Native Youth and the City: Storytelling and the space(s) of Indigenous Identity in Winnipeg

By

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Abstract

What does it mean to be Indigenous in the city? This question, expressing the experiences of a majority of Indigenous peoples in Canada today, is largely overlooked. Indigenous youth, who have grown up exclusively in the urban space of Winnipeg, with limited to no connection with the reserve or rural community of their families, define the contours of this thesis. My own personal and family history as having Cree-Métis roots in the Red River area as well as Scottish-English settler roots will tether along with the main narrative, if only to tell a parallel while also divergent story of the complex historical threads that inform many identities and collectivities today. In the days where Indigenous groups are struggling and fighting to maintain their histories and cultures against the legacy of colonialism that has been trying to rob Indigenous peoples of their history and culture for hundreds of years, the politics of identity are a highly charged scene where historical conflicts are waged. As lines are drawn, however, the complexities and richness of identity often deadened at the expense of urgency and expediency. It is my contention that the youth tell us something about the complexity of individual and collective identity, living as they do in an environment that contains cultural, political, and material paths laid down by both traditional Indigenous and settler-Canadian historical processes. The youth remind us to ground our intellectual and political work in the everyday, the place where our bodies make sense of the world we live in. The practice of storytelling is a unique source of making sense of this world that is grounded in the everyday. I will utilize the storytelling practices of a wide range of authors, and will also seek to expand the practice of storytelling beyond its discursive, literary, and oral forms to that of embodied practice and movement, as well as a primary mediator or our relations with the land. Storytelling helps us see that the youth are on Indigenous land and articulating a dynamic identity that helps us (re)conceive the divisions between the rural/reserve and the city as well as see differently the historical continuities and discontinuities of Indigenous identities. Storytelling becomes the basis in this project for me to seek how our political and intellectual commentaries can become accountable to our everyday experience while also putting the everyday in to dialogue with the political and intellectual concepts we rely upon to guide us.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

> Every attempt to "reproduce the facts" in a documentary way neutralizes the traumatic impact of the events described—or as Lacan, another atheist Catholic, put it: truth has the structure of a fiction… When considered this way, the pleasure of aesthetic fiction is not a simple form of escapism, but a mode of coping with traumatic memory—a survival mechanism.[1]

What better way to start a Native Studies Master's Thesis than a quote from the Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Zizek? If you find it puzzling, don't worry, I am still not entirely sure myself how Zizek 'fits' in to my thinking on Indigenous politics of identity, governance, and decolonization.[2] This thesis will hopefully shed some light on this seemingly bizarre relationship I have with Zizek, and will contribute to thinking through some of the fundamental antagonisms, contradictions, and affinities between more "Western"-based philosophy and Indigenous philosophy in the forms of storytelling and writing. At the heart of this quote, however, is an axiom that I hold dear: Our problems cannot simply be solved by representing the 'reality' of a situation, whether that reality takes the form of a history or a political structure, or simply an interpersonal interaction, from which we can then make appropriate and fair decisions. I do not see promise in the simple objective analysis of an event or moment, whereby someone, acting as arbiter, 'objectively' and neutrally deduces what 'actually' happened and can therefore met out a reasonable and fair form of justice. There are battles being fought across this country trying to determine what 'really' makes a Native person, a Métis person, and so on. And

[1] Slavoj Zizek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012), 23.

[2] The substantial index of his thousand plus page magnum opus, *Less than Nothing,* from which the opening quote is taken, is notable for the exclusion of any reference to colonialism, post-colonialism, decolonization, indigenous politics of any sort, or authors that might be associated with the traditions of post-colonialism or decolonization, like Fanon or Spivak. The point to be made is, Zizek is mostly uninterested in Indigenous politics, and is fervently dedicated to resuscitating a Western tradition of philosophy.

while these questions of who bears the *authentic* markings of Nativeness are troubling to me, I also find them understandable to certain degrees. They identify and articulate a political struggle for life that I identify with. When history has fought so hard to strip a people of their own history, culture, language, and community, we must fight to maintain our dignity and being and to resist the many forms of imperialism and colonialism that continue to degrade our cultures and communities.

But, political forms often have the tendency to obfuscate the complexities of the realities they are fighting for. Settler Colonialism has altered the conditions in which we all exist – what may have been authentic differences between the worlds of settlers and Indigenous peoples at the time of contact are much more complicated today with both worlds intersecting and (in)forming the other. Old forms of thought, pre-contact thought, do not exist free of struggle with settler colonial thought today, and making such a claim often raises more problems than it solves. While we struggle to identify what it means to be Indigenous, we often end up erecting borders that obfuscate the lived realities of peoples encapsulated under those definitions, while leaving others out in sometimes staggeringly arbitrary ways. The question for me, then, is how can we proceed with a politics of resistance to colonialism through the reclamation of our cultures and histories in ways that are sensitive to the complexities of lived experience? How can we (re)create community in ways that do not rebuild and reconstitute a politics of exclusion that is central to the ontology of colonialism? This is where "fiction" comes in for me. It is in the realm of fiction, poetry, and other aesthetic practice and engagement that these difficult questions are being raised and struggled with. It is our responsibility to engage this work. As Neal McLeod has said, the great narrative that is life can never be

exhausted, and there will always be new interpretive locations and embodiments that we must put in to dialogue with one another in order to enrich our understandings of ourselves, the past we come from, and the future we are moving towards together.[3] Our politics must learn how to espouse the forms of individual and collective individuation, to work in relation with the meanings that shape our futures in our struggles of becoming.

The question remains, however, how aesthetic fiction can help us better come to understandings of truth of events like colonial contact and the subsequent history of violent land theft, residential schooling, and the destruction of family, community, language, and culture of Indigenous peoples in Canada, or anywhere? Furthermore, is colonization experienced as such? Or does the violent rupture of colonization live on in everyday life complexly and densely, in ways that we might not have a common language for? For me, I tend to think that the latter is more accurate, and that historical processes are operated in the everyday in unconscious and subtle ways. The question that I am interested in is how trauma lives on generationally, how this informs identity, and what this can teach us about everyday of life and experience. It is at this level that I think aesthetics and fiction are able to operate and thus be affective for more complex understandings of events and things. It is through aesthetic engagements – that is, engagements that are more attentive to the experiential and affective – as both a supplement to and form of empirical study, that I believe we can contribute to a common language and understanding of how colonialism affects our everyday lives and how it lives on through generations of both Indigenous peoples and settlers alike.

[3] Neal McLeod, "Cree Poetic Discourse," in *Across Cultures/Across Borders: Canadian Aboriginal and Native American Literatures*, ed. Paul DePasquale, Renate Eigenbrod, and Emma Larocque (Broadview Press, 2010), 115.

The following thesis is based upon my work with a group of gang-affiliated Indigenous youth in Winnipeg who helped me see that claims of Indigeneity and the collective processes of belonging and community that are encapsulated under the term 'Indigenous' are complex and often contradictory. The crucial lesson that these boys taught me was that life is performative. That is, what we *know* is not strictly conscious and discursive (what can be uttered or enunciated) but is also largely embodied and unconscious. Life, memory, knowledge, history and culture are always enacted and experienced through us, as well as enunciated by us. The life of these boys, while certainly not romantic or easy, showed me how we all literally *act* out our collective and individual identities, how identity is always in surplus of our attempts to define it. I also think that these embodied practices can be read as critiques of rigid definitions of Indigeneity that get lost in the politics of identity and governance. While the political realm is obviously important, it is equally important to press back and keep our political leaders and movements accountable to the complexity of lived reality and the complex procedures of identity and collectivity. It is my contention that indigenous youth in urban contexts are in a unique position to teach us about new ways of living and relating and can help us move forward with more productive questions of what constitutes Indigeneity. Forms of storytelling, especially Indigenous storytelling traditions and forms, are also key to understanding this complex process. My interests in this thesis will be how performance, aesthetics, phenomenological methods, and storytelling are strong tools for helping our intellectual performances catch up to and treat more adequately the intricacies, and also the impermanence, of everyday life. With this intellectual tool set, I believe we can more productively approach a question of what it means to be Indigenous. The specific

question that will be asked is *what does it mean to be Indigenous in the city?* In pursuing this question, I want to contribute an intellectual piece that does not build borders around the fluidity of everyday life, but espouses and works with the processes of individual and collective development.

The key problem that informs my thesis question and focus on performance and aesthetics over other discursive realms like politics and economics, for instance, is that much of critique today depends on realist accounts of social and cultural processes and reductions of reality in to positivist accounts. My experience working with youth and my own struggles of personal identity have been primary locations where these more positivist accounts of reality have been challenged. Working with Indigenous youth who are gang affiliated raised many questions for me about identity and authenticity. It was often my response to think of the youth and their attachments to gang cultures as pointless, wrong, or stupid. But I soon discovered that such a stance was far more complicated than first appeared to me, and that there were significant ethical implications in my attempts of trying to correct these boys' minds and behaviours regarding gang life. We cannot simply go around snatching illusions from people, and thinking we can, or that we are the objective figures who determine what is illusion, is perhaps the ultimate delusional act. If we accept that life is lived like a fiction, then our political actions and efforts toward consciousness raising, in ourselves or in others, must take this in to account. I work with authors, thinkers, and storytellers in this work who all start from this realization, whether it is Walter Benjamin who recognizes the importance of historicity and the need for new constellations to interpret our pasts and look forward in to our

futures[4]; storytellers like Neal McLeod or Lee Maracle who recognize the limitless possibilities of collective narrative[5]; or Lauren Berlant who recognizes, via Freud, the difficulties in adapting and creating new libidinal economies, even when those very economies threaten the growth and well-being of the subjects who embody them.[6] I think there is great power in recognizing and accepting this storied version of reality. But, importantly, I do not argue, or at least *try* not to argue, for a "postmodern" account of reality as pluralistic, with theories as stories we tell each other that are not grounded in reality. As Theodore Adorno once celebrated the late Walter Benjamin, it was Benjamin's genius to elevate thought to the "density of experience" without degrading its rigour and demands.[7] My point is precisely that our stories are grounded in the world, based on our real struggles, and have real, concrete effects in our everyday existence.

This approach also comes from my own reflections on my attempts of claiming and recognizing my Native identity, which has been complicated and even contradictory at times. Coming from a family with historical roots in both settler and Native worlds has often created a tension between my political views and my lived experience. For example, my membership in the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) has been a source of both pride and existential torment. For, while I meet the requirements of membership for the MMF - having a mixed family of Cree and Scottish roots from the unique and formative period in the Red River where and when the Métis come from – my family never overtly identified as 'Métis'. There was always acknowledgement of the Native

[4] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 263.

[5] McLeod, "Cree Poetic Discourse," 115; Lee Maracle, "Oratory: Coming to Theory," in *Give Back : First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice* (Vancouver: Gallerie Publications, 1992), 85–92.

[6] Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism: On Marx, Loss and the Senses," *New Formations* 63, no. 1 (December 22, 2007): 33–51.

[7] Theodor W. Adorno, "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel M. Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), 240.

roots that formed my dad's side of the family, but not speaking the language of Michif, or performing any other cultural practices that I read about as defining Métis culture, I couldn't see how we embodied a Métis-ness. Secondly, and tailing off of this first point, joining the MMF also had particular strategic benefits. Since my father never sought, or cared, to get his Indian Status, the MMF was my only source of official membership in to an Indigenous group, which carries with it not only access to community but also other financial supports. Attending university was not financially viable for me and the MMF helped me support myself during the final year of my undergraduate studies. Yet, getting the MMF to support me was a bit of a struggle, as their funding opportunities were more geared toward vocational studies. I wondered why there was a disinclination to fund intellectual work? Furthermore, the pressures to prove that I had landed a career position directly out of my undergraduate program, which was a BA Honours in history, confounded me. The ample opportunities to work with Manitoba Hydro as an Métis person were also particularly disconcerting for me. My desire to pursue a career in intellectual work, my inability to provide the MMF with positive quantitative data that demonstrated a return on their investment in me, and my own financial motivations for joining the MMF, left me feeling like a fraud at times. More often, however, I feel immensely proud of who I am and my Cree-Métis heritage and have come to meet many people who share similar ambivalences to their 'Métis-ness'. The work I am doing is helping my family remember our past, and, in a small way, contribute to a process of healing. There is a pain that travels generationally through my family - my father's rejection of his Native identity being one such demonstration of this pain - and I want that pain to stop. Part of that healing is to embrace our history, and embrace the pain and

trauma that has informed it. There has to be a reckoning with our past, as we cannot continue to perpetuate this pain. The abuse is not sustainable.

Despite my political intentions and my commitment to connecting with the larger community that my family comes out of, I am often in a very tenuous position in terms of authenticity. As a quite fair skinned individual, the politics of identity and authenticity are quite pronounced for me in their own peculiar way. I tread this balance carefully, and sometimes allow my identity to sneak under the radar, unacknowledged to those I fear will not recognize me as Indigenous. Identifying as Métis can even be a contentious issue in some communities, so I stick with identifying only my Cree background in such circumstances. But the more people I meet, the more I realize that many people share this affliction of being unsure about their identities and pasts. This is precisely a consequence of colonialism in Canada, which makes identity claims like mine even more important and explicitly political today, while also raising a cautionary note for the politics of claiming identity.

It is important to protect identity and community in an environment where it is becoming politically desirable in a Canadian imaginary to claim Métis status as the multicultural backbone of Canada. The political claim that 'we're all Métis' is an insidious liberal notion that does more to destroy community and claims to land and governance than it does to create bridges between Indigenous communities and settler communities precisely because it implicitly denies Canada's colonial past.[8] While it is important to be politically mindful of the consequences of identity claims, then, we must be equally careful that the walls we build during the political process of identity are not

[8] See Adam Gaudry and Robert L. A. Hancock, "Decolonizing Métis Pedagogies in Post-Secondary Settings," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 35, no. 1 (2012): 7–22.

damaging to our own peoples. We must be accommodating to rebuilding communities that have been destroyed, and committed to healing the pain that has been carried through history.

1.1 Identity

How are we to define what it means to be Indigenous, or Native? The Indian Act, and the Canadian government, has been trying to sort this question out for one hundred and thirty seven years, for the sole purpose of assimilating or excluding Indians. The British government, before Canada was confederated, also attempted this feat for many years through political-juridical struggles of defining Indians so they could then be assimilated in to society. As early as 1850, Indian legislation began defining the legal parameters of what constituted an Indian. Peter Kulchyski has shown how through acts like the "civilization act" of 1857 and the "enfranchisement act" of 1869, precursors to the Indian Act of 1876, were attempts by the State to legally mark and marginalize Native peoples so that they could be assimilated.[9] Significantly, these legal precedents, ultimately inspired by the racist beliefs that being Native was undesirable, turned out to be useful tools for Native peoples to fight against hegemonic State policies of assimilation and as a way of affirming their unique cultural status and world views that are the subject of Aboriginal rights and the claims of special status in Canadian politics today.[10] But, that such attempts of assimilation have never been completely successful is not to downplay the pernicious effect that such policies and legal battles have had on communities across the country. Many Native people lost their status as Indian through

[9] Peter Kulchyski, "Primitive Subversions: Totalization and Resistance in Native Canadian Politics," *Cultural Critique* no. 21 (April 1, 1992): 179–80.

[10] Ibid., 180.

similar legal arenas – specifically, the Indian Act – and have subsequently been ostracized from their communities, which has had long lasting effects on family dynamics and sense of belonging for many people across generations.

That banishment from ones community because of Indian Act law has become a real phenomenon in many communities begs the question of how much policies like the Indian Act, while constantly being subverted by Indigenous communities, have also become heavily assimilated in to Indigenous governance systems, ways of thinking, and politics of community. In other words, there must be an attempt to come to terms with the fact that questions of identity largely originated through state interventions.

The subject of this thesis is on the generation of youth today who have grown up exclusively in urban centres like Winnipeg, many of whom are affected by some of the politics of defining Indigeneity that genealogically trace to the Indian Act and other settler-colonial logics of domination. Even if we decide to remove the Indian Act regulations out of the equation and turn to our own qualifiers, like requiring that a community claim you in order to satisfy Indigenous heritage, when one is not sure which community they come from this claiming procedure becomes a bit moot, or at the very least a much more complicated problem. What about those who have never been 'on the land', so to speak? Does not being able to hunt buffalo or pick berries or collect medicines necessarily preclude meaningful identification with the land and ones, albeit historical, people?

The demographic tides of this country are turning, and the majority of Indigenous peoples are now located in cities, according to the 'official' statistics provided by the

government.[11] In a 2013 interview with CTV news, Paul Maxim, an "expert in Aboriginal demographics," stated that according to the National Household Survey the national Aboriginal population had grown over 22% from 2006-2011 because of higher fertility rates amongst Aboriginal peoples compared to the non-Aboriginal population. But, more significantly than fertility, he said, was the other "definitional things" that contributed to population growth – more people are simply identifying as Aboriginal today.[12] Particularly noteworthy for Maxim is that people of mixed-heritage are the ones claiming Indigenous identity at increased rates compared to other Indigenous peoples.[13] For reasons that are unclear, more people are seeking recognition for their status as Indigenous in Canada today, either as registered treaty, non-registered, Métis, or Inuit. But these statistics are limited in what they can tell us. How many of these 'new identifiers', for instance, identify with the categories laid out by the government? Does 'registered Indian' do justice to the rich diversity of peoples and groups that are encompassed in this legal definition? Who has control over what Indigenous means here? And, does Maxim's ambiguous, though slightly incredulous, tone about 'mixed-heritage' people suggest an assertion to authenticity that silently discredits those mixed peoples' claims to identity? It is also interesting that many of the struggles over defining the authentic Métis, as deriving its historical roots from the Red River, would nestle up to Maxim's statement and logic quite nicely. In this short interview article, Maxim demonstrates the politics of identification by focusing only on the state conception of

[11] Aboriginal people living in urban areas (including large urban centres, census metropolitcan areas, and small urban areas) went from 50% in 1996 to 54% in 2006. See Statistics Canada, *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census* (Ottawa, 2007), http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/p3-eng.cfm.

[12] "Aboriginal Population Soaring, Getting Younger: Survey," *CTV News.ca*, May 8, 2013, http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/aboriginal-population-soaring-getting-younger-survey-1.1272166.

[13] Ibid.

identifying indigenous peoples, leaving the motivations for seeking recognition limited to mere self-definitional questions that are to considered suspect and even fraudulent.

In his poem, "Jam Cig Poem," Marvin Francis recalls a beating he and his friend received from a cop. The poem brings to light in a grim way just how much Native identity takes shape from interactions with settler-colonial apparatuses, but how there is a simultaneous resistance to this process:

> I want to jam this poem up that cop's ass
> back seat puncher
> who wants u to confess
>
> wants u to b & e
> meaning broke and evil
> we had jam
> way too much jam
>
> jam christianity down northern outhouse black hole
> cop spits out
> my blood shot eyes
>
> (basically partied in the 70s)
>
> my bloodfreakingshot eyes
> gave his body chills down and up
> after we pissed blood in the alley
> me and mike
> true blood brothers
>
> sat in this twenty-four joint nursing that bit of coffee
> till that waitress jams us some smokes
> in exchange for street story
> she was kool she was real
>
> we were too sore to laugh
> running rain sticky one way ticket jam
> train station grit
> life segment in the ditch
> jam those people memories foggy sidewalk
> jam those cop eyes with this
> jammin' cig poem[14]

[14] Marvin Francis, *City Treaty: a Long Poem*, 2nd ed. (Turnstone Press, 2002), 43–44.

Immediately notable in the poem is the keen sense Francis has on the way that the cop perceives and recognizes Natives. The cop's gaze demands that the Native confess to being poor and a crook, he wants the Native to be broken. But the gaze becomes physical, with violent punches. Francis alludes to the blood that clouds his and his friend's urine as they pee together in the back alley. The blood, caused by a beating, signifies recognition by the cop, his simultaneous violent *reading of* and *writing on* the Native. Francis cleverly flips blood quantum calculation on its head in this moment, showing a different way of calculating blood brothers, and revealing how central the state is to enforcing blood status. By showing blood as part of the shared experience between two friends Francis shows the violence of blood quantum, the dangers of letting the state define who you are. This form of recognition is all too familiar for Native peoples on the streets of Winnipeg.[15]

What is exciting about Francis' poem, despite the violence of settler-colonial state, is that he simultaneously opens up and reveals a different world, one that the cop or state can never see. "we had jam/ way too much jam." But what does 'jam' mean? Too much attitude? Maybe jam stands in for alcohol, a central mediator between Native people and cops in Winnipeg, filling the drunk tanks on a Friday and Saturday night. In this reading, Natives always have too much jam, even when raucous white patrons crowd the street just blocks away. But, white jam is understandable – a form of releasing steam after a week of hard work. Perhaps jam is an understanding, something that comes with shared experience, such as when the "real" waitress "jams us some smokes" in trade for

[15] Elizabeth Comack, *Racialized Policing: Aboriginal People's Encounters with the Police* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2012).

