism. My regular behaviour may be interpreted as an act of opposition depending on the context. Revealing the gender of a partner, expressing affection, or using a public restroom, all hold the potential of opposing cis/heteronormative values when such prejudice exists
around me. I may experiment, for example, by discussing politics in the abstract before revealing life details to determine how much of myself is reasonable to express. According to The Undercommons, “wherever and whenever that experiment is going on within the general antagonism the undercommons is found” (p. 109).

To give an example of the general antagonism’s dispossession and repossessing I must speak from the perspective of a student. As a teacher, I have been the authority figure in my classrooms no matter how casually or democratically I exercised this power. Teachers in our own classrooms reside in the commons, not the undercommons, particularly in relation to students over whom we have power.

At the start of class one day, a professor of mine brought forward a news story about a notorious academic who refused to use gender-neutral pronouns. This story was intended as a prompt for a discussion of free speech. As the only queer-identified student in the room, and someone who uses non-binary pronouns, I felt removed from the rest of the group: my gender was now a topic of debate. Speaking from a place of exhaustion, I remember repeating: “this is not interesting; this is my everyday.”

Kindly, a classmate interjected. She calmly explained to the professor that debating the existence of non-binary genders is analogous in some ways to debating the freedom of racist or anti-Semitic speech. If those issues were not appropriate to our discussion, as the professor agreed they were not, then we should not treat gender identity differently. My classmates expressed their assent, and I felt repossessed by a supportive cohort. The speaker may have had insight into dispossession by way of her own experiences. In any case, as a student, she was in a position of diminished authority when compared to the professor, and she experimented with her own safety in order to reclaim me as part of her group. That student exercised the general antagonism, and we became a tiny undercommons.

The practice of general antagonism is a social experiment which creates the undercommons, a virtual space that is cohabited rather than inhabited because it is formed between people and therefore has always more than one occupant. Dispossessed individuals who form refuge and resistance with and for each other produce the undercommons. In a high school context, the virtual space of the undercommons is created by affiliation among individuals passing out of belonging with the functions of administrative policy and into belonging with each other.

An awareness of the information gathering and community generating functions of the general antagonism in school contexts is an important consideration for educators tasked with disciplining antagonistic students. Further exploration of alternative interpretations of student antagonism is discussed below under Behaviour as Communication.

What Good is the Undercommons?

Extending inclusion as a support for disenfranchised students requires consideration and labour. The undercommons is founded in celebration of difference and originates at a vantage point that makes explicit the ways that particular students are excluded from common resources and life chances. As such, attempting to see and know through the undercommons has the potential to increase educators’ capacity to recognize and rectify injustice in schools. In addition to the important demographic-specific work of inclusion, the undercommons as an epistemic device provides a starting point for deploying inclusion as resistance to mechanisms of disenfranchisement.
I identify here three areas in particular where consideration of The Undercommons supports the inclusion of disenfranchised students. These are: first, any observable demographic patterns among students affected by school rules; second, alternative interpretations of student behaviours; and third, consideration of the need for social connections among students. I outline these below along with some of the thoughts and questions raised by a perspective informed by the undercommons.

The discussion in this section, along with relevant scholarship, and educators’ knowledge of their own school community is intended as a starting point for readers to target locally relevant mechanisms of exclusion. Some resources are listed above under Study and Planning although individual school settings will require unique approaches. School community members are deeply informed about their own school culture, and that information must be accounted for before theoretical discussions like this one can be usefully applied.

Patterns of Effect

The first area of interest highlighted by this paper’s interpretation of The Undercommons is the overall pattern of effects which stem from school rules. Such patterns may be explored by asking: first, whether intentionally or not, are there groups of students made fugitive by policy? And second, are there expressions of students’ identities which are not acceptable at school? Affected students may include those: who commonly dress outside of school in a way that is not permitted in school; who are barred from accessing concentration supports such as physical movement, music, and quiet spaces; and who do not see people like themselves reflected in learning materials or the demographics of school staff.

Further questions include: Are there ways that policies can be shifted to make schools more welcoming of these students in particular? Where segregation exists, what mechanisms reward or enforce it? Do common extracurricular activities require inaccessible cultural knowledge? What does welcome look like within disenfranchised groups? Is it possible for the school to create such conditions? Is the food in the school affordable and appealing across cultures? How might administrators defend against cultures of overwork and burnout in order to afford teachers the time and energy to connect with resources and explore these questions? In your own school context, what are the patterns of inclusion and exclusion?

Behaviour as Communication

A second area that may be illuminated differently upon consideration of the undercommons is the alternate meanings of student behaviour, particularly behaviour that conflicts with school rules or appears antagonistic. Here I reflect on a common example of antagonism as an experiment and resistance: boundary testing on the part of students. Regardless of its particular expressions, what can be learned from this behaviour?

Primarily, boundary testing indicates that the student does not understand boundaries. A boundary can only be tested when it is unknown, otherwise it is being either affirmed or transgressed. The second thing student boundary testing signifies is that the student is concerned about the rules. Tests are performed by people who are looking for information, not by those who are indifferent. Thirdly, boundary testing reveals a breakdown of usual modes of communication. Perhaps the student has experiences, such as having been lied to, which make spoken words seem unreliable. I do not write in favour of acting out as a method of discerning boundaries in public
schools. I do wish to highlight that antagonism is a basic and functional strategy for covertly gathering information; if it did not work, it would not be so common.

Reflecting on these nuances, why might a student, or any rational person, engage in antagonistic behaviour? What information does the student attain as a consequence of this behaviour? Is the information conveyed orally in school settings generally aligned with the student’s experiences? How can teachers and administrators become credible sources of information?

As a child, I remember being warned by teachers that their trust would be earned and not given. Educators of disenfranchised students would do well to remember this adage and employ it in reverse. As adults, we have the opportunity to model a healthy capacity for trust while our students may not yet have developed this skill.

Social Connections

Our ability as adults to model healthy ways of relating connects to the final area of reflection: the need for social connections among disenfranchised students. Many punitive measures within schools hinge on the social isolation of students: suspension, detention, and sending students to the office, for example. Consider that what is perceived as misbehaviour may be the student’s attempt, consciously or not, to gather information or even, ironically, to resist policies which threaten to categorize the student as a fugitive. Imagine the state of mind that leads to such behaviour: confusion about boundaries; apprehension about the credibility of school staff; and an expectation that normal behaviour, in the world of the student, will be found unacceptable by school authorities. If the student has experience of discovering school rules only after transgressing them, there may also be anxiety about which behaviours, in particular, will be problematic. Such a student will certainly seek social refuge. If the student is isolated from positive social ties, by expulsion or isolating forms of detention, it cannot be surprising when destructive socialities emerge. “Bad crowds” are more often created than fallen into, by young people seeking social connection.

Bearing these possibilities in mind, how can reasonable order be supported within schools without the isolation of vulnerable young people? Is it possible to create preventative, positive social engagement within school communities? Could restorative practices with a social component be instituted in place of suspension and detention?

Above are only three avenues of critical inquiry that arise from a reading of the undercommons. Readers may follow another line of thinking to investigate the nature of exclusion in their own schools. The purpose of such reflection is to isolate the factors which perpetuate the disenfranchisement of vulnerable students.

Targeting Exclusion in Public Schools

I have attempted to employ the undercommons in this writing as a way of seeing and knowing. *The Undercommons* is used here to detail the pathologizing encounters which occur between administrative structures and individuals who are found to be deficient or fugitive according to policy. I hope to have made two things explicit here: first, the value of study or learning as a social project unrelated to administrated education; and second, the methods by which fugitivity can be created by school systems rather than solely committed by students.

Conventionally, inclusion relies on the identification of individual students who need support. In addition to that important work, inclusion that targets disenfranchisement would rely on the
identification and cessation of exclusionary school practices, such as the excessive use of disciplinary expulsion. I argue for inclusion that not only supports marginalized students, but that also exposes and disables the means through which school systems contribute to the creation of student marginalization.

The inclusion of disenfranchised students means bringing practices of exclusion to the centre of our teaching in order to expose and dismantle them. The identification of exclusionary practices is meant to be supported here by a three-way conversation between: the lived experiences of readers in their school communities; relevant scholarship such as the resources referenced under the headings Study and Planning; and critical questions like those raised under the heading What Good is the Undercommons. Targeting school operations which create student disenfranchisement will benefit not only students who have been identified as marginalized, but also those with stories that are unknown to schools, and those who struggle to support their peers in isolation.

Wherever systems mark the in and outside of functionality and normalcy, a need is created for refuge among the excluded, and the site is set for resistance. In such situations, the undercommons is the underside of administration. Teachers on the front line of educational inclusions and exclusions may become more deeply informed about the effects of school systems on disenfranchised students by employing the undercommons as an epistemic device. By seeing and knowing through the undercommons, we may recognize the strengths that learners employ in service of survival and activism, and invite these forms of study into conversations with curricula. When we alter our teaching practices according to such recognitions we affect the inclusivity of educational systems that are, after all, composed of teachers.
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Pursuing Freedom, Making Strange: Pedagogical Considerations for Art as an Other

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Abstract

This analysis addresses the ethical and epistemological considerations for using an arts-based pedagogy in the classroom as a means of disrupting dominant hegemonies and as a foundation for a more inclusive, robust democracy. The work advances two arguments. First, education must seek recourse for a renewed democracy by focussing on our ethical and political responsibilities in relation to the other. Second, art can serve to act as that other in unique and powerful ways in the classroom. I begin by proposing that an intersubjective relation is at the heart of both ethics and politics. I then consider how art can serve as an other in that relation. To conclude, I discuss the pedagogical implications for art as an other in pursuing freedom and advancing toward democracy.

Keywords: art; art pedagogy; ethics; democracy; other

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This study explores the possibilities for an education that forefronts the intersubjective relation as the heart of both ethics and politics, and that enriches learning through a considered approach to the arts. First, I argue that in the face of post-industrial liberalism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism, education must seek recourse for a renewed democracy by focussing on our ethical and political responsibilities in relation to the other. I suggest that art, as an encountered sign, can serve as an other in the classroom. The last half of this analysis considers two possibilities for pedagogy: art as a way of pursuing freedom and art as a way to move toward a deeper, more responsive democracy.

The Significance of the Other

In seeking to disrupt dominant hegemonies and in moving toward a more just and inclusive democracy, this work aims to establish an intersubjective relationship with the other as requisite to ethics and politics. To elaborate on the significance of the other for ethics and politics, it is useful to contemplate the work of Levinas (1989, 2011) and Arendt (1998). Their work offers possible consideration for how (and why) the other might be established as a primary point of departure in our search for meaning-making that is simultaneously inclusive and disruptive.

Levinas: Listening, Responsibility, Wisdom, and Freedom

Levinas (1989) proposes the conditions for an ethics that is rooted in our inherent responsibility for the other. Each person assumes a pre-ontological responsibility for an “other” whose place and space they inhabit. Levinas (1989) notes, “one has to respond to one's right to be, not by referring to some abstract and anonymous law, or judicial entity, but because of one's fear for the Other” (p. 82). A person meets this responsibility through an interaction with the other in which the self (I) becomes a listener who is vulnerable to the other; this other speaks to me and calls me into question. In this interaction, where I am the listener the other becomes my teacher, I listen with the aim, not of possessing a complete knowledge of the other, but with the goal of breaking apart my own incomplete understandings of the world. I resist complete knowledge, the pretence of full understanding, which Levinas (1989) terms the bonne conscience, by seeking the uncertainty of the “mauvaise conscience” (p. 82) instead.

The distinction between the bonne and mauvaise conscience can be articulated as the difference between knowledge and wisdom. For Levinas, the bonne conscience is synonymous with Western epistemologies that prioritize the mastery of “accepted doctrine, teachings, [and] sciences” (Levinas, 1989, p. 77). Knowledge, independent of the other, is self-contained and untroubled, and “to know amounts to grasping being out of nothing or reducing it to nothing, removing from it its alterity” (Levinas, 2011, p. 44). The mauvaise conscience is, on the other hand, fragile. It is disrupted by our interactions with the other. Listening to the other troubles the mauvaise conscience, breaks through our sense of self and surety. Wisdom, for Levinas, emerges only through this intersubjective relation with the other.

This reading of ethics rejects conventional Western philosophical tradition, which correlates knowledge and being (Eppert, 2000) and has direct implications for learning. Learning for knowledge is “linear, cumulative, and progressive and leads to mastery” (van Alphen, 2005, p. 186); it unburdens the self from the responsibility to listen to the other and offers, in lieu of the
work of listening, certainty of what is and what will be. Wisdom, on the other hand, is tenuous; it emerges only through an interaction with the other in which we are forced to recognise the limits of knowing.

It is through this act of listening that the self also finds freedom. Freedom is produced through the act of listening because the possibilities for wisdom are infinite. Each interaction with the other produces wisdom. And yet, as listeners in this ethical exchange, we will never be able to know everything about the other; we will not be able to claim their alterity. There is always more to learn. Listening to the other as an ethical imperative advances a “freedom [that] consists in knowing that freedom is in peril” (Levinas, 2011, p. 35). This uneasy freedom is not a freedom from rules and obligations, but a freedom to submit to the ongoing work of listening and responding. In this way, freedom and wisdom emerge from the same space: from the demand of responsibility born of existence; from the call to listen; and from the uncertainty summoned forth in the shaky spaces between self and other.

**Arendt: Politics, Natality, and the Common World**

If the other is central to ethics, then it must also be the foundation for action, or politics. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1998) observes “no human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature’s wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings” (p. 22). She goes on to describe a political process that necessitates the presence of others, is rooted in the act of speaking, and resists conformity. This reading of politics relies not only on the interaction between self and other(s), but also on the fundamental assertion that everyone brings something new into the world. Arendt (1998) terms this newness and possibility “natality,” indicating that each person has the potential to enact change through participation in the *polis* and through a contribution to the common world. The concept of natality ties politics to listening, and to Levinas’ distinction between knowledge and wisdom, because the newness of the other is inherently unknowable. Natality endorses the suggestion that the alterity of the other lies beyond the grasp of knowledge.

Another aspect of Arendtian politics that is useful to the discussion of the other, and which is particularly relevant to a question of how educators might consider art in the classroom, is her emphasis on the common world. The common world is the shared space where democracy happens and it implies both a historicity and futurity. Arendt (1998) suggests: “if the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men” (p. 55). In the common world, one’s actions are imbued with a new purpose: what one builds in a lifetime should not merely advance personal wealth, but ought to surpass one’s own existence and become part of a larger world. Individual acts of interruption toward change become expressions of self that give meaning to a person’s existence through hope, through participation in a common world, and through the creation of something that speaks beyond one’s own sphere of need. It is precisely for this reason that the arts are important. As Arendt (1998) articulates, the arts interrupt in the moment of creation, but they also abide:

*If the animal laborans needs the help of homo faber to ease his labor and remove his pain, and if mortals need his help to erect a home on earth, acting and speaking men need the*
help of *homo faber* in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all. (p. 73)

By both interrupting and abiding, the arts serve a unique role in the common world. The common world becomes a context for emergent gestures toward democracy, but also a space where the traces of gestures past may reappear, to be studied and questioned, and to provoke further interruption.

**Coming Together: Intersubjectivity as the Basis for Ethics and Politics**

By both interrupting and abiding, the arts serve a unique role in the common world. The common world becomes a context for emergent gestures toward democracy, but also a space where the traces of gestures past may reappear, to be studied and questioned, and to provoke further interruption.

**Why Art as Other?**

Art, defined broadly here as engagements with visual art, music, film and theatre, dance, and literature, offers several possibilities for the intersubjective relation and for political action. Before proceeding with the argument for art as an other, it is relevant to note that Levinas (1989, 1991, 1996, 2011) presented ambivalence about arts’ capacity to function as an other in the intersubjective experience. While it is beyond the scope of this work to address this ambivalence, it is helpful to note that a body of scholarship exists interrogating Levinas' complex writing on the subject and developing ways to theorize art as other (Eppert, 2008; Kearney, 1995, 1999; Kenaan, 2011; Robbins, 1999, 2005; Staehler, 2010; Zhao, 2014).

Adams (2002) notes that art can: express the ideas and emotions of an individual or a group; become the voice of movements and protests; deepen commitment to a movement; reach a broader and more varied audience; have effects on broader culture; and evoke emotion. The connection between art and affect is important. In her work on art and trauma, Bennett (2005) uses a Deleuzian understanding of art as an “encountered sign” (Deleuze, as cited in Bennett, 2005, p. 7) to suggest that art is first received not through recognition or cognition, but through how it is felt. Deleuze (2000) notes that “thought is nothing without something that forces and does violence to it. More important than thought is ‘what leads to thought’; more important than the philosopher is the poet” (p. 95). In this way, art becomes an impetus for thought and for listening. The affective operations of art are less about form and substance, and more about bringing the viewer into a receptive state for thinking, listening, and responding.
A second consideration is that art makes space for reflection and responsiveness without the pretence of truth. Deleuze (2000) contends:

> the truths that intelligence grasps directly in the open light of day have something less profound, less necessary about them than those that life has communicated to us in spite of ourselves in an impression, a material impression because it has reached us through our senses.... (pp. 95-96)

Art, when seen here as a sensory impression, becomes a profound mode of communicating because it not only contains some substance and form that require thought, but also because, even more primitively, it engenders an affective response. This is perhaps why it is easier to turn away from news items about genocide than it is to watch documentaries or to view art or to listen to music expressing that particular trauma. The media pretends at the “open light of day” and is viewed with jaded cynicism. Whereas media feigns the offer of truth without taint, reality without the veneer of hegemony, art is honest in its innate positionality.

The fact that art works as an encountered sign, is felt more than thought, leaves us potentially more open and more receptive than we might otherwise be to the ruptures of interaction with the other. Art renders us more receptive to “listening” and to wisdom through our affective response. And while it may not evoke the same immediacy and power of a human interaction, art brings the voice of the other into spaces that the human other cannot attend (including the confines of the classroom). The connection here, made between art and affect and the orientation for an encounter with the other, is important because it advances the idea that art can perform an ethicopolitical function and that it can be especially effective because it is felt rather than understood. The linkages between art, affect, and the ethicopolitical are also significant because they invite a sense of futurity that breaks from the moment of the present and toward something that may be. Once again, art draws on affect by refraining from offering “a reassuring mirror reflection of a subjectivity already in place” (O’Sullivan, 2010, p. 200), art liberates us from the tyranny of a future defined by the present and leaves us uncertain. It is a sense of uncertainty that evokes a sense of the possible. Put another way, it is an uncertainty that emanates the fragile light of hope.

**Creating the Conditions for Art as Other in the Classroom**

So what does an other-centred ethics and politics mean for an arts-based pedagogy? If the arts are a voice of the other, then they ought to be meaningfully integrated, through both creation and analysis, as modalities of literacy to build meaning and interrogate norms across curriculum (for more on this see Albers & Sanders, 2010; Apple, 2006; Cowan & Albers, 2006; Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2015; Lynch, 2007; Russell & Zembylas, 2007; Zhao, 2014). And yet, a focus in recent years on literacy and numeracy, on standardized testing, and on achievement (high grades, good jobs) has diminished the scope and depth of art teaching (Zhao, 2014).

For the remainder of this analysis, I advocate for a pedagogy that advances toward goals of freedom and democracy by upholding the meaningfulness and importance of art in the classroom. I examine Greene’s (1973, 1994, 1995) thinking about art to articulate the goals of the pedagogy and a range of scholars to develop particular strategies in support of the pedagogy. In this way, I illustrate how art can open classrooms to the plurality and possibilities of the other by making
space for the pursuit of freedom and by “making [the world] strange” (Greene, 1994). I also offer strategies for educators to consider in creating the conditions for art as an other.

Art and the Pursuit of Freedom

Art exists beyond the confines of knowledge and the bonne conscience. There is no certainty or pretence of truth in art because “art cannot be known in the same way we know 1+1=2” (Zhao, 2014, p. 247). Art provokes the mauvaise conscience by confronting us with the other in a way that preserves the other’s alterity and draws us closer to wisdom. It exceeds us in much the same way as we are exceeded in a face to face with the other who we cannot completely understand or claim. This is where we find freedom.

