

**Who's the White Guy?**  
**Land, Water, and Relational Dis/embodiments on**  
**Unceded Coast Salish Territories**

by  
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## Abstract

*Who's the White Guy? Land, water, and relational dis/embodiments on Unceded Coast Salish Territories* is an experimental autoethnography that explores the Settler positionality of the author, a White cis-gender middle-class, second generation male Canadian in his forties living in New Westminster, British Columbia. *Who's the White Guy?* is a play with accompanying prose, describing, analyzing, and creatively re-imagining the results of three years of research Waller carried out using multisensorial auto-ethnographic methods in New Westminster and along the Sto:lo (Fraser) River and its tributaries. Simultaneously investigating his socially, economically, politically, and spiritually emplaced “somatic modes of attention” (Csordas, 1993: 138) *of* and *with* Coast Salish land, waters, rivers, and oceans. Waller also focuses an ethnographic lens on becoming; that is, asking himself a question posed by Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker (2015): *Is it possible for a White Settler to “belong in a way that doesn't reproduce colonial dispossession and harm?”* (19). Given, for example, Mayan scholar, annie ross' (January 21, 2021) assertion that a primary source of racism and environmental catastrophe lies within (neo)colonial ontologies that separate non-humans from society, along with Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson and Settler theorist Naomi Klein's (March 6, 2013) claim that “...extraction isn't just about mining and drilling, it is a mindset—*it's an approach* to nature, to ideas, to people”—the stakes inherent in Lowman & Barker's question requires attention on intersubjective levels that go beyond the overtly political, to micro-political “multisensorial, embodied...historically specific and politically charged” (Culhane, 2016: 14) zones of entanglement.

**Keywords:** Multisensorial ethnography; Indigenous methodology; Autoethnography; Experimental ethnography; Indigenous continuity and resurgence; Settler colonialism; Theatre; Multidisciplinary

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## Ready to launch



**The author's kayak before embarkation in 'Desolation Sound', in Klahoose, Tla'amin, and Homalco territories. Photo by the author, September 10, 2020.**



# Introduction

Here at the top of an ethnography (in this case a play with footnotes where the play is ostensibly the place to reach out into the fictive stratosphere and the footnotes the site of grounded research) it is conventional for the anthropologist to introduce who they are, what they are doing and why. Given my position and the topic pursued here, a considerable proportion of the statements I make in this thesis will likely be controversial. Consider the following attempt: “I am a white, cis gender (identifying as my gender of birth) male, middle-class Settler, anthropology graduate student exploring my personal “colonial forms of perception” (Robinson, 2020: 3)—or in other words, exploring my enculturated ‘Cartesian sensorium’ (defined below) through a methodology of imaginative auto-ethnography (defined below). I am doing so because I believe that my sensorium—the way I construct and perceive my ‘life-world’ (the world as self-evident to an individual)—is relatively homogenous with other White non-Indigenous Settlers occupying places of similarly inequitable privilege—and thus maintaining undue social, political, and economic influence in Canada—in particular regarding the resulting consequences on issues of Indigenous material sovereignties (land, water, rivers, oceans, and bodies).

Immediately I duck for cover waiting for the tomatoes to fly. Every word and some letters must be scrutinized. Matters of anthropological discipline (mostly) aside (for the moment), the politics of such an interest—addressed from my positionality—are legion as perhaps the reader is well aware. For example, I imagine the reader wondering why or why not politically-hulking words such as Indigenous and Settler are capitalized or not, how a (W)hite (S)ettler can presume to discuss (I)ndigenous sovereignties through an auto-ethnographic lens, what on earth a White Settler’s personal “perception” has to do with “Indigenous material sovereignties”, how I can possibly separate the material from the immaterial when it comes to Indigenous sovereignties, why the focus on Settler immaterialities in juxtaposition to Indigenous immaterialities (a denial of Indigenous spirituality surely), or alternatively what right does he have to discuss Indigenous spirituality (inherent in Indigenous sovereignties) to begin with, and how dare he try to be “creative” with any of this?...I am already spinning in circles and have not begun to define terms!

So where to begin with identifying who I am, what I am doing and why, when the very point of this thesis, in a manner of speaking, is to frame these questions as central ethnographic issues of concern. For how I perceive the world informs in large part who I am (Csordas, 1993; Merleau-Ponty, 2013; Robinson, 2020). My forms of colonial perception are directly connected to the central questions I set out with before I began fieldwork. They are: What is it to be a White guy, a Settler, living and working on Coast Salish Territories? Do I belong here? If so, how? Is it possible to “belong in a way that doesn’t reproduce colonial dispossession and harm?” (Lowman & Barker 2015: 19).

Here is where the committee professor asks reasonably: “Okay, forget the verbosity, so what have you learned? What is your thesis statement?” But, what if I have emerged from the research even more confused than when I set out? What if I have only found more questions? Allow me to explain.

The whole project started with an obsession that I could not shake for multiple reasons. It came from an article by Anishinaabe and Mohawk scholar Vanessa Watts (2013) that centers on “place-thought” (2) and non-human/human agency in Indigenous life-worlds. In her article, Watts poses a challenge to those of us still operating within a Cartesian sensorium (the idea that a human functions vis a vis five or six separate senses), a challenge to believe that land-places are not intellectually flatlined and agentively passive. She challenges us to believe that “land [is] alive and thinking” (2); to see that our thoughts and actions originate from “the extensions of these thoughts” (2)—which Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson and Settler theorist Naomi Klein (March 6, 2013) (2013) provide an example of with their claim that “...extraction [destructive mining] isn’t just about mining and drilling, it is a mindset—it’s an approach to nature, to ideas, to people” . Watts provokes us to consider that if we do not believe this we are essentially reproducing dualistic colonial ontologies that “separate theory from praxis” (3).

Mayan scholar, annie ross (January 27, 2021), whose ethnographic work spans multiple mediums including painting and poetry, places the very source of racism and environmental catastrophe in such an ontological “gap” (Tsing, 2005) between Cartesian/Kantian and Indigenous ontologies. The “gap” here mentioned, as Anna Tsing (2005) terms it, occurs in the ethnocentrism that blinds one ontology to the other. Its

meaning becomes clear when a ‘Westerner’ considers place-thought, a life-world where people can be born from animals or trees—or become them temporarily, rocks can be living humans in transformed states, parallel worlds exist beneath seas and fresh-waters, and unseen beings occupy the atmosphere around us (Carlson, 2010; Flikke, 2016; Sto:lo Nation, 2012; Thom, 2005; Watts, 2013 & 2020). I grew up and lived in a world where such “magic” was reserved for essentialized Indigenous and non-western cultures, fantasy books, movies, evangelicals, the self-deceived, and the mentally unstable.

It is perhaps not surprising then that according to Vanessa Watts (2013) this is how “colonialism operationalizes itself” (1). People ‘like me’ do not believe stories about sentient rocks and philosophical animals, for example, to be historical or ‘real’, but rather prefer to see them as Disney movies at worst, or legends and myth at best; similar to the way my ‘own’ origin stories are taken, as fictions engrained in the collective unconscious, as Carl Jung (1963: 311) famously put it—and amplified throughout popular Euro-cultures. If I believe, for example, that a massive granite rock sitting alone on a wide sandy beach is not a human being transformed into stone by a sky-god (to paraphrase and generalize a Coast Salish cosmology) but a rock carried and dropped by receding glacier ice, I am not likely to take the story as critically serious as a person with an environmentally interdependent ontology such as place-thought, because then instead of ‘truth’ or history, it will be metaphor and myth, with inevitable implications already spelled out. For Watts, this is how people like me “attempt to make Indigenous peoples stand in disbelief of themselves and their histories” (1).

Personally, I could, and cannot, think of a more insidious form of ongoing colonization—not to minimize in any way more overt forms (such as the Indian Act, residential schools and the Sixties Scoop, etc) that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to cover, and which have been addressed elsewhere (ex. Vowel, 2016). It is a manifestation of colonization and ongoing genocide that goes very much under the Canadian radar. Thus, as I considered myself not only sympathetic to Indigenous sovereignty claims but also a so-called ally, I took Watts at her word and asked myself: (what) do I believe? Who’s the white guy?

## Multisensorial Ethnography

Before beginning fieldwork I was also steeped in the multi-sensorial ethnographic literature, which I found provided a kind of bridge to approaching place-thought. For example, ethnographer Rune Flikke (2016) looks at cultures in South Africa where people consider human and non-human bodies to be made of the same substances as air and wind. For people living this way the boundary between the atmosphere and their body does not stop at their skin, the ground, or the so-called “Karman line”—an arguably arbitrary line scientists have labeled to denote the border of the earth’s atmosphere and space. Rather, Flikke’s interlocutors experience their bodies as what ethnographer Tim Ingold (2008) might call “porous” (1802), that is, their skins blend with the earth and sky to various levels of intensity, being part of the same substance. In other words, as I will expand upon below, modern science has begun corroborating Indigenous ontologies.

It was this porousness of the human body that especially intrigued me, along with its implied autoethnographic method. Ingold (2010) suggests that due to the body being porous to the earth and sky, just the act of walking is sufficient for “knowledge-growing” (122). Or in other words, develop awareness beyond the individual encapsulated senses of seeing, hearing, touching, and so on, extending beyond the limitations of a Cartesian sensorium. The theory runs that because our bodies are an inseparable extension of the ground and atmosphere, an entity moving through each inter-dependently, human bodies triangulate information with every step. Ingold’s argument follows that in the so-called ‘West’, people with a Cartesian sensorium are largely unaware of this process, given (Western) societies’ faith in Immanuel Kant’s notions of the phenomenal world—a world where our feet stand on a hard surface and our bodies in separate gaseous substances. A world where thought and body are discontinuous; a world designed perfectly for our manipulation of it.

Given all this, I wondered if such a method, which I call ‘porous-walking’ (after Ingold’s (2010) “wayfarer walking” [127]), of un/learning/becoming might bring elements of place-thought from a theoretical level to one of praxis within my fields of experience, and in the process uncover in unique ways important data about the sensorial life-worlds of a White middle class Canadian. Perhaps, I thought, such an ethnography could answer the question of “who’s the White guy”, while also giving some input as to whether and in what ways/to

what degrees he might live on Coast Salish Territories without contributing to colonial dispossession and harm.

## **So why is it a play?**

Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladski (2014) declare that when Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore performs a piece on the steps of the Vancouver Art Gallery wherein she emulates crucifixion, her very body as an Indigenous woman, brings attention to a space where “the consequences of violence are felt” (4). If this is so, which I believe it can be—given the history of colonial violence against Indigenous women (ex. Georgeson & Hallenbeck, 2018; Goeman, 2012; Harmon, 2018; ross, 2022; A. Simpson, 2016; L. Simpson, 2011; Million, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Watts, 2013), then a White male body onstage in the pursuit of a kind of redemption might bring attention to space where the potentials of the perpetuation of violence are felt. The body seen in space is a powerful politic, “communicating the material conditions” (Brophy & Hladski, 2014: 4) of individual and collective histories at 30 to 60 frames per second.

Though White bodies on Coast Salish territories were first felt remotely through the small pox epidemic which killed up to 90% of Coast Salish populations in the late 18th, and early 19th centuries, I imagine they likely became a visual terror (in anticipation of physical terror) when murder, rape and theft by White Settlers became common in the Fraser Canyon during the Gold Rush of 1859 (Harris, 1997). It isn’t hard to picture the terror continuing to entrench itself with the arrival of Indian agents and mounted police and missionaries, to take Indigenous children away in the later 19th century, and into the 21st century, when, for example, men murder Indigenous women by throwing heavy metal objects at them from passing trucks on the highway (see Turner, February 17, 2021; Hargreaves, 2017; Lavell-Harvard & Brant, 2016; Privy Council Office, 2019; A. Simpson, 2016; Strapagiel, 2014; Talaga, 2019).

There is clearly more nuance to this theme which I will discuss further below, but this is all to say, one reason to write my thesis as a play is to maximize powerful non-verbal messages of representation that it is beyond the neat summarization of a textual narrative to convey (Brophy & Hladski, 2014). Beyond this viscerality, there are two essential

(inter)connections between ethnography and theatre that my thesis utilizes. One looks at theory that connects everyday life—and thus cultural phenomena, to theatre, and vice versa. The other, at how the theatre can help amplify and disseminate ethnographic material/data in ways which might be considered more transformative than more traditional methods (as in prosaic monographs). I will begin with the former.

Anthropologist Victor Turner (1980) has long held that everyday life, occupied as it is with “social dramas” (Turner, 1980: 141)—or social disharmonies—overlaps with theatre in many ways. Though he famously reduced overlap to four parts—breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration (or schism), others have taken his lead and expanded the imbrications. Perhaps most famous, and at any rate of particular importance to my purpose, is performance theorist Richard Schechner’s (2011[1985]) theory of “restoration of behavior” (35). This is the way people play out a kind of cultural script in any number of micro-rituals. Schechner gives the example of a bride blushing as she steps down the aisle toward her fiancé even though they have lived together for two years (36). I think of the way so many White people pretend not to be offended when confronted with their racism/privilege by people of colour so as not to fit into the trope of ‘fragility’. But restorations of behavior can be longer in duration too (36). For an example of this I think of the time our step-father’s mother passed away, I was lost for words, but my older brother said to him “I’m sorry for your loss”, and with that, something seemed to calm in everyone present; I learned the restoration of grieving-behaviour throughout the rest of the week.

It is those ways that our ‘selves’ are multivocal, those times when we take on the mantle of a performance acted out countless times by our ancestors and contemporaries. As Schechner (2011[1985]) puts it, it is when a person “can act in/as another; the social or transindividual self is a role or set of roles” (36). It is behaviour that becomes “hardened into theatre” (36) so that “performance is...nth time...behaviour” (36).

With Schechner’s theory in mind, upon seeing a play (by theatre director Eugenio Barba) with her ‘self’ as the central character, Anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup (1992) claims that the show “mirrored a real social spaces but there was a crack in the mirror allowing a separate reality to be seen: a reality of not-me” (335). Similar to my thesis-play it included fictional elements, with characters taken from myth and history, and yet there was an

“unmasking” (337) at work, that “unlike ordinary ethnographic monographs that are nothing but texts” (335), brought visceral attention to cultural embodiments, “making it the subject for further interpretation, the source of further history” (335). Her own experience had become distinct from itself.

This is a kind of reality that only theatre can amplify, where an audience watches the performer live—even if it were me performing not-me—in the process of ‘restoring behaviour’ in ritual after ritual. This takes the dissemination of ethnographic material to a heightened place, an embodied, visceral place of *communitas* with an audience (Schechner (2011[1985])). Working with autoethnography, I was and am very interested in this space. Even in the process of writing, it has been transformative and freeing to write myself as a character, to see “the dramas of my life independent of me” (Hastrup, 1992: 335).

Beyond matters of self/representation there are other reasons I have chosen drama as an autoethnographic medium. At the top of Danielle Elliott’s (2016) solo contribution to the ground breaking anthology, *A Different Kind of Ethnography* (Culhane & Elliott, 2016), Elliott asks the question: “What might an imaginative ethnography look like?” (24). Coming from the theatre to academia as a director and playwright, I often assumed academia that ‘tries’ to be creative would probably look like a sleight of hand. It would be either an engaging poem, novel, or play, etc, that was simply called ethnography (in academic terms, ‘a wank’ [or, un-rigorous]); or it would be called a poem or play, etc, but be dull as a table top. Though either are theoretically possible, the examples Elliott provides her reader look like neither.

To simplify in summary, Elliott (2016) nonetheless distinguishes between two types—or three if combined. Those that are formally on the traditional side of things (ex. a textual monograph) but whose content deals with imaginative processes, particularly involving, for example, “sensations (color, taste, feeling, seeing) and the mundane” (35). And those that break with traditional form because the content requires a touch that is “more affective in the way that emotions can be portrayed and evoked” (28), and that thus provide insight into “forms of discourse and practice” (Maynard, 2009: 115, cited in Elliott, 2016: 28) that prose tends to struggle with—particularly in a life-world encultured with Cartesian dualism, as noted above.