"street story." But also, Francis urges us, jam those memories, of poverty, of death and "life segment in the ditch," and all the other symptoms of violent occupation, tragic and violent endings that over crowd an entire peoples imagination and experience. Jam the life of one-way tickets, a life that sticks to you, gritty. And most of all jam this up that cop's ass. Relentless strength and determination. Francis exhibits the audacity to recognize oneself despite the violent gaze of the cops and government. Self-determination. This, I think, is precisely what Glen Coulthard speaks to in his essay, "Subjects of Empire," when he calls on Indigenous peoples to recognize themselves and abandon recognition through the state.[16]

Compare this description of self-determination to that of the more explicit and politically motivated calls for self-determination of Taiakie Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, who claim that 'authentic' Indigenous life is fundamentally opposed to the political, economic, and cultural imperatives of capitalism and settler-colonial society.[17] Any politics of decolonization and resistance must therefore embrace the ways of life of Indigenous ancestry, such as remembering ceremony, returning to homelands, regaining language and adopting values of strong family and community, connection to land, storytelling, and spirituality.[18] Yet, what do these words really mean? What land are they referring to, and what does it mean to return to a homeland? Current day Winnipeg sits on top of a homeland. How to return to it? Do Alfred and Corntassel fall in to the trap of the

[16] Glen S. Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (2007): 437–460.

[17] Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, "Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism," in *Racism, Colonialism, and Indigeneity in Canada*, ed. Martin J. Cannon and Lina Sunseri (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2011), 142.

[18] Ibid.

intellectual who becomes allured by an ancient culture that Fanon warned us about over fifty years ago? Recall his description of such an intellectual:

> The culture with which the intellectual is preoccupied is very often nothing but an inventory of particularisms… merely a reflection of a dense, subterranean life in perpetual renewal. This reification, which seems all too obvious and characteristic of the people, is in fact but the inert, already invalidated outcome of the many, and not always coherent, adaptations of a more *fundamental substance* beset with radical changes. Instead of seeking out this *substance*, the intellectual lets himself be mesmerized by these mummified fragments which, now consolidated, signify, on the contrary, negation, obsolescence, and fabrication.[19]

When a group of people decides to wage resistance against an oppressive power that is holding them down, the fascination with culture, in Fanon's description of it, becomes a pathetic and impotent urge by those disconnected and unable to feel the "fundamental substance" of the people. So what is this substance of perpetual renewal, and how does this conception reconcile with articulations of the *authentic*? In such struggles, Fanon reminds us,

> [it is] not enough to reunite with the people in a past where they no longer exist. We must rather reunite with them in their recent counter move which will suddenly call everything into question; we must focus on that *zone of hidden fluctuation* where the people can be found, for let there be no mistake, it is here that their souls are crystallized and their perception and respiration transfigured.[20]

It would be unfair to compare Alfred and Corntassel to the kind of intellectual Fanon lambasts. Their categories of Indigenous, while a bit cut and dry, are, I think, recoverable and touch on something more complicated than perhaps their political and polemical discourse permits them to develop more thoroughly. Land, ceremony, family, culture. What do these things mean? And why are these concepts and practices so

[19] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 160.
[20] Ibid., 163. My emphasis.

opposed to capitalist and colonial society? Do, and can, these things identify the "counter move," do they dwell in that "hidden fluctuation" that has the power to "suddenly call everything in to question"?

The key to Alfred and Corntassel's argument about Indigenous resistance is that colonization is, as Alfred has said elsewhere, a "total relationship of power" that implicates everyone.[21] In other words, a totalizing power, the subject of much of Fanon's writings and those that he studied and worked with, such as Jean-Paul Sartre.[22] Peter Kulchyski has described this totalizing power as the movement of capital and the consolidation of the state, two movements of power that marginalize and exclude while also assimilating subjects in to their threshold.[23] The State, in its efforts of totalization, works on "imposing capitalist space and time, territory and history, on a territorially defined social collectivity. Both space and time are organized along the same principle as the factory assembly line, that is, seriality."[24] We begin to see that totalization is the work of homogenization, whereby all social and material processes have to be made commensurable. But it is here that Alfred and Corntassel, and also Kulchyski, claim that Indigenous peoples, such as traditional peoples and gatherer/hunter societies, have a different set of worldviews and practices that challenge this totalizing force. The problem is still how we articulate and imagine these different worlds. Political discourse often leaves these descriptions out.

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[21] Taiaiake Alfred, "Colonial Stains on Our Existence," in *Racism, Colonialism, and Indigeneity in Canada* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4–5.

[22] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1–2. Decolonization was, for Fanon, thus nothing less than absolute change, where "The last shall be first." (2).

[23] Kulchyski, "Primitive Subversions," 175.

[24] Ibid., 176.

Is it possible for two different groups of people to live in the same place, or location, but have completely different ontological frameworks and relational dynamics for this place? And, can these differences be conceptualized beyond simple cultural variations of interpretation of a single reality? Mario Blaser is one anthropologist today who is suggesting that we think ontologically about these questions. For Blaser, ontologies do not pre-exist the everyday, but rather they are performed in to existence. Borrowing from Bruno Latour the term "Factish," Blaser argues that reality is relational; reality is not simply reducible to 'facts' – pure, external objects – or fetishes – reified subjectivity in objects – but is the relationship, the practices and performances, between subject and object.[25] With such a form of thinking, the multicultural arguments of cultural difference that measure all difference based on the dominant social forms can be judged for what they really are: forces of totalization. Blaser uses E. Viveiros de Castros' term "uncontrolled equivocation" to describe what he means by this:

> 'a type of communicative disjuncture where the interlocutors are not talking about the same thing, and do not know this.' Uncontrolled equivocation refers to a communicative disjuncture that takes place not between those who share a common world but rather those whose worlds or ontologies are different. In other words, these misunderstandings happen not because there are different perspectives on the world but rather because the interlocutors are unaware that different worlds are being enacted (and assumed) by each of them. These equivocations are prone to go unnoticed where, as it is the case of the relation between the modern and the non-modern, asymmetries permeate the discursive field.[26]

Such 'uncontrolled equivocations' can explain how different Indigenous significations may be subsumed under national identity and state sanctioned processes. The supposed Canadian national identity of "Métis-ness" proposed by John Ralston-Saul is a good

[25] Mario Blaser, "The Threat of the Yrmo: The Political Ontology of a Sustainable Hunting Program," *American Anthropologist* 111, no. 1 (2009): 11.

[26] Mario Blaser, "Political Ontology," *Cultural Studies* 23, no. 5 (2009): 883.

example of this. Ralston-Saul effectively effaces the Métis nation and colonial history while absorbing this title as a productive identity for non-indigenous peoples.[27] Cultural, economic, and political hegemony in fact depends upon this very misrecognition. With such an emerging picture of cultural, economic, and political hegemony that Indigenous peoples have been resisting, we can begin to understand and sympathize with the political discourses of Indigenous intellectuals like Alfred and Corntassel. But, we still do not necessarily understand what they mean by authentically Indigenous.

The categories of returning to Homelands, reconnecting with the land, and remembering ceremony remain quite abstract and even meaningless. In the words of Lee Maracle, "If it can't be shown, it can't be understood."[28] These political discourses remain too stuck in the world of Western, positivist notion of theory, she might say, preventing them from making any sort of meaningful connection with the lived experiences of people. Recall her description of the peculiar self-referential definition of *theory*:

> Theory is a proposition, proven by demonstrable argument. Argument: evidence, proof. Evidence: demonstrable testimony, demonstration. We are already running into trouble. There are a number of words in the English language with no appreciable definition. Argument is defined as evidence; proof or evidence is defined as demonstration or proof; and theory as a proposition proven by demonstrable evidence. None of these words exist outside of their interconnectedness. Each is defined by the other.[29]

She goes on to distinguish Theory from *Oratory*, as:

> place of prayer, to persuade. This is a word we can work with. We regard words as coming from original being—a sacred spiritual being. The orator is coming from a place of prayer and as such attempts to be persuasive. Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social

[27] Gaudry and Hancock, "Decolonizing Métis Pedagogies in Post-Secondary Settings," 8.
[28] Maracle, "Oratory: Coming to Theory," 87.
[29] Ibid.

> interaction and thus, *story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people.[30]

The emphasis is on *story,* the form of communication that enacts proof and ideas in its *doing,* or through the very performance of the story. Is this creation through doing not unlike Blaser's conceptualization of reality as coming in to being through practice and performance? Cree storyteller, Neal McLeod, has similarly suggested that Cree narrative memory is a performative act of processing and creating knowledge: "As the storyteller weaves his tale, there are elements of description and analysis: the storyteller describes events and experiences, but also analyzes this experience. The stories are reflected upon and critically examined, and they are brought to life by being integrated into the experience of the storyteller and the audience."[31] The processual, performative, and practiced nature of stories is suggesting a different kind of truth for Maracle, Blaser, and McLeod. Their statements also echo the words of Walter Benjamin when he says in his essay, "The Storyteller," "…it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it…The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the ready. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks."[32] What made storytelling unique and powerful for Benjamin was that stories were intended to help people understand and navigate *their* worlds, in ways that made sense to the listener's cultural and subjective coordinates. Maracle reminds us that in the pressures to remain

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited, 2007), 8.

[32] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 89.

‘objective’ in our thinking, "It takes a lot of work to delete the emotional and passionate self from story, to de-humanize story into "theory." So we don't do it. We humanize theory by fusing humanity's need for common direction -- theory -- with story."[33] Our knowledge needs to make sense to our daily lives if we hope to transfer that knowledge in to action and relations within our world. Storytelling indicates an active engagement, a relationship, between teller and listener, who are both invested in incorporating this knowledge in to their daily lives.

While storytelling requires work, it is productive precisely because of the mystery that forms the currency it deals in. It is precisely the mythical quality of stories that gave them their power and function in society, argued Benjamin: “whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairy tale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest.” He continues, “The wisest thing—so the fairytale taught mankind in olden times and teaches children to this day—is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits.”[34] McLeod also suggests a similar logic of mystery in his description of the storytelling tradition of Cree poetics:

> Cree poetics link human beings to the rest of the world through the process of mamahtawisiwin, the process of tapping into the Great Mystery, which, in turn, is mediated by historicity and wahkohtowin (kinship).[35]

He continues:

> Poetic thinking involves dreaming, relying on the visceral, like a painter or jazz musician. A poetic way of thinking urges us to radically rethink the surface of things, like a dreamer. Such thinking allows us to bring back the

[33] Maracle, “Oratory: Coming to Theory,” 89.
[34] Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 89.
[35] McLeod, “Cree Poetic Discourse,” 109.

> words and the depth of the Great Mystery that the kehte-ayak [old ones] have already charted out.[36]

In Mcleod's version of Cree tradition of storytelling, mystical thinking provides a tool for creatively reinterpreting old stories and narratives and articulating them in ways that guide people in to the future. As he says in *Cree Narrative Memory*, it is in stories that people gain their voice, hope for the future, and understand their place in this world, and, most importantly, it is through stories that people remember who they are.[37] In both Benjamin and McLeod's work, they suggest the need for story as a way of challenging the narratives that are negatively affecting us. Stories, McLeod argues, can help us find our way out of colonialism.[38] It is with this understanding that we come to see why Mario Blaser puts so much stock in to stories as well. For Blaser, it is through story that ontologies are brought in to being, and it is stories that allow us to grasp the existence of the things in our world and to understand the relationships of dependence that exist between things.[39] Storytelling, in other words, is the process of creating reality, the mediation of the factual and material with the subjective. Following these writers, thinkers, and storytellers, the important thing I want to emphasize is that there is a clear difference between telling and storytelling. Land requires a story to be land, otherwise it is just an abstract notion.

So what is to be done with Alfred and Corntassel's political discourse? Is it adequate simply as a political discourse that highlights the struggles Indigenous peoples face with settler-colonial society, and that Indigenous peoples need to unearth the ancient

[36] Ibid., 112.
[37] McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory*, 70.
[38] Ibid., 9.
[39] Blaser, "Political Ontology," 877.

wisdom of their ancestors that is antithetical to settler-colonialism, which will guide resistance to the totalization of settler-colonial society? Yes, I think it serves a very useful role in this capacity as commentary and polemic. I commend these scholars for the work they do, and I look up to them in many ways in my own intellectual development and how I relate that to community. The problem though is that the meanings of identity and the reality they propose in their discourse remain quite abstract and are not grounded. If we take their category of land, for instance, literally, this could be interpreted as calling for urban Indigenous peoples to return to hunter/gatherer-type living, something that many do not have the skill set for nor the desire or inclination to pursue. Is it sustainable, or ethical, to uproot people who have grown up in the city to another location that is alien to them? But we should not simply take these categories as metaphor either. Land and ceremonies are not metaphorical, they are realities, they are things. As Tasha Hubbard has described so convincingly in her discussion of Indigenous processes of collective memory, memory is a lived practice and a reality in itself. It should not be thought of as simply a metaphor that represents reality or a moment in time that has been catalogued for future reference in ones mind.[40] Similarly, land and ceremony do indicate a particular reality, or ontology; they are reality and must be practiced and performed in to existence. I assume Alfred and Corntassel actually have a very intimate understanding of this, and that this is precisely what they are arguing for in their texts. My only addition to their work is that we attempt to make these political categories more relevant and accountable to lived experience. The following chapters will be different approaches and explorations in to how this might be done differently, focusing on what I think is the unique position

[40] Tasha Hubbard, "Voices Heard in the Silence, History Held in the Memory: Ways of Knowing Jeannette Armstrong's 'Threads of Old Memory'," in *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*, ed. Renate Eigenbrod and Renée Hulan (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 149.

of Indigenous peoples in urban settings, and particularly the space that the youth occupy in the urban.

There does remain another problem, however, with purely political discourse. Since political discourse often develops in temporalities of urgency and realities of crisis, it becomes easier to overlook the larger ramifications of our ideas and resolutions in our attempts to protect ourselves. A theme that will be explored in the latter two chapters will be what political concepts of Indigenous identity can mean for urban Indigenous peoples. Specifically, what I notice is that spatially bifurcated concepts of land, whereby Indigenous peoples are relegated to reserves and White, European-settler peoples to cities, is often maintained in political discourses of Indigenous identity, evidenced even in Alfred and Corntassel's discourse of land above. I will argue that these are ways that settler-State dynamics and logics have permeated and influenced Indigenous thought and practices. Native Studies scholar, Mark Rifkin, is a very perspicacious reader of such dynamics where settler-State logics are infused in to Indigenous community politics and struggles for self-determinacy. Acknowledging the important role that the conditions in which Indigenous struggles occur determine possibilities for being, Rifkin notes that

> Whatever Indian, tribe, or Indigenous might mean, the possibilities for identifying and acting as such are contingent on, though not mechanically determined by, how those terms/concepts are deployed, implemented, regulated, and policed in… law and policy.[41]

Recognizing the intertwining of State structures and logics with Indigenous politics, Rifkin reads several Indigenous poets and fictional writers who have interesting ways of

[41] Mark Rifkin, *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing in the Era of Self-Determination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 13.

exceeding "the literalizations of settler policy."[42] Following theorists like Raymond Williams, Rifkin argues for new practices of metaphor, recognizing it not only as a representational device but also a process of creation. In this sense Rifkin follows the thinkers above, like Hubbard and McLeod, in that metaphor is not simply a categorizing tool (though it is that too), but also a reality and a *becoming* reality. It is this latter aspect that he emphasizes as the creative and productive forces of metaphor. For Rifkin, a la Williams, metaphor has two major functions: emergent and residual. By residual he refers to the processes of bearing impressions of a reality that exists but generally goes without notice in everyday life. Emergent, on the other hand, refers to the ways that metaphor can identify and articulate new ways of being, new values and meaning, and new ways of relating.[43] Rifkin then suggests that metaphor understood this way could alert us to the ways that literary texts are part of a larger process of negotiating sociopolitical formations:

> …the residual and the emergent theoretically and practically are enmeshed, the enduring past providing both existing and possible options that can be materialized further in social practice while also being altered in the process. If indigeneity minimally entails some claim to precede settler occupation, metaphor, in its bridging of the residual and the emergent, can provide a resource for uncoupling such continuity from dominant ways of narrating and regulating what constitutes Native being, opening up the possibility of recognizing other modes of being—other social formations—as *really* Indigenous.[44]

Rifkin thus incorporates Fanon's earlier critique of the trap of the past and ancient, while maintaining a past that can work with new modes of being. Metaphor for Rifkin becomes a way of negotiating society similar to the storytelling methods outlined by figures like

[42] Ibid., 17. By literalization Rifkin refers to the process by which concepts become reality, and how those literalizations become part of Indigenous collective processes and experience.
[43] Ibid., 18.
[44] Ibid.

McLeod and Maracle, a process that both acknowledges history and pushes forward in to the future. My wager is that it is with such strategies of metaphor and storytelling that there is hope for the political discourses and struggles articulated by Alfred and Corntassel.

Rifkin's work, through his reading of Indigenous writers and poets, ultimately alerts us to the need to put our definitions of Indigeneity in check. Particularly, the question of memory put forth by Rifkin permits us to address the legacies of trauma and rupture in ways that acknowledge the shared history of colonialism but also the infinitely unique ways that peoples and communities have been affected and the different strategies that people are using to push forward with. Furthermore, in thinking through the trauma, we must also come face to face with aspects of our shared history that are not comfortable and may even be shameful. This is something that I address when discussing masculinity in Chapter 4. Following the lead of Veena Das in her thinking about how violence is lived on in memory and the necessity for creating a common language to account for the shared experience of that memory, Mark Rifkin says:

> If processes of settlement fracture prior sociopolitical formations, they and the violence done to them live on in memory, and that memory as lived, refracted by, and passed on in "ordinary relationships" gives rise to collective experiences for which there is not "a shared language," especially as sanctioned by a state whose existence is made possible by and sustained through that violence and its official erasure (or sublation as redemptive *recognition*).[45]

Storytelling and metaphor become ways of building this common language and accounting for the violence of our pasts, which lives in our present, and moving forward.

I thus view storytelling in this work as a way of reckoning with the history of

[45] Ibid., 20.

colonialism, in its many forms, and also as a way of developing new ways of being within the world. In chapter 3 I will perform a similar analysis as Rifkin in my reading of the work of Duncan Mercredi, a Winnipeg resident who comes from Grand Rapids, Manitoba. Mercredi is one of those writers, I think, who articulates a unique way of being Indigenous in the city that grounds the complex processes of identity and collectivity and the spatial realities in which they develop. While I will perform a literary analysis of Duncan Mercredi's work and relationship with the city, I also seek to set out how this process is literally grounded in the city and the history of that city. In other chapters I attempt to lay out a broader methodological approach that focuses not only on literary discourse or textual based strategies for realizing new dynamics and modes of Indigeneity. I also write about how the youth in the city that I work with are *writing* new modes of Indigeneity in different performance based, everyday ways. In this regard, I have been trying to develop my own methodology of *storylistening.* Chapter 2 is a story of my relationship with the male youth I have been working with at a program dedicated male Indigenous youth who are gang affiliated. This story is about how our identities are relational and constantly being negotiated with those around us. In chapter 4 I attempt to think through some of the ways I see the youth negotiating their identity through city space and particularly how this negotiation is facilitated by hip-hop lyric writing and music video production at a program called Just TV, situated at West Broadway Neighbourhood Centre in Winnipeg.

1.2 Who is the Story for?

If we understand colonialism and capitalism to be co-producing totalizing forces; if, as Alfred puts it, both settler and Indigenous communities have been affected by a system based on fear, violence, and lies, then we must also include settlers in to our stories at some level. Settlers must also be part of the process. I see my own story as one that is stuck in both of these worlds, growing up mostly in a white-Canadian identified household with a Native family history and culture forming the background. I struggle to negotiate these two family histories, cultures, and modes of being. In my identification with my Native family, I must also be true to the settler-European roots that inform my life experiences. Brenda LeFrancois recently wrote a piece where she shares her story of working in the social work industry, and the various ways that her settler identity is embodied despite her best intentions.[46] As someone who is self-reflexive and thinks about her role in a colonizing system, who sympathizes with the victims of her industry, she is inevitably recognized as embodying that institution and its history. Her political discourse and self-identification as sensitive and aware of the dynamics of colonialism are almost meaningless when facing a mother who perceives LeFrancois and her boss as enforcing paternalistic regulations on the way that this woman raises her child. Despite our intentions, the history of settler occupation must be reckoned with. Such stories of how the settler colonial world is embodied have helped me to accept and to reconcile my own identity as a settler. They have also helped me recognize the importance of putting my own story in to dialogue with a larger one of colonialism.

