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## Mnidoo-Worlding: Merleau-Ponty and Anishinaabe Philosophical Translations

Dolleen Tisawii'ashii Manning, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Helen Fielding, *The University of Western Ontario*

Joint Supervisor: Antonio Calcagno, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Theory and Criticism

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## ***Abstract***

This dissertation develops a concept of mnidoo-worlding, whereby consciousness emerges as a kind of possession by what is outside of ‘self’ and simultaneously by what is internal as self-possession. Weaving together phenomenology, post structural philosophy and Ojibwe Anishinaabe orally transmitted knowledges, I examine Ojibwe Anishinaabe mnidoo, or ‘other than human,’ ontologies. Mnidoo refers to energy, potency or processes that suffuse all of existence and includes humans, animals, plants, inanimate ‘objects’ and invisible and intangible forces (i.e. Thunder Beings). Such Anishinaabe philosophies engage with what I articulate as all-encompassing and interpenetrating mnidoo co-responsiveness. The result is a resistance to cooption that concedes to the heterogeneity of being. I define this murmuration, that is, this concurrent gathering of divergent and fluctuating actuation/signals as mnidoo-worlding. Mnidoo-worlding entails a possession by one’s surroundings that subsumes and conditions the possibility of agency as entwined and plural co-presence. The introductory chapter defines the terms of mnidoo philosophy, and my particular translations of it. The chapter further disentangles mnidoo-philosophy from the ways it has been appropriated, and misinterpreted by western interlocuters. It also situates the mnidoo ontology I am developing in broader conversations in phenomenology about the relational world. Chapter Two explores the complex implications of conducting Anishinaabe philosophy in colonial languages and institutions, framed in the context of settler colonialism and discourses of reconciliation and indigenizing the academy. In Chapter Three I engage with the ‘Indigenous Renaissance’ in Indigenous arts and scholarship, outlining epistemological-pedagogical methods including oral traditions, embodied knowing, land-based pedagogy and non-interference pedagogy. The

fourth chapter forwards a critique of liberal humanism and posthumanism through an interrogation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept "becoming-animal." The final, culminating chapter brings *Anishinaabe* ontologies, tacitly found embedded in our everydayness, together with Indigenous ways of being attuned to what is there in the world. In dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology I take up Anishinaabe *mnidoo* philosophies to consider everyday phenomena from the collective movement of birds, to intuition and dreams. These are profoundly imbued in these philosophically-lived practices as embodied ciphers—languages and knowledge hidden in our "encrustation" with the world—subtly revealed as a simultaneous presence and elsewhere paradox.

## Keywords

Ojibwe knowledges, *mnidoo*, *manitou*, other-than-human, phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, oral tradition, non-interference pedagogy, posthuman

## ***Co-Authorship Statement***

I have struggled over how these words speak as ink on paper. This text ultimately must be acknowledged as co-authored for I cannot disentangle myself, my thoughts, my knowing from mnidoo and my community of shared knowledge. Chi miigwetch to all of you who knowingly or not have shaped my world and contributed to this small part of our collective knowledge that I share.

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encouraging of my experimentation as I figure out how to master what is foreign to me, and also to proceed in a way that honors and acknowledges *Gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang* (“that which is given to us in a loving way” Geniusz 67). I feel very fortunate to have found not one, but two professors who are so supportive. Miigwetch for taking me seriously, and for broaching with such openness the possibility of respectful dialogue between Continental and Anishinaabe philosophy. Thank you to my reader Jan Plug, who I have taken the most graduate classes with, for good reason. Miigwetch to Regna Darnell for helping me transition from contemporary studio arts to rigours of academia. Thank you to my committee, Brent Debassige (Anishinaabe), Joel Faflak, Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw), and Patrick Mahon for not only chairing my defense, but for being such a good colleague and friend over the years. Chi miigwetch also to my aunt Rita (Sands) Clement Naakwegiizhigokwe, whose more recent friendship and input were essential to the Anishinaabemowin spelling and translations in this essay. Thank you to both Mona and Rita for sharing your considerable expertise as first-language Anishinaabemowin speakers and for helping continue the project begun with my mother to translate the philosophy that resides as much in the people as it does in our language. I would like to thank Manitoulin Elder Shirley Williams (Bird Clan) for her dedication to Anishnaabemowin, from which I have benefitted, and Elders Bruce Elijah (Wolf Clan), Thomas Mattinas and Adam Lussier (Eagle clan) who have informed my thinking, no matter how brief our interaction. There are many people whom I am grateful to for your dialogue and support. Miigwetch to my sisters Marena, Joanne and Jane along with my Cree sister Betty Ann Stoney. Thank you also to my brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews. At more than a hundred, there are too many of you to name! Special acknowledgement goes to my nephew Thomas Adam Jackson, with whom I have often had long conversations about Anishinaabe philosophy over the years. Thank you to my research

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction - Standing on the Shore

This dissertation develops a concept of mnidoo-worlding, whereby consciousness emerges as a kind of possession by what is outside of ‘self’ and simultaneously by what is internal as self-possession. Mnidoo (commonly spelled manitou) is a complex Ojibwe Anishinaabe concept that refers to energy, “potency” or processes that suffuse all of existence (Johnston, “One Generation” 11). I examine mnidoo ontologies (that is, mnidoo theories of existence) along with the permeable quality of Anishinaabe interrelational ontologies. Since pre-contact, Ojibwe philosophies have emphasized the interconnected and autonomous living status inherent to all of existence, recognizing the agency not only of humans, but also of animals, plants, inanimate ‘objects’ and invisible and intangible forces (i.e. Thunder Birds). Such Anishinaabe philosophies—frameworks with an aversion to hierarchy and anthropocentric individualism—conventionally engage with what I articulate as an all-encompassing and interpenetrating mnidoo co-responsiveness (this differs from individual Manitou, which are specific dynamic forces or persons). The result is a resistance to cooption that concedes to the heterogeneity of being. I define this murmuration, that is, this concurrent gathering of divergent and fluctuating actuation/signals, as mnidoo-worlding. Such a worlding or, in other words, mnidoo-consciousness entails a possession by one’s surroundings that subsumes and conditions the possibility of agency as entwined and plural co-presence.

## 1.1 *Terminology and Anishinaabemowin*

### *Translation Method*

Before diving directly into the thick of this discussion it is necessary to outline a few points on translation and my general approach to the Anishinaabe philosophizing that I undertake in this dissertation. Primary among these is how I come to the term *mnidoo*, as in *mnidoo-worlding*. I use *mnidoo* (singular), *mnidoog* and *manidoog* (plural) to refer to these energies/potencies, which is the spelling I derive from the pronunciation given to me by my mother. Potawatomi and Ojibwe dialects circulate in and around my Indigenous communities. *Manidoog* is not only plural but specifically refers to supernatural entities or ‘persons.’ Usually *manidoo* and *mnidoo* would be understood as different spellings for the same concept. However, I deviate from this by extending other kinds of knowing beyond the limitations of what western science claims to be the five human senses. I press on these Anishinaabemowin concepts to break with western ideological norms to reclaim the Anishinaabe ‘blessings,’ or gifts, that my teachings tell me that my ancestors hid inside of me. I am searching for a vibration, a sixth sense, if you will, a fluctuation, that is, Anishinaabe the exceptionally good original *mnidoo* frequency. It is a form or way of being and communicating between these little potencies, which brings to my otherwise obstinate human consciousness a knowing that flutters throughout this unending body of existence, instantly and simultaneously. I take compound terms such as *mnidoo-worlding* to be somewhat akin to Anishinaabe polysynthetic languages, that is, sentence words. Both the spelling and concept *mnidoo* is my rejigging or elaboration of these combined and related concepts.

The concept *mnidoo*, as I employ it, stems from a conversation I had with my mother about *Gizhemnidoo* when I was about twelve years old, a topic that we would return to often, right up to the last few evenings that we spent together. This is a conversation that continues in dream and memory. Indeed, she came to visit me a few days before submitting this dissertation (Oct 13, 2017) and clarified some important elements that I was missing. This concept *mnidoo* derives from the word *Gizhemnidoo*, from my mothers' dialect (which may or may not *necessarily* be the same pronunciation used in Kikonaang / Kettle Point, or even today in her nearby home community Stoney Point / Aazhoodenaang). She translated *Gizhemnidoo* in several ways; primary among these was Great Spirit (the most common translation in our area). *Gizhe* (great) is similar to *chi* (big). We can separate *gizhe* from *mnidoo*, which she called spirit, potency, potential—dynamic energy. She said that the word spirit is the anglicized interpretation, but *mnidoo* is something that is happening, and is about to happen at the same time. *Gizhemnidoo* is the Great Mystery/Spirit, mind boggling, because it is beyond human comprehension. But virtually everything is *mnidoo*, little spirits. Everything has a little spirit that is propelled by, and exists, due to this energy. My mother described how everything is and has this little spirit; everything is endowed with a piece or small version of *Gizhmnidoo*.

Consider, for instance, Wendy Makoons Geniusz' interpretation of *manidoons* as bug: "The word *manidoons* can refer to an insect or to a little spirit, including a fairy." Further along, citing Nichols and Nyholm, Geniusz notes "*manidoons* is a diminutive form under the entry *manidoo*, but also provide[s] a separate entry for *manidoons*, glossed as 'bug, insect'" ("Manidoons," 93, author's emphasis). So, we have an idea of *mnidoo* in a small scale but, as my mother elaborated, *mnidoo* is still a little mystery, potency, energy that is

an unfolding process, happening and about to happen simultaneously. According to Orrin Lewis and Laura Redish in *Native Languages of the Americas: Preserving and Promoting American Indian Language*, Gizhemnidoo is considered to be:

abstract, benevolent, does not directly interact with humans, and is rarely if ever personified in Anishinabe myths—originally, Gitchi Manitou did not even have a gender (although with the introduction of English and its gender-specific pronouns, Gitchi Manitou began to be referred to as "he.") ... "Gitchi Manitou" (or one of its many variant spellings) was used as a translation for "God" in early translations of the Bible into Ojibway, and today many Ojibway people consider Gitchi Manitou and the Christian God to be one and the same. (<http://www.native-languages.org>)

Lewis and Redish use the spelling “Gitchi Manitou” to refer to the concept Gizhmnidoo. Throughout the dissertation, the works that I cite use varying Anishinaabemowin spellings of terms such as mnidoo and Gizhemnidoo. I chose to keep the different spellings to honour the authors’ usage, as well as to mark the different territorial dialects, and changes over time. I also include the spellings used by anthropologists, early settlers and missionaries for historical accuracy, and to keep transparent the processes of translations taking place in these encounters. According to Lewis and Redish the following affiliated First Nations and Tribes employ similar concepts and spellings of Gizhemnidoo, although I suspect that this list is not complete or all inclusive: Ojibwe, Algonquin, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Menominee, Kickapoo, Sauk-Fox, Mohican, Mohegan, Shawnee, Cree. Members of these groups, as the authors show, have a wide variety of

spellings for the concept of Creator, Great Spirit, Great Mystery, vast potentiality or god, as follows:

Gichi Manidoo, Gchi Mnidoo, Kichi Manido, Gitche Manitou, Gitchi Manitou, Gitchi Manidou, Gitchee Manitou, Gitchee Manito, Kichi-Manidò, Kitchi Manitoo, Kitchi-Manitou, Kitche Manitou, Kicci Manito, Gzhemnido, Kchi Mnido, Gitche Man'ito, Gitsche Manitou, Gichi Manito, Gche-Mnedo, Gitchie Manitou, Kitchie Manitou, Gizhemanidoo, Kitchi Manido, Kchemnito, Kitshi Manito, Kigi Manito, Kchemnito, Kshe Mnito, Kitshi Manito, Gitchie Manitoo, Kitche Manido, Kihci Manito, Kigi Manitu, Chi-Mnidoo, Gche-Mnedo, Mese Manido, Me'se Manedo, Mesi Manito, Kesae Manetow, Keche Manitow, Kishä' Ma'nido, Kisi Manitou, Kehcimaneto, Kechimaneto, Kehci Manito, Kechi Muneto, Gichi Manitoa, Gechee Maneto, Kechi Manetowa, Kechi Manito, Ketchimanetowa, Kiche Manetowa, Kichi Maneto, Kechee Manitowa, Kichi Manetowa, Kiche Manita, Kechee Manetowa, Mishe Moneto, Mishemoneto, Mise Manito, Msawe Maneto, Konchi Manto, Gunche Mundo, Konkchi Manito, Waunthut Mennitoow, Wauntht Mennitow, Waun-theet Mon-nit-toow, Kisemanito, Kihcimanito, Kise Manito, Kici Manito, Kichi Manitou, Getci Mu'nito, Gisha Manitou, Tchi Manito, Monteo. (<http://www.native-languages.org/gitchi-manitou.htm>)

I include this list to give the reader a sense of the diverse nuances between languages and knowledge systems as different peoples interpret Gizhemnido. The variations also convey the challenges involved in writing across even small terrains of the same language group, as well as reflecting the necessity to maintain these dialects since they

reflect their local histories, and relationships to specific locations and territories, along with their development and movement over times. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list; for instance, Basil Johnson's spelling "Kizhae-Manitou" is not among these), and neither is my mother's pronunciation Gizhemnidoo ("Thesaurus" 17). In a move toward language preservation, Johnson's spelling is a special case, however, since he strives with his *Anishinaubae Thesaurus* to institute a standardized Anishinaabemowin writing system that conforms to English language grammatical structures. (No doubt, he is motivated to establish the clearest route to preserving not only the language, but also the life philosophy that comes hand-in-hand with it.) Nonetheless, it is easy to see the similarities and shared cosmology spanning from the East Coast to the Rocky Mountains, in and around the Great Lakes area, and dipping down as far as southern Ohio into what is now known as the United States.

Ojibwe mnidoo ontology is not only relational across species, but it also operates outside of animate/inanimate borders. Indeed, Anishinaabemowin does not contain specifically equivalent Anishinaabemowin terms for animate and inanimate, which have been externally imposed by western anthropologists in efforts to stabilize the morphing and ambiguous distributions of these concepts in the lived-realities of the Ojibwe (Jones 1919 and Schoolcraft 1834 cited in Hallowell "Ojibwe Ontology" 22). I have had innumerable conversations with my mother trying to puzzle out what 'inanimate' could possibly mean, it seemed so implausible to her. Likewise, Hallowell reports an encounter he had with an elderly Anishinaabe man whom he refers to only as "an old man" (24). He asked the man, "are all the stones we see here about us alive?" Hallowell notes that the man "reflected a long while," before finally answering, ambiguously, "No. But *some* are!" ("Ojibwe



Ontology” 24). Hallowell interprets this to mean that, for the Ojibwe, only some stones are alive under some circumstances (24). However, the long pause is particularly interesting to me since it suggests that the question put to the old man’s taken for granted ontology is as perplexing to him as the rules set in motion by the question itself (which invisibly structure Hallowell’s engagement). The problem we encounter here includes fundamental differences in both ontology and pedagogy. The question might make little sense to the old man for whom everything in existence is alive, for it would not exist otherwise (my mother’s teaching). The old man, furthermore, is tipped off that Hallowell makes a distinction between animate and inanimate, because the question itself confirms this position. Why else ask such a question? During the long pause, that old man, challenged to make sense of his worldview within the rules anticipated in the question (and within the timely manner implied by the direct question) must answer in a way that would leave this possibility of ‘living versus nonliving’ open; for in the non-interference pedagogy of Anishinaabe philosophical discourse, it would be harmful to assert his views onto Hallowell and yet, it is also unethical to deny that these metaphysical differences persist. So, he attempts to answer in a way that the question warrants, allowing Hallowell to remain open to his own learning, while respecting these grandfathers (rocks) at the same time. While visiting, Rita (Sands) Clements at her house in Wallaceburg, she told me that the rocks are linguistically inanimate until we interact with them in such a way as to change their status, such as bringing them into the sweat lodge for ceremony (September, 2016).

Ultimately, the old man strives to answer in a way that permits both worldviews to co-exist. Hallowell, in contrast, endeavours to come to a conclusion about what the man’s

answer means, drawing on a framework that would conclusively define the structure and the limits of Ojibwe ontology. For Hallowell, both the old man and his notion that some rocks are alive are anthropological objects to be investigated, interrogated, and ultimately, mastered. At play in this relationship is a power imbalance between Hallowell and the old man. This imbalance is structured by discourses of modern knowledge production that position Hallowell as named ‘expert’ and the old man as an anonymous ‘subject of research’ or ‘informant.’ Moreover, their differing epistemological and pedagogical approaches leave an abyss between them. One supports the project of mastery that suffuses western knowledge production. The other is a *mnidoo* pedagogy that concedes to each their own part, allows for difference to persist, and accepts the profound mystery of all of existence. I elaborate on the resulting epistemic violence and the need for decolonizing philosophy at the border of these epistemic fields in Chapter Two. I follow this discussion with an elaboration of what I term ‘*mnidoo* pedagogies’ in Chapter three. Although Hallowell’s ethnographic work is an immensely rich resource, these concepts insidiously threaten the viability and continuance of *mnidoo* ontology by restricting the fluid oral cultural transmission of these philosophies to westernized frameworks. My work addresses the enigmatic territory where image and reality, appearance and objects, self and word, collide. Yet, the specific structure of such a radical animacy as it pertains to Ojibwe Anishinaabe conceptions of consciousness and perception remains murky. Indeed, anthropologists cannot agree whether these purported ‘animating’ *mnidoo* forces are metaphorical or literal. The old man, I suspect, would say they are both. I endeavor to bring these threads together through a phenomenological study of textual, artistic and Ojibwe Anishinaabe oral cultural practices.

As I write, I find myself caught between worlds—one foot sinking in the sand and the other submerged under water. I write this Anishinaabe philosophy as part of a doctoral program in interdisciplinary critical theory, under the supervision of two continental philosophers, Helen Fielding and Antonio Calcagno, and Indigenous Elder and Cultural Advisor Mona Stonefish Kahawane (Bear Clan), whom I have been in dialogue with for over thirty years. My mother, Rose W. (Elijah) Manning Mshkode-bzhikiikwe baa, Turtle Clan, remains my first and primary teacher. Also among my teachers are my Irish-Canadian father Murray Alfred Manning, anthropologist Regna Darnell, a student of Hallowell, and my studio-based MFA supervisor Jin Me Yoon. It is as important, to me, to cite the lineage of my non-Indigenous teachers as it is to cite my Anishinaabe, human and other-than-human teachers. As much as my own place and who I am, in relation to others, is integral to the philosophy I unravel; the situatedness of my teachers not only informs my learning, but also establishes the conversations I place myself in. I have chosen to study critical theory at a western institution because I want access to the language it offers, to understand how the Ojibwe philosophy I began learning as a child is situated in relation to dominant thought systems. I strive to grapple with Anishinaabe theory in all its complexity in a foreign, colonial language, and to engage in a conversation with other philosophers, especially Indigenous thinkers, scholars, and turtles. I do not yet have the fluency in Anishinaabemowin (original language/ Ojibwe language) to write this philosophy in its proper language, nor can the Anishinaabe philosophy that I touch upon in these pages be contained in the linear architecture of an academic text (particularly because of the Eurocentric biases inherent to these forms of discourses); it simply does not live that way. The conversation about the status of rocks

with the “old man,” as recorded by Hallowell, provides an excellent analogy as I work across these distinct worldviews. Anishinaabe scholars working in the academy are asked to shape our philosophy into something that it is not, a structured argument with an introduction and a conclusion, even though this is not how we know. Thus, this dissertation is a compilation of essays structured in the style of western philosophy, and Anishinaabe aphorisms (here elaborated into an academic analysis) with a different form and logic. Some aspects of Anishinaabe ontology cannot be written in English, because these thought systems are incompatible in that the one subjugates the other, and neither does it make sense in a way that fits in the formula of a conventional dissertation. I understand both the language of western theory and that of Anishinaabe philosophy, as given to me by my mother, and this work talks between them. At times, I break from these hegemonic linear conventions by moving between academic citation and storytelling, formal and informal language, Anishinaabemowin and English, formal grammatically correct writing and vernacular speech. Occasionally, two or more parallel discussions emerge and take place on the same page inviting the reader to read across the narratives and make links for themselves. (Ideally, I’d design the text so that it not predictably lay next to one another in text boxes but would flow organically, and at times interweave, become jumbled and cross into a new format. Perhaps, as a work of art, I will design a perpetually reconfiguring digital book with designated anchors.)

I approach the project of *mnidoo*-worlding from the perspective of Anishinaabe, and specifically from Ojibwe-Potawatomi philosophical genealogy. This Ojibwe term ‘Anishinaabe’ is often translated as “original people/ Ojibwe people” and even simply “the people.” Rhodes Dictionary translates it simply as “Indian.” Ojibwe is also spelled

Chippewa, Ojibwa, and Ojibway. The Ojibwe concepts, along with the term Anishinaabe itself, have mobile meanings in my explorations. Anishinaabe and Ojibwe are terms sometimes used interchangeably. However, my mother understood them as having separate meanings. She reasoned that that is why we call ourselves “Ojibwe Anishinaabe” and not just one or the other name. My mother understood the term Ojibwe similarly to Mille Lacs Elder, Jim Clark, who says that it refers to “a type of Anishinaabe” (cited in Fairbanks). Fairbanks elaborates that this ambiguous interpretation likely respects differing interpretations across time, geographical regions, dialects, and personal histories (Fairbanks 4). Throughout the dissertation, I elaborate on this concept Anishinaabe as a *way* of being that functions in such a way that, even in obliquely adhering to intergenerational rhythms, we become attuned to what is there in the world in certain ways. It includes ways of being that are exceedingly respectful toward the *mnidoo* infused world—as a coexistent and inherently entangled interrelationality. In my usage, this second translation always accompanies the first.

Generally the term Anishinaabe refers to members of the Algonquian language family. These are different First Nations or Tribes who speak related Indigenous languages. The Algonquian language family is a linguistic category not to be confused with Algonquin First Nations people from Maniwaki, Quebec, and the Ottawa Valley (although they are also members of the Algonquian linguistic group). This language group includes about thirty different languages of nations spreading across the central part of Turtle Island, from the east coast to the great plains (Fairbanks, Valentine). Among them are the languages of the Three Fires Confederacy comprised of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations. Embedded in the many dialects and ways of being are unique

teachings and philosophical particularities, often subtly and indirectly conveyed. Yet, all of these philosophical lifeways take reciprocity for granted as an approach pervasive in *all* of existence. Despite the differences between these Nations (or as they are referred to in the United States, Tribes), many retain knowledges, ways of relating, and protocols of respect that are pervasive among these otherwise diverse histories, peoples and territories. For this reason, I use the term Anishinaabe to acknowledge that these many territories, dialects, and Nations share community-owned teachings and overlapping ethical-political ontologies, to which I and my philosophical elaborations are fundamentally indebted.

I respectfully use the term Anishinaabemowin from my Ojibwe dialect (and expect that others from this language family might draw from their dialects, in a like fashion, to discuss issues particular to the stories and translations from their territories. I do not mean to impose this as an umbrella term on any other First Nations who may not be comfortable with having this term Anishinaabe used in this the way. To be clear, my Anishinaabemowin translations do not follow conventional Eurocentric linguistic models; that is, they are not linguistic translations. Rather, I find my way to these understandings as one gathered up—in the way of—Anishinaabemowin, raised speaking in English but understanding through the Ojibwe worldview of my first human teachers. I often heard my mother say in English and in Anishinaabemowin, “I love my language, it is my first language, this beautiful sound, this beautiful sounding way, the beautiful way I sound.” I have heard many Elders describe the sound of Anishinaabemowin as beautiful. The earnestness of their claims stirs a desire in me to join them and my ancestors in conversation. These ancestors, I was taught, are offended by the sharp syllables of European languages. Their talk of beauty and love was also a supplication for their

children to fight for Anishinaabemowin, to learn and become in the way of these sacred sounds. From the urgency and tenderness with which they spoke it was clear to me that this sentiment did not derive from an aesthetic judgement but rather from a relationally experienced expression endowed with an elegant sacredness, a ‘blessing,’ a rare and most valuable gift. For me, my translation of Anishinaabemowin is something like “the sound of the exceptionally generous and kind (magnanimous) original way of being” which is Anishinaabe. I will elaborate on these translations throughout.

These Anishinaabe teachings provide the wellspring of who I am, how I think, and what I write. That said, I take sole responsibility for any missteps that arise from stretching and theorizing the small portion of knowledge that I have been given. I have tried to be specific about the genealogy of my knowledge. I refer here not only to my human teachers but also to my *mnidoo* helpers such as Anishinaabemowin and my territory, where the land meets the water in multiple expressions along the shores of Lake Huron, to acknowledge the magnitude of their influence, and to be accountable for my interpretations. Doubtless I have made plenty of mistakes, particularly since I am not fluent in Anishinaabemowin. However, I was raised in Ojibwe/Potawatomi life-philosophies, regardless of the contradictions posed by living in a colonized homeland. Much of this quotidian Anishinaabe knowledge is drawn from personal experience and memory in discussion with my mother. These fragments have then been cross referenced, primarily with Mona Stonefish, along with Rita Sands, and many other community members over the years. This work is driven by the sidelong and its silent stirring—*pneuma*, *mnidoo*, breath, spirit—potentiality. Stonefish says, “*Gizhemnidoo* gave the

Anishinaabe these gifts.”<sup>1</sup> I have many mothers, biological, chosen and mnidoo. These mothers, grandmothers, and little mothers (that is, aunts) have interpreted and relayed these fleeting glimpses to me in multiple gestures—spoken and unspoken. The deeply interwoven philosophies of North American Algonquian languages require their community-oriented praxis to not only activate them (for culturally significant reasons) but also to continually reactivate them in ways that resist uncritical dogmatism. In an effort to respect Anishinaabe traditions, I acknowledge that sitting in a room reading and writing alone, disentangled from community praxis, is not the proper route to Anishinaabe knowing, and moreover, that I must keep in view the observation of cycles of renewal (i.e. seasonal changes or day turning to night), refusing to accept prescribed principles without change or question. Thus, I approach these Anishinaabe concepts from a variety of directions, not to reveal so much as to allude to their outlying complexities and intersecting threads that otherwise threaten to collapse into the frail husk of a disembodied intellectualism. Indigenous knowledge keepers, such as my mother and Stonefish, insist that such culturally specific research be conducted with Anishinaabemowin first-language speaking Elders (where possible) in a community context (ideally spanning a lifetime).

As such, my accountability goes first to my Anishinaabe community, both living and non-living, human and other-than human, who are an extension of my own body. My process has therefore involved a series of reflections, consultations with elders, and other community members, along with experiments, negotiations and compromises as I

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<sup>1</sup> In conversation, March 27, 2017, Guelph, Ontario.



translate between different thought systems, bridge textual and oral philosophical traditions and consider their differing criteria for legitimacy, citation, and rigour. Throughout the dissertation I repeat a series of Ojibwe language translations, which are foregrounded as both the theoretical structure and the lived-apparatus or *Anishinaabe* philosophy as undertaken from a first person phenomenological account. Negotiating these borders is by no means a new or unique problem. Indeed, for centuries Indigenous peoples have been searching for ways to live together with settlers while, at the same time, resisting Eurocentric hegemony. We specifically seek approaches that will not result in our subjugation, assimilation or annihilation. In their own way, every Indigenous person continually grapples with these questions. This dissertation translates and migrates across epistemological, geographic and linguistic borders. These ideological borders connect and separate Anishinaabe thought and Turtle Island Indigenous scholarship and oral literatures more broadly, and European Continental philosophy, specifically the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the poststructural affect theory of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. I employ Anishinaabemowin (original language) and concepts of Continental philosophy throughout, sometimes in a cross-cultural dialogue, and at other points, in an effort to disentangle mnidoo philosophy from the ways it has been taken up, appropriated, and misinterpreted by western interlocutors. I define and explain some of these concepts in this introductory chapter, situating my work in broader contemporary conversations about the phenomenal world and relationality. In this section of the dissertation I also begin the work of disentangling mnidoo philosophy from western traditions that have appropriated or misinterpreted in these Anishinaabe cosmologies.

## 1.2 ***Western Encounters with Mnidoo Concepts***

Enlightenment philosophers were both aware of, and influenced by, Anishinaabe philosophy and concepts such as manitou (mnidoo), through the writing of explorers, missionaries, early settlers, and anthropologists, as well as through dialogue with First Nations peoples who were taken to Europe. As such, mnidoo has long been an object of fascination for the colonial newcomers, from the letters of Jesuit missionaries to the Romantic lyric poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Anishinaabe conceptions of manitou were poorly transcribed into English as spirit, spirit-soul and animism, in keeping with Christian concepts of ‘spirit’ in conjunction with notions of the soul (*psuché*) from Greek stoicism. While these discourses brought manitou into public consciousness as one of the most widely known concepts in Anishinaabe philosophy, today, its popular translation is a hollow reflection disfigured by the constraints of Eurocentric logics and beliefs. Longworth, for example, was inspired by Finnish legends for his epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (Brooks 175-176), which features a key character named Gitche Manito (also spelled *Gizhemnidoo*, which Anishinaabeg refer to as the Great Unknown/Great Spirit/Great Mystery, as opposed to a mythological character). Longworth names the Nanaboozhoo-like Ojibwe hero of this star-crossed love story/civilizing journey after a pre-contact Haudenosaunee founder of the Iroquois Confederacy. The story concludes with Hiawatha’s climactic conversion to Christianity. Notably, Haudenosaunee (people of the longhouse) culture is distinct from Anishinaabe cultures, not even sharing the same linguistic family. This gives us an immediate hint as

to the historical and cultural inaccuracies of this interpretation of manitou in Romantic poetry. American anthropologist Hallowell comes closer to an understanding with his ethnographic research of the Berens River Ojibwe, albeit still complicated with underlying settler assumptions. Nevertheless, he identifies a fundamental ontological structure typical of Ojibwe lifeways in his translation of manitou as “other-than-human persons” (Hallowell “Ojibwe Ontology” 21). Through this neologism, which he intermittently truncates as “other-than-human” (alluding to ‘more-than-human’ supernatural capacities and beings such as Thunder Birds), he encapsulates his “ethno-metaphysical” field research on the Ojibwe world-view, which he recognizes as profoundly revolving around the conception of mnidoo/manitou (Hallowell “Ojibwe Ontology” 20). While shifting structures are integral aspects of Anishinaabe philosophies, a quality that furnishes their inbuilt resilience, the impoverishment of popular translations, and the powerful hold they have on the western imaginary presents major epistemological challenges for Anishinaabe linguistic and cultural preservation. These misinterpretations also continue to inform contemporary scholarly discourses that are either implicitly (i.e. without referencing them) or explicitly informed by mnidoo ontology.

For instance, my research takes place alongside an emerging body of scholarship on immanence, pluralism and new materialism. This rapidly expanding frontier of posthuman research drifts and morphs along fields of intellectual contestation, gleaning from ancient traditional Indigenous knowledge from around the world. Categories such as community, race and nationality shift under the demands of global and transnational migration. Remarkable among these revisions is the reclassification of ‘objects’

themselves as Indigenous, as Ian Bogost does in *Alien Phenomenology: or What it's like to be a Thing*. This development is due, in part, to the redeployment of Indigenous philosophies as universalized research framing devices intended to illuminate other divergent knowledge systems for the consumption of Euro-western academia. Recently, Ojibwe *mnidoo* ontology has exponentially proliferated through offspring terms such as the 'other-than-human,' 'more-than-human,' and 'animism.' Speculative new materialists take up the affective potency of material existence, inherent to Indigenous concepts such as *mnidoo*, as rich resources for innumerable eco and social justice applications. These trends, however, often overlook the purveyors of this knowledge (and their impoverished material reality), concentrating instead on the 'indifferent,' 'alien,' 'Indigenous' status of materiality itself. At stake is a search for ecological sustainability and alternatives to the structures created by the history of Euro-western philosophy. Detached human-centred rationalism, based in Enlightenment thought, has culminated in a global crisis and precarity characterized by population displacement, transnational violence, climate change and significant ecological damage.

Anishinaabe philosophies, however, follow different traditions since they derive from pre-contact lifeways, developed over thousands of years in relation to specific geographies, locations, and ecosystems. These urgently needed alternatives provide a ground from which we can imagine other ways of thinking and being. Confirmation of this can be found in the upsurge in posthuman research, which ironically fails to move beyond humanism's insatiable appetite for Indigenous resources. That is, traditional Indigenous knowledges are being staked out at an alarming rate as yet another resource to be territorialized. I address this issue at length in Chapter Three, taking up the posthuman

or ‘becoming animal’ affect theory of Deleuze and Guattari. My concern is that the revolutionary possibilities of Anishinaabe and other Indigenous ways of knowing will be concealed by its assimilation into a neoliberal market unaware of the extent of its own embedded anthropocentric imperialism. I think it is important for traditional Indigenous knowledge keepers and Indigenous scholars to participate in this conversation, not only by examining our own cultural underpinnings but also by grappling with Euro-western thought systems in relation to them.

### **1.3      *Disentangling Mnidoo Philosophy from Western Traditions***

There is renewed scholarly interest in Indigenous knowledges. Their influences are increasingly widespread throughout many disciplines and modes of criticism, from literary and visual culture to individual artworks to corporate advertisements.

Appropriated Indigenous knowledge takes flight as ‘new,’ decentred and loosely assembled collectives—a faceless global morphology—advancing the common wealth of future populations. These perspectives, however, have the capacity to perpetuate colonial imperatives by misappropriating other cultural traditions while vicariously living through them. This amnesia forwards a human-centred solipsism concealed as posthuman liberation. In striving to be free of modern humanism’s harms, Indigenous intellectual property is harvested under the patronage of the ‘global good’ (i.e. equality packaged as sustainable futures and neo-liberal emancipation for all), while Indigenous peoples remain the most exploited and marginalized groups worldwide. Moreover, once

transported into another intellectual economy, these non-hierarchical ancestral philosophies cease to exist in their former interrelational capacities. That is to say, when they are incorporated into capitalist knowledge production, they cease to be what they are. In this way, Indigenous knowledge resists capitalism, and capitalism resists indigenous knowledge. Intellectual and cultural engagements that glean Indigenous knowledges, without aiming to change dominant systems in meaningful ways that allow for Indigenous cultures and ecological lifeways to thrive, are themselves products of late capitalism, perpetuating colonialism even as they claim to decolonize.

Indeed, such scholarship is rooted in the colonial science of anthropology and the salvage paradigm, whereby it is seen as necessary to save so-called ‘primitive’ cultures that are other to the west from corruption and destruction when they come into contact with western modernity (Clifford, “The Others”). Ethnography and anthropology are rich sites that record a wealth of information about Indigenous cultures. Yet, historically they present Euro-western biases that (through their treatment of complex systems as discreet objects of study) reduce sophisticated philosophies and practices to primitive oddities. Even the more recent decolonizing ethnographies must be read critically alongside the living texts of oral cultural practices. In other words, to begin to unlock these culturally specific artifacts we require the inside perspectives of First Nations peoples from Turtle Island, and other Indigenous peoples from around the globe, speaking for ourselves. These may work in conjunction with Euro-western scholars to sort through the generations of misinterpretations, romanticisms and discriminatory biases that burden knowledge production about indigeneity.

Indeed, anthropologists such as Edward Tylor, whose interpretations of ‘spiritual’

animism have today been largely discredited, nonetheless, he influentially defined humanity as having one culture that evolved in a single path through the same three stages from ‘savage,’ to ‘barbaric,’ to ‘civilized’ (albeit not unilaterally developing at the same rate by all peoples) (Logan 269). These views were expressed in his first volume of *Primitive Culture: The Origins of Culture*, published in 1871, which followed Charles Darwin’s 1859 *Origin of Species*. Tylor’s ‘evolutionary anthropology’ outlined that this universal human culture could be traced back to its origins through the survival of cultural remnants found in ‘advanced’ societies, which were compared to earlier ‘primitive’ beliefs and practices (Logan). While the first volume of *Primitive Culture* highlighted his method and the value of studying culture as a means for civilized societies to understand their own earlier stages of cultural infancy, the second volume focused on religion in primitive culture. In the latter, he articulated his theory of *animism* for which he is most famous and which bears the greatest weight for my research. Borrowing the term from George Ernst Stahl, a German proto-vitalist chemist, he defines animism as a “general belief in spiritual beings” (Tylor 10). Tylor’s speculative analysis compresses a smattering of cultural beliefs and practices from around the world to contend that Indigenous peoples and their knowledge not only exemplify the primitive first stages of western civilization, but also that it is, therefore, the duty of humanity to interrogate these ‘lower races’ to acquire more self-knowledge that would implicitly continue the advancement of the ‘higher races.’ By the 20th Century Tylor’s theory of universal human culture and its subsequent stages of development were widely rejected. Yet many forms of cultural tourism and attempts at self-actualization via associations with indigeneity and ‘primitivism’ continue to flourish (Deutschlander and Miller 30).

Through his Algonquian ethnographic field research and the publication of “Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View,” drawn from the Ojibwe from Berens River Manitoba, Hallowell updates Tylor’s animism by acknowledging the distinct cultures and unique epistemologies of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Hallowell coined the term “other-than-human persons” as an English language translation of the Ojibwe concept ‘mnidoo.’ Having begun his ethnographic field studies in the 1920’s, he focused his research “on the Algonkian Indians, especially the Abenaki and Ojibwa Indians of Canada and Wisconsin (Berens River, Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin areas), and the Saulteaux of Berens River” (*Alfred Irving Hallowell Papers*). Hallowell’s ethnographic record of Ojibwe culture and acculturation as it pertains to animism and his translation “other-than-human persons” has made a significant impact on several disciplinary fields in recent years, such as South American anthropology, new animism, new materialism as well as eco- and earth-phenomenology, which in turn have implications for the natural sciences and even neuroscience. Renewed interest in Hallowell’s ethnographic research is due, in part, to Stewart Elliott Guthrie’s popular *Faces in the Clouds*, which redeploys the Ojibwe ontologies that Hallowell meticulously recorded over his lifetime. Guthrie argues that religion is a universal human experience of systematic anthropomorphism. In other words, for Guthrie, mnidoo philosophy is just one more example of the ways that human beings attribute human characteristics to nonhuman things and events, essentially “seeing the world as humanlike” (3). Theories of affect, material vitalism, eco-studies and the network theory of Bruno Latour, to name but a few, are, likewise, informed (even if only peripherally) by this conceptualization of the other-than-human. Ojibwe *mnidoo* ontology, consequently, has been comparatively



transposed onto numerous Indigenous cultures around the world from the Nakaya people in Southern India (Bird-David), to Amazonian peoples in Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's 'multinaturalism' perspectival approach. Such Indigenous practices and thought systems are compared to accommodate the specific environmental attributes of each region. It is contended, for example, that Indigenous ontologies in South America not only circulate around human and other-than-human persons reciprocal co-existent gains, but also more notably emphasize *predation* as the primary nexus that unify these groups. For an excellent summary of the main themes, influences and debates amongst contemporary anthropologists focusing primarily on Amazonian ethnographies, see Ernst Halbmayer's article "Debating Animism, Perspectivism and the Construction of Ontologies" and Bird-David's genealogy of recent anthropological studies of new animism and relational personhood that traces back to Tylor's oeuvre.

Tylor's anachronistic theory of religion remains one of several key historical references<sup>2</sup> that set the terms by which Indigenous philosophies are taken up in Euro-western scholarship. Thus, even as I search through more contemporary ethnographies for evidence and supporting material of the redeployment of Indigenous frameworks onto varying groups, I examine them for such unthought givens. Although I do not employ Tylor's texts directly, this term 'animism' (associated with his work) has significant implications for the central themes in my research on Ojibwe *mnidoo* ontology. I must assert that my dissertation departs from Tylor's theory of religion in several ways. First, I

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<sup>2</sup> See also key texts such as Marcel Mauss's work on potlatch (*The Gift*), and Levi Strauss' work on the Ojibwe term totem (*doodem*) and taboo (*Elementary Structures of Kinship*).

reject the connotations of ‘spiritualism’ associated with Tylor’s theory of animism, particularly in the way that he deploys this term as having a “special relation to the doctrine of the soul” in the way that “theological ideas have been developed among mankind” (9-10). This ideological thrust (which Merleau-Ponty might define as disembodied intellectualism) prompts me to remain critical of framing Anishinaabe ontologies and epistemologies under this general category since their deeply interdependent relational structure as enmeshed co-existence manifests as a very different metaphysical reality. As a result, Ojibwe values and approaches fundamentally conflict with conventional Euro-western theology.

Tylor’s installation of concepts such as animism as a religious endeavour, likewise, collapses divergent global Indigenous lifeways into this historically violent and polemical Euro-western framework. It also affiliates them within the value economy outlined in Nietzsche’s theory of *ressentiment*, which traces the development of Christian ethics and the hierarchical structures specific to Euro-western philosophy. Notably, these follow an entirely separate history of thought, which is incommensurate with Anishinaabe traditions. Accordingly, Anishinaabe strategies of “survivance” in the wake of settler colonialism are not expressions of *ressentiment* any more than they are throwbacks to a primitive stage of humanity (Vizenor *Manifest Manners*). Instead, they represent a way of being that is entirely otherwise to Euro-western conceptions of morality and the ‘good life.’ The variations and evolution of the value systems between the Ojibwe and Euro-western traditions will not be undertaken at length in this research, yet these themes inevitably arise in the context of articulating their distinct metaphysical components. What Tylor does provide is the point of entanglement for key terms and concepts, such as

‘animism,’ ‘spirit,’ and ‘spiritualism’ that we take up throughout this dissertation, as well as providing the historical context for their misguided contemporary manifestations.

Alternatively, I propose the Ojibwe Anishinaabemowin concept *mnidoo*, which might more appropriately be compared to contemporary physics, ontology and metaphysics than with theology and the Judeo-Christian spiritualisms associated with interiority (soul) and monotheism. My *mnidoo* theory, alternatively, distinguishes the interrelational ‘life-force’ or *baabmaadzawin* (life) as something that nonhierarchically interpenetrates all of existence.

The twenty-first century has seen a marked affective turn in critical theory and philosophy, especially in response to the work of Deleuze and Guattari. While my work does not engage with affect studies in itself, their conceptualization of affect in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is of interest, especially insofar as they draw from both actual and imagined Indigenous related concepts, such as totem (‘*doodem*,’ an Ojibwe term for ‘human/animal system of relations’), becoming-animal, nomad and shamanism. Affect is not simply a personal feeling or emotion, as much as it is an “intensity” that takes place between bodies—a relating to bodies’ capacity to act and be acted upon. Affect theory, like Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “becoming-animal,” moves away from interiority and individualized understandings of autonomous agency. Aiming to decentre the subject, affect theory strives to think authority as a global movement of the immediate and the imprecise—fleeting assemblages. For these authors, it is a manner of “proximity in approximation” in which becoming-animal perpetually passes through doorways, or passes between fixed molar perspectives, while dispersing and re-gathering with what is “*closest* to what one is becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari

272). Becoming-molecular hence moves, interacts, disperses and gathers, not as singular entities but as morphing ‘segments’ or ‘blocks’ of reality. These blocks creatively recombine with other blocks that surround, blend, and mark the threshold through which each is pulled and transformed by their collusion and proximity. Operating from within these affectual conglomerations, becoming-intensities purportedly forgo the realities determined by liberal subjects (who instead cling to the rights of particularized bounded bodies and their accompanying identities), while assemblages *choose* processes of becoming—being swept away into a merging transformative “body without organs” (Deleuze and Guattari 270).

