

**Mentorship as Co-Created Relational Learning Alongside Trans and Non-binary
Young Adults: A Visual Narrative Inquiry**

by

Michelle Mary Anne Lavoie

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ABSTRACT

For trans and non-binary young adults, impoverished social support hampers positive identity formation and can have lifelong consequences. Mentorship may provide a platform to voice often silenced stories and counter hegemonic narratives such as hetero- and cisnormativity. Despite its potential, there is a paucity of research on mentorship as social support for trans and non-binary young adults. The purpose of this research is to inquire into the experience of mentorship provided to trans and non-binary young adults. There are four research purposes:

- 1) Understand the experience of mentorship provided to trans and non-binary young adults;
- 2) Attend to mentorship as a co-created identity formation and asset-building process;
- 3) Understand trans, non-binary, and queer intergenerational learning experiences, and;
- 4) Understand the tensions and possibilities with narrative inquiry to develop new theoretical perspectives. It is important to attend to mentorship as a life making experience that happens in dynamic interactions and in often conflicting constructions of identity, agency, and resistance.

I have engaged in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), a relational methodology, to understand mentorship because relational learning is tacit to both. I have created mentorship opportunities within this study using monthly sessions in a community printmaking studio to create artwork to deepen reflections on experience. I have used my expertise as an artist, post-secondary art instructor, and queer community activist to facilitate these sessions. This study has been conducted in informal settings over two years in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. I have used purposive sampling to recruit three trans and non-binary young adults who have engaged in trans and non-binary and/or queer programs and could speak to mentorship experiences. This research addresses a paucity of adult educational scholarship on arts-based

mentorship to support trans and non-binary young adults, who often do not feel safe or fully included in formal educational environments. Significantly, this research demonstrates how trans and non-binary young adults transform mentorship into “relational assets” (Sadowski, Chow, & Scanlon, 2009); abilities, skills, and resources co-created in relationship that foster a sense of connectedness to self and others. These trans and non-binary young adults mobilized artmaking to make sense of experience, combat social isolation, and build communities. These findings can be used to formalize trans and non-binary mentorship programs, resources, and services in public schools, universities, and community agencies. Additionally, this research highlights how theory, ground in daily experience, can be utilized as a practical tool to negotiate complex lives.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Michelle Mary Anne Lavoie. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE RELATIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF LGBTTQ (LESBIAN, GAY, BI-SEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, TWO-SPIRIT, AND QUEER) YOUNG ADULTS”, No. Pro00079772, on MARCH 21st, 2018.

Contribution and Collaborations:

This thesis is an original work by Michelle Mary Anne Lavoie. Three papers have been written for publication from this dissertation. They include the following:

Chapter 7: Contemplating Framing: Unpacking the Possibilities of Printmaking in Narrative

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Chapter 9: Building Communities of Difference: The Importance of Identity and World Making for Trans Young Adults.

Lavoie, M. (in review). Building communities of difference: The importance of identity and world making for Trans young adults. *International Journal for Trans Health*, 00(0), 1-20.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beautiful and brilliant partner and wife Dr. Maxi Miciak. You help me see the stars and inspire me to work every day to reach for them. You are my ground and my morning star. I am so thankful for our journey that we make every day by walking it together. I am eternally grateful for your love and support in our shared every day and in this too.

I also dedicate this work to my mom and dad. Their stories and my memories of our shared lives light my way each and every day. For all our good times, and for all the love we shared, I thank them. I hold them both close to my heart and their stories continue to teach me every day.

For my mom, Rita who loved me fiercely and supported me always, I dedicate this work to her. It is a work about care-filled, loving presence, and walking alongside, all of which she taught me every day in every moment we shared. She would always say, “we’ll do it together” and we always did. She taught me through her willpower, her tenacity, and her deep abiding love.

For my dad, Lawrence who taught me to think creatively and always supported my art and artistry, because he wanted me to be all I could be, this is for him. He taught me to think *with* his stories and through his strength, his intelligence, and his quiet loving presence.

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I wish to express my thanks to Max, Espen, and Adebayo for sharing their time and their teaching in this work. From each of you, I learned so much; without you, this work would not have been possible. From Max, I learned about world-travelling; Max seems to effortlessly walk between worlds. From Espen, I learned to travel through metaphorical borderland spaces by finding new ways to negotiate silences and absences to forge alternate paths we could walk together. From Adebayo, I learned to wait, not rush to judgements, to stand in patience and in uncertainty, and to extend my care with hope to continue making a path by walking it together.

An enormous thank you to my supervisors Dr. Vera Caine and Dr. Kristopher Wells. My deep gratitude to Vera for walking alongside me with care-filled attention every step of the way. Thank you, Vera, for demonstrating in our every interaction how to live research with heart. Kris, thank you also, for your insights, critique, and for turning things upside-down so I could see and respond to my blind spots. Thanks for standing by me and supporting me through it all.

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LIST OF PLATES

- 4.1. Artist: Adebayo. *Untitled I*(the Hug#1), Woodblock Print on Paper p. 169
- 4.2. Artist: Adebayo. *Untitled I*(the Hug#2), Woodblock Print on Paper p. 169
- 4.3. Photographer: Michelle. *Pride is Love Exhibition*, Photograph p. 170
- 4.4. Photographer: Michelle. *Pride is Love Exhibition*, Photograph p. 170
- 4.5. Artist: Adebayo. *Long Road to Peace*, Poster p. 171
- 4.6. Photographer: Michelle. *Re-Imaging Normal Exhibition*, Photograph p. 172
- 4.7. Photographer: Michelle. *Re-Imaging Normal Exhibition*, Photograph p. 172
- 4.8. Artist: Adebayo. *Untitled I*(*City Lights*), Woodblock Print on Paper p. 173
- 4.9. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP, Photograph p. 174
- 4.10. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP, Photograph p. 174
- 4.11. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP, Photograph p. 174
- 4.12. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP, Photograph p. 174
- 4.13. Artist: Adebayo. *WAIT*, Linocut Print on Paper p. 175
- 4.14. Artist: Adebayo. *WAIT*, Linocut Print on Fabric p. 175
- 4.15. Artist: Michelle, *Two Sides of the Same Hand*, Linocut Print on Fabric p. 176
- 4.16. Artist: Michelle. *Africa*, Linocut Print on Paper p. 176
- 4.17. Artist: Michelle. *Resist*, Linocut Print on Paper p. 176
- 4.18. Artist: Adebayo. *Trans Africa*, Linocut Print on Fabric p. 177
- 4.19. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP p. 177
- 4.20. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP p. 177
- 4.21. Artist: Adebayo. *Assorted printed shirts*, Linocut Print on Fabric p. 177
- 4.22. Artist: Adebayo. *RaricaNow*, Linocut Print on Fabric p. 178

4.23. Artist: Adebayo. <i>RaricaNow</i> , Linocut Print on Fabric	p. 178
4.24. Artist: Adebayo. <i>RaricaNow</i> , Linocut Print on Fabric	p. 178
5.1. Artist: Espen. <i>Untitled (Jellyfish)</i> , Woodblock Print on Paper	p. 227
5.2. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP	p. 227
5.3. Photographer: Michelle. Screen for Printing at SNAP	p. 229
5.4. Artist: Espen. <i>Untitled (Moth)</i> , Screen Print on Paper	p. 229
5.5. Photographer: Michelle. <i>Pride is Love Exhibition</i> , Photograph	p. 231
5.6. Photographer: Michelle. <i>Pride is Love Exhibition</i> , Photograph	p. 231
5.7. Photographer: Michelle. <i>Re-Imaging Normal Exhibition</i> , Photograph	p. 233
5.8. <i>Re-Imaging Normal Exhibition</i> Interpretive Guide	p. 236
5.9. Galleries West Review of <i>Re-Imaging Normal Exhibition</i>	p. 236
5.10. Response to <i>Re-Imaging Normal Exhibition</i>	p. 238
5.11. Artist: Espen. <i>Untitled (Mask)</i> , Digital Image	p. 242
5.12. Artist: Michelle. <i>Untitled (Mask)</i> , Digital Image	p. 257
5.13. Artist: Michelle. <i>Untitled 1 (Camouflage 1)</i> , Digital Image	p. 258
5.14. Artist: Michelle. <i>Untitled 2 (Camouflage 2)</i> , Digital Image	p. 259
5.15. Artist: Michelle. <i>Untitled 3 (Camouflage 3)</i> , Digital Image	p. 260
5.16. Artist: Michelle. <i>Untitled 4 (Camouflage 4)</i> , Digital Image	p. 261
5.17. Artist: Michelle. <i>Untitled 1 (Camouflage Hand 1)</i> , Digital Image	p. 262
5.18. Artist: Michelle. <i>Untitled 2 (Camouflage Hand 2)</i> , Digital Image	p. 262
5.19. Artist: Michelle. <i>Untitled (Barriers)</i> , Digital Image	p. 264
5.20. Artist: Espen. <i>Untitled 1 (Espen's Response)</i> , Digital Image & Paint	p. 268
5.21. Artist: Michelle. <i>Visualizing Barriers 1</i> , Digital Image	p. 270

5.22. Artist: Michelle. <i>Visualizing Barriers 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 271
5.23. Artist: Michelle. <i>Visualizing Barriers 3</i> , Digital Image	p. 272
5.24. Artist: Michelle. <i>Visualizing Barriers 4</i> , Digital Image	p. 273
5.25. Artist: Michelle. <i>Names I've Been Called</i> , Digital Image	p. 275
5.26. Artist: Michelle. <i>These Are Not My Names 1</i> , Digital Image	p. 276
5.27. Artist: Michelle. <i>These Are Not My Names 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 277
5.28. Artist: Michelle. <i>These Names I'll Keep</i> , Digital Image	p. 278
5.29. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playful 1</i> , Digital Image	p. 279
5.30. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playful 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 280
5.31. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playful 3</i> , Digital Image	p. 281
5.32. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shared Sketches</i> , Pen and Ink	p. 282
5.33. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shared Sketches</i> , Ink and Watercolour Pencil	p. 283
5.34. Artist: Espen. <i>Shared Sketches</i> , Pencil and Watercolour	p. 284
5.35. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shared Sketches</i> , Pencil	p. 285
5.36. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shared Sketches</i> , Pencil	p. 285
5.37. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shared Sketches</i> , Pencil	p. 286
5.38. Photographer: Michelle. <i>Espen Mentoring Lighting Techniques</i> , Photograph	p. 287
5.39. Photographer: Michelle. Carving Linocut Plates at SNAP	p. 288
5.40. Photographer: Michelle. Carving Linocut Plates at SNAP	p. 288
5.41. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP	p. 292
5.42. Artist: Espen. <i>Jack</i> , Linocut Print on Fabric	p. 293
5.43. Artist: Espen. <i>Jack</i> , Linocut Print on Paper	p. 293
5.44. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds</i> , Linocut Print on Paper	p. 313

5.45. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 1</i> , Digital Image	p. 316
5.46. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 317
5.47. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 3</i> , Digital Image	p. 317
5.48. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 4</i> , Digital Image	p. 318
5.49. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 5</i> , Digital Image	p. 318
5.50. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 6</i> , Digital Image	p. 319
5.51. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 7</i> , Digital Image	p. 320
5.52. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 8</i> , Digital Image	p. 320
5.53. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 9</i> , Digital Image	p. 321
5.54. Artist: Michelle. <i>Shifting Grounds 10</i> , Digital Image	p. 321
5.55. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 1</i> , Digital Image	p. 325
5.56. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 326
5.57. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 3</i> , Digital Image	p. 327
5.58. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 4</i> , Digital Image	p. 327
5.59. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 5</i> , Digital Image	p. 328
5.60. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 6</i> , Digital Image	p. 329
5.61. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 7</i> , Digital Image	p. 330
5.62. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 8</i> , Digital Image	p. 330
5.63. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 9</i> , Digital Image	p. 331
5.64. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 10</i> , Digital Image	p. 331
5.65. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 11</i> , Digital Image	p. 332
5.66. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 12</i> , Digital Image	p. 332
5.67. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 13</i> , Digital Image	p. 333

5.68. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 14</i> , Digital Image	p. 334
5.69. Artist: Michelle. <i>Playing Chess 15</i> , Digital Image	p. 334
5.70. Artist: Michelle. <i>Tactile Expressions 1</i> , Digital Image	p. 335
5.71. Artist: Michelle. <i>Tactile Expressions 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 336
5.72. Artist: Michelle. <i>Tactile Expressions 3</i> , Digital Image	p. 337
5.73. Artist: Michelle. <i>Tactile Expressions 4</i> , Digital Image	p. 338
5.74. Artist: Michelle. <i>Tactile Expressions 5</i> , Digital Image	p. 338
5.75. Artist: Michelle. <i>Dancing the Static 1</i> , Digital Image	p. 339
5.76. Artist: Michelle. <i>Dancing the Static 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 340
5.77. Artist: Michelle. <i>Dancing the Static 3</i> , Digital Image	p. 341
5.78. Artist: Michelle. <i>Focusing 1</i> , Digital Image	p. 345
5.79. Artist: Michelle. <i>Focusing 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 349
5.80. Artist: Michelle. <i>Focusing 3</i> , Digital Image	p. 350
5.81. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP	p. 353
5.82. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP	p. 357
5.83. Photographer: Michelle. Printing at SNAP	p. 358
5.84. Photographer: Michelle. Linocutting at SNAP	p. 360
5.85. Photographer: Michelle. Linocutting at SNAP	p. 361
5.86. Photographer: Michelle. Linocutting at SNAP	p. 362
5.87. Artist: Michelle. <i>Espen Re-Imaging Beauty</i> , Digital Image	p. 365
5.88. Artist: Michelle. <i>Espen Re-Imaging Beauty 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 367
5.89. Artist: Michelle. <i>Espen Re-Imaging Beauty 3</i> , Digital Image	p. 369
5.90. Artist: Michelle. <i>Returning to Joy 1</i> , Digital Image	p. 371

5.91. Artist: Michelle. <i>Returning to Joy 2</i> , Digital Image	p. 375
6.1. Artist: Max. <i>Portrait 1 & Portrait 2</i> , Painting	p. 379
6.2. Artist: Michelle. <i>The Gift 1</i> . Linocut on Paper	p. 382
6.3. Artist: Michelle. <i>The Gift 2</i> . Linocut on Paper	p. 383
6.4. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled</i> . Assorted Linocut Plates	p. 388
6.5. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (Blue Dog)</i> , Painting	p. 390
6.6. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (the Figure in a Flame)</i> . Linocut Print on Fabric	p. 391
6.7. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (What Should I Think?)</i> . Linocut Print on Fabric	p. 395
6.8. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (the Figure in a Flame # 2)</i> . Linocut Print on Fabric	p. 396
6.9. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (Protect Water)</i> . Linocut Print on Paper	p. 398
6.10. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (Protect Water)</i> . Linocut Print on Paper and Fabric	p. 399
6.11. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (the Figure in a Flame # 3)</i> . Linocut Print on Fabric	p. 411
6.12. Artist: Max. <i>Weeds are Resilient</i> . Button	p. 412
6.13. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled</i> . Assorted Buttons	p. 413
6.14. Unknown Artists <i>Untitled</i> . Assorted Buttons	p. 413
6.15. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (Portrait)</i> . Painting	p. 426
6.16. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (Green Portrait)</i> . Painting	p. 427
6.17. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled</i> . Assorted Prints on Fabric	p. 436
6.18. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled</i> . Acrylic Paint on Digital Image	p. 440
6.19. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled 1 & 2</i> . Linocut Print on Paper	p. 441
6.20. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (a Body is a Gift and Lifelong Mystery)</i> . Collage, Ink, & Paint	p. 449
6.21. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (Printed Carnations)</i> . Linocut Print on Fabric	p. 452
6.22. Artist: Max. <i>Untitled (Ys)</i> . Linocut Print on Fabric	p. 453

- 6.23. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Horsish)*. Linocut Print on Fabric p. 454
- 6.24. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Holding the Ball)*. Linocut Print on Fabric p. 459
- 6.25. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Thinking)*. Linocut Plate & Print on Paper p. 462
- 6.26. Artist: Max. *Untitled*. Paint on Rock p. 463
- 6.27. Artist: Michelle. *Song Birds*. Watercolour Paint on Wood p. 464
- 6.28. Artist: Rita Lavoie. *Chickadee*. Acrylic and Archival Colour Pencil on Paper p. 466
- 6.29. Artist: Rita Lavoie. *Goldfinch*. Acrylic and Archival Colour Pencil on Paper p. 467
- 6.30. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Thinking Patch)*. Linocuts Print on Fabric p. 471
- 6.31. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Horsish, Ys, Carnations Patch)*. Linocuts Print on Fabric p. 472
- 6.32. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Puffins)*. Linocut Prints on Paper p. 473
- 6.33. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Care & Seeing with Many Eyes)*. Linocut Print on Paper p. 479
- 6.34. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Green Hands)*. Fabric Plates Printed on Fabric p. 480
- 6.35. Artist: Max. *Untitled 1, 2, &3*. Fabric Sewn on Pants p. 481
- 6.36. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Checkered Face.)* Fabric Printing Plate & Print on Fabric p. 483
- 6.37. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Checkered Face.)* Fabric Printing Plate p. 485
- 6.38. Artist: Max. *Untitled*. Linocut Prints on Fabric p. 486
- 6.39. Artist: Max. *Untitled*. Linocut Prints on Fabric p. 487
- 6.40. Artist: Max. *Untitled*. Linocut Prints on Fabric p. 488
- 6.41. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Holding the Balls)*. Linocut Printing on Fabric p. 490
- 6.42. Artist: Max. *Untitled 1, 2 & 3*. Linocut Printing on Fabric p. 491
- 6.43. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Figure in a Flame & Masks)*. Linocut Printing on Fabric p. 493
- 6.44. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Thinking)*. Linocut Printing on Fabric p. 494
- 6.45. Artist: Max. *Untitled (MouthEye)*. Woodblock Printing on Paper p. 495

- 6.46. Artist: Max. *Untitled 1 & 2*. Woodblock Prints on Paper & Fabric p. 496
- 6.47. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Red & Blue MouthEye)*. Linocut Prints on Fabric p. 497
- 6.48. Artist: Max. *Untitled 1 & 2 (HandEyes & EarEye)*. Paint on Paper p. 498
- 6.49. Artist: Max. *Untitled 1 & 2 (BlueBoy & Masks)*. Linocut Printing on Fabric p. 500
- 6.50. Artist: Max. *Untitled (BlueBoy)*. Linocut Printing on Fabric p. 502
- 6.51. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Carnation)*. Acrylic Paint on Rock p. 504
- 6.52. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Carnations)*. Linocut Printing on Fabric p. 506
- 7.1. Artist: Vera. *Untitled*. Monoprint Printed on Paper p. 522
- 7.2. Artist: Adebayo. *Please Don't go Away – WAIT*. Linocut Print on Paper p. 524
- 7.3. Artist: Max. *Untitled (the Thinker)*. Linocut Print on Paper p. 529
- 7.4. Artist: Max. *Untitled (MouthEye)*. Woodblock Print on Paper p. 530
- 7.5. Artist: Michelle. *Gifted Linocut Plates*. Assorted Linocut Plates p. 536
- 8.1. Artist: Michelle. *Seeing with Many Eyes...* Linocut Print on Paper p. 556
- 8.2. Artist: Michelle. *CARE*. Linocut Print on Paper p. 556
- 8.3. Artist: Michelle. *Tactile Expressions 2*, Digital Image p. 564
- 8.4. Artist: Michelle. *Tactile Expressions 3*, Digital Image p. 564
- 8.5. Photographer: Printing at SNAP Printmaking Studio (left) & *Trans Africa*, Linocut
Print on Fabric (right), Artist: Adebayo p. 572
- 8.6. Artist: Michelle. *Two Sides of the Same Hand*. Linocut Print on Paper p. 573

GLOSSARY OF TERMS ¹

Agender refers to a gender identity in which individuals do not ascribe to gender identifiers or norms and refuse to be defined by gender and/or biological sex they were assigned at birth.

Asexual refers to people who are not sexually attracted to others regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

BIPOC is an acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.

Bisexual refers to a sexual attraction and/or sexual orientation in which men or women are attracted to both men and women. The terms men and women may refer to cis men and/or trans men and cis women and/or trans women and/or those on the gender spectrum.

Cis or Cisgender: Cisgender refers to a normative alignment of gender identity and expression (masculine or feminine) and sex assigned at birth (male or female) that remains constant, for instance, masculine gender identity and expression and male sex assigned at birth.

Cisnormativity (‘cis’ meaning ‘the same as’) refers to the commonplace assumption that all people are ‘cisgender’ (not trans). In other words, their gender identity is in line with or ‘matches’ the sex they were assigned at birth, and everyone accepts this as ‘the norm’ (Ontario Human Rights Commission OHRC, 2014, p. 9).

Cissexism refers to sexism based on gender norms, assumptions, and expectations.

FtM refers to female-to-male transgender, trans, or trans* gender identity and/or expression.

This term has historically been used to define sex reassignment surgery from female-to-male; this can also refer to people transitioning from gender roles associated with sex assigned at birth.

¹ This terminology remains fluid and is rapidly evolving and in relation and response to emergent requests and needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Trans, Intersex, and Two-spirit (LGBTIQ2) individuals and communities.

Gay is both a general and specific term. Generally, this term refers to a same-sex attraction and same-sex sexual orientation. Specifically, this term refers to men who are sexually attracted to men. This term men may refer to cis men and/or trans men.

Gender refers to cultural, social, and institutional constructions of normative behaviour as either masculine or feminine. Genders aligning with biological sex-assigned at birth are considered cisgender; while genders not aligning with biological sex-assigned at birth are considered transgender, trans, or trans*. While cis occupies a normative and relatively fixed position, trans and trans* occupies a multiplicity of gender identities and positions on the gender spectrum. Because gender self-definition is a highly personal, felt sense of gender, people may choose to self-define as cisgender or cis or transgender, trans, or trans* or they may refuse self-definition.

Gender expression refers to “how a person publicly expresses or presents their gender” (OHRC, 2014, p. 3). Preferred pronouns, those aligned with gender, are a form of gender expression.

Gender identity refers to “each person’s internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person’s sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum” (OHRC, 2014, p. 3). Gender identity and sex assigned at birth are intrinsically different and they may or may not align (OHRC, 2014). Gender identity and sexual orientation are not related.

Gender fluid refers to gender identity and/or expression that shifts and remains fluid.

Genderqueer refers to gender identity and/or expression that resists definitions.

Gender spectrum refers to a constellation of gender identities and/or expressions between cis or cisgender and trans, trans*, or transgender. These identities and/or expressions include, but are not limited to: agender, cross-dressers, drag kings, drag queens, gender fluid, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, queer, non-binary gender, transfeminine, transmasculine, trans men, trans women, transsexuals, transvestites. People on the gender spectrum may or may not identify

as cis or trans. Sexual orientation is not related to gender spectrum presentation.

Gender non-conforming refers to people who, “do not follow gender stereotypes based on the sex they were assigned at birth and may or may not identify as trans” (OHRC, 2014, p. 3).

Heteronormativity refers to the commonplace assumption that all people are heterosexual and heterosexuality is the norm.

Intersex refers to a “medically-defined status based on non-normative genital, gonadal chromosomal alignments” (Hutson, 2019, p. 11).

Lesbian refers to a same-sex attraction and same-sex sexual orientation in which women are sexually attracted to other women. The term women may refer to cis women and/or trans women.

LGBT is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, trans or trans* identities.

LGBTQ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, trans or trans*, and queer identities.

LGBTQ2 is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, trans, or trans*, queer, and two-spirit identities.

LGBTIQ+ is an acronym refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, trans, or trans*, intersex, and queer identities, plus a constellations of identities including but not limited to: agender, asexual, pansexual, two-spirit, plus those individuals not identifying as heterosexual.

MtF refers to male-to-female transgender, trans or trans* gender identity and/or expression. This term has also historically been used to define sex reassignment surgery from male-to-female; this can also refer to people transitioning from gender roles associated with sex assigned at birth.

Non-binary Gender or Non-binary refers to a gender identity that is not defined by sex and/or gender binaries (male or female, masculine or feminine).

Pansexual refers to people who are sexually attracted to a spectrum of people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and biological sexes.

Queer refers to both an undefined sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and/or an umbrella term used in the place of SGM, LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTIQ+, LGBTQ2 identities.

Sex refers to “the anatomical classification of people as male, female, or intersex, usually assigned at birth” (OHRC, 2014, p. 3).

SGM is an acronym for Sexual and/or Gender Minority, which refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, trans, or trans*, intersex, queer, pansexual, two-spirit, plus those individuals not identifying as heterosexual.

TQBIPOC is an acronym refers to Trans and Queer, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.

Transgender or Trans refers “to people with diverse gender identities and expressions that differ from stereotypical gender norms” (OHRC, 2014, p. 3). These terms refer a gender identities and/or expressions that do not conform to the gender identity and/or sex assigned at birth. Trans or transgender are also umbrella terms referring to a constellation of gender identities and/or expressions including but not limited to: trans man, trans woman, transsexual, transmasculine, transfeminine, MtF (male-to-female), FtM (female-to-male), gender fluid, genderqueer, and/or non-binary gender. Although, the term transgender, “has historically been associated more specifically with non-operative trans individuals who live ‘full time’ in the gender not assigned to them at birth” (Hutson, 2019, p. 11); this definition is fluid and changing, transgender or trans individuals may or may not choose gender affirming surgery, sometimes referred to as sex reassignment surgery.

Trans* “aims at encompassing different gender identities across the gender spectrum. The truncation forbids any classification process just as it refrains from naming or defining”

(Chapuis, 2016, para.12). Halberstam (2018), a trans theorist, used this term when writing about gender variability.

Transition: This is a time-period when individuals change their gender identity and/or expressions linked with their sex assigned at birth to align with gender identities and expressions which feel most comfortable for them. Transitions may or may not include medical interventions (e.g., hormone therapy) or medical procedures (e.g., gender affirming surgery) (WPATH, 2012).

Transfeminine refers to a gender identity and expression in which someone has transitioned, with or without surgery, to living full time in their chosen gender. Their chosen gender being feminine and/or female in this case.

Transmasculine refers to a gender identity and expression in which someone has transitioned with or without surgery to living full time in their chosen gender. Their chosen gender being masculine and/or male in this case.

Transphobia “is the aversion to, fear or hatred of trans people and communities. Like other prejudices, it is based on stereotypes that are used to justify discrimination, harassment and violence toward trans people” (OHRC, 2014, p. 9).

Transsexual refers to someone who has opted or will opt to surgically transition into their chosen sex and/or gender. This term is falling out of use amongst those who self-identify as transgender or trans as are the terms pre-op, post-op and non-op (Halberstam, 2018).

Two-spirit is a sacred Indigenous term, meaning an Indigenous person who identifies as having both masculine and feminine spirits; this is a contemporary term, based in the traditions of many First Nations (Wilson, 1996).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mentorship as Co-Created Relational Learning Alongside Trans and Non-binary Young Adults: A Visual Narrative Inquiry	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
PREFACE.....	iv
Contribution and Collaborations:.....	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
LIST OF PLATES	vii
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	xv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	xx
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: Prologue Finding Grace.....	3
Introducing the Research Puzzle.....	5
Narrative Beginnings: Building a Three-Dimensional Space of Inquiry	8
Framing the Research Puzzle	27
References.....	30
CHAPTER 2: Weaving Theoretical Threads: Foregrounding Narrative Theory.....	37
Seeking to Understand Lived Experience	37
Narratives of Self.....	54
Self-narratives: The Autobiographical Self	55

Narrative Coherence, Narrative Unity, and Stories of Self	57
Lugones: World-Travelling, the Borderlands, and the Self-in-Between	58
Community in the Borderlands.....	65
References	67
CHAPTER 3: Narrative Inquiry Methodology and Methods	74
Narrative Inquiry	75
Narrative Theory within Narrative Inquiry	76
Narrative Inquiry Touchstones	77
Before Entering the Field.....	77
Entering the Field	81
Interim Texts.....	82
Final Texts.....	86
Creative Responses: Creative Artwork in Relation to Stories, Creative Writing as Reflection & Creative Nonfiction as Method.....	92
A Note on Permissions.....	96
Parting Thoughts: The Return	96
References	99
CHAPTER 4: Adebayo’s Narrative Account.....	107
The Play: Introduction and Reader’s Guide.....	107
Addendum	111
On Creative Nonfiction	114
PART 1: REFUGE.....	115
ACT 1: Scene 1 – Beginnings.....	115

ACT 2, Scene 1: My Name is Adebayo	118
ACT 2, Scene 2: The Raid	120
ACT 2, Scene 3: Jail	124
ACT 3, Scene 1: Everybody Knows	125
ACT 4, Scene 1: I Didn't Mean to Stay	127
ACT 5, Scene 1: Settling In	135
ACT 5, Scene 2: Moving Forward	139
PART 2: INTERSECTIONS OF OPPRESSION – INTERSECTIONS OF POWER	145
ACT 1, Scene 1: The Protest	145
ACT 1, Scene 2: Pride is Protest	149
ACT 1, Scene 3: Confrontations	151
ACT 1, Scene 4: Negotiations	156
ACT 1, Scene 5: Snapshots	160
ACT 2, Scene 1: Dinner Conversation	161
ACT 3, Scene 1: The Café (June 10th, 2018)	164
ACT 4, Scene 1: I Had a Home	165
PART 3 – YELLOW VEST PROTEST & COUNTER-PROTEST	179
ACT 1, Scene 1: Connecting Dots	179
ACT 2, Scene 1: The Yellow Vest Protest and Counter-Protest	184
ACT 3, Scene 1: The Game	186
ACT 4, Scene 1: Why are We Doing This?	188
ACT 4, Scene 2: Remember	190
PART 4: PRIDE IS CANCELLED	193
ACT 1, Scene 1: Little Fires	193
ACT 1, Scene 2: Hate on Whyte	194

ACT 2, Scene 1: Calling the Police.....	196
ACT 2, Scene 2: Jack’s Place.....	202
ACT 3, Scene 1: Edmonton Pride 2019 – Cancelled	206
ACT 3, Scene 2: Response.....	206
ACT 3, Scene 3: Social Media Frenzy	207
ACT 4, Scene 1: Returning to the Start & Moving Forward	210
References for Adebayo’s Narrative Account.....	213
CHAPTER 5: Espen’s Narrative Account	217
Espen’s Stories: Introductions on a Winter’s Morning.....	217
Composing Espen’s Account: A Field Guide for Readers.....	219
A Note on Creative Nonfiction & Artwork Created in Relation to Espen’s Stories	223
A Note on Permissions:	223
Postcards as Prelude: Beginning Conversations Through Printmaking (Aug. - Sept. 2016).....	227
PART 1: THINKING WITH STORIES OF IDENTITY THROUGH IMAGE & TEXT	242
Artmaking to Reflect on and Integrate Stories of Experience: First Story – The Mask (Nov. 2017)	242
Artmaking to Respond to Stories: Second Story – Camouflage & Tattoos (Dec. 2018 – Mar. 2019).....	257
Artmaking Creating Spaces of Dialogue: Third Story – Barriers & Walls (Feb. – Mar. 2019) ..	264
Artmaking Making Barriers Visible: Fourth Story: Re-visioning/ Re-storying	270
Artmaking to Make Scars Visible: Fifth Story: Written on my Body (Mar. 2019)	275
Artmaking to Make Shaming Visible: Sixth Story – These are not my Names (Mar. 2019)	276
PART 2: SKETCKBOOK SHARING – CREATIVE SPACE-MAKING TO LEARN	
ALONSGSIDE	279

Looking to Find What You Do Not Know: First Story – Cultivating Beginner’s Mind.....	279
Discussions Around the Studio Table: Second Story – Sketchbook Sharing.....	282
Third Story: Line Drawings	296
PART 3: ARTMAKING AS SPACE-MAKING FOR MENTAL HEALTH DIALOGUE	
.....	313
Beginning to Think with Mental Health Stories – Dialogue 1: Inhabiting Spaces and Places.....	313
Continuing to Think with Mental Health Stories – Dialogue 2: Playful Approaches.....	325
Trying to Feel Alongside Espen’s Mental Health Stories – Dialogue 3: Tactile Expressions	335
Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 4: Sensory Overload	339
Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 5: Focusing.....	345
Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 6: Focus on Joy.....	353
Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 7: At the Studio Table	360
Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 8: Emergent Patterns	365
Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 9: Returning to Joy ..	371
References for Espen’s Narrative Account.....	376
CHAPTER 6: Max’s Narrative Account	377
PART 1: Living and Learning in Relation – Stories & Art – in the World & in Community	377
First Dialogue: The Figure in the Flame – the World is Burning.....	394
Second Dialogue: the World is (still) Burning	397
Third (Intergenerational) Dialogue: Identity Language and Community.....	413
Fourth Dialogue: World Travelling & Holding Space Open to Learn Alongside.....	425
PART 2: Living and Learning in Relation – Making Space through Sharing Art & Stories	

.....	460
PART 3: Living and Learning in Relation – (more) Printmaking Stories	481
References for Max’s Narrative Account	510
CHAPTER 7: Contemplating Framing: Unpacking the Possibilities of Printmaking in Narrative Inquiry.....	513
References.....	539
CHAPTER 8: Walking Alongside: Relational Research Spaces in Visual Narrative Inquiry	542
References.....	578
CHAPTER 9: Building Communities of Difference: The Importance of Identity and World Making for Trans Young Adults	583
References.....	610
CHAPTER 10: Conclusions.....	615
Reflections on Becoming in Relation.....	615
Expanding the Potential of Relational Research.....	617
Contributions to Adult and Community Education	619
Narratives & Counternarratives in Trans and Non-binary Identity-making & World Making.....	623
Complicating Queer Theory in Educational Practice	624
Conclusion	626

References.....	628
Thesis Reference List.....	631

INTRODUCTION

For trans and non-binary young adults impoverished social support hampers positive identity formation and can have lifelong consequences (Meyer, 2007). Social support is critical to reduce risk and build resilience and can be actively developed through mentorship (Heck, 2015; Johnson & Gastic, 2015). Shared narratives about self are key to mentoring relationships and can create agency (Jacobs, 2002), block antagonistic identity constructions (Hall, 1996), develop strong social networks, and foster an increased sense of belonging (Jacobs, 2002). Positive trans and non-binary identity formation may mitigate negative consequences of social isolation, including suicide (Peter & Taylor, 2014). Mentorship may also provide a platform to voice often silenced stories (Kumashiro, 2002) and counter hegemonic narratives (Meyer, Ouellette, Haile, & McFarlane, 2011). Despite its potential, there is a paucity of research on SGM² mentorship as social support for trans and non-binary young adults (Russel & Horne, 2009).

The purpose of my research is to inquire into the experience of mentorship provided to trans and non-binary young adults. There are four research purposes: 1) Understand the experience of mentorship provided to trans and non-binary young adults; 2) Attend to mentorship as a co-created identity formation and asset-building process; 3) Understand trans, non-binary, and queer intergenerational learning experiences, and; 4) Understand the tensions and possibilities with narrative inquiry to develop new theoretical perspectives. Grounded in Dewey's (1938) concept of

² The acronym SGM stands for Sexual and/or Gender Minority; it is often used by those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or non-binary, two-spirit, queer, pansexual, asexual, agender, amongst other identities, as well as, by those not identifying as heterosexual. It is often regarded as an inclusive reference for members of queer communities.

experience, it is important to attend to mentorship as a life making experience that happens in dynamic interactions and in often conflicting constructions of identity, agency, and resistance.

There is a need to understand these interactions within the context of queer world making, whereby I aim to understand trans and non-binary young adults as actively forming and reforming their multiple identities as they challenge heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions and structures.

CHAPTER 1: Prologue Finding Grace

As I began to write my path to research, I recall important work by community educators and educational theorists Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (Horton et al., 1990), *We Make the Road by Walking*. Although their ideas are pertinent, it is their imagining of a path to knowledge, informed by experience, and co-composed in connection and relationships, that helped me imagine my future research path, grounded in experience and located in a web of social relations (Arendt, 1958). Walking a research path is an embodied process and my wakefulness as a researcher has been essential.

I came to research by being in relation with Dr. Vera Caine, whom I met while I was teaching at the Society of Northern Alberta Print-artists (SNAP) community printmaking studio. My eyes were opened to the possibilities of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and visual narrative inquiry research (Bach, 2007; Caine, 2002; 2007; de Mello, 2007) when Vera invited me to walk alongside her and collaborate with her, as an artist and co-researcher, in visual narrative inquiry research (Caine & Lavoie, 2011; 2015). In my introduction to narrative research, grounded by friendship, I found home. Specifically, thinking *with* story³ felt authentic because it offered me a way to integrate and mobilize my understanding of past and present experiences to generate new understandings through collaborative social interaction and dialogue.

Two years ago, when I came alongside three trans and non-binary young adult

³ Morris (2002) explicates the difference between thinking about stories and thinking with stories, “[t]hinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking with stories is process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative [... but allow] narrative to work on us” (p. 196).

participants: Adebayo, Max, and Espen⁴, I began wayfinding – literally finding my way, amid lives being lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Together, we co-created spaces to learn along the way (Bateson, 1994). When, we began this research journey, there was no path and no destination, only a determination to learn together and in relation. The three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry served as a framework to build and learn in relationship while walking alongside one another (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Now as I look back through this research, it is Bateson’s (1994) writing on adaptation and creativity in learning, coupled with Greene’s (1995a) writing on releasing the imagination, and Lugones’ (1987; 1992) writing on playfulness and borderlands that emerged as touchstones on the path, that were there all along, but in Max, Adebayo, Espen, and my collective peripheral vision. Bateson’s (1994) writing now catches my eye, with her assertion that until we learn to see in new ways, through the filters of tenderness and grace, learning alongside difference remains begrudging and uninformed. Learning along the way requires both a “new kind of openness and responsiveness... [and a] need to disconnect the notion of difference from superiority and inferiority” (p. 234-235). Within this work, Max, Adebayo, Espen, and I created spaces to make art together, which served as a larger relational framework for being together and working together in creative ways, to celebrate our commonalities and uniquenesses. Relationship building throughout this research was key to working with and through difficult issues and challenging times. Differences and diversity were navigated both within our small research group and within larger community networks, places,

⁴ Adebayo, Max, and Espen joined this research project in April of 2018. They signed University of Alberta ethics forms which allow their first names to be used in research documentation and dissemination. Adebayo, Max, and Espen also created a great deal of artwork in this research; Adebayo, Max, and Espen also signed University of Alberta ethics forms which allows images of their artwork to be disseminated in this research.

and spaces. Larger societal issues such as xenophobia, racism, transphobia, homophobia, and ableism figure prominently in this work because these issues exist in the research landscape that Max, Adebayo, Espen, and I negotiated as we lived and worked alongside each other.

Introducing the Research Puzzle

Drawing on my experiences as a lesbian and queer identified person, a woman, an artist, and an educator, I return to my thoughts about my learning in relation. I realize that the wonders that constituted my research puzzle are based on intangible experiences that take place within shared or relational learning contexts. For instance, I recall times as a post-secondary art instructor when I attempted to acknowledge and support SGM students in my classes. In these instances, much was left unspoken and I was left to wonder how I could have better supported these young adults. My inability at knowing how to effectively respond to support SGM young adults in my classrooms now serves as a motivation that compels me to better understand how SGM young adults experience learning in relation. I too wondered if arts-based mentorship, which is implicit in studio art instruction, might be investigated and reimagined within my research as a potential form of support for SGM young adults, who often do not feel fully included or safe in formal educational settings. I realize in retrospect that as instructors, we teach beyond content; above content we are also always teaching ourselves, who we are in relation to content, to students, in this evolving moment in time. So, in this work, I sought to understand who I was or could be in relation. I also hoped to understand how trans and non-binary young adults access social supports and form identities in relation to other SGM young adults and/or

SGM adults, and as they navigate heteronormative⁵ and cisnormative⁶ familial, cultural, social, and institutional norms.

I came back to this work after a short absence to recognize that everything has changed, because I have changed. My mother, the source of my many stories, has passed away, and in her absence, I realize her constant loving presence in my life was the wellspring of how I conceived of learning in relation. As I now return to consider how to go about learning alongside in research, I return first to acknowledge my experiences of learning within my family, experiences of caring, sharing, and being cared for, and realize my family stories and experiences will be foundational to how I enter and walk through this work. Other concepts, such as “loving perception” (Lugones, 1987, p. 5) and wakeful walking alongside (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), inform my new burgeoning approach to research and enable me to understand an intangible component of relational learning: aspiring to be a care-filled, attentive, and loving presence capable of walking alongside. My parents’ teachings, their words and deeds exemplify for me my deepest relational learning experiences, which were always supported by their love and care. These experiences highlight for me the importance of being a caring and loving presence in

⁵ Heteronormativity is a mainstream belief that privileges heterosexual practice and posits this practice as the societal “norm”, while defining SGM sexuality as abnormal and deviant (Pinar, 1998; Kumashiro, 2002).

⁶ Cisnormativity is a mainstream belief that privileges cisgender individuals as the “norm” (OHRC, 2014). Cis or cisgender refers to those whose gender aligns with their gender and biological sex assigned at birth (OHRC, 2014). Cisgender has also been described as gender identity which tends to remain static or stable, while trans or transgender descriptors are often considered fluid and shifting gender identifiers (OHRC, 2014).

learning contexts⁷. I think of loving presence as a quality of being present and supporting another in unconditional caring ways. The words of Trich Nhat Hanh (2004) help define this quality of being in relation with loving presence, when he says, “Dear one, I am here for you” (p. 9). My experience of learning in relation to people who have been loving presences beside me continues to shape my richest life experiences. Being mindful of what and how I have experienced learning in relation, helped me bring my full and care-filled attention to Max, Adebayo, Espen, their lives and their stories, to endeavour to support them as we walked and learned together.

In this work, I brought my experience as a lesbian and queer identified⁸ adult alongside Max, Adebayo, Espen who identify as trans and non-binary young adults, to understand how learning in relation might act as an asset-creating process and source of resilience for Max, Adebayo, Espen as they attended to forming their identities and building communities of

⁷ Dewey (1938) asserts all experiences are learning experiences, and learning is inherent and inseparable from living.

⁸ Like Halberstam’s (2018) writing, I have taken many names and identities, which shift and continue to do so. Lesbian is an identifier, some would say antiquated, which still fits. Queer is another identifier, which is helpful because it allows me room to move. This is complicated terrain which I continue to tread. I may take other identities at some point, but I am comfortable with these for now. To ensure my engagement is respectful in this research, I follow Jacob Hale’s (2009) *Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism or Trans*. I take Hale’s (2009) writing very much to heart about forwarding trans voices and representations; through their stories and images Max, Adebayo and Espen have led this research. It was my goal in this research to find ways to amplify Max’s, Adebayo’s, and Espen’s voices, stories, and artwork and enable their voices and once silent stories to be seen and heard. Hale’s (2009) point about writers and/or researchers not doing this writing if they cannot imagine walking in trans worlds, I also take very much to heart. If I could not imagine walking in trans worlds, I would not be doing this work.

difference. Importantly, I realize the purpose of this research is learning and creating new knowledge, therefore I need to acknowledge my learning alongside Max, Adebayo, and Espen was significant because Max, Adebayo, Espen generously opened their lives and shared their stories with me, enabling my learning in relation as I walked alongside each of them.

Narrative Beginnings: Building a Three-Dimensional Space of Inquiry

I remember opening the door to the wooden cabin that would be my home-base for the next few days. This was my first time to summer camp and my first time attending Camp fYrefly, a four-day arts-based leadership camp for Sexual and/or Gender Minority (SGM) youth. I was the 2016 Artist-in-Residence at Camp fYrefly. In this capacity, I offered art workshops for fYrefly's campers, youth leaders, and adult mentors⁹.

Opening the door, I am aware of my trepidation. I am conscious of the discomfort in my body though a tightness in my back. Facing the uncertainties of Camp, I wonder: Who will I be here? Who are the youth I will meet and who will I be in relation? Who was I at their ages? As I wonder about interconnections, overlaps, and gaps between my lived experiences and that of the campers, I begin to consider how identity is experienced and how it might be formed in relation. I too sense my vulnerability as I realize that I may not

⁹ Each year Camp fYrefly brings one SGM artist to Camp to act as the Artist-in-Residence. They are expected to provide a series of art workshops to youth, throughout the duration of Camp, in their specialized media (e.g., visual art, songwriting, poetry). I received funding from the Edmonton Arts Council (EAC), through a Community Arts Program Grant, to provide workshops at Camp fYrefly and to offer free art workshops for SGM youth and young adults in the community (i.e., through a series of free printmaking workshops at SNAP printmaking studio, Edmonton) following Camp fYrefly.

*yet know how to be in relation with the youth*¹⁰. (Michelle's Reflective Note)

At the threshold to the art cabin, I paused to consider the role artmaking has played in my identity formation. I realized it would be hard for me to discern individual threads of this creative process, so interwoven has art practice become in the fabric of who I am and how I know. I began practicing art as a child, and now when I need to think, I go there. When I need to feel, I go there. When I need to just be in space of unknowing, without the certainties of either thought or emotion, I go there. Entering my art practice, allows me to suspend time, to pause, and to allow space for what I do not know and do not understand to emerge and make sense. This is the generative and generous space art practice provides for me; it has always been part of who I am and how I know. Bateson (1994) extends my understanding about the necessity of creating and

¹⁰ Camp fYrefly defines youth as young people between the ages of 14-24 (University of Alberta, n.d.). When I refer to youth I will be referring to the definition put forward by Camp fYrefly and not the United Nations definition of youth (i.e., young people between the ages of 15-24) (The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], n.d.). At the beginning of the paper, when referring to my experiences at Camp fYrefly, I will refer to youth because I am describing my experience working primarily with young people between the ages of 14-24. In my research project, I will be working with young adults between the ages of 18-25. I chose to write about my experience at Camp fYrefly because it was my first experience working exclusively with SGM youth (14-24) and SGM young adults (18-25). When I later describe, purposively sampling from Camp fYrefly in my methods section, I was focused on searching for young adult participants (i.e., campers, youth leaders, and adult mentors) between the ages of 18-25. Campers, youth leaders, and adult mentors are terms used at Camp fYrefly. Campers are mostly youth, ages 14-24; youth leaders would also be primarily categorized as youth, ages 14-24; and adult mentors would be primarily aged 18 and over. Camp fYrefly is an intergenerational SGM learning space that seems to take advantage of overlaps and differences in age ranges of participants to create both peer and intergenerational dialogue.

sustaining creative spaces to remain open, responsive, and adaptable in the face of shifting, uncertain, and emergent situations, and contexts.

I knew being Artist-in-Residence at Camp fYrefly would differ from my previous teaching experiences, and not necessarily fall within my comfort zone¹¹. Although I had taught studio art classes at universities and in community settings for many years, I wondered how I would relate to SGM youth in my new role. My sense of embodied discomfort caused me to consider how my perceptions might be informed by what Carr (1986) calls life story, or “an amalgam of roles and stories” (p. 84) that have been part of my past and present lived experiences, and frame or set boundaries on my imagined futures. I also sensed I was standing on shifting ground with my own identity in this new place with these new responsibilities. From this vantage point, I wondered: How would I adapt my previous role from university art instructor to Camp fYrefly’s Artist-in-Residence¹²?

What challenges and opportunities would this informal camp setting offer that differed

¹¹ At Camp fYrefly I would not just be teaching studio art practices; I would be teaching through the lens of my experience as a SGM adult and community member in relation to SGM youth.

¹² I began to understand that thinking through roles may have limited my ability to understand and be in relation with the SGM youth and young adults at fYrefly. Because roles imply scripts, expectations, and prescribed actions, they may have impeded my ability to be present and in relationship. Roles also suggested stasis, which might be at odds with future ways of thinking about relationships as dynamically co-constructed and evolving across time. I had a role at Camp fYrefly, but I had hoped this research would enable me to be in present and in relation in a good way, instead of prescribing or performing roles. When I allowed myself to shift from thinking about roles to thinking through experience, my perspective shifted and possibilities opened.

from formal classroom settings? How would my teacher knowledge fit here? How would I bridge the age gap between the youth and myself to relate? How could I help create artwork and generate dialogue ground in issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression? How much did I need to disclose about my own identity in the process? I also wondered how familial, societal, cultural, and institutional contexts have played into my identity formation and the identity formation of these young adults. Specifically, how have differing contextual issues, such as places and spaces played in our unique identity formations?

Initially, while at Camp, I defined place as a site of embodied experience, which was connected and bound by the specifics of time and circumstance. However, my understanding of place shifted, when I considered how places of memory disrupt and shift temporal continuities, by bringing the past into the present to inform possible futures. These places of memory are less tangible, but no less real, and no less impactful than places presently inhabited. Because as we reflect and act on stories drawn from memory, these remembered places have real life implications in the present and for the future (Bruner, 1986; 1990; Carr, 1986). Additionally, Basso's (1996) writing expands my definition of place to understand how memory "sits in places"⁵ (p. 105). Basso (1996) suggests that by attending to place we enter a relationship with the land, wherein "places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed" (p. 107). Furthermore, Basso (1996) suggests the ". . . physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind" (p. 107). Thinking with Basso (1996) and bringing his words alongside my experience, I realized that memory and stories rest in place and re-emerge when we revisit places previously experienced. Basso (1996) calls these embodied remembrances, triggered by

place, “place-based thoughts” (p. 107)¹³.

By thinking with Basso (1996), my definition of place has expanded to contain both the limits of a specific time, event, or circumstance; and through memory and story, an ability to extend across time to inform the present. My definition of space is less concrete, less tied to physical reality than place; in comparison, it is more abstract and expansive than place. In my current understanding, space represents gaps between the physical and intangible, the known and unknown. Space is tied less to memory and more to imagination. Space also literally reminds me of space - the star filled night sky of my childhood dreaming.

I remember warm summer nights as child gazing upward into the night sky. My sister and I would light the fire pit and stay out in the yard under a blanket of stars talking and laughing long after the others had gone to sleep. The longer we watched, the more stars appeared. As a child, I imagined eventually every space would be filled with stars and we would watch bit by bit as these spaces filled with points of light. The spaces I shared with my sister were filled with imagining possible worlds. We shared stories, dreams, and much laughter. I always felt supported by her; she helped me laugh and imagine.

(Michelle’s Reflective Note)

This story has helped me to think about relational spaces embedded within teaching and learning.

Bateson’s (1994) words also come forward to remind me “often what is taught would not be

¹³ Basso (1996) refers to Heidegger’s (1977) differentiation of space and place, in which Heidegger (1977) asserts space derives its essential qualities from specific locations, “and not space itself” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 332).

learned if it were not embedded in a relationship” (p. 204). As I consider Camp fYrefly, I wondered about teaching and learning spaces as relational spaces and spaces of possibility – spaces of opening, unfolding, and becoming; spaces of dreaming possible futures. These include spaces: of dialogue, reflectivity, criticality, and consciousness building (Freire, 1970); of liminality and in-between spaces of knowing (Lugones, 1987; 1992); of intersectional challenges and tensions (Collins, 1998; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw; 1998; Mayo & Blackburn, 2019); of refuge, recoupment, and resistance (Brosi & hooks, 2012; hooks, 1990; 1992; 2003; 2015); of imagination (Greene, 1995a; 1995b); of creative play (Paley, 1981; 2004; 2010); of adaptation and improvisation (Bateson, 1990; 1994); of storytelling and artmaking (Caine 2002; 2007; Grace & Wells, 2007; Wells, 2007); of being queer (Butler, 2006; Pinar, 1998; Sedgwick, 2008), or trans (Aultman, 2014; Bornstien, 1994; Halberstam, 1998a; 1998b; 2005; 2011; 2012; 2018); and/or fugitive (Hill, 1995; Hill & Grace, 2009; Grace & Wells, 2009). I wondered what possibilities and limitations these spaces might offer SGM young adults as they engaged in their processes of becoming, forming and reforming, their identities. I wondered too how these spaces might overlap and be formed into networked places and spaces of possibility to support for SGM young adults in relation (e.g., within the arts and/or queer communities).

I recollect Camp fYrefly as a physical place apart, and possibly a space of refuge and recoupment (i.e., a time out from the hegemony of heteronormative and cisnormative societal expectations). I found some spaces with the youth at Camp more relaxed and open (e.g., at dinner or around the campfires). As I worked with youth through reflective activities (e.g., artmaking and dialogue), I wondered: What is it about the Camp fYrefly experience that enables or hinders engagement? Who got to say what engagement looks like? How was I defining engagement? Is activity engagement? Could attendance be engagement? If some youths were

missing planned activities, did that mean they were not engaged? Or could other factors be at play? Was it enough to create and hold a space open for youth? How could space be shaped to enable engagement? Who got to shape those spaces? And could spaces be sustained over time?

As I shifted from thinking about spaces to physical places, I began to consider what Camp fYrefly meant as a place. First, I thought about the Camp's geographic location and considered the possibilities as well as possible limitations of place. If all experiences, including experiences of place, are transactional and relational (Dewey, 1938)¹⁴, I wondered how this place would influence what SGM youth and young adults would experience. For instance, I wondered how Camp fYrefly's isolation, away from the rush of the city and public scrutiny, called forward by societal, cultural, familial, and/or institutional expectations (i.e., heteronormativity or cisnormativity), could give participants space to be and become. Grace and Wells (2009) point out the hegemonic nature of cultural and societal norms, when they state, "heterosexism and homophobia are so culturally ingrained that they are residual and forever lingering in public spaces" (p. 24)¹⁵. I considered how Camp could function as an island of safety, a place and space of refuge (hooks, 1990; Brosi & hooks, 2012).

At Camp, SGM youth and young adults could decide how they wished to identify and/or

¹⁴ Dewey (1938) suggests that education cannot be separated from life and that all learning reflects lived experience and as such continuously take place over time, within networks of social interaction, and in specific situations.

¹⁵ After working with trans and non-binary young adults, I consider the ways cissexism and transphobia linger there also.

perform gender¹⁶ (Butler, 2006). I wondered about the necessity of isolation from hetero- and cisnormative publics that may not support SGM youth and young adults, and the support they may garner amongst SGM peers and adults¹⁷. I wondered too if the campers' dreams, hopes, laughter, tears, and care might become embedded in the rocks, trees, and water of this place. I

¹⁶ Judith Butler (2006) suggests that gender is a performance, a cultural act of sexual identity, and although there may be cultural scripts or cultural norms (i.e., acting masculine or feminine), these scripts are in no way inscribed on the body or defined by biological sex. Furthermore, Butler (2006) argues that gender as performance will not create a fixed or stable identity categorization, but rather mutable identity, always in transition, forming and reforming in relation. Importantly, performativity is a contested concept. At issue is the idea of authenticity versus performance, self-definition as opposed to being defined, and defining oneself in relation to chosen communities rather than cultural scripts and norms. Further Butler's poststructural concepts (i.e., performativity) tend to situate emergent trans theory within queer theory, but as Hutson (2019) notes the idea of a trans as endlessly mutable identity positions may be problematic because it seems to erase the possibility of trans essentialism, which Hutson (2019) posits is as valid as trans non-essentialist positions.

¹⁷ Social institutions (e.g., schools and churches) perpetuate heteronormativity and cisnormativity by privileging heterosexual and cisgender identities, ". . . and they legitimate this social order by couching it in a language of 'normalcy' and common sense" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 45). As a result, of the systematic societal and institutional pressure exerted by heteronormativity and cisnormativity, SGM identities are stigmatized (Kumashiro, 2002; Meyer, 2007; Taylor, 2011; Halberstam, 2018). hooks' (1990) writing suggests community building by groups of diverse individuals with common bonds (e.g., race, gender, culture) may offer a place and/or space of resistance and recoument. For instance, gender and/or sexuality related informational support given within SGM communities (e.g., between SGM adults and SGM young adults) may be more beneficial than advice given by heterosexual and/or cisgender peers, adults, or family members because it may come from individuals with personal experience of the proffered information (e.g., experiences of stigmatization or marginalization resulting from hetero- and cisnormative responses to their SGM identities and ways to thrive despite these) (Doty et al., 2010; Johnson & Gastic, 2015).

wondered if their stories, as Basso (1996) suggests, might come to live here and become part of the fabric of this physical landscape, to reemerge if or when they return.

Camp was located at a Girl Scout Camp and retreat site on Pigeon Lake, just over an hour drive southwest of Edmonton. The campground consisted of a smattering of old wooden cabins and fire pits scattered throughout pine covered grounds. This was my first time to summer youth camp, having never gone as a child; and my first time to 'Queer Camp' as it is affectionately called by returning campers. I wondered what Camp fYrefly is for the youth and young adults who come for the first time. As I watched them arrive at Camp with smiles and settle in with ease and laughter, I am reminded of my own coming out at 23. I remember thinking, how young they are. I wondered how our experiences differ and too what might be similar. I came out amongst queer peers into the LGBTQ civil rights activism of the early 90s. Queer theory was in its infancy. Theory wasn't much on our minds to be honest. My sense of queer identity developed in relation to my peers within a queer social association (QSA) on campus. We were very politically engaged and worked in opposition to a hostile press, government, and often, public. We were united in adversity and I believe my sense of queer identity and queer community was partially formed by acting in opposition to oppressive societal and institutional norms¹⁸. I remember wondering with so many LGBTIQ+ civil rights won, what struggles continue to shape the lives and experiences of these SGM youth and young adults as they

¹⁸ *Vriend V. Alberta* was the fight in the nineties, part of our fight, which ended in 1998 with the Supreme Court of Canada landmark decision in favour of Vriend, reading sexual orientation into the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. Marriage equality, adoption, pension rights came later.

form and reform their identities¹⁹. I wonder what ties bind queer youth and young adults today, what brings them to community²⁰, and what might queer or trans communities mean to these youth and young adults?

It was a hot August evening, just before dusk, when I arrived. We pulled up alongside carloads of others. Youth, youth leaders, and adult mentors were all arriving, milling about, finding their quarters, locating their workshop supplies, and greeting old friends. I meet and greet, but feel quite alone, because as yet, I know no one. I expect to find a sense of community here because we will all be working to a common purpose; I expect we will coalesce into an instant queer community to support queer, trans, and non-binary youth and young adults. (Michelle's Reflective Note)

Many claimed Camp fYrefly had been a life changing experience for them. I was curious how

¹⁹ In this research, I came to see and understand a plethora of issues and struggles trans and non-binary young adults are working to change. Foregrounding these are issues of trans and non-binary equity and equality within LGBTIQ+ communities; rights disparities continue to exist between LGB and TIQ people. Intersectional challenges tend to layer, deepen, and perpetuate these disparities. These intersectional challenges include, but are not limited to, confronting: transphobia, homophobia, sexism, cissexism, xenophobia, racism, ableism, ageism, classism, and health care systems that are not trans supportive. Importantly, I found community building is hugely important to trans and non-binary young adults. Many are deeply involved in community building, some of these communities are intergenerational, but many are uni-generational, consisting of mainly of youth and/or young adults. Additionally, chosen communities are being built around: common struggles, (e.g., confronting xenophobia, racism, ableism); shared experiences and identities (e.g., queer and trans BIPOC and/or LGBTIQ+ refugee communities), and; shared identities and common interests (e.g., being trans and being an artist).

²⁰ bell hooks (Brosi & hooks, 2012) speaks about community as a place of refuge and resistance - a place to accept, embrace, and learn from one another's diversity of experiences.

the experiences of queer, trans, and non-binary youth and young adults within Camp provided social support and what benefits they would bring forward into their lives beyond Camp. Also, in the absence of Camp supports, after four days at Camp, I wondered what supports youth and young adults would find, or fail to find, when they returned to their families, schools, and communities. In these contexts, I also wondered also how connected or disconnected these youth and young adults might be from other queer, trans, and non-binary youth, young adults, and adults in queer and trans communities.

As I opened the door to the Artist-in-Residence cabin, a disagreeable, musty smell met my nose. Light streamed through windows, illuminating huge dust flakes, floating suspended in the air, like fine snow. I tasted the grit of dust between my teeth. This creaky old door had not been opened for some time. I opened the windows, pulled back the drapes to let the light stream in and spun to quickly scan the room and determine its feasibility as an art studio - a habit I have developed from years of teaching at community sites. It would need a thorough clean, but the bones were good. It was a good size, big enough for three rows of tables. The line of attached counters that ran along the back of the room would serve to set out the supplies and make them accessible.

After donning a dust mask, I swept and cleaned the counters with cleaning solution I had found near a back window, complete with a note about cleaning for Hanta Virus. I cleaned with care. Afterwards, I opened boxes of art supplies. It felt like Christmas, boxes of possibilities. (Michelle's Reflective Note)

Close to a hundred campers and youth leaders came to that first workshop. I introduced ideas around art and activism, followed by small group activities. There seemed to be a lot of excitement, and a lot of bodies packed into one little cabin. I felt a bit overwhelmed, because the

cabin overflowed and people poured out the door into the picnic space beyond²¹. There was a lot of noise, a lot of play. It was chaos. Mostly good chaos, I think. There were smiles and laughter, conversations and debates, about how and what to create. Something about the experience was hard though, not what I expected. Which led me to wonder: What had I expected? Did I connect with the youth and young adults? Was it the chaos that was hard? Was it slipping from my role as teacher that unnerved me? Was I enacting the role of studio art teacher to art students, when that role didn't fit this place, with these youths? If I am not a teacher, who am I? I've been a teacher for over half my life. Back when I began teaching, most of my students were older than me.

For many reasons²², the second and third workshops at Camp were sparsely attended. I had between 6-12 campers for the following three workshops. Many came, they told me, for a quiet space away from the hustle and bustle of Camp. The studio seemed like a space of refuge, a necessary time out even within Camp, and I was happy it could serve that function. Although, I was disappointed the activities I had prepared did not seem wanted. Perhaps these activities felt too much like work or school²³. The preparation I had done felt like a waste of time. "*Can we*

²¹ Although I have taught large studio art classes of up to thirty-five people young adults, this group must have been closer to one hundred or more mostly teenagers— so it was great, unwieldy, crazy and fun, as it spilled out in all directions.

²² I had been told by the Camp administrators that everyone would come on that first day, and fewer would come to the following sessions because other activities would begin on those days in competing timeslots.

²³ Rereading this conversation after finishing my fieldwork, what I know now, what I didn't know then, is when working with trans and non-binary young adults, I found it essential to let them define the structure of the activity they might choose to engage in. Assisting Max, Espen, and Adebayo as they created prints in SNAP printmaking

just paint”, they asked? “*Yes, you can just paint*” ... and they put down their heads and painted. They would ask little things, technical things, art student to art teacher things. What makes a good wash? How do you use matte medium? Quiet concentration. I was accustomed to this feeling. It felt good. Still so few...

I thought about the necessity of art for me and the creative space it provided me for reflective thought and self-discovery. I remember the feeling of working in quiet studio spaces, with quiet concentration. Comfortable. I was always quiet. Perhaps when I was younger, I had a distrust for words, or maybe it was a distrust of people. Either way, there was safety and fulfilment in the solitary quiet reflection art afforded me. It was a necessary space undoubtedly; a refuge surely. bell hooks (1990; Brosi & hooks, 2012) reminds me that community can be a refuge too. Thinking *with* hooks (1990; 2003; Brosi & hooks, 2012), I wondered if this small studio space, and working quietly amongst peers was not only a space of refuge, but also a space of community for these queer, trans and non-binary youth and young adults.

I watched my thoughts as they skipped, like a flat rock across water, and I saw my younger self sitting at an art table engrossed in drawing. Returning to my reflection on my own art practice, I realized art was also a place of becoming, a place of dreaming, a place to wonder. I was looking to see – seeing the detailed tip, the feathered patterns, on a bird’s wing. It was a way to try to see and understand beauty, to make meaning from life, and to bring sense to lived experience. It was a way to pay attention long enough, to catch a glimpse of life in process.

studio meant I held the space open by showing printmaking techniques and then I stood back and supported Max, Espen, and Adebayo as they explored and developed their own art practice within and alongside this research. They each took up their work as co-researchers in unique ways, to support themselves and their chosen communities.

To draw from life, there must first be a sharpening of attention to the observation of every detail. My eye must follow the contours and shapes of things before pencil in hand can follow, leaving its trace. My sketches from yesterday are quick notations, life drawing – drawing from life, meant to capture life in motion. (Michelle's Reflective Note)

I wondered: Will this attention to detail, this skill at observation serve me or get in my way as I work with others? Catching myself as my thoughts wander, I watched the few who came to the art cabin to work and wondered: What is art for me now? What is art for these youth and young adults? What drives them to create? What are they seeking and what might they find? I wondered if artmaking might provide these queer, trans, and non-binary youth and young adults ways to sketch a glimpse of identity in process and transforming. Looking to the table scattered with drawings, I noticed many have drawn various types of portraits.

Some campers came to all three workshops. I also opened the studio outside scheduled workshop times, so youth could drop in whenever they needed. Several expressed their appreciation for the space, and for my being there to hold the space open. Still it was more of a passive role than an active one; quite different from teaching studio art in post-secondary institutions. This was space of quiet attending; my support was my care-filled, attentive presence. Was it enough? What place did attention and simple time spent together have in building relationship? Building trust? Creating together? Collaborating? What role could holding space open have in this research? How might creating a safe space to create within enable possibilities and facilitate future imaginings? As they left the cabin, one by one, or in small groups, they gave me shy smiles and quiet thanks...

I recall evenings, when I was a youth, fishing with my dad. It was our special time, the

summer of grade eight. He would pick me up after school and we would go to Aunt Anne's, where we docked our red cedar rowboat. The lake was beautiful at that time of day; brilliant light dancing upon quiet waters. We usually fished for a couple of hours. I remember the quiet, dusk painted sky – yellows, oranges, reds, greens, blues, indigos, purples – each colour brilliant, yet fading to another. Beauty, surrounded by beauty, and being part of it all. I remember the smell of fish, the sound of oars gently touched to water. Quiet, beauty. It was our time – dad and me. We didn't speak much, at least not that I can remember. I can't remember ever catching a fish, but it didn't seem to matter. We kept fishing. It was mostly about spending time anyway – I'm pretty sure. I remember our comfortable rapt silence – our silence was not empty but full. Those times remain my favorite memories with my dad. I hold these memories close. (Michelle's Reflective Note)

These memories of being in relation with my father came alongside my memories of being in relation with youth in the art cabin. The quiet, relaxed, being with, felt similar. But, I was distressed when I found that many youth left their artwork behind when they left studio space. They seemed so engaged, what had happened? Some left artwork where they had painted it, some threw their artwork in the trash as they left. Not everyone did this, a few had sketchbooks and other places to keep such things. I could not understand how they could be so rapt in their artwork at one moment and discard it the next. I felt this creative activity had not mattered to them; perhaps they had not valued it.

Driving home after Camp, a counsellor told me many youth lived in group homes and a

few were homeless²⁴. Many others lived in unstable home environments. My thoughts quickly returned to the artwork left on the studio tables, and my face flushed. It never occurred to me the fact some of these youth and young adults were homeless or would be returning to unstable home environments. It never occurred to me the thought some might not have walls to hang their artwork on. hooks (2003) writing reminds me of the blind spots we all carry and become aware of by living in relation, physically alongside those with different life experiences than our own. hooks (2003; 2012) suggests possibilities for transformation exists when we become aware of differences and seek to be in relation with others because of, not despite, difference.

I wondered about the possibilities and tensions I might encounter as I attempted to travel to the worlds (Lugones, 1987) of some queer, trans and non-binary young adults in my proposed research. As I considered how home might mean something very different to each of us, I wondered how I would bridge gaps in my understanding to come alongside these young adults. I had never thought of myself as privileged growing up in a working-class family, but despite times of economic hardships, I grew up with unwaveringly strong family supports and a stable sense of home.

I remember doing homework at the kitchen table. Every so often, I would look up and out the patio window to the view of the marina next door and the lake beyond. As dusk fell and turned to night on those cold mid-winter evenings, the lights across the lake flickered on, one after another. Mom stood at the stove. Tonight, like many nights, she is standing

²⁴ It is estimated that between 25-40% of Canadian homeless youth and young adults identify as SGM (The Homeless Hub, n.d.).

at the kitchen stove cooking stew. The smell of bread baking wafts from the wood stove across the room and mixes with smells of a hearty stew – carrots, potatoes, barley, beans. So many of my childhood nights were like this one. I never questioned dinner would be made, we would eat between 5-6 pm, and it would be good. I never questioned mom would be there to cook, dad would be home from work for dinner, and we would sit together at the kitchen table and share our day. (Michelle’s Reflective Note)

My family stories, like the one above, continue to play an active role in shaping my beliefs and understanding of past and present circumstances, as well as future imaginings²⁵. These family stories are drawn from my longest relationships - those with parents, siblings, and grandparents. I carry these stories with me, and draw on them continually, to make sense of the present²⁶. I am aware as I come alongside young adults, my family stories have been present in both my sense-making and in ways I relate. When I brought my stories of home alongside others’ stories and experiences of home, I had to be conscious that the words, and the stories contextualizing them, carried different meanings, and reflected experiences broader than my own. I had to be cognizant of how widely experiences vary to understand the experiences of others. In addition, I needed to negotiate meaning through conversation and across silences, in relationship, and over time. Thinking with my stories of home and how they have shaped my understanding, I wondered

²⁵ I had, in many ways, an idyllic childhood and youth. I took my parents’ care and love for granted, and, as a child, I thought all kids lived similar lives. I thought my childhood experiences were the norm.

²⁶ Connelly and Clandinin (1990) coined the term “stories to live by” (p. 2) to describe the stories that we carry, which have become part of how we understand our world and who we are in relation. In our stories to live by “we live our lives through our texts” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2) by thinking and acting on those stories we have heard and/or told.

what familial stories these young adults might bring that have shaped their present knowing. I wondered too what happens in the absence of familial stories or when familial stories are dislocated or difficult to access.

Thinking beyond family stories, I began to consider the role of broader collective and community stories (e.g., community histories, art, and artifacts) in understanding identity formation or senses of belonging. I wondered if community for some youth and young adults might be defined by four days each summer at Camp fYrefly. Further, if these youths defined Camp fYrefly as a community, I wondered what value they placed on their experience of this community, especially considering some youth and young adults would return to unstable, possibly unsustainable, environments. I questioned how intergenerational dialogue and artmaking within queer and trans communities might over time impact the lives of queer, trans, and non-binary youth and young adults. I further wondered if and how intergenerational activities, based in community networks, might have created and supported short term community sharing spaces (i.e., Camp fYrefly). I further wondered what importance community stories, like queer and trans histories might have played in supporting these youths' and young adults' identity formation and/or sense of belonging in queer and trans communities. Bateson (1994) suggests community spaces provide important sites of intergenerational conversation and learning. These community spaces provide both personal and public spaces for interaction and networking.

Fraser (1990) posits such community spaces are vital because these “public discursive arenas are among the most important and under-recognized sites in which social identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed” (p. 79). Following Fraser (1990), I wondered what benefits queer, trans, and non-binary youth and young adults might have encountered by

engaging in queer and/or trans discursive spaces and what queer and/or trans discursive spaces might look like if they were co-created and developed with the input of queer, trans, and non-binary youth and young adults.

Packing up after Camp, there were so many supplies that had not been touched, so much that had been left on the shelf. I felt left on the shelf. I had not been used, perhaps though, I had not recognized the role I played. I had brought so many possibilities that felt left untouched or perhaps they were touched in ways I did not know.

In retrospect, I held an idea of mentorship very close as I experienced Camp fly with these queer, trans, and non-binary youth and young adults²⁷. I framed my ideas of intergenerational dialogue within my conception of what mentorship is and could be between queer, trans, and non-binary youth and queer adults like myself. I believe my ideas of mentorship may have gotten in the way of being in relation and allowing youth to guide the unfolding processes (i.e., art creation). My ideas, expectations, and plans may have shaped this emergent process in a way that left me less able to be present to share space with youth, to listen, and to respond to their stories. The planned, but aborted, art projects and the unopened boxes of art supplies were clues that maybe what I was offering (i.e., mentored art projects) was not wanted or needed by these youths. I wonder

²⁷ At Camp, I was beginning to puzzle over future research questions. Initially, my experiences as a post-secondary studio art instructor informed and framed these questions around mentorship. For instance, I wondered how to better support SGM young adults in my classrooms. I too wondered if arts-based mentorship, which is implicit in studio art instruction, might be investigated and reimagined within my research as a potential form of support for trans and non-binary young adults, who often do not feel fully included or safe in formal educational settings.

what spaces these youths might have created, beyond the boundaries of my expectations, if they were invited to create that space. (Michelle's Reflective Note)

Framing the Research Puzzle

As I returned to my wonders, I began to see the centrality of relationship and learning in relation as core and recurrent themes that weave throughout this chapter. My stories emerged from my experience and interactions with queer, trans and non-binary youth and young adults at Camp fYrefly. I realized my many questions and wonders pivoted around relational ways of thinking and knowing. Threads that came forward from wondering about relationship, included questions regarding: intergenerational dialogue and sharing; discursive places and spaces; social support for queer, trans and non-binary young adults; and linkages between counterpublics (i.e., queer and trans communities) and general publics.

Before I reflected on my experience at Camp, I would have framed my research wonders within the context of finding solutions to a set of problems (i.e., understanding intergenerational mentorship as social support for SGM young adults). I have studied literature that points to dire consequences that spring from social stigmatization, isolation, and marginalization of SGM young adults (Meyer et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2011)²⁸.

My experience at Camp fYrefly, pointed my work away from fixed problems and probable solutions and toward framing the work as an intersecting network of evolving questions that emerged in relation to, rather than being superimposed on, experience. Although, I believe that research on SGM mentorship has merit, I did not wish to superimpose ideas of mentorship

²⁸ For literature review on consequences of social isolation for SGM young adults and mentorship as a possible solution, please see Chapter 9.

on my experience of learning in relation to SGM young adults, my research participants and co-investigators. I went to Camp certain that mentorship could offer a form of intergenerational social support between SGM adults, young adults, and youth – my only question was how. I realized in retrospect that by foregrounding ideas of SGM mentorship at Camp, I limited my ability to be in relation with queer, trans, and non-binary youth and young adults and to hear their stories. Reflecting on my experience of Camp fYrefly, I realized mentorship perhaps comprised a piece of a much larger “research puzzle” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124), such as SGM young adults’ experiences of relational thinking and knowing²⁹.

Within narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), research puzzles are used to frame the inquiry. Research puzzles are an evolving and interconnected amalgam of questions and wonders. They are a search that continuously transforms in response and relation to changes in the phenomenon under study and questions that emerge throughout an inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)³⁰.

Consistent with the principles of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), my research puzzle included the following questions: What are the stories trans and non-binary young adults tell about their experience of relational thinking and knowing? How would trans and non-binary young adults describe their intergenerational relational learning experiences?

²⁹ As I look back on my questions concerning mentorship and relational learning, I now realize mentorship as a lens, if it had been applied at the outset of this study would have too narrowly focused and overly directed this study. As it happens, this study, with its iterative and evolving shared learning teaching and learning processes, may inform how mentorship might function in a better way, as a collaborative and co-created relational learning and asset building process.

³⁰ For more information on Research Puzzles please see Chapter 9.

What are the experiences of trans and non-binary young adults in which they have felt supported? What roles do experiential contexts (i.e., spaces and place) or activities (e.g., creating artwork) play in supporting trans and non-binary young adults? How would trans and non-binary young adults describe their experiences of queer and trans community stories or histories? How would trans and non-binary young adults describe the importance of personal and collective stories (i.e., community, social, cultural, and institutional) in the identity formation and social support? What part, if any, has artmaking or creativity played for these trans and non-binary young adults as they form and reform their identities and sense of self and belonging? What types of creative, discursive, and relational spaces might trans and non-binary young adults create for themselves? What might intergenerational or community supports look like for these trans and non-binary young adults? How would trans and non-binary young adults describe the utility of theories as they form and reform their trans and non-binary identities and experience their lives.

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CHAPTER 2: Weaving Theoretical Threads: Foregrounding Narrative Theory

In this section, I weave theoretical threads that undergird this research. I foreground this work with narrative theory which lays the groundwork for narrative inquiry methodology and methods to follow in Chapter 3. Within narrative theory, I introduce narrative and relational thinking, self-narratives, and concepts of narrative coherence and narrative unity in relation to forming and reforming sense-making and self-identities. I follow narrative theory with Lugones' (1987; 1992) concepts of world travelling, to build bridges to understanding another's experiences, and borderlands, to understand liminal spaces as places of becoming. Art practice enters this discussion to ground and physically manifest these theories, by enabling world travelling, and helping to reimagine borderland spaces, as places brimming with creative possibilities. Community spaces conclude this discussion as forums to extend creative practices, create collective stories and sense-making, and continuously reimagine identities in relation. Additional theories (e.g., queer theory) manifest in my analysis in the articles that are part of this thesis. Consistent with narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) methodology and methods, theories, other than a narrative framework, must not be implemented at the outset of inquiry, but may come alongside the work in progress, if they are based in participants' lived experiences. Max, Adebayo, and Espen each used stories to navigate and understand the complexities of their daily lives; these are fully explicated in the articles.

Seeking to Understand Lived Experience

To consider the theories I will pull into this work, I first return to experience, which according to Dewey (1938) is always relational and transactional. According to Dewey (1938) experience always has three criteria. Experience takes place in situations, through social interactions, and within the continuum of time. Later Clandinin and Connelly (2000) ground

narrative inquiry in Dewey's (1938) writing on experience to create the metaphorical three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry. This space contains three common places of inquiry (i.e., place, sociality, and temporality) and mirrors Dewey's criterion of experience (i.e., situation, interaction and continuity). This three-dimensional space has been called the theoretical framework (Clandinin, 2006) while "thinking narratively" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 16) has been called the conceptual framework of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Taken together the three-dimensional space of inquiry along with narrative thinking provides a comprehensive relational framework for understanding experience (i.e., in the continuity of time, in specific situations and places, and within a web of social relations). Furthermore, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to narrative inquiry as both the "phenomenon under study and the method of study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4). In other words, "narrative names the quality of experience studied and also the pattern of inquiry" (Pearce, 2005, p. 58). Narrative inquiry provides a bridge to study and understand experience as an interrelated series of situations or events within an ever-evolving network of relations.

Thinking Narratively³¹

Thresholds and Doorways

Thinking narratively or thinking with story (Bruner, 1986; Carr, 1986; Coles, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1988), creates a narrative vantage point from which lived experience is understood in relation to personal and collective stories (i.e., familial, social, cultural, and institutional stories). Furthermore, these narratives are embedded, continuously contextualized, interpreted,

³¹ Thinking narratively is a term developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 21) to describe narrative ways of understanding and inquiring into experience based in Dewey's (1938) criterion of experience.

and reinterpreted within a web of social interactions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This web is dynamic and perpetually evolves in relation and response to mutable conditions of time, place and/or situation, and social interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938).

Furthermore, because story allows us to understand that life is experienced and understood relationally (i.e., within a web of nested and interdependent relationships evolving over time, in various settings, and social contexts), thinking with story allows us deep insight into the nature of experience and relationships (Bruner, 1986; Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Coles, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1988).

The concept of thinking with stories is meant to oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking about stories. Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking with stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative . . . [but allow] narrative to work on us.

(Morris, 2002, p. 196)

When I consider what it means to think narratively, I am drawn to think about my own relationship to story. I realize I cannot imagine my memories without their contextualization within storied structures that exist in relation to past, present, and imagined future stories. For instance, when I think about my experiences at Camp fYrefly, I consider both the centrality of relationship and the importance of story to my understanding these experiences. Springing from my stories of Camp, I question how these experiences continue to shape who I am and might become in relation. Furthermore, as I examine my relationship to the campers, I begin to sense the complex nature of relationships and how story acts as a vehicle to understand experience. From this vantage point, story and meaning-making emerging from story seem ubiquitous and almost impossible to bracket or separate from daily experience. In addition, because stories are

inherently contextual, and contextualizing, I understand thinking narratively to be almost synonymous with thinking relationally.

Thinking Relationally

Thinking relationally unhinges and challenges many conventional and habitual ways of thinking and knowing, because it centres knowledge production within a co-constructed evolving process that takes place continuously, in relation, and over time³². Because relational thinking requires continuous focus on events and stories beyond personal experience, it requires a constant decentring of sense-making to hold open spaces that centre the experiences of others. This constant decentring and re-centring process of relational thinking becomes even more complex when it seeks to understand experience, because experience is emergent, multifaceted (i.e., interactive, situational, and continuous), and remains in motion. (Dewey, 1938).

Relational thinking expands my capacity to understand developing and interconnected networks of relations, while simultaneously undermining my sense of certainty. The unfolding and dynamic nature of experience, and my learning about experience alongside Max, Adebayo, Espen, meant my sense of certainty, expectations, sense-making, sense of self, and sense of who I was in relation would constantly be challenged and unhinged. To keep up with the pace of emerging stories, I would need to suspend my usual habits of sense-making and often wait in a place of not knowing for other stories to come alongside. Sometimes, my new learning alongside Max, Adebayo, Espen, took time

³² When sense-making and meaning-making processes are co-created, they continuously evolve in relation; knowing and knowledge in this context remain emergent, always becoming in relation.

for me to comprehend because their stories were complex, evolving, and reverberating alongside and within emergent community stories and relational networks. (Michelle's Reflective Note)

Because stories reverberate in the present, draw on the past, and reimagine futures within a complex interconnected web of relations an embodied state of awareness or quality of presence is required (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) name this quality of presence *wakefulness* and assert it is essential because without it researchers might be blinded to the richness of experience of individual lives unfolding before their eyes. Thinking relationally makes me aware that I am constantly on shifting ground, which calls me to carefully attend to the stories of others occurring within my present set of relations, and which are nested within a wider web of ever-evolving relations.

Relational learning means becoming comfortable with the tensions of uncertainty, constantly checking and rechecking bias and assumptions, and decentring knowledge to centre others' ways of knowing. Perceptions constantly need to be considered anew to respond to dynamic, emergent interactions, and sense-making (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In relational thinking, like "narrative thinking, events can always be otherwise" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31) because experience, always in motion, emerges in relation, and is always subject to change (Dewey, 1938). Thinking relationally, is a forward orienting process that calls attention to past and present circumstances to imagine other possible futures and build bridges to understanding. Bruner (1987) reminds us that storytelling with active listening, "creates recipes for structuring experience itself" (p. 31) and lays tracks into memory that shape present perceptions and future understandings.

Deepening into Story

Thinking relationally helped me grasp the temporal nature my own unfolding lived experiences and become sensitive to noticing the temporally unfolding experiences of others. I believe I missed much from my experience at Camp because I went there more to tell, than to listen. I went to teach, not to facilitate. I went there to share, but I am not sure that what I wanted to share was needed by the young adults. The grant was written and the projects were set before I met any of the young adults and with no input from them. I wonder how the workshops may have been different if I had collaborated with the young adults and we built a workshop plan together. While at Camp, I positioned myself in roles – the authority, the helper, the guide. I was responding to what I believed the young adults needed, instead of asking, and listening, and instead of just holding space open for the young adults to tell or show me what they needed or wanted. After Camp, in all subsequent art workshops I provided, I tried to create a space to enable engagement and creative play; I let the youth and young adults lead the way, and I facilitated their artmaking as needed. At Camp, if I had trusted that experience would unfold in relationship and over time, I may have paused longer and left more space open for listening to the silent spaces between words.

Learning to Listen Through the Stories of SGM Young Adults

Thinking about time spent with youth and young adults at the art studio in Camp, I realize many of the youths made comments that I did not follow up in conversation. Sometimes, I did not know what to say. I remember a small group of young adults sitting in studio, working on postcards. I had bought ready-to-mail art postcards I thought Campers would enjoy sharing. They are blank, ready to be painted, with a place for name, address, and stamp on the back. The youth seemed to like the format and seemed to enjoy the activity. I told them they could pop

them in the mail when they were finished, to which they replied that they had no friends, and no one to mail them to. Then they laughed, and I laughed too, not knowing what to say. I thought they were joking. But when they left studio, they left their postcards behind, and said I could keep them, which I did. What I took as a joke was probably truth.

I wonder what conversation might have ensued if I was able to respond with compassion to the youths' stories; if I was able to listen to a deeper truth they may have been revealing to me. These moments happen so quickly. They can be so easily missed. I missed this opportunity to deepen into conversation and understand what the youth wanted to say. Perhaps, I was afraid of being vulnerable, afraid I wouldn't know what to say. But perhaps being in relation is being vulnerable. I am reminded of Butler's (2005) words, "to be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish to be sure, but also a chance to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act" (p.136). Beyond exposing vulnerability, this story helps me consider the necessity of developing an *ethic of care* (Noddings, 1984; 1992; 2013) to be able to respond and be responsible to those with whom I would be in relationship. We are called as researchers to attend with care to the stories shared in relationship and for those who have shared their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)³³. Butler's (2005) words come forward here:

Perhaps most importantly, we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies

³³ I write in detail about the ethic of care expected within Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in Chapter 3.

before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human (p. 136).

Overlapping Criterion and Common Places of Experience

My understanding of thinking narratively is shaped by Dewey's (1938) writing on experience. In this writing, Dewey (1938) describes how all experience is situated in concrete, physical reality, but is interpreted in relation to the continuum of time in various contexts. According to Dewey (1938) "every experience is a moving force" (p. 38) that is always contextual and always in flux. Dewey's (1938) three interdependent criterion of experience include: situation (i.e., a specific location or event), continuity (i.e., in relation to time, which includes past, present, and imagined future), and interaction (i.e., interpersonal relationships in various social contexts). When thinking with Dewey (1938) about experience, it is impossible to parse experience into discreet events without considering the influence of interconnected, contextualizing relationships (i.e., situation, continuity, and interaction). For instance, when I recall my stories of Camp, in relation to Dewey's (1938) criterion of experience, I become aware that my Camp experience was informed by interdependent and contiguous relationships between the specific situation of Camp (e.g., location, time of year), and how my past experiences and future expectations (i.e., as a university art instructor and new researcher) influenced my social interactions at Camp as well as my interpretations of these interactions (i.e., with youth, youth leaders, and adult mentors).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) drew on Dewey's (1938) criteria of experience (i.e., continuity, interaction, and situation) to create the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry (i.e., temporality, sociality, and place). These commonplaces highlight the importance of always attempting to understand experience within an interdependent, temporally unfolding web of

relations. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Dewey (1938) help me understand that experience is always situated in time and place – in the here and now, but is continuously shaped by our perceptions, actions, and interactions of ourselves in relation to our own beliefs, thought emotion and in relation to others in various contexts and across time.

Temporality – the Unfolding of Experience and the Continuity of Story

Carr's (1986) work grafts onto and expands my understanding of Dewey's (1938) criteria of experience. Carr's (1986) ideas mirror Dewey's (1938) concepts that experience must be understood in relation to time. According to Carr (1986) we are always located in the ever-present, yet transitory, here and now. Like Dewey (1938), Carr (1986) posits that experience is situated, yet ever-changing, and we interpret our present experience by contextualizing the present through our *reach* into our past and imagined future. Carr (1986) expands on Dewey's (1938) criterion for experience, by explicating a relationship between narrative structure and our understanding of lived experience. Carr (1986) suggests it is narrative structure that allows us to make sense of our experiences, "as we are having them" (p. 62) by drawing on stories from the past, present, and possible future and sequencing these ideas to inform present decisions.

By placing narrative structure at the heart of decision-making and sense-making, Carr (1986) suggests narrative is more than a description or representation of a recalled reality, but functions seamlessly and implicitly as an integral part of thought processes that informs action and creates reality. Furthermore, Carr (1986) claims narrative structures (e.g., narrative sequencing - beginning, middle, and end) do not so much follow life, but are embedded in lived experience and reality itself - events unfold in time and sequentially. Therefore, according to Carr (1986) narrative follows life and expands on lived experience, allowing individuals to both make sense of experience in the present and act, and contextualize experience within unfolding

time.

MacIntyre's (1981) work helps deepen my understanding of how narrative structures are embedded within and intrinsic to understanding experience. Like Carr (1986), MacIntyre (1981) suggests narrative structures configure both our experience and understanding of experience. Highlighting the link between stories and lived experience MacIntyre (1981) states, "stories are lived before they are told" (p. 210). Hardy's (1968) writing helps me understand MacIntyre's (1981) assertion that we live stories; demonstrating how pervasive, yet invisible narrative structures are, she writes, "we dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (p. 5). Through Hardy's (1968) words, I understand narrative is the both the fabric of experience and the thread that connects experience making it relevant and meaningful. To sum, narrative helps us understand and communicate what experiences mean to ourselves and to each other. Through narrative, we feel, think, dream, and imagine.

The Coherence and Unity of Narrative

Bruner's (1985; 1986; 1990) and Polkinghorne's (1988) narrative reasoning and narrative knowing respectively, help me understand how narrative configures and organizes knowledge. Bruner (1985; 1986) describes two modes of thought: paradigmatic reasoning, which acts to categorize and thematically relate information and narrative reasoning, which acts to create plot centred, storied accounts. Regarding the latter Bruner (1990) states, "We have an 'innate' and primitive predisposition to narrative organization that allows us quickly and easily to comprehend and use it" (p. 80). Like Carr (1986) and MacIntyre (1981), Bruner (1990) suggests narrative structures temporally organize and unify information into a meaningful and integrated whole. Furthermore, he writes, "each, in their own way, creates a different ontological landscape

out of ‘the real world’ to give it an appropriate force as the Scene in the narratives they are constructing” (Bruner, 1987, p. 32). In other words, narrative reasoning and structures help people create the reality they describe through narrative.

These stories, according to Polkinghorne (1988) configure and unify heterogeneous information by means of emplotment to direct future action. Polkinghorne (1988) states the function of a plot within narrative structures is to set the temporal parameters of story and subsequently select and organize events within this temporal range to create meaning.

Saturated by Story

I am drawn to the work of several scholars (i.e., Sarbin, Coles, Bateson, Clandinin and Connelly) because they help me consider how narratives function to open space and expand my imagination to travel to and inhabit multiple worlds. In an interview Sarbin (as cited in Hevern, 1999) suggests stories are ontological and implicitly create reality, when he states, “we are always enveloped in stories. The narrative for human beings is analogous to the ocean for fishes” (p. 301). Further focusing on the advantages of thinking narratively Sarbin concludes, narrative knowing, “looks for and even celebrates, novelty, and surprise” (Sarbin, as cited in Hevern, 1999, p. 301), while paradigmatic knowing, which focuses on thematic categorization, may shut down learning and curtail discovery.

Imagining Embodied Knowledge

Coles (1989) and Michaels (1996) help me deepen my understanding of the complex nuances of narrative thinking. From both authors, I get a sense of living and imagining with/in stories, to allow “stories to work on us” (Morris, 2002, p. 196). Coles (1989) suggests that living with and imagining within stories allows readers to temporally unwind and connect complex levels of associations and meanings embedded within contextualizing stories with personal

experiences. For instance, Coles (1989) a medical professional, finds listening to stories of patients reveals how they make sense of their circumstances. Further, Coles (1989) asserts teaching medical interns to think with and imagine themselves inside stories might enable them to access embodied, tacit ways of knowing to better understand patients' stories. By accessing the embodied knowledge embedded in stories, medical students may be able to build on and imagine beyond the scope of their present experiences (Coles, 1989). From Coles (1989), I see story as a bridge between types of knowledge (e.g., embodied and conceptual) and experiences, lived and imagined, of self and others.

Michaels' (1996) works of fiction, amongst others, pulls me into narrative in a way, I can't quantify. Their writing is evocative and poetic and seamlessly pulls me beyond words on a page and into stories I can sense and feel. This type of writing calls me to consider writing short stories, poems, and plays in this research to elicit embodied, immersive, and tactile experiences for readers to build bridges to understand experiences of others. In her brilliant work of fiction, *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels (1996) describes being immersed and saturated by stories, when she writes, ". . . I spent hours in other worlds, then surfaced dripping, as from the sea" (p. 29). Michaels' (1996) and Coles' (1989) writing, although coming from different genres, suggest story can facilitate deep understanding of another's experience by connecting readers first to their own embodied and tacit sense-making and knowing, and then through storytelling and imagination, connecting the readers' embodied senses to the stories and experiences of others. Connecting embodied senses with imagination, to imagine through our senses while within stories, creates an immersive experience for readers (Sarbin, 1998; 2004). To imagine with taste, touch, smell within story is to bring tacit and tactile ways of knowing alongside conceptual ways of knowing. Sarbin (1998; 2004) and Caine (2007) suggest that narrative is a bridge that links

imaginative knowing to our embodied knowledge and emotional lives. This imagined, embodied knowledge might provide valuable insight into travelling to the world of others (Lugones, 1987) and understanding ourselves and others in relational ways (Caine, 2007).

When Coles (1989) writes about allowing works of literary fiction to work on his imagining and thinking about daily experiences, I am reminded imagination does not have to be rooted in concrete reality to create new opportunities for thinking and learning alongside. Bateson (1994) provides further insight into the how improvisation, adaptation, and play, alongside imagination might function to open novel processes and possibilities for “learning along the way” (cover).

Finally, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) help me to understand how we carry stories and call them forward to continuously make sense of the world and our place in it. Story is “a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) guide me to understand narrative form with its evolving, and continuously unfolding contextualized and relational ways of thinking and knowing are necessary to understand experience. Particularly important are “stories to live by” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 2), in which individuals contextualize past and present experiences, while constructing their identities in relation to the stories they carry³⁴.

Stories to Live By – Embodying Practical Knowledge

³⁴ These stories to live by may contain “secret, sacred, and cover stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 3). Cover stories are stories authored to give an appearance of expertise or certainty, while simultaneously masking vulnerabilities (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

As I was planting seeds in the garden yesterday, I heard my mom’s voice in my head, telling my grandfather’s story, guiding my hands: “Don’t bury them!” I wonder how often these ever-present stories become part of my everyday thoughts, and how often they rise to the surface of consciousness to guide my actions. I too wonder how many times *stories to live by*³⁵ (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; 1999), lay just beneath consciousness, and inform my actions. These *stories to live by* go beyond conceptual knowledge, “they are expressions of an embodied knowledge of the landscape, of space and time, of borders, cycles, and rhythms” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 113). The metaphor of a storied landscape (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995; 1996), full of cycles and rhythms helps me imagine and act in relation to my mother’s and grandfather’s stories, as they are called forward, time and time again as needed. Every planting season, I recall and act on my mother’s and grandfather’s story³⁶.

Thinking with Stories – a Series of Returns to the Continuous Present

Like my grandfather’s and mother’s stories, my stories are always present, guiding my thoughts and actions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called this being “in the midst” of experience (p. 63). We are all immersed in life’s continuous unfolding and thinking narratively helps me remain aware and wakeful to emergent experiences evolving and transforming in relation and over time.

³⁵ The term “‘stories to live by’ . . . helps us to understand how knowledge, context, and identity are linked and can be understood narratively” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4).

³⁶ I love this *story to live by* for many reasons. I love that I recall it more than once every planting season, as I put seeds in the ground. I love how it reminds me of all the times I spent in the gardens with my mom and dad. It reminds me there is always more to learn, and not to forget what might seem simple. Although I never heard my grandfather’s voice, I hear it in this story, through this memory, I also remember my mother’s voice telling it.

Each time I return to the lake, I am guided by my stories to live by. I know these waters, these currents, these winds, where I am most likely to spot heron, loons, turtles, or carp. Huber (in relation with K. Whelan, 2000) suggests the metaphor of a storied landscape to help imagine immersive spaces we live and act within, as well as the borders that demarcate and limit these spaces. Further, Huber (in relation with K. Whelan, 2000) suggests that this metaphorical landscape, with its' implicit boundaries, (i.e., physical, spatial, and temporal) is created over time and becomes interwoven with our self-stories and identities. At the lake, in this physical landscape, I am immersed in the sound of water against the boat, the smell of fish, the sight of light dancing upon the waters. The landscape calls forward my stories with my father and my stories of being alone here too. The lake is a quiet thinking feeling space for me; a space apart to feel the rhythms of myself in relation to the rhythms of nature.

Queer Stories to Live By

Thinking of my stories to live by, I consider the stories I brought forward to Camp and how these stories reflected my past experiences and identities and shaped my expectations. My stories to live by consisted of my teacher knowledge, both in classrooms and community, and my queer, fugitive knowledge (Hill, 1995). The former knowledge shaped how I thought interactions should unfold: what was needed, how I needed to prepare, how I needed to present myself. None of this worked. Bits and pieces of my practical knowledge came forward, but for the most part it didn't fit and wasn't needed. My teacher stories and identities as a post-secondary art instructor did not fit what was needed in an arts-informed camp for SGM youth and young adults. My teacher knowledge at Camp acted as a hindrance to my experience of being at Camp - like a cookie cutter, it cut away pieces that did not fit my stories and expectations about what this experience should look like. By foregrounding my teacher stories, I distanced myself from youth,

and kept my sense and stories of self and identity intact.

I pulled forward a set of expectations with my teacher stories that hindered being in relation. I wonder how foregrounding my queer and fugitive stories might have shaped my experience and the experiences of the young adults. Fugitive knowledge (Hill, 1995) is knowledge of how to be, despite societal stories that mark us fugitive. Fugitive knowledge (Hill, 1995) is knowledge of how to exist and self-determine in relation to oppressive stories. Fugitive knowledge, for me, has meant many silent pauses as I assessed physical and emotional safety in situations³⁷. It has been a constant, conscious negotiation between myself and others, myself and my environment. I would ask myself: What is necessary here? What is needed here? What is expected here? How am I expected to act here?

Thinking with my stories of Camp, I recall the specifics of Camp in its complexity of overlapping and conflicting stories, sights, sounds, beliefs, interpretations, wonders and imaginings. I recall the words of Downey and Clandinin (2010) who write “narrative inquirers less try to drain the ‘swamp’ of experience through a systematic analysis . . . than try to make its

³⁷ This type of negotiation and being on guard is common amongst SGM people. Meyer’s (2007) writing highlights that minority stress occurs in SGM populations because of constant negotiations for safety in public spaces and places. Hutson (2019) further illuminates these negotiations, writing, “any lack of compliance to gender norms has the potential to be punished through physical or identity violence (p. 106). Forms of identity violence that SGM people regularly encounter in public places and spaces, because of hegemonic societal, cultural, and institutional norms (i.e., heteronormativity and cisnormativity), range from micro-aggressions to physical assault (Hutson, 2019). I have encountered a range of reactions to my presence in public places, from micro-aggressions, like staring, or comments, to threats and hostile acts; some people do not know how to read my gender and their reactions can be aggressive. I am constantly surprised by this, but it happens, so I maintain awareness of my surroundings.

muddiness . . . even more generative in opening possibilities for it to be otherwise” (p. 395).

Thinking narratively with Downey and Clandinin (2010), I am reminded that thinking with story allows for the messiness of lives and multiple way of knowing to simultaneously inform thought and action. Through story, I can revisit the tactility of experience – the smell of fir trees, sight of dust rising from my footfall on the path to the cabin as begin to imagine otherwise.

Narrative Thinking – a Relational Ontology, Epistemology, and Ethics

Recalling the times, I spent with youth and young adults at Camp, I realize for the most part, I missed getting to know them. I carried forward overlapping stories of teaching, of creativity, of queerness, of being youthful, and of being in relation to university and college students as an art instructor. I believe some of my stories (i.e., my teacher stories) limited my interaction with the youth and likely curtailed stories they wanted to share. I am reminded of Wagenaars’ (2011) writing that suggests that dialogic and hierarchical ontologies, epistemologies, and ethics are not congruent and often cannot work together. Wagenaar (2011) suggests that hierarchical ontologies, epistemologies, and ethics impose a top-down value system with embedded expectations, while dialogic systems (i.e., ontologies, epistemologies, and ethics) require a more symmetrical and relational approach. This relational approach was needed in this research.

Possible Discursive, Dialogic, and Creative Spaces and Places

Thinking with Freire’s (1970) ideas about dialogue, I am reminded that dialogue needs time and space as well as trust to build interactions and relationship. Freire’s (1970) ideas of dialogue remind me of Dewey’s (1938) criteria of experience and learning which happens through social interactions, in specific contexts and situations, and over time.

After the first day at camp, my teaching plan was scuttled. I began the next two

workshops by cutting a deal with the youth and young adults. I would take approximately twenty minutes to demonstrate new techniques and material that they could use if they wished, but the studio would be an open space for Campers to do with as they wish. I would be there to assist them in any way they needed. The question became how do I hold the space open and what kind of space could emerge in relation, over time?

(Michelle's Reflective Note)

Narratives of Self

In the previous section, *Thinking Narratively: Thinking with Stories*, I attempted to demonstrate what it means to think narratively and to live on storied landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; 1996). By referring to works of Dewey (1938), Carr (1986) and MacIntyre (1981), I attempted to demonstrate how thinking narratively is so intertwined in experience that it cannot be separated from life. Carr (1986) and MacIntyre (1981) make the case thinking narratively is ontological; it not only reflects experience, but creates experience *as it is being lived*³⁸?

From Bruner, Polkinghorne, Sarbin, Coles, Bateson, Clandinin and Connelly, I draw out

³⁸ This view, that life happens narratively, stand in sharps contrast to view by narrative theorists, such as Mink (1970) and White (1981a; 1981b) who argue that the structure of lived experience is very different from narrative structure. The former, they argue, is constituted from discrete and random events, while the latter involves retrospectively imposing a structure on events, that before description, they did not have (Mink, 1970; White 1981a; 1981b). Mink (1970) and White (1981a: 1981b) took the stance narrative is solely an act of the imagination, a representation of life, and a retelling of experience to impose order – a case of art describing life. Other scholars working with narrative theories, such as Ricoeur (1984; 1991; 1992) believe stories are unique expressions human experience, but do not endorse a narrative ontology (Carr, 1986).

narrative epistemology; a way of knowing through narrative that gives structure to understanding experience while remaining intricately connected to the places, social contexts, and temporality in which experience is lived. In the following sections, I extend applications of thinking narratively to address some of my questions about social support and identity formation of trans and non-binary young adults.

Self-narratives: The Autobiographical Self

In the previous section, I examined how narrative and relational thinking operates as a self-reflective and continuously contextualizing process that engages individuals to understand their world and their place in it. Self-stories, those stories people think and tell and about themselves, are continuously constructed and reconstructed into self-identities over time and across various situations and social contexts (Bruner, 1987; Carr, 1986; Davies & Harré, 1990; Kerby, 1991; MacIntyre, 1981; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riceour 1992; Sarbin & Scheibe, 1983; and Taylor, 1989). According to Polkinghorne (2004) people compose, articulate, and embody their self-narratives as they engage in the world and with themselves. Thinking with and telling self-stories allows individuals to reflect on and continuously reconfigure self-narratives and self-identity (Polkinghorne, 2004). In other words, personal identity is always in process, and always becoming. As Polkinghorne (2004) states, “Because narrative is the cognitive process that displays temporal unfolding, it produces the kind of understanding that matches the kind of becoming that characterizes human existence” (p. 46).

Self-narratives also provide a type of constancy to self-identities. Self-stories enable the self to exist in various contexts over time while remaining an “I” which is “always ‘located’ in the now” (Carr, 1986, p. 27). Carr (1986) names the constancy of the self, created through self-narratives, and in relation to the passage of time and shifting contexts, narrative coherence.

While thinking with Carr (1986), I turn to MacIntyre (1981), who writes narrative structures create coherence, which provide stability and resilience to self-stories and identities informed by these narratives. Describing the linkage between narrative structures and narrative coherence in self-identities, MacIntyre (1981) states, there is a “unity of the character which the unity of a narrative requires. Without such unity, there would not be subjects of whom stories could be told” (p. 218). Adding to the idea that narrative structures create coherent self-identities, Polkinghorne (2004) writes, “narrative is the form of cognition that links one’s life episodes into a whole and thereby gives one’s identity a unity and self-sameness through time” (p. 29). From Polkinghorne (1988; 1991; 1995; 1996), Carr (1986), and MacIntyre (1981) I begin to understand how self-narratives are constantly reconfigured in the telling and retelling to ourselves and others to inform our ever-shifting self-image and self-identity. Identity seen in this way is always created in relation, always emergent, and always capable of change.

Davies and Harré (1990) and Taylor (1989) further this discussion by describing the dialogic-self, which is formed in relation to the changing social discourse. Bruner (1987) extends this concept when he states we eventually “become the autobiographical narratives ... we tell about our lives” (p.15). If this is so, as Bruner (1987) suggests, then we can speak and imagine ourselves into existence through our narratives; our self-stories, and how we imagine ourselves into them; these stories have the power to transform, create, and recreate the self.