Because my thesis looks into places where attention to the unity of body and mind are necessary to track experience, where the boundaries between skin and sky are blurred, where feeling and intuition override the calculation of thought, where the human and non-human become indistinguishable, where the past and future become present, the dramatic form was the only way I knew how to approach it. Because my imagination was necessary to enter and learn from these places, imaginative ethnography was the methodological path I needed to take. It is what has allowed me to “challenge, open up, disassemble, and shift how [I] understand the social, political, economic, historical, and personal processes that shape and constrain [my] everyday li[fe]” (Elliott, 2016: 37)—in relation to land and belonging (and not belonging) on Coast Salish Territories.

Going further, I hope this form will facilitate a wider and deeper generalization of the material for White Settler audiences who may recognize themselves in the action. Whether that might be the vicarious sensation of watching a White person (and possibly other non-Indigenous settlers) struggle to become aware of highly charged intersections of race, class and gender in the moment of tension and conflict; or confusion/elation/fear faced with unexplainable social nonhuman phenomena, struggle with belonging, and so on. All this said, my use of drama as an ethnographic medium requires that I spend some time on matters of representation, which I now turn to before discussing my use of autoethnography.

## **Fiction versus ‘truth’**

Questioning whether or not anthropology, even in its most positivist forms, is able to communicate ‘truth’ or ‘authenticity’ is no longer (as) controversial. Because the “loss of illusions about anthropological authority” (Hastrup, 1992: 341) have “filled the pages of scholarly journals and books” (Stoller, 2009: 49) (ex. Culhane, 2016; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1988; Rabinow, 1979; Sahlins, 1985; Stoller, 2009), I will only briefly review a few points most relevant to my thesis here.

Paul Stoller (2009) aptly contextualizes the issue of ethnographic authority within a wide frame, as being productive: “Is there only one way to do anthropology” (46)? Apparently not. Why only write ethnography that is “untainted with imaginative prose”



(57)? But in this vein, Clifford and Marcus (1986) took a lead in admitting ethnographies have more in common with creative fiction than scientific research publications. Not only is it impossible to identify a single authorial voice in any given monograph given the multiplicity of voices that contribute to them, but the strategies of interpretation, not to mention personal bias, applied by the anthropologist inevitably employ considerable creative license in translating ‘data’ from ‘the field’ into academically palatable prose. In other words, the imagination has never been absent from the foreground of ethnographic writing.

Given the oxymoron of ‘authorial objectivity’, and the impossibility of ‘authentically’ representing interlocutors, it has been suggested that perhaps the ethnographic “subject has been destroyed” (Rabinow, 1979: 231). Anthropologist Paul Rabinow (1979) cites Roland Barthes responding to this situation with advice not to throw the baby out with the bath water but rather bring the subject back “...as fiction” (cited in Rabinow, 1979: 231). Ethnographer Tobias Hecht (2006) did just that, incorporating the fictionalized accounts of one of his informants while creating a character for himself as interviewer; Hecht ‘took from this’ material and eventually published *Afterlife: An Ethnographic Novel*.

Stepping into this arena, Dara Culhane (2016) leans on multisensorial ethnography (of which she is an early champion and innovator), with particular emphasis on Tim Ingold’s (2008) theory, “zones of entanglement” (1997, cited in Culhane, 2016: 3), to turn the very weaknesses of ethnography—that is, its sticky multiplicities—into strengths. A zone of entanglement can be found at virtually any ethnographic site, from a minute cultural practice such as biting one’s nails to wider-frame social/political/economic traditions such as voting or investing in stocks. A zone of entanglement takes a bird’s eye view of the relationships among all the intertwining things (entanglements) that go into any given practice, belief, value, and so on. In other words, it is a theoretical lens through which an ethnographer might make new connections, create new knowledges. Which, as Culhane combines Ingold with Biehl (2013), puts a spotlight on “the micro-political processes of knowledge creation” (Culhane, 2016: 4). Thus equipped, and bearing the weight of her interest in the multisensorial, Culhane challenges ethnographers to incorporate the “often-marginalized forms of embodied, affective, imaginative, and creative knowledge[s]” into our methods and methodologies (7).

This very much suited my interests as I looked at the micro-politics of my own perceptions and practices around land, both in the context of fieldwork and my use of drama. In terms of the former, how did I think and what about on land when I was employing methods of porous kayaking/boating or walking? What did I do on it/how did I treat it, how did my body act despite sometimes the ‘best of intentions’? What obstacles arose or ‘breakthroughs’ occurred when doing my best to imagine the land and water as an extension of my thoughts and body? And what about those settlers I observed and spoke with? What affects might arise, ‘new’ knowledges enter my awareness, what embodiments (such as the natural tendency to feel the direction of the wind on my skin) might I become cognizant of, or even shed, or develop? For the moment I will leave these as hypothetical questions to analyze in the discussion about my fieldwork below. More to the immediate context at hand, such questions nonetheless raise the topic of autoethnography, which I now turn to before introducing the play portion of my thesis.

## **Autoethnography**

Coming from my central question: Who’s the White Guy?, it is likely not surprising I decided to work with an autoethnographic methodology. Like many other White cis-gender guys I have talked to, working in the theatre (see below) and academia, I have heard many times from Indigenous colleagues that I need to ‘get self-reflective’ about the privileges I enjoy at the expense of others. It took some time to realize “they” mostly do not mean looking to “them” for the answers. Indigenous folks have their own (considerably more laborious) work to do, such as reclamation, resurgence, and cultural continuity work, and it is not their job to educate me. I understand that. And yet as common as it is to hear White people talk about being self-reflexive as to their position as Settlers, I was not aware of anyone taking it on in projects larger than single class assignments. I still had not seen a show produced that takes the subject head-on in the theatre either. This was a factor in selecting my topic, and it seemed to go along with autoethnography automatically.

When I started this thesis, however, because it was in the context of a Settler living on Coast Salish territories (Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, Katzie, Sto:lo, Musqueam, and Sts’ailes territories to be more specific), and given that I am in anthropology, I imagined that I would have to become an “authority” on one or more Coast Salish Nations. But I quickly ran into a

thick strain of influential criticism in decolonial anthropology and the larger community that such an idea is reproductive of colonial frameworks (Alfred, 2010; Coulthard, 2007; De Leeuw et al, 2103; Harjo, September 2020; Kovach, 2009; Sium et al, 2012). Beyond a strong and growing transdisciplinary literature, Indigenous colleagues in anthropology raised critical questions about my proposed research. Considering all this, I came to the conclusion that it would be best, and most effective, for me to focus on my own very specific cultural situation. After all, cis White middle class culture is infamously under studied (Ho, 2009). Here I could be an insider with an emic point of view.

Yet, while I may be an ‘expert’ on my own culture, there are massive theoretical and philosophical differences and outlooks endemic to so called “Western”, “Euro-North American”, or “Settler” ‘culture’. As if anyone’s culture is a monolith, and for example, all White middle-class Canadians live in a synchronicity of values, beliefs, and practices. I am, if ever, rarely even in synchronicity with myself, let alone others. My subjectivity is laden with contradictions, un/conscious ‘black holes’ (ex. unconscious binary thinking [Tsing, 2005]), and inner-conflict). Autoethnography also held answers to this riddle. The constitution of my ‘self’ is, while at once dialogic with the world outside myself—cultural—and thus ‘in common’, it is also, to borrow Patty Sotirin’s (2010) phrase, “radically specific” (2).

As an autoethnographic methodology, “radical specificity” (Sotirin, 2010: 2) focusses a micro-lens on human and non-human interdependency, or “intersubjectivity” (2), where cultural values, beliefs, and practices, experiences, are presented in their idiosyncrasies: temporally non-linear, interrupted by ugly/beautiful thoughts, haunted affects (ex. feelings at an old prison site in New Westminster where the graves of Indigenous men from along the BC coast, u/dystopian dreams (literal and aspirational), hallucinations (ex. feeling racially superior or inferior) and conflicting desires (Culhane, 2016; Sotirin, 2010). By being radically specific my aim is to position my ‘self’ as a “multisensorial, embodied, imaginative being living and dying with others in a historically specific and politically charged environment” (Culhane, 2016: 14), formed and forming in zones of entanglement with other humans, non-humans, events, memories and living histories.

And yet, with talk of an ethnographer sourcing knowledge from their own sensorium I need to revisit Cartesian dualism which poses obstacles, not just to place-thought but to

autoethnography itself. I mentioned Kirsten Hastrup's (1992) reservations about the ethnographer as interlocutor above, but in a later article (1994) she goes into more detail. There, she specifically highlights a potential blockage for those enculturated to the Cartesian split between mind and body. That is, though we experience the "unity of body and mind" (cited in Culhane, 2016: 14) naturally, because we have never framed our experience in such terms we tend to have difficulty expressing it in language. This obviously poses a challenge to an autoethnographer attempting to do creative, multisensorial ethnography about colonial perception and land. Not only do I need to deal with the binary between my body/being and land and sea, but my language to discuss such fieldwork, is, to understate, "lacking" (14).

However, Culhane (2016) suggests a way into this problem might be to focus on "imaginative processes" (15), which often act, even in our quotidian lives, as "pedagogy" (15). We learn by employing our imagination. For example, to access compassion and greater understanding about an ancestor's plight by 'putting ourselves in their shoes', or coming up with a delicious meal from nearly bare cupboards. As Paul Stoller (2009) puts it, imaginative processes can "...bridge the spaces between things..." (57), "...empower..." the ethnographer to "...take risks in order to tell stories, stories that enabl[e] the dead to live again...to connect with [the] past and imagine [the] future" (57). With all this said, I now turn to my play, which will be followed by further discussions around place-thought, before giving an overview of the fieldwork I completed and some analyses of the key takeaways as I work toward a 'paused' conclusion (defined below). But first, a few words to introduce the play.

### **The play: *Who's the White Guy?***

Here is a draft of the play, as complete as possible, I hope, without the kind of development work that includes the collaboration of actors, designers, and audiences. Workshopping a piece requires resources that are beyond the scope of my thesis project, though it is my plan to pursue development and production assistance in the near future. While I have written it to cover most themes of the academic text that accompanies it, I do not do so proportionately. For example, for reasons of dramatic tension the theme of ancestral communication is foregrounded while methodological matters such as autoethnography are omitted. I have chosen to make the character most approximated to

'me' (Jasper), largely uneducated (as I was until the age of 39) both for the sake of heightening stakes, and to include issues of class in Settler/Indigenous discourses.

## Scene 1

*Voilin's house. Jasper, a middle-aged White man stands shivering under an amber entrance light, apparently having just come in. He is wearing a too-tight black H&M sports jacket over a white t-shirt that has the print of a dream-catcher on its chest. His light-grey jeans are also too tight, and the meant-to-be-high leg-hems are somehow too high. The thought might occur to someone in the audience that he's been shrink-wrapped in cheap synthetic fabrics... He's trying to be up on the latest fashion but suspects he's failing and can't quite put his finger on it.*

*Voilin is sitting upright at an oak table on the edge of their chair, their back to Jasper, looking down at three large Tarot<sup>1</sup> cards spread in front of her. Their face is hidden by a wide-brimmed cream lace cloche hat with a braided leather band. Long bristly grey hair reaches down to the black fur collar of a peacock feather shrug worn above a flowing full-length jet-black velvet dress. Their feet can't be seen by any of the audience members, but white-gloved hands rest relaxed on either side of the card-spread as Voilin has been studying them. They appear to have four fingers on each hand, all of equal length.*

*Voilin turns from their cards and looks Jasper in the face, gives him a once-over head to toe. Jasper squints trying to get a better look at them. The brim of Voilin's cloche is low and they wear a black medical mask. But their violet eyes are unmistakable before she turns them back to the cards.*

Voilin: *(tolerantly)* Come in old man.

Jasper: *(anxiously)* I'm sorry.

Voilin: Why?

Jasper: I thought this was a shop.

Voilin: Like a butcher's shop?

Jasper: Uh No.

Voilin: ..Why don't you come in.

Jasper: Thank you. *(grateful, comes in).*

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<sup>1</sup> It doesn't matter if the audience are aware at this point if they are tarot cards, though they may assume as the scene progresses.

Voilin: (*tired now that she's seen him*) How can I help you?

Jasper: I want to- ...I would like to...

Voilin: (*teasing*) Come on old man. You want to talk to someone who's dead or you wouldn't be here.

Jasper: You are the spirit medium?

Voilin: No, I'm the butcher. What would you like?

Jasper: ...I was hoping to talk with...um..

Voilin: Let me guess, a long lost relative who buried the family jewels somewhere.

*Beat.*

Jasper: My Mum passed recently. Well not so recently. ..Two years ago...

Voilin: Sorry for your loss.

Jasper: ..I've been having nightmares<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> How does an ethnographer talk about dreams? An arguably dominant view in contemporary Cartesian life-worlds holds that dreams present little material value beyond basic biological functions designed to maintain balance in our bodies (Langlitz, 2015). Dominant streams in professional anthropology are little different. If not dismissed outright, they might refer to eminent neuroscientists such as Antti Revonsuo whose life work is studying dreams and dreaming and who continues to maintain an empirical stranglehold on the field. Views that see our brains as existing in an isolated compartment unaffected by the outside world are upheld in tandem by top neurophilosophers such as Thomas Metzinger (741). Yet disagreements with this point of view do not necessarily just exist on the fringe. Clifford Geertz (2000) for example has said: "Our brains are not in a vat, but in our bodies. Our minds are not in our bodies, but in the world. And as for the world, it is not in our brains, our bodies, or our minds: they are, along with gods, verbs, rocks, and politics, in it" (cited in Langlitz, 2015: 741). In other words, the way our brains function is entangled with the environments they find themselves in. Dreams, while unspeakably diverse are equally affected by this intersubjectivity.

Such a holistic viewpoint is not radical when looking beyond Cartesian life worlds. For example, Amira Mittermaier (2011), exploring Islamic dream-culture, asserts that to her Egyptian Muslim interlocutors "dreams matter...not because they provide dreamers with a protective blanket of false consciousness or hallucinatory wish fulfilment, but because they insert the dreamer into a wider network of symbolic debts, relationships, and meanings" (3). For Indigenous peoples in North America dreams are thresholds allowing contact with non-human entities, or access to time travel and sight into the past and future, or visions of healing or warfare/peace, etc (Carlson, 2010; Deloria Jr & Deloria, 2006). Pre-Christian Britains and contemporary Druids—with British and Irish diaspora practitioners all over the world—maintain similar views on dreaming (Carr-Gomm, 2002).

For myself, dreams have been instrumental in my journey, as part of this research, to explore cracks in my Cartesian sensorium, as I investigate my own micro-cultural embodiments in relation to land—in counterpoint to place-thought.

Voilin: I have to warn you, Sigmund Freud is not only a misogynist but overrated as an analyst.

Jasper: Sorry?

Voilin: If I had a dime for every person who wants to talk with that old fart, I'd be rich. I'm just saying.

Jasper: No. I want to talk to my mother.

Voilin: I'm just yanking your leg old man.

Jasper: What did you say?

Voilin: You White folks never know how to laugh at yourself. I'm telling you..

Jasper: Oh. ...

Voilin: I need to know why.

Jasper: Why what?

Voilin: *(pushing her chair back and standing, not much more than 4 feet tall)* You want to speak with your mother.

Jasper: Why?

*Voilin shuffles to the window with three steps, lifting one side of her body laboriously with each step.*

Voilin: I don't like surprises.

*Voilin opens to the heavy velvet curtain, letting moonlight in.*

Jasper: Oh. Like I said, I've been having a nightmare<sup>3</sup>.

Voilin: *(turning)* Ooooh. What kind of nightmare?

Jasper: You want me to describe it?

Voilin: No I want you to mime it. Better yet, charades. Come on let's play!

*Beat.*



Voilin: It's okay old man, I won't bite, just having some fun with you. Somebody's got to. ..You were going to say?

Jasper: ...I'm playing cards in a circle of men. All smoking. It's blurry. ..I feel a tug at my arm, I look down, and see that it's a little boy.

Voilin: Interesting.

Jasper: I ignore him. He tugs again, I shake my elbow loose from his little grip, he tugs again, and suddenly I lose all my patience, stand up, pick him up, and shake him with all my strength like he was a rag doll.

Voilin: You see, I'd hate to hear how Sigmund would explain *that*.