Affect theory has given way to an emerging corpus of texts in such interconnected areas as new animism as it is taken up by anthropology, religious studies and new materialism. Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, for example, moves beyond subjectivity and anthropocentric ideals in a speculative turn toward agential realism, quantum physics and an ontology of the object. New materialist thinkers, likewise, intervene where borders collapse, bifurcating between indifferent materiality and an emphasis on the corporeal/incorporeal experience of affect (as proximal relationality). These philosophically dense texts run parallel to New animist thinkers such as Graham Harvey, who gives a lucid account of Hallowell’s concept ‘other-than-human’ and his reformulation of Tylor’s animism in “Animism rather than Shamanism: New Approaches to what Shamans do (for other Animists).” I couple these movements with Bogost, who, with reference to new materialism, recites the experience of indifference from the perspective of objects in *Alien Phenomenology*. These fields are not immune to the many problems faced by anthropology, albeit assuming new appearances. I mention these only

briefly as I am reluctant to engage substantially with new animists and object-oriented ontologies, which strike me as trendy, naïve and appropriative. Yet, neither can I entirely ignore them, since they draw from concepts similar to those I investigate pertaining to relational Ojibwe *mnidoo* ontology that, unfortunately, remains associated with the primitivism outlined by Tylor in his work on animism. I do, however, take up some of these various themes and thinkers in dialogue with Indigenous scholarship and ethnographic records. To the extent that I consider such works, my engagement is critical and cautious of the tendency to valorize otherness and to anthropomorphise object consciousness in efforts (often unwittingly) to mimic the Indigenous perspectives from which these ontologies derive.

Social cognition theory is a new movement that links phenomenology with anthropology, Eastern philosophy (including Buddhism), the affective turn, relational ontologies emerging in critical theory, analytic philosophy and neuroscience. Drawing from the Husserlian tradition, throughout several articles, Dan Zahavi connects the question of intersubjectivity to the concept of empathy, which he describes as “an experiential access to other minds” (Zahavi, “Empathy” 140). For him, the problem of intersubjectivity appears to hinge on spanning the distance between one mind and another. Intersubjective empathy is here conceived as knowing or understanding the other, while simultaneously confronting or transcending their radical alterity. Yet, Zahavi points out that empathy on its own, and thus the face-to-face embodied encounter, is limited in how far it can advance our attempts to understand the other. He maintains that we are always met by the “irreducible difference between our knowledge of external objects, our self-knowledge and our knowledge of others,” as Husserl well knew (“Empathy” 141). Indeed, for

Zahavi, a deep understanding of others must do more than simply penetrate face-to-face empathy. In his estimation, this in depth appreciation must include a consideration of larger social, cultural, and historical contexts (“Empathy” 140). These claims can be found in what he describes as a “far more primitive sensitivity to animacy, agency and emotional expressivity” (“Empathy” 141). Exactly what he means by this is not entirely clear (perhaps some sort of affective intensity?).<sup>3</sup> The presentation of empathy as the paramount approach to intersubjectivity discloses a limit shared by the thinkers I critique in the coming pages, that is, the assertion of an ego bound consciousness. It seems that for social cognitive thinkers, such as Zahavi, the subjective cogito persists as the centre through which an intersubjective relation arises. Even if the subject supersedes individualism and a singular body to become (as articulated by Merleau-Ponty) a body implicated and entwined among other bodies, in the final analysis, for Zahavi, consciousness is located in the mind of the experiencing subject. What is perceived to be external to such a ‘self’ reaffirms the ‘experience’ of one’s own interior consciousness. I propose, alternatively, that so-called exteriority is the site of consciousness, *given* to us only in radical relationality, and that it appears most clearly and distinctly when intellectually disengaged. Such an instant might arrive intermittently when jolted out of an attentive posture (i.e. during a brief heightened moment of crisis) or when slipping into a slackened meditative state—distracted and caught off-guard an interior sense of ‘selfness’ is overridden by a world-entangled-self.

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<sup>3</sup> Connecting these two terms “primitive” and “animacy” together is problematic in view of the fact that they echo the universalizing and ethnocentric work of Anthropologist Tylor.

Zahavi and his collaborator Evan Thompson are surely reaching for something like this in their inter-cultural social cognition approach, which might be evinced in the collection of essays they edited along with Mark Sidertis titled *Self, No-Self? Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*. Yet, Zahavi's "Eastern" inflected philosophy seems to strive for outcomes dissimilar to my own project since, for him, the 'self' disappears when consciousness slackens. On this he writes, "there is no experiential self, no self as defined from the first person perspective, when we are non-conscious" ("Experiential Self" 79). Drawing from Husserl, he additionally defines consciousness as a "givenness." However, this pre-established fact of perceptual being or "facticity," at the same time, presupposes a kind of authorship of this 'isness,' which in its mere "being there" presumably exceeds self-awareness as its very condition of possibility (Heidegger). Nonetheless, Zahavi affirms this position through his contention: "the experiences that I live through from a first person perspective are by definition mine" (Zahavi, "Experiential Self" 79). He proposes that selfhood is only present in the "stream of consciousness" (Zahavi, "Experiential Self" 76). Significantly, the self or self-presencing, henceforth, is by definition revealed as self-possession. Further to this point he writes, "the continuity provided by the stream of consciousness, the unity provided by shared, first person self-givenness, is sufficient for the kind of experiential self-identity that I am eager to preserve" (Zahavi, "Experiential Self" 76).

Thompson's Buddhist inflected phenomenology is perhaps more in keeping with my own research in the sense that he locates consciousness in a space between self and other. In his article "Empathy and Consciousness," he argues that individual human consciousness is inherently intersubjective because it is formed in a dynamic interrelation of self and

other. As a method for understanding intersubjectivity he takes up what he defines as “contemplative and meditative psychologies” (Thompson, “Empathy and Consciousness” 29). The convergence of individuals as ‘intersubjective,’ he writes, “centres on the realization that one’s consciousness of oneself as an embodied individual in the world is founded on empathy—on one’s empathic cognition of others, and others’ empathic cognition of oneself” (Thompson, “Empathy and Consciousness” 2). Even if, as Thompson contends, self-awareness arises as an unwitting secondary response (following experientially shared emotions), his analysis continues to hinge on egocentric conceptions of empathy as well as on human cognition as the loci of knowledge. Further to this position, he points to “wisdom traditions” from the East to demonstrate that “heart–mind and empathy are what distinguish human beings from other animals,” a premise which he states is not new to phenomenology (Thompson, “Empathy and Consciousness” 28). In an apparent attempt to thwart interpretations that might align his research more closely with humanism than Buddhism, Thompson diverts attentions toward the benefits of Neo-Confucianism and Mahayana Buddhism for western sciences and how it might conceive of empathy in relation to what he refers to as “the more-than-human world” (a slight reformulation of Hallowell’s Ojibwe *mnidoo* translation “other-than-human”).<sup>4</sup>

Thompson’s contradictions privilege the human and the individual cogito, and yet appeal for an amalgamated nonhuman-centric form of being, at the same time. Aside from these inconsistencies, his concept of empathy also carries the sentimentality of the caring ego,

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<sup>4</sup> See also Theodore Sturgeon’s 1953 science fiction novel *More than Human*, reprint, Vintage, 1998.



which in many ways is admirable but not the right fit for my work. In considering this issue of ‘affectionate concern,’ he turns to emergent theories of biologists and environmentalists, which suggest that human beings might be biologically hardwired to *love* nature (“biophilia”) (Thompson, “Empathy and Consciousness” 28). Consequently, Thompson calls for a ‘science of interbeing’ that would include, as legitimate knowledge sources, the “contemplative and meditative psychologies of the world’s wisdom traditions” (Thompson, “Empathy and Consciousness” 29). While I find his sentimental phrasing naïve, I am also convinced that western philosophy requires such a radical transformation. Yet, this call to action remains problematic on a number of levels. Of primary interest is the renewed harvesting of Indigenous resources, which not only reinforce Euro-western colonial traditions but also conceals their alternatives and, at the same time, further disenfranchise these “wisdom” keepers. From the field of social cognition theory I had hoped to locate ways in which intersubjectivity might dislodge the ego from its centre as this is something I pursue within my own research (albeit through Ojibwe ontologies). Furthermore, in some ways my investigations might be said to exist outside of sentimental correlation. *Mnidoo* ontology interrupts and even defies canonical Euro-western traditions of logic and in a sense, leaves behind the finite concerns of humanity while simultaneously deeply and paradoxically founding itself in them.

## 1.4 *The Natural Attitude and the Phenomenological Method*

I derive the term ‘worlding’ in the proposed concept of *mnidoo*-worlding from Merleau-Ponty’s description of possession as a type of ‘worlding’ in *The Primacy of Perception*. Worlding, for this French thinker, has no such distinction as inside or outside, since it is the “degree zero of spatiality” or the immediate experience of being encrusted with the world as two sides of the same coin (164). As a phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty is interested in the way that things appear to consciousness (phenomena) as opposed to some essential truth about things themselves (noumena). This approach is immediately useful in the project to develop and articulate a *mnidoo*-philosophy, since phenomenological worlding is embodied, perceptual, and relational, and not necessarily tied to western individual ego concepts and humanist traditions. Bringing worlding and *mnidoo* together, I contend that consciousness, and by association, agency arise as an encrusted exchange between animacy, ‘inanimacy’ and immateriality, all of which are *mnidoo* (little energies) that are *gashka’oode* (entangled) *Nii’kinaaganaa*<sup>5</sup> (relations/relatives). Taken together each interpenetrates and fluctuates in co-responsive cascading patterns. Situated thus between particularized difference and a correspondent whole of communal indifferenciation this theory of entanglement negates absolute indifference. A kind of autonomy does indeed infiltrate these various ‘realities,’ not as bounded locus of knowledge, but as an externally conceived and torn co-responsiveness.

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<sup>5</sup> *Nii’Kinaaganaa* is the vernacular of my region in Southwestern Ontario (Ojibwe/Potawatomi dialect), elsewhere, *Indinawemaaganidog*.

Here the *thing-in-itself* is brought into relief as the very ‘thinglyness’ or *mnidoo* that thrusts itself upon us through the image: creating consciousness. Image and consciousness, in a sense, condition one another as a ‘polyphasic’ consciousness, neither limited to a single ego nor even to the human cogito. Unpacking and elaborating what I mean here requires some understanding of the phenomenological tradition, which I review in what follows.

The extension of the human from cogito (thinking self) to body, and from body to world, has been a central theme of phenomenology since Husserl. In *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, he distinguishes the phenomenological approach from what he terms the “natural attitude.” *He writes:*

I am conscious of a world endlessly spread out in space endlessly becoming and having endlessly become in time. I am conscious of it: that signifies, above all, that intuitively I find it immediately, that I experience it. By my seeing, touching, hearing, and so forth, and in the different modes of sensuous perception, corporeal physical things with some spatial distribution or other are simply there for me “on hand” in the literal or the figurative sense, whether or not I am particularly heedful of them and busied with them in my considering thinking, feeling, or willing. (Husserl, *Ideas* 51)

Referring to the way that human beings commonly go about their routine lives, Husserl contends that we engage with the things that appear to us without necessarily thinking about it. This is not to say that the natural attitude is ‘natural’ in the biological sense, nor does it furnish a more accurate perspective. It is simply the ordinary, taken for granted

way that people, most often, encounter the world and the things in it as ‘facts’ that appear to consciousness and, consequently, leave unexamined this much wider horizon of consciousness.

For Husserl, “bracketing” or holding the natural attitude in suspension while adopting a phenomenological attitude allows one to theorize beyond what appears as self-evidently present. Moreover, it also allows us to sift out the presumed metaphysical and epistemological beliefs that remain hidden underneath our everyday engagement with the world, but which inform the natural attitude nonetheless. Husserl was concerned that while appearing to be critically engaged, the natural attitude actually presented a naïve mode of theorizing. I have similar concerns, finding it hard to be certain of the point of collapse into unthought givens or pure speculative intellectualism. I attempt to remain vigilant as I write, continually questioning my own phenomenological method. This is to say I consider everything I write as provisional.

In working through some of these concerns below, I sketch out an example of particular unfolding phenomena. This example raises questions for my project as well as pointing to phenomenology as an appropriate tool of analysis as opposed to, for example, anthropology or the many emergent other-than-human theories. Firstly, it strikes me that one’s natural attitude can reveal important tacit knowledge that underlies daily practices. As such these routine attitudes themselves present rich resources that preserve intergenerational ways of being, especially considering that colonial laws prohibited Indigenous language use and ceremonial practices throughout Canada and the United States. Consequently, Anishinaabe knowledge is frequently passed along intergenerationally (often silently) through deeply embedded experiential teachings—

hidden from the prying inquiry of Indian agents.<sup>6</sup> This taking up of intergenerational ways of being in the natural attitude is similar perhaps to *Conversos* of the Spanish Inquisition who kept a secret adherence to Judaism after their apparent conversion to Catholicism. As a result, Anishinaabe community members, for whom the culture was apparently ‘lost,’ often conform to mnidoo interrelational philosophies in their natural attitude without necessarily being aware that their engagement with the world is embedded in this traditional Ojibwe ontology. Such ontological approaches are radically other to the historical traditions of western philosophy and its affiliation with settler colonialism. The imperialistic basis of western thought continually threatens to assimilate and, ultimately, inoculate these distinct Indigenous contributions. Is it possible to distinguish these thought systems, and if so, then how?

## **1.5      *Mnidoo Natural Attitude: The Example of Baash-go-abe***

In attempting to broach these concerns I turn to everyday practices, embodied knowledge, and works of art. Consider, for example, the natural attitude of my neighbour, a young Anishinaabe man, who is my cousin several times removed. I shall call him Baash-go-abe (Looks one way, meaning he doesn’t yet see the whole picture). He helps me out with yard-work and other odd jobs. It is not unusual for him to appropriate a hand tool or a

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Indian Agent’ was a government title, held in Canada’s recent past and legislated under the *Indian Act*. This agent supervised Indian reservation inhabitants and day-to-day operations.

garbage can if he notices that it is going unused at my house. To the outsider, it might appear that he has stolen from me, if their natural attitude, that is, if their routine ways of thinking and being in the world are underpinned by a relationship to things which presumes them to be inanimate objects that one owns. However, to my cousin, as for myself, these items are *mnidoo*, which are living entities. As such, my failure to allow them to be fulfilled in an inter-community capacity perpetuates a disservice. This engagement or interaction, while putting the tools ‘to use,’ fulfills a responsibility, but, more profoundly, fulfills a desiring or an inter-meditation, an integral aspect of *Baash-go-abe* and the tools’ relational structure, whose very being (*mnidoo*) calls out to one another.

Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh found in *The Visible and the Invisible* provides a valuable analogy for thinking through these multiple points of intersection, particularly for articulating how our beingness is entangled with the world (134). *Baash-go-abe*’s natural attitude reveals an interdependent co-responsive reflexivity that arises as a dialogue between *mnidoo*–*Baash-go-abe*, myself, the garbage can and other ‘things’ of the world, the words we exchange, the labour of our hands (that go beyond relationships forged out of dependency, for example, fish to water, or brain to oxygen, and perhaps even other to materially symbiotic systems). In performing a phenomenological analysis, I bracket my natural attitude and, at the same time, commit to the fact that it yields an indispensable wealth of perceptual phenomena. Moreover, the acknowledgement of my embeddedness or ‘encrustation’ in the world, takes me only part way to my task of articulating and elaborating Ojibwe *mnidoo* ontology (the encrustation represents the limits of western phenomenology), particularly as I wrestle with their more radical

outcroppings. Notably, mnidoo ontology presents a challenge to positivist assumptions that each human ego is fundamentally alone—consciousness bound to the limitations of a single organism—a singular being entwined, and yet, simultaneously, separated from the world as a private interiority. To be sure, indigenized mnidoo landscapes do more than query the affective force and vitality of material realities as living on, in, assembling with or swarming around us.

Conceptualizing what simply appears to consciousness even if only as a naïve natural attitude still places the human ego in ‘a’ relation to world which, according to Husserl, from the outset troubles the orientation of consciousness, world, and their relationship since they are always positioned one to the other. This phenomenological tradition meets its limit in the anthropocentric perspective of the ego, since phenomenological knowledge is derived from the reflective “I” who adopts a phenomenological attitude. This ego-centred approach conveys a fertile point of tension for my work particularly from the perspective of Anishinaabe philosophies operating from a position of interrelationality which is decentred from the ego. In a Husserlian phenomenology, apart from describing my perceptual experiences of that which is ‘given’ to me, I should have nothing to say about Baash-go-abe’s experiences. Thus, my interpretations of Baash-go-abe’s relationality with the tools of his labour are perhaps more of a sociological than a phenomenological effort. Here is where Merleau-Ponty’s later work is vital to my research, particularly his theory of chiasm. Indeed, I take him to contend that phenomena does not stand before me, but rather that I am immersed within their occurrence, in the same way that “the world is all around me” (*Primacy of Perception* 178). Aside from this, conventional mnidoo philosophy concedes that one cannot speak for another (I

should note here that throughout the paper, it goes without saying that for Ojibwe Anishinaabe readers such statements are not limited to human/animals). On the one hand, I cannot know and therefore must not speak for anyone except myself. On the other hand, since we are interrelationally connected, and I am infinitely populated, I am also accountable to virtually everything and therefore must speak for all others. These seeming paradoxes call for examples and analogies as well as the working through of cultural artifacts to tease out these nonconforming attributes and their many implications. I turn now to some key discussions in phenomenology that ground the Euro-western aspects of my scholarship, beginning with Husserl, and concluding with Merleau-Ponty, since the latter plays a central role in my dissertation.

## **1.6      *Phenomenological Self-Reflection, Intentionality, and Sociability***

Apart from famously inaugurating phenomenology by ‘returning us to the things themselves,’ the concept of intentionality is perhaps Husserl’s most significant contribution. Indeed, he referred to it as phenomenology’s principle theme as the directedness of experience *toward* things in the world. He writes, “Under intentionality we understand the own peculiarity of mental processes ‘to be a consciousness of something’” (Husserl, *Ideas* 200). He firmly asserts that the phenomenological attitude has no alternative but to pass through the “I” centred cogito. Moreover, he cites the ego as the source of ‘true’ or primal knowledge of experience. I take this to mean not only as nexus but also as more foundational than a symbolic or ideological mediation. In *The*



*Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* he contends that intersubjectivity is not only revealed but is also constituted “by starting from the ego and the system of its transcendental function” (Husserl, *Crisis* 185). Thus, Husserl’s phenomenological method of reduction is necessarily egocentric “insofar as he [man] is the self-objectification, as exhibited through phenomenological self-reflection, of the corresponding transcendental ‘I’” (*Crisis* 185-6). To be clear, this method does not arise from a straightforward egocentrism and neither is it solipsism since his entire project can be defined through intentionality as relational. In this sense, the conscious ‘I’ is ‘in’ the world and so consciousness is consciousness of ‘something’ toward which it is intentionally oriented. In other words, consciousness, for Husserl, does not arise in isolation as discreet cognitive events, rather, “in the explicit cogito: ‘a perceiving is a perceiving of something’” toward which the perceiving body turns (*Ideas* 200). In the final instant, however, Husserl cannot apprehend a way out of this seeming paradox, that is, albeit an intersubjective consciousness that arises in response to things of the world, for Husserl, this indispensable intentional orientation limits perception to a centralized egoistic interiority.

For Edith Stein, Gerda Walther and Jean Paul Sartre (following Husserl’s early works), consciousness is also attended to within the domain of the “ownness” of an egocentric cogito (Husserl, *Ideas* 200). In other words, the “object, at once intended and ‘given,’ stands before us, not as two objects, but as *one* alone.” It does so always and only as that which is ‘intuitively established’ by the essential ego of experience, which is, moreover, also necessarily accounted for through the first person phenomenological description (Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 291). Remaining committed to Husserl’s

phenomenological method of reduction, that is, as an interrogation of the experience of objects as they are 'given' to one's own individual perception, Stein later became disillusioned with what many perceived as his 'idealist' turn in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*. As a result, she separated herself from his later work on the transcendental ego but continued to employ his method and to expand on his inquiry into intersubjectivity. Nonetheless, in many ways she departs from Husserl's work on intersubjectivity as well, since, in her opinion, it did not go far enough in accounting for empathy. Instead, she opens the field by focusing on sociality and the problem of 'other minds.' But spearheaded by Husserl's egocentric methodology, this project was also constricted by Stein's inability to grasp her experience of sociality by any means other than her own "ownness." In *Edith Stein on the Problem of Empathy*, Kris McDaniel contends: "Stein understands the problem of empathy as the problem of accounting for how other people and their experiences can be *given* to me despite their distinctness from me" (3). However, although Stein's work on empathy and sociality stages a departure from Husserl's work, it, otherwise, holds true to "I's" engagement. In other words, she keeps to the distancing of a first person account such as that found in her theory of 'acts of empathy,' which forms the bases for self discovery and "I's" experience, albeit integrally linked with (and confined to) other empathetic living-breathing "I's" (Stein).

Similarly, in her work on the phenomenology of social communities, Walther sees community not as an entity distinct from its individual members, but rather situates community in the consciousness of the individual ego. As Antonio Calcagno puts it "The experience of the 'we' of the community lies in the I" (93). Yet, the "I" that is in-community is by no means typical of the autonomous, isolated subject of liberal

humanism, for it broaches the individual with interrelationality. Walther's subject is split into three vital aspects that fit together like Russian dolls, one inside the other (94). The first aspect is an unconscious locus of experience that Walther terms an "I-Centre." Calcagno describes this as an animating light or flame similar to the pure ego that, for Husserl, stands behind all experience (93). The self, in comparison, derives from the continually re-organizing assemblages of enduring experiences that make up personal identity, history and memory (Calcagno 93). The final aspect of this unity is the essence, or nature. Here, Walther refers to the constitutive meaning of subjects as I-Centre and self. This threefold unity also makes possible the interrelational experience of community. It has the capacity to "intend the essence" not simply of the lived experience of individually distinct subjects, but also of their shared lived experience as members of a oneness that is community, on passive unconscious levels and actively as intentional consciousness (Calcagno 94).

Sartre addresses the tension between singularity and inter-relationality by positing a subject that is ontologically grounded in "being-toward-others." In *Being and Nothingness*, the question of our being-together as humans is not, for Sartre, a concern about knowing the other, or of manifesting as a "we-subject" (a fickle manifestation of being "for others" that easily morphs into the treatment of "others-as-objects" or becoming the object of regard for a "they") (428). Rather, his concern is the implication of the existence of others for one's very consciousness of oneself (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 428). Arthur Danto asserts that Sartre's work on shame, for instance, "bypass[es] the epistemological problem of Other Minds by insisting that the problem really is an ontological one: that one could not exist as a consciousness reflectively aware

of itself unless one also existed for others” (114). Consequently, for Sartre, intersubjective experience is characterized by conflict and difference rather than unity. In *Being and Nothingness* he writes:

[The We] appears as a provisional appeasement which is constituted at the very heart of the conflict, not as a definitive solution of this conflict. We should hope in vain for a human ‘we’ in which the intersubjective totality would obtain consciousness of itself as a unified subjectivity. (428)

Indeed, such a unified “We” is a dream produced by the very fragmentation that divides us, one from the other. As Sartre continues, “The essence of the relations between consciousnesses is not the *Mitsein*; it is conflict” (*Being and Nothingness* 428). For Sartre, the subjective experience (which combines the unconscious “in-itself” and the conscious “for-itself” in an annihilating relation that obliterates the in-itself”) transcends the world in its singularity. In contrast he contends, “the Other by rising up confers on the for-itself a being-in-itself-in-the-midst-of-the-world as a thing among things,” that is, faced with the Other as an intersubjective being who is also for-others, one’s embeddedness in a world of multiplicity comes to appearance, emerging “in-itself” once again in the face of this relation (*Being and Nothingness* 429).

Thus, for Sartre, each time we turn to the other, where the certain knowledge of others and *community* might await, we are instead made painfully aware (not of the intelligibility of the other, through whose eyes we see ourselves, but rather we become self-conscious) of our own self intending as freely choosing to become objects for others. As Danto paraphrases Sartre, the “emergence of a consciousness of others is of a different logical order than a consciousness of mere objects, entailing as it does a

transformation of consciousness of self; entailing a loss of naïveté and of un-self-aware aloneness” (114). Sartre defines “being for-others” as “a fall through absolute emptiness toward objectivity” (*Being and Nothingness* 274-5). In this endeavor we project ourselves into the future possibility of being observed and in the doing become aware of the self through the presence of the ‘absent’ other, that is, through one’s own self-intended gaze of the other. We come to the realization of the opacity or nothingness of the ‘self’ as mere objects represented to ourselves through the mediation of the other. A gaze whereby my sense of self arrives as the shameful deeds only represented and made aware to me through my own perceived judgment is understood to emerge from the eye of the other. In this endeavor we, in turn, evoke the “‘third man’ as witness” in order to become conscious of our ‘conscious being’ as it falls under this judgmental gaze (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 284). Sartre contends that “consciousness must have to be itself and must spontaneously have to be this non-being; consciousness must freely disengage itself from the Other and wrench itself away by choosing itself as a nothingness which is simply Other than the Other and thereby must be reunited in ‘itself’” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 284). This self-awareness via the other as an object of ‘facticity’ is, however, only brought about from the self-negation or annihilation of one’s own conscious mind, which is revealed as an impenetrable and isolated ‘being’ only capable of observing oneself through the other as an object. As Sartre outlines:

The Other through whom this Me comes to me is neither knowledge nor category but the fact of the presence of a strange freedom. In fact my wrenching away from myself and the upsurge of the Other’s freedom are one; I can feel them and live

them only as an ensemble; I cannot even try to conceive of one without the other.

*(Being and Nothingness 275)*

In sum, in Sartre's early work, consciousness is realized as a withdrawal to the status of a no-thing recognition of one's own absence of the 'conscious self' in the face of the other. This touching of one's being, as such, is experienced as a nauseatingly pure "aloneness" or nothingness, which is ushered in through a solipsism that perpetually grounds this experience. Simply stated, the other and community, for Sartre, can never really be known. In this regard, the other is merely the implement for awareness and certainty of oneself.

## **1.7 Merleau-Ponty's Embodied Consciousness, Chiasm—Encrusted Flesh**

No matter how diverse the aforementioned philosophies, each, nonetheless, remains inhibited by the unmistakable influence of a liberal humanist approach. As such they do not go far enough in breaking free from the ego's narrow self-presentation. What is needed is a philosophy that starts from the place of interrelationality – one that dislocates, deemphasizes or alleviates the ego as the centre of 'consciousness.' In search of such an approach I turn now to Merleau-Ponty, who extends Husserl's research on intersubjectivity, most notably in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. The foremost difference, threaded throughout this work, is the way that Merleau-Ponty pressures the *coexistent* structure of intentionality. As a result, the way he tackles the problem of

consciousness and community takes on a very different tenor than the thinkers discussed earlier. In contrast, he gives rise to a first person description that discounts itself as a withdrawn consciousness by, instead, asserting a theory of “embodied consciousness.” This term provides a succinct way of summarizing the philosophical lynch pin behind his body of work, which is that “we are all immediate presences in the world.” Yet, it is not the most transparent of concepts (*Phenomenology of Perception* xxv). Due to the complexity of these themes, along with the fragility of their extraction from the natural attitude, further explication is required. It is perhaps more clearly illustrated through his discussion of experiencing things or reality as that comprised “not merely of a reality-for-sight or for-touch, but of an absolute reality...” that is, experience is “full co-existence with the phenomenon” (*Phenomenology of Perception* 371: 2002).

Guided, thus, by Husserl’s work on intentionality, Merleau-Ponty does not simply describe but rather *enters* an intersubjective attitude by embracing consciousness as an immersive experience. As opposed to simply undertaking the object of conscious reflection as that which stands before us, “out in front” of subjective analysis, Merleau-Ponty wants us to think alongside ‘things of the world,’ as a body amongst bodies (*Phenomenology of Perception* 297: 2002). Even more to the point, he posits a body “intertwined” within a world relational matrix—an experience of “reciprocal insertion” to which conscious thought is blind to its own perceptual experience (*Visible and the Invisible* 138). From his descriptive analysis, he strives and in many ways succeeds in articulating this relational experience from the perspective of embodied consciousness (in contrast to a *cogito* embedded perspective).

In his later work Merleau-Ponty begins to broach a theory of world co-existence. He proposes an intersubjective engagement with the world as a body among other bodies (including the earth itself), as a nascent experience, whereby reflective consciousness is not only founded but also made possible. Hence, the very condition of being “encrusted” not only “in” the world, as Husserl contends (*Visible and the Invisible* 134), but more profoundly, as being “of” the world, creates the chiasmic structure between corporeality and consciousness that ‘subtends’ reflective cognizance as a “subject destined to the world” (*Phenomenology of Perception* xxiv: 2012). That is to say, embodied consciousness is an ever emergent, ahistoric, “embryonic development” of prereflective knowing (*Visible and the Invisible* 147). This seamless exchange prompts Merleau-Ponty to cite ‘perception,’ itself, as the transcendent “gap which we ourselves are” and that, moreover, “we can never fill up, in the picture of the world” since it gives rise to the indistinguishable experience of our integral entwinement with the world (*Visible and the Invisible* 241).

## **1.8 Staking out the Terrain for an Anishinaabe**

### ***Phenomenology***

I am drawn to Merleau-Ponty’s main thesis on embodied consciousness, as well as the sense of “wonder” that he maintains in his approach. He arrives at his method subsequent to his embodied consciousness theorizations. This accounting for the “sedimentation” of practices and perception has significant bearing on my own theory of consciousness as it pertains to Ojibwe ontologies and relational modes of being. However, I depart from or



stretch his theories beyond his tacit adherence to an anthropocentric consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's theory of consciousness is, as I understand him, coexistent and interdependent and, at the same time, relegated to *living*, that is, cognitively perceptual bodies, which are, ultimately, limited to 'a' mind and a specific form of cognition (i.e., his own reflective/prereflective activities). I radically depart from such theories by locating consciousness external to the notion of a bounded human subject and, simultaneously, internal to a form of knowing that both precedes human consciousness (taken in the strict sense) and also permeates all of existence. I argue that consciousness is an exchange that surrounds and precedes the activities of a single cogito and which simultaneously reflects or apprehends its own embodied status and, yet, is also profoundly rooted in the world. In keeping with Merleau-Ponty's hypothesis, I contend that consciousness radiates from within as well as from without (having no inside or outside) (*Phenomenology of Perception 2*: 2012); but push his theory further in contending that it also erodes boundaries while paradoxically instantiating them as distinct at the same instant. His occularcentric<sup>7</sup> approach in "Eye and Mind" will be helpful for my analysis of ancient artifacts and everyday practices, as well as for unpacking examples of the natural attitude. I am also interested in Merleau-Ponty's discussion on consciousness in relation to representation, language, and being in the world. I employ this as a dialogical experience, which he surmises amounts to

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<sup>7</sup> Instead of occularcentrism his theories on "Eye and Mind," might more accurately be understood as one sensual example amid the entire embodied chiasmic structure of experiential knowing as is suggested by the title of the book *The Primacy of Perception*.

“signification: world,” particularly when I consider oneiric imagery and ceremonial artifacts (*Phenomenology of Perception* xxv).<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, I do more than apply Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology to Anishinaabe languages and cultures. My point of departure might best be understood through his theory of chiasm, which implicates both the space between entities, along with their entwinement. Working alongside Merleau-Ponty’s texts as I develop my own philosophy, I admit from the outset that the two approaches cannot be entirely extracted one from the other. All the same, I shall endeavour to convey the ways in which his theories overlay, intermingle and diverge from my own by first attending to his chiasmic ontology of the flesh. This will be followed by my own theories of mnidoo ontology. For Merleau-Ponty, chiasm turns on the shore of the overlap. It leaves discreet entities in their place—albeit transfigured by chiasm’s exchange. Unconsciously, or rather ‘faithfully’ subtended by world, each entity is not only ‘in’ but also ‘of’ the world as an embodied relational thread (*Phenomenology of Perception* xxiv: 2012). He further contends that perceptual experience transcendently exceeds us as a condition of “always-already” being there and is thus always ahead of the ‘second-order operation of reflective cognition.’ As he repeatedly demonstrates by touching one hand with the other, for Merleau-Ponty, a necessary interval exists between ‘bodies’ that allow each to remain discrete, even if it is the same body to which each is attached (as with the example of his two hands) that proffers the “lap [sic lip]” through which the chiasmic structure functions (*Visible and the*

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<sup>8</sup> For more on signification: world see “existential signification” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 444: 2002).

*Invisible* 136). These articulations move toward a complicated network of embodied-worldedness, which is more in keeping with my mnidoo project than a strict adherence to a first person anchored cogito (albeit the thinking self is vital for carrying out this philosophical endeavour). Getting at this experience through the look and things seen, requires a tricky reversed reconsideration of how one ‘incorporates’ the other through a shared gaze—a liminal space—one that pivots on a shared experience of absence, through which sight glides while providing a backdrop for visibles to appear. In a sense this “gap” presents a greater “co-constituted” body, which each integrally shares. These two sets, or dimensions of perception, Merleau-Ponty shows, are intertwined as a necessary condition that partakes of the world as aspects of a multidimensional worlding, that is, as a revealing of co-existent relationality.

No matter how tight the weave, Merleau-Ponty insists on a discontinuous breach between each intertwining thread. This ‘lip’ harbours an immersive liminality and simultaneously a “withholding” division. We might call it a field of resistance that emulates, for Merleau-Ponty, what is the transcendence of perceptual experience. This spacing ensures that discrete entities never merge with the other to become an indistinct whole. He writes, “this is possible as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one same human “consciousness” the primordial definition of sensibility” (*Visible and the Invisible* 142).

On the surface, I take this statement to refer to the human cogito and a generalized structure shared exclusively between them. However, this “primordial” “sensibility” points to his theory of a pre-reflective embodied knowing. Even if the lip of this seam issues from bodily flesh (human and otherwise), chiasm, it seems, requires a space to cross in staging an exchange. Employing Merleau-Ponty’s theory of reversibility in that

previous sentence, we traversed an exchange that passed from chiasm to mnidoo ontology. Here, I redeployed Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh to move the theory of consciousness beyond the confines of human/animal cognition toward mnidoo-worlding. The in-between for Merleau-Ponty guarantees a "holding" and a "withholding" allowing entities to remain separate amid a lived co-constituting interchange.

I contend that entities do, indeed, merge or at least pass through one another, in ways that alter each, even if only subtly over great distances and time, or in the instances of human consciousness perhaps in ways that are coopted by faculties aligned with the natural attitude (thus are overlooked altogether as a kind of false consciousness). Yet, these entities also remain discreet, but are never as discreet as the natural attitude suggests (leastways not as it is defined historically in western philosophy, particularly as it concerns prevailing discourses of animacy and consciousness). The interpenetration that I address, likewise, does not erode distinct attributes, or, at least, not always and certainly not immediately. Instead, it allows for and even necessitates this discontinuity as a force of continuity. This distribution or current arises from every direction as a ceaseless discourse that impinges from without as much as from within. This further implicates mnidoo as a sustaining potency but not necessarily as '*life*' per se (since mnidoo ontology also challenges conceptions of 'life' as it is conventionally understood in Euro-western philosophy). To be sure this mnidoo-worlding is not equivalent to the evolution diversification of phylogenesis. It might more appropriately be articulated as a faint hailing or perhaps as something that I am obliquely aware of as a constant but silent presence – a being there shown up through a simultaneous rupture.

Albeit ambiguously slipping under the tread of linguistic articulation throughout, I apply this *sensing* approach as I embark on a phenomenological translation of Anishinaabemowin since it integrally relates and conveys these concepts from an Ojibwe world-view. I propose that the Ojibwe language (being in the way of *Anishinaabe*) is marked by a unique, chiasmic structure of interrelationality, one that articulates a subtle and intimate relation with the environment (approached as localized sets of relations in anthropology, but this is not necessarily the case). Phenomenology offers itself to me as a methodology flexible enough to push the boundaries of Euro-western philosophy. For, as Merleau-Ponty contends, it is an ambiguous philosophy in the midst of which we must remain in a state of “wonder” and as such we must be willing to abandon pre-established theories in light of new considerations. In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* he cites Eugene Fink, Husserl’s assistant, who wrote that “Reflection does not withdraw from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world; rather, it steps back to see transcendences spring forth ... it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical” (*Phenomenology of Perception* ixvii: 2012). Similarly, Anishinaabe might negotiate the antagonism of our being in the world as autonomous beings and, yet, as members of an infinite multiple body that collapses at the borders. Hence, in the vein of the phenomenological attitude, my descriptions of mnidoo ‘otherness’ or of an ‘alien indigeneity’ do not reflect an isolated consciousness but rather my experience with others as a corresponsive flash-fire.

## 1.9 *Dissertation Structure*

This dissertation takes shape as a monograph on Anishinaabe epistemologies, mnidoo ontology and Euro-western phenomenology. Each chapter develops a necessary piece toward building a foundation for the culminating chapter on mnidoo-worlding. I originally intended to write a dissertation examining dream and imaging practices in Anishinaabe philosophy; however, I found that to do so, I first had to lay out the ontological and epistemological context of these practices. Moreover, I needed to both gain more fluency in Anishinaabemowin (an ongoing process) and to find an academic way of writing in English that was complex and mobile enough to communicate these fluid and relational mnidoo thought systems. I first looked to post-structuralism and Deleuze and Guattari's affect theory. Although there are some useful concepts and a very mobile framework here, I also found *A Thousand Plateaus* to be problematically colonial in its uncited appropriation of Anishinaabe concepts, derived through anthropology (Mauss, Lévi-Strauss and Schoolcraft, who was married to an Anishinaabe woman, Jane Johnson Schoolcraft Obabaamwewe-giizhigokwe) and New Age thought (Carlos Castaneda). Working with this text was weighed down with the need to continually disentangle their concepts from western romanticizations and misinterpretations of Anishinaabe knowledges. Merleau-Ponty is also influenced by anthropological interpretations of Anishinaabe thought. These seem to inform and shift his thinking, but he does not redeploy them as his 'original' contributions, instead offering a philosophical method that interpenetrates intellectual, embodied and relational being-in-the-world.

The dissertation is structured as follows. This introductory chapter defines the terms of mnidoo philosophy, and my particular translations of it. This chapter further disentangles mnidoo-philosophy from the ways it has been appropriated and misinterpreted by western interlocuters. It also situates the mnidoo ontology I am developing in broader conversations about the relational world in phenomenology. Chapter Two “Anishinaabe Philosophy in the Academy: Shedding Canadian Epistemic Violence” frames the epistemic effects of the settler colonial context in which I develop this mnidoo-ontology. I situate my project in current discourses of reconciliation, indigenizing and decolonizing the academy, reflecting on their relationship to Canada’s long-time goal to assimilate First Nations peoples. I also explore the complex implications of conducting Anishinaabe philosophy in colonial languages and institutions, and develop my approach to resisting the logics of assimilation, and engaging in decolonial and border thinking. The third chapter is titled “Mnidoo Pedagogy: Anishinaabe Phenomenological Approaches.” Here I engage with discourses of the ‘Indigenous renaissance’ and ‘resurgence’ and develop the epistemological-pedagogical methods that I employ to enfold intellectual, embodied, relational and everyday aspects of Anishinaabe philosophy. These encompass oral traditions, embodied knowing, land-based pedagogy and non-interference pedagogy. Chapter Four “The Becoming Human of Buffalo Bill” forwards a critique of liberal humanism and posthumanism through an interrogation of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept “becoming-animal” from *A Thousand Plateaus*. I further problematize the resulting ‘dispersion of molecules’ for First Nations peoples, Anishinaabe, in particular. In this chapter, I analyze Buffalo Bill’s Wild West along with performance artworks by Lori Blondeau (*Belle Sauvage*) and Adrian Stimson (Buffalo Boy) that queerly parody this

turn of the century exposition. The work culminates with Chapter Five: “The Murmuration of Birds: An Ojibwe Ontology of Mnidoo-Worlding.” I bring Anishinaabe ontologies, tacitly found embedded in our everydayness, together with Indigenous ways of being attuned to what is there in the world. In dialogue with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology I take up Anishinaabe concepts such as Nii’kinaaganaa as embodied philosophies and experiential translations. I consider everyday phenomena from the collective movement of birds, to image refraction, epiphany, intuition and dreams. These are profoundly imbued in these philosophically-lived practices as embodied ciphers—languages and knowledge not lost but hidden, rather, in our “encrustation” with the world—subtly revealed as a simultaneous presence and elsewhere paradox. I conclude with thoughts on the questions and possibilities that emerge from this work for future research. These are not new, so much as they are reformulations of the questions that I began with on Anishinaabe epistemologies of dreams and imaging practices. I also speculate on the arts through practice-based, land-based and community-engaged methodologies that are necessary to carry out this future work. In classic Anishinaabe fashion I end at the beginning, with questions and incompletions, conceding to an opening, and the requirement that I grapple with these concerns relationally, in-community.



## Chapter 2

### **2 *Anishinaabe Philosophy: Shedding Canadian Epistemic Violence***

I write this dissertation at a time of intense debate both within and between Indigenous communities and post-secondary institutions about de-colonizing and indigenizing academic institutions, conversations I have participated in while at public gatherings and council meetings as a student and as a faculty member. These debates arise in response to the report of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (hereafter, TRC), released in 2015. This commission was assembled at the request of Indigenous survivors of residential schools (also known as industrial schools) as part of an out-of-court class action lawsuit settlement agreement (Canada, *Indian Residential Schools Resolution*). In the executive report: *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, the commissioners cite Sir John A. Macdonald, the first prime minister of Canada, in his 1883 announcement to the House of Commons that would launch the Indian residential school era. His speech is recorded as follows:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from

the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men. (2)

Although I do not at length explicitly address the TRC report, nonetheless, it is salient to point out the historical links and intergenerational hurdles that First Nations peoples<sup>9</sup> continue to face since the onset of such practices of cultural genocide. These practices have proven to be incredibly robust. Many Canadians, for example, internalize the assumed superiority of European cultures, even today. This presupposed supremacy implicitly conveys paternalistic attitudes that continue to support, in one form or another, notions of disciplining and ‘civilizing’ the ‘savage’ with western education as both justifiable and necessary. While mainstream awareness of the atrocities committed at Indian residential schools is growing, the false impression that these ‘schools’ delivered an academic education persists, as opposed to the rudimentary literacy skills and training in menial labour (none of which being their primary goal which was to fracture social-familial-cultural ties).

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<sup>9</sup> I use the term First Nations peoples, throughout the paper, to collectively specify the original inhabitants in what is now known as Canada (First Nations, status, non-status, Inuit, and Métis) and the United States (American Indians, Native Americans, and Tribes) since First Nations Indigenous peoples do recognize the Canada/US border.

## 2.1 ***Decolonial Strategies and Unsettling Epistemologies***

Many of the tensions emerging in these decolonial discussions reflect problems that I have experienced in my journey as an Indigenous community-member and scholar. These tensions include negotiating differing kinds of rigour, citation practices, and notions of authorship, to name but a few. European modes of scholarship and models of rigour are not only hegemonic throughout academia, but they are also held as the standard against which Indigenous cultural production, scholarly work, methods of knowledge transmission, and pedagogical approaches are measured. In his review of *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies*, Damien Lee argues that academic institutions put the rigour of Anishinaabeg approaches to research under question, using “positivist traditions of knowledge production” that are themselves culturally biased (137). Such methodologies emphasize positive facts, verifiable data, empirical evidence, and reject metaphysics and intuitive knowledge. These differences are often overshadowed or coopted into a field where power relations are weighted heavily on the side of Eurocentric colonial dominance. Lee writes:

Among other critiques, Eurocentric scholars argue that stories and storytelling are not rigorous forms of scholarship because they are too subjective. Typical definitions state that for scholarship to be rigorous, it must be extremely thorough, exhaustive or *accurate*. We are told that the only way to achieve this is to maintain a distance between researcher and the researched: rigour in Eurocentric scholarship is defined by its degree of objectivity at the cost of relationality ... As

such, “rigour” is claimed in a hegemonic way that makes Eurocentric knowledge traditions the measure of “real” scholarship. (137, my emphasis)

These concerns circulate around constant threats of assimilation, appropriation and the romanticizing of Indigenous knowledges and lifeways. Heavy reliance on settler languages and logic, likewise, gives rise to complex issues and contradictions through the standardization of Indigenous languages and thought systems where cultural retention and revitalization initiatives intersect with these Eurocentric biases, specifically as they relate to indigenizing the academy. While many Indigenous students, staff and faculty may not be fluent Indigenous language speakers, they also may not communicate in ways that strictly follow Anglo and Francophone grammatical structures, syntactical order, logic conventions, values and argumentation styles – even if they speak in one or both official Canadian languages. Lee Maracle calls this phenomenon, whereby fluency in both one’s Indigenous language and the colonial language is impeded, “two tongue crippled” (65). I contend that this difference in grammar and logic—even when speaking or writing English or French—is also a trace of pre-Colombian, that is, 1491 pre-contact knowledge.