Because narratives of self not only inform how we think about ourselves, but also who we are in relation, self-stories are often shared. In telling self-stories, we position our self-narratives in relation to cultural and societal stories and expectations and these collective stories inform and potentially influence our self-stories (Bruner, 1990). These self-stories are the nexus between ourselves and our world, and our self-stories can be heavily influenced to conform to

societal and cultural expectations and norms (Bruner, 1990). Bruner (2003) writes, “we constantly construct and reconstruct a self to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and of our hopes and fears for the future” (p. 210). Thinking with Bruner (1990) about cultural and societal stories that may hold sway over individuals’ self-stories, I wonder what influences hegemonic societal and cultural stories (i.e., heteronormativity or cisnormativity), might have on the self-stories and positive identity formation of trans and non-binary young adults. I also wonder what influences such stories have had on me. Additionally, I wonder about possible consequences when self-stories of trans and non-binary young adults are missing from larger societal and cultural narratives. Rich (1986) helps me think about the absence of societal and stories, when trans and non-binary young adults are constructing their self-stories and self-identities:

When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you...when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. It takes some strength of soul--and not just individual strength, but collective understanding--to resist this void, this non-being, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard. (Rich, 1986, p. 199)

Narrative Coherence, Narrative Unity, and Stories of Self

Self-narratives are transactional, negotiated within social contexts, and contingent on thinking and knowing in relation. Self-stories and self-identities are continuously revisited and revised, formed and reformed, in relation to personal, as well as, familial, social, cultural, and institutional narratives. Furthermore, in a process called *narrative coherence* (Carr, 1986) self-stories are continuously constituted, formed and reformed, in relation to collective stories to

create a sense of continuity and unified sense of self within ever changing relations to time, place, and sociality (Bruner, 1985; Carr, 1986; Polkinghorne; 1988; MacIntyre, 1981), amongst others. Bruner (1990) expands on the idea of *narrative unity* to describe how individuals may adapt self-stories to fit within larger socio-cultural stories. This process of adaption becomes problematic when stories of self are erased or marginalized as they come into relation with dominant hegemonic societal, cultural, and institutional narratives (i.e., heteronormativity and cisnormativity in relation to the self-stories of trans and non-binary young adults). Lugones (1987; 1992) writing, particularly about: world travelling, the borderlands, and playfulness provides additional insight into how selves are formed and reformed in relation, and how individuals may authentically engage and even thrive in relation to hegemonic societal, cultural, and institutional narratives.

Lugones: World-Travelling, the Borderlands, and the Self-in-Between

As a creative artist who strives to remain open and playful to imagine possible worlds, I felt an instant affinity with Lugones (1987; 1992), concepts of world travelling, the borderlands, and the significance of being playful. These concepts from Lugones (1987; 1992) now step forward to provide insight into the complexities of entering and maintaining authentic relationships, while also negotiating barriers to walking alongside in relationship. In a broad sense, Lugones (1987; 1992) ideas help deepen my understanding of the ways individuals think, act, and make meaning through social interactions, which are contextualized within time and

place. Critical to my work, are Lugones' (1987; 1992) concepts of: 1) plural selves³⁹ to navigate multiple worlds; 2) world travelling to walk alongside others; and 3) borderlands⁴⁰ as places of new beginnings.

Possibilities for Plural Selves to Navigate Multiple Worlds

Lugones (1987) grounds her ontological and epistemological ideas of plurality in “*pluralistic feminism*” (p. 3). According to Lugones (1987) to authentically be in relation means seeing others through loving perception, because loving perceptions celebrates plurality and difference. Lugones (1987) argues that concepts of unified selves are intrinsically hierarchical and involve domination of the other. Bringing Lugones' (1987) ideas alongside Bruner's (1990) ideas of narrative unity and Carr's (1986) ideas of narrative coherence, I can begin to sense a rupture between their ideas of unity and coherence and Lugones (1987) concepts of continuously morphing and plural co-existing selves (Lugones, 1987). Lugones (1987) describes each of us as simultaneously existing as plural selves and inhabiting multiple worlds⁴¹. Further, we are different selves in different worlds, some worlds fight with others, and in these worlds, we are

³⁹ Like Lugones (1987), Arendt (1978) writes about plural or multiple selves, which she posits find their greatest potential toward transformation and self-realization in creative and performative acts that must take place in social relations and within the context of lived experience (Honig, 1992).

⁴⁰ For instance, as trans and non-binary identity formations emerged as threads within narrative accounts, it was interesting to see how theories (e.g., queer, trans, intersectional) came alongside the borders of narrative inquiry.

⁴¹ To clarify, I find the rift, between Bruner's (1990) ideas of narrative unity, Carr's (1986) concepts of narrative coherence, and Lugones' (1987) ideas of plural selves inhabiting multiple worlds, is that Lugones offers the possibility of multiple co-existing story lines, whereas, I believe, Bruner's (1990) and Carr's (1986) concepts operate and exist within a single unified story line.

not always playful, we are not always at ease. I am a plural self who inhabits multiple worlds; I am white, middle age, a lesbian, a queer person, a woman, an artist, a daughter, a sessional instructor, and I was raised Catholic. Each of these selves manifests in ways of being and of being seen in the world, in relation to familial, cultural, social, and institutional narratives. For instance, the world of white is usually a marker of privilege, while the worlds of aging, woman, lesbian, sessional, are marginalized and often seen as less in relation to societal, cultural, and institutional norms. These marginalizations play on my sense of self-worth, my sense of being able to make valuable contributions to society and my actual ability to make concrete contributions. Lugones (1987) describes how we abnegate parts of ourselves to exist in certain, especially privileged, worlds. Walking into Church with my mother, I was a daughter, white, middle-aged, educated, and Catholic; my lesbian and queer self was present too – observant and quiet. I was not entirely free in this world, although being able to travel there with my mother remains precious to me. World travelling allows me to see how, when, and why I walk between worlds. It allows me to observe my silences in some worlds and my ease in others. World travelling allows me to notice when I am not at ease, when I am not creative, and ask why this is so (Lugones, 1987; 1992).

World Travelling to Walk Alongside Others

World travelling provides insight into the ways we structure our relationships and might unconsciously oppress others and thereby fail to be in authentic relationships with them (Lugones, 1987; 1992). World travelling exposes a hierarchical power dynamic often at play in relationships. The basis of these hierarchical dynamics is called dualistic thinking (Lugones, 1992). This type of thinking is based on a competitive model which mediates between winners and losers, us versus them. When we are thinking dualistically, we are not truly in relation with

others, but rather in relation to our perception of who we think the other person is (Lugones, 1992). Importantly, if we are not aware of how we are perceiving others, then our relationships are confined to what we already know, or think we know (Lugones, 1992). Lugones (1987) calls this way of relating to others “*arrogant perception*” (p. 4) and says that it occurs because “we fail to identify with them – fail to love them” (p. 4).

To move beyond arrogant perception and see beyond our sometimes-myopic visions of the others, Lugones (1987) asserts we need to travel to another’s world to be in authentic relation, to authentically walk alongside them, and create space for individuals to be authentic. Lugones (1992) suggests we also need *loving perception* (p. 5) to remain open and playful to new experiences and new ways of learning. Recalling an experience at Camp, when the youths left their artwork behind or threw it in the trash bin when they left the art cabin, I felt their action as a rebuff or an insult. I couldn’t understand why they didn’t care about their work. Later, I could see my assumption (i.e., that they didn’t care about their artwork) was part of my world view. For some perhaps the process of making the art was more important than the final product, and some, I know now, didn’t take their artwork because they didn’t have a home or no wall to hang the artwork on. I failed to travel to their worlds and be in relation long enough to know them and long enough to love them. In part, I was seeing myself in these youths and young adults, my expectations and my experiences were reflected in how I saw them. I failed to see them.

Thinking about world travelling, Greene’s (1995a) words come forward to help me clarify the role of imagination in world travelling. Greene (1995a) states, “we are called upon to use our imaginations to enter into that world, to discover how it looks and feels from the vantage point of the person whose world it is . . . we extend our experience sufficiently to grasp it” (p. 4).

Lugones' (1987) ideas of world travelling through loving perception not only makes being in relationship possible, but opens the possibility this process might be an enriching learning experience. Greene (1995a) provides additional insight how imagination functions in world travelling, and helps me become aware of the seamless, almost invisible trace of imagination.

Borderlands as Places of New Beginnings

Lugones (1992) also helps me to understand *borderlands* or “mestiza consciousness” (p. 34) as both places of being stuck and places of becoming. In the borderlands, sometimes we get stuck, unable to move forward or backward because we are caught between selves and between worlds; here we are caught in a “state of intimate terror” (Lugones, 1992, p. 32). In the borderlands, we are caught between two dualities – the self-oppressed, by dominant socio-cultural forces, and the self-becoming. The latter state Lugones (1992) calls the “*self-in-between*” (p. 32). Anzaldúa (1987) explains this terrorized state inhibits the ability to respond and be creative, because the self is “petrified . . . caught between *los intersticios*, the space between the different worlds she inhabits” (p. 20). Lugones (1992) explains while the borderlands are stifling and silencing, they also can be generative places because they call forth resourcefulness, and adaptations to survive and thrive in relation. Lugones (1992) drawing upon Anzaldúa (1987) ideas states, “the self-in-between fashions herself in a quiet state” in which “. . . the possibilities of resistance depends on this creation of a new identity, a new world of sense, in the borders” (p. 33). Lugones (1992) calls this state of new self-creation, the *Coatlicue state*, and states that is born in the borderlands, as a way “to make new sense” (p. 33). Furthermore, Lugones (1992) posits while this dual self is caught between, unable to respond, and create within their surroundings, the plural self “of the new mestiza is a self-critical, self-animated plurality” (p. 35) and able to respond and create new meanings. Lugones (1992) qualifies this

creation of self and new meaning making as necessarily “anchored in and responsive to a collective” (p. 36) because it can only be understood “as meaningful because it is inserted in a process of resistance that is collective” (p. 37).

As I came alongside trans and non-binary young adults who are in process of forming and transforming their sexual and gender identities Lugones’ (1987, 1992) and Anzaldúa’s (1987) concepts of plural selves occupying multiple worlds were profoundly helpful for me. Ideas that living this multiplicity might generate new spaces to exist and new possibilities for sense-making (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lugones, 1987; 1992) enabled me to consider who and how I was in relation to Max, Adebayo, and Espen, as I travelled to the borderlands to attempt to make new sense. In addition, Halberstam’s (1998a; 1998b; 2005; 2011; 2012; 2018) writing on gender diversity, came alongside Anzaldúa’s (1987) and Lugones’ (1987; 1992) writing and enabled me to begin to understand gender identities beyond binaries, which exist in liminal sites of creativity and possibility.

Artistic Practice to Negotiate the Borderlands

I found Lugones’ (1987; 1992) writing called me to consider my experiences existing and recreating myself in the borderlands; in places, I was an outsider and not at ease. Memories of being a sessional instructor, underemployed, and undervalued as an aging, white, lesbian and queer woman within academia were balanced for me by returning to my studio to paint and create artwork. My silences, which emanated from the worlds where I was not at ease, were broken by my making space for self-creation through artistic practices. By creating and later exhibiting artwork, I found ways to reflect on my experiences, create new self-stories, and communicate them. Dewey (1934) helped me understand relationships between my art creation and understanding my experience when he (1934) describes how art is not a solitary practice,

disconnected from lived experience, but rather a means of connection and making sense of experience. Dewey (1934) states art “signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height, it signifies complete interpretation of self and the world of objects and events” (p. 19). Dewey (1934) posits art and the aesthetic experience expands the possibilities for understanding and communicating the multi-faceted layers of lived experience. Regarding the importance of art and the aesthetic experience, Dewey (1934) writes:

tangible scenes of life are made more intelligible in [a]esthetic experience: not, however as reflection and science render things more intelligible by reduction to conceptual form, but by presenting their meanings as the matter of a clarified, coherent, and intensified or ‘impassioned’ experience. (p. 290)

Thinking with Dewey (1934), I envisioned weaving together strands of my life, like a tapestry, in which art provides the coloured threads. Greene (1995a) expands on Dewey (1934) to suggest art plays a crucial and transformational role in opening imagination and enabling a multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations to be lived and told. Imagination Greene (1995a) asserts is a crucial element in artistic experience because it allows individuals “to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished . . . to carve out new orders in experience” (p. 19). Further, Greene (1995a) states imagination allows individuals to break habitual ways of being, by freeing space to “glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet” (p. 19). To sum, art allows imagining new beginnings and possible futures (Greene, 1995a). Furthermore, by acting as a vehicle for the imagination, art “enables us to cross empty spaces between ourselves” (p. 3) and others, thereby creating a basis for understanding, empathy, and compassion.

Writing on artistic ways of knowing, Eisner (2008), echoes both Lugones (1987) ideas of world travelling and Greene’s (1995a) concepts of empathetic imagination, when he writes,

through its evocative qualities, art may allow “one to participate vicariously in a situation. Experiencing a situation in a form that allows you to walk in the shoes of another” (p. 6). Although, I do not believe a person can ever walk in the shoes of another, I believe empathy created by connecting one’s embodied knowledge, past recollections, and imagination can help build a bridge to begin to understand the stories and experiences of another.

While Lugones (1987), within the context of world travelling, speaks about coming alongside, rather than inhabiting another’s shoes, Eisner’s (2008) description parallels Lugones (1987) and Greene’s (1995a) ideas of relating to another’s experience empathetically and with compassion. Further, while Lugones (1987) writes about opening spaces for creativity, Dewey (1934), Eisner (2008), and Greene (1995a) provide insight into ways art and art practice may help develop and expand this burgeoning space. In sum, as plural selves strive to critically create and recreate themselves in the borderlands (Lugones, 1987; 1992), art and aesthetic experience may enable “multiple forms of knowing” (Eisner, 2008, p. 5); these generative, imaginative, creative, and empathetic spaces, created through artmaking may enable new ways to understand experience as we walk alongside one another (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2008; Greene 1995a).

Community in the Borderlands

Lugones (1992) suggests communities are the sites where individual meaning-making “becomes meaningful because it is inserted in a process of resistance that is collective” (p. 37). Lugones (1992) ideas call forward Freire’s (1970) theorizing on critical consciousness, a consciousness formed and reformed in a transactional, socially constituted process of reflective thought and action, Freire (1970) calls dialogue.

Thinking about SGM populations, I return to hooks (1990) writing about the importance of communities as a space to rest, recoup and resist for marginalized populations. Fraser (1990)

and Warner (2005) name marginalized community spaces counter publics, and queer counter publics respectively, which they assert are spaces of resistance formed in relation to hegemonic social, cultural and political norms (i.e., heteronormativity and cisnormativity). These counterpublics (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2005) provide a space of recoument and resistant to hegemonic norms, while also creating vibrant discursive spaces for publics outside the common public sphere. Like Lugones' (1992) borderlands, Fraser's (1990) and Warner's (2005) counterpublics are dialectically created and recreated in relation to, because of, and despite, societal, cultural and institutionalized oppression. These counterpublics, like Lugones (1992) borderlands, may also be spaces of self-creation and imagination.

Bringing forward ideas from Caine (2007), Dewey (1934), Grace and Wells (2007) Greene (1995a), Eisner (2008), and Wells (2007) art practice and aesthetic experience may offer possibilities to reimagine within borderland and counterpublic spaces. Self-stories and self-identities (Bruner, 1986; 1987;1990; Bruner & Weiser, 1991; Carr, 1986; Polkinghorne; 1988; MacIntyre, 1981) may also be formed and reformed within these borderland and counterpublic spaces (Fraser, 1990; Lugones,1987; 1992; Warner, 2005) through creative practices. These borderlands and counterpublic spaces are future oriented spaces, spaces of becoming. Within these spaces, it is possible to acknowledge the way things are, while actively working to reimagine futures and build new frontiers. Art-making may be key to pulling together theoretical threads and manifesting these imagined worlds.

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CHAPTER 3: Narrative Inquiry Methodology and Methods

Narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) begins with autobiographical explorations, such as narrative beginnings, to generate wonders gathered from experience and to further theoretical explorations that may emerge within the course of inquiry. In narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) theory is interwoven throughout research texts to create a conversation⁴².

This research began with wonders drawn from my experience at Camp fYrefly in 2016. My wonders and subsequent questions at the outset of research were born out of my living in relation with SGM youth and young adults as they explored meaning-making through their stories and art practice⁴³. Their identity formation was taking place at Camp fYrefly, an SGM intergenerational arts-informed community space. By beginning this research with reflections on my experience at Camp and bringing narrative theoretical understanding alongside this experience, I could reflect on experience and see how my understanding was extended and reimagined through these theories. Although theory is always to some degree an abstraction,

⁴² Because this methodology is ground in experience, theory becomes visible through its iterations in the practical everyday applications of participants, rather than as abstract conceptual or theoretical frameworks to be applied to participants' experience by researchers. Further, consistent with Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) methodology, narrative theory acts as the groundwork for this inquiry. Other theories (e.g., queer theory, gender theory, neurodiversity theory, intersectional theory) come forward in this research, when Max, Adebayo and Espen use these theories as practical tools for sense-making in their daily lives. For these reasons, theories utilized and their implications are discussed in the article sections of this thesis (Chapters 7-9) to reveal how Max, Adebayo and Espen utilized theory.

⁴³ My learning in relation was a process beginning at Camp and moving forward through this research over multiple years; my questions and wonders evolved and unfolded over time and in relation.

theoretical understanding ground in narrative ways of knowing appeared to be ground in experiential, contextual, and relational ways of knowing, and therefore may be highly applicable to understanding lived experience (Bruner, 1985; Carr, 1986; MacIntyre, 1981; Polkinghorne, 1988). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explain that narrative epistemology is ground in Dewey's (1938) pragmatic ontology, which is "not transcendental... [but] transactional" (p. 3), and as such generates a form of knowledge in which "representations arise from experience and must return to that experience for their validation" (p. 39).

Narrative Inquiry⁴⁴

The door to this cabin is a threshold that opens so many questions not only about the research questions and puzzles that will eventually emerge, but also about the nature of the inquiry space itself. Specifically, within this inquiry space, I questioned how I will attend to the people, places, and situations, to allow this research process to unfold and open new ways of thinking and being. In the process of writing, reading, rereading, and rewriting emerging ideas, it became clear to me that these are part of an inquiry space. Furthermore, I am beginning to understand that my experiences and stories already have temporal, place, and space dimensions. (Michelle's Reflective Note)

The three-dimensional framework of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), ground in Dewey's (1938) ideas of experience as interactive, continuous, and situational, helped me begin to make connections between discrete events and a constellation of interrelated situations and interactions, that took place across time and in various social contexts. Dewey's (1938) description of experience as "a moving force" (p. 38) helped me understand experience is

⁴⁴ Please see Chapter 9 for more details.

dynamic; an energy in motion situated within a continuum of action. Furthermore, Dewey (1938) posits experience is interactive because it takes place within situations (e.g., places and events) and alters concrete reality, not only internal perceptions, in which they occur. Furthermore, these interactions and situations are inseparable because experience is always transactional (Dewey, 1938). In other words, experience is socially constructed between individuals and occurs in specific times, places, and social contexts. Finally, Dewey (1938) argues interaction and continuity are inseparable because situations occur successively over time and continuously impact both physical places and social relations in which they occur.

Narrative Theory within Narrative Inquiry

I was particularly drawn to work that helped me to understand how narrative functions to understand experience. I was drawn to writing on narrative theory and/ or experience that helped me to consider: 1) the continuities, coherence, and unities of lives in motion made visible through narratives (i.e., Bateson, 1994; Carr, 1986; MacIntyre, 1981); 2) the importance of narratives of self to identity formation and reformation (Bruner, 1990; Carr, 1986; Hall, 1996; Jacobs 2002; Polkinghorne, 1988; Taylor; 1989); 3) the ability to understand change and connectivity of relationships within the temporal unfolding of lives being lived (Bruner, 1986; 1990; Carr, 1986; Dewey, 1938; Geertz, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988), and; 4) the ability to imagine, improvise and remain playful to emergent possibilities (Bateson, 1994; Coles, 1989; Eisner, 2008; Greene, 1995a; Lugones, 1987; 1992; Sarbin, 1998; Paley, 1981; 1990; 2004; 2010), within community (hooks, 1990; 1992; 2003; 2015; Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2005).

Thinking narratively within a three-dimensional space of inquiry meant always thinking relationally about experience and in relation to time, place, and social contexts. I understood relational thinking necessitated me to look at my own stories in relation to those of Max, Espen

and Adebayo and be wakeful to the influence of temporality, sociality and place on my interpretations of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It was important for me to constantly reflect inward toward my emotions and tacit beliefs and outward to be sensitive and seek to understand Max's, Espen's and Adebayo's experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach to inquiry does not so much impose a theory onto experience, but instead situates researchers and participants within a three-dimensional inquiry landscape that calls attention to creating, maintaining, and learning in relation and within changing contexts.

Narrative inquiry is grounded in Dewey's (1938; 1958) "pragmatic ontology of experience" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 46). Further, because the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry is grounded in Dewey's (1938) criterion of experience, it calls researchers to focus on experience as it unfolds. Theoretical threads (e.g., narratives of self and identity formation) must not be superimposed on experience or emerging relationships, but be brought alongside Max, Espen, and Adebayo and my experiences as we co-constructed meaning in our unfolding lives. Other theoretical perspectives (e.g., queer theory, gender theory) emerged as inquiry unfolded in conversations between Max, Espen, and Adebayo to I deepened our understandings.

Narrative Inquiry Touchstones

To help researchers be attentive to the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry (i.e., temporality, sociality, and place) throughout the various stages of the research process, Clandinin and Caine (2013) describe twelve narrative inquiry *touchstones*.

Before Entering the Field

Narrative beginnings. The first touchstone in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013) is becoming aware of your own narrative beginnings as a researcher. In the first chapter of this proposal, I described my narrative beginnings and who I was becoming in relation to my stories,

and who I might become in relation to participants. My research purpose began to emerge from my experience as the Artist-in-Residence at Camp fYrefly where I first created artwork alongside SGM youth and young adults. I needed to be continuously aware of how my past stories and identities (e.g., as a university art instructor) both limited my ways of responding and being in relation with participants, and offered possibilities for deepening conversations.

Relational Responsibilities and Relational Ethics

The second touchstone is paying attention to relational responsibilities and relational ethics while working with participants (Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018). Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) requires attention to relational responsibilities begin before entering the field of research and continues throughout the research process. When thinking about relational ethics, I thought in part with Thomas King's (2003) story *Coyote and Ducks*. Thinking with King (2003), I wrote:

Coyote is acting the thief⁴⁵. He steals with cunning; he steals with charm; he steals with

⁴⁵ Coyote is a trickster and shapeshifter - he/she poses both as our self and a mirror of ourselves in relation to others (Dr. Sean Lessard, personal communication concerning the nature of Coyote as trickster and shapeshifter, November 19th, 2017). Although in this story, I am interpreting Coyote as a villain because it is helpful to think about the difference between sharing, like the ducks, and taking, like Coyote. Coyote poses a problem also – when asked, some people may give too much, and then what do you do? Coyote is never static, he/she defies binaries, like bad or good, hero or villain (Doueihi, 1993). He/she is always and continuously both and possibly neither. We are all to some extent Coyote (Dr. Sean Lessard, personal communication, November 19th, 2017). We are Coyote when we shift our positions, turn answers into questions, and trouble our sense-making by turning our certainties, upside-down and inside-out (Doueihi, 1993). Coyote was very helpful to remember in this work as I hoped to, in Butler's (2006) words, become undone in relation. It was

*agreement – mostly he just steals... Coyote only thinks of himself when he asks the ducks to give him their feathers. He is persistent that Coyote - asking and asking more, taking and taking more. What does he take from the ducks? He takes feathers. What are feathers to a duck? I think feathers might mean warmth, protection, and the ability to fly - or safety, survival, and the ability to thrive. How could ducks fly without feathers? Not very well, I imagine. Let's not forget trust. In the end Coyote steals trust too. Is he cruel, Coyote, or just oblivious to the needs of others? I don't know. I think he's oblivious. It's not an excuse.*⁴⁶ (Michelle's Reflective Note)

When I think *with King* (2003), I think about the violence of taking something from someone. It's a power dynamic and someone is losing. Sharing is different. Harm results from taking without thought for the other - taking without giving. I began to bring King's story alongside Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as I begin to think about relational ethics in research. I thought about possibility of harm to participants that could happen in the context of research. Lopez's (1990) words come to mind, "Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive" (p. 60). What happens to people when we steal their stories? How do they survive?

As a researcher, I worked closely with Max, Espen, and Adebayo, and they entrusted their stories with me. These stories do not belong to me - like the ducks' feathers. I do not own them; they are not and will not be mine. I remembered this story as a lesson on sharing and taking. As a researcher at a university, I have been in a position of privilege and power. Working

also helpful to remember Coyote as I co-compose narratives alongside Max, Adebayo, and Espen as they formed and reformed, imagined and reimagined their identities.

⁴⁶ This excerpt was my written response and dialogue with Thomas King's (2003) story *Coyote and Ducks*. It is an example of thinking with story to consider relational ethics in research.

alongside participants in their daily lives and familial, cultural, social, and institutional contexts over time built relationships and trust. In these research relationships, people have said that they trust me with their stories, and these instances, I must take care of their stories and remember Coyote's fur/feathers.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me that ethics in narrative inquiry includes ethics protocols at university research ethic boards, but it goes well beyond these. Relational ethics considers that research takes place in the "midst of stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 64), and daily living. In this study, relational ethics were constantly negotiated with Max, Espen, and Adebayo because their contexts (i.e., familial, cultural, social and institutional) were always in transition. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded me that I am *amid* storied and ever shifting landscapes. Like Max, Espen, and Adebayo, I have brought my stories into our research and research relationships.

Looking to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I read, "we came to narrative inquiry as a way to study experience . . . narrative is the closest we can come to experience" (p. 188). On the next page, I read, narrative inquiry is, "people in relation, studying people in relation" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189). Inquiry is built on building and maintaining good relationships, like friendships. I know in my heart how to care for the confidences of friends, and Max, Espen, and Adebayo deserve the same level of care and attention. As a researcher in relation, I had to remain wakeful to my "relational responsibilities" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 177). I needed to always be attentive to the possibility that stories may have negative consequences for Max, Espen, and Adebayo and to continue to watch for such possibilities and take steps to mitigate negative consequences. Max, Espen, and Adebayo generously contributed to this research through making artwork and meeting regularly to read through and contribute to their narrative

accounts. This process of continuous engagement throughout the course of research helped to ensure Max's, Espen's, and Adebayo's voices are present and they are represented in this research in ways they endorse.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have reminded me this means considering who may read Max's, Espen's, and Adebayo's stories to, and consider how these stories may be read in future by other audiences. I continue to consider how audiences may interpret participants, when accounts are disseminated in different contexts, places, and across time. As a researcher, I needed to remember these stories, like lives, exist in temporal, social, and place dimensions.

As a researcher, I will carry forward the story of Coyote and the Ducks. If I get to place of not knowing I will remember this story. It is a story to live by. Remember Coyote and the Ducks in relation. Be mindful that to be invited to share stories is a special privilege – it is to be invited into another's world. With those invitations come special obligations to take care of the stories that are given and those to whom the stories belong.

(Michelle's Reflective Note)

Entering the Field

Negotiating relationships and co-composing research in the midst

Touchstones three to six describe ways to enter and be in relation with participants. These touchstones suggest that constant negotiation and respectful engagement may allow researchers to develop and maintain relationships alongside participant's unfolding lives, which are created in relation to familial, cultural, societal, and institutional stories. Concerns regarding relational ethics and relational responsibilities are also called forward when researchers consider being attentive and *wakeful* to the fact our research is taking place amid lives being lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Negotiating relationships with participants, means

negotiating relationships with Max, Espen, and Adebayo within the contexts of their lives. Creating space for sharing concerns and ideas about research emerged from experiences of being in relation and responsive to the needs or requests of Max, Espen, and Adebayo. As Max, Espen, and Adebayo and I entered the field, we created various types of field texts. I journaled after meetings to help me remember and reflect on conversations. Other field texts included: recorded conversations; observation notes of participants; and artifacts (i.e., found artwork, photographs, and memory box items). Additional field notes included the creation of artwork, reflective autobiographical writing, and poetry. Artistic methods were used to facilitate Max's, Espen's, and Adebayo's autobiographical exploration and storytelling (Caine, 2007; Grace & Wells, 2007, Wells, 2007) and served to "queer" or disrupt heteronormative and cisnormative discourse and identity formation. The creation of all field texts were negotiated with Max, Espen, and Adebayo.

Interim Texts

Touchstones seven to nine describe deepening our mutual understandings by looking at stories in relation to time, place, and sociality (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). In this process, interim texts were negotiated between Max, Espen, Adebayo and I and new meanings emerged as stories were told and retold, written and rewritten. As Greene (1995a) suggests, it is in the retelling and reimagining we begin to understand stories may always be otherwise. At this stage of writing and rewriting of texts, Max, Espen, and Adebayo and I began to consider our audiences. The idea of audience in relation to the work calls us to consider the implications of the work and multiple ways of representation. It needs to be noted that since interim texts, like field texts, reflect different ways of knowing, multiple forms of expression, including visual art creation were appropriate. Final narrative accounts co-created with Max, Adebayo, and Espen include a play,

poems, short stories, and artwork.

Touchstone nine describes the importance of relational response communities to the work in progress (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Response communities allow researchers to share research with others to garner response and create space for reflection on research. Clandinin and Caine (2013) suggest that broad spectrums of individuals within the response community will be the most helpful. Response communities were helpful to uncover blind spots in research and reveal assumption or bias that I may not have noticed. Response communities in narrative inquiry like all other relationships are most useful when knowledge and response are co-created in relationship that have been built over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

In this research, I have worked with several response communities, groups, and individual qualitative researchers. First, my supervisors and supervisory committee were an important response group throughout this research process; Dr. Kristopher Wells, Dr. Sean Lessard, and Dr. Vera Caine have kept my work on track with robust and timely feedback regarding: forms, formats, content, methodology, and methods. Beyond my supervisors, the second constant and important responses to my research, from research design to writing articles, has come through conversations with my partner and wife Maxi, who is a qualitative health researcher and Adjunct Associate Professor in the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, at the University of Alberta. Our daily conversations about research, both hers and mine, have helped me gain perspective to navigate research challenges and tensions, and guide my reflective practice, assisting me to continuously check my assumptions and biases. For instance, I remember speaking with Maxi about a participant not staying in touch, and she asked me to look back through my emails and check my assumptions. When I checked, I found over fifty emails

from this participant over several months, either responding to my requests for meetings or initiating meetings. By checking my assumptions, sometimes in very concrete ways, I could remain more wakeful, present, and responsive when interacting with Espen, Adebayo, and Max. Building on these daily discussions on reflective practice, Maxi and I co-authored an academic article on reflective practice, which has recently been published (Miciak, et al., in press)⁴⁷.

My third response group consists of two doctoral candidates in Education Policy Studies, at the University of Alberta. These two dear friends, whom I met in graduate school, attended most of their coursework alongside me. We began having regular meetings during classes to speak about course work. We continued our regular meetings as classes ended, and we worked through Ethics and our candidacies, then entered our respective fieldwork, navigated challenges in the field, and wrote interim texts. We have shared our research at our regular meetings to receive feedback and help each other navigate research tensions and challenges. We were arranging a meeting just before the COVID-19 pandemic struck; we have not been in contact since March 2020. I hope we can resume our regular meetings through virtual means.

My fourth response community or group consisted of meetings at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED) table at the University of Alberta. I received thoughtful feedback from many qualitative researchers, both students and established narrative inquirers, around the table in response to sharing my research. For instance, when I shared found poetry and images I had created in relation to Max's, Espen's, and Adebayo's stories, I was given both general feedback about my direction, and specific feedback about which threads to

⁴⁷ Miciak, M., Barrington, G.V., Lavoie, M. M. (in press). Reflective practice: Moving intention into action. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 00(0), 1-20.

follow which may hold emotional resonance for audiences, and which threads might be less generative. As well as useful feedback, many people around the table were very caring about the research⁴⁸. This caring attitude helped me value my research journey as a process, and amazing experience, even as I navigated tensions arising within the work itself⁴⁹. In addition to receiving feedback about my work, researcher's stories, both from students and established researchers, about their research helped me see that my challenges were not unique, but part of all research journeys; these stories enlarged my perspective on my own research, especially in bumpy times.

My fifth response community emerged in response to Espen's, Max's, and Adebayo's creative research outputs. Because Espen, Max, and Adebayo each belong to their own communities, each of them took their artwork and creative outputs from this research back to their communities to share. It was very gratifying to see Espen's, Max's, and Adebayo's communities embrace Espen's, Max's, and Adebayo's artwork, and later, the writing that occurred in this research. I was always waiting for critiques or changes in direction to come from Espen, Max, and Adebayo after they shared their creative work, including artwork, found poetry, letter writing, short stories, and a play, in their communities; but these changes never came. I

⁴⁸ After showing the image *Names I Have Been Called*, which is an image of my hand with names written it. One person responded to the image stating that we cannot always chose these names, nor can we always erase them; she spoke from personal experience, when she shared that some names stubbornly stay with us, no matter what we do.

⁴⁹ Dr. Jean Clandinin helped me to understand that as we walk alongside participants sometimes we are pulled into their world in ways that create strong tensions for us as researchers. In these times, when our tensions make it difficult to walk alongside our participants with deep and care-filled attention, we need to work even harder to attend to our relational commitments and relational ethics toward our participants (Clandinin et al., 2018), while also holding open spaces of self-compassion.

believe this research was taken up by Espen's, Max's, and Adebayo's communities because Espen, Max, and Adebayo led this research to a large degree, by directing their own art-making activities and acting as co-authors in many creative texts, from field notes to narrative accounts. Max, Espen, and Adebayo each created work for themselves, while also attending to their communities, and how this research might resonate and act as resource within these communities.

Final Texts

The final touchstones, nine through twelve, highlight the fact that narrative inquiry is continuously unfolding and interactive. The twelfth touchstone calls researcher to remember research represents a snapshot of time within the continuously unfolding process of lives being lived and in relation to time, sociality, and place. Therefore, research texts, even final texts, need to be viewed as works in progress, that can always be otherwise (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Ground in Dewey's (1938) concept that education and experience are inseparable and continuous, inquiry and research are also viewed as continuous unfolding processes – although research takes place within a window of time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In the final texts, Max, Espen, and Adebayo and I as a narrative inquirer are asked to consider the connectivity and relationships between personal and collective narratives (i.e., familial, social, cultural, and institutional). Further, we are called on to justify why these stories matter and to whom (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Caine, 2013); justifications which are personal, practical, and theoretical.

Personal justifications⁵⁰

I came to this research with hope I might have something to contribute to society and the beginnings of a path to effect change for diverse SGM folks. I hoped also those who follow, SGM youth and young adults, might find a few more paths beginning to open that might make their paths easier. I came here for hope too, that I might make a little more space for myself just to be, knowing that space, might make space for others too.

I can say my eyes have been opened through this research, by walking alongside Max, Adebayo, and Espen, to stories and complexities of lives, I could not have imagined before this research. I have found resilient, talented, earnest, and brilliant trans and non-binary young adults to walk alongside and learn from in relation. Because of my learning alongside Max, I now forward my interactions and group work with questions: Whose stories are missing here? Why is that so? And what can we do now? How can we act to open space for missing voices and stories to be told, by those whose stories they are?

Practical justifications⁵¹

This research has the potential to insert the stories trans and non-binary young adults into the decision-making process in educational policy, government services, and community-based programs that support trans and non-binary young adults. Input to programs that are based on and responsiveness to the experiences of trans and non-binary young adults may lead to restructuring programs to better serve the needs and requests of these young adults. Specifically,

⁵⁰ Please also see Conclusions for personal significance.

⁵¹ Please also see Conclusions for practical and social significance.

these findings may be used to structure gay-straight alliances (GSAs)⁵² and to formalize trans and non-binary mentorship programs, resources, and services in public schools, universities, and community agencies. Camp fYrefly, for instance, may choose to incorporate information pertaining to the needs of trans and non-binary young adults into their programming.

This research has contributed to new knowledge on several fronts. Primarily, this research addresses a paucity of adult and community educational scholarship on arts-based mentorship to support trans and non-binary young adults, who often do not feel safe or fully included in formal educational environments. Significantly, this research demonstrates how trans and non-binary young adults transform arts-based mentorship into “relational assets” (Sadowski et al., 2009); abilities and resources co-created in relationship that foster a sense of connectedness to self and others. These trans and non-binary young adults mobilize artmaking to make sense of experience, combat social isolation, and build their chosen communities. I wish to stress three important findings from this work. First, artmaking and aesthetic experiences may act as a bridge to build understanding between diverse individuals and groups and may be especially helpful to support marginalized voices, whose stories have been systematically and historically silenced, like trans and non-binary young adults. Second, mentorship reconceptualized as a co-created relational teaching and learning practice can be an asset-building process, especially when these processes are augmented through shared experiences and

⁵² Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in this paper are defined as “. . . student-run and teacher-supported school-based groups that work to create safe, caring and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ students and their allies in schools” (Wells, 2006, p. 11). In 2015, the Government of Alberta passed legislation to support for gay-straight alliances and requires all schools to develop SGM inclusive policies and resources. This legislation and policies had uneven uptake due to strong resistance on ideological and religious grounds.

identities. Finally, when SGM adult learners learn alongside SGM mentors, there is a quality of seeing and being seen that comes alongside content to create relational assets that SGM young adults may use to develop personal supports and build community networks and resources. These types of supports are critical for SGM populations, especially for trans and non-binary young adults, who continue to find a dearth of trans and non-binary social, educational, and health recourses, supports, services, and networks.

If we are serious about creating resources and building support resources and networks for SGM young adults, policy amendments are needed to reflect and create change. This research posits there is need for SGM youth and young adults to learn in relation to SGM mentors, SGM instructors, and SGM professors, but before this can happen, hiring practices and policies need to be assessed and amended to support necessary changes. Policies could enable relational assets to be built to support SGM individuals and communities, for whom support is critical. I suggest the Canadian federal government update and amend the Employment Equity Act (EEA) to recognize SGM populations as a designated employment equity group in need of employment equity protections and support. Designated employment equity groups in the EEA have not been updated since 1995, although huge disparities persist and systemic intersectional challenges continue to obstruct SGM individuals from accessing necessary supports to become fully contributing members of Canadian society.

Theoretical justifications⁵³

Assumptions are key to considering what theories are valid and why use theory in the first place. How do you define knowledge? How do you define reality? In this research, I have

⁵³ Please also see Conclusions for theoretical implications and significance.

asked myself, not only what theories are important, but why are they important, and what types of knowledge do these theories provide. Bruner (1985) helps me consider how theories function in research through his writing about two types of knowing, paradigmatic and narrative, which sets the stage for two distinct types of theorizing. The first, paradigmatic knowing, is based on selecting, categorization, and thematizing (Bruner, 1985); this approach to creating knowledge is common to most research methodologies and methods. This approach is also intrinsically extractive, and like most theoretical lenses, it focuses on certain aspects of knowledge, names them, frames them as valuable, and discards the rest. I am interested in the discarded bits, the fugitive knowledges.

Narrative knowing (Bruner, 1985) is contextualized and continually contextualizing within dynamically unfolding narrative ways of thinking and relational learning. Narrative knowing completely upends paradigmatic knowing, and calls forward different theoretical approaches. Narrative knowing and theorizing is generative, instead of extractive, and it mirrors our intrinsic thinking and knowing processes (Bruner, 1985; 1990). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provide the theoretical framework of narrative inquiry; the three-dimensional space of inquiry, which sets the stage to understand and study experience in all aspects. This framework is so comprehensive that the amount of knowledge garnered is immense, emergent, and messy. This research framework unfolds in unpredictable ways; it cannot help but create new knowledge. This approach suits my quest to seek and find hidden knowledge.

Grounded in Dewey's (1938) concept of experience, it was important to attend to life making experiences of trans and non-binary young adults that happened in dynamic interactions and in often conflicting constructions of identity, agency, and resistance. There was a need to understand these interactions within the context of a queer world-making, whereby

heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions and structures were challenged. I wanted to understand the tensions and possibilities of integrating other theoretical approaches (e.g., queer, trans, or intersectional theories) in relation to pragmatism to develop new theoretical perspectives. Beyond academic theorizing, I wished to understand if theories can be pragmatically applied by trans and non-binary young adults as useful tools to make sense and negotiate complex lives.

Narrative theories and narrative frameworks (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) ground and foreground this research. From the perspective of narrative inquiry grounded in Dewey (1938), I understand experience in terms of three criteria - continuity, situation, and social interaction. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) helped me to understand experiences as always situated within nested, and interdependent relationships to time, place, and social contexts. Narrative inquiry itself offered a way to view experience within this web of connections that offers a counter narrative to experience as isolated events. In this research, theories (e.g., queer, trans, and intersectional), came alongside narrative inquiry to question societal, cultural, and institutional norms (i.e., heteronormativity and cisnormativity), because these theories were embedded in Max's, Adebayo's and Espen's stories; they each used theory to make sense of their experiences and negotiate complexity.

Queer theory was beginning to be published when I was a young adult; I had not read queer theory, nor heard of it, nor did I use it to build my identity. My identity was built rather in relation to, and often despite, societal norms, through my questioning stance. My stance was a matter of creativity and adaptability, rather than theory. When queer theory came along, I

recognized some parts of it, such as the questioning stance⁵⁴. I continue to hold a questioning stance toward the utility of theory, and continue to question how theorizing too narrowly focuses and over simplifies knowledge and problem solving within complex lives.

This research highlights how theory (e.g., narrative, queer), ground in daily experience of trans and non-binary young adults, can be utilized by these young people as a practical tool to negotiate complex lives. Finally, this research develops visual narrative inquiry methodology (Caine 2002; 2007; Caine & Lavoie, 2011; 2015) to understand how artmaking, and thinking with images (Eisner, 2008), intersects with narrative inquiry to open possibilities for deeper conversations to be seen and told.

Methods⁵⁵

Creative Responses: Creative Artwork in Relation to Stories, Creative Writing as Reflection & Creative Nonfiction as Method

Because Espen, Adebayo, and Max live complex lives, it was crucial to respond creatively within all aspects of this research⁵⁶. Extending the invitation to participate, as much as

⁵⁴ Queer theory emerged in the writings of Sedgwick (2008/1990), Butler (2006/1990), and Pinar (1998) in the 1990s. When I came out as a young adult queer theory was not known to me.

⁵⁵ Please see Chapter 9 for details.

⁵⁶ In this research, learning alongside Espen, Adebayo, and Max was key. This meant responding creatively and relationally in all aspects of research as opportunities emerged. Espen, Adebayo, and Max were invited to participate in research as co-investigators which means they helped inform research design. For instance, the research puzzle and research questions were formed and informed in relation to Espen's, Adebayo's, and Max's stories, requests, and interests. This research sought to understand how relational learning functions and its potential by creating and

Espen, Adebayo, and Max felt comfortable engaging, meant I had to continually find ways to open and hold open spaces for participation throughout research. Regular creative practices, such as group printmaking and individual conversations, created numerous research field notes. To respond to Espen's, Adebayo's, and Max's artmaking and stories, I found it helpful to create artwork in relation. This artwork helped me initiate research conversations and build my reflective practice to learn alongside.

To extend my reflective practice, I also wrote poetry, to hold space open for myself to think alongside Espen's, Adebayo's, and Max's stories. I shared this poetry with Espen, Adebayo, and Max to initiate research conversations. I also turned to found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2002; 2017; Richardson, 1992; Wells, 2004), as I poured over transcripts of our conversations to find ways to foreground Espen's, Adebayo's, and Max's voices, while maintaining the complexity of their stories for future audiences. By pulling bits of transcript from research conversations with Espen, Adebayo, and Max into poetic form (Richardson, 1992), I could highlight poignant pieces of our conversations while holding the felt sense of those conversations open for the audiences to read, and possibly in some way, experience. Poetry communicates experience uniquely, as Butler-Kisber (2017) suggests, "Poetry... appeals to our senses and opens our hearts and ears to different ways of seeing and knowing" (p. 2).

Creative Nonfiction as a Creative Response

studying opportunities to learn in relation. As a result, research design, including research methods, needed to be nimble, emergent, and responsive to Espen's, Adebayo's, and Max's stories as they were being lived and told within this research. This also meant Espen's, Adebayo's, and Max's stories needed to be told in ways Espen, Adebayo, and Max wished them told. This creative approach is reflected in my field notes and interim texts.

When it came time to begin writing interim texts⁵⁷, from field notes, each participants' unique stories and unique modes of story-telling, directed me to respond creatively to find narrative formats which could adequately respond to the complexity of Espen's, Adebayo's, and Max's stories. Creative nonfiction emerged as a method I could use to best reflect Espen's, Adebayo's, and Max's complex and unique experiences in a storied form.

In this research, creative nonfiction is employed in Espen's narrative accounts within the short stories; in Max's account within my letter writing; and in Adebayo's account within the found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2017) and within the play. Creative nonfiction in these works, is grounded in actual events, as gleaned from transcripts of conversations, and expanded through my imagination to step alongside Max's, Espen's, and Adebayo's stories in creative ways. All accounts and methods used therein are nested within the relational ethics commitments of narrative inquiry (Clandinin et al., 2018). In writing creative nonfiction Espen, Max, and Adebayo acted as co-authors of their narrative accounts, by collaborating in the writing processes through editing, commenting on, and amending sections, so their accounts reflect their stories in ways they approve.

A Note on Creative Nonfiction

Creative nonfiction is often viewed as contested terrain in academia, because of the propensity toward objectivity in academic writing (Sachs, 2010). Additionally, creative nonfiction is viewed with some scepticism in academic circles because of the paradox that lies within the term: how can something be creative and nonfiction as well (Sinner, 2013). The term *creative writing* suggests work informed by imagination and afforded strong creative licence,

⁵⁷ Interim texts in narrative inquiry are also known as narrative accounts.

while *nonfiction* infers a story anchored in actual events that can be objectively verified (Griffin, 2015). Griffin (2015) argues that the paradox within the term, creative nonfiction, “would appear to perpetuate the confusion within the form, which allows it to be interpreted as either fact or fiction” (p. 16). Pulling Griffin’s (2015) assertion forward, creative nonfiction as a genre forever sits in a liminal space, refusing binaries, between fiction and nonfiction. The liminality at the core of creative nonfiction writing draws me to it as a method and means to speak about liminality, refuse binary definitions, and creatively and relationally attend to Max’s, Espen’s, and Adebayo’s complex stories with care-filled attention.

I follow Richardson’s (1994) work on writing as a method of research inquiry and Gallagher’s (2011) writing on storytelling as method within educational research. I situate my creative nonfiction writing alongside the work of Sinner (2013) who writes about creative nonfiction as a method of inquiry within arts and educational research. When creative nonfiction is viewed as a form of literary arts, the genre aligns with arts paradigms, and requires less linear and more imaginative interpretations (Genette, 1999). As a form of literary arts within educational research, Sinner (2013) suggests creative nonfiction, “becomes an expansive educational space that further shifts our understanding of knowledge creation” (p. 8). In Sinner’s (2013) approach, creative nonfiction is a relational method that encompassed her relationships with her participants and creates a relational space to show and tell intimate stories.

I recognize creative nonfiction is a responsive and fluid literary genre where the contexts of everyday stories are not singular events but a form of relational interactivity, thereby affirming that storying has a critical role to perform in conveying intimate understandings of the lived experiences. (Sinner, 2013, p. 5)

I resonate strongly with Sinner’s (2013) approach to creative nonfiction as relational method to

enable my walking between worlds to make sense and find meaning. Alongside Sinner (2013) assertions about the possibilities of creative nonfiction as a method, I pull forward Lugones' (1987) concepts of world travelling to imagine into borderland places (Lugones, 1992) to understand, hear, and tell stories. These creative nonfiction approaches showcase the relational teaching and learning that has taken place within my research alongside Adebayo, Max, Espen, and extend and expand a relational space to possibly encompass audience as they come alongside these stories in future.

A Note on Permissions

Adebayo, Max and Espen have signed University of Alberta Ethics forms which allow for their stories and images created this research to be disseminated in this research. Within Adebayo's, Max's and Espen's narrative accounts all names of individuals have been fictionalized with the exception of Adebayo, Max, Espen, myself and Vera who worked with us in a community art studio as part of our research group. Place names have not been anonymized. Adebayo's narrative account is play and it is a work of creative nonfiction, as are the short stories in Espen's narrative account. Events in the play and short stories did take place, but all characters, except Max who gave permission for his name to be used in the play, are entirely fictional.

Parting Thoughts: The Return

I return to the threshold of the Artist-in-Residence cabin. As I reach for the door knob to reopen the cabin door, I realize my path to the cabin and stories within the cabin continue to shift and morph even in this moment. This journey has been an emergent, unfolding process of writing and rewriting, thinking and re-imagining; and on this journey, I was not alone. Max, Adebayo, and Espen have been my constant and intrepid companions through it all. For me,

coming alongside, and learning to think with the complex stories of these amazing individuals to co-compose our research has been a gift. Morris (2002) describes thinking with stories as “a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative . . . [but allow] narrative to work on us” (p. 196). They are working now, I can feel it. The narratives beginning at Camp, and ending four years later, continue to work on me, to teach me, and I am profoundly grateful. Through research processes (i.e., thinking narratively, closely attending to temporal, place, and social dimensions of experience, and sharing art-making experiences), I began to glimpse these cabin walls, once solid barriers, transformed into transparent webs of connectivity nested in relationships. I began to see complex interconnections between those of us at Camp, and our stories, and the at times comfortable and other times tense, reverberations of our stories alongside familial, societal, cultural, community, and institutional stories.

As I recall experiences at Camp and began to inquire narratively, I remember Camp as a community of individuals with diverse life experiences and as a space of opportunity for inter-generational dialogue, and arts-based creativity, and diverse identities and expressions. I wondered how these multiple sites of opportunity might intersect and translate into spaces and places of connectivity developed in relationship. I wondered further how these spaces and places might function to support trans and non-binary young adults as they formed and transformed their identities and built their lives and communities. When I thought narratively about stories-of-self and identity formations of trans and non-binary young adults, I considered the possible tensions in self-defining and redefining selfhood and identity in relation to a multiplicity of unfolding and nested stories. Because many hegemonic norms (i.e., racism, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, ageism, ableism, xenophobia) continue to repress emergent identities, I wondered how borderlands, communities, and counterpublics might serve as sites and sources of refuge,

recoupment, and resistance. I too wondered specifically if arts-based practices brought alongside narrative understandings would open new ways to be playful in the borderlands allowing opportunities for trans and non-binary young adults to create something new.

In this research, I have found community and supported arts-spaces to be generous and generative, playful borderland spaces for creative self-reflection, expression, and identity-formation alongside community building. I wondered if art-making might present new ways to re-count, re-story, and re-imagine personal and collective stories. I was hopeful that opening spaces for artmaking for trans and non-binary young adults might also provide openings for diverse, and previously silent and silenced, stories to be seen and told. Specifically, by drawing on my experiences, (e.g., of developing and teaching in community based public art programs), I had hoped to co-create with trans and non-binary young adults, spaces for creative exchange, intergenerational dialogue, and arts-based activities. I drew on my experiences as a visual artist and community arts instructor to respond creatively to stories of trans and non-binary young adults throughout this research process.

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CHAPTER 4: Adebayo's Narrative Account

The Play: Introduction and Reader's Guide

February 4th, 2020

I began writing this play in mid-June 2019. I was in Banff, staying at the Centre for Creativity, sitting at a shaded picnic table under a few fragrant pines when the play began to spill out. The play almost wrote itself when it came, but then, it had been a long time coming. The play organically arose from my learning alongside Adebayo. Writing this research as a play emerged, after I struggled to find a form that could portray the complexity of Adebayo's experiences and the dramatic, dynamic events evolving, and still in progress. I had also grappled to find a way to reconcile my learning alongside Adebayo with my learning gleaned from public facing documents.

Adebayo, the participant in this research and main character of this play, is a young trans Black man and refugee from Uganda, whom I met in September of 2016, just a month after he arrived in Canada. I met Adebayo at a free community printmaking workshop I was giving for sexual and gender minority (SGM)⁵⁸ youth and allies. When I met Adebayo, I knew nothing of his stories or his experiences. At the time, I was a graduate student and fully immersed in my academic bubble, feverishly writing term papers. Had I looked up from my desk long enough to watch the news or read a newspaper, I would have been aware of Adebayo's story. It was all over the news.

Over the past four years, since coming to Canada, Adebayo continues to make news. Adebayo has become a public figure; a vocal political activist and advocate for Queer and Trans

⁵⁸ Sexual and Gender Minority refers to a constellation of identities: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or trans, intersex, queer, two-spirit, pansexual, asexual, plus those individuals not defining themselves as heterosexual.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (TQBIPOC) movements, and for queer and trans refugees particularly. As a public figure and TQBIPOC community leader, Adebayo often seeks news media to amplify his words and speak to TQBIPOC community members and publics.

Learning alongside Adebayo also meant learning the concerns of Adebayo's community because understanding Adebayo's personal experiences also meant understanding Adebayo's public life as a TQBIPOC community leader. What I didn't know at the time I started working with Adebayo, but know now, is that news stories would be a key component of my learning in relation to Adebayo. As I have worked with Adebayo in a more concentrated way over the past two years in this research⁵⁹, I have come to learn that Adebayo enjoys being a public figure, who often advocates through various news media. Learning alongside Adebayo meant keeping up with the news, so that I could ask Adebayo informed questions, while being respectful of his time and his commitment to being a public figure, activist, and advocate.

As well as learning through news articles, and the drama of circumstances described therein, this research was informed by my working alongside Adebayo making art at SNAP printmaking studio. I found myself to be in a difficult position as I began to write though, because it was almost as if I knew two very different people, or more accurately, I knew one person in two very different ways. Furthermore, because of the complexity of Adebayo's stories, which spans continents, and deals with racism, xenophobia, and transphobia, while confronting familial, cultural, societal, and institutional hegemonic narratives, my challenge would be how to effectively speak Adebayo's stories, and who would be the audience? With these thoughts in mind, I return to Adebayo's public facing stories, which are a source of his activism and

⁵⁹ This time-period was April 2018 to January 2020.

advocacy for community building and public education. Taking my cue from Adebayo and how he constantly puts his stories in the public through news media, I thought I would approach the same audiences, but through a different form. While I recognize the importance of news, I think it often falls short as a mode of communication to promote understanding. There is something about news – the parsing of knowledge, the word limits, the slant, the angle, the story. News is one-sided, folded into neat and tiny packages, so unlike like life, which is messy, reverberating in all directions, all at the same time. As Marshal McLuhan (1964) would say, the medium is the message. That short sharp shock of news, puts the information out there, but how much can we take in? Can we use it? Learn from it? Integrate it? I wonder. A play though, that is a different matter. Reading a play or seeing a play, that takes time, it takes investment. You need to imagine scenery, characters, everything really. To write a play too, and I had never done such a thing, you must imagine, as fully as possible, every nuance of every scene and character. You need to taste the dust in the air and feel the sun on your face, to be able to flatten that experience into a page. And as a reader too, and I have read many plays, to experience a play, you need to fully invest your imagination to join your stories of experience with those being presented, so you can understand, feel, and learn with/in a play. A play becomes the container for imagination. A play is an invitation to play, to participate, to learn alongside, to open your experiences, and re-examine them in relation, to open your eyes, your heart, and your mind. In a play, imagination is key, the bridge between our stories and those of others; the play is the vehicle that makes it all happen.

As a child, when I began to read, there were too many words. I didn't enjoy reading,

although I loved being read to⁶⁰. But when I began reading plays, that's when I really began to read, because for me, a play brought the life of the book and my lived experience together, like nothing else – well except poetry or art. So, a play, writing a play, like reading one, comes to me naturally, I suppose. It's a comfortable form. It's a way for me to speak to you that may touch your heart and your mind; if it's done right. I know I experience plays as openings to my imagination, and I hope this play may open something for you. While, I can't speak to my ability as a playwright, I can say this play holds a lot of heart for me and for Adebayo also. My learning and my tensions too around this learning are all on full display in this play. I tried to think with Adebayo's stories, as accurately as I could, while allowing my imagination to come forward to deepen my thinking as well as my experience of Adebayo's stories. I hope this play will hold space open for others to understand Adebayo's stories in a different way too; to experience Adebayo's stories and think *with* them. Adebayo came alongside me as I was writing this play to give his feedback and to provide his insight and input. Large parts of the play were revised throughout the writing process to reflect Adebayo's stories and how he wished these represented.

Finally, Adebayo created many images in this research. These images have been included as an intermission at the centre of the play. Including Adebayo's artwork, as a centrepiece that comes alongside Adebayo's stories of activism and advocacy, seemed appropriate because his artwork always developed in relation to and was informed by his public and community work. My work and relationship with Adebayo centred around our work together. Observing Adebayo working in studio, I found while the content of Adebayo's artwork focused mainly on his

⁶⁰ Even as a child, it seems, I was drawn to stories. With stories told, I could visualize and imagine other worlds. Reading eventually became an imaginative space for me as well; a space which I am now shifting to writing.

activism and advocacy, his time spent in studio seemed like a personal respite, like an intermission, or temporary time out from all demands on his time and attention. The focus Adebayo brought to studio seemed to provide a short pause, a place to rest, like an island in a quickly moving stream. To mirror Adebayo's response to printmaking, as a short joyful pause, I have centred Adebayo's artwork at the centre of this play, in hopes you might also take a short pause with Adebayo's artwork and photographs of his time in studio. I wonder if this short pause might give you a different way to see Adebayo and his stories, because this is something I have experienced. In Adebayo's artwork, I find more than his confrontations and struggles; I find Adebayo's joy and celebration of his and his community's multiple identities, resilience and agency. I believe Adebayo's artwork beautifully and elegantly contributes to Adebayo and his community seeing, showing, and telling previously unimagined, new hopeful stories.

AddendumJuly 25th, 2020

This play raises issues of transphobia, homophobia, xenophobia, and racism that Adebayo and members of his queer communities faced either in Kampala, Uganda, or in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Policing is a red thread that weaves through this play; this issue arose organically within research in relation to Adebayo's stories and stories from his Ugandan LGBTIQ and his community TQBIPOC refugees and newcomers to Canada⁶¹. This play was

⁶¹ Although, this play confronts timely politically charged issues, this play was not preconceived to make political statements; it is rather the reflections on Adebayo's and his community's stories and lived experiences.

written before May 2020⁶², when George Floyd's⁶³ death in Minneapolis ignited moral outrage and mass public demonstrations throughout the U.S.A. and around the world, protesting murder, brutality, and excessive use of force by police, particularly against racialized individuals and communities of colour. I believe nonviolent peaceful protests are a sign of hope for a more inclusive world.

This play was written as a space of reflection, to say, see, tell, and imagine previously silent or silenced stories. This play was written with Adebayo's input as an act of hope; hope that this play might open a space for important conversations to begin to inspire action for change. I recall Adebayo's words as a call to action, when he said, "*Now you know; what now will you do?*"⁶⁴ This is a question I take to heart as I write, and it is a question I now pass to you.

Synopsis

Part 1 of the play touches on why Adebayo became a refugee. He was fleeing transphobia and homophobic violence, which continues to be publicly sanctioned, and supported by punitive and severe anti-LGBTIQ⁶⁵ legislation, and enforced by Ugandan police. The police raid on the

⁶² This play was written between June and October 2019, with major edits taking place near the end of January 2020. The play's introduction was completed early February 2020.

⁶³ I mention George Floyd's name in deference to the Black Lives Matter movement's request, "*Say his name*" or "*Say her name*". In many of these protests, chants "*Black Lives Matter*" were later joined by chants "*Queer and Trans Black Lives Matter*" in many cities around the globe.

⁶⁴ This was Adebayo's comment to audience at a panel discussion following the first public viewing of Adebayo's documentary *A Long Road to Peace*, Garneau Theatre, May 26th, 2018.

⁶⁵ The acronym LGBTIQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Trans, Intersex, Queer.

Kampala, Uganda Pride event was a real event (Associated Press, 2016)⁶⁶. Adebayo was Mr. Gay Pride 2015, he was about to hand over his crown and Mr. Gay Pride 2016 was going to be announced, when Ugandan police raided the event, attacked attendees, jailed them, took their personal information, including addresses and photographs, and later released this information to the press (Wong, 2016)⁶⁷. The act of Ugandan police taking people's personal information and later releasing it to the press was not uncommon. I mention one historical figure in this play, Mr. David Kato. Mr. Kato was a prominent LGBTIQ rights activist in Uganda, who was murdered in his home in 2011, a few months after press in Kampala published his personal information and labelled him a leading LGBTIQ activist (BBC, 2011)⁶⁸. Mr. Kato's work opposing anti-LGBTIQ legislation in Uganda, and subsequent murder, focused the world's attention on Uganda's treatment of LGBTIQ citizens, and ultimately shifted Uganda's anti-LGBTIQ legislation's sentencing protocols from the death penalty to life imprisonment (Okeowo, 2012)⁶⁹.

Part 2 of the play focuses on the challenges and tensions that arose within and between Edmonton's LGBTIQ+ communities when pressure was applied by TQBIPOC community groups to address social and racial inequities. This section of the play centres on the Edmonton Pride Protest of June 2018. Part 3 of the play, focuses on xenophobia and racism that Adebayo experienced in relation to the 'Yellow Vest' protests in Edmonton, December 2018. I was

⁶⁶ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/globalnews.ca/news/2866456/pride-event-in-uganda-disrupted-by-police-leaders-briefly-detained/amp/>

⁶⁷ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/globalnews.ca/news/2874212/ugandan-swimmers-in-Edmonton-recount-police-raid-on-lgbtq-event-share-challenges/amp/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15685648>

⁶⁹ <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/ugandas-kill-the-gays-bill-back-in-limbo>

shocked to see news media coverage and language by some Canadian federal political parties normalizing and sympathizing with the ‘Yellow Vest’ protesters, even after ‘Yellow Vests’ were involved in violent encounters with counter-protesters in Edmonton (McMillan, 2018)⁷⁰. Part 4 of the play, centres again around Edmonton’s LGBTIQ+ communities and tensions that arose within and between communities when Edmonton’s Pride Festival Society cancelled the Edmonton Pride Festival 2019. This section of the play showcases less public negotiations, which were going on behind the scenes, and highlights issues raised by TQBIPOC community groups through their demands for equity and support from larger LGBTIQ+ community during planning for Edmonton Pride 2019. This section highlights how personal and political motivations may be amplified and even distorted by social media, when emotional responses reverberate on these platforms and often polarize individual’s and group identities and positions, making much needed common ground all that much harder to find.

On Creative Nonfiction

On a final note, this play is a work of creative nonfiction, meaning real events are highlighted and imagined into a storied form. Almost all events depicted in this play are real; most events took place, and were experienced, either by Adebayo or myself. These real events are also imagined into, to add details to help readers engage, and more fully imagine into stories.

⁷⁰ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.cbc.ca/amp/1.4948100>

PART 1: REFUGE**ACT 1: Scene 1 – Beginnings** (Saturday July 27th, 2019)

Stage Note: Centre Stage. Spots lights come up on a white woman in her early fifties sitting at a small wooden desk, pen in hand. Her hair is curly, shoulder length, disheveled – it looks like she's been sitting a while. She wears dark-rimmed glasses, a green scoop-neck t-shirt with a Trent University Excalibur logo, faded jeans shorts, and sports socks. Her toes are curled against the floor and her knees are bent back so her legs can curl around the front legs of the chair. Moving slightly, she leans forward into the desk edge in her home office. Her left elbow rests on the desk allowing her left hand to sit alongside her left cheek. Her head is tilted down, eyes focused on the paper in front of her. She is off somewhere deep in thought. Still.

The office is small, brightly-coloured, filled with hanging plants, prints on the walls, art supplies strewn about, thick books, and stacks of papers sitting to the left and right edges of the desk. There, piles and piles of brown-edged newspapers, pages filled with poetry and creative writing, academic articles, photographs, and artwork teeter on edge, threatening to topple to the floor. Birds chitter-chatter through an open window as light streams in from outside. An antique green-glass desk lamp also illuminates the room, shining brightly down on the desk and the letter being written there. She remains deep in thought. Writes a few sentences, pauses, raises the fountain pen from the page, stares straight ahead. After a minute, she bends forward, to return to the page and continue writing. A projected screen reveals the letter as it is being written. A narrator's voice breaks the silence. A woman's voice speaks slowly, calmly, haltingly. Thinking. The woman's thoughts come forward, echoing the contents of the letter. The figure continues writing as the text is read aloud.

Narrator: First, I want to tell you, I'm not an omniscient narrator. I don't know everything and

this isn't the voice of God. I'm sure omniscient narrators don't exist; I'm not sure about God.

This is my voice – the voice of a white middle class woman living in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada with a wife and two dogs. Did I throw you with that last bit? I know – two dogs are a handful. Adebayo's voice will join mine soon. He's amazing. I think you'll like him. For now, though, you're stuck with me – a flawed narrator, who stumbles, makes mistakes, and gets anxious and cranky, because I'm learning along the way, dare I say, just like you.

I want to tell you a story, to give an account of a life, or more accurately, of two lives lived in relation, Adebayo's and mine, but where to start? I'm conscious that I am weaving a story for you out of countless threads. I know this story will be shaped by threads I pick up and threads I drop. I realize there are countless stories I could tell and countless ways to tell them. Thinking now of all the stories, they rush forward together, each calling for attention. I want so much to paint for you a bigger picture. I want to show you what I have seen, so that you too might enter this story and leave it with a deeper understanding. There is much to show and much to tell, but where do I even begin?

I'll try to begin at the beginning. But who's beginning exactly, and for that matter, who's story? Stories become interwoven over time – will this be Adebayo's story, my story, our story? Yes... I think it will be all those things. Much will depend on who's telling the story. Each story can have a thousand possible beginnings and no fewer possible endings. Beginnings and endings are to some degree arbitrary choices. The stories we chose to tell, or not tell, are choices too. As a researcher, I have walked alongside Adebayo and into the midst of some of his stories as they were being lived. It was like entering a stream, with momentum and currents, and my life was swept up in the currents also. I hope you can swim. I've become a better swimmer with time and practice. I can say that lives and their stories are complicated, with visible and invisible threads,

storylines, plots, dramas. I hope in this writing to make a life visible, to show you the beauty and complexity threaded through the life of Adebayo, a young black trans refugee from Uganda now living in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. I would like to tell you Adebayo's story and my story of learning in relation to Adebayo. Writing this play might allow for a multiplicity of voices to be heard and for previously invisible stories to be seen – overlapping, sometimes contradictory, distinct. Perhaps a play is the thing to catch the conscience of... Ahhhhhh.... well... Perhaps, that's too much to hope. We'll see. For now, let me tell you a story...

But first a caution about stories. If you take up a story and really listen with your ears and your mind and your heart, you never know what will happen. I have learned that stories can change you. Stories are living things and if you gather these stories, cherish them, and hold them close, they will change you. I know. Stories can change how you see and act in the world because they can shift fundamentally who you are. Stories can point you to new and better directions; help you to see what could not be seen; and help you not only to survive but thrive as you seek to build a better life and a better world⁷¹. Adebayo's stories changed me.

Stage Note: Still sitting at the desk, she looks up and swivels to face the audience. Removing her glasses, she looks to the faces of individuals in the audience and begins to speak.

Michelle: (*Earnestly*) When I met Adebayo, almost three years ago now, I knew almost nothing about his life either in Uganda or here. After walking alongside him in this research for two years, I know a little more. His is a story of strength and resilience, but also of heartbreak. In his story, there are great triumphs and great tragedies also. I will share with you what Adebayo has

⁷¹ Along with learning about stories by living and walking alongside Adebayo, Thomas King's (2003) book, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* taught me how to think with and live with stories.

shared with me and only what he has asked me to share with you. Will you hear it? It's a hard story to hear. It's also an amazing story that shows how one person's actions inspired by hope can build a brighter future for many. It is also a story about change; a need for change and how change and discomfort often go hand in hand. Because an individual's actions take place within and reverberate through interconnected webs of social, cultural, and community relationships, tensions, miscommunications, and misunderstandings are common and these can be difficult to navigate. Changing minds and hearts is not easy; it takes work, it takes time and patience, and it takes a lot of hope. There is much work to be done, time will tell. Adebayo and I have hope.

Stage Note: Michelle turns back to her desk, puts her glasses on, and continues to write. The woman's voice reads aloud again from the paper as it is being written.

Narrator: I am imagining now into your stories. I am adding details from my imagination to give flesh, bones, and sinews to the details you gave in our conversations. From newspaper articles and your interviews given there also, I have stitched together details about the police raid on the Pride in Kampala Uganda, the assaults and arrests that took place there, how you came to Edmonton for a swimming competition, and stayed to save your life.

Stage Note: Spot lights dim. Scene ends.

ACT 2, Scene 1: My Name is Adebayo

Stage Note: Spot light slowly comes on Centre Stage to illuminate a single figure standing. All other lights are off.

Adebayo: My name is Adebayo. Adebayo is the name I chose for myself. It is a male name; it is an African name. *Adebayo is a good name. (Emphasis – elongated first and last two words)* Adebayo means, he who comes in joy, it also means king. I chose my name carefully; I choose

my name with care. I am a leader and I hope to bring peace and hope and joy to others like me – to others who have lived similar stories. I wish to put my story out there, to show, to say to those still back in Uganda, to those still struggling every day to hold on – there is reason to hope.

Stage Note: The narrator's voice speaks.

Narrator: I remember when we first met in SNAP printmaking studio in September 2016, just one month after you claimed refugee status in Canada. We met during a hustling-bustling free printmaking workshop I had created for LGBTIQ+ youth and allies at the SNAP community printmaking studio in downtown Edmonton. As we worked together to print your images at the press, you told me your name was Adebayo, and you helped me pronounce your name. Then you told me the meaning of your name. I haven't forgotten.

Adebayo: (*Looking up and into the audience*) And I want to share my story with you also, if you will hear it. My story is my gift to you. Hear it, please, not just with your ears; but hear it with your heart, hear it with your mind – *Opened. (Emphasis - elongated last word)*

Narrator: For me, opening to your story was a journey; opening to your story took time. Because, for me, your story was a hard story to hear. Your story is a story of courage and strength and resilience, but those qualities were brought forth by necessity to counter trauma, suffering, and pain. Your story was hard for me to take in because I found it so emotionally hard. It was only by listening to your story repeatedly in our interviews and conversations together that I came to know you and your story in pieces. It was my repeated hearing of your story that allowed me to come alongside you and see your strength and courage first and those harder stories second. It was our times together in studio, those many hours standing shoulder to shoulder working together, which helped me see your joy. Those times allowed me to come alongside your stories and begin to understand. For many it will take time. Many have never

heard such stories.

Adebayo: When you hear – then you will know! When you know, what then will you do?

Narrator: Be patient. Let us catch up to you...

Adebayo: This is my story that I am sharing with you now. This is my gift to you. But understand that this telling, this story, that I am sharing with you now, this is only part of my story and my story continues...

ACT 2, Scene 2: The Raid

Setting: Gay Pride Event, Kampala, Uganda, August 2016

Stage Note: Spot light stays on Centre Stage illuminating single figure.

Adebayo: Let me take you back to where my story begins and to the moment when things changed – to the moment when things became dangerous...

I grew up, in Kampala, Uganda. I played competitive soccer, premiere league, and was a competitive swimmer also. I love sports; I love to compete. I am a very competitive person. Sports teaches many things – working together as a team, networking, learning when to lead, when to follow. I have learned many things, many skills, from playing sports. I have a degree in Sports Sciences from Makerere University, Kampala. I have many friends, many *good queer friends (Emphasis)* that I left behind in Uganda when I came here. They are still back there – I think about them every day...

Stage Note: Spot light goes down. Lights come up across the back of the stage. A disco ball spins in a darkened nightclub. Pride coloured lights (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple/ indigo) bounce to the pulse of the music. A deep bass beat throbs in the background. Music is loud as lights come up. Music volume reduces, but continues, as speaking commences. A festive and

diverse crowd approximately 20 people are dancing and talking in low tones. There are trans folk, trans men and trans women, there are drag kings and drag queens, and a variety of folks with diverse gender expressions and gender identities, sexual orientations, and ages. People are dancing around a runway that sits centre stage, (the runway begins backstage and moves toward the front). Music quiets and dancing settles as a speaker at a podium announces the fashion show featuring Mr. Gay Pride. Adebayo, emerges from back centre stage back and slowly saunters along the catwalk to stage front. There he turns, smiling to the crowd, obviously enjoying himself. Adebayo is medium height, with a muscular build. His hair is shoulder length, deadlocks, tied back in a ponytail. He is wearing aviator sunglasses, a colourful patterned silk shirt, grey dress pants, and stylish black leather dress loafers. His suit jacket is thrown over his right shoulder, held in place by his right hand. He emanates an air of self-confidence, ease, and joy. He seems very much at home.

Announcer: Mr. Adebayo, Mr. Gay Pride 2015, the time has come to turn over your crown to the next titleholder. Adebayo, do you have any words for your successor?

Voices from the Crowd: Speech! Speech! Ade!!! Speech!

Narrator: Adebayo, be careful. You are not fully free to speak here. The laws prohibiting homosexuality are harsh. Adebayo, can you hear them coming? You are in danger.

Adebayo: I am honoured by you – my friends. Thank you so much! I have worn this crown with honour and I will use this title to remind those in power that we have rights too. We have equal rights under the law. We, the trans folk and queer folk, and the gay, lesbian, bisexual folk, we have equal rights under our constitution. We are going to keep reminding those in power that we are here and we are going to protest and keep protesting until we have our rights and our freedom to be who we are and to live freely every day, not just at Pride...

Narrator: They are coming...

Stage Note: Voices in background, beyond the crowd gathered at back of the stage, are getting louder. Sporadic shouts occur – there are no distinguishable words. The crowd gathered listening to Adebayo on stage, starts to shift and turn to look back toward the noise in the direction of the audience. Noise is emanating from Front Stage Entrances Left and Right.

Suddenly, following shouts, with sharp, loud, indistinguishable words, 20 or more (amount equal or greater to the crowd) policemen run onto the stage with batons held high and guns in their hands. They Enter from Stage Right and Stage Left simultaneously. They run at the crowd gathered at either side of the runway. Whistles are continuously blown in short, sharp, bursts. An atmosphere of surprised panic ripples through the crowd gathered in front of the podium - this is shown by audible gasps and shrieks coming from the crowd. The crowd, panicked, starts to disperse, walking, then running in all directions.

A spot light highlights two people, Steven and Lola, speaking near the front of the stage as the police raid commences. Steven is tall and sturdy; he is a large, muscular man. His hair is cropped short. He is clean shaven. He is wearing a white dress shirt with rolled sleeves, casual tan colour pants, and sandals. Lola is smaller stature than Steven; she is slighter and shorter with a lean build. Lola has shoulder length hair, swept up and tied back. She is wearing some makeup which covers her light facial hair. She is dressed in a deep red satin, well-fitted skirt, cut below the knee, a flowing, colourful silk shirt, and red high heel sequined pumps.

Steven: (To another person in crowd) What's happening? (Emphasis last word)

Lola: I don't know... Police! (Emphasis)... It's the police!

Steven: What for? We haven't done anything... Can't we even have a party?

Lola: I don't know! It's the police!

Steven: What the hell is going on? *(Loudly – seeking an answer)*

Lola: I don't know... I don't know... *(Softly spoken)*

Stage Note: The Police Chief emerges onstage, following 20 policemen. All are in uniform. The Police Chief shouts into a megaphone to argue with the event announcer.

Police Chief: *(Shouting)* This is a Raid!!!! Don't move! Everybody stay where you are!!

(Emphasis) Nobody... Move!!! *(Shouting)* You are all under arrest! All of you are under arrest!

Announcer: *(Takes up the microphone on the podium)* By whose right? *(Emphasis)* By whose authority? *(Emphasis)* We are peacefully assembled here! We have the right to freedom of assembly! This is our constitutional right! You are violating our rights! *(Angrily)*

Police Chief: Homosexuality is illegal in Uganda. You are all under arrest! You are all going downtown. *(To the other policemen)* Get them out of here! Gather the evidence! Everything!!!!

Stage Note: The crowd is twisting and turning as people in the crowd are being jostled and handled roughly by police. Police begin searching people, they grab people, sometimes by their private parts, and begin to handcuff them.

Steven: Hey there, what the hell are you doing there! *(Twisting away from the policeman that has grabbed him by his genitals.)*

Policeman: Checking to see if you are a man or a woman!

Steven: I think you *like* grabbing men down there! *(Emphasis on the word like)* Not your first time, I think?

Policeman: Shut up!! *(Violently. Policeman slaps the handcuffed man across his face)* Enough from you! Be quiet! *(Contemptuously)*

Stage Note: Punches are thrown deeper in the crowd toward the back of the stage. Someone twists and breaks free. They run and Exit Stage Back Right. A policeman runs after them gun in

hand.

Policeman: Hey! HEY!!!! YOU there!! Stop!!! STOP!! *(The policemen stop, aim, fire -*

Shooting noise – sharp, sudden, once)

Stage Note: *The noise and movements of the crowd quietens. Each person in the crowd is lead off stage in single file with their hands cuffed behind their backs. Police guide each person from behind, hands on shoulders (Exit Back, Stage Left). Lights go down.*

ACT 2, Scene 3: Jail

Stage Note: *Lights come up. It is a jail. People from the crowd are gathered together in a small cell. They are clustered near the back. In the foreground, a policeman is sitting at a desk across from Adebayo. The policeman is pressing Adebayo's fingers of his left hand into an ink pad and then pressing his fingers, one at a time, into a paper pad. Then, mechanically but forcefully, the policeman takes Adebayo's right hand and repeats this process. He presses each finger individually into the ink pad and then presses each finger onto a pad of paper.*

Adebayo: My hand... it is injured... Be careful! Can I get some help for my hand? *(He shows the palm to the officer. It is bleeding).*

Policeman: After we are done... What is your full legal name?

Adebayo: My name is Adebayo.

Policeman: Adebayo is a man's name. Are you a man or a woman?

Adebayo: I am a man.

Policeman: Let me see.

Adebayo: What do you mean? What are you talking about?

Policeman: Undress.

Adebayo: I will not...

Stage Note: Lights go down. Lights come up in a police station, police officers and people in custody. Adebayo walks forward into a single spot light Centre Stage. He addresses the audience.

Adebayo Narrates: This part I will not tell you. I will tell you, it was bad there. People were beaten. Police took photographs. They held us overnight. They released everyone the next morning. Soon afterward, while I was Canada, police released our names, photographs, addresses... everything to the press. They said we were promoting homosexuality which is illegal in Uganda. That was summer 2016. Now it is winter of 2020, nothing has changed there. My hand had buckshot from the raid that night. I had an operation here in Canada to get it out.

Stage Note: Spot light fades. Adebayo turns and exits Stage left. Scene Ends.

ACT 3, Scene 1: Everybody Knows (*Kampala Uganda, three days after Police Raid on Pride*)

Stage Notes: Lights come up on three young men walking together, David, Michael, and Jerimiah. All three men are tall, with slight builds. They are all clean shaven with short cropped hair. They are similarly dressed in white dress shirts and light grey pants. They are wearing black dress socks and black leather dress shoes. The scene opens with the three young men deep in conversation. David is walking slightly out in front, gesturing with his hands as he walks. He is holding a newspaper, pointing, and tapping at the pictures on the front page. His body is turned slightly, so that he is almost walking backward. David is a little more animated than either Michael or Jerimiah.

David: (*Pointing to the paper*) I am telling you this is dangerous (*Emphasis*)!! You never know what they will do next!

Michael: I know! This has happened before. Do you think I have forgotten David Kato⁷²?

Jeremiah: This is dangerous. Remember what they did to Kato! They killed him in his own home; beat him to death in his own home. These people are crazy! They are capable of anything.

David: Now they have our names, fingerprints, addresses, photographs... everything... and here it is (*The youth strikes the paper repeatedly with his right index finger*). They are releasing everything!!! Our information is all over the news! *EVERYTHING (Emphasis)!!* It was on the national news last night... Our pictures, our names (*Exasperated*)...

Michael: Yes, it seems that they are releasing everything. I agree it is very dangerous. But what to do? What can we do? We must live our lives? It is impossible not to think of Kato right now. Kato showed us how to stand up and we must stand up for our rights.

David: Yes, but they murdered Kato. He fought hard, but they murdered him. He stood up but they still went ahead and passed the “Kill the Gays” bill⁷³ after he was killed. Kato fought hard, and in the end, what did it get him? It got him killed ...

Michael: Have some respect!

David: I have respect! You know *that!* (*Emphasis*) It’s just... they passed those laws anyway. Now we can end up in prison for life just for being gay, just for being who we are. Right before

⁷² David Kato was a vocal advocate and activist for LGBTQ rights in Uganda and protested legislation which proposed the death penalty for homosexuals. Mr. Kato was killed at his home in Kampala in 2011 after a local newspaper published names and addresses of Ugandan LGBTIQ activists. (BBC, (2011).

⁷³ The “Kill the Gays” bill was first introduced in Uganda in 2009. The bill proposed the death penalty for homosexual people. This bill went through many iterations between 2009 to 2014. Grassroots advocacy by LGBTIQ Ugandans coupled with international pressure prevailed in 2014, so the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment for LGBTIQ Ugandans (Okeowo, 2012).

Kato was killed, they published the list of Ugandan homosexuals on the front page of Rolling Horse Magazine⁷⁴. The police released their names, their photographs, their addresses, everything... they knew they were painting a target... they knew what they were doing... they knew...

Michael: Yes... and three months later David Kato was murdered in his home. Beaten to death in his own home. They called it a robbery, but we all know what it was. It was murder.

Jerimiah: So, what do we do now? What is our next step?

Michael: I really don't know... What can we do? We must keep living our lives! We really have no choice. Just keep living... just like we have been doing. We just keep living.

David: Yes well... they are making it very hard...

Stage Notes: Lights go down. End Scene.

ACT 4, Scene 1: I Didn't Mean to Stay

Setting: Kinsmen Sport Arena, swimming pool bleachers, Edmonton, Canada. A few days after the police raid in Kampala, Uganda.

Stage Note: Lights come up. A crowd of people are sitting in the bleachers watching the International Gay and Lesbian Swimming competition at the Kinsmen Sports Centre, Edmonton, Alberta. There is an air of excitement. Everyone in the large crowd of maybe two hundred gathered seem to be enjoying themselves. Everyone there is checking out everyone else. There is a comfortable vibe in the air – a relaxed and chilled excitement. It's all good – the space, the

⁷⁴ Rolling Horse Magazine is a pseudonym for a Ugandan magazine that published names and addresses of LGBTIQ Ugandans.

people. Shouts of encouragements fill the air from the bleachers to encourage the swimmers in the 200-meter race. A gaggle of excited talking, indistinguishable words, comes from the crowd in the stands. The smell of chlorine wafts through the air.

Occasional shouts, calls, and whistles of encouragement burst forth loudly. Adebayo sits amongst the crowd, wearing sports gear - a long sleeved shirt and shorts over his swimsuit. He is keeping warm between competitions. He is happily chatting with a few people sitting next to him in the bleachers. He is becoming a bit of a star, and a crowd favorite, having won five gold medals already. They are hanging around his neck, mostly hidden under a large blue towel hanging around his shoulders. It has been a good day. He is scrolling through messages looking down at his phone, when suddenly he stops scrolling and stares at his phone, frozen.

Adebayo's demeanor seems to shift from an outwardly calm happy state to a state of shock. His outward expression changes utterly from someone exuberant and joyful to someone void of expression. His face goes blank. Adebayo begins speaking to a young man, named Gordon, a fellow Ugandan, sitting next to him on the bleachers. Gordon is in his early thirties. He is average build and has an ease in his demeanor. He sits slightly slouched forward, comfortably watching the swim meet in progress. Gordon wears tan shorts, a white t-shirt and sandals. He has a few days growth of beard. Adebayo, still looking down at his phone in disbelief, begins to speak to Gordon. Adebayo's body and language and hand gestures suggest surprise, perhaps bewilderment.

Adebayo: Oh my God! Whoa! Oh my God! Oh, this is really bad... Oh my God! Oh, I can't believe it! This is really bad... This is bad... *(Talking to himself, looking down at his phone)*

Gordon: Ade, what's happening? What's going on man?

Stage Note: *There is pronounced shift in Adebayo's body language. Sitting, his shoulders begin*

to slouch a little forward. His arms outstretch toward Gordon sitting next to him. He is gesturing with his hands, as he talks, slowly opening and closing the fingers in both hands, palms facing up as if asking - why is this happening.

Adebayo: It's all over the news back home. The police raid on the Pride in Kampala, the police, they are releasing all the information. It's all over the news our names, our photographs, everything. They say I am promoting homosexuality, so my family, they are kicking me out!! *Oh my God! (Emphasis - last three words)* I can't believe it!

Gordon: Ade, who is texting you there?

Adebayo: It's my sister, she says, "I'm evil!" *(Emphasis - last word)* She says, "Don't come back!" and that they are *kicking me out (Emphasis - last three words)* ...My family – they are *kicking me out!! (Emphasis - last two word)*. They are disowning me! Calling me evil! ...They say that I am no longer part of their family! My sister says, since I came here, the news says I'm with people back home who are promoting homosexuality. That it's all over the news back home. So... my family...they are *kicking me out!! (Emphasis - last three words)* I can't believe this... I can't believe this! I don't believe they are *actually (Emphasis, last word)* doing this, that they are taking this *step (Emphasis, last word)*... that they are *disowning me! (Emphasis, last two words)* That they are kicking me out! I never thought they would do this! This is crazy! Oh my God! ... I can't believe this! This is bad...

Gordon: Ade, what are you going to do?

Adebayo: What can I do? It's my home. I have to go home. *(Voice is cracking – seems visibly distraught)* What can I do? It's my home...

Gordon: It doesn't sound good Ade – back home for you now.

Stage Note: *Seeing Adebayo visibly shaken, a second person approaches and comes to sit by*

Adebayo in the bleachers. This person is a young woman named Eva on the Ugandan swimming team, one of Adebayo's teammates.

Eva: *(Softly)* Ade what's going on? Are you okay? What is it?

Adebayo: It's my family... They are kicking me out! Back home it's all over the news about the police raid on Pride in Kampala. They are releasing everything. My family, they say it's all over the news that I'm promoting homosexuality, so my family are calling me *Evil!* *(Emphasis - last word)* They say if I go back home, they will kill me themselves or hand me over to police where no one would say anything... My head is spinning... *(Words trail off)* Oh my God, I never thought they would do this... I never thought they would go this far... This is crazy... *(Softly spoken, voice trails off)*

Gordon: Ade, I'm sorry this is happening.... You know I'm Ugandan too. I know how it is for us trans folks back home. It's not safe for you back there anymore. Not now.... You can't go back there now.

Adebayo: Where am I going to go if I can't go home? I have nowhere to go! I have to go home!

Gordon: Adebayo, you should stay! You should stay and save your life! It's gotten even more dangerous back home. Ade, you know this. And these last few years... things are only getting worse... You can't go back home to Uganda, not now... It isn't safe.

Adebayo: I'm going home! I don't know anyone here. Everyone, I know is back home. I didn't plan to stay here! I never thought to stay! I didn't bring anything! I don't know anyone here. I don't know what to do.... I want to go home. I want to be able to go home... Uganda is my *home!* *(Emphasis - last word).*

Gordon: I know Ade; I know. I left five years ago now, but Uganda is still my home. I still miss it. I still miss it every day, but I can't go back there. Ade, I can't go back home and you can't go

back home either. In Uganda, it's not safe for queer people, for trans folks, they imprison us, they kill us. We can't go there for our lives. Maybe someday, things will change, until then, we can't go home.

Look, I know someone... Let me talk to people from my Church, St. Paul's United. They have helped people before. They have sponsored a few people from Africa. I will talk to a friend and see about making a meeting for you. Do you want to try it? You should try Ade! You should try to stay and save your life. You should *try!* *Emphasis - last word*)

Adebayo: Okay...Okay, I will meet them ... *(Softly spoken)* but, I'm still going home; Uganda is my home!

Gordon: Okay!! Okay, I will talk to them tonight. I will see if I can set up a meeting for you. In the meantime, I have a number here *(He says looking down at his phone, continues speaking)* for The Pride Centre of Edmonton – they have a lot of connections. I think they have helped people before. I'm texting you their number now. If you call them and tell them your story, I'm sure they will do everything they can to help. Will you call?

Stage Note: Adebayo seems quiet, like he has so much on his mind - it seems he is talking and answering slowly. Trying to take it all in.

Adebayo: *(Deep in thought)* Yeah... Okay... Well, let me think about it... okay. I just need some time. Everything is moving fast, but it seems like time has slowed also. I am just trying to hold it all in my mind... there is so *much...* *(Emphasis - last word)*

Gordon: It's a lot take in Ade. But it's going to be okay. There are a lot of good people here. They will help you. They will do whatever they can to support you. You'll see... You aren't alone here. It is good we met here today...

Stage Note: Stage lights go down. Spot light comes up on Adebayo standing Centre Stage.

Adebayo addresses the audience.

Adebayo Narrates: I decided to stay in Canada to save my life. I'm not going to tell you much here, but you should know when I decided to stay, I had to hide. I hid for two weeks because the Ugandan coordinator stayed behind after the competition. He stayed for two weeks searching for me, so he could take me back with him. I wrote this song to share with you... So, you might understand; so you might know who I am and how I came to be here.

Stage Note: Adebayo sings his song I Didn't Mean to Stay.

I didn't plan to stay,

I didn't think I'll stay,

I didn't think I'd be disowned by them.

but here I am now,

here I am now, I stay,

here I am now, sing this song to you.

Raise up and shine,

Stand up and walk,

Know that in life,

Each and every step you make counts,

just look how far, how far I've come,

where I am now, please don't give up.

I didn't plan to stay,

I didn't think I'll stay,

I didn't think I'd be disowned by them.

but here I am now,

here I am now, I stay,

here I am now, sing this song to you.

Back in my mind,

Each and every day,

I think about home,

I think about my mom,

I think about my friends,

I can't play with them anymore,

I can't eat with them anymore,

because I stay to save my life.

Here I am now,

here I am now I stay,

here I am now, sing this song to you.

I didn't plan to stay,

I didn't think I'll stay,

I didn't think I'd be disowned by them.

but here I am now,

here I am now, I stay,

here I am now, sing this song to you.

When I look how far,
how far I've come,
I give thanks to you,
to you my friends,
when I look how far,
how far I've struggled,
I get down on my knees and pray to God.

Here I am now,
here I am now I stay,
here I am now, sing this song to you.
I didn't plan to stay,

I didn't think I'll stay,
I didn't think I'd be disowned by them.
but here I am now,
here I am now, I stay,
here I am now, sing this song to you.

Here I am now,
here I am now I stay,
here I am now, sing this song to you.

Stage note: Adebayo turns and slowly exits Back Stage Right. Spot light fades and goes down.

ACT 5, Scene 1: Settling In

Setting: Remedy Café, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Spring 2018

Stage Note: Bright sunshine is streaming through the window of a café in downtown Edmonton in late April. Many tall tables are aligned along the windows in a small room. Two to three people sit at each table. There is a relaxed vibe in the air. Everyone is engaged in quiet conversations. Some funky contemporary instrumental music plays. Michelle is awaiting Adebayo to arrive for their first research conversation. She is sitting at a tall table near the front of the Café, fidgeting with some papers, a bit nervous. Engaging in research conversations is new to her. While she is excited to speak with Adebayo again, she is also anxious.

Michelle looks up from the table just as the bell on the door rings and Adebayo enters the café. He has come directly from Church, dressed up, wearing a colourful, patterned shirt, grey dress pants, and brown leather dress shoes. His hair is cut shorter now, braided in rows along his scalp. He is smiling broadly as he enters the room, emanating a joyful self-confidence. Michelle stands to greet Adebayo with a hug. They decide to stand in line to grab some coffee and food. Two men, together in line, turn to acknowledge Adebayo, he smiles and greets them in return. Returning to the table, after ordering their food, their conversation begins. The conversation is a little stilted as it begins.

Michelle: All right, Adebayo. So, if I didn't know you at all, what would you like me to know about you? Who is Adebayo?

Adebayo: Adebayo, uh, he is a passionate guy, and he fights for what he really wants and he loves art. He believes everything he sees - it is art - made out of art. And he plays soccer. He makes friends. In one year, I had 500 friends. *(laughs)*

Michelle: I don't doubt it. That's pretty good! *(laughs)*

Adebayo: Yeah, Yeah. And I think you don't know about Adebayo. Adebayo has a degree in Sports Science.

Michelle: I didn't know that.

Adebayo: Yeah. From the Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

Michelle: I didn't know that. That's cool!

Adebayo: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Michelle: Adebayo, if you don't mind, can you talk about coming here, a little bit?

Adebayo: Yeah. So, I came to Canada August of 2016 for the International Gay and Lesbian swimming competitions that took place in Edmonton at Kinsmen Sports Centre. But before we actually came the police had raided the Gay Pride event in Uganda and most of us were arrested, most of us we were beaten. Personally, I was undressed to check if I was a man or a woman. I have injuries and I still have gunshots in my hand that I am trying – my doctor is going to do surgery on it. We are planning to do surgery on it so that they remove the particles in it. And then when I came here, after the swim competition, I got a text from my family, and they were kicking me out. Because the national television back home showed me on the news that I was a man -- that people were promoting homosexuality after our arrest. And so, they kicked me out. They disowned me. They called me evil, they say that I am no longer part of their family and they say if I go back, they will kill me, themselves, or they will take me to like the police so that no one would do anything. So, I had to decide, to stay. So, I decided to stay in Canada, where I really didn't know anyone, at all. I'm calling Edmonton my home and I'm calling Canada my home because Canada accepted my refugee claim and I'm here as a protected person now.

Stage Note: Characters freeze on stage as narrator's voice reads the following text.

Narrator: My heart hurts. I knew a little of Adebayo's story before our conversation in the café.

I had heard a little of his story from a friend who brought Adebayo to the first SNAP printmaking workshop, where I worked with him to make his prints just a month after he arrived in Canada as a refugee. I heard his story again when Shane and I interview Adebayo for the TREX exhibition catalogue, for *Re-Imaging Normal*, a show Shane and I curated to showcase art and stories of LGBTIQ+ emerging and established artists throughout rural Alberta. I heard Adebayo's story the third time when he spoke as a guest panelist at the opening of the *Re-Imaging Normal* TREX exhibition. This conversation would be the fourth time, I had heard some of Adebayo's story of coming to Canada, seeking refuge. Each time I heard his story, I heard a little bit more. Each time I heard his story, I felt a bit more. It's hard to believe that such a thing could happen – that people live through and survive such stories - that people like Adebayo have the courage to continue to tell their hard stories until people begin to hear. It was only recently, I went to the online news and read some of Adebayo's many stories of coming to Canada.

Stage Note: Lights go down on the two characters sitting at the table in the café. Projected on a large screen sitting high at the back of the Centre Stage Back assorted headlines from newspapers flash on screen - one headline followed in rapid succession by another and another. One newspaper covering another and another until the entire screen is filled with headlines and newspaper articles. The narrator reads some of the headlines aloud.

Narrator: *Ugandan police break up gay pride event*, by the Associated Press, CTV News August 5th, 2016⁷⁵; *Pride event in Uganda disrupted by police, Leaders briefly detained*, by the

⁷⁵ <https://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/world/ugandan-police-break-up-gay-pride-event-1.3015989>

Associated Press, Global News, August 5th, 2016⁷⁶; *Persecuted Ugandan Swimmers compete in International LGBT championship in Edmonton*, by Laura Osman. CBC News Edmonton, August 10th 2016⁷⁷; *Ugandan swimmers in Edmonton recount police raid on LGBTQ event, share challenges*, Global News, Julia Wong, August 10th, 2016⁷⁸; *Ugandan LGBT swimmers in Edmonton race for inclusion, acceptance*, the Edmonton Journal, by Clare Clancy, August 11th, 2016⁷⁹; *Uganda transgender man secures refugee status in Edmonton*, the Edmonton Journal, by Clare Clancy, December 12th, 2016⁸⁰; *Ugandan Transgender Swimmer in Edmonton Gets Refugee Status: 'Canada saved my Life'*, by Julia Wong, Global News Edmonton, December 27, 2016⁸¹; *'Canada saved my life': Surge of LGBTQ refugees seek asylum in Edmonton*, CBC News, by Wallis Snowdon, February 16th, 2017⁸²; *Ugandan athlete receives refugee status in Canada*, the Washington Blade, January 26th, 2017 by Kevin Majoros⁸³; *'We are the only family*

⁷⁶ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/globalnews.ca/news/2866456/pride-event-in-uganda-disrupted-by-police-leaders-briefly-detained/amp/>

⁷⁷ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.cbc.ca/amp/1.3714270>

⁷⁸ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/globalnews.ca/news/2874212/ugandan-swimmers-in-Edmonton-recount-police-raid-on-lgbtq-event-share-challenges/amp/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/ugandan-lgbt-swimmers-in-edmonton-race-for-inclusion-acceptance/wcm/0e28d016-0201-4f7a-90a7-5f71b1cf5256/amp/>

⁸⁰ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/ugandan-transgender-man-secures-refugee-status-in-edmonton/wcm/4430eab2-9f3b-4dd2-b5b3-e88d17b7645c/amp/>

⁸¹ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/globalnews.ca/news/3148860/ugandan-transgender-swimmer-in-edmonton-gets-refugee-status-canada-saved-my-life/amp/>

⁸² <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.cbc.ca/amp/1.3986202>

⁸³ <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2017/10/26/ugandan-athlete-receives-refugee-status-canada>

for each other': How LGBTQ refugees are finding support and solidarity in Edmonton, Star Metro Edmonton, by Nadine Yousif, January 1st, 2019⁸⁴. Projection screen fades to black.

ACT 5, Scene 2: Moving Forward

Setting: Continues in Remedy Café, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Spring 2018

Stage Note: Lights come up once again on two characters sitting at the table in the café.

Michelle: So, Adebayo, what help did you find when you got here? Did you find the help you needed?

Adebayo: I found a lot of help. There were a lot of Canadians with big hearts that helped me fall in love with Canada. So, yes there was The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, they helped me get connected to many resources.

Michelle: What about Edmonton's queer community resources centres? Did they help you?

Adebayo: No not really. They seemed positive at first when I told them my story. But when I decided to stay, they changed. They told me I should go back. They didn't look out for me. In fact, I heard when I went into hiding for two weeks, when the coordinator stayed behind looking to take me back, they were helping him (*Emphasis - last word*). I don't feel they had my back at all. So, I don't have anything good to say about them from that time. It really was bad, and I needed their support, and they let me down.

Michelle: Adebayo, I'm surprised. I'm sorry to hear this... But you found other supports in a community newcomer program in Edmonton?

⁸⁴ <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.thestar.com/amp/edmonton/2018/12/21/how-support-workers-are-helping-lgbtq-refugees-find-support-and-solidarity-in-edmonton.html>

Adebayo: Yes, and the Church, St Paul's United. Some people in the Church, they really helped me. They helped me get the resources that I needed. They had worked with a few refugees before from Africa. So, some people there, they really helped me through the process.

Michelle: So, the Church helped you! That is wonderful...

Adebayo: Yes, they really supported me, helped me to meet people, I needed to talk to and get through the application process. And I didn't have any money. The application process, it costs like five hundred dollars, but I didn't have any money. So, the Church, St Paul's, they helped me get my fundraiser together. They held the fundraiser at the Church, so I could make the money I needed to apply to stay. I printed the poster at SNAP, it's a woodblock; the poster I used for my fundraiser. So, I made the money I needed for the application, so I could make my application to stay.

Michelle: So, not like the Church back home?

Adebayo: No, they kicked me out of the Church. I was going to Church, all dressed for Church, and they said, "No, you Gay people, we are fighting with you! Get out of our Church!" So, I couldn't go to Church anymore back home in Uganda.

Michelle: The Catholic Church?

Adebayo: Yes, the Catholic Church.

Michelle: I was raised Catholic too. They can be bad sometimes...

Adebayo: Yeah...

Stage Note: Figures freeze in conversation, while narrator speaks.

Narrator: My mind slips back in time, and stops, when I was in my early twenties, just coming out. At that time, Pope John Paul XXIII put out a papal decree, to be followed by all Catholics, that they should actively discriminate against LGBTIQ+ people. At the time of this call

LGBTIQ+ people were already being shunned by family, friends, social, cultural, ethnic communities, and churches. At that time, many LGBTIQ+ people were already experiencing verbal and/or physical assaults. At that time, some LGBTIQ+ people were beaten, and some, I know, were killed. These words made things worse for a stigmatized and targeted minority.

Stage Note: Figures unfreeze and conversation continues.

Michelle: So, it took a while, the application process? That must have been a stressful time?

Adebayo: Yes, it took five months. But my claim came through and I'm a protected person now. (He smiles and rocks back in his chair).

Michelle: Congratulations Ade!! That's a really big deal! I'm so happy for you! You have a place now, a home?

Adebayo: Yes, I have an apartment. It's pretty good (Smiles - body relaxes).

Michelle: ... and furniture?

Adebayo: Yes, I'm all settled in now (Smiles). I must have spent ten-months couch surfing with friends. And I did some housesitting too. But it's all good now. I have a place now, I'm happy.

Michelle: What are your goals Ade? What's next for you?

Adebayo: I want to put a pole down, to help others that come later. I don't want to be a rich guy, but I want others like me to be where I am in the time it has taken me to get here. A lot of people they aren't so lucky. If I didn't know what to do, there were so many things, so many times, that kind of caught me. I wouldn't have made, if I wasn't strong enough.

There are so many - they don't have the help, there is the language and all the processes to get through. If I wasn't strong enough, I wouldn't have made it. So, I want to make an organization that pulls in all the organizations that helped me, organizations like SNAP. I want to make an organization to help refugees like myself navigate the system. Because so many, they

don't know what to do or where to turn. They don't have the help they need and they fall through the gaps. They get sent back and for some of them it means their life.

Michelle: That's amazing Ade!

Adebayo: Yes, people don't know our stories. They don't know what we lived through. They don't know our experiences. So, I thought before I make this organizations let me tell our stories. So Kay⁸⁵, she came to me and said Ade I want to make a film to show your story. So, we went to ARIPIG⁸⁶ and they gave us some funding to make our documentary - A Long Road to Peace. We made the documentary to get our stories out there, so people will know our stories.

Michelle: Adebayo that is amazing; you made a movie! I'm so impressed!

Adebayo: Yes, the movie, A Long Road to Peace, is showing at the Garneau this weekend.

Michelle: Can you send me the information I want to come...

Adebayo: (Looking down at his phone). Yes, here it is I'm sending it to you now. This is the poster.

Michelle: That poster Ade, that is the woodblock you printed at SNAP⁸⁷ for your fundraiser. Can you tell me about it? This image seems important.

Adebayo: Yes. It's a woodblock print (*Smiles*). I printed it at SNAP. It was the second time I came to SNAP. It is the Pride colours in the background. The image is two faces, one facing

⁸⁵ Kay is a pseudonym. Kay is a documentary filmmaker and producer who worked with Adebayo to secure funding by APIRG and film *Long Road to Peace*.

⁸⁶ APIRG is not an acronym, but the name of a funding agency which operated out of the University of Alberta. The agency funded small budget community and arts-based research projects.

⁸⁷ SNAP is the Society of Northern Alberta Print-artists. SNAP is a not-for-profit community organization and community of artists. SNAP runs a public gallery and a community print-shop in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

forward, one facing back. It's about people having your back. It's about people looking over your shoulder and watching out for you, taking care of you, looking out for you. A lot of people had my back here; when I came here. I made a lot of friends, maybe five hundred friends. I made a lot of good queer friends and they really helped me and supported me. And the Church, St. Paul's United, they really helped me too. They helped me get through the process; they really supported me.

Michelle: I'm so glad you found that support! I remember the first time you came to SNAP. I was teaching a woodblock workshop for LGBTIQ+ youth and allies. Dee⁸⁸, she emailed and asked if she could come and if she could bring you to make some art. That's the first time I met you. It was in September of 2016, so Ade, I realize now that was just like one month after you came to Canada. You came for the swim competition in Edmonton in August 2016, so just one month before.

Adebayo: Yes. It was just after I came here.