Greene (1994) describes this surplus by noting, “no accounting, disciplinary or otherwise, can ever be finished or complete. There is always more. There is always possibility. And this is where the space opens for the pursuit of freedom” (p. 128). Greene’s (1994) chapter in The Dialectic of Freedom, titled “Multiplicities, Pluralities, and a Common World” brings together the idea of multiplicity with the potential for the common world. In it, Greene suggests that in listening, attending to voices from an other, we open ourselves to possibilities for freedom. Using Merleau-Ponty, she notes that, “the freedom to be sought is inextricably meshed with responsibility and obligation” (Greene, 1994, p. 100). She also determines that art is one of the most powerful tools for pursuing that freedom through listening and exploring multiplicities:

art objects – not only literary texts, but music, painting, dance… have the capacity, when authentically attended to, to enable persons to hear and to see what they would not ordinarily hear and see, to offer visions of consonance and dissonance that are unfamiliar and indeed abnormal, to disclose the incomplete profiles of the world. (p. 129)

To do this requires a careful attention to pedagogy that does not foreclose alterity and presume knowledge. It requires that educators create the conditions for the study and creation of art in ways that pursue freedom through listening, through responsibility. Three strategies for teaching toward freedom are suggested below.

Pursuing freedom through questions for wisdom. One strategy is to make space for a particular kind of listening that moves away from the boundaries of a knowledge discourse to the possibilities of an interpretive or interruptive inquiry. Todd (2003) provides a way into a space of inquiry that integrates Levinasian listening with education. She suggests that this type of listening should form the foundation for a pedagogy rooted in social justice. Todd (2003) notes, “underlying each [student’s] responses is a certain quality of attentiveness in the listening of those stories; and it is this quality that seems to me to be important for considering ethical relations across difference, and ultimately for relations of justice” (p. 405). Here, the author is alluding to the particular orientation toward the other that Levinasian listening requires. It is a willingness to receive without the pretence of ownership. Todd (2003) elaborates this nuance: “someone who might deeply identify with another who may be suffering ... may not be listening and attending fully to the difference that marks the other's experience as unique and distinct from one's own” (p. 405). As teachers offer students multiple voices through exposure to art, they must also encourage a certain orientation that refrains from presenting the other as an anecdote of history or a fact to be seized
and memorised. Teachers can do this by disclosing the limits of their own wisdom and by presenting the other as an indomitable voice, whose experience can affect us, but whom we may never fully claim. Teachers can, as Todd (2003) does, ask questions that draw attention away from knowledge and rely on the shaky ground of listening for wisdom: “What is it that we listen to when we listen? How does listening contribute to establishing a specifically ethical attentiveness to difference? And, how might listening open up the possibility for a just response?” (p. 405). These questions help us to pursue freedom by exposing the tenuous scaffolds supporting what we construe as factual curriculum; they oblige us to turn our search for freedom away from a freedom from commitments, toward a freedom to respond.

**Pursuing freedom through relation.** A second strategy to make space for freedom is to move away from the study or creation of art that exemplifies outcome over process or meaning. Simon’s (2005) work on memory and history, which does not insist on conformity but relies on plurality, helps articulate a way to teach art that does not inculcate. Simon (2005) contends, “the practice of a transactive public memory evokes a persistent sense—not of belonging but of being in relation to, of being claimed in relation to the experiences of others” (p. 89, emphasis in original). The lack of belonging to a group means that one is not constrained by the boundaries of a particular group or set of rules. Using a relational approach, students are not bound to produce a specific outcome with their art nor are they compelled to identify the “right” meaning or message. Instead, educators can help students to explore art as a means of expression and as a voice of the other without insisting on replication or on one right way to interpret the work. Arts pedagogy shifts away from performance of perfection, and toward the creation of a relationship between students and the possibilities for art as inquiry and response. It is an approach that may render the learner more willing to question the role, purpose, and function of art from the past; also, more importantly, because the students are not forced into belonging or conforming, they may be more prepared to create art in response to their own socio-political context.

**Pursuing freedom through transactional memory.** A third strategy is to learn to work with diverse, historical examples of art without losing the ability to look forward into the possibilities for art as interruption. A significant amount of education, especially art education, is framed using tools and examples from the past referencing a traditional canon of works and principles. An educator must learn to interact with this form of art without foreclosing possibility for newness and natality. Simon (2005) assists with this reorientation from study of the past to becoming open to the possibilities for the future. He suggests collective public memory is not based on a stagnant knowledge set, but is instead concerned with creating a series of transactions that shape who we are and how we think by enacting a claim upon us. Simon (2005) calls for pedagogy that opens our historical consciousness to revision through an ongoing exposure to narratives that exceed our current impression or understanding. He notes:

> On such terms, a transactive memory has the potential to expand that ensemble of people who count for us, who we encounter, not merely as strangers (perhaps deserving pity and compassion, but in the end having little or nothing to do with us), but as ‘teachers,’ people who in telling their stories change our own. (Simon, 2005, pp. 88-89)
Because curriculum for the arts almost always draws upon the art’s history and principles from the past as its substantive content, educators must consider how to work with these tools in a manner that does not become rigid or certain. The approach is also relevant when teaching about historical context in other subject areas, since it calls historical consciousness into a space of ongoing revision. The pedagogy of transactional memory helps re-orient the learner from a disposition of passivity and indulgence (or mere appreciation in the case of arts pedagogy) to a state of personal responsibility and self-reflection.

Central to this pedagogy is the decision to work with art so that it appears not superficially as a manifestation of elements and principles that have been collated into a disciplinary method, but so that it troubles the learner’s perceptions of what art can achieve and how art’s purpose can diverge from conventionally held beliefs. To this end, educators should reference more than traditional canon, introducing art into the classroom that draws attention to the voices and authentic narratives of the marginalised, the hidden, and the invisible. These examples of art should not confirm students’ own stories, or be used merely as windows into a discussion of principles and form. Instead, art should tell the stories of both those who are in the classroom and have no voice in traditional curricular space, and those who are not represented in the classroom but who might be considered in discussions forging a common world.

“Making Strange”: The Promise of Art and the Possibility for Democracy

Now that the groundwork has been laid for the pursuit of freedom, the question becomes what do we, as a society, hope to move toward in our gestures for freedom? In reply, I draw a connection between an other-centred ethics and politics, and the potential for art as a move toward democracy. As I have previously argued, art is a powerful conduit to open students to a sense of the possible, because it is both accessible and affectively evocative. While it is difficult to always model the process of democracy within a school setting with its inherent contexts of power, the creation and analysis of art provide a window to respect for the other and hope for the future.

Greene (1973, 1994, 1995) describes this process and the utility of art for opening a classroom up to the world. In particular, she provides for a way of “making strange” (Greene, 1994, p. 122) the world that students and teachers share by shifting perspectives, interrogating meaning, questioning assumptions, and defamiliarizing the familiar. Greene’s approach for teaching lifts the terrible burden of conformity and obedience from the shoulders of students, and gives them license to engage, with respect and humility, the vast possibilities of the other. The pedagogy she develops mimics the orientation to the other that is needed to enact ethical politics and helps students begin to see art as a potential tool to explore democracy. While the previous strategies help move classrooms toward listening as responsibility, the next three can be thought of as strategies that move toward complex engagements with democracy. The pedagogy: suggests that art can render the world we share strange (Greene, 1994); is situated against the concept of the pre-formed citizen (Biesta, 2011); and relies on complex processes of witnessing and questioning (Maclear, 1999, 2003).

Making “art” strange. One strategy to move toward democracy is to show students that there is room, even within established systems, for something new, something strange. The arts
may be integrated into the classroom as an innovation or as a means to re-examine something familiar. Teachers can talk to students about how artists have deconstructed life experiences by first disassembling, and often times discarding, the “communal symbolism that made the visual arts a unifying force in earlier times” (Greene, 1973, p. 12). They can discuss how artists have pushed against the boundaries of the rules of their medium in the ongoing pursuit of making meaning and of resisting hegemonies. By working against convention, some artists have begun “tampering with inherited conventions, questioning the very idea of art” in order to force people to “examine [their] own preconceptions and expectations” (Greene, 1973, p. 12). This marks a purposeful shift away from standards and skill, and it mirrors the shift away from absolute knowledge that is required to begin with the break from the bonne conscience. Teachers can share examples of artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers and dancers who, by rejecting the historical parameters of connoisseurship, are offering people a chance, through art, of exploring the openness, tenuousness, and possibility of meaning. It is for this reason that the arts provide a unique opportunity to teachers and students, not only as a means of re-seeing the world for themselves, but also to introduce the complexity of meaning into the curriculum.

Making “the citizen” strange. Another pedagogic move toward democracy can be realized through explorations of art that challenge the narrative of the “good citizen.” Biesta (2011) clarifies that the concept of educating for democracy, manifesting as it often does through character education, is incompatible with an ethics and politics based on the other. This is because character education suggests that the ideal characteristics for a democratic citizen can be inculcated through explicit instruction of values; it proposes that what is best for democracy is what is, or what has been, rather than what could be. Biesta (2011) notes that notions of the good citizen and character education are founded in knowledge claims that reflect what a society thinks they collectively know and believe to be correct in the present. These knowledge claims include “knowledge about what a good citizen is; knowledge about what a good citizen needs to learn; and knowledge about how individuals can learn to become good citizens” (Biesta, 2011, p. 142). The danger, as Biesta and others (Mouffe, 2005; Todd & Säström, 2008) have observed, is that any type of democracy formed on the basis of knowledge claims pins down its citizens into one mode of doing, thinking, and speaking. It automatically asserts the primacy of a single ontology—of, as Simon (2005) suggests, belonging. It bars from the conversation the possibility of the other. The multiplicity of perspectives that Mouffe (2005) refers to as multipolarity does not form a substantive element of learning.

Biesta (2011) argues against the pre-formed citizen and toward the “ignorant citizen” using a pedagogy that discards claims of certainty and knowledge. This pedagogy works directly with the concept of fallibility and suggests that humility is the characteristic most needed to really learn from the other. In this vein, Todd and Säström (2008) suggest that the most important aspect of education for democracy is telling students “to come to an acknowledgement of their implication in creating—and sustaining—exclusionary forms of belonging in holding certain points of view collectively” (In Education for a Democratic Promise section, para. 3). Students are not expected to enter into the dominant discourse, accepting it as the one true path to democracy. Instead, their study of society, economics, and politics, provides possible points of connection to students who are seeking to understand their own relationship with the common world. To this end, teachers
must integrate the arts across subject areas as both a resource and as modalities of expression. They can bring examples of art into the classroom that introduce students to artists who disrupt hegemonic norms and resist tyranny through the voice their art has lent them. They can also provide opportunities through various curricula for students to create responses to issues of inequality in their communities using the arts as a voice. In this way, students can begin to identify the arts as a means of voicing resistance, participating in and influencing democracy, and constructing possibilities for new expressions of citizenry.

Making “listening” strange. A further pedagogic strategy for making strange is to move from listening for wisdom to a kind of parallax listening that brings the self/other interaction into the context of sociality and democracy. As Greene (1973) notes, art can bring diverse modes of analysis into the classroom:

Those who read or look or listen attentively can create new orders within themselves. Doing so, they are likely to discover new meanings, unsuspected angles of vision; they may discover original perceptions of what it is like to be alive, “themes of relevance” against which students can pose worthwhile questions. (p. 16)

Learning to question and to receive are central to an arts-based pedagogy grounded in an ethics and politics based on the other. In a previous section, “Pursuing freedom through questions for wisdom,” I advocated for a type of reflective questioning that seeks wisdom by making space for plurality. In this section, I suggest that this strategy can be extended into parallax questioning, a term I adapt from Maclear (1999, 2003) who develops it as a way of engaging with art.

Maclear’s (1999, 2003) work on witnessing, historicity, and art offers yet another way of making what exists strange in an effort to move toward the possibilities of democracy and justice. There are resonances between Maclear’s (1999) and Greene’s (1994) writing on art, as Maclear (1999) contends that art “may open up new sites of possibility by providing opportunities to see and hear what has become familiar differently” (p. 86). Maclear (2003) advances a parallax approach as a way of double questioning that makes space between what is and what is not represented. The first type of question, the “corrective” question, aims to deconstruct what is represented by asking “what counts as evidence” (Maclear, 1999, p. 86). The second type of question, the “contemplative” question, produces space to examine what our assumptions are in response to the work. Here I suggest a minor revision in the nomenclature of the questions that I believe offers nuance for art pedagogy. In lieu of being corrective, I offer constitutive questions to help students locate art’s relationship to the world. Contemplative questions, renamed intercessive questions to reflect the navigation of space between self and other, help students relate the art to their own lives. Constitutive questions ask teachers and students to look closely at the social influences that informed the work: What do we see? Why has it been produced? How has society determined that this work counts (or does not count)? Intercessive questions ask teachers and students to explore their personal response: What do I feel? What experiences and biases do I bring to this work? Why do I perceive the work this way? Is there another way of responding? Taken together, this double questioning serves to destabilize knowledge and certainty. It makes room for the other not only through study of art, but also through an examination of the process of how we engage with the art and how that art exists in the world. Because this double questioning interrogates art/world and art/self connections, it both challenges norms and builds pathways for
connection. It makes space for political action without collapsing each student’s uncontainable alterity.

**Concluding Thoughts**

We are bound by our skins. These bodies we inhabit present our first limit, the first press of horizon against other, the world of inside and outside. If we present students with a world as it is—a collection of facts, a reified knowledge—we serve only to reinforce the boundaries of their world: what is within and what is without. If we adhere to a curriculum of knowledge, especially knowledge as it is presented and defined by dominant hegemony, we obscure the possibilities for diversity and change. Art offers a way to listen to the other, to broaden students’ exposure to diverse perspectives, and to provoke uncertainty. Art inverts the thematization of the world: instead of saying to students “here is the world, make space for yourselves in it,” art suggests that not all is yet known of the world, that new spaces are continuously carved and forged. Art helps educators construct the world in all its fragility, suggesting that there is something beautiful in incompleteness. It forefronts the uneasy motion between listener and speaker, self and other, as the essential tension, as the responsibility that begets freedom.
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Resisting Indifference Through the Brooch of Bergen Belsen

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Abstract

In this extract from, and commentary on, my master’s thesis, “The Brooch of Bergen Belsen: A Journey of Historiographic Poiesis” (winning York University Department of Education Best Major Research Paper 2010), I explore a single aesthetic experience, an encounter with a small hand-made floral cloth brooch donated to the Holocaust Memorial Museum. At the start of my inquiry, I had only the object—the brooch itself—my emotional reaction to it, and the few lines of text on a curated museum card. I wondered, how do we create “spaces for remembrance” (Simon 2005) and what are the implications for teaching, learning and living in a just society? How are we accountable to Simon’s (2004) demand for “non-indifference?” Arts-based research methodologies such as historiographic poiesis have allowed me to merge the scholar and artist, to engage in research as an iterative process where deeper questions engender more complex and embodied responses, and to create an aesthetic intervention: an open, dialogic text and artworks that provoke new understandings of narratives previously overlooked.

Keywords: historiographic poiesis; arts and education; aesthetic inquiry; arts and social justice; historical consciousness; remembrance

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Kate’s master’s thesis “The Brooch of Bergen Belsen” which included original artwork and creative writing, won the Graduate Education Major Research Prize at York. After exhibition at the Holocaust Resource Centre, Manhattan College, her artwork was donated to the Director of the Survivors’ Speakers Bureau for educational purposes.

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Aesthetic inquiry allows researchers to combine intellectual investigation with emotional connection, resulting in a more holistic and integrative approach to knowledge seeking, where academic inquiry co-exists with lived experience. The arts are themselves a vehicle for complexity, ambiguity, and expressing the inexpressible. In them, recipients engage in a dialectic that allows for the courage to take action on social justice issues that, presented solely through traditional methods, can render an audience paralyzed or unmoved. The task of the arts is always to humanize the abstract, or, conversely, expand upon the so-called quantifiable and knowable, in order to open up possibilities for discussion, revelation, and awareness. Aesthetic inquiry moves us from our heads to our hearts and back. It disallows passive engagement; instead, it calls us to rise from our indifference and to dispel with merely theoretical examinations. As a researcher, I have used aesthetic inquiry, specifically historiographic poiesis and art-making as inquiry, as research methodologies in both my masters and doctoral work in education. My master’s thesis, sparked by an encounter with a small art object, brought to light an individual story of the Holocaust, demonstrating the power of art to not only deliver hope in times of darkness, but also in acts of historiographic poiesis, as a means to try to comprehend an incomprehensible event and its implications for myself and my students in the present. I began my project unexpectedly, caught unawares in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, on a school trip.

**Encountering the Brooch**

I lead approximately one hundred Canadian grade 11 students from Toronto along the Mall in Washington, walking in autumn sunshine that verges on the heat of summer. We are in the Holocaust Memorial Museum, an institute I have waited for, a stop I feel will be important for my research into remembrance and historical consciousness. A rather officious curator issues instructions and remonstrations. The students are respectful and only slightly restless at the lengthy preliminary instructions before being allowed to enter the site. They are, nonetheless, rambunctious teens with the energy and unpredictability of this age, with sound-bite shortened attention spans and a remarkable capacity for self-indulgence. As the educational preface drags on, they begin to push back at the edges, withdraw from their interiority or connect to their cliques in surreptitious mutterings.

Upon entering the first darkened corridor of the museum installation, however, I marvel at the change that sweeps over them. The group is uncharacteristically quiet; no, more than that: silent. They do not speak; they read, scan pictures, absorb video images. They let go of their characteristic bunchings, cliques dissolving into pairs or singles as they take their own pace. I see two girls sit quietly, gingerly, holding a printed transcript and listening to the voices of survivors tell their experience in the camps. A few others meet my eyes, shake their heads in helpless gestures, and look to me for some context but knowing none will be forthcoming, sidle away again hesitantly, eyes downwards. One or two point out something they feel I should not miss, or ask if I have seen. Some will be late for the rendezvous, and must be searched out; some writhing knots of adolescence will have already collected earlier, sprinting through horrors, unprepared to face them or willingly blind. No admonition will be given to any.

As teacher supervision is not truly needed, I drift to my own beat. It is numbing to walk through a transport car, smelling of musty wood and echoing with remembered fear, to see a clinically white scale model with step-by-step instructions on the gassing and cremation of thousands of bodies, or to look at small mounds of personal artefacts removed before the showers. But it is not the scale—I am somewhat prepared for that. It is not the numbers, the small mountains of objects,
the relentless escalation of the targets and body counts. For me, it is a small object tucked under a
large black and white mural, and its small typed explanatory card, that makes me weep. I break
down, tears flowing silently, with an immensity of feeling I cannot name. No cameras are allowed,
so I scribble with a soft leaded pencil on a folded piece of the only paper in my purse, my School
Voyageurs itinerary, trying to preserve this memory with words, and a rough sketch, and the force
of my will:

I have seen the most beautiful object in a place of unfathomable sadness.
It is not made of precious metal or jewels. It was not crafted by a renowned artist or discovered
as a rare archaeological or anthropological finding. It is not an object of transformation. This is
not a fairy tale.
It is small and easily overlooked, tucked under a huge photo mural of figures, and I almost do not
notice it. It’s simple to be overwhelmed in this place, to be awestruck at sheer numbers, methods,
madness. At the evil that humanity can and does perpetrate on others. And it is easy to be numb.
And yet...
I bend over and peer into the glass. I see four blue violets, grey centred, edged in white, that sing
of spring, perched lightly in harmony with two soft crimson roses and moss-tousled leaves of
summer’s promise. Delicate yellow and red berries, ripe like the autumn harvest, lead to ochre
mums. All wrought from soft cloth with such care. A token. A gift.
And a tiny card: “On May 19, 1943, Sala Spett received this cloth flower brooch as a birthday
present from her husband and two children while the family was imprisoned in Bergen Belsen
concentration camp. They traded their meagre bread rations to another prisoner to purchase this
gift.”
In such a place, at such a time, such a gift.
Framing a Response

And thus, my quest began, my non-indifference. My aesthetic experience, an encounter with an object, exceeded the finiteness of this object, in very profound ways. I made an immediate, strong, subjective connection of some kind, despite knowing that I could never truly identify with those who underwent this hell. Historians Sam Wineburg and Chris Lorenz (2004) locate historical understanding “between the poles of familiarity and strangeness” (p. 29), and it is this thin line that I walk. I wonder how people can connect to traumatic events of history through which they have no direct experience. And yet, somehow this is what I have been doing since the moment of seeing and perceiving this brooch. Despite my initial inarticulate emotional response, my imagination, intellect, and spirit were all engaged. As educators, we ask students to make creative investments in learning, where they must negotiate this same dichotomy. They must invest the self in the other, not subsuming one or judging the past through the lens of the present, and yet seeing the connections and implications of the past for the present and the future. How do we develop these investments in knowledge, how do we all find a glimpse of understanding in the strange yet familiar, and why is that important, both for my students and for myself?

