St. Stephen's College

Settlers, Gamers, & Identity Politics:

A Depth Psychological Approach

by Joel A. Crichton

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

A paper developing insights regarding gaming, the concepts of indigeneity and settler colonialism, artistic appropriation, and the field of psychotherapy. The writer engages in an intensive and sustained analysis of the psychic material (including dreams and active imagination) that emerges in relation to engagement with the tabletop role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons Fifth Edition* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014). The approach is phenomenological, and grounded in the psychology of C. G. Jung. The concepts of settler colonialism and indigeneity, discussed in response to the emergent psychic content, are explored in relation to one another as well as to gaming. Through the work's continual reflexive turn toward its own content, insights are gained about the nature of gaming and the gamer's psyche. As an offer toward the understanding of compulsive gaming-related psychiatric disorders (World Health Organization, 2018; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), it is suggested that a key danger of compulsive gaming may be its illusion of safety, providing a sense of potency, agency, and immersion in a *magic circle* (Huizinga, 1955) that is apart from reality. A multilayered understanding of the relationship between settler consciousness and indigeneity is developed. It is discovered that, in circumstances where imposing Indigenous values on an individual contravenes that individual's genuine nature, this imposition can itself be a colonial act.

Keywords: *Dungeons & Dragons*, Jung, depth psychology, phenomenology, appropriation, cultural misappropriation, internet gaming disorder, indigenous, indigeneity, colonial, settler, dreams, active imagination, game, gaming

Dedication

To my ancestors, literal and symbolic.

Acknowledgements

There are many to whom this thesis is indebted, as well as some who it could not exist without. The foremost, because this project would never even have been conceived without his influence, is my friend Darren Steele, who took the role of the Dungeon Master in the Pindus-on-Isles campaign (Shadows of Pindus, 2018). Darren's enthusiasm about the idea helped me to forge the original thesis proposal. There is no other person I would have entrusted this role to, and his involvement was invaluable. My descriptions of the actual campaign, which are necessarily short and summary in order to serve the needs of this paper, do not justly represent his amazing work, not in the slightest. I encourage the interested reader to seek out some of the work of this dedicated and passionate creator.

I hold a great depth of gratitude toward Dr. Evangeline Rand, the "old dragon" who has been my thesis supervisor and mentor. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from such a diligent, dedicated, and discerning scholar as Dr. Rand. Her and I could speak with rare seriousness about this work, and the fact that it was fully engaging had a great deal to do with her willingness to fully engage; without her it could not have come to be.

John Hoedl has for years provided something resembling "rules" for me to run up into and push against. I am deeply grateful for his steadfastness in making me do my own work.

I must thank dear Mareike Friedrich, for respecting my need to keep just about everything related to this work "secret", for also occasionally being available to talk about those same secrets with me, for letting me take over our office, and for helping me

I must also include my mother, who raised me, and my father, whose absence has shaped so much of my life. My ancestors, both literal and symbolic; my "professional" ancestors such as Hillman and Jung. And to Wolfgang Giegerich, Robert Romanyshyn, Vine Deloria Jr., Roger Brooke, Jerome Bernstein: Thank you for writing what you have written so that I might find it. I am sure that I have not completely understood it.

Acknowledgement is due to Ben Stevens and Tynan Boyd for hundreds of hours spent playing games, and as many more spent discussing them.

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Author's Note: The original drawings from which these figures come are mostly black and white, and most pieces are quite small; the majority of them are made on pages of a 3x5" sketchbook.

0.0 Self-Location

Here are some things about me that I consider important to the reading of my work.

Firstly, I am a storyteller. I worked professionally as a playwright for a decade. My undergraduate degree is a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting. I continue to participate in improvised theatre, a form of performance in which narratives (ranging from short scenes to full-length stage plays) are created extemporaneously by the performers. As a singer/songwriter and composer, my music and lyrics carry a strong narrative thread. This sense of narrative is a core part of who I am as an artist, writer, and psychotherapist.

Secondly, as a psychotherapist, I have been pulled strongly into the study of Jungian Psychology. This psychology is holistic and depth-oriented. It takes seriously the origin of the word psycho-logy, as the *logos* of *psyche* (or *soul*). My entry point into the field of psychotherapy was my own individual Jungian Psychoanalysis, and my education as a psychotherapist has prioritized Jung's work and the work of those who call themselves Jungians. This influence affects every aspect of this thesis, and it will be discussed in more explicit detail in the section on methodology.

Thirdly, I have gamed my whole life. When I was a teenager, my main involvement with gaming was with video games; in recent years, I have moved toward board games. Many of my most vivid memories are related to games. Throughout my life, I have unconsciously related to games as though they were babysitters, sometimes parents, friends or enemies, and sometimes as though they were gods. Games often filled a hole in my life as a young person, providing a sense of meaning, a mission, an emotional outlet; sometimes I felt I could trust a game when I could trust nothing else. I have seen a game as my nemesis; I have felt betrayed by games, and hurt by games. Games have often

shaped the way I understand concepts and structure knowledge; they have often shaped the way I perceive reality. Games have certainly shaped this work: On a literal level, this thesis is a study of gaming. On a meta-level, this thesis is game-like, for I have related to the rules that were set out by the methodology I have worked within as though they were the rules of a game, to be strictly adhered to and pushed against. I have treated these rules as though they were unbreakable, for to break the rules of a game is to cheat. I have respected these rules as I respect the rules of any other game, which is to say that I have committed to trust them, and more over to entrust myself *to* them, to listen to what they may say about the game they describe, and to experience the game they offer.

Bernard Suits' definition of gaming (1978, p. 34) is: "to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity". There are other aspects to the meaning of game which I will discuss later, but for now I want to draw focus to the words, "where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity". When I say that I trust the rules and listen to what they may say about the game, it is because the rules make the game possible. The rules delineate what the game *is,* and the activity of the game is not possible without acceptance of the rules. Likewise, the game of this thesis was not possible without acceptance of the rules that outlined it. And when Suits says, "where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means", he makes apparent another crucial point of this work, which is that the less efficient means are inherently bound to the activity which they make possible. Said another way, using less efficient means is central to the purpose of this work, and it is

only through patient, definitively *inefficient* submersion in the subject and process that this work has been able to come about.

Fourthly, I am a Canadian writing from Treaty 6 territory: traditional lands of the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Dene Tha, Nakota Sioux, and Saulteaux. I am fourth-generation Canadian, of Settler origin (English, Scottish, and German). This may seem irrelevant; I include it because the imaginative content generated by this research process has pushed me to research what it means to be a Settler in Treaty 6 territory, both literally and symbolically. My own perspective has necessitated continual refinement and clarification: When I explicitly discuss indigeneity as a concept and body of knowledge, I am discussing the meaning *of my perspective* more than any objective substantive entity called "indigeneity". The settler, by definition, is relating to a land which he or she is not indigenous to; that, symbolically, is my position in relation to many of the indigenous ideas in this paper. I state this upfront to foreclose any argument that I intend to speak with a voice that is not mine. This dynamic has been critical to my work and is critical to the understanding of it.

This work carries a great deal of affinity with indigenous approaches to research, and true to those affinities, it takes on a narrative style. This may at times be explicit, with the inclusion of a literal narration of an event. It may be implicit, such as in the way I find myself writing in a manner that builds tension between the reader and the material. I like to write this way; I write with the reader in mind. This style, having a multilayered relationship with my autobiography as a storyteller, my association with Jungian psychology, and the indigenous perspective, is an overdetermined choice, and in fact is less a choice than a mandate that I have accepted. At heart, this style is about speaking

precisely from where I stand, as a person in relationship to what I am talking about. To understand where a storyteller has gone, one must be allowed to understand where he or she has been, and what the movement between has been. In this work, ideas are often expressed in the order in which they developed, so that they can dialogue with one another. They bounce off one another, jockey for position, assert dominance, find compromise, or lead to mutual dissolution. As I am a classically-trained actor, perhaps it is appropriate to make a comparison to a Shakespearean soliloquy, which is above all a character's sharing his or her process of thinking-through. As Hamlet painstakingly works out the consequences both of *to be* and *not to be*, pledging his allegiance to neither, I will share the process that I go through for its own sake, and to bring the reader along with the journey. As this is a study of process, process must be included in its own explication.

It can be difficult, as a reader, to settle into a narrative. There are few quick takeaways or tools to pick up from this study, nor are the results presented up front. The results are the entire work; the results are the journey, and they are found here, and here, and woven throughout. An aim of this work was *depth*: The quality of phenomena that can be perceived only through spending enough time with them to learn what they are, to themselves. Doing this work required a patient surrender—a steadfast receptivity (Brooke, 1991/2009)—and reading it may require a certain amount of surrender as well.

And yet, with all these intentions stated, I must acknowledge that it is not possible to retell my story with complete accuracy. I am not working in an oral storytelling tradition, but writing an academic paper, and therefore crafting and refining have been necessary. It is something like following footprints through deep snow: Though you may

be able to follow where they lead, if you are following on top of them your own feet will naturally destroy them as you go. They will get messed up. And each time you go back to check, or examine more closely, you distort them even further, until you are left with only a memory of the footprints, which is itself a sort of distortion. So it is with this story. As I tell it, and think over it, and carefully interpret it, I mess it up. Though I have detailed notes, audio recordings, and memories to rely on, I am interpreting them after the fact, not from inside. As I interpret my interpretations, things get messier still. I offer this awareness not as an apology, nor as a reason that my writing should be taken less seriously, but as a statement of fact. This writing is what it is, and understanding what it is will help the reading of it.

1.0 Introduction

This is a qualitative research project, grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Indigenous ways of knowing. It is a study of games, of gaming, and of being a gamer; at the same time, it is also a study of Settler colonialism, indigeneity, relationship, and abstraction from relationship. I will begin with the primary game of this work, *Dungeons & Dragons*.

I began playing *Dungeons & Dragons,* or *D&D,* just prior to the start of this project. A close friend of mine had developed a strong interest in the game, and I thought it would be fun to see if I had a similar connection with it. After a few games, I realized that I did not enjoy it all that much. However, since it offered a reason to regularly spend time with my friend, I figured it was worth continuing. Knowing that the gameplay generally did not satisfy me, I tried to explore other activities adjacent to *D&D*, such as reading theory online and painting miniature figures of *D&D* creatures. I found that what

really interested me was not the game itself, but the way different gamers approached it. The notion surfaced that perhaps I could study my relationship with games for my thesis, using *D&D* as the primary source of data. The idea felt to me like a way to continue supporting my friend's passion, while also satisfying my own interests. Influenced by my Jungian background, I was drawn toward a study of inner experience. The research question was crafted: How will be I moved through a soulful engagement with *Dungeons & Dragons*?

It is a challenging question. Enough to turn most scientifically-minded readers off, I thought. I enjoyed this thought, that I was operating on the fringe and flouting a cultural norm, namely, scientific rationalism. This is significant, for it colours the tone of much of this work. I was under the influence of a strong anti-scientific sentiment as I researched and wrote. This will not be difficult for the reader to perceive, and I have left it mostly intact in my writing to retain the truth of the process. This sentiment was partly an iconoclastic rebellion against a mainstream culture that espouses scientific values, but functionally is often pseudo-scientific. It was partly a smokescreen that kept me from having to do the hard work of hauling my analysis out of the depths and into reality. However, it also had critical connections to the indigenous and depth psychological methods with which I was approaching my research. The smokescreen protected the work from being prematurely commodified, or reduced into data points and measurements. I do not pretend to have been fully aware of all this at the time; however, as I can now see that it was necessary in order to fully commit to the methodologies which called me into the work, I do not judge myself too harshly for my intransigence.

Even at the outset, however, I found my research question too nebulous. I rephrased it as: How will I experience my engagement with the game of Dungeons & Dragons, in paying attention both to how it affects me on the conscious level, and to what the unconscious reveals? Even with this somewhat more direct language, I knew that this study would raise the question of external validity. How would my account of an inner experience apply generally? Was there objective value to research with an *n* of 1? As an artist, experience has convinced me that creating from a place of personal specificity can hold more power both for myself and for a receiving audience than an attempt to be generally applicable or universal can. Universality is arrived at through specificity—this is a principle which underlies my creative process. For this work, therefore, I have held external validity as less important than subjective significance. Clark Moustakas, a researcher whose thinking has helped this process, writes, "The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social—and perhaps universal—significance" (1990, p. 15). (The word "autobiographic" here gives me pause, but I will wait to address that until a more appropriate time.)

The original research question also included a challenging word: *soulful*. I have thought a great deal about what I mean by *soul*, and I have been especially influenced by Romanyshyn (2013), Hillman (1975) and Giegerich (2012), but in the end, I find I am not quite sure what I thought I meant, way back at the beginning. What I mean now—and I will not use the word soul much more over the course of this paper—but what I mean by it is twofold: a quality of soulfulness and a soul process. I do *not* mean a literal substantive metaphysical entity ("*the* soul"); soul is a metaphor for the inner perspective that transcends the human. Having informally synthesized parts of Romanyshyn's,

Hillman's, and Giegerich's work into my own understanding, when I now write soul I am referring to: the depth dimension of phenomena; precisely those aspects of phenomena which can typically only be apprehended through patiently spending time with them, contemplating them in terms of their intrinsic meaning, and paying attention to what they disclose about themselves. A soul *process* is the process by which these soul aspects can be perceived and worked upon (or with). Here I mainly mean dream work and active imagination (to be described in more detail later), but also the directed use of (and surrender to) one's own feeling and intuitive functions, communication from the physical body, and application of penetrative and rigorous thought *for the purpose of developing awareness of these soul aspects of phenomena*. A more portable definition might say that I am looking at what emerges (from being previously unconscious) through the soul process, and what the emergent phenomenon seems to say for (and about) itself.

I have, above, indicated the four psychic functions described by Jung (1920/1971): feeling, intuition, sensation, and thinking. It is an aim of mine to bring these four functions to bear on this work, and like all people, I do not have remotely equal access to all four. Much of my writing comes to me intuitively, which I must later return to with refining thought to sort it all out. I always feel vulnerable when incorporating my feeling life, and if the reader notices a moment where I have written about physical sensation, it has usually come to be there through my active focus on giving it a voice (unlike my intuition and thought, which seem to express themselves whether I like it or not). Despite these difficulties, I have sought to include input from all four of these functions, providing, I think, a more balanced picture of the process.

Returning to the presence of *Dungeons & Dragons* in this research, I decided that I would play a duet campaign—two players only—for twelve weekly sessions, approximately ninety minutes each. I approached the friend I mentioned above about participating as the second player, in the role of the *Dungeon Master* (to be defined later). The psychological material to be studied would be whatever "came up" through the game, my approach to it, as well as my process as a player and researcher. This was to include feelings, emotions, sensations, and thoughts, as well as dreams, images, artwork, and fantasies that related to the work. My method of studying these phenomena would primarily be guided by Robert Romanyshyn's book *The Wounded Researcher* (2013), which describes the *alchemical hermeneutic* method. Alchemical hermeneutics aligned precisely with what I wanted to do: investigate the inner and unconscious processes, being led by my sense of the work's own agency (rather than consciously leading the work), and cultivating receptivity to the influence of the work (rather than intentionally imprinting my influence on it).

If it sounds unclear, this is because it was. It was a very loose structure, built to shape itself around whatever emerged in the course of the game. That responsiveness was one of the main goals of the work. I wanted to be responsive to the influence of the unconscious from the start, and therefore I began with a question precisely so open that anything could emerge; my challenge as a researcher would be to follow it. The work, at times, may feel as though it meanders. I see it, sometimes, as a sea journey, wherein I have set out from an island without knowing where the currents and winds might take me. Along the way, there are many different and diverse islands to visit. The islands may, at times, seem to be related only in a chain rather than in a network. Yet, in the end, in

this case, the current has proven to be circular. All the apparent wandering between islands does circumambulate a central point. I think this relatedness can best be felt if one is willing to entrust oneself to the journey's process; only then can the full archipelago be perceived.

This thesis document will share that process. The next sections will describe alchemical hermeneutics as well as the Indigenous methodological relationships that asserted themselves through the work. *Dungeons & Dragons* will be described for the benefit of those not familiar with the game; potentially alien *D&D* terms (like Dungeon Master) will also be defined. The main body of the paper will move back and forth between two things: First, the internal narrative of the *Dungeons & Dragons* games that I participated in, in which I portrayed the character Croak, a Dark Elf Druid, struggling with addiction and homelessness in an urban technological dystopia, and disconnected from the traditions and wisdom of his ancestors. The second part will be my reflection, analysis, and other work related to the game; in these sections I will develop and deepen ideas about gaming itself, as well as what I have come to call indigenous and settler consciousness. Finally, I will explore and describe what came up after the game had concluded, through the work of writing this thesis. Before the end, I will make the effort to distill some salient insights for the practice of psychotherapy.

1.0.1 Terminology

There are a few terms that need to be addressed before going on. The first is *Settler*, which is today used to identify people living in North America who do not identify as Indigenous. When it is used, it is primarily (as I understand it) to hold space in the language for the presence of Indigenous peoples. To say it another way, the word

Settler can remind those who hear it that Indigenous people were the first people on the land, and furthermore that they were largely displaced or otherwise oppressed. It is a word that signifies its own shadow. It also, in the case of a Canadian citizen, contextualizes the Settler as a member of one of the two parties to the Treaty which covers the land on which they live (if there is one).

Throughout the course of the paper the terms *settler* and *colonial* develop and interact with one another; I have attempted to separate the two terms into what can be conceived of as a benign and a malign aspect of the same phenomenon. Therefore, while the term settler in this work means simply one who settles, or one who finds a habitat in a land that they are not indigenous to, a colonist is the one who might destroy the land to make that habitat, or subjugate the people, animals and resources as an expression of a belief that they can possess the land. In my use of the terms, a settler can be a respectful guest in the land, while a colonist is necessarily extractive, assimilative, and destructive.

Frequently I use the terms settler, colonial, and *indigenous* not as proper nouns referring to specific groups of people, but as symbols of perspectives that are often associated with said groups of people. What these symbols and perspectives contain is one of the main explorations of this paper; admittedly it is a tricky business to differentiate indigeneity and Indigeneity, as a symbol and ethnocultural identity respectively, but it has been necessary to do so. The general rule, as can be seen in the previous sentence, is that I will use capital-I Indigenous when referring to a literal person, group, or cultural entity; I will use lowercase-i indigenous when referring to the symbolic perspective. The same is true of capital-S Settler and lowercase-s settler.

Though I have tried to avoid it for clarity's sake, it has sometimes been necessary to use the term *Western*, which in my understanding refers to the general attitudes toward phenomena held in North America and Northwestern Europe. I prefer to use settler where possible, since it is more specific to my topic, and I am predominantly discussing the settler perspective specifically in contrast to the indigenous perspective. I see Western as a style of consciousness out of which both settler and colonial have grown, and all three refer generally to a rational, scientific, and generally classically "masculine" mode of consciousness.

1.1 Research Methods

1.1.1 Dungeons & Dragons

Dungeons & Dragons, now in its 5th edition (Wizards of the Coast, 2014), is a tabletop role-playing game created by Gary Gygax in 1974. During a session, one or more players portray individual characters within a fantasy setting and undertake semi-improvised adventures. It typically takes place around a table, with pens and paper to keep track of character statistics and other important information. These statistics include attributes like the character's dexterity or intelligence, the strength of certain skills and abilities, possessions the character has with them, and more. Depending on the context of the game, there may be physical representations of the characters in the form of painted miniatures, as well as maps, model settings, or even costumes. The amount of paraphernalia associated with the game is the players' decision; only the pen, paper, and dice (or digital alternatives to these) are necessary.

Apart from the players' characters, all elements of the game are controlled by the Dungeon Master (or DM). This includes the other characters in the narrative of the game,

layout of communities, weather patterns, and even the will of the in-game deities. The DM is responsible for enacting and enforcing the rules of the game system, which are extremely detailed, and cover just about everything that can come up in a game, from whether a sword finds its target to whether a person can be successfully persuaded to share information, to the amount of money typically needed for a mid-range bed at an inn, to the swimming speed of a crocodile. These comprehensive rules guide the game and provide meaningful limits to its expansive possibilities. There is a basic pattern to most of the game (Wizards of the Coast, 2014, p. 6):

1. The DM describes the environment.

2. The gamers describe what they want to do.

3. The DM narrates the results of the adventurers' actions.

The word *campaign* refers to a single cohesive narrative, told throughout a series of game sessions that concern a certain group of characters in a certain setting. The word carries the meaning of a military campaign, owing to *D&D*'s having developed out of tactical tabletop war games; *D&D* originally came into being as a game that allowed a gamer to control a single soldier, rather than an entire army. A campaign may be quite large, weaving several adventures into a single arc, or it may be limited to a single adventure. Dungeon Masters may rely on published or open-source campaign content to guide them, or they may create these things themselves, or they may use a mixture of the two.

The word *adventure* points back towards the title of the game, *Dungeons & Dragons*. As the name implies, most *D&D* campaigns centre around heroic adventures: exploring dangerous locations (such as dungeons), and defeating monstrous enemies

(such as dragons). The players' characters may have superhuman abilities in such fields as spellcasting, fighting, thievery, or healing. Characters are often literally super-human, as they may be elves, dwarves, dragonborn, or half-orc, among other races. In most settings, adventurers comprise a societal class all their own; the adventurers are not common but rather unique, powerful, and driven by high and lofty goals.

Within these structures, there is one thing that remains a complete unknown, left up to fate, and that is the fall of the dice. Dice serve to bring the influence of something "other" to bear on the game. They are rolled to determine success, or the level of success, of most actions that a character can take. They may also determine a host of other possibilities, at the DM's discretion. Despite the wishes of the characters, gamers, or DM, the dice can and will force unforeseen elements into a story.

At heart, *D&D* is a heroic storytelling game. To different degrees (depending on the game), the players and the DM collaboratively create the story. Yet, despite being heroic, there is no way to "win" *D&D* (Gygax, 1987): Though on the narrative level the characters want to succeed, the goal of the gamers is primarily to tell the story, and the story of the characters failing to achieve their goal is as valid as the story of them achieving it. This aspect challenges whether *D&D* is actually considered a game or not, and this idea will be addressed in more detail shortly. What is important to note for now is that the goal of *Dungeons & Dragons* is not so much to slay a "dragon" as to tell the story of encountering it.

1.1.2 Alchemical Hermeneutics

There are some psychoanalytic terms I need to describe my usage of before proceeding:

a) A *complex* is a pattern of highly charged psychic energy, which is organized around a specific theme or content, and which is by nature not conscious (unconscious), and unintegrated into the conscious personality of the individual. "The complexes are the psychic energy centres through which experience is mediated and around which experience tends to gather" (Brooke, 1991/2009, p. 41).

b) *Active imagination* refers to any technique wherein a person attempts to contact these complexes. These interactions are often expressed through a written "dialogue" with a personification of some unconscious aspect, or through art. A foundational example of active imagination is Jung's *Liber Novus* (2009, though written from 1913-1916). Cwik (1991) writes that in active imagination, "the participant *sinks down* into [a] mood *without reserve,* or attends to [an] image with focused concentration and observes any changes that occur" (p. 103). And though the participant maintains a receptive attitude, and the image is allowed to disclose what it will, the conscious mind still remains assertive: "The position of the ego must be maintained as being of equal value to the counter-position of the unconscious, and vice versa" (Jung, 1916, par. 183).

c) *Archetype*: "The archetypes are the sources of those typical patterns of behavior, reaction, and experience that characterize the human species, in the same way that nest-building characterizes the behavior of birds" (Brooke, 1991/2009, p. 40). Archetypes are unknowable in themselves, but detectable through their myriad expressions.

Romanyshyn's book on alchemical hermeneutic method, *The Wounded Researcher* (2013), is subtitled "Research with Soul in Mind". As indicated earlier, by soul I do not mean a substantive entity but rather a quality of those aspects of experience that disclose or point toward greater depth; depth being the dimension of phenomena which can only be apprehended by patient and receptive presence; as well as processes by which the quality of soul is experienced. Ten features of research with soul in mind are indicated by Romanyshyn:

1. Research is *complex-oriented*. Alchemical hermeneutic method primarily approaches complexes using *transference dialogues*. These are a form of active imagination, in which the researcher dialogues with some aspect of the work, to deepen their relationship or understanding. The process acknowledges the presence of a dynamic field of unconscious transference between the researcher and the work. It acknowledges that "the researcher is always in some complex, myth, dream, or fantasy about the topic" (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 135), and tries to "differentiate what the complex researcher brings to the work from the work itself, just as a therapist must differentiate what he or she brings to the patient from who the patient is in himself or herself" (p. 136). Here is an example of what a transference dialogue looked like:

   a) I cultivated a meditative state. In a darkened and closed-off room, I focused myself by smudging my body, sketchbook, and drawing tools with sage smoke, observing my physical sensations, and directing my thoughts.

b) I asked a question to initiate a dialogue with the unconscious. In one case, this question was, "Who is the one who wants to be represented in this character?" I asked this question while I was in the process of developing a character to portray in the *D&D* campaign.

c) I waited for an image to emerge, or disclose itself. When it did, I began to draw it, and pay attention to any words that seemed to come from it. Continuing the above example, an image of a toad-like creature appeared, which I began to draw. Treating the image as a real, autonomous being, I addressed more questions to it. I continued drawing, as well as writing out both my words and the toad's.
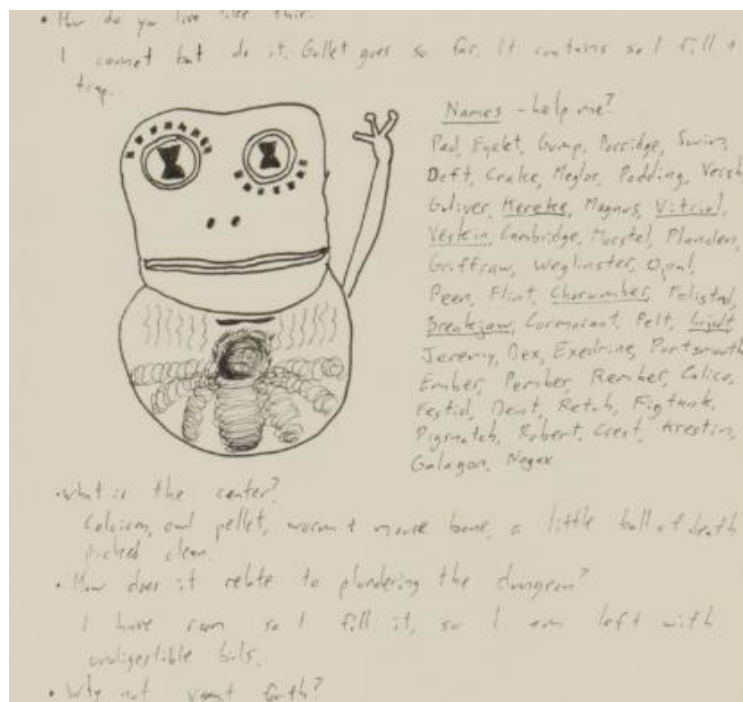
Figure 1: Toad, with some accompanying written dialogue.

2. Research is *creative*, in that it gives "the research a degree of freedom to arise out of the ongoing relation between the researcher and the topic" (Romanyshyn,

2013, p. 264). The spirit of the researcher's approach is open to changes in the direction, form, and content of the work. It encourages "a way of inquiry that is first and foremost in tune with the spirit of the work as it unfolds" (p. 264).

3. Research is *imaginative*, and is built on feeling relationship with phenomena; it values the impact of that which is invisible; it takes soul processes and qualities seriously (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 264).

4. Research is *aesthetic*, in that it seeks beauty, rhythm, and coherence. It encourages the use of "non-ordinary states of consciousness" (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 266) such as dreams, active imagination, and reverie, as sources. This is in line with other hermeneutic approaches, such as Paul Ricoeur's (1973) idea of treating meaningful action as text, as well as Roger Brooke (1991/2009) who specifically includes "pathological behaviour, bodily symptoms, love affairs, the therapeutic relationship, and dreams" (p. 71).

5. Research is *hieratic*, in that it works to see the symbolism in all things (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 266). Hillman (1975) refers to *psychologizing*: the action of seeing-through phenomena to the symbolic dimension within them; seeing deeper.

6. Research is *spiritual*, for research with soul in mind may bring about a transformation of the researcher; it necessitates a willingness of the researcher to be transformed. Through the complex-oriented and hieratic aspects of research, the researcher is differentiated from his or her work, and "The work is freed into its truth to the degree that the researcher is able to let go of his or her complex relation to it" (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 269). I am reminded here of words

attributed to Lilla Watson (1970), an Australian Aboriginal elder: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." The researcher's liberation is bound up with the liberation of the work; both are freed into greater truth through the relationship. This is the spiritual aspect of research with soul in mind.

7. Research is *ethical*, in that the continually deepening, transformative process is meant to eventually bring one to the point where his or her complexes are no longer projected into the work. "True objectivity . . . is achieved by taking into account deep subjectivity" (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 291). Research has an ethical responsibility, not only to one's research participants and one's field, but to the inner voices that are brought to awareness through the work. Transference dialogues are not intended to be light and flaky, but rather demand deep ethical involvement. It is important that the researcher experiences these conversations as real, for the researcher accepts an ethical responsibility to honour those images which emerge.

8. Research is *an-amnesis*, an un-forgetting, a method of bringing to light that which is being obscured, remembering what gets forgotten by the research itself. The research attends to its own shadow, or its own blind spots (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 270).

9. Research is *re-creation*, in that it is ongoing and ceaseless. An attitude of meditation on the work takes shape, avoiding a mindless application of procedures. Furthermore, the work is never considered done; it is considered as a

step in a continuing process that we have been called to participate in by our

complexes and ancestors (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 271).

10. Research is *erotic*, in that it is guided by *eros*, in the Jungian and Platonic sense:

the desire for relationship. "A loving engagement with one's topic"

(Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 271). The researcher makes a loving commitment to

following the work where it goes, and whatever it brings up.

I have striven to embody these ten qualities in my relationship to the work. This

was often very challenging. My ideas about what the work was shifted, and were at times

nearly obliterated in the face of new developments. The content that the work brought up

drew me to confront serious personal fears. My gaze was repeatedly forced backward, in

search of what had been left behind in the work's mutating development. The work

necessitated that I relinquish my hope to create something "important"; instead I needed

to learn to allow the work to create itself (and me). The work touched on my insecurities

about my methodology, demanding a complete trust in the process and an abandonment

of the desire for a specific outcome. In other words, I was affected by the work as much

as it was affected by me.

1.1.3 Heuristic Inquiry

Romanyshyn (2013) is clear that alchemical hermeneutics is more of an approach

to method than a standalone method itself, and thus it needs a separate methodological

structure to work on. I drew on Clark Moustakas' (1990) description of heuristic inquiry

to develop a light framework. In general, I see the two approaches as symbiotic.

Moustakas identifies seven main phases of research: initial engagement, immersion,

incubation, illumination, explication, creative synthesis, and validation of the heuristic

inquiry. These phases have been incorporated as a soft schedule through the time between writing my thesis proposal and submitting the final document; a map to keep me on track.

Moustakas (1990) also emphasizes many of the same things as Romanyshyn (2013), such as immersing oneself in the research question deeply, dialoguing with the phenomena one wishes to understand, valuing qualitative significance over quantitative measurement, and engendering holistic appreciation for the relational network of phenomena itself (as opposed to seeking to isolate cause-effect relationships).

There are some aspects of the way Moustakas frames his work that I do not wish to adopt, and by way of addressing them I hope to further elucidate my own approach. I hinted at them earlier when I quoted: "The heuristic process is autobiographic" (1990, p. 15). I have already stated that it is the word *autobiographic* that catches me up, and here is why: It seems to me that Moustakas orients the researcher at the centre of the work rather than the work itself. This can be detected throughout his description. At the core of the process, in his writing, is the researcher's "passionate, disciplined commitment" (p. 15), a "willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration" (p. 24), "rigorous, exhaustive self-searching" (p. 32), and pushing "beyond the known, the expected, or the merely possible" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 44). What I find the most telling is his turn of phrase, "one completes the quest when one has an opportunity to tell one's story to a point of natural closing" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). The word "quest" suggests to me the presence of a heroic fantasy beneath the surface of Moustakas' writing. Recalling Romanyshyn (2013, p. 135), "the researcher is always in some complex, myth, dream, or fantasy about the topic". I think the heroic fantasy needs to be acknowledged and approached with caution, not because it is a problem in itself, but

because it has the potential to aggrandize the researcher, and see the work not as an autonomous presence in its own right, but as a mere product of the person who writes it down.

