

A LIVING CURRICULUM FOR DISALIENATION AT CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

by

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Abstract: This dissertation, *A Living Curriculum for Disalienation at Canadian Universities*, examines how Canadian universities and their affiliated institutions remain entrenched in the colonial logics and alienating demands of twenty-first century capitalism. Drawing on the anti-fascist lineage of institutional analysis and institutional psychotherapy, I argue that distress and alienation in universities are not individual failures but symptoms of pathological systems. Following Jean Oury's claim that "the hospital is ill," I extend this diagnosis to the university, where well-being initiatives often compel conformity rather than transforming the structures that produce suffering. The three papers that make up this dissertation each propose pedagogical alternatives to this pathoplastic system. The first investigates indigenization and decolonization in faculties of education, considering how institutional pedagogy might support more accountable practices for non-Indigenous pre-service teachers. The second critiques dominant discourses of well-being in social service education, advancing a curriculum of refusal-as-well-being. Here, refusal is framed both as resistance to injustice and as the creative work of developing aesthetic diagrams for collective well-becoming. The third paper presents a research-creation project involving songwriting, guitar circles, and collaboration in an Indigenous Peoples Centre, offering an autoethnographic exploration of reconciliation as a process of collective practices, personal reflection, and political spirituality. As a first-generation settler scholar and mental health practitioner, I rework the psychosocial model of institutional psychotherapy through inherited working-class values, Indigenous feminist ethics, and anti-colonial thought to address hierarchies organized by identity politics, settler colonialism/whiteness, and capitalist orientations to land and the lives that depend upon it. Taken together, these interventions seek to cultivate disalienating pedagogies that confront systemic violence, foster creativity and collaboration, and open universities to more flourishing collective futures.

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Introduction

This dissertation, composed of three interrelated chapters, examines how Canadian universities and their affiliated institutions (e.g., faculties, student services, unions, boards of governors) remain entrenched in the colonial logics of 21st century capitalism. Dwayne Donald (2009) invokes the mythic symbol of the fort to characterize the ongoing colonial divides between Indigenous-Canadian relations. Like universities, fort walls were built to protect colonizers and their institutions from those outside of it, and fort mythology obscures the cross-cultural reality of long-standing Indigenous-European relations. Frontier logics perpetuate the belief that “Aboriginal peoples and Canadians inhabit separate realities” (Donald, 2009, p. 4) and our individualized efforts to adapt learning, research, and healing to the fort-logic of Euro western social and epistemological systems, sustains the conditions that produce distress and alienation.

I approach this concern from my varied perspectives as a former professor of teacher education, student services counselling therapist, and current role as an assistant teaching professor in a School of Child, Youth and Family Studies. As a first-generation student from a white settler working-class family, I inherited class consciousness and its accompanying political commitments, including widespread suspicion of university narratives that erase class, privatize suffering and rebrand identity politics as reconciliation. My interest in institutional analysis is also informed by over two decades of experience as a mental health practitioner in government and community settings, counsellor in public schools, clinical supervisor, and consultant. I have worked in hospitals, public schools, health units, medical clinics, forensic settings, harm reduction sites, prisons, music schools, martial arts clubs, and, more recently, in universities providing counselling at student services, teaching, and researching. These experiences have

exposed the systemic tensions between rising mental health crises and the bureaucratic narratives that Oury (2007) called simplism, which oversimplify suffering into data points, diagnoses and generalized therapeutic goals.

Drawing on the psychosocial tradition of institutional analysis in Europe, my work is grounded in the understanding that when institutions are ill, the people within them become symptomatic, not due to personal failure or disorder, but because the systems themselves are pathogenic. My central research question is rooted in psychiatrist Jean Oury's (2007) diagnosis that "the hospital is ill," and his insistence that addressing individual well-being without transforming the pathological institutions that produce distress is itself a form of madness (Genosko, 2020). In the context of the university, this means that interventions must begin with our institutions (e.g., student services, faculties, administrative protocols, and curriculum planning groups) because these sites house the bureaucratic compartmentalization, social roles, and stereotypes that Oury (2007) referred to as pathoplasty. Pathoplastic systems do not merely reflect but actively reproduce colonial and capitalist forms of alienation. I argue that contemporary adaptive psychologies (e.g., CBT and positive psychology) and ideologies (e.g., therapy culture) compel individuals to conform to dysfunctional contexts. These three papers present pedagogical alternatives that challenge and reconfigure curricula and engage in decolonial theory and practice, promoting sustainable orientations toward collective flourishing.

I conceptualize my treatment of these pathologies from the framework of institutional psychotherapy, a practice that emerged to deal with fascism in mid-20th-century Europe, addressing the consequent alienation as both a psychic and a social disturbance. Tosquelles' metaphor of Freud and Marx as "two legs" that worked together: "when one leg walked, the other needed to follow" (Robcis, 2021) remains instructive, though partial. The integrative spirit

of this psychosocial model connects the inner life with outer structures, but it must be reworked for non-transitional settler colonial contexts such as Canada, where racialized and gendered power hierarchies exceed the scope of its original formulation, along with the unresolved problem of unceded land. While institutional psychotherapy continues to be revolutionary as a diagram for disalienation, Robcis (2021) reminds us that these legs belonged to white men whose initial steps did not reach the kinds of hierarchies that continue to be created around gender and race. Fanon's adaptation of institutional psychotherapy for the context of his work in North Africa, while it attended to the problem of race, did not provide adequate analysis of gender and patriarchy (Bergner, 1995; Coulthard, 2014; Robinson, 2019; Said, 1994). For these reasons, I engage Indigenous feminist scholarship and anti-colonial politics, such as the work of Cree scholar Margaret Kovach, Dene political theorist Glen Coulthard, Indigenous musicologist Dylan Robinson, Canada Research-Chair in Reimagining Teacher Education with Indigenous Wisdom Traditions and amiskwaciyiniwak (Beaver Hills people) descendent Dwayne Donald, and especially local Indigenous matriarchs whose contributions inform a relational, place-based critique of the university and its colonial activities.

Institutional change can support new pedagogical possibilities for collective well-being, both at the level of organizational arrangements (e.g., curriculum, service provision, governance) and subjective life (e.g., creative identities and affects that contest and exceed the demands and productions of pathoplastic institutions). Following Fanon (2022), disalienation entails refusing subjectivization within dehumanizing systems that exert control in ways that shape how people see themselves and how they are recognized by others (e.g., folding them into categories to fit awkwardly into dehumanizing systems). This means refusing the colonial terms of recognition (e.g., "inclusion" that leaves structures intact), governance (e.g., extractive research relations),

and intelligibility (e.g., reabsorbing disalienated labour, knowledge, and affect into colonial circuits).

In the context of my work at the university, I understand decolonization as a restructuring of the conditions of learning themselves, rather than the inclusion of content related to Indigenous and settler colonial studies. By centering Indigenous educators and knowledge systems, I decenter Western epistemology and question who has the authority to define what counts as knowledge. In each of these papers, I view decolonization as a dual movement: first, a refusal of colonial relations of recognition, extraction, and governance; and second, a process of disalienation that reconstitutes collective life, subjectivity, and relations beyond the terms of colonialism and capture (Fanon, 2022). I exemplify this shift as a movement away from mastery and individual achievement toward relational, collective processes that reconfigure participation, power, and what counts as successful education from a dis-alienated point of view. What I intend to show is that decolonization is a process requiring both refusal and disalienation (or, as it is sometimes referred to in the context of Indigenous education, Indigenization). While all three papers engage this notion of decolonization, the second paper focuses specifically on its dimension of refusal.

My first paper explores the potential of institutional analysis for education faculties involved in the indigenization and decolonization of education curriculum at Canadian universities. In it I ask how the interplay of critical pedagogy and institutional pedagogy might support more accountable forms of reconciliation and decolonization for non-Indigenous pre-service teachers. The practice of diagnosing institutional problems and working collectively toward solutions originates in European educational contexts, where it is known as institutional pedagogy. Public schools were the initial sites where teachers reconceptualized public education

under the threat of fascism in France, while institutional psychotherapy sought to rescue psychiatry from fascism in Spain. In this paper I provide historical examples of how the treatment of public institutions (i.e., schools and psychiatric hospitals), changed deeply ingrained habits and disrupted established power hierarchies. I then explore how institutional pedagogy might be of use in making institutional changes in faculties of education at Canadian universities, by facilitating awareness and decolonial attitudes toward settler colonialism and neoliberalism as well as for supporting Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty (Battiste, 2013; Coulthard, 2013; Grande, 2015).

The second paper critiques dominant discourses of well-being in service training programs (e.g., counselling, social work, child and youth care) in the colonial learning context of the university. I draw on critical psychology to propose a curriculum of refusal-as-well-being (R-Wb) for educating future practitioners in the social and human services. This psychosocial curriculum foregrounds the refusal of structural injustice while fostering collective orientations to social change and care, a process I describe as the negative task. I then turn to the positive task: developing aesthetic diagrams for well-becoming. I offer an example from music and sound art to illustrate how diagrams can facilitate the institutional analysis of groups, such as the community of practice model employed in universities and other institutions of higher learning.

My final paper tells the story of a research-creation project that arose from the confluence of a guitar circle, a reading group, an experimental songwriting methodology, and a Cree and Anishinaabe singing and drumming group. In it, I tell a story about songs for (re)conciliation from an autoethnographic settler perspective and describe the process of collaborating within what has been characterized as a sovereign display territory (Garneau, 2016), an Indigenous Peoples Centre (IPC) at a rural university on Treaty and unceded territory. This research

integrates an Indigenous pedagogy called ‘personal reconciliation’ (McPherson-Derendy, personal communication, June 2024), autoethnography, and research-creation to develop an anti-colonial aesthetic praxis that unfolded through multiple collective engagements over the course of a year, in collaboration with a knowledge keeper, IPC staff, faculty, and students.

Taken together, these papers offer critical interventions into the problem of alienation and ill-being at the university. Each draw on institutional analysis to address how colonial and capitalist pathologies are sustained in education and mental health discourses, and how alternative practices of disalienation, rooted in creativity, collaboration and Indigenous thought, might help us imagine and enact more livable futures. Drawing from the intersection of critical theory, artistic practice, and decolonial thought, I ask how the university can create the conditions for (re)conciliation, understood not as resolution, but as a relational, unfinished movement for collective flourishing. This question has emerged from a longstanding commitment to collaborative creativity across multiple contexts: songwriting and sound recording (Harrison, 2013; Smith, 2007), “street analysis” (Kouri & Smith, 2016), improvisational engagements with street outreach (Smith, 2012; 2022), martial arts to support youth recovery, making music with multi-stressed families in the forest, and most recently research-creation projects I am involved in for clinical consultation (Smith, forthcoming) and climate grief cafes (Smith, forthcoming). These practices reflect a deeply relational and processual effort, a work of the self that can only happen in concert with others, to create spaces of care, resistance, and imaginative renewal.

Chapter 1: An Institutional Analysis of Indigenous Studies in a Faculty of Education

In the following paper I inquire into faculties of education for their potential as transversal institutions in the reformation of Western teacher education through the instituting of Indigenous studies. In the context of education, transversality refers to an inherent and decentralized aspect of learning (Cole & Bradley, 2018; Guattari, 2010) and I use it to analyze my experience instituting Indigenous studies while teaching a course called Teaching Indigenous Studies (TIS) at a regional university situated on unceded and Treaty territory in a Southwestern Canadian prairie. The concept “to institute” refers to the French act of instituting, which are educational interventions that introduce difference into the previously instituted norms of the educational establishment. The little-known notion of instituting is drawn from an anti-fascist lineage of pedagogical and analytic interventions on European institutions of education and mental health care during the rise of fascism and authoritarianism in the 1920’s and 30’s. Institutional pedagogy (IP) was developed to deal with the problem of student apathy toward politics and a rising tendency toward authoritarianism during the rise of fascism in twentieth century Europe, which are ongoing challenges for faculties of education in contemporary settler colonial societies. Until recently there has been little written in the English-speaking world about this movement and my work, although not properly institutional pedagogy, was inspired by the available literature and connections that I made with some generous European colleagues well-versed in the field of psychosocial studies. This allowed me to sketch out coordinates for an institutional pedagogy of Indigenous studies in the context of increasing neoliberalism at a regional university in the Canadian Prairies.

My intention in placing the instituting of Indigenous studies against the tensions arising from neoliberalism and nostalgic pedagogical orientations to “curriculum as planned” (Aoki et al., 2004, p. 161) in the faculty of education is two-fold. First, I follow the lead of Dene scholar Glenn Coulthard (2014), who argues that critical reevaluation of colonial domination is a requirement for Indigenous resurgence. Educational reform, including Indigenous education initiatives, must be accompanied by a thorough analysis of colonialism, or it will only serve to cover up imperialism (Coulthard, 2014; Grande, 2015). Our current hodgepodge of neoliberal and nostalgic methods and measures in faculties of education stand in the way of this task. Second, I argue that developing a non-appropriative relational praxis of Indigenous studies is a basic competency for reconceptualizing Canadian institutions of education in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Metis Elders, knowledge keepers, educators, students and their family members who, in my opinion, maintain a healthy skepticism about the colonial function of Western schooling. I describe my attempts to develop an indigenized institutional pedagogy that builds on the work that critical pedagogy has accomplished in collaboration with sovereign Indigenous communities (Grande, 2015; Malott et al., 2009). It is my assertion that institutional pedagogies can destabilize settler colonial schemas, reactionary habits, and hegemonic praxes that re-instantiate oppressive structures like the banking model of education prominent in neoliberalism. While it is important to maintain a clear understanding of the differences between epistemologies and ontologies, of land and identity, for example, which are often incommensurable under colonial conditions, this alone is insufficient. We must also attend to ethical relationality, understood as “an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (Donald, 2009, p. 6).

I begin by positioning myself in relation to my work in multiple contexts at the university. I then discuss the colonial hegemony of education in North America, and the neoliberal modifications of exploitation and appropriation that continue to dog revolutionary reconceptualization of Western education. I briefly discuss how colonial education was instituted in Canada as an apartheid system of settler schools and Indian Residential schools, indoctrinating students into views of human nature and culture that shaped the double-pronged structure (i.e., Indigenous/non-Indigenous) of settler colonialism that exists today. In doing so, I set up the second section where I discuss my reconceptualization of curriculum through the coefficient of transversality, which is a pedagogical concept that transforms classrooms from a teacher/student binary to a site for collective education praxis. The coefficient refers to the degree of openness that can be transformative in a classroom, and I describe my challenges maintaining transversality while teaching the course Teaching Indigenous Studies (TIS) to pre-service teachers. Drawing upon the notion of mediations from institutional pedagogy, I discuss the integration of autobiographical writing and critical pedagogies for consciousness-raising with pre-service teachers. I then discuss my experience instituting a collectivist orientation to Indigenous studies across the curriculum, which followed the critical theory tradition outlined by critical Marxist scholar Curry Mallott and his co-authors Lisa Wakau and Lauren Wakau-Villagomez in their textbook *Teaching Native America Across the Curriculum*.

It is worth noting that, while the church and state were using Indian Residential Schools to destroy Indigenous ways of life on Turtle Island, institutional pedagogues were actively involved in anti-fascist activities in Europe. With fascism on the rise globally, it is timely to revisit institutional pedagogies as an opportunity to increase the coefficient of transversality between Western and Indigenous orientations to teaching and learning, for new collective

expressions of hope (e.g. ongoing dialogues, writing, art, sound) and to cure the colonial delusions and unconscious expressions that have been keeping our lives separate and alienated. On a global scale, the genocide of Palestinians in their homeland and complicity of hegemonic power in the Global North to support it has re-affirmed imperialist projects of settler colonialism as an ongoing global threat against sovereignty. We see the rise of fascism in North America with the policing of protests, the appointing of partisan judges, the illegal deportation of immigrants and refugees in the US, the state-supported murder of protestors by ICE agents, and the censorship of professors, students, and community members on campuses for voicing their opinions on politics and societal collapse. If we talk about decolonization and indigenization of the university without addressing the ongoing imperialist projects of colonialism, genocide and fascism are we not swirling around decolonization as a metaphor? It is timely to revisit explicitly anti-fascist pedagogies, for reforming education in a way that also centers local Indigenous pedagogies and decolonial concerns. These ideas invite us to reflect on how we enact our ethics within public education, caring for student well-being globally, honoring the earth that sustains us, and preparing future generations for an uncertain future.

Self-location

I am a white-skinned settler Canadian with cis straight privilege, born into a white working-class family on the shared lands of Stz'uminus First Nation and Penelekt Tribe in the 1970's. My matrilineal ancestors (Galvin) settled in Quebec from Ireland and made kin with settlers from England, Holland, and Wales. My great grandfather (George Smith) from Scotland settled on the traditional land of Kleh-koot-aht, now known as Sproat Lake in Port Alberni. I am the father of a son and daughter whom I co-parent with my wife/partner who is a professor and

psychologist. I am a self-taught guitarist (with some help from dad to get started) with later training in Jazz from Vancouver Island University, a program which is the latest casualty of cuts in the neoliberal destruction of the arts in Western universities. I wrote this paper as an uninvited settler on the traditional territories of the Dakota, Anishanabek, Oji-Cree, and Cree Peoples, as well as the homeland of the Red River Métis Nation. While I continue to live in ways that support capitalism and colonialism on these lands, my academic work as a first-generation high school/university graduate, is dedicated to unsettling these structures and contributing to a post-colonial democratic society in Canada. My work as a psychotherapist, music therapist, professor, and researcher are guided by a careful consideration of conciliation, social justice and decolonization. I brought these ideas forward as a member of the Indigenous education Senate subcommittee, which I was elected to during my previous contract as a counselling therapist. In this space I drew on my working-class culture to speak up in meetings about concerns that students asked me to raise. Although some bureaucrats have interpreted my directness as abrupt or even rude, I understand it as part of my commitment to reconciliation, especially when working through political and systemic concerns with fellow settlers. Too often, settlers share their opinions in ways that ultimately protect the very systems of oppression we claim to challenge; speaking differently, and with accountability, is part of how I work to disrupt that pattern.

As a non-Indigenous academic, I explicitly retain my pedagogical locus in Western lineages like institutional pedagogy and transversality, which differ from the distinct projects of decolonization, Indigenous philosophies, and land-based understandings. My rationale is to follow what colleagues, and I have described as a “praxis that is attentive to decolonization and Indigenous knowledge while refraining from appropriating these modes of thought, subjectivity,

and relationality for ourselves” (Skott-Myhre et al., 2023, p. 13). While a professor of TIS, my engagement with the complexity of Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, cosmologies, and axiology were attempts to appreciate both the differences and commonalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous orientations to liberatory relational praxis by developing curriculum that centered social justice and care as shared cultural values in education.

Education in Canada

Education in Canada has been a colonial project since the beginning of public schooling. In the following section I describe how education has been used to undermine Indigenous cultures and knowledge, while simultaneously indoctrinating Indigenous and settler students in colonial ideologies. Colonial education has been used to maintain settler colonial structures for ongoing land and resource acquisition, which has deeply affected the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

Colonial Education in Canada

Vygotsky (1986) described how human consciousness develops through collective access to tools and signs, like language. The creative use of signs is a function of speech that allows for advanced interactions, which is why cultural genocide and the European assault on Indigenous languages has lasting detrimental effects on Indigenous communities. The loss of language is equally a loss in the ability to see oneself, others, and to understand the world (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). Grande (2015) referred to Western schools as attempts to colonize “Indian minds” (p. 23). By replacing Indigenous languages with colonial languages and Indigenous collectivist cultures and spiritual traditions with Christian ideologies and patriarchal

individualism, the Western hegemonic education of Indigenous children served a dual psychological purpose: to attack the values of Indigenous communities and to reflect the values of the colonizer (Grande, 2015). Colonial languages like English order the world in ways that favor the exploits of Western hegemony, which is an orientation to life that is literally worlds apart from ontologies that are shaped by the Earth. Donald (2009) refers to the effects of this ontology as “the transformation of the land to better serve the needs of market capitalism and the habits and priorities of Homo Oeconomicus or Economic Man” (p. 18). Colonial languages often function to categorize, abstract, and control the world. Indigenous languages, in contrast, are living expressions of relational knowledge, inseparable from land, spirituality, culture, and the ongoing responsibilities that connect humans, more-than-human beings, and place (Cajete, 1994). While Indigenous languages can be understood in Vygotskian universal terms, as word signs that convey complex information such as worldview, values, and relationships with the environment, their comprehension requires additional ontological and epistemological understandings about Land that differ radically from notions of private property and resource extraction.

Because Land informs Indigenous pedagogy through stories, holistic educational relationships are etched into the essence of every rock, tree, animal, pathway and waterway (Styres, 2018). Land has been sacred to the Indigenous people who have existed here since time immemorial. Storied landscapes refer to the stories of place, or what Styres (2018) refers to as literacies of Land. By interfering with the child and their environment, colonialism is a total assault against indigeneity: psychological, spiritual, cultural and structural. Colonialism seeks, through institutions like Indian Residential Schools, to destroy the diverse cultures and ways of relating of Indigenous Peoples. Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) described imperialism

as a “culture bomb” that serves to “to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (p. 3). This multifaceted attack on Indigenous culture was equally an attack on the Land, and on the relationships between the earth and the people. Cajete (1994) says: “People make a place as much as a place makes them” (p. 84) and that, because Indigenous cultures interacted with the Land for such a long time, the landscape became a reflection of their soul. When they were forcibly re-located to Reserves and Reservations, it was tantamount to “a form of soul death” (Cajete, 1994, p. 85).

In the making of Canada, the colonial ideologies that underpinned the instituting of a Western hegemonic education sought to “kill the Indian in the child,” which was a genocidal concept created by an American military officer that Duncan Scott adopted for the Indian Residential School (IRS) system. Christian authoritarianism in Canada, under the guise of education, undergirded a federally funded colonial genocide against Indigenous People on Turtle Island. This was instituted by the Roman Catholic Church, the United Church of Canada, and the Anglican Church of Canada between the 1870’s and 1990’s. The indoctrination of Indigenous children was delivered by nuns and clergymen who did not hold teaching certificates nor training to lead educational institutions. Under the euphemistic cover of “education,” students were subjected to cultural genocide, abuse, and exploitation. For example, children were used as unpaid agricultural workers at Indian schools set up by colonizers to gain access to “Indian labor, land, and resources” (Grande, 2015, p. 23). In addition to cultural genocide and exploitation, it has become increasingly clear that residential schools played a leading role in the physical extermination of Indigenous children, a fact that was known to Duncan Scott in 1910:

It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habitating so closely in these schools, and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this alone does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is being geared towards the final solution of our Indian Problem (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2002, p. 4-5).

The extent to which these institutions de-naturalized and de-humanized Indigenous people influenced Hitler, who was inspired by the efficiency of forced migration, starvation, violence, and the deliberate subjection of Indigenous people to epidemics on Reservations/Reserves in North America. Settler colonialism in Canada and the United States was a blueprint for the Nazi genocidal policy of extermination (Toland, 2014; Whitman, 2017).

Indoctrination of Settler Minds in Canada

Colonialism is a shared condition (Donald, 2009), and while Indian Residential Schools were colonizing Indigenous minds, Western schools were indoctrinating settler minds through a different form of colonial education. How did what Grande (2015) refers to as the “values of the colonizer” come to be valued as a wide-ranging pedagogical ideology? Canadian schooling has been a double-pronged system of indoctrination that separated First Nations and settler children in the making of the settler colonial state. Denying the relational connections between Indigenous and Canadian students reflects a separatist ideology that has normalized and sustained violence and exploitation toward Indigenous students and their families (Donald, 2009). Despite the rise of a progressive anti-fascist movement for public education, started by the workers movements in 19th century in France, early Canadian schools adopted failing European

models. Behaviorism was prioritized in North America while Dewey's inquiries were ignored, and the socialist influence of Lenin and Marx on Vygotsky's theories of cognition was erased. Political philosopher and social psychologist Cornelius Castoriadis criticized how a fragmented pyramid version of centralized bureaucracy in the USSR began taking root in private and public institutions in the West (Wustefeld, 2018). While institutional research showed poor outcomes on the mental health and well-being of European school children attending these establishments, sometimes referred to as "school-barracks" and "school slums" (Hess & Schaepelynck, 2013), the advent of mass schooling in 19th century Canada was similarly ideological. Authoritarian teachers set to instill appropriate modes of thought and behavior in children, in response to an increase in social problems such as poverty, crime, and vagrancy. These issues were presumed to be caused by the impacts of constant and substantial immigration, the transition from agriculture to industrial capitalism, and the subjectification of Indigenous communities and new settlers to new political figures and regimes through the process of state formation (Hurtig, 1985).

Western education is built upon psychological assumptions, with dominant models drawing on behavioural learning theories and Eurocentric developmental frameworks (Churchill, 1983; Malott et al., 2009). Although these theories are often presented as objective science, they also function as governing rationalities that organize educational institutions and shape the kinds of subjects they produce. Schools cultivate students who are motivated through competition, performance, and reward while simultaneously classifying and differentiating them within institutional populations. These processes of subjectification operate through classificatory technologies that subsume individuals under broad identities (e.g., Indigenous/non-Indigenous) and further differentiate them through legal-administrative categories, such as "Status Indian" and "non-Status Indian" classifications established under the Indian Act, that regulate

recognition, rights, and governance. These classificatory logics also structure how students learn to understand land in educational settings. For instance, geography classes commonly organize knowledge through maps of provinces, borders, and natural resources, teaching students to interpret land primarily through state territorial boundaries and economic use. In doing so, the curriculum positions students as observers and managers of territory rather than participants in relational systems of responsibility to land, reinforcing a settler orientation in which land is interpreted as bounded territory or resource rather than as a network of living relations. In addition to viewing land as bounded and separate from the rest of the living world, Donald (2009) has described how colonial frontier logic perpetuates a belief that Indigenous peoples, Canadians, and Newcomers inhabit separate realities. This has implications for the kind of hidden curricula that continues to alienate Indigenous and non-Indigenous children through new applications of indoctrination where culture is represented, celebrated even, on a surface where authoritarian colonial logics continue to cause alienation in the way they govern the education system.

Indoctrination operates at the level of the subject (e.g., teacher, student) through the imposition of colonial ideologies, governance structures, and languages on non-consenting populations. Over time, in settler colonial settings like Canada, indoctrination shapes a habitus that anthropologist Patrick Wolfe (1999) described as a “settler-colonial will” (p. 167), "...a historical force that ultimately derives from the primal drive to expansion that is generally glossed as capitalism" (p. 167). The links between settler colonialism and capitalism were described by Marx and Engels as the imperialist “need of a constantly expanding market for its products [that] chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe” (Veracini, 2010, p. 1). The settler-colonial will can be thought of as a particular kind of repetition compulsion that

“must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere” (Veracini, 2010, p. 1). While a general drive theory, applied to the settler-colonial will, can provide some insight into the compulsive expansion of settler colonial relations, a Foucauldian analysis of subjectification is helpful for explaining how this expansion becomes stabilized through institutions, classifications, and everyday practices. As educators, we need to improve our strategies for a teacher education that deals with the insidious nature of a capitalist drive for expansion and subjectifications that alienate our hearts, minds, spirits, and relationships to the world. We also need to consider how curriculum will deal with the ecological implications of sharing Land during an era of climate change and endless imperial warfare with increasingly efficient killing technology. In the following section I describe the settler schema, as a framework for grappling with the Imaginary identifications that influence settler desires (e.g., the settler-colonial will), and the roles and functions that university students are trained to perform as students-becoming-teachers in colonial educational institutions.

The Settler Schema

Jacques Lacan (1988) described schemas as structures that are trapped between the Imaginary of a separate self, surrounded by language of the Other, and the Symbolic (e.g., laws, language and social structures like culture) that orders relationships between the Imaginary self and Symbolic Other. For Lacan, as soon as children are born into a symbolic order, their schemas begin to develop as a result of conflict between the imaginary and the symbolic dimensions of the psyche. In settler colonial nations like Canada the symbolic order is shaped by colonial laws such as the Doctrine of Discovery (1493), the Gradual Civilization Act (1857), Gradual Enfranchisement Act (1869), the Potlach Law (1884), and other oppressive legislation.

These symbolic orders were accompanied by waves of foreign bodies to “flood”, as John A. MacDonald described it, Turtle Island. Lacan (1992) suggested that symbols replace the thing that they represent (e.g. the settler is replaced by the symbol of the Canadian), which he likened to a death. We can therefore propose that each time the National Anthem “Oh Canada” is played in Prairie schools it successfully kills the image of the settler that it symbolizes. The symbolic order of settler colonialism relies on the Imaginary construction of settler colonial Canada as a peaceful multicultural country, to disavow its historical and ongoing support of structural violence and genocide. This disavowal involves teachers who implore children to rise in song each morning and form an Imaginary political body.

The psychoanalytic notion of the Imaginary refers to a sense of internal consistency, which exists in the realm of the signified (i.e., the meaning of a sign) and allows it to be different than the actual forms that embody it (Oury, 2007). Lacan insisted that Imaginary relationships and behaviour are irremediably deceptive (Laplanche et al., 2018). Examples of this can be seen in settler spectacles of peaceful and hard-working community-minded teachers, who simultaneously raise concerns about social justice initiatives as “political.” The settler-schema is trapped between settler Imaginaries and interruptions of the Real. For example, the topic of Indigenous activism and land-based sovereignty provokes the Imaginary of neutral professionalism. The settler schema is mobilized when faculties of education repress the Real of Land Back Indigeneity to protect the settler Imaginary. This occurs, for example, in faculty meetings where developmental discourses are deployed to remove “upsetting” content from early, middle, and senior-year curricula, often accompanied by claims that politicizing education is misaligned with developmental expectations. However, the depoliticization of childhood can

also be understood as a formative process that nurtures an early-years schema, linking young people to the settler Imaginary and, by extension, to the broader project of settler colonialism.

French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville provides a foundational example of the settler political Imaginary as "a people without history in a place without history" (Veracini, 2010, p. 79). In regional settings, the settler-farmer divests themselves of prior social determination by imposing agrarian relations onto land, which represented as empty or "wild," is stripped of existing social, political, and relational orders (Veracini, 2010). Public schools, Universities, and other Western institutions emerge from a similar logic of no-place. The settler schema responds to the eruption of the Real (e.g., Land defenders, guest speakers who tell the truth about colonial violence and oppression) through symbolic acts like land acknowledgements which, as a politics of recognition, symbolically names Indigenous presence while leaving settler access, property relations, and capitalist accumulation intact. These acknowledgements increasingly function as marketing devices, inviting new waves of settlement by appealing to progressive settler and migrant consumers rather than disrupting the colonial conditions they claim to recognize (Coulthard, 2014; Smith et al., 2021). Those learning the speech of the settler without a critical orientation to the language and culture of settler-centric pedagogies, inherit the colonial Imaginary. This structure, that I call the settler schema, is transmitted to settler and non-settlers. While Indigenous educators and anti-colonial scholars are challenging what is instituted in faculties and programs, in my teaching experience these schemas appeared to maintain hegemonic organizing supremacy at the regional university level, even if this was occurring unconsciously.

The settler schema maintains a complicated relationship with what Lacan referred to as the absolute Other, the unconscious, which is also the repository of all signifiers in a culture. Our

relationships with the unconscious are unpredictable, and students and faculty are often enticed to ignore it through appeals to agency, professionalism, and rational self-control. In teacher education we may not encounter the settler schema explicitly until it shows up, rather troll-like, in our anonymous course feedback. For Lacan, the mediating factor between the self and the unconscious is the ego, which, like the unconscious, is based on images inherited from others. Settler schemas are re-enforced under racial capitalism, which covers up the violent and exploitative nature of capitalism while blaming Indigenous and other racialized students, poor white students, and displaced communities for failing against the hegemony of obscene wealth disparity. Settler Imaginaries have been modified by neoliberal multiculturalism, which is a counterstrategy that celebrates diversity on its surface, through the appropriation of discourses like autonomy and inclusion, while standardized testing and forms of assessment persist and “...accelerate inequities and devaluations under the aegis of settler normativity” (Goldstein, 2015, p. 44). While the settler schema is a rigid relational formation shaped by inherited conscious and unconscious identifications, the latter produces destabilizing effects by exceeding the individual self, the settler schema, and its Imaginary identifications. Because relational dynamics are not located within discrete subjects or groups, but are produced within shared historical and institutional relations, pedagogies that promote relational accountability (Donald, 2009) introduce radical alternatives to the separatism of colonialism. By interrogating what is being instituted in education and disrupting colonial habits, such as the settler schema, we can better reconceptualize an educational future that aligns with the TRC, Educational Blueprint, and other commitments to decolonizing education. In the next section I will describe my experiment integrating institutional pedagogy within an Indigenous education framework.

Institutional Pedagogy of Indigenous Studies in a Faculty of Education

As a reformist movement, institutional pedagogy (IP) shares many characteristics of mainstream schooling, such as teachers being in positions of teaching authority over students, conforming to curricular guidelines determined by the government, and maintaining procedures for student evaluation. The difference between mainstream schools and IP is that each of these characteristics are engaged critically through mediations, which are pedagogical objects utilized to reduce the separation between teachers and learners in the educational experience (Meirieu, 1987). Fernand Oury and his collaborator Aida Vasquez, informed by psychoanalysis and structuralism, crafted a three-legged “stool” that they called institutional pedagogy (IP). The three legs were made up of the materials of Celestin Freinet’s technology-based pedagogies (e.g., techniques that relied on the printing press), a notion of the ‘group’ as a particular kind of collective organization, and an emphasis on the role of unconscious desires in institutions (Carlin & Clendenin, 2019; Freinet, 1990; Hess & Schaepelynck, 2013; Legrand, 1993; Oury & Vasquez, 1967; Vasquez & Oury, 1971). The common French term for ‘elementary school teacher’ is “instituteur”, which translates literally as ‘institutor’ (Bouilloud, et. al., 2020, p. 157). This is originally a Latin term that was used to refer to the ‘preceptor and the master’. The idea that instituting education is the central role of the educator comes from a vision of society as its own regulatory body, the society, which is also recognized as an ‘institutor’” (Bouilloud, et. al., 2020, p. 158). In this scenario the teacher themselves is the mediation that acts as an intermediary between the student and knowledge (Beillerot, 2005). From this point of view, the non-Indigenous educator tasked with the integration of Indigenous studies is an institutor of Indigenous studies. Or, from another point of view, they are the mediation between the student and epistemologies of Land. Or, from the perspective of settler colonial studies, they are an

institutor of decolonization and the mediation between students and political organizing on campus. In each of these scenarios, I have portrayed the non-Indigenous educator as a mediation, operating in a machinic way. Schools that include Indigenous educators and/or maintain partnerships with community knowledge holders grounded in Indigenous heritage, consciousness, and tradition (Deer, 2024) are unlikely to frame their purpose within such narrow functionalist institutional roles. This illustrates my understanding of my role as a mediation as adjunct, not central, within Indigenous education.

In the context of Indigenous education, it is helpful to differentiate indoctrination (e.g., colonial schooling, fascism, and resultant settler schemas) from cultural diffusion. Cultural diffusion is what occurs when worthwhile technology, culture and forms of knowledge spread to new locations based on their use-value across cultures (Malott et al., 2009), which is what is happening with the widespread inclusion of Indigenous curriculum and community involvement in schools. Sandy Grande's (2015) observation that colonial logics blur distinctions between Indigenous and colonial protocols of public voice, as well as between author and authorship, is crucial for understanding how indigenization can risk cultural appropriation when the centrality of Indigenous educators and knowledge holders is not upheld. If it is everyone's responsibility to simply indigenize the curriculum, and the Indigenous/settler dialectic as it relates to land is eliminated, it becomes easier to ignore the economic geographical tension between "subjectivities produced in and through relationship to land and those produced under and through significations of property" (Grande, 2015, p. 3-4) and reconciliation curriculum risks falling into capitalist indoctrination and identity politics. Despite the current incommensurability of how we are situated on the land, with settlers living as occupiers on contested land and anti-colonial scholars demanding Land Back and economic and social reparations, we can attend to

conciliation in common spaces of education. A productive starting point for conciliation in education may lie in attending to the often-unacknowledged ways Indigenous cultures have shaped Western institutions. Genealogical accounts of Western democracy, for example, point to the influence of the Iroquois Confederacy on early American democratic thought (Lyons & Mohawk, 1992). As these ideas circulated through Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, Locke, and Paine, they arguably became sedimented within broader institutional formations. From this perspective, institutional pedagogy might be understood as operating within an Indigenous lineage, raising questions about how Indigenous modes of relational governance and knowledge-production may have indirectly informed contemporary democratic educational structures.

