Walking the bridge: Reading Edmonton's New Walterdale Bridge as a Socially Constructed Space and a Material Place

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore how constructed spaces become bound and localized places and how, within the context of Edmonton, Canada, places naturalize the presence of white settler bodies on Indigenous lands, extending the colonial project. I consider the colonial history of my hometown, Mexico City, to expand my understanding of this process.

In my study, I specifically focus on the Walterdale Bridge and the surrounding areas. I read how the myth of *terra nullius* works against ongoing Indigenous claims to the land. I understand this primarily through Edward William Soja's work on space and Sherene Razack's work with Henri Lefebvre's categories of space, perceived space, conceived space and lived space. Reading Razack, reading Lefebvre, I understand colonialism as a spatial practice, and the Walterdale Bridge as a social space that organizes bodies according to race, gender, class and naturalizes the presence of white settler bodies on Indigenous land. In order to resist the colonial organizing principles of the Bridge, in order to honor the actual land, river and sky of that Bridge, I also consider Tim Ingold, Sarah Pink and Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman, but, most importantly, the Indigenous place-based theory of Eve Tuck and Marcia Mackenzie, Dwayne Donald, Sharon Venne, Jay T. Johnson and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark. In my day-to-day research, in order to respond meaningfully to the Bridge and the theory I was reading, I developed a regular methodology of walking. In fact, walking became my main research method; it allowed me to practice on-site readings through which I could explore the history of Treaty Six, particularly in the Rossdale area. By regularly walking the Bridge, I was able to locate the history of white settlement and the ways in which the Bridge continues to be a colonial intervention on the land. However, in walking, I was also able to locate historic and current social relations that I understand as disruptive to ongoing colonial practices. In conclusion, by regularly walking on the Bridge, by regularly reading the Bridge, I began to unmap and remap that place. This helps me now as I try to better understand my hometown, Mexico City.

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Land Acknowledgements

Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge that when I began this project, I was on Treaty 6 territory, a home and traditional meeting ground, a gathering place, and travelling route of the Cree (nêhiyaw), Saulteaux (So-toe), Blackfoot, Métis, Dene (De-nay) and Nakota Sioux (Sue). Currently, I am in Mexico City, a land that belongs to the Nahuas, meaning "speaking clearly" in Nahuatl. The Nahuas are comprised of different groups of peoples who speak the same language, or similar variations, with their particular identities, cultures, across Mexico and south America.

In order to honour the ways in which the study of the Walterdale Bridge brought me home to Mexico City, it is important for me to also begin with a brief history of the Nahuas. According to historian Pedro Carrasco, the defeat of the Azcapotzalco empire led to the formation of the Triple Alliance between the Tepanecas from Tlacopan and Alcohuas from Texcoco. Carrasco believes that the term "Aztec" does not help to represent the ethnic complexity that once constituted the alliance which is why he prefers the term tenochcas instead (14). Tenochtitlan became the capital of the empire after Moctezuma declared himself the only ruler (68-69). When the Spaniards arrived, according to historian Federico Navarrete, the Nahuatl language variant *tecpillatolli,* was used exclusively by the nobility, governors and priests, and helped establish alliances with the Spaniards. Furthermore, a new Christianized variant of the *tecpillatiolli* was used to record the religious texts of the period. Christianized Nahuatl were also used by Spaniards to continue their so-called civilizing process across America (Navarrete). As a result, according to historian Gisela Von Wobeser, many Nahuas did not want to remove the Spaniards from their territories. However, mestizos and other Indigenous communities, who had formed the growing independence movement, convinced them to rebel against the conquerors to preserve their

communal sharing and lands (306). The independence movement, led by Miguel Hidalgo saw the Spaniards as threatening their economic prosperity and promised the Indigenous communities better socio-economic conditions, the preservation of their community and the recuperation of the social balance (7). However, the resistance did not bring these rewards. The economies of the Indigenous communities were damaged; the new laws did not recognize their rights and judicial systems as Indigenous peoples nor their right to communal ownership of the land (311). Today, the Nahuas, as well as other Indigenous communities, are only recognized for their cultures, and their political systems and presence in Mexico continue to be erased.[1] Another damaging result of colonization and the fight for independence was that the caste structures that were held by Nahuas were reinforced during colonization, enhancing conditions for the economic disparity that pervade Mexico to this day. However, it is important to note, that despite systems of ongoing oppression and military violence, Indigenous resistance continues. The Zapatistas (EZLN), for example, continue to resist the state and capitalist and colonial violence that permeate Indigenous lives all around Mexico. The Zapatista army (EZLN), according to the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), rose up in arms against NAFTA in five municipal capitals of the state of Chiapas: San Cristóbal de las Casa, Altamirano, Las Margaritas, Ocosingo and Chanal on January 1st, 1994. This Indigenous led army has a long history of communal organization that has tried to find ways to maintain Indigenous traditions, land title and government. In 1994, the main demands were "work, land, shelter,

[1] The Mexican Constitution had an Indigenous reform in 2001, which has modified 11 articles guaranteeing Indigenous rights. Article 2 states that the nation is pluricultural, sustained in its indigenous communities that inhabited the territory before colonization and that preserve their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (CNDH 11). As any legal system that was implemented after colonization, I am still reluctant to recognize this article as entirely a victory, as most of the rights given are still conditioned by their race and by their language.

food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace", to which the government responded to by sending in an army to put down the uprising. After twelve days, the government and the Zapatista army initiated a dialogue that allowed the armed conflict to end (Secretaría Ejecutiva).

However, the Zapatista army was unsatisfied with the government's constitutional reforms which did not attend to the agreements laid out, so they bowed out. Today, agreements have yet to be fulfilled. Still, the resulting legacy has extended to other states in Mexico, and small acts of resistance persist. According to anthropologists Leif Korsbaek and Evelyn Guadalupe Bello Salgado, in Mexico City, resistance continues in Milpa Alta, one of boroughs that maintains communal landholding, self-determination and the need for prior consultation in the use of their lands (50). Most of the population in Milpa Alta relies on agriculture as a source of income, as well as cultural and social exchange with other communities in Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas (45). Through their communal rights and organization, they have been able to sustain their own political, social practices, their own language, and have adapted Mexican and International law to maintain their claims to the land against transnational invasion and the expanding urbanism (60)

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Introduction

I was born in Mexico City to a supportive middle-class family who were able to provide me with a bilingual education which opened up other possibilities in my life. These privileges that I am so fortunate to have are, unfortunately, not available to everyone in Mexico nor is my life one that most people would be able to pursue. My dad, as the first person in his family to obtain a masters and then doctorate, worked and studied for years towards this goal. However, his dream to study abroad was never possible. With his support and love, he accompanied me through the process of applying to universities abroad and was hopeful that leaving Mexico would change my perspective on Mexico, would encourage me to find ways to improve this country and would ultimately prepare me for the future. In 2017, with the support of peers, family and friends, I applied and received the FONCA-CONACYT scholarship aimed at graduate students whose research promotes and enriches Mexican culture. What they were and still are expecting from me remains unclear to me. However, I honor my obligation by acknowledging the ways in which Mexico City has informed my life—whether I am home or away. Specifically, I try to understand how Mexico City was with me while I was away in Canada, in Edmonton, on the Walterdale Bridge.

After learning that I had been awarded the scholarship and had been accepted at the University of Alberta, in Canada, I was ready to leave Mexico City forever. I had become disenchanted with Mexico and could not seem to find a way to live happily in a country that had no interest in the well-being of its citizens. I was frustrated by how the government handled poverty, the amount of corruption that was being uncovered daily, the lack of health and education for people without enough resources, not to mention the amount of violence, particularly against women, that was part of our everyday lives. Hopeful about

starting anew, I emigrated to Canada without realizing that living there would awaken my connections to Mexico City; that is, that my new life in Edmonton, with its stories and histories, reconnected me to a place and a past that I thought I wanted to forget. Living in Edmonton encouraged me to learn more about where I come from, on whose land I walk when I am in Mexico and about how similar colonial histories have resulted in the inequalities and injustices that continue to permeate both cities and countries.

In this thesis, I begin with a land acknowledgement because I want to honour the different Indigenous Nations in Mexico and the Indigenous Nations who continue to live in the land now called Canada—whose land was never surrendered to the Crown. Across Canada, many treaties were signed and remain as legal arrangements that were meant to maintain fruitful and reciprocal relations on shared lands. Although in many ways, these treaties have not been honoured, a respectful recognition of the original Indigenous Nations, and for those Nations who continue to live and fight for their lands, is practiced in many events in Canada. However, this is not the case in Mexico. Despite the fact that Indigenous communities in Mexico have suffered similar displacements, erasures and dismissal of their rights to the land, we do not recognize them.

In the two years I lived in Edmonton, I learned about Canada's colonial history, the city's relationships with Indigenous communities, and the ways in which scholars, writers, both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, related to the city, consider its history, its present and their hope for its future. Surprisingly, the insight of scholars writing about colonialism and decolonizing in Canada and in Edmonton, in particular, brought Mexico closer into view and helped me reconsider how I felt about Mexico City and how I live with and on its land.

In Mexico City, as I mentioned before, the legal recognition for Indigenous peoples is basically limited to state approved cultural promotion. According to historian Claudio

Albertani, in Mexico, the Indigenous population census is based on language: only people over 5 years old who speak an Indigenous language are considered Indigenous (196). Albertani defines this methodology as statistic ethnocide because it provides artificial and deficient data that does not represent the actual Indigenous population (196). In the case of Nahuas, particularly in Milpa Alta, the dynamic between Indigenous immigrants from surrounding communities and Indigenous populations still inhabiting their traditional lands, in relation to the expanding urban city, has resulted in a complex situation. On the one hand, nahuas originarios[2] are still fighting to maintain their communal lands and ecological preservation against urban expansion. On the other hand, other Indigenous immigrants relocate to these lands and build their houses on agricultural land, unsuited for housing. Both of these groups struggle to find enough resources to continue living on and from the land (Albertani 206-7). Despite the fact that some Indigenous communities maintain their lands, the levels of poverty, exclusion and the destruction of communities have forced many people to migrate into urban cities where they hope to find a better life (198). Due to these precarious conditions, plus the intense pressures of legal and social discrimination, the political presence of Indigenous communities in Mexico remains unrecognized (Albertani 203).

Even though I have learned how problematic and insufficient the land acknowledgements are in Canada, the fact that the acknowledgement existed at all was surprising to me, as someone coming from another colonized country. Although, I understand now that these acknowledgements do not mean that Canada is less racist or less

[2] According to Mario Ortega Olivares, the term "originarios", much like First Nations, alludes to the people who lived on the lands prior to colonization. They named themselves originarios to avoid and deny the stigmatized term native, as it is a derogatory term used by urban population to discriminate them. (Ortega 88). I do not translate that term to acknowledge their proclaimed identity.

colonial (perhaps it is just differently developed than Mexico), they prompted me to wonder why they do not occur in Mexico. In Edmonton, I sought to understand these land acknowledgements and the city's history of colonialism. I turned to the city for guidance. I found my way to the libraries and archives and also beyond, to the riverbanks, the bridges, the lookouts, where Indigenous and Non-Indigenous histories and stories come together.

In fact, in Edmonton, I spent most of my time walking the city. I discovered the trails that went from University of Alberta to the Saskatchewan River, tracts of the land that were walked daily by very different people. I crossed the High-Level Bridge, the largest bridge in the city that crosses the river, on multiple occasions, visiting the Legislature Building, and the surrounding parks with a cup of coffee in hand and some time to spend. There are many bridges that bring the South and North of Edmonton together; however, I soon became fixated on the new Walterdale Bridge, a recent installation in Edmonton's skyline. The new Walterdale Bridge, located on 105th avenue, connects Queen Elizabeth park (South) to Rossdale (North) with an arch-steel structure that spans 206 metres from side to side across the North Saskatchewan River.

Fig.1. The Walterdale Bridge from the North-East. My photo.

On the east side, a new shared-use path was constructed for pedestrians and cyclists to reach their destinations while enjoying the view and sound of the river flowing beneath their feet. At the time, I was living on 86 Ave. close to 109 St, and even though I could walk across either the High-Level Bridge or the Walterdale Bridge, I was drawn to the latter. On that Bridge,[3] I felt closer to the River and to the city. The first time I stopped to listen to the River, I was walking with a friend at night. We were enjoying the chilly wind of Fall, sitting on the benches on the Bridge, a car or two passing by; no one else was around. We took our time to find the best spot on the Bridge to look and listen to the

[3] I will refer to the Walterdale Bridge as the Bridge to avoid re-asserting the settler narrative of progress that the name Walterdale imposes. By capitalizing it, I am re-mapping the Bridge. I am giving it a new name that is defined by its materiality. When I utilize the name Walterdale Bridge, I refer specifically to the designed social space constructed by the City of Edmonton.

