Down to Earth: An Arts-based Matryoshka of Critical Place Inquiries in Winnipeg, Manitoba

by

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Abstract

This manuscript-based dissertation embodies a conceptual format of a *Matryoshka* (nesting figures), which shares multiple multi-year critical place inquiries (Tuck & McKenzie, 2018) into Winnipeg, Manitoba, and a journey through a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004, 2013; Irwin, Lasczik, Sinner, Triggs, 2024; Leggo & Irwin, 2014; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). The *Matryoshka* activates an assemblage of interconnected topics such as Indigenous sovereignty, historical removals and displacements, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) and the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (2019).

I have linked four manuscripts (consisting of one chapter prepared for publication, one published journal article, and two published book chapters), which share stories and analysis of working with land art installations (soilwork) in urban locations with Indigenous significance in the city. Manuscript 1 is titled **"Unearthing Truths"** and analyzes an abstract artwork I created by sifting soil around my children's shoes at my home as a response to the discovery of unmarked graves of children that did not come home from Indian Residential Schools. Manuscript 2 is titled **"Homeland"** and documents the creation and impact of a larger-than-life scale soil portrait I constructed of Louis Riel at Upper Fort Garry on a corporately sponsored and re-branded historical location. Manuscript 3, **"Murky Waters"***,* documents the creation of an intricate soil spiral on snow around the public commemorative monument to Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. Manuscript 4, **"Red River Removals"**, analyzes a series of bold Métis symbols I sequenced repeatedly at Riel House, a Parks Canada national historical site, and that is accompanied by haunting footprints as a way of remembering a connection to water.

Embedded within this dissertation (referred to as the *Matryoshka* of manuscripts) are perspectives of land, place, and art that shift towards relationality (Donald, 2012, 2021; Tynan, 2021; Wilson, 2008). The artwork I created in and between each manuscript represents a visible negotiation of differing knowledge systems through an a/r/tographic embodiment of ethical space (Ermine, 2007). I layer methodologies as part of a journey towards understanding place and addressing two main research questions: 1) How can critical place and arts-based inquiries with pop-up soil art installations support (public engagement and teacher education with) decolonizing educational praxis in settler-colonial systems? and 2) What does earth-based art (soilwork) offer as an emerging methodology? Additionally, I frame both initiating and linking questions to value the dynamic and cyclical quality of learning from land and the layered interactions and power of place.

I share three horizons of soilwork that create unique topography within the creative realm of arts-based research, and which unearths the methodological potentialities of soil to understand what a localized version of decolonization means in this powerful prairie place. This dissertation takes an undisciplined approach (hooks, 2004; Kulchyski, 2002) to embrace the embodiment of the arts and anticolonial approaches that blur the boundaries between topics in ways that resist settler colonialism and challenge what research should look like. Methods include public provocations, poetic soil compositions, walking, and guided participatory workshops with teachers. The visual data of individual and collaborative soilwork installations and praxis form *living links* to give life to the conceptual framework of this dissertation. Overall, this dissertation contributes to anticolonial arts-based research and illustrates a process of understanding ethical space that provides the groundwork for interdisciplinary research collaborations. Grounding this research in the relational process of earth-based art gives understandings of settler colonial tracks

(Veracini, 2011) and has revealed new accessible modes of addressing complex topics that disrupt dominant research progression and paradigms. Soil speaks to the stories of places, and I present soil sensibilities as new renderings of a/r/tography which connect to place and led towards relational research endeavours.

Keywords: manuscript-based; critical place inquiry; decolonization; arts-based; a/r/tography; soil; soilwork; stories; Winnipeg; settler colonialism; anticolonial; land art; land-based; relationality; installations; public art

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is a synthesis of learning from many places, people, experiences of life and loss, and ongoing inspiration from people who seek relationality and creativity as a way of understanding and becoming more connected.

This work took a long time and will always be imperfect—a reminder that it is made with human hands. I ask forgiveness for the mistakes in this dissertation—in words, in deeds, in knowledge, or in ignorance. My learning is an ongoing work in progress and many new questions have surfaced. Soil reveals how much there is to know while on this earth and how I am scratching the surface. Thank you for reading with an open mind and a generous spirit of understanding.

I want to highlight the many ways my work within these manuscripts has been supported. The Overview of the Matryoshka (see Figure 0.2) shares the titles of all the manuscripts and details regarding their publication, review processes, and key topics. Three of the four manuscripts chosen for inclusion in this dissertation have been published and, thus, have undergone a peer-review process. I am grateful for these stages of revision and, while some of the reviewers are not known, their feedback has shaped my ideas.

Initial drafts of **"Unearthing Truths: Remembering the Children that Never Came Home through Soilwork A/r/tography"** (see **"Unearthing Truths",** Manuscript 1) written in 2022 received feedback from Dr. Jennifer Markides and Dr. Darlene St. Georges along with peers through an anonymous peer-review process but was not published due to time constraints in making the necessary revisions. Their feedback helped me address my own privilege and supported the complete revision of this piece. I have submitted this prepared manuscript for review to the second edited volume for a book series, Contemporary Perspectives on Semiotics

in Education: Signs, Meanings and Multimodality called*, Reimagining Critical Multimodality in Education: From Soil to Seedlings*.

I want to recognize Dr. Ellyn Lyle for her supportive feedback on **"Homeland of the Metis Nation: A Critical Inquiry into Winnipeg's Upper Fort Garry**" (See **"Homeland",** Manuscript 2), which was my first single-authored manuscript. I am grateful to Dr. Lyle for introducing me to a process of review that was both critical and supportive and that included numerous rounds of revision. She was able to envision the seeds of my ideas and motivated me to pursue this rigorous type of dissertation format. The chapter was also reviewed through a blind peer review process. Additionally, ideas for this paper were influenced by my graduate courses in curriculum, namely Historical and Contemporary Approaches to Curriculum (EDUB 7270) and Curriculum, Culture, and Citizenship (7550). Thank you to teachers Dr. Melanie Janzen and Dr. Shannon Moore for your feedback as these ideas were developed in connection to your coursework in curriculum.

In the publication of **"Murky Waters: An Arts-based Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls"** (see **"Murky Waters",** Manuscript 3). I owe gratitude to the editorial team and peer reviewers from the *Canadian Journal of Action Research*. This publication helped connect me to a community of cross-disciplinary research initiatives focused on gender-based violence and resulted in my joining a collaborative research team. Joining the team allowed me to enhance the quality of this work by connecting me to Elder Sherry Copenance and Knowledge Keeper Brenda Longclaws and members of the Manitoba Case Study inquiry team: Dr. Kendra Reiger, Dr. Lisa Bourque Bearskin, Dr. Francine Morin, Dr. Wanda Phillips-Beck, Rhonda Campbell, Dr. Jennifer Watt, and Anna Huard. This supportive network of teachers and nurses alongside two additional research teams in British Columbia is committed

to the specific *Calls for Justice,* including for all Canadians (15.1-15.8), for Educators (11.1 and 11.2), and *Calls for Health and Wellness Service Providers* (7.1-7.9). Through these connections, I had an opportunity to be part of a research collective, which involved professional learning from Indigenous leaderships to co-design opportunities with student teachers and pre-service nurses and processes, such as talking circles and collaborative arts-based experiences using soil. This collaborative research beyond the scope of this dissertation has helped me to keep grounded in local community needs.

Next, **"Red River Removals: Unsights and Hidden Histories of Water Stories through Critical Place Inquiry and Earth-based Art"** (see **"Red River Removals"**, Manuscript 4) is a chapter in *Indigenization, Decolonization, and Unsettling: Stories from the Land*, edited by Dr. Anna-Leah King, Dr. Kathleen O'Reilly, and Dr. Patrick Lewis. Thank you to the editorial team's advice, reviews, and opportunities to share the work. I want to acknowledge that the artwork was inspired from an Indigenous land-based learning course with Dr. Brian Rice (Kanien'kehá:ka). Walking with Dr. Rice was a physical and mental exercise that helped me to not only connect with the city in which I grew up but to see it through a new lens. This experience during the COVID-19 pandemic made me hopeful for ways to bring learning beyond classroom walls. Thank you, Brian, for reading the manuscript **"Red River Removals"** during various stages.

I am grateful for the opportunities to share and further develop my ideas in many venues, including: CSSE; InSEA: Artfulness Conference; Manitoba Teacher's Society Conferences; Canadian Society for Education through the Arts (CSEA); a guest lecture at UM course "Becoming Writers: Place, Power and Pedagogy in Teaching Writing;" and UM Program days, where I began facilitating workshops with soil. Thank you for invitations to share this work.

Thank you also to all the professors and mentors at the University of Manitoba from whom I have learned in my PhD program and coursework: Dr. Michelle Honeyford, Dr. Warren Nickerson, Dr. Bruno de Oliveira Jayme, Dr. Melanie Janzen, Dr. Peter Kulchyski, Dr. Shannon Moore, Dr. Brian Rice, and Dr. Clea Schmidt. Thank you for your support of my inquiries, for the opportunities to design workshops to support teacher candidates, and for the encouragement to push creative boundaries and refine my thinking. Thank you to Dr. Xiaoxiao Du, Dr. Michelle Honeyford, and Dr. Jennifer Watt for opportunities to share with your classes, which refined soilwork in connection to multiliteracies and encouragement beyond coursework. My ongoing work reviewing, writing teachers' guides, and presenting and working alongside inspiring Indigenous authors with Portage & Main Press, a local Winnipeg publisher, has helped me think more critically about how to support Indigenous perspectives in K-12 classrooms. I am grateful for collaborations with Indigenous writers such as David A. Roberston (Cree), Katherena Vermette (Métis), Sara Florence Davidson (Haida) and Garry Thomas Morse (Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw). Since 2019, I have worked alongside Anishinaabe Co-editor Christine M'Lot on an edited collection called *Resurgence: Engaging With Indigenous Narratives In and Beyond the Classroom (*M'Lot & Ferguson, 2022). I worked on a newly released text on about land and water called *Renewal: Indigenous Perspectives on Land-Based Education In and Beyond the Classroom (*M'Lot & Ferguson, 2025) has involved conversations with leaders in land education. These opportunities to listen to voices in land education have greatly influenced my personal life and informed my thinking throughout this research.

I am grateful for financial support through the significant contribution from the University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship (UMGF 2021-2023), The Truth and Reconciliation Fellowship, Dr. R Hedley Memorial Research Award (2021), and Delta Kappa Gamma

Manitoba Mary E. Lamont Fellowship (2021). I am grateful for opportunities to work as a research assistant alongside Dr. Jeannie Kerr, who shared Indigenous scholarship while I was entering as a PhD student and who continued to guide me for years to come. In 2023, I was awarded a Doctoral Internship funded by a Michael Smith Health Research BC Scholar Award to work with a study funded by a SSHRC Insight Development Grant for a study called, "A Decolonizing Exploration of Antiracist, Arts-based Responses to the Violence Described in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report across the Context of Higher Education". The project is led by Principal Co-investigators Dr. Kendra Rieger and Dr. Lisa Bourque-Bearskin and I am grateful to be working alongside the team, which spans three places in Manitoba and British Columbia, which operates as a network of researchers trying to mobilize the arts and address injustices. Thank you to Dr. Wanda Phillips-Beck for a wonderful conversation on the way home from Abbotsford, which helped me take on a new trajectory to really bring this research *down to earth*. Your direction at a critical turning point in my professional life gave me new guidance and grounded me in a new connection to Anishinaabe Elder Sherry Copenence, who has helped guide this work with soil teachings and new understandings about the role of women in connection to land.

Thank you to my boundlessly knowledgeable and supportive committee for helping read my work and refine my thinking. Jocelyn Thorpe helped me clarify my artistic work, offered seeds of information to pursue, and connected me with fellow PhD students. Dr. Francine Morin gave numerous hours of ongoing mentorship, was patient with my many questions, and modelled many aspects of research, including on how to facilitate collaborative research conversations about the arts. Guidance and encouragement from my advisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt, have helped me to find the confidence to complete this work and to find layers of meaning. She has provided me

opportunities to connect to a broader educational community and has stood strong with me throughout the past decade during my challenges in navigating criticality in my graduate work.

I am immensely grateful to Dr. Dwayne Donald for serving as an external examiner. His influence is noted throughout the manuscripts, and I am particularly appreciative of his thorough and thoughtful feedback which has helped me to develop awareness of research sensibilities, nudged me towards utilizing different terminology, and has inspired my next journey.

In my role as a teacher in the Winnipeg School Division, I have been in the presence of Indigenous Knowledge Holders, and of leaders and changemakers in formal and informal contexts, conversations, and connections. I am grateful for learning through and being part of ceremony as a support teacher at Niji Mahkwa School, a school in the heart of Winnipeg's north end. Coming back to teach in the community where I grew up and went to school made me think more critically about my beliefs, about my positionality as a white teacher teaching in racialized contexts, and about types of knowledge that are most important. I realize now that being in Niji Mahkwa, I was in the right place at the right time because I was able to learn through ceremony during a time of grieving losses of family members while also being pregnant and learning how to be a mother. I am forever grateful for this experience.

Thank you to my family and friends for your patience, love, and insights and for helping me strive for balance along this journey.

Dedication

To my children

Ilya and Lev

May you always

care for the earth

Play in the dirt

Unearth truths

Go below the surface

Understand

how learning is messy

Keep grounded and

Seek justice

And move towards it

in creative ways

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BackGround: A Soil Story

This dissertation documents a journey working with soil that emerged within my master's thesis in Education, entitled "Power in Places, Policies, and Pedagogies: One Teacher's Critical Inquiry into Reconciliation*"* (Ferguson, 2017). I used the power-conscious approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (Bloor & Bloor, 2007; van Dijk, 1995, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) alongside soil as a medium to communicate how reconciliatory efforts were resisted within the colonial discourses of deficit and domination that are embedded within the texts *on* schools and the language about achievement *in* schools, and internalized *within* teaching practices. The materiality and sentience of the land/earth/soil was not fully developed within the context of this 2017 study and these limitations now guide my next steps.

The artwork I created was purposefully called "Untitled" (see Figure 0.1) and was designed to convey themes of both hegemony and healing in a semiotic and metaphorical form. I initially created this work on a small scale and then re-designed it as a temporary larger-scale, 8x8 pop-up art installation that was intended for a purposefully high-traffic cafeteria in the Faculty of Education building at the University of Manitoba Fort Garry campus. Initially, when I approached Faculty of Education administration about installing my soil artwork on campus, I was told that it would be more convenient to place it in a remote hallway—a less obtrusive and less visible location. The white background of the cafeteria floor was part of the design that would help contrast the dark soil and would give more visibility to the intricacies of positive and negative spaces in the image. After making a case for the placement of this design, and with the support of my advisor, Dr. Schmidt, I was eventually granted permission for a more prominent location, which invited a broader audience to view the piece. My experiences trying to bring soil

into the university revealed a hidden curriculum (Eisner, 1985; Jackson, 1990), teaching me that the topic of reconciliation was at risk of being reduced to a peripheral priority of the institution.

Figure 0.1

Initial Soilwork

Note. Visual Representation of "Untitled", Ferguson, © 2017.

In September 2017, my first soilwork installation was created. This asymmetrical soil mandala utilized artistic elements of "positive and negative space to represent the complexities of negotiating spaces for reconciliatory discourse within colonial systems that privilege

Eurocentric knowledges and perspectives" (Ferguson, 2017, p. 98). Processes of adding and taking away soil purposefully symbolized aspects of settler colonialism and erasure (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013), and simultaneously supported restorative approaches. This research gave me a "deeper understanding of decolonization and its inseparability from issues of land and life" (Ferguson, 2017, p. 67) and reinforced recognition that reconciliation is always connected to relationships with people and with land.

This artwork was created with soil from my backyard, which I carefully sifted through a birch and sinew flour sifter passed down to me from my Baba/Grandmother from her Indigenous neighbours near Pickle Lake and Central Patricia in Northwest Ontario on Treaty 9 territory. I used the artistic elements of positive and negative space to represent the way colonial systems worked to privilege Eurocentric perspectives, which came through my analyses. I intentionally used negative space to show the marks of erasure and legacy of colonial impact; soil was a way to show this type of systemic silencing. I wanted to convey an awareness of the four directions and the circle without delving into Indigenous knowledges in an appropriative way, and so I decided not to create balanced proportioned quadrants, which might be too similar to the medicine wheel. Instead, I created a purposeful and disorienting flow of imagery where both connections and disconnects are made visible. Rooting the soilwork were images of roads from Winnipeg's central downtown intersection of Portage and Main and bricks representing institutions, such as current schools, Indian Residential Schools, universities, and other settler-colonial systems. Archival photographs and a former student inspired the image of the child and the imagery of seven generations of children echoing behind her. There is significant imagery of medicines like sweetgrass, a spider web, trees, and a canoe, which signify some of my own

learning, such as the need to listen and learn from Indigenous ways forward, and to restore Indigenous and settler relationships and connections to Mother Earth.

Creating this piece of art was a visceral and multisensory experience. When I was creating the artwork on the cafeteria floor, I frequently looked up and noticed the high walls of the institution and people gazing down from the second-floor balcony. Although I was working with organic materials, the solutions used to clean the cafeteria floors left a residue on my hands that caused them to turn red and gave me a burning sensation on my palms and fingertips. I found that, while moving the soil around with my own body, I was trying to make minimal impact on the land with my hands and feet. I noticed that even a gentle breath could move the soil. I became aware of how jarring it was to hear the sound the tape made in the building when stripping it away from the ground to reveal white space and how this sound echoed in the institution.

After several hours of creating the soilwork, I went home to prepare for my upcoming defense. When I returned the next day, the soilwork was destroyed. People ignored the installation and walked right through it. I had not anticipated that this would occur. Some passersby stomped through the installation, leaving large footprints and kicking the soil in all directions. This unexpected defacement made the multi-layered challenges of reconciliation explicit. Initially, it felt humiliating to be bringing members of my committee, family and friends to view the installation when it looked messy—as if it were just a pile of dirt, dragged throughout a cafeteria. In my thesis, I described the significance of this catalytic sharing that, despite the defamation, the art began to take on new meaning—"standing its ground" *and* claiming the space (Ferguson, 2017, p. 100). Now I see this transformative event as a profound learning story that revealed new questions, which this dissertation addresses.

On the day of the defense, instead of spending time interpreting the artwork, my committee, family members attending the defense, and the Dean who was invited to view the work, discussed the significance of the event and the defacement itself as we noticed how soil was dragged away and spread throughout the Education building. An image that stays with me are the imprints of people's footprints, what I called "colonial footprints" which were left on the face of the child. People present at the defence gave insights and possibilities for future extensions and questions, prompting inquiries into both place and land. If this is how people reacted to an image of reconciliation in a cafeteria hallway in the middle of a Faculty of Education building, I wondered how people might engage with reconciliation-inspired art within public spaces with layered socio-cultural and historical significances, and how might this inform my teaching. I asked myself why is it such a challenge to acknowledge land and its importance within educational institutions. This questioning led me to consider how I might layer what I learned from this dissertation experience with a renewed focus on place and more in-depth arts-based approaches. The next horizon of the soilwork was unearthed, making me think more critically of the colonial footprints I leave behind and to consider the following questions: How might I tread more gently on Mother Earth? and What does it mean to decolonize praxis? This first soil installation (Ferguson, 2017) had only scratched the surface of the potentialities of the arts-based research and earth as a medium. This dissertation documents how my soilwork has evolved since this first engagement with soilwork.

Upon reflection, the defacement by users of the space where I created one of my first public installations sent a powerful message; land did not belong inside the university walls because it was deemed too dirty, too in-the-way, too unsafe. This resistance represents an encounter with what Papachase Cree scholar Dwayne Donald (2012) describes as *colonial fort*

logics. In both product and process, this artwork enacted a "process of imagining decolonizing Aboriginal-Canadian relations [which] begins with carefully tracing the colonial nature of those relations—in the past and today and acknowledging that colonial frontier logics continue to have a tremendous influence on how the relationship is conceptualized" (Donald, 2012, p. 93). The university became the fort, with authority to decide what was permissible within, whose voice could be displayed, and what knowledge could be displayed where. According to Donald (2009), "universities are predicated on these colonial frontier logics and have served to enforce epistemological and social conformity to Eurowestern standards" (p. 3). I recognized that, as people walked through the art piece, they too were invited into an encounter with these tensions and fort logics. How have institutions participated in colonialism and stolen lands? How can soil help to acknowledge our own participation in colonialism?

Soil helped me to speak to the injustices documented in the *National Inquiry* (2019) and TRC (2015), such as the territorial dispossession, which changed the power relationships between humans resulting in cultural genocide, forced assimilation, internalized colonialism, and ongoing trauma. Through engaging with soil while learning from decolonial perspectives and informed by Indigenous scholarship, I reflected on what these power relationships might look like and how to represent them, for instance, within the installations in the manuscripts. The soil also spoke back. The soil called for more prominence to place and land. It was clear that decolonizing educational praxis required more attention to how settler colonialism functions in this place of Winnipeg, Manitoba. I am incorporating this key learning into this dissertation because it guides me to attend more critically, creatively, compassionately, and more wholistically to place/land/earth. Place plays a significant role in this dissertation as part of my research process. Tuck and McKenzie (2015a) caution that "the saliency of land/place is

frequently left out of the picture" (p. 17) by settler and non-Indigenous scholars. Earth/soil/land are the connecting elements which help in a way that words alone could not describe.

This manuscript-based dissertation (see more information in ForeGround) is a composition of four chapters and articles, organized in what I refer to in this dissertation as a *Matryoshka* of manuscripts, or *Matryoshka.* The *Matryoshka* is conceptualized based on an embodied matriarchal nesting doll motif that also activates connections to Indigenous scholarship highlighting perspectives of land as mother, and my personal learning and ancestral connections (see Rooting Terms and *Matryoshka* of Manuscripts sections). This *Matryoshka* of manuscripts presents four manuscripts that I have purposefully nested and layered. They are joined together by analytical interludes I call 'living links' that appear between the manuscripts and unify themes of places, power, and potential progression of a growing methodology, which shows how soil as a method is becoming increasingly more versatile and methodologically rich. Each manuscript functions as an entity or *Matryoshka* that gives centrality to place, and earth-based arts practices connected within and as a comprehensive *body of work* that began in 2017 and extended to multiple sites of Indigenous and historical significance in Winnipeg where soilwork stories emerged. The *Matryoshka* meaningfully connects the theories and ideas to each manuscript and shows how the ideas fit together across the manuscripts. Following this BackGround section, I open with an introduction called ForeGround to give an overview of: research processes such as a/r/tography and critical place inquiry; key topics connecting to land, place, and art; and ethical considerations that lie at the heart of this dissertation.

The following four manuscripts form a multi-perspective view regarding how the teaching and learning of the history of Winnipeg is an ongoing curricular engagement rather than a chronological series of events. Each manuscript contributes unique perspectives and processes,

and each has its own methodological merits. As this *Matryoshka* of manuscripts unfolds, I share images of soilwork alongside the visual and written stories of what happened, what I learned, and possibilities and understandings of land that arose in the making of the soilwork. I also connect these critical inquiries: What is the common ground? and Are there colonial currents that flow between the chapters and the stories of the soilwork installations? While each of the manuscripts can exist alone, and three have been published and are available in digital and print media, I designed this dissertation to position these publications in relation to each other. The manuscripts are placed in a particular order that holds meaning and shows the evolution of my research. Living links and connecting introductions add a material layering that reinforces the structure of this *Matryoshka*.

ForeGround: Introduction

This section opens the *Matryoshka.* This ForeGround introduces the key conceptual material(s) and methodologies that link the four layered manuscripts in the form of articles and book chapters. I provide overarching information about what this research has entailed, how it has progressed, and why it is important. This dissertation documents soilwork stories, collaborations, and possibilities, all of which have involved working and walking in specific sites in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and then coming back to these places as part of several years of my PhD coursework. This introduction offers an overview of the dissertation's aims, purposes, and format as well as the key conceptual, theoretical, and methodological components that are interwoven throughout the manuscripts. This section:

- outlines key terms and ideas rooted throughout this research
- provides a research overview (see the section, Research Overview) that describes each of the manuscripts, publication status, significant places, and topics as well as provides small visual examples of soilwork art installations
- provides individual descriptions for each of the four manuscripts
- charts layers of my research questions (overarching, initiating, and emerging)
- includes a rationale for the Manuscript-Based Dissertation (MDIS) format
- discusses the significance of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and key place of this research
- conceptualizes how the *Matryoshka* framework supports the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological approaches that connect the manuscripts
- reviews literature and perspectives of land, place, and art to further support a/r/tography and critical place inquiries

Rooting Terms and Ideas

This *Matryoshka* encompasses an integrated approach. Literature is reviewed and analyzed in this introduction, within each of the manuscripts, and in the linking materials that introduce and connect each of the manuscripts. The content of this dissertation connects topics such as settler colonialism, decolonization, and anticolonial approaches to research involving relational approaches, and it describes varying ontological relationships between concepts of space, place, and land. These central ideas are woven throughout the chapters of the dissertation and are taken up contextually and in relation to place. Some of the key language that needs unpacking at the outset, in alphabetical order, are terms such as: a/r/tography; arts-based, critical place inquiries; Indigenous; *Land*/Land/land; manuscript-based dissertation and *Matryoshka;* relationality and ethical relationality; settler; settler colonialism; soilwork; and terra nullius. Many of the terms described here are taken up more fully in the section, Grounding Literature.

A/r/tography

A/r/tography emerged from arts-based research (Irwin & deCosson, 2004; Irwin et al., 2024) but has developed as a distinct practice-based methodology (Springgay et al., 2005) recognizing that artistic inquiry processes are research in themselves; they do not necessarily follow the path of social science-based methods of research (Irwin, 2013; Irwin et al., 2024; Ng-A-Fook, 2020). A/r/tography focuses on relationships between the concepts and processes involved in artmaking, researching/inquiring, and teaching/learning. A/r/tography first emerged through the work of arts educators and researchers, who, around 2004, noted that arts-based approaches were being used in the social sciences and were focused on the *product* of art but did not go far enough to value the meaning making *processes* of the arts (Irwin et al., 2024). As the arts began to inform a re-making of research, helping to make it more accessible, scholars at the

University of British Columbia pushed the arts into the forefront. Irwin noticed the divide between being an art educator and developing her own artistic practice, and she, alongside colleagues, began to find a way to connect these dimensions and to validate artistic practices as a form of inquiry that could inform teaching (Ng-A-Fook, 2020; Irwin et al., 2024*)* The arts were informing ways that research was shared but that research was based on existing structures of social sciences and existing qualitative research methodologies. Creating the unique term, a/r/tography, helped to legitimize the arts as a form of research, and the use of the term validated the process of working with different materials, documented the affordances of what is revealed and uncovered through a variety of mediums, and emphasised how one engages and learns through the arts. Over the past two decades, a/r/tography has asserted itself as:

> a research methodology, a creative practice, and a performative pedagogy that lives in the rhizomatic practices of the in-between. Resisting the tendency for endless critique of past experience and bodies of knowledge, a/r/tography is concerned with the creative invention of concepts and mapping the intensities experienced in relational, rhizomatic, yet singular, events. (Irwin, 2013, p. 198)

A/r/tography is a practice-based methodology that encourages unpredictability and shows an ongoing commitment to creating, researching, and teaching with and through the arts throughout the research process. A/r/tography is a relational practice that demonstrates a commitment to public pedagogy and praxis (Bickel et al., 2010; Giroux, 2003) that has also been "recognized as an experience of living as an intercorporeal being in a relationship" (Bickel et al., p. 93). Many a/r/tography projects are "born out of a desire to spread experimental learning practices into informal sites outside the ivory tower and formal school settings" (Beer et al., 2010, p. 223).

A key component of a/r/tography is the complimentary space between the terms*, art* and *graphy*—art and writing (Beer et al., 2010; Bickel et al., 2010). I have been writing alongside artmaking for multiple years, which has given me an opportunity to reflect on my own thinking and to consider in depth the theories guiding my work and the important teaching component that comes by framing the work for audiences and publications. Furthermore, by writing about these experiences, I have strengthened the *graphy* portion of a/r/tography. Having these pieces peer reviewed and published is further increasing the educational value of the a/r/tography that is being created.

Additionally, living in liminal spaces is important to a/r/tography. This idea is concretely articulated through the forward slashes that separate the letters between a/r/t. These slashes serve not as division but rather "as folds of a fabric" (Irwin, Lasczik, Sinner, & Triggs, 2024; Ng-A-Fook, 2020) and as a playful way to focus on the liminal spaces of being between creating and inquiring as an artist/researcher/teacher about the creative practices and places flowing between these folds. While the focus has shifted overtime to be less concerned with the varying positionalities as artist/research/teacher, Irwin suggested that keeping this idea alive serves a helpful function. Some a/r/tographers have continued to expand the possibilities of these a/r/tographic extensions, for example, by adding an "m" to include the focus on embodied aspects of being a mother to think generationally and through body memory and to disrupt the patriarchal system of state-sponsored transnational teaching (Gordon, 2022) or by adding a "c" to convey connections to c/a/r/tography (Rousell & Cutcher, 2014). Irwin explained that, increasingly, a/r/tography is about the creative practices and flow between these folds. I conceptualize my practice as a *Matryoshka* that evokes the folds through embedded practices

(Horizons 1/2/3 of Soilwork), and nested intersectional relationships in different educational environments, and embodied renderings (see Soilwork Renderings, Sensibilities, and Methods).

Arts-based

The arts have been a central way for me to demonstrate my learning and provoke people into re-thinking, questioning, or to seeking a new perspective. Forerunners of the arts-based research movement, Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner, (2012) melded existing social science process with artistic and aesthetic means, indicating that arts-based research "is a heuristic through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world" (pp. 2-3). Barone and Eisner (2011) stated:

> One can say that we are more interested in paradigm proliferation than paradigm reductionism. We do not believe that there is one road to Rome; there are many, and it is through the exploration of alternative routes—some of which will undoubtedly lead to dead ends—that we exploit our human capacity to experience the world in different ways. (p. 10)

This research takes a path that is less travelled. This path aims to be less Westernized and less "towards Rome" and more open to heading on alternate routes to understand place. This a/r/tography research is, for me, about finding a way home and understanding Winnipeg in and through the arts by utilizing a material that is significant to the prairies. This research is also a way for unveiling new life-giving routes in research in the way it provides material (which in itself is a source of life, food, filterer of water, and holder of carbon and organic matter) to connect place, arts, and critical and complex topics, and to form a foundation for new earth-based methodologies.

There are many approaches to arts-based research (ABR), but scholars have identified three key purposes, which Greenwood (2019) outlined as: 1) investigating a social problem or challenge, and opening diverse and divergent perspectives that empower people to voice responses through alternative ways of knowing; 2) focusing on arts-making processes; and 3) researching the affordances of the arts for therapeutic and teaching purposes. The overarching umbrella of a/r/tography present in the manuscripts in this *Matryoshka* dissertation invited the arts to cross all three of these purposes.

ABR represents "one of many shifts in the search for truthful means of investigation and representation" (Greenwood, 2019, Why Use Art, para. 1). ABR has its specific criteria for assessing trustworthiness and quality. To be considered effective, ABR must achieve validity criteria in process, product, and aesthetic. The following achievement criteria listed by Barone and Eisner (2011) include:

> 1) a careful investigation into dimensions of the social world by the arts-based researcher
>
> 2) a reconfiguration and re-presentation of selected facets of what that research 'uncovers', with those facets now transformed into aesthetic substance upon their embodiment within an aesthetic form
>
> 3) the production of disequilibrium within the percipient of the work as s/he vicariously reexperiences what has been designed (p. 20)

Greenwood (2019) outlined key elements of quality as follows: "The researcher (in the artist) stays true to the data; the artist (in the researcher) arranges data for effect and affect" (Emotion—and Its Power, para. 3). Both the art *and* research should be powerful in conveying the message, they must involve art creations, and they should be useful (Greenwood, 2019). Additionally, ABR "needs to have explicit research purpose and needs to subject itself to peer critique"

(Greenwood, 2019, para. 3). Considering epistemology from an artistic perspective posits that symbolic and semiotic, sensory, and spiritual elements of communication hold immense power and that "color, space, sound, movement, facial expression, vocal tone, and metaphor are as important in expressing and understanding knowledge as the lexical meanings of words" (Greenwood, 2019, Site for Possibilities—and Question, para. 2). The aim is not generalizability but rather revealing entities that are not seen or that emerge, omissions, and learning that comes through aesthetic engagement. My dissertation embodies a generative shift from a/r/tography as this approach to research finds new ground on the foundation of critical place inquiry.

Critical Place Inquiry (CPI)

In their book, *Place in Research,* Tuck and McKenzie (2018) made a strong case for the need for place to have more prominence within research. These scholars asked enduring questions, such as: "[w]hat would it mean to do critical place inquiry that interrogates ongoing structures of settler colonialism and other forms of spatialized oppression?" (p. 22). This dissertation takes the same critical place perspective and considers several ontological perspectives of space, place, and land that shift through arts-based approaches that view land as complex, value-laden, and full of longstanding relationships (see more in Grounding Literature). Tuck and McKenzie (2015a) noted that "the persistence/existence of Indigenous theorizations and methodologies of land serve as rejoinder to Western theorizations of place, to mark how theories of the West have also been shaped by its colonial and settler histories and current pursuits" (p. 11). According to Styres, "space is empty and abstract, whereas place is concrete, sensed" (2019, p. 26). Place, on one hand, prioritizes the individual human whereas ontology of land prioritizes the relationship with land (Tuck & McKenzie, 2018). The 17th century Newtonian concept of *space* viewed it as an independent and concrete entity but the notion that

space is a neutral and passive backdrop or fixed location has been rejected in favour of views of places that can be *full* of practices (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). American feminist, scientist, and scholarly critic of anthropocentrism, Donna Haraway (2015), rejected the absolute dimensions of space and time for more inter-active and intra-active views of space as power-laced (see also Tuck & McKenzie, 2015a) Spaces can become *placeful* and alive in relationship to people being in and living with spaces (Styres, 2019). Tuck (2020) extended this idea, reminding listeners that land is not empty of bodies and that renewed relationships between the two are necessary. This study adopts the perspective that land is imbued with long relationships and is a relative. This inquiry is part of a journey or trajectory to understand Winnipeg, Manitoba, more fully.

Indigenous

The use of the term, Indigenous, is "inclusive of all first peoples—unique in our own cultures—but common in our experiences of colonialism and our understanding of the world" (Wilson, 2008, p.16). Indigenous refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. In citations, I try to indicate the specific nation of each Indigenous scholar (where known) so that their words can be connected to the diversity that exists among nations and allow me to stay grounded in place.

Land

This dissertation embraces hybridity in terms of ontological perspectives as each manuscript surfaces various ontological perspectives of *Land*/land/Land. My dissertation shows how my perspectives shifted over time as I learned from private property, an historic fort and provincial park, a commemorative monument, and a national historic site. For example, the literature review considers the various ways land is understood, such as emphasizing the reverence for Land with use of a capital "L" to connote reverence for instances when the word

land is intertwined with spiritual, relational and embodied aspects (Styres, 2019; Styres et al., 2018). I incorporate Indigenous place names for land and water and follow Indigenous perspectives which share that reconciliation needs to connect to land. As Isaac Murdoch, Ojibwe artist from Serpent River First Nation, shared aloud, "Reconciliation really needs to start with the Earth" (Project H.O.M.E., 2016). In conversations around land, the term, earth, is also used. Since European arrival, land and earth have been a constant focus of the Canadian expansionist vision. Through this perspective, the emphasis on earth included detailed surveying and geographical assessments of land as fertile and luxurious with the potential for occupation and settlement (Toews, 2018). In these inaccurate views, prairie land was positioned as *terra nullius*, or no one's land, (Donald, 2012) to entice many European and eastern European settlers to the region. Burow, Brock, and Dove (2018) helped to reconceptualize an ontology of land in the context of decolonization. Land was viewed by European explorers as a place to conquer to explore, to 'put a flag in the soil' as a way to claim it. This dissertation makes this key connection to soil on the prairies. Soil is land that is culturally significant to the prairies specifically because of "its suitability to European style agricultural production" (Toews, 2018, p. 37). Settler states restrict human-land-relationships to a limited transactional power relationship between owner and property. To consider land as more-than-human or even more-than-property is viewed as a threat to ongoing settler power (Burow, Brock, & Dove, 2018). Therefore, removal of land is not just a physical displacement but an ontological displacement (Burnow et al., 2018).

Despite many ontological perspectives, the critical scholarship and activism that guides this dissertation agree that relationships with land are critical to our survival and that knowing more about land and from land can generate solutions for problems of our own making, such as

cultural and ecological injustices. I call this dissertation *Down to Earth* because physically working with land/soil/earth with my hands and in significant places in Winnipeg has been the primary and unique mode of learning featured here. In the manuscripts, I reveal how the soil also unearthed relational elements and spiritual aspects and brought settler colonialism to the surface. This learning can support Indigenous and settler partnerships, alliances, and, for settlers, can serve to decenter subjectivities as well as work towards relational approaches. Land is not abstract but serves as an important link in my research praxis when theorizing settler colonial power relationships in numerous specific and through local examples in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Manuscript-based Dissertation

This is a manuscript-based dissertation (MDIS) that includes four distinct and connected manuscripts. It differs from a traditional dissertation (or IMRD), which typically includes an introduction (I), literature review, information regarding methodology and methods (M), results (R) and a discussion (D). Little variation is found in terms of this basic organization (Anderson et al., 2021). There are several salient reasons I have chosen a layered, manuscript-based approach rather than a traditional IMRD dissertation, including: (a) underrepresentation of the MDIS as a format within education dissertations; (b) MDIS' compliment to the arts and the chosen methodologies; and (c) accessibility, flexibility, and commitment to sharing. This format ventures beyond the 'sandwich-style' dissertation, as the IMRD is sometimes referred to, and presents nested chapters using the embodied conceptual format of a *Matryoshka* (nested entities of manuscripts and figures). My purposeful departure from the traditional dissertation provides a flexible format that works alongside arts-based approaches to take on an "eclectic array of methodological and epistemological approaches" (Greenwood, 2019, Introduction, para. 1). While not a new format, Duke and Beck (1999) asserted the need for this type of dissertation,

stating that “the field of education appears to be lagging other academic fields in exploring alternative formats for the dissertation” (p. 33). I have made a conscious effort throughout my studies to be active in sharing my work with the broader academic community while continuing to teach in various educational environments.

Scholars emphasize how the MDIS supports competitiveness in achieving professorships (Freeman, 2017; Lather 2006) within the “publish or perish” facet of academia. While this evokes a neo-liberal ethos that positions people in a competitive race for success, I see how these publications provide a public forum for me as an emerging scholar. As I have written these publications that make up the *Matryoshka*, I have considered the following question: How can I frame my ideas and questions in a meaningful way that maintains the integrity of the arts-based, anticolonial approaches while at the same time meets the criteria of academic publications? The idea of knowledge mobilization takes on a different quality than sharing as a form of reciprocity. In a conversation with podcast host and curriculum scholar Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, Haida scholar, Sara Florence Davidson (2023), emphasized how sharing is an important component of Indigenous pedagogies, stating that as we learn, a new responsibility for sharing that knowledge arises (as cited in Ng-A-Fook, 2023). This MDIS format has helped me to develop skills and confidence to share with multiple audiences as well as maintain a commitment in sharing research, which is an expectation for Canadian researchers (Government of Canada, 2019). Paré (2017) acknowledged that a traditional dissertation is “at odds with a world where knowledge is made collaboratively and disseminated digitally” (p. 407). Since researching the components of a manuscript-based dissertation in 2022, it appears that the context of academic publications has shifted through the presence of artificial intelligence. The format of an MDIS is more difficult to generate than traditional research. This difficulty is significant when considering the

technological capabilities that exist and that are quickly seeking to disrupt academic settings by revolutionizing how knowledge is sought and produced, and how research is analyzed and shared with integrity. The MDIS-style dissertation provides an opportunity to extend the reach and impact of this research into communities through various publications and its commitment to ongoing mobilization (Lach, Bailey, Bogossian, & Rothwell, 2016).

Considering the language used to describe this research, I noticed how the term, manuscript, comes from the Latin term *manu* or the Proto-Indo-European meaning "by hand" and "script" (written) (Etymonline, n.d.). The term connects to medieval Europe, when it was used to distinguish written texts that were not printed after the invention of the printing press. Therefore, the term, manuscript, emphasizes the role of the human hand. The origins of the term in Sanskrit originate with *manu* (meaning *man*), and as such, activates a paternal aspect while the term, *Matryoshka*, has maternal roots and possibilities.

Matryoshka

The root word of *matryoshka* (pronounced ma-tryee-oshka) comes from the Ukrainian/Russian words for mother: мати (Ukrainian) or мать (Russian), or матушка (pronounced, matushka, in both Ukrainian and Russian). This word typically described a nested doll, likely designed around the 19th century, one that had strong associations to both Ukrainian and Russian culture. The idea may have originally arrived uncredited from Japan and *kokeshi* dolls, which represent the child (Macalester College, 2023). In this context, the manuscript-in-a-manuscript idea (or *Matryoshka* of manuscripts) reminds me of the interconnections across borders and of ongoing power dynamics amongst colonizing or imperial powers. The boundaries that are left are there to interrogate, and yet there are overlaps, interconnections, and openness—qualities of strong arts-based research (Knight & Cutcher, 2018; Sinner et al., 2006). The

Matryoshka reveals an evolving learning process that is composed of several individual pieces with individual boundaries. However, there are overlaps, interconnections, and an openness to piece these together into a cohesive entity to bring meaning to the relationships, which, in turn, form a body of work.

The metaphor of the *matryoshka* expands when including critical perspectives of schooling; it helps me consider settler colonialism, and Indigenous presence as well as gives lessons about cultural appropriation. Russia may have taken the idea and claimed it as their own unique design, making it a valuable, relatable, and commodifiable Slavic symbol. Ukrainian President and war-time leader Zelenskyy pointed out this pattern of Russia's "co-opting of cultures," (Auciello, 2023, para. 6) which I think enhances the *matryoshka* by taking a critical stance of how it came to be and a reminder about appropriations. In relation to Russia's recent war on Ukraine, one can see that land continues to be the source of ongoing power pursuits.

In this dissertation, an uppercase "M" and italicized font is used to outline when I am referring to this specific dissertation – a *Matryoshka* of manuscripts. In this case, my *Matryoshka* brings together theoretical frameworks (such as critical, Indigenist, intersectional, and decolonial) and methodologies in a relational way to illuminate this relationship in action. For example, the *Matryoshka* illustrates how theories and methodologies through praxis are difficult to distinguish and separate. The *Matryoshka* of manuscripts supports this critical place inquiry into multiple places connected by layers of injustices. The losses and injustices described in displacements and dispossessions of people from land are nested through this embodied approach. The *Matryoshka* is imagined conceptualizing the relationships between critical place inquiry and a/r/tography as central methodologies, and it embraces a creative and unconventional framework. The *Matryoshka* is symbolic of land and earth as mother. The *Matryoshka* considers

how art is not just a passive background or object but an active process that is reflective of transformative work and artivism (a term referencing a combination of art and activism). By layering manuscripts alongside and connected to other manuscripts, I show how this research experience has been a relational way of journeying. The way the *Matryoshka* activates nested embodied practices, such as walking, art making, soilwork, and ceremonial components, has been part of this research.

Praxis

This idea of *praxis*—a Greek word for "action" (Honerich,1995, p. 713)—is highlighted in my research question as well as throughout the manuscripts. Freire (1970/2011) emphasized praxis as a symbiotic connection between action and critical reflection. Praxis is a relational way of thinking about how one might create, teach, work, and research. To extend this notion of praxis to a decolonial perspective, Wilson's (2008) work, *Research is Ceremony,* shared how research *as* ceremony is a form of relational praxis of spiritual insights, culturally-based connections, actions, and strengthened relationships. Styres (2018) also shared how land is a decolonial praxis. This research enacts the actions of artmaking, researching, and teaching alongside reflective practices throughout the manuscripts and connecting materials, showing what this 'thinking through' material, embodied, and decolonial actions looked and felt like.

Relationality

Relationality is a term used across disciplines, such as social sciences, geography, political theology, sciences, biology, and psychology, and across millennia of scholarship, theorizing, and philosophising. It is a term that is becoming more prominent in education, and it emerges throughout each of my four manuscripts in various ways. Relationality is one of the most important values in Indigenous and decolonizing approaches to research (Tynan & Bishop,

2023). Relationality represents multiple truths and "describes a reality in which all entities are related" (Tynan, 2021, p. 607). There are many definitions of relationality, and the section, Grounding Literature, will review various perspectives to keep this concept connected to notions of place, land, and art. I share numerous practical examples of key relational approaches, such as decolonizing praxis; ceremony; the importance of holistic, experiential, and embodied approaches; and the possibilities for relationality within land art. This dissertation is guided by the term, *ethical relationality* **(**Donald, 2009; 2012; 2016), which Papachase Cree curriculum scholar, Dwayne Donald, described as: "an ecological understanding of organic connections that become readily apparent to us as human beings when we honour the sacred ecology that supports all life and living" (2016, p.11). Researching and drawing upon ethical relationality supports my desire to connect to *land as a teacher*. Ethical relationality is grounded within an Indigenous worldview and, as a settler teacher, I find it a helpful guide to aspire to.

Settler

This term surfaces throughout the dissertation. In past research endeavours, I have used the term *un/settler* to speak to the tensions with the term, *settler*, as well as to my struggle with finding another name and with my intention of challenging and disrupting the status quo (Ferguson, 2017, p. 6). What I have come to realize is that the term, settler, is not unanimously supported but has a place. Flowers (2015) identified a settler as "a relational term that signifies the settler's relationships to colonialism" (p. 34). In sharing the term, Flowers (2015) noted that the Hul'qumi'num term for settlers is loaded and indicates people that needed help to settle here, to know where and how to survive, and it conveys a desire for accumulating resources and the land. However, the term, settler, does not merely distinguish someone who does not have Indigenous ancestry. Rather, Flowers (2015) notes that settler "is a critical term that

denaturalizes and politicizes the presence of non-Indigenous people on Indigenous lands but can also disrupt the comfort of non-Indigenous people by bringing ongoing colonial power relations into their consciousness" (p. 33). Flowers (2015) warned of insidious moves to falsely separate from the state and to think about individual settler actions and subjectivities. The term, settler, is connected to place in the way it refers to "anyone who seeks to live on Indigenous people's traditional territories and who benefits from the privileges of colonial relationships" (Styres, 2019, p. 31), and whose ancestral roots are grounded elsewhere. Throughout this dissertation, I keep the term, settler, nested within the context of colonialism as a reminder that settlers are part of the state and nation of Canada and benefit from colonial relationships.

Settler colonialism

Unangax̂ scholar and activist Eve Tuck (2011) described *settler colonialism* as an "anchor system that permits heteropatriarchal White supremacy" (p. 34). An issue that requires more acknowledgement, according to Tuck (2020), is *how* systems of settler colonialism require heteropatriarchy, land, lives, and erasures (as cited in Guilford Press). Differences in positioning land in settler colonialism and Indigenous movements should be examined for ways they co-exist and how they contrast as well as considered for the consequences arising from these differences (Burow et al., 2018). This dissertation responds to the need for settler colonialism to be further theorized (McCoy, Tuck, & McKenzie, 2016).

In K-12 educational contexts, *colonialism* is often misrepresented as a past event that discusses European exploration, viewed only as externalized forms, focused on physical and material (such as resource extraction), and positioned as a historical period rather than an ongoing structure (Wolfe, 2006). This dissertation exposes the logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2006) and displacements, which are two key features of settler colonialism. In response to Wolfe's

viewpoint, I position colonialism as an ongoing structure by highlighting how colonialism has worked in different places, and across time periods and social contexts. The ontology of settler colonialism employs structures of race and inferiority where the settler is positioned as superior, and it slowly erases or assimilates the Indigenous presence (Bang et al., 2014; Veracini, 2011). Settler colonialism is a source of resistance to relationality. Relational approaches and settler-Indigenous relationships can expose and counteract different types of colonialism. Settler colonialism is a form of colonialism that is harder to describe and notice, and it "covers its tracks" (Veracini, 2011, p. 3) compared to more visibly extractive forms. According to Veracini (2011), there is "a need to develop dedicated interpretative tools capable of sustaining an approach to the decolonisation of settler colonial formations" (p. 1). Veracini (2011) distinguished settler colonialism from colonialism to emphasize the different patterns and possibilities of relationships: "Colonialism *reproduces* itself, and the freedom and equality of the colonised is forever postponed; settler colonialism, by contrast, *extinguishes* itself. Settler colonialism justifies its operation on the basis of the expectation of its future demise" (p. 3).

Soilwork

Soilwork is a way of working with soil as a visual arts medium, research method, and pedagogy that arose through the intersectional work of critical place inquiry and a/r/tography portrayed in this dissertation. Soilwork melds land art movements (see Grounding Literature), research as a form of resistance, and decolonial teaching practices. This dissertation introduces and refines this idea throughout several manuscripts sharing how soil was part of my artwork, researching, and teaching. My 3 Horizons (described further in the Topography of Horizons and Soilwork section) are three different ways to articulate working with soil: public provocations, workshops and collaborative art installations, and personal praxis. Soilwork is moving towards a

form of anticolonial artivism (melding art and activism) in which art is used to critique the colonial systems and structures that enable ongoing settler colonial violence. While the soil functions as a natural ally to decolonial frameworks because it centralizes discussions about land, I acknowledge that this work can be further strengthened through Indigenous approaches, teachings, and worldviews. Arts-based approaches reveal "hidden dimensions" of social issues (Leavy, 2015, pp. 8-9) and portray-the power of the arts to "illuminate something about the social world, sensitively portray people and their circumstances, develop new insights about the relationships between our sociohistorical environments and our lives, or disrupt dominant narratives and challenge biases" (Leavy, 2015, p. 17). The art of creating with soil is *work* – alive, dynamic, and challenging. Most of the soilwork shared here is done individually (with the exception of some collaborations shared in the Living Links sections to show another dimension of this work). Other research endeavours have involved collaborative efforts with a focus on layering multimodalities of learning designs soilwork that highlight the spatial, visual, temporal, and auditory forms of songs and soil in combination (Morin et al., 2024). Renderings is a key term in a/r/tography, which diverges from dominant data collection and analysis. Renderings, instead, offer interpretive modes of sharing and transferring concepts with a unique concept-based approach that provides methods that are tied to the arts and support translating and sharing insights (Irwin et al., 2024, Springgay et al., 2005). In this study, I present earth-based renderings that enforced the intersection between the arts and place and focused on how renderings have relevance to the place of Winnipeg, Manitoba. I also will use the term *soil sensibilities* which is a term inspired by feedback from my examination to work beyond cliche concepts to create a new conceptual term to more effectively describe my research sensibilities and processes (Dr. D.

Donald, Papachase Cree, personal communication, September 4, 2025). It shows how renderings of a/r/tography can be land-based and deepen knowledges in relation to place.

Terra Nullius

This Latin term is used to describe land that was misrepresented as unoccupied, no one's land, or as empty land. Terra nullius is viewed as a key ethos of the age of exploration that began during the 15th century, initiated by papal bulls such as the Doctrine of Discovery. These bulls legitimized Christian conquest and claim of occupied lands, which enabled settler colonialism to take hold (Donald, 2011; *National Inquiry*, 2019; Tomchuk, 2023; TRC, 2015; Tuck, 2011; Wilson, 2008). I reference terra nullius throughout this dissertation as a way of sharing how ongoing coloniality manifests in contemporary places and times.

Another analysis of the term, terra nullius, connects to how academia, curriculum studies, and contemporary urban spaces are viewed. This study emerged from noticing how curriculum studies have deeply reinforced division between Indigenous and Euro-centric knowledges. One of my course texts, *The Curriculum Studies Reader* (Flinders, Flinders, & Thornton, 2004), attempted to provide a historical educational progression but failed to note the presence of Indigenous peoples and knowledges within North America—treating education as "new" territory. This type of colonial claiming perpetuates what scholars call the "logic of elimination" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Wolfe, 2006), falsely portraying educational fields in North America as open *terra nullius*, suggesting that Indigenous peoples were not here and did not have educational values, and that their worldviews had (or has) no place in schools. Taking the lead to expose this type of educational ostracism, Battiste (1998) stated that *cognitive imperialism* pushed Indigenous worldviews to the margins and manipulated "the curricula [to] serve as another colonial instrument to deprive Aboriginal communities of their knowledge,

languages, and cultures" (p.16). Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002), stated that, prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples "had absolute authority over our lives; we were born into and lived in a universe which was entirely of our making" (p. 24). Without Indigenous perspectives in educational institutions and curricula, practices can easily become colonial representations of the "imperial imagination" (Smith, 2002, p. 23). This term, terra nullius, is relevant as I write this in 2025 as sovereign nations, such as Greenland, Ukraine, and Canada, are being treated by the second Trump administration of the United States of America as if they are free for the taking.

Research Overview

The following section briefly describes each of the four manuscripts that make up this *Matryoshka* manuscript-based dissertation, outlines how each takes up the idea of critical place inquiry, and how I respond to, or become aware of, situated forms of injustices. My dissertation is a living inquiry—researching with an openness to new ways of learning and teaching that move away from settler colonialism and towards something more sustainable and relational. This dissertation draws upon work from 2019-2024 as well as a brief retrospective analysis of my first soil installation from my 2017 thesis, already described in the preceding BackGround chapter. Throughout, I use the abridged manuscript titles in bold font to support the reader in finding materials.

Soil is a non-conventional research material that provides a unique entry-point to share stories, uncover critical issues, surface connections (or disconnections), and inspire next steps. To create initial artworks, I took soil from my backyard and sifted through a slow and careful process. As installations began to take on bigger places, I required more soil, and I began to actively and creatively think about how to create with less and to return soil back to the earth. This endeavor of soilwork supports Indigenous and settler communities to find entry points in

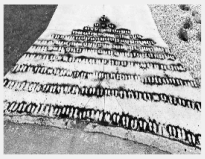
Indigenizing/decolonial work by activating how land is viewed as a source of knowledge and as a resource, which can, in turn, shift the relationship one has with land from a reciprocal to an exploitative dynamic. The soil can bury and is a source of life; it can cover up and expose. To be more specific, soil is a form of land and, therefore, is viewed as a source of knowledge because of the manner in which Indigenous languages and cultural and ceremonial practices are connected to the way knowledge is developed and shared. The artistic methods included in this dissertation are purposefully temporary. There is also an ongoing engagement with the root meanings of a decolonizing approach and return to land as well as a consideration of restoring physical land and land-based relationships.

The Overview of the *Matryoshka* of manuscripts (see Figure 0.2) provides a visual synopsis outlining each manuscript's title, guiding topics and theories, place of research, a sample image of the soilwork installations, and a description of artistic sensibilities that have grown across the manuscripts' approaches to soilwork. Each manuscript has been prepared as a stand-alone piece, and each has its specific characteristics of size, shape, design, and methodological affordances; however, there is value in assembling them together. Each place and each story, and the learning from each manuscript, contributes to critical place inquiry in unique ways, such as developing the artistic process, offering insights into how land and research can be generative forms of praxis, and analyzing how each of these places has provided important pedagogical potential. I aim to maintain relational accountability within this *Matryoshka*. Each of the manuscripts has been reviewed and critiqued, and the installations presented in the papers have also been subject to public viewing and responses. The focus on separate manuscripts communicates the living inquiry of a/r/tography, the cyclical nature of learning, and the unfolding of creative aspects while maintaining integrity to arts-based

approaches. More on relational accountability can be found in the section, Grounding Literature in Relational Approaches to Place, Land, and Art.

Figure 0.2

Overview of the Matryoshka

	Manuscript Title	Place	Land Art	Guiding Topics and Theories	Artistic Renderings and Soil Sensibilities
MATRYOKSHA 1	**Unearthing Truths:** Remembering the Children that Never Came Home through Soilwork A/r/t/ography	My home in south Winnipeg, Manitoba	 "215"	• Soil as a medium through a/r/tography • Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) • Aesthetic action • Ethical space (Ermine, 2007)	Initial renderings of a/r/tography (contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess (Springgay, Irwin, and Kind 2005) Sifting Re/covering Unearthing Under/understanding Soiled history Home/land Re/sourced Findings/Foundings Re/making Uncovering Unsights Remembering Breathing Honouring/Offering Relief Returning Ownership, Control, Access, Possession (OCAP Principles)
MATRYOKSHA 2	**Homeland** of the Metis Nation: A Critical Inquiry into Winnipeg's Upper Fort Garry	Upper Fort Garry, Art Installation called, "Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Heritage Wall" Winnipeg, Manitoba	"Louis Riel"	• Fort Pedagogy • Hidden Curriculum • Critical Discourse Analysis	
MATRYOKSHA 3	**Murky Waters:** An Arts-Based Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls	Forks/ Nestiwayah Commemorative monument to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People Winnipeg, Manitoba	"Circles and Cycles"	• National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) • a/r/tography and action research • Settler colonialism through racial capitalism (Toews, 2018) and discourses of disposability (Dean, 2015) • Cultural interface	
MATRYOKSHA 4	**Red River Removals:** Unsights and Hidden Histories of Water Stories through Critical Place Inquiry and Earth-Based Art	Riel House Connections to Rooster Town, Aqueduct Commemoration, Shoal Lake 40 First Nation Winnipeg, Manitoba	"UnReserved"	• Ethical relationality (Donald, 2019, 2021) • Water/Land injustices • Earth-based Art • Settler colonialism through Logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2006)	

The four manuscripts included have long titles because they have been submitted to prospective publishers or have been published with these titles. Throughout this dissertation, I use abridged titles for each of the manuscripts for conciseness. Each manuscript is numbered to signal the order in which they are found in this dissertation, not seriated based on importance. The order of these is purposeful, and there are connecting materials that introduce each piece and describe the relationships between these manuscripts more fully. Manuscript 2, 3, and 4 have all been peer-reviewed and published. As such, they are included verbatim and thus reflect my thinking at the time of publication. Manuscript 1 also went through a peer-review process and

has since been revised; it is currently being prepared for submission. Additionally, the references for each manuscript have all been incorporated into a comprehensive reference list at the end of this dissertation. Finally, the figure numbers use a decimal format to maintain the original figure number in the original publication. This format reflects their placement in the manuscript order in this comprehensive document.