[46] Brenda A. LeFrancois, "The Psychiatrization of Our Children, or, an Autoethnographic Narrative of Perpetuating First Nations Genocide through 'benevolent' Institutions," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (April 5, 2013), http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/18687.

As Mark Rifkin recently asked in a presentation at NAISA 2013, in Saskatoon, titled "Settler Common Sense," *how do future generations live the land theft that their forefathers enforced and enacted*?[47] The suggestion is that, were these generations to talk 'realistically' about the ways their fathers received land it would be beyond comical and could not sustain the personal and existential realities that have been created to justify and normalize this history of land theft. Just imagine a father sitting around a campfire with his children, telling them stories of how terra nullius permitted his great-grandfather to legally take the land that a group of Indigenous peoples lived on. Or how they forced a treaty on a group under duress, with a well-armed group of soldiers for intimidation. No, the father would tell other stories, ones that inspire adventure and a sense of wonder in his children. And, most importantly, he would believe them himself. Stories of struggle and perseverance, of conquering the inhospitable winters of the prairies, and so on. LeFrancois was unable to broach the divide between her own political sensibility and the institutional logics and culture of her workplace. She identified as someone who is an ally to Native causes, yet despite her good intentions and politics the clients she worked for did not recognize her as an ally. The logical follow up question to Rifkin, then, is *how do Indigenous peoples talk to and negotiate with those future settler generations?* How do we share our stories together and struggle against the totalizing violence of settler-colonialism and capitalism? How do we even recognize the forces of totalization that inform the quotidian of our everyday lives?

I see this thesis as a storytelling process, allowing me to engage in a larger discussion of collective history and remembering. It is not only about the boys, but also

[47] Mark Rifkin, "Settler Common Sense," in *Recuperating Binarism* (presented at the NAISA, Saskatoon, 2013).

about me and my relationship to Native community and identity, and how my family's history demonstrates a common symptom of colonial history in Canada. Like Mcleod, I think it is important to stress all discursive and narrative locations:

> Narrative imaginations expand the interpretative possibilities of the sacred story and, in turn, the interpretative possibilities of the present moment and present reality. The narrative layering of the story engages our state of being embodied in a collective poetic pathway, allowing us to think critically of this positioning and, finally, to think of possibilities to reshape this embodied present.[48]

My positioning is but another interpretive possibility and can serve to expand the collective story of colonialism. Furthermore, I feel a responsibility of reclaiming the history of my family that has been lost. Much like Gregory Scofield, I feel like my work is in some small way "Singing Home the Bones" of my families lost history.[49] In a beautiful poem that he wrote about the searching of his great-grandmother's grave, Scofield shows us how history is experienced and the role that reclaiming our bones has in the struggle against colonialism:

> Ida, but still the old church
> is without records
> and the crocuses along the gate
> have only a seasonal memory and still
>
> the yard is green and greener
> and the midday shadows
> slip past the breaker of spruce
> and down below the lake is still
>
> teeming with whitefish
> the mud-sunk bones
> of the Icelandic fisherman
> whose foot was caught
>
> in the net of his own casting but still

[48] McLeod, "Cree Poetic Discourse," 117–18.
[49] Gregory Scofield, *Singing Home the Bones* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2005).

Ida, the bones of you
are without marking
and who is to know

if the church bell rang
and who among the living
can say if old lady Asham,
old lady Sanderson,

sang with the sparrows
or if that day
Johnny tore down the house
log by talking log,

or set fire
to the trees
who carried their proper names,
if then the bible of you

Ida, was free to burn wordlessly
and all who were written there
would become still still
like the tea leaves settling

at the bottom of my story cup still
as the June crocuses
blind
to where you lay, to where

your hands hold upright
a century of silence --
Ida, but still the old church
is without records

and the lake for some time now
is slow in her bones,
and I am here amid so much green
without a blade of disturbance.[50]

Following Scofield, I see my work as that of personal growth and reconnecting to the past of my own family. But I also try to follow Scofield in another key way, where he sees his

[50] Ibid., 22–24.

writing as a form of community work.[51] The best outcome I could hope for is that someone finds words and feelings within these pages that help them understand and articulate some small aspect of their own lives. A very important piece of wisdom I have learned from Scofield and the other storytellers within this thesis is that if we have no stories, we have no journeys, we have no histories. So, much like the lost history of Scofield's Great Grandmother, Ida, "who is to know"? Most, if not all, of the authors, articles, and books quoted in this thesis have had no small impact on my own life and journey and have helped me articulate my own set of unique circumstances. I only hope I can honour their words by making them meaningful for someone else.

1.3 Masculinity

This thesis is based on work that I have done with male Indigenous youth. As a consequence, the writing within is specific to events and processes that have occurred within heavily codified masculine space. My own experience as a person who identifies as male is also crucial to this story. That there is not much about female space or identity processes is by no means a sign of the importance I assign to these issues. On the contrary, I think that it is extremely important to write and think about the experiences of Indigenous women, especially in a country and society where there are so many missing and murdered Indigenous women. The troubling gendered rituals of white supremacist society must be attended to and resisted. But, there must also be a balance to not only limit women in our writing and thinking to victims. The organization that I have been affiliated with in Winnipeg, Ka Ni Kanichihk, which is run almost exclusively by

[51] Gregory Scofield and Tanis MacDonald, "Sitting Down to Ceremony: An Interview with Gregory Scofield," in *Across Cultures/Across Borders: Canadian Aboriginal and Native American Literatures* (New York: Broadview Press, 2010), 289–296.

women, is emblematic of just how strong and important our women are. But the bodies of both women and men are read and written upon on this land, though in different ways and with different valences, and I do not think we can think of one without the other. Our men have filled the prisons for a long time and have been suffering from police brutality, alcoholism, abuse, and so on. They are injured too, and they are objectified, though in different ways. I do not wish to justify heteropatriarchical relations by focusing on masculine specific issues. Rather, I hope to explore further the pain and trauma that affects the men in our communities in hopes of making a small contribution to healing from the pain that follows many of our men and is enacted out in hurtful and harmful ways toward women, children, other men, and other people who are non-normative genders. By focusing on masculinities, this thesis cannot address the complexities of genders that exist in our communities and how they are read and written upon within our society. I can only hope that it can help inform the larger discussions of gender within our communities.

1.4 Terminology

Throughout this thesis I will often refer to the youth I work with as "our" youth. This in no way is my attempt to steal their stories or consider them my own. I do not want to be assuming of community. Rather, this acknowledges that I relate to these boys as my brothers. Over the year and a half of working with them, we have shared a lot of experiences, only a fraction of which will be shared within these pages. The use of "our" indicates the affective attachments I have developed with many of the boys. Furthermore, "our" also signifies that there are ways I relate to them and that we *do* share a certain

experience and memory. That is, we share certain communal and emotional knowledge and struggle to find our proper place in this world and in our communities. Our lives are embodiments of certain historical trauma and pain, complex and specific as that history might be. In many ways we are confused and hurt young men, living in conditions and environments that do not fit the traditional narratives or the state and settler-normative narratives of who we are. In the pages that follow, I will explore precisely the tension that exists between the dominant narratives of identity that we are expected to live and are ascribed to me and the boys and the experiences of everyday life that challenge those narratives. Such tension creates both affection for these narratives and also creates feelings of alienation and creates distance from these narratives. By using "our," I am sensitive to my own complicated relation to Indigenous community and do not wish to unjustly claim belonging, but rather draw attention to the tension that exists in this simple use of words.

Throughout I also maintain the word 'Indian' when specifically referring to the Indian Act and the logics of identification maintained by the state. While many people I know do not find the term offensive, some still remain quite offended by it, and I certainly sympathize with this response. In other moments I use the terms Indigenous, Native, and sometimes Aboriginal interchangeably. All of these terms identify to me an affiliation to a group of peoples who have lived on this continent since a time long before European settlers ever came, complicated as that affiliation might be. The point will be to address that complication of affiliation, using storytelling as a way of tapping in to this complicated history. If reality is structured like a fiction then stories can help us engage the social-political formations of this life, and help me address my own story and the

quotidian realities of Indigeneity. Through story we can honour the teachings of our collective memory and do justice to the political exigencies of our day.

Chapter 2 – Towards an Affective Methodology

1. We borrow Debbie's truck to go and get a Playstation controller from a house of one of the boys. We laugh and tell jokes, make fun of each other along the way. The mood is calm and we are relaxed. We tenderly ridicule one another and a low hum of bickering and teasing follows us along the road. In a moment, the mood is radically transformed. At the red light at Logan and McPhillips, two boys jump out of the truck and begin to chase an unknown man to me, but certainly known to the boys. I hear something about owing money and a snitch. My sense is now one of panic, while the remaining boys feed on the excitement as we whiz down a back lane in hot pursuit. Everything works out fine. No one is hurt; mind the breathless boys and my racing heart. The pursued man found shelter. Everyone seems excited but me. I remain grouchy and angry for most of the ride home. I chastise. I lecture. Finally, one of the boys, Alloon, calmly, but disdainfully, tells me: "This is the hood, shit happens." When we finally get back to the house, the boys all run inside, ready to play their game. It is the first moment I have to process what just happened. So I sit on the steps, light a smoke, and notice that Debbie's front passenger wheel is flat, probably from jumping over the curb…

I have been doing research with young Indigenous boys who are affiliated with gangs in Winnipeg for over a year and a half. My work is encapsulated under the larger project created and coordinated by Dr. Kathleen Buddle, titled *De-Ciphering Native Gangs: Backstreet Sociality in a Prairie City.* This project involves work with former and current gang members as well as youth who are either at risk of becoming gang members

due to affiliation through family networks and friends or by virtue of the neighbourhoods they live in that are gang territory. My work has principally been located at Circle of Courage, a satellite program offered by Ka Ni Kanichihk. I have been fortunate to join Dr. Buddle in her work as a student researcher, working in communities that she has been building relationships in for over 17 years. All of my research is subject to the standards of an ethical review that Dr. Buddle has overseen formally with the University of Manitoba ethical review board. Dr. Buddle has also mentored me throughout my research and has provided invaluable lessons and feedback for my own ethical conduct with the youth at Circle of Courage (COC). Consent for research with the youth has been obtained in written form by the youth themselves and their parents or guardians. Dr. Buddle holds several BBQ's and other events each year where she discusses the larger research project with family members, COC staff, and the youth. All of the youth in my research have been assigned pseudonyms, of their choosing, to maintain their anonymity.[52] Adults that were interviewed or who participated in my research and work with the youth were asked if they wanted their names printed. If real names are mentioned, it has been consented to by participants.

My research began at Circle of Courage when I started working as a tutor and mentor for the youth twice a week in November, 2011. Beyond my role as a researcher, my questions and interests have also inevitably gravitated towards thinking about pedagogy, and the meaning of my position as a teacher. As a tutor, I work with the boys to obtain their high school credits in math, English, social studies, and so on. These skills, especially reading, writing, and basic math, are important, and I enjoy being able to pass

[52] Cases where pseudonyms are one letter, such as 'L', indicate that the youth did not care to make up a name themselves and I identified them with a random letter.

on my own knowledge of these subjects to the boys. In my experience with these boys I have also learned that there are other modes, or levels, of knowledge. I have observed how learning also occurs at deeper levels than calculation, writing, or learning new vocabulary. I have also observed how the youth and I are both equally formidable in this realm. This other realm of learning, and teaching, exists at that level where my reflexes took over and I responded with retribution and the desire to keep things under control in the event described above. There wasn't time to really think about what was happening, only react. The moment that my young teacher and interlocutor, Alloon, told me to chill out and that "shit happens," I started to become aware of some of the fundamental differences in our worlds, and I could feel the gap that divided us in the ways we experienced our worlds. But my political-theoretical training tells me that, though there are different ontological worlds playing themselves out here, they are all conditioned by a similar political economic structure. It is this juncture and tension between theory and experience that has informed most of my research for roughly the past two years.

As an educator, I am curious to know how we can and do communicate and learn with one another despite these different subject positions. As an academic with my own social-political views, I am interested in Fredric Jameson's call to create an *aesthetic of cognitive mapping*, of linking the existential and individual subject with a sense of place in this "world space of multinational capital".[53] I am also interested in developing my

[53] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, First Edition (New York: Routledge, 1992). Jameson argues that the "world space of multinational capital" cannot be reduced to "existential experience" (pp 53-54) while Taussig differentiates ethnographic modes between those that simply rely on "abstract general locutions" and those forms of ethnographic reproduction that "create… like magical reproduction itself, a sensuous sense of the real, mimetically at one with what it attempts to represent", embodying the power of that represented so that "we are thereby lifted out of ourselves into those images…" (16). Both indicate a level of knowledge that is more appropriately aesthetic in its nature.

own aesthetic engagements, and am encouraged by practices and theories of storytelling, phenomenology, and affect theory and the pedagogical value they possess. An aesthetical approach, in my view, has value not only pedagogically, but also methodologically for researchers. It is my goal here to tease out some of the ideas I have had on what aesthetics can do for me in my educating and in my research.

I am intrigued by the resurgence in phenomenological thinking in recent years. Returning to the things themselves seems to be back in style these days. In the realm of education, philosopher of education Sam Rocha has put forth a useful concept for me to couch my ontological questions. Calling for a renewal of the ways that we seek, sense, and see our worlds, Rocha evokes the three different ontological categories of reality, which are Being, subsistence, and existence, through what he calls a *Trinitarian lens.* In Rocha's formulation, Being is the context in which things exist, in which things are *something* as opposed to *nothing*. Subsistence refers to the forces and energies that support things and allow them to maintain within Being. They are more analogous to concepts, abstract in their form, but some*thing* nonetheless. Think of gravity, for example. As a force, it subsists, but does not necessarily exist like the matter that it affects.[54] Existence is at the level of material reality, at the level of the perceptual.[55] A synthesization of different ontological approaches, from that of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein to Heidegger and Derrida, the *Trinitarian lens* is a useful ontological model that allows us to break down these basic levels of reality, to seek, sense, and see in a way that is "faithful to the minimal reality of things."[56] As a methodology for approaching

[54] Sam Rocha, "Education, Study, and the Person" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 2010), 10.
[55] Ibid., 6–7.
[56] Ibid., 8.

these ontological questions, the Trinitarian lens is a way of seeing life, and seeing the things that influence our lives. Through this lens we can learn much about the forces that sustain our lives and drive our desires and fears. It is my wager that such a methodological practice allows us to recognize ourselves in a greater context, the context that defines who we *are***,** and the various forces, mostly invisible, and material circumstances that shape our desires and feed our assumptions. It requires that we pay attention to the unmentionable details of our lives and to understand how they influence us and how they fill the space that exists between others and ourselves. This in turn permits us to understand how our contexts overlap, and clash, with others.

2. One of the boys told me today that he was going to buy some crack with the money he made shoveling snow. A business plan concocted by him and his partner in snow shoveling. The purpose was not to smoke it, but to sell it and make even more money. "An ounce," he said. I swallowed my moral lecture and instead took a utilitarian approach. *Wouldn't this be much more dangerous than shoveling snow?* I was bombarded with laughter. He couldn't care less about the potential for violence. On the contrary, it excited him. The conversation took a new focus, no longer the selling of drugs, but violence. *Why do you want to hurt people?* "I love rollin' up on people", he told me. Two of the other boys chimed in at this point, explaining the excitement of rolling people and the thrill of being able to chase off a group with a can of mace.

The thought of hurting someone was strange to me, but not completely foreign. My youth was not free of fights and had its fair share of stupidity and vulgarity. I

desperately searched for more explanations of why these boys desire violence. I thought in silence for a few minutes while the boys continued on with stories of their various experiences and close calls, performing every action from their memories with precision. The bodily gestures; the noises they imitated with their mouths, mimicking the sound of crashing fists; the dialogues, the beefs - all were performed with such cogency. Their stories intertwined together as they interrupted one another, but despite the abrupt changes in narration, the stories blended uncannily into a lucid whole. Each made sense and related to the larger story. What struck me most, however, was how their stories all ended with reflections on experiences with police. Bad experiences. Stories of brutality. But they took it like men. They accepted their fates in the cat and mouse game, and getting beat by a cop was a sign of weakness only because one made the mistake of getting caught. My contemplation on their desire for violence now seemed relatively unimportant. My interrogative gaze was now on the desire of the cops. What drove them to want to hurt people? How could they hate these boys so much? How have the images of these boys been absorbed in to a different story? And then I saw it. These opposing stories folded in to a strange juncture of violence. This strikes me as perhaps the *epistemic murk* that Michael Taussig refers to in the 19th century Spanish colonial rubber trade massacres or the contemporary dirty war of Argentina in the 1970s.[57]

So many desires, feelings, and emotions. They fly around each other and sometimes, crash into each other, with extreme force and violence. On the surface, there is a desire for money and material gain; existing alongside this in another context is the embodied feeling of authority and the concomitant responsibility to teach an Indian a

[57] Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1991).

lesson, even though it breaks the code you have sworn to live by – but, then again, extreme conditions call for extreme measures, and the question remains if these people even deserve to live by the same code. Then there are scrambling thoughts of a young teacher, concerned about the behaviour of his boys, and wondering if they will be imprisoned, or worse, killed. The latter are met with cavalier dismissal, and a declaration that one in fact enjoys such danger and violence. How do we make sense of these clashes and disparities? I am tempted to support my phenomenological musings with theories of affect here.

What we *know* is not necessarily limited to our ideas or thoughts, or even our emotions. That is, what we know is often of surplus, existing in floods or waves of energy that constitute us as subjects, but that cannot necessarily be represented or measured. Brian Massumi has described affect in a similar way, distinguishing it from emotion in that it is an unconscious and asignifying force that exists in singularity before being captured by a subject and given meaning and identity as emotions and concepts.[58] Rocha claims that his phenomenological method is a way to press against objects at their basic ontological state, at the level of *being* before they take on *meaning,* and I see a connection here with the realm of affect as put forth by figures such as Massumi. For if phenomenology can tackle such elusive topics as love and desire, then its very utility is that we can explore things that we cannot put under a microscope and that exist in surplus.[59] Whereas a scientific methodology would be interested in breaking down phenomena in to digestible pieces of information and abstract forms so as to have knowledge-*about* these phenomena, Rocha's use of phenomenology is more interested in

[58] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

[59] Rocha, "Education, Study, and the Person," 19.

rendering phenomena in a more intimate way that is adequate to its presence – an immediate knowledge. The goal of Rocha's phenomenology is to get close to a phenomenon, let it affect you, and to attempt to convey that encounter in a way that lends integrity to the object while acknowledging its tentative location in singularity. To say that a picture shows the Statue of Liberty on a bright, sunny day from the deck of a boat that looks out over the murky water of the New York harbour says nothing of the experience of the moment of that picture, nor does it say how that experience has aged and developed in ones mind and how it continues to float in and out of ones daily rhythms of memory. Phenomenology cannot reduce this rich and complex experience in to a solidified and whole rational explanation, but it can point us in directions and help us *feel* things through.

I must add at this point that there is also something peculiar in some of the return to phenomenology, and it is paralleled in other philosophical interests of presence and immediacy. While Janet Wolff, and many others, have acknowledged a renewed interest in phenomenology and affect theory as emerging out of a not entirely unwarranted suspicion of enlightenment thought, its human-centredness, and its relentless hermeneutical obsession, they also caution against the lure of a notion of the 'immediate' or of presence that do not take in to account the various ways objects and subjects are socially mediated.[60] Wolff would suggest that just because we cannot easily find words to describe our aesthetic experiences does not mean that it cannot be put in to words. Maintaining that there is some sort of mysterious quality to objects that resist interpretation and meaning, she argues, is simply obscurantism. While I do take Wolff's

[60] Janet Wolff, "After Cultural Theory: The Power of Images, the Lure of Immediacy," *Journal of Visual Culture* 11, no. 1 (April 1, 2012): 3–19.

warning seriously and, if not only because I am an aspiring anthropologist, question the implications these theories of presence and immediacy have for the very conception of culture, I do feel that Wolff's position often verges too much in a positivism that I find equally unhelpful. Such positivism, by reducing life in to structural bodies of *if, then* formulae, occludes, in my mind, how life is lived like a story.