River[4]. Even though, I would eventually find my favorite place underneath the Bridge, this first moment near the flowing River made me feel connected to something. The walk ended with a small visit to the city's Traditional Burial Grounds and Fort Edmonton Cemetery—both terms are used by the City[5] to describe this area. From the early days when Edmonton was called Fort Edmonton and one of the many hubs of the fur trade, this area was the burial place for Indigenous people and white settlers and fur traders. I had my first encounter with the history of the fur trade when I read the series of interpretive plaques located in front of the EPCOR power plant close to the Memorial. By walking on the Bridge and visiting the old Burial Grounds and the Memorial at Rossdale, I learned about the history of Edmonton and the bridge. The original Walterdale Bridge (first known as the 105 street Bridge but renamed in 1967) had been a steel grating-deck truss bridge built in 1913 to accommodate vehicles such as horses and carts.

[4] Similar to the Bridge, I re-name the North Saskatchewan River as the River to avoid re-asserting the name given by settlers to the River. In capitalizing the name, I try to define the River through its material relations.
[5] I capitalize City when referring to the City of Edmonton as an institution. I maintain the use of city when referring to the location.

Fig. 2. The old Walterdale Bridge. (Rynerson)[6]

The new replacement Bridge linked to my own life in that the Bridge and I both started anew in Edmonton in 2017. The Bridge also connected me to my burgeoning understanding of the colonial and Indigenous histories of Edmonton and by extension, Canada. It also brought me closer to the River (kisiskâciwanisîpiy or the North Saskatchewan) and to the trees, to the North and South side of Edmonton, and held me close to the different people who used the bridge and who enjoyed and experienced Edmonton in their own way. When I was on the Bridge, the world slowed down so that I was able to feel everything differently; so that I could be in the present and connect to my surroundings in a way that my life rarely allowed.

[6] The free media repository, Wikimedia Commons, still maintains some of the pictures from the old Walterdale Bridge. A quick search online shows that most of these have been removed from google searches to make room for the new one. I think this is interesting to note and I will circle back to this later on.

As I began to think more about the Bridge while walking across it, I began to create memories about this place I had just arrived in. Daily I saw pigeons dipping themselves into the water, people playing besides the River, trying to cross the River, fishing in it, and eventually, the Bridge became a very real place to me, as central as the city of Edmonton itself.

In order to consider the Bridge as the object of my study, in my thesis, I include my walking practice, as a method of study. Walking allowed me to engage and interact with the Bridge and the surrounding areas as actual places. As experiences on the Bridge have shown me, living in and engaging with this place requires a deep physical engagement with its material reality. Walking the new paths, observing people's routines and basking in the sun on the slopes close to the River helped me to explore the Bridge as both a constructed space and a material place.

Additionally, in order to think about the Bridge as a constructed space and as a material place, and to try and engage with the questions that Indigenous scholars are demanding from any research that relates to Indigenous land, I consider spatial theory and Indigenous place-based scholarship. To facilitate this, I begin by briefly explaining aspects of spatial theory and the central terms of "space" and "place" as I understand them.

In order to think about the *places* of Edmonton and the new Walterdale Bridge, I first explore *space* as a socially constructed organization of bodies in a given location. According to geographer Edward W. Soja, space is a socially constructed concept that reflects and enforces the ways in which a particular society categorizes and organizes its members (17-18). That is, space reflects the ways in which value is assigned to the humans who inhabit it, according to their race, gender, sexuality, ableism, and class, in the real

world (19). Space organizes people in relation to each other, to other living beings, to the environment and to objects around them.

I also consider *place* as that physical area that emerges from socially constructed spaces through Sherene Razack's formulation in "When Place Becomes Race" (17). Although Razack does not explicitly state what place is, through her work, I understand that place occurs when the organizing principles of a socially constructed space are naturalized. Razack shares example of places like the slums and wealthy suburbs to explain the idea of naturalization. While these places might seem to "develop organically," they are the literal products of displacement, and unequal economic conditions (7-8). Like Soja, Razack understands that places develop as the result of the imposition of socially constructed spaces whose systems of organization are based on race, class, gender, etc.

Unlike spaces, places are measurable and bound locations which have been given names—like the City of Edmonton. The name given to the place relates to a significant collective memory, or a history that differentiates this location. In the case of Edmonton, the name points back to England and tries to remove the nêyhiwaywak (Cree) name, amiskwaciwâskahikan. The name, Edmonton embodies the extent to which English settlers have defined the terms of the city. However, when I consider the place that is Edmonton, I also consider how its materiality exceeds the limits of its colonial spatial configurations. Humans are not in control of place, nor can we constrict the material world to our ideas. In fact, the material world will always exceed our designs. Tree roots reach out and break cement paths; pigeons nest in small concrete spaces; rivers overflow banks and erode the soil; people pee and sleep in gardens. The material world, in its complex and interacting life forms, will always disrupt ideology.

Space

In "When Place Becomes Race," Razack demonstrates how there are multiple systems of domination simultaneously at work in the creation of a space (6) and that to study any particular place is to automatically uncover processes of racialization (17). This is what looking at space exposes: the underlying principles that work together to naturalize certain hierarchical relations. These relations define where people belong and how people interact with each other. To explore how socially constructed spaces, such as the Walterdale Bridge, are rendered innocent, I will go through Razack's three categories of space: conceived space, perceived space and lived space.[7]

Conceived Space

I utilize "conceived space" to look at the "representations of space [. . .] how space is conceived by planners, architects, and so on" (9). I look at the material changes that were planned and implemented with the new Walterdale Bridge and surrounding areas to offer some of the reasons why this particular area is undergoing major renovations, including the new Walterdale Bridge. I also consider some of the effects of these spatial conceptions. For example, the new "shared paths" under the bridge, fulfill a need for additional "safer" running, biking and walking trails. However, as trees were removed, cement structures constructed, and certain landscaping decisions made, different communities are now prevented from living or moving as freely as they once did. For example, while the addition of carefully placed rocks under the bridge appears "natural" and visually attractive, the rocks physically prevent people from comfortably sleeping or fishing under the bridge. In a

[7] The categories of conceived, perceived and lived space are not only used to refer to colonial power.

very real sense, the rocks are used to police the bridge. While the Walterdale Bridge is advertised as "a gateway to the future," the material changes assist in controlling access to the area and in monitoring human activity in the area. The street lighting and a dynamic lighting system to illuminate the bridge's arches are meant to provide a safe and dynamic environment for its users, yet the use of these lights also contribute to the policing practices in the area. While the widening of lanes in the new Walterdale Bridge, from the previous two lanes to three lanes of northbound vehicular traffic, is said to decrease traffic jams and contribute to the use of sustainable transportation alternatives, the lack of public transit options (only one bus route crosses the bridge) makes the Walterdale Bridge accessible and useful mostly to vehicle owners and people from the nearby neighbourhoods. Even though these changes are designed to serve public needs, they demonstrate that this new Walterdale Bridge is a reiteration and amplification of colonial imposition on Indigenous land.

Perceived Space

Thinking about perceived space allows me to focus on the "spatial practices, the everyday routines and experiences that install specific social spaces" (9). Perceived space is a result of the materialization of the conceived space. While conceived space is about how the space is imagined, perceived space is about how people actually use that space. As Razack argues, in spatial practices, "the space comes to perform something in the social order, permitting certain actions and prohibiting others" (9). That is, human routines can serve to reinforce and naturalize the underlying principles of the conceived space. People engaging with a particular configuration of space organize their walks, or travels according to the roads, the paths or parks that are built up from blueprints. Some walkers from the Rossdale neighbourhood use the trail system next to the Power Plant and across the Bridge for the

Sunday morning walks. The shared-use path is used daily by bikers and walkers who wish to cross to either the North or South of Edmonton. Anyone seen acting against the given rules or regulations can be reported to the police.

Lived Space

Lastly, I consider Razack's idea of "lived space" which she explains as "directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and where the "the users of the space interpret" both "perceived" and "conceived space" (9). That is, Razack's "lived space" shows how we connect to other people and other beings from our own subjective and creative positions within a particular context. In "lived space" the impositions of perceived and conceived space are played with and acted against through individual, collective, creative, and localized acts. For example, some people use the grass as their own personal bathroom; others stand dangerously on the ice right next to the fast-flowing water; others bring shopping carts to the edge of the River and drop them in. Others leave pens, plastic wrappings and other pieces of garbage to decorate the area. Walkers create their own trails by the riverbank. Some people drink a lot and smoke near the River. Sometimes I stood on the Bridge and screamed to the wind and to the River. Once, I stayed after dark with friends. We played in the River, the lights from the Bridge shinning over our faces. Deer cross the Bridge. Soil erodes. Landslides break the paved roads. How a space is fully inhabited (beyond people following the prescribed paths) by people or other beings affects the space as much as the conceived and perceived space proscribes how people use it.

In this study, I gather different experiences from and interactions on the Bridge and its surrounding areas, to bring into focus the dynamic relationship between bodies and spaces. My methodology, my regular habit of walking over and under the Bridge, reading

its surfaces and its inhabitants, allowed me to both consider this idea of lived space and to literally "live" in the space and place of the Bridge. My everyday routines and experiences on these roads, paths, parks, trees allowed me to remap the conceived and perceived space of the Bridge and its surrounds. For me, the unexpected relations that I made on my walks, exceeded the imposed system of spatial organization as determined by the City planners, and tentatively (and so tenuously) connected the area to its pre-colonial past— a site of gathering; that is, as Pehonan. In my walks I tried to locate, to hear, to sense, how this land continues to hold that sense of gathering despite the colonial spatial mappings that the new Walterdale Bridge inscribes. Beavers stay to build lodges in the River's banks; fish swim on the North East side of the Bridge, and gulls congregate in spring and late fall. Deer have been spotted crossing the Bridge.[8] People gather to read, to talk, to drink, on the Bridge and next to the River. I collect these encounters of living beings with the material world. I do this in order to demonstrate how certain social practices produce social relations, on and around the Bridge, that are disruptive to the designs of the City planners. I find that when I connect the histories of the Bridge to the ground, the leaves, the River and the trees, I find evidence of the ways in which this land resists colonial designs.

In order to consider the Bridge further as a lived space and how that lived space of gatherings produces moments of resistance, I also read anthropology scholar, Sarah Pink and planning theorist, Tim Ingold. They help me in two ways: One, I can justify my walking methodology with Ingold's concept of "inhabitant;" that is, by walking regularly on the Bridge, I become an "inhabitant," living the Bridge, grounding my body in its

[8] In a google search of the Walterdale Bridge I found a Reddit thread that collects different images taken by people on the Walterdale Bridge. One of those entries shows a deer crossing the bridge. Link: www.reddit.com/r/Edmonton/comments/hfse7t/deer_on_walterdale_bridge_today_at_530_am/

networks of life. Two, Pink's concept of "emplacement" allows me to understand that the contextual relations that I am part of and that I observe are part of what creates the Bridge as a particular place. That is, by observing and/or by participating in the excess of its material relations, I become part of its archive of resistance.

Inhabitant

According to Ingold, inhabitant or inhabitants refer to the beings who "make their way through a world-in-formation", in a dynamic relation with the "open" world. Ingold defines the open world as a world that is "always coming into being"; that is a world of "formative and transformative processes" (1801). This world is a dynamic and interactive composition of matter. To understand this complex world, Ingold offers the term "inhabitant" to recognize the interconnectedness of every living organism. Bodies are recognized as a "tissue of knots whose constituent strands, as they become tied up with other strands in other bundles, make up the meshwork" (1806). For example, rain pours onto the land and helps plants grow. If there is a drought different living forms might die. Rain also rises water levels in rivers, oceans and lakes that benefit, or harm, fish, people and other species. The water cycle is always forming and transforming the land according to the levels of water on the ground and the amount of rain. Ingold's proposal highlights inhabitant's perception and register of these formations and transformations in the world. Inhabitants are, for example, affected by weather conditions "which affect their moods, motivations, and their movements" (1802). That is, inhabitants know and sense the world in which they live.