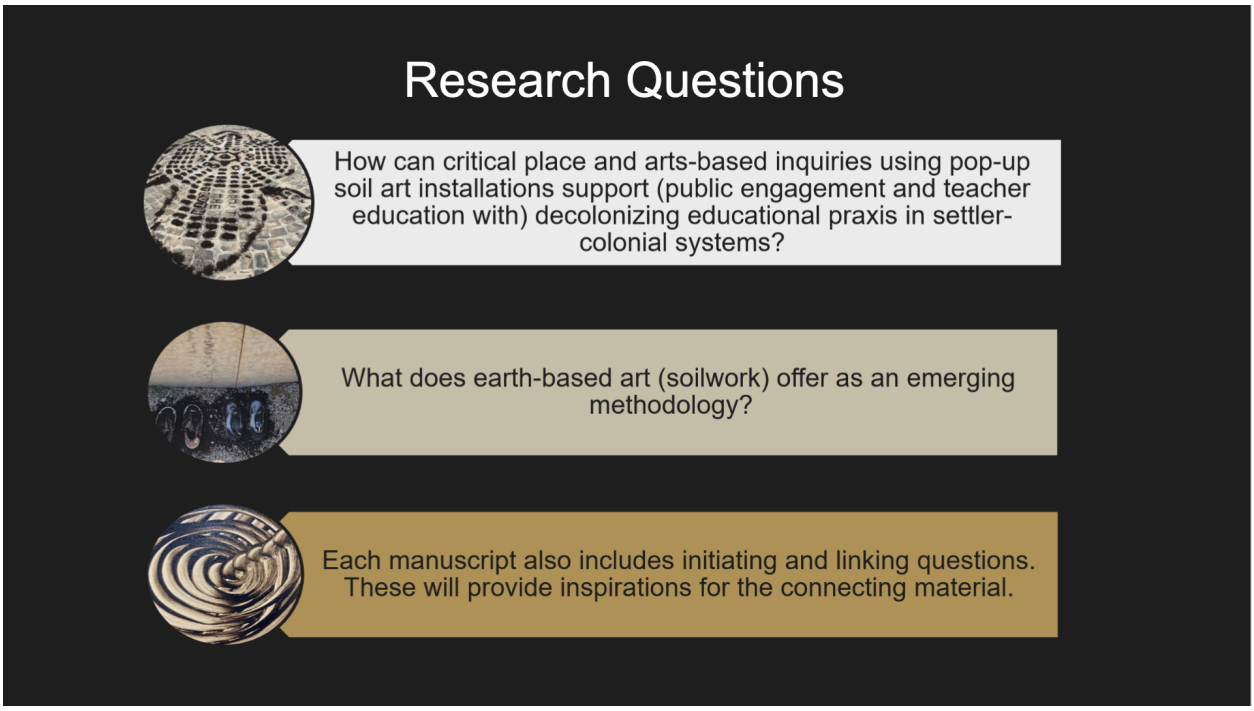
The literature review (see Grounding Literature) completes this introduction by considering perspectives of relationality and unearthing various ontologies of land and place. I consider how place-based education has moved towards critical pedagogies of place and continues to make relational shifts regarding the use of the term, Land. I discuss land pedagogies, and layered epistemological and ontological considerations, and I ponder how these are being addressed in educational settings and through artistic modes. I discuss relational accountability and considerations detailing ways that settler colonialism creates barriers to relational possibilities. To conclude, I provide illustrative examples highlighting intersections of land and place through decolonizing approaches, where art supports redress and 'righting' of history.

Research Questions

The manuscript-based approach supports an in-depth discussion of numerous research questions, incorporates various places to support critical place inquiry, and encourages the framing of each smaller inquiry while linking it to the larger whole. I have two over-arching questions that investigate the layering of inquiries prioritizing the earth-based arts practices alongside place (see Figure 0.3). Each manuscript also includes one or more initiating questions, which is a unique format reflecting the connections across manuscripts, and which acknowledges that my work is a form of praxis.

Figure 0.3

Chart of Research Question Format



Initiating questions and linking questions are categories that show how the manuscripts and this inquiry evolved. In the charts following the introduction to each manuscript, I highlight two forms of research questions—*initiating* and *linking*. The *initiating* questions are ones that I began while walking, designing the soilwork, and researching on site, and while inquiring into the specific places. The *linking* questions came from the work and informed the next inquiry or next place of the research; these show how the manuscripts are related to one another. Colour gradients within the background image of questions visually convey the depth that is achieved in this recursive approach to research. The image on the background is of soil that sprouted after a long winter. This background photo shows how alive the soil is, even when dormant for a seasonal cycle. The photo representing the linking questions is an image created using soil and water to create a muddy linking spiral, representing the connection, which resembles an

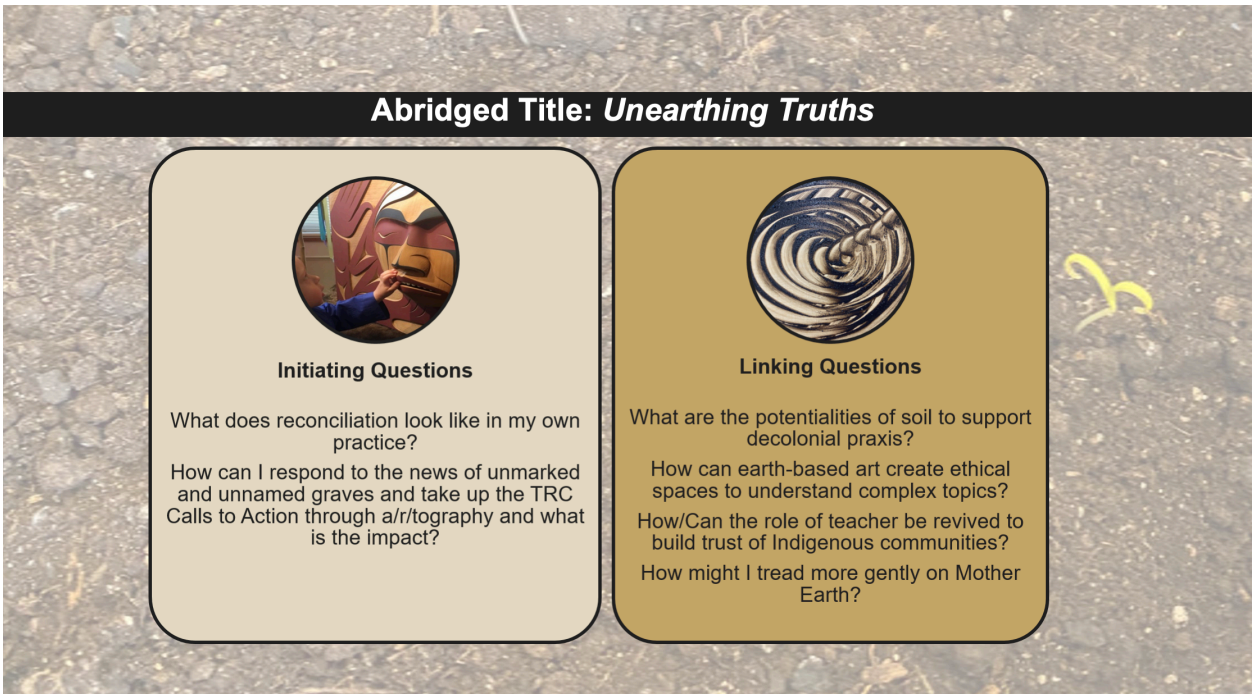
umbilical cord. The first circular image varies based on the manuscript and will depict a photo reflecting my learning from place through either walking or while creating the artwork. Placing the research questions in this format reflects how this arts-based manuscript dissertation evolved.

Manuscript 1 Overview

"Unearthing Truths: Remembering the Children that Never Came Home through Soilwork A/r/tography" (**"Unearthing Truths"**) looks at my home and neighbourhood as a site of decolonial praxis as I responded to the pivotal moment during the pandemic when ground penetrating radar unearthed the suspected remains of children who died at Indian Residential Schools—a truth which was documented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). This first manuscript *unearths* (see Soil Renderings) the colonial venture of Indian Residential Schools through an artistic response to one of the early reported discoveries of unmarked graves in British Columbia. Figure 0.4 presents the initiating and linking questions for this manuscript.

Figure 0.4

Manuscript 1 Research Questions and Field Notes



Several years after the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) *Calls to Action*, important conversations about Residential Schools are only just now becoming common in educational settings. It has taken time for teachers to prepare the groundwork for teaching about these complex issues, to deepen their own understandings, and to undergo processes of reconciliation regarding their professional practices. This first manuscript shares work that surfaces the systemic changes called for in Canada's TRC, which outlined 94 Calls to Action and numerous reparations for the harms caused to Indigenous people as a result of their forced attendance in Indian Residential Schools.

I describe more about my chosen methodology of a/r/tography by telling the story of an art installation. I completed this installation on my driveway with my own children's shoes, and I analyzed the experience of creating this installation through aesthetic and analytical perspectives examining how soilwork supported recognition of my own participation in the complicity in

settler colonialism as a settler colonizer and privileged landowner. My a/r/tography brings attention to Calls to Action 73, 74 and 75, which pertain to missing children and the need for burial places of missing children to be documented, accessible, and protected through describing these calls in relation to the art installation.

This manuscript shares a colonial confrontation, which highlighted for me the necessary work required to acknowledge land and move beyond tokenistic perspectives. This chapter details how the media's urgency and their effort to capture my art installation for an upcoming news segment led to its destruction when the reporter drove over it in their truck upon arriving at my home to photograph the artwork and interview me. The subsequent story that was generated represented a tokenistic response to the soilwork and failed to mention any of the key issues related to Canada's role in genocidal racial injustices through education and responsibility to address the Calls to Action, which I voiced to the reporter (Halmarson, 2021). To further analyze this experience and the potentialities of soilwork process, I examine the soil installation through the existing renderings of a/r/tography. This work drew important connections between First Nations Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP), which I elaborate on in the section, Body of Work.

"Unearthing Truths" connects to relationships between mothers and children as I consider what it means to be a mother and to work as an artist, researcher, and teacher on reconciliatory work at my private home/private property. It is a piece where I work through a/r/tography, align this methodology with justice-seeking topics, and explore how the medium of land activates the foundational meanings and understandings of decolonization. I focus on how land is typically viewed as private property in Euro-descendent perspectives, and when bringing

in political artwork into my neighbourhood, people became uncomfortable with the public acknowledgment of injustices and with me bringing this issue 'close to home'.

Manuscript 2 Overview

"Homeland of the Metis Nation: A Critical Inquiry into Winnipeg's Upper Fort Garry" (**"Homeland"**) overlaps my knowledge of Critical Discourse Analysis, a/r/tography, and curriculum theories to analyze one of the largest (and not-well known) installations in downtown Winnipeg called the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Heritage Wall, located at Upper Fort Garry (UFG), an urban provincial park. This study brings awareness to a settler colonial reality through a visual analysis of a public art installation I created that was informed by Indigenous theories and political discourses. Initiating and linking questions are presented in Figure 0.5.

Figure 0.5

Manuscript 2 Research Questions and Field Notes

This manuscript begins by introducing the idea that the phrase *Homeland of the Métis Nation* is often heard in land acknowledgements but not necessarily taken up beyond the formal

statement. Wark (2021) cautioned about this sort of benevolent complicity with the language of land acknowledgements to uphold the settler colonial project and presented his bold refusal of the practice. Through his response to land acknowledgements, Wark provided a review of the literature on land acknowledgement practices in Canada and outlined a strong critique. Soilwork moves beyond a symbolic and passive acknowledgement and in a way becomes a new form of acknowledging, but it does not fit the formal discursive structure such as those land acknowledgements often read verbally before institutional events.

This work emerged from my desire to seek deeper understanding of how one small phrase in a common land acknowledgement in Winnipeg, Manitoba, can be critically questioned and considered in relation to a particular place. This analysis was initially undertaken to address how Indigenous presences were minimized and histories were erased. It served to resist the formal peacekeeping, multicultural narrative of the former Manitoba Government that was promoted during the Manitoba 150 celebrations.

UFG is a former fort that has been reconceptualized as a place of learning and nostalgia. The critical place inquiry I conducted at that location shows how imagery plays a key role in reinforcing and perpetuating ideas that land was open and here to be developed in the name of progress. This paper analyzes the contemporary re-design of this historic fort space as well as the narrative written through images and a multisensory text written onto a steel wall. The critical frameworks and perspectives I used help me notice the absence of reference to the Métis leadership and their contributions on and around that place. I address the removals and misrecognition of the significance of Upper Fort Garry as a place where key moments of Indigenous activism took place and parallels with key omissions of political discourse around Manitoba 150 celebrations.

This manuscript features a large-scale soil portrait of Louis Riel that I composed as an artistic intervention as a way of refiguring presences (Nxumalo, 2016) and as a means of drawing upon the significance of soil to re-story Riel back into the Fort. **"Homeland"** portrays Winnipeg as a centre of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, echoing Niigaan Sinclair's strong statement that "Canada begins in Winnipeg" (2024, p. 12). This paper investigates Winnipeg as a place that gave birth to "an autonomous nation inherently connected to the ecology and life in this place" (p.12). **"Homeland"** provides an analysis of how Upper Fort Garry shares invisible fort logics and ostracizes Métis agency and sovereignty. In particular, this manuscript urges for more acknowledgement of the prominence of Indigenous leadership and perspectives, highlights the losses such as land and language rights, and illuminates the effects of the depletion of animals, such as the bison.

Manuscript 3 Overview

"Murky Waters: An Arts-Based Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls" (**"Murky Waters")** examines how a physical place, such as the convergence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers (known colloquially as "The Forks" or Nestewayah), can function as a cultural interface and a place where critical issues and perspectives merge. **"Murky Waters"** focuses on the injustices towards Indigenous women and girls as an urgent crisis locally and nationally, and it shares difficult and alarming facts about how discourses of disposability affect women and girls in Winnipeg, whose bodies continue to be found in muddy waters. **"Murky Waters"** is positioned as action research with links to a/r/tography. It surfaces the deeply embedded perspectives that connect women and land. This third manuscript shows how Winnipeg's famous Forks site is portrayed as a place of "neutrality" but is also a place where discourses of disposability are found, where bodies of women have been disposed.

"Murky Waters" highlights Winnipeg as a city that has wrestled with racism, racial capitalism (Toews, 2018), and gender-based violence, as a city that is a "microcosm of the ways Indigenous Peoples have experienced the country as a whole" (Sinclair, 2024, p. 13), and as a city that supports teachers developing their awareness of Winnipeg as an Indigenous Centre. In the chapter, I discuss a series of research walks alongside the soilwork I created on the snow that took place on land near the river surrounding the monument to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which is located near The Forks. **"Murky Waters"** illuminates how my research views soil as a relative and my analysis of encounters with women's stories live alongside soilwork and public art by Indigenous artists. Figure 0.6 presents the initiating and linking questions for Manuscript 3.

Figure 0.6

Manuscript 3 Research Questions and Field Notes

Manuscript 4 Overview

"Red River Removals: Unsights and Hidden Histories of Water Stories through Critical Place Inquiry and Earth-Based Art" (**"Red River Removals"**) tracks settler colonial removals over time in connection to the theme of water. This final manuscript addresses Winnipeg's role as a watershed connected to "one of the largest drainage systems in North America" (Sinclair, 2024, p. 15) and as a place for which the name, narratives, geographical position, and spiritual background have been shaped by water. While it is a physical watershed, Sinclair describes how Wînipêk (also known as Winnipeg) can also be described as a watershed for Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. **"Red River Removals"** explores one perspective of this dynamic relationship through the topic of water injustices in Winnipeg, revealed across several lesser-known sites that revealed *unsights* to articulate how systematically the injustices are obscured overtime and across several places. *Unsights* is one of many soil renderings that come from this manuscript (See Introduction to Manuscript/*Matryoshka* 4). This manuscript continues the work begun in **"Murky Waters"** by sharing how the *National Inquiry's Calls for Justice* (2019b) connect to land and water. Manuscript 4 provides more information regarding the guiding theories, methodologies, and experiences for this final part of this critical place inquiry and introduces how CPI functions as a trajectory rather than a perspective methodology. Figure 0.7 presents the linking questions for this manuscript.

Figure 0.7

Manuscript 4 Research Questions and Field Notes

"Red River Removals" connects to one of the many ongoing water and land injustices of Canada. This manuscript surfaces stories from several sites, beginning with an art installation in a parking lot at the Parks Canada National Historic site of Riel House and extending towards the river but blocked by private housing development. This initial site led me to connect the place and the artwork I developed there to other places, such as the Aqueduct monument, Rooster Town, and Ian August's permanent installation entitled the *Rooster Town Kettle* (August, 2019). I explored a collection of places linked by timeframes, all of which reveal hidden water stories and severed relationships with water.

This final manuscript shares a series of sites that are linked by the settler colonial transformation of landscapes. In particular, I look at severed ties to water resulting from the removals of Métis communities along the Red River and purposeful disconnections from water with impacts on First Nations and Métis communities stemming from the engineering of the

Winnipeg Aqueduct. In **"Red River Removals"**, land is commodified when profitable and water generously flows or is denied and is a resource that is manipulated in favour of settlers.

Final Chapter

The conclusion of this dissertation is called Body of Work because it re-assembles perspectives from each of the manuscripts (which have functioned like individual matryoshka entities) and unites them. This closing synthesis describes learning from soilwork, shares additional artistic renderings (such as offerings, relief, and understandings), analyzes connections embodied within and between chapters, and outlines important considerations and future collaborations that have come from this intersection of a/r/tographic critical place inquiry.

The Place of Wînipêk, Manitowapow (Winnipeg, Manitoba)

Within this dissertation focused on critical place inquiries, one of the most important aspects of this research is where it takes place. This section helps to describe more about Winnipeg, Manitoba as the central place of the research within all four manuscripts, the Indigenous significance of this place, connections to soil and earth-based art that already live here, and some insights into Winnipeg that include my personal connections.

Place and land have helped me to think about epistemology, ontology, and axiology from beyond a Eurocentric perspective by focusing on Indigenous scholarship. Winnipeg is not just the site or location where this research took place, but the land and waters of Winnipeg are integrally part of these inquiries through multiple layers of my research endeavours. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) called for rigorous engagement with place to further understand land-based injustices and solutions. This dissertation discusses Winnipeg's historical and contemporary connections to colonization.

Winnipeg has many contrasting aliases: The Gateway to the West, the Homeland of the Métis Nation, a Keystone Province, the most racist city (Macdonald, 2015), a Human Rights City (University of Manitoba, 2022b), Chicago of the North, and a powerful Indigenous centre (Sinclair, 2024). It is a place that has been referred to as "ground zero for MMIWG2S" (Faculty of Law, 2022), where different types of stories live in contradiction, such as an everyday example where the branding of Friendly Manitoba is visible on the provincial licence plates juxtaposed by the optional imagery of red hands and red dresses to signify the alarming crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. These images serve as haunting reminders that Winnipeg is a place where women have been found in rivers and refuse fills, and where they continue to go missing at alarming rates. I learned from Dr. Wanda Phillips-Beck that landfills should be called what they really are—refuse fills and garbage dumps. They are not filled with land. I tried to bring her strong sentiment into my work here, to think about the everyday language people use within this city. Additionally, labels such as the most racist city, which was proclaimed upon Winnipeg by someone not from here, "obscure[s] the reality that racism was birthed in the very foundation of the country itself and then imported here" (Sinclair, 2024, p. 13). Winnipeg is home to the highest proportion of Indigenous peoples in the country (Sinclair, 2024; Canada, 2021), and therefore, for me as a settler teacher living, working, learning, and raising a family on Treaty 1 territory, understanding Indigenous educational approaches is of critical importance.

Winnipeg is an Indigenous city (Perry, 2016; Toews, 2018; Sinclair 2024), divided by and brought together by the winding river systems. Long before the relatively recent laying of the railway and colonial tracks, which were also divisive structures, Winnipeg was geographically shaped by glaciers, influenced by algae, and transformed by floods (Sinclair,

2024), and thus, was shaped by land and water connections. Places are where knowledges and discourses from across time-periods live. Places are affected by seasonal cycles, and this influences interactions between humans, non-humans (such as plants and animals), and more than human entities (such as sensuous or spiritual entities including land and water). Land and water connections are inextricably linked to the topics I discuss in the manuscripts.

The Indigenous name for Winnipeg and its beautiful meaning brings this critical place inquiry *down to earth*. I come back to this idea recursively throughout this dissertation as my understandings of territorial acknowledgements for Winnipeg have transformed over time. For example, I have used various terms and spellings for Winnipeg, ending with the most recent, Wînipêk (Sinclair, 2024). The Anishinaabe name "Wiinibiigong" (Ojibwe) and "Winipékohk" (Cree) means "where the water is murky or dirty" (Manitoba Museum, n.d.). Most recently, I learned that this city is also known as "Wînipêk" (Sinclair, 2024). The significance of this place name exposes the murkiness of methodologies of a/r/tography that embrace uncertainty and living practice alongside learning about histories and from land and water in this place, which has influenced my thinking and actions. While on the surface, Winnipeg is literally a place of dirty water, Sinclair elaborates on a translation of the name to further emphasize interconnections of land and water, and Winnipeg as a watershed where the murkiness comes from algae, illustrating connections to an ecological system and historic cultural knowledge (Sinclair, 2024).

This dissertation connects to specific historical injustices, such as: Indian Residential Schools, failure to uphold the Manitoba Act, ecological injustices around water, violence against Indigenous women, and ongoing multi-generational displacements. A connection woven throughout my analysis in the different manuscripts is the persistent takeover of Indigenous lands and the underemphasized resistances. All manuscripts address omissions of Indigenous

perspectives and stories, and they all consider contemporary public discourses that have influenced my analytical lenses. I did not seek out Métis places, but the way this series of studies and manuscripts (**"Homeland"** and **"Red River Removals"**) progressed revealed injustices towards the Métis, which is not surprising since, as Sinclair states, "some of the worst assaults have been experienced by the Red River Métis, who were swindled by Canadian authorities out of their land via scrip, displaced from their homes and left out of treaty, and dehumanized and exploited while helping to build the country" (p. 12). This layered study shows how Winnipeg is significant to pivotal moments in Canadian history. My chosen places are not places of active dissent; they are everyday places, such as my concrete driveway (my home), gathering sites and places of commemoration, or historical sites that are almost forgotten. These places have become more contentious than I originally thought. My realization of how settler colonialism functioned throughout these places came about through reading, walking, and learning from Indigenous community members, and this awareness was greatly enhanced through soilwork to remain cognizant that these are Indigenous lands. CPI and a/r/tography come together to inform my understanding of land by considering both settler ontologies, alongside and in tension with, Indigenous ontologies of land.

Winnipeg is a place where anti-Indigenous racism is a problem and where Indigenous people experience effects of colonialism in the form of disproportionately high rates of incarceration, poverty, and children in welfare systems. Attention to the *Calls for Justice* (*National Inquiry*, 2019b) and *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015) throughout this critical place inquiry have helped me to think about Winnipeg in relation to justice. I consider several place-based cases that reveal discourses of racial capitalism and settler colonialism embedded in particular sites. All manuscript components of the *Matryoshka* work towards justice through my

ongoing praxis integrating art, research, and teaching as well as through processes of ongoing learning and unlearning. My Soil Topography and Horizons of Soilwork (shared in this ForeGround section) document how this emphasis on justice unfolded and give a description of the various ways I have worked with soil, such as personal art, public provocations, and ongoing teaching and learning experiences.

The Indigenous roots from the Cree and Anishinaabe word wiinad and nibiing ("dirty waters") share the idea that place is relational and beyond one place on a map. The name of Wînipêk speaks to the relationships of Winnipeg, Manitoba, to the assemblage of water systems and role as a watershed rather than a fixed civic entity with ends, neighbourhoods, ward boundaries, constituencies, catchment areas, and all the other borders (Sinclair, 2024). According to Sinclair (2024):

> Wînipêk is an ethic, a term that gestures to the creation of delicate and intricate collaborations between all things; a process where forces—good and bad—come together to form relationships that flow into the world. Wînipêk is the culmination of the connections between earth, water, air, and people and a reminder of how each must be in balance for life to thrive. All of us who employ this powerful and remarkable name attain an opportunity to learn this sacred teaching every time it's used. (p.17)

The possibilities within "dirty waters", which Sinclair surfaces helped me to understand the medium of soil that also conveys multi-elemental and relational connections.

The Canadian Human Right Museum ushered Winnipeg, Manitoba, into a new era of building an identity of place beyond a racist city (McDonald, 2014) into a human rights city (University of Manitoba, 2022b) and towards an Indigenous centre (Sinclair, 2024).Within geographer Doreen Massey's critical, feminist, and Marxist work detailing intersections of

power, she too emphasized that there is a "relational uniqueness to places" (Sergot & Saives, 2016) and said, "to fully appreciate a place's specificity, one has to be aware of the other places with which it is connected" (p. 342). The name "Wînipêk" prompts learning about geography, ecological connections, social distancing, and the impact of modernization of Winnipeg on rural communities, such as the impact of the Winnipeg aqueduct on Shoal Lake First Nation (which is discussed in **"Red River Removals"**).

Land and waters are always connected and, in working with soil, I found new meanings of Winnipeg's namesake of murky waters. This dissertation does not shy away from the complication of the muddy waters but activates this idea by showing how places are not just containers or surfaces where things happen; places and soilwork are like a matryoshka, with numerous connections to layers of understanding, stories, and interpretations. Through my inquiry into the intra-activity between material land, material praxis as settler a/r/tographer, Indigenous and settler perspectives and histories of land and earth-based praxis, I show how my examples of soilwork leave educational sediments with implications for anticolonial arts-based approaches.

The name, Manitoba, also shares connections to soil and earth-based art, which shares connection to the name for the rock formations such as the petroforms of Manitou Api, "Where Creator Sits." Sacred teachings and natural laws of this place are connected to these petroforms (Cariou & Sinclair, 2011; Sinclair, 2024). Petroforms are permanent installations made of materials from the earth with the purpose of teachings, guiding, healing, and meaning making. While it is not used in the same context, soil does have unique ways of communicating information and helping generate new awareness and connections.

I have personal connections to Winnipeg and have lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba my entire life. I am grateful to have had many opportunities to travel, but I am choosing to raise my family here in Winnipeg and to study here. Taking on critical place inquiries in a city I know well, I am engaging in processes that Marie Battiste (2013) called *making strange* to begin to see new perspectives of what I thought I knew and to ask critical questions. According to Battiste, "the interplay between making the familiar strange and the strange familiar is part of the ongoing transformation of knowledge" (p. 31). I now see this city through new lenses.

Analyzing the *Matryoshka* of Manuscripts

This section analyzes how the matryoshka metaphor lives as the conceptual, theoretical and methodological framework of this dissertation to link four manuscripts that exist as separate entities but are stronger when assembled together. I share how this critical arts-based dissertation provides a unique methodological meshing of both critical place inquiries (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) and a/r/tography (Irwin et al., 2024; Leggo & Irwin, 2014; Springgay et al., 2005) to visually and viscerally engage decolonial praxis through earth-based approaches.

Calling this MDIS a *matryoshka* gives this assemblage of arts-based papers symbolic, cultural, theoretical and methodological merits that align well with the generative potential of a/r/tography. I show how a metaphor articulates active approaches, activates cultural perspectives, and demonstrates a commitment to understand coloniality in different places and across several years. My approach resists traditional ways in which knowledge has been constructed within the "highly conventionalized genre" of a dissertation (Duke & Beck, 1999, p. 31) but is no less rigorous than the dominant dissertation structure that includes an Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion section. While taking a course from settler scholar and professor, Dr. Peter Kulchyski, I found that his idea about the *un-disciplined* nature of Native

Studies resonated with me. I began to think about how there is an undisciplined quality to this soilwork that also attempted to develop knowledge that pushes disciplinary boundaries. Inspired by transgressive approaches, I present an *undisciplined dissertation* that exposes methodological constraints of one type of traditional dissertation and draws upon scholars who question existing paradigms and methodologies. For example, Rita Irwin and Shawn Wilson are two researchers who questioned existing paradigms and made purposeful departures towards something new—a/r/tography and an articulation of an Indigenous research paradigm. Although they both sought relational work, they functioned within two different paradigms. However, both connected to spiritual, more-than-human aspects of research—felt, perceived, ephemeral, and not quantifiable or visible. Rita Irwin departed from arts-based research based in social sciences approaches, which limited thinking around artistic process and led to the creation of a/r/tography as a methodology (Springgay et al., 2005; Ng-A-Fook, 2020). In a similar departure, Wilson (2008) identified a need for articulating an Indigenous research paradigm that purposefully resists conventional research paradigms and Western research practices. Relational epistemologies share that "knowledge itself is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us" (Wilson, 2008, p. 87). This research has become a way of coming into new relationships with place through engaging with soilwork alongside listening to stories, hidden histories, and looking for power in places.

This dissertation is made of four layered studies guided by theoretical and ontological frameworks that complement one another; therefore, the *Matryoshka* makes sense of how they exist as an assemblage. While the image of the *Matryoshka* can be positioned in a seriated order, this metaphor's power comes alive when relational aspects are emphasized rather than the order. The *Matryoshka* draws upon culturally relevant imagery to my own ancestral backgrounds to

emphasize embodied, interconnected, and critical aspects of this research. This *Matryoshka* connects topics, such as place, land, sacredness of women, water, and themes of *being in relation* embedded in all the chapters. The relational concept of the *earth as mother* is an important concept that frames this arts-based dissertation.

An underlying message I received from Indigenous leaders has been to stay firm in my own ancestral connections and cultural background. Sometimes this advice has come in explicit ways, with language such as 'stay in your lane' or 'tread lightly on the earth', and other times, it has manifested as a warning regarding exercising caution about appropriation and other important considerations. There is a push and pull aspect to this work—being called to act and respond to national commissions and inquiries but also understanding when to step aside. Utilizing Indigenous frameworks without meaningful actions is a concern. I have witnessed debates about authentic versus superficial engagement use of the Medicine Wheel, use of story, orange shirts, use of cultural teachings/practices (such as totems, petroforms, bundles, and tipis, for example), and terms such as land-based in numerous contexts as people try to implement more Indigenous perspectives beyond an additive approach. Such practices can lead to a reaffirmation of settler colonial dominance and privilege (Flowers, 2015). My work accomplishes an in-depth look at settler colonialism from new modes of creative researching, and teaching. Within the context of pretendianism, and questions around Indigenous ancestry, it is becoming clearer how important and complex it is to be honest about cultural ties. I try to do this by considering the questions: Who am I? and Where I am from? (Sinclair, 2017) to guide my work. I also problematize my own cultural connections and draw upon the *Matryoshka*—known as a symbolic figure most associated with Ukraine and Russia—as a way of connecting to my

own cultural ancestry while also seeking connections to Indigenous scholarship, ontologies of land, and embodied praxis.

Matryoshka as Relational Entities

This *Matryoksha* acknowledges ecological perspectives that prompt the notion of *place* to move beyond the container or vessel metaphor and towards a more relational approach. The *Matryoshka* references the container metaphor, speaks back to it, and extends it in ways that offer more nuanced perspectives of being in relation than those by defined by boundaries. The *Matryoshka* highlights a notion of place that works beyond the geographical and social borders in place, to look for information in the in-between places. I look at specific sites but also consider how the information from these places contribute to a broader political movement towards decolonization and relational forms of researching.

The *Matryoshka* is a framework the emphasizes generational knowledge within storied places. For example, Styres et al., (2013) shared that, "Seven generational thinking is a particular form of Indigenous thought that suggests each generation is responsible for ensuring that decisions are made with a view to the implications seven generations into the future" (p.40). This way of thinking about research reinforces connections between thoughts, actions, studies, approaches, and emphasizes relational accountability on my part as researcher. How am I helping? How can my practices be more sustainable? This *Matryoshka* is designed to display a forming relationship, one that builds and changes over time, and to show how a "methodology is simply the building of more relations" (Wilson, 2008, p.79) by embodying relationships between multiple places and showing how the manuscripts are connected. The *Matryoshka's* focus on relationships is relevant to Winnipeg's role as a centre of relationships for centuries (Sinclair, 2024). This dissertation lays out some groundwork in preparation for participatory research by

providing insights into how art-based approaches can merge with decolonial aims. Tynan (2021) described how "the relationship between land and humans is held together by an intricate web of relatedness that envelopes all entities" (p. 603). Further emphasizing this point, Haraway (2015) provided a provocative commentary on the long-lasting effects of anthropogenic processes on the earth. Haraway's words provide scientific and interdisciplinary perspectives about the interconnectivity between societies and all species, sharing: "No species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern Western scripts, acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too" (p. 159). The model and metaphor of the *Matryoshka* serves as a reminder of the relational aspects to ideas, places, people, and connects to Haraway's (2015) description of the Chthulucene (an epoch of natural disaster after the Anthopocene, Capitalocene), when an entanglement of temporalities and spatiality to create an "intra-active entities-in-assemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus" (p.160). Thinking through this description of an entanglement helped me represent a commitment to kinship and relational approaches through the *Matroyshka*. The *Matryoshka* is an assembling model similar to the way "Making kin" is viewed by Haraway (2015) as an "assembling word" which includes more than ancestral ties. Decomposition of the term shows that "all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense, and it is past time to practice better care of kinds-as-assemblages (not species one at a time)" (p. 162). In Ukrainian culture, the *matryoshka* is like a Mother or Grandmother; in describing the word Grandmother in Cree, Wilson shared that "You can't be a grandmother without being attached to something" (2008, p. 73). In a way, these two perspectives are complementary.

Theoretical and Methodological Layers of the Matryoshka

This *Matryoshka* elaborates on core theories and approaches that have influenced my thinking. The following section will address critical and decolonial theories and praxis, anticolonial approaches and feminist approaches such as influences from intersectionality, Native feminist theories, and Indigenist perspectives. I have also been influenced by the theories from social activist theory and the arts-based assemblage that will be addressed in the next section describing the overlapping methodologies of a/r/tography and critical place inquiries.

Critical and Decolonial Theories and Praxis. Critical orientation of this research stems initially from previous research using Critical Discourse Analysis (Bloor & Bloor, 2007; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; van Dijk, 1995, 2009), which also had an influence on how I viewed my critical place inquiries. This study connects to critical frameworks that disrupt discourses of power in various places such as my own driveway, heritage sites, and public places of commemoration, and seek to expose settler colonial dynamics. This *Matryoshka* views knowledge as inextricably linked to power relationships. I use critical and decolonial theories, and experiential and embodied arts-based methodologies that emphasize power dynamics and critical reflexivity and that engage affective and wholistic components. While the research is rooted within a critical paradigm that acknowledges power dynamics as a frame for reality (Wilson, 2008), there are rhizomatic connections in epistemic, ontological, and axiological dimensions that extend and draw nutrients from other paradigms, most notably, Indigenous orientations. For example, this research journey has shifted towards more awareness of an Indigenous paradigm that views knowledge as holistic, relational, cyclical, and encompassing of spiritual elements alongside the mental, physical, and emotional (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Through my artwork as part of this research, I have consistently stretched for the margins—topics, stories, and methods that have

been marginalized, which has made me more aware how soilwork has troubled some paradigmatic boundaries.

This *Matryoshka* dissertation works towards a decolonizing approach by addressing the complexity of coloniality through soilwork. Alongside Indigenous resurgence, Wildcat et al. (2014) called for a settler's decolonizing to begin with a reckoning with colonial past and present. Burow et al. (2018) shared that decolonization involves grounded practices supportive of revitalizing Indigenous ontologies and "is constitutive of a resistant and ameliorative politics that unravels land's singularity" (p. 68). These researchers stated that "decolonization cannot simply be the rejection of one modality of land for the other but rather follows an uneasy path to maintain a hybrid assemblage of ontologies, with all their attendant affordances and limitations" (p. 68). **"Red River Removals"** shows how settler colonialism removes people, removes lands, removes water, but also how land-as-property removes Indigenous ontologies for settler economic gains and futurity.

Donald (2009) encouraged teachers and researchers to think about decolonization as working towards acknowledging colonial relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and how these relationships frame pedagogies before working towards repair. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002) discussed decolonization as a merging of knowledges and "about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (p. 39). I am aware of how the term "decolonize" is often used synonymously with human rights-based projects and subsumed by other social justice initiatives that do not consider Indigenous peoples or their perspectives and the importance of the land (Tuck & Yang, 2012). From the perspective of settler scholar Irlabacher-Fox (2014), decolonization is "a messy process of relational in-the-world becoming"

(p. 156). The soil makes the messiness of this process clear. **"Murky Waters"** is a manuscript that brings forward the murkiness of a methodology.

This research is a form of decolonial praxis, involving developing a critical consciousness regarding how settler ideologies and ontologies have silenced Indigenous perspectives, ways of knowing, living, being, and doing (Burow et al., 2018; Styres, 2019). One of the forerunner philosophers of the idea of decoloniality, Walter Mignolo (2009), offered helpful guidance to understand decolonial projects as more than undoing efforts of external colonization of places, but also how they pose an internal challenge, stating:

> De-coloniality, then, means working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ, which is what modernity/coloniality does and, hence, where decolonization of the mind should begin. The struggle is for changing the terms in addition to the content of the conversation. (p. 459)

Kanien'kehá:ka scholar Sandra Styres (2019) went further to state that Land itself is already connected to the term decolonial: "Land as a decolonizing praxis informs pedagogy through storied relationships" (p. 29). In the classroom context, decolonization can look like challenging colonial power and feel like critical consciousness to "trouble the ways purposeful ignorance twists the historical realities and the ways colonialist ideologies become normalized within national discourses and internalized among minoritized peoples" (Styres, 2019, p. 32).

Anticolonial Approaches. In this dissertation, I do not generalize the term decolonization but place it in dialogue with particular places, to understand its meaning more clearly, thus rendering noticeable the colonial stories that lurk in each place. These discussions include the dynamic between my own 'home' land and my *matroyshka* of responsibilities as a

mother, artist, researcher, and teacher; the hidden histories in Upper Fort Garry; the land-based injustices and gender-based violence at the place, Nesteweyah, where Winnipeg's rivers merge; and quiet, normalized and ongoing colonialism that is part of Winnipeg's history and present. The term, anticolonial, centres activism as connected to the goals of academic research and work to directly impact contemporary issues (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). While this dissertation uses both terms, anticolonial and decolonial, I most frequently use the term decolonial because it appears more frequently in the literature, although I understand how the terminology can give a false impression that the effects of coloniality can be erased. I take the advice of Rallis et al. (2024) who shared that it is not a matter of either/or but rather that decolonization is not distinguishable from the term anticolonial. In their approach, Rallis et al. (2024) referred back to Sofa Dei's (2019) description of approaches to anticolonial and decoloniality as intertwined logics that begins with anticolonial outlooks informing directions and pathways towards a decolonial future (p. vii, as cited in Rallis et al., 2024, p. 217).This intertwined approach of viewing an anticolonial perspective as connected to a decolonial aim is fitting within the *Matryoshka* framework and is taken up further in **"Unearthing Truths".**

This study activates anticolonial feminisms to counter an insidious type of colonialism creating an "institutionalized matrix of racism, sexism, and classism that has become invisible" (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 48). My focus on intersectionality through the *Matryoshka* and through looking at layers to soilwork and intersections with lived in places keeps these matrices visible in our minds, bodies, and spirits and supports an analysis of how power functions in each place and within ourselves. **"Murky Waters"** is a manuscript that specifically draws upon the intersectionality described in the *National Inquiry* (2019a), whose authors explicitly call for an intersectional approach described in the Final Report:

> Intersectionality recognizes that a person's experience will be different than another's based on their particular interplay of race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, and ability, as well as how these intersections encourage systems of oppression and, ultimately, target Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. For Indigenous Peoples in particular, using an intersectional approach requires understanding how a history of colonization has shaped their experiences today. (p. 11)

Together the *Matryoshka* of manuscripts highlights the intersections of coloniality and oppressions across specific places and generates new connections.

This *Matroyshka* encapsulates the notion of the Earth as Mother (Greene, 2017; Tuck, 2020 in Guilford Press). This is a term used often; however, after listening to soil teachings from Indigenous Knowledge Holder Sherry Copenance, I am learning more about Anishinaabe teachings and stories that share why the Earth is viewed as Mother (S. Copenance, Anishinaabe, personal communication, September 7, 2023). Native feminist theories call out hegemonic intersections between heteropatriarchy and coloniality and remind me that views of places must consider ancestral connections, relationships, and responsibilities to land and bodies (Guilford Press, 2020; Tuck, 2016). From an Anishinaabe perspective, Edward Benton-Benai (1998) shared that Earth is a woman and referred to as Mother Earth "because from her come all living things" (p. 2). These connections to Earth as Mother support the significance of earth as a form of land art and form of expression.

The research across the various manuscripts is influenced by an Indigenist paradigm and views of knowledge as wholistic (Absolon, 2019), which emphasizes the *whole*-ness and connections to mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual elements and towards a balanced and circular approach. Shawn Wilson (2007) pointed out that mainstream paradigms are insufficient

and in response, he surfaced the concept of Indigenist Decolonization that draws upon the wisdom of Indigenous paradigms with a generosity and supportive attitude towards researchers of non-Indigenous heritage choosing to learn and follow its tenets. Additionally, this study is informed by Indigenous aesthetics and by Indigenist perspectives. Learning from Elders Sherry Copenance and Brenda Longclaws while working and designing this study, I became more informed by a holistic and relational understanding of reality when thinking about responding to the *Calls for Justice* (*National Inquiry*, 2019b) through the land.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002) elaborated on the many ways research has typically been viewed through imperial eyes and called for questioning Eurocentric notions of time as one part of decolonizing methodologies. Following her lead, "many [I]ndigenous scholars have referred to the contrasts and even contradictions between [I]ndigenous and Western understandings of time and reality" (Marker, 2011, p. 100). In my research, each site considers historical perspectives and represents a view of time, which aligns with Clark (2023) and Marker's (2011) view of a "spiralling of events and themes that appear and reappear within circles of seasons and that are identified in oral traditions" (p. 101). Dr. Brian Rice shared a distinction between secular time and sacred time (2005) and noted that stories of place can be connected to sacred time as well as lived within present reality. This dissertation follows a circular view of time that returns to ideas from over a six-year period and acknowledges that my learning continues even after these papers have been completed or published. This sustained engagement looks at how methodologies and theoretical orientations have shifted over time, how the influence of many theories has prompted visual ways of making meaning of terms such as decolonization, and how land can be approached through ongoing engagements with soil to come to deeper understandings over time. I am informed by the feminist idea of situated knowledges and post-

modern perspectives that knowledge is partial and can be created through multiple studies and approaches.

Activism and agency. This dissertation moves towards activist frameworks and seeking the longstanding strength of the arts to serve as a form of activism and enhances criticality through visual arts. Critical perspectives enhance the visual metaphor of the *Matryoshka* beyond the aspect of nestedness and as a design that has cross-cultural significance. The *Matryoshka* concept acknowledges the existence of colonial logic. Eva Jewell (2024) described how within a "colonial logic, our *selves*—when cleared of our ability to care for, receive, and transmit our distinct knowledges, orders, languages, systems, sciences, technologies, and kinships—become empty vessels to be malleated" (p. 169). This is a powerful reminder about the role of education to debunk the empty vessel idea that students are receptacles of knowledge. Similarly, there is a need to move beyond a benevolent or passive doll-like version of the *Matryoshka* and towards activist frameworks. I see that reconciliation and decolonization and other concepts connected to these loaded terms can be at risk of being used abstractly and with surface level approaches. From a critical perspective, I recognize that the idea of a doll signifies how generations of settlers have come to live in what is now Canada, seemingly innocently, yet settler presence on Indigenous territory has had disastrous and long-lasting impact. Thinking through all the elements of the *Matryoshka* prompt me to think about how to disrupt my own participation in settler colonialism. I present this *Matryoshka* not as a static object but as an iterating series of methodological moves that go beyond a complacent replication of coloniality and that reject the factory style mode of schooling. One clear way I accomplished this was by taking this dissertation beyond the walls of institutional settings.

According to Flowers (2015), ["[a] material body is not merely symbolic but is agentic" (p. 41). Each written piece in this *Matryoshka* supports themes and is connected to topics found in the other publications and manuscripts; it shows how my soil methodology also evolved across time and across many sites. The *Matryoshka*'s life-giving qualities can be utilized to draw upon connections to phases of life and to connect to generational aspects and ancestral connections, which are important to decolonial projects (Tuck, 2020, as cited in Guilford Press, 2020). Symbolizing Earth as Mother, this *Matryoshka* also gives birth to various aspects of ontology and values inward knowing processes through learning from different places and embodied, spiritual experiences that are difficult to compartmentalize (Kovach, 2009). The nested nature of the manuscripts also supports an emergent methodology, connecting entities and ideas from practical work and reflection that cohesively make up a new material or Body of Work (which is the name of the assembling chapter at the end of this dissertation).

In my candidacy exams written in 2022, I compared theories of postmodern feminist theory with a focus on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989,1991; *National Inquiry*, 2019a) as well as the educational activist theory of assemblage (Buchanan, 2021, Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Delanda, 2016; MacLure, 2019; Semetsky, 2010), Indigenist feminism (Greene, 2017; Guilford Press, 2020), and ethical relationality (Donald, 2019, 2021). I noticed potential for these theories to support circularity of decolonial frameworks by bringing attention to barriers toward practices that are more just. These manuscripts portray an ongoing, entangled assemblage of relationships between situated ideas within the *Matryoshka* as a symbol of life, and they take on many forms of being, knowing, relating, and doing. A *Matryoshka* framework supports intersections of power in particular places that could be assembled in a way that also keeps me aware of my limitations as a white-cis gender scholar, and the insider/outsider

limitations of mainstream white feminist theories, which have focused on Eurocentric concepts (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 48).

Methodologies of Critical Place Inquiry and A/r/tography

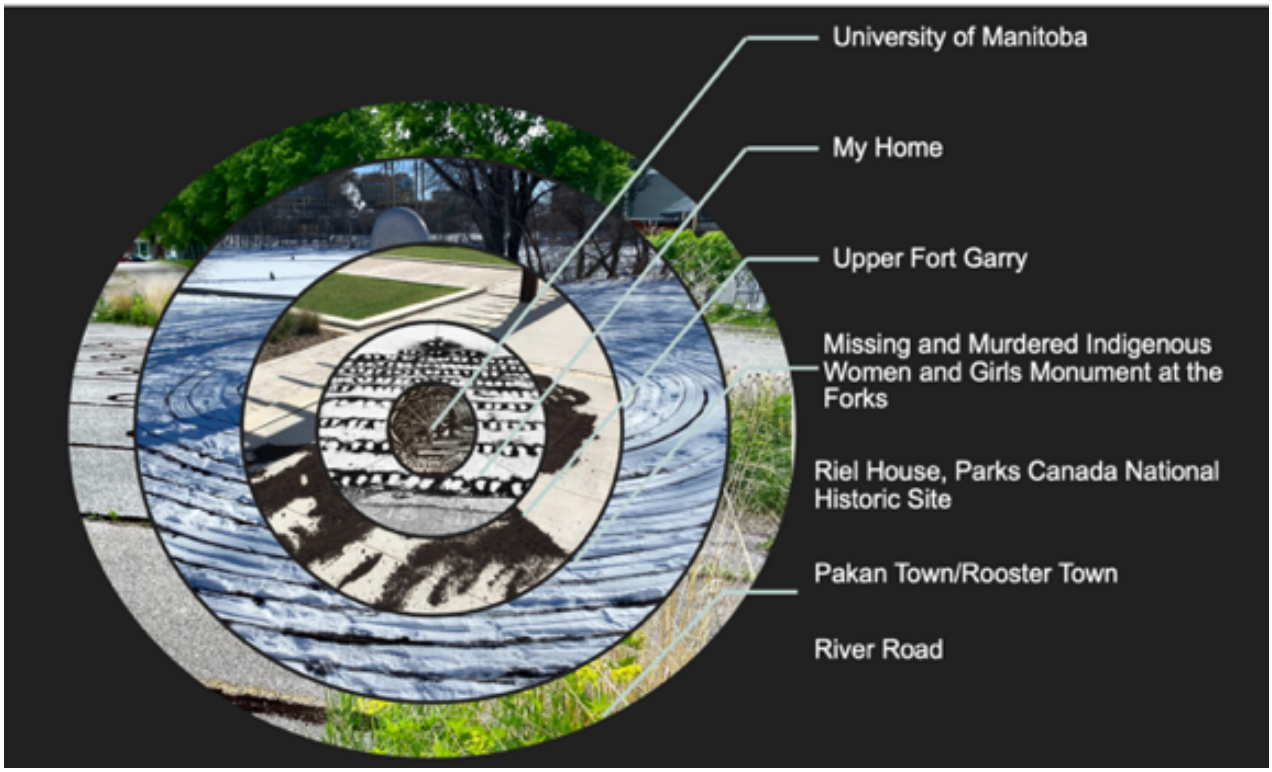
This *Matryoshka* functions as an assemblage of critical place inquiry and a/r/tography as two methodological trajectories. This arts-based assemblage draws upon the social activist theory of *assemblage* in which "the parts that are fitted together are not uniform either in nature or in origin, and that the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them" (Delanda, 2016, p. 2). Together these chapters function as a collection or constellation (Thomson, 2019) that are created out of merging together several distinct critical place inquiries and the methodology of a/r/tography. This approach functions with a pedagogical and social purpose that "enlists conscious and unconscious desires, mobilizes intentionality in particular ways and is always bound within a series of collective discourses, ideologies and expectations" (Thomson, 2019, p. 3). Assemblage theory informed my choices of how to combine these individual works and informed how I viewed places that were not necessarily close in proximity but have common links such as water injustices. For example, the fourth manuscript, **"Red River Removals"**, is a clear example of this theory in action—showing how an understanding of one place can become quickly connected to stories of removals in other locations. This study enmeshes theories and actions together to create an assemblage/*agencement* (Delanda, 2016). This assemblage of critical place inquiries marries with the potential of the arts to both generate a new assemblage and emphasize the undisciplined process of piecing together this creative work. In Delanda's (2016) perspective of an assemblage, "the parts that are fitted together are not uniform either in nature or in origin, and… the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them" (p. 2). Assembling this elaborate inquiry

of places helped me to see layered problems of displacements, racial injustices, and solutions, such as learning these stories across various sites. The ontological perspective guiding the assemblage focuses on immanence, which "forces us to conceive of the identity of a community or of a central government as being continuously produced by the day-to-day interactions between its parts" (Delanda, 2016, p. 18). This focus on the tangible and material level aligns with the messiness of soilwork and the focus on the social, political, and semiotic discourses of places, and the relationality between human and other living entities and material beings.

Figure 0.8 shows a conversation between key places within Winnipeg, Manitoba, which includes a combination of private property, public places of commemoration, and Parks Canada National Historic Sites. This conversation appears as a diagram, but there has been an ongoing conversation between the learning stories at each site that make calling it a diagram feel flat, when in reality the work felt connected by learning from land. This approach to assembling the *Matryoshka* also supports the need to compile divisive perspectives about land, such as the need to move away from the nature/city dichotomy, and to see natural and built environments as dynamic and relational (Styres et al., 2013). This *Matryoshka* represents research as embodied, lived practice and moves towards a multiplicity of different topics, approaches, and voices (Aoki, 1993). I emphasize nestedness by purposefully assembling these distinct places together with Living Links and through the development of distinct topography of soilwork processes.

Figure 0.8

Places of Research within Winnipeg, Manitoba



The *Matryoshka* framework aligns with notions of land as dynamic, shifting, layered, storied, and constructed through layered relationships and stories and as a "spiritually dynamic and relational place" (Styres et al., 2013). My perspectives of place as power-filled connects my inquiries to Massey's (2005) premise that space and place are political and that "you can't hold places still" (p. 125). While these manuscripts recall a specific *then* and *there,* my perspectives of Winnipeg are informed by local stories and interactions and with an openness to what lies in-between. Places are relational "spatio-temporal events" and "a moment within power-geometries" (Massey, 2005, p. 131). Places are "open and unfinished" (p.141) and represent an internal multiplicity of human and non-human trajectories. Place links past, present, personal, ancestral, and generational knowledge (Kovach, 2009). I view places as social constructions and

material locations: a nexus of experiences, power-filled discourses that are present in visible and invisible ways and where more holistic attunement and relational connections are possible. Through this view, I see Winnipeg as a place where power geometries are created over time and through specific discursive materials, such as historical plaques, public engagements, news stories, monuments, and interactions. I have lived in the north end of Winnipeg's inner-city and in the south end. This move from inner-city to south end when I was young made me aware of anti-Indigenous racism and negative stereotypes of immigrant and Slavic communities, and it brought my attention to division created within the city. The city is divided by rail lines, and during my first years studying to be a teacher, I heard that some Winnipeggers had never ventured beyond the tracks or crossed Arlington or Slaw Rebchuk Bridge—a physical divider of the North and South parts of the city. This division bothered me and prompted me to seek teaching employment where I grew up on the North side of the tracks. I had the opportunity to teach at King Edward School, which was on the street where I grew up. While it might be perceived as staying within my own bubble and contributing to an uncritical and narrow perspective, this experience of living, working, and crossing perceived borders within the city has contributed to a critical consciousness to Indigenous-specific racism within inner-city contexts and the limitations of culturally irrelevant content and approaches. I think these border crossing experiences of living and teaching in places of high poverty as well as in higher income and affluent parts of Winnipeg has given me a unique perspective of Winnipeg that influences my praxis and emphasis on power relationships.

A/r/tography as Methodology, Artistic Renderings, and Methods

A/r/tography is the over-arching methodological approach taken up in all four manuscripts as well as in the linking analyses between the manuscripts and guides the way this

Matryoshka of manuscripts has evolved, grown, and rooted itself over time. This section outlines approaches to a/r/tography presented in each manuscript and discusses the Living Links that connect them. I present a topography of soilwork described by layers called "Horizons" and describe specific types of artistic renderings that have grown from my layered approaches to soilwork. This *Matryoshka* represents a body of work made up of methods such as: earth-based art installations and soilwork, critical discourse analysis to support the analysis of multimodal and semiotic elements in public places, and the physical act of walking to see interconnections across places in Winnipeg in situ. All these methods have focused on strengthening relationships with land and places through art.

The first manuscript, **"Unearthing Truths",** draws upon established renderings of a/r/tography (Springgay et al., 2005) but uses an anticolonial lens to analyze the experience of creating an installation on my driveway in honour of the 215 unmarked graves discovered at Kamloops Residential School. I draw upon anticolonial theories to support critical reflexivity in my a/r/tography practice and to make meaning of the event of a media team covering the artwork for a news story but destroying the artwork in the process. In this example, my a/r/tography aims to connect to the TRC to reveal soilwork as a process that invites deeper thinking about settler colonial moves to innocence as well as my own responsibilities as teacher and researcher.

Second, in **"Homeland",** I use the disruptive qualities of art in portraying soil art as an intervention that responds to the hidden curriculum of the Upper Fort Garry heritage site to consider what it teaches based on existing imagery and discourses embedded in place. This art piece was created during Canada Day 2021, which enhanced the soilwork's position as artivism. This artwork generated many interesting conversations during the art creation as people who stopped to view the art piece helped me to clarify why I was doing this work. I remember a

family stopping to view the art piece in progress, and it prompted them to have a conversation about Louis Riel and his significant role in the history of Manitoba. I witnessed children teaching their parents. I also met relatives of Riel and an Indigenous artist who stopped to give me artistic tips about the composition, such as ideas for correcting his jawline, and process ideas, such as spraying water onto the installation to ensure it stays in place for a longer duration. These experiences, while they may not have made it into the chapter because of word count limitations, have shaped my ongoing creative practice.

In **"Murky Waters",** I make connections between action research and a/r/tography to show how art can be a voice for mobilizing the *Calls for Justice* as well as a way of responding to challenging topics and to understanding place. Alongside photographs of walks and artmaking, I layer red narrative text like the ribbon ties in memory of missing or murdered Indigenous women, whose stories I researched as part of my own action research in the article.

Lastly, **"Red River Removals"** shows how art helps viewers and educators notice what is not obvious. I use a self-made stencil of an infinity symbol to represent the Métis. I carefully use this symbol repeatedly and methodically in each of the stalls of an empty parking lot, forming a striking row of Métis imagery that moves towards the river. This was art that needed to be precise, accurate, and measured to ensure a strong visual effect. I included lines along the cement curbs and beside the parking stall lines that echoed the criss-crossing motif of a Métis sash. The aim of the imagery was to reinforce the idea of reserving space and assert that this land is Indigenous land. The artwork considers who this land is really reserved for and, to emphasize this question, I move the installation to a raw form of footprints towards the river that extend right onto someone's property.

Topography and Horizons of Soilwork

Imagery of seeds, trees, roots, shoots, and rhizomes are used in current educational discourses to articulate connections, growth, changes, development, curricular approaches, and much more. Even the term, academic *fields*, shows how land metaphors dominate disciplines and further enforces how knowledge is commodified. Agricultural analogies and horticultural metaphors of cultivating gardens have been around for centuries in Western philosophies (Mintz, 2018). To make a case for teaching in inclusive ways, Jardine (2002) made the analogy of an inclusive classroom as a garden—a topography that requires working together and valuing difference. Even some less obvious terms used in education, such as best practices, are connected to land. For example, my advisor, Dr. Clea Schmidt, cautioned me about the use of the term, best practices, because it originated from an agricultural term connected to environmental management of soil and land use to maximize productivity. In education, questions are frequently posed about: What *are* the *best* practices? The concept of best practice downplays teachers' practices, the significance of place and diverse contexts and is an "illegitimate importation from an inappropriate paradigm" (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 569). This learning taught me about how settler perspectives of land as a controllable resource are embedded within educational discourses, and it is an idea that has stayed with me as I work with soil. I want to further critique modes of generalizability and productivity, and reductionist approaches that are activated by and through soil.