3. I used to rely on the reputations of my cousins when I was growing up. They were hard and tough. They had broken trails for me to follow. When I was old enough and could be taken seriously enough to hang out with them, I felt the need to prove myself. I did what I thought they would do. I hardened. I became aggressive. Eventually, the scam became apparent to me. Looking back, I recognize it as a violent episode. It completely flattened me. It felt as though I had lost something. The self I had been working on for years crumbled, and there was no turning back. The boys often talk about their cousins or uncles who are in the gang, or who are in prison. I recognize the attachment - the need to be someone and to respect and be respected by someone.

My dad's friend offers to come in and talk to the boys about prison. He did six years and now makes it his business to pass on the truth of prison to young men. A noble gesture, I think to myself. But has that ever worked on anyone, I wonder? I don't dare ask him this. But I wonder what good it would be to bring him in to our circle? How would it help? I understand the motivations for wanting to warn people of the pain. But there is also a risk in telling these boys the 'truth' of prison, and they stand to lose a lot.

Karl Marx's notion of commodity fetishism provides some clues to our quandary of the relations between subjects and objects, I think.[61] As he showed many years ago, the commodity, perhaps one of the most basic and obvious *things* in our world, is actually "a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." (163). He famously concludes that commodities "possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour, that their objective character as values is therefore purely social." (138-39) What is curious is that commodities "reflect… the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves." (164-65). That is, what people experience as the essence of commodities is actually a mis-recognition of their own labour power objectified in the commodity. I think perhaps this keen insight of Marx's has been abused. How many times have we heard that people are voting against their own interests, and that Truth must conquer; that false idols must be replaced with Reason? But, as theorists like Lacan or Althusser have suggested, perhaps the real significance of Marx's commodity fetishism is that our worlds are structured and mediated by an ideological-imaginary realm. The commodity fetish is an example of how stories structure our lives, creating the rhythms and symbolic realities that attach us to objects and scenes of desire and that motivate us and give us the energy and optimism to live that life.[62]

A writer who maintained these insights of Marx and attempted to adapt them in a methodical way with particular sagacity is Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, the way we

[61] All references in the following paragraph are taken from Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Pelican Books, 1976).

[62] For an account of the attachments to objects and scenes of desire that motivate even at the expense of a subjects own growth and prosperity, see Berlant, "Cruel Optimism."

combat the stories and myths that are destructive to our lives is with an equal measure of story and myth. The beauty of stories and the art of storytelling for Benjamin was precisely that they gave us new coordinates in which to view our worlds. Contrasting storytelling to the scientific imperative to know things as bits of information that will help us fill in the picture of life, Benjamin says "…it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it…The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the ready. It is left up to [the listener] to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an *amplitude* that information lacks."[63] In stories knowledge is *thick* and it stresses a particular relevancy to the listener. Stories helped people in olden times overcome their fears by revealing the mythical nature of their fears, *but in a form that is equally mythical*. "The wisest thing—so the fairytale taught mankind in olden times and teaches children to this day—is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits."[64] Michael Taussig describes Benjamin's writing techniques as awakening the "congealed life in petrified objects", "demystifying and reenchanting, out-fetishizing the fetish."[65]

It is important to note that while storytelling is a form of passing on knowledge, this form could also be found in our everyday, mundane experiences. As Marx showed in the commodity form, story and myth were in operation in every object, from the architectures that we passed through daily, to the grocery stores where we purchase our goods, to the pavement we walk on to get there, the shoes we walk with, to the formal

[63] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller.," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections.*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 89. My Emphasis.

[64] Ibid., 102.

[65] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 1.

gestures and etiquettes that all go without mention or thought in our daily lives. The magic of the commodity, or the "metaphysical subtleties", as Marx described, shows that we perform stories at every turn. Benjamin had the wisdom to recognize this knowledge in everyday objects and experiences. His project was similar to that of Rocha's Trinitarian lens in that the point is to retune our senses to our worlds, to learn to see anew, and thus, to learn to *know* anew. To "penetrate the mystery" of the everyday, Benjamin argued, we need to "recognize it in the everyday world… [to] perceive… the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday."[66] What if, like storytellers, we were more willing to embrace the mystery of the everyday while also combating the myths that permit, at best, lazy thinking, and at worst, our own alienation? Arguing against the "forlorn attempts of social science" that take as their role to 'explain away' the myths of our world, Michael Taussig has also argued that anthropologists should press closer to myth in their ethnographic writings:

> …[myth] is held out as something you have to try out for yourself, feeling your way deeper and deeper into [it's abyss] until you do *feel* what is at stake, the madness of the passion. This is very different from moralizing from the sidelines or setting forth the contradictions involved, as if the type of knowledge with which we are concerned were somehow not power and knowledge in one, and hence, immune to such procedures. The political artistry involved in the mythic subversion of myth has to involve a deep immersion in the mythic naturalism of the political unconscious of the epoch.[67]

For Taussig, 'getting lost in the madness' is a deeply political act; a way of coming to terms with an economy of feeling, and a necessary procedure for constructing new economies of feeling and, thus, new ways of being. 'Getting lost in the madness'

[66] Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," in *Walter Benjamin, Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 189–90.

[67] Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, 10–11.

demands, I think, a need for both thinking *and* feeling through our research and writing – research and writing are cognitive *and* aesthetic processes.

4. First week. Curly rounds up the boys and sends them to the back room, which is dressed up as a classroom, where I await to give them instruction. Eight young boys, young men, walk in to the room, loudly slide their chairs in to position, and stare at me incredulously. The silence only holds for a brief second. Soon, a joke is cracked, roaring laughter ensues, and I am sent reeling to regain a control I never had. I search for words to explain my position, my job. It couldn't be less important to them. What difference does it make to them what my job is? The point is how my presence affects them. What it is taking from them. Facebook, internet, games, fun. I plead; try to explain that I have things I can teach them. D responds back without hesitation: "you know, we got things we can teach you too."

In just over a year of working with these boys, those simple words have been some of the most profound. Even if they were meant to be cheeky, they touched on something deeper than the immediate circumstances would allow, they revealed a truth that existed between the boys and me. I went in to this job with good intentions, with the knowledge of colonial history that had robbed these boys of a fair upbringing, and the intentions of treating them with respect and dignity; listening to them, and helping them. But I didn't know how to listen at first. My understanding of the socio-economic and political landscapes in which they grew up was not enough. They led me down paths of contradiction and frustration. Taken on their own, such frameworks did little but force the wrong questions upon me, like "why do these boys continue to participate in their own

isolation?" Or "how can I help these boys if they are not willing to help themselves?" I made the same mistake of letting the statistics, the demographics, and the social sciences represent their worlds rather than seeking to understand how they made sense of this world. If we begin with a methodology that imports an aesthetical commitment, beginning from the question of experience, I think that we can perhaps start to apprehend in more nuanced ways the differences between differently collective worlds and where the subjective and experiential reside within these collective worlds.

Chapter 3 - Wolf In the City

> wolf runs as he feels the breath of diesel monsters
> and the forest turns to concrete under his feet
> and trails turn to back alleys.[68]
>
> There will always be a little bush; under the cement is the earth.[69]
>
> Ghosts they never leave, they stay and wait, knowing we can't hide behind concrete and the darkened houses forever, they wait, downtown, maybe, where the rivers meet, yes, beneath your manicured lawn, I am told that there were many burial mounds here, so when you close your eyes tonight, just before sleep, listen closely.[70]
>
> I say hi to the geese when they go over you know. Like, they are here! They're so amazing! [laughter] They make me happy! They make me so happy! And they're so fierce! That's what id like us to be again. They take their space! And I love it! We take our space here too. People might not like it, we get battered up and beaten up sometimes, but we're here, you know.[71]

3.1 "I'm a Winnipeg Boy, That's Who I Am"[72]

"I don't want to be no country Indian!" These words were said to me during a break at the recording studio one day at Just Tv. Loud Voice of Golden Eagle (from here on simply 'Loud Voice') had been having some trouble with his girlfriend's family. Turned out that they did not like Loud Voice. To them he was just a delinquent thug, street trash. They wanted better for their daughter. And, if she - a mostly white girl with, I am told, some metis[73] family and blood - must date a native boy he had better at least be

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[68] Duncan Mercredi, *Dreams of the Wolf in the City* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications Inc., 1992), 3.

[69] Marvin Francis, "My Urban Rez," *Canadian Dimension*, November 1, 2004, http://canadiandimension.com/articles/1950/.

[70] Duncan Mercredi, "Wachea," in *Across Cultures/Across Borders: Canadian Aboriginal and Native American Literatures*, ed. Paul DePasquale, Renate Eigenbrod, and Larocque (New York: Broadview Press, 2010), 124.

[71] Leslie Spillett, Interview with Les Sabiston, April 23, 2013.

[72] Lyrics from the song "Winnipeg Boy" by Winnipeg Indigenous hip-hop trio, *Winnipeg's Most*.

[73] With the boys the term "metis" is more often used in small 'm', metis, terms, indicating both white and Native ancestry. It usually identifies someone as white in their appearance and in their social behaviors. It is a complicated identity and is articulated differently by each of the boys. Sometimes the boys

from the country. Apparently Loud Voice's girlfriend's family associated country Indians as the 'legit' Indians. And doesn't it make sense? This is where the land is, where native people can hunt, be in touch with their roots as hunters and gatherers. Yet, understandably, something about it really bothered Loud Voice, and he clearly did not identify as an Indian of the "land" in this context. He proceeded to differentiate himself with those country folks based on dress, language, and wit. Country folk dressed weird, with tucked in collared shirts, cowboy boots, and skinny jeans. They spoke with funny accents. And, most importantly, they didn't know the ways of the streets.

As I listened to Loud Voice talk about this emotional rejection and the pressures he felt that were put on him by others, I wondered about the city and the rural-rez divide and how they had become so distinct. Was this seemingly arbitrary separation not an unraveling of Indian Act logic that has been made literal in everyday affective modes of community membership? I could only think of how the youth in the city are being marginalized even further through such settler-colonial reifications. If the city youth do not count as Indigenous, then what are they? How do they identify themselves individually and how is their Indigeneity as a collective process individuated? I wondered about Loud Voice's demand that he be recognized as a city boy, an Indigenous city boy. Are the indigenous youth of the city articulating a new way, a new sense of collectivity and indigenous identity? In what way, if any, can this identity and collectivity relate to the rural/rez? Has the settler-colonial logic of spatial and racial division completely divided these two realities in their geographical, social, and political realms? Or, are the youth tracing a continuum of indigenous collectivity and identity, working from a shared

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with family members who are metis are even embarrassed to acknowledge it. Ace once struggled to tell me that his mom was metis. She is fair skinned, "pretty white looking," but she's more or less "down with the brown," he told me jokingly.

collective history while embarking in new directions and creating new senses of self, both individual and collective? The answers, if there are any, are no where as neat as my questions would like them to be, but I have learned that the important first step is to listen to our youth because they are sharing stories with us and they have something to teach us about collective memory and identity.

3.2 Spirits of Winnipeg

I write these words in Winnipeg, an ancient meeting place. Peoples have always gathered here. People still gather here. The land still gives to those who dwell on it. People still tell stories on this land. But relations on this land have changed; and the stories have changed. Not many people talk to the land these days. The relationship has changed. Concrete and manicured lawns have covered the ancient burial mounds. The two great rivers, the Red and the Assiniboine, flow, but they are silent. Or maybe we just block them out, for they continue to work on our collective spirit. Our main streets, (Main St. and Portage Ave.) attest to the influence of our rivers. These streets trace the ancient passages of those that were here before us. Today we walk, bus, bike, or drive down *Portage* Avenue, but mostly misrecognize this ancient embodiment. For all our technological advances we cannot escape the way our rivers still dictate our movement. From the Forks, where the Assiniboine meets the Red, Portage Ave follows the banks of the Assiniboine West all the way to Portage La Prairie and beyond in to Saskatchewan. The name reflects a great passage, portage, from the Assiniboine at current day Portage La Prairie to Lake Manitoba. This old trade route is no longer performed, at least, not with a canoe over one's head. Hernias no longer claim lives along this 25-kilometer path.

For, now, a water diversion slices through the plains that once required walking. Though the name 'Portage avenue' may lie still in our minds, discursively disconnected from history, we cannot avoid the power of the Assiniboine that it follows. We continue to travel these great routes/waters even though we no longer paddle their waters.

In the days of Manitoba Hydro, we are more likely to exert force over our rivers, reverse their flow, and suck energy out of them. We resist their currents and ignore their guidance. Our rivers have always been a source of energy, providing us with nutrients, hydrating our plants, and so on, but what does it mean today if we ignore the ways our rivers run through our veins? To borrow a line of thought from anthropologist Michael Taussig, though in a very different context, where does the spirit of the river go if we ignore it?[74] If our rivers are reduced to abstractions of pure use value, transformed in to quantities of electrical power and money, serving only our material needs and desires, what implications does this have? Duncan Mercredi says our rivers are dying, and speaks from a place of experience and profound sadness when he tells of the rapids that no longer make a sound in his home of "post-hydro" Grand Rapids.[75] In Grand Rapids, the fish no longer spawn or offer themselves for the fisherman's hook.[76] Our lack of respect for the river spirits has great consequences. And we continue to dwell on Taussig's question: Where do these spirits of our rivers reemerge? The spirits are alive, and they are talking to us, but as Mercredi puts it in his poem, "Wachea," though we may not be able to hear them any more, we cannot escape feeling them.[77] Just think of picking bits of algae off your skin after swimming in Lake Winnipeg. Or when the Red and Assiniboine

[74] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 18.
[75] Duncan Mercredi, Interview with Les Sabiston, April 22, 2013, Winnipeg, MB.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Mercredi, "Wachea," 124.

spill over their embankments and flood basements and wash homes away. Residents of Lake St. Martin First Nations today certainly feel the power of Lake Manitoba as they continue to live like refugees in downtown Winnipeg due to flooding waters in 2011 that destroyed their homes.[78] I follow the lead of many Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg today, whether they are community leaders, writers, activists, who say that the spirits of this land have not left. They still talk to us. We just need to learn how to listen to them again.

Duncan Mercredi is a local Winnipeg storyteller that walks the streets, attuned to their rhythms, and listens to the songs that were and are sung on the shores of the rivers. A descendant of Grand Rapids – or, the "village that lost it's name," as he sometimes calls it, referring to the destructive impact Manitoba hydro has had on his community[79] - Mercredi relates to city life in a way that affirms rather than discourages his traditional practices and ways of life. Mercredi disrupts and challenges our notions of the city as the soul-sucking and desolate paradise of European settlers. The expression *concrete jungle* takes on a new resonance for Mercredi because the city is a wilderness where one needs to walk carefully and negotiate survival like any other wilderness. There are still hunters and hunted, though the rules and stakes are different in this wilderness. Mercredi was able to feel comfortable in the city (Winnipeg) when he moved here in the 1970s, despite the simultaneous isolation and palpable racism he experienced from the dominant white

[78] Lake St. Martin residents also feel the power of the Manitoban government who had control over the water levels that were diverted from the Assiniboine back in 2011 in order to save farm land and property of thousands of residents in the south. The provincial government is now attempting to sue Lake St. Martin along with three other First Nations, including Dauphin River, Little Saskatchewan, and Pinaymootang, in a bid to deny responsibility and blame these First Nations for building on land that could flood. See Leslie McLaren, "Manitoba Sues Flooded-out First Nations: Government Responds to Class-action Lawsuit with Claims of Its Own," *CBC News*, May 31, 2013, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/story/2013/05/30/mb-lawsuit-flood-first-nations-manitoba.html.

[79] Mercredi, Interview with Les Sabiston.

and settler population, because he saw it as another wilderness: "The city, to me, was no different than growing up in Grand Rapids in the '50s… To me the wilderness had just been moved in to the heart of the city."[80] Mercredi writes about a different city, a different world, than the one many of us might live. He gives us pause to consider how Winnipeg, and, I suspect, many cities across Canada, North America and South America, have different cities and worlds that coexist and entangle with one another. Through the work of Mercredi we begin to see, perhaps, the differences between the ontological armatures of a more Euro-Western world and an Indigenous world. What does Mercredi have to teach us about listening? How is memory embodied and how can a storytelling open us up to this memory and collective spirit? How can storytelling open us up to a more radically refined relationship to the land and each other? After discussing these questions we will be able to start pondering what Mercredi's work can teach us about listening to our youth. Particularly, Mercredi's work on the city will show us that our youth are actively engaged in defining new forms of Indigenous collectivity and are challenging us to break down our notions of city versus rural/reserve Natives. What I am interested in is how Mercredi can help us think about the youth in the urban context and the ways they are articulating this space and how that space is intimately connected to other embodiments of Indigeniety and collectivity while also creating the conditions for the emergence of new articulations and practices of indigenous collectivity.

3.3 City is/as Metaphor

The city and urban space are often represented as cold and inhospitable places, where things move fast and relationships are impersonal – so many people in close

[80] Ibid.

proximity, yet everyone lives in their own bubble. In terms of how indigenous peoples live in the city, the assumptions are even worse. The city is no place for a native. But what I suggest here is that despite these common representations of the city, the city can be lived in many ways, and the city is lived as many worlds. There is no one correct way to live it. Peter Kulchyski demonstrates this view in his scathing critique of Canadian multiculturalism by evoking the concept and reality of 'the bush' as not only a geographical and physical description, but also an epistemic reality that challenges the arbitrary borders of colonialism and the spurious divisions between city and bush.[81] Often evoked as an allegory for non-aboriginal peoples - bush as a desire that is always out of reach - the bush is more adequately understood as a (co)reality. The bush designates a different world, a different way of living, being, and relating to the land and each other. Thus, just because the city is full of concrete, capital investment, and board meetings, this does not mean that it cannot be lived like/as the bush. Similarly, just because one is in the bush does not mean they are living the bush. Poet/Playwright Marvin Francis has also compelled us to not forget the bush-poetic, reminding us that "there will always be a little bush; under the cement is the earth."[82] Both Kulchyski and Francis maintain a complex understanding of city and bush, maintaining a critique of colonial history that forms current day conditions of Winnipeg and beyond, the traumas and pain that stem from the colonial logic that forcibly separated the first dwellers of this land from the cities, while also acknowledging that the city is not a static reality and can be lived differently and contain different meanings. It is the goal here to sketch out some artistic attempts to show how a bush aesthetic can help Native people reclaim the bush

[81] Peter Kulchyski, "Bush Culture for a Bush Country: An Unfinished Manifesto," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1996): 192–196.

[82] Francis, "My Urban Rez."

within the city and to confront the trauma and violence that founds our settler-colonial cities.

Before exploring how Mercredi's work performs other meanings and realities of the city of Winnipeg, I would like to focus our attention different ways the city can be represented and lived. I will begin first with a brief theoretical and historical look at Winnipeg and the logics of settler-colonialism that shape(d) this space. To properly situate Mercredi's work we must first understand the historical processes that he and many others have lived in their journeys from the rural/reserve to the urban and why that spatial distinction exists at all in the first place. This is the historical process that informs the conditions of our youth today who are growing up in the city, and in an important way the city remains a significant metaphor for the collision between Indigenous peoples and European settlers as the latter colonized North America. That is, the city is still largely imagined in its settler-colonial framework, as a place other to Indigenous peoples; a place that is too modern for primitive Natives. We must also take these historical and theoretical representations of the city to task and ask ourselves how they may still be influencing our understanding of what it means to be indigenous. Are we replicating the spatial logic of colonialism, maintaining the division between city and rez, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in our representations of the city and how Native peoples inhabit the city? The city is itself a socio-political space where collectivity and Indigeneity has been and is being (re)created in ways that challenge our assumptions of tradition and what it means to be indigenous. Following Mark Rifkin's political usage of metaphor, I will argue that the city is a residual site of indigenous collectivity while also a site of

emergences. The city as lived experience shows us the complexities and limitless possibilities of identity and space.

3.4 Settler Metaphorics

> *all the ghosts in this country are in the bush, where the killing took place. the spirits of the country are in the bush, roaming restlessly through the dreams of those whose bodies are marked with the trace of history forced on them, the history that hurts, the history that is not a story of how every day in every way things got better and better.*[83]

Urban space in Canada and the relationship with indigenous peoples and reserve lands has been imagined in different ways by both the Canadian and former British government and the dominant settler publics that these governments serve. One characteristic that has remained static, however, is that indigenous peoples do not belong in urban settings. They are spatially and temporally imagined as primitive and unsuited for 'modern' urban space. In the context of thinking about authenticity of Native community and identity, Mark Rifkin deploys the term and concept of "settler metaphorics" as a way of thinking through how conditions of settler society impact the possibilities for being. He defines settler metaphorics as "apparatuses and procedures through which a particular account of authenticity is generated, circulated, and implemented [that] help shape the effective reality—the actually existing options for and stakes of identification, articulation, and action—available to persons and groups."[84] I propose to think of the city in its settler-European form as the condensed site of development and capital growth, in this way. Important to Indigenous peoples today in

[83] Kulchyski, "Bush Culture for a Bush Country: An Unfinished Manifesto."
[84] Rifkin, *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing in the Era of Self-Determination*, 13.

the city is how it is imagined, which translates as to what is possible in the city for Indigenous peoples.