Rousseau's influence on George Lapassade's sociological and philosophical reworking of institutional pedagogy, particularly his concern with the authoritarian effects of institutions on human development, has not been considered in relation to Indigenous democratic traditions. While such a connection cannot be assumed, Lapassade's articulation of *negative education*, which resists institutional overdetermination (Janvier & Wustefeld, 2016), invites a broader line of inquiry. Specifically, his critique of the clinical privileging of the individual unconscious within institutional pedagogy invites a reconsideration of the individualizing tendencies embedded in consciousness-raising practices within critical pedagogy. As an alternative, self-governance pedagogy forgoes the individual unconscious to analyze the unconscious dimensions of group organization (Janvier & Wustefeld, 2016). This leads us closer to Guattari's notion of transversality. In negative education teachers are invited to redefine their role as analysts of learning processes and as responders to group needs, not as analysts of individual learning processes. In this dynamic the instructor follows a praxis of non-directivity while the student

follows an ethic of self-governance (Wustefeld, 2018). The emphasis on non-directivity and self-governance shares similarities to Indigenous education in its underlying relational ontology and ethics of learning. The emphasis on responding to group needs rather than analyzing individual learning processes echoes Indigenous pedagogies that situate learning within kinship networks, community responsibilities, and collective life. Donald (2012) refers to this as ethical relationality. Knowledge is not understood as an interior psychological property of the learner but rather as something that emerges through relationships, among learners, with teachers, and with the Land.

The IP analysis of hierarchies and power between teachers and students is useful in the instituting of Indigenous studies. In Iroquois society, political philosophy was transmitted to the young through social education oriented toward communal responsibility. This approach bears a suggestive influence on Rousseau's idea of a "natural society," in which unfavorable conditions are reduced so that children may come to discern good and evil through experience rather than indoctrination (Grinde, 1992). Rousseau's effort to humanize governments and institutions in the service of a just and democratic society rested on the claim that all beings are born natural and free, and that there is no legitimate rationale for rule by privileged classes. Yet his political philosophy emerged largely in abstraction, detached from the living examples of governance already practiced by the Iroquois Confederacy. Over generations shaped by war, grief, and collective responsibility, the Iroquois developed sophisticated systems of peaceful governance, forms of knowledge that went largely unrecognized, even as they informed Western political thought (Grinde, 1992). Against this backdrop, educating pre-service teachers about the ways Western political thought has drawn from; while often obscuring, Indigenous ideas and governance structures, offers one response to the colonial tendency to divide the world along

racialized and cultural lines (Donald, 2009). Engaging with histories of cultural diffusion, including the relational and unequal exchanges of the fur trade, can help pre-service teachers cultivate relational accountability, informing historical approaches to Indigenous content that resist both oppression and appropriation. (Donald, 2009; Malott et al., 2009). The reciprocal relationship between understanding and equity is crucial in education, as articulated by George Manuel (2019) the former chief of the National Indian Brotherhood. He emphasized the necessity of negotiating from a position of strength and described reciprocity as: "acceptance of each other's values as valid for the other" (Manuel, 2019, p. 221). The contemporary focus on Indigenous education in Canadian public schools primarily revolves around treaties and culture and, while an understanding of treaty history is important, it often leads to overly legislative discourses (Deer, 2022). One might say it leads us back to what is instituted. The hope is not merely to acquire new knowledge or competencies, but to open capacities, through cultural diffusion, for reciprocal relationships and new forms of non-oppressive sociality.

TIS, as I taught it, was an experiment in the indigenization of institutional pedagogy, a convergence of anti-fascist praxes (IP and critical pedagogies) and Indigenous studies. While not explicitly employing Indigenous *métissage* as a methodology, this work can be read through its lens, particularly in its effort to bring Indigenous and institutional pedagogical practices into proximity without collapsing their differences. I drew upon Indigenous ways of knowing when reframing the historical and ongoing relationships between Indigenous peoples and Canadians within the specific context of Canada. By attending to place and focusing on contested sites where Indigenous place-stories and settler narratives diverge, the course leaned into these epistemological and ontological tensions, to deepen understanding of land, history, and relationality. Through engagement with place-specific stories and cultural artifacts, Indigenous

métissage weaves through the settler schema, reframing Canadian history as layered, relational, and shaped by ongoing Indigenous presence. By interrupting the assimilative and classificatory tendencies of the settler schema, Indigenous métissage functions as a corrective to Western appropriation while remaining open to forms of cultural diffusion grounded in relational accountability. This confluence of cultural diffusion (e.g., Indigenous knowledges, critical pedagogy, institutional pedagogy, and self-governance pedagogy) can teach children how to resist indoctrination, and to understand and care for cultural differences, while applying their learning to change what is wrong in the world. A distinguishing characteristic of Grande's (2015) Red Pedagogy, which differs from both critical pedagogy and institutional pedagogy, is its basis in a particularly Indigenous spirit of hope. Not the future-centered hope of the Western imagination, but rather, a hope that lives in contingency with the past, one that trusts the beliefs and understandings of Indigenous ancestors, as well as the power of traditional knowledge that was accumulated over thousands of years (Grande, 2015; Simpson, 2014b). This is most explicitly conveyed by Indigenous educators, and I invited Elders, knowledge keepers, cultural and spiritual educators to the classroom to provide their divergent contextual perspectives about Indigenous history and futures premised on reconciliation, mutual respect and equity.

While Higher Education in North America has been described as a protective factor against authoritarian tendencies (Carnevale et al., 2020), the neoliberal implementation of market values in schools undermines democratic values and the kinds of orientations to the public good and the more-than-human-world that are congruent with Red pedagogies and Indigenous resurgence. Business models increasingly promote intellectual and symbolic forms of violence against progressive cultures, democratic policies, and pedagogies (Giroux, 2019). These influence hierarchical relationships between teachers and students and promote competitive

relationships between students. Because IP attends to the positioning of each person in the classroom, it provides opportunities to work through authoritarianism, individualized competitive tendencies, identity politics, and apathy that has been exacerbated by far-right propaganda promoted through post-truth Trump-era digital media culture. It also gives us opportunities to deal with the rigidity of opposing forces of identitarianism on the left. The late Christopher Hitchens (2011) voiced concern about the phrase “the personal is political”, which conflates the act of positioning oneself (e.g., gender, race, or disability) as an adequate political qualification. This is a problem for Indigenous education where identity politics replace class politics, ignoring the abject poverty caused by settler colonialism and the environmental catastrophe left in the wake of capitalist greed.

In addition to examining power dynamics and ideologies embedded within our educational institutions, IP also attends to those within our own psyches (e.g., the settler psyche). This psychosocial approach can challenge and transform the structures, practices, and subjectivities that perpetuate colonial legacies and reproduce unequal power relations in universities and public schools. IP positions faculties of education as sites of resistance and solidarity where institutors become co-conspirators with individuals and groups working for liberation from capitalism and nostalgic variations of white settler nationhood. Where institutors remain relevant to the instituting of Indigenous studies, so do their Imaginary identifications about schools and their desires for rules and realities (i.e., the settler schema). Introducing new cultural objects and learning systems allows faculty and pre-service teachers to put our instrumentalist desires “into play” with convergences and/or divergences between what is instituted (e.g., neoliberal adaptations of colonial education) and the new mediation that we are instituting (e.g., Red pedagogy). By altering the coefficient of transversality, through mediation,

the institution can produce new collective expressions (e.g. dialogues, writing, art) about the delusions and unconscious expressions that keep Indigenous communities, settlers and newcomers separate and alienated. Conflict that arises out of differences can be viewed as an opportunity for elaboration about educational relationships and learning about more reasonable and less aggressive orientations to group dimensions of learning (Beillerot, 2005). This opens possibilities for supporting students to work through learning blocks at intersections of class, culture, gender, dis/ability, sexuality, etc. In the following sections I describe a few mediations that I used to institute an Indigenous studies resonant with Red pedagogy, critical pedagogies, and Reconceptualist frameworks. In the following section I describe how I instituted *currere* as a mediation for pre-service teachers to explore a holistic four-directions model to teaching and learning developed by Chojko-Bolec et al. (n.d.) for course development at the University of Manitoba.

Circular *Currere* Mediation

In Europe, contemporary training programs in institutional pedagogy (IP) bring together teachers and professors to better understand educational difficulties in schools and to explore relationships between teachers and their students. These group discussions are facilitated by psychologists to raise awareness of what may be irrational in the educator's behavior (that of the professor in the University classroom and that of the teacher in the public school) and their students' (Dubois, 2011). IP assigns the writing of monographs as a precondition for working on professional dilemmas, as it is believed that writing and reflection is a requirement for both practitioner and group development. For Dubois (2011) a situation cannot be analyzed properly if it is not written down. While I value the European tradition of writing in education, and draw

upon written currere often in my teaching, I also discuss a culturally relevant adaptation I made in the North Direction section. In a similar spirit to the monograph, and inclusive of a critical pedagogy for consciousness-raising and emancipation, I introduced the currere method as a mediation for pre-service teachers to analyze their own autobiographies of education through the lens of Indigenous studies. While the currere of pre-service teachers differs from the writing of monographs, it is a preliminary opportunity to explore one's own educational history, challenges, relationships, and unconscious biases about Indigenous studies, settler colonial privileges, white fragilities, patriarchal violence, etc. In other words, it is an opportunity to begin decolonizing/unlearning settler schemas (for example, by de-subjectifying colonial ego structures), preparing teachers for an emancipatory praxis that uses education to question colonial structures (e.g., deconstructing mainstream curriculum and teaching to the test, refusing intergenerational family racism, inquiry about notions of private property), and opening to Indigenous ontological and epistemological understandings of teaching and learning, all before pre-service teachers enter their field placement.

It is unlikely for decolonization to occur in non-transitional settler colonial educational spaces until the faculty of education commits to undoing the double-pronged nature of colonial education: first attending to our own settler schemas and undoing our own indoctrination, and by designating leading roles to knowledge keepers and Indigenous educators and community members who can teach Indigenous ways of knowing and prioritize holistic development, critical inclusivity, and collectivity. These aims rely on Indigenous critiques of our mainstream and whitestream education praxes, which causes students to grapple with notions of truth, greed, capitalism, imperialism, and genocide. Under these conditions, Indigenous knowledge can help us reconceptualize new Imaginaries and desires supportive of Indigenous leadership, Land-based

teaching, holistic learning and educational processes for a more democratic Canadian future. To this end I incorporated a holistic four-directions model outlined by Chojko-Bolec et al. (n.d.) in the course development guide at the University of Manitoba (see appendix). Drawing on this circular process, I used currere to position students at the centre of a circular process that runs the course in four directions. This creates what Indigenous educators describe as a holistic Indigenous learning environment for balance and success (Battiste, 2013).

The East Direction

The Circular Currere Model invites students into the regressive mode of currere in the East direction, which is situated in the spirit of beginnings. Spirituality is at the heart of the East direction, playing a vital role in revitalizing Indigenous ways of life, with beginnings situated within the broader context of life's ongoing spiritual journey (Courchene et al., 2021). Pursuing a good life entail refraining from the exploitation of land and from attempts to dominate the bodies and souls of human and non-human beings (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2014b). Stories about life and culture pre-contact form a *beginning* for Indigenous education, while an analysis of settler colonialism on Turtle Island forms a beginning for settler colonial studies in North America. These beginnings need to be understood differently, with Indigenous place-stories deterritorializing Canadians' orientation to familiar towns and cities. Oral histories trouble Canadian myths and dismantle their frontier assumptions (Donald, 2009). Traditions that recognize the influence of the Land as a living ecology support students' social-emotional intelligence and foster an understanding of relationships as webs of material obligations, reminding us to value reciprocity among all living things.

A major assignment in the class was collective curriculum planning, which began by situating students in the East direction and inviting them to recall their own beginnings as learners. Indigenous education is strengthened when students share their own educational stories and connect them to the stories of classmates, Indigenous educators, and community members. Learning is enhanced through complicated conversations with each other about the inherited politics of education in Canada, and how each different beginning relates to reconciliation and decolonization.

I recognized that my spiritual journey East is a commitment to sustaining good relationships with others, regardless of our beginnings. And while it is easiest to intersect with those who share similar ethics as they relate to the progressive mode of currere (e.g., conciliation, reconciliation, socialist forms of care, etc.) my own work is related to understanding ethics that are different from my own. Coming to know ourselves (e.g., deconstructing settler schema, and exploring preferred ways of relational being) through our connections with others across diverse cultures, genders, abilities, and incomes, helps us clarify our analytic position as educators. Circular currere moves us in and out of the dialectical tensions that exist between persistent forms of colonial indoctrination and cultural diffusion, where we learn diverse ways of knowing, living, loving, and learning.

The South Direction

The South direction of Circular Currere is a time for reflecting on emotion, the meaning of childhood, and the importance of generosity. Children are sacred in Indigenous education and teachers are tasked with returning children to their sacred place in the learning process (Cajete, 1994; Chojko-Bolec et al, n.d.). Institutional factors like rigid timetables, standardized

curriculum, rules about who sits/who stands, and the effect of the architecture on the flow of bodies are causes of alienation and reactivity that can be reconceptualized in schools (Hess & Schaepelynck, 2013; Oury & Vasquez, 1967). The “barracks model” of schooling rely on factors, such as institutional organization and hierarchical regulation, that institutional pedagogy would diagnose and replace with opportunities for children to explore what is sacred to them in education. Cajete (1994) identifies the value of creative pedagogical methods such as music, art, movement, and storytelling. The incorporation of arts and play provide embodied opportunities for children to solve problems in creative ways. The use of developmentally relevant methods allows children to develop a sense of responsibility and understanding of their own personal purpose in the context of community and its surrounding natural environment. This form of education recognizes the importance of intergenerational teaching and learning, where Elders and knowledge keepers play a significant role in a children’s experience of hands-on learning (Battiste, 2013).

A long-overlooked aspect of education that returns children to their sacred place in the learning process is the Land, where nature shapes learning according to ecologies of knowledge (Cajete, 1994). When Simpson (2014b) states, *Land is Pedagogy*, she means Land becomes the pedagogy. Many pre-service teachers have lacked the opportunity for this kind of understanding in their own education and providing opportunities, through land-based Indigenous education, allows for a more holistic orientation to teaching and learning. The Land is both a central pedagogical force and culturally relevant learning context for this kind of development. For this reason, I included Land-based activities as a component of the course. While my orientation to Land-based pedagogy is weak, due to my own barracks education and urban upbringing, this is

an area that I have identified for future professional development. Given that Land is pedagogical across the lifespan, I discuss it again in relation to adulthood in the West Direction.

The West Direction

The West reflects the physical elements of life, the responsibilities of adulthood, and the importance of belonging within community and the broader social world. It emphasizes the material and embodied aspects of existence, including work, sustenance, and participation in social networks that sustain collective life. The shadow side of the West emerges in the form of Whiteman individualistic settler culture, which can valorize competition, personal achievement, and accumulation over relational responsibility, disrupting Indigenous ways of knowing and offsetting the balance between self, community, and land. By acknowledging both the generative (e.g., institutional pedagogy) and shadow aspects of the West, students can critically reflect on how their adult responsibilities as teachers, including social belonging and cultural values, are shaped by broader settler-colonial structures. They can then reflect on how these intersect or conflict with Indigenous teachings about relationality, reciprocity, and stewardship of the Earth.

The Physical Elements. Students in TIS explored physical aspects of life through land-based and hands-on learning. First, theoretically and ethically, through a study of Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning teaching ethics, followed by experiential activities in an environment of their choosing on the Land. These activities were further contextualized by the notion that Indigenous science takes place through watching, listening, connecting, responding, and renewing (Battiste, 2013), and we re-visited the value of science that is practiced for the good of the community, rather than as an abstract exercise to test one's ability to memorize

information (Malott et al., 2009). An Indigenous orientation to the material world is an important corrective to Western pedagogical orientations to materialism, including critical pedagogies and communist perspectives that have historically failed to adequately analyze colonialism or acknowledge Indigenous presence and ongoing resistance to colonialism. While Marxists have a strong analysis of capitalism and class politics, the Earth has too often been viewed as a resource from a communist perspective, and the overemphasis on the ownership of means of production overlooks colonialism and climate justice (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2014a).

Belonging. Belonging has been an important aspect of my work as an educator since my first job as a music therapist at an HIV clinic in a poor neighborhood, where I brought people together for the common purpose of music-making. I have since created many different groups in the spirit of belonging. While I worked as a counselling therapist at the regional university, I formed a reading group with students and some colleagues to address collective issues of well-being under the conditions of colonialism and neoliberal conservatism at the university. We read aloud Glenn Coulthard's text *Red Skin White Mask*, which is a strategy that I learned from colleagues that I met at an institutional analysis short-course taught online by Anthony Faramelli at Goldsmith's University in the UK during COVID lockdown. These consultations inspired my pursuit of this topic, however as life resumed in-person, I lost touch with that crowd and re-focused on my own local context. Our in-person meetings took place in an Indigenous ceremonial space that the university continues to use, after discontinuing the Indigenous counselling and wellness program that created the space (Smith, 2025). We incorporated the cultural practice of talking in a circle, as well as smudging, which is a sacred medicine that connected our group to good beginnings in the East direction.

In addition, I attend learning sessions, workshops, and joined a drumming group where I learned songs in Ininimowin and Anishinaabemowin languages. I miss this group very deeply since moving for work after my limited-term appointment. These opportunities for learning and belonging are rooted in creative relationships that cannot be replaced by books or distant-learning Zoom sessions. The university presents a tension between belonging and its dialectical opposite, the alienation felt as an outsider. I explore this tension here through the lens of Whitestream settler culture, reflecting on moments when I resisted its influence while simultaneously navigating its benefits.

Whitestream University Settler Culture. There is an affective pull among white settler teacher candidates of economic privilege, and a different kind of pull among those without privilege, to affirm whitestream culture as a professional competency. In regional universities, students whose educational experience in settler schools were positive and affirming of their identities and family histories relate to professors with similar local ties to the land and sentimental ties to normative colonial life. A strong local settler culture in Faculties of Education influences the degree to which a program is driven by settler futurity, much of which likely remains unconscious. Settler Imaginaries are promoted in neoliberal universities because they signify moves to innocence and adapt Indigenous knowledge and culture in ways that do not interrupt the functioning of capital (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Settler students in this regional setting appeared to have sentimental attachments to older white men and women professors who talk and teach like their former schoolteachers. The hegemony of local neoliberalism is bolstered by the lived experiences of these professors who, as former teachers, possess insider knowledge about local schools, administrators, school personnel, and the surrounding settler communities. In other words, they know the local variants of hidden curriculum, where coloniality remains

normative and predictable, and where it is being challenged by “DEI” and “decolonization”. They can tell you who “is a good guy” and who is “woke”.

Local professors and their students can be reactionary toward research and philosophical work that is not easily accessible to the local population or translatable to immediate curriculum design. Outsider scholars are at a deficit without teaching experience in these schools, as they do not possess the same insider settler knowledge. In my case, I have never assumed a teaching role in front of a classroom full of young divergent learners and, in a conservative teaching culture such as this one, I might have been positioned lower than the typical one-down position. However, those of us who did not enjoy schooling (regressive currere) and therefore did not desire to be teachers in those self-perpetuating systems (progressive currere), have outsider experiences that are not shared by mainstream/whitestream scholars. Those of us who became scholars of the “outside” while living on the outskirts of the school curriculum have life experiences and perspectives that are rare in education and, because of that, we can introduce alterity in class-based university settings. Nonetheless, Western hegemony supports demands for predictable structures and universal learning outcomes, and the banking model of education threatens to overtake our collective explorations of ideologies that circulate in schooling, such as neoliberalism, not to mention the colonial unconscious, which continues to lurk beneath surface of most Canadian institutions.

Adulthood. The West provides us with direction for addressing the problem of conservatism in educational psychology. The banking model of education is a conservative counterstrategy in the business of producing what Oury referred to as “greedy gulpers”, students who sustain a hunger for lessons that are predictable, palatable, and easy to recite (Vasquez & Oury, 1971). Repetition is assigned a reassuring value, while what is creative is incomparable

and therefore poses risks. For many students, university is a significant aspect of emerging adulthood, however it seems that students are robbed of independence when they are relieved of the duty to engage critically with their learning. The idea that “first we teach them the basics,” maintains status quo learning objectives that are rooted in whitestream pedagogy, an example of what Vasquez and Oury (1971) referred to as a digestive model of education: only teach what is easy to chew and swallow. It is as if pre-service teacher education programs serve an infantilizing function, where students don’t have access to the full menu until graduate school. This highly problematic narrative aligns with Britzman’s (2012) analysis of adults in schools who become subject to their own unresolved adolescence, shaped by internal conflicts, fantasies, and defenses. In education faculties, similar dynamics are replicated within the Whitestream settler schema, where critical approaches to pedagogy are often sidelined. Here the “Imaginary teacher” is idealized, a disciplined figure whose walk and talk establish an authority that students are expected to emulate to gain approval. This institutionalized schema both reflects and reinforces settler subjectification, shaping students and faculty alike to internalize norms of compliance, hierarchy, and performativity, rather than fostering relational, critical, or decolonial ways of knowing and teaching. Good students are those who capitulate to the master by remaining within their orthodoxy while teachers, by being a substitute for the parents, recapitulate the Oedipal problem (Vasquez & Oury, 1971). Patriarchal settler values and colonial power structures are internalized through school repetitions that map onto the knowledge, skills, and cultural practices of the nuclear family home.

To avoid Oedipal identifications, the IP educator introduces mediations, that invite students "into play" with objects and systems that provoke imaginary identifications (e.g., the teacher as a projected parental figure), which open new possibilities for learning (Janvier &

Wustefeld, 2017). Imaginary identifications refer to the interpretive schemas, images, and intuitions that students hold consciously or unconsciously, which are influenced by the roles that they were taught to play in various institutional structures (such as families, schools, churches, etc.). Influenced by the Oedipal analysis of Freud and Lacan, Oury (in Janvier & Wustefeld, 2017) viewed the classroom as an alternative space to the institution of the home, where children are often subjugated. He cautioned teachers against becoming “parental replacements,” which he believed provokes traumatic identifications that interfere with learning. Unlike other critical forms of pedagogy, institutional pedagogy emphasizes the importance of working through “traumatic identifications” (p. 904) that arise from past situations involving authority figures like parents, which need to be resolved for students to re-engage in learning. The institutional purpose of mediation is to bring roles into play in the classroom by providing students opportunities to “repeat, fix or modify ‘identifications’ they had constructed in other situations (for example, in their family),” (Janvier & Wustefeld, 2017, p. 904).

The North Direction

The North segment represents the mental life and situated cognitive abilities of the learner. It encompasses the development of reasoning, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, as well as the capacity for reflection and abstract understanding. In Indigenous pedagogical frameworks, the North is not just about individual cognition but also about how knowledge is connected to community, culture, and the natural world (Battiste, 2013; Grande, 2015). Learning in this dimension is holistic and relational, linking the mind to stories, histories, and patterns observed in both human and non-human realms. Developing the mind in the Northern direction requires curiosity, discernment, and critical engagement with ideas, grounded

in ethical responsibilities and guided by the lessons that emerge from the land and its relational networks (Simpson, 2014b). This is where critical consciousness develops, and settler schemas and colonial mythologies are subjected to deconstruction and analysis. Indigenous studies are a valuable starting place for preparing educators to understand and engage with diverse social and cultural perspectives, while critical pedagogies provide tools for analyzing how hegemonic educational programming, whether intentionally or unintentionally, precludes implementing Indigenous studies in curriculum-transforming ways. While writing was the primary medium for currere, following the tradition of the written monograph in IP, I invited students to submit oral accounts through video or audio technology as an oral alternative. This is an Indigenous cultural competency that was impressed upon me by an Anishinaabe-inini undergraduate student that I met during a community meeting about reconciliation. He offered insight into our failure as a faculty to indigenize curriculum, pointing to our obsession with Western pedagogical norms such as writing, memorization, testing, and assessment procedures. Western pedagogies can create barriers to a holistic education for all students by coercing them into performing colonial logics.

Settler students who find it difficult to move past inherited frontier logics, deeply held ideologies, and settler schemas tend to resist the holistic and immersive nature of Indigenous educational experiences. These students are protected in faculties where western hegemonic worldviews are oriented to as non-views. As good students they understand the expectation to adhere to dominant ideologies, treating them as if they were objective and rational perspectives and resisting disruptive alternatives (Malott et al., 2009). Where there is resistance toward the curriculum as a lived experience, indigenized cultural mediations provide opportunities for what Deer and Heringer (2023) described as “the appreciative inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the educational programming of a school for the benefit of student learning and cultural revival”

(p. 34). While Indigenous studies, especially when delivered by Indigenous guest lecturers and teachers, provided knowledge required for educators to support the cultural revival of Indigenous students, critical pedagogies provided additional tools for analyzing the hegemonic educational programming that intentionally or unintentionally precludes the instituting of Indigenous studies to transform the curriculum. I assigned readings in philosophy of education, critical theory and ideology, and Indigenous philosophy, alongside structured reflection assignments, to support students in navigating the complex relationship between truth and opinion as defined by Castoriadis (1987): opinion sustained by *logos*. This approach supports students in navigating the complex relationship between truth and opinion. By drawing on Castoriadis's (1987) notion of *logos*, students are invited to articulate the reasoning that sustains a given opinion (e.g., private property). In this framework, opinion is not opposed to truth; rather, it gains ethical and epistemic legitimacy through careful articulation, critical dialogue, and accountability. This ancient dialectical method resists both relativism and dogmatism by allowing multiple, situated opinions to coexist while remaining answerable to shared standards of meaning, coherence, and responsibility. By applying this approach to complex conversations, some students were able to examine how their beliefs (e.g., settler schemas) were formed and authorized, and now contested, without reducing truth to mere preference or reinstating it as an unquestionable universal (Castoriadis, 1987; Pinar, 2019; Wustefeld, 2018).

Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Instituting Indigenous studies would lack cultural humility without the leadership of cultural teachers and knowledge keepers who provide living examples of local traditional knowledge and by sharing their stories and teachings against the backdrop of unceded or Treaty Land. The study of Indigenous scholars and cultural figures like Vine Deloria Jr., Leanne Simpson, Aimée Craft, Glenn Coulthard, Sandra Styres, Dylan

Robinson, and Jeremy Dutcher provided further learning and guidance. Recognizing ongoing student resistance to reading and responding to the demand for more guidance in the currere process, I developed an instructional manual with coordinates to readings that directed students to explore their opinions against the logos of Indigenous epistemologies and the challenges posed by critical pedagogy. The main text that influenced this orientation was *Teaching Native America Across the Curriculum* by critical Marxist scholar Curry Mallott and his co-authors Lisa Wakau and Lauren Wakau-Villagomez, two master-teachers on the Menominee Reservation. These coordinates provided opportunities to practice reflexive autobiographical writing (currere), imagery, and oral recording and storytelling with the intention of consciousness-raising.

Independence. While psychoanalytic orientations to object relations and individual psyches have helped me navigate my own journey with the hegemonic education system as it currently exists, I am seeking alternative modes of transversality to disrupt my reactive settler schema, including the reflexive impulse to replicate patriarchal aggression from a militant leftist stance, as well as the tendency to vie for epistemological influence or recognition within competitive leftist contexts. Guattari critiqued transference as a psychoanalytic stereotype that promotes predetermined territorializations (i.e. roles and obligations), and transversal education offers an alternative to the role that transference plays in IP's interiorization of repression (e.g., through the Oedipus complex, Western familialism, and individual psyches). Rather than remaining overly focusing on the individual unconscious complexes of students (e.g., a traditional psychoanalytic orientation), which delimit currere projects as overly individualistic, I pondered IP's focus on the collective analysis of bureaucracies that Guattari believed have disrupted leftist politics since the 1960's. Transversality offers an expansion of the

intersubjective limits of transference, extending it into the social domain and allowing for an outward facing IP rather than a focus on individualized educational psychology.

Students who engaged transversally with an institutional pedagogy of Indigenous studies moved beyond demonstrating their knowledge about Indigenous culture or recounting historical details about settler colonialism, toward deterritorializations in their currere work. This is a phenomenon that I have described elsewhere as desettling (Skott Myhre et al., 2023; Smith, 2012). This process involves confronting the epistemic distortions of settler-colonial and imperialist violence, fostering empathy for its victims, and standing in solidarity with movements of resistance and resurgence, through actions such as challenging euphemisms of oppression, rejecting victim-blaming, supporting student protests, and speaking out in institutional spaces. Seeking independence from Western imperialist propaganda weakens the settler schema. For example, the stories shared by survivors of Indian Residential Schools during TRC events (one of the assignments was to attend an event during national TRC week), and the immersive experience of the Kairos Blanket Exercise led by a knowledge keeper, inspired complex articulations of student desire for a non-exploitative Canadian future. While we as institutors need to be trauma-informed, culturally humble, and critically engaged with the undisciplined settler gaze that too easily mixes Indigenous culture with settler violence (à la Hollywood-style “trauma-porn”), hearing the truth about colonial violence appears to be an important safeguard against settler disavowal of colonialism as an ongoing problem for educators. Disavowal is harder to maintain when the truth about violence and oppression is discussed in public spaces.

In the following section I describe how, through collectivist orientations to decolonization and education, we can use curriculum to refuse the proliferation of indoctrination and coloniality, while also centering Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Collective Work

In IP, the Council is designated as the body responsible for dealing with institutional matters, including the creation of subgroups and teams for various cooperative responsibilities, such as discussing weekly activities or classroom problem solving (Janvier & Wustefeld, 2017; Oury & Vasquez, 1967). Weekly Council meetings are a requirement for IP students to discuss activities for the week, but also to work through conflicts and deal with organizational issues (Janvier & Wustefeld, 2017; Oury & Vasquez, 1967). While more common in European pedagogy, the use of various councils has been useful for educational reform in North America as well, allowing for consensus decision-making among teachers regarding anti-racist curricular reform (Orelus et al., 2014).

My first classes were lecture-based, focusing on Indigenous ways of knowing and being and exploring the relations between all living things, as well as studying critical pedagogy, and philosophy, which I intended as preparatory knowledge for the collective work ahead. While students were used to working on projects together as an activity-based approach to demonstrate knowledge, the political project I proposed was unfamiliar. I did not provide clear instructions about what their interactions should look like, nor how their planning should proceed, which created a sense of discomfort and uncertainty. In hindsight, drawing on the Council or another mediation at the beginning of the course might have been a clearer enactment of pedagogical responsibility, as it could have disrupted the dynamic in which knowledge production became overly associated with me as the professor. Without an early, shared framework for understanding the political dimensions of education, some students were able to dismiss this unfamiliar mode of planning as misguided and to interpret their resistance as merely a difference of opinion rather than a refusal to engage with the course's critical commitments. Castoriadis

(1987) reminds us that opinion is a political sensibility that extends beyond individual taste toward a position informed by one's knowledge, ethics, and visions for society. We are living through an era marked by resistance to listening, reading, writing, including oral storytelling traditions, and critical thought, all of which undermines the development of reflexive practitioners.

Because this is a required course, the cohort reflected upon a range of perspectives on Indigenous rights, critical educational methods, and collective pedagogies. As individualism is one of the central laws of neoliberalism, it can appear anachronistic to many students to embrace cooperative approaches when they are rushing through school to reach the investment opportunities on the other side (Baltodano, 2012). By laws of neoliberalism, I mean symbolic law which, as defined by psychoanalysis, refers to the regulation of desire through the establishment of power hierarchies. These hierarchies then organize the exchanges expected to occur between relatively educated subjects. My attempt at developing a Council for working on collaborative assignments was also disrupted by predictable habits of individualism, with some students worrying that they would have to work harder than their classmates and that their grade would be negatively impacted by less motivated, less intelligent peers. In other words, students were uncomfortable deviating from what is instituted in a Western educational culture: testing, competition, and individualism.

My intention in introducing collective planning units for integrating Indigenous studies across the curriculum and the use of close-reading strategies, were to introduce a group process of knowledge production. Transversality recognizes the importance of students, as much as educators, for transforming institutional realities and modes of subjectivity and relationships in the institution. The subjugated nature of professionalization and the hierarchization of roles

within institutions serve to block the expression of individual desires in institutions (Genosko, 2008) and I proposed group-work as an opportunity to explore the value of relationships, referencing Indigenous models of learning and socialist and communist influences on group formations (e.g., unions, social services including public schools). In the spirit of Lapassade's (in Wustefeld, 2018) negative education, I invited students to re-think curriculum planning from a collectivist perspective and directed them to join two different kinds of groups: a reading group and a planning group.

Reading Group

The first group formation was responsible for an in-depth reading of a chapter of interest (e.g., mathematics, ELA, social studies) from the course text *Teaching Native America Across the Curriculum*. Group members were directed to reflect on three relevant passages in their currere, and to come to class ready to experiment with the conceptual speed dating method (Massumi, 2017). Through conceptual speed dating, students practice close reading (e.g., carefully analyzing language, ideas, and arguments), which in turn fosters transversality: the ability to move fluidly across concepts, disciplines, and viewpoints, allowing readers to make connections that might otherwise remain invisible (Massumi, 2017). Additionally, these sessions served to prepare students for collective planning during their second group formation. Conceptual speed dating is prescriptive to prevent generalization and pre-mature criticism of a text. Pre-existing knowledge is excluded from the conversation to make room for “new thoughts,” “new actions” and “the new perceptions that new actions allow to unfold” (Massumi, 2017, p. 50). However, close reading practice is difficult, as students are not accustomed to maintaining a strict focus on texts, and they would often fall into the habit of discussing what

was familiar to them, making irrelevant connections to mainstream methods or theories. Building on the close-reading exercises, students were then invited to use the currere process to bring their own experiences, reflections, and critical insights into dialogue with the text. This exercise in logos emphasized that meaning is not fixed but emerges through accountable interaction, allowing students to connect their personal reasoned understanding with broader social, historical, and theoretical contexts. The process also invited group transversality, when readers would have complicated conversations about pedagogy so that the reading, learning, thinking could not be considered closed or complete.

However, it is likely that my instruction was not clear enough, and my intentions as a limited-term professor not confident enough, as many of the students did not utilize these methods for reading and learning as they were intended. Many groups ignored the directives and got together in more normative discussion groups. I reminded group members of their task of teaching each other the content of their reading group chapter (from their own readings, the conceptual speed-dating process, and any complicated conversations that arose from their reading group) and encouraged exploring curriculum as an opportunity to address social inequities. I used my weekly feedback on student curreres, as an invitation to explore the political dimension of curriculum, to invite them back into conceptual readings, in which the text could be interpreted as an object that can be crystallized through its relationship with every new reader/thinker (Massumi, 2017). Weekly currere writing about the experiences of collective curriculum planning and conceptual speed dating, led some students back to the roots of the colonial Imaginary and their commitment to it, while it was coefficient with transversality for others. My attempts to encourage transversality included a dedicated class, which included a lecture and practice for engaging in free-associative writing to encounter the absolute Other- and

to explore connections with the undetermined and creative force of the “radical imagination” as an important revolutionary force for human action (Bouilloud, et. al., 2020, p. 158).

By integrating a critical readings group with the framework of *currere*, I created a space for students to trace the personal, social, and historical dimensions of their learning. The readings, spanning philosophy of education, critical theory, and Indigenous scholarship, provided conceptual scaffolding, while *currere* invited students to situate these ideas in relation to their own experiences, beliefs, and aspirations as emerging pre-service teachers. This combination encouraged reflexive engagement, allowing students to interrogate not only the knowledge presented but also the assumptions, values, and positionalities they bring to the classroom. In this way, the course fostered both critical thought and ethical self-awareness. It modelled a pedagogy in which learning is simultaneously collective, political, and personally meaningful. Building on these foundations, the following section examines how these insights informed the design for collective curriculum planning, highlighting strategies for fostering inclusive and critically engaged learning environments.

Curriculum Planning Council

The second group formation was a curriculum planning collective, a variation of Council. In the IP classroom, individual and collective autonomy are continually negotiated, and challenges to structural relationships can be addressed in Council settings. I did not provide instructions on how the interactions within the curriculum planning Council should unfold, nor on how their planning should proceed, which created a sense of discomfort and uncertainty. Instead, I invited students to generate local orders within their working groups and to draw on readings, as well as knowledge shared by guest speakers and writers, to develop new “laws” to

guide their curriculum planning. Students were invited to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and being, critical pedagogies, and institutional pedagogies as alternatives to the neoliberal and colonial logics of Western education. Toward this end I invited groups to choose a central concern from the class content that they would address across the curriculum through different teachable subjects (e.g., math, social studies, history). Examples of topics included: Indigenous notions of land relative to their field placement, Indigenous notions of literacy and oral traditions, matrilineal cultures and the genocide of MMIWG2S+. Group members collaborated across the curriculum to explore the types of anti-colonial interventions that public education could implement in response to their chosen concern. Emphasis was placed on how Indigenous education and critical pedagogy could foster consciousness-raising and promote democratic participation in developmentally appropriate ways for future students.