Michelle: I'm so glad I met you Ade! I remember, you made two great prints, two woodblock prints the first time at SNAP. The image is an outline of two people hugging. Those are the two images showing in the *Re-Imaging Normal* exhibit that is travelling through rural Alberta now. TREX is a great exhibition and a great way to get your artwork you're your stories out to people.

Adebayo: Yes, TREX is great! My image shows two people hugging. I wanted to put that out there, to say to people, you never know how much some people need that hug. You never know how far some people have travelled to get that hug. I wanted to put that out there for other people to see and to know that there is reason to hope. There will be people who will have your back,

⁸⁸ Dee is a pseudonym.

who will give you the support, that hug you need to get through.

Narrator: Vera⁸⁹ and I went to Adebayo's and Kay's film, *A Long Road to Peace*. It is a documentary, featuring the stories of LGBTIQ+ refugees who have come to Canada, many from African countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, and Sudan. There are so many people with so many hard stories, people who have been subjected to so much hatred and violence. It's hard to absorb. Being known to be LGBTIQ+ in many countries means your life is in danger. LGBTIQ+ people are targeted for beatings or worse by fellow civilians; they are also targeted by the state through harassment, imprisonment, and sometimes execution. So, within these countries, if you are LGBTIQ+, nowhere is safe. You might find safety, if you can get out.

Ade's film, *A Long Road to Peace*, is an important film; more people need to see it, to begin to understand the experiences of LGBTIQ refugees. But as I was leaving the theatre, I had an overwhelming sinking feeling. Why didn't I know this before? I had no idea that Adebayo's story was so common. I had no idea that so many LGBTIQ+ people flee their homes to save their lives. Is this common knowledge? If not, why isn't it? Why is there so much silence around this issue? What is this silence?

Stage Note: Scene ends. Stage lights go down. Adebayo and Michelle exit Back Stage Left.

⁸⁹ Vera is my supervisor. I was thankful when she asked if she might come to the theatre with me to see Adebayo's and Kay's film. I'm not sure if anyone gets accustomed to witnessing such hard, and sometimes horrific stories. I know Vera has previously worked alongside many people with difficult stories; I had not witnessed so many hard stories before, so I was grateful Vera walked alongside me to see the film *A Long Road to Peace*.

PART 2: INTERSECTIONS OF OPPRESSION - INTERSECTIONS OF POWER

ACT 1, Scene 1: The Protest

Stage Note: Spots lights come up on Adebayo standing front and centre of the stage. There is crowd of people standing behind Adebayo, but they are standing in the dark, not lit, barely visible. The crowd stands frozen in place while Adebayo speaks. Action commences in the background the moment Adebayo finishes reading the poem called Protest – the spot light on him fades, and the full stage is lit. The Adebayo opens the scene narrating to the audience. The narrator’s voice follows Adebayo’s voice.

Adebayo Narrates: My life has the spotlight now. (*Adebayo looks up toward the spotlight and then back to the crowd*). Someone else will have the spotlight later. But I need you to understand this – this is not one person’s fight. This is a fight for a whole community. I am looking at the Pride we all share. I am trying to give a platform for all those stories, and all those people with similar stories, who are always pushed to the margins for being queer. I want to bring the community together, so nobody is left behind. I want to help give space to those people who have been displaced for whole parts of their lives.

Narrator: This is a found poem (Butler-Kisber, 2017) Adebayo and I put together; it is based on excerpts taken from transcripts of our second research conversation together on June 10th, 2018, the morning after the Edmonton Pride Festival protest June 9th, 2018.

Adebayo: (*Addressing the audience*) I call this poem – Protest

There are a lot of needs –

There is a lot of work.

We don’t feel safe,

Police marching in the Pride.

The Marshals said – We are stepping back.

So, they reached out to me.

I said Okay – Let’s do something,

because if you just step back, no one will know,

you that even took that action.

So, they formed a meeting,

The Pride Festival⁹⁰,

We are like – Okay – You called this meeting – We are here...

We shared our stories,

They said – Okay – We will kick police out of the Pride,

We all went home – So happy!

Few days to Pride,

They sent us a letter,

and like, we are sorry, but police are marching...

It’s such a very big betrayal –

I felt like, Okay – Let’s put up a call.

⁹⁰ The Pride Festival is the Edmonton Pride Festival Society. The Edmonton Pride Festival Society disbanded in 2020.

I felt like, Okay – Let's protest.

Remind them the history of Pride.

Let's tell people Pride has always been a protest.

There are a lot of needs,

There is a lot of work.

We had a very big number of people who came.

We stopped the Pride for like an hour.

We gave them a list of our demands,

Our four demands – they are very reasonable.

It just made me feel – so supported – so loved – so cared for.

It just made me feel like we really mattered –

What I stand for, what we stand for.

Our community has power.

Some people really have my back,

they really understand me.

But since then, I've received these messages,

The guy, I don't know his name,

It just keeps clicking in my head and I need to write something.

I don't know how to handle it so,

I'll manage it and I'll put it down.

Him telling me that I should be lucky to be in this country.

If I don't follow the rules,
then I should be deported.

Him, actually, saying these words...

and they clicked in my head.

They made me worry,
and gave me more reason to actually stand up.

And hearing him and telling him,

This is my country too,

I belong here.

I came for love, and peace, and safety,

and it is why I am still fighting.

Because I haven't received the love, the peace, and the safety yet.

I'm still figuring it out – not getting it actually,

putting me on the ground,

keeping me traumatized.

Some people say things that they don't know,

and I need to talk in my head.

They talk out of privilege.

It wasn't a choice for me to stay in Canada,
but it was the last option that I had,
and it's my country too.

Stage Note: *Adebayo stands and looks to the audience for a moment after speaking. He looks down, turns, and leaves the stage, Exit Back Stage Left. As the spot light fades on Adebayo, the full stage is lit to reveal a huge cast of characters who suddenly swing into motion in a party atmosphere.*

ACT 1, Scene 2: Pride is Protest

Stage Note: *Stage lights come up. The stage is filled with hundreds of people. Its noisy with people talking and laughing - indistinguishable voices. There's a jubilant air. It's Pride, so everyone, seems to be relaxed and enjoying themselves. This is a Pride parade - so lots of folks are wrapped in Pride and Trans colours. The stage is filled with drag queens gathered together, talking in small groups, with lush big-big hair, long-long eye lashes, rosy cheeks and lips, awesomely bedazzled, amazingly-high pumps, and bright, long-flowing, shimmering sequined gowns. The girls are in back in town ... To the curb-side (Stage Right) decked out, head to foot, in black leather – everything, dykes on bikes, sit, coolly, arms folded, waiting, looking on. Between groups old and young queer and trans folks of all gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations are intermingling and dressed to impress others and express themselves. A rainbow bedazzled dog runs across the stage (Stage Front, direction Right to Left), sporting a rainbow colour dog collar, a rainbow jacket, and a matching two-two. The dog is on a leash and*

towing a person wrapped in a rainbow flag, wearing a rainbow bandana, a rainbow tank-top and shorts, and waving to the crowd while riding a rainbow colour bike. And there are flags. Hundreds of rainbow flags are waving everywhere. It's like a club night at the Roost, but way more, and instead of taking place in an out of the way dark club, sometime after midnight, it's main street and broad daylight. Once the dog and person on tow exit Stage Left, a more somber group is revealed. Approximately fifty people are standing in line with their arms interlinked... They have formed a human chain and are blocking the Parade. This group stands facing the audience.

All of a sudden, a myriad of signs are unfurled and hoisted high. Signs read: No Police in Pride; No Pride in Police; Decolonize; No Justice, No Pride; No Pride on Stolen Land; RCMP: Routinely Condemning My People; Racism is a Queer Issue; I Want Peace, Love, and Safety, Every Day, Not Just in Pride; No Pride for Some of Us, Without Liberation for All of Us; Pride is a Protest; Marsha P. Johnston & Sylvia Rivera⁹¹.

Many from the sidelines run to join the line of protesters, some sitting in front and many stand behind. It's a large crowd now. The majority, of two hundred people on stage, have joined the protest, with approximately forty standing as spectators in two lines on either side of the protest, Stage Right and Stage Left. The protesters and those standing on the sidelines appear different in terms of age, gender identity and expression, and race. Those on the sidelines of the protest look predominately middle-age or older, cisgender, and white, while protesters look to be predominately younger, very gender creative with a variety of gender expressions, and are more racially diverse – Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Colour.

⁹¹ The text from these signs are taken from actual photographs of signs taken at the Edmonton Pride Protest 2018.

Adebayo walks from the back of the Stage Right and stands just left of centre of the line of protesters. He is wearing a traditional grass skirt from Uganda that falls almost to his ankles, just above his sandals, a bright red soccer shirt that reads Uganda on the front and Uganda I'm still Gay and Alive, Thanks Canada, on the back. He's wearing a colourful red bandana and he holds a megaphone in his right hand. He turns his back to the audience and addresses the assembled protesters first.

Adebayo: *(Speaking into the megaphone)* We need to remind people about the history of Pride; we must remind people that Pride is *protest* (*Emphasis – last word*) – not celebration. We are here for peace, and for love, and for safety. And we haven't found that peace, and love, and safety yet! *And we want peace, love, and safety everyday* (*Emphasis – first and last word*) – not just in Pride! *(Turning to the audience and speaking into the megaphone)* **No Police in Pride!** (*Emphasis*) We do not feel *safe*. (*Emphasis – last word*)

Protesters: *(Call out to the audience as a group)*. No Pride in the police! No police in Pride!

Adebayo: *(To the audience)*. This is a protest! We are not moving until police leave the Pride. We will block the Pride until police are not marching. No uniformed police marching in Pride! We have a list of demands for Pride Festival organizers.

Stage Note: *Scene Ends. Actors freeze in place. General stage lighting on protestors dims by half to 50%. Spot Light comes up to move attention to Front Stage Left.*

ACT 1, Scene 3: Confrontations

Stage Note: *Lights come up on the sidelines as a tall woman standing on the sideline approaches a tall young protester. The woman who approaches looks to be in her mid-to-late forties. She is dressed in business casual. Her shoulder length sandy blond hair is tied back in a pony-tail. Her*

wedding ring is prominent on her left hand. The protester is young. She appears to be a young woman in her early twenties. She is very slender. She is wearing jean shorts and loose cotton tank top which flows from her shoulders. Her shoulder length brown hair is gelled back to sit behind her ears. She has a somber expression.

Narrator: The woman who approaches is named Cheryl. She is forty-six, a lawyer and she has been an LGBTIQ+ advocate for many years. Sometimes she has been called upon and taken up cases from people in the LGBTIQ+ community pro bono. She feels in touch with the community. She identifies as a lesbian. Her wife of six years is an accountant. Her name is Sarah. Their family consists of the two women, their two kids, two cats, and a very old dog, a Golden Retriever named Willie. She and her family live in newly purchased home in Ambleside, on Edmonton's Southside.

The young protester is named Lee. They identify as trans and non-binary. They live near Whyte Ave with their partner Patti. Lee works in the service industry and is also a talented artist who paints on her days off. Patti, Lee's partner, is also in her early twenties. She identifies as cisgender and queer. She is presently a student, studying social work at MacEwan University.

Cheryl: (*Approaching Lee*) Hey! Can you tell me what this is about?

Lee: Inclusion. (*Pause*) Safety. (*Pause*) Rights...

Cheryl: I don't understand. This is an inclusive event. Everyone is welcome here. Everyone is safe and welcome at Pride. That's the point of Pride!

Lee: *Not really!* (*Emphatically*) I mean, look around you, many people here don't feel included at all. Many of us feel left out and left behind. And a lot of people don't feel safe with the police in Pride.

Cheryl: Who feels left behind? Who doesn't feel safe?

Lee: Trans people, People of Colour, Indigenous people, refugees, sex workers...

Cheryl: Well, that's quite a list, but everyone is welcome at Pride! That's the point, to celebrate diversity! And police are part of our diversity. A lot of work has been done to create a police liaison for our community and to bring police into Pride. It's better for all of us; it's safer now!

Lee: Well, lot of people (*Pointing around at the crowd*) feel way less safe with police in Pride. Which kind of demonstrates my point that some people are way more equal than others...

Cheryl: What are you talking about? It feels safer to have police here in Pride! (*Assertively*)

Lee: Safer for who? For you? For a cisgender, married, middle-aged, white woman?

Cheryl: Don't make this personal! (*Annoyed*) What's your point? (*Sharply*)

Lee: Your age, gender, class, and heteronormative lifestyle don't allow you to see problems those of us in younger generations are facing. Issues of funding related to trans health for example, or problems of policing in Indigenous, Black, refugee, immigrant, and People of Colour communities. There's a lot of disparity. There's a lot of neglect. There's a lot of abuse. There's a lot of fear, frustration, and anger. There are a lot of needs and no one is doing anything! Why do we always have to go it alone? Why do we always have to do all the work ourselves? Why aren't we getting any help from you? We're tired. We're ticked off, *and we would really like some support from our queer community!* (*Emphatically*)

Cheryl: First off, I do a lot of work in the community, so I don't appreciate your assumption that I'm naïve! Secondly, when did cisgender become such a bad thing? Respect goes both ways you know! (*Angrily*) And as for heteronormativity – How I chose to live my life and who I choose to live my life with is my business! A lot of us older folks have worked long and hard to win the freedoms we, and by that – I mean all of us, have now! Your freedom to be here, at this Edmonton Pride parade today, and to be able to protest is built on our work, and the work of past

generations, and don't you forget it! (*Angrily – pointing her finger at Lee*)

Lee: (*Looking down at the ground, before looking up at Cheryl*). Yeah, well (*Pause*)... Thanks!

But... there's still a lot of work to be done... It didn't end with Vriend in the 1990s, you know.

And it didn't end with gay marriage, gay divorce, gay adoption in the early 2000s either...

Cheryl: Yes, I'm a lawyer, I'm well-aware... (*Irritated*)

Lee: If you're so aware then (*Pause*)... *listen to us!* (*Empathically*) Help us! There is a lot of work to be done. (*Quietly*) – we can't do it alone.

Cheryl: That's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to understand. I'm listening aren't I?

Lee: (*Sadly*) Are you?

Stage Note: Scene ends. Spot Light fades on Front Stage Left. Spot highlights Adebayo standing

Centre Stage. Three men quickly approach Adebayo from the left. They all appear to be

Caucasian and in their mid-to-late thirties. Two of the men are dressed in black leather. Jason,

the tallest man is bald with a short-cropped beard. He is sporting a black leather vest, no shirt,

black leather pants, and motorcycle boots. Arnold, the second man, is stocky and barrel chested.

He has short cropped red hair, a moustache and beard, and wears leather pants and boots. He is

shirtless also, but sporting a black leather harness across his chest. The third man, Todd, is quite

tall and thin. He has dark brown short cropped hair and is clean shaven. He wears a black t-

shirt, jeans, and sandals. Todd and Jason stand in front of Adebayo, Arnold walks past Adebayo

and stands just behind Adebayo and over his left shoulder.

Todd: (*Addressing Adebayo*) What the hell is going on?

Adebayo: (*Surprised – looks turn to his left as the three men approach*). It's a protest...

Todd: (*Belligerently*) Yes, we can see that!

Jason: What are you doing man! You're screwing this for everyone! (*Angrily*)

Adebayo: We don't want police marching in Pride.

Jason: Why the hell not? They've been in for years! What's your problem?

Adebayo: No police in Pride. We don't feel safe.

Jason: Listen man, I don't understand your problem! *(Curtly)* You should step back man! *(Voice trailing off)*.

Todd: Listen, this is the way we do things around here! *(Pointing a finger and stepping toward Adebayo. As Todd gets closer, because he is taller, he is looking down on Adebayo)*. You are lucky to be here, in this country! If you don't like it here, why don't you leave? *(Angrily)* Why don't you go back to where you came from! *(Sharply)* Uganda, right? Okay, well, if you can't follow the rules in this country, then you should get sent back. You should be deported! Who do you think you are? They should send you back. I mean it man! *(Getting red in the face as he speaks)* If you hate it so much here, if it's too hard for you, then just... please... go! *(Shouting)*

Stage Note: Stepping toward Todd, Arnold puts his right and left hands on Adebayo's shoulders.

Adebayo: I belong here! *(Emphatically)* This is my country too! Who do you think you are?

Stage Note: Adebayo steps forward, and slips out of Arnold's grasp. Arnold quickly steps around Adebayo on his left side and stands between Adebayo and Todd, facing Adebayo.

Adebayo: *(Speaking over Arnold's left shoulder to Todd)* It wasn't my choice to come to Canada! But it's the only country I have. *(Pause – Adebayo brings his right hand forward, over Arnold's left shoulder, to point his index finger in Todd's face)* I came here for love, and for peace, and for safety, and I'm here because I haven't found that love, and peace, and safety yet. *(Pause)* And, *(Pause)* this is my country too! *(Emphatically)*

Arnold: Okay, *(Calmly)* that's enough... *(Turning and speaking to Todd)* Walk away now...

Stage Note: Arnold walks forward toward Todd, takes Todd by both shoulders, and turns him

around. Arnold and Todd walk away. Jason follows.

Scene Ends: Lights on Centre Stage fade.

ACT 1, Scene 4: Negotiations

Stage Note: Light comes up Centre Stage. Adebayo is looking out at the audience with a bewildered expression. A tall, older, Caucasian man with grey hair comes and stands a few feet from Adebayo, to Adebayo's right. The tall man approaches and stands close, looking down on Adebayo with arms crossed. Glaring at Adebayo, he says, "We should put an end to this shit". Adebayo stands stock still, still facing the audience.

Spot lights fade on Adebayo, and comes up Stage Right where two men are conversing. They seem to know each other well and are probably together. Both men are Caucasian and seem to be in their early fifties. Their names are Johnny and T.J. Johnny is shorter and stockier than T.J. Johnny is also balding slightly, his hair getting a little grey at the tips. Johnny's face and the top of his head has gotten a bit red from the sun. T.J. has a slighter build than Johnny; he is lanky and lean. T.J.'s skin is still deeply tanned from his brief holiday in the Bahamas a few months earlier. They are both clean shaven and have short cropped hair. They are dressed similarly, both wearing jean shorts, colourful tie-died cotton shirts, no socks, and well-worn Dockers. They are also both wearing Pride BMO bracelets but are otherwise unadorned in Pride wear.

Johnny: Oh no! *(Pause)* What the fuck! *(Sighs)* What's this now? *(Questioningly)*

T.J.: Hey, it's a protest! *(Surprised)* What do you know Edmonton Pride is having its first protest.

Johnny: Ahhhhhh-ya – Like, obviously! *(Curtly)* Don't sound so excited! *I mean (Emphasis) –*

what's going on? What's all the *fuss about?* (*Emphasis – last and second last word*)

T.J.: No idea! (*Pause*) Cool! Who thought Edmonton had it in 'em? (*Questioningly*)

Johnny: You've got to be kidding me! Well – (*Long pause*) *this sucks!* (*Emphasis – last two words... words trail off*) What a waste of my time! – I didn't come here for this! (*Pace of talking is increasing through the next sentence, as if getting stirred up*) I'm not here for this and I'm not going to stand around and wait for this either... Whatever *this* is! (*Emphasis second word*) Let's get out of here, find a patio, grab a cool drink... (*Relaxing with those last words – thinking of being elsewhere*)

T.J.: Cool your jets Johnny! (*Curtly*)... We just got here... Why don't we see what happens...

Johnny: Why! (*Irritated*) What's the point? (*Sharply*) This is a waste of time (*Angrily*)! Who knows how long this is going to take and I didn't here come for this! (*Irritation building throughout the sentence*) I came to relax, unwind... Check some guys... I don't know... I came to play; *not* (*Emphasis*) to watch a protest – for fuck's sake! (*Voice is rising near the end – Beginning to get angry*)

T.J.: Well, I don't know. (*Exasperated*) I think it's kind of cool actually. Pride has gotten so commercialized and *so boring* (*Emphasis – last two words*) these last few years. I think this is the most interesting thing that's happened so far, to be honest!

Johnny: Seriously? (*Deeply annoyed*) You don't even know what it's about... (*Irritation continues to build*)

T.J.: That's what I'm trying to figure out. (*Getting annoyed in return*) Let's hang in for a bit – See what they have to say. If it takes too long, we'll leave okay? (*Negotiating*) I'm curious. I'd like to know what this all about...

Johnny: Fine! (*Emphasis*) We'll wait!! (*Snarkily – irritated*) But, if this thing isn't moving in

half an hour, I'm outta here. I mean it! *(Defiantly)*

T.J.: Sounds good. *(Negotiating)* I'm in! Just give it a bit...

Johnny: Yeah... *(Long pause)* Sure... Whatever... *(Quietly – annoyed, but placated)*

Stage Note: Spot light closes on the two men in conversation and comes up on Adebayo, still standing Centre Stage, who has just finished speaking to the audience and is still holding a megaphone to his lips. Adebayo turns to face the tall grey haired man standing beside him. A tall young man, one of the protesters comes to Adebayo's side from Stage Left and gives Adebayo a piece of paper. Adebayo hands the megaphone over to this tall young man and Adebayo follows the tall grey haired man off stage. They Exit, back Stage Right. The protestor with the megaphone holds it near his face but doesn't speak. He stands frozen in place Front Stage Left.

Spot Light comes up on two young women, who appear to be in their early twenties, Madeline and Jackie, as they approach Centre Stage, from the sidelines Stage Left, to talk to one of the protestors who are still standing arms interlinked and facing the audience. Madeline is Caucasian, average height, and has long wavy dark hair. She is wearing beige, long cotton shorts that come just below the knee, a loose, grey cotton t-shirt, and leather "Jesus" sandals. Jackie is slightly shorter and stockier than Madeline. She appears to be Latino. Her hair is cropped quite short, black with grey died tips. She's wearing a red halter top, short washed-out blue jean shorts, and orange flip-flops. Max, the protestor they approach, identifies as a non-binary trans person. They are Caucasian, with very fair skin, medium height and build, cool tattoos about both shoulders, and bright, ginger-colour hair cropped short and shaved close to their temples at the sides. Max smiles broadly, recognizing Jackie and Madeline, as they approach.

Jackie: Hey Max! *(With a smile of recognition)* What's happening? Like, *(Pause)* we're just

curious ... like, so... *(Pause)* what's up? What's going on?

Max: Hey Jackie! And Hey Madeline! Mmmmm ... Well ... I'd rather not say *(Pause)* ... I was asked by one of the organizers to come and support, so I'm here helping them hold the space.

Madeline: Okay... Yeah *(Pause)* Well ... we're down with it, like we totally support you, we're just like, wondering, you know *(Pause)* What's going down? Like, what's the protest about?

Max: Yeah... *(Pause)* Well... See *(Pause)*... The thing is... *(Voice rising at the end – Pause)* It's complicated... *(Pause)* I really *(Emphasis – last word)* don't want to speak *for (Emphasis – last word)* people, you know. I mean, I'm here as an ally to support the organizers and they are off right now working out the details, so ... people are negotiating as we speak, so *(Emphasis)* I really don't want to say anything. And, I *really (Emphasis)* don't want to *speak for (Emphasis)* the organizers – the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour groups, who organized this protest. I'm an ally and here to support, but like, you know, since I'm obviously, like, *(Pointing to his fair skin with a wave of his right hand from head to torso)* not in that group, so I'm not going to speak for them... I want to respect the process that is unfolding, literally, as we speak ...

Jackie: Okay Max, yeah... Right... Well, I'm sorry to have put you on the spot! Stay strong!

Max: No worries! It's good to see you both!

Madeline: You too Max... and I totally respect that. We were just curious... Thanks Max! See you soon!

Max: You bet. Take care!

Stage Note: Madeline and Jackie slowly walk back to the sidelines holding hands. As they leave, a young man approaches the protest line from Backstage Left.

Young Man: *(Speaking to the protest line as a group)* Hey guys!!! Ummmmmm ... We have a lot of floats, like a lot of floats, *(Pause)* and a lot of people backed up here, including some pretty

important dignitaries... *(Longer Pause)* Like, I appreciate where you're coming from, but...

Ahhhhh... *(Pause)* Can we, like, begin to move this thing along? People are beginning to get ticked off and some people are starting to leave. So... *(Pause)* can we, like, wrap this up soon?

Max: Like, I *literally (Emphasis)* just told some friends a minute ago...*(Pause)* This is all being worked out right now *(Pause)*, like literally, as we speak... the organizers of this protest are meeting with the Pride Festival organizers now. So, we are here and holding this space open as those negotiations take place *(Pause)* and we are staying here until this process is complete.

Young Man: Are you kidding me?

Max: *(Shakes his head)* Nope... *(Calmly)* We're staying... *(Smiles)*

Young Man: *(Shaking his head and walking back toward the Back Stage Exit – Stage Left – Speaking as much to himself as the protestors).* Ahhhh *(Pause)*... They aren't going to like this.

ACT 1, Scene 5: Snapshots

Stage Note: *Lights go down on the protest and come up on the screen at the back of the stage.*

The narrator's voice begins to speak as pages of black and white photos a projected one at a time until five pages of images are placed side by side.

Narrator: Max has shown these photos of the protest posted on Facebook. These are amazing photographs, but they also capture the mood of a moment in time. The photographs capture the actions and expression of what was happening on the front lines of the protest and give the protesters' faces. The expressions on the faces say so much. I read a lot of anger and a lot of sadness. The non-protesters look pissed; and they seem to be directing their anger at protestors. There is a lot of finger pointing. The protestors seem defiant, but saddened also. On their faces, you can see the pain this confrontation seems to be causing.

I can imagine protesting because you feel there is no other forum to be heard, and you want your queer community to step up and support you. You hope they can understand, that you are not being heard, that your communities are not being heard, and you need support. But in the heat of the moment, instead of finding the support and understanding within your community that you desperately hope for – you are physically confronted; you are shouted down, shamed, told to be quiet, and told to step back, or to go back to your own country, by your queer community, during a Pride parade. I can imagine how that feels. I would feel so disappointed...

These images don't paint the whole picture though; they are literally snapshots of a moment in time, a specific place and event. They show the division, the anger, and I think, the deep disappointment and hurt that many on those front lines of protest probably experienced. I also know that many who watched from the sidelines, or read about it in the newspapers later, who may have felt frustration or annoyance initially, later tried to understand what had just happened and why. They thought about it, and talked about it later. It mattered.

ACT 2, Scene 1: Dinner Conversation

Stage Note: Scene opens at a dinner table. Just as four women are sitting down to dinner. All women are in their early fifties. Michelle and Carla have shoulder length hair and no make-up. Both women are the same height. Carla has her hair swept up in a pony-tail. Both are casually dressed in shorts, short-sleeved cotton shirts, and sandals. Michelle is a graduate student in Education and Carla is a post-graduate student in Comparative Literature. Beverly and Rachael are both medium height and build, with Beverly being just a bit taller than Rachael. Both women have short hair. Beverly is blond and Rachael has dark hair, greying at the tips. Beverly and Rachael are both wearing jeans and t-shirts, sandals – a nice change from business casual. Beverly works as computer programmer and Rachael is a nurse.

Narrator: It's a special occasion, the two couples have been busy and haven't had time to get together for a while. Now, they finally have time to relax, unwind, and enjoy each other's company. Rachael is pouring each a glass of Merlot to accompany their meals. Roast beef, mashed potatoes, carrots and small salads are placed on the table. Rachael and Carla begin to help themselves to the dishes and then pass the plates of food.

Beverly: So, Michelle, *(Pause)* I've been meaning to ask you like what's up with Pride? Like what was that about anyway?

Michelle: Well... *(Pause)* its complicated ... There are a lot of folks who don't feel safe with the police marching in Pride for a variety of reasons. Many queer and trans folks in the Black, Indigenous and People of Colour communities don't feel well-served by police. There are stories about police harassment of Indigenous people, especially Trans women, and folks who work in the sex trade. The Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour groups also speak about racial profiling and being targeted by police for surveillance or harassment. Also, the LGBTIQ+ refugee, and queer and trans community do not feel well served by the police when they need to report incidents of verbal or physical harassment or sexual assault. So, it's complicated.

Beverly: Okay... Well, that makes sense. But, do you think anyone really gets it though? I mean, the reason for the protest? We didn't know what was going on or what they were trying to achieve.

Rachael: Yeah, well, I personally found it annoying and left. I couldn't figure it out. There were a lot of signs and each said something different. Did they even have a consistent message?

Michelle: I think there were a few messages ... the need for safety and support for one. But I think the messiness is kind of the point though. I mean protests are messy, inconvenient, and even upsetting. But they can be a starting point for conversations too, I mean would we be

talking about this now without the protest. This conversation and others just like this one that are happening around dinner tables throughout Edmonton tonight and in the coming weeks and months. I think, after the dust settles and people calm down, there might be a space that opens for thoughtful dialogue within and between different queer communities about how we can better support Trans folks and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour communities and hopefully build bridges to move forward together.

Rachael: Do you think it's possible to build those bridges?

Michelle: I think it's essential. I think we need each other. Now how that works, I don't know. I think, we need to see with fresh eyes, and learn from the perspectives of the younger queer generations and folks in the LGBTIQ+ BIPOC communities. They have the insight to know what their communities need to thrive and we need to find ways to support them.

Carla: If you think about it the LGBTIQ community has always been a coalition of diverse groups of people with diverse needs. The queer community has always been like a social movement or series of social movements. There are a series of organizations and groups that rise and fall in relation to different and changing needs. This seems to be a time when an organization, like the Pride Festival, is going through some growing pains. It may transition or it may fall apart, but one thing is for sure, if it does fail something else will take its place.

Michelle: Yes. The Pride Festival grew out of Gay and Lesbian Awareness group, called GALA that started in 1982. They organized the first gay and lesbian barbeques in the park. They later started the first Pride parades in Edmonton in about 1991 with their Gay Day Anyway. I think I was at one of those gatherings at the gazebo on Whyte.

Anyway, GALA splintered in 91 or 92 to become GALA legal defense that took the Alberta Government to the Supreme Court to eventually win *Vriend V. Alberta*. The landmark

case that made it illegal to discriminate against people based on their sexual orientation, by reading sexual orientation into the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The social group within GALA, that created the LGBTIQ barbeques in the parks, the social events, and parades, morphed into the Edmonton Pride Festival Society, so it's been around for a while.

Carla: When you think about it Pride Festival came about because of needs and a lot of people working to fulfill those needs. Now, there are more people and more diverse needs and the Festival, doesn't seem to be meeting those needs, so it will have to change or something else will take its place.

Michelle: Yes. When I think of the history of the Pride movement in Edmonton from 1970 to present, it's an evolution of organizations, one after, and everything in continuous flux. Because needs of individuals and groups are always shifting, the organizations are always changing to fulfill those changing needs. Organizations are an outward expression of those ever-shifting needs. So, we shouldn't be too surprised when things change, everything is in process.

Beverly: Ahhhhh (*Pausing*)... Can we eat?

Stage Note: Lights go down on the dinner table. Scene ends.

ACT 3, Scene 1: The Café (June 10th, 2018)

Stage Note: Scene open with Adebayo and Michelle sitting at a café a small table by a window drinking coffee. It's cloudy. Rain is running down the outside of the nearby window. It looks chilly. Both are hunched over the table.

Adebayo: I'll do something about it. I am currently trying to find a therapist. Because it is now so fresh, just yesterday. And I don't know how to handle it so, I'll manage it and I'll put it down. I'll write something down. Him telling me that I should be lucky to be in this country. If I don't

follow the rules, then I should be deported. Him actually saying these words to me. And they clicked in my head and they made me a little bit defensive. And hearing him and telling him, this is my country too and I came for love, and peace, and safety and it is why I am still fighting. Because I haven't received the love, peace, and safety yet.

Michelle: There are some people that think like that.

Adebayo: Yeah. And literally, I always think positive and I know they're thinking like this because they don't know and it is because nothing like this has ever happened to them and it is because they have lived a very privileged life.

Michelle: Yes.

Adebayo: Which doesn't include different fights and it's understandable. One thing, I just hear and actually for them I am hoping is that, just listen, open your ears, and listen – be able to learn. People choose not to change if they have heard something, if they listen to something that will help and it will make them think differently.

Michelle: It's a challenge too. It's still a choice right? But at least they have a chance to think about it.

Adebayo: Exactly.

Stage Note: Lights go down on Adebayo and Michelle sitting in the café.

ACT 4, Scene 1: I Had a Home

Narrator: This is found poem⁹² Adebayo and I put together; it is based on excerpts taken from

⁹² Found poems are built from fragments of transcripts from research conversations. They are often created, as in this case, to keep as close to the actual spoken words as possible (Butler-Kisber, 2017).

transcripts of our first research conversation together on April 21st, 2018.

Stage Note: Spot light comes up on Adebayo, standing Centre Stage addressing the audience. He reads his poem.

I Had a Home

I had a Home – So Beautiful, So Nice!

but I can't stay there for my life.

I am a refugee,

I am a Black transgender man,

I am Ugandan-Canadian,

I am a protected person now.

Police raided,

We are arrested, undressed, beaten.

I still have gunshot wounds in my hands.

We are, all of us, outed,

We are the news; all over the TV.

Names, pictures, everything...

I am kicked out of the Church,

They say, "You gay people – we are fighting you;

Get out of our Church”.

So, I can't go to Church anymore -

back home, in Uganda.

In Canada, for a swimming competition,

My sister emails,

She says, “You're evil”,

She says, “Stay where you are”,

She says, “You better not come home”.

I didn't think they would do it,

My family,

They kicked me out,

They disowned me,

They said they will kill me themselves, if I return,

or, they will take me to the police,

where no one would do anything.

People with tender hearts,

They made me fall in love with Canada,

But I had a home,

So Beautiful, So Nice.

Never Mind, they kicked me out,

It is Still my Home.

Each and every day,

I miss my mom,

I miss my friends,

I miss the animals,

I miss the rivers.

I had a Home,

So Beautiful, So Nice,

but I can't go there for my life.

Stage Note: Scene ends. Spot light goes down as Adebayo turns and Exits Stage Left.

Adebayo's Artwork – September 10th, 2016 at SNAP Printmaking Studio



⁹³ Images: 4.1 (top) & 4.2 (bottom). The acronym SNAP stands for the Society of Northern Alberta Print-artists. SNAP Gallery and community printmaking studio are located in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Pride is Love Exhibition, October-November 2016 at SNAP Printmaking Studio



⁹⁴ Images: 4.3 (top) & 4.4 (bottom).

Adebayo's Poster for His Documentary Film: A Long Road to Peace showcasing the stories of LGBTIQ+ refugees – May 2018



⁹⁵ Image: 4.5

Adebayo's Artwork in *Re-Imaging Normal* TREX Exhibition
 (Travelling Rural Exhibition Program), May 22nd–July 21st, 2018 at VAA CARFAC Gallery,
 Edmonton, Travelling through Alberta until August 2020



96

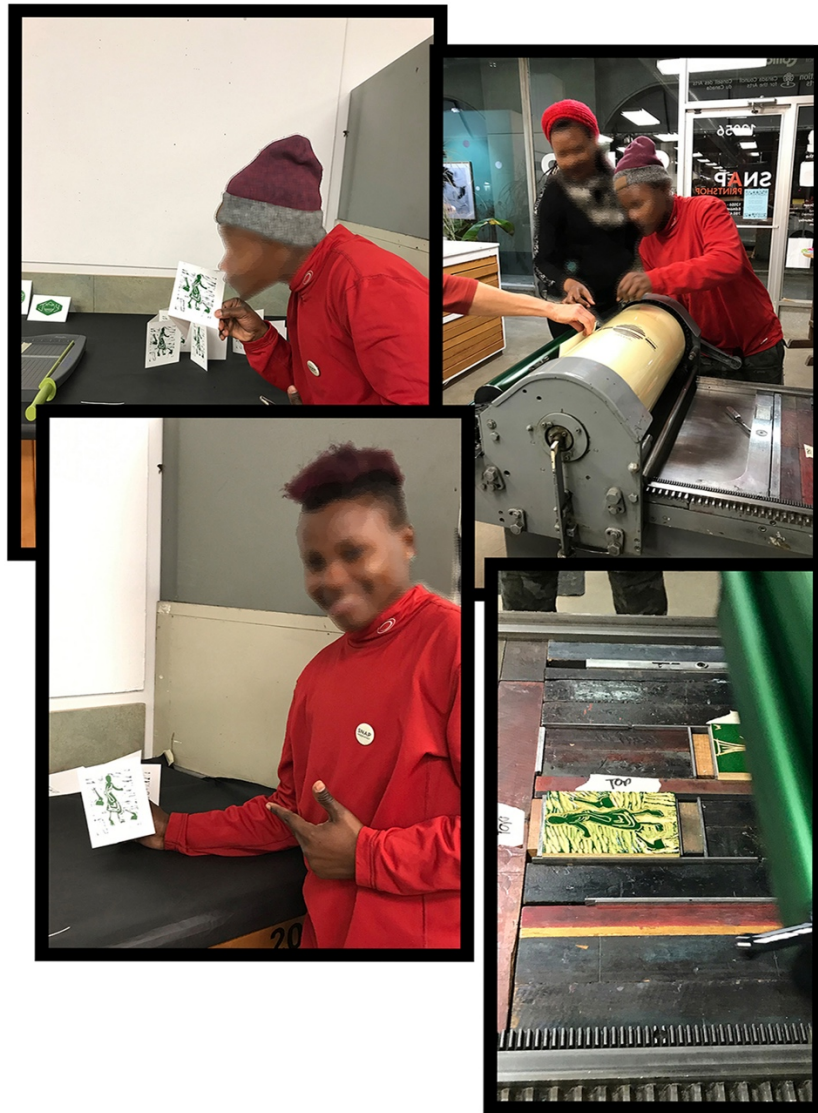
⁹⁶ Images: 4.6 (right) & 4.7 (left). The TREX (Travelling Rural Exhibition Program) is run by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA). *Re-Imaging Normal* was a TREX exhibition co-curated by Michelle Lavoie and Shane Golby of the AFA.

Adebayo's Artwork –October 30th, 2018 at SNAP Printmaking Studio



⁹⁷ Image: 4.8.

Adebayo's Artwork December 13th, 2018 at SNAP Printmaking Studio



⁹⁸ Images: 4.9 (top right), 4.10 (top left), 4.11 (bottom left), & 4.12 (bottom right).

Adebayo's Artwork – February 28th, 2019 at SNAP Printmaking Studio



⁹⁹ Images: 4.13 (top) & 4.14 (bottom).

Artwork Plates as Gifts – April 29th, 2019 at SNAP Printmaking Studio



¹⁰⁰ Images: 4.15 (top), 4.16 (middle) & 4.17 (bottom).

Adebayo's Artwork May 24th, 2019 at SNAP Printmaking Studio



¹⁰¹ Images: 4.18 (top right), 4.19 (top left), 4.20 (bottom left), & 4.21 (bottom right).

Adebayo's Artwork – October 31st, 2019 at SNAP Printmaking Studio



¹⁰² Images: 4.22 (top right), 4.23 (top left), & 4.24 (bottom).

PART 3 – YELLOW VEST PROTEST & COUNTER-PROTEST

ACT 1, Scene 1: Connecting Dots

Stage Note: A spot light comes up on Michelle sitting at her desk in her office. Stage, Front Right. She appears to be reading a newspaper. She puts the paper down and begins to write. Michelle's voice reads aloud the words as they are written.

Narrator: It's December 15th, 2018. Looking over the daily news with my coffee this morning, My attention is drawn by a headline: *Punches Thrown During Anti-Immigration Protest in Edmonton*, CBC News¹⁰³. My first thought: Is Adebayo there and is he okay? I kind of hope he isn't there. I'm worried for his safety.

I've seen this movement before, in France on our national news. Chanting, breaking, and burning. It troubles me they are here in Canada; in our backyard, exactly one month after they emerged in France. What is this? Why is this here? And why are they here right now? My father's stories of his days as a Canadian paratrooper stationed in France at the end of the Second World War come forward. His stories about civilian mobs, their irrationality and danger come forward for me, as I read about the 'Yellow Vest' protest in Edmonton. I am writing now to understand as my family stories come alongside Adebayo's stories. This is my writing called Yellow Jackets/Yellow Vests:

Protesters and counter-protesters meet at Churchill Square.

¹⁰³ McMillan, A. (2018, December 15). *Punches Thrown During Anti-Immigration Protest in Edmonton*. CBC News. This online article was updated to: McMillan, A. (2018, December 17). *Punches thrown as protest groups clash Edmonton*. CBC News. <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.cbc.ca/amp/1.4948100>

I've seen them before, in the news, these protestors,
the so called *Yellow Vests* emerged in France,
almost, exactly, one month before,
this wild, violent mob undercover of night,
Moving as one,
washing like waves down dim-darkened streets,
chanting, breaking, burning.

Leaving chaos and destruction in their wake.
In France, torches dancing wildly in the wind,
they were halted, eventually, by police in full riot gear,
bodies pushing in, wave upon wave,
meeting body-length shields.

And now, here they are,
fully organized again it seems.
Today gathered in cities across Canada,
threatening trouble.

My first thoughts:
Are you kidding? Where did this come from?
Here, they are fewer, quieter,
but still, they simmer,
waiting for a spark,

the promise of violence?

My father's stories come forward to me here. He often warned me about the danger of mobs:

Stay away from mobs, he said, they call it contagion,

You never know what a mob will do – they are capable of anything.

He knew. He had seen.

As a soldier fighting in France and Germany he had seen too much,

and stationed in France after the War,

Soldiers weren't allowed to interfere with the civilian mobs.

These mobs were considered too wild and too dangerous.

Civilian mobs gathered women they believed to be Nazi collaborators,

In the streets they shaved women's heads.

I think worse happened too,

while soldiers were ordered to not intervene.

Yellow Vests, they call themselves,

The name reminds me of yellow jackets, wasps,

stinging, annoying, aggressive in late summer.

In the fall, mom would put out a bottle with food colour and sugar water.

Drawn by both, they would crawl surreptitiously inside,

then unable to climb out, they would, eventually, inevitably drown.

Like wasps in bottles,

This movement seems ill-fated.

Are they caught by fate? precarity? hatred?

Some are real,

desperate, angry, afraid,

Trying to make a living

...and it's not working...

Some are political provocateurs,

...who don't give a damn about anyone,

They feed on fear, fan flames of hatred,

They blame immigrants, the United Nations, globalists.

We've seen it all before...

this playbook playing, loud and proud,

south of the border.

Some can't find a way out.

Some aren't looking for a way out.

Bumping against, forming, swarming,
in relation to grievance, anger, and ideology.

A few are becoming dangerous.

The Yellow Vests hold signs:

Stand up for Canada! No Trudeau! No Carbon Tax! No Immigration!

What large expensive billboards you have...

Politics aside: Stand up for Canada means no immigration?

But Canada needs immigration –

What is this about really?

Large men edge the crowd, arms folded across broad chests,

Scowling at cameras and counter-protesters,

Some jackets sport patches, showing their colours,

I don't know much, but there's a definite white nationalist undertone.

Adebayo is there too, amongst counter-protesters,

Not twenty feet from where the fight broke out.

I'm not happy to see him so close to violence.

I hope he will be safe.

Stage Note: Spot light goes down on Michelle writing at her desk. Scene Ends.

ACT 2, Scene 1: The Yellow Vest Protest and Counter-Protest

Stage Note: Spot light comes up on another area of the stage – Stage Centre Left. There is a crowd of people about forty people – divided equally with approximately twenty Yellow Vest protesters and twenty counter-protesters. The protestors wear yellow vests. They are uniformly dressed in black - pants, sweaters, boots. Many wear hoodies, hoods up, and sunglasses. A few wear ball caps and some wear toques with the words Canada. Three wave large Canadian flags. They hold large bright yellow signs that say: Keep Canada Canadian; No UN, No Migration; No One World Order; Stand Up!; Stand Up for Canada; No Carbon Tax; Stand Up For Democracy; Stand Up For Canadians; Down with Trudeau, Down with UN; and No Carbon Tax, No Trudeau¹⁰⁴. The Yellow Vests that line the back of the stage are large, husky men.

The counter-protesters by contrast seem younger, thinner, and more racially diverse than the Yellow Vests. They aren't uniformly dressed. They hold signs that say: Yellow Vests (not equal sign) Immigrant Scapegoats; Community United Against Racism and Xenophobia; Migrants Welcome Here; and We are Proud and Canadian!¹⁰⁵

Yellow Vests are standing on bleachers, three to four tiers deep, closest to the back of the stage. The counter-protesters are standing closer to the front of the stage and audience.

¹⁰⁴ Content of the Yellow Vest protest signs is accurately described from a photograph in the article: McMillan, A. (2018, December 17). *Punches thrown as protest groups clash Edmonton*. CBC News.

<https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.cbc.ca/amp/1.4948100>.

¹⁰⁵ Content of the counter-protester signs is also accurately described from a from a photograph in: McMillan, A. (2018, December 17). *Punches thrown as protest groups clash Edmonton*. CBC News.

<https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.cbc.ca/amp/1.4948100>.

Narrator: Adebayo is standing with the counter-protesters near the front of the stage. He is looking to the back of the bleachers where a scuffle is taking place, between a burly Yellow Vest protester and a smaller counter-protester. Almost immediately, a Yellow Vest protester pushes her Stand Up for Canada sign into Adebayo's face. Adebayo pushes the sign down and away, out of his face. The protester pushes closer to Adebayo, who steps back, out of the way of the sign. The Yellow Vest protester who is pushing her sign toward Adebayo, loses her balance and her footing. She slips, and falls forward. The police move in. The police now stand in a line between the Yellow Vests and counter-protesters. Eventually, the crowd begins to disperse. The news media who have been filming this event from the sidelines come forward as the protesters and counter-protesters begins to dwindle. A reporter approaches Adebayo.

Reporter: (*Microphone in hand extends toward Adebayo as the question is asked, a camera man follows and focuses on Adebayo standing with two friends*) Can you tell us what happened here?

Adebayo: Well, I was holding a sign saying: Refugees are Welcome Here. My sign was pulled out of my hands. They tore my sign into pieces, it was thrown on the ground and then it was trampled on¹⁰⁶.

Reporter: What do you think motivated these actions?

Adebayo: It is violence... it is racism!¹⁰⁷ Refugees mean no harm! Immigrants mean no harm! Hate is learned and it can be unlearned. I'm here for love, peace, and safety, and I'm home.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ McMillan, A. (2018, December 17). *Punches thrown as protest groups clash Edmonton*. CBC News.

<https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.cbc.ca/amp/1.4948100>.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

I hope people can hear our stories with open hearts. People don't know our stories. They say – Oh you, go back to where you come from. That is white privilege. It's not trying to understand our stories. It's racism! Racism is dangerous and it's what they're representing.¹⁰⁹

Stage Note: Stage lights go down on stage. Adebayo and reporter Exit Back, Stage Left.

ACT 3, Scene 1: The Game

Stage Note: Lights come up on a large wheel spinning. It's a carnival like atmosphere with gameshow music playing loudly. The announcer seems like a caricature, a mash-up of gameshow hosts. He is over the top, overly friendly, overly excited, overly loud, overly smiley.

Announcer: Welcome everyone to the wheel, to play: Whose More Canadian? We have two contestants here, so let's the spin the wheel and get going... You know how to play this game, when you see the video, this first one to the buzzer with the right answer wins five hundred dollars cash.

Stage Note: Announcer spins the wheel. The wheels spins quickly at first, begins to slow, then slows to a stop. When it stops a video plays. The video shows two people, one dressed in a red toque with the word Canada emblazoned on it, big winter boots, and fluffy down-filled coat. The second person is wearing Bermuda shorts, a cotton loose fitting t-shirt and flip flops.

Announcer: Okay, this should be an easy one. (Broadly smiles - waiting).

Stage Note: Buzzer goes off immediately.

Contestant #1: Well... Obviously, the person in the toque! (Smiling)

Announcer: (Loudly) Absolutely CORRRR---RRRRECT!! That is the right answer! That's

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

five hundred dollars for you... Okay, let's keep going... (He spins the wheel) Okay, the next one will get harder.

Stage Note: A video shows two people, a woman with long hair who is wearing a dress, high-heels and make-up and a younger person, who looks more androgynous, wearing jean shorts, a cotton t-shirt, and sandals. There is a pause as both contestants look at the video. Buzzer goes off.

Contestant #2: Ummm (Questioningly) ... They're both Canadians? (Pause) Maybe ...?

Announcer: Ahhhhhhh ... So sad ... that's IN-----CORRRR----RRRRECT!! Nothing for you. You remain with nothing.

Contestant #2: But what's the difference? They both look Canadian to me...

Announcer: Ahhhhhhh... Well, that's where you need to look closer...

And (Happily) since only I get to ask the questions... You lose an additional five hundred dollars, which leaves you five hundred in the hole... (Smiles broadly)

Contestant #2: What the hell? Are you kidding me (Bewildered)?

Announcer: Careful Nowwwwww ...

Contestant #2: This is absurd! I quit (Shouting)!

Announcer: ...And (Pause)... That's the point (With a huge smile, super-positive voice)!

Stage Note: Contestant #2 loudly stomps off stage, and Exits Back, Stage Left, shaking his head.

Announcer: And that's our time today! So, be sure to join us next week when we ask: Are they really married? And what constitutes a real family¹¹⁰?

¹¹⁰ This scene was imagined during the last Canadian federal election campaign of 2018 when political theatre lead some political parties to begin to pit Canadians against each other. Marginalized groups, such as recent immigrants,

Stage Note: Carousel-like, country fair music blares loudly Contestant #1 stays in place as the winner and person to beat next week. The announcer walks from behind his podium with a substantial wad of cash in his left hand. Contestant #1 holds out his right hand, palm up, while the announcer slowly takes one one-hundred-dollar bill at a time, from the stack in his left hand and slowly places it into the upturned palm of Contestant #1. Contestant #1 grins, nods, and shakes the hand of the announcer. Then the Announcer puts his arm over the shoulder of Contestant #1. They walk off stage together. Chatting and laughing both Exit Back, Stage Left.

ACT 4, Scene 1: Why are We Doing This?

Stage Note: Lights stay on no one is initially on stage. The narrator's voice speaks. Halfway through the narration, Michelle gets up from her desk and walks onto the stage and stands centre stage to address the audience.

Narrator: Of course, this entire game is absurd; absurdity is the point. Can you spot a real Canadian? A real married couple? A real family? A real man? A real woman? Why are we looking for differences to put each other down? Implicit bias gets in the way too. It is rewarded and not necessarily conscious. We need to do better to see our blind spots¹¹¹. We need to critique

LGBTIQ+ people, BIPOC and TQBIPOC groups, were frequent targets of political rhetoric. False dichotomies, false equivalents, outright lies, and barely masked xenophobia, racism, homophobia and transphobia were amplified by divisive political rhetoric to create political and polarization, gain votes, and promote an Us vs. Them social discourse.

¹¹¹ *In Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks (2003) writes about addressing race and racism through anti-racist workshops. hooks (2003) states that much time in these workshops is spent “breaking through denial”

implicit bias in our thoughts, actions, and civil discourse. We need to ask: Why are we doing this? Why are we playing these games? Who benefits when people are pitted against one another? Who gets to be the authority? Who wins and who loses?

Which bring us to today August 25th, 2019. The Amazon Rain Forest is burning out of control. Since Bolsonaro's election in Brazil, his inflammatory and racist political rhetoric has targeted Brazil's Indigenous people and emboldened non-Indigenous farmers in Brazil to start fires and participate in illegal land grabs. The Indigenous people live in a state of fear. Heated political rhetoric fans the flames of destruction, resulting in catastrophic environmental degradation for Brazil and the world. This environmental disaster disproportionately displaces and expels Brazil's Indigenous people from the land¹¹²; it may amount to genocide. But, it's not just in Brazil, little fires burn everywhere now¹¹³.

Michelle: (*Addressing the audience*) I've channeled my inner Vonnegut and my best Orwell for you because I don't know what else to do; because I don't know how to show you this. In my life-time I have not seen this before. Anger is simmering as people are becoming discontented. Marginalized people feel it most keenly, people who are: racialized, poor, with physical ability challenges, or working through mental health challenges, and sexual and gender minorities, especially immigrants and refugees and those who are living at the intersections of two or more sites of precarity. There is a mean chill in the air these days with severe cuts to social programs,

(p. 25) that racism and white-supremacist thought remains pervasive in society. hooks (2003) refers to this denial and lack of knowledge as blind-spots.

¹¹² Amnesty International. (2019, August 22). Brazil: Government failures are fueling wildfires across the amazon.

¹¹³ This sentence is a nod to a sensational fictional novel, by Celeste Ng (2017), called, *Little Fires Everywhere* which intimately describes intersections of race, class, age, power, and privilege.

health care, and education for those people who are most in need and most vulnerable in society.

ACT 4, Scene 2: Remember

Stage Note: Michelle is sitting at her desk writing. The screen at the back shows the letter being written, the narrator reads the letter aloud.

Narrator: Field Note September 1st, 2019. A few days ago, I met Adebayo at a restaurant downtown to go over his narrative account. As I waited I grabbed a lemonade, read through the play, and kept an eye on the door for Adebayo. The restaurant was quiet and mostly empty when I arrived. Two young men came in and sat close together as they ordered. A young couple, I think, maybe on a first or second date. A little later two women came in and sat at the table in front of me, one was older and the other much younger. They seemed related, a mother and daughter perhaps. Bits of conversation hung in the air and floated to my ears as I read. It was a comfortable space. I felt happy and grounded after getting a good night's sleep the night before. Later, two older men arrived and walked past my table to sit at the table directly behind. I looked up momentarily to take them in as they passed my table, then returned to my reading.

Deep in thought, enjoying the space and my quiet reading from behind, a voice from one of men sitting behind loudly asserted, “What do you expect when Jews control Hollywood”¹¹⁴. Good feeling gone. I sat there for a second thinking... what the hell? Did I really hear that? Momentarily disturbed, I quickly discounted the comment as an assertion of a nasty old man, and by the time Adebayo came to restaurant, I had forgotten. When Adebayo arrived, we ordered and

¹¹⁴ I couldn't make this up if I tried. This incident happened. These are not my words. There were two young men on site, and a younger and older woman, and two older men. I felt immediately unsafe when I heard this racial slur. I felt angry too. And I was shocked at the brazen language, stated as an assertion, loudly in a public space. Hearing nothing more from them though, I quickly forgot them.

proceeded to go through his account. I gave Adebayo the second part of the account to review, as I excused myself to use the washroom.

Walking through the lounge, I looked up to the sound of laughter. I was taken aback, to see the two older men standing beside and commenting loudly to a group of four young men sitting and laughing a response. The young men were non-descript in their early twenties, wearing jeans, plaid shirts. All were clean shaven and had short-cropped hair. I was surprised to see the two older men still at the restaurant and joined by a group of men. Something about them seemed off, I can't explain it. Being non-descript, I forgot them almost as soon as I'd seen them; they were easily forgettable. I returned to the table without thinking of them again. I thought about the group of men only later, after reading Adebayo's recent interview, where he mentioned hate group activity in Edmonton around Pride and the hate messages and threats his group regularly receives. It made me pause.

Stage Note: Michelle puts down her pen. Stands up from her desk. Goes to Centre Stage and stands in a spot light to address the audience.

Michelle: You know how, sometimes an experience throws something into sharp focus. How something, you haven't seen is suddenly apparent and obvious. Well, my experience at the restaurant did that. While, it's disturbing to overhear racist conspiracy theories spoken loudly and proudly in a restaurant in downtown Edmonton. And it's also troubling to accidentally stumble into a gathering who likely hold similar views.

I need to explain something to you, something you may not know. Some stories, I hold differently because I am a child of a Canadian Second World War veteran. I hold my father stories from that time in a different way. I hold my father stories in my body, in my spirit, and in my mind. His stories and memories from that time, like a scar of personal memory and historical

testimony. So, when someone spouts, “What do you expect when the Jews control Hollywood”, my body revolts. My father’s stories, my family’s stories, reach through my spine, percolate through my skin, and shout to be told.

My father, was a Canadian paratrooper in the World War II, deployed to France and Germany in 1944-45. His battalion was a spearhead unit that went first into Nazi held towns to clear them of snipers. He saw unspeakable things.

I remember Dad’s story at the end of the War, giving his rations to a young German boy, telling him to run the tins, hidden-tucked under his coat, straight home to his mom. He spoke too of the Camps, of the smell from twenty miles away. The Camps, he saw filled with people, like skeletons. Being told they could not feed the prisoners, now free, because after having no food for so long, food might kill them. My dad holding a cigarette to the lips of older Jewish man in a Camp. The man leaning against the fence while he smoked, too weak to hold a cigarette. My father’s anger at the Americans, the heroes always rolling in after, throwing chocolate bars from their tanks to skeletal prisoners. Some who had survived the War, would not survive this¹¹⁵.

Stage Note: Scene ends. Spot light fades. Lights go down. Michelle exits, Back Stage Left.

¹¹⁵ This was my father’s testimony and one of his many stories about his experiences as a Canadian paratrooper in France and Germany in 1944-45, at the end of the Second World War.

PART 4: PRIDE IS CANCELLED

ACT 1, Scene 1: Little Fires

Stage Note: Spot light come up Centre Stage, Michelle is sitting at her desk, writing. Glasses on, leaning forward, over her paper, she looks up, notices the audience, and stands to address them.

Michelle: I want to write this last bit, to show you what happened, and to maybe help me consider a path forward. It's complicated. It will probably be contested ground, but so be it. It's where we are. But there's something deeper, something at the root, something insidious. It's not in my peripheral vision anymore; it's completely blocking my vision completely now. I need to address it, to write through it, because I cannot go around it or avoid it. It is hate. Hate in its most visible form and how it is supported and sustained through less visible forms of systemic racism, implicit bias, privilege and power.

Let me back up just a little. Some tensions and challenges continue within Edmonton's queer communities between: LGB and TIQ+ folks; cisgendered folks and transgender folks, gender-queer, and gender-creative folks; different generations of LGBTIQ+ and QTBIPOC+ folks; LGBTIQ+ communities and QTBIPOC+ communities. Racialized QTBIPOC+ folks, QTBIPOC+ refugees and immigrants deal with daily micro-aggressions, racism, harassment, verbal and physical assaults, that most white and cisgender queer people don't experience. In Edmonton, white and cisgender queer people, usually feel safe in public, and feel free to live their lives. But, that safety is shifting too, as far-right extremist groups begin to emerge and take space in the mainstream media and public places and spaces. If you do not hold the views of these groups, you are not safe. If you are the member of a minority, any minority, you are not safe. Little fires burn everywhere now.

Stage Note: Scene ends. Spot goes down Michelle, she exits Back, Stage Left.

ACT 1, Scene 2: Hate on Whyte¹¹⁶

Stage Note: Setting: Whyte Avenue, early April 2019, approximately 9pm. There are two groups, protestors and counter-protesters, approximately twenty in each group. Protesters are mainly young white men, in their early to late twenties. They wear jeans, plaid cotton shirts, white undershirts. They are uniformly clean shaven with short cropped hair. Some cover their faces. A well-dressed, older man, addresses the crowd. The protesters have come into town from away. The counter-protesters are a coalition of various anti-hate organizations, including people from the QTBIPOC+ and LGBTIQ+ communities. The counter-protesters are racially diverse, young, and most are casually dressed in jeans, sweaters, and jackets. Police are separating the two groups. This represents a snapshot of Cora's and Peter's experience that night. Cora is cisgender and a member of the LGBTIQ+ community. Cora is Caucasian, in her late sixties. She is a part-time college accounting instructor. Peter is trans young Black non-binary person who identifies as a member of the QTBIPOC+ community, their pronouns are they/them. This is their conversation. Cora was on her way downtown when she passed crowds on Whyte. Curious, she stopped her car and parked nearby. As she approached the crowd, and recognized a friendly face, Peter, and walked over to Peter to ask what was happening.

Cora: *(Turning to Peter)* Peter, what's going on here?

Peter: Cora, hey! We are protesting the same group that was here last weekend. They're protesting refugees, immigration, queer rights, promoting white supremacy. You know – things they do... They're giving speeches... Police are protecting them...

¹¹⁶ This incident is based on a compilation of several events, both real and imagined. Characters are fictitious and entirely imagined, any resemblance to any real person, living or deceased is coincidental and unintentional.

Cora: Are you fucking kidding me?

Peter: Afraid not! Last weekend the group beat up a couple of counter-protesters. It's becoming a regular thing on Whyte now. They are taking the street, marking their territory.

Cora: This is nuts! Why are the police protecting them?

Peter: You got me there, hon...

Cora: This is insane!

Peter: Insane... Yeah, I'd agree.

Cora: I can't believe the police are letting this happen!

Peter: It's unreal. But, Ahhhhh... Yeah... Sadly girl... I believe it...

Stage Note: Cora notices some protesters gathered around a car, so she approaches close enough to quickly scrawl a partial plate. Then she approaches the nearest police officer.

Cora: Officer, I want to report an incident.

EPS Officer: Mame, *(Sharply)* I'm busy here!

Cora: My community is being threatened. I want to give you this...

EPS Officer: Mame, *(Sharply)* Step back!

Cora: I'm trying to give you this information! *(Angrily)* Why won't you take it?

EPS Officer: Mame, *(Sharply)* Am I having a problem with you?

Cora: *(Shocked, she steps back)* Are you fucking kidding me? Seriously *(Angrily)!!*

EPS Officer: Mame, *(Sharply)* Step back now! Let us do our work!

Cora: This is your work!! *(Angrily)* What's your badge number? *(Tired, she turns, feeling for her pen, in her jacket pockets. Annoyed, she realizes she must have dropped it. Disheartened, she slowly ambles back to find Peter. Picking her way through the crowd, she absently drops the note to the ground, where it is quickly trampled underfoot by passers-by)*

Stage Note: The police officer looks momentarily at Cora as she turns, then straight ahead. Cora tired, shaking slightly with anger now, walks back, trying to pick Peter out of the thick crowd. Her head is tilted down as she walks. She looks up to see several protesters pointing their phones into the crowd filming counter-protester. Shaken, she finally finds Peter in the crowd and walks toward him.

Cora: They wouldn't take it Peter! I wanted to file a complaint and give them a note but they wouldn't take it!

Peter: Not surprised! That's how they roll...

Cora: *(Stumbling)* Peter, they are filming the crowd. *(Concerned)* I noticed them filming when I was walking back to find you. I'm afraid Peter. I really am...

Peter: Welcome to the club Honey! I'm sorry but, you know love... we live this *every (Emphasis)* day. The racism, the xenophobia, the transphobia, the homophobia. It's just getting worse, is all. It's more brazen over the last few years. Like some folks take pride in ignorance, in being boorishness, in being hateful. And yeah, who the hell knows what they'll do! Nobody's safe.

Cora: *(Looking out over the crowd – Quietly – to herself)* Nobody's safe...

Stage Note: Spot lights go down. All exit Back, Stage Left and Right.

ACT 2, Scene 1: Calling the Police

Stage Note: Lights come revealing a long board room table with fifteen people sitting around it. This is a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Edmonton Pride Festival Society. They are set to start their meeting. Around the table there is one Indigenous Board Member, all other Members of the Board are Caucasian. Tamara is the singular QTBIPOC+ person on the Board.

They are tall and thin, and in their late twenties. They identify as two-spirit and their pronouns are they/them. Jenny is a co-chair. She is in her early thirties, cisgender. She identifies as lesbian and queer. Jack is a member of the board in his early seventies. He is a cisgender gay man. Cynthia is another board member. She is Caucasian and in her mid to late sixties. She identifies as lesbian. The door to the meeting room is shut. A uniformed security guard stands just outside the door in the hallway. He is joined by a group of fifteen QTBIPOC+ people also gathered in the hallway.

Jenny: *(Looking around the table, then to the door)* I would like to call this meeting to order at 7:15pm. All in favour? Quorum please?

Cynthia: I second the motion to call to order.

Jenny: All in favour?

Group: Ayy!

Jenny: The Ayy's have it! Let the minutes show, we are called to order at 7:16 pm. New business?

Tamara: We need to address the demands that I have brought forward on behalf of the QTBIPOC+ communities.

Jenny: Call for discussion to address the demands from the QTBIPOC+ community groups.

Jack: *(Launching forward as he speaks)* We can't do all this! It's way too much! For one thing, we don't have \$40,000.00 to pull from our budget to accommodate these groups. And no parade, a protest instead? Are you kidding me! We spent years building these crowds and we should throw it all away now? For what? People want to party and we are here to give the best Pride party yet!

Tamara: This is the fiftieth anniversary of Stonewall! Jack, it's gotta be a protest! And

Jack, you have no idea how much our QTBIPOC+ communities need this support! They have been supporting refugees, giving counselling, fundraising, lecturing on health policy, advocating on behalf of our queer communities of colour. And they have been doing it all alone, with no support – absolutely, no support from the LGBTIQ+ community. We're tired Jack. We're pissed off, and frankly we're a bit scared. There's a lot of shit going down! You'd know that if you've been down to Whyte Ave lately. Get your head out of your ass Jack!

Jenny: Order...

Jack: I don't appreciate the personal attack! And this (*Holding up a bunch of papers, waving them in the air*) is not what we do! This is not what we're about.

Tamara: It is personal Jack! It's very fucking personal! It's survival! The educational spaces, the closed safe spaces create safety for our communities, to advocate, and to celebrate being ourselves. We want space to protest and to address all the work that needs to be done, here and overseas. You know policing isn't working for everyone Jack! And sure, we need to come together, but first we need to create the space for us QTBIPOC+ folks to be heard, to be safe, to be creative. We need to forefront our QTBIPOC+ communities and put our stories, voices and needs out in front for once. We need the rest of the queer community to see what we are dealing with daily and to step up and help. We are going through something here – our communities are traumatized Jack and you don't get it! Come on Jack! And Jack... maybe this is who we need to be! Wake up!

Cynthia: That's enough with the personal attacks!

Tamara: Really Cynthia? After all I've said... that's what you got out of it? (*Voice trailing off*)

Jenny: Order! Come to order please! Tamara, please refrain from making personal statements.

Tamara: Personal statements? What are you taking about? You want me to stop speaking?

Jenny: I didn't mean that...

Tamara: What did you mean?

Stage Note: In the hallway, about fifteen QTBIPOC+ folks have gathered. There is a knock at the boardroom door. Jack walks to the door and swings it open. He steps forward into the open doorway. Cynthia and Jenny follow. They stand behind Jack, looking over his shoulder. The security man stands nearby, looking on from the sidelines.

Adebayo: We would like to come in. We would like to be at the table to present our demands, answer your questions, and support Tamara. We would like to be heard. We want to make our speech. We would like to come in to speak since you are voting on QTBIPOC+ issues.

Jack: This is closed board meeting. We have no room for you.

Adebayo: *(Looking over Jack's shoulder)* There is room at the table. *(Pause)* Let us in...

Jack: I told you already, this is a closed meeting of the Board of Directors. You are not welcome here and you are not coming in!

Adebayo: Why not let us in! You need to hear our voices! You promised to listen, so why are you not listening now?

Jenny: I'm sorry, but there is no room. We have your demands. We are addressing them now.

Cynthia: *(Chiming in – raising her voice)* We are the Board! And we are going to make these decisions! You need to leave now! Let us do our job!

Adebayo: We are here to lend our support to Tamara and to negotiate our demands. We need to be here!

Cynthia: You need to leave! *(She begins to close the door on Adebayo and people in the hall).*

Stage Note: Jack walks forward quickly, pushes the door shut with his outreached hand, and locks it. Jack turns and walks back to the table briskly. On the other side of the door, the security

guard moves to block the door with his body to stop anyone else from knocking. Inside the board room, Tamara breaks the silence.

Tamara: Are you really locking them out Jack? We can't do that! This is our community! We are voting on QTBIPOC+ issues – we need to hear from QTBIPOC folks. They're right here...

Stage Note: From inside the board room, loud voices from the hallway can be overheard.

Jack: I can't work like this Jenny! *(Long pause)* I've had it! I mean it! I'm done with this! *(Agitated - Voice rising in anger)* I've had all I'm going to take! *(Waving his hands in the air)* You are the Chair – do something! Do something now – we can't be expected to work like this!

Jenny: Jack, I don't know what to do ... like I really don't... *(Voice trailing off)*

Cynthia: *(With a patronizing tone)* Well, I do!! *(Sharply, addressing Jenny)* I'm sorry Jenny, but this harassment needs to stop now! It's gone too far! It's going to stop now because I'm ending it! *(Speaking caustically to Jenny, she picks up her purse and picks through it for her phone)*

Tamara: Cynthia what are you doing? Cynthia? *(Louder)*... Tell me you're not calling the cops!

Cynthia: Something, I should have done long ago *(Looking to Tamara)*... I'm calling the... Hello... *(Turning her attention to her phone)* Yes! I have an incident to report. We are being harassed. About fifteen young people. They're trespassing! Yes... do we feel threatened? Yes... the address? ...Just a minute... Jenny, what's our address here? *(Looking to Jenny)* ...Okay... I have it *(Taking a piece of paper from Jenny to read the address into the phone)* ... Just a minute ... It's... *(Cynthia continues speaking on her phone, her voice fades as Tamara begins to speak).*

Tamara: Cynthia, you are not doing this! Please... Cynthia ... Stop! ...Hang up! *(Pleading across the table to Cynthia, who is ignoring them, while continuing to talk on her phone)*

Stage Note: Tamara gets up from the table, crosses the floor, in few strides, and opens the door to leave the room. Tamara steps into the hall to speak with the group assembled there. When

Tamara leaves, Jack stands to speak.

Jack: I motion we adjourn this meeting and move to a new location. I suggest my place. We won't be disturbed there and we can settle this mess.

Cynthia: I'm in! I second Jack's motion we adjourn and move this meeting to Jack's.

Jenny: I agree! Jack, we have a to adjourn motion. Motion. A second? Cynthia. All in favour?

Other Board Members: Ayy!

Jenny: Ayy, have it! Motion passed. Jack give your address to the secretary for the minutes and for members who haven't been there yet.

Stage Note: Jack stands and walks to the secretary and gives his address. Newer board members step forward to write down Jack's address.

Jenny: This meeting is adjourned at 7:40 pm. We are reconvening at Jack's at 8:30. Hopefully, that will give us time to speak with the police when they arrive and get to Jack's to finish up. We stand adjourned. Let's get out of here! Anyone who needs a ride can come with me... Cynthia will you stay behind with me to speak to the police? We need to let Tamara in on the move as well.

Cynthia: I'll stay... *(To Jenny) (Then calling to Tamara through the open door).* Tamara, tell them they need to leave! Police are on their way...

Tamara: *(Looking back over their shoulder, calling a response)* Oh my God!! Cynthia really?!

Cynthia: We have called the police Tamara. *(Flatly)* They need to leave!

Tamara: *(Turning to speak with Adebayo and the QTBIPOC group assembled).* They've called the cops. *(Turning momentarily back toward the door as they hear the door latch-lock behind them. Tamara call out through the latched door)* Jack? Jack! Oh Jack, why do you have to be such an ass Jack *(Exasperated, quietly spoken as if to themselves)* Honestly...*(Sighs)*

Adebayo: You must be joking! They did that to us? They called the police on us? *(Bewildered)*

Tamara: I'm afraid so ... *(Shaking their head)* I know... I'm really sorry...

Stage Note: *Jack, Jenny, and Cynthia emerge, into the hallway, from the boardroom as two policemen arrive. Tamara, Cynthia and Jack speak with the police. Then Cynthia and Jenny pull Tamara aside to speak with them. After a few minutes, the group assembled outside begins to leave. Tamara walks away with the QTBIPOC group assembled in the hall. The police follow this group off stage. Jack speaks with the security guard dismissing him for the evening. Then Jenny, Jack, and Cynthia return to the board room to gather their things before leaving. Lights go down in the board room. Lights come up Stage, Front Centre on Adebayo and Tamara, who are followed by a small group of people walking up the street. Centre Stage is lit dimly as if by twilight.*

Adebayo: I can't believe they called police on us!

Tamara: I can't wrap my head around it either... *(Prolonged pause – for a minute or so)* They are moving the meeting...

Adebayo: Oh? *(Adebayo lights up)* Where?

ACT 2, Scene 2: Jack's Place

Stage Note: *Stage lights come up. Scene opens with Jack opening the door to his house, letting Board Members inside. He points toward his kitchen table and Board Members begin to sit down and pull out their papers. Tamara arrives last and comes inside to sit at the table.*

Tamara: I don't understand why we had to move this meeting! I want my concern about this move recorded in the minutes. I want everything recorded in the minutes...

Jenny: Duly-noted. Let it be so recorded. *(Looking to the secretary who is in process of pulling*

her notebook and pen from her backpack)

Jack: *(Stands up from the table, and moves into the kitchen)* Anyone want tea? Something stronger?

Several Voices: Tea! Something herbal?

Cynthia: Earl Grey, for me, with lemon, please Jack.

Jack: Sure... *(Pausing ... Looking past the kitchen table and through the large living room window)*. What the hell! Are you kidding me *(Very agitated)*!!

Cynthia: Jack? What's up?

Jack: They're here! They've followed us here! That's it! I've had it! I'm calling the police this time.

Tamara: Jack... come on! Don't overreact! Don't do that...

Cynthia: *(Standing up from the table to turn and look out the living room window)* I can't believe it!

Tamara: Jack, stop! Don't do that. I mean it! *(Sharply speaking loudly to Jack as he grabs for his phone)* Let me go out and speak with them... *(Calmly)*

Stage Note: *Tamara rises in one graceful movement, moves to the door, opens it. They step outside and down the stairs. Jack quickly walks to the door, closes it behind Tamara, and locks it. Tamara turns as they hear the door lock behind them.*

Tamara: *(Speaking as if to themselves)* Oh Jack! *(Pause)* Well, you're consistent... *(Sighs)*

Stage Note: *Tamara turns, walks back up the stairs, and knocks at the door.*

Tamara: *(Calling through the door)* Jack! *(Pause)* Don't be an ass, Jack! *(Irritated)* Let me in! *(Knocking and calling through the door)* Jenny! What's going on in there? Let me in!! I demand to be let in and right now!!

Stage Note: Jack opens the door a crack. Jenny and Cynthia stand behind him.

Jenny: *(Speaking over Jack's shoulder).* Tamara, you come in... Only you!

Tamara: No! This is the group we need to hear from; the group we need to negotiate with. I'm here to represent them. I'll come in, when we let them in.

Jenny: We're not letting them in Tamara...

Tamara: Jenny, I don't understand the problem here...

Jenny: We're not letting them in Tamara...

Tamara: I don't know what to do here...

Jenny: We want them to leave Tamara, so we can resume our meeting.

Tamara: Without me?

Jenny: If you don't come in and join us, then yes, without you...

Tamara: I don't believe this...

Jenny: We want them to leave...

Tamara: Why should they leave? This is about them! Why shouldn't they have their say?

Jenny: We want them to leave, so we can hold our meeting. They need to leave right away.

Tamara: I'm not going to tell them to leave! What are you afraid of?

Jenny: This is private property.

Tamara: Seriously Jenny?

Cynthia: *(From behind the door, Cynthia calls forward).* They need to leave or we'll call the police again...

Tamara: Oh my God, Cynthia really? Come on...

Cynthia: We will call the police Tamara!

Tamara: *(Turning and walking down the stairs to speak with Adebayo and the QTBIPOC group)*

assembled). They are going to call the police again... *(Quietly)*

Adebayo: You are kidding me?

Tamara: I'm afraid not...

Stage Note: Tamara walks down the steps to meet with the QTBIPOC group assembled on the lawn. Lights go down on the house and kitchen table. Lights come up Stage, Front Centre on Adebayo and Tamara and a small group of people. Centre Stage is lit as if by streetlights – it's dark with two to three, sharply focused spot lights, spaced in a linear fashion.

Adebayo: I can't believe they shut us out! I can't believe they called the police on us!

Tamara: They not only shut us out. They literally locked us out. I'm shocked. I'm really shocked right now. And I'm so disappointed! I didn't see this coming...

Turning to address the audience and the small crowd assembled on stage.

Stage Note: Adebayo pulls his speech from his pocket, unfolds it and quietly reads it to the small group assembled on stage. All but one spot light go down on the group. Scene ends. All exit Back, Stage Left. Narrator's voice speaks. Stage is empty.

Narrator: In his show, *United Shades of America: livingwhileblack*, Kamau Bell, calls out white folks for continually calling police on People of Colour. Delving deeper into this phenomenon, Kamau Bell spoke with Professor Syreeta McFadden. Kamau defined prejudice as an individual prejudging another individual based on characteristics, like skin colour. Professor McFadden defined racism as “prejudice plus power”. Together, they defined racism as prejudice backed up by systems of authority, which perpetuate systematic inequality and inequity. Professor Syreeta McFadden concluded with an example of systematic racism in action; she said, “I believe that this black body does not belong in this coded white space, therefore I feel threatened, and I know

that have the agency to call some sort of authority figure to correct that from happening.”¹¹⁷
 (Bell, 2019)

Stage Note: Final spot goes out. Scene Ends.

ACT 3, Scene 1: Edmonton Pride 2019 – Cancelled

Stage Note: An email from the Edmonton Pride Festival Society is projected on the large screen at the back of the stage. Narrator reads the email aloud.

Narrator: April 10th, 2019. It is with heavy hearts that we inform you that The Board of Directors has voted to cancel the 2019 Edmonton Pride Festival. In light of the current political and social environment, it has been determined that any attempt to host a festival will not be successful. Please keep in mind that we are a not-for-profit organization run almost solely by volunteers. It has always been the goal of the Edmonton Pride Festival Society to host a safe and enjoyable event that is as reflective and encompassing of the entire community as possible¹¹⁸.

Stage Note: Projection screen light goes off. Lights dim. Scene ends.

ACT 3, Scene 2: Response

Stage Note: Lights come up on Adebayo. Standing Centre Stage. He has a piece of paper in his hands. He addresses the audience as he reads the paper aloud.

Adebayo: We put out this response to Edmonton Pride 2019 being cancelled on our website. It

¹¹⁷ Bell, W. K. United shades of America #livingwhileblack

¹¹⁸ Text of a note by the Edmonton Pride Festival Society Board of directors announcing the cancellation of the Edmonton Pride Festival 2019.

reads: It is with profound disappointment that we express our appalment at the actions of the Edmonton Pride Festival Society, which culminated in their decision to cancel the 2019 Pride Festival. We are calling this decision for what it is: namely a disavowal of deep systematic problems in the framework of Edmonton Pride Festival Society as well as an attempt to dismiss, target, and put out of play the efforts put forward by Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour in the LGBTQ2S+ to point towards alternatives on how this organization carries out its activities¹¹⁹.

Stage Note: Lights go down. Adebayo exits, Back, Stage Left.

ACT 3, Scene 3: Social Media Frenzy

Stage Note: Lights come up and the stage is filled with people. Approximately, eighty people fill the stage. All are facing the audience. No one is looking at each other. Each person holds a large circular mask, about five times the size of their face, over their face. Each mask has a small handle at the bottom and each person uses the handle to hold the mask in place. All are dressed in black: tops, shirts, shoes. The clothing is non-descript so as not to take attention away from the soon-to-be talking heads. The masks are either picture of faces or cartoonish, illustrated characters: faces, memes, kittens, dogs, a vase of flowers, a ferret, a rainbow. When speaking begins, there is a chain reaction as person speak immediately followed by another. Sometimes there is overlap of voices as two or more speak together.

Rocket: What's this I hear? Pride is cancelled?

¹¹⁹ Note by RaricaNow, in response to Edmonton Pride 2019 cancellation by the Edmonton Pride Festival Society board of directors. RaricaNow is not-for-profit organization that works on behalf of LGBTIQ+ refugees and TQBIPOC people.

Several Voices Together: Cancelled... What???? No!!!!

Unicorn: It is! Pride is cancelled!

Several Voices Together: Pride is cancelled ...

George: True! Edmonton Pride Festival email was leaked last night... Here's the link

#EdmontonPride

Several Voices Together: It is not!

Rainbow: Edmonton Pride is Cancelled # EdmontonPride. Read below:

It is with heavy hearts that we inform you that The Board of Directors has voted to cancel the 2019 Edmonton Pride Festival ...

Several Voices Together: Edmonton Pride is Cancelled

Kitten: Fuck it! I'm marching up and down Whyte in high heels... Anybody with me?

Several Voices Together: Fuck it! We're in!

Ginger: I'm in Kitten. Anyone know where I can buy a rainbow feather boa?

Mark: We can't let Pride be cancelled. Let's fix this!

Brad: Let's bring all the stakeholders together and get this thing resolved!

Rodney: Yeah! We can fix this. The Pride was cancelled once before when the Festival fell apart but we can do this!

Jonas: I'm an event organizer, I'm on it! I can organize the Parade! Who is with me?

Craig: I'm in! Let me know what I can do!

Several Voices Together: Let's fix it!

Several Other Voices Together: Look at all the white, cisgender gay men taking over the reins of power to fix the problem! Sound familiar?

Echo Chamber of Several Voices Together: White, cisgender gay men taking over – typical.

Johanna: Yeah, look at all the gay guys stepping up to fix the Pride.

Veronica: That's the problem.

Echo Chamber of Several Voices Together: Yep ... That's a problem ...

Juniper: Uhhh ... Huh! Somethings never change ...

Echo Chamber of Several Voices Together: ... never change ...

Jasper: The voices of Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour need to be heard now!

Several Voices Together: The voices of QTBIPOC need to be heard! The voices of QTBIPOC need to be heard! The voices of QTBIPOC need to be heard! The voices of QTBIPOC need to be heard! The voices of QTBIPOC need to be heard!

Dom: Those groups hijacked Pride! They demanded \$40,000.00 dollars. They wanted to take control over the Festival and turn it into something else.

Echo Chamber of Several Voices Together: Those groups ... Took control ...

Casper: Edmonton Pride Festival Society is only a group of volunteers! These groups harassed them ... demanded money ...

Echo Chamber of Several Voices Together: Only Volunteers ... Harassed them ... Demanded money

Charles: Yeah, if you threaten folks don't be surprised when they walk away!

Echo Chamber of Several Voices Together: Threaten folks ... Don't be surprised ... Walk away...

Colin: Pride Festival cancelled the Pride! Don't blame the QTBIPOC groups!

Echo Chamber of Several Voices Together: Pride Festival cancelled Pride ...

Phoenix: Don't they know how much Pride matters to us! Don't they care how much we need this Pride! Why can't Edmonton Pride Festival own up to its' systematic racism and structural

problems to fix this.

Echo Chamber of Several Voices Together: Don't they know... Why can't they fix this...

Stage Note: Lights go down on the crowd. Spot light comes up Centre Stage. Adebayo walks onto the stage and into the spot light. He is holding a sign that says Our Voices Need to be Heard; Our Voices Need to be Heard; Our Voices Need to be Heard; Our Voices Need to be Heard. He stands and faces the audience, sign in hand. Tape covers his mouth. Scene Ends. Lights fade. All exit back rows first. exit Back Stage Left and Right. Adebayo turns and leaves last.

ACT 4, Scene 1: Returning to the Start & Moving Forward (Sept 9th, 2019)

Stage Note: Spots lights come up. Adebayo is standing Front Stage Centre. Michelle is sitting Back Stage Left at a small wooden desk, pen in hand. Noticing Adebayo standing Centre Stage and the audience, Michelle stands up from her desk, puts down her pen, and walks to the front of the stage to stand beside Adebayo. Michelle and Adebayo address the audience.

Michelle: The air is getting chilly now it's September. Thinking back to last April, it was a hard time. I found it hard and sad too. The 2019 Pride cancellation made a lot of fault lines in our Edmonton queer communities visible. It made visible racism, xenophobia, transphobia, class, power, privilege, and some of the distances we need to travel to walk alongside, support and learn from each other. It made visible a lot of work that still needs to be done.

Adebayo: When Pride was cancelled, our QTBIPOC+ communities suffered a lot of backlash and misunderstanding, even though we weren't the ones who cancelled the Pride. In April, too we lost Joshua¹²⁰, a beloved friend and community member. Joshua is a gay man, who despite

¹²⁰ Joshua is pseudonym.

our best effort, lost his refugee claim, and was deported back to Uganda. Nothing has changed there for LGBTIQ people since I left; being LGBTIQ+ in Uganda means life imprisonment or worse. Joshua is there now. The Canadian refugee system failed Joshua. Like many refugees, Joshua suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder caused by the violence and sexual assaults he suffered as a gay man living in Uganda. Here in Canada, he had to plead his case to stay in front of a judge. He had to tell the judge all the details of his traumatic experiences, which was re-traumatizing. Because Joshua was a refugee, he couldn't access the Canadian health care system, to get help for his PTSD. Because he couldn't get help for his PTSD, he couldn't communicate his story well, so that a judge could understand his experiences and his need to stay. And, Joshua got deported. It breaks my heart.

I hold hope in my heart for Joshua and all LGBTIQ+ people back in Uganda. I hold hope Canada can and will do better to support LGBTIQ+ refugees and that people in Uganda can someday live free despite differences. I work every day to support LGBTIQ+ refugees in Canada and beyond. There are a lot of needs and there is a lot of work to be done. I hope you hear our stories and take them to your heart. I hope together we might be able to help LGBTIQ+ refugees; we need to hold a light here, so LGBTIQ+ people in countries with persecution, can believe there is still a reason to hope.

We move forward, despite the backlash our community suffered when Pride was cancelled. In June 2019, our community went ahead with our first Stonewall events. They were amazing. We brought our community together to celebrate and we brought others to join us too. We are planning events now for our next Stonewall celebration in June 2020. We will bring international speakers to talk to our community QTBIPOC+ communities. We are in the planning now... It will be good! You should come out and join us – maybe lend us your hands,

lend your skills, lend your time. It will be a good time I think. I think maybe you will enjoy yourself... Maybe we can learn something from one another...

Stage Note: Michelle and Adebayo turn to face each other; they hug, turn, and walk off stage together. Lights fade. Scene Ends.

END

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CHAPTER 5: Espen's Narrative Account

Espen's Stories: Introductions on a Winter's Morning

It is December 12th, 2019 and it's 10 am. The sky is white, as it has been for the past few days. I miss the sunshine and clear-blue wide open skies, often seen on crisp-cold Edmonton winter mornings, like this. A light snow is slowly, softly, sifting down outside my window. Most of the snowflakes are fine, and being heavy-laden with ice, fall straight down. Only a few catch my eye, those puffy-fluffy dancing ones, as they waft, float, and wander sideways and upwards on invisible jets of wind. I remember as a child reaching out to catch snowflakes on my red wool mittens. Smiling still at the memory of a single snowflake, glistening-beautiful on the tip of my mitten, I return to my writing.

I begin again to think about Espen, as his stories and artwork once again dance in my mind. I recall how I have come to know Espen over the past three years; in the small quiet moments that unexpectedly pop up in those liminal in-between spaces and places: on those short trips together to the grocery store before heading back to studio; cleaning studio together, after a busy afternoon, and after everyone else had gone; or stopping for a coffee after touring an art exhibition. One of our most candid conversations took place the last time we sat together in a

café, just after visiting the *Dyscorpia Exhibition*^{121, 122}. That was over six months ago now. It's a long time, I realize, but somehow, like a chance meeting with an old friend, time doesn't seem to matter. Time seems to somehow fold in on itself, as Espen and I pick up again, just where we left off – and it's okay. I think it's okay anyway, and besides, it's just the way it is. I can't explain, but maybe I can show you.

My learning alongside Espen unfolded slowly over time, and in relation. There are many gaps and many times I didn't see or hear from Espen¹²³; and in those times, when I didn't know how Espen was doing, I worried¹²⁴. Throughout the study, I felt a precarity about Espen's well-

¹²¹ The Dyscorpia exhibition is an art exhibition that took place in May 2019 at Enterprise Square Galleries, Edmonton Alberta. This exhibition consisted of a group of multimedia and multi-sensory art installations based around the theme of how the human body interacts with and within technology. It beautifully demonstrated Marshal McLuhan's (Understanding Media, 1964) thoughts about the disembodied effects of technologies as they interact with and extend human senses and sense-making beyond human embodiment.

¹²² Espen and I also had a very candid two-hour meeting to go through and discuss this work on December 22nd, 2019 at Remedy Café. I thought it was one of our best conversations yet, as we talked at length and in depth sharing stories of experience that often overlapped with this work. I also received deep and rich feedback from Espen, who contributed with new stories and ways to think alongside these stories and artworks in progress.

¹²³ The first gap in seeing Espen, followed our initial research conversation, May 3rd, 2018. I didn't see Espen again until August 19th, 2018. We had been in touch via email in June, when Espen told me he was moving and some health issues had resurfaced. We had planned in July to meet, but that meeting fell through. And when I reached out via text Espen told me some health issues had again sprung up and gotten in the way. I began to worry, and was relieved when Espen responded he would be attending an artmaking workshop on August 19th, 2018.

¹²⁴ My sense of concern, and at times worry, regarding Espen's physical and mental health and well-being never really left me after that initial gap. My generalized concerns about Espen's safety and well-being were based on our initial research conversation in May 2018, in which Espen shared his concerns about very specific gaps in mental

being. I sensed this precarity more acutely in those times when Espen was absent¹²⁵. Yet while I often felt precarity around Espen's presences and absences from our work at the print studio, I wouldn't assume that Espen felt precarious. I believe Espen is resilient, courageous, and strong; and that he deals, very successfully, with some complex, sometimes serious, physical and mental health challenges, I learned with time that sometimes he is juggling a lot and his life gets complicated. He's okay though. He has support. I recall hearing someone speaking recently about music being the space between the notes; it is the shape of spaces as well as the notes that create the music. Espen's stories reminds me of music, with gaps and spaces, as well as notes.

Composing Espen's Account: A Field Guide for Readers

This account will take a variety of forms and formats; and at times it is complex and unconventional, and in some places, it is hard to follow. I hope, in this account, form will mirror content; the content being Espen's experiences and my learning alongside Espen, which is complex, at times complicated, and always unique. In terms of forms, I have used: written postcards to bridge distances, to keep in touch, to remember experiences; field notes to think and feel in relation to Espen's stories; artmaking, to share with Espen as a starting point of conversations and to think visually about and through complexity, and to attempt to bridge understandings through imagination; creative writing in the form of short stories to attempt to think with stories by imaging stories from within; and transcripts, with excerpted quotes, to refer back to Espen's specific experiences, in his own eloquent words, with excerpts set on blank

health services for LGBTIQ+ youth and young adults and his struggles finding adequate support within Alberta's mental health system.

¹²⁵ I suppose it's very simplistic, but I felt if I could see him, then I could know he was okay. In retrospect, I realize it's all so much more complicated than that because we all lead uniquely complex lives.

pages, because these words stood out for me like bright sharp shards of insight that I needed to highlight so as to return and continue to think alongside Espen.

With this account, I have attempted to reflect both the complexity of Espen’s experience, and my stories as they come alongside those of Espen’s, and the complexity of my attempts as a researcher to create and hold open spaces to walk alongside Espen. I have interwoven art and stories that Espen and I created to act as touchstones: and keepsakes to contain memories of the journey Espen and I shared over three years; and places to return that continue to hold open spaces for further conversations between Espen and myself; and possible insights, for you, into the complexity of Espen’s stories of experience, and my learning in relation to his stories, because in Espen’s words, “we’re all so unique” (Espen, personal communication, May 3rd, 2018).

So, here’s the catch – as a reader, you may have to cross to some open ground to engage and stay engaged with this account¹²⁶; you will have to imagine into stories and images, as I have, swim across gaps, navigate discontinuities, suspend temporalities, shift your perceptions to see differently, and make assumptions, which may or may not be correct¹²⁷. I’m still finding my

¹²⁶ Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, thank you for your feedback; I loved how you loved this bit!

¹²⁷ Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, thank you for meeting last Thursday for lunch and to go over this account as it is, in progress. I love when you agreed, that yes sometimes people need to make assumptions to keep lines of communication open. You told me that you found a big barrier to your communication around mental health issues that you sometimes experience happens when people shut down in mid-conversation because they don’t know what to say or how to respond. You said they seem afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. You spoke very eloquently saying people need to relax, and keep talking, there isn’t a wrong question, but communication often breaks down when people get bound up in social convention and are afraid to ask questions, especially regarding

way. My priority is to take care of Espen's and my stories in this account and to remain authentic to those experiences that Espen and I shared. Therefore, in this account, which mirrors life, Espen's and my conversations grew deeper over time and in relation. And later, when we confronted some really challenging topics, we spoke frankly and openly. Looking on some of our conversations now, I wonder if someone else looking in might find them dispassionate. I'm not sure how to respond to that critique, if it emerges, only to say, this is how Espen and I usually communicated, and I believe how we communicated allowed us both to engage in deeper discussions¹²⁸. Being both visual artists, and having both drawn and painted since we were small children, Espen and I share a common visual language¹²⁹. I believe Espen and I share a way of

mental health. I loved your statement: relax and talk, and just be interesting. Because you stated that's what you really need and want. I think your words will resonate with many; just be here, relax, go with the flow, and be interesting. I think you bring very important insight into speaking about mental health. There is so much fear around speaking about mental health issues and stigma attached to those who experience mental health challenges, that communication, which is so needed gets shut down, which in turn leads to further stigma and isolation for those experiencing these issues.

¹²⁸ Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, returning to thoughts on our meeting last Thursday, I was happy to hear you say that I hit the mark here. You stated that adding emotion into our discussion would have been inauthentic. We could speak about deep matters and get there very quickly because we always cut to the chase. We were both comfortable talking on the deeper level on whatever topic right away. You said that emotion and fear often get bound up together and we didn't have that barrier to our communication for whatever reason.

¹²⁹ Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, I was happy that you agreed that we hold a common visual language, which works as a communication tool and thought process between us and a space of comfort, we both know and have known since childhood. Thank you for sharing how visual art has been an access point for you to various communities whether you were creating artwork to post to online art communities and forums, or working

thinking through and with visual language that is complex; it defies being pinned down to singular associations and inferences and allows for uncertainties and multiple meanings to simultaneously co-exist. I believe visual language is a form of communication, and, also, a way of thinking, that permeates how Espen and I found and made meaning together. Not that we came to the same conclusions, mind you, but perhaps, we shared a way of thinking.

This account will begin soon after I met Espen in 2016¹³⁰ and carries forward to the present. And although the timeline will begin like linear progress narrative, it will soon shift in response to my search, within a variety of forms and formats, to find ways to reach out, communicate, and hold open spaces for Espen and myself to walk alongside each other. I did this by: creating opportunities for us to meet and make artwork together at SNAP printmaking studio; making artwork, for us to discuss, based on Espen's and/or my stories; writing short stories, which helped me imagine into snippets of Espen's stories from our conversations in studio; and finally returning to artmaking alongside transcripts of Espen's and my conversations, which helped me to deepen into my responses to Espen's stories. I hope in this account to show not only what Espen and I have learned alongside each other, but how we have learned alongside each other over time.

as a graphic designer for the Alberta Mental Action Plan and later becoming a speaker at mental health community forums for families and health care professionals.

¹³⁰ I met Espen in 2016 when he was a camper at Camp fYrefly, a leadership and arts-based Camp for sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth run out of the Institute for Sexual Minority, Studies and Services (iSMSS) at the University of Alberta. I was the Artist-in-Residence (AIR) at Camp fYrefly in August 2016 and met Espen when he attended workshops and art spaces that I had created at Camp run out of the AIR art cabin. My first memories of Espen are of him painting and drawing in the cabin with quiet focus as he joked with other campers.

A Note on Creative Nonfiction & Artwork Created in Relation to Espen's Stories

In Espen's account I have used a variety of text and image formats. These include: excerpts from transcripts of Espen and my conversations; Espen's images, which he created in this research; creative writing, I wrote in response to Espen's stories, and; images I created in relation to Espen's stories.

I inserted verbatim excerpts from transcripts of Espen's and my conversations to ensure Espen's voice is present and contextualized within the flow of our conversations. Espen's artwork has also been included because these artworks acted as touchstones for Espen's and my conversations, and which later helped me imagine into Espen's stories through creative nonfiction writing and artmaking in response.

My goals in writing creative nonfiction were: to attempt to understand Espen's stories in their unfolding and emergent complexity; to show the complexity of Espen's stories in a way that might insert readers into these stories, so they might, in turn, understand Espen's stories in a felt, and embodied way, and; to help myself and readers come closer to Espen's experiences. I have also created artwork in response to Espen's stories for many of the same reasons that I have engaged in creative nonfiction. Creating artwork in relation to Espen's stories helped me not just think, but feel in relation to Espen's stories, by drawing on tacit and embodied ways of thinking and knowing.

A Note on Permissions:

Espen signed University of Alberta ethic forms, which allow for his first name and the artwork he created in this research to be disseminated in outputs from this research, including within Espen's narrative account. Espen's family members have been mentioned in this account and they have been given pseudonyms to protect the privacy of their identities. These pseudonyms

are noted in footnotes. Characters in short stories are entirely imagined and fictitious characters, any resemblance to any real person, living or deceased is coincidental and unintentional. These fictional characters are noted in the footnotes.

Table of Contents:**Introduction to Espen's Stories**

Espen's Narrative Account - Introductions on a Winter's Morning

Composing Espen's Account: A Field Guide for Readers

Prelude to Share Stories: Creating and Exhibiting Art Together

Postcards as Prelude: Beginning Conversations through Printmaking (Aug.-Sept. 2016)

Continuing Conversations through Exhibitions (*Pride is Love*, SNAP, Oct.-Nov. 2016)

Continuing Conversations through Exhibitions (*TREX Re-Imaging Normal*, 2018-2020)

Part I: Thinking with Stories of Identity Through Image and Text

Artmaking to Reflect on and Integrate Stories of Experience: First Story - The Mask (Nov. 2017)

Artmaking To Respond to Stories: Second Story - Camouflage & Tattoos (Dec. 2018-Mar. 2019)

Artmaking to Create Spaces of Dialogue: Third Story - Barriers & Walls (Feb.- Mar. 2019)

Artmaking to Make Barriers Visible: Fourth Story: Re-visioning/ Re-storying (Feb. 20th, 2019)

Artmaking to Make Scars Visible: Sixth Story - Written on my Body (Mar. 2019)

Artmaking to Make Shaming Visible: Seventh Story - These are not my Names (Mar. 2019)

Artmaking to Select Chosen Names: Eighth Story - These Names I'll Keep (Mar. 2019)

Part II: Sketchbook Sharing – Creative Space-Making to Learn Alongside

Looking to Find What You Do Not Know: First Story - Cultivating Beginner's Mind

Discussions Around the Studio Table: Second Story - Sketchbook Sharing

Part III: Artmaking as Space-making for Mental Health Dialogue

Beginning to Think with Mental Health Stories - Dialogue 1: Inhabiting Spaces and Places

Continuing to Think with Mental Health Stories - Dialogue 2: Playful Approaches

Trying to Feel Alongside Espen's Mental Health Stories - Dialogue 3: Tactile Expressions

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding - Dialogue 4: Sensory Overload

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding - Dialogue 5: Focusing

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding - Dialogue 6: Focusing on Joy

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding - Dialogue 6: At the Studio Table

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding - Dialogue 7: Emergent Patterns

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding - Dialogue 8: Returning to Joy

PRELUDE TO SHARE STORIES: CREATING AND EXHIBITING ART TOGETHER

Postcards as Prelude: Beginning Conversations Through Printmaking (Aug. – Sept. 2016)

131

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

Sept. 14th 2016

I was going through some old photos on my phone and I wanted to share these with you¹³².

¹³¹ Images: 5.1 (right) & 5.2 (left). Field note, October 12th, 2018: Dear Espen, I found these pics when I was writing field notes about our working together at SNAP. I wanted to send you these pics from 2016, and our time working together at SNAP, soon after meeting at fYrefly. Great image! Your first woodblock print I think. Jellyfish, what beautiful and unique creatures.

¹³² Field Note January 7th, 2019: Dear Espen, I love your smile here! Your art is wonderful, but the best part of this photo of you at the press is your smile. When I said that I would have to blur it, to keep your identity anonymous, I was not entirely surprised when you stated that you wanted to your face to be seen and that was important to you. You said that you would sign a paper or initial every photograph if that's what it takes to keep your face visible in the research. I promise, I will see what I can do. I understand not wanting to be invisible any longer. I loved that you

I don't know if you have these, so I thought I'd send them to you. They are from our SNAP workshops¹³³ back in August. Is this your first woodblock print? It's wonderful! I love the colours! Jellyfish are so interesting looking. They are so unusual and unique. Shape-shifting as they move through the water. Is that why you like them? Do let me know if you have your print¹³⁴. I still have a couple of prints, from the *Pride is Love* exhibition¹³⁵ at SNAP that were unsigned, and I'll check back through the portfolio to see if this is one of them, and if so, I'd like to get it back to you.

Cheers! Michelle

wanted your copies of your narrative account to have your face, not blurred or anonymized – because you needed to see yourself, and show yourself, literally in the research, and smiling too sometimes.

¹³³ I created a series of free artmaking workshops for SGM youth and allies in August and September of 2016 to follow Camp fYrefly. They consisted of three full-day printmaking workshops and one half-day curatorial workshop at SNAP printmaking studio. My thought behind creating these art workshops was to extend Camp fYrefly and relationships beginning to build at Camp beyond the four-day Camp experience, in hopes of building a supportive space for SGM youth and allies, within the broader arts community, and within a professional and community printmaking space.

¹³⁴ Field Note January 7th, 2019: Dear Espen, I'm glad that you have your jelly fish print. It's a nice woodblock! Thank for your feedback about these photos Espen. You are right – it's really cool to see the prints alongside the intaglio relief printing presses with woodblock image of jellyfish or screens alongside the screen print image of moth. It's nice for people who have no knowledge of printmaking to get a glimpse into these creative processes.

¹³⁵ The *Pride is Love* exhibition, October to November 2016 showcased the artwork from participants of three printmaking workshops at SNAP, previously mentioned, and artwork from campers at Camp fYrefly. This exhibition was curated by the SGM youth and young adults that attended the final SNAP workshop about curation of art exhibitions, held at SNAP studio.



136

¹³⁶ Images: 5.3 (left) & 5.4 (right). Field Note, October 12th, 2018: Dear Espen, a few more pics from September 2016 at SNAP. Like your jellyfish image on the page before, where I love seeing the printing process – printing press, block, and prints. From your moth image, we can see the images you developed on your screen and the screen print you pulled as well. It's lovely to see the woodblock and screen prints as well as a nod to the printmaking processes. Here to I love your image too! Again, I think your first screen print? This time a moth. I recall you saying you loved moths because of their process of metamorphosis. You shared that you think moths are just as beautiful as butterflies, although people often don't see the beauty in moths.

Dear Espen,

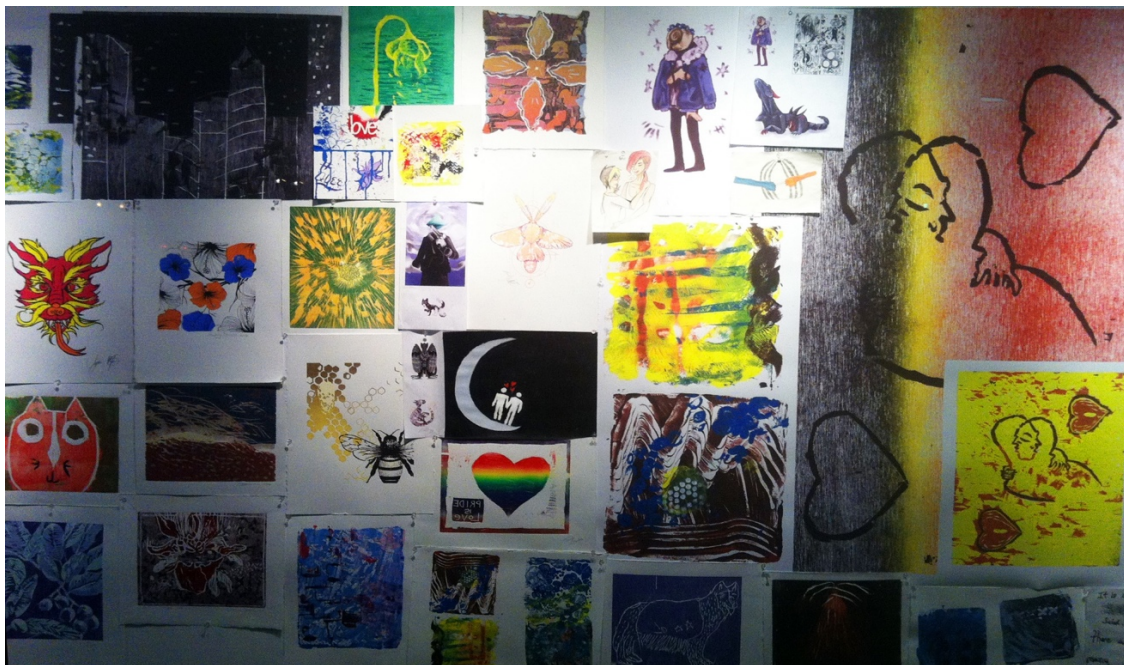
Sept. 14th, 2016

Here are a couple more photos from your screen workshop at SNAP in August. Again, I don't think you have these, so I wanted to share them with you. I know that you really loved that workshop and working with Katy¹³⁷. She's is a great teacher! It's kind of cool to see the screen layers that you screen printed to create your moth. I think I remember you talking about moths and how you liked them better than butterflies; butterflies being more conventionally beautiful, while moths aren't seen as beautiful, but they are. I think I recall you mentioning your interest in transformation and how insects like moths were fascinating examples of transformation.