In this dissertation, I continue to draw upon numerous terms and metonyms for soilwork to convey the relationships to land and topics. The renderings of soil that I have outlined are often connected to land-based imagery, metaphors, or processes of how I worked with soil and have become important ways to understand place. For example, soil can signify Canada's *soiled* history (**"Unearthing Truths"**). Dirt can signify the unethical approaches to research and the

marginalized and misperceived disposability of alternative methodologies, such as arts and Indigenous methodologies (**"Murky Waters"**).

Soilwork is a relational practice that involves the messiness and beauty of working with and connecting to land and the stories from the encounters that emerge. Simpson (2014) noted how relationality is integrally connected to experiences on and with land, and cannot be learned within settler colonial systems or solely through intellectual exercises and academic learning. Soilwork is wholistic (Absolon, 2010; Carlson, 2016) and encompasses body, mind, spirit and place/land working in relation to one another. There is no substitute for generating artwork using one's own hands. While the creation of art is at risk of being generated without human hands, soilwork is an embodied experience that cannot be replicated through artificial means.

To clarify how soilwork and earth-based art installations have supported meaning making and knowledge sharing, this *Matryoshka* unpacks and presents layered "Horizons" (presented with the section on the Topography of Soilwork), which describe three types of embodied practices of a/r/tography and distinct critical place inquiries. The topography gives a sample of how soilwork looked in practice as I worked with soil independently, with colleagues in professional learning sessions, collaboratively with family or friends, and with students of various ages in K-6 settings. This topography summarizes the methodological connections between manuscripts to describe soil as an earth-based method. More specifically, Horizon 1 is a layer of soilwork done more privately and described as Personal Praxis; Horizon 2 is Public Provocations and Critical Place Inquiries, which are the dominant focus of the four manuscripts, and Horizon 3 is comprised of Walking and Earth Art Workshops. These layers give the evolving entity of the *Matryoshka* its layeredness, not just conceptually but methodologically. These different horizons describe how public soilwork provocations and private arts practice

using soilwork, when assembled into this framework, help dig deeper into the complex place of Winnipeg, Manitoba. While new layers are emerging as this work extends beyond this dissertation and towards more participatory research and involvement with research colleagues and participants, here are the descriptions of the horizons of this initial topography of soilwork:

Horizon 1 - Personal Praxis. This layer is part of my a/r/tography practice usually done on my own but has also occurred alongside my children and colleagues. Personal praxis has given me a greater insight into working with materials and learning as an ongoing process. I have considered how to create soilwork compositions of various dimensions and scale by creating with my own hands and experimenting with different implements. I have also created ways to show erasures and replacements through many soilwork renderings that emerged from this work. This layer includes working with soil; writing (academic or poetry); walking within Winnipeg, Manitoba; and an example of land acknowledgement work, such as workshops focused on walking and active acknowledging land (as opposed to passive and performative statements) by using existing land acknowledgement language. Such a transformative practice breathes life to the words by connecting to significant places. Living Link 2 provides an example of Personal Praxis representing the type of work that this horizon has involved and demonstrates my personal voice as an artist, researcher, and teacher as I work with soil to make land acknowledgements visual, visceral, and valued. I did this through working with soil in my hands, which encouraged me to voice a land acknowledgement from the heart and from memory as I worked with soil without reading a script. I demonstrate my reflexivity and share what it is like to work with soil by combining text from some of my field notes, voice memos before or after working with soil, or connections I have made to Indigenous stories or teachings. The

linking poem in Figure 1.0 represents how my work and learning process unfolds poetically. It was created in response to a colleague's question: But what does this work feel like?

Horizon 2 - Public Provocations and Critical Place Inquiries. The soilwork and earth-based art included in all manuscripts are examples of work within this second horizon. The manuscripts feature critically oriented inquiries that involved walking (Donald, 2021; Kerr & Ferguson, 2020), learning alongside Dr. Brian Rice, and coursework in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning. I traversed various public places of significance during different seasons and times of day while learning and listening to teachers on site. I also listened to land by being attuned to the multisensory, multispecies, natural, and unnatural aspects about the sites' stories and by researching, reading publicly accessible plaques and online information, and engaging with public discourse. I created temporary, large-scale, soil art installations—a form of *monument hacking*—to unsettle the official histories. Documentation included photos, videos, and social media posts. I revisited how the space changes engagement over time, and my critical analysis is informed by broader social and political discourses. I have written academic articles about my experiences of creating artistic responses in each site. Each inquiry generated a learning story (Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Davidson, 2023, as cited in Ferguson & Davidson, 2023; Dr. S.F. Davidson, Haida Nation, personal communication, 2022) which describe learning experiences of each installation and led to new questions and research sites.

Horizon 3 – Walking and Earth Art Workshops. This phase draws upon learning stories and ongoing action-reflection cycles (McNiff, 2017) within Horizons 1 and 2, which has inspired work that I have led, including workshops with schools and teacher teams, early years learners, post-baccalaureate and graduate students, and pre-service teachers, and at provincial professional learning days for a variety of engagements. This horizon has been a

valuable part of getting to know how soil can be a teaching tool, what challenges emerge in creation, and how to prepare students for engagement with difficult topics.

In these workshops I have utilized various techniques and approaches to soil art—taking, displacing, erasing, and re-placing of land—to support engagement around the topic of settler-colonialism. This work has involved walking and sharing my own a/r/tography practices in the form of slideshows, videos, and photographs alongside research stories. This layer includes:

- walking land acknowledgement workshops,
- a combination of soil art workshops, digital presentations, and walking workshops for teachers in post baccalaureate programs at the University of Manitoba, pre-service teacher professional learning at University of Manitoba Program Days,
- work as guest facilitator of graduate-level courses offered through the Summer Writing Institute and a course called: Becoming Writers: Place, Power, and Pedagogy in Teaching Writing
- pilot workshops and participatory experiences connected to collaborative research projects.

Figure 0.9

Overview of Soilwork Horizons

Horizon 3
Walking Workshops and Earth Art Creations

- **Who:** Katya facilitating with University students and school teams
- **What/Why:** Participatory workshops involving art creation connecting to the National Inquiry into MMIWG and TRC; Walking land acknowledgements and soil-based art creation
- **How:** Using arts-based teaching strategies (layering soil, stories, and public art)
- **Where/When**: workshops (online and in person) multiple times per year beginning in 2021-2025

Horizon 2
Public Provocations and Critical Place Inquiries

- **Who:** Katya and public engagement
- **What/Why:** Unguided art installation; I will observe and take photos, part of action research
- **How:** Monument hacking, placing soil in public spaces and writing about the story of its creation; Process, outcomes, and challenges were documented
- **Where/When**: University, Upper Fort Garry, Forks, Riel House, Rooster Town, my home, around public art from 2017, 2020-2024

Horizon 1
Personal Praxis

- **Who:** Katya independently and with my children
- **What/Why: Composing;** Part of ongoing reflexivity; Insights inform workshop design and soil methodologies; part of a/r/tography practice
- **How:** Documenting field notes, aural notetaking/voice memos sharing reactions, ideas, questions, and inspirations throughout research process
- **Where/When**: Ongoing soil compositions, multimodal journalling; 2017-2025

Note. This chart visually summarizes the distinct research approaches in this dissertation.

Living in the Liminal

I focus on nested elements but also attend to the spaces between the manuscripts—the learning *between* places. All aspects of the *Matryoshka* live in the liminal space, searching for meanings in between spaces—between places, between manuscripts, and between the various roles and places of learning. This approach of creatively connecting materials echoes Aoki's (1993; 2004) curriculum of the *in-between* and Chung's (2016) notion of hybrid space in which different ancestral connections from different places enable envisioning linkages beyond the places analyzed here. Artists are concerned with things that are not overtly noticeable. There are

historical and ecological components, gesturing towards spiritual and ceremonial components to this research as it has progressed. I am not researching Winnipeg from the past until 2024; I am centring artistic practice in different places to see what emerged.

This study ventures to the edges of a new materialist paradigm that highlights the entanglements between matter (soil/earth/dirt) and its layered meanings as well as blurred lines between knowing, being, and doing. Truman (2021) referenced the openings that come though writing, which I see as strongly connected to soilwork, and shares

> Writing *about* research projects is always more than (and less than) the events that occurred. But more importantly, writing *is* an event in itself: instead of this recognition causing a crisis of representation, or closing down of meaning, I view it as an opening. (p. 24)

This *Matryoshka* dissertation provides an inquiry into Winnipeg that functions as a *topological analysis* (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p.15) that is more than and less than the writing. It is both a sharing of how I went deeper into a/r/tography but also demonstrates that I am just at the surface of the groundwork for further relational research projects. Additionally, my a/r/tography has revealed a liminal space between my job and my work as a graduate student. There seemed to be two different places where I have felt divided between two different ways of teaching, being, and researching. One way legitimizes the arts; however, in my work within a school system, I felt an active resistance to artistic expressions and processes, and to this type of creative and critical thinking. The zone of the in-between spaces is not just the sites but the learning in the liminal spaces and the learning that happened in between the writing of the manuscripts. The *Matryoshka* helps to show that these places should not be viewed as containers but as active ways of highlighting my thinking at a particular point in time, but the Living Links serve to

highlight that the learning continued, and new connections continued to be made between places. The focus on liminal serves as a resistance to compartmentalisations and is something that the *Matryoshka*-style dissertation also activates as it reassembles four manuscripts together. How do we resist creating borders within ourselves? Where are the boundaries of this art/life/work?

Living Links. This *Matryoshka* is joined by material called Living Links to emphasize the relationality *between* entities/manuscripts. They give windows into my praxis. This aspect of the *Matryoshka* activates Ted Aoki's (2004) work that discussed the curriculum *as plan* versus the curriculum *as lived,* and the tension between the two curricular worlds as the *zone in between*. Living Links leave space for *and* link spaces for tensions and difference that give the *Matryoshka* life. The Living Links feature soilwork examples of Horizons 1 and 3, and represent the active reflections/actions (praxis) regarding how I have taken up this work in ongoing ways with collaborative teams. A distinguishing feature of the MDIS includes several publishable materials that are connected. *How* the manuscripts are connected varies according to institutional guidelines and depends on the topic. To emphasize connections between pieces, I created Living Links that mobilize multiple knowledge forms and highlight this research as a form of praxis. Living Links reflect multiple literacies that layer soil compositions, poetic responses, and visual imagery; some of these Links are presented through QR codes and active hyperlinks. This material joining all the manuscripts also provides pedagogical tools that afford this dissertation a farther-reaching audience than if just text-based because the linking materials can become pedagogical tools that speak to the research without unpacking all the components. Paré (2017) argued that alternative text-types push academic boundaries and can be included as publishable material. The Living Links show ways that my soilwork and writing was informed by the teaching and learning from land, from experiences, and then enhanced by further conversations

and connections to scholarship, Indigenous movements, or events within Winnipeg. These sections are where the *Matryoshka* moves from a static metaphor to an embodied praxis from engaging in thinking about places and responding to places in a methodical and creative way.

Living Links include a visual icon (⁂) to both signal the end of a manuscript and the beginning of the linking or connecting material. The Living Links are chosen to maintain continuous flow of the manuscripts and include:

- ⁂ **Living Link 1** between **ForeGround** and **"Unearthing Truths" → Participatory Soilwork - Guided Workshop Introductions.** This QR code and link share a short video accompanied by guided prompts that draw on the elements of art. This idea is an example of one generated within five workshops (Horizon 3) with adults in post-secondary contexts at the University Program Days, in pilot workshops connected to a collaborative case study research project, and with teachers as part of the Manitoba Teacher's Society professional development (PD) day. I encouraged people to greet the earth and one another. I designed the series of prompts drawing on classical elements of art initially, but the focus on these elements with soil transforms the meaning and prompts artmakers to consider more nuanced and metaphorical elements. Living Link 1 shares my son's hands working with the soil in a very different way than how teachers responded to the same guided prompts. His action was more playful and open to change whereas many teachers focus was on a product. While these prompts seem simple, when paired with music or images, they support going deeper and more quickly into a topic and can stir a range of unexpected emotions. This type of affective engagement is encouraged in anticolonial work, which values the transformative potential of raw feelings and emotional responses of anger and resentment (Flowers, 2015). Soil art gives artists

agency to decide how much to share explicitly and what elements will be left up for interpretation. I have found this process generates stories and layered personal introductions with more depth than a typical professional introduction. I share that the focus is on making meaning through the process rather than on the product because the product is temporary and morphs with each question. This script is continually revised and has been used with a University of Manitoba case study team for an upcoming research collaboration. It was also used for a pilot workshop in December 2023 and for a Research Workshop in February 2024 (Reiger et al., 2022-2024). This guided art engagement drew upon Senator Murray Sinclair's four questions: 1) Who are you?; 2) Where are you from?; 3) How did you get here?; and 4)What is your purpose? (Sinclair, 2016; Wilfred Laurier University, 2016; Government of Manitoba, 2023). These introductions can also be framed to introduce oneself to a particular topic, with adapted questions such as: Who are you in relation to the topic of reconciliation and how does this connect to your life and work? and What connects you to this topic? I have extended these questions to accompany soilwork experiences and have prompted people to make a connection to the given topic (e.g. reconciliation, *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*).

- **Living Link 2** between **"Unearthing Truths"** and **"Homeland" → Acknowledging Land: A Soil Composition Video.** This QR code and link connect to a video as an example of my a/r/tography practice (Horizon 1 – My Personal Praxis). This soilwork activates the idea that the material of soil is not just dirt but is viewed as a relative and a mother. My acknowledging of land shifts over time and goes further to explain the Indigenous roots in the name of Winnipeg; this acknowledgement centralizes this notion

of murky waters in relation to research and the river location where the monument is located, and it includes several more Indigenous nations. I want to note that the nations and pronunciations represented are not perfect. As I learn new words to describe "Oji-Cree", I continue to adapt this statement. This short video does not reference all the First Nations Groups of Manitoba, and my wording continues to change. For example, in some acknowledgements, I have noticed that nations such as Lakota, Nakota and Dakota Oyate should have also been included. Since creating this video, I have been advised to "always include the Nakota because they were one of the first people encountered at the Forks" (Dr. B. Rice, Kanien'kehá:ka/Mohawk Nation, personal communication, 2024). Through sharing this work with learners and teachers, I continue to learn. The process of creating this acknowledgement has supported the analysis of all manuscripts and generated several new artistic renderings of soilwork. I have chosen to place this acknowledgement as a link to support how the process of the ongoing acknowledging of land shifts while in different places.

- **Living Link 3** between "**Homeland" and "Murky Waters" → Bridging the Bastion – Where do you come from? What brought you here?** This link is a photograph of a collaborative soilwork installation from within the creative and re-imagined fort featured in **"Homeland"**. I saw the cracks in the Manitoba famous limestone at the base of the fort wall installation as a place to create land-based art to fill the gap in the Fort Wall at Upper Fort Garry. I designed a guided and collaborative soilwork experience on the ground projecting outward from the centre of Upper Fort Garry. In 2023, I invited writers into collaborative soilwork to think about representing their journey to this place with a line of soil (an example of Horizon 3). The soilwork prompt was inspired from the time

when I was a participant in the Summer Writing Institute with Dr. Michelle Honeyford and Dr. Wayne Serebrin and by the question of the late Murray Sinclair/Mazina Giizhik Iban: “Where are you from?” What brought you here?” (Sinclair, 2017). After learning about the significance of this place, teachers were invited into the Bastion to write with the soil and encouraged to answer these questions through creating a *line* of soil. These lines are purposely placed, radiating from the noticeable gap in the Bastion, and we tried to mobilize this knowledge in a collaborative way that brought the divided narratives on the Walls together. Curvy, winding, intersecting, disjoined lines were drawn to symbolize their answers to these questions. In Living Link 3, each person created one line to represent where they were from and what brought them here, but the collective impact of their lines resulted in a joining of narratives that gave their work agency to weave approaches together. Lines echoed the imagery of the Indigenous map depicted on the Fort Wall and worked as a counter-narrative to the *us/them* dichotomy typical of fort design that give the false assumption of different places and realities (Donald, 2009, 2012).

- **Living Link 4** between **“Murky Waters”** and **“Red River Removals” → Search the Land.** This link is a poem layered on a photograph of soilwork. This link reflects a part of my a/r/tography practice where I combined soil and water to engage with the idea of Winnipeg as a place of muddy or murky waters. It shows an integral connection between land and water. The image is of a photograph of one image taken from an art workshop where I had an opportunity to attend a workshop called "Art as Medicine” and to learn from Kisa MacIsaac (K. MacIsaac, Métis, personal communication, October 25, 2024). This image reflects a muddy image that was wiped away and blocked almost entirely

through removals and by the dragging of my hand through the mud. I layered the printed text poem on top using only minimal words, to work with language in media around Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). This link connects the previous manuscript and the topics encircling MMIWG and bridges into a discussion in **"Red River Removals"**, which focuses more on water.

- **Living Link 5** between "**Red River Removals"** and **Body of Work → Soil Teachings.** This final link reflects my learning through a layering of a/r/tography using soilwork and poetry. It encapsulates where this journeying with soilwork has gone and articulates next steps both metaphorically and through concrete action. I composed this link after writing each of the four manuscripts. This image echoes the circular imagery depicted in **"Murky Waters"**; it depicts an image I created after learning about soil teachings from Elder Sherry Copenance, when sitting at the Forks, and after coming back to the monument in September 2024. This imagery reflects what I learned from Sherry about how soilwork is connected to land, plants, animals, histories, compositions and earthly and bodily cycles. This fitting link shows how this action research project provided the groundwork to take this learning and apply it towards collaborative research work.

Soilwork Rendering, Sensibilities, and Methods

From the various *horizons of soilwork* sprout specific artistic renderings—modes of meaning making used in a/r/tography—that show how soil creation functions metaphorically, and bring perspectives of realities to a visual, textual form through hands-on creative practices, sensations, and reflections. While the renderings of a/r/tography helped to address the topic of reconciliation in more depth and to connect to existing a/r/tography scholarship (See **"Unearthing Truths"**), over time the materiality of soil has surfaced unique renderings ,which I

feature here in the ForeGround (See Overview of the *Matryoshka* chart), throughout the manuscripts, and in the concluding Body of Work. Overarching renderings and soil sensibilities discussed in this section include examples such as: muddying, unearthing, home/land, re/covering, remembering, and returning. Additional renderings (including: un/sights, un/coverings, re/sourcing, findings/foundings, and returning) are featured in the introductory materials for each manuscript and in the final concluding chapter.

Muddying. This term is connected to the idea of muddying the waters, but is integral to the significance of Winnipeg, as it is a place named after its muddy or murky waters. The murkiness of the waters might be viewed in a negative way, but it can also be a sign of life (Sinclair, 2024). Likewise, the process of muddying acknowledges the value of confusion over certainty to give new understandings. Through this type of rendering, I have found that challenging topics, such as reconciliation or coloniality, are topics that cross personal and professional borders. Soilwork has the ability to make this blurring of the lines, roles, and responsibilities more explicit, and it is a helpful mode for decolonizing discussions and activating personal connections. Soil supports ways of becoming more relationally attune to these aspects of ourselves in professional workplaces. I am reminded of the words of Brazilian scholar and activist Vanessa Andreotti de Oliveira (2012), who asked: What kind of education could help us find hope in precisely "not having absolute answers" (p. 24) and being frequently challenged in our encounters with difference? I see opportunities to engage soilwork beyond merely a method or mode in a variety of contexts, including work with young children and adults. The soil helps to teach about history and to consider what events happened on the land and the impact they had on the lives of people. Soilwork brings to the foreground, the idea that the natural world is changing and is not a romanticized place. The work with soil has potential to

negate the idea "that local character of a place grew out of the soil" (Massey, 2009, p. 412). The idea of land is not stable and clear; it is muddy, layered, and land education is complicated.

Home/land. Soil can activate notions of home. Soil is also land. Combining the term *home* and *land* connects to discourses from land acknowledgements and from discussions of ancestry, and it can also evoke notions of imperialism. This rendering is evoked through soil and has been used in workshops with teachers (Horizon 3) to consider the questions posed to teachers such as: Where do you come from? Where is home for you?

Re/covering. With soil, the idea of *re/covering* comes through the process. Soilwork is forgiving in some ways. When mistakes are made, it is easy to re-cover the space and start again. When adding water to the soil, it changes the material completely. But when it dries, the process speaks to the acknowledgement that mistakes will happen and there is a need for ongoing healing and recovery, and that there has been a covering up and re-covering up of history and a need to expose harmful approaches to heal from them.

Remembering. This term surfaces in the first and final manuscripts. In **"Unearthing Truths"**, remembering is thinking about the children who never came home from Indian Residential Schools. In **"Red River Removals"**, I draw upon historian Adele Perry's (2016) work on how "re-enacted forgetting" (p. 96) is perpetuated by settler colonial politics and re-frame an inquiry that exposes dispossessions and soilwork as a *re-enacted remembering*— to simultaneously recall and piece together these denials of rights and security. Remembering is relevant to how this *Matroyshka* re-members the layers of work from the horizons and critical place inquiries from the manuscripts and recollects them together to form this dissertation.

Re/making. This rendering came through the process of having soilwork destroyed or disturbed, such as when soil art on my driveway in honour of the children from Residential

Schools was destroyed and the reporter asked me to re-make it (See **"Unearthing Truths"**). This term challenges the artist's desire to control, fix, make, and re-make by considering that sometimes ideas morphed through people's interactions, or natural elements. This idea is also significant because both the destruction of land and displacement of many Indigenous communities from land to re-make their lives on reserves is an ongoing issue that undermines Indigenous rights to self-determination. The idea of re-making also surfaces in **"Homeland"**, in the mural that highlights the settler colonial desire to re-make the prairies and to transform land into one that is aligned to settler views of progress.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

I draw upon the generative potential of discourse as a multidimensional social phenomenon (Van Dijk, 2009, p. 67) and root it within the particularities of specific places. This broad view of discourses includes, but is not limited to, political speeches, visual and semiotic information, site-based interactions, stories (of creation, of historical narratives, or of individual people, and so on), historical information, multisensory aspects, and messages from public art. I activate a focused noticing of discourses through an awareness of elements of art (e.g., line, shape, space, composition, form, and texture) and attention to spatial and multi-sensory dynamics. Van Dijk (2014) reminded scholars that when they activate specific types of knowledge, certain experiences, feelings, and affective and somatic responses are also activated. I try to keep grounded to knowledge that comes from visceral experiences in different places, such as what happens when walking and how people interact with monuments or official histories. CDA is a research method that has helped me to analyze discourses as multidimensional interactions that challenges existing power structures that "attempt to uncover, reveal, or disclose what is implicit, hidden, or otherwise not immediately obvious in relations of

discursively enacted dominance or their underlying ideologies" (van Dijk, 2009, p. 18). I have utilized and extended this method across different places to show how a broad view and application of discourse analysis can help me notice and trace relevant social links and processes across and in between pathways and events that contribute to "studying the linkages that allow individuals, signs, stereotypes and objects to travel across events and participate in a social process like socialization or learning" (Wartham & Reyes, 2015, p. 85). By looking at the entanglements of language and cultures, historical experiences, this work connects to Ofelia García's (2017) notion of becoming "entangled by coloniality of power" and to noticing how coloniality takes hold of people and within places. Analyzing dimensions of power uncovers hidden histories, settler colonial secrets, and unsights (see **"Red River Removals"**) enacted in places of Indigenous significance. Then, the artistic interventions share my analysis in the form of soil stories back into the landscape of each place.

Walking

Walking is an embodied form of learning that has taken on an educational imperative by both Indigenous scholars and a/r/tographers in effort to learn beyond institutional confines. All manuscripts have involved walking as part of the analysis, reflexivity, and artistic process. Indigenous scholars have used walking as a cultural practice of ethical relationality through attunement to the environment (Donald, 2021), and as an active and wholistic Indigenous methodology (Rice, 2021). Settler scholars have tried to engage with the work of walking informed by Indigenous methodologies (Kerr & Ferguson, 2021), and a/r/tographers have engaged in walking through post-human orientations (Irwin et al., 2024). European scholars have also created their own version of walking workshops or "walkshops", which take on decolonial aims (Weisskoeppel, 2022). Scholars have been re-branding walking as forms of curriculum

(Judson, 2017) and have focused on walking methodologies in a more-than-human world by engaging new materialist, posthumanist, and layering numerous theories, such as critical, queer, trans, and Indigenous lenses (Springgay & Truman, 2019). Numerous other scholars began infusing walking as part of their practices during the pandemic.

Walking has become an important component of soilwork that centralizes the knowledge learned through embodied experiences and values relational encounters when on foot. Kerr (2013) suggests that ignoring the body and *obscuring locatedness* is a "deliberate strategy related to colonial ventures" (p. 27). Wiesskoeppel (2022) shared that collaborative walking is an approach for decolonization that supports the envisioning of a respectful future. Sharing a Cree perspective, Donald (2021) stated that walking "is one of the most fundamental drives of humans" (Donald, 2021, p. 58), which can create a new story that bridges Indigenous-settler divides. I have learned about the wholistic possibilities and the ethical responsibilities of Indigenous Storywork principles through walking alongside Dr. Jeannie Kerr. We engaged in Indigenous Storywork principles (Archibald, 2008) and a walking methodology, and shared how embodied experiences inform how Eurocentric research design seeks disconnections from life and land through objectivity, measurability, generalizability, and other means. During the pandemic, I continued this process in my graduate coursework and learned from Dr. Brian Rice while walking in Winnipeg as part of a land-based course through the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreational Studies at the University of Manitoba. Dr. Rice taught me about Indigenous stories and offered significant information about numerous places, including the Forks area, the walking winding paths along the Red River, including a stop at Riel House (which inspired the manuscript **"Red River Removals"**) and at hidden burial mounds within the Winnipeg's industrial areas. I learned how engaging with embodied knowledges and

practices can be viewed as anticolonial because it is a way to expose the limitations of Western knowledges and support a relational view of Land as relative. In *Land as Pedagogy,* Simpson (2014) called for rebellion that moves beyond "'dreams of alternative realities' but to create them, on the ground in the physical world" (p. 8). During research walks, I have looked for: What curriculum lives here? What do these places teach us as dwellers of this place (Indigenous and settler relatives), and What lessons are to be learned? Walking kept this work grounded in physical places with particular histories and stories.

Except for my home, I include places that are not easily accessible by car, and information and analysis that are only available by *being there* and as a way of noticing and analyzing public memory as a series of ruptures and displacements (Giroux, 2004). Within the manuscripts, this way of attending to places comes through walking during different seasons to reveal a more robust analysis, such as in the first manuscript **"Homeland"**. In **"Murky Waters"**, a walking encounter at the outset prompted further inquiry and connections to the crises of missing and murdered women counterbalanced with the offerings of Indigenous artists near the Forks. This work involved walks returning to finish the installation and to watch how it transformed over time.

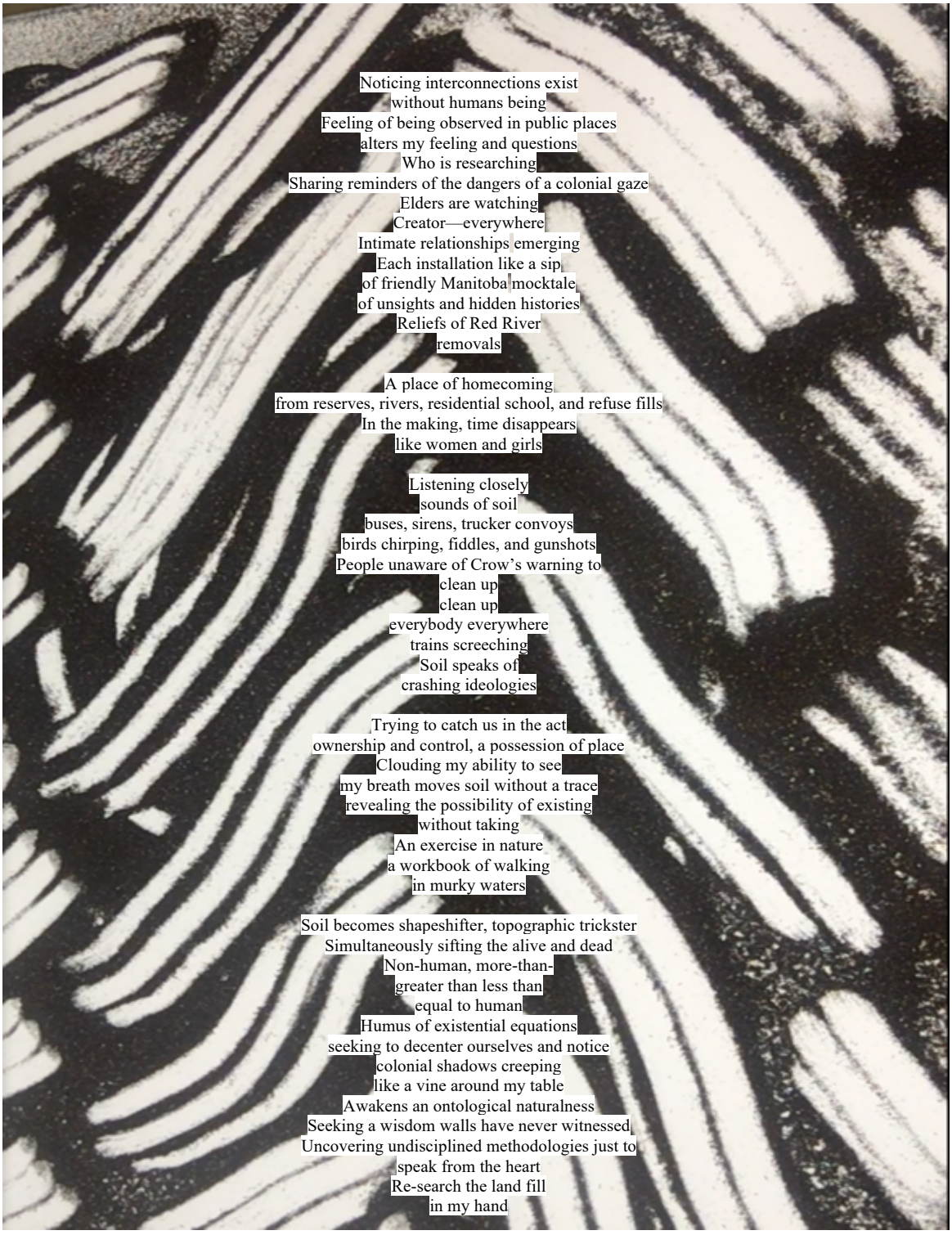
Because of its mode and accessibility, walking is at risk of being re-branded as a panacea for relational practices. The ease at which walking has been easily transformed into a research practice makes it seem easy and privileged, but it is a practice that demands relational accountability. Kanienké:haka scholar Brian Rice leads walks in Winnipeg as part of Indigenous land-based coursework in a territory that is not his traditional territory, but he maintains relational accountability through his practices of being informed by local Indigenous stories and through significant research for historical perspectives. From personal experience in taking a

course from Dr. Rice, I can attest that these are not short jaunts to connect with nature, but more of a journey to re-story identities and to seek out lesser-known stories, places to honour ancestral burial mounds, and pathways of animals, such as the bison, whose existence has been threatened. Rice's learning through and by walking came from travelling on foot 1100 kilometres alone through the Traditional Territory of the Kanienké:haka to follow the journey of the Peacemaker, as part of a land-based dissertation centered on oral traditions and spending time on the land where the knowledges emerged (cited in M'Lot & Ferguson, 2025). Beyond academia, there are significant examples led by Indigenous activists such as Mother Earth or Water Walks to bring attention to the ecological balance of the Great Lakes ecosystems (Bang et al., 2014) and Cree Nishiyuu walkers, who travelled 1568.5 km in winter of 2013 requesting dialogue with the former Prime Minister Harper (Hill & McCall, 2015). These types of walks are ceremonial, political, and connected through relational accountability to the land and community protocols.

Grounding Literature in Relational Approaches to Place, Land, and Art

Figure 1.0

But What Does Working with Soil Feel Like?



The literature review grounds this dissertation in local and global decolonial discourses and makes relevant scholarly links across the themes of land, place, and artmaking. I reviewed work and inspiring artistic expressions on topics such as relationality, pedagogies of land, and place, place-based, and land-based approaches. To deepen connections to my a/r/tography using soil, I share learning around why the soil is significant as a medium (and beyond) to critical inquiries and ongoing learning. This section discusses how soil supports relational accountability and considerations for researchers working towards decolonial approaches. I look beyond the field of education and into areas of settler colonialism, arts, geographies, and Indigenous scholarship and activism to reflect the learning that has emerged from this multi-year, multi-layered dissertation. I also provide several illustrative examples from artists, researchers, and teachers who provide profound intersections among art, place, and land that offer guidance towards relational practices-and inspire my a/r/tography.

Relationality within a Literature Review

Scholars have questioned the literature review itself and consider how it could become more relational (Tuck & Yang, 2014; Tynan & Bishop, 2023; Wilson, 2008). For example, Wilson (2008) dedicated a whole chapter to the question of "Can a ceremony include a literature review?" (p. 43). He shared that critiquing others' work does not fit his Indigenous cultural framework and value system, and leans towards the use of the term, review, rather than proposing any critiques. He stresses the importance of contextualizing the literature, rather than just piecing it together; the focus is on the relationships between ideas and topics. In this review, I highlight the connections of three distinct areas that encompass vast amounts of research—land, art, and place. However, when considering these overarching ideas, I also think about their intersections and relationships. For example, while the focus of some authors may be on land, I

then consider—*how does this work connect to specific places and how have the arts reinforced these connections?* When authors centralize art—*how do ontological perspectives of land and place affect the artists' chosen topics and relationship with materials?* Considering the literature on place, I think about— *how have cultural perspectives influenced the type of artistic relationships and how have these impacted notions of land and connections to land?*

Within this *Matryoshka* dissertation, maintaining relationships across all manuscripts is important. This type of relationality between ideas is emphasized by scholars such as Shawn Wilson (2008), who shared: "If you are breaking things down into their smallest pieces, you are destroying all of the relationships around it…You have to use an intuitive logic, where you are looking at the whole thing at once and coming up with your answers through an analysis that way" (Wilson, 2008, p. 119). To maintain relationality and an intuitive logic, as Wilson suggests, I interweave my relationships and personal experiences to complement academic works as a way of sharing how I am building in-depth relationships with the topics, the place of Winnipeg, and relationships to land and soil. My learning was not just from books or articles but also from experiences, from being in ceremony, from listening, learning through walking, artmaking with various groups and in many different places, from making connections with people and new places, and from being informed by experiences outside academia.

This research takes place on Indigenous land and aims to contribute to social change. Thus, in searching for solutions to local colonial-induced crises and ongoing violence, Indigenous voices are key to healing and working towards justice. I also have sought out examples of Indigenous and settler partnerships to support how people are doing this relational work together while balancing perspectives and approaches.

Indigenous researchers Lauren Tynan, who is trawlwulwuy from tebrakunna country in lutruwita/Tasmania, and Michelle Bishop, Gamilaroi from Dharawal Country in Australia, questioned how traditional literature reviews re-enforce gap finding and the pursuit of claiming territory within a body of knowledge that opposes decolonial aims and relational approaches (Tynan & Bishop, 2023). Tynan and Bishop (2023) shared "a relational literature review on relational literature reviews" and offered advice for how to generate a review that does not start with citing academic papers but rather begins with personal relationships to people, places, and knowledge. I interweave these connections throughout this review and between the chapters of this dissertation. Literature has also been incorporated throughout each of the manuscripts, so there has been a cycle of reviewing literature throughout each doctoral course, throughout my program, and while writing each individual manuscript.

Out of respect for the knowledge that currently exists, and with a realization that new approaches are needed and possible, Tynan and Bishop (2023) suggested that literature reviews should focus on silences rather than damaging deficit perspectives that seek to fill in gaps. I try to connect three key topics (land, place, and art) under the overarching theme of relationality, which focuses more on the connections between ideas and addressing silence, by giving voice to new connections. Stating where ideas come from involves more than the practices of following guidelines for citations and sourcing; it is also about seeing the cumulative genealogy of knowledge (Absolon, 2011). Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to introduce scholars' nations and ancestral place/land connections, which is a decolonial practise suggested by Tynan and Bishop (2023).

Another way to challenge the expectations of the academy suggested by Tynan and Bishop (2023) is to do what we love through love. Some Indigenous feminist scholars would be

cautious about this wording (Flowers, 2015); the word love can seem sugar coated with sweetness that negates decolonial aims and emphasizes settler moves to innocence. Love is a term with its own complexity, aligned with relationality, but it also possesses a transgressive quality that serves to disrupt systems and structures that crave objectivity. For example, Settler-Indigenous art educators are also using the term, *love*, to articulate the relationship between art and the affective and agentic component of love. The settler-Indigenous collaboration between Nicole Rallis, Shannon Leddy, and Rita Irwin (2024) revealed, "One may consider art as an act of love. Art is a deeply embodied form of communication, of communion, an expression of passion borne of the urgent need to manifest thought, to bring forth into the world the realization of our ideas" (p. 213). This affective component activated by the art is unsteady ground within the objectivity that many dominant research paradigms require, yet my research does not operate within this paradigm. The affordances of the arts bolster the significance of my work with soil and increases the accessibility and breadth of this work.

Academic research can overemphasize individual relationships with search engines and written work rather than embodied relationships and collaborations (Tynan & Bishop, 2023). When possible, I tried to send my manuscripts to teachers, mentors, or instructors for feedback. Many of the papers I have published as a graduate student have come about through people sending me calls to proposals and encouraging me to write because they saw connections to my work and themes of re-humanizing education, unsettling education, multiliteracies, hopeful practices, and the arts and action research. Throughout this dissertation, I think about relational citation practices, such as not just citing the most prolific writers but sharing how the knowledge came to me, asserting family connections and stories, and citing how my attention to relationships with concepts have emerged.

My connections to land, art, and place are rooted to connections across numerous academic and non-academic circles and experiences. What I have learned in this dissertation included formal learning in academic classes with teachers who incorporated Indigenous scholarship. Taking Indigenous Methodologies from the department of Native Studies with Dr. Peter Kulchyski early in my PhD highly influenced the direction of this dissertation. I took this course while I was grieving the loss of my Dad and my Baba, and while caring for my new baby. These life altering experiences inspired me to think about generational learning and to seek alternative ways of knowing, healing, and spiritual connections to human- and more-than-human beings.

Perspectives of Relationality

Relationality is used in a general way and can also be used to describe specific forms of cultural perspectives of relationality, such as Indigenous relationality. In Tynan's (2021) writing about relationality, she shared how a relationality reality operates and weaves together her own stories of Country as a trawlwulwuy woman. In her life and practice, relationality represents multiple truths and "describes a reality in which all entities are related" (Tynan, 2021, p. 607). Furthermore, Tynan (2021) described relationality this way:

> …being *in good relation* is being willing to cop a mouthful of flies and sand in eyes. It means despite the best intentions to work *with* Country to write a paper on relationality, that Country might work against you, and thus, teach you an even bigger lesson about being a good relative. (p. 599)

Tynan's focus on relationships despite unexpected and inconvenient elements or truths is an important part of relationality. For example, a fire-methodology guided Tynan's (2021) research on cultural burning and led her in unexpected ways, such as teaching her that fire has agency as a

co-researcher, which directed the research process. I see a connection to the approaches within a/r/tography as a methodology that has invited land to speak and unexpected elements to be incorporated in my learning and research. The earth guided me: wind undoing my compositions by moving the soil, rain challenging the longevity of an installation, animals influencing my decision making, cold temperatures forcing me to change how I engaged with the soil, and peoples' interactions causing me to think and engage as teacher.

From designing coursework around numerous articulating theories of relationality, Bialek (2022) showed intersections between perspectives in political theology and critical theory, and revealed how relationality involves an entanglement that "rejects individualist conceptions of the self and subject for a conception of the self as made by its relations with others, such that there may be no 'I' without 'you' or 'us'" (para. 21). There are numerous paradigmatic perspectives of relationality that were outlined by Bialek (2022), such as caring relationships that emphasized the self-in-relation with others, encounters, awareness of relationality through loss and mourning, and relationships to the planet. For example, an encounter with the face of an Other inspired by Levinas is addressed in **"Murky Waters",** when I have an encounter with the names of missing women on red ribbon ties, which prompts my learning about their individual stories.

Relationality involves kinship relations (Donald, 2021; Massey et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2022) and networks between people and beyond. People are relational beings, part of and made from elements of the world around us. Davis et al. (2022) shared that within partnerships and collaborations resides hope for practicing a type of kinship where "Settlers and Indigenous people involved come to view one another in family or kin-like terms and these relationships may extend beyond a particular activist struggle" (Davis et al., 2022, p. 17). Kinship relationality

is also embedded within Indigenous worldviews which seek egalitarian approaches where connections to humans, non-humans, and more than humans are forged.

In a complementary creative way, a/r/tographers explored radical relatedness and rhizomatic relationality. In the research creation project called "City of Richgate" (hereafter referred to as Richgate), a/r/tographers centred their inquiry around the people in the urban, transnational, diverse, gateway city of Richmond, British Columbia (Beer et al., 2010). Public spaces were used to create socially engaged art where unique relationships and networks among both research participants and collaborators emerged. Changes come from collaborative conversations and artmaking as an exercise in relational aesthetics. The Richgate project was an example of a/r/tography practice that analyzes and represents the complexities of place through collaborative linking of concepts of *home* and *away* and representations of daily lives to uncover identities, family histories, cultures, and geographies through a multimodal combination of public art exhibitions, posters, postcards, institutional banners, installations, and multilingual bus shelter art. Through a focus on relationality, Beer et al. (2010) "posit that artists/researchers/teachers can be activists, bringing attention to social, political, and cultural issues of land use, ownership, [and] the history of place" (p. 218). The researchers wrote and reflected on how the collaborative Richgate project invited a *radical relatedness* that "calls for a priority valuation of intersubjective coexistence with others, the environment, the community, and the world" (p. 87). In blurring boundaries between self and Other, Bickel et al. (2010) described:

> The Richgate study opens a gateway to understanding the relational and the intersubjective coexistence of the community with its ecological self. In each instance of encounter, the act of witnessing, listening, questioning, and being with each other on an

> ongoing basis during the study assisted in opening and connecting with coexistent containers held between the land, the city, the disciplinary fields, and the institutional organization involved. (p. 92)

My work, like the Richgate project, involves relational aesthetics conveyed through rhizomatic and interconnected networks. The most direct connection to my work appears through my topography of soilwork and the embedded horizons which describe how I worked in different ways with soil over long periods of time. The idea of *home* also surfaces in **"Unearthing Truths"** when my residence becomes a place for public art and unearths a colonial encounter with a news crew driving over my work to honour children that never came home from residential school. The term, homeland (in **"Homeland"**), conveys the tension between ownership, identity, and place, which has become a new artistic rendering.

Reading the texts of Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Papachase Cree professor Dwayne Donald, Nêhiyaw, Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach, and Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck grounded my PhD studies. I learned through meaningful conversations to researchers such as: Dr. Brian Rice, Dr. Wanda Phillips Beck, Dr. Sara Florence Davidson, artist Jeanine Gibbons, and teaching and writing colleague, Christine M'Lot. I also spent an intense amount of time over the last 6 years with the work of more than 32 Indigenous creatives through my work at Portage & Main Press and by co-editing two texts in the Footbridge Series (See M'Lot & Ferguson 2022; M'Lot & Ferguson, in press). Completing these two book projects while researching has undoubtedly informed my work. Outdoor experiences in Manitoba and Ontario with friends and family, being part of a MMIWG research collective of artists and researchers, and attending research gathering on territory of Sumas First Nation within

the Sto:lo Traditional Territory to think about arts as a form of decolonizing interdisciplinary practices have all influenced my evolving perspectives of land, place, loss, and healing.

Indigenous Relationality

Scholars are finding ways to weave in relational approaches, such as Indigenous languages and stories, to their research that meets western academic standards but that also push the boundaries of oppressive systems (Kovach, 2014; Simpson, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Shawn Wilson from Opaskwayak Cree Nation dedicates an entire chapter of the prominent publication, *Research is Ceremony* (2008), to describing forms of relationality that include relations between people with the environment/land, with spiritual relations with the cosmos, and with and between ideas that emerge from Indigenous foundations. Wilson included descriptions of how the knowledge he shares is part of a broader web of relationships, and he emphasized voices of friends and teachers along the way. His approach of weaving in narratives throughout is an approach I take in my work. Wilson's way of acknowledging harms, prioritizing alternatives, and keeping grounded to his ancestral teachings, while also circling back to big ideas so that one can deepen understandings overtime is an approach that informs my work.

In articulating an Indigenous research paradigm, Wilson (2008) emphasized the importance of relationality in all aspects of epistemology, methodology, axiology, and ontology, which all have to do with relationships. Each of these components of the research framework are related and work together. This perspective suggests an alternative approach, accentuating that, "[r]ather than viewing ourselves as being in relationships with other people or things, we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of" (Wilson, 2008, p. 80, emphasis in original). Soilwork moves away from a view of working with soil as just an artistic process and towards a relationship with land that does not separate the stories of land and people.

This inseparability is reinforced by Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (2014) radical approach, which exposed the confines of educational systems and called for intimacy with homelands and the embodied traditions that necessitate a break from settler-state education systems. She embodied relationality through her focus on community ties to Nishnaabeg thinkers who inform her work. In her highly influential and far-reaching article, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation", Simpson (2014) eloquently embodied how Niishnaabeg values of love, compassion, and understanding are shared through her version of a maple sugar origin story and how squirrel offers important teachings to an observant young girl (Kwezens). She prompts readers to think about how Kwezens is already a web of kinship relations or "hub of intelligent Nishnaabeg relationality" (Simpson, 2014, p. 8) whose very presence shatters settler consciousness, disrupts settler colonial commodification, and challenges land ownership. Simpson shares how Indigenous theories of a phenomenon are not merely academic explanations but can be embodied, personal, contextual, and relational.

There are established initiatives in Canada dedicated to this type of relational praxis, such as "Critical Approaches to Indigenous Relationality (CAIR)" led by Cree and Métis researcher, Shalene Jobin, who is working to create a network of scholars to apply the idea of Indigenous relationality in concrete, practical, and empowering ways across numerous research projects, including language camps, film projects, and buffalo rematriation (Betkowski, 2024; see Prairie Indigenous Relationality Network, 2024). Jobin (2024) shared that "(Relationality) is a key Indigenous concept that has been discussed too abstractly in academic circles, so it's important to enhance how it's understood and applied, particularly as society faces global challenges that

require sustainable ways of relating to one another and to the environment" (as cited in Betkowski, 2024).

Relationality involves being good relatives with human, non-human, and more-than-human relatives (Davis et al., 2022; Donald, 2012a, 2012b, 2016, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Dwayne Donald (2012a) described "[e]thical relationality [as] an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other" (p. 103). I have engaged with this concept in connection to Jo-Ann Archibald's principles of Indigenous Storywork (2018), through walking alongside researcher and settler scholar Dr. Jeannie Kerr. This experience revealed the methodological considerations required of Euro-descendent, white researchers, such as not placing ourselves into others' cultural orientations, recognizing complicity, committing to relational actions alongside academic writing, engaging in sustained learning and mentorship, and acknowledging the limitations of Eurocentric linearity when working towards relational approaches (Kerr & Ferguson, 2021). Distinguishing Indigenous relationality from more generalized forms maintains a relationship to Indigenous scholarship that keeps place-specific epistemologies in the forefront.

My first connections to the idea of more-than-human began with my family at home, although I never used that term. Sacredness, reverence for holy objects, practices, moments, and attunement to spiritual aspects are ways of knowing and being that I grew up with from an Eastern Orthodox Christian perspective. I see some similarities in my own spiritual traditions and Indigenous practices (such as incensing and smudging; lighting a pipe and lighting a candle in memory to forge spiritual connections), but I acknowledge clear divergences and incompatibilities, such as in the framing of relationships in creation stories. My focus on

interconnectedness in my art approaches stem from my father's perspectives as someone who studied in the area of zoology and who had an appreciation of non-human or other-than-human species and their complex ecological systems that were different from and perhaps superior to human ways of knowing. In a way, spiritual aspects or Indigenous relationality have activated an awareness of these differences alongside common understandings of more-than-human aspects.

Practice of Relational Accountability

Indigenous researchers are leading the way in how to go about doing research relationally and maintaining relational accountability (Battiste, 2013; Donald, 2012, 2021; Kovach, 2009; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015a, 2015b; Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) analyzed Indigenous researcher processes in two different contexts and identified shared aspects of relational accountability that connect to all dimensions of the research process. Settler Canadian and American scholar and social worker Carlson (2016) considered the influx in settler scholars delving into the call to engage in processes of decolonization and provided strategies for anticolonial scholarship. Decolonization should have practical applications. Abstracted academic scholarship often misses connections that relate to land and action (Carlson, 2016; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015b). In articulating an anticolonial methodology that could be used with white-settler participants, Carlson (2016) reminded readers that, as decolonization research continues to emerge from settlers, it is *not* groundbreaking. She follows in the footsteps of Indigenous leaders from the social work context, such as Cindy Blackstock, Michael Hart, and Michael Yellow Bird, and from the field of education, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Shawn Wilson, and Margaret Kovach (among numerous more changemakers), all of whom have embodied anticolonial praxis and have been articulating Indigenous paradigms for decades.

White settlers should proceed in anticolonial work with caution, through a centring of Indigenous resurgence, and with an awareness of the challenges of anticolonial work:

> With Indigenous resurgence at the centre of anticolonialism, the roles of white settler academics are at the periphery, making space, and pushing back against colonial institutions, structures, practices, mentalities, and land theft. Taking up the challenge to participate effectively in anti-colonial practice is more difficult and demanding than may be imagined. Fear, entitlement, and denial prevent many white settler people from engaging in anti-colonial practice. I argue that even though participation in anti-colonial practice on the part of white settlers [is] a limited possibility, it remains a moral and ethical responsibility. Participating in and reproducing colonialism compromises our personal and collective integrity. (Carlson, 2016, p. 5)

In my candidacy exams (2023), I began a list of guiding questions that guide me in relational accountability. These questions include:

- What learning (and unlearning) do I still need to do to be helpful? How can I share this learning with others?
- Why does this work matter? How do I directly support Indigenous peoples/communities?
- Am I mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually prepared for the work?
- How do I "honour front-line voices of resistance" (Walia, 2012, para. 3)?
- How do I demonstrate respect for Indigenous protocols and Indigenous presences?
- How do I show appreciation for Indigenous aesthetics without appropriation?
- Who am I? Who are my relatives? What are my kinship ties?
- What is my relationship to place/land/waters/people?
- How do I honour a relationship with and reverence for soil/earth/land?

- Is this anticolonial/decolonial/Indigenous/Indigenist?
- What is/are my intention(s)? How do I return to this intention in recursive ways?
- How might I incorporate the First Nations Principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP®)?

I consider all these questions throughout this dissertation, and I attend to more specific aspects of OCAP principles in the final chapter.

Ermine (2007) called to address the hidden Western "undercurrents" that influence Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and that become undetectable within systems and within people. Regarding the rapid and growing interest in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, Elder and Knowledge holder with connections to Gai-Mariagal and Wiradjuri people Dennis Foley (2018) boldly warned of the McDonaldisation and commodification of Indigenous knowledges. Foley alluded to the marketable industry of Indigeneity, and lowering standards, which can result in the McDonaldisation of Indigenous research valuing efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Indigenous OCAP guidelines exist to counterbalance the type of McResearch discussed by Foley. Based on his academic experiences of reviewing PhD manuscripts, Foley (2018) addressed the concerns around how scholars have reflected Indigenous processes but did not reflect Indigenous concepts in respectful ways in the vested interests of Indigeneity. Foley noted the problematic use of knowledge without the substance.

The connection to the earth in this dissertation links the physical and spiritual dimensions through a reverence for the connection to Earth. I am working to maintain a connection to my worldview, learning from Indigenous perspectives *and* working hard to find a balance between both. Drawing from Carlson's (2016) insights, I see how the mode of soil supports relational accountability. Carlson (2016) outlines eight principles of an anticolonial research methodology

for settlers. My research activates several of these guiding elements with a focus on a Resistance to and Subversion of Settler Colonialism (Principle 1, Carlson, 2016, p. 6). I show this principle throughout all manuscripts by problematizing the story of each place to highlight impacts of settler colonialism on people and land. Secondly, I demonstrate Relational and Epistemic Accountability (Principle 2, Carlson, 2016, p. 6) by foregrounding Indigenous theories, stories and scholarship, and through learning at each site while continuing my ongoing a/r/tography practice beyond the focus on writing each paper. For example, learning occurred beyond the page as part of my participation in separate research projects with a team committed to the crises of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and mobilizing the *Calls for Justice*. Our work involved learning from the interdisciplinary team and working with Elders to learn more about how to do soilwork in more relational ways. I attended protests and created soilwork installations in response to protests. Conversations with a team of researchers from both nursing and education that focused on a separate research project provided helpful mentorship. This dissertation is an accumulation of years of influences from teachers, guidance and cautions from friends, experiences with peers and colleagues on the land, and transformative ceremonial experiences.

In a similar way, this research involved Land/Place Engagement and Accountability (Principle 4, Carlson, 2016, p. 7) through small actions, such as returning land after each installation. Although this may seem like a performative move, it has helped me to maintain an accountability to natural laws, and a reminder that decolonial aims are not just symbolic gestures. I have sought to learn more about soil from scientific perspectives and learning from Inoka Imarakoon from the University of Manitoba Department of Soil Science to ensure that the

research methods I was using were safe and sustainable. Through critical place inquiries, I learned more about Indigenous protocols, natural laws, and territorial histories.

My engagement with land involved learning about soil teachings from Elder Sherry Copenance in a circle of women researchers and colleagues. Sherry Copenance taught me to see soil as a relational foundation that is connected to creation stories. She teaches about connections beyond soil to the moon and to cycles of life and internal cycles of women. I co-facilitated a soilwork arts-based workshop with guidance and direction from a teacher with experience in mental health and wellness programs in First Nations communities, Knowledge Keeper Brenda Longclaws. We met through another research study at the University of Manitoba. Knowledge Keeper Brenda Longclaws guided me in becoming more ceremonial and relational through the offering of tobacco and through seeing how the presence of soil alongside women's stories created an altar-like space that made space for spiritual connections to MMIWG who we honoured and remembered. The analysis of this soilwork workshop is forthcoming in our collaborative papers, conference presentations, and through community engagement.

I hold myself accountable to this learning and grateful for how it changed my research, and connected to the principle of Reciprocity (Principle 5, Carlson, 2016, p. 7), which shares how these teachings and experiences can enrich community-based work. This dissertation is not attached to a specific community; it emerged from a response to a research event and an encounter in 2017 within an institutional setting. Since then, I have been trying to bring my learning into my role as a teacher in Winnipeg, sometimes to be met with overt resistance, which allowed me a glimpse into how difficult it is to repair a relationship destroyed by our own making. Carlson (2016) shared:

> Settler colonial studies and anti-colonial settler scholars owe a huge debt to Indigenous oral and academic scholarship and to traditions of activism. Not only has our scholarship (hopefully) been built on the foundation of Indigenous anti-colonial oral and academic scholarship, the content of our work is also dependent on the historical and contemporary presence of the suffering of Indigenous peoples under settler colonialism. (p. 13)

Returning soil is a reconciliatory reminder about the relationship with land that needs to be prioritized for our survival and aims towards justice.

Relational Validity

In their article, "Relational Validity and the 'Where' of Inquiry: Place and Land in Qualitative Research", Tuck and McKenzie (2015) detailed the ethical imperatives and relational validity required in critical place inquiries. While it has taken time for research to centre the complex nature of place, it is not new for Indigenous contributions, which have consistently taken up place regarding notions of sovereignty, treaty, and identity and connections to land. CPI engages place explicitly and politically through dynamic interactions and "addresses spatialized and place-based processes of colonization and settler colonialism and works against their *forgone-ness* or naturalization through social science research" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 3). I have intentionally integrated Indigenous epistemologies through: drawing upon Indigenous activism, scholarship, epistemologies, and theories; choosing a medium with local relevance; learning how to treat the medium with the sacredness it deserves; and working in collaboration with communities of researchers and less as a sole researcher, which has helped me maintain relational accountability.

Validity in the case of CPI relational validity involves maintaining methodological flexibility, responsiveness, and a sense of responsibility; it is not just a box-ticking of

institutional criteria. Koro-Ljungberg (2010) took issue with seemingly objective, mechanical approaches to research validity and placed more weight on complexity of ethical considerations in qualitative research. She called for a radical reconceptualization to consider how opportunities to enact responsibility as a researcher "emerge at the least unexpected times, at the times of theoretical confusion, loss of power, privilege, and logic, and at the times of methodological uncertainty" (p. 610). Koro-Ljungberg (2010) drew upon Derrida's notion of aporia (or moment of puzzling ethical responsibility), describing layered responsibilities, such as being responsive to the unexpected; considering how the context continually changes with every presentation and publication of a manuscript; maintaining awareness of historical conditions and ongoing forms of oppression; and preparing for uncertainty and research encounters that test the epistemological, methodological approaches and values of the research. I have felt this sense of responsibility throughout the process, for example, by changing my tone when I realized that audiences were empathizing with the destruction of my art more than the atrocities against Indigenous children (See **"Unearthing Truths"**). I have a responsibility to share and teach when people ask me about the soilwork, to think about how to respond, and to seize a teachable moment when authorities ask what I am doing and who will clean up the mess.