On a literal level, this is difficult to escape, since the work *is* a product of the person who writes it down. And so here I wish to differentiate between the literal truth of this statement and the symbolic truth of the work's agency. Accepting the conception of the work's agency is a way of allowing imagination to play a more significant role in the process. In my experience, it aggregates, to a symbolic other, all those niggling or half-formed questions and ideas, which might go ignored in a one-sided egoic process. This other, viewed as "the work", advocates on behalf of these same ideas and questions. Dialogue with this other can push the work's development beyond the researcher's expectations, into new territory. It, like psychoanalysis, is a process of "quickened maturation" (Jung, 1935/1977, p. 172). It helps the work, and the researcher, come into their own maturity.

The attitude dominated by a heroic fantasy leaves the work as something to be conquered; something to be entered into or got inside. Understanding becomes something to be achieved or won. The difference of this is subtle, but central to the theme of this paper. The unconscious attitude of a heroic inflation, in my estimation, amounts to egocentrism in the guise of phenomenology. The phenomena are permitted to speak for themselves in this situation, but only because the researcher is bold enough to listen. From this perspective, it is really the researcher's accomplishment, his or her glory, and the work itself is a kind of trophy.

I am thankful to Romanyshyn's (2013) constant reminders to be humbled by the work; to not only get inside the work but to let the work get inside you; to remember that, as much as you are writing it, it is writing you. Moustakas (1990) approaches this when he writes of becoming one with the work, but in the context of his other words this "becoming one" cannot help but read as assimilative.

Is it possible to completely erase one's subjective presence from one's research? I do not think that it is, but nor is it what I am suggesting. The ego must play an active part in research, as it must in all human experience, since it is our primary mode of experiencing. I do not think pure objectivity—experience without the mediation of ego— can be had. Human beings are embodied, and they perceive through the physical substrate of their bodies; the psychic correlate of this is that phenomena are always mediated by the experiencing consciousness (in the present case, the researcher's ego). The ego is necessary, but it is also called on to behave *rightly;* ego is detrimental when it refuses to allow the work to evolve fully. Pure objectivity may be unattainable; however, it can be approached, through acknowledgement of deep subjectivity (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 291). This approaching of pure objectivity is made by realizing and seeing through one's own subjectivities (which become increasingly subtle as one proceeds). The act of the approach includes a consciousness of its own process, and has the effect of de-centering the ego from the work. Consciousness of the process of the approach necessarily acknowledges its own lack of objectivity, and therefore also acknowledges that the individual ego cannot be the sole authority. From this perspective, the individual becomes an instrument through which the work expresses itself.

It may be true, as Moustakas (1990) says, that heuristic work is autobiographic, but it need not be solely autobiographic; or as Romanyshyn (2013) might say, a "confession". The difference is that, for researchers serving the work, their own personal content and ego discoveries, their "rigorous, exhaustive self-searching" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32) are methods of getting themselves out of the way so that the work can shine through. Here personal growth, ego development, and so on, are not goals in themselves, but methodological instruments.

1.1.4 Why Are Dreams Important?

Across cultures and time, dreams have been understood as having a special meaning for waking life. Modern scientific inquiry into the nature of dreams began with Freud (1899/1995), who declared them the *via regia* (royal road) to the unconscious. Though some modern sensibilities see it as absurd and offensively contra-rational to even consider dreams as potentially important sources of knowledge, experience has shown me that dreams do indeed offer the conscious personality a window into what is unconscious (if not the comfort and directness of a royal road). It is important to note that, like with soul, the word "unconscious" does not refer to a substantive entity, a "place" below the threshold of consciousness. It is to be taken more as an adjective, referring to "that which is unconscious".

Relating to dreams can show us what we do not know about the goings-on within our own psyche; careful analysis of dreams can help to make perceptible the unknown dynamics that power our choices and colour our perspectives. As in the situation when "the work" is granted the assumption of agency and autonomy, the dream image taken seriously on its own terms can draw both the dreamer and the image into greater

relationship, maturing both. The same can be said about the images spontaneously produced through reverie, fantasy, or active imagination; though these are not identical to dreams (perhaps most importantly in that they are less free from potential manipulation by the ego, since the subject is awake) I consider them at least in the same family.

It is important to my approach that the royal road is not "a straight one-way street of all morning traffic, moving out of the unconscious toward the ego's city" (Hillman, 1979, p. 1). I do not think that it is beneficial, respectful, or even personally ethical to purely value dreams and images for what they can offer, as "resources" to be tapped and managed. For mutually respectful (and truly beneficial) relations with the unconscious parts of psyche to occur, the unconscious must be an equal partner in whatever dealings the conscious mind has with it. The unconscious mind suffers from being considered a *terra nullius* (nobody's land) to be colonized for the benefit of the "ego's city".

My view of the connection between the way one relates to images and the way one relates to everything else is that they are intimately linked. Images are, in part, expressions of the psyche from which they emerge. If an individual relates to an image in a receptive way, it may reveal a great deal about the way this person relates to related inner and outer experiences. It is this understanding which lies behind my treatment of settler, indigenous, and colonial consciousness as symbols. When I suggest that an approach to inner experience is indigenous or colonial, therefore, I mean that it treats the inner phenomena in the same way that a colonial or indigenous perspective might be expected to typically treat an outer experience (such as a foreign land).

1.2 D&D Play Method

Prior to the beginning of our twelve sessions, some important interactions occurred between me and the Dungeon Master. First, we collaboratively created an agreement (see Appendix A) that laid out what was expected of both of us during the course of the research. The DM was made aware that this game was related to my Master's thesis, and that I would be studying "a soulful approach to D&D". For his understanding, this meant that I would be incorporating dreams and active imagination. At the time, that was all I could be sure of as well. The agreement included provisions for the DM to back out of the project for any reason, and was clear that in such a case any contributions he had made to the research would not be used. He was given contact information for the chair of my program and my thesis supervisor as well. This agreement, as well as the research proposal in general, received approval from the college as well as from an independent ethics panel.

The DM and I had very little discussion about either the game or my work during the process. I thought that sharing our thoughts or experiences might influence the process unduly. My goal was for the processes to be separate, coming together only in-game. The DM was free to do what he needed to prepare for each session, which at times might include consulting with others, or play-testing certain scenarios. On my end, preparation looked like drawing, thinking, reverie, research, dream work, and engaging in transference dialogues (Romanyshyn, 2013). This work ranged widely (it visited many diverse "islands"), however it all aimed at deepening my participation in the game.

The DM and I communicated about the campaign setting and content prior to beginning. We also held, at the DM's suggestion, a "Session Zero", in which the essential aspects of the character were solidified, as per the requirements of the game.

Following that, we met 13 times, weekly (with two one-week breaks), on Wednesday nights at 7pm. The game happened in a spacious, well-lit meeting room, with basic recording equipment set up to record our dialogue. We recorded for three reasons: firstly, to allow us to review the previous game between sessions, aiding in our weekly preparation; secondly, to help my memory of the actual game experience when writing this thesis after-the-fact; and thirdly, to create the possibility of editing our game sessions into a podcast. The DM had expressed interest in making such a podcast, and I found the idea acceptable, provided that we both agreed it was in the best interests of ourselves and the work after we had finished the campaign. This proviso was necessary for me because I had no idea what content would emerge, or how it would come up, in the campaign. If the narrative were to touch upon challenging or sensitive issues, I was not confident that it would be ethical to make a show out of it. This concern was primarily with psychotherapy patients of mine in mind—if a patient were to discover a podcast in which a character I play deals with issues of addiction and homelessness (for example) in a troubling way, it could prove harmful to the therapeutic relationship. I was also simply not willing to play with the necessity of having an audience in mind. I thought that a game undertaken for its own sake, with the potential of being turned into a show, would happen very differently than a game undertaken for a show.

The table set up included, therefore, two microphones and a laptop into which they were interfaced. We sat across from one another. The DM's side of the table was

mostly hidden behind a small screen, but included his reference books, his own laptop, dice, and whatever else he needed for the day. My side included my character sheet, my player's handbook, and, eventually, some more reference sheets for other abilities that my character gained over the course of play. I also had my sketchbook and journal available, in case I needed to take some notes or make a quick drawing.

Game sessions were meant to last 90 minutes, though they often lasted longer. This extension was a result of several factors, such as the DM's attempt to reach appropriate narrative moments to end sessions on, enthusiasm for continuing to game, and, frankly, a desire to be nice and a corresponding lack of discipline on my part. It was a small disappointment to me that we did not stick rigidly to the 90-minute schedule, as I anticipated this schedule might impose some interesting (and useful) restrictions. However, I made the choice not to enforce that schedule, for the aforementioned reasons of storytelling and enthusiasm. In essence, the decision was between two games: *Dungeons & Dragons* on the one hand, and the game of adhering to the schedule on the other. For better or worse, I decided that *D&D* was more important to the work than the game of adhering to the schedule.

1.3 Games, Gaming, & Gameplay

Salen & Zimmerman (2004) offer many different definitions of the word game, taken from many different writers and theorists over the last hundred years. Rather than going over all of these, I will include two definitions that speak most clearly to what I am interested about in studying games, and then address important components of the other definitions.

First, and referenced earlier, Bernard Suits in his book *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (1978) comes up with the following: "To play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity" (p. 34). Later, a more portable definition is offered: "Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (p. 41). I appreciate this definition for its broadness as well as a sense of fun that I feel when reading it. I think that Suits invokes the spirit of the game more authentically than any other definition I have read. Now, it may be that his definition is in fact too broad to be useful as a definition per se. It is so broad that the Grasshopper of the book's title goes on to illustrate through his argument how in fact all activities can be conceived of as games (though this is very interesting, investigating it more directly is beyond the scope of this paper). A very important concept from Suits' book is the *lusory attitude*. The term, which comes from Latin *lusor* (player), refers to the attitude adopted by the player of a game that allows them to accept the rules as authoritative, because they make possible the very activity which they delimit, that is, the game. The lusory attitude provides "an explanation of that curious state of affairs wherein one adopts rules which require one to employ worse rather than better means for reaching an end" (Suits, 1978, p. 38). Suits draws upon the example of golf, wherein the goal is of course not simply to get the golf ball into the hole, because one could simply transport the ball there in a car and drop it in. Rather, the goal is to get the ball into the hole through the means prescribed, that is, by hitting it with different golf clubs, which are after all an extremely inefficient means for completing the task. The

lusory attitude brings one into the *magic circle*, a term used by Huizinga (1955) that has become incorporated into most discussion on the nature of games. The magic circle is the frame of the game, which separates the game from reality; it is a special space, psychologically (and often physically, for instance, in the case of a boxing ring). "It is responsible not only for the unusual relationship between a game and the outside world, but also for many of the internal mechanisms and experiences of a game in play" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 96). The lusory attitude is the intended way for a gamer to enter into the magic circle—intended in contrast to the behaviour of a cheater, spoilsport, or trifler.

A note on the term *magic circle*: It is used throughout the literature on gaming, quite independently of its other and more ancient meaning, the *mandala*. There is a connection between the terms, but for the purposes of this paper I simply use the term magic circle in the way Huizinga (1955) does, that is, as a distinct psychic space entered into during the course of a game.

Returning to Suits' (1978) definition of a game, if we apply it to *D&D*, it goes as follows. The specific state of affairs to achieve will be the completion of a quest or narrative arc. The means permitted by rules refer to the game system as well as the DM's binding decisions. Ways in which the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means are, firstly, that the player is bound to use dice to determine outcomes, and must roll them rather than simply set them down on the desired number; and secondly, that the player is bound to make choices as their character, rather than based in the player's idea about what might make the quest the most achievable. The rules are

accepted just because they make possible such an activity, which is the lusory attitude adopted by the players.

As can be seen, *D&D* does not fit neatly into the definition, and there are some lacunas. For instance, it is not possible to define exactly what constitutes a choice "in character". It certainly does not appear to be measurable, although the "inspiration" mechanic in *D&D 5th Edition* provides rewards to players who are judged as being especially in character (Wizards of the Coast, 2014). The restriction that choices are to be in character is perhaps more of an ideal than a strict rule; it is adhered to through more of a code of honour than through enforcement by the actual game system. It is also the case that, in different *D&D* groups, the nature of gaming in character is accorded different levels of priority. I have participated in a group in which the goal seemed to be to complete the quest as quickly and efficiently as possible. In this group, most of the character development that individual players had done seemed to play no part.

Salen & Zimmerman themselves offer the definition (2004, p. 80): "A *game* is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome." They differ, as many do, from Suits' definition, in that they consider a quantifiable outcome to be a necessary component of a game. There needs to be a "win" condition. *D&D* does not fit here, for there is not exactly a way to win or lose. As intended by the original creator, Gary Gygax, "There is no 'winner,' no final objective, and the campaign grows and changes as it matures" (1978, p. 7). One might say they have won when they complete the quest; in response to this I suggest that completing the quest is, in relation to *D&D*, what Suits (1978) terms the *prelusory goal.* That is, one adopts this goal in order to give the narrative a direction and urgency; to

make the activity of gaming possible. The more important goal, the *lusory* goal, or the goal of playing the game, I suggest, is to tell the story that needs to be told, and this may involve failing the quest. I am aware that "telling the story that needs to be told" is an extremely difficult-to-pin-down metric; yet I maintain it is what the gamers orient themselves toward, consciously or not. It may interact synergistically with the lusory goal of completing the quest, or it may run completely counter. There are also different extents to which this goal may be relevant for different groups of gamers, as each game, each gamer, and each DM is unique and has their own ideas about what the game is.

I am writing here in ideal terms, and do not mean to say anything pejorative about groups of gamers who play with the goal of defeating enemies and gaining stronger abilities for their characters. There are many different approaches to the relationship between player and character, and evaluating the worth of these approaches is not my business here. What I write should be taken as a statement of my own approach to the game, rather than a statement on how the game should be played. It is perfectly valid that the "story that needs to be told" by a particular group of players is, for that group of players, the story of beating up monsters and stealing their stuff.

My personal perspective of the relationship between player and character is very similar to the perspective I have adopted towards "the work": By granting the character the presumption of agency, the two can exist in a constant dialogue. In this project, I endeavoured never to let Croak become a mere extension of my own egoic agency, but speak for himself as much as possible. I adopted the attitude that he was autonomous, yet at the same time I could never be completely "lost" within him. To play the game, Croak required me, as a mediator, to share what I understood as his impulses and words. This is

not a trance state, or method acting; I did not "become" Croak in the game sessions. I simply tried to remain present both to my own impulses and those impulses which I perceived as Croak's, and navigate a dialogue between them. This understanding will help clarify what is happening later in this paper, when I describe the character Croak and myself having different thoughts, or a particular reaction that "both of us" had, and so on.

Adjacent to the precise definition of the word game, there are many qualities that I consider to be part of a game and which interest me in this work. First is what I conceive of as the challenge of understanding games "from within". To this end, I might imaginatively ask, what is the perspective through which the game sees? What does each rule mean, not to the player, but to the game as a whole? What is the game's specific form of behaving and playing out? It might be observed that, in addition to the work and Croak, I am also imaginatively endowing the game with agency and spirit. By cultivating this receptive attitude, I can "hear" what it is that the game seems to "say" to me. It is important to understand that I am referring not to the game *set*, that is, for instance, the chess pieces and board, but the game as the process which the gamers engage in with the aid of the set. A comparison I might draw is that as the human body can be understood as psyche's embodiment in physical reality, the game set might be thought of as the game's embodiment in physical reality.

There is an aspect of this that inflates the game beyond its capabilities and nature, and this will be treated later (since I did not realize it until partway through the process, it would be dishonest to elaborate too much here; this is necessary for the narrative aspect of this paper). That concern notwithstanding, there is a side benefit to my taking an empathic, exploratory attitude towards games, and that is that I learn about myself. I learn

about my own habits and patterns, and how they support or oppose the game with which I am engaged. I think of this as becoming a student of the game; being apprenticed to the game and taught by it.

Sarah-Lynne Bowman, in her work (especially *The Functions of Role-Playing Games*, 2010) describes many positive outcomes of role-playing games. She writes that they can aid in diverse areas such as developing a theory of mind (p. 57), personal and professional skill acquisition (p. 85), and improved social skills (p. 116). I am grateful for *The Functions of Role-Playing Games*, for it covers a lot of important ground, but also because it alerted me to some previously unconscious tendencies within myself. First, I have said that Bowman describes many positive outcomes. She spends a great deal of the book listing and elaborating possible benefits of participating in role-playing games, which I read as somewhat defensive. It may be that a defensive stance is justified and even necessary, in response to the societal stigma placed on role-playing games and those who play them that Bowman identifies (p. 66). The stigma does demand a response, and Bowman's appeal is comprehensive, drawing upon early psychoanalysis and contemporary roleplay theory alike to make her points. However, so much of her argument is grounded in role-playing's relevance for childhood development that it may subtly make the opposite point. Her arguments end up grounded in the perspective of the child, and I am left with the image of a child trying to convince a disinterested adult of the value of toys. The toys in this image are meaningful to the child, but that does not mean they are (or should be) meaningful to the adult. The adult might find that toys are important in a different way, but their relevance does not translate directly. What I am saying is that the argument put forth by Bowman that games are valuable for childhood

development, grounded in evidence as it may be, does not actually say anything about whether they are valuable for adults; it simply suggests that the adult who relies on such arguments to justify his or her own gaming is still a child to some extent. I think this may be part of Bowman's point, that is, that adults ought to get in touch with, or hold onto, their childlikeness. Perhaps there is something to that; yet I maintain there is an important psychological difference between, as an adult, unreflectively valuing games in terms of their meaning for a child, and, as an adult, maintaining a relationship with that inner child. The latter is a mature viewpoint, the former is not.

In addition, I feel there is something dishonest about approaching a game to learn about oneself or develop skills. "Delivering outcomes" is not, I think, part of a game's true nature, and translating it into such terms seems to be a defensive movement. It seems to guard against a vulnerability that might be exposed by an adult who is gaming for gaming's sake; in response to some inner voice that might say something like, "you are wasting your time", one can say "I am not, and here is my proof: I am strengthening my strategic thinking abilities". That reasoning may be true, but it is also the adult's way of unreflectively translating a game's importance into "grown-up language". It is still the child (or perhaps the adolescent) who needs to justify his or her own activities; an adult with a more mature relationship to the game might be able to say that he or she is gaming for enjoyment, or socialization, and be content with that. When we talk about putting away childish things (a phrase abducted from 1 Corinthians 13:11), it may not mean putting away the literal objects associated with childhood so much as moving past a childish relationship to them. Relating to a game either from the perspective of a child or the defensive adult is different from approaching the game with a receptive attitude

toward what it may offer. The former I consider *using* a game, changing it from what it is into a tool for one's own purposes; the latter I consider a more honest path to experiencing the game on its own terms.

Of course, it is only because these dialogues are going on within me that I can glimpse them in Bowman's (2010) work. Through her emphasis on justifying the game in terms of its benefits, I can glimpse my own defensive (and extractive) shadow. I undertook this research project in part with an unconscious aim of legitimizing my gaming, and, more to the point, itemizing and commodifying some of its effects. For who? I suppose it was for a judgmental inner figure of my own that I wanted to prove something to; a perspective that would prefer that I spend my time doing things that have more measurable and concrete outcomes. I think both Bowman and I set out to look at games and isolate their variables, transforming them from a holistic experience into a set of deliverables. At this point, I think that my consciousness of this impulse has transformed it significantly, and I have been much more content to approach games *as* games.

Another quality of games in which I am interested is that games offer a unique space wherein a player can *be* with full intensity. During time when I am totally involved in a game, playing it to the absolute best of my ability takes on great significance. I experience it as freeing, because within contemporary North American culture I find few places to engage with such unfettered focus and energy. I indicated, earlier, that games filled a hole in my life as a child: This hole was, in part, a feeling that there was nowhere to direct my energy, and that my intensity of feeling and thought was threatening or unwelcome. I remember often being described as a "spaz", which as I understood it,

meant that I had too much energy or was unpredictable. Games have always been an area where my full intensity is welcome, and often demanded! I feel a combative energy invigorate my body as I think about this, and I note that there is often a martial aspect to it, and a sense of potency. Like the fellow schoolchildren who categorized me as a spaz, other players have not always appreciated the intensity of my approach to games, and I have therefore learned to temper what I feel I need from a game with the actual situation. There are certain game settings where I know intense analysis, shouting, or even manipulating the other gamers through emotional pressure or deceit are all par for the course, and part of the mutually agreed-upon lusory attitude. There are other settings in which I have found it more appropriate to relax this approach. At bottom, though, I am always on some level disappointed by a game in which I feel obligated—not by the rules, but socially—to hold back; to lack commitment toward playing the game to one's utmost ability is to fall short of completely engaging the game. A player doing this is perhaps what Suits (1978) might call a trifler or a spoilsport, "playing at" the game.

The physical sense I associate with gaming is not always a martial energy, however. It depends on the game. Certainly when playing *A Game of Thrones: The Board Game* (Petersen, 2011)*,* in which the players battle over control of a continent, I feel martial, and within the group that I play with, we are often moved to our feet to strike war-like poses; war cries issue forth from our mouths, only partly in jest, as we reveal cards to resolve battles. But what about other games? *The Grizzled* (Riffaud & Rodriguez, 2015), a cooperative game about surviving the First World War, invokes feelings of brotherhood, sadness, and palpable physical and emotional tension. *Mottainai* (Chudyk, 2015), a game in which Buddhist monks collect materials and build crafts, has

a sense of peace and flow. When playing *Pandemic* (Leacock, 2008), a cooperative game about global disease management, I feel a heightened mental alertness, and physically jittery. The martial aspect does not underlie all of these experiences, nor even the competitive aspect, since cooperative games are some of the most satisfying to me. What does underlie them is the sense of fullness and presence felt when committing myself fully to the game; the fullness includes the specific energy and flow of each game.

Here again it must be said that I do not mean to tell people how to engage with games, or prescribe the proper way to be a gamer. My intent is rather to try and give voice to what I am interested in in games, and what I see as the true nature of gaming. From my perspective, a game can be released into this nature through a full commitment, on the part of the gamers, to achieving the prelusory goal. Any other approach, as I see it, does not fulfil this ideal. I say nothing here about the *value* of approaching a game for a different reason, such as for entertainment, to meet one's need to be social, to pass time, or what have you. I often approach games for such reasons. I wish primarily to demarcate a difference, which I can also describe as the difference between playing for one's own purposes, and playing for the game. One might, justifiably, ask: Is this possible? Can one truly get outside of one's own ego and devote energy to the game objectively? Or, is that simply a different form of bending the game to one's own purposes? At this point, my answer to the first question is: No. I do not think it is possible to completely get outside of one's own ego to approach a game from a purely objective point; yet there is value in the process of working towards it. The second question is very tricky. The issue of whether trying to approach the game in terms of its true nature is, despite one's conscious intents, actually a subtle way of subjecting the game to one's own desires is a very

important one. For my part, I know I have used games to fulfil my own needs, and have dishonestly framed this as serving the game rather than serving myself. My awareness of this speaks to a shift that has taken place within me through this work, and which will be explicated more over the course of this paper.

One more key quality of games I would like to address is the nature of the limitations that the game provides. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) note that Abt (1970)**,** Avedon and Sutton-Smith (1971), Suits (1978), Crawford (1984), and Parlett (1999) all include rules and limits in their definitions of *game*. The rules of the game are indispensable to its structure; a game is perhaps nothing if it is not rules. The meaning and perspective of these rules are what I am trying to vicariously introspect when I explore a game in depth, as described above. The limitations of a game provide challenge. They also keep the game comprehensible. The formality of the rules provides the container in which the game*play* can happen.

Where possible in this paper, I intentionally avoid using the word *play*, to better delineate the meaning of *game* itself. I think the word "play" is not actually quite appropriate to describe what is done in relationship to a game. Without delving into the vast body of theory on play, I will say that play is its own phenomenon, separate from game. Play may occur *in* a game's magic circle, but I do not think you really play a game. I think a helpful comparison can be made to the translation between Spanish and English of one what does in relation to a piano. In English, I play the piano. In Spanish, *Yo tocar el piano*: I *touch* the piano. Apart from having a decidedly more sensuous tone, touching the piano seems to me to be a much better way of describing the action, for it speaks to a relationship of connectivity. When I touch the piano, I come into contact with it, and it

comes into contact with me; when I play the piano, I use it as a play*thing*. As in a game, play can *occur* while one is touching the piano, but I do not think that it is the correct verb to connect the two. A piano is an instrument through which music might play. Might I then say, *Yo tocar el juego* (I touch the game)? It does not work quite right, but it suggests, somewhat more appropriately, that a game is the instrument through which play may occur. All this said, it is hopelessly awkward to write about games in the English language without using common phrases like *the players* or *gameplay*. I often use the word "game" as a verb in this paper where I might have colloquially used "play" (I game, you game, we are gaming), but just as often it has simply been more readable to write less self-consciously, and speak of playing the game. I hope the reader will look past the inadequacy of this language to take my intended meaning.

The sentence that required this foray was, "The formality of the rules provides the container in which the game*play* can happen." Now that I have established what I intend by "gameplay", I would like to turn to the container. I suggest that it is freedom within this container, regardless of how tight the container may be (that is, how strict or limiting the rules are), that can lead to the sense of total investment I described above. Absolutely clear rules delineate both the boundaries and everything that fits within them. Within the boundaries everything is permissible; the gamer has infinite freedom to game with those possibilities. I wrote in the introduction to this paper that I have, when younger, related to games as though they were deities. Here we come to a sense of how that can be the case. Since the rules of a game can take precedence over everything else while the game is happening, they become the de facto god within the game's magic circle. Commitment to a game, then, is a sort of version—not necessarily a good version—of commitment to a

god, or to a set of principles. The lusory attitude has something in common with the religious attitude here: It accepts what comes from "beyond".

Since the game is ultimately a thing designed by humans, is taking a religious attitude towards a game an inflation, akin to worshiping the game as a false idol? I think that it indicates a certain nihilism, or at least a flattening of the field of meaning that allows gods and games to be collapsed onto the same level. We can sense some danger in mistaking human rules for divine rules clearly when we amplify and imagine the case of a war criminal, who deflects responsibility for his or her atrocities by saying that "I was following orders." It is an abdication of personal, ethical responsibility to treat rules created by human beings as one's ultimate authority. How this extreme example interacts when brought back down to the gamer and the lusory attitude is something that begs much more discussion.

2.0 Pindus-on-Isles

Having described many of my theoretical premises for this study, I will now describe in a phenomenological way what happened. This section will discuss the process of the *D&D* campaign. I will begin with the preparation for the game, and then I will relate the narrative of the campaign, as it happened to the character Croak. These sections will take on a more explicitly narrative tone. These narratives will alternate with reflections on the game, its process, and descriptions of the work I was doing between sessions. Many of the ideas brought up in the first part of this paper will be developed in relation to the Pindus narrative; the narrative and the accompanying ideas will develop synergistically. Basically, the next section will be a back-and-forth between Croak's story

and hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of it; between the narrative and the meta-narrative.

2.1 Preparation

2.1.1 Dogs

Weeks before any serious work regarding the narrative content of the campaign happened, I had the following dream:

I am in a videogame. I am creating a character, and need to choose my race and allegiance to a faction. I had played this game before, though never completed it. I had talked to my mother about her character—I thought it was cool that the faction she had chosen was a "commonwealth", but she told me that she hadn't had any choice.

I chose Wolves (for my race), and then was presented with a first scenario in which to choose allegiance. I hadn't done this part before. I wanted to have a new experience, but also didn't want my choice to be too "obvious." Once I chose allegiance, I would need to attack another faction right away, to steal their money. Which faction I attacked would be determined by which faction I chose for my own. Some options of factions were Slavers and Giants. I was looking forward to seeing what kind of magic wolves had.

Writing this after the fact, I can see within this dream the seeds of every major development that this work took. At this point, I will tell how I related to this dream when it came. At first, I kept it in my mind as the campaign approached. Though on a literal level it dealt with the act of character creation, and I would soon need to create a character, I knew that I did not want to directly concretize this dream by insisting that the

game content feature wolves and factions and so on. I wanted to let the dream's symbolism work on me without directly trying to make it into something.

The idea of "wolf magic" held a particular resonance. I had been drawing animals for several months as a personal artistic practice, and the dream's suggestion of wolves seemed to point towards this artwork. I considered how I could value this offer within the framework of *Dungeons & Dragons*. I knew that the druid (a class of character) gained the ability to shapeshift into animals, and a druid of the moon excelled at this ability. From the *Player's Handbook* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014)*:

> Druids revere nature above all . . . Many druids pursue a mystic spirituality of
>
> transcendent union with nature . . . Druids are also concerned with the delicate
>
> ecological balance that sustains plant and animal life, and the need for civilized
>
> folk to live in harmony with nature, rather than in opposition to it. (p. 64)

I restrained myself from making any concrete decisions such as character class at this point. Setting aside the druid, I began to amplify the images in the dream. Amplification (Jung 1947/1954) is a comparative reconstruction of meaning, whereby a given symbol (for instance, a wolf) is related to other instances of the same symbol first in the individual's personal consciousness, and then with different instances of the symbol within diverse mythologies and ways of knowing. Amplification occurs spontaneously and naturally as a psychic function, evident wherever we react to one situation as though it is another; for example, reacting to something benign as though it were a threat because it "triggers" a past, potentially traumatic, experience. Some amplification, like this, is passive. A passive example here is that I am reminded by the wolf in the dream of my artwork, and of other dogs I know or have seen. The active

amplification which I do as part of this exploration is a process of making conscious the original "reminder" phenomena, and investigating what it brings up. The word amplification may sound as though it is an externalizing process, but the movement overall is inward. A way to put it that keeps with the metaphor of "sound" is that the image creates "vibrations" which I can perceive as I relate to it ("this reminds me of that"), and I amplify them into a larger "soundwave"; this makes it easier to see the details of them. But the amplifications are not "sent out into the world", rather they are understood within the context that they are the extension of what was already inner, that is, inside the relationship with the phenomenon. Amplification is the opposite of a reductionist approach, for it illuminates more aspects of the one symbol, rather than collapsing the symbol into a kind of code (wherein, for example, "dog" might simply be a stand-in for "scavenger"). I do not look to these amplifications to discover anything objectively factual about literal biological canines, but rather about the various images of canines within the psyche, and which are contained within my relationship with the original canine (the wolf in the dream).

The first amplification was my own artwork. I was aware that I drew in a way that reminded me of Haida art that I had seen. Some others have described my drawing in a similar vein, saying it resembles South American, Central American, or just generally Indigenous art. The drawings are mostly black and white, and most pieces are quite small; the majority of them are made on pages of a 3x5" sketchbook. Many animals and motifs recur throughout the series of drawings, developing themselves from one to the next. It is rare (though becoming less so) that the objects in my artwork touch one another, or interact. More typically the shapes and animals float, freely suspended, and

with clear and unambiguous boundaries. One of my favourite animals to draw was a long-tailed dog (Figure 2), which I thought of as a coyote, but which actually looked more like the extinct thylacine. A thylacine, also called a Tasmanian wolf, was a dog-like marsupial, and a shy, nocturnal apex predator. I am only aware of the thylacine from having seen footage, taken in 1933 in a zoo in Hobart, of the last known living member of the species.

Figure 2: The first of the "animal" series. The dog is in the upper right.

There is a song I love called "Coyotes". It is what might be called a cowboy ballad. The lyrics tell the story of a man of a bygone age experiencing the changing world. Here are a few of them:

And he'd tell you a tale of the old days,

When the country was wild all around,

Sit out under the stars of the Milky Way,

And listen while the coyotes howl. . . .

Now the long horns are gone,

And the drovers are gone,

The Comanches are gone,

And the outlaws are gone,

Geronimo is gone,

And Sam Bass is gone,

And the lion is gone,

And the red wolf is gone. . . .

Then he'd look off some place in the distance,

At something only he could see,

He'd say, "All that's left now of the old days,

Those damned old coyotes and me." (McDill, 1984)

The song ends with the old cowboy disappearing, and the mysterious suggestion that he has himself become a coyote. "But that night, as the moon crossed the mountain, one more coyote was heard" (McDill, 1984). I can hardly listen to this song without feeling the stirring of emotion in my chest. Even the silly imitation of the coyote's voice, "poo yip poo yip poo" strikes a deep chord of feeling. Part of it is the power and simplicity of the music and storytelling; more than that, though, I identify with the old cowboy. Though I was born in 1986, and have hardly known anything but the

modernized world, there are times I feel that there is "no place for an hombre like I am, in this new world of asphalt and steel." When I feel this way, I feel as out-of-place as a thylacine. This song seems to call me back to an unknown past, one I have never really known.

