

Embodied Landscapes:
A Creation-Research Indigenous Métissage

Darlene St. Georges

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Darlene St Georges

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Darlene St. Georges

Entitled: Embodied Landscapes: A Creation-Research Indigenous Métissage

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Signed by the final examining committee:

_____	Chair
Dr. Catherine Russell	
_____	External Examiner
Dr. Jackie Seidel	
_____	External to Program
Dr. Ailie Cleghorn	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Erika Hasebe-Ludt	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Richard Lachapelle	
_____	Thesis Supervisor
Dr. Anita Sinner	

Approved by _____
Dr. Anita Sinner, Graduate Program Director

April 9, 2020 _____
Dr. Rebecca Taylor Duclos Dean, Faculty Fine Art

Abstract

Embodied Landscapes: A creation-research Indigenous métissage

Darlene St. Georges, PhD
Concordia University, 2020

Embodied Landscapes: A Creation-Research Indigenous Métissage (EL) is a self-study inquiry about *identity* and *subjectivity* fostered by the seed of my research journey of retrieving my Métis identity. It is a storying journey through entrenched notions of identity and identity politics in a Canadian colonial context. EL is a creation story that moves through the experiential forces of subjectivity by using a creation-based Indigenous métissage spiral (IM Spiral). This inquiry approach is rooted in Indigenous epistemologies and creative and literary research practices of poetic inquiry, métissage, and artmaking. I use my own photos, images, poems, and stories for weaving, mixing, and layering artistic assemblages. EL values knowledge embedded in and generated from experiences, memories, intuitions, dreams, visions, and ancestral wisdom, and recognizes *being*, as in-motion and relational.

EL contains hyperlinks to a creative production—*Embodied Landscapes: Digital Exhibit* (ELDE). The two components are synthesized through a métissage of embodied personal and sociopolitical complexities, challenges, and expression. Through discussion, presentation, and engagement with the viewer/reader, EL and ELDE reveal an approach to inquiry, *living curriculum* (Aoki, 2005), and pedagogy rooted in relationships and in ways of being, knowing, doing, and learning with/in creation itself.

ELDE encompasses theories and methods that invoke an interplay among theoretical, curricular, and pedagogical frameworks. The Spiral sets in motion my Self evolution through forward, backward, inward, and outward movements, around and through realms of experience.

This evokes a multi-textural dialogue propelling my being as an historical subject, a community member, a researcher, an artist, a poet, a teacher, and a Métis woman. Subjective experiences, memories, and reflections of my research journey culminate with emerging pedagogical values and are discussed in context of inspiring the arts curriculum.

This thesis addresses the contemporary Canadian controversy over Métis identity. It critically explores the role that subjectivity plays in identification, self-understanding, learning, and ways of being and living in the world. It offers a creation-research approach and a means of exploring Self as a site of inquiry.

Keywords: Self-study, creation-research, Indigenous métissage, arts-based inquiry, poetic inquiry, storying, curriculum and pedagogy, Indigenous epistemology, Métis identity.

Dedication and Acknowledges

I dedicate this thesis to All My Relations, in the spirit of our shared future.

I would like to acknowledge help, assistance, and support from:

- My extended family participants: for their sharing and willingness to explore and discuss our Métis heritage and more.
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Contribution of Authors

Edna Lachance	Elder, Québec Métis Nation, consultation on Indigenous protocol
François Drouin	Elder, Québec Métis Nation, consultation on Indigenous protocol
Dr. Josephine (Josie) Mills	Gallery Director, Helen Christou Gallery, University of Lethbridge, curator and organizer for <i>Embodied Landscapes</i> exhibit and <i>Poetic Encounters</i> event
Jon Oxley	Administrative manager, University of Lethbridge Gallery, consultation on art print materials for exhibit
Chad Patterson	Gallery Technician, University of Lethbridge Art Gallery. Poster design for exhibit and consultation for installation of poetry for <i>Embodied Landscapes</i> exhibit.
Kirsten Meiszinger	Assistant curator, University of Lethbridge, consultation on installation of exhibit
David Smith	Assistant curator, University of Lethbridge, consultation on installation of exhibit
Taylor Hayward	Printing Services, University of Lethbridge, consultation on technical aspects of printing for exhibit
Marlene Lacey	Editorial consultation and assistance.
Simon Rose	Editorial assistance
David McMillan	IT specialist, technical support for Embodied Landscapes Digital Gallery (ELDG)
Dr. Bruce MacKay	Professor, Faculty of Liberal Education, University of Lethbridge, invitation to presentation on <i>Embodied Landscapes</i> to undergraduate class
Dr. Anne Drummond	Professor, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lethbridge, invitation to presentation on <i>Embodied Landscapes</i> and facilitation of <i>Poetic Encounters</i> event to graduate class

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Glossary of Indigenous and French Language Terms

ahah'	path	Wendat
alsusuti	self determination	Mi'kmaq
asoqoma'sit	cross over	Mi'kmaq
atriho'tat	pay attention	Wendat
autoportrait	self-portrait	French
awasos	bear	Wendat
ciel	sky	French
déjà vu	I realize that I have	French
réaliser je vis mes ancêtres	seen my ancestors	French
dit	also known as	French
elue'wa'latl	fool, trick	Mi'kmaq
face à l'est	facing east	French
gejiatl	aware	Mi'kmaq
gimtemit	cry silently, cry secretly	Mi'kmaq
gsite'taqan	cherished or valued; precious	Mi'kmaq
iyää'tou'tenh	two bodies	Wendat
je suis	I am	French
mi'walati	grateful	Mi'kmaq
mon coeur	my heart	French
ne'tata'suaqan	wisdom	Mi'kmaq
nestuapuguet	speak wisely	Mi'kmaq
nolka	deer	Mi'kmaq
ohskënonton	elle est forte	Wendat
ponki-mkazas	raven	Wendat
tëndih teyää'tayeh	two bodies	Wendat
tewendihwen'	lightning flashes	Wendat
toqwa'tu'kl	two-eyed seeing	Mi'kmaq
wendahronk	to hear her voice	Wendat
yändicha'	celestial body	Wendat

Wendat (Huron), Mi'kmaq and French languages are part of my ancestral heritage. Terms have been retrieved using online searching from the following websites, respectively:

<http://www.languewendat.com>

<https://www.mikmaqonline.org>

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english-french>

Key Terms and Abbreviations

ABR	Arts-based research (ABR) encompasses the diversity of current approaches to creative scholarship.
ABER	Arts-based education research.
Aboriginal	The term Aboriginal was in use prior to the Powley ruling (federally and provincially) as term that referred to First Nations and Inuit peoples in Canada. The term Indigenous is the term in current use, referring to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people of Canada.
All My Relations	An statement that reflects of an Indigenous worldview; “...everything that you are kin to....everyone....words as an act of ceremony...you come to this truth again and seek to breathe it into you, to become it even for a fraction of a second...”(Richard Wagamese, 2013)
<i>being</i>	Living and embodiment in and with the world, relationally. For reasons explained within, I invert the term research-creation to
capitalization	A capital-case letter will be used for terms such as Métis, Other, Self, Earth, and All My Relations to signify a proper noun and utmost respect.
creation-research	creation-research. This an approach to research that is rooted in indigenous epistemologies of creation stories.
ELDE	Embodied Landscapes Digital Exhibit is a centralized body of creative work—a creation-based Indigenous métissage—a storying of my experience using poems, visual art and stories.
Facing East	Face East: is a position I have learned to stand during and after a sweat lodge ceremony, within the circle of the medicine wheel, when giving thanks to Elders and Spirits for new beginnings.
FNMI	First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.
IM Spiral	My creation-based (creation-research) Indigenous métissage method and application process; a thing and an action; the genetic

indigeneity root of my research, sometimes presented as my Spiral, or a sense of spiraling when I want to emphasize movement and reflexive action. It involves a sacred reflective space/place.

Indigenous A sense of *being* Indigenous, in relation with human, non-human and the earth

M/métis A long-time rooted connection to place: the land, stories, language and traditions.

métissage Métis and métis. The use of the lower-case and upper-case “m” symbolizes the current political tension in Canadian context, as discussed in my thesis

Multi-textural dialogue Métissage is a method and a theory that mixes, contrasts, and juxtaposes multiple narratives in various literary forms of creative non-fiction, poetry, and prose. Métissage purposefully contrasts and juxtaposes stories and experience to generate complex dialogues and honour multiple voices and perspectives (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009). In this thesis I am broadening the scope of métissage by including visual art as a unique form of literacy.

photo-digital collage A visual and metaphorical dialogue that embodies multi-faceted experiences: knowledge, memories, dreams, visions, and internal knowing, which is processed and shared visually and metaphorically

Red Road An artistic composition created by layering, blending, and juxtaposing a variety of my own images—components such as photographs, paintings and drawings into a collage. My photo-digital collage artworks are created in Adobe Photoshop.

subjectivity The “Red Road” is a metaphor for living a spiritual way of life. Experience of relational Self and the continual unfolding of meaning and understanding as I engage in my research journey. It is the method and approach to theorizing about identity and

with/in

subjectivity, helping me to conceptualize, materialize and share my research experience and what being Métis means to me. To be read as “in and with” in respect to being in and with the world; a relationship between one’s Self, Others and the environment.

Embodied Landscapes Digital Gallery: Navigation and Style

The *Embodied Landscapes Digital Gallery* (ELDG) is a creation-based Indigenous métissage, an oeuvre in and of itself, comprised of a compilation of creative work that attends to my research journey. ELDG is positioned in the centre of the thesis to symbolize that creation is the heart and spirit of my research. While this thesis is presented in a linear way, it also critically and poetically interlinks the creation work in the digital gallery throughout the thesis with the use of hyperlinks. In this way the hyperlinks act to disrupt a linear progression, to create opportunities to engage aesthetically, and to weave a broader métissage throughout.

The hyperlinks [Bear paw icon and a key word] invite you to be transported to an art piece which may be a poem, an image, or both. I chose a Bear paw because it symbolically represents my spiritual relationship with Bear; I have dreamt of Bear all of my life. Once in the gallery, again click on the Bear paw icon at the bottom right of the page to go back to the discussion. I have composed EL and ELDG to share a relational journey. As we read and view together, through the movements of the IM Spiral, you will notice things from your own perspective and experience.

The images and poems in the ELGD are meant to extend the discussion beyond the expository text and into poetic and artistic realms. While reading through the Autoportrait 1 to 3 in front of the digital gallery, the hyperlink prompts invite you to engage with the artwork as a way of infusing the discussion with aesthetic imagination: Envisioning. While in the gallery you can experience the creation work as a whole, and then after the gallery and in the subsequent discussion of the research journey you can engage with ELDG as a way of reaching back: Remembering.

In this way the thesis provides spaces and places to rest, to pause, and to reflect; to attend to spirit. As we slow down, we come to see, hear, and share knowledge and insight through this métissage. Here we enter into a curriculum and pedagogy as lived and living experience (Aoki, 2005), and we honour Indigenous ways of being as *self-in-relation* (Absolon, 2011) with/in the world.



Figure 1. Bear paw icon. Click to move from the discussion into Embodied Landscapes: Digital Gallery (ELDG) and then back again.

Autoportrait 1: Opening the Métissage

It is time for us to go deeper into our own knowledge systems, deeper into our story worlds. We must now go beyond what has been “discovered”; we must go beyond the colonizing constraints of Western theories and paradigms.

Jo-ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Jenny Boi Jun Lee-Morgan, & Jason DeSantolo (2019), *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, p. 11.

This is a story

I have been

inside

and

outside

of

I am

I am not

Not

I

am

m o r e t h a n y o u s a y i a m



Congruent with Indigenous research protocol of positioning oneself, I begin with a personal introduction. My full name is Darlene Elsie Antoinette St. Georges. My given middle names are those of my maternal and paternal grandmothers. I have eight (recorded) generations of French, Métis, Wendat, and Mi'kmaq ancestors on my paternal side who lived on the Island of Montreal and other regions in Québec. My maternal great-grandparents immigrated from England and Germany into Québec. My parents grew up, met, and married in Témiscamingue, Québec, a small mill town adjacent Lac Témiscamingue on the upper Ottawa River, near Lake Kipawa. Along with many of their siblings, my parents were the first generation to migrate to Ontario for jobs at Falconbridge and INCO mines, the largest employers of Northern Canada at the time. Thus, my parents and many of my aunts and uncles settled in North Bay, Sudbury, Elliot Lake, Sault Ste. Marie, Kirkland Lake, Kapuskasing, Timmins, and other remote northern communities.

My siblings and I were born and raised in Chelmsford, a small northern Ontario town along Kings Highway 144. The highway was the main route through 267 kilometers of forest connecting bordering towns from the greater Sudbury region all the way up to Timmins. Winding and wintry roads required watching out for moose, bears, jackrabbits, and logging trucks.

I have three brothers and sister-in-laws', three nieces, two nephews, and a host of aunts, uncles, and first and second cousins. I have never met many of my extended family. Both my great-grandmothers and my grandmothers birthed 13 and 15 children respectively. My family network is vast and my relatives are spread across Canada. Many still live in the Montréal region, while others reside in northern and southern Ontario. Along with myself and my brothers, some family members now live in British Columbia and Alberta.

My educational, artistic, and scholarly practices are intertwined and have evolved simultaneously over the years of my life. In my youth I attended Catholic public elementary and high schools. After graduating high school, I worked for a number of years, before entering university as a mature adult. I began my university career with the intention to transition into education in the public sector. During this period, I obtained bachelor's degrees in psychology, fine art, and education with Carleton University in Ottawa, Concordia University in Montréal, and Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, and completed a Masters' of Arts in values and culture in arts education at McGill University in Montreal in 2010. Throughout my years of higher education, I have always worked full-time to support my basic needs of food and shelter and to fund my own education. I taught elementary and high school arts in Moosonee, Ontario, along the James Bay Coast, and then middle school and high school arts in the public and private sectors in Montreal, Québec. Throughout these years as I have moved and developed along my path, as an artist, educator, and emerging scholar over three Canadian provinces, I have come to recognize a fundamental and growing need, a calling if you will, to deepen my connections with “All My Relations” (Wagamese, 2013).

My research, *Embodied Landscapes*, is an arts-based self-study inquiry about identity and subjectivity. On my journey I reclaim my “official” Métis identity by gathering family documents, listening to stories that have circulated within my family for years, and retrieving official documents from historical archives to satisfy application requirements. I apply the half bracket to emphasize movements of reaching back and living forward within this process.

As a Métis woman, I use the concept of self-study within an Indigenous pedagogical paradigm of self-evolution as a personal journey (Archibald 1997, 2008; Ermine, 1996; Aluli-Meyer, 2013b) and critical self-reflection, as integral to decolonization (Smith, 2012). My self-

study is congruent with Indigenous methodologies and protocol by upholding Indigenous epistemologies, and ways of being, knowing, and doing (Battiste, 2000; Chilisa, 2012; Deloria, 2012; Ermine, 1996; Kovach, 2009; 2018; McGregor, Restoule, & Johnston, 2018; Aluli-Meyer, 2008; Wilson, 2001; Wilson, Breen, & Dupré, 2019). In a Western paradigm, in which I am also situated as a scholar, I harness the concept of self-study through a qualitative lens in which the researcher is immersed in a process of openly and reflectively examining their practice, making the practice, analysis, and resulting knowledge explicit to others (Samaras, 2010). Throughout my thesis I fold into my discussion select Western thinking that I consider supportive and congruent with Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies, not unlike other Indigenous thinkers and philosophers have done (Cajete, 2000, Highway, 2003; King, 2008). In the realm of arts-based research practices, I embrace self-study as a living inquiry that recognizes and attends to the interconnections between making, learning, and knowing through the entanglements and relationships of Self with Other, which include human and non-human beings. Here arts-based practices embrace the fact that Self cannot stand outside of practice and apply it, but rather is situated in and emerges from it as an embodied praxis (Irwin, LeBlanc, Ryu, & Belliveau, 2018).

Through my research journey I explore my sense of indigeneity and enter into a process of retrieving my official Métis status. Filling out applications required me to navigate government and political systems and provoked me to question the very notion of identity itself. Although identity is a crucial concept—one that is theorized in various ways in the current literature on métissage and Indigenous methodology—it is a limiting concept because it depends upon a structure, precisely, of identification, an assertion of “I am that” even if “that” is a hybrid identity. In order to move beyond the concept of identity I explore subjectivity, which—unlike identity—is based not on identification but on an experiential force found *within* identity, yet not

belonging to identity. In other words, identity imposes a structured limitation upon the subject. Considering how deeply identity is entrenched in colonial systems and narratives, I turn inward to explore in more detail the role and potential of understanding Self and what being Métis means, to me and in the larger geo-cultural and political narrative of Canada.

Colonial identity penciled in from an exterior intends to organize and classify beings—in being disconnected from experience(s) and inner knowing and our intricate and intimate interrelationships with Other. Identity seems pathologized and packaged while the real narratives of our lives don't fit into this model;

and just like that

our voices

are stopped

just like that

the water voice

the wind voice

the sky voice

the Earth voice

and

we cross our hands

over our chest

praying

in case we die

in the night

I registered for official membership with the Québec Métis Nation as illustrated in Figure 2, Nation Métis Québec Nation Identification Card. I met my application goal, receiving official recognition in November 2017. The journey was a complex one and involved not only locating family documents but also listening to ancestral stories and retrieving official documents from historical archives. The journey was and continues to be a path of defining who I am, using various deeply reflexive artistic lenses as I move through my personal self-evolution.

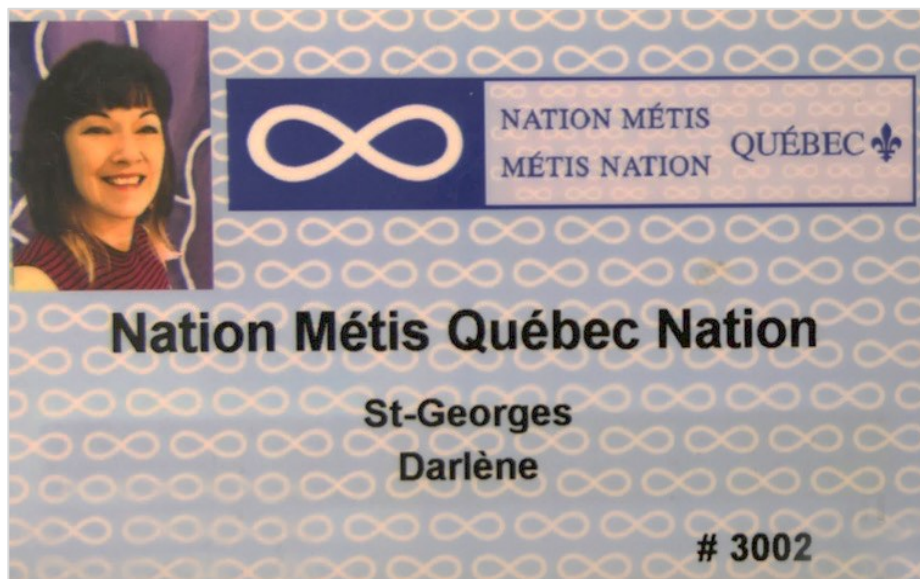


Figure 2. Nation Métis Québec Nation. Identification card. November 2017. Source: Author.

I make substantial use of a range of educative processes, scholarly reading, personal communications, and varied artistic methods to gather information, to witness, process, analyze, and synthesize experiences and stories through my IM Spiral. The IM Spiral is a creation-based Indigenous métissage—a method of process, application, and pedagogy that invokes a spiral-in-motion; spiralling forward, backward, inward, outward, around and through my research journey.

Symbolic Representation of My IM Spiral

I present my teaching story, *Pedagogy in Motion*, to consider some of the origins of my IM Spiral and its concepts, as well as the pedagogical implication of learning through creation. Enacting a method of storytelling honours Indigenous methodologies and pedagogy that rest on oral traditions, and can help us understand the theory and application of the IM Spiral. A deeper discussion of my inquiry approach is featured in *Autoportrait 2: Methods and the IM Spiral*.

Pedagogy-in-motion: An innovative lesson in colour theory.

Some years ago, I was teaching a lesson on colour theory at the school where I was working at the time. Art teachers understand how essential learning about colour theory is for foundational practice. Learning, applying, and exploring this theory helps students achieve what they want in their own work, analyze historical art pieces, and discover new contemporary approaches to artmaking and interpreting art. Colour theory is an essential component of foundational art practice and is a standard component in Canadian middle-school art curriculum for students in Grades 7, 8, and 9. Three basic categories make up a logical structure to guide middle school students through the multitude of definitions, concepts, and colour design. These categories are the colour wheel, colour harmony, and the context regarding how colours are used. The colour wheel or charts based on red, yellow, and blue are traditional starting points for students to learn primary, secondary, and tertiary colours. Many teachers, including myself, have introduced colour theory by using pre-made colour wheel charts to engage students in rote learning of primary, secondary and tertiary colours, followed by activities in which students practice mixing primary coloured paint to produce secondary colours, documenting achievements in assessable colour swatches or more creative products. While this common teaching approach serves its

purpose, it is primarily instructional.

Early in my career, my interest in this type of lesson diminished, and I began searching for new ways to engage my students when learning about colour theory. I was looking for more of an experiential approach to learning that could reach beyond typical rote instructional practice. I wanted a creation pedagogy that would guide my students toward the concepts of colour theory, where learning is situated in experience and creation.

Two particular events guided me in my search: recalling Georges Seurat's pointillism and rediscovering the visual effects of spinning images on the turntable of a record player.

I started thinking about the French artist George Seurat and how his innovative artistic experiments in the late nineteenth century with coloured dots and principles of contrast taught us that our perceptions and experiences of colour are more a matter of optics than of chemistry. Seurat's work was rooted in the idea that the optics of our eyes, how they are built and operate, play a significant active role in our experience of colour. He showed us that when coloured dots are juxtaposed, our eyes work to do the blending. In other words, when yellow dots are placed beside blue dots, we will experience green hues, courtesy of our eyes. I found the notion of optics versus chemistry very interesting, and I asked myself whether I needed to rely on the chemistry for my lesson.

A couple of turntables tossed in the trash that I saw while on my walk home from a long day of teaching triggered my memories of experimenting with my brother's turntable years earlier. I remembered that interesting visual effects were created by the spinning text and imagery featured on the labels at the centre of the records. I also recalled that varying the record player's speed caused more fascinating visual experiences to appear, which was the impetus for many new drawings and poetry, things in which I was always immersed. This reminiscing

prompted me to retrieve those discarded turntables that I had seen on my way home and take them to my classroom.

When I plugged them in at the school, I was thrilled to discover that the turntables still worked. I cut a variety of record-sized paper circles and fastened one onto the turntable. Using primary coloured pens, I dragged the tips across the spinning paper to create spiraling lines. Stopping the turntable, I added a few Seurat-like dots. I placed the paper back on the turntable, and when I switched it on, I was delighted to discover that the spinning motion transformed the primary colour lines and dots into a secondary-coloured optical image. It was then that my colour-in-motion lesson idea emerged.

I prepared a lesson designed in an experiential and open framework. The intention of the lesson was that creation and experience would lead my students' learning. The students were required to document their approaches and discoveries and over time make informed creative choices in order to demonstrate their understanding of basic colour theory, along with their extended learning and its application in their work.

With great enthusiasm, students cut out circles, creating primary line designs on their papers. They shared the turntables to explore how motion blended their primary colours into secondary hues and within a sixty-minute work period they were fully engaged and committed to their learning, collaboratively and enthusiastically. Students shared their artistic stories of approaches, results, and unexpected surprises. We extended our learning by including patterns as well as only colours, which shifted the experience beyond my expectations. We were mixing and blending lines, patterns, and colours optically while learning colour theory, but also, which is germane to my discussion, we generated a theory about learning in which motion was the key!

My story reveals how learning was enlivened as we moved from a static model to an active model that emphasizes movement, experimentation, surprise, and unpredictability. Through this learning experience I recognized the fundamental importance of motion in creating pedagogical openings and opportunities. Motion not only fulfilled the lesson's objectives but more importantly, and pertinent to my creation-research method, motion activated our subjectivities and allowed us to engage in ways of being and knowing that extended our experience. Significantly, my colour theory lesson and the work with my students in the classroom taught me more about teaching and learning by revealing how motion unleashed possibility and invited us to spiral inward to explore and generate theory, and then outward to engage with knowledge and practice. These conditions freed us to take risks, and to embrace uncertainty and difference, as we engaged subjectively and relationally as a community of learners. Motion was the genetic element of learning and being that created the conditions from which the new could emerge. This understanding profoundly informed my IM Spiral, and motion became its genesis. Through my developing comprehension of Indigenous epistemology, I came to realize that my spiral-in-motion is congruent with Indigenous understandings of relationships with/in the world where we are interconnected through a dialogical motion (Cajete, 2000; Little Bear, 2000; 2004). This is why relationships are central to Indigenous understandings of Self-in-relation with/in the world (Wilson et al., 2019). The inward and outward movement of my spiral metaphorically represents this relational connectivity, and this understanding informs my theorizing about the relationship between identity and subjectivity. My creation-research IM Spiral models the ways in which I engage in my research journey and is the method and approach to theorizing about identity and subjectivity. This helps me to conceptualize, materialize, and share my research experience and what being Métis means to me.

Research Questions

My self-study situates me as a site of inquiry. Here I explore the following questions: How indigenous am I? / How am I indigenous? What is my sense of indigeneity? What are the personal implications in claiming my sense of indigeneity? What are the professional implications as an artist, teacher, and a researcher?

This study also examines the curricular and pedagogical implications of developing a counternarrative of identity, my own and that of others...of what it means to be Indigenous in this place, in Canadian contemporary context. I ask: How can this creative métissage praxis as a form of resistance to imperialistic narratives about how one gets to live in the world, move us toward a new ethos for our times? (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo 2009)

My Creation-Research Indigenous Métissage Journey

A movement through a creation-based Indigenous métissage takes us on a path where multi-textural dialogues can open up a deepening awareness about our interconnectedness with Others and the world. In this way my dissertation goes beyond mixing colours for art; poems, images, stories, and words, in official and ancestral languages, are curated into a critical métissage to create an embodied story of *being* Métis in a contemporary Canadian context. Métissage purposefully contrasts and juxtaposes stories and experience to generate complex dialogues and honour multiple voices and perspectives (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009).

In the context of this dissertation Métis is a cultural concept, an identifier of peoples from a mixed First Nations and European ancestry, and considered one of three recognized Indigenous groups in Canada, along with Inuit and First Nations. Métissage is a method and a theory that mixes, contrasts, and juxtaposes multiple narratives in various literary forms of creative non-

fiction, poetry, and prose. In this thesis I am broadening the scope of métissage by folding visual art as a unique form of literacy into the praxis of métissage. In the context of this dissertation, and from an epistemological standpoint, métissage and Métis operate relationally because each are situated in an ethic of relationships, subjectivity, difference, and multiplicity.



I invite the reader into this critical relationship with opportunities to pause, engage, reflect, and consider experiences. In this way we enter into a unique dialectic of multiple perspectives and truths. I can never be “this” or “that”. The Self is relational; while I am telling my story, your story may emerge too, and in this way become part of the conversation. This multi-dimensional engagement breathes life into the work, enlivens it. In this way this dissertation is a living entity, imbued with spirit, shifting and changing as it responds with each encounter.

This work aims to generate openings for learning through sensing, experiential and insight, all in the storying ways of our ancestors. The integration of past with present, of art with words, methodologies with theories, in ancestral ways of meaning-making, is my effort to provide a wider, more open, inclusive educative perspective within a scholarly environment.

Three Methods of Inquiry: Poetry, Storying, and Visual Art

Each of the three creative inquiry approaches are discussed in Autoportrait 2: Methods and the IM Spiral, and are organized around the structure and elements within my Spiral. The distinct but related artistic methods are juxtaposed, mixed, layered, and braided in the style of métissage to produce a creation-research project that accounts for my research journey. This is how I engage with my questions and how new questions and knowledge emerge. In this way My Spiral is a method of thinking about pedagogy and ways of being with/in the world. My intellectual and

sensory experiences, memories, dreams, remembering, imagination, and all the spaces in-between—the holes, gaps, and silences—are embodied through these artistic inquiry strands and operate relationally. In the realm of métissage, the images, poetry, and stories generate a multi-textural dialogue and space where I explore and tell my story and into which I invite the reader (viewer/listener/interactor) through multiple portals. In this heterogeneous space subjectivity can move fluidly, spiralling inward and outward, moving in, around, through, and beyond fixed notions of identity, to explore the potential of *being*. Here we are guided through a storying praxis; an intellectual and spiritual journey that draws us deeper into Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Archibald et al., 2019).

Three Theoretical Strands: Creation-Research, Métissage, and Indigenous Methodologies

The three theoretical strands are discussed in the Autoportrait 3: Theory following the three methods of inquiry. The theory is also organized around the structure of the IM Spiral. For this reason, I present methods of the IM Spiral first, followed by theory.

Inspiration.

I draw inspiration from art, poetry, and prose from leading contemporary Canadian Indigenous artists and writers, individuals that challenge colonial narratives with their stories generated through the power of their creativity and personal subjectivities. I also draw inspiration and insight from *the girl of silver*, a series of photo-digital collage prints I created in my master's thesis, as a way of reaching back and moving forward through the motion of my IM Spiral, integral to the aims of my self-study.

Art.

There are many artists who inspire my practice as an artist, teacher, and emerging scholar. In the context of this self-study and creation-research project, the following female Indigenous artists have particularly informed my work in various ways:

Artist Meryl McMaster's collections, such as *Entre-Deux Mondes—In-Between Worlds* (2017) and *As Immense as the Sky* (2019)¹ explore imaginative self-articulations of being, through costume and photographed self-portraiture. At the heart of these works is McMaster's exploration of identity and subjectivity in the realm of the imaginative and mythological. McMasters juxtaposes visions of identity through the mixing of social, cultural, personal, mythological, and imaginative understandings of Self (Anderson, 2016). McMaster's work supports and contributes to my thinking about the potential of subjectivity and how creation can develop, deepen and expand our understanding of Self and challenge fixed notions of identity.

Métis artist Nadia Myer's work, particularly *Scarscapes* (2010), resonates with me. She explores identity and loss through a series of beadworks. She is engaging us viscerally with the impact of erasure, which my family and I have endured across multiple generations. In this series Myer evokes the materiality of erasure; the unhonoured agreements of the Wampum,² where once intricate patterns and symbols, beaded by women who recorded histories, agreements, values and culture, existed. Myer's *Scarscapes* symbolizes colonial whitewashing and erasure of Indigenous identities, cultures and values, leaving ghostly remnants; beaded-in scars on a backdrop of a whitewashed (erased) Wampum. Myer's work informs my self-study inquiry by demonstrating the power of art to evoke, provoke, and challenge colonial logics, narratives, and politics, and demonstrates how art is research in the ways that it informs and empowers. Myer's

¹ See: <http://merylmcmaster.com/> ; <http://www.nadiamyre.net/scarscapes>; <http://shelleyniro.ca/works/>

² Wampum Belt. See: <http://archaeologymuseum.ca/wampum/>

Scarscapes embodies how I envision creation-research, how art itself enables us to experience; to see, feel and come to know and understand, critically, and to further consider the implications and the ontological, epistemological, and pedagogical value of creation-research.

Both Rebecca Belmore's and Shelly Niro's seminal works and histories as female Indigenous artists emerged on the art scene in the mid 1980s. Their work is embedded in provoking political consciousness about self-liberation and resilience of Indigenous women, through oppositional juxtaposition of cultural signifiers (Augaitis & Ritter, 2008; Martin, 2003). Niro and Belmore are leaders in the art world who bring attention to contemporary Indigenous issues of stereotypes, identity, self-determination, and agency. Their work informs my self-study and supports my inquiry into colonial claims on identity and questions I have surrounding identity.

Poetry.

In my self-study, poetry is seminal to my creation-research. I interweave poetry with my visual images to inquire, explore, and provoke. In poetic genres I am compelled by contemporary Indigenous poets, such as Jordan Abel (2016), Lee Maracle (2015), and Joshua Whitehead (2017). In their unique ways each poet explores, debunks, and reveals alternative narratives embedded in the realities and complexities of living contemporary Indigenous lives.

Encountering their creative work, in content, form, and style, has opened the potential of poetry in my own creative process, affirming poetry as a powerful communicator of complex critical experience that is often challenging to communicate in a linear and explicit way. Further these poets' works help me understand that I see and experience poetry as image and symbol. In this way, in my creation work, I aim to render poems that resonate, move, intermingle and linger in relationship with my visual artworks, broadening and enlivening my creation-based *métissage*.

the girl of silver.

In “Project 3: A Multi-textural Self Analysis: *the girl of silver*,” which is part of my Master’s thesis (St. Georges, 2010), I quoted a suggestion by Maxine Greene (1995) that resonates with me persistently, regarding “a reflective grasp of our life stories and of our ongoing quests that reaches beyond where we have been depends on our ability to remember things past” (p. 20). Through my deepening understanding of my connections with/in the world, I re-enter this critical creative praxis and approach of honouring vision and voice. I generated my story of being with/in the world and deepen my experiences “outside of Western constructions of female identity” (St. Georges, 2010, p. 81). Archibald et al. (2019) support and reminds me that “the interrelational dimensions of storywork [enables us to] transcend time and space, connecting on deeper levels of understanding with each other, with all living beings, with the Earth and the multiverse” (p. 12). I have juxtaposed aspects of my creative series *the girl of silver* with elements of my creation work in this dissertation. I explore some of my previous creative works, re/presenting them as artists often do when they reach back to return to experience and insights, and to consider these through new lenses. This serves as a way to explore the sense of how I have changed, evolved, and unfolded. In doing so I consider shifts in my experience, from then to now, with new positionings and contexts, and with an underlying sense of returning home. In this way returning to the girl of silver is congruent with my IM Spiral, with the fluidity, movement, and growth of identity and *being*, and is a creative act and renewal of self-determination and agency.



self-determination

How Indigenous Am I? / How am I Indigenous?

My family’s genealogical records prove our Métis identity. During my research journey I have

found the politics of being officially identified to be contentious. A multitude of questions, surrounding the concept and definition of the word “identity” were provoked within me: What is the true test of identity? Who gets to decide? What kind of proof is valid? Is validity only found in the official colonial archives? What is not in the archive? Is identity in the genes, the blood, the psyche, and/or the spirit? Is it in day-to-day living, in our teachings, or in what we learn? Is it in one’s philosophy of life? Maybe it is not a question of identity at all? Although we cannot escape identity, or living within the boundaries that constitute an historical world, can we affect the places of this identity from the spaces of subjective experience? Can we discover sites and linger in them within their historical place of identity and spiral inward toward subjective experience, creation, and transformation, and then spiral outward again into new forms of Self-knowledge?

Despite the challenging experiences with government bureaucracy as I retraced my Métis heritage, I have come to embrace the inner energies of my subjective experiences and to honour the memories, dreams, and visions that connect me with my family and All My Relations (Wagamese, 2013).



The Research Journey

I have childhood memories of some of my relatives during infrequent visits and gatherings. My research project provided me a reconnection to a first cousin from whom I learned about at a 2015 St. Georges’ family reunion. The reunion was well attended, with over 500 relatives at the gathering. It took place a time when I first felt a deeply rooted sense of home while living on the island of Montréal. Knowledge of the family gathering would have satisfied my growing need to learn about my ancestors. Learning about the reunion acted as a prompt for me to dig into my

family history, leading me to discover my lineage on the island of Montréal.

Through my interviews and discussions with family members, information emerged that provided some answers to the questions I had asked my mother in my youth. For example, I learned that many of my paternal second cousins had been granted Aboriginal status well over 20 years earlier. Some of my first cousins are members of the Métis Nation of Ontario and others are members of the Québec Métis Nation. Like other Métis families, my family's attitudes regarding our Indigenous roots ranged from embracing this knowledge, to ignoring it through silence, and rejecting this. The fear of scrutiny of being labelled Native is one of the most far-reaching impacts of colonial claims and shame. However, I have also discovered that there is a deep relational quality that lies at the heart of being Métis. I have discovered this in multiple ways and through various processes on my research journey, including my personal reflections, experience, and story; shared understandings within my extended family; perspectives of Elders within the Québec Métis Nation and from contemporary Métis scholars (Anderson, 2016, 2018; Foxcurran, Bouchard, & Malette, 2016; Lowan-Trudeau, 2015). These understandings are shaped by experiences and interconnections that have spanned across multiple generations and expanded through kinships. Like rivers, these relational ties, run deep and long, provoking within me new ways of being in the world and, they propel compelling questions of being-and-belonging that lie at the heart of my self-study.

My personal journey extends into a scholarly one by attending to the concept of identity and exploring the fundamental importance of subjectivity. Subjectivity is considered within broader frameworks of arts-based research (ABR), métissage, and Indigenous methodologies as a way of distinguishing it from identity. In this thesis, subjectivity is brought to the forefront of discussions. I will demonstrate how the question of subjectivity is implicit, and sometimes

explicit, in the current literature, and in questions surrounding indigeneity. To accomplish this, my theoretical discussion and creation-based Indigenous métissage addresses identity and subjectivity, and more specifically, explores questions surrounding Métis identity in relation to my self-study.

My dissertation has been provided to and approved by Mrs. Edna Lachance, Council of Elders, and François Drouin, spokesperson of the Québec Métis Nation, in accordance with ethical protocols of Indigenous methodology and research.

Autoportrait 2: Methods and the IM Spiral

There are multiple components of my self-study that include the creation of ELDG, a creative storying métissage that maps my research journey, and contributions from family members (co-creators) by way of conversations, interviews and information gathering. The Québec Métis Nation aided in searching historical records and support of this thesis, along with the University of Lethbridge Christou Art Gallery, where I was invited to exhibit aspects of my creation-research, give a public ArtNOW lecture, a poetic encounters event, and talks with a graduate and an undergraduate class.

The methods I used to locate and recover documentation, information, about my ancestors, in particular my Métis great-grandmother and her Wendat (Huron) mother, are a blend of Western methods—such as archival research and semi-formal interviews—and Indigenous approaches—such as listening to and honouring family stories and personal histories. These approaches to inquiry reflect my positioning(s) as a PhD candidate and assistant professor within a Western institution, in which I straddle the tension between established Western methods and emerging Indigenous methodologies. While I respect certain non-Indigenous academic protocols, as a Métis artist, poet, teacher, and scholar I am rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being that value inquiry that honour relationships and personal histories (Kovach, 2018; Wilson et al., 2019). By reclaiming, creating and telling my story as a form of resistance to the grand colonial narrative (Smith, 2012), I am able to contribute to my broader Métis community who has been fragmented across multiple generations.

There were linguistic considerations that were challenging when searching archival genealogical databases. For example, when searching for my Wendat great-great-grandmother

Marie Godin's birth record I had to use multiple variants of the name Marie, which is a French translate of Mary as well as a Latin derivative of Maria. This complicated my search, and I was not able to locate her birth record. I speculate if the name Marie was really her name at all? I considered the question, recognizing that name-changing policies instituted through the Indian Act, stripped Indigenous identity, which was a key part of the process of assimilating Indigenous peoples into Canada. The Indian Act empowered Indian agents, teachers, and schools to reassign the names of Indigenous people, often giving them Christian ones like Mary (Belcourt, 2013, Joseph, 2018; Vowel, 2016).

I have applied multiple methods to gather attestations of my Indigenous heritage. They include: 1. locating source documents from multiple archives, 2. conducting semi-formal interviews with family participants to seek and collect information, documents, photos from family archives, and 3. to listen to the unrecorded histories of family stories, knowledges, and understanding. In archival research seeking information from multiple sources, is considered an effective system to access and gather information and evidence (L'Eplattenierto, 2009). This method of information seeking has also revealed gaps in information and led me to seek aid from family members and the Québec Métis Nation archival consultant. Seeking aid is considered integral to methods of archival research (L'Eplattenierto, 2009).

Along with these approaches to archival research, it is important to consider that although archives are about acquiring documentation as empirical and impartial evidence, there is new thinking about the role and form of archives in contemporary contexts and research on identity and memory. Here consideration of multiplicity and emerging identities opens the border between official archives and their interpretation. The archive may be more porous and interactive than once considered (Cook, 2013), which is a critical consideration in identity

research. In this sense, evidence of my family's Indigenous identity which is required to satisfy application requirements for official Indigenous recognition is in tension with established archival research. Gilliland and Halilovich (2017) ask: “What are the memory and recordkeeping needs, practices and exigencies associated with massive human losses, movement and dispersion? What are their implications for human rights and for the reconstruction of identity?” (p. 96). Although these questions are outside the scope of this thesis, the challenge these authors point out resonates with me and is perhaps an area of new research, as I move forward and attend to the complexities of contemporary issues surrounding Métis identity.

Family Archive and Interviews

I engaged in a lengthy search for ancestral information through family photo collections, documents, identity certificates, correspondence, conversations, stories, and interviews. I collected genealogical records, marriage and death certificates, and photographs of my great-great-grandmother. In an effort to honour and respect communication, memories, and the stories of my family, in interviews I was transparent in my intentions to obtain source data from their personal archives, following the ethical protocols and informed consent that were part of my research protocol.

I invited a range of family members to engage in conversations and one semi-structured audio-recorded interview to explore their knowledge and memories pertaining to our family's lineage and heritage, as well as to gather and share documents and photographs. My relationship with participants was integral to my inquiry because family members were considered co-creators or co-contributors (rather than ‘participants’). They were committed to sharing their personal family archives and stories, and discovering those of other participating family,

surrounding our Indigenous heritage. In this spirit, our conversations were in nature, relational and exploratory and honoured and respected the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of my family. Vignettes of my family's voices are woven into the Autoportrait 5: The Research Journey.

The Drouin Collection

The Drouin Collection is the most complete set of French-Canadian vital records from 1621 to 1947, along with Ontario vital records from as early as 1813, and information regarding US/Canada border crossings from 1895 to 1956. The Collection is preserved and curated by the Drouin Genealogical Institute in Québec and is one of the largest, most well-known collections³. It is a primary-source record collection, considered the most accurate, as it comprises records created at the time of the event, adding credibility to the information.

Métis Québec Nation Archive

François Drouin, Regional spokesperson, and Gérard Latulippe, Elder council and registrar, assisted with their expertise, consulting the Québec Métis Nation archive, solidifying information regarding my Métis great-grandmother and locating a Mik'maq First Nations hereditary link. François Drouin gave permission, on behalf of the Québec Métis Nation, to use the information in the context of my dissertation research project.



³ See: <http://drouininstitute.com/mfilms/>

Creation-Based Indigenous Métissage

Embodied Landscapes is a story about identity and subjectivity and is rooted in an Indigenous paradigm, one that is rich in ways of gathering, discovering and uncovering knowledge and is as diverse as the peoples who engage in the process (Kovach, 2009). Through my creation-based Indigenous métissage (IM Spiral) I weave together the complexity of my experiences through intellectual and sensory systems, locating myself subjectively, spiritually, and relationally within broader cultural and historical contexts. In doing so, I enact and honour ethics of relationships, holism, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, and respect, which are fundamental to Indigenous research methodologies and protocols, and integral to collective understanding and wisdom across generations (Archibald, 2001; Archibald et al., 2019; Battiste, 2000; Donald, 2012; Ermine, 1996, 2011; Aluli-Meyer, 2013; Sioui, 1999; Smith, 2012).

On my research journey, I explore the notion of truth and question whose proof and whose truth should determine my sense of Self. I question the very notion of identity itself because of how entrenched a concept it is within the colonial paradigm. As I search through historical documents, I invite family members into conversations with me to share personal narratives and our stories about indigeneity, coupled with an exchange of genealogical records, documents and photographs. Stories challenge us to engage holistically in meaning-making, to “involve the heart (emotions), mind (intellect), body (physical actions), and spirit (spirituality), as well as recognize the relationships of these realms to oneself, family, community, land/environment, and wider society” (Archibald, et al., 2019, p. 4). These are ways that we attend to questions to our Indigenous heritage that have circulated in our family for over three decades. Official records along with the unofficial gaps, silences, and erasures of our stories constitute the matter of our lives.

As a whole this relational self-study project can be seen as an active dialectic that enables me to draw out my Indigenous voice and my experience of being Métis in contemporary Canada. Through this dialectic I explore identity as fluid, changing and unfixed and consider the potential of subjectivity in being Self *and* being Métis

IM Spiral

I introduced the IM Spiral earlier in my colour-in-motion teaching story, here I discuss the provocations of my Spiral, that is, how it positions me and allows me to take up my self-study inquiry through artistic practices and approaches of métissage. This is further discussed in Autoportrait 2: Methods and the IM Spiral, in relations to theoretical strands, and in Autoportrait 5, Inspiring the Arts Curriculum through pedagogical encounters.

I lean into theories and practices in arts-based research (Kovach, 2018; Sinner, 2019), poetic inquiry (Sameshima, Fidyk, James, & Leggo, 2017), métissage (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009), and storying (Archibald, 2008; Archibald et al., 2019). My IM Spiral provided me a space to navigate my inquiry of selfhood and sense of Indigeneity, and to consider what being Métis means to me. With artifacts, stories, and experiences, I delved into a subjective experiential socio-cultural exploration of my sense of being.

The interactive nature and structure of this thesis is set up to support the theoretical concepts and enact the experiential and relational qualities of my IM Spiral. Through the discussion the reader/viewer can move into the ELDG, through the use of hyperlinks to take opportunities to pause and consider metaphorical and experiential realms of experience, knowledge, and knowing which are linked, in a non-literal way, to the theoretical discussion. Tak-Hue (2010) reminds us that critical artistic practice and pedagogy can intensify our ability

gain deeper awareness when we engage ourselves with the research design. In this way my self-study is situated in a generative, creative, and open inquiry approach that values and honours knowledges found in embodied experience, subjectivity, and ancestral memory. The potential of creation-based Indigenous métissage as a multi-faceted method for exploring complex experiences and alternative ways of being and knowing is to arrive at a better and more inclusive understanding of the Self as evolving through our relational encounters. Richard Wagamese (2016) suggests “ From our very first breath, we are in relationship. With that indrawn draft of air, we become joined to everything that ever was, is and ever will be” (p. 44).

In (Figure 3) I created a visual representation of my IM Spiral. It is comprised of three artistic methods and three theoretical strands. Subjectivity and identity are central concepts in my Spiral. It is designed to support my research journey of reclaiming my sense of indigeneity and Métis identity. In this way I am “leaving the warmth of the fire in order to engage in a decolonizing research approach that requires one to ask critical questions about colonial impact” (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 3). My research intends to show, as well as tell, a story in which my Self is the site of inquiry. This story is a generative praxis with pedagogical implications for my family, the Québec Métis Nation, and Métis people across Canada, in related socio-cultural contexts.

My IM Spiral is inspired and informed by my understandings of creation, curriculum, and pedagogy, which have evolved through my years as an artist and educator, and my developing philosophy of teaching and learning that is rooted in Indigenous pedagogies and relational ways of knowing and being. The IM Spiral illustrates the inward and outward movements of creation, along with the role and relationship of subjectivity and identity.

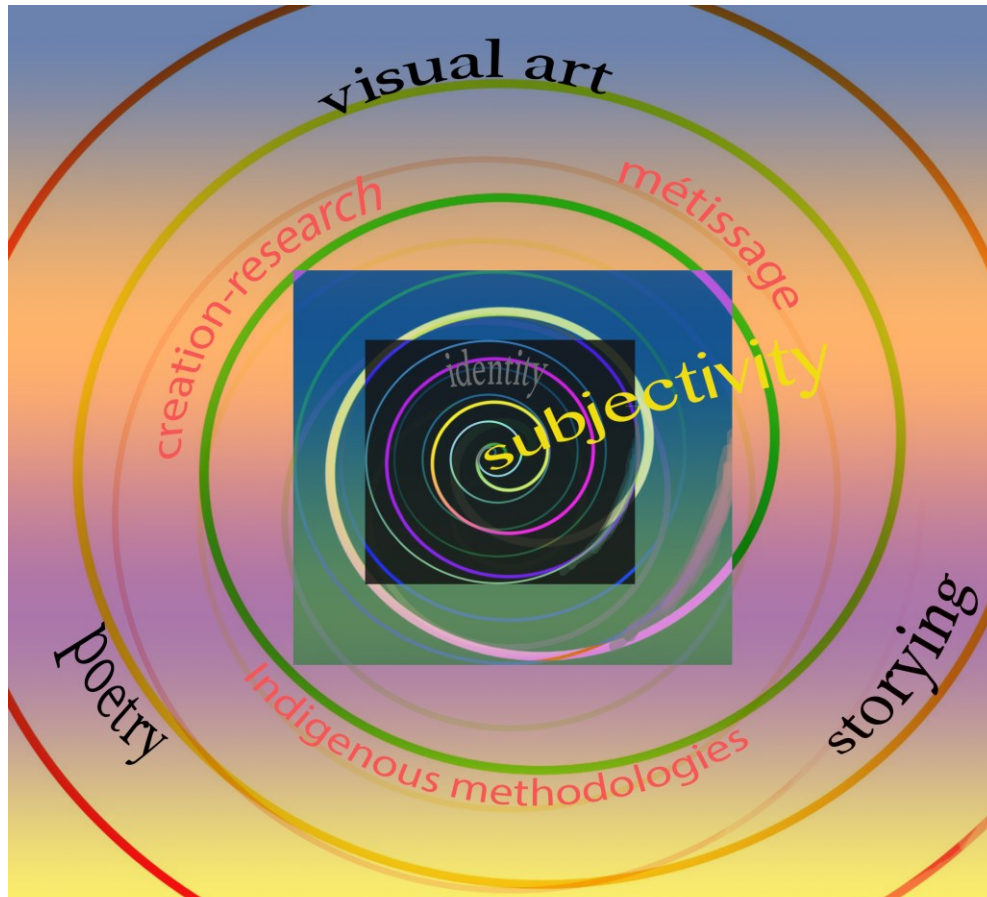


Figure 3. Creation-research Indigenous métissage spiral (IM Spiral). Source: Author.