I become an inhabitant of the Bridge by spending time there. Day after day. On one of those snowy and windy days in Edmonton, I decided to walk to the Bridge to look at the

North Saskatchewan River. I thought it might be cold, so I wore a warm sweater, a snow jacket, a toque and snow boots. The cold air hit my nose. It felt like an old soccer injury when a ball hit my nose and I had to put ice on it before it started to swell. I covered my face and headed for shelter underneath the Bridge, looking for cover from the bitter wind, trying to keep my hair out of my eyes. I was desperate to put my hair back, clean my glasses, but my snow gloves were too big to manoeuvre. I walked as fast as I could on the salted and sand paths and finally reached the under bridge. The River was frozen. The ice was shaped like small waves of water detained temporarily in place. I saw footprints and paw prints near the edge of the River. Two legged and four legged beings playing and playful on the River's surface that, if broken, could take you away. I threw a small rock to see if it would break the surface. I threw two more across the River, but they did not land very far. I wanted to know if they made any noise as they landed but I was too cold to pay attention to their sound. My feet were starting to feel numb; my face was sweaty and uncomfortable against the cold wind I could not entirely escape. I became aware of my body within this network of living beings realized how my perception changed throughout the year according to the season. I cherish this moment now though because that weather demanded attention to the present.

Emplacement:

I also consider the term "emplacement" alongside "inhabitant" because, as interdisciplinary research-creation scholars, Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman notice in their article "A transmaterial Approach to Walking Methodologies: Embodiment, Affect and a Sonic Art Performance," Ingold tends to focus on the individual and undivided self (3). That is, he focuses on the way "inhabitants" consciously perceive and know the world,

"the interiority of the self" (6). For me, this focus continues to place the human body and experience as different from other bodies and places. In his analysis, Ingold understands place within a more traditional sense; that is, as defined by boundaries instead of relations (1808). Since he does not stress the importance of the actual material place on the comings and goings of humans and other organisms, he avoids discussing historic, social and political relations and interventions (1808). While I find that Ingold demonstrates a lack of understanding of how physical place is also responsible for how we think, engage and place ourselves with the material world, for me, Pink's term emplacement serves to dissolve the distinction between the "sensuous experiencing body and the rational mind" in explaining knowledge building and human experience (345). Although, Pink acknowledges the value of embodiment, she finds that emplacement works better help us think about the body, as an organism, within a broader context of relations. For Pink, emplacement recognizes the specificity of a place, time, and the particular environment, as well as the history, previous relations, that precedes a place-event (354). Therefore, her analysis broadens the definition of embodied knowledge to take into account the "wider ecology of things" (Pink 354) in which humans, non-humans, places, time are considered as affecting each other. For example, as an inhabitant I think about seeing and feeling snow; I can explore how I experienced and survived those freezing temperatures. However, emplacement, requires me to think about how the cold and snow might feel or be perceived by someone who grew up in Canada. I can also think about how the freezing and thawing of the River affects and informs the lives of the people and animals in Edmonton

For me, it works best if I combine the concepts of emplacement and inhabitant together to think about the dynamic and intertwined engagement that my body, as an organism, experienced within the wider ecology of the Bridge area. In order to read the

Bridge, I must consider the relations between myself, the birds and trees that surround the Bridge and how I am embedded in a particular context of intertwined Indigenous and Non-Indigenous histories of the land. I am also inserted in the present context of settler colonial expansion within Treaty 6 territory and within the ongoing disputes with Indigenous Nations over Indigenous lands. I can note the effects of the weather— the snow, the cold— on my body to think about the following questions:

What are the effects of these elemental conditions on my way of thinking about this place? They take me out of my comfort zone. The act of walking requires a sort of ritual where I need to consciously and actively prepare myself for the outside. In this ritual I layer up and mentally prepare myself for the first draft of cold wind.

How do I react to these events?

I feel exposed and try to hide. My vulnerability feeds my body differently than when I feel exposed in the streets of Mexico City. In Mexico, my body feels exposed to unwanted attention. I feel stressed and anxious when I go out. I am exposed to the normalized gender social relations that make the materiality of place fade into the background. I try to blend, make my body unnoticeable, in order to survive. In Edmonton, being exposed to the weather activates a different reaction. The cold makes me focus primarily on my body's temperature and on how to keep warm. The act to preserve body temperature helps to recognize the body primarily as part of the material and interconnecting relations of the place.

How do I understand the effects of this cold within the history and current relations between Indigenous Nations, Non-Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous lands? In feeling the freezing temperatures, I begin to understand how important it is to establish a community and relationships to survive these conditions. I understand why settlers needed help to

survive and, when they had adapted to the cold, began exploiting the land, saw that they did not need the Indigenous Nations anymore.

I extend my perception to think about the wider ecology that constitutes this particular place. How do these elemental conditions affect peoples' routines, by modifying the actual place? How are socially constructed spaces challenged and transformed by these conditions? For example, the cold strikes differently each Winter. Depending on temperature, people may visit the Bridge, or simply travel over it by car or bus. The trails are covered in snow; sometimes the sand and salt do not seem enough to keep the well-defined paths visible to its users. Here, other spatial practices occur. Usually, people cut through the snowed over grassy sections to make the journey shorter. Sometimes I chose the snowier paths to feel and to hear the snow crumble beneath my feet. I like feeling stuck momentarily in the snow. Sometimes I fall into it. Always, I leave my small footprints behind for others to see. The snow makes the ground of this place a blank slate that I can draw on.

In order to really reflect on the changes and effects that a particular environment has on the body, I need to turn to my own memories of my home—Mexico City. As Ingold and Pink argue, the body is affected and changed by the different components in its environment. Due to the fact that I was not born in Canada, my body is always connected to Mexico. My memories and experiences of Mexico are affected by my interactions with the new environments of Edmonton and the Bridge and vice versa. Particularly, living and learning from within the contexts of two places helps me better understand what place might mean for other immigrants like me. Those of us who have relocated to Canada to pursue a better life, we might criticize, and seek alternatives to, the socially constructed spaces in which we find ourselves—both in our home country and in Canada. Mexico City

has always been a relatively unsafe place. Being in that same place for most of my life meant that I had naturalized, despite being against, the level of violence and danger that people experience in Mexico. Living in Edmonton did not eradicate my exposure to violence but rather showed me other ways to protest against this violence. It also showed me an active and relational community that found different ways to promote life and living against oppression.

Space and Place

Through these three categories of space, conceived, perceived and lived, I explore the legal, cultural and social practices that have configured the spaces of the Bridge, Rossdale Flats and the Memorial. I employ Razack's extended definitions of space and place to understand how naturalization occurs and how legal, cultural and social practices create particular national identities. In reference to nationhood, Razack argues that national stories are always about "a nation's origins and history" and that they enable "citizens to think of themselves as part of a community, defining who belongs and who does not belong to the nation" (2). The national mythologies of white settlers' societies tend to focus and reproduce a national identity in "deeply spatialized stories" (2); that is, European settlement has depended on the stories that depict the land as "empty" and "uninhabited", in order to deny Indigenous histories and land claims, and Canada's nationhood is, in part, based on a narrative of *terra nullius*. That is, as the story goes, skilled and self-reliant British subjects arrived to find a relatively empty land where they were able to work hard and virtuously. Through their perseverance, the white settler brought liberty and democracy to an uncivilized land and people (3-4). This narrative erases many facts: that the land was not empty; that hundreds of highly sophisticated Indigenous Nations inhabited Turtle Island for

thousands of years prior; that initially the settlers relied on Indigenous peoples to survive; that the Crown made treaty agreements to share the land; that these treaties have not been honored and that Indigenous peoples and Nations continue to inhabit these lands, illegally occupied by settlers.

As Razack argues, white settler stories confine Indigenous peoples to history (in space and time) and trap them "in the pre-modern, that is, before civilization has occurred" (2). These stories conceptually configure spaces that "segregate, contain, and thereby limit the rights and opportunities of Aboriginal people and people of color" (17) and anyone else deemed different. As I understand Razack, a result of this conceptually conceived (storied) space, place is the material manifestation of the literal arrangement of settler bodies on the land, and through this arrangement it "keep[s]at bay and in place any who would threaten [the settler] sense of mastery" (12). That is, "othered" bodies are given a particular social status and relegated to a material location that separates and contains them away from the white settlements in which they are not allowed to live. Indigenous peoples were not only displaced from their lands but also detained in particular places, such as reservations, which naturalized their separation from their rightful territories, their legal systems and their relation to the land. Conversely, within this context, white settler bodies are defined by their privileged position as a universal subject (13). This universal subjectivity permits white subjects to shape the environment to their advantage. They are able to move to non-European spaces where, through strategic colonial interventions, they interrupt the lives of Indigenous and illegally occupy their lands.

As a result, the white settlers come to know themselves as civilized, superior individuals, embodying the nation's values and ideals (13). The resulting hierarchical difference where settlers have defined themselves as superior allows them to establish their

own legal and political systems which they must teach to "save" the othered bodies (14). Thus, places are named and made—constructed to look innocent, despite the violent racialization processes that have been foundational.

Resistance to this apparent innocence requires denaturalization and the unmapping of spaces. As Razack argues, "explor[ing] space as a social product, uncovering how bodies are produced in spaces and how spaces produce bodies" requires "an interrogation of how subjects come to know themselves in and through space and within multiple systems of domination" (17). For example, exploring spaces produced by colonial law, might help to understand how Indigenous spaces have been made into settler spaces. Through the colonial articulation of Indigenous space as lawless, and savage, in need of colonial law, other settler systems like heteropatriarchy, monogamy, the division of human and nature, also sustain the racialization of bodies. The result is not only the displacement of Indigenous communities from their land, but the enforcement of a settler's social, political, economic structures. Therefore, considering social space as a product of colonialism helps me explore how certain social practices continuously reinscribe these spaces as colonial. The recurrent renewal and re-zoning projects of the Rossdale Flats area, including the structure of the new Bridge and the surrounding parks, are colonial designs of settler spaces that have resulted in particular places. Although apparent activities planned here seem innocent, like walking and sightseeing, they should be considered within the wider systems of domination in which white settlement and white settler presence are naturalized. The everyday activities that take place on the Bridge function within a wider network of economic, political and social interests and thus, what appears to be innocent space is

actually the result of colonizing structures that have made land into property[9] and have defined the sort of bodies, and practices, that can legally exist in these spaces. For example, over the years, a great deal of effort has been made to prohibit unhoused people from sleeping under the Bridge and to prevent Indigenous peoples from entering the EPCOR plant to reclaim their buried relatives from the traditional burial ground within (a demand that has been made over the years). The Walterdale Bridge, EPCOR and even, to some extent, the memorial, assert the normalcy of white settler bodies in place and naturalize settler use of the land as private property, parks, community streets, open spaces, parking lots, and highways.

Yet, noting how the colonial construction of "normal" and "abnormal" bodies (Razack 11), socially circumscribed practices, and colonial impositions are disrupted in everyday life might offer us insights into other ways of being. Theorizing space allows me to consider the day-to-day experiences of people engaging with the Bridge, and their surroundings, and the ways in which these engagements, where they walk, where they sit, might disrupt the naturalization of colonialism and capitalist conditions, including the moves to innocence that place allows settler bodies. This is what happens especially when I approach the literal place of the Bridge, thinking through the work of Indigenous scholars like Eve Tuck and Marcia Mackenzie. When I consider, the Bridge as a literal, localized, interactive and dynamic site that changes according to flows of people and species shifting over time and space (4), the colonial story destabilizes.

[9] In a conversation with Selena Couture the documentary film, otenaw was discussed to consider why Indigenous and settler relations went wrong. The word e-mâyikamikahk is used by Donald in this film to mark this particular moment.