Best wishes, Michelle

¹³⁷ Katy is a pseudonym.

Continuing Conversations through Exhibitions (*Pride is Love*, SNAP, Oct. – Nov. 2016)



138

¹³⁸ Images 5.5 (top) & 5.6 (bottom). *Pride is Love* is an exhibition at SNAP Gallery that I co-curated with LGBTQ+ young adults that featured artwork created at the SNAP workshops for LGBTQ+ young adults that I created following Camp fYrefly. Field note, October 12, 2018: Dear Espen, I'm sharing a few images with you that I took of

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

Nov. 19th 2016

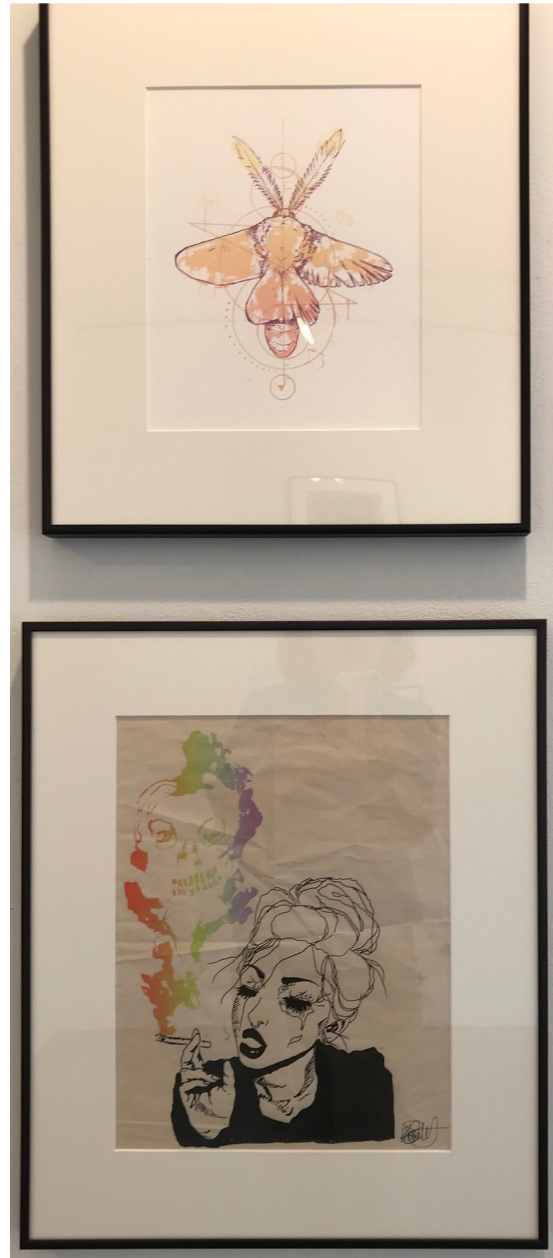
I took these photos at closing celebration of the *Pride is Love* exhibition at SNAP and I thought I would send you a couple photos of your artwork in the SNAP exhibition. It's wonderful to see some of your digital work, as well as your screen print, in the show alongside the work of the other LGBTIQ+ youth, young adults, older LGBTIQ+ folks and allies. I love seeing each persons' unique vision and creativity expressed through a variety of mediums.

Thank you for coming to the SNAP workshops Espen! Your joy and creativity at SNAP helped make it a warm and welcoming place for everyone involved. Thank you too for your insights during the curatorial workshop. I think it was a great idea to create a collage out of all the artwork by printing and enlarging a few images digitally and collaging the rest. I love it! I think this collage beautifully showcases the variety and diversity of the artwork of all those who participated. Thanks too for coming out to the closing celebration! I'm glad your mom made it out as well! She's such a hoot! I can see where you get your sense of humour.

Best Wishes, Michelle

your artwork in the *Pride is Love Exhibition* at SNAP Gallery in October-November 2016. I love seeing your digital images (the dragon, and two figures with the curiously shaped heads), alongside your abstract pieces (with brown and yellow mark-making) and your moth image. It is lovely to see the variety of your artistic skills and expression alongside the tremendous diversity of technique, subjects, and expression by other LGBTIQ+ artists. Great show! Thanks also for your feedback in the curatorial workshop. The collage approach worked, combining large digital printouts and small original prints combined made an impressive show that caught the eye of those passing by in car or on foot.

Continuing Conversations through Exhibitions (TREX *Re-Imaging Normal*, 2018-2020)



139

¹³⁹ Image: 5.7. The *Re-Imaging Normal* is part of the Travelling Rural Exhibition (TREX) Program sponsored by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) and run by the Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA). This exhibition began when I went to speak with Shane about creating a travelling exhibition to showcase the *Edmonton Queer History Project Exhibition*, a project I curated, which debuted at the Art Gallery of Alberta in June of 2015. When Shane told me

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

May 23th 2018

Thank you for getting in touch and letting me know that you have to work tonight. I'm sorry to hear you can't make out to the TREX opening this evening. It's not a worry!

Take good care Espen and talk soon, Cheers! Michelle

Dear Espen,

May 28th 2018

I'm just touching base to let you know that the *Re-Imaging Normal* show was well attended. And your work was well received and celebrated! We had about sixty people for the panel discussion and I think probably about one hundred people made it out for the opening. Everyone seemed to really love the show. So, it was a great success! I wanted to share this photo of your print framed in the exhibition at VAA CARFAC Gallery¹⁴⁰. It looks great! If you want to

that TREX mandate was to showcase contemporary Albertan artists, I remembered the artwork created a year earlier at SNAP workshop by emerging SGM youth artists. Shane and my conversations culminated in our co-curating *Re-Imaging Normal*, the first TREX exhibition to focus on SGM identities, stories, artmaking, and history. Shane and I asked Espen, and three other emerging youth SGM artists, and three established SGM artists, to exhibit. Shane and I also included ten artworks from the *Edmonton Queer History Project Exhibition 2015 (EQHP)* to serve as didactic panels alongside the artworks included in *Re-Imaging Normal*. This exhibition is currently travelling throughout rural Alberta to schools, libraries, and community centres. The show will travel until August 2020. *Re-Imaging Normal* represents an important public learning opportunity that highlights stories and artworks of SGM emerging and established artists. Additionally, because this exhibition will go to approximately 20 venues. With attendance recorded at 53,196 viewers 2018-19, *Re-Imaging Normal* has supported SGM youth and families in rural Alberta.

¹⁴⁰ VAA CARFAC is an acronym standing for Visual Arts Alberta, Canadian Artists Representation / Le Front des Artistes Canadiens. VAA CARFAC is the Alberta branch of the non-profit Canadian organization that lobbies on

walk through it anytime, let me know and we can meet and walk through. It's up until July.

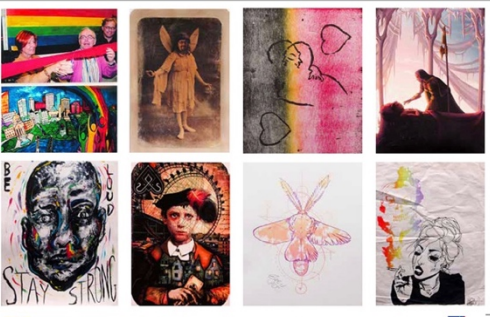
Take care Espen, Cheers! Michelle

Dear Espen,

June 22nd 2018

I'm writing to pass along these links that Shane sent me this morning. The first is the Catalogue/ Interpretive Guide that will travel with the show as it tours schools, libraries, and community centres in rural Alberta. Your interview and images of your artwork are included inside. The second link is a review in Galleries West Magazine. It's a very positive review, so we lucked out! It's hard to get a great review! The writer appreciated what we were trying to do with the show; when he commented on how eclectic the show is, and since it's about diversity, he mentioned that was kind of the point. Take good care, Espen! Best wishes, Michelle

behalf of professional visual artists in Alberta. The VAA CARFAC Gallery is run by Visual Arts Alberta Society of Artists.



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program

Re-Imaging Normal

An Alberta Foundation for the Arts travelling exhibition

Organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta
Re-Imaging Normal

Visual Arts Alberta ~ CARFAC p 3rd Floor,
10215 – 112 St. Edmonton, AB p 780.421.1731
visualartsalberta.com p carfac@visualartsalberta.com


Re-Imaging Normal - Galleries West <http://www.gallerieswest.ca/magazine/stories/re-imagining-normal/>

gallerieswest

Re-Imaging Normal

A compelling little whirl of a show considers changing conceptions of gender and sexual identity. Now on view in Edmonton, it will tour schools and libraries across the province.

by Fish Grilwosky
June 22, 2018 11:47 AM



1 of 10 2018-07-09, 2:00 p.m.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

July 20th 2018

I missed you today at our lunch meeting. I hope that everything is going okay and you are well. I wish you could have joined Jonathan¹⁴² and I after lunch. We met at the *Re-Imaging Normal* this afternoon, walked through the show, and grabbed a coffee afterwards. It was a nice afternoon. He's such an interesting guy and an amazing artist too. I think you and Jonathan could have a great discussion about digital art, Jonathan having worked for several major animation companies. I hope you get to chat with him at some point. I took a few photographs of the show for you. I'm not sure you had a chance to see the show, so I'm sending a couple pics for you now. Looks great framed!! Drop me a line when you get a chance Espen, Take care! Cheers,
Michelle

Dear Espen,

Dec. 22nd 2019

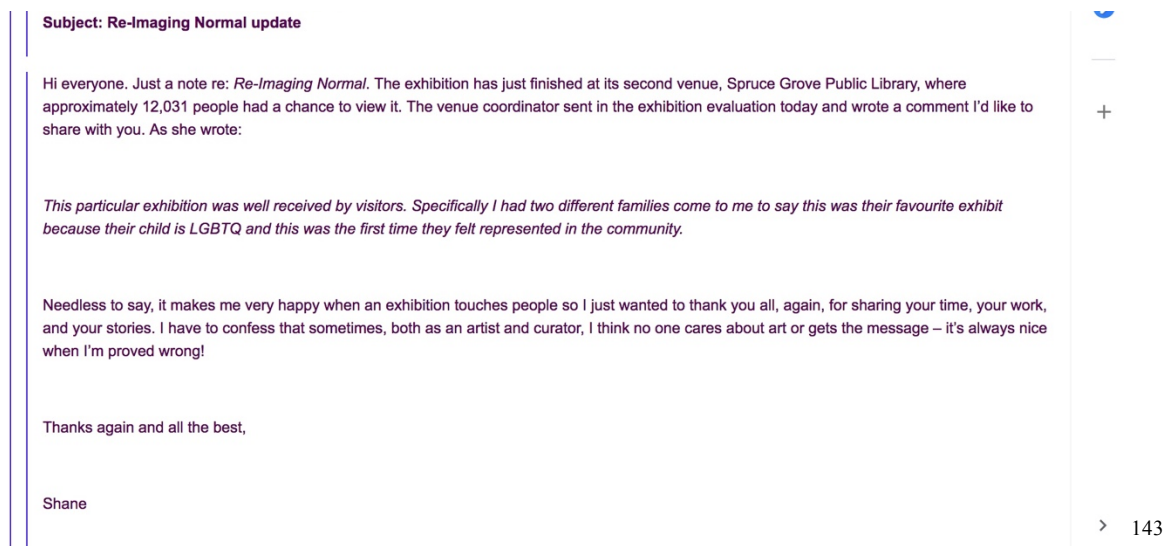
I'm so happy that these stories resonated with you when we met last Thursday to review your account. You also seemed very pleased that your stories and art were helping SGM youth

¹⁴¹ Images: 5.8 (top) & 5.9 (bottom) Field Note June 22nd, 2018: Dear Espen, I wanted you to see some places your art has been celebrated. The top image is the *Re-Imaging Normal* Interpretive Guide which travels with the exhibit to classes, libraries, and community centres throughout rural Alberta, and showcases your art and stories alongside the work of other LGBTIQ+ artists and historical articles and images from the *Edmonton Queer History Project Exhibition*, 2015. The lower image is the cover of Galleries West Magazine. This online magazine focuses on reviewing important exhibitions from Manitoba to British Columbia. It kind of coup just to get a review; and we got a great one! ☺ I'm happy to share the link with you again if you like, just let me know.

¹⁴² Jonathan is pseudonym.

and their families by supporting their sense of belonging within their communities. Also, as I promised, I'm sharing Shane's email regarding community response to the *Re-Imaging Normal* Exhibition you participated in. Also, as art exhibitions go, this was tremendously well attended! Art exhibitions, don't often get audience sizes this large; getting over 10,000 viewers at any single venue is very significant! 😊

Take good care Espen and Merry Christmas to you and your family! Michelle



¹⁴³ Image: 5.10. Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, I loved to see how excited you seemed a couple days ago while looking through this draft of your account. You seemed especially delighted to see the images of your artwork in the two Edmonton exhibitions, *Pride is Love* at SNAP and in the *Re-Imaging Normal* at VAA CARFAC Gallery. It was wonderful for me to see you looking at the photographs of the exhibitions and asking for this note, from one of the exhibition venue coordinators, describing what the exhibition had meant to some SGM youth and their families in rural Alberta. I'm happy to be able to share this note with you; it so important, but seldom that notes of appreciation like this make it back to the artist who created the artwork. Happy to share this with you!

OUR STRENGTH LIES IN DIVERSITY:

NORMAL IS BEING DIFFERENT.

MY WORLD VIEW IS THAT

WE'RE ALL OUR OWN LITTLE UNIVERSES.

BY NATURE, WE'RE ALL SO UNIQUE:

IT WOULD BE WEIRD IF

YOU WERE THE SAME AS SOMEBODY ELSE. ¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Quote from Espen during his interview by Shane and Michelle for *Re-Imaging Normal* and Exhibition Catalogue/ Interpretive Guide, October 30th, 2017. We had asked Espen for his interpretation of the word normal; Espen said it was a garbage word, which didn't really mean anything, then he gave this interpretation.

**I WANT PEOPLE TO SEE THAT
THEIR OWN LIVES ARE MASTERPIECES OF MOMENTS
THEY CAN NEVER SHARE**

AND

**I WANT THEM TO USE THAT
TO DERIVE THEIR OWN MEANING
FROM MY ARTWORK.** ¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Quote from Espen during his interview by Shane and Michelle for *Re-Imaging Normal* and Exhibition Catalogue/Interpretive Guide, October 30th, 2017. We asked Espen how he wanted people to interpret his artwork and what he wanted viewers to take away from viewing his artwork. This is Espen's statement.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

Dec. 15th 2019

I love these quotes from your TREX interview back in October of 2017 with Shane and I. Especially, now that I can look back with hindsight and I remember our conversation in May 2019 alongside your statement about wanting people to see their own lives as a masterpiece of moments, they can never share. I think I need to keep your words close, like a touchstone, I can return to occasionally in this writing, because it will caution me against generalizing, and help me continue to see your artwork and your stories as your unique masterpieces of moments.

Thank you Espen, Cheers! Michelle

PART 1: THINKING WITH STORIES OF IDENTITY THROUGH IMAGE & TEXT

Artmaking to Reflect on and Integrate Stories of Experience: First Story – The Mask

(Nov. 2017)



146

¹⁴⁶ Image 5.11. Espen painted this image of the mask after he wore it out on Halloween with his brother in 2016. The first time I heard Espen's story of the mask was October 30th, 2017, following his *TREX Re-Imaging Normal*

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: FIELDNOTE – 1st Research Conversation May 3rd, 2018

I'm on the train heading home now. It's about two in the afternoon. The sun has finally peaked through the clouds. Rain is stopping. The last grey dingy bits of snow have melted. This fresh cold rain will finally clean everything. Looking through the dusty train window, I note that it will soon be washed clean as well. I notice the grass finally greening. Puddles proliferate. Skipping back in time, I remember Kingston for its' rain. I wish I still had those duck boots. Where do things like that go? Where does time go? Anyway, the rain is a welcome sign. It's been a long bitter-cold winter and spring is finally here. Couldn't be too soon for me. Not that I dislike winter, but it becomes tired, I tire of it – like most Edmontonians, I suppose.

The change in season is welcome. I'm feeling it, as I bring my face close to the window to feel sunshine on my face. I'm looking forward to spring. I note that this will be my first spring without mom. It's funny how such thoughts come out of the blue – a touch of the sun, the promise of spring. I never know what will surface these memories and feelings. It's funny too how you count time differently after something like that. Time kind of changes and you note time differently - the first birthday, the first Christmas, the first Mother's Day... It's hard, no way around it. But time heals, it does. I love the spring, all busting buds and green shoots¹⁴⁷. I

interview. Espen told this story to Shane and I, as we looked through Espen's online art portfolio to pick work for the TREX exhibition. I think I also see in Espen's online signature the basis of his chosen name, beautiful.

¹⁴⁷ Time felt very different for me as it came alongside my grieving process. Time seemed to slow significantly at times and at other times, time seemed to speed up, quickly passing. Eventually, though not immediately, I realized that my shifting sense of temporality, that came for me in relation to my grieving process around the loss of my mom helped me to be, and to keep space open to be, in relation with Espen, who also seems to respond and work in relation to time differently.

return to my notepad and jot a few notes from Espen and my first meeting while everything is still fresh. The train is jostling me from side to side as I'm trying to write. I'll learn to roll with it. My mind skips back to our meeting as I write.

I'm early, I note, checking my phone, as I arrive to the Café. It's busy. But there are a few tables. I look around to check for Espen. Some soft funky music fills the air. This place always has a relaxed vibe and the food and coffee are always good. So – nice bonus. The atmosphere should help me relax because I'm a bit nervous, as this will be my first research conversation with Espen. I look around and note Espen's not here yet. I check around again, just to be sure, because sometimes he dyes his hair, and when he does that he looks so different, I could miss him. I find a table close to the door, so we will be able to see each other when he comes in. I check my email, nothing.

The Café is bustling. Almost all the tables are full now and I wonder if the music is too loud. Nice music though. I hope I'll be able to hear our conversation when I record it. It's close to noon and I wish now that I had picked a time before or after lunch, but it's too late to change now. Make a note for next time ... Still it's a chill and relaxed place to meet, so maybe we will come back here again¹⁴⁸. The comfy chairs, nice big tables by the row of windows, good food, and nice coffees make it a good place to meet. Just got a text from Espen's mom. He is on his way, he'll be a little late. I text back, not to worry.

We had a good conversation that lasted about an hour. Espen seemed comfortable. I was

¹⁴⁸ Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, I was delighted when you told me that you really liked this Café and had been coming here with friends since our first meeting here. I'm so glad this Café has become a comfortable place for you, as it had always been for me.

relatively comfortable too considering it was my first conversation. This is all new to me¹⁴⁹.

(Michelle's Reflective Note)

Research Conversations

May 3rd 2018

Michelle: So, here we are... So, Espen, if I didn't know you at all, what would you like to tell me about yourself? Who are you? Who is Espen?

Espen: Oh... that's an interesting question.... Oh, geez...

Michelle: Whatever you'd like to say. Whatever you'd like to tell.

Espen: I don't know. I would probably introduce myself as an artist, first of all, because that's what I like to do.

Michelle: And Espen, just tell me as much as you feel comfortable saying. We are just getting to know each other after all. So, you know, tell me, as much as you want to and feel comfortable saying. Because, also, in terms of settings, this is not the most private place to meet. So, the other thing, I'd like to mention is we can always move our meeting spots, if this doesn't work. And the other thing to remember is, like we talked about last week, this is not a one-time deal. We will be chatting over a period of time. So, in some research processes, I think it's really tough, because people have like an hour-long interview and then they extrapolate from that. And thank goodness, this process is not that compressed. We can get to know each other over a period time, we will probably have several meetings, and we'll still work together a little bit after that. We'll do some writing, and we'll do some art, including time in studio. So, this is a different

¹⁴⁹ Field Note December 16th, 2019: Looking on it now, it seems a little stilted... I was nervous... Trying to ask the right questions.

kind of research – that’s why I’m doing it. I like it because we will have time to get to know each other and for you to get into the research in whatever way you want to.

Espen: I don’t know. To a stranger, I probably wouldn’t be like, hey, here’s all this stuff about my identity and stuff like that. But, uh, I don’t know, if I wanted somebody to know stuff about me, I’d probably go with my identity as a trans-person, sort of a big thing that I’m passionate about is like mental health reform.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: FIELDNOTE – Standing Alongside Espen

May 23rd 2018

Espen began identifying as a trans man in July 2017. I had met Espen, the summer before, in August of 2016, at Camp fYrefly. I remember us both attending a workshop at Camp about intergenerational stories for those identifying as queer or lesbian. I remember later at Camp, there was a clothes exchange where Campers could find and dress in clothing that helped them express their gender identity. After the exchange, Espen came over and said hi to me and I didn’t recognize him. Well I did, I recognized his smile, but not immediately. I remember him chuckling at me over that. In July 2017, I received a LinkedIn message from Espen, saying that he was now identifying as a trans man and his name would be Espen. I messaged Espen back to let him know that I would support him in any way I could.

Research Conversations

May 3rd, 2018

Michelle: I remember – I just want to ask you a quickly about one story because I know our time is getting on here. I want to ask you about the story surrounding Halloween and the mask. You had shown Shane and I your mask painting as a possible image you might like to submit for the TREX exhibition. You had mentioned something about doing that drawing of the gas mask

after Halloween. Is that right?

Espen: Mm-hmm.

Michelle: Can you tell me about that because that was a really cool story.

Espen: So basically, I went trick or treating with my little brother. I had this mask on. And for some reason, everybody who like greeted me and used pronouns for me always used male pronouns and my brother was like that's kind of weird. But I was like actually I kind of liked that. That anonymity sort of brought me a lot of comfort and the fact that they were using male pronouns for me, I just felt really good. I was like it just felt like that was the missing piece to the equation, you know, like what I was missing. And it felt like an important thing to point.

Michelle: And why the gas mask? Was that just for Halloween?

Espen: Just for Halloween, yeah.

Michelle: Oh, okay, okay. That was – and so it covered...

Espen: It covered my face, so people wouldn't have that to work off of. For some reason after that, I don't know what set them off to interpret me as that way, but it was very welcomed. And it was a very good experience for me. Another one of those learning experiences, like nobody could teach that, you know? You're like, hey, wait a moment! This feels more like me than the other way around.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: FIELD NOTE – Imagining into a Story through Writing Sept 1st, 2019

I keep thinking about Espen's story about wearing the mask on Halloween and how this helped him begin to think about his identity as a trans man. But how can I think with his story? Can I imagine into his story and perhaps help myself and others to think about and maybe understand his experience in a different way? Is there a way I can bring an audience to see the

story from the inside, as a participant in a story, and not as someone looking at story, as a spectator from a distance? I have been writing a play, to bring to life some other stories of experience, and perhaps there is something to that. A play wraps you inside of it, it pulls you along in a different way alongside the characters; you feel it differently, you experience it, you embody it. Perhaps I can write a short story to think about, but also to think *with* Espen's experience wearing this mask on Halloween.

The following short story, titled *The Mask* is a work of creative nonfiction. This short story is built upon Espen's stories of his past experiences that he has shared with me. I have imagined into Espen's stories with the hope of bringing you the reader inside Espen's stories to imagine alongside Espen and I. Espen approved of this story and enjoyed the story and the characters. Espen's mom and his brother have pseudonyms in this story, as does one of Espen's online friends.

It's Halloween, about nine pm. Espen is sitting on a chair in the foyer waiting on Danny¹⁵¹, their younger brother, who is upstairs getting ready. Espen is not dressed for it and doesn't plan on dressing this year. They love Halloween, but, you know they're getting a little too old for it, and it's kind of their job to take Danny around now. Upstairs, their mom, Izzy¹⁵², who gets just as excited as any kid on Halloween, is putting the finishing touches on Danny's makeup. Danny is a pirate this year. She's helping him adhere his mustache and goatee with spirit gum. It's not going too well; it should be easier. It keeps peeling off and falling to the floor in a heap. As she bends to pick it up yet again, she wonders if maybe the makeup has gotten underneath. Danny is done up like Jonny Depp from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, so lots of eye shadow, crazy brows, a mustache and goatee. He's looking great, but the mustache keeps peeling. Long tall boots, puffy black pants, puffy white shirt, a tight red jacket, all compliments of Value Shop¹⁵³. Of course, there's also the tricorne hat, nifty sword, and eye patch compliments of the local Dollar Venue. And the wig, we mustn't forget the wig. It is black, long, and curly. Danny is tying it back to keep it out of his face and to look quite the dashing gentleman. Well, Danny is about twelve, so, gentleman-ish. Izzy calls downstairs¹⁵⁴.

¹⁵⁰ This short story is a work of creative nonfiction.

¹⁵¹ Danny is a pseudonym.

¹⁵² Izzy is a pseudonym.

¹⁵³ Value Shop is a pseudonym.

¹⁵⁴ Field Note January 7th, 2019: Dear Espen, thank you for your feedback on your story. I was thrilled that you liked it and delighted when you said this part, or that one, sounds like something your brother or mom would say. I've

Izzy: Almost done! He'll be down in a minute Esp! It's just this moustache now!

Espen: *(Calling back upstairs, eyes still on a laptop which is sitting on their lap)* Okay, *(Pause)*

No worries Mom!

Espen is engrossed in an online computer chat, and therefore not really worried about time. They are hunched over a lap top, chatting online with someone called Jazz¹⁵⁵. Jazz is a crazy good artist. Espen and Jazz met online about a year ago and have been exchanging drawings ever since. Espen loves it; this is the best way of communicating because you get to be creative, with creative folks, within a creative community. You start by going online to the artist community site to pick an image to draw, you know, of a character that other people are working on. Once you have the character, then you animate it, you morph it, you imagine it in different scenarios, with different lighting, angles, perspectives, landscapes, and actions. Then you draw it as accurately and as painstakingly as you can. You draw it as fully and as your imagination will allow. You see what you can do. You test your skills. Then you put it online to see what the others think of your work and to see what they have done. Then you get to see, you know, if they got it ... if they understood what you were trying to do? You take their feedback, then kind of fill them in on your intentions. You let them know what you were trying to do; what you were trying to achieve, and see what they say. Sometimes there's critique, sometimes there are disagreements, but it stays friendly, usually. People usually try to help each other out. It's kind of a learning community of graphic artists, emerging digital artists, burgeoning illustrators, you

changed your mom's name to Izzy as requested. It is a cool name – I can see why she likes it. ☺ I'm happy to hear that I'm catching the right tone and vibe, when I'm imagining into your story and showcasing this experience of yours in relationships to your mom and brother in a way that feels fitting. Thank you for guiding me here...

¹⁵⁵ Jazz is a pseudonym.

name it... anyone can join. Some artists are further along and some have more experience with different types of drawing – for example, drawing and lighting fur or animating water. Those things take special mad skills. Most people are generous with their feedback and you can learn a lot from them. Most are kind – a few aren't. You just ignore and avoid those ones, because they aren't helpful anyway. Usually, the nasty ones just get ignored and leave – after a bit. There are always a few ... Jazz is cool though, not like that at all. They are pretty consistently solid.

Although Espen and Jazz met on this artist's forum just over a year ago and converse all the time, they have never met in person. This is not unusual with friendships formed in online forums. Once in a while people meet, but not often. It takes a lot of effort and time, not to mention money, to travel and meet, and most folks don't have the time or the money. Still, Espen and Jazz are friends. Jazz is an amazing artist and Espen has always been impressed by their work. Their drawings are always immaculate and they always take time to give solid, and useful advice about lighting, perspective, and believability in general. They notice the smallest things too, the things you need to draw consistently, to give a character life and a sense of reality. Espen is taking in Jazz's latest drawing, kind of a dark superhero or superhero/villain. It's cool – cape, wide brimmed hat, umbrella, dark suit. But the character's face is tilted down, so you can't really see the face to read it. It's mysterious. The details are great, as is the lighting. The lighting is coming from underneath giving both the scene and the figure a foreboding quality. The buttons on the jacket sit just right. A tiny bit of light glints off each them, in exactly the right spot, to make them appear to be made of metal and lit from below. Espen is taking it all in and about to comment on the details when Danny comes clomping down the stairs and into the foyer. His tall boots have a bit of a wooden heel that resounds off the hardwood stairs and into the hall. Espen closes their laptop and looks up.

Espen: Whoa (*Emphasis*) look at you (*Emphasis*)! You look great!

Danny: Don't I know it! Let's go! Clocks ticking...

Espen: (*Pausing*) You need a bag (*Pause*)... you know for candy...

Danny: (*Yelling upstairs*) Mom, I need a bag!

Izzy comes patting down the stairs and into the hall in her slippers. Stopping, just before she reaches the two in the hall.

Izzy: Oh yeah, you need something for all the candy, after all, that's the point, right! (*Turning to Espen*) Espen, if you go downstairs, I have two old pillow cases sitting on top of the hamper, by the washer, grab those. They're clean, I just washed them.

Espen: Why me? Why do I have to go? He's the one going out after all...

Izzy: He'll trip in those boots going downstairs and break something. I can see it now. Nope, this is on you Esp! Grab both pillow cases, why don't you... You should get candy too after all... Why not?

Espen: I hadn't planned on it. I'm not dressed. Besides, I'm getting too old for Halloween.

Izzy: Nonsense! No one's ever too old for Halloween! I've got half a mind to throw on a mask and come with you. I love Halloween! I love seeing the carved pumpkins and the decorations. I love this time of year! I love the crispness in the air. I love it all (*Enthusiastically*)!

Danny: Mom, you'll slow us down... We have a lot of houses to hit and it's getting late...

Izzy: I would not! And after all the time I took on your moustache, that's the thanks I get?

Danny: I'll bring you chocolate... Mmmmmmmmmmm... Mmmmmmmmmmm... (*Teasing*)

Izzy: Ummmm... Well, maybe (*Pauses*)... I suppose... (*With mock disappointment*)

Espen: Mom, you can come if you want... It's up to you... I'm going to get the bags.

Espen turns and goes downstairs. When they reach the bottom, they flip the switch, walk briskly through the laundry room, gather two pillow cases, just as expected, from atop the hamper, and turn to leave. It's then a glint of light catches Espen's eye. Wondering about the source, Espen approaches their mom's studio shelving, filled with boxes of cast off, but not quite dispensed with, things. After walking slowly to the shelf, Espen reaches above their head and into a box to tug on a piece of protruding glass, the source of the reflection. With a final tug, the glass bits come free from the box, but attached to something... an odd shaped rubber bit. Espen looks down at the object in their hands, surprised to find two glass eye-pieces attached to an old gas mask.

Espen: *(Speaking to themselves – quietly)* Wow! What the heck is this? Where did you come from? Crazy!

Espen turns the object over and over in their hands, taking in every detail. It's cool. What a weird object! It's very usual, and like who has a gasmask in their basement? He chuckles to himself. After examining it for a few minutes and taking in the colour (army green), the smell (rubber), the glass eye pieces (like fish eyes), he tries it on. Surprisingly, it just fits. Just then, Danny calls from upstairs.

Danny: Espen are you coming? What's the holdup?

Espen: *(Fumbling with the mask to take it off).* Coming! *(To himself)* This is cool!

Espen is kind of enamored with his newly found buried treasure and unwilling to part with it just yet, he tucks it under his arm and climbs to the landing.

Espen: Look what I've found! *(Holding out the mask for Danny and Izzy to see)*

Danny: Cool! Can I have it?

Espen: Sure... *(Pause)* but where did it come from Mom? Like, why do we have this thing just hanging out in a box in our basement.

Izzy: *(Surprised)* You got me honey! It's something that probably belonged to great Opa from the First World War. Where did you find it hon?

Espen: Just on the top in a box in your studio...

Izzy: Huh *(Surprised)*... Well, it's got to be great Opa's then. I just brought some boxes over from Mom and Dad's place last weekend and I haven't had time to sort through them yet to see what's there.

Espen: This is cool! Like – what a wild thing!

Izzy: It's cool alright hon, no doubt about it. It's probably about a hundred years old by now, kind of an antique.

Espen: Do you think it would be okay if I wore it out tonight? Could I wear it out tonight, you know, when I'm walking around with Danny?

Izzy: I don't see why not hon. It's a cool mask and now that I think of it, I think it would be a great Halloween mask. Kind of spooky.

Espen: Done. I'm wearing it. *(Espen smiles, then dons the mask)*. Look, instant costume!

Danny: I'm jealous... You sound like Darth Vader. I want it!

Espen: When we get home – it's yours...

Danny: Deal!! *(Emphatically – Pause)* ...Okay, let's go!

Espen: Mom, you coming?

Izzy: Nope, you two have fun! Espen, watch out for cars! Danny, I want that chocolate bar...

And back no later than twelve...

Danny: Okay Mom! Let's go Esp!

Espen: Okay Mom! See you in a bit! (Handing the second pillow case to Danny as they leave).

Danny: *(Pausing as they get to the sidewalk)* Which way do you want to go?

Espen: This way... *(Turning right and heading down the block toward brightly lit houses with carved pumpkins on the porches)*

Danny: Wow, your voice is like way deeper through that thing...

Espen: Really? *(Surprised, shrugs)* ...Cool!

Danny and Espen walk from house to house, passing ghouls and ghosts, pumpkins and skeletons. At each house, doors open and person after person hands Halloween treats – small chocolate bars, bags of chips, and wax paper wrapped caramels. Person after person comments on the great costumes the boys are wearing.

Danny: They think you're a boy!

Espen: I know! *(Pause)*... It's wild! It must be the mask...

Danny: I guess...

They pass house after house, stopping at each house to chat and receive candy. A few hours later with sore feet and heavy-full bags, they head for home. Espen is a little bewildered. Silently, Espen thinks, as they walk home together. They think I'm a boy. All of them, they all thought I was a boy. I kind of liked it though, when they thought I was a boy. It actually felt great! Like they really saw me! What's that about then? When they reach their house, and slowly begin to walk up the wide cement steps to the front door, Espen pushes his mask up, to let it sit on top of his head.

Danny: Can I have it now? (*Pointing to the mask*)

Espen: I think I need to hold onto it – for just a little longer. I need to paint it. I need to paint myself wearing it. I need to think about it just a little longer, okay? Then it’s yours... I promise...

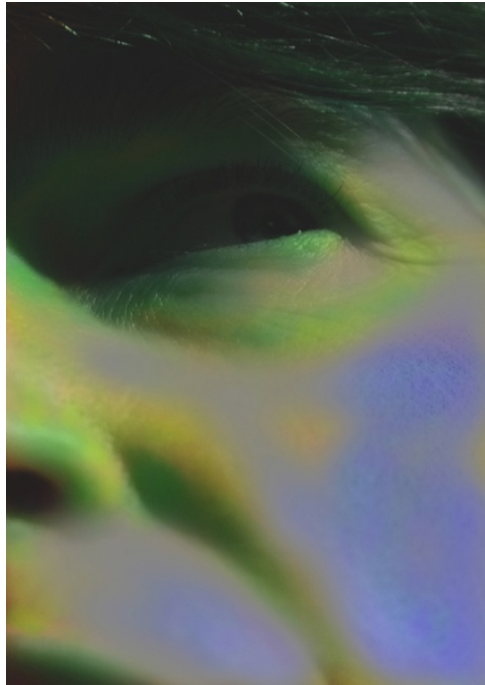
Danny: Okay-sure! Sounds good Esp!

Masks, usually meant to hide identity, can sometimes, it appears, do the opposite. That Halloween evening, Espen found that he liked being a boy and that identity felt completely natural, completely freeing, completely comfortable, and completely right. The mask also allowed Espen to feel that he was completely seen for the first time. Wearing the mask revealed to Espen an identity, which had previously remained elusive, un-thought of, and hidden from his sight. Espen’s experience, that Halloween night, was a first step for Espen becoming themselves.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ I wrote this short story to integrate the stories I have learned of Espen’s experience finding and wearing a gas mask on Halloween a few years ago from short snippets of conversation that took place at SNAP studio about his interactions with his mom and his brother. This short story format allowed me to imagine into Espen’s stories, integrate and weave several stories together, while also creating an open invitation to you the reader to imagine into Espen’s stories of having his identity revealed to him through experience. As I try to build a bridge to understand Espen’s experience through imaginative storytelling, I recall Espen’s words, “nobody can ever teach you these things”. Nobody can, but maybe art and storytelling can create a bridge so others can imagine Espen’s experience.

Artmaking to Respond to Stories: Second Story - Camouflage & Tattoos

(Dec. 2018 – Mar. 2019)



157

¹⁵⁷ Image 5.12. Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, I'm adding the green image I created in February 2019, that you liked so much when you saw it last Thursday. In this image, I was thinking with the idea of monsters, to be specific, I was thinking of a movie by John Greyson (1991) called *The Making of Monsters* and the process of othering people; the process of seeing others as not-self, as the Them in Us versus Them, and sometimes too as monstrous. Greyson's film premiered here in Edmonton in 1992 as part of a LGBTIQ film festival I created and curated called *The Voice and the Vision*. I had only set out to create a film night for Gays and Lesbian on Campus (GALOC), but when I spoke to someone from the National Film Board, Edmonton's first LGBTIQ+ film festival was born. I didn't know in 1992 that I was making some history by tapping into a new and burgeoning Canadian independent and LGBTIQ+ cross country film circuit. I'm telling you this story because you never know what effects your actions can have, even the small things, may ripple and have larger effects. Even small actions can matter and help support other SGM youth, young adults, and families. As I remember of our little show for TREX, it is wonderful to know that at least for two families and their SGM children or youth, it mattered.



158

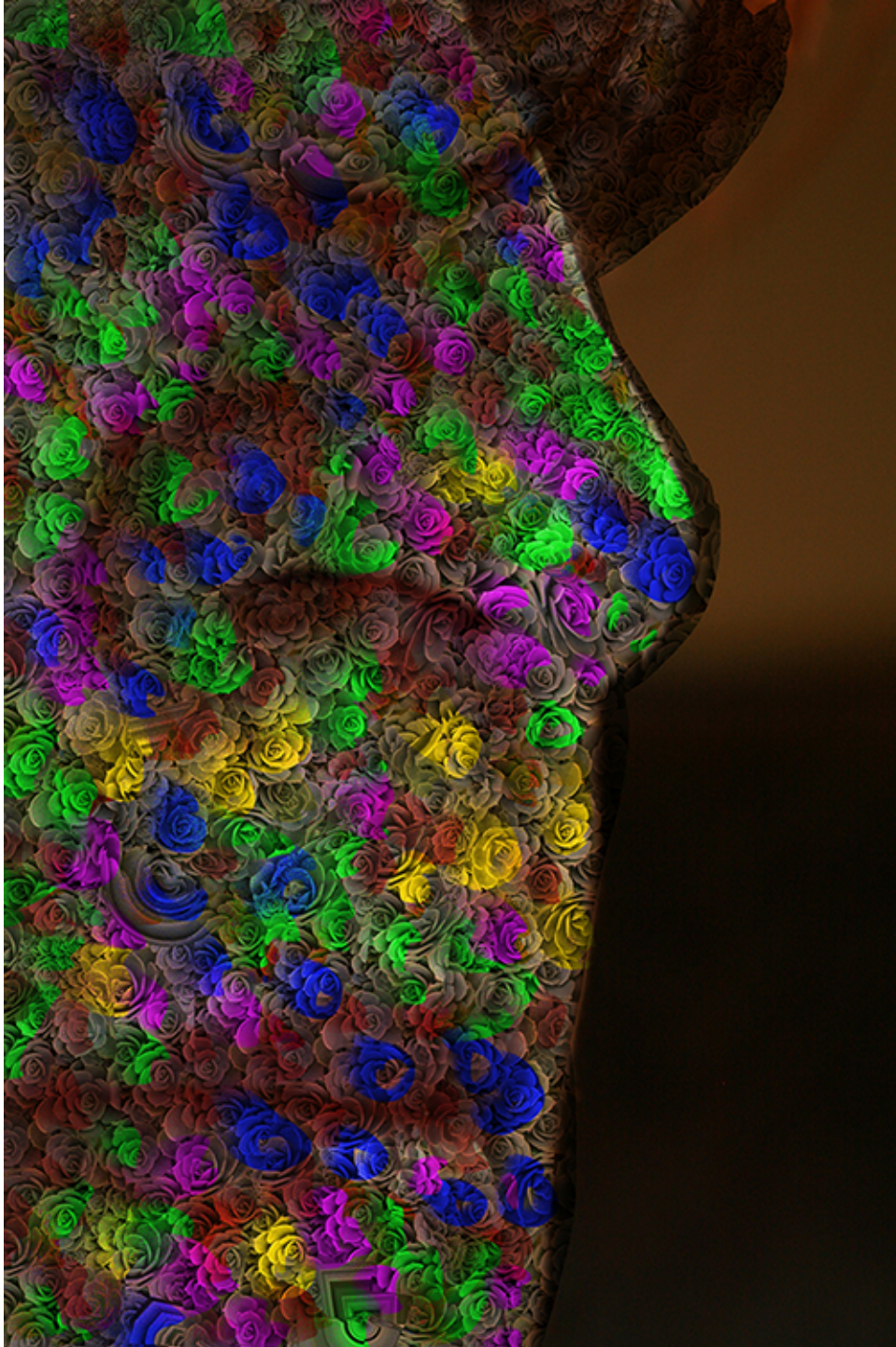
¹⁵⁸ Image: 5.13. These are a series of images I created in February 2019. These images helped me think about the idea of masks as concealing and/or revealing. Espen's story and his image of mask help me also think about camouflage alongside ideas of identity and passing in a chosen gender. When I think of how I am or have been read or seen, I am often misgendered in public spaces. When I am not being misgendered, sometimes I have the feeling I am passing as a woman, which I find curious, because I identify as a woman, I am a woman, and I was born biologically female. I am however often read or seen as male. I have experienced misgendering since my teens.



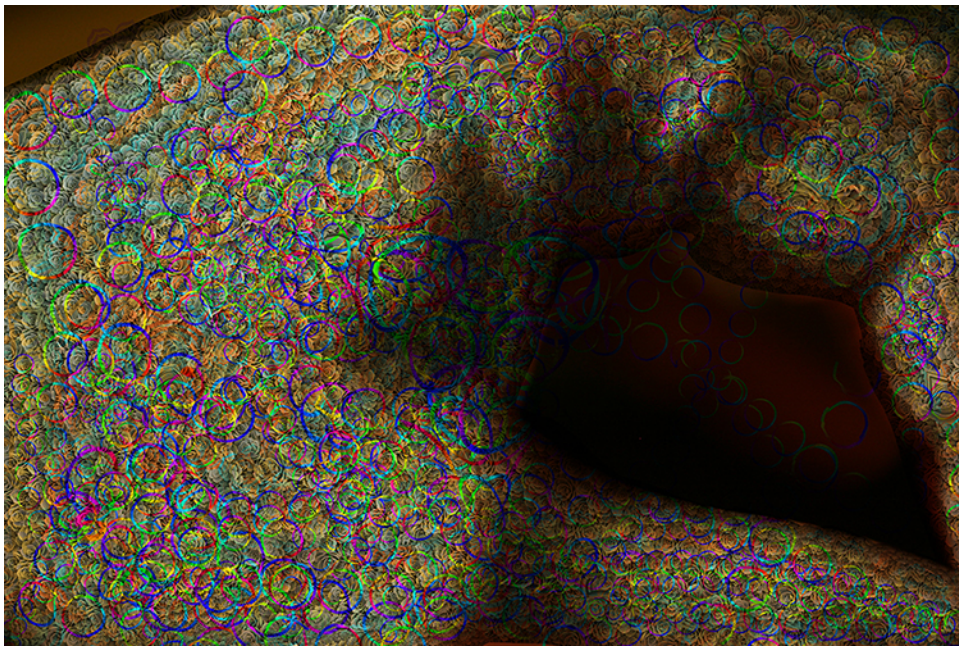
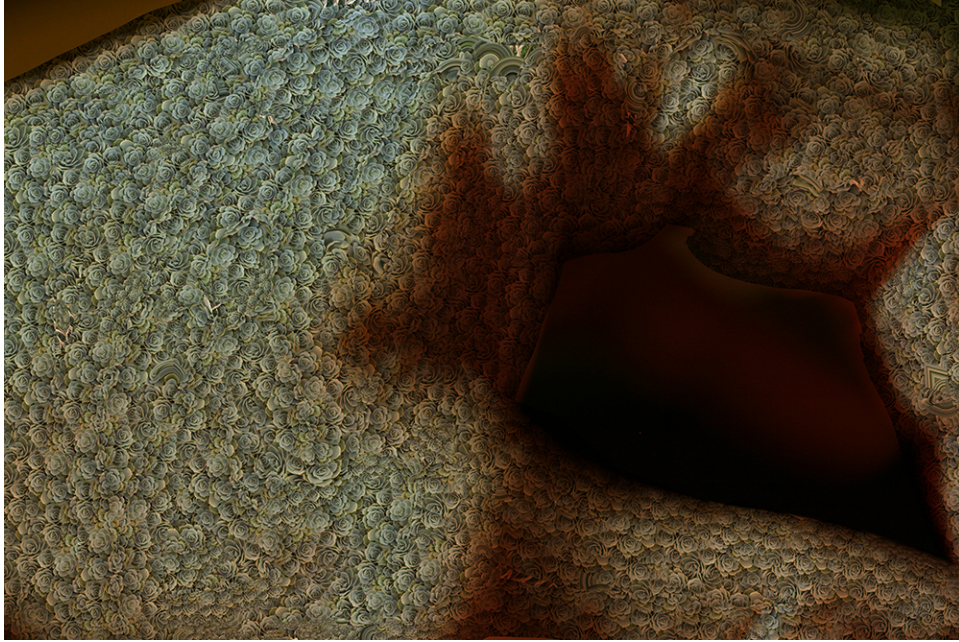


160

¹⁶⁰ Image 5.15.



¹⁶¹ Image 5.16.



¹⁶² Images: 5.17 (top) & 5.18 (bottom)

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

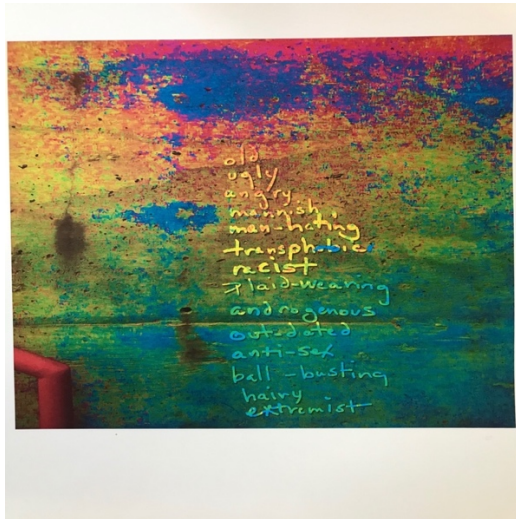
March 13th 2019

When I created these six images (Images 5.13-5.18), I was thinking about how camouflage could hide and paradoxically create identity, like tattoo ink indelibly marked in skin. You really loved these images and asked me to send them to you so you might rework them. I send them now as a gift, for you to rework later, if you wish. I created these images over the past couple of months to share with you. I was thinking in relation to your story about your wearing the mask on Halloween. I was considering how the mask you wore on Halloween, allowed onlookers to make gendered assumptions about your gender expression, and unmasked parts of your gender identity to you in a way you found welcome.

As I brought my stories around gender identity and expression alongside your stories Espen, I pondered how masks often hide instead of reveal, gender expression or identity. As I worked on the images, layering patterns on skin, I began to think about skin as camouflage. I wondered what happens when camouflage sits on the skin or soaks into the skin like a tattoo, or like a scar. I consider how camouflage has been ever present for me, along with the real and/or perceived dangers of fitting or not fitting in, being loved or not being loved. I consider how camouflage continues to sit on my skin lightly sometimes, when it is barely needed, and glows brilliant-neon in the dark at other times. I think of walking between different worlds, and slightly, or greatly, altering myself to fit within my surroundings, either shrinking back or expanding. I relate to how a chameleon instinctively changes their skin to blend into the pattern of the background, be it steel grey or neon green. It's a survival method, I think I picked up early. It's not usually conscious, and it doesn't always work. People surprise me. Recently, a cleaning woman walked into the washroom, as I was washing my hands before teaching my

class, and the look she gave me. How dare I wash my hands. I guess, I wasn't looking feminine enough. I guess, I scared her, standing there¹⁶³. It's surreal. I identify as lesbian, queer, and mostly cisgender, but lots of folks don't see me that way. It tires me.

Artmaking Creating Spaces of Dialogue: Third Story – Barriers & Walls (Feb. – Mar. 2019)



164

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: FIELD NOTE – Barriers/ Walls of Language

February 19th 2019

¹⁶³ Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, thank you for laughing and sharing that you couldn't count how many times this experience has happened to you. You seem very good spirited about it; I just feel ticked off and angry. I find it odd to have to respond to someone's perceptions and possibly fears too; and it's always out of the blue. It's weird when someone comes into a space you are occupying and makes you feel like you are trespassing in their (public) space. It's stranger yet to think, I came into this designated washroom space, because it is designated in a certain way, as a woman's washroom, then someone comes into the space and wants me out because they do not designate me to be a woman.

¹⁶⁴ Image: 5.19. I created this image in February of 2019 to make visible words I have heard used to describe the word and/or identity lesbian. Lesbian is a word I use to define my identity, but I would never use the words in this image to describe myself, who I am, or what I believe. But Max has pointed out, more than once, sometimes I wear plaid.

As I began to think with the stories of Espen, Max, Adebayo and my stories in relation and their stories, I begin to wonder what gets in the way – what are the barriers to my being in and staying in relation? I began to think about walls as barriers that we build, or that get built for us, and how we might re-story and break down these barriers or walls. I return to art to think through and make visible for myself possible barriers to working alongside Espen, Max, and Adebayo. In response to this thinking, I created the two series of artworks called Walls. The first series consists of two images, my image of a wall with descriptor of the word and or identity lesbian (Image 5.19) and Espen’s painted response (Image 5.20)¹⁶⁵.

A few days before I started the artwork I had gone through photos on my hard drive and saved several photos that might serve as starting points to images on my desktop. I was also, at the time, reading a thesis about an intergenerational oral history project that featured lesbian and queer identified women. Boulay (2014)¹⁶⁶ speaks about barriers to communication between

¹⁶⁵ The second series of wall images (Images 5.21-5.24), follows these two images (Image 5.19 and Image 5.20) and deals with conceptual blockages that might stand in the way of relationship building between myself and Espen, Max, and Adebayo in this research. This second series of images (Images 5.21-5.24) is described in detail later.

¹⁶⁶ Nadine Boulay’s (2014) unpublished Master’s Thesis Dissertation is titled: *Lesbian and Queer Generations in Vancouver: An Intergenerational Oral History Project*, within the Department of Gender Sexuality and Woman’s Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Simon Fraser University. Boulay’s (2014) writing speaks about the challenges of building LGBTIQ+ or Queer intergenerational connections and knowledges. One challenge Boulay’s (2014) writing points to is a challenge of language and naming of and within and between LGBTIQ+ and Queer generations. Her writing helped me to recall words that I have heard used to describe the word or identity lesbian. I created this artwork with the words I have heard used to describe the word or identity Lesbian. I wrote the words like graffiti on a wall so I could begin to think about them and then share them with Espen, Max and Adebayo to see

generations of lesbian and queer identified woman, and posits that queer cohorts are often uni-generational¹⁶⁷. In this work (Boulay, 2014) suggests that stereotypes exist within our queer communities and these stereotypes create cross-generational barriers to communication and understanding. For instance, older women in the LGBTIQ+ community often refer to themselves as lesbian, but many younger women name themselves queer, not lesbian¹⁶⁸. The term lesbian might be seen to hold a host of negative, even abject, associations (Boulay, 2014). I know that lesbian is also seen as outdated and less politically salient term than queer. Thinking with Boulay's (2014) work and my identity, where I use both lesbian and queer identifiers, I recalled the image of the wall I had placed on my desktop several days earlier. I took the image of the

how they understand the work lesbian and if these words reflect any of their concepts of lesbian as an LGBTIQ+ identity.

¹⁶⁷ Boulay (2014) wrote that many lesbian and queer identifying people tend to primarily socialize in uni-generation peer-groups, while intergenerational socialization is much less common.

¹⁶⁸ Language is in transition now as LGBTIQ+ or Queer community names are changing in relation to personal identifiers. Older acronyms LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTIQ+, LGBTQ+, are currently changing to a possibly more inclusive acronym SGM. LGBTQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two spirit or queer and the later iterations include an I for intersex, while the plus sign seeks to acknowledge all other identities. Sexual and Gender Minority refers to a constellation of identities: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or trans, intersex, queer, two-spirit, pansexual, asexual, plus those individuals not defining themselves as heterosexual. Importantly LGBTIQ+ community members are often older and often less willing to adopt the newer SGM community acronym, than people in younger generations. The complications of shifting language, for individuals engaging with and/or building communities, seems to serve as a rupturing factor instead of a rallying point for LGBTIQ+ and SGM communities.

wall and wrote descriptors of the word lesbian from the language I have heard used to describe lesbians. The descriptors hold negative connotations. I wrote these words on an image of a wall to literally see how these words might imply a barrier; I also specifically wondered if such words might pose a barrier to intergenerational communications. I wondered what Espen, Max, and Adebayo, being young trans identifying adults, might think of the term lesbian, and if they thought any of these negative associations applied. I wondered if language, like holding negative associations of the term lesbian, could form a barrier to being in communication with someone who calls themselves lesbian, such as myself. I also wondered as someone who holds the term lesbian as personal identifier, if I might also, perhaps unconsciously, carry the reverberations of language on my skin, and in how I know myself¹⁶⁹. It is interesting to think how we sometimes

¹⁶⁹ Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, thank you for sharing the following story, after we looked at the previous artwork, and talked about language barriers within and between various LGBTIQ+ or SGM communities. You spoke about your experience working at Boyle Street Community Services helping to distribute dog food to homeless people with pets. You told me about your interactions with one homeless gentleman, who had a hard time interpreting your gender. So, when he asked you if you were a boy or a girl, you told him that you were a boy. He responded to you, saying oh, you are a he-she. Next, you shared how off-putting it was for you when other young people, working at the mission alongside you, got offended for you, and jumped to your defense without you asking them to. They told him that he couldn't call you that; and that you are a trans man, and he needs to call you a trans man. You told me that you hate it when others are offended for you – like what's that! You asked, who gives them the right to be offended for you? Later, when things calmed down and you got to speak with the gentleman, he told you that one of his best friends is a he-she, and he didn't mean any harm. As you said, this is the only language he has, and we need to understand that different people have different language, and that's okay. We don't have to police it from the ivory tower. Furthermore, you said that white-tower talk put you in jeopardy because Boyle Street is not a safe place and you being generally known to be a trans man could put your physical safety in jeopardy. You

hold language close, and how sometimes, through our self-concepts and stories of self, we might wear language, like a camouflage or tattoo directly on our skin.

Espen's Artful Response: Painting Out Walls and Barriers (March 12th, 2019)



170

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

March 13th 2019

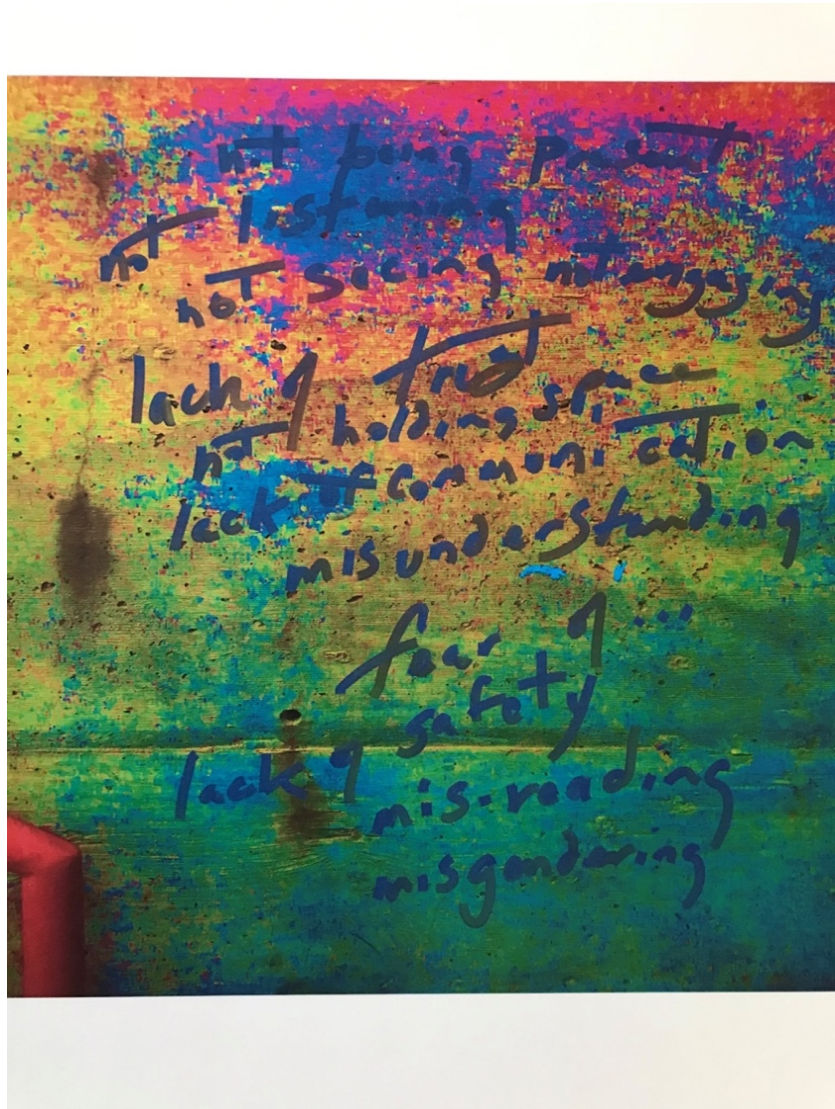
also stated your mental health issues already place you in a vulnerable position working there and being outed as a trans man. Espen, your story helps me consider how your co-workers, who had the best of intentions in trying to defend you, lacked fully understanding your experience, and could not foresee how their actions, more than the action of this homeless gentleman, may have put you in physical jeopardy while also upending your sense of safety. Your story helps me think about the privilege of not having to consider what helps to make spaces, not only fully inclusive, but also safe; and that safety is physical, emotion, and mental. Your story also helps me think about the way language may be used as a marker of privilege to mark off territories of inclusion and exclusion and how even in shifting landscapes of emergent inclusions some markers and boundaries remain intact. I think particularly about gendered and mental health exclusions within LGBTIQ+ spaces and places.

¹⁷⁰ Image: 5.20. Espen's painted response to the image of the wall and definition of the word and/or identity lesbian.

I enjoyed our visit in studio yesterday. And Espen, thank you so much for your response to my images! Thank you especially for your painted response to my image of the wall with the text descriptions of the term lesbian. I created this image wondering about possible LGBTIQ+/ SGM intergenerational barriers to communication. I was thinking of associations that I have heard in relation to the word lesbian and my identity as a lesbian, and I wondered how you understood this word. I loved your response, when you stated, “well that’s just awful, those terms have nothing to do with what it means to be a lesbian” (Espen, personal communication, March 12th, 2019). Thank you for that! I love how you immediately dismissed the labels as hurtful and not how you think at all. Your response makes me consider how language sometimes serves as a barrier to communication within our LGBTIQ+ communities, and but also how space for communication may open when language based assumptions get shelved.

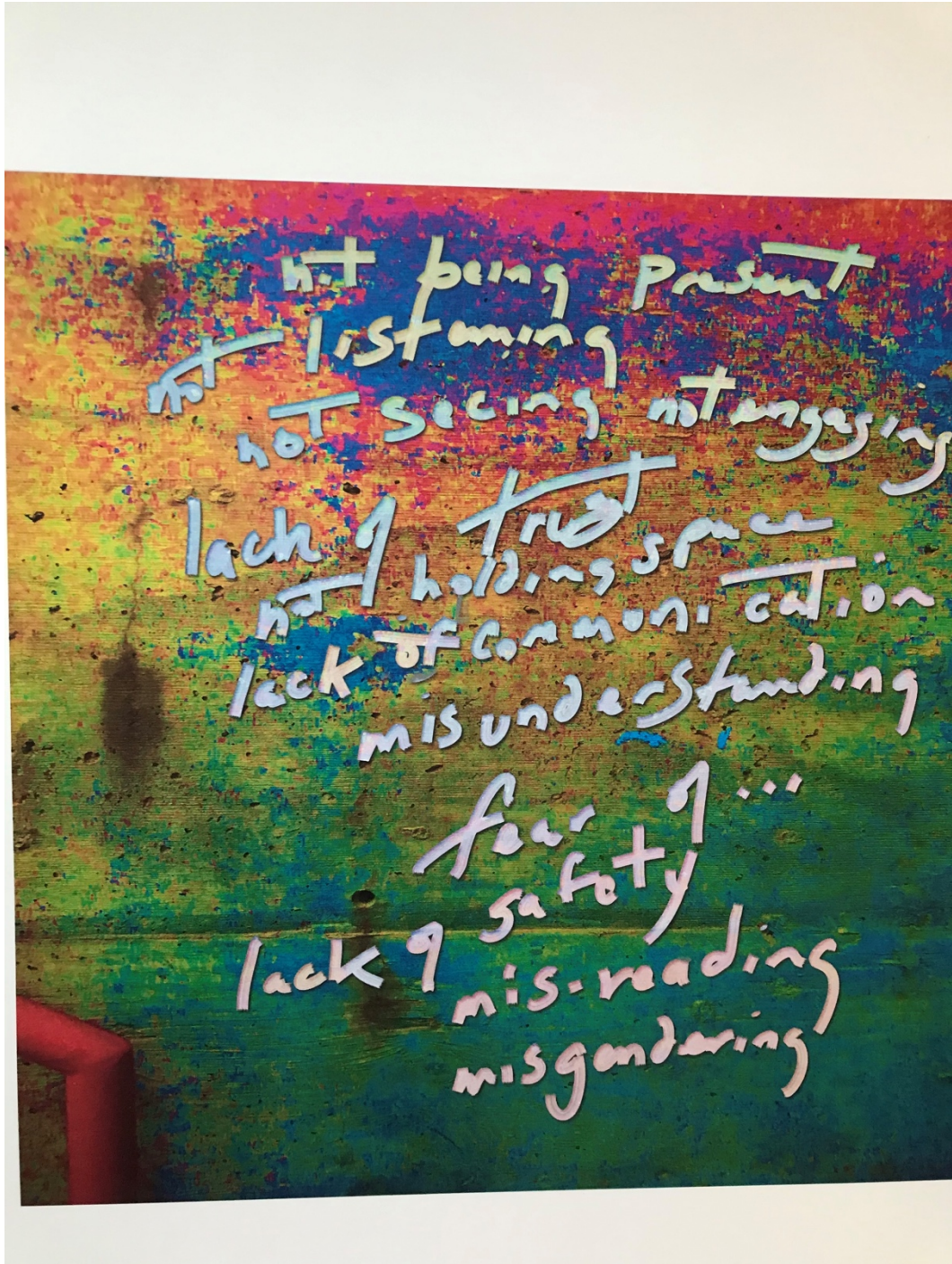
Espen, I love how imaginative you are! It was very cool to watch you basically paint the wall away and paint your own imagined landscape instead. You chose to paint out the wall entirely and instead paint figures in an imagined landscape with mountains and clouds. Your image, I think, suggests a story too, something is happening – A story is at play and we have walked into the action midway, and are thus off balance as audience, trying to figure out relationships and actions. Interestingly, you did keep one part of the original photograph of the wall, the red handrail from the steps. Here you placed your main figure, a dark figure in a hat, a villain or a hero, standing just behind the railing, both acknowledging the reality of the space and negating that reality at the same time. It was amazing to watch you transform this image. I like your imaginative landscape much better than my wall image. 😊

Artmaking Making Barriers Visible: Fourth Story: Re-visioning/ Re-storying



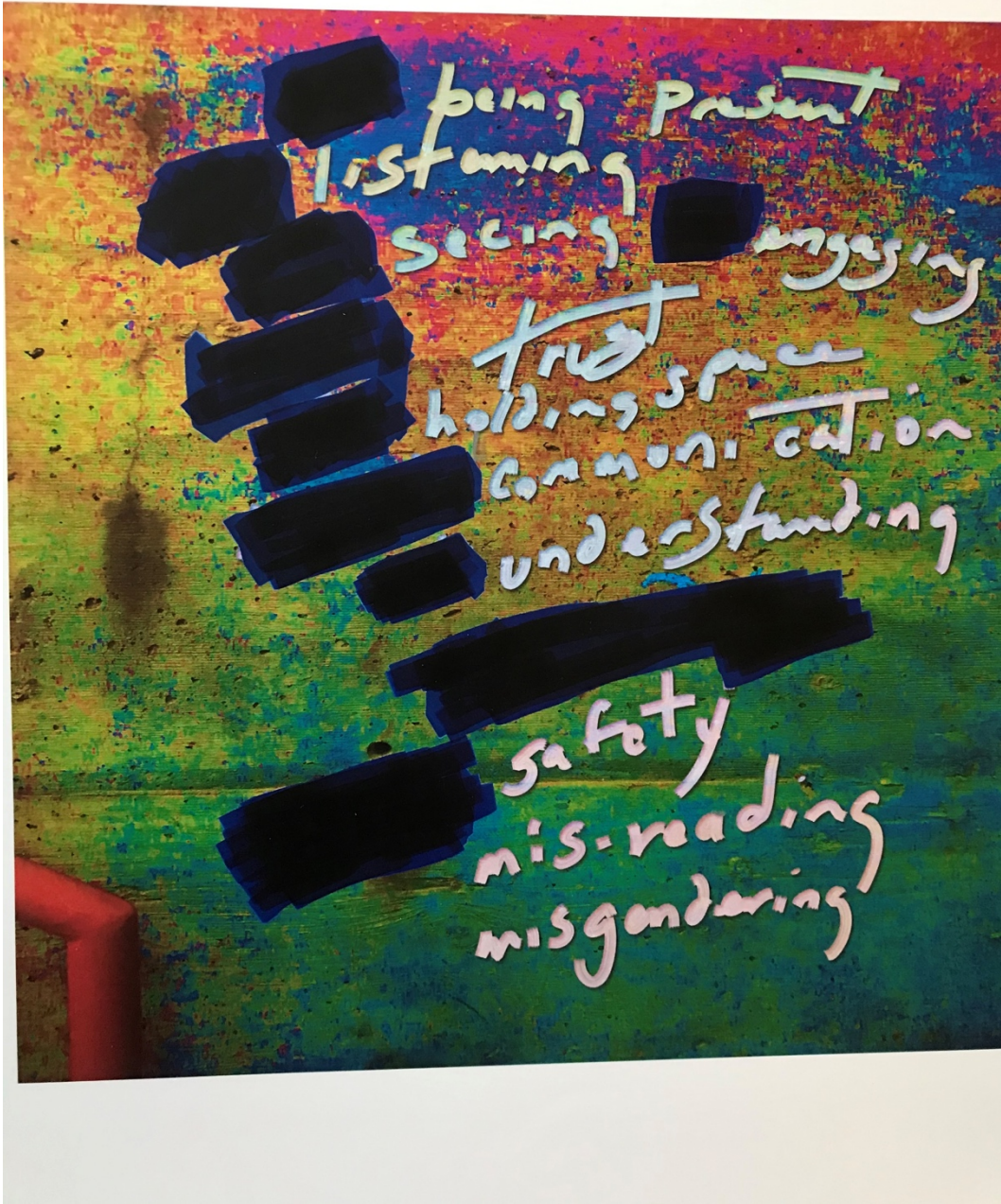
171

¹⁷¹ Image: 5.21. This second set of images of walls, I created in February 2019 helped me literally see my thoughts and my fears about being in relation. After creating the wall image, writing my fears helped me to see them and over time, revision and revise my concerns about being in relation.

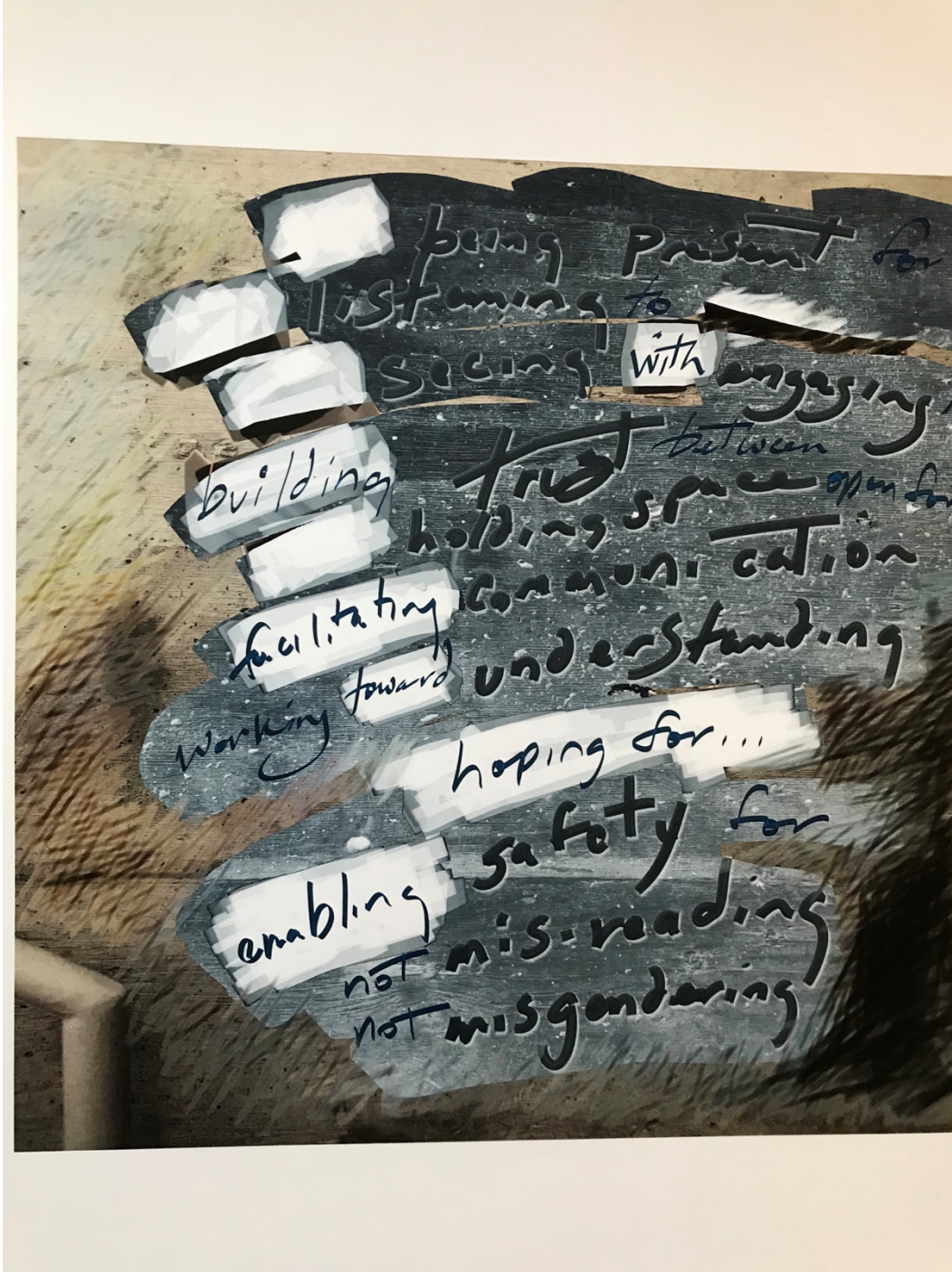


172

¹⁷² Image: 5.22.



¹⁷³ Image: 5.23.



174

¹⁷⁴ Image: 5.24. These wall images show how I transformed my understanding about barriers to communication over time through an artistic process of drawing and redrawing and image to revision and ultimately re-conceptualize my

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: FIELD NOTE – Thinking through Walls/ Busting Barriers

February 20th, 2019

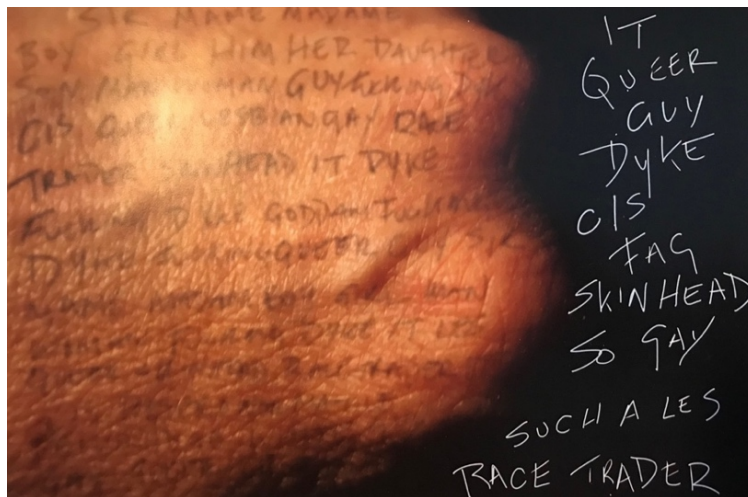
In my second series of wall images, I was thinking more abstractly about what might get in the way of my communication with Espen, Max, and Adebayo. I wrote text on the wall image digitally, and subsequently changed that text throughout the series to reflect my changing perspectives. First, I used the block-out poetry technique, that Max taught me, to get rid of words and change the meanings from a deficit reading to a resourced reading about being in relation. After blocking out text, I wrote text to re-story the image from speaking about possible barriers, to showing how barriers might be removed. Finally, I used a drawing tool to physically erase some of the wall image. The wall, a metaphor for barrier, was literally being erased. Erasing the wall allowed me to visually express my thinking about erasing barriers. Content (what is being said) and form (the way it is being said) became one (synergistic).

My series of images began with my writing graffiti on my image of a wall. The words I write in the first image are dark blue. This dark blue text colour, like these thoughts, barely lift from the background into my consciousness, before fading back. By brightening the text in the next image, I could physically see the text, and by highlighting this text, my thoughts about possible barriers to communication become visible. Next, I began to block out words that suggest actions I perceive as being unhelpful to being in relation. In the final image, I see how shifting my perspective can act as a resource and I write phrases that will help me think differently about being in relation. I also begin to literally erase the wall image as a metaphor for painting out

thinking. This art process literally helped me to see what I was not seeing; and seeing in turn enabled me to revise my thinking from only seeing deficits to resources instead.

barriers that stand in the way. This series of images, is an exercise in re-seeing an issue/problem and understanding that seeing a problem is only one perspective. This previous series of images demonstrates how actively attempting to change a perspective, through writing and drawing, may help open new possibilities for seeing and thinking differently, as well as ultimately creating different outcomes and telling different stories. In the end of these series of images, the wall and barriers begin to disappear as problems/issues transform into new perspectives. Literally seeing what I thought to be problem or barriers, by making them visible was a first step in seeing how to transform these problems/ barriers into resources that are workable.

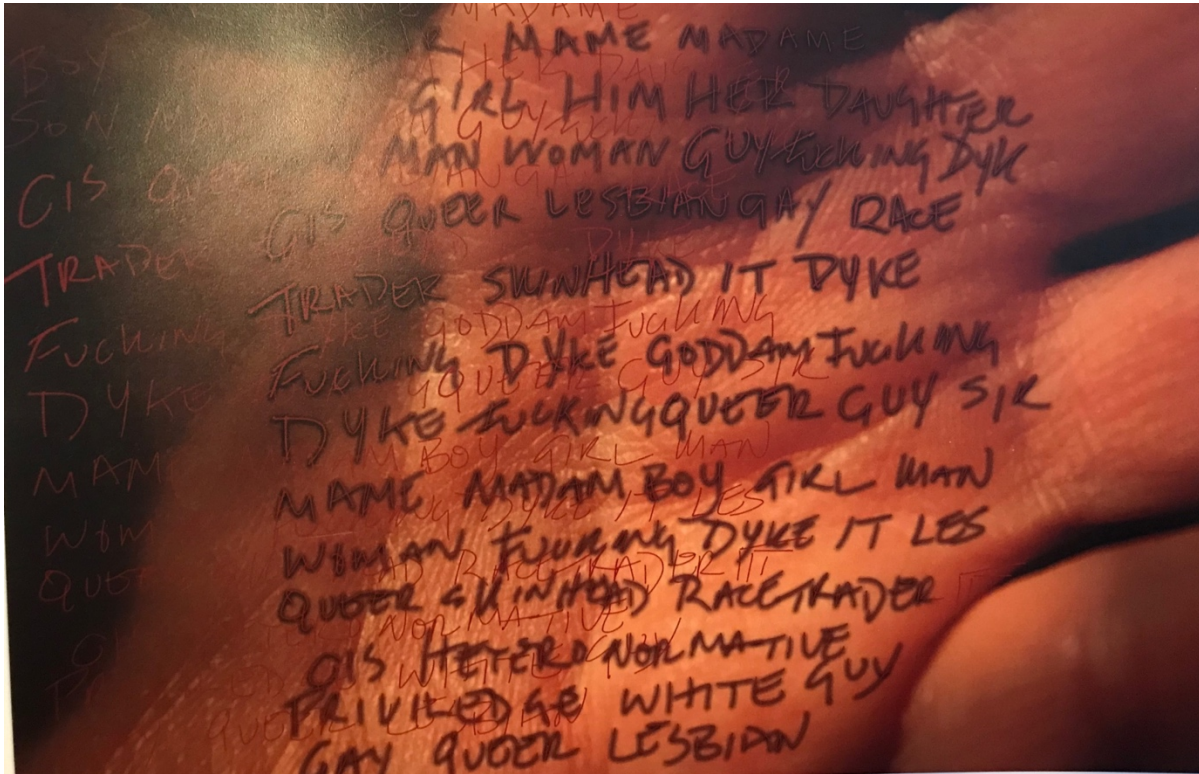
Artmaking to Make Scars Visible: Fifth Story: Written on my Body (Mar. 2019)



175

¹⁷⁵ Image: 5.25. This piece is called *Names I've Been Called*. I created this image thinking about identity and naming and how we create name for ourselves and how others create name for us too. I think "It" was the worst. I was shopping in a supermarket. Looking at fruit picking up some oranges or something... A little kid came running over to me to say hi. Their mother, I'm assuming, ran over, grabbed the child away by the hand, saying to the child, "Stay

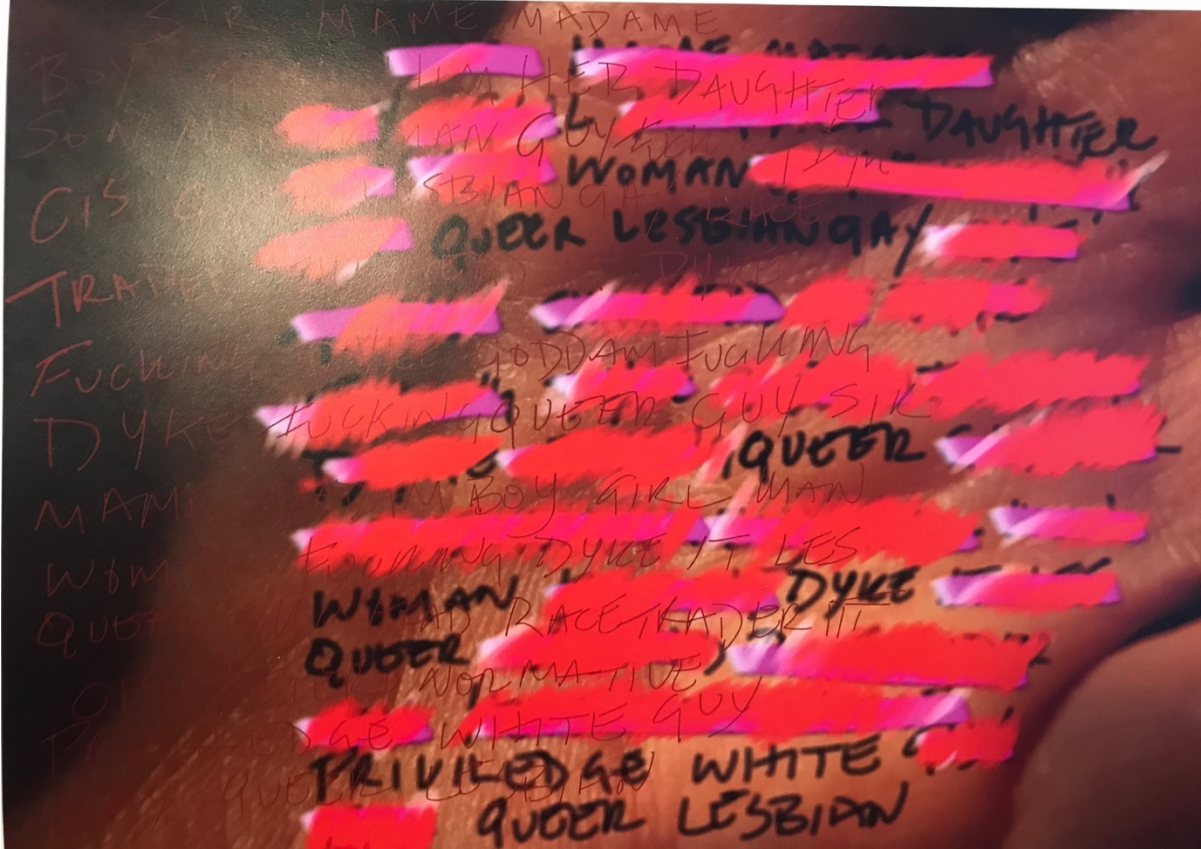
Artmaking to Make Shaming Visible: Sixth Story – These are not my Names (Mar. 2019)



176

away from it!". I think the names said in fear and anger are the worst because you never can tell what comes next. I love the way words sink into the skin in this image; because they do you know; words do sink into skin and get deposited there. Some words you can erase, and let go of and some words remain. Interestingly, it takes writing them down to see them; to make visible the cruelty some words pose.

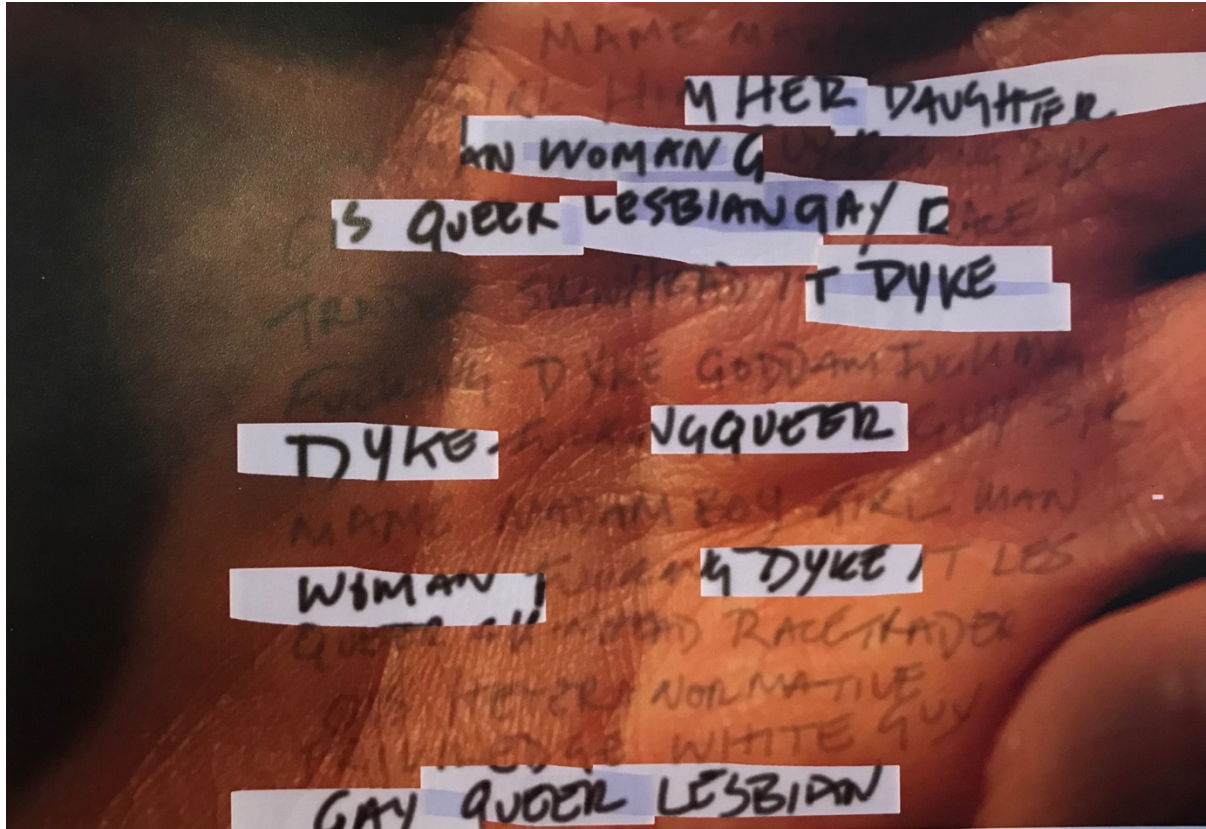
¹⁷⁶ Image: 5.26. This image and the series that follows is also called *Names I've Been Called*, in the following images I delete the names that have been put on me with hate, by people who don't know me. Over the following series, I delete many names, and keep only a few. I keep the names I have decided to take into myself, the names I allow to stay on my skin.



177

¹⁷⁷ Image: 5.27. Red is a good colour; it comes forward. You can't ignore red. Labels and names can be like that too, they push forward into consciousness. More often they sit somewhere below consciousness. They still work on you, whether you know it or not. Boy, girl, man, woman, gentleman, boy, guy, sir, queer, fag, skinhead, goddamned fucking dyke, les, lesbian, it, race trader, privileged, cis, white, old.

Artmaking to Select Chosen Names: Eighth Story – These Names I’ll Keep (Mar. 2019)



178

¹⁷⁸ Image: 5.28. In this series of hand images, I use digital drawing to think about names I have been called. I have used the block-out technique from the last series of images, to block out label which are hurtful and mean-spirited and keep the language and labels that I am comfortable with for whatever reason (her, daughter, gay, queer, lesbian, woman, dyke). I know some will find some of these labels derogatory (i.e., dyke), but you know when I think of all the amazing people who had held this label also, I think I would be proud to be in such esteemed company.

**PART 2: SKETCHBOOK SHARING – CREATIVE SPACE-MAKING TO LEARN
ALONGSIDE**

Looking to Find What You Do Not Know: First Story – Cultivating Beginner’s Mind



179

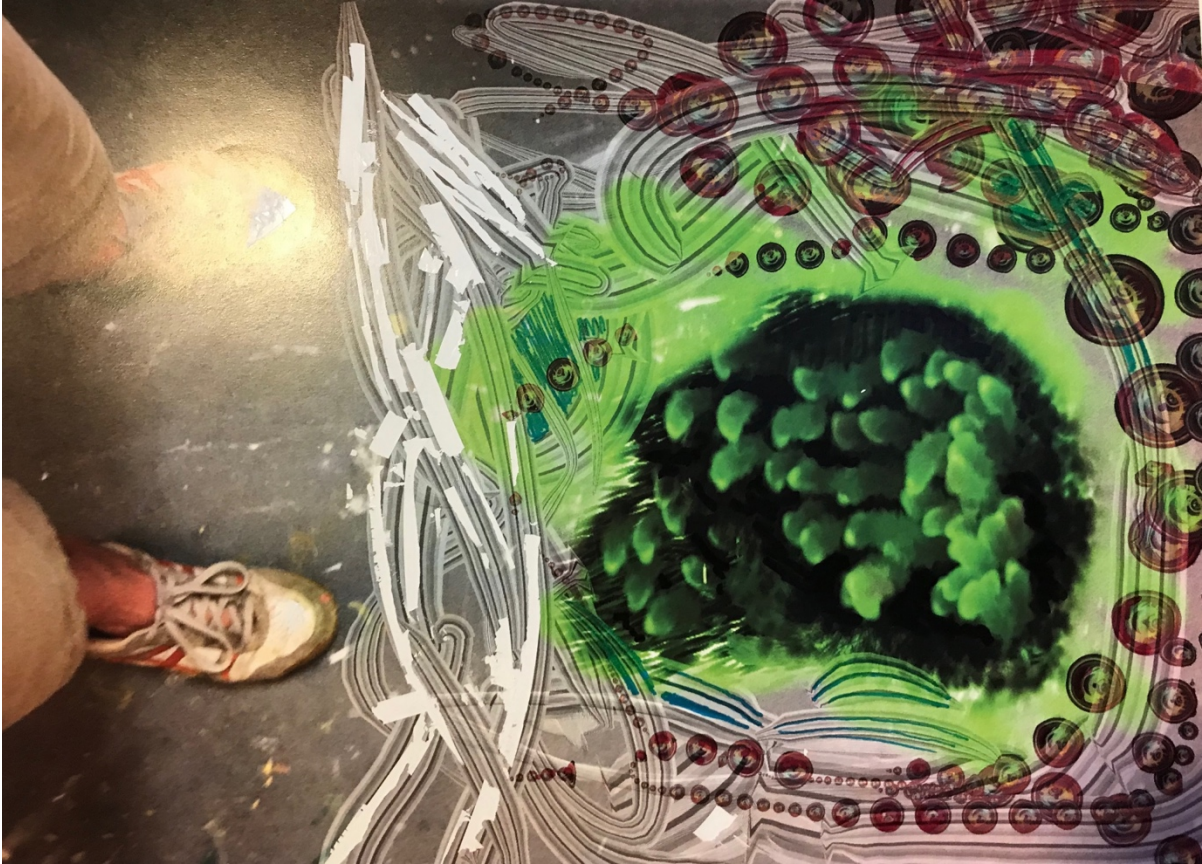
¹⁷⁹ Image: 5.29. These images three digital images, I created to think about are about play and remaining playful. Espen and I spoke about using older computer programs or old technology to find those happy accidents. Espen lit up and he told me he does that too, and loves to search for old programs that are kind of clunky to see what they can



180

do – looking for that lucky accident. We spoke of the joy of finding a computer program that was a little clunky, one that lets you make mistakes, because in those mistakes is the everything you need to know; everything undiscovered, un-thought of, yet to be known, exists in that space between seeing that mistake and deciding how to respond to it.

¹⁸⁰ Image: 5.30. This work was made with an old program. I chose to use it because I didn't know what it could do. I wanted to find its limitations. I hoped that it would lead me to mistakes, to places where I didn't know how to respond. I hoped it might help me see and think differently. I am not sure it worked, but it was fun being playful. In Zen Buddhism, there is the concept called beginner's mind. This beginner's mind is something that you strive for because this is the place where answers are yet to be discovered. Ideally, you will come at all projects and



181

challenges with a beginner's mind because in the expert's mind the path to learning is narrow because much is known, and there is less space for learning and willingness to learn (Suzuki, 2001).

¹⁸¹ Image: 5.31. Field Note February 18th, 2020: Dear Espen, when I created this image in March 2018, I was just playing, combining photographic and drawing content. I was bringing these two sources together to see how they would play together and what they might mean. Looking at this image now, I am reminded of our many later discussions about altered visual perceptions and hallucinations that you experience on occasion. We discussed how to show these types of experiences to someone who has never experienced it. Perhaps this image comes close? My decision to place the drawing on the floor of the photograph creates an illusion that I've opened a window into another reality in the floor of the photograph, so that imagined and real worlds occupy the same space. It was also a happy accident that when I took this photograph of this image, my left foot glows from a photographic flash. This lighting too adds to the surreal quality of the image. I am writing about this image to call attention to the importance

The following series of images (my pen and ink bunny drawing and my three sketches of songbirds) are sketches that Espen and I shared at SNAP Studio. These images help me to remember my quiet conversations with Espen around the studio table and the sometimes easily missed aspects of being in relation to Espen, who often worked in solitary ways at a computer, cutting a plate, or painting. It is in the quiet moments of being alongside Espen that I have learned much from Espen. So, to honor Espen's quiet ways of being and my less-spoken sometimes learning in relation to Espen, I return to open Espen's and my sketchbooks for you, to share not only what, but how Espen and I learned in relation.

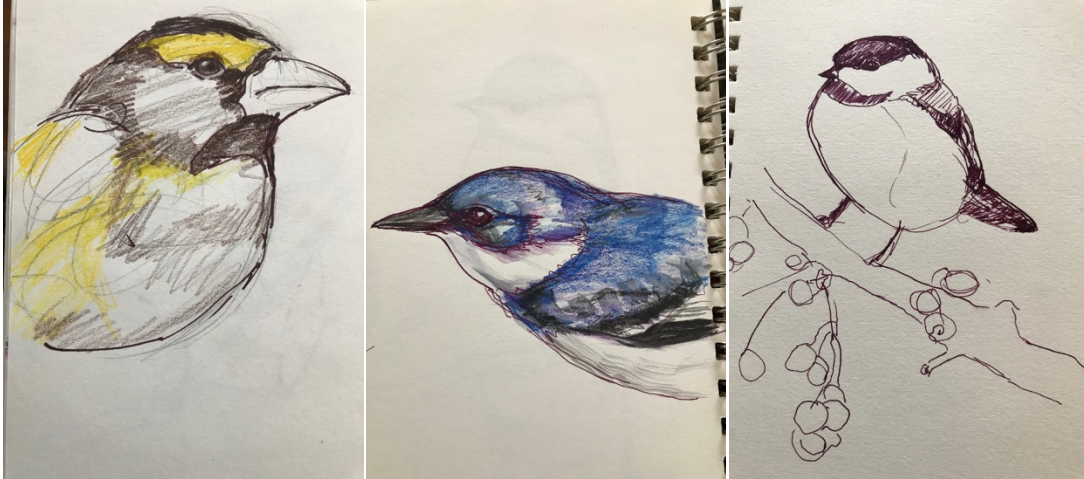
Discussions Around the Studio Table: Second Story – Sketchbook Sharing



182

of play and leaving possibilities open for the happy accident, because so often chance and accident opens space for creativity. It allows space to see what you cannot yet see and to know what you do not yet know.

¹⁸² Image: 5.32. Field Note December 23rd, 2019: Dear Espen, you made me laugh when we met with your response to the bunny I had drawn with dots of ink as a kid. You said that you would just draw one big dot, because it would



183

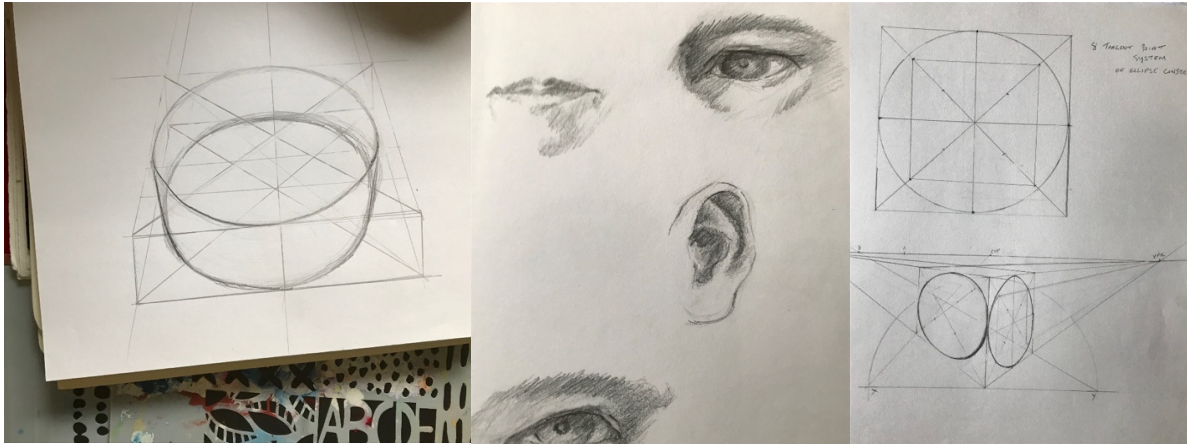
be hard for you to see and focus on the entire image, especially one drawn with dots. It's so interesting to think with your stories of ADHD. I remember you speaking too about only being able to focus on one side of a face and one eye at a time and how we both laughed wondering if perhaps cubist portraiture signalled undiagnosed ADHD.

¹⁸³ Images: 5.33. Field Note March 1, 2019: Dear Espen, I loved visiting with you yesterday at studio at the end of the day. I loved sharing stories with you as we sat at the drawing table at the end of a long day. We spoke about drawing and how each of us began drawing little animals, like bunnies. I showed you the drawing I did of a bunny when I was a teen and you shared that you drew bunnies too. Looking at each other's sketchbook and we spoke about facial features and perspective. I said that your work is good, really accomplished and you seem to light up as we shared our images. I spoke about mom learning to draw in her later eighties and shared a few of her images with you too. Then I shared a few of my more recent sketches (Goldfinch, Bluebird, and Chickadee) with you and my concerns about the disappearing songbirds.

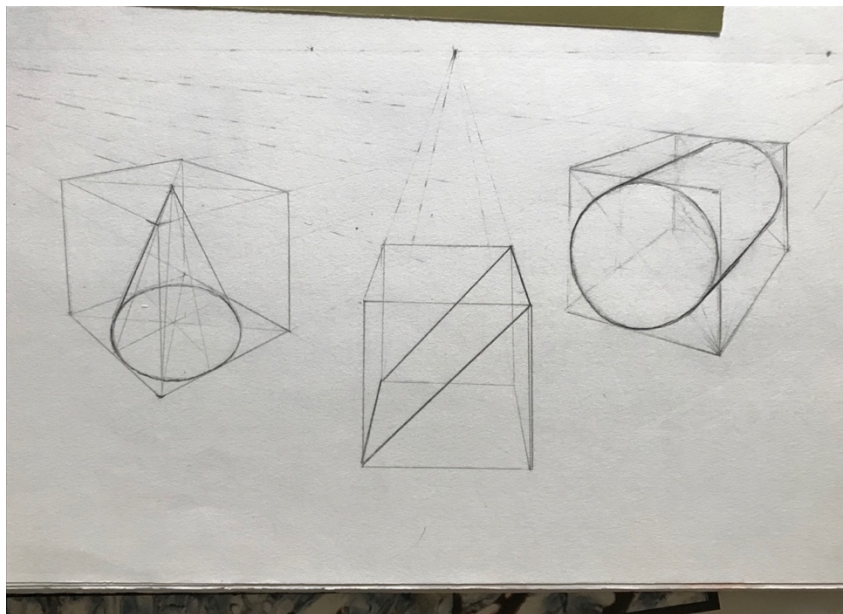


184

¹⁸⁴ Image: 5.34. Field Note March 1, 2019: Dear Espen, thank you for showing me your images of figures in your sketchbook and I was impressed with your facility working with figures and facial features, especially from memory. Your portraits have great expression. Your pencil drawing of a figure, just below your Chickadee drawing, looks like a DaVinci caricature. Do you sketch from master works? I used to do a lot of sketching based on master works. National Geographic magazine was another great source and basis for drawings as I learning to draw and paint, because the sources, photographic compositions, colour, and lighting were textbook.



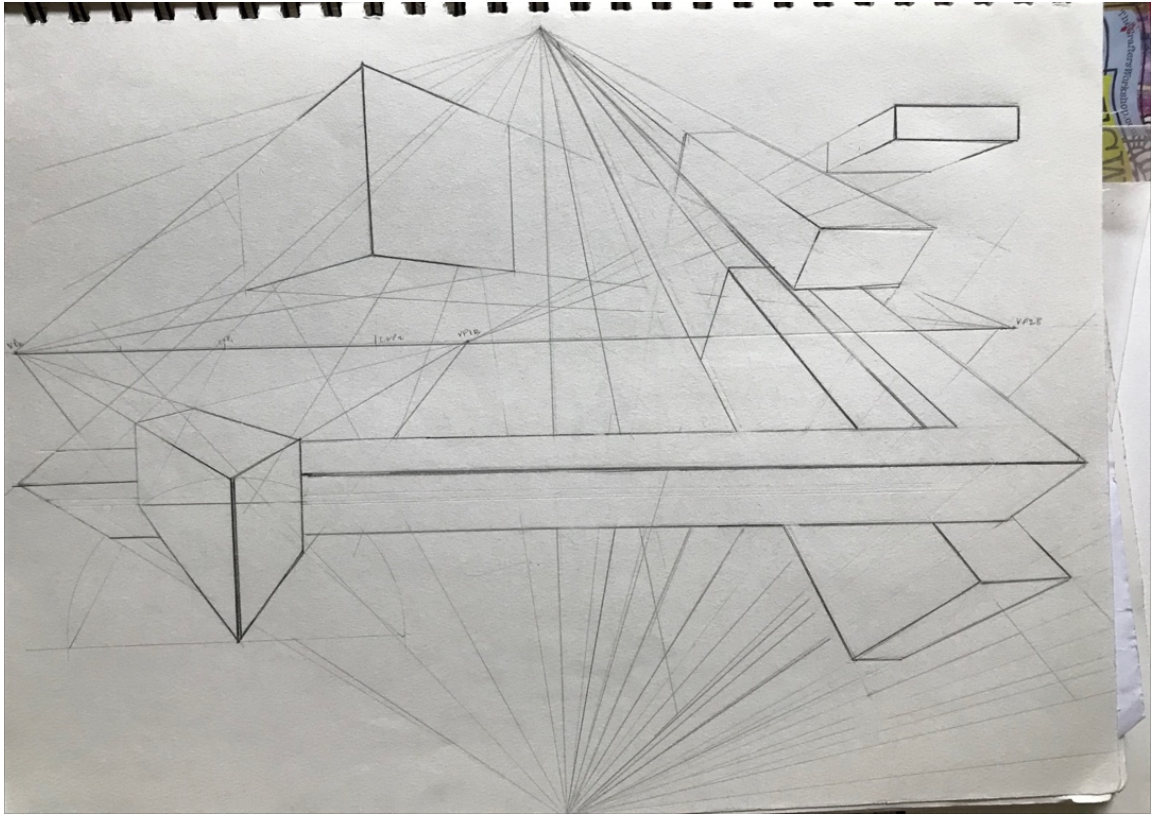
185



186

¹⁸⁵ Images: 5.35. Field Note March 1, 2019: Dear Espen, I shared these five technical drawings from my teaching sketchbook on perspective and facial features because of your interest in developing your drawing skills. We spoke about drawing eye areas as light and shade rather than shapes and lines. I thought you might be interested and you were. You said that it's easy to forget drawing basics, like perspective, when working digitally. I agreed and shared that these basics allow more believability in the construction of any image.

¹⁸⁶ Images: 5.36.



187

¹⁸⁷ Image: 5.37. Field Note March 1, 2019: Dear Espen, looking at my sketchbook we talked about the importance of perspective to give images a sense of reality in space. We also spoke about how interesting it is to use a four-point perspective exercise and line weight (the image with multiple rectangles receding in space) to create forms that appear real, but are entirely imagined.



188

¹⁸⁸ Image: 5.38. Field Note March 1, 2019: Dear Espen, after we shared images from our sketchbooks, I asked for your help to figure out consistent lighting on the plate I was cutting. You responded by painting a lighting effect to help me see the effect of some dramatic lighting from underneath on the nose, cheek bones, and eyes area. I tried the lighting effects that you suggested, while I was cutting the plate, and the plate started to look more realistic. Thank you for your advice, it worked. ☺



189

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: FIELDNOTE – SNAP Studio #4 with Espen & Max Dec. 18th, 2018

This is our fourth artmaking workshop, and our third workshop at SNAP. Max, Espen, and I are in attendance. Max has brought in a few plates and several t-shirts to print. Max has had some great success printing t-shirts at our last SNAP outing in November. Espen had to work in November, so he hadn't made it out to SNAP. But, today Espen would print an amazing t-shirt.