The IM Spiral suggests movement through the symbolic background colours and represents aspects of my teaching and learning experiences that I shared in my *pedagogy-in-motion* story. For instance, the green, orange, and violet hues symbolize motion through the mixing and blending of primary colours, representing the pedagogical conditions in which unbound ways of learning, being, doing, and knowing can emerge. Motion is the life force of my IM Spiral, creating the conditions for generative and authentic learning and research to unfold. Of significance is how my method is critically fluid, resonating inwardly and outwardly through realms of experience. It relies on experiential engagement and interaction. This is a relational inquiry approach that resists fixedness and embraces the power of creation. My IM Spiral is a

decolonizing approach to inquiry that aspires to “reach back, move forward, recover, recreating and, research back” (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 6). The multiple lines of my Spiral visually connote multiple cyclical pathways to knowing and knowledge that emerge through experience(s), in the process of living our lives. Here we are invited to return again and again to our interlinking stories and events, including the “turning points and points of inflection, bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centres; points of fusion, condensation and boiling points; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope” (Deleuze, 1991, p. 52). Through this engagement our subjectivities reverberate, comingle, and traverse the parameters of a “fixed” identity.

The darker square signifies identity and is positioned within the larger sea-blue square that symbolizes the socio-cultural context that impact and influence identity.

My three methods of inquiry of poetry, storytelling, and artmaking are used to tangle inwardly and outwardly within the intersections, and along the continuum of identity and subjectivity. They embody and theorizes experience, knowledge, and knowing.

The application of my IM Spiral, though created specifically for my thesis research, has implications for generating new theorizing in a variety of contexts and is timely. For example, I recently received a copy of *Researching Journeys In/to Multiple Ways of Knowing* by Jennifer Markides and Laura Forsythe (2019). I opened it up and was reminded of a conversation I had with one of the authors during CSSE (Canadian Society for the Study of Education) conference in Vancouver in May of 2019. We were at the University of British Columbia campus, sharing our ideas about teaching and learning in Indigenous contexts, in-between workshops. I shared the vision of my Spiral with her and another scholar, and we talked about this method of inquiry. I shared my thinking of the Spiral as a path to understanding subjective relationality, through an inward and outward motion, where we can travel inward to seek understanding, then move

outward to connect relationally with others. I explained that I was inspired by Willie Ermine's (1996) views on subjectivity and its role in self-actualization, according to his knowledge of Elders and how they traversed inner space to understand outer space. In the sharing of our ideas on campus that day, I was reminded how Indigenous pedagogies are critically rooted in stories and that learning can be evoked through sharing those stories. In reading Markides and Forsythe's introduction in their book, along with a subsequent review of it (Sinclair, 2019), I noted how they make use of a spiral as a metaphor of our inward and outward journey, one that connect Self with community. This reminds me how seminal ideas resonate with people, near and far. For instance, Leroy Little Bear (2000) and Gregory Cajete (1994, 2000) frequently share their ideas about our interconnectedness through the lens of physics and Native science, which helps us understand the essence of the phrase *All My Relations* (Wagamese, 2013). We live in a poignant time when Indigenous epistemologies, pedagogies, and research are teaming with ideas that are shared through conversations, at conferences, and at other educational spaces and places, where "together, the pieces [we share] contrast, blend, and broaden the landscape of Indigenous research and decolonizing discourse" (Sinclair, 2019). In my reflections on my Spiral I make use of the ideas shared by this reviewer, whereby through decolonizing discourse we can feel a generative tension that arises through the pulling and pushing movements of the Spiral. In the context of my dissertation and discussion this type of tension demonstrate that diverse ideas, rather than being in competition, are in fact intertwined in space and time, and that we are always in motion. This is a reconciliation, if you will, a rapprochement (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009), an realteration from the familiar to something new and unfamiliar — a type of metamorphosis, a new life, transformed through (re)newed perspectives and the like the Métis blood that courses through my veins, my identity is enriched and energized.



The Relationship Between Subjectivity and Identity

The concepts of identity and subjectivity, central to my inquiry through the IM Spiral are related but also distinct. It is this difference that I am curious about. The “subject” is a complex term with a varied and even contradictory history. However, for my purposes, I will ground the idea of the subject and how I am using the notion of subjectivity through a Lacanian lens. This is an example of how I fold in Western thinkers who I feel support and are congruent with Indigenous epistemology surrounding subjectivity (Cajete 2000; Ermine, 1996; Highway; 2003). This helps me complicate the notion of identity by juxtaposing it in relation with subjectivity, so that notions of difference, multiplicity, and complexity are emphasized in the context of indigeneity and questions surrounding my Métis identity.

Looking through a Lacanian lens: Visualizing the methodological movements.

Jacques Lacan tells us that identity can be interpreted as *imaginary* and *symbolic*. Identity as imaginary is conceived in the “mirror stage” where one sees a reflection of oneself in a mirror. For a young child that could be an actual mirror; for an adult, this can be more abstract, such as seeing yourself in someone. Self is identified in the reflected image: “It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context *as an identification*...namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he *assumes* an image: ‘I am that’” (Lacan, 2006, p. 76). For Lacan, this type of identification is imaginary because the image is not real; it is a reflection. Identity as symbolic, is explained by Lacan as a person identifying with something else through association: “I am part of that,” where that refers to a family, religion, community, professional group, and so on. Here, identity is understood through symbolic representations. For Lacan imaginary and

symbolic identity places Self within sameness; “I am this” and “I belong to that.” For Lacan, subjectivity arises precisely in those places where the imaginary and symbolic identifications break down; where experience disrupts understanding. It is in this breakdown, this space, where immanence of experience rises as multiple, different, complex, and even transformative. For Lacan these experiences are the “real,” the third term of his triad “imaginary-symbolic-real,” where subjectivity affects identity by disrupting the symbolic and the imaginary. Through the real, identity becomes something much greater than itself (Lacan, 2006).

It is useful to consider the distinction between subjectivity and identity in light of processes of identification that tend to restrict identity as being defined within sameness, rather than difference. I return to the image of the squares in my IM Spiral for further consideration. In my visual representation two squares represent identity. We can conceive these squares in space as contained places with parameters: sides, corners, top, and bottom—like a box. There may be boxes inside of boxes and even a collection of boxes, each holding different aspects of identity such as being, French, English, female, artist, educator, gardener, and social activist. These identities co-exist within a main social-historical “box” and govern, shape, and influence (me) with their own set of parameters. I cannot completely remove myself from these places and contexts, nor do I want to “not belong.” There is safety in belonging, and being human, I believe we are wired in the capacity of belonging; in relationships and community. Indeed, in my project my *own* search for identity is embedded in recovering and re-establishing my Métis identity and having a sense of belonging within a Métis community. In essence this is my process of identification, to say, “I belong to that.” This is a contradiction, given my discussion and how I am challenging the notion of identity itself; however, I believe it is within contradictions that new understandings can emerge. In this sense I am exploring this contraction and the notion of

identity in the theoretical contexts and applications of creation, métissage, and Indigenous methodologies and epistemology; through my IM Spiral. I want to know what is more about Self and identity. I want to know what happens outside the box and what accounts for difference. Where do subjectivity and experiences that arise outside the boundaries of sameness linger? How do these encounters impact identity? Can these change our perception or understanding of what identity comprises or can be? To what extent (and at what cost) do we maintain or reinforce sameness to ensure stability, and what are the implications to our growth as individuals and communities? Can understanding identity and subjectivity relationally, and perhaps as a continuum and a movement of inward and outward experiences, provide a broader vision about the potential of Self, and by extension our communities of being? From this vantage point can we better embrace the disparities, complexities, and multiplicities of/in *being*? What can we learn from redefining identity in self-understanding and relationships?

When I think about subjectivity, I see movement, fluidity, difference, alternative experience, and perspectives—a sudden surge of something new and real that permeates the boundaries and borders of identity. Thinkers like Donna Haraway (1992) Karen Barad (2007), Gilles Deleuze (1994), Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari (1987), and Jacques Lacan (2006) saw certain things about subjectivity: it surges up in an event; it is transient and unpredictable; it turns the place of the normal into something new; it is a kind of diffraction that lends itself to multiple perspective and perceptions; and it is a space or type of experience that cannot be codified. Here the unfamiliar surprises us with gifts-of-being that resonate beyond what we know, disrupting and provoking the familiar to provide us with glimpses of difference: new perspectives, knowing, and knowledge.

As an artist, I encounter surges of subjectivities that provoke me when I am creating a

painting, a collage, or series of works that explore my identity, my encounters with the land, water, animals, or dreams and visions. Many artists attest to and honour these emergent spirals of insight, vision, and wisdom. These are the precious fleeting moments that resist being pinned down and can have a powerful impact on being. My IM Spiral supports these, the evanescent waves of inspiration, intuition, epiphany, and the aesthetic encounters that emerge through the gaps, the contradictions, and the silences within experience. These are the incommunicable experiences that move in and out of the parameters of identity, suggesting, “I am more than that” and “I belong to more than that.” I ask: What are the implications of conceiving identity in-relation with subjectivity? Imagine subjectivity as a moving spiral, one that can erupt from the box of identity with an intuitive unbound rhythm, persisting as long as it persists without ever reifying itself.

As I launch into my own narrative, I am reminded of Chögyam Trungpa (2008) who says: “[A]rt-making attunes us to the fissures present in our current ways of being and thinking; it provokes the ways in which we relate with the world, it changes our visual system, our hearing system and our speaking system” (pp. 22–23). In a similar spirit, Anishinaabe scholar Vicki Kelly (2015) tells us, “when we deeply listen and hold with great gentleness the sacredness of the work of creating...we not only create art, but art creates us” (p. 48).

While I visit, reposition, and envision my understandings of Self and ways of becoming and belonging with/in the world, I recognize the potential of self-determination and agency as I attend to my inward and outward journey. By valuing subjectivity, experiences of internal knowing, sensations of memory, dreams and visions, along with loss, fragmentation, the silences and uncertainties, I honour All My Relations past, present, and future.

Artistic Inquiry Strands: Poetry, Storying, and Visual Art

My three creative methods of inquiry are distinct but related: poetry, storying, and visual art. The methods are mixed, braided, and juxtaposed in the ways of *métissage*. This produces a creation-based multi-textural dialogue that accounts for my research journey, how I engage with my questions, and how new questions and knowledge emerge. My intellectual and sensory experiences are embodied through my methodological processes and operate relationally

I have organized this section along with the theory section: Autoportrait 3, around the IM Spiral, its method and theoretical components. This is why I begin with a discussion of methods and IM Spiral, followed by theory. There are two sets of strands represented in my IM Spiral. Three artistic inquiry strands comprise poetry, storying, and visual art, while three theoretical strands consist of arts-based research, *métissage*, and Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. These multiple inquiry and theoretical strands tangle inwardly and outwardly along the continuum and in the intersections of identity and subjectivity; they embody and theorize experience, knowledge, and knowing through a creation-based *métissage*. Here we are invited to return to our interlinking stories and events, to the Deleuzian turning points of fusion where we travel along cyclical pathways to knowing and knowledge in the process of living our lives.

Two main reasons for organizing this discussion through my IM Spiral are important. Firstly, this approach allows me to cover the key theoretical strands of important work on creation-based praxis, *métissage*, poetic inquiry and roots of indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. Secondly, I want to demonstrate that in the literature there is a concern for subjectivity, by authors who advocate creative and poetic approaches in research that explore deeper and more complex aspects of being and bring our attention to difference (Boutet 2013;

Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009; Kelly, 2015). My work is grounded in the arts-based inquiry that has come before but my project brings to light a new idea—based in the work of subjectivity—that is often ignored or merely implied by the current work in the field.

Strand 1: Poetic inquiry.

In honour of Dr. Carl Leggo, who has recently transitioned to the spirit world, I would like to begin by sharing his vision of poetic inquiry, as an ontological way of being, with its own unique epistemology; “a way to be and become in the world that invites, informs, and motivates through its rhythms and wisdoms” (Leggo, 2018, p. 96). As a symbolic narrative of self-formation, Leggo saw the capacity and potential of poems to produce openings and possibilities; a method to deconstruct and reconstruct our experiences and sense of identity in ethical and meaningful ways (Leggo, 2017a). He understood poetic inquiry as “pedagogical rather than prescriptive” (Leggo, as cited in Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a, p. 4), and poetry as a form of living inquiry that examines the in-between space of one’s subjective experience, allowing us to deepen our understanding about Self-in-relation to the world.

I understand poems “as a type of dialect that can traverse walls and borders that work to separate us, moving us toward one another; a type of love” (St. Georges, 2019, p. 711). Poems reflect “a cause of right circumstance” (Jardine, 2018, p. 225). Poems are moments and opportunities to “dance, to sing, to chant the sublime, a moment, striving movement, sensations that whirl the body into a timelessness of space and sound” (Thomas, 2003, p. 23). Poems can create spaces to facilitate our coming to know ourselves and Others relationally—a place or space where we can submerge and emerge in a dialogue of our shared humanity, to “educate ourselves about the Other inside of us and the Other in front of us” (E. Hasebe-Ludt, personal

communication, May 10, 2018).

Poetic inquirers have been exploring and expanding the potential of poetry as modes of theoretical perspectives, methods of meaning-making and pedagogical opening that provide us with an opportunity to intentionally engage with the complexities and “complicated conversations” (Pinar, 2012) of our shared experiences. The *International Symposium for Poetic Inquiry* hosts a community of scholars who engage a range of methodological approaches that explore how poetry creates critical dialogue, and explores experiential perspectives. This community advocates and cultivates voices that speak to our new ecologies (Leggo, 2017a, 2018; Sameshima et al., 2017). Patricia Leavy (2015) notes three broad categories in the field: research-voiced, participant-voiced, and literature-voice poetry, where poetry can be generated from the researcher, from the data of participants or from sources of literature to synthesize, process, and make meaning from theory (p. 83). Through forms of rhythm and metaphor, poetry resonates with weight, emotion, tenor, sound, and meaning, which together embody and generate meaning (Leavy, 2015). Significantly, poetic inquiry considers “its power of connectivity [and the] nuanced ways of conjoining what might be seen as contradictory, even unrelated, so as to imagine new and sustainable configurations” (Sameshima et al., 2017, p. 18).

Germane to my research, poems allow us to simultaneously expose how identities are traditionally represented, while enabling us to expand and complicate identities; to negotiate identity and generate personal truths that comprise and honour difference. Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1987) *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, provides us insight into the struggle of mixed identities:

To live in the Borderlands means you

are neither *hispana india negra española*
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, halfbreed
 caught in the crossfire between camps
 while carrying all five races on your back
 not knowing which side to turn to, run from...

To live in the Borderlands means to

put *chile* in the borscht,
 eat whole wheat *tortillas*,
 speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;
 be stopped by *la migra* at the border checkpoints...

To live in the Borderlands means

the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off
 your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart
 pound you pinch you roll you out
 smelling like white bread but dead;

To survive the Borderlands

you must live *sin fronteras*
 be a crossroads.

(pp. 194 -195)

An attestation of identity politics, *Borderlands* exist within the milieu of authoritative boundaries. The pain of whitewashing, the unrest and uncertainty, the internalized self-doubt, the resolve of liminality—quiet hurts, underfoot, unheard (Maracle, 2015)—these Other truths *being* on colonial terrain are given voice. This voice is the powerful heart of poetic inquiry.

Poetic inquiry embraces the paradox of the inward and outward journey; that it is by going inward (into thoughts, experiences, emotions, memories, and perceptions) one can connect more deeply with community and shared ways of living and being in the world. Poems can empower us to attend to the complex and organic nature of our identities and relationships through a type of “wayfinding” (Chambers, 2009), and a “bringing to consciousness” (Jung, 1989) deeper aspects of experience. Ermine (1996) reminds us that we can only truly connect authentically with Others through our personal subjective experience.



Using poetry as a method of inquiry can open the senses, cultivate spaces, and create opportunities where dynamic shifts in understanding our humanity can occur (Armos, 2017; Leggo, 2017b; Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009). Connecting with and developing poetic paths of inquiry is rooted in our imaginative capacities and can activate our life energy to engage with our whole being.

By mapping sensations of embodied memory, and alternative knowing through practices of poetry, as a form of life writing, we can investigate (and share) experiences and our sense of Self (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). Poetry “shows us the way: the way of words; the way of living, loving, and leaving; the ways of transformative and activist, personal and political, pedagogical and prophetic, invocation and convocation in a world that is always home and never entirely home” (Leggo, 2018, p. 186). As a narrative of self-formation through “be(com)ing” (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015) poetry can contextualize subjective experience within a social/cultural framework because subjectivity is inseparable from the social (Pinar, 2012). In this way engaging in poetry allows the artistic researcher to connect through an aesthetic of personal and relational experiences, within both a material and spiritual process, to encounter a type of

knowing beyond the conceptual; knowledge then becomes rooted in shared memories and personal experience. This relational act enables us to experience a deeper vision of living through the relational connection with another's reality—through our shared humanity. In the following poem, Jordan Abel's poem *Injun* (2016) provokes us to consider the insidiousness of colonization, illustrating experience with a surrealistic image slowed down by the paralysis of a bad dream that is at once unreal and real:

he played injun in god's country
 where boys proved themselves clean
 dumb beasts who could cut fire
 out of the whitest sand
 he played english across the trail
 where girls turned plum wild
 garlic and strained words
 through the window of night
 he spoke through numb lips and
 breathed frontier

(p. 1)

In my self-study I explore, and question how deeply rooted/affected we can be from one generation to the next as we straddle frontiers imposed by colonial logics and identity. Attending to subjectivity in a hermeneutic space invites us to understand personal poems and stories as living entities and sites of pedagogy and curriculum that are situated in the political and the historical (Pinar, 2012).

I think about the power of poetic inquiry and see poems as testimonials of experience

and opportunities that can give rise to connectivity of Self and Others through a type of “witnessing consciousness” (Walsh & Bai, 2015, p. 24). Witnessing consciousness occurs through watching and observing with mindful awareness. This practice explores one’s ability to activate and magnify experience and relationality in terms of the ways we attend to one another, ourselves, and to the world. ⁴

Jackie Seidel (2017) considers engaging in poetic inquiry as a type of mystical unknowing, a process that urges us into new forms of conversations that emphasize listening. She tells us that by listening and hearing through our subjectivity, we attend to the “sublime working of the heart” (p. 158). Here we are reminded of our fragility and importantly, our interconnectedness. Seidel says, “engaging in poetic inquiry means to awaken and to experience...to listen and unlearn other habits, to change hearts and minds, to allow for the entrance and cultivation of mystery and poetry” (p. 158).

By attending to what needs to be heard, through poetry inquiry we can learn to recognize shifts that occur in our awareness, as relational subjective bodies and beings (Snowber, 2016; Walsh et al., 2015). Celeste Snowber suggests that

perspective, spirituality, and physicality are deeply entwined and interwoven in the fabric of our cells [and that] coming to knowledge and understanding of what it means to listen to the body is necessary...all the knowledge of how to listen is with you (p. xii).

Carl Leggo (2017) tells us:

I write poetry as a way
to hear my own voice

⁴ See: <http://taoism.about.com/od/meditation/ht/witness.htm>. Retrieved Aug 15, 2017.

and the voices of other,
 singing out with playful hearts
 and hopeful conviction,
 engage in writing in order to gauge
 how well I am living in wellness.
 In all my reading and writing
 and lingering with language,
 I seek not only to love literacy,
 or literate love of the world,
 but a lively love of the world

(Leggo, 2017a, p. 276)

If we consider the research as going beyond what we know, self-formation in relation to Others can be seen as fundamental to poetic inquiry, where “being, knowing and not knowing commingle, distinctions dissolve boundaries, form and reform in moments of awareness, heightened perception” (Walsh et al., 2015, p. 12). In the context of my creation-research Indigenous *métissage* that explores identity and subjectivity, the relational qualities of poetry, storying, and artmaking emphasize the central paradox of subjectivity; the travel inwardly to connect outwardly.

Indigenous scholars such as Cree Elder Willie Ermine, (1996, 2011), Anishinaabe artist-educator Vicki Kelly (2015), and Hawaiian theorist Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2013) tell us that, traditionally, Elders sought knowledge about the outer world through their subjective inward journeys. They understood that making connections between the inner and outer realms of experience is how to expand knowledge, relationally. Maori leader Mirini Maka Mead says,

“research seeks to expand knowledge outward, in depth and toward the light” (as cited in Aluli-Meyer, 2013b, p.1). This approach to research is not static. Like my IM Spiral, it is a generative and an ethical way forward in discovering concrete ways to live, explore, experiment with, create, and build on the insight of Indigenous methodology, as subjective and relational beings.

Strand 2: Storying, stories, myths.

Storying.

In my inquiry, as I trace my Indigenous heritage and interrogate Western notions of identity that can isolate Self from subjective experience and knowledge, I explore identity as a non-fixed entity, an evolving Self that is relationally connected with Other and embodied with/in a creation process. I resist the colonial narrative, one that has been imposed on me, that restricts knowledge to fact-gathering, suppressing and misleading the potential of being by harshly separating us from our inwardness and those stories that lie within. I embrace the imaginative and alternative aspects of identity, knowing and being. I draw strength from Indigenous stories that speak from and to a deep philosophy about humans' relationships with each other and more-than-human entities; stories that can provoke alternative understandings and guide us to be better humans (Smith, as cited in Archibald et al., 2019). I embrace storying as a method of exploring deeper aspects of Self through myths, legends and parables; stories that transmit ancestral knowledge and experience, and teach us important lessons about what it can mean to be human. In the context of my IM Spiral "storying" draws from Archibald's (1997) *Storywork* methodology, as well as from creative storytelling and métissage that juxtaposes stories and voices to attend the complexities of lived experience.



My IM Spiral is a creative and generative way for me to explore and tell my story. Using multiple lines of inquiry, my story is shaped and evolves through a critical creative praxis: a métissage of poetry, art, and storying. Storying works compatibly and relationally within my Spiral; firstly, through the inward turn that offers me the resources to discover and recover, and understand my Self, and then, secondly through the turn outward to share my story in relation to

communities of Others. I launch into my own narrative, re/contextualizing myself through an inward journey processed and shared visually and poetically; an artefactual enactment of re/creation (St. Georges, 2017).

Stories.

What is it about stories that makes them so compelling? Thomas King (2008) suggests, “in our cynical world, where suspicion is necessity, insisting that something is true is not nearly as powerful as suggesting that something might be true” (p. 23). McCall, Reder, Gaertner, and L’Hirondelle-Hill (2017) suggest that the significance of stories is in their instability and impermanence; “stories shift and change according to what the reader brings to the story, and what she takes away from it” (p. 14). King (2008) tells us “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 14). He asks how, if not through stories, we could imagine the world and ourselves? Stories, as the cornerstones of our cultures, are a way of coming home through the telling, listening and retelling of them, which often “precipitates a quest or a discover or a journey” (p. 24). Cynthia Chambers (2003) tells us:

Sometimes you have to hear one good story to remember another waiting to be told. I continue to read, watching and listening for the story that I can follow, for the trails—ancient and new—that make this landscape navigable for me and for Others. You need these stories, too; you need these trails, these maps. Why? Because like me, you are in a dream, you are lost always trying to find your way home. (p. 109)

Stories, myths, creation-stories, and life writing have the power to be continuous in our dream world and waking life as we learn to connect with the old stories and create new ones. In this way stories can act as the vehicles of cultural transmission by linking one generation to the

next. The interrelationship between story and knowing has for generations been considered a legitimate form of sharing and generating knowledge. (Archibald et al, 2019; Cole, 2006; Kimmerer, 2013; King, 2008; Tomson, 2003; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Margaret Kovach (2009) tells us that stories are tied to our past and “provide a basis for continuity with future generations” (p. 94). Furthermore, in oral traditions, stories are considered to be active agents within a relational world and pivotal in gaining insight into a phenomenon (Deloria, 2012; Ermine, 1996).

Within Indigenous epistemologies, there are different forms of stories. Some hold mythical elements, such as creation stories, some are teaching stories, while others are personal narratives of place, happenings, and experiences (Kovach, 2009, p. 95). Tomson Highway (2003) tells us that there are distinct terms for the concept of stories in his Cree culture. The first term is *achimoowin*, which means “to tell a story” or “to tell the truth.” The second term is *kithaskiwin*, which means “to tell a lie,” “to weave a web of fiction.” The third term lies at the point exactly halfway between these two terms: “*achithoogewin* means ‘to mythologize,’ meaning that the visionaries of my people, the thinkers, gave birth and shape to the Cree language as we know it today. The exact halfway point between truth and lie, non-fiction and fiction, situates mythology” (p. 22). Within stories, knowledge is held while simultaneously signifying relationships (Kimmerer, 2013). Within the structure of story, “through metaphor, symbolism, and interpretive communications, lies a perception and philosophy of being that is less definitive, less categorical” (Kovach, 2009, p. 60). King (2008) reveals that he tells stories because “stories help keep me alive”:

...I tell them to myself, to my friends, sometimes to strangers. Because they make me laugh. Because they are a particular kind of story. Saving stories, if you will. Stories that

help keep me alive. Of course, you don't have to pay attention to any of these stories. But help yourself to one if you like. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Cry over it. Get angry. Forget it. But don't say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You heard it now. (p. 25)

Myths.

For Chambers (2003), stories are interrelated with other stories and connected to our ancient past. She says: "...stories are connected to other stories, big ones like the Irish potato famine, immigration, and colonization, and these bigger stories are connected to other big stories, such as myths and legends that go back thousands of years" (p. 107). Myths and legends are stories that activate our imaginative capacities to enable us to explore the seemingly imperceptible aspects of being. Of myths, Joseph Campbell (1991) writes: "[W]hatever the inward darkness may have been to which the shamans of those caves descended in their trances, the same must lie within ourselves, nightly visited in sleep" (p. 86). For Campbell, "civilizations are rooted in myth in which stories function and emerge through symbolic and metaphorical fields of experiences, and are kept alive by renewal and constant interaction with the arts" (p. 72).



In his public lecture *Comparing Mythologies* (2003), Tomson Highway asks: "[W]hat is it about mythology that differentiates it, utterly, from other fields of intellectual activity?" (p. 21). As he delineates his discussion, Tomson suggests that ultimately "mythology tells the story of the spiritual movements of people...delineates the *spiritual nervous system*, as it were—and that system only—of that person, that tangle of electrical cords and wiring in all its wondrous, mystical, magical complexity" (p. 20).

In this way myths and creation stories inform and inspire my inquiry about the potential of storying for understanding the movements and multiplicity of *being*. Similarly, In Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) retelling of the oral creation story of Skywoman in *Skywoman Falling*, she honours her culture's long-held tradition of storytelling using myths and legends:

In the beginning there was the Skyworld...

In winter, when the green Earth lies resting beneath a blanket of snow, this is the time for storytelling. The storytellers begin by calling upon those who came before who passed the stories down to us, for we are only messengers. (p. 3)

Kimmerer reminds us that stories hold our beliefs and history, our relationships, and that like creation stories everywhere, cosmologies are a source of identity and orientation to the world. In this way identity can be understood as something more than colonial naming;

She fell like a maple seed, pirouetting on an autumn breeze. A column of light streamed from a hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been before. It took her a long time to fall. In fear, or maybe hope, she clutched a bundle tightly in her hand. (p. 3)

The teachings in the Skywoman story are about responsibility that flows between humans and the Earth. This deeply rooted understanding of relationality is at the heart of my inquiry, and it is the foundation of Indigenous epistemology (Wilson et al., 2019);

Hurling downward, she saw only dark water below. But in that emptiness, there were many eyes gazing up at the sudden shaft of light. They saw there was a small object, a mere dust mote in the beam. As it grew closer, they could see that it was a woman, arms outstretched, long black hair billowing behind as she spiraled toward them. (p. 3)

The Skywoman story, shared by the original peoples throughout the Great Lakes, is a star

in the constellation of teachings Kimmerer calls the “Original Instructions” (p. 8).

The geese nodded at one another and rose together from the water in a wave of goose music. She felt the beat of their wings as they flew beneath to break her fall. Far from the only home she’d ever known, she caught her breath at the warm embrace of soft feathers as they gently carried her downward. And so, it began. (p. 3)

Creation stories and myths from around the world are explorations of how humans came to be and they teach how to be at one with the world. Campbell (1991) tells us that myths and stories transcend logic and objective truth to engage us more deeply with/in our individual and collective identities. Indigenous worldviews reside in this deep engagement of complex and contemplative thinking surrounding the origins and sacredness of life and our connection with all creation (Archibald, 1997; Cole, 2006; Kimmerer, 2013; Highway, 2003).

Alexandra Fidyk (2017) writes:

[S]tory telling as an ancient practice preserves the journeys of humanity, embracing the ways of the underworld, with its integrity and wisdoms, its own sounds, movements and images, engages us in the wild and felt world about survival and important knowledge based in experience. (p. 1)

In these contexts, the relational Self is intricately complex and interconnected, thus colonial identity constructs may be too shallow to contain all that we are and can be. These understandings inform my IM Spiral and creation-research by accounting for subjectivity; experience, visions, dreams, as critical awareness of being and knowing.

Stories and myths can engage us in an epic journey; a process of questing, of envisioning and visioning Self in relation to Others, in relationship to the universe (Campbell, 1991). Ermine (1996) reminds us that Elders, “in their quest to find meaning in the outer space, turned to the

inner space...that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self or the being” (p. 102). In the story of Skywoman, Kimmerer (2013) suggests that the story endures “...because we too are always falling. Our lives, both personal and collective, share her trajectory. Where we jump or are pushed, or the edge of the known world just crumbles at our feet, we fall, spinning into someplace new and unexpected” (pp. 8–9).

One of the most powerful forms of storytelling, a form that illustrates subjective inwardness, and the journey of the counternarrative, is in the figure of the Trickster. The Trickster character is deeply rooted in Indigenous mythology and is the ultimate storyteller of counter-narratives that intend to disrupt and challenge fixed ideologies, beliefs, and values that block, inhibit, or limit growth, or try to pin identity down. Always fluid and changing, the Trickster takes on many forms and plays many roles. Sometimes the Trickster is like a magician, an enchanter, an absurd prankster, sometimes like a shaman, sometimes a shape shifter, and often adopts some human characteristics (Archibald, 1997). Trickster is a transformer figure, one whose transformation can carry good lessons using humor, satire, self-mockery, and absurdity (King, 2003). Well-known Trickster characters include: Coyote, Raven, Wesakejac, Nanabozo, and Glooscap (Archibald, 1997, p. 6). Some believe that Trickster is a “doing” rather than a “being”—a type of “doing” that “lives on through time as people interact with the Trickster through stories” (Archibald, 1997, p. 7). King (1990) tells us that the Trickster is an important figure for Indigenous writers because...

... just as the Trickster will sacrifice himself in conflict with great powers in order to bring truth to the world, so the Indigenous writer must have the courage to create the counternarrative that must stand up against the weight of colonial truth claims. Writers, one might argue, are the ultimate tricksters; they are all part of a long tradition of stories that

speak to the nature of the world and the relatedness of all living things. (p. xiii)

Seeing the Trickster as the ultimate storyteller supports King's assertion that the writer can borrow the transgressive power of the Trickster to generate timeless stories that speaks to some of the essential relationships between humans and the land, and the relationship between reality and imagination. In contrast, Western modernity has rendered myths, stories, and storytelling as untrue and historically "incorrect" (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). Colonial narratives are often narrow critiques that inhibit, suppress, and mislead the potentiality of knowing the world through subjectivity and in relation with Other. Ermine (1996) warns that Western desires for (objective) "truth" are a menace:

The Western world sought answers to the greatest questions concerning our existence and our place in the universe by keeping everything separate from ourselves...fragmentation has become embedded in the Western worldview and is the cornerstone of Western ideology. (p. 102)

This fragmentation and scientific pragmatism have not been able to explain the miracle of creation, the origins of the cosmos or of human life (Ermine, 1996; Cajete, 2000, Little Bear, 2000). It is stories and myths that help us explore our subjective human experience and the deeper aspects of our experience, knowledge, and knowing.



In this way stories are a living pedagogy and can be effective counternarratives that can resist the colonial lens by virtue of exploring this inner subjective space. Stories are both "singular and relational act of re/creation; when we claim and perform our stories, our subjectivity, we in effect remember our Self into the world and assert the relevance and the legitimacy of our humanness" (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2008, p. 10). As a way of forging new truths

about the multiple histories of our lives, by telling our stories we can contest exclusive narratives and bring attention to the world by speaking about Other truths. The most contemporary and compelling example of this “Other truth” is *Secret Path*⁵. This graphic novel and album produced by Canadian musician, poet, and humanitarian Gord Downey and graphic novelist Jeff Lemire tells the story of a boy named Chanie Wenjack who died on October 22, 1966 when he ran away from residential school at the age of twelve and attempted to return home on foot. Chanie’s home was four hundred miles away from the school. He died from exposure along the railway tracks.

In his efforts to honour Chanie’s life story, through music and art, Downey contacted Chanie Wenjack’s sister after reading an old *McLean’s* magazine that was published in the late sixties. Downey, renowned for his vocal activism on Indigenous rights and concerns, during his concerts, was compelled to bring what happened to Chanie Wenjack to public attention. Downey had the attention of the entire country at the time, having been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and having just completed his last Canada-wide tour with the band, the Tragically Hip, in the summer of 2016. With respect for and in collaboration with Chanie Wenjack’s family, the story of Chanie unfolded into public awareness:

Chanie Wenjack haunts us. His story is Canada’s story. We are not the country we think we are. History will be re-written. All of the Residential Schools will be pulled apart and studied. The next hundred years are going to be painful and unsettling as we meet Chanie Wenjack and thousands like him—as we find out about ourselves, about all of us—and when we do, we can truly call ourselves “Canada.” (Downey & Lemire, 2016, back cover)

Loss reveals some basic truths about how we are tied together and how grief challenges the very notion that we are separate (Stone, 2011). Based on my experience visual artist, poet and

⁵ Sales proceeds go to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba. (GordDownieVideos, 2016)

teacher, and evident in the literature, I understand how stories can bind us and have the power to reveal hidden truths. In my family the hidden story of our Indigenous heritage persisted through multiple generations and reconnected me with my extended family. Knowing that stories can critically challenge dominant narratives and discourse (Battiste, 2000; Blood et al., 2012; Smith, 2012) is compelling to me as a researcher and has informed my creation-research approach. In this way my IM Spiral is rooted in storying. It explores inward and outward journey; experiences, memories, dreams, and shared family stories, woven together into a *métissage* of rapprochement and reconciliation.



Storying as a method of inquiry is on the rise alongside the emergence of Indigenous methodologies (Archibald et al., 2019; Kovach, 2018; McCall et al., 2017). In the context of my creation-research Indigenous *métissage*, story as method is used in the ways of *métissage* where poetic inquiry, visual artwork, and stories are layered, braided, re/created, assembled, and juxtaposed to explore and express experience. Here a multi-textural dialogue generates a creation narrative that is at once personal and public, as well as political and pedagogical. I articulate my experience being between cultures through image and text; symbolically and metaphorically. I explore my sense of indigeneity through multiple alternative lenses. I weave together my story with stories circulating in my family and I am informed and challenged by the literature with which I engage. At the same time, I am exploring a personal, historical, and political space, speaking to community, and finding my own sense of truths through knowledge brought forth in the doing—in material creation and contemplative practices. In this way, the turn inward into subjective experience, as my project intends to show, is our greatest strength and our greatest

resource as we move into a relational future. I resonate with Archibald et al., (2019) who tell us that “story is the most powerful intergenerational manifestation of hope...it is a knowledge journey that harmonizes heart, mind, body, and spirit” (p. 12).

Stories can inspire generations and strengthen cultures. They can be a decolonizing act when used as methods of resistance (Kovach, 2009, p. 103). In a qualitative paradigm, “stories are considered the most accessible, the most readily understood, and the most flexible vernacular methods of conducting and circulation research” (Sinner, Hasebe-Ludt, & Leggo, 2018, p. 167). In arts-based methodologies the use of stories is often seen as “functioning as the backbone of all traditions of inquiry, regardless of how research is ultimately rendered” (p. 167). Because story-centred methodologies are situated within a collective memory it is a method that can cross cultural divides (Kovach, 2009). In this way stories can be an effective pedagogical tool to help us contextualize a range of knowledges and experiences, and to provide a way for engaging with complex contemporary issues and concerns. For example, Georgina Martin (2019) explains how she weaves together storywork (Archibald, 1997) and narrative inquiry to examine her Secwepemc identity and the disrupted sense of unbelonging she has experienced being separated from her mother at birth because her mother was detained in an “Indian hospital” (p. 187). In her research, Martin tells us she chooses to merge storywork and narrative inquiry because the methodologies share non-prescriptive features; Indigenous story-centred methods tend not have a set storyline. Rather, stories are interpreted through the lenses of both the teller and the listener. For Martin (2019), narrative inquiry is based on stories retold that can erupt anywhere along the continuum of an individual’s life cycle. Here the non-prescriptive approaches of storywork refer to how stories can be told to share histories or to teach an important lesson. In these contexts when stories unfold, the receiver may not form an interpretation until years later, or they may

never find meaning in the story. Martin suggests, “similarly, narrative inquiry is non-prescriptive, [because] the telling and the retelling of lived-experiences can be told from any point in the person’s experience” (p. 189). Her work is an example of the way that stories can be an effective and accessible method of conducting research. Privileging and honouring the story in “knowledge-seeing systems” (Kovach, 2009, p. 99) can provide openings for “living pedagogy...a third space...a site of possibility...a site of challenge” (Hasebe-Ludt, & Hurren, 2003, pp. 5–6). To do research into experience is an experience in itself, which is the essence of stories and storytelling. Vital to my research is how story is intimately connected with identity and experiences rooted in subjectivities of Self and communities of *being*.

Strand 3: Visual art.

Relegating art to performing extraneous and utilitarian objectives violates its essential nature and is in effect a type of censorship on aspects of human experience.

Danielle Boutet (2013) *Metaphors of the mind: Art forms as modes of thinking and ways of being*. In *Carnal knowledge: Towards a ‘new materialism’ through the arts*, p. 29.

Along with the lines of inquiry involving storying and poetry, I also harness art making, rooted in images and symbols, in my methodological approach. I believe art is a unique type of literacy that can tap into aspects of human consciousness through aesthetic experience (Boutet, 2013; Diaz & McKenna-Barry, 2004; Fidyk, 2017, 2019). I draw upon the term “aesthetics,” from the Greek verb *aisthanomai*, which means feeling through a heuristic act of perception (Irwin, 2003) and in a phenomenological sense, as experiences that impart knowledge and meaning, as opposed to merely sensations (Shusterman, 2008). I also draw on the understanding that art is a

form of dialogue that enables us to process our sense of existence (Chappell, Craft, Rolfe, & Jobbins, 2012; Hagman, 2005; O'Donohue, 2015; Shusterman, 2008; Torres, & Kamhi, 2000).

Aesthetic experiences afforded through art practices are essential and unique opportunities for broadening human perspective and meaning (Baron & Eisner, 1997; Barrett & Bolt, 2013; Boutet, 2013; Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1995) and contribute to a vision of, and indeed the making of a world through a complex process of aesthetic understanding. Many theorists tell us that aesthetic experiences are transmitted through both the conceptual and physical aspects of art making and become embodied in the work. They argue that the absence of the aesthetic experience would result in a superficial grasp of our relationship with the natural world (Barrett, 2013; Boutet, 2013; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Dewey, 1934; Shusterman, & Tomlin, 2008; Torres & Kamhi, 2000).

In *Art as Experience* (1934), John Dewey argues that there is a symbiotic aesthetic link between humans and art because art is an “organism comprised of an organization of energies formed through intuition” (p. 10), and he defines artworks as space where our cognitive, perceptual, and imaginative experiences emerge and present themselves. Ayn Rand’s theorizing about art, discussed in Torres and Kamhi (2000), supports Dewey’s views about art. She distinguishes art as belonging to the nature of human consciousness, something that humans need as a way of synthesizing aspects of reality. Like Dewey, Rand tells us the purpose of art goes far beyond a utilitarian usage, primarily because it has a critical psychological function of integrating complex experience within human consciousness.

As an imaginative process, Maxine Greene (1995) suggests art engages us as active participants in the shaping and reshaping of our experience, that “arts, as objects of our experience, enable us to see more in our experience, to hear more of normally unheard

frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, and what habits and conventions have suppressed” (p. 123). Bolt (2004), Barrett and Bolt (2013), and Boutet (2013) consider artistic practice as epistemological processes, methods of inquiry for knowing the Self and the world and for exploring nature and its meaning. Boutet (2013) suggests artistic practice and its resulting images are a “performative mode of knowledge production that emerges through sensory processes and gives rise to multiplicity, ambiguity and indeterminacy” (p. 63). She tells us that artistic practice is an “epistemic modality” (p. 32), and art is a “form of knowledge that is epistemologically comparable to gnostic knowledge and ancient forms of thinking; integral, metaphorical, using duality and synthesis” (p. 32). Like alchemists, says Boutet, artists think through matter by way of “aesthetic/symbolic operations... a thinking process where one contemplates and experiences situations, themes, feelings and complex ways of being” (p. 30). Through the creation process—in the making and doing—subjective experiences become embodied in the work, resulting in “archetypical art forms—models of the psyche; forms of thinking, ways of being, forms of experience, and forms of the psyche’s life” (p. 33) that enter into our perceptual awareness. Boutet goes on to say that knowledge that arises through this process is performative in nature because it emerges through *sensory modus operandi* and operates beyond the codes of a given visual or verbal sign system:

...knowledge produced through aesthetic experience is always contextual and situated since it involves direct sensory engagement with objects in the world. Artistic experience, therefore, occurs as a continuum with normal processes of living and is derived from an impulse to handle objects and to think and feel through their handling. What emerges from this process is the aesthetic image—an image that is heterogeneous in that it permits a *knowing* that exceeds what can be captured by the symbolic. (Boutet, 2013, p. 64)

Julia Kristeva (1984) also talks about artistic practices and their ability to disrupt established codes of language to allow alternative, and more complex, forms of thought, experience, and understanding to exist. She says:

[D]espite their variations, all modern linguistic theories consider language a strictly “formal” object—one that involves syntax or mathematization...but modern linguistics’ self-assigned object—lacks a subject or tolerates one only as a transcendental ego...and defers an interrogation of its already “externality.” It has always been a particular problem for semiotics, which is concerned with specifying the function of signifying practices such as art, poetry and myth that are irreducible to the “language” object. (pp. 21–22)

Anna Hickey-Moody (2013) suggests that, “the capacity of art to effect a movement from invisibility to visibility, to make stories and publics, is a critical cultural function” (p. 120). Using Deleuze’s (1994) concept of differentiation, she points out that the material power of art magnifies difference and uniqueness; presenting subjectivity differently with meaning is the capacity of artwork to magnify voice. This resonates with my creation-research in the ways I assemble a métissage with my art and poetry to illuminate my voice.



Through creative acts, we can interpret artistic experience as operating through embodied knowledge, knowledge that is not reliant on established codes and which is an alternative logic and discourse:

...artistic practice proceeds not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on tacit and experiential knowledge. Experience operates within the domain of the aesthetic; knowledge produced through aesthetic experience is situated in direct sensory engagement with the world. (Barrett, 2013, p. 64)

As an artist and researcher, I recognize a complex praxis that emerges within my own studio practice and use the term *multitextural dialogue* to describe it. This is a type of visual metaphorical dialogue, situated in subjective experience, that embodies meaning, knowledge, perception, intuition, and cultural and metaphysical phenomena. When I consider this dynamic interplay in artistic practice, I see a dialectic that occurs between the artist, the images they create and explore, their experiences, and certain types of thinking undertaken throughout the process. Along with recognizing an active dialectic in my own practice, I also see it in the artistic practices of my artist peers. In dialogue with them, I have identified the kinds of thinking and knowledge that we artists employ in our artistic practice. I have found that perceptual knowledge and aesthetic thinking are prominent learning platforms or pathways to insight and understanding. I understand perceptual knowledge as “a process that utilizes not only the retinal image but also the whole of a person’s being” (Barry, 1997, p. 65), where image and being are intriguingly linked in a meaning-making process. Aesthetic thinking on the other hand can be understood as a kind of energy that seeks materialization in forms and considered “metaphors of the mind—archetypes that represent certain structures of our mind, emotions, thoughts, modes of being and our thinking and experience patterns” (Boutet, 2013, p. 38).

When artists engage aesthetically, our images, experience, perception, memories, and intuition encounter each other dialectically in a complex and critical engagement. The aesthetic images emerge as the result of the flow and plasticity of material and psychic forces that operate through the artist’s interaction and intra-action with the world (Barrett, 2013). Aesthetic ways of knowing and being in the world emerge out of this dialectical tension, encapsulating an aesthetic way of knowing and being an integral part of world. In this context, as artists, our creations emerge according to deeper structures in our mind and body (Boutet, 2013).



Forms of artwork, such as painting, drawing, poetry, theatre, dance, collage, and weaving for example, manifest our experience and our way of being in relation with the world (Boutet, 2013; Leggo, 2017b; McCosh, 2013; Millette, 2006; Tak-Hue, 2010; Thomas, 2003; Trungpa, 2008). For example, in her compelling artistic research, Suzanne Thomas (2003) describes her artforms and process in this way:

...the artist/researcher explores sense of place in the natural world as a lingering, a pause, a dwelling, that honours the primacy of experience, affirms tacit and intuitive dimensions of personal knowledge, and awakens to a porous receptivity by embracing embodied knowing...embodied aesthetics of poetry, photography and “found artifacts” illuminate moments of immersion in the natural world. These experiences are represented in visual and textual encounters; each fragment suspending a moment of temporality, acts of discovery, and re-enactments of embodiment. (pp. ii–iii)

Art can enable us to acknowledge the complexity of experience, allowing us to grasp and accept the unknown (or subconscious) as a part of experience (O’Donohue, 2015; Shusterman, 2008). Much like the spaces and pauses in a poem, art encourages us to explore the in-between spaces—the alternatives and possibilities of our experiences and our interpretations of them. Art plays a significant role in self-understanding, and learning (new) ways of being and living in the world (Baron & Eisner, 1997, 2002; Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1995), which are congruent with Indigenous epistemological understandings of art (Cajete, 1994; Kelly, 2015). Understanding of art is inspirational:

...[A]rt, which is transformation of raw materials into a form that reflects meaning for both the artist and the user, is equally a reflection of an elemental transformation. Indeed, art in

its highest forms of expression is a kind of magic. And in this magic of creation, the artist becomes immersed with his media and the mind of creation. (Cajete, 1994, p. 149)



The implications of art as an alternative logic and discourse (Kristeva, 1984) and an ontological and epistemological potentiality (Boutet, 2013) of voice, informs my creation-research. In this context my creation-research is rooted in artistic processes and methods that embraces experience, subjectivity, and voice; it is educative in nature, bringing about a growth or evolution in thought, experience, understanding, and perception. Understanding art's potential and demonstrating how art can function as an active critical practice allows us to consider art and artistic practice as opportunities to access, develop, and express our subjectivity. Deleuze (1991) remind us that "art makes subjectivities through voice and speaking positions, new 'I's': *I* is not only the 'I conceive' of the brain as philosophy, it is also the 'I feel' of the brain as art. Sensation is no less brain than the concept" (p. 211).

Experiences with art and artistic processes can be seen as paths of insightful knowledge that emanate from explorations and meanderings through (internal) landscapes, languages, and culture. This is how new knowledge is generated and how we can gain insight from our thoughts, memories, and experiences, and importantly, how we connect relationally with/in the world. Of her artistic practice Kelly (2015) tells us:

...my philosophical orientation or worldview and my artistic practices have been tuning over time so that they are fine-tuned to the world. I feel a connectedness and continuity of being as an artist. I learned how to embody the gestures of the natural world and attend to my body's location and to listen...I listened in order to learn how to make visible the creative forces of the natural world. (pp. 47–48)

Many artists explore identity as a central theme in their practices. This is prevalent in the work of many female Indigenous artists over the past several decades and has inspired me on my research journey. For example, Meryl McMaster (2016) explores imaginative self-articulations of being through costume and photographed self-portraits with distinct landscapes. Her work is seen as “a kind of cross-temporal portraiture” (Anderson, 2016, p. 10); a seemingly solitary practice of self-articulation that “enlarges the historical narrative she has received through her experimentation with the speculative limits of identity” (p. 11). In her recent work, *As Immense as the Sky*, (2019), McMaster takes on different personas through the theatrical embodiment of various aspects of herself, extending the boundaries of her identity through the realm of the imaginative and extraordinary. In her artist statement she writes:

[T]he way we experience the passing of time shapes our relationships to and our understanding of our immediate world...I sought wisdom in the places of ancestral life, listening to the truths of relatives, Elders, friends and people who have traversed this land before me...I came to see these landscapes as immense time capsules....As Immense as the Sky is about walking these ancient paths, experiencing the diversity of panoramas, and learning about my ancestor’s wisdom. (Retrieved from merylmcmaster.com, June 24th, 2019)

McMaster’s work embodies her imaginative world through “objects and apparel and juxtaposes these identity ‘visions’, rendering inherited vectors of culture and the embodied experience of living in the present tense, [which is] as much social commentary as personal discovery” (Anderson, 2016, p. 14). She works in close meditation with her subjectivity, seeking and inviting “the unknown, the idea or the form or the tale that has not yet arrived, yet is what must be found” (Solnit, as cited in Anderson, 2016, p. 11). I discovered McMaster’s work

midway through my creation-based work for this dissertation and prior to my exhibition, *Embodied Landscapes* at the Christou Gallery, University of Lethbridge (2019). McMaster's creative exploration of her identity affirms and contributes to my thinking about the potential of subjectivity to open up our understanding of identity, outside the realms of colonial identity politics, and reminds me again of the power of stories and of our relational interconnectedness.