As Canadian academic institutions embark on restorative measures we must be vigilant that they do not reinstall colonial imperatives that claim to ‘indigenize’ by further exploiting and disenfranchising Indigenous people and their knowledge (*Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “Calls to Action”*). Education is deeply implicated in colonial processes. As Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo write: “The control of knowledge and subjectivity through education and colonizing the existing knowledges ... is the key and fundamental sphere of control that makes domination

possible” (134-5). Current trends to indigenize the academy using the language of reconciliation may very well be another version of this colonial power in a new guise. Colonial control and dispossession have, in the past, been deceptively framed as measures that would benefit First Nations peoples. Certainly, residential schools were promoted as benevolent interventions. A similar argument was forwarded in the 1969 *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, commonly referred to as the *White Paper* that was widely rejected by First Nations peoples. This Canadian policy document, created by then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Cr tien, proposed to address the marginalization experienced by Indigenous people through ‘equality’ measures that would eliminate Indian status, repeal the *Indian Act*, and abolish the reserve system.

The document failed to take into consideration the recommendations of Indigenous people gathered through the consultation process, blatantly disregarded their treaty rights, and ignored land claims. In *The Unjust Society*, Harold Cardinal described the policy as a “thinly disguised program of extermination through assimilation” (1999). Indigenous groups strongly opposed the policy. It was vetoed in 1970. The *White Paper* treated Turtle Island Indigenous people as if they had lost their languages and cultures (insinuating that it was by some fault of their own), and therefore were no longer distinct groups requiring special status. It employed the language of equality to rationalize the country’s longstanding mandate of assimilation (a principle that also underlies the *Indian Act*), and attempted to terminate the government’s responsibilities as a treaty nation. It is critical that we ensure that initiatives for reconciliation and efforts to indigenize or decolonize the academy do not repeat this history. These decolonizing processes have a

long way to go in terms of challenging deep-seated discriminatory beliefs about Indigenous peoples and our complex histories. Institutions must grapple with underlying normative assumptions of white settler superiority, reified through colonial narratives that privilege dominant cultural values and logics.

Even well-intended solidarity with Indigenous peoples, “studies of settler colonialism,” and commitment to reconciliation risk “reifying” and “replicating” the very power relations and “modes of domination” of settler colonialism they seek to amend (Snelgrove et al. 4). Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon and Jeff Corntassel contend that reparation demands centering Indigenous voices, adopting a “relational approach to settler colonial power” and attending to the very real, specific, and contingent conditions of settler colonialism (4). These include a long list of critical issues, from land claims, to lack of access to potable water, underfunding of schools on reserves, removal of children from families through child welfare policies, racial profiling and criminalization, systemic poverty, and high suicide rates, to name a few. Indigenizing and decolonizing the academy in Canada is about more than simply including content about First Nations peoples in curriculum (for example through mandatory classes on Indigenous Studies, as is being proposed at some institutions), and increasing the numbers of students, staff and faculty Indigenous to North America.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> First Nations peoples and American Indians, alike, do not recognize the Canadian/American borders since they are sovereign Indigenous Nations with traditional territories that stretch beyond these invisible lines.

The history of settler colonialism must be critiqued in every subject from every angle to reveal and address invisible biases and resulting harms to Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups (it need not be the primary focus in every classroom, but most every course containing Canadian content, in particular, could easily contextualize the relationship and development of the subject matter to the history of settler colonialism). Canadian students, that is, settlers, as well as teachers and professors, must be informed of their part as contemporary actors that both benefit from and participate in the ongoing exploitation and dispossession of the original inhabitants. A university faculty and staff member, a white man, recently told me that he felt liberated by what he perceived to be a call to study Indigenous cultures. He expressed to me that Anishinaabe philosophy, in particular, provided him with creative license as a knowledge producer. His arrival at such a conclusion derives from a place of white male privilege, and suggests to me a covert redeployment of settler agendas to dispossess Indigenous knowers while appropriating their knowledge(s), this time through the jargon of reconciliation. Responses such as these demonstrate an eagerness to exploit Indigenous resources further (in this case our knowledge). I would urge such potential allies to instead consider how they might seize the opportunity presented by reconciliation to embark on restorative justice measures that benefit First Nations peoples as a primary focus. Responding to pervasive violence and discriminatory attitudes toward Indigenous people following the release of the TRC, Tracy Bear and Chris Anderson note a “general lack of knowledge of Indigenous histories” and contend that “...Canadians need to learn about Indigenous issues and Indigenous peoples’ historical and contemporary relationships with Canada and (other) Canadians.” Settlers, multigenerational descendants and new immigrants,

alike, must take up the difficult and necessary work of studying the history of Euro-western colonial imperialism in Canada to figure out what part they play in our current treaty relations.

Certainly putting resources toward expanding and improving access to Indigenous language and cultural education in post-secondary institutions is important. However, currently many people in our Indigenous communities face significant barriers to accessing college and university-based programs because of the severe underfunding of schools on reservations, the systemic racism they encounter in elementary and secondary education systems, and a lack of acknowledgement of their culturally distinct epistemologies. In other words, addressing Indigenous childhood poverty and elementary school success is of paramount importance to building toward higher learning both in academics and with traditional knowledge gathering. Canada must prioritize education funding for First Nations peoples' communities, support Indigenous-led measures to remove these barriers, as well as supporting community-based programs. To my thinking, indigenizing and decolonizing are reparation initiatives intended to rectify both past and ongoing harms by disrupting and restructuring oppressive colonial regimes and their presiding institutional frameworks. In other words, to those non-Indigenous scholars who feel 'liberated' by the resurgence in Indigenous knowledges, I say stay in your own boat, God damn it!<sup>11</sup> The last thing we need is more white experts, speaking on behalf of First

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<sup>11</sup> I refer here to the parallel boats in the Two-Row Wampum, signifying a treaty of non-interference between the Huadenosaunee (People of the Longhouse) and Dutch settlers.



Nations peoples, trying to teach us about ourselves, telling us ('Indians') what to do. Fix your own problems before knocking on my door, peddling cheap-assed advice.

Having attended many in several post-secondary institutions, I have had the opportunity to be part of numerous conversations and consultations about indigenizing the academy. While I am certainly heartened by the visibility and priority these discussions are given, these also take place in a climate of austerity and neoliberalizing of the university. It is imperative that measures to decolonize and indigenize are not tokenized, or treated as peripheral to the structures of these institutions more generally. Speaking to McGill University's Provost's Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education in 2017, Eve Tuck remarked that universities need to make themselves deserving of participation by Indigenous people, through such strategies as disinvesting from mining and oil corporations, military research, and other activities and partnerships that implicate them in ongoing colonial violence. I would add that they also must unsettle their narrow academic standards of rigour, modes of knowledge production and research methods.

Cluster hires of Indigenous faculty and commitments to long-term strategies to increase representation of Indigenous Peoples on faculty, staff, and among student populations are definitely to be applauded. But part of dismantling hegemonic biases is acknowledging First Nations peoples' community standards for what constitutes a person as an expert or as a traditional knowledge keeper. I have heard several different institutional administrators remark that there are few *qualified* Indigenous scholars in North America to recruit for the TRC positions that are opening. With respect to this issue, at one such meeting, one 'ally' enthusiastically piped in that the university should extend recruitment of such hires to global Indigenous candidates, and in this way further enhancing the

university's international prestige. No question, more global Indigenous scholars and scholars of colour are essential assets to the decolonizing and indigenizing process. However, we should not be forced to compete with one another. This should not be an either/or scenario that pits us against each other. Rather recruitment and funding are necessary to honour both local and global Indigenous knowledges. This strikes me as a weak justification for overlooking Turtle Island traditional epistemologies, knowledge holders, artists, activists, and scholars. If there is such a shortage, which I doubt, then foster emerging First Nations scholars through scholarships, dissertation completion fellowships, and by restructuring academic institutions themselves along with disciplinary expertise expectations. It seems to me that many Indigenous scholars are choosing not to work in the academy for a variety of reasons, ranging from epistemic violence, low numbers of Indigenous students in their classrooms, a desire to contribute to Indigenous communities directly, and the neoliberal culture of hyper-productivity in university faculties (leaving little time for community engagement—hanging out—which is often not recognized as legitimate field research and partnership building relations).

Decolonial initiatives must investigate what changes need to take place to make universities and colleges more attractive environments for Indigenous scholars to work in. Approach local communities to identify Elders and other cultural knowledge holders that might be hired in tenured positions as instructors and Elders-in-residence. Recognize community-based work in making determinations about hiring, tenure and promotion. Some schools are better than others in these regards. But I find it very disappointing when I see institutions vying to fulfill TRC obligations toward indigenizing the university by hiring Indigenous people from other continents. By all means, hire Indigenous people

from everywhere in the world. Institutions can only benefit from this diverse knowledge and representation, as well as adding to operating budgets by attracting foreign students with their foreign tuition fees. However, this should not be advanced as a part of the reparation to Turtle Island Indigenous Peoples, to whom Canada owes a very specific debt, beyond the nation's obligations as a global citizen and as a multicultural society. As Sunara Thobani writes, Canadian nationhood, and the rights of its citizens, are premised on the dispossession of First Nations peoples (*Exalted Subjects* 74). Resources intended for reconciliation and reparation through research on the colonial history of First Nations and Canadian settler relations, is rerouted to non-Indigenous scholars, or to diversity hiring more broadly. Important as the latter is, these are purchased on Canadian Indian Residential School reparation dollars, that is, with funds slated to assuage the social inequities of Indigenous Peoples of North America. The poverty and discrimination faced by First Nations peoples are urgent. Peoples' lives are at stake. If there are too few 'qualified' Indigenous scholars from Turtle Island then change the system and the criteria by which knowledge holders are judged to be qualified. This claim of too few qualified applicants is based in systemic discrimination. Give these students and traditional knowledge keepers the same access to success as non-Indigenous students enjoy by expanding the breadth of academia. Certainly, it is difficult to move outside of our normative frameworks, but that is exactly what the academy must do. Obviously, the system is broken, not First Nations peoples (albeit bankrupted, impoverished and brutalized by colonialism). Universities cannot simply find a way around academia's structural problems. Rather, the obstacles must be removed while maintaining rigorous

and culturally appropriate criteria, that is, criteria that are *equally* rigorous, but practiced in a different way.

The indigenizing reconciliatory turn in Canada is explicitly tied to the class action case concerning Indian Residential Schools (Canada 2006), and the survivors/claimants request for the inquiry that led to the *TRC's 94 Calls to Action*. This inquiry exposed the complicated knot of settler colonialism to mainstream masses, as well as its hand in the ongoing social inequities of the lives of First Nations peoples. Many Canadians were shocked and even deny that the dispossession of the one could be so intricately tied to the rights and privileges of the settlers who, by definition, seek to take their place. The term 'Indigenous' is proving to be too broad for reparation initiatives. Moreover, self-identification is also proving to be cumbersome, because this system is being taken advantage of by dominant groups, that is to say, by settlers. I heard, anecdotally, that research funding bodies are seeing an influx of self-identifying applicants claiming to be Indigenous (by first generation settlers and settler descendants from colonial countries specifically, that is, with ancestry not recognized by the United Nations as Indigenous<sup>12</sup>)

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'Indigenous' according to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Factsheet states: "Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, an official definition of 'indigenous' has not been adopted by any UN-system body. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following:

- Self- identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic or political systems
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs

in order to access dollars intended for reparative measures for Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. Apparently, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) chose to continue to use the now contentious term “Aboriginal,” to specify First Nation, Métis, and Inuit, so that it was clear that these ‘above quota’ applications were intended for these groups only.<sup>13</sup> Since we now move between colonial and pre-colonial thinking, subjected to interference by occupants of the ‘other boat’ (a reference to the Two-Row Wampum Treaty), we need to negotiate the muddy waters of how Indigenous identities are recognized and given legal status, in light of the ongoing exploitation of Indigenous resources by settlers. Self-identification is an important alternative to racist blood-quantum measures of identity, and as a means to ensure that people dispossessed by residential schools, the child welfare system, and the patriarchal measures of the *Indian Act* can find their way home. However, with the vague criteria of self-identification as the standard, anyone might claim ‘Indian Status’ in order to qualify for jobs, scholarships, grants, and to collect treaty rights. With self-identification (that denies the self-determining rights called for by Indigenous communities to determine

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- Form non-dominant groups of society
  - Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.” Web Accessed Oct 12, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Their website is worded as follows: “Applicants to most NSERC scholarship and fellowship programs are invited to indicate, on a voluntary basis, whether they are Aboriginal. Although this data is not seen by NSERC award selection committees, universities are permitted to recommend self-identified Aboriginal applicants above their application quota.” <http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/OnlineServices-ServicesEnLigne/instructions/201/e.asp>). Web. Accessed Oct 5, 2017.

their own membership), it would seem that Pierre's son, Justin Trudeau, the current Prime Minister of Canada, has finally solved the Indian problem: assimilation through multiplication, that is, by potentially turning all Canadian Citizens into 'Indians.' As an example, I was present at a public talk, where an audience member, a white man, stood up and asked when, as a fifth generation settler descendent from England, he gets to claim to be Indigenous. "Because," he said, "I think I've been here long enough." He completely misunderstands what it means to be Indigenous to Turtle Island, and what reparation discourses address. The poverty and precarity experienced by Indigenous people is very real, resulting in crisis levels of despair for those peoples who were dispossessed in the making of the Canadian nation, a process that this settler has been benefitting from for five generations. Long enough\_indeed! To underscore what is at stake for us, the leading cause of death for First Nations peoples (up to 44 years of age) is suicide and self-inflicted injuries. Our young men (ages 15-24) are six times more likely compared to non-Indigenous men, the same age, to take their own lives.<sup>14</sup> Among young Indigenous women, the suicide rate is eight times higher than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Centre for Suicide Prevention).<sup>15</sup> By asking to be recognized as Indigenous (I can only assume to claim some benefit or rights intended for these First Nations community members) such arguments negate the importance of repairing this dire situation, and instead divert scarce resources to already privileged dominant groups. Reparation is supposed to take us off the trajectory of annihilation by settlers, and instead

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<sup>14</sup> 126 per 100,000 compared to 24 per 100,000.

<sup>15</sup> 35 per 100,000 compared to 5 per 100,000.

support initiatives to reclaim traditional Indigenous self-governance, which include protocols for citizenship. The intention of self-identification is to make every effort for First Nations peoples disenfranchised through settler governance models to have their citizenship re-instated. By claiming entitlement falsely, at the expense of Indigenous Peoples, they show that they are decidedly not Anishinaabe, since, it is this way of being and thinking that sets us apart from settler imperialism.

The history of disenfranchisement is very complex and painful, especially since generations of children have been removed from their homes and adopted out, sometimes with few records of their biological families. Universities, research boards, arts councils, government agencies, and other institutions are not qualified to determine the legitimacy of self-identification, and neither should they be given such authority. Resources marked for the original inhabitants and reconciliation initiatives are limited. Local Indigenous communities have customary practices that may vary from one group to the next for assessing membership that does not necessarily hinge on blood quantum.<sup>16</sup> Individuals that have lost their community connections through residential school or the 60's scoop, for example, have the opportunity to return to Indigenous communities (both urban and on reserve), where they can learn by participating and giving back, becoming accepted over time, as they become in the way of community as it is understood, for example, by the Anishinaabe (in a sense, exchanging imperialistic tendencies for interrelational

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<sup>16</sup> Anyone can claim to be an astronaut, but only a community of the same can verify membership. Otherwise, you're just wearing a tinfoil hat, fooling only yourself. Or, perhaps, more fittingly, an academic graduation cap in which case both institution and illegitimate self-identifiers might be found to be complicit in exploiting these identities further.

reciprocity). It's not a perfect system, not by a long shot. But a common way to verify Indigenous community membership, in North America, is by being able to recite the succession of one's maternal line, and that living community members from their territory, in return, are able to recall some of these women (every community is different). Anishinaabe, as far as I know, are quite lenient toward accepting either the mother or father's line, for example. As I was taught, many are most concerned with skills at being a 'good citizen,' that is, generous, good humored, and kind, even when being assertive. Recognizing such attributes requires a level of intuitive co-relational "social competence" between all parties involved.

My main point here is that reparation must also meaningfully address epistemological-methodological differences. Indigenous knowledges and modes of knowledge creation and transmission should not be measured according to western concepts and standards of rigour, but rather according to the standards of our own Indigenous traditions (for me, that's Anishinaabe). Indigenous scholars and students should not always be the ones to conform to western institutions. The institutions need to be unsettled. They need to change at a structural level, and not through merely tokenizing measures, such as rearranging classrooms into a circle, and offering the occasional honorarium for Elders to give an opening prayer at public events. Accepting and valuing Indigenous norms of rigour does not result in lowering academic standards, but instead demands that the standards be raised to meet the high expectations that Indigenous communities hold to relational accountability, environmental sustainability, and the complex ways that knowledges are shared between community members, across genealogies, and across our nations. Western concepts of authorship, copyright, and academic property rights operate



according to a logic that cannot address such relational complexity. Together, these issues underscore the importance of examining the subtleties and complexities of Indigenous philosophies. One way of addressing the troubling negotiations of this broad term 'Indigenous' is to turn to specific local knowledges. Hence, I take up Anishinaabe ontologies, and forward a theory of *mnidoo*-worlding, at the nexus of emerging fields in western scholarship that draw heavily from Ojibwe philosophies with little to no acknowledgement of their influence. As Lee points out, for Turtle Island Indigenous peoples "academic rigour is not rigorous if it comes at the expense of our relationships, including our relationships with the ecology and *manidoog*" (137-138). Respectful collaboration, process-based learning and kinship making (that decenter individualism and humanism) are as legitimate as, and more ethical than, current settler models that value competition, productivity, commodity and acquisition. Indigenizing the academy calls for nothing less than a global socio-ecological paradigm shift, as opposed to co-opting difference through intellectual resource extraction (reaffirming colonial regimes). Such a movement would mobilize a radical restructuring that validates the unique contributions of diverse perspectives and ways of being as deeply interconnected, dynamic and, yet, necessarily other and equal. The subjugation of Indigenous peoples by settler ideologies will continue as long as western institutions fail to take responsibility for the ways in which they advance systemic racism (historically and presently). To end this oppression Canadians must critique dominant biases, as well as take meaningful actionable steps to restore, through *Indigenous-led* initiatives, sustainable relationships with the land and her people.

## **2.2      *Toward Decolonial Anishinaabe Ontologies***

While my goal in this dissertation is to articulate a specifically Anishinaabe *mnidoo*-philosophy, my research takes place in the context of settler colonialism, and as such within academic institutional regimes that not only play a central role in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, but also in their subjugation through the project of modern knowledge production. This colonial context, along with the disparate intellectual traditions that I negotiate, impact my processes and methodological decision-making throughout. Colonialism or ‘coloniality,’ as a thrust that maintains inequitable relations, is deeply embedded in the fundamental assumptions of western philosophy and academia in general.<sup>17</sup> Building on the concept “coloniality of power matrix,” developed by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (2000), Troy Richardson marks a trend whereby decolonial theorists shift from the term ‘colonialism’ to coloniality. Colonialism, he specifies, in “Disrupting the Coloniality of Being: Toward Decolonial Ontologies in Philosophy of Education,” refers to a historical event whereby imperial powers administered various colonies. ‘Coloniality,’ on the other hand, is “the normalization of the specific concepts and forms of theoretical knowledge which support relationships of subordination” (Richardson 540). Other decolonial theorists retain the term colonialism, but shift its meaning from ‘historical event’ to encompass the continuing structures of settler-colonialism (Wolfe “Settler Colonialism” 88; Tuck and Yang “Decolonization” 5).

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<sup>17</sup> Although some of the authors cited, such as Quijano and Mignolo, specifically address the history of colonization and the resulting power imbalance of Latin America, these theories are applicable to the North America context as well, since they share a linked history of contact, conquest, and an ongoing legacy of settler colonial violence.

Both of these meanings are incorporated in the way I employ colonialism throughout the dissertation.

Richardson points to the widespread export of European patriarchy, epistemology and spirituality through imperialism and colonial expansion, deployed simultaneously with the emergence of scientific racism and humanist philosophy. These mechanisms, furthermore, were designed to rationalize colonial domination, on the one turn, while subordinating and exploiting African and Indigenous peoples on the other (Richardson 541). Even seemingly neutral philosophical concepts are imbued with colonial ideology, which has been cause for a slow, painstaking process of thinking through my own use of such terms as ‘ontology’ as I translate and develop my Anishinaabe thought. Richardson argues that the concept of ontology was reworked as colonial/modern philosophy developed, and as such is “part of a hierarchical knowledge system maintaining colonial/modern social relations” (542). In developing his concept of Dasein, for example, Heidegger took European man as his model, rendering the colonized as “primitive” (Richardson 547). From Rousseau to Kant, we find numerous examples of Enlightenment and Modern philosophers whose theories of humanity and historical progress rely on notions of the primitive savage as a foil to justify their claims.

Richardson writes:

Ontology is not a neutral term or unproblematic transcendental concept with which philosophers of education can develop de-colonial relations to counter social hierarchies. The very dehumanization of racialized peoples stems from the interrogation of being posed by modern western philosophy as a response to the

assumed lack of being of colonized, racialized peoples (or at the very least the question of their being). (542)

He contends that discourses about ontology thus both count on and obscure the construction of this perception that colonized peoples are inherently primitive (Richardson 542). This prejudice becomes codified in an epistemically violent distortion of Indigenous subjectivities as they become enmeshed in the processes of racialization and discrimination, a problem noted by numerous scholars concerned with Indigenous knowledges and language revitalization (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson “Protecting Indigenous Knowledge”; Chacaby “Crippled Two-Tongue”). Richardson explains that “...racism cannot be divorced from colonialism or the role philosophy plays in developing a theoretical knowledge which establishes the coloniality of being” (548).

Maya Odehamik Chacaby, noting an etymological link to “conquest” in the term “translation” (from “carry across, to carry over”), writes that “[t]ranslation, as a means to impose cognitive imperialistic authority, became a process of displacement and dislocation” (2-3). At the level of language and philosophy this process of distortion and displacement significantly impacts the structuring of social reality (Meissner and Whyte 9). According to Meissner and Whyte, when Indigenous languages are suppressed, the logics of coloniality and heteropatriarchy displace traditionally egalitarian gender systems with hierarchical binary divisions such as “man/woman, human/land and colonizer/colonized” (9). These authors demonstrate that the epistemic violence of Eurocentric logics is both rationalized and rendered invisible because social spheres and settler-Indigenous relations are increasingly shaped by hierarchical divisions that privilege one side of the binary as normative and superior to the other (9). Hence, over

time it comes to appear ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ that one side of the equation (man, human, civilized) can and should, in terms of the moral good of humanity, conquer and control the other side (woman, land, uncivilized) (Meissner and Whyte 18).

Indigenous approaches to ontology are notably different, since they are constructed according to complex and dynamic interrelational threads that presume an energy-infused world in which multiple possible realities are happening at the same instant. In “Jagged Worldviews Colliding,” Leroy Little Bear describes the ontological presumption, in Blackfoot metaphysics, that existence consists of energy. This is also a fundamental aspect of the concept of *mnidoo-worlding* that I develop based on my Anishinaabe philosophical lineage. As Little Bear points out, since everything is animate and in ceaseless motion, “in this realm of energy and spirit, interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance” (77). Where for him, this relationality implies that the spatiality of reality is more important than temporality, for Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson, relationality also means that reality is plural. In *Research as Ceremony*, Wilson writes:

In an Indigenous ontology there may be multiple realities...reality is in the relationship that one has with the truth. Thus an object or thing is not as important as one’s relationship to it. This idea could be further expanded to say that reality is relationships or sets of relationships. Thus there is no one definite reality but rather different sets of relationships that make up an Indigenous ontology.

Therefore reality is not an object but a process of relationships, and an Indigenous ontology is actually equivalent to an Indigenous epistemology. (73)

Wilson goes on to describe the interpenetration between ontology and epistemology and the protocols of respect and responsibility that underpin both judgments about what exists, and processes of knowledge creation. He forwards a beautiful analogy from a dream, for the way that the self is constructed of multiple points of light connected by threads of relationality between the self and other entities – the threads of these multiple relations coalesce as knots, which is where forms or entities such as self, thing, or theory emerge (Wilson 75-76). I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5, taking this argument one step further to encompass *mnidoo*-worlding. That is to say, these different sets of relationships are not limited to the empirical world of objects and physical interactions, or even to conceptual relationality alone, but also to *mnidoo* realities that are tangible in a different way. We might call this a multi-reality ontological-epistemology or, in other words, the broad-spectrum mantra, ways of knowing. This phrase ‘ways of knowing,’ in my usage, encapsulates such phenomena as experiential, sensed or embodied awareness, as well as ‘spiritual’ connectivity, that is, the undertaking of an infinite churning shapeshifting potency. The interpenetration of these finite and infinite ‘knowings’ might be said to fall outside the direct gaze of intellectual speculation and perhaps even beyond linguistic annunciation. To be sure, this is not a trade up of rational thought for emotion. Rather, it is a grounding—an amplification—of different *kinds of knowing*, perhaps less detectible and therefore overlooked, for whatever the reason, whether due to the obstruction of the ‘natural attitude’ or the mediation of representation. Wilson writes:

While forming all these relationships, you can understand the responsibility that comes with bringing a new idea into being (or articulating/making visible an existing one). The new relationship has to respect all the other relationships

around it. Forming and strengthening these connections gives power to and helps the knot between to grow stronger and stronger. We must ensure that both sides in the relationship are sharing the power going into these new connections. Without this reciprocity, one side of the relationship may gain power and substance at the expense of the other. (79)

I'd like to emphasize this as an interrelational mode, that is, a way of being that is often taken for granted by Indigenous practitioners, as opposed to a profit-driven initiative, even if conceived as mutually beneficial. Here, I approach the distinction between Indigenous concepts of reciprocity and European interpretations via models of debt and exchange, that is, as leveraging an advantage with the promise of a gift in return. For Anishinaabe cultures, reciprocity implies a comportment of respect toward interdependence, and for the frailty and dependence of human beings in the face of Gizhemnidoo (Gitchi Manitou), the powerful and vast unknown—the fire of which, however, also resides in all things equally (so that no one is raised above another, and as such, no one speaks for another). Thus, this *Creator*, Gizhemnidoo, should not be mistaken for a Christian monotheistic God but as a nonhierarchical being-with process that all existence is gathered up in.

For Little Bear, the customs and values of Indigenous people center on maintaining these relationships, to the ultimate purpose of “holding creation together” (81). Like Wilson, he describes interrelational reality as a web, but he also emphasizes the cyclical and repetitive pattern of the relationships that make up existence. The people participate in maintaining these patterns through their customs, ceremonies, and the ways that they conduct themselves (Little Bear 81). He contrasts these metaphysically grounded

responsibilities with the “linear and singular, static, and objective” value systems of modern European ontologies, using time as an example. He writes:

Time begins somewhere way back there and follows a linear progression from A to B to C to D. The linearity manifests itself in terms of a social organization that is hierarchical in terms of both structure and power. Socially, it manifests itself in terms of bigger, higher, newer, or faster being preferred over smaller, lower, older, or slower. (Little Bear 82)

Linear, binary, and hierarchical thinking can have extremely harmful consequences, as we have seen over the past five hundred years, especially if we consider the world’s state of near ecological collapse, inequitable distributions of resources and global geo-political instability. Indigenous conceptions of time do not conform to a conventional notion of time (and progress) unfolding in a linear

progression. Non-linear time is not a contradiction if we approach it from differing dimensions. For example, from a finite perspective, my physical body travels through space and time for about 6 hours during my drive between Montreal and Toronto. In a broader sense, I will pass through the four phases of life (an Anishinaabeg teaching) in about one hundred and seventeen years (really stretching it out). No joke, that’s how old my

Commenting on Cree stories, Sarah Preston contends, “to locate truth in the incredible aspects of the story is a snare and a delusion. Truth is to be found, however, in the actions and interactions of the protagonist...” that often speak to “socially responsible behavior, or Cree [and Anishinaabe] social competence” (256). I agree, but this is only one side of the veil, that being the tangible finite world.



Great Grandmother, Lena, told me she was. Although, she could not remember if it was 116 or 117. But she thought it was the latter. My mom laughed and said, “she’s just making that up.” But she was very convincing, and she seemed convinced herself. She passed away when I was twelve.

At the same time, strange things might happen along the way, on my drive between cities. For example, I could be transformed and, in fact, transported through differing conceptions of time as a ‘spirit,’ ‘soul,’ or energy/potentiality, that is, while indwelling as infinite *mnidoo* entanglement. This is the condition of possibility for Cree Elder Malcolm Diamond’s “*atiukan*, stories which no one can remember to whom or where the events took place.” In Anishinaabemowin the term is *Aadzookan*, which translates loosely as an ancient story. Diamond shares an *atiukan* (recorded in 1983 by Sarah Preston), about a child that awakes to find that he has literally become a man, overnight, after dreaming of becoming an adult adept at many skills as a provider for his family (253). In this dream, the boy passes through all the stages of life in receiving knowledge and gifts from his ancestors, rather than gaining them through direct experience (254 - 255). But this is rare and comes at great personal cost. For a candle to burn so brightly it would be seen on either side of the veil—catching the full attention of the *manidoog*. Such an extraordinary gift or “blessing” (as it is often described by anthropologists such as Hallowell) would come with great accountability not only by resigning oneself to fulfilling (utilizing these gifts to the furthest extent for the benefit of the people) and passing that knowledge along responsibly, but also at the expense of one’s own life. That is to say, the greater the gift, the greater the sacrifice that one must be willing to make in service of uplifting the people. A boon such as wisdom beyond one’s years and experience, for example, might

bring about an early corporeal death, since the near completion of a learning journey reverberates throughout *manidoo*-consciousness, communicating that an elder approaches. My mother said this is why we are not to claim the title of Elder, ourselves. If anyone were to ask my mother if she was an Elder, she replied, “No, I’m just old,” and she’d laugh. She did not want the *manidoo* to come for her too soon. I’ve noticed other old Anishinaabe momentarily become serious and hesitant when I address them as Elders. Aside from catching, perhaps, unwanted attention from the *manidoo*, we know that such honoured titles also summon grave responsibility in turn, and so recipients must weigh for themselves if they are ready and willing to take that on. Rather than claim the status of Elder for oneself, community members in noticing the respectful way that a person lives as Anishinaabe or in identifying the gifts that they carry and generously share, the people honour them with such titles. In this way, Indigenous community members show respect and call people into those *traditional*, that is, non-Christian, roles (although some might have complicated relationships with Christianity).<sup>18</sup> To claim such an honour for one’s self is not only boastful, it runs the greater risk of offending the *manidoo*, or inadvertently inviting them to escort you to the spirit world sooner than you’d wish. We do not just throw ideas of the other-than-human around carelessly. The *manidoo* are real, they are listening, and they are very powerful!

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<sup>18</sup> This term *traditional* is controversial, since it implies that these cultural teachings and way of life are static, on the one hand, and too broad, on the other. At the same time the definition is exclusionary, in that Christians and people who use drugs and alcohol generally are not included in this category. Yet they may directly and indirectly live and understand traditional Anishinaabe philosophies, practices and teachings. Christianity however, disavows traditional Indigenous thought as satanic or sinful (i.e. Indigenous languages were alleged to be the devil’s language by Christian leaders). Hence Christianity, alcohol and later drugs were implemented as settle colonial tools to discourage these practices, languages and belief systems.

When I write about ontology, a different set of assumptions are at play than in western philosophy. For even though I write much of this work in English, the underlying concepts derive from my Ojibwe mother and grandparents and hence from Anishinaabemowin. This language follows different logics and value systems, starting with the key ontological assumption that everything is alive. There is no logical contradiction for Anishinaabeg to speak to trees and rocks, who are manidoog persons, in contrast to English language and western contexts, where “tree” and “rock” are nouns, one animate, that is, alive (the tree), the other inanimate (the rock), and neither conceived as persons (Little Bear 78). As Little Bear makes clear, in his Blood/Blackfoot language everything is animate and therefore trees and rocks are entities that humans can dialogue with (his language and cultural teachings are similar to Anishinaabemowin since they are both from the Algonquian language group). He writes: “If everything is animate, then everything has spirit and knowledge. If everything has spirit and knowledge, then all are like me. If all are like me, then all are my relations” (Little Bear 78). As he explains, collective social thought is embodied in language, which one absorbs and is interpellated by as one learns to speak. Since Indigenous languages like Blackfoot and Anishinaabemowin are “verb-rich,” “process- or action-oriented” and describe “happenings” rather than things, they express a different, more fluid metaphysical reality that allows for “the transcendence of boundaries,” compared to the dichotomized logics of European metaphysics (Little Bear 78). Wilson elaborates the difference clearly with respect to his Cree language (also from the Algonquian language group). He uses an example that, coincidentally, I also often use when discussing how Anishinaabemowin works. In Cree, he explains, the word for chair literally translates in English as ‘the thing

that you sit on.’ Rather than naming an object in the form of a noun, the word is a verb that describes an active relationship between two bodies. My translation, which I derived in conversations with my mother, is that *apabiwin* means something like “being in the way of the chair.” As Wilson points out, because a chair might be used in multiple possible ways – as a doorstep, or a surface on which to pile papers, there are multiple possible ontological realities for that object/relationship (73). Moreover, no one way to use a chair is more correct or better than another.

Unpacking the meanings and histories of western concepts such as ontology is vitally important to a project of decolonial philosophy, since such concepts have the power to inject their colonial logics into the meaning-systems surrounding them, while remaining invisible even to those perpetuating the ideologies. Michel de Certeau writes,

The language produced by a certain social category has the power to extend its conquest into vast areas surrounding it, “deserts” where nothing equally articulated seemed to exist, but in doing so it is caught in the trap of its assimilation by a jungle of procedures rendered invisible to the conqueror by the very victories he seems to have won. However spectacular it may be, his privilege is likely to be only apparent if it merely serves as a framework for the stubborn, guileful, everyday practices that make use of it. (32)

In other words, academic logic enacts a silent, passive colonialism that even its perpetrators may be unaware of. Not only does this logic create an oppressive environment for colonized subjects, preserving and further perpetuating exclusionary and

assimilating harms, it also prohibits the capacity of fields of thought to grow and transform in creative, intellectually vigorous *new* ways.

The power relationships between Indigenous knowledge/people and western knowledge/people remain “asymmetrical,” so that “both Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Indigenous learners end up in a never-ending battle for recognition within that system” (Simpson “Land as Pedagogy” 22). For example, in my own graduate program, I had to fight for the right to study Anishinabemowin in order to use it to fulfill my secondary language requirement. Indeed, I was told by one gatekeeper that Ojibwe is not a Romance language and therefore it is not a theoretical language. In another example of this imbalance, Simpson writes about the reluctance of universities to create tenured positions for elders, reserving this level of recognition and commitment to academics with university credentials. Here again colonial authority over Indigenous knowledge is reinforced, in a system that is ultimately designed to propagate settler colonialism (“Land as Pedagogy” 22). Chacaby, invoking Maracle’s concept of the “Crippled Two-tongue” draws from both critical race (Razack) and critical disability (Titchkosky) discourses to show that Indigenous learners become pathologized and constructed as lacking in these processes, “frozen in the ancient past, unable to cope with modernity,” and unable to speak, or write, proper English (4).

For these reasons, it is especially crucial that Indigenous traditional knowledge holders and scholars lead the way in indigenizing and decolonizing the university, particularly in emerging fields that point toward decentering the human subject. This is important not only in order to interrogate and break these insidiously recurring regimes, but also to create real decolonial change, rather than simply being absorbed into the settler colonial

machine. The relationship of Indigenous knowledge to colonial philosophy is not simply a matter of translation or comparative philosophy, but rather it offers an opportunity to disrupt these colonial logics. As Richardson puts it “Native Americans are not enigmas for philosophers of education but opportunities and invitations for a formulation of being that is non-assimilationist to the privileged and hegemonic languages of philosophy” (548). To this purpose, Richardson gestures toward a trans-ontological shift, that is to say, he evokes an attitude premised on generous exchange, border thinking, and dialogical practice (Richardson 542, 550).

Indigenous stories and interpretations need to be heard in order to develop, build and strengthen these connections and concepts in complex and balanced ways. Anishinaabe knowledge is often sidelined by academic theories that put these Indigenous intellectual influences under erasure and delegitimize them in order to claim authorship of theories non-Indigenous authors pose as new and innovative. I am thinking, for example, of David Abram's appropriation of Indigenous knowledge in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. Here he claims to have coined the phrase more-than-human, a slight deviation from Hallowell's ethnographic translation of Anishinaabe conceptions of mnidoo (spelled Manitou by Hallowell) as "other-than-human persons." This phrase clearly implies more-than-human since Hallowell is referring to notions of the superhuman, supernatural, or spirits, such as Thunder Birds ("Ojibwe Ontology" 30).<sup>19</sup> Abram not only claims authorship of this Anishinaabe concept, but also goes on to describe the practitioners of these Indigenous knowledges as superstitious and corrupt. In an interview

"The old man thought that one of the Thunder Birds had said something to him. He was reacting to this sound in the same way as he would respond to a human being, whose words he did not understand. The casualness of the remark and even the trivial character of the anecdote demonstrate the psychological depth of the 'social relations' with other-than-human beings that becomes explicit in the behavior of the Ojibwa as a consequence of the cognitive 'set' induced by their culture" (Hallowell "Ojibwe Ontology" 33).

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<sup>19</sup> Theodore Sturgeon also employed this phrase decades earlier in his 1953 science fiction novel titled *More than Human*, which is about a group of misfits whom, in a sense, synchronize as a collective, and thereby raise each other above their limitations to become more than either their individual and human limitations.

with Scott Landon, Abram equates Indigenous knowledge with deceitful trickery (“Ecology of Magic”). He says “sleight-of-hand ... has its origins in the work of the shaman or sorcerer in altering perception and the organization of the senses.” He describes such medicine people as magicians who are “susceptible to the solicitations of ... other-than-human shapes” and who could, moreover “most easily enter into some kind of rapport with another being, like an oak tree, or with a frog” (“Ecology of Magic”). As a professional magician, he includes

himself as one of those select few endowed with this extraordinary ability to communicate with the mnidoo, and hence forgoes the need to cite the authors of these orally transmitted literatures, whom he tends to not mention by name. He collapses the philosophical traditions of multiple unrelated Indigenous cultures from all over the world into a single pan-magician more-than-human theory, attributing “most of what he knows about magic” to what he learned from

“Every magician that I met had a number of animals or plants or forms of nature that were their close familiars. Just as we speak of the witch's black cat as her ‘familiar,’ so in these animistic societies the magician might have crows and frogs and perhaps a certain kind of rubber plant as his familiars. It might also be a certain kind of storm—a thunder-storm—a being that, when it appeared in the sky, would tell the magician that it was time to go outside and just gaze at those clouds and learn from them what they might have to teach.” (Abram “Ecology of Magic”)

Indigenous medicine people in Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka, connecting their knowledge to European traditions of witchcraft, equating the more-than-human concept with the witch’s black cat, or familiar (“Ecology of Magic”). An American who is



undoubtedly aware of Turtle Island Indigenous thought, he does not count North American First Nations peoples among his influences. Nor, I suspect, did any of these Indigenous communities profit from the commercialization of their traditional knowledge through Abram's publication of their intellectual labour.

In the current climate of indigenizing and decolonizing institutions, notions of collaboration, building bridges, working together for better relations between Indigenous and settler societies lack real commitment if they are not backed up with dismantling colonial logics and settler privilege (Tuck and Yang "Decolonization," Coulthard *Red Skin*, Simpson *Dancing*, Alfred *Wasáse*). That means protecting land specifically for the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples to live as they choose, without further molestation (to land, bodies, and knowledge, alike). Consequently, this also preserves clean land, water and air for all the earths' inhabitants. I am cautious about current academic discourses and claims by settlers on community building, kinship making, and decentering the human in order to emphasize other-than-human or more-than-human *materiality*, since it can be understood to mobilize affect theory as a dispersion of agency.

Materiality, as I understand it, articulates the interactive ways of being *material*. It is a theoretical position that strives to deemphasize and delegitimize humancentric narratives while, at the same time, underscoring the affective potential inherent to organisms, and so-called objects and things, such as germs, bullets, and bullfrogs (regardless of any previous status as inanimate inorganic, living, or inert). This perspective brings into view an interactive and unpredictable flow of power at work influencing ecologies and systems; such as my laptop forcing me to contort my body to conform to its design, or the influenza virus, or gut bacteria that control human behavior as opposed to human

consciousness, in a top down hierarchical power relation, acting as the primary mover and authority. Hence, such a position critically challenges notions of the supremacy of human agency. I agree with these principles. It is well known, to the point of being a cliché, that Indigenous cosmologies, such as those held by the Anishinaabe, revolve around interconnective, co-existent, interrelationality. These Indigenous philosophies have been doing exactly that for so long (time immemorial, another clichéd phraseology) that no one can recall the precise moment that these teachings became our guiding principles. They focus on relations and the dynamic movement between them.

Whereas emerging western discourses such as new materialism, posthumanism and affect theory, little cousins to earlier Indigenous versions, not only shift the focus away from humancentrism but in many ways also disown human responsibility altogether. Now that western logics have brought us to a global tipping point of ecologic devastation and mass biodiversity extinction this is the time when humans need to step up and take responsibility for the continuing damage being done to the earth. Yes, strip the human of his Euro-western supremacy, but not at the expense of shirking accountability for ongoing harms. We need to take drastic action as well as be willing to make difficult sacrifices to restore the ecosystem, biodiversity, and other relations in both human and other-than-human worlds. This is particularly urgent since we continue to circulate in this patriarchal structure, which is intimately tied to individualism and liberal humanism. That is to say, the subject of individual rights and freedoms is closely linked with capitalism, and the exploitation of resources for personal gain without accountability (I'm thinking here of corporate ecological devastation, in particular). Examples of responsibility and sacrifice include not only the actions of such activists as the Indigenous water protectors

at Standing Rock, but also some settler communities who are beginning to understand that all life is at stake in the face of capitalist environmental destruction. For instance, a Quebec village on the Gaspé Peninsula is currently facing a possible \$1.5 million loss to an oil company, should they lose a court case for striving to protect local waterways. According to the CBC, “The municipality of Ristigouche Sud-Est is being sued by Gastem, a Montreal-based oil-and-gas exploration and development company, for passing a bylaw in March 2013 establishing a two-kilometre no-drill zone near the source of the village’s water” (Shingler).

### **2.3      *Logics of Assimilation***

Where Anishinaabe knowledges meet western knowledges within the violent structures of colonialism, they are either cast as utterly alien, primitive and romantic (othered), or made palpable by assimilating Indigenous concepts to western constructs (saming). Acts of *saming* delegitimize these innovative, Indigenous specific contributions, rendering them transparent, unexceptional and as such fair game for dismissal, on the one turn, and appropriation, on the other. It is saming that I am mainly concerned with here. In western thought there is a pronounced logic of saming at play in the requirement for a western-oriented comprehensibility that inevitably demands concepts be consistent with logocentrism and dominant worldviews. Logocentrism and saming are under contestation in discourses of postmodern philosophy that aim to shift to ontologies of difference, by such thinkers as Derrida, Levinas, and Irigaray. Saming nevertheless has a strong hold in western cultures, even in popular discourses like multiculturalism that advocate tolerating difference, or recognizing the sameness hidden beneath differences (Boler and Zembylas

110-111). Saming is a problem related to assimilation. Kari Weil defines saming as “seeing likeness where others have seen difference” (82). As she explains, this is converse to the concept of ‘othering’ articulated by Simone de Beauvoir in her analysis of the subjection of women, whereby women’s apparent difference from men disqualified them from inclusion in the status of full human subjectivity (82). Weil turns to Luce Irigaray for an analysis of saming as the means by which women are assimilated under masculine concepts, where they are “refused their difference — a difference ... that cannot be defined simply in terms of a comparison or contrast with men” (82). Saming operates according to the same logic as anthropomorphism, extending to humans the reduction or disallowance of difference that we see when we ascribe human qualities to animals.