In a later piece of my artwork, the dog and a monkey can be seen staring into one another's eyes (Figure 3). Later, the dog's head appeared on the monkey's body (Figure 4). The monkey was felt, by me, to be approaching humanness—the only thing that made it apparent that it was not human was its tail.

Figure 3: Dog and monkey, staring into one another's eyes.
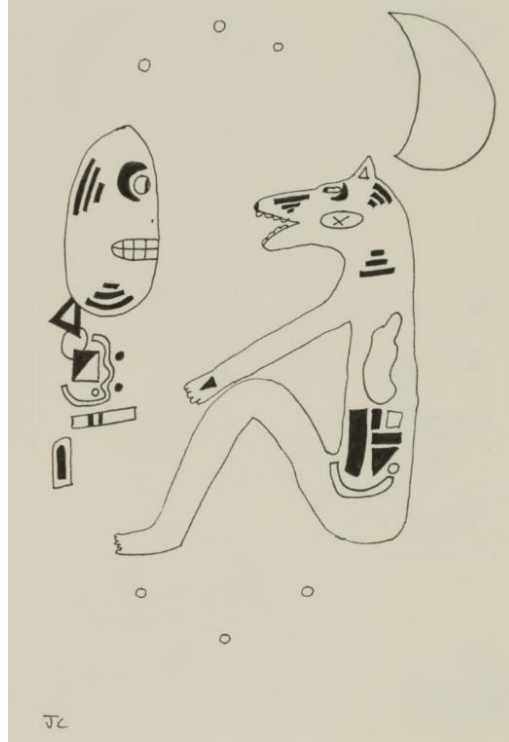
Figure 4: The dog and monkey's heads are reversed, the monkey's tail lost.

My dream was about a wolf, however for the moment I thought it was not much

of a leap from a wolf to a coyote, and so I considered these images in context of one

another, generally as dogs. The eye contact, and the switching of heads, suggested to me

that there was a kinship between the monkey-human and the dog. The concept of

indigeneity had been brought up by my artwork, as well as an image of an alley-dog

which I will describe later; it is also present in the coyote song's nostalgia for the

Comanches and Geronimo (McDill, 1984). I was therefore quick to note that both wolf

and coyote feature prominently in the traditional thinking of some Indigenous cultures.

While the symbolism of coyote across these cultures is too much for me to explore

seriously in this paper, at the time of this work I knew coyote to be a shapeshifter and

trickster. Coyote's cleverness and distaste for following rules often gets him into trouble;

though he is a trickster he frequently ends up being tricked himself. Aspects of this part

of the coyote's nature have been represented in the animated character Wile E. Coyote (Maltese & Jones, 1949). Wile E. Coyote will stop at nothing to get what he wants (the Road Runner), and devises a multitude of increasingly clever methods of doing it. Each time, his plan backfires and he ends up hurting himself. Yet, he does not seem to accrue any wisdom related to the situation, and continues to go after something that is not his to have.

A wolf is more fearsome and dangerous than a coyote. Given that the dream presents me with a choice of "faction" for my wolf character, I am led to think of the wolf pack versus the lone wolf who the pack has abandoned. I have heard and read that the Ojibwe people traditionally consider the wolf, *ma'iingan*, as a brother who shares their fate (Cerulli, 2017). In the dream, the wolf is juxtaposed with my mother's faction, a "commonwealth". I think here of the British Commonwealth, of which Canada is a part, that aggregated disparate lands under its banner during the colonial period. The presence of the wolf and the commonwealth in this dream, then, seem to prefigure a dialogic that dominated much of this work, concerning indigenous and settler consciousness.

I am also reminded again of the "hole" that gaming filled for me as a child, which I described earlier as partly being a sense that there was no acceptable channel for my energy and intensity. My intensity, in this context, threatened the common wealth; I often felt this in relation to my personal mother. It seemed to me that she experienced my inner intensity or chaos as threatening. The "commonwealth" therefore did not have a place for me and I became a "lone wolf". There is something interesting in the dream-thought that it was "cool" (admirable, impressive, novel) that her faction had been a commonwealth, yet she had not had a choice in the matter. To me, this points to a developing respect for

the collective, and of my own position which I still feel to be "outside". In the dream, I think it is cool to be integrated into a group, or to serve a group, but that itself is an appraisal from outside; I can only think that it is cool because I have not had a sustained experience of being integrated into a group myself. When I have, it has almost universally been as the "radical element", the part that is pushing against the boundaries of the group, and trying to change it rather than accepting what it already is.

Returning to my artwork, the image of the monkey with a wolf's head also reminded me of the Egyptian god Anubis, who has a human's body and a jackal's head. Researching Anubis led me to discover connections between the jackal, death, and darkness. In ancient Egypt, Jackals were said to prowl outside tombs; in fact, jackals may have been a reason tombs were first developed—to keep corpses safe from their scavenging. From this, the jackal and Anubis were believed to have knowledge of the embalming process, as well as the journey to the afterlife. Anubis was "guardian of the corpse and steward over the mysteries of death and rebirth" (DuQuesne, 1991, p. 11); furthermore, he was the one who weighed the heart of the deceased, determining by this measurement where the spirit was destined to go. He also led them there.

Dogs are often associated symbolically with mystery, darkness, and the threshold between life and death; this occurs across cultures. From classical Athens we can look to Euripides: "You will be a dog, the image of light-bearer Hecate", Hecate being the goddess of witchcraft, the moon, and ghosts (among other things). From the Persian Sûfi tradition, "Dogs are hidden behind the veil, O friend… Though his outward appearance would seem to deny it, the dog partakes of many Mysteries" (Nuribakhsh, 1987).

Mircea Eliade offers several relevant dog symbolisms in his work *Shamanism* (1964/2004). The Yakut regard the dog or wolf as the lowest form of *ié-kyla* (animal mother) that a shaman can have (p. 90). The Koryak shaman, descending to the underworld, finds it guarded by dogs (p. 251). A shaman of the Eskimo tribe may descend to the bottom of the sea, to the abode of Takánakapsâluk, the mother of the sea beasts; if they do they will find it guarded by a vicious dog who opposes all but the most powerful shamans (p. 295). Eliade connects the lycanthrope (werewolf), generally, with cannibalistic secret societies (p. 467); the man in the shape of a dog is one who devours his own kind.

Cŵn Annwn are the spectral underworld hounds of Welsh myth; Garmr is the hound who guards Nilfheim in Norse myth; and perhaps there is no more iconic underworld guard dog than Cerberos, the three-headed hound of Hades. Though while the dog that the Koryak shaman encounters guards the way in, Cerberos guards the way out.

As can be seen, the dog is associated with mystery, death, and the underworld in many different cultures. They are frequently liminal, guarding the threshold one way or another like Cerberos or the dog of Takánakapsâluk, or functioning as the psychopomp (soul's guide) like Anubis. The dog's humble or wretched appearance belies its importance; it is viewed as the "lowest" form of animal-mother that a Yakut shaman can have. Yet depth itself is a "low" quality, and its movement is downward: "Though his outward appearance would seem to deny it, the dog partakes of many mysteries" (Nuribakhsh, 1987). There is a direct relationship between lowness, or depth, and the underworld, as noted by Hillman (1979, p. 5): "A depth psychology which relies upon the shadowy images of fantasy, upon deepening and pathologizing, and upon therapy as a

cult of soul is referring mythologically to the underworld. . . . all daylight consciousness begins in the night and bears its shadows." Jung, too, understood depth psychology in direct and intimate relationship with the underworld: "The dread and resistance which every natural human being experiences when it comes to delving too deeply into himself is, at bottom, the fear of the journey to Hades" (1968/1980, para. 439). Darkness can be fascinating, transfixing, and healing (Marlan, 2005), but is also very dangerous: The underworld is, after all, the place one is only meant to travel to after death.

In these amplifications, I observe an unmistakable tendency toward darkness, mystery, and death. This is, as Romanyshyn (2013) might put it, a complex that has called me into the work. The fascinating and transfixing nature of darkness is a quality with which I am deeply familiar; I am personally drawn repeatedly toward the psychological shadow, or that which is forgotten, left behind, or repressed. And as that which is overlooked, the humble outward appearance of the dog attracts me. I want to learn the mysteries that the dog partakes of; as the dream says, I want to know "what kind of magic wolves [have]". The connections between the images emerging and indigeneity were also growing at this point. The concept of shapeshifting was also gaining in importance, and this is what I will explore next.

2.1.2 Shapeshifting & the Meta-Game

Shapeshifting was appearing in many forms: The implication in the song "Coyotes" (McDill, 1984) that the cowboy becomes a coyote in the end; the shapeshifting coyote of some Indigenous mythologies; the dream in which I chose to be a wolf; the therianthropic (from Greek: wild beast-human) drawings of the dog-headed man; and a yet-to-be-described image of a man transforming into an alley-dog. Shapeshifting has

been designed into the *D&D* system as an ability that some creatures possess, expressed in a few different ways. A druid is able to shapeshift into certain types of animals they have seen. A lycanthrope transforms either willingly or with the full moon from a human into a great wolf. Doppelgängers can transform into the guise of other humanoid beings that they have seen. There are also spells that can transform one's own shape, or the shape of another. These spells can help or harm—a wizard might be able to transform an ally into a bird to help scout the area, or an enemy into a mouse to be tossed over a cliff.

I began to consider shapeshifting as a metaphor for empathy. To gain understanding of the subjective psychic state of others, I thought, I must be willing to learn the ways of their perspectives: how they see, how they know, how they interpret phenomena, how they tend to think, what they value, and so on. I was drawn to the idea of shapeshifting as living, for a time, in another's shoes (or paws). Remembering once more the dream text, "I was looking forward to seeing what kind of magic wolves had*"*, I entertained the idea of my character having the magical ability to shape-change into a wolf. Again, I say entertained because I was very careful not to attach myself too strongly to any idea at this point. Though my conscious amplifications and imagination were fun, and deepened my appreciation of the symbols that were confronting me, I was trying to let the unconscious decide in the form of dreams or active imagination. I did not want my conscious personality to get in the way of the unconscious content emerging. I did not want it to be "me" that made the choice. Nor did I want to take the dream image too literally. Perhaps, I thought, it is not that the character needs to be able to actually transform into a wolf; maybe he or she will only have wolf-like personality traits. At any rate, I wanted to keep all the options open until one seized me unequivocally.

As the notion of shapeshifting worked on my imagination, it began to connect to my work as a therapist. I conceived of psychology as a process of symbolically shapeshifting, trying to vicariously introspect (Kohut, 1959) my way into a patient's experience; to try and see from the patient's perspective. I had already conceptualized perspective-taking as an important aspect of my psychological practice, and so the connection to shapeshifting felt appropriate once it was made.

Shapeshifting, perhaps, is over-determined in my personal psychology. My undergraduate degree is in acting—a shapeshifting art if ever there was one. Much of the education of that degree was in the work of effacing one's own personal characteristics in order to more fully disappear into a character. I see acting as generally a work of coming to know one's own subjectivities and patterns, in order to release the power of choice; choice to do otherwise. Once the power of choice has been released, then the actor can make a choice, which is, usually, whatever enters into a stronger sense of unity with the character which one portrays. Through this, an actor releases their character into its truth. "True objectivity . . . is achieved by taking into account deep subjectivity" (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 291).

There is yet another area in which I have intentionally and proudly shapeshifted: as a playwright and composer. Though I do not regularly write plays or songs anymore, when I did, there was always a dialogue with genre going on in my work. For example, I would write songs "in the style of" various artists or bands; I would write plays in a horror genre, or in the style of a particular television show. In some of my musical plays, each song is of a different genre. My album *Pins on a Map* (2012) is, among other things, an exploration of different musical genres. I sought this eclecticism and took pride in it. I

was drawn to the styles of others not simply as a way of imitating them, but as a way of vicariously introspecting my way into them; I wanted to find myself within someone else's style, to understand it from the inside, and, often, to transcend or break it. The aim was never to parody another style, or mockingly ape it, but to represent it faithfully as though I were "indigenous" to the genre. I wanted to find what was "country music" in me, or "political drama" in me, et cetera, and create from that place.

This leads to an amplification of the shapeshifter motif that has serious bearing on this work: Learning the rules of games can be a shapeshifting process. I have been talking about learning the rules of another's perspective, or a style of writing or musical composition; entering a game can be much the same. Different games call upon different faculties of the players. They have different goals, different methods of achieving them, different ways of interpreting phenomena, different rhythms, different levels of interaction with the other players, and so on. Games have, for me, often been about learning the game deeply, or becoming a student of the game. I like to explore precisely what makes a game vibrant, from the inside, and how to play according to the game's rules, not as set down by the game designer, but from the game's perspective. What does the game "need"? Once again there are echoes of my approach to this thesis work: What does the work need? Both questions, like acting, songwriting, and playwriting, are movements of dedicating my own presence and energy to the work, to best serve the art that is creating, or the game that is playing, me. And the "me" that is being created (or played) is subordinated to the work (or game). I consider my own personal process to be relevant primarily insofar that it reveals something of the game, and the game's intentionality.

It is here that I can say something more concrete about this work: that it is not about what happened, but the way in which it happened. Gamers use the term *metagame* to refer to the level of play "above" actual play. In chess, for instance, the metagame is not about checkmating the opponents' king, but rather it is concerned with how that happens. How it has happened historically (what moves are typically used) is situated as a trend in time or place; the metagame in 1980s-era Russian chess (for example) might have seen great importance placed on the opening moves of the knights, or a tendency toward an early-game forward positioning of the queen, or perhaps a more qualitatively defensive style of play that is more about waiting for the opponent to blunder than it is about offensively creating an opening. These are only hypotheticals—I know nothing about the metagame of 1980s-era Russian chess—but they serve to show what metagame aspects a player might be aware of. The metagame could also include personal characteristics, such as a gamer's habitual moves, or a rivalry between two gamers that changes the way the game is played.

Though I spend a great deal of time talking about what happened in the course of research, it is important to remember that it is primarily to reveal something about the *how*; about the metagame of the research itself. My amplification of the wolf image is an example of this. What I learned about dogs is as relevant to the research question as sharing the process of amplification is. Amplification in this way was one method of deepening and transforming the experience of the game, thus allowing it to be a deepening and transformative experience.

All of this is to say that, as I begin to share the narrative of the Pindus-on-Isles campaign, I will frequently connect back to the metagame of the work. These

connections to the metagame are as important to my discussion as the narrative which I share, though the two levels are inseparable.

2.1.3 The Sunken Ship, the Dungeon, & the Shivering Bird

I have written about the dream I had about the wolf, and character selection. I have also written about my reluctance to concretize any of the dream images—to take too literally the idea that the character should "be a wolf", or something like that. Rather, I kept the images present in my mind, assured by experience that they would continue to work outside of my conscious activity while I continued to mentally prepare for the campaign.

During some active imagination work that was part of this preparation—I refer the reader back to my earlier description of transference dialogues—I became aware of an extractive impulse which I was acting out. In one session, a sunken ship (Figure 5) appeared and, in dialogue with it, I was unable to glean anything useful. I expressed frustration: "Why is this so obscure?" The ship, in response, put me in my place: "Why not commodifiable, you mean?" The dialogue went on to reveal a suggestion that the ship had been sunken by my own storm of egoic ambition.

Figure 5: The sunken ship.

In another session, the image of a basement/dungeon (Figure 6) that emerged in response to the question, "what place has something to say about this work?" revealed further anger with being disturbed, and with being invaded and plundered. This gave voice to an inner resistance I was feeling to the preparatory work, and coincided meaningfully with the dungeon-delving aspect of *D&D*. Dungeon-delving is the term used for what is nominally one half of the *Dungeons & Dragons* formula: breaking into a dungeon. A dungeon, in this sense, could be a dangerous prison filled with traps, a lost temple, an ancient tomb, or a mysterious cavern; the commonality is that they are places the adventurers are not welcome, and that they go there anyway. They typically kill all the creatures inside and loot the place for whatever treasure it might have (though there are of course exceptions). This—dungeon-delving—was how I had been treating the

unconscious psyche up to this point. I had been approaching transference dialogues, active imagination, and dream work with the intent of plundering them for their riches. I would not, of course, have put it in those words just yet, but dialoguing with the images made it clear that there was a strong resentment on the part of the images themselves towards my attempts to penetrate them, demystify them, and drag them into the light of consciousness. It is worthwhile here to include some of the "dungeon's speech":

> The Dungeon Master has his pleasures and they are not all meant to come into the light, not even in the reckoning. I, the Dungeon, hold and keep. The fire keeps burning, or it goes out and the darkness has its way. Let sleeping dogs lie. Not to wake them later, but maybe never. Come down, but do not disturb, do not pillage, do not root around. You are not welcome if that is your aim.
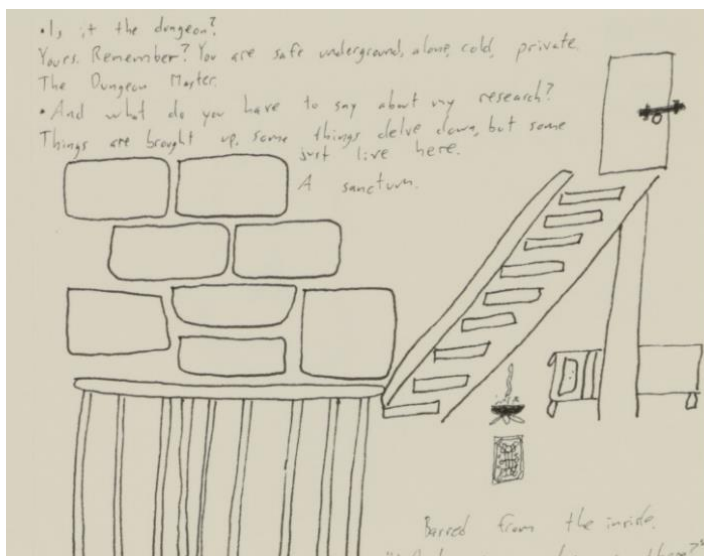
Figure 6: The basement dungeon.

The next transference dialogue seemed to refuse the question with which I initiated it. Instead, I found a small, shivering bird encircled by a protective ring of leaves (Figure 7). The bird would not respond to inquiry, nor would it divulge secrets; it would

only draw labyrinths or incomprehensible doodles. After a tense period, I offered to wait

until the little bird was ready. "Play without destroying like Phaedrus" was the response,

a reference not to Plato's *Phaedrus*, but to Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle*

Maintenance (1974). In that book, the character Phaedrus is one who wields an analytic

knife, slicing all phenomena into bits, reducing them to their constituent parts. His

intellect is a great tool, and a greater weapon, but his healing comes through seeing (and

appreciating) the relatedness of all things rather than cutting them up conceptually.
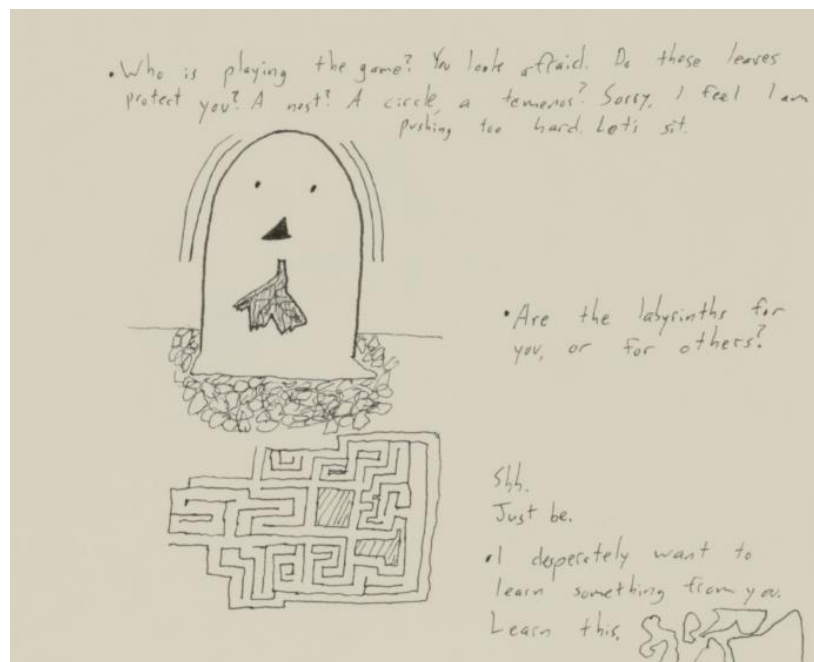
Figure 7: The shivering bird.

Here was a complex, I think, suggested by the reactions of these images. I

perceived that the sunken ship, the dungeon, and the shivering bird were all defending

against an as-yet unconscious perspective within me: the colonial; the commodifier,

plunderer, capitalist, analyst, and rationalist.

2.1.4 The Lonely Alley-Dog

While this network of imagery grew and developed, I began to have my first inclinations about the nature of the actual game content. It was a moment of reverie that catalyzed this network of ideas into something clearer. I was on my balcony in downtown Edmonton, at the end of summer, watching over the city at night. The city skyline was around me, with the traffic below. Allowing my thoughts to drift from what I was seeing and where I was to the game and back, the image of the city became very strong. Allowing the image to elaborate itself, I saw the modernity of the city, vaunting the ideals of progress, profit, and luxury, set against the stark reality of the homeless who live in the shadow of these ideals. From my 14th-floor apartment, which I find very comfortable, I can often see homeless people on the street below. I am often confronted with homelessness as I walk through the downtown core, and I am aware that I am confronted only with the barest slice of its reality. I feel guilt at times for not helping people who have fewer resources than I do; even if I do help with money or food I question whether this has any meaning or impact. As a psychotherapist, I am of the opinion that the well-meaning impulse to "help" is often not helpful, and may blindly reinforce a complex situation. Part of my understanding of my work as a psychotherapist is to create and hold a space wherein a person can help themselves. Is the impulse to give a few dollars to a homeless person, like a compulsion to give a therapy client some useful "tools", potentially more about one's own need to feel like they are "doing" something than it is about healing the person? Is it more about the need to act out a personal heroic journey? These questions were present in my mind at the time of this balcony reverie.

As I sat on the balcony, thoughts about the wolf dream entered my mind. The image of "a lonely alley-dog" emerged. I consciously stayed with the image, and allowed it to develop. The dog became a homeless man, wandering the cold streets and sleeping in the alleys of a metropolis big enough for someone to be anonymous in; big enough for someone to disappear into. I was reminded of patients I had been seeing in my practice who were or had been homeless; who were or had been addicts; who were or had been completely down and out. This image began to take on qualitative aspects of these patients' stories; I started to feel that the image was related to these people.
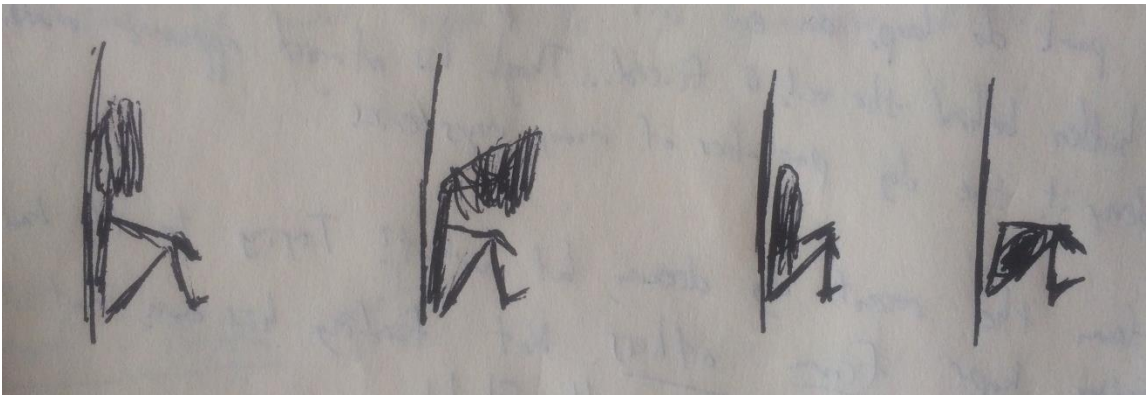
Figure 8: A lonely figure seated against a wall, curling in on itself, drawn after coming inside from the balcony.

I had, after the wolf dream, considered creating a character of the druid class for the *D&D* game. A druid in *D&D* is a class of spellcaster with ties to the natural world. It was in connecting this druid idea to the homeless archetype that I thought (and I found this thought quite threatening) that this image was related to the "urban Indigenous". The connection is that, while not exactly druidic, many Indigenous perspectives are steeped in relationship to place, the land, nature, and the living spirit that is present in all things (Goulet, 1998; Meyer, 2003; Kovach, 2012; Deloria, 2016).

In my practicum experience as a psychotherapist I have seen several patients of Indigenous ancestry, with varying degrees of connection to their cultural heritage. I had been especially struck by a sense, reinforced by my own knowledge of the history and pervasiveness of Canada's colonial apparatus, that these Indigenous patients were displaced within their own land; that they were suffering in part from lack of connection with a rich spiritual vein that was all but buried here in the city. I am aware that I felt a singular tenderness towards these patients. This tenderness is more about me than about the patients, as it is connected directly to a feeling of guilt for living in societal circumstances in which I benefit at the expense of Indigenous peoples past and present. I have to be vigilant to not let an unconscious desire to atone for the injustices of history cloud my ability to provide therapy to these patients.

In other work, I have had occasion to research Canada's historical treatment of Indigenous peoples in detail, from first contact to treaty-making to the residential school system to present day. It is an issue that touches me deeply, and yet also one that I think, in many ways, is none of my business. Some people more experienced with the content and dynamics than I, such as Art Therapist (and a friend) Jean Tait, have advised me to focus on speaking from a place grounded in my own personal experience when treating with issues of Indigeneity and Settler Colonialism in Canada (personal communication, January 24 2017).

The complexities and tension of the issues that arose here stayed with me through this entire process, and will be treated more thoroughly later, but there are some basic things that I feel I must address here. I am aware of a feeling of trespassing: Though certain practices and ceremonies that are part of Indigenous cultures in the area in which I

live are meaningful to me, they are not mine. I am not a member of an Indigenous culture, and to act as if it is otherwise would be a disservice both to the Indigenous culture as well as my actual background. Bernstein (foreword to Vine Deloria Jr., 2016) and P. J. Deloria (1999) express dismay at the idea of "Playing Indian" to try and erase or naïvely transcend the difference between cultures, or even in an attempt to "fix" historical injustices that cannot be fixed and cannot be undone. This is also in line with warnings by Jung (1929/1967) about Westerners adopting a culture that is not theirs, thereby escaping the lot of their own psyche. What my attitude here amounts to is, I think, one of respect (as in re-spect, to look-again and see more clearly). I respect the situation and those involved in as comprehensive a way as I am able; I also respect my own position and do not presume it to be anything other than it is.

The image emerging, of the lonely alley dog who was also an Indigenous homeless man, was difficult for me to handle. It felt dangerous, and outside the bounds of my comfort zone. It was accompanied by a sense of tension and weight in my abdomen, which often manifests in my body when dealing with some large, homogenous issue that needs to be broken down and "digested". Though I had done research and worked with Indigenous, homeless, and addicted patients, my actual lived experience with substance addiction, homelessness, and being a visible minority was nearly nil.

It must be owned, too, that in relation to these issues I was feeling overwhelmed by a cultural movement toward "identity politics", a perspective which holds that the categories to which one belongs (which, at time of writing, most popularly break down along lines of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) determine what issues or ideas one can or cannot engage with. Regardless of my apprehension, the unconscious

presented what it presented, and I was committed to following it; to "leaning in" to the difficulty and fear. The alley-dog image was also directly related to the dynamics of commodification, invasion, and appropriation that arose with the sunken ship, the dungeon, and the shivering bird. This lonely alley-dog was the other side of the coin: the one left orphaned in the cold by the capitalist city, the settler city, the city of advancement and production. This lonely alley-dog was, to me, a personification of North American capitalism's shadow.

2.2 Session Zero

After sharing these initial inclinations with the Dungeon Master, he presented me with a concept for a campaign setting: Pindus-on-Isles, a valley with an enormous lake that had, on an island in the centre, a technologically advanced city called Pindus. In keeping with the *D&D* fantasy flavour, it would not be strictly scientific, mechanistic, or chemical technology but would also be mixed with magic. This was, therefore, an *arcanepunk* campaign setting: A world in which both magic and scientific technology exist, and both are commonplace enough to be available to the majority of people (FANDOM, 2018). I was inspired by the concept, as well as by the Dungeon Master's responsiveness to my ideas. This was an idea that, I was certain (partly because he was explicit about it), had come about in direct relation to my concept. I had shared the image of the homeless alley-dog disappearing into a labyrinthine city, and it seemed that he had appreciated that image, and created the world of Pindus-on-Isles for the image to live and develop in.

This was where our co-creation formally began. From this point on, though we kept our processes quite secret from one another, all game content was to greater or lesser

degrees developed between us, in response to the offers of the other. The next major step in the process was our "Session Zero". Holding Session Zero was a suggestion of the DM, who wanted us to take time to flesh out the character and his or her place in the Pindus-on-Isles world before Session One. Through questioning and collaborative discussion, he coached me through the creation of the character's biography, including important life events and meaningful relationships.

Though I wanted my dreams and transference dialogues to guide the choices I made in relation to the campaign, the rules made it necessary to solidify some things. For instance, we needed to determine a class for the character. We decided that he would be a druid, which as indicated above is a kind of spellcaster whose magic is grounded in the natural world. The character would live in the slums of Shadowhurst, a district in the city of Pindus. His life would be derelict: He would live and sleep in the streets, under the shelter of a bridge or an unused doorway. He sometimes would earn a meager living by running drugs for a local dealer, as well as occasionally being hired to do a day's work on the docks of a shipping company for which his uncle worked. He would be Drow, a Dark Elf. In most *D&D* settings the Drow are portrayed as an evil and barbaric people, and are typically hated by all the other races. As to the latter, Pindus would be no different: Though the city was populated with all manner of racial diversity, including elves, orcs, bullywugs (a sort of humanoid toad), lizardfolk, and so on, the Drow were still generally reviled. The character's daily life would be characterized by struggles with his addiction to a stimulant drug called paste, a tendency for wrecking relationships, and with the systemic racism of the society in which he lived.

In my desire to play an utterly disadvantaged character, I refused many of the beneficial items (money, tools, and so on) that typical *D&D* characters begin with. I even suggested starting as a "Level Zero", a concept used sometimes for beginning characters that have no special abilities, and only gain them later—if they survive that long. The DM was confident that the game would be difficult enough as a solo character, and we would not need to resort to beginning at Level Zero to make it more difficult, so we left that idea aside. Part of my reasoning for wanting the game to be difficult was compensatory: I wanted to try to really inhabit the sense of disadvantage and working within an antagonistic system, of which the identity politics perspective told me I had no real-life experience. Of course I have been marginalized and disadvantaged in many situations in my life, but at the time my thinking in this regard was quite literal: As a Caucasian male, I could not understand. Another part of wanting the game to be difficult was that I wanted to really feel its limits. I wanted very tight parameters to operate in. This is indicative of a partially-conscious belief that adhering to the rules of the game stringently was what made the game come alive. This desire was also, probably, a compensation for my awareness that *D&D* does not really have as strict parameters as other games. I wanted it to be a game that I could be taught by, through running into its limits, and I was looking for ways to artificially tighten those limits.

The DM, during Session Zero, expressed discomfort with my character's lack of connection to the world. He was concerned that it would be very difficult to create a meaningful or enjoyable story with a character who had no relationships, no goals, and nothing to live for. I agreed, and so we set about finding some meaning for the character without departing from the essence. This is where the thug who sent him drug-running,

his uncle, and a childhood mentor all emerged. This mentor was an old Drow who lived

in Shadowhurst, and who had possessed some druidic secrets. He had shared some of his

knowledge with my character when he was young, and this was the source of my

character's abilities. He had also given the child a pet mouse as a birthday present, which

had been accidentally stepped on by the child's father. We also established that the

character would harbour an intense, but perhaps unacknowledged, desire to connect with

his people and their traditions. The Drow, in this world, once had a great and deep

cultural tradition which had been all but stamped out. This was guided by my relationship

with the lonely alley-dog image, as well as the dream image of the lone wolf who needed

to connect with a faction. These measures served to bring some colour and meaning to

the life of the character, satisfying both me and the DM.