Land-based Approach to Place

Tuck and McKenzie center the need to engage with the material reality of place. Unlike Razack who focuses mostly on language and institutions and underestimates the importance of the material reality, Tuck and McKenzie define place as literal, mobile and relational, as changing through time and space (4). For me, considering place fluid, helps to flood the colonial lens through which spaces and land are viewed. Cherokee geographer Jay T. Johnson's article "Place-based learning and knowing critical pedagogies grounded in Indigeneity", helps me read the Bridge as place or as "a location endowed with meaning" (830), a place of storied histories, cosmogonies, philosophies and sciences of Indigenous knowledges (829). From the Bridge, the Papaschase Cree, Blackfoot, Plains Cree, Edmonton Stragglers Band,[10] Enoch First Nation, and Saddle Lake First Nations and Métis, are in my view. The area now known as Edmonton has always been an important site for Indigenous peoples. The Cree fished in the North Saskatchewan River, built birchbark canoes that they would later use to travel down the river to York Factory on Hudson Bay (Harold Kalman et. al. 38). Métis families used to provide casual and seasonal labor and, some, settled close to trading posts (43). The Papaschase Cree history is also key to exploring Rossdale and surrounding areas as they were one of the communities that lived in the Rossdale area, traded at the Fort and, after the signing of their treaty (South of the River) were forcibly and illegally removed and separated into other reserves—such as Enoch First Nation, Saddle Lake First Nation. To approach these stories, I begin what Johnson calls a "journey of ontological discovery" (10). I immerse myself in place and

[10] The Papaschase Cree that decided to remain in their territories, despite governments pressure, were considered outlaws by the government, and were named the Edmonton Stragglers Band. (Chief Bruneau 7)

connect my experiences, my senses, and my history to the stories, histories and that make up the Bridge and its surrounding areas in order to "understand [its] living, dynamic, changing environment" (10). I also approach place as way of knowing and learning about the world, where place is "performed and (re) shaped through practices and movements of individuals and collectives" (3). I carry out this exploration from an embodied and localized perspective, understanding that the knowledge, and histories, I receive and represent from being and living in place are only small fragments of a more complex and dynamic whole. An important project that has also guided my exploration of place, in a way that critiques and resists settler naturalization practices, is the Edmonton Pipelines Project. The Edmonton Pipelines Project is a collection of digital maps and literary provocations created by 5 professors (Daniel Laforest, Heather Zwicker, Maureen Engel and Russell Cobb) and student researchers (Erika Luckert, Joyce Yu, Samia Pedraca, Luciano Frizzera, Anna Sajecki, Katherine Krohn) whose objectives were to create an interactive digital framework for urban storytelling. One of the "Pipelines," which "stands for ways of channeling understanding through dense city space" is centered on the Rossdale area. The Rossdale "Pipeline" aims to "make the past visible in the present, so that Rossdale's diverse narratives can be read simultaneously" (Zwicker et al. 376). Through poetry, data and technologies of mapping, the project aims to analyze how "the twin vectors of capitalism and colonialism have created Western Canadian cityspace" (Zwicker et al. 375). Through a critical cartographic reading of colonial mappings, this project offers a counter-mapping in which "the largely colonial instrument of the map can be subverted to reveal other landscapes that are concealed by our more conventional representations of geography" (Zwicker et al. 378). In the Rossdale counter-mapping strategies project, the use of topological images of the past and the present Rossdale demonstrate the ways in which the

concepts of capital and property have literally distorted the land. That is, the average home value has increased over time, making the land only "hospitable to the wealthy" and uninhabitable for most Edmontonians, especially Indigenous peoples (384).

Ultimately, the multidisciplinary approach and play with form, format and research creates spaces for other kinds of research on and about place that privilege engagement and relationality. This is the purpose of my own project as well.

By considering the relationships that were established between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and by paying close attention to the history of Rossdale Flats and this portion of the River as a site of trade and gathering, I explore both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous historical accounts to better understand how each history shifts the new Bridge and my connections to it. As I share the relations that the Bridge allows me to be a part of, I try to demonstrate the ways in which the material place itself inspires relational, responsible and respectful relations that resist valuing property over life. I think that this is what Springgay and Truman mean by an "ethico-political engagement" (4). This engagement, I believe, is key to imagining decolonial practices and decolonial worlds. By looking at Treaty 6 from an Indigenous perspectives, from the Bridge, I find an agreement of reciprocity and familial obligations and locate a particular ethico-political engagement. Additionally, as I also consider the settler history of Treaty 6 from the Bridge, alongside the life of the celebrated businessman John Walter (after who the bridge is named), I find stories that highlight capitalist value of property and ownership, which conceive of land and its relations according to Western values of progress and development.

Staying focused on place, staying in place (on or under or beside the Bridge) allows me to better understand what maintaining an ethico-political engagement might be. In Tuck and McKenzie's place-based research, they argue that postcolonial theories and theories of

coloniality only address two forms of colonialism, external and internal[11], both of which do not consider place because to "do so would require consideration of genocide" (5). Yet genocide must be considered in their formulation of settler colonial nations. That is because colonial nations are "total and require a mode of total appropriation of Indigenous land and life" (5). Settler colonial nations require "ongoing displacement and dispossession of people in relation to land" (3). Removing Indigenous peoples from their land strips them of their identities, because they are being removed from the place in which they formed their communities and where they learned to live with and from the land. For Tuck and McKenzie place-based research is essential because it requires that we acknowledge Indigenous epistemological, ontological, cosmological relationships to the land. Instead of the economic validity of place that drives settler colonialism, place, for Tuck and McKenzie, is a site of relational validity composed of, and resonating with "humans life's connection to and dependency on other species and the land" (4), I look for these relationships. I find them in Indigenous stories of Treaty 6. I find them in the place known as Pehonan, the nêhiyawak name given to the Rossdale Flats area (meaning Gathering Place). I find them in Papaschase Cree historian Dwayne Donald's article "Edmonton Pentimento: Re-Reading History in the Case of the Papaschase Cree." In this work Donald reclaims the history of his own Papaschase Cree family and critiques the history of settlement in Canada. By peeling back layers of memory, Donald re-reads his own history against the official history of the city of Edmonton, as a way to "tease out that which has

[11] For Tuck and Yang, external colonialism is the "expropriation of fragments of Indigenous worlds, animals, plants and human beings, extracting them in order to transport them" to the empire and profit from them (4). Internal colonialism is the management of people, flora, fauna and land to "ensure the ascendancy of a nation and its white elite" (Tuck and Yang 5)

been obscured and forgotten, to peel back the layers of official Canadian history and memory obscuring it" (23).

Chief Calvin Bruneau's "Papaschase Proposal for the Settlement of the Unlawful Surrender of Papaschase I.R #136" is also an important piece in my place-based research. He also explores the Indigenous history of Rossdale Flats, particularly looking at the signed treaty agreements, the conditions that made this agreement possible and the resulting unlawful removal of Papaschase Cree from their traditional and treaty lands. Additionally, Cree Rights Attorney, Sharon Venne's account of Treaty 6 demonstrates the illegal ways in which settlers became owners of the land despite the land sharing agreements made (202). Listing the ways in which Treaty 6 is based in respectful and mutually beneficial agreements, Venne brings into focus how the settlers dishonored and continue to dishonour treaty obligations, silencing Indigenous histories and centering stories that better serve colonial interests (206).

Turtle Mountain Ojibwe political scientist Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark's article "Criminal Empire: The Making of the Savage in a Lawless Land", extends Venne's argument by studying the transformation of treaties from relationships to land cession contracts which served to impose colonial law, drawing the boundaries of both settler law and nation "by judicially proclaiming their own criminal behaviors as lawful". The colonial move to legally validate criminal settler actions translates into a radical remapping of territory, in legal, spatial terms, that naturalizes settler presence in the lands. How have the old and new Bridges participated in this rewriting of the land, parsing it into public and private spaces, naturalizing illegal settler presence?

Focusing on Indigenous scholarship, mapping the different material and symbolic strategies that have been implemented in an attempt to transition from a colonial past to a

supposedly different future, I locate symbolic strategies within the context of the new Bridge. These include: the limited legal recognition of Indigenous presence, the slow replacement of the older Bridge's history with a new history, and the complicated and limited process of public consultation. These strategies later turn into material colonizing interventions with the removal of soil, trees and birds, as well as the removal of Indigenous remains (Goyette and Roemmich 36). These strategies make and remake this place so that the history of settlement continues to be naturalized.

By focusing on (prioritizing) Indigenous stories of this place, and taking into account my own position, I try to resist settler spatial designs. When I encounter, in this literal place, the elements, the pigeons, myself, Indigenous histories and stories, I can imagine space and place differently. Ultimately, my initial question that guided my project was: can the new Bridge be a colonial and colonizing space and place as well as a site that embodies decolonizing imaginings and practices? I think that it can.

My Form

I believe my walking shapes this work as a research-creation project that engages theory through a creative exploration and that allows me to reconsider the process of naturalization. The openness and flexibility of the creative process allows me to think and express ideas about space and place through formats that reflect my particular position and perspective in relation to Edmonton. I believe art is essential to imagine new ways of being that exist outside of colonialism. Art is flexible and open to explore concepts that can describe and not prescribe reality. So, I utilize the term research-creation to underscore the importance of art in the process of thinking or, as Springgay and Truman argue: "instead of perpetuating an idea of art as separate from thinking, the hyphenation of research-creation

engenders ‘concepts in-the-making’ which is a process of ‘thinking-with and across techniques of creative practice” (2). In my project, I utilize different formats, such as diary entries, visuals, and poetic entries, to think-with and across the Bridge, allowing thoughts, experiences and feelings to move my thinking freely across different frameworks. The diary, for example, allows me to informally engage with the Bridge, its history and my own honest and uncensored perceptions of colonially constructed spaces. This form offers a safe space to explore and learn from doubts and anxieties about my own methodology, my perspective and my relationships to other bodies, other voices and other perspectives.

I also use photographs to place myself within the reality of the actual Bridge and, later, within the reality of Mexico City. Through images, I am able to capture and “read” my different contexts. I am also able to represent and describe the Bridge from different and particular angles, inspired by something that stands out to me—a discarded jacket or the frozen River. In my mind, the catalogue of images, and the moments they represented, create a memory of the place that keeps me connected to Edmonton, even now that I am in Mexico City. Lastly, the poetic entries allow me a freer association of words where I can engage with, and read, place through sound, images, feelings, dreams and memories. Creative interventions have the potential to imagine and create something else; hopefully, this project offers that possibility as well.

Although this project is told from my perspective, I also aspire to “move beyond an individual and sensuous account of the body in space” (Springgay and Truman 4) to a more fluent and relational conceptualization of the body within an enmeshed network of bodies “in a messy and shifting ontology” (3). Personally, I do not believe in an undivided and individual self. Rather, I engage with “disassemble[d] and disturb[ed] taxonomies . . . to confound the notion of an embodied, coherent self” (3). Disregarding the so-called

universal subject, including its many socially constructed spaces, seems important to bring into focus the interconnected tissues that bind humans together to all living forms. I want to use my experiences on the Bridge, particularly focusing on my senses, for example on how the wind and the River feel, sound, look, smell at any given moment, in order to compose a series of points of relation between me and other life forces.

To Begin in Place: An Introduction to The Walterdale Bridge

The Walterdale Bridge is a *place*

I can find it on a map of Edmonton

It crosses the North Saskatchewan River

It connects north and south of Edmonton

It is a new addition to the skyline

It is made of Korean steel,

125-tonne puzzle pieces,[12]

42 pieces

To be put together

Concrete deck and steel arches

Thrust-block foundations

Buried 20 meters underground

Cables tightened one by one

A race against the freezing River.

The Bridge is a place

That people have constructed out of

Drilling, welding, pulling

Piecing together those 58 holes

To its anchors,

Making nation

[12] References to the Bridge's material were taken from: Stolte, Elise. "Building new Walterdale Bridge like assembling puzzle made with 125-tonne pieces" *Edmonton Journal.* 5 Jan 2017. Accessed 29 Mar 2021.

Out of imported materials

This place is part of the city of Edmonton

A new place to look at the River

To sit on white painted benches

Against cold wind

But

The Bridge is a space as well.

Well, made up of several spaces

Made for what the City considers to be leisure, for what the City considers to be fun,

For walking and running

For crossing and enjoying the River

No sleeping though

It is a public space, as they are called,

Normal

Part of the scenery.

But

let's think of the Bridge,

Not only as a place on the map

A place that serves to cross and connect north and south

Of Edmonton

But also,

As a socially constructed space and the result of a series of displacements and replacements

A socially constructed space that demonstrates certain principles of organization that reveal who is and who is not of value

The ground, the land, the people and their histories

Of bodies driven away, of land being rearranged

Into lots,

parking lots, public lots, private lots

These principles now define

who lives in the area,

who gets to sleep close by legally/safely housed

who sleeps here illegally and in precarity

And who is forgotten.

These spaces have been made

To displace others

That are not white, that are not

For these places anymore

This Indigenous place, Pehonan to some,

Traditional burial grounds, gathering grounds as well

Now a public space, for people to walk on

To bike on, a layer of newer cement ground

To cover the past

No history, but new beginnings

No removal but re-zoning

No Indigenous peoples but rebranding of the City's identity

Not knowing what it took to make the Walterdale Bridge

An innocent place.

Let me tell you about this place, though. There are stories everywhere. I see two geese, walking together. To them, nothing can be forbidden. Signs impeding certain activities hold no power over them. They have returned to this land despite the "under-construction" signs stuck in the snow, bits of green showing through. This is new grass, showing under this spring snow, settling into the new soil, overlooking the River. The geese are exploring—the newer greens and the smaller trees. They are unfazed by the speed of mountain bikes rolling through.

Maybe land cannot be simply claimed as property by building new bridges.