Weil, who is writing from the perspective of critical animal studies, proposes a third way between a form of othering that Frans de Waal terms ‘anthropodenial’ whereby one refuses to see the ways that the two types might be alike (human/nonhuman or man/woman) and a refusal to see their differences. That is, she displaces the human knower from the objective standpoint from which they judge the qualities of human or animal (Weil 82-83). To better understand this process of saming, I turn to Irigaray’s analysis of the logics of recognition in western thought. She writes,

To conceive of the act of seeing in this way approximates the manner of conceiving understanding in our culture. And to say: I understand, we often say: I see. That is: I see something, framed as and reduced to an object–conceptual, mental–for my comprehension. Moreover, our ‘I see’ is equivalent to “I recognize:’ I recognize a form, I recognize a concept. I recognize something that

already has a face according to a model, a paradigm, an *eidōs*, that I have been taught. (143)

This has two implications for Anishinaabe thought – the first is the way that western thinkers since the Jesuit missionaries and the Enlightenment philosophers who read their letters, reduced Anishinaabe concepts to their own “learned and memorized” Eurocentric models—imbuing conceptions like *mnidoo*, for example, with the significance of ‘spirit’ in both Christian traditions and Platonic forms (Irigaray 143). The second is the very necessity of such a logic of resemblance for a concept to have meaning. When the Jesuits, in their first naïve encounters with Indigenous peoples, were struggling to understand *mnidoo*, they described it as a god, devil or ideal form. I will elaborate on this later, but for now, it’s a good example of how Anishinaabe philosophy became distorted by the western viewer, who could not see what he did not recognize, and therefore saw only what he already knew, which was western concepts. Irigaray continues, describing the process by which we only come to know that which we already know:

Thus seeing, as understanding, generally corresponds for us with knowing again, knowing a second time, and so entering in complicity with ourselves and with the one who has already defined or constructed the form – verbal or nonverbal, plastic for example. Seeing as understanding corresponds to a second time: we submit ourselves here to a model learned and memorized. (143)

This assimilative logic, as Irigaray points out, does not provide room for newness, it “is not something or someone unknown that we discover, that surprises or amazes us” (143). Rather than leaving nonsensical enigmas out *there*, in uncharted terrain to be contended

with on their own terms, she asserts that aspects of reality that are difficult to understand are, instead, subsumed under the equation of an incomprehensible beyondness. In other words, such mystery is ascribed to the realm of Gods, or of nightmares, that is, of faith or imagination in an all-encompassing apriori otherworldly force. She writes as follows:

Then what we see – through the eyes or through the mind – is not something or someone unknown that we discover, that surprises or amazes us or sometimes touches us without our being able to recognize it or assign a name or a sense to it. Such an encounter with something or someone unknown, with what remains without form given by us, constructed by us, such an encounter we generally defer into the invisibility of a God or into the fear of a nightmare: that which evokes the time before birth, for example. (Irigaray 143)

As I understand it, this differs from Ojibwe philosophies and oral cultural practices, which concede to the fact that each of us carries only one small part, which might vary greatly from one to the other. The correspondence here is that reality does not necessarily line up with the tangible world as it is ‘seen’ (whether that be through physical or conceptual sight). This makes allowances for differences, for dissent, for variation, paradox and conflicting truths/knowledge/views to exist simultaneously without cancelling each other out. This receptivity—this way of being together in mndoo interrelationality, as I will elaborate later, has not dissipated. Rather, we press on our practices and relations that intersect and pass between our ways of being and doing. Mndoo-infinite does not fit or correspond to my limited finite knowing, that is, with my human consciousness, and yet this vast incomprehensibility is taken into my ownmost and made comprehensible as an unfolding potency.

Since the earliest colonial encounters, settler conceptions of ‘Indians,’ that is, Turtle Island Indigenous Peoples, and their knowledges have been subject to miscomprehension structured along a continuum between othering and saming. Jesuit missionaries kept careful archives of their impressions of the people who took them in, gave them shelter, instructed them in how to speak their languages, and taught them how to survive while they established their missions. These observations are recorded in the 71 volumes of letters published as *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* between 1610-1791. Any similarity to Christianity was seized upon with enthusiasm. Father Paul Le Jeune, for instance, writes in 1634 of the Montagnais (Innu): “As to the Messou, they hold that he restored the world, which was destroyed in the flood; whence it appears that they have some tradition of that great universal deluge which happened in the time of Noë, but they have burdened this truth with a great many irrelevant fables” (v.6 159). Such accidental similarities were taken as immediate validation of their own worldview. The letters are rife with naïve ‘saming’ misunderstandings of concepts like *mnidoo*, which are described by different pious correspondents struggling with varying degrees of xenophobia, curious admiration, and terror. In 1710, Father Joseph Jouveney was certain that ‘*manitou*’ was the devil: “They call some divinity, who is the author of evil, ‘*Manitou*,’ and fear him exceedingly. Beyond doubt it is the enemy of the human race, who extorts from some people divine honors and sacrifices” (v.1 287). La Jeune’s 1634 interpretation was more Platonic, for he saw the “*Messou*” as more like a Christianized ideal form:

They also say that all animals, of every species, have an elder brother, who is, as it were, the source and origin of all individuals, and this elder brother is wonderfully great and powerful. The elder of the Beaver, they tell me, is perhaps

as large as our Cabin ... Now these elders of all the animals are the juniors of the Messou. Behold him well related, this worthy restorer of the Universe, he is elder brother to all beasts. (v. 6 159)

Roger Williams, a settler who founded the first Evangelical church, saw *mnidoo* as a concept that identified God in all things:

Besides there is a generall Custome amongst them, at the apprehension of any Excellency in Men, Women, Birds, Beasts, Fish, &c. to cry out *Manittóo*, that is, it is a God, as thus if they see one man excell others in Wisdome, Valour, strength, Activity etc. they cry out *Manittóo* A God: and therefore when they talke amongst themselves of the *English* ships, and great buildings, of the plowing of their Fields, and especially of Bookes and Letters, they will end thus: *Manittôwock* They are Gods: you are a God, etc. A strong Conviction naturall in the soule of man, that God is, filling all things, and places, and that all Excellencies dwell in God, and proceed from him, and that they only are blessed who have that Jehovah their portion. (118)

Saming in this way was the means by which these Christians acknowledged the humanity of the Indigenous people they encountered. Williams writes, “From *Adam* and *Noah* that they spring, it is granted on all hands,” designating Native people as worthy of conversion (4).

Yet processes of othering take place simultaneously. Ceremonial leaders and medicine people are conveyed as duplicitous and greedy sorcerers, and the people as largely



superstitious and simple minded, despite their incredible dignity,<sup>20</sup> peaceful communities devoid of crime, astounding generosity,<sup>21</sup> enviable good looks,<sup>22</sup> and ability to

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<sup>20</sup> In 1611, referring to several Algonquian groups, including the Mi'gmaq, Father Pierre Biard writes: “You will see these poor barbarians, notwithstanding their great lack of government, power, letters, art and riches, yet holding their heads so high that they greatly underrate us, regarding themselves as our superiors” (*Jesuit Relations*, v. 3 93).

<sup>21</sup> Father Joseph Jouveny wrote of an unspecified people in 1710:

They know nothing of anger, and at first were greatly surprised when the Fathers censured their faults before the assembly; they thought that the Fathers were madmen, because among peaceful hearers and friends they displayed such vehemence. These people seek a reputation for liberality and generosity; they give away their property freely and very seldom ask any return; nor do they punish thieves otherwise than with ridicule and derision. If they suspect that any one seeks to accomplish an evil deed by means of false pretenses, they do not restrain him with threats, but with gifts. ... They kindly relieve the poverty of the unfortunate; they provide sustenance for widows and old men in their bereavement .... Whatever [page 275] misfortune may befall them, they never allow themselves to lose their calm composure of mind, in which they think that happiness especially consists (*Jesuit Relations* v.1 appendix 275-277).

He continues:

There is nothing which they are more prone to use as a counter-allegation, when provoked, than to charge a man with a lack of intelligence. For they claim praise because of their intelligence, and not without good reason. No one among them is stupid or sluggish, a fact which is evident in their inborn foresight in deliberation and their fluency in speaking. Indeed, they have often been heard to make a peroration so well calculated for persuasion, and that off-hand, that they would excite the admiration of the most experienced in the arena of eloquence (*Jesuit Relations* v. 1, appendix, 277-279).

<sup>22</sup> In 1611 Father Pierre Biard writes: “Generally speaking, they are of lighter build than we are; but handsome and well-shaped, just as we would be if we continued in the same condition in which we were at the age of twenty-five” (*Jesuit Relations*, v. 3 93).

dialectically out-argue the priests, much to the Jesuits' chagrin.<sup>23</sup> Of medicine people Fathers Vincent Bigot and Claude Dablon wrote:

[T]hey practice a thousand sorts of Juggleries over their sick people, which, after all, are only shams, the Jugglers or medicine-men pretend to draw from the Bodies of the sick either stones, or wood, or hair, or other things. Sometimes, not unlike our own charlatans, they execute this cleverly, so as not to be found out in their deceit; sometimes, with horrible Cries, Conjoined with most extraordinary postures and contortions of the Body; and, finally, with festivities and superstitious dances, which they prescribe for the cure of the sick. (v. 61 149-151)

Viewing their new world hosts through a Catholic mindset bent on a christianizing mission, the philosophical ideas of the First Nations peoples were sometimes remarked upon with curiosity, but largely dismissed as ignorant superstition or the devil's work. According to Michael Pomedli, the Jesuits did not recognize a proper philosophy among Indigenous people.

The natives, the Jesuits noted, embodied an almost exclusively experiential approach to life. .... Can such an experiential ... peace-pipe approach qualify as

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<sup>23</sup> Father Paul le Jeune quickly ends the argument when he is logically out-manuevered by his Indigenous interlocutor in 1634:

And when they see that I make sport of their dreams, they are astonished and ask me, "What does thou believe then, if thou dost not believe in thy dream?" "I believe in him who has made all things, and who can do all things." "Thou hast no sense, how canst thou believe in him, if thou hast not seen him?" It would take too long to relate all their silly ideas upon these subjects; let us return to their superstitions, which are numberless (*Jesuit Relations* v. 23 183).

‘philosophy’? The Jesuit missionary, Paul Le Jeune, thinks not. He notes that if the Hurons did any philosophy it was with their feet and not with their heads. (57-59)

Pomedli indicates two problems in addressing the question “were there any philosophies among the North American Indians” (57). The first is a presupposition that the native people “embodied an almost exclusively experiential approach to life” (57) and the second is the incompatibility of these different epistemological traditions. In other words, he questions whether the Jesuits could recognize Indigenous philosophies deriving from oral traditions, and suggests that the western concepts by which they measured philosophy did not fit the Indigenous contexts.

Pomedli nevertheless avoids the more difficult epistemological question of incompatibility, which is perhaps as inaccessible to him as it is to the Jesuits, since he is also coming to the question from a western perspective. Indeed, on reading Pomedli’s article alongside the primary texts (the *Jesuit Relations*), there is a striking similarity between his failure to evaluate the acuity and complexity of Indigenous philosophies on their own terms, and the cultural bias he notes among the Jesuits. Pomedli proceeds to make the same mistake as the Jesuits, despite his more open-minded good intentions, by comparing the Indigenous philosophy (via the Jesuit’s naïve interpretations of it) to Aristotle’s concept of the soul. He notes both differences and similarities between the European concept of soul and Indigenous concepts reported by various Jesuits about

varying cultures and language groups, in several volumes of the *Jesuit Relations*.<sup>24</sup> He thus takes a Pan-Indigenous approach, collapsing into one “Indian philosophy” examples drawn from the Huron, Mi'gmaq, Montagnais, Algonquin, Ottawa and Onondaga. He shows that native people have concepts for what “animates the body and gives it life,” a soul possessing reason, a soul that thinks and deliberates, the affective or desiring soul, the soul that separates from the body at death (and remains for some time), and the soul that stays with the remains of the dead. Native people, he adds, see souls as divisible, reasonable (*raisonnable*) spiritual and immaterial (58). In the final analysis Pomedli identifies two kinds of ‘souls’ reported by the Jesuits—the body-soul and the free-soul, that is, the soul possessed by humans and animals alike that is attached to the body, and a soul that can leave the body while dreaming or following death.<sup>25</sup> What is pertinent here

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Le Jeune, writing about the Montagnais (Volumes 6, 8, 11), Jean de Brebeuf’s reports on his mission with the Huron near what is today Barrie, Ontario (volume 10), letters by Father Buteux about his work at the Mission Of The Holy Cross At Tadoussac, Quebec, frequented by Mi'gmaq, Montagnais/Atikamegues (Innu) and Algonquin (Volume 26), Father Allouez’s observance of the Ottawa Indians (Volume 50), Paul Ragueneau on Huron mission (33), Jouvençy’s description of the “manners of the Savages of New France” who might be a mix of Iroquois and Algonquin peoples (an appendix of volume one written in 1710), Bressani’s reports on the religious practices of both the Huron and Algonquin (Volume 39), Pierre Biard Saint Sauveur Mission - Mount Desert Island, Maine, Abenaki (Algonquin group) (Volume 3) (Volume 42 Jean de Quens; Jerome Lalemant, Jean de Brébeuf, Paul Ragueneau, Jean de Quen, and others, with reference to the Mohawk and Onondaga.)

<sup>25</sup> “The body-soul is perceptive. Humans have this soul in common with animals; « dogs, deer, fish and other animals have ... immortal and reasonable souls». For the Onondaga, the body-soul is the seat for violent emotions such as sadness and anger. While this soul has a localized existence in the bones, upon death at least, it may slip somewhat accidentally into the fetus of a pregnant woman who passes by. The body-soul operates in connection with the body and its organs. It is active when the body is active or awake. Its existence is tenuous upon death.” “The free-soul is rational and can achieve an independence from the body in several ways; in dreams; on the occasion of violent passions arising from the body soul;

is the inevitable saming that Pomedli engages in that assimilates Indigenous concepts to western ones when discussing them in English and using heavily weighted western concepts like soul as the standard, even as he points out how the Indigenous concepts deviate from that standard, and exist apart from it.

Trends of both saming and othering Indigenous people and their thought continued well into the twenty-first century, but with a secular spin. Anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl leans toward ‘othering,’ in his 1910 *How Natives Think*, where he argued that the ‘primitive mind’ merges the supernatural with reality, whereas the ‘modern mind’ is more highly evolved, rational and logical (30). Robert Bernasconi writes that Merleau-Ponty criticized Lévy-Bruhl for othering and exoticizing the native people he wrote about (239). Yet, at the same time, Merleau-Ponty did not know how to negotiate this without falling into a saming reductionism, asking, “How can we understand someone else without sacrificing him to our logic or it to him?” (Merleau-Ponty cited in Bernasconi 239). As Bernasconi points out, western progress narratives designate Euro-American societies as the civilized standard of humanity, against which all other cultures are judged, and by which Euro-American cultures are readily affirmed (241). Such a logic does not allow space for real difference of thought to be comprehensible. Bernasconi contends:

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while displaying a leadership or erratic tendency; upon death. Let us briefly examine how the free-soul achieves some measure of independence in dreams. Paul Ragueneau wrote of the Huron mission: “When, during sleep, we dream of something that is far away, they think the soul issues forth from the body and proceeds to the place where those objects are that are pictured to it during that time” (Pomedli 60).

The multiplication of discourses does not sustain difference, unless the dominant discourse is also explicitly attacked. It cannot even be allowed to survive as simply one discourse among many, because it is constructed in such a way as to subsume all other discourses and refuse dialogue. (243)

Yet despite these problems, Bernasconi shows that Lévy-Bruhl's influential ideas also inadvertently undermine modern thought, even as Lévy-Bruhl takes its superiority for granted. For example, by 1915 Max Scheler, while influenced by Lévy-Bruhl, challenged the absoluteness of the natural view of the world, making room for the possibility of different worldviews. Bernasconi shows that Scheler's "relative natural view of the world ... is defined as whatever is generally given to a (usually genealogical) group subject without question so that they not only do not need justification but are being given justification" (231). For Scheler such varying views were legitimately different, although not equal – they mirror human psychological development, in that some are immature and childlike, and others more advanced. Because such relative worldviews are deeply ingrained and self-apparent to their holders, Scheler asserts that one cannot simply teach a 'primitive' culture a different view of the world. Rather, worldviews can only be altered through "racial integration and possibly linguistic and cultural mixings" (quoted in Bernasconi 231). Thus, we can see how these ideas form the philosophical context for the assimilation policies that characterize North American Indian policy, such as Canada's *Indian Act* throughout the modern period.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For more on these see: Gaudry, Adam, and Darryl Leroux. "White Settler Revisionism."

## 2.4 *Decoloniality and Border Thinking*

The problem for Indigenous and other non-western scholars who attempt to engage in a dialogue with Eurocentric thought systems (that now dominate the globe) is that we can only ever be heard on their terms – and not just because of the power imbalance, but also because of the very framework by which European philosophy comes to recognize knowledge. There is a need for a shift in thinking in western philosophy, that can make space for Indigenous cultural perspectives without either othering, or absorbing them. Maintaining that the rhetoric of modernity is complicit with colonialism, Walter D. Mignolo proposes a different kind of universal project under the auspices of ‘decoloniality.’ For him, decoloniality is a critical consciousness that emerges at the limit of the abstract universal and the way that it manifests in the modern world.

As Mignolo asserts, decoloniality marks the need for new social forms. He points to the dangers of repeating old forms of abstract universalism as if they were new, such as neoliberalism and neomarxism (Mignolo “Delinking” 500). He proposes a decolonizing ‘trans-modernity’ with an orientation toward ‘pluri-versality.’ This alternative view reaches “toward a world in which many worlds will co-exist” (“Delinking” 499). Such a project would by necessity be informed by a critical method of border thinking, and characterized by “inter-epistemic and dialogical, pluri-versal” approaches that would be achieved by multiple ethnic or cultural groups working to “fill the gaps” (“Delinking” 499). Although, it is difficult to see how this approach is not or will not quickly become absorbed into the readily accepting arms of diversity and multicultural rhetoric. However, we leave that question aside for now, and attempt to remain open to the revolutionary

potential and otherness of such a position. By “gaps,” I take him to mean the erased, silenced, and unwritten Indigenous stories that were never documented since the onset of modernity and contact with the new world. Such gaps, he suggests, might be filled by telling the stories and by performing the practices that have been put under erasure, or due to coloniality, have not yet been written at all. As I understand it, “never written,” refers to that which was interrupted, delegitimized, and either prevented from being recorded or from being developed further. In other words, it is a call for the development and articulation of our philosophies, arguably, as I am doing in this paper while contextualizing the climate under which my mnidoo-worlding philosophy takes shape.

Anishinaabe knowledges, traditions, and cultures are not lost. Rather they are so close and so integral to us that we take them for granted (not as a naive natural attitude) but as a fully immersive process of becoming. This process of becoming knowledge, this mnidoo-worlding, does not entail a seizing upon, like property to be acquired and owned (although this is now necessary to thwart further exploitation by non-Indigenous individuals and corporations). For mnidoo is not an object of study made accessible through disentangling this potency from lived experience. Rather, mnidoo-worlding involves a surrendering over—a slackening grasp of reality, as it is, otherwise, intentionally received.

In his essay “On the Colonization of Amerindian Languages and Memories: Renaissance Theories of Writing and the Discontinuity of the Classical Tradition,” Mignolo points to the colonization of Amerindian languages, and with it the implantation of a civilizing ideology (302-202). He argues that missionaries and settler scholars strategically reorganized Indigenous speech, grammar, and meaning making by introducing the Latin



alphabet and written text. Indeed, the language was a site where people's very memories could be supplanted with foreign discursive genres so that the languages "are not only re-arranged but also possessed and assimilated" ("Colonization of Amerindian" 304, 305). He cites what he describes as a well-known conversation between the Bishop of Avila and the Queen of Spain that shows how deeply aware the colonizers were of the subjugating power of language. In answer to the Queen's query as to why the natives were being educated in Spanish, he replied: "Soon Your Majesty will have placed her yoke upon many barbarians who speak outlandish tongues. By this, your victory, these people shall stand in a new need; the need for the laws the victor owes to the vanquished, and the need for the language we shall bring with us" ("Colonization of Amerindian" 306-7). Indeed, this disruption of intergenerational knowledge transmission is the very problem that Maracle identifies with her concept of being "two-tongue cripple" due to a lack of fluency in either one's mother tongue or the colonizer's language. She writes of how as their own language is suppressed, the people know they have to master the colonizers tongue in order to survive: "She whispered in the language of the old people, a language she forbade me [her daughter] to speak lest the craziness of her sons and daughters who had died overtake me. Lest I have not one language but become a crippled two-tongue. 'Master their language, daughter; hidden within it is the way we are to live among them'" (Maracle 65).

The suppression of language is an ongoing strategy of colonial education. A unified colonial language is used as a way of controlling Indigenous people, and at the same time Indigenous languages are put under study and standardized according to western "grammars" and systems of modern rationality ("Colonization of Amerindian"

307). These processes are still underway today in large-scale language standardization projects, and in the ‘indigenization’ of universities as a continuance of this agenda.

Chacoby writes about the frustration she experiences as an Indigenous student who is always required to conform to Eurocentric logics, even in the study of

Anishinaabemowin:

we placidly go along with language reduction to Eurocentric typologies of animate and inanimate noun classes, ignoring the fact that our entire cosmology is, in fact, alive (bimaatisi gema bimaataan). We go along with the notion of “verbs” rather than whole verb-phrases built into a single word; we go along with Eurocentric social constructions such as ownership, truth, honesty, good and evil as having a direct correlation to our own worldview when they do not mean the same thing. Our identities are written for us—our consciousness is created through a specific discourse and, in this case, even in our efforts to reclaim the language we risk being claimed; the way Anishinaabemowin has been shaped and defined by Eurocentric translations shapes our understanding of the world. (5)

Chacoby critiques the standardization of Ojibwe through a process she calls “dictionarying Anishinaabemowin,” whereby dictionaries impose a Eurocentric worldview in the way they translate words from Ojibwe to English. The translations, she writes, are “oriented towards a reality that does not come from an Anishinabe-esh indiatimonoawriyn (Ojibwe worldview)” (4).

I agree that language standardization is not the best route to language revitalization, since the philosophy lives in the diverse dialects of our languages, and their structures are not

only lived in its use, but are also alive as *mnidoo*. I am concerned about the institutionalization of language preservation, especially as it is blended with strategies of reconciliation such as with the indigenization of universities. Language revitalization is key, but universities are not sites where a majority of Indigenous people can access language learning (because the vast majority drop out of high school). We need to ask who is receiving funding and support, who has the leisure time to learn those languages, and to what end? If the language lives in the people, and settlers with an imperialist mindset speak in Anishinaabemowin, is the language not then distorted through this disparate worldview? It is critically important to preserve and revitalize Indigenous languages, but this simultaneously requires ending colonial violence against the people themselves, and making reparations. This involves supporting them to live in healthy ways with the land by addressing ecological devastation, corporate resource extraction, poverty, dispossession and the other effects of settler colonialism. Merely introducing Indigenous languages and cultures to universities where the majority of students are non-Native, settlers, creates yet another generation of 'Indian' experts who are non-Indigenous. Yet again the power imbalance of coloniality is secured, while non-Indigenous students, researchers, and institutions either clamor to self-identify or redirect their research in order to secure financial support intended for Indigenous scholars and communities to help offset these grossly inequitable relations.

Regarding the colonization of language Mignolo makes clear the ways that linguistic discourses espouse an evolutionary conception of writing, one that privileges the representation of speech in textual form. He articulates a tenacious belief that 'true writing' involves any system of graphic signs that are alternative to oral discourse

("Colonization of Amerindian" 313). Thus, not only did written language conflict with the orally transmitted languages of colonized cultures, alphabetic writing also "transgress[es] or ignor[es] the orthographic rules and subordinat[es] the more familiar way of picture writing..." ("Colonization of Amerindian" 314). European and Indigenous languages and forms of representation have different histories and philosophical underpinnings, illegible to one another. Mignolo reports that the Spanish found Inca oral narratives incoherent, and therefore imposed their own patterns onto the oral narratives ("Colonization of Amerindian" 320). This is similar to the experience of the Jesuits cited earlier, who found the worldviews of the people they encountered impossible to comprehend. For the Spaniards, the Incas' lack of a writing system placed them outside of history. Disregarding complex systems of memory and mnemonic devices, such as the *areytos*, or memory songs of the people of the island of Santo Domingo ("Colonization of Amerindian" 320), the Spanish presumed that without books, the Incas had no memory of their past. Thus, as Mignolo points out, in colonially imposed systems of writing, a problem arises for Indigenous historians engaging in processes of remembering and transmitting history. He writes of a "tension between the past which Amerindian historians needed to remember, fix, and transmit conflicted with the models of writing and writing history which used a tradition which was not their own" ("Colonization of Amerindian" 324). Likewise, writing in the language of the colonizers in effect truncates the complexity of concepts that can only be expressed in Anishinaabemowin, because it is not only a different language, but also expresses different values, worldviews, relations and practices. The written form restructures meaning by fixing it along narrow channels of linear, teleological sentences. The language and its textual form of transmission both

assimilate difference and perpetuate imperialism, for the logic of coloniality is also “the logic of land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of gender and sexuality, of knowledge and subjectivity” (Tlostanova and Mignolo 219). Similar to Latin America, in Canada alien languages were violently imposed through the *Indian Act*, residential school systems, and religious coercion, and hence they are deeply problematic for the reasons outlined above.

Nonetheless, Indigenous people adapt and employ western writing systems, discursive genres, and media to maintain our cultural traditions, turning these oppressive regimes back on themselves (Mignolo “Colonization of Amerindian” 324, Meissner and Whyte 9). We tactically redeploy colonial languages and incorporate them for our own purposes in modes of “...resistance through adaptation...” as Mignolo puts it (“Colonization of Amerindian” 325). Dian Million describes the use of colonial languages by Indigenous writers as a strategic appropriation that transforms these European languages, their understanding, and action in the world. Indeed, she writes that such appropriation reflects embodied “communal knowledges” and narratives that “can be acted on, danced, and transformed in ceremonial act” (“Intense Dreaming” 329-330). In other words, Indigenous authors bring an alternative framework to colonial languages and textual engagements that restructure them as if they were oral, communal knowledge traditions. At the same time, through this restructured lens we prepare the way for traditional literatures such as mound building and basket weaving along with other modes of knowing and meaning making, such as ceremony, song, and lived experience (Million 329-330).

These tensions pose obvious problems for the project to write Anishinaabe philosophy from within the academy, where the mandate to write clearly, and communicate complex ideas effectively in English demands mastery of colonial languages and thought systems, a project that is knotted with a simultaneous resistance to assimilation. It is a slow and careful process, where each grammatically correct turn of phrase and acquisition of a professional skill must be measured against this threat and the limits of English and textual communication. It requires a particular vigilance to negotiate the assimilating and absorbing impulse of western systems that are structured as appropriating and resource-extracting apparatuses, phenomena of colonialism that some institutions are forthright about in their indigenizing projects. As recently as 2009, in a brief article titled “The Realisation of Native American Philosophy: Non-Western Philosophy as a Colonial Invention,” American philosopher Gene Blocker (who is not himself Indigenous) aims to persuade “Western culture” to “continue” the advancement of the colonial project to “absorb and incorporate ... at least that part of Native American thought which could be successfully translated into Western philosophical terms” (Blocker 11-12). Blocker is a well-respected senior scholar, and author of foundational philosophy textbooks, whose views both shape and express pervasive western assumptions. He proposes to inaugurate an academically recognized Native-American philosophy that operates through a “cross-cultural comparison” because it is not only “an investigation of non-Western philosophy initiated *within*” western philosophical logics (Blocker 8, my emphasis), but also “translated into the style, language, and terminology of Western philosophy” (Blocker 10). He was not deterred from carrying this proposal forward, even though he could find no meaningful benefit to Native Americans in becoming involved in the project aside

from an opportunity to engage in discussion with western philosophers and to communicate their ideas beyond their own communities. Indeed, he is very clear that Indigenous people have much to lose in being incorporated into western philosophy, writing “why should they want to have their thought – in some cases ethnically and religiously unique and precious to them – translated into some alien mode, to be taken over by foreigners?” (Blocker 12); and “Native Americans would give up their traditional ways of thought to an alien Western mode of expression and articulation, allowing their Indigenous thought to be absorbed by Western modes of thought, expression, and argumentation” (Blocker 11). He nevertheless contends that it is valuable and well worth persuading Native people to participate in order to benefit the west. Although he acknowledges that this epistemological violence has already begun as part of the longstanding colonial project, he expresses a desire to “*initiate* (or rather continue to final realization)” (Blocker 11-12) this process, which he systematically outlines as assimilative and exploitative of Indigenous peoples and their distinct knowledges. His proud use of the term ‘initiate’ anticipates an enthusiastic response and appeals for recognition of his contribution. The matter of fact disregard for Indigenous authorship reminds me of the aforementioned appropriation of Indigenous concepts of the more-than-human by Abram. Blocker similarly seeks authorship and acknowledgment in the form of praise for bringing this project into fruition. As the initiator, he situates himself as the first to stake a claim to the wealth yet to be gleaned from Indigenous knowledges. Through his assertion that Indigenous philosophy is, after all, a “colonial invention” set into motion with the publication of his article, he presents himself as pioneer, asserting

first rights to territorialize these Indigenous logics via their conversion into western philosophical grammars.

Blocker's discourse makes clear the dangers of the asymmetrical power relationship between Indigenous and western knowledges, and in this regard, it is hardly surprising that Indigenous scholars are skeptical about current Indigenizing initiatives in the academy. Writing Anishinaabe philosophy is an impossible task since the written form is foreign to its logic. Yet, I believe there is value in writing it down to make the small portion that I have been given accessible to other Anishinaabeg, particularly, because our traditional modes of knowledge transmission have been disrupted. My mother and Elder Mona Stonefish have instructed me that it is time to bring this philosophy into textual conversation. There is also a benefit in being part of a wider philosophical conversation. It provides an opportunity to correct the romantic simplifications of Anishinaabe ethics and epistemologies, and to dispel misperceptions that Anishinaabe philosophies do not exist, simply because they operate according to different logic than western traditions. Indeed, I think it is possible to disrupt western philosophical systems by engaging in this dialogue, to make possible a different set of relations, and a different world. Tactical redeployment of languages of phenomenology have been useful in this project, particularly the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. So, my research is, by necessity, a border philosophy, a conversation that takes place between Indigenous/Anishinaabe oral cultural practices and literatures, and western textual phenomenology and post-structuralism. The conversation is imbued with resistance through and through. As Tlostanova and Mignolo write:



‘Borders’ are not only geographic but also political, subjective (e.g. cultural) and epistemic and, contrary to frontiers, the very concept of ‘border’ implies the existence of people, languages, religions and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the coloniality of power (e.g. structured by the imperial and colonial differences)...[and] created in the very constitution of the modern/colonial world. (208)

As the title of his article “Jagged Worldviews Colliding” suggests, Little Bear argues that Indigenous people today live in a world that is inextricably marked by colonialism. Clearly, numerous worldviews are held by many different cultures all over the world, and these ontologies are embodied in thousands of human languages, cultures, and collective stories that have interacted with each other in various ways for millennia as humans travel, trade, and intermingle with each other. Yet the collectively shared ontologies of Indigenous peoples, our worldviews, are always contested within colonialism and this, according to Little Bear, is the central paradox that Indigenous people must negotiate every day as we make choices about how to live our lives (85).

As for Tlostanova and Mignolo, for Little Bear the borders between us are not immutable, impermeable and clear. He too writes at a “jagged” border, explaining that “No one has a pure worldview that is 100 percent Indigenous or Eurocentric; rather, everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness, a precolonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again” (Little Bear 85). The meeting of these worldviews – colonizer and colonized – is the site of a violent erasure, an exertion of social control “that suppresses diversity in choices and denies Aboriginal people harmony in their daily lives” (85). In his article on “Delinking,”

Mignolo cites Franz Fanon in the epigraph, who powerfully expresses these ideas in *Wretched of the Earth*:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it. (Cited in Mignolo 449).

Hence, it is impossible to extricate the project of writing an Anishinaabe philosophy from the fact that these borders have been imposed by colonialism and European languages and thought systems together with the appropriation of our land and resources over the past five hundred years. But this also makes it all the more crucial that we strive to do so. As Tlostanova and Mignolo continue, the “control of knowledge,” or what they call “the epistemology of the zero point as representation of the real,” was achieved precisely by delegitimizing and controlling non-European languages and epistemologies through a range of strategies, such as harshly criticizing their modes of discussion and debate (I think of those conversations recorded by the Jesuits, for example), civilization, democratization, and the globalization of culture (208). What this means for these authors, and I agree, is that it becomes necessary to think from the position of such borders themselves (Tlostanova and Mignolo 214). Writing an Anishinaabe philosophy is one such effort – although to be clear, it is imperative that community-based traditional knowledge-holders be supported in their endeavor to continue the oral cultural tradition, in land-based and non-interference pedagogies that take place completely outside of western institutional control. Indeed, this is another way in which I intend to engage as a philosopher.

I have chosen an academic route to engage in a conversation and to transmit the knowledge that was passed to me, but this is not the first, best, or the only way to do so. Writing, choosing to be in this conversation, bending myself to these colonial languages and thought structures, is a political act, since inhabiting the border between us is also “re-writing geographic frontiers, imperial/colonial subjectivities and territorial epistemologies” (Tlostanova and Mignolo 214). The problems arise at the border between the epistemic systems of colonizers and colonized, and this is where the solutions must be enacted. As Tlostanova and Mignolo suggest, to broach this border from an Indigenous perspective shifts that “epistemic line.” For them, “borderland epistemology” “emerges *in* the crack and it emerges *as* an epistemic shift. It is a shift from theo- and ego- to geo- and body-politics of knowledge” (214). In my view, this is one of the primary reasons why the project to decolonize and indigenize academia is met with such skepticism by Indigenous scholars and communities. This stems from the challenges such border epistemologies pose to colonial logics and its gatekeepers. That is to say, sincere claims to carry out such a task are dubious, at best, since it not only requires the erosion and serious alteration of foundational Eurocentric beliefs in what constitutes logical discourse and valid knowledge but, more significantly, it also includes a loss of privilege. For the state cannot acknowledge border thinking without losing its “imperial control over knowledge and subjectivity” (Tlostanova and Mignolo 215), so it is hard for us to imagine such indigenization taking place as anything but another mode of appropriation and control (a lot of bluff and superficial gestures). In terms of my own methodology as I negotiate these power imbalances, border thinking is helpful for articulating the ways in which engagement with oral cultural traditions and their textual citations of petroglyphs,

beadwork, mnidoo, and landscapes press on the boundaries of western philosophical notions of rigour. For border thinking comes with a presupposition that the boundaries of disciplines and genres will be, and should be, transgressed by alternative narrative viewpoints, aesthetics, discourses, and logics (Tlostanova and Mignolo 215).

It is challenging for Indigenous scholars to work within the academic system, and my engagement here is fraught with doubt as to whether this is the best place and manner to make a contribution to my communities. Indeed, some Indigenous scholars choose to leave the academy because its colonial structures are too restrictive and unhealthy. In *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, Leanne Simpson, advocates shifting the focus from trying to transform colonial institutions, to fostering Indigenous knowledges and processes of governance, pedagogy, health, and economics, without the sanction or participation of either the state or western theory (17). She is firm on the need for an independent, Indigenous resurgence in “Land as Pedagogy,” where she writes:

We cannot bring about the kind of radical transformation we seek if we are solely reliant upon state sanctioned and state run education systems. We cannot carry out the kind of decolonization our ancestors set in motion if we don't create a generation of land-based, community-based intellectuals and cultural producers who are accountable to our nations and whose life work is concerned with the regeneration of these systems, rather than meeting the overwhelming needs of the western academic industrial complex or attempting to “Indigenize the academy” by bringing Indigenous Knowledges into the academy *on the terms of the academy itself*. (13, my emphasis)

Creating new ways to revitalize Indigenous thought systems and political movements within communities is crucially important, and western academic knowledge is certainly not necessary for realizing this. Indeed, Indigenous political theorists such as Glen Coulthard and Gerald Taiaiake Alfred argue that Indigenous people must establish a politics that is independent from, and indeed even critically oriented against, state systems of recognition (Coulthard "Subjects of Empire"; Alfred *Wasáse*). In "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada" Coulthard writes that current liberal pluralist discourses of the politics of recognition that seek to reconcile Indigenous identities within Canadian state sovereignty merely reproduce old forms of colonial power in a new guise (Coulthard 438-439). In the asymmetrical balance of power held by the colonial state, he argues, "the state institutional and discursive fields within and against which Indigenous demands for recognition are made and adjudicated can subtly shape the subjectivities and worldviews of the Indigenous claimants involved" (Coulthard 452). Instead, Indigenous cultural politics and activism, he suggests, ought to be directed away from the interpellating assimilation of statist recognition politics, and instead "fashioned toward our own on-the-ground practices of freedom" (Coulthard 456) that "seek to prefigure, alongside those with similar ethical commitments, a radical alternative to the structural and psycho-affective facets of colonial domination" (Coulthard 456).

This is certainly the tenor of the Indigenous resurgence, as is evident in the emerging literature of Indigenous political theory. This form of resistance, however, is by no means new. Indigenous people have continued to engage in our own forms of meaning making and counter-discourses since contact with the Europeans. In the past fifty years (since

about 1960) Indigenism has been deployed effectively at both local and global levels, posing an “alternative, active, and mobile set of meanings available in the midst of globalization, diaspora, multiplicity, and ‘complexity’” (*Therapeutic Nations* Million 13). But it is worth noting that Coulthard, Alfred, Simpson, and Million, along with emerging scholars such as myself, gain significant credibility, status, and economic stability as a result of our degrees from western academic institutions. This is a reality of our present world, that universities are the gatekeepers who sanction which knowledge has value and legitimacy. I’d like to underscore Simpson’s point that we need not bring “Indigenous knowledge into the academy on the terms of the academy itself” (“Land as Pedagogy”13). Such non-institutional initiatives are essential, as well as Indigenous scholars remaining in educational institutions, intent on disrupting and transforming academia from the inside, as many of the above-mentioned authors do. Decolonial work and resurgence require people working everywhere from all angles. That is the basis of non- interference philosophies: that we each hold one piece of the puzzle, one fragment. As my mother described it, the pieces we hold continually transform in accordance with a shifting mnidoo landscape—a clandestine fluctuation. New perspectives bring ever-unfolding new teachings and understandings. This is what it means to respect difference, and to engage in the ethical diplomacy of being Anishinaabe. Striving to leave room for each other to save face, and willing to wade into the unknown, open to possibility, surprise, and transformative potential, especially if it challenges one’s normative assumptions.

Working at these borders to move toward a wider decolonial shift also remains necessary.

Quijano proposes a strategy of ‘delinking’ (‘desprenderse’) from the domination of

western colonial epistemologies and its consequences for colonized subjectivities (cited in Tlostanova and Mignolo). Delinking does not simply ignore colonial epistemic and linguistic structures, nor does it fully leave them behind (which seems impossible in most contexts). Rather, to delink is to figure out how to manage “imperial sedimentation” and break “free of the spell and the enchantment of imperial modernity” (Tlostanova and Mignolo 218-219). Indeed, it seems to me that this is more properly what scholar-activists like Simpson, Coulthard and Million are doing, as part of the Indigenous resurgence. This decolonizing project, a project in which I include my own work, is committed to realizing another possible world, and not merely a world structured by some alternative modernity (Tlostanova and Mignolo 219). Tlostanova and Mignolo designate this other possible world as a universal project of pluri-versality, inspired by the Zapatista’s aim to create “a world in which many worlds will co-exist” (219).

Methodology, language and various standards of rigour are the battle-ground on which this power struggle is being played out. The decolonial turn pivots on culturally specific epistemic strategies and modes of theorizing, from oral cultural knowledges to dream imaging practices. Likewise, even though they are not always legitimized in academia, Million points out that Indigenous scholars “recognize orally based communal knowledges as organized narrative systems that do exist and whose influence is active ... These narratives may never be “pure,” bearing the marks of their production in chaos, but they cannot be ignored, since they too represent discursive strategy” (231-232). Where Quijano presses for the importance of delinking Indigenous epistemologies from colonial epistemological tyrannies, in “Intense Dreaming: Theories, Narratives, and Our Search for Home” Million stresses the important role that oral narratives play in linking

knowledge to the real consequences of both practical action and affective experience (322). She writes that oral narratives are today “informed with the affective content of the colonial experience...and that has made them almost unrecognizable to a Western scholarship that imagines itself ‘objective’” (Million “Intense Dreaming” 322).

Communal oral knowledges are sometimes articulated in public ways, and as such become positioned in relation to, or taken up in written form, as a method that many Indigenous scholars engage with in their work. She writes:

‘knowledge,’ ‘knowing,’ or ‘making meaning’ is not ‘thing like, a substance that can be contained; it cannot be peeled, swept away, or dipped into. It does not seep. I contend that making meaning should be considered a verb, a doing, as “strategic comprehension” ... I perceive discourses spatially as potent mobile fields of meaning making where Native peoples are already fully engaged, whether any use the kind of language I work with here or not. (“Intense Dreaming” 323)

Million maintains that it is impossible to keep the spheres of community-produced oral knowledge separate from written knowledge production in contemporary reality, nor does she find it beneficial to do so (322). Indeed, knowledge and meaning making are not only living, mobile fields of engagement, but as such, different First Nations’ cosmologies often overlap and inform one another. As Little Bear explains, “verb-rich” Indigenous grammars are active and process-based; rather than naming objects, they describe “happenings,” in a fluid, dynamic worldview that has room for “the transcendence of boundaries” (“Jagged Worldview” 78).



The current resurgence of critical Indigenous theory and praxis is a *reawakening* of indigeneity through the arts, activism and scholarship, as new generations of traditional knowledge carriers and cultural producers strive to break free from the yoke of colonial violence and dispossession. This movement reclaims knowledges, practices, privileges and ways of being that were suppressed by policies of cultural genocide in what is now known as Canada and the United States. These issues are brought into mainstream forums in order to both reveal the mechanisms and effects of settler colonialism, as well as to critique the inner workings that keep this apparatus in motion. The discrepancies between seemingly ideal or romantic Indigenous life-philosophies in comparison to the egregious socio-economic realities of our day-to-day lives can be difficult to unravel. But such contradictions only arise when viewed through western normative models of morality. Indigenous lifeways were not severed altogether since much of this knowledge still survives and can be found in our contemporary everydayness. Nonetheless, these traditional ways of being were severely impeded and in many ways also distorted. This renaissance includes a reclaiming of Indigenous languages, and pedagogical approaches such as storytelling and land-based learning, along with the inclusion of traditional crafting techniques and the use of natural local materials. These customary intellectual and creative practices are critically taken up and redeployed with contemporary concerns that are cautious of reinstalling the straight-jacket of fossilized stereotypes such as the ‘Red Indian,’ frozen in time, a primitive prototype of modern man.