The seminal work of artist Rebecca Belmore, *Rising to the Occasion*, characterized as “a singular, compelling polemical voice” (Augaitis, & Ritter, 2008, p. 9) provokes political consciousness about self-liberation and the resiliency of Indigenous women. In *Rising to the Occasion*, through photographic representation, costume, and performance, Belmore creates a Victorian dress, an artifact from a stage performance, to wear during an official Royal visit to her town. In preparation of this visit she punctuated the bodice of the dress with beadwork and porcelain saucers, trimmed it with a buckskin fringe and embellished the bustle with a beaver-hut made from sticks and kitsch souvenirs. Belmore literally rose to the occasion, wearing the dress during the official visit of the Duke and Duchess of York in Thunder Bay, Ontario in 1987 (Augaitis, & Ritter, 2008). Belmore's artistic provocations rest on the juxtaposition of cultural objects; in this case she embellished the dress with objects such as a beaver pelt and teacups, to challenge colonial contradictions and injustices. Belmore's approach has inspired me critically to consider how I can weave objects, symbols, and text into my work as a way to provoke and unsettle. Of her work, Augaitis and Ritter (2008) write:

The body is a constant presence in Belmore's work. It is at the core of her performance work, and it is used consistently to signify resistance, labor and endurance. The artist frequently uses her own body as both a specific, personal entity and as a stand-in signifier of a politicized body marked by race and difference. Belmore effectively addresses a com-

plex set of power relations in contemporary society and specifically speaks to the effects of colonization on Aboriginal people, especially women. (p. 10)

McMaster's and Belmore's work provide a view of how art can function in multiple and diverse ways—as provocations, as sites of cultural phenomena; as gateways to aesthetic experience and as spaces in which the imagination can reshape, reform, and redefine our vision and understandings of Self. These works put into context what theorists argue in terms of what art can do, its benefits, values, and its inherent personal worth. Here we can see art in terms of its unique literacy and contribution and as its own phenomena.

Through my creation-research method, I harness the intrinsic value and nature of art, along with poetry and storying, to explore experience and issues surrounding my Métis identity. In my research I intertwine these forms of expression and methods of inquiry to create a visual and textual métissage that acts in the formulation and articulation of experience and knowledge within a framework of cultural self-analysis. In this way my IM Spiral situates me in “moments of cultural practice” and engages me in a critical process of “agency and action” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 247). Greene (1995) suggested that it is within the social imagination that “there is a capacity to invent new possibility and to draw upon our own initiatives through imaginative dialogue” (p. 5). This type of dialogue can activate one's ability to explore, shape and reshape experience. Through my creation-research, and particularly in my digital gallery, I enter into “the social fabric of events, and examine experience, attitudes, cultural understandings, and values and perceptions of self in the world” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 240). In this way my self-study creation-based research encompasses a critical discourse on how art and art making can be viewed (McNiff, 2008), and demonstrates how art is fundamentally a critical way of seeking. In this spirit the métissage of images, poetry, and stories generate a multidimensional space where I

explore and tell my story and where I invite the reader in through multiple portals.



Autoportrait 3: Theoretical Strands: Creation-Research, Métissage, Indigenous Approaches

As a Métis visual artist, poet, and educator, creative practices and epistemologies imbued in spirit, holism, and subjectivity are values and teachings central to my theoretical and pedagogical research, approaches to teaching, and ways of being within the world. Theories in arts-based research, métissage, and Indigenous methodologies underpin my IM Spiral. Theoretical concepts and ontological and epistemological perspectives that arise within these strands support and inform how I have designed and engaged in my research. These strands are braided intentionally to interact with and inform each other and to help me navigate, understand, and interpret the complexity of my (research) experiences. I have drawn on my own experience and those of participating family members and present these in the form of a theoretical discussion and creation-based métissage.

Strand 1: Creation-Research

The IM Spiral is my own creation-based method, which is informed by my artistic and pedagogical practice, aspects of arts-based and research-creation theories and practices, along with Indigenous métissage. These relationships generate a type of multitextural dialogue that intertwines and engages with my sensory, spiritual, and intellectual ways of being and knowing. To better understand this particular theoretical strand, I have inverted the currently used term research-creation to become creation-research. During discussions with my supervisor I had often inverted the term research-creation to creation-research throughout our dialogue. It was natural for me to do so because I situated myself in creation pedagogy in my teaching and artistic practices, where I consider the role of generative creative praxis in learning. I was encouraged to

pursue creation-research as a counterpoint to research-creation. Situating “creation” first better represents my ontological and theoretical axiology/values as an artist and creative soul. It is creation that informs and drives my research. This is why my creation-based work is positioned in the middle of my thesis; it is the heart. This is important because I believe it is with/in creation that we can see, hear, and come to know. Creation is an engagement and enactment of holism, subjectivity, and spirit. These are foundational and fundamental values that resonate and reverberate with/in my being and living as an artist, teacher, and researcher. Creation is generative, open, fluid, and permeable; thus, it moves and is restless. Creation is to research what I consider subjectivity to be within the broader frameworks of ABR, métissage, and Indigenous methodologies. It is a way of distinguishing subjectivity from identity and bringing subjectivity to the forefront of my inquiry.

Throughout the following section I will delineate my positioning in this manner as a researcher. I will begin with a brief review of qualitative research because it is an historical paradigm where the use of visual tools emerge in research. The relationship between qualitative and arts-based paradigms intersect and interact in a way that prompts a kind of relational, yet distinct evolution. Because of this history, I feel it is valuable to consider this chronology.

The field of qualitative research and inquiry has been in transition over the past two decades. The ontological turn in social science research, and along with it the incorporation of alternative methods, has created the emergence of divergent theories and practice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Even in this shifting terrain and decades of establishing legitimacy of alternative approaches, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln report that “the fight over the very existence of qualitative research, while seemingly part of the distant past, is very much alive in the second decade of the new millennium—in tenure battles and granting agencies” (p. 2). Neoliberal

discourses continue to threaten with de-legitimization by continuing to reinforce evidence-based “gold standard” practices (Baron & Eisner, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Shavelson & Towne, as cited in Eisner, 2008). For decades, notable advocates for creative methodologies, in particular Elliot Eisner, have consistently pushed against field-based trials as “gold standards” of (educational) research and have resisted perceptions of creative approaches as “soft-form” qualitative research (Eisner, 2008). As we move through the twenty-first century, innovative and creative methodologies in qualitative research continue to be saddled with confronting historical understandings and dispositions of the empirical knowledge. Indeed, today’s creative qualitative practices “are characterized by maneuvering between positivism, post positivism, critical theory, constructionism, poststructuralism, participatory models of inquiry and more” (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2018, p. 2).

Discourse generated by research that uses creative methodologies destabilize longstanding empirical axioms, work to legitimize diverse and multiple understanding of what knowledge can be, and consider more deeply how we experience socio-cultural phenomena. As Denzin and Lincoln (2018) point out, the resistance to empirical axioms is evidenced by the “international push-back through wide-scale legitimization of interpretive post-structural research across the curricula of social sciences, humanities, education, health sciences, science education and more” (p. 3). Examples of this evolution, which infuse my own research trajectory, can be found in the work of Sarah Pink (2012), Michelle O’Neil (2012), and Claudia Mitchell and Jeanette Allnutt (2008), where visual methods intersect, inform, and transform traditional qualitative approaches. Pink (2012), for instance, advances visual methodologies to intersect with anthropology, sociology, and culture. For Pink, a visual/ethno/anthropological methodology is a more diverse tool and better suited for contemporary contexts that are

multifaceted and interconnected. I appreciate Pink's vision, particularly in the ways that creative approaches seek to "problematize data, explore alternative perspectives and epistemologies, and support researchers in collaborative and interdisciplinary work" (p. 4). In this way Pink's vision informs my own creation-based *métissage* approach that uses multiple lines of inquiry to attend the complexity of identity and subjectivity. Pink tells us she advances visual methodologies because it "contributes to a field of scholarship that crosses disciplines, influences theoretical developments and creates relationships between theoretical and technological fields of study and practice" (p. 3). Notably, engaging relationships and transcending empirical boundaries within the research design are central to Indigenous methodologies and to my IM Spiral. It is through multi-disciplinary practices where creative approaches emerge and proliferate, as evidenced in Pink's (2012) edited collection of visual methodologies.

Michelle O'Neil (2012), Claudia Mitchell and Jeanette Allnut (2008), effectively demonstrate ways that qualitative research has adopted and folded visual and artistic practices into qualitative research practices. O'Neil (2012) demonstrates how creative methods can broaden qualitative research and free it from empirical constraints. In her *ethno-mimesis* and participatory research, she brings together sociologists and artists to explore the inter-textuality across the arts and social sciences. She examines "lived cultures, as well the transformative role of connecting arts-based work and social research, in research projects" (p. 158). By exploring the intricacies of lived experiences, as my self-study does through a creation-based Indigenous *métissage*, O'Neil argues that, "both the narrative and visual can be defined as critical theory in practice and an example of public scholarship" (p. 158).

The work of Canadian scholar Claudia Mitchell also exemplifies the use of visual methods through the use of photographs, taken and found, in her qualitative humanities research,

see: (Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell, & Allnut, 2008; Weber, & Mitchell, 2004). In establishing the *Centre for Visual Methodologies for Social Change* at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, as well as *The International Visual Methodologies Project* at McGill University, Montreal, Canada, Mitchell harnesses the participatory nature of “photo-voice” and the emancipatory potential of empowering participants to activate their own voice and stories through taking their own photographs. Photo-voice research projects rely on providing participants with cameras to document their own lives in relation to a particular research goal. Photo-voice projects “tend to be grounded in consciousness-raising theory [and] can elicit narratives that would otherwise have been out of reach” (Leavy, 2015, p. 234).

Another way in which Mitchell approaches “photo-voice” is by studying photo albums. She considers the album to be a site of lived experience and memory; a window into the relationships between memory and experience and the ways in which photographs are a social documentation. For Mitchell and Allnut (2008) “there is power in the use of photographs and photo albums as objects, as things in social science research and their capacity to talk through a sociocultural lens” (p. 252). They state: “[E]xploring how visual methodologies can make a difference, contributes to activism, [by] render[ing] the photograph as representational agents of change” (p. 259). Having studied under the scholarship of Dr. Mitchell during my Masters, I adapted photo-voice into my own creation-research by interlinking research concepts and methods of photovoice, such as using personal photographs as consciousness-raising, with my artistic practices of collage and photomontage. I used artistic methods that juxtapose, disrupt, and reveal the obscure or the hidden. *The girl of silver* was a self-study project I initiated in Dr. Mitchell’s Creative Methodologies and Memory Work seminar, at McGill University in the winter of 2009, launching and informing my current inquiry approach, IM Spiral.

Qualitative research crosses disciplines, fields, and subject matter. It is a diverse research approach and like a complex family is rooted in unique traditions, histories, and perspectives that result in a range of research designs and methods. Not unlike my creation-based approach, and congruent with Indigenous methodologies, qualitative research can be a situated practice, one that locates research and the researcher in lived and living experiences. This kind of positioning is reflected in my IM Spiral through theories and practices of métissage, creation-based approaches, and in the relational protocols of Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, et al., 2018).

This evolution of the qualitative paradigm has opened up a space for creative and innovated research methods out of the struggle to emerge from the “gold standard.” The use of visual methods, promoted by Pink (2012) and taken up by many qualitative researchers such as O’Neil and Mitchell, began a type of metamorphosis of qualitative research.

Arts-based research.

Leavy (2018) describes ABR/ABER as “a transdisciplinary approach to knowledge building that combines the tenants of the creative arts in a research context...in order to address research questions holistically” (p. 4). She considers ABR an umbrella term that encompasses the use of diverse artistic research practices that include literary, performative, visual art, multimedia, and multimodal methods (Leavy, 2018). Pursuant with my creation-research (IM Spiral), epistemologically, ABR constitutes multiple pathways to knowledge creation and meaning-making through aesthetic experience, sensory, kinesthetic, and imaginary modes of being and knowing. Shaun McNiff (2018) emphasizes how exploring the nature of art has helped us understand artistic knowledge and knowing, and their potential in teaching, research, and

inquiry. He suggests that creative and artistic renderings of experience are an evocative and effective lens through which to see alternative perspectives of research phenomena. In this way arts-based approaches are seen to generate new ways of engaging with knowledge by using “the actual making of artistic expression in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience” (p. 29). In an arts-based paradigm, practitioners pursue and theorize experience and phenomena through artistic processes, where questions emerge and submerge throughout the inquiry. This is fundamental in my own approach and supports my intention as a creation-based researcher to engage actively and creatively within the process. This is an “active stance to knowledge creation [or knowing creation], one that is emergent, generative and responsive to all involved [in the research process]” (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p.109).

In the last decade, ABR has effectively problematized status quo scholarship and opened up critical dialogues about multiple new pathways of knowledge and meaning making. In this way aspects of ABR align with Indigenous approaches that intend to push the boundaries of colonial certitude and instead honour personal truths (Archibald et al., 2019; Markides & Forsythe, 2019; McGregor, Restoule & Johnston, 2019; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Critical issues surrounding creative methodologies, particularly in art education, provoke and advance our understanding about what constitutes research and how we can envision “truth” (Boutet, 2013). As communities of researchers, we understand the value and role of emergent and experiential knowledges, and how these types of knowledge can propel dialogical ways of knowing and being in the world (St. Georges, 2018; Sinner, Sahagun-Sanchez, Wicks, & St. Georges, 2019). The unfolding metamorphosis of scholarship in ABR and ABER enables us to disrupt established codes of language (Kristeva, 1984) and access alternative modes of

knowledge production (Barrett, 2013). While we are cautioned about framing the vast and diverse approaches to ABR within static parameters, Sinner, Irwin, & Jokela (2018) suggest that under the ABR/ABER umbrella, methodologies operate uniquely in how research inquiry and analysis/interpretation are taken up in the research design and process. For instance,

arts-informed provides creative responses to a traditional methodological study; *practice-based* locates research in the studio through artmaking; and *artistic inquiry* is material-based, bringing the studio art practices to the fore, and often engaging with existing artworks or museum collections. Each given approach then informs visuals created for research, collected as data, presented as part of the outcomes, or created to document artistic process, learning events, or as responses to wider social issues that permeate art education curriculum and instruction. (Sinner et al., 2018, p. 8)

The collection of contemporary arts-based dissertation practices (Sinner, et al., 2018; Sinner, Irwin, & Adams, 2019), which I am a part of, attests to the range of twenty-first century theorizing and methodological approaches currently underway in the ABR and ABER international communities. In her editorial, Sinner (2018) suggests that “each practitioner brings their own technical elements to bear, much as is expected in their development of an artistic vision, making each iteration of inquiry uniquely singular” (p. 7). The following contemporary examples from Australia, Finland, Iceland, and Canada demonstrate the current diversity unfolding within the contemporary ABR paradigm. Exploring a selection of practice-based, arts-based, and research-creation projects helps us consider what ABR can look like and helps me to delineate my discussion about my own creation-research, in contrast, and why I distinguish my work as creation-research.

Project 1: Practice-based research: Artistic Action for Sustainability.

Overall, practice-based approaches locate research in the art making and situate the researcher in the process of creating art that exemplifies data. For example: *Artistic Action for Sustainability* (Jónsdóttir, Macdonald, & Jokela, 2018) developed in collaboration with the Iceland Academy of the Arts and the University of Lapland, was a practice-based approach comprising action-research and art making, generating three art exhibits with a focus on Arctic sustainability. The resulting work aimed to connect with audiences in various contexts such as with visitors at a local museum, along with scholars attending an international conference on Arctic sustainability in Lapland, Finland. Research approaches included “art making, participation [of others], and qualitative and anthropological investigations that included interviews, and building data from the interviews into the art-work” (p. 33). Three exhibits took place over a period of two years within the Lapland community: *Challenge (2015)*; *Boundaries and Bridges: Creating a New Role for Old Traditions (2015)*, and *LOOKING, Back, Around, Forward (2016)*.

Challenge, the practice-based research, explored questions about how to balance the wellness of complex ecologies and the wellness of humans. It explicated its findings into the production of artwork, intending to reveal that connection with nature was fundamental in changing perspectives and asserting positive change, specifically by believing that one can make a difference. *Boundaries and Bridges*, installed in a local concert hall (museum) during an international conference on Arctic sustainability that was attended by 1500 participants from 40 countries, was designed to increase participation and dialogue amongst attendees to strengthen the international focus on the future of the Arctic (p. 34). *LOOKING, Back, Around, Forward* was designed for invited community members to share, through an interview process, their personal experiences about place and landscape. During the interviews, participants were invited

to choose a coloured card from 314 samples to symbolize personally memorable local environments. The researcher comments how many tones of blue were chosen, symbolizing Finland's skies and surrounding waterways. The resulting contemporary artwork, comprising large colour swatches, reflecting participants' choices, was installed in town to symbolize community members' home environments. This practice-based project emphasized community participation to provoke dialogue, and to cultivate attitudes aligned with sustainable practices that were considered integral to the future of the Arctic. The data generated from the action-research was represented in the artworks produced by the researchers whose interests were in socio-cultural topics. Here art is used as a method of representing the research data.

In my own creation-research *métissage* I too generate artworks. My IM Spiral uses multiple lines of artistic inquiry and *métissage*, as a creative and theoretical trope to problematize "data" by accentuating the interconnectedness and complexities of relationships, amongst the methods and theoretical strands, and subjectivities, experiences, memories, and stories. In my creation-research "data" is active and activated through the entanglement of these relationships and in this way is intangible, always changing and shifting.

Project 2: Arts-based research: Artist Book.

Unlike practice-based research that tend to produce artwork to represent data, arts-based inquiries tend to use art as a methodological tool for inquiry, reflective of qualitative visual methodologies we saw earlier (Mitchell, 2008; Pink, 2012). The artistic method intends to engage with what is being studied. For example, at Monash University, Australia, Geraldine Burke (2018) explores "Immersive Art Pedagogy (IAP), [to build] a creative analysis and philosophy of [research] practice" (p. 117). Her research explores alternative ways of knowing

and analysis, investigating the pedagogy in “creative world communities,” such as in schools and in artist spaces (p. 120). This research aims to understand the intricacies of *Immersive Art Pedagogy* and how it “develops socioecological understanding of place and identity” (p. 121). Her method; an art/ist photobook, compiles text and image that document her inquiry. The book is considered a “creative analysis tool that reveal[s] insight and contestations” (p. 125) made possible through the intersection of literal notations, reflective writing and images created during the research journey. For Burke, her art/ist book is understood as a manifestation of knowledge making, which is then reflexively analyzed and theorized.

Burke’s art/ist book is compelling to me as an artist, art educator, and researcher, particularly in the ways elements of image and text commingle, and the exploration of IAP that aims to inform thinking about contexts, identity, and aesthetic sensibility (Burke, 2018). On my own research journey, I originally planned to create a book for my creation “chapter”, however in my many deliberations I came to recognize that my urge to create a “book” was actually predicated on the need to create a distinct space for my creation-based métissage to exist. Theories and practices of métissage, storying, and Indigenous methodologies that situate research within an ethic of relationships and which purposefully juxtapose voices to create openings for generative dialogue (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009; Kovach, 2018; Wilson et al., 2019), calls for such a space. In this way my creation-research project purposefully honours relationships, multiplicity, and movement by activating the creation work with hyperlinks and enlivening it through dialogue in each distinct relational encounter. In this way the art work—my creation-based indigenous métissage—is not a resulting research art object and resists being analyzed and theorized in an empirical manner because it is alive; it shifts and moves in the relational ways of my Spiral.

Project 3: Research-creation: Threads, Trends and Threats of the Wedding Dress.

Research-creation is an emerging form of research and distinguishes itself through the entanglement of materiality and experience. An example of this can be seen in the work of *Threads, Trends and Threats of the Wedding Dress*, by Mexican Canadian artist and researcher, Maria Ezcurra (2018). She examines, responds to, and resists heteronormalizing behaviours symbolized in the bridal-fashion industry. Her methods are embedded in participatory and community art practices and ethnography. In her project 16 participants, along with the researcher, engaged in a recreation process with their own wedding dresses in a collaborative, creative, working environment where dialogue ensues, questions emerge, and practices inform and transform inquiry. The project's idea responds to a contemporary social phenomenon called *Trash the Dress*, where brides damage or destroy their dresses during a photoshoot, sometimes exposing themselves to harm or even abuse.⁶

For Ezcurra, including the voices of her participants was “an effective way to respond to, explore, and resist together, the gender-based violence, that I believe *Trash the Dress* supports” (p. 130). While Ezcurra acknowledges the repressive impact that the fashion industry has on gender identity, she directs her inquiry to “create alternative clothing styles to promote the construction of flexible identities and to oppose cultural expectation of women's roles...to actively transform them [dresses] to collaboratively resist their oppressive expectations about our sexuality, femininity and behavior” (p. 130). In the process of selecting dresses and fabrics, the recreating acted symbolically, and formally, as a type of investigative inquiry that “resulted in new understandings about the connection of fashion and popular visual culture, to the ways

⁶ Tirosh, Udi. (2013, July 12, 2013). Is the Picture Worth the Risk? A Bride Set on Fire for a Trash-The-Dress. <https://www.diyphotography.net/picture-worth-risk-bride-set-fire-trash-dress/> This project speaks to *Trash the Dress* phenomena and the dangers encountered in this extreme form of performative photography.

women learn and generate meaning” (p. 138). In this research-creation project, the wedding dress functioned as a metaphor to critically explore ideals of female purity, objectification, beauty norms, and heterosexuality while presenting notions of identity as ambiguous, fragmented, fluid, and contradictory. Here, art is not “used” so much as a manifestation of data, rather artmaking and materiality are centralized and integrated in the research design and the methods of exploring questions on the topic at hand.

This type of research-creation resembles my own approach where artmaking is centralized. However, there is a difference that I am proposing in my project; creation-research treats materiality as something that is alive and active; it moves, flows, resists, connects, affects, and virtually transforms through each relational encounter. It is imbued with spirit.

Creation-research is embedded in indigenous epistemologies, creation-stories and storying methodologies that move through the experiential forces of subjectivity. Creation-research is an engagement with and an enactment of holism, subjectivity, and spirit. It enlivens and generates spaces and opportunities to dwell intentionally, both inwardly and outwardly. Creation-research embraces the potential of being; our inwardness, stories and our ancestral memories, that reside in the deep cavities of our being. It is part of a shifting paradigm in Indigenous methodologies and ABR that explore new ways and possibilities of working, experiencing, and understanding, as a form agency and action in self-determination. (Archibald et al, 2019; Kovach, 2018; St Georges, 2018, 2019a/b; Windchief and San Pedro, 2019).



The diversity of research designs and methodologies within the ABR community speaks to its proliferation and links with diverse artistic practices. The proliferation and diversity of arts-

based practices can act as “portals with multiple ways in and out” (Kalin, 2018, p. 11), expanding the parameters and possibilities of research. In this way, as Leavy (2015) suggests, ABR requires a novel worldview [because it] covers expansive terrain (p. 6). Sinner (2018) considers ABR a type of “interruption: a forum to deliberate upon critically...where form and content, how the visual operates along with purpose and intent of the visual as data is part of ongoing practices that broaden views on the affective, sensorial and intuitive qualities underlying” (p. 7). As an emerging artistic scholar, I see creative methodologies as having the potential to transform and recontextualize theory and research, including theory within the ABR communities.

Research-creation as an emerging concept and a methodological approach is distinguished from other forms of arts-based approaches, reflective of a desire to involve artistic practices more deeply in research. In this regard, I am interested in the use of the term research-creation and take note of the influence funding agencies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) have in defining what research-creation is. Because institutions inform what research-creation is, coupled with little theorizing in the field, I suggest the nature of art, and our relationship to it can be a valuable lens through which to reconsider research-creation. Through this lens I propose creation-research as a way of honouring our imaginative capacities and the roles creation and storying have in meaning-making and learning.

Research-creation or creation-research?

Over the past two decades, theories emerging from arts-based methodologies have intertwined with and have been informed by theories in qualitative research practice, which in turn has

influenced thinking surrounding research-creation. Gaps in theorizing on research-creation has inadvertently invited institutions to define and determine what research-creation is, and as Chapman & Sawchuk (2012) point out, there are various ways it is understood across Canadian institutions. For instance, Concordia University has adopted the term and defines research-creation through the Hexagram website as:

...a developing research trend in Canada's academic milieu, linking the interpretive disciplines (humanities and social sciences) with creative ones (art and design). This involves the creation of knowledge in and through creative material and performative practice (Hexagram, 2019, para. 1)⁷.

SSHRC defines research-creation as:

...an approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms). Research-creation cannot be limited to the interpretation or analysis of a creator's work, conventional works of technological development, or work that focuses on the creation of curricula. (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, 2019, para. 22)⁸

Research-creation is defined by Fonds de recherche du Québec (FQRSC) as

... any research process or approach that fosters creation and aims at producing new aesthetic, theoretical, methodological, epistemological or technical knowledge. Specifically, the research-creation activities carried out under this program must contribute to: The development of productions or works resulting from an artistic or creative practice,

⁷ See: <https://hexagram.ca/index.php/eng/scientific-orientations/what-is-research-creation>

⁸ See: <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#a22>

provided that they add an element of renewal or innovation in terms of approach, process, technology, materials, form of presentation or experimentation, repertory or interpretative style. These productions must lend themselves to problematization leading to the development of new aesthetic, theoretical, methodological, epistemological or technical knowledge. (Fonds de recherche du Québec—Société et culture, 2019, para. 2)⁹

The Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) keeps the terms separate and defines research and creation in the following way:

The Research and Creation component of Explore and Create supports the initial stages of the creative process. Canadian artists, artistic groups and arts organizations can apply to develop and make creative works. Grants provide support for creative research, creation and project development. (Canada Council for the Arts, 2019, para.1)¹⁰

I see a challenge in the way research-creation is being defined and positioned within social sciences and other research realms. Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) point out that the term research-creation, now adopted by the Canadian funding authorities such as SSHRC, FQRSC and CCA, is being entrenched in a conventional social science paradigm. They note that these “authorities have formulated their definitions and shape evaluation criteria based on pre-existing definitions [and] unwittingly reified traditional methodological frameworks that are more or less uncontested in terms of epistemological and ontological conventions for knowledge production” (p. 15). The concern being drawn out here is with who and how the term research-creation is being defined and how these granting authorities determine what projects get funded. I suggest, in this context, research-creation would benefit by more theorizing to balance institutional influence. Vivienne Bozalek & Michalinos

⁹ See: <http://www.frqsc.gouv.qc.ca/en/bourses-et-subventions/concours-antérieurs/bourse?id=qdf2e1si1559928269097&>

¹⁰ See: <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/explore-and-create/research-and-creation>

Zembylas (2017), Owen Chapman & Kim Sawchuk (2012) and Cher M. Hill (2017) have initiated this theorizing by reaching back and bringing forward a theory of diffraction originated from the seminal works of Donna Haraway (1992,1997) and Karen Barad (2007), as cited in, Bozalek & Zembylas (2017) and Hill (2017). Here we can consider and examine how diffraction theory may harness new ways of thinking about practice and research-creation.

Diffraction theory.

The term diffraction comes from the Latin verb *diffringere*. It was coined in 1660 by Francesco Grimaldi, who observed that light streaming through a pin hole behaved fluidly, bending and spreading outward in different directions (Hill, 2017, p. 2). Haraway (1997) articulated her ideas of diffraction from this notion, seeing difference and multiplicity as a way to engage with and discuss the potential of diffraction to understand human phenomena. In this regard, Haraway generated a theory that attended to the “fluid and evolving process of *world making*, in which phenomena are constituted through their material entanglements” (as cited in Hill, 2017, p. 3). This is valuable insight and is congruent with Indigenous epistemologies surrounding stories, and how storying and creation-stories function dialogically, as a form of knowledge creation, renewal and meaning-making (Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Archibald et al, 2019; Kimmerer 2013, King, 2003, 2013).

Haraway contrasted the inadequacies of reflective methods “that produce static representations of a reality that is assumed to be pre-existing and stable” (as cited in Hill, 2017, p. 3). In contrast, diffraction is understood as a theoretical trope where patterns of difference and heterogeneity are a material-discursive phenomenon, and are opportunities to generate critical provocations about the complexity of experience (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017), where “all forms

of knowledge production are at the same time formations of reality” (Haraway as cited in Hill, 2017, p. 2). This idea supports my thinking and informs my IM Spiral in the ways it embraces complexity of experience and heterogeneity of living through multiplicity and motion. Hill (2017) tells us “diffraction theory does not assume pre-existing ontological categories, but rather a reality that is continuously re/constituted through material entanglements” (p. 2). Haraway (1992) raised questions about the theoretical assumptions of reflective practice and argued that reflective practices are grounded in representationalism and reductionism, simply mirroring and amalgamating experience, not unlike how parameters of identity reduce Self to “sameness,” as I discussed earlier, from a Lacanian lens.

Hill (2017) suggests that rather than reflecting on what a person or individual knows, diffraction allows us to come to know through our situatedness in relationships with others, including other-than-humans and ecologies. This is a valuable insight from a Western lens that I consider congruent with Indigenous epistemologies of holism and subjectivity, as discussed earlier. In this way diffraction can inform us, about the essence of All My Relations (Wagamese, 2013). I am reminded of Indigenous scholar Dwayne Donald (2012), who calls us to reconstruct colonial understandings and to explore human relationality more deeply. This is germane to my own creation-research and discussion because it recognizes how our histories and experiences position us in relation with each Other.

Diffraction theory can inform arts-based practices (Sinner et al., 2019), *métissage* (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009), and my own theorizing surrounding subjectivity and identity, in the ways I juxtapose multiple lines of inquiry (art, poetry, storying), multiple voices, and experiences (mine, my family’s, literature, and my Métis community’s). This is a praxis that honours subjectivity and creates the conditions to embrace disparities, difference and multiplicity. My creation-based

Indigenous métissage (IM Spiral) is a way to stay with the tension “without the need to resolve, assimilate, or incorporate” (Donald, 2012b, p. 533). This is a more complex view of identity of human relationality, and a way to challenge colonial claims on identity and ways of being in the world.



Through their own literature review and analysis, Hill (2017) and Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) recognize and depart from the binaries of reflection versus diffraction embedded in the Haraway and Barad discourse and consider how both theories can be enacted together. They suggest:

...entanglement of reflexivity and diffraction is one that includes continuities and breaks rather than a “story” of one vs. the other...where concepts of reflection, reflexivity and critical reflection, while used interchangeably, critical reflectivity lends itself to interrogating and responding to power structures and relations in reflection process.

(Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 118)

Likewise, Hill (2017) tells us her intention is not to replace the notion of the reflective practice with diffractive practice or to treat these as binary opposites; “indeed as there is light in dark and dark in light...there are elements of diffraction in reflection, as well as aspects of reflection in diffraction” (p. 2). By acknowledging the merits of reflective practice and propelling the value of diffraction, in the way it is embedded in material discursive processes, Hill (2017) and Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) call for an entanglement of the two theories as a way of understanding research-creation. I agree with this thinking and see a relationship among reflection and refraction, not unlike identity and subjectivity; these are not binaries but part of a broader relational system of being and knowing. I see many parallels between diffraction theory

and my creation-research in the ways that it attends to difference and multiplicity, how it moves away from fixedness and embraces heterogeneity.

While Hill (2017) and Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) depart from the reflection/diffraction binary to consider how entangling these theoretical visions may help navigate the trajectory of research-creation, Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) mix up the term research-creation using a variety of conjunctions to extend what might constitute research-creation within an academic apparatus. They do so by drawing on the Wittgensteinian concept of “family resemblances” and “games” as metaphors and lenses to conceive research-creation as a “complicated network of similarities; overlapping and crisscrossing—similarities in the large and in the small” (Wittgenstein, as cited in Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012, p.16). They look for what makes a particular phenomenon similar as well as distinct to see the ontology of research-creation not as a thing, but as a concept with “blurred boundaries” (p. 16). Chapman and Sawchuk seek to draw attention to the mutual relationship of research and creation, in terms of “how they are imagined relationally, and how this enactment is formed and performed” (p. 17). Their approach echoes defining processes within the ABR communities that have unfolded over decades, which have resulted in a plethora of terms to distinguish nuances among arts-based methodologies, such as arts-informed, practice-based, artistic inquiry, arts-based and many more, as I showed earlier. Given that institutional stakeholders have had a hand in determining what research-creation is, Chapman and Sawchuk’s proposed iterations of research-creation has been an important first steps toward to deliberation in the field, by and for creative researchers.

In their proposed conjunctions of *research-for-creation*, *research-from-creation*, *creative presentations of research*, and *creation-as-research*, Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) suggest that research-creation as a concept can be perceived as a potential form of “intervention” because of

its relationship with a range of creative processes and materials, its performative qualities, and its connection with diverse audiences. In fact, they consider intervention and enactment as research-creation's potential and uniqueness and their various iterations as a way of conceiving, defining, and supporting the nature of research-creation as a "multifaceted, heterogeneous, and sometimes even contradictory creative academic inquiry" (p. 19). By delineating the four modes within the Wittgensteinian concept of family resemblances, they begin with *research-for-creation* and define this as a process of gathering and collecting of materials, ideas, concepts, collaborators and technologies to support creation (p. 20). Here initiatives can include literature reviews, the tracking down of precedents for one's creative ideas, the articulation of a cluster of concepts, as well as trying out different prototypes or iterations. In this way the gathering is the research. Gathering includes reading through recent journal articles, tracking down important references, or conducting interviews, "all of which are considered key elements to academic contributions to knowledge" (p. 20). The results in this iteration are embodied in both the creative production, which can comprise the creation of artistic works, experimentation, and interview, and the resulting (art) object.

Research-from-creation is understood as artwork, in its diverse forms, that generate data or information. Here creation operates "as both artworks and as vehicles for questioning the nature of human interaction and non-verbal forms of communication" (Sawchuk as cited in Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 22). As questions emerge and unfold through the research, the artistic process can shift, as the inquiry extends itself further, not unlike forms of practice based ABR inquiries. The data can then generate formal academic papers solely or in combination with showing artworks. Essentially "the art making process is not done for arts' sake, but as a mode of data generation and study" (p. 22).

Creative presentations-of-research is fairly straightforward. It is the presentation of traditional academic research in a creative fashion. Many of the social sciences use this iteration; using Richardson's (1997) notion of creative analytic practice (CAP) (as cited in Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 22), Chapman and Sawchuk define this iteration of research-creation as “seeing knowledge in connection with practice in the ways it is [creatively] reiterated” (p. 21). Here they provide an example of using collage and language to convey and support a description of panic disorder by a health practitioner/researcher. In the context of a conference, the visuals along with audio tracks are juxtaposed then used to provoke the audience.

Creation-as-research are projects where creation is required for research to emerge. It directs exploration through creative processes that include experimentation, analysis, critique, and engagement with theory and questions of method. “It allows for a body of original and focused artistic work to be realized, analyzed, contextualized, and theorized—providing a rich, multi-modal learning experience” (p. 23). In this iteration the possibility and potential of the work is revealed. Here “intervention” is realized and likened to a weaving of theory and practice. They tell us the Möbius strip is a good symbol to connote this form because it symbolizes the relationship between research and creation and how they function as theory and practice.

Through each iteration, Chapman and Sawchuk delineate the range of possibilities for the types of research that could comprise research-creation. They do follow a systematic and linear path of a research cycle, to break research-creation into parts, as a method of identifying stages. For example, they begin with a gathering stage (research-for-creation), followed by the use of art as a research tool or vehicle (research-from-creation and creation-as-research) then data is taken up with analysis and dissemination (creative representation) and work is then analyzed, contextualized, and theorized. This linear lens used to describe research-creation makes sense in

a qualitative paradigm and it is helpful to see these variations. However, I would like to consider this discussion through the lens of a creation paradigm and to consider our relationship with art, aesthetic experience and the types of knowledges and understandings evoked through artistic ways of being and knowing. I wonder if art and the experiences that emerge through artistic research can be considered data? McNiff (2018) tells us:

artistic expressions and processes are larger than the idea of data...art is diminished when reduced to it [because] the term does not necessarily apply to the complexities of “living” expression; artistic expressions are alive and active participants in our relationships with them that invite ongoing interpretations. (p. 29)



Chapman and Sawchuk finalize their discussion by using the Möbius strip, a symbol of non-duality, to represent research-creation. I understand the logic around using this symbol in this manner. It does seem to encapsulate ABR’s aim to emerge from the constraints of an empirical data-driven system, to have artistic methods and alternative methodologies valued. Another perspective, that I offer is that the Möbius strip symbolizes the containment of creation into a type of a system that tempers, meditates and mitigated it. I see that this type of system may be generating a trend where art and our relationship to it is at risk of being overlooked, and potentially undermined. In this context I offer some questions for future inquiry: What if we considered more deeply our relationship with art and its role being and knowing? What if we consider opening up the notion of research for the sake of creation, indeed for arts’ sake? What if we lift up creation and bring it forward; to generate and consider our own creation-stories? What if we take the risk and have creation lead; to open up our story worlds and explore what creation-

research can do?

I inverted the term research-creation because as an artist and art educator it is natural for me, and is precisely why I have generated my IM Spiral in the ways of creation. It is with/in creation that we live with and through the complexities of experience and where we generate our visions and our stories. It is how we develop our agency and exercise our voice. Art as something that is active and alive has an inherent link to our humanity, consciousness, and process of evolution. Creation is to research what subjectivity is to identity; it is generative, fluid, and permeable. It moves and it is restless. Creation is never complete. It cannot be bound or replicated, which is the challenge that it brings to research.



Strand 2: Métissage

Métissage is both a theory and a method that mixes, contrasts, and juxtaposes multiple narratives in various literary forms of creative non-fiction, poetry, and prose. From an epistemological standpoint and germane to my research, métissage is situated with an ethic of relationships, subjectivity, difference, and multiplicity. Métissage theorizes by “purposefully contrasting and juxtaposing stories among disparate, unequal individuals and groups to create openings and opportunities for generative dialogue and conversation” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 8). With meaningful intention, practices of métissage open spaces and create pedagogical opportunities to face and engage with points of contention and difference. By “reading the word and reading the world” (Freire, 1972, p. 63), métissage intends to disrupt and resist the grand colonial narratives our times by lifting up voices of the “petit récits,” the everyday narratives of lived experiences (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009).

Métissage supports and informs my research in three primary ways. Firstly, in the creation and conceptualization of my photo-digital collage prints; in the way that I specifically mix, blend, and juxtapose images and symbols to create complex relational subjective self-portraits. Secondly, in the way that I braid and juxtapose my poetry, stories, and theoretical perspective, as I situate myself subjectively and give voice to family stories and experience, as a way of speaking from personal truths. Thirdly, in the ways I juxtapose image and multi-textural dialogue between my inward and outward experiences of identity and subjectivity in both intimate and public socio-political and pedagogical context(s).

The meaning of métissage “as a conceptual trope and as a practical tool or strategy” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a, p. 8) comes from two main of sources: from the Latin term *mixticius*, meaning the weaving of a cloth from different fibers (Mish, 1990 as cited in Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a, p. 35) and from the name of the Greek primordial figure, Metis, an ancient Titaness and a descendent of Gaia and Uranus that possessed skill, craft, and cunning. She was a *trickster* with powers of transformation who resisted notions of purity by weaving and blurring textiles (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010). Métissage was “derived from these origins and is an artful craft and practice, an active literary and pedagogical strategy for negotiating conflicting or dichotomous value systems” (p. 4). This resonates with my research approach as I explore and attend to the complexity of identity and subjectivity, and to my experience of reclaiming my Métis identity. As a visual artist and poet, I extend the literary praxis of métissage into a visual realm, another portal and a unique type of literacy.

The history of métissage as a research praxis began through kinships developed at the University of Lethbridge and University of British Columbia. This involved the friendships and scholarly commingling of Dr. Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Dr. Cynthia Chambers, and Dr. Carl Leggo,

who worked together from different landscapes, heritages, and life experiences and developed a unique type of Canadian scholarship—theorizing and practicing *métissage* as “an ethos for our times” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a). They stated:

Our lives have been shaped by multiple and mixed cultures, races, ethnicities, and languages—including German, Japanese, Dene, Cree, French, British, English, Scottish, Irish, Canadian, and Newfoundland (a distinct culture in Canada)...we belong to different and diverse affiliations and relations—as (grand)mothers, (grand)fathers, husbands, wives, and friends. In our attempts to live and work ethically as professors in the academy and as human beings...we have been mindful of the complicated responsibility that come with professing to be life writers in a post-colonial time and in a nation and landscape shaped by and subjected to colonization. (p. 1)

The intention of *métissage* is to consider a postcolonial and curricular theory that seeks genuine exchange and sustained engagement with the tracing of “mixed and multiple identities” in the “messy threads of relatedness and belonging” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a, p. 2). The ways of *métissage* are rooted in epistemologies of subjectivity and multiplicity, threads found within my IM Spiral. It is a personal and relational praxis, and a method of generating counternarratives of difference, where “ontological and epistemological roots and routes and rhizomes” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a, p. 1) can challenge the dominant voices of the colonial narrative. In this manner, *métissage* moves toward difference and away from sameness, issues at the heart of my research. Chambers et al., (2008) write:

... *métissage* as a research praxis is committed to interdisciplinary and the blurring of genres, texts, and identities, it seeks cross-cultural, egalitarian relations of knowing and being, and resists “heterophobia”, or the fear of mixing, and the desire for a pure untainted

space, language, or form of research. (p. 142)

Here, researchers and their audiences can “imagine and create plural selves and communities that thrive on ambiguity and multiplicity” (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 142) and are “committed to promoting emancipatory projects of learning and teaching by exploring, contesting, and negotiating the imaginative possibilities of knowing and being in the world” (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010, p. 2). In the context of this research praxis, and my own creation-based research, *métissage* operates through an ethic of relationality and is seen as a living literacy (Chambers, 2010). It propels the life stories of Other, resists homogeneity, and leverages authentic experiences against systems of oppression (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a). Along these lines, *métissage* supports the type of work I am doing in my project and my intention of attending to the erasure of my histories, stories, and voices. *Métissage* opens up a space for new perspectives, knowledge, and alternative logics to emerge through generative dialogue and conversation. (E. Hasebe-Ludt, personal communication, March 24, 2018). By mixing spaces, places, memories, and histories we can see how we are shaped by multiplicity and difference, making us who we are in the present (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a).

The inward turn and outward movement through *métissage*, modeled through my IM Spiral, offers a method of discovering, understanding, speaking, and expanding subjective experience. Germane to my research, *métissage* generates counternarratives that resist the grand narratives and recasts colonial stories that claim the status of “truth.”



The work of *métissage* purposefully brings together multiple texts and voices to juxtapose, contrast, and highlight, to search for affinities and dichotomies and find what is not readily seen, in hopes of coming to a better understanding of what is being looked at or

considered (E. Hasebe-Ludt, personal communication, March 24, 2019). Attending to these living spectres, the counternarratives and the intervals between cultures, languages, and subjectivities, *métissage* is seen as a method of “performing subjectivities” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a, p. 230) with the intentions of generating new knowledge and understandings. Hasebe-Ludt et al., (2009a) provide insight into the workings of *métissage*:

...from our mixed geo-cultural locations and heritages, we have truthfully examined ourselves as subjects (instead of objects); in these texts we have become subjects in our own lives, and our lives and our-selves have become sites of inquiry. Through life writing and literary *métissage*, we have aspired to create a literature (in its original sense of the art of reading and writing) of the self-in-relations. (p. 231)

Likewise, *métissage* enacts the theoretical and methodological strands of my IM Spiral, moving inward toward experience, outward into voice through material manifestation of poetry, art, and stories, to juxtapose and attend to challenges and ask questions. *Métissage* acts as a “powerful counternarrative to the grand narratives of our times. It is an active literary stance, political strategy and pedagogical praxis” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 9). I chose to employ *métissage* in my theorizing and inquiry approach because it resonates with me artistically. It does this in the ways that I create, and also, importantly, because *métissage* enacts a type of ontology that is congruent with Indigenous epistemology and methodology, by offering new ways of *telling* truths through subjective remembering, envisioning, creating, and sharing (Chambers et al., 2012; Donald, 2012; Hasebe-Ludt, et al., 2009); “*métissage* as a research praxis can be constituted in a variety of ontological, epistemological sources and in varying degrees of resonance” (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009b, p. 3). In these contexts, my self-study can be understood as a self-in-relations study, as an expression of reconciliation, as I share my story and expose the

challenges and complexities of being Métis in twenty-first century contemporary Canada.

In its literary origins, *métissage* weaves together multiple life writing texts with the aim of juxtaposing identity and cultural stories (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009a/b). Since its inception there have been different iterations of *métissage* as a research praxis, such as Gregory Lowan-Trudeau's (2015) ecology *métissage* and Dwayne Donald's (2012a) Indigenous *métissage*. As a creation-researcher rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and methodologies, I blend aspects of these forms of *métissage* and weave into these folds art's unique literacy and epistemology.

Literary *métissage*

For Hasebe-Ludt et al. (2009a), *literary métissage* “highlights the resonances between the experiences of the writers and their audience, and it makes possible new ideas and insights as well as new discourse and action” (p. 37). In the same context, literary *métissage* is a “locus of literary *métissage* is an inhabited historical place...The ethos of *métissage* is to seek rapprochement among disparate, unequal groups, in particular places of coloniality without erasing the differences indigenous to each group” (pp. 37-38). Literary *métissage* emulates the strands of a traditional braid, tracing roots and routes of linguistic artifacts with the intention of provoking understandings of self-in-relation through the power of mixing. It weaves “repressed languages and traditions of local cultures and vernaculars (particularly incorporating autobiographical and local oral traditions and stories) with the dominant (often colonial) languages and traditions of literacy” (p. 39).



In Chambers et al. (2008), for instance, six life writers collaborate to mix and juxtapose their life stories in the forms of poetry, narrative memoir, and postcard essay. Each story is

braided in a way that “retains the integrity and distinctiveness of the individual texts/voices and at the same time creates a new text, one that illuminates the braided, polysemic, and relational character of our lives, experiences and memories, as well as the interconnections among the personal and public realm” (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 142). In this literary métissage stories about identity and place; childhood homes and cabins in Edmonton, Alberta, and York Harbor Newfoundland, on the edge of the Atlantic, are intertwined with stories and historical photographs about relationships with Others in doctoral mentorship, historical photographs, learning to speak Cree, and a family’s life line are metaphorically and critically linked with a walnut tree.

The walnut tree stood in my mother’s garden in Saarbrücken for over two hundred years. Every autumn, my family labored to gather the nuts, dry them on racks, compost the leaves. Each year the tree shot higher, until it was taller than the house next door. Every spring my father pruned the tree. After his death my brother took up the saws and ladders. (Erika Hasebe-Ludt, pp. 144-145)

“[W]here are you from?” the question is asked with a tone of familiarity and camaraderie that distracts me and leaves me not wanting to answer the question. “I’m from Edmonton,” I reluctantly reply, and then I wait for the looks of confusion, wonderment, the slow half-hearted nodding of the head. These work together to give one message: “I thought this guy was an Indian, but I guess he’s not...” (Dwayne Donald, p. 143)

in the Wiseman’s cottage
rented at the end of Main Street

In Your Harbor faraway
 on the edge of the Atlantic
 I learned in slow ways
 how to live sabbaticals,
 drawing silence like
 the sun calls the sea (Carl Leggo, p. 144)

A theory is a way of looking at the world rather than a form of knowledge of how the world is (Bohm, 1993). Thus, every topic statement, being from a point of view, implies (*L. implicare to enfold a theory*) a way of seeing (Topic: Gk. *topos* 2. Commonplace way of seeing). Once aware that looking is always from a place, a position, a point of view, the possibility arises that we could look differently, and hence see differently, thereby changing our prospects. (Antoinette Oberg, p. 143)

maybe because of the way an evening breeze
 played with a lock of hair just so
 she could see his eye smiling his chin tilted
 just so she decided he would be the one then
 and now I am standing her on the banks of
 the Notikewin River (Wanda Hurren, p. 149)

And when that Métis women finally spoke, she said, “I got evaluated today.” Now, Margaret had eight kids and she’d volunteered in all their classrooms. And that’s when she

wasn't cooking, sewing, raising kids, and going to school, first that adult upgrading, then college... (Cynthia Chambers, p. 14)

no more snow

will come and erase the line we wrote

yesterday, we'll clear more paths like drafts

of writing, impermanent transitory traces, both

visible and invisible. (Carl Leggo, p. 148)

Literary *métissage* is a reading praxis that engages the world as dialogic; a writing praxis that attends to ambiguities and multiplicities; a political praxis that resists fixedness and affirms difference; and a research praxis that honours multiple ways of being and knowing in the world and resist colonial-rooted conventions of binaries and limitations (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). In my creation-based *métissage* I harness literary *métissage* by juxtaposing experience and voice, through poems and words in different languages: English, Wendat, and French. My work in *métissage* attends to its literary and storied properties and generates a type of visual and metaphorical and metonymic dialogue that makes possible a type of "rapprochement and a kind of curriculum in which we can live, speak, and act in the places of difference in which we dwell" (p. 38).

Ecological *métissage*.

Gregory Lowan-Trudeau (2015) offers another approach to *métissage*. He developed his concept of *ecological métissage*. This arose from the idea of ecological identity and how we understand

ourselves in relation to the natural world (p. 5). Lowan-Trudeau is a Métis scholar and educator with the University of Calgary, Alberta. He is interested in characteristics of ecological identity and how the concept of *métissage* can reshape environmental education in Canada. He adapts *métissage* as a research praxis through the metaphor of the infinity symbol on the Métis flag, “representing the coming together of two cultures and the existence of a people forever” (Dorion & Préfontaine as cited in Lowan-Trudeau, 2015, p. 19). His research “focus[es] on a *métissage* of methodological influences that explore contemporary peoples’ lives, experience and perspectives of ecological identity through a narrative approach” (p. 19). He uses *métissage* to engage with and analyze narratives that hold distinct ecological worldviews, in an effort to address the world’s current ecological crises. He tells us:

While some believe that Western and Indigenous knowledge systems should never be blended, carefully maintaining mutually respectful separate existences that may benefit and interact with each other from time to time, others such as the Integrative Science Institute, a collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers at Cape Breton University, Canada advocate for “Two-Eyed Seeing”, a more comprehensive integration of Western and Indigenous science. The ISI also proposes the possibility for “Three” or “Multiple-Eyed Seeing”, simultaneously viewing and addressing contemporary ecological issues from Western, Indigenous and other cultural perspectives. (p. 69)

By honouring the Mi’kmaq concept of two-eyed seeing—*Toqwa’tu’kl kjjitaqnn* (p. 69), Lowan-Trudeau juxtaposes knowledge systems and worldviews to evoke a kind of critical consciousness about our shared connection and responsibility to the Earth. I draw on this notion in my own practice of *métissage* as I resist notions of identity as fixed and honour subjectivity as a path of relational connectedness. Like Lowan-Trudeau, I resonate with ways of being rooted deep in

ecology, with “tenets of respect and recognition of cultural and ecological diversity, the inherent value of all beings, spiritual forces, long-term multigenerational thinking, the embedded and relational position of human beings in the circle of life” (p. 71). Through ecological métissage Lowan-Trudeau, in collaboration with the ISI is generating critical dialogue essential to understanding and honouring diverse ecological knowledge systems and philosophies.