There was one more concern raised by the DM at this time. He noted that the

personality information that I put on my character sheet (Appendix B) appeared to

contradict itself. The trait "anybody nice to me is hiding evil intent" seemed to conflict

with the ideal, "I help the people who help me—that's what keeps us alive". Similarly,

the bond "I owe a debt I can never repay to the person who took pity on me" seemed to

conflict with the flaw "people who can't take care of themselves get what they deserve". I

recalled a piece of advice that has stuck with me through my acting and writing for years,

from John Barton's (1984/2001) work *Playing Shakespeare*: In the contradiction is the

character. "If I had to say to an actor one thing only about the part, I think I'd choose to

say, Look for the ambiguities and the contradictions and play them" (p. 212). I assured

the DM that I did not think these apparently conflicting ideas would render the character

unable to function, but rather that the ambivalent nature of them might point the way towards the character's real depths.

After Session Zero, I had two weeks in which to further develop the ideas we had created and prepare for Session One.

2.2.1 Departing from Rules

Given the value I have indicated on adhering to the rules of the game system, it may seem counterintuitive that there were several rule elements which the DM and I agreed to alter. We did so to make the character somewhat more versatile, and the game somewhat less difficult. As *D&D* is a game typically intended for a party of several adventurers, it can be difficult (sometimes too difficult) for a solo character to survive. It was in response to this that we decided to give the character some extra hit points (a measure of the physical damage a character can take before dying), as well as a unique ability: He would be able to transform, at will, into a medium-sized dog, hereafter called the pariah (Figure 9). The pariah form would be weak, so as not to confer too much advantage on Croak, but it would be a means of hiding and disappearing within the city. This ability would be available from the beginning of the game.
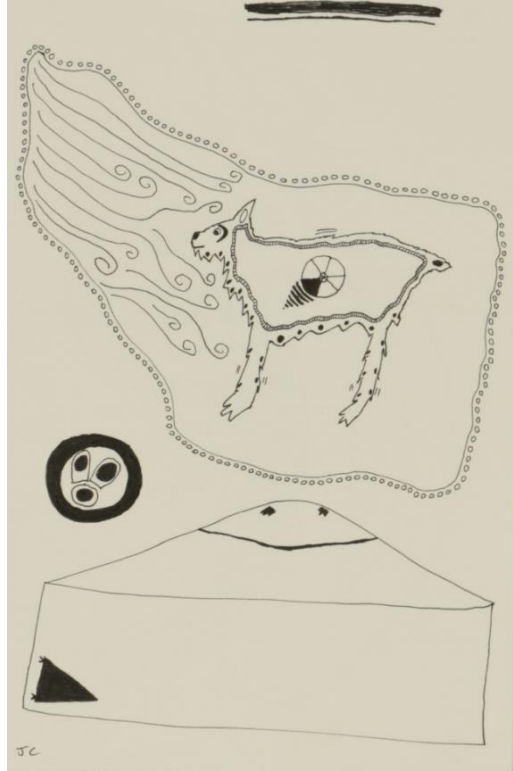
Figure 9: Pariah dog, shivering in the cold.

I was open to these alterations because of my understanding that the nature of *D&D* is that it is ultimately the DM and not the rulebook that acts as the final arbiter of what is acceptable. This invests the DM with a great deal of authority and responsibility: Making the game vibrant falls on his or her shoulders, rather than solely on the game designers. However, this freedom to adjust the rules does not mean that the DM flouts the structures frequently (although a different DM might have done so). The DM role, as I understand it, holds constant tension between providing the players with difficult-enough obstacles and telling a good story. Too much emphasis one way or the other may diminish the game. For instance, it is often the case that several dragons descending upon the player characters and killing them instantly may not be the best choice in terms of storytelling, though it will certainly provide difficulty. In combat, sometimes the DM will

choose not to make their most devastating attack, in order to facilitate a more engaging story. Sometimes, however, treating the rules as immutable is crucial: If a character is killed due to another's mistakes, for instance, it may be better to bring a harsh reality to bear and let them die, rather than adjusting the rules so that they survive. The game can be neither too antagonistic nor too friendly, for both thwart the enjoyable tension of the game, which demands that the gamers be working at the edge of their ability. Under these terms, I trusted the DM's rules over the official game rules, believing that he would take care of making it all work.

2.2.2 Indigenous

Leading up to Session One, I felt very challenged by the material that was being brought up. Most powerfully I felt afraid of overstepping my bounds. I thought I would be in danger of future censuring by people online who would read a line from this thesis, abduct it from its context, misconstrue it, and then amplify and distort it through the echo chamber of social media. I feared that I would be made to look at best stupid, and at worst racist. Prompted by this fear, I asked myself: What place do I, a white male of Settler origin, who has no firsthand experience of homelessness or substance addiction, of internalized racism or systemic disadvantage—what place do I have in any discourse about those issues? Do I even have a right to portray this kind of character? A theatre company I am involved with would have certainly said "no". It would be viewed as racist to do so, similar to Johnny Depp playing the Native American character Tonto in *The Lone Ranger* (Bruckheimer & Verbinski, 2013), or Mickey Rooney playing Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Jurow, Shepherd, & Edwards, 1961). The work was taking me to the heart of an issue featured heavily in the media in the last few years, and which

challenges my thinking on many levels: cultural misappropriation. Cultural misappropriation is a term used to indicate the action of a dominant culture extracting or copying a minority culture's artistic practices, religious or spiritual traditions, or other elements without the minority culture's consent or voluntary participation. It is particularly identified as harmful when the one appropriating does not have an understanding of the appropriated phenomenon that is grounded in the context in which it was formed (Johnson, 2016; Bradford, 2017; Malik, 2017).

Beyond simply the danger of transgressing a boundary through misappropriation or "Playing Indian" (Deloria, 1999), there was the fact that I was doing so through a game. It seemed to me that there was hardly a method more flippant and fatuous that I could have chosen to engage with these difficult issues than playing *Dungeons & Dragons*. The cultural traditions of the Indigenous people of Canada were not dungeons to be delved into and plundered, and that critique stuck keenly as I realized the situation that my imagination had led me into. I felt I was being drawn directly into the role of the colonizer! Was there a way to explore this role without being accused of perpetuating a systemic pattern of injustice? And would I deserve such an accusation? Of course, from my perspective I had not exactly chosen to engage with these difficult issues and images, rather they had chosen to engage with me. Thus my task was to "lean in" to the fear I felt.

By leaning in, I mean moving through my initial reactivity to discover exactly what it is I was dealing with. And as a beginning, and as with the term "soul", when using the word "Indigenous" there was a need to clarify what exactly was meant. Does it refer to a race, or perhaps a collection of ethnicities? Is it a biological term, meaning someone who has genetically "Indigenous" blood? Are we talking about a specific

Canadian First Nation, a specific Native American tribe, or using a broader, "pan-indigenous" generalization? Is the term specific to North American Indigenous peoples, or does it include the Maori of Aotearoa, the Sami of Sweden, the Bilen of Eritrea?

All important questions, for it seems the word as it is generally used can mean any or all of these things. I suggest that it is inadequate to reduce indigeneity to any of these partial definitions; however, at this point in the process, I did not have a superior definition of my own. My work became to puzzle out, what exactly is the "indigenous perspective" that I am relating to? My intuition led me to discard the notion that I was referring to a specific tribal culture, such as the Plains Cree. I drifted towards the "pan-indigenous" viewpoint, based in similarities I had learned about, that seem to exist fairly regularly across Indigenous groups. I recognized that this pan-indigenous perspective is viewed as problematic in itself (Kovach, 2012), given its tendency to erase differences between tribes. I think it is worthwhile to express what I specifically mean when I say pan-indigenous.

Leroy Little Bear (2000, p. 77) writes that "there is enough similarity among North American Indian philosophies to apply concepts generally". The prime quality of the indigeneity with which I am concerned is relationality. This indigeneity takes a holistic viewpoint, acknowledging the effect that all things in the world have on one another. It perceives people, animals, plants, and ideas all within a circle of interrelationship (Cajete, 1994; Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2012). It does not "destroy like Phaedrus", wielding an analytic knife to cut and abstract phenomena from their contexts. It emphasizes process over product (Little Bear, 2000), for process keeps relationship open. It makes no attempt to extract phenomena from their embedded nature (Goulet,

1998; Kovach, 2012). Phenomena are understood in relation to one another, at times in terms of cause and effect, and at times with an understanding of acausality (Deloria, 2016). Phenomena are understood in a way that keeps them situated in their surroundings. The perspective "saw the world as harmoniously interrelated, so that knowing how things were related to each other [enabled the development of] predictive talents—comparable to those of Western science but based upon entirely different foundations" (Deloria, 2016, p. 83). An extractive attitude is seen as counter to understanding phenomena in any depth, for from this perspective phenomena cannot be understood outside of their relationships (Svenson & Lafontaine, 2003). Phenomena are appreciated for what they are. Leroy Little Bear contrasts this indigenous perspective with a "Eurocentric" perspective as cyclical (instead of linear), plural (instead of singular), dynamic (instead of static), and grounded in awareness of subjectivity (instead of objective).

After relationship, the second quality is that the Indigeneity to which I refer is *place-based* (Cajete, 1994; Wilson, 2008; Kovach*, 2012). This is a major reason why the pan-Indigenous category does not quite hold water, at least not if one attempts to generalize the traditions of a single tribal culture to several different and distinct peoples. As each tribe is intrinsically connected to the physical places in which they exist—that is, the plant life, animal life, topography, seasonal patterns, sacred sites, and so on—each tribal knowledge is very different despite being grounded in the same quality of place. Put another way: A commonality between different specific Indigenous perspectives is that they are different from one another, but different in a common way, which is that they are connected to their land. This, of course, both generates and is generated by a

holistic viewpoint: Connection with place attunes one to the cyclical flow, the greater

pattern of change, and, in a concrete way, to the relationships between different living

(and non-living—but still spirit-possessing) things that exist.

These two qualities, relationality and place, on their own, have no inherent ethnic

or biological allegiance. In fact, to construe them as the property of a particular group

would be misappropriation. What, then, does the fact that they are connected with an

"indigenous perspective" mean? A friend shared the comment, "Indigenous? I'm not

Indigenous, a *plant* is Indigenous!" Both this friend and another, Lewis Cardinal, shared

the view with me that all people are indigenous—indigenous to somewhere (personal

communication, November 3 2017). Indigenous means native or natural to a place; the

Latin roots are *indi* (in) and *gignere* (begotten): to be indigenous to a place means to be

begotten in that place, or perhaps begotten *by* that place. It might be observed that the

"settler" and "indigenous" perspectives which I am describing map roughly to many

other dualistic patterns: masculine and feminine; Apollonic and Dionysian (Hillman,

1977); extraverted and introverted (Jung, 1920/1971); yang and yin (Wilhelm & Baynes,

1951). This has led me to consider the settler/indigenous dynamic as a new iteration of

this archetypal pattern. It was unclear, to me, however, whether moving in this direction

would lead toward greater understanding or prematurely reduce the discussion.

Therefore, this work remains on the level of settler/indigenous, presuming these concepts

to have a unique important resonance in themselves; no doubt this resonance is related to

their currency in popular culture as well as their specific sociocultural implications.

Remaining on the literal level of settler/indigenous meant that I could not resolve

my uncertainty about my subject matter, and my research in this area did little to quell it

and much to amplify it. Writers such as Wilson (2008) and Kovach (2012) spend a great deal of time and effort discussing the pattern of well-intentioned people from the dominant culture studying an Indigenous tribe, extracting their knowledge and practices, disrespecting the network of relationships, and giving nothing in return. I was aware of the potential for me to fall into this same dynamic, and I wanted to avoid it. This made the research urgent: The fear and uncertainty with which I began lasted and permeated my entire life during this period, driving me to lean in, lean forward, and strain the limits of my thinking.

Within the *D&D* campaign, many of Croak's choices were coloured by his experiences of marginalization as a member of an explicitly oppressed visible minority group (the Drow). As I portrayed the character, and analyzed my experience doing so, I questioned many times how "real" Croak's experiences were. Did the thoughts and feelings I was having during the game bear any relation to what a real human being who belongs to an oppressed minority group might go through daily? I was reminded of John Howard Griffin's book *Black Like Me* (1961), in which the author artificially darkened his skin to pass as a black man in the Southern United States, so that he could learn about (and report) what black people were experiencing. I was not exactly putting myself into the work in the same way Griffin did, but there is an important similarity between our desires to experientially understand, to "shapeshift". When Griffin eventually stopped lecturing on this book, it was reportedly because he realized it was "absurd for a white man to presume to speak for black people when they have superlative voices of their own" (in Watson, 2011, attributed to Stokely Carmichael speaking on Griffin). I am receptive to the wisdom here. I cannot speak from a perspective that is not my own. What

I can speak *on* is the impulse to do so; the impulse to shapeshift; the apparent need, as a member of the dominant culture, to hear the voice of an oppressed minority culture from within, rather than hearing and respecting it from the mouth of another.

The discovery of Vine Deloria Jr.'s *C. G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions* (2016) at the very end of my research process lent an academic and grounded clarity to my ideas, for which I am extremely grateful. In this, his final book (and published posthumously), Deloria Jr. explores the strong connections between Jungian psychology and his own Sioux cultural tradition. The "indigenous perspective", as I have described it so far, has definite resonances with the approaches I have described above regarding my approach to games, this work, and phenomena in general; Deloria expands on these connections, as well as differences, and very importantly for this work, Jung's oft-referenced (but never really formalized) concept of the "primitive".

Deloria's reading of Jung's writings on "primitives" cemented for me something that I knew, but had had difficulty articulating. My intuition that I was not, through the Pindus-on-Isles campaign, being drawn into the anthropological study of biological Indigenous people of a particular tribal background, was correct; furthermore, this was not a failing of the work but rather the entire point of it. My "indigeneity" and Jung's "positive primitive" (Deloria, 2016) are very close, especially insofar as they are not actually lived experience but projections. They may be educated projections, but they are projections nonetheless, indicated in part by the emotional charge associated with them. We might consider a reflexive turn on the Latin roots of the word indigenous (*indi* and *gignere*), and take it not only to mean that which is begotten in a place, but also that which is begotten in itself (or autochthonous). Indigeneity, looked at this way, is the

quality of that which is most authentic, and which is original, and which can be so because it is embedded in its own origin; in the place in which it was created.

> The naïve primitive doesn't believe, he knows, because the inner experience rightly means as much to him as the outer. He adjusts his life—of necessity—to outer and inner *facts* which he does not—as we do—feel to be discontinuous. He lives in *one* world, whereas we live in only one half and merely believe in the other or not at all. (Jung, 1951/1976, p. 5)

Whether this quality may be found in real living Indigenous peoples is not the question, because it is those qualities the work was drawing me to, not the people. It was the inner indigenous, the inner "primitive" that was calling me into the work, which both the character and I hungered for connection with. And while my "inner indigenous" and Jung's "primitive" may be projections, perhaps they had been thrown out into the world in order to draw psyche forward, toward relationship with them. In Giegerich's (2005) terms, I had to catch up with the projections; to make "the leap after the throw."

So much to say, I had begun this work looking for an archetype to study, and I was starting to comprehend what the archetype was: the settler's fantasy of the indigenous, the inner "primitive". And just as abstracting the pattern to the level of yin and yang would avoid the driving fear which brought me into the work, collapsing the work's call into an anthropological study of the Plains Cree (for instance) would be to totally misunderstand the impulse and image. I was studying not Indigenous people, but my draw to indigeneity as a Settler; therefore, I was studying settler consciousness much more than indigenous consciousness. From this perspective, I could confidently ask, what is the draw towards the inner indigenous? It seemed that my own inner indigenous had

something to do with the image of the lonely alley-dog, the lone wolf, the coyote, and the druid lost in an anonymous urban jungle, abstracted from almost all connection with his roots, ancestors, and core being. I am relating to the *D&D* campaign as I might relate to a dream when I ask, "Who is this figure in me, and why have they come?", as well as, crucial to the context of this work, "What do they have to do with gaming?"

2.2.3 Croak

I have earlier shown the image (Figure 1) of the toad that gave me the name "Croak". I remind the reader here that the question I entered this transference dialogue with was, "Who is the one who wants to be represented in this character?" In this dialogue many of the other names of important characters were found: the thug Vitriol Breakjaw, uncle Veskin, and the old mentor Chorumber. Speaking to the toad image also taught me something about the nature of Croak's addiction: He could not help but gorge himself. The toad enjoyed the feeling of distending his gullet with what he could eat. He would vomit it up, and eat more. "I don't know if I can stop, it's my nature," the toad said; "Honour and Reflect. Show it." It was honouring this quality of Croak that led him, over the campaign, to repeatedly squander any material or relational advancements he had made. The toad indicated that Croak was to have no natural ability to delay gratification, and would consume until he was glutted. I saw this dynamic as parallel to my own desire to root out the treasures of my own unconscious dungeon, consuming them and distending the "gullet" of this paper with them; my dynamic stood as a sort of negative image of the toad's.

The toad is commonly an image of poisonousness. An ancient Chinese image in Williams (1974, p. 188) shows the toad alongside the scorpion, spider, centipede, and

snake as one of the "five poisons", which can also function as a protective charm (Marlan, 2005, p.55). From the field of alchemy Edinger (1985) writes, "the toad as *prima materia* drowns in its own greed and hunger. It dies, turns black, putrefies, and is filled with poison" (p. 150).

The initial image of the dog, through amplification, had revealed a distinct tendency toward darkness, and the development of Croak continued this trend. Croak and his world are very dark. This was clearly not to be a jaunty tale of adventurers overcoming monsters and gaining glory and renown, but something born in the shadow of the *nigredo* (the alchemical phase of the *materia*'s blackening). Marlan (2005) writes in depth of the healing power of the *nigredo*, of darkness, and of the psychic shadow (shadow is a psychoanalytic term for those psychic contents which are undeveloped, felt to be inferior, or unacceptable to the conscious personality). Often the *nigredo* is perceived from a developmental perspective, as a necessary phase one must pass through before returning to the (symbolic) light; we can perceive here traces of a heroic fantasy. It seems, for much of the field of psychology, that the dark places only exist to be dredged, or to transform us so that we can be "better". Marlan takes issue with this standpoint, and argues persuasively in favour of taking the *nigredo* on its own merits, and in facing its horrible and destructive power without relying on a fantasy of future escape to dull the pain. Only this way can one find the light within the darkness, or the luminous darkness of the black sun which gives Marlan's book its title. Though at this point in the process I had not yet read Marlan's *The Black Sun*, I intuited that Croak was not dragging this work into Hades for the purpose of resurrection. Croak heralded a journey down, for no explicit purpose other than to go down, and, perhaps, to engender the necessary

acceptance in the DM and me that *permitted* us to be dragged down without naïvely struggling back up through fantasies of redemption.

2.3 A Croak for Help: Sessions One, Two, & Three

The first three sessions of the Pindus campaign saw Croak living in the dangerous neighborhood of Grin Flats, a small part of the Shadowhurst slums, itself a district in the metropolis of Pindus-on-Isles. Though no stranger to the dark criminal underworld of the city, in these sessions Croak found himself caught up in forces far bigger than himself. Croak initially set out to retrieve some money that had been stolen from him, though doing so required solving the mystery of who had robbed him the previous night. This led into a violent confrontation, as a result of which Croak became the target of a rival gang. Croak barely escaped an ambush that had been set up for him by his own low-level thug employer, and might have been hunted down were it not for the intervention of his uncle Veskin. Veskin held a powerful position in a large corporation, and upon learning of his nephew Croak's violent and addicted life, offered to send him to rehab. Croak accepted the offer, more out of a sense that rehab would be safer than the streets than out of any desire to rehabilitate himself.

The content generated by the first three sessions led to me to deepen the exploration of my relationship with the concepts of privilege and marginalization. I also struggled with the tension of performance as I found my desire to portray the character honestly often conflicted with my desire to entertain. Furthermore, I continued to be challenged by the complex dynamics of portraying a character who was outside my realm of personal experience. What follows is a synthesis of my reflections and analyses that took place along the way. This section will focus on exploration and analyses of the

colonial attitude, as well as further development of the idea of inner indigeneity and what I have termed settler consciousness. Everything in this exploration was guided by my engagement with *Dungeons & Dragons,* and the inclusion of my dreams, reveries, fantasies, and active imagination—in short, the inclusion of the unconscious—as data.

2.3.1 Performance

What I was most aware of during the early sessions was an inner need to perform. This probably should not have come as a surprise, since my background is as a performer and the door had been opened toward sharing these sessions in the future as a podcast. Yet, I was unprepared. I found myself very aware of the hypothetical podcast audience, and I often acted out of a desire to be entertaining and have an engaging show, despite my intentions to be as true to the character as possible. My performer aspect seemed to function beyond my conscious control. In addition to the audience, I also did not want to disappoint the DM. To me, his offers appeared to be so complete, well thought-out, and meaningful that I felt tremendous inner pressure to match them with my own inspiring choices.

I felt frustrated each time I succumbed to the impulse to perform. It had been very important to me to do justice to the image of Croak, and I felt that every moment of self-aware performance was a moment of betraying the truth of the character. Since with Croak I felt far outside my personal realm of experience, I believed that if I was going to portray him in an honest way, it would not be an act of my conscious mind; rather I believed it could only happen if I could dull my ego enough to get out of the way. I was hoping to accomplish the *abaissement de niveau mental* (lowering of the mental level) suggested by Jung (1916/1970) in his descriptions of active imagination. Yet my ego

remained, I would say, hyperactive. I was not able to bring myself to trust the work and sink in, at least not yet.

As a gamer, I found the tension between my performing instincts and my desire to abandon performance totally paralyzing. I hardly spoke in the first two sessions, and the things I did say often felt laboured and disingenuous. My desire to say the "right" thing often meant I said nothing. It is worth noting that this was primarily present in dialogue scenes—when I was narrating my actions, solving problems, or in combat, the story flowed naturally. It was when I was asked to speak that my voice dried up. I was waiting for Croak to somehow speak through me, but I was not yet sensitized to "his" voice.

There was a second tension which I conceptualized as being between authentically portraying the character and gaming. Early on, the DM and I discussed the challenge that I was feeling in portraying a character with a low charisma score (the value that determines a character's charm, persuasiveness, ability to deceive, and so on). I was finding it difficult to portray such a character in moments when I, as the player, had what I thought was a good idea about how to handle a situation. It was the DM's opinion that the player's personal resources should be used, and the game mechanics would sort out whether it was successful; that is, if I as the player had a useful idea about how to persuade someone, he thought I should employ it regardless of whether I thought Croak would come up with it. He said that the dice roll was the game's method of determining whether I was successful or not, and I did not need to handicap myself.

There are two sources (that I have identified) of the constant tension related to character authenticity that I felt. The first was an unconscious desire to have a hermetically-sealed experience with the game, which I now see was not possible. My as-

yet-unarticulated hope was that the influence of the DM and the game would act as the regulatory function of the *Self* does. Brooke (1991/2009, p. 41) refers to the Self as the "tendency to create order and harmony within the psyche". Edinger writes,

> The Self is the ordering and unifying center of the total psyche (conscious and unconscious) just as the ego is the center of the conscious personality. Or, put in other words, the ego is the seat of *subjective* identity while the Self is the seat of *objective* identity. (1972, p, 3)

If there had not been recording equipment to blame for interfering with my process, I think that blame would have fallen on the DM, or the room where we played; I may have been bound to blame something at this point. The pressure to perform was not an issue per se, but the emotional struggle around it was a signal that I specifically wanted not to perform; that I wanted to work in isolation. It is clear to me now that tasking the DM with regulating the game experience as the Self regulates the psyche is inappropriate; not only does it demand something inhuman from a human being, it is simply not the DM's role. The DM has a task that is far more active and provocative than regulatory; as I wrote earlier, his job is to make the game subjectively vibrant, not to guide the game toward objective order and harmony.

Considered in the context of the Indigenous perspective described above, it is also tempting to label my desire to play in a hermetically-sealed manner as decidedly not relational. It might be more correct to say that I was overwhelmed by the quantity of relationships with which I was confronted early on. I was prepared to have a relationship with the game and with my own process regarding the game, and that was all. Learning not to hermetically shut out other influences and needs turned out to be a key theme of

the game, both for Croak and myself. There were times when both Croak and I felt overwhelmed by the scale of the world in which we were playing. We had to deal with it regardless.

The second source of tension around authentically portraying Croak I have already touched on, and that is the fear that, as Croak was a character who was outside of my experience, I had no real right to portray him. When I had tried to allow Croak to speak, no words had come, and this suggested to me that the voice I was looking for was not actually within me. Due to my pre-existing concerns with identity politics, I attributed this lack of spontaneity purely to my lack of common group membership with Croak. Where he was a visible minority, I am white; where he was substance-dependent, I am substance-free; where he was homeless, I am financially solvent. I was not confident that the experience of being systemically oppressed was one that I could even begin to approach. I therefore tried to refocus by returning to the symbolic level: What were the essential aspects of Croak's experience that I could connect with? What do I understand about the archetypal core of the image of the stranger, the outcast, or the untouchable? Movement in this direction, towards a universal archetype, proved to be necessary as I detached myself from the idea that I might discover the literal experience of being an oppressed minority. This literal experience was not going to somehow be genuinely replicated in this game, yet the symbolic experience might find genuine expression. I had known this, of course, and even written it down; yet I repeatedly found myself returning to the hope that my shapeshifting approach might mean I was able to get inside some authentic literal experience. The tension between the symbolic and literal levels

continued to tighten; it was necessary for me to find a way to hold this dialogic steady without collapsing it.

2.3.2 Balcony

Croak had first come into my consciousness while I was sitting on my balcony in downtown Edmonton. What happened that night turned out to be the seed of a new practice, wherein I stepped onto the balcony first thing in the morning and last thing before going to bed, and took in the city. I still do this. I take in the city's sights, sounds, the air, the temperature, and the feeling. I stay anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes, depending on the temperature and my ability to bear it (note that I am writing this in the early days of January 2018, and that Edmonton is the northernmost metropolis on the planet).

This practice is a way of connecting to the city in which I live, and it grew directly from my contemplation of connection with place, and a realization of my own need to do so. I have lived in Edmonton for a decade now, and nearly the entire time I have inwardly wished that I lived somewhere more natural, with more animals and plants and natural topography, and fewer people and streets and buildings. Yet I have stayed in the city. The emergent indigenous voice in this work called me to reflect on that, and ask myself, what is meant by "connection to place"? Both Croak and I found ourselves detached from nature, and lost within the city. But is a city not a place? The *Turba Philosophorum* (Waite, 1896) continually returns to the axiom, "Nature rejoices in Nature, Nature overcomes Nature, and Nature contains Nature; at the same time there are not many diverse Natures, but one having in itself its own natures and properties, by which it prevails over other things" (p. 199). There is nothing outside of nature. Lewis

Cardinal, who I have referenced earlier, reminded me in a concrete way that the buildings and machines with which the city is made are made themselves out of minerals, which of course come from the earth (November 11, personal communication). The fact that buildings are made of stones is not news to anyone; yet thinking about it permitted a psychological shift in the way I saw my city. I had been defining nature and place too narrowly. If I was not deep in the forest for several days, I was not open to connecting to the land. How then was I to connect to nature and place if only certain places were acceptable? I had been treating nature the way many governments treat the Indigenous people of their land when they grant them "Indigenous status" according to blood quantum: Only beyond a certain threshold of literal genetic Indigeneity does it "count".

Lewis has also taught me the Cree word *tatawaw*, "Welcome: There is room for you." I understand this word as an acceptance, a drawing into relationship. It is not the mindset of the colonial attitude that says *tatawaw* to phenomena, for that archetype prefers to evaluate, change, assimilate, or transform phenomena into resources. *Tatawaw* comes out of the abundance of the inner indigenous, which knows that nature—all of nature, not only the deep forest—will provide. Brooke (1991/2009) suggests that the guiding metaphor of Jung's life was the Greek myth of Philemon, who embodied "respectful receptivity", and who was a "humble hermit who gave hospitality to the gods in an ungodly age" (p. 143). I think *tatawaw* could serve as an appropriate statement of the attitude of Jung's psychology in general, and perhaps of this research process as well.

And yet, returning to the discussion of place, is there not some difference between the natural world that I experience in the backcountry, left more or less to its own organic devices, and the constructed city of stone? I want to say that the minerals of the buildings

and machines are not living like the forest is, but this brings me into conflict with the common indigenous perspective that all things are imbued with spirit (Deloria, 2016). Leaning into this apparent conflict, and following my persistent intuition that there is some difference, I find the idea that spirit in the city is present, but is generally ignored, disrespected, or persecuted. This city, to me, is not thriving. The people in it may thrive, but the city itself, I think, does not. Is this a consequence of its being a city, or a consequence of the way the city is related to? Jung has suggested a dynamic between the development of Western ego consciousness and the draining of the world: "[the ego's] complexity has increased in proportion to the despiritualization of nature" (1959/1969, p. 25); Hillman described the one-sided development of ego consciousness as "stuffing the person with subjective soulfulness and leaving the world a slagheap from which all projections, personifications, and psyche have been extracted" (1973, p. 123). Both Hillman and Jung here describe a pillaging of the phenomena of the world for the ego's profit. If the city does not thrive, that is, if the rocks and stones of the earth have been thoughtlessly transformed into machines and buildings, how was this made possible? It only appears acceptable for the natural world to be harnessed into "resources" because, to the Western ego's perspective, it is no longer alive. The natural world's spirit has been withdrawn and placed inside the individual's psyche, viewed now as a series of projections, leaving the person stuffed and the world vampirically drained. Brooke (1991/2009, p. 95) writes that "the heroic 'withdrawal of projections' has a manic edge which leads to blindness, not insight." From my balcony, I can see trees planted as tokens along the boulevard, prettily reminding me that I live in a world and not only a city. But do those trees not bear a feeling resemblance to butterflies pinned to velvet? They are

trophies, they are specimens; they as living manifestations of nature's spirit have been colonized and misappropriated into decorations, or even more soullessly, representative tokens of biodiversity. Don Edwards, who recorded the "Coyotes" song referenced earlier, has another lyric that says it succinctly: "These ain't the plains of God no more, it's only real estate" (Clark, 1919).

It is no wonder, then, that I feel a lack of connection to place, and to nature. Even psychotherapy, as the nominal "healing of psyche", has become a drainer of the world's spirit. Many modern psychotherapeutic disciplines seem to have become one-sidedly identified with the heroic fantasy of aggregating things to the "ego's city" (Hillman, 1979), gaining tips and tricks, building solutions (de Jong & Berg, 2002), appropriating mindfulness and relationship (Gehart, 2018) to generate outcomes.

Is there anything to be done differently? Hillman (1973) sees imagination as "a way of being in the world and giving soul back to the world" (p. 123). Imagination may be a conscious way to invest phenomena with meaning, but perhaps meaning is inherent, with or without the individual ego's recognition of it. Deloria (2016) argues that the "primitive" perception of spirit in the world is not a projection at all (as Jung and many others supposed), nor an imaginal investment of the psyche's contents into phenomena, but rather an awareness of, and respect for, what is already there. That, as much as anything, is what I find when I contemplate what is meant by inner indigeneity: It is not colonial. The indigenous perspective is the perspective that has not been colonized—this is nearly a truism. The indigenous perspective has not fallen prey to the heroic fantasy and subsequently drained the world of its vitality; nor has it fallen prey to the missionary

fantasy, which might see the world as naturally empty (a priori drained) and in need of rescuing through the ego's investiture of energy and imagination.

2.3.3 *Terra Nullius* & **First Contact**

A transference dialogue initiated with the question, "What does the land have to say about this work?" brought me into relationship with an image of Indigenous peoples' first contact with European settlers.
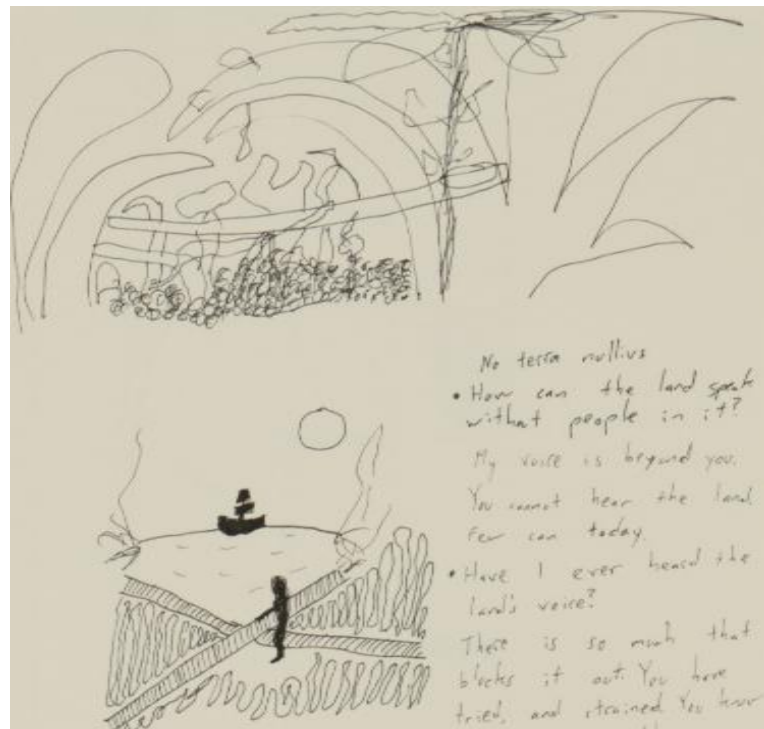
Figure 10: Terra nullius and first contact.