Jasper: (*joke goes over his head*) And then there's the part where I'm a pig...in the body of a pig. Every time, the two together.

Voilin: And this dream repeats night after night.

Jasper: Yes. It started last week.

Voilin: Let me guess. On the lunar eclipse.

Jasper: Yes. And there's another part.

Voilin: Go on.

Jasper I'm reading something. I hear my voice as if it's coming from another room. It's awful. About kids being separated from their families. Taken to schools. Abused terribly. Now I know what it is, Residential Schools, but it's totally weird because I've never even read the Truth and Reconciliation reports before, but in my dreams I'm reciting them. ...And I wake up feeling like a...monster... And it's' all part of everything, my life's falling apart -and-I've-been-having-these-thoughts-of-killing- myself-Everything-since Mum died-everything-has-fallen-apart. My brother's sick, I hate my job, I can hardly pay rent and I'm in my forties, I'm already a loser and then the other day this person calls me a Settler and a Racist and a Murderer and I've never done anything like that before and...I've lived here my whole life and now I feel like I don't belong.

Voilin: (*genuinely soothing*) it's okay. It's okay. Calm down. Just take a deep breath.

Jasper: I'm not a *settler*, we've been here for three generations now...well. I don't know.

Voilin: (*tough*) Stop it.

Jasper: What?

Voilin Can I say something?

Jasper: Yes.

Voilin: You're not going to slit your wrists if I do?

Jasper: ...

Voilin: Okay. Don't take this the wrong way but self-pity coming from a White man is..unsettling.. to say the least. Plus, and trust me on this, it doesn't do anyone any good.

Jasper: ..Okay..

Voilin: And don't lie to a psychic.

*Beat.*

Jasper: Sorry?

Voilin: Especially when the truth is going to come out anyway. It's actually kind of stupid.

Jasper: I was going to get to that.

Voilin: The real reason you want to speak to your Mum.

*Jasper collapses into a chair at the oak table, covering his face with his hands in torment, lets out a sort of sob.*

Voilin: Don't be melodramatic. What did I say about self-pity?

Jasper: (sitting upright) Sorry. (*wipes his eyes roughly*)

Voilin: I know you love her. I know you and your Mum used to call each other soul mates. And I know you have been devastated since you lost her.

*Pause.*

Jasper: This (*situation*) is so crazy.

Voilin: Tell me about it.

Jasper: (*missing her point*) ..Okay.

*Pause.*

Jasper: ..Before Mum died, she was really sick. It was no more than a week before she passed. I was staying with her, at her place. Nursing her. And...it was the lunar eclipse when she showed it to me.

Voilin: A letter.

Jasper: A very old letter. A letter from Gwydion.

Voilin: Your great great uncle.

Jasper: From Wales.

Voilin: Who was here, during the Gold Rush.

Jasper: He died here. Drowned apparently.

Voilin: Okay. ..Go on.

Jasper: I had no idea there was a lunar eclipse. She woke me up in the middle of the night and insisted I come with her to the living room. Even though we'd never shown much interest in astronomy when I was a kid growing up.

Voilin okay.

Jasper: Rori was nowhere to be found.

Voilin: Your older brother.

Jasper: He was drunk somewhere, probably. Him and Mum hadn't been on very good terms for a long time.

Voilin: So it was just you and your mother.

Jasper: Yeah. So I followed her to the living room. It had just begun when I saw it at first, and you could hardly notice, a tiny sliver of the full moon being erased. Totally magical as it grew. But you know, I mean, it wasn't quick. And I was so worried about her. Clinging there practically, to the window sill as we watched it, so frail, the whole time, insisting on it, standing there with me, just in awe of the universe, you know, second by second, as the earth gradually, minute by minute, blocked out the moon's light. Felt like it was her light. Until it started to grow back .. ...Mostly we stood there in total silence. When it was over she sat down, exhausted. She was crying. She said she regretted never having kept in touch with 'the family' and that now Rori and I would be all alone. But, she said.. she said there was a chance we might still have family in Wales, and that there

was a letter, that she had a letter from a brother of her great grandfather's to his wife in Newport Wales, and that Rori and I should try to get in touch with them. She said he was a miner here during the Gold Rush in the 1860s, and that from what she understood it was the last anyone heard from him.

Voilin: And you asked if you could see it.

Jasper: The letter, yeah.

Voilin: But then she asked you to help her back to bed.

Jasper: That's right, she started to fade really fast, and she said we could 'look at it tomorrow'.

Voilin: But she died during the night.

Jasper: I was by her side the whole time. Just like the moon, something passed in front of it. But it never came back. By the morning she was cold.

Voilin: Sounds like she had a good death.

Jasper: Thank you. ...

Voilin: ...And now you want to know where the letter is.

Jasper: We could never find it. Well Rori didn't care. But it never turned up.

Voilin: Why do you want the letter, Jasper?

Jasper: (*looks at her startled*)... I need to know Gwydion's last name, because I searched Myrick's on Ancestry.ca and no one alive came up connected to my great great grandfather Ernest Myrick. So I'm thinking there's a chance the spelling of the name might be different.

Voilin: That's not all.

Jasper: No.

Voilin: Your Mum told you his letter included a short diary.

Jasper: That's right.

Voilin: And..

Jasper: Well he was a gold miner. Here...when it all went down.

Voilin: You want to know what?

Jasper: Well, after the small pox, the miners that came up for the Gold Rush were the next biggest scourge to visit the Coast Salish. There was murder and rape and theft.

Voilin: Jasper you don't know what you're getting yourself into.

Jasper: What do you mean?

Voilin: First of all, if you think the letter will either damn you because he was an evil man or absolve you because he was kind, you *are* mistaken. Indigenous folks here consider you a Settler no matter what. You're white and you have undue privilege, every word that comes out of your mouth as long as you deny that likely acts as thorn, to put it politely.

Jasper: But—

Voilin: Trust me. You have to deal with the politics here and now.

Jasper: But—

Voilin: And second of all, Gwydion has been hunting you for some time.

Jasper: Haunting me?

Voilin: I said *hunting* you.

Jasper: What do you mean?

Voilin: Your dreams, for example. They're not just your own.

Jasper: What?

Voilin: You're being hunted by a spirit whose intentions I can't ascertain. And as long as you look for that letter, I think you're in danger. And it's not just Gwydion. There's others.

Jasper: Spirits?

*Voilin nods slowly.*

Jasper: What should I do?

Voilin: Forget about the letter. Or, burn it.

Jasper: I need to ask Mum where it is.

Voilin: If I tell you do you promise to burn it?

Jasper: ..Yes.

Voilin: Your mother is in danger, you know. You're not the only one Gwydion's looking for.

Jasper: How do you know all this?

Voilin: Your mother told me.

Jasper: She's here?! Can I talk to her?!!

Voilin: It's not a good time.

Jasper: (calling into the room) MUM?! Are you okay??!!

Voilin: She's not a dummy. She's hiding. She's fine. Either forget about the letter or promise you'll burn it.

Jasper: I'll burn it!

Voilin: Say: 'I understand the consequences if I don't burn the letter'.

Jasper: I understand the consequences if I don't burn the letter'.

Voilin: Again.

Jasper: I understand the consequences if I don't burn the letter!

Voilin: One more time.

Jasper: I understand the consequences if I don't burn the letter!!

Voilin: It's hidden in the old trunk your mother left for Rori.

*Voilin's head swivels oddly nearly 180 degrees as she turns and shuts the curtains.*

Jasper: ...Why do you keep calling me 'old man'?

Voilin: Because you're trapped in thinking that keeps you locked in your own separate little world.

*To Black.*

## Scene 2

*Rori's hysterical laughter for several beats before lights come up, revealing:*

*A tastefully minimalist living-room. Coffee table with a 26oz bottle of Jameson Whiskey half empty on it, two upholstered arm-chairs, and a Japanese water colour of a river and mountain bluff. Over the course of the scene, dying light from a sunset fills the room warmly from a west facing window. Rori is a White person in their late forties. Narrow shoulders, slight frame, beard and glasses, tattoo sleeves on both arms. They have the confident air of competence and success about them.*

*Jasper sits nervously on a love seat beside Rori, wearing the same outfit.*

Rori: *(laugh finally subsiding)*. You never cease to amaze me.

Jasper: I don't see what's so funny. People change.

Rori: For god's sake, laugh at yourself at little. Always so serious.

Jasper: You're always drunk.

Rori: Maybe, but even with that handicap I do a lot better than you.

*Beat.*

Rori: Sorry. Jasper, I'm sorry, that's going too far.

Jasper: You always go too far.

Rori: *(What can I say?)* I'm extreme.

*Beat.*

Rori: *(pouring themselves another whiskey)* Anyway, so you think this person is serious.

Jasper: It feels right.

Rori: Since when do *you* use your intuition?

Jasper: Alright. *(puts down his untouched glass of whiskey, moving toward the door)* I'm going home. I'll come back another time when you're earlier on in the bottle.

Rori: Awww, Jasper, don't be a pooper scooper. Alright, look I'm sorry. I'm just playing, I'm not that drunk anyway, I didn't drink all this before you got here (*puts their drink down*). ...Okay. ...I'm being serious. ....You're having nightmares.

Jasper: *A* nightmare.

Rori: That's been coming back over and over and over.

Jasper: Yes.

Rori: And you said part of it is that you hear yourself reading from the Truth and Reconciliation Report?

Jasper: Yes.

Rori: That *is* really weird. ..For you.

Jasper: Thanks.

Rori: I'm just saying. ..But you know about the 'hashtag Read The TRC Report' campaign, right?

Jasper: I do now, yeah.

Rori: Well, now that you've been doing all this "research" on Coast Salish stuff, do think that maybe you're having what they call "prophetic dreams"—dreams that foretell the future. As in, at some point in the future maybe you'll be like an Indigenous ally? Stranger things have happened.

Jasper: Fuck you.

Rori: Sorry broski, I couldn't resist. Come on, have a drink, loosen up. Go on, go on.

Jasper: Yeah... fuck it.

*Jasper takes gulp of the whiskey. Beat.*

Rori: Do you think maybe it's just the depression again?

Jasper: Probably... (*takes another gulp, finishing the glass; pouring himself another while Rori does the same*). I don't know what's going on.

Rori: Where did you find this person anyway? They're a 'spirit medium'?

Jasper: Yeah.



Rori: Jesus.

Jasper: Believe it or not, I picked her rand—

Rori: THEM. By the sounds of your description, you don't even know if they're human let alone female identifying. You said, four fingers?

Jasper: For someone so "woke", you're an asshole.. She-, THEY obviously have a disability.., or birth defect.

Rori: True. Sorry.

Jasper: I picked them randomly from Google.

Rori: So weird bro. ...And they said this letter is in Mum's trunk?

Jasper: Yeah. So, one more time, can we have a look?

Rori: ...No.

Jasper: What do you mean "no"?

Rori: ..I cleared out all of Mum's stuff a long time ago. My collection of China's in there now.

Jasper: What did you do with her things?

Rori: ..Burned them.

Jasper: YOU WHAT? That was her memory chest!

Rori: It was totally cathartic.

Jasper: Why didn't you give it to me?

Rori: Because I wanted to ritually cleanse myself of all the bad blood. It was mostly doilies and shit anyway.

Jasper: What about all those old photographs?

Rori: Up in smoke...

Jasper: I can't believe you. I'm...I'm truly fucking amazed. ...I'm in shock.

Rori: Sorry Jasper. But we didn't know any of those people anyway. All dead relatives who we never met. We didn't even know their names. And it was a way...it was a way for me to have the last word on Mother.

Jasper: *(putting his glass on the coffee table)* The only pictures of our great grandparents were in there.

Rori: *(wincing)* Not any more.

Jasper: I'm in shock.

Rori: *(pouring themselves another drink)*. As Tom Waits says, 'that's the way the cookie crumbles'. *(takes a long pull from the whiskey)* Don't push me on this, you know what I went through-

Jasper: Wait a minute.

Rori: Don't blow me off, you know how her transphobia-

Jasper: Voilin said that Gwydion would hunt me as long as I looked for the letter.

Rori: I said don't interrupt me.

Jasper: She said, "it's hidden" in the trunk...

Rori: *(standing)* JASPER.

Jasper: There must be a hidden compartment.

Rori: You KNOW how sensitive I am about this.

Jasper: Yeah, and you're drunk. That tends to affect your sensitivity.

Rori: You don't know how it feels to have the skin of a freak...to feel disapproval just for being present. Mum treated me like a strange indecent artefact best left undusted in a dark cupboard.

Jasper: How many times have we been through this?

Rori: WHAT? You're just starting to clue in to questions about belonging and now it's all about you? Who gives a FUCK about your little quest, you poor fucking CIS WHITE MAN.

Jasper: *(Standing)* Mum loved you and you know it. She came around.

Rori: When she was on her DEATH BED.

Jasper: EXACTLY.

*They both glare at each other for long silence.*

Rori: Alright. You wanna have a look at her precious trunk?

Jasper: YES.

Rori: Alright.

*Rori walks at speed leaving the room momentarily, and comes back dragging the trunk with one hand, carrying a baseball bat in the other.*

Rori: You think there's a secret compartment eh?

Jasper: Rori.

Rori: She should have given it to her little momma's boy, but she DIDN'T.  
Let's see if there's a secret compartment, you spoiled little shit.

Jasper: RORI NO!

Rori: *(Threatening Jasper with the baseball bat)* BACK OFF.

*Jasper steps back, as Rori turns and slams the baseball bat into the trunk once, twice, three times, caving in the lid. But unsatisfied with that they open it and slam the lid knocking it off one hinge, then the other-*

Rori: What do you see? Anything? Jasper? Anything? I don't see anything.  
Let's have a better look.

*They continue full throttle smashing the bat into the trunk, cracking one wall, then shattering the China, and another trunk wall.*

Rori: OH WELL, doesn't look there's a secret compartment. Surprise surprise.

*Rori drops the bat and collapses onto the floor exhausted, wood and pieces of porcelain strewn about the room. Long pause, Rori breathing deeply, Jasper staring in shock. Finally:*

Rori: I was going to tell you when the time was right. But there's no right time.

Jasper: ...Tell me what?

Rori: I'm moving to New Zealand, kid. I can't do this here anymore.

*Pause.*

Jasper: ..What?

Rori: I put my place up for sale last month. There's a buyer, we close tomorrow. I'm tired of being a freak. Which is what I am here. New Zealanders treat *rivers* like human beings, maybe they'll treat Trans like ones too.

*Pause.*

Jasper: But (I'll be all alone).

Rori: It's about time you stood on your two feet.

Jasper: Did something else happen?

Rori: You wonder if you belong now that a person or two at work has challenged you when you're in your *mid-forties*? A month or two, maybe a year of feeling out of place? ..Well try it going on and on for decades. Try your own mother telling you you don't belong. Try everywhere you go, every nationality and positionality telling you you don't belong. Canada is fucked. And I'm out.

*Pause.*

Jasper: Rori, no...

*Rori stands, looking at the wreckage of the trunk:*

Rori: Remember the time that older boy stole your hockey stick?

*Beat.*

Jasper: Yeah.

Rori: You were playing on the street and he came by on a bike. Stole it right out of your hands.

Jasper: I ran to tell you.

Rori: Everyone thought I was a girl.

Jasper: You got on your bike and went after him. I followed. ...When I got there you were pulling him off his bike.

Rori: I wasn't stronger than him physically. But my rage was. Take something from my little brother?

Jasper: You only punched him in the mouth twice before he was crying to leave him alone.

Rori: Hockey sticks don't grow on trees... Well wood ones do.

*They giggle. Jasper chokes up.*

Jasper: Rori I don't want you to go.

Rori: I know kid. *(looking closer at the rubble)* ...But look at this

*Rori bends down, flicks a few things aside and pulls out an old stained, creased brown envelope.*

*To black.*

## Scene 3

*Voilin's space. Moonlight streams through her window. Voilin is standing perched on one of her chairs, her back to the audience, looking out, her black dress reaching to the floor. Jasper stands shivering in the entrance light.*

Voilin: You didn't burn the letter.

Jasper: I haven't yet.

Voilin: You're putting us both in danger.

Jasper: There was a map on the back of one of the pages.