Looking at the picture I took of Espen working today, carving his linocut plate, reveals his singular focus. He is hunched over his plate just working away with singular attention. He

¹⁸⁹ Image: 5.39 (left) & 5.40 (right) Field Note December 20th, 2018: Dear Espen, I recall your stories of not feeling safe and not feeling relaxed. I recall your stories about losing jobs that you found too stressful and I am so happy to see you here, relaxed and being creative.

stated he was enjoying listening and all the conversations taking place at the same time in studio. When I took the photograph of him working, I commented on his focus. He was smiling and seemed very relaxed in his body language. I am happy to see Espen relaxed and engaged in being creative in this space. I'm so glad that we've come back to SNAP for our research group art-making sessions. I have Max, Espen, and Adabayo to thank for our return to SNAP, because we came here to work following their suggestion we do so, after our first art workshop in August¹⁹⁰. I'm at home here at SNAP and I feel I can better support everyone here too¹⁹¹.

¹⁹⁰ Our first art making workshop was a collage workshop in August 2018. Max had asked about the possibility of Shane teaching a collage workshop, so I followed up with Shane and he agreed to provide this collage workshop. Shane gave us an artist talk about his work and a little time to work on individual collages. Shane gave a great workshop, but the space the workshop was held was not conducive to making art. We couldn't get messy, so I wasn't entirely happy with our first artmaking experience. And when Espen mentioned that he was having difficulty focusing because his attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) was acting up. I wasn't sure how to support Espen; I don't think I knew how to ask him how I could be of support. And because this wasn't my space, and I was not teaching the workshop, I felt that I could not fully support Espen.

¹⁹¹ I am a professional printmaker and I have been a post-secondary printmaking instructor since 1991. SNAP printmaking studio has been a second home. SNAP is the Society of Northern Alberta Print-artists. It is a not-for-profit community and world class professional printmaking facility and gallery. I joined on the SNAP board in 1993, and began the educational outreach adult programming through printmaking classes in 1995. I was the President of the Board of Directors in 2000, just the second year of the gallery. During that time and subsequently, I have rented studios, printed at SNAP, and taught classes. SNAP has existed in three different locations, so far; but the change in locations has not lessened my familiarity with the organization or the local and international printmaking community.

I wondered if the background conversations¹⁹² were causing a difficulty for Espen in his ability to concentrate¹⁹³, but it didn't seem so, because his demeanor was very relaxed and he said he enjoyed listening to the background conversations. My memories of Espen, at this and past workshops, have been of his intense and singularly focused attention on artmaking. He is so fully engaged; he is all in. I love to see Espen's focus as he works because it reminds me of myself as a budding artist: the attention to detail, the looking to see, the making to find what would be revealed in the act of creating.

My first memories of Espen working in the art studio cabin at Camp fYrefly were similar. He was intensely working. I recall, Espen joking, laughing, and chatting with others in the cabin, but not so much as to take his attention away from the work he was making. He seemed to me then, and I believe now still, a little bit shy, a little bit quiet, but happily so. I love looking at this next picture, I took of Espen with his print standing at the press right after he had printed it. He has a huge grin and he looks so happy. He had just printed his linocut of his snake Jack onto a shirt and it looked great! I had said that printing one colour over another might mean that some of the first colours may blend with the second colour resulting in an image that wasn't crisp. It didn't happen; it printed beautifully! I could tell he was excited and pleased with his work. Max

¹⁹² Although I rented SNAP print-shop for the exclusive use of our research group (Adebayo, Max, Espen, and I), during our printing times, SNAP renters worked in their individual studio spaces not far from the main open studio area where we worked; sometimes noise or conversations carried from these adjoining studios.

¹⁹³ Espen had mentioned briefly at our first collage workshop that his ADHD was acting up and he was having an extremely hard time concentrating. I don't feel like I adequately addressed Espen's concern at that time, because I was not sure how to respond to support Espen. Since that workshop, as I have gotten to know Espen and feel that I would now ask Espen what I could do to improve conditions.

and I had both commented that Espen's image looked great, just before I snapped this picture.

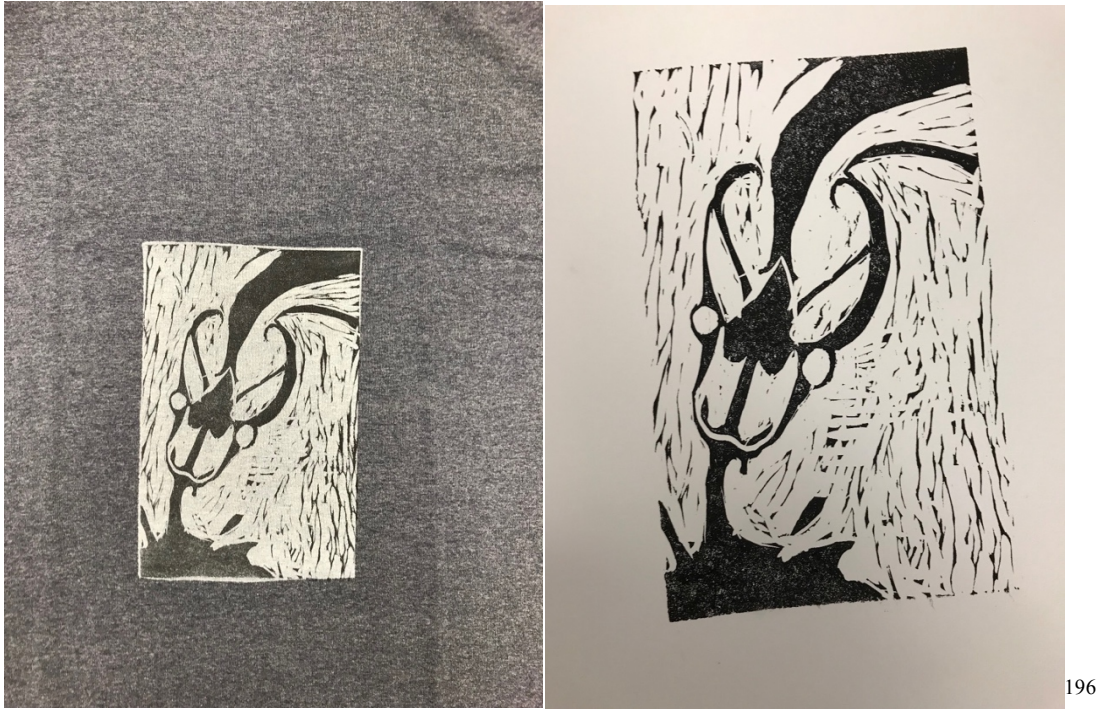
This afternoon Max had brought several t-shirts to SNAP to print. Max had been working through a series of images, having successfully printed several plates on many different fabrics on a variety of shirts. After seeing Max's results, Espen seemed interested in printing on a t-shirt. So, when Max offered a variety of t-shirts for Espen to try, Espen picked out a grey one that he might like to wear. It was lovely to see Max and Espen sharing and learning from each other. Max was happy to share his shirts and Espen was excited to try printing one. It was wonderful to see, and feel, Espen printing successfully. He was delighted and Max and I were delighted for him. It's nice to think of Espen wearing his shirt and getting compliments on the shirt he designed and created¹⁹⁴. As I write that last sentence I think of Espen possibly wearing his shirt in public and how that shirt might become a topic to open dialogue. The thought of this possibility makes me smile.

¹⁹⁴ Field Note January 24th, 2020: Dear Espen, I remember speaking with you at the café about your shirt. You told me that you were very proud of that shirt and how you were afraid to wear it in case something happened to it. I wish that day we printed two t-shirts. I wonder if there are other ways of sharing this image with you so that you might be able to share this image with others if you wish.



195

¹⁹⁵ Image: 5.41.



196

It was also lovely to see Espen's interactions with Max who was also attending the workshop. They chatted in an easy manner and seem to get along well. They would probably

¹⁹⁶ Images: 5.42 (left) & 5.43 (right) Field Note December 20th, 2018: Dear Espen, when you created your linocut image of Jack your pet white snake, you spoke about his shyness and how he hides, and how ironic you found it that people are often afraid of him when you bring him out from his cage. Max was printing t-shirts and asked if you might like to print a t-shirt for yourself. I wasn't sure that the image would show up if we printed it on a grey t-shirt so we printed a white flat first and then your image of Jack, who, yes, I always want to call Jake, because, yes ... rhymes with snake... Jake the snake – But Jack the snake. Your image printed beautifully and you seemed really pleased, Max and I were really impressed. It looks great! This linocut print of your snake, like your earlier print of the moth reminds me of you speaking about your interest in metamorphosis and transformation; your interest in subjects, such as moths and snakes that naturally transition from one state to another.

have met at Camp fYrefly in 2016. I believe that Max is a little older than Espen, Max is perhaps a year or two older. I sense from Max a sense of ease and groundedness in his interactions with Espen and myself. From my interactions with Espen, I also sense a groundedness and a sense of playfulness, and perhaps also a touch of shyness too at times.

I wonder if what seems like shyness in Espen might be allayed by Max's calm demeanor. They both enjoy a sense of play and exploration through art making. It was wonderful to see Max share his shirts and Espen's enjoyment with successfully printing his shirt. Both Max and Espen bring a sense of exploration to making art and both have a sense of ease and playfulness around results. I hope this playfulness will allow Max and Espen to remain playful and creative around the work, and not tighten around results.

At the end of the workshop, Max had gone and Espen and I were cleaning up. It was a short time working to clean the inks and rollers at the end of the day, but we covered a lot of ground in a short time. It was nice. I feel like I'm getting to know Espen, and he is so sweet and fun and talented.

We chatted briefly about work. I had asked Espen how things had gone during the Grey Cup in November, where Espen had worked in a coffee truck. Espen told me that he had gotten fired due to illness. I was surprised and saddened because I know through our emails that he is always happy to be working. He told me that it hadn't gone well because the truck wasn't prepared for the crowd or Edmonton weather. The heater had broken down and it was cold and those working in the truck had to borrow a heater from another truck. He said it was hard because it was so busy and there wasn't a spare room or a panic room he could go into, if he needed one to take a break. I know he loves to be working and I wonder if experiences like this are hard on him.

It was lovely. Our conversation kind of went all over the place, as you can see, and I loved that. It was a good day and we were both tired at the end. Well, I know that I was tired at the end of a five-hour printing session. He was probably fine. I know when I get tired, physically tired, I tend to ramble, and I was rambling. I was relaxed and it felt nice to have time to hang out and chat with Espen and getting to know him a little better. I felt privileged Espen shared some of his stories with me that day. I enjoyed sharing my stories with Espen as well. It's always nice to spend time with Espen.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: FIELD NOTE – Imagining into a Story through Writing Jan. 24th 2019

Thinking with Espen's stories of work, alongside his other stories of learning alongside friends and family, as well as my working alongside Espen in studio, I could imagine the following short story, called *Line Drawings*. Because I know from my conversations with Espen, that work spaces have not always felt safe, inclusive, or comfortable for Espen, I hoped that writing this story might allow me to imagine a workspace and friendships that could support and celebrate Espen.

The following short story, titled *Line Drawings* is a work of creative nonfiction. This short story is built upon Espen's stories of his past experiences that he has shared with me. I have imagined into Espen's stories with the hope of bringing you the reader inside Espen's stories once again to imagine alongside Espen and I. Espen approved of this story and enjoyed the story and the characters. Espen's brother and mother have pseudonyms in this story, as does one of Espen's online friends. These pseudonyms will be noted in the footnotes. All other characters are imaginary and entirely fictional. These fictional characters will also be noted in the footnotes.

Third Story: Line Drawings

Espen has just recently turned twenty-one. He's decided to take a gap year or two after school to save money for school and sort out future directions. He's happy about his decision; it feels good to wait – for school anyway – not so much for other things. He knows he will probably go back to school. He's not sure yet, if he'll settle on computer programming, graphic design, or some other digital art field. Perhaps a digital school art school in Vancouver, it's shockingly expensive there though, like insanely expensive, so perhaps, somewhere else. For now, the plan is to work, save money, and enjoy life. It's all good.

Although, he hasn't set a career direction yet, it feels okay. In fact, it feels great. He's taking time to let his life unfold as it should; and he's been waiting a long time to let his life begin to unfold as it should. It's been hard to wait too. In fact, his life really feels on track now for the first time. He thinks of Pinocchio and when he states that now, like Pinocchio, he will finally become a real boy. You see, he's just started taking T¹⁹⁷. He's just recently gotten the go ahead from his psychologist to begin. It's been a long wait, over a year now. For Espen, it has felt like forever. He can't wait to begin his life; it's been on hold for a while now, like a plane circling to land. Now, finally, he can really begin to transition and begin his life as a young man. His body will finally begin to transform into Espen – into who he has always been. Will he grow a moustache – hmm, how would that feel? A goatee? Maybe... Who knows – fun to think about though. So many changes to come...

He knows that since he has started taking hormones, a lot of things are beginning to

¹⁹⁷ Testosterone is often called T for short. For anyone deciding to transition physically, hormone pills or injections will be a major step. For Espen T will help him physical transition into being a trans masculine man.

change. He's finally going through puberty and he's looking forward to catching-up with his younger brother Daniel¹⁹⁸. Daniel, though younger, is taller, has a deeper voice, and has just begun shaving. So, this is going to be interesting – all the changes to come. With puberty, now there will be acne, a possible growth spurt, voice cracking and deepening, facial hair, maybe shaving... It's a lot to take in. He's ready though– it's been such a long wait. And, now, finally T is going to be a real game changer. It's the beginning. It's hard to imagine. Life is going to change in strange and wonderful ways and once he's down with it – accustomed to it, stabilizing physically, then maybe school.... But school and puberty at the same time, well, it could be a bit much. For now, he thinks, take a job, begin to transition, settle in, and when he's ready, maybe, classes. Yes, that feels about right. Oh, he's anxious to get going, don't get me wrong, but also happy and settled where he's at right now. His feet are solidly planted on the ground and he's excited as he begins to imagine his transformation into who he is and who he might become.

Imagination comes naturally to Espen; it's threaded into his very being. He's intelligent and he sees everything. He notices every detail. And he thinks with all those details and wonders. Sometimes these details show up in his artwork, at other times his thoughtfulness becomes visible in his conversations and his actions; you will see as you walk alongside Espen at work in just a few minutes. For Espen, drawing is an essential thinking tool; it's a way of being, a way of thinking, and way of seeing combined. Drawing is a way of knowing, of understanding, and of thinking deeper, later, over time. Art is like a bookmark on a thought. It's a reminder to come back later. It's an invitation to wonder and an opportunity to share. Since he was a small child drawing, he has honed his sight and his ability to envision and imagine. For this reason, he

¹⁹⁸ Daniel is a pseudonym.

always carries a small sketch book, a few pencils, archival markers, a few small brushes, and a watercolor set. Life unfolds and you need to be ready to see it, to capture it for later, to hold it up for your imagination, to dream with it, and to invite others to imagine with you.

He loves this job and being here right now in the food court working. It feels good to be out in the public, interacting with the people, serving them good food. What's more, even though it gets busy for the lunch rush between noon and 1:30 pm, it's pretty laid back. There's time to relax and chat with a variety of folks when you serve them and there's time to people watch too. He loves people watching; it's really the best part of his job. Sometimes he hears bits of conversation as people pass by his kiosk and he imagines himself a writer, their words – fragments of his script. From these shards of conversation, he pieces together a snapshot of their lives – who they are, what they do, their work, their family relationships, their plans for the rest of their day.

Occasionally, when it's slow, he pulls out his pencils, brushes, and the small sketch book that he always carries, and begins to draw people in the food court. It's a game he's played since he was a small child and began drawing characters for online communities, like Neo Pets. You create, draw, share. Online communities were so cool back when they started. There was a lot of excitement and people were nicer and kinder to one another back then. Nothing like now; online communities have taken a hard shift toward meanness. Now, it's harder to find a niche and nice people out there. They're there, but harder to find. But regardless, those communities were the first place, he shared his images and began imagining with others possible characters, plots, and storylines. Now, it's kind of second nature, drawing while thinking about people, wondering about them, and imagining into their lives and stories. Let's bend in now and listen for a

moment, as Espen serves Peter¹⁹⁹, a middle age man who comes to The Sushi Shop²⁰⁰ regularly.

Espen: Hi Sir *(Smiles)*! Nice to see you again! What can I get for you this time? *(Smiles)*

Peter: Hey there! I think that sushi combo, the Sushi Combo # 2.

Espen: To drink?

Peter: Iced tea...

Espen: ...and no ice right?

Peter: That's right! Good memory!

Espen: Thanks! *(Smiles)* You got it! Let me ring it in for you. Its ahhh... \$11.95 after tax.

Peter: Here you go. Keep the change.

Espen: Thanks man! *(Espen drops the extra change into the group tip jar on the counter by the till and then looks to Peter with a big smile).* That #2 will be up for you in just a couple minutes *(Espen looks back at Shannon²⁰¹, his co-worker, who has already jumped into action, getting the tray together.)*

Espen: *(Speaking to Shannon)* Need some help there?

Shannon: Nope *(Looking up at Espen for a moment)* – Thanks Espen! Got it!

Shannon hands the sushi tray to the customer wordlessly, without expression, and returns to the back area to continue chopping vegetables for salads and to sort cutlery and napkins.

¹⁹⁹ Peter is an entirely imagined and fictitious character, any resemblance to any real person, living or deceased is coincidental and unintentional.

²⁰⁰ The Sushi Shop is a pseudonym.

²⁰¹ Shannon is an entirely imagined and fictitious character, any resemblance to any real person, living or deceased is coincidental and unintentional.

Espen pulls out his sketch book and pencils as Peter sits down to eat. Espen doesn't know Peter's name, not yet anyway. The man has come here about four times in the last two weeks. As Espen, begins to draw, he notices more and more details and begins to wonder into these details...

Espen's line drawing captures, the man's slight and tall frame. His line drawing moves rapidly, never leaving the page. The sketch captures the forward lean of the man's body, his slouched shoulders, his light growth of beard, his dark eyes, and dark bags under his eyes. He hasn't been sleeping well, Espen notes. He looks tired. Perhaps something has gone wrong. As Espen draws the man's faded jeans, t-shirt, and work boots, he notices that all the man's clothes are clean, including his boots – no soot, no dirt, no mud. He's dressed in work clothes, but he hasn't been working. At least, not yet, and it's getting on in the day... Perhaps, he's out of work. Maybe he can't find work, or maybe he's been fired. What would unemployment mean for this man's relationships. Would it put a strain on his partner or wife, and possibly if they had one, his family? Maybe he's under some stress or strain, maybe it's work related. Espen wonders as he draws – what kind of work might he do? As Espen draws the man's hands, he notices they are big hands, capable hands, tanned, weather-worn working hands. Perhaps, he is or has been a craftsman or a tradesman – a carpenter, a bricklayer, or a handyman? That could be very satisfying work, the craftsmanship, that precision and attention to detail. Espen notes how much he admires someone who pays attention to details, focuses on the little things, and uses that focus to be creative. He ponders how it would feel to create something people would love, and use, and make memories around – a kitchen table, a set of cabinets, a tiled backsplash, a stone fireplace. How would it feel to create places for memories to be built and stored? Hmmm... he sighs. Yes, there is something beautiful about that kind of work. He imagines it could very satisfying. Perhaps he should consider it; taking up a trade. Maybe he could become a tradesman. It's good,

honest work. He had never thought about it before, but just now drawing this man, he began to consider the trades as a noble profession. It could be very satisfying. Though this man didn't seem happy at least not now, it was hard to say what that source of that unhappiness was – A job? A relationship? Health? It's hard to say, people live such complicated stories. Shannon interrupts abruptly ending Espen's sketching and thoughtful concentration.

Shannon: (*Calling out from the food prep area in back*) Hey Espen! I'm taking my break now!

Espen: Sure! I've got it covered here!

Shannon pulls off her apron and gloves and tosses them near the edge of the food prep counter. Then she retrieves her lunch tray from under the counter, quickly exits the kiosk, and crosses the floor to the food court. Once there, she sits and immediately starts texting on her phone. Ralph²⁰², her boyfriend shows up shortly after Shannon sets down her phone and begins eating. Espen busies himself cleaning and sorting. Waiting for customers. He tries very hard not to watch Shannon and Ralph. Shannon, although bossy, is cool. He likes her – she's nice. She's good to work with, kind, and kind of pretty. Her long dark hair is beautiful. Espen has tried not to notice because Ralph is in the picture – and he's kind of a duffus, but hey... None of his business, right...

Espen looks up from the counter just in times to hear some short, sharp talk exchanged between Shannon and Ralph. An argument? Shannon is sitting back into her chair, arms folded across her chest. Ralph is bending forward across the table toward her, holding Shannon by her

²⁰² Ralph is an entirely imagined and fictitious character, any resemblance to any real person, living or deceased is coincidental and unintentional.

elbows. Ralph shakes his head, looks down at the ground for a few minutes, let's go of Shannon. Then, he stands abruptly and storms out of the food court. Angry. Shannon is still, sitting and crying. Her hands cover her eyes. Espen looks around, it's not busy. He can step out for a minute – while keeping an eye on the kiosk too. He pulls off his apron, looks around, then steps out to talk to Shannon. As Espen approaches Shannon's table, he speaks.

Espen: Hey... *(Pause)* Shannon *(Quietly)*... Can I sit with you...*(Quietly)* Can I join you?

Shannon: Yeah, sure... *(Haltingly... Pause)* I guess...

Espen: You okay?

Shannon: I'm a mess... as you can see. *(Defensive, Pause)* but, I'll be fine... *(She looks up at Espen, through her hair, tears in her eyes)*

Espen: Hey... Well... I'm sorry... Here... Ahhh... *(Pauses, then passes her a napkin)* For your eyes. Sorry... it's all I have...

Shannon: Sorry for what?

Espen: For whatever just happened... And Ahhh... Sorry, for the napkin too. It's all I have...

Shannon: Its Ralph... We broke up... He wants to see other people. I didn't see it coming.

Espen: Ahhh... *(Pause)* I see...*(Pause)*... Well, I'm sorry Shannon... That sucks...

Shannon: Yeah... Well, I'll be okay... I guess...

Espen: You'll will be.... You will be fine... You totally will be...

Shannon: Thanks Esp! I appreciate that...

Espen: Yeah, well... *(Big smile)* It will get better...

Shannon: Espen, thanks I appreciate it, you know...

Espen: Anytime...

Shannon: Espen, can I ask you a favour?

Espen: Ummm... Well... *(Pause)* I guess... What is it?

Shannon: Can I see your sketchbook? I noticed you drawing earlier...

Espen: Yeah *(Pause)*... Ahhh... I guess so... Let me grab it for you... *(Espen gets up and walks quickly to the kiosk to gather his sketchbook. He returns to the table, handing his sketch book over to Shannon as he sits down.)*

Shannon: Wow Espen! *(Pause)* ... These *(Emphasis)* are really good! Like amazing!! You drew all these? I didn't know you could draw like this...

Espen: Yeah, well, it's what I do *(Downplaying)* ... Some of it's just fan art, you know like doing riffs on online characters. Yeah, see that one, it's from *How to Train Your Dragon*...

Shannon: It's Toothless! Great movie! I loved that movie! That is so amazing! Cool! You could totally be doing animation if you wanted to... Why are you working here?

Espen: Saving money for school, hanging out, meeting people... It's all good...

Shannon: Yeah but... You could be doing *(Emphasis-last word)* this... You're really talented!

Espen: Yeah... *(Sighs, smiles, looks down – getting red in the face)* Well *(Pause)* thank you! But, I'm in no hurry...

Shannon: ... *(Looking down at the sketch book - Surprised)*... Hey, isn't this that guy who was just here... Like a few minutes ago – the Sushi Combo #2?

Espen: Yeah... that's him or at least my sketch of him. I love to draw people, you know, when I people watch, when it's slow. I love to draw and think about their lives, wonder who they really are. You know beyond what we see... People are so fascinating...

Shannon: That's really cool! You're a pretty cool guy Espen *(Looking up from the sketch book)*.

Espen: Thanks *(Smiles)*... I try...

Shannon: Okay wait! *(Emphasis, Pause)*... Is that me *(Excited – possibly annoyed)*? Did you

draw me?

Espen: *(Sheepishly)* Ahhhh... Yeah... Sorry. It was a few weeks ago... I was bored. You were there... I did a quick sketch when you were having lunch... Sorry, I didn't mean to intrude. I was just doing a quick sketch...

Shannon: No, ahhh... It's okay... I mean *(Pause)*... You really see me like this?

Espen: Well, yeah... I think that it captures you, your likeness anyway...

Shannon: I look good here *(Pausing... Studying the drawing more carefully in silence)* You see me like this?

Espen: Yeah... Well... *(Pausing)*... Yeah...

Shannon: Hey Espen... *(Pausing)* Thanks! Thanks for this! *(Shannon reaches over and squeezes the top of Espen's hand, which is sitting palm down on the table)* It's nice to see myself this way. It helps, especially right now... so thanks Espen for this! *(Smiles broadly)*

Espen: Anytime... *(Returns the smile)*

Shannon: *(Looking to the kiosk and a small group of customers beginning to form)* Let's get back to work...

Espen: You bet!

So what will happen next for Espen? It's hard to say... I'll leave it to your imagination. One thing is for sure, Espen's life is changing, as he grows into the confident and gentle young man he's becoming. Life is just beginning to unfold for him in new and exciting ways. Will he become a carpenter, an artist, or a designer? Will he get married and have a family? I can't say. I can only begin to imagine all the possible directions and storylines his life will take as he takes up his future self. One thing I can say, is walking alongside Espen for a while has helped me to

imagine new and possible storylines in my life. He has helped me to wonder, to re-imagine possibilities, and see beauty in myself and in of all life's little quiet, hard-to-see, and easy-to-miss moments.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

Dec. 23rd, 2019

Thinking back over our experiences at SNAP printmaking studio, I remember our conversations working on plates and over sketchbooks. It seems to me those times and activities, as well as, the space we shared were foundational to our building trust as a basis of future sharing. These experiences and stories, help me to wonder further about the part shared activities, common interests, and spaces and places play in building relationships. I also start to consider how relationships between individuals begin to weave into the fabrics to build community. I wonder how different generations of SGM individuals engage in and build communities. As I recall our shared stories about places and spaces where you and I have worked within and built communities, I wonder generally what community means, and more specifically, what community means to both of us. I wonder further about generational differences in how you and I have engaged in and built communities; specifically, I wonder if we have built different communities, and if we have built them differently.

As I begin to contemplate what constitutes community, I consider the importance of SGM groups like Queer Social Associations (QSAs) on college and university campuses or Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools to build social networks. While I know GSAs often offer critical support for SGM youth and young adults, I know too from your story (to follow on pages 310-312) that GSAs didn't work for you, because as you noted, they are just a group of people

after all. When I consider group dynamics and how hard it can be to join groups and feel safe and fully included, I recall my experience showing up for Camp fYrefly as the Artist-in-Residence at the Pigeon Lake campground. Initially I felt quite out of place and out of touch with the youth leaders and adult mentors in attendance, as many of them had previously forged deep relationships over years of working together. As time went by I found my place and sense of safety and security amongst a few adult mentors and several youth and young adult artists. It was funny, because even though fYrefly was created to be a pop-up SGM community, built with everyone working to create safe spaces to support SGM youth, the creation of safety for everyone wasn't automatic; it didn't just happen through good intentions or by providing space. It happened when intentions of being inclusive met actions to help everyone feel included. It took time and everyone working together to make it happen. While of course some people will never be fast friends, I think what ultimately made Camp feel welcoming for me was the unconditional positive regard offered by some, time spent together through shared activities, and my ability to contribute to the group. Importantly though, I think it's safe to say, community is not automatic; kinship cannot be assumed, any more than someone's feeling of safety or sense of being fully included can be assumed. Your words Espen, come forward for me here – “We are all so unique”. Being unique, I think we need to acknowledge that creating and building SGM communities needs methods as diverse, complex, and multi-dimensional as the multiplicity of identities, expectations, and needs of these communities seek to serve.

As I wonder what part shared places and spaces, like SNAP community studio, play in building relationships and communities, I recall bell hooks (2003) writing about her beloved community. hooks (2003) helps me consider community as a physical place as well as an intangible space of refuge and resistance. Her writing (2003) helps me think about the blind-

spots we all carry, regarding each other's experiences, and how these get in the way of mutual understanding. hooks (2003) stated we begin to heal those blind-spots, when we live and learn alongside those we don't know, and those who hold different lived experiences from our own. My mind travels back to our SNAP studio times, where we worked alongside each other, sharing stories, and making art. I am beginning to see how our time at SNAP, and before that at fYrefly, provided places and spaces where bonds of friendship and community began to form.

Additionally, your stories about building and engaging in online and virtual communities helps me consider what it might mean for community members who have no physical place to meet. Further, I wonder how virtual communities serve as a mechanism of social support for yourself, and other SGM young adults, as you and other SGM young adults navigate heteronormative structures and systems that often silence SGM stories and create barriers to societal participation. I too wonder how relationships built in these virtual communities allow you and other SGM young adults to transform and/or transition through multiple identities, while negotiating complex intersectional challenges and/or systemic and institutional barriers (e.g., lack of SGM inclusive health system supports and resources). I also wonder about the implications for agency in virtual communities, in terms of finding voice and being creative with and within multiple and/or transitioning identities while creating and holding open virtual, imagined, and possible spaces, especially when physical spaces may be difficult to navigate or closed altogether to participation. Espen, your words help me think about relationships between individuals as the glue that forms community bonds and holds them together.

Research ConversationsMay 3rd 2018

Michelle: So, tell me about Camp fYrefly, you really enjoyed those times – you were there twice?

Espen: Yes.

Michelle: I met you at the first one. Which was great! And yeah, tell me about that. Like how was fYrefly for you?

Espen: It was awesome.

Michelle: What in particular did you like?

Espen: Like, I feel like I don't know, the one LGBTQ friend in the group isn't a real thing because I was the first one to come out in my group of friends and then slowly one by one...

Michelle: Oh, really? Oh cool!

Espen: Everybody started coming out, so like I didn't have very many friends who were out and it was just awesome to be surrounded by people who had all these different stories and all these different.... Again, it's that information sharing that you don't get.

Michelle: Yes.

Espen: Because it's not like other minorities where you can pass down things from generation to generation.

Michelle: Right, yes, those intergenerational spaces don't necessarily exist, right? I mean, those spaces of conversation aren't really there, right? So fYrefly was good and so you made some friends there?

Espen: Um, I did make friends. I didn't stay in contact with them very much, though. Which was okay for me, because it was – I felt like a place where you could go and you could try

on a bunch of different identities and see what fits and not be afraid of who's going to see you or having to maintain something you're not.

Michelle: It's making me think of what's in Las Vegas stays... (laughs)

Espen: What's in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas. What happens in fYrefly stays in fYrefly.

Michelle: Just made me think of that. I don't know that you were meaning that... but that's cool. Um yeah, it was fun.

Espen: Yeah, it was fun.

Michelle: I remember you in the white sunglasses and I didn't recognize you and you had a big smile on your face, and I was like oh! I didn't recognize you!

Espen: (laughs) That was so much fun! That was funny.

Michelle: But yeah, I remember that. You got a real kick out of that.

Espen: Yeah! (pause)

Michelle: So, you went to Camp fYrefly twice. What was different about the second time? Was it similar or even better...?

Espen: The second time, I was more secure in my identity, like I was sure now, that yeah, I am a trans man and this is how I identify and I could go there and I could – less of a self-exploration thing, it was more of a – okay, I want to see how other people are dealing with these problems and provide support for them, too, as well, like sort of give and take. It was just a completely different experience to be honest, but... yes, just as important, if not more.

Michelle: Yeah. Well, it sounds like you had some specific questions, too, or things that you were thinking about?

Espen: Yeah, a lot of things, yeah.

Michelle: So, you got to be able to kind of find out about those particular things, too? So that's pretty cool. Where the first time is more the – it's kind of a try-on sort of thing. See how it fits, yeah. So, let's see... What else?

Espen: Outside of fYrefly – I don't know, like I feel ...it was always kind of hard for me to get involved with structured LGBTQ sort of meeting things. I remember throughout school I just – I went to the GSA²⁰³ once, maybe twice, I was nervous, didn't like the people there.... Didn't go back, you know.

Michelle: Because it's all about the people really...

Espen: Yeah. Exactly. Like when it comes down to it, it's still just a group of people

²⁰³ Field Note January 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, thank you for helping me think about Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) and Queer Social Associations (QSAs), and SGM folks engaging in social groups more generally. I remember finding Gays and Lesbian on Campus (GALOC), in my early twenties, soon after I had come out. I went to the meetings and social events, and a small group of us socialized on and off campus. We went to nightclubs and held awareness activities on Campus. GALOC was fun. It was a good experience for me. In retrospect, I kind of lucked out because they were a great group of people, and I found it easy to be with them, and as you said, no matter the group, feeling comfortable in groups, always comes down to people. These thoughts help think about SGM individuals and group in public spaces more broadly; as I begin to consider safety and constantly negotiating safe public spaces, I recall an afternoon at SNAP, when that safety felt precarious. Letting my mind skip back, I recall, one afternoon at SNAP studio, when an older renter became quite gruff with us for accidentally spreading some ink into his inking space. I remember thinking, if I weren't here and I couldn't diffuse this situation with this fellow through the administrator, his hostile attitude might have been all it took to block Max, Adebayo, and yourself from returning to print at SNAP. Safety is such an important thing and part of my being at SNAP was to support you, Max, and Adebayo and help you to be in, take up, and occupy that public community space. I remember feeling very protective of you three when this happened; I also recall feeling frustrated with the older renter for not being more generous in his actions. Some folks occupy space without a thought; for others taking up space is harder.

meeting. And you know, the teachers are supportive, but I didn't really connect with any of them, you know.

Michelle: Yes.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

December 17th 2019

Reading your words again just now, I think of the printmaking workshops at SNAP that happened on the heels of fYrefly in 2016. I had created those workshops with the hope that those SNAP workshops for LGBTIQ+ youth and allies might extend the friendships that were beginning to form in Camp beyond the three days of Camp. So, it was interesting for me to hear that maybe extending those friendships beyond Camp wasn't that important to you. I wasn't thinking that you might be going to Camp to try on different identities without the pressure of having to maintain and carry those identities forward. It made so much sense when you said that. It just hadn't occurred to me, but it makes perfect sense. What happens at fYrefly stays in fYrefly ☺ It so interesting to me that I created those workshops with a goal, that helped me organize the project... but when folks participate, they make it their own. I love that!

Also, it's interesting when you spoke about returning to fYrefly and how that served a different and possibly even more important purpose for you because you were at a different place in your journey and more secure in your identity as a trans man. It sounds like you could get your specific questions answered, while also providing support to others who were at different places in their journey or grappling with similar issues.

Espen, I love hearing about the positive effects of Camp fYrefly in your life and in your process of trans identity formation. I am amazed how Camp Fyrefly brings a diverse group of

LGBTIQ+ youth, young adults team leaders, adult mentors, and support service teams together for a weekend to create a pop-up community. It's amazing to me that this short-term resource can have such long-term positive effects for you and probably for many who participate in Camp. Camp is like a musical cord that continues to resonate in the lives of those who have attended, but this cord seems to resonate differently for everyone; Camp seems to serve purposes as diverse and unique as the individuals in the community it serves.

Thank you Espen for helping me think about GSAs too. GSAs aren't helpful to everyone because they are just a group of people after all; and kinship isn't automatic. Your words help me wonder what part intergenerational conversations might play within LGBTIQ+ groups.

PART 3: ARTMAKING AS SPACE-MAKING FOR MENTAL HEALTH DIALOGUE

Beginning to Think with Mental Health Stories – Dialogue 1: Inhabiting Spaces and Places



204

²⁰⁴ Image: 5.44. This image I created as a gift to Espen, is titled, *Imagined Spaces: Figures and Spaces Blend*. It is a Linocut print on paper created by Michelle Lavoie April 29th, 2019 for Espen. I was thinking with Espen's stories of finding or not finding ease within spaces. I created an imagined space, a room with the suggestion of floors, walls, and windows, but the perspective is intentionally inaccurate. I wanted this space to feel not quite real for the viewer. The perspective, which usually gives the viewer an impression of depth within a realistic image, has been intentionally skewed through my knowledge and technical perspective. Two abstract figures also occupy space in

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

April 29th, 2019

When I decided to create images for you, I was trying to demonstrate, in image form, how creative and imaginative I think you are as you navigate spaces and places. In the two linocut prints (Image 5.44 & Image 5.55), I originally created for you, I thought of figures navigating imagined spaces, spaces that felt both real and imagined. Relationships between figures and spaces change within the images and over the course of this series of artwork because these interactions and shifts are the focus of this series of artworks.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: FIELD NOTE – More Art Making as Space Making

October 13th, 2019

The following series of images were created as postcards to Espen. I have created these images to both be in relation to Espen and his stories and to think with Espen's stories through images. Thinking with and through images allows me to consider tacit, and sometimes easily missed aspects of being in relation to Espen, as he often worked in solitary ways at a computer or cutting a plate. I also wrote text in response to my images and the image making process, to provide insight into both my image making process and my response and insights into Espen's stories that occurred as I reflected on the images.

The previous linocut image is one of two linocut prints I created for Espen to show him my learning alongside him. In the image, I used perspective to give the building and walls a

the drawing; one is sitting and the other is standing, perhaps running from the room. One figure holds the other figures foot, stopping them from leaving the space.

sense of reality and solidity, but I also skewed the perspective to give a sense of unreality to the scene. In the image, I placed indications of walls, windows, a floor, and a ceiling, but the space itself is not exactly demarcated and obvious. I used the same style of mark-making and cutting in the background space and in the figures which occupy the space, in order that perhaps the spaces and the figures might blend together – or at least not be too clearly defined. I place two figures in the space and in relation to each other in the space. These two figures possibly could illustrate one figure in motion or two figures in relation. One figure is sitting tentatively in the space and the other figure looks to be abruptly leaving the space. The sitting figure holds the foot of the other figure who seems to be leaving, as if to keep them from exiting the space too quickly.

Thinking about this image (Image 5.44) over time and in relation to Espen, I think that there is something entirely too solid in the image. I think about Espen who is changing so quickly. There is something about this print and the lino process that seems too fixed and too solid when I think of Espen, who seems to be always in motion. Therefore, I turn to Photoshop to help me think with Espen's stories. Because Espen, and I both work with digital graphic processes, this medium seems appropriate to think with Espen's stories²⁰⁵. I begin by taking a photograph of the print that I gave to Espen, then I take this photograph into Photoshop to manipulate and morph it.

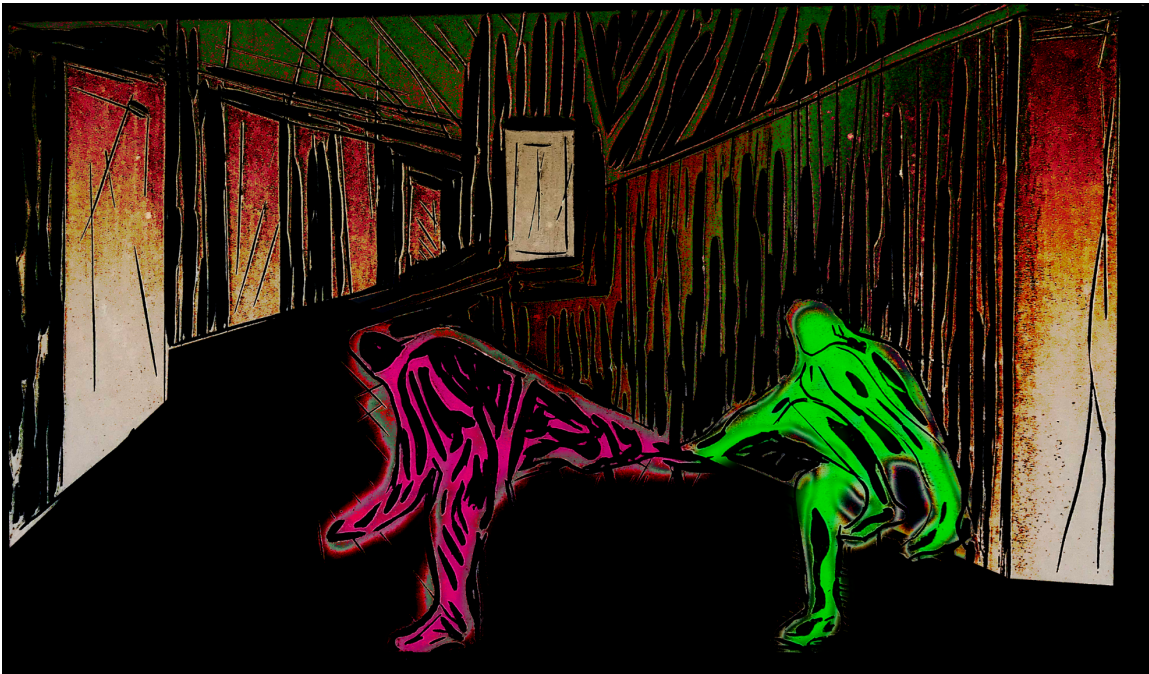
²⁰⁵ Photoshop is an amazing digital art and design program that allows artists to edit and change an image endlessly. When I think of Espen's stories about transition, and the fact he is changing so much right now, Photoshop's endless possibilities for transitioning images seems like the perfect medium, the perfect form, to reflect multiple transitions over time and the complexity of Espen's stories.



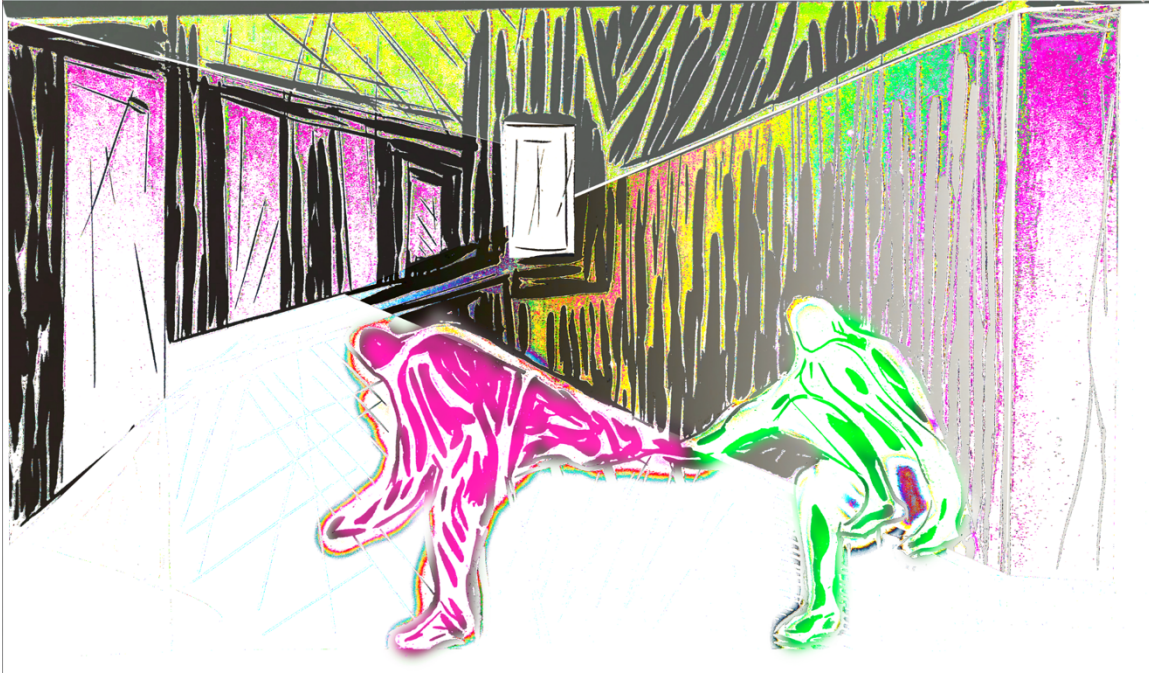
²⁰⁶ Image: 5.45. Field Note October 20th, 2019: Dear Espen, because linocut printed images seemed almost too solid and too fixed to help me think of your experiences of occupying spaces and places, I turned to Photoshop, to help me visualize and imagine relationships between spaces and figures as shifting and fluid. I created the following series of images to make the figures more distinct in the space...



207



²⁰⁷ Image: 5.46 (top) & 5.47 (bottom) ... or to make the mark-making more distinct...



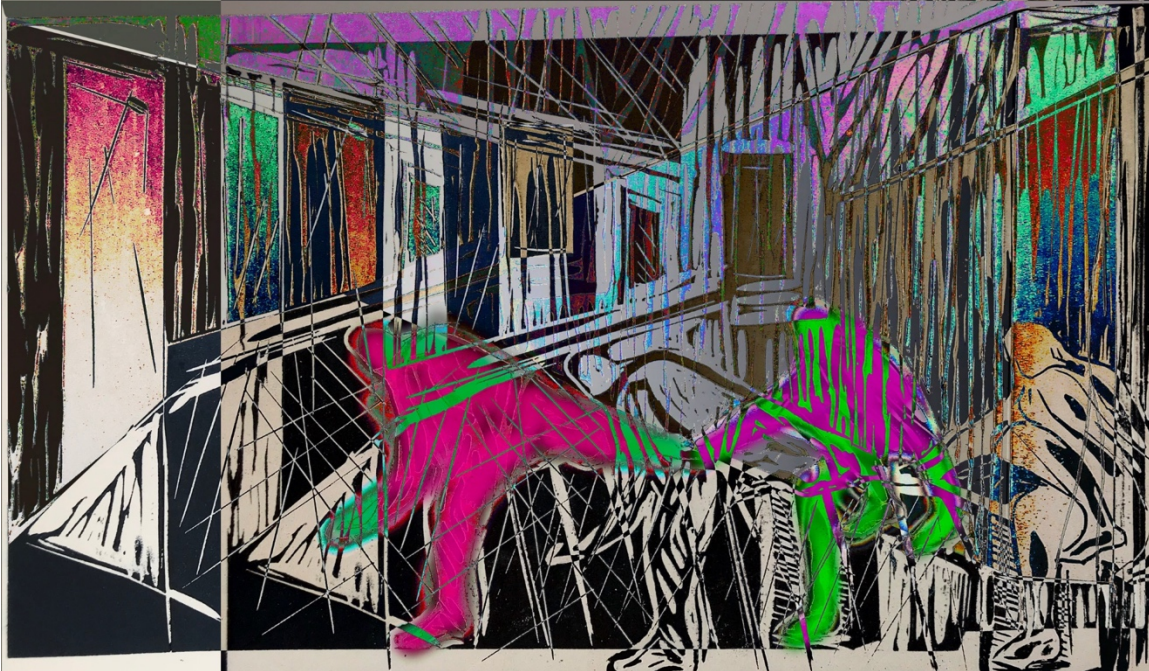
208



²⁰⁸ Image: 5.48 (top) & 5.49 (bottom)...or to make the background spaces and context more distinct...



²⁰⁹ Image: 5.50. Field Note January 28th, 2019: Dear Espen, working in a series of images with minor alterations helped me demonstrate the passage of time and your being in process and transitioning over time. When I shift Photoshop layers, the figures and the spaces take on a sense of dynamic interaction, with the space shifting and figures possibly exiting the picture frame. You commented, when we met last, how much you loved these final more abstract images. You stated that you loved some figures becoming more solid as others dissolved. You also stated that you loved the patterns that form in the overlapping and shifting planes. I agree, visually these images are so much more compelling than the original black and white linocut image. These images also align more closely with your stories.



210

²¹⁰ Image: 5.51 (top) & 5.52 (bottom). In the final two images the space and figures dissolve into complex and beautiful patterns. New mark-making and expression emerges as the figures and spaces begin to dissolve into each other. In the final image the figure (in the centre) re-emerges within new, seemingly emergent, patterns.



211

²¹¹ Image: 5.53 (top) & 5.54 (bottom). Field Note January 28th, 2019: Dear Espen, I was thrilled when you said that these images (Image 5.53-5.54) are your favorite images now. I think they are my favorites as well. You also stated that you liked these digital prints better than the original linocut print (Image: 5.44). In our conversation on

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

December 22nd, 2019

Sometimes you seem to tentatively occupy space, whether you are working in studio, or sitting in a café having coffee. I can't say that I understood what I was observing until you shared many more stories with me, stories that would come later (May 10th and December 19th, 2019) as we sat in the café and you spoke at length about some mental health challenges that you continue to navigate. In retrospect, these images come alongside those stories in interesting and informative ways.

I think when I created this series of images (Image 5.44-5.44), I only knew that sometimes ADHD caused you some challenges in concentrating, but I didn't understand the depth and sometimes severity of your perceptual challenges when I created these images in relation to your stories. In this series, I was thinking of you as being both the figure sitting tentatively and the figure leaving the space. I have been wondering how you navigate and negotiate spaces and places. I wondered if relationships forefront if and how you decide to interact within a space. I wondered if little indistinguishable bits of information, like floating bits of conversation hanging in the air in studio, catch and hold your attention. Or is it the physical space itself, that becomes the primary focus to how you decide to be in the space and if you decide to be that space or leave it²¹². I wonder also if there are times when perceptual and visual

December 19th, 2019, you described liking the figures disappearing and reappearing in the centre, while windows look to open spaces to new worlds.

²¹² Field Note February 11th, 2020: Dear Espen, I loved our discussion over this work on December 19th, 2019. You pointed out the windows, as a place where the figures might escape or transition into another world. As we spoke you said that you loved the last ones particularly, where walls, windows, and figures dissolve into abstract patterns.

challenges come to the fore and become the pivot point around which you navigate the space and how you interact in that space.

Dear Espen

May 12th, 2019

I remember our talk at the Café after visiting the art gallery. I remember how you spoke about your ways of seeing and understanding, which meant sometimes seeing with extreme focus and clarity and sometimes seeing by making sense of jumbled information²¹³. When we spoke at the café, we talked about not only the challenges but also about the opportunities of being able to see and walk within new emergent patterns. You spoke about neurodiversity and how that often meant, literally and figuratively, seeing differently than others. And when I asked how you navigate the challenges when people did not understand what you were communicating, you spoke again about art as a way to stick a pin in an idea and make the idea solid so that you could return and with others to begin a conversation around a piece of art. I remember your words, you said, “you know what – if you really want to hold onto a moment, that’s what art is for; art does that. Maybe that’s why I’m so interested in art” (Espen, personal communication, May 10th,

You said that in these patterns you could still make out figures moving and morphing as they travel through space and transform with and within it.

²¹³ On several occasions Espen has described perceptual challenges that he has experienced from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He has also described hallucinations that he has experienced because of a calcium channel mutation. At our last meeting on December 22nd, 2019, Espen stated that he has had more hallucinations recently, and his doctors are considering a possible diagnosis of psychosis. It has been an amazing journey alongside Espen, I have witnessed Espen’s courage and resilience as he navigates and finds language and strategies to work around and through these sometimes daunting physical and psychological health challenges.

2019).

To think with your stories, I returned to that first print I created for you and began to lift and shift layers of information to give a clarity to some aspects of the image and disassemble other aspects of the image (spaces, forms, and figures). Interestingly, these images, because I shifted of layers and spaces, begin to create new patterns which are both more complex, than the original image, aesthetically and, potentially, conceptually as well. I created the previous ten images thinking with your stories in these ways²¹⁴.

²¹⁴ Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, I remember how thrilled you were to take this work in progress home with you to share with your friends and family. When we were reviewing this work, I was struck by the many times you said: “*I thought I said that*” (Espen, personal conversation, December 19th, 2019), and by your joy at seeing your artwork in your account. I had hoped this work would be a memory signpost to celebrate this research, our artmaking and our conversations together. But I did not realize, when we started, and as we now finish this work, how important this work would be to you as touchstone of memory. I was surprised and happy to see how much it meant to you to see your words, your stories, and your artwork in this research. I was delighted that you wanted to share this work immediately with all your friends.

Continuing to Think with Mental Health Stories – Dialogue 2: Playful Approaches



215

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

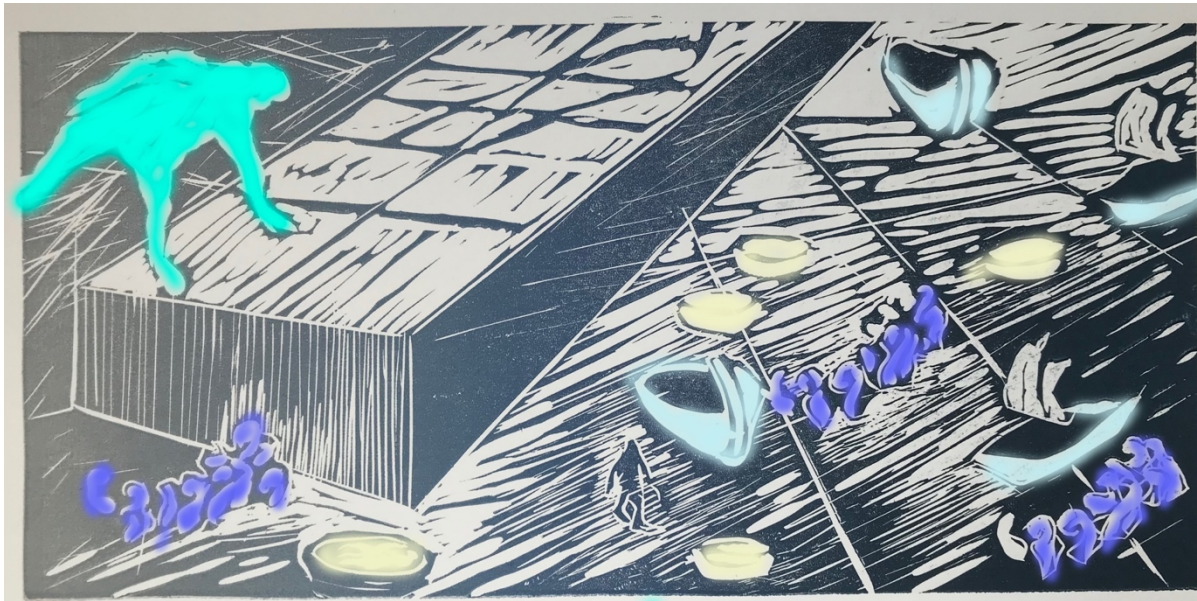
Dear Espen,

October 20th, 2019

When I return to look at the second linocut print (Image 5.55) that I made for you, I try to remember why I created this composition as I did. I remember thinking about how creative and playful you are as you negotiate places and spaces. With your playfulness in mind, I created first the floor space as a checker or chess board and I repeated images, boats, pots, and wave forms like chess pieces perhaps in process of play. I also played with scale of two figures within this

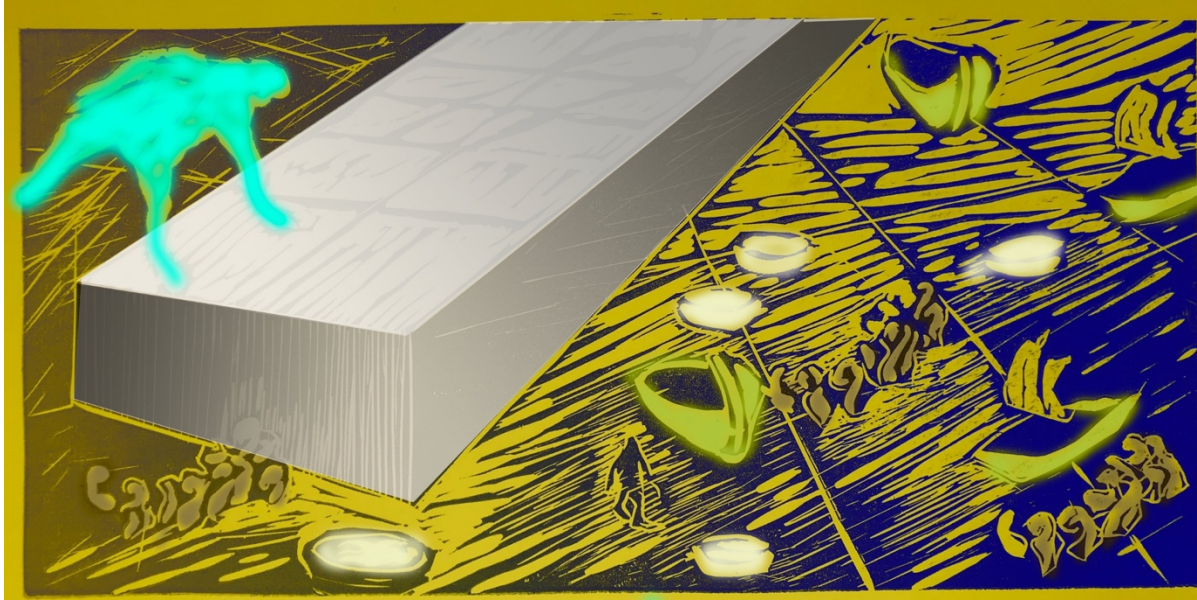
²¹⁵ Image: 5.55. Field Note October 20th, 2019: Dear Espen, when, I showed you this linocut print in studio, I described how I built the image through research; how I found the wave and the boat forms, in an ancient Assyrian drawing depicting the Epic of Gilgamesh, an ancient story of a great flood that enveloped the Earth; a story which it is said predates Noah's ark. We talked about research in art and building compositions from research. You seemed fascinated by these ancient forms reimagined in this new composition.

image. I placed a figure leaning into the space of the image and another figure, smaller, walking across the chess/ checker board space. Again, as in the first print, this is a mono-colour lino print, so spaces, forms and figure blend together in colour while the lighting of forms demarcates figures, forms, and spaces.

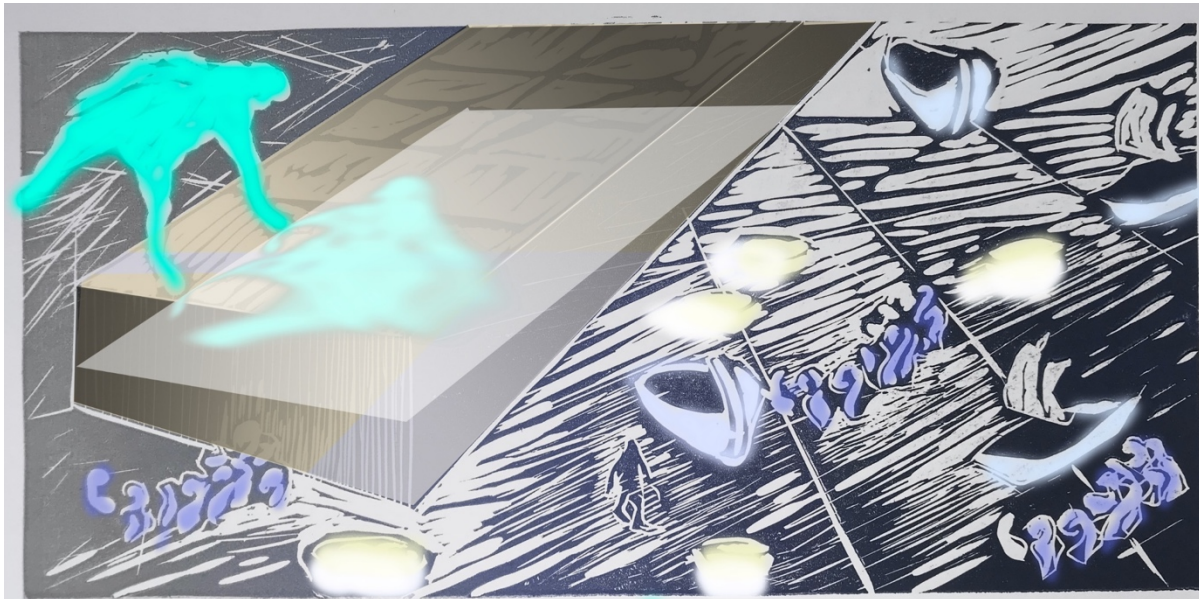


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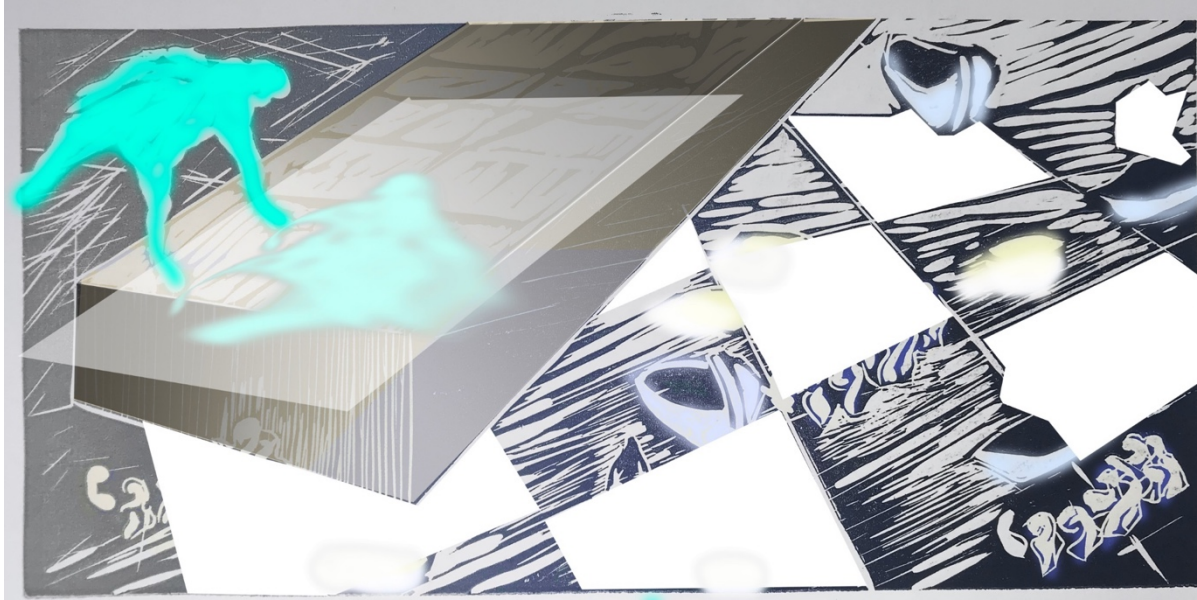
²¹⁶ Image: 5.56. This image depicts a figure leaning into a space, a small figure, boats, wave forms, a chessboard, ponds or tokens, and an imagined form sitting in the space. I brighten a few objects first: boats, wave forms, bowls and a figure.



217

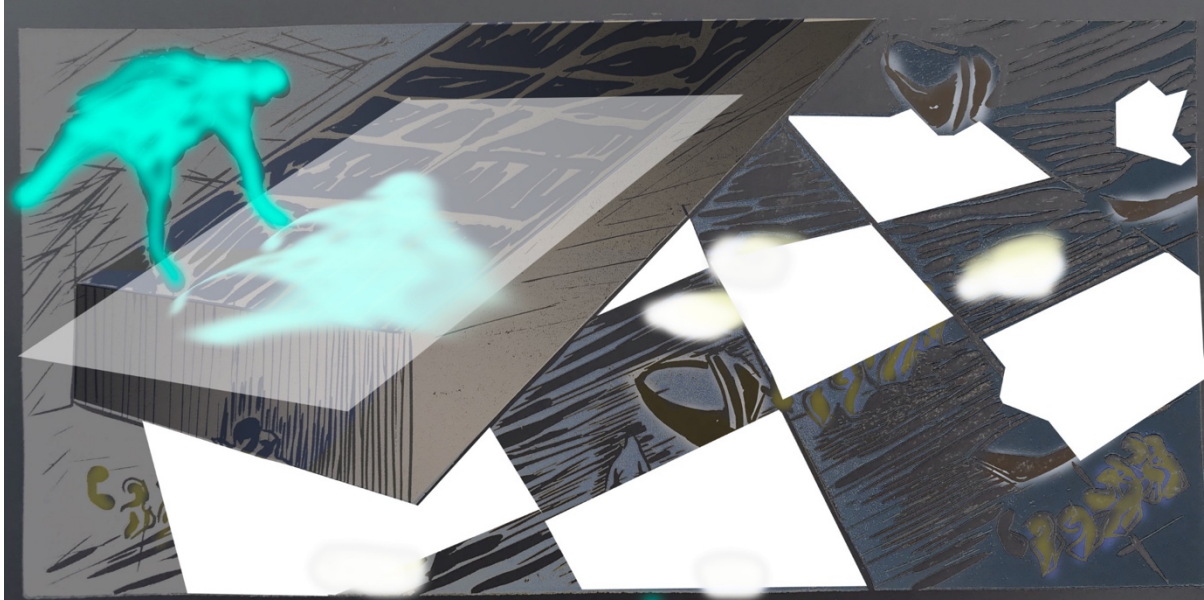


²¹⁷ Images: 5.57 (top) & 5.58 (bottom). Field Note October 20th, 2019: Dear Espen, in these colourful abstract images, I brought attention to individual elements of the picture. I remember you speaking about how you focus to see details. I tried to make certain elements of the image almost glow or stand out through vibrant colour and sharp delineation of form. The figure leaning in to the picture glows bright pale blue and becomes the focus of the image.



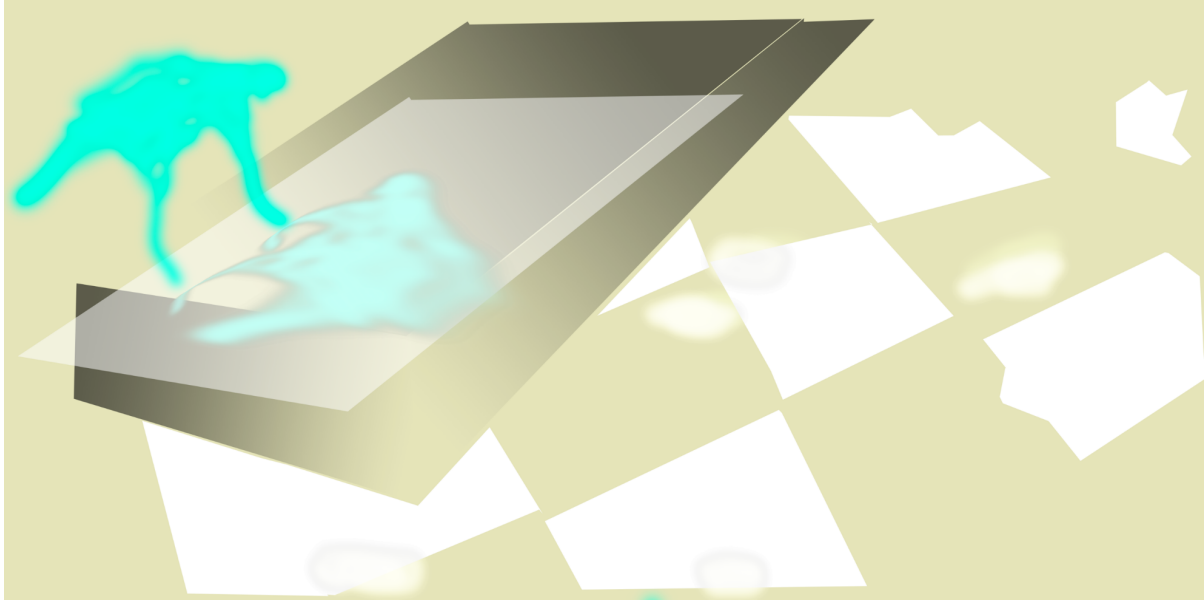
218

²¹⁸ Image: 5.59. In the next checkerboard images, I began to shift layers to de-solidify some forms and create new relationships between forms and figures. As I begin to define the checkerboard with flat colours, the form begins to float in the spaces in a new way, gravity and those rules or reality in spaces and places seem to fall away. I give the figure a shadow and disconnect planes from forms (like the top of the box form from the box). The checkerboard pattern flattens the space, covers objects, and defines relationships between forms and figures in the space. I wanted to highlight the checkerboard pattern to focus on play and playfulness. I also knew that this pattern would nullify some spaces and objects while making others prominent. For example, the white checkerboard sits beneath the box like form (on the left) and makes the box form and figure standing on top more noticeable.

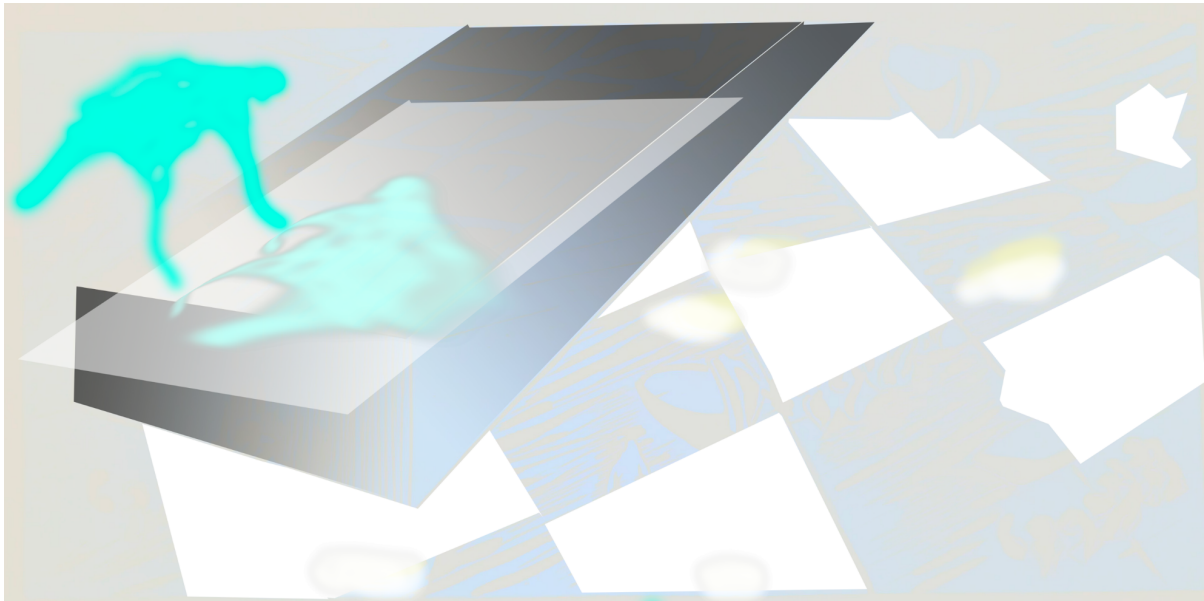


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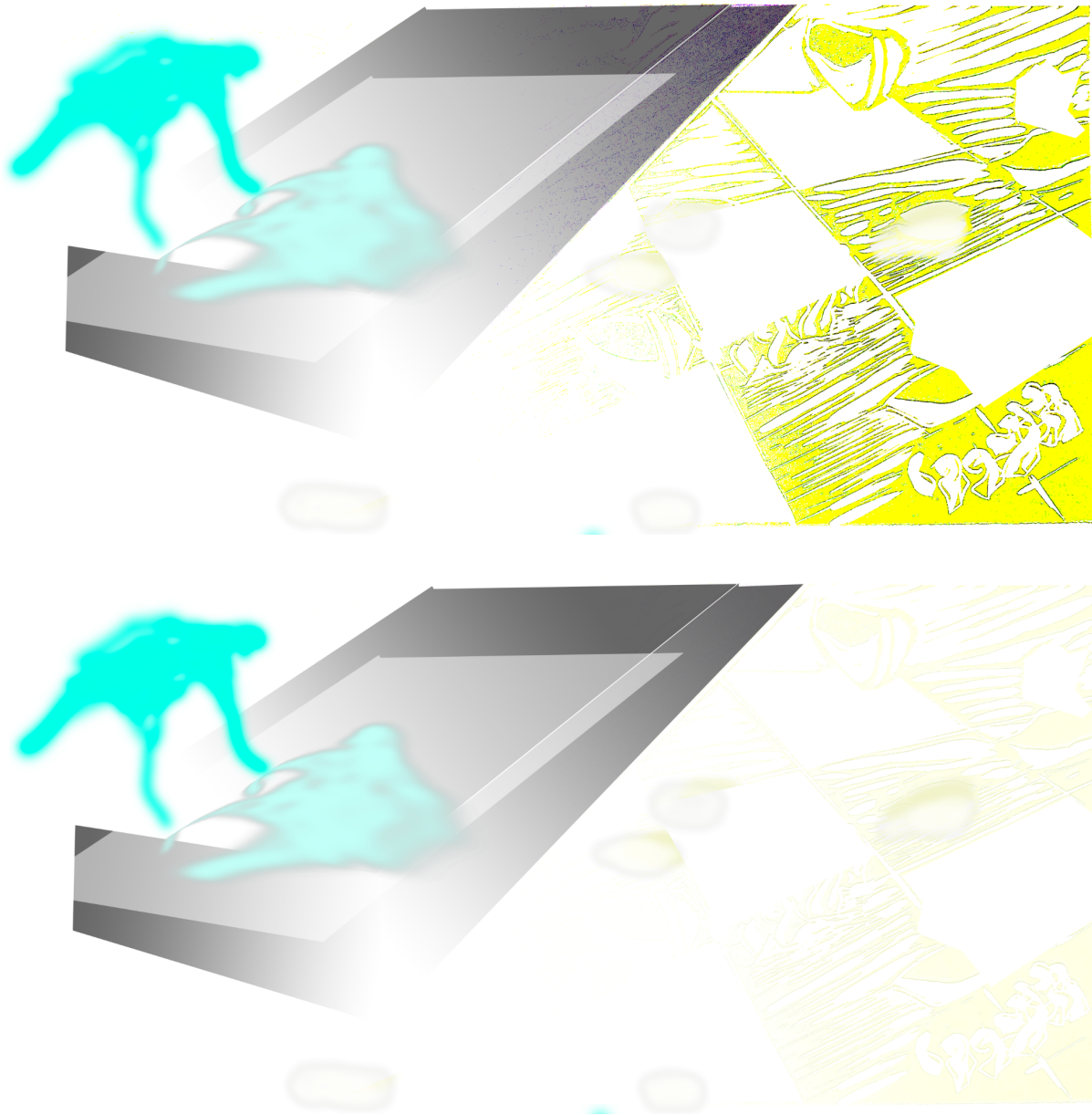
²¹⁹ Image: 5.60. A shadow is an interesting metaphor for Espen's presence in or absence from studio. When Espen couldn't make it into studio I often worried. I worried more over time as I came to know more about the complexity of Espen's physical and mental health challenges. For me, the shadow of worry around Espen's well-being always occupied the physical space of SNAP even while other printmaking activities bustled in that space. The shadow, sitting and reflecting on a disconnected, floating horizontal plane, probably contains further insights, but these are not yet clear to my vision.



220

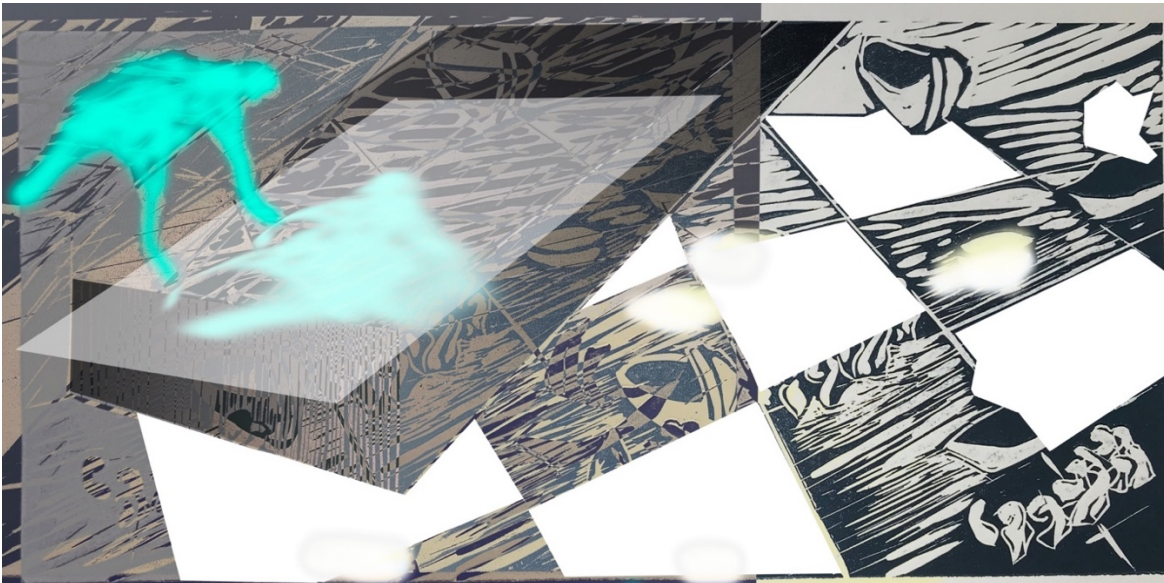
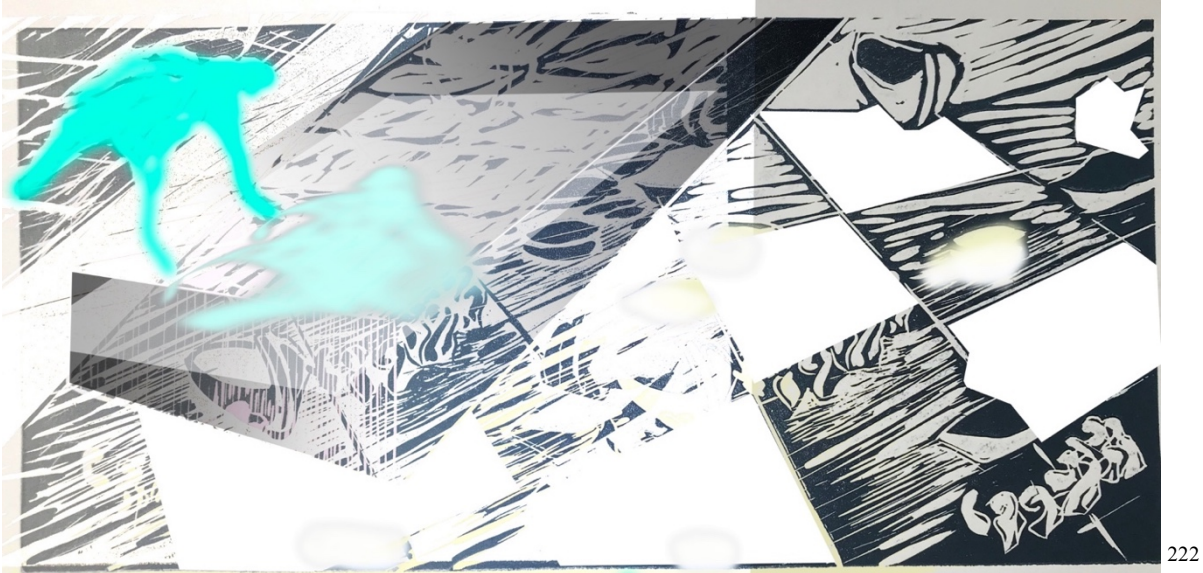


²²⁰ Images: 5.61 (top) & 5.62 (bottom). Next, I deleted parts of the background in some of the images to see what happens when spaces are flattened out and details fall away. Only the figure, the shadow on a reflected plane, the indication of a form and a flattened space remain. This image and the following three images empty the picture of detail.

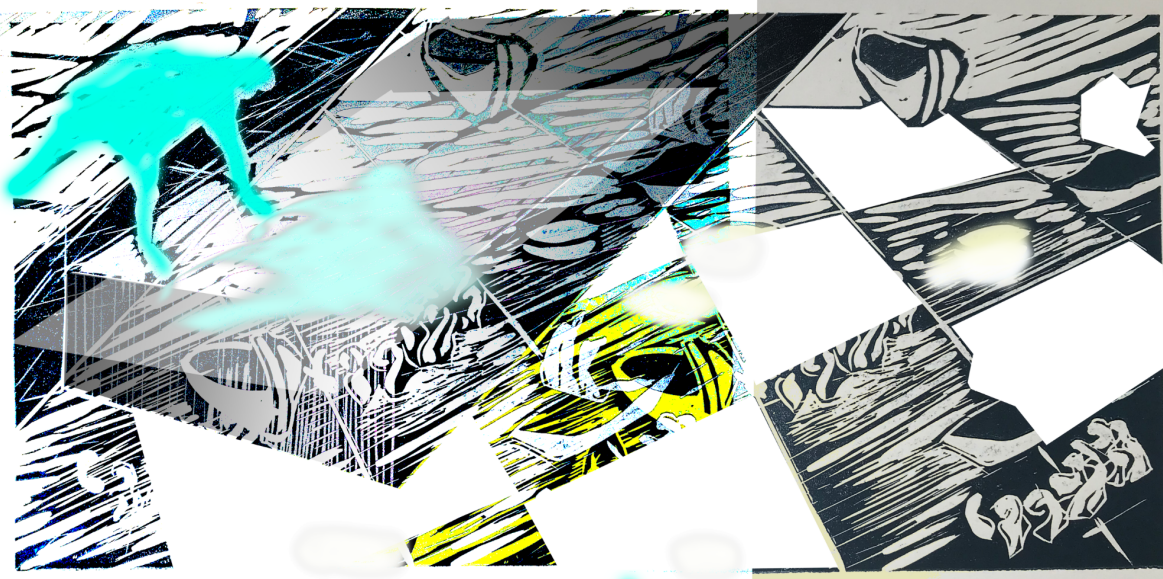


221

²²¹ Images: 5.63 (top) & 5.64 (bottom). This last emptied image I find particularly poignant: the figure, the shadow, and little else – only enough to indicate where other objects might have been. This image feels like absence.

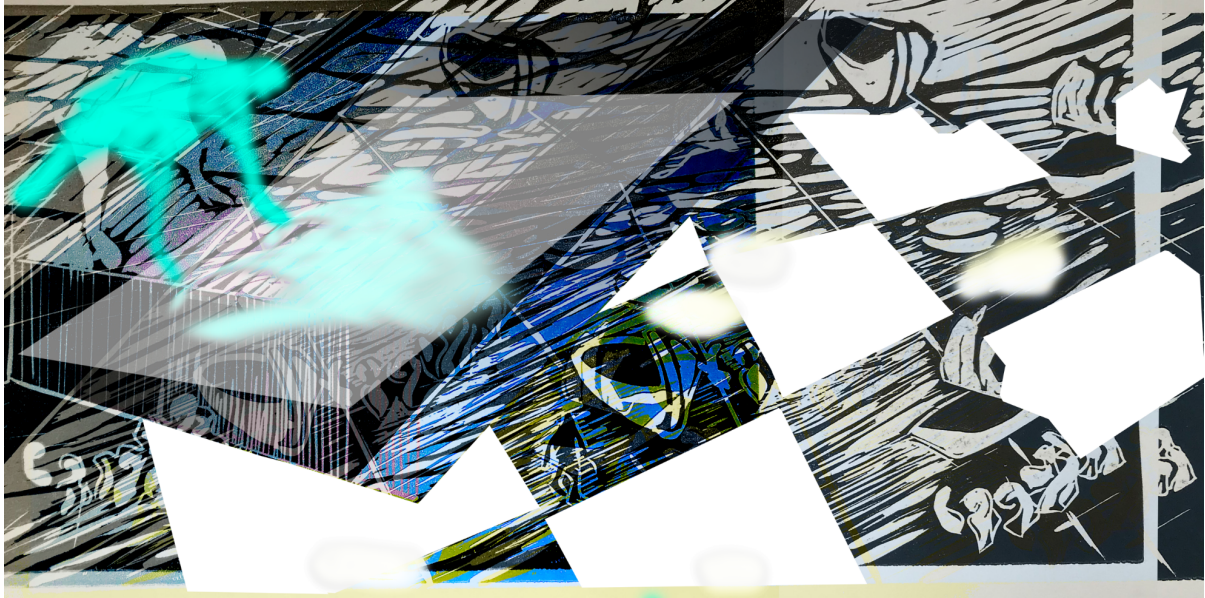


²²² Images: 5.65 (top) & 5.66 (bottom). Then I began to shift layers to see what new patterns, forms, and figures might emerge. The picture plane fills with detail and new emergent patterns again form.

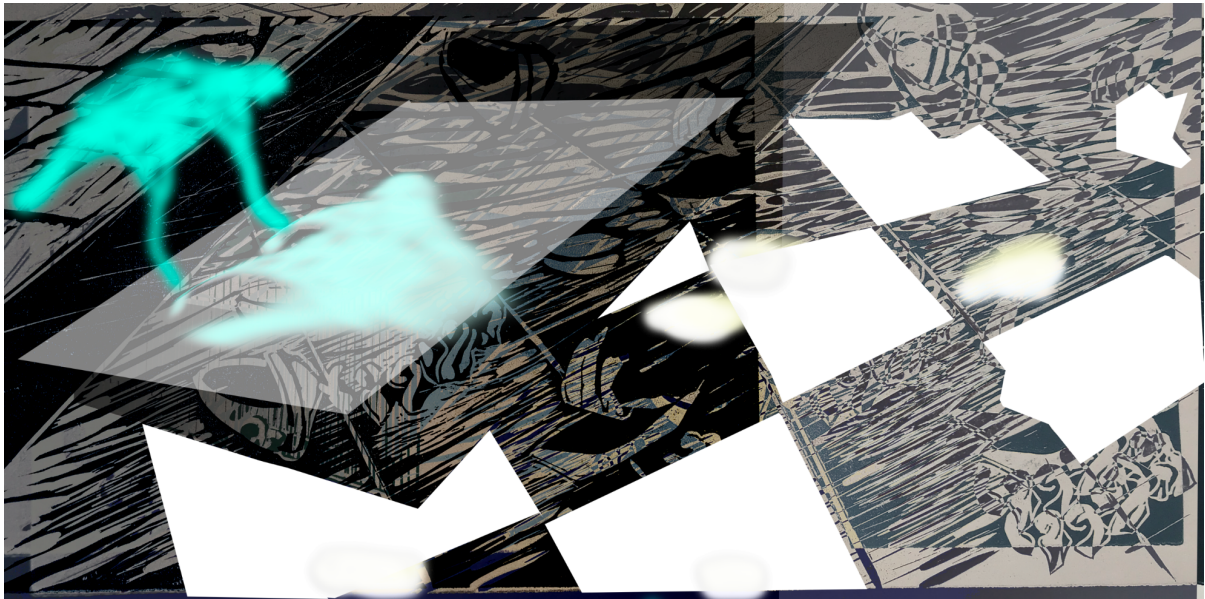


223

²²³ Images: 5.67. Pattern and forms re-emerge. The repetition of forms, such as the boat, creates structure, and suggests meaning, even though there may be none. Besides, the intention, the meaning I intend, may not be as important as the stories and meanings you bring alongside. My letting go of trying to find meaning, may allow meanings to emerge regardless. In artmaking, there is always the question when to stop or when is the image finished, because I recognize that others may look and find something I did not intend as the artist, something that speaks powerfully to them. To keep and show artworks that are liminal, becoming, unfinished, like these, is a chance to communicate, to let the artworks communicate something to someone, to whom I do not, and will likely never, know. Artwork holds these spaces of liminality open.



224

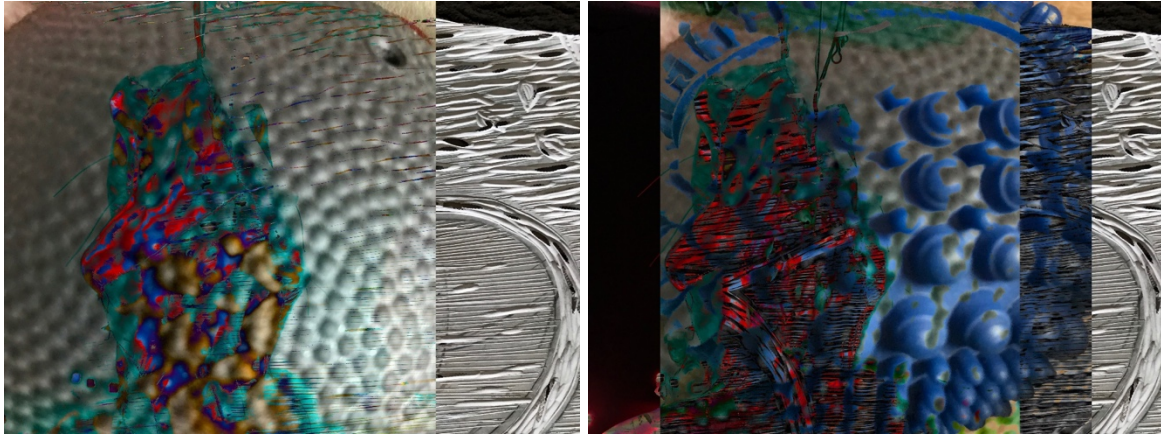


225

²²⁴ Images: 5.68 (top) & 5.69 (bottom). Let's think together: boats – tools for the journey; waves – difficulties encountered, water, life; checkerboard – a game, remaining playful; box – container a safe place; figure on top of the box, leaning into the picture – agency, bird's eye view, above it, playing, taking action, perhaps in charge; the shadow – reflection of thought and/or action, good/bad both/neither; pattern – complexity, movement, time, in progress; shifting planes – uncertainty, unfinished...

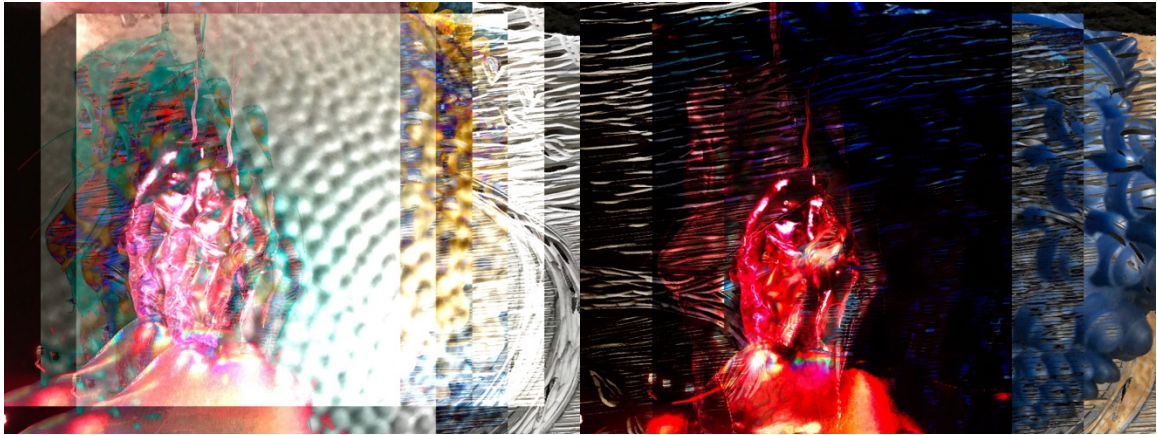
²²⁵ Beautiful. Messy. Complex.

Trying to Feel Alongside Espen's Mental Health Stories – Dialogue 3: Tactile Expressions



226

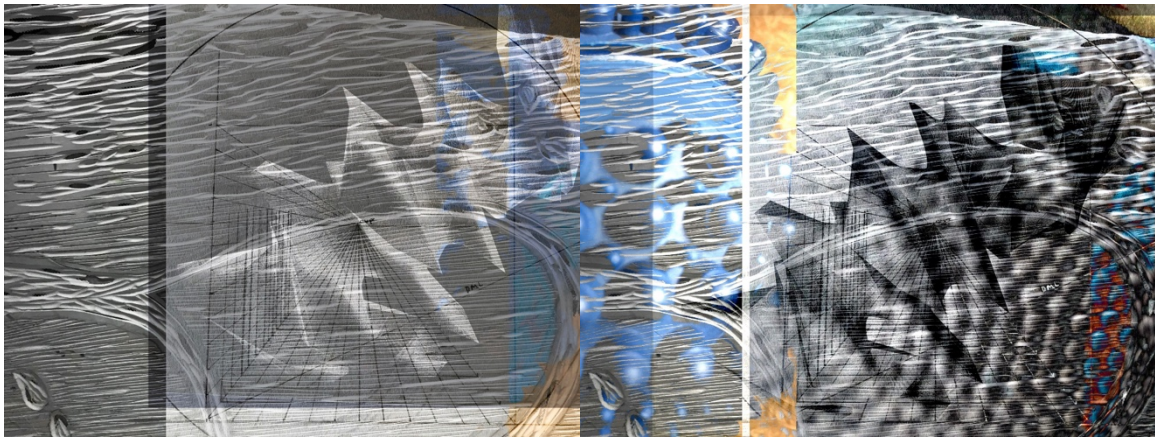
²²⁶ Image: 5.70. Field Note January 29th, 2020: Dear Espen, I was delighted with your enthusiasm for these artworks. After I created these artworks, I was initially concerned that you might not resonate with them, because you had spoken earlier that you often find it difficult to connect with abstract artworks. I created this series, layering colour, form, and mark-marking to create a sense of tactility within each image. As well as attempting to build a sense of tactility within each image, I placed images in diptychs to create a sense of continuity and shifts across time. Also, where possible, I placed more than one image on a page to create relationships and showcase continuities and discontinuities between images. In this and other series of artwork, I also often placed more than one image on a page, to allow images to be read together. Proximity creates reading. Looking at the top and bottom image together, I sense time has passed, because the lighting and viewpoints have shifted on similar objects and marks within and between images.



²²⁷ Images: 5.71 Field Note October 20th, 2019: Dear Espen, after you, Max, and I visited the gallery, when we sat at the café to chat after, you opened-up about what you termed neurodiversity and the many ways you perceived spaces and places. I wonder where you learned of neurodiversity and if this was part of your learning about your ADHD. I thought about your stories about your ability to focus on an eye, but not see the entire face; how sometimes there was too much sensory stimulus, and how that sometimes results in your feeling panicked. I wanted to think about your stories and your experiences without words and in relation to the multimedia, multi-sensory art exhibition that we experienced together just before. I created these images for you thinking of imagined spaces and objects and how spaces might be perceived to overlap and collide and in turn form and reform and transform into new and beautiful patterns.



²²⁸ Images: 5.72. Field Note October 20th, 2019: Dear Espen, I remember when we were talking at the café about your neurodiversity, the challenges and wonders and I asked what part art plays in communicating your mental health stories. You stated that sometimes you found people really didn't understand and it was very hard to communicate your experiences. You said that unless people had those experiences also it is hard to communicate those experiences in a way someone can understand. You said, "*Sometimes when it you felt it was hard to communicate you would create a piece of art because, in the art piece you could sort of stick a pin in the conversation and keep conversations open*" (Espen, personal communication, December 19th, 2019). Art for you, you explained, became a place where you could return to later and start other conversations, when earlier they had become stuck. These art pieces I have created in relation to your stories, Espen. I too will consider a place for us to stick a pin in our conversations – these art pieces are perhaps a place to start other conversations about perceptions, communication, and the role of art in keeping spaces open to return later, to take up older conversation, to see new emergent patterns, and revisit, revise, and transform old ideas and futures paths.



229

²²⁹ Images: 5.73 (top) & 5.74 (bottom). Field Note December 23rd, 2019: Dear Espen, Thank you so much for your enthusiasm for this work! I was so delighted that you loved this abstract digital image I created in relation to your stories. I loved that you loved the last one as much as I do. I too love the grid underneath, especially because it doesn't really measure or contain anything.

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 4: Sensory Overload



230

²³⁰ Image: 5.75. Field Note, December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, I loved talking with you about these images. Your feedback is very helpful, in response to these images I had created in response to some of your experiences with your vision. I was trying to visualize your ability to hyper-focus in this series of three images, by focusing on you



231

and blurring the background. I was trying to fill the background with static or noise as you described in your stories.

²³¹ Image: 5.76.



²³² Image: 5.77. Field Note, December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, when we last met, you responded this third image with a grey blurry background, was closest to your experience of seeing patterns in your peripheral vision.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

Nov. 27th, 2019

It's been such a busy fall. Time has just flown! It seems like only yesterday that it was mid-May and beginning to get warm, and we walked as a group to the grocery store to grab a bite to eat before working at SNAP. It was such a nice surprise to see you last week on the steps of the legislature just after the Trans Day of Awareness Rally – even if it was just for a few minutes. After we last met, I realized that although we've been in touch via text and emails since May, we haven't sat down to visit since then. We've missed you at SNAP this last few months – I've missed you! But, I was happy, and relieved too, to see you last week because it's been a while and was hoping, and concerned too, that you are continuing to do well. When we met last week and I asked if we could meet, you said you would like to, but that it's complicated right now. Your answer made me worry a little because I have some sense of what complicated can mean alongside your stories.

So, I was very happy when I got a text from you yesterday, saying you were doing well, and that you did want to get together. You mentioned in your text that a new medication was making you a little paranoid, so I felt very honoured that you were still able to stay in touch by reaching out to me via text. I have been creating artwork based on a transcript from our last meeting at Remedy Café on May 10th, when you and Max and I stopped in for a coffee and chat after visiting the exhibition downtown. Through your stories there, you shared many important insights about art and the beauty and your challenges with neurodiversity.

I have created this series of artwork, thinking with your stories of your experiences of being neurodiverse and how this at time drastically effects your visual perception. I hope you don't mind, but I have been working with your questions: How do you show such things? How

can you communicate to someone an experience so outside their experiences? How can I show someone that these experiences can be beautiful?

I will share in the following pages the art I have created recently in response to your stories, as I read back into the transcripts of our conversation in early May – some of which I will share here. I know there will be gaps between what I can create and your experiences and I don't mean to presume that I can know or show your experience. But I hope that my artwork in relation to your stories will act as a touchstone; a place to start conversations about art and the beauty and challenges of neurodiversity, and, also how resourceful and resilient you are.

Research Conversations

May 10th, 2019

Espen: My ADHD meds were discontinued because they stunted my growth. (laughs) I'm short – is anyone surprised? I recently started my ADHD meds again because my executive functioning was so bad that it was affecting my visual perception. My eyes would see something, but my brain would want to overcompensate for the lack of executive functioning. So, I would get a lot of static in my vision. You know when you start to pass out – it gets like a lot of static.

So when I'm not taking my meds, instead of all my vision going like that – it will sort of highlight and pick out the areas that I'm focusing on and those bits will be clear. So, I'm looking at Max's face and maybe his right eye and left cheek are something I want to focus on more, so I will focus on those and everything else will be static.

Max: Oh, that's interesting!

Espen: And I just thought that that's the way everybody saw the world – like a camera lens. And I never brought it up because during vision tests, they aren't checking for that. And I'd bring it up to my psychiatrist, and he's not a specialist – so – sounds normal.

Michelle: Espen, how long did this go on?

Espen: All my life. I still get it if I don't take my meds, it comes back.

Michelle: Wow! Well, that explains how you focus – how you have that laser focus sometimes.

Espen: Gets back to the hyper-focus idea of people with ADHD. We are terrible about focusing but when we do...²³³

²³³ This conversation took place at Remedy Café, May 10th, 2019. It followed Max, Espen, and I going through the Dyscorpia exhibition at Enterprise Square. We decided to grab a coffee and snack after the exhibition to discuss the artwork. I asked Max and Espen if I could record this conversation as part of our research together and they agreed.

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 5: Focusing

234

²³⁴ Image: 5.78. Field Note, February 16th, 2020: Dear Espen, I created following images to respond to the additional stories you confided about your visual perception on December 19th, 2019, at our last meeting. You revealed how sometimes you would have a narrowed visual field and as a result see only one part of a face at a time. You described how your attention limited your field of vision and while focusing on a face you might see only a small area only with one eye, part of the nose and mouth, with clarity, while everything else blurred to a degree.

I RECENTLY STARTED MY ADHD MEDS AGAIN BECAUSE

MY EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING WAS SO BAD

**THAT IT WAS AFFECTING
MY VISUAL PERCEPTION.**

MY EYES WOULD SEE SOMETHING

BUT

**MY BRAIN WOULD WANT TO OVERCOMPENSATE FOR THE LACK OF
EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING.**

SO

**I WOULD GET
A LOT OF STATIC
IN MY VISION.²³⁵**

²³⁵ Field Note, February 16th, 2020: Dear Espen, these are excerpted quotes of our conversation (Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019). Thank you for sharing your experiences and your understanding of your ADHD with Max and I. It was wonderful that we went for coffee right after touring the exhibition. I know that I felt a bit disembodied and a bit sensually disoriented after touring and experiencing the many tactile and virtual interfaces on display. I think perhaps touring that exhibition opened a space for us to talk about perception and experiences of

**SO, WHEN I'M NOT TAKING MY MEDS,
INSTEAD OF ALL MY VISION GOING LIKE THAT
– IT WILL SORT OF HIGHLIGHT AND PICK OUT THE AREAS

THAT I'M FOCUSING ON
AND THOSE BITS WILL BE CLEAR.**

**SO, I'M LOOKING AT MAX'S FACE AND MAYBE THEIR RIGHT EYE AND
LEFT CHEEK ARE SOMETHING I WANT TO FOCUS ON MORE

SO**

**I WILL FOCUS ON THOSE
AND EVERYTHING ELSE WILL BE STATIC.²³⁶**

visual perception. I had no idea though, even after working with you for over three years now, that you have these experiences. Thank you Espen, so much for sharing your powerful stories.

²³⁶ Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: NOTES to ESPEN

Dear Espen,

February 14th, 2020

With these images, I am trying to imagine *with* your stories and to imagine how my visual perception might change with an ability to hyper-focus, and also see static in my field of vision beyond my focus. I am trying to see, to sense a little through your eyes, through your experiences, although I know I can never really know what your eyes see and how these experiences feel.



237

²³⁷ Image: 5.79. Field Note, February 16th, 2020: Dear Espen, in this image I was attempting to illustrate your description of shifting your attention from one area of focus to another. In this image, I was trying to demonstrate to the viewer how your visual perception shifts from blurry to clear as your eyes, attention, and focus shifts.



238

²³⁸ Image: 5.80. Field Note, February 16th, 2020: Dear Espen, with this dramatic image I was attempting to visualize your stories about how you might visually perceive a shift in your attention and a resultant shift in your field of vision, from the clarity of seeing a face, to clarity in seeing a hand only. By proxy, I am looking at this image and trying to imagine your experience of seeing. I find it so frustrating to shift focus and have the rest of my field of

AND I JUST THOUGHT THAT THAT'S THE WAY

EVERYBODY SAW THE WORLD

– LIKE A CAMERA LENS.²³⁹

vision disappear from my view. I would find it very hard to have my peripheral vision blurred as dramatically as you have described.

²³⁹ Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.

WELL, THAT EXPLAINS HOW YOU FOCUS

– HOW YOU HAVE THAT LASER FOCUS SOMETIMES.

GETS BACK TO THE HYPER-FOCUS IDEA OF PEOPLE WITH ADHD.

WE ARE TERRIBLE ABOUT FOCUSING

BUT WHEN WE DO...²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Michelle in conversation with Espen, May 10th, 2019.

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 6: Focus on Joy

241

²⁴¹ Image: 5.81. Field Note, December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, in this next set of images (Image 5.81-5.83), I was focusing on your ability to hyper-focus, with a resultant blurring of peripheral vision; but I was also focusing on your joy. I was focusing on your finding joy in being creative, not despite perceptual and vision challenges, but in the midst of negotiating them.

**NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT THE DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF
PEOPLE WHO ARE NEURO-DIVERGENT.**

**HOW DO YOU BREAK DOWN THE WAY YOU UNDERSTAND THE WORLD
WHEN ALL YOU HAVE IS HOW YOU SEE THE WORLD?²⁴²**

²⁴² Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.

THE WAY I LOOK AT THE WORLD IS WAY DIFFERENT
THAN THE WAY THAT MOST PEOPLE THINK OF THE WORLD.

THE THINGS THAT I PICK UP ON LIKE –

IT CAN BE REALLY FRUSTRATING SOMETIMES

BECAUSE

I THINK THE THINGS PEOPLE WANT ME TO PICK UP ON,

I DON'T,

AND THE THINGS THAT I EXPECT PEOPLE WILL PICK UP ON

THEY COMPLETELY MISS.²⁴³

²⁴³ Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.

BUT YOU KNOW WHAT

– IF YOU REALLY WANT TO HOLD ONTO A MOMENT,

THAT’S WHAT ART IS FOR;

ART DOES THAT.