The validity of this research project does not have all the predetermined criteria but has aimed to maintain responsible praxis. Throughout this dissertation, whenever possible, I explicitly name teachers and people who have supported the reviewing or reading of my manuscripts, or who provided inspiration as I feel a sense of responsibility to them. While I do not claim an Indigenous research paradigm, I am working towards a relational one.

Significance of Place

This dissertation uncovers subtle differences between terms such as space, place, and land. Thinking about the concept of place has been a source of philosophical debate for ages and has resulted in varied perspectives that have shifted over time. The word, *place*, itself makes it difficult because of the multiple meanings to convey in/out of place or in reference to an event occurring and taking place (Sergot & Saives, 2016). In the *Fate of Place*, Casey (1997) tracked a philosophical history that presented views of place as a void, a vessel, an isolated location, a matrix, space as absolute, extensive, and relevant, and a site, and compiled numerous philosophical orientations spanning millennia. While I will not be able to expand upon all these concepts, these different perspectives of place still influence how people relate to places and reveal the need to incorporate Indigenous perspectives of places, especially in a transcultural, multilingual nation of many nations such as Canada. Tracing some of these orientations to place has informed my work in this dissertation, for example, through my deliberate choice to move away from a term such as space, which can overgeneralize and problematically portray places as empty or neutral. Through critical place inquiry (Tuck & MacKenzie, 2015a), identifying a specific location, such as Winnipeg, as merely a pinpoint on a map also becomes problematic because it misses the layers of social and cultural histories and geographies that make up what is now identified as a city.

Perspectives about place have evolved to be more relational than a concrete and fixed sense of place. In a conversation with British geographer Doreen Massey (see Massey et al., 2009), Danny MacKinnon asked her: *Is there possibly a middle ground between relational and more traditional fixed views of space?* Massey (2009) affirmed that "there never was place that was a container" (p. 416) and that place needs to be re-thought, re-imagined, and reconceptualized because trying to contain place into fixed parameters can divide global

humanity. This idea plays out in my work as I have engaged in creating the *Matryoshka* framework to demonstrate relational views of place. The *Matryoshka* connects to the idea of how place has been described as a vessel—emphasizing the materiality and the move from a chaotic void to the creation of place (Casey, 1997). I consider how place can be occupied and portrayed as a nexus between place and body (Casey, 1997)—*who* we are and *where* we are therefore signify that there is a place. Casey summarized how Merleau-Ponty (1962) advanced the idea that we participate in place; our physical presence and our lived body aid in accessing understandings of place and how the body *is* a place. Casey (1997) described the body as an implaced entity. This *Matryoshka* framework aims to convey this togetherness and "withness*"* (p. 214). Casey synthesized philosophical trends from thinkers, such as Kant, Whitehead, Husserl, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, that identify the bond between body and place and that show how, over time, the idea of becoming more oriented within a place is an action that involves the mind but "belongs to the body" (p. 205).

To study a specific place such as Winnipeg is not to limit the knowledge only to information about what is now considered part of the city. Massey (2009) influences multi-disciplinary scholarship and draws upon feminist and Marxist theories to propose the possibilities of "a politics of outwardlookingness, from place beyond place" (2005, p. 192; see also Massey, 1994; 2009), which views local interactions as agentic and significantly connected to broader global interactions. I learned about commonalities in numerous places. For example, throughout this journey, I made cross-cultural and cross-continental connections with Indigenous histories, such as parallels between the colonial oppression of Canada and Namibia through collaborating with Dr. Cynthy Kaliinasho Ya-Otto in 2022 on relevant inclusive practices, which gave potential decolonial solutions across two different places. The manuscripts **"Murky**

Waters" and **"Red River Removals"** show Winnipeg's relationship with watersheds and bodies of water, such as Shoal Lake in Ontario. My analysis highlights the effect of generational dumping into the rivers that has had repercussions on numerous places but also a broader impact in that this abhorrent practice affects how women, girls and two-spirit people are treated, which connects to gender-based violence as described by the *National Inquiry* (2019a). Links such as these are akin to what Massey (2009) described as *power geometries,* which has been an important idea for critical work because it shows that relational work is not all positive but can illuminate relationships forged through connections in relation to power and oppression. All manuscripts surface power geometries through viewing places as opportunities to teach critical perspectives. Giroux's (2004) description of places of public pedagogy revealed the dynamics within an "ongoing project to theorize the regulatory and emancipatory relationship among culture, power, and politics" (p. 62). Furthermore, all manuscripts prompt thinking about public art and how large-scale art installations make ongoing colonial forces and power dynamics visible through soil.

Pedagogies of Place

Place-based education (PBE) connects across disciplines and to a variety of practices such as, but not limited to, experiential learning, environmental education, problem-based learning, Indigenous education, and critical pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2003). Leaders such as David Sobel and David A. Greenwood (formerly cited as Gruenewald when the article was written in 2003) have been pivotal in the PBE movement, which has helped educators connect to outdoor environments as a starting point to develop pedagogies of relationality. For example, a "critical pedagogy of place" investigated how curriculum might become more ecologically and socially conscious, and forge sustainable relationships between place and education

(Gruenewald, 2003). Gruenewald's (2003) critical perspectives brought attention to a type of silencing that happens in education discourses of accountability and competitiveness, and proposed that focused attention to place may help attune to particularities of local places in a way that is also connected to global trends. Raising one's consciousness to place can change a relationship to make one *more* human, which Gruenewald (2003) identified as processes of decolonization and reinhabitation. There are clear connections to the Frierian notion of *reading the world* (Freire, 1970/2011) and becoming more attuned to how oppressive realities are enacted and how they can be changed. Gruenewald (2003) called for merging ecological and social justice concerns, stating that:

> … ecological educators and critical pedagogues must build an educational framework that interrogates the intersection between urbanization, racism, classism, sexism, environmentalism, global economics, and other political themes. What makes this so difficult is that diverse social experiences produce diverse and sometimes divergent perspectives toward cultural and ecological politics. (p. 6)

Emphasizing socio-ecological components, Gruenewald (2003) noted that critical pedagogies of place cannot be only about struggles with human oppression, and they should focus on restoration and responsibilities beyond human connections. In his perspective, Gruenewald (2003) acknowledged tension between the processes of transforming and preserving and that "outrage towards injustice must be balanced with renewing relationships of care for others—human and non-human—and that the shared experience of everyday places promotes the critical dialogue and reflection that is essential to identifying and creating community well-being" (p. 10). While Critical Pedagogy of Place (CPP) is rooted in empathetic experiences, it is not rooted

in Indigenous perspectives, and it does not yet specify connections to settler colonialism and what it means to envision places as settler occupations of Indigenous territory.

Relationality to Land and Place

There is an ontological shift when considering place from Indigenous perspectives, which emphasize the spiritual and more-than-human connections to land. Indigenous scholars have cautioned settler scholars to be aware of the trappings of place-conscious education and prompted re-thinking about the relationship to land on new terms, not from the way land has been conceptualized since colonization. Bang et al. (2014) questioned how Indigenous perspectives can have a voice within place-based education. They critiqued Gruenewald and Sobel for indigenizing settler majority identities (Veracini, 2011) even though relational pedagogies are used. Warnings were issued that even place-conscious work can reify settler futurity and move to innocence, which challenges relationality because of the epistemic ontological and axiological perspectives that may problematically create constructions of land as not Indigenous (Bang et al., 2014). Similarly, the work of Styres et al. (2013) provided guidance on how to approach research on Indigenous territories by noting the importance of respectful approaches and protocols to develop Land-centered teaching to ensure that non-Indigenous educators are not appropriating and contributing to contemporary colonization of Indigenous knowledges.

Relationality to land and place come through being in specific locations and developing a sense of place through forms of placemaking practices, naming connections to land, identifying varying ontologies of land, and through learning from land as teacher. For me this learning about place connected to new understandings about my family name. When learning the ancient earth-based traditions of the sacred art of Byzantine iconography from the studio of iconographer Vera

Lazarowich-Senchuk, I saw connections to the research process, to a/r/tography, and to thinking about earth-based practices and cultural protocols. This complex spiritual process follows specific protocols, rituals, teachings, and layered meanings. An icon, in this tradition, is not considered an art piece of a Euro-Western approach, and it defies classical perspectives. It is not a painting—but rather referred to as icon writing. Through this mentorship experience, I learned about my own personal, ancestral, physical and artistic connections to the earth and clay. I learned that my own family name stems from the root word meaning Adamah (אדמה), which in Hebrew means earth.

Sense of Place During a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented shift in thinking people's relationships with place. One Australian geographer, David Bissel (2021), analyzed key dimensions of place in connection to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. He described: "In short, the pandemic has rewritten our global sense of place and changed our emotional geographies in the process" (p. 152). Each manuscript was initiated during the pandemic and, therefore, was influenced by the restrictions of the pandemic, which reflect a "hyperlocal sense of place" (Bissel, 2021, p. 153), and a time when I felt grounded and close to home.

As the pandemic intensified the feeling of global distances, it opened the possibility of learning more from local places. During the time of COVID shutdowns, Bissel (2021) highlighted the *hyperawareness* to colonial borders that occurred in Australia and the fictitious territorial lines that became restrictive as governments enforced rules around movement:

> The re-emergence of Australia's colonial boundaries and the associated fragmentation of society provides a (much attenuated) glimpse into the impact of the colonial disciplining of space in the colonies' early periods (which included the decimation of First Nations'

> societies through pandemics in addition to possession, occupation, and extermination). (p. 152)

During the pandemic, borders were being reinforced between people. Our sense of minimal flexibility in our movements challenged us to seek relationality in new modalities. During this time of a *looped sense of place and hyper-locality,* a shared responsibility emerged, which facilitated restored enmeshed connections to global issues, such as climate change and environmental degradation, by prompting thinking about the type of world we wanted to live in (Bissel, 2021). When taking a land-based course during the pandemic at a time when gathering size was limited, my classmates and I walked spread out at a 2-meter distance, like a trail of ants, resulting in walks that had government-enforced restrictions on how we moved and related to each other. I began to consider many of the initiating questions that link this dissertation, and I was prompted to think: What did I really know about Winnipeg, the place where I grew up? What does it mean to be a teacher in Winnipeg, Manitoba? What did I need to know as a teacher? What did I learn from living in the north and south end and then having the privilege to work in both places?

Placemaking and Placefulness

Placemaking is an approach used in early childhood settings that reminds educators to avoid framing nature in a way that reinforces anthropocentrism and a romanticized view of land that contributes to settler colonial emplacements. Instead, Nxumalo and Tepeyolotl Villanueva (2020) looked at curriculum of the "otherwise", which considers the limitations of "extractivist, and instrumentalist ways of knowing water rather than reimagining the kinds of pedagogies that can unsettle normative water relations and that situate children within the actual real-world watery precarities in which they are living" (p. 212). Through their consideration of a relational

affect and a curiosity to more-than human relationships, they resisted anthropocentric, colonial, and universalizing approaches (Nxumalo & Tepeyolotl Villanueva, 2020). Their approach took a perspective of water as agentic and already connected to their lives—demonstrating genuine and complex inquiries are *with* water rather than *on* water. Nxumalo and Tepeyolotl Villanueva (2020) accomplished this by sharing their pedagogical moves towards an "otherwise" curriculum and pedagogy, which has a less human-centered focus, pays more attention to emotional and affectual components, and uses practices such as repeated experiential engagements in places like a waste-filled waterway. In a similar way, my a/r/tography is work with soil rather than just on soil and involves repeated walks and encounters that activated affective dimensions to learning. I am in a reciprocal relationship with soil where I make designs based on my learning, but the process involves a sense of deep learning and listening to how soil speaks back.

According to Styres (2019), moving from space as abstract into a nuanced engagement with Land through actions of soulful experiencing, being present, storying, re(membering) and re(cognizing) creates a type of *placefulness*. Styres (2019) shared how we are intimately connected to places: "In this way we are in place as much as it is in us—every experience and expression of place is replete with multiple layers of memories, each informing the other in diverse and entangled ways" (p. 27). Such entanglements, which I cite throughout this dissertation, can result in unexpected encounters with a difference that support relational meaning making. Situated confrontations have been brought to life in my work that reveal different opinions about what art should look like, where art should go, how it should be treated, and who has the power to decide. Art on my driveway (**"Unearthing Truths"**) was driven over and considered as dirt, my installation in the university was trampled (See BackGround), and debate ensued over who would clean up the mess of a collaborative turtle installation on a

cobblestone cul-de-sac (featured in Honeyford et al., 2025). These experiences surfaced diverging opinions about what should happen in these places and have helped me understand relationships to place. These experiences, according to Massey (2005), might be described as a "confrontation with alterity [that] gives place its creative character" (p. 94). In searching for hope in hybridity, scholars such as Bang et al. (2014) recognized the productiveness of sites of difference that can also be "sites of potential transformings—forming a nexus between epistemologies and ontologies of land and Indigenous futurity" (p. 39). This is the type of educational work we need more of in Winnipeg.

Dwayne Donald's work guides all my manuscripts and supports a thinking of place that considers how to bridge established divides reinforced by inside-outside boundaries of fort pedagogies (Donald, 2011). Donald (2009) emphasized a sensibility that he called "Indigenous Métissage" to see curriculum and pedagogy in a relationship that exposes the limits of dominant perspectives while weaving in learning from Indigenous perspectives. My conceptualization of the *Matryoshka* is inspired by this approach as it aims to work across *frontiers of difference* rather than denying different positions, ancestries, or experiences (Donald, 2009). Donald's (2009) notion of *ethical relationality* also guides a way forward that is grounded to Indigenous ontologies and focuses on perspectives of place that transcend settler colonial notions and narratives created of each place. This sacred ecology prompted me to re-read places and understand them as layered, relational, and with stories and contentious and problematic histories that may expose differing versions of a story. In **"Homeland",** I applied Donald's *pedagogy of the fort* (2009, 2012a) as a curricular framework for understanding contemporary and historical silences in the Upper Fort Garry Heritage Wall, which reinforced how insider/outsider dichotomies play out in public art (such as leaving Riel outside the fort). It

also revealed how other places, such as universities, institute and normalize fort-like boundaries. Also, writing all these manuscripts during the COVID-19 pandemic brought new meanings to invisible divides and borders. The early stages of the pandemic were a paradoxical fort-building time when leaders urged the public to pull together by staying apart for the health of the broader local and global community. People retreated to their fortresses at home but also challenged notions of relationality through virtual connections.

Relational approaches should not simplify the issues but bring attention to the complexity, different layers, and challenging complications and incommensurability. Ermine's (2007) notion of *ethical space* is a guiding term for all aspects of my a/r/tography. I seek to create an ethical space where perspectives, knowledge systems, and cultures come together to create "a space that is new, electrifying, and even contentious, but ultimately has the potential for an interchange or dialogue of the assumptions, values, and interests each holds" (Ermine, 2007, p. 105). This *Matryoshka* of manuscripts functions as a multidimensional mode of communicating an ethical space that visually engages difference between the contrasting connections of positive and negative spaces. This term supports my understandings of how soil *works*. The soil initially took the form of a representation of my ideas, but by bringing the earth into various places, the entanglements of power and place became apparent. Soil can create both positive and negative space. These traditional elements of art reflect a creative embodiment of absences/presences that are always visually connected. *Negative space* is created by taking soil away or created by the soil around it. **"Unearthing Truths"** shows how a/r/tography alongside anticolonial approaches to expose privileges of settler researchers and work with soil can deepen understandings of settler-colonialism. Ethical space is helpful, but it is a challenging term to articulate, to see, and to feel. Soil helps me to understand this term as I work with the artistic

representation of positive and negative spaces that come together to create something new. Matter and meaning become inseparable where I began to see how ethical considerations become entangled by varying perspectives. I use this approach to convey types of silencing, omissions, removals, usurping, stealing, displacements (such as in the soilwork called "215", featured in **"Unearthing Truths"**). *Positive space* is created with soil and works to restore, re-story, replace (such as in **"Homeland"**). The positive and negative spaces created with soil together became a form of ethical space in which "each of the visual elements were both connected (and yet disconnected)" (Ferguson, 2017, p. 99). In **"Red River Removals"** I use the elements of positive and negative space intentionally to create a Métis infinity symbol by only replacing land. To represent settler colonialism, I sift soil around my shoes leaving a noticeable absence. Positive or negative space are connected relationally to the other.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples navigate positive and negative spaces in reality and not just in artistic terms. Soil, dirt, and disposability reminded me to be cautious and reflexive. Each installation involves an embodied process, and, in the semiotic components of the soilwork, I focus on bodies (layered feet, portraits/faces, and imagery that layers, encircles, and intertwines). The possibilities afforded through working with positive and negative elements towards an ethical space helped show contrasting approaches coming together. In all manuscripts, I share how places are connected to and disconnected from colonial occupation through art. Additionally, government-initiated land theft (under the guises of education, freedom, and progress), the re-branded and re-developed sites of Indigenous significance, and the normalized removals of people away from water or water away from people have been key themes amongst the chapters. In **"Red River Removals"**, I created my own stencils to design several Métis infinity symbols by only *replacing* land and not taking anything away. The stencils

were the shape of a water droplet. To represent settler colonialism, racist, and genocidal educational policies, I sift soil around my own feet while I take each step leaving negative space and an absence. This installation had two parts where both processes of asserting and replacing were used to convey connections to Métis history and the stealthy takeover of territory.

Other scholars also define a complicated hybrid space where Indigenous and Western viewpoints may merge in partnership. In a similar way, but from another hemisphere and entirely different geographical place, Martin Nakata (2007) shared that Indigenous knowledge continues to be filtered through Western discourses and contexts and, therefore, the space is contested. The melding of worldviews is not straight-forward: "Things aren't just white or black, and things cannot be fixed by simply adding in Indigenous components to the mix. This is a very complicated and contested space" (Nakata, 2007, p. 8). Scholars echoed this concept of a third space (Irwin et al., 2006) or zone of the in-between (Aoki, 2004) and supported relational arts-practices and traversing worldviews.

Part of this journey to understand the place of Winnipeg has involved processes of unsettling a place I have called home, revealed unsettling truths, and unsettled my own practices. *Unsettling* is a term that has been used to acknowledge the troubling relationship and the tensions between differing perspectives (Regan, 2011). Burow et al. (2018) analyzed how Indigenous efforts have unsettled settler ways of relating to land through revitalization of land-based programs, strengthening plant knowledge, and land back efforts, which they called practices of "unsettling the land, given their propensity to cultivate ontological hybridity and contribute toward decolonial futures" (p. 58). My fourth manuscript, **"Red River Removals",** is part of a collection focused on *Unsettling Education*: *Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Land* (King, O'Reilly, & Lewis, 2024), which describes *unsettling* as a new field of study and a

movement that “calls for settlers to follow Indigenous leadership and relationality and work towards disrupting the colonial reality through their everyday lives in their work and family life” (p. 2). The terms unsettling, decolonization, and Indigenization are often researched separately, but they “share similar aims of transcending the status quo of relationships among Indigenous and settler societies and their relationships with the land, the swimmers, the crawlers, the flyers, the four legged, and plants” (King et al., 2024, p. 2).

Pedagogy of Land

In the literature, there is a noticeable turn towards a pedagogy of Land (Tuck and Mackenzie, 2015a; McCoy, Tuck, & McKenzie, 2016; Simpson, 2014; Styres et al. 2013; Styres, 2019; Wildcat et al., 2014). Instead of using the term Land, Simpson often used the Niishinabeg term, Aki (or earth), which is inherently relational and “includes all aspects of creation: landforms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings, energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies and networks that connect these elements” (2014, p. 15). Soil encompasses all of these aspects of creation, which makes earth a poignant medium to interrogate constructs such as land and place and to form new relationships.

Partnerships between Indigenous and settler scholars have demonstrated scholarly shifts away from place-based education and towards pedagogies that centre land. For example, scholars Sandra Styres of Kanien'kehá:ka, English, and French descent, settler scholar Celia Haig-Brown, and Melissa Blimkie (2013) articulated this shift as a move towards a pedagogy of *Land* [emphasis and uppercase in original] and share how this relates to urban settings and how Land influences praxis. A pedagogy of Land encourages students and teachers to consider how they are “grounded, shaped, and informed by the Land and how pedagogical practices based in deepening understandings of Land can be (re)claimed, (re)constructed, and (re)enacted within

the cultural and linguistic diversity inside and outside urban classrooms, informal learning environments, and communities" (p. 40). This pedagogy considers that while we may physically be in one place, we are connected to other communities, practices, nations, clans, and locations, which all inform how we relate to land.

Land is also a key component to understanding settler colonialism and the relationships people have with this term. Burow et al. (2018) called on scholars to take up "culturally constituted ontologies of land long highlighted by scholars of Indigenous studies" (p. 58) and to acknowledge how settler colonialism functions to hide and obscure Indigenous ontological land-based connections. Understanding pedagogies of Land*,* such as traditional attachments and original stories, are important action steps that make meaning of the "tangled web of colonial relations" (Styres et al., 2013, p. 43). Wilson (2008) articulated that "Identity for Indigenous peoples is grounded in their relationships to the land and with their ancestors who have returned to the land and with future generations who will come into being with the land" (p. 80). Euro-descendent Australian scholar Patrick Wolfe, who is credited with supporting the emergence of settler colonial studies, conveyed the settler colonial logic of elimination (p. 387) and how settler colonialism is an "inclusive, land-centred project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 393). When Styres et al. (2013) called on the importance of grounding contemporary stories and relationships on Indigenous land in urban contexts, they shared:

> When we speak of layers of stories and relationships, we often image an X-ray allowing us to peer down through the layers of the earth to see the footprints of all those who preceded us on this land. Our footprints join those of the first Indigenous person who

> walked here and all those who followed. Our stories are layers on theirs just as the footprints are layered on one another. All our stories. (p. 45)

This imagery evoked by peering through the layers connects to the way I worked with and imagined the soil unearthing stories throughout this dissertation. Soil is a fitting method to uncover the stories of Indigenous ancestors that lie "beneath mounds of concrete, debris and layers of colonial tracks; their lives are painstakingly and inextricably recorded in the rocks, earth, waterways, as are those of related plant and animal life" (Styres et al., 2013, p.46). **"Red River Removals"** shows soilwork as an emerging methodology and presents an artistic rendering of un/coverings to expose settler colonial tracks.

I have been maintaining my own cultural ties and connections to land. Land, soil, and clay have significance in my own cultural traditions. Through Ukrainian dancing, for example, I understand how land affects quality of movement in folk dancing, for example, in the types of steps, and how flora and fauna influence the cultural regalia that dancers wear. Understanding this connection between cultural regalia has helped me to develop a sense of place and connections to Ukraine, where my ancestors are from and where I have visited but have never lived. This awareness demonstrates connections to physical materials and physical places and how they are embodied within cultural arts practices.

Names for Relationships to Land

Language to articulate place and our relationships with land are taken up in various ways. Burow et al. (2018) called on scholars to undertake "culturally constituted ontologies of land long highlighted by scholars of Indigenous studies" (p. 58) as well as to acknowledge ontological differences and how settler colonialism functions to obscure Indigenous ontological land-based connections. Over time there are different ways of articulating relationships and connections to

places, such as being a *resident* who lives in a place temporarily and superficially and then as an *inhabitant* who is rooted and nurtures a relationship to place (Gruenwald, 2003). The term, settler, is sometimes used as an alternative term to Indigenous, however, it should be viewed as a call for engagement and action (Carlson, 2016; Flowers, 2015). Unlearning what dominant schooling teaches is central to decolonization, which according to Greenwood (2003) "involves learning to recognize disruption and injury and to address their causes" (p. 9).

The ƛaʔuukʷiʔatḥ (Tla-o-qui-aht) Nation's use of the terms, guests and newcomers (Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation, 2016) and the X̲aayda Nation's use the term, guests, to negate the presence of settler colonialism by reasserting sovereignty over lands and the futurity of Indigenous presence predicts that visitors are only temporary. The Haida Nation on the West Coast of Canada asserts their sovereignty alongside their ontological commitment to land. The relational accountability of all who visit as guests and live on the island is formalized in the Haida Gwaii pledge to respect and honour the Air, Ocean, Land and People of Haida Gwaii and Haida Ways of Being. It is a pledge that asserts a relational approach to tourism and that views land (and ocean, air, and people) (Haida Nation, n.d., Haida Gwaii Pledge). When travelling was possible again as pandemic restrictions lifted, I sought out learning in different ways, such as travelling to Haida Gwaii. I had just finished a collaborative book project completed during the pandemic with Sara Florence Davidson and Janine Gibbons and co-wrote a teacher's guide with Sara entitled *Sk'ad'a Stories.* I did not really understand Haida Gwaii, and I wanted to learn more. I wanted to see the Yakoun River, to be on the water, and to see and feel the totems to experience Haida Gwaii beyond a museum-based culture. I went on my own before tourist season, so the main museum in Skidegate and some popular tourist destinations were closed. My travels then took on a different feel as I chatted with people, seeing land-based practices in action

in the schools and students building kayaks to take to Gwaii Hanaas. I also saw families feeding friends in the restaurant, held conversations with knowledge holders at a school, ate a homemade gift of smoked salmon, and saw murals by renowned artist Robert Davidson, which were previously whitewashed murals, now being restored. I learned through place by making connections and through connections initially forged in a digital space during the pandemic.

The way place is repackaged can become a form of resistance. While Greenwood (2003) discusses the distinctness of places, such as urban and rural, Indigenous scholars see all land as Indigenous lands. Relationality and land education are not limited to rural environments. Two-Spirit Red River Métis Sundancer Nicki Ferland debunked the divide between the urban-rural binary and centres relational learning experiences in urban settings to ensure that people are reminded that urban locations are *Indigenous land* (M'Lot & Ferguson, in press). Indigenous scholarship, such as Ferland's, continues to push boundaries of critical pedagogues and place-based educators away from anthropocentric perspectives to reinforce more ecological perspectives and the need to be aware of local forms of knowledge and Indigenous perspectives. My research involved Indigenous perspectives and, through soil renderings, acknowledged ethical spaces between critical pedagogies of place and land-based education.

Colonial concepts around land have limited the possibilities for engaging with land as a teacher and in culturally meaningful or spiritual ways. Indigenous languages are relational and, rather than a noun-based objectification as in English, languages such as Cree emphasize active connections (Wilson, 2008; Reimagining Lit Assessment, 2024). Indigenous communities have always had connections to place. The connections are in their names, language, and ceremonies; these connections are not new. Indigenous scholars name their relationships to land in holistic ways, such as through introducing themselves in relation to their kinship connections to clans,

clan animals, and community-based connections. To dive even deeper, the term, wakhotowin, is shared by several scholars with connections to the prairies (Campbell, 2007; Donald, 2021). Maria Campbell (2007) shared:

> There is a word in my language it is "wahkotowin." Today it is translated to mean kinship, relationship, family, as in human family. But once, from our place it meant the whole of creation. And our teachings tell us that all of creation is related and inter-connected to all things within it and Wahkootowin means honoring and respecting those relationships. There are stories, songs, ceremonies, and dances that taught us from birth to death, over and over again our responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to each other. Human to human, human to plants, to animals, to the water and especially to the earth. Our whole environment, our world in turn also had responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to us. (p. 2)

Similarly, Dwayne Donald used wâhkôhtowin as a nêhiyawêwin concept to describe more-than-human kinship relations and as ethical guidelines to be a good relative and to humbly work in accordance with more-than-human relatives. The relational wisdom within wâhkôhtowin acknowledges humans' dependence on more-than-humans and the need "to repeatedly acknowledge and honour the sun, the moon, the land, the wind, the water, the animals and the trees (just to name a few animate entities) as, quite literally, our kinship relations, because we carry parts of each of them inside our own bodies" (Donald, 2021, p. 59).

Even the way *land* is written in English text can assert a specific worldview about what is valued and how it is positioned. Styres et al. (2013) made a case for the uppercase to connote a specific type of spiritual and culturally connected perspective of Land. Each time the authors

Styres et al. (2013) used the term, Land, it is written with a capital L and is italicized, which emphasizes complexity and the authors' stance that:

> *Land* encompasses all water, earth, and air and is seen simultaneously to be an animate and spiritual being constantly in flux. It refers not only to geographic places and our relationships with urban Aboriginal landscapes but also gestures to the ways that discourses within places inform and are informed by our vision, pedagogies, and teaching practices. (p. 37)

They emphasized relational aspects of Land and draw upon historical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspects of Land as a sentient and living being and entity.

Key terminology choices highlight the relationships between land from colonial perspectives and the perspectives of Aboriginal groups in Australia. Tynan (2021) characterized this relationship through use of the term, Country, sharing that Aboriginal groups in Australia use the term "Country" and that practices of "caring for/as Country" describe and distinguish from the term land, which is an English term connoting extractive logic as resource and property.

While I oscillate between many terms for the soil, I do this intentionally to convey different power dynamics and qualities, and to convey certain messages. The root word for human comes from the Latin humus—meaning from the Earth. Settler scholars Ellyn Lyle and Celeste Snowbere, in their poetic introduction to *Re-humanizing Education*, the book where **"Homeland"** is published, discussed the connection between soil and human beings, offering a description of humus that "references the totality of organic composition and determines what might take root and grow. We are being invited into the humus of our own souls and being asked to consider what might emerge from our inner composition" (Snowbere & Lyle, p. 7). This sentiment helps me think about the relationship between people and land beyond human

existence and to see relational accountability to non-human and more-than-human in this research. I also use the term earth to signify land-based connections to Earth as Mother and life giver, which can also move beyond human and evoke sacred and spiritual aspects.

Land as Teacher

An Indigenous view is that land is sacred, spiritual, respectful, reciprocal (Carroll; 2014), and in relation to all non-human beings and more than human entities. Land is also a powerful source of knowledge, curriculum, and pedagogy (Simpson, 2014). In Leanne Simpsons' "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation" (2014), she poetically presented the relational learning of a young girl observing teachings from a squirrel and from generations within community, learning from and with land all connected to the sugary gift from maple trees. Land as Pedagogy to Simpson is grounded within a Nishnaabeg intellectual framework rather than a generic approach to land-based education. Throughout this dissertation, land has been the grounding concept as a pedagogical tool, artistic medium, method, and guide for me to learn more about myself, and about place and its layered topographic histories. Land as teacher has been a term that has made more sense to me through working with land alongside my studies, in my writing, and in other collaborative research projects that extend beyond this study.

Learning from animals, plants, Elders, and community through experiences and observations are ways that strengthen land relationships. The idea that land is a teacher is key to pedagogies of Land (Styres, Haig-Brown and Blimkie, 2013; UNESCO Canadian Commission, 2021). A pedagogy of land encourages a journey towards relationship with the environment that is respectful of traditional ways and stories of place, and that develops skills to meaningfully and respectfully incorporate Indigenous teachings based on Land as first teacher (Styres et al., 2013).

There are underlying commitments to land that can affect how Land as teacher is interpreted. For example, Wildcat et al. (2014) surfaced the dialectic between land-based education and settler colonialism: “Land-based education, in resurging and sustaining Indigenous life and knowledge, acts in direct contestation to settler colonialism and its drive to eliminate Indigenous life and Indigenous claims to land” (p. III). Carrol (2014) further illustrated this dialectic through a “Resources-relationships continuum” (p. 37) to describe divided ontological commitments and responsibilities to land and to Indigenous territory. On the other hand, Burow et al. (2018) described the sinful nature of taking and separating Indigenous people from land and the ontological connections to land, stating, “The ‘original sin’ that precedes the extraction of economic value is more than the alienation of workers from the means of production: it is the alienation of Indigenous ontologies by settler modes of thinking and controlling land” (p. 68). The universalistic quality of settler ontologies tends to discredit alternative worldviews (Burow et al., 2018).

While Marx (1876) articulated the concept of land as capital many years ago, there are numerous contemporary ways that settler ontologies of land have continued subtle extractive practices and transformed the way land is used and viewed. Burow et al. (2018) described extractive examples, such as the way settler land management produces palm oil, to illustrate how this extraction changes people’s relationship with land and with each other. Similarly, Simpson (2014) exposed how the hyper-capitalistic aspects of the settler process of making maple syrup presented a method that negates relationality embedded in the process. The “loving web of Nishinaabeg networks within which learning takes place” (p. 9) is contrasted to extraction, production, commercialization, and deterritorialization of maple syrup production.

Simpson (2014) provided a firm stance, asserting that “The land must once again become the pedagogy” (p. 14).

In my work, soil serves multiple purposes. It functions to link the manuscripts, bridging the space between them and reinforcing a stronger relationship. While this research did not include participants, I felt as though the land was a participant. I took time to meet with soil to think and create. The soil often moved and responded in ways that caused me to rethink my designs and understandings of both the creative practice and the topics I was thinking about. This unexpectedness forced me to ask new questions. There was a dialogue happening and I hope the links can make some of this exchange visible.

Land-based learning experiences are becoming more common within educational institutional settings, and they provide opportunities to centre relationality for diverse student groups and places. Forest-based schools are becoming popular across Canada as people seek out repairing and renewing relationships with land. Settler scholars are seeing how land-based learning experiences prompt understandings of more-than-human elements, diverging from Western knowledge systems towards a meaningful engagement of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being (Irlbacher-Fox, 2014; Mooney, 2021). People are valuing how Indigenous spaces provide transformative opportunities for self-education (Anonymous Racialized Activist, as cited in Amadahy, 2008, p. 7) and give solutions for a climate crisis. Indigenous land-based programs, such as the Dechinta Centre in Yellowknife, Northwest Territory, are leading the way towards relationality, by developing a curriculum committed to revival and continuation of Indigenous practices prioritizing Northern Indigenous teachings, knowledge, values, and practices particular to Dene and Inuvialuit communities (Dechinta, 2024).

In my own experiences, being part of a Nature-based Learning initiative in the Winnipeg School Division, I saw moves towards relational approaches, while at the time, there was still strong resistance to associating relationality to Indigenous teachings. The reasons for this were unclear but could have played out as an example of how Indigenous erasure continues to function in educational systems. I see how the use of the term nature is sometimes used problematically as if it is neutral ground.

In engaging with some of Ferland's work, I shared my encounters with creating soilwork and being asked to remove it, to which she responded, "I experienced something very similar when I took a group of Indigenous high schoolers to The Forks to celebrate Indigenous land in the city and we were told that we needed a permit to "protest." We were on a walking tour of one of the few sites in Winnipeg that is recognized as Indigenous.... I learned that day that Indigenous presence is protest, and Indigenous existence is resistance" (Nicki Ferland, Red River Métis, personal communication, December 17, 2024). Through his Land-based Experience course, Dr. Rice gave us an opportunity to spend time on the university campus learning from Elder Ed Mazur and tenting on the grounds near the river. This course prompted me to think differently about urban Indigenous land as I learned about burial grounds in downtown Winnipeg and in industrial areas of the city. I became more aware of the layered stories and soiled histories beneath my feet.

Another example is brought forth by the collaborative effort of Bang et al. (2014), who shared Indigenous approaches to land-based pedagogies in urban settings as a way to learn more about the wetland of Shikaakwa (now known as Chicago). They showed how "working to move [their] practice beyond historicized us/them dichotomies and willfully contradicting common narratives of assimilated and landless urban Indians toward longer views of our communities and

our homelands not enclosed by colonial timeframes" (Bang et al., 2014, p. 39). Chicago may be unrecognizable to most as a wetland because of the efforts to make the land profitable. Bang et al. (2014) identified a need to shift to viewing this and other wetlands as places of stories, birth, death, and renewal as well as other important parts of Indigenous history and stories that become limited by a settler ontology. The settler ontology views land as needing to be transformed and mapped into a place ready for monopolizing and money-making. Despite drastic efforts to transform the land, the land talks back through evidence of resilient medicines growing in this urban wetland location (Bang et al., 2014). In a way, Winnipeg, too, has been transformed. **"Red River Removals"** addresses how the City of Winnipeg prioritized the changing of the landscape of Shoal Lake to get water for its citizens without consideration of the surrounding communities and ecosystems, and then bragged about it for years to come through several aqueduct monuments installed throughout the city. I am curious about how the natural laws of the land here speak back.

There is a need for advancing decolonial approaches to post-humanist scholarship. Sometimes post-humanist scholarship attempts to engage in relational ways but may miss the mark. There has been an ontological turn through post-humanist perspectives that Burow et al. (2018) described as affecting how land is conceptualized, limiting relations and the agency of non-humans, such as rocks, micro-organisms, machines, and animals, which has implications for Indigenous communities and efforts of decolonization. Settler-Indigenous collaborations can help to ground relationality from multiple perspectives. Some settler-Indigenous scholars provided anticolonial art education in academic settings (Rallis et al., 2024) by making spaces in artist-in-residencies that partner with Indigenous artists. This type of collaboration shares how the practices of Indigenous artists support engagement with the concept of *relational ethics*

through the flesh (drawing upon the radical feminist scholarship) as "an embodied, social justice–oriented way of being in the world" (p. 213). These scholars demonstrated how love and land connect to creative practices and inform new possibilities for relational praxis. Envisioning the word love as an active verb, form of praxis, and artistic practice helps to uncover connections between land, love, and learning, stating: "To truly understand what it means to decolonize and to reconcile, to teach in anti-colonial ways, the first act of love we need to make is to help our students break free of their disunity with land" (Rallis et al., 2024, p. 214).

My work with soil is becoming more collaborative and has been greatly enhanced through insights of Knowledge Keepers such as Sherry Copenance and Brenda Longclaws. They are helping me to see the relational components of working with the earth and how this work is already connected to relatives, to the stories of creation, and to cycles of life. The concept of Land as a mother is also an idea that aligns Indigenous perspectives shared to me through stories of Knowledge Keeper Sherry Copenance and also links with my cultural perspectives shared by my own mother, Marianna Carol Hryniuk-Adamov. The Earth as Mother is an idea shared amongst my relatives. Soil is significant to my ancestral roots in Ukraine and was significant to my family's choice of settlement on the prairies. The soil is what brought many settlers here, and they have continued to transform the land and waters since arrival. When my ancestral territories and ways of life were threatened, my family had to escape Soviet occupation and fled to Europe. My own relatives felt at home here in Winnipeg when they moved from places including Berdyansk, Ukraine through Austria/Germany; Halychyna, Ukraine; Kharkiv, Ukraine through Dubrovnik Croatia; Rueckenau, Russia (which is likely the Zaporizhia Oblast of Ukraine) migrating through Oklahoma; and then to Manitoba because the soil was rich similarly to the soil of Ukraine and could support food practices to which they were accustomed. Small traditional

practices from their traditional lands were transferrable to this new-to-them place, such as foraging, berry picking, mushroom picking, and growing foods, and these activities could be continued because there were many similar plants, fruits, and fungi growing here. The geography looked familiar, which made them feel at home. They knew how the land could sustain them but were unaware of how their arrival was impacting original, Indigenous peoples.

Art as a Relational Approach

Land, place, and art have an ancient aesthetic relationship. Art can give a way of making visible the type of relationality and knowledges residing in place that many scholars try to articulate with words. Here, I identify how artists working with land support intersecting relationships between materials, between spaces, between people, between human and more-than-human. Some of the key relational approaches I highlight include samples of land art, art as a form of redress and righting of history, decolonizing art and praxis, and ceremonial and wholistic approaches. In this *Matryoshka*, I develop a horizon of soilwork that includes public provocations with land art that I refer to in the manuscripts as earth-based art. For example, **"Unearthing Truths"** looks at how soilwork is an aesthetic action to move beyond reconciliation by a focus on loss, ruptures, refusals, and the arts connections to healing.

Art from the Earth and with Land

This dissertation is inspired by the way artists have preserved generational land/place relationships and reflect traditional ways of sharing knowledge and preserving practices across cultures. For example, Buddhist mandalas are a sacred symbolic form that reflect Buddhist cosmology that are impermanent, involve ceremony, invite meditation, and signify transformation of a universe of suffering into one of joy (Berzin, 2023-2024). This approach inspired my first soil installation, "Untitled" (Ferguson, 2017), featured in the chapter

“ForeGround”. While differing in significance and spiritual traditions, Hindu Rangoli are visual and are created around festivals, such as Diwali, using an array of coloured sands. Byzantine iconography, too, is a sacred tradition that I am learning is created with methods using traditional earth-based materials, with the use of egg, clay, water, and ground pigments from the earth.

For an Indigenous example within my local context, in Manitoba, rock petroforms of Manitou Api (“The Place Where the Creator Sat”) in the Whiteshell Provincial Park share local stories and relational connections including animals and spiritual beings (Sinclair & Cariou, 2011). Since time immemorial, petroglyphs, petroforms, and pictographs are Indigenous examples of earth-based visual and embodied practices. These practices reflect traditional systems of writing used in Manitowapow (the area now within the province of Manitoba) and are often used alongside oral traditions (Sinclair & Cariou, 2011). In the case of the Manitou Api petroforms, Sinclair and Cariou (2011) shared how the Path of Life symbolizes physical and spiritual journeys taken in life and death, and teaches and advises about politics, ceremonies, and actions needed to live within and belong to a healthy community. While it appears that from an artist’s perspective, rocks are used as the medium in petroglyphs, these are not merely artistic materials but respected as beings, relatives, and ancestors. This type of epistemological significance makes petroforms ontologically distinct from European-inspired forms of land art, such as the prolific genre of landscape art.

Indigenous approaches are distinct from the land art movement of the 1960s and 70s, but there are many aesthetic connections as they both encourage a relational making that connects people and places. The land art (or earth art/earthworks) movement was a conceptual art movement that was largely interested in human’s impact on earth. This movement represented concepts and genres such as conceptual work, environmental art, psychogeography, and

landscape art (Tate, n.d.[a]). Where they differ is perhaps in how the land art movement does not emphasize the relational aspects to more-than-human connections. Some artists within this movement used minimal equipment to move the earth, and some, Richard Long for example, were determined to make marks with only walking and his feet. Perhaps one of the most prolific and recognized pieces characterizing the land art movement of this specific time is an earthwork by Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (1970)—a 457.2m spiral of mud, salt crystals, rocks, 4.6 meters wide that was created in Great Salt Lake (The Board of Trustees of the Tate, 2025[a]). Dennis Oppenheim (1970) engaged in questioning the purposes of art as he moved from gallery spaces into the public realm with a renewed focus on physically creating with his body. His work "Parallel Stress" consisted of two black and white photos reflecting a short performance-based art piece where he stretched his body between masonry walls near the Brooklyn Bridge at their highest point of stress and then repeated the same pose on an abandoned piece of land on Long Island—this time showing how his body curved and was supported by the land (Oppenheim, 1970 as cited in The Board of Trustees of the Tate, 2025). These examples connect to how places are understood "by way of body" (Casey, 1997, p. 202) and ways of being are connected to place. As part of my personal praxis (Horizon 1), I attempted other ways of creating without any soil at all and just tried to understand place through my body by acknowledging the land of Tkaronto. There, I created an art installation in a snowstorm using only my feet in the prominent Nathan Phillips Square in downtown Toronto, Ontario. While this work is not featured here, this experience informed my a/r/tography.

A combination of visual imagery and material is used by Indigenous artists to address historic and contemporary legacies of colonialism, and to speak to the relationship between past and present in a way that words cannot fully express. For example, through the *Resurgence* and

Renewal book projects (M'Lot & Ferguson, 2022; M'Lot & Ferguson, forthcoming), I became inspired by Indigenous contributors who demonstrated powerful relationships between land and various forms of art, such as displays of layering of traditional and contemporary media, such as birchbark, beading, and digital texts. One such artist is Elizabeth Lapensée (2022) who showed how digital spaces can be relational by connecting to history, teachings, Indigenous ethics, and land-based connections through games that enable a type of digital journeying (see more in M'Lot & Ferguson, 2022).

Decolonizing Art Practices and Praxis

Mainstream dominant Eurocentric arts practices and museum practices have othered Indigenous artists, and Indigenous artists are speaking back (Elston, 2012; Hill & McCall, 2015; Iseke-Barnes & Estrada, 2008; Robinson & Martin (2016). Iseke-Barnes and Estrada (2008) explained how multi-media Haisla artist and political activist Arthur Renwick conveyed his relationship to his village of Kitimat in northern British Columbia, the dynamic aspects of Haisla history and culture, and the complex colonial relationships through the exploitative aluminum company taking over the town and toxifying the surrounding waters. Renwick's art showed "culture is an active process of changing while deeply rooted in traditions" (p. 24), and he used art to imagine possibilities and to heal and recover from coloniality. For example, Renwick, in his exhibit "Deeply Felt" (1999) worked with felt— a material used traditionally on button blankets for warmth—on military uniforms. Renwick's examples showed how relationality is conveyed through juxtaposing his use of materials. Renwick's art piece, "The Great One", used aluminum to encourage reflection of the viewer. Additionally, this material is part of the story and conveys the place-based history of the aluminum industry in his home village of Kitimat, which used water to create the aluminum and subsequently ruined the health of the water and

water dwelling beings (Iseke-Barnes & Estrada, 2008). In other works, copper is used to embody a complex relationship between the power of an Indigenous community leader/Chief and the colonial powers of extraction. In a similar contextual and material way, I try to convey colonial impacts on land and people through soil stories and images re-created with the earth.

Artists are activating notions of place from a perspective that disrupts ideas about ownership, control, access, and possession of arts and work towards decolonizing artistic spaces and places. One such artist that has influenced my thinking throughout this research is Cree artist Kent Monkman. Hearing Monkman speak in Winnipeg to introduce his exhibit while thinking about the intersections of culture, citizenship, and curriculum, and seeing how he positioned the North End of Winnipeg led me to problematize the place I called home. While Monkman's work is prolific and involves a variety of media, the work that specifically referenced the North End of Winnipeg where I grew up prompted me to think differently about my artwork in places of pedagogy. Monkman disrupted the Eurowestern canons in urban locations, such as museums, and made relational aesthetics part of the broader public discourse. Monkman's simultaneously profound and playful large-scale canvases employed the neoclassical styles of settler artists—often called the "Masters"—with a distinctive Western style, who often portrayed Indigenous people in their paintings as subjects of what Monkman referred to as a perceived "vanishing race" while Indigenous people remained "very much alive" (The Met, 2019). According to Elston, "despite continued Native presence in the land depicted by white painters, natives themselves were seldom seen in these sweeping empty vistas, where they hung on the walls of humble Midwestern parlors or sophisticated galleries in New York and other Eastern cities" (Elston, 2012, p. 183). Vast empty landscapes were rhetorical devices that romanticized the colonial takeover in North America (Elston, 2012). Monkman's work refuted themes of

disappearance and aimed at "reversing the colonial gaze" through the portrayal of an allegorical protagonist and persona of Misschief Eagletestickle, who created a masterful mashup of perspectives.

Encounters in other cities, similar to my experiences in New York travelling with my youngest son at the end of my maternity leave and at the beginning my doctoral journey, prompted me to critically consider places of public pedagogy, access to curriculum, and hidden stories. In 2019, I wrote about the absence of Indigenous narratives at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met), which only several months later was addressed by Monkman. While I did not know this was in the works, I felt as though my work was synchronous with some of his ideas. While Monkman's work experienced unfortunate timing due to the pandemic, he displayed a diptych of two large-scale pieces commissioned for the Met during 2019-2021 in an exhibit called mistikôsiwak *(*wooden boat people), talking about migration and forced removals of Indigenous people and subverting the normalization of displacement of Indigenous lands. Monkman cleverly subverted the unquestioned iconography of New York with the first painting, *Welcoming the Newcomers* (Monkman, 2019), within a city whose iconography venerates freedom and statues of liberty in 'new' lands. Then, with its counterpart, he talked back to one of the most visited paintings in the entire museum, and mimicked the migration captured in *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (Leutze, 1851) with a piece called *Resurgence of the People* (Monkman, 2019). Monkman created an Indigenous reflection of colonial history and brought in Indigenous perspectives into an institution that Linda Tuhiwai Smith might have called engaging in a "researching back" or "talking back" (Smith, 2002, p. 7) and restorying relationality. While Smith spoke of this idea in terms of Indigenous artists, there is a place for non-Indigenous artists to expose colonial violence as well. The arts-based approaches documented in this dissertation

show my place within this effort to shift narratives and to bring new ways of understanding the complexity of the histories into view. This dissertation serves as a reminder that while the arts can be freeing and boundary-pushing in many ways, for Indigenous communities, arts practices have been colonizing—extracting, collecting, and misrepresenting— and at serious risk of becoming displaced from Indigenous cosmology, epistemologies, and ontologies (Iseke-Barnes & Estrada, 2008; Smith, 2002).

Art as Redress

Learning about land and healing from harms of the past is alive through the arts. The power of arts to disrupt and shift ideological stances have prompted a "radical re-evaluation of reconciliation" (Hill & McCall, 2015). This research is influenced by numerous artists who have shown interconnections between living beings, timeframes, places, and spiritual connections. For example, the art of a well-known Michif visual artist and activist from Lac Ste. Anne, Christi Belcourt, focuses on making visible interconnections between living beings and non-humans, such as animals and diverse plant life, and conveys more than human connections (Belcourt, 2024). Belcourt stated: "I paint what I want for this world. I try to reflect to the best of my ability the power and sacredness of Mother Earth which is the sacredness of all life as we know it" (Belcourt, 2024, Artist Statement). While place does not appear as an overt topic, its centrality subtly emerges through knowledge of local plants and their roles as part of an ecosystem.

Indigenous artists provide visual resistance to colonialism through decolonizing arts practices and by presenting alternative discourses and new modes of reviving ancient teachings and knowledges (Iseke-Barnes & Estrada, 2008). For example, multi-disciplinary artist of Anishinaabe and Finnish descent, Jamie Black, views the human body and the land as sources of knowledge—both cultural and spiritual. Most notably, Black's REDress Project was described

by Isaac as “an aesthetic response to the more than 1000 Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women in Canada” (Black, 2020), and it garnered international attention to gendered and racialized violence. Through the continued action of hanging red dresses and remembering MMIWG, she transformed relationships to land as redress, and through redress, called for justice. This concept dramatically changed places into visceral acknowledgements of colonial violence and absences by bringing aesthetic attention to the ongoing atrocity of Missing or Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. She showed the power to transform a public place that activates a spiritual connection. Her relational work has served as inspiration for how arts, such as in manuscript 3, **“Murky Waters”**, can be used to share difficult knowledge, and how earth-based art can show how to connect land, place, and art in ways that reinforce spiritual connections and more-than-human elements. In my research, I reference other aspects of Black’s portfolio, which expands to other embodied practices that include her own body being part of installations to engage with place, a sense of home, shelter, belonging and land, illuminating a rawness through numerous forms of natural materials, such as mud, clay, sticks, stones, and rocks. The Reclaim Project (n.d.) connected matrilineal knowledges rooted to land and brought people together through storytelling, the offering of tobacco, presence in circles, drum songs, and artmaking as ways to remember strong connections to land in sacred sites, such as the Forks in Winnipeg. About this relational practice as part of the *National Inquiry* (n.d.), Black shared:

> We worked with red clay, with earth, not only knowing that connection to the land in our minds, but really feeling it, working with it, working with our hands in a kind of mutual healing. We formed human figures, figures of women and girls, goddess figures, calling in the strength, courage and power of all the circles of women that have gathered at this place. (ReClaim, para. 8)

This work informs my earth-based art with soil on the snow in **"Murky Waters"** and around the commemorative monument to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and my work in collaborative research projects, as described in more depth in the final chapter, Body of Work.

The collection of works in *The Land We Are: Artists & Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation (*Hill & McCall, 2015) critiqued apologetic reconciliatory discourses, explored the use of art in political engagement for change, and inspired artists "who took it upon themselves to engage with this concept [reconciliation], to shake it up, to wrestle with it, and to insist on other possible futures" (p. vii). Dylan Robinson and Keren Zaiontz examined the role of public memory in neoliberal environments and brought attention to what they called *the civic infrastructure of redress* on Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm/Musqueam, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw/Squamish Nation, and Tsleil-Waututh territory, which ignores First Nations history and the fact that Vancouver has displaced Coast Salish communities (Hill & McCall, 2015). Despite numerous land disputes, plaques and public art from Indigenous artists not from that territory are prominent and narratives of truce dominate the urban landscape. The work of settler scholars such as Allison Hargreaves and David Jefferess showed how spaces of dissent or fracture lines, such as conflict zones and barricades, are contentious places, and yet are generative starting points for creative work.

Additionally, as part of my own process of redress, I include reference to public art or activism by Indigenous artists and leaders throughout all four manuscripts. **"Unearthing Truths"** draws inspiration from Haida Artist Tamara Bell. **"Homeland"** connects to public art of the redesigned fort but draws most of the inspiration from Louis Riel's activism. **"Murky Waters"** engages with public installations while walking at the Forks, such as the MMIWG

monument and the collaborative piece of Niimaamaa (Adams, Isaac, & Vint, 2019), and inspired themes of responsibility, connections to water, sacredness of women, focus on mothers, and generational connections to land and culture, which were ideas supportive of relational praxis. **"Murky Waters"** also highlights art as a voice in the Gallery of Expressions used by Indigenous communities to commemorate loved ones and as a form of activism to bring attention to the *Calls for Justice* (*National Inquiry*, 2019b). **"Red River Removals"** contrasts the unsightly history of water injustices in Winnipeg with Métis artist Ian August's Rooster Town Kettle.

Righting of History

Art has the power to convey historical wrongs and contribute to a righting of history. For example, the work of internationally known settler Canadian artist, Peter von Tiesenhausen, encompassed a variety of natural materials focusing on relationships to land. His work conveyed the idea of a *homeplace* and brought attention to cycles within nature that showed ephemeral state of materials and conveyed tensions between absence and presence. Von Tiesenhausen's work ranges from structural supports for waterways, site specific installations, and dozens of formal gallery exhibitions. Von Tiesenhausen shared a provocative example of artivism (melding of art and activism) when he actively protected land from extractive oil and gas industries in the oil hungry province of Alberta by claiming copyright for the top six inches of the territory for which he had a deed and claimed it as his art (Kowalchuk, 2017). His work also ventured into transitory artwork, and his most travelled artwork was the Watchers/Journey in which five figures made of charred wood circumnavigated Canada's terrain over a five-year span of time and featured the diverse landscapes of Canada, including Canada's Northwest Passage (von Tiesenhausen, 2024; Vu, 2010). "The Watchers/Journey" gives a new perspective of developing relationships with land through active art making and activism. Von Tiesenhausen viewed the

land as sacred and in relational ways. Interviewer and scholar Kowalchuk (2017) reflected on the actual meaning of von Tiesenhausen's sentiment of *righting the land*:

> …[which] actually means righting *us* [viewers]; that is, righting our perspective—recognizing that we are part of the land, not objective observers who are separate from it. Such a perspective seems rare in academia, where it is often assumed that the job of scholars, including writers and artists and scientists, is to simply record the changes happening, without directly acting. I feel increasingly impatient with this stance, and I think it has led to our anthropocentric problems in the first place. Recognizing we are part of the land, intimately related to it, means loving it: paying close attention to it, respecting it, standing up for it, taking inspiration from it, healing it. Von Tiesenhausen's art reflected for me the observation, care, courage, creativity, and humility wrapped up in such a perspective. (para. 3)

Tiesenhausen shared how settler artists can also play an important role at the unique intersection of artist, activism, and allyship.

Scholarship in a/r/tography is delving into nuances of human relationships to place. Arts-based educational researchers see how the arts support social justice-orientations that raise consciousness to issues of power, domination, and privilege (Leavy, 2005). A/r/tographers have engaged with place in artistic and relational modes that are also forms of research and ways of teaching. Further west on the prairies, settler Patti Pente (2010) engaged with soil alongside a/r/tographic inquiry to examine the intersections of place, art, and pedagogy, and exposed the dominant practices of landscape art, questioning the notion of nature as synonymous with wilderness. Pente (2010) challenged normative art practices and explored soil as a way of connecting body and land in a way of "becoming in the land" (p. 40). In a study called, "Soil:

Threshold Spaces of Subjectivity, Pedagogy, and Place in Landscape Art", Pente involved three artists, Pat Beaton, Robert Dmytruk, and Peter von Tiesenhausen, in placing 12-foot lengths of white cotton outdoors for a six-week period. Through the documentations of unearthing the cloths, she shared photographs and a poetic analysis that expounded on the multisensory experience, which positioned learning from this experience as an emergent process and aesthetic inquiry with versatility.

In another effort to re-write public places, Canadian/American artist with Chinese roots Ken Lum, has closely analyzed the intersections of land, place, and art in urban locations by taking inventory of the "monumental landscape" in cities such as Philadelphia in an effort to transform it (CBC Gem, 2019) to become more inclusive of marginalized narratives. This idea of re-thinking historical moments was happening in real-time as people responded during the pandemic to the discovery at Kamloops (see **"Unearthing Truths"**) and began changing the monuments to tell a different story. Many of the approaches to my walking and writing, shown most clearly in **"Homeland"**, took note of who and what was deemed monumental and how narratives are viewed as worthy of remembrance. Relationality through art in public places is part of imagining a different future.

LIVING LINK 1

Participatory Soilwork - Guided Workshop Introductions

Link to YouTube: https://youtu.be/z8tvibNHtr8

MANUSCRIPT / *MATRYOSHKA* 1

Introduction to Manuscript/*Matryoshka* 1

Home is a good place to start the discussion and groundwork for reconciliation. To begin, the events featured in this first manuscript **"Unearthing Truths"** takes place in a south end suburban neighbourhood of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The art installation takes place on my driveway and shares how personal a/r/tography can surface in depth considerations of the atrocities of Indian Residential Schools. This paper begins this multi-manuscript inquiry and demonstrates some of my thinking about the question: *What does reconciliation look like in my own practice?* First drafts of this paper heavily drew upon the term reconciliation; it bridges the soilwork shared in the BackGround section and how this soilwork started to become part of my research. As I revised this work, I became influenced by Indigenous voices whose refusals of benign terms, such *reconciliation* to articulate genocidal actions, showed reconciliation as an "altered relation" (Hargreaves &-Jefferess, 2015, p. 202). I became more self-critical and began to see my a/r/tography practice shifting away from the representational focus. Instead, I focused on my own positionality as settler and a/r/tographer, my use of the term reconciliation, and my development of more interpretive and relational practices as an artist, researcher, and teacher. This work was influenced by Indigenous artists such as Rebecca Belmore, Luke Marston, Tamara Bell, and Christi Belcourt. Around the time when the term reconciliation was first introduced during the Oka Crisis, its use was critiqued as being a placating alternative to discussing land rights (Hill & McCall, 2015). Rebecca Belmore's "Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother" (Belmore, 1991) featured a large mobile wooden megaphone that was transported between blockades to invite people to voice their concerns and messages

directly to Mother Earth. My approach here discusses the discovery of 215 unnamed and unmarked graves under Kamloops Residential School as Mother Earth speaking back.