Group members taught one another their reading group chapters, drawing on close readings from the conceptual speed-dating process and subsequent discussions, while beginning to explore curriculum responses to social inequities. Students then participated in group brainstorming sessions to identify themes related to Indigenous Studies or problems associated with settler colonialism. They were invited to consider how each discipline could contribute to a shared focus, how their approaches were informed by Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies (e.g., decolonization), and how the curriculum could be mobilized as an integrated, interdisciplinary unit. Students were directed to apply subject-specific tools across disciplines to deal with problems such as corporate encroachment on Indigenous lands and the ongoing effects of colonialism (e.g., statistical analysis in mathematics to examine race-based poverty and environmental inequities, spatial mapping in geography to trace water contamination and land dispossession, archival analysis in history to interrogate policies like the Indian Act, critical

reading in English to deconstruct dominant narratives, and scientific inquiry to investigate ecological harm).

Castoriadis' (1987) theory of autonomy recognizes relationships as central to meaning making and inquiry. Autonomy does not mean living without rules; it entails the ongoing creation, recognition, and governance of one's own laws in relation to others, to shared social-historical contexts, and to the collective processes through which meaning is negotiated. In this sense, autonomy does not separate the individual from the social but situates them in a participatory and reflective engagement with it. This is an invitation to accountability where students take responsibility for the norms and significations that shape their curriculum and teaching habits. In the context of educational group activities autonomy promotes reflective, active capacities, not reckless forms of freedom from constraints. The internalization of "new laws" (e.g., classroom norms, working group rules, collective agreements) is not passive; it involves actively understanding, negotiating, and making rules meaningful within relational and ethical educational contexts. Following Castoriadis (1987), I recognized that having students internalize group laws to support their working relationships would enhance collective problem-solving and decision-making. Groups that engaged with this dimension of the social imaginary and established agreements to facilitate meaningful participation consistently produced higher-quality outcomes. While I imposed some of the structures: e.g., students first joined a collective, negotiated a teachable subject, and introduced their chapter to the group, it was up to the groups to develop local laws for integrating Indigenous education across the curriculum, to agree on a central concern, and to identify supporting literature and other forms of knowledge. Once these self-governance structures were in place (to a greater or lesser extent), groups were then invited to align their lessons with the goals and outcomes of the relevant provincial curriculum

guidelines. At one point I instituted a law of the critical classroom, instituting critical pedagogy and enshrining it in a rubric due to the resistance of more vocal students. This philosophical and pedagogical imposition created anxiety for some and a sense of liberation for others. Although I intended my curriculum to model progressive pedagogy, my approach, rooted in a specific strain of critical pedagogy and structured around a rubric assigning both individual and collective grades, prompted student concerns about my overt authoritarian political stance, which is an example of slippage into the position of the Master, whose political commitments become asserted as settled truths rather than remaining open to collective dialogue.

Rene Lourau criticized institutional pedagogy for centering the mastery of the teacher and prioritized social connections for developing counter-institutions against what is instituted (Wustefeld, 2018). These modifications of institutional pedagogy prioritize self-governance as a pedagogical goal in the classroom. Many students were uncomfortable deviating from what is typically instituted in a Western educational culture: testing, competition, and self-interest. Students accustomed to activity-based learning and unfamiliar with political pedagogies met the curriculum with resistance. The main form of resistance was normative lesson planning and apolitical educational discourse inherited from other classes, often coupled with the names of local white late-career male-identifying professors. When some of the same students were not satisfied with the rubric I presented, I used it as an opportunity to engage self-governance pedagogy and invited them to co-develop a new rubric for the curriculum assignments. This process was embraced by some, ignored and/or misunderstood by others, and even caused ripples of anger in others. Oury and Vasquez (1967) recognized expressions of mutism, aggression, and passivity as pedagogical opportunities, with the classroom as an appropriate symbolic environment for collective work to take place. Rather than viewing my classroom as a

site for managing problem behaviors (e.g., by punishing or ignoring problematic identifications resulting in aggression), I attempted to view them as opportunities for conscious raising about the hegemony of symbolic orders of colonialism and neoliberalism in mainstream education. I then re-linked to the instituting of Indigenous studies as a different symbolic order for the non-oppressive classroom.

Because I did not maintain an explicit orientation to the unconscious dynamics that arose among group members, my explicit orientation to critical pedagogy and anti-colonial curriculum coupled with neoliberal coefficients (such as the individualized whitestream curriculum normalized by influential colleagues) strengthened learning blocks (Boimare, 1999) for students who were already resistant to Indigenous epistemologies and/or critical pedagogies. These blocks are reinforced in faculties of education who act as coefficients to regional variables, such as politically conservative religious context like that identified by Vine Deloria Jr:

Native studies poses not just a political challenge to the transcendent and simultaneously universally held barometers of truth, but an epistemological challenge to the institutionalization of that truth- namely, the academy. He [Vine Deloria Jr.] argued that Western imperialism and colonialism flowed from a Western epistemology that was premised on either-or logic systems based on Christian precepts. (Simpson, 2014a, p. 3)

The influence of these local variables causes the entire institution to suffer from predictable forms of blindness (e.g., Christian morality about women's rights, patriarchy and rape culture, gender normativity, mutualizing of genocidal violence, racism and cultural essentialism,

increasing campus security presence and pro-policing/pro-war sentiments, and private property as an inalienable right). By blindness, I am referring to aspects of the settler schema, ideologies that go unquestioned and exert strong cultural and political influence within regional universities. Without mediations that bring attention to the blind spots within our institutions, they remain co-efficient with the violence and exploitation that accompanies settler colonialism and its variations under neoliberalism. The culture of individualism, competition, prescribed outcomes, and best practices will continue to alienate many of us from one another in classrooms, in faculty meetings, and committee meetings. On the other side, when subjectivities that appear in the classroom culminate in a collective self, which is affirmed by other group members (Janvier & Wustefeld, 2017), we move closer to a transversal education that functions as a coefficient for conciliation between Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, Indigenous students and their communities, and Western educational systems.

Conclusion

The faculty of education and what is instituted as teacher education plays a central role in how pre-service teachers and the children they will teach are indoctrinated into colonial forms of education. As an educational ideological apparatus, the university is a monolithic establishment with power to dictate laws, timelines, structures, and other internal regulations that institute normative forms of knowledge and sociality on campus. For non-Indigenous educators working within these ideological conditions, supporting Indigenous cultural resurgence and anti-colonial praxis requires an orientation grounded in land-based competencies that are not our own. Engaging Indigenous conceptions of Land, participating in land-based practices, and valuing Indigenous histories and critiques of dispossession and resource extraction can open

epistemological and ontological frameworks for relational, anti-colonial mediations. These frameworks create possibilities for non-Indigenous professors and their students to critically examine neoliberal formations that collapse Indigenous education into multiculturalism and can then lead to divisive identity politics. This anti-colonial intervention requires attention to one's own subjectivities (e.g., the settler schema), shaped across the lifespan, while simultaneously opening psychodynamic and relational possibilities for student learning grounded in responsibility, cultural humility, reflexivity, and affective engagement. By attending to the intersections between Indigenous ontologies of Land and our shifting post-industrial understandings of materiality, the university classroom can be reconfigured as a site of relational transversality for ecologically grounded social change processes rather than assessing for epistemic or pedagogical mastery.

Although my early experiences as a limited-term professor functioned as a rude awakening from a vulgar Marxist dream, I remain motivated to undertake this work. I have since revised my idealized assumptions about revolutionary students readily invested in critical pedagogy who would join me in challenging hegemonic and colonial curricular norms within settler-dominated faculty. My earlier naïveté regarding the power of shared imaginaries, sustained by both professors and students who seek pre-existing order and certainty through rubrics, methods, and detailed lesson plans, became a source of hard-earned learning. This understanding clarified that, within highly regimented educational contexts, mediation must attend to the relational dynamics among institutions, rules, and material objects, and to how these arrangements position the subject in relation to knowledge (Dubois, 2019; Meirieu, 1987). In the context of Indigenous education, this shifts the focus away from knowledge as content to be

mastered and toward the ethical, relational, and material conditions through which learning is mediated.

My experiment with institutional pedagogies of Indigenous studies did not substantially reorient most students' relationships to curriculum. While individual curreere reflected moments of exploration and critical questioning of previously held ideologies, these engagements were less visible in public discussions and curricular artifacts. This pattern suggests that institutional expectations, assessment structures, and dominant pedagogical norms constrain the extent to which commitments to social change, such as unsettling settler colonialism or other oppressive structures, are taken up through the curriculum, despite their explicit articulation in class and in the assignment rubric. Perhaps I made the mistake of imposing too much of the wrong kind of structure, which, like Lapassade's (in Wustefeld, 2018) critique of Council meetings, led to student resistance against authoritarianism. He argued that when mediations position teachers into roles of spokespeople for bureaucratic and depoliticizing structures, it limits institutional creativity and the critical thinking capacities of students. Rene Lourau added that when centering the mastery of the teacher, IP fails to nurture social connections for developing appropriate counter-institutions against what is instituted. To achieve autonomy at the group and individual level, one must learn to give up any demands for meaning and resolution that would be achieved at the expense of collective responsibility (Wustefeld, 2018).

The professor's subject status as "expert" needs to be displaced through a shuffling of the institutional hierarchy, in which the teacher is no longer the model of a perfect superego for the student. Instead, our priority is to redirect attention to interpretations that limit transversality, and to analyze the connection between the production of the institution (Indigenous education) and how desire is situated in the surrounding society (First Nations, Metis and Inuit cultures; settler

colonialism/imperialist structures). The displacement of the professor in the hierarchy does not signal the end of the tenure-track profession but rather infers a new role: that of an “analyzer” for the function of transversality. Transversality is generated through forms of communication that produce new group formations and subjectivities, which is helpful for new configurations that are anti-colonial in the way they support Indigenous resurgence.

For Guattari (2011/2015), the institution is related to desire and subjectivity at both individual and collective levels. For us in teacher education, the undoing of neoliberal structures calls for learning collectives to refuse indigenized multicultural neoliberalism and to work earnestly with knowledge keepers, students, and faculty to cure the institutions of their colonial and imperialist pathologies. Guattari described the anxiety of the professional who embraces transversality as “the panic fear of being torn into bits”, which can occur when we accept and solicit questions about our actions (Genosko, 2000). I can attest to this experience, however I will continue to anchor my mediations more deeply in a self-governance philosophy, as well as bringing *currere* more clearly into the kinds of complicated conversations (Pinar, 2019) that open what Geffard (2014) refers to as a shared psychic space. Finally, it is from within this shared space that I will attempt to follow Spivak, as Faramelli and Graham (2020) have done, when they write: “to become an educator is to train in the practice of uncoercive rearrangement of desires” (p. 843).

Taken together, these reflections situate my project of TIS as an institutional and pedagogical experiment in transversality, one that sought to intervene in how desire, subjectivity, and knowledge were organized within pre-service teacher education. Rather than positioning TIS as a method or curricular innovation, I understand it as a mediational practice that works across Indigenous education, psychodynamic/autobiographical learning (e.g., *currere*), and institutional

critique to unsettle the contemporary banking model of education. My orientation to TIS operated by foregrounding relational accountability, land-based epistemologies, and currere (self-exploration of the curriculum-as-lived) as conditions for shared inquiry, while working with the anxiety and vulnerability that accompanies transversal work within professional institutions. In this sense, this example of TIS functioned as a practice of self-governance and collective responsibility that aimed not to resolve institutional tensions, but to create the shared psychic and pedagogical spaces necessary for the uncoercive rearrangement of desires described above, alongside Indigenous educators and knowledge keepers and against colonial educational formations.

Chapter 2: Anti-Colonial Diagrams for Well-becoming in Social Service Education and Communities of Practice

In order to converge with the perspective of the art world, psychiatrists must demonstrate that they have abandoned their white coats, beginning with those invisible ones they wear in their heads, in their language and the ways they conduct themselves.... Every care organization, or aid agency, every educational institution, and any individual course of treatment ought to have as its primary concern the continuous development of its practices as much as its theoretical scaffolding (Guattari, 2011, p. 27).

The following paper explores the development of theory and practices for liberatory social services education (e.g., social work, child and youth care, counselling psychology, psychiatric nursing). In it I explore problems related to psychology and well-being at institutional (here: the university), group (here: the classroom and communities of practice), and individual levels (here: students, professors, clients, professionals). The university is a relevant context for this kind of study, and I ask how the power relations reproduced in classrooms, practice communities, and broader mental health and well-being curricula come to shape suffering and govern processes of human change in social service settings. In the first part of this paper, I discuss the history of Western psychology as an individualizing ideology that has influenced contemporary common culture in North America. I explain, illustrate and critique how the mass production of mental illness and mental health has been mobilized to reproduce the pathologizing tendencies of psychology for cultural use in everyday life. By utilizing a form of soft power, which has been referred to as therapy culture, the mass production of human

vulnerability has found solace in mainstream research programs that introduce continuums and spectrums that capture more of the world in their diagrams. I explore how psychology discourse shapes educational and service providing contexts, as well as its proliferation through mass psychology instituted by Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training on Canadian campuses and the involvement of the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) in university mental health programming. Each of these Western institutions orient predictably to discourses of neutrality and retain a common axiom in the psychologized individual, who is subjected to “the discursive transformation of social problems into individual psychological problems, which then appear to require individual solutions” (Parker, 1997, p. 2).

In the second part of the paper, I introduce Refusal as Well-becoming (R-Wb), drawing upon an earlier paper titled “New Positive Psychologies of Well-being” (Smith, 2022). Building upon my argument in the first part of this paper, R-Wb responds to diagrams of control that contract power relations from two schools of thinking, clinical psychology and well-being studies, which produce a dialectical view of the human psychological subject. I begin by exploring how positive psychology and notions of well-being have provided alternatives to traditional pathologizing tendencies in clinical psychology but, by retaining psychologized individualism they are adaptive to neoliberal ideologies. So, while the possessive and competitive individual ego strives for wealth and to accumulate land and more goods than others, the social causes of oppression and suffering remain concealed. I deal with this problem in part three by drawing upon critical theory and critical psychology to carve away the reductive tendencies of well-being without throwing it out altogether. I inquire about the ideological nature of well-being studies and positive psychology literature by developing two pedagogical responses to the problem of psychologization in human services programs. First, I discuss a

pedagogy of refusal that proceeds through the deconstruction of psychological ideologies that internalize problems and conceal their social causes. I situate discourse analysis in classroom conversations about human change processes. I then draw upon political philosopher Andrew Culp (2016/2022), who critiques traditional symmetrical political engagement, advocating instead for asymmetrical strategies of invisibility and non-participation to disrupt existing power relations without direct confrontation that leads to schismogenesis. Schismogenesis is a destructive tendency that occurs when positive feedback loops sustain “a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behavior” (p. 175), which escalate through an accumulation of rigid interactions between individuals or groups (Bateson, 1958). I explore the anti-colonial and asymmetrical work of Fanon, Coulthard and Yellowbird in this regard. The second pedagogical task is to encourage students to re-think the locus of diagnosis by shifting the clinical gaze from individual assessment to an institutional analysis of the pathological systems that are sustained under neoliberal governance. I discuss how pathological systems shape group formations and discuss the relevance of diagnosing the pathologies of institutions as a first step toward curing them.

The final project is framed as a generative task, taking a line of flight from Falkenberg’s (2019) notion of well-becoming, which emphasizes the value of promoting flourishing within educational contexts. Inspired by Guattari’s revolutionary mapping, I experiment with partial diagrams of well-becoming, to chart emergent possibilities. By escaping dominant linguistic signifiers and representational logics, I reevaluate the unconscious processes that are ignored not only in therapeutic culture, but also within more progressive educational contexts. I finish the paper by way of institutional analysis, positioning the university community as the most relevant “analyzer” for interpreting its own individual members (e.g., students, professors,

administrators), unofficial groupings (student activist groups and grassroots mutual aid), and official groups (university clubs, communities of practice, committees, etc.). This take is based on Guattari's extensive clinical understanding that institutions can only be studied properly from the inside and not through an external objective gaze (Genosko, 1996). The cure for the pathologization of human life at the university (e.g., the therapeutic capture of MHFA), calls for collective social responses to the neoliberal forms of oppression and alienation that currently disrupt our pedagogies and relationships. I conclude by proposing that a transdisciplinary collective can emerge from the striated community of practice (CoP) model and I present the Blue Diagram as an example that draws upon a jazz improvisation framework. Like the blues, I end on a hopeful note that the liberatory possibilities of the university might emerge through the creative interplay of its members.

Part 1: Therapeutic Capture

These three elements of the 'psy complex', the dense network of theories and practices about the human subject that warrants and reinforces power under capitalism and patriarchy, are now woven together in the global ideological process of 'psychologisation', expansion of the psychological at the expense of politics, society and culture, which are the places where we can meet each other to mobilize and liberate ourselves. (Parker & Pavón Cuéllar, 2021, p. 149)

In the following section I explore how critical theories of psychology, starting with Foucault's analysis of power and discourse, illuminate the ways mental health and well-being are

constructed and governed within the context of Canadian universities. I start by examining Foucault's influence on the critical study of psychology, focusing on how the psy-complex influences contemporary perspectives on mental health and well-being within Canadian universities. I introduce the concepts of ideology and discourse to analyze how social service education is shaped by national institutions like Canadian Standards Association and Mental Health Commission of Canada. I also explore restrictive pedagogical frameworks like Mental Health First Aid and trace how psychological discourses extends to individuals' personal relationships, leading them to monitor and regulate themselves and others within the expanding landscape of therapy culture.

The Psy-Complex, Psy-Power, and the Academicisation of Knowledge

Michel Foucault's (1965) history of madness shows how medical discourses about pathologies of the body were modified by psychology, to pathologize individualized minds. The production of pathologizing discourse persists and mutates each time a new diagnostic statistical manual is published. Foucault's (1965) work shows how psychological complexes legitimize the categorization of a segment of the population as mentally ill, which contributes to the social exclusion of mad individuals by limiting their opportunities for meaningful participation in communal life. The psy-complex (Foucault, 2006) refers to a regulative network of theories and practices that constitute the discipline of psychology and, in turn, have a shaping effect on those people categorized as unwell (Parker, 2002). Those attentive to the ways human suffering is framed through categorization and individualization, often at the expense of its sociopolitical roots, are called to critically study the subject positions offered within the psy-complex. We must first inquire about how we ourselves are enlisted in mobilizing the psy-complex. Those of us

involved in human services education are vulnerable to the influence of power relations that circulate through curriculum and pedagogy. We can begin to deconstruct our orientations by studying the roles that we are positioned within as academic subjects and the discourses that frame our working relationships in teaching, research, and service. The Althusserian (2006) notion of interpellation suggests that we base our actions on what is made to appear moral or natural through the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) (e.g., schools, churches, family structures, the media). Psychology, as a discourse that is naturalized through many Canadian ISA, hails us toward what Althusser (2006) referred to as an Absolute, Other Subject. Being hailed is a way of describing how we are called into ideological forms of subjectivity, by figures who recognize their own positions as subjects within the same ideology (Guilfoyle, 2009). The Absolute Other Subject is a subjectifying force that naturalizes our conduct by hailing us to arrive in particular ways (Guilfoyle, 2009). Our response to the call, is our interpellation. Power hails us as particular kinds of subjects, and the more this is repeated (i.e., the more we are interpellated) the greater is the shaping effect. For example, when the laws of psychology hail teaching professors, to hail students, to hail clients in ways that support existing power formations. The educator hailed by diagnostic criteria, hails their students into the pathologizing curriculum that this paradigm endorses. A critical examination of psychological discourse can open the possibility of refusing interpellation. Once we deconstruct the subject positions psychological discourse imposes on its subjects, we can begin to grapple with the notion that we are not actually addressing each other in classroom lectures and helping encounters, but rather that it is texts that are addressing other texts.

Parker's (2014) deconstruction of psychology shows how discourses are in conversation with themselves, which problematizes the emphasis that helping professions place on

interpersonal communication. Professionals are not the driving force of psychological notions, rather we act as a conduit for psychology to reference itself. This occurs when we analyze folks as mentally ill or well, as if these categories were empirical objects. From this pedagogical perspective the addressor of a discourse is not a professor or service provider. Rather the addressor is a text that positions the people who are involved in the study and/or practice of psychology. This is how psychology subjects us to psy-power. When we “teach” about psychology, we are demonstrating how we are products of the academicisation of knowledge. Academicisation refers to standardized fantasies that lead to the bureaucratization of teaching and learning in a way that drains the scholarly imagination of its revolutionary potential (Parker, 2017). For example, curricula that are based on standardized and instrumentalized mental health pedagogies rely on students to imagine real events outside the university (i.e., the hospital, school, government offices, community clinic, outreach, treatment centres, etc.). By encouraging this Imaginary, our students are hailed to export professionalized fantasies into the field. They attempt to interpellate their clients in the ways that were imagined for them, through dominant psychological discourses presented as passwords for the gatekeepers of professionalism (e.g., practicum supervisors, team leaders, program directors). That is why, when students diagnose a young person on their first day of practicum without first learning about the context of their lives, they are demonstrating the effects of academicisation to their practicum supervisors. This is how ideology interpellates students. The academicisation of psychologizing concepts has socio-political implications for the education of social service providers who will go on to work in government, education, mental and physical health, non-profit sectors, etc. (Frawley, 2015; Parker, 2017; Viera & Languido, 2017).

Discourse Analysis of Academicisation

We can begin to problematize our mass orientation to academicisation by practicing critical discourses analysis in the classroom. We do this by asking ourselves out loud about the roles (e.g., professor, researcher, therapist) we as addressees are required to adopt when hearing, speaking, and applying psychological messages and methods (Parker, 2002). We can show our students how psychology turns each of us into subjects who speak, write, and teach about the texts (e.g., mental health) that discourses (e.g., mental illness) inhabit, and then explore how these subjectivities delimit alternative options for change. As subjects of discourse, our reflexivity depends on our capacity to recognize how the addressor, the psychological text, interpellates us as its addressees. This reflexive orientation to psy-power complicates our praxis as professors, which is demonstrative for our students. By studying ourselves as psychological subjects who are shaped by sets of professional locations (Parker, 2002), we can explore how professionalism cycles us through various psychological discourses (diagnostic criteria, psychological interventions, orientation to therapeutic relationships, notions of personal boundaries and countertransference, etc.). Reflexivity allows for intersectional analyses of power by identifying the different rights and roles that are designated to professors and students from diverse social locations, and to practitioners and clients/patients, as different kinds of addressees that have access to different kinds of discourses in the ISA. We do this not only to care for our students' learning, but also to attend carefully to their future work as professionals in roles of caring for others. The challenge ahead is that psy-power is on the rise in popular culture and seeking new targets through rapidly evolving technologies.

In social services education, critical psychology helps surface how psy-power, rooted in psychological norms, assessments, and classifications, shapes what it means to be a “good”

helper/client or student/professor. This critique opens into a broader analysis of therapy culture, where therapeutic discourses have become normalized beyond the clinical settings and classrooms traditionally dedicated to their proliferation, leaching into everyday practices of self-understanding, care, and governance. In the next section, I explore how therapy culture manifests within the university, shaping student subjectivities and institutional approaches to care.

The Panoptic Therapy Culture in Canada

The psychological discourses that render some subjects as rational and responsible and others as irrational and irresponsible undergo historical modifications to produce new forms of discipline, surveillance, and power. There has been a cultural shift away from the disciplinary power of experts (e.g., doctors, psychologists, etc.) and a move toward voluntary participation in therapy culture, which extends the reach of psychology further into everyday life under the guise of mental health. The trend to increasingly view life through a lens of sensitivity to harm is what Haslam (2016) referred to as concept creep. The psychological imperative to locate one's emotional vulnerabilities, and/or those of the other has crept into contemporary ontologies about the human condition itself, which Furedi (2013) calls therapy culture. As an ideology, therapy culture promotes the mass production of emotional vulnerability and disability, encouraging individuals to understand themselves and others as psychologically fragile. Therapy culture amplifies psychological pessimism by emphasizing widespread vulnerability to mental illness, promoting a sense of hopelessness through discourses that frame fragility as inherent to human nature (Furedi, 2008). This pathologizing culture extends the tendencies of clinical psychology into the very pulse of every human life. This is a form of psychological capture, where the medicalization of previously normal human phenomena such as tiredness, isolation,

disappointment, and sadness can render anyone ill. Psychology now traces people's personal narratives of struggle, and psychiatric diagnoses have become integral components of many individuals identities. Contemporary psychology has become a structuring force within the cultural field, where diagnostic categories are mobilized as forms of cultural capital, enabling individuals to negotiate and legitimize their position within dominant social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1986). Illness discourses, about vulnerable selves and vulnerable others, influence how we relate to our own subjectivities and to those of our students and clients. Those of us with critical and anti-colonial orientations to social service provision need to contend with the implications of this uptick in therapeutic capture, by providing clear rationale and methods for analyzing and, where appropriate, unlearning.

In Canada, therapy culture has become a national focus. The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) is a national group that develops standards through a consensus process that is approved by the Standards Council of Canada. Developing mental health standards, based on consumer needs demonstrates how ideologies can lead to mass manipulation, with those permitted access to technologies managing the mass production of culture and exerting power over society (Horkheimer et al., 2002). The CSA partnered with the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) to publish a standard called Mental Health and Well-being for Post-secondary Students. The standard reproduces power effects by “educating and equipping the post-secondary community to respond to early warning signs” (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2021, p. 30). This is an example of inclusive disjunction, a process that promotes connectivity over collectivity. By connecting through discourses of therapy culture, rather than encouraging care for our collective lives, our relationships are governed by clinical criterion that is driven by the intensity of crisis. The concept “at risk” is a mass integration that has been

bound up in the paranoid discourse of crisis since the 1980's. It constructs the person as passive and dependent: "To be at risk is no longer about what you do- it is about who you are" (Furedi, 2013, p. 130). The formalization of academicisation through the development of tools, such as Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), moves therapy culture beyond its hidden curriculum in popular culture by providing a standardized crisis-driven curriculum that conflates the promotion of large-scale mental illness diagnosis as "anti-stigma" practice. Hidden curriculum refers to "the unstated norms, values and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure of meaning in both the formal content as well as the social relations of school and classroom life" (Giroux and Penna, 1979, p. 22). The explicit curriculum of MHFA is clearly displayed on the website www.mhfa.ca:

the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. Just as physical first aid is administered to an injured person before medical treatment can be obtained, MHFA is given until appropriate treatment is found or until the crisis is resolved.

The indoctrination of the university campus by semiotic diagnostic systems that medicalize mental health is being established through the training of professors and other staff as lay mental health practitioners in the implementation of MHFA on university campuses. My analysis of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) within the university context returns us to Ian Parker's (2017) critique of academicisation, which describes how academics often fetishize social service practitioners as those engaged in "the real stuff" beyond the university (p. 30). Within this

dynamic, MHFA conflates the identification of mental illness (the signified) with the rhetoric of anti-stigma advocacy, thereby promoting the emergence of an in-house psychiatric gaze. To date, this credentialing process has produced over 300,000 MHFA-trained individuals in Canada, situating them within a disciplinary apparatus that blurs the boundaries between layperson and expert. As these individuals increase their “mental health literacy” and take on the role of informal diagnosticians, detecting symptoms of mental illness in students and among peers, academicisation effectively turns inward. In training people to perform this work within the university, we enable a form of self-surveillance that mirrors the logic of the panopticon (Foucault, 1977), rendering the university a site of internalized monitoring and regulation.

The original panoptic model is a prison, with a guard tower positioned in the centre, where each inmate could be watched through a one-way window at any given time. This structure was designed to develop an internalization of the gaze, so that the prisoners would take-up the task of self-surveillance (Foucault, 1977). This notion has been described in reference to mainstream psychology by the likes of Michael White and David Epston (1990). They argued that psychological assessments and diagnostic categories (e.g., depression, anxiety, ADHD) produce normative judgments about human behaviour, thought, and emotion. They argue that a diagnosis invites individuals to monitor themselves, much like prisoners would do in the panopticon. Psychology interpellates people as problems and hails them to correction through forms of self-surveillance based on expert knowledge. Narrative therapy deconstructed the expert status of psychologists and doctors who write generic clinical stories about people’s lives and identities (White & Epston, 1990). Like the possibility that guards are occupying the panopticon at any given time, the fact that plain-clothed MHFA attendants could be anywhere is a reminder for the rest of us to internalize our gaze. As lay people are increasingly positioned as mental

health guardians, there is a greater risk that individuals will lose touch with their own meaning-making and agency as psychologizing becomes more dominant.

Critical theorists have shown that the culture industry manufactures need (Horkheimer et al., 2002), a dynamic evident in institutions such as the Standards Council of Canada and the Mental Health Commission of Canada, which function as closed systems promoting psychologism. In this context, therapy culture shifts attention away from the social and environmental causes of suffering, undermining relational care in favor of risk assessment. As more people line up to participate in therapy culture, reproduction processes ramp up to meet the need. Re-packaged therapy approaches, new digital applications, more mindfulness. Train the trainer programming. It is no wonder that there is a massive increase in newly diagnosed students seeking accommodations for their disability. Social documents such as the *MHFA Participant Reference Guide* provide the governing algorithms. As Dorothy Smith (1987) argues, texts do not simply represent social life; they actively organize it. If we understand text as a form of rule, there is a risk that students, already monitored and assessed within psychiatric and university systems, may experience heightened stigma under expanded regimes of surveillance. What was once a private interaction between patient and professional, or a relational appeal to loved ones, becomes subject to public scrutiny, an operation characteristic of panoptic surveillance. Ongoing efforts to “upgrade” skills through standardized frameworks risk stereotyping learning and well-being, dulling our responsiveness to difference and undermining pedagogical transformation aligned with anti-colonial life (Loveless, 2019). However, alternatives to this pathology-focused model exist, emphasizing strengths, resilience, and well-being, an approach taken up in the next section.

In conclusion, the critical perspectives offered by Foucault, Althusser, Parker and others reveal how mental health and well-being are not merely personal or clinical concerns but are deeply ideological, embedded in institutional discourses and power relations. The psy-complex, an entanglement of ideology and its discourses, shapes not only pedagogical practices in social service education but also extends into the everyday lives of individuals, encouraging self-surveillance and regulation aligned with dominant therapeutic norms. By uncovering these dynamics, we can begin to refuse the taken-for-granted assumptions of therapy culture and consider alternative frameworks for supporting well-being that resists psychologization. Alternatively, we can open space for more collective, situated, and politicized understandings of care. Before we arrive there, however, I will look more specifically at how well-being studies, positive psychology, and integrative models like the dual continua have responded to the pessimism of psychology and therapy culture.

Part 2: Eudaimonia, Positive Psychology and The Dual Continua

Psychology is a powerful ideological force, and those who really believe it suffer from false consciousness, but a suffering that they actually enjoy. It is then a mystery to them how others cannot want to be similarly enlightened. For those who are drawn into psychology it is as if the revolution has already taken place; this is one reason why the discipline is such a dangerous and pernicious part of psychological culture on the left (Parker, 2017, p. 182).

In this section, I examine the construct of well-being, beginning with its origins in the Aristotelian concept of *eudaemonia*, which promotes living a virtuous and flourishing life. I connect this work to that of Freud and then trace its evolution through Carl Rogers and into the neoliberal context of North American capitalism. I analyze how well-being is operationalized in contemporary discourse through frameworks such as positive psychology and the dual continuum model. Alongside these applied orientations, I engage with insights from critical theorists and critical psychologists to reveal the limitations and ideological underpinnings of dominant well-being narratives. This sets the stage for the following section, where I introduce the concept of Refusal as Well-being (R-Wb) as a counterpoint to prevailing models.

Well-Being: From the Fully Functioning Person to the Entrepreneurial Self

Well-being is a construct that reaches back to Aristotle (2014), who declared that *eudaemonia* (i.e., the good life) can be achieved by directing all human activities toward dignified means. *Eudaemonia* is not simply for pleasure or wealth but understands our potential as rational human beings through virtuous actions (e.g., conveying moral strength and practical wisdom). We do this in political communities, through friendships that are just and reciprocal. The cultivation of practical wisdom, or what Aristotle (2014) referred to as *phronesis*, requires us to spend time in contemplation, to develop sound judgment and increase our capacity to make moral decisions in specific situations. *Phronesis* differs from abstract principles because it requires that we know how and why we are called to act in particular ways in specific situations. Freud's (2015) notion of the *reality principle* also requires these capacities, which he attributed to the ego. However, Freud (2015) introduced another concept, that of repression, as necessary and undesirable imposition required for the reality principle to function in capitalist societies

(Parker & Pavón Cuéllar, 2021). The reality principle requires the repression of self-interested urges and adherence to the social rules expected of law-abiding members of society and its institutions (Freud, 2015). While the reality principle frustrates our desires and hence causes suffering, we abide by its repressive laws for the common good (Marcuse, 2012; Sloan & García, 2017). This is especially true for those of us in the caring professions, who learn specialized techniques for bracketing our instincts and desires, to prioritize phronesis for the Other.

The contemporary study of eudaemonia in the field of well-being research is still relatively new, with its inception paralleling the human potential movement in the 1960's. The first North American figure of well-being was defined by Carl Rogers (1961) as the “fully functioning person”. This figure is open to experience and accepting of their emotions rather than avoiding them; they trust their own feelings and intuitions; they are open to the unpredictability of human existence and can live in the present moment; they are creative thinkers that take risks and seek new experiences; and they are generally satisfied with life as they continues to seek out new challenges and experiences (Rogers, 1961). The emphasis on human potential and self-interest ushered in an ideological shift, where psychologizing discourses began to replace religion as the central organizing framework of North American culture (Lasch, 1978). As the Absolute Subject shifted from God to the self, collective sociopolitical grievances were re-configured as personal problems, for which therapy culture emerged as a solution (Guilfoyle, 2009). Lasch (1978) refuted post-World War II claims that ideology had ended, arguing instead that it persisted in new forms that were more diffuse and deeply internalized. Ideology is difficult to identify because, like culture, it provides systems of meaning that shape how individuals interpret the world and social behavior. Shared meaning is

what differentiates shared schemas from private delusions (Sloan, 2002). But what about when the private delusions of a rich minority become the shared meaning of the masses?

Neoliberal policy makers stalked Rogers and, hiding in the shadow of the human potential movement, piggybacked on the worship of concepts like personal growth, inner freedom, and the courage to seek novelty. Under neoliberalism, the self becomes increasingly commodified through the individualization of the ego. As Jacques Lacan (1988) notes, “the ego is structured exactly like a symptom in Freud’s sense: it is a formation that is borrowed from the Other” (p. 16). This insight helps explain how neoliberalism mobilizes self-interest as a governing principle, exploiting subjects already constituted through external demands and recognitions. In this context, the ego, shaped by the gaze and expectations of the Other, is drawn into the Symbolic order of financial logic. Financialization, understood as the reorganization of social and institutional life around market principles, prioritizes economic efficiency and the redistribution of risk over collective well-being and political accountability (Vellucci, 2021). As a result, the ego is reconfigured to align with metrics of productivity, individual responsibility, and performance. The validation-seeking ego internalizes these imperatives, securing recognition through compliance with neoliberal ideals of self-optimization and market value:

The ego of each one of us is constantly used to take over our bodies. We are spiritually exploited as individuals in order to materially exploit us as a collectivity. Social exploitation would be impossible without the complicity of an ego that is usually the weakest link in the community. (Parker & Pavón Cuéllar, 2021, p. 41).

In this shift, the lifeworld that traditionally served humanistic symbolic functions such as morality and ethics, self-conception, social norms, stories, art modalities, and games, becomes a resource for capitalists (Sloan, 2002). Neoliberal tinkerers dismissed the holistic and relational dimensions of humanism and targeted the eudaimonic emphasis on collectivity, characterizing it as conformist and outdated, a nostalgic relic of a pre-modern past (Eiroá Orosa, 2017). Even the concept of growth, once associated with personal and communal flourishing, was appropriated and reframed within the capitalist logic of accumulation and productivity. The focus of individual life shifted from the pursuit of becoming a fully functioning person to embodying the entrepreneurial self (Seligman, 1990). The ideal of the fully functioning person seemed to vanish, until, in the late 1990s, when Martin Seligman re-introduced it in the context of positive psychology.