The human figure that can be seen in the foreground of the image was added only after drawing the rest of the landscape, and came with the words seen to the right of it, "no *terra nullius*". *Terra nullius,* or nobody's land, is a concept that has been invoked historically to legitimize a colonial power's conquest of a land which is not yet legally owned. From the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report (2015): "Imperialists could argue that the presence of Indigenous people did not void a claim of

terra nullius, since the Indigenous people simply occupied, rather than owned, the land. True ownership, they claimed, could come only with European-style agriculture" (p. 46). Australia, the South Island of New Zealand, and British Columbia, among other places, were officially designated *terra nullius* as a means of ethically sidestepping the presence of Indigenous peoples who lived there, and who either did not have the same concept of land ownership as the colonizing power, or did not meet the colonizer's definition of "civilized". Recent critical discourse on Canada's Group of 7 artists has centered on their reinforcement of *terra nullius* (Mitchell, 2002; Balzer, Gerges, & Morgen-Feir, 2016). The majority of the Group of 7's paintings feature a pristine and untouched Canadian wilderness; that is, one uninhabited by people. These iconic images lift the spirit, but the critique runs that in the process they have contributed to the erasure of Canada's Indigenous peoples.

When writing the words "no *terra nullius*" into the above drawing, my feeling was that the image was not content with being only landscape and vegetation, empty of human presence. The dialogue itself centered further around relationality; I realized the ecological connections between animal and plant species, between varieties of weather and varieties of behaviour, and the relationships between humans and animals, were "thicker than I could ever draw." The dialogue ended with the insight that *terra nullius* can only be a valid pretext from the point of view of a consciousness that has already lost touch with the voice of the land. The Settlers of North America, by "withdrawing the projection" of spirit, had already colonized the concept of land, determining that it was inert and could therefore be owned. Such a perspective only values human presence and

ownership, and sees plant life, animal life, and spirit as simply resources, obstacles, or superstitions.

From another perspective, the land of Canada does not belong to Canada; nor does it belong to Britain, or to the Plains Cree, or to the Blackfoot. It is owned by nobody, for land cannot truly be possessed, though it can be lived upon, with, or subjugated. But un-owned, what is it? It is other; alien. The land is itself, and we are visitors upon and within it. Land is other not only because it is un-ownable, but also because we as human beings have detached ourselves from it. Jung (1930/1997), p. 187: "The life of man is detached to a very high degree; we have produced an artificial world for ourselves that is very far from the laws of nature and has an entirely different rhythm." Indigenous writings and stories, Deloria Jr.'s among them, are filled with events that take the consciousness, intentionality, and value of plants and animals as given. A Western perspective might explain such a story away as myth, symbol, or projection, but

> it is only the assumption of [human] superiority that allows Western readers to doubt such an account. . . . The story certainly has little "scientific" value since it describes an incident that a new and "objective" observer cannot repeat. Not even a Sioux could repeat such an experience at will. Yet the knowledge of Sioux people—and of Westerners too—who live day in and day out in nature are filled with such experiences and stories. (Deloria, 2016, p. 119)

As with any previously unconscious emerging image, it may be beneficial, in addition to encountering it on its own terms, to ask: Why did this image occur to *me*? What is the significance of *terra nullius* to this work? This image directed me to recognition of my inner settler. This inner settler can be seen in the moments that I have

described wanting to be "alone" with the work, without any interference. It can be seen, too, in the moments in which I have been driven by a desire to create something completely unique with this work. Though at times the discovery of a new source to draw upon for this work has been relieving, or validating, or inspiring, it has just as often carried with it a seed of disappointment: I feel that I am exploring new land (*terra nullius*) and then suddenly discover somebody else's flag. "Somebody has been this way before. The discovery is not mine alone." The desire for *terra nullius* may be a significant part of the *settler's* inner indigeneity. Because the settler is, by definition, not indigenous, the land is not personal; it is other. In contrast to this, think of the Whanganui iwi of New Zealand, who, in recent years, have won the legal status of personhood for one of their ancestors: the Whanganui River (Te Awa Tupua Act, 2017); the Tūhoe have done the same for their ancestor and homeland, Te Urewera (Te Urewera Act, 2014).

(I have hiked and camped in Te Urewera, and kayaked and camped along the Whanganui River, though I did this prior to these developments. I find it wondrous that there are groups of people who value these lands as persons, beings, and ancestors, and even more wondrous that this has been legally recognized. I deeply admire such a connection to these beautiful lands.)

I have suggested earlier that the qualities attributed to indigeneity, primarily relationality and connection to place, cannot be solely associated with biological capital-I Indigeneity (blood quantum, for instance); nor are these qualities the exclusive possession of Indigenous groups. Yet there is a difference. These qualities are present in the collective human psyche, but approached from different angles; perhaps *terra nullius* is the settler psyche's attempt to connect with its own understanding of indigeneity, as a

stranger in a strange land; to develop its own, unmediated relationship with the land. I suggest here that the settler archetype, by definition detached from the land to which it is indigenous (and on some level aware of this), attempts to recreate the depth of relationship with place by viewing the as-yet-unsettled land as *terra nullius*, which is new, undiscovered, and, therefore free to be "mine".

2.3.4 Cultural Misappropriation

In relating to issues of race and culture, I was hyperaware of how my work interacted with the concept of cultural misappropriation, which has been a popular mainstream media topic in recent years. Articles in the *New York Times* (Malik, 2017), *The Atlantic* (Friedersdorf, 2017), and *NPR* (Bradford, 2017) have debated the dangers of, and injustices perpetrated by, cultural misappropriation, as well as its possible merits, and (perhaps most critically) its meaning. Use of the term is inconsistent, and many writers use "appropriation" and "misappropriation" interchangeably. In my opinion this erases an important distinction between the two. Johnson (2015) defines misappropriation as "when somebody adopts aspects of a culture that's not their own. . . . a particular *power dynamic* in which members of a dominant culture take elements from a culture of people who have been systematically oppressed *by that dominant group*." It has been applied in the media and by activists to diverse phenomena such as yoga classes taught by non-Indian instructors (Foote, 2015), modern-day blackface (Friedersdorf, 2017), and sushi prepared by non-Japanese chefs (Friedersdorf, 2015). A Settler Canadian artist's gallery showing was cancelled, and she herself was accused of "cultural genocide" because her painting style is inspired by the Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau (Nasser, 2017). Discourse around the subject has often been highly charged emotionally,

and it has also led to great consternation and confusion. Jonathan Kay, former editor-in-chief of the Canadian magazine *The Walrus*, and Hal Niedzviecki, former editor of the *Writers' Union of Canada Magazine*, both resigned in 2017 after some ill-timed public remarks on cultural appropriation generated a firestorm of controversy. Despite cultural movements toward privileging an individual's subjectively felt identity over biological components, race has remained an intransigent line, as the case of Rachel Dolezal shows. Dolezal attracted international censure in 2015 when it came to light that she was biologically born white, but identified as black (Brownson et al, 2018). She had become a leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

I am not about to settle these issues, but I do want to separate the potentially damaging effects of cultural *mis*appropriation from appropriation *as such*, that is, as a psychic function necessary to ego survival. I hope, by way of this, to tease out some of the nuances of what I am doing in this work.

In the context of Jungian psychology, Brooke (1991/2009, p. 166) identifies appropriation as that which "awakens the truth of one's gathered world". Appropriation refers to "responsible acceptance of such a gathered world as uniquely 'mine'. It is appropriation, therefore, that is concerned with the establishment of personal identity and boundary, as one says yeah or nay to the different appeals that call one." And, later (pp. 205-206), "For Jung, the unconscious is that absence which nevertheless calls for appropriation so that the one-sidedness and limitations of consciousness may be compensated. This can best be done with an attitude of steadfast receptivity to that which seeks to show itself."

Appropriation, in this sense, is called forth by an absence, by a sort of vacuum of unconsciousness, and the perceiving consciousness appropriates from that absence what it needs to increase its own powers of perception. Appropriation is a natural part of psychic function, and of recognizing and establishing an "I" in relation to the world. I will now attempt to direct this insight toward a concrete instance of what is termed *cultural misappropriation*, using the hypothetical example of a young Settler woman who wears a Sioux-style headdress to a music festival. On a symbolic level, we might say that she is doing more than making a fashion statement; or, more precisely, there is more to the *statement* of the fashion than is obvious at first appearances. The statement the fashion makes might be something like, "There is something of this Sioux culture that speaks to me, or that I recognize myself in, and I am wearing this headdress to not only perform this affinity, but to try to live it myself in a way." This would likely be unconscious, and it is a fairly generous interpretation. A less generous interpretation might see a sense of trophy-wearing in the headdress; this hypothetical woman might also have the sense that she is entitled to wear whatever she pleases. Such a sense could be seen as embedded in the unconscious notion of her cultural superiority; even if my generous interpretation above were completely accurate, the act of wearing a sacred item (such as a headdress) as fashion is a way of draining the item of its inherent meaning. "The heroic 'withdrawal of projections'" (Brooke, 1991/2009, p. 95) here withdraws spirit from the sacred item, transforming it into an accessory. As Susie O'Keeffe writes, "[Settlers] have tended to take up these traditions with little regard for the context within which these ways evolved and took form. There is a formidable, unconscious conceit in believing that we of one culture can adopt the sacred rituals of another in order to fulfill

our own needs" (2010, p. 65). I might point out here once again an emphasis on context, on a practice's relationships to that from which it sprung. Part of the dividing line between appropriation and misappropriation is that misappropriation extracts the phenomenon from its context.

Building on that insight, it might next be asked, what is the subjective difference between psychic appropriation as a necessary function of establishing and exploring one's identity, and cultural misappropriation as a function of unconscious colonialism? At the deepest level, as my first "generous" interpretation above shows, there may be little. At the manifest level, it may have to do with a certain amount of literalizing taking place, as well as with the absence of "an attitude of steadfast receptivity" (Brooke, 1991/2009, p. 206) in the case of cultural misappropriation. Firstly, regarding literalizing, we may regard the wearing of a headdress by a Settler woman as the too-literal expression of a symbolic psychological need. She may truly recognize something in the headdress that resonates with her, and know of no better way to respond to that. She may be unconsciously making "the leap after the throw" (Giegerich, 2005) to catch up with her projection. However, rather than wearing it and reducing it to a piece of fashion, she may do better to recognize the impulse, and "psychologize" (Hillman, 1975) it by pursuing relationship with the inner need that generates it. Secondly, appropriation in Brooke's sense is not the ego's colonization of the unconscious, but a recognition of oneself in the other and the other in oneself. Perhaps appropriation has something to do with settler consciousness in general, in that it is psyche's way of "inhabiting a foreign land"; discovering how psyche lives in the image and how the image lives in it. A colonial attitude can be correlated with misappropriation.

Returning to the example, a more receptive attitude might, with time, reveal to the young woman that what she sees in the image is something that already resides within her, rather than something that needs to be taken. Appropriation, when taking place at a level of sufficient depth, may settle and develop relationship as a stranger in a strange land, but it does not take what is not freely given, for it understands that the quality it finds resonant within a given phenomenon is already symbolically within itself, as psyche.

I would like to return to Brooke's words (1991/2009, pp. 205-206), "For Jung, the unconscious is that absence which nevertheless calls for appropriation so that the one-sidedness and limitations of consciousness may be compensated. This can best be done with an attitude of steadfast receptivity to that which seeks to show itself." Without an attitude of steadfast receptivity, one simply recognizes an absence which calls for appropriation: a *terra nullius*. I think that any time we are seeking something new, untouched, and previously undiscovered, we are in the domain of the inner settler. One aspect of the inner settler would seek to colonize or appropriate, while another would cultivate within itself the attitude of steadfast receptivity that allows for communication, and respectful in-dwelling. In other words, psychological appropriation recognizes the Self in the other and the other in the Self, and it relates consciously. Cultural misappropriation tends to physically take, or wear, or abstract, or commodify; it may wear the guise of "withdrawing projection".

2.3.5 The Meditating Hermit & the Stitched Manikin
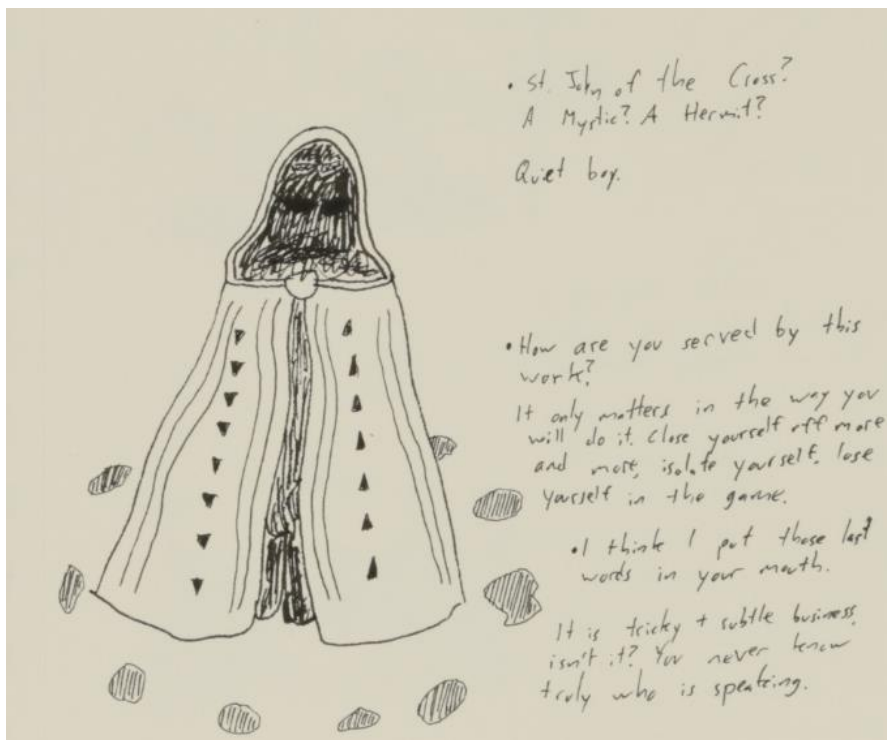
Figure 11: The meditating hermit, in a circle of stones.

A transference dialogue prior to session three revealed the image of a meditating hermit, surrounded by a circle of stones (Figure 11). This mystical figure was the response to my initiatory question, "Who is being served by this work?" Through this dialogue, I felt that I was assured that I needed only to trust the process, and enclose myself within it, "hermetically" sealing it—a play on the word hermit. "The circle is cast, look. What you need is within it. Enter it." At first, I understood this as a validation of the desire I have described to game "alone", or to have a hermetically sealed experience. Though it had been previously unconscious, I was now led by this image to actively conceive of my research process as one in which I needed to seal myself off from outside influence, and dedicatedly work with the inner material and imagery, as an alchemist works with his or her *materia*. "Above all, don't let anything from outside, that does not

belong, get into it, for the fantasy-image has 'everything it needs'" (Jung, 1947/1970a, para. 749). I brought this image into concrete reality by creating a circle of dried rosehips under my writing desk: It reminded me of the hermit's circle, which I felt corresponded to the magic circle of the work, and the necessity for me to submit myself to its inscribed boundaries with a lusory attitude. It also reminded me to trust that whatever I needed to see the work to completion was already within the circle.

As noted, this dialogue took place prior to session three; session three itself offered a strong challenge to my hermetic approach. After Croak was admitted to rehab in the game narrative, I felt that I had been *railroaded* by the DM, which is a term used for the dynamic in which a DM forces his or her players to take a certain narrative path; it is usually considered bad form (RPG Geek, n.d.). I, and Croak, felt swept along by the other characters and events. Croak was resistant to rehab, and I was resistant to the idea that this campaign might be the story of an addict kicking the habit and redeeming himself in the eyes of society. I imagined that the DM had an idea that Croak should heal himself in a certain way and become a functional citizen, and was acting these desires out on the story.

I think now that I was projecting that attitude onto the DM. Embedded as I was in the perspective of the hermit, the interaction coming from outside the circle felt oppressive. The question, "Who is being served by this work?" takes on a new significance in this light, one that I could not fully appreciate until much later. I find that one must be very precise with the questions one addresses to images; like a mythical genie they seem to respond directly to the words used, rather than helpfully interpreting the subtext. Thus, when I asked, "Who is being served by this work?", I had asked

nothing about who *needed* to be served, and yet I interpreted the response in that light. This is why I took the image of the hermit as a guide, leading to a very frustrating session. On reflection, I realized how the image had responded strictly to what I had asked: The work was serving the hermit figure, yes, but that said nothing about whether the hermit figure was serving the work. In fact, looking at this session, it is clear to me that the hermit figure was impeding the work, or at least impeding my ability to give myself over to it. I was circling myself off without realizing that the things I wished to circle myself off from were already within the same circle. I tried to circle myself off from the DM's influence, the audience, the necessity of creating an academic paper out of the experience, and thoughts of the future thesis panel, but all these were inherently part of the work. Yet I was not ready to accept them. I think this conflict became vivid and conscious at the time that it did as an outcome of the dialogue with the hermit; though I apparently misinterpreted the nature of the dialogue (taking it as a prescription of how to behave rather than a description of how I was already behaving), I was later able to see the misinterpretation that had occurred.

Becoming conscious of my hermetic approach allowed the realization that it was untenable in the context of the game. The nature of my misinterpretation also shows that I was still looking for something to extract from my active imagination, in this case a prescription on how to act. I had, in fact, extracted something that was not really there. Psychologically, I might say that I had projected something extractable into the image, so that I could discover and extract it.

Figure 12: Stitched manikin.

Two days after Session Three, a new figure emerged through a transference

dialogue: a stitched-together manikin, like a doll, with intestines spilling out, keeping a

small fire alive in the jungle (Figure 12). This image remains one of the more powerful

that came up in the course of this work, though I cannot really say what I "got" from it. In

fact, that may be why it remains powerful: I did not plunder it for meaning. Perhaps as a

result of my experience with the hermit, I entered this transference dialogue much more

conscious of my desire to endow meaning into an image, rather than allowing meaning to

emerge. This stitched manikin may have been the first image that came up during the

course of this work that I did not (or could not) apply an instinctive colonial attitude to.

I think again here of James Hillman's words (1973, p. 123) about "stuffing the

person with subjective soulfulness and leaving the world a slagheap". I think my

relationship with the hermit is one way that this dynamic can come about: Through

inadequate trust in the image, a consciousness projects that which it desires (meaning) into that same image, precisely so it can subsequently extract it. All the while, the image is not considered on its own terms; it has no agency. It is filled as an empty vessel, and then drained. I see three separate violent movements here, which I will return to the metaphor of *terra nullius* to speak about: The first violent movement is that the image is a priori defined as *terra nullius*, draining it of its inherent meaning and value. The second violent movement is that it is stuffed with expectations of discoveries and unknown riches; these are projected into it by the one who intends to discover. The third violent movement is that the image is "discovered", and drained again so that these discoveries can enter the possession of the discoverer: They are "my" discoveries. Throughout this process, the land, which is not a *terra nullius* on its own terms, is simply used.

Returning to the manikin image, I suggest that it is perhaps a development of the hermit. They are both alone, and while the manikin keeps an external fire alive the hermit spoke of keeping an inner fire alive with his meditation. What is markedly different between the two figures is that the manikin is obviously wounded. Reminded of Romanyshyn's (2013) insistence that research with soul in mind begins from a psychological wound that calls the researcher into the work, this manikin reminded me that I was myself operating from a wound, and perhaps the wound and the hermit were related. Perhaps this wound perpetuates itself by hermetically circling itself off; by creating the magic circle around itself and detaching from the world. The notion of a magic circle, I realized, conflicts with the reality of relationship. The magic circle is a boundary, or a distancing movement away from immediate reality, and from psyche.

I might do well to give voice to a dialogic that is coming up here. On one hand, a magic circle acts psychologically as an alchemical vessel. It protects what is inside from contamination, and allows the work to reflect back into itself, to interiorize itself into itself (Giegerich, 2012), and release the spirit within. On the other side of the dialogic is the knowledge that a magic circle separates, and though that is its whole point, it is not "all good". It cuts off relationship, and indeed strains the ability *to* relate with that which lies outside the circle. The circle is *contra naturam*: it is against nature.

The next chapter will return to the Pindus campaign narrative, but it seems necessary to regroup before moving forward. These ideas will be considered and refined: Firstly, when I refer to nature, I am referring not solely to plants and animals and environment, but to *embeddedness in relationship*, or an ecological sense. Secondly, a game is, in some respects, a way of severing natural relationships and creating artificial ones, and it does this through the creation of a magic circle. The magic circle of a game is a kind of artificial ecology, or artificial network of relationships. I become aware here that I have been searching for nature within *game*, and therefore these statements feel as though they are in conflict with one another. This parallels another dialogic with which I am engaged: I am searching for (symbolic) indigenous consciousness within the consciousness of a (symbolic and literal) Settler. Describing how these concepts began to develop and relate is the task of the next few chapters.

2.4 Adventure Rehab: Sessions Four, Five, Six, & Seven

The next section of the campaign focused on Croak's journey through "adventure rehab", which his uncle Veskin had sent him to. Grouped with three other patients and a therapist, Croak was brought into an underground concrete jungle (literally, a jungle

made from stone and artificial materials). This location, as Croak learned throughout the four sessions, was a now-defunct theme park styled after the adventures of someone named Horugan and his crew.

At first, the patients were given a series of tasks to complete as a group, such as exploring, finding food, and building a raft to float down the river. The group members experienced various levels of camaraderie and interpersonal tension throughout. There are two things of note from the initial explorations: First, there was a Drow adventurer represented as part of Horugan's party. This Drow seemed to be sidelined by the creators of the theme park, for in a painting representing all the adventurers, the Drow alone was not named. However, the Drow was seen several times in illustrated and animatronic form, accomplishing amazing and heroic feats just like the rest of the group. Croak found these moments quite moving, as he had never before seen a Drow represented as a positive figure. Croak felt validated by this Drow's presence. The other important discovery for Croak was a spirit bear shown in many of the park's animatronic set-ups, who seemed to have an important connection with the Drow hero. (A spirit bear, or Kermode bear, is a rare black bear with white fur). Croak felt connected to the spirit bear, and saw aspects of himself in its anomalous nature.

As the journey progressed, things took a turn for the worse. The obstacles the group faced, which apparently were typically benign, turned out to be quite dangerous. One group member was injured by an animatronic wolf, while another was killed by falling from a broken bridge. And all throughout, Croak was hearing a disembodied voice that told him not to trust his fellow patients; that they were dangerous, and he should strike while he had the opportunity. The story of Horugan's band unfolded in piecemeal

fashion as they progressed, and Croak was heartbroken when the recorded narration of an exhibit seemed to imply that the Drow adventurer had been sacrificed by his friends to pass an obstacle. Croak had come to identify with this Drow, and the implication that he had been disposable touched a deep core of anger and sadness within him.

At the end of the journey, the disembodied voice finally revealed itself to be an imp named Xlotl. Xlotl had an offer for Croak: He said he could connect Croak to his "kin". He instructed Croak to kill the remaining group members to prove his commitment. Croak was emotionally paralyzed by the decision for some time: He was deeply drawn to the prospect of connecting with other Drow, but the cost was gruesome. Xlotl said that the people in the group were not Croak's true friends, and that he would only ever be at home among his kind. When Croak recalled the anger he felt at learning about the fate of the Drow hero, the decision was made. In this moment, he thought that his own companions would likely have done the same to him, if given the option.

Croak murdered his companions in cold blood, and underwent a ceremony that bound him and Xlotl to one another. Xlotl brought Croak out of the adventure park to a secretive and very posh lounge, which was populated entirely by Drow. Xlotl informed Croak that, though most people were unaware of it, the Drow were the ones who controlled all the criminal activity in the slums of Shadowhurst. This was their stronghold. Croak was brought to a comfortable room to sleep in, stocked with paste and other drugs.

The content generated in these four sessions challenged me to continue deepening my relationship with Croak's feelings of other-ness. I imaginatively explored, and gave expression to, what I felt Croak would be going through as he tried to cope with getting

clean (from the drug paste) at the same time as dealing with tension (including racial tension) within his group, and following the small scraps of the story of the Drow hero and the spirit bear. My work in and around the game sessions continued to focus on the question of my own inner indigeneity, as well as the growing mystery of what this work had to do with gaming.

2.4.1 Wrestling the Ouroboros

There were times that I wondered whether this work was just a convoluted pretense for me to explore the concept of indigeneity. In a way, that is precisely correct, since the *D&D* sessions were meant to evoke whatever needed to be evoked. In that sense, the process was like any psychotherapeutic intervention, in that it is meant to bring up the psychological material to be worked upon. However, I was aware that the discussion of indigeneity was, at this point, only very loosely related to the discussion of gaming. The psychological material that was being evoked had to do with settler consciousness, indigeneity, and a colonial attitude toward phenomena, but because the work was focused around relating to a game, I felt bound to connect the two. I conceived of these two apparently unrelated topics as two ends of a snake, and it felt very difficult to wrestle the two ends of this snake together into a circle. I reached a point where to leave this difficulty unacknowledged would have been to betray the work, since I had undertaken to follow wherever it goes, and that included acknowledging the times that it became muddy and unclear. Furthermore, I intuited that to fail to somehow transcend this difficulty would be to leave the work unfinished. The snake, therefore, needed to be wrestled together, with the trust that it was somehow ouroboric, that is, that it would take its own tail in its mouth and become a coherent cycle.

I am aware that the image of the researcher *wrestling* the snake together is quite forceful, and goes against the general tone of this work. All that I have written thus far points toward the sense that I was trying to let things happen in their own time. I leave this image in, now, both to record it as the genuine image which emerged in the course of writing, and to continue contrasting it; to continue saying, "yes, but…" Yes, it seems the snake must come together, but it must be allowed to do so in the manner it chooses to, and only when it is ready to do so. Though it may be guided, it cannot be wrestled into an ouroboros. The question of how the ends would come together, at this point, remained to be seen.

2.4.2 Ni Kso Ko Wa (All My Relations)

I had a dream between Sessions Four and Five which referenced the adventure rehab that Croak was going through:

I drove, and then clomped through a wetland on foot along with a thin girl who looked like [one of Croak's companions]. We came to a room with three exits. Earlier, an earthy Inuit woman had told us the way out, which we believed would lead to a cliff to jump off from and die. This was our goal. In this room, one exit was a laundry chute, which seemed to dice up that which passed through. A second exit was a mail chute for packages. Third was a circular tunnel that turned a corner, with a sign that read, "Centre for Intergenerational Research." Water sometimes flowed backwards out of this tunnel. Though we had been given directions, it was not clear which way we should go.

The girl was going to enter the laundry chute, but I told her to stop, since it would kill her. I suggested we keep exploring, since there might be more to find.

If we found the cliff, I said, we could die from jumping off it at that point. I realized that we were choosing to live (for now), and discovered another door behind us.

It is not the place to fully delve into this dream, but there are some important things that must be said, for the similarities between Croak's situation and the dream suggest that a certain synchronization was taking place in our inner journeys. The are some immediate surface parallels to Croak's journey, such the girl who reminds me of one of Croak's companions, the potential of death from falling, and the fact that we are exploring some sort of human-made quasi-natural complex. There is also the presence of nature, trap-like danger, and a river (although this one flows backward). So what was the similarity between Croak's experience and my inner experience that this dream seemed to be speaking to? To start, there is a desire to "fly free" off a cliff; this is mirrored by Croak's behaviour when first arriving in the jungle, running off intoxicated by a feeling of closeness with nature. Outside of the game, I was feeling encased in the work, and getting bogged down with the volume of research that I was having to do to keep up. Part of me would have liked nothing more than to break off this academic pursuit and "fly free", though the dream shows that this would have been a self-destructive decision, a symbolic suicide. It might return to the comforting unconsciousness of the Earth Mother (or nature, suggested in this dream by the earthy Inuit woman), but it would betray the work. Staying in the tension of the work, on the other hand, felt as though it held the danger of psychic dismemberment, corresponding to the laundry chute, which in turn corresponded also to Croak's need to stay in the tension of his withdrawal symptoms. It "diced" things up, seemingly a reference to the fateful fall of the dice in *D&D;* a feeling

that giving up control would abandon things to chance. The mail chute seems to offer a way around the work, a psychic sidestepping of it. This might manifest as caving in to one side or another of a dialectic in my case, or taking a hit of paste in Croak's. And in the water flowing back from the Centre for Intergenerational Research I see Croak's growing need for connection with his ancestors, both druidic and Drow, as well as my own: The search for my own indigeneity, moving backward through the flow of "time's river".

I have a friend named Hunter (Lewis' son) who values his Woodland Cree ancestry highly. He has, on more than one occasion, asked me where my own ancestry leads back to. I feel that I have no answer as meaningful as his, for the fact is that I am not able to trace the Crichton name all the way back to tribal roots. I sometimes imagine that if I could go back far enough I would discover a connection with the Picts of what is now Scotland. As a matter of fact, I had drawn a Pict only the day before this dream (Figure 13), in a transference dialogue initiated with the question, "Who of my ancestors has something to say about this work?"

Figure 13: Pict drawing. The words in the bottom right corner read, "painted one,"

which is thought to be the meaning of the word Pict.

I realized something about ancestors in a separate conversation with Hunter (personal communication, January 11, 2018). Hunter seems to revere his ancestors. He studies them, reports feeling a connection to them, and imagines what they might think about his life as a modern-day city dweller. I have no such connection with my ancestors. Certainly, I can intellectually cast my thoughts back to an obscure band of Picts (who I am as likely to be genetically related to as an Anglo-Saxon tribe), but the ancestors that I am much more aware of are not Indigenous at all—they are the Settlers! Although, as far

as I know, I have no biological ancestors who were literal settlers, none who came to Canada during the period between first contact and the making of the treaties, nor any who were even tangentially responsible for any of the main colonial abuses perpetrated on Canada's Indigenous peoples, yet I feel those Settlers and colonists are part of my heritage much more than an ancient Pict. The colonists are the ancestors I identify with. They are, as Romanyshyn (2013) says, the ancestors that call me into the work. Upon further analysis of this, I see that I conceive of this image of the colonist as the *collective* ancestor with which Canadian Settler people of the dominant culture are currently reckoning. While Hunter seems to hold in his heart a desire to do right by his ancestors, I want little more than to break with mine, and right what I see as their wrongs. This is strongly related to the fear and guilt generated by the identity politics perspective, which casts me as a member of the identity groups that "benefit most" from the oppression of others: Caucasian and male. I find that I am very jealous of Hunter! I would love to, like him, have ancestry that meant something positive to me. I was recently asked by a different friend how I thought I would respond if I discovered one day that I had one thirty-second fraction of Maori ancestry. I said that I would feel thrilled; validated that there was something literally, capital-I Indigenous about me; perhaps this would come with a sense of being justified in the research I am doing here, that I had the "right" to do it; I would certainly want to connect with a Maori community and learn all I could. I feel no such pull to connect with my roots as a mixed-blood European. Such a thing—a meaningful connection with European (or "white") identity—seems to be, at the moment, among the greatest social transgressions a person can make.

What I am disclosing here I think can shed some light on both my fear of approaching the subject of indigeneity, as well as the context in which I was drawn to approach it. It also seems to reveal that, though I consider "blood quantum"-type laws which grant Indigenous status based on DNA to be somewhat shallow, literalistic, and even a bit racist in nature, there is a part of me that believes that indigeneity *is* biological. Or, if not biological, at least it is not "for me". Though I have put great effort into clarifying that this research is not about Cree or Sioux but rather about the view of indigeneity from a non-indigenous standpoint, I do seem to hold a deep-seated belief that there is something more indigenous about a Cree friend than about me, and I apparently attach it to DNA.