Indigenous métissage.

Dwayne Donald’s (2012a) application of métissage involves comparing and contrasting colonial and Indigenous narratives of historical sites and objects, and it resists colonial frontier logics. He combines the term Indigenous and métissage to support his vision of “interpreting and reconceptualizing the historical and contemporary interactions of Aboriginal peoples and Canadians” (p. 541). He tells us:

...Indigenous métissage purposefully juxtaposes layered understandings and interpretations of places in Canada with the specific intent of holding differing interpretations in tension without the need to resolve or assimilate them. The goal is to resist colonial frontier logics and instead forward new understandings of the relationships connecting Aboriginals and Canadians. (p. 542)

For Donald the central aim of *Indigenous Métissage* is “to *reconstruct* understandings of the colonial constructs people (including the researcher) hold so that: ‘over time, everyone formulates more informed and sophisticated constructions and becomes more aware of the content and meaning of competing constructions’ [Guba and Lincoln 1994, 113]” (p. 545). In this way “*Indigenous Métissage* is a research sensibility closely affiliated with a hermeneutic understanding of lived experience and historical consciousness” (p. 545). This approach to

métissage informs my own work as I challenge colonial narratives of identity and advance subjectivity and interrelational understanding of Self in the world, one “that resists cultural homogeneity and embraces multiplicity and expresses this through personal manifestations of cultures” (Kovach, 2009, p. 61).

In Donald's own personal heritage “ancestors from one side of [his] family were displaced from their traditional lands and suffered numerous hardships stemming from ‘spatial and ideological diaspora’ (McLeod, 2001), the other side was just settling in and beginning to enjoy the numerous economic and social benefits derived from colonialism” (p. 2). As a researcher, inquirer, writer, and teacher educator, Donald (2012a) developed *Indigenous Métissage* as a way of attending to the complex difficulties of Indigenous and Canadian relations, enacting Indigenous métissage as a decolonizing research approach that attends to ethical relationality: “predicated on ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (p. 535). As a decolonizing research sensibility that supports my IM Spiral and approaches to research, Indigenous Métissage “provides a way to hold together the ambiguous, layered, complex, and conflictual character of Aboriginal and Canadian relations without the need to deny, assimilate, hybridize, or conclude” (Donald, 2012b, p. 533).



As Donald suggests, through Indigenous Métissage, complex understandings of human relationality can be explored in connection with memory, experience and history without the need to resolve. His “indigenized form of métissage” (Donald, 2012b p. 542) is a research praxis that works within the tension and emphasizes and honours uniquely layered memories and

experiences of people who now live together, and “provokes the possibility of those different groups facing each other in ethically relational terms” (p. 542). For Donald, developing Indigenous Métissage as a pedagogical research praxis attends to how Aboriginal and Canadian relations are still often delimited by a kind of colonial frontier logics that “continue to circumscribe the terms according to which people speak and interact (Donald 2009a; 2009b, p. 535), and links peoples together through revitalized relationships, with a common sense of place” (p. 550).

All these different articulations of métissage generate complex narratives in various places and domains. Métissage as a research praxis both reveals the contexts of the personal and political, the textual and the historical, as well as analyze them (Lionnet as cited in Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 27). Importantly métissage is a theory and praxis that calls those that practice it:

“to create an aesthetic product that combines disparate elements without collapsing or erasing difference [because] the act of creating new mixed forms, stronger and more resilient than the existing ones, gives métissage its generativity in the face of difference and thus its power to reconfigure the past, to transform the present, and imagine otherwise” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, pp. 35-36).

Métissage is a type of research praxis that is well suited to my artistic approaches to research; through visual art, poetry, and storying. The ways of métissage are congruent with Indigenous methodologies and ABR practices that aim to look for and respond to difference; to explore what is not easily seen. Métissage is a reflective and refractive practice in the ways that it juxtaposes, mixes, contrasts, and encourages voice without suppressing Others and other ways of being. Métissage honours a multiplicity of voices and is a strategy for engaging with complexity

and honouring subjectivity; not reducing subjectivity to “sameness,” a Lacanian idea, as explored earlier in my thesis that is central to my thinking about identity and subjectivity.



Strand 3: Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies intertwined

In much of the literature on Indigenous approaches to research, epistemologies and methodologies are not separated. Many researchers are developing theory from Indigenous values, wisdom traditions, and protocols that inform their methods (Wilson, 2008; Anderson & Meshake, 2019).

Central to Indigenous research is that it requires “the exploration of identity, an ability to be vulnerable, a desire for restitution, and an opening to awakenings” (Kovach, 2018, p. 217). Subjective experience and knowing are honoured as valid pathways to knowledge and meaning making. Collective knowledge and wisdom are expanded and deepened. A relational ethic permeates my inquiry as a creative act and a telling, a subjective relational story for the benefit of Others, my family, my Québec Métis Nation community, my students, academic colleagues, and peers. “Key theory-principles” are considered “value-teachings” (Kovach, 2018), such as “connection between mind and heart, self-awareness, subjectivity, spirit imbued philosophy, reciprocity and responsibility” (p. 222), ensure validity, reliability, and authenticity in my work. My creative inquiry methods support my journey and enable me to generate and tell my story. In this way, my métissage honours oral traditions and creates capacity for Others to take up their own unique journey. Indigenous research aims to advance personal truths and open pathways to reconciliation. Many emerging Indigenous inquiries projects are pushing the boundary of colonial ideological and epistemological certitude. The ability to challenge longstanding ideological frameworks that tend to fix and bind ways of being and knowing, and limit what

counts as knowledge, is a driving force underlying contemporary issues in Indigenous scholarship. There is no denying that Indigenous scholarship and its visibility are on the rise. During my recent attendance at the 2019 Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) conference in Vancouver, for instance, many Canadian academic publishers were featuring multiple new publications in Indigenous research (Markides & Forsythe, 2019; McGregor, Restoule, & Johnston, 2018; Stega & Brown, 2015; Wilson, Breen, & DuPré, 2019; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019) alongside featuring seminal texts (Battiste, 2000; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). The wave of Indigenous innovative and creative research and scholarship is evident and powerful.

Indigenous research methodologies distinguish themselves by attending to the politics of “truth” and centralize and honour “tribal knowledge” (Kovach, 2018). They position research in relational contexts within Indigenous thought, subjective and communal experiences, and within spiritual and cultural practices:

As Indigenous people, we have come to terms with the “politics of truth”. We are contesting at the level of knowledge, but also, we are contesting colonization processes...this is the politics of truth, understanding the limits and capacities of what you can do at any site. The ache associated with these limitations characterizes the decolonizing embodiment. (Kovach, 2009, p. 85)

This positioning aims to develop subject-centred analysis and solutions (Pewewardy, 2019) for engaging with problematic sites, that can subvert colonial responsibility in truth and reconciliation. Indigenous site-specific and subject-specific research aims to challenge the implications of “post-colonialism”; resisting the idea that colonialism is in the past, along with empirical approaches to “knowledge extraction” (Ermine, 1996; Hart, 2010) and claims on

“truth.” For example, my project explores my subjective experience of historical colonial constraints and erasure of my Métis identity, and reveals how these historical processes continue to be enacted today in contemporary socio-political contexts.

In the world of research, this is but one dilemma or problem that is distinctively Indigenous and can only adequately be taken up through an Indigenous methodological context. In the case of my research, I feel it is important to find ways to circumvent colonial narratives and structures of identity so I can navigate my inquiry of selfhood on my own terms, as I explore my sense of indigeneity and consider what it means to me to be Métis. The space and context needed to explore such an intimate and complex experience requires a generative, creative, and open approach, one that values and honours knowledges found in experience, subjectivity, inner-knowing, stories, ancestral memory, and relationships. Kovach (2009) has suggested:

Indigenous ways of knowing are internal, personal, and experiential...the word conceptual privileges thought as the sole pathway to knowledge and places feeling, spirit, and experience as secondary creating one standardized, externalized framework for Indigenous research is nearly impossible, and inevitably heartbreaking for Indigenous people. (p. 42)

My IM Spiral enacts an epistemological and ontological position, rooted within an Indigenous paradigm. This relational positioning supports me to generate, interpret, and offer insight and knowledge differently. My literature review of Indigenous research has informed and deepened my understanding of epistemological underpinnings and protocols of Indigenous methodologies.



Indigenous epistemologies.

An Indigenous epistemological paradigm is rooted in a worldview that considers knowledge,

meaning, and experience to be relational, cyclical, emergent, dynamic, and evolving over time (Cajete, 2000, 2015; Chilisa, 2012; Ermine, 1996, 2011; Little Bear, 2000; Madjidi & Restoule, 2008; Aluli-Meyer, 2013a/b). Cajete (2000) suggests, “we are a microcosm of the macrocosm and part a greater generative order of life that is ever evolving” (p. 14). In traditional contexts, Indigenous epistemological theories, philosophies, histories, ceremonies, and stories are ways of knowing and comprise all knowledge pertaining to a particular people and its territory that has been transmitted from generation to generation (Couture, 1991). Colonial disruption of the transfer of knowledge, culture, and language has created a contemporary challenge for many Indigenous peoples and communities. However, at the heart of Indigenous ways of knowing and being—the lifeline of Indigenous epistemology—is relationships (Chilisa, 2012; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2018; Wilson, 2008; Wilson, Breen, & DuPré, 2019), and our ethical entanglements with our relationships, which include our ancestors, family, animals, the Earth, our place/land, and our ideas and cultural understandings (Wilson et al., 2019). These relationships are not simple, rather they are interconnected, complex, dynamic, and filled with responsibility for community, language, ontologies, environments, the cosmos, and diverse ideologies (Garcia, Tenakhongva, & Honyouti, 2019). Indigenous philosophers and thinkers have contrasted key aspects of Indigenous and Western paradigms as a way of distinguishing what is unique about Indigenous epistemology and to offer insight into Indigenous ways of thinking and knowing. Concepts such as holism, spirituality, and subjectivity are consistent throughout the literature. These are considered fundamental to Indigenous epistemology and subsequently inform and shape Indigenous research methodologies, protocols, and teaching.

Shortly after first contact colonizers assimilated and subjugated Indigenous people by indoctrinating them into a Western system (Madjidi & Restoule, 2008). The collision of

Indigenous and Western epistemologies “shifted the two systems of learning as one was quashed by the other because of the lack of understanding of local knowledge systems” (Grande, 2004, p. 2). Only recently in Canada, through the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission is this history being understood in mainstream thinking as a genocide of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and ways of knowing and learning. This is not unique to Canada. In the United States, during the era of Indian boarding schools the U.S. government specifically implemented federal policies (i.e. allotment) servicing the campaign to ‘kill the Indian and save the man’” (Grande, 2004, p. 14); in Australia, Aborigines are considered the “stolen generation” and “in developing countries such as Guyana, the boarding school model is still used in rural Indigenous regions and many of the same cultural genocide practices continue today” (Madjidi & Restoule, 2008, p. 79). At the heart of this cultural clash and crisis are fundamental epistemological differences that are only now receiving attention and being understood. Madjidi & Restoule (2008) list binary classifications such as linear versus cyclical, objective versus subjective, secular versus spiritual, industrial versus nature, and context-based and fragmentary versus holistic, as ways of introducing these fundamental differences in educational comparative research.

Seminal works by Indigenous philosophers and scholars (Cajete, 2000; Deloria, 1995, 1999, 2012; Ermine, 1996; Grande, 2004; Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2000) identify core aspects of Indigenous epistemologies that diverge from colonial ways of being and doing. The literature presents a consistent critique of Western colonial ways that tend to diminish forms of human knowledge rooted in holism, subjectivity, memory, dreams, land and place, community, cultural, and spiritual practices (Deloria, 1995; Ermine, 1996; King 2013). My IM Spiral was created to honour these realms of knowledge and knowing, which is congruent with my ways of being in the world as a Métis woman, artist, educator, and scholar. From an Indigenous perspective,

fixation on power and control compromise the ability to gain insight into the nature and origin of knowledge” (Ermine, 1996, p. 102) as a relational experience with/in the world. This is considered a “fragmented world view” (Little Bear, 2000), where relationships are negated and/or minimized; theories of flux and space are omitted from experience, and emergent knowledges are scrutinized (Cajete, 2000; Deloria, 1999; Grande, 2004; Kovach 2018). Central to Indigenous epistemology, is that our experience of *being* (our Self) is situated within multiple ecologies in a dynamic space that is in constant flux (Little Bear, 2000). This flux is symbolized as motion in my IM Spiral and is key to my approach to inquiry. Understanding this allows us to recognize that we humans are a small part in a larger complex ecology of relationships that have spanned generations (Cajete, 2000). Systems of knowledge that are formed by isolating, separating, and extracting knowledge on a “corporal level” (Cajete, 2000), restrict our capacity for holism and block our understanding of interrelational connections and dependency (Ermine, 1996, 2011).



In context, the Western colonial paradigm has been critiqued for devaluing paths to knowledge that emerge from relational subjective experience, which can undermine our potential to generate knowledge and understand more about existence (Cajete, 2000, 2015; Ermine, 1996, 2011; Grande, 2004). There is no denying that our present system is unsustainable as we face mass environmental decay and poverty. Cajete (2000) suggests, “this doesn’t mean we need to return to hunter-gatherer existence, but we must carry [the] perceptual wisdom” (p. 22). My IM Spiral resists the tendency to suppress unique knowledges by positioning creation at the heart of my self-in-relation study, honouring subjectivity and the inward journey. In this way my Spiral offers a way to seek ancestral knowledges that survived through generations, and explore and

activate knowledge and knowing through voice and stories, through our memories, experience, insight, intuition, and internal knowing.

It is outside the scope of this dissertation to provide an in-depth or extensive comparative analysis of Western epistemology and Indigenous epistemology, and, I do believe there are commonalities. In the context of my inquiry I have drawn on key Indigenous epistemological underpinnings such as holism, spirituality, and subjectivity. These have informed my creation-based Indigenous métissage approach, and are rooted in my way of *being* in the world. Kovach (2018) reminds us that there is “significant research and writing on Indigenous knowledges and sufficient published scholarship to [be] deliberated on Indigenous epistemologies” (p. 218).

Holism.

Indigenous epistemological views on interrelationships and responsibility toward All My Relations (Wagamese, 2013) influence how knowledge is attained, what is considered knowledge, and how it is shared and used. From this perspective, meaning derived from knowledge extracted or segregated from its relational contexts and experience is considered skewed at best. This relational balance is a holistic epistemology (Kovach, 2009, 2018). Through the lens of holism Indigenous epistemology includes knowledges that are empirical, experiential, sensory, metaphysical, and spiritual. Knowledge is considered animate and fluid and arises from interconnectivity and interdependency across multiple generations and contexts (Ermine, 1996; Kovach, 2018). This understanding supports my IM Spiral inquiry in the ways that I attend to and honour subjectivity.

Garcia, Tenakhongva, and Honyouti (2019) tell us: “Indigenous knowledge systems are intricate, intellectual, living, and part of a larger organic system of eco-relationships that shape multiple realities” (p. 110). Significantly, these systems “respect and present a holistic form of

knowledge(s)” (Madjidi, & Restoule, 2008, p. 80) that weave past and present understandings into contemporary contexts and create space to connect with spiritual aspects of life and alternative perspectives and insights (Hart, 2010; Aluli-Meyer, 2013a; Miller, 2013). Indigenous epistemology is grounded in Self and spirit, with knowledge sought through subjectivity and inner space (Ermine, 1996; Aluli-Meyers, 2013a/b). As a scholar I am acutely aware of the challenges, that solely empirically driven systems can impose on alternative worldviews and understandings of knowledge and knowing. I see this critical issue as part of the evolution of scholarship, and attending to these as opportunities to advance our understanding(s) about what constitutes knowledge (St. Georges, 2019).

Hawaiian theorist, Aluli-Meyers (2013a) tells us, “to know, one must consider dimensions of knowing beyond the mere facts and make connections between the mental aspects, the physical feelings, and spiritual experiences, and understand that these three delineated ways of knowing are interrelated, are affected by one another, and dependent upon one another” (p. xvii). In this Indigenous Hawaiian paradigm, types of knowledge are understood as *aloha*: understanding that clarifies thought/action “*mana’olana*: knowledge that floats outside us as ideas; *mana’o’o*’ knowledge from direct experience (Aluli-Meyer, 2013b, p. 256). Similarly, but also uniquely, from the perspective of the Sámi (the Indigenous peoples of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia) knowing or the search for knowledge is less about discovering “truth” and more about translating and understanding different phenomenon from the Sámi point of view (Guttorm, 2015, p. 63). Here experience and knowing are integral to relationships with the subarctic landscape, where traditional practices such as reindeer herding, and craft practices inform identity.

My Spiral emphasizes this kind of intricate self-in-relation with ecologies as pathways to

knowing and knowledge. This holism in Sámi epistemology is embedded in *duodji* (handicrafts), *gatka* (costume), *yoik* (music), and *leudd* (oral stories). Specifically, *duodji* is “intricately connected with traditional spheres of life and livelihood” (Hautala-Hirvioja, 2015, p. 82). Guttorm (2015) describes contemporary *duodji*. Handicrafts are a means to personally experience and understand Sámi traditions. Similar to many Indigenous populations, the Sámi culture has neither separation nor borders between the physical and spiritual, between spirit and matter. The crafting process, which embodies time, nature, and place, creates knowledge. A *duojár* (craftsman or woman) is expected to have traditional knowledge and also to generate new knowledge that emerges through the individual expression of their crafting praxis. Crafted objects are imbued with spiritual significance and values (Guttorm (2015)).

From a Cree perspective, holism is considered a “different incorporeal knowledge paradigm situated in forms, energies and concepts that constitute the outer and inner worlds and the undivided wholeness in flowing movement” (Ermine, 1996, pp. 103–104). Here, a relational dynamic between inward and outward experience among Self and Others is considered sacred and contributes to total human knowledge. Deloria (2012) provides us insight into the intricacies of an epistemology of holism:

We are all relatives, when taken as a methodological tool for obtaining knowledge means that we observe the natural world by looking for relationships...this concept is simply the relativity concept applied to a universe that people experience as alive and not as dead or inert. Thus, Indians knew that stones were the perfect beings because they were self-contained entities that had resolved their social relationships and possessed great knowledge about how other entities, and every species, should live. Stones had mobility but did not need to use it. Every other being had mobility and needed, in some specific manner,

to use it in relationships. (p. 34)

Integral to holism in a Cree paradigm is nondifferentiation of spiritual and physical energies, and the involvement of both the sacred and mundane (Kovach, 2018, p. 219). In this way holism is seen as a relational and sacred way of being within the world, one that honours the spiritual and considers subjects and communities as places and space of knowing and knowledge making (Deloria, 2012; Ermine, 1996; Kovach, 2018).

For Québec Métis, an epistemology of holism is integral to the complex and diverse kinship and cultural practices among French and First Nations peoples, notably the Iroquois, Wendat (Huron), and Algonquin peoples (Anderson, 2016; Boudreau et al., 2018; Foxcurran, Bouchard, & Malette, 2016). In this way, Métis are best understood as a relational people, who emerged during the French colonial period and are situated across Canadian landscapes from east to west. In Eastern Canada, specifically in the provinces of Québec and Ontario, the Métis “land-base” was the river systems (Foxcurran et al., 2016). A nomadic lifestyle of traversing vast landscapes along the rivers generated a complex Métis people who were trans-territorial and developed an epistemology of holism that was fluid and in motion, and intersecting multiple geo-cultural sites, values and traditions.



Bear woman

Angie Tucker (2019) asks: “Is it possible that both physical and temporal detachments from land could be responsible for the complexity of identity within contemporary Métis bodies?” (p. 34). This is a very interesting question and one that I consider at a deep personal level on my research journey. Lowan-Trudeau (2015) considers Métis epistemology as a “third space ...where beliefs, values and knowledges intersected, co-habit and intermingle” (p. 42) and where new knowledge and traditions emerged through cultural fluidity and adaptability. These

multiplicities of lived experiences and identities “are what made Métis people who they were as their relationships blossomed through contiguity with Indigenous worldviews held together through marriage, kinship and shared societal values and beliefs” (Foxcurran et al., 2016, p. 358). In their multiple trajectories, Métis were interrelational and flexible, adaptive and responsive in contexts. They developed knowledge situated in skills and abilities that allowed them to traverse diverse landscapes and cultural contexts (Foxcurran et al., 2016). Holism is at the core of Métis identity, woven from an inter-relational understanding of Self in the world that resists cultural homogeneity, embraces multiplicity, and expresses this through “personal manifestations of cultures” (Kovach, 2009, p. 61).

It is helpful to see subjectivity within multiple contexts: within relationships and diverse experiences that are considered flexible, adaptable, and in diverse kinships with Others and the world. In this way we can recognize multiplicity and difference, and consider more deeply and critically the relationship between subjectivity and identity. My research explores the potential of subjectivity in knowing oneself, the world, and Others. Alternative pathways to knowledge that I explore using multiple lines of inquiry like art, poetry, and storying, lead us to consider embodied ways of knowing, knowledge, and meaning-making.

Spirituality.

The idea of spirituality here is not associated with religious or cult phenomena and I will not generalize spirituality. Also, I am not suggesting that spirituality is the dominion of an Indigenous paradigm, rather, I will bring forward, in brief, key ideas found in Indigenous scholarship about spiritual aspects of human experience that are valued, honoured, and functional in knowledge production and meaning-making within an Indigenous paradigm.

Spirituality, one's experience of spirit, can be understood as a relational link connecting our inward and outward experiences and realities. (Ermine, 1996; Aluli-Meyer 2013a/b) In this way spirituality is situated in holism, which is a value or concept rooted in relationships. (Kovach, 2018; Wilson, et al., 2019). Spirituality functions by deepening our interconnections with/in ourselves and Others, which include non-human and Earth/space ecologies (Cajete, 2000). These spiritual relationships are pathways to knowledge and knowing, and are born from the entanglement of physical and metaphysical realms. Ermine (1996) tells us:

Ancestral explorers of the inner space encoded their findings in community praxis as a way of synthesizing knowledge derived from introspection. The old ones had experienced totality, a wholeness, in inwardness, and effectively created a physical manifestation of the life force by creating community. In doing so, they empowered the people to become the culture of accumulated knowledge. Each part of the community became an integral part of the whole flowing movement and was modelled on the inward wholeness and harmony. (p. 104)

Castellano (2000) recognizes knowledges that come from spiritual sources, through dreams, visions, cellular memory, and intuition (as cited in Kovach, 2009, p. 58). The spirit is the haven of dreams that send messages to the knower, says Ermine:

Dreams are the guiding principles for constructing the corporeal and [are] the voice of the inner space, linking us to the spiritual world and they are the link with undivided wholeness in flowing movement...it is through dreams that sacred undertakings give rise to the spiritual and prescribe all ceremonies on the physical level. (Ermine, 1996, p.108)

Like dreams, visions are derived from the inner space and spiritual experiences and are considered fundamental paths of insight and knowledge. In many Indigenous traditions, a vision

quest is a way of both engaging in deep processes of self-actualization and “being in relation to the cosmos [that] possess[es] intriguing and mysterious qualities that provided insight into existence” (Ermine, 1996, p.103). The quest is a fundamental teaching about the interconnectedness of being.

Cajete (2000) links spirit with creativity and our inherent sacred connection to broader ecology of the universe:

...nature is a dynamic, ever-flowing river of creation inseparable from our own perceptions and the metaphoric mind...here connections are made with a natural principle, which is a precept of Native science, for truth is not a fixed point, but rather an ever-evolving point of balance, perpetually created and perpetually new. This understanding of the creative nature of the world and of human beings is reflected in the core spiritual beliefs of Native thought, life and traditions. (p. 19)

This creative eco-cosmic link is a fundamental pathway to knowledges that emerge through our subjective experiences with nature, which have evolved through our shared humanity, our histories, and our connections with Earth over thousands of years. This is not an “out there” idea. Consider, for example, how forests are understood as a community of trees that literally communicate through a diverse and complex network of relationships, alliances, and kinship. Their languages are carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, water, hormones, and chemicals. Hub trees (mother/father trees) support hundreds of trees at a time, sending nutrients, retracting root systems to create space for younger ones to grow, sending distress signals when in danger, and when dying they pass on their knowledge to younger saplings in the forest community (Wohlleben, 2017; Simard, 2016).

Finding knowledge “is a spiritual act in and of itself that animates and educates,

allow[ing] us to enter into wonderment, it allows knowing to be an act of consciousness and provides renewal of meaning and understanding” (Aluli-Meyer, as cited in Garcia, Tenakhongva, & Honyouti, 2019, p. 110). The vital nexus needed to explore the sophisticated world of the spiritual is embedded in traditional Indigenous education systems and harnessed through cultural practices such as stories, dance, ceremonies, dreams, visions, and teachings of our relational connections within the inner and outer realms of experience (Archibald, 2012, Archibald et al., 2019; Battiste, 2000; Castellano, David & Lahache, 2000; Kelly 2015; Aluli-Meyer, 2013a).



Spirituality is integral to Indigenous experience and ways of being with/in the world (Cajete, 2000; Ermine, 1996; Madjidi & Restoule, 2008) and a fundamental aspect in Indigenous education, methodologies and research (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009, 2018; Madjidi & Restoule, 2008; Wilson et al., 2019). In this way, Indigenous methodologies honour spiritual ways of knowing, knowledge creation, and meaning making by lifting up sacred understandings, so as not to see these as inferior or “superstitious” (Chilisa, 2012). I consider this honouring, and openings of Other worldviews and critical understandings about self-in-relation, as fundamental to the evolution of scholarship. Embedding a sense of spirit in the research design may open pathways to regenerate critical understandings about ourselves in-relation-with the world. In my inquiry approach spirit moves through my creation-based practice. Through my IM Spiral, I go inward to reflect and create, which is where I am in touch with, and touched by, creation, intuition, and spirit. When I move outward to relate with Others and my relations, Spirit moves me, and I move Spirit through this relational dance.

Subjectivity.

In an Indigenous paradigm, epistemology is rooted in subjectivity. The Self is seen to contain the resources and sources of information that enable an individual to delve into the metaphysical, and the nature and origin of knowledge (Ermine, 1996; Cajete, 2000). “Indigenous epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self” (Ermine, 1996, p. 108).

Within lived experience or the “life-world,” subjective experience is considered a fundamental source of human knowledge, the basis for our explanation of reality, and the foundations of our objective explanations of the world (Cajete, 2000, p. 24). In this worldview knowledge is sought through the Self; a *self-in-relation* (Absolon, 2011), that is linked with the creative life forces of the natural world. This is a relational ontology to which Ermine (1996) refers using the Cree terms *mamatowan* and *mamatowisowin*. *Mamatowan* is an inner space within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self/being, where subjective experience arises in relation to the cosmos and provides insight into existence:

the phenomenon of *mamatowan* refers not just to the self but being in connection with happenings. It recognizes that life forms manifest the creative force in the context of the knower. It is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge in itself. The experience is knowledge. (Ermine, 1996, p. 104)

Mamatowisowin is the capacity to use all our “self-faculties”—intuition, experience, dreams, visions— to tap into the creative force of the inner space and to exercise inwardness (Ermine, 1996). These two Cree concepts, Ermine tells us, explain methods Elders exercised for understanding a range of knowledge:

...the idea of our progenitors was trying to gain understanding of many of the greatest mysteries of the universe by exploring existence subjectively; that is by placing them-

selves in the stream of consciousness, Couture (1991) has said “Elders are familiar with Energy on a vast scale, in multiple modes, e.g., energy as healing, creative, life-giving, sustaining.” (Ermine, 1996, p. 104)

The integral role of subjectivity is an empowering idea because it disrupts a hierarchy of knowledge and broadens the scope, potential, and the roles and responsibilities of Self within the world:

...they speak [Elders] in the silence of the unknown, about the progressive growth of self through a cyclical journey of repetition, experience, and construction of meaning. The wheel mirrors the cosmology of the inner space...our subjection to the metaphysics of the inner space. (Ermine, 1996, p. 106)

To enact self-in-relation with the world, with practiced ability and skills developed to enter into a heightened sense of awareness, “allows intimate understanding of the processes of nature, and forms the foundation of respecting mutual reciprocal responsibility shared with all inhabitants of one’s environment” (Cajete, 2000, p. 20). This relational dynamic of self-in-relation is central to Indigenous epistemology; “as we experience the world, so we are also experienced by the world” (Cajete, 2000, p. 20). Aluli-Meyer tells us that “knowing something is bound to how we develop a relationship with it [knowledge], and is the by-product of slow and deliberate dialogue with an idea, with other’s knowing, and with one’s own experience with the world” (as cited in Garcia, Tenakhongva, & Honyouti, 2019, p. 110). Deloria (2012) shares a story that encapsulates an essential self-in-relation experience:

... if we greatly expand our understanding of the sense of being relatives, we discover that plants, birds, and animals often gave specific information to the people. Standing Bear described one such instance: “A food that had an interesting history for us was the tall

plant that grew in the swamps, commonly called bulrush. The duck, who brought many good plants and roots to the tribe, told the Duck Dreamer medicine-man about it and named it psa. In the early spring and summer, we welcomed this plant, which was pulled up by the roots, and the white part eaten like celery.” Here is a bird-human relationship that involves information about the plant and its use. We do not know what the subsequent plant-human relationship was or might have become, but we can assume that at some point the tribe had more knowledge than what Standing Bear relates. (p. 37)

Understanding the power of subjectivity is important because it affirms and reestablishes the essential link between individual experience and knowledge, the role of Self in a collective praxis, and the extent of knowledge production, where it can come from and who can create it. Furthermore, subjective experience and its value in knowledge and meaning-making calls into question ownership of knowledge. Deloria (2012) says:

[P]ower and place produce personality. This equation simply means that the universe is alive, but it also contains within it the very important suggestions that the universe is personal and therefore must be approached in a personal manner. The personal nature of the universe demands that each and every entity in it seek and sustain personal relationships. (p. 4)

In this way, there is an apparent paradox in Indigenous societies because although community members are relationally bound there is an explicit recognition of the individual’s capacity, right, and responsibility to develop and engage within the world through one’s own subjective worldview (Ermine, 1996). If we consider this in the contemporary context of decolonization, it is not surprising that decolonizing the Self (Battiste, 2000; Chilisa, 2012; Pewewardy, 2019 Smith, 2012) is considered the first step in the five phases (Chilisa 2012) of

this process, that include rediscovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action. Here *rediscovery and recovery* of personal identity begins the process and includes restoring personal history, culture, and language as a method of releasing the “captive mind” and to define one’s own rules on what can be known, spoken, and written about. Mourning, as part of the path to recovery, allows us to get to a place of dreaming. *Dreaming* helps to recover and use one’s voice to invoke and contribute to Indigenous experiences and knowledge through our expressed subjectivities by means of multiple literacies, languages, and worldviews. In the process of decolonization, *commitment* speaks about the necessity of sharing and creating pathways for Others to lift their voices, while *action* includes methods of translating dreams and stories into strategies to promote empowerment, inclusivity, and respect for all (p. 17).

I have experienced elements of these phases in my personal journey. I consider my story of reclaiming my Métis identity and the challenges I faced reflective of the process of decolonization. I am proud of my resistance to the politics of identity and my unfolding (and ongoing) process of decolonizing myself. I maintain that my subtle and subjective intuitions and sensitivities, although trying at times, are my greatest strengths and have supported me on my path. My creation-based Indigenous métissage enables me to engage subjectively, as I activate my voice, retrieve my sense of indigeneity, and engage authentically, albeit political barriers; to heal connections and deepen relational experiences with me. Cajete’s (2000) insight about modern society’s “abstraction traps”, resonate with me and echo Lacan’s ‘*I*’, where fixed identities can hypnotize our attention and fragment our being. Alternatively, Cajete suggests that we are wired to be in tune with the sounds of birds and the changing qualities of natural environments.

I suggest we must consider the consequences of suppressing our subjectivities or

minimizing our value and role in broader contexts of knowledge production and knowing. Where does Cajete's statement: "when something no longer exists in [our] perceptual memory it also no longer matters" (Cajete, 2000, p. 22) leave us when such atrophy impacts our participation in the world with our whole being?



Theorizing connections between Indigenous epistemologies and research protocols.

Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and protocols are interwoven as they attend to holism within Indigenous experiences and challenges, and operate through an ethic of relational responsibility (Kovach, 2018; Windchief, & San Pedro, 2019; Wilson et al., 2019). The literature is very clear that Indigenous research methods align with central tenets of Indigenous epistemologies that allow for connection to Self, spirit, place, people, relationships, and to land, connections (Windchief, & San Pedro, 2019). There must be a "meaningful interplay of relationships between the method and paradigm" (Kovach, 2009, p. 40) and applications must be "dynamic, contemporary, diverse and essentially centred within Indigenous value systems" (p. xvii).

The "congruency between methods and Indigenous paradigm [and epistemologies] requires a significant level of reflexivity and flexibility to honour and attend to the relationships involved in the research" (Windchief, & San Pedro, 2019, p. xvii), where these relationships are between those participants directly involved in the research process and those peoples and communities implicated in the work. In this way a relational ontology holds the research design and drives the process, drawing attention to a relationality, experience, and understanding of reality. We must acknowledge and attend to our "ethical responsibility in where and how we are connected and co-emergent with the ideas and questions we research" (Kovach, 2018, p. 219)

and to “acknowledge and honour systems of knowledge and knowing [that] are intricate, intellectual, living, and part of a larger framework of relationships that shape multiple realities” (Garcia, Tenakhongva, & Honyouti, 2019, p. 110).

Traditional teachings guide and facilitate relationships, assisting in the conceptualizations of the research, practice, and interpretations. In this way, Indigenous theory, epistemology, values, and needs anchor Indigenous methodologies. Indigenous research is theoretically engaged, but not isolationist; it is critical, change oriented, transferable, but not universal. It is flexible and accessible but not fixed (Kovach, 2018). There is no fixed Indigenous theory or methodology. To expect this is counterintuitive to Indigenous epistemology and worldviews. (Kovach, 2018). The teachings and evolving protocols in Indigenous methodologies ensure trust (validity), reciprocity, and responsibility, which replace the “qualitative method” found in a Western paradigm (Kovach, 2017, 2018).

Within an Indigenous paradigm, the goal of research is not about finding objective truth, but rather about pursuing understandings that are emergent, situated in values, and that support and emphasize relationships with Self, Others, other-than-human, and the environment. My self-study is predicated on these understandings and sacred relationships, and so from this perspective my research “is grounded in reality as relationships, relational accountability, authenticity, and credibility, which replaces ‘validity’ or ‘reliability’” (Wilson et al., 2019, p. 15). Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2013b) tells us:

...here is why Indigenous minds are vital. We simply hold a relationship to enduring patterns and languages that must be brought forward to be of service, again, to what is before us. This is our time to find each other and to affirm the qualities inherent in Earth, sky, and water, so we can once again regain a place of purpose and relationship with our

natural world...all relationships matter. Here is our work. Here are the spaces for the practice of courage and consciousness. (p. 258)

In this context, the integrity of the relationships becomes the emphasis of the research and becomes the measure of whether research is credible (Wilson et al., 2019). When Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and protocols are absent in Indigenous research, and driven from “damage-centred narratives” (Markides & Forsythe, 2019; Tuck, & Yang, 2012), “the results; the interpretation itself, and the dissemination of that interpretation serves as a colonial tool of erasure” (Calderon, as cited in Windchief, & San Pedro, 2019, p. xvii). Indigenous epistemologies, worldviews, and values have shaped Indigenous methodologies uniquely with the intent to break this cycle of erasure, and circumvent damage centered narratives. By establishing protocols (teachings) such as relational accountability, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility, Indigenous epistemologies, and ways of being, knowing, and doing are upheld (Battiste, 2000; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; 2018; Markides & Forsythe, 2019; McGregor, Restoule, & Johnston, 2018; Wilson et al., 2019; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019).

In an Indigenous paradigm, one shares and is accountable for knowledge that is connected holistically, with intellect, emotion, spirit, and the physical aspects of being (Absolon, 2011). “How one *does* Indigenous methodologies cannot be untangled from how one *does* relationships” (Kovach, 2018, p. 230). Indigenous theories of respect, reciprocity, responsibility, purposefulness, and re-storying (Kovach, 2018) offer researchers guidance. Indigenous methodologies are change oriented, transferable, flexible, critical, and accessible. In this way Indigenous theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and research protocols are interwoven, and are not solely about knowing, but also about *being* and what arises from experience. My self-study and creation-based Indigenous métissage work supports and is supported by these

epistemological and ontological bones.

Holism, spirituality, and subjectivity informed and helped shape my inquiry, and is an example of how Indigenous epistemology informs and acts as the infrastructure in a research design. My work exemplifies how Indigenous methodologies are “about who we are, how we know, and engage with knowledge, and the ways we enact relational accountability” (Wilson, et al., 2019, p 29). For instance, my IM Spiral was designed to consider subjective experience as valid forms of knowledge and knowing. My self-study honours the stories circulating in my family about our Métis heritage, all of which are considered valid sources of information to support my process of reclaiming and strengthening my Indigenous voice. Much of my creation-based approach embodies my reflexive inward journey. My outward journey explores and navigates official and unofficial archives through conversations with family on the topic of our Métis identity and heritage, and confronting contemporary discourses and debates surrounding Métis identity in Canada. Relational accountability is built into my process as I connect with family in conversations and interviews and share my work with my Québec Métis community. Here, Métis Elders, Mrs. Edna Lachance and Mr. François Drouin reviewed and approved my work as it represents my community. Additionally, I have shared and discussed my creation-research in a variety of public forums and classroom settings, including an art exhibit, lecture, and class talks. Details are presented in Autoportrait 6: Inspiring the Arts Curriculum through Pedagogical Encounters. I have reflected critically on my experiences and considered the implications of my work for Others, as well as my contributions to evolving Indigenous methodologies and arts-based educational research practices.

Autoportrait 4: The Embodied Landscapes Digital Gallery

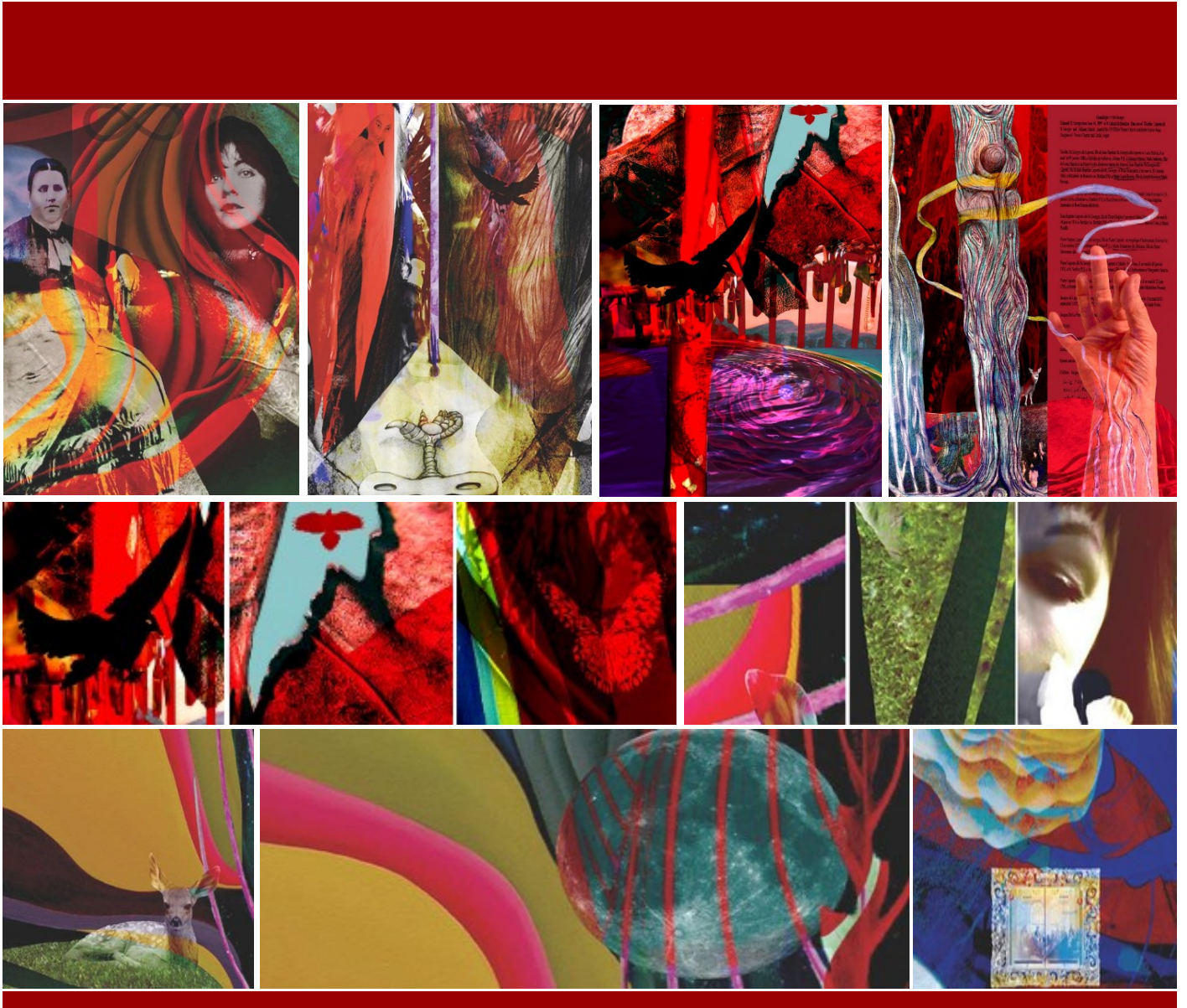
If we consider the essence of research as a process of discovery and strive to go beyond what we know, then we can understand subjectivity, self-formation in relation with Other, and the continual unfolding of meaning and understanding, as the cornerstone of creation-research and pedagogy. As an artist, researcher, and educator, I am rooted in a continual quest for deeper understanding and meaning. In my artistic practice, when creating I enter into an alternative time and space dimension. I see through, and beyond, into the essence of things. My imagination is an endless reservoir of images, symbols, and forms that act as metaphors of intrinsic knowledge, perception, insight, and imagination. Through my practice I connect with and develop alternative knowledges that ignite an energy within me. In a creation process and space my whole being; mind, body, and spirit, become engaged. My developing literary practices run parallel with and intertwine with my visual work. Although each are distinct artistic forms, they inform and support the Other in an intricate creation-based métissage.

Embodied Landscapes is the evolution of *the girl of silver*, as indicated in my Introduction, where I extend my creative praxis to delve deeper into my subjectivity. *Embodied Landscapes* is a creation-based Indigenous métissage, a “storying” (Archibald et al., 2019), a creation-story that explores my experiences and attends to questions surrounding the complexities of my *being* Métis.

I have chosen to centralize this collation of creative work within my doctoral thesis to symbolize creation as the heart of my research. The intention of ELDG is to create a space for subjectivity and experience to rise, shift, and move in the ways of the spiral; inward, outward, around, and through. This creation-based Indigenous métissage is a way to explore interior landscapes; subjectivity, embodied experiences, memories, knowledge, and knowing and to

animate voice and to generate and share stories. In this way *Embodied Landscapes* attends to the complexities of living and is an artistic expression that is alive and imbued with spirit. *Embodied Landscapes* takes the viewer and reader on this unfolding journey. It honours relationships by creating openings and opportunities to deliberately slow down, to submerge and emerge, and through dialogue, experience *self-in-relation* (Absolon, 2011).

Embodied Landscapes Digital Gallery



ne' tata' suaqan
wisdom



my cryptic imagination
ignited my sacred pilgrimage,
fleeing the antagonists,
down the stairs
toward my ancestors;
red fold
trans-dancing
with copper voices,
defying the mythmakers;
spilling out Earth's meditations
amidst the drum
a humanized space,
SAFE
to grow and be who you are:
with the currents
under the pillar of my tongue;
delicate whispers
a firefly
an ocean

iam more than you say iam

I quiet my mind
look up to the sky
stand firm on the Earth

exhale

how am I going to do this?



locating myself

[on the red road]

subjectively

within

internalized

self-doubt



I learned about the Huron at public Catholic school

identities

while drawing a collection of images of clothing and weapons

linger

after kneeling in wreaking pews

on roads

confession sins

travelled

secretly wondering

under revealing moons

if these were my people

A w a s o s

BEAR

PROOF

Middle English *prof*, *prove*, alteration of *preve*, from Anglo-French *preove*, from Late Latin *proba*, from Latin *probare* to prove—more proof, proved; proved *or* provenplay/prü-vən, *British also* prō /; provingplay/prü-viŋ.
First Known Use: 13th century

Attestation

Confirmation

Corroboration

Documentation

Substantiation

Validation

Testament

Testimonial

Witness



I've made headway, deepening my reconnection with my Indigenous self, using family interviews and archives of official and unofficial records, to acquire the proof I think I need to reclaim that—[missing]—part of my self, to embrace the disparity of my being.

How deeply affected
people be
from one generation to
another?



My Métis Great-Grandmother

Julienne

was a farmer in the end

dying of diabetes

after going blind

in the summer

of 1925

like her mother

she gave birth

to fifteen children

no

birth

certificate

and just like that

voice

is stopped

.
.
.

water

wind

sky

Earth

silently
secretly

alsusuti
self determination

repositioning subjectivity
centrally in self-understanding
self-determination and agency
honours Indigenous perspective
of self-in-relation with the world

artifacts of my identity
manifestations make me
wide-eyed and wondering
whether or not I can capture
the sound that
resonates in the
unfolding of a story
I have been
inside and outside of

like a harbour
between time and
space sleep and wake
a movement inward



pulled tightly
in the acids of cells

red



curled into my [Self]
steeped

mangled

internal

flesh

i am: with [outta] doubt

divid/ed/de/coded



I exist

ripe: in full colour



crawling through fragments of time

split

hair
skin
blood
dreams



[promises]

downwind
downwind
downwind
downwind
downwind

blew right through me...

[upwind]



drag

scatter

squash

divide

etch

braids withstanding





windbreaker



fleeting through borders
unsurfaced

i wind my horn



downwind

wide-eyed on the edge of tracks



I see myself
in birds

shuttling
through breath
residing on bridges
floating on rivers

fledging anxiety

channeling



gummed boots
against the wind



we are plugged in
borrowed deep
in an unchartered
efficacy

username: onyx

I think we are alone
can you hear it?



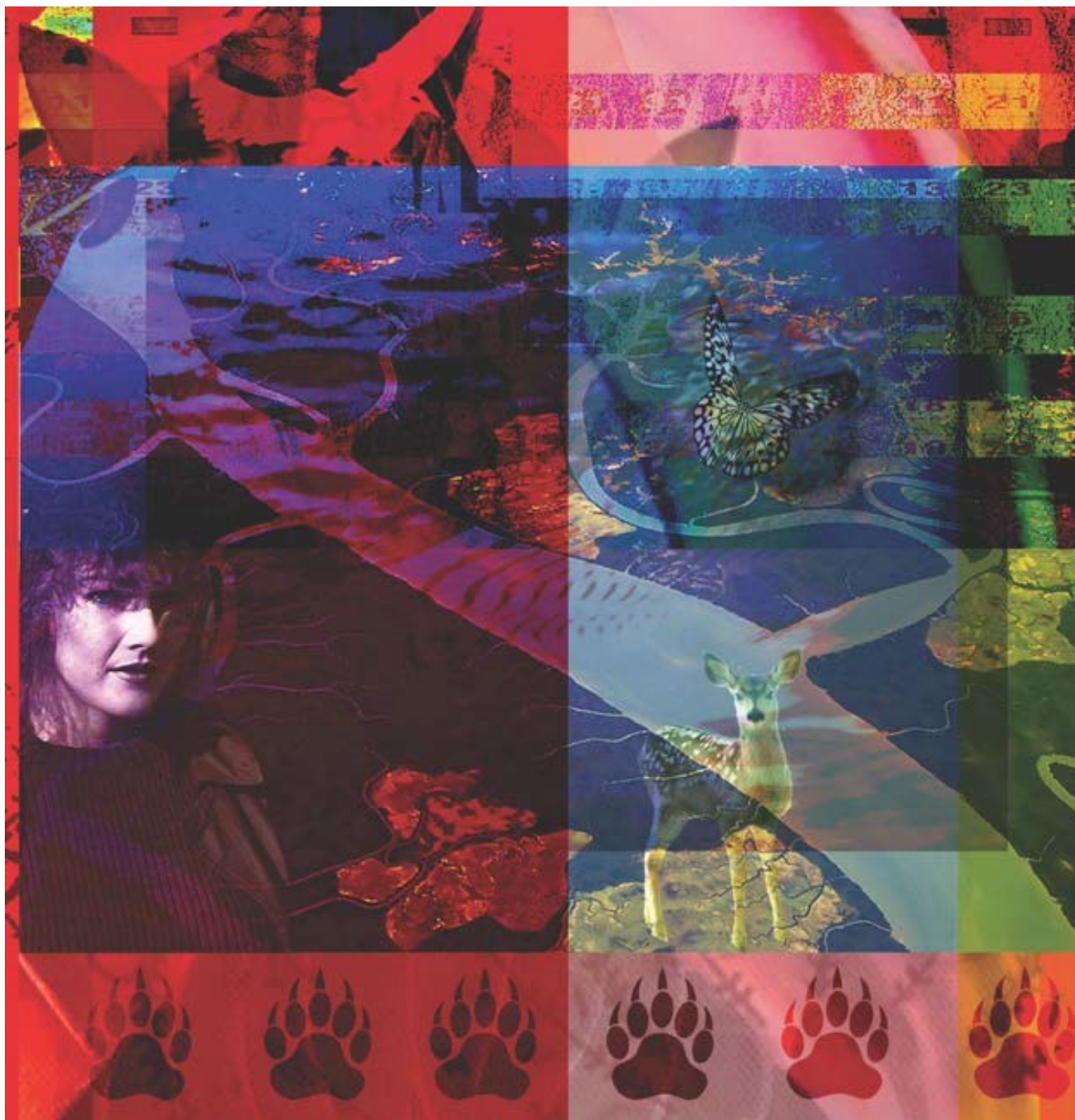
before I was born when I
unlived I was logged in
mountains nestled in fields
dancing along rivers with
possibility when the stars
threw down their swords

like a spring amulet



I with my
exquisite wings
refracting light
reaching distances
on winds

i swear
i could sing



I am here
crushed by gravity

[unbecoming]

but I promise

I will teach you to fly



I am the spine of the stars

braids withstanding



lip-sync with me...

i am becoming
story
through long fragile stings
howling
with sun-drenched jaws
at eastern winds
dancing circles
squeezing dreams
existing as I exist—
a protesting body
entangled with roots
slanting sideways

ancestral adaptations:





i swore
i could sing
can't i?