Positive Psychology and the Performance Principle

Positive psychology can be understood as the renewed search for the subject that Aristotle wrote about. Building on the Rogerian turn, positive psychology redefines the aim of psychological inquiry as the pursuit of growth, creativity, and emotional flourishing. Seligman's scientific inquiry operates as a discursive compass, re-directing psychology from a focus on pathology and toward a framework of flourishing that echoes Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia. Seligman's (2012) PERMA model identifies five core components of well-being: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. These dimensions expand the conception of well-being from mere happiness to include purpose, connection, and personal achievement, while other contributors, like Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (who developed the concept of flow), helped extend the field by exploring how people find deep satisfaction through

immersion in meaningful activities. While alternatives to dominant forms of psychology are important in supporting human flourishing, positive psychology has been described by its critics as a discipline that attempts to explain the causes of happiness and well-being and then using this knowledge to create more of it (Ahmed, 2010). It retains the use of diagnostic tools, scales, and interventions developed for clinical contexts and it implicitly relies on pathology and therapy culture for its dialectic (positive/well-being vs. negative/pathology) to work. In fact, by pathologizing normal human experiences such as grief, stress, and existential anxiety, and redirecting people to be mindful, grateful, or optimistic, positive psychology increases the likelihood of deviation.

Psychologizing grids deflect our gaze from systemic injustice by channelling responsibility inward, intensifying what Herbert Marcuse (2012) termed the performance principle. The performance principle refers to the internalized schema to continually demonstrate productivity, adaptability, and emotional well-being, even under exploitative or oppressive conditions. In wellness culture, this often appears as pressure to display resilience, positivity, or “growth” in ways that align with dominant discourses rather than lived realities. This principle operates not only in workplaces and schools but also in the therapeutic and educational spaces where self-regulation and positivity are treated as universal goods, regardless of context. This reframing can produce unintended consequences, including what Frawley (2015) terms “iatrogenic unhappiness” (p. 70). Despite its emphasis on the transformative power of positivity, therapeutic education rooted in positive psychology may function as a performance principle, paradoxically expanding rather than reducing experiences of disability. Frawley (2015) attributes this to the field’s pursuit of a fixed, totalizing definition of happiness, an “axiomatic error” (p. 63) grounded in the epistemological assumption that happiness has an essential form. Moreover,

as Ahmed (2010) argues, positive psychology establishes an affective imperative to be “positive about positive feeling” (p. 35), presuming in advance the value of its own object.

What Seligman produced, through the discursive apparatus of positive psychology, was a subjectified ideal: the resilient, self-regulating individual who continues to thrive amid local and global sociocultural crises. This figure functions as both a psychosocial norm and a regulatory ideal, aligning subjectivity with the imperatives of adaptation, performance, and affective self-governance. Rather than attending to the relationships between negative affect and systemic conditions, positive psychologists emphasize a focus on optimising personal traits as the mediators of well-being, prioritizing cognition, resilience, and mastery over one’s own circumstances (Seligman, 2012). Positive psychology reifies expert knowledge about individuals, which requires psychologizing rather than social, cultural, or relational healing praxes. Reinforcing neoliberal ideals of self-optimization and personal responsibility for distress can lead to feelings of failure and inadequacy when individuals don’t get better as promised (Frawley, 2016). In sum, positive psychology can be seen as a psychologizing of Aristotle’s subject of flourishing, stripping it of the collective, ethical, and especially political dimensions that Aristotle saw as essential. In the following section, I will explore how these ideas have been combined with psychology to produce a more complex form of therapeutic capture called the dual continuum model.

Continuums and Spectrums

Constructs like well-being, happiness, mental health, human flourishing, and resilience are refracted through the same Euro-Western ideological fantasy, that which Herbert Marcuse (2013) referred to as: the one-dimensional man. This is a bounded individual governed by

instrumentalist rationality, societal rules, and administered technology. While research on well-being and mental illness differ in foci (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2012), they are intertwined in the one-dimensional man who is increasingly interpellated, as a solitary and alienated figure, on continuums of human functioning. The rise of spectrum and continuums in psychology represents a philosophical shift from categorical thinking (e.g., sanity/insanity and sick/healthy) toward understanding mental states as fluid and often overlapping ranges of human experience (Keyes, 2002). This shift, influenced by trait theory, humanistic psychology, neurodiversity, and systems thinking, continues to influence how clinically oriented psychologists understand diagnosis, treatment and recovery, and identity in psychology (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2012; Widiger & Samuel, 2005). The dual continua model of mental health developed by Corey Keyes (2002) is based on research that suggests that individuals experience flourishing/languishing and mental health/mental illness as separate but related phenomena, and it maps mental health along two separate axes (BCcampus, 2020):

1. Top Right Quadrant (Flourishing with No Mental Illness):
 - a. This figure experiences high well-being and no symptoms of mental illness.
 - b. Often considered the ideal state of mental health.
2. Top Left Quadrant (Languishing with No Mental Illness):
 - a. While this figure does not meet criteria for mental illness, they experience low well-being, lack of meaning, and low vitality.
3. Bottom Right Quadrant (Flourishing with Mental Illness):
 - a. The figure who is diagnosed with a mental illness but who maintains a high level of well-being and functioning.
 - b. This figure highlights the possibility of resilience and positive adaptation.

4. Bottom Left Quadrant (Languishing with Mental Illness):
 - a. The figure of poor mental health and low well-being.
 - b. Typically, this figure is the focus of conventional mental health treatment.

There is enough conceptual flexibility in this model that a person can simultaneously occupy positions indicative of both favorable (e.g., optimal mental health) and unfavorable (e.g., symptoms of mental illness, or conversely, diminished well-being) psychological states (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). Research related to the flourishing axis suggests that achieving positive well-being (i.e., emotional wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing, physical wellbeing, spirituality and cultural wellbeing) can prevent the development of mental illness (Keyes, 2002). It also suggests that focusing on well-being can support someone's recovery from mental illness (Keyes, 2002). On the languishing side of the continuum, mental illness is addressed through the proliferation of mental health literacy, which invests in the notion that individual human suffering is akin to a medical condition that, once understood in those terms, can be treated accordingly (Jorm, 2012; Kutcher, Wei, & Coniglio, 2016).

While integrative models can provide more nuance to the promotion of mental health, continuums can also contract power relations that remain invisible in their scientific discourses of neutrality and science. Taken in isolation, continuums such as the one above appear to function merely as indicators of the constructs they claim to assess. However, psychological continuums are easily stratified by other dominant discourses that promote social control through self-monitoring and the monitoring of others, as well as promoting self/other corrections (Deleuze, 1992; Foucault, 1977). From this perspective the dual continuum could be used to widen psychological territories by providing a map that re-produces the individualized figures that it describes. Individualized human experience can be captured in the continuum by

presenting its four quadrants as a neutral universal model. Universal notions of well-being are often decontextualized from their social context in capitalism and colonialism. This makes it easier to subjectify people as enterprising subjects who are accountable for good and poor decisions and as I wrote earlier, much like financial investors, they face individualized consequences for their investment choices (Cohen, 2016). Further, the imposition of a universalized notion of well-being onto the lived realities of individuals subjected to the structural violence of colonialism and settler colonialism constitutes an unethical form of oppressive hegemony.

Paranoid-Continuum Models

While continuums add complexity to the binarity of traditional psychology, their axes are easily appropriated for projects of adaptation to the dominant capitalist and colonial teleologies of our era. Rose (1999) identified how psychological notions function as forms of governance to shape individuals according to social and economic imperatives. The dual continuum advances these agenda where it facilitates a Symbolic reconfiguration of social, political, and ecological effects as psychological. Lacanian psychiatrist Jean Oury (2007) described the Symbolic, on its own, as a mere point that acts as a marker. It is an empty signifier before it is invested with meaning. As a discursive formation, the dual continuum acquires its meaning through the subject's insertion into its Symbolic order. Because the model does not account for the historical and material conditions of exploitation, such as discrimination and structural violence, it can easily become an adaptive diagram for individualizing and psychologizing. According to Deleuze and Guattari (2009), psychological systems that collapse human desire into reductive frameworks operate in a paranoiac mode. Understood this way, the continuum acts as a striated

grid, organizing and constraining the production of alternative modes of well-being. It does this by containing and reorganizing desire within the socially sanctioned diagram of wellness and illness, which are regulated on its spectrum. These models are susceptible to neoliberal logics that inform curriculum for the instituting of mental health and well-being ranging from the local to the national level. Oury (2007) suggests that drafting a proper schematic for dealing with the simplism of modern psychology requires bracketing through phenomenological reduction. He simplified the process with two guiding questions: “what am I doing here?” and “what are you doing here?” Returning to the context of education, each of these questions situates the educator and student in the same landscape, as it situates the service provider and client in the same landscape. For Oury (2007) possibility only exists when we are situated in the same landscape as the Other. How we deal with the oppressive nature of subjectivation in this situating process is a complex problem, which remains poorly accounted for within the simplism logic of continuum-based models. Models that widen psychological territories while reducing analysis of the socio-political field could be recast as *paranoid-continuum* models.

The subject who is interpellated through such structures does not produce meaning autonomously because the continuum precedes and mediates the subject’s relation to itself and others. Oury (2007) argues that under hierarchical conditions the Symbolic causes paranoia. Parker and Pavón Cuéllar (2021) expose how the psychic pain of both the oppressor and the oppressed are not accidental but are symptomatic of capitalism’s deep structural violence. In situating ourselves between a culture of overdiagnosis, overtreatment, and pharmaceutical excess on one end, and commodified wellness practices like yoga and mindfulness on the other, we risk socializing our students, and by extension, those they will serve in the future, into modes of adaptation that at the least ignore, if not normalize, structural violence, ongoing colonial and

imperialist genocides, the resurgence of fascist ideologies, and the escalation of hate-based violence.

The joining of professional psychology and therapy culture on one hand, with positive psychology and well-being studies on the other represent a strategic merger between clinical discourse and the aspirational narratives of the human potential movement. These are easily consolidated under the market logics of entrepreneurialism and self-optimization. Replacing human relationships with networks and subjecting the reality principle to market regulation shows disregard for the collective, the earth and the lives of other beings. These are indicators of what Sloan (2002) described, drawing on Theodore Adorno, as a damaged life. He argued that the psychological destruction caused by capitalism has caused a radical disruption of "the symbolic reproduction of the personality component of the lifeworld" (p. 95). The lifeworld refers to the socio-cultural contexts that generate collective cultural knowledge, which we depend on for communication, social interaction, forming consensus, and resolving conflict (Sloan, 2002). Such processes are essential for societies to develop, sustain, and transform ideas, which in turn shape how people decide what to believe, value, and how to construct meaning (Sloan, 2002).

By tracing the historical, philosophical, and political dimensions of well-being and mental health, this section has described how the concept has been reshaped to align with neoliberal values of individual responsibility, self-optimization, and resilience. While models like positive psychology and the dual continuum have gained traction in clinical and educational settings, they often obscure the structural conditions that shape lived experience and enforce normative ideals about mental health. In short, they conceal the causes of a damaged life while attempting to do otherwise. In response to these limitations, Part 3 proposes an alternative

framework, Refusal as Well-being, which resists the moral imperatives of wellness culture and reclaims well-being as a site of political, relational, and existential possibility for social service work and the higher education programs preparing social service workers.

Part 3: Refusal as Well-being (R-Wb)

The theory Refusal as Well-being (R-Wb) is a vulgar example of applied critical psychology. Emerging from the discursive turn in qualitative research, critical psychology is a discipline that foregrounds the social and historical dimensions of human experience. While it offers a robust analysis of structural oppression and psychosocial responses, its latest developments, often shaped by Lacanian psychoanalysts, are largely inaccessible to Canadian university students, where psychoanalysis remains understudied if not maligned. Affordable analytic training is also scarce, particularly for mental health workers, who are among the most underpaid and overworked in the social services field. Though my proposal cannot match Ian Parker's (2005) comprehensive Lacanian psychoanalytic model, it draws from his work and others to build on my previous contributions (Smith, 2022), to develop a pedagogy of R-Wb, for social service workers. Parker and others rightly critique the limited theoretical and practical engagements that social services programs have with psychoanalysis, as well as the adaptive tendencies of mainstream psychotherapy (Parker & Pavón Cuéllar, 2021), I argue that inviting students into a psychodynamic process of developing a practice philosophy oriented toward anti-colonial and anti-oppressive social service pedagogy is a necessary and worthwhile task. The common mistake that practitioners make is ending up back where we began, recapitulating the symmetrical theories that leverage rather than refuse the colonial world that middle class settlers like me have inherited. In developing this theory, my intention is to address Parker and Pavón

Cuéllar's (2021) second concern regarding the adaptive tendencies of Western psychotherapists. Adaptation refers to the labour performed by mental health professionals to adapt people to capitalist society, which extends a regrettable history of psychiatric autocracy: "discourse and practice of feudal pre-capitalist masters... adapted themselves to capitalism while repeating the worst classical patriarchal sexist abuse of women and colonial racist persecution of indigenous people" (Parker & Pavón Cuéllar, 2021, p. 135). Adaptation is expected in polite Commonwealth colonies like Canada and refusing its performance principles can lead to powerful disagreements.

In the university, efforts to create symmetrical relationships between dominant psychology curricula and anti-colonial or anti-racist approaches often backfire, reinforcing what is already hegemonic. When mutual understanding fails, Gregory Bateson's (1958/2000) concept of schismogenesis becomes useful: a feedback loop of escalating rigidity where opposing groups amplify difference until communication breaks down. I've experienced this in practice, especially when working across divergent paradigms like narrative therapy, psychoanalysis, EMDR, schizoanalysis, and response-based practice. Even shared commitments fracture when key terms like "trauma" or "victim" hold incompatible meanings (Hirschberger, 2018; Hydén et al., 2016). Narrative therapists have rejected such labels as essentialist (Augusta-Scott, 2007), while response-based practice uses them as tools for ethical action (A. Wade, personal communication, 2015). When disagreement becomes positional rather than productive, dialogue collapses into ideological deadlock. Against this, asymmetry functions as a strategic refusal of capture by the demand for consensus. Rather than pursuing reconciliation through integration, refusal preserves political and epistemological difference. As Andrew Culp (2016) argues, symmetrical politics too often favor the desires of the dominant, while asymmetrical politics by contrast, recognize that some worldviews are incommensurable.

The rejection of colonial norms and therapeutic assumptions are examples of schismogenetic refusal to adapt to systems that misrecognize or erase them. This is not an obstacle to healing but, as Glen Coulthard (2014) insists, a condition for it. Refusal, in this sense, is about protecting the space needed to imagine a better world and then to begin creating it. Opening space for pedagogies and practices that are rooted in refusal, rupture, and antagonism, are not unproductive breakdowns in communication, but rather necessary breaks from systems that demand equilibrium, control, and consensus (Culp, 2022). Applied to therapeutic and academic settings, asymmetry offers a schismogenetic path beneath their dominant structures and the trap of schismogenesis, where opposing positions mirror and escalate against each other. In settler colonial contexts such as Canada, asymmetrical strategies enable oppressed groups to navigate threats to their well-being in subtle ways, avoiding direct engagement with professional or institutional conflicts that often reinforce dominant hegemonic norms (Coulthard, 2014; Culp, 2022; Wade, 2000).

Despite our anti-colonial intentions, those of us working within institutions are often pulled back to the surface, into the logic of symmetrical struggle, because our roles remain imbricated in the schismogenetic structures that benefit us. We do this by remaining vigilant about the symmetrical dynamics embedded everywhere, including therapeutic frameworks like the dual continuum model that rely on a psychologized, rational subject lacking balance. The intervention is directed at modern psychological subjectivity, shaped by Hegelian synthesis and neoliberal optimism, at the Symbolic level. In Hegel's dialectic, thesis/antithesis leads to a synthesis. This dialectical view understands psychological subjectivity as evolving through conflict toward integration and resolution. In therapy and education, this appears in the assumption that all conflict leads to growth or that contradictions in the self must be harmonized.

This framing can obscure or oversimplify enduring tensions, marginal perspectives, or resistances that do not fit neatly into linear developmental models. Marcuse's performance principle, which I described above, naturalizes this kind of surplus repression, which refers to the over-application of psychic regulation and social control beyond what is required to maintain the reality principle. To confront surplus repression, we need to engage in refusal as a disalienating act that interrupts the pathologizing of human life in therapy culture, that recognizes the harmful effects of extractive relations to other beings and the land, and, perhaps most importantly, that opens opportunities for decolonization. In what follows, I explore anti-colonial alternatives to the performance principle by foregrounding practices of resistance, relationality, and collective healing that challenge the demand to be well on the terms of the dominant order.

A Schizoanalysis of Psychologizing Continua and Asymmetrical Alternatives

Deleuze and Guattari's (2009) schizoanalysis began as a "negative or destructive task" (p. 322), an intervention that emanates from an "epistemology of the negative" (Schmitt, 2017, p. 311). Drawing on Noys, Schmitt (2017) highlights the potential of a "negative" intervention that "defines itself not simply as a mode of misery" (p. 101). While an epistemology of the negative swivels on misery as its starting point, it politicizes suffering in ways that delink it from the very structures that produce it (Noys, as cited in Schmitt, 2017). The potential of an epistemology of the negative to overcome the performance principle simultaneously renders it an "affirmative task" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009, p. 334; Schmitt, 2017). It is affirmative because it creates an epistemology, even if negative, that promotes a new way of being that is not determined by psy-power. Schizoanalytic approaches to depression and anxiety resist framing suffering simply as an individual pathology to be normalized through therapeutic adjustment, instead understanding it

as produced within capitalist assemblages of precarity, acceleration, and cognitive and affective labour (Berardi, 2021; Fisher, 2022).

Resisting the grid of universalized optimism and enforced positivity requires outward refusal of performative displays of happiness and politeness, when other emotional expressions would be more truthful, contextually appropriate, or politically necessary. Remaining on the Outside of narrow models of the good does not point to a negative pedagogy that encourages indwelling about endless misery (Ahmed, 2010). Rather, it serves as a grounded starting point from which we can identify the underlying causes of large-scale misery and develop collective and culturally responsive strategies for addressing them. An epistemology of the negative is an anti-colonial ethic that aligns with Dene scholar Glen Coulthard's (2014) reworking of Indigenous resentment, which he views as a sign of critical consciousness and a logical political response to the injustices of colonialism and genocide. Coulthard (2014) addresses the bleak outlook of the totalizing effect of colonial power by exploring an alternative to colonial forms of recognition: "a quasi-Nietzschean form of personal and collective self-affirmation" (p. 43). Coulthard's intervention is deeply influenced by Frantz Fanon, whose work offers radical alternatives to the neoliberal underpinnings of positive psychology.

Fanon's (2008) concept of "psycho-affective equilibrium" (p. 49) offers both a relational and politically situated account of well-being. Within neoliberal discourse, psychological distress is frequently pathologized as a personal inability to internalize the mandates of positive psychology (e.g., a resilient mindset, promote personal happiness, display grit, and self-regulation). In contrast, Fanon (2008) locates psychic transformation in the collective realm, arguing that cultural resurgence allows the colonized to reclaim their own past from the lies of the colonizer, and recognize themselves as free, dignified contributors to humanity. This

recognition catalyzes a profound shift in “psycho-affective equilibrium” (Fanon, 2008, p. 49), challenging the internalized effects of colonial violence and refusing the reduction of mental health to privatized, apolitical adaptation (Fanon, 2008; Parker & Pavón Cuéllar, 2021). Where PERMA invites a notion of reconciliation through inner transformation, Fanon (2008) saw liberation in the turn away from the master and toward a struggle for freedom of the oppressed on their own terms. Positive psychology promotes adaptation to dominant systems through inner acceptance and by reframing suffering as resilience. Fanon’s turning away is an alternative to the dialectic of positive-psychological avoidance (e.g., avoiding oppressive social conditions by turning optimism inward) and the reactive force powered by the resentment of therapy culture (i.e., we are naturally weak and vulnerable). Fanon’s decolonial psychoanalysis unfolds through a double movement: first, a turning away from the hegemonic forces of white supremacy, coloniality, neoliberalism, and capitalism; and second, a turning inward, toward a decolonized and indigenized psyche supported by its own culture. This process can be understood as a resurgent interpellation, one that calls individuals into collective resistance through asymmetrical forms of recognition grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, forms that remain fundamentally incommensurable with colonial logics (Skott-Myhre et al., 2023). In this sense refusal is the first step toward decolonization. By interrupting the pathologizing of human life in therapy culture, it negates the invitation to cope within colonial structures (e.g., extractive relations to other beings and the land). The second step (or what I refer to above as a turn inward, is equally a turn to the Outside of colonialism), is disalienation. Disalienation, as a reconnection to land, culture and collective life, is a reclamation of Indigenous forms of knowing and being. This knowledge shifts the psycho-affective equilibrium (e.g., subject transformation) it opens space for the positive task of decolonization (changing colonial structures).

The Logic of Exclusive Disjunction. Fanon's (2008) work reveals how colonialism enforces exclusive disjunctions upon Indigenous and colonized populations, binary choices that deny complexity and agency. For instance, under colonial logic, one is either a subject or an object; either human, like the colonizer, or not fully human; either assimilated into colonial society or excluded from it. Rigid either/or choices foreclose alternative ways of being. Mainstream psychology reproduces similar exclusive disjunctions: one is categorized as either mentally healthy or mentally ill, functional or dysfunctional, emotionally healthy or maladaptive, treatment-compliant or treatment-resistant. These binaries mirror the exclusive disjunction of colonial logics by offering only two possible positions, both defined within one dominant framework. The logic of exclusive disjunction, either A or B, never both, demands that individuals adapt to fixed identities, disallowing multiplicity or contradiction. This binary structure comes from Hegelian style dialectics, where contradiction is resolved through a synthesis by negating the negation. For example, many people who experience flourishing as well as anxiety do not find traditional mental health models helpful. This is because, the thesis of the traditional model equating well-being with the absence of illness, does not fit their lived experience. The dual continuum model of mental health (Keyes, 2005) negates this thesis by treating mental illness and mental health as two independent axes, offering a more nuanced view. In my private practice for example, I use frameworks like acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes, 2004) to encourage the acceptance of anxiety while experiencing flourishing (e.g., the Hegelian antithesis to the dominant view: well-being = the absence of illness). The resulting synthesis of this contradiction promotes a more dynamic self-concept: one can be both flourishing and anxious, thus transcending the binary of traditional mental health discourse. This

dialectical move reflects a contemporary application of Hegelian logic, overcoming opposition by integrating both poles into a higher unity: the dual continuum.

While these models introduce complexity, they still operate within a psychologizing paradigm that retains and reconfigures original psychological binaries, albeit in more subtle ways. They also preserve a Hegelian teleology of identity, framing individuals as rational, developmental subjects who must actualize their optimal position on both axes (the telos of the top right quadrant) (see the dual continuum description above). Insight and psychological reflection are the path to internal reconciliation, which ignores the social conditions that frame human suffering. In supporting this, we subtly reinforce the neoliberal ideal of the entrepreneurial self: the individual who can be mentally ill yet still high-functioning and productive (e.g., the bottom right quadrant). This exclusive disjunction is adaptive to the performance principle: it does not dismantle the binary, but repurposes it for resilience, productivity, and self-management that fulfills its obligation to capitalist society.

The Disjunctive Possibilities of Outside. To foster meaningful social transformation, however, both the subjective and objective dimensions of power must be addressed (Coulthard, 2014; Fanon, 2004/2008). This perspective invites us to move beyond continuum-based models and toward disjunctive possibilities, where subjectivity is shaped not by individual rational insight alone, but by affective intensities that emerge through relational and environmental assemblages. Where Hegelian logic seeks to resolve contradiction through self-realization and synthesis, Fanon, Coulthard, and others reject this individualizing reconciliatory model of well-being. They advocate instead for radical subjectivities that are rooted in resistance and committed to asymmetrical struggles for collective liberation and flourishing. These are the disjunctive possibilities of decolonization, where refusal

Schizoanalysis offers a distinct understanding of exclusive disjunction, one grounded in an ontology of desire that resists resolution. Rather than aiming to reconcile opposites or synthesize contradictions, desire flows through multiple divergent paths. It does not settle into fixed identities or unitary solutions but sustains the intensity of difference without compromise (Culp, 2016; Danewid, 2023; Deleuze & Guattari, 2009). In this way, asymmetry is not something to be corrected or harmonized with neoliberal diagrams of power, because they are fundamentally incommensurable. Without frameworks to support complex and often nonconforming forms of resistance, we risk misreading or overlooking the real-world skills and anti-colonial intelligence enacted by community members responding to oppression and violence (Coates & Wade, 2007; Richardson, 2006; Wade, 1997/2000). Asymmetrical strategies mark out a different diagram of power, one that moves in direct opposition to dominant formations (Culp, 2022). They prioritize rupture over reciprocity and refuse the recursive logic of mirrored escalation (schismogenesis), which many therapeutic models try to manage through balanced communication, mutual understanding and inner reconciliation.

As Culp (2016) argues, asymmetrical resistance is antagonistic, drawing its force not from within the dialectic but from the Outside, a creative space beyond the logic of synthesis and equivalence. The following example is a composite account that comes from several meaningful conversations about Indigenous knowledge over seven years with several individuals knowledgeable about decolonization and asymmetrical resistance in rural prairie communities. In it I recount what I learned about pre-colonial Indigenous lifeways that exist in direct opposition to colonial structures. By bringing this relational knowledge into conversation with critical theory, I demonstrate how a praxis of refusal can reorient us in ecological and political

directions, where more culturally competent accounts of resistance and renewed purpose can emerge.

Bush Analysis. In Canada “the bush” (i.e., the Land) is a form of power that exists outside of the Indian Act. During settler raids on the children of colonized communities, in what is now known as Southern Manitoba, sometimes a “gookomis” (grandma) or other relative would take their loved ones to live in the bush to escape the Indian Agent. Stories of relatives bringing children into the bush to hunt, collect berries, and escape capture for Residential School remind us of the power of the Outside. On the other side is the symmetry of colonial law, which empowered the RCMP, Churches, and settlers. Battell Lowman and Barker (2015) have suggested that settlers and their institutions relied on the metropole as their source of power until they achieved an “isopolitical shift” (p. 27), which transferred legal and political power from the distant empire to the new settler society. The figure of the Indian Agent and the forces that support them (e.g., the Indian Act) are incommensurable with the figure of the berry picker on the Land who moves Outside of the diagram of colonialism. Opposed to the inclusive disjunction of colonialism, for example, the legal command to consent to life under the Indian Act, is the exclusive disjunction of refusal, or decolonization. Exclusive disjunction intensifies what is incommensurable within the colonial diagram and can generate alternative pathways (Coulthard, 2014; Culp, 2022).

The Indian Agent, the RCMP officer, and the social worker are incommensurable with the figure of the Outside, like gookomis whose knowledge of the Land provides a through-line to the Outside of colonialism. My understanding of gookomis as a figure of the Outside is constrained by my Western orientation to subjectivity and tenuous connections to figures of the Outside proposed by philosophers: “The ‘nothing’ (Heidegger), the ‘trace’ or ‘différance’

(Derrida), the ‘surplus always exterior to the totality’ (Levinas), the ‘differend’ (Lyotard), ‘the invisible’ (Althusser),” and “the ‘pariah’ (Arendt), ‘the jew’ (Lyotard), the ‘migrant’ (Virilio), the ‘nomad’ (Deleuze and Guattari), the ‘hybrid’ (Bhabha), the ‘catachrestic remainder’ (Spivak), the ‘non-being’ (Dussel), the ‘refugee’ (Agamben), and the ‘émigré’ (Said)” (Culp, 2016, p. 33). While I recognize that my example, connecting gookomis to a Western philosophical lineage is problematic, it is my intention to make a case for global asymmetry that connects local decolonization to the rhizome of the Outside, which would be required for organizing against global capitalism as a system that relies on colonial rule.

Beyond the Performance Principle: Refusal as a Praxis of Well-Being in Social Services

A critical positive psychology would advocate for the enjoyment of pleasures for the collective good because it creates the space and energy needed for people to engage in ways that are disruptive to oppressive systems (Sloan & García, 2017, p. 402).

Well-being has assumed an implicit rather than explicit role in educational contexts and is often viewed as a precondition for learning rather than a legitimate focus of learning (Falkenberg, 2014). To make the implicit notion of well-being an explicit object of pedagogy it might be helpful for me to clarify how I teach about its discourses in a sociohistorical frame. For students who are not part of the “culture of power”, critical pedagogy was developed to teach its rules and codes, so they would be better able to negotiate within it (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; McLaren, 2015). Professors in critical social service programs and team-leaders in social services agencies, can use critical pedagogy to raise awareness about the ways that therapy

culture and psy-power promote the performance principle in the mental health field. While didactic, it is helpful for students to study the function of dominant rules, codes, and discourses, lest their academicisation lead to unconscious psychologizing repetitions in mental health settings. Freire (2018) described prescriptive pedagogy as the banking model of education.

As an instructor in a helping skills course, I have provided a living example of this banking model of education through my own pedagogical orientation to academicisation, by assuming the figure of the banker, depositing helping skills knowledge in students for their retrieval in an imagined future scenario separate from the original context of learning, to invest in future clients. Knowledge about well-being, in the banking model, is like a currency that can be exchanged by any investor in any context to achieve the same effect. For example, positive psychology predicts in advance what will improve the life of the individual: “to feel better is to get better” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 36). When our investment in standardized one-dimensional outlooks and adaptive behaviors fail, individuals are simply invited to show more effort because happiness ideology distracts us from questioning its underlying ideologies. Sen (2008) stated the problem this way: “The central issue is not the significance of happiness, but the alleged insignificance of everything else, on which many advocates of the happiness perspective seem to insist” (p. 273). This is what R-Wb makes explicit.

The Banking Model of Well-being

The investment in unconditional positivity over other relevant social factors is an example of what I refer to, borrowing from Freire (2018), as the banking model of well-being. The banking model of well-being is invested in another source of implicit knowledge, that of therapy culture. While they are presented as opposites in the dual continua discourse,

schizoanalysis shows us that therapy culture and well-being co-function as a mutually sustaining circuit. They form a dual continua assemblage that does not thrive on resolution, as presumed in its Hegelian-type synthesis, but rather they rely on each other's perpetual movement. Therapy culture introduces lack to the notion of well-being, while well-being is a telos that is equally lacking and seeking a solution (e.g., more yoga, mindfulness, wellness podcasts). Each of these produces a flow that the dual continuum model manages.

Anti-Hegelian scholars are not necessarily free of the pathology of positivity. Culp's 2016 book *Dark Deleuze* identifies a "metaphysics of positivity" (p. 6), referring to overly affirmative interpretations of Deleuze's philosophy focused on joy, connectivity, and the harmonious rhizome. Following Culp's observation, it is important that asymmetrical pedagogy challenges any philosophical, political, and ethical frameworks that harbour neoliberal forms of thought. In the university context, this means creating academic spaces that embrace rupture, refusal, and antagonism. Echoing Freud: "negation is finding a way to say no to those who tell us to take the world as it is" (in Culp, 2016, p. 17), educators need to cultivate an ethic of intensity in the classroom and a willingness to confront the status quo embedded in our inherited pedagogical practices. Asymmetry is not concerned with fairness or compromise; rather, it demands pedagogical strategies that intensify the desire for justice.

The Performance Principle and Microfascism

Instituting Refusal as Well-being (R-Wb) as a negative task in the classroom invites students to interrogate how social services curricula reproduce the performance principle through pedagogies of therapeutic capture, and to explore how this represses non-conformist desires. Marcuse's (2012) performance principle helps illuminate the broader role of oppressive

pedagogies in training future social service providers to function as agents of therapeutic capture. As with the social service world, we replicate the performance principle in education dominating the experience of learners through individualized assessment and quantitative measurement and linking self-worth to academic output. In doing so we instantiate the excess application of the reality principle and create surplus repression in the classroom. If we can help students discern where and how excessive domination and repression operate in the classroom, a dynamic often required in capitalist societies that treat people as machines for low-cost production, we can begin to reduce its instrumentalization when applied to future work contexts. Educators and service providers can begin to trace the genealogy of the performance principle in our working contexts by inquiring about what is missing in our diagrams of well-being and psychology, for example, by asking about the social determinants of suffering. It is difficult to detect what is not there, but by palpating for what is missing can move education away from hegemonic forms that psychologize our human services work and promote surplus repression. This is more challenging in the context of capitalist realism, where our social ontology conceals the central cause of suffering. Like Fanon, we could use psychologizing for critical consciousness. For example, we could invite students to keep a personal log of surplus repression as it relates to their educational experiences. They might become aware of symptoms like guilt and shame about creativity, sexuality, intelligence, and their bodies, which are re-configured as consumption machines under capitalism. They might track experiences of alienation from others and from themselves, whether these emerge in home, work, or community contexts. They could also identify tendencies to submit to authority or to exert authority, including expressions of microfascism.

Microfascism refers to unconscious normalized behaviors and beliefs that align with control, repression and hierarchy, even when individuals think they are acting freely. In the

Preface to Deleuze & Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (2009), Michel Foucault referred to it as “the fascism in our heads” that “...causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.” (p. xiii). An Anti-Oedipal pedagogy supports students to learn about how they came to desire their own domination. It invites us to study how systems of repression become internalized in our pedagogical desires, habits, and identities. There is pedagogical value in studying our fears of ostracization, displacements of desire (e.g., giving up songwriting to focus on work), and consumption (e.g., substance use and workaholism) presented as a replacement for creative desire. There is also value in the study of ideologies that govern Symbolic orders (e.g., fundamentalist religions, mental health discourse like MHFA, identity politics) (Guattari, 2011; Marcuse, 2012; Parker & Cuéllar, 2021; Sloan & García, 2017).

Our struggle to elude the suffering caused by surplus repression is hindered by capitalist realism, which Mark Fisher (2022) described as: “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it” (p. 2). The practice of erasure, through which capitalism obscures its own historicity and contingency, enables neoliberals to claim an ideological post-political condition. Erasure is the spine of neoliberal doctrine. Being spineless, it relies on us to carry its weight, and we do. We support capitalist realism by living in the world as if it will always be governed by neoliberal ideas and that there could be no other viable system to replace it (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013). Capitalist realism operates as a hidden curriculum in the classroom. It eludes our analysis by hiding behind therapy culture, re-configuring the damage caused by human exploitation as an inherent trait of human weakness. As capitalist ideology becomes more axiomatic, universities and other social institutions remanufacture its central notion, that the

primary goal of life is to expand production (Mathews, 2019). This is something we need to organize against in our revised curriculum.

By decoding symmetrical power relations and its subjectivities in a diagram of therapy capture in university programs, we can imagine new diagrammatic models for the training of radical social service workers. Working against surplus repression and engaging in more collaborative egalitarian practice, aligns with a schizoanalytic framework. This framework is like a burrow tunnel for passing underneath, or through, the performance principle and its surplus repression. The classroom is an ideal place for the tunnelling, which must be done collectively because it is laborious. The digging is different for each classroom, and for each pedagogical situation. There is no singular map to distribute. No standardized curriculum. The process is cartographic, and any directions and strategies that we might offer as instructors need to relate to the local social conditions that interfere with collective flourishing in that time and place. This is particularly relevant in settler colonial contexts, such as those we find in Canada. In the following section I explore how R-Wb responds to these issues by integrating decolonial theory.

R-Wb as Anti-colonial Praxis

As asymmetrical pedagogy, R-Wb is an anti-colonial orientation to flourishing. It differs from dialectical understandings of colonialism and reconciliation that frame Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in an intrinsic dialectical entanglement. Dialectics premised on symmetry obscure asymmetrical forms of resistance to colonialism and weaken institutional understandings of violence and oppression in both domestic and global contexts. In Canada this dialectical symmetry has been described as a colonial code of relations (Wade, 1995). A counter argument to a dialectics of colonialism is that Indigenous and settler colonial lifeways are not merely

opposed to one another dialectically, but that they are asymmetrically opposed (Culp 2016; Grande, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Decolonization introduces possibilities that are asymmetrical to colonialism, examples like neurodecolonization and strategic desubjectification, which I discuss below.

The colonial code of relations is often re-instantiated through a discourse of science, which seeks to mutualize violence as conflict and to universalize suffering. Despite the tireless efforts of Indigenous scholars and community members to study and decolonize the structures of settler colonialism, the scientific antiseptic of psychologization continues to obscure structural violence and dismiss anti-colonial Indigenous responses. As Viera and Languido (2017) note, this “scientific antiseptic” (p. 421), a term used by liberation psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró, persists through psychological theories such as self-efficacy, self-regulation, resilience, and cognitive behaviourism. These frameworks reduce complex sociopolitical realities to internal deficits or dysfunctions. The medicalization of mental health, which treats psychological suffering as if it were analogous to a biological virus, erases the lived experiences of service users who are resisting intergenerational colonial oppression, exploited within neoliberal labor systems, or displaced by imperialist warfare. In doing so, it fails to account for the social conditions underlying their distress and neglects to incorporate culturally relevant values and community-based resources into psychological theory and practice (Viera & Languido, 2017).