Working to interiorize this notion, I suggest that I unconsciously consider the qualities of indigeneity—specifically, relationality and spiritual connection with the land—to be somehow beyond me. On some level, I consider those qualities as being for people with "real" Indigenous DNA, or even for a Settler person who is interested in becoming part of a "real" Indigenous community, but not for me, not as who I am. This inner indigenous that I am relating to is an "other" within my own psyche.

The dynamic at the end of the dream seems to be very important both to Croak and to me as a gamer. "I realized that we were choosing to live (for now), and discovered another door behind us." There is a turning toward life, and toward what life offers, that is signalled here. There is a recognition of what is already there. The dream thought, "there might be more to find" can be seen as a move away from a destructive neither-nor (Schwartz-Salant, 1989) attitude, and towards valuing what is given, in all of its complexity. I think this movement introduces a growing receptivity, a growing

willingness to be in relationship with these complex issues. I see "there might be more to find" as a willingness on the part of the individual ego (mine, in this case) to take in the actual reality of its environment, rather than flying away, sidestepping, or being dismembered by it. This willingness of the ego includes ecological awareness of *all* its relations, allowing them to speak and affect it. Taken in the context of the previous discussions of the hermit, the magic circle, and relationality, this seems to signal another development in the direction of relatedness.

I have often used the word *relationship* in this work, and I want to revisit its meaning. When I use the word, I have come to mean it in the sense of "all my relations", or *ni kso ko wa* in Blackfoot. My understanding of "all my relations" is that it indicates connection with not only one's literal human family, but the entire community, and the entire human race, and in fact all the animals living on the planet, and the plants as well, and the spirits, and when I say it I include relationship to the ideas and histories to which we are bound as well. "All my relations", as I understand it, comes from a place of embeddedness within the fabric of all that our world is composed of.

2.4.3 Religiosity

It probably reveals a certain amount of my own naïveté to write that during this period I felt the work leading me to into what I thought of as a "religious" attitude. I found that a sense of awe and wonder at the depth of the campaign world was growing; I felt gratitude toward the DM for his offers, as well as his responsiveness to mine. I had already begun to conceive of the DM role as the de facto god within the magic circle of the game. In a flash of realization, it occurred to me that I did not feel this sense of gratitude at the "real" world's own offers and responsiveness—the "real god", one might

say—and why not? I had no ready answer to this question, however I learned a great deal by following the question's path. An intellectual connection was forming, for me, between this religious attitude, and Suits' (1978) lusory attitude. This connection emerged when I realized that the way I conceptualized this religious attitude reminded me of the way I felt playing videogames when I was young.

Until I was perhaps thirteen years old, I experienced videogames with a sense that anything might be possible within them. For instance, I remember that when playing *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo EAD, 1998), I was captivated by the idea that, even after I had finished the main game content, there was something yet to be discovered. I spent hours exploring the game's world in meticulous detail, searching for a secret; a secret that nobody else had found, and that I could uncover. It was absolutely superstitious; I remember undertaking various essentially random in-game tasks in the hope that something secret would happen; that something in the game would unlock for me. I thought that, perhaps, the created videogame world of *Ocarina of Time* was big enough to hold real depth. And there was a sense that I could go out into it, and make choices, and the game would respond; "meaningful play", as Salen & Zimmerman (2004) might put it.

After making this connection between my religious attitude and my gaming attitude, the next logical step for me was to ask: Have I experienced this outside of gaming? After completing my undergraduate degree, I took a solo trip to New Zealand, and undertook what are called the nine "Great Walks". Completing them became, for me, a kind of mythic ordeal, but also a game, and being out in the world reminded me of being in a videogame. It seems completely backward to me now to have had that

association, that travelling through nature was like playing a videogame. I think that speaks to how little nature and how much videogame there had been in my life up to that point. But there it is: Life felt, at that point, as deep as a video game, and for me that was not a sobering statement of my own disconnectedness, not at all; it was exhilarating! Out in nature, I could look to a place on the horizon and, if I wanted to, I could go to that place, just like in a game. I could discover whatever there was to discover in the open world before me, just like in a game.

Above, I questioned why I do not feel a strong sense of gratitude in my interactions with the real world. Still occupied with the question, I noticed how, within the *D&D* game, I would take an event that Croak experienced as a catastrophic setback as a meaningful offer toward fulfilling the game's purpose, which for me was to tell the story that needed to be told. Everything that happened in the game was part of the art of storytelling. Why not approach life outside of the game this way? This line of thought facilitated an intellectual transition from the game world to the real world; said another way, I tried it—responding to the world's phenomena as though they were all gifts. And, to a certain extent, this had an effect: It seemed to me that I could see the world's phenomena for the gifts they were, and furthermore that I had an ethical obligation to witness the world's own self-disclosure in this way, as well as honour it with gratitude, and match it with my own offers. Just like in the game.

At this time, I amplified this vision by reading accounts of Indigenous people and cultures who also appeared to understand nature in this way. Cajete (1994) speaks of the land as both teacher and curriculum. Fools Crow (Mails, 1991), Black Elk (Neihart, 1932/2008), and Vine Deloria Jr. (2016) describe at length the relationship with natural

law that emerges from relationship with the world; in Deloria's words, "the overwhelming presence of *Wakan Tanka* in everything" (p. 196). *Wakan Tanka* (a Sioux term) is not a "god" in the European sense, but is rather (as I understand it) a permeating ecological sense; a sense of connectedness, and of being held within a world with *telos* (purpose). The things that resonated with me in these varied accounts were a sense of humility before nature, service to something greater, and receptivity to the inherent meaning of phenomena.

Reflecting on this after the fact, I do not I think I was really in a religious frame of mind at the time, but rather something that looked like it. Nevertheless, the connection appeared to me, and I will accept and investigate *that* as a psychic fact. What I think is important to look at here is that I have both desired games to be deeper than they are, and that I have felt a "religious" attitude as something shallower than it truly is. Something relatively shallow and something relatively deep, then, were collapsed together onto the same level of meaning. Taken together, the nature of this collapse, and my previous experience of nature as "like a videogame (in a good way)" demand further analysis.

I am aware of a temptation to toss aside these ideas as the inflations of a man living in a disconnected "post-modern" culture. Though that may be an accurate interpretation, I must look with a more focused eye and ask, what does it mean? Is there some truth to this collapse? Games can be worlds in which relationships between the relevant dynamics are all clear, understandable, and explicit. They can offer a sense of embeddedness in a coherent system. An ecological sense is simple to cultivate in a game, since the components and relationships are explicit. The deepest games offer purpose as well as freedom to choose. The feelings associated with these are extremely powerful.

Arnett (2011) has proposed incorporating a new phase into frameworks of development psychology: *emerging adulthood,* which is characterized by a lack of clear purpose, a paralyzing multitude of choices, and strong internal pressure to "get it right". Speaking for myself, I can say that I have frequently felt psychologically awash in a culture where relationships between phenomena are unclear. I often feel that I have spent a huge portion of my life trying to make the "right" choice out of an infinite number of equally valueless choices. In light of this, it seems obvious that the properly designed blend of purpose and freedom that one finds in a superior videogame can be very attractive.

Does such a game engender a religious attitude? I think not, but I suggest that there may, today, be others like me who unconsciously seek from gaming what people reportedly once felt when in touch with a higher power. I say "reportedly", because, really, if my suggestion hits true, then reports may be all we know. Where else in modern North American culture would a religious attitude be found? Jane McGonigal, in her book *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (2011) seems to understand these concepts at an intuitive level. In response to them, she pitches the reader on gamifying the world so that people can feel more everyday challenge, triumph, and flow; I think therein lies the danger of this collapse. Whereas in this section I am exploring the need to use games as a stand-in for a deeper relationship with reality, McGonigal seems to get caught up on the physiological-emotional rush that people get while gaming. In this way, I think that she fetishizes positive emotion as a solution to the issue of growing meaninglessness in the digital age.

I find it troubling to suggest that gaming may be, for many people, an unconscious attempt to substitute something where their religious function once lived.

Games, despite being fun, engaging, and emotionally involving, may yet be a very poor substitute for being in relationship with the world. Even the deepest game is not a container for *Wakan Tanka.* When relating to the game, the game does not relate back. It is an insensible god, except, unlike other images of inscrutable gods, there is no depth beyond the human, for the game is created by humans. When my friends and I jump around and shout while playing *A Game of Thrones: The Board Game* (Petersen, 2011)*,* our martial feelings do not come from "Mars" (the god, not the planet), nor are they in touch with anything resembling the reality of war. We are playing a game, and awareness of that difference is exceedingly important, lest we inflate the game (and our own experience) far beyond its nature. I am confident that the game, like active imagination, has the ability to facilitate growth and development of consciousness, but it cannot lead *past* the human. Granted, when playing with another human player the relation may be able to grow somewhat deeper; yet I think that the game will not itself transcend the human beings gaming it.

Beyond misusing the game by inflating it beyond its actual nature, this substitution also cheats the human being. Sarah-Lynne Bowman, whose book *The Functions of Role-Playing Games* (2010) I have discussed earlier, refers repeatedly in her work to the safety of role-playing games, in contrast with the danger of the real world. This brings a crucial point of response to the question of why one cannot hold the same lusory attitude towards life that they hold toward the game: While role-playing games are (speaking in ideal terms) safe spaces where all consequences are held within the magic circle of the game, real-life decisions do bring real-life consequences. The drawing of the magic circle, though it circles one off from reality, takes place *within* reality; to choose

abstraction from reality is still a choice within reality. Therefore, though role-playing

games can be relatively risk-free places in which to explore identity, develop social skills,

build relationships, explore one's personal shadow, and so on, I must question the

purpose of a risk-free experience. What is the magic circle, in this case, for*?* I think a

core shadow aspect of the phenomenon of risk-free gaming is the collapse I described,

within which gaming and religiosity, for instance, can be brought to the same narrow

level. In my reading of McGonigal (2011) and Bowman (2010) I have often felt that

something is amiss in their writing. I feel relieved to finally be able to put some words to

it. Both McGonigal and Bowman pitch the risk-free gaming experience as doing gamers a

service by treating them to all manner of experience without ever leaving the safety of the

magic circle—what I think it may do, more than anything else, is engender a fundamental

lack of respect for the *risky* world. Though a role-playing game may help develop social

skills, without the danger inherent in a situation with real stakes, is there really the

possibility of any movement happening below the surface? If one *knows* that the activity

is false, or a performance, or a game, then the danger and stakes are necessarily one-step-

removed. I think this means that the potency and authenticity of these activities are one-

step-removed as well. Is this the risk of being "risk-free"? It is when the superficial

experience is made the focus that the depth dimension of human life is missed; when

McGonigal writes about *flow* and *fiero* as goals-in-themselves, she collapses existence

into a quest for emotional highs. Her writing is in line with the general attitude of our

time. I feel a sense of the danger of this perspective most keenly when I read Bowman's

words about war simulations, offered as a positive feature, "these games offer players the

opportunity to experience war-like conditions without incurring the risks involved in

actual combat" (p. 97). Does this not engender a lack of respect for war, for combat, and for reality? Perhaps there is something important in the uniqueness of war-like conditions; perhaps it is not good for human beings to experience such conditions without also experiencing their corresponding risks. Experiencing them in such a way diminishes our appreciation of the real thing. I think here of Al Gore's (2000) words: "We have assumed that our lives need to have no real connection to the natural world, that our minds are separate from our bodies, and that as dismembered intellects we can manipulate the world in any way we choose. Precisely because we feel no connection to the physical world, we trivialize the consequences of our actions" (as cited in Bernstein, 2005, p. 33). Gore is, of course, writing about runaway climate change here: possibly the greatest possible consequence of our dissociation from the physical world, as well as one that is frequently trivialized.

In 2018, the World Health Organization recognized *Gaming Disorder* as a diagnosable condition. A symptom is that gaming takes increased priority over other activities in the individual's life, resulting in "significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning" (World Health Organization, 2018). Additionally, *Internet Gaming Disorder* has been included since 2013 in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5*) as a condition for further study (APA, 2013):

> . . . studies suggest that when these individuals are engrossed in Internet games, certain pathways in their brains are triggered in the same direct and intense way that a drug addict's brain is affected by a particular substance. The gaming

prompts a neurological response that influences feelings of pleasure and reward, and the result, in the extreme, is manifested as addictive behavior.

A more prosaic interpretation would say that gaming offers an unrealistic sense of freedom, agency, and purpose. When children compulsively game, they may not yet be developmentally able to comprehend the nature of these feelings; children typically have quite restricted agency as they learn and adhere to the rules imposed by their family, culture, country, and biology. This easy path to meaning and purpose may "spoil" the child (for lack of a better phrase), rendering the ups and downs of banal, all-too-human reality forever insufficient. My own experience, as well as growing interdisciplinary attention to compulsive gaming, would suggest that this can happen to the adult as well. The danger of prioritizing safety is that there are certain ways in which reality cannot be made safer. The basic fact of human vulnerability in relationship cannot be done away with by progress, except, significantly, by creating a virtual reality, or magic circle, in which relational concerns are not present.

Throughout this paper, the sense has persisted for me that gaming is a fairly superficial medium through which to approach the sensitive and complex issues of racial oppression, colonialism, and indigeneity. I have tried to accept that sense, and move through it and with it, by committing myself to following the movement of the work wherever it may lead. And now that I seem to be coming out the other side, I see that, yes, it is a pretty superficial medium with which to tackle these issues, and that its superficial nature is part of the work's *telos*. The very heart of it is superficiality standing in for depth; a risk-free and easily rewarding environment standing in for reality. This has not been done out of any conscious malice or flippancy; much to the contrary, it has been

done for lack of knowing how to do anything else. If what I, and others, are really after is a sense of meaning, of relationship, and of purpose, then gaming may be the closest thing to it with which we are familiar!

It seems to me that a society in which human experience is constantly being directed away from its own complexity toward the simplicity of emotional highs and quantifiable indicators of positive outcome; where human beings are increasingly disconnecting from the physical reality of which we are made, and of which our cities and technologies are built—the natural world—it is in just such a society that games could be thrust into the position of carrying a human being's drive for religious transcendence.

2.4.4 Drow Like Me

Something resonated in me when Croak learned that the Drow hero had been sacrificed by his friends, and I must follow it up. First, it seemed clear at the time that the Drow had been chosen for the sacrifice because he was a Drow; in other words, because the other members of the party considered him disposable. As far as my response goes, on one hand it would be naïve to suggest that I had a real experience of suffering at the hands of racial discrimination here, but on the other I must acknowledge that I felt wounded when it happened. Even though the Drow adventurer's story was unknown, and therefore little more than the fantasy of Croak, my fictional character, I had found it moving and inspiring. For Croak, seeing a representative of the Drow race immortalized in a painting (even though he was not named) was meaningful, and came with a real sense of validation. I suppose that, as Croak grew attached to the image of the Drow adventurer, I had grown vicariously attached, like a father might grow attached to his

son's hero. When Croak saw the Drow riding the spirit bear and fighting a dinosaur, Croak felt proud, and imagining his pride moved me. Both Croak and I were under the impression that the Drow adventurer had been an equal within the adventuring band, and even if the historians had not treated him as kindly, he still represented something to hold on to. When Croak learned that the Drow had been sacrificed, Croak felt betrayed, and I felt indignant on his behalf. We had both bought into the image of this heroic Drow, and it seemed as though we had been fooled. We both felt angry that we had grown attached to a particular narrative, and that that narrative had been false.

I asked myself how this experience related to the real-life experience of being racially oppressed. *I* am not a Drow; Croak's experience of marginalization is not my own, and though I call it "his", it really amounts to my imaginative endowment of what it might be like. In the *D&D* session, I am portraying Croak through the instrument of my own personality, and though I think I am doing so in a subtle and nuanced way, it is still my portrayal and not really an autonomous Croak. Failing to realize this would be to confuse my experience of "vicarious oppression" with a literal experience of racial oppression.

And yet, while Croak's side of the equation may owe its resonance to the power of my imagination, that does not mean it is lacking in truth. As a member of the dominant culture of the land in which I live, I may be unlikely to be seriously and systemically oppressed on the basis of my skin colour, gender, or other visible attributes. I have, however, experienced marginalization, bullying, and abuse. I have experienced betrayal, self-hatred, and struggled with my internalizations of the negative images others have had of me. I have been hurt by peoples' insistence that I amount to no more and no less than

what their projections define me as. On an inner level, there is a commonality that I connect with that is more than vicarious oppression; Croak and I are more alike than we are different. It is only on the literal level of identity groups that the comparison fails.

With the literal and symbolic levels of this issue differentiated, I can see that my inability to experientially know what a real-life Croak might experience day-to-day does not preclude me from relating on a deeper level. Both levels are of value and import, though, and it does seem necessary to repeatedly acknowledge the gulf between my experience and Croak's on the literal level. I cannot know what it is like; I can, however know what it is like *to not know what it is like*. That understanding itself seems to generate empathy, and openness. It seems to avoid the reductive tendencies of thinking I "get it". There is a gulf between these two perspectives (knowing and not knowing) which can be bridged only partially through relating my inner world to another's. Through this work, I keep returning to this gulf to realize it in different ways. It seems I cannot know certain things; I cannot empathize or "shapeshift" my way into a literal experience. Through continually trying to penetrate the experience in different ways ("shapeshifting" my methods of "shapeshifting"), I appear to be repeatedly brought to this gulf to re-learn my own position as one who cannot know.

If I keep returning, it is because "the one who cannot know" is a difficult position for me to accept: I want to know it all! I remember that when I was seriously pursuing an acting career, I thought that I could comprehend and portray any character that was given to me, with enough effort. It was conceivable that I might be held back by a lack of imagination and skill, but I would never be held back by something unalterable like my literal human attributes (including race). This sense that I even have a right to "know it

all" may be a key part of my (symbolic) settler ancestry: Many writers on cultural appropriation would likely assert I do not have such a right. The sense of this right lies within the shadow of settler consciousness, and is closely related to the colonial attitude through which external phenomena are seen as resources to be appropriated, aggregated, and assimilated; to be made "mine". Even the idea of shapeshifting, as I analyze it, appears to be primarily a subtle trick; a different tactic to gain access to something "other". Shapeshifting still assumes that the shapeshifter has a right to enter a space (or a form) that is not its own, without being invited; the shapeshifting perspective believes that the dungeon will reveal its secrets if only the subject can (through its own egoic cleverness or tenacity) find the tactic that allows the threshold to be subverted. The fact that there are areas that are off-limits may be one of the most difficult things for the settler archetype to accept. But there are sacred spaces; there are magic circles to which the outsider is not permitted access. And when the settler attempts to gain access, through any means besides being invited, it amounts to a fundamental show of disrespect to the autonomy of these sacred spaces, and those who belong within.

2.5 The Garden: Sessions Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, & Twelve

After being invited into the private hideout of the Drow organization called the Gardeners, Croak undertook a Gardener initiation rite: the vision quest. This took place in the Garden, which was an expanse of *real* landscape hidden underground in the middle of the city, with organic flora and fauna. Croak was instructed to "gain the heart of a beast", which to the Gardeners apparently meant to slay an animal and eat its heart. This was how all the Gardeners chose their signature form into which to shapeshift.

The Garden was maintained by a Fey (fairy-like creature) named Keena, who Croak met upon entering. Croak set out on his quest determined to find a spirit bear, and was able to do so with the aid of other animals and some magic. After using magic to calm the bear and speak with it, it told Croak that the Garden was poisoned, and that Keena was its source. The bear, named Succor, regarded the Gardeners to be a perversion of the druidic order. They were lost and power-hungry. Succor had been around for many generations of Gardeners, and had once been the friend of Chorumber, Croak's childhood mentor. At last, Succor entrusted Croak with cleansing the Garden, and allowed Croak to take his life and his heart to complete the vision quest ritual.

Before leaving, Croak went in search of his mentor Chorumber's office, which he knew to be hidden in the Garden somewhere. He discovered it, and inside found several gifts as well as a letter from Chorumber. The body of the letter read:

With faith in the cycle I here advise you: Look to nature for your guidance. Neither the Elven philosophies of power nor altruism can give you true strength. They are hollow. The druid path is more difficult for its nuance. Nature is pitiless and all-providing, violent and tender. The peoples of Pindus hold themselves apart from nature at grave risk. Relationship is everything. Species disconnected become extinct. The fungus is deadly [this refers to a growing threat in the world of Pindus, a dangerous and apparently unstoppable fungal army]. It must be courted, investigated, respected. The fungus is essential, the fey are our translators, they must be dealt with similarly. Keena is the wisest creature I know. Look to her. Look after her. Keep the people connected. Preserve the garden.

Croak was confused by the contradictory messages about Keena: Succor had said she was poisonous, yet Chorumber wrote that she was the wisest creature he knew. Xlotl, the imp, was of the opinion that Keena was to be trusted. Croak wanted to decide for himself, and called out to Keena. She came, but Croak was unable to discern anything about whatever her true motives might have been. In the end, he decided to trust her, and left the Garden. He was received back into the Gardener stronghold as a hero for having killed the spirit bear.

Croak, the Archdruid, and several other Drow then planned and executed a mission to gain information about an artifact which would free Keena from the Garden. In a frenetic high-stakes battle, they boarded a flying barge pulled by gryphons, and defeated the wizard who owned it to learn the location of the artifact. The artifcat, Croak was surprised to learn, was currently in the possession of Nielken, a man Croak had met much earlier alongside his uncle Veskin.

These next sections relate the work that occurred around these sessions. The central thread to them is that I was coming to more subtle awareness of my own inner dynamics that were exerting influence on the game and the work. The difficulty involved in the work was beginning to express itself in unexpected ways; one was in my perception of the DM's actions. Another was that I was overworking myself to make something meaningful happen; this was borne of a fear that, if I was not extracting meaning from the work nor projecting it into the work to be "discovered", there would be no meaning. These pressures caused me to realize how my settler and colonial instincts continued to be present throughout the work, despite my greatest efforts; this realization

in turn led to a transformation in understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the inner indigenous and settler consciousness.

2.5.1 Synchronization, Paranoia, & Privacy

Without having discussed any of this work outside of the game with the DM, he appeared to be picking up uncannily on key content and themes. The journey to meet and speak with animals, the idea that the natural world was becoming increasingly rare and distant, and even the reference to a vision quest, all served to feed a sense that there was communication going on at a non-verbal level between us. Certainly, he knew that my initial inclinations for the character included the idea that Croak might be separated from his ancestry in a way that I imagined an urban Indigenous person would be today. He also was, of course, aware that the druid class in general is concerned with connecting to nature, fighting on its behalf, and even taking on animal forms. To a certain extent then, we had not departed far from the original ideas with which we began. However, the specific expression of these meaningful coincidences gave me the feeling that the DM and I were in tune at a deeper level, and reinforced my desire to keep our processes separate. It seems to me that it felt more meaningful for these various concepts to emerge through the story on their own without our having jointly decided to include them than it would have if we had openly discussed the direction we wanted the story to take.

Later, this dynamic inverted: In contrast to a sense of synchronization with the DM and his offers, I left a session questioning if I was being manipulated. It was a surprisingly paranoid thought; it grew from the fact that the letter found in Chorumber's office seemed almost *too* in tune with the work I was doing privately. I questioned how the DM could not only hit notes that resonated with my investigation of indigeneity and

nature, but also speak in a way that was very sympathetic to my approach to psychology as well as to portraying a druid: that the fungus, though threatening, "must be courted, investigated, respected." Such an attitude seems directly in line with the stance of steadfast receptivity (Brooke, 1991/2009) that I have written of so frequently in this paper. Chorumber's letter also bespoke a deep respect for nature, the centrality of relationship, and the difficulty of holding a nuanced position; a deeper appreciation than I expected from the DM. After that session, remembering the words in the letter, I found them so appropriate that I wondered if I was being pandered to. My head grew hot as my thoughts raced in frustration at this idea. I questioned whether I had somehow "let it out" and indicated what I was working on to the DM, who had begun feeding me what he thought I wanted to hear.

There may be some truth to that interpretation, since I am sure the way I responded to the DM's offers throughout the campaign let him know what I was most interested in. However, as I reflect on these thoughts after the fact, I think that I had been underestimating the DM. I had begun to think that *D&D* was limited to a one-sided heroic perspective, and I was unconsciously identifying the DM (as an individual) with this same perspective. I had unconsciously felt that *he* was limited to the heroic perspective. Considering our personal relationship, I might have known this to be false if I had become consciously reflective on it; I (with some embarrassment) admit that I did not for some time. Yet, there it was, operating under the surface; it became apparent when I analyzed the notion that I was personally being manipulated by Chorumber's letter.

There were many ways in which abstraction from relationship was making itself felt in the work. I found the session in which Croak was faced with the choice of whether to trust Keena frustrating; I was overwhelmed by the lack of clear choices. I, as a gamer, found myself unable to weigh the various arguments from four different characters (Succor, Chorumber, Xlotl, and Keena). I found thinking about what choice Croak would make even more difficult, since it added another layer of abstraction. I reflected that this was probably Croak's baseline; to live with no grounding centre, no strong organizing principle (Self) nor any strong relationships binding him to one course of action or the other. His intentions and goals were extremely volatile and subject to the influence of others as well as his own impulses.

This feeling was intensified by my decision not to discuss it with the DM. A DM and player keeping their processes entirely private is an atypical approach to *D&D*. The game is not designed to be played in such a fashion, and while it led to some very meaningful game moments, it also came with challenges. Any relationship between us had become increasingly concentrated into the game; we had hardly spoken outside of it for several months. It could be said that, in many ways, we were specifically avoiding relationship throughout this process. I have noted that the DM and I have a personal relationship outside of the game, but it was proving quite challenging to draw a boundary between our game relationship and our friendship; in fact, it did not seem possible to do so. It seemed that our relationship was being suffocated by our commitment to the privacy of the game. Knowing that my initial interest in *D&D* and this project had grown out of a desire to put energy into my relationship with my friend, this was an unwelcome development! There appeared to be two ways that this dynamic could move. The first

would be to soften the boundaries of the game, so that our personal relationship was able to bleed in more, and "breathe". One way to do this might have been to talk more explicitly about our experiences during the game. We did not, however. The process was nearing its end, and it seemed to me that it was better to stay the course, so I did not bring it up. Nor did the DM. This, as I learned after the campaign had ended, led to the DM experiencing significant stress. He was not comfortable with the degree to which he did not know what was happening on my end. The privacy caused me stress as well, though I saw mine as a stress that I had chosen, and I was therefore content to relate to and analyze it as part of the work. Despite the stress, however, we both agreed that the process bore intriguing, unique, and even desirable results, allowing our creative offers to develop more organically than they otherwise would have. If I were to repeat this process in the future, I would approach this dynamic somewhat differently. I would set clearer boundaries as to the nature of the DM-playing relationship, as well as discuss what the possible positive and negative consequences that this kind of process might have on the relationship and the individuals. I would ensure that we agreed on our approach.

Taken as a moment in the context of this entire work, I see the stress of our disconnection, and my impulse to lean further into it, as related to a general statement of post-modern Western culture at present. I refer here to a permeating sense of disconnection, and of "floating" in a world of abstract and ungrounded ideas as described earlier in relation to Arnett's (2011) work on emerging adulthood. O'Keeffe (2010, p. 68) describes "the essence of the modern human condition: the desire to meld again with nature, yet possessed by a legacy that hinders and distorts such union, as well as the profound pain involved in waking up to our innate love of nature to find that what we

love is being destroyed." In context, when O'Keeffe writes "nature" she is referring to literal plants, animals, and land; however, I think what she says is true of the ecological, relational sense that I have come to identify with nature as well. Here I will share an illustration (Figure 14) that came out of a transference dialogue initiated with the question, "Who wants to play?"
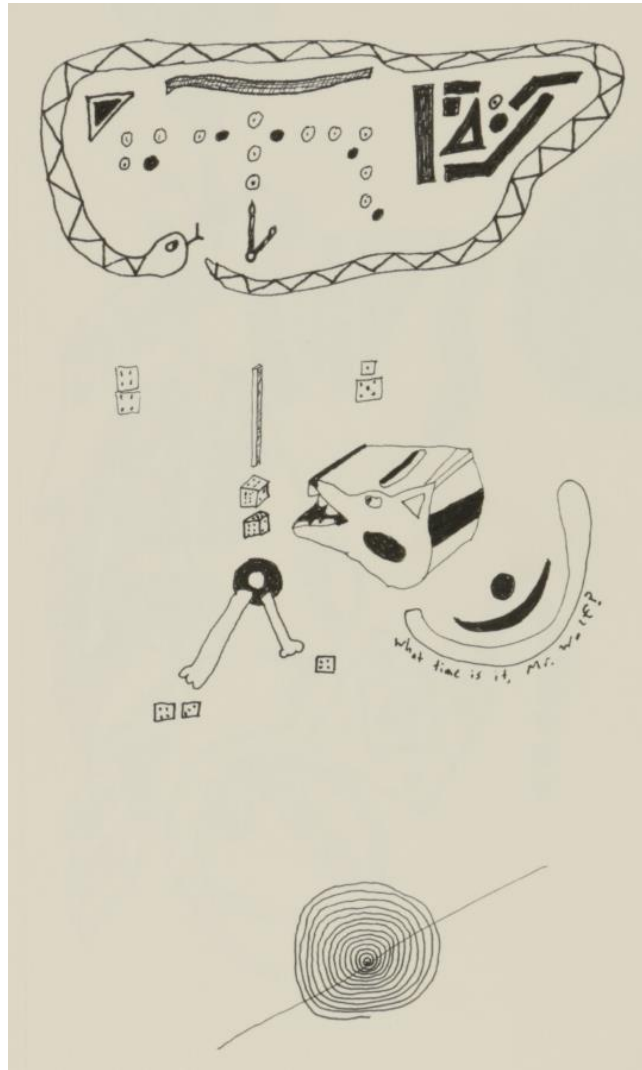
Figure 14: A drawing that is aware of lack of connection and grounding.

The coyote is present again, and this time he seems to have been dismembered, or is simply detached from himself. His arms form the hands of a kind of clock just left of

centre, and his tail curls around just to the right of centre. His face is stretching out in a rudimentary three-dimensional style of illustration, and I have a sense that this indicates his existence over a span of time. When putting this piece to paper, I knew it was in part expressing a non-linear vision of time. A preoccupation with time can be seen in the two clocks, the line "what time is it, Mr. Wolf?", and the symbol at the bottom. This symbol was a way of visually communicating a juxtaposition of Western consciousness' experience of time (the straight line) with a more cyclical nature of time (the spiral), such as I had been reading about in work on indigenous ways of knowing (for instance, Little Bear, 2000). The cyclical time-line here travels in an extending spiral, repeating patterns and cycles (of nature, of seasons, of spirits, of human behaviour), and a consciousness following this line perceives the coherent relationships between phenomena. The linear time-line bisects the spiral, and a consciousness following this line picks up the unique and differentiated nature of each part of the spiral that it touches, but it misses the whole.

What I find most clear in this drawing is a sense of disconnection that is becoming aware of itself. The time lines symbolize this. The straight line is juxtaposed directly with the spiral: It (the line) "knows" there is something outside of it. Similarly, as the coyote's head becomes three-dimensional, it does not do so in a realistic way, but in a perturbing way that highlights how all the other drawings (up to this one) had been purely two-dimensional. I would like to say the drawing here is becoming aware of its own drawing-ness. At the same time, I am becoming aware of the limitations of my own perspective. In the context of the present discussion, the disconnection that I was becoming aware of was firstly in my relationship with the DM in reality, secondly as

Croak in the narrative world, and thirdly as the researcher engaging with ideas that were not yet grounded in me. Deloria Jr. writes that

> a major component of [the kinship between Sioux traditions and Jungian psychology] is Jung's strong sense of a dissociation in western culture due to its separation from nature and the Indian psyche that has never experienced such a separation and for whom nature is a living experience and spiritual presence. (2006, p. 17)

Indeed, this can be seen in Jung's words (1930/1997, p. 420): "We must find out how to get everything back into connection with everything else. We must resist the vice of intellectualism, and get it understood that we cannot only understand." By intellectualism I think Jung means the one-sided use of the intellect, exclusively and at the expense of other functions. Figure 14 and my analysis of it both feel very intellectual. In Figure 14, as in my research and the game, I was responding to a need to "get everything back into connection with everything else", and the impossibility of doing so exclusively with the intellect was becoming clear. It was from a one-sided intellectual position that the image of "wrestling the ouroboros together" emerged; I would say at this point that "getting everything back into connection" is not something one can "do" at all (as one "does" a heroic task), but rather these connections might disclose themselves when given the space to do so.