I knew that by recording the physical details of the brooch, I was beginning a journey of investigation into memory and remembrance that would be layered in many ways. I am, in Roger Simon’s (2005) terms, “touched” by the testament of another, a synonym for those occasions when one is ‘moved,’ when one begins to feel a range of possible psychic states in response to another’s story: sorrow, shock, elation, rage. There is obviously some form of human connection...an empathic response to stories and images of other's plight, [and] this is clearly one trajectory through which an archive of narrative and images might be redeemed from its hellish construction as a set of disconnected fragments. (p. 136)

While Simon suggests that there are also other less affect-laden possibilities in dealing with the fragments of difficult history, this type of identification is one way I found myself drawn into this story, a point of connection.

Part of my task would clearly be to work with this narrative fragment and endeavour to piece together not only the story of other lives during a historically horrific event, but also to consider how to respond to the information gathered. “Much depends upon the structure of our mode of attention, on how we audience the stories and images that come before us. For the onlooker does not simply encounter testimonies that speak for themselves” (Simon, 2005, p. 138). How will I be able to construct meaning out of mere splinters of record, places, times, events, and customs that are foreign to my experience? As the Irish poet, Eavan Boland (1995) writes, “the way to the past is never smooth...Every step towards an origin is also an advance towards a silence” (p. 254). The voices of ghosts of the past and those living in the present call out for remembrance. What might I pay attention to or disregard due to my historical consciousness?

The brooch would convey the story of a series of people with names and identities and thus help humanize an event where the sheer numbers of mass murders threaten to dull the senses. The brooch is a way to rescue the humanity of one family, and to make this heinous historical event a narrative of people rather than statistics, to create a painful, tangible link between the spectator and the participants in the remembrance of historical trauma. Many such “object survivors” were “donated to the [Washington Holocaust Memorial] museum. These were not only to be evidence of Nazi crimes or American responses but would illustrate ““armed and spiritual resistance”...rescue... [and] re-establishing life anew” (Linenthal, 1995, p. 321). The brooch is one
of these object survivors, and this subsequent exploration is not the evocation of collective cultural memory or dominant historical narrative. As Sam Wineburg (2001) suggests in *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, “attempts to arrive at a conception of collective memory that bypasses the individual, a collective memory curiously held by no one in particular, will run aground on the banks of reductionism and essentialism” (p. 250). I was motivated by the individual story. I then needed to consider how to respond, how to commit an act of remembrance, “a mature form of public memory” (Simon et al., 2002, Endnote 4), but one that is also individual, artistic, and adds to the range of possibilities of academic and aesthetic research. Yet I felt paralyzed by an inability to grasp or process even the miniscule shards of knowledge I had been given, emotionally or intellectually.

Britzman (1998) terms difficult knowledge as knowledge of traumatic history, one that disrupts the learner’s sense of self, continuity, and predictability, where “we are given too little and too much, too early and too late” (p. 134). Handling difficult knowledge demands engaging with death and loss, pain and suffering, and a sense of helplessness in the face of horrific events that have already happened. Britzman suggests, “perhaps this time of belatedness, when learning is made from loss, makes learning from difficult knowledge so difficult” (p. 118). She posits, “if teachers and students are to commit themselves to the interminable work of social justice and ethical understanding, it is still necessary to explore how the learner comes to identify and dis-identify with difficult knowledge” (p. 119). This identification and dis-identification with exploration of affect and intellect, of acceptance and denial, of trying to frame a coherent narrative where none is to be found, to find an explanation that will never be forthcoming, is a daunting task. “What am I supposed to do with the stories of others, in particular stories of widespread suffering and trauma? How and why would it matter if accounts of systemic violence and its legacies were part of my memorial landscape?” (Simon, 2000, p. 17). For Britzman (2000), the effect of trauma is “the incapacity to respond adequately to a terrible and shattering event, the incapacity to think an afterward, and to make meaning from the ruins of experience” (p. 33). I have to frame a response of some kind but traditional forms — the linear essay, the five-chapter thesis — seem limited and disconnected.

**Aesthetic Interventions: Historiographical Poiesis and Art-Making**

My solution became the use of aesthetic intervention. I knew that I wanted to generate art of some kind, that not just words would suffice to contain my response. In Rishma Dunlop’s (2005) terms, “historiographic poiesis” (p. 112), art-making in response to history, began to take a visible hold on me. It is through this lens that I could see my way to the beginning, using it to frame a response, to guide my way forward in this investigation, and in my investment in the people I longed to connect to, whose story moved me immeasurably, and whose fate I wished I knew. In spite of my ignorance, I felt compelled to honour them in some small way. I wanted to create. I could in no way claim to find a universal response, but I did try to both honour and expand the way I represented this artefact and shared this story. Included in this paper are images of four works of art using glass as a medium and a metaphor, invoking by turns shattering, breaking, and obscuring, balanced with delicacy, transparency and connection. “The Brooch” involved recreating the brooch itself, the colours and shapes coalescing into the beauty of the object itself without commentary or political statement. “Matching Necklace” was meant to investigate the interplay between beauty and horror, the brooch evoked through the floral medallion and leaves,
juxtaposed with barbed wire and triangles consistent with those worn by camp inmates. “The Brooch II” is collaged from sections of Sala Spett’s son Martin’s (Monius) Holocaust paintings. Traces of Holocaust imagery creep into this version of the brooch in subtle ways that demand a more extended view. The final and most complex piece, “Lines of Force,” evokes Kristallnacht, erasure, tears, and rivers of blood. However, the red line finishes in drops that are created with flower petals. These very small, perhaps to be unnoticed petals, are an allusion to the brooch and its gifting, a small act of hope and beauty in an otherwise colourless and brutal world. Two singular words in the corners ask us to “remember…a gift.”

Historiographic poiesis became the methodology and aesthetic intervention that manifested naturally for me and drove the rest of my work. Historiographic poiesis begins with an encounter with a wounding event in history. This encounter may be superficially known by the receiver, with some understanding of the historical location and magnitude, such as the knowledge of what is variously labelled the Holocaust or the Shoah. The genesis may be a tiny fragment, or in my case, an object, that spurs a need to comprehend the enveloping story, and a desire to recognize the individuals swept up into the incomprehensible forces of history. There is a feeling of being called to, a desire to humanize an unknowable event in order to try to grasp it, a feeling of responsibility to those whose stories yearn to be heard. And then, in the poiesis, there is a kind of artistic or aesthetic response, whether in the form of writing poetry, devising a play or creating music or art. These acts of creation in some way try to neutralize the acts of destruction encountered, and strive to offer a kind of salvific counterforce. The art-making provides a commentary and a challenge to those who witness it, because these stories of the past are the legacy of our collective choices, how we, as a people, have received, witnessed and participated in such aspects of history, and how these patterns carry forward in our lives. In my work with students, I try to provide an environment where they will make connections to moments of history that will inspire their artistic and empathetic responses. And so, I embarked upon this ongoing journey on my own.

In Marla Morris’ book Curriculum and the Holocaust (2001), she warns that:

- doing interpretative work around the Holocaust is not just about acquiring knowledge. Rather it is about understanding the event while standing at the limits of understanding...it is to understand that we cannot understand. Still we stand at the limits of our own situatedness, at the limits of our own horizon. (p. 6)

My encounter with this event is tangential. It is only my visceral experience in the Holocaust museum and my aesthetic encounter with an object that led me in my own journey from a detached observer who tried to understand and know about this event, to one who felt driven to invest myself in the journey of remembrance. I might empathize, but I can never truly know. I can only try to invest in a narrative told from a perspective that is not my own and “understand the structure of narrative is to comprehend the limits and potentials of historical understanding” (Gergen, 2005, p. 115). I realize that I cannot tell the truth of this event; however, I can try to be attentive to the implications of my attempts as an act of remembrance and non-indifference. By calling upon history, layered through art objects, I am creating work that engages the intellect, the emotion, the spirit, and the creative impulse, each layer enhancing the other, inviting the viewer to engage with the material, and bring something of their own imagination and experience to their understanding. It is with this type of approach that we hope to engage our students, with the emotional and affective, and therefore, it is worthy of developing in our own pedagogical practice.
In Freudian terms, as noted by Britzman (1998), this is the difference between “learning about” and “learning from”:

Whereas learning about an event or experience focuses upon the acquisition of qualities, attributes and facts, so that it presupposes a distance (or, one might even say, a detachment) between the learner and what is to be learned, learning from an event or experience is of a different order, that of insight... Learning from demands both a patience with the incommensurability of understanding and an interest in tolerating the way meaning becomes, for the learner, fractured, broken, and lost, exceeding the affirmations of rationality, consciousness and consolation. (p. 118)

To “learn from” we must try to come to grips with the uncertainty of knowledge, abandoning the quest for clarity, and instead embracing incompleteness and the fragmentary. We must also be ready to be implicated in the learning, to work through resistance to what can be difficult knowledge, especially in dealing with narratives of oppression and trauma, to consider what might be being asked of us as recipients. Britzman suggests that to idealize, to use hope, or to attach a higher lesson to narratives of people who endured the Shoah, so that their suffering can somehow be comprehended and honoured as a noble act, is dangerous. What, then, are our obligations? Is there an appropriate response?

Roger Simon et al. (2002) call for historiographic poetics as a practice of creative ethical remembrance, a form of learning from. This involves a doing: a re-telling of stories and an openness to reflective reception and contradictory voices. I expand this concept from poetics to poiesis, from doing or telling to making, in innovative practices of remembrance, “in the witnessing and enabling of stories staged across fluid margins—an aesthetic frame in which both fact and fiction illuminate truth, each in their different forms” (Zatzman, 2005, p. 97). I can only respond to the art object left behind in a museum, as an individual in all of her contextual placements that limit and illuminate perspective. Simon (2000) argues that “on such terms remembrance enacts possibilities for an ethical learning that impels us into a confrontation and reckoning not only with stories of the past but also with ourselves as we are (historically, existentially, socially) in the present” (p. 8). He warns of the difficulties of remembrance pedagogy in the face of incomprehensible human events. Simon does not suggest we ignore loss; nonetheless, he calls the practice of remembrance hopeful. I entered into engagement with Holocaust testimony with hope, trying to reduce the space between the strangeness of the event and time, and attempting to make this experience more immediate, a sense that it surrounds one rather than remaining separate, and that it has continued implications for our present and our future. But what does it mean to employ hope? And whose hope are we speaking of: those who have experienced wounding events, those who choose to retell those experiences, those who actively study such traumatic stories, or those who performs acts of witness? I want to honour this story, this family and this object, and its significance—but not just for them. I have a desire to travel through “paths of memory, retracing and recovering the sparks of life, until the worlds that were, and are no more, come into view” (Linenthal, 2001, p. 321).

I see a connection to my artistic impulse to create as a response to difficult history and discussions of the salvific force of art. Through art, creators and receivers may choose to witness, and even perhaps to heal. The abstract, the inexpressible, begins to coalesce into something more concrete. Such is the observation of Louise DeSalvo in Writing as a Way of Healing (1999), who talks of the custom of Native American sand painting. She reports that in these cultures sand painting is a way of healing:
When you feel sick at heart, sick in the soul, you do sand paintings. Or you make a basket. The thing is that you are focused on creating something. And while you’re doing that there is a kind of spiritual alchemy that happens...It’s all because you are intensely creating something that is beautiful. And in Native American cultures, by the time you have finished the sand painting, you’re well. The point is to heal you. (p. 154)

The handmade brooch created for Sala Spett while in the Bergen Belsen concentration camp by a young girl from Warsaw, whose name is now unknown, can be another example of this healing through creative acts. The artist, the family—husband Arthur, son Monius and daughter Rozia Spett, who “bought” the brooch for Sala as a birthday present on May 19, 1943, with their daily ration of a precious slice of bread—and Sala herself, all may have been spiritually revived, if only momentarily, by this incongruous object of beauty. Sala was able to keep the brooch with her during their incarceration, and there is a photographic portrait of her wearing the brooch that was taken in Belgium in 1946 after liberation. Sala cherished the brooch for the rest of her life, taking it out on special occasions; after her death, it was donated by her son to the Holocaust museum in 1990. Yet, it seems to me that the object is secondary to the subject; the brooch is representative of the woman but cannot be substituted for the woman. She is being served by the object, and although it is the object that remains for us to view, it is the woman’s story that resonates. From earliest times, art objects have held the stories of those who came before, traces that those in the present may never uncover. An object may be full of stories, but also, sadly, full of silences.

I begin to think again about my aesthetic response to this encounter with the object. I want to think it could also be a thing of beauty, just as that brooch must have been to Sala, and as it struck me in the museum. Perhaps this is a defensive mechanism against difficult knowledge. In order to create an art object that signifies what the brooch represents in context, I must invest in the study and representation of historical trauma in very concrete ways. Yet I was engaged by beauty and the impossibility of that beauty, the incongruity of finding something like the brooch in a concentration camp. That very incongruity stopped me and forced me to look, to think and to consider its meanings. Roger Simon (2000) notes this point of connection by suggesting that “the more concrete and specific this connection, the more likely the memories of another will be drawn to one’s attention” (p. 12). The beauty of the brooch is not exclusive to its context and surroundings; rather its intensity is amplified by the very fact of what lies outside its physical boundaries, and what is contained within its creation.

I live in a milieu of privilege, a country of stability and peace. And yet, as news broadcasts make it clear, the erosion of peace and humanity is only a border or election away. The loss of the sanctity of human life is not a historical past; it is an ever-present threat. Emily Grosholz (2008) notes, “disaster often causes a retreat into intense aestheticism, domesticity, and the miniature (and therefore manageable)” (p. 88). Perhaps the brooch encapsulates this hypothesis. The creator of the brooch may have felt the need to make an object of beauty to counteract the ugliness of her circumstances; so too, the givers and the recipient. Its creation and its giving are small but concrete acts. The making of the brooch is an act—an action. It is the opposite of nihilism, of doing nothing. In that choice, lies hope. Similarly, the Spett family also deliberately acted. They chose to engage this artist. They chose to sacrifice the materials of basic survival for the creation of an object that would serve no practical purpose other than bringing pleasure and beauty, both transitive things, to their mother/wife. Such acts, no matter how small, may have provided a kind of spiritual sustenance. Creating an art object, wearing something aesthetically pleasing, or rituals of gift giving and celebration, are small but profound acts of resistance. As an artist, I understand the
power of the act of creating, and I know that the brooch’s significance for me is also partially because it is the manifestation of a creative act. Through the creation of beauty, something of terror is diminished.

“Hope and “Object Survivors”

Most incredible in the creation story of the Washington Holocaust Memorial Museum to me was the debate over how, or even whether, to exhibit some of the “object survivors” collected. Many poignant artefacts were never displayed in the museum, and the focus of the design team on hard material rather than the individual human story within the grand narrative is another example of the primacy of ontology over epistemology—the intellect over the emotional. Ultimately, only three small personal artefacts were included in the final display: the brooch, a cigarette box, and a small pair of shoes, all overwhelmed by a large photomontage of Auschwitz. The glass insert beneath it containing the brooch would be easy to overlook. Yet, I believe the tiny light in darkness in this one specific case also holds universality, and that this event and my art-making have greater implications. I can in no way claim to find a universal response, but I can try to both honour and expand the way I represent this artefact and share this story.

When Marla Morris (2001) invokes Deborah Britzman’s claim that to suggest that there was hope in the camps is to rob these places of the difficult knowledge otherwise contained therein, I have to disagree. The giving of a gift is a hopeful act. In the face of such terrible atrocity, there must be room for hope and beauty. These are humanity’s tools of resistance, our secret treasure trove of psychic nourishment. Ultimately it is the intangibles we fight to keep—love, respect, and connection. If these are lost, then humanity is lost. I think this is what resonated so strongly for
me. It is this small act as representative of caring, family, and love, trying to bring joy to someone against all the odds, that is profound. The brooch, in this case, is not simply an object, decoration, adornment or vanity. It has a real purpose. It is a vessel of hope, a small act of resistance.

Even the idea of resistance in this context appears to be problematic for many, and this was another branch of the debate on including “object survivors” in the Washington museum, some fearing this could easily lead to “an epic Holocaust narrative in which heroic resistance gained equal time with the narrative of destruction” (Linenthal, 1995, p. 321). Although the caution against a romanticized recounting and memorialization is reasonable, this narrative is also the story of individuals not necessarily defined by the global experience now labelled the Holocaust; within it, is also evidence of a particular story not necessarily categorized by total destruction. And even for those who succumbed to the evil, how can we not rescue a part of who and what they were, by refusing to leave them only as part of a unified, global, faceless experience? “Overturning the anonymity that is often the fate of victims of historical trauma, testimony is treasured to the extent that it saves the shards of catastrophic experience from oblivion” (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 51). By finding out the names and circumstances of this family, by sharing in their small act of resistance, this moment is rescued from oblivion, and, as Martin Spett may have hoped, the brooch became the transmitter of their story to me, and through my work, to others.
Also, I am reticent to disavow the power of hope contained in the creation, giving, preservation, and donation of the brooch, which are also acts of aesthetic intervention. Even if the fate of the Spetts had not been uncovered, the act of researching and the creation of art in response to historical consciousness are also hopeful acts. I hope they will keep this story alive, and that they will inspire others to consider more deeply ways in which we need to renew our efforts to live justly with one another. Darkness remains in our lives; it will only defeat us if we refuse to acknowledge it, ignore those who are experiencing it, and deny that it can be changed. Hope is not a panacea: it is a weapon.

Acts of Remembrance

I keep returning to my central question: the question of the responsibility of the viewer/reader upon encountering stories of historical trauma. How am I accountable for the story I have received? What is an appropriate act of remembrance? How would this translate into teaching practice when dealing with similar stories of trauma as starting points for artistic works?

Audre Lorde in her poem, “There are No Honest Poems About Dead Women” (2005) asks:

What do we want from each other
after we have told our stories
do we want
to be healed
do we want
mossy quiet stealing over our scars
do we want
the powerful unfrightening sister
who will make the pain go away. (p. 216)

Is there a kind of healing that can happen through the giving and receiving of such stories? The past cannot be rewritten or altered or even truly exposed. Pain, torture, starvation, or despair cannot be diminished despite platitudes about the softening effects of time.

Eavan Boland (1995) warns,
if [an artist] does not tell the truth about time, his or her work will not survive it. Past or present, there is a human dimension to time, human voices within it and human griefs ordained by it. Our present will become the past of other men and women. We depend on them to remember it with the complexity with which it was suffered. As others, once, depended on us. (p. 254)

What then are my rights and responsibilities with this information? How do I ensure that I have listened attentively? How do I collapse the distance of the past, so that time becomes a unifying force rather than a distancing one? Roger Simon (2004) also notes that,

acts of memory must become transitive, actions that ‘pass over’ and take effect on another person or persons...[They] enact a claim—providing accounts of the past that may wound, or better haunt—that may interrupt one’s self-sufficiency, demanding an attentiveness to others that cannot be reduced to a version of our own stories. (p. 190)

I am haunted. This act of remembrance has taken such a hold over me. I hope I am able to do it justice.
Something of significance has happened to both my students and to their teacher. We have considered Simon’s admonition of our “responsibility to attend to the concerns of those who arrive facing us demanding not just apology, memorialization, and reparation but something of our time, energy and thought” (2004, p. 199). This is part of the power of art and is why I believe in its importance. I, and my students, have thought deeply about the difficult knowledge encountered and struggled with our own gaps of perception and reception.