Neurodecolonization

R-Wb favors tools that interrogate colonial ideologies that proliferate as science. For example, while most people understand the consequences of stress on both subjective well-being and physical health (Diener et al., 2017; Stowell, et al., 2001), when survivors of colonial

violence are pathologized for their stress-responses to its structures, without naming the histories and structural violence of settler colonialism, we are as firmly rooted in ideology as we are in science. This is something that Michael Yellowbird (2013) has addressed in his adaptation of mindfulness to develop the practice of neurodecolonization. This approach combines mindfulness, and other variations of contemplation, to interrupt and replace colonial patterns of thought, emotion and behavior with more liberatory ones (Yellowbird, 2013). Yellowbird (2013) provides an example of the way that anti-colonial movements can utilize psychologization and contemporary science for revolutionary praxis:

Neurodecolonization seeks an understanding of how mind and brain function are shaped by the stresses of colonialism and compromise the well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Some stressors include, but are certainly not limited to, racism and hate crimes; loss of territories, culture and pride; high levels of mortality, poverty and poor health; and disregard of Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty and rights. Along with building new empowered neural networks, neurodecolonization activities are aimed at deactivating old, ineffective brain networks that support destructive thoughts, emotions, memories and behaviours, particularly, past and contemporary oppressions associated with colonialism (p. 298-299).

We need to invite our students who have not experienced colonialism to thicken their interpretive schemas, about stressors related to settler occupation and colonial law for example, so they don't continue to pathologize intergenerational responses to colonization (Coulthard,

2014; Fanon, 2004/2008; Million, 2013; Richardson & Reynolds, 2014; Todd & Wade, 1994). There is a pervasive victim-blaming mentality that accompanies the ideological application of well-being to individual bodies when there are clearly documented asymmetries in the social, economic, and physical health of Indigenous peoples compared to non-Indigenous peoples (Cooke et al., 2007; Million, 2013). In fact, colonialism has been established as a distal determinant of Indigenous health. Czyzewski (2011) writes:

The structural and systemic contexts make for colonialism to be distal. Distal determinants are generally beyond the individual or community's control and are the causes of causes for unjust life situations for certain groups or people over others. Exploring colonialism as a distal determinant of health is linked to examining how current ideologies and historic events influence the health of contemporary Indigenous peoples (p. 4)

The interminable effects of land dispossession and Reserve-based sedentism on cultural land-based continuity, lack of access to traditional economies, and physical separation (due to the remote locations of Reserves and Reservations) from mainstream monetary economies, contribute to Indigenous experiences of suffering (Czyzewski, 2011). The trauma of colonial genocide in the past (e.g., residential school) and in the present (e.g., MMIWG2S+) is a political problem as much as it is a psychological and spiritual problem (Ficklin et. al, 2022).

Strategic Desubjectification

Coulthard (2014) builds on Fanon's argument to advocate for human rights struggles that will allow Indigenous people to break completely with these forms of colonial power. If not, he states that "white liberty and white justice" (p. 39) will continue to pollute the psycho-existential complexes of people who have been subjected to colonial logics. As a psychiatrist Fanon (2008) did not do away with psychology but re-configured it to be useful for his patients who were victims of colonial violence and oppression. There are debates about psychologies that attend to the "internal distortions in the structure of the consciousness of the oppressed" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 37). Some argue that any form of psychologizing in this context is victim-blaming. This position dismisses Fanon's (2008) emphasis on the subjective conditions of decolonization, which he argued need to accompany the objective forms of decolonization (e.g., law, land back, curriculum reform). For example, Coulthard is critical of philosopher Nancy Fraser's one-sided focus on the development of more equal social relations, which overlooks Fanon's warning that "a change in social structure would not guarantee a change in the subjectivities of the oppressed" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 37). Coulthard (2014) argues that psychological problems can "take on a life of their own and thus need to be dealt with independently and in accordance with their own specific logics" (p. 37).

When Coulthard writes about the importance of "strategic desubjectification" he is referring to the psychological process of purging colonial mentalities. Respectfully teaching about strategic desubjectification in our curriculum does not promote the pathologization of Indigenous minds but rather follows the lead of Indigenous scholars and practitioners who are developing models to promote Indigenous sovereignty in contexts where there is "unequal exchange of institutionalized and interpersonal patterns of recognition between the colonial

society and the Indigenous population” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 32). For example, Michael Yellowbird (2013) argues that decolonization needs to begin in the mind. Without methods for strategic desubjectification, recognition politics maintain hierarchies where “colonial masters” can persist in new elite forms (Coulthard, 2014, p. 32). Fanon (2004) was clear that the anticolonial praxis of strategic desubjectification, which is subjective, needs to be accompanied by rigorous objective decolonization. His proposal is to make a complete break from settler colonial society, so that colonized people can “reestablish themselves as truly self-determining: as creators of the terms, values, and conditions by which they are recognized” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 3). This is an asymmetrical process that receives very little support in our classrooms, but decolonization requires a break from capitalism and its multitude of distractions and decoys.

I have argued that anti-colonial praxis requires more than critique, it demands a radical refusal of systems that normalize and reproduce colonial power. This refusal is not passive withdrawal but an active undoing of hegemonic knowledge regimes and their Hegelian logics of reconciliation and synthesis. In this context, the R in R-Wb stands for Refusal: a political, epistemological, and affective stance that dis-aligns from therapeutic capture, settler futurity, and the moral imperatives of self-development and individualized well-being. Rather than recuperating colonial harm through reformist models of well-being, refusal opens space for other possibilities: knowledges, identities, and practices that persist beyond the reach of neoliberal humanism and capitalist care economies. However, refusal is not enough. The question remains: what alternatives can we co-create with future service providers? Given our location within the caring professions, we must take up the problem, and possibility, of care. In the next section, I turn to Herbert Marcuse and well-being theorists who follow his lineage, not to reclaim care as

individualized labor, but to explore its radical potential to resist commodification, sustain collective life, and foster non-exploitative ways of being together.

R-Wb as a Pedagogy of Care

The post-pandemic malaise spreading across North America and its universities is intensified by the chaos of a second Trump presidency, the Hamas attack on Israel, the genocidal response against the Palestinian people in Gaza, the repression of anti-war protest, the precarity of being cancelled, and a broader global resurgence of authoritarianism. Together, these forces are eroding the meaning and collective purpose that once grounded education, dissent, and public life. Well-being researchers have voiced their concern about the weakening of prohibitions in capitalist economies, which has created markets for “lower forms of pleasure seeking” (Sloan & García, 2017, p. 396), e.g. pornography, violent films, sexual objectification of girls and women’s bodies, screen-based gadgets, etc. Not only are these low cultural forms problematic on several ethical levels, but pleasure-seeking of this kind also distracts people from organizing for social change. The low-culture industry reduces the time we could spend on creating more equitable, sustainable, and shared forms of well-being that are inclusive of exploited and marginalized individuals (Sloan & García, 2017). When academic or social services labor becomes increasingly alienated and meaningless, due to its over-instrumentalization as a profession, or due to trauma or other dissociative conditions, the notion of pleasure is advertised as a reward at the end of a working day. Commodified pleasures contribute to ongoing domination by reducing creativity, acts of solidarity, and forms of collective resistance (Bauer et al., 2012; Viera & Languido, 2017).

Yellowbird (2013) describes how habits of thinking, feeling and reacting to life events in unproductive ways, “inadvertently strengthen the unproductive neural networks and become even more prone to anger, depression and frustration” (p. 299). Many front-line workers dealing with vicarious trauma and other work-related stressors (McCann & Pearlman, 1990) understand the turn to vices, to turn off the heartache at the end of a hard shift. While alcohol, other drugs, and other methods of escape can provide short-term relief, they also muddle the details of our suffering. Sloan and Garcia (2017) encourage us to attend to the ways we avoid feeling our responses to suffering and oppression in daily life using alcohol and other drugs, exercise, social media, process addictions, etc. Critical psychologists are in favor of cultivating awareness of those evasions, and I see the value in that practice when it is done in a relational and non-instrumentalist way. Fortunately, many front-line workers are also leaders in the recovery community, supporting both abstinence and temperance movements. Others find solace in circle, in sangha, and other spiritual community settings, also within circles of friends, in therapy, and through psychedelic healing modalities. Many of us have found well-being in various modes of creativity. And yet others have continued to seek these connections in the university itself.

Parker and Cuéllar (2021) write that the unconscious repetition of life patterns (e.g., consumption, self-deception) can operate for life or for death. We can begin by considering how our professional responses to repetition promote life (e.g., unconditional positive regard) or death (moralizing against IV drug use). The notion of psychoanalytic transference can assist us with the problem of repetition in classroom and in the helping fields. Transference refers to the ways that people repeat behaviours, or what is referred to as a symptom in the therapeutic setting. A radical psychoanalytic take on transference refuses its generalization and instrumentalism. There is a shift away from the power relations of clinical psychology and psychiatry. The emphasis is

placed on the analysand (e.g., in the social services: the client, the service user, in the school context: the student) and their analysis and interpretation of their unique situation. They are the only people who will be able to find something significant to say about their lives (Parker & Cuéllar, 2021).

For Parker and Cuéllar (2021) the path to liberation from the alienating effects of capitalism requires the empowerment of service users. Empowering service users is not a return to individualism, however. As Surya Nayak (2021) reminds us, movements for liberation rely on collective solidarity. Collective solidarity is not premised in an identity politics like sameness, but rather it is a movement reliant on our capacities to relate across intersectional differences. As equals. It requires an ability to listen deeply to the Other. And yet so much of what we hear is the self-promoting voice of the ego, which tries to overpower the repetition compulsion of the unconscious (e.g., unresolved traumas, failures, shame, etc.), which Freud and others identified at the beginning of the twentieth century. Building upon these insights, I move next to the positive task of R-Wb, which requires a re-configuration of our orientation to the language and other communication systems that are referred to as semiosis.

Affirmation: The Positive Task of R-Wb

Guattari's psychoanalytic conception of semiotics was shaped by Charles Sanders Peirce's (1974) triadic model, particularly the function of the icon: images, metaphors, or diagrams that signify (i.e., stand for and convey meaning about a referent or object), through their resemblance to objects in the world. Peirce understood icons as representations that maintain visual or structural similarity to their referents. In contrast, Guattari resists representational logics that limit semiosis to what already exists or is recognizable within

dominant meaning systems, arguing that this constrains possibilities for becoming (Genosko, 2014). He disrupts the correspondence model of signification, where the signifier (word) refers to a signified (concept), by distinguishing between the image and the diagram (Guattari, 1995).

While images remain tied to symbolic systems (e.g., letter grades assigned to students), diagrams can function within asignifying semiotics. Rather than referencing a preexisting reality, they mobilize new potentials in relation to the Real. However, asignification does not automatically produce liberatory outcomes. For example, we might consider algorithmic risk-scoring in child welfare systems, where administrative inputs (case notes, service interactions, and demographic data) are translated as predictive risk indicators. These outputs function as machinic signals that do not directly represent the lived experiences of families but are nonetheless reterritorialized into symbolic decisions such as intervention thresholds, surveillance intensity, or removal protocols.

Guattarian semiotics challenges the dominance of representation by proposing a more dynamic, processual form of mapping experience. By splitting the image from the diagram, he opens lines of flight from representational regimes, enabling the aesthetic diagramming of new subjectivities and realities. This informs my understanding of well-being, not as a static state, but as well-becoming, the affirmative task of R-Wb. In the following section I elaborate on this through a transdisciplinary engagement with the community of practice model, proposing it as a site for experimentation rather than replication.

By integrating the tradition of eudaimonia with the negative diagrams of schizoanalysis and anti-colonial theory, I have been developing a theory of Refusal as Well-being. Having explored its implications for praxis in social service education at length, I now turn to its affirmative, well-being dimension. While the militant anger that powers R-Wb is powerful fuel

for protest and change, so is what Skott-Myhre (2009) refers to as creative force. Creative force pushes us beyond what we refuse, to generate new forms of identity and community (Skott-Myhre, 2009). This is the positive task of R-Wb. In the section that follows I develop an affirmative notion of aesthetic diagrams that re-conceptualize well-being as collective well-becoming. I then consider Communities of Practice as transdisciplinary collectives. I discuss aesthetic diagrams as means for overcoming unconscious repetition and attending to flourishing as a collective creative endeavor, with a continued emphasis on outplaying conditions of injustice and collective colonial trauma (Bava, et al., 2013; Carello, & Butler, 2014; Carter, 2015; Sweeney, et al., 2018). Guattari's later work, and his collaborations with Deleuze (1987), increasingly emphasized the importance of maintaining a through line to the Outside, which is where aesthetic diagrams escape the semiosis of R-Wb.

Part 4: A Transdisciplinary Practice Collective

The diagram is no longer an auditory or visual archive but a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field ... a map of relations between forces, a map of destiny, or intensity ... the cause of concrete assemblages that execute its relations; and these relations take place "not above" but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4)

In the following section, I institute Félix Guattari's (2010) concept of the diagram to deterritorialize the notion of the community of practice (CoP) within the university. In the

French pedagogical sense, to institute a diagram is to enact an educational intervention that introduces difference into the habitual norms of an educational system (Smith, 2025). Here, the CoP becomes both a site for institutional analysis (e.g., faculties, student services) and a space for cultivating asymmetrical relations that resist individualism, colonialism, and the homogenizing tendencies of therapeutic capture and neoliberal optimism. I return to the problem of language from a semiotic perspective under conditions of semiocapitalism, a term popularized by Berardi (2011) to describe a stage of capitalism in which signs, affects, and symbolic exchanges, rather than material goods, become the dominant form of production and value creation. Against this cacophony, I propose practices of collective listening that attune us to how semiocapitalism profits from repressive desublimation and produces conditions such as overwork, addiction, stress, colonial thinking, and consumerism. I develop a notion of the blue diagram as an intervention: much like in music-centered therapy (Aigen, 2005, 2014), where improvisation can disrupt entrenched affective patterns and open new relational possibilities. I suggest the CoP as an appropriate site for this experiment because, before configuring the classroom as a space where students develop listening and creative capacities for social service work, we as professors must first cultivate these capacities in ourselves.

From Community of Practice to Transdisciplinary Collective

A Community of Practice (CoP) is traditionally understood as a group of individuals engaged in collective learning within a shared domain and common purpose (Wenger, 1998), such as enhancing well-being in universities or advancing mental health and social services in our communities. Members collaborate formally and informally, developing shared resources, language, norms, and knowledge relevant to their practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). While the

CoP model offers a valuable framework for understanding situated learning and collective knowledge-making, it often assumes symmetrical participation, shared identities, goals, and mutual engagement, which obscures the asymmetries, exclusions, and power relations shaping who participates and how. As I have argued in relation to Refusal, this assumption of harmonious learning can mask the affective and structural violence embedded in institutional knowledge production.

In university settings, CoPs often retain organizational logics grounded in shared identity, disciplinary coherence, and developmental hierarchies (e.g., novice to master). They rely on symbolic semiotics that reinforce the logics of productivity, inclusion, and professionalization. Such signifying systems can overdetermine what counts as participation, gently steering members toward institutional alignment under the language of “collaboration” or “engagement.” In doing so, they risk folding difference into sameness (Fox, 2000), where refusal, interruption, or non-consensus no longer register as legitimate forms of participation. Like the classroom, CoPs can drift into affectively muted spaces where collaboration is performed but not lived, listening is simulated, and asymmetrical complexity gives way to consensus.

Guattari (1995) was skeptical of stabilizing notions like “community,” especially when idealized in ways that exclude difference. Resisting CoP hierarchies that privilege one form of expertise or disciplinary logic over others opens possibilities for transdisciplinarity: a creative, non-linear, process-based movement across domains that resists stabilizing knowledge within disciplinary boundaries (Goffey, 2015). Unlike CoPs that often orient toward professional development and institutional improvement (e.g., aligning with neoliberal imperatives of audit culture, performative competence, and productivity metrics), transdisciplinary collective encounters disrupt rigid institutional roles. Rather than merging disciplines into a unified

framework, as interdisciplinarity tends to do, the deterritorialization of the knowledge and practices of groups like the CoP, concepts, affects, and actions begin to move fluidly across education, health, art, economics, science, politics, and psychology without reducing them to a shared denominator.

A transdisciplinary collective foregrounds asignifying semiotics, a schizoanalytic concept that I define in the section below titled: Asignifying and Signifying Semiotics. There I provide examples of improvised creative gestures, extended silences, lapses of leadership, and disorienting diagrams as forms of political subjectivity that resist absorption into dominant academic diagrams. Re-orienting the CoP to make space for asymmetry, refusal, and generative antagonism shifts education from training experts for fixed professional roles to collective diagramming processes for institutional analysis. The transdisciplinary collective as analyzer extends the aims of Refusal Well-being (R-Wb) beyond social service education into the broader university, not as a stabilizing institution but as a site for unsettling institutional diagrams while composing new ones in the process.

Institutional Analysis

Genosko (1996) writes about the value of progressive institutions that, acting as analyzers, diagnose institutional practices that contribute to social and mental alienation. In institutional analysis, the key operation is the analyzer's work of exposing issues, crises, or power relations that the institution denies, provoking members to articulate and externalize what they already know but avoid discussing (Hess & Schaepelynck, 2013). For example, returning to the problem of MHFA and the oppressive power structures underlying such initiatives, we can begin to dismantle the panoptic gaze by revising social relationships and redefining our

institutional roles. If there is a Guattarian (2015) orientation to mental health and well-being pedagogy, it is based on the therapeutic potential that exists in the entirety of an institution. This was demonstrated in his work at La Borde, where everything was considered relevant to an institutional cure (e.g., therapeutic and nontherapeutic staff, collective practices, the architecture and spaces, as well as its temporal rhythms). Those working across faculties within the institution are well positioned to examine its histories and challenges, making a community of practice a valuable forum for such reflection. Through our relationships, we as analyzers can pose questions about the objectified problems under analysis, encouraging our colleagues to take positions on things that an outsider might not (Hess & Schaepelynck, 2013). A dynamic institution relies on ongoing instituting processes to critically revise the rules, norms, and roles shaping its operations, with insider knowledge holders (e.g., mad and neurodiverse folx¹), community members, students, and professors who, in sharing rotating tasks, are freed from the university's imposed representations.

Group Types for CoP Analysis

To reimagine a CoP beyond its arborescent roots, where masters lead novices through organizational learning (Fox, 2000), I draw on Guattari's (2011) institutional pliability and his distinction between subject groups and subjugated groups, noting that any group can move between these states. This is not about labeling one group as 'subject' and another as 'subjugated,' but about recognizing the capacity of members to examine the unconscious drives that constrain their collective formations. Guattari's group-types provide criteria to assess the general state of a CoP seeking collective anti-colonial approaches to a problem like well-being.

¹ Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines *folx* as "folks" with explicit intent to include marginalized groups

To get to collective expressions, groups need to understand what stands in the way of forming subject groups. A subjugated CoP takes its laws from external authorities (e.g., administrators, authors, psychologists, content experts), while a subject group develops its own internal laws and acknowledges the temporariness of its configurations. A CoP moving toward a “group subject, with enunciative capacities” (Guattari, 2011, p. 1) would critically reflect on its structures and value the collective effort needed to care for the group subject.

Soon, I will describe the act of instituting the Aesthetic Diagram and its emergence as an enunciative capacity for well-becoming. The diagram functions as an abstract machine, a non-representational tool for producing new assemblages, affects, and subjectivities. Rather than describing or representing, it invites creation, offering a way to reorganize static models for emergent purposes. In the aesthetic diagram, replacing well-being with well-becoming signals a shift from signifying to asignifying semiotics. Below, I outline the differences between these terms and their implications before turning to the notion of aesthetic diagrams for well-becoming.

Asignifying and Signifying Semiotics

As I wrote earlier, Guattari’s semiotic theory draws on Peirce’s (1974) notion of icons: images, metaphors, and diagrams that signify through resemblance (Collett & Sdrolia, 2019). Peirce’s icons represent the signifier, limiting them to culturally recognized forms (Watson, 2009); for instance, a picture of a tree resembles the familiar stem, branches, and height of a “tree.” Guattari (1995) reworks this concept through psychoanalysis, creating diagrams untethered from resemblance, which opens non-representational relations with the Real. Lacan (1977) described the Real as that which exists outside Symbolic and Imaginary systems. By

separating the image (a representational capture belonging to the Symbolic) from the diagram (a generative, non-representational machine for transformation), the diagram intervenes in the Real. Drawing from an asignifying domain, where signs escape fixed meaning and activate affective and material processes (Genosko, 2014), allows for new subjectivities to emerge beyond fixed psychological schemas. By locating the diagram's force in the asignifying domain, where signs act directly on bodies, affects, and material assemblages rather than represent, the diagram can touch the Real by activating processes that bypass representation. This generative force is unsettling, as it destabilizes meaning and can surface in unconscious repetitions, such as trauma, yet also provides an intensity capable of rupturing dominant systems and opening new possibilities (Guattari, 2011).

Guattari's diagram also operates through part-signs, a term adapted from object-relations psychoanalysis, particularly the work of D. W. Winnicott (Genosko, 2000). Winnicott theorized how early interactions are internalized as "partial objects" (e.g., a caregiver's voice) that shape our inner dialogues and influence behavior over time. These inner objects, constantly substituted and projected outward, are at the root of transference (Genosko, 2000). Guattari's innovation was to detach these partial objects from their original referents (like Oedipus or the nuclear family) and reorient them toward new existential possibilities. By renaming part-objects as part-signs, Guattari makes a shift from the representational register of psychoanalysis to the operational field of semiotics. His part-signs don't point to a meaning as they do in psychoanalysis, they trigger, modulate, and interrupt flows of sensation, affect, or material processes. This is what makes them productive. An inquiry of the education system might sample a recording of the school bell, a symbol of institutional control, and recontextualize it in a Faculty of Education sound installation. Stripped from its routine role, the bell reveals how schooling rhythms shape

our bodies, emotions, and thoughts, inviting reflection on the power dynamics that constrain educational spaces and imagining more liberatory possibilities.

Guattari (2011) recognized that signs like the school bell are shaped by ecological, material, and unconscious forces. This insight inspired his concept of schizoanalytic cartography, which maps subjectivity as a dynamic process co-constituted by signs, social forces, and affective intensities (Guattari, 2011). Unlike maps or genres that replicate fixed forms, cartographies trace the movements and transformations of desire. Asignifying semiotics still use elements of signification (e.g., interpreting a flat facial expression within a discourse of “depression”), but they ultimately destabilize this logic. For instance, a withdrawn posture in a youth center might exceed diagnostic meaning and instead express “the quiet defiance of a peer harm reduction worker handing out clean supplies with the care of someone who’s lost too many friends too young.” Lacan (1977) emphasized that language alienates us from the Real. While social service education often positions language as a relational resource used for connection, resistance, and healing, it also functions as a bureaucratic and clinical tool of capture. Guattari’s (2010) diagram offers an alternative: a way to map and disrupt dominant semiotic systems (like the dual continuum model of mental health) by opening aesthetic and asignifying possibilities for flourishing and subjectivity. In this view, well-becoming replaces well-being, not as a static goal, but as a dynamic process of transformation beyond the constraints of signification.

New cultural expressions are acts of deterritorialization, moments when generative forces break free from dominant codes (Guattari & Rolnik, 2007). Music exemplifies this by deterritorializing the human voice for singing, transforming it into a conduit between inner subjectivity and outer expression. It mediates among the Symbolic (language, lyrics, notes in a key), the Imaginary (images and their assemblages), and the Real (the unsayable, like John

Coltrane's later improvisations). Subjectivity, then, arises from an ecology of bodies, institutions, signs, and machines (Genosko, 2014). Building on Guattari, Berardi (2011) describes the psyche as a terminal shaped by intersecting semiotic, technological, and institutional flows. Under semiocapitalism, our terminals have been saturated by mass media and digital noise, which fragments subjectivity (Berardi, 2011). Yet, terminals are also potential sites for transformation, or what Guattari (2011) calls ecosophy: a rethinking of ecology as the interplay of environments, signs, and subjectivities. This transformative potential is where asignifying semiotics, such as music or poetic refrains, come into play. Rhythmic repetition and variation form new partial objects, motifs, or refrains that catalyze assemblages of meaning. The blues, for instance, deterritorializes European musical codes by adding blue notes and polyrhythms to produce what has been called a minoritarian vernacular (Bishop & Skott-Myhre, 2019). Minor expressions arise from an excess of desire that exceeds dominant norms and appear across all progressive music genres. Desire is a pre-personal ontological force on a line of flight through the Real, which fuels creativity. Revolutionary art forms emerge from this desire, which operates within the asignifying domain, bypassing fixed meanings and triggering new becomings and deterritorializations.

Aesthetic orientations to well-becoming attend to existence as it emerges, not as something captured in a structure, but as something unfolding. Improvisation and sound art experiment with this, perhaps ethnographically, but always into asignification. When multi-instrumental improvisers and composers converge around a tonal center, it becomes a refrain, a new collective diagram. Asignifying semiotics can also emerge through our open engagements with students, colleagues, knowledge keepers, social workers, activists, therapists, and administrative leaders, when we attend to the singularities and part-objects within and between

us. This is the contact zone that Haraway (2008) writes about, where becoming is always becoming-with.

Aesthetic Diagrams for Well-becoming

Music, to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be "out of time" and "out of tune." (Keil & Feld, 2005, p. 96)

The aesthetic diagram takes a line of flight from the pedagogical semiotic framework of Refusal, which I have described as a vulgar critical psychology of well-being. Mapping well-becoming with aesthetic diagrams opens a non-linear process that moves between the imposed order R-Wb refuses and the unpredictable chaos of becoming. It does this by giving rise to new modes of expression, institutions, subjectivities, and social formations. In other words, it possesses an enunciative capacity that not only opens the way for an aesthetically oriented institutional analysis, one that studies dominant forces, but one that recomposes them through minoritarian interventions. I discuss this process first by emphasizing the importance of listening, then by discussing a pedagogy of collaborative composition, and finally by developing a Blue Diagram for transforming Communities of Practice into transdisciplinary collectives.

Gibbs (2005) argues that mimicry extends our cognitive and affective capacities across the lifespan. Yet within Communities of Practice (CoPs), mimicry is often framed developmentally, organized into triadic hierarchies of “masters” (or “old-timers”), “journeymen,” and “apprentices” (Fox, 2000, p. 855). While capitalism thrives on mimicry by reproducing culture, identity, and style for profit, aesthetic diagrams harness mimicry not by

copying the master's original act but through our failure to do so. Unlike neoliberal mimicry, which pathologizes failure and reshapes institutions to serve capital over public good (Harvey, 2005), diagrammatic mimicry disrupts repetition, becoming a site of innovation and difference (Gibbs, 2005). Under neoliberalism, artistic practices are increasingly devalued or reduced to market metrics and therapeutic functions (e.g., playlists to unwind). As a result, programs with low immediate financial returns, like the jazz program that opened my ears to new sounds and my hands to new possibilities, are cut. A society without artists loses its ability to imagine alternatives, suffocates dissent, and ignores meaning beyond dominant logics. This reflects a deeper failure of neoliberalism, which forecloses alterity, ambiguity, and affective life, undermining conditions for collective well-becoming. Without artists, society may function but loses the capacity to feel, think, or create. By refusing to recognize neoliberal mimicry as failure, institutions spiral into toxic repetition, prioritizing performed creativity over genuine production, while eroding the foundations democracy needs to thrive. Performing neoliberalism destroys everything we require for democracy and collective flourishing.

The university faces an urgent question: How can our collective desires reconfigure the performance principle and promote more creative, culturally diverse, and relational education and care? By developing tools that reveal and respond to the tensions within subjugated groups. In this sense, aesthetic diagrams can inform R-Wb by inciting an analysis of the subjugated group. Berardi (2021) calls for a schismogenetic poem, not to resolve fractures but to resonate with and give form to the dissonance we are experiencing. These poetic inquiries might be essential for navigating the increasingly antisocial terrain of our institutional environments. A CoP cannot become transdisciplinary until it creates the conditions for collective listening. Before composing, resisting, or transforming, it is helpful to listen differently: to each other, and

to the institutional tensions that often go unnamed in group situations. This is not passive listening, but a diagrammatic or machinic attunement.

The Stimmung and Sounds of Subjugation

We need to hear the forces that are shaping us (e.g. audit culture, affective governance), to be able to recognize the signs and signals that bypass symbolic meaning but still produce effects (e.g., complicity and defeatism). The subjugating effects of neoliberalism on our educational institutions can be performed, by composing with the Stimmung that it produces. “Stimmung” refers to the tone, mood or atmosphere of a space or context (Oury, 2007). Oury (2007) argues that in institutions like hospitals and universities, the affective atmosphere tends to remain unchanged. This enforced homogeneity diminishes institutional vitality and capacities for transformation. To collaborate with a renewed sense of communal purpose requires a robust praxis for listening to the Stimmung. As a child I learned how to listen, in part, as a self-taught musician, by tracing the sounds of my favorite albums with my guitar. This is a transferable skill that I developed later as a jazz musician and now am modifying for aesthetic institutional analysis. Many of us learn to play along with neoliberalism, by adapting to its rhythms. We learn to mimic its tones, like following rules for a game. However, we can learn to listen to neoliberalism, transcribe its patterns, tune into its tones, and experiment with how it influences our groups. We can then gather in musical formations to play it back. By analyzing its mood and remixing its signals, we can bend the rules to create something new, and next I explore how musical composition would further this project.

Diagrammatic Mimicry

To invite non-musicians into creative processes requires a model that supports an alternative to capitalist subjectification, to the mimicry of experts and heroes. A transdisciplinary subject group would first need to attune the collective to tones and styles that could help them identify how authority has been maintained in the institution and in their own personal lives. In Above I discussed listening to the Stimmung, as a form of “ear training” to hear the subjugation of the group. Once sensitized to group conditions, members can begin to and engage creatively with their redundancies. In *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari (2011) described how poetic texts transmit messages by engaging with the redundancies of expression and content. The redundant sounds of neoliberalism, playing itself, might create something unexpected. The conditions for surprise and astonishment, which are effective differences, open possibilities to enunciate differently, non-hierarchically, collectively, and with autonomy from the institution (Genosko, 1996; Guattari, 2011; Oury, 2007). We can analyze an institution by writing refrains about the consequences of value systems that govern like this and then playing it back to itself. It might not recognize itself at first but, by inviting its members to speak about what they hear and then listening closely for new signifiers and glitches in the narrative, the group might begin to experience a difference.

It is likely that CoP formations would begin by composing something familiar, repetitive, and maybe cheerful on the surface, but our ears are now attuned to hear more. A haunting refrain beneath the veneer, giving voice to the Stimmung. Like the absence of blue notes in smooth jazz, or like the shiny bared teeth of an institutional actor’s smile while treating others as obstacles to navigate or as instruments for personal advancement (Matthews, 2019). When we amplify the overtones beneath smooth surfaces, we hear more clearly the murmurs and dissonances of

subjugated groups. These are motifs we should listen for and respond to. By tuning into their rhythms, tempos, and intensities, we can compose something dissonant enough to interrupt the repetition of an oppressive Stimmung soundscape. In the following section I theorize an aesthetic diagram that draws on my training in jazz, music therapy and ethics growing up in a working-class home.

The Blue Diagram

With an understanding of collective analysis of group subjugation, we are now positioned to compose an aesthetic response that refuses the institution's subjugating conditions. This need not be a witch hunt. If music and language involve making mistakes, then the characters in our songs are allowed to make mistakes too. Consider Brecht's characters who lamented lost paradises and sang songs of cruelty, greed, exploitation, cheating, and lies. In singing their deception the characters learned the causes, and only then did they begin recuperating a truth about their lives (Marcuse, 2013). My diagram is inspired by jazz music and the blue-collar worker traditions that interrogate the ways we, as workers and educators, have been interpellated into systems that distort our values, revealing not only how we've been complicit in our own exploitation, but also how we reproduce harm within sites of delegated care under neoliberal governance.

Jazz is a form of blues music, and therefore a relevant genre for the paradox of surplus repression because, as Cornel West (1999) reminds us, it is tragicomic in form. Tragicomedy offers catharsis by confronting despair through comedy, without giving in to it. An aesthetic-pedagogical method rooted in Black musical traditions risks cultural appropriation when practiced by the white hands of an upwardly mobile new scholar. My jazz studies included an

ethnomusicological focus, emphasizing that Black music is deeply embedded in specific geographies, spiritual traditions, and political struggles (Moten, 2003). Jazz and blues are not mere universal resources for aesthetic consumption, and I approach the Blue Diagram with awareness of these risks, as a site of political apprenticeship. Following hooks (1994), respectful engagement requires accountability to the communities we draw from, especially when working with cultural forms shaped by histories of struggle. As West (2004) writes, jazz is democracy enacted, a collective practice grounded in improvisation, listening, and freedom. Inspired by these thinkers, I use my training in jazz as a model for conceptualizing sonic refusals of anti-democratic culture on campuses and beyond.

The Blue Diagram is not a metaphor. It functions as a diagram in Guattari's (1995) sense: a generative site where signs, gestures, affects, and machinic processes converge to open new lines of flight. In this spirit, it enacts Refusal as Well-being (R-Wb), reclaiming a compositional space from the striated logics of social service pedagogy and Communities of Practice within the neoliberal university. Grounded in lived struggle and expressive resistance, the Blue Diagram serves as an aesthetic tool to trace how neoliberalism inscribes itself onto our characters, labor, and emotional landscapes. Providing opportunities for new subjectivities, new collectives, and new listening capacities is of particular importance for those entering the caring professions amid conditions of burnout, moral injury, and systemic abandonment. The Blue Diagram emerges at the intersection of blues music and blue-collar working-class values, both of which offer embodied, affective responses to hardship, exploitation, and systemic neglect. Our flawed characters function as part-objects, fragments of subjectivity, that we can analyze as sites of difference through their collective expression in song. If the blues serves as an antidote to being fooled, numbed, or heartbroken, then singing about how affective governance under neoliberal

rationality has shaped us, our peers, and institutional practices becomes an act of collective refusal.

The neoliberal impulse might be to mock this aesthetic orientation the same way it might satirize the Gullah-Creole resistance song Kumbaya, inviting us to “save it for the campfire”. To avoid this transference, we might be tempted to “grow up” from the naïveté of idealistic group sentiments and get back to the “real work” of academicisation. This capitulation would preserve the colonial Symbolic order that sits in judgement of objects and cultures that exist outside of its structures. Songs like Kumbaya have been integral to human rights movements, drawing people together (i.e., “come by here”) for emotional expressions of unity and resistance (Chambers et al., 2023; Sanger, 1995). While I do not make any cultural claims to this tradition, African American musical forms, particularly jazz, have profoundly shaped both my musicianship and approach to improvisational music therapy. For example, experimenting with sound improvisation has proven to be a powerful mode of outreach collaboration with underhoused folks, offering a space where shared sonic exploration can build trust, express resistance, and create fleeting but meaningful moments of connection (Smith, 2007; Smith, 2012). My orientation is informed by “music as therapy”, which positions music itself, its sounds, structures, and processes of making, as the primary agent of therapeutic change, rather than as a medium for achieving non-musical goals. It views music-making as inherently relational and meaning-bearing, where the human change process emerges through active engagement in musical practices such as improvisation, composition, and performance (Aigen, 2005, 2014). Rather than treating music as an adjunct to verbal or behavioral interventions, music as therapy affirms that musical interaction can generate new modes of being, foster self-expression, and

restructure relationships, with change taking place within the musical experience itself (Aigen, 2005).

The music as therapy perspective aligns with Keil and Feld's (2005) musicological understanding that music's power emerges from "participatory discrepancies," where subtle variations and tensions, such as "inflection" and "creative tension", create dynamic interplay that fosters connection and vitality rather than rigid synchronization. Composing collective refrains is an existential response to institutional tone-deafness and the dissociative noise of semicapitalism. Smuggling improvisational practices through the back door of Communities of Practice (CoP) into the university enables a form of institutional jazz where divergent rhythms and dissonances become openings for critical reflection and transdisciplinary praxis, rather than problems to be corrected.