This manuscript (**"Unearthing Truths"**) surfaces notions of land that are based in Eurocentric notions guided by the Doctrine of Discovery. For example, the idea of *terra nullius* ("no man's land") denies the presence of Indigenous people's connection to lands. According to the TRC, terra nullius is a founding imperialistic ethos for Residential Schools—children were taken away from land, culture, community. The removal of children was reckoned as justifiable under the guise of education. This soilwork underscores the reality that Residential School grounds were not playgrounds but instead have become cemeteries (or hidden unmarked gravesites) where people were buried. These places are now sacred grounds. Families deserve to know the final resting place of their children.

This manuscript introduces the terms *unearthing* and *under/standings* as artistic renderings. The idea of land-based materials exposing truths and revealing nuances about a topic connects to Syilx Okanagan traditional knowledge keeper, Jeanette Armstrong's (1990) powerful sentiment:

> Imagine how you as writers from the dominant society might turn over some of the rocks in your own garden for examination. Imagine in your literature courageously questioning and examining the values that allow dehumanizing of peoples through domination and dispassionate nature of racism inherent in perpetuating such practices…Imagine interpreting for us your own people's thinking towards us, instead of interpreting for us, our thinking, our lives and our stories. (para. 12; also as cited in Reagan, 2010, p. 235)

This manuscript represents my effort to overturn rocks in my own colonial garden and personal and professional places. The process of unearthing with soil demonstrates how soil exposes

structures of colonialism through understandings about land. Relationships between the topic, my own life, job, and next steps became highlighted through the work of "215". In his case for a critical pedagogy of place, Greenwood stated "People must be challenged to reflect on their own concrete situationality in a way that explores the complex interrelationships between cultural and ecological environments" (2003, p. 6). The idea of my own concrete situationality is materially activated at home and on my own driveway.

This chapter is not published but is prepared for publication for a second edited volume for the IAP Book Series, Contemporary Perspectives on Semiotics in Education: Signs, Meanings and Multimodality, entitled *Reimagining Critical Multimodality in Education: From Soil to Seedlings*. It is currently submitted for publication, and after it is reviewed and revised, it may not be verbatim with the manuscript included here given the timeframe of publication of this dissertation and the edited collection.

ABSTRACT

The discovery of 215 unmarked and unnamed graves of children near Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in the province of British Columbia, prompted an outpouring of artistic responses from the public, re-igniting the urgency of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) and the need for all Canadians to respond to the Calls. Framed within the living inquiry of a/r/tography (Irwin et al., 2024; Springgay et al., 2005), I share an installation called "215" that I created with soil at my personal home in a residential neighbourhood in Winnipeg, Manitoba in commemoration of the children lost to the Residential School System. This public provocation shows how land can be a modality to bring attention to Calls 73, 74, 75 on Missing Children and Burial Information and pertains to the need to establish and maintain plot records of deceased residential school children, to inform families, and to respond to their rightful requests for ceremony and commemoration as well as protection of places where children are buried. Renderings of a/r/tography support my critical analysis and document the emerging educative potential of activist art using pop-up soil installations to disrupt discursive landscapes of reconciliation. I analyze how unexpected resistance to this artwork gives new initiating research questions such as: *What are the potentialities of soil to support decolonial praxis? How can earth-based art create ethical spaces to understand complex topics*? By analyzing my own aesthetic actions, I share how soil is becoming *more than* a medium or method; it is a powerful anticolonial approach to understandings complex topics, such as the senseless displacements, disappearances and deaths of Indigenous children. This small soil study presents methodological potentialities for various horizons of soilwork, which begins a layered journey towards more collaborative and relational work. The multimodality of soil provides a foundation to uncover new renderings, such as

unearthing and *under-understandings* to address a *soiled* history, support decolonial aims, and expose settler limitations and considerations for future research.

Keywords: reconciliation; a/r/tography; soil work; arts-based inquiry; renderings

Unearthing Truths: Remembering the Children that Never Came Home through Soilwork A/r/tography

Since the publication of the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC] (2015a; 2015b), many truths continue to surface about the education system in Canada. There are still numerous Calls to Action that need attention for both educational and public contexts. According to Yellowhead Institute's *Status Update on Reconciliation* (Jewell & Mosby, 2023), only 13 out of 94 Calls to Action have been addressed after nine years since the *Calls to Action* report was released. Since the release of the TRC in 2015, there has been a steady exposure of colonial discourses in local environments that has led to the re-naming of schools, streets, and public parks, accompanied by increasing media attention. One of the most significant shifts in urgency and public response was the initial discovery of 215 unmarked and unnamed graves of children buried under the grounds of former Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia (Dickson & Watson, 2021, May 27) in the ancestral lands of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc. Jewell (2024) describes a post-Kamloops era of reconciliation in which momentum and urgency intensified towards the Calls to Action. Websites of the Government of Canada now document the next steps on "Delivering on Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action" (Canada, 2024), which include comprehensive progress updates involving sections detailing the status of the Calls to Action. The media's focus on materiality of physical evidence reawakened the public to the horrific realities that caused generational trauma for many Indigenous families.

The fractured relationship between Indigenous peoples, settlers, and Canada is rooted to land. Métis scholar/artist David Garneau (2015) described how art creates spaces of "perpetual conciliation" (as cited in Hill & McCall, 2015, p. 13), which seeks to create pedagogical places

open to charged cultural exchanges, productive space of irreconcilability, and processes that re-imagining rather than moving on. After the ground-penetrating radar located the suspected remains of 215 unmarked and unnamed graves, there was an outpouring of public responses. People throughout the world seemed to embrace a renewed urgency to respond to the injustices of Residential Schools, with many reacting with shock about the horrific news; I have come to realize that this may well have been the first-time people in Canada and international audiences were hearing about this unspeakable truth. Spaces of perpetual conciliation were created when school communities and the public across the nation, and beyond Canada's borders, rallied to re-ignite the TRC's Calls through active artistic responses. Schools, galleries, staircases of prominent landmarks and legislative buildings, and sites of former Residential Schools along with their grounds became the focus of public outpouring in support of Indigenous communities. This piece considers conceptual connections between soil and settler colonialism and examines how this investigation supports the groundwork to support further decolonial perspectives.

Aesthetic Actions

The arts have played an important role in understanding the complexity of reconciliation. In the *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, interdisciplinary artists, such as David Garneau, Beverley Diamond, Sam McKegney among other creatives, show how the arts facilitate multisensory "aesthetic actions" to work through and move beyond TRC's discourses on reconciliation (Robinson & Martin, 2016). While disconnections are a theme of colonial movements, intended to displace people from lands, family, traditions, languages, cultures, and futures, the arts support healing by focusing on connections alongside ruptures, refusals, and loss. The arts have the power to move people into new ways of thinking, being, and doing. In this chapter, I show how the arts and

anticolonial perspectives serve an alternative way to respond to the Calls to Action and invite emotional responses to diverse audiences.

My work with earth, which began in 2017 (Ferguson, 2017), serves as mode of merging soil as a semiotic, symbolic, and sacred source. Robinson and Martin (2016) highlighted that the arts are about working though new forms of relationships and are not resolution-seeking efforts. Garneau (2016) noted that Indigenous artists have been using their creative voices to speak back to colonial experiences for a long period of time, and they often speak through aesthetic connections to the earth and through sacred connections (Hill & McCall, 2015). Aesthetics can support "cultural affirmation, healing, political mobilization, or even the packaging of residential school experience[s] in 'safe' forms for public consumption." (Davidson & Keavy, 2016, p. 8). The image of Figure 1.1 depicts my son when he was two years old, touching the iconic "Medicine Box" (Marston, 2009), often referred to as "The Bentwood Box", which is a vessel of reconciliation designed to hold and witness expressions of reconciliation. Bentwood boxes are traditional boxes to the northwest coast and serve a variety of practical and ceremonial purposes (National Centre of Truth and Reconciliation [NCTR], 2024; Robinson & Martin, 2016). This Bentwood Box was carved by Coast Salish artist Luke Marston from a piece of sacred old-growth cedar. Carved imagery on all four panels represents cultural connections to all who attended residential schools, including First Nations, in Woodlands' style, Métis, and Inuit (NCTR, 2024). Marston (2017) described, "We believe that when we cut down one of those old growth trees, or any tree, we give it a new life into something else. It's still a living thing, it still has its own spirit or its own soul, even when it's just a piece of wood" (University of Manitoba, 2017). Kalbfleisch (2016) described the TRC Medicine Box as a gesture of reconciliation, an active memorial, a mnemonic device, and a "communicative thing" (p. 301). This unstaged

photo shows this communicative quality in which my son reached out as if to console the weeping mother.

Figure 1.1

TRC Bentwood Medicine Box by Luke Marston (2009) with My Son

Note. Personal photograph taken by Katya Adamov Ferguson in 2017 at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg, Manitoba

This photo captures the witnessing of a moment and an ephemeral connection between my son and the Bentwood Box. There is a sense of understanding created without words but an embodied interaction meeting a visual image. This image stays with me as I work as a teacher. It makes me wonder: *How do we reach out with this reverence in our daily practices to restore trust with a respect that also confronts the challenging realities face to face, hand to hand, heart*

to heart? This image also depicts the accessibility of the arts to engage a wider audience than merely academics. My son, who was approximately two years old at the time, was gentle and in awe—understanding on some level the reverence required in this place. The arts have the ability to engage and make complex feelings, thinking, and responses accessible, valuable to, and inclusive of all ages. As a teacher working with young children, adults, pre-service teachers, and learners in post-secondary contexts, this engagement makes the arts powerful in crossing both age and institutional boundaries. This healing box (Marston, 2009) travelled as an embodiment of truths and hope, and it bore witness to the stories of survivors and communities across Canada. This sacred item moves beyond the material and embodies an active, lived expression, and it serves as a place of witnessing and remembering, which has inspired my own work with earth-based materials as well as my work as artist, researcher, and teacher.

A/r/tography

A/r/tography is a useful methodology to consider what research must reconcile and what further education settler teachers and researchers need to respond to the TRCs *Calls to Action*. In 2020, while taking doctoral courses, I began developing my knowledge and practices of a/r/tography using earth-based arts methods with a focus on soil. I was drawn to the way that soil work complimented a/r/tography as an underlying methodology, which "requires attentiveness to what is seen and known and to what lies beneath the surface" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 905). Soil naturally united to the significance of burials, unmarked graves, and colonial displacements.

In their paper, "A/r/tography as Living Inquiry through Art and Text", Springgay et al. (2005) proposed six initial renderings as part of a/r/tography, including: 1) contiguity, 2) living inquiry, 3) openings, 4) metaphor/metonymy, 5) reverberations, and 6) excess. I draw upon several of these pre-determined renderings of a/r/tography to learn about how aesthetic actions

with soil might support decolonial work. I ask the following two questions, *How can I respond to the news of unmarked and unnamed graves and take up the TRC Calls to Action through a/r/tography* and *What is the impact?*

Anticolonial Aesthetics

This paper considers how soilwork supports anticolonial aims. The term, *anticolonial*, which appears to have emerged from Māori educator Rau, portrays "the illusion that decolonizing can eliminate the effects of oppression" where the "the notion of anti-colonialism then requires an orientation that is radically activist and does not support a false separation between academic research and transformative actions in the contemporary world" (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 49). My work draws upon the focal view of some a/r/tographers that position anticolonial work as a perspective, which is intertwined with the idea of a decolonial future (Rallis et al., 2024). Soilwork is an anticolonial aesthetic action that serves as a form of layered praxis with different ways of working, which I articulate as a topography of soilwork that includes horizons such as: 1) working with soil as a form of personal praxis; 2) soilwork as part of collaborative artmaking and walking workshops; and 3) pop-up public provocations through soil installations. This chapter reflects an intersection between the first and third horizons.

According to Cannella and Manuelito (2008), anticolonialist research practices and approaches are needed to turn the inside out, and to "create transparent public conversations (not just academic dialogue) concerning philosophy, agenda, method, and results" (p. 50). A/r/tography and this emerging way of engaging with soil demonstrates empathetic alignment with the topic of unmarked graves and anticolonial perspectives to understand genocidal policies, such as those in place around residential schools. This alignment is enabled because a/r/tography is "a methodology of embodiment" and contributes "Research that breathes. Research that

listens" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899). A/r/tography that is grounded in anticolonial perspectives helps to "dislodge the dominance of written text" (Knight & Cutcher, 2018, p. xix) and surfaces a particular and ephemeral quality in response to the harmful research approaches that have had disastrous effects on Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2002). My hope is that my contribution shows how researchers, educators, and artists might nudge a/r/tography approaches beyond autoethnographic activities and towards relational approaches that attend critically to land and Indigenist (Wilson, 2007) approaches.

Children Who Never Came Home

Indigenous communities have long known the truth at the heart of the discoveries of the residential school graves because *their children never came home*. The TRC confirmed this horrifying reality. Many years prior to this discovery, a Working Group on Missing Children and Unmarked Burials posed four questions: 1) Who and how many [Indian Residential School] students died?; 2) What did [Indian Residential School] students die from?; 3) Where are they buried?; and 4) Who went missing? (TRC, 2015b). Research has been done to systematically answer these questions, and there is urgency to complete the work initiated by the Commission.

The timing of the discovery of the unnamed and unmarked graves close to the end of a school year offered a haunting reminder to people of those thousands of children who disappeared and never made it home. According to the TRC (2015b), "well over 3,000 children died while at residential school" (p. 127). The TRC shared that "Many, if not most, of the several thousand children who died in residential schools are likely to be buried in unmarked and untended graves. Subjected to institutionalized child neglect in life, they have been dishonoured in death" (TRC, 2015a, p.134). In a "cost saving measure" (TRC, 2015b, p. 126), bodies of deceased children were not returned to their families and home communities. The TRC

documented that students were buried in school cemeteries on or near school grounds, in sites that are not maintained. Moreover, the location of some sites and graves is unknown, some burial places were informal and uncared for, and other sites may have been destroyed because of ongoing development. It is important to note that prior to the discovery of graves at Kamloops, communities and groups, such as the Remembering the Children Society, have quietly organized memorials and ceremonies to consecrate the unmarked graves of children (TRC, 2015b, p. 132). Families still have many unanswered questions about what happened during the time when their relatives attended residential school, and there has been an ongoing concern to answer the questions: where are the children and when will they be brought home?

In response to the discovery of 215 unmarked and unnamed graves of children near Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, Heart Gardens blossomed, orange ribbon installations adorned school yard fences, and pop-up public memorials were collaboratively created. Many people sought concrete references to the disappearance and displacement of children by placing children's shoes in public places. The first installation of this kind may have begun with Haida artist Tamara Bell and her son, who laid 215 shoes on the steps of the Vancouver Art Gallery in response to the initial discovery (Dellplain & St. Denis, 2021). I was moved by the outpouring of ways communities shared their grief and support for families.

215

Two-hundred fifteen unmarked graves were discovered on the grounds of the Kamloops Residential School. In response, I created a soil art installation, called "215", on my driveway leading to my home in a residential neighbourhood (see Figure 1.2). This installation focused on the imagery of 215 embodied presences and absences of children. The choice to create this artwork at my own home intentionally emphasized the fact that *children never came home*. The

discovery of 215 graves also hit close to home as a teacher and a mother of two young children. As an artist, my driveway was an intimate place to generate conversations in my neighbourhood. The topic of reconciliation is often talked about in school settings, but I wondered how the arts might engage people who are not involved in educational contexts.

I completed the installation over several hours by taking two pairs of my children's shoes and sifting soil around them 215 times with the materiality of using earth. This technique left a footprint when the physical shoes were removed; I drew upon both elements of positive and negative space to activate the presences/absences, connections/disconnections, and truths/perpetual conciliation.

Figure 1.2

Soilwork entitled "215"

Note. Soilwork photograph by Katya Adamov Ferguson, sifted soil on my driveway, June 2021.

The shapes of the footprints created through the removal of the shoes and the addition of the soil was a way of "re-figuring presences" (Nxumalo, 2016) and activating both the children's absent presence and the present-day separations of children from families and communities. The shoe prints were placed in rows with a decreasing number of shoes in rows, meant to create the look of a multistory building, such as a residential school. Looking at it from another perspective, it can also signify the growing number of graves that are likely to be found. The repetitive motion of sifting soil over and over brought attention to the large-scale, systematic, and calculated atrocities of the TRC. The injustices, too, were repeated over and over.

Educative Potential

While I was working, many neighbours stopped to talk and ask questions. The topic of residential schools would not have normally entered the usual yard work pleasantries or benign passerby exchanges, but our conversations launched into deeper and critical matters. Some neighbours did not want to talk about it and seemed bothered by the 'mess' I created.

For my oldest son, who was in kindergarten at the time, it was an opportunity to learn about this painful history. This learning took on the living inquiry of a/r/tography, and his questions guided my responses. There was nothing appropriate about the topic of children dying at school; as a mother, I had to consider how I conveyed the information and what selected information was shared. I did this by inviting him to create with me and ask questions. The art helped me to be present and responsive to his questions. I continued to have discussions following the installation by using age-appropriate resources, such as *When We Were Alone* by award-winning Cree writer David Robertson (2016) and by thinking through the information he needed to hear at that point in time. Without much detail, he seemed to understand this was important and displayed concern for children that never made it home.

After completing the installation, my children wanted to interact with the soil; they were curious about matching their shoes and physical bodies within the prints. There was something haunting about my children moving amongst the rows and putting their feet within the absent footprints. Although I wanted to maintain its position and keep the soil in place, I didn't discourage them because their natural curiosities and movements brought life to the space. This juxtaposition between my pedagogical intentions and their natural movement made me wonder how "dark matters" of history (Elliot, 2018, para. 1) could be taught without losing sense of hope for more equitable futures for all children?

Call to Action

This installation received attention and responses on social media. A local news station wanted to cover the installation for their evening news story. I consented to an interview and allowed photos of the installation. Preparing to share a statement with the media gave me an opportunity to synthesize my key messages. I was reminded of Archibald's (2018) notion that it takes sustained time to *become ready* for the respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence that story work requires. I wanted to remind people to engage with the TRC documents to support the unearthing of truths and to bring attention to Call to Action #73:

> We call upon the federal government to work with the churches and Aboriginal community leaders to inform the families of children who died at residential schools of the child's burial location, and to respond to families' wishes for appropriate commemoration ceremonies and markers, and reburial in home communities where requested. (2015a, p. 135)

Before creating an installation, there is a level of preparation to become ready to share its purpose and relevance as a form of a/r/tography, and the embedded and intertwined acts of art

making/research/teaching. While the art can stand alone, as a form of activism, it may require further explanation. Through writing and sharing about the experience of creating "215" and the unique story that emerged, the art piece has more wide-ranging potential. From collaborating with Haida scholar and educator Dr. Sara Florence Davidson (Ferguson & Davidson, 2022), I have come to see how this installation generated what Davidson articulated as a *learning story* (Davidson & Davidson, 2018). Stories of the a/r/tography experiences of creating the installation and talking with neighbours and the media unearth much more beyond the interpretation of the representational imagery. A story of unexpected resistance also further added to this learning story and connected this learning to my teaching.

Story of Unexpected Resistance

The photographer who came to feature the art piece completely ignored it and drove over the installation with their van before coming to my front door to speak with me. When the photographer arrived at my door, he asked where the installation was located, and I informed him that he had driven over it. Tire treads violently left their marks over the imprints of children's shoes. The unconventional artistic medium and location for this artwork may have caused it to be disregarded as a form of art. It was viewed as dirt. This made me realize that the meaning and intention behind the installation was not fully understood. To get the photo opportunity, they had to repeat the action of driving over the installation. Unashamed, he requested that I *re-make* the art piece, rather than take responsibility for ruining it.

There was an urgency for media outlets to capture messages about this unfolding national news story—about what has been an underemphasized issue for Indigenous communities for decades and what had been *under-understood* for many Canadians. Publicly, the news story appeared to honour the issue, but privately, the spirit of the piece, the land, and the issue of

children's graves on school grounds was ignored. The art was ruined but the atrocity was the story's superficial coverage of the issues (see Halmarson, 2021 to view the story as it was reported). From my interpretive analysis of this event, it appears that it was important to obtain the news story for the sake of covering the issues but not *uncovering* the issues; the centrality and sacredness of both the children and land were simultaneously ignored. The news story highlighted my use of art to help grieve and connect after the discovery of the mass graves (Halmarson, 2021), but it did not mention my commentary about taking action to read the TRC and address layers of injustices, such as clean water on reserves, underfunding on reserves, or about the important role of ongoing education to address anti-racist practices. What was captured by the local news station was a message of solidarity through grief, not solidarity in anger and outrage. Upon reflection, I worried that the way the news story was framed could position this art as what Flowers (2015) identifies as a settler desire for recognition, when I was really trying to assert my responsibilities as a teacher. Reflection has led me to wonder: How/Is the colonial residue (Kovach, 2009, p. 18) of Residential Schools still seeping into public spaces in schools or in the public domain? How do we resist these colonial desires?

Unearthing Topographic Renderings

Reflecting on the soil stories of creating "215" through renderings of a/r/tography offers emerging insights into earth-based a/r/tography and how soil can support anticolonial praxis**.** Irwin et al. (2024) described renderings as an interpretive strategy for translating and sharing insights in a unique concept-based approach that provides methods tied to the arts and that depart from typical data collection and analysis procedures in social sciences. While a/r/tography is not limited to or confined by these six renderings (contiguity, living inquiry, opening, metaphors/metonymy, reverberations, excess) introduced by Springgay et al. (2005), I draw upon

them here to expand the pedagogical and material significance of the medium, and the potentials of earth-based art as a multimodal teaching and research tool.

Through *contiguity*, ongoing contact with land and place connects histories, memories, learning, and experiences to particular places. I see the soil-based artwork as a layered mode: to create (as an artist), to draw upon layered approaches within my theoretical and methodological approaches (as researcher) and to highlight the pedagogical potential of sites with historical significances (as teacher). However, there is also contiguity between the roles as artist, researcher, teacher, and mother and that all these identities and responsibilities are inseparable. Through *living inquiry,* this research moves from a sharing of findings and using art as a product towards centering the arts throughout. This process raised important questions and next steps about the role of place and significance of land in my work and relationship with soil. Each installation becomes a learning story; what happens before, during, and after creating them provides a productive *opening* for new insights to emerge. Earthly *metaphors* support soilwork that is highly nuanced by looking at how unrelated concepts are connected, and *metonymy* can uncover the layered meanings of soil and Canada's soiled history.

The use of soil activates the fact that this was Indigenous land in a very real and un-metaphorical way. The use of soil also activated the notion of settler colonialism, which continually seeks removal of land and displacement of people from land. What *reverberates* in this work is a soiled history. Upon reflection, the encounters with unexpected defacements of my art, including but not limited to "215", act as metaphors for challenges around reconciliatory work—ground filled with untold stories and truths about children who never came home. Truths about children *were* known. Mothers knew. Grandmothers knew. Mother Earth holds the truth. Each unearthing of unmarked and unnamed graves reverberates these truths for all to hear.

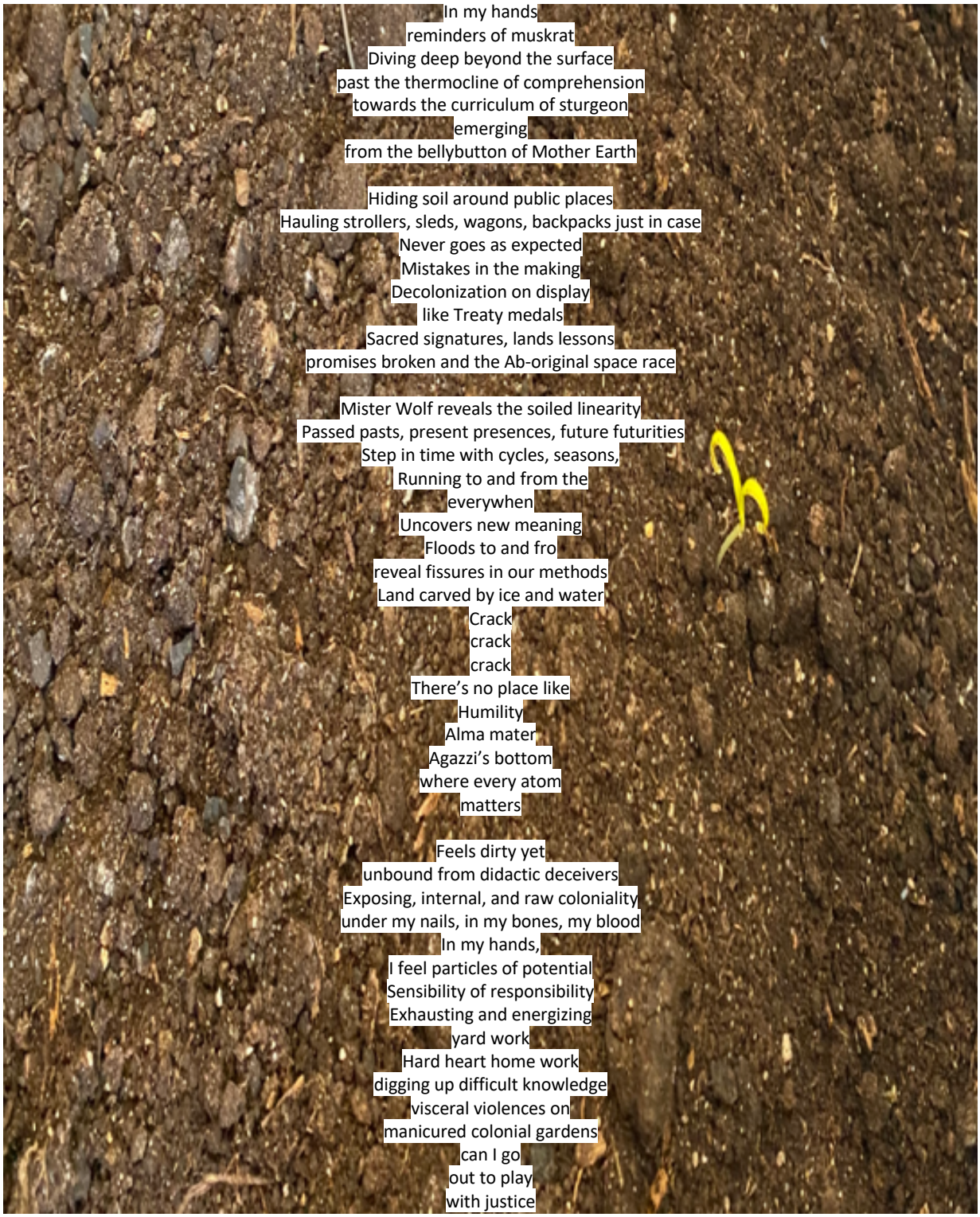
Excess is a rendering that calls me to think about my actions and my privilege, and about how much land is taken and used. I had ordered extra soil to create this piece and, while putting it together, I recognized that a little went a long way. Only a small portion was needed to create the soilwork. The soil was returned to the land and no waste was generated. This sustainable process of returning soil to the earth through natural environmental patterns was an integral and intentional part of my process. Soilwork prompts me to think about: What am I leaving behind in *excess* after working with soil? What do I need to purge or re-think before journeying forward? How can I take less and make less of an impact and footprint on the land? Marker (2011) suggested a type of recognition of excess in the divergence from Western ideals, stating: "Comprehending [I]ndigenous ways of seeing the past requires travelling these intellectual trails up an [I]ndigenous mountain and leaving behind some of the expectations about what constitutes "history" from a Western mindset" (p. 99). Perhaps I need to leave behind some of the esoteric ways of arts-based research that may over-focus on positionality of the artist over relational practices and diverge from established renderings and towards new ones that emerge. While positionality is important, relationality is more important.

"215" highlights the complimentary process of art creation and writing—the symbiotic relationship of art/graphy. I call this art—*work*— and not a piece because it is not just the image of the art that matters. It *is* work to learn more, and to do the work within our own heads and hearts to be prepared for the process; moving and preparing soil can also be physically demanding. The writing and analysis that accompanies this *living inquiry* considers how the artistic experience works from an affective perspective and extends the work beyond the creation of the installation, which adds a layer of depth to interpretation and possibilities of soilwork as a form of earth-based art.

This study shows a creative reimagining of critical multimodality in educational research from the ground up. I have spent significant time on this process, beginning in 2017 with my first soil installation in a university setting (see Ferguson 2017) and continuing with several other soilwork workshops and installations in public sites, such as Upper Fort Garry (Ferguson, 2021), around the commemorative monument to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and Riel House (Ferguson, 2023). All of these installations are part of a sustained journey of art-based actions, and they generate the groundwork needed for more relational research. Figure 1.3 shares a visual image illuminating the combination of my analysis of several places, including the pop-up installation of "215" featured in this chapter. This image makes visible how I am merging my learning from Indigenous teachings, learning about Manitoba's history, and my own personal reflections into a/r/tographic forms. The photo in the background is of the soil, which shows how alive it is. I took it from my garage in the springtime after a long cold winter, when the soil began to sprout. This layering of the photo with a poem takes on a new form of 'field notes', which connect to emerging renderings such as *unearthing* and *under/understandings.*

Figure 1.3

Field Notes: Sprouts in Spring



Soiled History

This work unearthed a soiled history. Arts-based researchers, Barone and Eisner (2011) sought "research that has elegance and subtlety, which promotes meaning not only through its literal or discursive features but because of its metaphorical and qualitative features as well" (p. 48). The soil indeed has powerful discursive features and is a metaphorical medium to portray the soiled history of Canada. The soil speaks about Canada's soiled history in an intrinsic way. In the case of residential schools, the material of soil was one method used to physically cover up the deaths of children. Families lost physical access to a material connection to their children's bodies.

Soilwork as Decolonial Praxis

In the arts, sometimes the focus is on the work of *art (*Barone & Eisner, 2011)*,* focused more on the aesthetic object, product, or experience. Barone and Eisner (2011) discussed the notion that the *work* of art focuses on the "process of *doing* something that has aesthetic consequences" (p. 48). Soilwork was an active process of reflection and action, not just an art piece. The focus on the in-the-moment experiences of its creation and destruction engaged what Kovach (2009) might have described as *inner knowledge*. My interpretation alone was the focus initially, but by bringing this non-traditional artform into a public space, the traditional, Eurocentric viewing guidelines for audiences as passive observers did not apply.

Through the lens of the *living inquiry* of a/r/tography, this installation supported critical reflexivity and is becoming part of anticolonial and decolonial praxis. Styres (2018), who prefers the term decolonial, stated that decolonial praxis troubles dominant colonialist perspectives, exposes ways they are maintained, raises awareness to privileges, and questions Canada's role as a peacekeeping nation. It became clear that reconciliatory work extended beyond classroom

walls and needed to begin at home. By bringing this issue up at my own house, I could not be complacent to the truths; I am developing a critical consciousness to the issues and more aware of my participation in colonial systems.

Creating "215" made me more aware of my privileged position as an artist, researcher, and teacher—to be with and create art with my children, to have a home in a safe neighbourhood close to a variety of options for schools, and to have a yard where my children can learn and play. I empathize but cannot fully comprehend the unimaginable grief of Indigenous families and communities. Flowers (2015) reminded us that while this artwork was *close to home*, I was distanced from the heartache, the pain, the anger, and the resentment that continues to be felt by Indigenous families, and that my own "settler sympathies should not be entertained" (p. 37). Flowers (2015) stated that "For Indigenous peoples, unbearable suffering is often the motive for revolutionary action; whereas for the settler, it is anguish in the facing of truth that compels them into action" (p. 38). This statement is a humbling reminder and teaches me about privilege. It is the arts that prompt movement towards change, but it is undoubtedly a privilege to have time, space, and energy to create over more basic needs, such as safety, food, shelter, and supports.

I realized that the land could be viewed in many ways (for example, as earth, soil, and dirt) and is multi-layered—aesthetically and metaphorically. In relation to research, the soil activates Smith's (2002) notion that research is "one of the dirtiest words in the [I]ndigenous world's vocabulary" (p. 1). Soil can be viewed as life-giving or perceived as dirty. This paradoxical aspect of soil resists positivistic approaches to research and conveys historical issues around researching within the context of Indigenous education or decolonizing studies. Soil serves as a constant reminder of how research in Indigenous communities has often been done to people rather than with proper consultation, understanding of protocols, or respectful relations.

Forthcoming publications will take this up further to show how soilwork adds dimension to anticolonial work by linking to Indigenous frameworks, such as First Nations Principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP), which guide community-based research but that can also be terms that are made visible through experiences engaging with land.

Settler Limitations

Working with soil does not produce concrete answers but encourages deeper learning and reflection. Soil helps me to be cognizant of potential *moves to innocence* (Tuck & Yang, 2012), which in this context required an active resistance to the feel good and performative aspects of art-creation as a potential glossing over of the issues. The idea of unsettling is common in connection to the topic of reconciliation (Regan, 2010). I initially entitled this manuscript "*Unsettling* with *Soil*", but the truths are much more than *unsettling* and that word no longer seems to work towards justice in this context. I can see that a/r/tography can be at risk of becoming self-indulgent, where artists translate another's' pain yet maintain the status quo. This realization has led me to draw more from feminist scholarship. For example, Flowers (2015) stated that "some modes of solidarity are misrecognitions of settler allyship" (p. 33). Flowers critiqued settler-research as sugar-coating and a move towards what Pitt and Britzman (2003) would call *lovely knowledge* in contrast to *difficult knowledge*. Flowers (2015) emphatically stated there is a need to make space for rage and the refusal to forgive:

> Settler responses to calls for solidarity ought to oppose rather than perpetuate structures of domination and the settler position of privilege, recognizing that those calls offer opportunities and preconditions for ethical engagement based on respect, while keeping in mind that solidarity is not a temporal commitment… (Flowers, 2015, p. 35)

I understand that this work may be viewed as glossing over the issues or may never venture beyond a passive feel-good type of reconciliation that is "for the colonizers" (Landry, 2017). What has been revealed is how truth and reconciliation require ongoing work to understand and theorize land. Soil speaks to this complexity of ontological commitments. Drawing upon the earth as a medium, a method, and a message in my work as a/r/tographer, I began to think more critically about diverse commitments and perspectives of land and how these ideas influence my practices and action steps. My work has shifted from thinking of soil as a multimodal material to thinking about *unearthing* layers of meanings of soil and thinking about soil as capital and a resource. My work moves towards viewing land as teacher, and as mother—all grounded in different paradigmatic perspectives (Ferguson, forthcoming).

The unexpected resistance of having the artwork driven over shows that there is still a propensity of settlers to *under-understand* the issues. There was something intense and vulnerable in doing soilwork in my neighbourhood rather than more anonymously in public spaces, as I had done previously. Bringing the soilwork close to home exposed my own viewpoints, my learning, and need for unlearning. It caused me to think about how families who lost children in residential school would feel having these deeply personal truths unearthed in the news so frequently and subjected to public scrutiny and opinions.

I became more aware of my own participation in the settler colonial system, and my ownership of land and property. I could not disappear after the installation was complete as I was able to with other installations on public property. Overtime, the definition of the prints disappeared as the wind transformed their shapes. My driveway started to look messy. However, the impressions of the footprints were still visible long after it rained.

Collaborative Next Steps

This installation helped me to re-design some of my teaching practices; the learning from this experience informs more collaborative work. I have been doing Walking Land Acknowledgement workshops, which involved time walking, talking, artmaking, critically observing public art, and being immersed in local environments, past, present, and future. After several years, I made a shift to add in an art-making component to walks, providing a way to respond to stories within particular places and as a way to engage more wholistically, body, mind, and spirit. For example, in summer 2023, I facilitated one session for the course, *Becoming Writers: Place, Power, and Pedagogy in Teaching Writing (a* two-week, six-credit hour graduate and post-baccalaureate course offering modeled after the Summer Writing Institute conducted by Dr. Michelle Honeyford and Dr. Jennifer Watt of the National Writing Project. This full-day session took place at the Forks in Winnipeg, Manitoba, at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. I designed an experience of artmaking and visiting places that centred around body, mind, and spirit. We brought attention to *body* in relation to the horrific legacy of Indian Residential Schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015) through viewing Mike Valcourt's art "Jackson Beardy", depicting this groundbreaking artist and residential school survivor that is placed up high on a historic railway bridge. This public art was in conversation with the work by Métis artist Val Vint, entitled "Education is the New Bison / Chi-kishkayhitamihk Si Te Li Neu Biizon" (Vint, 2020), which featured important texts by Indigenous and settler writers that are stacked to create a large-scale steel sculpture of a bison made of books. Vint's (2020) public art resides in a newly developed part of the Forks called Niizhoziibean and is a focal point of this area situated after a historic rail bridge and near a ceremonial area where there is a traditional lodge or wigwam and where large limestone blocks create a turtle formation. I brought my experience of creating soilwork on my driveway with

shoes and designed a participatory art-making experience and installation. This time I invited teachers into the same process of sifting soil around children's shoes and encircling "Education is the New Bison". Each participant in the course was invited to create one set of footprints in honour of a child lost in the residential school system. This work is featured in a collaborative manuscript alongside professors and fellow graduate students who take up place work through a/r/tography and movie making and who embodied practices through dance (Honeyford et al., 2025). The footprints, similar to "215", activated elements of positive and negative space, and they were intensely focused on one individual child by centering their art on sifting soil slowly over one pair of shoes. The artistic response had a contemplative and funerary type tone (Featured in Honeyford et al., 2025). I noticed people taking time to place the shoes and carefully sift the soil in a very slow and introspective pace. I noticed how there was a sense of reverence. Some people chose not to participate in the art but appeared actively engaged in observing these acts of embodied learning and art making. They stopped to write and take photos, and some people were visibly affected by the artwork, tearing up at the sight. I hope that this experience of creating such solemn soilwork brought new attention to the *Calls to Action* in a place that also highlighted a resurgence of Indigenous activism through permanent public art. This opportunity embodies both the meanings of truth and reconciliation through a physical engagement that will be an art experience, one that will continue to stay with people. Additionally, together, we engaged *mind* by thinking critically about public art and aspects of hidden curriculum in familiar public sites, such the Forks composting area and Upper Fort Garry. We then engaged *spirit* by spending time learning more about stories of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls around a commemorative monument and the topics connected to systemic racism, ongoing coloniality, and gender-based violence as documented by the *National*

Inquiry (2019a). These are all experiences in which I encouraged teachers to work and walk towards decolonizing praxis by pushing traditional teaching boundaries.

Landscapes of Reconciliation, Action, and Justice

Overall, this chapter reveals the emerging potential of soil to examine how the layers of culture, politics, history, identity, memory, experience, and imagery create a unique landscape of understandings. Soilwork can be an aesthetic action that deepens terms, such as myths and misconceptions (which are often used when thinking about learning more about Canada's true history), and re-presents the rendering of *under/understandings* as another way of thinking about this type of learning. Perhaps some nuanced issues may benefit from this term, which does not imply a right and wrong, but acknowledges that understandings are layered. Soil prompts thinking about how decisions have consequences that we may feel beneath our feet, albeit perhaps not immediately, but in time. The word, understandings, also makes me think of land as a place where we stand and how to engage with the ontological aspects of land to fully understand a place. What is under-understood? What do we still need to know? What do we value and where do we stand? What is a myth or misunderstanding or an under-understanding?

Soil was used to cover up many truths. Thousands of children are now part of the earth on which these so-called educational institutions of Residential Schools stand. Since the initial Kamloops discoveries, numerous school sites continue to be searched, each with hundreds more bodies found buried beneath the soil (BBC, 2021). Each subsequent burial site evokes a renewed sense of horror, shame, and fury in communities across Canada. These unimaginable truths of Canada are unearthing the depth of the damage caused by colonial systems. The process of *unearthing,* literally and metaphorically, can also create a place for healing to begin by bringing key, foundational issues to the foreground.

As I work through a/r/tography, I am becoming less concerned with my own identities as artist/researcher/teacher and moving towards more commitment to conceptualizing justice through the art-making process. Irwin et al. (2024) affirmed that there is a need for resistance to focus on aspects of identities of artist, researcher, and teacher. A/r/tography is "concerned with relationality between and among individuals, groups, and what is now spoken of as humans, nonhumans, the environment, cultures, and histories..." (Irwin et al., 2024, p. 4). This became apparent to me through this art-making experience. While I was trying to adhere to existing renderings of a/r/tography, the medium of soil bent beyond those limits and became open to the potential of a living inquiry into how land art can support activism and moves towards justice.

When I was creating "215", it had a ceremonial feeling and reminded me of the feeling of leaving soil on a relative's casket in a final goodbye, which could be understood as a way of grieving in a community that was denied. As new driveways and developments take over the land, the risk of damage to burial grounds increases (TRC, 2015b, p. 135). Doing soilwork in my neighbourhood caused me to think about how families who lost children in residential school would feel having these truths unearthed in the news so frequently and up for public scrutiny and opinion, when it is a deeply personal matter.

The unexpected destruction of my installations has inspired me to ask the following initiating research question: *How can critical place and arts-based inquiries using pop-up soil art installations support decolonizing educational praxis in settler-colonial systems?* It became apparent that to understand reconciliation more contextually and meaningfully, it needed to be situated and grounded in the stories of a particular place. I want to continue to position stories of art installations in relationships with each other to better understand the complex prairie city of Winnipeg, Manitoba as a place where reconciliation can grow strong roots.

Groundwork

This study could be further enhanced through collaboration with Indigenous and settler scholars, Elders, and knowledge holders, which is the direction where this chapter has headed. Next steps have involved taking this learning through my own personal praxis and moving towards another *horizon of soilwork*—collaborative work. I am currently part of the University of Manitoba's interdisciplinary team of educators and nurses researching how to draw upon the power of earth to align with anti-racist practices as a way to mobilize the *Calls for Justice* in the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (2019b) in higher education. In this case, soilwork provides *common ground* to address colonization as a gender-based expression connected to the land as a "crisis centuries in the making" (*National Inquiry*, 2019a, p. 19). Our learning about soil is informing the *groundwork* necessary to prepare for facilitating research that engages community. Although this work is still in progress, preliminary analysis suggests that soil is a non-conventional medium that is greatly enriched by the guidance of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers who provide ontological guidance to learn from land, and to deepen sacred relationships with land and water. Soil as a critical multimodality and non-conventional medium moves beyond a mode of communications and shows how it can be transformed alongside Indigenous mentorship and methodological guidance to support decolonial research design. Earth-based learning modes function as a foundation for redress and relational work. The next layer of this groundwork is to consider how soil works beyond merely a method or mode and show its significance to the topic of ongoing colonial displacements and the murkiness of what it means to teach, learn, and live in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

LIVING LINK 2

Acknowledging Land: A Soil Composition Video

Link to YouTube: https://youtu.be/GyQ-0-nAGtc

MANUSCRIPT / *MATRYOSHKA* 2

Introduction to Manuscript/*Matryoshka* 2

The following chapter was my first single-authored publication, and it is a published book chapter in an edited work by E. Lyle (2021) *Re/humanizing Education.* The copyright office at the University of Manitoba was consulted, and the advice given noted that author agreements grant permission for its full inclusion. This paper is included here as a reprint of the text verbatim as included in Dr. Ellen Lyle's edited collection *Re/humanizing Education*, without the publishers' formatting; therefore, page numbers differ from the original. Please consider that this whole manuscript 2 is intended to be included verbatim, as per university guidelines, even though it may not be perfect. It is included as it is already published and reflects my thinking at the time of publication.

Due to word count constraints, not all my analysis that I had prepared was published. This introduction provides several additional stories and images that were not part of the final edits but continue to support the re-humanizing of the educational potential of this site.

"Homeland" shares an analysis of a recent artistic renovation of a parcel of land on a historic fort site. This site was recently considered 'surplus property', destined to be commercial space with the intention of being sold by the city for development; however, public pressure and a small group listed as Friends of Upper Fort Garry lobbied for its preservation. They raised 10 million dollars to save the site and have the land transferred (Heritage Winnipeg, 2017; Signex, 2019). Upper Fort Garry (UFG) was a hub of economic and political activity, a supply and fur export centre, a place of small kitchen gardens, and later, a gateway to the West's agricultural lands (Coutts, 2025). UFG was also the birthplace of Manitoba and a provincial park that "would forever preserve the history of the keystone province" (Winnipeg Heritage, 2017, para.1). The

artistic elements of the fort art installation appear to be a collaborative effort of the Friends of Upper Fort Garry and architecture firms such as HTFC and Cohlmeyer Architecture, who contributed the creative and technological visions for the re-design of this heritage site. I am still curious about the ease of settler land ownership/transfer, and I wonder if Indigenous groups were consulted both in this land transfer and in the design phase.

This chapter shows an atypical, non-textbook-way of approaching history, by learning from the stories in places of public pedagogy (the fort, the didactic information plaques, and multisensory experiences) and through critical analysis of how this learning connects to contemporary political movements and stories in public discourses. In my initial analysis, the work of settler scholar Stephanie Anderson's (2017), entitled "Framework of Canadian National Narratives", was used as a framework for understanding contemporary curricular issues and historical silences in contemporary public contexts. Anderson (2017) described the standard Master National Narrative template 1.0, which tells a "progressive, unified, Euro-Wester, colony to colony meta-narrative of Canada" (p. 16) and then a Master National Narrative 2.0, one that takes on the tolerant multicultural perspective. **"Homeland"** shares how a former Premier used his power to reinforce a collective historical consciousness that ignores the significance and presence of Indigenous Peoples in Manitoba. Brian Pallister's statement on Manitoba 150 shared a perceived, unified, multicultural narrative: "Manitobans of all races and religions, working together each day to build an even brighter future for themselves, for their families, for their neighbours and for future generations of Manitobans" (2020, May 12). This comment was rebutted by former leader of the opposition and current first First Nation Premier of Manitoba, Wab Kinew. What is needed, according to Anderson (2017), is a *Counter* National Narrative 3.0 that rebukes the previous narratives by addressing omissions or silences.

"Homeland" brings up important events in the context of Winnipeg at the time it was written, such as the toppling of the Queen Victoria monument that I refer to as a form of monument hacking in this paper. Referencing this grass-root-type of editing of history, Sinclair (2024) also highlighted how Queen Victoria was a "constitutional head during some of Canada's worst atrocities against Indigenous communities", and he recalled the removal of her statue as a new form of installation that enhanced the grounds at the Manitoba Legislative grounds. Sinclair shared how this type of editing of history became one of the "first monuments commemorating First Nations, created through collective, peaceful, and grassroots-led efforts that didn't cost taxpayers a dime" (p. 5). This manuscript is talking back to public places, which affirmed for me the directions for soilwork, and the writing of it encouraged me to seek out sites of Indigenous significance that are not well known but exist with hidden stories that give a fuller sense of place.

The place of this first inquiry is significant for several more reasons than what is mentioned in this paper. For example, The Peguis-Selkirk Treaty of 1817 is represented on the Fort Wall through an image of this ground-breaking Manitoba treaty, which "set the groundwork for Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships during a critical time in Canadian history and is a primary reason Winnipeg (and arguably Manitoba and Canada) looks like it does today" (p. 24). Thomas Douglas, 5th Earl of Selkirk (a Scottish settler) is given prominence and displayed beside the dodem animals of the chiefs (Upper Fort Garry, 2020). While Peguis' dodem/clan animal is represented, public viewers may not know who these animals represent, and they are smaller than the dominant Selkirk signature (see Figure 2.0). On the information panel, the Chiefs remain unnamed, and the pedagogical potential of this treaty is not mobilized to its fullest. This treaty image presents the first formal written agreement in Western Canada before the numbered treaties (Manitoba, n.d.) in which Lord Selkirk secured land use and settlement

along the Red River in exchange for an annual payment or gift. Often referred to as the Selkirk Treaty, this treaty, which made settlement in the Red River region possible, might more fairly be called the Peguis Selkirk Treaty to acknowledge the leadership of a key signatory, Saulteaux Chief Peguis (Peguis Selkirk 200 Years: Honouring the Spirit of 1817, n.d.). Sinclair (2024) noted the significance of this treaty and the gift of asemaa (tobacco) that was to be given to the Chiefs, warriors, and successors as an annual gift. Sinclair referred to this exchange, and the lessons of time, commitment, and sacrifice that come with growing good tobacco, as a powerful example of "what Peguis was trying to teach Selkirk in 1817, a teaching that continues to be the foundation of relationships in Winnipeg, Manitoba" (2024, p. 27).

Figure 2.0

Peguis-Selkirk Treaty (1817) Signatures Represented on the Fort Wall.

I call into question how progress on the prairies is positioned to de-legitimize power and silence Indigenous perspectives. **"Homeland"** describes how places like Upper Fort Garry represent the conflict between imperial desires and Indigenous peoples. This site is a contentious place of activism, but I have not noticed that type of story surfacing on the official plaques of this historical site. Upper Fort Garry was the place of the infamous execution of Thomas Scott, a

fairly new Euro-descendent settler arrival to the Red River Colony from Ontario, who joined a counterinsurgency led by John Christian Schultz against Riel and the provisional government (Manitoba Historical Society Archives, 2015a). Thomas Scott was held at Upper Fort Garry. He escaped by digging out the iron bars on his windows. He then attempted return to free other prisoners but was captured and tried for insubordination against the provisional government (Manitoba Historical Society Archives, 2015, para. 2). While there are many unknowns (such as where Scott is buried) and varying stories about Thomas Scott, "What most observers can agree upon is that Scott, as a prisoner of the provisional government led by Louis Riel, was tried by a military tribunal for insubordination, found guilty, and executed by firing squad before the walls of Fort Garry at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers on 4 March 1870" (Manitoba Historical Society Archives, 2015b). Scott's execution was a historical turning point for Riel and for Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, this is sacred ground, and people are buried in this area. I have recently learned about the area near Upper Fort Garry from Dr. Brian Rice, who shared that: "They [Nakota First Nation] and the Cree (Ininiwak) are buried across from Humphry Inn and Suites in what is now a parking lot. At least 400 or more died due to a smallpox epidemic in 1781 at the Forks." (Dr. B. Rice, Kenien'kehá:ka/Mohawk Nation, personal communication, April 11, 2024). This reminds me of what Styres et al. (2013) shared:

> …while landscapes have changed over time and have become layers over with concrete and glass, in moments and spaces when people listen, placed stories reclaim power. They do and will find ways to speak to our present and future generations. We—all of us who dwell here today—can activate this process through education and the

> process of determining what and how we teach children—all our children—about their relationships to the lands on which our cities are built. (p.50)

When I was writing this paper, I was learning through a graduate course on Culture, Curriculum and Citizenship, and the ideas presented here guided my interpretive lens. According to Logan (2014), there is "a considerable distance to bridge in order for an agreement between Indigenous peoples' accounts of history and public accounts of history to be reached" (p. 112). There is a brief description of Indian Residential Schools' and Government's goal to "civilize and Christianize" First Nations children on a plaque (Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Heritage Wall, 2017). The Fort Wall includes one tiny depiction of "First Nations Women", which is just one woman by a fire who remains nameless, and she is about the same size as my cellphone. This depiction minimizes the role of Indigenous women, their contributions within Manitoba, and the sacred connections to Mother Earth and connection to the rivers at the Forks' location. The Indian Residential School system is also minimized and portrayed as a discrete, driven event without addressing the multigenerational impact, which "results in Settler colonial eliminationist policies [being] fragmented into isolated parts of a more complete process of genocide" (Logan, 2014, p. 114). The reality is that Indian Residential Schools broke down the relational trust of institutions as places of peace and security (TRC, 2015), and generations of people are recovering from its legacy. How do you build a wall seven generations long?

The Fort Wall's sponsorship by The Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Corporation (MLLC) booms over the speakers positioning the MLLC as a philanthropic organization committed to the preservation of arts, history, and culture, and masks the neo-liberal agenda that "ultimately privileges the individual over the collective and profit over social justice" (Milne, 2015, p. 106). There are often liquor bottles scattered at the base of the Fort Wall. Unfortunately, the reality in

Manitoba is that in the first three months of 2019, it was reported that 1,011 people were hospitalized for substance related hospitalizations in Manitoba, and these numbers, along with the number of deaths from substance abuse were also steadily increasing (Manitoba, 2019). This paper prompts me to revisit the question: *How does the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Heritage Wall at Upper Fort Garry forget about colonialism and its impact? How can land art remember?*

"Homeland" analyzes how the Fort Wall preserves settler-Canada's views of progress, emphasizes settler futurity (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013), and establishes the narrative of Winnipeg's position as a "frontier town" (Toews, 2019). The fort served as the central economic centre, but now, corporate culture dominates all the downtown space *surrounding* the fort, and minimal activity remains within the fort space. The skyline is bordered with larger neo-liberal branded buildings, including the Fort Garry Place Condos, Western Canadian Lottery Corporation, Hotel Fort Garry, Wawanesa Insurance, TD Bank, The Richardson Building, Via Rail, Northwest Company, and the Manitoba Club (once a gentleman's club for privileged white men). Yet within downtown locomotion, people usually drive parallel to the fort or they park along the back and then go about their business; commuters face the opposite direction as they wait for the bus. The stories of this place are at risk of fading into the background.

Since I drafted this publication, the Manitoba Métis Federation purchased the Bank of Montréal at the prominent corner of Portage and Main—just down the street from the location of Upper Fort Garry (Dacey & Thompson, 2020). Ironically, this historic intersection, with the name, *Portage,* meaning to carry a canoe from one body of water to another, has been closed to pedestrian foot-traffic for decades. Winnipeggers voted instead to walk to a hidden underground concourse to cross this intersection, making it a very challenging, confusing, and unsafe walk,

with people portaging around barriers to get to the other side. When the Manitoba Métis Museum opens here, what will take the place of the land around Upper Fort Garry is yet to be seen.

Through my analysis and research walks, I noticed people climb the old fort gate, which has since been barricaded. I found inscriptions, such as 'bison tribe', etched into the stone, showing that people are subverting the ways public are supposed to use the sites and have been silently pushing back through the use of graffiti and climbing onto the original structure. I also observed how children run along and interact with the Fort Wall and play along the planters where fort buildings once stood. When the fiddling music plays, I have witnessed couples jump onto the stage to start dancing together and people break out their best jigging moves as they walk along the wall. These are learning experiences that bring history to life.

This use of multimodal and mediated forms of text shifts the ways we receive and interpret information (Giroux, 2004). There are many promising aspects. Accompanying the Fort Wall is a free app, designed to expand upon this location as a site of pedagogy, including a multi-lingual component for a wide-ranging audience. While there are many unique and creative aspects and digital teaching material, the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Heritage Wall falls short of "blasting history open, rupturing its silences, highlighting its detours, acknowledging the events of its transmission, and organizing its limits within an open and honest concern with human suffering, values, and the legacy of the often unrepresentable or misrepresented" (Giroux, 2004, p. 68). The iron structure is built to last, but the technology exists to make changes. Embedded in the design is an online app component, with the multilingual and lighting features, and it could, at some point, be changed. The educational flexibility built into the digital components gives an interesting idea for the future of public art and places of public pedagogy to adapt to contemporary discourses, if those in charge are willing to make changes.

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Homeland of the Metis Nation: A Critical Inquiry into Winnipeg's Upper Fort Garry

Homeland of the Métis Nation is a standard ending to land acknowledgements in Manitoba, yet the contributions of Métis are often absent from significant historical sites within the province. The historical context of Manitoba's 150th anniversary year, celebrating its entry into Confederation, has inspired this inquiry into the way Métis stories are represented at Upper Fort Garry (UFG) on the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Heritage Wall. Omissions of Métis contributions and the elements of hidden curriculum found at UFG inspired this arts-based critical inquiry with the hope that it might provoke reconceptualization of teaching and learning of history as an ongoing curricular engagement that extends beyond classroom contexts and into places of public pedagogy.

Winnipeg, Manitoba, as Métis Homeland

Winnipeg is located on Treaty 1 territory, original land of the Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe), Ininíwak (Cree), Anishininiwak (Oji-Cree), Denesuline, Ithiniwak (Manitoba Museum, n.d.), Dakota, and birthplace of the Métis Nation. In wanting to deepen my understandings about the significance of this place as homeland of the Métis Nation, I wondered how Métis stories were portrayed in local sites. My curiosity surfaced that "there are profound and persistent misunderstandings about Métis people, misunderstandings that extend to both the identity of Métis people and their rights as Aboriginal people" (Canada, 1996, p. 4). The concept of this place as homeland of the Métis Nation goes beyond the relationships forged between European and Indigenous peoples and stems from a "distinct political consciousness" (Toews, 2018, p. 32) linked to this historical location along the Red River. To describe these unique beginnings, Mohawk scholar Dr. Brian Rice shares that Métis leader Cuthbert Grant was one of the founders of the Métis nation and their first Captain General leading them to victory at the Battle of Seven

Oaks. He raised the flag of the Métis which united members under one Métis Nation (Dr. B. Rice, Kanien'kehá:ka/Mohawk Nation, personal communication, 2021, June 13).

While this victory was only one of many Métis resistances against the control of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and Canada, this history is starkly absent in public spaces of history, like that of Upper Fort Garry (UFG). The UFG is located at Winnipeg's historic "Forks" at the joining of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers and a meeting place for Indigenous and settler communities. During the 19th century, UFG at the Forks was a major economic, political, and cultural hub. It was "the heart of the Red River Colony [and] was a Hudson's Bay Company post established in 1822" (Allen, 2021b, para. 1), and it was also a key place where imperialist desires to control the area and people who were already living there were both resisted and retaliated against.