Political scientist Karen Bridget Murray has suggested four distinct periods of governmental discourse on the spatial relationship between reserve and city.[85] Though this model is specifically suited to her work on federal and provincial policies in New Brunswick, there are some broad strokes that help us work through the historical trends in government spatial discourse and policy toward reserves. The four periods she identifies are *proximity*, where the government wanted reserves to be close for purposes of administrative efficiency as well as having stronger powers of control in the project of civilizing Natives; *segregation and distance*, which was a way of dealing with strong anti-Native sentiment among the growing settler population as well as appropriating lands for development and municipal growth; *reserve eradication and urban inclusion in to labour market*, which was an attempt to deal with the growing migration beginning at mid twentieth century and furthering assimilation projects while growing the Native labour force; and a *trans-spatial relationship between reserve and city*, in which new levels of government (municipal and provincial) become more involved in interpreting responsibilities over Native peoples while reserves and bands begin also to extend their powers and services to Status peoples within cities and off reserve. Murray shows that these different spatial discursive regimes are far from innocent, and that new discursive regimes signal new ways of thinking about the political, economic, and racial benefits that could be gained by different spatial relations between city and reserve. For our story of current day Winnipeg, the policies of segregation and then reserve eradication and

[85] Karen Bridget Murray, "The Silence of Urban Aboriginal Policy in New Brunswick," in *Urban Aboriginal Policy Making in Canadian Municipalities* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP, 2012), 60–74.

urban labour market inclusion are the most significant and illustrative of the transition from reserve to city that many people experienced beginning at mid twentieth century.

The systematic stripping of indigenous lands and the sequestering of native peoples on reserves and other designated plots of lands had been a policy for years before the Indian Act of 1876 by both Canadian and British governments. After the Indian Act was inaugurated, such policy became much more routinized and codified, and the location and re-location of reserve plots came down to two main logics of administration and development.[86] Administrative reasons were deemed for the purposes of paternal control of native peoples - including efforts at civilizing – and for convenience of having people centralized. Development was to make way for urban development, agricultural growth, or clearing for hydroelectric damming. A look at early amendments to the Indian Act is revealing of the pressures that were developing between settler and Indigenous peoples at the turn of the twentieth century.

Between 1905 and 1911 the Indian Act was slowly changed to facilitate transfers of reserve land to municipalities and relocate reserves to lands that were further away from towns and cities.[87] The political tool used to drive these amendments for further segregation between city and reserve was the notion of public benefit, whereby the needs of the growing majority of white settlers was to be satisfied over those of the minority of native peoples, whose living on reserve land was seen as a private right that must not impede on public rights (read: white-settler rights).[88] Importantly, these amendments occurred just after the relocation of the Songhees reserve that was on the land of current

[86] Canada, *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Looking Forward, Looking Back*, October 1996, 397–99.
[87] Ibid., 449.
[88] Ibid., 448–49.

day Victoria, British Columbia. Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver, said openly during a House of Common's debate that the amendments would be used to specifically deal with a "reserve in Vancouver that only differs in degree from the case of the Songhees reserve in Victoria."[89] The reserve he was referring to was the Kitsilano reserve, which has had a particularly fraught history with the settler population of Vancouver and the municipal government.[90] The governments, from the federal all the way down to the municipal, were all engaged in a similar logic of segregation and land expropriation in order to benefit settler society. Such logic only cemented the differences between reserve and city, native and settler, both conceptually and materially for the majority of the twentieth century. It was not until about mid century that a significant migration began to take place from reserve to city, threatening the spatial divide between settler society and Indigenous peoples.

There were many reasons and motivations for the migration from reserve to city. Increasing populations on reserves stressed the viabilities of reserve life for families and limited even further any opportunity for employment on reserves. [91] In 1951, the Indian Act went through another significant set of amendments that had unintended consequences, including the increase of urban migration. The primary revision was the creation of a centralized national registry that increased the legal specificities of 'registered Indian'. With this change, even previously registered 'status Indians' could loose their fiduciary relationship with the government simply because they did not know

[89] Ibid., 450.

[90] Jordan Stanger-Ross, "Municipal Colonialism in Vancouver: City Planning and the Conflict over Indian Reserves, 1928–1950s," *The Canadian Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (2008): 541–580.

[91] Evelyn J. Peters, "Our City Indians: Negotiating the Meaning of First Nations Urbanization in Canada, 1945-1975," *Historical Geography* 30 (2002): 79.

to register.[92] Many women lost their status because of the new provisions of this amendment, which forced their 'enfranchisement' and effectively took their status if they married a non-status man (including settler, Métis, Inuit, and non-status Indian men). It is not insignificant, then, that of the three prairie cities of Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Regina that have the highest rates of in-migration from reserve to city out of any other Canadian city, women have formed the majority of migrants at roughly fifty eight per cent.[93]

As cities, particularly Winnipeg, began taking on an influx of native migrants, the governments had to respond to new pressures from settler populations and had to update their own mechanisms of colonial rule. Because of the Indian Act, the government had no way of even defining an "urban Indian" and had to develop new policies and procedures of addressing this void that migration was creating. The Indian Affairs Branch began extending its reach beyond the reserve and in to the city with employment placement and training programs that were intended to integrate and assimilate native peoples in to the mainstream.[94] A contradiction arose, however, between the paternalistic mandate of assimilation that was the modus operandi of the Indian Affairs Branch and the administrative perspective that focused on reserve Indians as wards of the state – "urban Indians" were an entirely new category that, as far as Indian Affairs Branch was concerned, were the jurisdiction and responsibility of provinces and municipalities. When different First Nations groups began to develop their own employment placement programs in cities and request assistance from the Indian Affairs Branch, the

[92] Murray, "The Silence of Urban Aboriginal Policy in New Brunswick," 67.

[93] Sherene H. Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George," in *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 132.

[94] Peters, "Our City Indians: Negotiating the Meaning of First Nations Urbanization in Canada, 1945-1975," 83; Murray, "The Silence of Urban Aboriginal Policy in New Brunswick," 68–69.

contradiction became unavoidable and the fact that First Nations would be controlling their own programs in the city clashed too heavily with the Branch's historical definitions of Indians as either wards of the state or as ordinary, enfranchised citizens.[95]

During the same period that the Indian Affairs Branch was developing employment placement programs, The Citizenship Branch of the federal government, which is typically concerned with issues of immigration, began development of programs that were intended to integrate migrants from the reserve. It was from these pursuits that Friendship Centres were developed as a strategic space that was supposed to act as a buffer zone for native peoples transitioning to the city. At the root of such 'immigration' programs was a sense of danger from the cultural differences of Native peoples. The job placement programs of Indian Affairs was also concerned with difference, but more concerned with purely assimilating the Indian and instilling him/her with the skills necessary for a modern city. In other words, eliminating difference. The Citizenship Branch, on the other hand, was concerned with the loss of culture that the Native would experience when they came to the city and the deleterious effect that would have on employment prospects and the overall health of the city.[96] While these two programs came from different perspectives on assimilation and the dangers of cultural mixing between the reserve and the city, they both presumed a spatial and temporal difference between urban life and reserve life that can be translated as modern versus primitive. Either native people could not integrate themselves in to the 'modern' labour force because of the significant disadvantage that res life gave them, or they must be able to

[95] Peters, "Our City Indians: Negotiating the Meaning of First Nations Urbanization in Canada, 1945-1975," 83.
[96] Ibid., 84.

preserve the reserve in a contained way in Friendship centres in the city so as to not completely crumble from the pressures that a modern city can put on ethnic groups.

Despite the pressures of lack of employment that drove people off of the reserve in search of a better life, or the attempts by the government to exploit this new migration and funnel and assimilate Native peoples in to the labour force, the economies of post-World War II were changing rapidly and opportunity in cities like Winnipeg were shrinking by the year. As Jim Silver has noted, the political-economic changes after WWII changed the face of poverty in Winnipeg and Saskatoon.[97] Whereas poverty was largely a working-class phenomenon in the half century before the war – in other words, people were poor precisely because they *had poor paying jobs* – the shrinking industrial sector and the exporting of jobs in a new globalizing world economy meant that not many migrants to the city could find jobs in the post-war environment.[98] Furthermore the strong conceptual division between white-settlers and Native peoples led many in the latter group to suffer at the hands of racist employers who preferred to hire white workers. Sherene Razack has convincingly argued that with the change in spatial ordering of Canadian society and Indigenous communities, new strategies of spatial regulation had to be adopted at a more micro level. Whereas spatial division used to be between city and reserve, settler colonial violence now had to be more fastidiously enacted through the spatial practices of zoning, project building, and planning authorities, which continued to mark settler and Native both conceptually and materially.[99]

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[97] Jim Silver, "Segregated City: A Century of Poverty in Winnipeg," in *Manitoba Politics and Government: Issues, Institutions, Traditions* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 331–357; Jim Silver, *The Inner Cities of Winnipeg and Saskatoon: a New Form of Development* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Manitoba, 2008).

[98] Silver, "Segregated City: A Century of Poverty in Winnipeg," 348–49.

[99] Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George," 129.

The settler colonial violence of spatial regulation can literally be seen in Winnipeg today, particularly if one ventures in to the North End.[100] A different class and race of immigrant, mostly of Eastern European descent, characterized the North End in the earlier period of the twentieth century. In post World War II Winnipeg many of the non-Anglo Saxon immigrants, who had previously been coded as non-white and other, benefited from the arrival of Native peoples who took their place in the poor area of Winnipeg. As non-Anglo Saxons became socially and economically mobile they left for the suburbs and created a vacuum in their wake. Not only did businesses follow them, but also government subsidies for roads and infrastructure, government support for mortgages and suburban development, while simultaneously the government divested in North End development.[101] The North End became the cheapest place to rent, and slumlords quickly took advantage of the tolerated poor standards of living in the North End, cramming dwellings beyond capacity to collect more rent without maintaining properties. All of these various processes indicate that the North End is a perfect example of how poverty became "spatially concentrated racialized poverty" in places like Winnipeg and Saskatoon, and how settler colonial rule continued to maintain divisions between Native and settler populations spatially, materially, and conceptually.[102]

[100] The North End describes the geographic location of much of Winnipeg's Northern parts, though it also indicates a cultural, political and economic local that is generally imagined and treated as the place of the 'Other.'

[101] Silver, "Segregated City: A Century of Poverty in Winnipeg," 341.

[102] Silver, *The Inner Cities of Winnipeg and Saskatoon: a New Form of Development*. Silver has acknowledged that the North End has always been a racialized space, with Eastern European and non-Anglo Saxon immigrants filling the place of the 'Other', but has also incorporated an analysis of colonialism in to his work and shows the important differences between these groups and Native peoples. That the Canadian government did not systematically root out European cultures, religions and traditions, as was done to Native peoples of this land, is significant and must be acknowledged when thinking about the different ways racialization takes place and is operated spatially.

Jim Silver's work is a great example of some of the scholarship that is being produced in places like Winnipeg that contain a sense of political urgency about the plight of Native peoples in the inner cities of Winnipeg and Saskatoon and the racially informed lack of political will power to do anything about it. Works like this should inform our scholarship and activism on colonialism. Yet focusing too heavily on such political-economic analyses will only take us so far and is limited in what it can tell us about the cultural processes of collective meaning making and how Native people imagine the spaces of places like Winnipeg. As we saw earlier, Duncan Mercredi thought of his transition to Winnipeg as simply moving to a new wilderness, and did not consider himself as embodying the confused definition of an Indian that the Indian Affairs Department thought of him as. Evelyn Peter's has echoed this sentiment in her work with other Native peoples who have migrated from reserve to city and viewed this transition as tracing a path of an historical map that is distinctly indigenous.[103] In an interview with Leslie Spillett, executive director of Winnipeg's Indigenous led community centre Ka Ni Kanichihk, she questioned sharply why so many people don't understand that Winnipeg is land! Just look at the geese, she said to me, "[T]hey are here! […] And they're so fierce! That's what I'd like us to be again. They take their space! And I love it! We take our space here too."[104] If we recognized Winnipeg as a place that is an ancient dwelling and meeting place, our questions could be different. The focus of political-economic questions on a place like Winnipeg should be: *why are the original inhabitants of this place so disadvantaged*? Then we can begin to avoid the colonial imposed distinction of reserve and city that characterized treaties and the Indian Act, and we can

[103] Peters, "Our City Indians: Negotiating the Meaning of First Nations Urbanization in Canada, 1945-1975," 87–88.

[104] Spillett, Interview with Les Sabiston.

avoid assumptions of poor Natives in the city as having anything to do with their race or notions of primitiveness. Silver does a wonderful job of pointing out that writers, politicians, historians, and the general public of Winnipeg have had a particularly bad track record of blaming its poor for their disadvantaged lifestyles while avoiding any analysis of the structural changes that contribute and contain cycles of poverty.[105] To refocus his analysis with this decolonial perspective of space would only strengthen his work and avoid the historical traps that Peter's makes evident whereby the government and settler society can only imagine Native populations as spatially and temporally different from modern and civilized Canadians.[106]

So what did the city transition look and feel like? While there is no way of adequately documenting this immensely diverse and complicated historical process, we do have stories from some of our elders, storytellers and community leaders who went through the process themselves. Duncan's experience is quite illuminating.[107] As a young man, he came to Winnipeg in the 1970s. Like most of the young men of his reserve, he said that he followed the construction trade out of town in search of work. The hydro dam had changed his community for the worse – the river was now sick, slow from hydro's imposition on it. "When the river slowed down, our life slowed down," said Mercredi. Many also left to pursue education but did not return due to lack of opportunity. Many, he said, ended up in the city. Many of his friends died, and many of them ended up in jail. Through my discussion with Duncan, it seemed that the representation of the city as a

[105] Silver, "Segregated City: A Century of Poverty in Winnipeg," 344–45.
[106] Peters, "Our City Indians: Negotiating the Meaning of First Nations Urbanization in Canada, 1945-1975," 88.
[107] The following is based on an interview I did with Duncan Mercredi on April 22, 2013.

monster that literally engulfs Native peoples prevailed, but Duncan told me that it was in the city that he actually found tradition.

As a young boy back home in Grand Rapids Duncan experienced many consequences of years of residential schooling and systemic governmental policies that sought to strip Native peoples of their culture, history, and language. As a young boy, the "older people", his parents and elders, struggled to teach him about his culture. They did not want to talk about Sun Dances, for instance, because they feared the "younger people", the children and youth, could be careless with this information and alert Indian agents, RCMP officers, teachers, or priests to the fact that traditional ceremonies were being practiced.[108] As a result, the young people were not educated on ceremony and traditional practices. Not overtly, at least. For Duncan remembers that the older people in the community would disappear for days on end every summer. Duncan didn't know until many years later that they were in fact going to Sun Dance. When he got to the city, Duncan, much like many of the other new city dwellers, lived in close proximity to other people, was poor, and was treated as a second-class citizen. Furthermore, he did not know much about his culture. Driven to understand where he came from, Duncan began to seek out other Native people who were interested in their culture and who shared similar experiences. Slowly, they found each other and began patching together what he calls a "beef stew traditionalism." They would take what little bit one person might know and build on what another person might know. Eventually, they were Sun Dancing. And while it was a bit haphazard at first, a community of people who shared similar histories were coming together and creating community and relationships in an otherwise hostile

[108] Mercredi, Interview with Les Sabiston. Sun Dances were illegal under the Indian Act until the 1951 amendment to the Act.

space. What struck me about our conversation is that Duncan did not see any contradictions with different bands and groups, like Cree and Anishinaabe, coming together to create what otherwise would be interpreted as a pan-Indian movement. If we are to take tradition to be an example of the 'actual' events of history, what 'really' existed long ago, not everyone practiced the same ceremonies, but yet people are now recreating and sharing ceremonies that their ancestors might not have practiced. What is important for Mercredi is that people are finding each other, creating community and support, and re-instilling pride in to people who had for too long felt shame for being Native. Besides, he said, even if people were practicing traditions differently than might be custom in different cultural and ethnic circles, this was not what mattered: people would figure out what worked for them through struggling to remember the collective history they came from. The details were not what is important, rather, it is the way we relate to one another and how we fill the spaces in between us that makes us traditional. Remembering, then, is less about what exactly, or "really", happened and more about how people engage with one another and the land.[109] It is Duncan's discussion of memory that became the focus of our talk and what has inspired me in his storytelling and writing so much.

When Duncan was a young boy his grandmother told him that he would be a storyteller. This was a responsibility, and not something he had a say in. He was chosen. As a young man he did not appreciate this role, but when he came to the city he began to see how important it really was. Storytelling was about remembering for Duncan, and

[109] I am not suggesting that historical memory of events as they happened is not important. Certainly I would not suggest that the oral histories of treaties, for instance, should be ignored. This is immensely important for communities today. The remembering I am discussing here is distinguishing cultural memory from legal-historical memory, which is also very important in many court proceedings over land claims and treaty history today.

memory was more of an embodied action. He began to remember moments and events from his childhood, like the way the fishermen used to throw the nets in to the river. The ways they moved. How his grandma cleaned the fish and the delicate movements she would make as she carefully maneuvered around bones and then placed the fillets in the pan. One memory that was particularly powerful was when a new member of the family was born. As a male, Duncan's presence would not typically be permitted during or after a birth, but it was requested of him by his grandmother to come after the birth of a new family member for a reason he did not know. While he was there, he witnessed his grandmother pick up the newborn baby and chant to its face. He did not understand what he saw for many years, but now it is obvious to him: his grandmother was giving the baby the sound of her voice and the scent of her breath. To this day, Duncan remembers his grandmother's scent and voice, a gift that was similarly bestowed up him when he was born. I think this is the most beautiful example to think about where culture resides, and it shows us how memory is embodied and performed. In his storytelling, Duncan passes on this cultural memory in creative ways that also recalls the history of events such as the Hydro dam that destroyed his community. His storytelling is about contributing to the "recreation of tradition to fit the times," and performs memory in ways that Indigenous scholars like Tasha Hubbard have written about. Memory is more than the literal cataloguing of an event or image in ones mind, something that can be recalled later; it is more literal, more of a reality itself. It is lived.[110]

3.5 Wachea

[110] See Introduction chapter; Hubbard, "Voices Heard in the Silence, History Held in the Memory: Ways of Knowing Jeannette Armstrong's 'Threads of Old Memory'."

Duncan Mercredi begins his story, "Wachea",

> *Tansi, aneen, boosoo, sago,* words of greeting or are they, strange coming from the same voice, whispered across the land with no one listening, *tansi,* how are you, *aneen,* how are things, *boozoo,* good day, *sago,* a greeting of well-being coming from the eastern door, and travelled along the rivers and the trails now covered in gravel and asphalt, making its home on the flatlands of the prairies, riding the waves of the lake, mingling with all those other greetings of well-being and safe travels, old words, older than the land, greetings carried from the stars, mixed in with other words and phrases I don't know, yet I have heard whispered on the streets and paths of today and yesterday, slipping in and out of places like the back alleys of main street, carried into the northend and now some are even found in the suburbs, old words, planting their seeds into new memories.[111]

Words, the most concrete objects of our everyday life. They challenge the distinction between writing and speaking. What has been printed has a life beyond the page. They have histories, older than this land itself, Mercredi reminds us. They mix and live with other words and greetings. They have lived through the changes of our environment, but are unfazed by the gravel and concrete that now lines the paths they travel. These words have travelled great distances, spatially and temporally, and their experiences dawn them with the gift of great wisdom. What is particularly striking to me, however, is how Mercredi tells us that these words continue to influence us, "planting their seeds into new memories." The words in this story recreate the world Mercredi is telling us about while simultaneously struggling toward a new actualization of a different world. Rather than simple metaphorical definition as representing an existing piece of reality with different words, these words *tansi, aneen, boozoo, sago, are* reality. They identify something older than this land while relating us to a future that is becoming and struggling to actualize itself. He Continues:

[111] Mercredi, "Wachea," 123.