**Remembrance and Pedagogy in a Canadian Context**

Britzman (2000) argues that “to learn from disclaimed history requires a willingness to confront one’s own discomfort, one’s own inadequacy, and the conditions and actions that coalesce to foreclose the possibilities of self and other as ethical subjects” (p. 39). I am disquieted; I think that, as a result of my encounter with the brooch, I will remain so. My thinking has been complicated, and my self-sufficiency interrupted. These are good things, for they reinforce my interconnectedness and responsibility to others. And this does not stop with a story that is focussed on suffering in other countries, at other times. We need only look to Canada’s own history to apply the same insights, and similar responses to our own “difficult knowledge” of social justice issues.
“Lines of Force” (2009)
Stained Glass, Findings, Phototransfer, Distressed Pine
Religious schools designed to assimilate Indigenous children into Canadian culture, or those whose wives, sisters, and daughters have been lost, abused and murdered, are only now being recognized by our country. Indeed, scientists even realize that trauma can have genetic effects across generations, through epigenetics, “the study of how environmental factors and experience can alter how genes are expressed” (CBC Radio, 2015). Linking the research on the long-term effects of the Holocaust to the cumulative effects of generations who passed through the residential school system, it has been discovered that psychological distress is possible not just for the experiencer of the trauma, but subsequent generations. Thus, it is even more imperative that we listen to these untold stories, and find some appropriate ways to respond. Instead of some commissions’ emphases on fault-finding, as noted by legal scholar Theresa Godwin Phelps (as cited in James, 2010, p. 49), “more narrative-inspired concern with victim voices and experiences” could be our focus, one that looks ahead to our future as a nation for all peoples, finding new ways to acknowledge the effect of past events through attention to testimony. Phelps reminds us that “gross injustices tend to deny social voice to victims by systematically smothering their aspirations and perspectives” (as cited in James, 2010, p. 50). Senator Murray Sinclair (2017) speaks eloquently about the need for embracing and understanding the need for remembrance during his time spent on the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, as he responded to frequent suggestions that survivors and the community should simply move on:

My answer has always been, “Why can’t you always remember this? Because this is about memorializing people who have been victims of a great wrong...It’s because it’s important for us to remember. We learn from it. And until people show that they have learned from this, we will never forget. And we should never forget even once they have learned from it because this is a part of who we are. It’s not just a part of who we are as survivors and children of survivors but as part of who we are as a nation. And this nation must never forget its most vulnerable people.” (“Senator Murray Sinclair responds,” para. 16-17)

It is the capacity of art “not just to witness, but to take the witness stand” (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 206) that makes it a tool against indifference, against the impulse to just move on. The calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC—2015) specifically include artistic interventions and acts of historical consciousness, part of the methodology of this paper, such as call 79, which asks for revising the “practises of the National Program of Historical Commemoration to integrate Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada’s national heritage and history” (p. 340). Also, call 83 demands “funding priority for a strategy for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process” (p. 341).

However, teachers, students, and citizens cannot wait for our government to do the work alone. Individuals might take up the challenge, through careful attention, and the transformation of difficult knowledge into creative action. Recently departed artist and musician Gord Downie’s Secret Path project of an album, musical concert, and an animated film based on the graphic novel by Jeff Lemire, for example, brought to light the story of one residential school victim, Chenie Wenjack, who died in 1966 while trying to make the long walk back to his home, 400 miles away. As Downie (2016) said, “His story is Canada’s story...We are not the country we thought we were. History will be re-written. We are all accountable” (“Statement,” para. 3). Perhaps through aesthetic intervention, we can work alongside our fellow Canadians, implicating ourselves in order to redress injustice, but also engendering understanding and healing: our own Canadian sand painting.
Whether it is Holocaust survivors, or closer to our own shores, Indigenous peoples in residential schools, missing and murdered Indigenous women, the enslaved and their descendants, interned Japanese-Canadians, the diaspora scattered from homelands, exploited migrant workers, or refugees, to name just a few more, all groups have stories of individuals who have been traumatized, silenced, or overlooked. In a multidisciplinary arts-based approach to find new ways of representing such wounding experiences, we might begin to redress these injuries and omissions. We might encourage empathy and critical reflection, unlock a greater cultural understanding, and ultimately, enact appropriate acts of remembrance.

I reflect on my own research processes of art-making as inquiry and historiographic poiesis, that I embarked upon by chance, and how much they have come to haunt me. I do not have any certain conclusions. I can only try to be open. I can try to leave those spaces for remembrance Roger Simon speaks of in whatever form they might take. Writing this paper and creating art objects in stained glass are themselves forms of remembrance. I can learn about others whose lives and experience are so very different from mine, from the fragments and traces left to me. I can try to expose my students to ways of honouring and remembering their histories, and the accounts of others, and hopefully finding something that stimulates them into investigating and rethinking a part of themselves and their world with energy.

Historical consciousness can contribute to a kind of citizenship education, as students reflect on the precariousness of their own freedom and basic rights. But this goes beyond mere historical study. Historiographic poiesis is a participatory form of exploring history: the impulse to create artistically in response to history has not only cognitive but an immediate emotional force that resonates because it includes and demands something of both the creator and the viewer. It begins to spawn a community, as multiple perspectives, understandings, and approaches are taken to create inclusive narratives of the past. The past is therefore no longer remote, separate or objectified, merely an accumulation of knowledge. It can be studied collectively and creatively, generating new ways of learning.

Marlene Kadar (2005) admonishes that “there is a need to question the restrictions we have used to exclude the voices of the deeply wounded, the refugee, and the survivor” (p. 99-100), whether it is in our historical past or the collective present that rests upon the choices made in the past. It is a lesson I take to heart. I have learned that the power of a subjective encounter cannot be underestimated in personal or pedagogical contexts. I once again learn how important it is to engage more than the intellect in responding to the fragments and traces of history we encounter, in the past or continuing into the present, at home and abroad. I learn the demands of moral education, and the attentiveness necessary to the creative possibilities in responding and honouring the stories of those who are not like us, and yet are part of us—And I learn, with sadness, that the name Sala comes from a Hebrew word for “peace.”
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Pig Girl: An Indigenous Woman’s Perspective Through “Scriptive Things”

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Abstract

Indigenous representation in various genres has always been questionable in regards to who has a voice, and content that is culturally sensitive and appropriate. This paper critically examines the controversial theatrical play Pig Girl (Murphy, 2013) through the lens of Robin Bernstein’s (2011) “scriptive things” theory. Although Pig Girl sought to give voice to Canada’s missing and murdered Indigenous women, it instead was sharply criticized by Indigenous community members. This paper explores historical ideologies corresponding to the dehumanization of and violence perpetrated against Indigenous women based on the imagery provided by those who created and promoted the Pig Girl stage play. The paper discusses how such imagery can re-inscribe prior beliefs and be interpreted with “things” depicted within the play’s narrative. The paper also addresses the function of interpellation and imagery, aesthetic intervention, and resulting associations.

Keywords: scriptive things, Indigenous resistance, power of imagery, deconstructing things, aesthetic intervention, reclaiming representation

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“A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it’s finished; no matter how brave its warriors or how strong their weapons” (Cheyenne proverb).

An Indigenous woman is placed on stage in a vulnerable state, violated, tortured, and hung on a meat hook for 90 minutes. She is in constant physical and emotional pain and cries out in anguish for someone—anyone—to help her. She is eventually strangled. This is a brief synopsis of the play *Pig Girl* (Murphy, 2013), written on the subject of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) in Canada, for which the playwright Colleen Murphy won a coveted Governor General’s Award.

**Context**

Indigenous women in Canada have endured years of overwhelming destitution (Graveline, 1998; Lawrence & Anderson, 2005; Maracle, 1996) derived from colonialism, racism, and non/misrepresentation which, unfortunately, continue to this day. However, Indigenous women in Canada are taking control and writing a new narrative for themselves. I too write from such a liminal space, from the perspective of both an artist and a scholar. As such, this discussion paper is congruent with the *Brock Education* journal’s special issue exploring aesthetic intervention and social justice through various art platforms while deconstructing and/or reconstructing ideas surrounding hegemony and colonialism. Such themes are evident in the theatrical performance of *Pig Girl* that links normalization of violence and dehumanization of the Indigenous woman appearing in the play, and that also re-inscribes fallacies and misconceptions pertaining to Indigenous women.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between *Pig Girl* (Murphy, 2013) and Indigenous communities. The paper exemplifies the power and influence of visual presence and artistic expression in society, and the possible negative effects of underlying messages in theatrical performances and surrounding elements. Theatre can play a key role in perpetuating old stereotypes and biases by way of “things,” which are analyzed here through theorist Robin Bernstein’s (2011) theory of “scriptive things.” This paper contributes to this journal’s theme by looking at epistemological implications of social justice in the realm of arts culture as well as the field of education. Additionally, the paper interprets *Pig Girl* with Indigenous insight, adapted and used to create the power to resist and generate a new narrative using the same communicative mode of theatrical performance. The paper’s antithesis thus resonates with the journal’s special issue by taking on the task of aesthetic intervention as a means of a decolonizing aesthetic experience in artistic creation and representation.

Murphy’s (2013) *Pig Girl* was rejected and deemed insensitive on numerous levels by the local Indigenous community after the play premiered in Edmonton in fall 2013, thus necessitating aesthetic intervention. Murphy authored *Pig Girl* ostensibly to voice opposition to police indifference towards Canada’s MMIW (an acronym also includes young Indigenous girls). However, despite her good intentions, the play re-inscribes long-standing tropes about Indigenous women overall. The title and pivotal image of an Indigenous woman hanging from a meat hook stand as a graphic reference to Robert Pickton, the convicted serial killer charged in 2002 for the murders of 26 women on his pig farm. As noted earlier, the play’s initial Edmonton production raised much controversy and indignation among the Indigenous community. As Meagan Wohlberg
(2016) reported in *EdgeYK* magazine regarding *Pig Girl*’s Edmonton premiere, the play “incensed the Indigenous community. … Its initial run resulted in calls for a boycott” (para. 1). As Wohlberg noted, the play captured widespread response and warrants further inquiry on a socially responsible level.

So, the question remains: How can we explain the gap between awarding-winning recognition to such discontentment for the same theatrical piece? More pointedly, how can an audience, already knowing the end, sit and watch an Indigenous woman being tortured and strangled to death?

As an Indigenous woman, I felt compelled to further interrogate such perplexing questions. *Pig Girl*, at least when it premiered, was produced solely by a non-Indigenous team without any involvement of the population to whom it meant to give voice, which may explain the confounding disparities in artistic appraisal. Arguably, the graphic violence enacted on stage functions to enscript violence against Indigenous women and re-inscribe ideologies that support the dehumanization of Indigenous women, binding them (us!) in places of inferiority and subservience.

Disturbed by the notion of portraying (and hence perpetuating) Indigenous women in such a weakened state, I begin by exploring and critically examining the elements surrounding *Pig Girl* through the lens of Bernstein’s (2011) “scriptive things.” Such elements include the play’s title, its characters and initial theatrical poster, as well as the glaring violence on stage, all of which substantiate my thesis that the play dehumanizes Indigenous women.

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper is steeped in theories of “new materialism” referring essentially to non-human entities, and such objects’ agency within performance artwork (Bernstein, 2011; Butler, 2011; Schneider, 2015; Sofer, 2016; Van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2012). Having said that, this paper draws explicitly from Bernstein’s (2011) theory of scriptive things—which offers a novel approach “to analyze items of material culture” (p. 80)—and links this notion to how audiences interpret and make meaning of non-human entities. I refer to Bernstein’s work and theory throughout the paper as a means of interpreting and analyzing *Pig Girl*.

Bernstein’s (2011) scriptive things theory expounds on ideations of “thing theory” and posits that objects become things and things prompt behaviours that often (though not always) script an absolute performance. As Bernstein states, “a script is a dynamic substance that deeply influences but does not entirely determine live performances, which vary according to agential individuals’ visions, impulses, resistances, revisions and management of unexpected disruptions” (p. 71). Bernstein’s scriptive things concept forms relationships between the real and the fictional, and describes how the two interact. This interplay provides individuals and/or groups with underlying messages—implicit and explicit—and provokes a response. The overarching scriptive thing discussed in this paper is *Pig Girl*, which is inflected with artefacts like the aforementioned meat hook that become things that re-inscribe real events.
Pig Girl

Murphy’s (2013) contentious play reopened deep wounds within Indigenous communities as it reignited the horrors serial killer Robert Pickton perpetrated on (mostly) Indigenous women. As Mali Ilse Paquin (2015) reported in The Guardian, “Canada’s worst serial killer ... targeted First Nations women,” and Pickton “tortured and killed at least 33 Aboriginals before he was arrested in British Columbia in 2002” (Justice for the Missing or Murdered section, para. 1). Worst still, Pickton was claimed to have fed the murdered women’s bodies to the pigs on his farm, thus fully eradicating the women’s very existence. At the time of Pig Girl’s premiere, the Indigenous population and leaders already were pushing for an inquiry corresponding to the hundreds of Indigenous women who either had been murdered and/or were missing. The Indigenous communities’ frustration regarding the stalled (or non-existent) inquiry coupled with the lack of collaboration in the making of Pig Girl undoubtedly aggravated their dissatisfaction with the play. Thus, while Murphy may have enscripted the real into fictional hoping to raise awareness of MMIW in Canada, she failed in her efforts. In this paper, I therefore explore how her attempts were unsuccessful, and how Pig Girl instead functions as obscene entertainment that dishonours Indigenous women. In this regard, since the onset of public interactions with the play and in accordance with Bernstein’s definition, Pig Girl embodied a scriptive thing as it prompted and incited behaviours.

The overall construct of Pig Girl presented the public a place that asserted the dehumanization of Indigenous women. Journalist Paula Simons (2013), for instance, reported that “the shocking on-stage violence of the piece is morally problematic” (para. 26). The play reified desensitization in the treatment of Indigenous women and implied that their erasure does not matter, because they are imagined as complacent with a submissive status within society. There is a long history of violence against Indigenous women in Canada (see, for example, Lawrence & Anderson, 2005; Maracle, 1996; Smith, 2015) and, as Bernstein (2011) explains, “scriptive things contain massive historical evidence” (p. 80) that may have contributed to the continuing story—and acceptance—of violence against Indigenous women. Thus, scriptive things have the ability to prompt the audience to re-inscribe values and act them out through their behaviours in everyday life.

The subservient status mentioned above is repeated and naturalized through varying contexts in the play. Although the most obvious is the rape, torture, and killing of an Indigenous woman, the latter’s sister also symbolizes the accepted, apathetic treatment from authority figures (throughout the play, the police officer cannot be bothered to search for the Indigenous woman despite her sister pleading with him to at least file a missing person report). The very act of an Indigenous women pleading and begging authorities to take action reasserts Indigenous women’s meekness and reliance upon a dominant, White male figure to be the saviour in their world. Fortunately, Bernstein’s (2011) “scriptive things” allows us to investigate and garner insight into the various functions and impacts “things” contribute to overall societal beliefs.

Title

The title Pig Girl, herein understood to be an artefact (thing) that likely introduces audiences to the play, associated Indigenous women to farm animals, suggesting that they exist for and are

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handled by those in power who do with her as they so desire. The title was demeaning and humiliating as it inferred that Indigenous women are actually held in less regard, because in this narrative it is public knowledge that Robert Pickton’s victims eventually were fed to his pigs, thus ending all traces of the women’s existence. Also, in Western society, being called “a pig” is a pejorative term that generally implies uncleanliness. Moreover, the title also equates an Indigenous woman as being a girl, which therefore equates her as being infantile, immature, and not fully capable of taking care of herself. Indeed, the title prompted Tanya Kappo, an Indigenous woman and one of the founders of the Idle No More Movement, to boycott the performance based on the play’s title alone (Simons, 2013). Bernstein’s (2011) conceptualization of scriptive things apply here; her statement that “things also literally shape human behaviors” (p. 73) certainly corresponds to Kappo’s action. Similarly, the accompanying poster initially shown in the Edmonton Journal was instrumental in Kappo’s and other Indigenous groups’ stance against Pig Girl. See poster – Figure 1 - at following link: https://edmontonjournal.com/life/homes/buying-and-selling/edmonton-wins-nine-awards-atchba-alberta-annual-gala

Poster

The first poster, another artefact of Pig Girl, included graphics that presented “a script” to the greater population of theatre goers, which ultimately indicated that heinous acts are tolerable within the story of the Indigenous woman—in this case the titular Pig Girl. This “script” thus continues to perpetuate mistreatment of the marginalized population of Indigenous women. Bernstein (2011) argues that “the term script denotes not a rigid dictation of performed action but rather a set of invitations that necessarily remain open to resistance, interpretation, and improvisation” (p. 12). This theory implies that graphics as script or narrative are ultimately determined by and for the greater society’s consumption.

When viewing the poster shown in Figure 1, the human eye reads left to right, and thus the spectator first perceives imagery of dirt showing the bloodied, carved inscription PIG GIRL on skin buried in the ground. Directly above the distorted carving is a partial tattoo of long black hair (a common genetic trait of many Indigenous women) reifying PIG GIRL with Indigenous women and being invisible. The woman is not granted a complete identity; she is not given a face but instead is allowed a place among the dirt and darkness. Following the eye’s left-to-right reading, a black backdrop sets a dark overtone along with the red text used for the words PIG GIRL. The red cuts out on the right, acting like an arrow pointing back to PIG GIRL in the same blood red that first pierced the skin. Therefore, the natural human act of reading brings the viewer back to the initial graphic. This idea of normal function aiding in providing a script is aligned with Bernstein’s (2011) notion of scriptive things, which states that “Things script behaviour not only through determined actions that are required for function but also through implied or prompted actions” (p. 77). The effortless flow of reading and viewers’ uninterrupted gaze help re-establish that there is nothing wrong or jarring within the space/poster. And the poster itself was not alone in affording the overarching vulgar scriptive experience of Pig Girl.
Similarly, the characters in the original performance of *Pig Girl* acted in a like manner to the poster—they were not assigned individual names but rather more generalized terms: Sister, Police Officer, Killer, and Dying Woman. The first three terms have generic, stand-alone applications; however, the fourth noun is assigned the adjective *dying* to ensure the spectator understands that the woman not only died (i.e., actually murdered by Pickton) but also will die today (in front of our eyes) and, perhaps even more significantly, will remain in a weakened, damaged state and keep on “dying.” By extension, the notion of Indigenous women perpetually dying reintroduces and invites harmful historical stereotypes and characterizations. Bernstein (2011) suggests that scripts can reignite both welcomed and unwelcomed historical beliefs and actions, and thus *Pig Girl*'s portrayal of Indigenous women collectively as the Dying Woman character becomes the representative voice of Indigenous women, and implies that we must accept the fate given us no matter the situation.

The play’s script is set in two timelines and literally invites the past into the present. At the start of the play, Dying Woman recounts a conversation she had with her adoptive parents about her time away at school and recalls that even then she was not valued and felt invisible. She was invisible in life, and she is invisible in death—she can be erased. Although author Colleen Murphy said Dying Woman “fights with everything she has … [and] used all her smarts and wit” (Kelly, 2016, Audio Podcast), we know she is going to die even before the play begins. Therefore, the script reiterates that although an Indigenous woman can do whatever she wants—struggle, fight, cry out for help, and more importantly employ all her intellect—she will inevitably fail. She is still not heard or regarded as being of any substance in present day society; there is nothing more than indifference towards her. As such, the script re-inscribes colonial assumptions that Indigenous women are insignificant, inferior, and a burden on society.