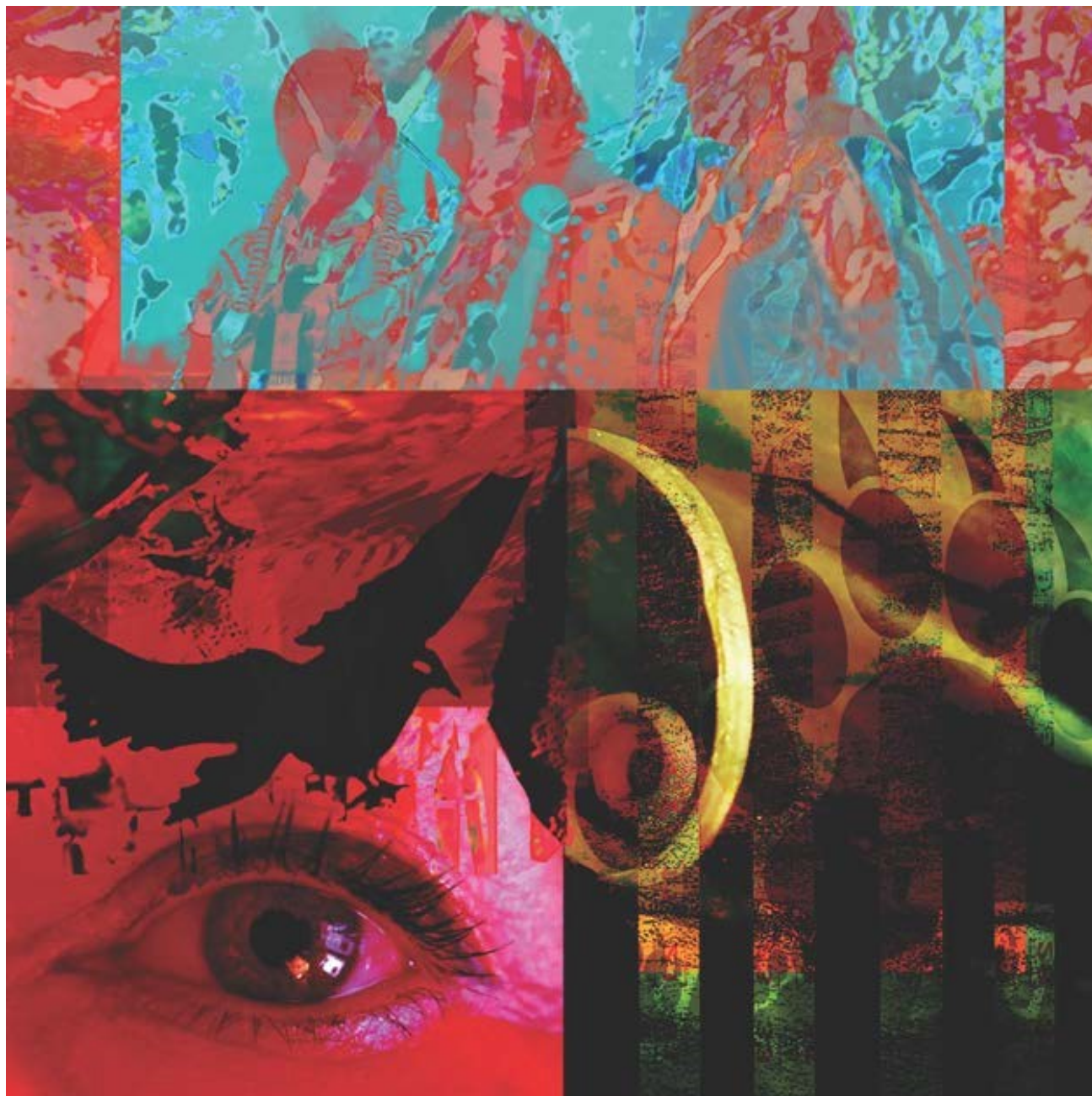


and then
after long moments
of silence

nomadic compass
[outlasting doubt]

I accumulate the residue
of stirred up impressions
without tremor
an anti-path
a promise
of sentience





I see you
your fountains
and echoes
insistent voice
that brings us together

I know your body
beautiful throat
meticulous sustaining
clear chords

I feel you
your rhythm of breath
lucid primordial intonations
that unravel time
setting in motion
an evolutionary path

I remember you
between shadows
drawing open
consciousness
carrying the burden of peace
over your body of rivers

like pauses
simple things
can change everything



magnetizing the things of the world

north
south
east
west
above
centre
below

Is it possible that magic
exists within and can
transcend, connect and
retrieve —

d i g n i t y

Ponki-Mkazas

Raven's Muse



a story
I have been inside
and
outside
shuttling through breath
warming up
to
difference

Awasosqua

Bear Woman



Bear Story

I dreamt I was looking around an old, run-down, abandoned building. It grew very dark, very quickly. A big black bear had suddenly come in and his large frame obscured much of the light. Bear stood up on its hind legs to greet me. I was so scared that I felt paralyzed; I could not move.

Bear walked past me and built a fire on the floor of the old run-down building we were in....As Bear worked, his looming figure cast a huge shadow on the wall, drawing my attention there. It was not an ordinary shadow. It took on a life of its own with a light increasingly illuminating at its centre. Soon the light was the size of a car tire and out of it many ancestors came. They poured in....twenty or more.

The group walked around the dilapidated building, looked around, and chatted amongst themselves. They acted as if they had not seen each other in a very long time. I couldn't believe my eyes. Eventually, they sat around Bear's fire and invited me to join them. I sat down near the fire, and I listened as the ancestors sang songs and told their stories.

Then one old woman asked Bear to show me his big teeth. "Growl loud and hard," she asked. Bear happily obliged. He stood up on his hinds, bent over, meeting me face-to-face, inhaled deeply, opened his jaw as wide as possible, and set off a roar so loud that my face almost blew off, as though I was on the steep end of a roller coaster ride. I could hardly move; my mouth was wide open; my eyes watered; and my hair was flying. The power of Bear's growl nearly knocked me over. I rearranged my face, smoothed back my hair, caught my breath, and regained some composure.

The ancestors rolled with laughter, making me laugh. Bear joined in and soon all of us were sitting around the fire, bent over in laughter. After some time, everyone settled down.

One of the old men asked Bear to transform himself into a bear head. “Like a toy,” he requested.

Once more, Bear obliged: He rose up on his hind legs, closed his eyes, filled his cheeks with air, and held his breath. His face turned red, and then—poof—he transformed into a toy bear head that bopped up and down on the floor. The face of the toy bear head showed his big teeth, just like Bear did when he roared.

The old man picked up the toy put it on a fire stick and handed the stick to me. I thanked him but was confused about why he did this. Amid my confusion, the ancestors slowly rose to their feet, said their goodbye with pats on my head, and strolled through the portal that Bear had cast on the wall.

That dream felt very real to me. It took days, weeks, months, heck—years—to process its impact on me, having shifted my sense of being in the world. I thought about the power of Bear’s loud growl and thought about what it would take to regain my own voice and power, which I knew I needed, in order to continue my journey of dreaming myself into the world and standing up.

It was unclear for me at the time how to go about this but I understood that reclaiming my Indigenous voice would be the journey that required the roar of Bear.

I quiet my mind look up to the sky
stand firm on the Earth
exhale

how am I going to do this?
who will believe me?
do I even believe myself?

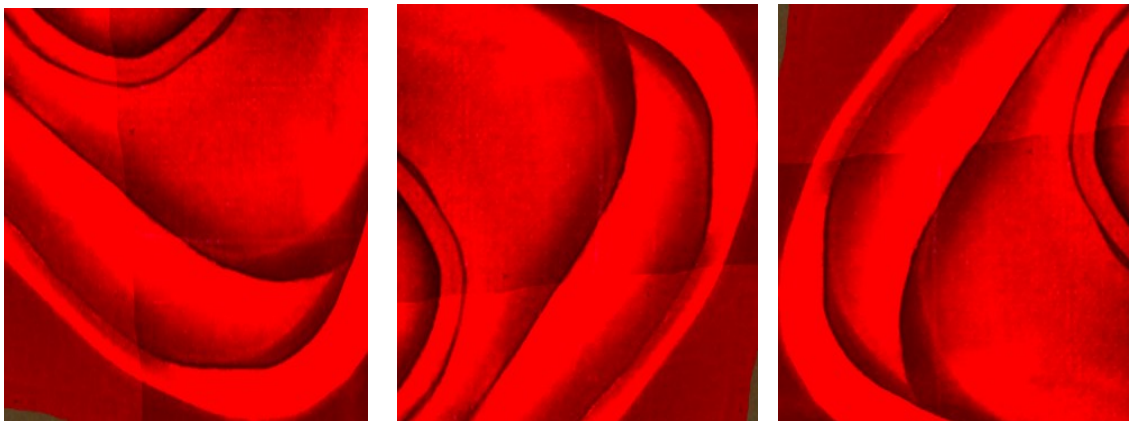


can hardly bear
the conflict
inside
alternative path
red road
locating myself
subjectively
within
internalized
self-doubt

who will believe me?
do I even believe myself?



living
divided
me
not me
half of a whole
a quarter



1/8
1/3
a minuscule

who will believe me?
do I even believe myself?

who knows? does anybody know?
Buffy Sainte Marie says, power is in the blood!
how much blood
how much blood
does it take
to be



real
authentiC?



tewendihwen'
lightning flashes



It is 7 pm

with the highs and lows
etched on my face
lawnmowers travelling full speed
after days of smoldering heat
the ancestors
are calling

air—breath

breathe

-
-
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-
-

there is energy in the fields

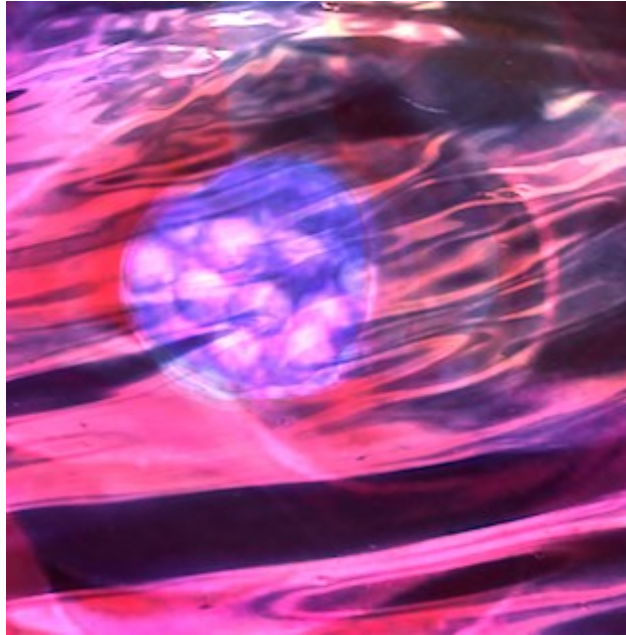
I remember

[]

The presence of soil
in ancient parks
remote discourse of birds
echoes
generous and intoxicating
leaving an imprint
of incandescent words
close to my skin
each born to its source
in infancy
like a needle
entering its field of
memory...



I never intended to leave



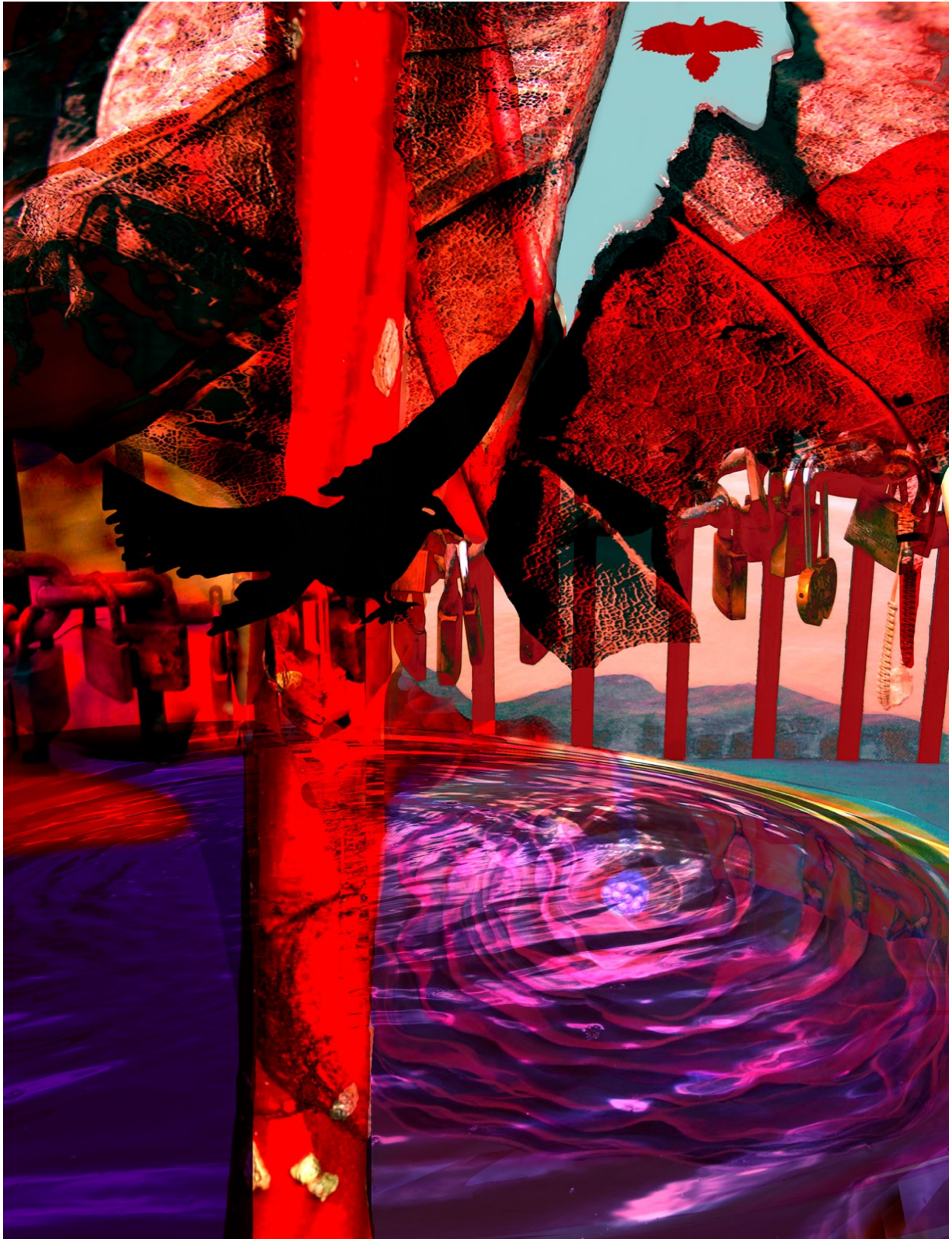
the creek
splashing beavers
grass snakes
hornet nests
my sunlit face
beaming through openings
of the tree house out back
the playground of old rusted cars
an old barbarian mineshaft
where I climbed high in the rafters
for a new perspective
on living
in the swamped-out edges of our property
with gigantic sunflowers
offering me shade
and privacy

artifacts of my identity



leaving me wide-eyed





lyää'tou'tenh
her body

How long have we existed
with the land and sky?

: : : : : : : : : : : :

questions Raven tries to answer
tapping on the window
while in bed earlier that I ought to be
with full sun beaming
through white Sears curtains
kids playing outside
me thinking about
my ancestors
conjuring up impressions
images
imaginings

trying to unveil

speculations

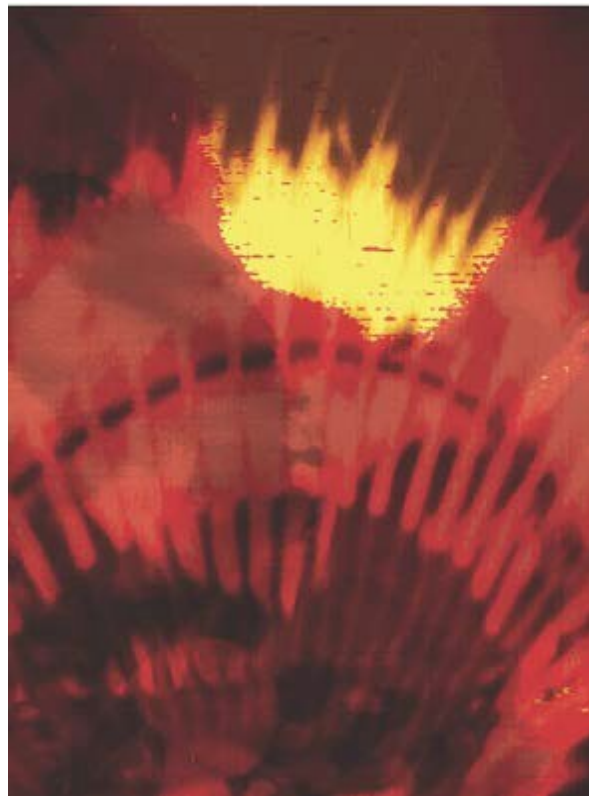
about

who I am

christianized white girls sitting in the front pew
 white wedding dress on a ten year old body
 smoking cigarettes on the playground at dusk
 missing the dreaming
 belonging
 ing
 in
 implications
 of becoming
 other

with all my relations ancestors calling me home
 through the dreaming
 connected
 in the making
 métissage
 than white
 other

A singular and relational act of re/creation is an attempt to articulate my own path by witnessing the energies that move me inside and out—



in an attempt to rescue my Métis identity



I think I am not the self I have been told I am; imposed through masks I wore in a wielding colonial narrative purposed in ownership: political naming and claiming of subjects and subjectivity...these pieces of property are so inconsequential though, aren't they?



dancer

of

dreams

blazing

lights

in

hollow

eyes

P O N K I – M K A Z A S

Raven

I

As an assimilated Métis person in a contemporary world experiencing losses—losses lodged in my genes, create shadows on my psyche that are driven spiritually to my consciousness...





I am speaking out, sharing my voice,
and working through aspects of memory
like an endless walk on a windy day...

I learned about the Huron at public Catholic school
remain
in social studies class,
on the road
after sitting in the polished church pew
where I walked all night
having received communion
traumatized
wearing a wedding-type dress
confessing my sins
of pulling carrots out of the garden
in the middle of the night
(the ones that balance out the food stamps)
while a good part of me was
missing
as we “camped” outside in a tent in the yard that
missing
lit up with fireflies on hot summer nights
missing
secretly wondering
missing
if these were my people

in bits and pieces

elue'wa'latl
dismantling lies

The pressure
of legitimizing
my identity
is so
insidious.

The craze for the
“authentic Indian”
forces me
to answer
quantifying
questions
like
how
Indigenous are you?

Did you grow up
on a reserve?

#band?

Are you
connected
with
“REAL”
Indians?



scribbling in books
official notations
vanishing
filled with holes
with secrets
unable to bear
the wrath

of

your

identity

politics



cross referencing

changing rules

mid air

like lawn darts

eager to

firm up

what

is mid air

what who

is who

Doesn't
the idea
of the
authentic
used to
firm up
who
we
are
just play
into
long
standing
colonial
identity
politics
that
have
operated
intentionally
for centuries
to
conquer: families
divide: *being?*



with a generative tongue
as sure as the rain
for what I know
and
the wind
deep in the throat
eyes blue
hair dark
in the pores
remote cusp
and sweat
immortal flower
of my ancestors



Boston streaming from car stereos
thinking about my grandmothers
over boys and beers
at Morgan "lake"
the only watering hole
in five miles
down gravel roads
lit up by Orion's arrow
where we gathered
to fulfill
some kind of urgent fantasy
of escaping
our homes
our families
our selves
where I was the fire keeper
gathering twigs and branches
carefully traversing bushes
filled with lovers
caught in the chase
of whiskey and wine
where winds pick up
chimes
only I could hear
faint murmurations
of my grandmothers
hiding their identity in bushes
caught in the chase
fleeing
colonial terrain

climbing high in rafters to gain some kind of perspective on living
in between worlds



wendahronk
to hear her voice

PONKI-MKAZAS

RAVEN

II

[manifest]



A consistent gaze from a liminal space—between past and present, future and dreams, image and reality, and life and creation—a mirror and window, connecting multiple worlds through spontaneous surges of manifested cultural survival that can (maybe) extend the boundaries of identity.





tëndih teyää 'tayeh
two bodies

Raven's echoes

linger among shadows
in low-lying playgrounds

transmuting

[]

through time

[]

imprecise encounters

[]

leaving me

b r e a t h l e s s



déjà vu—

réaliser

je vis avec

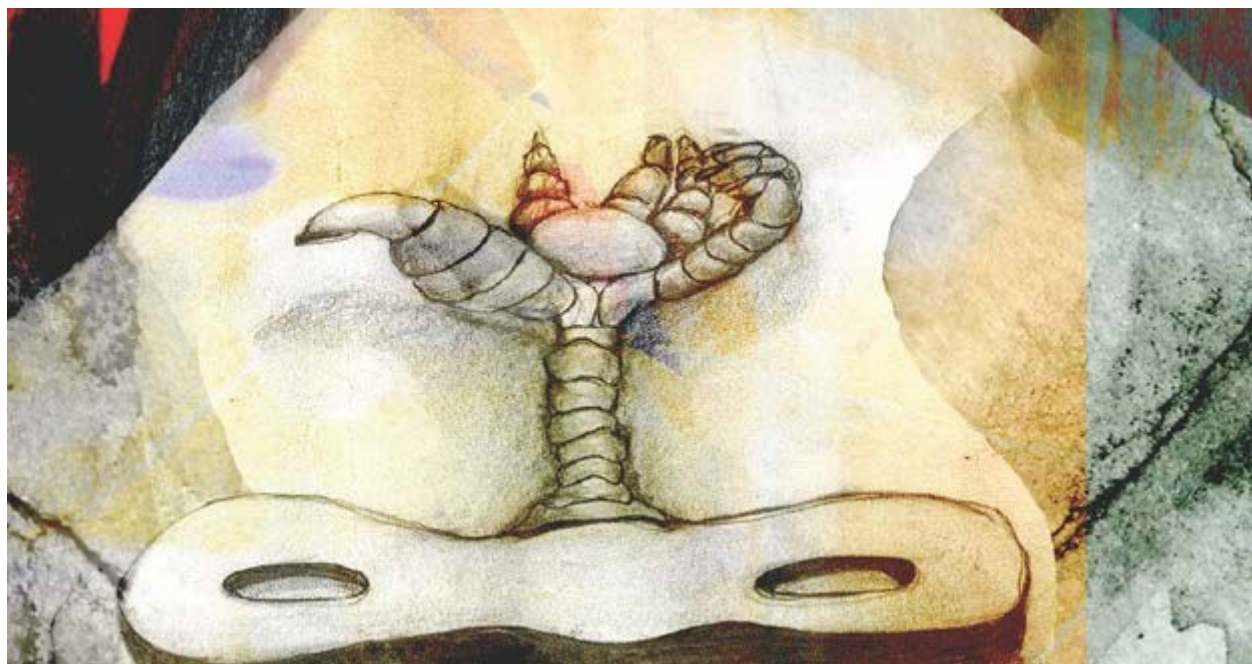
mes ancêtres.



In between dreams
the work is in
the recognition of *being*
directed through body
and lived experience
through multitextural dialogues:
thoughts
reflections
memories
imagination
creation
stories







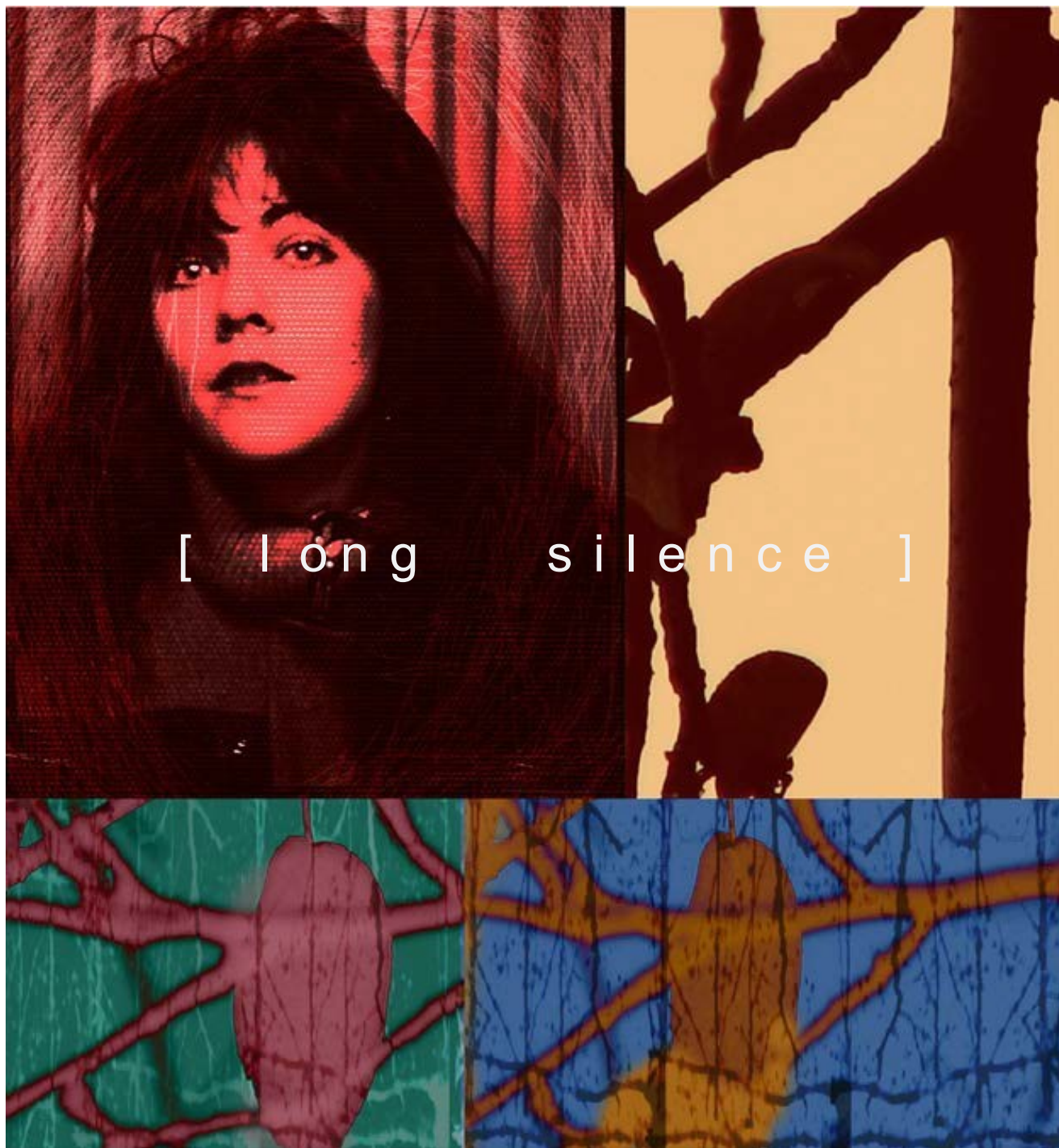
P O N K I – M K A Z A S

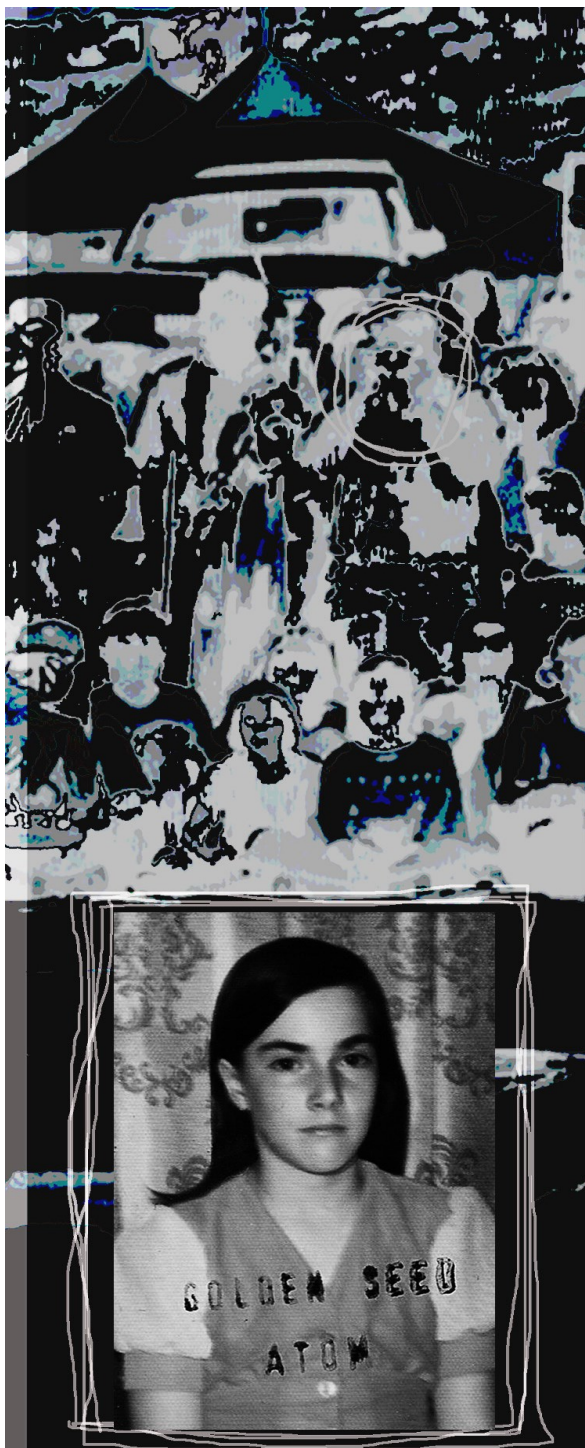
R A V E N

III

Identity definitions have always been excerpted from an exterior source intent on “organizing” people, disconnecting us from our subjective inner knowing, our multiple connections with All Our Relations; pathologizing identity. The real narratives of our lives don’t seem to fit into this model.

.
. .
. . .
. . . .
.
.
.
.





while
winds disrupt creation
red-winged black birds
shout



weighted with blankets
prognosis: [false] skin

vessels unchanged



fragmented stories heard
at immeasurable distances
link
this
territory



[in absence]

blow into hands
etch in trees
perch
on smooth edges

in

[v i s i b l e]

s u r v i v a l

mode

I used to dream
 that I could fly
 down the street
 to the corner store

above the trees
 I noticed people
 walking down
 the street below
 eating ice cream
 pushing baby carriages
 sleeping on lawns
 in front of the liquor store
 waiting for it to open
 locked in by grass
 and shards of class



when I woke
 in the morning
 to the spectacle
 of words
 spewed out
 on my bed
 the night before
 to recount
 the events
 I witnessed
 the radio
 was playing
 a melody
 about a guy
 who lost his dog
 and was dreaming
 about dying
 because
 he was
 his only friend



It was a lovely
high-pitched
romanticized
love song
leaving me to
wonder
why
someone would
want to die
on a sunny
summer day?



I guessed
it was a parable
about liminality
living and not living
or what was worth living for
if you were alone
separated from
your people



in my experience
as I flew
down my street
I was shouting out
to my friends
but
they didn't hear me
or see me



alone on this journey
seeing like a hawk
what everyone was doing
I would recount this
to my friends
in the following days
to see about
the truth
of my
experience(s)
only to have
them look
at me
queerly

and then
after long
moments
of silence [outlasting doubt]
they'd ask
if I could teach them
to fly too



so, we took out
our Ouija boards
called on the spirits
together
like a bunch of girls
in a remote
northern town
would do

by the time
our parents
came around
we had already freaked
each other out
and by the time
we reached
high school
they were
past that stage

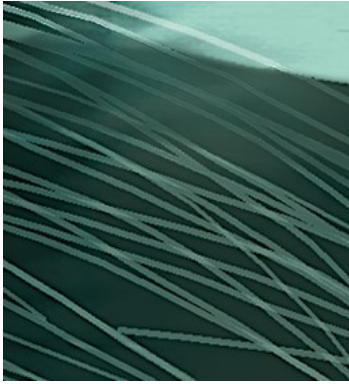


as I continued to dream
I lost my friends
to the reality of living
as wives and mothers
before
or just after
finishing
high school

I converted myself
from christianity
after sitting
week after week
on church pews
searching
for something
I felt I had lost
something
deeper inside of me
but I realized
it was not there
had never been there
will never be there
in those goblets and hosts
stained-glass windows
and expected
silences



I remember the last day
leaving it all behind
returning to my trails and tales
my inward prayers
my ancestors
who
were felt
in trees
woods
ponds
and
river rocks
who
I knew
I wanted
to
live
with

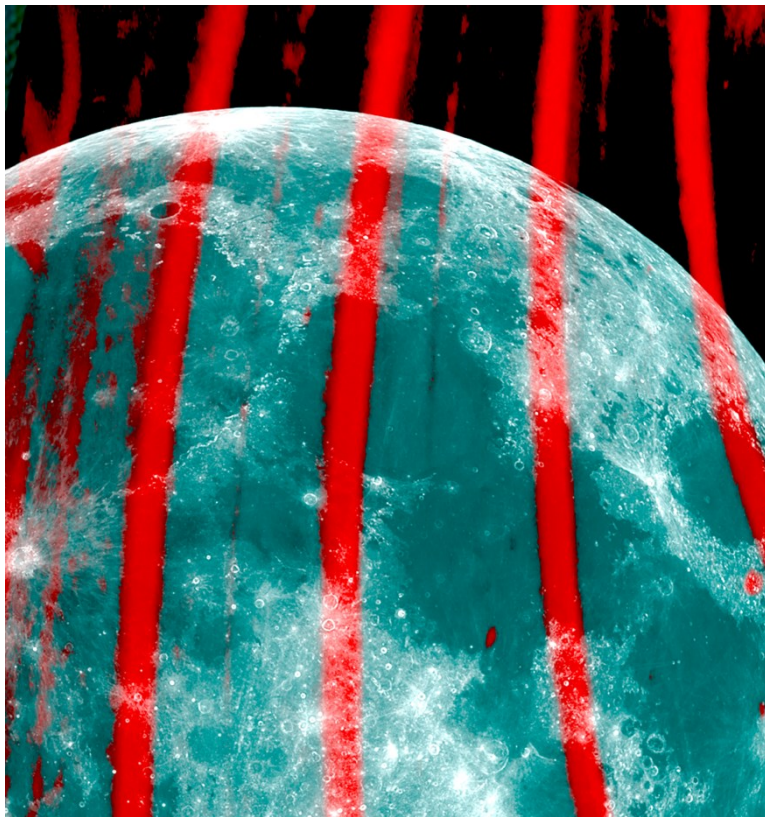


reminding me
that
losing things
and
getting lost
invited a strangeness
that expanded
the parameters
of
who
I
would
become



teaching me
that what needs to be found
is the possibility
of stories
and the
recognition
of my *being*

making
suspect of
colonial
claims



self-determination

alsusuti

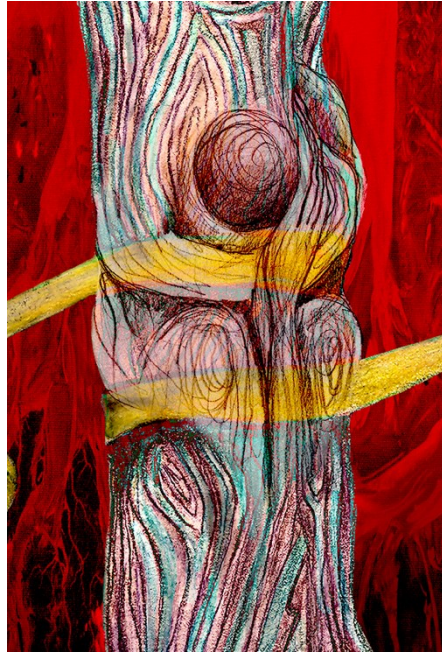
NOLKA

DEER

I

The colonial narrative is, and always has been, a prohibition of inwardness—the refusal to value the subjective over the objective "fact"—the denial of experience that does not fit the colonial framework, and the prioritization of the physical over the spiritual.





I
think
we are alone now
plugged in

hyperlinked

navigating

pain & strength

[feel it?]



In the deep silence of things
is where you dream yourself alive

[yändicha]

celestial body







gejiati
aware

miles of arteries
my story
appearing and disappearing
in a flux of exquisite voices

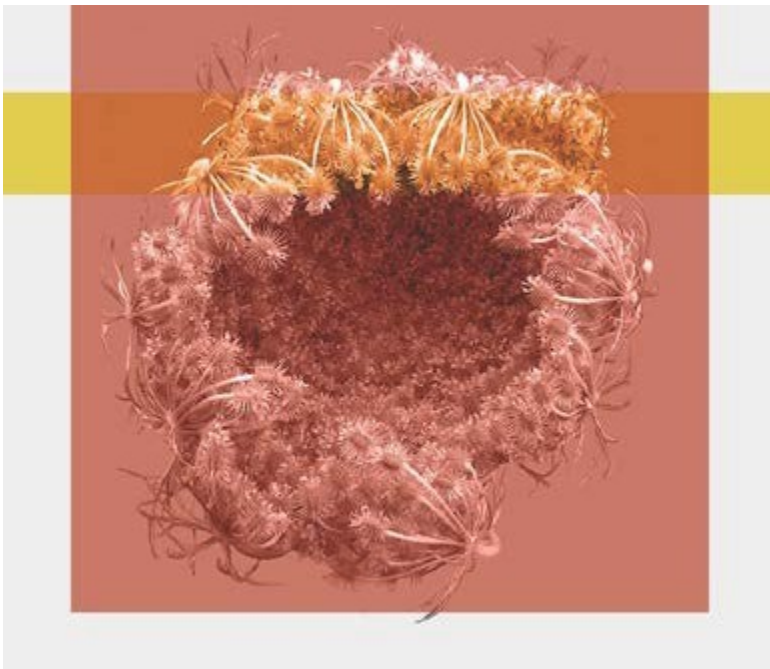
it is the memory of wind
that guides me through
shadows and corridors
impermeable spaces

to recoup on all fours

I am thick in premise
a concentrated plenitude
intact
circling from the centre

steep in tenderness and meditations:

Earth's drum



[braidsnotwithstanding]

NOLKA

DEER

II

What is the test of identity? Is it what is in the official archive? What is not in the archive? Is it in the genes, dna, the blood, the psyche, the spirit? Is it in day-to-day living, our teachings, what we learn? Is it in one's philosophy of life? Can identity be defined in terms of what is missing?



missing



The determination
of colonial claims
left behind
a spectacle of
ten pounds of heart stones
charring my dreams
unborn things
swept away like circles
drawn in the dust
turning my tongue to stone
blocking my horizon
yet the possibility
of stories
teaches me
that what
needs
to be
found
is in
illuminated
memories
sensations
silhouettes
copper voices
that resonate
within the
world

find

seek

rescue

rise

fall into the disruption
of this hunt
absorb moans

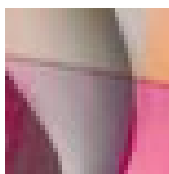
[stand up]



stand up
in the fertile heart of life
its vertices
its breath



collect the pieces
dance those pieces
mountains
lakes and rivers
into existence



carry your bundle
of medicine
that timeless
powerful
voice



fluid
keys





oa'tahndirih
she is strong

N O L K A

D E E R

III

Paths of alternative inquiry open spaces to reconnect with core sensory systems—to explore through aesthetic and personal subjectivity and internal knowing, beyond the conceptual, allowing me to generate my relational story. In understanding that each of us has within us a piece of everyone and everything that we experience, and in understanding that we are all part of the web, brings to my consciousness the possibility that I am [we are] implicated in my [our] own creation story of my [our] selves and [my] our community. In this way, [my] our personal, subjective [experience] [is] are both an inward and outward relational journey.

we

are

deer

and

deer

walk

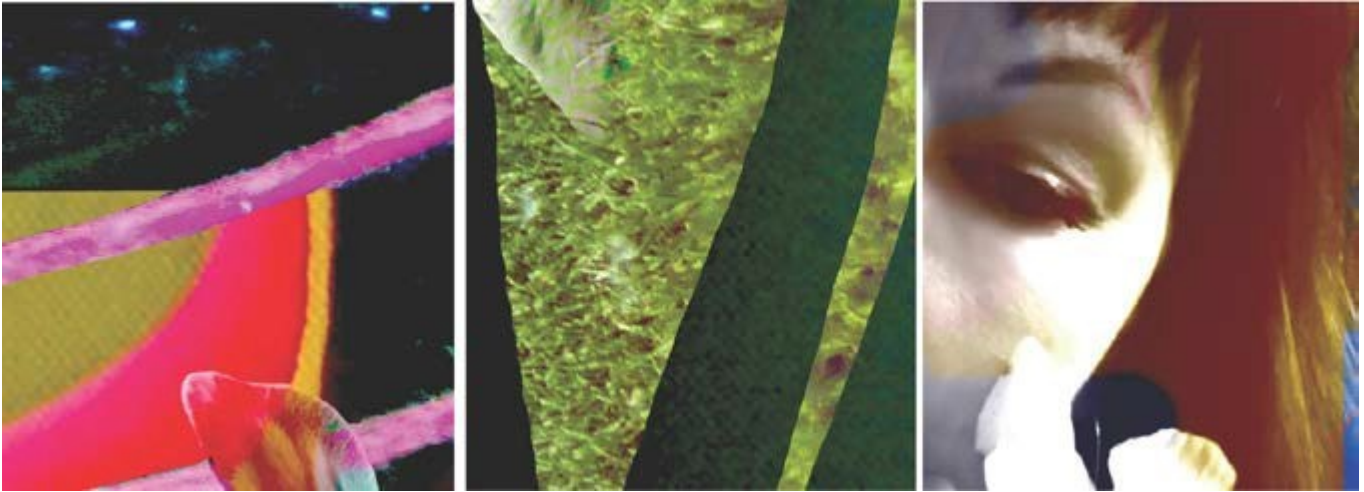
together





I met you in my childhood days
in summer's lush chambers where
we shared intimacies of birth and
friendship among sacred grasses
you believed in me



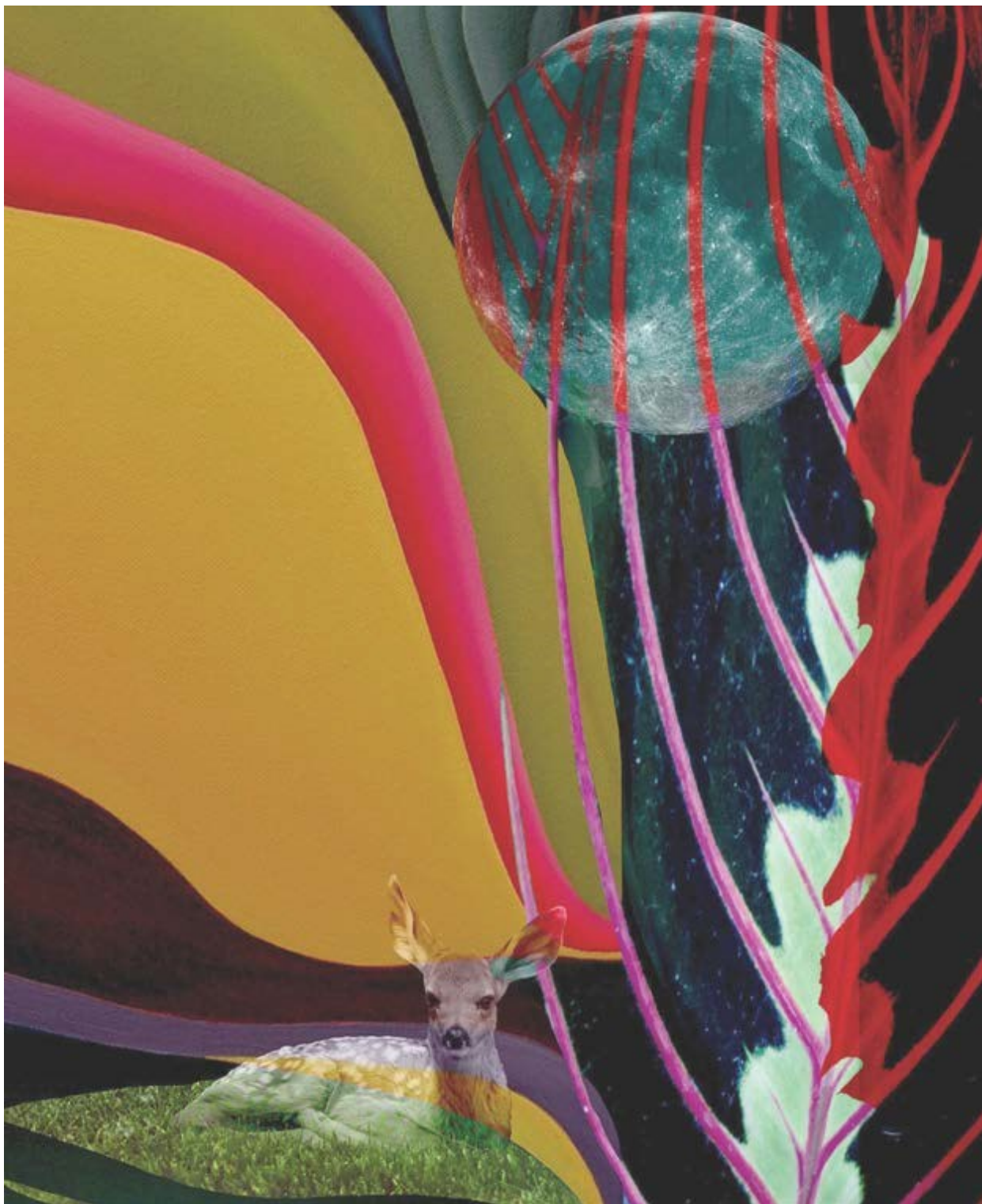


I believe in you, your delicate premise
rooted in the cusp of singing birds
circulating stories in ancient
passageways shifting realities where
the duet of our heartbeat echoes in a
vestige of jade forests

you have given
me my dance of
promises
a door to the world
I am disarmed
against your light



gsite'taqan
precious



ohskēnonton yāndicha
deer celestial body

I believe I belong to you
like hues of light and fragile moments
sharing the limits of one another in birch forests
[unfettered beings]
we are related

entwined
interwoven
[in motion] sensations



a kaleidoscope of bone songs



shifting realities with unlimited sky

lucid

compelling

infused with stories

echoing landscapes

circulating in my dreams

washing over my body

shifting the night

into

ancestral songs
& sky dancers

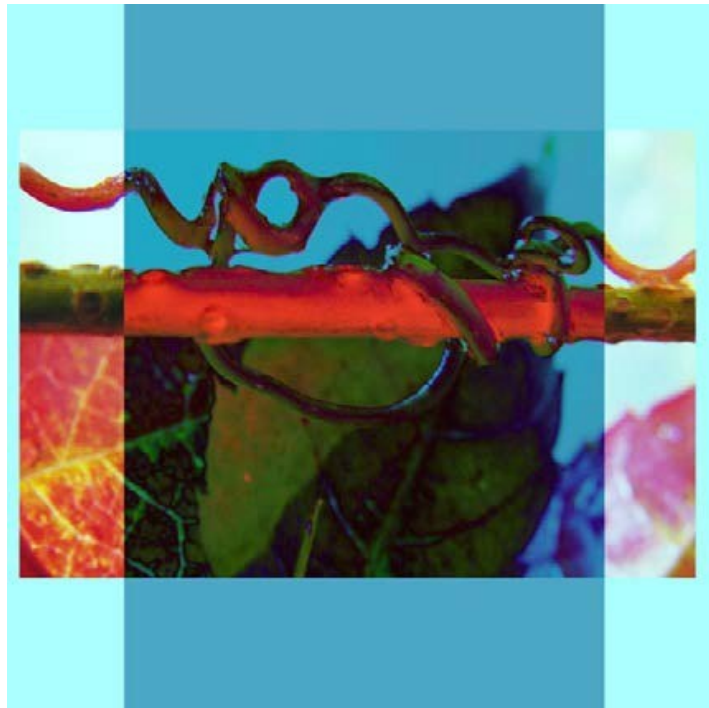


primordial syntax

pulsating frequencies

drawing out my view

beyond my own horizon



infusing my clenched heart



A W A S O S

B E A R

The inward and outward, individual and collective movement of *being* speaks about the potential of knowing something more about identity, something that runs deeper than physicality where we live linked to a network of relational connections and encounters that expand across generations of *being*—over space and time. These stories tell us about the potential of identity as complex experiences rooted in subjective relationality and animated through questing, envisioning, and visioning self—with/in the world



and the
world
too
tuned into
the

frequencies

of

being





ahah' a-yee-ia-hchia
path of my heart

Awamosqua: [Bear woman]
remembered intensely
ached it, lived it, learned it
in the silence: in caves and wombs
finding her way
walking, running, drinking from rivers
tasting mid-summer rains and berries
leaning into heart
leaning into vulnerability
liberating her spirit and body
resetting consciousness
pouring out vision

deliberating

like a good strategist and warrior...



ne' tata ' suaqan
wisdom

Another Bear Story

I was walking west on a road near dusk, the only long road in town, from the teacher's houses on the old army base where I lived near the local highschool. It followed the Moose River along the Mushkegowuk James Bay coast and was about two miles long. It perfectly supported my aerobic walking routine, listening to Blue Rodeo in the new spring light.