Fostering this resurgence means acknowledging the incommensurability of traditional Indigenous lifeways and philosophies with Eurocentric epistemologies. Indigenous collective ownership, for example, operates according to entirely different logics. That is

to say that copyright, from traditional Anishinaabe contexts, never falls within the western public domain as resources to be claimed by any one individual or even by a conglomeration (I refer here to corporate patenting of Indigenous traditional knowledges), since it is collectively shared by Indigenous peoples in relation to certain territories as an ongoing relationship between sovereign nations (human and other-than-human). In keeping with Indigenous paradigms of Turtle Island, ceremonial designs and their materially crafted ‘artifacts’ are living entities that co-exist with their makers. Moreover, it is the responsibility of Indigenous human communities to speak for and to protect these living *manidoog* since they give themselves as helpers to these particular families, communities, artists and artisans to share if/as they choose (since they were given these gifts they, too, are entrusted with meeting the proper protocols for choosing who and how they might be shared).<sup>27</sup> Conventional Euro-western methodological approaches must transform by embracing Indigenous knowledges, governance and laws as equally valid to their own, that is, *if* we are to get beyond impotent reconciliatory paternalisms. As Taiaiake Alfred writes: “For justice to be achieved out of a colonial situation, a radical rehabilitation of the state is required. Without radical changes to the state itself, all proposed changes are ultimately assimilative” (“Restitution”). Such restitution involves a move away from *saming* (reducing difference to the same as ones’ own experiences), or rendering difference transparent and thus available for possession and mastery.

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<sup>27</sup> See: “Nunavut family outraged after fashion label copies sacred Inuit design.”

## Chapter 3

### **3 *Mnidoo Pedagogy: Anishinaabe Phenomenological Approaches***

I have experimented with several different writing styles in preparing this dissertation, grappling with what is essentially a foreign mode of communicating that contradicts the fundamental principles of the Anishinaabe philosophy from my childhood upbringing and which I advance here in this document. As we've gathered so far, particularly from chapter two, the logics and grammars of colonial languages—imposed on the Anishinaabeg, the original peoples—are not only assimilative, but also perpetuate inequitable relations and racialized biases. The ideas I wish to convey rest uneasily in this harness. Yet, while translating these Anishinaabe concepts, English remains the only language available to me, since it is the only one that I have as a measure of fluency. Even still, although deeply ingrained in the logic that ascends from the continent of its origins, the philosophical sensibilities of this colonial tongue in many ways remain out of reach for me. Perhaps, this is because I am both 'othered' from these Eurocentric discourses and simultaneously socialized in another way. The lived experience of the original inhabitants of a colonized homeland is one of contradiction. The biases of this othering process paradoxically positions me as outsider and primitive freeloading savage, as well as inauthentically Indigenous to my own homeland. And, at the same time, having been taught English as a child by a first language Ojibwe speaking mother and grandparents, who themselves had minimal western education, I have undergone an

extensive Anishinaabe socialization (not spoken but lived). Consequently, I contend that for the greater part of my life I have spoken in Ojibwe and only use English to do so. It is only now, as I draw near the final stages of my doctoral studies that I gain a clearer understanding of the intricacies of this foreign language and, in particular, the implications of its morphing assimilative logic. The argumentation style of an academic thesis tends to move toward a preconceived endpoint, claim, or theory, generally by way of textual evidence.

Linear approaches are at odds with Anishinaabe cultural values and foundational cosmology. Shawn Wilson writes about the stylistic disparities between western academic discourses and Indigenous approaches pointing to Manu Meyer's observation from a Hawaiian perspective that in universities, not only are students encouraged but

Although my Grandfather, Wellington 'Cobb' Elijah was taken to Shingwauk Indian Residential School, these were not really educational institutions, so much as they 'trained' 'Indian' children in manual labour, while trying to strip them of their culture and language. My mother was one of the few from her community who did not go to these boarding schools. Instead, she attended a one- room schoolhouse, gaining a grade 4 education. Her Grandmother was a teacher at this school at Aazhoodena (Stoney Point), her home community.

It should be noted that in keeping with notions of academic rigour that, within this essay, I have chosen to follow this linear structure. My reasons for employing this style are twofold: first, so that both non-Indigenous readers and those, like myself, who were stripped of their native languages and educated in western educational systems can understand my critique. Secondly, perhaps due to my own inculcation into western logics, I slide easily into these patterns of reasoning, which is daily reaffirmed by the weightiness of

they are specifically trained to use competitive adversarial dialogue, to identify problems and gaps, to question and critically critique (57). For Anishinaabeg, such adversarial approaches are viewed as unsophisticated and disrespectful. As Cree educator Evelyn Steinhauer argues, respect, or in Cree *kihceyih towin*, is a basic law of life that applies to academic discourse: “Respect means that you listen intently to others ideas, that you do not insist that your ideas prevail. By listening intently you show honour, consider the well-being of others, and treat others with kindness and courtesy” (cited in Wilson 58). Wilson puzzles over western approaches in which it seems as if “one’s work will look better” if “one can find fault with others” (57). In my estimation, western modes of critique assume intentional or unintentional error, deceit, or lack of understanding as a basis to be either dispelled, or overcome. As such, interlocutors

this approach. That is to say, scholarly argumentation styles, although intimidating and inaccessible to many, are nonetheless received as valid, impressive, desirable and hence proof of authoritative power. Even though published works and textual citations are no more plausible than any other evidence, depending on alternate contexts (i.e. visual, gestural, or spoken). In a sense, published authors are merely endowed with the resources to acquire a facility to formulate these particular (dominant or academic) kinds of *convincing* arguments. Moreover, they are persuasive, precisely because we become subsumed into these Eurocentric logics. On the other side, oral cultural knowledge is dependent on longstanding traditions and consensus to acquire the same kind of authority. So, it’s kind of like voting, its rigged towards a majority, so that challenging or innovative ideas may not be received well at first (the dubious response to the work of Merleau-Ponty during his lifetime is a great example of this).

require concrete proof, or at least consistent evidence, and that these *facts* align with an adversarial argumentative style.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Anishinaabe worldviews insist that everything is alive, autonomous, and simultaneously interrelated. From an Ojibwe perspective, everything is profoundly connected. My mother described this as “one continuous body of existence.” It is a knot that cannot be untied since its parts are thoroughly enmeshed one with the other. Within such a framework, one cannot write as an authority but rather only as one limited fragment that speaks from a narrow genealogical knowledge inheritance. One fulfills their responsibility to share their gifts and the small bit of knowledge that we are given.

To write with the intention of elucidating some predetermined thesis conflicts with my earliest Anishinaabe teachings on nonhierarchical interconnectivity. Perhaps this contributes to practices of *doing* that continue to play a key role for Anishinaabe communities (i.e. artworks, experiential learning, process-based experimentation, improvisation). Non-textual literatures, such as quill basket weaving, have protocols of respect for working with *mnidoo* others. These open ended cultural systems maintain balance within this web. They do not claim mastery over another but rather indirectly circle, acknowledging our inability to fully grasp that which lies at a distance even if it is located within our own physical bodies. I have not employed such arts practice methods in this dissertation, which is primarily a work of textual engagement. However, like many other Indigenous academics I have found my own ways of adapting the written text to the

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epistemological and ontological context from which I write. In this chapter, I outline methodological and pedagogical themes central to my approach.

There are multiple Anishinaabe philosophies. I address only one small part, which is filtered through my memories and interpretations. Wendy Makoons Geniusz identifies several branches of Indigenous knowledge in *Our Knowledge is Not Primitive*. These include anishinaabe-inaadisiwin (a psychology or way of being); anishinaabe-gikendaasowin (knowledge, in the sense of information and what one has been taught); dibajimowinan (personal stories and history); anishinaabe-izhitwaawin (cultural knowledge such as customs and history); and aadizookaanan (traditional stories and ceremonies) (*Our Knowledge* 11). I find these categories to be invaluable, for they indicate not only the *kind* of knowledge I am referring to, but also the way varying fields of knowledge are differently embodied and imparted. Hence, I structure my approach through epistemological-pedagogical methods that enfold these Anishinaabe branches of thought. They are as follows: i) oral traditions; ii) embodied knowing; iii) land-based pedagogy; and iv) non-interference pedagogy. Within these, the systems of evidence that I present include textual citations; knowledge shared with me verbally by elders and other community members; reminiscences from my childhood; stories from everyday experience, analysis of petroglyphs, and artworks.

### **3.1 Oral Traditions**

The Anishinaabe philosophy that I write about has been passed to me through oral traditions, through my maternal genealogy, and wider community, throughout my lifetime. This

work is situated in conversation with other Indigenous scholars and, at times, I point to connections between my work and theirs. I respectfully acknowledge that each of us gives our part according to our specific knowledge, territory, nation, clan and family teachings. However, my project derives primarily from oral traditions. In other words, I do not systematically review and analyze texts written by other Indigenous authors. Instead, I rely heavily on memories of teachings, conversations, experiences with my mother, and consultation with elders. Indigenous textual scholarship reaffirms the views and concepts every Anishinaabe has been given through communally shared knowledge and an endless variation of re-told stories and their snippets. Many Indigenous researchers incorporate oral cultural forms of knowledge transmission in their scholarship, finding methods to mediate between the different ways that this knowledge lives, breathes, changes and acts upon us through *mnidoo* personified agency. This is contrasted to western societies that *primarily* transfer knowledge through the printed word. We can see, right off the bat, that oral cultural education relies heavily on community engagement, social interaction, place, and variation between interlocutors and environments; whereas ‘literate’ cultures pivot on individuality borne out around primarily solitary or singular activities such as reading, writing, and presenting academic papers that are prewritten. Orators from oral cultures memorize intergenerational stories and teachings, which are spontaneously tailored and finessed, on the fly, responding to the sway of the audience, the gathering *manidoog*, in the midst of spinning a tantalizing tale. Moreover, oral traditions are not limited to word-of-mouth dissemination but also include such literatures as pictographs and beadwork as with treaty wampum belts (These oral traditions are neither less rigorous or less valid. They are however very challenging



to canonical academic thought systems). Western individualist approaches, alternatively, comply with predetermined, standardized educational goals and linear logics, in opposition to Anishinaabe non-interference community-engaged pedagogical practices.

Wilson writes:

[T]here are several different problems [that Indigenous scholars] can run into. The first has to do with our oral traditions and styles of discourse and logic, because our non-linear logic leads to a problem when we try to give a linear or written expression of how ideas were formed. Separated from the rest of their relationships, the ideas may lose their life or become objectified and therefore less real. The mainstream style is to dissect or take ideas apart to see how they work, and written discourse is a part of this process. Our Indigenous style is to build things up to see how they work. This often requires hands-on or experiential ways of knowing that are difficult to relate in words. (123)

Wilson negotiates this contradiction in *Research as Ceremony* by including conversations he has had with several interlocutors, including scholars, elders, and his father, Stan Wilson. This strategy is shared by several contemporary Indigenous scholars (Geniusz, Simpson, Alfred and others). Wilson incorporates short transcripts of these conversations into his text, whereas Leanne Simpson transcribes short orated teachings by elders such as Edna Manitawabi whom she is in dialogue with. Writing and interpreting both Aadizookaanag (traditional stories), and dibajimowinan (personal stories) are also methods that Indigenous scholars employ to include oral traditions. Simpson's *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, for example, transcribes and interprets elders telling traditional stories and teachings, as well as theorizing the language. These methods allow for

considerable fluidity of interpretation, and their meaning is contained in the telling as much as in the story itself. Sarah Preston explains in “The Old Man's Stories: Lies or Truths?” with respect to *Aadizookaanag*, that what makes a story credible is not the facts, but rather the actions, relationships, and meanings. Referring to a fantastical traditional story relayed to her by Cree Elder Malcolm Diamond in Washkaganish, Quebec, she suggests that the truth lies in the example the story sets for “socially responsible behaviour, or Cree social competence” (256). In *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories*, Doerfler, Sinclair, and Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark write that “*Aadizookaanag* and *dibaajimowinan* are ultimately about creation and re-creation. We believe that all of our stories include and encompass senses of *Aadizookaanag* and *dibaajimowinan* and together form a great Anishinaabeg storytelling tradition” (12, italics theirs).

My own approach is less systematic, but no less rigorous by Anishinaabe standards. From early childhood, my mother and other relatives relayed *Aadizookaanag*, *anishinaabe-izhitwaawin* (cultural knowledge), and taught us through their often hilarious *dibaajimowinan*, stories of their own lives meant to transfer a certain meaning or lesson. My mother was a philosopher, a member of the Turtle clan, who are known for their intellectual acuity and ability to straddle different worlds, that is, moving with ease between realms, negotiating difference (land, water, Anishinaabe, western, material, *mnidoo*). Turtles are slow, thoughtful, deep thinkers. Keeping me home from school, the youngest of her twelve children, she instructed me in memory, interpretation, and meditation, and this remains the primary source of my philosophical knowledge. When I was a child, as part of my Anishinaabe education, my mother had me sit in the backyard

and, the best way that I can describe it is meditate, in combination with sensory mapping. When I was very young she sat with me and spoke back and forth between Anishinaabemowin and English (as she guided me through these techniques). I asked her, one time as an adult, what she used to tell me. She said, “How am I supposed to know, that’s why I told you, because you were supposed to remember.” And I do, particularly when I hear old people speaking in the language, I remember her holding me in her lap, shielding my eyes from the sun with her long hair hanging down, skirted around me. For one thing, she was recounting our creation stories. The knowledge she passed on to me, both the spoken and experiential lessons, have been confirmed multiple times by various elders I have encountered, including my current Cultural Advisor and Elder, Mona Stonefish, who knew my mother well (as close friends). I do not transcribe my conversations with my mother verbatim, nor those I hold with Stonefish. Both of these teachers stress the importance of exercising memory. They instructed that I not only remember but that I must share this knowledge in the way I understood it. Both are in agreement that the goal is not to master and control these gifts, but rather to become them, to embody and live this knowledge, seamlessly unconsciously becoming in the way of Anishinaabemowin and these Anishinaabe teachings. Both have encouraged me to attend university. Both have said it is time to share and write these teachings. I paraphrase what they tell me, and cite them as authors of the knowledge and ideas that they share.

Stonefish, like my mother, is a powerful force, and should she feel the need, will not shy away from correcting me. Even if communicated with a subtle reclining stance, an Anishinaabe socializing gesture. One time, while visiting my Gram at the Anglican

church basement rummage sale, I encountered this along the whole length of a church pew. I guess I was about sixteen, when I was telling her about sliding on the ice with my sister, Marina, and her kids, on the inland lakes—home of the Great Serpent. Anyway, I was very animated while telling her the story, and didn't really stop to think about the fact that I had to keep moving closer to her because she was a little too far away to hear when she spoke to me (and she was always so quiet-spoken). So, I'd shift a little closer to hear her, each time before resuming my story. By the time I finished we had slid all the way from one side of the bench to the other. And she was now leaning slightly over the arm rest away from me (and she was tiny, I mean tiny, so that was a bit of a feat). When I realized what had happened, I laughed and asked her, "Hey what's going on?" She laughed hard, too, after I pointed it out. She said she was "scared of anyone that had gone to the inland lakes." She gestured, that it was because of the serpent, which she would not name out loud. So, I teased her about that, too. She just laughed. Among other lessons, I learned that this was a powerful manidoo that requires a deep respect. Consequently, we should not have been fooling around by their domain. And that the manidoo are not restricted to corporeal limitations but can attach to us, or follow us, bringing mischief and possible harm to the different places and people we visit. But, for our purposes, here, we return to the withdrawal, which is both a non-interference move that provides room for my learning journey, while indirectly situating my interlocutor's disapproval. Sorry Gram, I should not have been out teasing the manidoo.

Like my hair, my mother said I should not worry if one teaching falls away because another will take its place. She also instructed that I would only be able to take what I could carry. Thus, I was not to worry about remembering everything, because if it did not

resonate with me, then it did not belong to me. It would be a gift for someone else to carry and pass on, in their turn. Moreover, I should not waste time on petty criticisms, for just because something didn't speak to me, it doesn't mean that it wouldn't emblazon itself in another and sing for them. Stonefish has confirmed this teaching different times, by saying that we should not speak badly of others, especially in their efforts to share traditional Indigenous knowledge; it is all good and these efforts might help lead others into deeper knowledge of Anishinaabemowin and Anishinaabe life-knowledge. The gifts given to me, are my responsibility to share until, like a strand of hair, it too falls away. As a side note, I must qualify that the hair metaphor is part of a much larger array of teachings on self-care and self-love, in which I would not carelessly drop even one strand of my hair. Rather, I only employ this, my mother's metaphor, as one example of an oral cultural literary device.

When I ask questions of my mother and other elders, much of what they share is indirect and circuitous, leading me around to my own understanding so as not to steal from me my own learning and the journey that I alone must take to bring it to fruition, averting the assertion of their own views too strongly. This is a classic Anishinaabe elder teaching and communication style. Onondaga scholar David Newhouse describes a similar style among elders of his Haudenshauwee community, that sometimes leads to misunderstanding between generations. As he explains, western education systems structure direct questions with direct answers. Whereas "Elders would respond to questions with stories, fully expecting the student to answer his or her own question...We have had both to teach how to respond to each other and to learn how to relate to one another in a new way" (192-193). This is consistent with much of the conflict that arose in my childhood family

home, with each generation frustrated by the inconsistencies between their clashing approaches and expectations.

There are multiple layers of being and knowing, and Anishinaabeg today negotiate at least two knowledge systems. The first is the mainstream education system. The other is implicitly carried out in every Anishinaabe community interaction and immersion in the *mnidoo* infused world, in which every *mnidoo*, that is, everything, are teachers and ancestors. As someone raised in an Anishinaabe oral culture these “silent teachings,” as my mother called them, often conflict with their western counterparts. These silent teachings interact with western logics in ways that, at times, might make us doubt the resilience of our Anishinaabe knowing. Indeed, Indigenous knowers are frequently confronted with the odd juxtaposition of western theo-philosophical-historical contexts and western ‘expertise’ of Anishinaabe knowledge, distorting these living philosophies by either bending them to conform to Eurocentric narratives—as with the earlier examples of Jesuits misinterpreting *mnidoo* variously as soul, platonic form, spirit, or devil—or reducing Anishinaabe knowledges to simplistic romantic clichés that are suspiciously reminiscent of Christianity. I think, for example, of my niece Summer, who was taking an Ojibwe culture class in an Ontario highschool a few years ago. She was continually getting the answers ‘wrong’ because her own cultural knowledge contradicted the education system’s curriculum, the knowledge of her non-Indigenous instructor, and textbooks authored by non-Indigenous experts. This was extremely unsettling to her, as was her sense of being an object of knowledge and a native informant, but not a legitimate knower, as the teacher dismissed her critiques and contributions as a failure to understand the lessons. After discussing the problem with family, she eventually resolved

the issue by approaching the class as a study in what non-Indigenous people think about Ojibwe cultures and knowledge. My niece's experience is not exceptional. Anishnaabe knowledges and ways of knowing continue to be systematically delegitimized by settler colonial institutions that present these complex knowledges as disorganized, non-rigorous, myth, shamanistic superstition or primitive cosmologies. Removed third parties—outsiders, settlers, academics, priests, explorers—are presented as more legitimate, objective experts, whereas Anishinaabeg are seen as being too close, and therefore too emotionally attached to be dependable authorities on our own epistemologies.

I want to be clear that when I address my childhood teachings and traditional Indigenous upbringing, I do not refer to 'traditionalism' per se, that is, to customary ceremonial practices. Instead, I look to the everyday ways that philosophy is lived by ordinary contemporary Anishinaabe who negotiate both western and Anishinaabe ways of being and knowing. I exclude ceremonial practices as a primary focus not because they are unimportant, lost, impure, co-opted or exchanged for contemporary lifestyles. Such allegations are often vocalized by settlers, in "moves toward innocence" that naturalize settler colonialism and the assimilation of Turtle Island Indigenous peoples as inevitable, permanent, and progressive (Tuck and Yang 3). These ideas, however, can become internalized by those made to feel shamed as though they or our cultures are lacking in some way. Consequently, some Anishinaabe doubt their authenticity because they live contemporary lifestyles, or are unsure of how to disentangle traditional knowledge from romanticized fictions of the western imaginary. I want to highlight that despite the immense colonial project of cultural genocide in the Americas, Anishinaabe ways of

knowing and being do survive, and continue to be transmitted across vast temporal and spatial territories. This knowledge is integrally etched within the multiple layers of modern living in ways that are subtle and often unspoken. Traces of customary Indigenous epistemologies show up in everyday gestures, practices, and social observances, conveying a rich and diverse thickening of contemporary oral cultural traditions. These practices might include open-ended storytelling, deer hide tanning, modern dance performances, digitally synthesized powwow beats, or teachings drawn from practical observations of the natural world. This solidified embodied knowledge spans generations with both nonverbal cues and the content of ancient stories in combination with tales from everyday current events.

I don't recount specific dreams or ceremonial practices in this dissertation; however these practices are in the background, informing my process and theorizations. Million elaborates on the power of dreaming as a mode of theorizing that shifts boundaries and brings other possibilities into view. As she argues, theory is "intensely dreamed, because that is the edge where meanings are transformed" ("Intense Dreaming" 321). This takes place not just on an abstract level, but may also have the "power to change a paradigm or reinvest a political movement with a new vision to act" (231) "Theories," she continues, "are active, embodied, narrative practices that inform mobile abstractions, 'traveling' or 'migrating' across certain kinds of seemingly reified knowledge domains, reorganizing boundaries as they go, claiming something—is something else" (231-232). Geniusz and Simpson likewise designate the spiritual realm (what I term *mnidoo* potency) as the site where Anishinaabe knowledge originates: "Knowledge comes to us through processes of *gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang*, passed to us by *mnidoo* through dreams, visions, and



ceremony” (Geniusz *Knowledge* 67, Simpson “Land as Pedagogy” 9-10). My dissertation also relies on memory and recollection, that is, retellings, practices of the oral tradition that are indistinguishable from dreams and visions, since, as Silvia Martínez-Falquina puts it, “Dreams are also a way in which the ancestors are brought back to the present,” adding with a twist of humour that through dreams they offer “instructions on how to act or how to make the best frybread” (85).

The sound of Anishinaabemowin, when spoken by elderly first language speakers, is like a low continuous rumble. I recall, from my early childhood, the way my grandparents sounded in conversation with my mother. To me, the best way to describe their voices was like water, in a riverbed, rolling over a slow slope. I can hear them still, pouring over me, washing through me, rumbling and laughing. It made me so happy, I’d laugh along with them. Knowing that I could not fully understand them, sometimes they’d say, “what are you laughing about?” I’d say, “Because you’re laughing.” And we’d all laugh again. In this way, our Ojibwe language’s repetitious chant-like songs and laughter utilize the body as a resonating chamber. It hits and sustains certain frequencies in a way that we might compare to Eastern forms of meditation chanting or even contemporary binary beats (that strive to mimic those ancient traditions). I believe that these frequencies do more than simply release feel-good hormones, such as endorphins and dopamine, that present as other worldly experiences during meditation, as suggested by neuroscience today (Krishnakumar et al.). Rather, they align our embodied frequencies with the world, that is, with the language of mnidoo, awakening us to the infinite infrastructure of mnidoo-consciousnessing.

Our teachings tell us that Anishinaabemowin is a gift given to us by our ancestors, and that it is imbued in these other-than- (confirmed at by different elders, Thomas Mattinas, language is flexible, Together they teachings and role diplomacy. It dips and rises with rhythms of their mean to sound so to say, simply, that

*Paagaag is a flying skeleton that rattles in the tree tops. Paagaag, is also spelled Baagaag (Johnson spells this “Paugauk,” Thesaurus). This is a traditional story (Aadizookaanag – capitalized to honour them, because they, these stories, are powerful living mnidoo). When I was younger it seemed that Ojibwe would capitalize everything, I think because we know everything to be alive, and so, all, everything must be honoured. I am still not certain when to capitalize while writing in Anishinaabemowin, and I often also switch spellings as I aim at varying contexts, subtle inflections in meanings, and how I’ve heard*

the earth but also with human persons Elders’ gatherings, and including Stonefish, and my mother).<sup>29</sup> Our it bends like the trees. provide important modelling about follows the wind, and aki in wrestling with the negotiation. “I don’t damn poetic!”<sup>30</sup> I mean our language literally

<sup>29</sup> I have a digital recording of my mother talking about this.

<sup>30</sup> I write in prose because I don’t have to be concerned about English grammatical errors, and also because I was taught English by Anishinaabemowin speakers who translated in this way. When I first met Mona Stonefish, thirty years ago, she gave me teachings, speaking in Anishinaabemowin and translating into English. One day she exclaimed, “I don’t mean to sound so damn poetic. Its the English translations!” She was concerned that the poetic intonations of the translations would be romanticized and would therefore deligitimize the power and the knowledge being conveyed. To emphasize that Anishinaabe epistemology is not always so poetic she told me that we have teachings that basically translate as “everybody’s’ shit stinks.” This says we are all equals, we all make mistakes, we are all flawed, so we have to be patient with one another.

derives from the  
 it reflects our  
 be the sound of an  
 near imperceptible  
 Rumbling thunders  
 Grandparents need a  
 remind us of our  
 reciprocity; while  
 and the clack of  
 into the forest until  
 lost. My  
 story about  
 small child,  
 task, to stay  
 complete.  
 of becoming lost  
 details and curious  
 away from my  
 possibly into  
 was afraid I'd  
 the bush behind her

*different Ojibwe words being used.  
 by various speakers. More recently,  
 I've begun to be more mindful of  
 following, or at least questioning  
 standardized writing systems  
 (perhaps because of the  
 dissertation restrictions). But I am  
 torn over this point, because some  
 elders urge that we take up one  
 standard written system in order to  
 preserve our endangered  
 languages, while others, are  
 concerned that we will forget how  
 to practice the language and the  
 philosophy together as a life that is  
 lived. My mother and Stonefish are  
 among the latter. In their view, as I  
 understand it, one communally  
 embodies the knowledge and, over  
 much time, a life time, becoming in  
 the way of this exceedingly good,  
 generous and courageous way of  
 being, which is Anishanaabe; as  
 opposed to merely conversing in  
 Ojibwe and being able to  
 intellectualize about it.*

contours of the earth and  
 environment, whether that  
 approaching storm or the  
 rustling of leaves.  
 remind us that our  
 smoke, that is, they  
 obligation of respect and  
 the lure of snapping twigs  
 Paagaag's bones lead us  
 we become helplessly  
 grandmother gave me this  
 Paagaag, when I was a  
 teaching me to stay on  
 focussed until a job is  
 Otherwise, I run the risk  
 and ensnared in unrelated  
 distractions that lead me  
 responsibilities and  
 danger. Also, my Gram  
 literally become lost in  
 house, so she scared me

with this story so that I wouldn't wander off. At the behest of thunder, both my  
 Grandmother, Marjory, and my mother, on separate occasions, would sneak tobacco into

the woodstove when they thought no one was looking. Their lips moved, speaking something quietly, not so much a whisper as an indistinct mumble. Although, I was not the intended audience, eventually, when no one was around to hear, they each gave in to my urging to tell me what they were up to. I can only guess that they didn't want others to hear for fear of being judged as foolish, superstitious, or thought to be doing something wrong, in the sense of committing a Christian conceived sin (Anishinaabeg had no conception of hell before contact. One time, Stonefish told me about a run-in with a racist who despised being around Native people. So, she told him, "You can go to hell, there are no Anishinaabe there!"). More likely, they were secretive because they knew that the manidoog were listening, and they did not want to offend them. Speaking with one's ancestors is a private matter. Others should not pry into the ways that we each must figure out how to navigate our own being in the world. My grandmother, mother, and Stonefish confirmed this time and again. I shy away from describing this as the 'good way' (as is often the interpretation of baamaadazawin) in favour of *a way that is right for oneself-in-community, as a finite and infinite interconnective being-with.*

My Gram would laugh to herself and tried to get away without verbalizing what she was up to. Only after my carefully watching and catching her out, over several visits, did she finally fess up. She'd say quietly and simply, "My Grandparents need tobacco" or "My Grandparents want a smoke." My mother moved between articulating the Thunderers as either her Grandparents (plural) or the singular Grandfather. She never mentioned whether or not her Grandmother, Zhiibaajmaa [my phonetic spelling], smoked when she was alive, but her Grandfather John Wellington did. I wonder if that's why she didn't pluralize on these occasions. Always the irreverent one, she'd say "they're grumbling

because they want a smoke.” She really believed in the power of the Thunderers though. When we were children, she’d wake us up and make us all go down into the basement when there was a thunderstorm, until we were old enough to tease her about it. Embedded in my environment I reflect these contours with Anshinaabemowin in return. Being in the way of Anishinaabe, that is, conceding to this exceptional community oriented way of being-together, fulfills this sacred treaty, this law, this trust. My mother made passing comments about this, particularly when correcting my pronunciation of Anishinaabemowin. She’d point out that my speech was too separated into discrete syllables, which she thought sounded the way English was spoken.

I recall a conversation with Elder Thomas Mattinas, who confirmed this teaching about Anishinaabemowin deriving from the earth, as well as it having been given to us by our ancestors. He and I talked about this on our drive to Bkejwanaang from London. Mattinas and I met shortly after my mother passed away (shifting from finite to infinite). My mother no longer presents as the finite body that I recall. Instead, she sees and communicates in the full stream of mnidoo-consciousness. Even though I miss our being together as mother and daughter (our corporeal relationship), when I feel lost but am not intentionally searching, her words, her teachings, her mistakes, her fears, the way she’d turn a phrase, turn an argument (revealing she had the upper hand all along), and most of all her laughter finds me and speaks more clearly than ever before. Just when I need them most, I just open my hand and her teachings are in my grasp—dooshtoomaapii (this translates something like, “its right here, not just in the palm of my hand, but everywhere, all around us,” Stonefish gifted me with that word and its teachings, fully extending her hand, palm held upright, while emphatically gesturing). From the serious

way that I take up Anishinaabe philosophy, you might think that it is somberly respectful. But, no! Well, yes, it is respectful. But these teachings are alive, are lived, demonstrated, and followed by example in community, in a carefree supportive way (on healthier days, that is). It's all laughter, jokes, and teasing even during supposedly serious situations. Some of my fondest and funniest family get-togethers take place at funerals. To be teased by Anishinaabeg is a good thing. It's a sign of endearment. The more that you're teased, the more you are accepted, and the more that you're loved (whoa, slow down, it don't mean you're adopted... ha ha ha).

Our teachings, Elders and ancestors (human and other-than-human persons) tell us through oral cultural traditions that these gifts—Anishinaabemowin and their philosophies—were given to the Anishinaabe. Its linguistic structure reflects and embeds our being in that exceedingly-good and honourable way, as in that sacred life-giving way. This way is to generously and sacrificially be-in-community, but not in the Christian sense of sacrifice. Rather, we Anishinaabe have a different and, perhaps, a more expansive sense of community that often runs counter to Euro-western religious beliefs and ethics with their implication of admiration seeking martyrdom. To qualify my following claim, I should first say that there are very few things that I can say with absolute certainty, as Anishinaabe, since I must be careful to acknowledge that I speak only of my limited perspective (so that I do not inadvertently disrespect, speak for, or alter another's life-learning journey). Perhaps, this is also why I often speak in the passive voice, omitting the noun, so as not to be too explicit with the who and the what, which might shift or not appreciate being identified as such). Instead, I favour a verb that speaks to the living active status of Anishinaabeg epistemologies. The passive voice is a

maneuver that respects discrepancies between myself and other(s); this includes unforeseen manidoog ‘others,’ along with their shapeshifting capacities, and other stuff beyond my comprehension. My non-Indigenous editors try to catch and correct these ‘bad’ habits that, in western contexts, are simply English language grammatical errors. Too be sure, this undoubtedly is also the case, being ‘two-tongued crippled,’ as are many Anishinaabe to some degree (Maracle). But, I feel so strongly about this point that I will here make an absolute statement because to say otherwise runs the risk of the greater offence which is to exclude some from this claim: *Anishinaabeg rank humour and laughter highest among our ethical values*. We take every opportunity to laugh at ourselves and at each other. My mother said that this is how we survived, and go on surviving—by this it was implicit that she meant it was the way we get through the day-to-day horrors of settler colonialism. She also used to say, “In the old days the native people used to laugh at everything, but now you have to tell a real good one to get a laugh.” My niece, Jazmine, often recalls my mother telling her this at an Elder’s gathering in Bucktown (Delaware First Nation at Moraviantown).<sup>31</sup> This is not to say everyone is equally funny or that we laugh, all the time (even though this tends to be the case!).

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<sup>31</sup> <http://delawarenation.on.ca/>

### 3.2 *Embodied knowledge*

In oral cultures learners/knowers transmit knowledge by repetitiously following by example, through observation, and physically participating with their role models. It is one thing to talk about community or respect, but another thing entirely to perform it. Teachings are taken up as an interrelational embodiment, which might be undetectable or even present a bumpy road, particularly when dealing with difficult situations (and difficult relatives). This

embodied knowledge requires humility, the antithesis of puffed up public displays of modesty, a thin disguise of self-promotion. My mother would say, “be it, don’t say it.” Our old people were not idle. Their quiet, considered and calm repose is the face of Anishinaabe strength and integrity, a way of being that I hope to accomplish one day. This thoughtful composure is more subtle and powerful than Euro-American assertiveness intent on control and

I slow down here to ponder for a moment over the ways in which humility in Anishinaabe contexts is lived compared to western notions of humility. By measuring ourselves according to western ethics and their expectations of us as Indigenous, alongside Christian notions of morality, we risk trading one dogmatism for another. My mother taught me that to be Anishinaabe is a most sacred thing, that we are proud and love ourselves immensely. She loved debating, teasing, laughing, yard-saling and immodestly breaking rules. She was a proud woman and she taught her children to be the same. I see my uncle John, gentle like my Grandmother, and many other elderly Anishinaabe, they go about their day-to-day lives quietly humble in a routine matter-of-fact way. Conversely, it’s not humility if we deliberately draw attention to ourselves with long-winded speeches about being humble. We need not prove we are more generous, sensitive or considerate than others. For Anishinaabe, this is a given! 😊



interference. These gentle approaches, in my view, form the very back that has carried our resistance for five hundred years. Don't get me wrong, I have seen my women giddy with laughter, long-faced and serious, cry, yell, have fits of anger, and turn to take a strip off anyone foolish enough to get in the way. They're human. What I'm getting at is that this way of being is a becoming that spans a life-time. It is these nonverbal subtleties, such as those displayed by my grandmother, that drive my research concerns.

To a certain degree, all humans learn in this embodied way. Differences arise from what each society prioritizes as most valuable. This is evident in the conduct and cultural emphasis that members of a given group widely subscribe to. An Anishinaabe embodied approach to knowing requires a hypersensitivity to social, natural and mnidoo cues that might be invisible to western intellectual frameworks. To the outsider, these subtle practices are rearticulated as storytelling, which seems, on the surface, to be comparable to western oral traditions. Textual literacy, as a social phenomenon, has, after all, only been possible in western cultures since the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century (McLuhan 2011). Yet, there also remains a deep-seated, silent difference at play, because for the Anishinaabe, everything is infused with life.

Embracing the vivacity of oral cultural practices, that is, in instances of nonverbal knowledge transmission, is not just an intellectual endeavour; rather it is knowledge which we live and know intimately in our entire being. *Being*, in this sense, is distinct from static and hierarchical western ontologies. Rather, a dynamic transforming being is in keeping with an Anishinaabemowin world, particularly since, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Algonquian languages are comprised primarily of verbs (estimated percentage of verbs range from 70 to 90%). Citing Little Bear, Simpson writes that:

Coming to know is a mirroring or a re-enactment process where we understand Nishnaabeg epistemology to be concerned with embodied knowledge animated, collectively, and lived out in a way in which our reality, nationhood and existence is continually reborn through both time and space. This requires a union of both emotional knowledge and intellectual knowledge in a profoundly personal and intimate spiritual context. Coming to know is an intimate process, the unfolding of relationship with the spiritual world. (“Land as Pedagogy” 15)

As an example, in her re-telling of the story of the sweet water and maple syrup, Simpson underscores the multiple ways of knowing practiced by Anishinaabe peoples, the importance of not only intellectual and emotional cognisance, but also of being “fully present in all aspects of your physical and spiritual body to access the gift of knowledge from the spiritual world” (“Land as Pedagogy” 13). In the story, as Simpson tells it, Kwezens, a young Anishinaabekwe receives the gift of the sweet water through her careful observation of *Ajidamooa*, a red squirrel, sucking on maple bark in the early spring. She positions Kwezens as a model Anishinaabe citizen, someone embodying multiple modes of intelligence who upholds the deep relationality of the other-than-human world. As such, for Simpson, the resurgence of traditional Indigenous philosophies is taken up through doing and being together as learners. This non-hierarchical cultural resurgence that concedes to children and squirrels, as teachers and leaders, stands in stark contrast to academia and the prioritization of adult, white, male, human, rational thought as the privileged route to knowledge. Simpson points to Geniusz’s interpretation of what I call *mnidoo pedagogy*, or *gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang*, which she translates as “that which is given to us in a loving

way.” In a like sense, I take this to mean that it is given by *mnidoo*. What is notable in this translation, for Simpson, is that intelligence and learning are here conditioned by both emotion and relationality. *Mnidoo* pedagogy is transmitted with emotion and affection: “*Gaa-izhi- zhaawendaagoziyaang* requires love,” Simpson explains. The word *zhaawen* connotes empathy, compassion and kindness as well a “deep unconditional love” (10). Little Bear describes the way such pedagogy is practiced through example, experience, and positive reinforcement, as children (viewed as “gifts from the creator”) are cherished by “a large circle of relatives and friends” who instruct them by praising them, encouraging their talents, and recognizing their achievements (“*Jagged Worldviews*” 81). In keeping with this approach, and distinguishing between western rationalism, as it is opposed to Anishinaabe intelligence, Simpson proposes that Anishinaabe intelligence includes spirit and emotion and is arrived at communally, through a complex “web of consensual relationships” (15-16). These are, moreover “infused with movement (kinetic) through lived experience and embodiment” (15-16).

Thus, when I say knowledge is lived in our entire being, I mean both as a singular continuous body of existence (infinite interrelationality) and as multiple ways of knowing from divided perspectives, that is, as finite subjectivities. In such multiplicity, the ‘facts’ do not always line up and support one another, but may contradict and appear to discount the other. In western contexts this might be seen as an unscientific error in judgement or as non-rigorous. However, from an Anishinaabe perspective, contradictions are just unrealized potentials. Opposing elements are not only accepted, but difference is actively sought. As Little Bear contends, “In Aboriginal societies, diversity is the norm” (“*Jagged Worldviews*” 83). This is demonstrated with oral cultural practices such as communal

mound building, pictographs and dream cartographies. Indigenous textual citations can be embodied, in both human and mnidoo potencies, as with the earth, understood as a body that speaks of our trauma and survivance, in what Jill Carter describes as a “performance ‘mound,’ its artists meticulously layering the soil(s) of personal stories and communal histories” (430). These earth, image, and visionary practices are Indigenous literatures and embodied practices that coexist with their orally narrated lived stories, histories and commemoration. They are mnemonic devices and performative utterances. They provide fixed structures around which adaptation and iterable differences emerge, without losing the main premise of those early (ancient) teachings given to us by our ancestors.

This is unlike the broken telephone exercise intended to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of orally conveyed knowledge. In this exercise, each participant whispers in the ear of the person next to them a phrase relayed to them in the same manner. This is a highly inaccurate method because it is disentangled from the lived-world. In contrast, in oral cultural traditions, interlocutors live, experience, participate and perform stories again and again, often employing mnemonic devices (oral cultural literatures such as a feather). This is a reliable method for those trained to listen, observe, and remember (through multiple re-tellings), particularly since these participants are immersed in community-oriented oral cultural communication practices and teachings. All of these are arguably more mobile than textual literatures since they have a higher degree of interpretative leeway. This interpretive structure opens toward the multiple possibilities of future tellings. Specifically, since all of existence shares one body, knowledge is not simply transmitted intergenerationally between same species members, but also between all of existence, simultaneously. I want to point out again that there are multiple ways of

knowing, both as a finite corporeal entity and as entangled infinity. In this regard, knowledge does not merely travel through a series of transmissions over time, as it is passed from one generation, or carried to another. Rather, it also radiates throughout existence in an immediacy that to finite entities might be perceived as a premonition of future events, when in fact they are overcome by an awareness of events as they are unfolding, but which is occurring somewhere else (whether that be two feet away or two thousand miles away).

### **3.3 Land Pedagogy**

This profound embodiment suffused with *mnidoo* interrelationality ties Anishinaabe epistemology deeply to *aki*, thus returning my task once again to the urgency of unsettling the settler colonial structures that have stolen Indigenous land and brought the earth to the brink of ecological devastation. For these combined reasons, Indigenous land-based education has received increasing attention by Indigenous pedagogues such as Marie Battiste and Glen Coulthard, together with the creation of university affiliated land-based field schools, such as the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning in Northern Alberta, and the University of Saskatchewan's Land-Based Indigenous Education institutes. In a special issue on land-based education in *Decolonization: Education, Indigeneity and Society*, editors Matthew Wildcat, Mande McDonald, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox and Coulthard situate land-based education in direct relation to contesting settler colonialism. One's presence, and indeed one's 'being present' on the land, plays a role in both epistemology and conscientization, that is, in "seeing one's relationships to the land and other-than-humans" in ways that also resist and contest

settler logics and the structures of colonialism (v). Citing settler ally and Dechinta educator Erin Freeland Ballantyne, they propose that land pedagogies help make it possible to imagine life “outside of the enclosures of capital” through a “multi-cultural decolonizing praxis where all students learn from the land in a shared space in which Indigenous epistemologies are central” (cited in Wildcat et al. vi).

The decolonial force of land-based epistemologies is so potent because its logics make a critical intervention in how we think about knowledge itself, as well as the relationship of humans to all of existence. Citing Geniusz, Simpson writes that *aki*, or the earth, includes:

land forms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings, energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies and networks that connect these elements. Knowledge in *akinoomaage* flows through the layered spirit world above the earth, the place where spiritual beings reside and the place where our ancestors sit. (“Land as Pedagogy” 15)

The relationship of humans to this multiplicity is not external. I argue that we are constituted of this diverse *mnidoo* world, that it makes our very sense of self-ness and consciousness possible. Our Anishinaabe epistemology is connected to the land, because the land, in this extended sense, *is us*. Stan Wilson explains that the bond we share with the land is much deeper than a relationship to property, or inert objects. Rather, it comprises a responsibility to all living things that derives from an understanding of self that is constituted through relationships with all living things (91). These living things, Wilson specifies, include “grasses, medicinal plants, fruit bushes and trees, insects that

live off the plants, birds that in turn eat the insects, four-leggeds that forage on the grasses and hedges, and animal hunters that prey on smaller animals” (91). Following my mother’s teachings, these relations, as I understand them, also include inorganic, inert ‘objects.’ Thus, even though I am not literally creating an earth mound, or engaging in practices that are typically considered part of land-based pedagogy, such as bush skills, as I write this dissertation, my very being in the world, my sense of knowing what I know, and my responsibility to give what I know, is derived from this interconnectedness with aki and all mnidoo. As Simpson suggests, this engagement with knowledge is “a gift to be practiced and reproduced” (“Land as Pedagogy” 9). It cannot be contained within a university degree, or for that matter, in a discrete task like writing a dissertation. Simpson also specifies that Anishinaabe learning depends on balanced long-term relationships in family and community, including both extended human and mnidoo relations. Moreover, intelligence is not an individual attribute or possession, nor a universally generalizable quality, as in western rationality, but instead “[i]ntelligence flows through relationships between living entities” (10). We arrive at knowledge (rather than acquire it) through a practice of openness to these multiple realities and interdependent entities, and through living in a way that engenders relationships with the mnidoo ancestors and all our relations. That is, on the one hand, protocols of “reciprocity, humility, honesty and respect with all elements of creation” (9-10) and on the other nurturing our relationships with mnidoo and ancestors through storytelling, dreams, visions and ceremonies (12). The work in this dissertation is land-based because it is mnidoo-infused. My teachers include the trees, the rocks, objects such as jewellery and art, Anishinaabemowin, and other mnidoo relations.