Manitoba 150

The commemoration of 150 years since the ratification of the Manitoba Act was more than a milestone of passive unification of a new province into Confederation. When Canadian land surveyors planned ways to take over the land, Métis leader, Louis Riel, confronted their intentions and took an anticolonial approach (Toews, 2018). In 1869-70, Riel took action within the UFG, formed a provisional government, and negotiated Manitoba's entry into Confederation (Foot et al., 2021; Toews, 2018). As part of this advocacy, Riel compiled a bill of rights that outlined conditions such as ensuring language and property rights for Métis including respect of current land-use systems, respect for Indigenous nations, and commitment to the absence of Canadian military force (Toews, 2018). The story that is seldom told is that these rights were ignored by the founding Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, who deployed troops to overthrow Riel's local

government. MacDonald encouraged a reign of terror "designed to break the spirit of a people committed to self-determination and to expel them from the homes they so vigorously sought to protect" (Toews, 2018, p. 44). In this way, Manitoba 150 was not just a birthday party; it was also the historic anniversary of the Red River Resistance Movement born of "the largest land sale in history" – one that was executed without consultation with Indigenous peoples (Canadian Geographic, 2021, para. 1).

The 150th anniversary was a lost opportunity to re/centre Métis efforts; unfortunately, Premier Brian Pallister's celebratory address failed to recognize the contributions of Indigenous peoples, specifically the pivotal role of Louis Riel. This gave rise to an intense debate and, in a CBC News story, Manitoba's opposition leader, Wab Kinew, affirmed: "It's a point of pride for Manitoba that we have an Anishinaabe and Cree name and that our province was brought into Confederation by the Métis" (CBC News, 2020). This truth stood in stark contrast with Premier Pallister's statement: "They found a society of freedom and opportunity, where the only obstacle to achieving your potential is the size of your dreams" (2020, para. 2). Pallister's address emphasized the "finding" rather than "founding" of Manitoba which presumes this was land open for the taking—conveying sentiments of *terra nullius*, that this was land belonging to no one (Donald, 2012; TRC, 2015). This political discourse contrasts with the assertion of Riel as the "Father of Manitoba" (Manitoba Métis Federation, 2021a) and, therefore, teaches a hidden curriculum influencing who and what deserves to be remembered.

This form of debate is echoed within Manitoba curriculum that often discusses Louis Riel as either a hero of the Métis, or a traitor of Canada. Reinforcing this divisive narrative in the heart of the Métis Nation teaches the privileging of the Canadian Narrative at the expense of the

Métis one – the one that details how Riel was killed because he advocated for Métis rights and was skeptical of the Government's intentions. Logan (2008) asserts that if the Government of Canada were to take a stand on this debate and pardon Riel, this would be a significant step for Métis communities. No such pardoning has occurred, and schools, political systems, and public artifacts continue to legitimize erasures of Métis land, language, and rights.

Hidden Curriculum and Re-imaginings

This work is part of a broader critical place inquiry (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) to uncover the hidden curriculum lurking throughout public spaces in the complex prairie city of Winnipeg. While walking through Upper Fort Garry, the hidden curriculum revealed itself through my understandings of the land as sentient and storied (Simpson, 2011; Styres, 2019). According to Styres (2019), "Land is more than the diaphanousness of inhabited memories; Land *is* spiritual, emotional, and relational; Land is experiential, (re)membered, and storied; Land is consciousness—Land is sentient" (p. 27). I was informed by this perspective as well as *walking analyses,* both of which draw upon ethical relationality (Donald, 2012) and the sentience of land in ways that opened opportunities for storied and wholistic engagements with place (Kerr & Ferguson, 2020).

I also draw upon notions of hidden curriculum (Apple, 2019; Eisner, 1985; Jackson, 1990) and conceptualize it as unseen presences that are learned but not necessarily taught, stated, or written explicitly, and become powerfully engrained over time. While often developed in terms of school life, the hidden curriculum within places of public pedagogy (Giroux, 2004) can be implicitly taught through the semiotic sources such as imagery, elements of size, shape, and spatial dynamics, and the interaction between discourses and ideas. I understand discourse as a multidimensional social phenomenon (van Dijk, 2009) to support an analysis that is open to what is noticeable, but also those colonialisms that remain unseen. Nxumalo's (2016) methodological

approach of *refiguring presences* provides guidance for how to disrupt the settler-coloniality in these public spaces and to "creatively grapple with, interruptively respond to, as well as work through the doubts, complicated frictions, discomforts, knots and silences" (p. 641). I view the socio-political and cultural contexts as integral to the ongoing inquiry process and analyses.

The potentialities of a/r/tography (Leggo & Irwin, 2014; Springgay et al., 2005) manifest in pop-up soil art installations and are part of my action-oriented process of re-humanizing and teaching within the public space of the Fort. A/r/tography "requires attentiveness to what is seen and known and to what lies beneath the surface" (Springgay, et al., 2005, p. 905). This living inquiry involved numerous walks around the site during different times of day and during all seasons, and it required a responsiveness to social contexts that inspired the process, placement, and imagery of this artistic response.

Figure 2.1

Upper Fort Garry Gate

Note. Katya Adamov Ferguson, © 2021. Used with permission.

Hidden Histories at Upper Fort Garry (UFG)

The recent renewal of UFG provided an opportunity to revive the hidden histories of this site. The redesigned UFG consists of the largest free-standing art installation in Canada (Tourism Winnipeg, 2021) and a 19th century archway to complete this modern provincial park. The Fort Wall installation is a 450-foot-long steel structure officially called "The Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Heritage Wall", which positions itself through centrality, size, and location as a place of public pedagogy. With a modern fort approach to convey openness, UFG is designed with two walls and large planters filled with local grasses placed where the Fort's interior buildings once stood. The multisensory design of UFG brings the space to life by layering audio sounds from past and present, including the rolling thunder of bison hooves, sounds of rain, birds, humans, and guns. The LED lightshow features the northern lights and beautiful Métis flower beadwork, which beams brightly accompanied by the sound of a fiddle. This sensory experience brought to my attention the absences of Métis stories.

Figure 2.2

Re-designed Upper Fort Garry

Note. Re-designed Upper Fort Garry. Katya Adamov Ferguson, © 2021. Used with permission.

Despite an innovative approach, the site's imagery still functions as a typical fort which acts "as a mythic symbol deeply embedded within the Canadian national narrative that reinforces the troubling colonial divides that continue to characterize Aboriginal-Canadian relations" (Donald, 2009, p. 1). Understanding that this was where Riel took charge of establishing a provisional government, I could not help but wonder where Riel was in this copper-coloured, steel wall of a curriculum. Later, I found a small plaque about Riel, but it was located outside the Fort. This pattern of ostracism continued throughout the Fort Wall and even its debut.

The official unveiling of the wall took place on November 16th, coincidentally the same day Riel died (Sinclair, 2016). While the Métis community held an annual graveside service honouring Riel, this new fort structure was being memorialized and celebrated for preserving provincial history. The Fort's rebranding as the "Manitoba and Liquor and Lotteries Heritage Wall" (Fort Wall) mars the historical significance and replaces it with corporate sponsorship portraying these sponsors as philanthropists committed to the preservation of arts, history, and culture. However, neither liquor nor lotteries have made positive and transformative contributions to support the long-term health and well-being of citizens of Manitoba. Rather, the UFG preserves a nostalgic, settler-colonial version of history and omits the contributions of Métis. Such an omission begs a comprehensive analysis of how the Fort Wall minimizes Indigenous perspectives.

Figure 2.3

Sparse Indigenous Narrative

Note. Katya Adamov Ferguson, © 2021. Used with permission.

The Fort Wall's linear narrative begins with a simplified First Nations story shown through a small tipi settlement and a bison hunt, followed by a minimized Métis and fur trade narrative. This takes up approximately one quarter of the wall. The 24-foot Northwest Bastion physically separates this Indigenous portion from the settler narratives in ways that silently (re)teach "colonial frontier logics" (Donald, 2009, 2012) and "traces a social and spatial geography that perpetuates the belief that Aboriginal peoples and Canadians inhabit separate realities" (Donald, 2009, p. 4). The Bastion's physical space symbolizes a time-period when Indigenous peoples were systematically displaced by newcomers. While there was a plan for this empty Bastion to lead to a Métis Museum (Sinclair, 2016), the museum was never built, and this power-filled space separating the Indigenous and settler narratives

now leads into an often-empty parking lot. While the Bastion signals a clear separation, elements of settler colonialism within the wall are more nuanced.

Figure 2.4

The Bastion

Note. Katya Adamov Ferguson, © 2021. Used with permission.

Indigenous erasure is a settler colonial process that removes and ignores Indigenous people (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). This is most evident in the focus on the expansionist take-over of land and re-making of the prairies that dominates Indigenous narratives. Firstly, Métis narratives, key to bridging Indigenous and European relationships, are evident on both sides of the Fort Wall, but in minimal ways. The imagery of the Métis sash is woven throughout except in the pivotal section depicting a time of Métis' anti-racist uprising and, gradually, the stylized sash morphs into railway tracks. This significant transformation reflects how the Canadian government forcibly removed and killed Métis in effort to gain control in the Red River area.

Figure 2.5

Hunting Bison to Remake the Prairies

Note. Katya Adamov Ferguson, © 2021. Used with permission.

Even the seemingly benign imagery of the York Boats and Red River carts contribute to Métis erasures. Despite their prominent placements, no information acknowledges how "the Métis were essential in commercializing both the fur trade with the invention of the York boat, and the buffalo hunt with the invention of the Red River cart" (Manitoba Métis Federation, 2021b, para. 3). Similarly, the imagery of Manitoba's provincial symbol, the bison, coveys a hidden message. The bison was integral to the survival of Indigenous peoples, and it provided everything needed to survive. However, the horse transformed the prairies by changing how people were able to access bison (Brian Rice, Kanien'kehá:ka/Mohawk Nation, personal communication, June 10, 2021). Through a critical lens, the stampeding bison hooves heard on the audio are a powerful haunting that neglects the reality that bison populations were almost completely wiped out from the prairies after European arrival. It appears that the killing of the bison was

necessary for progress. The disappearance of the bison had a significant impact on Indigenous peoples and ways of life and the unquestioned absence of the bison in Manitoba reveals the hegemonic transformation of the prairies. Through the progression from the empty land narrative to the more visually captivating section on the Remaking of the Prairies, the Fort Wall teaches the assumption that Manitoba was given life by European presence and gives prominence to settler-Canada's views of progress.

Figure 2.6

Remaking of the Prairies

Note. Katya Adamov Ferguson, © 2021. Used with permission.

Re-storying the Space with Louis Riel's Image

A significant absence from the Fort Wall was Louis Riel's name, crediting him as the Father of Manitoba and recognizing this as the place where he negotiated Manitoba's entrance into Confederation. The Red River Resistance, which occurred during a time of settler-colonial uprising of power, takes up a noticeable physical space on the Fort Wall,

but the abstracted representation makes the formation of provisional government with Riel's leadership seem insignificant. The Fort Wall positions Riel as neither hero, nor traitor – worse, in many ways he was rendered irrelevant, which perpetuates a "logic of elimination" (Wolfe, 2006).

Figure 2.7

Louis Riel Pop-up Art Portrait

Note. Photograph by Katya Adamov Ferguson, 2021.

In an effort to re-story the space, I placed Riel's image prominently back within the Fort. I created my installation on Canada Day 2020 in a central location leading the Bastion—a key focus for pedestrian traffic. My hope was to encourage passersby to think about Riel's presence in relation to this re-imagined Fort. The absence of Riel at UFG became undeniably noticeable when I displayed his 12-foot portrait front and centre.

I chose earth to emphasize that land is both the medium and part of the message to consider such systematic erasures. Giroux (2004) suggests that it is necessary to analyze public memory as a series of ruptures and displacements. The soil work speaks to the stories already residing in this Forks location and brings colonial realities to the surface. My ideas are communicated with soil through the processes of "presencing" (Simpson, 2011) and inviting the public to think about past, present, and future relationships within this place. Re/moving the earth with my hands is a process representing tensions within Indigenous resurgence and settler colonialism (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

My intention was to surface conversations about land, rights, and respect—key elements of the Manitoba Act that were never fully acknowledged. The Fort Wall portrays land as the bedrock of social progress and mobility, rather than as a living relative with whom we are connected. Land is surveyed and mapped but not portrayed as a source of wisdom and knowledge. Toews (2018) reminds that the "serial dispossession of lands" extends beyond late 19th century, and the Fort Wall glorifies this continued urban dispossession. My artistic response places the land in the divisive Bastion location to acknowledge that usurping the land was a primary concern of the Canadian Government.

While creating the piece, I met people who claimed to be related to Louis Riel. Kids recognized Riel's face and showed their parents, who seemed surprised that they knew the

history. Several Indigenous people offered ideas and shared stories and connections. Locals were eager to take photos to post online. Other visitors were concerned that I had not asked for a permit. There was even some evidence of disrespect when someone drove through the piece with their bike while I was working. Planning and physically taking soil to a site to re-design the curriculum *in situ* made the significance of the hidden curriculum more tangible.

The complexity of Métis history may have challenged designers of the Fort Wall leading them to shy away from the portrayal of the Métis of Red River as a mighty force who boldly advocated for maintaining their homeland, rights, and ways of life. Noticing this avoidance in Pallister's political commentary at Manitoba 150 shows how this erasure functions as part of a broader settler-colonial discourse.

Conclusions

Despite Manitoba's efforts to celebrate, this inquiry showed the more complex layers of the last 150 years. My analysis of the hidden curriculum of the Fort Wall reveals the historic tensions that still reside in this place and are avoided by both the architects of the Fort Wall and political discourses that intend to celebrate a neutralized version of history. Through the analysis of the imagery and interactions from Louis Riel's replacement within the fort using soil, I became more aware of this site as a central location for early resurgence against settler-colonial aims. The art/work initially focused on the presence of Riel, but through the process came to represent a symbol of resistance. Working with earth in my hands provoked new understandings of how contentious the site became and how swiftly displacements occurred to push Métis off homelands. The settler-colonial take-over of downtown Winnipeg and current anti-Métis sentiments became

apparent.

The concept of this place as *Homeland of Metis Nation* and the power of the Red River Resistance movement are not mobilized enough within the UFG. My graphic provocation, displayed alongside critical inquiries, provided a new form of creative engagement with what it means to live on Métis homeland. Fostering consciousness of aspects of the hidden curriculum brought attention to how contemporary designs may prefer a nostalgic settler history over reconciling or acknowledging truths of the past. Métis history and depictions of Louis Riel on the Fort Wall may have been avoided due to potential controversy, but artworks can serve to re-ignite such prolonged public debates with deeper criticality. It is becoming clear that Indigenous erasures extend beyond this Fort site and are trending in numerous places within Winnipeg that require further critical inquiry and creative responses. I hope my a/r/tographic representations contribute to the call to bring the hidden curriculum into public conversations in more pedagogical ways**.**

LIVING LINK 3

Bridging the Bastion – Where do you come from? What brought you here?

MANUSCRIPT / *MATRYOSHKA* 3

Introduction to Manuscript/*Matryoshka* 3

This manuscript, **"Murky Waters",** shares work encircling the monument to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which has become a place of commemoration and activism at the historic meeting place at the Forks. I share my learning about Winnipeg through connections to historical and ongoing injustices, which are guided by Indigenous public artists and Indigenous resurgence efforts. Winnipeg, as part of an ecological watershed and drainage system, teaches about connections between places and impacts of practices overtime (Sinclair, 2024, p. 15). This third manuscript shows ongoing ways that we have taken advantage of land and water in Winnipeg, and how this use is reflected in a parallel exploitation of women in this place. Winnipeg is a place where the search for the remains of women was politicized by the Progressive Conservative party in a 2023 when they emphasized their stance to "stand firm" (CBC News, 2023) in opposition of searching the landfill for the remains of women. Ultimately, Manitoban's chose to elect a new party, and an NDP leader, Manitoba's first First Nations Premier, Wab Kinew, was elected. About a year later, Wab Kinew announced that the compassionate search had begun of the Prairie Green Landfill for the remains of Morgan Harris and Marcedes Myran, announcing: "This is about doing the right thing and sending a message to all Manitobans that you matter and deserve dignity. When someone goes missing, we go looking" (Manitoba, 2024).

My thinking continued from writing this piece as I began to listen more carefully to the names and stories of murdered or missing Indigenous women, such as Linda Beardy, Rebecca Contois, Buffalo Woman, Marcedes Myran, and Morgan Harris, whose names echo in the Winnipeg news. I have attended public events and created several other soilworks connected to

this topic, which are not featured here. Writing this manuscript has pushed me to learn more about how gendered expression connected to the land is a "crisis centuries in the making" (*National Inquiry*, 2019a, p. 19). I have also been led to create learning and research practices that are rooted in the stories and strengths of Manitoba women and how earth-based modes and learning connected to soil function as a foundation for redress and relational work.

This study at the MMIWG monument attends to embodied experiences and ethical relationality as a decolonizing philosophy, rather than relying on the linearity of Euro-centred methods which can make subjectivity of such an approach seem as *outside* the accepted norm. The *National Inquiry* (n.d.) stated: "Public commemorations, through art, can help bring forward personal stories of colonial violence. Art as commemoration bears witness to injustice, recognizes human dignity of victims and survivors, and calls institutions, systems and structures to account" (para. 2). When creating the installation on the snow around the monument over the course of two days, the experience of being with my son one day and on my own on another brought my attention to feelings of loss and the recognition that this as a place of activism, mourning, and commemoration.

This paper discusses the idea of the Forks as a cultural interface by drawing upon Nakata's work, and it also brings attention to the idea that there are complex intersections and discourses around Indigenous knowledges (Nakata, 2007). A basic component of Indigenous education is: "educators need themselves to develop their scholarship in contested knowledge spaces of the cultural interface and achieve for themselves some facility with how to engage and move students through the learning process" (p. 13). This manuscript shows how I am trying to facilitate this engagement through a/r/tography and to see links between Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledge systems. Nakata discussed that the body of knowledge of

institutionalized discourses produced about Indigenous peoples, societies, and cultures that connected to existing disciplines is shifting to include a presence of Indigenous voices and renewed and revalued perspectives. Martin Nakata is a Torres Strait Islander and comes from a territory far from the banks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, but there is a geographical connection to the Forks location. The location of the Torres Strait, where Nakata is from, is situated in-between the Arufura Sea in the west and the Coral Sea to the east, and in-between land masses, with the northernmost part of Queensland Australia situated to the south of Torres Strait and with Papua New Guinea situated to its north. While the climate and geography of Torres Strait varies significantly from that of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Nakata's perspectives is based on his life in this *in-between space* is a way to draw upon Indigenous knowledges from another hemisphere to deepen local perspectives. The *Matryoshka* shows that this process is not just learning about Indigenous knowledge or, as Nakata described, the corpus that is already bounded and shaped by the perspectives and interests of non-Indigenous others. Nakata (2007) offers profound words cautioning not to *disembody* knowledge from the knowledge holder or from its original place and to consider what *grounds* us and how this influences our perspectives:

> We are all also grounded in Western epistemology, through historical experience, through Christianisation, through the English language, through interventions of and interactions with colonial and contemporary institutions, through formal education, through subscription to the law, through subscription to the world of work, to democratic values, through everyday living, through use of technology, through popular culture, and so on. This is also familiar and recognisable, and we may accept it, refuse it, assimilate it, domesticate it, use it, subvert it, but nevertheless are constantly engaged with it, as we move forward in a constant process of endless and often unconscious negotiations

> between these frames – or reference points – for viewing, understanding, and knowing the world. (p. 10)

Soil gives a new discursive language to discuss the complexity of Indigenous and settler relationships in Winnipeg. While this manuscript draws attention to the idea of the Forks and downtown Winnipeg as a form of cultural interface, it must be noted that schools and universities are also places where students, and in particular Indigenous students, may feel the confines and tensions.

Arts based practices, such as the soil installation featured here, are helping me to challenge how we come to know. The *Matryoshka* is challenging me to think about how this series of studies emerged and to honour the processes rather than forcing the learning that has occurred to fit into the parameters of a traditional IMRD dissertation format. Much of the learning would not be easily captured within the linearity of this format.

The following journal article has been published in the *Canadian Journal of Action Research*. The article was also reviewed by several peers through a blind review process. While the analysis of the previous manuscript, **"Homeland",** was systematic and planned over a long range of time, the writing from **"Murky Waters"** came about through a colonial encounter while on a research walk as part of my coursework in Qualitative Research with Dr. Bruno Oliviera deJayme. From the perspective of action-research, I show how my encounter of red ribbon ties that were lost in the snow and detached from their original locations was used as a catalytic action to prompt artmaking. This article tells the story of an art installation of soil circles around the MMIWG, and it highlights the longest standing installation I have created because it was created during the winter and then lasted until springtime melt.

This article shows how critical place inquiries can emerge from small encounters and grow into broader inquiries that uncover land-based injustices and solutions. This article dives more deeply into soil as a paradoxical medium with many names, such as land, earth, and dirt, reflecting the fact that "The soil can bury and is a source of life; it can cover up and expose." (Ferguson, 2022, p. 125). The article is centered on the Forks site, one of Winnipeg's most popular destinations, but when I was creating this work, very few people were there. This place did not feel the same, and, indeed, it felt eerie. Indigenous educator, graduate student, and Residential School survivor Victoria McIntosh from Sagkeeng First Nation shared that the Forks site was a significant meeting place for not only the exchange of goods, but for its value in preserving stories, culture, and languages (V. McIntosh, Anishinaabe, personal communication, March 30, 2020). In a course we took together during the start of the pandemic, Victoria McIntosh also reminded me that the space at the Forks, where the Canadian Museum of Human Rights (CMHR) is located, resides on burial ground (V. McIntosh, Anishinaabe, personal communication, March 30, 2020).

This action research features how women's stories, alongside artmaking process notes, public art, and educational resources from the *National Inquiry,* become a way to respond to the Calls for Justice. I was honoured to see that a leader in a/r/tography research, Dr. Rita Irwin (2022), in her guest editorial described how my manuscript

> …courageously and creatively embraces the power and impact of action research informed by critical place-based inquiries, a/r/tography and Indigenous methodologies…Engaging in her own arts practice alongside Indigenous artists, she and others were able to access critical place-based approaches to better understand the displacement and disappearance of Indigenous women and girls. Beginning with her own

> journey, the research soon became a journey of many collaborating together. Perhaps this is a way forward with our national commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. (p. 6)

Like the confluence of rivers that guided **"Murky Waters",** this manuscript is part of a collection in the *Canadian Journal of Action Research* and participates in the melding of artistic forms of inquiry with and about action research. This small study has given life to more collaborative research in partnership with an interdisciplinary team of settlers and Indigenous teachers and healers, and it is presently in the data analysis phase. The work that came from this manuscript has led to my engaging in more relational work guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers rather than continuing as a solo researcher.

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ABSTRACT

The Forks in Winnipeg, Manitoba is the central site of this study which un/covers the potentialities of combining critical place inquiries and a/r/tography to mobilize Calls for Justice and education around displacement and disappearance of Indigenous Women and Girls. This study reflects part of my doctoral research which connects living, action-oriented inquiries utilizing earth-based art/works as public provocations. In this contribution, I share how my artistic process of encircling the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) monument with an intricate soil spiral and my encounters with women's stories and educational resources from the National Inquiry have uncovered complexities of the ongoing disappearance and erasure of women. The discourses embedded in place reveal strong connections to settler colonial forces and have drawn attention to the role of the arts in supporting commemoration and reclaiming discourses of power and place. This action-oriented approach aims to find ways to bring important topics around MMIWG into curricular discussions. This study inspired action steps for advancing the Calls for Justice, including the design of walking professional learning experiences for teachers. The study shows how the place at the Forks functions as a framework inspired by the layered histories and geographies of this significant location.

Key words: a/r/tography; arts-based; critical place inquiry; decolonizing praxis; ethical relationality

Murky Waters:

An Arts-based Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls

The National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) documents thousands of stories of violences targeted at First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people through colonial structures, genocidal policies, and breaches of their rights (National Inquiry, 2019a). A few years after their publication, "First Nations leaders say not enough progress has been made to help stop the genocide identified by the National Inquiry" (Crabb, 2021). Despite the calls for more public education and awareness, the National Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice (2019b) are neglected. My critical inquiries into reconciliation (Ferguson, 2017) and my interest in the hidden curriculum of local sites (Ferguson, 2021) led me to think about how to bring the National Inquiry into focus in relation to my own practices as an artist, researcher, and teacher.

Reclaiming Power and Place is a central part of both the title and ethos of the National Inquiry, which thoroughly documents how colonization is a gendered expression connected to the land and "is a crisis centuries in the making" (National Inquiry, 2019a, p. 19). While the disappearance, murders, and displacements of women is a contemporary and ongoing crisis, the National Inquiry emphasizes the colonial roots: "Harmful encounters for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people in what is now called Canada started with 16th century 'explorers', who used *terra nullius* and the Doctrine of Discovery to dismiss them as savages and claim rights to the land" (National Inquiry, 2019a, p. 17). It is clear the exploitation of land has also led to an exploitation of women. According to the National Inquiry (2019a):

> For First Nations women, the *Indian Act* tied a woman's Indian Status to her husband. Policing was also established to exert control over Indigenous Peoples, particularly First

> Nations and Métis women, by casting them women [*sic*] as "a menace" to society and stereotyping them as prostitutes. This made it easy for early police misconduct (including rape and murder) to go relatively unpunished. (p. 17)

There is also an urgency to support the need for engagement with critical issues both in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs and amongst current K-12 teachers (Kerr & Ferguson, 2021). I feel a sense of responsibility to bring the ongoing displacement of Indigenous women and girls into curricular discussions. This sense of urgency to act is echoed by the National Inquiry's Chief Commissioner, Marion Buller, who stated: "The continuing murders, disappearances and violence prove that this crisis has escalated to a national emergency that calls for timely and effective responses" (National Inquiry, 2019a, Preface, p. 5). The Calls urge educators to teach about genocidal and colonial practices and policies, to incorporate Indigenous perspectives of Indigenous history, law, and practices, and to use *Their Voices Will Guide Us: Student and Youth Engagement Guide* (Bearhead, 2019) with children and youth (Calls to Justice, 2019b, Education 11.2, p. 22-23). This study was initiated to uncover ways to connect teacher learning to the Calls for Justice.

This action research combines methodologies of a/r/tography and Critical Place Inquiries (CPI)—enabling artistic methods and processes that centre on place and follow an iterative cycle of observing, thinking, analyzing, and creating. My research questions include: How can critical place inquiries and arts-based inquiries using earth-based art installations support (public engagement and teacher education with) decolonizing educational praxis in settler-colonial systems? As a settler artist/researcher/teacher, how can I begin the work of decolonizing my own curricular practices?

Murky Waters, Manitoba

This study is situated in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which is on Treaty 1 territory, original land of nations including Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe), Ininíwak (Cree), Anishininiwak (Oji-Cree) (Manitoba Museum, n.d.), as well as the Dakota, Lakota (The Forks, 2021b), and it is acknowledged as the "Heart of the Métis Nation Homeland" (City of Winnipeg, n.d., p. 1). Winnipeg's name has Indigenous roots ("Wiinibiigong" in Anishinaabe and "Winipékohk" in Cree) meaning "where the water is murky or dirty" (Manitoba Museum, n.d.). This research takes place on the banks of murky waters at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. This place is commonly called "The Forks" and is known by the Cree name Nistawayak meaning "Three Points" (Manitoba Historical Society, 1998-2021, para. 1).

The Forks

The Red and Assiniboine Rivers at the Forks were important places of travel, mobility, and trade – linking people and places from all over the continent (Turner, 2021). The Forks is a place of public pedagogy because of its current popularity with millions of visitors each year as well as its historical significance as a thriving Indigenous territory for hunting, fishing, settlement, and trading (The Forks, 2021a). In 2018, the southern area of the Forks was named Niizhoziibean, meaning "two rivers" (The Forks, 2018b, para. 2), by Elders Barbara and Clarence Nepinak who uncovered the name through ceremony. According to Anishinaabe scholar Niigaan Sinclair, "Niizhoziibean not only embodies the spirit of the past of The Forks but enhances our understanding of what this place means—a collaborative space where people have been coming together to trade, grow, and make life for millennia" (The Forks, 2018b, para. 4).

After the arrival of settlers and newcomers, the Forks became a site used by both European and Indigenous peoples as more fur trading posts and forts were established. The Forks transformed dramatically in the late 19th century when it became a railway yard and housed new

settlers in immigration sheds, turning Winnipeg into what is described as "Gateway to the Canadian West" (The Forks, 2021a). These technological shifts transformed the land, systematically minimized Indigenous presences, and reified settler histories and *settler futurities* (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). In the late 1980s, the Forks site was redeveloped once again from an old railyard to its current design, which includes a marketplace, indoor and outdoor theatre spaces, formal and informal gathering spaces, museums, tourist attractions such as river boat rides, a hotel and spa, and numerous restaurants and stores. It is an active hub for locals with year-round events. However, Gray and Gardner (2016) call into question the benign narrative of reciprocity in this space, stating:

> Despite the apparent objectives, the CMHR [Canadian Museum of Human Rights] and the tourist development of The Forks remain contemporary colonizing forces through the illusion that this geographical location is somehow "shared land" and their collective projects of unequivocally representing a specific settler history while downplaying the centuries of Indigenous struggle, resistance and systematic removal of Indigenous bodies in this space. (p. 324)

Similarly, Toews (2018) provides a critical perspective documenting reports about how Winnipeg projects, such as the Forks mega redevelopment, was not a neutral venture. While purporting to benefit residents of Winnipeg's city centre, these initiatives did not support basic needs, housing and employment of inner-city residents (Toews, 2018). Toews (2018) refers to these ventures as situated within a complex system which he defines as *racial capitalism*— a perspective rarely spoken of in relation to this century long meeting place.

Theoretical Frameworks and Methodologies

This action research is framed within critical, intersectional feminist (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) and decolonial approaches, and is informed by Indigenous theories and methodologies (Battiste, 2018; Donald, 2009, 2012, 2016, 2021; Kovach, 2009; Nakata, 2007a, 2007b; Smith, 2002; Smith et al., 2019). The National Inquiry emphasizes that a decolonial approach is needed as "a way of doing things differently that challenges the colonial influence we live under by making space for marginalized Indigenous perspectives" (National Inquiry, 2019a, p. 167). Battiste (1998) suggests that educators "must acknowledge the colonial shadow through an awareness of the sociohistoric reality that has created the current context" (p. 24). Focusing on the specific location of the MMIWG monument at the Forks cast colonial shadows on the issue of displacement of women more contextually and relationally.

Racial injustices manifest along the river's banks and have influenced my thinking and actions as an artist/researcher/teacher. This study is informed by experiences and stories of the past. In 2014, Tina Fontaine, a young 15-year-old girl from Sagkeeng First Nation, was discovered wrapped in a cover and garbage bag weighed down by rocks at the Alexander Docks in the Red River close to the Canadian Museum of Human Rights (CMHR) (Conn, 2019; Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019). The horrifying discovery of young Tina Fontaine's lifeless body in the Red River is a story that has transformed the Forks site. Around the time when Tina Fontaine's body was found, I was taking a university course at the CMHR on Human Rights, and I noticed how commemorations of Tina Fontaine went underemphasized in the shadow of the CMHR opening its doors. Upon reflection, this inquiry began early in my master's coursework:

> While visitors flock to the museum and ascend the metaphorical struggle up the mountain, Indigenous families are scouring the depths of the rivers with hopes of closure

> and justice. In some ways the CMHR has become a tombstone for these women who have been tossed into the rivers, unable to climb to the tower of hope. (Ferguson, 2014, pp. 3-4)

Indigenous communities, scholars, and journalists called out the horrible human rights abuses surrounding the inaugural celebrations of the CMHR (Dean, 2015; Logan, 2014; Gray & Gardner, 2016). As a research assistant in 2019, I walked and researched alongside settler scholar Dr. Jeannie Kerr. We engaged in *walking analyses* in significant places in Winnipeg, including the Forks location which led to metaphorical findings, including the River as a teacher (Kerr & Ferguson, 2020; Kerr & Ferguson, 2021). Through this experience, informed by Donald's concept of ethical relationality (Donald, 2009, 2012, 2016), "we were taught by land and place and the participants' words" (Kerr & Ferguson, 2020, p. 6). This experience helped us to listen and learn in ways that evoked a "felt sense of the divisions and violences here and within ourselves (Kerr & Ferguson, 2020, p. 6). I became more attuned to how the stories of landscapes and waterscapes guided my thinking and how our analysis also became haunted by the horrific reality of Tina Fontaine's body being pulled from this river location (Kerr & Ferguson, 2020; 2021). Tina Fontaine's story also confronts another connected issue—the over-representation of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children in Manitoba's child welfare system (Manitoba Legislative Review Committee, 2018).

In their theorizing of Critical Place Inquiries, Tuck & McKenzie (2015a, 2015b) call for rigorous engagement with place to further understand land-based injustices and solutions. I take on a perspective of place that is more than neutral ground or an abstract idea—earth is a tangible medium, but it is also the central aspect connecting the issue of MMIWG to colonial histories. This study responds by giving centrality to land: "Land *is* spiritual, emotional, and relational;

Land is experiential, (re)membered, and storied" (Styres, 2019, p. 27). By utilizing earth-based methods, the land both informs and is part of the medium and the meaning making. Taking steps to understand the dynamics of this environment overtime and the art creation invoked a sense of *placefulness* (Styres, 2019). Styres states: "We are in place as much as it is within us—every experience and expression is replete with multiple layers of memories, each informing the other in diverse and entangled ways" (p. 27).

According to Donald (2009), "curricular and pedagogical work dedicated to the goal of decolonization in Canada must engage critically with the colonial nature of the relationships connecting Aboriginal peoples and Canadians and the logics that circumscribe them" (p. 6). By drawing upon decolonial theories, I view the MMIWG monument at the Forks as connected to stories of the past, transformed by present day interactions of both sadness and hope, and shaped by ongoing political and community dynamics. I view the Forks as a sacred and storied place that has been transformed by settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is an ongoing structure (National Inquiry, 2019a, 2019b; Toews, 2018; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Wolfe, 2006) that normalizes the ongoing disappearance of women and silences their Calls for Justice. Settler colonialism "functions through the replacement of Indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that over time develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty" (Bearhead, 2019, p. 14). Actively uncovering enactments of the "logic of elimination" (Wolfe, 2006) is a central concept in decolonizing praxis which exposes the extent to which colonial power relations are hidden within public places. Understanding these colonial logics (Donald, 2012) remind me about the importance of acknowledging as a white settler researcher of Ukrainian/Russian/Eastern European ancestry, I am part of these ongoing oppressive structures.

These frameworks guide my action cycles and remind me to practice "epistemic modesty" (Mooney, 2021, p. 237), striving for relationality and taking responsibility through my actions.

The arts function as a natural ally to decolonial frameworks which can counter-balance the dominant positivist paradigms. Arts-based educational research and a/r/tography aim to "illuminate something about the social world, sensitively portray people and their circumstances, develop new insights about the relationships between our sociohistorical environments and our lives, or disrupt dominant narratives and challenge biases" (Leavy, 2015, p. 17). A/r/tography's action orientation as a living and practice-based research (Leggo & Irwin, 2014) enables me to look, think, and create as a/r/tographer (*a*rtist/*r*esearcher/*t*eacher). This arts-based action research centralizes embodied experiences and values relational encounters.

A/r/tography is "a methodology of embodiment, never isolated in its activity but always engaged with the world" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899). As an approach to research, it doesn't claim objectivity, one truth, or generalizability—all of which have had disastrous effects on Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2002). Arts-based approaches can raise consciousness to issues of power, domination, privilege (Leavy, 2005) and "are committed to artful ways to mobilize knowledge for wide audiences" (Leggo & Irwin, 2014, p. 151).

My focus is on the MMIWG monument which was unveiled in 2014 as a small solemn site for commemoration amongst the celebratory (and seemingly neutral) spaces that surround it. While walking at Winnipeg's Forks in the winter, I found that the white granite of the MMIWG monument was lost in the snow—a visual metaphor conveying urgency. My on-site encounters with women's names written on red ribbons prompted me to learn about women's stories which lie at the heart of the Inquiry.

Methods

This article describes one personal place-based action inquiry within a broader set of multi-site inquiries throughout Winnipeg to uncover the curricular potential within public spaces and bring attention to injustices. Arts-based interventions and critical analyses in other sites of Indigenous significance such as a piece about the omissions of Métis narratives and the hidden curriculum at Winnipeg's Upper Fort Garry (Ferguson, 2021) have informed this research cycle. All my critical place inquiries have emerged from *encounters* such as a story, an omission, or a visceral reaction to an experience. This study is connected to encounters I had while on research walks at the Forks in Winnipeg during the winter of 2021. This was followed by walking in the location and taking time to consider the discourses and hidden curriculum of the site—considering what it teaches explicitly and implicitly. I take on the perspective that positions discourses as multidimensional social phenomenon (van Dijk, 2009). This broad view of discourses includes visual and printed texts, interactions, stories, political discussions, historical information, signs, symbolism, and sensory elements. For example, at the Forks, stories from the media about MMIWG in the context of finding the body of Tina Fontaine, ribbons of names, Indigenous place names, monuments and commemorations, grassroots Indigenous activism, and how people move and interact with this place all weave together to uncover settler-colonial dynamics and relationships between both ephemeral and physical places. I returned to the site several times and during different seasons and was attentive to how discursive information shaped my noticings. Several of my field notes/written reflections (see red italicized sections) and photographs which documented the journey have been inter-woven here to maintain connections to the lived experiences of being *in situ* at the Forks.

Walking was an important method. Engaging in the practice of walking and returning to the Forks (while learning about the histories of the site, researching women's stories, and

learning from educational resources in the National Inquiry) has been an important action which incited an active remembering of what has happened here, but also an opportunity to re-imagine possibilities. Papachase Cree scholar, Dr. Dwayne Donald (2021) affirms walking as part of his own life practice with "potential to enable relational renewal" (p. 55).

I traversed the Forks locations and drew upon embodied experiences utilizing a walking methodology (Kerr & Ferguson, 2020; Donald, 2021) which complimented the living inquiry of a/r/tography. During several research walks, I encountered names of women and memories of stories such as Tina Fontaine as I was attuned to erasures and silences.

Earth-based/soil art installations are used as a central creative method. My critical inquiry into reconciliation revealed colonial discourses embedded within schools (Ferguson, 2017) and the potentialities of soil as a pedagogical tool. Soil – a non-traditional material – uncovers critical issues and gives life to next steps as a sustainable medium. I created several soil-based works at home inspired by the imagery and information from the National Inquiry. I do these smaller pieces before the place-based installation as part of my own practice and reflexivity, which supports important reflections of doing this work. For example, the art was a way of honouring, not a provocation, but would the soil be viewed as "dirt" and the message be buried?

I chose one location for the art installation. I noted reflections about how passersby engaged with the space during the art creation. I looked out for: What aspect did people comment upon? How/was the space respected? I also shared images of the process on social media. On art-creation days, I went to the site with a design in mind, however, I worked with the natural conditions. Because of the cold temperatures in which exposed skin freezes in minutes, this installation took two separate days—one for sketching the form in the snow and another for working the soil into the design. I returned to the site on February 14, 2021, on the National Day

of Action for Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls and created a temporary, large-scale installation using soil to bring more attention to the monument. I encircled the MMIWG monument with an intricate spiral and observed how it transformed over time and how people interacted with the space. Documentation of my ongoing action-reflection cycles (McNiff, 2017) includes photos, field notes (appearing here in italicized red text), off-site soil videos and artworks, and social media posts. My analysis and action cycles are informed by broader social and political discourses.

Encounters at the Monument to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

> *I felt honoured to finally meet Niimaamaa. As I stood in her womb, I noticed my reflection looking up. I've seen her before, but now I hear the message she has for me. As a mother, as a researcher, as an artist, she speaks to me and my desires to research in a good way, for my family and for my relatives. She confronts me with responsibility to the land and waters. She guides me to notice more women along my path. How do I show I care?*

Rivers were key to maintaining relationships and their significance extends beyond the Eurocentric view of this as merely a waterway. Water is sacred; the Niimaamaa sculpture, a beautiful collaborative piece of public art designed by Indigenous women artists KC Adams, Jaime Isaac, and Val Vint, teaches that women are naturally connected to water as water carriers (The Forks, 2018a). On a research walk, I learned from Niimaamaa's reflective womb—reminding me of my responsibilities and the importance of honouring the sacredness of water and women.

Figure 3.1

Exterior and Interior of "Niimaamaa" (Adams, Isaac, & Vint, 2018)

Note. This public art installation called Niimaamaa is a 30-foot steel sculpture of Mother Earth who kneels in humility and reverence towards the river and "is a towering reminder of our responsibilities to the environment, love to all our relations and hope for the future" (The Forks, 2018a, para. 5).

> *The afternoon sun shone a spotlight on this place, making the most interesting shadows... Flashes of red on the old footbridge and ribboned railings—people calling for justice. They stand out fiercely in the frigid Winnipeg winter. One ribbon lay detached from its commemorative resting spot and now lay on my path. In that moment I encounter two women, their names written boldly on the red ribbon. In tiny letters it says "Missing". Who were/are they? Why/ Is this the end of their story?*

Figure 3.2

Encounter with red ribbons of two missing women, Janice Desjarlais and Lana Derrick.

Women's names and stories informed directions within this study. I researched publicly accessible information to learn about Janice Desjarlais and Lana Derrick's stories alongside Tina Fontaine's appalling Winnipeg-based story. Of these three women, Tina Fontaine was the only one whose story was integrally connected to this site because her body was discovered on the banks of the Red River (Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019). All three women come from different places, but their stories are connected by oppressive structures.

I can still remember hearing about Tina Fontaine's body being discovered before the CMHR was set to have a grand opening. The museum built on the bones of relatives.

I inquired into the resources made available as part of the National Inquiry. I was conscious of thinking as *teacher*: How might this art making experience become more

pedagogical to the public or inform my practices with students and colleagues? I wanted to bring attention to the positive discourses and educational supports to mobilize the Calls for Justice.

Phase One of the Art Installation: Sketching into the Snow

> *I told my son that we are here to create art in the snow in honour of women who died or are missing. He asks me, "Does that make you sad?" My son had empathy, and his young mind was understanding the significance. I had planned to just look at the site and to plan out the art, but I noticed that the snow was untouched, like a blank canvas.*

My eldest son accompanied me on the first day of art/work during what was described as a polar vortex. I pulled my son along with me in a little sled that we bought at a garage sale; it was broken at the bottom and left interesting marks. I was inspired by the joy that my son brought as he rode in the sled and by the marks made in the crisp white snow. Together we journeyed around the monument and drew the initial contour lines for the installation. The concentric circles represent the multi-layered and multi-generational impacts of colonialism as well as the networks and circles of support needed for healing. Upon reflection, the circles also became symbolic of the ripple effect of how small changes and actions have impact.

> *"Mommy, are we in the Arctic?" Through the mesmerizing motion of concentric circles, my son became disconnected from place but connected to the mythology and sense of a place he had never been and only imagined.*

Figure 3.3

Concentric circles in the snow around the monument

Phase Two of the Art Installation: The Earth Breathes

The next day, I returned to the Forks and headed straight to the monument. It was too cold to wander. I walked through the Oodena Celebration Circle (from the Ojibwe term meaning heart) (The Forks, 2021b), a large stone structure and recessed gathering place, and trudged uphill to greet the monument. The circles were untouched. The absence of my son made it feel lonely. I followed our previous tracks, but the quality of the process today was sombre.

> *As I poured the earth onto the sled, it appeared to be breathing against the cold winter air like hot air from one's mouth on a cold day. It looked alive. I poured it onto my son's sled, and the shape of the sled made it look like I was pulling a grave around the monument. The weight of the soil made it challenging to pull, as if there was somebody in the sled.*

Figure 3.4

Soil circles art installation

Note. Documenting seasonal changes of the installation at Winnipeg's monument to MMIWG.

The Red River is frozen over right now. The powerful currents of the river are hidden from view, seemingly dormant—like an inquiry whose calls are frozen in time. What awaits us along her banks in the spring...Will it be new life or death?

Phase Three of the Art Installation: Dust to Dust, Ashes to Ashes, Earth to Mother Earth

Winnipeg had record setting warm temperatures in the beginning of March, and the snow began to melt rapidly. I returned to the Forks to see how the art piece transformed. The sun had melted one side more than the other, but the circles became more prominent. As the spring melting season approached, the soil's significance shifted from being out of place on the stark canvas of snow to symbolize nourishing the land with water and soil which now provided nutrients for new growth on the green space surrounding the monument.

I wanted to give more space to the monument and bring people's attention to it. It seemed to work as people stopped to look and read the memorial plaque. Was this design inviting or alienating? Was I showing how far I am from the actual problem or was it revealing my role in both the problem and solution? I noticed a child playing within the rings, jumping and running along the lines, and her Dad was near but stayed further away from the monument. As the snow melted and mixed with the soil, the ground became muddy. Like the rivers and muddy waters that surround the city.

Soil/land/earth/dirt is a paradoxical medium. Soil speaks to the complexity of the issues in ways that words cannot. My use of soil acknowledges that land is central to Indigenous sovereignty and to understanding the complicated settler-colonial dynamics. The soil can bury and is a source of life; it can cover up and expose. Continually returning to the land as part of the artistic process engages the root meanings of a decolonizing approach.

When I returned to the Forks with my son in autumn, he recognized this place. He had a new connection to the site of the monument. He had a memory of doing art with his mom and that we were commemorating the women.

Through the process of watching the product change and having my perspectives deepen and shift throughout the process, I got clarity about how I wanted to mobilize this knowledge that was uncovered through observing, walking, thinking, and creating.

Uncoverings

I started to worry about my chosen medium of soil. It was intended to show the connection between Indigenous women and the land, however, if the earth is not viewed as sacred, I became conscious of how this may be misinterpreted. To me this was not dirt,

it was life-giving soil. But the medium took on new significance as I combed through many stories of women who have been mistreated and treated like garbage.

Discourses of Disposability

This study emphasizes the loss of women as a sign of disconnection to land and irreverence for water and Indigenous women. I have learned from Indigenous women artists who have permanent art installations at the Forks and emphasize important positive discourses, for example, the idea of women as water carriers was emphasized through engagement with Niimaamaa (Adams et al., 2018). According to Tuck & McKenzie (2015a) "settler societies are based on on-going displacement and dispossession of people in relation to land" (p. 3). Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (2019) state:

> To know Tina's story, to really understand how she came to symbolize a churning anger of a nation enraged, each of us can look as far back as the arrival of European settlers, and as close to home as the depth of our own involvement or indifference in the lives and experiences of Indigenous youth. (p. 6)

Bang et al. (2014) describe the growth of Chicago as the filling of the wetland which disrupted the relationships between land, and water and the life it supported. I see parallels with how expanding modernization away from fur trade and shifts to the wheat industry made the rivers less significant to settlers. After settler arrival, the use of land and waterways were used for disposal. Historically, "the area became a dumping ground for the by-products of railway activities—cinders from steam locomotives and a cornucopia of interesting junk" (Canadian Geographic Education, 2021).

The oppressiveness of settler colonialism paves the way for these "discourses of disposability" (Dean, 2015) which simultaneously reveals an irreverence for women, the river,

and surrounding lands. In recent years, millions of litres of raw sewage have leaked into the river (Cheung, 2016) and the site was used for the dumping of toxic products such as diesel (Billeck, 2019). Most recently, during a period of heavy spring rains, the City of Winnipeg "[released] 59.6 millions of litres of untreated sewage into the Red River" (CBC News, 2022, para. 1).

The generational dumping of toxic materials and garbage into the river is horrifyingly replicated in the disturbing disposal of Tina Fontaine's body into the river within a garbage bag (Malone, 2019). When I encountered Janice Desjarlais' red ribbon, I found that her story was associated within this discourse of disposability because Janice was last seen entering a garbage bin, and despite days of searching the dump, Janice was never found (CBC/Radio Canada, 2016).

The Forks has a new campaign called "Target Zero" which aims to have zero garbage, water waste, and carbon emissions by implementing "responsible environmental practices that are good for the planet and the bottom line" (The Forks, 2021c). This is a worthwhile goal, and I think the same target should be made for zero bodies being discovered along the river's banks.

> *Like the life-giving force of the water, the river's power is in its movement. There is a negative flow of colonial power which can feel unending and its effects all-encompassing. Yet the flow within and through the creative arts invite a more life-giving force.*

Engagement through the Arts

Art is clearly at the heart of the Inquiry's way of re-claiming both power and place. The Gallery of Artistic Expressions is a powerful digital gallery of hundreds of pieces that were gifted during the Truth Gathering Process. The arts mobilize the Calls for Justice through key initiatives such as: the ReClaim Project, the Legacy Archive, and "I am a Change Maker" (See the National Inquiry's website for more information). The National Inquiry (n.d.) states: "Public

commemorations, through art, can help bring forward personal stories of colonial violence. Art as commemoration bears witness to injustice, recognizes human dignity of victims and survivors, and calls institutions, systems and structures to account" (para. 2). The National Inquiry's online galleries support public awareness and create contemplative spaces which act as public memorials and places for peaceful protests.

The ReClaim Project, organized by Métis artist Jaime Black, on sacred sites across Canada, shows this powerful intersection of the arts with critical place inquiries. The aim of the project is to "re-assert presence and power on the land itself as a way of reclaiming the sacred feminine, promoting safety and wellness, and transforming the narrative around Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people" (National Inquiry, n.d., para.1). The project, which engages multidimensional historical, artistic, and spiritual aspects, brought people together at this scared site of where Winnipeg's rivers meet, where participants worked towards mutual healing by working with clay from the river to create offerings at the MMIWG memorial. The ReClaim project showcases this deeply emotional place- engagement:

> For centuries we have gathered where the rivers meet, and this land remembers us, remembers the drum, the heartbeat, the song, remembers the women who gathered with their families, harvested clay by the riverbank and formed the vessels. Sitting here listening to the stories of the Elders, forming clay figures, we see the women who gathered on this land thousands of years ago, we see them reflected in ourselves. (National Inquiry, n.d., para. 3)

I am now more aware of how the arts have a powerful educative role in exposing colonial truths and injustices while working towards healing and empowering solutions. There is a resurgence

of public art installations by Indigenous women artists at the Forks (The Winnipeg Foundation, 2019) which serve as beautiful reminders of Indigenous presences.

Difficult Knowledge and Responsibility

This study proposes the absence of dialogue about this issue in schools as emerging from the Calls for Justice being read as "difficult knowledge" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003) within educational settings. Just as Dean (2015) posits that museums have a responsibility to care for and to curate difficult knowledge, I think teachers too have a responsibility to care for and include difficult content within a safe environment. There is still resistance to systemic aspects being taught in schools as shown through difficult topics such as the inclusion of the topic of Residential Schools deemed inappropriate for younger students in the school system (French, 2021), despite Indigenous children having to endure the consequences of these ongoing legacies.

Power of Family

The discourses around the MMIWG monument teach about the multigenerational aspect of our actions. The multi-generational work and advocacy of Indigenous families and communities have been the real catalysts for demanding the Governments to act and begin the Inquiry into this generational crisis (Bearhead, 2019, p. 3; Dean, 2015).

As a mother, engaging my son in the artistic process helped me take a slower pace and engage more thoughtfully and pedagogically. The absence of him on subsequent art-creation days made me more empathetic to the absence and displacement of Indigenous youth.

Throughout this research, I have witnessed women who have been willing to share how they have been subjected to violence themselves or have felt the impacts of murders within their own families or have initiated searches. After hearing women's stories, I feel more responsibility.

My art installation around this monument was created differently because this monument was a commemorative place. Families gather here and it is used as a place for healing, contemplation, and advocacy. My other art installations often provoke and interrogate omissions, but this work required researching with reverence; this is not just a historical site but a memorial for people who may not have a final resting place, or whose bodies have never been found.

> *As I watch the monument over the course of this study, I noticed that although small and seemingly lost, the commemorative nature of this monument is its power. The legacy and memory of women come alive as people use this as a gathering place, to mourn, to remember, and to seek justice.*

Taking Action

Walking workshops that centre Indigenous places, artists, and Calls for Justice, as well as theorizing new conceptual frameworks have been two main modes of mobilizing the knowledge from the "uncoverings" throughout the process.

Walking Workshops

The "uncoverings" of this work have inspired the design of walking land acknowledgement workshops for teacher professional learning sessions at the Forks location. On October 2021, I piloted the first walking workshop during Manitoba Teacher's Society Professional Learning Day. This workshop was filled, indicating that there is a high level of interest in moving beyond the neutral "coming-together" settler story of the Forks and to engage with the tensions and the stories of this place. The workshop invited teachers to walk alongside each other in places of public pedagogy. These walks are informed by theories of ethical relationality which Donald (2012) shares as "an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different

histories and experiences position us in relation to each other" (p. 535). I focused on Indigenous artworks and action steps connecting to the National Inquiry. For example, teachers visit Niimaamaa and engage with teachings shared through the artists' statements (Adams et al., 2018) and then visit the MMIWG monument where they are provided with time to access online databases on MMIWG and hear women's stories on site. Teachers are invited to commemorate women and girls through acts of writing their names on ribbons. I share the resource entitled, *Their Voices Will Guide Us: Student and Youth Engagement Guide* (Bearhead, 2019) and encourage teachers to walk away with a next step centered on the Calls for Justice. I balance the narratives of trauma with the voices of strength and displays of activism on this sacred site. The walks are continually being revised.

Frameworks

The convergence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers has inspired new frameworks for understanding. Torres Strait Islander Martin Nakata's theorization of the *cultural interface* (Nakata, 2007a, 2007b) supports my new understandings of the Forks location as a metaphorical framework. A cultural interface is:

> ...constituted by points of intersecting trajectories. It is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation. It is a space of many shifting and complex intersections between different people with different histories, experiences, languages, agendas, aspirations and responses. (Nakata, 2007a, p. 199)

The Forks represents a *cultural interface*—a place where cultures have become enmeshed, collided, and continue to live in tension with each other (Nakata, 2007a).

As I work towards compiling my doctoral research, this study has informed the development of a *matryoshka* (nesting doll) as a potential theoretical and methodological framework—re- connecting to my own heritage. The motherly *matryoshka* is similar in shape to the Winnipeg monument in honour of MMIWG. It is a symbol of a body, and the name comes from the root, Mother, similar to the Niimaamaa sculpture. This echoes the importance of multi-generational teachings and embodied knowledges.

Conclusions

The rivers tell a story of life and death, exchanges, and spiritual connections embedded within this place—a coming together of rivers and people. The Forks recent English name connotes a similar divergence; however, the flow of the Red River water flows north which shows that the movement of the water is a convergence of flowing of two rivers into one. This melding within the natural environment teaches about the possibilities of ethical partnerships. Like the Niizhoziibean, the two rivers flow together, further muddying the waters from separate storied banks to a powerful converging flow. The physical place of the Forks was not only the location of this research but became integrally part of the framework itself. Focussing on the metonymic quality of the Forks location—like its significance of joining two rivers—helped me see intersections between decolonizing theories, arts-based, Indigenous, and place-based methodologies and how they generate a new flow of knowledges.

The Forks is an important starting place for decolonizing my teaching practices. This study challenged my perspectives of this place called Winnipeg—*murky waters*. The exploitation of land at this junction of rivers has led to an exploitation of women which was made visible

through intersections between the history of The Forks, and women's stories, and through engagement with my own art/work alongside installations by Indigenous artists on site.

Arts-based approaches alongside critical place-inquiries lead to deeper understandings of the displacement and disappearance of Indigenous women and girls and gave ideas for how to begin conversations amongst teachers and with students. I learned about a valuable curriculum resource, which encourages students of all ages to use artistic expressions to support the translation of resources from the National Inquiry into learning opportunities and activism. The Guide also inspired me to share my own artistic voice and to engage my son in the process. His questions prompted me to reflect on what information to share and how to share it in age-appropriate ways.

Working with soil uncovered critical issues, surfaced (dis)connections and inspired next steps. The way the soil breathed, it awakened and connected to Nxumalo's (2016) methodological approach of *refiguring presences*— prompting me to think about how to revive women's stories so they are not forgotten. This study has inspired a community-based art project repositioning these women's images and names back onto the land/water scape at the Forks.