As an artist, walking west when the sun was full and setting was a carefully planned aesthetic event—vivid colours, long shadows, eyes squinting, music blaring, heart pounding, water glistening, blissful moments I cultivated and cherished to shake off the cobwebs and stresses of the day. What I didn't plan on that day, on that Friday the thirteenth, was being confronted by the unexpected presence of a man who just came off the river.

I watched him as he climbed up the riverbank and stood still, facing east, in the middle of the road. He was about a hundred feet ahead of me, large husky guy, staring in my direction. Maybe he was deciding which way to go, I thought. My walking instantly slowed to a strategic stroll, as I considered turning around because it was a little weird that this guy just appeared and was not moving. On any other day I would have immediately turned around, but that day, for some unknown reason I decided to continue walking.

Besides, I could run if I had too, I was pretty quick, and this place was safe, everybody knew me, heck, I probably knew the guy. In my quick rational analysis that day, I concluded that since I was good at reading body language (and running), with one weird movement from that guy, I would be outta' there. So, I picked up the pace again and continued my journey. Within a few minutes I noticed he started walking toward me in a leisurely way, still in the middle of the road.

Despite a certain unusualness about the situation, it didn't feel threatening. As we neared each other and with my intention to just walk on by, he shouted out: "Hello Sister!" He introduced himself as Archie and proceeded to show me a skillfully painted rock he made. He was a large Cree man, plaid shirt, jeans, boots, braids, big smile and friendly eyes. "Oh, you're selling your artwork?" I said. This wasn't unusual at all in our town. Many artists sold their work in common places; in the grocery store, on water taxis, along the side of the road.

In his hand was a river stone, smooth and round, painted in hues of purple with Eagle in the middle and seven moons around the parameter. Done in a Cree style of painting with long lines, circles, and dots. It was glazed and rendered with striking details. He let me hold it.

It fit into my palm and felt warm and welcoming, like the sun.

I asked him how much he wanted for it and he said "no, I want to give it to you".

"Oh, no." I said, "I will give you money, this is your artwork."

"Ok, sure"

While I was digging around in my pocket. Archie told me that the image of seven circles and the Eagle symbolized the eighth fire prophecy—a legend that tells us about how all people of the Earth will come together to remember and reclaim the knowledge of the past and in so doing light the eighth fire—which moves us into the future on a sacred relational journey. I was very moved by the story. He said: "an Anishinaabe friend told me this story and I was inspired to paint this stone".

He went on to say that he had a dream the previous night telling him to pass on the stone, which was why he came across the river that day. "Well", I said, "I'm so glad you did because I love it and it feels very warm". I then told him that I was the art teacher at the local high school and that purple was my favorite colour, that symbolizes the spiritual. He seemed happy when I shared that with him.

Then Archie said he had to go because he was also meeting up with some family. He told me to keep that stone and to every now and then talk to it. Talk to it? So, I thanked him and wished him a great evening and continued on my journey, thinking how glad I was that I didn't turn around when I initially saw him climbing up the riverbank.

Meeting Archie affected me deeply and I felt like I had met him before, perhaps in another life. His story touched me, and his beautifully painted stone was a precious gift.

Heart-filled, I turned around to see him again, but he was no longer there, only a big old black bear leisurely waddled down the road.

I watched as Bear headed down the bank.





— Great Bear constellation

Clear moon
illuminating symbols
that fly over the past
like spotlights
weaving memories
into dreams
stirring
up impressions
outlasting [doubt]

deep in the throat

in the pores

and sweat

of my ancestors

undercurrents of my being



signifiers of sense



weaving my dreams

attention

elements

and

understandings of my heterogeneity

into

being

In my becoming before daybreak
I sit on the edge of light
witnessing
murmurations in trees
portals of living energy
where space shifts—multiplies—refracts
through one breath
and then another



what do I grasp in these
luminous amplitude?



truth of the world: turn toward voice



reality

imagination

land

body

sky

serendipity occurring while

we: synonymous souls

travelling

b

linked

i

n

g

s



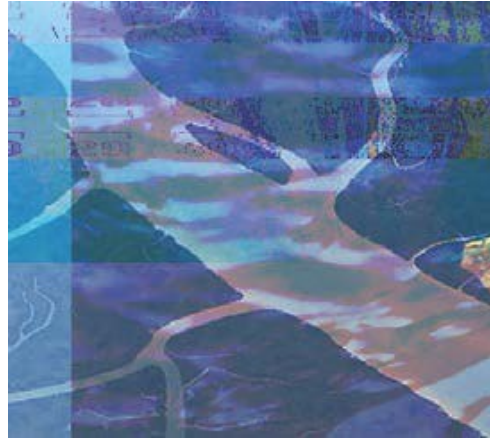
|

gejati
aware



to ride a bike
was strategic on my part: an escape
quick getaway
from my home town Chelmsford
to neighbouring northern towns
to be
with/in the world
on my own terms
with an old packsack weighted with essentials
I would hit the road
as often as I could
riding through trails along edges
nesting in fields of long grasses
along riverbanks

rivers long and winding
 like the Moose River in Moosonee
 where I first began teaching
 my first professional job
 having graduated
 from cleaning post office
 corridors and bathrooms
 the one I would walk along
 to gain perspective
 on the day
 on my life
 and the
 next move



not unlike
 the St. Lawrence River
 running through
 the Old Port in Montreal
 where the Cirque du Soleil
 sets up their tents
 and where I would take refuge
 in the otherworld(ness)
 of acrobatic spectacles,
 from smoldering July humidity
 in the streets,
 while working through my master's
 broadening the parameters of my being
 [voice]

not unlike the Oldman River
in southern Alberta
where I now live
where I hear
people camp
in random sites
along the highway
near the Crowsnest Pass



I think of the far-reaching river systems
where my ancestors lived
cultivating the land
along the St. Lawrence
where the French, Wendat and Métis
the river people
farmers and entrepreneurs
who built strategic alliances
within multiple communities
living harmoniously
for centuries

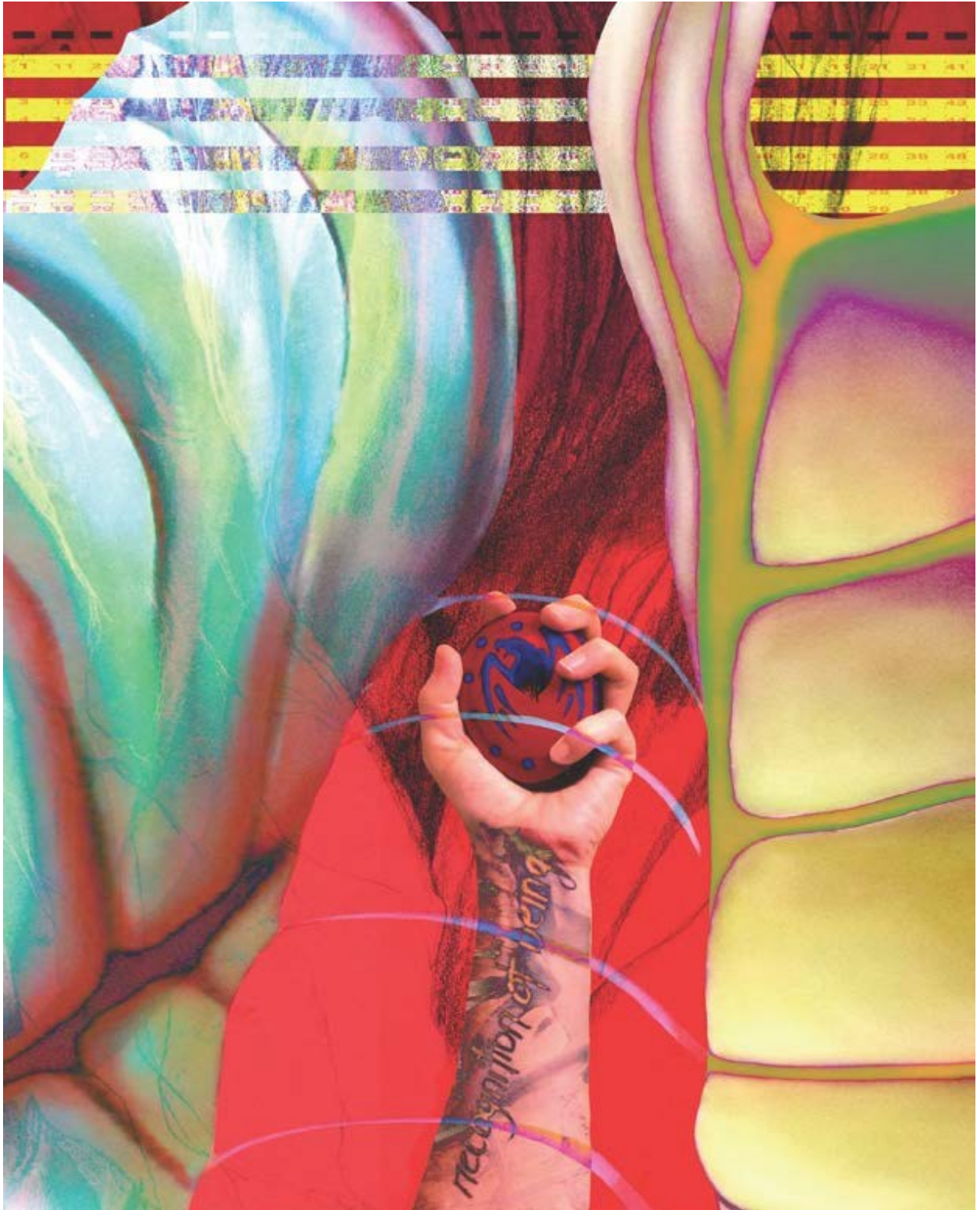
I think about
how rivers connect
past and present
while moving through space(s) and time
meandering
folding and unfolding
across lands
down hills through towns
collecting stories
reminiscent
of who we were
who we are
who we might become
if we attend to
the undercurrents



[voice]

A whole new imagining of ourselves in relation to embodied ancestral memories not only propels the potential of being, it dispels the colonial myth about identity as a fixed construct (arbitrarily) determined by outside forces, giving us a place to breathe and a sense of hope for self-determination and our own future





atriho'tat
pay attention



I embraced the inner energies that connects me with my ancestors. Subjectivity is powerful knowing because it emerges from an energy within that provokes our ability to grow, adapt, and change. It guides us through our personal evolution

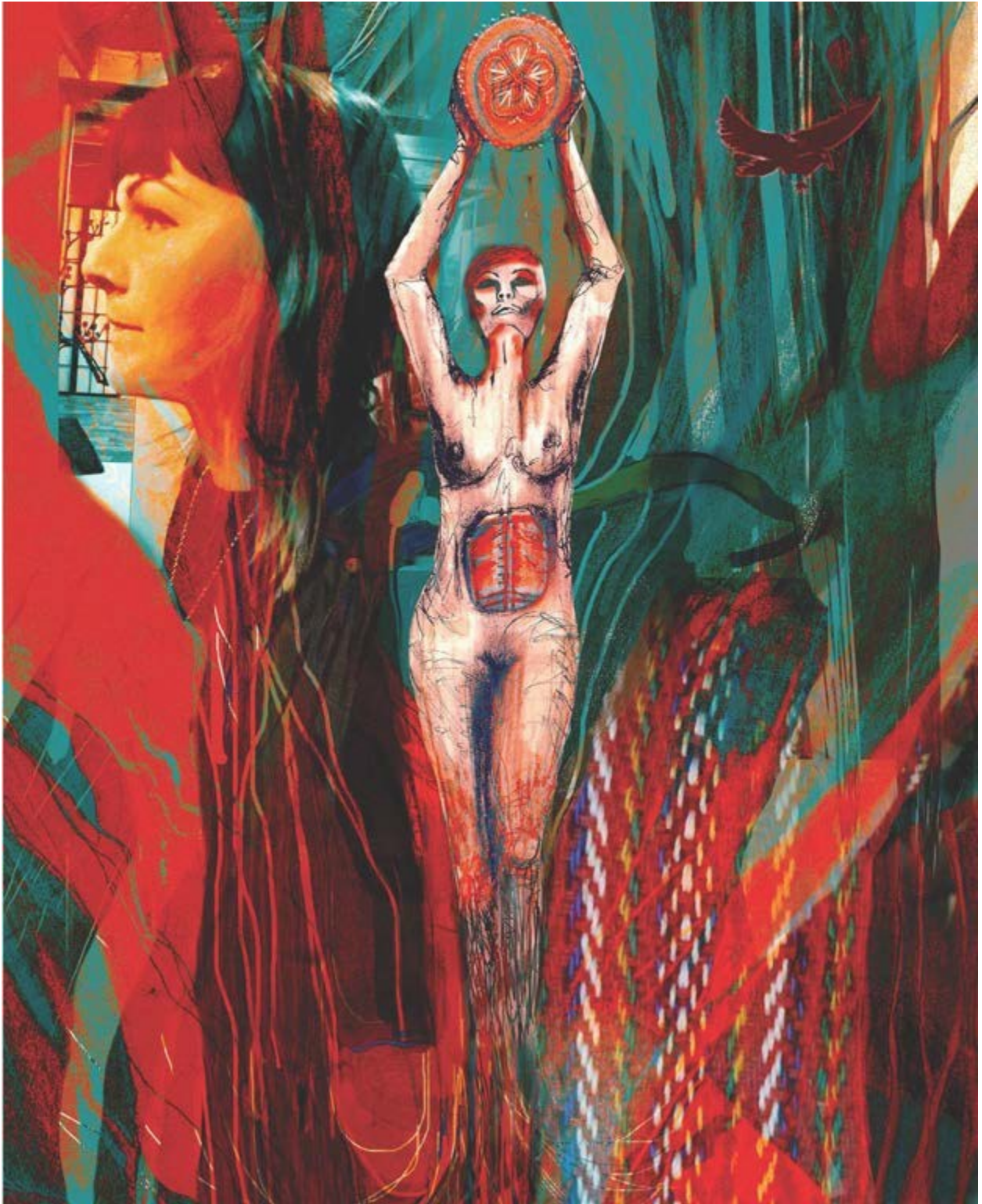
As I assert my Métis identity
I wonder how it ever got to
the point where saying
I am Métis
provokes suspicion?

I walk with BEAR through the maze of
skeptics with the passing equinox
season-by-season
we weather this storm
like good warriors

s t o r y i n g

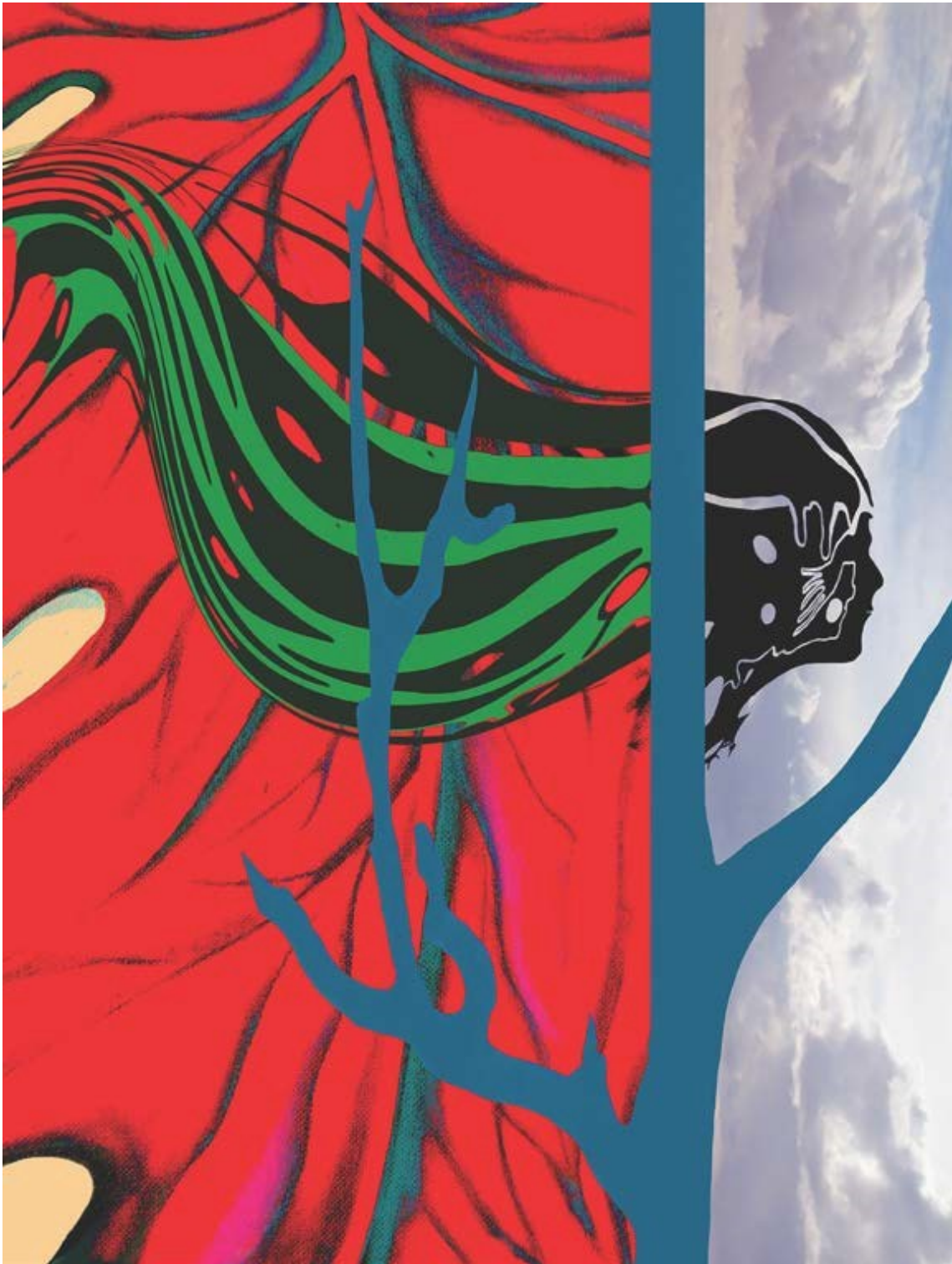
generating
our story
we wander
through a forest
of symbols
on our way
to the summit
where we gather together
to share mountain water





Je Suis Métis
I am Métis

As we consider the in-between spaces of our experiences, we can disrupt the fixed ideologies that dictate the rules about how we get to live in the world. Generative creative dialogues reveal the relational links among us and offer us a deeper vision of living shaped by kinships that have evolved across generations—ties that like rivers, run deep and long.



face à l'est
facing east



[]

Autoportrait 5: The Research Journey

To demonstrate how my IM Spiral operates as a creation-based Indigenous métissage, on my research journey I implemented this approach and associated strategies in my work with official and family archives as well as interviews. Through the use of my IM spiral I responded to internalized undercurrents to draw out my own voice. I am learning to apply this ontological and methodological strategy to disrupt established codes of language (Kristeva, 1984) and identity politics (Foxcurran, Bouchard, & Malette, 2016; Pinar, 2011), to resist these discourses. In these places and spaces new understandings emerge and alternative forms of curriculum and pedagogies engage with aesthetic performative *intertexts* (Hasebe-Ludt & Hurren, 2003).



The Politics of Identity

I recognize knowledge and knowing, that rise from an inward journey, as authentic and legitimate. My living for years in the liminal space of knowing and not knowing my Métis heritage has propelled me to locate my Indigenous lineage, within official and unofficial archives. By way of my Spiral, I explored my sense of Self, my internal knowing and knowledge.

A multi-textural dialogue generated through a creation-based Indigenous métissage supports the complexity of my self-study as a “living inquiry” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009a). I am the site of inquiry. The research dialogue is philosophically rooted in decolonizing practices: inwardness, connection, and active resistance. My story positions me both subjectively and relationally and is a form of agency and action. In this way my research is part of a shifting

paradigm in critical creative practice(s) and Indigenous methodologies that explore new ways and possibilities of working, experiencing, and understanding



As I explored and articulated my sense of indigeneity, I recognize that my approach may inspire Others to search out their own indigeneity as acts of claiming identities, historically erased in Canada through the laws and re-naming policies instigated by the Indian Act. There is no blueprint for my story, nor is there any prefabricated model of how to go about mapping a complex story such as mine. Geneviève Cloutier's (2016) "An a/r/tographic Inquiry of a Silenced First Nations Ancestry, Hauntology, G(hosts) and Art(works): An Exhibition Catalogue," and Jacquie Kidd's (2016) "White Skin, Brown Soul: A poetic autoethnography" are similar stories of this nature. The complexity of this project revealed many dimensions. It began simply in my search through official archives that seemingly hold the secret of my identity. Subsequently, the theoretical work of the IM Spiral was put into practice. The story and study revealed the emergence of subjectivity by the working through creative assemblages of métissage.

My IM Spiral is embedded in an ethic of relationality and concerned with developing authentic connections with Others. This approach to research and learning is "pedagogical rather than prescriptive" (Leggo, 2009, p. 4) and it harnesses creative, critical, spiritual, and performative ways of knowing and being in the world (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015).



The Archives

I have been wrestling with my sense of indigeneity since my early teens. To no avail, in my early twenties I started asking my parents if we had Native ancestry. My mother initially rejected the notion and dismissed my early questions. There was no initial concrete explanation for either my sense of indigeneity, nor my compulsion to ask about our Native heritage. However, a sense of knowing lingered. Relatives lived in remote towns all over Ontario and Québec, and there were very few family visits and little connection while I grew up. Indigenous heritage was an undercurrent or subplot circulating in my family for over thirty years. Family members differed in their perspectives and responses to the notion of familial Native ancestry. Although my mother and an uncle initially rejected the notion, my aunt became an active co-partner in discovering our Indigenous roots; another uncle self-identified as Métis but did not follow through with the application processes. My second cousin, Carol Young, who became a participant in this project, provided information that my second cousins and their uncles and aunts in Ontario have had Métis (Aboriginal) status for over 20 years. Patrick, her grandfather, and Edmund, my grandfather, are brothers. Carol and her siblings obtained Aboriginal status using our family tree and genealogical record (see Figure 9).

My immediate family declined to participate in this research project, with varying levels of comfort regarding the topic. Conversely, an aunt and several first cousins interested in our Indigenous heritage consented to be part of the project. Of the seven participants, some self-identify as Métis, some have been interested in pursuing an application process to officially claim their Métis identity, while others have had their Métis status for a while. Although some of my extended family have Métis status, my branch of the family, including aunts, uncles, and first cousins, have been living in the same liminal space about their Métis identity as I expressed

earlier. We individually and silently grappled with the consideration for years. Prior to this project, my cousins, aunt, and I, while separated by place, time, and circumstance, were in fact unknowingly connected by these silent stories. This research project has illuminated our stories through our sharing of inclinations, experiences, and materials. Both official and unofficial archived documents and photographs informed individual understandings, and we worked to piece together our fragmented family history of our Métis identity.

We conversed about disparity and erasure dilemmas in our conversations, e-mails, and phone conversations. My aunt and cousins speculated that my grandfather may have purposely buried his Indigenous heritage to protect his position as a 1930s hometown police officer, along with his family of several young children living in a remote region bordering Ontario and Québec; it was a challenging time for Indigenous families living in Canada during this period.

We were only children when the grandparents could have answered any of our questions about these issues: my grandfather died of a heart attack when I was eight years old, and my grandmother passed when my cousins and I were in our early teens. My aunt's interview revealed that when they were young, she and one of her brothers persistently asked their parents questions about "Indian" heritage, but there was only silence from my grandparents.



The story of our Métis great-grandmother, Julienne Marois, and her Wendat (Huron) mother, Marie Godin, was another speculative, but critical discourse. Julienne and Marie may have also buried their Indigenous identity for security and safety reasons. This is plausible, given the negative repercussions of being labelled an Indian or *half-breed* woman. "Half-breed" was a term used in official Canadian federal government documents to identify people of mixed Native

and European ancestry¹¹. The term created a type of identity diaspora as the person belonged neither to Indigenous nor European culture. Particularly, reference to a woman or her children as half-breeds often had disparaging intent.

Although my sense of indigeneity began with an inward feeling—a connection to Earth and to animals, a dream-symbolic language that spoke to me, a sense of a Self out of place—the interviews and conversations with family participants made clear to me that this journey must also be an outward one. This supports the theory of my IM Spiral that claims that movement of subjectivity must be both inward through memory, sensations, and intuitions as well as outward in the historical and material world.

This outward process began with an unofficial record that had been circulating in my family, documenting my great-grandmother Julienne Marois as *Métis Indienne* and her mother Marie Godin as *Indienne des nation Huron* (see Figure 5). This record is unofficial: there is no letterhead, file number, nor any indication of the organization that conducted this genealogical search. It was our starting point however, albeit problematic in terms of “proof.” In addition to this unofficial archive, my aunt, cousins, and I pooled our family photo archives and I collected as many relatives’ names as possible to begin mapping a broader family tree. I searched through the Québec *Drouin Vital Archive Collection*; the most complete set of French-Canadian vital (church) records from 1621 to 1947, along with Ontario vital records, from as early as 1813¹². I located a marriage certificate (see Figure 7) for Julienne, my Métis great-grandmother, and Marie, my Huron great-great-grandmother, along with a registration of Julienne’s death (see Figure 8).

¹¹ See: Library and Archives Canada: Use of the term “Half Breed” <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/metis/metis-scrip-records/Pages/term-half-breed.aspx>

¹² See: <http://drouininstitute.com/mfilms/>

Genealogie+++St-Georges

Edmond St Georges born June 16, 1899 in St Gabriel de Brandon Que. son of Dosithe Laporte dit St Georges and Julienne Marois, married Oct.19,1926,in Vermer Ont. to Antoinette Sophie Anne Daughter of Ernest Charest and Della Forget

Dosithe St.Georges-dit-Laporte, fils de Jean-Baptiste St.Georges-dit-Laporte et Lucie Boivin, il se mari le 09 janvier 1880, a St.Felix-de-Valois co. Joliette P.Q. a Julienne Marois, Metis Indienne, fille de Louis Marois et de Marie Godin, (Indienne nation des Hurons) Jean-Baptiste St.Georges-dit-Laporte, fils de Jean-Baptiste Laporte-dit-St. Georges, et Rose Desrosiers, il se mari le 20 Octobre 1860, a St.Gabriel de Brandon co. Berthier P.Q. a Marie-Lucie Boivin, fille de Joseph Boivin et Marie Provost.

Jean-Baptiste Laporte-dit-St.Georges, fils de Jean-Baptiste Laporte et Elisabeth Cottu il se mari le 26 janvier 1836, a Berthier co. Berthier P.Q. a Rose Desrosiers-dit-Lafreniere fille de Jean-Baptiste Desrosiers et Rose Fuscau-dit-Roch.

Jean-Baptiste Laporte-dit-St.Georges, fils de Pierre-Sulpice Laporte et Marie Denomme, il se mari le 14 janvier 1814, a Berthier co. Berthier P.Q. a Elisabeth Cottu (Coutu) fille de Francois Cottu et Marie Plouffe.

Pierre-Sulpice Laporte-dit-St.Georges, fils de Pierre Laporte et Angelique Charbonneau il se mari le 22 novembre 1773, a Berthier co. Berthier P.Q. a Marie Denomme dit- Delorme, fille de Pierre Denomme- dit- Delome et Joseph St.Onge.

Pierre Laporte-dit-St.Georges, fils de Pierre Laporte et Marie- Anne Jean, il se mari le 18 janvier 1752, a St. Sulpice P.Q. a Angelique Charbonneau, fille de Pierre Charbonneau et Marguerite Senechal.

Pierre Laporte-de-St. Georges, fils de Jacques-de-Laporte et Nicole Duchesne, il se mari le 27 juin 1703, a Montreal P.Q. a Marie- Anne Jean, fille de Francois Jean et Marguerite-Madeleine Preunier.

Jacques de Laporte-De St.Georges, fils de Jacques De Laporte et Marie Hamelin, il se mari le 03 septembre 1657, a Montreal P.Q. a Nicole Duchesne fille Francois Duchesne et Marie Nolet.

Jacques De La Porte, et Marie Hamelin, de Noce-pres-Belleme, Perche, (FRANCE)

SON OF:

ID: Hughes Laporte borne 1566 in Noce ,Ome France Burial: 1625 *121201E*

Ancestral File #:WILD-FQ

Spouse unknown

Children Jacques de Laporte b: AB11606

*WILL TRY TO FIND THE
REST OF THE PAPERS
THAT GOES WITH THIS*

Figure 4. Family archive document of author's great-grandfather, Dosithe St Georges; great-grandmother, Julienne Marois; and great-great-grandmother, Marie Godin.



Figure 5. Julienne Marois and son Hildége. Author's great-grandmother and great-uncle. Source: Family Archive.

16		- Février - 1880 -	
numéro	date	parties	acte
383	2	Moruk Handshamp à Jos. Sophie Handshamp	Donation
384	3	Dosithé Laporte, dit St. Georges à Julienne Marois	Mariage
385	5	Théod. Marois à Séverin Marois	Donation
386	-	Séverin Marois à P. Pichard	Cession
387	7	Mrs Pouches à Mrs. Pouches pin	do
388	-	Mrs Pouches pin à André Pouché	Vente
389	8	Jos Beaulieu et P. Pichard	Mariage
390	11	Victor Krouillon à P. Jean. Non Gata	Obligation
391	20	Léon du Vivand et J. Vivand	Partage
392	-	Léon du Vivand	Legat & Prerogative
393	-	Mrs Pouches à Nages Douthier	Quittance
394	-	Mrs Laravin à Léon du Vivand	do
395	23	Jos Beaulieu à Julien Piché	do
396	25	J. O. Laurent à Nages Douthier	Vente
397	26	Mrs Laravin à Léon du Vivand	Quittance
398	-	Mrs Beauparlant à Joseph Clément	Vente
399	-	Mrs Pichette à Joseph Vivand	do
400	27	Mrs Virginie Bélan	Testament
401	-	Mrs Douthier	do
- Mars - 1880 -			
402	2	P. Pichard à Adolphe Pichard	Vente
403	8	Victor Pouches à Louis Massé	do
404	-	Mrs Marois à M. Laurent	do
405	-	Pascal Galanin à Séverin Marois	Quittance
406	9	Mrs Beauparlant	Prerogative
407	13	M. J. Vivand à Olympe Joly	Vente
408	-	Mrs Yermans à Mrs. Vivand	Transport
409	15	Mrs Pouches dit Handshamp	Prerogative
410	23	Théod. Marois à Narcisse Joly	Vente
411	-	Séverin Marois à P. Pichard	Quittance
412	26	Mrs Amélie	Testament
413	29	Mrs Beauparlant à Louis Pichard	Mariage
414	-	Mrs Pichette pin à Narcisse Pichette pin	Donation

Figure 6. Février 1880 Québec Drouin archive document: Line 384, marriage of Dosithé Laporte, dit St. Georges and Julienne Marois. Québec Drouin archive.

June 1925
All white sheet
REGISTRATIONS OF DEATHS which occurred outside the 439
 Division of *Northumberland, Ontario, Canada* and by which I have issued *Final Returns*

REGISTRATION	1	2	3
Name of Deceased Full given Name Place of Death (a) Sex, (b) Marital Status, (c) Single, Married, Widowed Age (a) Place of Birth, (b) Date of Birth Trade or Occupation Kind of Industry Date from which to which completed Trade or Occupation Kind of Industry Date from which to which completed Length of Residence Name of Father Occupation of Father Maiden Name of Mother Occupation of Mother Name of Informant Address Relation to Deceased Date of Birth Name of Doctor Address Cause of Death (as far as known) Date of Death Name of Deceased Date of Death Distribution which to which Medical Certificate received Primary Secondary Name of Physician Address Date of Return Date received by Division Registrar	No. 022632 * <i>Riberdy</i> <i>Joseph-Léon</i> <i>m. French</i> <i>20</i> <i>4</i> <i>10</i> <i>Cobourg (444) Jan. 1st 1905</i> <i>Farmer</i> <i>Orsime Riberdy</i> <i>St-Melanie, Juliette, Luc</i> <i>Eugenie Robesseau</i> <i>Lambton, Beauce, Luc.</i> <i>Bruno Lecompte</i> <i>Lavigne, Ont.</i> <i>no rel.</i> <i>Lavigne, Ont.</i> <i>June 2nd 1925</i> <i>M. J. Roulland-Binet</i> <i>Verner</i> <i>May 30th 1925</i> <i>not received</i> <i>Bright's disease</i>	No. 022633 <i>Marois</i> <i>Julienne</i> <i>F. French</i> <i>66</i> <i>—</i> <i>25</i> <i>St-Felice de Valois May 9th 1859</i> <i>farmer</i> <i>Louis Marois</i> <i>St-Felice de Valois, Luc.</i> <i>Marie Godin</i> <i>St-Felice de Valois, Luc.</i> <i>Dosithé St-Georges</i> <i>Lavigne, Ont.</i> <i>Husband</i> <i>Lavigne, Ont.</i> <i>June 6th 1925</i> <i>M. J. Guinette</i> <i>Verner</i> <i>(hydrophobia)</i>	No. 022634 <i>Dandeneau</i> <i>Joseph</i> <i>m. French</i> <i>0</i> <i>0</i> <i>0</i> <i>Lavigne July 6th 1925</i> <i>Honorius Dandeneau</i> <i>St-Damien de Brandon</i> <i>Eva Plante</i> <i>Rigley Falls, Minn. M. d. a.</i> <i>Honorius Dandeneau</i> <i>Lavigne, Ont.</i> <i>father</i> <i>Lavigne, Ont.</i> <i>June, 6th 1925</i> <i>Weakness!</i>

June 1925
 I certify that the foregoing are correct registrations of deaths made to me during the month of *June*
R. B. Rabuc D. R. Sub-Registrar. Address *Lavigne*

Figure 7. Registration of Deaths: Julienne Marois, June 6, 1925. Information details are provided in the second column of the displayed page. Québec Drouin archive.

Locating records of aboriginal ancestry is notoriously complex, with records from different sources contradicting each other and all reflecting the perspectives of those who documented them. Often, a more complete picture emerges only after consulting many types of records from many sources (Library and Archives Canada, 2019). Adding to the challenge of locating primary-source information was a fire in the 1980s that destroyed the community church in Saint Felix-de-Valois, Québec, where my great-grandmother was married.

Despite the paucity of records, I elected to apply for my status with the federal government based on the one available genealogical record and my family tree, which are the same documents that other members of our extended family had submitted to make their successful applications. Since the federal government houses an historical archive, I believed my application would also act as an avenue to locate information, thinking that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs would conduct a search in that archive through the application processing.

Using the guidelines presented through the Government of Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs website, “How to register and apply for Indian Status,” in August 2017, I completed an application for registration of an adult under the terms of the Indian Act. One of the requirements of this application was a long birth certificate, which I first had to apply for. A long birth certificate indicates specifics of a person’s place of birth, location of hospital, and attending physician, and parent details (names and address), and child details such as birth weight and height. My mother recorded this information in a baby book, which she later passed on to me. Having this information on hand helped me complete my application for the long birth certificate. In late August 2017, I forwarded, by Canada Post, my complete application and

accompanying documentation to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) in Ottawa.¹³

In October 2017, my application package and my documentation was returned, along with an unsigned letter by the Indian Registrar, stating:

...the fact of having ancestors who were born or who lived, on or near a reserve does not in itself, constitute proof of eligibility for Indian status within the meaning of the Indian Act...as an applicant the onus remains on you to supply us with the information and documents necessary to establish your Indian ancestry and eligibility for registration. The information you submit will then be verified against our historical record. (Letter from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, December 10, 2017)

This response was confusing. The application form was a very straightforward request for information, requiring only the names of my parents and grandparents. There were no questions regarding living near or on a reserve. I had included a family tree, which provided information that my great-grandmother was Métis and my great-great-grandmother was Wendat (Huron). My hope that my application would prompt a search through their historical archives was not met; their archives were not consulted, and my application was rejected. Everything in my application was returned to me and there was no file number assigned, which indicated that an application file had not been started. Everything was sent back including the envelope.

What sparked such a response?

A respectful response would have the INAC department recommend that the appropriate next step for my application would have been to apply to a provincial organization. I felt

¹³ In August 2017, the Prime Minister announced the dissolution of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and a plan to create two new departments: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). Government of Canada (2019, January, 11). <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1547129719241/1547129739904?wbdisable=true>

burdened by an uncooperative bureaucracy throughout this process, one which demanded the burden of proof from me with little assistance. On a personal level this felt insulting, on a professional level, as a researcher, I began to question how to access the inaccessible.



I consulted with my second cousin who has her Aboriginal status (Figure 9), and she confirmed that she had provided her family tree and the same genealogical document that I did,

Date of Birth 26-Nov-59	Height 5'4"	Weight 140	Eyes Brown
Sex Female	Community Elliot Lake	Expiry Date 15-Nov-01	
X Holder's Signature			
Issuing Officer's Signature <i>Leslie Bushara</i>			

CERTIFICATE OF ABORIGINAL STATUS	
	This is to certify that Young Family Name Carole Given Name 1000022237 ID Number
is an Aboriginal person within the meaning of section 35 of the Canada Constitution Act 1982.	
Member Number 1000022237	Expiry Date 15-Nov-01
Name and Address Carole Young 102 Frame Cres. Elliot Lake Ontario P5A 2S5	
Issue Date 17-Oct-00	
Issuing Officer's Signature <i>Leslie Bushara</i>	

<p>ONTARIO METIS ABORIGINAL ASSOCIATION</p> <p>This card is not a valid OMAA Membership Card unless accompanied by the Certificate of Aboriginal Status Photo Card</p> <p>If your address changes, please notify OMAA within 7 days</p> <p>Toll Free 1-800-423-3361</p>
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Figure 8. Carol Young. [Aboriginal Status Card] Author's second cousin. (Carol's grandfather, Patrick St. Georges, and author's grandfather Edmund St. Georges are brothers). Source: Carol Young, with permission. 2018.

indicating our great-great grandmother's Indigenous heritage, which resulted in her successful application. It was a mystery to both of us how the same documents for the same family lineage could be read differently and result in different status outcomes.

Through continued discussions and more research, I discovered that I needed to apply to a provincial rather than federal organization for Métis recognition. I learned that the federal government is responsible for on-reserve Indians only. Aboriginal peoples are defined in Section

35 of the 1982 Constitution Act as the “Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.” Despite this broad constitutional definition, the federal government’s current policy is that its responsibility—with a few exceptions—extends only to on-reserve Indian residents, while provincial governments have a general responsibility for Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve. (Federal-Provincial Jurisdiction and Aboriginal Peoples [Website]. Retrieved May 10, 2018). In this context I understood that I needed to apply for Métis recognition at a provincial level.



I told my story of rejection to my aunt, describing the challenge and lack of assistance that I had encountered. She responded with telling me her story, one she had kept hidden, of quietly making an application for Native status, which was also unsuccessful. She said she never told anyone at the time because she was worried about the reaction of others, such as friends and family members. She told me she “just wanted to try” and that she was grateful that I was “taking this on.” My trying made her regain hope after her experience that had been “gnawing at me for thirty years” (aunt, personal communication, December 12, 2017). I understood instinctively how she felt, an uncertain state of knowing and not knowing, something that does not go away, that is always in your thoughts, dreams, longings, and wondering, nestled in evocative silence.

At this stage my self-study inquiry was part of an ongoing conversation with my aunt and cousins who were committed to joining me on this journey of self-discovery. Late in December 2017, my aunt dug further into her papers, searching through shoeboxes of records stored in her closet. She came across a genealogical document with an ancestral file number. This was a missing piece of a previous document that we had been working with.

She contacted us right away and we were ecstatic. This was a significant lead. The challenge now was to trace the file number. My aunt decided to contact the Library and Archives

Canada, since they house ancestral file records. In early January 2018, she sent a letter by registered mail asking for search assistance for our newly discovered Ancestral File #WILD-FQ. In late February 2018, the genealogy consultant from the Public Services Branch in Ottawa responded in correspondence, giving my aunt a detailed list of all the ways she could consult the archives housed by Library and Archives Canada: family history, library website, historical digitized record databases, indexes, and digitized collections stored within various genealogies databases, published collections, digitized genealogy books, and catalogues available on microfilm and only accessible at the nearest family history centre. The letter concluded by explicitly telling my aunt to not write a personal letter, that she was to contact them through the online site only.

My aunt communicated to me that she was upset by the resistance she perceived in providing assistance. She felt insulted that her handwritten letter was dismissed (aunt, personal communication, February 25, 2018). Subsequently, my aunt sent the letter to me with a note, indicating that navigating the recommended avenues of research was something she was unable to do. She expressed that she felt constrained by the difficulties inherent in the tasks of navigating a matrix of systems, data banks, microfiche files, and online collections, in addition to material in offices distant from her town.



The sequence of events outlined here suggests a disconnect between the government that is meant to serve the people and the people asking for service. Government archives are guarded and hardly accessible. The burden of providing official (objective) “proof” forced onto the individual in this system is a challenge for the average person who lacks experience with archival records and researching, often deterring information like my aunt. Instead of assistance,

my aunt felt restrained by the difficulties inherent in the onerous tasks of navigating multiple systems.

After six months of collective research—sharing information, documents, photos, stories, memories, and searching through online data banks, along with trying to access historical archives from the federal government and the national archives of Canada—I (we) felt my objective was blocked. The following story of Deer gave me some perspective:

One day Fawn heard Great Spirit calling her from the top of Sacred Mountain. Fawn immediately started up the trail. She didn't know that a horrible demon guarded the way to Great Spirit's lodge. The demon was trying to keep all the beings of creation from connecting with Great Spirit. He wanted all of the Great Spirit's creatures to feel that Great Spirit didn't want to be disturbed. This would make the demon feel powerful, and capable of causing them to fear him. Fawn was not at all frightened when she came upon the demon. This was curious, as the demon was the archetype of all the ugly monster that have ever been. The demon breathed fire and smoke, and made disgusting sounds to frighten Fawn. Any normal creature would have fled or died on the spot from fright. Fawn, however, said gently to the demon, "Please let me pass. I'm on the way to see Great Spirit". Fawn's eyes were filled with love and compassion for this oversized bully of a demon. The demon was astounded by Fawn's lack of fear. No matter how he tried, he could not frighten Fawn. Much to the demon's dismay, his rock-hard ugly heart began to melt, and his body shrank to the size of a walnut (Sams, 1988, p. 53).

I adapted this story to draw out some of my points, reading it as a story about decolonization. It holds great insight about the illusion of power derived from artificial and externally imposed control mechanisms. It is a story about deeper connections between the

spiritual and physical world within us. Keeping this intimate line of communication open between inner and outer realms of experience can challenge the myth of the beast: colonial power systems. This parable holds value in recognizing it as a counternarrative that is embedded in intuitive knowing and in spiritual and relational interconnectivity. Positioning subjectivity at the centre of one's journey, valuing personal truths, questions current established information systems like government archives, how knowledge is stored and accessed, and how one establishes their identity. The power of subjectivity, Fawn, seen as frail and weak through its fleeting, ephemeral state, is a metaphor for subjectivity. Underneath an initially perceived weakness is an unwavering power to stand up in adverse situations.



One evening, while going through the Québec Métis Nation website, I discovered an image of a Métis family from the 1800s in Québec; it was part of the Métis Nation's growing visual archive (Figure 10). The woman in the photograph had a strikingly similar styling of hair and dress to Julienne's in a Saint Felix-de-Valois photo with her husband, Edmund. Through an online search, I learned that the dress style was *basque*, worn by Métis women in the early to mid-1800s in Québec. Such dresses were typically black and were derived from French European dress styles.

I contacted the Métis Québec Nation in the hope that they had an archive and could help us. The national spokesperson, François Drouin, wrote back within a few days, noting that the picture was of his family. His great-great-grandmother is the mother in the photograph with her children and their spouses; his grandfather was the youngest boy. Mr. Drouin asked me to provide him with my own genealogical record and said he would search the Québec Métis



Figure 9. Le Petit Famille Adèle. Adèle Landry. Abénaki. great-grandmother of François Drouin. Source: Métis Quebec Nation archive. With permission by François Drouin. 2018.

Nation archive collection. I promptly forwarded the genealogical record and some photographs along with our family tree, the same documents I had previously sent to the federal government. Having a positive and supportive response was a ray of light in this challenging pursuit.

The Québec Métis Nation supported my genealogical claim of my Wendat (Huron) great-grandmother. Through their archive search they also established a hereditary link with Christine Hautbois, my Mi'kmaq ancestor from Acadia, now known as Nova Scotia (Figure 11). This link was a most interesting discovery and a direction to pursue in further research. When I examined the genealogical record provided to me by the Québec Métis Nation, it clearly showed the migration of my ancestor Elizabeth Savoie from Acadia to Berthier, Québec, sometime

between 1738, the year of her parents' marriage in Acadia, and 1773, the year of her marriage in Berthier, Québec. The great Acadian Deportation, a forced removal of Acadian and Eastern Métis by the British, occurred between 1755 and 1764 (Historical Canada, 2019). Historically, Acadians and Mi'kmaq, including my ancestors, had been living peacefully together as a Métis society for centuries. During the deportation, Mi'kmaq hid many Métis and Acadians in exile (Boudreau et al., 2018). My Métis ancestor, Anne-Marie Comeau, along with her husband, Honoré Savoie, either sent Elizabeth to Québec or they all escaped the Acadian push, settling in Berthier, Québec, a small community located along the north shore of the Saint Lawrence River, between Montréal and Trois-Rivières. It is important to state here that this is not verifiable information at this time. The limitation of records and access to information restricts typical documentation analysis requirements, along with other methods standard in archival research (L'Eplattenier, 2009); however, I will continue to pursue this in further research.

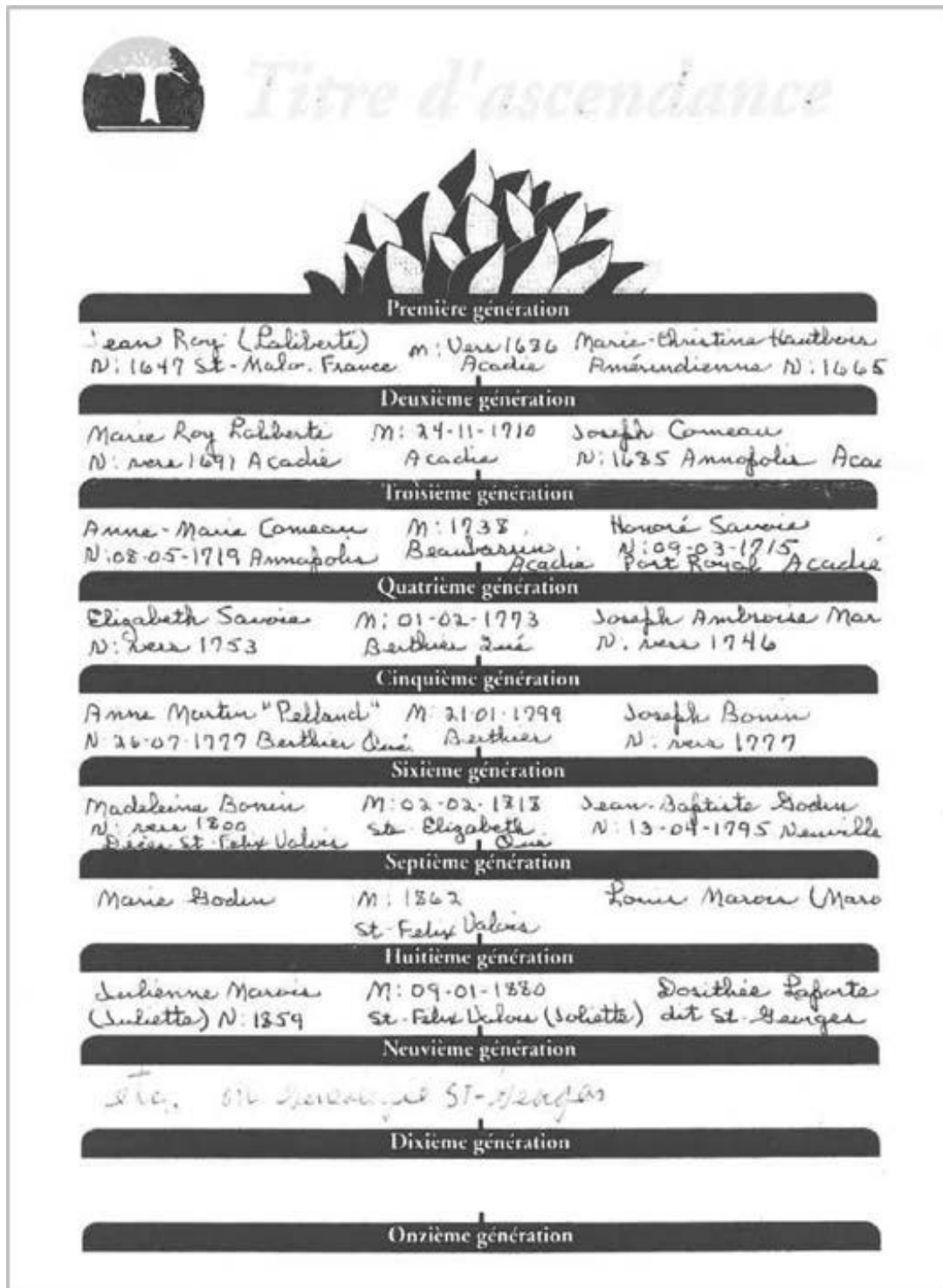


Figure 10. Link to Mi'kmaq ancestor Marie-Christine Hautbois and Acadian ancestor Jean Roy (Laliberte). Source: Québec Métis Nation archive.