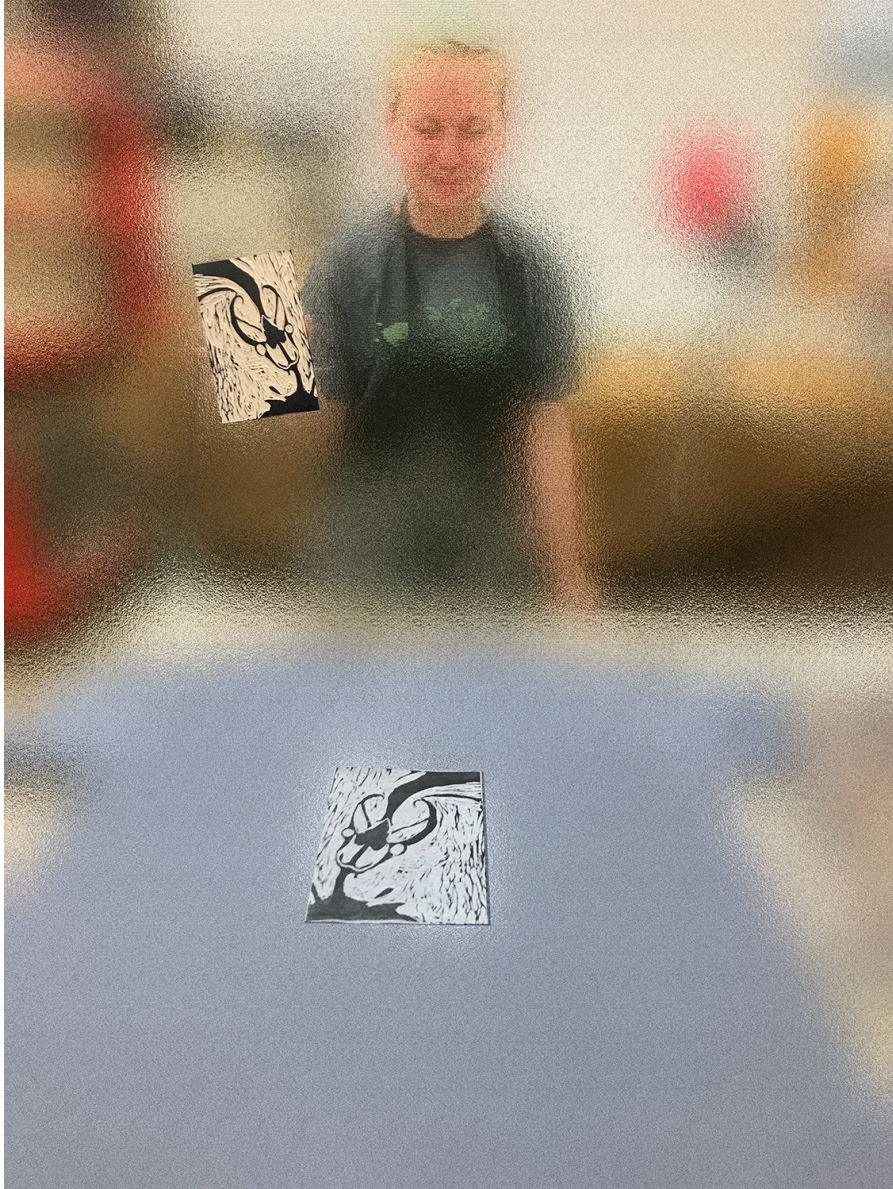
MAYBE THAT’S WHY I’M SO INTERESTED IN ART.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.



245

²⁴⁵ Image: 5.82. Field Note December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, I have repeated an image (Image 5.81) with minor alterations (Image 5.82-5.83) (i.e., varying degrees of clarity and blurriness) to highlight various ways of seeing and possibly the passage of time.



246

²⁴⁶ Image: 5.83. Field Note, December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, I love this image. For me this image celebrates your joy at creating something meaningful to you, not just the artwork, but also the experience of creating the artwork.

Research Conversations

May 10th, 2019

Espen: No one is talking about the different perceptions of people who are neuro-divergent. How do you break down the way you understand the world when all you have is how you see the world?

Michelle: Everyone perceives so differently. You are so focused sometimes, it's amazing to learn how you work through your perceptions.

Espen: My brain works in weird ways.

Michelle: It's amazing! It's good if it helps you imagine.

Espen: It's good when I'm doing art.

Michelle: When I look at your artwork, your skill set is fantastic. It's really good! I am amazed at the amount of details you put into things. Do you think, this [way of perceiving] has helped you as an artist?

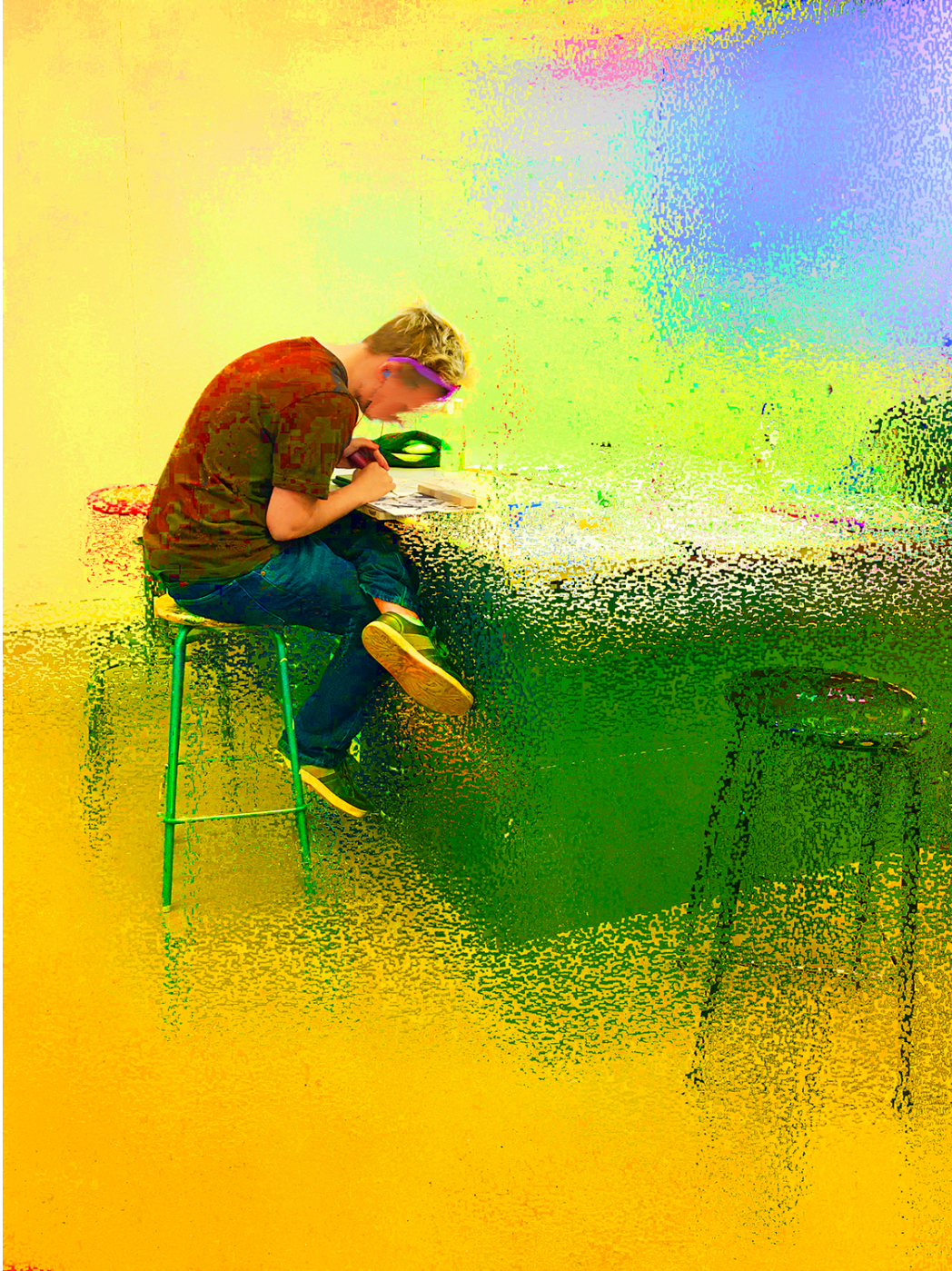
Espen: Definitely – I think the way I look at the world is way different than the way that most people think of the world. The things that I pick up on like – it can be really frustrating sometimes because I think the things people want me to pick up on, I don't, and the things that I expect people will pick up on they completely miss.

Michelle: And do you feel like you can explain this or it's – the moments gone?

Espen: The moments gone, but you know what – if you really want to hold onto a moment, that's what art is for; art does that. Maybe that's why I'm so interested in art.

Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 7: At the Studio Table

²⁴⁷ Image: 5.84. Field Note, December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, this next series of three images again examines your stories of hyper-focus. The background static ranges from blurred glass, to colour-filled, to cement-laden. I was trying to imagine how space might be: porous and more easily negotiated in this first blurred image this series, or



daunting to move within in the attention-grabbing, colour-filled second image in this series image; or hard to move through in the frozen in place, cement-laden space of the third image in this series (Images 5.84-5.86).

²⁴⁸ Image: 5.85.



249

²⁴⁹ Image: 5.86.

Espen: I've struggled really hard to understand abstract art. That's why I was so surprised that I enjoyed the art in this show. Because it's really hard for me to feel emotionally attached to abstract art because like if you focus on the tiny dots you aren't getting the whole image and it's really about the whole image. I watched a documentary about abstract art. The artist was a lesbian with schizophrenia and she wanted to paint a picture for her daughter to communicate beauty. She was asking the question: how do you paint a rose behind your back; how do you show the beauty that can't be seen, but is still there?

Neuro-divergent people have that train of thoughts in our heads. The work around is not always – the way our brains are different, they work around. But it's not always so terrible. And we want to share those moments, but we don't know how. It's like painting the rose behind your back.

Michelle: As a kid, I remember looking out the car window and feeling the grass. I would look at anything and know exactly how it would feel – its' temperature. Someone said oh that synesthesia. But I don't know if it is that or just my growing up in the woods. But do people do that? I don't know. Maybe they do and maybe they don't. I think it's normal, but like, doesn't everybody do that? I don't know.

Espen: And how do you explain something like that. Maybe I experience that as beautiful and you'll never be able to understand that. Maybe even ugly things in my life, like when I had a migraine and half my body was paralyzed and I was having vivid hallucinations because my brain was deprived of oxygen.

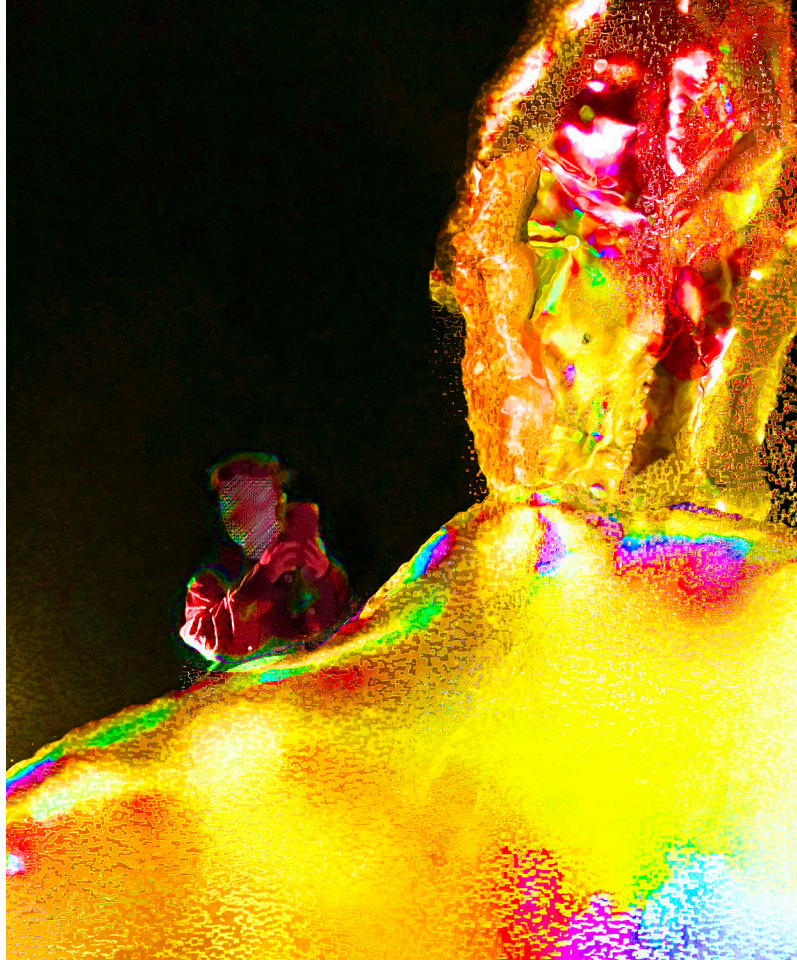
There was no way I could draw it; they were just like patterns. Your brain is trying to make sense

of the world – but it's because there is a disconnect there between your brain understanding and putting labels on what you are seeing. It doesn't understand what it is seeing so it just confuses everything. It looks like something but you know it's not right and it changes and it morphs. It's just wild. How do you take that and put it on paper?

Michelle: It reminds me of layering multiple images in Photoshop.

Espen: Yeah. How several images come together and form something else.

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 8: Emergent Patterns



250

²⁵⁰ Image: 5.87. Field Note, December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, in this series of three images (Images 5.87-5.89) I created in response to your stories, I was thinking about the beautiful emergent patterns that you see sometimes. I was thinking with your words, that even in difficult experiences, like when you experience hallucinations, there can be beauty there. Someone else will probably never be able to understand that there is beauty in these experiences too. As you described it, it's like holding a rose behind your back. The rose is so beautiful and you know its' beauty, you have seen and experienced this beauty, but if someone has never see this beauty or experienced this beauty, how can you possibly communicate that beauty to them – the beauty of holding a rose behind your back and wanting so much to share that beauty.

**I'VE STRUGGLED REALLY HARD TO UNDERSTAND
ABSTRACT ART.**

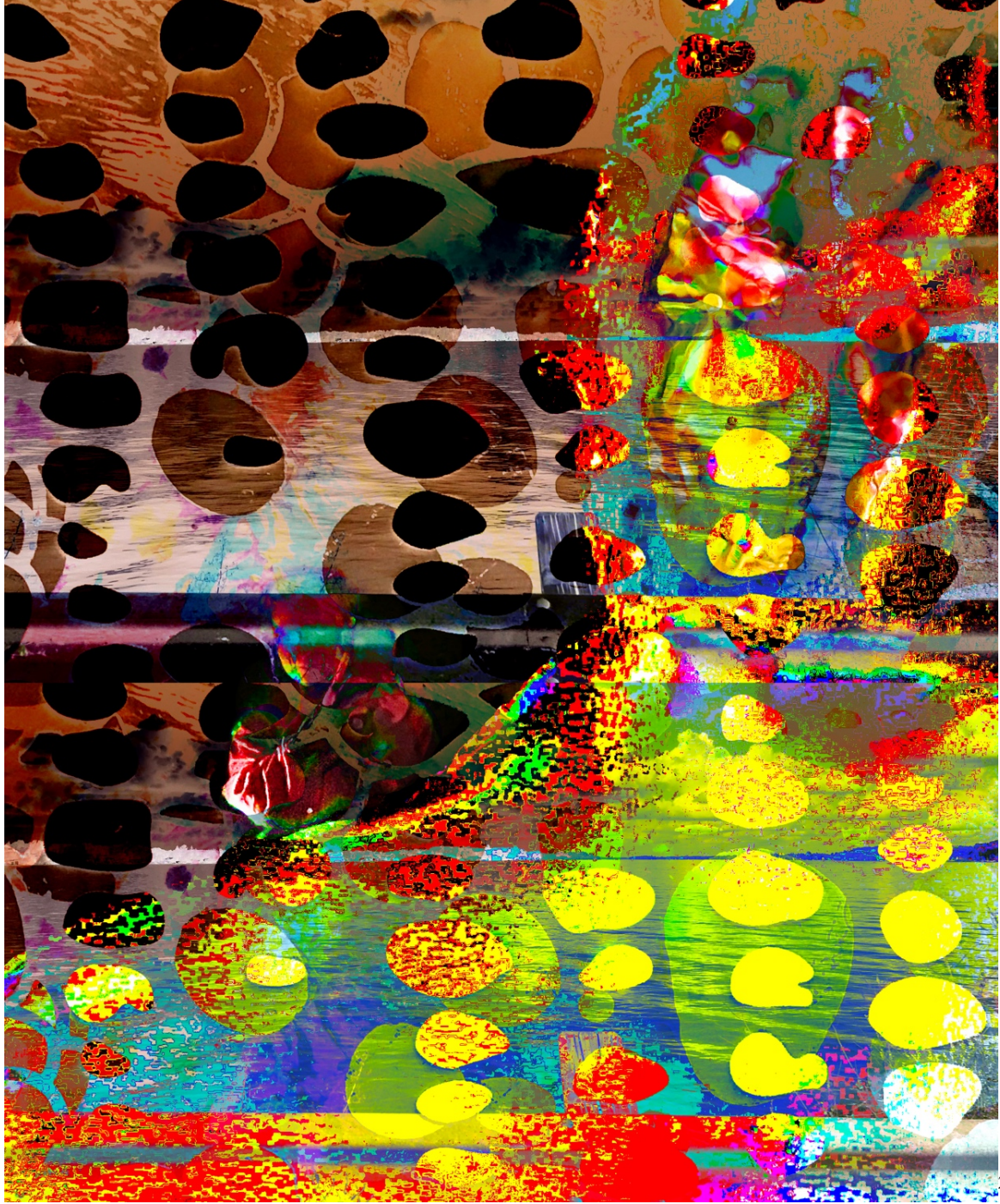
**THAT'S WHY I WAS SO SURPRISED
THAT I ENJOYED THE ART
IN THIS SHOW.**

**BECAUSE IT'S REALLY HARD FOR ME TO FEEL
EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED TO ABSTRACT ART**

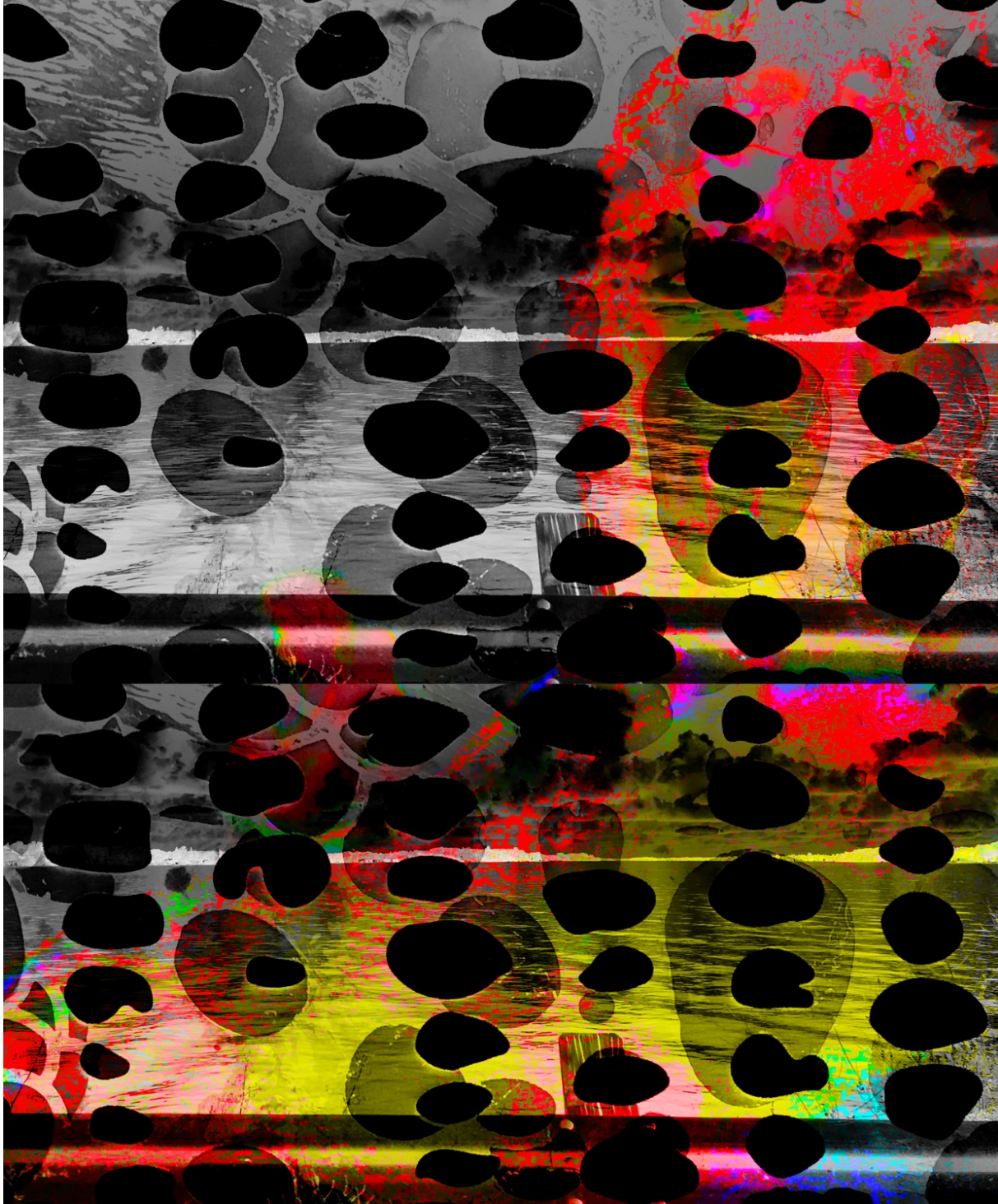
**BECAUSE LIKE IF YOU FOCUS ON THE TINY DOTS
YOU AREN'T GETTING THE WHOLE IMAGE**

**AND ITS REALLY ABOUT
THE WHOLE IMAGE.²⁵¹**

²⁵¹ Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.



²⁵² Image: 5.88.



253

²⁵³ Image: 5.89.

THERE WAS NO WAY I COULD DRAW IT;
THEY WERE JUST LIKE PATTERNS.

YOUR BRAIN IS TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD
– BUT IT’S BECAUSE THERE IS A DISCONNECT THERE

BETWEEN YOUR BRAIN UNDERSTANDING
AND
PUTTING LABELS ON WHAT YOU ARE SEEING.

IT DOESN’T UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS SEEING
SO
IT JUST CONFUSES EVERYTHING.

IT LOOKS LIKE SOMETHING
BUT
YOU KNOW IT’S NOT RIGHT

AND IT CHANGES
AND IT MORPHS.
IT’S JUST WILD.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.

AND HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

MAYBE I EXPERIENCE THAT AS BEAUTIFUL
AND
YOU'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THAT.

MAYBE EVEN UGLY THINGS IN MY LIFE

LIKE WHEN I HAD A MIGRAINE
AND HALF MY BODY WAS PARALYZED
AND I WAS HAVING VIVID HALLUCINATIONS
BECAUSE MY BRAIN WAS DEPRIVED OF OXYGEN.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.

Returning to Stories of Experience to Deepen Understanding – Dialogue 9: Returning to Joy



256

²⁵⁶ Image: 5.90. Field Note, December 22nd, 2019: Dear Espen, I have included this image close to the end of your account because I wanted to return to the idea of your joy and your experience of beauty. I wanted to use this photograph to talk about your joy, because at first glance, I would interpret this image as an image of being stuck within the static of the background noise. It is only as these images comes alongside your stories of these experiences as beautiful that I can once again see your joy expressed in your amazing smile. I recall your words Espen, asking what if you experience these experiences as beautiful and how can you ever show someone this beauty.

**AN ARTIST WANTED TO PAINT A PICTURE
TO COMMUNICATE BEAUTY.**

**SHE ASKED THE QUESTION:
HOW DO YOU PAINT A ROSE BEHIND YOUR BACK?
HOW DO YOU SHOW THE BEAUTY THAT CAN'T BE SEEN?
BUT IS STILL THERE?²⁵⁷**

²⁵⁷ Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.

NEURO-DIVERGENT PEOPLE
HAVE THAT TRAIN OF THOUGHTS IN OUR HEADS.

THE WORK AROUND IS NOT ALWAYS
– THE WAY OUR BRAINS ARE DIFFERENT,
THEY WORK AROUND.

BUT IT'S NOT ALWAYS SO TERRIBLE.

AND WE WANT TO SHARE THOSE MOMENTS,
BUT WE DON'T KNOW HOW.

IT'S LIKE PAINTING THE ROSE BEHIND YOUR BACK.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Espen, personal communication, May 10th, 2019.

TEXTS ALONGSIDE: RETURNING TO THE BEGINNING & MOVING FORWARD

January 20th, 2020

Looking up again to see the snow falling continuously, I marvel at what I have come to know of Espen's uniqueness; his complexity, beauty, delicacy, and illusiveness. It's complicated too, because I wouldn't say that I know Espen well, even after four years; and he is changing so much right now too. I barely recognized Espen when I met him last month by chance, for a moment or two, on the steps of the legislature, following the Trans Day of Remembrance Rally. His bright clear-blue shining eyes and generous smile gave him away. But his voice is changing, deepening, and his face and body are changing too. He is growing leaner now and taller too, I think. You see, I haven't seen him for the last six months and when I saw him last, he was just beginning to take T. He was thrilled to finally begin to physically transition; he had been waiting for almost two years, and he was tired of waiting.

Espen is moving forward now. He's moving out of my line of site and I know I will miss walking and learning alongside him. From Espen, I think I will carry forward new ways of thinking about and with complexity. Espen has also expanded how I see and understand beauty. When I try to create something beautiful now, I will always remember Espen's description of seeing and communicating beauty; like painting a rose behind your back.



²⁵⁹ Image: 5.91.

References for Espen's Narrative Account

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CHAPTER 6: Max's Narrative Account

PART 1: Living and Learning in Relation – Stories & Art – in the World & in Community

Meeting Max

I met Max on a cool rainy afternoon in August of 2016, inside a dusty little wooden art cabin, at Camp fYrefly. At the time, Max was a Camper, and I was the Camp's Artist-in-Residence. I had given a couple arts-based workshops and kept the art cabin open throughout the duration of Camp. Keeping the cabin open allowed me to hold space open for any Campers who felt like popping in to make art, as schedules allowed. I remember Max working in a quiet, concentrated fashion, for an hour or two each day to make art. Max's dedication to their art practice was visible to me in those first meetings and their quiet, joyful, grounded presence; Max's commitment never altered over the course of this research, but only deepened, as did my appreciation for Max's demeanour and talent, as I came to know Max over these past few years.

Max would probably describe themselves as a ginger, with short cropped ginger hair. They have a generous smile, bright eyes, an easy laugh, and some pretty cool tattoos. I remember discussing Max's tattoos at one of our first meetings. The detail and skill of Max's tattoos are amazing. I recall Max telling me the tattooed faces are reversible, you can read them both ways; depending on your perspective, you will see one face, and then upside down, another. I mention Max's tattoos because they remind me of so many stories Max shared with me and how shifting my perspectives in relation to Max's stories, helped me to see many previously less visible perspectives and invisible stories, especially regarding disabilities and access.

Sometimes, I hear a bit of Newfoundland in Max's speech, but it's not an accent, so much as, a pattern of speech, like a lilt when they say, "Fair Winds". Max grew up both in rural Newfoundland and in urban Alberta, with parents from each province. When I asked Max how

they would describe themselves, on our first research conversation on April 21st, 2018, Max told me that they were a student, an artist, a community activist engaging with LGBTIQ+ issues and disabilities, and a non-binary trans person. Max's art practice touches on their activism and identity and has remained, since our first meeting in 2016, an ever-present touchstone in my learning alongside Max.

In one of the first sessions at the cabin, Max painted two portraits without a model. I was impressed having taught portraiture techniques in post-secondary fine arts programs. My experience has shown me that most find portraiture techniques daunting and difficult. But Max had an ease with it, which I haven't often seen. One portrait appears to have a nose bleed and perhaps a cut on the cheek, with rainbows colours painted in these places, and on this portrait Max painted in the border: Be Loud; Stay Strong. A story sat alongside these images, but Max never revealed many stories about their intentions undergirding their images painted at Camp, not that I can recall. A year later, during an interview for the TREX *Re-Imaging Normal* exhibition and program guide, I would learn Max's inspiration behind the two portraits; Max was thinking about his friends and community members who face violence, harassment, and stigma because of their trans (trans masculine, trans feminine, and non-binary trans) identities. To quote Max,

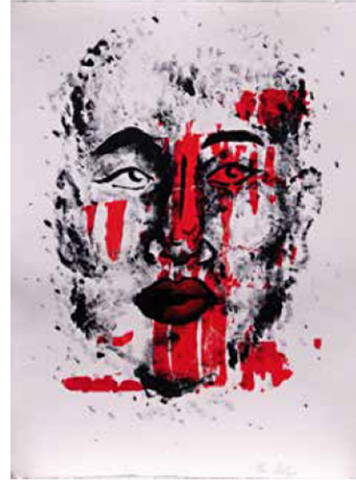
“these ‘victims’ are still resilient and keep going and that’s very inspiring. While things have improved or progressed there are still many challenges (in Alberta), especially in rural communities. Through this piece, I’m telling people to keep

going (and show their colours) ”²⁶⁰

(Max’s interview for TREX *Re-Imaging Normal* Interpretive Guide)



Max
Untitled #1, 2016
 Acrylic on paper
 Collection of the artist



Max
Untitled #2, 2016
 Acrylic on paper
 Collection of the artist

261

Max seemed to appreciate other LGBTIQ+ youth and adults enjoying their artwork; but Max also didn’t elaborate on their intentions or interpretations undergirding these artworks and seemed happy to leave space open for others to bring their own stories and interpretations alongside. In fact, the artwork itself, once created seemed to act, as an opening space for dialogue and conversation. I recently learned Max prefers to leave their artwork open for others

²⁶⁰ For more information about these images and to see Max’s full interview, please see the TREX *Re-Imaging Normal* Interpretive Guide: <https://www.aggp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Re-Imaging-Normal-Interpretive-Guide-.pdf>

²⁶¹ Image: 6.1. Artist: Max. *Untitled#1 (Portrait#1-Be Loud, Stay Strong* and *Untitled#2 (Portrait #2)*. Acrylic paint on paper, August 2016. These are two paintings Max completed at Camp fYrefly, an arts-based leadership camp for LGBTIQ+ youth, in August 2016.

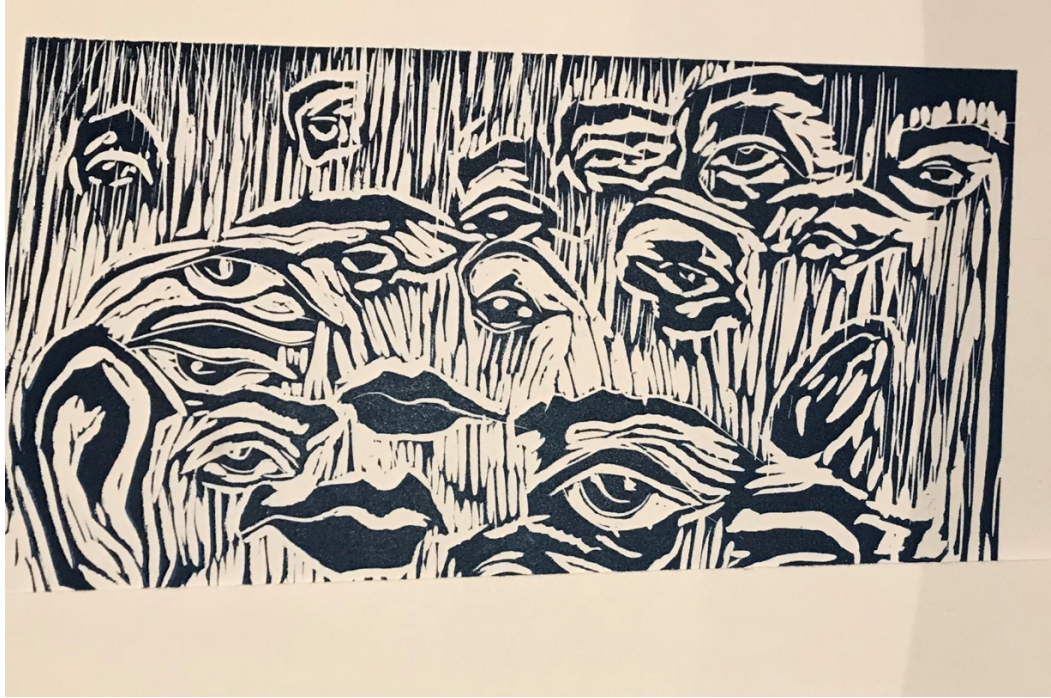
to interpret and learn alongside. Last month as Max and I were discussing the participatory nature of their artwork as an invitation to audiences, Max revealed, “That’s ideal for me because, sometimes I don’t have all the answers. So, if people are going to come up with them, for what it means to them, that’s perfect!” (Max, personal communication, March 12th, 2020) Max’s words beautifully demonstrate how art, can jump beyond the bounds of artists’ intentions, to speak to each of us and our own stories uniquely, to create meaning, which in turn continuously shifts and unfolds over time and in relation.

After working alongside Max in the SNAP printmaking studio in the research, I created two linocut plates which I gave to Max as gifts to thank Max for my learning alongside them. These images printed from the plates also helped me think about my learning in relation to Max. The first linocut plate (Image 6.2, Gift#1) is filled with many eyes, many mouths, and many ears. I created this image to think about how Max seems to be able to see with many eyes, hear with many ears, and speak with many voices, or rather, voice the concerns of many. Max seems to be able to seamlessly travel between, work, and live within many worlds, and hold multiple points, while remaining grounded in their identity as a non-binary trans person. I have wondered if Max’s identity helps them negotiate worlds with seeming ease, or possibly makes it necessary for Max to travel between worlds²⁶².

I reached for my sketchbook to find source material for these plates for Max because so

²⁶² World travelling is a concept of Maria Lugones (1987). Lugones (1987) wrote about interstitial places, liminal spaces, she called worlds. She posited that we all inhabit and occupy multiple worlds with multiple selves. She also wrote it was necessary to world travel to find places where we could be at ease, playful, and creative.

many of Max's and my conversations had centred around art and artmaking. My portrait sketches caught my attention, because the attention to detail displayed in these portraits, mirror an attention to detail I had witnessed both in Max's artwork and in Max's graceful interactions within our small research group at studio. One such interaction immediately comes to mind. I recall watching Max print his first t-shirt, and seeing Espen look over Max's shoulder with curiosity. Espen who hadn't brought-shirts to print on, looked on a little wistfully. Without a word, Max offered up his bag of t-shirts for Espen to look through and find one he might like to print on; it was an offer Espen graciously accepted. It was a momentary interaction, a fleeting look that anyone might have easily missed. But Max didn't miss it; he noticed Espen and thoughtfully responded in the moment and with care. It was lovely and seamless, like so many of Max's actions. It was the timing, the thoughtful action, without skipping a beat, without waiting for a request, without pause. (Michelle's Reflective Note, December 18th, 2019)



263

In the second linocut plate I created for Max (Image 6.3, Gift #2), I wrote the word Care in sign language. I know that Max is learning sign language and has friends who negotiate hearing challenges, as Max does also. This image was my attempt to travel worlds and learn a little of a language that Max knows better than I. I created this image, so that I would need to move beyond my comfort zone and travel to a world that Max is more familiar with, as they engage with those who negotiate abilities challenges; I would also work in relation to my personal and familial stories of hearing loss. I chose the word Care, when thinking about my learning alongside Max because I think care is a major motivation for Max's world travelling, and for

²⁶³ Image: 6.2. Artist: Michelle Lavoie. *Gift#1 (Seeing with Many Eyes, Hearing with Many Ears, Speaking in Many Languages)* Linocut print on paper for Max, April 29th, 2019, printed at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

artwork. I also chose the word Care because I have witnessed and experienced Max's care, which seems to characterize how they most often communicate and interact, with care. I think care may also guide Max's future paths. Care would probably be an impetus for Max wanting to become a social worker or perhaps an art therapist. Care may enable Max to walk between worlds to speak with many voices, to see with many eyes, and to hear with many ears. It is care, I think, that helps Max walk seamlessly between worlds.



264

²⁶⁴ Image: 6.3. Artist: Michelle Lavoie. *Gift #2 (Care)*. Linocut print on paper for Max, April 29th, 2019, printed at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Dear Max,

I remember our first chats sitting at those little tables at Allard Hall in the foyer alongside those enormous windows that let the bright light stream through in the spring, throughout the summer, and into the fall. You preferred mornings, while I struggle a little with mornings. I would always arrive after you with an iced coffee for you and a lemonade for me. I came to know you would always be on time or early, even though you had travelled far. I would always swoop in feeling a bit rushed and harried, as is my way, and you would always exude a quiet calm that always reminded me to slow down and be present. You always checked in with me before we got started, and we would have a catch-up on recent events to ground our conversation. Your presence always felt so calm that I was immediately put at ease. Looking back now, I realize your care for me and this project, helped me feel at ease, which, in turn, grounded our many wonderful conversations. It's hard to demonstrate what care looks like, but I now see that all our meetings were anchored in your care-filled attention and by your quiet calm presence. As our talks shifted from discussion about art-making, where I was most comfortable, to tensions around intergenerational challenges, where I was less comfortable, you held open space for me to come alongside you and learn. It is this space-making that you performed in our conversations that I experienced, and later witnessed in your interactions with Vera²⁶⁵, Adebayo, Espen and others at studio, where I came to understand how you not only travelled between worlds, but forged paths for others to travel alongside you too.

(Michelle's Reflective Note, March 20th, 2020)

²⁶⁵ Vera is not a pseudonym; Vera worked alongside Max, Espen, Adebayo, and I in our small research group printmaking sessions at Society of Northern Alberta Print-Artists' community printmaking studio (SNAP).

In addition to care, I have witnessed Max's playfulness while making art in studio. Lugones (1987) wrote that we all occupy many worlds and we act and are different persons within these worlds. Lugones (1987) spoke of the importance of playfulness to travel between worlds. She posited that if someone could world travel with awareness and with playfulness, they might not get stuck in world where they were not at ease, but be able to travel to worlds they could live with ease, to not only survive, but to be creative and thrive. In Max's artmaking, I see a playfulness and creativity that carries into their artwork; I see in Max's artwork, an extension of Max's generous personality, an invitation to be open and playfully engage alongside.

Max's Art: Foregrounding Fun & Sharing Creative Ideas

I think for me art is important and meaningful, but it's also for fun. It's for sharing really creative ideas. You can talk about really serious and important issues that are really important to you in really fun ways. And yes, sometimes serious things need a really serious tone – but in these times when the house is on fire and everything is already pretty sad, I don't necessarily feel that way. Just because you aren't treating something seriously doesn't mean that you aren't showing respect to it. And I think that comes back to the way adults are – is this right? It can still be something enjoyable. With

this one²⁶⁶ I'm talking about language barriers and how sometimes people don't have access to the type of communication that suits them best. But I'm dressed like a giant Muppet because that's still fun.

Sometimes with all my art, it would be nice if people thought about things, but I also don't want them to leave sad about the things that I'm teaching them about you know... And I think that part of that for me is that I'm inspired by things that I enjoyed in my childhood. I really liked cartooning as a kid, which still really influences the way I make things. I'm taking a puppet making course - I'm thrilled! All these things inspire the things that I do in my art practice and because all these things have very childish influences, my art does kind of get read as more playful and cartoony, all those things.²⁶⁷

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)

²⁶⁶ Max is talking about a performance art piece, which they were set to perform immediately following our lunch, and Max is referring to a red plush fabric outfit they have sewn to wear during that performance piece.

²⁶⁷ Dear Max, your words remind me how art practice is a bridge between many worlds. Sometimes serious issues and intentions undergird your artwork, but your artmaking seems so playful and creative that images which emerge seem playful as well. Your words help me consider how artmaking provides a platform to communicate a range of issues, even serious ones, with expressions that may be playful or even humorous.

A Note for Readers: Introducing Max's Narrative Account

This account is filled with letters, conversations, and artwork. Artwork at times lead Max and I into deep discussions, while at other times artworks cropped up to come alongside stories and lives already in the making. This account has been created to demonstrate Max and I learning in relation, as artwork comes alongside stories, and in a continuously unfolding, and emergent process. This account is also meant to be participatory and an invitation to you the reader to walk alongside Max and myself as we discuss art and life and negotiate meaning-making together and uniquely. I have a sense of Max, as I have come to know them – as the grounded, intelligent, articulate, caring, and talented young person that I have had the honour of walking and learning alongside these past few years.

A Note on Permissions:

Max has signed a University of Alberta ethics forms for this research. These ethics forms allow for Max's first name to be used in this research. Max's stories and artwork created in this research are also covered by University of Alberta ethics policies; these forms allow for Max's stories to be discussed, and Max's images to be shown in photographs and disseminated in this research, including in this narrative account. Pseudonyms have been used to protect privacy in some instances and these pseudonyms will be noted in footnotes. A few real names have been used in this account. Real names will be footnoted. Most real names have been used, either if these people are already covered under University of Alberta ethics policies, meaning they have signed ethics forms allowing for use of their first names in this research, or if these names are connected to events which are already in the public domain, meaning these names are already public knowledge.

A Note on Max's Images:

Most of Max's images were *Untitled*, I have added descriptive titles in footnotes when describing these *Untitled* images in parenthesis to avoid confusion for the reader.



268

Introduction: Art & Storied Touchstones²⁶⁹

Dear Max,

October 25th, 2019

I've been looking through photographs of artwork that you brought to our conversations, transcripts of those conversations, and images of the many prints you created at the SNAP printmaking studio within this research over this past year. Max, you have done so much

²⁶⁸ Image: 6.4. Artist: Max. Various linocut plates, August 29th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

²⁶⁹ Field Note April 11th, 2020: Dear Max, this funky art deco typeface is a nod to our conversations about having fun (with art) and a nod to your appreciation of retro styles.

amazing work! It is wonderful to look back now to see the amount and range of artworks you created, at SNAP studio particularly, and remember those times we spent working there together. As I begin to think about writing in relation to your art work and your stories, I am drawn to group your images²⁷⁰. My hope is that I will be able to discuss the nuances of the individual pieces as well as groups of images in relation to your stories. I hope that your artwork will act as a touchstone that will ground, and stand in relation to, the writing and ideas that continue to emerge in our discussions as we continue to think alongside each other.

Max, I structured this account trying to pay homage to our many conversations that often started by looking at and discussing artwork, and to the deep stories that emerged and branched out in all directions from those starting places. This account will follow that format, by using artwork as touchstones for thinking, feeling, and reaching back into our discussions to think further. I hope this account might also be a continuation of our sharing of ideas and artwork, which might also allow readers to catch a glimpse, not only of what we have learned alongside one another, but also, how we have learned in relation, over time. To this purpose, this account has been written to act like a continuing dialogue between us, which might also hopefully hold open an invitation to readers to think, hear, and see, alongside us as well. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

²⁷⁰ I am drawn to group Max's images because image groupings call forth stories, embedded and contextualized, within other stories. Images grouped together also help me see the continuities of stories, as well as the discontinuities, gaps, absences, and contradictions that sometimes sit between stories and images. In the gaps and discontinuities between stories and images, sometimes I see my biases, assumptions, and realize how my stories don't always fit these stories and images. Then I am lead to reflect and consider new ways of thinking, seeing, and imagining, alongside images and stories.



271

²⁷¹ Image: 6.5. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Blue Dog)*. Ink and paint on paper, July 2018. Max I included this image as an introduction to your artwork, to point to your playfulness and imaginativeness; a theme that recurs throughout.

First Dialogue: The Figure in the Flame – the World is Burning

272

²⁷² Image: 6.6. Artist: Max. *Untitled (the Figure in a Flame)*. Linocut print on t-shirt, February 28th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Stories Alongside Images: Michelle's thoughts on Alchemy & Elemental Transitions

Dear Max,

Oct. 21st, 2019

I'm looking at your image (the Figure in a Flame), the lino-plate you printed on t-shirts on February 28th, 2018. It's an amazing and concise image – spare and yet full – like a riddle. Like a riddle, I am captivated by the image and drawn to try to understand its' meaning or to make up a meaning. Like a riddle too, I know that I am reading it through my own thoughts and experiences. I know too, my experience as a post-secondary studio drawing and printmaking instructor for many years, compels me to look for and possibly find meaning through the images. Meaning-making though, I've found, is dialogic (Freire, 1970) in that it is a shared endeavour²⁷³. (Michelle's Letters to Max)

The Figure in the Flame: Michelle sees Strength and Vulnerability

Dear Max,

October 25th, 2019

I will start by saying, I love how stories can come alongside pieces of art to sometimes reveal part of an artwork's secret. Much of art though, I think, always stays at a level of secret or mystery, because like stories, art can always mean otherwise. We've addressed this a little in our discussions too, there were your intentions as you created the work of art and how an

²⁷³ Paolo Freire was an educator and education theorist who wrote about learning as a dialogic process (Freire, 1970), which takes place in relation and is ground in experience. Freire (1970) argued that critical consciousness could be created, through dialogue by people in relation, to understand experiences and seek to ways to transform their lives. As part of writing this account, I invited Max to share further stories, write responses, and to add, delete, or rewrite any part of this.

artwork will be taken up and read when someone, like myself, brings their interpretations, stories and experiences alongside your artwork. So when I begin to read this image, and think with this image, I am first drawn to spend time with the image, imagine into the image. I am called to build a relationship with the image, for however long and invest my time, thought, feeling alongside that image. I have found that having art on my wall at home, my relationship to these artworks changes over time, as I change, as my stories change. An artwork is always opening and allowing me to create new understandings in relation.

I just love this image of the Figure in a Flame; I'm not sure what it is exactly. Perhaps it is the drawing of the person. At first glance, the figure, due to their reclining and curled pose, seems fragile or vulnerable. The flame, to me, suggests adversity or difficulty. Yet the figure sits within a flame that does not seem to burn them. They seem comfortable within the flame, which would suggest enormous strength. Your image compels me to think of strength and vulnerability, often thought of as binary, even opposites, yet it takes enormous strength to be vulnerable.

(Michelle's Letters to Max)

Max's Response: The Figure in a Flame

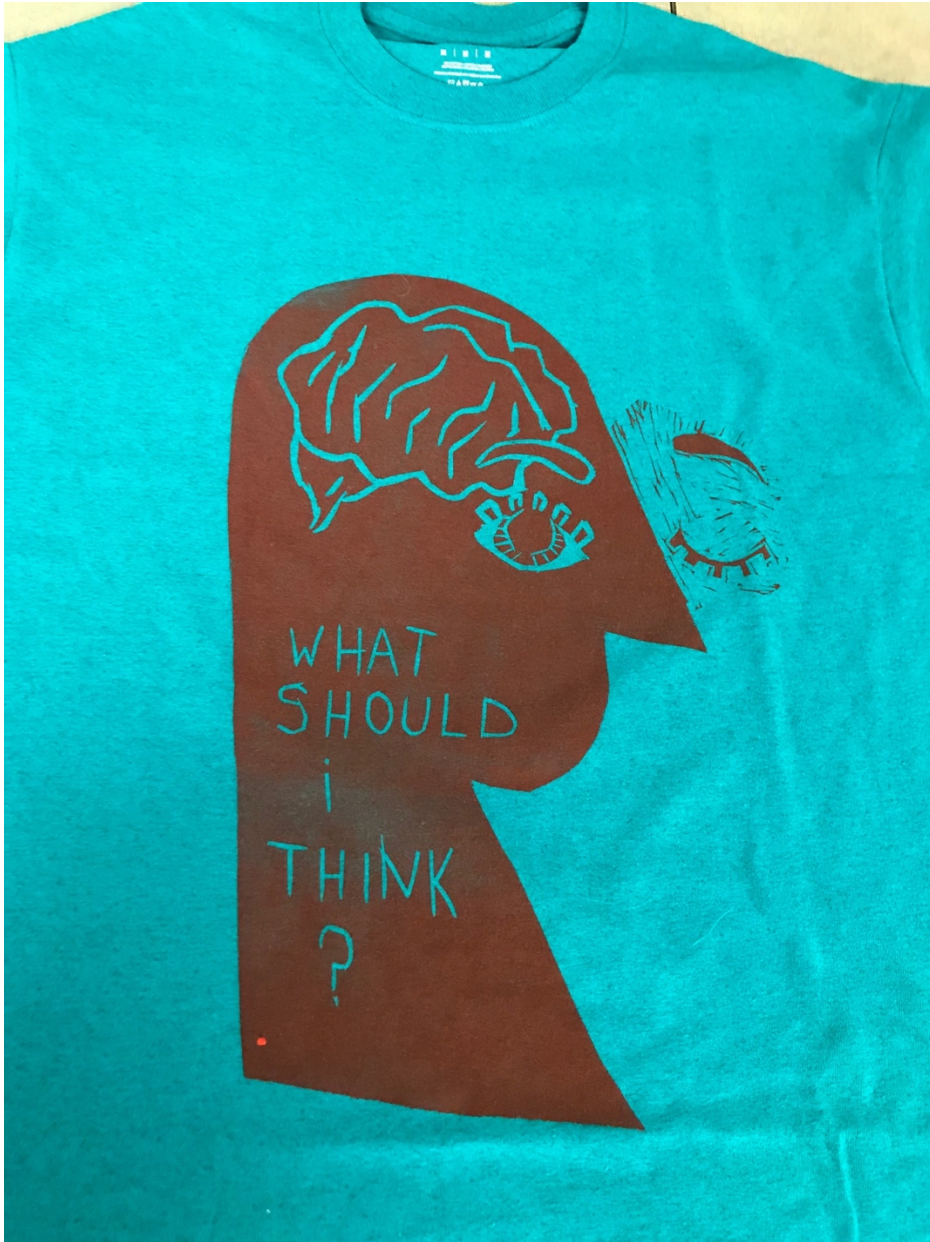
At least part of it came from the terror of climate change. Because for me as a young person, it's like, sometimes I'm in school and I think, if the world is in climate collapse, then what am I doing in school? What are we all doing, all this regular stuff, if the world is in climate collapse?

I feel much the same way now. We're in a pandemic and were all still working like

everything is normal. I'm like – it's not. The entire country of Italy is in quarantine, like that's not normal. Even with that there's a thing. They are like we can do schooling from a distance and you can work from home. On one hand, from someone who engages with disabilities, I'm like, well you couldn't have done that with people with disabilities years ago? But now it's affecting able bodied people – so now it's a thing – cool! But even beyond that, the world we live in is so workaholic, so based on productivity. It's like people are dying from this disease and we're still thinking about how we should be working. This is so bizarre to me that this is something that we are even letting happen. Like we are in a pandemic and like I'm still going to school today to do a performance piece – like what am I doing? So, for me, the piece is really about that idea. It's business as usual, but everything is on fire. And like, why is that? But also, I thought it looked cool²⁷⁴.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)

²⁷⁴ Field Note March 12th, 2020: Dear Max, it is very powerful to understand your thoughts that inspired your artwork because I see how your story and image reflects your care and concern, and highlights our individual responsibilities and common humanity. I also love how wildly different interpretations can be. That art work can mean so many different things, to so many people, speaks to the communicative power of art.



275

²⁷⁵ Image: 6.7. Artist: Max. *Untitled (What Should I Think?)*. Linocut print on t-shirt, December 18th, 2018th, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.



276

²⁷⁶ Image: 6.8. Artist: Max, *Untitled (the Figure in a Flame # 2)*. Linocut print on t-shirt. February 28th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Second Dialogue: the World is (still) Burning

Reflections from Lock Down

Dear Max,

April 16th, 2020

It's been about a month now. As we are currently locked down in our homes, and asked to stay inside, during the COVID-19 pandemic, our recent conversations come to mind. The social and physical isolation is profound and for some of Canada's most vulnerable people, the consequences are severe, even deadly. As the pandemic spreads, people with disabilities and the elderly in long term care (LTC) homes are particularly vulnerable. Some of these people, who are least able to take care of themselves, have become more isolated and vulnerable during this health crisis. In LTC homes relatives and loved ones cannot visit, while some LTC care workers have gotten ill, or they have been called home to care for family, and many remain fearful of getting sick themselves.

In these times, I can't but help think of my mom. She was 91, active, alert, vibrant, and able to live at home independently, until she passed away almost three years ago. I can't imagine how I would feel if she were in a LTC home now and I couldn't visit. Well, I can imagine; but it's too much to feel. And this is only a piece of this unfolding tragedy, which defies comprehension, but calls us witness, and act, in some way... I have included just a few of our discussions about the necessity to rethink priorities, change direction and act in more responsible, compassionate, and caring ways. (Michelle's Letters to Max)



277

Taking Stock~ Re-Imaging Priorities

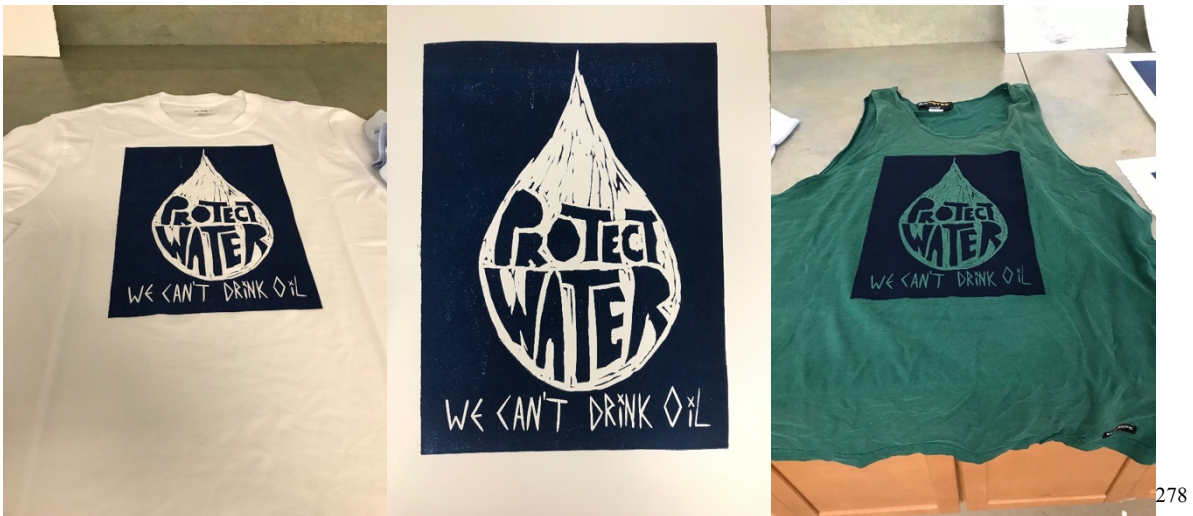
It feels so bizarre, when we should be taking this time not only to take care of ourselves, making sure that we stay healthy, but caring for our community in a way that lets us support people who aren't able to go out and stockpile right now. Because they

²⁷⁷ Image: 6.9. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Protect Water – We Can't Drink Oil)*. Linocut print on paper, July 30th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton Alberta.

have immune system problems, like they are at the highest risk of getting sick. There are a lot of people who have chronic conditions, and like people who are older – simply because that’s how aging goes. But instead there are people who have sold multiple Walmarts out of toilet paper. And like that’s not even the biggest need...

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)

Oil or Water?



Dear Max,

October 25th, 2019

²⁷⁸ Image: 6.10. Artist: Max. *Untitled #1, Untitled #2, & Untitled #3 (Protect Water – We Can't Drink Oil)*. Linocut prints on t-shirts and paper, July 30th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton Alberta.

I'm looking at your, Protect Water: We Can't Drink Oil linocut prints. Common sense would agree with this sentiment, but would many Albertans right now - I wonder. We are having a bit of a political moment just now with Wexit trending wildly, a newly elected Liberal federal minority government, and a Conservative provincial majority. The airwaves are full of western alienation; the let's leave the country sentiment is palpable. Tensions are pretty-high in Alberta just now with certain politicians stirring the pot to harness western alienation and separatist sentiments, while whipping up their political base. Although, when the provincial budget dropped yesterday, many Albertans probably had a sober second thought, as the blush fell off the rose. In this political climate, I'm not at all sure that someone wearing one of these shirts would be safe walking down the street. It's a strange day in Alberta when it feels safer to be a queer person than someone concerned about the environment²⁷⁹.

This political climate, now, October 25th, 2019, reminds me of the days following the

²⁷⁹ Within Canada, Albertans have elected, almost exclusively, Conservative governments (i.e., for the past 40 + years). As a result, politics and policies have trended to the right of the political spectrum in the Province of Alberta. The NDP formed a progressive centre-left Provincial Government under Premier Rachel Notley, (2015-2019). In 2019, Albertans elected an ultra-conservative political party, the United Conservative Party (UPC), which joined centre-right fiscal conservatives and right-wing social and religious conservatives (Mason, 2016). The current UPC Provincial Government is arguably the most right-wing provincial Conservative party in Alberta's history. Since his election, Premier Kenney has fomented dissent through *Us vs. Them* rhetoric. This heated rhetoric is polarizing and sets: Albertan's against Albertans; and the Albertan Provincial Government against the Canadian Federal Government. The UPC's political rhetoric is reminiscent of the *Us vs Them* language following the *Vriend V. Alberta* decision of 1998. Curiously, some of the current UPC political rhetoric might be traced to Jason Kenney's speech writer (von Scheel, 2020), who was a former writer/editor of the notorious Alberta Report; a magazine ubiquitous in Alberta in the 1990s.

Vriend V. Alberta, Supreme Court decision in 1998²⁸⁰. The Albertan government under Premier Klein, was in a frenzy and vitriol was flying out of the highest offices. At the time, Murray Billet²⁸¹ and Michael Phair²⁸² asked Premier Klein to stop fanning the flames of political polarization because it was getting dangerous. That's how it feels now – a little dangerous. But is there anyone out there right now able to ask the Premier to cool the rhetoric, and if so, would he listen? (Michelle's Letters to Max)

Max and Michelle on Activism: Now & Then

Michelle: I was coming out in 1991 when the Vriend court cases began in the Alberta courts. I was on the periphery, working on my Master's degree at the time. I was in a group called Gays and Lesbians on Campus (GALOC) at the University of Alberta, and we did some work, but nothing like Gay and Lesbian Awareness (GALA), they were the main support behind Vriend. It's so interesting that so much happened in Edmonton, a lot happened here. I find it amazing. It's almost because Alberta is the Texas of Canada... There is a lot of activism here...²⁸³

²⁸⁰ *Vriend V. Alberta* 1998 is the landmark Supreme Court of Canada decision that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and reads sexual orientation into the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is considered supreme legislation, which means all provinces and territories needed to amend legislation to align with this decision. The Albertan Government under Conservative Premier Klein briefly considered instating the Notwithstanding Clause to opt Alberta out of Charter compliance.

²⁸¹ Murray Billet is a well-known LGBTIQ+ activist in Alberta.

²⁸² Michael Phair is a well-known LGBTIQ+ activist in Alberta.

²⁸³ My reference here is specifically to LGBTIQ+ activism and the irony that the conservative, at times repressive nature of politics in Alberta, seems to spark activism in response.

Max: Yeah, I think that is pretty much it. It's like, the amount of push back you can get from some things in Alberta is the thing that drives change in a lot of ways because there is like that open level of conflict right. Literally, I went to Edson, I think about a month ago for work, and we passed, I guess it was a trailer or something, but basically it was a big sign against Bill 10²⁸⁴, and we were like, some things don't change, I guess. But also, how did you get this out here because there was nothing else around it. It was confusing, but we are also, like this is how Alberta just works. There is conflict, some of us, like the people I work with, chose to ignore some of the conflict, since we live in the city, we don't have to deal with this stuff so much, but – this is why we do the work we do...

Michelle: It's true right. Also, there is that huge separation between rural and urban, like you have mentioned before, the differences are massive...

Max: Yeah, but I think, with those sort of reminders, it is what keeps a lot of activists here pushing, I think. So, and, I think in many ways, I find the same thing when I look at how Newfoundland is doing sometimes. I forget where it was, but super recently I forget where, but

²⁸⁴ Bill 10, *An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children*, passed third and final reading, March 10th, 2015. It was brought forward by then sitting Conservative MLA Sandra Jansen. Bill 10 (2014) called for Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), LGBTIQ+ social clubs, to be formed in any school upon a student's request. Sandra Jansen introduced Bill 10 to the Alberta Legislature in December 1st, 2014 (Chorney, 2014). Ms. Jensen faced continued harassed by fellow MLAs throughout her tenure in office, but especially following the passage of Bill 10. Ms. Jansen responded by first crossing the floor to join the official opposition, before later retiring from politics altogether, citing continued harassment from fellow MLAs and some members of the public (McConnell, 2016). This story exemplifies Max's and my discussion about gender bias, misogyny, and its' implications for female leaders and female leadership on pages 420-421.

basically an openly LGBTQ speaker was invited to do a talk and they were effectively driven out of the town, they were supposed to be going to. Which I'm like, I'm not surprised because Newfoundland has a huge amount of rural space and their separation between church and state is a lot more recent than most provinces. And realistically, I don't think that is truly the case. But, I know people who are in St. John's, which is kind of where the queer place to be, [where there are people] who are doing the really hard work on that as well, so it is interesting to see the ways in which almost open levels of conflict pushes people to fight harder.

Michelle: It's an interesting point, because I think when everyone is trying to build consensus all the time, it kind of smooths over the rough edges, and sometimes you need to see those rough edges to understand the details of peoples' realities.

Max: Instead of smoothing things over in Alberta and in Newfoundland, I think it more like things are crashing together and breaking.

Michelle: It's all rocks...

Max: They almost like beat each other to a pulp and then they come together and it's fine. (Michelle's Field Note, May 22nd, 2018)

Michelle's Reflection: on Greta's Visit & MAGA

Dear Max,

Oct. 22nd, 2019

Thinking about open levels of conflict, I am reminded of seeing and feeling those tensions at recent climate rally in Edmonton. I went to see Greta Thunberg²⁸⁵ speak in Edmonton on

²⁸⁵ Greta Thunberg is young Swedish climate activist. She spoke on the steps of the Alberta Legislature in Edmonton on October 18th, 2019, calling on Albertans and Canadians to address the climate crisis through meaningful policies.

global warming and the ongoing and impending climate crisis. That evening, everyone who attended the rally in Edmonton was labeled radical climate activists by the Premier. Freedom of assembly is a Charter right; my grandfather and father fought in the First and Second World Wars respectively, so Canadians should have such rights and freedoms. I thought it was important to see Greta Thunberg speak and hear what she had to say. I also wanted to go there to physically show my support for all the youth. I knew it would be a bit of a circus too, with a counter-rally scheduled as well – and oh it was ... I was a bit concerned because the Together We Roll group of counter-protesters were last in Edmonton, along with the Yellow Vests, in December of 2018, when violence broke out²⁸⁶.

It was surreal, arriving at the rally, to be greeted by: Canadians in MAGA²⁸⁷ hats, these

Approximately 6000 attended. It was sobering to witness Edmonton Police Service (EPS) snipers atop the Alberta Legislature surveilling the crowd.

²⁸⁶ The *Yellow Vest* Protesters mixed with the *Together We Roll* Protesters in December 2018 at Churchill Square in Edmonton (McMillan, 2018). The *Yellow Vests* showed up at rallies across Canada exactly one month after they appeared in violent protests accompanied by looting and fires in Paris, France. A few months later, the *Together We Roll* group drove large rigs from Alberta to Ottawa. This group, some sporting yellow vests, was greeted by Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs) in Ottawa (Boutilier, 2019).

²⁸⁷ MAGA hats are often worn at Trump rallies by supporters of President Trump to signal support for the Trumpism and the Republican political agenda in public domestic and foreign policies under his administration. MAGA is an acronym that means *Make America Great Again*. The *Make Alberta Great Again* hats seem like a double play; reading as both a nod to Alberta oil and gas, and perhaps not so obviously, a nod to the generally anti-evidenced based policies, belligerent overtones and practices, and often racist, xenophobic, homophobic, transphobic, etc. political rhetoric south of the border (Mason, 2016). Other iterations of Trump's MAGA hats, include the *Make Canada Great Again* (MCGA) hats, which cropped up in the months before our last Canadian federal election, and

ones though, read Make Alberta Great Again; people standing on hills filming all who entered; and chants of I love energy and I love Alberta oil. The MAGA hats threw me for a second because I didn't realize I was at a Trump rally, and I had to shake my head ... Nope, I'm not in Kansas yet, I'm still in Alberta... which is, at this point, is still in Canada ...

The bizarreness of that day aside, your lino prints about oil and water help me think about leadership. I think of young adults like yourself who are saying we need to do things differently. I think of how leadership fails by holding to old ways and not adapting to needed change. I believe youth see more keenly when priorities become disordered and policies that follow become brittle, heartless, and cruel. A case in point would be a newly minted provincial policy, out just yesterday, that will de-index Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) pensions, so that severely handicapped individuals will not get cost of living increases in their disability pensions²⁸⁸. This policy seems particularly cruel to people who in need of government support, while huge oil companies received provincial tax breaks in the billions.

(Michelle's Letters to Max)

Privilege

Dear Max,

April 30th, 2018

Privilege is such an important conversation and such a difficult one too. I know so many people, myself included, when I began thinking about privilege who would say, well you know I

MGHA (*Make Germany Hate Again*) hats, adopted by white nationalist groups, an obvious nod to the underbelly of policies, practices, and political rhetoric south of the border (Engel, 2019).

²⁸⁸ For more information see: Bellefontaine, M. (2019, November 6). *It really upsets me: AISH recipients worry about halt to indexing*. CBC News. <https://www.google.ca/amp/s/www.cbc.ca/amp/1.5350899>

am not privileged; but I am. I admit initially not understanding privilege because it was easy to look with a very short lens and a very narrow focus, and not see the depth of issues and needs that need attention. Initially, I thought, my family wasn't rich, but lower middle class. I had a stable, but modest home growing up, and although the budget was tight sometimes, we were fine. Better than fine; we were good. I think it is so easy to think of privilege in relation to neighbors, neighborhoods, and communities, and to think, well, we aren't as rich as those folks But having the ability to have a narrow focus is a privileged position; to be able to choose not to see hard issues is a privileged position; to be able to go home and have the stability of a home is a privileged position. It is necessary, but hard, to look to see – where people are experiencing housing and food insecurity, and other forms of precarity including inability to access: employment, physical and mental health supports and necessary services²⁸⁹.

(Michelle's Letters to Max)

Max: Yes, because even in – because I don't super agree with a lot of the conservative teaching or whatever, so like, for obvious reasons. (laughs)

Michelle: Me either, yes.

Max: Like they're kind of anti-me²⁹⁰, so I'm not really cool with that. It's like to what level is that knowledge important now, even if it's something that I disagree with? Even though like for some people when I encounter people who sort of come back to me with, "Oh,

²⁸⁹ I have included Max and my conversation above (Michelle's Field Note, April 21st, 2018), in which Max eloquently speaks about the problems of privilege and how that manifest in their lives and the life of their brother.

²⁹⁰ Max is referring to anti-trans rhetoric and public policy stances often promoted in social conservative circles.

everyone's allowed to have their opinion"²⁹¹ or something I'm like, yeah, but your opinion is that I cannot fundamentally exist. So where do we draw the line? [What's] the importance of this knowledge – is it telling you that I don't necessarily have the right to the same opportunities as you? And like for people of different marginalizations, right? I find this a lot – especially in terms of disability, especially people who are on disability funding like my brother. It's like where – we inherently start talking, like, we have to contribute to society. And that's through work. Where like reasonably speaking, my brother doesn't have the capacity to do work in the same ways that most of us would, which is like the eight-hour a day work week. My brother simply doesn't have that ability. I know that so many people don't either, for a variety of reasons. And trying to explain why my brother deserves something. It's like well, he can't create a living for himself because of, um, an aspect that he was fundamentally born with. He still deserves a right to life, though.

Michelle: And to have the best possible...

Max: Yes, and to have a good life at that, so but again it's back to ideal like how do I teach empathy to other people? You can't do that. Because either you believe that a bunch of people should be given the same rights as you, or you feel cheated by the world and therefore those people are given an advance, which is like try to give that fundamental conversation of privilege, but then some people really don't want to hear it, and then – because it's like oh, well,

²⁹¹ The freedom of expression argument is commonly used in social conservative circles. The argument is: *I have the right to my opinion and the right to express it.* Yes. The problem arises when speech crosses the line to infringe on another's right to exist as an equal citizen under the law. The opinion Max is referring to, is the opinion that trans people do not and cannot exist; as Max points out this opinion, taken to fruition through policy and legislation, would mean that Max would not be an equal citizen under the law. This would be a Charter violation.

you don't have that privilege in this way, so therefore you're biased on the subject. I'm like ooooh... (Michelle's Field Note, April 21st, 2018)

Max's Response: AISH & Oil

AISH payments used to be a few days before the end of the month. So, people could reasonably pay their rent and all that stuff. They²⁹² moved it to the first of the month because the end of the fiscal year is March 31st, so it looks like they have millions of dollars. When they are giving it out in the next few days. So, it's inconvenient to all those people who need income support; people who literally are severely handicapped – these people are unable to work. Your taking advantage of them to be able to say – look we saved some money – and it's not even true... It gets back to the whole world is on fire.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)

Dear Max,

Oct. 22nd, 2019

Max, I remember us talking about how there seemed to be two groups of people; with fundamentally different philosophies – those who believe that people with disabilities, like your brother, deserve to have a good life, even-though they may never be able to work a forty-hour

²⁹² The United Conservative Party (UCP) under the leadership of the Premier of the Canadian Province of Alberta, Jason Kenney.

work week to make a living, like many other people for all sorts of reasons; and others who believe these necessary supports are entitlements and governments need not provide them. I return to look at your image – oil and water indeed, these two philosophies are so far apart, they don't mix – like oil and water. In Alberta, the importance of oil floats above water.

(Michelle's Letters to Max)

Michelle: I think oil prices are currently sitting at \$3.85 a barrel...²⁹³

Max: Oil prices have tanked – like, we've been telling you this – this whole time...

Michelle: It's a roller coaster...

Max: That's how stocks work, that's how economics work. Even part of me wishes that Alberta would have started to invest in transitional stuff earlier, because then at least we would have something...

Michelle: Agreed. They recently took the nurses' and teachers' pensions and invested them in the Oil Sands; the entire world is getting out of oil stocks right now and your investing...

Max: ...into a dying economy.

Michelle: Yeah, and you're never going to be able to compete with Saudi Arabia, if they so choose.

Max: Yeah, exactly.

(Michelle's Field Note, March 12th, 2020)

²⁹³ Like many Albertans, one would hope this might be a wake-up call to begin to diversify our economy, especially after Alberta's Investment Management Company (AIMco), which manages public sector pensions recently lost 4 billion dollars (Willis & Jones, 2020).

Afterword – and Again

Dear Max,

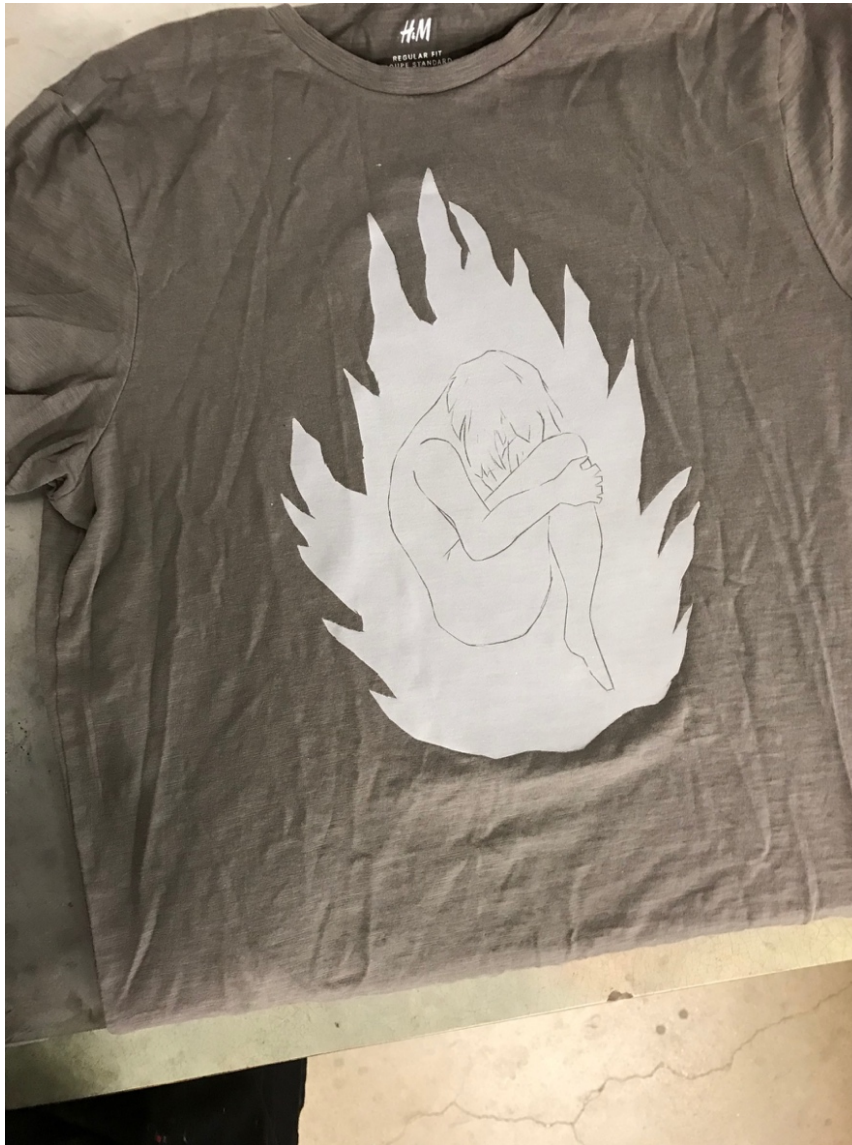
April 16th, 2020

The latest news from the States is showing the beginning of public protests against social and physical distancing measures, stay at home policies, and similar public health measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. Trump is rumbling about relaxing all the public health measures to return to business as usual²⁹⁴, while he is considering unanimously cutting American funding to the World Health Organization (WHO). Some political rhetoric is beginning in Canada too, suggesting mistakes have been made by WHO²⁹⁵, with some complaining about the competence of Canada's Chief Medical Officer, in what looks like an attempt to undermine public confidence in the public health measures put in place to limit the COVID-19 spread (Zimonjic, 2020). Money, money, money...²⁹⁶ I remember, in one of our conversations, speaking about human rights and developing supports for people with disabilities, you said, you can't teach compassion – so here we are. (Michelle's Letters to Max)

²⁹⁴ Politicizing public health seems to have deepened this crisis. Recently, Trump suggested people take disinfectants internally, prompting a spate of accidental self-poisonings and trips to emergencies in several states (BBC, 2020)

²⁹⁵ To be fair, perhaps mistakes were made by WHO, however, best time for postmortem is after, not during a crisis.

²⁹⁶ Ironically, models show that if physical distancing measures are relaxed too early, the virus will likely strongly rebound causing the economic crisis, and health crisis, to deepen over an extended period; instead of a contracted health crisis, shortened through physical distancing, we would have to endure a prolonged health crisis and period of economic instability. The economy, science, and health seem to be all aligned here; but will people buy in? Interestingly, this is not a binary choice – although questions are often posed this way. A Nobel Prize winner in economics, Nash (1950) suggests understanding complexity and basing decision on interconnectivity, may help us make better, mutually beneficial, collective decisions.



297

²⁹⁷ Image: 6.11. Artist: Max. *Untitled (the Figure in a Flame #3)*. Linocut print on t-shirt, July 30, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.



298

²⁹⁸ Image: 6.12. Artist: Max. *Untitled (you may not want me but WEEDS ARE RESILIENT)* Button. July 2018.

Third (Intergenerational) Dialogue: Identity Language and Community

Read my Buttons



299

Dear Max,

June 25th, 2018

This seemed like a nice place to start. With your interest in queer history and my access to the Edmonton Queer History Project (EQHP) collection at the moment, I thought I would bring some artifacts (Assorted Buttons from EQHP) from project in for discussion. It was wonderful that you brought some buttons, that you had recently made as well (Max's Assorted Buttons). First, I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I didn't know buttons were still a thing. I was feeling a little out of touch with youth when you told me that buttons are very popular

²⁹⁹ Images: 6.13 (left) & 6.14 (right). Artist: Max. *Untitled (Max's Assorted Buttons)* Buttons. July 2018; and *Untitled (Assorted Buttons from EQHP)* Buttons from the Edmonton Queer History Project (EQHP) exhibition collection, 2015 (button dates circa 1970s -1990s). I am grouping images (Image 6.13 & 6.14) to think *with* Max's artwork alongside historical artifacts, what is common and different in content, context, expression.

amongst youth today. You spoke also about your group of friends in OUTLoud in Caldon³⁰⁰, who whenever possible pull out the button-maker to make buttons. I talked about when I came out in the early 90's in Edmonton, and how buttons were a thing then too. People sometimes wore jackets covered with buttons and you replied that some youth you know do that too. Their bags are covered with buttons, and your saying to them, like, how do you not lose those? I said back in the day, when I came out in the 90's anyway, buttons were pretty political. If you had something to say, you wore a button saying it. It was a way of communicating what was important to you, and taking up public space, without having to speak. You said that that sounded cool; it's like read my buttons, then we can have a conversation. I laughed and said – yeah, that's about right... (Michelle's Letters to Max)

Michelle: So you like this one the best the purple one?

Max: Yes.

Michelle: (reading the purple pin, from EQHP) *I don't mind straight people as long as they act gay in public.* Yeah, I like that one too. (laughs) It's funny you know, in the 80s it was like the buttons were such a big thing. It's like you didn't have to say anything – you just wore a lot of buttons. (laughs).

Max: I like the implication of that – just look at the buttons and then we can like – discuss...

Michelle: Then we can discuss, exactly. It was kind of true...

(Michelle's Field Note, June 12th, 2018)

³⁰⁰ Caldon is pseudonym.

... I especially love the big button you created with the writing, (You May Not Want Me but WEEDS ARE RESILIENT). That dandelion has some attitude; it seems rugged, with its' stalky stem. It reminds of dandelions or grass that breaks through cement. I love your drawing too. And I love the message – growing wild and untamed regardless taking up space and breaking though barriers and making and taking space to be. I imagine that, like that dandelion, you do that too – break down barriers to make space for yourself, as I have had to too so many times. (Michelle's Letters to Max)

Returning to Pull on a Loose Thread: the Promise of and Challenge to (Queer) History

Dear Max,

Dec. 17th, 2019

*Thinking of possibilities and possible supports for queer youth and young adults, my thoughts return to the Edmonton Queer History Project (EQHP) 2015, a project that Dr. Kristopher Wells³⁰¹, Michael³⁰² and I created. I recall the TREX travelling exhibition *Re-Imaging Normal*, which showcased EQHP and contemporary artwork by LGBTIQ+ artists such as yourself, and I wonder how EQHP, if it was digitally archived or packaged as a travelling exhibition, could act as an important resource for queer youth and young adults, especially in remote and rural areas. As I return to one of our conversations about history and resources, I think about how EQHP could be developed and extended to suit the needs of queer and trans*

³⁰¹ Dr. Kristopher Wells is not a pseudonym; Kris was the Primary Investigator (PI) of the Edmonton Queer History Project (EQHP) 2015. EQHP is currently (2020-2021) being transformed into a digital archive. To view EQHP please see <https://www.edmontonqueerhistoryproject.com>

³⁰² Michael is not a pseudonym; he was a project coordinator in the Edmonton Queer History Project (EQHP) 2015.

*youth and young adults*³⁰³. It is important to acknowledge in queer histories, as well as more traditional histories, that silences and gaps exist in any narrative, and to look to see whose stories are yet missing and still need to be told. (Michelle's Letters to Max)

Max's Response: But Whose Narratives are Left Out Here?

It also reminds me that I know so many history majors who come from places of privilege. So, you have like cisgender, straight, like, white people primarily [who say] well, history's just facts, like I don't even have to worry about it. I'm like do you know who writes this? (laughs) This is a big issue. This is sort of fundamental knowledge of going in, I'm like, who's narratives are being left out here?

(Max in conversation with Michelle, April 21st, 2018)

³⁰³ The challenge of history is its relevance to the present and future (Hall, 2001); Stuart Hall (2001) writes about the possibility of building a *living archive*, by which he meant an archive, alive to the present and future. EQHP (2015) is an amazing archive that encompasses Edmonton's Queer history from 1970-2015. Being a community-based project, it is amazing, but it also has holes. Holes and absences that need to be acknowledged, honored and addressed. How can we do this – this is a question. For instance, Queer, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour history has happened in Edmonton between 1970- 2015, and very accessible history has been made recently between 2015 to present. Who can we bring to talk about these histories? I know a few people, and I bet they know a few more...

Returning to Pull on an Early Thread³⁰⁴: The White Stripe

Dear Max,

October 27th, 2019

Because your images sometimes makes me think about strength and vulnerability in relation to adversity, they call to mind one of our early conversations³⁰⁵. We had spoken on several topics, including the trans flag, which sparked a conversation about gender identity. I was surprised when you said that your identity as a non-binary trans person continues to be contested terrain, even within the queer community, because many trans and cisgender people believe non-binary identity does not exist. (Michelle's Letters to Max)

Michelle: I forget what the white stripe means do you remember?

Max: Um, the white stripe represents non-binary people...

Michelle: Oh yes... Of course...

Max: This is something that kind of confuses me... there are like people, who are trans and cis alike, who say like non-binary people don't exist. I'm like, it's in the flag! It's – right –

³⁰⁴ Field Note April 11th, 2020: Dear Max, these sewing references (i.e., following a thread and picking up a stitch), are both a nod to your love of sewing and recently picking up of my mom's crochet hooks and knitting needles to pick up again where mom and I left off, when mom began to teach me these skill years a few years ago now.

³⁰⁵ This is May 22nd, 2018. Max and I are meeting for our second research conversation. It is convenient and comfortable place to meet for Max and myself because Max has just finished taking art classes here in the previous fall and winter terms, while I continue to teach drawing class in this place. It is a sunny morning and we are meeting at what will become our regular table over the next few months. It is a small table by a bank of windows in the foyer at Allard Hall. Light streams through the windows where we meet. At this point in our conversation, we are looking through the Interpretive Guide/Exhibition Catalogue for the TREX *Re-Imaging Normal*, an exhibition in which Max participated, and we come across a photograph of the Trans flag. This is a piece of our conversation.

there. And also, I don't just see why people can't see that someone's existence is proof of a thing... They're like -- that's not real! ... And I'm, like, I know a solid like 30 people who identify as non-binary and there are so many more, like globally, and in North America and such. The fact that people are identifying this way is proof that it's real!

Michelle: Absolutely! I think it's that need to categorize and put people into tidy little boxes... (Michelle's Field Note, May 22nd, 2018)

Follow a Thread: Troubling Gendered Bias

Max: I understand that the human brain really loves to categorize things and it makes things easier to have these very cut and dried categories. This came up in my class because someone made a project about toxic masculinity and someone replied that there are also good masculine traits. And that got me thinking what are masculine traits? And why are they considered masculine? Like leadership, for example, okay, so, that is just wrong! So, it is a weird balance understanding the categorization to describe things, but also do we need those categorizations? And what are the implicit biases that are tied to those?

Michelle: Like how does that effect female leaders? How does that play into the barriers they face daily?

Max: Like the name calling they get called more so, more directed toward female politicians, it's ridiculous, and it shows how men in politics don't have a good idea of how women work. Even this idea that so many male politicians promote that women can't be in charge because what if they get their period, and that one was used in reference to Hillary Clinton, and no offense, but she is past menopause. They don't know anything about female anatomy. (laughs)

Michelle: Look at some of the women leaders now like the prime ministers of Finland and New Zealand. They are kick ass. I think the person in New Zealand was an activist.

Max: Yes, and in New Zealand I've heard their motivation isn't profit. They are turning away from more capitalist based systems to focus on the fact that we are in climate emergency and that is deeply impressive to be able to do that as a country. Sure, New Zealand is a small country, but it is still deeply impressive.

Michelle: To change your priorities around like that and respond in a timely and meaningful way. Like the assault rifle ban, they enacted. They were like, okay – these are gone. These politicians are not paid by a lobby. We need more leaders like that³⁰⁶.

(Michelle's Field Note, March 12th, 2020)

Michelle's Reflections: on Gender & Bias

Dear Max,

Nov. 12th, 2018

Just thinking back to my childhood, my parents never gendered me really, in that they never pushed me to perform gendered roles. I mean, in the mid 60s, when I was born, a lot of gender roles were strongly advocated and promoted by parents, schools etc. Sure, Mom made me a few dresses as a kid, and I wore them to church or what have you. But, I grew up like a wild child of the woods, climbing, swinging from trees, and mucking about in the creek. I got trucks, dinky cars, and dolls for Christmas, and I played with them all. At school, the kindergarten books, sitting benignly on the back shelves, foretold career paths for boys and girls: boys could

³⁰⁶ I applaud the Canadian's Government's Order in Council, May 1st, 2020, to act quickly to ban assault style rifles in Canada; this is a courageous act.

be firemen, policemen, and doctors; girls could be either nurses or teachers. At least, I suppose, the books hinted girls could have careers, however limited the options.

Importantly, since my mom and dad grew up in the 30s, during the Great Depression and lived through the Second World War, they adopted certain roles themselves, but they never placed any of those gendered expectations on me (girls act like this, boys like this). In high school, I remember having a hard time finding a summer job, so my dad taught me bricklaying, and took me onto the job sites with him. I remember people stopping on the sidewalks to watch me work. Dad got teased by the other bricklayers; but I was good at it, and the teasing stopped. They didn't want to be outdone by a girl. Dad was proud of me; as he told me, and everyone else too, I was one of the best he had taught. He was a stone mason, foreman, and bricklayer. He was skilled and took great pride in his work; so did I.³⁰⁷

Thinking back to my parents growing up in the Great Depression, it was a time when everybody worked in some way, if they could. During the War, when Dad was overseas, as a paratrooper deployed in France and Germany, Mom worked in a factory, like so many young women. She loved working and being in the world. When, dad came home after the War, mom like most women gave up her job, for the returning men, and started working at home instead. Women in the workforce were no longer needed; they were seen as extra people³⁰⁸. Although my

³⁰⁷ I love these memories when I learned alongside my dad in this way.

³⁰⁸ There of course is no such thing as extra people; but referring to Max and my conversations, this sentence refers to the downside of capitalism, extra labour in the labour force. In the 1950's, when the men and some women, returned home from the War, gender norms were widely promoted and stringently adhered to, in what looks like an attempt to remove women from the workforce, so men could occupy existing jobs. I think of the lost human potential, the loss of innovation, and creativity.

mom and dad lived those roles themselves, they never seemed to consider those roles for me. They never wanted anything to confine me, hold me back, or define me. They wanted me to define myself. They were determined, I would not be an extra person. They dreamed for me that I would go to university, I would have a job, I would have agency, I would make my own living, my own life, and my own way. My mom and dad were amazing and I love them for loving me enough to help me be and become whoever I needed to be. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

Returning to Pick Up a Dropped Stitch: Reflecting On the Challenges of Naming

Dear Max,

October 30th, 2019

When I think about self-definition and what a challenge it is for me; I think of the challenge of language, as it becomes fixed, rigid, and laden with associations. As I consider notions of binary oppositions and the arbitrariness of ideas around gender binary opposites - fixed, set in stone, non-negotiable; I too think about how some of these ideas are becoming brittle over time, thin, worn-out. I also think of the persistence of norms. I consider how much personal strength and resilience, it must take for you, to stand your ground to just be yourself – a self-identified non-binary trans person, an artist, a queer community activist, and a student, within and outside the queer community. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

Language Alongside Queer, Trans and Non-binary Identities: Intergenerational

Differences

Dear Max,

May 30th, 2019

In our conversation June 12th, 2018, we spoke about the advantage of having language to name identity, but also about the policing of language and terminology within the queer

community. Your words help me consider how language and naming can either open imaginative possibilities that enable queer identity formation and existence or shut down these possibilities.

We enter this conversation as you are discussing your learning about non-binary trans identities within the context of The Intergenerational Queer Dialogue Project, a project run by your co-worker. (Michelle's Letters to Max)

Max: ...it always comes up as a topic, people who identified this way always existed, but there just wasn't always the terminology for it. It's just a super interesting way for me to think about things, because I have largely grown up with that terminology – I'm like – Oh! That didn't always just happen... Which is like an interesting thing to remember because the people who I was talking to recognized, it is a thing that you could see in people, just like – didn't have the words for it, which is interesting...³⁰⁹

(Michelle's Field Note, June 12th, 2018)

³⁰⁹ Field Note June 14th, 2018: Dear Max, I love thinking with this piece of our conversation because it provides me with insight into the importance of intergenerational sharing and learning in queer communities. I am curious to know what older people learned from you and if they told you what your conversations together had meant to them. Your story also help me think about how having language and terms for identity helps you understand your identity as a non-binary trans person in relation to queer community stories and histories. As I think of queer community stories and histories, I think too about the fluidity of language over time, and how queer identities exist despite absences, gaps, or changes in language and naming. I also think about the difficulties with language and how sometimes I have struggled to name myself, as I often feel caught between terms that don't quite fit or grow loose in time. I also think about the names we choose and names others put upon us, inside and outside queer communities.

Max: on Language Policing & Troubling Terminologies

I think what I find really interesting in terms of terminology, or what you can find in some part of the community, is the ways some people tend to strongly police terminology, especially for people who use what might be considered outdated terms. Honestly, that kind of frustrates me a bit, because people didn't have, like, certain terminology growing up, so they created their identity alongside this other word that you wouldn't necessarily use I suppose. Some words I see often really policed are some words that are considered slurs for some reason or another, or people who consider themselves transsexuals, or just the wrong word for trans, or there are also a number of older trans men who label themselves as lesbians, and there are a lot of young folks who are not super into it.

I don't like when people are policing the ways in which people use language because I'm, like, not everyone has the same language as you, and some people apply language differently. Because of the context in which they were raised, and that sort of stuff, and saying people that people can't use terms for their identity that they have been using, for let's say thirty years or something like that, because it's offensive or

whatever, is really invalidating to their identity³¹⁰.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, May 22nd, 2018)

³¹⁰ Field Note May 30th, 2018: Dear Max, As I think about the word lesbian in relation to gender policing, I recall the words of some older women in the queer community, who identify as lesbian, and are very uncomfortable with trans women calling themselves lesbians. I have also witnessed push back by some older folks in the LGBTIQ+ community to newer terms, like queer, because some see that term as a slur. As I think about names put upon people by others, I recall my stories; I think of the names I have chosen to call myself and other names put upon me. I have often thought of names we choose, being names we choose for ourselves, originating from within the queer community, and names put upon us, as names, put upon us by those outside the queer community. Your story expands my thinking to consider both: the complexity of intergenerational differences within the queer community, and the multiplicity of what we call the queer community is in fact multiple, diverse, queer communities, each with their own languages and ways of identifying, naming, meaning-making, and storytelling. Time is a factor too. The term queer, for example, was derogatory and was put on members of queer communities from those outside those communities. But with time, many people from inside queer communities reclaimed the word queer as a badge of resilience and pride. On a more personal note, just recently, Max I was trying to write about my identity in the introduction to a paper and it is complicated. As I have told you, I identify as lesbian and queer. Lesbian is an older and kind of outmoded term; it comes with a lot of baggage. Yet when I was coming out, it was the term that was there. I was coming out in the early 1990s just as queer theory was introduced and I came to the term queer later and adopted it as it gives me more room to breathe. But lesbian is still a term I hold because I took it up years ago. While I know, for some, it holds negative connotations, for me it remains part of my identity, even though at times it feels uncomfortable. For me, language, never seems a comfortable fit, whether it is naming originating from inside or outside queer communities.

Fourth Dialogue: World Travelling & Holding Space Open to Learn Alongside

Max: On Being Open to Learn Alongside

I feel very grateful for the fact that my mom sort of raised me under the guise of, “you don’t know everything – because we all have different experiences”. And I think my brother’s having – like my brother being autistic, is something that definitely contributed to that too. Because I can literally see firsthand that even though we both are in the same family, we have different life experiences, like in school and in general, just because of my ability to communicate. So yeah, I think that at least set me up in a way that it’s like it’s been easier for me to accept almost like criticism on my lack of knowledge and really understanding the fact that I don’t have all the knowledge in the world and I never will...³¹¹

(Max in conversation with Michelle, April 21st, 2018)

³¹¹ It is April 21st, 2018. This is piece of Max’s and my first research conversation. We are meeting at Remedy Café. The Café is busy, but chill. The place has a comfortable, relaxed vibe. We are sitting in large comfy chairs near the entrance. Music plays lowly in the background. Our conversation is relaxed, as we speak over latté and iced coffee. I love this quote because it helps me think about your art, and an openness that will also need as audience to comes alongside your artwork and learn in relation.

Images as Space Holders

312

³¹² Image: 6.15. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Purple Portrait)*. Ink and paint on paper, August 2018.



313

³¹³ Image: 6.16. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Green Portrait)*. Ink, crayon, and paint on paper, June 2018.

Dear Max,

Aug. 5th, 2018

I remember you showing me these faces (Purple Portrait and Green Portrait) that you had painted during one of our first research conversations. I remember asking about the colour and you said that green was your favorite colour and a purple was also a colour you were drawn too. You also said that you loved painting faces.

I recall asking you the meaning behind your paintings (Images 6.15-6.16, Purple Portrait and Green Portrait) and our conversation that followed. It was insightful for me to hear the stories underlying your image. When you told me a story about the circumstances that surrounded and possibly informed your artmaking process, your image took on new life for me³¹⁴. (*Michelle's Letter to Max*)

Michelle: *Beautiful! So why the ...? What's this one about with the purple and the green? And do you mind if I take photos of them later?*

Max: *Oh, totally. Well, honestly, it started with me just drawing a face cause, I like to do that ...*

Michelle: *Yes.*

Max: *And, I sort of like trying to think about some meaning that could come from it because [there are] a lot of things that I feel. But then I don't know how to word it or if I want to.*

Michelle: *That's alright, that's alright...*

³¹⁴ The conversation that follows is an excerpt from Max's and my discussion June 12th, 2018. Max and I are sitting at a small table by a large sunny window in the Allard Hall foyer at MacEwan. Max had been taking classes there that past winter and fall terms. He is now enrolled full time in a program. I continue to teach classes at MacEwan. This is an excerpt from our conversation in process.

Max: *I think in a lot of ways I really like the colour green and it is a colour that I really associate with myself a lot for whatever reason. I think it's just because I like it.*

Michelle: *You are wearing a blue green shirt (laughs)....*

Max: *Yeah, I think, if I am remembering correctly, because this was earlier in the month. I was starting to get stressed about a bunch of different things because like this was before Pride season had officially started. It's like I had a lot of things going on. It's also like a stressful sort of season, in a multitude of ways. Because there is a lot to do and not just because I am an active community member. It's also thinking about how the other people around me navigate Pride as well.*

Michelle: *Interesting, that's interesting...*

Max: *Having to talk to my friends, who are like, this is my first Pride or these are my feelings on Pride – all that kinda stuff. So, it's like there are a lot of different emotional pulls.*
(Michelle's Field Note, June 12th, 2018)

Dear Max

Sept. 30th, 2019

Thank you for this conversation, because it helps me to get some insight into the multiplicity of meanings and complexity of stories, thoughts and feelings, that compel your artmaking practice and, also, to see how your art is informed by your stories of lived experience. Our conversation about this artwork helps me remember the words you often used to describe art and life: "It's complicated". Here, I am reminded how Pride can be a set complex negotiations, especially for LGBTIQ+ youth and LGBTIQ+ young adults, members of the trans community, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour groups (BIPOC), in relation to often older, cisgender, and non-racialized segments of the LGB/ LGBTIQ+ community. I am reminded of

one of our earliest conversations where we talked about the frustration you sometimes felt talking to adults, as a trans and non-binary young adult, and talking to older members of the LGBTIQ+ community, trying to get them to see all the work that still needs to be done.

I flash back to 1992 and just coming out. I remember a group of my friends gathered at the Gazebo on Whyte Ave. I think there was a Pride Parade that year, which consisted of a few people walking down Whyte together. I remember Michael Phair speaking and a bunch of us folks hanging out, sitting on the grass, listening. Maybe there were one hundred or two hundred people. There wasn't much, you know... I mean back then, there really wasn't much. The whole Pride movement was so small, that we hung together, and found common ground. But again, there were so few of us you know... that were out anyway. There was solidarity because – we were just trying to do something, make something... anything. Because there was next to nothing³¹⁵. There were few supports. When I created the LGBTIQ+ film festivals in Edmonton in 1992 & 1993³¹⁶, it was a big deal. It was big because it was public facing community event. We

³¹⁵ It should be noted that HIV/AIDs impacted LGBTIQ+ communities and movements in the 1980s and 1990s and many, many people from our communities were lost. LGBTIQ+ organizations were also negatively impacted by this health crisis. Fear of HIV/AIDS was rampant and resulted in increased social stigma and violence against LGBTIQ+ people. In Alberta, fear-based homophobic and transphobic political rhetoric and intolerant policies were a sign of the times.

³¹⁶ In 1992, the first LGBTIQ+ film festival, I curated was called the *Voice and Vision*. It consisted of about thirty Canadian independent films, the most renowned being the Edmonton premiere of John Greyson's film the *Making of Monsters*, which had previously opened Berlin and Montreal. The National Film Board hosted the event in Canada Place. This first film festival came at the beginning of the cross Canada independent film circuits, which began in the early 1990s. The second film festival, I curated was called *Speaking in Tongues*, as part of Gays and Lesbians on

had about 300 LGBTIQ+ folks come out for three days and nights. It's hard to imagine being a LGBTIQ+ youth or young adult now, and what Pride would mean for me because Pride has become huge. I know there were 50,000 people at the 2015 Edmonton Pride. I walked with the iSMSS³¹⁷ and Camp fYrefly group in 2015. It was amazing. It felt great – all the people out.

I suppose, truth be told, I'm torn. More needs to be done, no argument there; and us older folks need to step up and help as we can. I suppose the torn part is that we did create something that calls for remembrance and celebration; it was always going to be imperfect, but there was nothing – and without that past, and those fights and those wins, where would we be now? Perhaps no better off. But just thinking to the recent press coverage around Pride being cancelled or the Pride protest – most coverage was respectful – so that's changed. In 1992 and 1993, some press coverage was respectful, but some wasn't. You know I am reminded of something you said about not being able to teach compassion – which is true, but between then and now, there has been a generational shift toward societal, and for the most part, political acceptance. This wasn't the case in the early 1990s. I recall you saying that you shouldn't have to convince people you have the right to exist; that was our fight too. Queer history is so interesting here, because it is foundational, however imperfect; as Stuart Hall (2001) points out the importance of history is how it is lived in the present and future – this includes contesting it, challenging it, remaking it, as we were doing then, and as queer youth and young adults are *doing now*. (*Michelle's Letter to Max*)

Campus (GALOC), we brought approximately 30 international and Canadian independent films by LGBTIQ+ filmmakers.

³¹⁷ iSMSS is an acronym for the institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Max: on Barriers to Progress, Inclusiveness & Moving Forward Together

*Progress was made at the time, but it was not fully inclusive, so not for Queer and Trans People of Colour. So, we need to go back and do that again ...*³¹⁸

*But I find there's an extra hurdle in working with adults. I'm nineteen, so it's almost like because I don't have that formal education yet or anything even though I work at the University of Alberta now. A lot of my programming comes from research, there's still the thought that I'm younger than them. That I therefore don't have – they would have more knowledge than me, or [know] how the world works. So, I'm like: "but I'm here to share knowledge with you. This is why you brought me here..."*³¹⁹

These kind of things are frustrating and I'm like even sometimes [when] I'm working with other people in the queer community, it depends on what sort of thing they

³¹⁸ This piece of our conversation Max, on May 22nd 2018. We were discussing *Vriend V. Alberta* and advances made in LGBTIQ rights, but also that there remains a lot to be done because people are still being left out. Max and I had been speaking about the Edmonton Pride Protest 2018, in relation to queer history and the progress of queer rights. When we spoke earlier, that same day, Max spoke about the challenges within the larger queer community and trying to find support to address work that needs to be done on behalf of Queer and Trans People of Colour and queer people with disabilities.

³¹⁹ In this section, Max was referring to their work in *OutLoud and fYrefly in Schools*, where youth and young adults have been invited by school board to come in and talk about LGBTIQ+ issues.

focus on obviously, but there are some people who are like, we have like legal same-sex marriage – we're done. I'm like trans people don't do it, but okay. And different experiences come through like disabled queer people and people of color. These are still things that we have to work towards, but just saying that [it's] the stuff that effects you, [and] that's done.

I'm, like, but there's still so much work to do! And having to try give them that push, and almost convince, them, like oh, but there's other people in the community that aren't you. It's so – it almost feels bizarre to have that conversation, because it's like – I think that's the problem. Like a lot of the stuff that I do [is] just because it's like you can't really teach empathy. It's like the fact that for some people – I have to convince you that someone's life is worth working for, or someone deserves to be respected. That is so kind of like complicated, like to build up to, so I find my experience is a bit more in terms of disability activism, but still my activism is like, queer people should still be able to exist, you know. And then having that as something that I have to convince people of is so – it's bizarre, and I still don't know really how to do it. Because it's not something that anyone can be or is trained to do...

(Max in conversation with Michelle, May 22nd, 2018)

Making the Effort to Engage in Communities

Dear Max,

Oct. 31st, 2019

Thank you for talking about the barriers you face, as you seek to educate those both within and outside queer communities. You remind me that age shouldn't be equated with experience. I have learned so much from your stories, stories I did not and could not know otherwise. Lugones (1987) speaks about arrogant perception and it is arrogant perception to think someone knows less because they are younger or older than we are. If we fail to see each other and what we each might contribute, for whatever reason, we are locking out, missing, all that knowledge, all that humanity.

Regarding LGB and TIQ rights – Fair enough; there is so much to do. It's not fair to say, for any of us to say, I'm good, I'm done. I think back to my early twenties, and so many of us were fighting so hard to carve out a space, just to exist – just as LGBTIQ+ youth and young adults are still trying to carve out spaces today to exist, and be healthy, and happy. I know too, for me, after the film-fests, after the death threats, after the tons of work with no pay, I was tired. I stepped back for a while and I took care of my career and my life. Over the years, I have found ways to step forward and take the limelight for a time again to create something, to help create something, for and within community (like the Edmonton Queer History Project Exhibition, or *TREX* Re-Imaging Normal). I enjoy making targeted contributions that I know will use my expertise to try and make a difference. I know I can continue to contribute through the arts and through teaching, and I hope these contributions will support a few folks along the way. My presence and sometimes seeming absence from community, brings forward our recent conversation about what does it mean to be in community, to be active in community. Does it mean being physically present at community events, to be, and to be seen to as, active in

community?

Thinking with your story, I am reminded of the writing of bell hooks (2003). In her early writing, she speaks about her Beloved Community, as a place of refuge, resistance, and resilience and in her later writing she speaks of the need to go out into different communities, to rub elbows and live, work, and learn alongside others who will have different lived experiences from our own. Because older queer generations often live, work, and socialize in places that are physically separate from younger queer generations (Boulay, 2014), it is necessary for older queer folks to bridge the gaps and make efforts to stand and work alongside trans and queer youth and young adults. I think for moment about SNAP and our printmaking together and how it was a generative time and space of learning alongside. (*Michelle's Letter to Max*)



320

On Being an Ally: Holding Space Open For

Dear Max,

Oct. 28th, 2019

³²⁰ Image: 6.17. Max. *Linocut printing (Max's plates and t-shirts)*, February 28th, 2019, at SNAP printmaking studio
Edmonton, Alberta.

Max, I love the way you seem to see both sides, or multiple sides, of an issue. I love the way you see the people first and the issues and stories in which they are immersed second. It seems to me that your curiosity, along with your compassionate stance, helps you keep spaces open both figuratively and literally to walk alongside and learn in relation.

I recall meeting just two days after the Edmonton Pride protest in 2018, which you attended as an ally to support the LGBTIQ+ Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities. This is part of our conversation about the Edmonton Pride protest 2018. I recall the story you told me about literally holding the line, by linking arms with others at the Pride protest in 2018, to stop the Parade. And when people came to ask why, what, and for how long, you held firm, saying they weren't going to speak for others, but you had come in support as an ally, and they would stand your ground and hold that space open for real-time negotiations, then in progress. *(Michelle's Letter to Max)*

Holding Space: From Inside the Edmonton Pride Protest of 2018³²¹

Max: *And even in response to me as a white person in the demonstration, there were people who were like, the variety of people who were coming up was, like, very interesting, I found. Um, for some people, they came up with the – like hey, like we still love you, but can we get the parade going...*

Michelle: *Right.*

Max: *And were like – Um – that's not a super point – we are sort of like waiting until – like this gets worked through – you know...*

³²¹ This conversation between Max and I took place two days after the Edmonton Pride Protest on June 10th, 2018.