> Unable to shake free of these words, older than this land, we glance into the shadows looking for their origin, but the picture is shrouded in mist and the voice is but a whisper, still weak, *tansi, aneen, boozoo, sago,* ah but much stronger now than yesterday or even the year before that; the voice is old, the body weak, the mind forgetful, and the trail is faint, but the footsteps are straight and do not waver from the path though the sharp stones rip and tear soles of the feet—somehow it is comforting, to feel the pain and smell the blood: it means life these words, *tansi, aneen, boozoo, sago.*[112]

These words mean life. We could also say that these words *are* life. By showing how these words have lives of their own and are part of and constitute a reality, he also shows that these words are embodied. These words whisper to us from a time and place long ago, but they also continue to guide our steps: "the voice is old, the body weak, the mind forgetful, and the trail is faint, but the footsteps are straight and do not waver from the path…"[113] And the act of walking that Mercredi describes helps show how these words not only guide our steps, but are in fact constituted by the literal walking we do; our minds and bodies are of the same reality as, and directly in contact with, the land. The land possesses memory, and as we walk it we (re)live those memories. And what better an image to demonstrate this simple truth of embodiment and our connection to this land than that of the path. Bodies travelling a particular area over and over make paths. But where does the trail leave its mark on us? The profoundness of Mercredi's poem, "Wachea," is not simply that he shows us how we make marks on the land, but also that the land marks and is engrained on our own bodies as well. A double movement of being marked and marking; carrying the past and making the future.

The problem that Mercredi addresses in "Wachea" is that "we", a collectivity of Indigenous peoples, the first inhabitants and ancient dwellers of this land, have stopped

[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

listening to the land. A competing history battled for the rights to write its story on the land. An entire peoples' way of life changed so rapidly. In a moment a completely different history was forced on top of this land, setting its people on a different course that they would have to struggle against:

> …our lives were changing so drastically and in such a short period of time, our skins, our eyes, our hair had become a lighter shade of brown, almost indistinguishable from the strangers that had invaded our village; our language, too, was now the second voice, our past guardian, no longer recognizable after years of abuse, was spoken in whispers, eyes downcast; we became angrier, our anger directed against ourselves and those around us; through all this, we never realized that the river's voice had been silenced, not until the roar of the machines, that had been brought in to stem the flow of our lifeline, ceased, only then did we begin to comprehend all that we had lost: instead of heralding the arrival of spring with its awakening, the river sat silent, barely alive, its flow dictated by that monstrosity that sat above all, the silver wires hummed and lifted the hair on our heads when we passed beneath them, sang a different song, one we could not dance to, nor could we remember the words—the old people were the first to go, then the children, then us, our world had become a stranger, we no longer recognized the lake and the river, once full of life, was lifeless, and yet at times it seemed menacing, *we could feel the anger just below its surface*.[114]

But all is not lost for Mercredi. Though history many have been written over, though it may not be spoken anymore, it continues to break through in ways that cannot be ignored. This history can only be forgotten for so long, Mercredi says, for the "ghosts they never leave, they stay and wait, knowing we can't hide behind the concrete and the asphalt and the darkened houses forever, they wait, downtown, maybe, where the rivers meet, yes, beneath your manicured lawn, I am told that there were many burial mounds here, so when you close your eyes tonight, just before sleep, listen closely."[115] Mercredi calls for a reorientation of our ways of living, directing our attention to the ways our bodies already possess a collective knowledge and history, tying people to the land. In

[114] Ibid., 124. Emphasis mine.
[115] Ibid.

this way, Mercredi resurrects the oral tradition or storytelling, finding the *voice* (in Hubbard's sense of the term) of his ancestors and articulating the memories of his community.[116] Mercredi, through his discursive practices of storytelling and writing, reveals a form of Indigenous collectivity, one that is not rooted in notions of traditional dress or ceremony or notions of blood quantum and other legal definitions, but one that conceives of ceremony more broadly: where memory is socially and historically mediated through our bodies and the land.

It should be clear by now that Mercredi's writing on the city is fascinating precisely because of the way it brings traditional forms of being, thinking, and relating to "fit the times," but also to define the times and the future. His work cannot be limited to an image of insulated continuity, like Indian blood, nor can it be reduced to native stereotypes. He acknowledges in "Wachea" that Indigenous peoples have become entangled with White European cultures and communities. Identity and collectivity are not as simple and straightforward as they may have once been. But, despite this, Mercredi senses a residual spirit from the past that defines a contemporary spirit – less cohesively unified than discourses of blood quantum or stereotypical images of 'the Native' want to suggest, but collective nonetheless. Images and culture are imagined in and juxtaposed with new scenarios and environments, indicating the inescapability of the past, and the unlimited possibility of the present and future for Indigenous peoples. In his poem "He Likes to Dance," a man dances to create the visions of his dreams on the beer stained floor of a smoky bar.[117] His memories of his dreams are actualized in his dance. Dreams, Duncan tells me, are the place that the grandfathers come to tell us things; what we

[116] For Hubbard's conception of voice, recall: Hubbard, "Voices Heard in the Silence, History Held in the Memory: Ways of Knowing Jeannette Armstrong's 'Threads of Old Memory'," 145–49.

[117] Mercredi, *Dreams of the Wolf in the City*, 37.

should be doing, what we shouldn't be doing; warning us about the future; guiding us.[118] "He Likes to Dance" shows the refusal of a man to succumb to his surroundings of poverty, drug abuse, sexual exploitation, and the yearning to create another life, another world. Memory is also signified in the two different ways discussed above. In his struggles, the man must sell himself, performing oral sex and "washing the taste away with whiskey/ erasing the memory with needles in the arm." While he actively seeks to destroy the memories of his street life, he continues to dance "to the music in his mind/ creating visions from his dreams" while "living his lies in the daytime." One memory is of the scenes of disgust, a recollection of something that happened, something that exists; another memory is a dream enacted literally through his body. This latter memory is interesting because it identifies a reality that does not yet exist, or rather, a transforming of the immaterial reality of his dreams in to material reality on the dance floor. This aspect of memory is central to the way Mark Rifkin, as we saw in the introduction chapter, analyzes the use of metaphor in Indigenous literary texts, functioning at once as residual and emergent formations and reminding us that what constitutes Native being goes beyond the discourses of pure continuity of a pre-settler past and also the discourses and geographies of the settler state that have had such success in defining the contours of Indigeneity today.[119] Mercredi articulates an identity and collectivity of the Indigenous that enacts both of these formations, carrying the past while also changing in to the future, articulating new possibilities and realities, new modes of being, and showing what it *really* means to be Indigenous. Mercredi gives us reason to rethink our notions of Indigeneity in the city. It is with this understanding and approach to the possibility of

[118] Mercredi, Interview with Les Sabiston.

[119] Rifkin, *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing in the Era of Self-Determination*, 17–18.

Native being that we now turn toward the youth and how they are negotiating their identities as young Indigenous men in the urban environment. Using Duncan Mercredi's words as a map, we can begin to see the complexities of Indigenous identity in the city and the ways that the youth are at the forefront of staking out new claims of Indigeneity and struggling for new futures.

Chapter 4 - Native Youth in the City

Listening to Loud Voice's story about not wanting to be a "country Indian" created a lot of mixed feelings for me. Not the least of which was coming to terms with how the rural and rez had become so divided conceptually as well as materially and geographically, in the minds not only of the government and settler public but also for Native peoples. It became blatantly clear that I needed to listen more to this young man trying to articulate his own identity. Though he stumbled over the words, and often limited his justifications of his own identity as a "city boy" to petty categorizations of "country Indians" as stupid and backwards, his position was unambiguous, energetic, and highly emotional. Loud Voice was expressing himself in a very emotional way and defended something he felt near and dear to his self-worth and very being. He did not want to fit himself in to a predefined notion of Indian, and was struggling to articulate his own sense of what Indigenous meant. Listening to Loud Voice, I was reminded of a poem by Duncan Mercredi titled, "dreams of the wolf in the city":

> in the silence of a long dead river
> i hear the whispers of lovers
> their words fading into the past
> but their spirits live along the river
> among the trees that shade me from the sun
>
> in the darkness of the dark moon
> i hear the cry of young wolves
> as they search for lost memories
> that burn deep in their minds
> but the message is lost
> in the silence of a falling star
>
> in the noise of city streets
> i hear the voices of blue coats
> as they slam me against concrete walls
> while white faces glance approvingly
> from passing cars

though my only sin is pride and nonconformity

and inside my heart
i hear the silence of a long dead river
begin to sing
and the cry of young wolves rise again
barely heard through the back alleys of hate."[120]

This poem beautifully shows the struggle for memory, as articulated in the previous chapter, amongst Indigenous peoples. What is particularly striking though are the lines about the young wolves who are searching for the "lost memories" burned "deep in their minds" that are "lost in the silence of a falling star." The young wolves are rising up, asserting themselves and wrestling with the memories that have been lost and taken from them. But as Mercredi has showed us, you may wipe out memory in some ways, but residuals exist and collective history operates and emerges in many ways. The young wolves are doing this, yet their voices are lost, ignored, and stamped out by hate. This hate could stand for many things. It could be the hate of police officers that make it their duty to hold our youth down, stopping them and harassing them at every corner, and expecting them to be criminals and thugs. It could be from people like Loud Voice's in-laws or from other Native people who have turned the pain they feel into hatred towards their own Native cousins. Hatred is poisonous and contagious, but the point is that wherever it is coming from it is doing a good job of silencing our youth.

The goal of this chapter is to further explore some of the ways the youth are struggling to understand and articulate themselves. As young men, most of whom are affiliated with gangs, much of my observations focus on the particular masculinity that is performed by the boys and how this is often inflected through violent performances.

[120] Mercredi, *Dreams of the Wolf in the City*, 29.

Rather than demonizing such behavior, my thinking has been to see how such behaviors are performances of collective histories of trauma and pain. The boys do not have a shared language to conceptualize this shared history, and, for the most part, it remains at the level of social performance and embodiment. The second part of this chapter is on programs like Circle of Courage and Just TV that I have participated in with the boys and how such spaces of teaching and learning offer the boys new means of expression where they are developing key skills in a collective and collaborative way that are helping them articulate their experiences and the broader struggles of individual and collective identity that they share.

4.1 Outside the Arbour

One story that I have spent a lot of time listening to is the near confrontation between me, Loud Voice, Chipper, and Little Bear and a group of boys from Sandy Bay at the Sandy Bay Pow Wow in the summer of 2012. This other group of boys was about the same age as Loud Voice and Chipper. Little Bear was the youngest, and not very interested in matters of turf or posturing, but Loud Voice and Chipper knew what was happening when these boys walked in to our campsite on the first night. These boys were pushing in on our territory, a little camp sight we had neatly located at the edge of the grounds, naturally marked by the bush that traced the very outside of the Pow Wow grounds. There was a trail that went in to the bush very close to our site, and we thought nothing of it at first. We soon learned, however, that this trail put us in the direct path of a group of young boys who were coming in to the Pow Wow and starting trouble. There was a cat and mouse game that went on for quite some time, where these boys, anywhere

from six to ten of them, would sneak in to the Pow Wow and start some trouble and then security would chase them off, inevitably through our camp sight. The first time this happened the security guy showed me a sock with a billiard ball in it that he had confiscated from one of the boys before the boy got away from him. It was clear these boys were looking for some trouble, or at least prepared to defend themselves if trouble found them. I became worried, but by this time there were not really any other campsites available, unless we wanted to set up in the middle of the field where the wind would surely take our insecure tent away with it. It was also approaching dark, and we were all tired from a long day of driving, arguing, wrestling, and exploring the new place we were in. When I asked the boys what they thought, they rubbed off the question, saying with puffed up chests that if anything happened they would take care of it. Reluctantly, I agreed that we would take our chances at the camp spot.

It was just before dusk when our first real encounter with a group of four local boys happened. Chipper was dressed in his regalia, ready to participate in a men's traditional dance. We had the van parked parallel with our tent, creating a little nook that provided a bit more shelter and privacy from the people walking in and out of the path in to the bush. This worked well as long as those people walking in to the bush recognized our little nook as our space. These four boys obviously did not and they wanted us to know it while they walked directly through our campsite. They stopped and started to stare at us. I quickly made myself a mediator between these boys and my boys, worried that things would escalate quickly if Chipper and Loud Voice were to negotiate this confrontation in their own way. One of these strangers was very drunk, and was wrapping a white handkerchief around his fist, demonstrating his readiness to fight while also

representing some colours that he clearly wanted Loud Voice, Chipper, and Little Bear to see, which they recognized immediately as Native Syndicate colours. He began talking about how drunk he was and how crazy that made him. He made loud whoops, indicating that he was looking for a fight and that he didn't care what was to happen to him that night. He also made it clear to us that he was the one who had brought in the weapon that the security guard had shown us previously.

While my boys waited for these four strangers to make a move the air got tense. I couldn't wait for something to happen so I just engaged in some small talk, asking them their names and what not. At first they didn't seem to be very interested in me and didn't really care for my questions, but they began answering, little by little. I started asking them about their families and, knowing that Curly - the boys' effective second father and cultural leader from Circle of Courage - was from Sandy Bay, began to trace familial connections and friendships that created a direct connection between us and these boys via Curly. With this connection we became less like strangers encroaching on the land/turf of these boys and a little less threatening. Eventually things started to cool down a bit and even the drunk, confrontational boy began to joke around with me. Eventually the other boys that were with the drunk one started to get embarrassed by his drunkenness and they pulled him away. I said goodbye and we didn't see them for the rest of the weekend. When they left, I looked at Chipper and Loud Voice, still in their same positions of the front seat and middle seat of the van, respectively. They slowly relaxed and their bodies sunk a little bit in to their seats. I noticed that Chipper was sitting in a particularly odd position, leaning back quite a bit and off centred with his arm reaching back behind his seat. When I asked him why he was sitting like that he straightened up

and pulled his arm from behind the seat where he had been holding on to a wooden pole. This piece of wood was used to wrap and store the headdress of his regalia when it wasn't being used. It is a pretty thick and solid piece of wood that tappers out like a classical torch, which gives it a nice handle and also a nice battering surface area. For Chipper, this made the perfect weapon. As Chipper began to explain to me how he was ready to pull it out should things have gotten out of hand, Loud Voice began to show and tell me how he had The Club, the security mechanism we used for the van, ready and accessible should he have needed it. Two common items made in to deadly weapons, ready for action.

The image of Chipper and Loud Voice sitting there, Chipper dressed in full Men's Traditional regalia, ready to fight with another group of boys, dressed in regular 'street' clothes, flashing gang colours, was hard to shake. That Chipper was willing to fight while in his traditional regalia, and that he was willing to use the pole for his headdress as a weapon, was unnerving for me. It seemed so… un-traditional. To complicate things further for me, Chipper, Loud Voice, and Little Bear were three city kids with minimal contact with the reserves of their extended families, who were coming to the rez to dance in the traditional men's dances, while these boys who were from the rez were dressed like 'city kids', drunk, and ready to fight and cause trouble at the Pow Wow of their own community. In this moment my reflexive understanding of tradition and what it means to be indigenous was – fortunately, I should say – torn asunder. It was the Pow Wow that circumvented my thoughts on what constituted a truly traditional Indigenous practice and way of life. The whole point of hitting the Pow Wow trail that summer was to allow these boys to 'connect' with their traditions, to explore what has been taken from them and to help them feel proud of who they are as young Indigenous men. It was blindingly clear

that these boys were all contesting this rigid definition of tradition in one way or another. They were more interested in maintaining and exploring the identities they knew best, the ones they were invested in. Interestingly, the boys from the rez were invested in something similar. Their urban hip hop-like clothing indicated a similar attachment to a particular set of signifiers that Loud Voice, Chipper, and Little Bear were certainly familiar with. These signs and attachments also made them aware that they needed to confront one another, test each other, and prove themselves. That these rez kids and the city boys I was with were all communicating with one another indicated further to me the false division between the urban and rez. If anything, their comfort in identifying with one another, though aggressively, seemed to indicate a set of relations that were more or less generational, and that what they truly shared in common was that they were 'outside' of the arbour, outside of tradition.[121]

If what these boys were doing is expressing themselves and identifying with one another, articulating their identities in radically different ways than the Pow Wow that was going on fifty meters away, what does it mean that violence is a central means of this expression? Has violence become a way of indexing contemporary Indigenous identity in the city, or on the rez? Recall Marvin Francis' poem, "Jam Cig Poem," whereby what signifies the Native brotherhood between him and his friend is their shared wounds and the blood that clouds their urine, aftermaths of a violent encounter with a cop.[122] The cop

[121] More work and research needs to be done to understand the gang connections between urban centres and reserves. What unites the youth in both of these scenarios are similar socio-economic barriers and systemic forms of discrimination that make Indigenous youth one of the most marginalized groups, even more so than other "at risk" and gang involved youths, which makes gangs an attractive opportunity for them. See Jana Grekul and Patti LaBoucane-Benson, "Aboriginal Gangs and Their (Dis)placement: Contextualizing Recruitment, Membership, and Status," *Canadian Journal of Criminology & Criminal Justice* 50, no. 1 (January 2008): 77. More work also needs to be done on the specific role prisons serve in connecting gangs between the urban and the reserve.

[122] See Chapter 1.

in Francis' poem "…wants u to confess/ wants u to b & e/ meaning broke and evil."[123] What does it mean that violent behavior, performance, is expected and provoked by various settler forms of recognition and regulation of Native peoples? As Mark Rifkin attests, such forms of recognition perform a double act of effacement: the cop's violence toward Native peoples is justified while also the historical violence of land theft and the "geopolitics of jurisdiction" on which the settler state continues to legitimize itself is further perpetuated by the spatial regulation of the Native.[124] Yet surly the examples of violence I have described above are not enacted by state apparatuses, they are part of the everyday experience and imagination of these boys. The question to be asked then is whether this violence is an historical operation of trauma, consequences of a settler metaphoric that has become literalized in Native community – a residue of the violent rupture of settler colonialism – and is it a matter of survival? Was the coming together of these two groups of boys illustrative of the historical process that they are at the forefront of, whereby they must negotiate the life of 'tradition' amongst the colonial legacies of pain and abuse, alcoholism, and abandonment, all through new forms of social politics of gangs and violence and the realities of urban living?

4.2 Youth Gangs

Kathy Buddle has suggested that gangs serve a particular socio-political and historic function for Indigenous youth today. As one of the most marginalized segments of our society, gangs provide a new arsenal of ethics and codes of belonging for youth

[123] Francis, *City Treaty*, 43.

[124] Mark Rifkin, *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing in the Era of Self-Determination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 222–228.

who are otherwise excluded by society.[125] In what she identifies as the process helping youth transition from "bush to street, from boy to man, from weak to fit," gangs are alluring to youth who are struggling with existential dilemmas of finding belonging, respect, and prestige and to other material needs for/of money. Violence fits in as a direct means of resisting the everyday oppression and exclusion that youth experience. But the defiance does not only apply to the conditions of urban lifestyle and the material politics of poverty that the youth must contend with. Buddle notes that Indian Country cultural politics are also perceived as a site that constrains the possibilities, both materially and conceptually, of the youth.[126] Youth collectivity is thus a place for experimentation and re-signification of various symbols, including Aboriginality and community, which makes them often a contradictory and antithetical group to 'traditional' Native peoples. Caught in between both traditional Native community and Canadian society, Native youth are often forced to chart their own paths, and the structures of gang membership and sociality and the potential for material and economic gain that is offered through such venues are tempting alternatives.[127]

A key insight offered by Buddle through her work with current and ex-gang members is that gangs generally do not fulfill their promise of escape from the existential

[125] Kathleen Buddle, "Bullets for B-Roll: Shooting Native Films and Street Gangs in Western Canadian Cities," *Emisferica* 4.2 (November 2007); Kathleen Buddle, "Urban Aboriginal Gangs and Street Sociality in the Canadian West: Places, Performances, and Predicaments of Transition," in *Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian Cities: Transformations and Continuities*, ed. Heather Howard-Bobiwash and Craig Proulx (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 171–202.

[126] Buddle, "Bullets for B-Roll: Shooting Native Films and Street Gangs in Western Canadian Cities."