Maybe land cannot be held only by a few wealthy people that seek to exploit it. More parks, more trails, more roads, more cars, more, more, more.

Geese are great at reminding us that we are not as entitled as they are to the land. They are able to walk and fly wherever they please. Even as they see me, they are unbothered by my presence. To them, I am no one. They swagger together on and off the grass, leaving their prints in the grass and the snow.

Fig. 3. Geese Gathering. My photo.

Mexico is similar in some ways.

Mexico is legally identified as

A pluricultural country

Accepting all Indigenous peoples

Equality for all!

Mexico is a place that wants to forget

Its colonial history but

Holds Indigenous crafts:

Huichol art, from Jalisco,

Alebrijes from Oaxaca

Huipiles from Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca,

As their identity.

Mexico cannot acknowledge

That *mestizaje* was not a nation spread occurrence.

No matter how Spanish some might be

There is more story to be told.

Mexican identity, if there is such a thing,

Does not respect Indigenous communities' voices.

Governments ignore their rights, their political voice

Making their rural lands spaces to contain them

To silence and forget them

Keeping them away

from the so- called developing nation

called Mexico.

A good way to see how physical place exceeds socially constructed spaces is to look at Mexico City's sidewalks. Trees grow underneath these sidewalks, breaking through the cement paths in order to grow. The city, and entire neighborhoods, prefer to chop down the trees or the branches to maintain an order, but even then, there is no possible order that can detain this place. The earth itself shifts. Buildings collapse when unexpected earthquakes occur. Tectonic plates move; the land breaks. On September 19th, 2017 at 1:14pm, an

earthquake with a magnitude of 8.0 changed the everyday routines in Mexico City. According to relatives and friends, the earthquake felt like the world was crumbling at their feet. They are still on edge today when the seismic alarm goes off. I was in Edmonton. I did not live through that trauma. I guess that high seismic areas combined with poorly or illegally constructed buildings without the proper structures made so many buildings collapse. The earthquake reminds us that we are temporarily placed in this reality. According to reporter Olinka Valdés, civil protection coordinator, Luis Felipe Puente, confirmed 369 deaths. Yet this was not the deadliest earthquake in Mexico. In 1985, an earthquake of the same magnitude killed at least 10,000 people. The date was September 19th. I remember my dad telling me about the pain of seeing his home and family wrecked by this natural event. I remember hoping that I would never experience such loss. I remember trying to imagine what the city must have looked like filled with rubble, bricks and people walking on traffic lanes. I never wanted this to happen again. And it did. On September 19th, 2017. I was alone, in Canada and far away from my family. I felt shattered. I thought about how many people had lived both earthquakes and had lost someone. I realized how little we can control the world. Socially constructed spaces cannot guarantee that security that private property promises. The ground/the land resists.

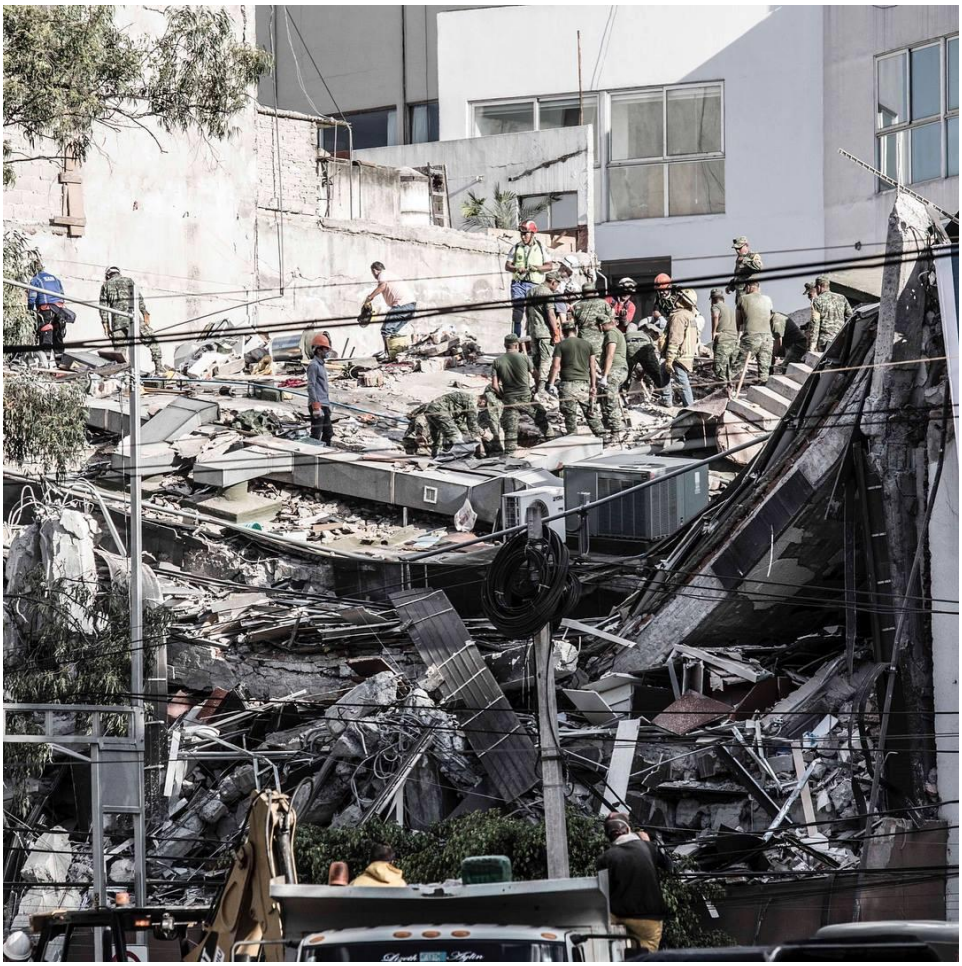

Fig. 4. Day of the Earthquake. (Narayana).

As soon as the ground began to settle, people offered to help anyone who was in need. Food and water were shared to anyone who volunteered to remove rubble. People brought shovels and helmets to share. People organized as if they had always known each other because, in Mexico, we are a family in the darkest times. This temporarily shifted everything. The top priority became removing as much debris as possible to reach anyone who might be stuck underneath the fallen buildings. It took a month or two before there was any kind of normalcy. Even today, buildings that need to be removed or remodeled still stand with old “do not cross” signs taped to the windows and doors. At least, for a while, our responsibility towards one another was honored. Words and laughter were exchanged during difficult times. The

material reality of our place, of this city, continues to shift our constructed spaces, continues to challenge our individualistic ways of living. After the earthquake, Mexico City was reimagined as a place of community and supportive relationships. Even after the disaster, so much was salvaged.

Thinking in place: Influences and New Ways of Living

In my first year at the University of Alberta, I was challenged to think about nature through a physical and lyrical interaction, engaging knowledge not only through reason and logic but also through emotion and experience. The class "Canadian Texts: Nature, Wilderness, Ecology" taught by Sarah Krotz, a literary scholar whose main interests are ecological relationships and natural histories in Canada, introduced a physical engagement to reading and writing about a place. In every class, we walked to the river valley, and gathered in a circle. We shared our thoughts; we read poetry to the sound of leaves and birds flying and singing. Sometimes, we would pick a spot nearby and tried to find something that caught our attention. We could choose something based on its color, its texture, its sound or anything that attracted us to it. Choosing became a playful and evocative routine that, with time, opened up how I approached knowledge and allowed me to explore different ways of communicating and sharing within a small community.

The course highlighted the need to incorporate the experience in the world to our reading and thinking about literature, but also to our thinking about how we live within the different networks that we are a part of, not only as students in this particular university, but also as individuals walking these treaty grounds, surrounded by trees, and other living and non-living entities that have been here for years. This practice resonates with Ingold's

inhabitant as someone who, through observation and intervention, is able to recognize the interconnectedness of every living being. I was able to recognize my physical presence in this new city through observing the interconnecting tissues between the ground, the rooted and uprooted trees, the different singing birds and the colonies of fungi that exist together in the riverbanks close to the Bridge. Reading this particular experience through emplacement, as taking into account the wider ecology, I was able to understand how the particular relationship between the shade provided by the trees, the proximity to the particular sound of the River and the leaves rustling against the wind, provides the conditions for each body to be present and to engage with other bodies. Through those moments of experiencing the riverbanks with a particular community of people, I recognize the material conditions that create this particular place. In a way, these sessions became an interesting starting point to explore the history and present of this place.

The first object I chose to share with the group was a red, medium-sized branch which I had never seen in Mexico City before. I did not research it at the time, but the red branch that I took was from a redosier dogwood, also known as red willow, a small shrub that is common in Alberta. According to the University of Alberta's *Indigenous Teaching & Learning Gardens* website, redosier dogwood's bark and leaves are used in tobacco mixtures in pipe ceremonies as well as for medicinal purposes and for making certain tools. This type of shrub is found in the north, extending as far south as northern Mexico. The object, the red branch, I took from the river valley, introduced me to the traditional pipe ceremonies, which historically and currently open negotiations between different nations as a way for "good talk to take place" (Asikinack). According to Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia, a meeting started with a pipe ensures truth and respect and guarantees that all agreements made are honoured (Asikinack). I was only beginning my journey in

Edmonton and in the simple act of wandering curiously on the land I encountered an important being that held the history of that place. Through these explorations, Edmonton became a palpable location.

Walking on my own, or for my class, engaged me physically with the roots, the leaves, the branches that I found on the ground. I began to know the river valley through my hands and feet.

Fig.5. During Winter the Redosier Dogwood Stands Out. My photo.

I remember a similar experience in Mexico City, when I visited the Ajusco national park. I regularly visited one of its designated spaces, walked among the trees and, for a moment, took some time away from the everyday life. It was a place I visited with my parents when I was younger and then visited again with friends when I was older. Usually in areas like

the Ajusco, cellphone signal is unavailable, so people can get away from the fast-paced city life.

Fig. 6. Ajusco National Park. My photo.

As shown on the picture, Ajusco can be surrounded by trees, but there is usually a field or two that have been made into soccer fields, quad bike circuits, horseback riding areas, among other activities run by the local community. To me, this experience of being with nature was as close as I had ever been, and even then, I was surrounded by flattened out grounds made into soccer fields. Camping on the area was allowed but this activity never appealed to me. My experience and understanding of nature and myself in this world were shaped by this very clear division between the urban city, and the outskirts of the city.

In Edmonton, the experience was vastly different. A short walk from the university and I was already looking at the River, hearing the wind shaking the leaves. I could see

unrestrained nature as part of my everyday routine. Walking the River Valley, across the Bridge to Rossdale expressed city life as necessarily intertwined with nature, both equally important to the experience of living in the City of Edmonton. The different ground levels, result of the floods and precipitation, the challenges of walking in between the trees' roots and piles of leaves, the discarded objects that are sometimes found in the riverbanks, including bedding, chairs, couches, rocks and fallen trees, made me acutely aware of the new materials of the place that I was learning to live with and feel comfortable in. These finds also reminded me of the common things I used to see in Mexico, like the jacarandas and cacti, and the discarded clothing, bedding, couches, blankets, umbrellas that people leave where they sleep. Missing and remembering these forms put into perspective how people live and experience both places, whether they were born in Mexico and migrated to Canada, if their family moved to Canada before they were born, or if they were born in Canada and sometimes visited Mexico during the holidays. I realized how each one's relation to where they come from, and how they are positioned in the new place they inhabit, translates into their way of living on a place they visit or settle in. Mexico City, where nature and city are divided, framed my engagement with Edmonton. I tried to unconsciously make my living in Edmonton similar to life in Mexico City, failing to grasp that the tools I had gathered to survive in Mexico did not apply to Edmonton. My nostalgia and constant yearning for Mexico City made me much more aware of the particularities that Edmonton had. Interactions with these new materials, new places, began to undo the taken-for-granted practices I had gathered from socially constructed spaces in Mexico, realizing that there really are very different ways to live and engage with places. Particularly, the experiences shared with friends, colleagues and teachers, near the River and the Bridge

acted across time and space and put into perspective my life in Edmonton and in Mexico City.

When the semester ended, I began to explore other areas in a similar way, in the end always drifting back to the Bridge, my source of comfort in the roughest days. The Bridge with its imposing white arcs, cemented on the north and south edge of the River, was a reminder of Mexico City's traffic noise, traffic lights and skyscrapers. Although the proximity to the Saskatchewan River was a new experience, this Bridge was the closest I had felt to Mexico City. The fact that the Bridge was new to Edmonton, as I was, became a source of comfort as it seemed that both of us were finding, and making, our place here.