### 3.4 *Non-Interference*

Earlier I noted the indirect and circuitous style with which elders often answer questions in order to avoid placing limits on the possible meanings, realities and understandings that students come to actively, as interlocutors in a pedagogical relationship. This is an example of non-interference—a grounding principle of Anishinaabe pedagogy and leadership. Furthermore, it is closely connected with a sense of responsibility for one’s own learning and knowledge. Asking direct questions might, likewise, be seen as reorienting one’s interlocutor toward a particular kind of response and a particular kind of engagement, with regard to both abstract thoughts and tangible worlds.

Another point to consider regarding petitions and the teaching “we only own what we give away” is that gifts come with responsibilities to share them appropriately. I recall in my youth asking one question after another of Mona Stonefish. But to the last question, she replied “you have to learn how to walk before you learn how to run.” I took her to mean that I had to take time to ponder those gifts that she had already given me. I had to learn for myself before I understood and possibly before I was ready to understand. I don’t want to provide too many analyses. For one, their inferences are infinite, and, for another, to outline a limited number of possible interpretations also forecloses options that would otherwise remain open to you, if I hadn’t so helpfully limited your perspective to my own and thereby stolen that alternate learning journey from you. In a linguistic analysis of requesting favours in the Algonquin language group, Roger Spielmann and Bertha Chief point to the preference for indirect requests and an aversion to persistently and directly asking for something (319). It seems to me that a direct philosophical question can be equally awkward in Anishinaabe-settler contexts. Perhaps the question in



itself is not the problem, so much as its directness is incompatible with Anishinaabe “social competence” (Preston 256). A direct question compels not only an immediate response that is commensurate with the implicit expectations framed by the logic of the question (imposing restraints on the respondent to answer in a particular way), but it also requires a reduction of complex interrelated networks into discrete entities. In other words, the pointed quality of an explicit question summons a trenchant response. Hence the profoundly interrelated Anishinaabe world is reduced to blunt subject/object binaries from which to articulate and make rationally verifiable truth claims (in the same vein as the direct question regime dictates). Education should result in different individuals achieving unique learning results, and as such Anishinaabe pedagogies aim to nourish individuals’ particular gifts, fostering within the community a diversity of strengths, perspectives and knowledges.

This autonomy is balanced through collective decision-making processes. In community decision-making processes, participants are mindful of conceding to each other – making their own arguments, to be sure, but also giving up individual desires in order to make concessions for one another (this in an Anishinaabe ideal). Following these protocols of respect, everyone knows their singular perspective is insufficient to fully grasp multiple realities, so each grapple to meet the other and accept their difference. The collective reaches consensus by striving to make room for differences, validating the multiplicity of particular truths. Non-interference is thus contoured by a deep sense of relationality. My mother said “life is about learning, learning how to get along with one another.” Life and learning are inseparable. Our embrace of difference is conveyed in oral cultural practices of recognizing the value in each other’s gifts and welcoming their contributions. One’s

life/learning is a personal journey, which we do not obstruct or pry into, so long as it adheres to the basic principles of an interconnected cosmology, that is, respect, responsibility and reciprocity. It is common practice at Anishinaabe community gatherings for participants to qualify what they say as reflecting only their own limited perspective and experience (often following an introduction that contextualizes who they are in relation to what community, clan, lineage, and their Anishinaabe name). We are all responsible for our own thoughts and interpretations. To try to persuade another to one's way of thinking, or impose one's perspective on them is considered unethical as well as prying into their personal life. Indeed, it potentially disrupts the other person's purpose or life-learning journey.

I know that the nonhierarchical equality to which I refer is without a doubt *Anishinaabe* because our traditional teachings and stories support this theory many times over. As children, in my home, we were encouraged to be open to the potential in others whether it was directly or indirectly revealed. Even if we did not agree with someone else's choices, we'd try to take it in stride, so long as it did not infringe upon us. We are instructed to listen and watch out (*naa*) and consider every possibility an *actuality*. These alternate realities might also arrive as oneiric slumberous dreams or insights that clatter into view as an epiphany while wide-awake. But, in my usage, vision should not be confused with daydreams conjured as a work of imagination. Basil Johnson provides a prime example of a key feature within Anishinaabe homes even today. My mother regularly affirmed that I chose my family before I was born and that that responsibility, this life, of being with them was my choice. On the notion of truth and the allowance given to each, so that one might throw themselves as far as possible, Johnson writes:

Our word for truth or correctness or any of its synonyms is *w'dae'b'wae*, meaning “he or she is telling the truth, is right, is correct, or accurate.” From its composition—the prefix *dae*, which means “as far as, inasmuch as, according to,” and the root *wae*, a contraction of *waewae*, referring to sound—emerges the second meaning, which gives the sense of a person casting his or her knowledge as far as he or she can. By implication, the person whom is said to be *dae'b'wae* is acknowledged to be telling what he or she knows only insofar as he or she has perceived what he or she is reporting, and only according to his or her command of the language. In other words, the speaker is exercising the highest degree of accuracy possible given what he or she knows, in the third sense the term conveys the philosophic notion that there is no such thing as absolute truth (Johnson, x, *Anishinaubae Thesaurus*).

So if we were to rewind and walk backwards through these three encoded implications beginning with the third, in the absence of “absolute truth,” I would suggest that possibility surges in here to blur the distinction between an ‘actual’ finite world (as it is perceived by human consciousness) and the potentiality of *mnidoo* infinity. While in the second “the highest degree of accuracy” might be understood as absolute truth given a measure of leniency in light of the partial view of any single perspective, which is limited to an infinitesimally small fraction. And finally, the constraint of “correctness” is pitched as a facile gradation shut off from that which exceeds quantifiable verification (as the currently limited actually). And finally “truthfulness” is transmitted not as content but as aural resonance carried from body to body whether that is a body of air, earth, vapor or even intangible concepts and language itself. The point in the first sense is that it exceeds

the human ear through the reverberation of sound waves as well as surpassing the subjective content of the sign as such, which is picked up instead by generative concentric pulsations, if you like, in the possible *mnidoo* dimension (that's what I am getting at with my concentric ring sketches in chapter five.) In *Ojibwe Heritage: The Ceremonies, Rituals, Songs, Dances, Prayers and Legends of the Ojibwe*, published in 1990, Johnson describes the auto-generative capacity of the *Anishinaabe* as “beings made out of nothing, because their substances were not rock, or fire, or water, or wind.” Instead, as he describes, they are “spontaneous beings” (15). He does however take it down a notch in his 2007 *Anishinaube Thesaurus*, conceding that “*Anishinaube(k)*” either means “Spontaneous Being(s) or The Good Being(s)—most likely The Good Beings, to correspond to the understanding that humans generally mean well” (14). Note: his spelling is different since he attempts with his thesaurus to install a new “orthography” that follows the conventions of English as a universalizing bridge language. Another interesting feature is that “The Good Being(s)” is added and it along with “Spontaneous Being(s)” is now capitalized. We could speculate that the ‘The’ as with the capitalized title specifies Supreme Being or God. But that would be incorrect since throughout his thesaurus the phrase that articulates the meaning of the word is capitalized while the supporting evidence is not.

These collective processes of respect and reciprocity only hold if all uphold these responsibilities to share our gifts and respect those who have other skills and abilities (human and other-than-human) so that we each contribute and benefit from this infinite body of learning how to adapt and improvise. It may seem paradoxical but we must, simultaneously, fight to defend those ways of being as our ancestors taught us to do,

through their example of protest, war and non-hierarchical debate. We are not doormats who roll over to maintain romantic ‘Indian’ stereotypical ideals of peace and love. To be ‘stewards of the land,’ although problematically romanticized, means that we must utilize our capacities to the fullest extent to care for and defend those who are harmed but cannot defend themselves (human and other-than-human). Hence, it is also our responsibility to resist oppression and fight for the health and safety of all community members.

This principle of noninterference is central to Anishinaabe thought systems, and many other Turtle Island Indigenous pedagogies for as long as we can remember. Non-interference informed our relationship with the newcomers, in ways that our ancestors presumed would be reciprocal (a catastrophic error). One of the most well-known treaty agreements between settlers and Indigenous North Americans is the two-row wampum belt that outlines the relationship between Dutch settlers and the Haudenosaunee. It signifies the principle of non-interference, described by Kanien’kehá:ka historian Tehanetorens (also known as Ray Fadden) as follows:

We will not be like Father and Son, but like Brothers. [Our treaties] symbolize two paths or two vessels, travelling down the same river together. One, a birchbark canoe, will be for the Indian People, their laws, their customs, and their ways. The other, a ship, will be for the white people and their laws, their customs, and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither of us will make compulsory laws nor interfere in the internal affairs of the other. Neither of us will try to steer the other’s vessel. (72)

The Jesuits also met with this philosophical principle when they set out on their mission to convert the Anishinaabeg they encountered early in the colonial process. Father Pierre Biard, firmly intent on imposing his views, wrote with frustration in his 1611–1616 *Relation* of the challenges he met trying to persuade the people to his beliefs.<sup>32</sup> He writes “For all your arguments, and you can bring on a thousand of them if you wish, are annihilated by this single shaft which they always have at hand, *Aoti Chabaya*, (they say) ‘That is the Savage way of doing it. You can have your way and we will have ours; every one values his own wares’ (v.3 123). No doubt his Indigenous listeners were appalled by his single-minded agenda to bend them to his worldview, for non-interference is a principle based on respect for diversity. Basil Johnson writes about the importance of this principle of non-interference:

To foster individuality and self-growth children and youth were encouraged to draw their own inferences from stories. No attempt was made to impose upon their views. The learner learned according to his capacity, intellectually and physically, some learned quickly and broadly; others more slowly and with narrower scope. Each according to his gifts. (“One Generation” 70)

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<sup>32</sup> The people Biard is commenting on are possibly the Montagnais/Innu, but it is not entirely clear in his report.

So, we can see how the principle of non-interference relates to the colonizing force of European languages, discussed in chapter two. The concepts and logics of settler languages differ from Anishinaabe approaches. As unique peoples with our own languages, we co-exist in multiple

linguistic-ethical-philosophical ways of being. When subjected to such colonial language constraints Anishinaabe ways of knowing and being, in turn, come under attack by the seemingly innocuous approach of collaboratively having a conversation. This is part why I am cautious of reconciliatory initiatives, established by settler institutions, which I fear will perpetuate another form of colonial theft, especially when it is taking place in systems that cannot fully comprehend nor admit to the impact and depth of its own presumed biases.

It should be noted that the impression of Indigenous peoples (I focus on the Anishinaabeg), as described by the Jesuits, changes drastically over hundreds of years, with their representations becoming increasingly more savage and brutal. Several factors might be at play here: chief among them:) is the rationalization of genocidal practices. These actions in turn were, in my estimation, supported by these very fictions that were unconsciously and, to some degree, deliberately constructed to serve this purpose. Hence, settlers became increasingly threatened by the ‘survivance’ of Indigenous folks, and so actually began to believe that they were hostile and dangerous (Vizenor). Secondly, no doubt, after realizing what they were dealing with, Turtle Island Indigenous peoples reacted in like kind to colonial violence (The legacy of colonial violence is well known so I do not dwell on it here at length).

Anishinaabe cosmologies cannot be torn apart and made to conform to western disciplinary regimes without losing their interrelational eloquence. Because everything is alive, they require protocols for respectful engagement. Anishinaabeg are taught implicitly, through example, to be careful to not speak *for* others (human or otherwise). We are neither authors, experts, nor truthful witnesses on the experiences of others. I can only speak for myself, from my own admittedly limited perspective, drawing from the small bit that I am given to give back in return. Moreover, this knowledge only ever becomes mine in the instant that I give it away. This knowledge is not entirely known, or perhaps not fully revealed, without the interrelational folds that activate and enliven their threads. Hence, they

Add to this the deaths of multitudes, seemingly overnight, from a mysterious illness (small pox), and it is feasible to see the great lengths and desperate measures that anyone in the same situation would take in efforts to assuage and appease whatever forces were responsible for such a plague, which the ‘good fathers’ record having readily attributed to their obstinate ‘savage’ customs and Godless heathenism. And third, this behaviour might have arisen from an awareness that settlers did not share Anishinaabe positive social assumptions (engaging with others from the perspective that each is open and respects the other as equals (see Richard Rhodes “We are Going to Go There: Positive Politeness in Ojibwa”). However, settlers would have us believe that the noble Savage was an idealized fiction constructed entirely from the western imaginary (as is the case with the derogatory stereotypes). In my experiences as a student, from public school to university, settlers, that is, my teachers and professors, frequently qualified pejorative conceptions of First Nations peoples as having a ‘grain of truth’ around which stereotypes circulate, while denying or ignoring any affirmative potential inherent to any romanticisms.



reveal in their experiencing, while lived as complex systems, as opposed to being treated as discrete objects of study. Everything is alive, and therefore has its own perspective, as well as its own spirit, soul, or better, *potency*. It is, therefore, disrespectful to assume that we could possibly know that ‘other’ in an immediate sustained way, since this position is one of assumed authority over them. We can, however, speak *of* these ways of being, as I am doing right now.

Anishinaabeg have developed a complex network for approaching the subtle internal inflexions of this continuous or infinite *mnidoo* body. Through experience, that is, through following by example, my first human teacher, my mother taught me to speak and act circuitously, as well as to take a passive voice, rarely directly or absolutely pinning down the addressed

One of my graduate school professors boasted about being a member of a group called “The Wild Indians,” explaining that since settlers had constructed notions of the Indian, as such, that they, the settlers were, therefore, the *real* Indians. I’m not entirely sure what they do, but I got the impression that they get-together somewhere in Quebec and play out these romantic fantasies. Aside from contextualizing the everyday unique challenges faced by Indigenous students, I mention this because it is baffling, to me, how settlers can unabashedly lie to themselves in rationalizing First Nations Peoples out of existence. Yet, despite the enormous efforts to eradicate the Anishinaabe, many of the ethical markers (recorded in the early letters by the Jesuits), can be found circulating throughout Turtle Island (Indian Country). Like rays of light they poke holes through the carnage of settler colonialism in moments of reprieve and laughter. This persistence, suggests that Indigenous peoples of the Americas, did indeed, and in many ways still do, share an egalitarian social structure that continues to contrast sharply with the Euro-western newcomer ideologies.

‘noun,’ since to do so would be disrespectful and even incorrect. That is to say that the named *noun* is pulled out of the very entangled condition that makes it what it is and, simultaneously, arresting the concept rendering it incapable of shifting into something else. So, by naming ‘it,’ this potency/process is made inert. Besides, we also run the risk of drawing the attention of their mnidoo beingness—an infinite shapeshifting element endowed with great power—they are listening and they can interact with us. This will be taken up in more detail in chapter five, in relation to mnidoo-worlding. But for now, I will say, from my limited perspective, and perhaps creative interpretations, that these waves and circuits are mobile, curving and indirect. So, in our reaching towards one another, between finite and infinite dimensions, our human modes of comprehending are insufficient and our lines of communication can be skewed. The proper route to knowledge is to be always circling around the subject, the topic, the issue, the content. My perspective is flawed, not simply because I hold only a fragment of a vast, moving puzzle, but also because I—my conscious rational grasping—am always at a distance from whatever it is that I address, even that part of me which is most mine. To be clear, this is not the mediating fissure said to exist between the thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*) and the representation that stands in for it (Kant). Rather, this mnidoo beingness flows through me, it is me, it is the pulse that penetrates and conditions my existence. Yes, I do have access to it, but it does not bend to my will and demands.

Truth and reconciliation demands a revealing, which, arguably, derives from the desire initiated by western enlightenment to shed light on the unknown, so that we might apprehend and be able to pass informed judgment. Why are the intimate details of our abuse necessary for settlers to believe us, or to understand why ongoing colonial practices

are violent, and that their negative effects are intergenerational? That word ‘reconciliation’ assumes that the original inhabitants and settler new comers once had a good relationship which we now endeavour to return to. The hospitality and generosity of First Nations Peoples who helped settlers, well... settle in, was documented by early explorers and priests. By sharp contrast, however, settler conduct, as is also evident from the Jesuit records, was devastatingly vicious towards the original inhabitants. Settler institutions have never demonstrated a willingness to share or be together in an equally respectful partnership.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as Million points out, Canadian state officials discuss ‘truth and reconciliation’ in the language of human rights, and a form of “therapeutic catharsis” without making any firm commitment to reparation, economic responsibility, or measures to secure the well-being of Indigenous people or their access to power

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<sup>33</sup> Settlers have never returned the favour and so they and their descendants continue to owe a debt. But the gifts received and the atrocities doled out in return are staggering. Yet, reparation is still possible, for example by first recognizing the violence of settler colonial economies and logics; opting out of fossil fuel consumption by using alternative energies (not just for yourself but more importantly help under privileged groups gain access to sustainable alternatives as well); demand that corporations be held accountable for ecological impact damages; demand that governments reinstitute strict environment laws (replaced by the Harper Government) as well as installing new tougher policies to protect air, water, land, and Indigenous communities from further molestation; demand that Indigenous peoples and communities receive the same educational, and health service funding support as anyone else (currently these services are also greatly underfunded in comparison to every other group in Canada). If you are reading this chapter then you have skills that could be put to use for such purposes: organize, write letters, make films, art, novels, and discuss these issues with students to inform following generations of their duties to the land and her people. Even now I am distracted with an art project fundraiser to help update the water filtration systems on First Nations’ reserves (which, FYI, many have not been updated since the 1970’s, even though this service is regularly checked and updated in every other community in what is now known as Canada). Of course, the issues are much more complex than this. I include this list merely as some do-able practical examples in response to settler ally questions of how they can be supportive.

(*Therapeutic Nations* 28). This is the big difference between Indigenous and settler ways of thinking and being in the world. Anishinaabe is something we endeavor to live up to, to be Anishinaabe is to be that really good way of being together. This does not mean that we, so to speak, ‘turn the other cheek,’ in the sense of Christian morality. Indeed, we do as our ancestors did, we fight to protect our communities and our way of life. Western institutions and settlers themselves have not shown any real commitment toward reparation and being together respectfully because this also means being together equitably. Institutions don’t run themselves. At the very least, they require a complicit majority. My concern is that Indigenous resources are not only further exploited, but perhaps, more disturbingly, these transformative Anishinaabe concepts are made to conform to an imperialistic mindset, reflecting western fantasies, repackaged and sold back to us. Nonetheless, I cannot allow my fears, real or imagined, to deter us from having a conversation and remain, as Anishinaabe, open...for the people. So, with my research I speak specifically to the Anishinaabe—those able to become something they haven’t any control over in themselves but instead improvise by interweaving between new stories and old.

What I offer in this dissertation is one piece of an inconceivably vast shifting web of multiple intersecting realities (finite and infinite). My finite partial view is limited to my current moment and obscured by the pressures of the competing demands placed on me. As such, I can never fully know the thing that western philosophers such as Kant refer to as the noumena, or the thing-in-itself. Not only because it exists outside of and prior to the mediation of my own meaning making representations, but because it is not mine to possess. Perhaps, it is because of this fragmentary and oblique view that Anishinaabeg

defer to the image, story, and circuitous teachings, drawing from metaphorical examples as a fitting pedagogical strategy. Both the act of creating—craft, design, or fine art (themselves problematically divided designations)—and the finished product, carry an element of the sacred, that is, a communion, and an observation of respect of the interdependence of existence through the enmeshment of infinity with finitude. The *other* that I refer to is not necessarily human, but includes all, everything—existence—animate, inanimate, tangible and intangibles (such as *Kinoodin* the West wind). These teachings about the vitality, mystery and interconnectedness of creation were given to me both directly through the content of stories but more often through a subtle registry, such as the gentleness of my mother's hand floating lovingly over her fleamarket goods, bemused as she haggled over the prices. These are the tacit, tactile teachings she handed down to me. They ring out in the *way* we are, not only in the *content* of what is spoken or written down. We can think of it as a faint reality that is ongoing and in dialogue with the imposing harsh everyday demands that often overshadow this other crucial aspect of mniidoo-knowing. It is also two interlinking ways of conceiving of time. It is this kernel that I contend has survived 500 years of settler colonial oppression. It is this knot that I struggle to understand. To approach these veils respectfully requires that I do so slowly, gently, thoughtfully, and circuitously, indirectly that is.

## Chapter 4

### 4 *The Becoming-Human of Buffalo Bill*

Buffalo Bill's Wild West was a spectacular site of encounter between North American Indigenous peoples and settler societies. This turn-of-the-twentieth-century circus-like show featured rodeo skills and theatrical depictions of battle scenes between settlers and native peoples. These performances were set in the context of 'historical events.' Once the most popular show on earth, Buffalo Bill provides a rich illustration of colonial evils, ripe for parody and critique (Kasson 15). Consider, for instance, the performance art personas *Belle Sauvage* and Buffalo Boy, developed by Laurie Blondeau (Cree, Sauteaux and Métis), and Adrian Stimson (Silsika). While Buffalo Bill is himself a performance artist, whose exhibitions assembled performers (such as Sitting Bull, Molly Spotted Elk and Annie Oakley), artists Blondeau and Stimson offer queer Indigenous reinterpretations of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. These campy contemporary characters refuse to submit to the subjectivities demanded by the Wild West, including both the racialized 'Red Indian' and hegemonic colonial identities, for these artists are tricksters who traverse the in-between of these polarized possibilities. Buffalo Bill, likewise, finds himself deconstructed in his colonial encounters. He exploits and colonizes Indigenous peoples, but ultimately finds himself transformed by his own becoming-animal encounters with difference. In this chapter, Buffalo Bill, *Belle Sauvage* and Buffalo Boy set the backdrop for a second site of encounter: this time between *Anishinaabe* (original peoples of the Americas) and Western theory.

This encounter is a meeting of radically different systems of thought, one of which has attempted to assimilate and eradicate the others, while at the same time appropriating and romanticizing them. On the side of the Wild West, in this analogy, is the concept “becoming-animal”, elaborated in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In this text, itself a kind of performance, Deleuze and Guattari appear as contemporary versions of Buffalo Bill, caught undecidedly between colonial thought and their own transformations initiated by their anomalous Other, ‘the Indian.’<sup>34</sup> On the one hand, becoming-animal represents an effort to re-conceptualize difference or its engagement by re-examining the concept of encounter through affect. On the other hand, while Deleuze and Guattari posit their theory of becoming as a shedding of privilege, it depends on that very privilege for the efficacy of its praxis. For Indigenous peoples, becoming-imperceptible and becoming-dispersed (aspects of becoming-animal) are by no means to be desired, since these processes are associated with colonial violence and its institutionalization. As such, the becoming-animal concept treads a slippery slope between posthumanism and dehumanization. The romanticized terms of this concept naïvely overlook the deadly consequences of dehumanization and deterritorialization for Indigenous peoples while redeploying misinformed Western interpretations about them. Indigenous philosophies notably are neither humanist nor posthuman, but emerge as something else entirely. Becoming-animal negates both individual subjectivity and collective political agency,

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<sup>34</sup> The term ‘Indian’ is employed ironically throughout this chapter to refer to the misnomer (still embedded in policies such as Canada’s *Indian Act*) that collapses all the diverse Indigenous cultures of the Americas into one monolithic stereotype; while I refer to ‘actual’ Indigenous peoples as Aboriginal, native, First Nation, First People, *Anishinaabe*, or in their specificity as Ojibwe, Lakota Sioux, etc. ‘Aboriginal’ is another generalizing term used in Canadian policy and thus it too is a source of contention).

and reflects a subaltern position of incomprehensibility and unintelligibility into which Indigenous peoples have been swept up.

Yet, the *Anishinaabe* are not passive victims in this relationship. Like *Belle Sauvage* and Buffalo Boy, Aboriginal thought is a trickster that turns relations to becoming-animal around. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari, like Buffalo Bill, are caught in the spell of their anomalous Other, since *Anishinaabe* philosophy is structured as a relational transformative discourse of becoming. Indigenous peoples have long waited for the West to enter the conversation. Deleuze and Guattari, ridiculous as they look in their shaman costumes of suede and turkey feathers, awkwardly turn towards this discursive invitation. A conversation (or, rather, a conversion) begins.

## **4.1      *Humanism***

In this chapter, I not only address struggles with the emergent posthuman era, which is engaged in the worthwhile project of dismantling binaries such as self/other and nature/culture. My concern, rather, is that underneath the posthuman becoming-animal concept persists a liberal humanism that continues to permeate contemporary lived realities. Where the human is the ground of ethics, politics, capitalism, democracy, colonization and subjectivity, with becoming-animal, Deleuze and Guattari call for a disruption of humanism, through an emphasis on difference and dispersion, rather than commonality. The theory of becoming-animal critiques humanism in several ways. First, there is a shift from individuality to multiplicity, as the authors point to “modes of



expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling” that occur as one encounters Others (Deleuze and Guattari 239). Second, faced with the difference of the Other, a person is transformed, jolted from one’s identity, rather than identifying with Others along lines of similarity. Third, the concept of freedom is dislodged from free will and tied to the involuntary transcendence of individuality that occurs when one’s sense of self is disrupted by pure difference. It is a movement from the autonomous to the anomalous. Deleuze and Guattari write, “Wherever there is multiplicity, you will also find an exceptional individual, and it is with that individual that an alliance must be made in order to become-animal [...] there is always a pact with a demon. [...] Every animal swept up in its pact has its anomalous” (243). The anomalous is not a characteristic, but “a position or a set of positions in relation to a multiplicity” (Deleuze and Guattari 244). The emphasis on disrupting identity and shifting from individuality to multiplicity reflects the authors’ critique of the bourgeois tenets of liberal humanism, including its emphasis on individualism, autonomy and reason as the essence of humans.

This disruption of identity, moreover, suggests that multiplicity is a space of pure plurality, which does not gather around commonalities nor organize along lines of similarity. This space creates the possibility for a new kind of politics, one that would be free from the hierarchies and exclusions of both state and identity politics, and thus, ideally, colonization: Deleuze and Guattari propose a shift from what they term the “macro-politics” of states, institutions and subjects, to a “micro-political” posthumanism that disperses around multiplicity and relationality. The terms for the agents of these types of politics are ‘majoritarian’ and ‘minoritarian.’ Minoritarian refers to “groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions,

groups all the more secret for being extrinsic, in other words, anomic” (Deleuze and Guattari 247). Such groups express the disruptive politics of becoming-animal, a politics that “rupture[s] with the central institutions that have established themselves or seek to become established” (Deleuze and Guattari 247). That is to say, the confluence of external forces perpetually breaks with the histories and memories of unified internally constructed subjectivities. Disrupted, thus, by the chaos of mutating assemblages, these externally summoned ‘blocks of becoming’ forge a kind of forgetfulness. This amnesia materializes in relation to the entrenched molar positions (or striated spaces) that are passed through by minoritarians. As such, minoritarian concerns circulate in a collapsing economy rather than fixating on an embedded and particularized majoritarian state or molar territory.

Deleuze and Guattari draw heavily on concepts associated with indigeneity, such as nomadism and shaman mysticism. They valorize themselves as “author/sorcerers” endowed with “clandestine” modes of becoming, yet they dismiss “totemic relations,” which they understand erroneously as static and correlative. They adamantly contend that the term ‘minoritarian’ does not refer to social or political minorities, which are aggregate identities, bound by hereditary, religious, gendered or racial affinities. Accordingly, totemic affiliated Indigenous populations are excluded from such micro-political claims, since minoritarians engage in modes of becoming that depart from any such homogenizing correspondence. Majoritarians or molar identities are specifically associated with ideological domination and immutable standards (forming the basis for rights), which are supported by the historical roots and rational partitions that territorialize difference. The term ‘majoritarian’ thus refers to a standard rather than a

quantifiable majority of constituents. Hence, the negotiation of parameters through which members of any group (including social minorities) gain their sense of belonging also unavoidably entrench the fixed coordinates that establish a majoritarian rule.

Minoritarians conversely remain heterogeneous by setting themselves at odds, even with minority identification, and by resisting normative claims.

Like contemporary European recreations of ‘Indian’ villages, whose participants purport to be more Indian than the Indians,<sup>35</sup> Deleuze and Guattari also map minoritarian politics by replicating nomadic lifestyles, but ones that always already disperse from majoritarianism. Similar to German and Czech ‘Indian’ recreationists, *A Thousand Plateaus* may be an impeccable imitation, but, uncannily, these ‘superior’ Indians are blonde and blue-eyed. This positions the text, like the recreation village, as a kind of contemporary Wild West Show, filled with nomadic warriors, neighing horses, mysterious shamans and heroic cowboys, all swept up into one shifting assemblage. Foremost, in this spectacle, is the weight of humanism, under which ‘real’ Indians—that is to say, the tired and hungry Indigenous cast members who are shot over and over again in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West—are dehumanized. There is no glory in becoming-animal for them, no great adventure in deterritorialization. Instead, these Wild West cast members have been cobbled together from poverty-stricken reservations, their homelands devastated by colonial violence. Here, we find the humanism that Deleuze and Guattari so urgently struggle to shed, but that, nonetheless, pursues them in the haunting of

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Dir. John Paskievich’s *If Only I Were an Indian*.

becoming-animal and its implication in the history of colonial dehumanization. Buffalo Bill aptly sets the backdrop for this sideshow of reversals and becomings-dehumanized.

## 4.2 *Becomings-Buffalo*

Born William Cody in 1846, this American soldier, buffalo hunter and entertainer was transformed from William Cody to Buffalo Bill, and experienced a becoming-animal of his own. He earned the nickname Buffalo Bill by killing more than 4000 buffalo while under a six-month contract to supply buffalo meat to the Kansas Pacific Railroad. Cody's prowess at buffalo killing occurred in the context of a mass slaughter by settler societies (often for sport) that brought the buffalo near extinction (along with the Indigenous inhabitants that were dependent upon them). Cody was also celebrated as an 'Indian Killer,' which he proudly recounts in *An Autobiography of Buffalo Bill*. In some editions, the story appears under the subheading "How I Killed My First Indian." He writes:

Presently the moon rose, dead ahead of me. And painted boldly across its face was the black figure of an Indian. There could be no mistaking him for a white man. He wore the war-bonnet of the Sioux, and at his shoulder was a rifle, pointed at someone in the bottom below him. I knew well enough that in another second he would drop one of my friends. So I raised my Yaeger and fired. I saw the figure collapse, and heard it come tumbling thirty feet down the bank, landing with a splash in the water. [...] "What is it?" asked McCarthy [...] "Hi!" he cried. "Little Billy's killed an Indian all by himself!" (Cody 33-34)

Hence, when young Cody meets his anomalous Other, he kills him — the first of many whose humanity would obscure his vision of the Americas as vacant and free for the taking. Reduced to an ‘it,’ the ‘Indian’ is dehumanized and thus, like the buffalo, is fit to be slaughtered. In order to validate young Cody’s actions, the threat to his friend is hyper-contextualized in the anonymous and menacing characterization of the Sioux, which presents Cody not as a murderer but as a heroic hunter (of beasts). This narrative underscores the social acceptability of Indian killings, while skewing the colonial context in which this Sioux is found defending his homeland. The demonization of the ‘Indian’ is located in the overly dramatized silhouette, the contour of which denies the seat of identity—the face, where a subjective recognition might occur. Consequently, this outline, or ‘it,’ becomes a screen that prevents Cody from responding ethically to his personhood. The description “painted across its face” also evokes culturally specific practices of body painting (often equated with primitivism) employed by many Indigenous populations, including the Sioux. Cody’s deployment of this trope, thus, not only conflates diverse Indigenous cultures into one vilified Other (as Red Indian) but also dissolves distinct personages into this one disfiguration.<sup>36</sup>

Biased colonial attitudes regarding ‘Indianness’ obscured the historical context, for young Cody, to such a degree that he could not conceive of this Sioux as human in a relatable sense. Instead, the recognition of individuality is compressed into a projection

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<sup>36</sup> Regarding this term, ‘Red Indian,’ it was rumoured that upon John Cabot’s inaugural voyage to the ‘Americas,’ he had observed the Newfoundland Beothuck ‘Indians’ with their entire bodies painted in red ochre. This contributed to the widespread identification of all Indigenous peoples of the Americas as the ‘Red Man.’ This misnomer spread throughout Europe and mutated into the ‘Red Indian’ (Howley).

that underlies colonial consciousness but is perceived to line the surface of the face as ‘Other.’ Hence, a disruption and contradiction reveal a semblance of a ‘thing,’ which is discerned, via his ‘war-bonnet,’ as an ‘Indian.’ This judgement contests the humanity of Cody’s counterpart, which is reluctantly identified but only as ominous figuration and non-identity, disclosed in the designation ‘it.’ Ergo, the becoming-animal of Cody becoming-Buffalo Bill signals his becoming-inhumane. In other words, for Aboriginal and Western peoples alike, this colonial encounter involves a process of reversals and dehumanization.

### **4.3 *William Cody’s Transformative Intrigue***

William Cody’s encounter with his anomalous Other transforms him into Buffalo Bill. Yet, this intrigue already pervades the colonial imaginary and, thus, is returned a second time by Western audiences fascinated by the carnivalesque. It is an intrigue that Buffalo Bill’s Wild West spectacle promised to fulfil. These alliances created monstrous demonizations in the figure of the ‘Indian’— an integral façade necessary to reign in the wild, vast and furious frontier. This feedback between Buffalo Bill and his audiences formed what Deleuze and Guattari celebrate as “illicit unions” (Deleuze and Guattari 246). Here the tepid waters of homologous same-species procreation are contrasted to the exhilarating turbulence of profane and aberrant amalgamations that precipitate such illicit unions. This anomalous “relation of alliances” spread heterogeneously through contagion to form “abominable [interkingdom] loves” (Deleuze and Guattari 246). According to Deleuze and Guattari, “it is the return of the alliance [... and] the reaction of this alliance

on the first family, that produce werewolves by feedback effect” (Deleuze and Guattari 246). This feedback transformed seemingly humane acts of civility into beastly atrocities (as witnessed in colonial attempts to ‘educate’ the Indian through forced residential schooling and religious interventions where Indigenous children and youth were subjected to extreme physical, sexual, psychological and cultural abuses, which many would, in turn, bring home to their own communities). These colonizing tactics (initiated to eliminate cultural difference) thus produced werewolves in the form of contemporary abuses that now infect Indigenous communities. This savage alien not only comprises but also *compromises* the border between settler societies and Indigenous cultures from within the structures that support their differences. This constructed image of indigeneity not only divides by distinguishing what falls within and outside of these ‘authentic’ categories, but also interpenetrates and spreads out to infect subsequent realities (Western and Indigenous).<sup>37</sup> Settlers envisioned painted Indians creeping menacingly along the edges of their homesteads. Yet, alongside this becoming-dehumanized process, these fears and secret desires also disclose the feedback effect of the becoming-inhuman of the colonial West (as the first family to Buffalo Bill). That is, in terms of the ‘white man’s

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<sup>37</sup> As opposed to dismantling the threat posed by the ‘red man,’ these early assimilation projects actually created, pronounced and doubled his menacing presence. This then produced racialized fictions with material effects (such as abject poverty and the disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous populations). However, the offensive ‘offspring’ of these interventions (that being the intergenerational effects of colonialism) assume the form of so many communal abuses that range from minor dysfunction to extreme expressions of trauma. As such, these symptoms have now penetrated that perceived ‘essential’ difference, which undergirds these stereotypes. Indeed, today trauma lines the very consciousness of Indigenous communities who grapple with how to appreciate their distinct cultures before, aside and amidst these colonial catastrophes.

burden,' the West was compelled to provide evidence of his own humanity in the imaginary face of the 'it' inscribed as the nonhuman Other. Despite this complicated relationship, Indigenous peoples are not considered to be nomadic, in Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term, because Indians band together under affiliating totemic relations.

Since this figure was conjured from the Western imaginary, one might argue that there are no 'authentic' Indians left, nor did they ever exist (Francis). One might venture further still to suggest that this figure actually represents 'white' settlers themselves (a Frenchman, perhaps). Yet, what of the Indigenous inhabitants whose cultural, philosophical, technological, political and scientific knowledge was exported to Europe to become appropriated, molested and distorted in order to form the basis of those fictions? Association with the imaginary Indian and the buffalo transfigured William Cody into the Buffalo Bill icon, whose exploits, in turn, gave way to the "initiatory journeys" of Aboriginal peoples (real and imagined). Thus, each "changes" according to the "stages of a journey", with each intensity inter-dispersing to become all the more intricately embroiled, one with the other (Deleuze and Guattari 249).

#### **4.4     *A Pact with the Red Indian***

It is with the 'Red Indian' that William Cody—and, I daresay, Deleuze and Guattari—forge a pact. Although constructed in the West, this fiction contaminates actual Indigenous realities. Buffalo Bill's becoming-Indian and becoming-inhumane are



especially poignant for contemporary Indigenous peoples who, as a result of colonial violence, must negotiate a slippage between complex Indigenous cultures and impoverished stereotypes. Romanticisms emerge as complicated encrustations of peripheral and primary engagements and characterizations that accompany Western and Indigenous expectations. The interplay of these expectations renders actual and desired circumstances difficult to distinguish. The romantic dimensions of such images combine with the invisible lines that blur given norms and their accompanying forms of discrimination. This tightly woven knot might be further complicated by positive enforcements evoked in localized settings. Nevertheless, these seemingly affirmative characterizations also always transmit traces of their reversed derogatory implications. As such, romantic images are also repudiated in efforts to shed the inertia inherent to such fossilized terms.

The figure of the 'Indian' has something in common with actual Indigenous realities. Regardless of the nature and origin of this relationship, the attributes and history of this figure have become forever enmeshed with the many distinct Aboriginal cultures of the Americas. This homogenized figure elicits alliances that create new assemblages amongst new peoples that politically mobilize around the many forms of discrimination that it yields. If there are similarities between these diverse peoples it does not lie in this worn-out figure (though at times usefully deployed) but rather in a shared eco-ontology. These Aboriginal philosophies operate outside of liberal humanism, as *other* to humanism. Many regard animals as well as plants and 'inanimate' objects (such as stones) as relations of human beings. This is to say that the definition of human subjectivity is not limited to a bounded particular. Moreover, these ontologies throw the entire concepts of

humanity and animism, and even notions of what constitutes life itself, into question. Concepts like *kinaguna*,<sup>38</sup> for example, suggest a completely different understanding of agency and what it means to be human. Although *kinaguna* is translated as “all my relations/relatives”, the nature of this relationality is indeterminate. But it is most often pragmatically transcribed along Western conceptions of human correspondence or, in other words, as familial kinship. Yet, no equivalent term in English conveys the expanding and contracting sense of this concept. *Kinaguna* does not externalize the world via anthropomorphism. But, in reverse it apprehends the world as conditioning consciousness, selfhood and agency.

In a sense, these *Anishinaabe* ontologies assert that ‘humanity’ is ‘given’ to ‘humans,’ or, rather, that subjective consciousness is acquired through this interrelationality with other forms of ‘being’ or expressions of existence. They are *kinaguna* in the sense of interrelations and interdependence. Contact with the West threatens multiple distinct Aboriginal cultures and their becomings, which collide with the monolithic Red Indian image. New Age Indian lovers and the like may see the ‘noble savage’ as becoming more human (when self-possession is mistaken for a civilized measure of self-restraint), while affronted by the harsh contemporary realities that refuse these romantic ‘Indian’ ideals. Ironically, the simultaneous rupture with becomings (the ones that are re-inscribed as

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<sup>38</sup> *Nii kina ganaa*, “all my relations/relatives”, is an expression of respect and gratitude in the Potawatomi-Ojibwe dialect employed on my reserve, Kikonaang miinawaa Aazhoodenaang (Kettle and Stoney Point), as well as Bkejwanong (Walpole Island). Both reserves are mixed Ojibwe-Potawatomi. In Anishinaabemowin, the term “Indinawemaaganidog” is used for this concept. It is a mediating phrase, often employed in prayer, acknowledging our openness and dependence (as the youngest and most fallible entities) towards all that is ‘unknown’ and other, but that, nevertheless, makes possible our very existence.

becoming more human in the face of the West's inhumanity) also offers the route by which these groups gain the political gravity of a majoritarian politics, while remaining stigmatized as primitive savages according to Deleuze and Guattari's molar standards.

Becoming-animal, exemplified here in the becomings of Buffalo Bill through his pact with the imaginary Indian, is thus an ambivalent becoming for *Anishinaabe* peoples as opposed to the inherently revolutionary becomings that Deleuze and Guattari specify. It is a journey initiated by the contagion between the West and its Indigenous Others.

Caught up in the swell of this 'postcolonial' aftermath, it is difficult to conceive of such 'contagion' as anything but catastrophic, since exposure to new diseases, including intentional contagion through the distribution of smallpox-infected blankets, quite literally eradicated up to 80% of the North American Indigenous population after contact (Wilson and Northcott 25-27). Yet, for Deleuze and Guattari, contagion is valorized as the very mode by which experiences of multiple becomings commence. They write, "Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes" (Deleuze and Guattari 241). It is through a fascination with the perceived multiplicity and its subsequent affectuation that "the human being encounters the animal" (Deleuze and Guattari 239). Perceived as such, individuals are stirred by a horror for what they sense dwelling within themselves (Deleuze and Guattari 240).

Deleuze and Guattari urge us to accept an experience of a dispersion of molecules. Yet, this "awareness" of existing as indistinguishable beings and becomings is a horror that seems too overwhelming, too divergent for them to fathom, at least, as anything more than the correlative affect of a self-positing agency (Deleuze and Guattari 240). The tale of "Little Hans" dispersing with horse and street, for example, elucidates the experience

of intensities arising from the entwinement of form and abstraction that result from an interaction between phenomenal bodies and abstract cognitive processes (Deleuze and Guattari 256). This is made evident in Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that one does "not imitate a dog; but [rather] make your organism enter into composition with something else," in which case, the "making" of one's organism suggests that becoming is a wilfully produced engagement (274). Yet, the "making of your organism" could just as easily be interpreted as allowing an opening for affect to overwhelm. It can also be defined as an endeavour, which is manufactured insofar as both instances require an active self-invested agent. Where Deleuze and Guattari become "fascinated with a peopling of rats," they relate to the similitude located "within" and "through" humanity as well as in the "interstices" of a "disrupted self" that they "experience the animal as the only population before which they are responsible in principle" (240). Thus, they are bound not only through modes of expansion but also through the very "filiation by heredity," which they disavow, not *if* but *as* "the two themes [pack and classification] intermingle and require each other" (Deleuze and Guattari 241). This multiplicity, achieved through modes rather than by classification, also identifies the banding together of Indians as a proliferation of difference—in which case 'Indian bands' waver between civilized societies (albeit ones still identified as 'primitive') for adhering to hereditary lines and, at the same time, collapsing with animal packs, which run together without apparent justification other than proximal relations. This fascination with pack modes and their becoming-possibilities, which these writers relate to as an Othering within oneself, is the same fixation that sets the "initiatory journeys" of Buffalo Bill with his Indian Other in motion (Deleuze and Guattari 249).

There is a contagion between Bill Cody and the figure of Buffalo Bill that spreads through his pact with Western imperialism as well as through his unwitting pact with the demonized Indian. This contamination filters back and forth between these zones of becoming, infecting the contemporary consciousness of the Americas. This feedback loop, thus, offers a “rupture with the central institutions” and their homogenizing structure (Deleuze and Guattari 247). This rupture results from the emergence of becoming-human in relation to becoming-animal for both molar and minor realities as they disband and forge fleeting alliances that swell together and, at the same time, become monstrously Othered to one another in the dispersion of minoritarian concerns. This in turn disrupts a fixed majoritarian politics. Deleuze and Guattari write of these dissolving identity affiliations,

[B]ecoming-animal is an affair of sorcery because (1) it implies an initial relation of alliance with a demon; (2) the demon functions as the borderline of an animal pack, into which the human being passes or in which his or her becoming takes place, by contagion; (3) this becoming itself implies a second alliance, with another human group; (4) this new borderline between the two groups guides the contagion of animal and human being within the pack. (247)

In a like sense, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West exhibition and *A Thousand Plateaus* forge a pact with audiences that unite around the spectacle of the Indigenous Other. It is a pact/pack, in which audiences/readers advance the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples by passively or uncritically engaging with it. Western humanism historically distinguishes its own humanity by making animals or ‘sub-humans’ of its Others. Such conflicts inspire the call by Deleuze and Guattari to become-animal, to follow the swell

of that anomalous Other and release oneself from one's molar assertions. Becoming-animal, as such, is an attempt to shed privilege. Referencing William Faulkner in that endeavour, Deleuze and Guattari write that "to avoid ending up a fascist there was no other choice but to become-black" (292). However, this misguided effort to disperse with Faulkner merely erases the very blackness that it claims to become. This approach hence fails to abandon privilege and, instead, sheds only the responsibility that one must take for one's privilege.