[127] For analyses of gang violence based on systemic poverty and racism, see Elizabeth Comack et al., *If You Want to Change Violence in the 'Hood, You Have to Change the "Hood: Violence and Street Gangs in Winnipeg"s Inner City*, A Report Presented to Honourable Dave Chomiak, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Government of Manitoba, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Manitoba (Winnipeg, September 2009).

and material dilemmas that makes them so alluring in the first place.[128] Furthermore, there is no real leadership or sense of political consciousness at the level of the gang, and the moral codes that may have been present in earlier formations of gangs like The Warriors have mostly ceded to new material exigencies of a growing drug trade.[129] For all of the work they do in offering new formations of belonging and facilitating new identity negotiation, the gangs do not necessarily lend themselves to a brighter future or to a movement of liberation and political consciousness. And yet. And yet these social formations drive so many of our youth. They feel dedicated to certain gangs and neighbourhoods and are willing to put their bodies in harms way for these convictions.[130] These performances are significant and indicate that just below the surface of bodily movement and posturing and symbolic forms of membership and affiliation is the movement of history. A shared history of displacement and violence meted out by the structures of a settler colonial state inform this shared language.

4.3 Masculinity and Family – Some Brief Thoughts

> I know I made you mad but I don't care about the damn parts of my past because all can say is dad you're the man.[131]

Young boys, searching for their fathers. In anything. Even in the violence, the abuse, the toughness. Mothers not understanding, trying to fill them with love, but exhausted and unsure how to make up for absent fathers. This absence is the norm today

[128] Buddle, "Bullets for B-Roll: Shooting Native Films and Street Gangs in Western Canadian Cities."

[129] Ibid.

[130] That gang affiliations often change, and quite regularly at times, amongst the youth does not discredit that the youth still adopt strong feelings and attachments to different gangs.

[131] Lyrics from a song titled, "Don't Bother," written by Ace during our work together at Just Tv in February, 2013.

amongst many families. The sad fact is that among the eleven boys that I've worked with to varying degrees over the past year and a half, only a few of them have contact with their biological fathers. Three of them are in foster care and have limited contact with even their mothers. Two of them live with their fathers, though one them, Alloon, lives with his father out of convenience when he has troubles living with his mother – in the past, when he has had fights with his mother, he would temporarily move to his father's home. In the summer of 2012, I witnessed T trying desperately to have a relationship with his father who was living with another woman, most often with disappointing results. He hated the man that was living with his mother, rejected him as his 'father,' and saw her relationship with this man as a betrayal. He would run away for months on end, which seemed to me as both a way to express his freedom and punish his mother at the same time. I recall the time he came in to COC one afternoon out of the blue, wanting to use the phone to call his mom. His mother hadn't seen him in about a month and a half, nor had we at COC. He was happy to talk to his mom, and kept telling her that she should see him and how much weight he had lost. It was significant to me that one of the main things he wanted to tell his mother was that he was so skinny, assuming that she would want to nurture and feed him. He had been living with his father for the most part for that month and a half, having the freedom to come and go as he pleased. With his newfound sense of freedom, however, also came a significant neglect, as his father did not take the same interest in making sure that T was fed. Even though T had access to his father, the experience of him was mostly one of absence.

On my dad's side: poverty, three children, a single mother who remarried when the kids were nearly adults, and a promiscuous and absent father. He was a drinker and a gambler. He knew how to live on the land, but rarely passed on these skills to my dad, uncle, or auntie, mostly on account of his absence. He was an angry man, my grandpa. And he was abusive to my grandma, my dad, uncle, and auntie. My dad always had his mom, and they were close. But there was only so much she could do; only so much she could teach him. I saw regret in my grandma's eyes that day she came with my dad to the police station to plead with my mom and the officers not to press charges. She was full of pain. It was as if she saw my dad's behavior as a fault of her own. But where was grandpa? Not even on my mind. It was so normal that he wouldn't be there. Though I was not necessarily cognizant of his absence, it is clear that his absence created a gap that each successive generation would try to fill. My dad became oddly similar to my grandpa, despite the experience of his father as absence during his childhood. I experienced my father similarly.

My great-grandfather, George Cromarty, was the first mixed-blood in our family, resulting from the marriage between Samuel Cromarty and Mary Kipling. My uncle Les, who I am named after, still remembers his great-grandma, Mary Kipling, bringing him bundles of sweet grass in the summers when he was a little boy. She was a Cree woman, from the St. Peter's Band just North of Selkirk. Due to the gendered structuring of the Indian Act, this marriage robbed her of her official recognition as a status Indian by the Canadian government. Great-Grandpa George was a boat operator, taking goods from Selkirk up the Red River to communities on the Lake. He died when my grandpa Mel was only ten years old of a burst appendix. His absence was hard on the family, and my

grandpa's life was not easy, subsequently. My great-grandma, Nora Cromarty, couldn't take care of all the kids and had to give grandpa away to neighbours who could take care of him. He learned how to take care of himself, but in the process became so fiercely independent that he couldn't maintain relationships, a weakness that his children, my dad, certainly felt. I recognize this fierce independence in my own father, but with the magnified characteristics of not being *able* to depend on anyone, or have anyone depend on him. His dad, grandpa Mel, left my dad and the family when my dad was ten, the same age, coincidentally, grandpa Mel was when he lost his own dad, great-grandpa Goerge. "I *am* because of what he *was,*" my dad tells me in his usual shrewd demeanor. "We lost a lot of time, him and I." I am amazed at how the absence works on us, my father, grandfather, and me. It is a screaming, gaping hole that I realize I have been trying to fill for most of my life. Despite the pain, and the far too occasional reprehensible behavior, I idolized my father. I desperately wanted to be him, but only the best parts. I knew I didn't want to repeat his mistakes. But despite my own best efforts, I am my father in more ways than I care to be. I have been trying to understand the pain that is passed down, generation to generation. The loss of a father at a young age, growing up not really sure about his family, ashamed of being Native in a society that was largely inhospitable to Natives. In each generation, these absences are passed on, silently working on us.

On my mother's side: poverty, ten children, two different fathers, an angry and spiteful mother. Grandpa loved my mom, but he always sided with grandma – she was a force to be reckoned with. She was tough, and she even worked at the Merchants Hotel and, I've heard, had no trouble throwing drunks out on their asses if they got out of hand. At one point in her life, I suppose, her anger and strength commanded her respect, or

most likely, fear and intimidation. And I suppose this was necessary to get through a lot of her life. But it loaded up a legacy of negative consequences for our family. Her presence too is now felt in our day-to-day relations. And as much as my mom tried to make her an absence, grandma shaped our family in ways my mom never could have foreseen. Grandma demanded toughness in her children, and she generally taught that lesson through keeping her love guarded, especially to my mom, and through physical beatings. My cousins, most of them older than I, learned these lessons too. And as much as my mom wanted to keep me away from my grandma, she wanted me to have relationships with my cousins. She didn't see how becoming close to my cousins would also make me close to my grandma. In a funny way, my grandma, partly, informed the masculinity that would shape my family on my mother's side. She created many of the coordinates that would be latched on to when the young men of the next generations were trying to create a world for themselves. And not just the toughness, but also the alchoholism. Alcohol became a way of comforting or suppressing, for at least one of my uncles, the deep emotional scars left by an often cold and distant mother and a life of poverty. I remember thinking my uncle was so funny, always the funny drunk who made every family gathering fun. When he unabashedly volunteered to sing karaoke on grandma's birthday, and filled in most of the long gaps when no one else wanted to, he entertained us. My cousin, his son, was an idol to me. A few years older, he was tough, and smart. He got in to a lot of trouble, and started drinking at a very young age. He had a reputation, and people knew who I was because of who he was. It felt good, and I followed his steps, getting drunk for the first time at the age of 12, fighting long before that. But I remember the time uncle had a bad drunk at the fair campgrounds. I'd never

seen my uncle so mean and angry, or my cousin so scared and emotional. Those emotions were just another thing to push down though. We couldn't see at that age the patterns in all of this.

What does it mean to come from a disrupted family? How does history live in our bones? How is masculinity - and its various articulations, such as violence and the clichés of tough men - a particular armature for this history to grow while also suppressing a greater understanding of this pain? The dysfunction travels many generations, growing, festering. As a young man I sought out different experiences and ways of life - anything to fill in the holes I felt in my own life. I left my family behind, and I tried to find new families. In travel, politics, new groups of friends. Generally these friends had anger like me, though they expressed it in different ways that I thought were creative and exciting. But as much as I tried to run from them, my family was always present, and unfortunately, it was the negative qualities in them that I always felt haunted me. Instead of the quality of a relentless curiosity that my father instilled in me, I noticed the anger and temper that he taught me. I remembered the nights when police officers came to our house, sometimes taking my father away, sometimes taking statements from my shaken, emotional, and abused mother. I remember the time I looked on helplessly as a police car drove by down the street without noticing the violence that was happening on a commercial boulevard in front of the Merchants hotel. For all of this violence that I was exposed to as a child, my father saw no contradiction in teaching me to fight. He saw it as an essential tool, as a way to defend myself from the many threats that would come my way. In many ways, this skill did pay off. I learned how to stick up for myself, and, significantly, it was also my key to independence.

Loud Voice lives with his single mother and, as the oldest boy living in the house with many siblings, is effectively the 'man of the house.' He takes this role seriously. He often talks intensely about how he would deal with a man who was trying to "shack up" with his mom and feels obligated to protect her aggressively and violently if needed. His need to resort to violence demonstrates the way that the displaced family has been refilled by different senses of masculinity. He searches for ways of asserting his role and understanding himself. I am beginning to see how violence was a way of organizing dysfunction in my life. The stories of a good fight, the fantasies of defending ones family and sense of dignity with the only thing they have: their fists and their wit. In a house without a male role model, and with the only examples of manhood I witnessed being very aggressive and domineering, I struggled to articulate my own sense of manhood, much like Loud Voice.

According to Duncan Mercredi, many youth today, even people of older generations, are unable to accept the past of their parents and ancestors. At first I did not understand what he meant by 'accept.' He told me that he saw gangs as a way for people to protect themselves from the pain.[132] Mercredi compared the gang to the groups he and his siblings, cousins, and friends would mingle in when they were young. These groups, he told me, were a way of seeking protection from the alcohol-fueled violence at home, to seek commonality, and to relate. But, Mercredi warned, eventually you can become exactly what you are protecting yourself from. To not "accept" is to not understand that pain and anger, to let it work you. One of the common ways people fight the pain, unable to accept it, Mercredi remarks, is to make others feel pain. These words are important to hold on to in order to acknowledge the predatory nature of the social forms that youth are

[132] Mercredi, Interview with Les Sabiston.

creating in gangs, and I want to do my best to avoid romanticizing gang culture precisely because it has such destructive consequences. We need to be cognizant of this destructiveness while also recognizing the generational pain and trauma. How can we productively critique and challenge current formations of masculinity and sociality while striving to recapture and reclaim traditional signifiers of masculinity, to point our youth in directions that are positive forms of collectivity? And, most importantly, how can we permit a diversity of identity and a cohesiveness of collectivity that permits ambiguity and refuses the rigidity of dominant social forms? It is in the spaces of youth programming, such as Circle of Courage and Just TV, that I think have the potential of combining safe spaces for building community and teaching the boys about their cultures and where they come from while also giving them the space to develop their own sense of self that is not stifled or seriously restricted. It is in these spaces that I see potential for youths finding their voice.

4.4 Circle of Courage as Family

> Well even in jail a lot of people found [their culture]. I used to think when these guys, like when they come out of jail, like even the other day I got a call from [a guy in] remand and he says "I woke up this morning thinking about you." He's been in remand[133] probably for three months. And he said "I'm going to sweats twice a week" – when he was living on the streets here he wasn't going to sweats at all, you know he was doing lots of like drinking and stuff like that. He's connecting with some of the people, like some of the elders over here. And in my head you know, I'm thinking, this is like, good! I'm glad that you're there! Like I'm glad! Cause he is able to, but lots of our people connected with their identity in jails. And he was. He'd done some time in Stony[134] already, so he's been there, hey? But its true, I agree that we're in this city together. That's what the other thing is that I've found too, Les. Like I'm 62 years old, and I know that lots of people's families have

[134] Stony Mountain Penitentiary is a Federal prison in Manitoba, just North of Winnipeg by thirty minutes.

> been so damaged and like there's lots of people that are you know, like uh, children have lost their families, its part of the whole experience really, hey? And so, I think that this is how I've made sense of it as well, is that um, cause I think family is still really integral to peoples' identity and peoples' sense of well being and peoples' sense of belonging. So around creating, you know, creating [family]. And we kind of do it here, kind of not too, because we work cross culturally here as well, and I don't try to force something that's not natural to people. You know it has to come from a natural place. But people here, some of the staff here are connected to our Sun Dance family. And we're connected, like that's our family! Hey? That's just as important as the family that we've been born in to and sometimes even more eh? And so like when people need moms, I'm a mom! Our, I'm the auntie. I'm that person that can give them that connection. And we can. And that's not mine alone to be. It's just to try to bring them in to that larger family. All our lost people. Even you! If we are lost that way, we have a right to our connections, to our spiritual traditions. Cause to me that's where the power is, that's where the transformation is. Its only there, but not everybody knows how to get there hey? And to me, we are a portal for that, if people want that. And I've never forced it on people, but that's just, that's a little bit of how I conceptualize. On Saturday night were having a weepy ceremony, and I'm not gonna be able to be there, but Ka Ni Kanichihk is sponsoring it. And the people, people want to have that connection to the spirits cause that's where we have power, that unbelievable power. That's to me where it's at, hey?[135]

Circle of Courage was a program offered for young male youth by Ka Ni Kanichihk. While the history of Circle of Courage is part of other policy and educational philosophies, I focus on my own experience with COC in Winnipeg.[136] The basic premise of a program like COC is to create environments where the youth can feel comfortable and that they belong, where they can learn positive life skills and gain a sense of independence and pride in themselves and their culture. Based in Indigenous teachings, the seven teachings of Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, and Truth were always central to activities. While traditional teachings were at the root of

[135] Spillett, Interview with Les Sabiston. Leslie is the executive director of Ka Ni Kanichihk.

[136] For more information on the philosophy of Circle of Courage, see Larry K Brendtro, Steve Vanbockern, and Martin Brokenleg, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future* (Bloomington, Indiana: National Educational Service, 1990); For more information on the pilot project funding that COC was part of in with the Youth Gang Prevention Fund (YGPF) of the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS), see *Final Report: Circle of Courage. Winnipeg Youth Gang Prevention Fund Projects*, Prepared For: Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. (Winnipeg: Proactive Information Services Inc., June 2011).

this program, tradition was never something that was pushed on the youth against their will. In fact, some youth were quite apprehensive about the focus on traditional ceremonies like Sweat Lodges or Sun Dances and Pow Wows. But, Leslie argued, the purpose of places like Ka Ni and programs like COC is that they are Indigenous led programs and they are intentional ways of creating cultural space where people can be comfortable with their history and build new social bonds, support structures, and family. To be able to control the political and economic structures of an environment and use them to serve ones people is crucial for self-determination.[137] What separates Ka Ni from other non-profit organizations whose mandate was to address issues of poverty and community is that Ka Ni is about family and is rooted in the community in ways that other organizations are not and cannot be. Leslie noted Curly as a great example of this. After funding was lost for the Circle of Courage program in March, 2013, Curly remained a close figure for the boys. The boys know they can trust Curly and that he cares about them. Also, Curly knows where they live and is familiar with their neighbourhoods (some of the boys live in the same neighbourhood) and can keep an eye on them. The simple fact that the boys know he is there has enormous power and influence on them. In other organizations, relationships like this are uncommon. We all know the story of the social workers that get shuffled from family to family, never having time to build significant relationships. The youth are extremely sensitive and wise to the host of individuals working in the non-profit and correctional industries that try to hook the boys on assumptions of trust and respect, who then move on to other jobs when funding runs out or when it is decided that programs will take on restructuring. Programs like Circle of Courage, and the insights and cultural perspectives that people like Leslie

[137] Spillett, Interview with Les Sabiston.

Spillett and Curly bring to the table, challenge the nuclear structure of family and practice other forms of kinship that promote strong social bonds that don't simply put the responsibility on parents.

Teaching and learning at COC is also firmly rooted in cultural practices that go beyond pedagogies that depend on reprimanding and discipline. Curly, as the cultural leader and team leader for COC while I was there demonstrated this difference in many ways. For one, Curly made sure that the atmosphere was filled with laughter. New boys often remained hesitant to get involved in jokes, but once they started coming regularly they felt like part of the family and contributed to jokes. Curly taught the boys, and me, how to make fun of each other in ways that were not malicious. Not every boy picked up on this in the same way, and some times boys could still be mean while thinking they were adequately imitating Curly's behavior. But we all learn differently and at different paces. One of Curly's best qualities was his profound patience. He gave the boys the space and time to be themselves, safely and free from malicious judgment. Curly seemed to embrace, intuitively, a pedagogy that was structured like storytelling. He did not simply reprimand the boys or lecture them every single time they did something wrong. I am reminded of Leslie Spillett's words when she described the "non-intervention" style of parenting that she experienced when she was a child and that she saw as a central part to her Native community growing up:

> There was a lot of non-interference in my mom's parental practice. You know the non-interference? Like we were never told what to do, when to do it, how to do it, who to do it with. You know, that was just, we were free. We grew up free kids eh? And we were everywhere. We were in that bush all the time… on our own. The only thing we had to do was kind of come in when it got dark. That was it. We were totally, and that doesn't mean that we were not well taken care of cause in our community everybody had a role, and if they saw, but we were on our own. It was really quite beautiful. So from that perspective, we were raised kind of traditionally

> like that whole practice of non-interference was quite prevalent still in my mom's parenting skills. Which I love that, I'm happy about that, cause when I think about that, uh, it was one of the, I think it was one of the things that really contributed to my own development. Because, I'm pretty free spirit hey? Like, I don't want to be, I don't want to be part of the sheep [laughs]. You know?[138]

Curly had a similar style of non-interference that had very interesting effects and created positive relationships between all of us. Instead of just lecturing and yelling at the boys he would show them that they were being disrespectful, and in ways that made them have to work to understand Curly's lessons. I recall seeing Curly ask a boy to respect the rules of COC by taking his hat off (no gang colours are permitted at COC). The boy laughed at Curly, challenging his rule. Curly simply turned his back on him and walked away. The youth seemed awe struck and was not expecting this reaction from Curly. But this simple gesture demonstrated that rude behavior was not tolerated, there were rules, and that respect would have to be earned. The next day as Curly and I sat in the office talking, the same boy arrived to the COC house and came directly to the office. He had his hat in his hands and politely walked it over to Curly. Of course, not just anyone could replicate such a behavior, as it was only in the respect that this boy had for Curly that made it effective. It was the respect they had for him that gave them encouragement to join Curly in the inner circle of the arbour at the pow wows. When they saw him dance, they could feel proud of their culture and felt safe to join. Curly helped the boys not feel as outsiders and to gain confidence enough to not feel marginalized. But what was significant is that Curly *showed* the boys. Like a true storyteller, Curly's lessons were always work and they required active participation. And while sometimes the boys were not interested in playing along, or were frustrated that they did not immediately understand Curly's point,

[138] Ibid.

there were many examples where they came to an understanding and sought to maintain respectful relationship with Curly.

4.5 Just TV

Just TV was an amazing opportunity that I was able to participate in with the boys. Offered through the basement of the West Broadway Neighbourhood Centre in Winnipeg, there was a full studio for musical and multimedia production, and with trained staff who could work individually with youth to develop skills in various areas, whether it was video editing or the creation of beats and tracks. Four boys from COC initially joined Just TV in order to write a song and make a music video.

There were lots of stories that would come out of the lyrics of the boys. It wasn't even the finished songs that were most important, but often just the writing process where the boys were really thinking about how to construct their songs and the contents they wanted to include. Sometimes the drafts of loose leaf that they would give to me to review and make commentary on had notes in the margins that caught my attention. I remember one day L gave me lyrics and in the left margin were the words "worry," "jail," "money," "in here," all with check marks beside them. Given the nature of his song, it seemed clear that these were themes he wanted to put in his song. They provoked a long discussion between us, and we talked about how he always had to watch his back and the fear he felt when walking through certain neighbourhoods that had gangs he was not associated with. We also talked about the sense of glory and freedom he felt by how much money he could make by working for a gang selling drugs. Another day L gave me a different song he had written and one of the lines read: "now we're all here lookin' at the last spot of the dead body found here." The song recalled a friend being killed, and he

even directed my attention to a YouTube video that had been made by local Winnipeg youth that he knew who were singing about this incident. In the same discussion L also told me about a house he used to live in that was haunted. He told me a story about a person who was killed there and dismembered. It was the ghost of this person who he believed was haunting the house. The songs we wrote together were often a way for the boys to express their anxieties and fears, and I think they were good ways for the boys to begin to learn how to process strong emotions.