Various indicators throughout the performance illustrate the aforementioned points. For example, the Sister character calls out to Dying Woman, “probably you don’t have enough brain cells left” (Murphy, 2013, p. 6), and later says, “her welfare cheques haven’t been cashed; her prescriptions haven’t been picked up” (Murphy, 2013, p. 10). Also, in a conversation with Sister, Police Officer states, “we don’t have any evidence that your sister’s missing or that any of those other hookers … are actually missing” (Murphy, 2013, p. 11). The problem with Police Officer’s statement is that it implies that the missing women were all hookers. Consequently, *Pig Girl*'s Dying Woman character is a drug addict, on welfare, and a sex trade worker whose voice falls on deaf (i.e., unsympathetic) ears throughout the play.

Conversely, the voice that does get heard and humanized to the point of being granted sympathy is Killer’s (the Pickton character). He is large, overbearing, and in constant control of Dying Woman, violating and abusing her at will. Lyn Gardner (2015), writing about Murphy and voice in London’s *The Guardian*, comments that the playwright “certainly unnecessarily, gives [voice] to the killer too” (para. 6). *Montreal Gazette* theatre reviewer Jim Burke (2016) similarly discusses “the damaged, lonesome Killer who tries to make a connection with her” (para. 1) and the play’s “humanizing of all the characters, even the Killer” (para. 4). Author Colleen Murphy later spoke in an interview excusing this horrific behaviour, explaining that “There is the killer and there is no question about it, people, guys like this just don’t do things like this out of the sky. Things happen.
to them. They grow up in the same society, so he is a human being” (Kelly, 2016, Audio Podcast). But because “script” according to Bernstein (2011) “aims to discover not what any individual actually did but rather what a thing invited its users to do” (p. 11), the question remains: Are we meant to look past the brutality and heinous act and sympathize with Killer (i.e., Pickton) at the cost of his victim(s)? Is this what Murphy is essentially inviting and asking us to do? The art of rhetoric and predominant structure of this play would ostensibly lead us to this assumption, which again coincides with a re-inscription of a particular social order silences Indigenous women to the point of denying their (our) very humanity.

Glaring Violence

The social order mentioned above is based on Western and colonial ideologies of patriarchy that underpin the play despite its female authorship. The script houses a patriarchal point of view through Killer and Police Officer. Killer’s character, a White male, makes no apology for his intentions towards his victim, the Indigenous Dying Woman. After brutalizing his victim, Killer places the woman on a hook, prompting associations to the practice of slaughtering and butchering pigs for market. Such graphic imagery revives the harmful misconception that MMIW are not only dispensable but also trafficable, and is egregiously detrimental to the Indigenous communities and families of MMIW who have to deal with this supposition. What’s more, within the scope of this social order, the Indigenous male is not involved in the Pig Girl narrative—he is not given a voice nor any representation and is omitted from the conversation altogether. Indigenous scholar Lee Maracle (1996) has commented on “things” such as this play, noting that “the dictates of racism are that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as [thriving] women. ... The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath the Native male comes the Native female” (p. 17). In Pig Girl, the Native male is out of sight, out of mind; he is erased by not being acknowledged nor represented in any way. This again evokes Bernstein’s (2011) notion of calling on historical components wherein scripts of mis/non-representation are often brought about from places of privilege.

Andrea Smith (2015) conjoins both Maracle’s and Bernstein’s analogies and states that “The analysis of and strategies for addressing gender violence have failed to address the manner in which gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism” (p. 1). Simply put, the hanging of an Indigenous woman on a hook conjures historical, barbarous acts of racism and oppressive behaviours and mentality. Maracle (1996) further comments on the implications of texts like Pig Girl, saying “each time I confronted white colonial society I had to convince them of my validity as a human being” (p. 14). Similarly, although the focus of Bernstein’s (2011) Racial Innocence is the African American experience, the same mode and analysis functions within the marginalized Indigenous population: Bernstein links behaviours in relation to how violence manifests in a historical context, which applies to Pig Girl. While the play invites the audience to consider the violence perpetrated against Indigenous women that has occurred for centuries, the viewer ultimately decides the manner in which such violence is interpreted; in short, does the viewer challenge and protest the flagrant violence, or sit passively hidden in the darkened audience?
The stage in *Pig Girl* is the imagined space in which the final act of a male strangling an Indigenous woman with his legs and killing her takes place. Because such action happens openly and brazenly in the performance, it invites old ideologies of Indigenous women as being deficient and of lesser value than their non-Indigenous counterparts, or at best maintains the status quo. In other words, the act corresponds to statistics showing that the “violent victimization of Aboriginal females [is] most often committed by males” (Statistics Canada, 2009, para. 8) and that the “victimization of Aboriginal women close to triple[s] that of non-Aboriginal women” (Statistics Canada, 2009, para. 4), thus perhaps reducing the horror of the stage performance given that it is a not uncommon occurrence in the lives of Indigenous women. This enactment also interpellates the violent behaviour, but unfortunately this only happened within the Indigenous community.

Bernstein (2011) describes a comparable association, noting that “by entering the scripted scenario, the individual is interpellated into ideology and thus into subjection” (p. 77). Interpellation happens when the script leaps out and calls out to the recipient to stop and pay attention—or moreover demands attention. As Bernstein (2011) puts it,

> Stylized bodily performances in everyday life are utterances of thoughts that can not be expressed in words. These thoughts are neither conscious nor unconscious, neither wholly voluntary expressions of intention nor compulsory, mechanical movement. Things invite us to dance, and when we sweep them onto the dance floor, they appear to animate. (p. 74)

Therefore, the grave physical actions, underlying narrative, and symbolic imagery in *Pig Girl* echoed throughout Indigenous communities. Following *Pig Girl*’s November 5, 2013 premiere, a panel was created to discuss the play’s ramifications. Although Indigenous activist Kappo had refused to accept *Pig Girl* as being representative of Indigenous women and boycotted the play, she wanted to take part in panel discussions. To her and many other Indigenous people’s dismay, there was no one else from their own community on the panel to speak with about *Pig Girl*. While the play is based on true events, the author is non-Indigenous, as were all cast members. Without any collaboration with the Indigenous community, the play purposes to tell the story that predominantly and dramatically affected this community. Overall, the play falls in line with Bernstein’s (2011) scriptive things when she explains that “an object becomes a thing when it invites a person to dance” (p. 73). Upon being invited to dance, the Indigenous community expressed their discontentment by renouncing many colonial assumptions, and they voiced concerns that *Pig Girl* did not include Indigenous people respectfully and instead bound Indigenous women as inhuman and inferior by killing the protagonist Dying Girl over and over again. *Pig Girl* hailed the Indigenous community! Hailed, in this context and according to Bernstein (2011) means to provoke and incite a response.

**Glaring Violence—Intermission**

In the same year as *Pig Girl*’s premiere performance, multidisciplinary artist and Indigenous (Ntlaka’pamux) playwright Tara Beagan (2013) introduced *In Spirit*, a play and theatrical performance on the same tragic subject of MMIW. Beagan’s script brought to life an actual account of a missing Indigenous girl—12-year-old Molly, whose loving family and community immediately are aware of Molly’s absence. Molly is not an addict nor lost to society; everyone looked for her. Molly is given a bicycle for her birthday, not new but new to her, representing
previously established narratives bestowed upon young Indigenous girls who are handed a history not of their (our) making. One day Molly rides the bicycle out towards the highway and disappears; all that is left behind is a discarded, broken bicycle by the roadside. Her remains are found decades later and her community gathers for ceremony to release her Spirit. Throughout the play, Molly reaches out to the community and family members by telling her story, all the while rebuilding her broken bicycle. Molly’s bicycle is the prominent visual “thing” that she rebuilds in front of the audience—she rebuilds this *scriptive thing* and reclaims her story. Indigenous women often were (and still are!) handed a history, a painful past, but now we are recreating and writing new scripts: a broken bicycle and a trapped Molly are transformed into a rebuilt bicycle and a Spirit released.

**Glaring Violence—Resumed**

The theatrical performance of Beagan’s (2013) *In Spirit* did not speak to Indigenous communities in the same manner as Murphy’s (2013) *Pig Girl*. To garner a greater understanding of how *Pig Girl* hailed the Indigenous community, we must first take a step back and reflect. Bernstein (2011) paralleled objects and things with *studium* and *punctum*, whereby the former is understood to be an area of study or matter that is being viewed, and the latter as an anomaly that punctures its way through the subject at hand and draws the attention of an individual or collective experiencing the expanse of studium:

> The punctum is an “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces” an individual viewer. In other words, a patch in what would have been studium becomes punctum at the moment in which it leaps forward to pierce the spectator. (p. 72)

The studium in this case was the topic of MMIW in Canada. Many Indigenous communities across Canada were holding vigils, ceremonies, peaceful public gatherings, social media campaigns, and marches on Parliament Hill in Ottawa to create awareness of MMIW. Projects such as the REDress (Black, 2014) and Faceless Dolls (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2015) were established in the hopes of gaining support and drawing attention to calls for an inquiry into the disappearances of Indigenous women over the past decades. Such initiatives illustrate Bernstein’s (2011) theory that “both *studium* and object are orderly; each orients toward human thoughts and intentions” (p. 73).

In contrast, Bernstein (2011) notes that “punctum and thing are unruly, unpredictable rogues” (p. 73). In this instance, *Pig Girl* is punctum that pieced this studium, interpellating the Indigenous community and inviting us to dance. Bernstein also addresses further potential reactions to punctum:

> The ontological distinction between things and objects is that things *hail*. And they do so persistently, constantly, when we are alone and when we are in groups; when we think about them and when we do not; when we respond obediently and when we resist; and when we individually or collectively accept the invitation to dance, refuse it, accept but improvise new steps; or renegotiate, deconstruct, or explode the roles of leader and follower. (p. 77)

In relation to the above quote, the Indigenous community was hailed and we “danced,” which according to Bernstein generally means to connect, engage, and interact by prompted scripts. Upon encountering the various signifiers involved in *Pig Girl*, the Indigenous community reacted. The
concern was the lack of mindfulness paid to these women and the emotional upheaval stemming from negative portrayals of our culture throughout the generations.

Our communities were and are still in the process of healing from the ripple effects not only of the horrific events that occurred on Pickton’s farm but also all MMIW stories and the injustices done to our People and culture overall. The latter portion of Bernstein’s citation above speaks to various aspects of our communities’ responses. Resistance to colonization was evoked and as much as Pig Girl was first met with frustration and hurt and pain, our communities also understood this as something that we collectively needed to “renegotiate, deconstruct, or explode the roles of leader and follower” (Bernstein, 2011, p. 77). The intervention may have started with Kappo and the local Indigenous community surrounding Edmonton where the play premiered, but would soon spread across Canada as indicated at the outset of this discussion paper.

During the months that followed the initial outcries from Indigenous individuals and communities, changes were made to the overall production of Pig Girl. An aesthetic variation markedly noticeable was the lead role of Dying Woman, which was taken over by an Indigenous woman named Reneltta Arluk. Arluk felt that Indigenous women need a voice and place within this play: “we need to bring a voice. We need to bring our voice” (Kelly, 2016, Audio Podcast). Thence, our women started owning this content and giving a co-narrative to Dying Woman, who no longer gave way to an absolute script but rather opened a new dialogue that included our presence: One solitary Indigenous “dying woman” opened the door to a story that included the whole of Indigenous women. Yes, she is on stage dying and inevitably dies; however, she will live beyond the stage and speak alongside her colleagues on panels about the plight of MMIW. As Indigenous women, we danced and continue to dance after the show is over.

The Intervention

“Dignity, love, and, life. These basic principles ground social movements for justice, movements for social change” (Smith, 2015, p. xv).

The play Pig Girl interpellated Indigenous communities, allowing us to internalize playwright Colleen Murphy’s artistic expression and to react, resist, and ultimately refuse to accept the “script” that was being presented. Pig Girl subsequently was adapted and produced in August 2016 by Sacred Roots Productions, a Native production company helmed by Akwesasne Mohawk women, which provided Indigenous women agency without re-stigmatizing old belief structures and insolences suffered throughout history from the dominant population. The collective voice of Indigenous women in Sacred Roots Productions was a means of responding to Pig Girl. The reaction of the Indigenous communities is reminiscent of Bernstein’s (2011) view that “the set of prompts that a thing issues is not the same as performance because individuals commonly resist, revise, or ignore instructions” (p. 71). These Indigenous women indeed resisted, revised, and ignored instruction by creating a new script and did not give in to the old underlying stereotypes and ideologies housed within the original play.

As Bernstein (2011) further explains, because “the evidence delivered through scriptive things is crucial to the histories of oppressed people” (p. 80), we must strive to think of the scriptive thing “as a thing in use” (p. 9). Thinking of scriptive things as “in use” allows them to be addressed and rather than accepted as a static, non-refutable narrative. Therefore, despite being witnesses to the
horrific images in *Pig Girl*, we can expose and address them with a move towards positive change. It would be socially irresponsible to hide, forget, or pretend that offensive material like that shown in *Pig Girl* never existed, which is why Sacred Roots sought to revisit and rebuild the narrative (much like Molly’s bicycle) in response to *Pig Girl*. The Indigenous women were able to nourish this *scriptive thing* with elements from their own lives, inserting or changing symbolic colours and materials in order to make this play their own, for Indigenous communities. Thus, after being hailed, these Indigenous women were enabled to respond in such a way to resist and intervene by revising the script so that it included positive images and *things* for the betterment of an oppressed people. The Akwesasne Mohawk women of Sacred Roots did not see any dignity in hanging an Indigenous woman from a hook for the duration of an entire play like *Dying Woman* in *Pig Girl*’s premiere, and instead metaphorically rebuilt their bicycle as did Molly in *In Spirit*.

Alex Jacobs (2016), writing about MMIW in *Indian Country Today*, similarly argued that *Pig Girl*’s script was improved by “adding native culture, language, song and spirituality” (para. 3; see Figure 2)—none of which had been included in the original narrative. Alongside the idea of inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, Smith (2015) notes that

Native spiritualities have always been a cornerstone of resistance struggles. These spiritualities affirm the goodness of Native communities when the larger society dehumanizes them. They affirm the interconnectedness of all things that provides the framework of re-creating communities that are based on mutual responsibility and respect rather than violence and domination. (p. 5)

First and foremost, among differences between the original and the Sacred Roots productions of *Pig Girl*, the hook in the reworked play is considerably and meaningfully smaller, suggesting we can overcome what it represents. It can be held in one hand and does not loom overhead, holding an Indigenous woman in place and in servitude. The stage is also rife with artefacts that resonate within our communities as positive and healing elements: women wear customary regalia on stage, and the red dress—the visual “thing”—that many Indigenous women are wearing in the background is significantly present. The red dress is a *scriptive thing* in our communities because it represents all the missing and murdered Indigenous women; when we see this, we remember and honour all our endeared missing and murdered girls and women—lost but never forgotten. See image – Figure 2 - at the following link:

https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/pig-girl-a-play-about-mmiw-portrayed-by-akwesasne-mohawk-women-KYv3lGVjXk6HyICtSBUug/

The significance of the red dress is also illustrated in the aforementioned REDress Project, initially a travelling art installation created by Métis artist Jaime Black in 2011 to acknowledge and pay tribute to all MMIW in Canada. The artist draped empty red dresses from various locations (campuses, parks, and art exhibits) to represent all the Indigenous women who disappeared and were murdered in our country. The red dresses are void of anything solid as an evocative reminder that women once filled these spaces. When asked in an interview by Samantha Edwards why she chose the colour red, Black (2014) responded, “Red is a really powerful colour in Indigenous communities. It’s the colour of life and blood. It’s what connects all of us to each other. It’s a very sacred colour, and it also represents the violence that these women are facing” (para. 3). The REDress Project is also an aesthetic response to MMIW in Canada, which again reiterates the power of a visual presence. It was carried out nationally and still has a presence online and across Brock Education Journal, 28 (1), 2018.
Canada. In numerous communities, red dresses were and still are being placed in various sites, and gatherings are held to respectfully pay tribute to MMIW.

The women wearing red dresses shown in Figure 2 are also positioned physically higher than the “live” characters, thus signifying their worth. After public showings of the second version of *Pig Girl*, *Indian Country Today* reporter Alex Jacobs (2016) observed that “On the final dates of the performances at both Mohawk communities the actors were thanked by family members of victims of violence” (para. 6). Therefore, as Bernstein (2011) posits, scriptive things are situational and subjective depending upon the interpreter’s perspective. As such, an individual or collective can resist and reconstruct the “things” that constrict and contain us, thereby, allowing all peoples the opportunity of countering hegemony.

**Conclusion/Moving Forward**

This paper has shown how a visual presence and/or “thing” (in this case a meat hook, a bicycle, or a red dress) can have either grave consequences or carry hope and create new narratives for generations to come. More specifically, a “thing” such as *Pig Girl* can become either a piercing arrow or, with collaborative vision, a meeting place where diverse cultures can reconcile and possibly heal together. Colleen Murphy saw the first show in Akwesasne and said, “Theatre is a safe environment to confront painful events because there is catharsis in witnessing” (Jacobs, 2016, para. 12). Murphy added that “a play belongs to everyone who performs it and to everyone who watches it” (Jacobs, 2016, para. 12). Being actively involved with/in an event affords feelings of connection. Therefore, instead of attempting to give voice to others, perhaps it is best to ask questions and work collaboratively with others so as not to silence anyone. Had Murphy heeded her own words a few years earlier and included Indigenous people, she and the Indigenous community may have avoided a polemic situation.
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Shakespearean Pedagogy and Copious Paradox: How Might we Queer Shakespeare’s Work?

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Abstract

Despite opposition to ‘queering the text’ by established Shakespeare critics, this essay sets out to ponder the possibility of teaching Shakespeare in a queer context. The essay begins by examining the social and sexual conditions of the early modern period, making the observation that there were a wide variety of sexualities, moral attitudes, and sexual practices at that time, and that often the early modern moral codes of conduct contradicted each other. It then traces the significance of the rhetorical device of paradox through Lyly and Castiglione, and examines the method of Elizabethan rhetoric, which involved ‘copia’ (the elaboration of one idea into a variety of ideas through language) and its associated variety of meanings. The essay then turns to the text of Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis, observing that its subject matter—the love of an older woman for a younger man—may have reflected the early modern heterosexual fear of women’s sexuality—and continues to baffle male critics today. Finally, turning to the poem itself—analyzing it in terms of ‘copia’ and paradox—the conclusion suggests that perhaps there was a relationship between Shakespeare’s use of these rhetorical techniques and the sexuality of his time.

Keywords: feminist, queer, rhetoric, early modern, Shakespeare, sexuality

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Queering the classroom is more than just honouring rainbow signs that proclaim the room a ‘safe space.’ We must also honour our histories as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people. This process is more transparent in the social sciences, where there are, for instance, actual historical facts; confirmed dates and confirmed data, as well as literary, scientific and archeological discoveries. English literature is often a matter of interpretation. And when we study Shakespeare’s work, there is a tendency to assume not merely that ‘the Bard’ himself was heterosexual, but that interpretations related to same-sex desire have been imposed by the interpreters.

**Foucault’s Approach**

Foucault (1978) says of literary texts in *What is an Author?*: “From where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design? The meaning ascribed to it and the status or value accorded it depend on the manner we answer these questions” (p. 213). Perhaps no other western author has quite as many assumptions and associations attached to their name as Shakespeare—and many of those assumptions involve his sexuality. This essay suggests how we might ‘queer’ Shakespeare’s work for the classroom through the lens of New Historicism, focusing on *Venus and Adonis* as an exemplary Early Modern queer poem.

**Methodology**

The methodology here is to offer a close reading of *Venus and Adonis*, observing first that Early Modern sexuality could be characterized as both copious and paradoxical, and that these attributes are mirrored in the rhetorical devices utilized by Shakespeare in his famous poem.