Voilin: The old New Westminster Train Bridge.

Jasper: That's what's there now. Yes. Built in 1905.

Voilin: What did you find?

Jasper: "Sxwoymelh". In English it translates as: 'A Warrior Was Turned To Stone Here'. It's what the Coast Salish call a Transformer site. Well, that's what they tell Settlers they call it. It's apparently a very sacred site. Or it used to be? I don't know. I don't think I should talk about it. Now it's a steel bridge for trains, and a paved road runs by it. Lots of traffic.

Voilin: It has a newer name.

Jasper: 'Place Where People Died'.

Voilin: A village was decimated by small pox there.

Jasper: According to a book I read, Coast Salish elders and scholars believe up to 90 percent of the pre-Settler population was killed by it. Before we even got here our diseases had a genocidal impact.

Voilin: Why do you think Gwydion drew a map of it?

Jasper: It's where he camped when he first arrived. It was a protected site. A vantage point, you could see if anyone was coming from up and down river. It was already cleared, so... It made sense to camp there while they gathered gear and what not while they waited for a transport by steamboat up to Port Douglas. Which is where he sent the letter from.

Voilin: At the head of Harrison Lake.

Jasper: Peqwpa:qotel.

Voilin: “Splashing down off the mountain, water joining”<sup>4</sup>.

Jasper: Its Sts’ailes name

Voilin: You’ve really done your research.

Jasper: In the letter Gwydion dreamed about the place becoming a city. He said: “it begged for improvement”. ...Are you alright?

Voilin: You promised me.

Jasper: I said I understood the consequences.

Voilin: Three times.

Jasper: But I didn’t understand. I still don’t. Maybe Gwydion just wants to talk to me.

Voilin: Can you feel him?

Jasper: No.

Voilin: He’s smelling us.

Jasper: That was in my dream!

Voilin: He’s showing you.

Jasper: It’s you he’s hunting.

Voilin: What was your impression of him, from the letter?

Jasper: Why am I a wolf in the dream?

Voilin: That’s not you in the dream.

Jasper: I don’t understand.

Voilin: Do you know the legend of Gwydion? The trickster.

Jasper: No.

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<sup>4</sup> Sto:lo Atlas (Carlson, 2001: 144)

Voilin: Gwydion is a character from Welsh mythology. He and his brother were turned into mating stags, then pigs, then wolves, for three years.

Jasper: Whoa. Why?

Voilin: For betraying their uncle.

*Voilin closes the curtain, the light changes dramatically. Steps down from the chair awkwardly.*

Voilin: (turning to Jasper) I knew you would lie to me.

Jasper: I don't understand.

Voilin: No, you don't. And now you're gallivanting around sacred places just like your kin before you.

Jasper: It's an industrial site now-

Voilin: Seeking out knowledge keepers and ignoring their advice.

Jasper: You didn't tell me what the consequences were!

Voilin: Do you want to find out?

Jasper: No.

Voilin: I think you do.

Jasper: I'm confused. Gwydion's letter was just...a normal letter. It was a love letter to his wife who he hadn't seen for years.

Voilin: Then you have nothing to fear.

Jasper: He was a poor miner looking for a way out.

Voilin: (shuffling toward Jasper) OOOOhh, the heroic pioneer story all you settlers like to tell about your "destiny".

Jasper: His story wasn't heroic. That's not how he saw himself.

Voilin: Then why did he stay?

Jasper: He died here.

Voilin: (*dragging a chair out from the table to the centre of the room*) Is that really what you think of his story? Do you think he would tell his wife the truth?

Jasper: I don't know.



Voilin: Why do White people have such a proclivity to self-deception?

Jasper: He died here.

Voilin: (*Voilin's voice is magnified throughout the theatre, no longer sounding human*)  
SIT.

*Jasper sits. Voilin picks up the bottle of blue fluid and holds it to Jasper's lips.*

Voilin: Drink. And you will see beyond your little mind.

Jasper: What is it?

Voilin: What do you care? You don't really believe any of this anyway. ... Still can't take a joke. It's an herbal elixir that thins the lines between, here, and there. Physically harmless. No side effects.

*Jasper hesitates, looking up at them. Then lets them pour the blue liquid into his mouth, swallowing as they pours. Finished, Voilin sits at the table, and from a tall side table pulls out three candles, a silver bowl and carafe. They light a match and touches it to the three candles. Jasper closes his eyes.*

*Voilin pulls out a square hunk of clay the size of a Rubik's Cube and places it on the oak table; pours water into the bowl from the carafe. They then remove their white gloves one by one revealing an owl's talons as they wet the clay down until it is glistening smooth. Jasper's torso begins to bob back and forth gently..*

*Both hands on the clay, Voilin begins to chant:*

Voilin: 'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola', Gwydion.  
'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola', Gwydion-

*-Jasper's whole body stiffens-*

Voilin: '-Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola', Gwydion.  
Gwydion, 'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola'.  
Gwydion. 'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola',  
Gwydion. Gwydion. Gwydion.

*A draft runs through the room, the candles flicker, and then stop. There is silence, stillness, for some moments before Voilin begins to intone again as she begins to press her hands into the clay, molding the tension in the room as it were.*

Voilin: Gwydion-

*Jasper's head dips banging against his chest, then stiffens upright again.*

Voilin: 'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola', Gywdion.  
'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola', Gwydion.  
'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola', Gwydion.  
Gwydion-

*Again Jasper's head dips, more violently, banging against his chest, stiffens up again, jerks down again and then up part way, and then looks directly at the audience.*

Voilin: (louder) 'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola'.  
Gwydion. 'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a gipio'r ola',  
Gwydion.

*Again, a strange draft, a breeze this time, begins to blow through the room.*

Voilin: (louder still) Gwydion, 'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a  
gipio'r ola', Gywdion. 'Adref, adref, am y cyntaf', Hwch ddu gwta a  
gipio'r ola', Gwydion.

*A sudden wind, accompanied by a panicked exclamational scream (blend of human and sow) rising from all corners of the theatre as all the candles blow out leaving a deep orange glow around the perimeter of the room, causing Voilin and Jasper to appear in silhouette, the wind dying down as quickly as it came.*

*Silence and stillness. Jasper is glaring at the audience, his head tilted back..Voilin opens their eyes wide, showing huge dark violet eyes.*

*Until the atmosphere is shattered by Rori bursting through the door letting a blinding light into the theatre—*

Rori: JASPER?!!

*To Black.*

## Scene 4

*Through the scrim onstage can be seen a lamp standing on a tall side table, an over-stuffed lazy boy arm chair that has been thoroughly thrashed by house-cats. Jasper is reclined in the chair with his feet up, apparently sleeping, wearing only underwear, socks and a white t-shirt. He looks excessively pale, wan.*

*Rori is sleeping curled up on a mat beside him.*

*The sound of wind. Static.*

*Jasper begins having what looks like a seizure in slow motion, then he sits up somnolently and begins speaking in his sleep. It is like he has a different body.*

*Gwydion speaks through Jasper in his sleep (GJ). The projected images continue. The feeling is surreal. We're not sure what is real or what is dream. Gwydion-speaking-through-Jasper's-body (Gwydion/Jasper):*

Gwydion/Jasper:       *(addressing the audience, speaking with a Welsh accent)* Well.  
Look at all you lonely souls. Look at us. I'm happy. I am very happy.  
Am I needed again? Don't think for a moment I'll take the  
opportunity lightly. Did he call you too? Are you here to help or to  
get in his way? Do you know where you are?

*Rori stirs and sits up on an elbow, watching Jasper carefully.*

Gwydion/Jasper:       Do you know *when* you are? Now that you're dead,  
where is home? We've come a long way. But from where to where?  
I wander aimlessly. No place knows my name. And you? And Jasper?

Rori:       Jasper?

Gwydion/Jasper:       I can go far and wide and deep. To any galaxy I want.  
And you?

Rori:       Jasper! Are you okay?

Gwydion/Jasper:       *(turning to Rori)* And you must be..Rori.

Rori:       JASPER.

*Jasper's whole body sags, he blinks and looks around confused.*

Jasper:    Rori?

Rori: What are you doing?

Jasper: Why am I standing up?

Rori: You were talking to yourself. Or to someone I couldn't see.

Jasper: That wasn't me (talking)...RORI.

Rori: What? What the fuck, Jasper?

Jasper: Gwydion was in my dream.

Rori: He was inside you.

Jasper: No.

Rori: YES.

Jasper: ...We were on an old gaff-rigged wooden skiff named Abigail on the Sto:lo River. Off the eastern end of Lulu Island and... New Westminster didn't exist. It was all forest. As far as the eye could see. A thick mist lay over the water and foreshore...

Rori: (*shaking him gently*) What happened with Voilin?

*Beat.*

Jasper: It felt like I was wrapped in a warm blanket.

Rori: That's not how it looked or sounded.

Jasper: You were there?

Rori: I brought you home. You're home. I stayed with you.

Jasper: ..Why?

Rori: Jasper. What else do you remember?

Jasper: She said I'm on the right path.

Rori: Who did?

Jasper: Mum. She brought Gwydion to me. And then-

Rori: You saw Mum?

Jasper: (smiling eerily) Yeah...incredible right? You know what she said?

Rori: What?

Jasper: She said, tell Rori they are the bravest person I've ever known.

Rori: I think we should go to the doctor. You're super pale. And your eyes are...hollow.

Jasper: You know I think that too right?

Rori: (grumpy) Fuck off, Jasper.

Jasper: She's been watching over us. She said it's like being able to breathe in water.

Rori: Come on. Get dressed.

Jasper: (*eyes beginning to focus*) It's so wild Rori. It's like a feeling language so much more precise than this. Me talking to you. If we were both there we would know instantly what the other wants and needs, stories are communicated in flashes.

Rori: And Gwydion?

Jasper: ... He showed me beings..

Rori: Christ.

Jasper: Here. They *aren't* ghosts. They're ..spirits, for lack of a better word..who live here too. Not just dead ones. Which is a totally clumsy way of putting it. There are ones who are living, now, who are..like those kinds of spirits who might dwell in a rock or a river eddy. Or a grove, or a... They are alive, today, here in New Westminster, for example, but living in an entirely different world from us.

Rori: I have no idea what you're talking about. Will you please get dressed?

Jasper: We don't have to be ghosts. ...Gwydion said the Aboriginals on the Sto:lo River used to call him Xwelitem<sup>5</sup>; Greedy One. Hungry One..

Rori: Why did they call him that?

Jasper: Because he didn't know how to survive here. Because he had to change the whole environment, change it enough to sway things in his favour. Like an alien in a foreign world.

Rori: ...

Jasper: And he said we've only gotten worse since then. Changed it more and more and more and more. We're more greedy than ever.

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<sup>5</sup> See Heaslip, 2017.

Rori: Who is “we”?

Jasper: Those of us who don’t see this place as the place it is, but the place we want it to be. Settlers, I guess, who want it to look like England or Germany, or wherever. Instead of what it already is continuing to *be*, for so many of us it’s become a place to become other than who we are. Like ghosts floating over empty surfaces...putting all our meaning into comfort. We’ve paved over everything... Gwydion said that’s why boats are so important. You have to be in relationship with the land and sea when you’re on a boat. In a truck or a car you might as well be flying through the clouds ...it’s just another way humans separate ourselves from everyone else.

*Beat.*

Rori: Sounds more like LSD than dreaming.

Jasper: We kill our dreams just as we kill the land and waters and sea. But It’s always talking to us. They speak in languages we choose not to learn. People and spirits who have lived here since time immemorial have been telling us that since we first arrived. On the rare occasions we’d stop for long enough to pretend to listen. Or at least, that’s what Gwydion says. The miners wanted gold. They wanted “freedom”. But we brought all the things we tried to escape from. I think that’s why we’re still so afraid of this place. We don’t want to hear about spirits being burned by dynamite and mercury.

*Pause.*

Rori You sound like a fanatic.

Jasper: It’s real.

Rori: If you say so. (handing him clothes) Okay, here. Put these on.

Jasper: (*ignores them*) Did you know Lulu Island was named after a famous local entertainer? Must be such an insult... Or at least a testament to the escapism we imported with us...Gwydion set the anchor off Lulu Island and we sat there in Abigail, side by side looking at the land that would become New Westminster. Proud trees reaching into the clouds. He told me a story about Taliesin, the greatest bard and seer of the British Isles before the Romans wiped out the Druids. Taliesin claimed to be first born as dust. ... “I was myself gleaming fire/When I was first given life/I was dust on the earth/And grief could not reach me/I was a great wind...”.

Rori: You *remember* that?

Jasper: In other words, Gwydion said, the Britons were first and foremost, *physically*, the land. They were born as elements and then as animals, and then as humans. All related. Gwydion went on to tell me about a time when he first came here, he had been pulled from the Sto:lo River, miraculously by a Leq'a:mel fishing party. They nursed him back to health. One of the Elders told him a story while he was convalescing that was similar to the legends told by Taliesin. Gwydion told the Elder, who was really happy thinking he'd found something in common with the invaders. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad. ...But Gwydion told the Elder he was happy to have escaped such chains. Chains of dust and coal...Now he could go wherever he liked unhindered by the cage of birthright. Jesus had set them free. A colonial dream. A faith born thousands of miles away, was a faith to ramble with, into the unknown. And he was happy to be free of the stinking mines and filth of Abergavenny. ...He dreamed of New Westminster growing into a big city. All new, in a new era, with new power, and new meanings.

Beat.

Rori: Do you agree with him?

Jasper: I don't know...But I want to find out.

Beat.

Rori: Anyway, we know where humans came from. Africa. All of us from a single ancestor. We migrated over millennia. We *know* that.

Jasper: Do you *know* that? How? Just because you have faith in science? Gwydion said the people he met thought they come from the animals, trees, the fish, and he says they still do.

Rori: It's not about faith or belief. That's exactly the point. It's about facts.

Jasper: Who's the ideologue?

Rori: ...Anyway, there's no point arguing.

Jasper: Sorry.

Rori: Whatever. So what does Gwydion want with you?

Jasper: ...After he told me the story of Taliesin, he disappeared, literally into thin air. And I watched, the City of New Westminster, from Abigail, come into being plank by plank, bleeding into existence in flashes of slow motion. Like a kind of sunset, the colours exploding into space. Becoming a new place. ...The boat felt so good. And I knew, I know,

that even though New Westminster and all the rest of the urban landscape of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland continues to crust over the soul of hills and valleys and mountains, the waterways are still as they were thousands of years ago. They're a path back in time, as Gwydion showed me. The land and sea and its spirits haven't gone anywhere. I want to see if they'll accept me. If I can find the way to ask for their blessings. And to see what that does to the way I think and act here. And that maybe, in some way, that might, for one, put me in responsible relationship with Coast Salish people and their territories.

Rori: Better take another pill before you come down. Anyway, at least you're not so sullen. That's a good thing. ...So what are you going to do?

Jasper: Get a skiff and name them Abigail. Spend time on the waters, on the land, on the sea. Do you know I never even realized that pretty much all of Vancouver and the whole region is part of the same watershed system? It's all connected to the Fraser River, I mean, the Sto:lo River. The whole City. I want to say hi to the River and its tributaries. Introduce myself to it. Ask it if there is any way I might belong here. Ask if there is anything I can do for it. And listen. Just listen<sup>6</sup>. Learn to listen without inserting my own agenda. You know? Wanna you come with me?

Rori: Come with *you* on a *boat*? Never in your life.

*Pause.*

Jasper: So you're still gonna move?

Rori: To New Zealand?

Jasper: (*pushing them playfully*) No, to Texas.

*Beat.*

Rori: (sighs) The house is sold. It's gonna take a few months to wrap everything up. But..yeah. It's okay little brother, you can come visit with me. Right?

Jaspers: ...

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<sup>6</sup> See Robinson, 2020



## Scene 5

*Voilin's space. Voilin is sitting at the oak table where she was at the top of the play, studying five Tarot cards.*

*There is a knock at the door. Voilin gets up, goes to the door and opens it. It is Rori, in shorts and t-shirt.*

Voilin: Rori. There you are. Come in.

Rori: I thought I'd be the last person you'd expect.

*Rori steps inside. Voilin motions for Rori to sit at the oak table.*

Rori: I'd rather not, thank you.