Pehonan

The old Bridge that spanned the River at the place once known (and still known by some) as Pehonan, was originally designed for horse drawn carts. The New Bridge is composed of 5 lanes for cars. The expansion of the EPCOR power plant, the growing pollution in the air, the River, as well as the series of different floods have changed the land. Settler intervention has had a great impact on how people relate to this land and its history. Different changes implemented since the signing of Treaty 6 have obscured Indigenous history as well as that of the animals, plants, trees and the land. The City of Edmonton has obscured how important all these beings and relations are to life and living and instead highlights a dependency on the oil industry, and economic growth and prosperity. Métis scholar Zoe Todd critiques the new projects planned for Pehonan, also known as Rossdale Flats. In her article, "You call it Rossdale, we call it Pehonan", Todd expresses her anger towards the newer development projects she sees as "breathless, greedy and historically and culturally tone deaf" to the sacred area of Pehonan. If these projects actually intended the

best future use of the land, then they would acknowledge it as an Indigenous space and would acknowledge its history, through "the most amazing, audacious, humble, respectful approaches that we can muster" (Todd). In her mind, these projects seek to maintain discourses of property instead of actually seeking to honor the collective, and historical, connections that people have to Pehonan, as the birthplace of the city. Ceremonies were held here, families lived, traded and gathered here—for, at least, thousands of years.

Donald proposes that in order to examine the history of Edmonton, we must consider that mainstream interpretations of an official history have "painted over" Indigenous histories before and after contact. The separation of Indigenous histories from Canadian history is one of legacies of colonialism that continues to "displace or replace Aboriginal history and memory (as the history of Canada) with a new "painting" of a civilization" ("Edmonton Pentimento" 23). Donald considers that history must be seen as dynamic, constituted by a mixture of layers, each layer influencing our perceptions of it (24). To explore the different layers requires us to do *pentimento* which is to "pull back those things obscuring our perceptions of an idea, explore the place for a while, and pay closer attention to the ways the place has changed over the years" ("Edmonton Pentimento" 24). Understanding that this history is layered, painted over and constantly being influenced by these changes "requires us to mix many different stories as a way to try to fill the different conceptual holes that become evident as the story is created" ("Edmonton Pentimento" 49). Exploring the Bridge and its history requires that I look into different layers, histories, perceptions in order to provide a fragmentary but combined story of Pehonan.

I walk the Bridge with the idea of looking at the different stories that are located in Pehonan. The land was changed to make the old Bridge. It was changed again to replace the

old Bridge for a new one. I think about the planners, construction workers, architects who were involved in the project. I wonder if they were thinking about Indigenous peoples while they were working. Did they think about the unmarked locations, unmarked burial grounds and the many remains that have been found throughout the years? Did they put up each piece of metal, each layer of cement, each rock thinking about all the people who crossed this River, fished in its water and traded on its banks? Can the space still be special if people don't know or care about it? Are there other ways to use the land without covering up its history?

For future projects, Todd believes that there are other ways to approach these changes, to create projects that address current necessities, like housing, while also honoring the land. Todd states: "what did the people who used this space for all those years think about this space. Why was it special? how do we honour that?" I walk along the Bridge and wonder if it *is* still special and why. As I walk, I see pigeons nesting underneath the bridge, in between the deck and on the cement block holding the bridge. I see people reading together. I see mallards diving into the water. I see someone trying to fish on the rocks near the Bridge. I see people throwing rocks at the river. I see different moments where changes in spaces have not affected the way people go about their day, the way the River flows, the way geese walk. I cannot exactly describe what makes this place special, but I can share other moments when the different elements of the space simply seemed to exist and live, relationally, together.

Fig. 7. The Bridge from the South of Edmonton. My photo.

The image above is the Bridge from Saskatchewan Drive, from a street located on the south of Edmonton. The Bridge, regardless of where you are looking at it from, tends to stand out. Its white metallic structure accompanied by multi-colored lighting tends to draw people's attention to this new attraction. This view of the Bridge making Edmonton's skyline, reminded me of my city life experience in Mexico. Able to explore the unfamiliar through something I felt somehow familiar allowed me to compare both cities but then explore Edmonton through its particular material and social configurations.

Fig. 8. Mexico City. My photo.

The photo above is from Mexico City's elevated tollway meant to improve traffic flow. From here you can see the faraway mountains and the entire city. The similar skyscrapers and roads served to make Edmonton a bit more familiar. The sounds of machines which were moving gravel, digging holes on the ground to make the Walterdale Bridge, was only the beginning of a list of sounds, smells, sights and feelings that brought Mexico City back to me. For me, looking at these places now is like looking through different lenses that I travel back and forth from as I think about living in place and what that means for how I engage with socially constructed spaces in Edmonton and in Mexico. In Edmonton I was made aware of the politics that compelled me to leave Mexico and decide to seek a better life in Canada. In a way, coming back to Mexico is my way of learning from Indigenous lands and knowledges, and honouring what I have learned and need to learn now.

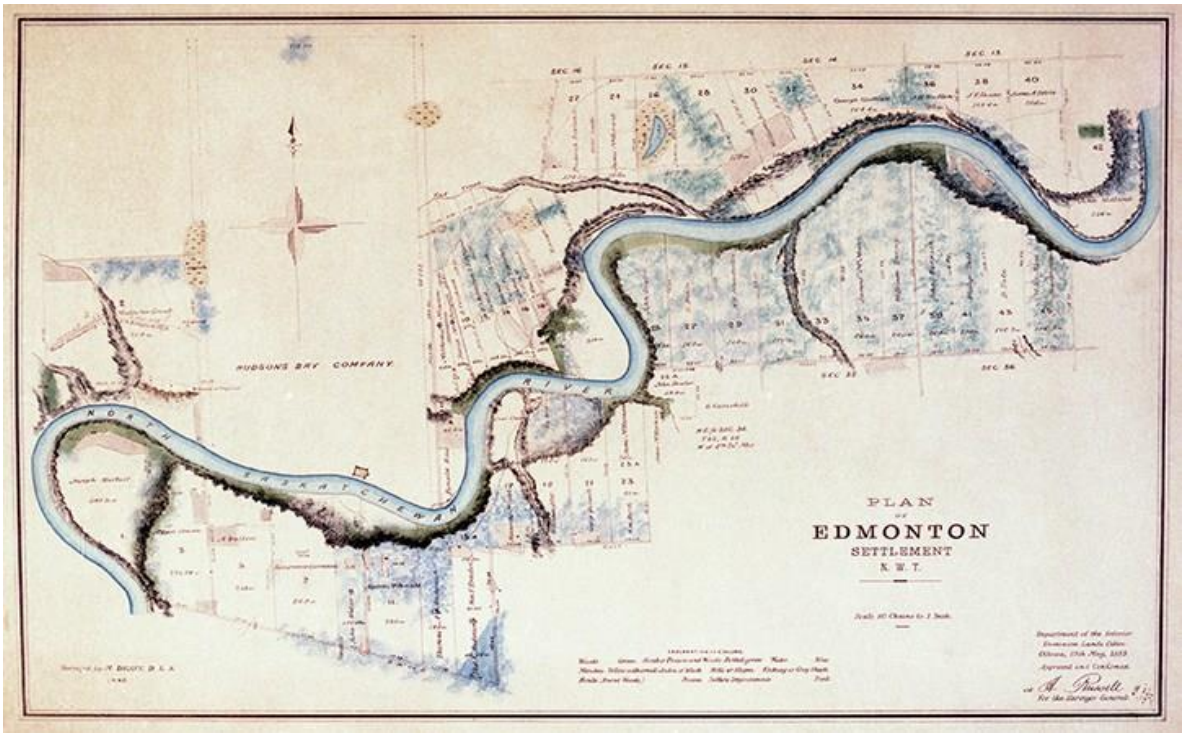

Fig. 9. Plan of Edmonton Settlement circa 1882. Image courtesy of the City of Edmonton Archives EAM-85 (Thompson).[13]

To understand Edmonton, it is necessary to look into the history of Treaty 6. Relationships between First Nations and European settlers began before the signing of treaties but were deeply affected by the signing of the treaty. Most historical accounts of treaty, and history of Canada in general, focus on the Crown's authority, disregarding Indigenous authority, political structures and historical accounts. In "Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous perspective", Venne offers the perspective of her Elders and attributes the misunderstanding of treaty agreements to settlers' view on authority and on legal protocols and responsibilities, which greatly differed from Indigenous legal and political practices.

[13] The numbered and named lots deny Indigenous presence, highlight the work that settlers planned to do within this new place, close to the North Saskatchewan River, an important water source. Indigenous place names are erased.

As a form of introduction, Venne recalls stories she heard from her Elders. She highlights Cree oral tradition and the importance of sharing stories and histories. Venne writes that to know the truth requires "repeated and continuous contact with Indigenous communities" (176). Beside always being open for review, these stories reflect how, just like in treaty relations, each exchange requires time "to ensure that everything is done right" (177). In her work, Venne corrects the common colonial narrative, regarding treaty. First of all, Venne states, the Chiefs were selected to carry out the community's decisions not the other way around (179). They were granted the authority to share the lands but could not sell or surrender them as they belonged to the women of the community (191-2). Second of all, the treaty was signed to last "as long as the sun shines and the waters flow," referencing women's birth waters and the birth of Indigenous children thereby agreeing to enter into treaty with future generations as well (194). Lastly, Venne states that Treaty 6 was established when Canada was a colony of Great Britain, so it meant entering into treaty with the Queen, not the government of Canada. Although Canada has since taken on the treaty agreement, Venne argues that because this change was not agreed upon by both parties, Canada cannot be a party to the treaty and has no authority to alter it (189). Treaty 6 was agreed upon on good faith by the Indigenous Nations involved. However, it has not been honoured in good faith by the Crown or the Canadian Government and this has greatly (and adversely) affected Indigenous life (214). Like Stark's work, Venne's version of Treaty 6 unsettles the official colonial story of the Bridge.

Certain historical accounts from settler perspectives also critique settler theft of the land. By examining legal documents and written documentation, these accounts also provide an insight into the various ways that settlers handled and imposed their own legal and political structures. For example, according to white settler historian Jim Miller, treaty

relations were first established with the Hudson Bay Company during the fur trade, ensuring a successful commercial relationship which accommodated the different political, social and economic traditions of both parties (3). A series of protocols, such as the exchange of gifts and the smoking of a pipe, were followed to establish and to nurture positive relations between First Nations and HBC traders. These relationships were seen as ongoing but terminable if either of the parties did not live up to the agreement (9). However, during the nineteenth century, the HBC's selling of lands to the Canadian government changed these relationships—without the consent of the Indigenous Nations involved. First, there was a decline and intentional destruction of the Indigenous populations by the Canadian government. The intentional destruction and near extinction of the bison, for example, resulted in starvation for many Indigenous communities. The 1870s smallpox epidemic brought even greater suffering to the Indigenous populations who were already starving. Treaty 6 was signed during and because of these conditions.[14] Yet, according to Miller, despite the precarity of the Indigenous people at this time, the treaty was agreed to by both the Crown and the First Nations and ratified by government's chief negotiator, Alexander Morris, which confirmed First Nations sovereignty. In the Treaty 6 agreements, a specific and limited land sharing agreement (only to the depth of the plow), plus farming equipment, financial support in western education methods, and a medicine chest clause were offered. These were some of the reasons why First Nations were willing to sign the treaty (131). In 1871, after hearing stories about the selling of lands to the Canadian Government in Treaty 4, the Plains Cree and the Saulteaux sent a letter to the government affirming that their lands were not for sale and that treaty negotiations would

[14] Interestingly, according to Venne, the Cree agreed to sign Treaty because they felt pity for the white settlers and the poverty that they had experienced in England.

be contingent on the support of the government during the difficult time. However, meetings between treaty commissioners and Indigenous peoples, Cree, Assiniboine, Saulteaux and Chipewyan, did not occur until 5 years later, when band dispersal was on the rise, due to trading and poor health conditions, as well as low food supply. In these meetings, Morris' concession to grant assistance to Indigenous peoples in the case of pestilence or famine and to provide medical care in accordance with Indigenous medicinal knowledge permitted the signing of treaty in 1876. The lands included in treaty encompassed 121 000 square miles (Niemi-Bohun 148-49). According to Venne, the notable absence of the Cree leader, Big Bear, in the treaty negotiations, can be attributed to his influence on the Cree in that area as well as his refusal to settle for less than what was owed (181). Big Bear did not trust the Canadian government, nor the promises being made, so he was not in favor of signing. In 1882, when famine started to affect his community, Big Bear was forced to sign.