The term 'becoming-animal' thus signals a complex and conflicted terrain with respect to Indigenous peoples. In this, a majoritarian politics is necessitated in order to gain access to basic human rights in a colonial context, which not only privileges certain individuals over others, but also privileges humans over all else. Where, for Deleuze and Guattari, becoming-animal is a strategy intended to shed one's privilege, for First Nations peoples, 'becoming-human' (an oxymoron for Deleuze and Guattari) is a necessary majoritarian strategy to gain rights and representation in states that did not, officially, acknowledge the humanity of the 'Indian' until as recently as 1956. But becoming-human is also a form of assimilation that renders Aboriginals imperceptible in the worst kind of way. Indeed, it is intended to make these culturally distinct peoples disappear altogether (through a process of 'whitening'). In point of fact, cultural genocide was an overt policy objective of the Canadian and American governments that has resulted in the extreme exploitation and marginalization of Aboriginal peoples today.

## 4.5 *Critique of Becoming-Animal*

The distinction between becoming-animal and dehumanization possesses an interesting twofold dilemma for Aboriginals in the colonial context of the Americas. First, there are the difficulties of cultural misconceptions and their subsequent romanticizations (i.e., ‘stewards of the land’ or ‘at one with nature’). In such instances, First Nations peoples’ relationship to nature/animals is interpreted as a self-referential kind of agency that merely domesticates nature/animals by assimilating them into a totemic collapse of “symbolic correspondence” (Deleuze and Guattari 247–48). According to Deleuze and Guattari, totemic relationships merely draw “us into a narcissistic contemplation” (240). On the other hand, First Nations peoples are persistently dehumanized on the basis of their ‘Indianness.’ Indeed, debates ensued throughout the colonial era questioning whether or not native peoples were, in fact, even human. In the United States, Indigenous inhabitants gained legal ‘human’ status in the 1879 Standing Bear trial (Dando-Collins; Dundy), whilst in Canada they did not enjoy the citizenship rights of adult humans until 1956, nor did they have the right to vote until 1960 (Leslie and Maguire 152).

Indigenous philosophies and methodologies are strikingly different from those of the colonial newcomers. While Aboriginal ontologies vary, generally, they understand existence as a kind of relational becoming, a discourse between all that exists. Humans do not assume primacy in these theories of co-existence. Rather, agency and interdependence not only are recognized between human and animal relations, but also are identified in and amongst animate and inanimate, material and incorporeal entities. Political and social structures, reflecting this cosmology, tend to be consensual rather

than hierarchical, acknowledge fluid subject positions and non-binary gender variance, have equal gender relations and are often egalitarian. These realities, which might be defined as ‘minoritarian’ were not only foreign to emerging settler societies but also inconceivable as anything other than a beastly threat. Even so, the continued impoverished existence of Indigenous populations today challenges the growing idealized fantasies of an impartial posthumanism. Both derogatory and romantic ‘Indian’ images project versions of becoming-animal onto Aboriginal peoples, in modes that have resulted in complicated social inequities, which are equated with a depraved and essential animality (wild and domestic). In this, complex Indigenous cultures are reduced to mythologies, their assertions defined as reactionary and previously as instinctual, instead of a kind of reason undertaken along culturally distinct lines of co-responsiveness (equated with intuition). As such, they are rendered as dependent Others to the tolerant West.

The identification of injustices makes necessary a majoritarian politics by, and for, Indigenous populations confronted with the harsh realities of living in a colonized homeland. Yet, majoritarian politics concretize these groups as hapless minorities, once more stripped of agency (yet again depicted as teetering on the edge of extinction)<sup>39</sup>. This ‘charitable’ gesture at inclusion (extended to the ‘underprivileged’) not only solidifies this space of oppression but also is contaminated with the residue of a ‘self-inflicted primitivism.’ Hence, Aboriginal peoples continue to be feared, pitied and romanticized,

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<sup>39</sup> This is not unlike the images of vanishing tribes, popularized in American media, scholarship and Wild West literature of the recent past. Indeed, the theme of the vanishing Indian was a key marketing ploy of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West (Kasson 17).



for the unknown Otherness of the constructed 'Indian' retains the façade of a self-generating beastliness. The view that Indigenous cultures lack sophistication is, often, alluded to as the 'real' underlying source of the inequities experienced by their members. This perspective unfolds as a form of blindness, or denial, of the socio-political and economic structures that perpetuate disenfranchisement arising from colonial policies and their contemporary consequences (such as the complicated and continually unfolding devastation resulting from residential school abuses). Oversights such as these fail to address the radical disparities that continue to exist between Western and Indigenous philosophies, values, and cultures (despite any cross-fertilization). These profound differences (some obvious and many others intricate and subtle) aggravate postcolonial relations, but herein also lies the possibility of a new conversation and a new set of relations.

#### **4.6      *Undressing the Beautiful Savage***

The difficulties presented by this mix of stereotypes with so-called authentic traditional expressions is the dilemma that artists Lori Blondeau and Adrian Stimson subvert in performance works that take up the theme of Buffalo Bill and the Wild West. These performances address the relationship between historical and contemporary Western fears and desires, which are identified in the figure of the 'Indian.' Having formed new assemblages with the West, traces of this imaginary figure can be glimpsed haunting the critical and uncritical terrain of contemporary Indigenous cultures. Stimson and Blondeau

seize the contradiction, whereby the imaginary ‘Indian’ figure is both taken up and resisted by contemporary Indigenous peoples.

Blondeau’s persona *Belle Sauvage*, based on real turn-of-the-twentieth-century Buffalo Bill’s Wild West performers Molly Spotted Elk and Lost Bird, is, as art critic Lynne Bell describes, both believable and absurd. In *A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage* (2002), Blondeau creates a cathartic camp melodrama in the guise of a historical Wild West show. She uses parody to disrupt the hegemony of colonial memory, as Bell writes, “challenging and disempowering the inherited violence embedded in Western ways of knowing the world” (Bell, “Scandalous Personas” 51). Queer Indian cowgirls and cowboys who live between worlds populate Blondeau’s Old West. Stimson’s Buffalo Boy, likewise, represents the negotiation of multiplicity: Bell describes Buffalo Boy as multi-gendered, “neither human, beast, boy nor girl—giv[ing] us access to the *trans*, to the crossing of boundaries, to metamorphosis and the hybrid” (Bell, “Buffalo Boy” 44).

Stimson’s 2005 site-specific exhibition, *Buffalo Boy’s Heart On: Buffalo Boy’s 100 Years of Wearing His Heart on His Sleeve*, presents a centennial counter-memory that disrupts dominant provincial histories of white settler culture by inserting the parodic, campy Buffalo Boy into historical photos. In these, Stimson re-envisioned the assimilationist project of residential schools, recounts the buffalo slaughter and points to other colonial events. In a performance series called *Buffalo Boy’s Wild West Peep Show*, Buffalo Boy camps it up while dancing to powwow music, the *Dances with Wolves* soundtrack and techno-Aboriginal music. As Stimson changes costumes and roles, audience members witness the transformation of Buffalo Boy as he crosses multiple identities that range “from the corporate Indian to traditional powwow dancer to shaman-exterminator” while

spectators watch through a peephole in his studio or performance space (Bell, “Buffalo Boy” 47). The phenomenological experience of bending down to voyeuristically peer through a peephole, beyond closed doors, forces audience members to embody the perverse historical advances made by the West. It implicates and challenges audiences to consider the continuation of these roles in undressing and redressing Indigenous becomings as the monstrous and profane. In their performance works, Blondeau and Stimson flaunt their queer bestial intersubjective becomings as that which continues to lie beyond the taming reach of the West.

Blondeau and Stimson engage with transforming identities/stereotypes of North American Indigenous peoples by creating personas that are multiplicities, patching together stereotypes and traditional Aboriginal roles. As the ‘*Sauvage*’ and ‘Buffalo’ nominations suggest, these roles are cast in a spectacle of the becoming-animal. The performances employ humour in order to confront the limitations and complexities of contemporary Indigenous identities as they evolve in relation to settler societies. In the passing through of becoming, these artists form a block between the multiple positions to which each has been subjected and to the expectations placed on them by both Aboriginal and Western contexts. Blondeau and Stimson’s critiques emerge from Indigenous worldviews that operate outside, and simultaneously inside, of Western human/posthuman conventions. Consequently, unlike Deleuze and Guattari, they are able to avoid the persistent infection of humanism in its alternative.

## 4.7 *Becoming-Human*

Deleuze and Guattari's complex analysis of becoming appears, on the surface, to break with traditional Western epistemological models. However, not only do they begin with a humanist approach but also the sweeping intensities, stirred in these blocks of becoming, arise in conjunction with the embodied cognitive subject intersecting with his or her surroundings. This thinking subject, furthermore, defines and thus also colonizes his or her reality even while moving in amongst these torrents of relational becomings. These becomings-animal must be rethought at the intersection of contingency and deliberation. The many instances of power exerted through or amidst an infinite set of purposeful calculations and unforeseen ruptures in identity formation work hand-in-hand to undo lines of flight that become arrested in the *will* and *choice* necessary for making microdistinctions. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal not only erases the majoritarian cause of dispossession for minority groups, but also allows individual accountability for privilege to fade out of sight, as a different sort of vanishing line or line of flight. Similarly, the blocks of becoming, proposed by these authors, perpetually cast away human responsibility. On the one hand, the phenomenon of 'becoming' in Deleuze and Guattari's sense appears to be marked with a kind of abandonment, in which one is swept up into "interassemblage haecceities" in an experience of pure affect (Deleuze and Guattari 262). Yet, with regard to the 'thought-provoking' composition that becoming-animal stirs, they write,

[I]t is in him that the animal "bares his teeth at monstrous fate." It is not a feeling of pity, as he makes clear; still less an identification. It is a composition of speeds

and affects involving entirely different individuals, a symbiosis; it makes the rat become a thought, a feverish thought in the man, at the same time as the man becomes a rat gnashing its teeth in its death throes. The man and the rat are in no means the same thing, but Being expresses them both in a single meaning in a language that is no longer that of words. (Deleuze and Guattari 258)

This assemblage between rat and man does not merely arise from an uncontrollable rupture that sweeps the man away by affect. Regardless of the intensity of the fever, or however passionate the impulse, that wells up inside the block of becoming experienced by the man (which plummets him into dispersing with the dying rat), this affect of becoming-rat is filtered through what “is in him” as an embodied experience operating in conjunction with abstract cognitive processes (Deleuze and Guattari 258). This affect is filtered through a ‘thought’ that not only is “in the man” but also *becomes* the man (258). These becomings not only depend on this “feverish thought” (258), but this undertaking also requires subjective volition, which is “applied in the course of events” to the “criteria” that “guide us through the dangers” indicative of becomings and multiplicities (251). To reiterate, Deleuze and Guattari write that one should “not imitate a dog; but make your organism enter into composition with something else in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity, into which they enter” (274). This rationale, necessary in determining the “criterion” along with the decisive act required for motivating “your organism” to assemble with a particular aggregate in a particular way, implicitly conveys that such a self-possession and endeavour unequivocally proceed from a self-willing agent who would, presumably, do so according

to the balanced calculation of gains and losses. Even the momentary lapses, when one is swept up into the affect of the pack without predetermined reflection, are overridden by the *decision* to act according to “the making” of a subjective agency.

The deterritorialized becomings of becoming-animal, thus, take on a decidedly humanist aspect—for its authors cannot help but territorialize their Other, as they mark out their own space of deterritorialization. These self-identified sorcerer/shamans usher in our more recent reflections on affect. However, along with Buffalo Bill (the great entertainer and Indian killer), they too represent a new breed of colonizer. This veiled imperialism is dressed in drag to conceal humanism, dressed down as posthumanism, for the show. Yet, the becoming-animal concept is dependent on humancentric practices: “(you can become-dog with cats, or become monkey with a horse), or an apparatus or prosthesis to which a person subjects the animal (muzzle and reindeer, etc.), or something that does not even have a localizable relation to the animal in question” (Deleuze and Guattari 274). The “you” addressed is clearly directed towards human consciousness. Moreover, it is directed towards the subjection of all else that is drawn into this vortex of human-centred general causalities. Thus, the subject as such transforms difference into what is most human and most relatable to itself.

The human centre, concealed in Deleuze and Guattari’s complex ‘posthuman’ labyrinth, is the threshold through which the concept of becoming-animal is underscored by its link to becoming-woman. Here, sexual difference is ranked first in a hierarchy of oppressions that characterize (Western) human relations to difference (as in second-wave feminism). To this effect, these Western theorists contend that “becoming-woman is the first quantum, or molecular segment, with the becomings-animal that link up with it coming

next” (Deleuze and Guattari 279). On the one hand, their theory of merging and dissipating blocks of becoming attempts to obviate a misperception of time, read as chronological points of reference, since according to Deleuze and Guattari existence is composed of pure process, in which we are always already on route to becoming something else. However, by stating that becoming first arises from humans, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that this ‘first,’ even if it jumps between and enters into the middle, implicitly conveys that the movement that proceeds from this entity (an assemblage that spreads from a “minimum” amount of retained form) is paramount as a centrality of force (270). It would then contract, expand and circulate around and within these particles. Becomings-animal, in this instance, is implicated as a human-specific—or, at least, a human-centred—endeavour (driven by the micro-instances of the human consciousness—around which Deleuze and Guattari constantly reassemble in their collaborations), which in turn evokes subjectivity that further entrenches the becoming-animal theory in the thinking subject of humanism.

## **4.8 Conclusion**

These criticisms notwithstanding, Deleuze and Guattari do forward a philosophy of becoming that strives to open itself towards difference. However, the fact that this can also be said of humanism (that rationalizing agent of imperialism) should not be forgotten. No doubt, these authors are sincere in their efforts at decolonization, and see themselves as allies who strive to think about becoming and multi-species relationality, according to the philosophical principles of Indigenous peoples, amongst other

influences. And they are not entirely without success, although a comparative analysis of *A Thousand Plateaus* in relation to Indigenous philosophies is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, there is a tendency, especially in popular scholarship responding to this text, to romanticize these authors, along with concepts such as becoming-animal and nomadism, and to overlook or even to celebrate their territorialization of Indigenous thought. Deleuze and Guattari are philosophers whose texts are grounded deeply in the Western canon: uncritical and romantic readings fail to do them justice. And they certainly fail to do justice to complex Indigenous philosophies and violent colonial histories. Such misguided readings provide the context in which *A Thousand Plateaus* begins to resemble the greatest show on earth, and reduce becoming-animal to the fictional status of a New Age shaman.

Yet, even the greatest show on earth can be a site of decolonization, and an opening for Indigenous critics to talk back. This is certainly the message forwarded by those tricksters *Belle Sauvage* and Buffalo Boy, who simultaneously subvert cowboy and cowgirl conceptions along with the iconic Buffalo Bill image (which epitomize American political ‘shoot-from-the-hip’ ideals). Indeed, William Cody is initiated into becoming Buffalo Bill through his encounter with the anomalous ‘Indian’ (synonymous to his buffalo-hunting excursions). It is also through this meeting that his majoritarian stardom, as the figure of the West, is won. However, with their re-envisioning, and trajectories of becoming, *Belle Sauvage* and Buffalo Boy ‘deflower’ the machismo of Buffalo Bill’s hetero-normativity and dispute the dehumanizing objectification of Aboriginal peoples by critically engaging with these Western stereotypes. They become, in their humorous



performance characterizations, the object becoming-nonobject with their interrogation of these crucial junctures.

The transformative becoming-minoritarian influence of the ‘Indian’ or, rather, of Indigenous peoples is not restricted to these contemporary performance artists. For it would appear that the Aboriginal performers of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West (including Sitting Bull, 20 of his warriors and their families) also possessed the transformative powers of the anomalous Other. Historical testimonies portray Buffalo Bill as a humanitarian and an environmentalist who provided decent work to disadvantaged peoples. Ironic as this seems, for the celebrated buffalo hunter and Indian killer, it appears that William Cody’s anomalous Other did have the effect of stirring a real becoming-animal, in Deleuze and Guattari’s revolutionary sense, initiating a new assemblage in a context that was shifting under Cody’s own transformations.

The later Buffalo Bill did experience a dispersal of personal identities that led to his recognition of the molar possibilities of his new Lakota Sioux friends. In this regard he became an advocate, not only for the rights of native peoples and the honouring of treaties but also for the establishment of a hunting season (to prevent the extinction of the buffalo) and for the rights of women to work of their own choosing for equal pay. One can only surmise that his change in attitude resulted from years of living, in a line of flight, between worlds, in close proximity with his anomalous Other, under the influence of these Indigenous cast members. Although Buffalo Bill still represented Aboriginals as bloodthirsty savages in the exhibition battles, he also included an Indian village in the show that portrayed Lakota Sioux cast members as human—just regular families from another culture. This was achieved by having cast members set up and dwell in their

nomadic settlements, alongside the exhibition grounds, which gave audiences access to their actual homes and day-to-day activities. Here again, we see the to-and-fro becoming-exploitation of the transformation from beast to domestic animal through the assimilation or becoming-human of these Indigenous performers.

Deleuze and Guattari contend, “All so-called initiatory journeys include these thresholds and doors, where becoming itself becomes” (246). The multiple and divergent choices of William Cody and the becoming of his celebrity alter-ego Buffalo Bill arise at the cost of First Nations peoples’ exploitation and misrepresentation as savages in his Wild West expositions. Likewise, the initiatory journey of *Belle Sauvage* and Buffalo Boy’s plural identities are ushered in through Buffalo Bill’s imaginary relation to the territorialization, and simultaneous deterritorialization, of the Americas (which physically displaced Indigenous populations).

The characterization of Aboriginal peoples as savages, brought to life in the figure of the Red Indian, justified measures aimed at assimilation and eradication. This colonial project was epitomized in the widespread slaughter of the buffalo, the backdrop against which the buffalo killer reels against the fear of his own dissection and dispersion.

Buffalo Bill’s later humanitarian efforts do not distance him from his more famous earlier exploits any more than Stephen Harper’s apology for residential schools erases the history of colonization (despite the Prime Minister’s efforts to do just that, when the following year he made the audacious claim that Canada “has no history of colonization”) (Canada Newswire).

North and South American Indigenous populations still live with colonial violence, yet they persist as culturally distinct societies with unique philosophical traditions. At the same time, these cultures are not immutable. They exist in dialogue with settler societies and continue to adapt in the current context of global diversity. Moreover, despite the deployment of strategies to re-invigorate cultural distinctiveness, in response to state assimilation policies, Aboriginal peoples are ‘traditionally’ open to newness as an inevitable aspect of their relational ontologies and oral practices. As such, storytelling is an engagement of iterable repetition as opposed to a mere restaging of fossilized narratives. This call to newness or to the ‘unknown’ permeates many of these philosophies, often as a tacit subtext that paradoxically conforms to established conventions. Encounters with global philosophies, assimilation policies and the prevalence of misrepresentations and stereotypes render these distinctions impossible to fully disentangle from the doorways that usher in their transmutations.

Thus, while Deleuze and Guattari may be “content to mark the thresholds through which an idea passes” (235), Indigenous peoples cannot afford to *uncritically* allow ideas (either about them or appropriated from them) to float freely across their borders. Indeed, such ideas threaten to (de)territorialize them once again, for these thresholds are not only ‘marked,’ but they have the capacity to mark back. These inscriptions not only verify that a threshold has been traversed but also record a series of permanent transformations. This is particularly problematic considering that such encounters have consistently resulted in explicit attempts to efface divergent Indigenous practices. Knowledge deriving from these practices is, subsequently, displaced as myth (too fragmentary, varied and disparate

to authenticate). In contrast Western thought is equally often aligned with fact, which is profoundly validated by its own history of textual citation and logical correspondence.

Becoming-animal is an affair of sorcery because it involves being and becoming multiple things at once—Cody and Buffalo Bill, killer and rights advocate, human and animal, becoming-animal, becoming-dehumanized and becoming-inhumane as he becomes-human through the other: memory and counter-memory. The line that vanishes as it takes flight is a tricky one—the *Anishinaabe* capture it in tales of tricksters like *Belle Sauvage* and Buffalo Boy. Deleuze and Guattari might be tricksters too, for that line of flight, in becoming-animal, is an undecidable one. Yet, to glamorize this dispersion is to deny this perpetually reassembling and inherent passage through liberal humanism. Regardless of how fleeting, this fluctuation between dissolving and assembling, unfailingly, inaugurates a subjective historically positioned and particularized mark of individualism. Thus, these assemblages also circulate within, re-gather around and perpetuate molar assertions, which are all the more veiled but nonetheless, actualized.

## Chapter 5

### 5 The Murmuration of Birds: An Anishinaabe Ontology of Mnidoo-Worlding

This chapter sketches out precursory notes on the entangled ontology of the Ojibwe-Pottawatami Anishinaabe, members of the Algonquian language family, particularly regarding mnidoo (spirit/mystery, “potency, potential”), animacy, and other-than-human persons. Since this concept mnidoo is difficult to translate linguistically with all of its intricacies intact, I conduct here a phenomenological—that is, an experientially embodied—translation, which, in my view, is more in keeping with everyday lived-indigeneities. We begin with a schematic drawing and a perplexing annotation on presence and consciousness to be investigated from a number of approaches throughout.

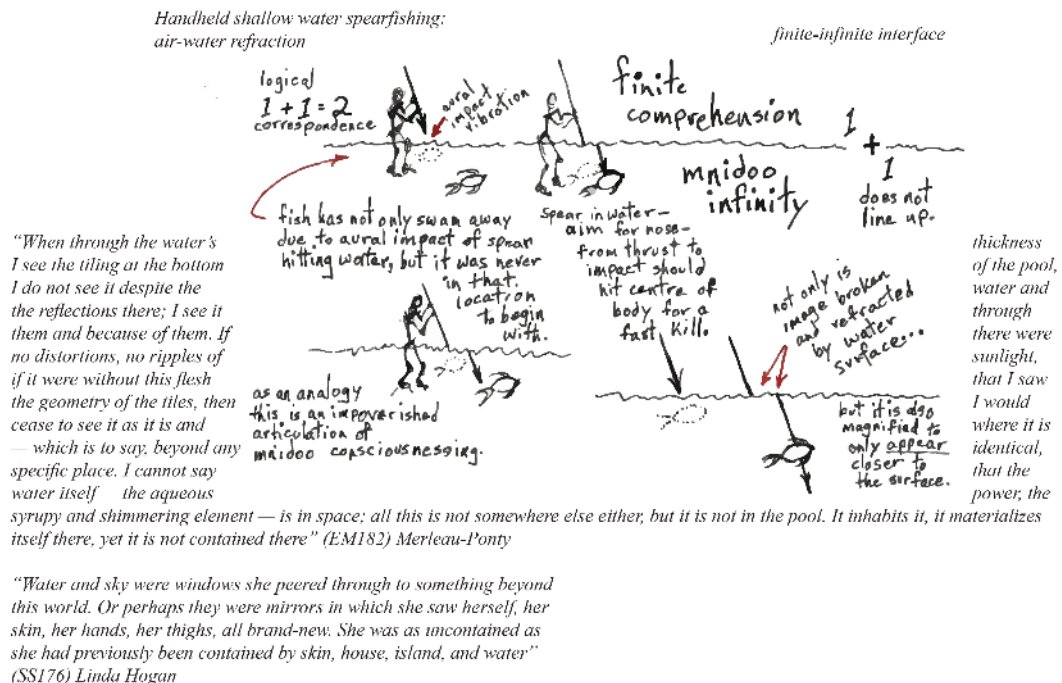


Figure 1 Interdimensional spearfishing

These range from the navigational acuity of flocks of birds, to the poetics of Chickasaw Indigenous author Linda Hogan and the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

These vignettes gather and break apart rather like a shoal of fish or a flock of birds—that is, with an eye for the immediate and a pulse in time with the infinite.

The schematic drawing here (fig.1) assembles the overlapping contour of infinity as expansion seen through the reflection of finitude's recoiling contraction into signification. The image is of a person spearfishing, their spear refracting in the water. However, this sketch does not represent spearfishing in itself. Instead, it articulates our thoroughgoing permeation with *mnidoo*, as seen through routine acts—that is, without recognizing it in an obvious way. The arrow depicts the direction of the thrust (whereas an actual spear would have three or more prongs). This diagram pronounces how an Anishinaabe *mnidoo* structure of correspondence and discord (or division/difference) is enmeshed without paradox when their variant dimensions are taken together as a fluctuating co-responsiveness. It should be noted that although I use the Ojibwe term *mnidoo*, similar concepts are shared by Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. It therefore takes expression in diverse forms. Even among Algonquian language groups there are numerous spellings and interpretations. Other than minimal linguistic definitions, my analysis in this chapter is restricted to philosophical inquiries in keeping with my mother's teachings and those from her home territories Kikonaang miinawaa Aazhoodenaang (Kettle and Stoney Point First Nations), and the neighboring Anishinaabe communities in Southwestern Ontario, in particular Bkejwanong (Walpole Island). My mother Rose Manning Mshkode-bzhikiikwe baa, was my formative teacher, and a first-language Ojibwe speaker. My interpretation of *mnidoo* is thus specifically an

Ojibwe-Anishinaabe interpretation, and more specifically my mother's interpretation, which I develop and elaborate on.

To begin to understand the intricacies of *mnidoo*, it is important to first grasp the significance of Ojibwe conceptions of ourselves as Anishinaabe. My mother translated Anishinaabe as meaning “a human being/ First Nations peoples” inscribed with exceptional ethical integrity as the prefix “*anishin*” articulates, whereas by specifying First Nations peoples (she might have said “Indian” in the 1970s and 80s), in my understanding, she identifies indigeneity as the expression of this exceedingly good “way of being” which the Ojibwe identify with. Her translation is consistent with Basil Johnston (“Is that All There Is” 6). This interpretation implies that other human cultures may not indwell in the same way as Anishinaabe beingness, or that “as a way of being” the Anishinaabeg carry an element of something that one becomes (as with a moving target we continuously strive to attain), or perhaps grow into, or awaken to what is already there. My mother and I initiated these discussions on translation together when I was in kindergarten in 1974 (after being called a “dirty Indian” at school for the first time that I can recall). The Ojibwe are one philosophical group among many Anishinaabeg who aim at *bimaadiziwin* “living in a good way” (unconsciously perhaps through what Merleau-Ponty describes as sedimentation or embodied social acquisition, as well as consciously). In other words, they live in a divine way, so to speak, both by emulating and being in possession of an aspect of “the first exceedingly good Anishinaabe (human *mnidoo* being) that was lowered down.” This way of living is also good in the sense of having been ignited, infused with, and open to this *anishin mnidoo*-beingness “an exceptionally respectful spirit or good way of being together.” Anishinaabe is integral to

conceptions of an interconnected web of life, co-existence, and “two-way positive” interrelationality (Rhodes “Going to go there”).

The spear fishing diagram thus represents the way that within an Anishinaabe worldview, existence is founded for us in the contortion between the limitations of human consciousness (embodied or otherwise) and *mnidoo*-worlding. The air-water refraction of the here and now bends and breaks images through the encounter of these two mediums. As such, transcendence is gathered into the infinitesimal as the instantaneous, which in return is laboriously concealed by corporeal demands and competing appetites (desirous or affective). This is illustrated in “selfish herd” collective motion theories as “a continuous movement towards the safety of the centre” in efforts to escape predators (theories, in my view, too pragmatic to account for another impetus and other ways of being attuned) (King and Sumpter 112, 114). This composition casts an exploratory glimpse toward the interconnected world of the Ojibwe Anishinaabe. Through attending to our immediate contact with the world—that is, by querying perception itself, as Merleau-Ponty contends—phenomenology similarly emphasizes life-knowledge and the world of experience. My phenomenological approach follows the subtle distinctions of an Anishinaabe community-oriented context that apprehends *kina* (all) as community but also as an unending body, which I arrive at through Ojibwe “thing” memory, as in the other-than-human that might be thought of as a pervasive *mnidoo* vitalism.

The tremulous dialogue of accessibility and unreachability presents the theory of *mnidoo*-worlding. The diagram articulates this simultaneous and elsewhere immanence of *mnidoo* as interfacial coalescence and refracting dissidence, wherein infinite differential microbursts meld to transmit a single fluctuating pulse—a reverberating wave that is



invisible to the direct gaze of human consciousness. I undertake mnidoo-worlding to be an unconscious conceding or an interruption of intentions that is embedded over generations. We address, here, differing dimensions and differing ways of being at the same instant (in this chapter I focus on finite/infinite mnidoo correspondence).

Moreover, this palimpsest or “memory/knowing” (as described by Indigenous elders) saturates and imbues (Elijah, “Soaring”). A palimpsest is something that has been written and erased, again and again. And as such, it ‘vibrates’ with these echoes, these traces that exert a ressure across time and space. In a sense, collapsing temporal notions of duration and the linear unfolding of events as they appear to finite beings such as human consciousness. Those faint

To be clear, I speak of differing ways of being at the same time. What follows is a close study of the elusive and faint eruption of mnidoo intimations, leaving aside, for now, brute phenomenal reality. However, mnidoo intangibles and sociality are integrally affective. Consequently, each is impacted by their competing demands. This is particularly evident when mnidoo presence appears to human consciousness only to be dismissed by rationalism as mere coincidence. Problematically, this also insists on a transparency of Anishinaabe lifeways while continuing to validate intellectualism over other kinds of knowledge. In return, Indigenous ways of knowing have been delegitimized, pathologized, and reduced to obscurantism, or primitive and infantile ineptitude. As a result, the widespread social inequities and patterns of abuse that plague Indigenous communities, due to settler colonialism, evoke paradoxes that appear inconsistent with the mnidoo world that I am proposing here.

traces exert a reverberating impression. I discussed this way of being attuned with the world with Haudenosaunee Elder Bruce Elijah (Wolf Clan), an Onyota’a:ka member of

the Oneida Settlement in Southwestern Ontario. In his language he used the term “sadoke” to describe that connection (my spelling). This concept of ‘thing memory’ that the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee share, subtends human consciousness as opposed to the other way around. I recall talk of “thing-memory/thing-knowing,” being spoken about in an implied/indirect manner. Thing-memory resonates somewhat with the concept “blood-memory,” which is cited in Anishinaabe contexts today but was not a familiar part of my childhood vocabulary. “Blood-memory” is a contentious term with an uncertain genealogy and meaning. The intergenerational memory that I conceptualize as a *mnidoo* interconnectedness between present people, ancestors, descendants, and all of our nonhuman relations *might* be described as blood-memory, referring to the animation of our very blood and cells as *mnidoo* potencies, with their own agency and way of knowing and communicating. I refer to this phrase cautiously. Blood-memory is controversial for essentializing Indigenous identity as a reduction to blood quantum, a racializing approach instituted by the *Indian Act* as part of a program of cultural genocide. As Kim Tallbear points out, it problematically conflates Indigenous identity with genetics, which could have deleterious consequences for land claims, self-determination, and resource struggles.

This appreciation—this intimation, this memory/knowing—is taken up into the unthought givens of what I contend is an Anishinaabe approach. Merleau-Ponty aligns such givenness with the natural attitude, although he also cautions that the “experience [*l'épreuve*] of absurdity and that of absolute evidentness are interdependent and even indiscernible,” (*Phenomenology* 309, 201: 2012). This suggests that all people sensibly gather and arrive at signification in the same way (in a manner, moreover, as it is defined

by western philosophy). This relegates orientation and valuation to the second-order operation of cognitive reflection. The Anishinaabe way of being is conveyed in Ojibwe/Potawatomi as *Nii kina ganaa* (“All my relations/All my relatives”; also implied is “My all/ My everything”) (“Potawatomi Dictionary”). *Nii kina ganaa* (All my relatives/All my relations) is the term spoken in my home community of Kikonaang miinawaa Aazhoodenaang (Kettle and Stoney Point), as well as nearby Bkejwanong (Walpole Island). Speakers use both *Nii kina ganaa* and *Kina enwemgig* (All the ones I’m related to); people elsewhere might use *Indinawemaaganidog* (Relatives). The spelling and translation for *Nii kina ganaa* was arrived at in several discussions, over time, with my mother, Stonefish, and language teacher Rita Sands (doing guesswork from oral accounts). However, I was unable to find this dialect of *Nii kina ganaa* in any Ojibwe dictionary. One possible source derives from the mixed Potawatami-Ojibwe ancestry of the people at Kikonaang miinawaa Aazhoodenaang and Bkejwanong. The Potawatami phrasing of *All my relations* is *jage nagonan*. Between the “my” and the “all” of “All My Relations” is a reciprocal possession and an interrelational gravity. The ownership is one of responsibility. The “mineness” inheres and indwells with an *everything* that is beyond finite comprehension but to which I am indebted. It is capitalized to acknowledge the profound significance of this coexistent autonomous/oneness structure.

The basic translation of *Anishinaabe* is the “original person/being” and it is the identifying term by which the Ojibwe know themselves. In my usage, a second translation ‘mode of being’ or ‘beingness’ always accompanies the first as an originary sedimented resonance. It is ‘original’ in the sense of the always already condition of possibility, which, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, is not only encrusted over a lifetime but

also intersubjectively sedimented over generations. I extend this concept to a condition of being attuned to what is there in the world in a particular way. Though often overlooked, this subtle and oblique comportment is an integral aspect of Anishinaabe philosophies. My mother described this as a kind of attentiveness toward what approaches from a distance or what is apprehended from the corner of one's eye (perhaps days or even years in advance). I would add that it quivers (almost imperceptibly) in the convergence of temporal bodies/potencies as they emit, acquiesce, and collapse into one atemporal/instantaneous body while, in another sense, retaining their separate phenomenal materiality. My mother surmised that the closest English term for this dialogue was "intuition." Along with visual acuity, this *intuiting* might also appraise fluctuations in temperature, air pressure, sound distortion, and so on. Yet there are other registers that fall outside of conventionally conceived modes of consciousness, even in a sense other to Merleau-Ponty's embodied consciousness—it is a question of accessibility and discernment.

This discreet knowledge-gathering approach informs my engagement with the mnidoo-infused world, as well as the enclosed investigations, since what's out in front is never entirely what or where it appears to be (all things are not only comprised of but also are broached by one another). Forever out on the periphery is where the "real" of mnidoo is most present—that is, just when that amorphous shudder begins to take shape. Since it passes through me, it is never fully and inextricably comprehensible as an object that stands apart from me. Neither does it emerge from my sideways glance turned toward an event, but rather from that unformed place—the periphery of an ocular event placed

elsewhere; from *there* it pressures the *here*, while I am attentive but not directly preoccupied with it.

These cursory notes open a conversation between the profoundly interconnective integrity of the Anishinaabe and the “savage mind”—that is, the pre- or non-reflective knowledge gathering of Merleau-Ponty (Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind*).<sup>40</sup> I elaborate on Ojibwe Anishinaabe ontology through what I term mnidoo-worlding that takes as its starting place the presumption of a life-world (Husserl’s *Lebenswelt*) populated by human and other-than-human persons, “entities/bodies” or, rather, potencies. I bring mnidoo-worlding into dialogue with Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmic postulate of an “ahuman lineate” (Mallin 264). Johnson asserts that while western interpreters of the concept “Manitous” (also spelled mnidoog) associate this concept with “spirits,” the Anishinaabe hold them in high esteem as *qualities* in the sense of “essence, transcendental, mystical, muse, patron and divine” (Johnston, *Manitous 2*). He writes:

[T]he word [Manitou/mnidoo] bears other meanings even more fundamental than ‘spirit’, as such, and/or pertaining to the deities; of a substance, character, nature, essence, quiddity beyond comprehension and therefore beyond explanation, a mystery; supernatural; potency, potential. (“One Generation from Extinction” 11)

I bring mnidoo into a philosophical context in order to query this inter(intra)relational stimulus.

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<sup>40</sup> Notably, Claude Lévi-Strauss dedicated *The Savage Mind* to Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty describes the conjoining of human corporeality with the world as a “field” that we are taken up into as the interface of an exposed “wound.” As such, it is taken for granted and routinely functions as an invisible backdrop that intra-marginally communicates situatedness. Much in the same way, I contend that Anishinaabe philosophies include a gathering-up and a being-there-together with the exception that they also break open onto an interminable and co-responsive permeation. These nonhuman-centered “traditional” or pre-Columbian Anishinaabe ontologies are, in theory, devoid of hierarchy. They strive for interrelational accord amid brutal contemporary forces that compose our complex lived Indigenous realities. The result is a philosophy that resists co-option and concedes to the heterogeneity of being.

I define this murmuration—that is, this concurrent gathering of fluctuating and divergent inflections—as *mnidoo-worlding*. My use of the term “worlding” brings Heidegger’s conceptions of “*In-der-Welt-sein*” (Being-in-the-world) together with Merleau-Ponty’s “*être-au-monde*” (being-in-the-world) as a pre-reflective “intra-corporeal” world-adhesion, which I think about through *mnidoo* ontology (Heidegger; Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 261). Merleau-Ponty’s conception of *possession* makes no inside/outside distinction, since it is the “degree zero of spatiality” (Merleau-Ponty *Primacy* 178). It is the immediate experience of being “encrusted” within the world as two sides of the same coin. As such, it is a kind of worlding. To this, I add the ontological presumption of *mnidoo* immanence to contend that consciousness, and by association agency, arise as an encrusted exchange between animacy, “inanimacy,” and immateriality. All of these are *mnidoo* (energies/potencies/processes) that are “*gashka’oode*” (entangled) *kina ganaa* (relatives/relations/all/everything) (Nichols and

Nyholm 49). Taken together, each interpenetrates and fluctuates in cascading patterns akin to the murmuration of starlings. Situated thus as a cohesion of particularized differences and a correspondent whole of communal indifferenciation, this theory of entanglement negates the possibility of any absolute indifference. I propose that a kind of autonomy does infiltrate this “reality,” not as a bounded locus of knowledge, but as an externally conceived and torn co-responsiveness.

Merleau-Ponty’s thesis on somatic consciousness accounts for the “sedimentation” of practices and perception. His approach has significant bearing on my own theory of consciousness as it pertains to Ojibwe ontologies and interconnective Indigenous modes of being. While his later work is situated firmly in a “pre-personal” world, it continues to be inflected by his earlier conclusions on culture and “the social.” Merleau-Ponty writes, “[t]hrough the intermediary of my society, my cultural world, and their horizons—at least a virtual communication with them . . . the social exists silently and as a solicitation” (*Phenomenology* 379: 2012). Unlike mnidoo-worlding, Merleau-Ponty privileges human subjectivity, for, as he contends, “If there really is to be consciousness, if something is to appear to someone, then an enclave, or a Self, must be carved out behind all of our particular thoughts” (“Phenomenology” 421: 2012). As such, his theory of consciousness is coexistent with, interdependent on, and, at the same time, restricted to the “living” or in other words relegated to cognitively perceptual bodies. Moreover, these bodies are ultimately limited to “a Self” and a specific form of cognition (i.e., his own reflective/pre-reflective activities) (Merleau-Ponty, “Phenomenology” 421: 2012). By identifying consciousness as external to a bounded human subject, and at the same time as internal in terms of immanence (radiating from within as well as from “without”), I

carry Merleau-Ponty into the ahuman mnidoo structure that he seems to strive for but cannot reach. I take up his theory of visibility as one sensual example amid an entire field of a worlded-adhesion. This is, as he contends, a world-oriented and a world-conditioned structure, which pleats chiasm with experientially situated knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* xxv, 428: 2012). Even so, I push his thought further in contending that mnidoo-worlding also erodes boundaries while paradoxically instantiating them as discernibles.

My point of departure from Merleau-Ponty might best be understood through his ontology of the flesh, which emphasizes the space between bodies along with their entwinement. Working alongside his texts, as I extend this pre-Columbian onto/epistemological Anishinaabe philosophy, I acknowledge that these approaches cannot be entirely extracted one from the other. Stated differently, “categorical abstraction” is insufficient for accessing the “ethno-metaphysical” realities and implications of cultures to which one does not belong (Hallowell 20). Informed by an Ojibwe mnidoo worldview, my interpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s work is “incorporated,” and as such, is also imparted with my particular “acquisition” of Anishinaabe knowledge, which can never entirely be cleaved from my being-in-the-world. All the same, I endeavor to convey how his theories overlay, intermingle, and diverge from my own by first attending to his chiasmic ontology of the flesh.



## 5.1 *Chiasm and the Transcendence of the Body/Mind Exchange*

For Merleau-Ponty, the reversibility of chiasm transforms through the overlap, where presencing gathers the nullified equation of the foregone and the not yet into a differential seam that is comprised of “a nothingness one can turn over” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 263). In this exchange differing entities/bodies are left in their place, albeit transfigured by “the application of the inside and the outside to one another” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 264). Unconsciously, or rather, faithfully subtended by world, each body is not only *in* but also *of* the world as a relationally entwined thread (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* xxiv: 2012). Perceptual experience occurs as a pre-reflection—as a first-order condition—that is invisible to the mind, since it functions on a different dimension. It transcendentally exceeds us as a condition of always already being there and is thus ahead of the second-order operation of reflective cognition/signification. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is that immediacy of experience or corporeal indwelling as a sensible for sensibles, which I can never access due to my being there—at the heart of it. Essentially, I block my own direct gaze of its “presencing” (Heidegger’s term) while I am taken up into the encounter. Merleau-Ponty writes:

There can be no question of describing perception itself as one of the facts thrown up in the world, since we can never fill up, in the picture of the world, that gap which we ourselves are, and by which it comes into existence for someone, since perception is the “flaw” in this “great diamond.” (Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology*)

241: 2002)<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, this “gap which we ourselves are” is what makes perception a transcendental condition, and makes the present “able to connect up with a past and a future” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 196). This lacuna/concealment/continuity, moreover, points to a pre-reflective manner of knowing. Intellection is thereby a second-order operation that is dependent on embodied knowledge as a prerequisite to cognition. The invisibility of transcendence is located in the tangible *model* of sensible bodies and sensibility, since both eclipse and exceed human consciousness, inasmuch as “the sketch of a thing, and the thing is the initial sketch of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 428: 2012). Merleau-Ponty identifies this reversible transitional structure as “chiasm.” His theory makes it possible to understand the world as other than objective truths disentangled and held out as objects for inspection. Instead we are to presume the perspective of “our insertion in the world-as-an-individual” as a means of accessing a pre-personal immediacy with which the “primordial arrangement” of transcendence is entwined “as our inherence in things” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 366: 2012).

Since the “world is in the field of our experience,” we intersubjectively touch upon it through the adhesion of these two outlines that are “superimposed” one onto the other (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 366: 2012). Getting at this experience through “the look” and things seen, however, requires a tricky reversed reconsideration of how one “incorporates” and is incorporated through a mutual gaze. This liminal space pivots on a

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<sup>41</sup> Note: For this particular quote, the Smith translation was required.

shared experience of absence—that is, transcendence—through which sight glides while providing a backdrop for visibles to appear. Merleau-Ponty describes these two dimensions of perception as “obverse and reverse ensembles,” conditionally intertwined “abstracts from one sole tissue” of a multidimensional worlded body (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 262). The “fission” or negative space between these outlines bonds them together, “each the other side of the other” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 142, 263). This co-constituting sameness “in the structural sense” may be enough for Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 261). Yet, although it is a point of transition that knits together at the site of contact, the character of the outline as bridge and partition also presents as a line that withholds and divides. It is a line that keeps pace, contours, and frames but, at the same time, withholds the world that it unites with me. Hence “that frontier surface at some distance before me” in some sense also always stands over and against me (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 263).