Voilin: Okay. What can I do for you?

Rori: I'm not sure if you're more interested in helping or hindering. But whichever it is, whatever you did, undoubtedly gave Jasper some hope and purpose. He was totally lost before. He's always been kind of lost. But now I think he might be lost again. I think Gwydion never left his head.

Voilin: He's been spending a lot of time on the water.

Rori: He bought a boat a few months ago. He's been taking a lot of time off work to explore the Fraser River and its tributaries. He has a GPS phone, but he hasn't responded for three days now. He keeps going up to Harrison Lake.

Voilin: Peqwpa:qotel. "Splashing down off the mountain, water joining"<sup>7</sup>. Its Sts'ailes name. Something has been calling him up there.

Rori: That's what he said. But it's obviously Gwydion.

Voilin: You leave for Auckland tomorrow.

Rori: It's not like him to not say goodbye.

Voilin: He's devastated by your decision.

Rori: Is he angry? Is that why he's staying away?

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<sup>7</sup> Sto:lo Atlas (Carlson, 2001: 144)

Voilin: I don't feel that...

Rori: Port Douglas. That's the site of the first Gold Rush boomtown in BC isn't it?

Voilin: Yes, Port Douglas. At the main water source of the lake where the Lillooet River runs into it. The miners took steamboats to Port Douglas and then portaged in canoes into the interior and Cariboo gold fields. But of course, more significantly, to the Sts'ailes, Xaxsta, and other Nations there are countless other historical and present day significances.

Rori: Is Gwydion leading him up there?

Voilin: Maybe. His body is buried there. But Jasper is also attuning himself to other spirits.

Rori: He's in over his head.

Voilin: Possibly. He's a grown man. And he finally feels a sense of purpose.

Rori: Even if it's a culturally appropriative and probably racist purpose?

Voilin: (laughs) Maybe. But I think he's looking for spiritual and ontological reconciliation. Some would argue that needs to come before meaningful material reconciliation can occur.

Rori: Bullshit. We need to give the land back.

Voilin: And moving to New Zealand is your idea of doing that?

Rori: Why not?

Voilin: What about the unceded lands there?

Rori: It's different there.

Voilin: When it's convenient, I imagine it is different.

Rori: That's what Jasper said. Though not as articulately. Christ, why couldn't he just have been a banker or something? It's a fool's errand.

Voilin: (*looking at the Tarot spread on the table*) Quite possibly.

Rori: So what are Gwydion's intentions?

Voilin: ..I have no way to know that unless he decides to visit me.

Rori: Can you summon him again?

Voilin: Jasper was the critical link.

Rori: Is there no other way?

Voilin: Let me show you something.

*Voilin reaches into her side table cabinet and pulls out a small clay effigy. Rising from a square base, all one piece, a long haired, bearded man's head stares out in wonder. She hands it to Rori.*

Voilin: Look at it carefully.

Rori: *(inspecting it)* It's beautiful. Why are you showing- ...It's from the clay I saw on the table when I came for Jasper.

Voilin: Yes. Does the figurine remind you of anyone?

Rori: The cheekbones.. and the nose. ...It's Jasper as an old man?

Voilin: *(laughs)* No.

Rori: Why is that funny?

Voilin: Jasper can tell you.

Rori: It's Gwydion.

Voilin: Most likely his likeness, yes. Now follow my talons.

*Voilin takes it back from them, walks to the front row of the audience, and hands it to a person in the front row.*

Voilin: *(to the audience member)* Please have a look and pass it on. Make sure everyone sees it.

*Rori stands in shock, spell-bound, as they see the audience for the first time. They watch the figurine move through the audience, as if it were a floating object.*

Voilin: *(motioning to the audience)* You see them now?

Rori: *(staring)* If I'm awake...who are they?

Voilin: Spirits who haven't found their way to the other world yet. The clay will soothe them.

Rori: Why do you use it in the ritual?

Voilin: ...The clay acts as a binder, helping to invite a spirit into the room. As my fingers shape the clay, the spirit gets closer, which in turns moves my fingers. A circle of force. It's like a contract with the spirit. Albeit an underhanded one. Destroying it is a failsafe.

Rori: If a spirit refuses to leave? Gwydion, say?

Voilin: If we break it, the spirits connection..foothold, you might say, ..breaks.

Rori: Oh thank god. ...

Voilin: But before you get too excited. You have to consider that it is really Jasper's decision to make, and he hasn't contacted me. If you break it, and Gwydion is Jasper's ally, you might put him at risk.

Rori: Oh.

Voilin: We could threaten to destroy it and let Gwydion know we want to speak with him. If his intentions are good, he might come willingly. He might be paying attention already.

Rori: Yes. Let's. ...Why don't we?

Voilin: He may insist on possession, as he did with Jasper.

Rori: So that's what happened.

Voilin: In that case, one of us would have to be willing to let him in.

Rori: Right.

Voilin: Not only is that potentially dangerous if he is parasitic—demonic, if you will, but every time he occupies a host he gets stronger. There's the risk in that case that he may use the opportunity to steal the covenant of the effigy. He didn't agree to it after all. I imagine he's not too happy about it either way.

Rori: But if he continues to possess Jasper he grows stronger that way also.

Voilin: Yes, but to a much lesser degree. He needs other hosts.

Rori: Fuck! ...Do you have any sense at all what his intentions are? I should have burned that letter.

Voilin: A common sentiment among Settlers from Europe is that they make their choices in all cases.

Rori: Unless we're Jesus freaks.

Voilin: Do you ever stop to think that might be a trait inherent to adherents of, what do you say? Capitalist-cis-heteronormative-patriarchy?

Rori: Oh you too. Right. That's easy to say.

Voilin: It's also easy to dismiss Jasper's search for belonging outside of the box.

Rori: Isn't it just another role in the whole pioneer ethos? You know, the heroic adventure to find redemption for one's self and Nation?

*Voilin laughs.*

Rori: Why is that funny?

Voilin: Jasper can tell you. ...Don't you think going to New Zealand because you feel more comfortable there has similar echoes?

Rori: ...I've never thought of it that way..

Voilin: And is it not possible that Jasper's is a nation-state breaking impulse? He's not looking for new lands to occupy, he's looking to see how his assumptions go against the will of non-human forces, while trying to develop a latent sensorium that might allow him the opportunity to be responsible *with* them. To enter into relations *with* the land and sea, not dictating terms *to*—which is what nation-states do; dictating terms to humans and non-humans.

Rori: I told him he should be talking to Indigenous people about this. Not setting out on his own.

Voilin: And how has that worked out for anthropologists? No harm there, right? And do you think the land can only speak through Indigenous people? Can it not speak for itself sometimes? Isn't that a little..essentializing?

Rori: What *don't* you know about us?

Voilin: It's all in your aura, Rori. You're telling me. ...Justice isn't *necessarily* served by following the most obvious convictions. Especially if it involves ignoring ways of thinking and knowing that colonizers have been dismissing for centuries now. It's like a dog chasing its tail. Don't you think? Listening to non-humans is not restricted to North American Indigenous cultures. As I think you know. For most of your people's history ascertaining the will of non-human relations was a matter of survival too. At what cost do you ignore it now? ...Jasper, in his own way, fool's errand or not, feels like it is a matter of his own survival. Whether he knows it or not, he's acting out a

very social impulse, even if somewhat coerced. Let me ask you this. If the federal and provincial governments ‘give the land back’ do you think that will automatically mean you belong here? Give the land back, make reparations, and leave the rents in place? Give the land back and let the commons continue to go to the billionaires? Where is it you “belong” then?

*Long pause.*

Voilin: Do you-

Rori: Okay, I think I’m done with lectures for the day, thank you. Whether or not “I belong” isn’t my issue.

Voilin: Oh it isn’t?

Rori: New Zealand, right.

Voilin: To speak metaphorically, yes. And I would never intend to minimize your reasons. But what if I told you, *you* were the catalyst for Jasper’s search for belonging, when you came out, as an adult?

Rori: I don’t know what I would say.

Voilin: You are the biggest and most important being in his life. Not just because you’re the only family he has left. He’s always looked up to you. And why?

*Beat.*

Rori: ...I’m the bravest person he’s ever known.

*Long pause.*

Rori: (*defeated*) Then why isn’t he here to say goodbye?

Voilin: That’s part of your journey now.

*Beat. Voilin takes the effigy of Gwydion back from the audience.*

Voilin: And listen. I’ll leave this with you. And up to you.

Rori: (*suspicious*) ..Why?

Voilin: You are more likely to see Jasper before I do. And remember, if you break this, Gwydion will be sent back to the other side irrevocably. Whatever he is doing to or with Jasper will be stopped from that very

moment on. But. Also remember. There are consequences to confusing your own fears with someone else's experience.

*Beat. Looking at Voilin's talons.*

Rori: Jasper said something about you telling him a legend about a trickster in Welsh mythology named Gwydion.

Voilin: That's right.

Rori: Why is it important?

Voilin: That's for Jasper to understand. *(Handing the effigy to Rori)* Just remember what I said.

*To black.*

## Scene 6

*Black light. PX on the DS scrim is static, an incomplete image of broiling water, a blurry body tumbling head over feet.*

*Seen through the scrim, Jasper's living room. The chair is empty. Rori is sleeping on the mat beside it on the floor. Two suitcases are packed, standing upright, ready to be rolled out the door. Jasper stands centre stage 'in the body' of Gwydion. He wears thick wool pants three-quarter length storm jacket. The dim light in the theatre blinks on and off, like a warning signal in a submarine.*

*When Jasper is breaking through, "Jasper/Gwydion"; when Gwydion breaks through, "Gwydion/Jasper".*

Jasper/Gwydion:       Being in the boat felt so good. Familiar. And I knew, I know, that even though New Westminster and all the rest of the urban landscape of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland continues to crust over the hills and valleys and mountains, it can't cage their souls.

Gwydion/Jasper:       *(tipsy)* Get a grip. You want to go back a hundred and fifty years? Have you ever tried living off the land? I can assure you, the spirits are no help putting food in your gullet.

Jasper/Gwydion:       The land and its spirits haven't gone anywhere. I want to see if they'll accept me. If I can find the way to ask for their blessings. And to see what that does to the way I think and act here. And that maybe, in some way, that might, for one, put me in responsible relations with Coast Salish people and their territories.

Gwydion/Jasper:       *(more tipsy)* I've met spirits as old as stars. Does he think they're concerned with a little mercury? A little hatred? A little retribution or a pre-emptive strike? With the enslavement of millions? The death of languages? How many of you remember *their* names? Do you think I hold a grudge against the Saxons? Look at the Sturgeon, they're dinosaurs. You think they care about a few four-thousand year-old stories? Land is land, you just need to whisper its name in its own language. A thousand languages can be reborn from the wind; from the sweet sighing of cedar trees. I bet a good half of you agree with me. I hear your thoughts murmur. Is this evil? I bet you won't speak up. ...Come on, speak...That's it, walk out. Censor your own mind.

Jasper/Gwydion:       That I might be in responsible relationship with Coast Salish people and their territories...



Gwydion/Jasper:       *(drunken, laughs; to the audience)* He wouldn't survive a week in the woods. I bet at least half of you want me to put this over-pruned White guy in his place. Don't you? Sure he's my relative. But when has being a relative ever stopped deceit?

Jasper/Gwydion:       The dust of bones, blown by the wind to the other side of the world, top soils caught within the jet stream, becoming soil on this land over millennia, home to creatures not yet born...become creatures yet born...becoming nutrient star dust to form other worlds become other worlds mirrored here...

Gwydion/Jasper:       *(very drunken)* I crave the emotion of shame. The shame of others. Jasper is dripping with it. I'm drawn to it like heat to stone. Like cold to bones. You don't have to worry about me. My people, the Welsh people, were indentured, deported, and now they're wandering lands they keep strange to themselves, wandering like wolves lost in sheep's clothing denying culture and extending their blind justice to those they would rather never-mind like ancient stumps with the proud markings of fallers in new born forests.

Jasper/Gwydion:       Another present...here...not later...now...other nows...right here, right here...right here...HERE...where I move through eternal presents...eternally presented grains of dust.

*The next time the light blinks off and then on, Jasper is gone.*

*PX image takes foreground: Jasper standing in a small skiff in the middle of an expansive body of dead-calm water, mountains in the near distance; it is a majestic landscape without a trace of modern human constructions, shot from 20 meters or so behind.*

*Rori stirs and sits up, looks front at the audience. Rori stands, walks DSC, sits with their legs curled up into their chest, watching the audience. They hold the clay figurine of Gwydion.*

*The film has transitioned to show Jasper suspended under deep water, light shining from below. Eventually the dream-scape ends, Rori is still sitting DSC. The creature at Rori's ear. Rori snaps the figurine in two.*

*To black.*

## Scene 7

*The back wall lights up with projection. A selfie film made by Rori:*

Rori: Well here we are Jasper, at Mile 20 bay. I know you stopped here on your way to Doctor's Point--or Lhxeylex as the Sts'ailes have called it for centuries. I know because we've pieced together what happened to you. You were seen. For some reason that matters to me anyway. It's been six months.... I got a wolf dog, as you can see behind me! His name's Jasper (giggles). Sorry. But he just loves the water. Loves it out here. He has a mind of his own. But he's my special guy. ...I connected with an Elder at Sts'ailes. They told me you actually tried to contact them but they thought you were a total weirdo. ...And with the pandemic going on they didn't want anything to do with you! That's the way the cookie crumbles eh? ...When I told them what you were up to and what happened, the Elder I spoke with from the council said some special things that just.. put my heart back in place. ..I was pretty broken there kid. Pretty broken. ...But the Elder offered to let me volunteer at the little clinic they have on the reserve. I've met so many amazing people. And well, I guess I have you to thank for it. And of course, Voilin too (if she's even real)... ...I decided not to move *forever* to New Zealand. Just take a break you know? But I guess you know that. Couldn't leave you here on your own, you're so goddamn stubborn! ..So here I am for now. Here we are. ...And you know, I... You were right..well, Voilin was right, but you know, she was defending you. She said I've always struggled to belong. And..But I never really thought so much about this dimension of it. In terms of the *place* you live. The rocks, and the sand. Water....Individual rocks, you know? Individual eddies. Getting to know them like kin. And of course the soil. The water and sky and the wind and magic swirling of all the spirits and beings and animals and human-animals just living our day to day to day in and through each other. They don't judge me for the way I think of myself...for who I know I am...Everyone I've known, besides you of course, well and now a bunch of good people, have always been so caught up in what career or sexy friends, or exciting entertainment, or quality of life, you know, how we fit in to what kind of a life-style it can give us..that a place can give us. Not thinking about *place* as part of our heart and soul, not thinking of *place* as our teacher, showing us what we *need* to know, and what we need to give back to help it stay healthy too. Maybe that's belonging, kid. ..Do you feel like you belong now? ...I think us middle-class White folks missed out on that somewhere along the way. Maybe just too flabbergasted at all the possibility after centuries of scraping servitude and what not. I don't know, sounds like a bullshit excuse to try not to be White..

...Humans will be humans but not all humans are like that. Not even all White people. And, you know maybe you were right. Reconciling relations with Coast Salish folks without a shift in the way we perceive and sense.. is probably..limited. It must be. And...we do have a role in it. We need to have a role in it. ...If I'm making any sense at all.

*Long pause, Rori shifts the camera angle.*

Rori: ...So the Elder brought me down to Lhxe:ylex the other day. To Doctor's Point, with a bunch of kids from the school. And we did a...we did a prayer for you. I think you would have liked it. I think you might have been there. Were you?... The Elder said you must have been just crazy to ignore the Doctor's warning, apparently the storm was really bad that day you drowned, given the freshet and what not. All the logs in the water pushed into the narrows of the north end and what not. She said you'd know what all that means in your own way whether or not you were familiar with the sxwoxwiyam, the legend. ...A fool's errand.. It's funny. Voilin told me that 'The Fool' is card zero in the Tarot deck's major arcana—kind of like the Joker, and she said she pulled that card just before you barged in on her the first day she met you. It signifies “the beginning of a journey, childlike wonder, and potential”. That's you in a nutshell isn't it? Well, if you add stubborn, and a healthy dash of clueless. I'm joking kid... ...I'm missing you. ..I'm missing you. Boy, the journey you're on...So you better be looking out for me, alright? It's your turn now. I'm not gonna summon you or anything (giggles). I figure if you want to talk to me, you will. ...So, ..dog-Jasper and I are gonna burn this film now, in order to send it to you. The Elder told me the smoke might reach you and you'll be able to see it that way. That's why the super-eight thing..she was probably just humouring me, but.. ..I love you J.. ..GOD, it's so beautiful here! ...I know you're in the right place. And, hey, ..as the Elder said, there's no goodbyes, because, there's no such thing as time, so.. ..till next time eh?