**Opposition to Queering the Text**

Stephen-Guy Bray (2002), in his study of Roman pastorals, suggests that:

Consumers of texts, even of the famous classical texts central to Renaissance notions of culture, history and identity, similarly interpret texts as they move through them, according to their own ‘interests and desires.’ If a famous classical text is a public place open to all who could read Latin, a reading that highlighted its homoeroticism—a reading that might inform a new poem—might turn that place into a space. (p. 7)

And yet the most respected members of the critical establishment are skeptical of those who search for queer ‘spaces’ in Shakespeare’s work. Stanley Wells (general editor of the Oxford and Penguin Shakespeare, and honorary president of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust) warns us to be wary of interpreting the Bard’s work as sexual. He asks us to consider the question: “When...do sexual interpretations proceed from what would once have been considered the dirty minds of the interpreters?” (2004, p. 2).

In *Looking for Sex in Shakespeare*, Wells also criticizes what he considers wild goose chases in search of sexual subtext. He admits that Shakespeare, the man, if he “did not, in the fullest sense of the word, love a man, he certainly understood the feelings of those who do” (2004, p. 65), nevertheless, he concludes that Shakespeare is somewhat heroic in his heterosexuality, that he “is the greatest celebrant of heterosexual love” (2004, p. 68). Harold Bloom (1999), whose weighty bestselling tome *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human* is for many the defining work of 20th Century Shakespearean scholarship, is concerned too about our greatest living writer being placed
under the gaze of a man who was the most famous of all gay philosophers, saying: “Shakespeare does not fit very well into Foucault’s ‘archives’” (p. 9). When it comes specifically to foregrounding lesbian sexuality, scholar Dympna Callaghan (past president of the Shakespeare Association of America, and editor of A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare) rules Shakespeare as fundamentally disqualified. She speaks of the situation of women in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night as one in which the unmentionable, but much referenced; vagina hangs like an invisible cloud over a play in which, “femininity is little less than an impossible condition, and female authority a ridiculous one” (2002, p. 43). Under such formidable opposition how might one begin to ferret out Bray’s queer ‘spaces’ in Shakespeare’s work?

Definition of the New Historicism

If we ignore Bloom’s advice and press forward with a Foucauldian approach to Shakespeare, we will find ourselves in the New Historicist camp. Stephen Greenblatt (1991) often acknowledges his debt to Foucault’s ‘archives.’ His definition of the New Historicism states that his concern with literary texts:

Has been to reflect upon the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to examine the relationship between these circumstances and our own.... The idea is not to find outside the work of art some rock onto which interpretation can be securely claimed, but rather to situate the work in relation to other representational practices operative in the culture at the given moment in both its history and our own. (p. 43)

Greenblatt’s scholarship is based on Foucault’s (1966) notions of epistemes. Foucault posits that various eras are dominated by overarching fundamental assumptions that change significantly the way we perceive people and their actions. Foucault asserted, quite memorably, in The History of Sexuality, that the notions ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ did not appear until the late 19th century. Thus, in the Early Modern period, there could have been no homosexuals, only sodomitical acts: “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (1978, p. 43).

Contradictory New Historicist Approaches

Although there may have been no notion of homosexuality in Shakespeare’s time, there were certainly same-sex acts. How were they understood or perceived? Stephen Orgel (1989) and Valerie Traub (2016) offer arguments for certain specific kinds of acknowledgment of same-sex desire in the Early Modern period. Orgel suggests:

What is less often observed is that along with the varieties of conventional romance, romantic and even erotic homosexual relationships also figure from time to time in the literature of the period, in a context that is often—though certainly not invariably—positive, and registers again surprisingly little anxiety about the matter. (p.14)

He goes on to say:

Homosexuality in this culture appears to have been less threatening than hetero-sexuality, and only in part because it had fewer consequences and was easier to desexualize. The reason always given for the prohibition of women from the stage was that their chastity would thereby be compromised, which is understood to mean that they would become
whores. Behind the outrage of public modesty is a real fear of women's sexuality, and more specifically, of its power to evoke men's sexuality. (p. 17)

And yet Valerie Traub (2016) tells us that during the Early Modern period women’s sexuality was written about (mainly by men) with a certain freedom that might shock us even today. She quotes Richard Brome’s play *The Antipodes* (1638) about a young woman whose husband is having difficulties consummating their marriage. The woman confides in a female friend who tells her “A wanton mayd once lay with me, and kiss’d / and clipt and clapt me strangely and she wished / that I had been a man to have got her with childe” (2016, p. 104). Traub also mentions *The Chois of Valentines or the Merie Ballad of Nash his Dildo* (1592), a work of Elizabethan pornography by Thomas Nashe. The play takes place in a brothel where young ladies educate naïve young men about sex. After having sex with the young man, one woman is unsatisfied and pleases herself with a dildo. On the surface at least, this does not sound like a male culture that is afraid of women’s desires.

Here is a hint of a sexuality both complex and abundant. How can we compare it to our own? Traub proposes that two opposing approaches to historicism appeared in response to Foucault: continuity and alterity. Continuity refers to those who “emphasize a similarity between past and present concepts of sexual understanding” whereas alterity refers to “those who highlight historical difference” (2016, p. 82).

**The Facts of Life in the Early Modern Period**

History provides us with an array of facts about Early Modern life. Joy Lee Gibson (2000) reminds us of many of the realities of London existence at this time. For instance, the population nearly doubled during Elizabeth I’s reign. Life was short, and people married soon after their spouses died. “There was really no such thing as childhood” (2000, p. 13) as children were exposed to the most extreme horrors of life from an early age. Six thousand people were executed in public during the Elizabethan period, and these spectacles were enjoyed along with bull-baiting and cock-fighting. Probably one of the most revealing facts in terms of sexuality was that people “lived in crowded houses that were unsanitary in the extreme...most houses were small and there was very little privacy” (2000, p. 13). This means that the bedrooms had no doors—as family members had to go through one room to get to another. And, significantly, people went to the bathroom in front of other people. If the environment has anything to do with behaviour, then we must assume people who have no privacy for sex or going to the bathroom would think very differently about their bodily functions than people who live in London today—where privacy is considered a prerequisite for civilized life.

**The Facts of Sex in the Early Modern Period**

Valerie Traub (2016) has compiled a list of what scholars now know about Early Modern sex in England. Apparently, sexual contact for adult men and women was considered generally desirable, but sexual control was important to “household order, including the patriarch’s self control and governance of women” (p. 139). Sexual matters were “community matters”, and sexual pleasure was important to “good health and conceiving children” (p. 139)—hence celebrations on a wedding night might involve a communal disrobing of the bride and groom to encourage copulation. As well, there were, “high numbers of unmarried adults” (2016, p. 140). But contradictions also existed, as there was “an official horror of sodomy set against the
valorization of intimate male friendship (2016, p. 140). Also, there were, “limited options available to women, who nonetheless fashioned idioms to articulate their desires for men and for one another” (2016, p. 140). And there was, “the endurance of a double standard regarding male honour and female reputation, enforced by women as well as men” (2016, p. 140). Surprisingly perhaps there was, “the rise of an indigenous erotica and pornography (2016, p. 140), and perhaps not so surprisingly, “all-too quotidian acts of violence among domestic intimates” (2016, p. 141). And finally, Laura Gowering (as cited by Traub), tells us that people practiced, “a wide repertory of behaviour that avoided pregnancy and alleviated sin” (2016, p. 151). In other words, in a culture which held procreative sex in high esteem, people commonly did anything but that.

The fact is that citizens in Early Modern England engaged in a vast variety of sexual activities, and since sex was considered a good thing for adults to do, sex probably occurred often. There was then a certain variety—let us say ‘copiousness’—of sexual activities. But what is really striking about these attitudes and activities is their inconsistency. Widespread moralism accompanied widespread sexual activity. There was condemnation of sodomy along with an encouragement of intimate male friendships, and though women were highly policed, they still discovered ways to satisfy themselves and their partners. This suggests, if not a widespread hypocrisy, then certainly, that there were contradictory ideas and practices. Early Modern sexuality was paradoxical; and rather than being analyzable in terms of modern binaries, these paradoxes were left unresolved. Valerie Traub (2016) confirms this interpretation, cautioning us that a moralistic lens through which we tend to analyze sexuality is not helpful: “None of the bicameral rubrics through which we routinely process Early Modern sex—the licit and the illicit, the homo and the hetero, the queer and the normative, erotic acts and erotic identities—provide us with much analytical purchase” (p. 113).

**Sexuality in Venus and Adonis: A Queer Poem?**

Elizabethan sexual activities were many and contradictory, and the usual categories (such as gay, straight, or queer) do not apply. It might make sense to consider the possibility that queer ‘spaces’ are not to be found in the usual places in Early Modern life. For instance, according to Ben Saunders (2006), “in the Renaissance, the love that dare not speak its name is not homosexuality but rather any love that dares to posit a woman as worthy of a man’s complete devotion” (p. 15). Sinfield (2006) speaks of an Early Modern trope in which heterosexual romance meant, for males, “a fall into impotence of powerlessness, a loss of manly strength, and even of identity” (p. 159). Perhaps a story which privileges a woman’s overpowering and all-pervasive passion for a young man may be the place that queers can come closest to finding a ‘space’ for themselves in Shakespeare.

Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* lies at the centre of the complex and copious contradictions that comprised Elizabethan sexuality. The work has not received the same critical attention as Shakespeare’s sonnets or plays. This may be because it is somewhat pornographic even by modern standards. Also, there is the unsettling subject matter: the story concerns an older goddess (Venus) who lusts after a teenage boy (Adonis). But Venus -- after chasing Adonis into the forest--cannot persuade him to have sex with her. The young man escapes and hunts a boar. The boar ultimately gores him. Venus, discovering his dead body, curses all love.
Elizabethan Pornography?

Though the poem is pornographic, it is not filled with sexual puns, as many of Shakespeare’s comedies are, nor is it as explicit as the pornographic pamphlet that is often referred to as ‘Nashe’s Dildo.’ But there is something even more sexual and compelling about figurative and expressive rhetoric applied to sexual caresses: “Even so she kisses his brow, his cheek, his chin, / And where she ends, she doth anew begin” (Shakespeare, 2002, 178). And Venus entreats him: “I’ll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer: / Feed where thou wilt, on mountain, or in dale; / Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry, / Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie” (Shakespeare, 2002, 187). Adonis is described much as a titillating female virgin of the period might be, his skin drifting sensuously between red and white--“Still he is sullen, still he lours and frets, / Twixt crimson shame, and anger ashy pale, / Being red she loves him best, and being white, / Her best is bettered with a more delight” (Shakespeare, 2002, 179).

The Early Modern Male as Sex Object and the Modern Desiring Woman

In Colin Burrow’s edition of the poem, he speaks of the similarities between the way Ovid and Shakespeare were received in the Early Modern period. Speaking of Ovid as a source for Shakespeare’s poem, Burrow (2002) says:

Is Adonis lovely as a girl?....Renaissance readers of Ovid responded vigorously to this aspect of his art, which is not anything so reassuringly stable as ‘homosexual:’ it makes any reader who is committed to reading with his or her sexual desires alive experience sexuality as a dislocating force. (p. 21)

This bewitching and upsetting concoction of a desiring woman and a sexualized young man is perhaps more unsettling than the ‘explicit’ aspects of Shakespeare’s poem—for Early Modern readers and for contemporary ones, as well. Critic, John Klaue (1991) seems to take it for granted that Venus is a very difficult character to identify with. In this passage, he bemoans her arrogance and her lusts:

Venus never questions the litany of her passions, never regrets her onslaughts, and never quite attains a self-abnegating respect for the rights and privileges of another. Indeed, in her sour leave-taking after Adonis’ death, she may seem extravagantly mean spirited, hardly of a disposition to inspire in an accommodating observer a sympathetic attitude. (p. 101)

Klaue’s inability to find Venus sympathetic is not necessarily justified by the text. He assumes that readers might not identify with Venus simply because she unequivocally, aggressively, and quite openly desires a beautiful man much younger than herself—so much so that she is bitter when her advances towards him are ignored. One must ask—if the poem were about the bitterness of an aggressive male suitor whose advances to a young woman were ignored, would critics label the hero unsympathetic? Probably not, as Western literature has traditionally mined this fertile subject matter, rarely criticizing, ethically, the choices of an older male suitor.

The present day hypocrisy concerning this double standard (older males are allowed to be attracted to younger women but not the other way around) is rampant. The movie P.S. was released in 2014 and concerns an older woman (Laura Linney) who lusts after a teenaged boy (Topher Grace). The film received a 55% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, and many critics treated the film’s premise with as much skepticism as Klaue treats the premise of Venus and Adonis:
‘P.S.’ contains more than its share of implausibilities and absurdities—and let’s not even imagine the reception the movie would get if the genders were reversed—but if it’s not Linney’s finest role, it contains some of her nerviest work. (Burr, 2004)

Most of the reviews of P.S. sarcastically suggest, as this one does, that movies about older men and teenaged girls are rarely made—therefore challenging the appropriateness of a work that presents the yearning that an older woman has for a younger man. But this is simply not true. The list of present day movies that feature older male protagonists who love younger women is extensive. And there are also quite a number of very successful movies specifically about older men and teenaged girls, including Oscar award winners: American Beauty, An Education, The Big Sleep, Blame it On Rio, Circle of Two, Damage, Election, Ghost World, Girl with a Pearl Earring, Great Balls of Fire, The Horse Whisperer, Gigi, Last Tango in Paris and The Blue Angel—to name a few.

**Rhetoric in Venus and Adonis Early Modern vs. Modern Rhetoric**

Utilizing the approach Traub (2016) labels as ‘continuity,’ we can see similarities between Early Modern culture and ours. Similar to Early Moderns who were likely to have viewed the sexual situation in Venus and Adonis as ‘unsettling,’ we likely would view it that way, too. The only significant difference between Early Modern work on this subject and ours is in the expression; the artifice itself. P.S. is, formally, a very different work than Venus and Adonis, and not simply because (as some would assert) Shakespeare’s poem is ‘great art’ and P.S. is not. While Venus and Adonis is an Early Modern poem and relies primarily on words to communicate, P.S. is a modern film, and as such, relies on images as well as words. Also, the language in Shakespeare’s poem—which contains much dialogue between the two characters (it is in fact mostly dialogue)—is not simple; it is both bewitchingly and frustratingly complex. In contrast, the language used by the characters in P.S. for the most part resembles everyday modern speech.

**Ramism versus Euphuism**

Shakespeare’s language, however, is not merely poetic or ‘connotative,’ his style was specifically chosen from among the range of approaches that typified the Early Modern period. In his doctoral thesis, contemporary theorist, Marshall McLuhan (2009) clearly delineates the two sides in what he posits as the Elizabethan ‘style wars.’ The two opposing camps in the debate were devotees of Cicero vs. the followers of Ramus. Ciceronians were old school stylistics who thought that “the great arts are politics war and eloquence, mediocre arts are mathematics, physics, ethics, logic, grammar” (2009, p. 56). Art is “a virtue or power which enables us to act” (p. 57). McLuhan also says, “Cicero’s choice and emphasis fixed the influence and oriented the interpretation of ancient thought, Greek as well as Latin, at the beginning of the middle ages and again in the Renaissance” p. 57. Cicero–like the Greek Sophists–was more concerned with persuasion than truth, and with the figures of rhetoric that served his art. Ramism (named after Petrus Ramus, a Huguenot who died in 1572) exemplified the opposite impulse. Ramists wished to strip language of unnecessary excesses and floridity in order to focus on content (i.e., it’s ‘truth’). McLuhan (2009) even makes the bold statement that,

The complete severance of style and matter in the Ramist rhetoric was a direct contributing influence in bringing about that deliberate impoverishment of poetic imagery
after the Restoration. It co-operated with Cartesian innatism to render imaginative or phantasmal experience frivolous at least. (pp. 192-193)

Shakespeare’s writings display a certain ‘anti-Ramist’ stylistic tendency. For instance, there are many similarities between Shakespeare’s manner of writing and euphuism (associated with John Lyly)—a writing style very much in vogue in the 1570s. The euphuists represented the last gasp of Greek and medieval rhetoric in the Early Modern period. Critics have found stylistic references to euphuism in Shakespeare’s plays, especially *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, and certain lines in *Henry IV*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. But most are reluctant to call Shakespeare a ‘euphuist’ because euphuism has for many years been associated with shallowness, frivolity, and effeminacy. Lately, however, literary critics like Andy Kesson have begun to assert that insisting that Shakespeare’s work has no textual relationship to Lyly’s work does not help us understand the Bard’s poetry. He says, “in the eighteenth century Lyly is repeatedly described as an infection or disease for which Shakespeare was the cure” (2014, p. 5). Also, he observes that scholars are beginning to see that although “the denigration of Lyly’s work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been an important part of the formation of the Elizabethan canon” (2014, p. 205), now, in a small step forward, Lyly is “being taught to undergraduates as an inconvenient precursor to Shakespeare” (2014, p. 204).

**Paradox in Shakespeare**

**Paradox and Euphuism**

The most obvious stylistic element that Shakespeare’s work shares with euphuism is the persistent employment of paradox. Lena Ostermark-Johansen, in her essay linking the euphuistic style and nineteenth century ‘effeminate’ poetry, mentions Pater’s language in the context of the history of paradox: “He adopted and developed a number of the rhetorical figures Lyly had introduced after such Italian models as Castiglione, who had recommended the use of antithesis as a means of obtaining stylistic grace and movement in his Cortegiano” (2002, p. 3). Croll—the first critic to attempt an in-depth analysis of Lyly in the 20th century—mentions Lyly’s use of paradox, but he does not believe that antithesis is an effective lens through which to view Lyly’s style because antithesis “can be both a figure of sound/words and a figure of thought. In Lyly’s use, antithesis is purely a scheme, a figure of the arrangement of words for the effect of sound, it is not about revealing striking and new relations between things” (1916, p. xvii). More recently, critics have contested this notion. McLuhan, for instance, suggests that Lyly’s use of paradox was not merely as embellishment, stressing that one of the features of euphuism was that “the patterning of the language is related to thought, to ideas, the formality of the language is the working out of ideas” (2009, p. 45).

**Paradox in Venus and Adonis**

If Shakespeare is ‘working out’ ideas in *Venus and Adonis*, what conclusions does he arrive at, and to what degree is he aided by rhetorical technique? The nature of paradox as figure is that the medium is undoubtedly the ‘message.’ Paradox forces us to think while (paradoxically) staving off the possibility of resolution. The form is by definition binary; paradox displays an idea or image and its opposite simultaneously. But in this case, though opposites attract, they do not resolve themselves into a clear synthesis in the Hegelian manner. Nearly all of Venus’s romantic feelings,
and her advances on Adonis are expressed in the form of paradox. The fourth stanza contains no less than four paradoxes in six lines:

And yet not cloy thy lips with loathed satiety, / But rather famish them amid their plenty, / making them red and pale, with fresh variety / Ten kisses short as one, and one long as twenty / A summers day will seem an hour but short, / being wasted in such time beguiling sport.” (Shakespeare, 2002, p. 176)

What ideas are suggested by the expression of these paradoxes? This passage observes that when one is satisfied, one does not wish for more kisses, but when one is famished one will consequently desire—and receives—more. Yet this paradox is unresolved, for being famished leads to plenty, and being sated leads to lack of desire. Both states have their advantages and disadvantages; how to choose? The paradox sets us thinking about the contradictions of desire, without offering a resolution. If we think of cheeks both ‘red and pale,’ and a plentitude of short kisses versus a single kiss that takes a long time—then a possible explanation for Shakespeare’s use of paradox is clear. Sexual activities are not logical. Sex may exist in collusion with love, but also with hate, or physical violence—in the case of rape or lack of full consent. Love and sex may lead to both affection and irritation, both impatience and satiety. Shakespeare piles paradox upon paradox in the body of the poem and these contradictions succeed in accurately describing the contradictory realities of love troubled by lust.