An awareness of disconnection was growing in me, as well as of the gap between "all my relations" as an intellectual statement, and the living and inward knowing of *ni kso ko wa.* And the presence of disconnection that I felt in the *D&D* project was, I realized with a dull "click", by my own design! I had designed this methodology in an

effort to isolate my own experience with the game, to have an "alone" experience that more or less excluded relationship with the DM, even at the same time that the project, on one level, existed to serve that very relationship. And here I found something that I might have known all along: Relationship could not be excluded. It seems to me now to be hopelessly naïve and misguided to have tried to ignore the influence of the DM, and our relationship, on the process. In light of these dynamics, it is no wonder that the process had, in response, become about relationship itself. I think the importance of relationship to this work emerged in a compensatory way to my anti-relational approach to this work. And now it appeared suddenly clear to me that my relationship with the DM had, in many stages of the game, mirrored or complemented Croak's experience, and as this had fed into my research outside of the game, that in turn fed back into the game and my relationship with the DM.

Had I had these insights earlier, I might have softened the boundaries of my process, to ameliorate some of the stress that was being felt in the relationship between the DM and I. Instead, I proceeded as the straight time line in Figure 14 did, cutting through directly, irrespective of the qualities of the individual moment. Softening the boundaries of my process might have felt like widening my straight, clean line into a meandering spiral; yet at this point the meandering spiral seems to be a much more desirable (and certainly more relational) approach. However, it was only due to leaning in to the straight line that I was, at last, beginning to perceive the ouroboric thread of relationship that ran throughout this work and made it coherent. Like the situation described earlier in response to the hermit drawing (Figure 11), only by committing fully to what I, at the time, perceived to be the right choice, was I able to see the meaning and

effects of that choice. By resisting relationality through my commitment to the privacy of the process, I was able to finally see that same resistance to relationality, and therefore comprehend how relationality itself wove all the disparate parts of this work—gaming, indigeneity, colonialism, and nature—into a single cloth.

2.5.2 Relaxation & Ritual Without Stir

While Croak was struggling with substance addiction, I was falling into my own compulsive behaviour, something akin to "workaholism". Perhaps this happens to every graduate student writing a major paper. The areas I needed to research were adding up, while the unread books on my shelf were multiplying; I was beginning to feel totally overwhelmed and drained of energy to continue. I was depressed. My thesis supervisor kindly shared the opinion that this compulsive attitude towards work*ing* might not be beneficial to *the work*. What I needed to do here was release my expectation that I would write something grand and important, and simply write the work that was waiting to be written. I had reined in my impulse to plunder the unconscious with endless transference dialogues, and now I was asked to rein in my impulse to plunder my own conscious abilities. I decided that I would try to play the game *as* a game, and see if I could enjoy myself. I had begun to conceive of the weekly game session as a sort of ritual, and I thought of Giegerich describing true ritual as being done without stir (Giegerich, Miller, & Mogenson, 2005, p. 50): "One did not have any thoughts accompanying these rituals, nor any feelings or emotions. The action just happened, was performed and as such it was self-sufficient". I realized that my intensity of reflection, analysis, and attempt to somehow make the game more than what it was, was contrary to my conception of it as a ritual, and furthermore was compensatory for my fear that it would not be enough. I

recognized in this fear the thought that, if I grew accustomed to the work, or treated it as normal instead of extraordinary, I would not be working hard enough. In response to this fear I had been treating the game as work, indeed as harder work than any other work I was doing. To a certain extent, I think this was appropriate given the game's central place in this thesis paper. However, the draining effect that it was having on other areas of my life suggests that I was overdoing it. Referring to my earlier discussion of Bowman (2010), who I felt to be defensive, as though trying to prove the worth of a game to an antagonistic listener, I think I can say that a similar dynamic was playing a part in my own relationship to this work. I was still trying to prove to "someone" (an inner judgmental figure) that gaming was worthy of serious attention and time.

Becoming conscious of this led me to make some choices. One was that I would allow my frantic pace of research to slow. I would accept that this work could not cover all the material it brought up. Every path was leading to several more pathways, each question opened into many more, and if I tried to follow every road to its conclusion I would end up trying to write a thesis the size of the universe. A second choice was to acknowledge that I was objectively invested in Croak's story, and to trust, from that point on, that the investment would be sufficient; I did not need to compensate for a feeling that I was lacking as a researcher by continuing to dig, mine, and generate more material. A third choice was to write with an interested and sympathetic audience in mind, rather than an antagonistic one to whom I had to prove something. In general, the choice here was to more actively (or rather, less actively and more receptively) incorporate the phenomenological perspective, and trust that the phenomena had what they needed within themselves.

These shifts led to a session in which, for the first time, I felt that I was gaming reciprocally with the DM. By this I mean: It had always been clear he was gaming with me, in that he had ideas and content prepared and was able to use his storytelling abilities to deceive me, catch me off guard, or provoke my investigation into certain details. But prior to the session in which I expected Croak to find the spirit bear, I had some ideas about how I might treat that encounter; I kept these ideas secret from the DM, and consequently I think he was surprised by Croak's choice to calm and speak with the bear rather than fight it. This was satisfying to me. I felt that we were gaming together in a way we had not up to that point, and providing him with unexpected surprises like this was a way of matching his offers, which I have described wanting to do throughout the campaign. This was another point at which keeping our processes private seemed to lead to meaningful developments (both in and out of the game) which might not have occurred if we had been communicating more.

2.5.3 Colonial Indigeneity

Games, *D&D* included, often encourage heroism and dragon-slaying. They often encourage using, manipulating, or capital-izing (making into capital). One definition of *game* that I have not yet referenced says that a game is "a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions in order to *manage resources* through game tokens *in the pursuit of a goal*" (Costikyan, 2002, emphasis added). Gaming as such is, to thinking like Costikyan's, about using what you have to accomplish some end. This can be seen as an extension of the general attitude of Western ego consciousness, as described, for instance, by Jerome Bernstein (2005): "nature was to be "dealt with" as that ego deals with other objects – as a denuminized object to be exploited" (p. 35). The

word "denuminized" here refers to the Jungian-Kantian concept of the *noumenon,* or "the thing-in-itself" (Brooke, 1991/2009). In this context, I interpret Bernstein's use of the term to say that the natural phenomenon in question has been severed from its own nature, or extracted from its own reality; it is no longer "the thing-in-itself" but is an externally-defined resource, a "thing-outside-of-itself". Further on this idea, Deloria Jr. writes,

> I think the primary difference between [the western and indigenous ways of life] is that Indians experience and relate to a living universe, whereas western people – especially scientists – reduce all things, living or not, to objects. The implications of this are immense. If you see the world around you as a collection of objects for you to manipulate and exploit, you will inevitably destroy the world while attempting to control it. Not only that, but by perceiving the world as lifeless you rob yourself of the richness, beauty, and wisdom to be found   by participating in its larger design. (as quoted in Bernstein, 2005)

An aim of my attempt to approach the game "with soul in mind" was to subvert what is an inherent quality of *D&D* (and so many other games), that is, that they are fundamentally about manipulating and exploiting. And that is exactly what my attempt to subvert had been, too! My approach to the game of *D&D* had been, in many ways, manipulative and exploitative of the game itself. Despite my stated phenomenological aims, I had often done everything *but* patiently and non-violently allow it to disclose its own meaning. I tried to enter it with its own rehabilitation in mind; I was an uninvited missionary to *D&D*. My own attempt to relate to the game in a rigidly phenomenological

or "indigenous" way was colonial; I had been embedded in the colonial attitude with the very movement by which I had tried to escape it.

2.6 One More for the Toad

Session Twelve was a marathon session. The DM had asked in advance if we could extend it, since it was our final session, and I agreed. We spent the better part of four hours playing through the mission of ambushing the flying barge. The battle itself had been designed intricately by the DM. There were a great many moving pieces within it, and many different aspects to consider. It felt very full. In addition to Croak, I also controlled three of the accompanying Gardeners during this scene. It was exhausting, but exciting to be part of. I was aware, however, that it was a departure from the tone of the rest of the story. Most of the action had been, up to now, in relatively small scenes and interpersonal relationships; to wage a large-scale coordinated assault involving two airships was very different. As a final session, it felt appropriately climactic, but not exactly appropriately climactic for *our* final session, that is, for the story we had been telling up to that point. I knew, of course, that it had been the DM's, Croak's, and my choice to follow this path, and this mission was the direction that our decisions had taken us.

There was no sense of resolution at the ending of Session Twelve. At most, it felt like a cliff-hanger; like the end of the first season of a television show. I imagined, in this context, that season two (if we ever went there) would involve the difficult task of tracking down and recovering the artifact from Nielken. Regardless of the lack of resolution, though, I was glad to be finished, for it meant that I could finally start writing

in earnest. I could now reflect on the campaign in its entirety, and analyze it from a more objective standpoint, compared to having been completely immersed in it up to this point.

And yet I was not surprised when the DM contacted me and asked me if I would like to do one more session. We shared a strong desire to resolve the narrative arc, and not leave it on such a cliff-hanger. Though it went against my initial plan to do exactly twelve sessions, doing a thirteenth felt like the more relational choice. It took into account our real, human relationships both to one another and the story we had co-created. We wanted to honour the story by bringing it to a more complete resting place (if not a conclusion). And so, after a one-week break, we scheduled Session Thirteen.

2.6.1 Ekkyklêma: Session Thirteen

In Session Thirteen, Croak and the other Drow returned to the Gardener's hideout. Croak was able to send a message to Nielken, asking for a meeting in Croak's home neighbourhood, Grin Flats. In the meeting, Croak told Nielken that he wanted the artifact in order to free Keena, which caused Nielken to attack him. Croak, however, was able to steal the artifact and escape.

Croak, Xlotl, and the Archdruid went immediately to the Garden to see Keena. Croak tried one last time to use his insight to determine if there was anything "off" about Keena. Was releasing her going to be the right choice? He was, again, unable to perceive anything that helped him determine this. After taking the artifact, Keena led them through the back passages of the Garden, to see the army she had been preparing. I relate this scene to the *ekkyklêma* of Ancient Greek theatre, which is the device used for revealing the corpse(s) at the climax of a tragedy; Keena's army was a horrifying assemblage of walking corpses, infected by the fungus, and sprouting mushrooms from their bodies.

Croak finally had enough information to know that this was not the path he wanted to take. He tried to flee with the artifact, but the Archdruid knocked him unconscious. Keena began a low drone, which Croak could perceive even though he was unconscious. He could perceive it because it resonated within his body, calling on the fungus which was apparently already growing in him. The paste he had been addicted to had been filled with the spores of the fungus all along; his system was full of it. Croak slowly became an observer in his own body, which was now at the service of Keena. Croak had become part of the fungal army.

2.6.2 Heroism Now

These next few sections will describe reflections made post-game on the material generated in-game. Some ideas will be developed further, and many will be brought to their temporary resting place. This resting place is necessary for practical reasons: This thesis paper is nearing its conclusion. The resting place is temporary because the ideas are not resolved in any final sense, nor are they meant to be. As stated in the chapter describing alchemical hermeneutic method, I intentionally recognize that, though the paper may conclude, this work is ongoing; this paper is simply a chapter in in the work's process of unfolding.

Session Thirteen certainly had the sense of resolution that the DM and I had felt lacking after Session Twelve. The resolution itself was brutal and unpleasant. On one hand, I was very glad that the DM had made choices from within the reality of the Pindus world, and had not shied away from delivering harsh consequences to the decisions Croak made. It was very satisfying to feel that the ending of Croak's story was a direct outcome of what had happened before, and had not been manipulated by the DM, as the

deployment of a deus ex machina that allowed Croak to survive might have been. On the other hand, I was sad that Croak died! Or, rather, he did not die, but was enslaved to the power of a fungus, which I think is even worse. Part of me wishes that Croak had escaped. I wish he had not trusted Xlotl, or the Archdruid, or that Croak's last attempt to use an "insight check" to perceive Keena's true intentions had succeeded. Due to the way the dice fell, it failed, which is why he could not perceive anything about her true intentions. I am most sad when I think of Succor, the spirit bear. He had trusted Croak, and believed he could restore the garden to balance; he had even given his life to aid Croak. And Croak had failed. And against my desire, as a gamer, to figure out the "correct" path of action and to help Croak succeed, I portrayed Croak in the way that felt most true to me, which was often to make poor decisions, or decisions that simply delayed the more difficult decision. I feel that Croak's end was prefigured somewhat by the symbols out of which he grew—the dark nature of the dog, and the gluttonous toad. The toad image had spoken to its habit of glutting and binging whenever possible, and insisted on being faithfully represented. Earlier I quoted Edinger (1985, p. 150): "The toad as *prima materia* drowns in its own greed and hunger. It dies, turns black, putrefies, and is filled with poison". I discovered these words after the campaign had ended; they feel quite apropos.

After Session Thirteen, I drew the triptych below (Figure 15). These I drew slowly, and with tenderness. I had the sense that putting them down on paper made them real; that the act of drawing them acknowledged the death of these characters, and allowed them to affect me.
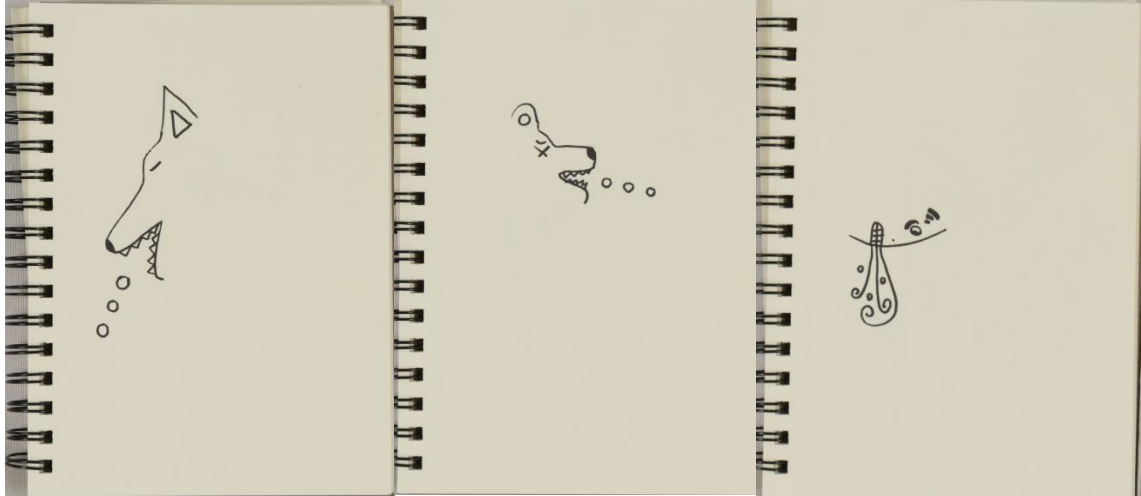
Figure 15: Death of coyote-bear-man triptych.

One effect of finishing the campaign in this way is that I find myself drawn to return to the world of Pindus for another campaign with a new character. When I consider this possibility, I am unambiguously drawn to a traditionally heroic character. I want to portray someone who has a definite opinion on the happenings in the world around them, and has an active interest in righting what they perceive to be the wrongs. I want to portray somebody who can, somehow, rescue Croak from possession by the fungus—although there is no hint that this is even possible, I still fantasize that it might be. Further, I want to explore the far reaches of the Pindus Valley. Croak hardly left the slums of Shadowhurst in the entire campaign, and I want to see what else is out there.

I am interested in analyzing the movement to this heroic impulse. I have described basically all the qualities that I have heretofore associated with settler colonialism: an inflated heroism, a missionary perspective of saving the world, a desire to fight and subjugate others, and the explorer's drive to discover uncharted lands. Throughout the campaign with Croak I felt such impulses to be anathema, so what might this apparent reversal suggest? At the surface, I can suggest that I had become emotionally invested in

Croak, and these emotions are what drive my desire to rescue him. I often related to him, as I have described, as I think a father might relate to his son. I wished to support Croak's decisions and self-discovery while also feeling very frustrated with the choices that he was making. I wished that he would make choices that helped him achieve his goals. I think a father, however, would have felt more freedom to intervene, or to offer Croak some advice—as a gamer I was committed to trying to interfere as little as possible. Part of the drive to enter Pindus as a hero is that, after restraining the impulse to interfere for thirteen sessions, I now want to interfere. I want my ego to have some agency in the game, and not submit myself to an ideal of "serving" the character.

I think this is partly compensatory; if this impulse could speak, it might say something like, "I gave this receptive thing a try, and look what happened! Now I need to step in and fix it." I am annoyed to recognize this thought, because it suggests that, in part, the commitment to a phenomenological process that I have undertaken throughout this entire project has been kind of a lark; it was not undertaken from a genuine place, but as an experiment (or as a game). "Now that the experiment has failed", this thought might continue, "it is time return to what I know works: ego control!" The presence of these ideas suggests to me that my journey has, after all, been like so many well-meaning anthropologists (and others) over the centuries, just "playing Indian" until I get tired of it and want to go back to my comfort zone.

That, however, seems to me to be a poor reading of the situation. Describing the psychic entity of settler consciousness as my "comfort zone" is itself judgmental and reductive; "comfort zone" has many negative connotations for me. Therefore, perhaps I can bring a more receptive eye, perhaps a more phenomenological eye, to this dynamic.

When I do so, I can recognize that it is naïve to imagine that the deeply embedded and entrenched psychic entity of what I have been referring to as settler consciousness could be lifted out and uprooted in such a short period of time, or even in an entire lifetime. And it is the settler's own perspective that *would* uproot it: It is an egoic conceit, borne out of settler consciousness itself, to imagine reforming and re-populating my own psyche. It treats my own psyche as material to be developed and improved; one might even say it treats it as *terra nullius*, an empty land that is languishing in misuse. As such, this perspective does great disservice to the indigeneity of my own psyche, which of course, I realize, must naturally be that of a settler. The dynamic impulse to completely reform my own settler consciousness into a more indigenous way of being, which I have held through this entire work, is not really all that different from the impulse to reform an indigenous consciousness by assimilating it into a settler way of being. Psychologically, it is no more noble to try and kill the Settler in me than it is to try to "kill the Indian in the child" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

This work has often consisted of my discovering deeper levels of colonial instinct within myself; deeper and more subtle levels of the impulse to rehabilitate or convert or control. Here, I must acknowledge that another level has made itself apparent. I have become aware of my impulse to do violence to my own psyche, my own soul, and my own indigeneity, and I am aware that this impulse is grounded in a thought that what is already there (what is indigenous) is not "right". The difficult question arises: How does the de-colonizing and re-indigenizing dynamic operate when that which is indigenous is also colonial? For, in the final analysis, my indigeneity is found primarily in the ways that I am naturally a settler. How can this knowledge reckon with my feeling that I

"should not" settle, and that I "should" allow things to be as they are and express themselves in a pure and unaffected way?

I can sense in the words "pure and unaffected" some idealism, and I hear the echo of the meditating hermit. I have written a great deal on letting phenomena "be as they are"; on a subtle level I now realize that this itself was compensatory, and masked something I know to be true: I cannot relate to a phenomenon without affecting it, and without it affecting me. The latter part of that, the phenomenon's effect on me, I have been keenly aware of. Yet I have stubbornly maintained the fantasy that, if I am careful, I can have no effect; that I can pass undetected; that my presence as an observer will make no difference, or that my relat*ing* will not affect the network of relationships. But relationship is reciprocal. If I am willing to be affected, I must also be willing to affect. To pretend otherwise is to deny the *sine qua non* of relationship. Settling is a form of relationship. It can be one-sided and destructive, this is true (as when it manifests as colonizing); but so can any dynamic.

Is *shapeshifting*, on the other hand, relating? Or is shapeshifting, the very tool which I have relied on and put my trust into, a subtle way to subvert the possibility of authentic and reciprocal relationship?

2.6.3 Shapeshifting, Empathizing, Relating

Earlier I wrote about shapeshifting as a metaphor for empathy. I wrote that shapeshifting could serve as a symbol for the process of getting "inside" someone else's perspective; for seeing things their way, and for understanding them from the inside. I compared it to my chameleon-like approach to playwriting and songwriting, as well as the way I saw my approach to games. Being taught by the game's rules was, I suggested,

the same as understanding the game from its own perspective. This must now be questioned.

What has become apparent to me is that this notion of shapeshifting is somewhat narcissistic. It values my experience too highly, for it implies that I need to be able to understand from the other's perspective if I am to truly value it. It also implies that I have a right to try and do so, by whatever means necessary. It is an image from a dream that has guided me to this line of thought, and before I share it I want to say that I was initially quite hesitant to do so. This dream feels very precious to me, and putting it into the world has me feeling vulnerable as I write. I will not try to unpack the dream in its entirety, for it feels very important for me to leave as little a mark upon it as possible; I do not want to mess it up with my footprints, but I will respond to certain aspects of it.

My mother has suggested that I swim in a particular lake, and I am doing so. It is a cold, alpine lake in the Rocky Mountains. I have brought my towel into the water with me, and when I notice this I think it was a silly choice, since the towel will get wet. As I swim, I am telepathically describing my experience to a woman who is somewhere else—perhaps at home. I become aware of a current in the water, which I surrender to, and which moves me in a circular motion. I see something swimming towards me, and realize as it comes closer that it is a bear. I do not know whether it means me harm or is only coming to meet me, but I know that there is no hope of escape. I know that I must wait and see what it does. The bear looks at me.

I am drawn to value this dream as the crystallized outcome of this entire work; the purpose of the immersive process was to meet this bear. The mother, similar to the earthy

Inuit woman from a previous dream, guides my initial immersion in this situation. It appears to be, like this work, a submersion in a natural, receptive, and feminine process. The feeling tone of this dream suggests that, if I can remain calm and receptive, the bear will pose no threat to me. When I think of this dream I feel lucky to have had it; I feel grateful that I was able to meet a bear in a dream. And "meet" is the right word, for here there is no shapeshifting, merging, or assimilation. In place of any attempt to empathically understand the other's perspective, there is an awareness that I *cannot* understand: I do not know what the bear's intentions are. There is instead a receptivity and a meeting. The meeting takes place in a liminal space: Though both the bear and I can swim, a lake is not the natural element for either of us. We are meeting one another not in either of our homes, but in a third space. There is a moment of contact at the end, when the bear looks at me, that could not be achieved through shapeshifting or dissolving the presence of one into the other. There is resonance here with an image included at the beginning of this paper, which I will include again here as Figure 16.

Figure 16: A moment of contact, perhaps between Self and Other.

Taken as a whole, these images evoke for me the concept of *allyship*. The word "ally" is often evoked today by those who do not identify as members of a particular identity group, but are willing to support that group, or the individuals who comprise it. Ally comes from the Latin *alligo*, "to bind to". To ally two separate elements is to bind them together; crucially, to bind there must be a plurality. Two objects bound together must, necessarily, be separate unto themselves. Allyship is different from combining, or assimilating one way or the other, which is perhaps closer to "alloy" than "ally". An image that arises here is the two row wampum belt, which was used to represent a treaty between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch in 1613. The belt features two purple rows with a white row between. The rows represent "peaceful co-existence, sharing, and reciprocity,

in which neither party seeks to impose its ways on the other" (Horn-Miller, 2016, p. 35) The rows, as parallel lines, are mutually separate yet travel together.

My words throughout this work have frequently indicated an awareness that I must get in contact with my own position, my own subjective experience, and my own perspective, in order to speak honestly. I have often viewed this position particularly through the lens of being a Settler in Treaty 6 territory. From there I have sought relationship from my position to another. However, guided as it was by the metaphor of shapeshifting, *alloying* may be closer to the truth of my approach than allying. I have repeatedly tried to sublate—assimilate myself into—the work, rather than meeting it as a separate entity. Relating to the dream image above, I have tried to become one with the lake (and presumably drown) rather than swim in it. This new awareness demands a re-acknowledgement that one cannot know another's literal experience, even by acting-as or portraying them, or vicariously introspecting (Kohut**,** 1959), or trying to dissolve one's own presence into a different whole.

In a clinical context, Bernstein (2005) cites awareness of this as critical in truly being able to *witness* another person, particularly in the case of survivors of trauma. A clinician imagining that he or she understands the survivor's experience can be felt, by the survivor, as though they are being "objectified, analyzed, classified, and abandoned" (p. 154). As far as shapeshifting *as* empathy goes, Bernstein says "for the therapist to witness the patient's trauma, in my experience the therapist must shut down empathy – even the desire to be empathic" (p. 154).

It seems to me that shapeshifting may indeed be related to empathy as I have suggested; so, it may be empathy itself that is the sticking point here. Jung, in 1920,

wrote on empathy; synthesizing his own clinical experience with other sources, he said that "empathy presupposes a subjective attitude of confidence, or trustfulness towards the object. It is a readiness to meet the object halfway, a subjective assimilation that brings about a good understanding between subject and object, *or at least simulates it*" (1920/1971, p. 292, emphasis added). The trustfulness towards the object I think I have embodied, as seen in my willingness to serve and be affected by the game and the images that came through it. However, is it really trustfulness if I do not trust the object enough to affect it reciprocally? I am not sure that I have met the object halfway, as Jung describes; rather it seems that I have tried to disappear into it. I may have missed the mark on Jung's dictum on active imagination: "The position of the ego must be maintained as being of equal value to the counter-position of the unconscious, and vice versa" (Jung, 1916, par. 183). As for his idea that empathy "simulates" a good understanding between subject and object—what does Jung mean by these words? A longer quotation may help here:

> Empathy presupposes that the object is, as it were, empty, and seeks to imbue it
> with life. . . . As the essence of empathy is the projection of subjective contents, it
> follows that the preceding unconscious act must be the opposite—a neutralizing
> of the object that renders it inoperative. In this way the object is emptied, so to
> speak, robbed of its spontaneous activity, and thus made a suitable receptacle for
> subjective contents. . . . As a result of the unconscious act that precedes empathy,
> the sovereignty of the object is depotentiated, or rather it is overcompensated,
> because the subject immediately gains ascendancy over the object. (pp. 292-293)

I think this must be considered carefully. Empathy, according to Jung, responds to a situation in which the object has been a priori depotentiated by the subject. Jung does indicate that this depotentiatiating occurs unconsciously; it does not reflect any *conscious* intent to "empty" the object. However, I find I am reminded here of Suits' (1978) definition of *game*: "To play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and *where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity*" (p. 34, emphasis added). Read in this context, I see the activity referred to as empathizing, or projecting one's subjective contents into the object (shapeshifting); the rule that makes the activity possible here is the need to depotentiate the object; by depotentiating something it becomes possible to empathize with it. Empathy requires a depotentiated object. Empathy responds to an emptiness, a perceived vacuum in need of filling, and for phenomena to need to be filled they need first to be perceived as empty.

Shapeshifting empathy can be conceived of as an inversion of misappropriation, which also responds to a perceived emptiness; however, while misappropriation perceives the emptiness in the subject, shapeshifting empathy perceives it in the object. Neither embody a reciprocal relationship. I can once more reflect on the earlier discussion of *terra nullius*, in which I suggested that to have perceived a land as "free for the taking", one must not only erase the presence of the human inhabitants, but one must a priori consider the land itself to be emptied and take-able. For a person to even conceive of the conceptual right to "own" the land, the land must be already drained of spirit. That is the rule that makes the activity possible. Lest its significance be missed, I

will reiterate that the definition I am applying from Suits (1978), is the definition of *a game*.

I am not suggesting that empathy, in every instance, amounts to a game wherein one psychologically empties an object of its potential and spirit to feel oneself investing the object with life (in the form of one's subjective trust and confidence). However, I do think that the ease with which the form of the game (as defined by Suits, 1978) can be seen in the dynamics of empathy suggests a second look at one's own empathetic drives, especially if one is involved in the psychotherapy field. I have found great emphasis placed on empathy in the contemporary field; this emphasis has been wholly devoid of reflection on this shadow side of empathy, in which "the subject immediately gains ascendancy over the object" (Jung, 1920/1971, p. 293). As Bernstein points out, the therapist's empathy too often can leave a traumatized patient feeling "objectified, analyzed, classified, and abandoned" (2005, p. 154).

It is a leap, on the literal level, to draw a line of identity from a trauma survivor to a member of a group such as Canada's homeless Indigenous population, but on the symbolic and logical level the link is apparent. Throughout this work, I have described strong efforts on my part to rid myself of the notion that I might be able to "get into" another's experience and understand it. And yet this effort has been contradicted by my simultaneous emphasis on subjective understanding, empathy, and shapeshifting. I had not seen that the dynamics of settler consciousness, which I had so carefully tried to sidestep, were operative in the very core of my process. What is more, the colonial attitude that I have defined and criticized can be seen manifested in my own process of shapeshifting empathy, since empathy may spring from a need to heroically fill a

perceived emptiness (a *terra nullius*) with one's live-giving energies. This attitude symbolically treats the other as an adventurer treats the dungeon, and though my intent is not to loot the dungeon and kill the dragon within by fixing, converting, or controlling it, delving into it in the first place can still be disrespectful; it certainly demands a second look, and is, I think, still embedded within what I have called a colonial settler consciousness.

These insights call to mind Robert Bly's words, "the brighter the light, the darker the shadow" (1988, p. 1). Within my own self-righteous attempt to stand outside of the dynamics of settler colonialism, settler colonialism was itself indigenous. This work has revealed increasingly subtle forms of the settler instinct within me. Earlier I referenced my friend Hunter; I have often heard him use the term "shapeshifting forms of colonialism", and I think I understand better now what is meant by it. The colonial archetype, as an autonomous personality unto itself, resides deep within one's psyche, and reveals itself in an abundance of forms; forms which are not limited to those as easily identifiable as the Indian Residential Schools, but which can be present in the microcosm of the way one approaches a game, or sees another human being as in need of empathy, or sees an unsettled land as *terra nullius,* or even tries to colonize one's own psyche with an alien indigeneity.

I suggested earlier that the roots of the word indigenous, *indi* (in) and *gignere* (begotten), psychologically might be taken to mean "that which is begotten within itself", which seems to refer above all to an awareness of what is within, a dwelling within it, and allowing it to inform the position one stands in, in relation to what is without. If there is any moment in this work that has truly embodied the spirit of what I have been calling

indigeneity, it may be the image of floating in a lake, and looking from my own eyes to the eyes of a bear in a dream. Importantly, the image has nothing to do with race or culture, nothing to say about the relevance of historical injustice or the privilege of the dominant culture. It is simply a moment of looking to the other, knowing that the other's inner life may not be available to be known or understood, and meeting that other from a subjective position in a place of mutual trust and vulnerability.

2.6.4 Borderland

One way to approach this research might be to ask, what does it say about psyche? What is psyche expressing through the work? What needs or dynamics of psyche can be perceived in it? A place to start is that, in a general sense, the settler-indigenous dynamic can be seen as an extension of what Jung formulated originally as the problem of types: One is (more or less) extraverted, or oriented toward the object, while the other (more or less) introverted, or oriented toward the subject (Jung, 1920/1971). This is not adequate, though, since at bottom it fails to integrate the insight about the "positive primitive":

> The naïve primitive doesn't believe, he knows, because the inner experience rightly means as much to him as the outer. He adjusts his life—of necessity—to outer and inner *facts* which he does not—as we do—feel to be discontinuous. He lives in *one* world, whereas we live in only one half and merely believe in the other or not at all. (Jung, in a letter dated February 13, 1951; published 1976, p. 5)
>
> Deloria (2016) also endorses this insight. The question is more than a clash

between introversion and extraversion; it is closer to say it is both-and rather than either-or. I think my work is an expression of a collective dynamic—something happening

generally in the human psyche—and that is the dynamic of a return after separation; a return to (psychological and literal) nature. Bernstein (2005) posits an emerging psychic constellation, which he calls the *Borderland personality*:

> I have described the "Borderland personality" as someone who psychically straddles the split between the developed, rational mind and nature in the western psyche, and one who holds and carries the tension of that split and an emergent reconciliation of that split at one and the same time. The Borderland is a recent evolutionary dynamic that appears to be rapidly gaining momentum and liminality in the western ego. (p. 17)

A story has come to me that may help to colour this description in. In this story, the human race once existed as a part of nature. They were as all animals are in the wild, in that they did not see themselves as apart from nature. It could be said that they hardly saw themselves *as selves* at all, rather, they simply existed in a relational network of all beings. This was rarely peaceful, for nature could be harsh and difficult to get along with. Over the course of time, some humans began to develop in opposition to nature. They saw that they could establish themselves as autonomous and separate by bending the plant and animal kingdoms, as well as the elements, to their will. They could rise above nature. As they did so, they began to see nature as an enemy. They saw how dependent they had been on nature, and resented this. They began to believe that they could fulfill their own needs better than nature ever could, and they could even continue to develop better ways to satisfy their needs. When still they could not fulfill these needs, at least they had nobody to blame but themselves. This personal responsibility, and sense of self-

determination, was felt to be superior to dependence on nature. (What nature felt about all this business, they did not know—nobody thought to ask).