According to Miller's revision of settler documentation of treaty, settlers saw their decision to enter into treaty as "high-minded and wise and its treaty negotiators as paragons of patience, reasonableness and good humor" (205), establishing a notable contrast with how Indigenous peoples were handling negotiations and emphasizing how settlers saw Indigenous presence and their ideas as derailing the progress planned for Canada. As represented by settlers, the Crown was seen as benevolent and generous. However, even though Indigenous demands were considered, the nation-to-nation agreements were not, and are still not, honored.

The current Canadian government's disregard for the nation-to-nation agreements is, in a way, invisible for the uninformed visitor who is exploring Edmonton for the first time. I encountered this version of a benevolent government in the information banners that

were placed along the newly constructed paths of the Walterdale Bridge. In one of those banners, the title “Education and Respect” framed the two-sentence explanation about “Indigenous communities” being “encouraged to visit the project site.” As history in Mexico City has proved to me, these official statements tend to occlude some of the devious tactics that governments use to appear inclusive and considerate without actually doing the work. The act of encouraging Indigenous communities’ visit seems enough for the government to state that they are "educated and respectful”. The Bridge sustains this claim as well. The trails are rarely covered in litter, grass is neat and well cut, the rocks placed along the banks are neatly arranged. The entire area of the Bridge has been made to look as if everything is perfectly in place, even though this is far from the truth.

From Treaties to Residential Schools

According to the online site *Treaty 6 Education*, soon after the signing of Treaty 6, the prime Minister, John A. Macdonald commissioned Nicholas Flood Davin to write a report on Industrial schools. Davin thought that the assimilation of First Nation children to white settler society would be achieved through residential schools which would teach European education and religion to Indigenous children (“Residential Schools”). It is well documented that while in the schools, the children endured corporal punishment, humiliation, degradation, sexual abuse and that many died. They were forced to forget their beliefs, their languages, and their communities in order to assimilate into Canada. I remember visiting the Residential Schools exhibit at the Royal Alberta Museum and listening to the stories being told on a video recording, the sounds captured to explain what Indigenous people had experienced, lived and survived through. I lingered on a map of Alberta, showing the locations of different residential schools and the year they closed.

This history was palpable. I felt as if I could see their voices laid out on the map. People still alive to tell the story. Sometimes because colonization in Mexico happened long time ago, I cannot connect these kinds of violent histories to the present. I try to imagine these histories as alive and living on the land. From the Bridge, I imagine what this place would have looked like if the Papaschase Cree had not been displaced. Those children would have grown here and continued to honor their good relations. So many mothers and fathers would have told other stories about their families, their histories, not about their trauma and the violence they suffered. So much about the Bridge feels detached to the reality of the loss and trauma that Indigenous peoples have suffered. So much of this sweeping new structure depends on that forgetting.

In 2008, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to rebuild relations between the Government of Canada and Indigenous Peoples by looking into the history and legacy of residential schools. In 2015, a final report was released, including 94 calls to action, encouraging the government, and other institutions, to address the impact of residential schools in child welfare, health, education, language, justice and culture. One of the actions that stemmed from this report was the implementation of land acknowledgments at all public events. Although currently, UCP officials have made land acknowledgments a personal preference, these acknowledgements continue to be a recognition of the history and impact that colonialism currently has on Indigenous life.

Naming as a Colonial Practice

As I mentioned earlier, the fact that land acknowledgments exist at all was unique for me. Even though these acknowledgments do not begin to address the trauma and erasure experienced by Indigenous people or the fact that the Crown and the Canadian

Government attempted the genocide of the Indigenous Nations, the reminder that Indigenous communities are, in fact, still present in everyday events differs greatly from the place given to Indigenous peoples in Mexico and Mexico City. In fact, it is because of these acknowledgments that I initially felt the need to explore Edmonton and the new Bridge and now, it is why I feel like I need to better understand Mexico today. In 2021, Mexico City's government is officially changing the avenue "Puente de Alvarado" to "Calzada México-Tenochtitlan" to honor Indigenous resistance to Spanish colonizers. The avenue was originally named after Spanish conqueror Pedro de Alvarado, responsible for one of the greatest massacres in Tenochtitlan which broke off the peaceful, yet fragile, agreements between the Spanish and Mexicas (Yañez). This sounds similar to the efforts made in Edmonton to remove Frank Oliver's name from a park, school and pool. Frank Oliver was federal minister of the interior who was against non-British and non-white immigration. He campaigned to sell off First Nation reserves for development, and, through the implementation of the Oliver Act, he was able to expropriate Indigenous land reserves and to remove Indigenous peoples from reserves in or near towns (Simons).[15] Although, of course, the decision to remove both names come from a desire to confront such a violent colonial history, the continuing economic disparity, the lack of health resources for Indigenous population not to mention the increasing discriminatory practices in both Mexico and in Canada put into question whether these acts are enough to actually address the historical and ongoing systemic violence that these communities experience. Is changing a name a first step on the way to real change or another redesign of the land that remaps spaces as innocent?

[15] For more information on this change and why it is being debated see Simons and Cook.

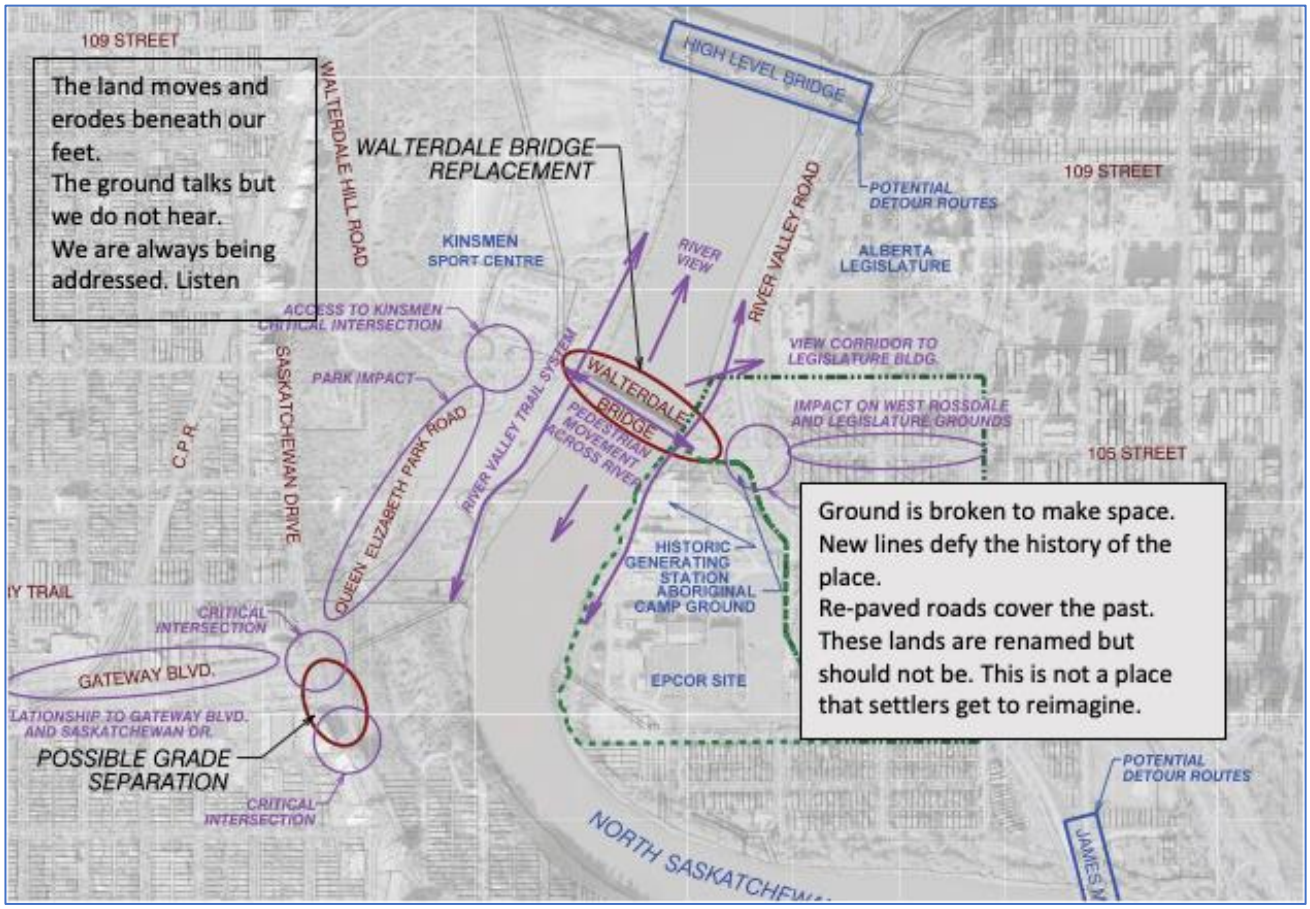

Fig. 10. Blueprints for the new Walterdale Bridge (City of Edmonton *Walterdale Bridge Replacement and Approach,* 8)

Above is my reinterpretation of one of the design plans drawn for the area the new Walterdale Bridge, and the planned changes to connect both sides of Edmonton to the Bridge. These representations of space, conceived by architects and planners, imagine what the place will be once the renovations are done. That is, the conceived space helps to bring the underlying principles, in this case, economic development and investment, into material reality. In mapping these spaces, the land becomes defined and bounded, given a name, such as Oliver Park, that naturalizes an existence and a historical value in reality. The name "Aboriginal Camp Ground" noted on the previous image differentiates Indigenous claims to land to that particular location while marking the rest of the land as

Non-Indigenous. The campground also suggests that Indigenous peoples lived here temporarily and lightly, without setting strong roots. This also implies that the place is ready for the taking. Therefore, these particular practices of naming, whether they attempt to honor a past or create a new history, naturalize settler's presence on and claim to the land, while avoiding/denying the fact of illegal occupation that continues to dispossess the existing Indigenous Nations of their land and homes.

The small poems imposed over the image, try to bring attention to the layered histories that makes up a place and that cannot be seen, or that the colonial administration of the City of Edmonton did not want to be represented, on a map. The poems are also meant to obscure the colonial spatial designs that conceive of these spaces in order to cover the histories that white settler culture seeks to deny, especially the attempted State sanctioned erasures and displacements of Indigenous peoples. Here, I wanted to emphasize the artificiality of maps and spatial representations as they are created to organize, separate and define the land according to colonial and capitalist interests.

The Bridge: a history

I should state that I know I do not hold the same relation to the Bridge as people who walked, biked or drove across the older Bridge, or who have witnessed the changes that the new project brought, but I think that this lack of relation actually encouraged me to learn more about the place. What follows is a brief history of the Bridge, paying close attention to the social and economic configurations that I think are important to understand the new Bridge as a project that inscribes colonizing practices. The old Bridge, or 105th Street Bridge, was the result of a number of fast-paced changes that happened during the beginning of the 20th century. The first cable ferry across the North Saskatchewan River

began operations in 1881 (Kuban 7). Although this ferry was extremely valuable, it did not help transporting goods up the north slope. In, 1900, the Low-Level Bridge opened to build a rail link between Strathcona and Edmonton. Two years a rail service was offered across the river (11-2). At the time, the white settler communities of Strathcona and Edmonton were independent cities that saw their merger as an opportunity for property values to rise and to attract manufacturers to the south side of the River (Sadava B2). This moment in the history of Edmonton is defined by the increase in a mostly white settler population, the increase in property value and the development of local infrastructure—streets, sidewalks, bridges. (Kuban 17). On February 1, 1912 this amalgamation became a reality with the guarantee that Edmonton would build the 105th Street Bridge and a hospital at the University of Alberta. The 105th Street Bridge, built by the Dominion Bridge Company, was completed in 1913 and re-named in 1967 in honor of John Walter, "an Edmonton businessman and a pioneer who strung the first ferry cable across the North Saskatchewan River at Fort Edmonton" (Historic Sites Committee 327). Born in Scotland, Walter came to Edmonton in 1870 to work for the HBC, building boats for traffic on the North Saskatchewan River (327).

Walter became the first settler to own property on the south bank. He developed several businesses and became a wealthy entrepreneur. Although the completion of the High-Level Bridge ended the need for his ferry service, it was not until the 1915's flood of the Saskatchewan River that his sawmills were wiped out and he was left in ruin. However, the fact that he was a white male settler with an interest in and a capacity for making money, made him someone to be remembered and honoured. I included Walter's history because it is essential to the history of the new Bridge, as I think this ideal entrepreneurial

character directly relates to the envisioned wealthy future that the new Bridge is supposed to make possible.