The Implications of Paradox in Venus and Adonis

But it is at the end of the poem when Venus is rejected by her would-be lover, that she addresses not only the paradoxical nature of love and sex, but the paradoxical nature of our attitudes towards love and sex. Here Venus curses love:

Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend.
It shall be waited on with jealousy;
Find sweet beginning, but unsavoury end;
Ne’er settled equally, but high or low.
That all love’s pleasure shall not match his woe.
It shall be fickle, false and full of fraud,
Bud and be blasted in a breathing-while;
The bottom poison, and the top o’erstrawed
With sweets that shall the truest sight beguile.
The strongest body shall it make most weak,
Strike the wise dumb, and teach the fool to speak.
It shall be sparing and too full of riot,
Teaching decrepit age to tread the measures.
The staring ruffian shall keep in quiet,
Pluck down the rich, enrich the poor with treasures.
It shall be raging mad, and silly mild,
Make the young old, the old be come a child...
It shall be cause of war and dire events,
And set dissension ‘twixt the son and sire;
Subject and servile to all discontents,
As dry combustious matter is to fire.
Sith in his prime death doth my love destroy,
They that love best their loves shall not enjoy. (Shakespeare, 2002, pp. 234-235)

Could there ever be a more accurate description of the paradoxes that characterized Elizabethan attitudes toward sexuality? How—in a culture where women are ‘governed’ by the patriarchy and yet still empower themselves to find sexual satisfaction—could love and sex cause anything but ‘dissension’? And the men who loved other men ‘best,’ would most certainly not be permitted to ‘enjoy’ their loves. Those who reject the New Historicism might insist that Shakespeare’s paradoxical representations of love in the curse of Venus are not merely reflections of the sexual politics of the time, but instead are the poetic embodiment of ‘truth’—the essential tragic nature of love.

But the nature of Shakespeare’s rhetoric suggests the opposite. Sexual activities and loving relationships were copious—many and varied—during Shakespeare’s time. Marion Trousdale (1982) speaks of Shakespeare’s rhetoric also being copious; and suggests that copiousness was characteristic of Ciceronian rhetoric. She also suggests this rhetoric had a tenuous relationship to didacticism. According to Erasmus, “nature rejoices in variety” (1963, p. 41) so it behooves the Early Modern rhetorician to write copiously, that is, expand, and express one idea in a variety of ways. This means that in euphuistic writing—as in the works of Shakespeare—we are often offered a list of what seems like variations on a theme; we are treated to the author saying the same thing in various ways, repeatedly. But the list occasionally becomes so extended and complex, that the original ‘message’ is obscured. Trousdale (1982) reminds us that Elizabethans appreciated this kind of poetry. Rather than expecting a work of art to reveal a single straightforward message, “the more successful the artistic creation the greater number of moral lessons can be taken from the tale” (p. 116), and “even a simple tale may reveal a huge number of meanings not consonant with each other”, p. 118).

Unlike many other literary and dramatic works of the Medieval and Early Modern periods, Shakespeare’s plays often defy thematic exegesis. It is, at any rate, a challenge to whittle any of his plays or poems down to one, cohesive, non-paradoxical moral. This is perhaps one reason why his work seems so modern today. This aspect of Shakespeare’s style, along with Shakespeare’s reversal of the usual romantic situation (uncharacteristic for his time) in Venus and Adonis—placing the woman in the position of relentless huntress, and the male in the position of passive object of a desiring gaze—exemplify the ‘queerness’ of Shakespeare’s poem.

Venus and Adonis is as complex and contradictory as sex and love in Early Modern England. Trousdale (1982) tells us, for the Elizabethan rhetorician “the words that we use never exhaust all that we could say about a sensible experience” (p. 130). Was Shakespeare moved by the contradictory sexual practices and attitudes to sexuality of his time to create an accurate, but somewhat amoral, reflection of it? Or was this reflection unconscious? Perhaps Shakespeare was drawn to unresolved paradoxes and the Ciceronian rhetorical style, because this technique—by its very nature—teaches us an important—but again, somewhat paradoxical—lesson; that while life sometimes leaves us with a myriad of choices, it often leaves us with no lessons at all.
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Cree Elders’ Perspectives on Land-Based Education: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study deals with the notion that Indigenous peoples are concerned with preserving their communities, nations, cultural values, and educational traditions. Indigenous peoples have a land-based education system that emerges out of their own worldviews and perspectives, which need to be applied to research concerning Indigenous cultures. This work explores Indigenous land-based education through the perspectives of Cree Elders of Northern, Manitoba. Six Cree Elders were interviewed to explore the ideas and practices of land-based education. The article engages discussion of Indigenous land-based education stemming from Elders’ teachings of Indigenous knowledge, cultural values, identity, and vision. Informed by Cree Elders, this qualitative study articulates an Indigenous interpretation of land-based education. Research findings demonstrate that Indigenous land-based education can be used to promote well-being among Indigenous peoples in Canada. While the study is based on the Cree experience in Northern Manitoba, its message is significant to many other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Drawing on the Elders’ teachings, policy recommendations are generated for advancing Indigenous land-based education.

Keywords: Land-Based Education, Indigenous Knowledge, Culture, Healing, Decolonization

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Many contemporary theories, national and international policies do not incorporate Indigenous voices into their understanding of nation, or peoples. Such viewpoints reduce Indigenous peoples to citizens, ethnic groups, racial groups, or interest groups, which do not give accurate representation of who Indigenous peoples are. (Champagne, 2015, p. iv)

Champagne (2015) argues that Indigenous voices are often treated as marginal within contemporary academic theories and institutional policies. Because Indigenous voices are marginalized, this study sought to promote Indigenous voices in the literature. Since colonized Indigenous peoples have been deterred from voicing their concerns and practising their own culture and land-based education traditions, it is understandable that there is a knowledge gap. It is conceivable, therefore, that a comprehensive discourse on how Omushkegowuk (Swampy Cree) Elders see and understand land-based education is not completely developed in the literature. This article provides a Cree model of land-based education that outlines the ideas and practices, which is lacking in the literature. However, this study developed out of the need to examine Elders teachings and thereby provides an understanding of how land based education occurred. This research hopes to provide a land based education model, model which have been used by the Swampy Cree—People of the Muskeg—of Northern Manitoba.

The Indigenous Elders in this study are members of the Cree Nation who, like many other Indigenous nations, have been colonized, dispossessed from their lands, and silenced (Adams, 1975; Champagne, 2015; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014). The primary purpose of this study is to engage discussion about Cree Elders’ voices and perspectives on land-based education. In conventional education, Indigenous voices are often marginalized and viewed as being unimportant or academically irrelevant (Champagne 2015; Hansen & Antsanen, 2016; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRCC], 2015). The hypothesis of this discussion is that Indigenous peoples such as the Cree of Northern Manitoba are part of Canadian society, and will continue to be part of the social and cultural fabric of Canada for generations to come. Therefore, it is important to restore and develop land-based education in an Indigenous context.

Land-based education has taught people lessons for living for thousands of years—ways of life that today can be reclaimed and redeveloped through a decolonization process. The development of an Indigenous-based model of education that takes into account the needs, values, teachings, and cultures of Indigenous community members and nations is both a challenging and worthy endeavour. The challenge rests in the fact that Indigenous-based models of education require more from the learner than simply studying culture from textbooks. For instance, Indigenous students ought to have contact with Elders, relatives, and knowledge keepers who can pass down knowledge and culture. An Indigenous-based model of education would help students develop solid community commitments, and to foster knowledge of their culture and identity in ways that prepare them to be knowledgeable in their own culture and traditions, all the while being fully prepared to function in Western culture and society.

This article provides considerable discussion on Cree Elders’ perspectives of the land, culture, and experience. The article also briefly discusses Western interpretations of Indigenous education that creates the need to decolonize and develop land-based education (Adams, 1975; Brown, 2004; Champagne, 2015; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014). In a Western-based education system, Elders and cultural knowledge do not have a primary role in educating students and consequently students do not gain an understanding of the land and its significance in Indigenous cultures. Decolonization therefore seeks to decentre Western interpretations of Indigenous education that often do not teach the values, culture, and language of Indigenous people.
This article can be considered a decolonization project. Linda Smith (1999) notes that “decolonization is about centering our concerns and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (p. 39). Smith reveals that Indigenous perspectives and worldviews are paramount in a decolonization project, and I hope that the significance of Cree Elders’ perspectives on land-based education will be reflected in this paper.

Because Elders are guides in many Indigenous communities, the author interviewed six Cree Elders as participants in this study to explore the notions of Indigenous land-based education. The study is qualitative in nature and uses ethnographic open-ended interviewing methods, field notes, audio-taped conversations, and observations (Creswell, 1998). The study’s research methodology is based on Creswell’s (1998) assertion that qualitative research is appropriate when the central research question(s) ask “how” (p. 17), in this case: (a) how Indigenous land-based education within Cree culture is interpreted, and (b) how six Cree elders understand land-based education. The nature of these questions suggests this inquiry is suitable for a qualitative examination. Creswell (1998) notes that a qualitative inquiry entails that “the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15).

**Literature Review**

While this study deals primarily with Indigenous Cree teachings in Northern Manitoba, Canada, the ideas relating to Indigenous land education apply to many other Indigenous peoples in Western countries. The article encompasses and Indigenous perspective corresponding to the negative impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities, Cree cultural understandings of land-based education, and spiritual teachings that shape a deep respect for the land. The interviews conducted with Cree Elders as primary sources also are reflected in the literature. For example, Radu, House, and Pashagumskum’s (2014) influential article “Land, Life, and Knowledge in Chisasibi: Intergenerational Healing in the Bush composes (offers) a Cree account of a matter between the Cree and the federal government in which the former were removed from their traditional territory. However, the land continues to be a non-toxic space where traditions and healing still manifest. As Radu et al. (2014) report:

In 1980, the Fort George iiyiwiwch were unceremoniously moved across the James Bay to the present-day community of Chisasibi—a place not of their choosing. The impacts of a cumulative range of stressors, from residential school abuses, mercury poisoning, and land loss from hydroelectric development, as well as overt paternalism from both governments and settlers working within Cree institutions, have disrupted family structures and undermined individual and community wellbeing. Nevertheless, the land, as much as it has endured, still offers a place and space where relationships of respect and love can be rebuilt and strengthened. (p. 86)

The above passage illustrates how the Cree use the land in ways for subsistence: hunting, fishing, living, and healing. Thus, Indigenous communities tend to perceive and understand the land in ways that are spiritual and healing in nature. Many Indigenous Elders teach us that the Creator provided the people with particular land to live on and sustain. Indigenous peoples demonstrated appreciation to the Creator through ceremonies, and by showing respect to plants, animals, and the land that enables them to live. Still, they did not consider themselves owners of the land; they used
the land in ways that ensured it would be sustained for future generations (Castellano, 2000; Champagne, 2015; Ermine, 1995; Hansen, 2009; Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013).

Indigenous peoples also have a shared colonial experience of being dispossessed from the land (Adams, 2000; Blaut, 1993; Champagne, 2015; Charlton & Hansen, 2017; Hansen & Hetzel, 2018; Hansen, 2012; Hansen, 2015a; Hansen, 2015b; TRCC, 2015; Wildcat et al., 2014). Wildcat et al. (2014) suggest that “if colonization is fundamentally about dispossessing Indigenous peoples from land, decolonization must involve forms of education that reconnect Indigenous peoples to land and the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land” (p. 1). It is well documented that Indigenous peoples in Canada experienced the colonization of their lands, forced assimilation, residential schooling, and the suppression of their languages, spiritual practices, identity, and culture (Adams, 2000; Antsanen & Hansen, 2012; Blaut, 1993; Champagne, 2015; Charlton & Hansen, 2016; Ermine, 1995; Hansen & Antsanen, 2016; Hansen & Antsanen, 2012; Di Angelo & Sensoy, 2012; TRCC, 2015).

Although Indigenous peoples have experienced colonization and suppression of their cultures, land-based education ideas and practices still exist within many Indigenous communities. In contemporary Indigenous communities, there are Elders who continue to teach the succeeding generations to have respect for the land, plants, animals, and water. According to the Indigenous sociologist Duane Champagne (2015), the “land was a means for life and livelihood, and the people were guests of the Creator” (p. 4). As Champagne (2015) notes,

The land was given to the people by the Creator, who had a sacred task or purpose for the people. The people gave thanks to the Creator through ceremonies, and by showing respect to the land, plants, animals and other beings living on the land. Indian people were not owners of the land, and shared the land with other power beings with whom they had to show respect. (p. 4)

These kinds of understandings demonstrate the spiritual nature of Indigenous worldviews and perspectives, which have been an important factor in the development of land-based education (Adams, 1975; Antsanen & Hansen, 2012; Castellano, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Hansen, 2013; TRCC, 2015; Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013).

Misinterpretations of Indigenous Education

In many ways, there have been problems with Western interpretations of what constitutes Indigenous education. As Champagne (2015) observes:

About two and half centuries ago, northeastern Indian leaders chided American colonial educators for wasting their young men in European education. The young men who attended colonial schools returned with no skills to hunt, could not run, could not take care of themselves in the wilderness, did not fit into tribal communities, and tended to break down into depression and drink. (p. 48)

Often, the educational approach has persisted in trying to change Indigenous people into Western people. According to Wildcat et al. (2014), “Settler-colonialism has functioned, in part, by deploying institutions of western education to undermine Indigenous intellectual development through cultural assimilation and the violent separation of Indigenous peoples from our sources of knowledge and strength—the land” (p. 3). In other words, colonial Indigenous education has been geared towards assimilation into Western culture rather than towards maintaining Indigenous culture and identity. As a result, Indigenous learners have long been perceived as a “problem” in
conventional schools. Adams (1975) maintains that colonial education marginalizes Indigenous learners and destroys their self-esteem:

The school systematically and meticulously conditions natives to a state of inferiorization and colonization. It does this in a number of ways: most important, however, is that it teaches the languages, literature, and history of the colonizer and thus forces the students to deny their language, culture, and essential being. (p. 152)

Adams clearly illustrates the tendency of education in Canada to emphasize Western understandings of education. Adams (1975) also states that Indigenous students are socialized to assimilate into the underclass of the society: “Schooling leads to alienation, subordination, and conformity. Instead of providing social mobility and serving as an equalizer for its citizens, it rigidly maintains the class system” (p. 159). Therefore, the dominant groups’ language, history, and culture are emphasized while Indigenous language and culture are marginalized.

Decolonizing Indigenous Education: A Land-Based Approach

Times of course change, and today educational discourse now recognizes that Indigenous education should convey Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and so there is much interest in decolonizing Indigenous education. However, any model of decolonizing Indigenous land-based education should have a vision and objective for the future well-being of Indigenous communities.

In its research with Indigenous Elders, the TRCC (2015) reports that there is much work to be done in terms of developing the future well-being of Indigenous communities and promoting the reconciliation of relationships:

We have work to do. That work we are [already] doing as [Aboriginal] peoples. Our relatives who have come from across the water [non-Aboriginal people], you still have work to do on your road. ... The land is made up of the dust of our ancestors’ bones. And so to reconcile with this land and everything that has happened, there is much work to be done ... in order to create balance. (Elder Mary Deleary, as cited in TRCC, 2015, p. 9)

Elder Mary Deleary suggests that the land is significant to fostering improved relationships and reconciliation for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. However, in order to do so, one must examine the traditional teachings that demonstrate respect for the land.

Many critics recognize the significance of Indigenous teachings in relation to the development of Indigenous community well-being and healing (Champagne, 2015; Hansen & Antsanen, 2017; Radu et al., 2014. For instance, Hansen and Antsanen (2017) observe that “Indigenous lives and communities can be improved by connecting to traditional teachings, practices and spiritual ceremonies” (p. 16). Smith (1999) reminds us that Indigenous education involves a decolonizing movement that seeks to restore the cultural ideas and practices from a history of colonial oppression, and that “cultural survival, self-determination, healing, restoration and social justice are engaging Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities in a diverse array of projects” (p. 142). Indigenous land-based education thus is a fundamental part of decolonization because it promotes an Indigenous model of education in a culturally appropriate way; it is more than a set of beliefs.

Indigenous land-based education has developed into a finely tuned model of Indigenous ways of knowing (Ermine, 1995; Hansen & Antsanen, 2016). Chandler and Lalonde (1998) have found that restoring the teachings within Indigenous education has produced some incredible results in Indigenous communities, and that those which “have taken active steps to preserve and rehabilitate their own cultures are shown to be those in which youth suicide rates are dramatically lower” (p.
Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1998) share a similar perspective and claim that at-risk youth can benefit from being exposed to holistic, traditional Indigenous teachings. Brendtro et al. (1998) further note that

The number four has sacred meaning to Native people who see the person as standing in a circle surrounded by the four directions. …We believe the philosophy embodied in this circle of courage is not only a cultural belonging to Native peoples, but a cultural birthright for all the world’s children. (p. 45)

This passage suggests that Indigenous teachings are relevant to the world and that these teachings can benefit all humanity.

Brown (2004) notes that Western philosophy is not very holistic because it tends to suppress the emotional realm, and that such a lack of emotional development has had some negative impacts on Indigenous peoples:

When the European male (Zeno, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Descartes, etc.) separated their mind from their heart ... this emotional detachment from their lands allowed them to leave their homeland and export their philosophy of oppression throughout the globe. When Europeans became detached from their affective awareness, it allowed them to avoid the emotional feedback from their exploitation of the world’s peoples and environments. The oppression of the European heart by the European mind was the beginning of the oppression of Indigenous peoples, women, and the earth itself. (p. 28)

For Brown, such lack of emotional development has been an important factor in the ensuing exploitation of the land. Similarly, Hart (2002) claims that Eurocentric colonizers espoused two basic views to justify the exploitation of Indigenous lands:

First, they hold a self-righteous stance that their views and actions are the proper and best ones to be held by all peoples of the world. In turn, Aboriginal people’s worldviews are trivialized, our histories are rewritten from the eyes of the colonizers, and our values are demeaned and manipulated. The second reason lies with the colonizers’ need to legitimize their dominion over Aboriginal peoples’ land. If the Aboriginal peoples’ cultures keep them tied to the land, then this connection needs to be severed so that the colonizers’ claim over the land and its resources can be confirmed. (p. 25)

This passage by Hart, demonstrates the notions of so-called European superiority and Indigenous inferiority that have dominated society for so long. Such views of Indigenous peoples’ inferiority were a major stimulus towards suppressing Indigenous culture, values, and philosophical thought.

Protection of the Land

Although Indigenous peoples such as the Cree have been colonized, they nonetheless have maintained their cultural teachings that advocate protection of the land, which is reflected in the “Idle No More” movement. Wotherspoon and Hansen (2013) observe that Idle No More is based on ancient Indigenous cultural teachings that promote respect for the land and embrace “a vision to protect the land and water that leads to sustaining rather than exploiting the environment” (p. 27). Wotherspoon and Hansen (2013) add that

Although the Idle No More movement seems to have disappeared from the media, it is in fact very much alive and vital in and beyond Indigenous communities. Idle No More has not disappeared but has demonstrated its deep roots as part of an established system of cultural teachings and values that advocate respect for the environment that has been continuously reproduced to the present time. Idle No More speaks of modern Indigenous
interpretations of development that are rooted in the ideology of future wellbeing of succeeding generations. (p. 33)

Indigenous peoples, communities, and nations are concerned with protecting and preserving the environment and their cultural values and understandings. Indigenous peoples are also concerned with reproducing cultural teachings. As Hansen and Antsanen (2016) note, the Elders “still teach us that the land should not be sold or destroyed” (p. 3). Thus, Indigenous land-based education has functioned to socialize community members into Indigenous society and to respect the land.

In spite of the above, Western school systems have failed to develop Indigenous students’ potential because of generations of colonial approaches to education. Simply put, many Indigenous students are not taught about collective Indigenous values and teachings. In conventional education, Elders often play a marginal role in the teaching of Indigenous students. Consequently, many Indigenous students do not develop their educational potential and do not identify with either Indigenous culture or mainstream culture. The Elders suggest that land-based education has the potential to develop students in ways that promote their individual and community well-being.

Research Methods Including the Voices and Knowledge of the Elders

Indigenous voices are unheard and often considered to be unimportant and/or academically irrelevant within scholarly research (Champagne, 2015; Smith, 1999; Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013). This study argues that Elders have been the customary guides and teachers in Indigenous societies for thousands of years, and are still regarded highly in many Indigenous communities at the present time.