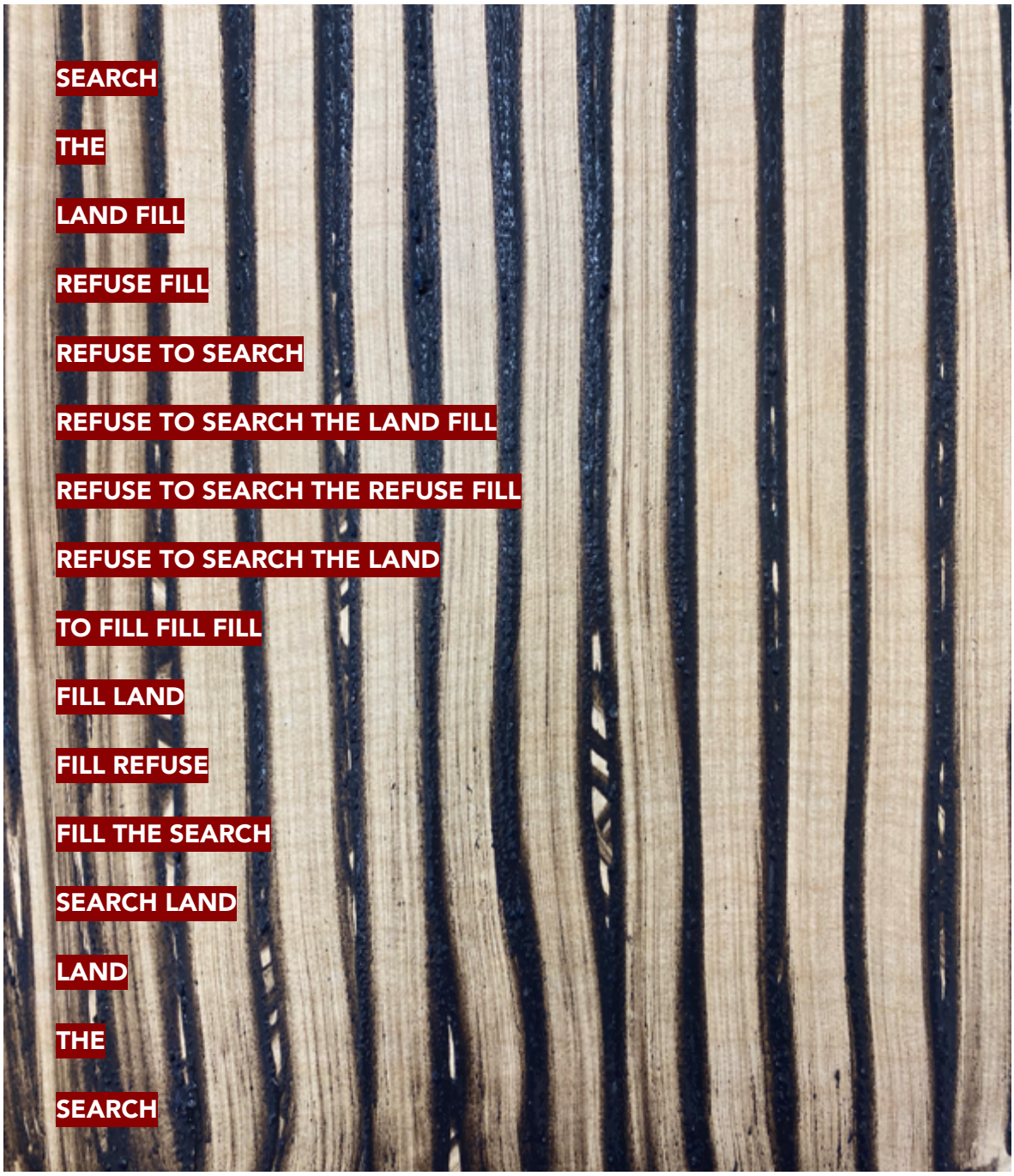
The interactions of arts-based and action-orientations reveal colonial logics living here. Earth-based artwork is complicating my own participation in the settler colonial project as a settler artist/researcher/teacher. The movement of the soil and its paradoxical quality revealed ongoing settler colonial soiling and how it functions. I have become acutely aware of the ability and risk of "land-based" discourses to cover up the roots of the issues and at-risk of becoming a "move to innocence" (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Observing how people use the site as a place of commemoration changed the quality of the art produced here; this was an active site of healing. Like the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in this place, this was a place where families of missing and

murdered women could also converge to support each other. Reverence for land and waters and the stories of women are important.

This research began individually and has resulted in planning collaborative walking workshop experiences with teachers from across school divisions. These walks helped initiate a journey. From these initial engagements with women's stories, it is clear that teachers need time and places to engage with the Calls to Justice and information from the National Inquiry.

LIVING LINK 4

Refusal to Search



MANUSCRIPT / *MATRYOSHKA* 4

Introduction to Manuscript/*Matryoshka* 4

Winnipeg, Manitoba comprises many perspectives of land and water—in its names, creation stories, and contemporary public places. This manuscript, **"Red River Removals",** is informed by Indigenous water stories. At the centre of Turtle Island, Winnipeg is connected to an Anishinaabeg Flood Story, which according to Sinclair and Cariou (2011), "tells of the covering of the world by water and the recreation of it by Nanabush after a heroic muskrat dives and sacrifices himself to get a paw full of earth" (p. 1). Edward Benton Benai (1998) described the Great Flood as a teaching and shared that the tiny ball of Earth was taken from the lifeless paw of Muskrat, and the Earth was offered a spot upon Turtle's back, who would bear the weight of the new earth. This story informs ongoing relationships to this storied land, continually humbled by the force of and reverence for floodwaters' power.

This chapter is distinct from the others because it begins at one site and then shows an assemblage of other places that are all connected to the theme of water. I provide more information regarding the guiding theories, methodologies, and experiences for this final part of this critical place inquiry, and I introduce how CPI functions as a trajectory rather than as a perspective methodology. **"Red River Removals"** connects a historical site, a commemorative plaque, an art installation by a Métis artist, and a community formerly known as Rooster Town within a city where water themes are present on the landscape. From living nearby, I noticed that Parks Canada attempts, several times a year, to revive this National Historic Site and to encourage people to come visit by planting the garden and offering short historical tours. Riel House emphasizes the house itself rather than connections to the Red River. Without easy access to the river, this site no longer represents what Métis life was like.

This final manuscript in the *Matryoshka* shows the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery and ethos of *terra nullius* in several contemporary and historically connected places. Even while writing this manuscript, I saw the ebb and flow between settler takeovers, such as another tract of land being developed into lucrative apartment complexes on the same street along the Red River, on River Road. I also share how Winnipeg is a place of Indigenous resurgence through the positive example of what surfaced while writing, which was the re-naming of a popular commuters' route to the Abinooji Mikanah/Children's Way.

Yet only about 100 years ago, there was an area known as Rooster town, and it was left on the fringes of the city during a time when the City of Winnipeg was actively stealing and re-routing water from Shoal Lake and First Nations reserves. The clashing timeframes of the Métis challenges, removals, and access to water in Rooster Town occurred at a time when the city of Winnipeg was gaining access, "as if by gravity", as the Aqueduct plaque coveys.

This manuscript includes more development of a/r/tographic renderings that are unique to working with soil and creating public provocations. These include: unsights, re-moving and re-placing, re-sourcing, and remembering. *Unsights* is taken up most in **"Red River Removals"**, but it is a rendering that was revealed through soilwork over time. Unsight is a type of noticing of information not overtly visible or explicitly outlined but something revealed, felt, noticed, or experienced through public artmaking and walking. They are a type of knowledge that will likely not be found on a didactive panel and a national historical site. They are similar to a logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2006); they describe a colonial mechanism that purposely covers up settler colonialism and insidious forms of oppression, which has a normalizing effect on maintaining the status quo. Unsights are a colonial tool that give greater understanding of how settler-colonial processes work through removals and re-placements across an assemblage of places. This work

draws on that of settler historian Adele Perry's notion of *re-enacted forgetting* (Perry, 2016, p. 96), which helped me to think about how to describe unsightly parts of the history that are intentionally hidden from view. Each site reveals its own unsightly facet of privilege, power, and settler colonial perspectives. Soilwork brings attention to unsights and to facts that may be new and troubling and that may disrupt a bias or perspective of a place. The way soil can easily cover and hide something from view helped me to notice this rendering.

Re/moving and *re/placing* are terms that surface in all manuscripts, but primarily manuscript 4. This rendering explicitly connects to coloniality and the preoccupation with removing lands and peoples. **"Murky Waters"** describes placefulness as a reciprocal and entangled relationship between our experiences in places, and our impact on them and how they impact us (Styres, 2019). I think this type of placeful approach helped me to notice how changes of removing or replacing in an environment can result in intersectional impacts for humans and non-human relatives. From an artistic perspective, a removal is much easier than a replacement.

Re/sourcing is a rendering that considers how human actions and anthropocentric views and Euro-centric concepts around land affects land-based teaching, learning, and practices. What are people's ontological commitments to land? Is land a resource or relative? What needs to be re-sourced? What versions of history need to be enhanced through new resources and perspectives? This rendering also encouraged me to think about where the material of soil comes from. As I have gradually needed more soil for larger installations, the practice shifted from the intimate and local approach of taking soil from my backyard and the relationship and interaction that is lost when sourcing soil from a garden centre.

Remembering shows how soil participates in the praxis of *re-membering* and bringing together experiences from a non-linear timeframe that relate to place. In the absence of a steady

flow of parking lot traffic at the National Historic site, I am reminded of Bang et al.'s (2014) work, where asema (tobacco) sprouts surprisingly in the streets of Chicago and shows the power of land in slowly *re-becoming* itself, as Indigenous plants take back this place. Working on this manuscript helped to illuminate how my soilwork praxis was becoming more relational over time. In all manuscripts, the critical engagement with ongoing enactments of settler colonialism (such as ways that water was rerouted and stolen) show that places may be at risk of being rebranded to nod to superficially or *forget* these histories.

This piece further substantiates a relationship among the manuscripts by taking this inquiry further to answer linking questions that emerged from the manuscript of **"Homeland"** and through soilwork done between 2019 and 2021. **"Red River Removals"** connects back to the story of activism at the upper fort in **"Homeland"** through discussion of Louis Riel and his family property, where Riel's body lay for public viewing after being hung for treason only a few short years after the signing of the Manitoba Treaty at Upper Fort Garry.

The focus on water enhanced the flow of stories between places and became a way to connect past, present, and future, as Sinclair (2024) discussed. The water stories shared here are revealed through Indigenous resurgence efforts and through an analysis of water imagery and names that seek a benign reference to land without acknowledgement of atrocities. This manuscript brings this topic *down to earth* and makes it relevant by showing very visceral colonial tracks as a method for bringing attention to the removal of land away from Métis communities and into colonial tracts and settlers' hands.

The following book chapter, "Red River Removals: Unsettling Hidden Histories of Water Stories through Critical Place Inquiry and Earth-based Art" was published in summer 2024, in the text, *Indigenization, Decolonization, and Unsettling: Stories from the Land,* which is edited

by Dr. Anna-Leah King, Dr. Kathleen O'Reilly, and Dr. Patrick Lewis. This text is laid out in three categories—Unsettling, Decolonizing, and Indigenizing—which aim to question and work against the status quo while also seeking new forms of relationships between Indigenous-settlers and land. This collection shows how people are sharing their experiences courageously and with an acknowledgement that unsettling, decolonizing, and Indigenizing terms are not destinations to achieve but are ongoing processes with no agreed upon definitions. My chapter adds to the section on "Unsettling". The idea of unsettling has surfaced as a term calling for disrupting coloniality in which settlers follow the lead of Indigenous leadership.

This manuscript works towards relational accountability by returning to work that began in an Indigenous land-based learning course with Dr. Brian Rice. Since then, I have shared the evolving manuscript with Dr. Rice several times and was accountable for how I have taken up the learning through his coursework. He also offered feedback, such as providing information about the nations that could be included in my land acknowledgement statement and ensuring my interpretation was affirming of Indigenous land-based learning practices.

The rivers were the lifeblood of the community for travel, for water, and for fish (Coutts, 2025). The movement of people away from water and the movement of water away from people, or taking power over people's rights to clean water, is not isolated to what is shared in the manuscripts. Attawapiskat has had a long-standing water advisory (Tyna Legault Taylor, Omushkego-Cree, personal communication, 2022): DeBeers diamond mines has left the water not even boilable; Mercury poisoning of the waters continues from the paper mills in Grassy Narrows First Nations; and the aluminum industry and the creation of Alcan town have ruined the water outside the Kitimat townsite (Iseke-Barnes & Estrada, 2008). Unfortunately, this list could continue. As of January 2025, many First Nations reserves have boil water advisories and

“35 short-term drinking water advisories in place in First Nations communities south of 60, excluding those in the British Columbia region” (Canada, 2025).

In the manuscript, I did not share how the Indigenous community of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation advocated for changes in response to the Winnipeg Aqueduct. For example, Shoal Lake 40 (SL40) used human rights discourse in its Freedom Road Campaign to raise awareness, rally allies, and garner support to challenge the land and water-based injustices (Davis et al., 2022). Winnipeg continues to take from Shoal Lake on a daily basis. My family is cleansed and is nourished by this water. I also failed to detail the lasting legacies of the extractive actions of the government on Shoal Lake. Davis et al. (2022) shared that “the government expropriated 3500 acres of SL40 reserve lands, excavated its burial grounds, and forced the community to relocate”, which left “entire generations of people [who] have grown up using a ferry barge or walking across unsafe ice roads to enter or leave the community” (Troian, 2019, para. 1). The Indigenous-settler collaboration on the Freedom Road Campaign mobilized social connections to put pressures on governments to build a connecting road (Davis et al., 2021). Ironically, the Canadian Museum of Human Rights (CMHR) in downtown Winnipeg at the Forks continues to use water from Shoal Lake in the contemplative Healing Waters exhibit while the Anishinaabe community of Shoal Lake thirsts for clean drinking water. I tried to mobilize my learning from this manuscript in a collaborative work with school teams to bring into the CMHR, but I met resistance from my educational institution. I was inspired by activist efforts from SL40 led by Chief Erwin Redsky, who created a counter-museum called the “Museum of Canadian Human Rights Violations at SL40”, to educate the public (Troian, 2019). There is work to do.

Book Chapter Citation:

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Red River Removals: Unsights and Hidden Histories of Water Stories through Critical Place Inquiry and Earth-Based Art

Winnipeg, Manitoba

This chapter is part of a broader critical place inquiry (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) to uncover the hidden histories lurking within public spaces in Winnipeg, Manitoba— "Canada's most Indigenous city" (Perry, 2016) and homeland of the Red River Métis. Through this sustained and ongoing journey—which includes several other places such as forts and commemorative monuments (Ferguson, 2021;2022)—I show how walking and public artmaking has surfaced place-based colonial processes in the form of unsights and has given life to a soilwork as an emerging approach to arts-based research.

This research takes place within Wiinibiigong—Anishinaabemowin meaning "where the water is murky or dirty" (Manitoba Museum, n.d.a). This is the homeland of the Red River Métis, the Anishinaabeg, Ininíwak, Anishininiwak, Dakota, Dene (Manitoba Museum, n.d.b). Manitoba has historically been called Manitowapow— a land *of* water—which is an embodiment of stories and spirit of the "Cree words *Manitou* (Great Spirit) and *wapow* (sacred water)" (Sinclair & Cariou, 2011, p. 4). The voice of Manitowapow is heard "where waves dashed against the rocky shores of Manitou Island" (Sinclair & Cariou, 2011, p. 4). As a flood area, the surrounding waters keep Winnipeg aware of rising rivers and the power of water.

People were brought together by the flow of the waters. Winnipeg is also a city socially and geographically divided by waters. At the centre of what is known by many Indigenous communities as Turtle Island, this land is originally connected to a Flood Story where this place emerged through the help of humble muskrat, who brought up earth from the deepest depths of the water (Sinclair & Cariou, 2011, p. 1). This water story has intrigued me. Winnipeg's water

stories can teach many lessons, including about unsettling histories of Winnipeg as a racist city (Macdonald, 2015) and how to develop ethical relationships.

This chapter documents a dialogue of inquiries between sites of significance such as the National Historic Site of Riel House (former family home of Métis leader Louis Riel) and the Métis settlement of Pakan Town and interweaves it with the development and commemoration of the city of Winnipeg aqueduct. In response to the discourses of hidden histories that lie in-between these places, I create temporary, large-scale, soil art installations—a form of curricular and artistic intervention to bring forth new understandings and to inquire into the overarching research question: How can critical place and arts-based inquiries using pop-up soil art installations support (public engagement and teacher education with) decolonizing educational praxis (Styres, 2018) in settler colonial systems?

My family immigrated to Canada with ancestral roots to Ukraine, Russia, and Eastern Europe, and I maintain my own cultural ties to these places. I am a white, cisgender female, and settler and un/settler (Ferguson, 2017) and am committed to learning from my own histories and from Indigenous artists, researchers, and teachers. I acknowledge my positionality and participation in ongoing colonial projects because of where I come from. I was born and raised in Winnipeg, and I seek new understandings of this place in the centre of North America to guide my work as an artist, researcher, teacher, and as a mother of two young children.

Critical Place Inquiries

Critical place inquiry is described as a *trajectory* and emerging research framework in which place is prominently part of the topic and integral to the research process (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). As I learn about the potentialities of a critical place inquiry, Tuck & McKenzie (2015) remind us that "research needs to move beyond understandings of place as

neutral backdrops, or as bounded and antiquated concepts or as only physical landscapes" (p. 18). I think explicitly about place as dynamic by blurring past, present, and futures and layering time frames of various sites. I engage with shifting political discourses found between specific sites by considering social contexts, movement of land and people, and colonial transformations of the earth (such as re-routing water away from Indigenous communities). The openness of critical place inquiry to involve various methodologies has prompted the overlapping of the living and action-oriented inquiry of a/r/tography (Irwin, 2013; Leavy, 2009; Leggo & Irwin, 2014; Springgay et al., 2005) to bring together artistic, pedagogical aspects, and cultural and ethical considerations. In a way, this chapter shows melding processes of *developing* a critical place inquiry and *becoming* a/r/tography (Irwin, 2013). Guiding questions include: What new understandings of place can come from inquiry lenses as artist-researcher-teacher? As a settler artist-researcher-teacher, how can I begin the work of decolonizing my own curricular practices in Winnipeg, Manitoba?

Guiding Theories, Methodologies, and Experiences

I draw upon Indigenous scholarship to inform my critical inquiries. This work is inspired by Papachase Cree scholar Dr. Dwayne Donald's theories and methodologies of ethical relationality (2009, 2012, 2016) and the practice of walking as a relational life practice (Donald, 2021) to seek out new stories and nurture new kinship relationships. Ethical relationality is "tied to a desire to acknowledge and honour the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences position us in relation to one another, and how our futures as people in the world are similarly tied together" (Donald, 2016, p. 11). In "From what does ethical relationality flow? An 'Indian' Act in three artifacts," Donald (2016) engages with three public murals that display ongoing resistance to enact ethical relationality. Donald positions public art

as reinforcing and omitting specific stories and considers whose stories are told as well as where and how they are shared. Donald states: "To better understand the ways and means by which particular curriculum stories are selected and promoted over others requires an inquiry that engages with the mythological networks that undergird the public dreams held by a society" (Donald, 2016, p. 12). As I visited each site, the stories that were hidden became a central focus. I noticed how settler colonial mythologies and neoliberal mechanisms (that value and thirst for individual wealth over collective health) create networks that may position a certain view of progress in the public's eye. Additionally, my critical place inquiries position places of public pedagogy in Winnipeg as *cultural interfaces* that display multiple interconnected discourses, practices, and histories which "condition how we all come to look at the world, how we come to know and understand our changing realties in the everyday, and how and what knowledge we operationalise in our daily lives" (Nakata, 2007, p. 9).

Framing my engagements through the methodology of a/r/tography combines my living practices as artist, researcher, and teacher and complements these underlying approaches. I utilize the term *unsights* to refer both to revealing stories which may be out of sight, and to the unsightly-ness of the stories that are revealed. While this is not a comprehensive perspective of all Winnipeg's water stories, and could further include Indigenous stories, it brings narratives, public knowledges, memory, and scholarly discourses together with new synergy.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a starting place for my research into how to engage in practices of reconciliation regarding my own practices, and my findings indicated deeply engrained colonial discourses *in* schools, *on* schools, and *within* my own practices (Ferguson, 2017). Overall, my dissertation engaged in inquiries into reconciliation and affirmed that land and life were two inseparable dimensions.

Dr. Dwayne Donald (2009, 2012), who is a descendent of the Papachase Cree amiskwaciwiyiniwak (Beaver Hills Cree), posits that Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewpoints are often positioned as incommensurable. By centring on specific places, Indigenous-settler relations move from the abstract to a more grounded foundation. Places of public pedagogy serve as a nexus for the intersection of settler-Indigenous stories and activate multilayered curriculum perspectives. The stories and analysis of the various sites featured here aim to expose colonial frontier logics (Donald, 2009) which separate the experiences and realities of Indigenous and settler Canadians. A/r/tography is key to making these intersecting ideas visible and accessible to the public living in these places.

My research is informed by my experiences engaging with methodologies of ethical relationality (Donald, 2009, 2012, 2016), Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008) and walking in several Winnipeg sites alongside Dr. Jeannie Kerr (Kerr & Ferguson, 2020, 2021). Indigenous frameworks combined with walking analyses generated complex findings in the forms of story and metaphor that "were constant teachers for us and helped us to keep ethical relationality as a priority in our relations" (Kerr & Ferguson, 2020, p. 709). Walking (Donald, 2021) and ongoing visits to these sites on foot and during different seasons has been an important aspect of learning about places. I then return to sites to create an art piece in response. Sometimes the piece itself becomes a pedagogical tool, but the active artistic process before, during, and after the installation is also a central part of the meaning making.

This work builds upon my analysis of Upper Fort Garry during Manitoba's 150th anniversary year of entry into Confederation, which revealed omissions of Louis Riel's contributions within political rhetoric and in the public art installation, called the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Heritage Wall (Ferguson, 2021). Additionally, my arts-based action

research into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) monument at Winnipeg's historic Forks location involved *uncoverings* such as connections between discourses of disposability toward women and water (Ferguson, 2022). The National Inquiry's connections between violence against women and land/waters taught me about Winnipeg's unsettling secrets connected to water at Winnipeg's Forks location where two rivers meet. This previous arts-based inquiry into the MMIWG prompted me to continue to search for water stories along the rivers' banks.

Public sites with historical and contemporary significance help to understand the particularities of colonialism in relation to specific places. The bank of the river is not an unlikely place for public activism and commemoration because it is within the stories of water where many stories of injustice take place. During one research walk I noticed graffiti along a cement waterfront near the Forks along the Red River where the body of Tina Fontaine, a 15-year-old Indigenous girl from Sagkeeng First Nation, was found (see Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019). Tina Fontaine's name is written in bold, red letters. Alongside is also the message "Shelter is a human right." This message is juxtaposed with the Canadian Museum of Human Rights visible nearby.

Removals and Re-placements

The discoveries of children's bodies buried under residential schools within Canada have ushered in an era of urgency in education in which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action (2015) and the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls for Justice (2019b) need more prominence. Removals are central in both these comprehensive reports. Removals of Indigenous peoples are shown through separations of children from families (TRC, 2015b; Government of Manitoba,

2018; Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, 2019), displacement of generations of Métis people, technical diversions of water (Perry, 2016), the ongoing violence against and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls (National Inquiry, 2019a), and more silently through omission and enactments of the null and hidden curriculum (Eisner 1985, Jackson 1968/1990). These ongoing issues are intertwined within this project to deepen understandings of settler colonialism in Winnipeg.

In protest to bodies of children being found buried under residential schools, people removed statues of the colonial legacy and monuments commemorating architects of residential schools (CBC News, 2021; Singh, 2021). By painting and toppling statues of the past, a form of monument hacking emerged that created public sites of resistance and refusal. In this context of "cancel culture" and the removals of names, and public commemorations, the general public have utilized creative methods to shift political discourses and bring attention to important issues. Researchers have also engaged with the hacking idea in places such as museums (Jayme et al., 2016) as a creative method to bridge formal and informal places of learning. In a similar way, I wanted to bring my a/r/tography practice into public spaces as a form of teaching and *talking back* (Smith, 2021). Through my use of earth-based art and pop-up soil installations, I too am participating in these discourses toward activism. I want to move beyond superficial engagements with reconciliation, and hollow land acknowledgements, toward more active and sustained engagement with decolonial work (Battiste, 2013).

My curriculum studies revealed a need for more engagement with environmental issues and colonial injustices connected to land and water in provincial curricula. Differing perspectives of land is a "primary source of misunderstanding during the process of treaty negotiations and continues to be a source of misunderstanding to this day" (Government of Manitoba, 2003b, p.

8). Euro-descendent settlers thought of themselves as owners of land, while Indigenous people saw themselves as care-takers of the land and viewed the land as sacred (Manitoba, 2003b, p. 8). The current Kindergarten to Grade 8 Social Studies: Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003a) attempts to weave in Indigenous perspectives; however, the overemphasis on chronological history and a physical geography led to omissions of the spiritual and cultural significances of land (Ferguson, 2020). Manitoba's *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives Across Curricula* document makes a clear point: "One aspect that remains constant is that the Land is the giver of life and law and must be respected above all else" (Manitoba, 2003b, p. 8). The National Inquiry's Calls for Justice include a call to ensure that Indigenous peoples have access to water (National Inquiry, 2019a) and it acknowledges that Indigenous women and gender-diverse people have key roles as land defenders, water keepers, teachers, leaders, healers, and protectors (National Inquiry, 2019a, 4.1, p. 14). In connection to these types of social actions, Pashby et al. (2014) propose a vision for curriculum that *engages with difference*. While Manitoba's social studies curriculum focuses on "commitment to social justice" and active democratic citizenship (Manitoba, 2003a), there is minimal mobilization of *injustices*.

Water Stories

Winnipeg also has an infamous water story. Winnipeg is located on Treaty 1 territory and has taken water from Shoal Lake on Treaty 3 territory for more than one hundred years (Perry, 2016). Settler historian Dr. Adele Perry's (2016) book *Aqueduct* brings critical attention to the Greater Winnipeg Water District Aqueduct (Winnipeg Aqueduct), which "tells us a great deal about colonialism structures by being named after the community which has benefited from it" (p. 14). According to Harp (2016), "It is doubtful one could find a more blatant example of

settler profiting off the resources of Indigenous peoples" (p. 8). Land was sold and transformed to gain access to water. The dike and canal built to access the water made Shoal Lake 40 an island, and left this First Nation community without road access, without adequate sewage treatment, and most notably—without access to clean water (Perry, 2016).

Institutional land acknowledgements have begun to recognize that Winnipeg's water comes from Shoal Lake and reference it being "sourced" from Shoal Lake (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, 2024; University of Winnipeg, 2022). Winnipeg's water has been re-*sourced* and through the process has violently isolated Shoal Lake 40 First Nation on an island created by the physical, social, and legal engineering at several levels of government, causing the community generations of thirst for clean water. The dispossession of land (and lakebed) was carried out without consent of the Anishinaabe community of Shoal Lake 40 (Perry, 2016). Despite the attempts for land acknowledgements to include water, there is a need for further considerations about how this is one colonial water story amongst others.

The deeper one goes into water stories, the more *unsights* are revealed. The National Inquiry's Executive Summary includes a chapter which confronts the *right to security*, stating: "As families, survivors, and others shared their truths with the National Inquiry, it became clear that, for the majority of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people living in all settings and regions, security is a key area where violence against Indigenous women and girls can and should be addressed" (National Inquiry, 2019c, Executive Summary, p. 32). This right to security includes holistic aspects, which includes the right to access water (National Inquiry, 2019).

When the aqueduct was finally complete, Winnipeg celebrated this colonial act of expropriation, and according to Perry (2016): "This urban and imperial celebration foreshadowed

the relationship between Winnipeg, memory, and water supply that existed for the century that followed" (p. 83). This engineering achievement has become a symbol of colonial ingenuity.

Métis Removals

Winnipeg, formerly Red River, is the "Birthplace of the Métis Nation and the Heart of the Métis Nation Homeland" (City of Winnipeg, n.d.). Métis identity is more than the concept of mixing (Vowel, 2016) and encompasses unique cultural identity, history, and Michif language (Dussault & Erasmus, 1996) and which *where* one comes from is integrally important to Métis culture and identity. The specific term Métis Nation is used to refer to Métis people who identify themselves with historical roots in the Canadian West (Dussault & Erasmus, 1996, p. iv), and more specifically to the Red River region.

Riel House

A central place of this inquiry was Riel House, a former family residence of the well-known Métis leader often portrayed as the "Father of Manitoba." It is located on a street called River Road along the Red River and is considered a Parks Canada National Historic Site. I drive past Riel House regularly and for years it looked neglected, with chipping paint and in need of care and attention. It was easy to miss given its quaint appearance and often chained-off parking lot. Then one day, it had a fresh coat of paint.

In May 2020, when the 150th anniversary of Manitoba was being celebrated, I went to Riel House and took my children to the site in hopes of teaching them more about Louis Riel. The freshly painted building was locked. Several historical information plaques were padlocked. Even though it was during the pandemic, I was surprised to see historic plaques locked shut—quashing the potential to teach the history. On Louis Riel Day 2021, to my surprise, the history

was still inaccessible—a very explicit encounter of the hidden curriculum that taught that Riel's story was not worth sharing.

Figure 4.1

Riel House Lock

Note. Photo taken by K. Ferguson, 2021.

I revisited Riel House during different seasons and my engagement with this place was influenced by my doctoral coursework in curriculum studies. On Louis Riel Day 2021, I visited with my eldest son, and I created a Métis sash design with soil and snow leading up the driveway and around the Riels' house. We posted this to social media in hopes of bringing attention to the site. In the spring, I returned to the site for a walk with Kanien'kehá: ka scholar Dr. Brian Rice. During a University of Manitoba Indigenous land-based learning course, Dr. Rice led long walks and encouraged us to consider Indigenous perspectives through ways of seeing, relating, knowing, and doing (Rice, 2005). His stories about this site brought my attention to things that were no longer there—*unsights* of this place. For example, pathways to the river where the Riel family would have walked were no longer visible or accessible. The pathways were now entirely

blocked by housing developments. Through these encounters I learned what the National Historic Site was intentionally *not* teaching about.

While the Riel family house appears to maintain the nostalgic real-house feel, the barriers, locked doors, padlocked plaques of history, and settler residential housing developments blocking access to the river all contribute to a fort-like quality—recalling Donald's concept of *pedagogy of the fort* (2009, 2012). Fort pedagogy emphasizes perceived divides and can reinscribe who or what is inside/outside accepted citizenry, determines what norms are accepted or whose cultures and histories are valued (Donald, 2012).

Figure 4.2

Locked Information Plaques of Riel House Parks Canada National Heritage Site and Information Centre

Note. Photo taken by K. Ferguson, 2021.

Within the *logic of elimination* which "strives for the dissolution of native societies" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388), displacements and erasures are understood as part of a broader settler

colonial project that requires removals of land and lives. Throughout this chapter, I refer to these as *unsights* which work as colonial tools— connections which were not explicitly there. The locked doors, the historical information behind padlocks, through ongoing walks and artworks prompted critical action, and reflection created an opening to understand this historic river location with more depth.

The most significant realization from Riel House was the loss of connection to the Red River. One of the ways that Métis land rights were usurped was through Métis "scrip"—land entitlements. According to Indigenous rights lawyer Jason Madden, "The intention of scrip was to actually provide equitable settlements of Métis—but what was devised was a system that never got lands in the hands of Métis ... essentially the largest land swindle in North America," (Madden, as cited in Muzyka, 2020, para. 2). The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) highlights that "those who tried to collect the land they were owed encountered delays, inefficiency, stonewalling and outright scams" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013). Métis were promised 1.4 million acres in the Manitoba Treaty which Canada failed to deliver (Toews, 2018). As Canada expanded its powers and ways of taking over territories and existing systems, the complex and evolving nature of Métis identity served as a problem for national and provincial governments who had imperialist beliefs and wanted white-European dominance over Canada (Dr. B. Rice, Kanien'kehá:ka, personal communication, June 10, 2021). Métis did not fit neatly into Canada's colonial categories and their position between jurisdictional boundaries resulted in their being "subject to inconsistent and disorganized policies" (Logan, 2008, p. 79). According to the RCAP (Canada, 1996), "Their [Métis] rights, ignored and abused for generations, are in urgent need of recognition and restoration" (p. 4).

Riel House is an almost forgotten space that teaches about the loss of Métis scrip and forced disconnection of Métis from land near the river. I see how this "swindling" continued and am curious about how the prominent Riel family lost access to the river. In this case, I see part of the bigger picture of how "settler colonialism makes property and unmakes Indigenous land" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2018). I want to know how housing developments have budged in-between and all around this heritage site. Tuck and McKenzie (2018) restate: "When land is recast as property, place becomes exchangeable, saleable, and stealable" (p. 64). Historically, the river lots were more than sought-after real estate properties; they provided access to water for families, freedom of mobility, and cultural connections. At the Parks Canada site, only one commemorative plaque was visible highlighting the map of the grounds, but it did not show the location of the river where many social activities would have occurred. This type of historic erasure minimized Métis attachment to land and waterways and the river's significance in the formation of cultural knowledges and identities.

To share this learning of systematic usurping of Métis lands, I created an installation in the parking lot of Riel House. I created this soil art by bringing soil from my yard to the site. I had a plan in mind. However, I was flexible to the elements and remained aware of physical and ephemeral aspects in the surrounding environment and attuned to human, non-human species, and more-than-human encounters (Donald, 2021). Drawing upon the artistic element of space, I created the symbols from the Métis flag using positive space by pouring the soil gently by hand over a stencil I designed. In contrast, I also used negative space to create the footprints to mark the story of erasure of access to the river. While foot traffic is low, and the parking lot is rarely used, the audience for this piece includes Winnipeg residents living on Métis land, whose backyards look onto this site. For the families who bought properties, potentially without

knowing of the significance of this place, this art functions as an activist land acknowledgement and may be an eerie reminder of the site's history and of settler colonialism as an ongoing force. The repurposing of the Riel family land for economic gain and new housing development appeared to occur without question. This separation of the Métis land from the river access was detrimental to Métis livelihood and severed cultural ties to the river because "the rivers were the highways for the Métis and cutting off river access resulted in the loss of connection with their way of life" (Dr. B. Rice, Kanien'kehá:ka, personal communication, June 10, 2021).

Figure 4.3

Pop-up soil Installation at Riel House

Note. Photo taken by K. Ferguson, 2021.

Métis symbols are placed within parking lot spaces to represent the idea of reserving and re-claiming this place and as a symbol of power. It echoes the way Indigenous peoples were

pushed to reserve lands and the stalls are reminiscent of the traditional ways Métis distributed land along the river. Oppression of Métis through land scrips and disconnection from lands and water is a curriculum area that needs more attention. The design is meant to direct attention to the lack of river access, now replaced with a housing development called River Pointe that includes streets such as "Settlers Way." The absence of footprints is an eerie reminder of who walked here and how the land has been re-appropriated. The Riel family walked toward the river, but today access is blocked. Creating this art revealed to residents that historically, this property extended to the river. To emphasize this, I utilized the row of angled concrete blocks in combination with soil to emphasize arrows pointing toward the river. I purposely left the artwork in place to return naturally back to the earth to bring attention to the idea of removing my sense of ownership of the piece and to teach myself continually that processes of de-colonization are "always involving recalibrations of human relationships to land" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2018).

During this research, the construction of a new apartment building called "The Pearl" emerged along the Red River near Riel House. Surrounding the apartment lined billboards giving credit to the businesses which have silently taken over. The site of "The Pearl" is evidence of settler colonialism along the Red River in between the Riel House site and one of the city's commemorative aqueduct monuments. The corporate billboard fence creates a fort-like border for this building site which highlights powerful neoliberal branding of "settler futurity" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). This bold advertising is in stark contrast to the hidden histories within the locked information plaques at Riel House. The settler colonial forces are so noticeable and unsightly in these places—yet they may remain largely un-seen and have been normalized to the public.

Figure 4.4

Settler Colonialism and The Pearl Along the River

Note. Photo taken by K. Ferguson, 2022.

Rooster Town Kettle

My inquiries around accessibility to the river led me to wonder: Where did Métis communities re-locate? One community where Métis re-settled was Rooster Town, or Pakan Town—the Michif word for hazelnut, as the Métis themselves refer to it (City of Winnipeg, 2022a). Rooster Town was a small community of around 250 people who lived on the outskirts of the city from 1901 to 1961 (August, 2019) and the housing consisted of using railway remnants and other found materials (Tait, 2018). Toews (2018) describes the 1950s in Winnipeg as a time when the city's expansion "coalesced with a revitalized racialism" (p. 114). Indigenous people of Winnipeg were pushed out to the edges of Winnipeg by the Canadian state (Toews, 2018) and forced to find new places to live as their land went to European settlers (Tait, 2008).

Through visual methods, Métis artist Ian August brings attention to such water injustices

and conveys that access to clean water remains a current and crucial issue for many Indigenous communities (August, 2019). August's 2019 piece, called *Rooster Town Kettle*, is a larger-than-life kettle located near a bus junction in former Rooster Town. This art installation is relatively new and not yet well known. August modelled the design after a common kitchen fixture of the Rooster Town community which "would have had a permanent place on every wood stove in every home in Rooster Town" (August, 2019, para. 5). The kettle was an indication of how the Métis built a strong sense of solidarity—water was central to healthy communities and social life. Rooster Town was not considered part of the city during the early part of the 20th century and therefore many services (including running water) were inaccessible. Residents had to walk a kilometre to retrieve water from the closest pump (Tait, 2008).

Although there was poverty and overcrowding in Rooster Town (Tait, 2008), the Métis families developed strong community ties, and it was a hub for Métis culture. Unfortunately, the livelihood that Métis communities resiliently sought to revive was disregarded by city developers who paid families a measly sum to relocate to the inner city of Winnipeg. Following the pattern of settler colonial removals, Rooster Town was further displaced in the 1950s when the city sought to develop the land for commercial property and what would become Grant Park Mall, a small shopping centre which is now a popular neighbourhood place in the south end of Winnipeg. While Grant Park Mall and Grant Avenue are named after Cuthbert Grant, the Métis leader responsible for uniting the Métis nation (Dr. B. Rice, Kanien'kehá:ka, personal communication, June 10, 2021), this legacy is not well known.

August's installation makes a powerful statement about access to water. During my first walk to the kettle, I thought it was whimsical. After subsequent walks and learning new stories, I began to see layered meanings. The welcoming spirit of Métis communities who built

relationships over tea was juxtaposed with the way they were treated in a place people now commonly refer to as the homeland of the Red River Métis. The physical design and size of the kettle intentionally represents the minimum amount of water that would need to be boiled daily for the community of 250 who lived in Rooster Town "as identified by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 64/292, the Human Right to Water and Sanitation" (August, 2019, para. 6). August (2019) also includes Fetching Water silhouettes, which depict the physical act of how the Métis of Pakan Town "carried water in buckets, filled empty dairy cans to pull by sled, or paid for water delivered by horse and cart" (August, n.d., para. 3). This long walk would have been a tremendous challenge in long, frigid Winnipeg winters.

Nearby *Rooster Town Kettle*, the City of Winnipeg recently decided to rename a park to remember the displaced Métis community (Lam, 2022). This is a park that includes a library which shares historical images of Rooster Town, but it is the beautiful and accessible playground proudly stamped by the neoliberal branding of "Canadian Tire" that attracts the attention. It must be said that water has returned as a central (albeit entirely different) hub of activity. Public nods to water are all around the area. Ironically, next to Pakan Town park is Pan Am Pool, a large Olympic-size pool—a "premier aquatic facility" (City of Winnipeg, 2022b) and recreation centre that takes prominent place on Poseidon Bay within this re-designed area and former Métis community.

Figure 4.5

Rooster Town Kettle (August 2019)

Note. Photo taken by K. Ferguson, 2021.

From Denials to Re-Enacted Remembering

Critical inquiries into Riel House, *Rooster Town Kettle*, and Perry's work highlighting the government-enforced exile of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation have all converged here to show the flow of colonialism more clearly. Perry (2016) brought my attention to how the settler colonial achievement of the aqueduct is celebrated in several places within Winnipeg. There is an arch-shaped monument honouring engineers, boards of commissioners, and administrators that mimics the design of the aqueduct and proclaims it "was constructed to bring water by gravity

from Lake of the Woods" (City of Winnipeg, 1960) and portrays the usurping of water from the lake as natural and as if water was meant to be taken. This example of an aqueduct commemoration is located close to Riel House, next to "The Pearl" development at the intersection of River Road and a high-traffic roadway: Bishop Grandin Boulevard, named after a Roman Catholic bishop who is infamously known as an architect of the residential school system. It was recently renamed Abinojii Mikanah, meaning "children's road" in Ojibway (MacLean, 2023).

Commemorations of Winnipeg's aqueduct are simultaneously public commemorations *and* public denials. Perry aptly points out: "None of these monuments or plaques gives a word or an image to Indigenous history of the Aqueduct" (2016, pp. 91–93). This history of the aqueduct brings attention to "how the settler colonial politics of dispossession depends on erasure and regularly *re-enacted forgetting* (Perry, 2016, p. 96; emphasis added). The example of the Winnipeg Aqueduct alongside stories of displacement of Métis communities shows how denying access to water is also denying the right to security through a denial of cultural practices. This inquiry becomes a way of *re-enacted remembering*—to develop new relationships to land and waters beyond simply "resources" and toward more relational connections.

Settler Colonial Unsights and Conclusions

This research is one part of a sustained journey of action. Each walk and installation envision new kinds of relationships to places and takes action to understand topics deserving of more attention. The layering of frameworks such as a/r/tography and ethical relationality in places of public pedagogy have deepened my understandings of problematic settler colonial dynamics in sites of Indigenous significance. By zooming into the stories of specific sites, I can see examples of what place-based processes of colonialism and settler colonialism looks like in

Winnipeg. This helps me to engage less metaphorically and more relationally and realistically with the concept of decolonization.

Access to water and ongoing displacements in Winnipeg are themes that emerged through a critical analysis of the settler colonial erasures (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Wolfe, 2006). As Winnipeg continues to celebrate modern expansions, there is a risk of forgetting about past (and current) injustices connected with water. In this case, critical place inquiry began at one historical site, but the living inquiry of becoming a/r/tography enabled me to see new connections between seemingly disconnected places. Similarly, while I initially focused on the hidden curriculum at one historic site, the generative processes of walking, creating arts-based interventions, and writing revealed a broader normalization of settler colonial networks to many places. While some of these sites are seemingly disconnected, there was value in bringing together these places to reveal more clearly where colonial erasures and misrepresentations have been enacted. For example, stories of the *Rooster Town Kettle* and aqueduct commemoration show that while the city of Winnipeg was getting a new, safer water source, Métis communities were actively moved away from water. Connections to water flow through each of them, but so do stories of neoliberalism, settler colonialism, racial capitalism (Toews, 2018). When learning the stories of each place, there appears to be a type of synergy in between the place-based stories, reminding me of Aoki's (2004) "curriculum of the in-between." This study provides a sense of how urban development of Winnipeg systematically tried to sever Indigenous peoples and their connections to water and land. Perry (2016) indicates: "As Cree, Metis, and Anishinaabe people were in different ways put down, eliminated, or relocated, urban growth was cultivated and celebrated as a particular manifestation of colonial and capitalist

success" (p. 46). Looking critically and creatively at places has generated interdisciplinary, colonial case studies that can inform new relationships.

Perspectives of land and water that extend beyond simple resources to be extracted is imperative for our survival. Places of public pedagogy reveal the powers of the Indian Act and Métis scrip policies to legitimize dispossessions that call for anti-racist, decolonial, and Indigenist orientations to curriculum. While First Nations and Métis communities have maintained cultural practices and sacred connections to water, removals of Métis communities away from the Red River, as well as physical disconnections from water and land for Anishinaabe communities in the case of Shoal Lake 40, have shown the intersecting ways that governments have denied access to water for a variety of nations.

One of the major *unsights* revealed here is the failure of governments to support the holistic health of Indigenous communities. The *National Inquiry* (2019) states: "We demand a world within which First Nations, Inuit, and Métis families can raise their children with the same safety, security, and human rights that non-Indigenous families do, along with full respect for the Indigenous and human rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis families" (p. 54). The unsightly generational removals are powerful colonial techniques with long-lasting impacts.

The arts-based components from this study are used as pedagogical tools within teacher workshops. From this work, I design walks for teachers to engage beyond classroom spaces to see and feel these *unsights in situ*. I have invited teachers to inquire into water injustices with students and to utilize the power of their voices to support Indigenous sovereignty and reclamation of power and place. I have also incorporated water into my work with soil, which echoes back to the name for Winnipeg—where the water is murky.

This work reveals missed opportunities within Métis heritage sites to engage deeper understandings of Métis culture and identities and what it means to live on the Métis homeland. I see how myths of meritocracy (McLean, 2018) become reinforced when ongoing displacement, resettlements, and removals of Indigenous peoples become "commonsense logics" (Donald, 2021)—clearing the way for settler colonial logics to take root.

Critical place inquiries have noteworthy curricular potential. By centring on specific places and through sustained artistic and reflexive practice, Indigenous-settler relations move from the abstract to a physical foundation—a common ground for intersecting histories and starting place for activism. What differences and histories need to be engaged and what forms of justice do I need to work toward? In this case, *unsights* around water justice and neoliberalism emerged. Furthermore, creating art with soil at Riel House made me think deeper about ongoing forms of settler colonialism and oppression that begin when settlers arrive and invade, and continue each day settlers live on Indigenous territories (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). Working with soil while learning more about how settler colonialism has been enacted has made me more aware of my positionality in ongoing colonial projects as a white settler.

Earth-based art through soil work began as part of a/r/tography practice but is becoming a new form of meaning making and potential methodology which I plan to elaborate upon in subsequent writing and research as new questions have emerged. I found designing art pieces using soil is also becoming a powerful tool for reflexivity and for understanding the complexities around decolonizing practices. I still want to work past metaphorical uses of decolonization and to draw more from Indigenous stories and worldviews. I hope this encourages people to view their local environments through new lenses.

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. Where can you see evidence of settler colonialism in your specific context?
2. Given your own positionality (settler, Indigenous, refugee, racialized individual, etc.) how can you begin the work of decolonizing your own curricular practices or places of public pedagogy?

Key Terms:

***Critical Place Inquiries*:** is a concept derived from Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie which calls for making the dynamic notion of place more central in qualitative research and moves towards methods and methodologies that engage Indigenous worldviews in relation to land and settler colonial politics in relation to places.

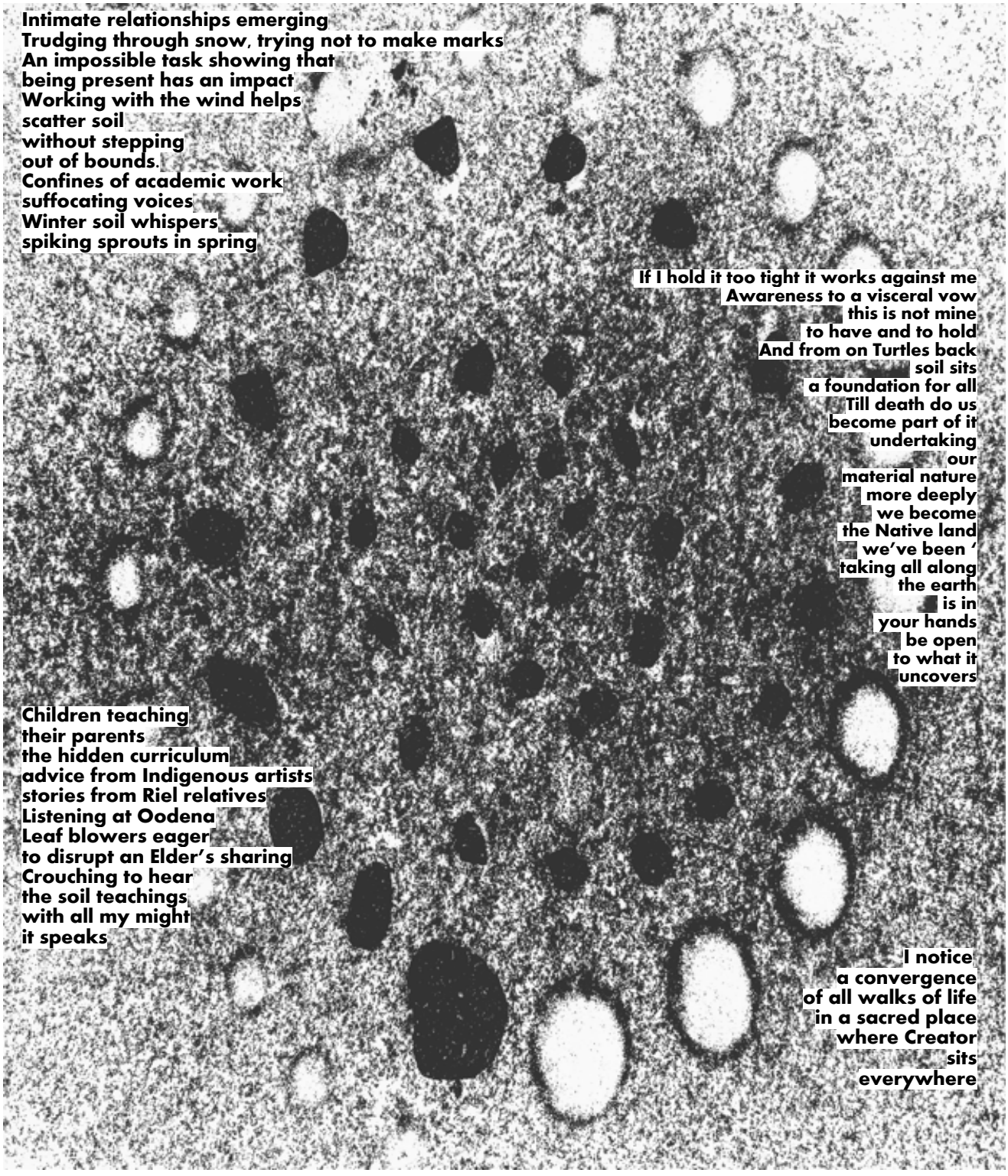
***Settler Colonialism*:** is an ongoing form of colonialism in which settlers displace people and take over spaces, places, and land.

***A/r/tography*:** a form of living inquiry which is an innovative arts-based approach recognized as a distinct methodology which engages ongoing creative works, reflection and writing as artist/researcher/teacher.

***Arts-based*:** describes approaches that give centrality to the arts during multiple phases of the research process to generate and communicate new insights, information, questions, and knowledges.

LIVING LINK

Down to Earth: A Response to Soil Teachings and Poetic Soilwork Synthesis



BODY OF WORK

Assemblage of Artistic Compositions, Horizons, Decompositions, and Further Inquiry

This final chapter re-assembles the *Matryoshka* by bringing together artistic analysis through compositions and decompositions, further renderings and sensibilities of soil, next steps, and the broader relevance of this work. The earth-based art (soilwork) that I began through pop-up soil installations in 2017 has supported several years of analyzing topics, such as reconciliation, hidden curriculum, systemic violence in the form of erasures, displacements, and removals. After reflecting on each of the pieces and linking them together, this assemblage reconnects to the overarching research questions: 1) *How can critical place inquiries and arts-based inquiries using pop-up soil art installations support (public engagement and teacher education with) decolonizing educational praxis in settler-colonial systems?* and 2) *What does earth-based art (soilwork) offer as an emerging methodology?* This chapter also surfaces shifts toward more relational connections to people and places. I share new extensions for collaborative teams and participatory research workshops and teaching opportunities to meet a variety of educational goals. This *Matryoshka* has many more entities and installations than featured here. I conclude by sharing implications for further art, research, and teaching.

Integrated throughout this chapter are my own layers of limitations. I have undoubtedly made mistakes or omissions throughout. At the outset, I know the size and scope of this research may be a limitation. My hope is that the option to read and access the shorter individual manuscripts and the additional living links will bring this research to life.

Converging Arts-based Approaches and Critical Place Inquiry

I combined a multifaceted critical place inquiry alongside a/r/tography with earth-focused arts-based practices that show intersections *in-between* history, politics, art, and

education grounded in land. Earth-based mediums combined with systematic place-based inquiries, action research, and personal a/r/tography practice supported the creation of a soilwork topography (originally shared in ForeGround). This topography describes the three horizons that show various ways in which I worked with soil. These approaches ventured beyond established curricular boundaries and encourage thinking critically about how the terms decolonization and relationality can be engaged within settler-colonial educational systems in a place such as Winnipeg. As a/r/tographer, I examined the layered histories of places through the combination of public conversations, walking, art making and writing/graphy, designing workshops and art experiences, and personal praxis of private soilwork at home. Thinking about place through an artistic lens and a relevant medium that was significant to place helped to attend to Indigenous perspectives of place. All four manuscripts demonstrate theoretical frameworks that have been grounded with a common earth-based medium. I hope this topography of soilwork is a valuable contribution to research and the field of education, and that it can support more people in working through this layered approach.

Public engagements gave insights into settler colonialism, tendency of innocence, and restored relational connections. For example, the colonial encounters or surprising confrontations that occurred helped me notice ways media responded, missed opportunities for education, or dangerous discourses of disposability, as shared in **"Murky Waters".** Conversations and connections to people when creating installations in each place or when sharing the work in workshops or presentations gave new stories that enriched my understanding of place and thus guided this inquiry. Gasps when people heard "215" was destroyed, connections to Riel relatives while I was creating the art, or questions from workshop participants asking if I had offered

tobacco were reflexive moments that changed my approaches to a/r/tography towards becoming more informed by public reactions and responses. I also became prepared for confrontations.

Besides learning from public engagements, I learned more about the significance of soil within my family. I considered how land influenced my family's way of life alongside learning about the teachings of soil and the significance of land to Indigenous communities. I engaged with these differences through soilwork. I learned how to convey ideas through soil. I learned that soil is not as easy to work with as it may seem. It seems to have a mind of its own; it does not move where we expect when creating work outside, and the artists intention and design never goes exactly as expected because natural elements are part of the process. In the example of every installation, I was challenged to let go and work with the weather and local environment. Overtime, I learned to show gratitude back to the earth, not as a performative action but as a necessary part of my ongoing work, teaching, and creative practice. I hesitated to do this for a long time because I did not want to be appropriative, but I realized that it was a relational connection to land that developed through this work. The advice of Knowledge Keeper Brenda Longclaws gave me the permission I needed. Working with soil over a multi-year period showed how the soilwork became more sophisticated over time, influenced primarily from artivism within Winnipeg, experiences learning from Indigenous artistic and permanent public installations such as ones at Winnipeg's Forks location, and through working in collaboration with teams of teachers and learning from Elders.

I have combined the problem-oriented approach of the arts, discourse analysis, and the openness of a/r/tography with a commitment towards sustainable artistic practices. This approach became a unique way to study place and gave new ways of thinking about Indigenous materials, such as soil and the land of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Through this layering of methodologies, I

developed an awareness of what relational making can be in conjunction with Indigenous aesthetics, which are always connected to land and place. Had I not melded a/r/tography with critical place inquiries, I may not have noticed this. I am not sure how many Indigenous researchers have taken up a/r/tography, but I see that the combination of CPI and this way of researching could be supportive of Indigenous worldviews and methodologies.

Similar to how the rivers in Winnipeg, Manitoba converge at the Forks, CPI and a/r/tography bring together new insights and *unsights* regarding relationships and responsibilities around place and how people create community. As a researcher, CPI and a/r/tography encouraged a type of reflexivity and praxis that was able to move learning beyond the walls of the system's existing structures. The combination of CPI and a/r/tography has given solutions that can move within walls but are also comfortable staying outside of them as well. For example, I developed ways of trying to understand place through soil in online sessions, in-person walking workshops, and art making experiences as well as ways to bring in soil into post-secondary spaces. What has emerged may be akin to learning that may have existed pre-colonization that thinks flexibly beyond the school as places for powerful learning and seriously considers land-as-teacher-relationship.

Arts-based approaches alongside critical place inquiries have uncovered new ways of beginning difficult conversations with teachers and students. **"Unearthing Truths"** began this dissertation by focusing on understanding the place of my own home and responding to the TRCs *Calls to Action* (2015) on private property as a valuable beginning to think through the medium of soil in relation to Canada's soiled history. The involvement of my children in several of the installations and at all sites, in varying capacities, helped me think carefully about how to mobilize this work in ways that are meaningful for early years learners. When visiting each of

these places, I talked with my sons about how children were treated at Indian Residential Schools, of the life and death of Louis Riel and Canada's betrayal of him, of how many First Nations communities do not have access to clean water, and of how a system was designed to take it away. In these moments with them, I responded to their insightful questions on these topics and synthesized the learning to the most essential elements. Also, I found a way to adapt workshops for young students and to bring attention to MMIWG in age-appropriate ways, such as looking at creating handprints with soil, making offerings of red rose petals on the monument, and creating ribbon ties to add to a place of honour. I see these gestures as both actions and public provocations.

While my focus has been on understanding more about Winnipeg, Manitoba, soil tells new perspectives of stories of sovereign nations and their self-determination efforts, and promotes thinking about land-based issues, such as treaties or takeovers of unceded territories through different renderings that engage visually and in embodied ways with these terms. As I write, there are pivotal moments unfolding in the world that are connected to land. Ukraine is still being attacked by Russia and newly elected U.S. President Donald Trump has begun to interfere in negotiations for Ukraine's valuable and rare earth and minerals. Colonial terms, such as terra nullius and manifest destiny, have been dusted off and are alive and well in the practices of the new Trump administration in the USA, which is threatening to take over the sovereign nations of Greenland, the Gaza strip in Palestine, and Canada. Indigenous leader Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak (2025) has called for leadership:

> This land has been home to sovereign Nations since time immemorial, with inherent rights to our lands, waters, and resources that predate colonial systems. While we do not seek permission to uphold our responsibilities to the land and our people, we welcome

> partnerships rooted in mutual respect. True leadership honours all Nations equally, and we will continue to stand strong for our people, our rights, and our future. (Assembly of First Nations, 2025, para. 2)

Soil as a medium, method, or mother are three ways I worked with soil to spark various stances towards land in this dissertation. Settler ontologies that view land as capital, resource, commodity and perceive that land is there for the taking. This way of understanding silences Indigenous and relational, reciprocal ontologies of land that view and treat land as a relative with whom we live, wherever we are on the earth, and gives us life. So many of what I have unearthed, such as the displacements and dispossessions, fort pedagogies, ideas connected to reclaiming power and place, under-understandings, and "re-enacted forgetting" (Perry, 2016, p. 96) can all be applied to thinking critically about how power functions within places in the current moment. How we teach new generations to respect the stories and sentience of land and water, and people's long-standing relationships with land and water that transcend capitalistic philosophies, will impact the future of sovereign nations and the sustainability of the planet.

Methodological Potential

These four soil stories demonstrated methodologies of multimodal action-oriented studies (through walking and soil artwork) that re-imagined, re-presenced, and re-storied perspectives of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Soil installations began as an artistic method, with soil as an artistic medium, and has emerged as a methodology with its own artistic renderings that support relational connections to land and place. The soilwork stories within the multi-site critical place inquiry brought public awareness and engagement to inter-connections between earth, water, air, people, and intra-actions within the *Matryoshka* of manuscripts.