*Rori moves the camera off them to the beautiful landscape behind. Light rises as the film burns, then a slow burn to black. The sound of a fire crackling rises gently, quiet.*

THE END

## Towards a Conclusion

Below are two excerpts from my fieldnotes written during the second year of fieldwork. They are representative of the kind of work I undertook to understand and move outside of my Cartesian sensorium at the middle stage of my thesis journey. As I attempted, for a second straight year, to experience my body as porous, as fluid with the environment, as essentially boundaryless (Ingold, 2008 & 2010); to experience agency—thinking, decisions, actions—as an “extension” (Watts, 2013: 2) of the land and water’s thoughts as I kayaked and camped; to perceive land and water *thinking*, and to see those thoughts reflected in my shifting values, beliefs and practices. As I mentioned above, I hoped such a method of un/learning/becoming might bring elements of place-thought from a theoretical level to one of praxis within my fields of experience, and in the process uncover in unique ways important cultural data about the sensorial life-worlds of a White middle class Canadian.

It is critical to note, before moving on, that I do so outside of a situated Indigenous context, for reasons I will discuss shortly. I have carried out my work in a spiritual-philosophical space instead. One that approaches an Indigenous critique of Western Euro-culture from multi-sensorial positions. While I have surveyed a wide swath of the ethnographic literature on Coast Salish cultures (see bibliography), my knowledge-base is necessarily limited, and yet it seems nonetheless clear that every individual community likely has their own version and approach to what Watts has called place-thought. This thesis thus in no way attempts to apprehend, or become “expert” or “authoritative, on any of them. Where my thesis intersects with Indigenous concerns is where my positionality is imbricated by ‘necessity’—that is, as I live and work on stolen Coast Salish lands, and as I reflect and act on gestures made by Indigenous scholars and elders toward ‘me’, as a Settler/member of the colonizing culture. It is my hope that this reflects, not disrespect for Sto:lo, Sts’ailes or any other Coast Salish ontologies/epistemologies/cosmologies, but rather the inverse, as I follow the lead of other White ethnographers in choosing “disengagement rather than engagement...as the most respectful route and the one that most fully acknowledges local epistemologies” (Miller, 2007b: 207).

I hoped to especially observe the obstacles that arose in the pursuit of approaching place-thought. And that in such a process, I could note the evidence of my cultural (white cis-gender middle class Canadian) somatic modes of attention, and thus come to understand the mechanics of my colonial sensorial ontology/apparatus in perceiving the world around me more comprehensively. Potentially answering the question, “who’s the white guy”, while also providing input as to whether and in what ways I might live on Coast Salish Territories without contributing to colonial dispossession and harm (Lowman & Barker, 2015).

Along the way I kept the following questions at the forefront of my attention: How do I think, and what about, on land and water when employing methods of porous kayaking/boating or walking? How do I treat lands and waters and the other non-humans inhabiting it? What obstacles arise and/or ‘breakthroughs’ occur when doing my best to imagine the land as an extension of my thoughts and body? Is such work by one of my positionality colonial no matter what the intention? What affects might arise, and/or ‘new’ knowledges enter my awareness? What embodiments (such as the natural tendency to feel the direction of the wind on my skin) might I become cognizant of, or develop—and what are the significances of all this for the way I ‘live my life’ in relationship to and with Coast Salish people/s, land, waters, and sea?

These questions intersected throughout fieldwork and research for this thesis with Vanessa Watts’ (2013) provocation: *Do I believe?* Do I believe, literally, that Turtle Island (the continent of North America) is an extension of Sky Woman and Turtle’s bodies? Do I believe, literally, in any number of Coast Salish cosmologies, from people being turned into stone, to inverted worlds inhabiting the fresh water and Salish Seas of S’olh Temexw (traditional territory of the Sto:lo people), to name two examples? Or, if not, as Watts intimates: *am I just another Settler operationalizing colonial frameworks while purporting to be an ally?* Is that who the White guy is?

Though it is beyond the scope of this MA thesis to fully extrapolate, as part of my research I explored ‘mythic’ traditions of my own Welsh ancestral heritage. Such as ‘legends’ about Bards with ‘superhuman’ powers (Taliesin), and shapeshifting tricksters like Gwydion. I read ‘expert’ ‘scholarly’ treatises proclaiming the purely allegorical nature of such cosmologies—and felt the consequent sense of betrayal and cultural belittling that I imagine

Vanessa Watts and other indigenous people/s might experience as they reclaim pre-colonial/Christian/positivist knowledges, protocols, value systems and beliefs within the gaze of colonial academic institutions. Like thousands of other Europeans and Euro-diaspora who *ostensibly* reject patriarchal monotheistic religions and extractive neoliberal economics by pursuing Druidry and other pagan ‘nature-worship’ systems, I too feel the power and renewed senses of purpose that come with such reclamation work (Carr-Gomm, 2002). In my own way, I feel desperation to counteract the a/effects of colonial “modernity’s culture of violence” (ross, 2022: 74) and necro-politics, in order to access “the pre-colonial mind” (Watts, 2013: 1) . And yet, *do I believe*, literally, for example that Gwydion shapeshifted from human to stag to boar to wolf and back to human? Do I believe, as Vanessa Watts (2013) does her own cultural stories, that “this is what happened” (1)? And more importantly, is such an analogy politically legitimate? As a Settler living on stolen lands I personally believe that I cannot retreat into such work in the hope of some kind of reclamation without first and foremost addressing the entanglements of my White body, its somatic modes of attention, and its micro-politics, etc, in relation to Coast Salish people/s, lands, waters, and seas, and the living histories that birthed them.

So Watts’ question persists, *do I believe?* There may not be a more unscientific question, I imagine you the reader possibly saying out loud. In terms of anthropology, contemplating the beliefs of ‘others’ is not a new ‘problem’. In their summary of the phenomenological literature in anthropology, Knibbe & Versteeg (2008) wonder why ethnographers want to look at matters of belief if only “to reduce them to factors [that are] alien” to belief itself (48). Such as the in/famous ethnographic analysis that cows are sacred to Hindus because their dung is essential to the growth of crops. However, while phenomenological anthropology may claim to offer a solution, by allowing inwardly skeptical ethnographers to observe experiences of belief as, for example, “natural and unremarkable, strange only to the outsider” (Knibbe & Versteeg, 2008: 49), Watts has raised the stakes. And Sto:lo cultural adviser Sonny McHalsie provides additional reasons to be wary of the phenomenological approach on belief. McHalsie claims that anthropologists who “fail to understand” (cited in Miller, 2007b: 190) Indigenous spiritual epistemologies and ontologies may have starkly high-stakes-consequences by for example, “jeopardizing land claims” (190) when lawyers or so-called experts cite them in court; misunderstanding might also lead to

misallocating resources due to inaccurate aetiologies (191), and /or creating unsafe conditions for ethnographers and their Indigenous collaborators (192).

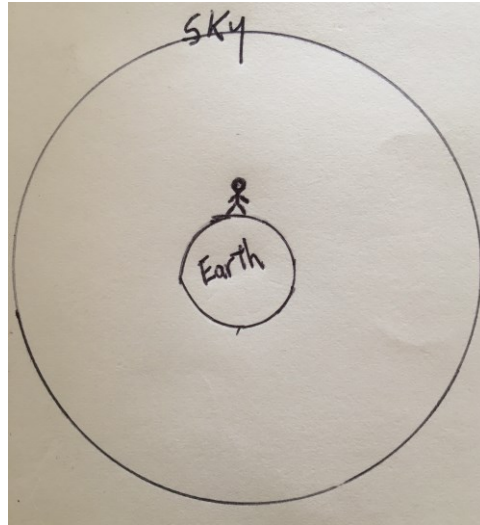
But is there a difference between understanding something and believing it? What lies beyond the binaries of mis/understanding or dis/believing? Can a person ‘understand’ land/water/sea “as alive and thinking” (Watts, 2013: 2) and still maintain their Cartesian/Kantian sensorium? And, for the moment, assuming one can even-for-a-minute suspend one’s Western/cultural sensorial apparatus, does that open the door to the kind of ‘belief’ Watts (2013) asserts? And finally, are these even the right questions? Well, before engaging these questions directly, I think it is important to elaborate further on just what I mean by the “Cartesian/Kantian sensorium”, how I am using it, and where I ‘sit with it’. Then I will introduce the fieldnote excerpts as promised, and analyze them through a lens that combines Csordas’ (1993) “somatic modes of attention” with Ingold’s (2008) “zone of entanglement”, before finally moving on to my ‘paused’ conclusion.

## **Cartesian sensorium and Kantian conception of space/place**

I grew up thinking about my body as having five senses with which I could perceive and interact with the environment around me. On a local/personal level, this meant I could touch it, smell it, hear it, look at it, and taste it. Beyond that, a sixth sense, with which I lacked the words to express its function, included an ability to sense affects around me; coming out in expressions such as ‘this place feels eerie’, or, ‘feels good’, or, ‘this place is haunted’, etc. A ‘place’, in the woods, or by a lake or the ocean, for example, was perceived with these senses, all of which were subsumed by sight. If I couldn’t ultimately see it, it didn’t exist.

Extending this Cartesian sensorium to a Kantian conception of space, as Tim Ingold (2008) describes it, my feet stand on solid ground, my skin is the boundary between ‘me’ and the air; the sky starts somewhere above me, though I never need to exactly articulate where it begins because it tends to be where the clouds pass by. This same sensorium is the one I took into fieldwork in the summer of 2019. As I mentioned above, the idea that my body might be porous, intersubjective with the earth and sky (Ingold), was theoretical. I didn’t *believe* it. And it still hadn’t occurred to me how limited this construction made my world.

As anthropologist Tim Ingold (2008) points out, this Western world-view, when summed up in the mind's eye, often looks something like the diagram in Figure 1 below. It is a familiar 'way of looking at things' to most of us who grew up with Canadian, or any other Eurocentric agents of socialization (ex. schools, popular media) but one that, I will argue, likely makes place-thought impossible even to consider. To explain my reasoning I need to first look at the social construction of place and its interconnection with the senses.



**Figure 1.** A global view of the Cartesian/Kantian sensorium, person standing on the earth under the sky. Copied by the author, from Ingold, 2008: 1799.

If cultures are built on systems of symbols (Geertz), including language and thus thought (Saussure), along with learned and biological somatic modes of being (Csordas), together constructing a cultural member's 'reality', several ethnographers have argued that 'land' must be included as a critical aspect of this system. As Alexander King (2002) puts it: "terrain and culture are not separate in practice, and they should not be separated in analysis" (65). Keith Basso (1996), Brian Thom (2005), and others condense this thinking to the construction of place; that is, how "people come to know, embrace, and become constituted by place" (Thom, 2005: 2). As Basso (1996) defines it, 'places' are "regions or local landscapes where groups of men and women have invested themselves (their thoughts, their values, their *collective sensibilities*), and to which they *feel* they belong (xiii, italics mine).

Ingold (2008) distills this down to ways Western versus pan-Indigenous cultures perceive the body in place. Which has critical repercussions for how humans interact with



land and water, and thus fits into Watts' critique of the Cartesian/Kantian sensorium and its ongoing micro-political (neo)colonization of Indigenous life-worlds. *Who's the White guy?*

If somatic modes of attention are “culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in the *surroundings* that include the embodied presence of others” (Csordas, 1993: 138, italics mine), and we assume ‘others’ here includes all emplaced non-human beings and elements, then how we perceive our bodies very much informs how we *sense* ‘land and water’ around us. These are critical elements in our zone of entanglement—which I will define further below.

Returning to the diagram in Figure 1, which shows a strictly bordered world with clear distinctions between person and ground, ground and sky. There is no ‘porousness’. No in-between-ness. Living beings touch, taste, smell, look and hear others. ‘Inanimate’ beings are here and there. The ground is here, the sky, there. A tree stands over there. An animal can be seen in the near distance. It is a world dominated by vision and relegated to a neat set of discrete tools of orientation. Every one of us is “over and against” (Ingold, 2008: 1798) each one of our “knowing minds” (1798). Like Darwin's metaphor of sentient and insentient beings on a “surface riven by innumerable wedges, ‘packed close together and driven inward by incessant blows’” (Darwin, 1950, cited in Ingold: 1806). In other words, there is no overlap, no porousness, and therefore, for humans, a perfect world to manipulate to meet our desires. If I am separate from a tree, the consequences of cutting it down are significantly less than if I view it as kin; or, even more critically, if I sense it as ‘part of me’. The opening of Genesis is the narrative Euro-environmentalists like to cite in the etiology of climate disaster, but as we do so, an insidious ontology is operationalized through our sensorial *machine*.

Taking direction from pan-Indigenous ontologies, Ingold (2008 & 2010) reflects their alternative in a Western lexicon. Whether or not it is a bridge to place-thought remains to be seen, but at the very least, it suggests the *possibility* of a way beyond the arrogance of an omniscient zone of entanglement. In a somatic mode of attention that perceives itself as moving *across* landscapes, as one would do in *figure 1*, it necessarily *occupies* place, as an “exhabitant” (Ingold, 2008: 1804). It is an image that brings to mind invading armies. I think of music festivals that leave behind crushed grass, churned mud, and toxic garbage littered

across the ravaged fairgrounds by so called “woke” youth. But a body that moves *through* the landscape, Ingold insists, *inhabits* place. In the former sensorium place is a “pre-formed surface” (Ingold, 2008: 1802)—it fits into neat categories like ‘wilderness’, ‘frontier’, ‘developed’ or ‘undeveloped’ (Tsing, 2005). But in the latter, bodies move through “a world-in-formation” (Ingold, 2008: 1802). Which holds striking echoes in this latter phrase of Watts’ (2013) illustration of place-thought as “nondistinctive space where place and thought were never separated because they never could or can be separated” (2).

A striking example of such inhabiting-of-place can be seen in White Mountain Apache somatic modes of attention on land and water. In an Apache life-world, even a dried up water-source is held as sacred; its destruction unthinkable due to its inclusion as kin. Ethnographer Keith Basso (1996) gives an example when he recounts the way an elder “fashion[s] a place-world” (14) at the site of an inactive spring named Snake’s Water by his ancestors. When approaching Snake’s Water, Charlie (the elder) “gazes at the rocks for several minutes, as though *waiting for them to speak*” (14, italics mine). Basso describes how Charlie, in a kind of internal interweaving of agency with the dried-up spring, unites the past with present in a storytelling that simultaneously recounts the spring’s history (as far as it goes back with his people and the snakes they found “protecting it” [15]) with its evolving conditions. Thousands of years ago becomes the present tense as Charlie resurrects his ancestors as they find and name this place. The features of the landscape themselves provoke Charlie’s words, as the “distant world” of the past “casts a powerful spell” (15) on the present. It is the stones and its textures, the plants and mud, of the place that help construct this reality in the present; interacting with Charlie’s “act of imagination, that moral act of imagination, which constitutes his understanding of the physical world” (64-65).

Interestingly, and pertinent to my project/praxis, Basso (1996) does not seem to see this kind of work as necessarily out of reach to the ethnographer, whom he challenges “to fathom what it is that a particular landscape, filled to brimming with past and present significance, can be called upon to ‘say’” (75). All this appears to resonate with, if not be representative of, place-thought. Going back to Basso’s account of Apache place-thought for a moment, it may provide some insight into Watt’s (2013) “literal” (3,4,8,11,12) belief. In the story Charlie recounts of Snake’s Water, the elder who is the first to encounter the place, talks to the venomous snakes protecting it, and asks them if they wouldn’t mind moving so

that his people can benefit from the spring too. The snakes make a mutually beneficial agreement with the elder, who provides gifts and offerings of thanks to the spring, and move on—ostensibly long enough for the people to enjoy the water. It is the very *belief* in this story that allows, as Schechner (2011) might say, the elder to ‘restore the behaviour’ of his ancestors as he puts himself in their shoes discovering the place and negotiating for its co-use. I wonder if belief in this case, might be literally entangled within Charlie’s very somatic mode of being, necessary to not only resurrect the bodies of his ancestors but to ensure the maintenance of this place. And thus impossible within his life-world to imagine ‘improving’ it by some kind of development project.