The Glitches of Diagrammatic Mimicry

In an era of semicapitalism, institutional analysis can be understood as mapping the glitches within our aesthetic diagrams. Drawing on glitch as an aesthetic, where breakdowns, interruptions, and noise reveal the limits of dominant systems (Cascone, 2000), these disruptions can be traced across Guattari's (2011) three ecologies: environmental (e.g., extractive infrastructures and data centres that render ecological degradation as background noise), social (e.g., the friction between care work and managerial metrics, where relational labour is translated into quantifiable outputs), and psychic (e.g., the fragmentation of subjectivity through overlapping therapeutic, diagnostic, and productivity discourses). Incorporating sound, image, and improvisational practices alongside other asignifying materials can further intensify these disruptions, supporting the emergence of transdisciplinary subject groups.

The Blue Diagram and Return to R-Wb

Marcuse's (2012) concept of the performance principle informs a critique of how capitalist societies redirect the productive flows of desire into mechanisms of domination. Basic desires, love, creativity, solidarity, are deterritorialized from their open-ended potentials and reterritorialized onto capitalist logics such as career achievement, consumer accumulation, and institutional recognition. Productivity becomes moralized; work is no longer merely economic but a measure of value, identity, and legitimacy. In contemporary universities and human service programs, this persists through learning outcomes, professionalism, therapeutic discourse, and affective self-management, where students are trained not only to care but to perform care within institutional frameworks that often undermine its ethical force.

The Blue diagram offers a countermeasure by shifting attention away from polished professional discourse toward embodied expressions of strain, rupture, and refusal, the "blue notes" that register how subjects live these conditions. Singing what neoliberalism has done to us, our relations, and our institutions becomes more than expression; it is a minor, collective mapping of how the performance principle shapes and is reproduced through us. Like music-as-therapy, where transformation can emerge within the creative experience itself, this practice functions as both process and product: a rehearsal of alternative relations that, when carried into social service work, offers not just services but a shared account of suffering that affirms solidarity and opens space for imagining life beyond institutional constraint.

Music, in this context, allows us to access what Guattari might call an asignifying scale of institutional life, where meaning slips but intensities increase, much like the sonic spaces opened by free jazz. In Ornette Coleman's (1985) harmolodic approach, melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic hierarchies dissolve, allowing each voice to move with its own autonomy while still

participating in a shared field of creation. Similarly, within institutional life, this asignifying register makes room for divergent gestures and unexpected resonances, generating collective intensities that refuse to be contained by dominant genres. This orientation to jazz theory fosters a transdisciplinary reimagining of Communities of Practice (CoPs) and reconceptualizes the classroom within social service education. Traditionally conceived as spaces for professional learning and knowledge exchange, CoPs are often governed by the very logics they aim to support students in resisting: standardization, performance, and the individualization of competence. As I have attempted to show, when approached aesthetically and diagrammatically, CoPs can be repurposed as sites of collective inquiry, affective attunement, and institutional analysis. Rather than reinforcing the performance principle, these practices invite us to interrogate it. Social service education is not just a backdrop for this work; it is the driving force behind the need to develop such counter-institutional practices. It is within the contradictions of social service training, between care and control, ethics and efficiency, presence and professionalism, that the call for Refusal as Well-being (R-Wb) becomes most urgent.

In social service education, the Community of Practice (CoP) model offers a valuable framework for fostering collaborative learning among students, educators, and practitioners. By engaging as members of a shared community focused on advancing social care, participants develop collective knowledge, language, and skills through situated and relational learning. Classrooms designed around CoPs encourage peer collaboration, reflective practice, and the co-construction of professional identities, aligning with social service's emphasis on relationality and ethics. However, traditional CoPs often assume consensus and symmetrical participation, which can obscure power dynamics and suppress dissenting voices critical to social justice work. Therefore, reimagining CoPs in a university setting with my colleagues is essential preparation

for applying transdisciplinary and aesthetic approaches in social service education. This shift challenges institutional norms, preparing students to navigate and transform the complex, inequitable systems they will encounter in practice.

R-Wb is not a retreat from responsibility but an act of reclamation: a refusal to reduce well-being to functionality, or care to deliverables. In this context, institutional analysis is both method and necessity. It asks us to consider how institutions live within us, how they inform our gestures, our language, our desires, and how we might, through collective practices, begin to dislodge their grip. Aesthetic CoPs grounded in R-Wb shift the pedagogical frame: from managing performance to composing spaces of listening, witnessing, and shared sense-making. Through the aesthetic force of the diagram, and in my example of the Blue Diagram, music can be instituted to analyze the way that performance principle shapes institutional orientations to creativity, relationships, pedagogy, well-being, etc.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the individual, group, and institutional dimensions of psychologization in social services education and the broader neoliberal university context. By tracing the historical and ideological development of Western psychology, including its entrenchment in therapy culture and its adaptation to neoliberal governance, I have illustrated how discourses of mental health and well-being continue to individualize and depoliticize human suffering. While positive psychology and contemporary well-being studies offer an apparent alternative to traditional clinical models, they frequently retain the logic of the self-managing subject and, in doing so, conceal the structural and relational origins of distress. Against this backdrop, I introduced Refusal as Well-being (R-Wb) and Aesthetic Diagrams for Well-

becoming as two pedagogical responses that challenge the dominant semiotic and diagnostic frameworks within social service education. R-Wb emphasizes asymmetrical resistance to symmetrical political engagements that often lead to schismogenesis, escalating conflict and identity entrenchment (Lütticken, 2023). In contrast, aesthetic diagrams inspired by Guattari's asygnifying semiotics and schizoanalytic cartography, offers tools for rethinking subjectivity, desire, and collective well-being outside of the performance principle and its capture by institutionalized neoliberal-well-beings. These aesthetic diagrams emphasize situational responsiveness and creative experimentation, privileging immanence and ecological attunement over fixed psychological categories. Drawing from Fanon's anti-colonial ethics of resentment and refusal, and Guattari's modification of partial objects, I argued for a reconfiguration of affective life that resists pedagogies of adaptation to harmful systems. The unconscious, rather than being pathologized or contained, can be approached like free jazz music: as a site of generative potential that is polyphonic, polycentric, and radically social. This perspective moves us away from static identities and ways of being, toward a re-singularization of experience.

In social service education, we emphasize relationality, ethics, and care, yet the institutional culture we prepare students for can resemble a smooth jazz performance, polished, pleasant, and predictable on the surface, while masking the deeper affective dissonances in the institutional characters. In this setting, collegial smiles and strategic affirmations often serve as scripted performances, where others are positioned as either obstacles to navigate or instruments to be played for advancement. This dynamic exemplifies what Guattari (2010) critiqued through his notion of asignifying semiotics: a move away from interpreting human behavior solely through signifiers like "burnout" or "professionalism," and toward mapping the affective, machinic, and institutional forces that shape subjectivity. The aesthetic diagram offers an

alternative, an experimental cartography of social force, desire, and institutional rhythm that invites students and faculty not only to analyze what is (e.g., institutional analysis), but to improvise what might become (e.g., aesthetic diagrams). Rather than reproducing dominant models like Communities of Practice or striating human functioning on a continuum, social service educators can invite learners into a polyphonic terrain of well-becoming, where affect, singularity, and collective composition and improvisation can propel a line of flight elsewhere.

In closing, I returned to the university not as a neutral institution, but as a potential institutional analyzer, a site capable of interpreting and transforming its own practices, cultures, and power relations. While current university mental health frameworks often reinforce neoliberal ideologies and normalize settler colonial structures through standardized approaches like Mental Health First Aid and CSA compliance models, the university also holds latent therapeutic potential. Through collective practices in classrooms, communities of practice, and grassroots formations, we can repurpose university spaces for relational transformation and systemic critique. I developed my example of Blue Diagrams from the dual tasks of R-Wb and aesthetic diagrams to ground social service education and CoPs in refusal, creativity, and collective care. Like the blues itself, this practice draws power from mourning and resistance, from contradictions and improvisations, and from the refusal to let suffering be privatized. It is in these refrains, neither purely hopeful nor cynical, that we begin to compose new forms of life as co-writers of learning and liberation.

Chapter 3: Waniskâ: The Journey from Research-Creation to Political Spirituality

The work of telling new stories, or new versions of stories that need retelling/recrafting, is propositional; it requires ongoing engagement and a willingness to denaturalize the social, disciplinary, ideological structures within which we are embedded (Loveless, 2019, p. 20)

As a methodology research-creation is attentive to which voice and form will best write research stories (Loveless, 2019). In the following chapter, I use an autoethnographic voice to follow the narrative arc suggested by Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach (2021), with a beginning, middle and end. I tell stories about research-creation as a technic for establishing anti-colonial relationships and exploring aesthetic processes for truth-telling, reconciliation, conciliation, and cultural humility at a regional Canadian university. I use the term (re-)conciliation, which joins reconciliation and conciliation to show how my understanding of these terms evolved during our research project. The prefix (re-) emphasizes how important it became to recenter conciliation, as a means for shared understanding. It is a difficult story to tell because research-creation, reconciliation, conciliation, and decolonization are difficult concepts to define and to embody under the pressure of persistent colonial conditions. My social location as an uninvited white settler collaborating with Indigenous research partners troubles simplifying these constructs even further. As a non-Indigenous researcher integrating Indigenous methodologies, I follow Kovach's suggestion and explore my own beliefs and values about knowledge to understand its shaping effect on my practices (Kovach, 2021). As a means of structuring this inquiry, I draw upon autoethnography to engage in what Cree knowledge keeper Susie McPherson Derendy calls personal reconciliation, which is an open invitation for

Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to tell their stories in relationship to the stories of the land and its caretakers since time immemorial (personal communication, 2024). Personal reconciliation requires first that we accept the inseparable ongoing relationship that Indigenous people have with land (McPherson Derendy, 2022), which has been described elsewhere as grounded normativity (Coulthard, 2014). Learning about First Nations, Inuit, and Métis ontologies of land prompted me to reconsider my own anthropocentric epistemology, particularly considering Deloria's view that the universe must be approached personally, with the land placing each of us in relationship to its aliveness. Part of our task in this life is to seek and sustain relationships with the universe and its many entities, a practice that supports personal reconciliation as settlers work to repair and reorient our ways of being in relation to the living world (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

To this end, I begin with a critical orientation to my location as a white settler PhD student, researching my place of work- a regional university situated on contested Treaty and unceded land. I then describe the pre-research context, a sovereign display territory called the Indigenous People's Centre (IPC), on a university campus in the Canadian prairies. Garneau (2016) describes sovereign display territories as places where Indigenous culture and ways of gathering are open to respectful visitors, which makes them possible spaces for reconciliation and conciliation. This is where I initiated an informal music group, offering music andragogy through guitar instruction and music theory, as well as hosting singing circles and jamming. I then discuss my orientation to research-creation and the development of a proposal called Songs for Reconciliation, which was disrupted by the loss of my co-researcher, who travelled home to the North for the sake of her well-being. The middle of the story conveys another event that further altered the trajectory of our research collective, when one of our collaborators was

threatened with expulsion after engaging in anti-racism activism in the classroom. I describe how our collective responded to the therapeutic capture of Western mental health discourse by embracing a history of Cree musical resistance to colonialism at this institution².

The apex of this story is not new to any university, and because history was repeating itself at our university, our collective was introduced to a local song of resistance called *Waniskâ*, under the guidance of a respected knowledge keeper. This composition, written several years prior by a cousin of our collective, urges all people to wake up to the colonial structures and practices oppressing Indigenous students here and around the world. In this speculative - middle of our research event, I describe how the fleeting notion of Songs for Reconciliation was revived by Plains Indigenous orientations to collective singing and drumming. I describe how learning a Cree song about waking up to colonialism and standing in solidarity against it, led me to experience what Michel Foucault described as political spirituality, which is a concept that articulates the centrality of spirituality to all political and social movements (Foucault & Bremner, 2020). In this context, I recognize political spirituality as an outcome of personal reconciliation.

Positionality and Autoethnography

Gadamer's (2013) theory of interpretation insists that understanding inevitably involves the concrete and historically situated subjectivity of the researcher and that a positivist claim of objectivity is unattainable. Haraway (2013) built on this critique, describing it as a "view from nowhere". For both thinkers we can only ever understand something from a point of view (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2008). While it is generally accepted in self-location praxis that

² Powerful stories of Anishinaabe, Dakota and Métis resistance to colonialism circulated as well but these histories would be the topic of another dissertation.

subjectivity is inseparable from the situations we encounter in familial, institutional, and other collective settings, Guattari (2015) identified a regressive tendency to reify a self-sufficient individuality. I have made efforts to avoid my habit, as an author mediated by the regressive subjectivity of a principal investigator, to position myself as a transcendental subject in this research story. I've utilized autoethnography to tell more than descriptive stories about research-creation. I've woven an analysis of my sociohistorical location and research priorities throughout the text, beyond a simple positionality statement. My location as a settler is always on contested land (whether Treaty or unceded) and needs to be interpreted as such. Rather than simply locating my situatedness as a fourth-generation settler with a scholarly interest in reconciliation, I was interested in the way that creative research methods operated as a kind of care of the self, that opened my scholarly work to new political modes of being (Foucault, 1988). While Foucault (2020) traced practices of care of the self to the ancient Greeks, care of the self in my research context required an account of the land and its influence on long-standing local cultures. Coulthard's (2014) theory of grounded normativity describes "modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (p. 13).

During this project I was invited to explore my personal relationship to the notion of reconciliation (i.e., personal reconciliation) by understanding my autobiography as it relates to the land, to the reparations my work undertakes, and to the continuous development of good relations with the local stewards of the Treaty and unceded lands where I live (Susie McPherson Derendy, personal communication, June 2024). Derendy's notion of personal reconciliation teaches cultural humility as a mode for care of the self, where my research context was equally

influenced by the logic of Indigenous grounded theory. Where Foucault's (1997) notion of care of the self maintains a focus on modes of being and the techniques that the subject *must carry out on itself* to attain an ethically grounded and relational mode of being, personal reconciliation is a care of the self who *cares for* lands that sustain us, for all of our relations (e.g., all of the human and non-human forces in our environment), and to recognize the Indigenous caretakers (past, present, and future) who have stewarded the land since time immemorial (Susie McPherson Derendy, personal communication, June 2024).

Opposite the grounded-normativity of personal reconciliation we find the governmentality of Western research paradigms, influencing how our bodies and the bodies of others are disciplined by our topics and methodologies. Governmentality relies on a transcendent unity that undergirds a common understanding of ourselves as individualized subjectivities (e.g., we are all the same because we are all individuals). However, Western individualism allows for dividing practices that use our identities (e.g., First Nation, settler, newcomer, class, queer, straight, etc.) as barriers (e.g., identity politics). To this end, I drew upon autoethnography to analyze the subjectifications of a primary investigator and to describe the experience of resisting forces for my re-integration with the dominant society of control (e.g., a colonial politics of Indigenization), as well as alternative relational subjectivities that arose in the context of sovereign display territories. From its foundations in ethnographical research, autoethnography brings together the study of self (auto) in relation to culture (ethnography) (Kovach, 2021). As “a practice that thinks” (Manning, 2015, p. 53) research-creation added additional dimensions to autoethnography. Erin Manning (2015) presents research-creation as a methodology that:

...generates new forms of experience; it situates what often seem like disparate practices, giving them a conduit for collective expression; it hesitantly acknowledges that normative modes of inquiry and containment often are incapable of assessing its value; it generates forms of knowledge that are extralinguistic; it creates operative strategies for a mobile positioning that take these new forms of knowledge into account; it proposes concrete assemblages for rethinking the very question of what is at stake in pedagogy, in practice, and in collective experimentation (p. 53).

Autoethnography provided a means of tracking the constructivist processes of personal reconciliation, which, beyond the inclusion of field notes, reframed research-creation as an experiment in creation, research, and the self.

The latter becomes an integral assemblage within both the research process and, by providing insight into lived experiences of settler subjectification and desubjectification in sovereign display territories, is a valuable source of knowledge itself (Ellis & Adams, 2014; Kovach, 2021). Guattari (1995) described subjectivity in terms of complex assemblages, which explains how multiple forces and their environments (e.g., special interest groups, sovereign display territories, irreconcilable space of Aboriginality, online platforms, etc.) shape our identities and activities. While I tell this research-creation story from a first-person perspective, it has been deeply informed, decolonized, de-formed, and re-harmonized through the creative processes I experienced with a research collective. As as a white settler collaborating with Indigenous research partners on what is recognized as both Treaty territory and unceded territory, my research-creation story begins (and ends) with respect to a hermeneutics of

suspicion. The hermeneutics of suspicion refers to the deeper hidden meanings that connect research to power, ideology, or unconscious motives (Ricoeur, 1970).

Critical autoethnography helped me retain a focus on the influences of culture and power in my research as our collective was affected by hegemony and, it helped me facilitate inquiry into cultural subjectivities and intersectionality that was reproducing social inequalities in my research-creation context (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021). My suspicious location as a white male among Cree and Anishinaabe matriarchs increased my awareness of patriarchy and antiquated performances of masculinity, which have been detrimental to my relationships in many contexts. Following Kovach (2021), I examined the performances I've inherited as a cis normative, heterosexual, able-bodied, upwardly mobile white middle-class male. Opposite to the social milieu of restrictive masculinity norms are Indigenous research paradigms that place conciliation at the centre of collaborative work. *Miyo-wicêhtowin* is a Cree saying about good relations, which provides a relational continuum upon which settlers and other outsiders can be understood and positioned between trust and distrust (Kovach, 2021). The stakes of trust are heightened where credibility stress is a factor. Credibility stress refers to outsiders who are invited to sovereign display territories and do not conduct themselves respectfully, which puts the community member's reputation at risk (Kovach, 2021). The awareness that my conduct would not only reflect badly on me but would also compromise the credibility of the people who vouched for me, provided extra motivation to work thoughtfully and within a relational framework. As a settler researcher, the continuum of trust/distrust represented the health of my research-related relationships, and this was useful to gauge whether my responses to difficulties arising from university politics were trustworthy or not. Personal reconciliation allowed me to deconstruct truth and reconciliation schemas that did not disrupt my own orientations to

coloniality at the university, which was agitated by my desire for a position in it. My ethical response to this weakness for power was to maintain relational connections through music as a commons³ and to ask knowledge keepers and other knowledgeable friends about cultural protocols in this context.

Kovach (2021) writes “there is risk in bringing Indigenous knowledges into the academy while individual and systematic racism persist; however, proceed we must because much is at stake” (p. 11). In writing as a non-Indigenous person about my experiences collaborating on research-creation, I attempt to convey my good intentions for research partnerships that are conducive to collective anti-colonial flourishing at the university and elsewhere. In assuming this ethical stance, I follow a research-creation tradition to “...expose the violence of settler colonialism and anti-Black racism in order to create more just and flourishing worlds” (Springgay, 2022, p. 19). Since grade school in the 1980’s I have witnessed my Indigenous friends, and their families suffer the effects of colonialism. Later, in the helping field, I learned about the nuances of settler colonialism and was told about how unforgiving intergenerational systems of oppression are toward Indigenous folks who are struggling with the ways institutions are imposed upon them. As I have continued to develop as a therapist, these disparities have eaten through my conscience and soured my attitude toward the psychotherapy profession. The holes this left in my professional persona are being stitched together by more competent models of praxis, inspired by the learning and experiences that I recount in this study. My motivation for undertaking anti-colonial work resonates with the desire that Kovach (2021) has written about:

³ In their book *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri (2009) refer to the commons as the collective resources and forms of social cooperation that stand in opposition to capitalism and the privatization of resources, services, and social life. The availability of guitars (purchased as tools for research-creation), provided opportunities for a collective social order premised on creativity and harmony.

“to construct new, mutual, relational forms of dialogue, research, theory, and action- a sphere where contempt withers and a moral ethos can flourish” (p. 12).

Autoethnography facilitated the analysis of my inner experience, the tension between conciliation (e.g., knowledge that brings us closer together) and representations of reconciliation (e.g., gestures that pose as reparations), which in-turn supported my journey of personal reconciliation. Representations of reconciliation are what Dene scholar Glenn Coulthard (2014) refers to as politics of recognition. These are mainstream liberal practices of cultural recognition such as symbolic gestures (e.g., I use the medicine wheel in one of my lectures, but retain a Western epistemology throughout the course), and identity politics (e.g., a settler calls out a colleague for not making a land acknowledgement during a meeting), that are ineffective when they leave colonial structures unfettered. A politics of recognition refers to various means for incorporating Indigenous people and territories into the capitalist mode of production (Coulthard, 2014). There are endless enticements for our work at the university to settle on the status quo of recognition in a neoliberal context, which is an individualizing political orientation that disrupts economic, social, and political alliances that challenge systems of domination. White settlers are particularly vulnerable to this system as it continues to benefit us the most.

Roediger (2007) has written about the way that “white” feelings are connected to status and the way that white-skin privilege (all premised in the heritage of settler colonialism, slavery, and racism) was conferred historically upon Irish workers by elite whites. I have noted this influence at the university as well, with the dominant presence of polite white feelings in faculty meetings and the use of psy-discourses to regulate anti-colonial critique. Those of us performing limited-term cognitive labour grapple with our anxiety related to the threat of downward mobility and white feelings are dangerous enticements to forget the common interests that we as

white folks who grew up working class shared with our working-class Indigenous friends and other racialized folks. As a white working-class kid, I witnessed the stunting effects that capitalism had on my family, the ethnically diverse working-class families of my friends, on our relationships across households, and our subsequent experiences of alienation from each other, from ourselves and from our surroundings. I wanted to take care that any benefits of research-creation would be shared and that it would contribute to more than my PhD. Loveless (2019) asks: “How might we best mobilize research-creation as a site of resistance and remaking within ever-more-corporatized university spaces?” (p. 39). To answer this question, I listened closely to my research collaborators for guidance about what would be of use to them about the notion of reconciliation and to this point, I acknowledge the generosity, cultural knowledge, and strategic resistance of the students, faculty and staff at the IPC. I make a special mention of the work of Cree knowledge keeper Susie McPherson Derendy, whose insight, musicianship, commitment to Indigenous teaching and learning, spiritual guidance, living example of reconciliation, critical mindedness, and compassion were instrumental to the trajectory of this project. When I think of Susie and the members of my research collective, I relate to the words of ethnomusicologist Beverly Diamond (2012):

we should be prepared to query the terms of our (often self-described) collaboration. One of my “collaborators” recently asserted that she never collaborates; she says that she helps me out of friendship and because it is the way of her people to assist when asked. She stresses that it is my responsibility to use the knowledge she shares with me ethically.

Collaboration, then, is not a verbal veneer that absolves anyone of individual responsibility. (p. 10)

In writing this from my own perspective, it is my intention to take individual responsibility for the interpretations that I am sharing. My hope is to demonstrate personal reconciliation, as a living curriculum that calls us to be responsible with the lessons we learn and to apply them in new ways and in new contexts. For me this is teaching at the university in ways that honor the time that cultural teachers have taken away from their myriad other community commitments to help me in my work teaching and helping others. To not overburden local cultural teachers, I drew upon the work of other Indigenous scholars, especially Margaret Kovach's (2021) work on methodology to develop the cultural competencies required for shaping research-creation in Indigenous contexts. I also acknowledge the generosity of composer and music professor Jason Young, who taught me about Cree composition by drawing diagrams and discussing musical nuances, as well as discussing ethical concerns related to researching and recording Indigenous music. My lived experience of Indigenous education and Indigenous music has taught me about the central importance of friendship. My experience of anti-colonial praxis at the university taught me how to stand alongside friends who refuse colonial systems through their cultures, languages, and traditions. I learned to adapt to local articulations of self-determination and to support demands for students' rights to be recognized. This includes the freedom to express resentment against colonial violence. This is a refusal of psycholonization at the university and its "colonial code of relations" (Wade, 1995) where professors, helping professionals, and administrators transpose colonial social processes into the psyche of Indigenous students and others in ways that obscure the forces and actors of colonization (Todd

& Wade, 1994). Rather than navigating colonial codes, where experts are positioned, hegemonically above people suffering the effects of settler colonialism, our collective not only made space for nuanced accounts of resistance to institutional racism, isolation and alienation at the university but our research-creation trajectory was deeply influenced by them.

Beginning: Circles

Tippertonic (in Grande, 2015) describes the importance of making authentic connections with people on the front lines, which in a university context includes students, professors, administrators, and staff. We are also encouraged to work closely with communities. My collaborations with students, staff, faculty, and community members began as an anti-colonial well-being initiative in the context of a reading group where our learning processes were not to be graded or rushed. Colonial institutions like many, if not all, universities are reactionary sites that tend to reward compliance with competitive individualism and punish resistance. Our collective reading group reversed these norms and took up Glenn Coulthard's (2014) book *Red Skin White Mask: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. We sat in a circle, reading sections aloud⁴ and then discussing how the theory applied to members' lived experiences at the university and in other settings. The practice of close reading is based on Bertrand Russell's advice on how to study a philosopher by beginning with hypothetical sympathy, to develop an empathic understanding of their theories. The importance is to understand what a work seeks to accomplish in its own field of relations. Only once we understand the author's theories might we introduce a critical attitude (Manning, 2015).

⁴ A close reading technique that I learned online during the COVID-19 lockdown from colleagues affiliated with the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths University of London in the UK.

Our form of gathering also reflected the pedagogical value of “circle work” that Frye Jean Graveline (1998) described in her book *Circle works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*. The transformative circle model was familiar to members of our research collective who know Graveline and who continue to promote diverse Indigenous orientations to consciousness raising at the university. During my research conversations I was told about the impact that Graveline and other Indigenous scholars, students, and community members once had on campus, including the development of an Indigenous healing and wellness program, and the construction of a ceremony room, which was later used without cultural consultation by the university for commercial purposes, such as wine and cheese events. Research collaborators told stories about the backlash Indigenous folks including Graveline faced for challenging Western paradigms and for their anti-colonial activism against the monetization of their sacred spaces. Indigenous concerns about these experiences were shared by my research collaborators, who continue to navigate colonial systems while standing up for their rights on a campus built on their ancestral lands.

In addition to the notion of circle work, our reading group introduced other protocols for close reading on Treaty and unceded territory. My colleague and friend Bill Cook is an Indigenous language professor, and he introduced spirituality as an important aspect of learning in Indigenous contexts. We began our sessions with a smudge and words of respect for the land and each other in the Swampy Cree language. We then practiced mindfulness together, with the intention of neurodecolonization, as it has been developed by Michael Yellow Bird (2013). This practice deals with coloniality, the colonization of the mind, as a problem that can be addressed by mindfulness practices, which he argues have always been an integral part of Indigenous culture. Because colonial awareness is relevant to any mind that has been indoctrinated by

coloniality, we introduced neurodecolonization as an important practice for everyone involved in our group. This process was deepened when a knowledge keeper began to attend our meetings and shared her reflections on the readings and provided culturally specific support to group members struggling with experiences of racism, institutional backlash, and alienation at the university.

A music collective began to form around the same time as our reading group, with some overlapping membership. The IPC was the sovereign display territory that hosted our music group, which began as an educational and well-being initiative that drew upon music andragogy, with guitar and theory lessons, as well as community jam sessions with singing and musical improvisation. Building on my background as a music therapist and drawing on my experiences facilitating guitar circles in various settings (Smith, 2007), I embraced music as a generative mode for bringing people together. I began to consider the value of researching the relational power of music, which I have engaged in my entire life, and I reached out to the director of the centre about applying for a university research grant to provide honoraria for an Indigenous knowledge keeper, to purchase guitars and related equipment for a research-creation project, and to provide food to be shared with collaborators and other students at the IPC. She joined as a co-investigator and, as a Cree woman with over seventy years of cultural, spiritual, social, and ecological knowledge, along with expertise in ending violence against Indigenous women, the focus of her MA thesis, a leadership role at the university, and a deep interest in the role of music in students' lives, she agreed to provide ongoing cultural feedback to me, cultural support to the participants, and to ensure that the research site remained a safe, trust-based learning environment. These dialogues led to a proposal for a research-creation project titled *Songs for Reconciliation*. As co-investigators both of us agreed to adhere to values of respect, humility,

truth, honesty, and to promote the well-being of Indigenous students. IPC staff were invited to participate, given their understanding and deeply held values for the knowledge, culture, traditions, and lived experience of Indigenous relational perspectives.

A Proposal to Tell the Truth

Our original research-creation proposal was geared toward truth telling. Reconciliation scholars have recommended teaching truth before exploring reconciliation (Jurgens, 2020) and to this end, our original proposal had three goals. Our first intention was to engage in truth-telling as a difficult but important knowledge translation process that builds bridges across cultural and experiential differences among people living in settler colonial nations like Canada. Learning the truth allows for common understandings about the harms caused by colonialism and the drastic differences that exist between people oppressed by colonialism and those who have benefitted from it. Disavowal or ignorance about colonial violence, ignorance about diverse Indigenous orientations to life and culture, and disinterest in the concealed nature of ongoing structural oppression and violence against Indigenous people were deemed, by my collaborators, to be detrimental to reconciliation. While raising consciousness is important to begin talking about the truth, ignorance has a long historical tradition in Canada and intergenerational thought-habits are difficult to change. Yellow Bird (2013) has proposed the concept of neurodecolonization to describe “how mindlessness is deeply embedded in the neural networks of those that disregard Indigenous Peoples’ rights and concerns” (p. 302). Hidden curriculum includes norms and values that are learned in schools but that are not officially taught. It allows for implicit norms like racism to persist under the surface of the official curriculum, which renders it less amenable to formal logic and education. Following a lineage of feminist, anti-racist, anti-ableist, and

anticolonial education in research-creation (Springgay, 2022), we proposed to inquire about the role that songwriting might play in neurodecolonization, given that music “reveals the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach” (Langer, 2009, p. 199) and engages in the “subjective content of the listener’s mind” (Langer, 2009, p. 258).

Our second goal was to promote relationships through sustained creative practices by writing at least one song about reconciliation. Research-creation is a bridge that allows movement back and forth between practice and theory, and our research proposed to entail processes of give and take between talking and other forms of research (e.g., literature reviews, autoethnography) and creation (e.g., songwriting) for reconciliation at the university. This process was inclusive of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, knowledge keepers, faculty, and community members. An additional goal for engaging in a songwriting praxis was to invite settler accountability and explore reparations through collective compositions that would inspire social transformation. While we planned to write in a contemporary Western English popular folk and/or rock style, we proposed to integrate Cree, Anishinaabemowin, Oji-Cree, Michif, Dakota, and the international languages of interested participants. We also proposed to integrate other musical genres that any of our collaborators introduced. We proposed to invite others into relationship by sharing our story of reconciliation through a sound recording of the song(s). This would be circulated on social media, as well as played in conjunction with future conference presentations and other social media events (e.g. podcasts). The rationale for the dissemination of a sound recording about reconciliation was to bridge to a larger audience, given that music is a more inclusive medium for those who may be less inclined to read research articles about the topic.

Our third and final goal was to promote education and dialogue about reconciliation as an opportunity for collective well-being as a living curriculum that can be nurtured on campus and beyond. A living curriculum refers to a biographical orientation to pedagogy, in which students consider their past, present and future through the lens of a course of study (Magrini, 2015; Pinar, 2015). However, a more culturally competent model would include Derendy's notion of personal reconciliation. Reconciliation curriculum is lived when we come to understand how our lives have been shaped by colonialism, and for non-Indigenous Canadians to come to heart felt understandings that call us to ethical partnerships with Indigenous folks to demand futures for all our relations. Collective well-being is premised on the notion that as Canadian settlers, refugees and newcomers gain awareness of the inequalities that negatively impact the well-being of Indigenous people, it negatively impacts our well-being too (Smith, 2025). In other words, as we become more conscious of the causes of suffering for our friends and neighbors, our empathy and anger motivate us to work together on solutions to facilitate greater collective well-being. After we were notified that our proposal was successful, we went out to a local music shop to buy guitars. My co-researcher purchased her own so that she could support the guitar group beyond the research-creation project and my limited-term appointment.

Research and Reconciliation

To do research—of any kind—is not simply to ask questions; it is to let our curiosities drive us and allow them to ethically bind us; it is to tell stories and to pay attention not only to which stories we are telling and *how* we are telling them, but how they, through *their very forms*, are *telling us*. (Loveless, 2019, p. 24)

Traditional academic research and creative practices have historically been categorized according to different operating logics. On one hand, academic research has tended toward linear argumentation, reproducibility, and objective criteria of validity, which is meant to arrive at truth through reason (Loveless, 2019; Manning, 2015). On the other hand, creative practices tend to embrace nonlinearity, subjectivity, tacit knowledge, and embodied experience. The interweaving of theory (e.g., reconciliation) and creative practice (e.g., songwriting) in research is often presented as a binary, with one side supporting the other. Research-creation differs in that it gives equal responsiveness and weight to theory and practice (Loveless, 2019). The hyphen is a symbol of this integration, which I describe in more detail in the following section. Here I discuss my orientation to the first half, *research-creation*, which refers to maintaining an attentiveness and openness to what we are participating in.

Some of the earliest stories about reconciliation appear in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Old French cultures in reference to the “action of restoring humanity to God’s favour” (Oxford University Press, 2009). That the roots of reconciliation lead back to the church, which played such a decisive role in the colonization of North America, make it a difficult concept for reparations at universities declaring allegiance to decolonization. Despite this Christian genealogy, reconciliation frames the potential of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in many other ways and therefore can be mobilized for many different projects. Because it means different things in different contexts and across different group formations, it is prone to conflicting interpretations with vastly different practical implications. In the Canadian context it is a process that arose in response to the Federal government’s oppressive, if not genocidal, intentions against Indigenous peoples. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015) defined reconciliation as a process of restoring and

maintaining mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous people and the Canadian state. It has since been extended to institutional and individual efforts to address issues related to the harms of colonialism (Sterritt, 2023).

Despite historical examples of large-scale conciliation in Canada, such as the Two Row Wampum Treaty, the Peace and Friendship Treaties, the Royal Proclamation of 1763, and the Treaty of Niagara in 1764, as well as more recent examples like the 1981 Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the 1995 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the broad definition of reconciliation remains problematic. This is especially true when it obscures the fact that reconciliation is at odds with imposed legislation, such as the Indian Act of 1876, which facilitated the mass settlement of Europeans on Indigenous lands (Garneau, 2016). Further evidence against the notion of prior conciliation includes the Doctrine of Discovery (1493), the Gradual Civilization Act (1857), the Gradual Enfranchisement Act (1869), the Potlatch Law (1884), and other legislation and colonial ideologies that have perpetuated land theft, illegal settlement, and genocide. The notion of reconciliation also often fails to capture the unique historical and cultural perspectives of Indigenous folks who resisted colonialism and continue to fight for self-determination, decolonization, and do not necessarily share a desire for reconciliation with oppressive governments, colonial institutions, or settlers who reside permanently on their traditional hunting, fishing, trapping, and trading grounds.

In most conceptualizations of reconciliation there is an emphasis on harmony. Some of our research collaborators pointed out that in fact “Indigenous people have been working toward reconciliation for a long time.” They discussed reconciliation as something that they have been doing among themselves, to restore peace and harmony in their own communities, in response to the complications arising from colonial violence and oppression. The notion of reconciliation is a

sensitive topic when uttered by a settler, who might use it discursively to signify empathy and contrition in some social contexts and then betray these discourses by concealing colonialism in other contexts. Given the obfuscations and injustices upon which reconciliation is touted and considering the unrealistic wishes of many settlers to quickly “put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future” (Garneau, 2016, p. 37), the notion of reconciliation was a problematic construct at the outset of this research-creation project.

Despite its conceptual difficulties, reconciliation is a concept that also infers wider social transformation, and music has always played a central role in disseminating new cultural knowledge and inspiring social movements. Consider the history of music in the labour movements of the 1930’s, trade union songs, songs against apartheid in South Africa, Sandanista songs, and Anti-Soviet songs in Poland. Foucault’s (1972) insights about the history and context of concept formation, provide a logic for us to understand activist songwriters as historians. Operating like an archeologist rather than a historian, Foucault (1972) studied how history is produced by following certain rules, including the rules about the doing of history. By analyzing activist discourses in music, we can say something about how they understand themselves and their conceptual object (e.g., anti-apartheid) in ways that make history. Returning our focus to reconciliation, there are some well-known examples of settler Canadian musicians exploring reconciliation from an anti-colonial perspective. Canadian folk musician Bruce Cockburn wrote *Stolen Land* as a protest song about Indigenous land rights and colonial injustice. The late Gord Downie created a concept album the *Secret Path* about Chanie Wenjack, an Anishinaabe boy who died trying to escape from a residential school. Downie is a powerful example of settler commitment to Indigenous rights, dedicating the final years of his life to reconciliation.