As an insider of the group examined in this study and a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, I grew up in Northern Manitoba, Swampy Cree territory, and I have observed the traditional value of respect that the Cree have for the old people. It is the Elders who carry the traditional knowledge, and it is this source that I wanted to focus on in this research. The Elders are appreciated for their experience and knowledge of the community—its history, morals, customs, and ceremonies. The Elders play significant teaching roles in many Indigenous communities, whether they are widely known or not. I turned to my Elders for knowledge and guidance as is the custom of the Cree. I knew the Elders before I conducted this study, and I recognize them as my Elders because I have observed their personal character, wisdom, and knowledge of Cree culture. This form of Indigenous research methodology is similarly reflected in the works of Indigenous scholarship (Brown, 2004; Hansen, 2013; Hansen, Booker, & Charlton, 2014; Hart, 2002).

Participants

The Elders were recruited from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation territory by the researcher, who approached them and explained the nature of the study. Since the Elders knew and trusted me, they were happy to participate. Opaskwayak Cree Nation is a Swampy Cree (Omushkegowuk) First Nation community located in Northern Manitoba (about 600 kilometers northwest of Winnipeg), situated at the junction of the Saskatchewan and Pasquia rivers. Opaskwayak Cree Nation has a total population of 5,368 (Statistics Canada, 2016). The Cree word Opaskwayak means “narrrows between woods.”

To demonstrate respect for the Elders and honour Indigenous ethics, culturally sensitive protocols were followed. This included offering cloth, tobacco, and sweet-grass to demonstrate
respect and acknowledge the Elders’ contributions to the study. The researcher used the tools of ethnography: open-ended interviewing methods, field notes, and audio-taped conversations. During my interviews with the Elders, I observed their descriptions of land-based education. The Elders taught me much about the traditional teachings and how they perceive and understand the land. I had the privilege of having in-depth conversations with the Elders on topics about environmental concerns, spirituality, and how personal development was promoted through a spiritual connection to the land. For example, Elder Stella describes her personal development in the following way:

*My personal development was given to me in a very deep sense as I was growing up because it was connected with my spirituality. And it was the stories that were told that developed us into who we are because when you think of these stories that were told there is so much about me that I know is spiritual.*

The more Cree teachings are examined, the more they are seen as spiritual. Indigenous teachings are powerful because they become an integral part of the thought processes of the Indigenous people in their communities and shape their reality and identity.

The particular interpretation of Indigenous Elders depends also upon their particular experiences. For example, Elder William Lathlin infers that there has to be a spiritual connection to the land for communities to function:

*There has to be that connection because if there isn’t, to me, then it’s all hostile; there is no peace. If you go out into the bush by yourself it is so peaceful, and you can hear the bugs on the floor or on the grass and the trees.*

Specific understandings, and nuances of Cree customs, spirituality and traditional teachings were observed in my visits with the Elders, which include significant meanings, values, and perspectives that are found the Cree community. As Woods (1996) notes, “ethnography is concerned with what people have, how they behave, how they interact. ... It aims to uncover beliefs, values, perspectives, motivations” (p. 4). The interviews were tape recorded with permission and were conducted in the traditional Omushkegowuk (Swampy Cree) territory of Northern Manitoba. Each Elder was interviewed for approximately 90 minutes and all interviews were conducted during the winter season, which in the Cree culture tends to be a time for sharing stories (Hansen, 2013). All the Elders with one exception are named: Jack is the pseudonym for one participant who chose to remain anonymous, and the pseudonym is used to refer to him throughout this paper.

Another participant was Sylvia Hansen, who is a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation. She was born in 1937 and experienced life on Opaskwayak territory; however, like many other Indigenous children of her time, she was forced to attend residential school. Sylvia is fluent in the Cree language. Stella Neff is a member of the Misipawistik Cree Nation or Grand Rapids First Nation, and is fluent in the Cree language. William G. Lathlin is a member and former chief of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, and fluent in Cree language. John Martin is a member of the Mosakahiken Cree Nation or Moose Lake reserve and is fluent in Cree language. Dennis Thorne, an Elder of mixed Indigenous ancestry (primarily of Cree descent but including also Dakota and Ojibwa) was born in 1939 in Wanless, Manitoba, a small Métis community located some 50 kilometers north of Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

The Elders were interviewed in accordance with Creswell’s (1998) work on qualitative research. As such, the interviews were conducted at a time, place, and setting chosen by the Elders. As Burgess (1984) advises, the open-ended questioning style provides the participants “an opportunity to develop their answers outside a structured format” (p. 102). These open-ended interviews are also culturally appropriate in the Indigenous community, particularly when
interviewing Elders. I transcribed the interviews myself in order to develop a better understanding of the data and to identify common themes to draw conclusions. This process enabled me to identify common themes in the findings.

**Analysis of Themes**

Stake (1995) notes that “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (p. 71). My analysis began from the moment I began interviewing the Elders. To ensure that I characterized the Elders in context, I recorded the interviews and consulted with the Elders to confirm that my interpretation of the transcripts reflected what the Elders meant.

During the analysis, I searched for themes in relation to the Elders’ teachings of land-based education. I reflected on the data, and the themes that emerged are identified as follows: counseling from the Elders, traditional teachings, ceremonies, and a connection to the land. The themes revealed that obstructions to well-being were disconnection from the land, colonization, and misuse of medicine. According to most participants, the disconnection from the land weakens the potential for well-being. A key way Western colonial powers weakened Indigenous nations was to disconnect Indigenous peoples from the land (Adams, 1975; Antsanen & Hansen, 2012; Hart, 2002; TRCC, 2015; Wildcat et al., 2014). Hart (2002) notes that “If the Aboriginal peoples’ cultures keep them tied to the land, then this connection needs to be severed so that the colonizers’ claim over the land and its resources can be confirmed” (p. 25). The Elders perceived that the disconnection from the land decreases the capacity for individual and community well-being, and that colonialism functions to disconnect Indigenous peoples from the land. The Elders expressed that land-based education involves re-connecting to the land, traditional teachings, practices, and ceremonies; it involves returning to cultural practices and healing ceremonies that were suppressed through colonization. According to the Elders, the significant obstructions to well-being arose from the alienation of Indigenous language, traditional teachings, and values that emerged out of colonization. However, the major obstruction is the disconnection from the land, which is crucial to Indigenous identity and culture. Elder Stella Neff, for example, describes how the community was impacted by the Indian residential school system, which has become recognized as a part of Canada’s colonial history:

> When the residential schools took the children away, that had an impact on our people in Grand Rapids and so when that happened and all those things combined it was a disaster for the roles of women and men because when they lost their children. That’s when they started fighting and the angry aggression was a disaster for our community.

Stella’s statement clearly illustrates the negative impacts of residential schools. Stella also shared later that she misses the respect for the land:

> We were taught gently; we didn’t get the stick like what was introduced, or like a strap like we got in school. It was by a gentle teaching and these values were passed on like respect and love for land and honesty and good behaviour. So the values were priceless for me and I’m so sorry that the system is gone.

The land-based education Stella received was comprised of gentle teachings and stories that taught the people to have a love for the land. When the Indigenous education system had been overthrown by colonial education, Stella felt a deep sorrow.

Elder William Lathlin describes the impacts of the residential schools in a similar way:
The impact of it has split up families, took away the children, and so some of the parents didn’t really know the rules anymore. Because the state more or less invaded the home, it affected how the parents raise the child, and the responsibilities of how to raise the child and the consequences of their action or inaction. So those things changed.

The residential schools have become a recognized part of Canada’s unfortunate colonial history; however, the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in Canada’s history is a positive step towards healing from colonialism and restoring and redeveloping Indigenous land-based education.

Discussion of Findings

Summarizing the Elders’ Discussions

Participants’ narratives about land-based education demonstrate that the Cree Elders have a spiritual connection to the land. The narratives have been perpetuated over many generations, and demonstrate how teaching is done in the Cree world. The participants described the traditional educational process as being holistic, which makes spirituality significant. The Elders expressed that the purpose of traditional education emphasized the significance of respecting the land and the reproduction of culture, ceremonies, and traditional thought. This dimension of the land became increasingly apparent in the participants’ discussion, which adheres to a belief in Manitou, or the Great Mystery, which the Cree call Kitche Manitou. The mystery also corresponds to one’s personal “soul” or the inner self, which also relates to how the individual is connected to all creation.

A Spiritual Connection to the Land

Traditionally, Indigenous Elders guided the community and the educational process. Today, Elders continue to contribute their knowledge to education. The Elders discussed a spiritual connection to the land. For example, John shared that

Everything is spiritual: the trees are alive, the grass, the rocks, they have a spirit. The animals, they have a spirit and so the ceremonies are based on those teachings, like the things that we do, it was for a purpose; … the purpose is spiritual. We didn’t use the bible, so we used the feather, because that feather teaches us; or the rock, it affects every one of us and it is spiritual. These are the kinds of things that helped the Cree people, and I hope that they continue. ...We have to use the spiritual part, the spiritual side, when we do our work and in the conflict resolution and in peace that’s what we’re asking for. If you understand the wind [makes a circular movement with his hands] to blow the bad things away, to blow in the good things into your mind—when you’re doing that, that’s what the Elders do; one of the grandfathers will help you with that process.

John provides an interesting discussion on the spiritual connection to the land. In terms of his own understanding, John would like to see these traditional teachings continue and suggests that the “spirit” or the “soul” is what connects us all. John suggests that we need to realize such interconnectedness—that each action has an impact on all things. For John, the land is crucial for teaching important lessons and appropriate behaviour; he notes that everything is alive—the animals, the plants, the rocks—and they have a spirit.
William responded to the same question by stating that:

> When you go into these ceremonies like the sweat lodge and you sweat you feel nice and clean. In your mind after you’ve been through that in your meditating, your mind is receptive and you’re ready for suggestions by the Elders.

William’s statement speaks of the significance of keeping an open mind when being taught. He also refers to the sweat lodge as a cleansing process that contributes to receiving teachings from Elders. Similarly, Stella states that:

> Spirituality is the essence of the being, the being that comes from your environment. My grandfather would always take us to this place where poplars are in a circle. And he would take us there and it was on the swiftest part of the rapids that he would stop and he would have a hard time stopping there because it was swift and he would grab a branch because the water was so swift and he would stop there every time we went on the rapids and we would walk up to this place and I never saw anything there in particular. I couldn’t tell you if it was wonderful because I never saw it. I could tell you it was a clearing and when we walked up to it my grandfather said Manitou, which means God is here and everybody quit talking. … When we walked under this clearing we got this amazing sense. I could never describe it because you have to believe what this sense was; it was a feeling that there was a presence there but you have to experience it and you can’t describe how it feels.

This passage demonstrates the belief in a Great Mystery or a spirit. For the Cree, the Great Mystery is Manitou and there is energy or a spirit in all of us; in fact, there is energy or a spirit in all of creation, which indicates that spirituality and ceremony are important to the education process.

**Personal Development**

The Elders spoke of how personal development is related to teachings related to ceremonies. Stella, for instance, said:

> My personal development was given to me in a very deep sense as I was growing up because it was connected with my spirituality. And it was the stories that were told that developed us into who we are because when you think of these stories that were told there is so much about me that I know is spiritual. And here it was from the teachings and yet although they never mention ceremonies I know it and yet I knew when they mention sweat lodge I knew it was something that was special; I knew when I heard that first drum, I knew I remembered something from the back of my mind from way before and I got the sense that, yes I know this sound. I heard the sound because when it’s a part of you for millennia you have to recognize it when it’s in your blood; you have to recognize it.

Stella stresses the importance of teaching traditional stories and demonstrates the notion that a collective memory of the people is transmitted through the bloodline. In his discussion of personal development, John speaks of the significance of the process:

> When you’re going to do fasting, you never say that “I’m going to fast for 4 days.” But if you can go for 4 days that’s good, and if you can go for 2 days that’s good, and if you can only go for 1 day that’s good too. Like me, I started fasting at my place and then I went to finish off in the mountains. I went to the mountains and I started outside of my house. When you fast, you have to make yourself a lodge or something that you can [pause] ... well you know sometimes it rains, and we don’t want you to suffer in the rain and get cold so this is why we build ourselves a lodge.
John refers to knowing one’s limitations and abilities. In the context of fasting, individuals can learn to develop their abilities. Personal development, then, is a process of learning and introspection; as John noted, “I started fasting at my place and then I went to finish off in the mountains.” Thus, in pursuit of personal development, John describes a process of introspection and a connection to the land. The fasting is done on the land, in nature.

In addition, it is interesting to observe the spirituality and the stories that speak of healing from sickness, such as those shared in Sylvia’s discussion:

Well, one time my mother just about died and that’s why we went to Cedar Lake. Because there was this old man and he was from Cedar Lake, and he told us of an old lady that cured people. I was just a little girl at that time. And my mother took a bottle of wine and I think she gave her 10 dollars. And that old lady was singing a song and she was dancing around. Then she took a pillow, and put the pillow on her knees, and she told my mother to lay down, and she put her hand on her ear and turned it back and then she showed her and said see it is right here. And there was a worm there with those white berries, those red willow trees, I think they’re called, and there was one of those with the worm. She took it out of her, and she said, “do you want me to send this back or do you want me to burn it?” And my mother said to burn it, so she burned it and that was it.

Sylvia’s statement reveals an aspect of the Cree spirituality in accordance with a belief in spiritual healing. In this case, when Western medicine failed to heal, the grandmother was healed through Cree spirituality. Within such a spiritual dimension, it is recognized that sickness does not occur strictly by violation of sacred or tribal laws; it happens, however, that sickness can be caused by those who use medicine to hurt rather than to heal. Altogether, the story about how the grandmother almost died demonstrates the accounts in which Indigenous peoples experience healing. Healing took place by strengthening the body’s natural defenses and by applying medicinal plants that are known through Indigenous land-based education.

Indigenous people such as the Cree understood and valued the land because the land not only was used for teaching values for life but was also necessary to sustain life itself. Therefore, it follows the Indigenous tendency to protect the land using three lenses, as discussed by Stella. The first lens emphasizes how dependency on the land instills an awareness of the need to value and preserve the land. The second lens recognizes that humans are responsible for guarding against wrongdoing that can negatively impact on the land (such as through fire). Lastly the third lens described by Stella points to the land itself, as a tool that teaches and corrects behaviours, particularly through spiritual visions. As Stella explains:

When you’re so dependent on the land like we were, then the land had to be a part of every decision because that’s what sustained us, so protecting the land and protecting the hunting areas, the trapping areas, and all of the water areas, it had to be above all protected from any damage. So I think that if there was any conflict in these areas it was considered very serious, especially if there was any kind of environmental damage done by the wrongdoer. I am specifically thinking about setting fire or things like that, which could destroy so much land. ... Sometimes they talk about it where they are just as some people on an island. My brother went there for 3 or 4 days on an island because he was drinking too much and so my father just dropped them off there. So that was something he could think about for a few days later but he never forgot that experience, he never forgets
it because he saw himself there when you start getting hungry and when you start seeing visions and when he start seeing himself he became scared and so that’s one lesson we used: to go and see visions.

Stella’s narrative conveys explicit connections to the land as a deep reflective and spiritual space for teaching and learning. One important aspect to understand in Stella’s answer is the concept of understanding life as a result of being isolated and connecting to nature. In this case, Stella’s brother is dropped off on an island, which is another way of connecting to the land. The traditional spiritual connection to the land is reflected in the quest for visions that help individuals find their purpose in life.

In his response to the same question, William stresses the connection to the land and peacemaking methods:

“There has to be that connection because if there isn’t, to me, then it’s all hostile; there is no peace. If you go out into the bush by yourself it is so peaceful, and you can hear the bugs on the floor or on the grass and the trees.

William’s response emphasizes the importance of the land and the traditional way of life upon which our society was structured. It appears that when William speaks of the peace and silence when out on the land, one must realize that this insight is consistent with John’s statement that “the world is alive” and it also suggests that the land is alive and must be respected. Similarly, Dennis discussed the ways in which healing can occur in the sweat lodge:

“The sweat lodge was used for purification to take out the negative. It took out the negative and put it away so you don’t hurt anybody in order to get back to the positive outlook. If a person did something wrong, all the people in the sweat lodge got a scolding because that lesson was for all of us, not just for that individual.

Dennis explains that the sweat lodge is instrumental in restoring a positive outlook on the world. He also mentions that a lesson for one is a lesson for all, and is an indication that an individual’s action affects the entire community.

Jack in turn discussed the spiritual aspect of traditional medicines as follows:

“When I was a boy I cut my toe almost in half. There was an old woman who mixed some medicines together and she put it on my cut and after a few days my toe was better. But there was also talk of medicine men who some people believe held powers, that they could do things to you like twist your face or make you sick. But only if you believe in that are they able to have some control over you.

According to Jack, traditional medicine not only is used for healing but sometimes also is used inappropriately in order to hurt others. The point here, however, is that such misuse was perceived as inappropriate and accordingly the point about control is significant. Here, spirituality and medicine become interconnected. For the believer, spiritual medicine is real. In other words, Jack suggests that one’s physical well-being is not only physical but also spiritual in nature. The Elders’ teachings have been passed down for generations. These ancient teachings are holistic, and the spiritual accounts of medicine being used for healing as well as hurting are not fictions but rather are recognized as actual accounts within the Swampy Cree culture.

Now I will organize the themes that emerged in the interviews with the Elders. The themes are identified in the tables below, which I describe in terms of factors that promote well-being and factors that obstruct well-being.
Identifying Significant Factors

Table 1  
Factors That Promote or Obstruct Well-Being

| Participant   | Factors that promote well-being                                           | Factors that obstruct well-being                          |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Stella Neff   | ceremonies; vision quest; connection to the land; stories; counseling from the old people | disconnection from the land                              |
| Sylvia Hansen | counseling from the old people; spirituality; traditional medicine        | misuse of medicine                                        |
| John Martin   | Language; spirituality; connection to the land; ceremonies; sweat lodge; healing circles; vision quest; the old people | mainstream justice system; exclusion of spirituality in the courts; exclusion of community in the justice process |
| William Lathlin | the old people; connection to the land; language; ceremonies              | disconnection from the land                              |
| Dennis Thorne | counseling from the old people; ceremonies; sweat lodge                   | erosion of traditional culture                            |
| Jack          | connection to the land; the old people                                    | misuse of medicine                                        |

Conclusions

This article engaged in a discussion of Cree Elders’ perspectives of land-based education in Northern Manitoba. The cultural ideas contained in the Elders’ teachings demonstrate that land-based education is significant to Indigenous education. The Elders expressed a spiritual connection to the land, the desire to preserve their cultural values and the belief that land-based education is significant to Indigenous people’s personal and community well-being. This study provides an example of an Indigenous interpretation of land-based education from the perspectives of Cree Elders. The study is important because a comprehensive understanding of Swampy Cree land-based education is addressed insufficiently in the literature. This article is worth reading by educators, researchers, and community members because Indigenous communities have been impacted by colonization.

An important impact of colonization has been the decrease in well-being in Indigenous communities. The evidence of a decrease in well-being is found in the array of studies documenting educational disparities between the Indigenous peoples and mainstream Canadians, as well as the disproportionate instances of incarceration, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide among the former. However, research findings suggest that Indigenous land-based education is important to Cree Elders, individuals, and communities. Understood this way, the Cree Elders interviewed in this study recognize that land-based education predicated on cultural teachings can be used to promote well-being of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

While the study is based on the Cree experience in Northern Manitoba, its message is significant to many other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Drawing on the Cree Elders’
perspectives and teachings, the following recommendations are made to advance Indigenous education:

1. Educational institutions—universities, colleges, and both public and band-controlled schools alike, including Opaskwayak Cree Nation—should sustain and support Indigenous land-based education. More specifically, Indigenous Swampy Cree land-based education requires greater funding to provide successful educational outcomes.

2. Efforts should be made to increase knowledge devoted to raising awareness of Indigenous land-based education and cultural knowledge among non-Indigenous communities, who also could benefit from learning about Indigenous land-based education.

3. National and provincial government funding agencies should continue to support education and cultural programs that have demonstrated success in Indigenous communities.
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