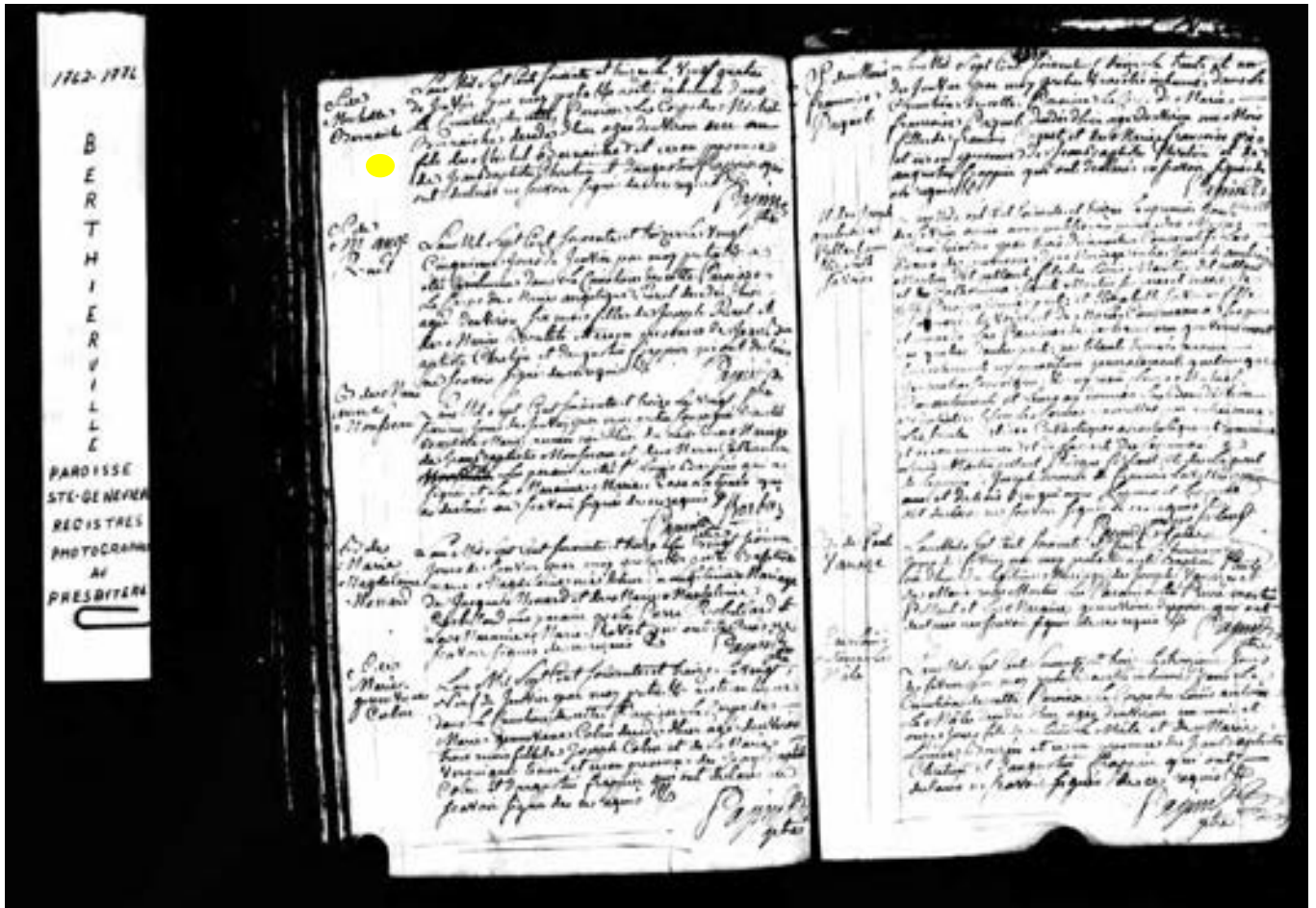


Figure 11. Marriage record: Ancestors Elizabeth Savoie and Joseph Ambroise Martin. Source: Québec Drouin archive.

The only official record of Marie Godin is her marriage record (Figure 13) indicating that her parents were Madeleina Bonin's and Jean-Baptiste Godin's, which aligns with the information in my family tree. A search through Madeleina Bonin and Jean-Baptiste Godin's genealogy (Figure 14) did not contain a child record for Marie. I speculate that either the record is incomplete, that there was a name change, or that my great-grandmother, Marie Godin, was adopted in the Bonin/Godin family. I plan to continue my search of the official ancestral file

#WILD and for Marie Godin's birth record.

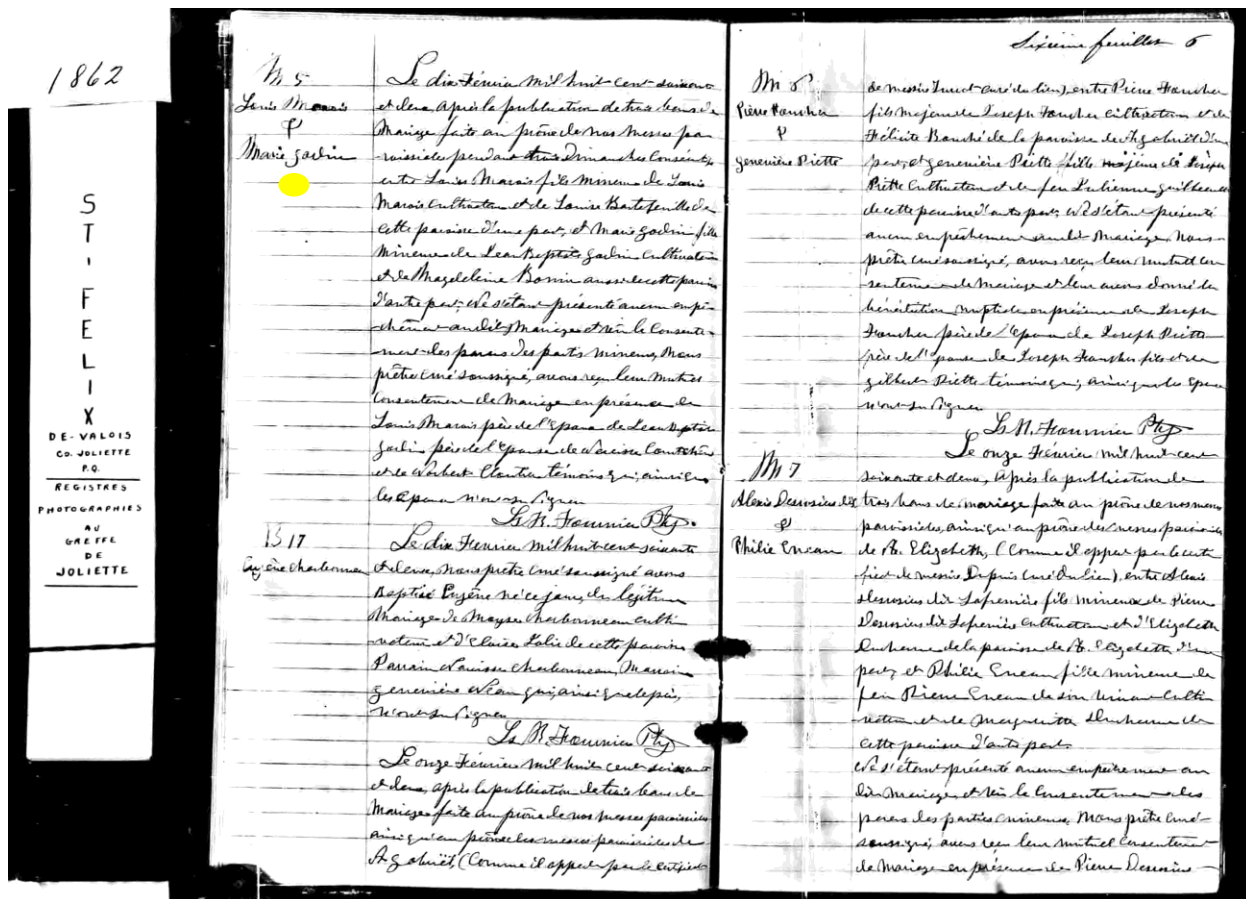


Figure 12. Marriage record: Marie Godin and Louis Marois (top left). Author's great-great grandparents.

Further exploring my question about the link between my Mi'kmaq and Wendat (Huron) heritages, I returned to Marie Godin and the genealogical record of her as Wendat (Huron) First Nation.

Many marriage records were available in the archives. Over 8000 records in the Drouin Archive included names under "Marie Godin," and I located the record of Marie's marriage.

The screenshot shows the Genealogy of Canada website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with a search bar and various menu items. Below the navigation bar, there are two main sections: "1 | MyHeritage™ - Family Tree - Easy & Free - Just Add Names" and "2 | Search Birth Records". The main content area displays a family tree for Madeleine Bonin and Jean-Baptiste Godin. The tree includes parents, a marriage record, and a list of children.

Parents:

- Father:** Joseph Bonin (ID: 310564, Born: 1777, Death: [redacted])
- Mother:** Anne Martin (ID: 236137, Born: 26 Jul 1777, Death: 07 Aug 1819)
- Father:** Jean-Francois Godin (ID: 310532, Born: 06 Sep 1756, Death: 25 Jul 1835)
- Mother:** Genevieve Brousseau (ID: 310533, Born: 1765, Death: 29 Nov 1831)

Marriage or Union: Madeleine 18 & Jean-Baptiste 23, 02 February 1818, Ste-Elisabeth, Quebec, Canada.

Partner: Jean-Baptiste Godin (ID: 310523, Born: 13 April 1795, Death: 26 January 1885 - Age: 90).

Record Principal Person: Madeleine Bonin (ID: 310524, Born: 1800 estimation, Death: 26 March 1882 - Age: 82).

Married children of Bonin Madeleine and/or Godin Jean-Baptiste:

Name	Born	Death	Father	Mother	Husband/Spouse
Theotiste Godin	29 May 1823		Jean-Baptiste Godin	Madeleine Bonin	Boucher Louis-Conzague
Jean-Baptiste Godin	03 Oct 1824	16 Jun 1879	Jean-Baptiste Godin	Madeleine Bonin	Branconnier Aurelie-Rosalie
Agnes Godin	1835		Jean-Baptiste Godin	Madeleine Bonin	Boucher Alfred
David Godin	01 Apr 1839	03 Sep 1908	Jean-Baptiste Godin	Madeleine Bonin	Bibeau Thersile Henauff Aglaee

Figure 13. Genealogical record: children of Madeleine Bonin and Jean-Baptiste Godin [Screen Shot]. Marie Godin is unlisted. Source: Genealogy of Canada. Retrieved May 20, 2017.

Birth records were much harder to find. I could not locate any birth record for Marie that either links to our family tree or explains the link between my Mi'kmaq and Wendat heritages.

I was welcomed to the Québec Métis Nation. I was issued a citizenship and identity card in November 2018 based on the information I provided the Québec Métis Nation. This included my genealogical record as well as copies of our families' unofficial archives that included photographs, a genealogy tree, and other documents. Claiming my Métis identity has been and

continues to be a powerful inward and outward journey. Giving myself permission to say out loud that *I am Métis* is a deeply personal and complex experience that I am weaving into my consciousness and sense of Self.

Propelled through the folding and unfolding of Self and family on my journey of decolonizing ontological truths I encountered the “turning points and points of infliction...points of tears and joy,” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 52).

In the searching through and gathering of official and unofficial archives, meeting colonial gatekeepers, the limitations of bureaucracy, and in the mixing of interlinking family stories I have rendered alternative narrative.



Métis Identity: The Journey Home

As a recognized citizen of the Québec Métis Nation, after having been displaced from my heritage because of colonial and post-colonial sociopolitical politics and rhetoric, I wanted to focus on learning more about my Métis identity, heritage, and culture through the contemporary sources I had available to me at the time. I began with Chris Andersen's 2014 book, *Métis: Race, Recognition and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*. I thought it was a good place to start, until the author declared in the foreword: "[W]hether or not an Indigenous individual or community self-identifies as Métis today, and whether or not the Indigenous community is "older" than Red River, if the individual or group lacks a connection to the historical core in the Red River region they are not Métis" (p. 6). In reading this declaration, I felt the blow of this powerful authoritative sweep and dismissal of my Métis identity. Ironically, despite provincial approval and being welcomed into the Québec Métis Nation, this academic source was defining how Indigenous am I and raising the question of who gets to say this. Propelled, I began to investigate the present Métis identity crises on the forefront of public and academic discourse and debate. Going back to my IM Spiral which conceptualizes identity through the lens of subjectivity, I ask: How do encounters with subjectivity and experiences that arise from them impact our perceptions about what can comprise identity? To what extent do we maintain colonial ideas of identity that situate Self in sameness? At what cost do we reinforce notions of Métis identity as restricted to one particular geo-political event? Can understanding identity as a continuous movement of inward and outward experiences provide a broader vision about the potential of Self and our communities?

Early debates in 2003 surrounding Métis identity, that drew public attention in Canada, were generated from two Supreme Court of Canada rulings: *R. v. Powley* and *Daniels v. Canada*.

Recently, certain authors (Andersen, 2014; Gaudry & Leroux, 2017) have challenged Métis identity claims in regions of Canada outside the Red River settlement. I will begin with briefly reviewing the historical court cases to provide insight into the complexity of contemporary Canadian politics surrounding Métis identity, followed by an analysis and discussion of current academic literature and discourse surrounding Métis identity. The political context and the historical struggle of Métis experience is important. It affects me and it affects many others.

On October 22, 1993, Steve Powley and his son Roddy entered a plea of not guilty to a charge of unlawfully hunting moose in contravention of the Game and Fish Act (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2018; R. v. Powley, 2003). The twelve-year legal battle spiraled out from the question of whether or not Powley committed an illegal act, to be a test case in re-establishing legal parameters regarding who are Métis. In September of 2006, in a unanimous judgment, the Canadian Supreme Court found that the Métis communities in and around Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, are “Aboriginal peoples of Canada” with protected harvesting rights.

The court acknowledged that the existing *Van de Peet Test* that determined who had Métis rights, required adjustments to take into account “post-contact ethnogenesis and evolution of the Métis” (R.v. Powley, 2003, para 3). This part of the ruling resulted in what is now known as the *Powley Test*, a test of identity with the following three criteria for legal inclusion as a Métis person under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution:

Self-Identification: The individual must self-identify as a member of a Métis community and that identification must have an ongoing connection to an historic Métis community.

Ancestral Connection: There is no minimum “blood quantum” requirement, but Métis rights holders must have some proof of an ancestral connection (by birth, adoption, or other means) to the historic Métis community whose collective rights they are exercising.

Community Acceptance: There must be proof of acceptance of the individual by the modern Métis community. Membership in a Métis political organization may be relevant but the membership requirements of the organization and its role in the Métis community must also be put into evidence. There must be documented proof and a fair process for community acceptance. (R.v Powley para. 31–33)

According to Andersen (2014), the only homeland or historic community is Red River, but according to the new ruling, there are Métis communities outside the Western Canada realm such as in and around Sault Ste. Marie, a ruling unacknowledged by Andersen. Despite this debate and still ambiguous framework for identifying who can be rights-bearing Métis, the Powley case is significant because Métis are, for the first time in history, recognized in the Constitution of Canada as Aboriginal peoples. It established Métis as a recognized group that can (potentially) claim rights.

While this is a valuable victory for Métis communities, not everyone is happy about it because of the potential administrative strain and budget drain related to potential mass rights and benefits claims. For example, Statistics Canada 2006 census data shows an increase of 600,000 self-identified Métis (2006 census data). First Nations and Inuit communities express uncertainty because of the already scarce federal and provincial funding available to them to support vulnerable communities (Malette & Marcotte 2017). This competition does shed light on the motivation some may have to narrowly define and claim Métis identity for themselves.

My IM Spiral calls attention to both an outward and an inward movement for Métis subjectivity, suggesting that court rulings and historical accounts alone cannot establish Métis subjectivity because there are also a set of experiences, subjective events, and perceptions that are just as important. Both movements happen simultaneously. If only the outward accounts for

truth, we may find ourselves caught in a colonial trap.



Daniels v. Canada is the other significant constitutional case law that impacts Métis identity.

Harry Daniels was a Métis from Regina Beach, Saskatchewan, and the leader of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP). His work for Métis people began in the early seventies. His prodigious efforts in having the Aboriginal rights of the Métis recognized, affirmed, and enshrined in the 1982 Constitution of Canada. Daniels will indeed be remembered as a pre-eminent Métis crusader (Goulet & Goulet 2014, p. 3).

This case aimed to entrench Métis more deeply into the constitution. During a Congress meeting, Daniels addressed the chair:

Mr. Chairman, I am a Métis from Regina Saskatchewan who is proud of his aboriginality and who believes that every person of Native ancestry from whatever Indian stock and from every place of this great country has a special place in this constitution...what we are talking about [is] the equality of people, and, to use what you're saying, "just society," it can't be just for some Aboriginal people and not for others (Métis National Council, 2014).

In 1999, Daniel's son Gabriel Daniels joined with Leah Gardner, a non-status Anishinaabe woman, and Terry Joudrey, a non-status Mi'kmaq man, to launch the case of *Daniels v. Canada*. This case focused on the inclusion of Métis and non-status Indians as "Indians" under Section 91(24) of the 1867 Constitution Act. The case explained that the Powley Test opened the doors for Métis, but the two sections of the act, 91(24) and 35, were inconsistent in their use of terminology—specifically "Aboriginal" v. "Indian" (Goulet & Goulet, 2014). It was argued that this inconsistency was problematic because although Métis and non-status people are now

included as Aboriginal, they are still excluded as “Indian” under Section 91(24) and therefore cannot benefit from any associated rights that come from that legal identity title, most notably in terms of health care, social programs, and activated land claims (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Lipinski, 2014). In the spring of 2016, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously ruled that while upholding the Powley Test, Métis and non-status peoples are considered Indians under Section 91(24) of the constitution:

There is no need to delineate which mixed-ancestry communities are Métis and which are non-status Indians. They are all “Indians” under s. 91(24) by virtue of the fact that they are all Aboriginal peoples. “Indians” has long been used as a general term referring to all Indigenous peoples, including mixed-ancestry communities like the Métis. (Daniels v. Canada, 2016 para).

The Daniels case confirms that the term “Indians” in Canada’s 1867 Constitution means the same as the terms Aboriginal or Indigenous today, which include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. It is important to note that federal jurisdiction does not mean Canada now has control or power over the Métis people. Under the Justin Trudeau government, section 91(24) is expressed as the Crown’s *relationship* with Métis Nations, reflecting Parliament’s goal of advancing reconciliation with *all* of Canada’s Indigenous peoples (Ottawa, Ontario, 2017).

Métis or métis?

While the Powley Test and Daniels ruling set an agreed-upon framework for contemporary self-identification, Métis “identity” is still up for debate. The Powley and Daniels court rulings opened a Pandora’s box, giving rise to an intensive public debate about who is and who can be Métis. Most notable is the attempt to separate “true” Métis from other métis. The

distinction has been made through the use of uppercase and lowercase for the letter “M” and “m” (Andersen, 2014; Gaudry & Leroux, 2017; Vowel, 2016). Despite legal definition, this debate ignores the Powley Test and posits a very different definition of Métis. It proclaims there is only one “true” Métis Nation, tied to Red River. This argument is grounded in concepts of Métis consciousness, considering historic nationalism to be the “identifiers” of “true” *Métis-ness*. Here the “the Red River region [is] thought of in terms of the power of its gravitational pull on national Métis collective self-identification, especially in the years leading up to and following the Riel Rebellion in 1869–1870” (Andersen, 2014, p.18). Here Métis identity is embedded in a nationalist framework and render a “legitimate” political Métis identity. This political drive is embedded in a rhetoric of authenticity. What is destructive about this discourse is the re-establishment of “other” (lowercase “o”) and “métis” (lowercase “m”), and that it arises at a time when we, as Indigenous people and as a society are coming together under truth and reconciliation. I suggest that the core of Métis identity is relational, multiple, and complex; rooted in subjectivity and inwardness that has been shaped over multiple generations in diverse contexts. By activating the IM Spiral, we can rise from exclusionary notions of Métis identity, in order to explore a more complex and inclusive understanding of Métis identity.



Sébastien Malette, a scholar of Métis and French-Canadian heritage and an expert in Aboriginal law, Indigenous legal traditions, relational politics, and worldviews, argues that many Other Métis communities existed across Canada for centuries. Malette (2016) provides historical evidence and gives us a broader and alternative view of who [can be] Métis. He says that while aspects of the history of Métis peoples are known in Canada, “the current Prairies-centric view is

exclusionary, narrow and problematic because it insists on cultural homogeneity—a view that is counter to the complexity and multiplicity of Métis’ actual lived experiences across Canada and bordering United States” (p. 356).

Métis communities have historically been forged on kinship relations that included adoption practices, (Anderson, 2016; Boudreau et al., 2018; Foxcurran, Bouchard, & Malette, 2016; Malette & Marcotte, 2017) and have evolved through an indigenous worldview of identity as flexible, multifaceted, and evolving (Acoose, 1993; Anderson, 2018; Archibald, 2001; Ratteree & Hill 2017). Métis’ identity has evolved throughout Canada, relationally, and emerged through kinship and interconnected lifestyles with Indigenous peoples (Anderson, 2016; Malette 2016; Malette, & Marcotte, 2017). For instance, Malette (2016) tells us that the Eastern Métis “land base” has been the river systems that were actively used during the fur trade and where identities emerged and evolved in distinct ways as part of nomadic de-centred communities. Malette (2016) provides a more in-depth discussion and historical account of French Canadian and Métis cultures born out of the interconnected pathways sprouted mainly from the fur trade routes. These communities have continued to be the bearers of a “flexible, multilayered, multifaceted and permeable” Métis identity (Malette, 2016, p. 222).

The Métis of the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence River regions in Ottawa and Québec, Illinois Country, and to the Pacific West are considered the *Canadiens* (Foxcurran et al., 2016; Malette & Marcotte, 2017, p. 357); the voyageurs, who were a result of the mixing and blending of Indigenous languages, and relationships through marriage with/in Indigenous nations and communities, fused multiple belief systems and cultural practices. These other Métis were “a people of cultural adaptability, which is what made them who they were; their relationships blossomed through contiguity with indigenous notions of identities and worldviews held together

through marriage, kinship and shared societal values and beliefs” (Malette, 2016, p. 358).

In the video podcast, *Understanding Aboriginal Identity*, Indigenous scholar Kim Anderson points out that historically, Indigenous communities throughout Canada have always had their own unique way of establishing who were community members, which was not based on race or blood quantum. She tells us that we had ways of adopting people into communities, ways of integrating between nations and ways of continually evolving and redefining ourselves. In these way identities have always been changing throughout time and Indigenous peoples have always had the right to do that (BearPaw Legal [Video podcast], 2015).

Eastern Métis, including my ancestors, are best defined as a relational people who emerged during the French colonial period. Of this group, the Acadien-Métis in the Maritimes are considered the first distinct Métis group of the French Acadien, Mi'kmaq, and Malecite Nations (Boudreau et al., 2018). The Eastern Métis from the upper regions of Canada, who lived along the St. Lawrence in regions of Québec and in areas all the way to the Pacific Coast, emerged through the interlinking river systems and a semi-nomadic lifestyle (Foxcurran et al., 2016). In their multiple trajectories, Métis identities emerged through the mixing and blending of settlers and Indigenous peoples and through Indigenous ways of being flexible and adaptable, with skills and abilities that allowed them to traverse multiple and diverse landscape through connecting river systems. These rivers stretched across the country, from the east to the west coast (Foxcurran et al., 2016).



The Royal Commission of Aboriginal People and the Supreme Court of Canada also recognize the diversity of Métis peoples and their evolving histories. The Métis of Canada share the common experience of having forged a new culture and a distinctive group identity from

their Indian or Inuit and European roots. This enables us to speak in general terms of “the Métis.” However, particularly given the vast territory of what is now Canada, we should not be surprised to find that different groups of Métis exhibit their own distinctive traits and traditions. This diversity among groups of Métis may enable us to speak of Métis “peoples,” a possibility left open by the language of s.35(2), which speaks of the “Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada” (Article 11).

The French referred to the fur trade Métis as *coureurs de bois* (forest runners) and *bois brulés* (burnt-wood people), in recognition of their wilderness occupations and their dark complexions. The Labrador Métis who had earlier roots than the River settlement were originally called “livyers” or “settlers,” those who remained in the fishing settlements year-round rather than returning periodically to Europe or Newfoundland (Foxcurran et al., 2016). The Cree people expressed the Métis character in the term *otepayemsuak*, meaning the “independent ones” (R. v. Powley, 2003, para.10). These complex narratives of Métis identities and cultures broaden our understanding of Métis as diverse people across Canada, evolving from multiple social and cultural contexts (Foxcurran et al., 2016). This panoramic view invites a more complex understanding of Métis, as multiple and trans-territorial, “one that is distinctly recognized and historically documented in multiple regions of Canada through the use of the terms ‘Bois-Brulé,’ ‘Michif,’ or ‘Métis’” (p. 51). Louis Riel used the identifications of “ ‘Canadien,’ ‘Français,’ and ‘Métis’ in one single term, ‘Canadien-Français-Métis,’ when he referred to the people of his ‘New Nation’” (p. 49). How ironic that a term that opens up the definition of Métis is also one that undermines the claim that only those originating in the Red River Métis community are true Métis, and that it comes from Louis Riel himself. With these understandings can we render Métis identity as bound within a particular geographical boundary and one historical event? Can

identity be an experience that is built upon itself? For example, the subjective experience of something not being right or enough, of something not fitting, that insistence from within that you are more than the identity that was handed to you? There seems to be more to the story of Self-identity. My IM Spiral demonstrates how subjectivity is critical to an awareness of *being* and essential to understanding self-in-relation with the world. Identity is informed and affected by this alternative knowledge and knowing.



Who has the authority to be the arbitrator of someone else's authenticity? Can we truly sever subjectivity from identity? What if what defines Métis is its resistance to fixedness, and embracing our multiplicity. Donald (2012b) refuses to choose sides:

My particular problem, in terms of identity and belonging, is that I have been led to believe that I cannot live my life as though I am both an Aboriginal person and the grandson of European settlers. As a citizen and aspiring academic, there has been considerable pressure to choose sides, to choose a life inside or outside the walls of the fort (p. 534).

I claim that it is ethically crucial to consider a view of Métis identity that refuses to attend to contemporary political anxieties surrounding administrative strife or worries about sharing of resources. It is crucial because if we succumb to this strife, then we restrict and inhibit the process of Indigenous people coming forward to reclaim their lost and stolen identities, and continue the cycle of colonial suppression and erasure. Using rhetoric and tactics that challenge and shame people into political submission, and further disenfranchise people from asserting their own identity, sabotages people's sense of being, their subjective experience and knowing, and skews our ability as a society to understand the deeper, more complex, and rich aspects of identity.

Understanding the emergence of Métis identities through diverse subjectivities and historical and personal accounts can help us better comprehend the significance and diversity of Métis identity, both historically and in contemporary Canada. Inclusive discussions surrounding Métis identity provide us with an opportunity to resist a notion of “true” and “pure” that is rooted in colonial prerogatives. It broadens the discussion of identity and redefines Métis identity as multifaceted, relational, adaptable, and fluid. If Métis is to be regarded as a way of being in the world, then how is this being in the world to be understood?

By activating the IM Spiral through subjectivity and inwardness, we can navigate challenging colonial terrain and shift the exclusionary vision of Metis identity. Smith (2012) tells us that reclaiming our history is a critical and essential aspect of decolonization; “the need to tell our stories remains a very powerful imperative and form of resistance” (p. 34).



Situating identity subjectively, and relationally, within oral tradition and across multiple trajectories, histories, stories, perspectives, and within experience and the lives of people and their families, can help us generate more productive and healthy dialogues around notions of identity and who are Métis. By engaging in critical creative practices and “perform[ing] our ongoing collaborative and individual inquiries about our relationship with/in the world” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, Donald, Hurren, Leggo, & Oberg, 2008, p. 57), we can actively and powerfully tell stories that need telling. The pedagogy of my creation-based Indigenous métissage provides these openings and helps us weave together important potential applications and implications for arts education, which I will attend to in *Autoportrait 5, Inspiring the Arts Curriculum through Pedagogical Encounters*. How might we open a space for exploring what it means to be Indigenous and to decolonize “identity” by reclaiming and reestablishing our subjective

connectivity with our ancestors and accessing what they had in mind about good ways to live? It is clear to me that the stories and narratives of people's lives, the multiplicity of experience, do not fit into the colonial model.

As an individual and scholar who is reestablishing my relational connections, claiming my Métis identity, learning about my heritage, and extending the boundaries of my being, I find myself in very turbulent waters. As I continue my genealogical dig through a matrix of systems, I recognize that my Métis ancestors were displaced by war, that identities went underground, and that I have only fragmented “proof.” Does this make me less Métis? Since the Powley case, census numbers of people who self-identify as Métis have doubled, yet the overall Métis population in Québec (69,369) accounts for a mere 0.85% of the total provincial population (Census Canada, 2016). What value is there in emphasizing the increase in self-identification as an imposition or as a watering down of authentic Métis-ness? Self-identification and a statistical increase in people identifying as Métis are viewed by the Métis National Council (2014) as a result of people coming forward because the Métis population has not previously been recorded. Isn't this emergence good? Doesn't it reflect a long overdue resolution toward truth and reconciliation? Others challenge these findings, by pointing fingers at people who courageously ticked the box on the census form as self-identified Métis, perhaps as a first step for many in reclaiming their identity publicly. Are they to be ashamed? What does this accomplish?



Does the official archive, with all its gaps and holes, and its recorded and unrecorded events, trump my own inner knowing or my family's inner knowing? Does the official archive, as fragmented and scattered as it is, with its tightly woven historical narratives and gatekeepers, hold precedence over my unofficial and unfolding archive and narrative—my subjectivity and

those experiences and knowledge that arise from it? What is the impact of the obsessive need to seek “proof” and “authenticity” that push people toward DNA testing? What do we know about the reliability of these contemporary methods of “proof”? We must consider that DNA testing companies are part of a conglomerate of businesses with a vested interest in having people seek and expand their ancestry for profit (Wagner, 2018). DNA banks have very narrow repositories and in large part represent a majority that can afford to spend 300 dollars or more on a DNA test. Should this scientific method have the final word on ethnicity when it is essentially based on algorithms and interpretations based only on the strands available within the system? (Wagner, 2018). I suggest that identity ultimately comes down to how each of us self-identify through a deep inward process. Wagner suggests: “you no longer have to accept the beginning point or an end point of the story that has been given to you. You can start it over and you can begin it at a different place” (Wagner, 2018, [audio podcast]). What I am arguing for is a new *recognition of being*, in which subjectivity is a viable and legitimate claim on reality and how we live in the world. In this new configuration of the world we can begin to embrace all the stories we are coming to know.



Decolonizing Self

The first step in this process is the decolonizing of Self through deep and authentic reflection, an inward journey in the reshaping and reclaiming of identity outside of the colonial harness, on our own terms. Indigenous methodology is built on the foundation of decolonization, the practice of confronting and challenging the frameworks and limitations imposed by colonial power and systems, and narratives (Battiste, 2000; Chilisa, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Kovach, 2009; Smith,

2012). This practice is seen in *R. v. Powley* and *Daniels v. Canada*, in the debate of métis vs. Métis, where Other Métis challenge exclusionary visions of Métis identity (Malette, & Marcotte, 2017; Boudreau et al., 2018; Foxcurran et al., 2016), and in my unfolding creation research story, *Embodied Landscapes*. Rhizomatically, these stories tell us that there is something more, something beyond the official archive and colonial claims about who we are.

Cultivating our voices, telling our own stories and recasting colonial narratives invites alternative ways of being in the world to evolve, ways of being that are symbiotically and relationally connected with/in the world. This is an Indigenous path of learning and worldview that begins with the idea that “relationships, including our relationship with our Self are not nouns, but verbs” (Archibald, 2012, [Video podcast]) and that knowledge is situated subjectivity (Ermine, 1996; Gehl, 2017; Aluli-Meyer, 2013a). The symbolic “m” versus “M”: divide is a good example of severing people’s subjectivities and embodied relationality by harnessing them within a conceptual noun. A good place to start to recast colonial narratives and decolonize Self is through the inward journey and the retrieving and telling the stories of Self and Other, which my IM Spiral is designed to do.

I would like to draw on Archibald’s (1997) lesson about Trickster as “a doing” and consider a decolonized Self as an embodied doing, achieved through the movements of a spiral-in-motion: inward, outward, around and, through; envisioning, imagining, and experiencing Self (and Others) outside of a colonial framework. In this way, situating oneself subjectively is a radical positioning. On this journey, Self is activated when we begin with taking responsibility to attend to our inner world. When we situate our Self within our subjective understandings and experiences, we give value to our own knowing and knowledge and begin the process of shifting the (internalized) colonial myth, that knowledge and understanding is something that is “out

there.” In this way we realign ourselves in a most fundamental way, within our uniqueness, and our intricate relationships with our Self, Others and our environments. This inward journey does not fit into the colonial model, wherein we are coerced into shaping ourselves to meet the demands of the (external) system, without a say, and an imposed heteronomy of identity. If we apply the alternative understanding to the Métis debate, I question how “true” Métis-ness can be delineated to one experience.



While attending to our inner space is an independent act, it is not an isolating experience. On the contrary, it is relationally connected to Other because while embarking on our inward journey, we are simultaneously linking to a deeper network of relational experience, like the river systems that linked Métis from one part of Canada to another (Foxcurran et al., 2016). In this way, we are at once authentically connected within ourselves and with Others in flexible and multifaceted ways. These connections are not and cannot be arbitrated by an external source or mandate. They are situated within an alternative network that is more deeply rooted in subjective experiences and in relationships.

In stating this I have recognize and experienced that this repositioning and realignment requires work, determination, and deep reflection. It is a process that unfolds over time. It is making the decision and starting the process that is important. This is where the inward journey begins.

On my own journey, as I became more and more aware of colonial claims on my identity and how these became internalized and have impacted my life. I felt such dissonance, a deep and insidious conflict that disassociates me from my sense of knowing and how I am linked with Others. This is exactly what the colonial model requires. It exploits this type of psychological

phenomena and mitigates its intent through the dissemination of its crafted grand narratives. In this scenario the individual, becomes silent, voiceless, and relinquishes types of knowledge and knowing that have evolved within, over centuries. The positioning of Self as unequal in the external world disconnects us from our deeper networks of relationships, knowledge, and knowing. This can negatively impact one's self-perception. We can understand how this conflict materializes when we consider the reality of Métis people hiding their identity and going underground, only to emerge centuries later, like the Eastern Métis (Malette, 2016), like my ancestors, relatives, and family.

In a decolonizing self journey, when we realign ourselves within, we have a wealth of tools and resources to support us: our dreams, visions, intuitions, inclinations, epiphanies, and aesthetic experiences. These knowledges and pathways to knowing link us to inter-subjective experiences connected to inter-generational knowledges that have evolved through our shared humanity, our histories, and our connection with Earth, all through a diverse eco-cosmic energy system (Cajete, 2015; Deloria, 2012; Ermine, 2011; Little Bear, 2000; Lovelock 1998). Thomas King (1990) tells us that decolonizing Self can begin with learning to “acknowledge and honour the relationship between humans and the animals, the relationship between humans and the land, and the relationship between reality and imagination” (p. xiii). These deeper relational connections with/in Self can be understood by considering the diverse and complex network of relationships, alliances, and kinship similar to the tree communities who pass down knowledge to younger saplings in the forest community (Wohlleben, 2017; Simard, 2016). Likewise, Ravens, with their prodigious memories, plan ahead for future events based on experience, transferring their knowledge from one generation to the next (The Secrets of Nature, 2015; Remerowski, 2009). Crows and magpies have evolved and survived by transferring knowledge

amongst themselves and intergenerationally about “bad” humans to avoid (Simon & Schuster 2012; AJ+ Publishing, 2016).

Attending to our inward subjective journey connects us relationally to a vast network of intergenerational experiences and knowledge. The implication of this alternative narrative is in recognizing the power and value of subjective experience as essential knowledge that is intricately woven into our *being*—our identity. In my view, becoming Self is a radical act of decolonization because it can expose the limitations of colonial claims and grand narratives.



The critical shift in perception about who we are and the evolutionary role of our subjectivity and interconnections challenges the very foundation of the colonial model. It calls into question contemporary notions of Métis identity that ignore experiential histories of Indigenous rhizomatic practices of adopting and integrating others into communities and nations (Anderson, 2016, 2018; Archibald, 2012; Boudreau et al., 2018; Donald, 2012a/b; Aluli-Meyer, 2013a). Knowledge and insight about our subjectivities supports and helps us recognize the complexity and potential of human experience. Hawaiian scholar, Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2013a) explains:

In ancient systems around the world there are inevitably three main ways in which to view and experience knowledge: (1) via the objective, physical, outside world, the world of science and measurement, density and force; (2) via the inside subjective world, the space of thought, mind, idea and interiority that helps us understand meaning and our linkages with phenomenon; and finally (3) via the quantum world shaped by trans-spatial descriptors and intersections, a spiritual dimension unlinked to religious dogma, described in ethereal, mystic, and yet experiential terms: i.e.: All My Relations; or in Science: the *Implicate Order*. Simply put: *body, mind, spirit*; or in Maori: *tinana*,

hinengarowairua. Hawaiians refer to this epistemologic trilogy as: *manaio*, *manaolana*, and *aloha*; Fijians see it as *vuku*, *kilaka* and *yalomatua*. (p. 1)

My IM Spiral help me make these connections by propelling my subjectivities and providing creatives spaces for me to connect with my intimate and historical life stories and relations. As a creation-based métissage in curriculum and pedagogy my IM Spiral enacts an epistemological triad of mind, body and spirit and can connect, build, and help strengthen our relational capacities.



As I discovered on my journey home, a significant moment of learning was the confrontation with colonial gatekeeper. The gatekeeper comes in many forms and uses a variety of tactics to establish and guard its prerogatives through legislations, official histories, media, and education systems and thereby suppressing Other stories and voices. I faced the colonial gatekeeper on multiple occasions: in the Government of Canada, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Access to Information Act, and in Library and Archives Canada. The colonial gatekeeper also presented itself within academia in some contemporary scholarship on Métis identity. Often the virtual space is the first encounter with the colonial gatekeeper. It is an invisible barrier that blocks individuals who want to access information, seek support, or acquire a service. If you attempt to bypass this preliminary virtual step by making direct contact, as my aunt did, the gatekeeper redirects you back to its virtual barrier. When I completed the initial online form, I provided all the information they required. The response I received did not match the circumstance. Under the current legal system, the onus is on the individual to collect information housed in a matrix of systems. In this information-hunting game the gatekeeper resets you back to the initial stages in the system without key information. When I cited the

Access to Information Act, as a response to the letter I received, the colonial gatekeeper continued to challenge me. While I provide the relevant and official information the gatekeeper maintained: “you have provided your Métis status card, but are you affiliated with a specific band?...please produce the band name, number, and any supporting documents showing your affiliations....provide information about your parents or grandparents membership/status....provide more information” (Government of Canada, personal communication, February 10, 2017 [e-mail]).

My strategy in dealing with the colonial gatekeeper began with following the rules, providing requested information, completing applications, and researching information: genealogical files, family archives, and national archives. When the gatekeeper continued to turn me away, I harnessed my legal right under the Access to Information Act. However, even under this law, I was asked for more information before the process could go forward. After one year my family and I remain standing at the gate of the colonial gatekeeper.



Family Interviews

I engaged with each family member (co-partner) in semi-formal conversational style interviews over a period of a year. In between and after interviews my family and I have kept in contact by phone, e-mail and facetime. I have woven voices of family co-partners into the text by using a synonym of their name and indicating the page # from interview transcripts.

I recognize the tension between the university ethics protocol pertaining to anonymity and concealing names, and the experience of erasure my family and I, and our ancestors have endured. I have attended to this with pseudonym name to represent stories and voices.

On my journey I was supported by a network of academic relations that created a crucial sense of support and helped me keep confident and motivated to continue to face the barriers and politics imposed on my efforts to claim my Métis identity. However, when I reflected on my experiences in contrast to those of my extended family, I recognized through the interview data that each of my family members had faced the colonial gatekeeper alone, as many people do when trying to reclaim their Indigenous identity. Without a network of support, they became exhausted, depleted of the necessary energy required to seek official recognition:

I've hit a lot of dead ends. Especially on *MéMère's* [Grandmother] side. It's hard for me. I didn't contact anyone. I was searching on my own for a while and then I started talking with my mom, and she was telling me how they [ancestors] changed to different names...this made me realize what I was up against" (Nancy, p. 13)

When I discovered my family's, experiences were similar to mine, I recognized that we are part of a deeper relational network; the interviewee voices reflected and intensified my experience. This was significant and very meaningful in the ways that it has deepened my sense of connection and how it supports the theory of my IM Spiral as built on connectivity and relational connections.

When applications were denied, participants convinced themselves, as my aunt did, that "knowing is enough for me" (aunt, personal communication, August 12, 2017). Accepting this liminal space of knowing and not knowing, bound by a deep sense of hopelessness, is a difficult experience, which is revealed in the interview data, described by my family:

[L]ost time...I felt disconnected from something, and somewhere I knew it [that I'm Métis] but I just didn't have the proof or affirmation or whatever you call it that I needed... I could have experienced the heritage...maybe I would have been more happy,

feeling more whole. (David, p.18)

The interview data illuminated how when your personal sense of identity is undermined by an external authority, this creates a sense of isolation and disconnection and keeps identity hidden. This is a profound subjective experience:

He [my father] was thirteen when he heard we had Native roots, and he remembers specifically that his sister heard it when she was twelve...so it was going around at this time...but there were a couple of dominant voices that snuffed it out and it became secretive to talk about it. (David, p.12)

Opening up a space for dialogue allowed us to voice our stories, a decolonizing act at the root of my IM Spiral. Ironically, through my family's encounters with the colonial gatekeeper they discovered the true core of their Indigenous identity: a deeply embedded subjectivity that refuses to be suppressed and excluded:

We just continue on. At least we know more now, but it's a shame that the government... I don't know, knowing what was done to Indigenous people and the reason why a lot of the documentation shows French Canadian, they couldn't even acknowledge the fact that they were married to Native women, they [the government] made us feel ashamed of something we should never be ashamed of whatsoever (Remi, p. 6)

The frustrations, the bureaucratic mazes, the humiliating hoops, did not diminish my family's and my own desire to give a name to our experience, our way of being in the world. On the contrary, the data revealed that the more obstacles there were on the path to Métis identity, the more insistent our inward sense of subjectivity asserted itself. It strengthened our sense of indigeneity, embodying a conviction that inner knowing is a truth worth pursuing:

You really have to have a drive, energy and persistence to make this happen. I've been searching several years now and I'm still at the beginning...It's so hard to go through all the data banks ...it's like finding a needle in a haystack. Even still, I'm going to keep trying...I just feel that I have to (Debbie, p. 22).

I've had it all my life—official recognition—now I need to file another application, which I will, but really, it's what I feel inside that counts the most. I know who I am. It bugs me that I have to go through the whole application process again; that my husband can't get his. (Karen, p. 27)

The influence of the colonial gatekeeper is far reaching. Encountering this barrier in contemporary Indigenous scholarship was a most unexpected experience on my research journey. An exclusionary colonial logic asserted that Métis identity is homogeneous and fixed. Métis consciousness, rendered through concepts of nationhood and peoplehood, tried to assert that my family, myself, and others can never be Métis, if we are not connected to a particular geographical region. This logic perpetuated the deep sense of loss and longing my family and I have experienced, and is a type of exclusionary practice that can be challenged by exploring and sharing our inward journeys as well as creating and envisioning our stories:

I wish my Dad was here. He would be happy to be finally recognized—you know, he was so proud. Like, he knew it all along, talked about it all the time. (David, p. 22)

I might have been in my twenties when they found a photo and Mom told me that Mère [grandmother] was Native. Mom sent it to me a while ago, and I fell in love with it.

(Remi, p. 22)

... it's who I am, and I can live who I am. It's an inner feeling that is deep inside and we sometime just can't explain. It's just there. And sometimes, it's so strong that you just have to do something about it. (Nora, p. 19)



As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) claimed, valuing subjective gives a voice and power to personal experience, which is in alignment with the resistance espoused by the IM Spiral. I called on scholars to respect multiple ways of knowing (Malette, 2016; Markides & Forsythe, 2019; Aluli-Meyer, 2013a) and to broaden the research discussion surrounding Indigenous identity in particular. Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2013a) suggests: “[H]ow one sees mind is a turning point of self-reflective subjective awakening” (p. 97). This changes everything, she said, by allowing intuitive experience and knowledge to break through into an unfolding reality. In contrast, a fixed identity suppresses subjectivity and effectively inhibits our personal and collective knowledge and knowing.

I was handed my colonial identity at the tender age of eight years and reluctantly wore it with a white dress and veil in a Catholic confirmation ceremony (Figure 15). This staid tradition was intended as a vow to strengthen your relationship with God. It was a ritual in which I was uninformed and did not have a say. The story of this God was told through the scriptures, filtered down, and enacted within families where the male figure is dominate. The identities of male and

female are fixed and homogenous according to colonial rules. Man ruled and conquered Other (other-than-white, other-than-human, and other-than-the-Earth). Woman, his obedient supporter and servant, is quiet, nice, forever smiling, beautiful, doesn't speak out of turn, is housebound, and has no story, place, or space. I struggled in this fixed identity, all the while I was connecting with my ancestors and dreaming my own narrative. My subjective world took me on meandering journeys through long grasses. Instinctively, I understood my relationship with nature, my connection with spirit, and my interconnection with all of Earth's creatures. I sensed how these relationships informed and shaped my sense of Self, being, and belonging. In my



Figure 14. Author in Catholic communion attire, age 8. [Photo]. Source: Family Archive.

instinctive space, I generated stories with my ancestors in my mind, heart, and spirit. All through my life, Bear has come to tell me stories, teaching me what I know, deep inside, where my ancestors reside. In my subjectivity, I experienced my strength and my purpose, fueled with imagination and hope. I experienced my power as I dreamt Bear and Bear dreamt me. I sang my songs, wrote my poems, and shared my aspirations with Mother Earth and Father Sky. I knew instinctively who I was inside, and to the best of my ability as a young person I refused to recognize the fixed identity imposed on me. Throughout my life I have resisted this colonial model and fought to maintain and nurture the deeper connections with Indigenous ancestors inside of me. How did I know to do this? How and why did my aunt and my cousins hang on to their inner knowing for all these years? As we began to share our stories, through the interviews, I began to recognize that my subjective experiences were linked to my family's subjective

experiences and that we were, in turn, more broadly linked with our ancestors. Like trees and Ravens we are linked within multigenerational memories and knowledge and through multi-textural dialogues:

I'm going to be honest with you...one day, I asked for feathers and I was walking in the park and it just so happened that the geese were shedding their feathers...so I got the feathers I asked for. All kinds of things like that—spiritual things—have been happening to me all my life. (Lorraine, p. 6)

Through our subjective experiences, we claimed our Indigenous identity and outwardly challenged the historical narrative of a suppressed past, through our connection. With this understanding and experience, I questioned how an entity such as an institution, or an individual, scholar can assert who we are not.

Internal truth(s) is what asserts itself in our sense of being, and asserts the power of the outward and inward movement through and beyond colonial limitations. In this light we must consider a more complex understanding of identity through the lens of subjectivity, and how this can impact contemporary issues and conflicts surrounding self-identification?



I began exploring the potential of subjectivity through an alternative epistemology, such as through the lens of Indigenous scholar Willie Ermine (1996). Ermine tells us that an Indigenous epistemology is rooted in an inward journey and situated in subjectivity:

“[T]he alternative expeditions and discoveries in subjective inner space by Aboriginal people wait to be told. Our ancestors were on a valid search for subjective inner knowledge in order to arrive at insights into existence.” (p. 101)

What the ancestors found became the basis of continued personal development and of Aboriginal

epistemology (p. 102). At a fundamental level, these inward journeys led to insights that all existence is connected and inclusive, that we are relational beings and “this is the starting point for Aboriginal epistemology” (p. 103). Ermine also sheds light on how we come to know the world through subjectivity. Here I was reminded of the work of Gregory Bateson (1980). This renowned anthropologist integrated an ecological and metaphysical perspective into his philosophical explorations of how we come to know. Bateson contemplates:

What if our inner world is our microcosm; and our microcosm is a metaphor for the macrocosm?...that our sensory apparatus being the creation of nature, is a reflection of it—it is “of nature”...our sense and our mind have evolved from natural processes; we are wired according to those processes. So, we can know the world because we are from nature and our perceptions are in metaphorical correspondence with the world (Bateson, as cited in Boutet, 2013, p. 31).

Understanding identity through our inward journey—our subjectivity and interconnectedness—is a more complex, creative, ontological, and epistemological framework, which is distinctly different than understanding ourselves through a static homogenous colonial model. I drew on my artistic auto-ethnographic project, *girl of silver* (St. Georges, 2010, [Master's thesis], pp. 80–91) as a way of contextualizes my experience. *Raven's Muse*, (Figure 16) is an example of creation-based artwork that allowed me to deeply explore my subjective experience. Through the act of creating, in all parts of the process, I juxtaposed images to explore experiences of womanhood in my life: myself a young woman posing in a modelling shoot; my mother as a young pregnant wife, preparing dinner; and an Indigenous Elder walking in ceremony during a pow wow I attended in my youth. In this photo-digital collage I juxtaposed a tree branch and lines that symbolize my ancestral connections with images that represent me.