As generations passed, the ideas of the humans began to change. They saw that they had been callow to separate from nature in such a destructive way. The freedom had come at the price of a very important relationship; one that grounded them in themselves and served as a model for all other relationships. When they tried to reconnect with nature, however, they found that it was very difficult—in fact, sometimes it seemed like it might be too late. Irreversible damage seemed to have been done to the relationship. However, they were drawn to continue trying to make the connection anyway. They found that the connection was possible, but it was different. It could never be the same as it had been before they had separated. They were as differentiated adults returning to home are, for they were returning to nature now as new beings, and the separation could not be undone.

Colonialism itself, on the manifest literal level, has done a great deal of damage to many, and has had no shortage of victims. On a symbolic level, the qualities associated with colonialism and settler consciousness are neither inherently good nor inherently bad. Fixing, converting, controlling, exploring, changing, improving, and assimilating—all being versions of the desire to affect a phenomenon rather than solely remaining subject to its effect—all of these have their places in the psychic function of a human being, regardless of culture or race. There is a complex dynamic between the thing-in-itself (as an ideal) and its enactment in reality; between what it is "trying" to do, and what it does in reality. This pattern can also be seen in diverse phenomena such as religion, science, and the drive for progress: The greatness that is ascribed to them as ideal forms often

does not adequately acknowledge their negative effects. "The brighter the light, the darker the shadow" (Bly, 1988, p. 1). I have focused primarily on attending to and articulating the shadow side of colonialism in this work, because I see the repression and "forgetting" of this shadow side as being in need of serious compensatory attention if we are to reduce the unnecessary suffering caused by it. Light needs to be brought to the shadow. Light must also be found *in* the shadow; to understand the full depth of a phenomena, it is critical to perceive the luminous darkness of the black sun (Marlan, 2005). Throwing the colonial attitude out of the front door, while it may be momentarily politically advantageous, does no good psychologically *or* politically in the long run. As this work shows, it comes back again through the window. The conscious settler's task, therefore, is not to eliminate his or her inner colonial attitude, but to develop keen awareness and understanding of it, and give it expression in appropriate ways.

In my earlier discussion of *terra nullius* (nobody's land), I found that it was only a perspective which had already detached from the influence of nature that could see nature as something that could be owned by humans. It is my opinion that the dynamic of inner *terra nullius* is also at play in the identity politics movement, which has affected this work so heavily.

To explain this, I must address a different phenomenon: Many have declared that the earth has entered a new epoch, the *Anthropocene (*Working Group on the Anthropocene, 2017; *The Economist,* 2011; Owen, 2010). The concept of the Anthropocene is of an age in the earth's geological history during which human beings have been the main influence on it. The legitimacy of this announcement is debated in the scientific community (Meyer, 2018), but this is irrelevant to the current discussion

because the term itself has left its origins in geology, entering the mainstream media. The Anthropocene, in this sense, does not refer to the earth's substance but now refers to the Age of Humanity; an era dominated by people. Therefore I will not discuss the geological perspective of the Anthropocene; I will discuss rather the psychological fact of its emergence in the public realm. I think this may shine light on the issue of just how identity groups are able to be considered *the* fundamental determinants of an individual's life. Humanity has, to a significant extent, overcome the challenges to survival presented by nature. For most of this work, I have explored the shadow side of this development: That this *overcoming* is the result of a fundamentally oppositional stance taken *against* nature (and psychologically against phenomena in general); I have often called this stance a colonial attitude. There is a benevolent side to this overcoming as well, however, and one can observe it in trends like a plummeting infant mortality rate (Roser, 2018; United Nations, 2017) and dropping global undernourishment (Roser & Ritchie, 2018; World Bank, 2017). Furthermore, one can observe this benevolent side without erasing the fact that there are many people in the world that continue to endure brutal and catastrophic suffering, at times apparently as a direct result of the benevolent side's inability to include everybody. (This fact is what I felt the character Croak represented at first; "the one left orphaned in the cold by the capitalist city"). Ignoring and vilifying this progress, however, as one does when possessed by a desire for things to be as they were in an idealized and pre-colonized past (a lost Eden), lies in the shadow of the indigeneity archetype. Indigeneity must, of course, cast a shadow, though that fact has gone sorely unrecognized in this work thus far, as a result of my frequent one-sided anti-colonial stance. To understand a phenomena in depth, both sides must be appreciated; we cannot

pick and choose only the facets we like. Human consciousness is capable of holding both sides without collapsing into either.

If nature has been conquered, why, then, are objectively "successful" people—that is, people who have more opportunities than their ancestors, and far fewer immediate threats to their existence—why are they still unhappy? Why do they still feel oppressed? I suggest that it is because, having dominated nature, and in the absence of gods, humanity has become for the collective the main determinant of meaning, the main standard for its worth, and the main obstacle to its achievement. Having "withdrawn all the projections", the perceived cause of suffering falls to other humans: If suffering is not natural, nor divine, it seems it must be some other human being's fault. If one has forgotten our natural state, fantasizing an idealized paradise and taking the results of thousands of years of human progress for granted, then it only seems obvious that the changes humanity has made were for the worse. These changes have separated us from nature. Today, an objectively successful life as a creature meeting its basic needs is no longer meaningful; it is now expected that one must be a successful *human being*, measured against the standards of other human beings. And while human beings, from this perspective, are responsible for creating all of the problems and difficulties with which we live, they are also responsible for fixing them. In the Anthropocene Age, heaven, hell, earth, and all the angels and demons have all become collapsed into a single anthropocentric layer.

I have spent a great deal of time exploring how an individual can force a game to stand in for real life, and how real life can feel as though it is a game. I suggested that a game was an inadequate construct or container for these purposes, since a game is ultimately a thing created by humans; a magic circle apart from reality, which cannot

transcend the merely human. I now suggest the same inadequacy is present in a one-dimensional anthropocentric perspective. Both the anthropocentric perspective and a naïvely devotional attitude toward games inflate that which is human beyond its means; both draw magic circles, creating artificial rules with artificial value systems. Both can provide a sense of reward, punishment, agency, meaning, and safety for those who play within their rules. These rules and value systems, however, must be taken as the artifice they are, for to forget their artificial nature and mistake them for reality both overloads the artifice and cuts off the reality in which they are embedded. To unconsciously devote oneself either to the rules of a game or to the rules of an anthropocentric perspective is to try and live within one small and isolated circle apart from the vast relational network of reality.

3.0 Returning/Conclusion

Some dreams take a long time to unfold their meaning. Such is the case with one that I had very close to the beginning of the process. In it, I find it necessary to leave my piano behind to go travelling on foot through "Indian country". A Blackfoot woman lets me know that she will put a tarp over it, and watch over it while I am gone. I depart, still concerned that it will get wet.

The piano, for me, is a language I can speak almost as well as English. It comes naturally to me, and it always has. It is also related to the domain of the archetypal father, insofar as it was my father who gave me a piano when I was a child; symbolically, music is also the realm of pure logic. Music is math; music is order. For the duration of this research process I have left my piano behind as best I could, and I have traveled through Indian country. "It's Indian country all the way south," the Blackfoot woman in the

dream says, and indeed I did find the work brought me ever deeper, the southern border continually receding in front of me as I approached.

It was a second dream, which came after I finished several drafts of this paper, which gave the first dream some additional context. In it, a man is improvising piano music onstage, in front of an audience of appreciative listeners. They are in tune with him, and explode with applause when he returns to a musical theme that he had developed in an earlier part of the piece. I awoke from this dream thinking, "I got my piano back."

And so I have, for, as my strong desire to return to Pindus as a definitively heroic character indicates, I have in many ways emerged from Indian country. The dreams lend credence to the integrity of the journey: They suggest that I was not Playing Indian, or wearing a music festival headdress, but making a serious, considerate, and thoughtful exploration through something inner. But it is clear that I must return to what I have left behind.

Earlier drafts of this paper concluded with an adherence to the Indigenous methodologies with which I had set out. I quoted a lengthy passage from a Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* (2008) which indicated that, when working within an Indigenous methodology, it is unethical to try and isolate variables or restate insightful conclusions; in short it is unethical to tell the reader at the end of the story what it is they were "supposed" to learn. Rather, emphasis is placed on the autonomy of the reader (or listener) to pay attention to what resonated with them.

However, I now see that it is adherence to that which would be unethical at this point. The work has brought me back to my own Settler consciousness, not to a

continuing devotedness to the Indigenous methodologies which, though they have been meaningful guides along my path, are not mine. After the journey through "Indian country" I must return to my piano; I cannot stay where I do not belong. A conclusion written in a voice that is not mine would be false. What I want, at a deeper level than that of the Indigenous method of letting the listener take what they will, is to tell the reader what they were supposed to get, and to summarize what I think are the most important insights of this work. Below the layers of indigeneity that I have carefully passed through and related to is another bedrock of settler, and that bedrock is of course more indigenous than the indigeneity I have been working with for so long.

An image insists on being disclosed here: In New Zealand, there is a placed called The Bridge to Nowhere. The eponymous bridge crosses the Mangapurua Gorge, through which flows the Whanganui River (which, it may be recalled, is a legal ancestor of the Whanganui *iwi*). I arrived at the Bridge to Nowhere while on a kayak journey down this river. The bridge was built to a ghost settlement; land in this area was given to soldiers returning from the First World War. Despite the determination with which they set about clearing this land, the thick bush continually grew back. They were unable to maintain structures, grow crops, or bring much of anything out of this place. They were unable to settle it. The land would not allow them to settle it. This image says to me, in the context of this present work, that what is indigenous will out. As in, "the truth will out". And like the land around the Mangapurua Gorge, perhaps the psyche will ultimately reject anything false that attempts to settle it. Anyone who has tried to live with a serious lie for any length of time knows the truth of this. Only that which truly belongs can thrive without creating tremendous strain.

Sometimes that strain is necessary, though.

An outcome of having sunk deep enough into this work to reach a new sedimentary layer of my own Settler consciousness is that I can now, without feeling that I am betraying the work, attempt to apply what I have learned to the practice of psychotherapy. I have hardly spoken of the practice of psychotherapy in this work, occupied as I was with honouring and maintaining the un-extracted integrity of the inner images. The work's return to reality makes some things apparent. Primarily, I can see that just as I imposed ideas of indigeneity on myself to complete this work, I have at times imposed these same qualities on my work as a therapist. As I have one-sidedly rejected the scientific perspective, and notions of progress and goal-setting throughout this work, I have at times done the same in the consulting room. In seeing the dominant culture as one-sidedly "colonial", I have as a compensation made my practice one-sidedly "indigenous", forcing a dogmatic idea of "depth psychology" into the process; believing that, to be true, my work must be slow, receptive, and directionless; believing that decisions must be made by the unconscious, or not at all. When this has happened, it has totally unseated the ego from its (often necessary) position in the driver's seat. The desire for effectiveness has been ignored completely, viewed as a complex reaction generated by my (or the patient's) discomfort with not-knowing. I have distrusted my own desire to help a patient, thinking that a desire to help must indicate a heroic missionary perspective. I have often believed that the only way to help a patient is to *not* help, and in this way call their own self-healing function into action. There are times that I am sure that this has been correct; there are others that I am not sure about.

As was shown in this work, my commitment to the idea of relationship was paradoxically expressed as radical individualism. I would relate to anything and everything happening that was inner, but remained insulated against the other in the room. The personalities contacted in my transference dialogues took priority over the DM. I am not sure that I have exhibited the same solipsistic tendencies in therapy: The urgency of the therapeutic situation often calls me to relate fully to what is happening in the room. My instinctive posture, however, is more reserved.

Both aspects are necessary in analytical therapeutic work. Hillman (1965/1997) describes the stance of the analyst as having one foot in, and one foot out. The analyst must be present in the room as a full human being, but also be able to view it from outside, psychologically; perhaps from the (metaphorical) soul's perspective. The human and the psychological must be present together. I have undertaken this work, for the most part, with both feet out. Dedicated to only one part of Romanyshyn's (2013) view of "research with soul in mind", I left the human realm almost entirely behind; I come now at the end to "research with the human in mind".

It seems to be a common danger of depth psychology to drown in its own depths. Perhaps this is due to the fact that advocating for psyche and soul has been a compensatory movement against the dominant Western culture since Freud. Perhaps it has roots in the fact that Jung intentionally wrote very little practical advice for the psychotherapist. Depth or analytical psychologists often insist that the only tool of the therapist is their own differentiation, and though this may be true, it can be an opaque and impenetrable dictum. The importance for the psychotherapy discipline to join the human element with psychology is reiterated by Hillman (1975) again, who asserts that practice

and theory must be one and the same. Giegerich (2012) sees the necessity in *What Is Soul?* to ground what is predominantly a theoretical book with some words on actual practice. He identifies two opposite purposes of the (metaphorical) soul: "The need to be born into the world, to obtain a real empirical presence in life, to display itself", and, "the need of the soul's further-determination, the need to overcome and redefine itself" (p. 318). Both must be acknowledged and valued, the human and the soul. In the language of this paper, both the settler and the indigenous are necessary and one cannot triumph over the other, since they are essentially uroboric. The desire for indigenous dominance is an expression of its own settler shadow; the desire for settler dominance is an expression of its own indigeneity. Psychologically, what consciousness kicks out the front door, comes in again through the window.

If, as I suggested, what is indigenous "will out", growing back like the bush around Mangapurua Gorge, this does not mean that the psychotherapist need not be on his or her guard about unintentionally colonizing the patient with his or her views. Over an infinite timeline, perhaps all would work itself out, with the patient's psyche sorting what belonged from what did not, but existing on a limited timeline is precisely what makes human beings human. We have not totally conquered nature, for we die; we do not have the luxury of spending eternity developing—that may be the (metaphorical) soul's prerogative. And the concerns of the mortal human are just as valid as the concerns of the eternal soul. They are, in a way, the same concern, and though it is important to differentiate the perspectives, their sameness should not be forgotten either.

As at many points through this process, the overemphasis on certain aspects of my approach has allowed me to become conscious of them, and learn. Ideas, such as

shapeshifting, that had formed the foundation for my entire research process were found, in the end, to be contradictory to it. Like Croak, I had the "fungus" within me all along. And I feel that, like coyote, I have been undone in some respects by my own clever ways.

This transformation is very satisfying. I wanted my ideas, which on some level I knew to be inadequate, to be upended. I suggested early in this paper that the goal of *Dungeons & Dragons* was to tell the story that need to be told, and that sometimes failing the quest *is* that story. And it is the same with this research. I may have failed the quest on one level, but having learned to see more of the subtle biases and filters which transform my own perspective is to succeed in a way that could not have been predetermined by me. It is the story that needed to be told. As I wrote in my introduction, the results of this work are not limited to a single concise takeaway, but are implicitly present here, and here, and here.

I have often, during the course of this work, been tumbling down a path of ideas only to discover that Jerome Bernstein, Vine Deloria Jr., C. G. Jung, or some other has already been there. Rather than feeling lucky to be able to stand on the shoulders of giants, I have felt disappointed to find their trails intersecting mine. In these moments, I feel suddenly brought low: I have the sense that I have fallen behind the work rather than continuing to scout out the path from above. Despite my repeated emphasis on depth and relationship, there is a significant part of me that prefers flying free above to landing and embedding within. I have learned to accept the lowness, though, and sometimes even appreciate it. I see now that my desire to explore "lands previously unknown" is another shifted-shape that the settler archetype can shape-shift into for me; it is a longing for *terra nullius*.

Early on, I raised the question of whether I had the right to approach issues of indigeneity. This was joined with the question of whether I had the right to portray the character Croak. These questions are borne out of the fact that it is not uncommon, at the time in which I am writing, for people to be told they have no right to hold an opinion on issues which concern identity groups to which they do not belong. Croak, as a symbolic analogue of an urban Indigenous homeless addict, shares only one of the most commonly referenced identity group markings with me—we are both male. I have been a good student of identity politics through this work, repeatedly checking my ideas (and my "privilege") against its popular tenets. This work, however, has developed for me the understanding that the level of interpretation on which identity groups are the prime authority and determinant is inadequate. This is because it is completely literal. It takes the rules of an anthropocentric perspective, within which human society is the sole oppressor, savior, and determinant of meaning, to be the rules of reality. I find it far too reductive to collapse the complexity of me and Croak into our respective identity groups; that would ignore the very significant reality that Croak was an expression of images which emerged from my psyche; that would ignore any real knowledge I might have of what it is to be marginalized, and any real suffering I may have endured in my life, in favour of blindly assigning an abstract notion of privilege that I have been accorded as a member of my identity groups. My work shows that I have approached the issues of misappropriation, marginalization, and privilege with sincerity and humility; I think the work stands as a strong argument in favour of general artistic freedom, as well as a model of approaching such issues with sensitivity and integrity. It is my opinion, at the end of

the work, that collapsing complex relations into the single layer of identity groups reduces all involved.

I began this paper with a self-location, the purpose of which was to situate myself as a writer, making my biases explicit as far as was possible, and aiding the reader's understanding of the context in which this work was brought forth. A self-location is indicated as an important component of research work within both phenomenological (Romanyshyn, 2013) and Indigenous approaches (Kovach, 2012). I identified my background as a Settler Canadian, writing from Treaty 6 land, with strong connections to narrative storytelling as well as gaming. These sections segued into my description of my research methods, which involved the game *Dungeons & Dragons Fifth Edition* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014), as well as alchemical hermeneutical method (Romanyshyn, 2013), heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990), and eventually an exploration of the work's affinity with Indigenous ways of knowing and approaches to research (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2012; Deloria, 2016). This introductory section ended with a description of the approach to *D&D* that would be taken and an initial exploration of the meaning of games, gaming, and game-play.

In the description of alchemical hermeneutical method, I indicated ten qualities of research (given by Romanyshyn, 2013) that I would strive to embody throughout the work. The first is that my research would be *complex-oriented*. This has been seen in my use of transference dialogues to further and deepen the work, as well as my own focus on which of my own complexes have been involved in the work's creation. The second is that my research would be *creative*, particularly in its freedom to continually develop and change in relationship with the topic. I think this has come about most clearly through the

work's having been penetrated by complicated ideas about settler consciousness and indigeneity, which of course were not an explicit part of the original research question. The question itself, "how will I experience my engagement with the game of Dungeons & Dragons, in paying attention both to how it affects me on the conscious level, and to what the unconscious reveals?" intentionally fostered this creativity by remaining open to the movement of the work. The fourth quality is that my research has been *imaginative* insofar as have I integrated what came from the imagination. My feeling and intuitive functions frequently led the way, informing me that some concept or image was inadequate, or needed to be considered longer to reveal its depth. The fifth quality is that I have approached research and writing *aesthetically*, seeking beauty, rhythm, and coherence. In this regard, I have treated many aesthetic forms, such as drawing, music, and meaningful action, as text. I have also kept an ear attuned to the rhythm of the text, with the belief that a properly crafted sentence will communicate meaning all the better. The fifth quality has been a consistently *hieratic* orientation towards the work, as I have worked to see its symbolism, that is, what the work points to beyond its manifest or surface nature. The sixth quality indicated was a *spiritual* approach to research, allowing the research to transform me as I worked. The seventh quality is that I have brought an *ethical* sense to my research, insofar as I have felt and valued the works' responsibility to others, to myself, and to those images which have emerged and demanded to be related to and represented faithfully. I have adhered to the ethics of my profession, as well as my role as a researcher. I have aspired to adhere to the popular ethics of identity politics, and though I have found wisdom in that pursuit, my ethical obligation to the truth as it has been revealed through the work has proven stronger. The eighth quality was an approach

that treated research as *an-amnesis*, or an un-forgetting. This has been realized through a repeated turn towards reflecting the work back on itself, allowing what it has said about itself to continually deepen. This is how the research has attended to its own shadow, which it could not have found its own meaning without doing. The ninth quality was to treat research as *re-creation*, that is, as engaged in a continual and ongoing process of re-creating itself. This has led to many points at which I was drawn to revise the entire paper, beginning seemingly all over again from a new perspective. Though I did this sometimes reluctantly, it was necessary in order to keep the work from stagnating. Finally, the tenth quality was that my research was *erotic*, that is, lovingly engaged with. I committed to following the research wherever it took me, and this often brought me toward ideas and topics that my ego resisted. I did not always want to hear what the work seemed to be saying to me, but I was committed to follow it and continue bringing it forth.

The main body of the paper alternated between sharing the narrative of the Pindus-on-Isles campaign, and my reflections and explorations that were generated by, in, and around the campaign. As I described how Croak, the street-dwelling Drow elf made his way through a world of underground crime and imprisoned nature, I wove in the themes and ideas that became relevant. Settler consciousness, colonialism, and indigeneity were the primary themes that asserted themselves through the campaign as well as my dream work and active imagination. I undertook a search for what was "indigenous" in me; which rests for now essentially where it began, with the knowledge that being a settler is *precisely* what is indigenous to my psyche. Though that information was stated in the chapter on self-location at the beginning of this paper, the return to it at

the end of the Pindus narrative brought a much deeper and nuanced understanding. This is particularly true in regard to the multiplicity of forms that colonial consciousness can take, even in regard to itself. I had been striving to de-colonize my own psyche, but my method was, in essence, trying to strip it of what was indigenous to it and colonize it with something else.

Throughout the body of this paper, the question of how indigeneity and settler consciousness relate to gaming was ever in the background. At last the two threads seemed to join together. I suggested that games provide a semblance of embeddedness in relationship, through the creation of a completely artificial space called the magic circle, and the cultivation of a lusory attitude with which to enter it. The related world within the circle, in contrast to the reality on the outside of it, is comprehensible to human consciousness. The rules are known; that which is up to chance is explicitly so; actions have definite and clear consequences. Being within this circle can, at times, feel something akin to living within a world saturated with inherent meaning, which is the way a consciousness separated from nature might perceive the psychic situation of an "indigenous" consciousness, or a consciousness that is unmediated, uncolonized, or unsettled. Crucially, the experience within a game's magic circle is of a significantly different magnitude than the experience of relatedness to the external universe. This is due to the fact that the game is always designed by a human, and therefore remains within the realm of the human, whereas the external world (nature) is "designed" by itself, or by some super-human process (natural selection, for instance).

Early in this paper I wrote that gaming had, at some point in my life, filled a psychological hole or gap. Exploration revealed that it has done this in two main ways,

the first being the way a game can offer a sense of immersion in a comprehensible network of relationships. The second is related to this, since this sense of immersion, being only a simulation, offers a sense of safety, and therefore the potential to express one's fullest capabilities within the frame of the game. Levels of intensity far beyond the pale of everyday social behaviour are acceptable, and even expected, within a game's magic circle; we need only look at major league sports to confirm this. Learning this about games and my relationship to them has helped me to contextualize and relate to them in a more mature and conscious way. Some insights about the nature of gaming-related psychiatric disorders were drawn from this.

Post-game reflection was occupied with the ways in which the entire research project had been subject to its colonial underpinnings, or my own "settler indigeneity". I explored the possible meaning of a drive to return to the Pindus-on-Isles world as a definitively heroic figure. I investigated the previously unseen connections between my concept of shapeshifting empathy and *terra nullius*, or, the settler's unconscious attitude to a world he or she sees as empty or devoid of spirit. Finally, I grounded the insights gained, about the deep relationship between indigenous and settler, in reality. I observed how I had served one principle at the expense of the other in this work and in my psychotherapy practice. I suggested that this might be a significant part of depth psychology's own shadow; as a counter-culture movement in service of soul it may instinctively try to wipe out the necessary influence of the settler, or, the concerns of the ego in opposition to its own human nature.

The last movement of this work was to uncover a connection between gaming and the identity politics perspective. I suggested that identity politics was the product of a

too-literal and one-dimensional relationship with reality, one which takes human society as the sole determinant of meaning for individual human beings. Calling this an anthropocentric perspective, I have argued that it is inadequate, being separated from a vast relational reality; it denies the relevance of countless other factors, collapsing man, gods, and nature into a single, small, and isolated magic circle.

This work has come about at a time in which the relationship between humanity and the nature which makes us is becoming increasingly unclear; detached, disjointed, and deconstructed. Games offer a magic circle which has the illusion of protecting against those qualities, and in which all relationships are explicit and comprehensible. It is far more challenging to commit to living in the complexity of innumerable dynamic relationships and infinite possibilities that is the real world; it is also more fully human.

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Appendix A

Written Understanding for Research Process

This document is to outline the process which Joel Crichton and Darren Steele agree to complete as research for Mr. Crichton's thesis paper, for his Master in Psychotherapy & Spirituality degree. It will serve as documentation of informed consent.

The research question being investigated by Mr. Crichton is: <u>How will I experience my engagement with the game of Dungeons & Dragons, in paying attention both to how it affects me on the conscious level, and to what the unconscious reveals?</u> The process outlined below is designed to facilitate Mr. Crichton's own depth exploration of his experience. This exploration, done without Mr. Steele present, may involve writing, art-making, analysis of dialogue and content as data, or any other method that is indicated by the process. This exploratory work will not endanger the participants in any way, including their right to confidentiality and anonymity.

The parties agree to the following:

Process:

1. We will complete, together, no less than twelve ninety-minute sessions of the game Dungeons & Dragons. These will occur between September 2017 and January 2018.

2. For these sessions, Mr. Steele will serve as the Dungeon Master, with all that he or she interprets this role to entail.

3. For these sessions, Mr. Crichton will serve as the sole player, with all that he or she interprets this role to entail.

4. It is understood that this process is for the purpose of research. While Mr. Steele is aware of the general outline of the work, it is understood that he or she will only be made aware of any specifics of the work, as it progresses, at Mr. Crichton's discretion.

5. Mr. Steele will not be intentionally deceived as far as the nature of the research is concerned.

6. The research process is considered to begin as of the signing of this document, and will end once the thesis paper has been submitted and passed.

Use of Creative Content

7. Mr. Crichton is granted license, free of charge, to freely reproduce any and all creative content generated in this process as part of the thesis paper. This includes elements of narrative, character, setting, and actual transcribed dialogue that emerge as part of the gameplay. This also includes any communication between Mr. Crichton and Mr. Steele, related to the game and its elements, that takes place outside of the actual game sessions, including written, telephone, and online forms of communication.

8. The creative contents are understood to be the intellectual property of Mr. Steele.

9. Mr. Steele may opt out of this project at any time, withdrawing his or her own creative contributions, with no penalty. This includes all the elements named above that are generated by him or her.

10. The play sessions will be audio recorded. This audio will be kept by Mr. Crichton until the completion of the research process. It will be made available to Mr. Steele at his request.

Confidentiality/Use of Data

11. Until Mr. Crichton's thesis has passed, the audio recordings will not be made public in any way. The recordings are meant to exist as an archive while the research is ongoing, to assist both Mr. Crichton and Mr. Steele in their ongoing preparation and writing.

12. Once Mr. Crichton's thesis paper has been passed, and provided both parties agree it is in the best interest of themselves, each other, and the work, it is permissible for the audio recordings to be developed into a form of public media or art, such as a podcast. The specifics of this will require an additional agreement, to be collaboratively written by both parties.

13. Mr. Steele will not be identified by name or any other means in the research paper, or any presentations or articles relating to this process, without further consultation. If Mr. Steele wishes to waive this right to anonymity and confidentiality, a new written agreement may be collaboratively created to handle the issue.

Potential Benefits/Risks

14. Potential benefits to participants in this process are:

    o The opportunity to develop and refine skills related to the role of a Dungeon Master, particularly in a duet configuration.

    o The opportunity to express creative impulses in a safe environment.

    o There is a potential for use of the recorded sessions in other projects, as described in #12 above.

15. Potential risks to participants in this process are:

- o Interpersonal conflict between participants.

- o Stress as a result of needing to prepare adequately for each session.

- o Stress as a result of participating in a collaborative creative storytelling process (the game itself).

16. Should any concerns arise related to the process, methods, or content, the participant will be connected with community mental health resources.

17. Any interpersonal conflict between participants may be dealt with through direct verbal communication. In the case of a conflict that is unable to be resolved in this manner, a neutral third party trained in interpersonal communication may be brought in, at Mr. Crichton's expense.

18. Mr. Steele is invited to contact Mr. Crichton's thesis supervisor, or department chair, to discuss any concerns related to the above.

Contact

19. Mr. Crichton's telephone number is [omitted], and his email address is [omitted].

20. Mr. Crichton's thesis supervisor is Dr. Evangeline Rand. Her telephone number is [omitted], and her email address is [omitted].

21. The department chair of St. Stephen's College is Ara Parker. Her telephone number is [omitted] and her email address is [omitted].

Other

22. Mr. Crichton bears the responsibility of arranging the space in which to play, as well as the audio recording.

23. The schedule for the sessions will be developed collaboratively, by both parties.

24. It is understood that, during a game session, both parties will make reasonable efforts to curtail outside distraction.

25. It is understood that there will be no formal compensation, monetary or otherwise, for Mr. Steele's services.

We, the undersigned, have read the above and agree to the terms and conditions indicated.

_____ _____

Signature **Date**

_____

Name (Print)

_____ _____

Signature **Date**

_____

Name (Print)

Appendix B

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

Croak
CHARACTER NAME

Druid	Urchin	Joel
CLASS & LEVEL	BACKGROUND	PLAYER NAME
Drow Elf	Chaotic Neutral	
RACE	ALIGNMENT	EXPERIENCE POINTS

STRENGTH
12
+1

DEXTERITY
16
+3

CONSTITUTION
13
+1

INTELLIGENCE
7
-2

WISDOM
14
+2

CHARISMA
6
-2

INSPIRATION

+2 PROFICIENCY BONUS

SAVING THROWS
- ○ 1 Strength
- ○ 3 Dexterity
- ○ 1 Constitution
- ◉ 0 Intelligence
- ◉ 4 Wisdom
- ○ -2 Charisma

SKILLS
- ○ 3 Acrobatics (Dex)
- ◉ 4 Animal Handling (Wis)
- ○ -2 Arcana (Int)
- ○ 1 Athletics (Str)
- ○ -2 Deception (Cha)
- ○ -2 History (Int)
- ○ 2 Insight (Wis)
- ○ -2 Intimidation (Cha)
- ○ -2 Investigation (Int)
- ○ 2 Medicine (Wis)
- ○ -2 Nature (Int)
- ◉ 4 Perception (Wis)
- ○ -2 Performance (Cha)
- ○ -2 Persuasion (Cha)
- ○ -2 Religion (Int)
- ○ 3 Sleight of Hand (Dex)
- ○ 3 Stealth (Dex)
- ◉ 4 Survival (Wis)

14 PASSIVE WISDOM (PERCEPTION)

OTHER PROFICIENCIES & LANGUAGES
Common, Elvish, Druidic
Rapiers, short swords, hand crossbows
Clubs, daggers, darts, javelins, maces,
quarterstaves, scimitars, sickles, slings,
spears
Light, medium armour
Shields (no metal)
Herbalism kit
Thieves' tools

16 ARMOR CLASS

+3 INITIATIVE

30 SPEED

Hit Point Maximum 36
36
CURRENT HIT POINTS

TEMPORARY HIT POINTS

Total
3d8
HIT DICE

SUCCESSES ○○○
FAILURES ○○○
DEATH SAVES

ATTACKS & SPELLCASTING

NAME	ATK BONUS	DAMAGE/TYPE
Scimitar	+5	1d6+3 Slashing
Scimitar	+5	1d6+3 Slashing
Hammer	+3	1d4+3 Bludgeoning

EQUIPMENT
Rawhide bracer
Leather armour
Blue book

PERSONALITY TRAITS
I sleep with my back to the wall,
clutching all I own.
Anybody nice to me is hiding evil intent.

IDEALS
I help the people who help
me--that's what keeps us alive.

BONDS
I owe a bond I can never repay to
the person who took pity on me.

FLAWS
People who can't take care of
themselves get what they deserve.

FEATURES & TRAITS
Darkvision 120ft
Fey Ancestry (adv vs charm, no
magic sleep)
Trance
Sunlight Sensitivity
City Secrets

Combat Wild Shape (2/day)
Bonus action to transform
Expend one spell slot for 1d8 hp
(per level of spell slot) (bonus
action)

Faerie Fire - 1/day