Merleau-Ponty proffers the “two laps” through which chiasm functions as a turnabout (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 136). The English translation provided in *The Visible and the Invisible* gives us the “two laps,” but in the original it is “*les deux lèvres*,” or “the two lips.” Yet, this mistranslation deepens my understanding of their reversible insinuations (Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’Invisible* 179). I take “laps” to mean overtake and enfold as a continuous circuit. In this interpenetration, each of the two sides is simultaneously implicated as it outstrips the other as with an overlap, whereas, “lips” clearly asserts a demarcation and convergence between two outlines. The term “lips” identifies a border, edge, or brink between bodies (visible or invisible) such as where a rocky cliff face meets its limit to become airborne. It undoubtedly bespeaks a breach as

two surfaces exposed and yet still touch. These plausible translations (“laps” and “lips”) present another form of holding and withholding that is indicative of chiasm’s reversibility. Such an outline opens onto a complicated network of embodied-worldedness, which is in keeping with conceptions of the mnidoo-worlding that I wrestle with in this chapter. Merleau-Ponty’s earlier work articulates this complicated network as a “coexistence” that “must be in each case lived by each person” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 373: 2012). It is ambiguously perceived as *lived* experience as opposed to a subject/object reflective analysis.

No matter how tight the weave, Merleau-Ponty insists on a discontinuous breach between each intertwining thread. These two lips comprise immersive liminality and division (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 266). We might call it a field of resistance that emulates the transcendence of perceptual experience. This spacing ensures that distinct bodies never merge to become an indistinguishable whole, one that might resemble “some huge animal whose organs our bodies would be” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 142). Alternately, he proposes that a perceptual “synergy” between “different organisms” is achievable “as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one *same* [human] ‘consciousness’ the primordial definition of sensibility” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 143; emphasis added). To gain a better understanding of sensuality apart from this presumed “sameness,” I return to Merleau-Ponty’s earlier work in *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he challenges our perceptual faith in accepting “a common situation in which they communicate” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 373: 2012). In this example, sentience is presupposed as both a human attribute and a shared phenomenon. Yet he wants us to think of consciousness in “the thickness of being”

(Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 202: 2012), since, as he observes, “my body is a movement toward the world and because the world is my body’s support” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 366: 2012). However, he does not refute the private thoughts of human consciousness either. We should then understand consciousness to be discontinuous between individual psyches and nevertheless an instance of projecting “this ‘single’ world” from the background of one’s own subjectivity (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 373: 2012). For Merleau-Ponty, consciousness can only be intersubjectively shared among bodies caught up in the structure of the world (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 373: 2012). He writes, “The fundamental truth is certainly that ‘I think,’ but only on condition of understanding by this that ‘I belong to myself’ in being in the world” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 431: 2012). As for the question of an other-than-human vital materialism, particularly with respect to inanimate agency, Merleau-Ponty describes this as “an absurd undertaking” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 367: 2012).

## 5.2 *Mnidoo-Worlding*

As with Merleau-Ponty, I do not conceive of mnidoo as a massive organism whose parts comprise a unified body, nor do I grapple here with the other-than-human as a

*Water and air became the same thing, as did water and land. . . . Birds swam across lakes. It was all one thing. The canoes were our bodies, our skin. We passed through green leaves, wild rice, and rushes” (Hogan 177).*

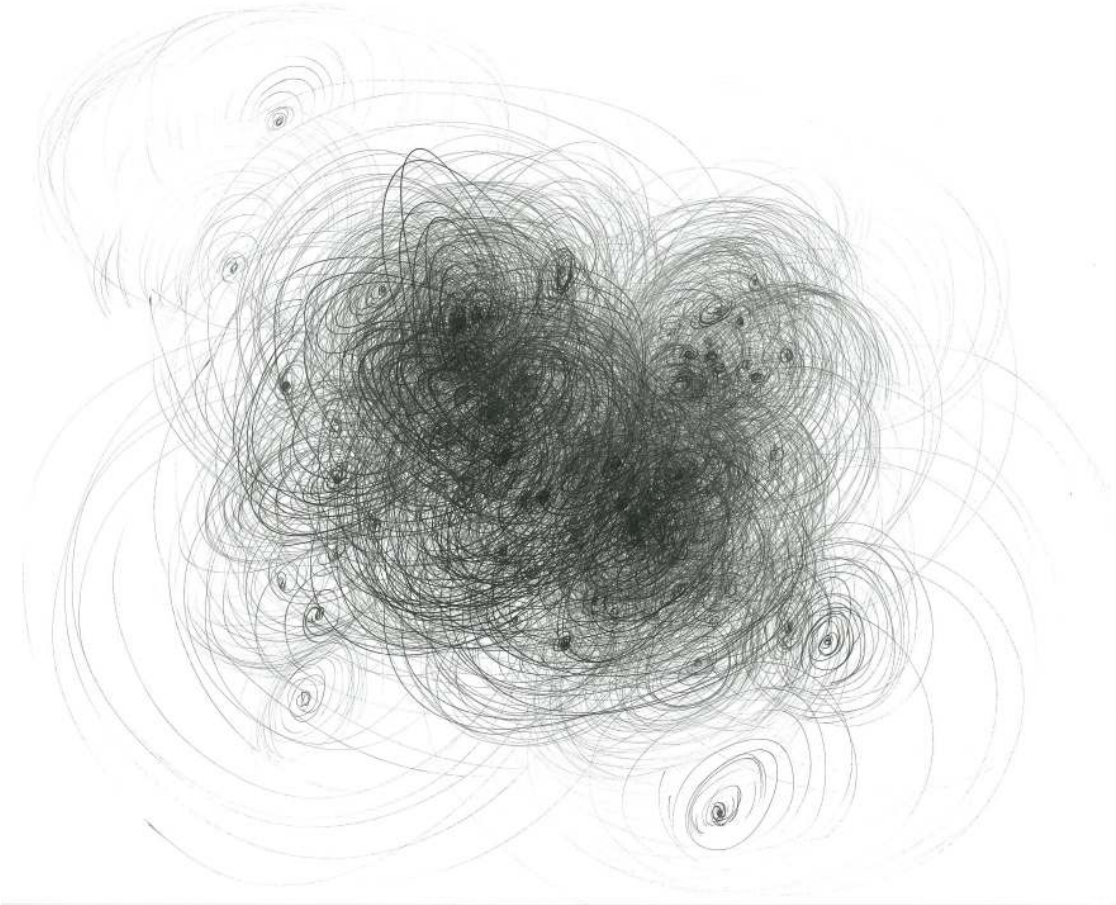
distinct “soul/spirit.” Rather, mnidoo-worlding/consciousnessing has an autonomous

structure, which it imparts in the interspersion of the “my/all” indwelling. As such, mnidoo does indeed merge in the piercing through that fleetingly eradicates my self-holding. Even if the two lips of this seam issue from bodily flesh (human and otherwise), chiasm, it seems, requires a space to cross in staging a conversion. In what follows, I retain Merleau-Ponty’s “inherence in things” while redeploying his ontology of the flesh (*Phenomenology* 366: 2012). However, I expand the definition of consciousness beyond human/animal sentience by locating it in the world—a living agential co-responsiveness to the field itself, where the eye first opens. I do not mean the tangible eye per se, but the adhesion of this “massive sentiment” opening onto the world (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 142). Merleau-Ponty writes, “It can be said that a human is born at the instant when something that was only virtually visible, inside the mother’s body, becomes at one and the same time visible for itself and for us” (*Primacy of Perception* 167-168). My trajectory introduces another dimension of experience or perhaps a different kind of sensibility, not as an entwined and reversible *of-ness* but instead as a *with-ness*.

Ojibwe Anishinaabe seven directions teachings include north, south, east, west, up, down, and center. Among other applications, they offer a midpoint from which to stake ethical claims no matter how indirect or abstract. They also present another means for approaching mnidoo ontology inasmuch as these intimations are encrusted in countless accessible contemporary Anishinaabe pedagogical models. This shifting cipher does not track geographical coordinates, nor even the globe’s contour. Rather, it evokes a three-dimensional swelling of continuous and discontinuous bursting forth that does more than overlap and communicate through this segregated channel, as Merleau-Ponty contends.

Undoubtedly, they—this infinite and finite mnidoo outpouring—not only subtend(s) but also coalesce and together bring about the heterogeneity of space, time, and consciousness. But this leap is too great and far too sudden. Nonetheless, how else can I approach except from the “thickness” of my worlded structure, where miniscule universes, so to speak, radiate and converge. From this framework I provisionally consider each mnidoo dimension to harbor a center that intersects and flows through the others. I return here again and again to tease out these complex mnidoo streams, beginning from the center of the self. This is not an anthropocentric retort. Rather, it is the median of my surrender, when I am torn, given over, rendered inoperative and discontinuous. The egoistic “I” offset as “non-I.” The reverberation of each microcosm and their perpetual breaking open constitutes an infinite inner horizon. Neither center nor self is limited to the notion of a bounded reality cut off from an outer world. (See fig. 2.)

For Merleau-Ponty, an interstice/seam guarantees a holding and a withholding that allow bodies to remain separate amid a co-constituted interchange. I contend that mnidoo/bodies (animate, inanimate, and intangible), in piercing one another, do indeed fuse, in a sense, or in some dimension as an indistinguishable whole. In the example of human consciousness, perhaps this transformation arises in ways that are co-opted by faculties aligned with the natural attitude (thus overlooked as a kind of false consciousness). The linear temporality of mortal consciousness is distinct from an infinite/always already (space-time compressed into the instant). Their collision results in the piling up of one upon the other as simultaneity. Yet, material bodies or objective remain discrete but are never as discrete as the natural attitude suggests (leastways not as it is defined historically in western philosophy, especially regarding discourses of



**Figure 2 Mnidoo Wave**

animacy and consciousness). Likewise, their interpenetration does not erode disparate attributes, or at least not always and certainly not immediately. Instead, it allows for and even necessitates this discontinuity as a force of continuity. This ceaseless discourse impinges from without as much as from within, implicating mnidoo as a sustaining potency, but not necessarily *life* per se (since mnidoo ontology also challenges conceptions of “life” as it is conventionally understood).



### 5.3 *Merleau-Ponty: Écart*

Merleau-Ponty's theory of encroachment is conveyed in the overlap between the visible and the invisible, look and sight, seer and things seen, whereby vision is doubled and in reverse sees the seer "installed" and "occupied" in the very depth and interiority of the world that allows vision to arise at all (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 134).

This edge, these two facing frontiers, are knit together and simultaneously separate. The body-world hence offers up the leaflet of a single adjoining feature, which is perceptual experience itself. Merleau-Ponty writes that this experience unites us

directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two laps [*sic*]: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open. (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 136)

The French word *écart* describes the paradoxical hinge of bifurcation and entwinement particular to Merleau-Ponty's theory of chiasm. It defines space and surface as a splitting off in every direction while covering over and manifesting bodies that depart and adhere in their pronouncement of difference. Each dimension spreads, diverges, deviates, and separates in a worlded structuration that articulates this complex being-in-the-world adhesion (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 197). In a sense, Merleau-Ponty suggests that time and space converge as immediacy through the sensible and the reverse of chiasm's touch. Additionally, I contend that every aspect of existence (not only sentience) knows itself primordially as a thing of the world through the infinite reverberation of *mnidoo*. That is to say, not as overlap and gap, but as *Nii kina ganaa*—

All my relations/All my relatives/My all/My everything—an ownmost immediate knowing.

These infinitely doubled outlines might be said to permeate existence itself in an interrelational dialogue. In my interpretation, infinity and finitude converge as simultaneity, which I argue is experienced as a rupture in the transcendence of perceptual experience. But if transcendence is ruptured, how do we perceive this disruption when transcendence itself exceeds apperception? We might think of it as a flicker, in which indistinguishable static (electromagnetic, visual, or aural), consistent and subtle, gradually fades, re-appears suddenly in a hazy coalescence—intermittently seeping through to seize hold without context. Let's consider Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "two outlines" of *écart* in terms of mnidoo potency conceptualized through the pulsing resonance of bird flight patterns. In a murmuration, a flock of starlings interweave intricate cascading flight patterns (with each correlating to the one next) around land, wind, and other flock formations without ever colliding. A researcher of animal collective behavior describes these patterns as "one of the most impressive examples of organization in the natural world, with flocks of up to 300,000 individuals or more able to coordinate themselves into a cohesive and highly coherent group" (Pearce et al. 10422). From the perceptual faith of the natural attitude, this phenomena might be rationalized as multiple singularities following tangible air currents (perhaps affectively swayed) with each event occurring in space through a sequential unfolding of time.<sup>42</sup> But this conception of the "physiological event," Merleau-Ponty contends, "is but the abstract

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<sup>42</sup> For more on this, see Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 7.

outline of the perceptual event” with each tackled as objects that stand out in front of consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 366: 2012). Scientists find that perception is the key to startling organization, asking, “What does a bird actually see when it is part of a large flock?” These researchers describe a perceptual analysis in keeping with both mnidoo and Merleau-Pontean ontologies:

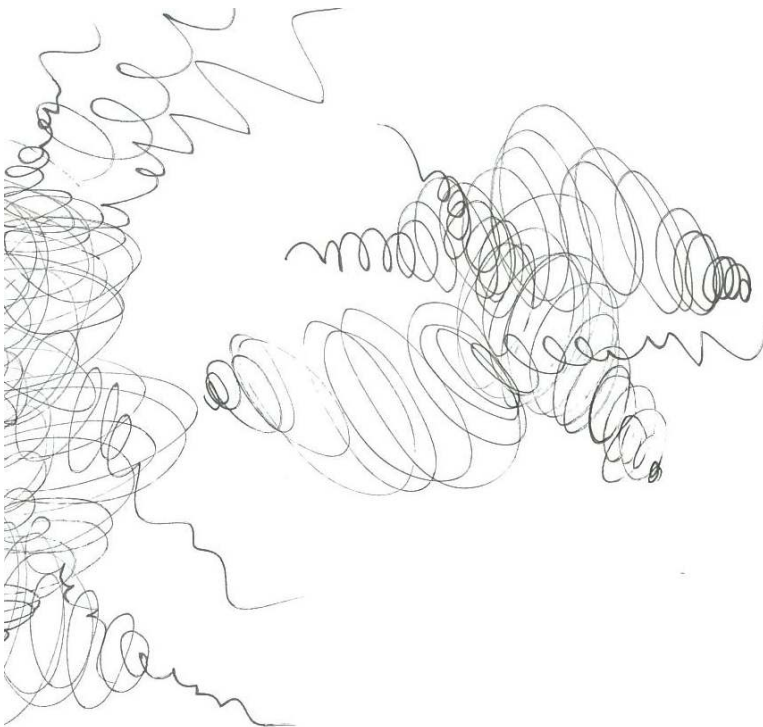
[A single bird’s] view out from within a large flock likely would present the vast majority of individuals merely as silhouettes, moving too fast and at too great a distance to be tracked easily or even discriminated from one another. Here the basic visual input to each individual is assumed to be based simply on visual contrast: a dynamic pattern of dark (bird) and light (sky) across the field of vision (although it might be possible to extend this to other swarming species and environmental backgrounds, respectively). This has the appealing feature that it also is the projection that appears on the retina of the bird, which we assume to be its primary sensory input. A typical individual within a very dense flock would see other, overlapping individuals (dark) almost everywhere it looked. Conversely, an isolated individual, detached from the flock, would see only sky (light). The projected view gives direct information on the global state of the flock. (Pearce et al. 10422)

The tension evoked by the spreading inherent to écart in this example points to its capricious status wavering between “sedimentation and spontaneity” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 132: 2012). The traction engendered by the reverse poles of this fluctuating and paired outline undulates interminably—infinity compressed through the fissure of the absolute present. The internal pressure of holding and withholding exerts a

grasp through this seam. A chorus of visible and invisible tangibles emerge, discharge a signature, interpenetrate, co-join, dissipate, emerge—a mnidoo wave that transmits and subtends. Comprised as I am of these mnidoo forces that infinitely exceed me, I incorporate and make sense through the limitation of my cognitive ability to sign and apprehend. Yet, beyond the regions of sight, touch, and their future anticipating, my own rhythmic modulations line up or are ruptured in such a way that the other (my mnidoo ancestors) have shot through me, collapsing distances and bodies (temporal and spatial) (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 428: 2012). I am gathered in your call, in the ache of our being there together—I am awake—suddenly, fleetingly, bitingly, and in the next breath I am alone.

As for chiasm, in order to maintain this “hold” while resisting the returned grasp (so as not to become fully incorporated one into the other), each “dimension” must remain at a distance (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 266). Hence, aside from the visible and the invisible dimensions of sensibility, *écart* emerges, for Merleau-Ponty, as a third possibility for explaining the acute facility of pre-reflective situatedness. He defines *écart* as the separation necessary for articulation and consciousness “to have a figure on a ground” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 197). Despite the series of correspondences between perception and the thing that lines its contour, he contends that there remains a “stroboscopic” interval. Between touch and touching, self and world, cognition stroboscopically/retroactively doubles back to create meaning from perception (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 265). In his example of one hand touching the other, the two sensations (of being touched and touching in return) do not collapse into one undifferentiated experience. Rather, consciousness can only attend to either one or

the other but is never able to apprehend both distinct senses simultaneously. Even though “the two systems are applied upon one another” as an “encrusted” imprint (and sedimentation of “primordial faith”), Merleau-Ponty insists that “they do not merge into one” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 133-134). Alternately, I propose that, albeit fleeting and fitful, in that very interstice within the rhythm of those spatial distances, human consciousness does indeed break into a unified body of mnidoo correspondence, not as an arrested state but rather as a glancing blow that penetrates, passes through, and deflects, which I articulate as mnidoo-worlding’s mode of address. (See fig. 3)



**Figure 3 Mnidoo Papitaiton: Pulsing, Colliding, Piercing**

This cascade of infinitesimal explosions resonates immanently and, at times, becomes accessible to the impoverished receptivity of human consciousness (burdened as it is by the obstacle of its own psyche). Starling murmurations are just

one example of these resonances. In working through his articulation of an ahuman-world adhesion (a pre-personal somatic-immediacy), Merleau-Ponty finds that he must concede

to the breach between one palpitation and the next. He transitions from an emphasis on intersubjective situatedness to chiasmic reversal. To put this in another way, chiasm removes subject/object polarization, while simultaneously counteracting the risk of a totalizing collapse. Yet, the two can be seen to mirror the other as a world structure of the “hold [that] is held” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 266).

#### **5.4      *Inter-Dimensional Thickening: Flesh-World/Mnidoo-World***

Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the stroboscopic describes the instrument of intellection as an intermittent flashing light that makes bodies/objects appear immobile. This cognitive grasping (a flawed revealing) extracts the primordial experience of perception (or at least its receding appearance) from the transcendent (and, hence, ambiguous realm) of its *actual* entwined first-order occurrence/adhesion. This term *stroboscopic* articulates our fluctuating relationship with the visible (perceptual ground for reflective signification) and the invisible (pre-reflective backdrop or embodied knowledge from which cognition arises secondarily). Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the visible and the invisible, as I take it up, is not limited to a discussion on sight and sightlessness, but opens to the invisible primacy of embodied knowledge and our inability to directly access/signify any perceptual experience during its immediate undertaking. From an Anishinaabe interrelational view, the logic behind écart’s stroboscopic interval (doubled as both an intersubjective and a primordial “being-in-the-world”) does not leave room for the subtle registry of mnidoo other-than-human encounters. For Merleau-Ponty, to be *of* the world

describes an “encroachment” between adjoining tissues. This is despite our capacity to be elsewhere through the insinuation between eye (embodiment) and mind (cognition)—that is, via encrusted anticipation, intersubjective reversal, or reflective imagination. By contrast, the implications for mnidoo entanglement convene as divergent pulsation(s) that are singular, plural, and auto-generative—“spontaneous beings” “made out of nothing” (Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage* 15). These animate, inanimate, and intangibles converge and inscribe in the proximity of silent masses that absorb and insinuate as they perturb with their relative magnitude. In this sense, every dimension of existence has autonomous agency. I use the weaker argument “in this sense,” since mnidoo harbours animacy and inanimacy (holds and withholds as potentiality). This potency runs alongside and saturates affective “intensities,” to use Deleuze and Guattari’s term, without canceling them out. If, that is, mnidoo arises not as a cacophony of divergent elements that ignite and splay apart, as with Merleau-Ponty’s *écart*, but instead form a teeming flood—mnidoo potency/potential/process—from which dissidence is considered and taken up differently by each pebble that partakes in a landslide.

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari articulate the “overwhelming” mode of affect through such examples as a swarm of bees that indirectly trigger one another into motion as a shifting assemblage. They describe this as a process of “becoming” in which we are taken up into a “body without organs” through proximal relations. Notably, the term *dissidence* is employed to describe the variance/disagreement inherent to difference. Albeit a necessary friction, I contend in contrast that affect does not overwhelm entirely as a pre-personal process. Rather the material world is *alive*, conscious, and it co-responsively exerts agency. Unhampered by

cognition, it/they are not befuddled by the limited capacity of human consciousness. Rather, discernment or the transparency of intellection is itself the opacity that stands in the way of fully accessing the mnidoo-self-world (where so-called lifeless inanimate objects in-dwell as immediate fully accessing interrelationality).

These varying dimensions might be understood as indifferent or passive and at other times as competitive and active. The interaction of converging spheres breaks other centers open at odd angles. Together they shift and contort to produce tumultuous intersecting waves. The above schematic drawings of colliding spirals (figure 2) and pulsating concentric rings/spheres (figure 3) are similar to an illustration by Leroy Little Bear during a presentation that I attended on quantum physics and Indigenous knowledge at the Banff Centre for the Arts in 2011. He scribbled a densely tangled line drawing on the chalkboard to convey the complex entanglement of Indigenous thought systems in contrast to the linear approaches of western science. On the other hand, there remains a distillation or an evaporation between finite and infinite dimensions. I am a finite entity (animate or inanimate). I am both breathing and in possession of another finite mode of interconnectivity—that is, human consciousness—one starling entangled in the fluttering murmur of a multitude. The constituting population of each system is minutely ever more divisible until breaking into the mnidoo potency seen pulsating throughout. This infinite mnidoo consciousness conditions finitude, not merely as a “life-sustaining” interpenetration (as with oxygen molecules that fill our lungs in a shared biological process).<sup>43</sup> But more enigmatically it is an integral fusion that is always already there.

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<sup>43</sup> See Irigaray, “From *The Forgetting of Air* to *To Be Two*.”



We might think of this undifferentiated “consciousness” akin to black matter flowing through us. It allows for other experiences to emerge and challenge the presentation of empirical “truth” (consequently, it is often overwritten by an acute presence to the presentation of objective reality). I am part of this tumultuous unified body. As such I am both finite and infinite: singular, discontinuous, mortal. I am also continuous, immortal, and infinitely divisible. I transpire along two ways of being—finitude and infinitude. The two do not *systematically* line up—in other words, each is askew one from the other. My psyche, or rather my mnidoo-world-self, is overshadowed by my finite concerns. This obstinate human comportment grants neither a sustained direct view nor full access to this other aspect of my existence. Hence, we attend to the sidelong and the circuitous.

## 5.5 *Mnidoo World-Consciousness*

The world is consciousness

and we human “I’s” are

mere shimmering

reflections, ever-receding

afterthoughts. Possessed in

this way, by world, we are dispossessed of autonomous self and yet also delivered over to an authentic world-self, a mnidoo-self. We do not skillfully master mnidoo. Rather, we arrive to it, through oblique interrelational modes, unconsciously and indirectly glancing with my “side-eye” (to use a phrase from Mona Stonefish). The aim is not to articulate phenomena as they appear to consciousness, but rather to wade into these subtle mnidoo

*“The old world dawning new in me was something like the way a human eye righted what was upside down, turned over an image and saw true” (Hogan 189).*

regions in order to momentarily overcome the self (histories and attitudes). Ultimately, ceremonial reflexivity immerses the self in the perceptual field—exceeding subjective projection by rousing instead to this relational entanglement. In slackening my hold of self-possession, an elliptical intimation rushes in as a unified kina and simultaneously as an autonomous dimension of world-self (nii kina). Amid an ephemeral encounter, I awaken to Nii kina ganaa and gain access as a *thing* profoundly imbued within its transmission. Since conscious awareness is the very obstacle that bends the circuit, as it were, to bypass what is closest to me, this access defies signification, particularly when considered solely from the discontinuous estrangement of finitude. A world-mnidoo-self is not an experience of inert thingly silence, but of ancestors whittling axe handles, diminishing in one sense while increasing in another, consciousness cajoled from the competing and conversing of wood shavings—self and non-self—active, autonomous, *living* materiality.<sup>44</sup> By apparent chance, fleetingly and haphazardly, I stumble into the clarity of mnidoo-consciousness, of which my sense of selfhood is momentarily overridden by a resolute ownmost. Located somewhere in that midpoint as I fumble toward linguistic articulation, I exceed my acquired knowledge and the future-telling anticipation that arises from this “acquisition.” This exceeding does indeed entail a merging of consciousness; or a passing through, as with an electric current; or a bursting forth of what is always already there, but is most often suppressed by my reflective prowess.

I take up what Merleau-Ponty defines as an “adhesion” between “one sole body before

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<sup>44</sup> Distinct and vastly more complex than New Materialism.

one sole world” but depart from his pre-personal aim to instead interrogate the slackening of consciousness (i.e., awake, yet inattentive, exhausted, while in some way remaining open) (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 142). This simultaneity bridges the “gap” or “lacuna” with a second penetration between the linear temporality of mortals and the immediacy of infinity’s ubiquitous reach. Hence, in the latter instance I am both heedless and alert, which defies the logical order of finite beings by subtending discontinuity (death or rupture) in the space of delirium and exhaustion. The world suddenly appears and seizes hold of a necessary portion of my cognition.<sup>45</sup> This fissure refocuses my attention in accordance with the things of the world—that is, in keeping with a co-constituted world-relationality that briefly overshadows my own conscious appointment.<sup>46</sup> In that moment, my hold on a particularized self-determining is weakened if not lost altogether.

As much as one dimension is overlapped and drawn into the other, this terminal lip of “acquisition” offers up figure and ground such that “I have the position of objects through the position of my body, or inversely I have the position of my body through the position of the objects” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 366: 2012). Taken into the spacing between touch and touching—held and holding to itself—this palimpsest can never be wholly eradicated, remaining instead entangled between one “palpitation” and the next as traces and echoes. Aside from the “encroachment” that serves, as Merleau-Ponty

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<sup>45</sup> It seizes hold, perhaps, through Merleau-Ponty’s three pre-linguistic regions—motility, social, and perceptual (Mallin 275).

<sup>46</sup> We leave aside the question of oneiric dreaming for a future essay.

contends, to hold self to self, this seam is inhabited by another dimension that tears through the structure of withholding as a defenseless conceding (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 202). Fleeting and obliquely glimpsed in a bewildering upsurge, the giving over surrenders up authentic self as authentic experience—consciousness divulged before being engulfed again by what Sam Mallin calls the “technologism” of our time (Mallin 281). To clarify, in approaching this sensually registered mnidoo, consciousness overtakes the world. It exceeds itself, is thrown outside of self, and, simultaneously, is seized hold of as a reversed rupture by the things of the world “of which it is also a part” (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible* 133). This mnidoo-worlding subtends existence by passing through it. Human consciousness in some sense is also a dimension of this worlding. Mnidoo presencing is the linchpin between interior and exterior horizons, upon which perception stands out from a conflicted and indeterminate terrain. Effaced imprints are commingled—brittle, tender spears shot from a murky void—issuing forth as a faint distraction and at other times as an electrified epiphany. They are atemporal memories covered over by layers of embodied and linguistic symbolic histories. (See fig. 4.) *F*



Figure 4: Mnidoo-memory

## 5.6 Conclusion: Simultaneity and Mnidoo

### *Indwelling*

Without denying the significance of the double-lined reversibility of chiasm, I contend that with mnidoo-worlding there is another dimension other than the differential reality necessary to uphold finitude's weak grasp. In slackening my hold of the cognitive-linguistic region, I awaken, in some oblique way, to my immersive entanglement with another dimension of myself. That is to say, conscious apprehension does not follow the other "regions of being" but rather is caught up in this disorienting confluence—Nii kina ganaa (All my relations/My all/My world-mnidoo-self). As I am immanently present within this potency, it is not immediately present to my conscious thought. Yet I have access to the other through the collision of time-space as simultaneity. How else do we account for being struck by alarm, for no apparent reason, in response to a loved one's misfortune registered instantly halfway around the world? Or waking from a deep sleep to an empathic summoning from someone, at a distance, unconsciously piercing the veil between us via the heat of a crisis. Why, then, do we so often not hear the cry? Why do we not tune into strangers or natural disasters when they quake? Tackling these questions through what Merleau-Ponty defines as "intellectualism" would surely carry us away into the rabbit hole. I have attempted to

*"It was this gap in time we entered, and it was a place between worlds. I was under the spell of wilderness, close to what no one had ever been able to call by name. Everything merged and united. There were no sharp distinctions left between darkness and light"*  
(Hogan 177).

broach some of these inconsistencies through the finite limitations of human consciousness pitted against an infinite world-consciousness. But more than that is too complicated for this short essay. The simple answer would be that I am not so certain that in some sense we are not already there, but that it is concealed from our immediate and sustained grasp due perhaps to a lack of attentiveness. Entangled exploding microcosms (each aspect retaining a sense of an *isness* and an autonomous *mineness*) collapse time and space into this silent call. We converge as simultaneity. My human consciousness is aroused to this always already unending body to which I am infused. The breach, opened by the call, provides tenuous access to a larger sense of self as *mnidoo* indwelling. Amid this partially veiled and tremulous experience we pre-reflectively communicate with a *mnidoo*-world-self as *Nii kina ganaa* (All my relatives/All my relations/My all/ My everything). One's ownmost (*mnidoo*-self) likewise stands out as a flickering glint against the backdrop of the other.

*Mnidoo* knowing arrives as a piercing epiphany just as often as a nagging undercurrent, sometimes vague and at others distinct and incontrovertible. It erupts and overturns perceptual experience with a sudden insight. It stirs, pierces, awakens, and draws into contrast that subtle near imperceptible (perhaps even extrasensory) interiority of one's ownmost. This ownmost exerts a sense of ownership to that part of me that is most familiar. Yet, what is most mine also escapes me when I am taken up into another interiority of alien impulse, leaving me bewildered. I am struck with the monumentality of how it both beguiles and exceeds me. Surely, it is more than I am and, at the same time, all that I am, when I am most at home, lost to myself. This sudden rushing in of what is most mine baffles and defies my reflective veracity. This troubling contour

challenges me in subtle ways that I cannot ignore. Just the same, this receding “I” manages to rationalize banal excuses for doing so. Yet I discover here that to arrive at my ownmost requires a break with my reflective concentration, and not of my own volition. This involves a double absorption. Such attentiveness might be pure reflective self-absorption in which presence of mind arises over time through a slow releasing of embodied distractions. It’s a withdrawing from world, a loss of my embodied presence. But it’s not exactly this, since the experience of my ownmost includes this autonomous self-self (corporeality) and *mnidoo-self* (a self-communicating receptivity between these finite and infinite dimensions).

This term *mnidoo-self* suggests that this oblique communication is somehow made cognizant. It is an infinite *mnidoo* dimension that operates as its own interlocutor—that is, as both sender and receiver. It exceeds the autonomous/authority of the self-self with the undulation of its own reverberating interiority as *mnidoo-world-self* presencing (momentarily suppressing the false appearance of subject/object distinctions). This requires the dissolution of ego or self-self. In other words, individualized autonomy is both instantiated and dissolved when I am seized upon by the passing through of a world-positing centrality. Here, any single-dimensional vibration might momentarily take possession or brush by and inadvertently imprint a new fluctuation. *Self-self* refers to bounded intentional human consciousness; *mnidoo-self* is an orienting but indeterminate intuiting that exceeds a personalized centeredness, whereas *mnidoo-world-self* (synonymous to world-*mnidoo*) courses through and suffuses everything—the *All*—to which I am grounded, interdependent, and coexistent. These terms are not only insufficient placeholders but also misleading, since they are neither states of mind nor

separate entities. Neither slackened nor straining attention inhibits the other; both continue to operate in different ways. In the dispossessed loss of my ownness, I awaken to an absolute imperative, or at least to a vague sense of reorientation.

Other-than-human persons—that is, mnidoo ancestors—radiate from every direction, as colliding universes. This world-mnidoo interlocution might be understood simply as an exchange (but this is too trivial, too diminutive, too premeditated). Perhaps it collapses into an endlessly undulating body—as a murmuration or a mnidoo-wave—not a unified body stopped up and solidified by harmonious elation, but rather a dialogic body spurred on through permeation and absorption in which resulting tensions rifle out existence and its ontological query. When we attend to mnidoo realities as an object of direct contemplation, it is only by a feeble mind isolated in the construct of an inner world. Hence, in these instances such reflections are cut off from the competing chorus of a world-mnidoo from which thought so often stumbles, unable to discern one dimension of existence from another. This includes imaginary representations and empirical or tangible facticity, each equally valid and interdependent dimensions.

I define this Anishinaabe phenomenology as Ojibwe-*inflected* instead of -specific, because I do not speak on behalf of all Anishinaabeg and the multiple becomings of these divergent philosophers, speakers, and familial dialects. Rather, it represents the small bit that I have been given and in return am responsible to give back. As my mother says, repeating a well-known Ojibwe-Anishinaabe aphorism, “we only own what we give away.” In giving we not only deepen our own knowledge but also enrich our communities and ensure that these Indigenous ways of being attuned are strengthened and revitalized. Moreover, only in conceding to that amorphous something are we gifted



with a second sight—that is, with a greater understanding and appreciation of differing ways of thinking, engaging, and being. The theories articulated in this essay oscillate around a specific time and place. In keeping with Anishinaabe comportment, such translations and my arrival to them might be understood as a deeply personal undertaking. Yet, without a doubt this endeavor is mediated through cultural reflections and shared community knowledges that are embedded within my particular being-in-the-world (passed between mnidoo ancestors, past and future, through the infinite and the simultaneous). To be sure, the philosophical structure that I aim for has slipped away in the exchange from lived experience, to thought, to codex, for it lives exclusively with the Anishinaabe—the original people—that is, those marked with a profound integrity as interconnected and co-responsive. As such, this text should not be taken up as a universal model, but rather as a shedding metamorphosis en route to an elsewhere.

## **6 *Final Words: Becoming through Mnidoo-consciousness***

Anishinaabe is something we already always are, and at the same time, it is something that we become. What is meant by this paradox, this seeming contradiction? We might think of that which we already are as the inanimate or the dormant, which is not absent or nonexistent, but rather is alive and waiting to be awoken. To be sure, Anishinaabe integrity is always already awake and active. It might be more accurate to say that it is human consciousness itself that is sleeping or unaware of this other aspect or its full potentiality—mnidoo potency, at the same time that we are caught up in becoming (becoming this knowledge), as process. In other words, mnidoo capacity is a pregnancy

that we are filled with as both constituting and conditioning. It is alive; it is life, a permeation and a subtending as that which already *is* and that which is not *yet*. Anyone can intellectualize about Anishinaabe teachings and even copy them, superficially. But one cannot become Anishinaabe by consuming such ideas, absorbing, or appropriating them. Coloniality and capitalism span the globe and regulate sociality in particular ways that result in self-preservation tendencies such as individualism and the accumulation of wealth and private property. Hence, undertaking to become Anishinaabe-knowing, from such an imperialist perspective, might be limited to mere information that one acquires for profit (even if only as cultural capital), but can never grasp in the sense of becoming. However, I do think that children can be mentored into sincerely and profoundly knowing themselves and world in this integrative way. This requires a community, who already live this as something that they *are* and not just something they *think* about (and cosmetically wear with false humility and self-righteous indignation). To become Anishinaabe, children need healthy, supportive role models. It means taking care of the little bit that we each have and sharing it with others.

We are flawed, doubtless. The Anishinaabe philosophy I write about might sound ideal or romantically harmonious. I outline a philosophy, ways of thinking and of being that may appear to contradict the actuality of our complicated lived realities, that is, of our day-to-day frailties. In many ways or in a certain light or, better, in different dimensions, this way-of-being might be understood as a moving target that we strive for and, at the same time, we hit upon the target in another dimension and in another register.

Everything is connected, in the sense of the infinite, big picture. Everything operates as a collaborative dynamic chorus. We permeate one another as one continuous body—

dancers, drummers, crowd, and dust clouds kicked up and carried off into the same undulating wave. But as I go about attending to my day-to-day needs securing food and shelter for this discontinuous body (one that lives and dies in a relatively short span of time), I experience my life as that which I alone am responsible for and accountable to. This autonomy is not, despite my Anishinaabe upbringing, living-enmeshed in a dynamic interrelational world; rather, this is the case because of this paradoxical simultaneous and reciprocal commitment. This ontological way of being, as my Mother used to say, “is something that one *becomes*.” Such a becoming takes place over an entire lifetime and occurs in relation, in community (with human and other-than-human).

We become in the sense of arriving at a destination without conscious effort by being immersed and distracted—simultaneously mindful and paradoxically also inattentive. In other words, by obliquely *sensing* or picking up on peripheral movement while casting one’s primary attention elsewhere. I am scarcely certain of this resonance except when I am gathered up and engulfed with it and then, bobbing along with my head submerged, I have lost sight of any sort of orientation. Thus, I cannot articulate the route. It is not something one learns from reading a book, or finds in a map, or hears in a classroom. For one thing, academia requires a presence of mind, concentrated effort, scrutiny and, for another, it involves rational correspondence. Rather, Anishinaabe *mnidoo*-worlding must be experienced and not experienced at the same time. It must be lived in the subtleties of the banal and the everyday. Land is a great place to directly embrace this connection that, unfortunately, has been obscured for many. Out of the land, one gains first-hand experience of co-existence reciprocity.

## **6.1 Future Research: Anishinaabe Imaging, Intuiting Other-Than-Human Spheres**

There is a limit to what can be known, and communicated, in the linear form of the written text. As such, with this exploration of mnidoo-worlding, I find myself not at the end but rather at one of several beginnings. From this starting point I can address the questions I had at the outset, with respect to Anishinaabe epistemologies of dreams and imaging practice. Wide-ranging scholarship marks the importance of dreams and visions in the human condition, from Sigmund Freud's seminal *Interpretation of Dreams* to Nancy Van Deuson's interdisciplinary exploration of dreams and visions across cultures and time periods. The significance of dream quests in cultures indigenous to the Americas is well known, but it is vastly simplified and misunderstood in common knowledge and popular culture. Hollowell saw dream quests as petitions for the blessing of powerful "other-than-human persons," through rituals that further instilled ethical responsibility and self-discipline (Berens, Hollowell "Role Of Dreams"). Numerous Turtle Island scholars, such as Vine Deloria Jr. (*God is Red*), mark the significance of dreams in Indigenous spiritual practices, and these are central tropes in the canon of Indigenous literature (Noodin). However, there are no *sustained* studies of vision practices from the perspective of Indigenous philosophy. Moreover, little scholarship investigates the connection between dreams, imaging practices, and the relational ontology that shapes the Anishinaabeg worldview. While it is fairly ubiquitous for Anishinaabe scholars to acknowledge our other-than-human ancestors, none investigate these Anishinaabe-specific practices in depth through philosophical praxis and phenomenological inquiry, and none employ dreams as research methodology. For me, positioning singular and collective processes of dreaming as modes of inquiry, as well as

epistemologies is a logical next step that will allow me to bring my artistic and philosophical practice into dialogue in community contexts.

Dream imaging is significant for artistic and philosophical study due to their ability to span corporeal and mnidoo (spiritual) worlds and to provide interpretive frameworks for theorizing how best to respond to diverse situations. I intend to employ practice-based art research to explore customary Anishinaabe dreaming and visionary practices and their contemporary adaptations found in everyday rituals, life-ways, place-based knowledges and Anishinaabemowin. I take these imaging practices up as embodied ciphers, not as conscious reasoning, but as “embodied consciousness” which is arrived at through aki (earth) and the integration of bodies within ecology (Merleau-Ponty). Perturbing one another they emit reverberating frequencies—secret codes—registered in the body and imaged (not imagined but collectively insinuated). The concept of Mnidoo-worlding I developed in this dissertation describes this interrelational negotiation. It is this inter-gravitational interplay that subtends and conditions the possibility for human consciousness. These subtle improvisational gestures are spontaneous, co-responsive and collaborative. Together with their philosophies, I juxtapose these imaging practices with the pathologizing classification of hallucination, associated with psychosis and schizophrenia, to ease out their implications for Indigenous contexts and mad studies by reconsidering these ‘disabilities’ from an Anishinaabe perspective that, in some cases, revere them as prophetic visions and spiritual leadership. Focusing on philosophical practices, from my own Ojibwe and Potawatomi traditions, I interpret such Anishinaabe imaging through the lived-body (i.e. with phenomenological descriptive analysis) and practice-based art research. The

project will draw from archives and art (i.e. petroglyphs), scholarly texts in philosophy and other fields, and will involve visiting landscapes and sacred sites traversed by my ancestors across Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Ontario (Wetzel 2015).

How might Anishinaabe philosophy, dream-visioning and imaging-praxis be employed as an interpretive framework, critical improvisational engagement, and relational ethics? Access to knowledge is gained in dialogue with human and other-than-human relations through fasting, dreaming, and open flexible being-in-world-in-community, as well as in close proximity to specific places. Anishinaabeg interact collaboratively with *mnidoog* (manidoog) as animate potentialities. It is a relation of being caught up together as a dynamic vibrational confluence. My objective is to better understand the role and significance of dreams and imaging practices at play in contemporary Anishinaabe social, cultural and political contexts. Celebrating what Gerald Vizenor terms “survivance,” I ask how dreams and imaging tap into what has been hidden within us—the Anishinaabe, preserved in our bodies, in the cadence, rhythm, and intonation of our speech, in our everyday practices, gestures, and bodily comportment (*Manifest Manners*). Bodies, aki, and artworks are Indigenous textual citations that speak of our trauma and survivance. Earthworks and embodied encrustations open in return to the transformation necessitated by a thorough examination that asks, ‘how am I implicated and what is my responsibility?’ These are questions for which I needed to first outline, as a ground, a philosophy of *mnidoo*-worlding. It is also a work that demands a more fluid and dynamic, community-engaged methodology, and a return, quite literally, to the land.

Nii kina ganaa.

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## ***Curriculum Vitae***

**Name:** Dolleen Tisawii'ashii Manning

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** University of Windsor  
Windsor, Ontario, Canada  
1991-1994 B.F.A.

Simon Fraser University  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
1995-1997 M.F.A.

The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2002-2005 M.A.

The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2009-2017 Ph.D.

**Honours and Awards:** Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)  
Vanier Canadian Doctoral Fellowship  
2010-2013

Ontario Graduate Scholarship (declined)  
2010-2011

Ontario Graduate Scholarship  
2009-2010

Theory Centre Award of Excellence  
University of Western Ontario  
2009-2010

C.D. Nelson Memorial Graduate Scholarship  
Simon Fraser University  
1994-1995

**Related Work Experience** Visiting Professor  
Institute for Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies  
McGill University  
2016-2017

Assistant Professor  
 Indigenous Visual Culture  
 Ontario College of Art and Design University  
 2015-2016

Adjunct Professor  
 First Nations Studies and Department of Visual Arts  
 University of Western Ontario  
 2004-2009

Teaching Assistant  
 University of Western Ontario  
 2002-2003

Teaching Assistant  
 Simon Fraser University  
 1995-1997

### **Publications:**

Manning, Dolleen Tisawii'ashii. "The Murmuration of Birds: An Anishinaabe Ontology of Mnidoo-Worlding." *Feminist Phenomenology Futures*, Eds. Helen Fielding and Dorothea Olkowski. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press (Fall 2017).

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