I now recognize that through *the girl of silver* I was accessing my Indigenous rootedness as I was envisioning myself outside the colonial lens. It was a parable of subjectivity, as *the girl of silver* breaks out from an imposing identity through the intensity of experience, manifesting her experience of seeing herself through a Western cultural lens, and her becoming Self, as she rejected the colonial model of womanhood. Through creation, I began to develop a new understanding of what Self could be, finding one that is more epistemologically and ontologically interconnected and that made sense to me. At a fundamental level my inward journey, as Ermine (1996) suggests, led to insights that connected me to a deeper and broader relational existence with my ancestors.



Figure 15. Raven's Muse. Photo-digital collage. Project 1: the girl of silver. [Master's thesis]. 2010.

Extending from the girl of silver, *Embodied Landscapes: A Creation-Research Indigenous Métissage* is a deeper exploration that specifically relates to expanding the notion of identity through subjectivity. On this research journey I have gained insights about myself in relation with the world, and I have honoured Indigenous worldview. I created my IM Spiral to recognize and honour epistemologies and perspectives of flux and motion that acknowledge the complexity of our All Our Relations.



Family interviewees were from three generations: my aunt, first cousins, and a second cousin. Each of us had wondered and asked questions about our Indigenous roots in childhood or adolescence. The interview data revealed that we felt linked to our Indigenous heritage by an internal knowing and were also linked in the ways we managed and negotiated our sense of indigeneity in our personal lives. For instance, we each embraced the inner energies, feelings, and sense of knowing our Indigenous identity, despite the taboos that silenced us, and our inward sensations and experiences guided and propelled us in our individual ways to rise and continued to ask questions as a way of investigating our Indigenous heritage. As a researcher I found it compelling that we shared these experiences despite being out of touch for most of our adult lives.

Interview conversations began with the research question: “When did you personally start to think that you are Indigenous?” The responses revealed that for my cousins and my aunt, feelings began to emerge when they were children and teens. Some tried to talk about them with their parents and other siblings but, similar to my story, their inquiries were met by an unwillingness to discuss the matter. In conversation with my aunt she told me that she asked her mother about her family history and her mother never wanted to talk about it. When talking with

her brother, she experienced his vehement refusal to acknowledge his Native heritage: ...there's no goddamn way that we are Indians" (Nora, p. 27). His response exemplifies how subjective knowledge and knowing can be undermined and ultimately suppressed by an authoritarian voice. This is not to suggest that my grandparents were colonizing their children, but it does demonstrate the stigma that colonization bred about being Indigenous and how it can play out in intimate spaces, within family relationships.

It is plausible that my grandparents and their parents before them were operating from a fear evoked by a larger system. When my aunt asked her mother about her Native heritage, the "Sixties Scoop" was well underway: "When I tried to ask my mother questions, she didn't want to talk about it." (Lorraine, p. 33). During this time, thousands of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were taken from their homes by child-welfare service workers and sent to live with families in other provinces, the United States and the United Kingdom, often without the consent of their parents. The scoop began in the 1950s when my aunt was about eight years old. By the 1970s, between 50 and 60 percent of Indigenous children were accounted for in care. Survivors of this "Sixties Scoop" are today coming forward now to make claims against the federal government (Russell, 2016). This action is propelled by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Given the very different social and political realities of the past, my grandmother living in a remote region bordering Québec and Ontario, was likely not willing to take the risk of exposing her young children's Métis identity.

My cousins and I felt there was something different and unique about us. In our youth, we did not consider the fear, shame, or danger of being "Native," we were curious about our history and heritage and wanted to hear about our family's histories. However, there was a secrecy surrounding our identity that infringed upon our curiosity:

I overheard a comment made by my uncle...that he was embarrassed that he was Native. At the time, it was not only our family that was embarrassed or ashamed, it was a lot of other families too, that didn't want it to be known. (Lorraine, p. 15)

I might have been a teenager. I used to ask my Mother about her background...On my mother's side there is Native...but it's hard to prove it. So, I used to ask my mother about her family history and she never wanted to talk about it. (Nancy, p. 22)

Communication about our history was closed and opinions were divided. Our history was a tenuous and taboo topic, strongly impacting our evolving sense of identity. Nevertheless, our youthful curiosity continued, and we paid close attention to communication scraps, those bits and pieces of information that we could gather to write/right our family story. We gravitated toward others who shared similar feelings about a spiritual sense of being in the world.

With similar Others, a sense of identity was generated through our subjectivities, through our internal knowing and inclinations. This is how we connected with, negotiated, and maintained our sense of indigeneity within a colonial framework for most of our lives:

...I would say as early as Grade 5 or 6. My best friend [name] was from the Reservation...and that's when the connection started. Me and [name] created a Pow Wow presentation for [our] class. (Remi, p. 23)

I had a lot of Ojibway friends, I connected with them...they had such a spiritual side... this was the side that I felt I was missing. This was the side of who I really am. I always felt that there was this space. (Lorraine, p. 9)



While there was no direct question in the interviews about spirituality, participants consistently brought up the topic or discussed it as part of their experiences. The connection between spirituality and identity emerged in relation to their sense of Self and as an expression of their Métis identity:

I'm a type of person who is very sensitive. I'm moved very deeply by a lot of things. I've started recently understanding this as a spiritual realm...it makes me feel that I have a connection to everything that surrounds us (Remi, p. 16)

[I] always felt very deeply connected spiritually to the Earth...and my peaceful place has always been outdoors. When I was kid, I spent as much time outdoors as I could.

(Debbie, p. 13)

This is not unusual as a theme in the literature. For example, Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) tells us:

[an Indigenous perspective of Self] is embedded in the inter-relatedness between the intellectual and spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the creator) realms, and the emotional and physical (body and behaviour/action) realms, to form a whole healthy person"...to "attain a mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, elements of nature and the Spirit World (p. 11).

As one of the interviews stated:

...in the way that I feel, in the way that I view the world, in the way that I see nature, honestly, I feel a genetic connection, which a way to articulate it...not so much a blood line, like putting it on paper...[I]t feels like this is who I am. (Nora, p. 26)

Leroy Little Bear (2000) says that "the realm of spirit and the inter-relationship between

all entities are of paramount importance” (p. 75). Our inner worlds are active value systems connected with those of others. This is integral to our relationships with nature and the spiritual world around us. Elder, Dr. Simon Baker suggests that we were a spiritual people who paid homage to the Creator and we must get back to that way of thinking and being (Baker, as cited in Archibald, 2008). Little Bear (2000) tells us:

[I]n Indigenous epistemology, there is no animate/inanimate dichotomy that allow[s] for talking to trees and rocks, an allowance not accorded in English. Indigenous epistemology understands that everything is animate. If everything has spirit and knowledge, then all are like me. If all are like me, then all are my relations.” (p. 78)

I suggest that within this relationality lies a network of connected subjectivities, not unlike that of a community of trees, which is what the colonial model has tried to sever. The emergence of the spiritual element in my family’s expression of their Indigenous identity was a natural occurrence, despite the silencing and taboos. We continued to be rooted in our sense of our Métis identity through spirit. This was at the core of our experience and we recognized this.

The process of generating connections with my extended family, and creating a space for family to talk openly about the topic of our Indigenous heritage, was significant and enacted through my Indigenous methodological approach. For the first time in several generations, there was a forum to say out loud what had been rumoured for over 30 years. Several family members who had been researching on their own before this project offered the first opportunity to work together, sharing necessary genealogical information. Our lives were validated, and we recognized that we each went through similar experiences in terms of our subjective inner knowing and the political challenges we encountered. I recognized that for each of us our inward journey and subjectivity were not an experience of isolation, but rather a space and place of

relational ties connected to a broader relational network.

For multiple reasons, our ancestors hid their Métis identity. Paradoxically, this hidden identity is where we found each other again. The internal and external struggle that my family and I have experienced, of knowing and not knowing, self-searching, soul-searching, jumping through administrative hoops, silence, shame, denial and divisions (within the family), has been difficult:

Some of the things I've encountered trying to get those official documents is nearly impossible. They make it impossible for us to do it. I've spoken the Métis office here and I was told the documentation specifically has to say "half-breed." I'm like, it [census data] says she's [great-grandmother] Native from Lower Canada, isn't that enough? Why does it have to say half-breed? To me it feels very discriminatory and it upsets me. (Remi, p. 29)

Back in my day, you had to be the fourth generation and beyond that they didn't consider that you would be part of a tribe. But someone told me recently that it's seven years. I have been researching that for a while, I don't know how many years, at least 15 years. Every document that I get about this I print it and keep it. I have a folder just for this. I still have forms when I applied to Ontario Métis Nation years ago. I just didn't have enough information at that time (Nora, p. 3).

Our story is similar to that of many Métis families, and thus part of a broader historical story in which the onus of proof and authenticity is thrust upon the individual. It is the story of a system that operates in intimate places and spaces. This keeps us questioning ourselves and the internal and external struggles materialize in various forms of expression. I see all of these

expressions as multiple views of the same story of denial of the diversity of the Métis in Canada.

I argue that experiences of erasure, fragmentation, and disconnection are juxtaposed with experiences of subjectivity where the Self is rooted in a complex and relational space. Cultivating our voices, telling our stories, and recasting colonial narratives invites us to consider an embodied and inspirited way of being and becoming in the world (Aoki, 2005).

My journey home lingers in belonging and unbelonging, in a lived tension where I have deepened my understanding of my relational connections, where, like rivers I am linked with Others and my ancestors. Through this inspirited inward and outward journey, I have attuned myself to multiple ways of being with/in the world as Métis. This is a living and embodied curriculum, one that Ted Aoki (2005) tells us flows from:

being-in-relation-with-others...and is at the core of an ethical being...[which] guards against disembodied forms of knowing, thinking, and doing that reduce self and others to being things, but also strives, guided by the authority of the good in pedagogical situations, for embodied thoughtfulness that makes possible a living as a human being. (p. 365)

As I come home to Spirit, I cast a light on subjectivity where body and soul intertwine in knowing and *being*. In my pedagogical praxis I am attending to Aoki's (2005) "plea to fine arts educators" to lead and inspire through creation and our sense of poetics, and to cultivate a new curricular landscape [an embodied landscape] that resonates with Earth's rhythms. To create a space and place where attunement can be felt and experienced "in the name of 'inspirited education'" (p. 423).

Autoportrait 6: Inspiring the Arts Curriculum: Pedagogical Encounters

My creation-research is built upon connectivity and engages with embodied and lived experience. In this way it is an inspirited approach to art education and research in an Aokian sense. My IM Spiral enlivens curriculum by opening spaces and generating opportunities to dwell intentionally, both inwardly and outwardly, where body and soul can intertwine in their fullness (Aoki 2005). Creation-based learning offers a way to engage with learning outside traditional frameworks, where rather than studying an object or concept, one can experience it (Aoki, 2005).

I enacted my IM Spiral through collaborative activities, with faculty and students, in various exhibition and related research contexts, at the University of Lethbridge, where I am now assistant professor of art education. In January 2019, I presented my creation-research project at the University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, which supported three consecutive events: an art exhibit, *Embodied Landscapes*; an ArtNOW lecture, also entitled *Embodied Landscapes*; and a collaborative poetry event called *Poetic Encounters*. The art exhibit, which ran from January 4 to February 22, 2019 in the Christou Gallery at The University of Lethbridge,¹⁴ comprised eight 35” by 45” photo-digital collage prints, selected

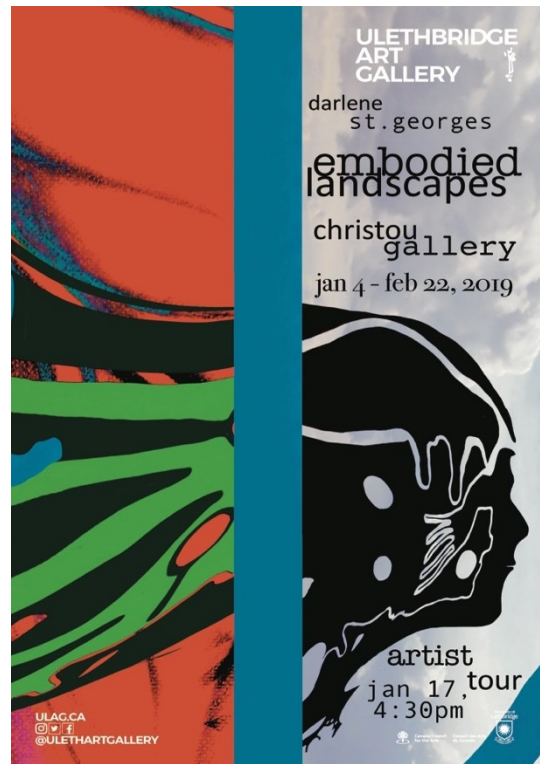


Figure 16. Embodied Landscapes [Exhibition Poster]. Chad Patterson, Designer. Permission of University of Lethbridge Art Gallery.

¹⁴ See: Embodied Landscapes Art Exhibit: <http://www.uleth.ca/artgallery/?p=17273>
Art NOW Lecture: <https://www.uleth.ca/notice/events/art-now-series-darlene-st-georges#.XSTyVql7nUs>

poems, and audio soundscapes. The public Art NOW lecture was hosted by the university's Fine Art Department on January 30th, 2019 and was live streamed at Lethbridge's community art centre, Casa. In connection with my art exhibit, I organized a four-hour collaborative poetry event, *Poetic Encounters*, at the Christou Gallery in February 2019. The Poetic Encounters event was inspired by a poetry activity carried out at the TATE Liverpool Exchange Gallery, 2018. I was invited by Dr. Anita Sinner, primary investigator to take part her Partnership Development Grant entitled, *The Pedagogical Turn to Art as Research: A Comparative International Study of Art Education*, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Canada. I exhibit the beginnings of my creation-research digital collage prints, and under Dr. Sinner's ethics protocol, designed and implement a poetry activity for participants to explore their identity under the auspices *I AM*.

As a result of these events, I received invitations to be a guest artist and educator in an undergraduate liberal-arts class and a graduate seminar in art and activism. The professors who contacted me saw my work as a rich opportunity for their students to engage in meaningful ways with issues of identity, decolonization and social activism. I welcomed these invitations and considered these as integral to my IM Spiral; the outward movement of pedagogical resonances and a type of teaching that is: "a mode of being-with-others...[in which] togetherness of 'doing' and 'being' enfold in 'becoming'" (Aoki, 2005, p. 361).

I present these pedagogical encounters to demonstrate the workings of the IM Spiral and the extent of the inward and outward journey. As an artist, researcher and teacher, what I learn through my inward practices reverberates outwardly and relationally through an inspired living

curriculum with my students and Others.

The Embodied Landscapes Art Exhibit

The opportunity to exhibit my work came by way of an invitation to meet for coffee with Dr. Josephine (Josie) Mills, the Director/Curator of The University of Lethbridge Art Gallery. She reached out to me because I was a new faculty member at the university. She was inquiring about the type of creative work I did, and she gave me a tour of the multiple gallery spaces in the Faculty of Fine Arts. As we talked about my creation-research, she expressed great interest and offered support for my research. She considered my work part of a broader critical conversation and a commitment of art and museum education to heed the Calls to Action generated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2015). In her curatorial statement of my exhibit she wrote:

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its findings and issued 90 Calls to Action, including a call to museums to review policies and implement best practices to advance reconciliation....The University of Lethbridge Art Gallery is committed to keeping the momentum from the TRC going and to building bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and perspectives. Thus, it is with pleasure that we exhibit Darlene St. Georges' exploration of identity through her multi-textural dialogue of photo-digital collage, poetry and sound...(Josephine Mills, 2019).

My creation-based métissage is an entry point to critical action and dialogue that explores understandings of learning that is rooted in subjectivity; our life experience and stories—our lived curricula—are a fundamental source of how we come to know the world. The creation of *Embodied Landscapes*, the métissage of artwork, poetry, and layers of stories has been a life

changing experience for me. During my creation-based process, I was moving inward and outward, encountering memories, searching and sensing, breathing through uncertainty, shifting and traversing through personal and sociocultural barriers, and reaching for incommunicable experiences. I illuminated the past and brought it forward in a critical dialogue with the present, resting at points, and embracing the disparity of my being as a kind of restitution. My journey is not mine alone, however. It is one piece of a larger complex story (Chambers, 2008) and congruent with Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world; it is a story that is meant to be shared (Smith, 2012). In this way my creation work, and exhibit were designed intentionally to connect with Others through multiple creative pathways—visually, textually, and sonically—with large photo-digital collage prints and accompanying poems and soundscapes. My creation-based *métissage* intends to invite people into a relational engagement of interconnecting stories, memories, and experience. Conversations that emerge are intertwined with sensory, spiritual, and intellectual ways of being and knowing. These exchanges are the workings of the Spiral and cultivate what Aoki (2005) considered “a move forward to embrace a more edifying and inspired sense of theorizing” (p. 358). In these encounters and exchanges, Self is activated, and learning is enlivened as we reach back, move forward, and resonate with one another in an active and critical space.

It can be a vulnerable experience opening up to, and with Others. Many artists, educators and students can speak to the sense of vulnerability when learning and creating something new and putting oneself “out there”. I can testify to this experience. I am learning however, that being open with Others in creative and relational ways allows us to embrace learning through a restorative lens where mind, body and spirit are activated and engaged in balance; in an inspired way.

Our personal and collective movement toward truth and reconciliation is a new way of learning to develop an embodied curriculum that resists homogeneity, leverages authentic experiences, and opens up space for new perspectives, knowledge, and alternative stories to emerge. We become stronger when we listen, share, and honour our stories, and when we raise our voices to speak our truths. I believe that opening up to our subjectivities in learning and exploring identity is the foundation of a new kind of art education curriculum. Engaging students in creation-based *métissage* invites them into the curriculum in inspired ways; it creates opportunities for students to learn about their relationships with art and about what art can do.

The Christou Gallery was the most public of three gallery spaces at the University of Lethbridge (See Figure 19). The space is located in a throughway that connects various buildings across campus. Hundreds of students, teachers, and visitors pass through this gallery on any given day. With my exhibit located here, while my sense of vulnerability was magnified, I felt this broad exposure was an important opportunity to connect with my new community. My design of the exhibit intended to encourage people to interact with the work, and to engage with the multi-layered textural poems that were woven with the prints. The poems and prints could be read from multiple directions; right to left, left to right, up and down, or the reverse. There was also a set of headphones to listen to two soundscapes that I created while looking at the images and/or poems.

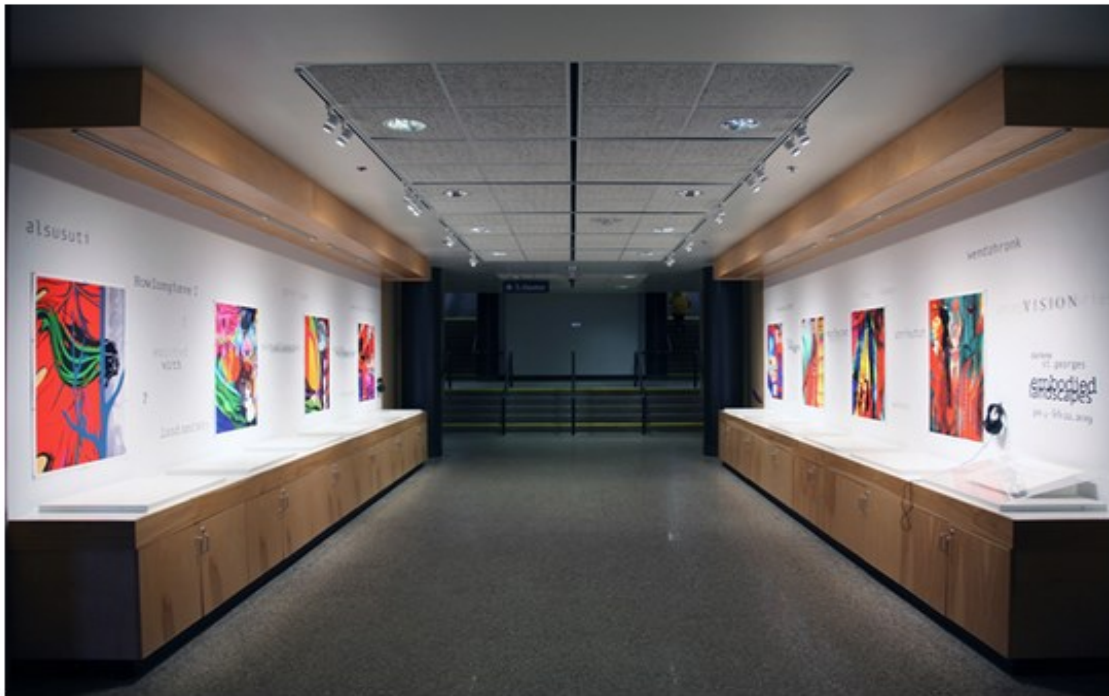


Figure 17. Embodied Landscapes: Helen Christou Gallery, exhibit by Darlene St. Georges. [West-Facing Photo]. Source: University of Lethbridge archive. 2019.



Figure 18. Detail of Embodied Landscapes exhibit: “Ancestral Vision”, Darlene St. Georges [Photo]. Helen Christou Gallery. Source: Author, 2019.

The way the poems engaged with the artwork and how they were installed was unique to a visual art exhibit. This was an important feature because many of the poems incorporated words in the First Nations languages of my Wendat (Huron) and Mi'kmaq ancestors. Mills and her curatorial team were enthusiastic about incorporating my poems. They outsourced a local business to create stencils of the words and use a stippling with graphite powered; each word was installed by hand with graphite on the wall (see Figure 20 and 21) This method and medium supported my creative intention of juxtaposing words and images and allowed flexibility in the placement and layering of the text. Various gradients and tones provided a visual and textual depth and resonance to my poems and words, which was important so that my art could provoke additional layers of meaning.



Figure 19. Detail of Embodied Landscapes exhibit: “Relational Connections Consciousness” [Photo]. Helen Christou Gallery. Source: Author. 2019.

Interweaving multiple art forms and literacies allows us to juxtapose diverse experiences as a way of exploring our personal truths, and the complexities of our identity, including the holes, gaps, and the silences within them. I intended for my art to provoke questions as viewers pondered why the words and images were presented in an atypical arrangement, format, and

style. For instance, the art work shown in Figure 21 features a being-in-motion traversing a boundary, symbolized by the solid blue branch, that is emerging into another dimension of space, and perhaps, time. Hints of animal forms are in the face of this Being. The poem accompanying the image “How long have I existed with land and sky” invites us to contemplate a broader

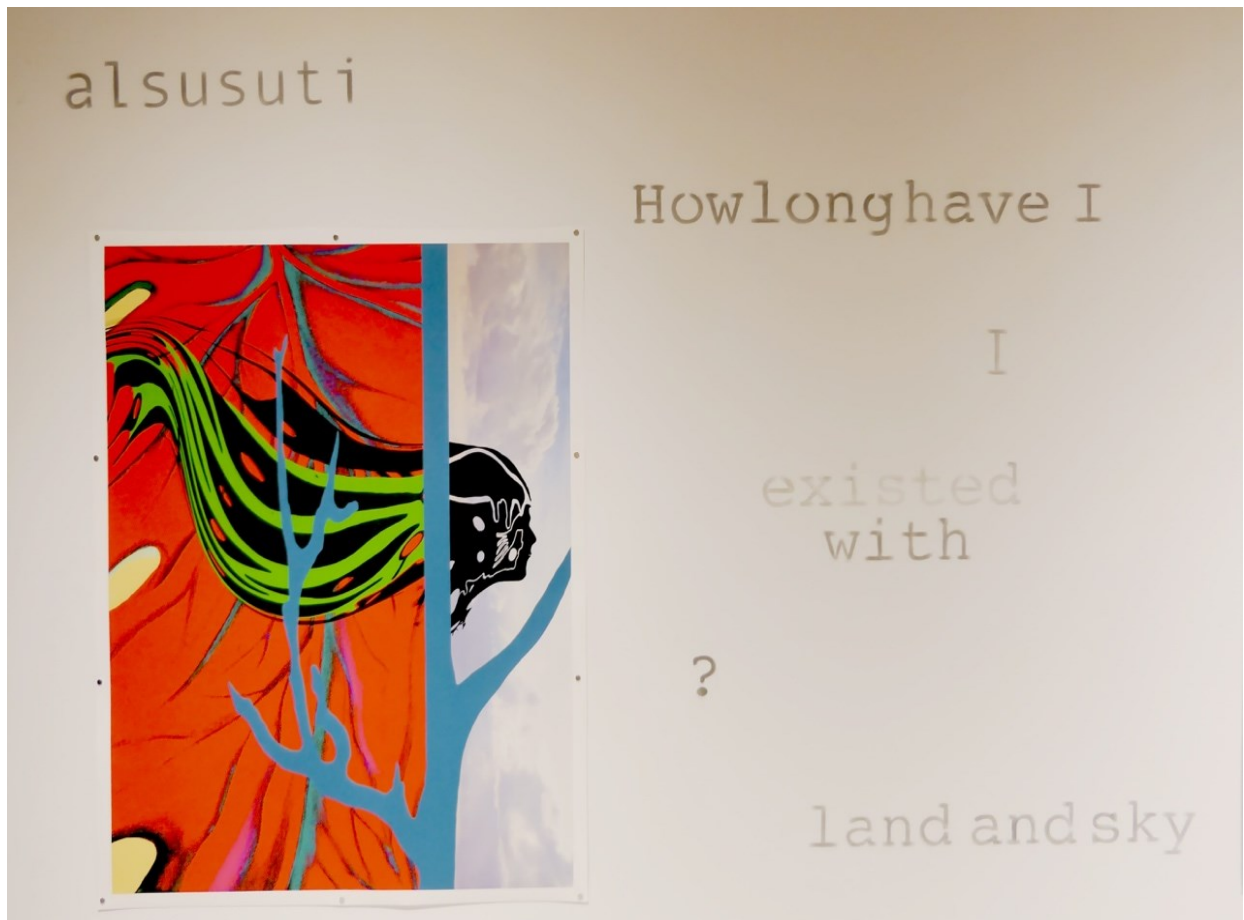


Figure 20. Detail of Embodied Landscapes Exhibit: “Facing East,” *alsusuti*, How Long Have I, I, existed with, land and sky [Photo]. Helen Christou Gallery. Source: Author. 2019.

relational connection that we might have with Others, including other-than-human, our environment, and diverse ecologies. The grouping of the words allows us to read and interpret the text in various ways. “*alsusuti*, How long have I” or “I existed with” or “land and sky, *alsusuti*.” Note that the question mark hovers in the text arrangement. By doing this, my intention was to open up the potential to ask multiple configurations of questions, or more

simply, to question. More than one “I” is presented. What might the repetition and placement suggest? The title of the artwork is *Facing East* and has various interpretations depending upon the viewer’s prior experience and knowledge. Why would the artist display that particular print on the south wall so that it literally faces west and the title it *Facing East*? Perhaps “east” has a different meaning to the artist than a simple compass direction. Facing east could be a symbol for my looking in the direction of my heritage or of new beginnings. Does it have a spiritual connotation? What story is being told? What stories are being generated?

The text in the poem shown in Figure 22, “extending the boundaries of identity,” is stenciled with graphite producing various gradients of grey providing visual characteristics distinctly different from a polished image. Is it text or an image? It resists a linear reading and meaning. Spending time with the poem, a viewer can notice that each word seems suspended in its own space. This offers the potential for multiple ways of engaging with the poem. It invites the reader/viewer to go beyond a literal reading because of its spacial depth. Each word resonates differently because of the overlapping and variety of tones—the words begin to reverberate. Slightly below is the Mik’maq word, *nestuapuguet* (speak wisely), which provokes new meaning in relation to the poem and image. What are the relationships between all of these elements? What is at the intersection of these languages? Both text and image suggest movement and action, which are epistemologically and pedagogically rooted in ways of living and being in relation with/in the world. How are the poem and image related? How does the title of the image: “*iyäa’tou’tenh* (Her Body)” presented in Figure 22, resonate with/in these relationships? In the image, Raven is in flight, emphasized, and centralized within a variety of land, water, and sky references: leaves, tree branch, water, locks, chains, a gate, and a distant mountain. A Hawk soars and can see. What is the relationship between Raven and Hawk? What are the relationships

among identity, extending boundaries, nestuapuguet, her body, Raven, and Hawk? What story is being told? What story is being generated?

As a whole the prints, poems, and soundscapes enacted a multitextural dialogue, a *métissage* of multiple and alternative pathways for audiences to engage with and experience.



Figure 21. Detail of Embodied Landscapes Exhibit: “*iyäa'tou'tenh* (Her Body)”, extending the boundaries of identity, *nestuapuguet* [Photo]. Helen Christou Gallery. Source: Author. 2019.

This is an example of how my IM Spiral functions pedagogical by providing a place/space where we can submerge and emerge in stories of our shared humanity. I want my students to learn how to engage subjectivity, to explore their living curriculum and find relational links with Others. Through the Spiral as we weave multiple literacies, we can generate complex artistic expressions

and understandings that honour our identities and our lives in all its messiness and complexity. In this way we can artistically navigate binaries and limitations through juxtaposing in the ways of métissage to learn about, and with, art. I want my students to recognize that it is possible to move away from reductionist thinking and reach for learning that can traverse binaries and didactic approaches. By helping students to recognize fluidity, movement, and non-static representations of knowledge and knowing, we can embody a curriculum of creation that embraces potentiality, hope, disparities, and uncertainty within and among us, without the need to resolve, reduce or suppress.

The *Embodied Landscapes* Art NOW Lecture

Concurrent with the exhibit, I was invited to give a public lecture, which is part of the University of Lethbridge Fine Arts Department's Art NOW lecture series. This series invites national and international artists to present a forty-five-minute overview of their artistic work, process, and insights. The lectures are livestreamed at Casa, the Lethbridge community art centre. Fine Arts and Education students are encouraged to attend this lecture series. For my lecture I presented the evolution of my art practice and emphasized my *Embodied Landscapes* research. I described my art, teaching, and research as sacred practices that intertwined, informed, and provoked my personal evolution. I presented *Embodied Landscapes* as a journey of tracing of my inward and outward experience, as I reclaimed my Métis identity. I highlighted how my creation-research praxis honours my Indigenous ways of knowing and being and enables me to engage critically and relationally with/in the world. I shared my vision of creation-based métissage as the cornerstone of an inspired arts curriculum, a "teaching that is a tactful leading out—leading out into a world of possibilities...that is alive in tension and attunement" (Aoki, 2005, p. 362).

I drew on the work of Danielle Boutet (2012) who tells us art emerge according to deeper structures in our mind, body, and spirit and manifests our experiences. I emphasized the creative ontological and epistemological capacities of creation-research and how these qualities give us the ability to create stories and amplify our voices. It acknowledges “ways of knowing, thinking, and doing flow from who one is...[in] a curriculum of what it is to be deeply human...” Aoki, 2005, p. 365).

After my Art NOW presentation, some of my art education majors revealed that listening to my talk provided them a sense of validation of their experiences with art and their choices to become art educators, in spite of resistance by some of their peers and family members. I have always considered art to have immense intrinsic value; as an art educator I am intimately aware of how art in schools is often underappreciated. In particular, students were keen to explore in more depth notions of métissage and of weaving multiple elements in their own practices along with the potential for their lesson development for their upcoming practicum placements.

Poignantly, one day before class, a student approached me, eager to share his animated stories that portrayed his struggle with his Cree identity. He showed me multiple short animations he had created using stick figures to embody his subjective experiences. Although his personal story is outside the scope of the ethical protocols for my research project, it points to the pedagogical potential and significance of sharing our stories and how subjectivities can be brought into inspired art education practices.

The *Poetic Encounters* Event and Class Visits

In February 2019, I facilitated with a four-hour collaborative poetry event. It was a free, drop-in, public programming hosted by the University of Lethbridge’s Christou Gallery. This event

invited the public to create “I AM” identity poetry using found and created words, symbols, and



Figure 22. Poetic Encounter wall. [photo collage]. Helen Christou Gallery. University of Lethbridge. Source: Author.

images on the west wall of the gallery (see Figure 23). The goals of this pedagogical encounter were to invite other's poetic voice into the métissage of my *Embodied Landscapes* exhibit, to provide a generative space for people to express their identity creatively and collaboratively with others, and to engage in conversation about what we can learn about Self and Other through creation-based activities. Over the course of several hours, we enthusiastically created our poems. Interestingly, I observed that many people spent quality time watching others create poems, and then carefully engaged with these afterwards, by posting their poems intentional

beside what they saw, to add to or respond to the story then were being told. Many inspired conversations ensued during the event, and I was thrilled to see and participate in such generative poetic encounters.

Dr. Anne Drummond, from the Department of Art History, invited me to speak with her graduate seminar class a week after the *Poetic Encounters* public event. I proposed that along with talking with her students about my *Embodied Landscapes* exhibit, we could also engage in a poetic activity and contribute to the installation. She was thrilled with this idea.

The class was exploring art and activism and was beginning a unit on Indigenous art. Dr. Drummond expressed how my artworks and my Art NOW lecture intersected with key themes she wanted to explore with her students, notably activism and identity themes found in contemporary Indigenous art practices. She, along with many of her students, had attended my lecture and were enthusiastic about spending time with me. These students were active in their own artistic practices, exhibiting their work in the surrounding South Alberta communities and in student exhibition spaces in the Faculty of Fine Arts. The group comprised 15 young adults which included Indigenous students from the local Blackfoot community, other local students and students from various regions of Western Canada.

The class visit was held on site at the university's Helen Christou Gallery. We began with creating identity poems to situate student's subjectivities meaningfully within the exhibit and connect with what they were learning. I shared some detail of the *Poetic Encounters* event and how creation-based learning can help us explore the complexity of identity. I turned student's attention to my exhibit, *Embodied Landscapes*, as an example of how poems can provoke the viewer to engage with the images in multiple ways. Students embraced the idea of working collaboratively discovering the ways we can learn about ourselves and Others through poetic

encounters. Their teacher could see how this experiential and critical engagement supported their current explorations of identity and art activism. These were the relational and inspired ways of the Spiral at work. Students were eager to begin creating their poems and contribute to the already established installation. As students created and shared poems, despite some initial uncertainty, openings and opportunities emerged to engage with each other and ask meaningful questions.

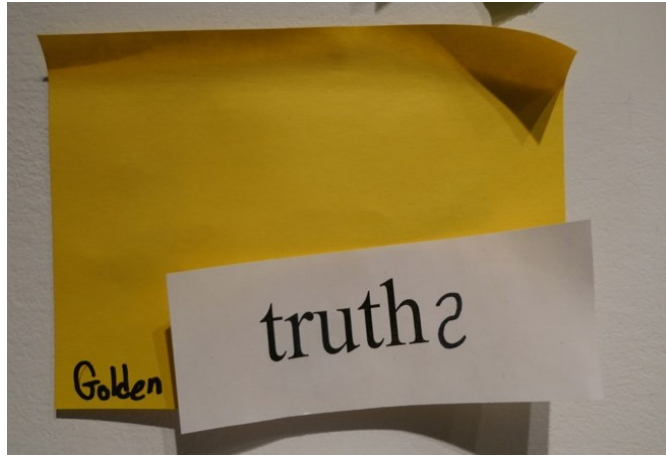


Figure 23. Creation-based poem. Anonymous. 2019. Source: Author.

Some poems gave evidence of this dialogic process by exploring notions of truth. Consider the poem “Golden Truths” (Figure 24), which illustrates how with the juxtaposition of papers with inverted letters provokes multiple interpretations of, and contemplations about truth. Truth is pluralized, suggesting multiplicity and the letter “s” is inverted, which suggests a resistance to logic. The word “Golden” is written in small personalized handwritten text, juxtaposed with the word “truth” presented in a depersonalized type. The positioning of “Golden” at the bottom leaves space for the colour to expand the sense of the word. In this poetic encounter, it seems truth has imposed itself on a vast golden space.

This mini interpretive analysis demonstrates one way of entering into a dialogue with the person who created the work. It is important to note that my interpretations and experience of this creation poem are rooted in my personal experience and knowledge. For instance, in my explorations of identity and subjectivity. I ask, “Whose truth and whose proof should determine my sense of identity?” Each individual viewer will encounter “Golden Truths” differently. This

type of diffractive potential of creation-based métissage becomes an opportunity to explore multiple meanings and our experience, and to consider the intersection where we meet and the moments we diverge in our understandings and subjectivities. As an educator in a teacher education program, I want to challenge my student teachers and create critical opportunities for them to navigate these vital multi-textural dialogues; to explore notions of truth and attend to diversity and difference in their own future classroom.

Alberta's new teaching standard (TQS 5) require that all students and teaching professionals have knowledge and understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures and ways of knowing, experiences, and perspectives.¹⁵ I propose that engaging with creation-based Indigenous métissage, supports students development and aligned with this teaching standard because it offers a way for students to bring their subjectivities into learning. This type of inspired curriculum provokes students to learn about the Other within themselves and the Other in front of them (E. Hasebe-Ludt, personal communication, October 28, 2018).

In Figure 25, the creation-based poem “Uncertain Comfort” invites us into a tension and paradox of juxtaposed words and their meanings. This transport me back to my personal challenges of living in a liminal space of knowing and not knowing, and my creative movements through subjectivity where I explore my own experience and truths. Hasebe-Ludt, et al., (2009b) tell us that it is in these creative explorations and movements that we can listen to the echoes and vibrations of lived experiences, with all their

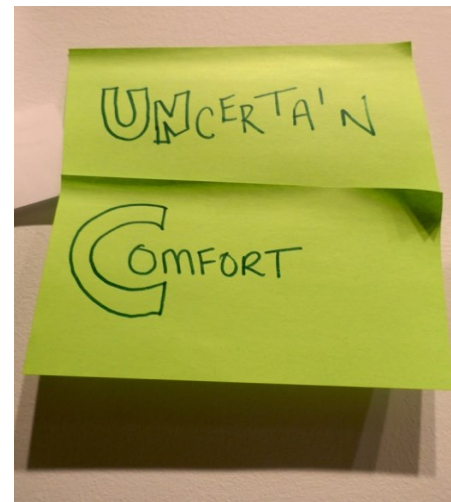


Figure 24. Creation-based poem. Anonymous. 2019. Source:

¹⁵ See: www.learnalberta.ca Teaching Quality Standards. Retrieved February 1 2020.

difficulties and challenges. The creation-based poem “Beyond Space and Time, Beyond Yours and Mine” (Figure 26) seems to be indicative of this kind of movement where subjectivity moves beyond the fixed boundaries of identity and into other new worlds where we are intricately connected with Others.

The *Poetic Encounter* activity provided an indispensable preamble for our engagement with my exhibit and with the themes of Indigenous identity the class was exploring. In this part of our discussion, some students pointed out that many Indigenous artists weave themes of identity into their artistic practices, like Meryl McMaster and Rebecca Belmore. Students were intrigued with notion of subjectivity, which we explore through the poetic encounters activity and began asking questions to learn more. In our discussion I referred to the image “*oa'tahndirih* (She is Strong)”, and accompanying poem “*elue'wa'latl*; telling truths, dismantling lies” (Figure 27) calling attention to a framed image from my passport

(Figure 28). Here is a document that asserts my

identity within an historical colonial framework. I shared how it dawned on me that my passport was a key identity document and how it symbolized the tension of identity and subjectivity, which led me to examine my passport in more detail. I realized that one of only one of 36 pages featured Indigenous symbols: a feather, the Métis infinity symbol, and an Inukshuk, while the rest of the booklet contained images and statements of colonial identity. I was particularly drawn to the image of “The Fathers of Confederation; Les Père de la Confédération,” originally painted

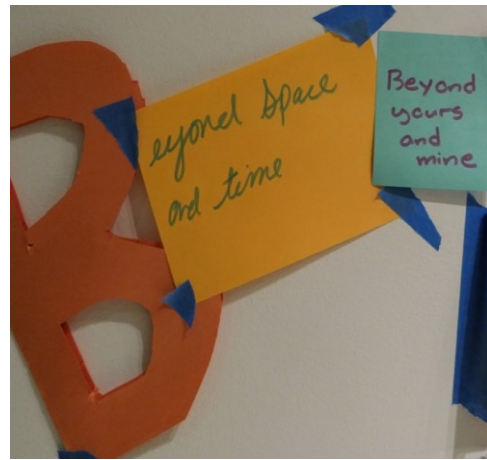


Figure 25. Creation-based poem.
Anonymous. 2019. Source: Author.

by Robert Harris of the Charlotte Conference in 1864.¹⁶ This image represents the British colonies that were founded by 36 male politicians. The caption of the passport image quotes Sir John A. McDonald: “Les Pères de la Confédération founded a great nation—great in thought, great in action, great in hope, and great in position.” “*oa'tahndirih* (She is Strong)” juxtaposes this colonial story with my fragmented family story, about my great-grandmother, a Métis woman who married young, bore many children, and died young from diabetes.



Figure 26. Embodied Landscapes Exhibit, *oa'tahndirih* (She is Strong). Helen Christou Gallery, University of Lethbridge. 2019

¹⁶ Harris was asked to superimpose the larger Québec Conference of October, to include colonial architecture in the image. This painting was destroyed when the parliament building burned February 3, 1916 and later recreated by Rex Wood in 1968 See: https://www.ourcommons.ca/About/HistoryArtsArchitecture/fine_arts/historical/609-e.htm



Figure 27. Embodied Landscapes Exhibit [Detail, Les Pères de la Confédération] oa'tahndirih (She is Strong). Helen Christou Gallery, University of Lethbridge. 2019.

In this art piece I purposefully put the Fathers of Confederation image within a superimposed nineteenth-century colonial frame to juxtapose this grand narrative with the *petits récits* of my ancestors.

My portrait, and particularly my defiant pose and facial expression, along with the poem, “Telling truths, dismantling lies, in bits and pieces”, tell this story (Figure 29). After the class visit many students lingered in conversation and shared aspects of their own personal experiences and struggles with identity. These were a vital curriculum conversation which created resonances between us and our stories.

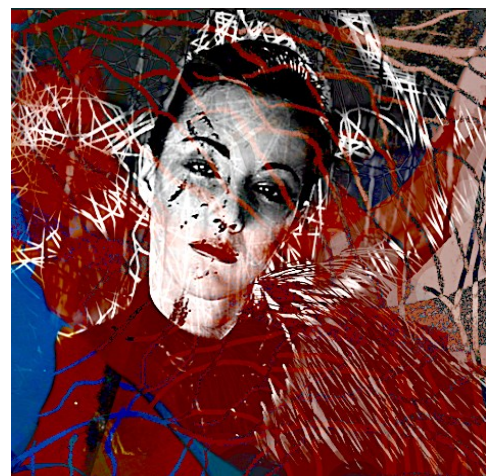


Figure 28. oa'tahndirih (She is Strong). [Detail].

Having an opportunity to talk with classes about my creation-research was an honour. Dr. Bruce MacKay, in the Department of Liberal Education, was opening his undergraduate course with a discussion on the theme of identity and decolonization. I met with his class shortly after the opening of *Embodied Landscapes* exhibit and before the *Poetic Encounters* event. He was expressed how my work was a rich opportunity for his students to engage in person with an artist who was exploring the topic they were opening the semester with. Like the graduate class, we met on site at the exhibit. When I arrived the students and the professor were engaging with the exhibit, mingling, and talking with each other. This was a moment of pause for me as I witnessed the relational opening that my research created. I was inspired to reflect on the value and potential of my research for arts education. Intuitively, I abandoned the prepared introduction to my lecture and instead opted to mingle awhile with the students in conversation.

Students seemed attuned and attentive to explore themes of identity and decolonization, in the context of Truth and Reconciliation. As part of this relational pedagogical journey I drew the student to attention to “*atriho ’tat*—Pay Attention,” (Figure 30) and the tattooed statement on the arm in the image, “recognition of being.” I encouraged the students to share their thoughts about the artwork and talked with students about how Kim Anderson’s (2016) story inspired this image and my thinking about how indigenous people consider identity as fluid and complex and intricately related to communities of others that include other-than-human. In this way “*atriho ’tat* (Pay Attention)” speaks about the challenge and necessity of standing up and asserting oneself.



Figure 29. Detail of Embodied Landscapes Exhibit: “*atriho ’tat* (Pay Attention) manifested cultural survival”. [Photo]. Helen Christou Gallery. Source: Author. 2019.

Students were encouraged to share their perspective on how the stenciled words, “manifested cultural survival,” in the image informed them. They saw the visual and textual components of the artwork as representing the struggle to save Indigenous languages and cultural practices. One student remarked that identity is a “double-edged sword” in the sense of belonging and knowing, or not knowing where you belong; reflective of my own personal story. Another student commented on how our communities are trying to get along, but that the histories, realities, and struggles that result from colonization continue to strain relationships. Students’ insights were powerfully perceptive and a strong indication that they needed opportunities to deliberate their ideas and to examine interconnected experiences. Dr. MacKay noted that his students’ conversations along with his own experience with my exhibit helped him

think more deeply about how he could take up the themes of identity and decolonization with them in newly creative ways. He recognized that alternative learning approaches such as creation-based métissage could allow his students to explore their own experience in the context of what they were learning. He saw that they had a lot to say and contribute and wanted to continue the conversation in subsequent classes.

Upon sharing aspects of my Bear Story and the *Eighth Fire Prophecy* as translated to me by Archie that day along the Moose River on the Mushkegowuk James Bay Coast, moments of contemplative silence permeated the group. A poignant question arose by one of the students: Can we actually have a shared future, given today's ecological crisis and political unrest? This question resonated throughout our conversations and within me, making us aware that we all bear a deep concern for a future we can share.

The pedagogical essence of my IM Spiral—creation-based Indigenous métissage—is how it can support us to engage with complex issues by attuning us to our inner knowing, knowledge, and insights. In this way My Spiral is a proposition of engaging with an inspired curriculum where we can emerge from constraints precisely by asking critical questions and engaging subjectively and relationally in rich, aesthetic, spiritual, and intellectual multi-textural dialogues.

Although self-study is often considered limited as a research approach, through a lens of self-in-relation, Self-study takes on new meaning and potential as a methodology rich in the ways of being, living and learning with each other. I believe my project brings this unique lens to scholarship through its intimate aesthetic quality and in the ways it honours indigenous understandings of our critical interconnections with All Our Relations. In this way, and in this spirit, I have situated my Self as a site of inquiry and have designed my IM Spiral to evoke a

relational and inspirited pedagogy and curriculum. Exploring the complexities of subjective and identity called for such a reflexive and open approach. Inviting family to collaborate with me offers multiple lenses and generates a relational story. I experienced the tensions of qualitative boundaries and undercurrents that conflicted with the relational ethics and spirit of my work, and this has been critical to my learning. Although this research project is concluded, the journey continues to unfold, deepen, and mature. The path of the IM Spiral as a living curriculum, a pedagogy-in-motion is one that I aim to further explore, as my contribution to the evolution of Indigenous methodologies and inquiry through the arts.

Autoportrait 7: A Point of Rest Along the Lines of the Spiral

As I sit here this morning watching the sun rise, I feel grateful to witness a delicious renewal of life; bursts of peach, tangerine, and magenta emerging through hues of lavender and turquoise that rest upon atmospheric ice crystals formed in a moment in time. This fleeting spectacle of life propels me to move closer. I traverse my living room to open the door, finding myself outside, breathing in as deeply as I can; I am facing East through the movements and changes of the sunrise: I am Métis.

As a creation-researcher I have been propelled to explore what is more about *being* and living; beyond the day-to-day duties and the tasks. It is time for us to go deeper into our story worlds (Archibald et al., 2019) with our hearts beating in our lived curriculums. Moving along my Spiral in this research journey and weaving the strands of my creation-based Indigenous métissage, I have discovered and brought forth my voice in the shaping of my own identity, as a Métis artist and educator on my own terms. I have sought out ontological ways of being and learning that arise and move through the rhythms and wisdoms of art and poetry. I have considered deeply Carl Leggo's (2019) call for educators to consider "what it means to be human in the creation, what it means to live in relationship with all of creation, what it means to resonate with voice and voices" (p.103). These selected stanzas of his poem "Ecology" invite meaningful reflection about the delicate and resilient ecologies of our hearts:

If I can believe in an invisible net of worldwide
interconnections in cyberspace, surely I can
believe in the ecology of words and lines of care
borne lightly in the heart, even the unbearable.

I will hold my friends through the blustery
winds of winter into the promises of spring
as I know they will hold me, in blood-beating
heart and imagination and memory beyond
all counting of tense time, in tenderness only.

(Leggo, as cited in Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmich, 2008, p. 96)

These creative wisdoms are intricately linked with Indigenous wisdoms that honour each individual's subjectivity as valuable and integral experiences that connect us, and deepen and expand human collective knowledge.

There is a capacity and potential of creation-based *métissage* practices to produce openings and possibilities; not unlike bursts of magenta through hues of turquoise, an exegesis and approach to attend to the organic nature of our identities; and to recognize the Other in inside us and the Other in front of us.

Envisioning identity as a subjective way of being and living that is philosophically rooted in multiplicity sheds light on the rhizomatic nature of our becoming, one that rests on our ability to change, to adapt, and to embrace the new. It allows us to perceive identity as being subject to transformations. It is always in the process of creation.

By creating a space to generate productive dialogues that reveal and explore the relational links between subjectivity, identity, and learning we can provoke ways to envision and reposition subjectivity in new relational communities of learning.

My IM Spiral offers us a way to weave together a creation-based *métissage*, a creation story that explores and embraces the paradox of the inward and outward journey. This process is

congruent with Indigenous epistemology where our deeply rooted stories are honoured and valued as an integral part of our humanity. It lifts up our voices, provokes us to take up our stories through creative and critical aesthetic practices and challenges us to consider the pedagogical implications of a new inspired curriculum.

This relational and inspired curriculum is a proclamation of agency that is simultaneously personal, political, and transformative. It is a living curriculum and pedagogy rooted in creation that, like sunrises, is unbound, and renewed again and again.

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