Beyond individual artists there are examples of music collectives that include Mino Ode Kwewak N'gamowak (The Good Hearted Women Singers), a drum circle focused on intercultural relationships to work toward reconciliation and healing (Davis, 2021) and the Ubuntu Choirs Network that brings people together to celebrate diversity in song. There is a history of radical Indigenous music and collaboration between Indigenous artists like John Trudell, Jesse Ed Davis, and non-Indigenous rock musicians (e.g., Jackson Browne, Jeff Beck, and Peter Gabriel). This shared affinity for rock music, exemplified in John Trudell's album *Johnny Damas and Me*, combines "traditional sounds, values, and sensibilities with urgent rock and roll" (Harris, 2023, p. 41). Drawing inspiration from this shared history of rock'n'roll and using the blueprint of the collective songwriting circles I've initiated as a music therapist, following in the footsteps of folks like Jeffrey Hatcher, I leaned heavily on a common cultural tool, the guitar, to initiate new creative relationships. My use of the guitar is an example of a technic that I have inherited as a lifelong musician and later as a music therapist. Andrew Murphy (2002) describes the practice of telling people what works in research-creation a cloning of technics. He suggests that once we have done our research, we are able to tell the readers and listeners about the technical possibilities and limitations of our methods. I will relay some of that here. My original proposal was to use the guitar circle as a technic to facilitate meaningful cross-cultural songwriting opportunities that enabled exploring the complexity of Indigenous, settler, and newcomer relations at the university. The guitar circle is a technic that has emerged from my career-long collaborations with Indigenous folks, and their cultural influences have had a lasting imprint on my work. This began when I was an early career music therapist in an inner-city drop-in centre for HIV+ folks at an organization that was called Vancouver Native Health Society. We named this group the Circle of Song (Smith, 2007). I have continued to use this structure in

many different contexts since, as a mode for establishing and maintaining respectful relationships across intersectional differences (Smith, 2012).

As a technical term, technics are not always grand. For example, jamming cover songs on a quiet afternoon is a technic that retains its relationality in part because it is mundane. Jamming is informal and it is voluntary. For example, guitar players gather like this all the time without resorting to strict power relations. A relational technic characterized this way can help avoid adversarial relations that are common at the university. Much like the acoustic guitar, technics can be mobile, and I have used them in a variety of other situations including public schools, music conservatories, roadsides and sidewalks, municipal parks, conferences, anti-violence workshops, and now the university. Song writing is another carry-over from my music therapy praxis, where co-writers/clients can re-create their subjectivities in relation to a problem that they are in the process of overcoming (Smith, 2007/2012). However, this shift toward more intentional and structured forms of creation also changed who felt able or willing to participate. When songwriting groups began to replace our guitar circle jams, many of the singers, some of the musicians, and most of the members who came to listen and participated passively during our IPC jam sessions did not join us for the song writing sessions.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe how forms of content and forms of expression shape group transformations. Forms of content are understood in terms of the bodies involved, both human and non-human. The content for our collaboration included the members of our collective, our instruments (e.g., guitars, drums), smart phones and lyric application software that supported our technic of singing and improvising. When we initiated a move away from the informal tradition of using our phones (networked electronic bodies) that facilitated chords and lyric sharing of our favorite songs, to labouring for lyrics about a convoluted concept like

“reconciliation”, we experienced a shift in the plane of expression. When we shifted from forms of content that were familiar to us (e.g., singing our favorite songs) to a notion like writing Songs for Reconciliation, participation decreased. The introduction of lyric writing tasks, new “bodies” (e.g., microphones, computer, software) and new venues, changed our patterns of interplay and introduced the figure of the songwriter into our collective discourse. This is an example of how a shift in the domain of signs can alter a social setting. Our jam group existed on a musical plane of expression that involved signs like song lyrics, chord diagrams, musical key and tempo data. The shift from a general *musical plane of expression* to a *political plane of expression* (e.g., reconciliation) instituted an incorporeal transformation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). An incorporeal transformation occurs when changes in how we express our relationships come to influence those very relationships (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). While we continued to rely on familiar signs from the musical plane of expression for creation, the political plane of expression shifted our attention from music as a collective gathering force, to the effects that power was having on our subjectivities as individuals, and as a research collective. The move from informal jamming where everyone is invited to participate at their own discretion in their own way (e.g., from playing guitar and singing to tapping their foot to the beat), to the more formal task of songwriting introduced new forms of governmentality.

Musicologist Dylan Robinson (2020) has written that providing Indigenous singers, songwriters, and instrumentalists opportunities to record in a Western musical context, rather than orienting from their preferred genres, configurations, and venues is less about inclusion and more about importing or extracting. We continued exploring Westernized fragments of reconciliation in the recording studio, but with the support of a Cree composer and professor of music. His contribution not only provided technical expertise in terms of production, but he also made

musical contributions and discussed the importance of observing cultural ethics when working with Indigenous music in the studio. We began to move our inquiry into other university spaces as well, where established technologies of power function (e.g., recording studio, student practice rooms, university café, the Faculty of Education building where I taught). During our songwriting sessions we continued our non-structured conversations for gathering knowledge and it appeared that these spaces introduced new power dynamics. The stories that students had shared previously about life back home, the joking, and the group-singing were replaced by more silence.

During our songwriting sessions we had non-structured conversations, which, following Kovach (2021), differ from interviews due to their open method for gathering knowledge. We talked openly about cultural concerns, such as the lack of words in Indigenous languages for reconciliation. Some of my collaborators talked about how reconciliation isn't a concept that makes sense nationally, but re-iterated that Indigenous communities are working within their own cultural frameworks, to reconcile with each other in response to the harmful effects of colonization and lateral violence in their communities. We discussed the importance of language revitalization in this process and agreed that our songwriting should honor some of the major language groups in the area (either Cree, Oji-Cree, Anishinaabemowin, Dakota, or Michif). We wrote a song in Anishinaabemowin, but that collaborator left the study after feeling unappreciated by the university (likely I contributed to that by reserving funds for identified knowledge keepers only, and community members were not compensated financially).

As we continued to meet in circles, our singing and composing in English was superseded by Cree concepts, as well as Anishinaabemowin, and Oji-Cree language traditions. Collaborators began calling home to ask their parents about words, phrases, and to get proper

translations. This connection to home had a revitalizing effect on some of our collaborators, while it caused grief for those collaborators whose parents did not learn their traditional languages. The collective held them and worked through a mix of sadness and anger about the cultural genocide that every group member was dealing with, except me. This was about to be a period of transition for the study. Around this time, after experiencing disrespect and consequent alienation during her time as director, my co-researcher made the difficult decision to move back home. I understood the importance of this move for the sake of her well-being as I had personally witnessed her being disrespected at team meetings in front of a large group of people, and our collective silence demonstrated the normalization of colonial mentalities at this institution.

After her departure we were able to continue the project with the commitment of our collaborators, the additional support of a respected knowledge keeper and, eventually, the incoming director. The problematic arrangement, which placed an Indigenous program under non-Indigenous governance and settler leadership, was discontinued shortly after the director's departure and eventually replaced by a more culturally appropriate arrangement that gestures toward an Indigenous governance model. This was a period of loss for our collective on several levels. In the absence of a consistent in-house Indigenous leader, our music collective began to drift in different directions and our gatherings at the IPC became less frequent. With the director gone, there were times when the IPC was locked, and I had to get keys from a colleague to open it. Then when students would arrive for connection with their peers or Indigenous staff, the first thing they see is this white guy sitting there with his guitars, big smile. Whether conscious or not, as a non-Indigenous settler guest, my presence casts a shadow of colonialism. Not everyone shares the same level of concern about this shadow, however as Indigenous writer and visual

artist David Garneau (2016) has written, settler presence can have a negative effect on Indigenous gatherings, potentially triggering a “Reserve response,” (p. 33) where Indigenous subjectivity is inhibited, or conforming to settler expectations.

If we are living in an era of reconciliation it is punctuated by historicity, with Indigenous people telling the truth about colonialism and inviting Canadians to work toward compassionate understanding and committing to doing better, then we need to assess the good that a concept like Songs for Reconciliation can achieve. Theorizing about history, is an example of doing historicity:

The historian, or any other historical subject, constitutes history through thought, and possibly research and writing, but at the same time this historian is also constituted by historical events in the course of life and through living within frameworks generated in the deeper past. (Stewart, 2016, p. 80)

As a member of a group involved in the historicity of reconciliation at the university, I stated that one of our goals for collective song writing praxis was to promote settler accountability, explore reparations, and inspire social transformation. A challenge that our collective faced was a lack of settler involvement. When I asked my trusted settler colleagues why they weren’t getting involved, they began to describe the institutional demands on them, fulfilling their obligations under the collective agreement. Just imagine my friend and Métis educator Doug Pople’s best settler voice saying: “I would but I’m just soooo busy”. I know we are all busy with the demands of university life: marking, curriculum development, grants, meetings, and service. Yet these demands are not neutral; they reflect institutional priorities that often sideline anti-colonial work.

In the research-creation collective, limited settler participation signaled less an individual failing than a structural issue: the conditions of academic work did not support sustained engagement in this kind of relational, and often difficult, practice. Without institutional space for navigating the tensions of collaborative, anti-colonial work, it becomes challenging to reconfigure priorities collectively. Following my co-researcher's departure, this raised questions for me about the university's commitment to transforming its relationship with Indigenous communities and shifted my thinking about research. While our collective remained connected through music, our efforts were continually disrupted by the ongoing pressures and priorities of institutional coloniality.

One day a small songwriting group worked on a concept inspired by Cree composer Andrew Balfour's talk, which I attended earlier that week with my children. As usual we arranged our guitar technic in a circle, however this time we moved the harmony around the circle by taking turns playing the chords that made the progression. This was inspired by Balfour's concept about thinking, hearing, and singing in the shape of a circle. A member of our collective, a singer and guitar major, assigned three of us a single chord to play (one was an inversion of the same chord), which when played in succession moved the harmony around the circle. It took us a while to get into the circular groove of the chord changes, but the flow found us. Flow is a notion conceptualized by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) that refers to any process involving an intense focus, that results in a sense of effortless action by merging action and awareness. This flow continued around the circle until our process was dismembered by an obnoxious sound. It erupted from the classroom where I had taught a class about integrating Indigenous studies into curriculum. It ripped a hole through the circle of sound we had orchestrated. I was suddenly faced with a sharp sense of apathy, which is an anticipated

effect of interrupted flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). I couldn't ascertain what was so offensive about this cacophony until one of our research collaborators referred to it as "white claps". I laughed maniacally as I registered that sound, and my affective response with this new concept. I've heard this noise and reproduced it across my lifespan in classrooms, sporting events, meetings, and concerts (although I was cautious during the Keith Jarrett Trio performance). It is anonymous, simple, and robotic. This bland form of communication, where you politely clap for anyone in a position of authority, are experienced by many of us as loud and arrhythmic responses. We see this in classes to reward rote rubric-driven presentations, and this strengthens the teach-by-numbers strategies that many students come to abhor at the university. From an early age we teach learners how to follow the script for the white-clap: stand up, sit down, take off your hat. Later we see them, clapping for Bibi and Trump. Drowning out a genocide. I didn't have a name for this training regiment, cheerleaders for fascism, but now I can say: "it sounds like you've got the white clap!" How much was my politics of reconciliation motivated by the tin ear that is trained to listen for the white clap?

Governmentality, Fragments of Reconciliation, and Conciliation

I had a growing concern that the Western pedagogy of songwriting and exploration of Indigenous attitudes toward reconciliation as research-creation activities, in the absence of settler/newcomer participation, was aligning with the wider governmentality of indigenization at the university. By this I mean the incorporation of Indigenous ideas into Western frameworks. Limiting our collective conduct to the completion of a Western song about a Western concept risked reproducing the politics of recognition that our reading group was studying. Given that I wrote the original draft, I take responsibility for an overly nationalistic Canadian orientation to

Indigenous/settler relationships, and do not include my co-researcher in this problematic. Her contributions to the proposal were based on her observations of the pre-existing music group, the benefits students had reported, and clarifying the program values of the IPC. To deal with this problem I began to study critical musicology, an interdisciplinary field that integrates history, sociology, critical theory, music theory, aesthetics, psychology, and performance. The work of Stó:lō ethnomusicologist Dylan Robinson (2020) is particularly relevant to non-Indigenous researchers involved in Indigenous music, as we require commitment and attention to unlearning the settler colonial listening positionalities that we have been trained in, a colonial phenomenon called hungry listening (Robinson, 2020). Robinson (2020) describes hungry listening positionalities as “unmarked structures of certainty that guide normative perception and may enact epistemic violence” (p. 10). The way we listen is connected to the musical cultures we have belonged to and, despite a history of being part of activist music circles, there were additional competencies that I had not yet developed.

Despite my experiences in a radical culture of music in East Vancouver in the early aughts, where I spent time as the guitarist for the activist Carnival Band, playing a wide range of global music, or in the pit band for an anarchist rock opera, there are specific cultural competencies to be aware of regarding the use of Indigenous music as a settler researcher. The idea of radical inclusionary music, where I collaborate with students, faculty, and staff to write a political song about reconciliation was intended as a socially progressive act, but as Dylan Robinson (2020) has identified, collaborations between Indigenous and non-Western musicians too often replicate representational politics by failing to address the structural inequalities that underpin inclusion. Robinson’s (2020) critique of intercultural music exchanges between Western and Indigenous traditions is relevant to research-creation, especially where we intend to

address the structural inequalities that are concealed in narratives of inclusion and redress. The very idea of inclusion demonstrates a motivation to fit Indigenous work into pre-existing art performance music genres (Robinson, 2020). Despite my growing awareness of the Indigenous roots of rock'n'roll, its appropriation by Western mass culture, always risks re-linking it to “a field of social management” (Grossberg, 2014, p. 27). Governmentality can be detected when self-cultivation methods model power over others (Foucault, 2019), and the culture of rock'n'roll is rife with problematic notions of patriarchy, misogyny, racism, and narcissism. These forms of self-discipline lend themselves to the management of others, where the band leader's drive for rock star status is not unlike other desires for power and domination in Western institutions (e.g., police officers, administrators, school principals, and primary investigators).

Governmentality ought to be a concern for research-creation in this regard. Researchers with artist subjectivities are driven by current capitalist practices where, at least partially, value is defined by individualized notions of talent and prestige-value (Manning, 2015). While I had taken care to maintain a collective orientation to research-creation, was I not still positioning myself apart from the group as an inclusive researcher and scholar. Who or what was I modelling myself after? I was struggling with the issue of seriality, which Guattari (2011) describes as a problem that occurs when a group's unity relies on structures outside of itself. Structures that are asymmetrical and non-reciprocal tend to normalize the terms of engagement for musical composition according to colonial structures and settler desires (Robinson, 2020). As PI, my Western orientation to research-creation reified a separateness that allowed for a politics of representation to govern my conduct. While my inclusion was guided by an interest and respect for Indigenous cultural content, how solid was my commitment to Indigenous structure and anti-colonial forms of inclusion? If I were the person deciding where the music would take place,

how it would be recorded, and how the ensemble or band would be formed, was I not demonstrating apathy toward Indigenous structures of performance and gathering? If so, this dynamic was complicit with epistemological violence (Robinson, 2020).

While I pondered the problem of epistemological violence for research-creation, another one of our collaborators faced it head-on in another context, for her anti-racist and anti-colonial advocacy in the classroom. She was required to sign a behavioral contract under threat of expulsion after challenging institutional norms, including the ways educational settings reproduce colonial relations through their disavowal or psychologization, and through the proliferation of overly securitized, “trauma-informed” classroom practices that pathologize disturbance and foreclose the possibility of engaging difficult, politically charged knowledge. Reframing Indigenous student resistance as a failure to self-regulate allows institutions to subject anti-colonial activists to the individualizing demands of behaviourism and its colonial tendencies for documentation and control. I was contacted by an administrator out of concern for her well-being, but because the discourse was rooted in dominant therapy culture it had the effect of individualizing this student and lacked accountability on the part of the institution. For those reasons I experienced it as an invitation to participate in a colonial desire that Garneau (2016) described as “scopophilia—an urge to penetrate, traverse, know, translate, own, and exploit” (p. 23). Lacan analyzed expressions of patriarchy as expressions of a phallic law, which is resistant to change in settler colonial societies (Skott-Myhre et al., 2023). When this law is invoked, those of us implicated in colonial institutions are pressured to participate. While I have participated in various levels of scopophilia as a supervisee and as a supervisor in the field of psychotherapy, referred to as client consultations, I increasingly steer conversations away from this type of gaze. On this occasion I offered a terse critique of how my collaborator was being treated by the

institution and took a strength-based perspective on her struggles, acknowledging the value of her social analysis and highlighting the importance of her activism in achieving the stated goals of the institution. We need folks like her challenging institutions from within, as we need to continue to do ourselves. When institutional oppression happens, we need to craft responses adequate to confront the attack, while avoiding further harm to students.

Creating space to critically engage colonialism within both the institution and my research design, without censure or adjudication, enabled Indigenous students to reconnect with histories of resistance and embodied anti-colonial knowledge. These engagements activated forms of historicity that were already present but often unacknowledged within the campus context, including localized knowledge of the programmatic and institutional dynamics shaping student experience. Situating Indigenous struggles against colonial and authoritarian formations within their own understandings of history and relational continuity reframed issues of student retention, not as matters of individual adjustment, but as questions of institutional safety, legitimacy, and the conditions under which students are able to remain within and engage the university:

Where colonial racism is not acknowledged and where it prevails, post-secondary educational environments will not be safe zones. If we do not remove the roots of racism from our collective soil, racism will grow again. This means – subconsciously or overtly – repeating a troubling historical pattern that veers towards assimilation, on one hand, and abandonment, on the other. Indigenous peoples currently in the academy are not yet in the clear; we still find ourselves on the edge of a colonial space. (Kovach, 2021, p. 259)

Programs that respond to Indigenous refusals of coloniality, in curriculum and in the classroom, with psychological measures like behavioral plans, are examples of what has been called reconciliation to colonial structures (Wyile, 2017). This is an orientation to reconciliation that demands Indigenous conformity to colonial institutions. When Indigenous students refuse to reconcile themselves to the status quo, they can be targeted, and their mistreatment can be concealed as an issue of trauma-informed pedagogy, e.g., “their anger is triggering other (non-Indigenous) students”. Institutions often demand that oppressed people become visible, what can be understood through a lens of scopophilia, by rendering them legible through frameworks of mental illness and dysregulation, thereby reinforcing colonial power relations. Strategies that pathologize matrilineal Indigenous resistance and re-frame anti-colonial activism as a lack of professionalism, are well documented across many social contexts (e.g., education, therapy, medicine, and law) (Richardson, 2006; Wade, 1997). Instituting a research-creation project delimited by reconciliation, and my goal of connecting different ways of knowing through the output of Western song forms as valid forms of evidence and knowledge, became challenging under increasingly toxic social conditions. The mistreatment of my research collaborators provoked my already skeptical orientation to our project title “Songs for Reconciliation” and raised my consciousness of historical and current colonial structures and attitudes. I gained more clarity about how exhausting colonialism is for Indigenous folks who deal with it daily.

Exhaustion has been described as an immanent critique of redundant and repetitive modes of activity on campus (Brunner et al., 2017). I was exhausted by my attempt to fit a preferred notion of reconciliation together with a methodology; to produce an artifact (i.e., an original song) to fit the idea I had about research-creation. My desire to maintain an open group model driven by radical empiricism with respect to Indigenous epistemologies was at odds with

the goal of recording an original song about reconciliation in a Western genre. An over-emphasis on the songwriting method turned research-creation into an assembly line, and I began to experience the lack of an object, a completed song. The issue of positing an original sound recording, premised in the Western popular music genre, introduced lack into our group at the outset. Lacan (1977) described lack as the locus of human motivation. As an ontology, it is lack that motivates our striving for a wholeness, or unity, that we will never fully achieve. My goal, to write and record a song, was based on past experiences I had as executive producer of a recording project called the Circle of Song (Smith, 2007). Lacan's (1977) notion of the *objet petit a* refers to an idealized past that is required for notions like Songs for Reconciliation to be recognized as adequate concepts. I had selected memories of my past work that resulted in a recording product, which became the *objet petit a*, a symbol of structural absence, that I began to project onto different objects and people to fill the void that Lacan (1977) described. When we got together to compose, it seemed like the *objet petit a* was ever evaporating on the horizon. Our harmonies and lyrics were grating against the events happening at university and the busyness of our outside lives. Our conflicting schedules (me teaching, studying, parenting, and students studying, parenting, and coming and going between school and their home Reserve) and other complicated aspects of our lives made it difficult to complete our compositions. The musicians and other collaborators wrote some beautiful chords changes, melodies, and lyrics. Given the struggles we had with the concept of reconciliation, with coloniality, and with the Western orientation to songwriting, I refer to the unfinished compositions as "Fragments of Reconciliation". Like my orientation to reconciliation, I was fumbling with symbolic objects in ways that introduced lack into our collective subjectivity as collaborators.

While Lacan argued that lack is an ontological reality of human desire, the Dakota word *Wasi'chu* identifies it as a European colonial pathology. This Sioux concept refers to settlers as “takers of the fat”, those people who take more than their share (Estes, 2015). The concept is often applied pejoratively to white settler folks, who are implicated in capitalist systems of settler colonial extractivism:

Desire is configured as lack, leading to a desperate hunger for fulfillment that can never be attained. Such subjects become hungry ghosts in their own lives, unable to connect with the experience of their own life fully. The voracious appetite of such subjects has been foundational for establishing Empire. To take more and more and more without surcease or satiation is the hallmark of the colonist and the settler. (Skott-Myhre et al., 2023, p. 10)

Brunner and colleagues (2017) described the process through which exhausted bodies and collectives reach a limit, which increases our capacity to perceive and create differently: “exhaustion can be inflected towards new possibilities of existing at the limit, which is the overall definition of life” (Brunner et al., 2017, p. iii). Exhaustion can be contrasted with the notion of burnout as: “the state of being overworked and thus somewhat dysfunctional for the place one supposedly holds in the assembly line of capitalist value extraction” (Brunner et al., 2017, p. iii). While burnout is understood as an individual failure, exhaustion provides a limit-quality (Brunner et al., 2017). Rather than being driven by lack, deeper into the endless pit of extractivism and landing in the chasm of burnout, the limits imposed by exhaustion led me back to the abundance of wonderful music around us again.

An influential example of this comes from Tahltan performance artist Peter Morin's "church of karaoke" concept, *Love Songs to End Colonization*, which is a powerful intervention that reconstitutes popular karaoke songs through a discourse of decolonization. After witnessing the beautiful collaborative work of Morin and settler singer-songwriter Jimmy Kilpatrick, our guitar circle group began to re-think our song list in terms of *Love Songs to End Colonization* (2023) (which is also the title of Morin and Kilpatrick's karaoke sound recording). Once the singers and audience follow along with the words, it becomes clear that love and decolonization are beautifully intertwined in those lyrics. As Whidden (2017) writes, Indigenous music makes sense in context as a living process, and the concept *Love Songs to End Colonization* added an invaluable discursive dimension to the technic of our guitar circle jam, which we began to renew. Our guitar circle jam sessions reverberated with popular songs that reconnected us to our listening histories, memories, and to our hopes for the future. Only viewing rock music through a temporal lens (e.g., the decline of its revolutionary potential post-1960s anti-war movement) had me overlooking the spatial significance that connects it to other political, economic, and cultural forms of power (Grossberg, 2014). The co-production of story through song has a long tradition in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, as it does in non-Indigenous and settler communities. Grossberg (2014) argues that music culture is "an active agent in the production of places and spaces" (p. 26) and that our understanding about histories must be "deployed in space" (p. 27). By singing songs as interventions of love against the exploitative nature of colonialism, we can see how popular music deployed in the right space, with the right subtext (e.g., the Indigenization/reclamation/decolonization of Western music genres), can create revolutionary expressions that are central for processes like reconciliation to have meaning. While I was at a standstill about my original research plan, feeling lost without my colleague and

co-investigator, I re-connected with a foundational task of research-creation: attending to the rhythms of disciplinary attachment and detachment (Loveless, 2019). Our collective was about to enter a period of detachment from our original research-creation coordinates. The loss of my research partner signalled the need for a radical shift in our work, and I returned to the hyphen as an opportunity to pause and reconsider research and creation processes.

The Hyphen

feeling displaced (ignorant) at the moment one feels one should be at home (knowledgeable) is the condition of knowledge making at its best, the condition that drives curiosity (as a drive to aim rather than to attain), and a condition that cannot be predicted. (Loveless, 2019, p. 47)

The hyphen that joins research and creation has been described as a “creative inbetween” (Thain, 2008, p. 2). This is significant because it differentiates research-creation from research and creation as distinct projects (Thain, 2008). As both art and science, research-creation nurtures both experiential and analytical processes. This orientation to sensory and affective modes allows for inquiry into multiple epistemologies that inform the complex act of thinking about our everyday lives in a world of shifting self-network relations (Loveless, 2019; Murphy, 2002). When my collaborators were subjected to forms of oppression that alienated them from the institution, the hyphen served an existential function: time to analyze my drive to accomplish closure through a completed song, which replicated forms of reconciliation that view it as an endpoint. Recall the way that forms of content (e.g., human and non-human bodies involved in research-creation: members, guitars, smart phones and software apps) were reconfigured by

forms of expression (e.g., songwriting about reconciliation). In the face of persistent coloniality, songs for reconciliation expressed a politics of representation, or what Deleuze and Guattari referred to as anti-production. Anti-production is what happens when we become bewitched by our own group fantasies (e.g., rock'n'roll stars We-Are-The-Worlding about colonialism) through repressive objects (e.g., Western songwriting, English grammar) that plug creativity (e.g., research-creation) into repressive signifiers (e.g., reconciliation and white claps).

The hyphen bridged multiple research methodologies (e.g., autoethnography as a mode for personal reconciliation, research-creation, musicology, and schizoanalysis) that helped me to modify the institutional object (e.g., Songs for Reconciliation) that was driving my end-point-orientation to research-creation and reconciliation. This drive was at crosscurrents with the need to slow down and provide space for what the collective needed to say and create. After losing the director of their centre my collaborators took time to engage in grounded normativity, while I took time with the hyphen to consider axiology, which Kovach (2021) states is “a term that signals to the researcher to pause, take a breath, and consider questions such as these: What knowledge is of value? What knowledge is worthwhile to study?” (p. 92). Rather than continuing to pursue subjugation through the larger politics of reconciliation governing the university, I re-oriented to meaningful local changes inside the group. I talked with my collaborators about the context of our creative gatherings, and we agreed, some of us inspired by *Love Songs to End Colonization*, to resume the guitar circles indefinitely. Under these revised conditions, I began to experience what Genosko (2000) describes as: “new initiatory acceptance and the production of a new kind of subjectivity that is not stunted by the institutions under the sway of capital” (p. 148). Writing in pursuit of reconciliation was becoming too absurd in the face of institutional colonialism and, from a technic standpoint, sticking to a research-creation structure that becomes

oppressive is methodologically incorrect (Murphy, 2002). Research-creation in Canada is premised upon the question about “what knowledge does” (Manning, 2015, p. 56) and at this juncture in our project, knowledge about Indigenous rights and anti-colonial relationships needed to do something about the top-down exercises of power and its effects on my collaborators.

The incorporeal transformation that occurred when our *musical plane of expression* (e.g., a circle of song) was subjected to a *political plane of expression* (e.g., a politics of reconciliation) was re-configured in the creative inbetween of the hyphen. The overcoming of governmentality opens creativity to transversality, which is about the kinds of relationships that exist between expression and content (Genosko, 2000). The radical psychoanalyst Felix Guattari (2011) implored social scientists to orient our work away from scientific references and metaphors and toward “ethico-aesthetic” paradigms. I’ve come to understand the hyphen as an ethico-aesthetic bridge that, by evolving through various technics and research methods, extends multiplicities across the duration of projects. Ethico-aesthetic paradigms mobilize ethics, politics, and aesthetics in pursuit of new forms of subjectivity and configurations for social organization (Guattari, 1995). The hyphen was an ethico-aesthetic-inbetween with my object-oriented songwriting approach on one hand, which overemphasized Western notions of creation and reconciliation research, and the algorithms of *mistikwaskihk* (the drum) on the other hand, which, as I describe in the next section, moved our technics away from Western songwriting methods and toward anti-colonial Indigenous expressions of *miyo-wicêhtowin* (good relations).

Garneau (2016) points out that the central emphasis of the TRC on establishing and maintaining respectful relationships, seems to be addressing conciliation, not reconciliation. Conciliation can be defined as “the action of bringing into harmony... a state of hostility or distrust” and “the promotion of good will by kind and considerate measures” (Garneau, 2016, p.

36). Relational Indigenous epistemologies distinguish Indigenous research from qualitative approaches that are overly concerned with Western history and intellectual concerns. Kovach (2021) writes: “new tools demand a new relationship” (p. 259) and the historicity of reconciliation/conciliation that we were composing at this university, to be in harmony with tâpwê, a Cree understanding of truth, required a cultural turn to miýo-wîcêhtowin. As I tended to the notion of conciliation, my emerging understanding of Indigenous epistemologies and Indigenous music began to have a greater shaping effect on my conduct as a researcher in these sovereign display territories and beyond them.

Creation: *Waniskâ*

At the heart of a cultural renaissance, Indigenous or otherwise, is a restoration and respectful application of that culture’s knowledge systems. Colonial history and contemporary racism persist in disrupting the ability of Indigenous peoples to uphold knowledges by cultural methodologies. (Kovach, 2021, p. 11)

Ethics of grounded-normativity need to be practiced in research-contexts, not just discussed. As Indigenous grounded-theory, grounded-normativity is best understood in collaboration with knowledge keepers and Elders to structure ethical relationships within research contexts that honor the earth and our relationships with each other (Coulthard, 2014). Our research collective received guidance from a knowledge keeper who introduced a song called *Waniskâ*, written by a relative of our collective during similarly difficult times at this university. *Waniskâ* was written to wake us up and *nikamo* (i.e., sing together) against

colonialism at the university. As colonial histories were repeating here, this song had local cultural relevance. It had additional meaning, as the knowledge keeper was Auntie to our anti-racist advocate/research collaborator who was now commuting 2.5 hours away from her family to complete her classes at a different campus. Songs and their histories carry experiential knowledge, and Waniskâ represents the historical struggle for Indigenous sovereignty at this university. It provided an epistemological alternative to the original research-creation methods for collective songwriting and moved our collective closer to a pre-figurative Nêhiyaw ethos for decolonization at the university. Coulthard's (2014) prefigurative politics emphasize cultural practices that introduce Indigenous alternatives to colonial power. Waniskâ promotes the revitalization of Indigenous languages and culture, which is important for cultural resurgence. Songs like Waniskâ remind us of who we are when we are together and the words invite all of us: iskwewak (Women), napîwak (Men), squesisak (Girls), nabesisak (Boys), and we would add âyahkwêw, a Cree word for non-binary gender for two-spirit singers (Pyle, 2018), to nikamo (sing out loud).

Waniskâ



Waniskâ iskwewak

Waniskâ napîwak

Waniskâ squesisak

Waniskâ nabesisak

Waniskâ âyahkwêw

Nikamo iskwewak

Nikamo napîwak

Nikamo squesisak

Nikamo nabesisak

Nikamo âyahkwêw

Translation Susie McPherson Derendy:

Waniskâ: Wake up

Nikamo: Sing

Iskwewak: Women

Napîwak: Men

Squesisak: Girls

Nabesisak: Boys

Âyahkwêw: Non-binary (Pyle, 2018)

One could argue that my understanding of reconciliation discourse began as a kind of groundless normativity and, while Songs for Reconciliation inspired some beautiful fragmented sonic landscapes, it was singing traditional songs in Cree and Anishinaabemowin languages, listening to the stories of students, knowledge keepers and their relatives, and being invited to tell my own, that situated me differently on Treaty and unceded territory. Indigenous leaders teach relationality and connectivity by “...asserting historical consciousness, citizenship, and nationhood that are informed by their place-based philosophies, ceremonial practices, and ontological priorities in relation to their lands as they know them.” (Donald, 2009, p. 6)

Members talked about the drumbeat as a tribute to the heartbeat of mother earth. Waniskâ calls first to iskwewak (women), perhaps in recognition that iskwewak were the first people to receive the gift of mistikwaskihk (the drum) in this part of the world. We appreciated the cross-cultural gift of well-being/medicine created by music, that connected each of us to spirit in our own ways and at our own pace. The flexibility of the song as technic and the algorithm of mistikwaskihk was a more powerful cultural response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to decolonizing action. The Cree notion of nisitohtamowin infers that a speaker and a listener have reached an agreement, which results in understanding (Young, 2023). Waniskâ was introduced to our collective as a song for everyone to sing and we were told it could be recorded in the studio, which we did. I also recorded a reprise of the melody on solo guitar to share my appreciation of the melody with our teacher.

My orientation to personal reconciliation became less about how I governed myself and my creativity (e.g., making something original and being recognized for it) and more about recognizing where I am. Kovach (2021) cites Cree Elder Joseph E. Couture who explains: "Everybody has a song to sing which is no song at all; it is a process of singing, and when you sing you are where you are" (p. 80). Boundary objects like songs are plastic enough to evolve in local contexts, and robust enough to retain a common identity that can be translated across disciplines and sites (Star, 2010). Said otherwise: The song remains the same. While a shared interest in song oriented me toward conciliation, it was the affective intensity of *i-māmawinikamoyahk*, which Bill Cook (personal communication, November 9, 2023) translated as "singing together" in the context of disalienation, that animated its realization as a form of political spirituality, where collective expression becomes a site for decolonization. As a non-

Indigenous person learning about disalienation through Indigenous music in a sovereign display territory, I was inspired by Foucault's outsider reflection on spirituality as:

a certain practice by which the individual is displaced, transformed, disrupted, to the point of renouncing their own individuality, their own subject position. It's no longer being the subject that one had been up to that point, a subject in relation to a political power, but also the subject of a certain mode of knowledge [savoir], subject of an experience, or subject of a belief. (Foucault & Bremner, 2020, p. 124)

The spiritual experience of i-māmawi-nikamoyahk (singing together) is an example of the pedagogical enactment that Donald (2009/2012) refers to as Indigenous Métissage, a research sensibility that causes one "to question their own assumptions and prejudices as limited and limiting, and thus foster a renewed openness to the possibility of broader and deeper understandings that can traverse perceived cultural, civilizational, and temporal divides." (Donald, 2009, p. 5-6)

I was invited by members of the drum group to perform with them at a Spring feast to celebrate the Indigenous excellence of graduates from the Indigenous teacher education program who were preparing to return to their home communities as certified teachers. In addition to performing, I was asked to volunteer and tasked with serving food to the students and their guests at the event. Learning the protocols of the feast and being of service in this circle of celebration was an honor. As these were my last days as a settler on these territories, I performed these duties with an increasingly heavy heart. Our group stood in the middle of the circle made

up of all the celebrants. We sang several songs that transmit important cultural knowledge about history, genealogy, thought, and beliefs about our relationships in and with the world (Kovach, 2021). This included the local song *Waniskâ*. My involvement in the performance at this cultural event can be interpreted as a mode of creative dissemination that aligns with Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies (Kovach, 2021). The hearing of a performance like this is culturally relevant because it connects to the wider methodology of oral stories that exist in the now (McCall & L'Hirondelle Hill, 2015; Kovach, 2021). The value of a song is in its correct use and not necessarily in a singer's ability to manipulate musical elements. A song is said to be effective when it evokes an emotional response in the listener, de-emphasizing the technical proficiency of the performers (Whidden, 2017). As we sang, I looked out at the surrounding circle and saw graduates and their family members singing along with the songs that were familiar to them. My time singing with this group led to a lesson in political spirituality:

Rising up must be practiced, by which I mean one must practice rejecting the subject status in which one finds oneself, the rejection of one's identity, the rejection of one's own permanence, the rejection of what one is. It's the first condition for rejecting the world. (Foucault & Bremner, 2020, p. 133)

Political spirituality refers to the collective spirit that emerges when cultural movements work to overcome oppressive regimes, an act of rejecting and moving beyond a colonial world, otherwise known as decolonization.