Michelle: Yeah.

Max: Um, and then some people – like, I did like the people that came because of genuine curiosity. Although, some people were like, I don't think the protestors know what they are talking about because of this and this. But it was important to remember when it comes to this sort of thing, how there are designated people for communicating these kind of things... And those people were off doing negotiations at the time.

Michelle: Right.

Max: ... and the rest of us were like, we're not going to say too much. Just because that is not our position in this, right?

(...)

Max: Mmmmmmm. Also, a funny thing, I thought about was that person – She was telling a story after [the parade] how someone came from the crowd and hit them with their sign – that said, *Silence is Violence* or something like that.

Michelle: (laughs) Wow!

Max: (laughs) Like do you know what your own sign says?! (laughs)

Michelle: They hit them with their signs? Oh my god!

Max: Yeah, (laughs) and she just thought it was really funny.

(Michelle's Field Note, June 12th, 2018)

Carving Spaces to Listen – Between Queer Communities

Dear Max,

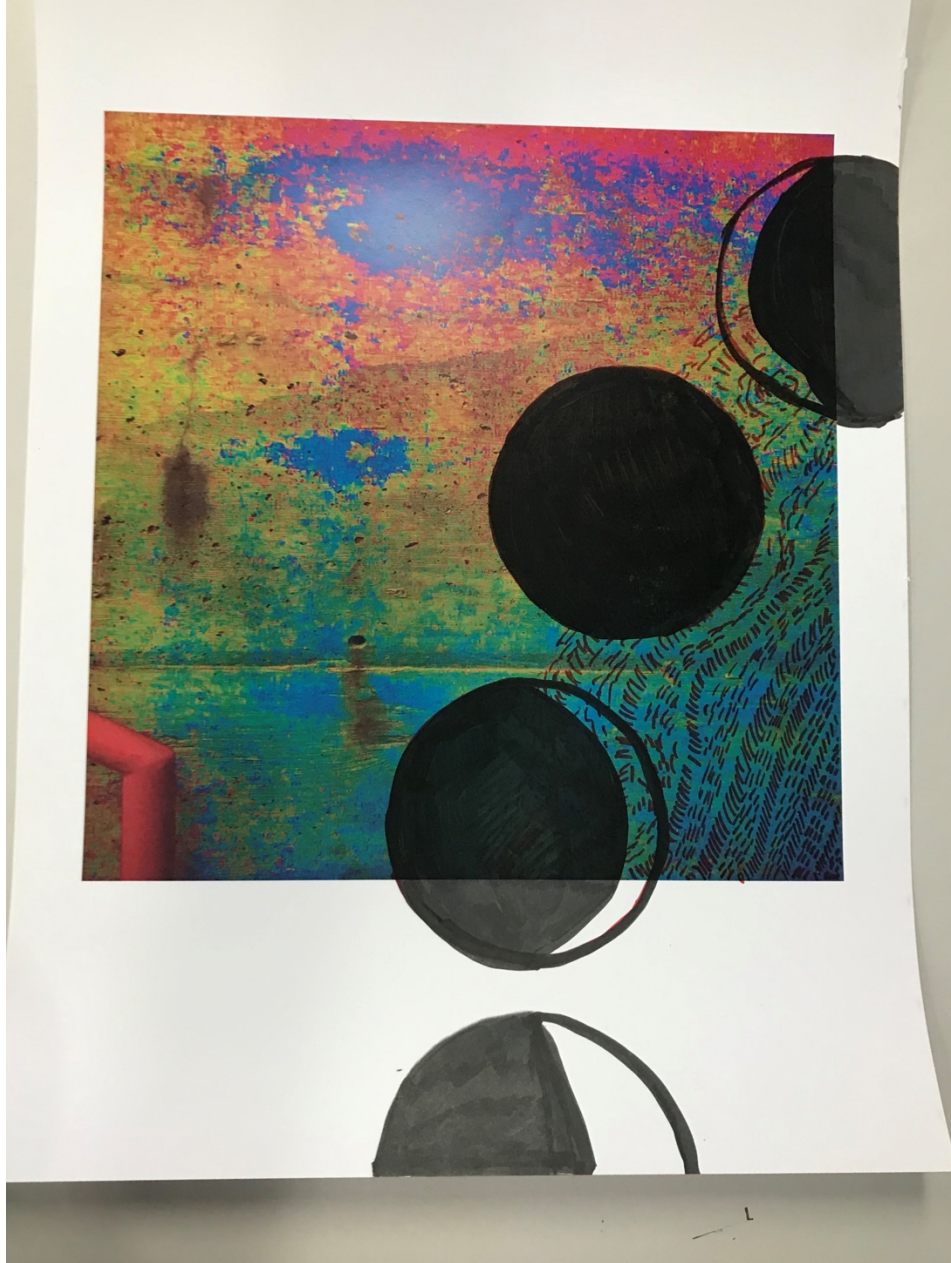
May. 6th, 2019

Listening again to your story, and the last comment, in particular, I am struck by how high the passions were between LGBTIQ+ groups and communities at the Edmonton Pride

Protest in 2018 and the later Edmonton Pride cancellation in April of 2019. Looking at your green portrait, I consider the tensions that arose around race during the 2018 protest and in its' aftermath. I think also of the tensions between queer generations that arose in 2018 and 2019, when LBG rights and celebrations were called out by younger TIQ folks saying more needs to be done to support everyone in the community (TIQ folks, People of Colour, Trans and Queer people with disabilities). These were uncomfortable times, that highlighted ruptures and fractures in our communities, and passion were high³²². Your words: It's complicated, comes to mind, when I think of the complexity of issues and passions involved; I think of the millions of shades of colours that ask us to think beyond binaries and beyond comfort zones to respond to our communities. Your story reminds me also about the complex and complicated relationships between various queer communities and the challenge of moving forward together.

(Michelle's Letter to Max)

³²² Please see Adebayo's account Parts Two and Four, which address, in some depth, many issues surrounding the Edmonton Pride Protest of 2018 and the subsequent Edmonton Pride cancellation by the Edmonton Pride Festival Society (EPFS) in 2019.



323

³²³ Image: 6.18. Artist: Max. *Untitled (the Wall and Circles)*. Acrylic paint on digital image, March 12th, 2019.

Fifth Dialogue: in Transition – Finding and Building Queer Communities



324

Max's Response: Just Mixing It Up

Sometimes, I just like mixing up the plates Michelle – I'm not going to lie to you. I just like doing stuff ... I'm not sure there is much thought to it. I just thought that it would

³²⁴ Image: 6.19. Artist: Max. *Untitled #1 and Untitled #2 (the Figure in a Flame with Circles #1 & #2)*. Linocut print on paper, March 12th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

look cool.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)

Transitioning in Relation: Queer Identities & Queer Communities

Dear Max,

March 19th, 2019

When I gave you the image of the wall to draw on, you painted circular forms that to me suggest phases of the moon. I begin to think about transitions, like the phases of the moon, and how people and communities change over time. I recall one of our early conversations about your thoughts that Edmonton's queer community seems to be in a transitional phase where resources and services for queer youths and young adults seem to be more abundant, but also, at times, less accessible.

When I think of the queer organizations in transition, I think of the Edmonton Queer History Project (EQHP), and I recollect the ebb and flow of a series of queer organizations that popped up and over time either disappeared or transitioned into something different with a new name, new mandate, and new group of people involved organizing and/or participating. Change was the only constant because queer organizations were always affiliated with larger political and social agendas within LGBTIQ+, or queer, social movements³²⁵. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

³²⁵ As noted earlier even language signifies change, the acronym LGBTIQ is often now replaced by the inclusive term queer; whereas LGBT is not as often replaced by queer and could stand for a different body politic. I am most often now using the acronym SGM, which stand for sexual and gender minority and is comprehensive and inclusive. The acronym SGM refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or trans, intersex, queer, two-spirit, pansexual, and asexual identities, plus those not self-defining as heterosexual.

Transitional Challenges: Finding Community – More Open/ More Closed

Max: Yeah. And even like although I do see like [it] getting more open, it's almost as if like we're in this weird transitional phase of there being information available and not being available. Even though we have these community organizations that have existed for many years now. It's like, I don't know, how do people learn about this because I'm like – I even go into schools like that that aren't even rural, they're within Edmonton and there's like these youths who [have] never heard of there being a Queer community before. I'm like, you even live in the city, this is whoa! And I guess it's because I work on the different levels of exposure, right?

Michelle: For sure, yes.

Max: It's also because schools aren't really teaching about it unless we come in. So, it's very complicated.

(Michelle's Field Note, April 21st, 2018)

Reflections on Finding Queer Communities

Dear Max,

Nov. 25th, 2018

I was introduced to Edmonton's queer community, in the early 90s, through my peer group – Gays and Lesbians on Campus (GALOC) at the University of Alberta. Those friendships helped to introduce me to the larger queer community because we often socialized as a group. I was surprised to hear that it is still difficult for queer youth and young adults to find queer resources and communities in Edmonton. It was interesting for me to hear, how you were first introduced to the LGBTIQ+ community through OUTLoud, a youth lead LGBTIQ+ group in Caldon, and how those friendships in OUTLoud pointed you to Camp fYrefly. I'm so glad that you came to fYrefly, because that's where we met in 2016.

(Michelle's Letter to Max)

Max: Because for me, to get into the sort of position I'm in now, I just happened to come upon an article in the Caldon newspaper, which I'm surprised the Caldon newspaper published it, about the youth group that my friend was starting up, which is like the one I work with now.

Michelle: Now is that – is that fYrefly in School or is that a different one?

Max: This one is OUTLoud. It's just like the place I volunteer in Caldon.

Michelle: Nice. Okay.

Max: But this person also introduced me to fYrefly because they had been going for three years, to that point, and that's what gave them the skills to start that group.

Michelle: Okay. Cool.

Max: It's like if they hadn't found out about fYrefly, I wouldn't have actually found out about there being a queer community for much longer than I did. Because I think I was like 15 or 16 when I found this group. And just because it's like the work that we put into getting the word out there within the Caldon community. And it's only been four years since that point, which I'm like I'm glad to know that's becoming more open, but it's also like it's a lot of a fight to keep it more open in that way, I think.

Michelle: Yes. So, let me just clarify this bit – people from fYrefly or they were working in fYrefly, then they created OUTLoud? Is that true?

Max: They went as a Camper for a couple years from age 13 and they started a group at 15, like that's incredible.

Michelle: Very cool.

Max: Yes, like how did you get this knowledge?

(Michelle's Field Note, April 21st, 2018)

Young Adults Taking a Lead

Dear Max,

Dec 1st, 2018

When I hear your story Max, I am impressed that youth and young adults, like yourself and your friends, are first, finding, much needed resources, and then, spring-boarding off those resources to create and tailor services and resources to suit their needs. That much of this work is happening through youth lead initiatives and organizations is amazing. And these youths led initiatives are happening while many established LGBTIQ+ organizations in Edmonton are going through re-structuring. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

(but Still) Come by Chance

Max: Yeah, I'm very surprised by it. Like I'm almost surprised by the amount of queer resources that we have within Edmonton, considering the attitude that I see predominantly like in parents and even teachers and all this stuff. I'm surprised that we have the resources that we do. But it's almost as if those resources are only accessible to people who come upon them by chance.

Michelle: Huh. Yeah.

Max: Because I didn't know that – like a queer community existed like for a long time. Like really because although my mom took me to a Pride Parade when I was five, to see my brother's support worker in the Parade, which looked really cool!

Michelle: That is cool, yeah...

Max: It's almost as if I only perceived that as a one-time thing but there's no other community around that. Like everybody just got together this one day a year – to party, party,

party, then they go home – that’s it. Whereas – like this. There are – at this point, there are like multiple facets of the community and that like do more like activism or more like just sort of community based get-togethers, all this kind of stuff. But unless you know someone in that community, unless someone introduces it to you, it’s so hard to find and discover. (Michelle’s Field Note, April 21st, 2018)

Spanning Gaps?

Dear Max,

Dec. 5th, 2018

My thoughts turn to the gaps in services and supports for queer, trans and non-binary youth and young adults especially in rural settings. I consider all the work done in university and community-based programs, and how even established queer community organizations are going through major transitions and disruption in services. I think about the youths and young adults possibly falling through gaps in services and programs because of transitions and changes³²⁶.

(Michelle’s Letter to Max)

³²⁶ I need to acknowledge that university institutes, such as the institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS), at the University of Alberta have been doing some of this work for decades now along with community organizations like the Pride Centre of Edmonton, which has also played a crucial role in supporting queer and trans youth, young adults, and adults in queer and trans communities. But, additional work needs to be done with input and leadership from queer, trans and non-binary youth and young adults to adjust programs and services to support emergent and changing needs amongst this demographic within specific communities. Specifically, physical and mental health supports for trans youth and young adults are in urgent need of attention. Community support programs using visual arts spoken word, and sports activities, could help support primary care physical and mental health supports.

Rural Community: Supports & Challenges

Max: Yes. I do know many people who kind of get really reductionist about these sort of things, sort of well, if you put the knowledge out there then like change will start. I'm like yeah, but you also need support for that because just giving them knowledge and zero follow-up especially, when it's really fresh; it's really new knowledge for a lot of people, even me, that's not going to stick as well as if you're there giving continuous support³²⁷. Giving continued resources – those kinds of things. Because without further guidance there isn't like a whole lot that people know how to do it. Especially if you're setting a foundational knowledge, they don't even know the extent to which this knowledge can go.

Michelle: And who they can talk with to further it, and how they can connect, you know?

Max: Yes, exactly, so, it's very complicated.

Michelle: Yes, it's interesting, it can't be a conversation, if there's nobody to talk to.

Max: I kind of wish there were more opportunities in which there could be integration of these rural like liaison sort of positions where you have someone who even like visits even if it's once a month, once every couple of months to check in, rather than be like okay, here's our session for the year that is basically giving similar knowledge to what you learned last time.

Maybe adding something more. (Michelle's Field Note, April 21st, 2018)

Community Building & The Importance of Being There

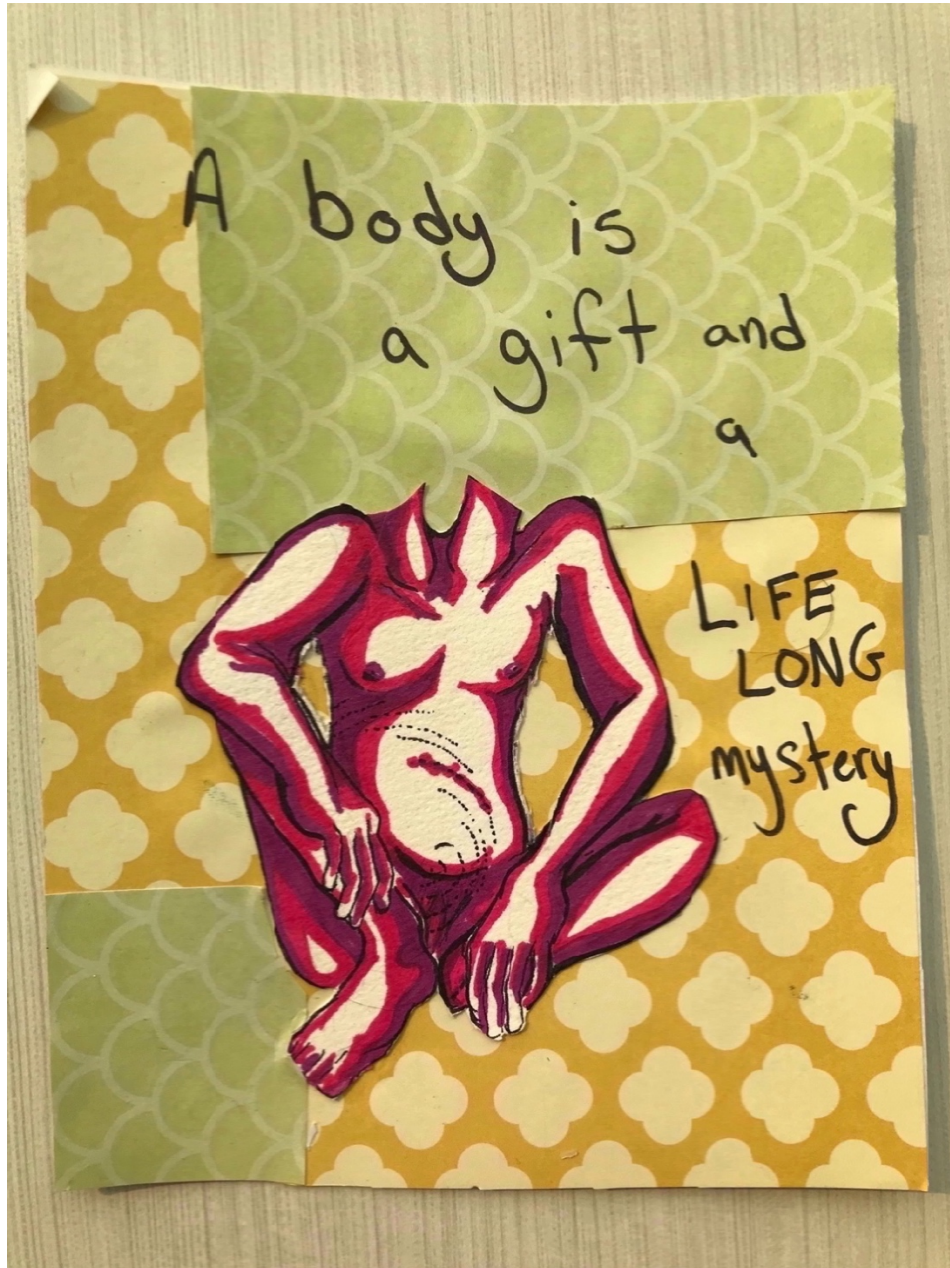
Yeah, this is the thing I try to pass onto all the groups I go to. Support can make

³²⁷ Max is speaking about their work in rural Alberta school settings, as part of the fYrefly in Schools initiative; this was a public education program focusing on LGBTIQ+ issues with training and resources provided. fYrefly in Schools was coordinated by the institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS), University of Alberta.

such an impact. I think a lot of people don't even realize that in a lot of ways because just like you know that even just being respectful of someone's pronouns or even just being like a good friend to someone to give them a lot of support and confidence for them to end up doing such amazing things. Being able to feel accepted and confident and love themselves at such a young age, it's like fantastic. So, and I try to pass this on to the people. I'm like don't brush me off on this. I have so much experience with this particular thing. I'm like please! Because, I also, like, I don't even think I'd be where I am currently without the support of the people at OUTLoud like taking me in and like having supports from fyrefly and like building that like into what I do now.

Especially, like, I find for many of the youth I've met just the impact of meeting someone who's trans, someone who's even like gay, it can give them a lot more hope for their own future, especially if they don't have that representation at home, or in their school, or whatever. And they don't necessarily feel like they have that initial support, but knowing that there's other people out there even just having that, it's almost like a bit of internal support is also really important, right?

(Max in conversation with Michelle, April 21st, 2018)



328

³²⁸ Image: 6.20. Artist: Max. *Untitled (a Body is a Gift and LIFELONG Mystery)*. Collage, ink, and paint, August 2018.

Sixth Dialogue: Building Deeper Knowledges by learning Alongside

Making Space for Lived Experience as Legitimate Knowledge

Dear Max,

May 21st, 2018

Your image (a Body is a Gift and LIFELONG Mystery) reminds me of you speaking about teaching gender theory through fYrefly in Schools. You spoke about how difficult it is to teach gender theory as part of a public education outreach program, because some students and staff view this programming as less legitimate, because it is not part of formalized curriculum. You spoke about the push back you received teaching students in public school gender theory, even though you were teaching from a place of lived experience. I remember you speaking about body parts and how certain body parts are gendered or take on gendered stories. In our discussion you stated, who says certain parts of the body mean anything, we are just taught to associate certain stories and meanings with parts of the body, but all this meaning is learned and socially conditioned. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

Even though there are so many of these stories that are erased that even though members of the groups who are part of those almost erased narratives try to bring in this education, especially if you're like public education program, they're only there for that one day, and like a school cycle or whatever, and it's almost seen as less legitimate for that reason, because it's not part of mainstream education, which is ... Yeah, it's not part of the curriculum, so it gets very complicated, or I'm like my work is important but some of you all don't see it as important as what you learn in like history or even the

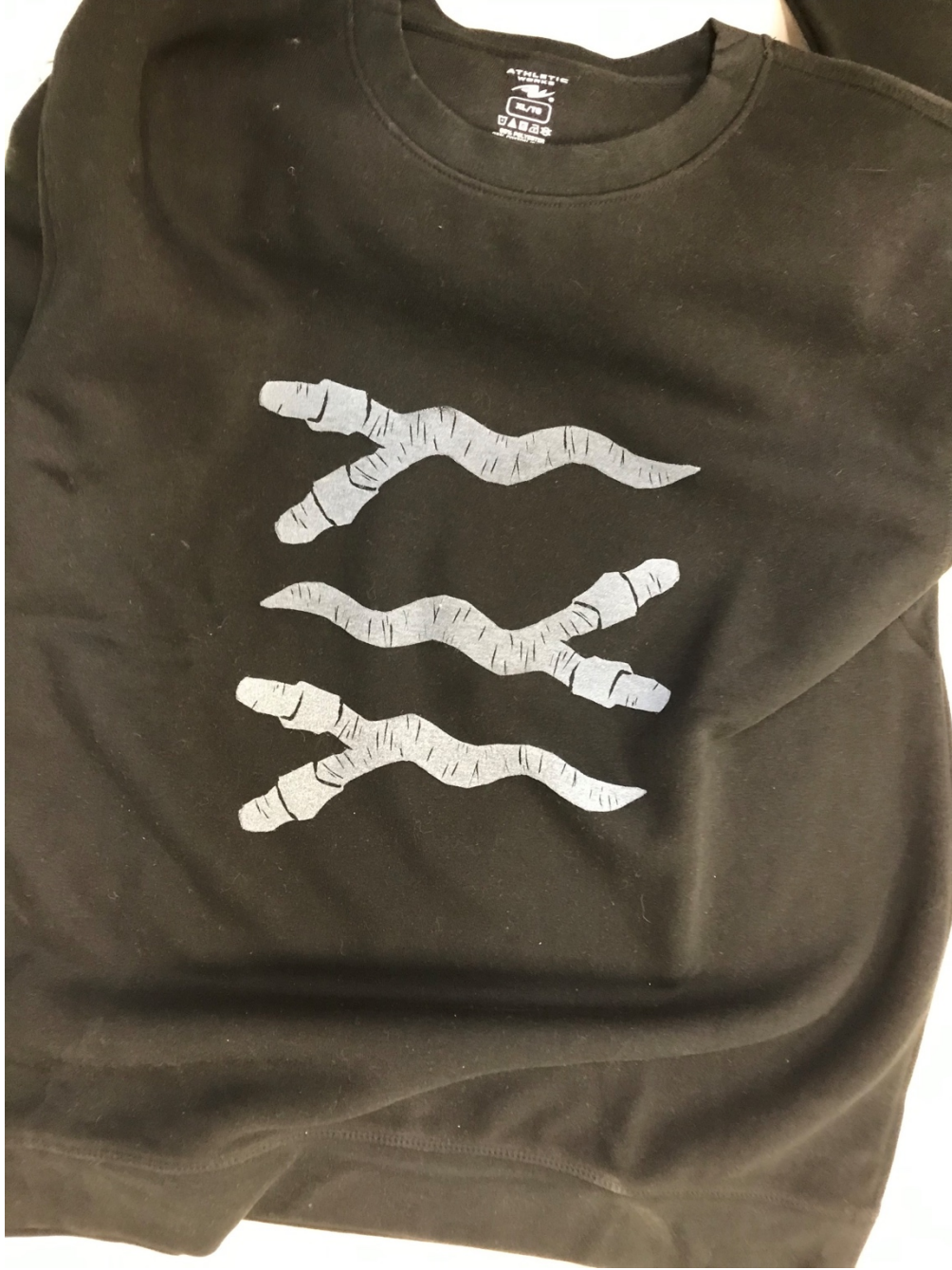
amount of people I get talking about biology and stuff to me especially when I bring up trans stuff. And this person saying... like you don't learn everything about biology in high school, but even so, there's knowledge that exists outside of school. Just so that you know. Very complicated. And having to justify that to people as well, like what I've been getting recently is a bunch of youth, who are like yeah, but how do you know that you're not wrong? I'm like, I don't know, you can find a study that proves anything, if I'm being honest with you. But I do bring a lot of lived experience, but you're not going to take that as legitimate information. Especially when it's people talking about like oh, there's only two genders or whatever. I'm like, well, I know a bunch of non-binary people and their existence, simply proves that there isn't, but okay.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, April 21st, 2018)



329

³²⁹ Image: 6.21. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Printed Carnations)* Linocut print on t-shirt, August 29th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.



330

³³⁰ Image: 6.22. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Ys)*. Linocut print on t-shirt, December 18th, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton Alberta.



331

³³¹ Image: 6.23. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Horsish)*. Linocut print on t-shirt, August 29th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton Alberta.

Dear Max,

April 24th, 2020

I love these three prints on t-shirts (Images 6.21-6.23). The first image (Images 6.21, Printed Carnations) aligns nicely with your previous comments about gender theory. Makes me laugh, I can't help it ... I think about the 1970's t-shirt motif with fried eggs placed just so ... The second image (Image 6.22, Ys) makes me think about Y chromosomes with bandages; I think about damage and repair, and the idea of fixing something, broken or not. When I think of these images in relation to our conversation about privilege and how that relates to freedom of expression, it's clear that some feel very free to express opinions about how others should live and be. The third image (Image 6.23, Horsish) reminds me of magical creatures. Thinking in relation to the first and second image (Images 6.21-6.22), and their associations for me, I think of beautiful possibilities, and the possibilities for beauty, wonder, and imagination when people are free to be who they are. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

More Thoughts on Learning Alongside

Dear Max,

May 24th, 2019

I've been reading over our discussions about your learning alongside your brother and thinking about, experiential learning as a different type or learning than you could get in school. As I think with your stories of learning alongside your brother, I remember my many good stories of learning alongside my mom as she got older. A book could never describe that learning. My mom was fiercely independent, but as she aged, and especially after dad passed, she needed some help. The tricky part for me was learning from mom what she needed and wanted, and when and how she wanted to be supported, and then helping build that path she chose. It was hard for me to hold back from directing her; sometimes I did, and that didn't work

very well. Mom knew what she wanted and needed, and so I worked with her to help enable her living independently. She did so for the last nine years of her life. Living in her house, planting her flowers and fruit trees, taking her little dog for walks, going shopping and out for lunches and dinners with friends. She lived well and as she wished, because in part I learned alongside her, how she needed and wanted to be supported; and we did it together. My learning alongside my mom, in some ways reminds me of how you have spoken about learning in relation to your brother. When you speak about your brother being left out sometimes, I think of my mom too. I think particularly about people's opinions about her living alone, at her age, and how she had to fight stereotypes of seniors, just to live her life as she wanted. She was strong though; it sounds like your brother is too. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

Living Alongside – Learning Alongside³³²

Michelle: So, you hold a lot of knowledge that way, which is really cool.

Max: I try. (laughter)

Michelle: I think it's really interesting you're thinking about social work, because you bring a lot of different perspectives through your lived experience, right?

Max: Yeah.

Michelle: It's a relational knowing. This is a type of knowing that's not just general. But there's a really specific knowledge about issues too, right?

³³² In this excerpt from Max and my conversation, we delve into the importance of experiential knowledge gained by living and learning alongside, and how this type of knowledge is often not deemed as legitimate as formal education.

Max: Yes, well, I would say that lived experience is a lot more powerful than anything you can get in university. No offense to my brother's support workers. But honestly, in seeing the work that they do with him, I would almost consider myself to be at the same level as them. Simply because I have that lived experience. This has been my life for almost 20 years. Just like knowing things my brother goes through. And actually, keeping my eyes open to those issues and that kind of thing, right. And just knowing how to work with him. Whereas there are some people who literally go to get an education to do this. I'm like this is my life. (laughs). Didn't have to pay for this.

Michelle: No, that's right. I think that's a really interesting point, too, right? What do we think of as education? What do we think of as learning?

Max: Exactly. I kind of wish a lot more workplaces would consider lived experience. Especially in terms of social justice work, non-profit work, all that kind of stuff.

Michelle: Absolutely.

Max: Because there are so many places that require they can have at least like a diploma or degree, or whatever. There are so many people out there who have lived experiences of the issues you're trying to work with. Who literally don't have access to the education that they need to even apply for this role.

Michelle: That's right. And these workplaces are locking out that knowledge.

Max: Exactly. And they probably carry more valuable knowledge than a lot of people who were able to pay for that education.

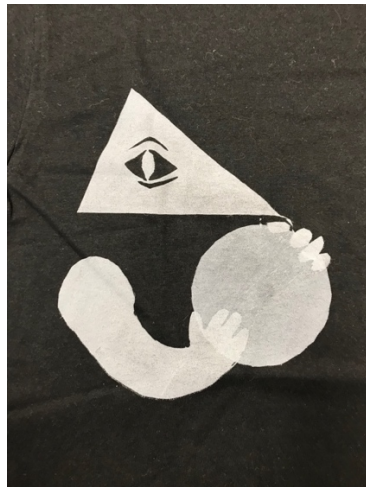
(Michelle's Field Note, April 21st, 2018)

Max: on Learning Alongside – Building on Empathy, Compassion & Love

Yeah. I find – well, my mom, like when I was growing up, was like also very outspoken about her beliefs. She was a very open-minded and caring person. I could see so many examples of her going out of her way to help other people when we were young, but I think again a key part of my understanding of empathy even with her teaching, does just come from my brother. Because it gives a very close and intimate experience of comparison, like an intimate comparison of ways in which two people who live very close and have very similar upbringing, are still treated differently and how that can apply to other people. Because I have distinct memories of my brother being treated much differently than me. Even within my extended family. And I don't even know if people even intended it in a mean way. It's just sort of like subconscious, right? I would be offered to go out more with members of my extended family, like oh, do you want to go for dinner? Do you want to do this, do that? Whereas my brother wouldn't because he can't go independently without my mom or dad with him. And whereas I would just get to go alone. And I also got to see that these things definitely affected him, even if it took him more time to process what was happening. He would be visibly upset by these things because he understood that he was being treated differently.

And I understood because I would see that he would get off of that and I would later see the consequences of that if he was being incredibly hurt. So, I think without – again without my brother there, and seeing experiences from – even just a second party point of view, just observing, is – it has definitely shaped the way I go about the world and go about my activism; simply because even to be like a role model you should be empathetic to all people, [and to] see the impact of societal, like preconceptions and sort of like biases nonstop, is incredibly powerful. Especially at a young age. So, it's ahhh, again I attribute a lot of the work, that I'm able to do, to my brother for that reason. Because I'm like you built my understanding. You're amazing!

(Max in conversation with Michelle, April 21st, 2018)



333

³³³ Image: 6.24. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Holding the Ball)*. Linocut print on t-shirt, December 18th, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton Alberta.

PART 2: Living and Learning in Relation – Making Space through Sharing Art & Stories
Reaching in & Reaching out: Sharing Stories and Spaces through Art

Dear Max,

April 20th, 2020

As a kid artmaking was a way for me to share, which I carried forward as I grew.

Artmaking was a space for playfulness and creativity, a solitary pursuit of excellence, and the art pieces became a place to share and begin to speak my thoughts and experiences. I also found comfort in speaking through images, which often came easier than communicating directly to others through words. Art became a thinking space for me and a place of outreach for me to communicate through. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

Max: on Speaking with Images – Thinking through Images

I think for me growing up art was like a main way of communicating about a bunch of different things, before I was able to, because I was someone who was diagnosed with childhood mental illness. So, art was a main way for me to communicate, a bunch of different things before I was able to. Because for me, I was like someone who was diagnosed with childhood mental illness, so I was someone who went to art therapy for a number of years. Which is what got me into art in the first place. Most people think that I just liked drawing a lot as a kid. I was like mandated one hour drawing session each week. That sort of thing to communicate anxiety and like that sort of stuff right. So, I think, in

that sense art is really important to how I communicate things about how I understand the world in some ways. I think the art I make speaks a bit more to how I think, than sometimes I do verbally – just like what my experience of existing is more conveyed in my art than it is through my talking.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)



334

³³⁴ Image: 6.25. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Thinking)*. Linocut printing on paper and printing plate, December 18th, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Engaging Family & Friends through Art & Artmaking

Michelle: You are a good communicator.

Max: Not to brag, but a lot of people say I'm very eloquent. Even with that, I would say art is something that has helped me engage, like with my brother, [and] engage with my community, in a lot of different ways and I think that kind of speaks to the communicative power of art. Just in the sense that it connects people so easily. It's like even with language barriers and you can make things together and that's very cool.

Michelle: Have you created art with you brother?

Max: Yes! He's like really good at painting and drawing so...

(Michelle's Field Note, March 12th, 2020)



335

³³⁵ Image: 6.26. Artist: Max. *Untitled*. Paint on rock, December 18th, 2018. Max I am highlighting this painting as a touchstone and reminder of our discussions about your collecting rocks to paint with your brother in Newfoundland, on the breaches, just below your grans' house.



336

Dear Max,

Oct. 5th, 2019

I also am reminded of sharing experiences of making things together and how lovely those experiences are. I think first of our little research group printing away in SNAP studio, then my mind skips back a few years, to my mom and I baking and making art together, such

³³⁶ Image: 6.27. Artist: Michelle Lavoie, *Song Birds* (for Mom and Dad). Watercolour on wood, 1983. Max, I decided to share these art pieces I made for mom and dad, when I was younger. They followed one of our conversations about art and sharing handmade gifts with friends and family.

special times. In her late 80's, my mom decided that she wanted to learn to paint. I asked if it would help if I did some of the drawing. She thought that was a great idea, and so I drew landscapes and images of birds that she wanted to paint. She must have completed between thirty or forty small paintings between age 86 and 90. I have included two of her birds below. It was a lovely gift for me to share those experiences of learning alongside her as she explored her art practice. Mom was so joyful making these pieces and especially proud of these accomplishments as she aged. I love her attention to detail. These images will always remind me of my mom, her love of birds, nature, and all those good times we shared. (Michelle's Letter to Max)



337

³³⁷ Image: 6.28. Artist: Rita Lavoie, *Chickadee*. Acrylic and archival colour pencil on paper, 2013.



338

³³⁸ Image: 6.29. Artist: Rita Lavoie, *Goldfinch*. Acrylic and archival colour pencil on paper, 2013.

Max: on Engaging in Art to Learn in Community

Being able to learn from the kind of art my peers make in school is really interesting. Simply because we all have very different focuses. There are ideas of aesthetics that I wouldn't necessarily explore myself, but seeing other people explore them is really interesting and it helps me find ways to explore my own practice and that's really fun. So that's kind of learning in community... I think in general that just having a space that we can share is really valuable, even if they aren't the most intentional things. Simply because there are not a lot of spaces that you can see intergenerational gatherings – like in large groups of queer people of one generation.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)

Playing it Forward

Dear Max,

Nov. 12th, 2019

Thinking with my own stories, I remember being able to create printmaking workshops at SNAP to follow Camp fyrefly, because I could build on my skills as a printmaker and printmaking instructor, my connections to people at iSMSS and SNAP, and my experience writing arts grants, to create art workshops for queer and trans youth and young adults. I also think of TREX and how, when an opportunity presented itself to promote the art of queer and trans youth emerging artists as part of the exhibition, I seized the opportunity. Such opportunities are not always possible – but sometimes they are. Those opportunities to learn

alongside through shared experiences – are such a gift.

I think of opportunities that present themselves and how opportunities can be built. As my thoughts return to thinking about our small research group creating prints at SNAP over the course of a year, I think of the ripple effects that might occur. I consider how Espen, Adebayo, and yourself honed skills to make prints, and how these skills and abilities, in the form of artwork, seemed to ripple and reverberate in good ways, in communities. I think of your printed t-shirts and patches going to the Quilt Bag, a trans owned and operated clothing store created so queer and trans folks could find gender appropriate clothing. I think of Adebayo's WAIT shirts speaking about resilience and hope for members and supporters of the trans and queer, Black, Indigenous, refugee, and People of Colour groups. I think of Espen's artwork now being created to work alongside the Alberta Mental Health Action Plan. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

Max: on Community Learning – SNAP & our Little Research Group

First of all, I think learning printmaking has been really fun for me. It's something that I enjoy doing and exploring. I think opening-up printmaking to something like community learning for me is actually pretty nice and being able to find ways to exist in community, like even being responsive to my accessibility needs, like being able to take classes that still gives us a sense of community even on a small basis, instead of just like art openings. It is amazing. It really suits my needs a lot better especially because it is just really fun. SNAP is like a really nice space to be in both like physically and I'm

excited for the new space and like being able to see people like Stella³³⁹ and say, hey it's great to see you again... All that kind of stuff. I've had a couple people come up to me and say that they recognize me from seeing me work at SNAP. I'm like really cool! I didn't expect that!

I think that the space the five of us have had at SNAP has also been really fun. Again, the idea of seeing people on a regular basis with enough time to be like, "hey how have you been doing", and even just fostering a nice creative environment to be in. It feels nice! A good little community³⁴⁰.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)

³³⁹ Stella is a pseudonym.

³⁴⁰ Dear Max, I really hoped this would be the case when I set up the workshops at SNAP. I hoped that we would be able to work as a little group of artists, nested within, supported by, and able to network with other artists within the larger SNAP community of artists. I'm so glad this was a good experience for you.



341

³⁴¹ Image: 6.30. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Thinking Patch)*. Linocuts prints on fabric, August 29th, 2019. Printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.



342

Making it Accessible: Engaging in Community through Art

Dear Max,

April 24th, 2020

My thoughts return to the work of our small research group meetings over time and creating art together at SNAP. There are so many intangibles, we will never know exactly all the ways our meetings and working together over time helped to create our small community within the larger community space of SNAP. But there were ripple effects, some good concrete things happened. SNAP created scholarships with lowered barriers to access in direct response to seeing our research group printing at SNAP. The prints that you, Espen, and Adebayo created at

³⁴² Image: 6.31. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Horsish, Ys, Carnations Patch)*. Linocuts prints on fabric, August 29th, 2019.

Printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

SNAP are going out into public and queer community spaces to act as community outreach and/or education through TREX, and through queer community events and queer run businesses.

Our conversations, as they always do, spread rhizomically, to touch on so many important aspects of learning in community through art practice and art exhibition, and as always highlight what's working and what is not working so well. Our chats that follow touch on accessibility and lack of accessibility of art in traditional art exhibition spaces (galleries), lack of funding for rural supports, and questions what it means to be present in community.

(Michelle's Letter to Max)



343

³⁴³ Image: 6.32. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Puffins)*. Linocut prints on paper, November 23rd, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio. Dear Max, I remember when you created these images as Christmas presents for friends and family. Looking at your print edition, I am reminded of our many discussions about handmade gifts. These

Printmaking: An Accessible Artform

Michelle: So, I'm wondering about the materiality of printmaking - the carving and the ability to make multiples prints from a [single] plate, was that important? It's a bit different from painting - that ability to share your art, what does that mean for you?

Max: I had a really cool talk with someone I interned with at the WORKS. We talked about how printmaking is anti-capitalist and built on community building because of the culture of trading prints and being able to make multiples³⁴⁴ and stuff like that and I find that really interesting and I also find that as a medium printmaking really aligns with how I feel about art on a wider scale. Because, galleries are cool I understand that they are an institution that exists for art, but they also drive me up the wall. Because of like this idea of what art is deemed to be worthy. To be in a gallery space often copies of the larger systematic issues of larger systems – abled bodied artists and all these things. So, it plays into the idea of what is good art. So again,

Puffins also remind me of Newfoundland, their home, your grandparents' home, your mom's home, your home as a child, and how Puffins are becoming endangered through climate change and how these changes are in particularly noticeable in coastal regions.

³⁴⁴ Please see the previous image (*Puffins*). Making multiple original images is known in printmaking as editioning. A wonderful part of printmaking, is that after you have created a plate, a matrix, your plate can be inked and printed multiple times. Each printing is thought to be an original image, an original print and through the printmaking process you can print multiple originals. The puffin image is a four colour multiple plate reduction print, in which the plate is printed several times in one colour and then the plate is cut again and the next colour is printed several times; with each colour print run, the plate is cut (reduced) before re-inking and reprinting. In the image (*Puffins*) the edition is in a split state; four images have three colours and four have three colours. If Max printed all images with black, the final colour, his edition of identical prints would be eight. I believe, however, in this case Max enjoyed both the finished and state (unfinished) proofs and decided on two editions with four prints.

galleries are cool - I love to share my art, but not in a way that feels inaccessible to people.

(Michelle's Field Note, March 12th, 2020)

Max: on the Value of Rural Exhibitions such as TREX *Re-Imaging Normal*

Even talking about art as it is displayed in gallery settings, it is very focused in a city settings and I think that even goes for most arts-based programming. The better ends of things, for like schooling, always tends to be in the cities, because that is where they have the funding for it. But I would argue those rural communities, where people don't necessarily have the supports, all the time, need it more than Edmonton ever will. There are so many galleries, with so many takes on things, but then you go to the rural communities, and they don't have access unless they come to the city – Art is for everybody!

That's why I'm starting to learn about digital art. The stuff that people make freely available – because yes, on one hand there isn't much ability to make money from things you are sharing freely, and with art that is kind of part of the struggle. But I believe [in] a balance, in making your art free online and making it something that is more

open and accessible³⁴⁵.

It's also a balance between making your art free online and making [it] something that is more accessible than the traditional art spaces. Who else then do you end up inviting to the table? Who else feels that they can also do art? And who else feels they can be an artist? And what kinds of communities get built around that?

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)

Dear Max,

March 15th, 2020

As our conversations return to thinking about access and creating possibilities for individuals and individuals in communities, we begin to trouble the idea of community and what

³⁴⁵ Dear Max, in our conversation, we spoke a little about digital printmaking, and how it is finally, but not without some resistance, being brought alongside traditional printmaking techniques (woodblock, linocut, etching, lithograph, screen, etc.). I just wanted to mention a little note about printmaking exhibitions to follow up here on our discussion about accessibility and digital art. In 2004, I began a series of large scale images combining digital with tradition printmaking practices. This combination of print medias was quite uncommon at the time, as large scale, archival digital printing was just beginning to become affordable and accessible. So, this type of printmaking was quite new, when I was invited to exhibit these image in Busan, South Korea in 2005. International print competitions are very common practice for printmakers. So, I just want to mention printmaking competitions, worldwide biennales and triennials, are often held in large, publicly accessible venues which are usually free to the public. For print-artists, these competitions are also usually free to enter, and although many are juried, they remain open competitions in which anyone can make a print, and send it via mail for possible exhibition. So, in this regard printmaking remains relatively open and accessible art form in terms of exhibiting and exhibition.

communities are and how they are and possibly should be envisioned. As our thoughts turn again to thinking again about presences and absences and what that looks like in community and how that may be perceived by fellow community members, your story below helps me attend to the gaps and absences to consider more deeply why these gaps and absences exist, who is missing from the table and why, and how these individuals how might be served in community, if we extend our care into those less seen spaces to understand these still quiet, often unspoken, and still unheard, stories. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

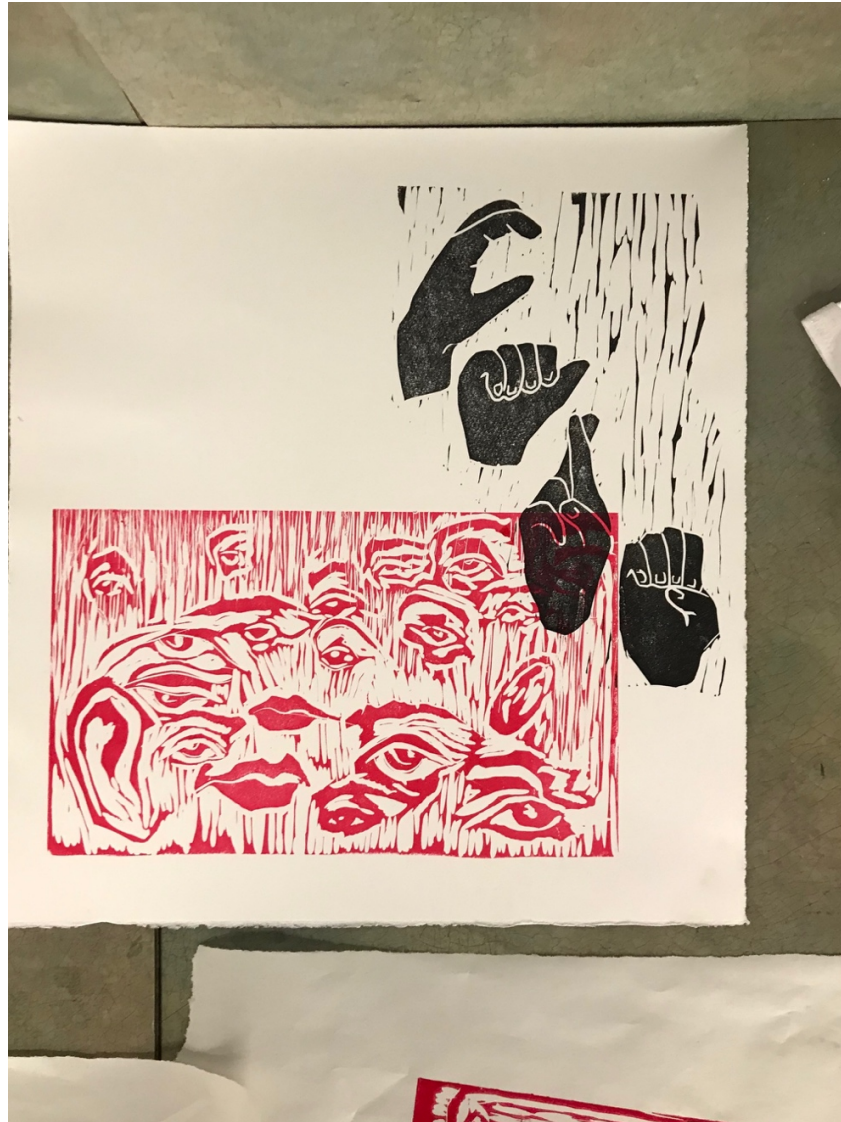
Max: on Being Present in Community

Latitude 53 and Mitchel Gallery have done a collaborative project, and as part of that project, I wrote a letter about how my experience with chronic health issues relates to my experience in community. I mean even sometimes within Edmonton's community I have wondered what it means to be active in community. Is it another way of saying you have to physically be there? And who are you excluding in your community narratives when we think of who we see at the events all the time. When people have children to take care of, people have jobs, that don't necessarily align with the times that galleries are open. And how sometimes I'm missing some of these events. I'm like, wow, am I really part of Edmonton's art community.

I might be at home in because I feel awful. But I'm seeing these artists I know and respect out and about, and it would be really cool to be at that event right now – but,

guess not – It's like this really weird dynamic. And I think that also plays into that rural perspective because like again just because people aren't in our sight doesn't mean that they don't matter. And it doesn't mean, they don't have anything to give.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, March 12th, 2020)



346

³⁴⁶ Image: 6.33. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Care & Seeing with Many Eyes, Hearing with Many Ears, Speaking in Many Languages)*. Linocut on prints on paper April 29th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta. Max I love how you printed these plates I created for you (*CARE* and *Seeing with Many Eyes, Hearing with Many Ears, & Speaking with Many Tongues*) - that is what it takes isn't it? These two type of involvement, care and seeing/ trying to understand from many perspectives, to walk alongside in a good way.



347

³⁴⁷ Image: 6.34. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Green Reaching Hands)*. Fabric plates printed on t-shirt, November 23rd, 2018. Printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

PART 3: Living and Learning in Relation – (more) Printmaking Stories

Printmaking: Wearable Shareable Art



Dear Max,

Dec. 1st, 2018

I love these pants! I love the faces and hands that you have cut out of fabric and sewn onto your pants. I love the fabric hands too that you cut from fabric rolled and printed onto your t-shirt. So cool! It looks so good!! I love the three sets of hands climbing up, and down the leg too. These hands suggest touch, as do the three arms and hands printed on the t-shirt. I love too how the hands arms and face will become animated and three dimensional as clothes are worn; they are truly interactive artworks. Love it! Makes me wish I could sew!

³⁴⁸ Image: 6.35. Artist: Max. *Untitled #1, Untitled #2, Untitled #3 (Blue Hands, Eyes, Nose, and Mouth, and Green Reaching Hands)*. Fabric sewn on pants (*Blue Hands and Eyes, Nose, and Mouth*), October 2018; and Fabric plates printed on t-shirt (*Green Reaching Hands*), November 23rd, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

I love your playfulness and cheekiness in the above set of images. First in the image (Blue Hands), you sewed three set of hands reaching up and down the leg of the wearer. Next, you sewed an abstract face and large hand onto the front of the pants (Eyes, Nose, and Mouth). Finally, looking at the printed fabric hands (Green Reaching Hands) shows three sets of hands and arms reaching across the torso of whoever wears it.

The interactivity of the images as they sit provocatively, part of a performance. Does Camp³⁴⁹ influence your interest in clothing and making items of wearable art for yourself and others? I wonder Max, if you were thinking about Camp when you created these wearable art pieces or were you just playing with materials and having fun? If Camp did inspire these pieces, how do you think it motivates your ideas or your interaction with the materials you use or choices you make while you create your pieces of wearable art together? Do you wear these pieces? I'm curious if there are certain audiences or specific spaces or places where these wearable artworks feel particularly appreciated? I think it's amazing to take a generic pair of pants or t-shirt and make it a unique piece of wearable and sharable art. How does it feel to have people appreciate your artwork and wear it? And what does it mean to you when someone takes up your art and wears it as their own? (Michelle's Letter to Max)

³⁴⁹ Camp in this section is a reference to an aesthetic style or fashion that is known for its extravagant nature; Susan Sontag (1964) described Camp as a celebration of amplification and overstatement. My question to Max about Camp followed our lunch meeting in March 2020. Our lunch had followed Max's trip to New York and visit to the opening of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition named *Camp: Notes on Fashion*. Max had brought the exhibition catalogue from *Camp: Notes on Fashion* for me to view over lunch.



Why Materiality Matters: Removing Barriers to Engagement³⁵¹

Michelle: When I see your material and fabric pieces, I notice you are obviously interested in materials. Could you talk about that a little, Max?

Max: For me I really like fabric because I think it's fun. Like paper is cool, but I just have a lot more fun working with fabric because it has a pre-established colour print, not in the same way that you get with paper. Also, because I did grow up sewing and that is really important to me. So being able to engage with materials in my printmaking kind of ties into it, even if it is just printing on t-shirts. It is something that for me helps me to understand how ink sits on fabric and how I can better understand these fabrics that I don't use all the time. Because

³⁵⁰ Image: 6.36. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Checkered Face)* Fabric printing plate and fabric plate printed on t-shirt October 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

³⁵¹ This excerpt of Max's and my conversation answers questions about what it means to have someone wear your art and why that matters.

admittedly, I'm not the best at picking fabrics and knowing how to use it properly. But it's still this idea that I'm learning to do more with it.

Michelle: I remember you talking about wanting tactility in your artwork...

Max: If I could touch the Mona Lisa I would. I love touching things. I like to be able to physically engage with the world around me. I think being able to touch things, is for me another level of engagement with things and being able to have those multiple levels of engagement is something I enjoy in art. Which isn't something as adults we don't get to do super often unless we go to the kids' gallery at the AGA. I think the things that most excited me at the AGA was when you could go through and touch things. I love stacking those foam cubes.

So with the tactility I'm kind of removing those barriers to engaging with art. A lot of people don't know how they are supposed to engage with art, so they just stand there and contemplate. I'm contemplating what does it mean? What are the colours saying to me? I know it's a thing we do, but also there is something to be said for looking at a piece of art and saying I like it or I don't and having a different layer to help you decide if you like something or you don't. It's really fun.

Michelle: Getting those barriers out of the way of engagement.

Max: Art can have a lot of elitism. But for me – art is effective if people like it and they know why they like it – not if someone can pick out the themes. That's part of the reason I make t-shirts. If someone thinks that what I made is cool, I don't care if they know what my intention was in making it. I'm like thank you for enjoying this thing that I also enjoy, and sharing it with other people by wearing it on your body.

Michelle: They are participating too, by taking it up and wearing it, sharing it with other people who might enjoy it also.

(Michelle's Field Note, March 12th, 2020)



352

Dear Max,

October 14th, 2019

I love the fabric plate (Checkered Face). The sewn lines of the face you created are so lyrical. The colours of the thread and movements of sewn lines on fabric reminds me of prints and drawings by Paul Klee³⁵³. Perhaps Klee comes forward for me also because of the bits of colour in the background as well, the playful oranges and reds. I love this shirt too, your printing

³⁵² Image: 6.37. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Checkered Face)*. Fabric printing plate, October 2018.

³⁵³ Paul Klee was a Swiss-German artist who worked in the early 1900s; he is best known for his abstract expressionist line work in his paintings, drawings, and prints (e.g., the *Angelus Novus*, 1920).

from the fabric plate.

As I am writing this, you have printed many amazing t-shirts and we are still counting. You go for it Max!! I love it! I love it when you come to studio with three or four plates carved, ready to print, and a bag of fabrics or t-shirts to be printed. I love that you have an idea of the colours you want to try and know just how to ink up and run them through the presses. I can't wait to see all your artwork and prints to come, and your future artworks created at SNAP and elsewhere. (Michelle's Letter to Max)



354

³⁵⁴ Image: 6.38. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Holding the Ball, Horsish, Carnation, Ys)*. Linocut printed on fabric, August 29th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Patches: DIY Handmade Wearable Art



Dear Max,

Sept. 8th, 2019

I love the idea of patches. First, I think of fixing wholes, but then again, I think of adorning anything really. What a great idea to print on fabrics so that people could bedazzle whatever piece of clothing they choose! I love the DIY attitude to artmaking and creating wearable art. Seems to me that any of these would make pretty nifty patches. I also love that the artwork isn't contained on a t-shirt, so someone could put patches on anything – pants, shirts, bags, whatever. Now if people want they can create their own wearable art by sewing your printed patches onto their clothes. I love how patches invite people to participate in the process of making their own wearable art. It's a wonderful way to share art and ideas by making

³⁵⁵ Image: 6.39. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Max's Assorted Patches)*. Linocut plates and *Untitled*. Linocut prints on fabrics, August 29th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

wearable art to get that art and those ideas into the public sphere.

These lino plates remind me of stamps also, because they seem like ideas pared down to the nub, spare, parsimonious, concise. There are messages inside the artwork too, but the messages are not obvious. These images feel kind of urgent to me, like riddles, I will need to spend time with them, so in time, they might reveal their meanings. These images also feel very playful to me; they make me curious. I want to spend time with them also because they feel like an invitation for me to be playful in relation. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

Printmaking & Playfulness



356

Dear Max,

May 7th, 2019

I recall in retrospect, our conversation about working with found images in your artwork

³⁵⁶ Image: 6.40. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Cupid & Seeing with Many Eyes, Hearing with Many Ears, Speaking in Many Languages)*. Linocut print on t-shirt, April 29th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

and how you loved working with and repurposing found materials and images. I had brought a few of these shirts (with images on them, such as t-shirt with the red cherub) as rags to be torn and used for clean-up. But when you saw them, you immediately asked if you could print on the t-shirts. I agreed, interested to see what you might create. I had forgotten this part of an earlier conversation until just recently... (Michelle's Letter to Max)

Max: I remember in high school, one of my favorite projects I did, in retrospect - my teacher's motivation with this was to get rid of a bunch of old canvases that were just sitting in her room. She's like - oh try to reuse these old canvases, like abandon ones, from former students. And then to incorporate what's on there already into what you're doing. And I'm like oh, and I found that most of them were flat. But I found this one had a really interesting [texture] – I think that it was done with glossy gel medium.

Michelle: Yeah.

Max: That one sort of sticks out and spikes, and so it had all these like peaks and stuff, and it had black paint put all over it. And I thought... Uuuuuu.. I can add to this and I built a sort of like structure with it.

Michelle: Mmmm

Max: ...and that was one of my favorite projects that I've done. And I was just like ...
Yes!

Michelle: We could do something like that...

Max: Add it to the project list. (laughs)

Michelle: (laughs)

(Michelle's Field Note, July 10th, 2018)



357

³⁵⁷ Image: 6.41. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Holding the Balls)*. Linocut printing on t-shirt. May 17th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.



358

Dear Max,

May 20th, 2019

Your three images help me think about your playfulness in studio. Your attitude seems to be why not just try things. I think these are very interesting images because when two images are printed together like this, relationships are formed. We automatically read one image into another and try to create connection and meaning. I like the element of chance here. I wonder if you were watching Vera play with printing multiple plates together, to see what would happen. I wonder if Vera's work influenced your decision to print multiple plates and images together.

The second image (Figure in a Flame & Masks) brings back your figure within a flame image and sits it over your image that to me suggests theatre, performance, masks, happiness and sadness. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

³⁵⁸ Image: 6.42. Artist: Max. *Untitled #1, Untitled #2, & Untitled #3 (Holding the Balls, Figure in a Flame & Masks, & Holding the Ball #2)*. Linocut prints on t-shirts, May 17th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Dear Max,

March 22nd, 2020

Thinking of theatre and performance, I can't help but recall our last conversation sitting together, and enjoying sushi, as had become our tradition. I recall you sitting across from me with your red plush outfit in hand, removing stitches from your costume for your performance and critique, which was to follow immediately after our lunch. I remember you talking about your love of puppetry and theatre. You said that you were really a big kid and just loved to play. With that though, you said that with this performance you would be speaking about serious issues, like people being able to have access to the type of language that suits them best, but you would be dressed like a giant puppet to deliver this message. So again, we revisit how your art and your performance art, might deliver very serious messages, but in a non-threatening and playful way. Your performance work, like your artwork, Max always seems to hold the audience in mind; it seems to me that through your artmaking and performance art-pieces, you make space, with compassion and with care, for the audience to come alongside and learn in relation. It is like a dual space you seem to take up, your space as performer/ artist and the space you have carved out for the audience as well. Audience in your artworks, always, seems to me, considered – not to move them in certain ways, but to care for them, challenge them and teach them, in that order. Teaching it seems to me, would benefit if it were more often foregrounded by this type of care. (Michelle's Letter to Max)



359

³⁵⁹ Image: 6.43. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Figure in a Flame & Masks)*. Linocut printing on t-shirts, May 17th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Imagine



360

Dear Max,

Dec. 20th, 2018

*So much of your work asks the viewer to imagine with you; so many pieces are an invitation to play, think, and wonder. I find so much of your work playful, so much of your artwork I find engages me and continues to engage me because I don't know what it means. As I have said before in this writing sometimes your artwork is like a riddle to me. Your lino plate suggests a figure thinking, in the pose of *The Thinker* by Rodin³⁶¹, and it also suggest perhaps playing cards with the two heart symbols, and a suit of cards with the sideways diamond shape. The image suggests a state of play, love, thinking about love, having two hearts. The drawing*

³⁶⁰ Image: 6.44. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Thinking)*. Linocut printing on paper and t-shirts (left, middle & right), December 18th, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

³⁶¹ Auguste Rodin was a French sculptor; his bronze sculpture *The Thinker* features a seated figure with chin resting on hand, as if immersed in thought.

style of the figure seems whimsical and lyrical, so it suggests whimsy and playfulness. Again, my interpretations are just that, my interpretations, and there are so many more interpretations and meanings possible. I find these images to be an invitation for me to play and to bring myself and my experiences into the piece. This make me consider the possibility that artwork as something that is continuously unfolding and emergent in possibility, always in process of becoming meaningful, just as we are always in process of being and becoming. (Michelle's Letter to Max)



362

³⁶² Image: 6.45. Artist: Max. *Untitled (MouthEye)*. Woodblock printing on paper, November 23rd, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta. Woodblock is similar to linocut as a relief printing process. In woodblock prints (*MouthEye*) you can often see the woodgrain, unlike linocut printing.

Combining Senses – Feeling your Way



363

Dear Max,

Sept. 28th, 2019

Above are some linocut prints that you created with an eye in a mouth. Another riddle? There is piece from art history, I recall vaguely with an eye in mouth, perhaps a surrealist? Perhaps it means seeing before you speak, or perhaps seeing instead of speaking, or perhaps it is speaking before you see. Your image reminds me of our many talks about the value of experiential learning, learning through experience. I am also reminded of our talks about your advocacy on behalf of people with abilities challenges. We spoke often about how people make meaning and communicate in different ways. We spoke about how touch and sound, replaces sight if that sense is weaker and how a sense becomes stronger to compensate and aid both sense-making and communication. We spoke often of your accessibility advocacy on behalf of

³⁶³ Image: 6.46. Artist: Max. (*Untitled #1, Untitled#2*), Woodblock prints on paper and t-shirts (above left, above right), November 23rd, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

those who work through communication and language barriers. (Michelle's Letter to Max)



364

Playfulness & the Mouth Eye Prints

Michelle: This mouth eye image. I love it. I don't know why I love it. I just do!

Max: Perfect!

³⁶⁴ Image: 6.47. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Red Mouth Eye & Blue Mouth Eye)*. Linocut prints on t-shirts, November 23rd, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Michelle: And I don't even want to know why I love it. There is a playfulness and creativity and care that you combine and bring to different issues. To me your art always has a sense of care combined with a sense of creative play. That's what I see, but also what I sense from your work. It calls me to play and be playful. I'm not sure how to describe it except its' fun and your work makes me want to spend time with it, but not to figure it out necessarily.

(Michelle's Field Note, March 12th, 2020)

Embodied Thought: Touching Experience & Bringing Forward Stories



365

Dear Max,

Sept. 23rd, 2018

Early in our research conversations, we spoke about sensing and feeling experience. We also spoke about how sometimes one sense takes over for another. I remember you telling me a

³⁶⁵ Image: 6.48. Artist: Max. *Untitled (HandEyes)*, Drawing on paper August 2018; and *Untitled (EarEye)*, Paint on paper (July 2018).

story about a friend who is legally blind, but she has a little sight at the edges of her vision. I remember you saying that she wanted to know what you looked like and asked you to stand by a window in the light, so she might get a sense of your profile. I believe that you said you created your drawing of the hand (Image 6.18, HandEyes) when you were thinking about how your friend navigated the world through touch. Touch and sight together helped her when sight alone was insufficient.

Interestingly, when I think of printmaking processes, I think of touch; these are tactile experiences. With linocut printmaking you cut the plate, you ink it, and you print on a surface. Sometimes, you print a plate multiple times over the course of years. All choices made (the cutting, inking, and printing process), are embodied processes, physical actions and these become embedded in the final image. All of decisions, in the printmaking process, play between intention and accident, as the artist responds to the medium. Perhaps thinking with and responding through vision and with touch helps printmaking communicate with both specific ideas and tacitly through embodied experiences.

I'm looking at your painting (Image 6.18, EarEye) of the eye containing the ear. I remember how we both discussed our issues around hearing. You said that you wore two hearing aids and I was surprised because I had not seen them. You have your hearing tested every year, or so, and you were concerned that you were gradually losing some hearing and might need to learn sign language as a necessity to help communicate in the future.

That's when I told you my own hearing challenges and about my mom's hearing issues, her congenital deafness, and how it runs in the family from my mom's side. My mom was totally deaf in one ear. Without her hearing aids, she could hear very little. I remember making drawings or writing notes for her sometimes if her hearing aid batteries died. She managed

remarkably well, considering her hearing loss was considerable. She was so resilient and such a strong person. Perhaps, her hearing challenges helped make her stronger and more resilient.

Perhaps too, these images speak of resilience and strength of character built through adversity.

(Michelle's Letter to Max)



366

Tactile Impressions

Dear Max,

Dec. 15th, 2018

These images (Image 6.49, BlueBoy and Masks) are some faces you printed during our times at SNAP. I love the parts of the lino-plate that you cut away and the remnants of those cut away parts that show up in the printing. Lino-cutting is such a simple process really, but is hard

³⁶⁶ Image: 6.49. Artist: Max. *Untitled #1(BlueBoy) and Untitled #2 (Masks)*. Linocut printing on t-shirts, November 23rd, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton Alberta.

to get a lino plate printing well, I think, because you have to understand how to get those shades of grey in such a high contrast and graphic process. You do a great job of that Max! I'm especially impressed with the face (Image 6.49, BlueBoy) leaving certain areas almost uncut (the hair and shadow on the neck) and less cut (under the cheekbones) and then cutting away the plate in the other areas of the face and neck. The result is a very well defined face. The Masks (Image 6.49) are very well done as well! I especially like the remnants of plate cutting process. These marks help me see that the image is a linocut. These marks also remind me that printmaking is very tactile process, and a remnant of that tactility remains in the finished product. (Michelle's Letter to Max)



367

³⁶⁷ Image: 6.50. Artist: Max. *Untitled (BlueBoy)*. Linocut print on t-shirt. November 23rd, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Art to Touch Home*Dear Max,**April 20th, 2020*

Looking to this flower painted on rock, I recall your story of picking this rock from a beach, just below your Gran's house in Newfoundland. This is the beach of your childhood summers, where beachcombing with your brother, you would both gather flat stones to paint on. These flowers, red Carnations, are the flowers your grandfather had planted all around the house for your grandmother, because she likes them. Your painted Carnation reminds me how your artwork and stories are often embedded in your childhood stories, memories, and home-places. Your artwork and stories remind me of the winds sweeping inland from the ocean, winds that carries a touch of water and the taste of salt from the sea. Your stories Max, especially your childhood stories spent at your Grans in Newfoundland, seem to be always sprinkled with a little salt from the sea³⁶⁸. Looking back to your Carnation painted on rock, I am reminded how home-places, such as your Gran's beach, permeate our souls. Home-places, I think, stay with us wherever we go, and we bring them into the present through our actions, like painting Carnations on rocks from Newfoundland. And because these home-places are as unique, as this rock from your family's beach in Newfoundland, I believe the memories, stories, and experiences

³⁶⁸ Max, it's lovely when our stories overlap; it is lovely too how they diverge. Your *Carnation* reminds me of my mom's poppies, Cheddars, beautiful multi-petalled tall red flowers. A friend gave us some seeds when we visited their cottage at Lac St. Anne. I had commented on their beauty and she pulled a couple seed pods from the dried heads. As she placed the seed in my outstretched hand, she told me they had been a favourite of her father, and now, years after he has passed, they continue to remind her of him, of his gardens, and their good times. These poppies had become a favourite of my mom, and since my mom passed, these flowers always remind me of her, and of my home places, and many good memories alongside her.

which shape you are unique too, partially rooted in your home-place, its land and traditions.

(Michelle's Letter to Max)



369

Handmade

Max: Yeah, all my great aunts, and my gran are really good at knitting. Because a really big thing in rural Newfoundland is like they sell the knit goods and stuff.

Michelle: Yes.

Max: So they have like mittens with one finger separated for whatever reason... So you

³⁶⁹ Image: 6.51. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Carnation)*. Acrylic paint on rock, August 2018.

can like grab things.

Michelle: Yep.

Max: And then like socks and all that stuff. So, like I'm just like, I have so many knit things. It's like I have no idea how you made these. (laughs)

Michelle: Cool, cool. (laughs)

Max: Oh yeah. So yeah, I love knit slippers.

Michelle: Oh yeah they are so... mmmmm. There is something about that, when somebody makes it as well right? Its unique and the wool they chose and the pattern and everything. It's so nice.

Max: Absolutely.

Michelle: It's kind of lacking these days right? With the big box stores.

Max: mmmHm... Well, in general, I really prefer to make a lot of the gifts that I give to other people for pretty much that reason. Because I put a lot of thought and intent into like why I'm making it for my friends and all that kind of stuff.

Michelle: Yes.

Max: Or at least I can be like I put some effort into painting you this rock (laughs) or something, right?

Michelle: Absolutely.

(Michelle's Field Note, July 10th, 2018)



370

³⁷⁰ Image: 6.52. Artist: Max. *Untitled (Carnations)*. Linocut print on t-shirt, August 29th, 2019, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

Dear Max,

April 21st, 2020

Looking at your painted and printed images of the carnation, I am reminded how printmaking sits between art and craft. Printmaking techniques create reproducible images and texts, which means these images and texts can be readily shared. I remember speaking with you both about the tactility and versatility of printmaking and how it might offer you the possibility to make multiple prints to share your handmade gifts with your loved ones³⁷¹. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

Michelle: And sometimes the plates themselves are very beautiful and you can keep them, depending upon what they are made of. Then you can print them later or exhibit them [the plates]. If they are made of cardboard though, they kind of tend to fall apart. I used to make mine on Masonite.

Max: Ahhhhh...

Michelle: So, the nice thing about a printing plate, is that can you get it the way you want it and [then] you print it – it's called proofing. You see if you like it [the print] and then you can do something else to it [the plate] – you can change the board.

Max: Ahhh...

Michelle: And then when you have the board the way you want it, you can print 10-20-30, more if you like...

Max: Ouuuuuu – I like that! Yeah, as much as I like painting rocks, I can't make copies

³⁷¹ The following excerpt of a conversation between Max and I covered the topic of reproducible images and how in printmaking you can make multiple images form one plate, exactly replicated images are known as editions.

of the rocks. If I want to like give one to my friend... And then keep one, because I like to keep a lot of my art.

Michelle: Yes. And with printmaking, you would be amazed the types of marks, the tactility, and embossing you can get. The paper has depth too because it gets embossed.

Max: Ouuuuuuuu... See here is the problem with us talking, because I love talking about visual art stuff, and I will always want to learn more about different medias I could use, but that just encourages us to keep adding to this project list because I want to do that – Michelle, can we do that?

Michelle: (laughs) Let's see what we can do.

Max: It all sounds so great!! (Emphasis) Because I'm literally up for anything, because so many different things interest me.

Michelle: Fantastic!!

(Michelle's Field Note, July 10th, 2018)

Printmaking: Sharing Images & Spaces

Dear Max,

May 1st, 2020

Following up on ideas of the art and craft of printmaking. My memories of my dad teaching me bricklaying and mom teaching me crocheting and knitting come to mind; those embodied teachings, I remember in my hands and movements. Printmaking is like that too in a way, those embodied processes: the act of cutting a plate, rolling out ink, the sound of ink on glass, the tug of the printing wheel as plate squeezes ink to paper, the smell of materials. There is a teaching in it too, a standing alongside and supporting, until experience becomes embodied and is known: setting the pressure, ordering blankets, picking out ink, rolling, printing, clean up. This was part of it all, an implicit sharing, teaching and learning alongside. While I taught

printmaking, you taught me quiet stories, and how to think with them, laugh with them, cry with them, while learning how to learn alongside. (Michelle's Letter to Max)

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CHAPTER 7: Contemplating Framing: Unpacking the Possibilities of Printmaking in Narrative Inquiry

Abstract

In this paper we explore, name, and unpack the possibilities printmaking, as an art form, holds in visual narrative inquiry. We also explore the relationship between visual narrative inquiry and narrative inquiry, a relational qualitative research methodology that attends to experiences.

Drawing on two different ongoing narrative inquiry studies, where we engage with either trans young adults or refugee families from Syria with pre-school children, we explore how printmaking practices facilitate processes of inquiry. As part of these studies, we have engaged in ongoing conversation with each other to understand how printmaking frames and reframes how we understand and inquire into experiences over time, diverse contexts, and places. In the study with trans young adults, Michelle worked alongside participants as they use printmaking, amongst other arts-based processes, to reflect on and communicate their experiences. The printmaking studio in her work becomes a place in which differences can be lived, shared, and explored. Art in this study is relational and participants are using it to further relationships with selves, others, and imagined audiences. Vera in her work alongside refugee families explores the stories families have shared with her through printmaking to gain a deeper understanding of the stories lived and told. For Vera printmaking is a way to explore resonances across experiences. The etymology of the word frame, helps us understand framing as a process that is future oriented and reflects a sense of doing, making, or preforming. In this way, framing allows us to see otherwise, to respond to and with participants, and to engage with experiences in ways that open new possibilities of inquiry.

Espen, Max, Adebayo, and Vera are absorbed in their projects at the community printmaking studio. I love these quiet moments. It's good to see everyone working together. The air is abuzz with sounds of activity that reverberate through the print-shop. I revel in the comfort of these familiar print-shop sounds – the creak of the printing press as the blankets are first engaged under pressure, the slurp of ink as it wraps around rollers at the inking tables. Vera and Max, already at the press, are absorbed in conversations about ink thickness and colour. Adebayo and Espen sit across from each other, at the table, quiet and focused. Both are hunched over woodblocks engrossed in plate cutting. Carving tools sit at the ready, covering the workspace, spreading across the table. I love seeing Espen, Max, and Adebayo, take up space, and feel free to take risks to be creative. I've learned the ability to take up space, to occupy place, and feel safe enough, free enough, to be creative is not a given; it is not a given for young trans adults like Espen, Max, and Adebayo who lead complex lives and who continuously need to carve out spaces in which to exist – spaces to be seen, to be heard, to live with dignity, and a sense of well-being with hope for the future. Today is the first time all of us have come together in the printmaking studio. There is excitement in the air.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

Situating our Work

Over the past three years we have engaged in two different narrative inquiry studies, each of which has involved printmaking practices as part of the inquiry process. In one study, Michelle engaged with three trans young adults to explore their experiences of community making across their lives. Over the same time-period Vera engaged with refugee families from Syria with pre-school children to inquire into their unfolding experiences of schooling. Both

narrative inquiry studies were focused on understanding experience in relation to time, place, and social context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013). Much of the inquiry Michelle undertook was situated in a local print studio, where participants could reflect on and communicate their experiences visually. The printmaking studio in her work became a place in which differences were lived, shared, and explored. Art in her study was relational and participants were using it to further relationships with selves, others, and imagined audiences. Vera joined Michelle and her participants, Max, Espen, and Adebayo in the printmaking studio. However, instead of working alongside participants, Vera engaged in printmaking to explore resonances across the experiences of three families she worked closely with who arrived in Canada as Syrian refugees. In this paper, we explore the possibilities printmaking offers us in narrative inquiry and visual narrative inquiry. We play with notions of framing as a way that allows us to see otherwise, to respond to and with participants, and to engage with experiences in ways that open new possibilities of inquiry.

Art in Narrative Inquiry

Art practices are especially generative in relation to narrative inquiry because of the unfolding and overlapping nature of each process. Michelle was intentional to conceptualize her study as a visual narrative inquiry study. When art processes unfold alongside or within narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which seeks to understand experience through social interactions, in situational and place contexts, and over prolonged time-periods, possibilities for inquiry multiply. Additionally, narrative inquiry is a relational methodology, and relational ethics is at the centre of each inquiry (Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018). Clandinin, Caine, and Lessard (2018) described relational ethics as: engaging in playfulness and improvisation; moving slowly and listening; unfolding as a process; positioning researchers in uncertainty, and;

embodying experiences to remain attentive to silence and contemplation. These five components of relational ethics in narrative inquiry make explicit our relational commitments. These commitments align with the art processes we engaged in. Ethics approval for both studies was obtained through the University of Alberta Ethics Board.

Emergent Potentials of Art in Research

We situate this paper in stories around the studio table to unpack the possibilities printmaking offers us in visual narrative inquiry. Art processes call forth creativity, imagination, and playfulness, while resultant artworks are imbued with “complexity, ambiguity, multilayered meanings, and richness of imagination” (Jackson, 2007, p. 181). Art practice and reflection on artwork unfolds in a myriad of multi-sensory and multi-dimensional ways (Dewey, 1934). In research, art practice expands and continuously opens spaces of inquiry by responding to new and emergent opportunities for participants and researchers to engage and re-engage. Others, like Bach (2007) and de Mello (2007) have explored the use of arts in narrative inquiry. Bach (2007) was particularly drawn to work with photographs to reflect “seeing as a way of being in relation with people, nature, and self” (p. 281). For de Mello (2007) the arts became another way to create and express meaning. She includes arts in the data gathering process and also as a representational form, including poetic representations. Caine and Lavoie (2011; 2015) took up printmaking to explore the emotional and deeply personal impact of experiences alongside participants that were too difficult to be told in previous studies.

Printmaking is a unique art-form that offers distinct medium-specific types of engagement. In our work, we found printmaking’s processes develop five nested and interactive forms of engagement. These spaces of inquiry and engagement include: spaces of community to act within networks of support; spaces of activity to physically engage in art making; spaces of

self-reflection, criticality, and self-expression to pause and inquire into narratives; spaces for play and imagination to create and re-imagine possible futures, and; spaces of vulnerability and risk-taking to encourage and celebrate difference and allow world-travelling (Lugones, 1987).

We have returned time and time again to the printmaking studio to work alongside each other. This community studio, with its shared space, equipment, materials, and community spirit welcomed us, while our printmaking activity in the space, carved space for our small research community to work within a broader community of artists. Our printmaking activities (carving plates, inking, and printing) alongside each other allowed us to learn in relation. Returning regularly (monthly, for 5-hour group printmaking sessions over the course of a year) to print allowed our inquiries to deepen, while remaining responsive to our relational commitments to learn alongside each other. This communal studio space and our research activities within this space, over time, and in relation created a safe community space, nested within a larger community, to explore our stories, while taking risks and remaining playful together.

(Michelle, Field Note)

First Inquiry Space: Sharing & Shaping Community Printmaking Spaces

While the focus of our paper is on printmaking and the spaces of engagement and inquiry, it is critical to consider the physical places in which our work occurs. Community print-shops are grassroots, artists' run cooperatives, created by artists to support artists; they are not commercial enterprises. These artists-founded and artists-run print-shops encourage collective sharing and creative differences. Within this context, printmaking as a medium harbours a history of societal interaction and activism (Jule, 1997). A worldwide network of not-for-profit community print-shops has been developed by artists to offset expenses of specialized

printmaking equipment and supplies, while offering space for print-artists to congregate, share knowledge, and make prints. A sense of comradery tends to imbue these spaces, promoting a sense of optimism and belonging to a community of artists. The community spirit of these printshops offers the possibility of developing and deepening community connections, while setting the stage to create safe spaces for self-exploration through printmaking activities. Both Michelle and Vera have been part of these communal printshops. Max's statement below highlights his appreciation of printmaking while building community connections and learning in community.

First of all, I think learning printmaking has been really fun for me. It's something that I enjoy doing and exploring. I think opening-up printmaking to something like community learning for me is actually pretty nice and being able to find ways to exist in community, like even being responsive to my accessibility needs, like being able to take classes that still gives us a sense of community even on a small basis, instead of just like art openings. It is amazing! It really suits my needs a lot better, especially because it is just really fun... Again, the idea of seeing people on a regular basis with enough time to be, like, 'Hey how have you been doing', and even just fostering a nice creative environment to be in. It feels nice! A good little community.

(Max, in conversation with Michelle)

Adebayo also states the importance of printing within a supportive community space.

Michelle invited me to continue working on prints with her, and I've been making work at [the print-shop] ever since. And I don't want to print anywhere else because of how welcoming the place is and how easy everything is. Everyone is helping you all the time and complimenting each other, like 'that's so good, you made that?' and I got this idea in my head that there is no bad art, especially if you make it [here]. I connect [...] because

*the work I make here is healing and being here releases my stress*³⁷².

(Adebayo, 2019)

Situating Michelle's research at a local community printmaking studio enabled Max, Espen, and Adebayo to feel a sense of connection to this community and experience the support of working in a creative community arts space. Michelle's experience as a community member and organizer (volunteer, renter, and board member) have caused her to return, time and again, to reconnect with and through this community. As someone who identifies as lesbian and queer, Michelle has found community art spaces, to be welcoming spaces where she could find community and a place to be herself. Knowing the high degree of stigma and social isolation young trans adults face, which sometimes results in their withdrawal from public spaces (Schein et al. 2014; Taylor et al., 2020; Wells et al., 2017), Michelle had hoped Max, Espen, and Adebayo might find the communal arts studio to be a safe space, a good place where they could feel free to be themselves. For Lugones (1987) being at ease is a foundational step to being creative; she suggests that being at ease, to feel at home and be oneself in a world is a generative experience because it enables both taking up space and the ability to be creative in that space. Printmaking within the context of a communal arts studio offered us new possibilities to engage.

Second Inquiry Space: Getting Physical & Why Materiality Matters

As Michelle turns her thoughts to printmaking, her experiential and embodied

³⁷² Adebayo in SNAPLine, Resistance, 2019_2, p. 19. It is noteworthy that Adebayo's interview in SNAPLine, the SNAP Society members' newsletter, would go to hundreds of print-artists across Canada, thereby introducing and virtually connecting Adebayo to SNAP society members and through this interview demonstrating institutional support for Adebayo's burgeoning art practice and his life experiences as a Black trans man, recent newcomer, and refugee from Uganda.

knowledge comes forward; arms extending to scrape ink, shoulders hunch rolling a new palette, hands and forearms tighten in response to the resistant tug of the presses' fly-wheel. She smiles, realizing how remembering her printing experience brings to present an embodied sense of comfort and connection not only to her years of printmaking, but also to so many other lived stories. She recalls some of her experiences in a note to Max.

Dear Max, following our talk on printmaking art and craft, memories of my dad teaching me bricklaying and mom teaching me crocheting came to mind; those embodied teachings I remember in my hands and movements. Printmaking is like that too, those embodied processes: the act of cutting a plate, rolling out ink, the sound of ink on glass, the tug of the printing wheel in hand as plate squeezes ink into paper, the smell of materials. There is a teaching in it too, a standing alongside, and supporting, until experience becomes embodied and is known: setting the pressure, ordering the blankets, picking the right ink, rolling ink to the right thickness, setting printing pressure on the press, printing, clean up. This was part of it all, an implicit sharing, teaching and learning alongside. I hope you carry these processes, this embodied knowing, with you, as I do. While I taught printmaking, you taught me quiet stories, how to think with them, laugh with them, cry with them, while learning how to learn alongside.

(Michelle, Note to Max)

Printmaking processes (plate cutting, inking, and printing) are physical activities, which engage participants in an unfolding process of self-discovery³⁷³. Max's, Adebayo's, and Espen's stories

³⁷³ All activities require attention to detail and technique for personal safety and for care of shared materials and equipment. Michelle's experience as a post-secondary printmaking instructor and professional printmaker allowed her to support Max, Espen, Adebayo, and Vera in the studio by teaching them necessary printmaking techniques that facilitated their artistic exploration of their imagery and personal stories.

emerged through and throughout the process, seeming to deepen their commitment to inquire, through art-making, into their personal stories of experience. Dewey (1934) notes that art experiences, embody thinking, imagination, and action, and concentrate and frame experience as episodes that help artists see their experiences anew. As a professional printmaker, Michelle long ago embodied these processes and finds a deep-down sense of comfort in her embodied knowledge of printmaking. Connelly and Clandinin (1990; 1999) named such embodied knowledge, stories to live by³⁷⁴; these are touchstones that call forward past stories of experiences to help guide present actions. Stories to live by, this embodied knowing, may offer a sense of continuity. For Vera being in the print studio allows her to reach backwards and forward.

Stepping across the door frame at the print studio, the smell of ink greets me. It is a welcomed and familiar smell. I have been spending hours alongside participants and feel unsettled and restless – the experiences shared have been difficult and I long for a space to be quiet, a space that allows me to dwell within the fractures and ruptures that accompanied their experiences. The smell of the ink calls forth memories of my mother and aunt, of the long ago days spent doing crafts, spent in pottery studios, and alongside women who had arrived as refugees in Germany. I notice Michelle and the others engaged in their work and welcome their quiet presence. Soon my hands will be covered with ink and the large turning wheel of the printing press a reminder of the quest to create, to seek insights and surprise.

(Vera, Field Note)

³⁷⁴ The term “‘stories to live by’ . . . helps us to understand how knowledge, context, and identity are linked and can be understood narratively” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4).

The smell of ink and the quietness that is part of the process for Vera make it easier for her to think *with* and across difficult stories.



Adebayo reminds us that the physical activities of printmaking, like plate carving, may also embody hard stories, when plates act as repositories for difficult memories, with strong emotional resonances, and printmaking becomes a form for self-expression. For Adebayo, the act of carving was therapeutic, and even cathartic at times, when the materiality of printing enabled him to physically scrape against the surface of some of his harder stories. We also have come to understand the physical act of printmaking as an embodied gesture and visible scar of memory (Caine & Lavoie, 2011; 2015). When printed materials are transformed into printed images, experiences can be transformed into tangible, tactile traces of memory, experienced through art objects (Barthes, 1980). Through art we not only see, but begin to wrap our hands, heads, and hearts around experiences, touch the surface of hard memories, and sometimes with courage and support, act to change them.

I like the physicality of carving [into a plate], like I'm carving out all the trauma in my life, like I'm making my mark on this object and it's not going away. Even after a long day of carving, I don't feel tired. It feels good even if you don't print. I do a lot

³⁷⁵ Image: 7.1. Artist: Vera, Untitled. Monoprint. Printed at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton. Alberta.

*of carving at home.*³⁷⁶

(Adebayo, in conversation with Michelle)

Adebayo's statement also highlights how embodied printmaking processes aided his exploration of his experiences, and helped Adebayo take ownership of his art practice and engage and participate as a co-inquirer in this research.

Third Inquiry Space: Self-reflection, Criticality & Self-expression

It's February 28th, 2019, a cold snowy winter afternoon, and Espen, Max, Adebayo, Vera and I have gathered for our fifth printmaking workshop. I am reminded our work is not without tensions when Adebayo arrives, coming directly from an appointment across town; he speaks his frustration with accessing supportive health care and appears agitated. After we chat, Adebayo picks a plate and carves his frustration with quick gestural marks into his plate. Seeing Adebayo work I am reminded of the complex stories Max, Espen, and Adebayo bring to studio, often negotiating challenges, like accessing gender appropriate and trans supportive health care.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

The third inquiry space of self-reflection, criticality, and self-expression allows for participants to deepen their understanding of experiences through complex and powerful processes embedded in art creation and thinking in relation to their artwork. Art processes allow artists to engage in Dewey's (1933) five step critical reflective thought process in which, "a reflective thinker: becomes conscious of a problem, defines the scope of the problem, seeks potential solutions from experience, plans a path forward, and tests for effective solutions" (Miciak, Barrington, &

³⁷⁶ Adebayo in SNAPline, Resistance, 2019_2, p. 19.

Lavoie, in press). Adebayo describes the importance of printmaking in his reflective thought process (thinking, processing, and acting in relation to his past experiences). Adebayo's art series named *WAIT* poignantly reflects Dewey's (1933) critical reflective thought process.

*My prints are related to my story, my lived experiences, things I've survived. I heal and survive using art. I survived a lot of things and I put it on paper so that I can talk about it, so I can look at it and own it. The community work I do is also really heavy emotionally and mentally... You have to be a safe space for 20 to 30 people at a time and take in everything they're going through, and you have no outlet for it. Using printmaking I can work through it and process it. It doesn't go away because it's a part of me, but it calms me down and that helps me move on.*³⁷⁷

(Adebayo, 2019)



378

In Adebayo's print entitled *Wait*, the mark-making (plate cutting) is gestural and expressive. The

³⁷⁷ Adebayo, in SNAPLine, Resistance, 2019_2, p. 19.

³⁷⁸ Image: 7.2. Artist: Adebayo, *Please Don't go Away - WAIT*, linocut print on paper, printed February 28th, 2019, at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton Alberta, Canada.

vibrant orange colour jumps in contrast to the pale purple and light tan. The face seems like a mask, with sharp teeth, tears in the eyes, and the word WAIT written on the lips. Adebayo describes the story behind his artwork and how the printmaking process intervened in his thought process and self-stories, allowing him to reflect, pause, and act (to make a print, and reimagine his self-story).

*WAIT was made at a time I was at the peak of helplessness and feeling suicidal. I was scheduled to meet Michelle for a printing session, and I started crying on the bus. There were a lot of heavy things happening in the community regarding Pride—people sending us hateful messages, hate group activity in Edmonton... And when I got to SNAP, Michelle gave me a plate and I put it all down. I was telling myself it's okay to wait, wait to take your life, you can resist it and you can survive it, it's okay to take a step back, you don't have to move so fast, you don't have to move at everyone's pace. And that's where the WAIT project came from.*³⁷⁹

(Adebayo, 2019)

Importantly, printmaking processes allowed Adebayo to wait, to press pause on thoughts of suicidal ideation. It's noteworthy that Adebayo's process (carving, printing, reflecting) took place within the tight and supportive social network of a small research group in our now familiar studio space. We literally stood beside and worked alongside and with Adebayo as he created this artwork. Much of our support for Adebayo was lived in silence, by being there and with our care-filled quiet attention. This form of silence held open a space for Adebayo to take the risk of creating artwork that was reflective of his experiences.

³⁷⁹ Adebayo, in SNAPLine, Resistance, 2019_2, p. 21.

Adebayo's presence mixed with sound of the rollers soaking up ink filled the space today. As his body leaned into the plate to carry the marks left, my mind wandered to the families I worked with. Like Adebayo, they had arrived as refugees. The journeys of displacement and hard stories was palpable. The silence that was present was reassuring somehow, there was no attempt to erase or shift the experiences and the rawness of the pain was present. I remember the sense of our bodies leaning into the space ... the choice of colours, the thickness of the ink, and the pressure of the press helping to create new possibilities. While I found myself amidst the stories told to me, I recall my desire to bring the families to the print studio. Would they, like Adebayo, find this space welcoming?

(Vera, Reflective Note)

Creating artwork together, sharing space, and helping one another as we engaged in the printmaking processes undoubtedly acted as implicit support. Because no expectations were ever placed on Max, Espen, or Adebayo to create art in a certain way or speak about the prints they created, Adebayo knew he was free to create images without a requirement or expectation to show his images or speak about them for this research. Michelle regarded Adebayo's, Max's, and Espen's art practice as their exclusive experience, which was housed amidst the research, but not owned by the research. This allowed Adebayo, Max and Espen to take full credit and ownership of their artwork and individual art practices, and bring only what they wanted to share (i.e., images, text, stories) to this research as co-researchers.

Taking time to carve and print the image literally helped Adebayo pause and wait. Then seeing his printed image – the face, the tears, the marks, and the word WAIT - Adebayo stopped and reflected on his experience alongside his print. Adebayo's process mirrors Dewey's (1933)

critical reflective thought process in that printmaking allowed him to see a problem (depression, stigma), considering the scope of this problem (these feelings are also happening with others), consider possible solutions from experience (art has acted as healing medicine), and plan a course of action (wait, press pause on suicidal ideation, and share the idea to wait by creating prints to share in community).

Adebayo took his print to his community of LGBTIQ+³⁸⁰ refugees and found that his artwork became a source of personal and community support; it created the possibility within his community to discuss mental health issues and confront suicidal ideation. Adebayo over the several next months printed hundreds of t-shirts, through which he shared his artwork and stories.

The act of printmaking and personally reflecting on his artwork as well as sharing these prints in his chosen community, gave Adebayo time to pause a narrative of helplessness, and take actions: create artwork, which expressed his feelings. In this way, Adebayo began to speak his emotions. By expressing his feelings Adebayo began to transform a feeling of helplessness into hope for the future. When Adebayo discovered he could speak his stories through his artwork, and his artwork would find an audience, his art became a resource for both himself and his community. With this realization, Adebayo started to become more prolific and more playful in studio re-assembling and re-imagining his stories. Through printmaking, Adebayo created multiple original prints from a single plate; this multiplicity, unique to printmaking, allowed Adebayo to share his prints with friends and community.

³⁸⁰ LGBTIQ+ is an acronym that stands for a constellation of identities including: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Trans, Intersex, and Queer, plus those not identifying as heterosexual.

Creating prints did not resolve the hegemonic and systemic issues Adebayo faced daily, like discrimination based from anti-Black racism, xenophobia, or transphobia, but creating prints helped Adebayo create a safe space for himself – a space to breath, to stand, to reflect, to speak, to be heard, and act to strengthen and build his community of LGBTIQ+ refugees. Adebayo’s beloved community (hooks, 1990; 2003), in turn, supported Adebayo as a space of refuge, to build resistance, and personal resilience within a web of social connections (Arendt, 1958).

Fourth Inquiry Space: Printmaking to Engage in Spaces of Playfulness and Imagination

The door of the printmaking studio fell closed behind me as I stepped outside. The work was intense, focused and brought so many questions to the surface for me. There were times where my responses to the experiences the families shared were inadequate and silencing. Words were unable to express my responses. Leaving the studio space, I wondered how I might engage in playfulness and imagination, to open possibilities of inquiry. It was in this moment that I turned to Michelle.

(Vera, Reflective Note)

Deepening into thinking about engaging in spaces of imagination and playfulness in printmaking, Michelle recalls how Max’s prints, often felt whimsical, like a playful invitation to participate in meaning-making. Max’s image, reminds Michelle of Rodin’s artwork, *The Thinker* combined with a suit of a playing cards (diamonds or hearts); it feels like a puzzle, a riddle, something to solve. Max would often make a conscious decision to hold back from explaining their artwork and bringing their stories alongside, instead preferring to offer their artwork to audiences as a thinking process. Max explains how fun and playfulness sit at the centre of their art practice to engage both themselves and their actual and imagined audience.



381

I think for me art is important and meaningful, but its' also for fun. It's for sharing really creative ideas. You can talk about really serious and important issues that are really important to you in really fun ways. And yes, sometimes serious things need a really serious tone – but in these times when the house is on fire and everything is already pretty sad, I don't necessarily feel that way.

(Max, in conversation with Michelle)

³⁸¹ Image: 7.3. Artist: Max. *Untitled (the Thinker)*. Linocut printing on paper and printing plate, December 18th, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.



Max made multiple prints, using different techniques. Thinking with Max’s woodblock print, Michelle, notes the content (the lip eye image), the medium (woodblock carving), the mark-making (lively gestural graphic white marks against red ink with a woodgrain pattern). She notices the immediacy of the communication and how the gestural quick marks make the image seem almost alive, ready to blink. Michelle recall’s Dewey’s (1934) writing characterizing art as embodied through thoughts, feelings, and actions, which are imaginatively generated by an artist; the artwork conceived, communicates by eliciting imagined thoughts and feeling of the viewer. Dewey (1934) states, in art, “meanings are actually embodied in a material which, thereby becomes the medium for their expression” (p. 218) and “the formed matter of [a]esthetic experience directly *expresses* [...] the meanings that are imaginatively evoked” (p. 219). Art experiences communicate evocatively by invoking the imagination, first of the artist through the creative process, and second of the viewer through the artwork. Furthermore, artwork holds a multiplicity of meanings because artwork gains its meaning in relation to both artists and viewers unique interpretations which evolve continuously in relation to the artwork over time (Dewey,

³⁸² Image: 7.4. Artist: Max. *Untitled (MouthEye)*. Woodblock printing on paper, November 23rd, 2018, printed by Max at SNAP Printmaking Studio, Edmonton, Alberta.

1934). Michelle continues to think with Max's image and writes:

Max because of our talks about your role as a disability activist and advocate, your print makes me think of the role of sight in communication, and literally the act of watching or reading lips as well as a general thought about watching (taking care with) words. Continuing to look at this image I recall our personal stories of hearing loss and loved ones with hearing loss come forward as meanings interwoven in stories continue to unfold.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

As Vera and Michelle talk about the significance of meaning-making, Michelle recalls Freire's (1970) writing about meaning-making as a dialogic, shared endeavour. Freire (1970), an educator and education theorist, wrote about learning as a dialogic process, which takes place in relation and is grounded in experience. Freire (1970) argued that critical consciousness could be created, through dialogue by people in relation to understand experiences. As Michelle and Vera consider printmaking in relation to Freire's (1970) dialogic process, they realize that printmaking and prints are a touchstone from which dialogue can proceed in any direction, and artwork serves as a gateway to open multiple paths for stories and imagination to follow.

I am drawn to the ideas of the dialogical and feel a sense of urgency to return to the printmaking studio. It is here that I seek conversations with difficult to tell stories, with ideas, and possibilities. I return to the studio space over and over, where the smell of ink welcomes me to try again. To try again to understand, to make visible, rather than erase the memories of hard to tell stories.

(Vera, Field Note)

As Michelle looks at Vera's and Max's prints, she recalls Lugones' (1987) writing about travelling worlds to engage and learn alongside others in playful ways. As she considers the role of art and printmaking to allow world-travelling Michelle recalls her discussions with Max about the importance of sharing handmade gifts with friends and family, as a way to extend the possibility to world travel.

I would say art is something that has helped me engage with my brother, who is autistic, [and] engage with my community, in a lot of different ways and in a way and I think that kind of speaks to the communicative power of art. Just in the sense that it connects people so easily. It's like even with language barriers and you can make things together and that's very cool.

(Max, in conversation with Michelle)

Thinking with Max about the importance of visual art as a thinking process, Michelle realizes that visual thinking sometimes creates spaces for words to come later. Dewey (1934) called art an evocative language because the immediacy of art as visual communication, means art engages and communicates on multiple levels (tacit, sensory, emotive) simultaneously. By engaging thought, sense, and imagination, through art practices the groundwork may be laid for new thoughts and thought ordering to emerge, resulting in new forms of sense-making and understanding. Max speaks of a process of visual thinking they learned as a child, which enabled Max to work with language and meaning making through artmaking.

I think for me growing up art was like a main way of communicating about a bunch of different things, before I was able to, because I was someone who was diagnosed with childhood mental illness. So, art was a main way for me to communicate, a bunch of different things before I was able to. Because for me, I was like someone who was

diagnosed with childhood mental illness, I was someone who went to art therapy for a number of years. Which is what got me into art in the first place. Most people think that I just liked drawing a lot as a kid. I was like mandated a one hour drawing session every week. So, I think, in that sense art is really important to how I communicate things about how I understand the world in some ways. I think the art I make speaks a bit more to how I think, than sometimes I do verbally – just like what my experience of existing is more conveyed in my art than it is through my talking.

(Max, in conversation with Michelle)

Fifth Inquiry Space: Printmaking Engages Shared Spaces of Vulnerability and Risk-taking

Spaces of vulnerability are ever present in research particularly in relational research methodologies, such as narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), where research is nested amidst relationships and grounded in relational ethics. Co-creating spaces of research to maintain and develop ethical relational research commitments means walking alongside participants amid the complexity of their lives, over prolonged periods and across diverse situational and social contexts (Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018). This also mean participants come alongside us in the midst of our complex, often messy, lives.

Rushing out my office door to catch the bus to the printmaking studio, I felt unfocused. My mind was preoccupied, I could feel my heart racing and wonder if I should just stay on the bus, rather than stop to join Michelle, Adebayo, Max, and Espen. My presence, I was certain, would disrupt the generative space. As I passed the familiar streets and walkways, I wondered if anyone would notice my absence. Did it matter that I attended the printmaking sessions Michelle had organized? Did I matter? Questions about who I was and was becoming surfaced as I wondered how I could shift the difficult stories of

the families I worked with. Stories of racism, of poverty, and of disruption. As I passed the usual stop for the printmaking studio, I stayed on the bus. I saw everyone gathered around the table through the window as the bus passed the printmaking studio. This sense of the table suddenly called me to get off the bus. The cool air cleared my head and the few minutes of walking grounded me as I backtracked my way to the print studio. Opening the door to the studio, I could hear Max's gentle 'hello'.

(Vera, Reflective Note)

March and April 2019 were full of tensions in Edmonton's LGBTIQ+ communities and these tensions reverberated into Michelle's research. The tensions were present as we gathered around the studio table. Some of these tensions were caused by racial remarks and racially motivated actions, others were marked by the precariousness of political decisions. April was a bitter month for Adebayo and his community. First, a beloved member of the Adebayo's community, a LGBTIQ refugee, was refused the right to stay in Canada and returned to a country where it is illegal and dangerous to be queer. Second, *Edmonton Pride 2019* was cancelled and demands from BIPOC LGBTIQ+ groups were cited by event organizers as reasons, amongst others, for the event's cancellation. The cancellation created a social media firestorm, which deepened rifts between LGB and TIQ+ communities and between racialized and non-racialized LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities.

I really was at a loss, I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to reach out and make things better. I grieved alongside Adebayo's community, as they mourned the loss of a friend deported. I also sensed the deep disappointment and grief Adebayo and his community felt with the lack of support and blame the community was fielding around Pride's cancellation. The sense of isolation of the BIPOC LGBTIQ+ communities seemed

very profound, and I didn't know how to bridge these divides. I also tried to hold a space to allow myself to feel disappointed with the Pride cancellation, and sense the deep rifts in Edmonton's LGBTIQ+ communities, and hold the space for needed changes to come. I tried to hold open a space of support for Adebayo, and for his community who were grieving, and for me to grieve as well. I needed a way to reach out to Adebayo at this time, so I returned to what I know best, art and printmaking to try to span a divide of grief, sorrow, and loss, that I was feeling, that Adebayo and his community were experiencing, and that many were experiencing in Edmonton's LGBTIQ+ communities at that time.

(Michelle, Field Note)

Over time it became evident that spaces of vulnerability are shared spaces where trust is negotiated and renegotiated in relationship and within shifting, sometimes turbulent, contexts. Artmaking helped to build important bridges to understand silent and sometimes hard to speak stories.

Adebayo had missed studio in April. He hadn't had much time to cut plates since we last printed in March. When he entered the studio, he looked tired and asked to talk. I asked if he wanted to grab some lunch, but he wanted to stay at SNAP, as it was quiet with no one around³⁸³. When I pulled out the plates and proofs I had made as a gift for him, he lit up.

³⁸³ I created several additional printmaking workshops to work with Adebayo alone, to make up for group printing sessions he could not attend due to his shifting schedule and commitments. The SNAP print-shop was even more quiet this day because this session, like the session in March, was scheduled solely for Adebayo and I to print together.

We started printing with the Map of Africa plate. When Adebayo asked what colour, I wondered if we should print the colours of the trans flag to imagine trans inclusion. Adebayo lit up with the suggestion. We must have printed about thirty t-shirts that day. It was lovely to see his mood lift as we worked. As he cranked plates through the press, he said, “this is really meditative, isn’t it?” I replied “Yes...yes it is”, just doing this work – those physical repetitive movements. I thought, how wonderful we get to do this, just be here, just print the next shirt, and be surprised how inks sits on fabric.

(Michelle, Field Note)



384

³⁸⁴ Image: 7.5. Printmaking plates Michelle gifted to Adebayo from top to bottom: *Two Sides of the Same Hand* referencing a statement Adebayo made about differences in the LGBTIQ+ communities being like two sides the same hand, but people not being able to see that connection; *Map of Africa* to imagine possibilities of LGBTIQ+ inclusion; and, *Mandela’s Solidarity Symbol* to pay homage to one of Adebayo’s heroes and imagine a world without racism.

Printmaking's Unique Promise to Deepen Spaces of Inquiry and Engagement

We found that printmaking offers possibilities within each of the five aforementioned spaces of inquiry to deepen and expand opportunities for participants and researchers to engage research together as co-inquirers. Printmaking specifically: helps create safe spaces to think through and tell stories in community settings; engages participants as co-researchers in unfolding, emergent activities; embodies experience and communicates embodied ways of thinking and knowing; may temporarily press pause on narratives; disrupts, interrupts, disassembles, re-assembles, and helps re-imagines narratives; creates space to reveal silent and silenced stories, and; acts as an asset and resource created in relation to connect individuals to themselves and to their chosen communities.

Conclusion

Printmaking opens new possibilities in narrative inquiry and visual narrative inquiry. Forefronting the visual and creative aspect of our work shifted how we told, retold, lived, and relived experiences alongside participants, as well as during moments when we tried to make sense of the stories shared. Participants in Michelle's study, were able to engage and participate in research as co-inquirers working within five interconnected spaces of inquiry, which opened a multitude of emergent possibilities within relational research. We were able to attend to complex experiences in new ways, in ways that embraced silences, diverse ways of knowing, and stories yet to be lived and told. Printmaking in this way allowed us to frame and reframe how we understand and inquire into experiences over time, in diverse contexts, and places. The etymology of the word frame, helps us understand framing as a process that is future oriented and reflects a sense of doing, making, or preforming. In this way, framing allowed us to see otherwise, to respond to and with participants and ourselves. This sense of response that was

present in the printmaking, was marked by a relational ethics, that called us to attend to and engage with participants in ways that open new possibilities of inquiry.