Soil Renderings as De/Compositions

To further bring this concluding Body of Work *down to earth*, I shared soilwork renderings that can be described as de/compositions. Soilwork composing and decomposing processes are a way of describing what I have learned through the active combination of creating with soil, walking, writing, and assembling. Soil composes and generates new life. Soil also is material created by a breakdown and decomposition of materials. Soil de/compositions help answer *how* and *why* soil is a process of decolonizing educational practices and *how* understanding this process might support teacher education. I hope the idea of compositions and decompositions can be taken up further in K-12 and post-secondary contexts, to support fruitful engagements with Ermine's (2007) pivotal concept of ethical space. There are parallels, too, with colonial and decolonial or anticolonial approaches. Soilwork supported me in decolonial praxis by activating thinking more critically about settler identity, racism, colonialism, whiteness, Indigenous specific racism, systemic factors, intersectionality, gender-based violence, and land-based knowledges. One way my critical transformation happened is through constant contact with the soil, using my body. I found the idea of embodied practice was used superficially. I purposefully did not use many typical tools and artist's implements. Having soil in my hands made me an active participant in learning about land through the process, without denying the very real settler activity of land-takeover and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) view of the dirtiness of historical practices of the past.

To extend the idea, new earth-based artistic renderings featured throughout this dissertation can be thought of as both *compositions* and *decompositions*. I first brought this connection forth to elicit deeper reflection of the historical dumping at the Forks site (McLeod, 1986) during learning walks at the Forks in 2021-2023 and in artmaking experiences in 2023-2024. I followed group composing opportunities around public art with discussions about de-

composing at a lesser-known place of composting stations, off the regular pathways to bring attention to "Target Zero" (Forks, 2024, para. 2)—an initiative to improve responsible environmental practices, which includes efforts such as using geothermal energy and biofuels, composting, ensuring better water usage, conducting more recycling, and creating a public orchard. The composting site was a site of public pedagogy that I think brought critical attention to the Forks as a site with a problematic history and to the effort needed to repair the relationship with land. I considered: *What histories or practices need to be exposed and broken down for more sustainable practices to sprout?*

When walking with teachers, I critiqued the notion of "target zero", discussing how sustainability is often minimized to conversations surrounding only waste management. While I appreciated the Forks' effort to produce less waste, I pushed this further by surfacing the story that Tina Fontaine's body was pulled from the Red River, and I identified the urgency for the citizens of Winnipeg to aspire to bigger goals to eliminate systemic racism and gendered-based violence so that zero women will be found in the muddy waters of the rivers. To further address systemic violences towards women, girls, and gender diverse peoples, I designed learning experiences with teachers in courses and professional learning opportunities with school teams to learn more from the *National Inquiry* and Calls to Justice. During walks at the Forks location, I encouraged teachers to spend time reading stories of Manitoba women from the CBC database and *Their Voices Will Guide Us* (Bearhead, 2019) while sitting on the green grass encircling the MMIWG monument. We brought the women's names back to the land by listening deeply and with respect to their stories. We also engaged with spiritual connections to the knowledge we were learning about and witnessing through the stories of Manitoba women. We wrote their names on red cotton ties and honoured them by placing the ribbon ties on trees near the

monument. By learning their stories of disappearances and displacements, we moved beyond statistics to help teachers see the injustices more clearly, not as isolated incidences. Teachers expressed how this gave them urgency to act and has prompted them to read more into the materials of the *National Inquiry*. This action of layering place, art, action, and connection to land bring this research *down to earth*.

In another manuscript (not included here), I have worked through collaborative writing opportunities with settler artists and teachers engaging with place through dance/movement and digital movie making. I shared how land as a medium or material (immanent, embodied) was also ephemeral and transcendent (engaging spiritual and affective dimensions) by thinking through movements, through digital media, and through visceral responses to and through creating with land. Thinking about the earth as mother and as relative who I have learned to thank are ways that engage these dimensions. We focused on shared affective aspects of our work and chose to focus on *decomposing pedagogies* to articulate a counternarrative approach to standardized educational approaches, and we saw the value in processes of "becoming/making/meaning-making that are always *something else/more/different* and even *less*" (Honeyford et al., 2025, p. 161). I continue to build on this idea and conceptualize soil as always part of a composition to support the new and re-growth, always also in a decomposition process to breakdown the old—a relational connection to old and new, past, present, and future, yet inseparable. I continue to practice processes of composing (through creating art installations) and decomposing (analyzing, thinking through sediments of soil) to understand Winnipeg as a place embedded with unique significance. De/composing echos Battiste's (2013; n.d.) notion of layered decolonizing practices—de-construction and re-construction—deconstructing Eurocentric privileges, systems, lenses, imperialism, land appropriation, and degradation, and

embracing a reconstructing layer, which includes renewing Indigenous ways of life and knowledge systems, and relational ways of being and learning from land. The terms also bond the tension between coloniality and anticolonial work, and support this *Matryoshka* by showing that knowledge and 'what now' aspects from the manuscripts come through interconnected processes of assembling and breaking apart. Many of the soil renderings use the "/" symbol to convey this relationship, but not as a mere esoteric literary feature but to symbolize growth and renewal, and to convey the ethical space that I noticed through soilwork.

Soil sensibilities show the semiotic and symbolic significance of the soil through renderings that are relevant to the artistic process and meaningful to the research questions and modes of teaching. Soilwork renderings serve as epistemological supports about the nature of thinking in relation to soil and colonial issues. The final renderings include the following.

Honouring and Offering. The importance of honouring and offering gratitude to soil has been a pivotal component of this research that emerged at the later stages. As I was assembling these manuscripts together and working collaboratively in a Manitoba inquiry pod as part of the case study of University of Manitoba, I sought guidance from Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers beyond the work shared in the manuscripts. Returning the soil in a small way was a decolonizing attempt, but over time, the act became less tokenistic. One way to honour land is by showing gratitude by offering tobacco as part of preparing myself to work with land. Knowledge Keeper Brenda Longclaws taught me that anytime I am working with land, I should offer tobacco to the earth because I am taking from the earth and need to give back something in return as a practice of reciprocity. This action and guidance changed my work. Beginning soilwork with a gesture of gratitude was not part of the artistic process but showed how this work was ceremonial and an honour. I have offered tobacco to Sherry Copenance to learn more about

soil teachings with our Manitoba Inquiry pod and research team. The knowledge she shared continues to guide my ongoing work.

Under/standings. A/r/tography and soilwork deepened opportunities to learn about myself, and *what* I thought I knew about places and *how* I thought I would learn about places. The learning initially was more historically based and concerned more about reading texts. That learning became more intertwined with relational ideas connected to places that related to the history but was developed through experiential learning, listening, and reading land as a text. **"Unearthing Truths"** highlighted that anticolonial approaches are needed, and I showed how soilwork can be an aesthetic action to understand. When working with soil, there are inevitable layers that show how meanings are layered; what is visible at a particular place or public art installation requires further critical engagement. I noticed that terms such as myths and misconceptions are often used when contemplating learning more about Canada's true history. I introduced the term, under-understandings, as another way of considering this type of learning. Perhaps some nuanced issues may benefit from this term, which does not imply a right and wrong, but acknowledges that understandings are layered and often contain a grey area. Soil revealed a way of thinking above and underground as well as how decisions do not just effect humans but have consequences that we may feel beneath our feet, albeit perhaps not immediately, but in time. The word, understandings, also made me think of land as a place where we stand and consider how to engage with the ontological aspects and perspectives of land to fully understand a place. What is under-understood? Where do we stand? What do we value and believe? What is a myth or misunderstanding or an under-understanding?

Relief. Relief refers to the carving-like forms called relief sculptures that can be created with soil when I used volume and dimension of the soil and then used a method such as carving

out shapes and images. It also connects to land as a source of grief and could move towards a source of relief. Overtime, I have noticed how the process of working with soil has helped me to process my own grief. While my grief is not connected to a colonial experience, soil can activate this human feeling. Soilwork can be a supportive mode of healing (Iseke-Barnes & Estrada, 2008) and a form of relationality, and when used by Indigenous artists, could be used to activate the idea of *art as medicine* (Fontaine, 2024; Kisa MacIsaac, 2024). While it is not an Indigenous methodology, it embeds Indigenous ideas and frameworks.

Breathing. Breathing life into the work is a rendering that connects to creation stories. Both Biblical traditions and the creation stories of Adam and Eve contrast greatly from Indigenous creation stories in that the former are centred on the man and the latter on the female, Sky Woman. Both these stories use breath and earth to activate humanity and reveal the potential of earth to give life. I brought the practice of using breath from my studying of ancient iconography practices, which uses breathing as a way to adhere materials, such as clay and gold. When creating with soil, breathing was a way to move soil with minimal impact and without my hands. Even if we try not to make a mark in the soil, just by being, our breath is part of the soil's cycle. Through breathing, we are connected to the plants that grow in the soil.

Re/sourced. This rendering surfaced in **"Red River Removals"**. It connected to how land and water was viewed. It activated the idea of differing and often conflicting views of land (land as resource/commodity or land as relative) and how these perspectives have shifted over time. The term also connects to an overarching idea that came through art creation workshops where participants asked me questions that made me think about where I get soil from.

Findings/Foundings. In traditional IMDR dissertations and qualitative research projects, findings are typically included; however, a/r/tography as a methodology does not lend itself to

clear findings. Soilwork disrupts this idea of findings by activating alternative notions of foundings. Soilwork emphasizes foundational pieces to meaning making, resistance, significance of place, and the need for relational practices in the research process. Soilwork, throughout the various horizons and ways this a/r/tography practice has looked (personal praxis, collaborative workshops, and public provocations), has helped me to see how understanding settler colonialism is a founding piece to the *Matryoshka,* one that encompasses a multi-site critical inquiry into Winnipeg Manitoba. This dissertation considered what is the foundational groundwork that we need to know about places and about our history. Each manuscript shared information and learning through a variety of ways; some of this learning is taken up further as foundations for my teaching and for use in professional learning workshops (which are not visible here). This idea originally surfaced within the second manuscript, **"Homeland"**. Founding activist actions are inherent in the 'founding' of the province of Manitoba when thinking critically about the omission of Riel.

Soilwork as Decolonial Praxis

This research expressed a form of praxis that gave life to the generative horizons of soilwork and surfaced unique artistic land-based renderings. Each rendering had its own story and taught me something different about the materials, about myself, and about the work that is needed around decolonizing praxis and exposing settler colonialism.

This section outlines how soilwork exposed settler colonialism, brought attention to land and place, and had the potential to resist ongoing coloniality. Anticolonial approaches should be localized in particular places (Carlson, 2016). This research was localized, and the soil renderings, using processes that engage negative and positive space, seen as metaphorical ways of highlighting specific facets of *both* colonialism and anticolonialism that have come through

social and soiled engagements. The *coverings* and *uncoverings* were sensibilities that surfaced in the manuscripts (see **"Murky Waters"**), which helped to think about the push and pull of colonialism and decolonial approaches. I have brought this rendering into workshops where participants create soil art by uncovering truths and reading them aloud or create found poetry with stories where specific words are uncovered. While recognizing the struggle, Bang et al. (2014) shared that there is benefit in looking for the covered tracks of colonization by desettling settler colonialism and melding the search for colonial footprints alongside learning about land-based perspectives and engaging with and on the land. Enhanced through Indigenous perspectives, my soil installations served to subvert colonial discourses in particular places, bringing critical attention to the stories of track covering. **"Unearthing Truths"** shared how the media covered my work to honour the children by ignorantly tracking tire prints across the piece, which further reinforced the ongoing force of colonialism. **"Homeland"** drew upon the removal of Riel's historic contribution from the Fort to boldly place him in the centre. **"Murky Waters"** and **"Red River Removals"** told stories that need more attention, and I challenged the attempt to silence these stories by making a connection to land and water (or soil and snow in **"Murky Waters"**) and soil pathways of footprints towards the river (in **"Red River Removals").** These examples illustrated the anticolonial potential of the story telling aspects of earth-based art to show that dispossession, displacement of people and the neoliberal thirst for property and clean water are all matters rooted as land-based issues.

This research revealed a storied landscape connecting busy public places, commemorative sites, an institutional space, and the other on the quiet, private property of my home. Stories help soilwork become a decolonial approach. In *Indigenous Methodologies*, Kovach (2009) noted the purpose of stories to connect people socially to the past by breaking

down linear notions of time and inviting us to see links between actions and consequences. While stories are often thought of through the oral traditions, they can also emerge through visual means as shown here. The manuscripts ranged from personal experience stories to stories of Indigenous leaders in communities, stories of scholars in other urban settings, and stories from women in the *National Inquiry*. This dissertation talked through the story of the soilwork composition process. I took numerous photos that documented the process and used them to ground workshop discussions (Horizon 3) and as prompts for artmaking experiences with teachers, teacher candidates, and pre-service nurses (forthcoming). Then, after the soil was returned to the earth and as each installation decomposed and disappeared, the soil left behind a story. This storied residue enabled this work to extend beyond the installation as a representational artifact and to return to the stories in recursive ways, such as through visual retelling as pedagogical tools (such as the examples of Living Links).

The stories that emerge become *learning stories* (Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Dr. S. F. Davidson, Haida, personal communication, 2022; Ferguson & Davidson, 2023). Each story is a pedagogical mode that reinforce a relational connection to land. Re-storying experiences in this sort of way can support healing and "in sharing stories there is creative energy and celebration of relationships to earth" (Iseke-Barnes & Estrada, 2008, p. 6). For example, the stories of each of the pop-up soil installations have become a way of talking about the discursive topography—how it is informed by Indigenous stories and guided by histories, memories, and experiences. Specific examples of what this looked like in the manuscripts included how narrative methods unearth the silenced and unfinished stories of children that never made it home from Indian Residential School, in **"Unearthing Truths"**. These untold stories conveyed a sense of responsibility to act. In **"Homeland"**, I showed how narratives on the Upper Fort Garry

Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Heritage Wall were positioned in relation to each other. These narratives also spoke of the segregation of Louis Riel outside the fort, and they drew attention to the missed opportunities to share the story of Métis activism at the site. My art works showed respect that was owed to Riel and brought together a synergy of political stories across decades about Indigenous activism that was missing from the historical information. **"Murky Waters"** involved researching specific stories on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and uncovered three individual stories that served as reminders about the sacredness of land, water, and women; that reverence for women helped to dispel narratives of disposability. These stories stay with me. Moments when it looked like the soil was breathing in the cold winter air became part of the art/research/teaching. **"Red River Removals"** focused on the interconnected stories that revealed *unsights* into how coloniality functioned through privileging settlers' priorities over the rights of Indigenous peoples. I hope this work encourages artists, researchers, and teachers to expand approaches and potentials of critical place inquiry.

Writing, sharing, ongoing art, and critical analysis are part of my ongoing reflexivity. Throughout this long process, I learned about each place, and about the different ways of viewing land and research. While preparing **"Murky Waters"**, during a course on Qualitative Research, I created a soil video of a portrait of Tina Fontaine, but I decided not to re-create this anywhere. While the manuscript of **"Murky Waters"** brought up her story, this soilwork was part of my personal praxis and I chose not to place it in public as I recognized this would have not been relationally accountable. Without permission, my inclusion of her image could be seen as performative and inconsiderate. Tina Fontaine is still connected to earth through her ties to families and communities, and her spirit continues to guide us through her story. This type of raw learning through working with soil has been integral to next steps of the research process.

Confronting Colonialism with Soil Stories. This storied *Matryoshka* exposed greater actions needed to address access to water. It also exposed how ongoing colonial violences are connected to environmental sustainability and 'wealth over health', as I describe in **"Red River Removals"**. Seeing Land as storied (Styres, 2018) helped me to see how each place was/is/will be an active site of learning, living, activism, colonialism, or commemoration. I have designed soil-based workshops for all ages such as whole school teams (Nursery-Grade 6), pre-service teachers and teachers, post-secondary classes, and several teacher professional learning environments. These workshops happened before and after each of the four manuscripts and are the real living links coalescing the way this research became part of my praxis—each aspect informing the other. Likewise, bringing stories of soil installations into my teaching has been a key feature of my methodology because what surfaces when people engage with the soil (their questions, place-based connections, reactions, grief, stories, sensory concerns, admissions of complicity, range of feelings, genealogies, consciousness raising moments, memories of playing with dirt, and confessions) have all taught me about how land as a material opens up a space for people to share stories that attend to the wholistic aspects of this work. I learned through being attuned to the *synergy* within a group of listeners, which is a principle of Archibald's storywork (2008). For example, when people reacted to the destruction of my artwork, I wondered why audiences' visceral reaction and expressions of shock stood out, and yet, people appeared unaffected in the same ways by the crises and atrocities represented in the artwork itself. I questioned how these issues have been normalized or how we have been desensitized in ways that make it seem as if they are no longer horrific events.

Unexpected resistance that occurred during several installations, at the University, on my driveway (See **"Unearthing Truths"**), and at public sites outdoors, has led to seeing colonial

confrontations as valuable learning experiences. For example, as part of the graduate level course on place-based writing at the Forks, I led a one-day session focused on walking land acknowledgements to pilot a collaborative process for soil work installations at Winnipeg's Forks location. During an art-making portion of the workshop, we met resistance from a caretaker of the Forks grounds (Honeyford et al., 2025). Designed around connecting body, mind, and spirit, I led teachers and graduate students in making connections to public art, the TRC (2015) and the *National Inquiry* (2019a) through three guided soilwork installations. One of these soil installations (see Figure 5.1) began to attract the attention of security and the Forks Parks Canada staff. We created a turtle installation in a central cul-de-sac near an important gathering site Oodena and the Children's Museum. This installation represented truths from the day's learning and visually connected to oral stories about this site as Turtle Island. One staff member of the park asked us: *Who is going to clean up the mess?* I shared that this artwork represented our learning about the significance of this place and that part of the process was for it to be returned naturally to the earth. The staff member shared that he was responsible for caretaking for the land and that he cared about this place. He was adamant that the art be taken down and that authorities be called because we did not have permission or authorization to create this artwork. The teachers present asserted their own learning and took a stand about the significance of the soilwork of a turtle representing truths of the place (of Winnipeg's Forks), which they had created collaboratively. Park authorities confronted several teachers, including myself and the course instructors. In effort to intimidate and exercise control, we were subversively video recorded without permission; it became clear that the recordings were made in the hopes of catching us in an act perceived as vandalism and were to be used against us. In this moment, the installation became an embodied public provocation prompting us as art makers

to consider the purpose of the art and the hopefulness in this work to affect change (See Honeyford et al., 2025). When challenged by someone with the responsibility for caretaking within that space, we were confronted by a difference of ontological perspectives of land and what of it means to care for the land and to restore and re-story places. We never completed this installation, but the caretaker agreed not to clean it up and reluctantly deleted the video. This example shows how the arts generated intense feelings from caretakers and art-makers. This situation called into question people's responsibilities in that particular place, provoked intense feelings and emotions from everyone involved, and in the end, created a dialogue that demonstrated the need for more education around Indigenous perspectives of place and on how to respond in those intense moments of confrontation as teachers. It made me consider what caretaking is and looks like, and how soilwork was developing into a form of artivism.

Figure 5.1

Truths at the Forks

Note. This was a collaborative art piece that was left unfinished.

Below the surface, these types of stories are connected in the way they unearthed a hidden disregard for land. I think the dynamic between soilwork installations and places of significance revealed a new mode to learn about topics such as: continued violence towards women (Ferguson, 2022); removals from land and waters (Ferguson, 2024); hidden colonial curriculum (Ferguson, 2021); neoliberal branding of sites; ongoing racial capitalism (Toews, 2018); and re-claiming ownership of land. The fourth manuscript, **"Red River Removals"**, showed this most clearly because it synthesized many aspects of learning from **"Unearthing Truths"**, **"Homeland"**, and **"Murky Waters"**, and demonstrated how learning in previous

places revealed how several seemingly disconnected (Riel House, Rooster Town, Shoal Lake, River Road and Abinojii Mikanah) pieces could be connected to a broader colonial story, such as the movement of people away from water or water access away from First Nations communities around Shoal Lake.

To realize decolonizing efforts, Donald (2012) called for these sorts of "confrontation with colonial legacies that continue to bedevil scholars and philosophers" (p. 93). In teacher workshops and presentations, when I shared that my art installations were destroyed, audience members were often shocked, uttering sounds of disbelief and disgust. This is a recurring confrontation, one that has caused me to reflect on what I share and how I share the story. There is usually a visceral response when the audience learns that many of my installations have been destroyed; there is remorse for the artwork but not the outrage at the loss of life represented by the work itself. While it seemed benign and a sound of empathetic response or shock from participants or audiences for the destruction of my artwork, it has caused me dissonance. It made me think about how it articulated a move towards innocence—how I was not at fault, rather it was instead, the 'uninformed' others. When doing presentations now, I take a moment when this happens to highlight how these sounds of disbelief over a ruined art installation functions as a reminder for people to pause and think about that feeling and their reaction, and how it might move them to proactive approaches. I urge them not to lose sight of the larger struggles, namely loss of land and loss of life.

First Nations Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, Possession (OCAP)

The turtle installation soilwork story shown in Figure 5.1, activated a new way of thinking about community-based research. Working with soil added a dimension to anticolonial work by linking to Indigenous frameworks, such as First Nations Principles of ownership,

control, access, and possession. These principles are formally used to think about who owns, controls, has access to and possesses data, knowledge, research questions, directions, and outputs, and ensures that Indigenous communities have data sovereignty. In the following sections, I draw upon these terms in a slightly different way to consider their value to researching, teaching, and learning in the context of an inquiry into place with soil as a land-based art form.

Ownership. First, *ownership* activates the differences in ideas around who owns land, which surfaces questions related to the ownership of land and the various ontologies of land, which were discussed in the Grounding in the Literature. I have learned that there is a long-standing relationship between land and power. Land is key to a primitive accumulation of capital (Marx, 1876), which is the theft of common lands through controlling, converting, clearing, cultivating, and conquering.

The key rendering of *returning,* which was featured in the ForeGround, connects to the Land Back movement to restore Indigenous lands and sovereignty. While land back movements focus on the return of land, I have learned to think of returning land as more than giving back property, considering that land back also includes an ontological perspective in terms of restoring relationships. For example, the Idle No More movement is instrumental at relational networking, which reinforces connections between people and protection of the land, water, sky, and planet. This activist movement began with a collaboration of both Indigenous and settlers to protest the "Canadian government's dismantling of environmental protection laws, endangering First Nations who live on the land" (Idle No More, 2020, para. 1). Idle No More teaches that reclaiming stolen lands is political; it is about space, it is about severance from land, and it is also

about healing (Carroll, 2014; Idle No More, 2020). This land back movement also emphasizes returning to a relationship of mutual respect.

Moving away from a perseverance on ownership, *returning* land was a key part of my pedagogical and artistic process, which engages the idea of decolonization. Writing about this part of the process could have been made more explicit in each of the manuscripts as it was not often shared in the analysis. This is a rendering that reminded me not to cling to the ownership of the land but rather to appreciate the gifts that the earth gives. Creating the art and then leaving it to wash away removes my ownership of the soil. The soil is naturally returned to the land. Some of the soil that I prepared was returned more intentionally. When preparing for the large-scale portrait of Louis Riel (**"Homeland"**), I had soil delivered to my house and I created a draft with soil on my own driveway. I intentionally did not clean up this image and gradually let it wash away with the rain. I had a shadowy image of Riel on my driveway for several weeks. When creating "Untitled" (featured in the BackGround section), I sifted earth from my garden where I live—my property and this earth was later placed in the flower beds around the Faculty of Education building by my son Ilya, after it was destroyed. I have become more aware of where the soil is from, how I access the soil, and how much easier it was to have soil delivered versus the more laborious and time-consuming process of taking soil from my own property. I came to know this material in an entirely different way and have more relationship to it and know its texture more intimately than when it was displaced and dropped off from an unknown place.

Even in public places, creating soilwork makes me feel like I am trespassing. When creating "Sunflowers for Ukraine" at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights (CMHR), I encountered a security guard who wanted to make sure that I was not trying to vandalize the museum property. When creating the Turtle installation at the Forks (See Figure 5.1), I was told

that this was not my place to be using this space in this way and that I needed to take ownership of the mess that I created. This makes me think about how the concept of land ownership has been so fundamentally destructive to the Indigenous way of life in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This distance from ownership prompted several instances of fellow graduate students taking my work at a surface level and appropriating and, in some cases, nearly plagiarising the work. The idea that anyone can work with dirt and that I do not own it affords interesting considerations for the ownership practices engrained in academia. The lines between intellectual property for some reason are not as clear, and the taking and usurping of ideas seems to be justified because it is just soil or dirt. But through this process, I did not see or treat this material as just soil or dirt. It became more than the medium. The research went far more in-depth than a movement of a material from place to place. Taking ideas developed through soilwork shows the latent settler colonial ways of knowing, being, and doing, that make takeovers seem justified. As a settler, it also makes me conscious of the idea of claiming space as I practice a/r/tography.

Furthermore, I do not want to give the impression that earth-based art is akin to artistic *terra nullius*. While soil was a way of making meaning throughout my course work and central in this research journey, drawing *from* and *with* the earth is an ancient form of art that crosses cultural borders; I have merely attempted to bring it into the research context. While it is non-traditional form of research, working with earth-based materials is a traditional and natural form of art.

Control. Each place brings up aspects of control of physical space (private property, national historic site, and public monument). The university, my own driveway, Upper Fort Garry, the commemorative monument to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and Riel House among others, became powerful sites that helped me understand reconciliation

from both a public-institutional and a private-personal perspective. The experience as the university site revealed the borders created and controlled by neo-liberal discourses because of the way land was perceived as unnatural and a hazard to regular movement within the building unless it had been strategically used in relation to reconciliatory discourses and when it served the interests of the institution. Aspects of control showed up in thinking about who had the power to decide the stories revealed in the steel design at Upper Fort Garry. In a similar way, the focus of the art at my home brought attention to how individual property can detract from the conversations around reconciliation. It also brought attention to how the principles of the Indian Residential School system depended on the control and removal of children as if they were Government or Church property and disregarded the important role of family and growing up on traditional land and within community.

As a teacher, I gradually gave up control of the processes I had been developing and invited teachers to participate in collaborative experiences, which involved an element of risk. I never knew what would happen, how people would react, what images they would represent, whether they chose to listen to my instructions, or if they would aim to create their own designs. The work of "215", in **"Unearthing Truths"**, began on private property, then the process was repeated at a public site. When leaving art in public places, I gave up control of the piece in a way and invited anyone to interact with it.

Access. The arts support thinking about who has access to the research process and content and considers ways to make work more accessible. I think there is accessibility for people who are not practising artists to engage with soilwork and to find an entry point for decolonial topics. Some horizons, such as personal praxis, might be easier than art installations, but I have provided some Guided Soilwork Introductions (Living Link 1) that I think could be

used by any facilitator and that support an entry point for working with soil as a form of praxis and participatory land art. I would like to further explore how this support might look across different learning contexts and how my learning could support the work of others. The material of soil could be viewed as a very traditional material reflective of an Indigenist aesthetic while also be considered a totally unconventional material when considering art from the Eurowestern tradition. My ongoing practice as an artist is part of a productive process "to imagine otherwise" (Buikema & Thiele, 2018, p. 32) and to use the power of imagination to envision a world that is more just. A/r/tography has made the process of doing research something that is engaging for my own children. We have gone on walks and made art together, and I now see them engaging with the earth, noticing, and asking deep and insightful questions that challenge me to think about praxis from my role and responsibilities as a mother.

The three layers of critical discourses analyses from the qualitative paradigm of my master's thesis (see BackGround) gained momentum for knowledge mobilization when paired with the arts and stories of soil work. By sharing my artwork on my driveway, I surfaced conversations between people in my neighbourhood. This brought research into reality and brought important conversations about truth and reconciliation closer to home. On the other hand, this was private property on Indigenous land. I considered my own privileges as someone who owns property, whose family was able to purchase land at the expense of Indigenous peoples, and recognizing this privilege serves as a reminder of treaty responsibilities to respect Indigenous land and sovereignty. The hacking aspect of the work and creating pop-up installations without permission adds to how this research and methodology functioned as a form of resistance. It called into question permissions, rules about access to spaces, who and how these aspects are regulated, and what is deemed appropriate.

Possession. None of the places analyzed in this study were in the possession of First Nations, Inuit, or Métis people, but all aspects of the work took place on Indigenous lands. All sites were private properties or National Historic sites, but all were on Indigenous lands. Art works in **"Unearthing Truths"** and **"Red River Removals"** visually conveyed the logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2006) pervasive through past and present land dispossession. For example, at Riel House, the footprints of the path towards the river that is blocked by a new housing development was designed to bring attention to this haunting dispossession. As I worked on this pathway of soil footprints, a man came out of his house and stood on his deck preparing to barbeque. It brought to light this idea of work and to notice one's complicity in possession of land and property. We did not speak to each other, but I felt a palpable tension and uncertainty.

Veracini (2011) shared that while settler colonialism aims to be hidden, it is most recognisable when it is most imperfect. This imperfection was made visible with soil and in places of Indigenous significance, and because of the active intentional presence of Indigenous voices (Dr. Brian Rice), perspectives (such as Indigenous scholars, *National Inquiry* and TRC), and local artists (such as Adams et al., 2019; August, 2019; Vint, 2020) that guided me and shown Indigenous resistance and work against a settled status. When settler colonialism becomes invisible, possession of land and power becomes normalized as the status quo and much more difficult to refute, oppose, and change. Land is a key aspect of settler colonialism; soil keeps this feature noticeable. Tracks are always visible.

Relationality

This dissertation articulated a process of journeying from a focus on positioning myself as researcher towards thinking about concepts and practices more relationally. For example, I attempted to embed my positionality throughout instead of parsed into separate sections. My

personal connections were not a focus but a way of sharing relationships that connect to ideas. In a similar way, I saw how it is difficult to separate ideas, which is why I chose the *Matryoshka* mode to make sense of these connections. I am now more aware of how this process of working with the earth in my own hands reinforced my positionality as third-generation settler with ancestral roots in Ukraine and other parts of Eastern Europe and Russia. To research as a relative was an idea that was shared with me several years ago at my M.Ed. defense (Dr. Niigaanwiwidam Sinclair, personal communication, September 20, 2017). I was hesitant about using the term, relative, for fear of it appearing as a *move to innocence*; I worried that it may seem as though I were claiming Indigeneity. Positionality focuses on the self while relationality decenters the self and focuses on connections.

I read Shawn Wilson's (2008) work, *Research as Ceremony,* at the end of this dissertation process, which was fitting because it helped synthesize the work, its significance, and its connections to all the existing work by scholars, artists, researchers, teachers, and those who engage with land. Wilson's (2008) writing on relationality helped me to make sense of the journey of this research:

> As I was walking through the spaces between the clumps of willows and trees all of a sudden I realized in mid-stride that if our ancestors have been living here for centuries it is likely that some may have died even on the very spot I was going to step. If that were the case, then everywhere I go on this continent is also likely the case. Everywhere their remains would have gone back into the land that became enriched by them. They would supply nutrition for the grass I was walking on, the worm that feeds on the grass, and the bird that feeds on the worm and so on. We Two-legged Beings eventually find nutrition from those same sources! Thus, our ancestors ARE part of us in that way. We are all

> connected! Now I truly understood the term "and all our relations." We are only a part of that circle. (p. 96)

I now see soilwork as relational praxis to think about how we come to know, be/become, and feel part of a broader life cycle in this world. I am hesitant to use the term, land-based, understanding that entire dissertations are being written with that complex term at the centre. This work has shifted gradually towards more collaboration with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. I have been encouraged to offer tobacco to the soil by Brenda Longclaws (B. Longclaws, Anishinaabe, personal communication, December 2023). This action formed a new part of my practice, and I now see how soilwork becomes ceremonial.

The unique topography of soilwork, conveyed in the horizons, helped move towards relationality. It showed my commitment to ongoing praxis and mobilizing connections within community and public realm. Simpson (2014) summarized relationality in a reminder salient for researchers:

> …we cannot just think, write, or imagine our way to a decolonized future. Answers to how to rebuild and how to resurge are therefore derived from a web of consensual relationships that is infused with movement (kinetic) through lived experience and embodiment. (Simpson, 2014, p. 16)

The teaching experiences of walking and sharing the work with teachers or students have encouraged dialogue and challenged me to see this work beyond my own perspective. Additionally, I have had unexpected encounters as I listened to perspectives of a soil scientist and Indigenous land-based leaders. I followed the work of relational makers and learned from public art. My dissertation represents my own perspectives of one place, and thus further critical place inquiries into Winnipeg from other researchers may help add further nuance. Throughout

the development of the manuscripts and as my artistic process evolved, these experiences have been gradually influenced by Indigenous theories and involved greater linkage to physical and geographical and spiritual connections.

Reflexivity

Soilwork has been a mode of embodied reflexivity through artmaking experiences, multisensory experiences, and relational encounters. Indigenous scholars have cautioned about the limitations, missteps, and misrecognitions of settler researchers. I try not to essentialize or romanticize my role as a settler researcher, by instead continually getting my hands dirty. It looks like and feels like hard work that is messy. I have attempted to make my choices and reflections along this journey through a/r/tography, to show how I am trying to develop a relational praxis that is explicitly conscious of, and resistant to, settler colonialism. In doing so, I have felt exposed, and needing to adapt to: my own mistakes, challenging weather or natural occurrences, interruptions of people, leaf blowers trying to silence Elders' words, conversations with caretakers, and offensive or misinformed comments from media.

Critical incidents throughout this journey (see the section, Colonial Confrontations) led to emerging topographic connections between the methodologies of a/r/tography and critical place inquiries. Additionally, reframing unexpected resistance during these installations gave insights into the types of confrontations that people encounter when challenging coloniality as well as gave ideas about how to prepare and respond in the moment. Unexpected sources of resistance can have great autoethnographic and reflexive components. For example, thinking about the destruction of my artwork helped me decenter myself and focus more on the urgency of the issues. It became less about the artwork and more about the learning needed and the next teaching steps. I learned about the power or practices I needed to give up, and when to stand

grounded. Even the destruction of the soil installations by natural means (rain, wind, snow, seasonal changes, and erosion) reminded me of temporal aspects, the need to let go, and the need to attune to land as a teacher.

Through this work with soil, I felt a shift beyond settler ontologies, which view land as resource and capital. Haraway (2015) noted that "It matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts. Mathematically, visually, and narratively, it matters which figures figure figures, which systems systematize systems" (p. 160). This frame prompted me to consider the importance of soilwork—which soil speaks stories of truth, which earth considers Earth, and whose land lands Land. Relational land art practices can help understand treaty relationships as well as the reciprocity and respect for land agreements and ways of life that are part of this responsibility. There is potential for soilwork to become a mode to educate for survival by critically examining human-made mistakes, such as injustices towards other species or to the planet. Soilwork can uncover a range of issues, such as multispecies eco-justice, climate justice, and food sovereignty, and become an exercise of kinship ties, to name a few. Haraway (2015) stressed that:

> We have a mammalian job to do, with our biotic and abiotic sym-poietic collaborators, co-laborers. We need to make kin sym-chthonically, sym-poetically. Who and whatever we are, we need to make-with—become-with, compose-with—the earth-bound. (p. 161)

Through these analyses, I saw the impact and now understand my own learning in familiar places—a formal education institution and the informal location of my personal home—in more depth. This type of thinking will help Manitoba teachers see intersections in their own lives and in how they interact with dynamics in particular local places. *Returning* soil is a reminder about the relationship with land that needs to be prioritized for our survival and aims towards justice.

Carlson (2016) shared that social location and reflexivity are important to keep grounded to ways in which colonialism is reproduced, to be mindful of trappings along the way, and to acknowledge mentorship and mistakes. Each of the manuscripts aimed to share who has helped me along the way, what lessons I have learned, and what privileges I hold as a settler as well as the process of asking questions throughout rather than seeking concrete and objective findings. I have become more aware of my limitations as a white settler scholar, and I need to be mindful to maintain connections to theories of decolonization as it relates to practice and land. Also, I cannot fully understand the colonial experience, so instead I consider, how did settler colonial privilege affect my actions?

The principle of wholism (Carlson, 2016) emerged after piecing together this *Matryoshka*. Soil activates all aspects of being. It is multisensory, it can be ceremonial, it has the ability to access memories of past and affective dimensions, and it contains hopeful elements and promotes deep reflexivity and reflection. Soil is a medium that can be used with children and has allowed me to learn alongside my children. I am interested in continuing to see how soilwork supports intergenerational storytelling and participatory engagement.

Continually returning to Tuck and Yang's (2012) emphasis that *decolonization is not a metaphor* has become a recursive reality check for grounding this research in anticolonial actions. Working with soil helped me to think about decolonizing work as an ongoing process—something to work *towards* and not a place where you have arrived. I think about the statement of *Land Back* (Idle No More, 2024) each time I return soil. It reminds me of my position as a visitor here and my Treaty responsibilities to live together reciprocally. I continue to think about: How is this research helping Indigenous communities and their aims for sovereignty? Am I helping or getting in the way? How do I maintain an active stance in anticolonial teaching?

Flowers (2015) prompted me to acknowledge the longstanding activism and work of Indigenous communities and leadership. While I have created installations, which have come and gone, camps have been created by families of MMIWG to call for the search of the city's refuse fills. Communities created two camps; one camp located near the Brady landfill garbage dump in the south end of the city and another camp situated beside the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. Since the decision took such an extended period of time, people at the camps have endured two Winnipeg winters in an ongoing battle for the garbage dump to be searched for their loved ones. Indigenous activists kept sacred fires burning round the clock. After a very long wait, the search began. Recently, the remains of Morgan Harris were found (Manitoba, 2024; Ward, 2025).

Additionally, my work melded a/r/tography and critical place inquiry. This melding helped me consider my own colonial dynamics that play out in my family by examining the problematic imperial dynamics in my ancestral land of Ukraine. During the writing of this dissertation, Russia declared war on Ukraine. Two places representing my ancestral homelands were in direct conflict with each other. Living between Russian and Ukrainian cultures for all my life has always generated tension, but now a new complicated relationship has emerged. Stories from the war in Ukraine also hit close to home; they made me consider my relationships to land and how art could communicate this complexity. I was struck by the way Ukrainian soldiers drew their war stories as elaborate relief sculptures in the earth on the sides of trenches and on the front lines, as expressions of connection to land and national pride (Ukraine, 2023). These images, which can be found online, affirm the centrality of land and its connection to power, and its potential to convey layered meanings through art. I have tried other approaches to my earth-based art, such as adding seeds to enhance the relational dynamic of an installation. I created sunflower art on the slopes of the CMHR with my son by combining soil and sunflower seeds—

an emerging symbol for peace in Ukraine. For the first time, I wondered how birds would be invited to this space for nourishment and what might I learn from them?

Next Steps in Curriculum

All four manuscripts offer important topics for curricular discussions in K-12 settings and understandings of adult learning in higher education and give a new awareness to next steps needed both in and out of school settings. A/r/tography provided the lens through which to look at the encounters between visual representations and made connections to curriculum, teaching, and learning by seeking solutions beyond institutional constraints and unearthing the limitations of settler colonial structures. This research revealed the interdisciplinary possibilities of working with earth-based art using soil, and it contributes a unique form of land art to education that expand research possibilities because this form encompasses the visual, performative, poetic, digital, and composition (or decomposition). Together these manuscripts assembled a form of activist art-based pedagogy that centralizes the significance of place with relevant extensions for K-12 and post-secondary classrooms. The topography of soilwork could inform curriculum re-design to enhance topics addressed in classrooms on a day-to-day basis, such as climate change, environmental injustices, water access and sustainability, and place-based consciousness. For example, I considered how land art could be used to support personal praxis (Horizon 1), how soilwork and walking experiences can become pedagogical (Horizon 2), and how to share learning in public places (Horizon 3).

This approach is adaptable. For example, some of the horizons and the renderings could be employed and tried again by artists, educators, researchers, or people inquiring in other disciplines and other places. The research questions and theoretical frameworks could change, which would enable new directions for this work. McCoy, Tuck and McKenzie (2016) called for

the challenging work of bridging settler colonial studies, Indigenous studies, and environmental education. This study connected to all three of these disciplinary areas and provided an arts-based approach utilizing land (such as renderings of soilwork) and the accompanying pedagogies that centralize place (such as Soilwork Horizons). For example, in settler colonial studies, using the Horizon 1 of Personal Praxis, someone could privately work with soil as a form of reflexivity in their research—a way to stay grounded to the idea of being a settler-colonizer throughout a project or inquiry. Another example could involve drawing upon Horizon 3 of Art Creation and Workshops as a pedagogical strategy where people could inquire into environmental questions such as: Why is carbon important? or What are the signs of environmental degradation in this place? Thinking through renderings such as *under/standings*, *resourcing, re/moving* and *re/placing* could be meaningful. I am also curious to see other sensibilities that might emerge.

Connecting the Dots. I have brought my learning from writing, creating, and researching together to design collaborative art installations with school teams. I have seen how this type of work, soilwork, is an example of decolonial praxis. It provided me an opportunity to share learning while also considering what reconciliation really means. Soilwork helped to think about settler colonialism, systems and structures in place, and transforming experiences for children by learning from the past. Reconciliation is a term that blurs the boundaries between personal and professional, and signals a move towards respect for people, land, languages, and practices with a renewed focus on relationships. I have learned that reconciliatory work must take place within schools *and* requires both raising public consciousness and moving beyond institutional boundaries. I tried to take this learning further.

The first month of the school year involves learning about each other, building relationships and community, and the challenge of learning about the atrocities of Indian

Residential Schools in age-appropriate ways. September is a heavy month and to acknowledge the weight of the learning and the difficulty of the topics, I designed an experience that was a way of responding to what students had learned but also provided a form of relief, an expressive outlet, and a form of action that acknowledged both truths and healing.

In 2024, on September 30, now called Orange Shirt Day or the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, I took my learning from this research and applied it to my workplace in a K-6 school in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This installation took place on the conglomerate of the school playground—a place where children take a break from academic learning and focus on social skill building through play and interactions with peers and community. I brought learning about Indian Residential Schools onto the school ground. The school community engaged in a collaborative installation in combined grades and age levels. This synthesizing aspect is melded together further though the name and concept of the work, which I called "Connecting the Dots".

The design stage of a collaborative land art installation takes a lot of invisible groundwork. I think through the image, process, and I reflect on the heart work of preparing for people's emotional responses and for being open to how the soil speaks back. Land art as a public provocation or a participatory art creation is not something I do spontaneously. It takes time and care to plan and organize. It is a challenge to combine the message with a process that makes sense. My work in September 2024 focused on two actions: removing and returning. I wanted "truths" to be represented with erasures and removals through negative space, and I wanted aspects of returning land to be conveyed through giving land back and positive space. Again, these processes work together to build upon Ermine's (2007) concept of an ethical space. The work that I and the students would be doing consisted of a series of removals and replacements and involved "connecting the dots" of soil to synthesize learning about Indian

Residential Schools through collaborative art making. Before beginning this installation, I offered tobacco to the soil as was taught to me by Brenda Longclaws. Before, I might have hesitated in doing so, but I now realized that gratitude to the earth that was of utmost importance.

Each class came and found a mound or dot of soil. They then sifted soil around their own hands to symbolize erasure and then *replaced* and *returned* a dot of soil in a new circle for the next group of students. This action resulted in a process that worked from the inside out. A repetitive pattern of connecting the dots with their own bodies and then returning land emphasized the connections between truth and reconciliation. When it was nearly complete, several students volunteered their recess to create and add their own ideas. This collaborative art piece became an example of taking my learning and finding a way to bring it to life.

Figure 5.2

Connecting the Dots

Note. This was a school community collaboration in Winnipeg on September 27, 2024.

As has been a theme of this dissertation, something unexpected happened; this time, the occurrence was unexpectedly positive. The soil transformed to an agentic material through the

eyes of children. Children saw the beauty of their work. They wanted to protect the earth and share their knowledge, and they sought connections to land within the school grounds. I thought the installation was complete because everyone had participated, but during recess, students were eager to gather other natural materials, such as leaves, to encircle the installation. Students applied their knowledge about plants from other places and times, which was shared with each other when it was decided to search for medicines in the yard. This gathering exercise was unprompted. They came back with cedar and flowers, and they added to the design with their own aesthetic patterns, drawing from natural elements in this urban school yard location. The grade 5 and 6 classes then came to this space with their teacher, and the art provided a sacred place to ground circle discussions about Indian Residential Schools and acts of reconciliation that can be taken at the school level.

The final manuscript surfaces a brief discussion about how land is framed in some provincial documents, such as Manitoba's (2003) provincial document, "Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula: A Resource for Curriculum Developers, Teachers, and Administrators", which devotes a section to the Land, stating: "one aspect that remains constant is that the Land is the giver of life and law and must be respected above all else" (Manitoba Education and Youth[b], 2003 p. 8). Europeans thought of ownership of Land and power over people through land, while Indigenous people saw themselves as caretakers of the Land and viewed the land as sacred (Manitoba [b], 2003, p. 8). These differing perspectives reveal a critical tension between Indigenous and settlers and their perspective ontologies, and they are a "primary source of misunderstanding during the process of treaty negotiations and continues to be a source of misunderstanding to this day" (Manitoba [b], 2003, p. 8). These stories of soil help to understand and consider ontology as a theory of reality and existence. How is our ontological

connection to land and the meaning of nature/the existence of land our reality and how does this impact how we are, who we are, and how we treat each other?

Manitoba's formal provincial curriculum indicates a need to prioritize land as curriculum and Indigenous land-based connections to place. For example, knowledge shared in **"Red River Removals"** regarding water (in)justice(s) should be part of ongoing discussion as an element of curriculum, especially considering Winnipeg is a place that actively takes water from Treaty 3's Shoal Lake and because Winnipeg is named after its cultural and geographical connections to water. Issues of sustainability and the increasing tenuousness of the natural environment are mentioned in current curriculum, but those mentions are understated. There is an opportunity to centralize climate change and living in sustainable ways as topics that necessitate positioning Indigenous knowledges at the centre. Outcomes that connect to environment are placed last.

This *Matryoshka* connected to a rematriating approach to curriculum studies, in which Tuck (2011) outlined a list of nine-alternative aims, including pushing back on the fixed idea of place for deeply rooted settler colonialism to grow. Tuck urged people to deepen dramatically different perspectives of place:

> In much of curriculum studies, place is usually slated as significant in three primary ways: as space, as text, and as *context.* A curriculum of repatriation would seek to deepen considerations of place, beyond context or backdrop. The notion I raise here pushes back against the presumed fixity of place, especially when the fixity is balanced upon the preeminence and permanence of settler colonialism and the nation-state. (2011, p. 36)

I focused on lived curriculum experiences that are not relegated to formal institutions but live in everyday places. Working with land helped to understand the displacement/disappearance of land and people, such as the silencing of Indigenous histories and stories, the removals of Métis

communities away from water, and ongoing gender-based violences of MMIWG2S. The pop-up installations have created pedagogical tools (e.g. my stories, videos, and photographs) to prompt discussions and featured Indigenous voices (e.g. quotes, artwork, videos, and texts from the *National Inquiry*) to initiate connections to place. This type of approach could be used to guide curriculum inquiring into places through K-12 and post-secondary contexts.

Loss and Healing

The process of creating these installations emphasized embodied learning through a critically reflexive, vulnerable, and disruptive way. It stirred up emotional responses, such as experiences of loss, grief, guilt, privilege, relief, and a range of many more. Physically making the soil installations was a power-filled, multi-sensory experience and a wholistic process that engaged the praxis of mental thinking and physical actions and of being in relation to human, other than human, and more than human elements. I found it to be emotional and spiritual work. It is a very physical process of hauling, moving heavy soil, and being watched as I am creating an installation. For example, introductions (guided by the prompts from Living Link 1) have surfaced profound discussions about childhood memories, life in other places, ancestral connections, and often feelings of loss and grief, internal challenges, anger about not knowing Canada's true history, and frustrations about teachers own miseducation in confronting biases and in examining their own identities. The process of guided soilwork showed that the material of soil was engaging affective components that where, if part of further research, requires significant attention to be given to ethical considerations and emotion supports.

The soil/earth/land connect topics of both life and death through the focus on the body-earth connection. Corporeality was emphasized when a footprint was left on the soil image of the Indigenous child's face or when the rows of missing footprints were flattened by one man's tire

treads. These footprints and tread marks echo Haraway's (1989) notion of the "traffic caused by nature and culture" (p. 377). My embodied moves and creations made the violences of settler colonialism more visceral.

This *Matryoshka* presented soilwork as a type of kinship model, a way of thinking about assemblages of places and land-human-multispecies-more than human connections all together. The learning through soilwork has revealed more than I expected. This dissertation focused on absences in the form of missing people and missing perspectives, and it surfaced nuanced discussion around settler colonial displacements in Winnipeg and the losses of land and lives. Through trying to convey ethical space, the soil helped me as an artist to convey both hurt and healing. This conveyance occurred through discussion of the atrocities of colonialism within Winnipeg in all manuscripts, but primarily in **"Unearthing Truths"** and **"Murky Waters"**, it but also delved into realities that were very personal. The soil also helped me within my own journey of losing loved ones during my graduate student journey. Grieving surfaced a type of relationality that revealed connections to loved ones and how this grief affected my own understandings and place in the world. The place where this internal inquiry surfaced was on the page in **"Murky Waters",** as part of my reflexivity, which involved creating land artwork on my Dad's grave before creating this expression encircling the monument to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The process gave me layered insights into research and supported how to connect to memories in connections to places. It helped me process my own grief of losing grandparents and my dad, and to think about cycles of life in a new way.

Winnipeg, Manitoba, as a Place of Resurgence

Working with soil helped to understand Winnipeg, Manitoba through the three horizons of soilwork. Each critical place inquiry attuned to ways of thinking and being that present

themselves in each place. This dissertation offered connections to Winnipeg projects, such as the Forks development and Aqueduct construction and commemoration, producing a hopeful shift from racist city to a human rights city and place of resurgence. Through decolonial and critical approaches, I moved beyond nostalgic viewpoints and beyond notions of historical plaques as the only accurate story, and instead, moved towards a truthful consideration of historical erasures in four initiating public places. Each of the manuscripts revealed something new about how I come to know, live, and work in relation to people, land and topics such as genocide and colonial violence. For example, **"Unearthing Truths"** considered the privileges of land ownership and treaty responsibilities and showed how Indigenous artists are using significance places and unique materials (such as shoes) to talk back to settler colonial atrocities. **"Homeland"** shared how, in Winnipeg, Métis have shown a steady commitment to Indigenous rights, languages, and activism against settler colonial forced takeovers of land, lives, and language. Sinclair (2024) offered us a poignant reminder.

> [S]ome of the worse assaults have been experienced by the Métis who were swindled by Canadian authorities out of their land via scrip, displaced from their homes and left out of treaty, and dehumanized and exploited while helping to build the country. (p. 12)

This dissertation reflected how even contemporary designs may leave out key semiotic information (such leaving Louis Riel's historical plaque outside the Fort as one example), which has implications on public memory to minimize the full historical significance of the site. In **"Unearthing Truths"** and **"Murky Waters"**, I highlighted Indigenous community activism to respond to the *Calls to Action* and *Calls for Justice*. **"Red River Removals"** showed how Indigenous resurgence demonstrates survivance across multiple sites despite usurped lands and unmet basic rights.

Learning from Land

Soilwork showed new connections between land and education, and it serves as a reminder that the idea of remaking educational practices in Canada has always been connected to land. People removed from land as well as numerous attempts to sever land-based and community-based connections through Indian Residential Schools and serial dispossessions are some of many concrete examples that are referenced in the manuscripts.

I developed a deeper understanding of place and Winnipeg's layered histories and physical and cultural geographies. Trying to write land acknowledgements throughout (including with words, soil, and my body), I have made shifts to my language and learned more about place names. I thought about the movement of water (and people away from water) in **"Homeland"** and **"Red River Removals"**. **"Murky Waters"** taught that the rivers are both supportive of life in Winnipeg but also that they can be dangerous. I wanted to learn and live up to this city's powerful name, by highlighting how Winnipeg's murky waters show the complexity that bring Winnipeg and Manitoba to life. Just as Winnipeg is part of an important watershed, integrally interconnected to several other places, my inquiries showed significant watershed moments and connections across places that do not initially connect.

Learning from land in urban contexts involves important education: "Learning about traditional attachments to land, respecting and learning about and through Indigenous thought including stories of Land since time immemorial" (Styres et al., p. 43). Sinclair (2024) reminded me about the relationality invoked through working with land in my own two hands, sharing: "Everything that therefore flows off the rocks, seeps through the soil, and interacts with animals…" (p. 15). The soil reminds us that what we do here seeps into the ground and connects back to the water and affects the lives of people, animals, micro-organisms, and plant lives.

This dissertation made important connections to land education as a significant part of curriculum. I am reminded of what Wilson (2008) shared: "Knowledge itself is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us" (p. 87). My *Matryoshka* also showed that while the term, Land, is used, Land education includes water. Water shows settler colonialism in a different way. Where it is difficult to see the violence inflicted with land, the water is something that we take into our physical bodies and that ecologically connects many humans and non-humans. Thus, the cycles of colonial legacy can be seen as something that affects our state of being and becoming.

Research involving place is inherently interdisciplinary. There are connections to history, Indigenous studies, environmental studies, urban geography, and other disciplines. There are many ways to approach this methodological mashup. Had I wanted to focus on history, I could have emphasized more primary source documents or archival material. Meeting with a soil scientist, Inoka Imarakoon, in April 2024, I learned about the properties of soil and added a scientific lens, which could be another route to take up further. She offered me advice that ensured working with soil would be safe, unless taken from marked toxic sites. I will continue to find ways to connect to soil in natural locations by sourcing the material differently rather than moving it from place to place or by purchasing yards of soil. Learning more about the composition of the soil reflects the soil's colour, texture, and unique story. There is more I could learn about soil itself.

Place and contextual factors matter in education. What works in one place may not work in another. While this comment seems self-evident, place-less approaches are common, problematic, and irrelevant to social, cultural, and political dynamics, leading to a need for a curriculum that centres place (Greenwood, 2003). Relational networks are being created that

resist notions of over-generalizing places, and these are finding ways to highlight knowledges in relation to places. The Prairie Indigenous Relationality Network (PIRN) brings together a collective of Indigenous scholars who are from, or have connections to, the prairies, to share research initiatives, and resources, declaring a unifying belief that Indigenous knowledges are relational.

This work has prompted me to consider how territorial acknowledgements and artistic modes of acknowledging land support a sense of place. The global practice of acknowledging Indigenous presence on land shows how the recognition of Indigenous lands is a local process and a global process. However, the idea of creating a sense of place by acknowledging land and territory as a form of relationality is not without critique. While Wark (2021) critiqued land acknowledgements as "rhetorical devices that reference a mythical fabrication of Indigenousness that is consistent with settler dreams of benevolence and innocence" (p. 192), he also encouraged finding new relational ways of showing resistance and contextualizing relationships. Sinclair (2024), too, troubled the static discourse and called for the use of territorial acknowledgement to develop and renew a sense of place that considers Indigenous presences, wisdom, languages, and contributions. I have been thinking about land acknowledgements for many years, trying to make them visual, poetic, active, and embodied—another starting place for this research. Trying this approach with soil has helped me to consider aspects rarely addressed in formal acknowledgement discourses in a way that visually represents and speaks back to the colonial histories of a territory, using a medium that also reinforces the need for concrete and tangible return of lands. My Living Links are a way of actively acknowledging land. My acknowledgements involve elements of art and guided questions, and they are activated through

links between poetry and field notes paired with images. I have also begun a similar process to weave soilwork and territorial acknowledgements together with students K-6.

Groundwork

This research introducing soilwork as a form of land art gave me an opportunity to do the foundational work before using soil as a participatory arts-based approach in transdisciplinary research collaborations. This timely research has acknowledged atrocities on Canadian soil, and it forges actionable frameworks and accessible methods to move forward. Cannella and Manuelito (2008) called for anticolonialist research practices that turn the inside out and generate ways to revise research to be accessible and "that create transparent public conversations (not just academic dialogue) concerning philosophy, agenda, method, and results" (p. 50). The groundwork from this research could generate creative community-based art collaborations.

This study has shown the culmination of a sustained journey of art-based actions, and it has generated the groundwork needed for more relational research (Ferguson et al., forthcoming). This dissertation has led to new research projects that involve a focus on finding *common ground* and the merging of strengths and contributions from local Indigenous Elders, experienced Indigenous nurse educators and researchers, Indigenous community leaders, settler educational leaders and researchers, emerging arts-based researchers, community-based leaders, and activists who offered cultural guidance and support. I have begun to elaborate on this idea, and I am working on another manuscript tentatively entitled, "Groundwork: Growing Case Study Research Design Centering Soil to Respond to the *National Inquiry's Calls for Justice*". This paper will share the groundwork necessary to prepare for facilitating research that responds to colonization as a gendered expression connected to the land as a "crisis centuries in the making" (*National Inquiry*, 2019c, p. 19). It will highlight how the non-conventional and powerful

medium of earth for individual and collective soil-based artwork supported journeying together to understand more about the sacredness of land and water informed the research design, provided mentoring opportunities, and deepened awareness of community needs.

Soilwork is also open and unfinished, which makes it a helpful foundation for further artistic or pedagogical inquiries or research. I recognize that further research to connect soil work to maternal pedagogies (Brant, 2017) could be beneficial, and I hope to dive further into the topic as this work evolves. Feminist theories that guide my work could continue to be expanded upon to consider how soil can activate these intersectional assemblages. I am eager to shift towards partnering with community-based initiatives to enhance relational aspects of this work.

Next steps of this research include further work into anti-racist work in higher education. I was grateful that my individual writing and action research (**"Murky Waters"**) has led to connections with groups of interdisciplinary teams and broader research networks. This study could be further enhanced through a team approach, such as collaboration with Indigenous and settler scholars, Elders, and knowledge holders, which is the direction where my work is headed.

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