My plan for exploring the value of song for reconciliation (axiology) shifted in response to the experience of my collaborators and the knowledge (epistemology) shared by a diverse Indigenous community about what to do next (Kovach, 2021). Research-creation for reconciliation was transformed by political spirituality in the context of anti-colonial ethics and Cree music. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I approached Nêhiyaw teachings with cultural humility, using the research-creation process to take time to reflect on how to engage these experiences responsibly without appropriation. I recognize that, without following Kovach's framework for Indigenous methodologies and "...seeking out Elders, attending to holistic epistemologies, and participating in cultural catalyst activities" (Kovach, 2021, p. 54), this research knowledge would not have emerged. Through autoethnography and storying a collective process from research-creation to Waniskâ, I've attempted to differentiate reconciliation research driven by governmentality, from tâpwê, a Nêhiyaw word that means to speak the truth (Kovach, 2021). The hyphen became an askesis for personal reconciliation. Askesis is a spiritual practice of self-discipline, which has been defined as the living substance of philosophy (Foucault & Bremner, 2020).

A praxis such as personal reconciliation offers a living example of anti-colonial curriculum, one that facilitates the "exercise of oneself in the activity of thought" (McWhorter, 2003, p. 8). What I encountered was a reminder, something I have experienced differently in other contexts, that music opens possibilities for ethical relations. The ongoing generosity of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, in offering alternative modes of relationship to the failures of settler colonialism and capitalism, presents an opportunity to awaken from the conditions of colonialism. This opening toward decolonization can also be understood as an ethical and affective reorientation, one that resonates with questions of political spirituality.

Foucault argues that Western societies experienced a loss of political spirituality following the Renaissance and the crisis of Christianity (Foucault & Bremner, 2020). Writing in the context of the Iranian Revolution, he suggests that political spirituality cannot be grasped through external analytic frameworks but must be engaged on its own cultural and historical terms (Foucault & Bremner, 2020). The cultural terms of Indigenous spirituality emanate from the multiplicity of natural forces at play in the universe which, as a polytheistic orientation, differ radically from monotheistic religions (Hillman, 1975; Kovach, 2021). This relational metaphysics offers alternatives to right-wing Christian fascist governance structures that are developing rapidly in the USA and proliferating elsewhere. The logical relational metaphysics of notions like all my relations, opens the irrational metaphysics of materialism to inquiry about the effects that capitalism and private property are having on family structures, friendships, work contexts, economics, and politics on Turtle Island (often referred to as North America).

When my boundary object, *Songs for Reconciliation*, woke up to Waniskâ, the governmentality imposed by my orientation to Western research methodologies was overcome by political spirituality. Political spirituality arises with abductive knowledge, the flash of holistic knowing through a confluence of observations, instincts, and experiences (Kovach, 2021). Becoming a drummer in an Indigenous drumming group with Cree and Anishinaabe Matriarchs, created the conditions for me to experience what Foucault referred to as “becoming other than what one is, other than oneself” (Foucault & Bremner, 2020, p. 124). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write about the notion of becoming as a tendency that occurs on a spectrum between molar identity (e.g., my identity as a patriarchal white cis male settler) and more molecular forms of subjectivity (e.g., becoming-woman). Perhaps this was demonstrated when our drum group was introduced by a knowledge keeper during our performance at the feast as:

“the women will sing and drum”, there was some laughter, and then it was added “oh and Jeff” (who is becoming other than what one is).

The notion of becoming-woman was used by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to describe changes that respond to the social dominance of molar subjectivities like white patriarchy. As a white cis-male settler drumming with Cree matriarchs, I did not imitate feminine conduct or wear women’s clothing. My orientation to the discourse of becoming-woman speaks to the experience of singing, talking, sharing food and respecting a social group that has been targeted by patriarchal colonial violence (i.e., MMIWG2S+). Becoming-woman is another way of referring to the transformative experience of practicing feminism, which is a political position that can be supported by any gender. In this context, becoming-woman is a mode for anti-colonial gathering. It is also related to the task of listening differently, away from settler listening positionalities, and toward a more holistic way of hearing. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have argued that becoming is not necessarily a desirable process, because its capacity to destroy us is as likely as it is to open the door to fruitful experimentation (replacing molar structures like “settler” with something more liberatory). I suggest that there is a kind of holding environment that knowledge keepers create that facilitate experiences like political spirituality. So, while some aspects of our subjectivity can be destroyed, there is the potential for other aspects to be enhanced.

Settlers in hegemonic positions, such as primary investigator/researcher, can pay attention to how experimenting with intersectional power can produce an unsettling agency, like becoming-woman. The creation side of research-creation offers an immanent orientation to research collaboration, which subjects our thinking and learning to surprise. Those of us ready for this kind of experiential and embodied learning are moved beyond the familiar and

prescribed, toward unexpected insights that activate our transformation as subjects. Experiences that occur prior to cognition and representation, when we allow for new learning to take hold of us, is elusive and pathic. *Pathic* refers to forms of knowledge that emerge through the body as lived experience. The pathic is a form of sym-pathy, which differs from forms of empathy that merge with the object (O'Donnell, 2018). *Sym-* refers to a sense of being-with-the-other, that welcomes them as an autonomous subject and preserves mysteries about our differences that cannot be grasped or mastered. This is a way of respecting the sovereignty of identities and it promotes a way of being-with that respects the private lives and lived diversity of research collaborators. A friend in a research context is someone who appreciates the other's presence without staking a claim to them or falling into an illusion of ultimate knowing (O'Donnell, 2018).

While the pathic power of political spirituality is transformative, it is important to note that as an unsettling agency it is still a bounded activity. This means that it is constrained and limited to serve a destabilizing function that does not benefit the settler in our current neoliberal iteration but works against Wasi'chu futurity. Steinman (2020) calls unsettling “a modest form of agency” (p. 565) given that it plays a supporting role in decolonization. Steinman (2020) refers to “the modest settler”, which I understand as a figure that aspires to the work of an imperfect ally, a concept that my friends and colleagues Cathy Richardson and Vikki Reynold use to describe non-Indigenous folks who work as closely to a collective ethics of decolonial justice and equality as possible. While settlers will play a role in destabilizing colonialism at the university, Indigenous leaders are central to teaching and supporting the resurgence of holistic and relational alternatives. Ending settler colonialism as a structure requires unsettling and

destabilizing praxes that refuse capitalist and colonial logics, supplanting them with Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies.

As a non-Indigenous faculty member, I have learned to work with an Indigenous research community in ways that have motivated me to be more accountable to Indigenous learners across my academic career. Jeannine Carriere described the pressure caused by dual accountabilities for Indigenous graduate students (in Kovach, 2021). Dual accountability refers to the requirements for Indigenous students to attend to their responsibilities to the traditional knowledge systems of their Indigenous communities while dealing with Western institutional expectations. Kovach (2021) notes that faculty who understand this dual accountability can serve as a lifeline by remaining open to Indigenous methodologies, supporting researcher-community relationships, and acknowledging the emotional work of doing Indigenous research. Settlers and other non-Indigenous collegium have evolving roles to play in supporting Indigenous students and faculty, by upholding Indigenous research and scholarship, as well as respecting cultural aspects of this work, including spirituality. We also need to keep in mind that Indigenous people are not members of a homogenous group and that two-eyed seeing not only provides unique sightlines between diverse Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, but it also sees what might be of use in Western theories and practices, that also differ radically from each other.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has traced the evolution of my understanding of research-creation as a transformative tool for anti-colonial relationship-building within the context of a regional Canadian university. Through the process of autoethnography and personal reconciliation, I have explored the complex interplay of (re-)conciliation (i.e., reconciliation, and

conciliation) and anti-colonialism within an academic environment that both shapes and is shaped by these forces. Thomas King and Donna Haraway have influenced how research-creation stories are told in Canada, as material-semiotic events (Loveless, 2019). The story I have told reflects not only the difficulties of reconciling in colonial institutions like Canadian universities, but also the potential for collective well-being and solidarity through collective music-making, storytelling, and an evolving understanding of Indigenous ontologies of land. I wrote this paper to tell a story about personal reconciliation and to describe material-semiotic encounters of *miyo-wîcêhtowin*: singing and jamming in circles, collective study groups analyzing Marxist/Dene critiques of capitalism, composing original chords and lyrics about reconciliation, improvising on guitars in different spaces around campus, sitting in varied configurations of contemplation, meditation, and neurodecolonization, eating food together, making jokes, sharing difficult stories and sharing beautiful stories, talking about history and the future, advocating for Indigenous student activists, engaging in collective creative research, and learning songs in Cree and Anishinaabemowin. I chose research-creation as a methodology because it was designed to prioritize relations and problematize boundaries based on the categorization and standardization of knowledge within siloed disciplines; it does this by telling “new stories in new ways in the university landscape” (Loveless, 2019, p. 28). Research-creation in a sovereign display territory led to deeper understandings of radical empiricism, and I had to come to terms with Murphy’s (2002) forthright conclusion that nothing empirical sticks to a script. While the script for technics, like a guitar circle, Western songwriting, and research interviews, were foundational to begin a research-creation project like this, the hyphen inbetween research and creation exceeded what I imagined this experience would be.

It is only after scholars carry out this personal and - institutional examination that they and their disciplines can be in a position to acknowledge Indigenous knowledge and what it means in changing an organizational culture. A new decolonizing relationship between peoples begins with decolonizing hearts and minds. (Kovach, 2021, p. 267)

The hyphen between research and creation became a practice of caring for the self as researcher. As a decolonizing force, it disrupted my orientation to extractive linear time and opened my ethics to relational responsibilities rather than the progress-driven deadlines of colonial frontier logic (Donald, 2009). Donald (2009) has described how colonial teaching and learning has denied connectivity across cultural groups, and that we need a “...new or renewed ethical framework that clarifies the terms by which we can speak to each other about these pressing issues of shared concern.” (p. 19) Care of the self is about ethical practices, and the hyphen of research-creation opened a temporal, if not liminal, space to attend to the contemporary political context. This space, in turn, allowed for the resurgence of the drum as a cultural teacher of creation on these Treaty and unceded lands. Opening a new path for research-creation led to new semiotic understandings of (re-)conciliation. The collective practice of drumming and singing traditional songs that tell stories about the lands we sing on, gave rise to a lesson in political spirituality, wherein pedagogy was inseparable from the drum; a relational being that carries its own voice, inviting us to play along with the heartbeat of the land. The drum is a symbol of Indigenous sovereignty everywhere and to be invited to play it, as a settler on these lands, was a generous example of inclusion; to learn and support local cultural resurgence, ancestral authority, and law. Indigenous law is lived and embodied through

ceremonies and other cultural events, which are often organized around the drum (Burrows, 2010). These semiotic understandings reaffirmed the deep significance of music as a cultural practice that carries layered meanings within complex social worlds. As Waniskâ re-awakened me to the transformative power of music, the Jazz Studies program at Vancouver Island University was being cancelled, a stark reflection of a neoliberal culture that devalues the arts, even as communities continue to draw strength, resistance, and meaning from them. Without the learning I gained through Jazz Studies, including courses in critical ethnomusicology, it is unlikely I would be writing this today. The neoliberal dismantling of arts education in universities is a dire reality, and one I will continue to engage with critically in my future conciliatory and anti-colonial work. Collective music-making (e.g., *Love Songs to End Colonization*, *The Circle of Song*, Songs for Conciliation, Fragments of Reconciliation, Waniskâ) is a lifelong process that can only unfold through a series of conciliatory events necessarily planned around shared ethics (e.g., mutual respect for the arts and culture, the recognition of Indigenous rights, and centering the importance of land to support a shared future for the next generations). Creation is a technic for deterritorializing governmentality and its elitist subjectivities (e.g., primary investigator, PhD candidate, singer-songwriter, self-described ally), that anchor research practices in what we already know and do (e.g., my indoctrination in an individualistic culture driven toward professional credentials and self-centered accomplishments). Our shared love of kitohcikêwin (music) led us to traditional Indigenous drumming and singing (influenced by the Cree, Anishinaabe, Oji-Cree, and Dakota traditions of these territories).

My writing about this process is political in that I am attempting to influence the reader to re-assess the modes of governmentality that situate research-creation in particular ways to the

arts, knowledge, land, and relationships. I have accepted an obligation as a researcher and professor to engage in anti-colonial resistance to hegemonic power, and to support students and service providers promoting social change across their professional careers. As Kovach (2021) states: “knowledge mobilization is not solely about dissemination - it is about capacity building” (p. 242). Professors and researchers have an obligation to protect students who mobilize Indigenous knowledge about social change and who advocate for anti-colonial human rights. These students exemplify the courage required to change the oppressive systems that we are training them for as future professionals. Those of us who work in alternative traditions to mainstream psychological practice have an obligation to rebuke our colleagues who seek to maintain an oppressive and harmful status quo. Autoethnography is a way of attending to the ethical work proposed by knowledge keeper Susie McPherson Derendy as “personal reconciliation” (personal communication, June 2024), which refers to our own autobiographical orientation to the land, reparations and promoting good relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks on Treaty and unceded lands. This is a relational circular process of the self:

My faith has led me back home to myself and to personal reconciliation, which I have in turn invited others, Indigenous or not, to begin by knowing their own stories, the stories of the land and the people that were there before. It is in circles of sharing and learning from others that I continue in my healing. And so the spiritual journey continues. (McPherson Derendy, 2022)

In telling a story about research-creation, I have described the shift from a songwriting methodology (e.g., "Songs for Reconciliation"), which resulted in fragments, not songs.

However, these experiments with refrains created nodes of belonging, which increased when we began learning and singing Waniskâ and other Plains Cree and Anishinaabe songs. It was under these cultural conditions of disalienation that my experience of abductive knowledge came to resemble Michel Foucault's notion of political spirituality. I tell this story to expand upon the unsettling of my subjectivities as a settler researcher and author engaged in care of the self or, stated otherwise an autoethnography of personal reconciliation, which is not a project for re-settlement or an affirmation of the good settler subject, or aspiring ally. Bataille's political philosophy holds that an experience does not affirm the subject or sustain their endeavors; instead, it disrupts both the subject and their projects (Foucault & Bremner, 2020). This rupture has caused a transformation that altered my relation to familiar objects like songs, classrooms, and musical instruments. While my academic research taught me more about the influence that Indigenous culture has had on music in North America, it was through learning a Cree song about waking up to specific examples of coloniality and the metalinguistic enactment of singing about singing together with Cree and Anishinaabe Matriarchs that I learned about the political spirituality of music. I learned that while music carries a universal power, it is the local historical and cultural nuances that teach us how to tell the truth, *tâpwê*, to institutional power with respect to grounded normativity. This is what folks like Susie McPherson Derendy have been teaching at this university and beyond since time immemorial.

By engaging in research-creation as a decolonial practice, I have sought to honor the teachings of Indigenous methodologies and knowledge systems, while critically reflecting on my own experience as a settler researcher in this process. The problem of alienation in the research project (e.g., the loss of my co-researcher and the institutional attack on our research collaborator) and the response (songs for disalienation), demonstrate the power of Indigenous

cultural forms of resilience and the importance of remaining open to the spiritual dimensions of anti-colonial work. Ultimately, this journey towards political spirituality, as articulated by Foucault, offers a pathway for settlers navigating the complexities of reconciliation and decolonization, creating space for both personal and collective forms of creative resistance in the face of ongoing colonialism. Reflecting on this experience through the lens of research-creation reveals that (Re-)conciliation is not a fixed destination but an ongoing, relational, and at times uncomfortable or transformative process of learning, listening, and working toward disalienation in the company of others. As a methodology, research-creation allowed me to engage with complex and shifting dynamics of power, voice, and responsibility in a way that was embodied, affective, and grounded in community-based practice. It became a space for storying knowledge differently through sound, rhythm, silence, and collective memory, rather than relying solely on academic conventions. In the context of (re-)conciliation, research-creation opens space for non-extractive, co-created forms of inquiry that attend to Indigenous laws, land-based teachings, and spiritual-political practices. It challenges settler researchers like me to resist defaulting to intellectual mastery and instead cultivate humility, relational accountability, and an awareness of how colonial logics operate within well-meaning projects. Most importantly, it reminds us that (re-)conciliation, if it is to have meaning, must be enacted through practice: in how we gather, create, sing, drum, and respond to the calls of others with care and integrity.

General Conclusion

The perspectives developed here continue a psychosocial tradition of reimagining a disalienated world. In the context of my university work, I have examined how anti-colonial orientations to education, mental health/well-being curricula, and research-creation might address the problems of colonialism, and how decolonial praxes can reshape institutional determinations both at the level of the university (e.g., prioritizing Indigenous education and educators, refusing colonial policies and curriculum, collectivizing individualized mental health practices, opening communities of practice to transversality, and re-thinking research methodologies as opportunities for disalienation) and at the level of individual subjectivization (e.g., becoming certain kinds of subjects through the cultural and aesthetic practices available for communicating relational knowledge and meaning). When self-production emerges alongside the autopoietic force of art (e.g., as discussed in the second and third papers) the entwining of organism and environment, self and world (Zepke, 2011) create conditions for the autopoietic flourishing of new subjectivities. The pedagogies and practices of disalienation I've explored here prioritize collective well-being, not solely through cultural recognition, but by actively dismantling the systems of oppression and violence that Fanon and others identified as fundamental to colonialism and its ancillary forms of oppression.

Teaching guitar and songwriting, organizing public readings and meditations on *Red Skin, White Masks*, training martial arts with my Cree boysak, research-creation, and Waniskâ taught me about ethics and how to be responsible for conciliation. These experiences rekindled what Negri and Guattari (in Zepke, 2011) describe as the collective creation of subjectivity, a joyful and precarious form of radical togetherness. Collectivity is never pure and harmless. Creative groups are always at risk of stagnation, co-optation, and hierarchization. This is why I

have argued that collective flourishing must include praxes for decoding, for example, continually unsettling the colonial and capitalist encodings that tether desire to domination and control. This decoding opens space for experimentation with more adequate ideas, freeing group life from capture and marketing that appropriates our lives and relationships. In this aesthetic practice, the focus is less on the product than on the relational process, where reciprocal engagements generate new forms of world-making. As a concept, awakening to collective flourishing exceeds the limits of neoliberal thought and calls for a pedagogical shift from a possessive and destructive world toward a living one: the world evoked in Waniskâ.

Following Berardi (2021) and Culp (2022), the death of the colonial world can be distinguished from the death of the Earth. Understood as both existential and ontological, anti-colonial artistic praxis offers a generative means of inhabiting this distinction. For Guattari, such praxis is meant to achieve what labor movements have not yet realized: the radical production of autonomy (Zepke, 2011). I described the personal outcome of this process, in Foucauldian terms, as political spirituality. As a non-philosopher, I have relied on creative processes that are not subordinate to philosophy, science, religion, or politics, but rather as privileged human activities capable of reorganizing sensibilities for co-creating new existential territories. If art can indeed shift how we hear, feel, and understand the world, then perhaps it can open us to a deeper receptivity, one that enacts what Marcuse (2013) imagined as a “non-aggressive, non-exploitative world” (Sloan & García, 2017, p. 396). This final question, whether aesthetic praxis can open us to such a world, may best express the desire that animated this dissertation. It is a desire for a pedagogical, collective, and artistic life oriented not only toward the end of what ails us, but toward the ongoing production of new worlds fit for collective flourishing.

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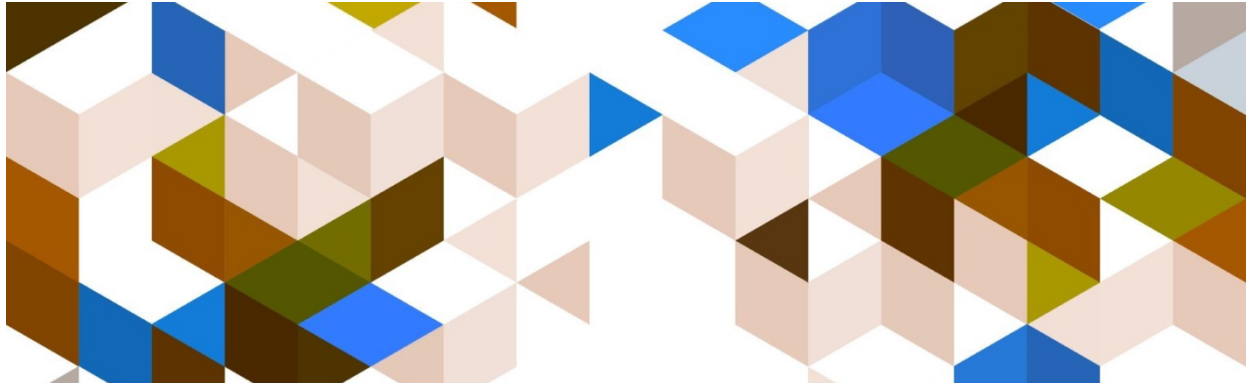
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Appendix

Instructional Guide: Integrating Indigenous Studies through Currere



02-381 Teaching of Indigenous Studies
Professor: Jeff Smith (PhD Candidate)

Overview

Objective: I offer this instructional guide to support your working through the four phases of Currere, as a framework for integrating Indigenous Studies across the curriculum as conveyed in the textbook *Teaching Native America across the curriculum: A critical inquiry*. This approach encourages a holistic examination of your own educational journey, enabling you to understand and teach Indigenous Studies from a self-reflexive and academically informed perspective.

Goals include: ongoing scaffolding of Indigenous pedagogies across the curriculum; the development of critical consciousness (e.g., exploring unconscious biases and identifying hidden curricula that persist as functions of Western hegemony in schools); the promotion of reconciliation, decolonization and democracy as lived curricula that can be demonstrated through: your presence in the classroom, as an advocate for students and their families suffering oppression, and as a role model of democracy for the larger community.

Self-Reflexivity and Critical Consciousness

In this paper you will practice self-reflexivity by adapting the method of Currere to your learning experience in Indigenous studies. Self-reflexivity refers to an increase in self-understanding that develops when you deconstruct taken-for-granted notions about human nature and the earth with the intention of critical-consciousness-raising (e.g., learning the truth about colonialism and deciding how your teaching will work against forms of oppression and toward the resurgence of liberation and democracy). For example, the textbook identifies ideological problems and “interpretive frameworks” (p.9) that present white-skinned people as “self-actualized” (I.e., self-aware, and emotionally regulated), while describing Indigenous and racialized people as “damaged” (e.g., traumatized, resentful, and stuck in the past) (Malott et al. 2009).

In your autobiographical writing I encourage you to speak “with” and not “for” people who are oppressed by colonialism and capitalism, and to develop an ability to listen closely to people’s stories about the truth- which is a skill you have demonstrated in your previous reflections. For example, many of you showed a close-listening ethic in how you discussed what you learned about residential schools from survivors at TRC events. Beyond developing skills for listening the textbook invites those of us who benefit from settler colonial privilege to “take responsibility” for the abuse, deception, genocide, and plunder of colonialism by collaborating on “counter-hegemony” against ongoing racism, colonialism, classism, and exploitative capitalism.

Please see this short blog: <https://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2018/11/settler-fragility-why-settler-privilege-is-so-hard-to-talk-about.html> for an explanation of settler privilege and discuss implications for education in your Currere.

Critical-consciousness and the Land

As a way of locating yourself reflexively, please include a section about your relationship with the land. This practice can begin by answering the question “aandi wenjiiyan?” (Anishinaabemowin), which is translated as “where are you from?” This is an invitation to trace the lines of your ancestors to your own traditional homelands. If you are First Nations or Inuit, which community are you from? Is it your traditional land, or was it designated by the Canadian government? If you are Metis is there a story about your family that connects you to the Red River Settlement? How did your non-Indigenous ancestors come to be on Turtle Island? Non-Indigenous students might ask the same thing about your ancestral homeland and how you came to be here. Did your ancestors flee poverty, colonialism, and imperialism? This practice of self-location allows us to deal with the “non-perspective” (p. 9) that Western hegemony introduces when it refers to non-Indigenous people as Canadians, refugees, and/or newcomers.

Critical-consciousness and World History

Next please relate your ancestral biography to the broader historical context of Chapters 1 & 2. Explore your interconnectedness to the complex history of humanity, for example, reaching back to the relevance of Africa and its contributions to the world through cultural diffusion. Please include the notions of convergence and/or indoctrination (defined on p. 14 and elsewhere) to describe whether the evidence-based Afro-centric view of world history, for example, changes your understanding of world history, culture, and knowledge production. Also please comment on the influence of Indigenous (what the text refers to as Native American), African, and Egyptian epistemologies on Western civilization (see chapter 1, 2 and elsewhere). Does a clearer understanding of the history of imperialist violence (the fact that Africa and Egypt were the first civilizations to establish empire through colonialism and to establish early forms of capitalism), cultural appropriation (e.g., the fact that Greek civilization was deeply influenced by Egyptian and Phoenician colonizers; that democracy is an Indigenous invention; and that Western hegemony continually tries to erase the history of world-shaping civilizations), and indoctrination (based on notions like divine right, aristocracy, Platonic idealism, and colonialism) change how you relate to inequality? If, as the authors argue, inequality is not genetic, or part of human nature how will you resist it pedagogically? (see p. 53-55)

Four Phases of Currere

Regressive: Recalling the past
Progressive: Gesturing toward the future
Analytical: Being free of the present
Synthetical: Re-entering the present
(Pinar, 1994/2019)

Regressive: Recalling the Past

In this phase, you will explore your own educational journey, considering experiences with First Nations, Inuit, and/or Metis knowledges and cultures (and/or their absence) in schools, as well as experiences with colonial indoctrination and Western cultural hegemony (Malott et al., 2009). The objective is to uncover relevant biographical experiences from your educational history, from early years to your current university experiences, as they relate to what you are learning in Indigenous Studies (refer to Malott et al., 2009). The goal is to develop the skill of critical consciousness as an asset for educators promoting reconciliation and democracy as a public good in public education systems of Manitoba and elsewhere.

Regressive: Free-Writing Method

Write/Don't Stop: Begin writing when instructed and continue without interruption. Let your thoughts flow naturally.

Don't Edit: Avoid editing or censoring your thoughts. Include everything, even seemingly unrelated or odd ideas.

Follow Your Associations: Pay attention to thoughts and ideas that spontaneously emerge. Follow word associations in your writing.

Regressive: Practice 1

Start with a biographical experience related to Indigenous education in school (see Malott et al., 2009, for a definition of cultural diffusion, and for examples of Indigenous philosophy and pedagogy in Menominee schools).

Focus on your educational experiences from elementary school until now.

Consider the holistic model of the learner in your responses (see appendix).

Begin free associating, following the guidelines of the free-writing method above.

Regressive: Practice 2

Start with a biographical experience related to colonial indoctrination in school (see Malott et al. for a definition of indoctrination, and for examples).

Focus on your educational experiences from elementary school until now.

Consider the holistic model of the learner in your responses (see appendix).

Begin free associating, following the guidelines of the free-writing method above.

Stumble through cultural taboos and forgotten memories.

Regressive: Reflection

After your writing session, review what you wrote.

Consider the holistic learning self (see Appendix)

Make note of any insights, emotions, or connections you weren't previously aware of.

Progressive: Gesturing Toward the Future

The Progressive phase focuses on imagining futures for Indigenous Studies in the classroom. You will integrate what you have learned about Indigenous philosophy and pedagogies, Western hegemony and dominant systems, and critical pedagogy. Develop a vision of the future in which curriculum provides what is needed for decolonization (see chapter 3 and 4, Malott et al., and consider which cultural, academic, and/or political figures/activists in Canada are playing a significant role in supporting/or undermining Indigenous sovereignty).

Progressive: Considerations (refer to Malott et al., 2009)

Integrate Knowledge: Integrate what you've learned about Indigenous education and the land. Apply what the text defines as problems of colonialism and imperialism and pedagogical responses (see chapters 5-9 for subject-specific examples). Translate it from the context of the United States to what you are learning about dominant systems in Canada (and other imperialist nations if these are relevant to you). Also, refer to chapter 10 to discuss how the authors describe capitalism and how education can challenge or maintain oppressive hierarchies in Western societies.

Reflect on Western Hegemony: How has Western hegemony influenced your schemas and understandings about education? You will need to define this concept for yourself and provide biographic examples.

Reflect on Indigenous Democracy: Examine chapter 1 and discuss Indigenous philosophies that promote forms of self-awareness and interconnectedness that contribute to the development of a democratic mind. How has Indigenous philosophy influenced your schemas and understandings about education?

Acknowledge Hopes and Fears: Discuss your hopes, fears, and other feelings related to Indigenous Studies, critical pedagogy, and education for social change.

Progressive: Explorations

Explore the differences and similarities between your contemporary life in Canada and the history of your ancestors.

Consider your historical lineage in the context of other untold world histories (see chapters 1 & 2 from Malott et al., 2009).

How does your understanding of cultural diffusion (especially the Iroquois confederacy) promote a vision of a vastly different democratic future (consider the story of Peace Maker in Chapter 1) in a Canada that would recognize Indigenous sovereignty? (consider chapters 3 and 4)
Reflect on the role of cultural diffusion and Western appropriation (e.g., the contributions of Africa, Egypt, Indigenous democracy).

Progressive: Pedagogical Possibilities

Consider your future role as a teacher of Indigenous Studies. Describe how you will translate any foundational knowledge or emerging understandings from these progressive explorations for your future students.

Describe how you imagine incorporating it across the curriculum (consider what chapters 5-9 recommend for each subject area). Consult with your chapter reading groups and other chapter reading groups to fill in gaps in your knowledge. Teach each other the content of your chapter in your unit planning groups. Please explain how curriculum addresses social inequities (e.g., using percentages to deal with the economic problem of race-based poverty, water contamination, corporate encroachment on Indigenous lands, etc.). Also, discuss how you could use critical pedagogy and curriculum to raise consciousness and promote democratic participation in age-appropriate ways for your future students.

Please refer to your experiences reviewing and developing curriculum in your unit planning groups. Consider the notion of collective intelligence regarding curriculum planning for decolonization and reconciliation (Kanu, 2006). How do you propose to work collectively in the future?

Analytical: Being Free of the Present

The Analytical phase involves stepping back from the past and future to focus on the present. This phase is about mindful self-reflection.

Analytical: Mindfulness

Take a breath and get settled.

Imagine the past, future, and present as separate pictures.

Reflect on what you see in each picture, make some notes or sketches.

Explore your sense of the holistic learning self in the present.

Analytical: Interconnections

Reflect on how the past, future, and present are interconnected.

Consider who else has shaped your understanding of these phases.

Which schemas are showing up in relation to each of these phases?

How has the experience of Indigenous cultural diffusion shaped your understanding of education? Were you taught with respect to the complexity of Indigenous cultures? Or did you come to understand Indigenous history and culture through the mechanistic education of the banking model (Malott et al, 2009)? Was it done in a way that credited particular people or Nations? Or was it an example of cultural appropriation?

Determine which of your schemas are in alignment with Indigenous education and critical pedagogies, and which of your schemas are not. Make a list of each. Include examples of biographic experiences (use regressive phase).

Describe which aspects of Indigenous studies are expanding your consciousness through education and self-awareness and which aspects of Indigenous education and critical pedagogies are eliciting defensiveness. Make a list of each. Include examples of biographic experiences (regressive phase).

Plan your next learning steps for Indigenous Studies based on your analysis of the interconnections between your biographical experiences of Indigenous Studies (regressive), related schemas (progressive), and aspects of the holistic learning self as they relate to the past, future, and present.

Synthetical: Re-Entering the Present

In the Synthetical phase, you bring everything together. Assess your educational experiences and consider how they illuminate your next steps in Indigenous Studies.

Synthetical: Integration

View the past and the present as if you were watching a movie of your own life. Explore any lessons your holistic learning self is teaching you.

Synthetical: Self-Awareness

Reflect on which schemas are activated as you watch the movie of your life. Differentiate between these schemas and the mindful presence of your holistic learning self, sometimes called the observing Self, as it synthesizes your ideas now.

Embrace the practice of synthesis by putting your experiences back together. An example of putting your experiences together is composing a paper (using APA), which is a story in academic language, about your life in relation to schooling. Or it could be a series of original poems, a series of photographs accompanied by text, musical compositions, or a combination of any of these. The synthesis is an invitation to put the pieces back together in ways that make sense to you.

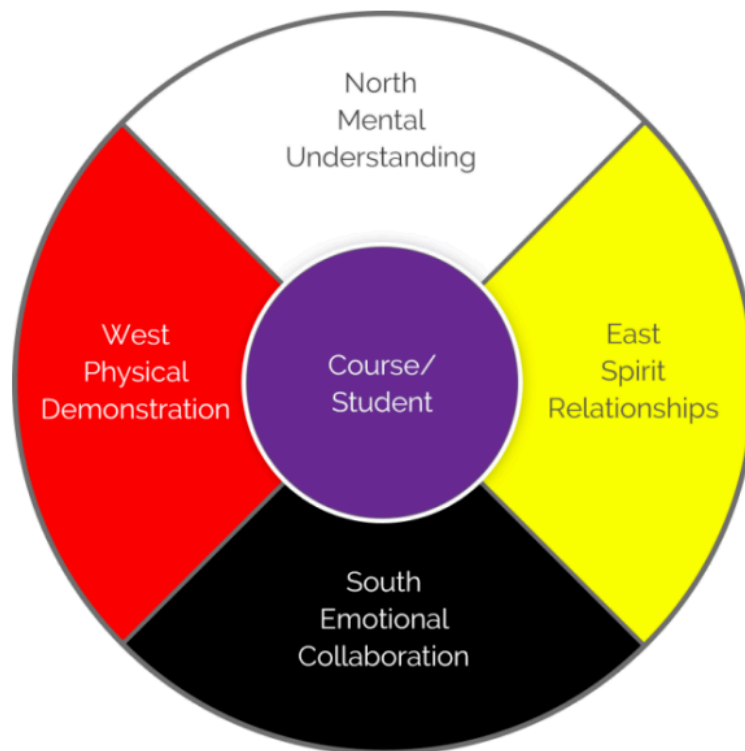
Conclusion

This instructional guide is one of many interpretations of the four phases of Currere providing a framework to integrate Indigenous Studies with a deeper connection to your own educational journey. By exploring your past, envisioning the future, and focusing on the present, you will be

practicing some of the skills required as a critically conscious educator at this momentous time of reconciliation in the field of education.

Appendix

The Holistic Learning Self (Chojko-Bolec et al.)



The Centre

The centre is where Currere takes place, where the course and the student are guided by the other four segments (which create an environment for balance and success). Incorporating the four concepts within the Currere process provides a holistic learning experience for educators and learners. (If you are following the circular model, please enter the circle in the East direction. Begin in spirit.)

The East reflects the Spirit

The East encourages collaboration and the exploration of your life experiences in the company of your peers. The spirit of Indigenous education is strengthened by connections made between students, so that the sharing of individual stories can take place. Collaboration with others and connections with yourself will clarify your place as an educator working within the dialectical

tensions that exist between Indigenous ways of knowing and persistent forms of colonial indoctrination.

The East represents adolescence and the importance of mastery. Consider what the textbook relays about the importance of mastery in education (for example, refer to the work of Mrs. Hellen Teller as well as co-author Lisa Waukau in the textbook).

The South reflects Emotion

The South represents childhood and the importance of generosity. Children are sacred. Teachers and other responsible and welcoming adults play a significant role in schools for returning children to their sacred place in education.

Consider your commitment to Indigenous education for Indigenous children, as well as critical pedagogy for Indigenous and other children who face adversity in Western hegemonic institutions. When children look to you for care and guidance, for protection from hate, how will you provide it?

Characterize how you nurture a relationship with yourself (inner life). How will you utilize critical pedagogy to deal with unkind ideologies that promote selfishness and/or self-judgement? How will you facilitate this process for young people?

The South segment reminds us of the importance of Elders and knowledge keepers as central guides for the development of emotion. How will you integrate the South through Indigenous languages?

For example:

mino-ayaa - they are good, fine.

aakozi – they are sick.

minwendam - they are happy.

nishkaadizi - they are angry.

bakade - they are hungry.

debisinii - they are full.

agaji - they are shy.

maanendam - they are sad

The West reflects the physical

The West also represents adulthood and the importance of ongoing belonging. If you are an emerging adult (18-27) this is a significant segment for you developmentally. The West reflects the manifestation of learning and currere provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate your learning as it relates to your own life.

The West reminds us that land-based and hands-on kinds of learning are important. While you reflect on your currere, remember the class about land-based learning and any lesson you learned from your time in nature.

The West is also where Indigenous science takes place through watching, listening, connecting, responding, and renewing (Battiste, 2013). Also refer to chapter 7 of the text (Malott et al.),

which describes how science is practiced for the good of the community, and not as an abstract exercise.

The North reflects the mental

The North represents the wisdom carried by Elders and knowledge keepers and highlights the importance of independence.

This segment reflects the cognitive abilities of the learner, and this is where critical consciousness is developed.

The knowledge and concepts the student will need to understand within the course are conveyed by clearly stated objectives and outcomes.