A heartbreaking example of such ‘development’ is the reckless devastation of sacred places with the construction of the CPR railroad through the Fraser Canyon in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries through Sto:lo and Nlaka’pamux territories. Seen as the easiest and fastest route from the Fraser Valley through to the Cariboo Gold Fields and connecting to the rest of Canada, crews blasted through ancient fishing and transformer sites alike (Bierwert, 1999; Carlson et al, 2001; Wickwire, 2019). In the Coast Salish world, ‘Transformer sites’ are *places* where humans and animals were transformed into stone by Xexa:ls, in a transformation of not only the physical landscape but of the moral one too (Bierwert, 1999; Boiselle, 2010; Carlson et al, 2001; Sto:lo, 2012; Thom, 2005). There are similar traditions throughout North America, Siberia and Australia and they are a stunning example of “the agency that features of the land can have” (Thom, 2005: 17). Here, ancestors are embodied in stone and remain living to the present day, visited, honoured and often considered by descendants as powerful and influential in the world around them. For example, to this day, food is left by Sts’ailes and other Coast Salish people/s at the feet of *Lhxeylex* (“standing up”), a doctor (shaman) turned to stone by Xexa:ls, to secure good weather for return passages from the north end of Peqwpa:qotel/Harrison Lake (Boiselle, 2010; Carlson et al, 2001). And, as a Sto:lo family said, whose transformed relative had been stolen and kept by a museum for over one-hundred years, and finally repatriated: “T’xwelatse’s soul remains alive and embodied in stone” (Sto:lo,, 2012: 15); he, like the other transformations “surround us as the living, ancestral landscape of s’olh temexw—the Sto:lo world” (15).

In such ontologies even skin and stone are porous with one another. Returning to Ingold (2008) then, in such an ‘inhabiting’ sensorium the diagram of a body in place likely looks more like the diagram in Figure 2. It is a porous world. The body/mind does not act upon a pre-existing world but rather is acted upon and acts with the environment. Unlike Figure 1, weather is taken into account, literally and metaphorically (more below), as well as time. There are no arbitrary borders between substances and bodies. All intersect, mix, and co-become. As Ingold flushes out his ‘zone of entanglement’, he disorganizes our conception of ‘the body’. “The organism” (1805) is less “in here”, while the environment is “out there” (1805). There is “no boundary separating the two domains” but instead “a trail of movement or growth” (1805). In other words, relationality is not between two fixed points, for example between you and me. Rather, you and I and rocks, trees, plants, animals, birds, and, many would add, spirits (see below), are a co-becoming path “along which life is lived” (1805). Rather than relationality being a line that ends at each point, between you and me, it is a becoming, with the line/s between us stretching in ever growing “lines of flight” (1805).



**Figure 2.** Copied by the author, from Ingold, 2008: 1804.

It is an image which, when looking at the literal biology of organic tissue, for example, takes on remarkable clarity. Considering lines of flight, Ingold’s (2008) logic follows that we do not live in a network or web of interconnected life, but rather a “meshwork” (1805) of ever flowing lines “like the riverbed or the veins and capillaries of the body” (1806). Like plants, mitochondria, algae, etc, the human body is made of “bundles of such lines” (1806) forming tissue constructed of “myriad fine threads tightly interlaced, presenting all the appearance, to a casual observer, of a coherent, continuous surface” (1806).

Taking this another step forward, it seems that we are not just a product of some kind of universal inner genetic dictum, or seed as it were—all developing ‘in here’. But also of messy intermediating forces—which the weather also acts as a metaphor and literal example (Ingold, 2008: 1807). Ethnographer Rune Flikke (2016) refers to such phenomena as “the weather-world...a central element in the structuring of the human senses” (20). In an ontology that substitutes hard surfaces (see Figure 1 above) for porous mediums (Figure 2) the air is seen as material, and thus crucial to not only the survival of most species on earth (including oxygen in water), but as a medium critical to the transportation of birds, insects, and, according to many cultures, spirits and other non-visible beings (Flikke, 2016). Indeed it is not unusual for cultures to believe “the air is full of forces and power” (12), and for birds to be connected in some way to ancestors (Flikke, 2016: 12; Thom, 2005; Ingold, 2010). A left-over of the latter belief is perhaps reflected in Anglo-euro-culture in sayings like ‘a little bird told me’. Scent—activated by our limbic system and thus “the emotional centre of the brain” (Flikke, 2016: 10)—is left behind in the wind for dogs and other animals to be ‘picked up’, the wind carries smoke, pollens, seeds and so on. Sound is carried by air and wind; and there are cultures who believe that when sounds interact with the landscape, such as wind “howling over a mountaintop” (21)—or, as I experienced many times kayaking when the mix of air and waves slammed under hollow rocks created sounds I could only describe as human/animal—that they are “messages from the ancestors” (20). That such experiences would cause me to check for physical dangers around me or internal misalignments is not surprising considering I come from a Christian culture steeped in Greek notions of *pneuma* “denoting both ‘spirit’, ‘wind’ and ‘breath’” (25).

Seeing this weather-world as part of the meshwork of place then, non/humans can be seen as also constituted by bacteria-culture/mitochondria/microbiome (Ingold, 2008 & 2010). And like a river bank held together with a chaotic and dense covering of ground-cover plants, shrubs, and ferns, constructed of “multiple sources...comprehensively bound up with one another” (Ingold, 2008: 1807) in ever growing and winding paths of becoming. With all this, the repercussions for Ingold’s conception of ‘place’, then, is that it is not static and apart, but rather entangled with our bodies and those of other beings. Not so much existing in stasis, as ‘taking place’, as it were (1808). Like Charlie listening to a place

improvise his ancestors into the present, the present weather-world affected by the past, an inactive spring providing untold sustenance.

This marks a critical difference to the Western idea of place which especially since the industrial revolution has ever increasingly sought to contain space in constructed places in order to “convert the world we inhabit into furnished accommodation, made ready to be occupied” (Ingold, 2008: 1808). Or else, I would add, left ‘pristine’, ‘pure’, and neatly ‘natural’ or ‘wild’ (Tsing, 2005)—and thus also static and strictly bound/unporous. All of which is to say, subject to the agency of humans, with land now sensed as passive, non-acting, unthinking, and de-linked from human society.

This is a state of mind, a somatic mode of being, with which I entered the fieldwork stage of my thesis work. Though I had read most of the above works prior, it is one thing to read materials and another to put them into practice. But as I’ve already mentioned, my project was more about becoming conscious of my own somatic modes of attention on Coast Salish lands, waters, and oceans. Which I will now discuss. Sharing where I went and why, before introducing an excerpt from my fieldnotes that is emblematic of my second year of fieldwork (for reasons I will explain below), before moving on to analyses that will hopefully shed further light into who this White guy is, along with thoughts as to living on Coast Salish territories as per my central questions: *What is it to be a White guy, a Settler, living and working on Coast Salish Territories? Do I belong here? If so, how? Is it possible to “belong in a way that doesn’t reproduce colonial dispossession and harm?”* (Lowman & Barker 2015: 19).

## **Overview of fieldwork**

When I began fieldwork in the summer of 2019, I had little idea what I was getting myself into. I used part of my SSHRC award to invest in camping and kayak gear, as well as beginner kayak lessons as I’d only been in a kayak once before. With that, I headed out to Harrison River to launch my first field trip in late May. At first, all I knew was that I was going to conduct methods of what I called “porous kayaking” (after Ingold’s wayfarer walking, see above), and become as familiar as possible with the geography of Sts’ailes territories. I figured, following an inductive methodology, that things would become clearer as I went. Little did I know at the time that it was the beginning of a three-year journey.

My work on Sts'ailes territories stemmed from two central concerns. Historically speaking, Harrison River and Lake, known as Peqwpa:qotel in Halkomelem (meaning, 'splashing down off the mountain, water joining' [Carlson et al, 2001]), is at once the place where one of the most important Coast Salish 'deities' (Xexa:ls) began his journey of transformations (Carlson et al, 2001). It is also the site of the first major Gold Rush boomtown, at Port Douglas, where the Lillooet River runs into Harrison Lake/Peqwpa:qotel (Taylor, 2017). This intersection of Coast Salish/Settler histories/cosmologies interested me for further reasons, which I will explain shortly.

Peqwpa:qotel, the Lake, in turn empties into what is today known as Harrison River which is a major tributary of the lower Sto:lo River (The Fraser River). It is not an exaggeration to say that the Sto:lo River is at the heart of the Coast Salish world, being the central highway and food-basket for a majority of Coast Salish Nations (Bierwert, 1999; Carlson et al, 2001; Carlson, 2010; Harris, 1997; Sto:lo, 2012; Suttles, 1987). For the Nations whose winter communities lie around the Salish Sea (from the Strait of Juan de Fuca to Puget Sound, to Squamish, Sechelt to Powell River, to the north end of Quadra Island), most inevitably spent some time in the summer harvesting the all-important salmon on the Sto:lo River, as well as any number of other economic and social activities (see ex. Arnett, 2007; Bierwert, 1999; Carlson, 2010; Duff, 1952; Miller, 2007a; Suttles, 1987).

This is a vast over-simplification, but as I have already made clear, this project does not try to reflect "expertise" about Coast Salish cultures. This detail of the River's importance is critical however for several reasons. If I was to approach place-thought on Coast Salish lands, waters and seas, I felt it salient to spend the majority of my time where the histories of Coast Salish nations overlapped most significantly. In addition, as a Settler who grew up around the Burrard Inlet, getting around by bus, car, foot and bicycle (not boats), my awareness of the Sto:lo River as the veritable spine of Coast Salish life-worlds, was, previous to my research, virtually non-existent. This felt like a critical area of ignorance that I had to correct. And the fact that a majority of Settlers whom I spoke to in the first months after selecting my topic were also unaware of this fact, reinforced my decision. Finally, further reasoning lay in the sentiment that as a resident of New Westminster (Shxwoyemelh), which sits directly on the Sto:lo River, to be as rigorous with my self-

reflexivity as possible, familiarizing myself with the Coast Salish lands, waters and seas where I now lived seemed respectful and prudent.

That summer I clocked 42 days in the Peqwpa:qotel ecosystem, filled a thick notebook with fieldnotes, took well over 200 photos and videos, and took note of encounters with 16 White identifying Settlers and five people who identified as Indigenous whom I met boating or camping on or near Harrison Lake. Once my ethics application was approved, I reached out to the Sts'ailes Band Council on three different occasions in the pursuit of collaboration. But I received no commitments and only luke-warm responses. I didn't press the matter. And by the summer of 2020 the pandemic was in full swing. Though my project was much more fleshed out, like other Coast Salish communities in BC, Sts'ailes had closed itself off from outsiders.

Rather than spending the summer of 2020 engaged with community as had been my previous plan, I continued porous-kayaking work, expanding my scope to include the Sto:lo River itself, the Fraser Canyon, as well as the Brunette and Coquitlam Rivers, the Pender Harbour area on the Sunshine Coast and Desolation Sound. In between these more clearly defined days of fieldwork, I made it a habit to walk somewhere along the Sto:lo River at least two days per week, in as many parks and urban-neighbourhoods-with-access to the River as I could find. This latter practice continued throughout the entire third year as well. Throughout these three years I also spent uncounted hours exploring New Westminster by foot and bicycle.

I also kept track of my dreams, sought out an ancestral healer from the Welsh Celtic tradition, and started a daily Druidic study and mediation practice which I continue to this day. The more I tuned into the 'atmosphere' of places, and my fluid place within them while carrying out 'porous methods', the more I began to experience what some anthropologists call ecstatic experiences (Miller, 2007b). That is, hearing, seeing, and feeling phenomena I did not have the language to adequately describe or verify. My fieldnotes contain many such experiences.

Getting in touch with my own ancestors, an experience which the sensorial epistemology I grew up with excluded, has only led me to respect Coast Salish



epistemologies all the more. It grounded me as a person with ancient roots in the world, and largely negated anxieties I have had of being a ghost—and thus deepened my senses of relationality and responsibility to and with Coast Salish people/s and their territories. This feeling, of being a ghost, is not surprising given that there are Indigenous elders on the ethnographic record stating their belief that White Settlers “have lost their souls” (Miller, 2007b: 198). Indeed, as Bruce Miller relates in his essay on ecstatic research, it is “a widely held view among indigenous communities that ‘Western’ society is woefully, dangerously short of values, is spiritually deficient in its emphasis on rationalism and universalism, and that we are ‘people without culture’” (Wolf, 1982, cited in Miller, 2007b: 198).

Feeling like a ghost without culture has certainly been part of my experience, and judging from my conversations with other Settlers, I am not alone. But Mayan scholar and artist annie ross (2022) provides clarity to my conundrum when she asks: “Are our dreams made of the sacred nature of Creation...or are they daytime nightmares of Lands whose every Being has been vanquished?” (52). In other words, like all peoples in our contemporary world, Settlers have a choice that begins with our somatic modes of attention. As in another question of ross’: “does our work knit, or does it ruin?” (52). It is a simple logic that brings me back to Ingold’s co-becoming paths of movement. A metaphor (knitting) that, for me, unites the “spiritual and feminine” (Watts, 2013: 2), co-agency of place and organism, the material and immaterial, spirit and flesh, earth, sky and weather, and dreams. And because, as Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2016) puts it, “the force” of human sensoria “mov[es] through bodies” (137), the current status quo of “rule by men” (137) vis a vis nationalistic state Institutions—which Simpson calls out as “male, [and] more than likely white” (137)—I have done my best to make paying attention to my somatic modes of attention as “meaningful, purposeful, [and] important” (ross, 2022: 52) as my current zone of entanglement allows.

With that, I will now turn to an excerpt from my fieldnotes. I have selected it because it is representative of a more or less average day—if somewhat a little out of the ordinary. It has been tempting to pick one of my more ‘ecstatic’ entries, such as a description of the day I got caught in a giant hydraulic hole and nearly drowned after ignoring several bad ‘omens’ (touched on in the play), or the day I heard voices ‘in the air’ speaking causing me to feel and see history in a place that previously had been invisible to me. But

considering the limited space I have left here, and that my central purpose is to answer the question Who's the White Guy?, it feels more scrupulous to go with an entry more indicative of my average somatic mode of attention.

Text in [] has been added after the fact to provide more context.