Loud Voice wrote many lyrics that talked about the sadness and loneliness of being locked up in Manitoba Youth Corrections (MYC) for months on end. Particularly, he missed his girlfriend and not being able to be with his family to help support them. Other songs carried a very cynical tone, with lines like "That's why the Bible say be careful sharin' your dreams with your friends." The whole song had a sense of profound mistrust. When I asked Loud Voice about it he began telling me a long story about his older brother who didn't live with the family anymore would come and steal stuff from the house so he could pawn it. Such an incident had happened recently and he was clearly still distraught about it. These lyric writing sessions often became a way for the boys to release stories they were building up inside. I did my best to create a safe space that was free of judgment, where the boys felt like they could just share whatever was on their mind or how they were feeling.

The only problems that generally arose were when the boys would tease each other about the song lyrics that others had written, especially if it was too "emotional." One day Ace pulled me aside near the end of program and handed me a folded piece of paper with a song he had written titled, "Don't Bother." He had been distant for most of

the day, and was not socializing with many of the other boys. The song he handed me contained the lyrics that were quoted earlier, "I know I made you mad but I don't care about the damn parts of my past because all can say is dad you're the man," and the song was mostly about the family that he felt estranged from. The emotions were very pronounced and ambivalent, expressing hate for his mother for abandoning him but also missing her and feeling that his family didn't want him despite his attempts to reach out to them. It was obvious why he handed these to me in secret, as the other boys could have used this vulnerability in mean ways against him. What was interesting about this was that Ace had written these lyrics the night before, as he had been distant and preoccupied with other things while the rest of the boys were writing. He wanted to express these thoughts and wanted to share them with someone else. But he needed to do this in the safety of his privacy at home, away from the other boys, and was very careful with who he shared them with.

These song-writing exercises became productive engagements for both the youth and me. Where I was able to get a richer sense of these boys' lives and the issues that affected them that they felt compelled enough to write about, the boys were able to take time to think about these issues and express them through a medium that they could relate to. I saw this as a first step for the boys beginning to articulate their own voice. When the boys were accepted in to the program Just TV new layers of production and writing were added to the lyric writing process. Most notably, Just TV is a multimedia youth program that helps youth develop technical skills, such as audio and video production, recording and editing. The youth can learn to write and produce their own short films, music videos, and they get to be their own creative directors. Most often these projects are

collaborative, with music videos featuring several youth, but they all get to have creative control over their own sections while negotiating together the larger aesthetical themes and technical decisions of the video. There is one video production process that I would like to share that I think describes in a very beautiful way the complex processes of identity negotiation that takes place during such project creation.

4.6 Loud Voice's Song

Loud Voice wrote and produced a music video while attending the Just TV program from February to April, 2013. He started writing the song with three other boys, Ace, D, and L, but they all dropped out and stopped attending Just TV for various reasons. In the end, Loud Voice was the only boy to complete a finished video, though all of the other boys did get to different levels of production. All of them were able to write their lyrics, record them, and edit and master them with sound editing and mastering software. They all took part in developing the beats and audio tracks and the hook of the song. These are the lyrics of Loud Voice's song:

> Take a seat and pay attention
> young kids on the streets are packing weapons
> 9 inch blades and Smith and Westons
> ready to let it fly if you go and test em
> lost with no goals, young and so cold
> And taught early on, that's just how life goes.
> Friends become foes, Foes become threats
> young lives are taken over drug debts
> families crying, theirs kids are dyeing
> gun shots, blood shed and police sirens
> walk at night, you might catch your death
> you see fiends on the street on coke and meth
> it's a struggle… and i passed the test
> I aint perfect but I'm a do my best
> as long as this heart beats in my chest.
> I'm gonna struggle on till the day I rest.

I helped with some of the lyric writing for this song, but mostly just hung out with Loud Voice and the boys at Just TV, trying to motivate them when I could and taking them out for fifteen minute breaks if energy levels were dropping. I was there when Loud Voice was trying to decide on locations for the video shoot for the music video and trying to construct the visual aspects of the music video. And I was also able to be on location when he directed the 'shoot' for the video. Figure 3 below shows a scene that Loud Voice was directing, along with one of the mentors at Just TV who help the youth with these projects. One of the more interesting things to me was the location of this shoot, an old Protestant United Church (Figure 1). I later asked Loud Voice why he chose that location while we were drinking beverages in the parking lot of a Tim Horton's just down the street from the church. He just looked at me and then gestured with his arm in a sweeping motion to look around. 'What do these streets have to offer us?' he asked me. The landscape that he gestured to was a pretty bleak one, consisting of old square buildings and endless parking lots (See figure 2). He struggled to articulate himself, and tripped over some words, but the overall message was clear that he didn't think there was anything to look up to in this city. This led to all sorts of problems, he told me. "Too many kids willing to pull the trigger. I'm willing to pull the trigger!" At least the church offers people a moral compass, "something to believe in," as he put it. "What does this [gesturing to parking lot] have to offer us? This?" he asked while pointing to the bottle of orange juice that I had bought him from Tim Horton's. The setting of a Tim Horton's parking lot was appropriate. In the past 10 years there has been a concerted effort to remove public spaces from this area of Winnipeg. A major roller-skating arena that was

destroyed to make way for University of Winnipeg expansion, and the Sherbrook pool, which has been closed because the city is dragging its heals on whether to fund needed repairs. As more recreational and public places continue to shut down, Tim Horton's is one of those places in some areas of Winnipeg that fill in gaps and serve as a major meeting place. The Tim Horton's at Portage and Maryland in Winnipeg is actually an interesting place to have coffee. It is always busy, and there is always a flurry of conversations. Loud Voice seemed to intuitively recognize the necessity of this Tim's while he simultaneously criticized our conditions that required us to meet there. When I asked him if he believed in what the church had to teach he told me, flatly, "no." But, he proclaimed, he knew that his great granny believed in Christianity and the church and that many other people do and that it therefore represents something positive and uplifting for many people. He saw no contradiction between this and his own belief in the creator. If it could bring a positive message and meaning to a mundane and deleterious landscape like the one that he and his family and friends lived in, then that was better than nothing. It was clear that Loud Voice's video was intended for an audience, and he was making explicit statements to his community and family. And this was coming from a youth who, on paper, by the courts and correction officers, or by someone reading the newspaper, would most likely be written off as a hoodlum.

Figure 1: Church on Maryland St and Westminster St. Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Figure 2: The landscape Loud Voice gestured to quizzically. Located in a Tim Horton's parking lot.

Figure 3: On the set for Loud Voice's music video. Curly is sitting on the steps in the left of the picture and Addison Sandy, mentor at Just TV, is standing in front of Loud Voice. These steps are at the same church of Figure 1.

4.7 Conclusion:

Does the example of the Sandy Bay Pow Wow show the negative consequences of our history and the place our youth have now to occupy? Or, does it demonstrate a resilience and ability to survive. How can we think of this violence in ways that do not relegate our youth to raw, hollow subjects and hardened criminals? Furthermore, where does our own perceptions of what it means to be indigenous and traditional impact our responses to the youth? Through the settler-colonial lens it seems obvious that the assumptions of what constitutes the Indigenous plays a significant part in the ways our young men are read and written on, whether it's a police officer roughing up one of the boys or its someone reading a newspaper about the latest statistics on car theft rates that are so often linked to the indigenous youth. As I demonstrated, my own reading of the confrontation was filtered through my presumptions of what tradition was and how I pictured an indigenous way of life. In my own struggles to understand Indigeneity, filtered through my interactions with the youth and also my own struggle to understand and reclaim my family history, I conceptualized a form of collectivity that has its roots in settler-colonial history. In Mark Rifkin's words, my thinking about tradition and identity articulated through a structure of feeling that was inflected by settler-colonial logic and history. What was particularly striking was how my initial view in fact effaced the complex ways that these boys were struggling to articulate their own identity. At the very least I ignored these struggles of the youth as non-Indigenous. My intention is not to suggest that violence is inherent to Indigenous identity. It would be reckless and irresponsible to think of indigenous identity as strictly these violent outbursts and tendencies – it too easily lends itself to a pathologizing of our youth, as strictly victims

that act out their historically learned disabilities. But it would be equally irresponsible to ignore the facts of violence that our youth, and many of our people, are faced with on a daily basis. The point is to acknowledge this struggle as legitimate. We should, I think, be striving to espouse the processes of individual and collective individuation that our peoples are experiencing.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

This thesis has been a modest attempt to come to terms with my own personal family history and to situate it within a larger historical process. It has also been an attempt to think through some notions of identity and collectivity with youth in the city. Native youth are often the most marginalized segment of this society we live in, and their struggles are often overlooked. As I have tried to show in this thesis, our youth have a lot to teach us. Specific to the interest in this thesis has been the forms of individual and collective identity and the forms of Indigeneity that are developing in the cities, of which the youth are at the forefront. Our notions of Indigeneity cannot be limited to the city, however. There are many more studies and research that need to be dedicated to the effects of systems like Child and Family Services, who gather and regulate native children, taking them from their homes, putting them in to white family foster care, or in to rooming houses. Many of the boys I work with have experience with CFS and a few of them live in group housing scenarios with other Native youth who have been taken away from their families. How do these processes determine native identity today? How does this shared experience inform the possibilities of identity, and how is it collectively lived and acknowledged? Can this history of trauma and pain be used to productively carve out a native identity?

The process of migration from reserve to city is also something that needs more attention, as well as thinking about the space between these two places. For all of the remaining, and endless, questions we might have to pursue, in terms of the questions of city living, there remains a large amount of elders within the city who can tell us what the transition was like. As the living heirs to the transition from rez to city, their stories need

to be told as well. As I write these words I am excited by what might be potentially productive dialogue between the generations of elders and youth. What would those who experienced the transition have to say and teach to the ones who live exclusively in the urban now? And vice versa? Perhaps this is one of those spaces where stories can safely be exchanged, generating greater historical understanding and contributing to a shared language that can help us negotiate the present and put our sights on a different future.

Music is always important for me when I am writing, and this thesis was no exception. I logged many hours running through albums and playlists that helped me muster the strength to stare at the computer screen for yet another day. One day while writing, I caught the lyrics of a particular song that seemed to "click" with what I was trying to say. Though, as artistic forms so often do, it was said in a way that I couldn't express in my writing. The song was called "Real" by Kendrick Lamar on his album "good kid, m.A.A.d city." My attention was caught in the middle of the second verse:

> You love keepin' control
> Of everything you love, you love beef
> You love streets, you love runnin', duckin' police
> You love your hood, might even love it to death
> But what love got to do with it when you don't love yourself?

This verse reminded me of my own approach to the youth I worked with. What does all of this gang stuff really mean, and how can it be good for you if you don't even love yourselves? The hook followed and continued to stimulate this newfound sense of epiphany:

I do what I wanna do
I say what I wanna say
When I feel, and I...
Look in the mirror and know I'm there
With my hands in the air
I'm proud to say yea
I'm real, I'm real, I'm really really real *[x4]*

Things were clicking. The hook seemed to be a literal exposition of something the youth had told me over and over again. They have their own rules and that's what they follow. The word "real" here signals many different meanings and has a genre specific context in hip-hop and rap music. On first listen I thought about being 'real' in some of the stereotypical meanings, like the street credibility and legitimacy that being real signifies among a group of peers, or the capacities one has developed to live a hard life. But after listening to the third verse, these meanings became more ambiguous and filled with a different, and surplus of, meaning:

The reason why I know you very well
Cause we have the same eyes can't you tell
The days I tried to cover up and conceal
My pride, it only made it harder for me to deal
When living in a world that come with plan B
A scapegoat cause plan A don't come for free
And plan C just an excuse like because
Or the word "but", but what if I got love
I love them, I love when I love her
I love so much, I love when love hurts
I love first verse cause you're the girl I attract
I love second verse cause your the homie they packed
Burning like a stove top, they love cooking from scratch
I love what the both of you have to offer
In fact, I love it so much
I don't love anything else
But what love got to do with it when I don't love myself
To the point I should hate everything I do love
Should I hate living my life inside the club
Should I hate her for watching me for that reason
Should I hate him for telling me that I'm season

Should I hate them for telling me ball out
Should I hate street credibility I'm talkin' about
Hatin' all money, power, respect in my will
Or hatin' the fact that none of that shit make me real

This verse seemed to take seriously the question that I posed to the youth: 'all this gang shit is so meaningless, why do you hang on so strongly?' Lamar answers the question and puts all of those different relationships that he hangs on to so desperately under scrutiny – like the women and the club culture that demands its own standards and trends of beauty and cool, or the friends who make him feel powerful and important, or the street credibility that is what its all about. The feeling quickly becomes one of existential tension when he starts to see that perhaps "none of that shit make me real" and that maybe its all founded on lies. In this sense, the hook takes on a more desperate tone than it does a cheeky and arrogant one that I had previously thought. The repetition of "I'm real, I'm real, I'm really really real" seem to be more of a desperate search for self-recognition. *Maybe this is all bogus, but I/it have/has to be real! What else is there?* It's clear that plan B or C are not options, rather they are copouts and excuses. To me this song reminded me of the danger in trying to force our youth, or anyone for that matter, to abandon the life they know. Is the legacy of colonialism not the supreme allegory of the consequences of thinking that life can be dictated?

The song finishes with a set of dramatizations that are central to this album, which is a non-linear narrative of a young man returning to the brutal streets of Compton, Los Angeles, where Lamar in fact grew up. The voices are presented as answering machine recordings from his father and mother who are pleading with him not to retaliate against the death of a friend of his, an incident that happens earlier in the album. The struggle to

resist the life of the streets and the "homies" is apparent throughout the whole album, which itself deserves acclamations for its brilliant style. The album is a reflection on Kendrick Lamar's own child and teen-hood and features prominently the struggles to find a different lifestyle than the violent one of Compton. Going back to the streets of Compton to write the album, Lamar said that he was able to get back in to the same space he was in as a teen, feeling the same things he used to, and remembering that "The kid that's trying to escape that influence, trying his best to escape that influence, has always been pulled back in because of circumstances that be."[139] Through this album, and particularly the song quoted above, Lamar achieves a subtlety that is generally not apparent when thinking about gang and street youth, and the serious attachments that go along with such a life. What is further significant to me is that all of the boys from COC listen to Kendrick Lamar.

I would like to finish with a few words about the potential of the city, and how the city as both place and imaginary, in my mind, offers us a way of thinking through the complexity of Indigeneity. Specifically, I think the city forces one to struggle.
As Duncan Mercredi makes clear in his piece "Writing and life," telling our stories is a process and struggle. In a truly Hegelian-Fanonian approach, Mercredi acknowledges that it is the struggle that defines who the indigenous of Winnipeg are. On discussing how the old language and voice of his people and of this land is regaining its strength, he says: "the voice is old, the body weak, the mind forgetful, and the trail is faint, but the

[139] Jayson Rodriguez, "Kendrick Lamar on Aftermath Debut: 'This Album Won't Sound Like Section.80, Nothing Like It'," *XXL*, accessed July 28, 2013, http://www.xxlmag.com/xxl-magazine/2012/08/kendrick-lamar-on-aftermath-debut-%e2%80%9cthis-album-wont-sound-like-section-80-nothing-like-it%e2%80%9d/.

footsteps are straight and do not waver from the path though the sharp stones rip and tear soles of the feet—somehow it is comforting, to feel the pain and smell the blood…" Story is a struggle, and we gain our voice through it. The lesson Mercredi teaches us is that stories are lived. Their essence is of active performance rather than passive reception. What is key is to see how performances are occurring in the everyday by everyone. As Rifkin has explained, and Mercredi showed, we literalize metaphors in our daily lives. Our youth are performing and we would be wise to pay attention to the stories they are telling us and struggling through. Loud Voice makes it so clear in his lyrics: "it's a struggle… and I passed the test/ I aint perfect but I'm a do my best/ as long as this heart beats in my chest/ I'm gonna struggle on till the day I rest."

Indigenous peoples are often faced with difficult struggles, whether it is the violent threats from police officers or the poisoning of land by a dirty industry. We develop political strategies in these atmospheres of urgency, and these struggles often have the effect of further reducing our articulations of identity to fit in to a simpler version of politics, like the colonized vs. the colonizer; Settler vs. Indigenous. If the youth and my own experience have taught me anything, it is that these political definitions of identity and collectivity can have very negative consequences. Our politics, motivated by good causes, can end up replicating the logics of exclusion that we were initially fighting against. Our politics need to embrace the complexities of lived experience. As I once heard Métis artist, David Garneau, put it in a debate over identity politics, the need for politically firm rhetoric and borders is understandable in this day and age, but our models could be better inspired by the Métis buffalo hunt than by fort

building exercises.[140] In terms of our youth and the development of gangs and gang culture, this implies that things are not going to change easily or quickly - it has taken generations for gang culture to develop. Years of pain and suffering. We can't expect it to change overnight. One day during a Just TV session, three out of four boys left at the break and went to the street corner. (As a brief note, the location of Just TV is active gang turf, and the gangs here are ones that the boys are typically not associated or friendly with.) One boy took the opportunity to "post up" at the corner and two of the others followed his lead. I approached them, knowing what they were up to, but decided to ask anyway. "Just posting up," I was told. I asked if they were coming back to program. No one really answered, just a couple of mutterings. My pleas and explanations about how great an opportunity this was did nothing to change their minds. My first reaction was anger, and I walked away in disgust. How stupid, I thought. But time has helped me see this scenario in a different way. We can't expect these boys to just abandon their social forms of attachment or their fantasies. We can't go around expecting to just snatch up fantasies or illusions. We cannot only count on 'real' talk to change these boys' behaviours or actions. Change will have to ultimately come from them. What we *can* do is create opportunity for them and positive alternatives that they can fall back on. Programs like COC and Just TV are examples of these places. Youth are using them and I think years from now we are going to start seeing the leadership and creativity that was fostered in places like these. The struggle we can have is to create political will for programs like these and divert and generate funding and resources for them. We also need to have the patience to see these projects through. We need to think generationally about change for

[140] David Garneau, Reply Post on Chris Andersen's Facebook page. July 7, 2013. https://www.facebook.com/chris.andersen.90857/posts/10153007002025634.

the simple reason that it is generationally that pain grows and transfers itself. And it is in a generation that this pain takes on new form and transfers in to other facets of life. Storytellers like Duncan Mercredi show us that listening is more important now than ever. Our youth are speaking, and it is up to us to listen to their voices and the history they carry. Story is one way we can do this. So, to quote Mercredi one last time, "when you close your eyes tonight, just before sleep, listen closely."[141]

5.1 Epilogue

It has been over half a year since I first started writing this thesis. We have come a long way since those days of chasing my boys through back lanes and lecturing about the dangers of selling drugs, though I still find myself lecturing to them despite myself. Our relationships have grown, but a lot has also changed in this time. Most significantly, Circle of Courage has shut down due to lack of federal funding. Consequently, my connection with the boys has changed significantly. We no longer meet regularly every week at the COC house. We no longer have planned group outings, and I doubt we will be able to go on the pow wow trail again this summer. Also, I have taken an opportunity to pursue a PhD at Columbia University, which puts a significant distance between us. Despite the temporal and spatial distances that exist between us, I have managed to stay in touch with a several of the youth, mostly via Facebook, and when I am in town we try to meet for lunch or something and catch up. The Tim Horton's parking lot that was so often the site of Loud Voice schooling me in social theory and philosophy still serves as a main meeting spot. One boy continues to send me drafts of movie scripts he is constantly writing, and I continue to provide feedback. I still try to act like a positive role model,

[141] Mercredi, "Wachea," 124.

telling them to stay in school and the like. They still speak their minds to me as to what they think of that option, rarely couching their language in soft terms. We still know how to tease each other.

Funding may have forced the COC program to shut its doors, but the relationships built there continue to be strong in many ways. Curly still has an active presence in these boys' lives. They still call on him when they need help, when they need advice, or when they are bored. Kathleen Buddle, my supervisor who graciously brought me in to her research and work with Ka Ni Kanichihk, continues to work closely with inner city organizations and is developing grants to hopefully recreate similar types of comprehensive programs like COC for youth who are gang affiliated. She also remains close to the boys from COC. Leslie Spillett and all of the people at Ka Ni Kanichihk continue to work tirelessly, developing programs and resources and remaining dedicated to advocating for the youth. Life rolls on, a little less structured than it once was.

As for my own involvement with the youth, my long-term plan is to remain in touch and organize my summers around returning home to Winnipeg and continuing to work with them in some capacity. More music video making workshops in the future seems like a fun way of staying in touch and creating something with them again. The last two years have been formative, and I take a lot of experience and knowledge with me as I journey to New York. The boys have inspired something in me, and I hope that I can put it to some good use and honour the many lessons they have taught me.

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