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CHAPTER 8: Walking Alongside: Relational Research Spaces in Visual Narrative Inquiry

Abstract

Walking alongside is a phrase used in narrative inquiry to describe relational commitments that shape how we attend to the complexity of lives, unfolding over time, and within a web of social relations. The space of inquiry requires researchers to attend to participants' lives and stories of experience across various social situations, places, and times. In this paper, I explicate and unpack an intimate, and sometimes complex, journey and unfolding research process alongside participants. As a narrative inquirer, I walked alongside three trans identifying young adults, to co-create, re-imagine, and transform research in relation to participants. In this paper, I provide insight into how I walked alongside three trans young adults as a narrative inquirer. This process is undergirded by attention to and a deepening awareness of relational ethics, and by creating spaces that allow for emergent possibilities of being in relation and honouring diverse and multiple ways of knowing.

Packing up after Camp fyrefly, an arts-based leadership camp for Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM)³⁸⁵ youth, so many supplies had been left touched, so much had been left on the shelf. I felt left on the shelf. I arrived at Camp excited to learn what arts-based mentorship might mean for SGM youth. I came in with my head full of ideas, a list of activities to offer, and expectations how these should roll out. It all landed flat. In retrospect, I came in head first, when heart first might have worked better. My plans got in

³⁸⁵ i.e., Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Trans, Intersex, Queer, Two-spirit, Pansexual, Asexual, plus those not identifying as heterosexual.

the way of my being able to know the youths, relate to them, hang out with them, and allow them to know me, and guide the unfolding processes. My preconceived plans left me unable to be present. The planned, but aborted, art projects and the unopened boxes of art supplies were clues that there was a need for me to attend differently, perhaps in a more responsive way. I wonder what spaces these youths might have created, beyond the boundaries of my expectations, if they were invited to shape the space.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

In this, my first experience working exclusively with SGM youth as Artist-in-Residence at Camp fYrefly, I began to understand the importance of co-creating spaces with youth. My future doctoral research focused on inviting SGM young adults to shape research spaces of engagement and co-inquiry to better understand what mentorship might mean to SGM youth. When I entered my fieldwork, two years later, my experience at fYrefly reminded me of the necessity to co-compose research with Adebayo, Espen, and Max. It was important to keep spaces open and to negotiate boundaries, expectations, and possibilities.

My initial research conversations with Adebayo, Espen, and Max were amazing. Then nothing. Check-ins for coffees and chats were stymied when requests went unanswered. Eventually two participants got in touch to say their lives had become complicated, and they were unsure when they could meet again. I was concerned both about the wellbeing of participants and how the research might proceed. After a couple months, and considerable fretting on my part, an email arrived from a participant asking to return to SNAP printmaking studio to make art. In their email, they told me they had gone through a tough time and wanted to meet and return to studio because they needed art at their back. This became the stimulus to situate research in regular group

artmaking sessions – it was not something I had initially planned for. These experiences, at the outset of research, highlighted the necessity to make processes adaptable and responsive to emergent requests of Adebayo, Espen, and Max amid their complex lives.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

Walking alongside, a term used in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), refers to negotiated relational commitments between participants and researchers. These relational commitments are influenced by many factors. In this paper, I explicate and unpack my intimate, and sometimes complex, journey and unfolding research processes. As a narrative inquirer, I walked alongside three trans identifying young adults, to co-create, reimagine, and transform research in relation. I too built participatory, open-ended, and evolving spaces of research to engage with Adebayo, Espen, and Max. In this paper, drawing on Lugones' (1987; 1992; 2003) ideas about world-travelling, I will explicate how generative and creative spaces of co-inquiry were developed alongside Adebayo, Espen, and Max. These spaces of co-inquiry are marked by: engaging in playfulness and creative activities; negotiating borderlands, which demand new ways of seeing and responding to complexity; and, navigating liminality through plural selves, which offers multiple and complex relational responses that spring from new “resistant logics” (Lugones, 2003, p. 161).

The Focus of the Research

Using a visual narrative inquiry design (Bach, 2007; Caine, 2007; de Mello, 2007), the purpose of this research was to inquire into mentorship as a relational learning experience alongside trans young adults. The specific objectives focused on understanding mentorship as a collaborative relational learning experience; attend to mentorship as a co-created identity formation and asset-building process; and to better understand how practical applications of

theory may be used to inform concrete actions in relational research. Being grounded in Dewey's (1938) concept of experience, I attended to mentorship as a life-making experience that happens in dynamic interactions and often conflicting constructions of identity, agency, and resistance. As part of this study, I engaged in multiple conversation with each participant. We also engaged as a group in monthly opportunities to create artwork in a well-supported community studio to deepen reflections on experience. I facilitated these studio sessions drawing on my work as a professional artist and post-secondary studio art instructor. This study took place over a three-year period in informal settings in Edmonton, Alberta. I used purposive sampling to recruit three trans young adults who engaged in SGM programs and could speak to mentorship experiences. Field texts were diverse and included transcripts, meeting notes, conversations, found poetry, creative writing, photographs, and artwork. Overall 16 (5-hour) group artmaking sessions and 6-12 individual participant meetings were held. Narrative accounts, or interim research texts, were written and negotiated with participants and included a play, poems, short stories, and artwork. Metaphorically speaking, I laid the narrative accounts side by side to discern resonant threads across participants' accounts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to compose final research texts. University of Alberta Research Ethics Board approval was obtained prior to the study. Adebayo, Espen, and Max, agreed to use their first names, as well as all their stories and artwork in any publicly accessible research texts.

Living Relational Research Alongside Participant Co-inquirers

Adebayo, Espen, Max and I engaged in printmaking activities at a small communal printmaking studio operated by the Society of Northern Alberta Print-artists (SNAP). The shared activities of printmaking shaped how Adebayo, Espen, Max and I experienced walking alongside. These experiences reflected an action-oriented process developed through living

relational research. Visual narrative inquiry, like narrative inquiry, seeks to understand experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) and begins in the process of living experiences or through the telling of stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Grounding research in the living means the “researcher and participants live the experience that is being studied” (de Mello, 2007, p. 214). Living relational research alongside participants may necessitate greater amounts of risk and trust, by both researchers and participants, than research situated in the telling, because experiences that are shared might be less certain and less predictable. In this study, participants created artwork based on their own interests, unguided by research questions, projects, or preordained plans. Adebayo, Espen, Max and I took risks participating in this way; we could not know what would happen. Living relational research allows participants and researchers to experience research as a means of coming to story, it supports reflection, understanding, and expression of long silent or silenced stories. In this way, living research may facilitate storytelling by participants, enabling them to make sense of experiences and find words to tell their stories over time. By engaging participants to inquire into their experiences through living research processes, they also may come to see themselves as authorities in their own lives within research (Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018), and develop greater agency to act as co-inquirers (de Mello, 2007, p. 215).

In this research, shared creative activities laid the foundation for Adebayo, Espen, and Max to attend to experiences and acted as the basis for subsequent conversations, collaborative writing, and storytelling. For Adebayo, Espen, and Max, artmaking enabled reflection on experiences, and ways to communicate these experiences to different audiences to resist social isolation and build community networks. In response to Adebayo’s, Espen’s, and Max’s developing art practice, I adapted research processes to support their developing agency as co-

inquirers in research.

Relational Inquiry: Methodology, Theory and Approaches

Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is informed by a relational ontology (Clandinin et al., 2018), which posits knowledge is co-composed through interactions between researchers and participants over time, in multiple contexts, places, and situations. Participants' engagement and contributions are essential as participants are considered co-inquirers. Narrative inquiry enables us to understand life as experienced and understood relationally, and to think *with* story (Morris, 2002). Thinking *with* story, rather than thinking about story, facilitates the use of tacit and embodied knowledges in meaning-making (Caine & Lavoie, 2015), allowing insight into the nature of experience and relational learning.

Visual narrative inquiry is the form of narrative inquiry undertaken in this study. This type of research is rooted in narrative inquiry's (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) theory, methodology, and methods, but emphasizes art creation by participants and researchers as a key component of relational research to elicit storytelling, respond to, and tell stories (Bach, 2007; Caine, 2007; Caine & Lavoie, 2011; 2015; de Mello, 2007). Narrative inquiry is theoretically grounded in Dewey's (1938) pragmatist philosophy. For Dewey (1938), experience consists of social exchanges (interactions), which take place in distinct events (situations), and over time (continuously). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reflect Dewey's (1938) principles in narrative inquiry to understand the social, place, and temporal qualities of experience; they name these qualities of experience the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry. In this study, the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry acted as the theoretical frame which enabled relational research to develop over time, across various contexts and situations. My research puzzle, the series of wonders I brought to research, evolved throughout the research and was shaped by

Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's experiences and our relationship.

Elsewhere, I (Lavoie, 2021a; Lavoie & Caine, 2021b) have demonstrated that artmaking in visual narrative inquiry has the potential to develop unique spaces of engagement for participants to act as co-inquirers. Dewey's (1934) writing on the importance and uniqueness of art experiences - as imaginative, playful, evocative, reflective and critically thoughtful – is important to visual narrative inquiry. This work is undergirded by writing which emphasizes the contributions of artmaking and the arts in qualitative research. In this study, I specifically attend to the relationship between the arts and reflexivity (de Freitas, 2008), imagination (Greene, 1995), and diverse representations through a multiplicity of forms and modes of communication (Barone, 2008; Eisner, 2008). Critical to the relational aspect of this work was my ability to world travel.

Turning to World Travelling

For me attending to the complexities of world-travelling (Lugones, 1987; 1992; 2003) was essential, theoretically and practically, to enable my process of walking alongside Adebayo, Espen, and Max with humility and compassion. Lugones' (1987;1992; 2003) writing especially supported my ability³⁸⁶ to respond to Adebayo, Espen, and Max. Particularly helpful was her writing on world-travelling through playfulness to deepen understanding of self and others (Lugones, 1987); borderlands as sites of generative space making (Lugones, 1992); and, responses to multiple oppressions through theories of multiple selves, multiple positionalities, and her notion of liminality (Lugones, 2003).

³⁸⁶ In this context, I was thinking of my ability as my capacity to respond to the emergent needs of Adebayo, Espen, and Max; I was reflecting on my response ability and my responsibility to act supportively in relation.

According to Lugones (1987) we live in multiple worlds and it is possible for most to world-travel. Further, Lugones (1987) asserts we act and are different within each of the worlds we inhabit and we may travel to other worlds to learn alongside and understand others. Lugones (1987) stresses world travelling to know another is a necessity because, “[w]ithout knowing the other’s “world,” one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other’s presence because the other is only dimly present” (p. 18).

Defining worlds, Lugones (1987) stresses “for something to be a ‘world’ in my sense, it has to be inhabited by some flesh and blood people” (p. 9). Lugones (1987) continues, “a ‘world’ may be an incomplete visionary non-utopian construction of life or it may be a traditional construction of life” (p. 10). Describing Lugones’ (1987; 2003) worlds and world travelling, Dewart and colleagues (2019) write, “[i]ndividuals can be present in multiple ‘worlds’, and their ability to travel between these “worlds” is dependent on context, setting, shared history, shared language, and understanding of the social norms” (p. 2). The necessity of world travelling becomes essential for those who do not comfortably exist within hegemonic socio-cultural norms (Lugones, 1987; 2003). Lugones (1987) claims, “[f]or some of us, ‘travelling’ between ‘worlds’ is part and parcel of our experience” (p. 11), because for those who live outside dominant and hegemonic narratives world travelling is a necessity and survival strategy. World travelling may create the possibility for new “counterhegemonic discourses” (hooks, 1990, p. 149) and “counterlanguage[s]” (hooks, 1990, p. 150) to develop in the margins, those liminal spaces between worlds, “giving us ways to speak that decolonize our minds, our very beings” (hooks, 1990, p. 150), and generate new spaces and new worlds.

Generative Space-Making

Before my experience at Camp fYrefly, I would have framed my research wonders within

the context of finding solutions to a set of problems, such as understanding SGM intergenerational mentorship to combat social isolation of SGM young adults. I had studied literature pointing to dire consequences that spring from social isolation, stigmatization, and marginalization of this population (Meyer, et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2011). Consequences that included: avoidance of public spaces (Scheim et al., 2014); minority stress (Heck, 2015; Meyer, 2007); depression, substance abuse, homeless (Abramovich, 2012; 2016); suicidal ideation (Nesmith et al., 1999; Peter & Taylor, 2014; Taylor et al., 2020; Wells et al., 2017); and suicide (Peter & Taylor, 2014; Taylor et al., 2020; Wells et al., 2017). While these issues are critical, I found myself wondering who my participants are as individuals, and what complexities they negotiate in their daily lives. I was reminded of the reflective note I shared earlier.

I came in with my head full of ideas, a list of activities to offer, and expectations how these should roll out. It all landed flat. In retrospect, I came in head first, when heart first might have worked better. My plans got in the way of my being able to know the youths, relate to them, hang out with them, and allow them to know me, and guide the unfolding processes.

My experience at Camp fYrefly, pointed my work away from attempting to answer fixed problems with probable solutions and toward framing the work as an intersecting network of evolving wonders that emerged in relation to, rather than being imposed on, participants' experience. Research puzzles rather than questions, which are used to frame inquiry within narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), enabled my relational and iterative process of inquiry. These research puzzles were an evolving and interconnected amalgam of wonders that continuously transformed in response to changes in the phenomenon under study and questions that emerged throughout inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Because wonders evolve and

continue to emerge, “narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Because research puzzles evolve in relation to participants’ unfolding experience, they hold the possibility to frame generative spaces.

Learning to Walking Alongside: Leaning Along the Way

Dear Max,

October 30th, 2019

When I think about self-definition and what a challenge it is for me; I think of the challenge of language, as it becomes fixed, rigid, and laden with associations. I think of how I have named myself and how I have been named by others. The names I have chosen to self-identify have shifted a little over the years and will probably continue to shift and evolve in time and in relation. As I consider notions of binary oppositions and the arbitrariness of ideas around gender binary opposites - fixed, set in stone, non-negotiable; I think too about how some of these ideas are becoming brittle over time, thin, worn-out. I also think of the persistence of norms and hegemonic collective narratives that define behaviour and expression. I consider how much personal strength and resilience, it must take for you, to stand your ground to just be yourself – a self-identified non-binary trans person, an artist, a queer community activist, and a student, within and outside the queer community.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

When I came alongside Adebayo, Espen, and Max, I began wayfinding – literally finding my way, amid lives being lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Together through conversation and artmaking, we co-created spaces to learn along the way (Bateson, 1994). These co-created research spaces were marked by negotiations created primarily in response to participants’

requests. The research spaces we co-created developed through a series of nested supports. These supports included institutional supports I negotiated with SNAP to support the participants and the research project housed within SNAP studio.

Adebayo, Max and Espen requested to return to continue printmaking at SNAP as part of our research. We had previously worked together at SNAP, when I gave a series of free printmaking workshops for LGBTIQ+ youth following Camp fYrefly. Because SNAP was a known space to Adebayo, Max and Espen, they knew it to be a safe and inclusive space, and a place where they could express themselves openly and freely. My previous LGBTIQ+ SNAP printmaking workshops created a LGBTIQ+ safe community space nested within SNAP, an artist-run community studio space. To support Adebayo, Max and Espen in this research, we agreed to meet regularly to make prints at SNAP. To facilitate our group printmaking sessions, I consulted with Adebayo, Max and Espen every month to find a time and date that would work best for their schedules. I also scheduled solo printmaking sessions with each one of them when they were having difficulty attending group printmaking sessions. Over the course of a year, Adebayo, Max, Espen and I worked together in 16 5-hour printmaking sessions. In these sessions, I supported Adebayo's, Max's and Espen's developing agency as artist-researchers and co-inquirers. For each printmaking sessions, I rented the studio space from SNAP so that we had full access to printing presses and equipment and were not interrupted in our work. I also brought all necessary printmaking supplies - inks, paper, and plates for Adebayo, Max and Espen. I wanted Adebayo, Max and Espen to be supported and to be free to make art. To support their developing art practice, I also gifted Adebayo, Max and Espen with supplies, plates, and lino-cutting tools, so they could have access to materials outside of our studio times, and between group printing sessions.

When, we began this research journey, there was no path and no apparent destination, only a determination to learn together and in relation. Over time, my walking alongside Adebayo, Max, and Espen took its own path; a path we built together. In our printmaking sessions at SNAP studio, I did not assign projects, ask participants to consider themes, or direct their art-making in any way. I worked alongside Adebayo, Max and Espen as they created their artwork, offering printmaking technical assistance. Because I wanted Adebayo, Max and Espen to be able to focus on and pursue their artistic aspirations, I did not ask them to tell me stories about their artwork when we worked in studio. If they wished to tell me stories in relation to their artwork later, it was welcomed, but never required. The creative space of printmaking was a sanctuary in a way.

When Adebayo came into studio, he sat at the table and asked if we could talk. This was the first time we had met since April, when all the tension arose in Edmonton's LGBTIQ+ community, just after the Edmonton Pride cancellation. Adebayo looked tired, and when I asked him how he was doing, he told me that he had been up most of the night supporting a friend who was going through a tough time. He told me he hadn't gotten his sleep. I asked if he wanted to grab lunch and talk elsewhere, but he replied he preferred to stay at SNAP because it felt comfortable. I asked if he wanted to reschedule our printing session, but he told me he wanted to stay and print because printing relieved his stress. When I shared some printing plates, I had cut for him, his spirits seemed to lift. We printed for the next five hours and at the end of printing session, Adebayo and I returned to sit quietly at the studio table. We sat in silence for a what seemed a long time. It seemed to be a comfortable silence though; a silence born after a productive afternoon of printing together. After a time, I wondered if Adebayo wanted to go. I realized then

that I didn't want him to leave to rejoin the tensions, struggles, and fights I knew were waiting for him on the other side of the studio door. I realized then that sometimes our studio sessions felt to me like an island in a fast-moving stream, a time to pause and to rest, while engaging in printmaking activities. I wonder if our printmaking sessions felt this way to Adebayo.

(Michelle, Field Note)

Outside of SNAP studio, Adebayo, Max, and Espen and I met for lunches or coffees at times to catch up and sometimes to discuss their work. When requests and invitations came for me to support Adebayo's, Max's, or Espen's initiative, I made sure to take time to travel to their worlds and support them. One participant requested my input as they composed a portfolio and curriculum vitae for their application to a university program. Another participant invited me to attend some of his speaking engagements and events. Another participant expressed interest in attending an art exhibition as a group, so I asked others and we took in the show together. I was happy Adebayo, Max, and Espen felt free to ask for my assistance or invite me to attend events alongside them and celebrate their interests and their achievements.

In this research, I was learning to see with different eyes. Adebayo, Max, and Espen acted as my teachers and guides. Thinking about this idea of learning to see with different eyes, I am reminded of Bateson's (1994) writing. She asserts that until we learn to see in new ways, in ways that reflect tenderness and grace, our learning alongside difference may remain begrudging and uninformed (Bateson 1994). Learning alongside others, Bateson (1994) suggests, is an unfolding process of adaption and learning along the way, which requires a "new kind of openness and responsiveness... [and a] need to disconnect the notion of difference from

superiority and inferiority” (Bateson 1994, 234-235). Max’s words below hint at what is required to learn *alongside with a new kind of openness and responsiveness*.

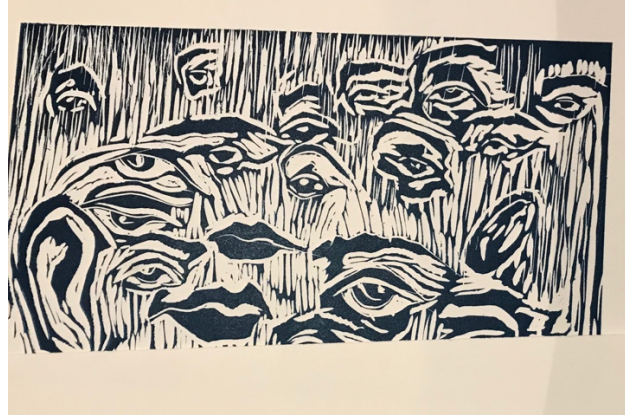
I feel very grateful for the fact that my mom sort of raised me under the guise of,

“you don’t know everything – because we all have different experiences”. And I think my brother’s having – like my brother being autistic, is something that definitely contributed to that too. Because I can literally see firsthand that even though we both are in the same family, we have different life experiences in like school and in general, just because of my ability to communicate. So yeah, I think that at least set me up in a way that it’s like it’s been easier for me to accept almost like criticism on my lack of knowledge and really understanding the fact that I don’t have all the knowledge in the world and I never will.

(Max in conversation with Michelle)

In this work, relationship building was key as was checking my biases and emotional reactivity when stories became hard to hear and walking alongside meant responding with great care-filled attention. I created two linocut prints and gifted the plates to Max to respond to their stories. Artwork was a way for me to embody and feel through my experiences alongside Max, so I could reflect on and share my understanding in conversation with Max. I intended these images to be touchstones for my personal reflection (de Freitas, 2008) and a spark for dialogue and conversation primarily between Max and myself. The first image I called *Seeing with Many Eyes, Hearing with Many Ears and Speaking in Many Tongues* I created this image to reflect what I saw as Max’s seamless ability to travel between worlds. The second image signs the word *CARE* because I felt Max’s caring facilitated their being able to see and hear and speak with others as they travelled to others’ worlds. I used sign language because I do not know it, but Max

is learning sign to speak with their friends, so I thought I would begin to learn another language to be able to speak with Max.



387



388

Travelling to Another's World and Becoming Playful

Lugones' theory of world-travelling (1987) originated to understand how to be in relation and come to know another. Specifically, Lugones (1987) developed the theory of world-travelling to respond to and better understand her mother. Lugones (1987) writes, "[o]nly

³⁸⁷ Image: 8.1. Artist: Michelle. *Seeing with Many Eyes, Hearing with Many Ears, & Speaking with Many Tongues*. Linocut Print on Paper.

³⁸⁸ Image: 8.2. Artist: Michelle. *CARE*. Linocut Print on Paper.

through this travelling to her “world” could I identify with her because only then could I cease to ignore her and to be excluded and separate from her” (p. 8) By drawing on Frye (1983), Lugones asks the question: How is it possible to understand and know another? From Frye (1983), who posits we look at others through either “loving eyes” or “arrogant eyes” (p. 75), Lugones (1987) developed her concepts of loving and arrogant perception. Looking at others through the filter of arrogant perception, Lugones (1987) asserts we see only ourselves and our own reflections; while it is only through loving perception that we might travel to others’ worlds to see and better understand another. Lugones (1987) world-travelling responds to Frye’s (1983) assertion, “that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one’s own will and interests and fears and imagination” (p. 75). Without world-travelling Lugones (1987) suggests that it is not possible to know another; and without travelling playfully one may not travel at all.

Walking Playfully Alongside Max

Lugones (1987) posits we world-travel through an embodied sense of ease and/or dis/ease as we inhabit shared places and spaces. Playfulness, a playful attitude, Lugones (1987) claims is required to world-travel. When we are playful:

We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are open to self-construction. We may not have rules, and when we do have rules, there are no rules that are to us sacred. We are not worried about competence. We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular “world.” We are there creatively. (p. 16)

I think for me art is important and meaningful, but its’ also for fun. It’s for sharing

really creative ideas. You can talk about really serious and important issues that are really important to you in really fun ways. And yes, sometimes serious things need a really serious tone – but in these times when the house is on fire and everything is already pretty sad, I don't necessarily feel that way. Just because you aren't treating something seriously doesn't mean that you aren't showing respect to it... It can still be something enjoyable. With this one I'm talking about language barriers and how sometimes people don't have access to the type of communication that suits them best. But I'm dressed like a giant Muppet because that's still fun.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

As they spoke, Max unstitched the red hands from their red furry Muppet-like costume for the critique of their performance art piece that was to follow our sushi lunch. Remembering Max working on their Muppet-suit that morning, I'm reminded of the joy and playfulness Max always brought to their artmaking studio practice. Our yearlong process of printmaking at SNAP studio had ended just a few months before this talk, so it was wonderful to catch-up and look through Max's narrative account. My thoughts skip back in time and I recall working alongside Max, Adebayo and Espen in our group printmaking sessions at SNAP community studio. Between them they must have printed three hundred prints. They were prolific as each developed their own unique art printmaking practice. One afternoon printing session alongside Max comes to mind.

Max and I were just finishing our printing for the day. I was a little tired. The work was physical and we were going on five hours of printing. Max had taken this opportunity to really experiment. He had printed four different plates on a series of t-shirts, and paper prints in a small edition. Max and I were working away, in sync, without much talk. We

had settled in to a rhythm of doing. I smiled to myself as our work reminded me of my past experiences as a printer for professional printmaking artists. It's like a dance, no action spared, all attention focused on the task at hand – creating the art. I looked up to catch a glimpse of the newly printed multi-coloured t-shirts drying across studio countertops, and wondered at the generative space opened by our shared creative play.

(Michelle, Field Note)

Working alongside Max in a printmaking studio was second nature to me. As a professional printmaker and post-secondary and community-based studio art instructor for many years, I had learned through experience to guide the technical printmaking process, from beginning to end (e.g., cutting the plate, inking, and printing) with enough information and technical support, so emerging artists could work independently on their ideas. Coming to this research, I followed my practice of teaching artmaking techniques, but not directing ideas, because I did not want my stories, ways of expression, or artmaking expertise to supersede, delimit, or in any way silence, Max's, Adebayo's, Espen's developing art practice and their emergent images or stories. I agree with Finley's (2008) assertion that 'expertism' may act as a barrier to inclusivity, diversity, and the generative potentials of artmaking practice within research (p. 76). Researchers should instead facilitate artmaking processes, "without taking the stance of either expert researcher or expert artist" (Finley, 2008, p. 76). Recalling my experience of Camp fYrefly, I know I needed to attend to Max's, Adebayo's, and Espen's stories in a different way, in a more responsive way.

The planned, but aborted, art projects and the unopened boxes of art supplies were clues that there was a need for me to attend differently, perhaps in a more responsive way. I wonder what spaces these youths might have created, beyond the boundaries of my expectations, if they were invited to shape the space.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

Working alongside Max, Adebayo, and Espen in studio in this research, I put my expertise aside, or rather, I focused it to facilitate their artmaking experiences. Thinking about our working alongside, I recall Lugones (1987) words about playfulness and its necessity for world travelling.

Lugones states:

“loving playfulness” is characterized by a sense of possibility as it is, in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges as a source of wisdom and delight. (p. 17)

In this research, risk-taking came from engaging in creative processes, because creative processes have the capacity to “lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers” (Balwin,1962, p. 17). It was evident that these creative activities and processes can disrupt conventional ways of thinking and knowing. In this study, as suggested by de Mello (2007), arts-based narrative inquiry processes empowered Max, Adebayo, and Espen to act as co-inquirers and affirmed their status as the leading authorities on their experiences and lives (Clandinin, et al., 2018).

As Dewey (1934) suggests, artwork is continuously reinterpreted, “it is recreated, every time it is esthetically experienced” (p. 213). Dewey (1934) considered art and the aesthetic experience of interpreting artwork as a means of connection and making sense of experience. Dewey (1934) states art and aesthetic experience “signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height, it signifies complete interpretation of self and the world of objects and events” (p. 19). Greene (1995) expands on Dewey (1934) suggesting art plays a crucial and

transformational role in opening imagination and enabling a multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations to be lived and told. Artmaking in this circumstance, seems to have enabled Max to question current pressing issues and imagine potential responses. As Greene (1995) states imaginative responses allow individuals to “glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet” (p. 19). Dewey (1934) solidifies my understanding of how artmaking and aesthetic experiences may make stories and experiences tangible to enable future imaginings.

The work of art [...] is not only the outcome of imagination, but operates imaginatively rather than in the realm of physical existences. What it does is to concentrate and enlarge an immediate experience [...] the meanings imaginatively summoned, assembled, and integrated are embodied in material existence that here and now interacts with the self. (p. 219)

My experiences taught me to trust how engagement with artistic activities and processes generates creative outputs; I knew something would happen when Max, Adebayo, Espen and I engaged in artmaking activities. In addition to my experience, I recall Eisner's (2008), writing on visual ways of knowing, which suggests, artmaking experiences have the potential to disrupt habitual meaning-making strategies through a process of non-linear thinking that allows us to think and communicate with diverse forms to create complex meanings. Dewey (1934) also argues that artmaking and aesthetic experiences are creative, imaginative, and evocative and connect us to our experiences in the world in unique ways. Dewey (1934) posits art and the aesthetic experiences expand the possibilities for understanding and communicating multi-faceted layers of our lived experience. Regarding the importance of art and the aesthetic experience, Dewey (1934) writes:

tangible scenes of life are made more intelligible in esthetic experience: not, however as reflection and science render things more intelligible by reduction to conceptual form, but by presenting their meanings as the matter of a clarified, coherent, and intensified or ‘impassioned’ experience (p. 290).

By supporting Max’s playful artmaking experiences in studio, stories came forward later, which likely would have remained unspoken. Because as Max, so eloquently states, artmaking is a process of creative thinking that allows them work through complex ideas before forming these ideas into words, sentences, and stories.

I think for me growing up art was like a main way of communicating about a bunch of different things, before I was able to, because I was someone who was diagnosed with childhood mental illness. So, art was a main way for me to communicate, a bunch of different things before I was able to. Because for me, I was like someone who was diagnosed with childhood mental illness, so I was someone who went to art therapy for a number of years. Which is what got me into art in the first place. Most people think that I just liked drawing a lot as a kid. I was like mandated one hour drawing session each week. That sort of thing to communicate anxiety and like that sort of stuff right. So, I think, in that sense art is really important to how I communicate things about how I understand the world in some ways. I think the art I make speaks a bit more to how I think, than sometimes I do verbally – just like what my experience of existing is more conveyed in my art than it is through my talking.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Max’s story, reminds me of Dewey’s (1934) writing which suggests artwork is evocative, and draws on tacit and implicit knowledge, which in turn enables unique ways to communicate ideas.

Travelling to the Borderlands Alongside Espen

Dear Espen,

Nov. 27th, 2019

It was such a nice surprise to see you last week on the steps of the legislature just after the Trans Day of Awareness Rally – even if it was just for a few minutes. After we last met, I realized that although we’ve been in touch via text and emails since May, we haven’t sat down to visit since then. We’ve missed you at SNAP this last few months – I’ve missed you! But, I was happy, and relieved too, to see you last week because it’s been a while and was hoping, and concerned too, that you are continuing to do well. When we met last week and I asked if we could meet, you said you would like to, but that it’s complicated right now. Your answer made me worry a little because I have some sense of what complicated can mean alongside your stories.

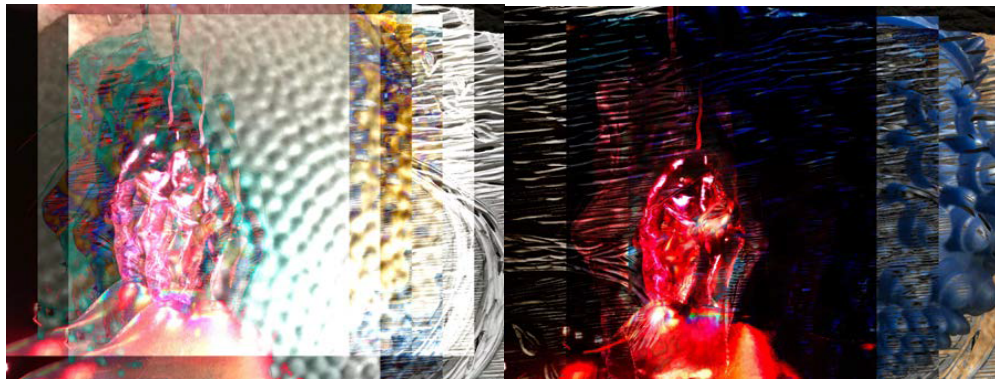
(Michelle, Field Note)

I recall first meeting Espen in the Artist-in-Residence cabin at Camp fYrefly in 2016. Espen was always joking, always laughing. Thinking of Espen, I remember his bright blue eyes, his generous toothy grin and his infectious laugh. Early in our conversations he told me his stories of being a mental health advocate, but I never imagined the complexity of his health and mental health stories; those I would not hear until much later. Those stories came after many silences and absences; they came alongside artwork I began to create to respond to snippets of Espen’s stories, often in his absence. I never understood until I walked alongside Espen for years, the deep chasm of silence that still surrounds the telling and hearing of mental health stories. I recall Espen and my talk on the silence and stigma surrounding mental health that arose as we looked at images I had created to respond to Espen’s still quieter stories. These images were my attempt

to respond to Espen's stories about tactile impressions and how perceptions shift becoming clearer or less distinct over time.

I recently started my ADHD meds again because my executive functioning was so bad that it was affecting my visual perception. My eyes would see something but my brain would want to overcompensate for the lack of executive functioning. So, I would get a lot of static in my vision.

(Espen in Conversation with Michelle, Field Note)



389



390

³⁸⁹ Image: 8.3. Artist: Michelle. *Tactile Expressions 2*, Digital Image.

³⁹⁰ Image: 8.4. Artist: Michelle. *Tactile Expressions 3*, Digital Image.

Dear Espen,

December 22nd, 2019

Thinking back, I am amazed how our conversations on mental health began in response to this artwork, which began as my response to pieces of your stories. I am amazed too how artwork disrupted long held silences and held open spaces for us to begin to speak about silence and stigma surrounding mental health. Looking up from the artwork, you stated that art keeps meanings open and people need to make assumptions to create meaning. Then shifting your focus to mental health, you said, there too it would be helpful if people kept lines of communication open. You told me that you found a big barrier to your communication around mental health issues when people shut down in mid-conversation because they don't know what to say or how to respond. You said they seem afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. You spoke very eloquently about people needing to relax and keep talking because there isn't a wrong question. But, you said that communication often breaks down when people get bound up in social conventions and are afraid to ask questions about mental health. I loved your statement: "Relax and talk, and just be interested". You said that's what you really need and want. Your words resonate with me and I think your words will resonate with many. Just be here, relax, go with the flow, be interested. There is so much fear around speaking about mental health issues and stigma attached to those who experience mental health challenges; that communication, so needed, gets shut down, which in turn leads to further stigma and isolation for those experiencing these issues.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

To travel to Espen's world, I needed to acknowledge and allow myself to traverse what Lugones (1992) calls the borderlands. Lugones (1992) describes borderlands as stuck places; places

between dominant hegemonic mainstream narratives and our lived experiences and embodied knowledges. These borderland places may be metaphoric, or they be literal places and spaces (Lugones, 1992). I had to negotiate a place of uncertainty and reach from that place with my partial understanding and uncertainty toward Espen, so we might begin a conversation. Without working relationally, I think these stories would not have emerged.

In the borderlands, Lugones (1992) argues we are caught between two dualities – the self-oppressed, by dominant sociocultural forces and the self-becoming. The latter state Lugones (1992) calls the “self-in-between” (p. 32). Anzaldúa (1987) explains this terrorized state inhibits the ability to respond and be creative, because the self is “petrified [...] caught between [...] the different worlds she inhabits” (p. 20). Acknowledging stigma and mental health experiences in the borderlands means asking questions about the silences, why is there so much silence, but also about one’s own vulnerabilities. In the borderlands, identities, and certainties become uncertain and porous. Dominant narratives as pillars and norms shift out of focus and become pliable. I realized in the borderland that I have much to learn about mental health and being mentally healthy, and that conversations about mental health cannot afford to be hidden from the public sphere. Even though, Lugones (1992) explains, the borderlands are stuck, stifling and silencing places, they have the potential to be generative places and to call forth resourcefulness, adaptations, and creative solutions to survive and thrive in relation. Artmaking and discussions around artwork allowed me to think and imagine *with* Espen’s stories, and to share my imaginings with Espen. It was artmaking in response to snippets of Espen’s stories and often in Espen’s absences that allowed me to learn to walk alongside Espen. Lugones (1992) explains, even though borderlands are stuck, stifling and silencing places, “the self-in-between fashions herself in a quiet state” in which “the possibilities of resistance depends on this creation of a new

identity, a new world of sense, in the borders” (p. 33). Lugones (1992), drawing on Anzaldúa, calls this state of new self-creation, the *Coatlicue* state. In this state, a process is born in the borderlands, as a way “to make new sense” (p. 33). I needed to travel to Espen’s world to imagine his experiences. By creating artwork that shifted before my eyes, as Espen described how images sometimes dance before his eyes, I caught a fleeting glimpse of Espen’s experiences and he began to speak his stories.

Espen: *No one is talking about the different perceptions of people who are neuro-divergent. How do you break down the way you understand the world when all you have is how you see the world?*

Michelle: *Everyone perceives so differently. You are so focused sometimes.*

Espen: *My brain works in weird ways.*

Michelle: *It’s amazing! It’s good if it helps you imagine.*

Espen: *It’s good when I’m doing art.*

Michelle: *When I look at your artwork, your skill set is fantastic. It’s really good! I am amazed at the amount of details you put into things. Do you think, this [way of perceiving] has helped you as an artist?*

Espen: *Definitely – I think the way I look at the world is way different than the way that most people think of the world. The things that I pick up on like – it can be really frustrating sometimes because I think the things people want me to pick up on, I don’t, and the things that I expect people will pick up on they completely miss.*

Michelle: *And do you feel like you can explain this or it’s – the moments gone?*

Espen: *The moments gone, but you know what – if you really want to hold onto a moment, that’s what art is for; art does that. Maybe that’s why I’m so interested in art.*

(Michelle, Field Note)

Recalling our discussion, I marvel at the ways art objects transgress and disrupt mainstream and mainstreaming narratives, and have the potential to create space to speak silent stories. I begin to consider how artmaking and aesthetic experiences hold the potential to recreate borderlands as workable, creative, and generative spaces. Working with art while walking alongside Espen enabled me to attend to silences and find ways to bridge absences and gaps in our communication and mutual understanding. The complexity of both Espen's stories and his silences laid the groundwork for me to attend to and respond to complexity.

Working the Borderlands Alongside Adebayo: Negotiating Multiple Oppressions through Liminality & Plurality

Michelle: Adebayo, if I didn't know you at all, what would you like me to know about you? Who is Adebayo?

Adebayo: Adebayo is a passionate guy, and he fights for what he really wants, and he loves art. He believes everything he sees - it is art - made out of art. And he plays soccer. He makes friends. In one year, I had like five hundred friends. Yeah. And I think you don't know Adebayo has a degree in Sports Science.

Michelle: I didn't know that. Wonderful!

Adebayo: Yeah! From Makerere University in Uganda.

(Michelle, Field Note)

Adebayo and I met two years before this conversation at SNAP studio where I was giving free

printmaking workshops for LGBTIQ+³⁹¹ youth and allies. We met just a month after he had arrived in Canada where he claimed refugee status.

Michelle: *Adebayo, can you tell me your story of coming to Canada?*

Adebayo: *Yeah. So, I came to Canada August of 2016 for the International Gay and Lesbian swimming competitions that took place in Edmonton at Kinsmen Sports Centre. But before we actually came the police had raided the Gay Pride event in Uganda and most of us were arrested, most of us we were beaten. I have injuries, I still have gunshots in my hand that I am trying – my doctor is going to do surgery on it. And then when I came here, after the swim competition, I got a text from my family, and they were kicking me out. Because the national television back home showed me on the news that I was a man – that people were promoting homosexuality after our arrest. And so, they kicked me out. They disowned me. They called me evil, they say that I am no longer part of their family and they say if I go back, they will kill me, themselves, or they will take me to like the police so that no one would do anything. So, I had to decide to stay. So, I decided to stay in Canada, where I really didn't know anyone at all. I'm calling Edmonton my home and I'm calling Canada my home because Canada accepted my refugee claim and I'm here as a protected person now.*

(Michelle, Field Note)

Adebayo identifies as a trans Black man and refugee from Uganda; over the past few years he has become a prominent vocal advocate and activist on issues of race and citizenship for Trans

³⁹¹ Those identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer plus others not identifying as heterosexual or cisgender.

and Queer, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (TQBIPOC) and LGBTIQ+ refugees. To walk alongside Adebayo, I needed to attend to Adebayo's public facing stories, his TQBIPOC and refugee advocacy and activism, and to his quieter stories of personal triumph and struggle.

Responding to an invitation from Adebayo, I attended the film screening of Adebayo's documentary on the experiences of LGBTIQ+ refugees to Canada. While watching Adebayo's film, as refugees gave testament to their stories, my heart sank, as I realized I had never heard such hard stories. I remember thinking how can I walk alongside Adebayo when our lived experiences have been so different; how can I hope to respond to and understand such stories.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

I found the complexity of Adebayo's experiences daunting because Adebayo's experiences with anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and transphobia differed so greatly from my experiences, as a white Canadian citizen, who identifies as lesbian and queer and mostly cisgender. Adebayo has faced and continues to face many struggles; struggles that are unfamiliar to me. With that knowledge, I wondered how I could walk alongside Adebayo in a good way, while keeping in check my implicit biases and emotional reactions, and while honing my ability to share power and remain conscious of my dominant and non-dominant personal and group identities (Choudhury, 2015). I wondered how I could negotiate this complexity as I walked alongside Adebayo.

In thinking with Adebayo's experiences, I returned to Lugones (1987) theory of world-travelling because it explicates both the possibility and necessity of travelling to another's world to understand the complexity of another's experience. Importantly, Lugones (1987) world-

travelling emphasizes the difference of other's experiences and how we need to be awakened and see those differences, rather than attempt to reduce or erase them. For Lugones (1987) to see another, we need to see beyond your own experiences, reflections, and expectations, otherwise we are only seeing our own arrogant perceptions mirrored back to us. Spelman (1988) named such perceptions, "boomerang perception" and describes them his way, "I look at you and come right back to myself" (p. 12). Lugones (1987) suggests it is care and what she calls "loving perception" (1987, p. 3), that allows us to travel to another's world with care-filled attention.

April had been filled with tensions. Edmonton's annual Pride Festival was cancelled by the Pride Festival Society organizers in response to accessibility and inclusion demands by Edmonton's TQBIPOC groups. In response to the cancellation, tensions were surfacing in Edmonton's queer communities as TQBIPOC groups received blame for the cancellation on mainstream and social media platforms. Adding to these tension, a member of Adebayo's community, a fellow LGBTIQ+ refugee and friend of Adebayo lost his refugee claim and was deported. I didn't know what to say and how I could reach out to Adebayo to support him during this stressful and sad time. I knew that Adebayo wanted to return to SNAP to continue printing and he would be returning in a month. I didn't know if he would have time to carve new plates for this upcoming session, so I created some plates and gifted them to Adebayo to reach out to Adebayo when I couldn't find words. When he returned to SNAP, Adebayo took up these plates and I assisted him as he printed them.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)



The plate with the map of Africa, I created thinking about Adebayo's friend who had recently been deported and wishing things could be better there for LGBTIQ+ citizens. Adebayo decided to print in the colours of the trans flag to imagine acceptance, inclusion, and freedom from persecution for trans and LGBTIQ citizens of African countries with anti-LGBTIQ laws.

³⁹² Image: 8.5. Adebayo printing at SNAP Printmaking studio (left) & *Trans Africa*, Linocut Print on Fabric by Adebayo.



393

The second plate of two hands I created to respond to Adebayo’s comments on race and how the tension in the Edmonton’s queer communities were like two sides of the same hand. We were not seeing each other, even though we are all so interconnected. Adebayo printed both plates in many colours on many shirts to share with his friend and members of his TQBIPOC communities. Adebayo also gifted a printed shirt to me.

Recalling Lugones (1987), “[w]ithout knowing the other’s “world”, one does not know the other [...] because the other is only dimly present” (p. 18). In 1987, Lugones introduced the concept of plural selves to world-travel and negotiate liminal spaces between worlds. In the limin, Lugones (1987) asserts one develops multiplicity both as a sense-making strategy and the capacity to understand oneself and others as multiple. Lugones (1987) writes, “[t]hose of us who are “world”-travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different “worlds” and of having the capacity to remember other “worlds” and ourselves in them” (p. 11). Continuing this point, Lugones (1987) clarifies, “I am different persons in different “worlds” and can remember

³⁹³ Image 8.6. Artist: Michelle. *Two Sides of the Same Hand*. Linocut Print on Paper.

myself in both as I am in the other. I am a plurality of selves” (p. 14). Lugones (2003) suggests, “I think that to experience oneself in the limen is significantly to experience oneself as multiple” (p. 61). In 2003, Lugones expands her theory of world-travelling through multiple selves, when she affirms, “I give up the claim that the subject is unified. Instead, I understand each person as many” (p. 57). Multiplicity enabled me to begin to travel alongside Adebayo’s stories.

Recalling Adebayo’s film, I felt a trauma witnessing the stories of LGBTIQ+ refugees. By seeing Adebayo’s film, I could begin to imagine the experiences of those telling their stories; I could begin to imagine myself inside their stories; the experience was terrifying.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

Lugones (2003) suggests that existing in the limen as plural selves complicates and decentralizes binary subject positions and concepts of difference, which are often conceived as dualities or binary oppositions. In the limin, hierarchies are destabilized, when concepts of self are disrupted, and personal and collective identities become porous and malleable (Lugones, 2003). The need to defend identity positions may take on less importance when one experiences oneself as multiple and realizes one may take up these positions or identities or others.

Liminality and multiple selves enabled me to see myself as adaptable and able to change in relation. Experiencing myself as multiple, meant I could acknowledge that I am not static, fixed or finished, but able to make complex choices amid my unfolding life and respond to others with similar complexity. As Lugones (1987; 1992; 2003) suggests, seeing myself as multiple enabled me to see and understand others as multiple, adaptable, and able to negotiate complexity with creative nimble responses.

To travel to Adebayo’s world, to respond to the complexity and multiplicity of his experiences, and to respond to and through my own multiplicity, I also took up playwriting

(Barone, 2008). Taking my cue from the way Adebayo continuously sought media platforms to advocate on behalf of himself and other TQBIPOC folks and LGBTIQ+ refugees, I began to write a play as a way of thinking *with* Adebayo's stories. Morris (2002) clarifies, while “[t]hinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking with stories is process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative [... but allow] narrative to work on us” (p. 196).

To write a play, to read a play, takes time, it takes investment. You need to imagine scenery, characters, everything really. To write a play too, and I had never done such a thing, I had to imagine, as fully as possible, every nuance of every scene and character. I needed to taste the dust in the air and feel the sun on my face to flatten that experience into a page. To write, and to experience a play, I needed to fully invest my imagination to join my stories of experience with those being presented, so I could understand, feel, and learn with/in a play. A play becomes the container for imagination. A play is also an invitation to play, to participate, to learn alongside, to open up experiences, and re-examine them in relation, to open eyes, hearts, and minds. In a play, imagination is key, the bridge between my stories and those of others. Within a play, I could travel to Adebayo's world while occupying the position, even for a moment, of every character – both those who oppressed and those who were resistant to oppression. Here I could experience and reflect on myself in relation to Adebayo and on my experiences and Adebayo's experiences in their complexity and multiplicity.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

Experiencing multiplicity through playwriting, enabled me to experience liminality and multiplicity. This experience placed me as Lugones (2003) suggests, “inside and at the

intersection of multiple realities, multiple and inseparable historical lines, lived spaces where the construction of space shifts constantly under the tensions of domination and resistances to domination” (p. 196). Turning to think with Greene (1995), I consider the power of imagination with art-making and with playwriting to develop generative ways of thinking and being in the limin, in multiplicity, which supports ways of learning alongside complex stories. I recall hooks (1990) writing on the importance of developing a “counterlanguage [...] which includes recollections of broken tongues giving us ways to speak that decolonize our minds, our very beings” (p. 150). Remembering my experience writing a play to travel to Adebayo’s world and to walk alongside him, I recall Lugones (2003) words, “[a]s I form my words in this multitude, I hear my voices, and hear you hearing me. I/you extend myself/yourself or recoil, stand my/your ground among subjects, consider my/your concreteness” (p. 195). In the end my many forms of outreach alongside Adebayo enabled me to begin to develop more complex ways of thinking, knowing, and learning in relation. Working through liminality and multiplicity, I am beginning to become “knowledgeable in other resistant logics and benefit from the complex exchanges” (Lugones, 2003, p. 163) which may enable me to see and work alongside Adebayo and others in their complexity and emergent possibilities.

Conclusion

In the research, walking alongside Adebayo, Espen and Max was an active process of supporting and facilitating research participation and engagement. Walking alongside each other was an embodied process of living relational research, while carefully attending and responding to the unique complexities of our unfolding and emergent lives. Sharing artmaking experiences and artwork enabled Adebayo, Espen, Max and I to travel to each other’s worlds to create spaces to live and learn alongside one another. Our experiences were embodied in informal everyday

interactions and shared moments lived and experienced side by side: through our artmaking activities and art sharing; story-telling and story-hearing; in the conversations over the printing press, at galleries, and over steaming cups of chai lattés; and, in those shared silences when we stood and worked alongside each other, when words were unnecessary, and even when words failed. Lugones' (1987; 1992; 2003) writing allowed me to understand and respond with care-filled ways to the emergent complexities of lives unfolding within a web of social relations (Arendt, 1958). Attending to Lugones' (1987; 1992; 2003) concepts of multiplicity, world-travelling, borderlands, and liminality allowed me to respond creatively in the places of uncertainty, risk-taking, and unknowingness; in those gaps between my understanding and the stories and experiences of Adebayo, Espen and Max. Turning to artmaking and creative writing in response to Adebayo's, Espen's and Max's stories, we found pathways to extend our care. This too allowed me walk alongside Adebayo, Espen, and Max to support their developing senses of agency, identities, and world making.

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**CHAPTER 9: Building Communities of Difference: The Importance of Identity and World
Making for Trans Young Adults**

Abstract

In this paper, I draw on a three-year narrative inquiry study with three trans young adults. As part of this inquiry we developed interim research texts, also referred to as narrative accounts that bring forth highly contextual and localized stories of experiences, and they make visible the relationships we have formed, individually and collectively, as we engaged in this inquiry. Narrative inquiry enabled me to reflect on and inquire into how trans young adults form and transform their trans identities at the intersections of race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression, to engage in and build their communities. Since narrative inquiry is a relational methodology that holds relationship central, I lived alongside participants, over a prolonged time, across various context, places, and situations, as they negotiate their lives. Furthermore, since relational learning is both implicit within this methodology and the subject of this research, this work provides significant insight into the complexity of participants' lived experience; both how they understand their experiences as formed in relation and how they mobilize their learning as relational assets to support their lives and to engage in and build communities of difference. Importantly, this research sheds light on the complexity of trans: identity formation; intersectional challenges, tensions, and creative possibilities; and, performativity of intersectionality and identities in and across multiple communities' places and spaces.

As I look at Max, Espen and Adebayo experiences, experiences of three transgender

young adults, I see their identity-making unfold alongside traces of absent, missing, and invisible communities; pop-up and intermittent communities; and emergent communities.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

Introduction

In this paper, I highlight and explicate Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's unique stories of identity-making and world making as trans young adults. Their stories and counterstories are forefronted to illuminate the complexities they each continuously negotiate in Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM)³⁹⁴ communities and in the public spheres to make and hold open spaces for themselves and others to live their complexity. Storytelling and telling stories to counter hegemonic stories is a mechanism Adebayo, Espen, and Max employ to make sense of their worlds and unfolding lives as they form and transform their trans identities. Halberstam (2018) reminds me that trans* is a multiplicity of transgender identities and possibilities, which embody liminality and infinite variability. It is within trans multiplicity and emergent possibilities that Adebayo, Espen, and Max each also routinely navigate intersectional challenges and priorities (e.g., citizenship, race, ableism, health, mental health). This paper stresses Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's trans identity-making as a highly nuanced and heterogeneous process always in the making, always in relation to their distinct intersecting challenges, priorities, and needs.

Background/ Context

³⁹⁴ The SGM acronym, meaning Sexual and Gender Minorities, is interchangeable with the acronym LGBTIQ+. Sexual and gender minority identities, and includes: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or trans, intersex, queer, two-spirit, pansexual, asexual, plus those not identifying as heterosexual.

Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM) communities have often served dual roles, both social and political (D' Emilio, 2014; Warner, 2002). These communities³⁹⁵ constitute what hooks (1990) names a homeplace, which fosters a sense of belonging, connectedness, and safety; and, spaces of advocacy and activism that focus on achieving rights of citizenship (D' Emilio, 2014; Warner, 2002). Current SGM communities often trace their advent to specific civil rights events, such as The Stonewall Riots³⁹⁶ and civil rights movements, such as the Gay Liberation Movements³⁹⁷ of the 1960s and 1970's³⁹⁸ (D' Emilio, 2014; Duberman et al., 1989; Warner, 2002). Many SGM communities also developed in relation to highly localized and community

³⁹⁵ Lindemann Nelson (1995) makes an important distinction between communities of choice and communities of place. Sometimes communities are both; often however, communities of choice, which are built around common affiliations, interests, needs and desires, may transcend communities of place, which are geographically located in specific places (Lindemann Nelson, 1995). In this paper, Adebayo's, Espen's and Max's stories and counterstories take place in relation to events and situations taking place primarily in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Their stories and counterstories often critique practices, assumption, and expectations located in communities of place and sometimes also within their chosen communities. Adebayo's, Espen's and Max's stories highlight their unique negotiations of identity and world making, through complex negotiations with and within communities of place and choice.

³⁹⁶ The Stonewall Riots were six days of protest which took place in Greenwich Village, New York City in 1969, when the New York City Police (NYPD) raided the Stonewall Inn, and began to take arrest SGM patrons (D' Emilio, 2014; Duberman et al., 1989). The Stonewall Riots are widely recognized as a pivotal moment in SGM, and trans history (Stryker, 2008), which coalesced emergent communities through collective actions and activism to resist systematic discrimination and oppression (D' Emilio, 2014; Duberman et al., 1989; Stryker, 2008).

³⁹⁷ Gay Liberation Movements have been critiqued by trans activists and scholars for not being trans-inclusive, for erasing trans lives, and for transphobic attitudes and actions (Halberstam, 2005; Namaste, 2000; Stryker, 2008).

³⁹⁸ Although earlier SGM community networks (e.g., from the early 1900s) have been traced and documented through archival research, much remains hidden from history (D' Emilio, 2014; Duberman et al., 1989).

specific contexts³⁹⁹. SGM communities are complicated consisting of multiple and diverse identity groups and communities, each with unique histories and narratives, and continuing and emergent needs (Barriault, 2009; Chenier, 2009; Nestle, 2009; Stryker, 2008).

Framing the Research Puzzle⁴⁰⁰

My research puzzle emerged from my experience working with queer and trans youth

³⁹⁹ Communities are often built to respond to pressing needs of individuals and collectives (D' Emilio, 2014). For instance, Adebayo created a not-for-profit organization to support LGBTQ refugees in 2018. Adebayo, a trans refugee from Uganda, found gaps in services and resources necessary to support LGBTQ refugee claimants in Edmonton. Adebayo's organization created a space to build and support an emergent community of LGBTQ refugees in Edmonton. An earlier example of community building to respond to community specific contexts, would be the creation of the first AIDs Network in Edmonton. In the early 1980s Michael Phair, with Ross Armstrong and Liz Massiah, created the first Canadian AIDS Network to respond to and to support HIV and/or AIDs positive members of Edmonton's LGBTIQ+ communities. This work became a model for HIV/AIDs Networks nationwide and began the work of building both compassionate local and national responses to the HIV/AIDs health crisis and communities of HIV and AIDs positive individuals, those who would support them, as well as, resources and services. Highly localized and diverse contents of SGM community archives bear witness to the how specific SGM communities developed and the relationships between locale, archival content, and communities. For some examples see: Barriault, 2009; Chenier, 2009; Nestle, 2009.

⁴⁰⁰ Within narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), research puzzles are used to frame the inquiry. Clandinin and Huber (2010) describe a research puzzle as "part of a process of thinking narratively" (p. 10), in which a set of evolving wonders continue to emerge. In other words, "narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124).

and young adults as Artist-in-Residence at Camp fYrefly⁴⁰¹. My questions and wonders pivoted around relational ways of thinking and knowing. Specifically, I wondered: how relational teaching and learning might act to support queer, trans, and non-binary identity-formation of young adults. I wondered how experiences formed in relation to communities might inform queer or trans identity-making. Initially some of my wonders were influenced by narrow definitions of mentorship in relation to support; these understandings broadened over time. Reflecting on my experience of Camp fYrefly, I realized mentorship perhaps comprised a piece of a much larger “research puzzle” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124), such as trans young adults’ experiences of identity and world making.

For trans and non-binary young adults, impoverished social support often hampers positive identity formation and can have lifelong consequences (Abramovich, 2012; 2016; Meyer, 2007; 2011; Nesmith et al., 1999; Peter & Taylor, 2014). Mentorship, reimagined as a co-created relational teaching and learning process, may provide a platform to voice often silenced stories and counter hegemonic narratives such as hetero- and cis-normativity (Doty et al., 2010; Duntley-Matos, 2014; Johnson & Gastic, 2015; Russell & Horne, 2009; Sadowski et al., 2009). Despite its potential, there is a paucity of research on mentorship as social support for trans young adults. It is important to attend to mentorship as a life-making experience that happens in dynamic interactions and in often conflicting constructions of identity, agency, and resistance.

⁴⁰¹ Camp fYrefly is an arts-based leadership camp for LGBTIQ+ youth, created and run out the of Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS) at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta. Camp fYrefly Edmonton, is the template for Camp fYrefly programs now in development and running in several Canadian cities.

Methodology & Approaches

I engaged in a narrative inquiry study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology that focuses on understanding experience and is reflective of a relational ontology (Clandinin et al., 2018). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explicate the relationship between story, experience, and narrative inquiry, explaining that “story . . . is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (p. 477). They continue, “narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). In seeking to understand the complexities of human experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) were specifically drawn to Dewey’s (1938) insights into human life as a continuous temporal unfolding, taking place in relation and within discreet events. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) based the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry on Dewey’s (1938) criteria of experience: continuity, interaction, and situation. I paid close attention to the three common places of narrative inquiry in this study in relation to participants’ stories of experience.

Methods

This study took place in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Informal settings in Edmonton, Alberta, included The Society of Northern Alberta Print-artists (SNAP) community printmaking studio, public exhibitions of the *Edmonton Queer History Project (EQHP)* including the *TREX Re-Imaging Normal exhibition*. I engaged with participants in settings where stories are remembered, told, or contextualized (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). I worked with three trans and non-binary young adults, age 18-25. This sample size is typical of a narrative inquiry, as narrative inquirers are interested in continuous engagement and prolonged interaction study

(Caine et al., 2013). I initially met participants four years ago in 2016 in informal arts-related group activities. I subsequently worked alongside all three participants in 2017 for a short time, when I co-curated an art exhibition that they participated in called *Re-Imagining Normal*, for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Travelling Rural Exhibition (TREX). Participants formally agreed to be part of the study in 2018.

Field Texts

As I engaged with participants over time, we included diverse field texts, which consists of recorded conversations, field notes, and artifacts. Additional data sources included the creation of artwork and poetry. This creative activity took place both on an individual basis and in small groups with other participants in this study. Artistic methods were used to facilitate autobiographical exploration and storytelling (Caine, 2007; Grace & Wells, 2007) and served to “queer” or disrupt heteronormative and cisnormative discourse and identity formation. The use of all data sources was negotiated with participants. I met with participants for multiple and ongoing conversations over a two-year period. Because the purpose was to learn about the diverse experiences of mentorship for trans young adults, I engaged in open-ended conversations. I also provided monthly opportunities to create artwork in a well-supported community artmaking studio, called SNAP, to deepen reflections on experience. I could facilitate this given my work as an artist and post-secondary art instructor.

Data analysis

Analyzing the data involved reading and rereading field texts. Narrative accounts were co-written with participants who shared evolving stories and contributed feedback (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). This iterative process involved interpreting the participant’s experiences by examining them in relation to familial, cultural, societal and institutional narratives (Clandinin &

Caine, 2008). In addition, analysis involved making visible my relational commitment to participants. The narrative accounts were negotiated and finalized with each participant's feedback. Final narrative accounts (interim texts) include: a play, short stories, poems, art work and stories. The final analysis involved exploring narrative threads that resonated across the narrative accounts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative Threads

Two narrative threads that emerged from this study are explicated in this paper, these include: 1) Building complex communities through ongoing negotiations of identity; and 2) Telling counterstories to make spaces for identity and world making. Narrative threads that resonated across Max, Espen, and Adebayo interim narrative accounts formed intricate patterns, while each story thread remained distinct. Gaps and absences are visible across their experiences and some stories were not shared.

To appreciate the nuanced complexity of these thread, I attempt to think *with* Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's stories. Turning to Morris (2002) I am able to discern the difference between thinking about stories and thinking *with* stories, "[t]hinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking with stories is process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative [... but allow] narrative to work on us" (p. 196). Allowing Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's stories to work on me, I begin to see their identity-making processes emerge as they each uniquely engage in distinct communities.

Building Complex Communities Through Ongoing Negotiations of Identity

Yeah, I'm very surprised by it. Like I'm almost surprised by the amount of queer resources that we have within Edmonton... But it's almost as if those resources are only accessible to people who come upon them by chance. Because I didn't know that –

like a queer community existed like for a long time. Like really because although my mom took me to a Pride Parade when I was five, to see my brother's support worker in the Parade, which looked really cool! It's almost as if I only perceived that as a one-time thing but there's no other community around that. Like everybody just got together this one day a year – to party, party, party, then they go home – that's it. Whereas – there are – at this point, there are like multiple facets of the community that do more activism or more like just sort of community based get-togethers, all this kind of stuff. But unless you know someone in that community, unless someone introduces it to you, it's so hard to find and discover.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Thinking *with* Max's story, I am drawn to think about SGM pop-up communities that appear and disappear just as quickly. An event, like a Pride Parade, brings community together for a short time and then community disperses. This dispersal creates a sense of absent communities, which in turn shapes *stories to live by*. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) coined the phrase stories to live by to refer to a narrative process of understanding identity. The term “‘stories to live by’ [...] helps us to understand how knowledge, context, and identity are linked and can be understood narratively” (p. 4). As I think with Max's experiences, I am reminded of how Grace and Benson (2000) used the term “spectral community” (p. 109) to describe, “a loose confederation of people with shared experiences of marginalization because of their sexual orientation or gender identity” (Grace et al., 2004, p. 302). Spectral is a useful term when thinking of invisible SGM communities because it suggests both presence and absence, or rather a presence which exists,

but remains absent, missing or invisible⁴⁰². Further complicating issues of SGM communities are their intersections with power and privilege within and outside SGM communities; some SGM populations and identities (i.e., trans communities and individuals) remain more spectral, and more invisible than others (Halberstam, 2005; Namaste, 2000; Stryker, 2008).

As I consider what might make some experiences or episodes more important than others in terms of identity-making processes, my thoughts return to Espen's experiences at Camp fYrefly and his difficulty finding spaces of SGM intergenerational community. In the following excerpt Espen discusses the importance of these communities.

I didn't have very many friends who were out and it was just awesome to be surrounded by people who had all these different stories and all these different [experiences].... Again, it's that information sharing that you don't get. Because it's not like other minorities where you can pass down information from generation to generation.

(Espen in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Thinking *with* Espen's challenge of finding SGM community places and spaces to hear and tell his life stories, McAdam's (2003) reminds me "that life stories echo gender and class constructions in society and reflect, in one way or another, prevailing patterns of hegemony the

⁴⁰² When considering visibility or invisibility of SGM communities, there are many variables to consider, such as geography or age (D' Emilio, 2014; Harley & Teaster, 2016). For instance, in considering geography and community visibility, it is noteworthy that many SGM organizations are located primarily in downtown areas of urban centres; SGM community is often focused downtown, which creates its own kind of metronormativity in these areas and erasure of SGM communities and identities in suburbia (Dr. Kristopher Wells, personal communication, January 10th, 2021).

economic, political, and cultural contexts wherein human lives are situated” (p. 201). Thinking with McAdams (2003), makes visible the complication of SGM identity-making in relation to absent SGM communities, in which SGM life stories may be told and heard and potentially counter familial, cultural, social and institutional hegemonic narratives (i.e., heteronormativity and cisnormativity) to make space for SGM identity-making, life-making, and world-making. Although both Max and Espen’s experiences of intergenerational SGM communities were fleeting, their stories suggest these experiences remain impactful and important in their SGM identity-making processes. Turning back to think with McAdams (2003), I recall that evolving quality of each person’s life story is uniquely and purposefully composed, with some episodes being “more central to self-definition than others” (p. 195). While Max’s and Espen’s stories point to a challenge for young adults coming out into and alongside SGM absent, missing, and invisible communities, they also point to Max and Espen’s resilience and determination to find and create opportunities for SGM intergenerational conversations and community-making

Telling Stories to Live by Alongside Pop-up & Intermittent Communities

SGM pop-up and intermittent communities are opportunities to participate in SGM communities through short term, and non-reoccurring events, as well as, opportunities to participate in SGM communities through short-term but regularly scheduled events. Although online forums continue an online presence, I would also describe online forums as intermittent communities because community members’ participation and engagement tends to be sporadic.

I look out over the audience of about eighty people who have gathered to hear about the TREX Re-Imaging Normal exhibition and Max’s and Adebayo’s stories as young emerging trans artists in a provincial touring show. As co-curator, I sit back, delighted, that Max and Adebayo take up public space to tell their stories. Adebayo shares his

stories of taking refuge in Canada and refers to his image showing two people hugging. Adebayo: “You never know how far people have travelled, what they have gone through to get that hug”⁴⁰³. Max also shares a story of resilience speaking of the stigma and transphobic and homophobic violence their friends have encountered. Referring to his artwork, Max states: “these ‘victims’ are still resilient and keep going and that’s very inspiring. While things have improved, or progressed, there are still many challenges [in Alberta], especially in rural communities. Through this piece, I’m telling people to keep going and show their colours”⁴⁰⁴.

This pop-up community came together to celebrate artwork and stories by trans emerging artists and established SGM artists. Max and Adebayo had a chance to be seen and heard and take up public space to tell their stories. Importantly, the exhibition was the first exhibition in the Travelling Rural Exhibition (TREX) program to circulate stories and art with a SGM and trans theme to rural schools, libraries, and community centres in Alberta. Importantly too, Adebayo, Max, and Espen participated by sharing their stories and artwork. It was a pop-up community of support and like so many it was deliberately built.

I turn to Espen’s stories, to recall his story of Camp fYrefly and his experience identity-making within this intermittent community.

I did make friends. I didn’t stay in contact with them very much, though. Which was okay for me, because it was – it felt like a place where you could go and you could try on a bunch of different identities and see what fits and not be afraid of who’s going to see you

⁴⁰³ Adebayo personal communication, at VAA CARFAC Gallery Edmonton, May 23rd, 2018.

⁴⁰⁴ Max personal communication, at VAA CARFAC Gallery Edmonton, May 23rd, 2018.

or need to maintain something you're not.

(Espen in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

What I find unexpected in Espen's story was his speaking of the intermittent, maybe pop-up, nature of Camp fYrefly being in sync with his process of ongoing identity formation. I am drawn to think further with Espen's stories of identity-making to consider the processes and practices of making, doing, trying in relation to identity forming and reforming within communities. Bruner (1990) suggests that cultural contexts in which meanings are created, "are always contexts of *practice*; it is always necessary to ask what people are *doing* or *trying* to do in that context" (p.118). Bruner (1990) further states:

The realities that people constructed were social realities, negotiated with others, distributed between them. The social world in which we lived was, so to speak, neither 'in the head' nor 'out there' ...[a]nd both mind and the Self were part of that social world" (p. 105).

From Espen's story, I turn to Carr's (1986) writing to consider temporal continuities and discontinuities in life-stories. Continuities in life-stories provide a sense of self across time, while discontinuities in life-stories tend to disrupt a continuous sense. As I begin to wonder how Espen is negotiating his sense of identity-making and community-making, I begin thinking with Carr's (1986) theory of narrative coherence. Within this theory, Carr (1986) asserts narratives function to unify individual's experiences by composing the self, "as subject of a life-story" (p.128). Carr (1986) further argues that communities are similarly constituted; he writes, "narration, as the unity of story, story-teller, audience, and protagonist, is what constitutes the community, its activities, and its coherence in the first place" (p. 128). Furthermore, Carr (1986) suggests the act of narration seems to develop personal and collective agency through narrative

coherence by enabling possibilities for the storyteller to act as the subject and protagonist of their life-story and for communities to take collective action.

Continuing from Espen's experiences of continuity and discontinuities within his SGM identity-making processes at fYrefly, I am reminded of Espen's stories as a youth participating in online communities.

Well, when I first started drawing, it was an entrance point for a whole bunch of different communities, you know. Because I was always doing my art online. I enjoyed drawing, in general, but when I found out there were communities you could go to online and post your stuff there and have people you don't know see what you've done and get a fresh perspective on things. I thought that was incredible.... and you get to meet all these different people. And at that time, a lot of my peers were starting to develop crushes, and I just wasn't. And I – it was something I was very insecure about and I found online communities – like the first – the gateway to my LGBTQ personality was sort of through online communities.

(Espen in conversations with Michelle, Field Note)

For Espen online forums seem to be spaces where he found community in conversation, a sense of belonging, and enough fluidity or flexibility to begin to think about his process of identity-formation and reformation. Importantly, Espen felt comfortable enough to interact within, contribute to, and stay connected in this online community as he explored his SGM identity. I recall often sensing Espen's presence as tenuous or fleeting in spaces and places we attended together. I understood my sense later, when Espen related his health and mental stories, and how at times these experiences challenged his sense of well-being and his ability to stay connected.

I recall meeting Espen, just for a few fleeting moments on the steps of the Legislature on the Trans Day of Remembrance Rally. When I asked if we could meet for a coffee, he told me that his life had become complicated again and I worried because I know a little what complicated can mean in relation to Espen's stories.

(Michelle, Reflective Note)

I was delighted when Espen told me a café, we visited for our research conversations and lattes, had become a favorite haunt, because not all public spaces were comfortable for Espen. Thinking about Espen's seemingly embodied experiences of comfort in certain spaces and places, I recall how *stories to live by* "are expressions of an embodied knowledge of the landscape, of space and time, of borders, cycles, and rhythms" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 113). For Espen, it appears these online forums, like the café, provided a place and space of community, where he experienced the comfort of a familiar landscape, where he knew the time, borders, cycles, and rhythms; these spaces shaped his ability to tell and live his stories to live by.

Developing Stories to Live by Alongside Emergent Communities

Adebayo's stories of coming to Edmonton as a LGBTIQ+ refugee and subsequently creating a not-for-profit organization to support LGBTIQ+ refugees highlights his experiences of identity-making while simultaneously building an emergent community.

My experience made me sit down and think about a thousand of refugees who are going to come in the same way I came in and find these gaps. Some of them I've known survived. [...I am] a survivor of this. I wanted to make sure that I put something down that can help a thousand of them.

(Adebayo in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Adebayo takes leadership as a community builder, founding and forging both a new organization and an emergent community. Adebayo's identity-making centres around his experiences as a LGBTIQ+ refugee, a trans Black man, and leader in community. Supporting and taking care of others following in his footsteps seems to strongly resonate across all of Adebayo's stories.

We're starting this organization to look out for other refugees who are coming in and need this [support]. To cover the gaps that were so hard. And collaborate with all the resources I've received as a person. I want to link up with them to see how we can support other people like me. So, if I link up with them, they will help someone else to jump the same gaps.

(Adebayo in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Adebayo describes his community of LGBTIQ+ refugees and his work as an artist. I am struck by Adebayo story of family and community and that his story is being shared with a community of artists to which Adebayo now seems to implicitly belong.

I'm working with LGBTIQ+ refugees so it's family, it's community. I can't describe how strong it is. I keep reminding them that we have power, you have power, there is power that is unseen that we can show people. There is power where we stand within our stories, even if you don't move how society wants you to move, you have power even in your existence, even in you being alive. It's like community itself is a powerful hidden movement.

(Adebayo⁴⁰⁵)

⁴⁰⁵ Adebayo speaking in SNAPline, p. 22.

Discussion of Resonant Threads

Thinking *with* Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's experiences I see complexity as a thread woven through their *stories to live by*. Much later I begin to see their complex identity-making processes as they each uniquely engage in distinct communities. Adebayo seems to thrive in activism and advocacy to make space for himself and others through leadership in SGM refugee communities. Espen, on the other hand, withdraws from spotlights, seeking spaces to join communities at his pace. Max seems to travel to others' worlds to learn alongside others.

Multiplicity is what I see when looking across Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's identity-making in communities. They engage within multiple, diverse, and at times, complicated communities. Letting go of the notions of selves as always continuous and unified, Lugones (1987) creates the possibility of selves to exist in a state of continuous becoming, a state which can always be otherwise. Importantly, Lugones (1987) also highlights how playfulness and ease can allow us to travel to the multiple worlds, those we inhabit and those of others. Thinking with Lugones (1987) concepts of selves and worlds, I see how identities are endlessly formed and reformed in multiple communities that are always in the making. Plurality is a helpful concept when considering the complexity of Max's, Espen's and Adebayo's self-stories and collective stories alongside diverse communities.

Lugones (1987) concept of multiple and plural selves negotiating multiple worlds holds open a path to consider Max's, Espen's, and Adebayo's multiplicity of identity-making processes across multiple communities. From Espen's, Max's, and Adebayo's stories we see complex SGM identities being formed in relation to diverse communities. Recalling Bruner (1997), selves are forming in relation to experienced worlds and worlds are forming in relation to selves. Thinking with Bruner (1990; 1997), identities are forming and transforming in relation to stories

lived and told in communities and communities are likewise contributing. As Bruner (1990) suggests we position our self-narratives in relation to cultural and societal stories and expectations, and these collective stories inform our self-stories and identity-formation. Our self-stories are the nexus between ourselves and our worlds, and our self-stories can be heavily influenced to conform to societal and cultural expectations (Bruner, 1990). Hegemonic stories exist in publics and in SGM community spaces and places that preclude and block identity-making; in response, counterstories need to be told to take, to make, and to hold open space for ‘othered’ stories to be seen, told, heard, and lived.

Telling Counterstories to Make Spaces for Identity-Making

Counterstories are stories told to disrupt or counter mainstream and mainstreaming hegemonic narratives (Lindemann Nelson, 1995). From Lindemann Nelson (1995) we learn counterstories are told in communities, often by those asking for, sometimes demanding, recognition and the rights of full citizenship within communities and publics. SGM communities are an example of communities founded in part in reaction to hegemonic narratives (i.e., hetero- and cisnormativity) that inform larger familial, cultural, societal, and institutional conversations and discourse.

Max’s experience working in public education for the *fYrefly in Schools* program meant they travelled to multiple urban and rural high schools in the province of Alberta to teach gender theory and LGBTIQ+ issues and programming. This is one of Max’s stories.

Yeah, it’s not part of the curriculum, so it gets very complicated [...and] having to justify that to people as well like what I’ve been getting recently is a bunch of youth who are like yeah, but how do you know that you’re not wrong? [...] I do bring a lot of lived experience, but you’re not going to take that as legitimate information. Especially when

it's people talking about like oh, there's only two genders or whatever. I'm like, well, I know a bunch of non-binary people and their existence, simply proves that there isn't, but okay.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

From Max's story, we see complications of what is seen as legitimate knowledge within school populations, who are seen as legitimate knowledge holders, and questions too about whose identities are legitimate. The information Max points to is sourced and grounded in academic research and in his lived experience as a non-binary trans person. From Max's story, we see the power of essential and hegemonic norms and assumptions built into the concept of masculine and feminine traits. The double edge of normalcy is the stigma, biases, and often discriminatory actions and oppressions enacted upon those who fall outside the boundaries of 'normal' assumptions and expectations.

Max's counterstories as a non-binary trans person call for creating space for full citizenship and include the right to exist as a non-binary trans person.

I don't super agree with a lot of the conservative teaching or whatever, so like, for obvious reasons. Like they're kind of anti-me, so I'm not really cool with that. It's like to what level is that knowledge important now, even if it's something that I disagree with? Even though like for some people when I encounter people who sort of come back to me with, "Oh, everyone's allowed to have their opinion" or something, I'm like, yeah but your opinion is that I cannot fundamentally exist – so where do we draw the line? [What's] the importance of this knowledge – is it telling you that I don't necessarily have the right to the same opportunities as you?

(Max in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Many of Max's counterstories revolve around the complexity of living and being acknowledged as a non-binary trans person both within and outside SGM communities. Max's identity in the story below meets the complications of working in SGM communities, where multiple marginalizations still occur, but are seldom acknowledged.

[... when] I'm working with other people in the queer community, there are some people who are like, we have like legal same-sex marriage – we're done. I'm like trans people don't do it, but okay. And different experiences come through like disabled queer people and people of color. These are still things that we have to work towards, but just saying that [it's] the stuff that effects you, [and] that's done. I'm, like, but there's still so much work to do! And having to try give them that push, and almost convince them, there are other people in the community that aren't you.

(Max in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Max's stories highlight ageism, ableism, classism, and intersections of race and multiple sexual and gender identities. It highlights a larger counterstory; the de-centring of self to look beyond personal stories and identity group needs, expectations, and rights to gain a broader awareness of the breadth and scope of continuing and emergent needs of those facing multiple barriers and levels of marginalization within Edmonton's LGBTIQ+ communities.

For Espen things were different:

I remember I got into a very dark place because there weren't those supports there for me. I kind of just got juggled around by the system a lot. And I remember consulting some Help Lines and they told me to go to the hospital. So, I had quite a jarring experience there. When I get upset, I completely shut down, like I stop displaying distress on my face and I just – I go flat. And that's not what they're looking for. So basically,

what happened is instead of them talking me down because I wasn't screaming and crying, they put me in a cement room for psychosis patients, and I was in there for six hours. When finally, the psychiatrist came to see me, I said: "Look, I'm really struggling here. Please give me something in my toolbox to help me. I need something". And we had a little bit of a chat basically about my home life. And it slipped out that, you know, I'm also concerned about my gender. It's causing me a lot of stress. Do you have anything in your toolbox to help me with this? And he's like, yeah. And he gave me a number and sent me home. And we called the place with the phone number on it and it was the Gender Gatekeepers. So, how it is, is in order, to transition medically, you need to go to a gender specialist and it takes years on the waiting list to get to them. So instead of giving me something that could help me in the moment, like actual therapy numbers or something like that or actually talking me through my problems, they gave me a number to a place that had a two-year waiting list.

(Espen in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Espen's experience speaks to silence around mental health stories in the general public which reverberates into LGBTIQ+ communities as well. Espen's story also hints at the false narrative that LGBTIQ+ communities are all inclusive and welcoming places and spaces. Community is not always granted. For those, like Espen, struggling with mental health issues stigma and silence tends to combine and result in further stigmatization and isolation.

Adebayo's counterstory speaks to structural barriers in Canada's immigration system that are reinforced by implicit bias and racist language.

So, when I came to Canada, I got the resources I really needed, but there were gaps, there were a lot of challenges I faced. If I wasn't strong enough, maybe for different

challenges, I wouldn't have survived. People telling me to go back home. People telling me that – people being racist, and then I had to prepare for my permanent residence, 500 bucks, 550 bucks, yet I didn't have the money. I didn't even have a work permit yet. Like all these things that actually caught me and it was a struggle for me to work through them. All the trauma recovering, from my story, from my life experience

(Adebayo in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Adebayo's counterstory makes visible how barriers multiply at the intersections of race, citizenship status, and gender identity. His experiences highlight the additional complexity of mental health and trauma suffered by so many refugees and how these factors intersect with other structural barriers (i.e., homophobia, transphobia, racism, and xenophobia), to act as barriers to refugees accessing support and being granted asylum and later citizenship.

Adebayo's experiences make visible some of the layers of challenges encountered by his community of LGBTIQ+ refugees attempting to claim refugee status in Canada. Layers of bureaucracy atop layers of trauma, which cannot be addressed because of claimants' lack of rights, lack of access to services, and lack of citizenship status seems to disadvantage their opportunities to have successful claims. It is hard to acknowledge that racism, classism, ableism, ageism, xenophobia, transphobia and homophobia exist in SGM communities. As Adebayo eloquently states below, counterstories are an act of hope to bring everyone together in SGM communities.

My life has the spotlight now. Someone else will have the spotlight later. This is not one person's fight. This is a fight for a whole community. I am looking at the Pride we all share. I am trying to give a platform for all those stories, and all those people with similar stories, who are always pushed to the margins for being queer. I want to bring the

community together, so nobody is left behind. I want to help give space to those people who have been displaced for whole parts of their lives.

(Adebayo in conversation with Michelle, Field Note)

Discussion of Narrative Threads

Creating counterstories are opportunities for missing stories to be told. They also offer opportunities for communities to think *with* previously excluded stories, with still silent and silenced stories, and to find new ways of being to create and recreate complex communities which speak to multiple publics. Lugones (2003) describes forged communities as complex coalitions that provide platforms for complex thinking and complex problem solving. Importantly, Lugones (2003) explicates her imagining of complex communities as both creative spaces and concrete places to: 1) negotiate and respond to emergent complexities; 2) manifest resistant logics, resistant creativity, and resistant negotiations; 3) counter essentialized, reductionist, hierarchical norms of identities and communities; 4) physically embody, express, and celebrate multiplicity, plurality, and difference; and 5) transgress binary oppositions and binary logics in favor of complex reasoning and problem solving. Lugones (2003) imagining of complex communities is nothing less than a radical rethinking, what she calls an *epistemological shift*, toward a new understanding and reimagining of communities. In Lugones (2003) complex communities and members are not bounded, isolated, fixed, or finished; rather communities and identities are always in the making, always filled with emergent possibilities.

While this concept might seem overly idealized, Lugones (2003) asserts it reflects the practical and concrete realities of communities and identities formed in relation; it is instead the concept of communities as ossified, geographically bounded, isolationist, and protectionist that reflects an overly simplified, and often politically motivated, binding notion of what

communities and members are and can become. The truncation of becoming and the erasure and homogenization of difference, should be clue that bounded definition of communities are false flags set to divide people and groups into arbitrary assignments of Us or Them (Lugones, 2003). On the necessity to resist binary logics and develop complex, thinking communities, Lugones (2003) writes:

The importance of the impulse to reject dichotomies lies in the resistance to have one's plurality and the interrelations/paths among the multiple worlds of sense we inhabit reduced or erased. It is that plurality that enables us to acknowledge, discern, investigate, interpret, remake the connections among crisscrossing oppositional subaltern worlds of sense, oppositional to the very logic of subjection. (p. 197)

Counterstories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) may be a mechanism to develop and support Lugones (2003) imagining of complex forged communities. Counterstories are stories told and lived to counter hegemonic narratives. When counterstories are told in communities, they may challenge and undermine simplistic mainstream narratives. Counterstories, enacted in the telling and living of stories may further act as mechanisms to develop agency and manifest complexity, while countering simplicities of binary logics.

Max, Espen, and Adebayo negotiate multiple worlds (Lugones, 1987). They prioritize certain selves and identities alongside their gender identity and expression as part of their identity- and world-making. For Espen, finding and making space to tell his mental health stories was an important part of telling his stories of trans identity. For Adebayo, telling stories of racism and xenophobia come alongside and become enmeshed with his experiences and stories of homophobia and transphobia. For Max, complex intersection of ageism and ableism become enmeshed with their stories and experiences living as a non-binary trans person.

Although SGM communities continue to fight homophobia and transphobia, these communities still have dominant stories, groups, identities, power dynamics, emotional reactivities, and implicit and explicit biases. A tendency to homogenize collective and community SGM stories means dominant groups and identities continue to tell stories for entire SGM communities, when stories from communities still marginalized within SGM communities need to be heard, even when they are conflicting stories, disruptive stories, and at times, challenging stories.

Taking a Reflective Turn

Through their diverse community making experiences Adebayo, Espen and Max developed “relational assets” (Sadowski et al., 2009); skills, abilities, and resources co-created in relationship, which they used to foster a sense of connectedness to self and others. Adebayo, Espen, and Max mobilized relational assets to make sense of their experiences, combat social isolation, and form social and political support networks.

Communities are dynamic and emergent processes, rather than final destinations; grounded in acts of making, communities continuously evolve in the hands of makers (Greene, 1995). Within communities, possibilities expand and are reimaged; individuals make choices to act to embody newly imagined futures. Nested in community, personal experience “becomes meaningful because it is inserted in a process of resistance that is collective” (Lugones, 1992, p. 37). Communities are the places and spaces we continuously make and remake through storytelling, artmaking, direct action to communicate and connect our lives.

It is the experience of living and learning in community, that Lugones (2003) draws on to explicate the complex learning process enabled through complex negotiations of identity and difference within communities. Lugones (2003) resists notions that draw deeper distinctions

between types of communities because she asserts these distinctions fail to recognize the complex negotiations of identity and community making taking place within and across communities. Adebayo, Espen, and Max and help me understand communities as complex sites of negotiations of identities and communities in the making. These complex communities are dynamic sites of identity-making and world making. They promise not to erase differences, but find ways to create paths forward by acknowledging commonalities and learning from differences to continuously build and imagine new possible futures that shape and reshape unfolding identities.

Conclusion

Through stories and counterstories, this paper highlights Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's complex and ongoing processes of identity-making and world making as trans young adults. Making visible Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's lived and told intersectional challenges creates space for telling, hearing, and honouring complex stories of difference and complicates categorical notions of homogeneous trans identities and identity groupings. These stories illuminate highly complex negotiations and nuanced identity-making, community-making, and world-making processes that showcase each person's unique resistant logics. For audiences, some of Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's counterstories may be challenging to hear because they require a de-centring of self, self-stories, and sometimes common beliefs and collective stories to make room for new telling of long told stories. These counterstories stories may challenge readers to complicate their thinking processes by decentring popular binary categorizations (e.g., Us or Them). Furthermore, because counterstories often reverberate through webs of community connections in complicated and unforeseen ways, they can be disruptive and upsetting, both individually and collectively. Importantly though, counterstories enable individuals and

communities to address blind spots and reset, re-evaluate, and reimagine collective stories informing identity-making, community-making, and world making. Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's stories and counterstories offer novel ways to see, think, and imagine through liminality and multiplicity, enabling creative and complex choices to transform and reimagine possible identities, communities, and worlds.

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CHAPTER 10: Conclusions

In narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), researchers are asked to justify why the research they engaged in matters and to whom. In each study the personal, social or practical, and theoretical significance are explicated. Returning to the personal justification of this study, provides me with an opportunity to revisit my evolving narrative beginnings. Specifically, I reflect on my becoming in relation and my new understanding of relational learning. As I contemplate the social and practical, as well as theoretical significance, I highlight the scholarly contributions of this research to the field of Adult, Community, and Higher Education. I will also briefly discuss how scholarly impacts and implications of this research crosses disciplinary boundaries, and expands methodological understandings. Specifically, I will expand on the potential of relational research in narrative inquiry; contributions to relational research; contributions to visual narrative inquiry; and contributions to adult and community education. I will also point to directions in which mentorship can be reimagined alongside trans and non-binary young adults. The theoretical significance highlights the importance of storytelling and counterstories in trans and non-binary identity-making and world making. As part of my work, I am complicating queer theory within educational practice.

Reflections on Becoming in Relation

I returned to graduate school for several reasons. Some of these reasons included, my desire to learn how to attend to SGM young adults in my art studio classrooms; to understand how mentorship might function to co-create relational assets and support agency development for SGM young adults; and, to creatively respond to SGM young adults seeking to express themselves through creative activities (i.e., artmaking and creative writing). By walking and learning alongside Adebayo, Espen, and Max I gained insight into all these priorities. Most

significantly, I learned art practice combined with mentorship through shared creative activities can build relational assets, or skills, abilities and resources, that can be mobilized by SGM young adults to support and develop personal and collective agency. From the outset, I had framed my questions from the point of view of being an educator because this was and remains part of my identity. While I often focused on the participants, it has been important to me to acknowledge that this research shifted my concept of teaching and being a teacher. Through this research, I have begun to understand education as a relational, co-created, and emergent process that cannot be separated from learning. Teaching is also and always learning in relation. I can see that being a teacher is also, and always, being a learner. The dialogic of teaching and learning became evident in the ways Adebayo, Espen, Max and I taught and learned alongside each other throughout research.

I learned a great deal about myself too by attending to who I was and was becoming alongside Adebayo, Espen and Max. I learned that my identity continues to evolve and shift in relation. Witnessing Adebayo, Espen and Max transform their identities, enabled me to gradually shed extraneous self-stories and self-limiting beliefs. Living alongside Adebayo, Espen and Max as they nimbly negotiated their identity-making in relation to community-making, life-making, and world-making, was inspiring and helped me realize that we are all in the making.

Relational Learning

I have struggled with self-naming and how I have been named and framed inside and outside SGM communities. By witnessing Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's resistant logic and complex negotiations of their sexual and gender identities at the intersections of race, citizenship, health, mental health, ableism, and ageism, I have begun to understand the complexities of identity-making in relation. Witnessing Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's lived complexity has

helped me to glimpse my own lived complexity. It was Lugones (2003) who helped me realize that I too am a plurality of selves. From this standpoint, I have a multiplicity of options and can choose to move in various directions. Lugones (2003) concepts of liminality are key within this process because they enable me to de-centre my self-stories, biases, emotional reactivity and make space for Adebayo, Espen, and Max to act. This sense of acting was important as we each developed and told self-stories of identity-making through conversations and artmaking. Making space for Adebayo, Espen, and Max also made space for me. Supporting their developing agency, also supported my agency. Relational research, experienced as teaching and learning, reverberated through all our lives and into communities in distinct, impactful, and profound ways. It changed who I am and may become.

Expanding the Potential of Relational Research

In this study, creating a space to build relationships was foundational. Because of multiple intersections of oppressions, discrimination, and stigma, trans young adults often shun public spaces (Schein et al., 2014). With this knowledge, I intentionally created and actively maintained the community printmaking studio as a safe space to support Adebayo's, Espen's and Max's developing agency to create, show, and tell their stories. By responding to Adebayo's, Espen's and Max's needs and requests, we co-created original artworks, a play, and short-stories. Adebayo, Espen and Max took these research outputs back to their communities, often using them as community resources. While the uptake of creative research outputs created in collaboration with participants warrants further study, this study begins to illuminate how research grounded in relational ontology and relational commitments, such as narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2018), creates nested relational supports for participants. Relational supports may create potential for vulnerable and marginalized

populations to build relational personal and community assets, supports, and as a result create or further agency. Artmaking in this study acted as a powerful relational asset that mobilized ways to make sense of experiences, combat social isolation, and build social networks.

Highlighting Relational Research in Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is a relational research methodology built on equitable, continuous, committed, and collaborative relationships between researchers and participants. This study highlights how complex learning processes implicitly unfold between researchers and participants within this relational research methodology. The research context, particularly the printmaking studio, functioned as a site of informal community and adult learning that fostered participant engagement and participation by generating excitement for learning. Further study into the relational approaches of narrative inquiry may lead to a deeper understanding of factors that support participation and engaged learning of underserved and marginalized populations within the field of Adult, Community, and Higher Education. Specifically, studying narrative inquiry methods and practices may yield insights into what factors facilitate adult learning in informal and community settings. Insights provided from this study suggest relational research can provide nested spaces of physical and emotional safety, which are foundational to inquiry. Further, this study suggests relational research practices and approaches may be key to engaging and working with vulnerable populations in research.

This research also provides insight into art-making as a co-created relational asset-building process within visual narrative inquiry methodology (Lavoie & Caine, 2021b) to understand how artmaking, and thinking *with* images (Eisner, 2008), intersects with narrative inquiry to develop agency and open possibilities for deeper conversations to be seen and told.

Contributions to Adult and Community Education

Adult and community learning experiences are ubiquitous and often implicit, making them a challenge to explicate. I turn to Knowles' (1984) definition of adult learning as an activity or set of activities, often collaborative, which builds on life experience, and subsequently allows individuals to set goals, define relevant issues, strategize, and act to achieve practical, concrete results in their lives. Knowles (1984) definition of adult learning mirrors Dewey's (1933) 5-step process of process of critical/reflective thought (Miciak et al., in press), and Freire's (1970) dialogic critical thought process. Importantly, criticality is central, as are activities that ground experiential learning, co-created and experienced in relation. Adult learning theory stresses how adult learners build on experiences to co-create assets necessary to support future choices and build future lives. Importantly, adult learning theories (Freire, 1970; Horton et al., 1990) posit personal and collective agency is developed through *praxis*, or actions taken to achieve future-oriented goals. In this study, Adebayo, Espen, and Max utilized art practice created in research to reflect on pressing issues in their lives, critically reflect on their stories, choose directions, and act in relation to their stories that emerge in relation to their artmaking. Adebayo, Espen and Max shared their artwork in their networks and communities. Adebayo confronted suicidal ideation amongst SGM refugees; Espen spoke about barriers to trans inclusive mental health; and, Max shared his love of art making and creative ideas with friends and family. This work builds on adult education scholarship of Grace and Wells (2007) and demonstrates how shared creative activities have capacity to create spaces for SGM identity-making amongst SGM youth in informal community learning spaces. To understand SGM youth identity-making and trans young adults identity-making processes, in particular, it is helpful to understand Freire's (1970) concept of *praxis*, or critical reflective thought in action.

Praxis is a unity of thought and action that cannot be separated into constituent parts, nor can it be separated from social relations (Freire, 1970). Thoughts are communicated and learned within *praxis* through dialogue (Freire, 1970, p. 87). Dialogue according to Freire is a deeper form of communication, one rooted in *praxis*, and as such it must also be grounded by the social context that created it and gave it meaning, or it loses its connection to reality and becomes “hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity” (Freire, 1970, p. 71). Finally, it is this unity of reflective thought and concrete action (*praxis*) in the world and in relation that creates a sense of individual and collective agency. Further, this agency may create conscious awareness, for individuals and collectives, that their actions have the potential to change their worlds (Freire, 1970).

This research contributes to a dearth of scholarly literature on how trans young adults engage in *praxis* through arts-based activities to form and reform their identities, as they engage in life-making, community-making, and world-making. This study highlights how trans young adults, took up printmaking to create a dynamic dialogic learning space. Adebayo, Espen, Max were in dialogue with their art practice, as their artwork manifested and externalized their life-stories and served as spaces of critical reflection to direct action (Lavoie & Caine, 2021b). Adebayo, Espen, and Max were also in dialogue with each other, myself, and their communities when they shared artwork. In this visual narrative inquiry, our research group constituted an informal learning community that supported both individual and collective agency development.

Over time and in continuous interaction through active participation in art-making, Adebayo, Espen, and Max became deeply invested in research knowledge creation and mobilization as they saw benefits develop both for themselves and their communities. Their engagement was based on something beyond the organic unfolding of a narrative inquiry

practice. Adebayo, Espen, and Max seemed to intuitively grasp and became excited by the potential for learning and acting on the learning generated through their art practice.

Significantly, in this study, creative activities were a generative source of *praxis* that enabled Adebayo, Espen, and Max, to continuously re-engage, revitalize and reimagine research to support their development as trans and non-binary young adults. For adult and community education this study highlights the importance of building nested spaces of relational supports for trans and non-binary young adult learners. In this study, building nested spaces of relational supports meant: 1) understanding what safety requirements meant to individuals; 2) building and maintaining safe spaces for relational learning; 3) continuously and creatively responding to requests, interests, and needs of individual learners; 4) creating flexible schedules and activities so learners could choose how and when to participate; 5) situating learning in shared activities that call forth and support creativity, performativity, and diverse expression; and, 6) encouraging and supporting efforts of individual learners to mobilize and share their learning in safe environments by providing opportunities and supporting their initiatives.

Mentorship Re-imagined Alongside Trans and Non-binary Young Adults

I define mentorship as a learning and teaching process that is dialogic, collaborative and ground in the interests, needs, and requests of learners. From this study, I learned that mentorship relationships that are hierarchical teacher/mentor and student/mentee are unhelpful and hinder possibilities to learn in relation to people from vulnerable or marginalized populations whose stories may have been silenced or remain untold. Hegemonic mainstream and mainstreaming beliefs, roles, and narratives, may come into play in hierarchical teacher/mentor and student/mentee relationships further marginalizing and silencing already quiet stories.

In this research, I learned from Adebayo, Espen, and Max stories, and they learned from

each other, as well as me. Learning was an exchange; we were all teachers and learners. Some may question whether relational implicit learning within research can be called mentorship. This study provides insight into mentorship reimagined as informal, small group or individual relational learning, responsive to emergent, unique needs, and requests. Importantly the care-filled attention I provided in response to Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's needs and requests constituted mentorship as evidenced by the creative outputs and the quickening of skill development and resources each developed through their evolving agency as artists and co-researchers.

This work contributes to adult educational scholarship on arts-based SGM mentorship for trans and non-binary young adults, who often do not feel safe or fully included in formal educational environments. Significantly, this research demonstrates how trans young adults transform mentorship into "relational assets" (Sadowski et al., 2009); skills, abilities, and resources co-created in relationship that foster a sense of connectedness to self and others. For these young adults, artmaking acts as a powerful resource they mobilize to make sense of experiences, combat social isolation, engage in and build communities. These findings can be used to re-imagine formalized trans and non-binary specific and SGM mentorship programs in public schools, universities, and community agencies, as opportunities for co-learning and co-teaching. These programs can be transformed by queering or quee(r)ying mentorship, to reimagine mentorship programs in relation to trans and SGM young adults. This research suggests that young adults need to be consulted and enabled to co-create trans and SGM programs, from the ground up, to address their present, emerging, and shifting needs, interests, and requests. Traditional notions of mentorship need to be sidelined to create space to reimagine

mentorship as a co-created, collaborative, non-hierarchical, dialogic teaching and learning process developed and implemented alongside trans, non-binary, and SGM young adults.

Narratives & Counternarratives in Trans and Non-binary Identity-making & World Making

Theory, in this study, manifests close to the ground in the ways the study was conducted and in the ways Adebayo, Espen, and Max made-meaning and lived their lives in relation to this process. This study is grounded in Dewey's (1938) theory of experience and seeks foremost to understand Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's lived experiences as trans and non-binary young adults. Narrative theories of meaning-making and identity-making (Bruner, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Kerby, 1991; McAdams, 1993; 2003) helped me understand how Adebayo, Espen, and Max created *stories to live* by that embodied their lived experiences and helped them negotiate future actions. The telling of identity-making self-stories were particularly important to Adebayo, Espen, and Max as they created their trans and non-binary identities. Counterstories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) enabled Adebayo, Espen, and Max to counter hegemonic mainstream and mainstreaming narratives both within SGM communities and in general publics. In sum, stories and counterstories, seen, heard, and told, were mechanisms Adebayo, Espen, and Max used to make space for and understand their emergent and transforming identities in relation to SGM communities and publics. Far from being straightforward, their negotiation of their identity-making processes was complex alongside sometimes complicated SGM communities and publics. Importantly, Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's stories and counterstories highlight the nuances and complexities of their emergent trans and non-binary identities, with each negotiating intersectional challenges. These stories in their detail and uniqueness may contribute to cross sector, intersectional theories or practical tools that

need complexity and nuance to more accurately understand and reflect populations (Clow et al., 2009).

Complicating Queer Theory in Educational Practice

Importantly, Adebayo, Espen, and Max used queer theory (Pinar, 1998) at a ground level, as a practical stance to question hegemonic norms and make space for their identities as trans young adults. Queer theory has been used in adult education (Grace et al, 2004) with SGM young adults to explicate a questioning stance. In this study, Adebayo, Espen, and Max used queer theory to make space for their identities and identity-making processes by naming themselves trans, non-binary, and sometimes queer. Queer theory seems to have acted as a ground to stand on, while self-stories, *stories to live by*, and counterstories were practical mechanisms and tools that Adebayo, Espen, and Max used to maintain and expand their identity-making spaces.

Problematically, while queer theory created space for Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's identities, it provided no practical mechanism to support these identities. Further complicating queer theory, some writing (Grace et al., 2004) valorizes queer identities over other SGM identities, which are labeled essentialist. Labelling identities as essentialist fixes them, seeing these as finished and incapable of change. This notion of essentialized identities is contradictory to Dewey's (1938) theories of experience and seems out of touch with lived experience. According to Dewey (1938) lived experience is always in motion, always emergent, never static, and always a learning process.

I have always felt discomfort with the practice of privileging some identities over others because I wonder whose identities get invalidated in the process of doing so. Whose stories get left out? Whose identities get further marginalized? And, importantly, who gets to choose? I

have wondered about the practical use of queer theory, and if it could be of practical use. Seeing Adebayo, Espen, and Max make space for their identities through queer theory helped me see a concrete, embodied, and practical application of queer theory, which is paramount to me.

Embodying Liminality

To understand Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's lived experience and their complex negotiations of trans and non-binary identity-making, I turned to Lugones (1987; 1992; 2003). Lugones (1987; 1992; 2003) theories have practical applications for negotiating borderland spaces, through playfulness and embodying multiplicity and liminality. These (2003) theories on negotiating multiple oppressions enabled me to understand how Adebayo, Espen, and Max experience their sexual and gender identities at the intersections of race, citizenship, health and mental health, ableism, and ageism. To understand the complexity of these intersectional challenges, I turned to Lugones' (2003) writing on resistant logics, resistant creativity, and resistant negotiation. Turning back to self-stories, life stories, stories to live by and counterstories, told and shown through artworks, I see Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's embodied actions, their *praxis* of trans and non-binary identity-making in relation.

Lugones (2003) helped me understand complex identity-making alongside complex community-making through *non-dichotomous thinking*, or *non-binary thinking*. Spelman (1988) wrote *The Inessential Woman* to explicate how there is no essential woman; women are a complexity of differences. Thinking with Lugones (2003), Spelman (1988) and Grace (et al., 2004), I suggest we need to understand *The Inessential Queer* or how we are, perhaps not so queerly, all inessential. I understand queer theory (Pinar, 1998) was meant to embody inessentialism and non-binary thinking, in use however queer theorizing at times becomes categorical, essentializing, and ironically, binary (e.g., Us or Them).

Responding to the complexity of Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's identity-making and my identity forming and reforming in relation, I think all of us need some space. I suggest we take our cues from Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's trans and non-binary identity-making. Thinking with Halberstam's (2018) ideas of liminality and their definition of trans* as an infinitely expandable trans identity, I suggest we consider lesbian*, gay*, bisexual* alongside trans* and queer* as non-binary, inessential and expandable identities always in the making. To respond to queer, trans and non-binary complex negotiations of identity-making often at complex intersections (e.g., race, citizenship, ethnicity), perhaps we need new terms, like qu + intersectionalities or quintersectionalities* or tr + intersectionalities or trintersectionalities*. Whatever terms we use to name our identities and those of others, we need to be generous and compassionate with ourselves and each other. We cannot afford to leave anyone behind if we are to embrace differences, negotiate intersectional challenges, and embodying resistant logics to build complex identities, communities, and futures.

Conclusion

The lives of Adebayo, Espen, and Max are complex. In this research, Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's identity-making and world making processes were unfolding and showed emergent complexities. These complexities called forth a continuous and creative responsiveness. Narrative inquiry with its relational ontology, theory, approaches, ethical commitment and methods allowed me to walk alongside Adebayo, Espen, and Max, sometimes leading, and more often following. Throughout this research process stories, artwork, and creative writing co-created with Adebayo, Espen, and Max contributed to research and to each's developing agency as artists and co-researchers. More research is needed to understand how relational research engages participants and often generates relational assets for participants to support individuals and communities.

This research contributes to expanding and emergent scholarship on relational research and methodologies to engage marginalized and underserved populations, like trans and non-binary young adults. This work was personally significant to my understanding of myself becoming in relation and through relational learning. Socially and practically this work contributes to scholarship in the field of Adult, Community, and Higher Education by explicating the importance of building on and supporting the learning experiences and requests of adult learners. Specifically, this work contributes to adult educational scholarship on arts-based SGM mentorship for trans and non-binary young adults, demonstrating how trans and non-binary young adults can transform mentorship into relational-assets to foster a sense of agency and connectedness to self and others. Theoretically, this study complicates queer theory by bringing it into the complexity of lived experience. In this study, queer theory's importance is in the questioning stance, which held open spaces and places of questioning. My relationship with theory remains complicated; I believe when theory contradicts, or oversimplifies lived experience, it may become a barrier, blocking complex understandings instead of explicating them. This research found theories useful in the living, when they became practical tools and mechanism for expression, creativity, and action. Storytelling, telling counterstories, and artmaking were profoundly generative practices in this work that supported Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's identity-making and world making. In the end, this research highlights Adebayo's, Espen's, and Max's complex processes of trans and non-binary identity-making and world making and calls those of us who read, hear, or see their stories to engage with complexity and creativity in our processes of thinking, being, and becoming.

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