June 8 [2020]

*“This morning, I packed up and left camp early with the goal to slowly make my way to Doctor’s Point [where a Sts’ailes doctor was transformed into stone resides; named Lhxe:ylex, “standing up” {Carlson et al, 2001}. It was a ‘transformer site’ I had wanted to see since I began fieldwork, but hadn’t managed to get to due to its distance from my launch sites]. The wind was dead calm and a dense mist of rain blanketed the blue-grey air. Sky and water reflected each other in a disorienting manner.*

*Within half-hour I was soaked from head to toe, but paddling kept me warm enough. Looking north-east, rain-studded cerulean blue waters stretched six-kilometers across to steep metamorphic, garnet, and andalusite rocks rising up to form the great Mólkwcen [Mount Breakenridge], a mountain that makes me feel like I’m in lord of the rings or something..in an epic fantasy.. no wonder legends have been inspired by it... ..Watts [2013] says our thoughts are ‘an extension’ of the land’s thinking...but I am always taking it too literally...or am I?*

*Next to the mountain I felt as tiny as a drop of rain. Utterly insignificant...then the thought, still considering place-thought, occurred to me that maybe I was thinking raindrops’ thought... Then I laughed. Here I was thinking so literally...as if place-thought could be translated to a positivist paradigm of all things—though that does resonate with Watts’ words about essentialism... I’m hopeless, this whole project is utterly stupid and pointless. ...I stopped paddling and closed my eyes. Breathed for a minute. Strangely, my mind calmed down quickly. The atmosphere was so still. Utter quiet but for the horizon-wide-scatter-patter-thups of the medium-light rain. All I could smell was the wet synthetic fabrics on my body and B.O. Or...could I smell my own fear...what was that high-pitched smell..? Almost like bleach...I ran through the porous-exercise I’ve done a thousand times now: breathing consciously and imagining my body as a median between earth/water and sky, not a line or hard boundary, part of both... ..mixing both upside-down, which way is up in outer-space? There’s no up, there’s no down...like a tree and its roots...feeling the rain on my skin, water covering my whole body, linking me to the lake and sky... And suddenly I found*

*myself spinning slowly, like an anti-gravity spin in a space movie, everything utterly connected. The lake was so still.*

*At that moment I remembered how confused I had been when Sonny [McHalsie] told us on the Sto:lo Tour last year about the mountain in Chilliwack that had once been a woman, her two daughters and a dog [transformed by Xexa:ls into a four-peaked mountain]. I remembered the manner in which I quietly dismissed it as 'going too far'. Thinking: it's one thing for a rock to have once been a human, but a mountain? A thought I've often had about the transformers... The scale didn't make sense to me.*

*But this frame of mind now felt like a significant shift..*

*It was occurring to me that a mountain's thoughts in a human might precisely mirror this scalability of dimensions... That if I don't separate my somatic mode of awareness from my surroundings then perhaps I am at once as small as a raindrop and as big as a mountain... Thus a mountain can be a relative... And why not akin to human? Suddenly the mountain no longer felt like an imposing object in someone else's epic...*

*I don't know what this means but it seems to have some weight...?*

*But when I opened my eyes I was maybe a kilometer from shore and I felt a sharp stab of panic! I had just been no more than 100 meters from the shore-edge. What happened?? The current was obviously stronger than I thought. But how long had my eyes been closed? Now I was far enough out to get caught in a gale if one came up, and it was almost 10am when strong winds are common enough on Peqnpa:qotel.*

*I felt disoriented like I couldn't be sure what world I was in... Until the rain stopped as suddenly as it started. I snapped out of it and began to paddle back on the tightest possible angle to the west shoreline, away from Mólknvcn.*

*This is terrible ethnography. Appropriative. Is it? What am I doing? Do I have any authority to think and talk this way? Even to myself? But these are fieldnotes...a false security.. Anyway, what choice do I have now?*

*...Back on track ... Once I'd made it back to the shoreline, I paddled around the next point and decided to camp here on its leaside, looking at Lhxe:ylex in the near distance. Like a giant's shoulder resting with its elbow outstretched into the lake. I took out some sweet beets and asked my ancestors to offer them to*

*the spirits here, asking for a sign if my presence was welcome or not, still feeling an odd sensation of being in another world. That calmed me down. A seal popped its head up looking at me about fifty meters out. I took it as a positive sign. I asked quietly, as if they were right next to me, what she thought of me going to Lhxe:ylex tomorrow, but as soon as my voice entered the air she dipped back down one at a time. Not knowing how to read that, or not wanting to acknowledge what it likely meant, I got out my stove and cooked lunch/ dinner.*

*Spent the afternoon walking along the shoreline and discovered a squatter camp in the woods with two elaborate, very permanent looking dwellings about a kilometer north. One with a pitched and shingled roof, the other more of a dome roof, covered with a tarp. It was almost invisible from the beach, and I only noticed it because someone had left a tiny shampoo bottle on one of the logs I passed. It was perched as if placed, not discarded randomly. That's how I found the little trail, which I immediately backed out of when I saw the dwellings. Fear was my first reaction for some reason. Came back to camp and stayed the rest of the day.*

*Now to bed. Exhausted, uncertain, and a little afraid I'll have visitors in the middle of the night. 930pm. Tomorrow I think I'll pack camp, paddle by Lhxe:ylex, but not linger”.*

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## **Analyses: Who's the White Guy?**

One of the first things that I notice in this excerpt is how alone I am despite just beginning to tune into how un-alone I really am! I am acquainting myself with all the other beings, introducing myself, and perhaps am being considered by those beings as an acquaintance, but really, we are utterly strange to each other. It is like the kind of 'aloneness' one experiences in a large foreign city. Surrounded by countless numbers of people but because you are a stranger, there is a sense of even greater isolation. In itself, this feels like a good portrait of this White guy on Coast Salish territories. A stranger to spirits. To the thoughts of trees and rocks. To water and sky.

To continue the metaphor, like a traveller to foreign lands I had done some work before arriving to familiarize myself as much as possible. I had some very limited knowledge of oral histories from the specific area—particularly ethnographer Charles Hill Tout (1904),

Franz Boas' (2000[1895]) chapter on the 'Lower Fraser River', and fragments of James Teit's (1906) work, along with the few archeological works I could find, by Sanders & Ritchie (2005), Ritchie & Springer (2009 & 2017). And thinking about myself here, as a stranger in a foreign country, I can't help but compare my own lack of knowledge to the locals. I think of the White Mountain Apache man, Charlie, on his people's territories. And of the T'xwelatse family discussed above, emplaced within meshworks of relations "connecting [them] to time immemorial" (Sto:lo, 2012: 15). I had no "roots of practices and tradition wrapped in relations of property, reciprocity, respect and spirit" (Thom, 2005) in the area beyond some fifty or so days of paddling and camping by the time I wrote the excerpt. Though I had developed my own 'traditions' including prayer and offerings (adopted from Welsh pagan traditions), and practices such as making sure I left 'zero-trace' of my presence (copied from settler initiatives in the mountaineering community), and cleaning up garbage left by previous campers, I was/am forced to admit—in relation to Sts'ailes, Sto:lo and other Coast Salish people/s—I was/am a total foreigner. In these regards I might as well be a tourist. In fact, I had met a (re)visiting German couple the summer before who had more familiarity, at least in terms of geographic features, with the area than I did. And yet, as mentioned above, my 'Canadian citizenship', and even BC birth certificate (born in Trail), supposedly made me a "native of British Columbia".

As an aside, I grew up in Vancouver, not the Fraser Valley, as already mentioned. And though I have a greater degree of familiarity with the North Shore mountains and Burrard Inlet, for example, the vast majority of any 'intimacy' I can claim to those lands and waters is within urban neighbourhoods—most of which have changed their constitutions by way of gentrification more than once in my short lifetime. And sure, I have walked some trails and reclined on some beaches more times than I can count—though I could probably guess. But to attempt to compare this kind of Cartesian/Kantian knowledge-accrual with Coast Salish and/or other Indigenous ways of knowing, would be bereft of substance. And yet, again, as a White, cisgender male, I can very much statistically compare my privileges on these lands, waters and sea to Indigenous people/s—within a Western paradigm at any rate. Another portrait.

Nonetheless, the fieldnote excerpt does show that I am attempting to listen to the rain, to a mountain, to the air and wind. I am entwining my imagination with histories of a

place, opening space for shifts in my somatic mode of attention, opening the pores of my consciousness if you will. And I was surprised how much evidence of ‘porousness’ there is, particularly when outside of urban environments—if one has the theory to bring it into awareness, and an open mind to experience it.

The brief note about the sky and water reflecting each other ‘in a disorienting manner’ reveals an interesting example. I found such disorientation to be a common phenomenon when kayaking. Particularly on perfectly calm water when doing long crossings, there is a visual effect that takes over the whole body. A kayak makes very little wake, leaving the water virtually undisturbed. There is only a few millimeters of plastic between you and the water. And when the water/sea reflects the sky without any distortion it had the effect of making me dizzy, with a feeling of vertigo wherein my anchor to a hard ‘home’-surface became untethered. My sense of balance was challenged, and I had to spend a lot of energy tricking my mind back into thinking I am ‘upright’. These experiences gave me insight into how one can easily conceive of parallel worlds under the water; when there is no sky ‘up there’ and earth ‘down here’, there is no unified sense of ‘this world’ for my feet to walk or float on. In fact I had a period of perhaps twenty minutes one time in Desolation Sound when crossing a channel early one morning when I thought I must be paddling upside down. I almost threw up, and if it wasn’t for the fear of capsizing, who knows what new awareness I might have developed?

This showed me how being open to experiences beyond the Cartesian sensorium and Kantian dimension of space, could reveal the arbitrary nature of six senses, and made me strongly question my belief in hard boundaries. This kind of ‘praxis of innocence’, brought other gifts. If water and sky were porous, with indiscernible borders, and if the limits of my body were now in question, what else was there in the environment that I was unaware of? If I could smell my own fear, who else could? Were the emotions I was feeling my own? The fear seemed to come out of nowhere, and as I remember it, I only became aware of it after smelling it. Where did the fear come from and was it somehow connected to later finding myself inexplicably far from shore? Or was it some ‘higher power’ wanting me to be aware of a current I was otherwise oblivious to? Could this higher power be an ancestor guiding me? Or was it maybe a local trickster spirit having a laugh at my expense? There is a Coast Salish subjectivity that perceives the body as constituted with seven beings making the one

(Carlson, 2010). Cuban Creole Espiritismo traditions see the self as constituted by an ever evolving set of spirits; the self can thus expand or contract depending on visiting spirits that can be adopted or exercised (Espirito Santo, 2015). I was aware of these cultural subjectivities and respected them to the limits of my awareness.

As part of my ancestral healing work I had learned to erect protections around my ‘self’ whenever I felt threatened. I had done this work as soon as I felt the fear just mentioned. Similar to Christians holding up a cross or asking Jesus for help, as I had learned as a child growing up with a father who was an Anglican minister; but if it ever had, Jesus no longer worked for me. Coast Salish elders are on the ethnographic record warning about dangers from spirits—another reason to be wary of disbelief (Miller, 2007b; Sonny McHalsie, 2019, personal communication). I avoided places known to harbour ill-meaning spirits in the Coast Salish world. The Sto:lo Atlas (Carlson et al, 2001) names several. But of course there was no way to know them all, and I was well aware that I was like a baby considering such forces. Another portrait of this White guy.

The fact that on this day I was heading to Doctor’s Point to see Lhxe:ylex for the first time, speaks to this conversation. I am uneasy about even talking about it now. Perhaps I will not. Those stories are for another context, and I have been wary of appropriative trespass throughout this thesis. I am sure I have failed in places. I hope one day soon I will have the opportunity to learn from these mistakes. But for the time being there are two other elements from this excerpt that I wish to discuss—the seal and the ‘squatters’—before I finally move on to what my supervisor, Dara Culhane calls a “paused conclusion” (Culhane, 2021, personal communication); that is, a conclusion without very satisfying concluding statements!

I often took the sightings of land and marine animals, fish and birds as signs of things. Judging from my conversations with other Settlers I met kayaking and camping, this is not uncommon. The fact that a seal, a rare sighting in most areas of Peqwpa:qotel, popped her head up so soon after I asked for guidance from unseen ones felt significant. But without a significant history with this animal, my relationship to seals were necessarily limited to my whims; if I wanted it to be a good sign, it would be so. If thunder had struck immediately after, maybe I would have interpreted it as a bad or more complicated sign. This goes to

show that while White Settlers might generally respect animal-omens, not only does it go against much of our land and water ontologies, but it has long been divorced from actual knowledge. For example, concerning crows, Sonny McHalsie told a group of us taking his Sto:lo Tour (in July, 2019), before the pandemic started, that in a Sto:lo tradition crows will tell you when someone you love has died. I heard a similar story from a Dene man I met in downtown Vancouver too. But though after hearing these stories I pay more attention, when I see a crow I have no idea how to communicate. I often think they know what I'm thinking before I do though. And incidentally, regarding the seal, I realized on subsequent trips that the area I was in, is close to a steep underwater shelf where fish gather which is more than likely why the seal was there. Even most Settler fisherman could have told me as much. Nonetheless, I still think there was a message, I just don't know what it is. I've run these stories by many Settlers and it seems to be a relatable experience. Another portrait.

It is likely that if I had stayed to talk with the squatters I came across they would have told me about the underwater shelf. More than likely it is one of the reasons they built their homestead/village there. Instead I was afraid of them, and I have to admit for the sake of science, a bit disgusted and angry that they would illegally 'invade' such a 'pristine wilderness' with such a permanent looking settlement. It's weird, because I stopped to talk to all kinds of people during the course of fieldwork, including other squatters in less remote parts of the lake. It was something to do with hiddenness, the secrecy...But now, I am so curious about them. I am aware of the binary thinking. That the very reasons I was upset are part of the very reason, ontologically speaking, that we are in a climate disaster, as I briefly discussed above—putting land and water into neat categories of use. In this case, I was in 'the wild' and so humans weren't allowed, in my mind, to dwell there. And maybe they are nothing like the image that first came to mind: beer drinking, disrespectful animal killing 'rednecks'. I can say it, right? I'm a White guy who arguably comes from 'white trash', albeit removed one generation. Maybe they could have taught me about place-thought. Maybe they were Sts'ailes people reclaiming their territory. I will return this summer, to see if they are still there and maybe leave a note at the head of their trail with my phone number in case they would be open to talking with me.

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## Paused Conclusion

A mind and body struggling to open up to place-thought is then perhaps another portrait of this White guy. Opening to place-thought is thus perhaps one of the strongest ways Settlers might begin to live without reproducing colonial dispossession and harm. At least within the insidious realms Vanessa Watts (2013) talks about, and that I have discussed at length above. Over and over during the course of my research I have come up against my inner gate-keeper, only to have thoughts that shut down Indigenous ontologies dissolve—exemplified in the note about mountain-top transformers in the excerpt above. Every time this process has occurred my world has only expanded, while my sense of respect and gratitude toward Indigenous ontologies increased, along with my outrage for ongoing forms of colonization. What excites me most about this work, is that while my power to change the reality of Indigenous struggles for sovereignty in British Columbia, or the disproportionate numbers of Indigenous peoples living on the streets and in prisons—to name just three injustices—is limited, the power to change my own sensorium and relationships to place/land, waters, and sea, are more accessible. Does my work knit or does it ruin (ross, 2022)? Who's the White Guy?

I have heard religious people talk about the difference between faith and belief. According to their logic, faith is for people who don't have experience of God, belief is for those who have. So while I may not have experienced place-thought, I have experienced enough to have faith that land and water does think. I have the desire to believe it. I guess I can say then that I have faith that Xexa:ls and their transformation of the Coast Salish landscape is actual history. That there are inverse worlds under the water populated with other kinds of people. That I communicate with ancestors and spirits and not just my own imagination. That my imagination is not just 'child's play' and therefore delusional thinking, incapable of opening my awareness to the unseen, to the 'other world' as I've heard and read pagans say. This is my cultural reality today.

It is a culture between. Like all cultures, not a monolith, or a neat summable set of facts, but an ever evolving, ever becoming mix of symbols, languages, and somatic modes of being. While my zone of entanglement is radically specific, it has capacities for multiple entanglements with people/s and non-humans inside and outside of White middle class,

cisgender, Canadian culture. And while I might not belong on Coast Salish territories (I don't believe that in the current political climate it is my right to claim to belong here), I have the desire to belong. I certainly don't belong anywhere else. I have a deep love of this land, water and sea. I hope to never have to leave it. I want to get to know it better. And I plan to continue this land and water work for as long as I am able.

On the note of continuing work/knitting, though I currently work with many Indigenous people/s in my capacity as a Support Worker in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, I feel ready to engage responsibly and accountably, with First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities in the near future. Now that I no longer have the ulterior motive of trying to complete an ethnographic thesis; now that I have done some work toward understanding my own sensorium and where it reproduces colonial dispossession and harm; now that I have the capacity to open my mind to Indigenous life-worlds, I feel like I am ready to do so. But that will not be up to me alone.

I have the feeling that this knitting work will also entail going to Wales and England to pursue land-work in regions where my ancestors were born and lived for countless generations. Not for the reason—as I thought at the outset of this project—to see if I belong there, but to deepen my knowledges of where I came from. I believe this will only help deepen my relations with Indigenous people/s and non-humans here on Coast Salish territories. I hope my desire to belong here will continue to propel me further into appropriate (and not appropriating) collaboration and co-habitation with Indigenous communities, and further into my own ancestral healing. I have faith that this is a good path toward reconciliation.

All my relations

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