As a newcomer, I barely remember seeing the old Bridge, and knew little about why this area, including Rossdale, was so important to Indigenous communities. Walking around the nicer houses on Rossdale felt like I had stumbled upon a different time and a different place that had no history but the present. The new Bridge had a similar effect for me. The Bridge transported me into a reality where the past was forgotten, where new memories could and should be created. In a way, the Bridge emulated the feeling you get from opening a new present and playing with it, unaware of the work it took for the present to reach your hands. The smell and feel of something new to the touch sometimes finds a way to excite us into forgetting why the past matters.

Looking through books like *Naming Edmonton: from Ada to Zoie* developed and compiled by the Historic Sites Committee, *An Edmonton Album* by Jo-Anne Christensen and Dennis Shappka and some articles on the *Edmonton Journal* on the history of the Bridge, I notice that most of the history about the Bridge pays closer attention to John Walter. Today, the new Bridge already has a number of newspaper articles and official documents about the project. This is the beginning of a new narrative of the place, devoid of the social, and historical, configurations that allowed the approval of this project in the first place. Even the plaques holding the name "Dominion Bridge Company" on the older Bridge, which held the story of the beginning of the City of Edmonton, have been removed. This removal signifies the removal of the complicated relations between Canada and Indigenous communities that the plaque represented as well.

Some images online have captured both bridges existing at the same time. While it is true that the Bridge needed to be renewed, or refurbished for other uses, the history that it held did not need rebranding.

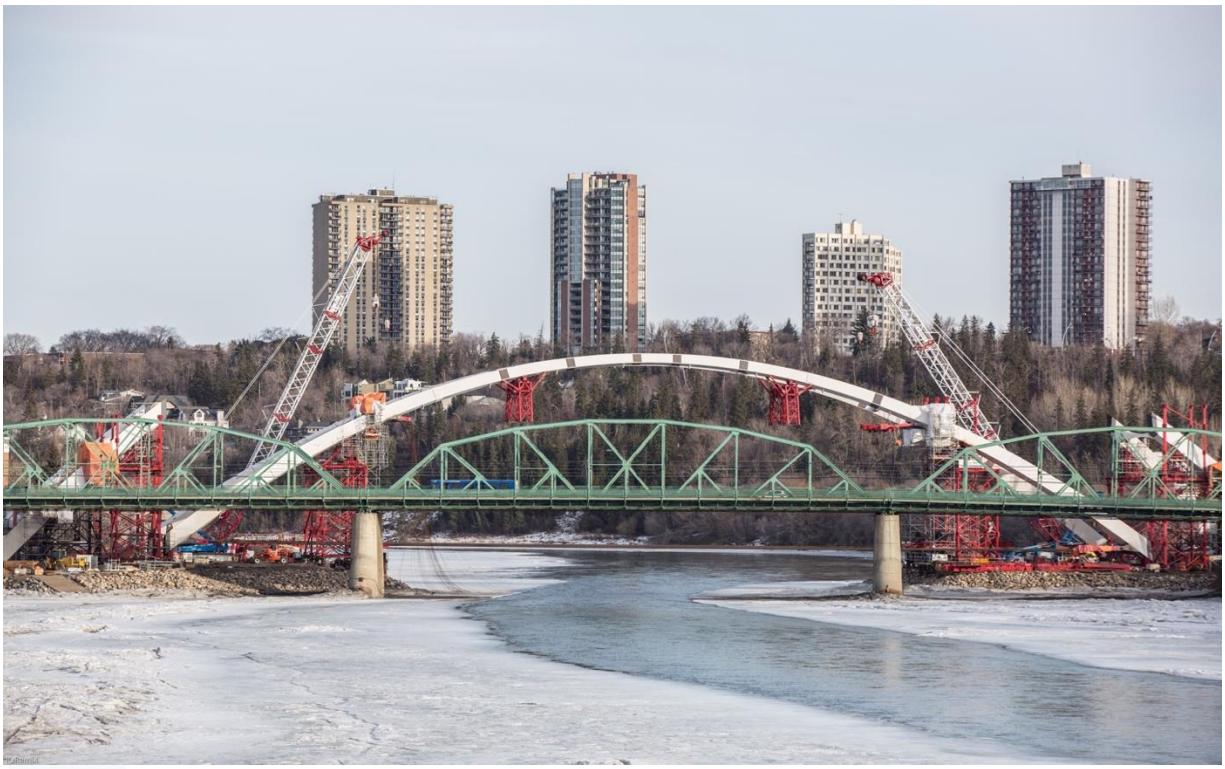

Fig. 11. The new and old Bridge (IQRemix)

Many photographs found online show both Bridges together, showing how the new white arching Bridge stands taller over the smaller green more angular structure. This new Bridge is reported by the City of Edmonton as being a "functional 'signature' replacement bridge that will enhance the unique beauty of the river valley and surrounding neighbourhoods" (*Walterdale Bridge Replacement Public Information).* The new white Bridge outshines the rusty older one made to accommodate the width of the horse drawn buggies and carts, accentuating the need for a more modern-looking city. The Bridge aims to be a "striking new entrance into Downtown Edmonton and a unique gathering place in the heart of North America's largest urban parkland" (DIALOG). This Bridge is supposed

to “rebrand the city” and “breathe […] new life into the City’s identity” (DIALOG), which is meant to bring attention, and foreign investment, to Edmonton, as if removing its past was necessary to bring in a new future. The removal of the old Bridge is an important moment in Edmonton’s history as well. Edmontonians are finding ways to preserve some, if not all of the bridge’s structure. According to Heather Stewart and Paul R. Messinger, the City presented the opportunity for the public to get involved. However, it became evident that their voices were not being heard when their plan to preserve the old Bridge as a pedestrian-cycling route was never considered (59). Instead, ambiguous initiatives to preserve the Bridge’s metal through the building of other objects, circulated the media stating that the Bridge may have other lives, but I believe these lives still have not come to fruition (Cummings). This initiative to preserve the Bridge through repurposing its material, I believe reflects an underlying desire to refurbish a new identity that seeks to forget its colonial past and present. Nonetheless, the Bridge, as many other spaces and places in Edmonton, maintains that connection to the past, present and future of the city.

Poem- Land interventions

Repurpose

Reimagine

From the ground up UP UP

I landed on an invested city

Undisturbed sites, newer designs

Historic buildings younger than the city I grew up in.

I grow older here, already dreaming about the first day of snow

Snowing, snowed in, words that are now meaningful

To my inexperienced eyes.

I had only known rain,

had only known the way

rain pours on pavement

the way puddles form on main roads

the way the land remembers

Tenochtitlan exists still underneath

The once historic Texcoco lake vibrates underneath

Under earth and newer roads that always

Lead us back to the land.

History floods every time we try to forget our water. [16]

[16] An interesting conversation with Selena Couture about the way to solve the flooding problem in Mexico City through unpaving. Emmett FitzGerald, producer of the 99% invisible website, explores exactly how this can be done and why it might be the best solution for the drought problem in Mexico as well.

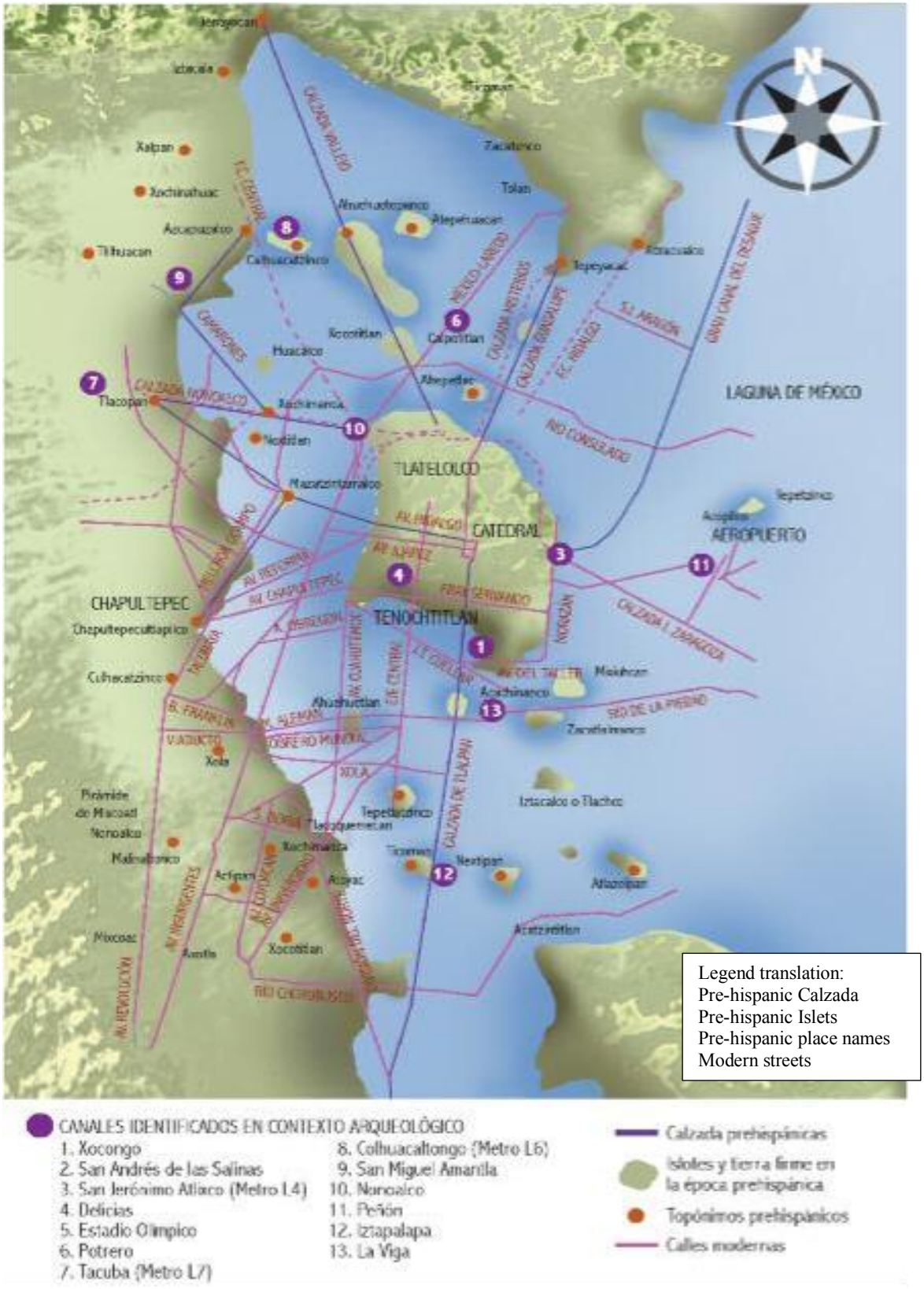

Fig.12. Pre-hispanic locations and modern streets (Mora Vázquez 26).

The image above shows our current main avenues in Mexico City, subway lines and railways in relation to Tenochtitlan. As shown, the current main roads and connecting subway lines and current municipalities are found on Pre-hispanic settlements. The Texcoco lake was drained, its rivers were polluted or diverted from their natural flow in order for Spaniards to settle and expand their empire from Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec Empire. Later the lands created on the dried land were sold. Maribel Espinosa-Castillo states that in 1954 water flows were controlled and channeled to pipe systems (777). Due to severe deforestation, water pollution and exploitation, Mexico City still struggles with floods, during rainy season, and water scarcity. Today, the dry lake on which Mexico City stands worsens earthquakes as its clayey subsoil accelerates and amplifies the seismic waves that arrive from other parts of the country (Secretaría de Gobernación, CENAPRED 31).

Water/Agua

The North Saskatchewan River, like the Texcoco lake, is a vital living force that has shaped the City of Edmonton. Indigenous nations held ceremonies on its banks, fished and canoed in its waters; these nations learned from and lived with the River. The River is a grounding and vital element for the city. In her article "Fish, Kin and Hope: Tending to Water Violations in *amiskwaciwâskahikan* and Treaty Six Territory," Todd recognizes how important the River has been to her family and to Edmonton: "to speak Edmonton,/ *amiskwaciwâskahikan* (Beaver Mountain House), is to speak a water truth. [The water truth] is nestled along, and spans, the banks of the mighty *kisiskâciwani-sîpiy*, which has carved its way deep into the soil and clay and sand and stone to yield steep banks that cut through Edmonton like an artery, supplying the city with water, with life" (103). Todd cites

the oil spill of 2016 on the River to illustrate our responsibility towards more-than-humans. She notes the necessity of us providing care and love to tend to the rivers and waters but also to the carbon and fossil beings that are being weaponized within the petro-state economy ("Fish" 106). Even though these fossils have polluted waters, the work Todd offers us is to think of them as kin so that "we may de-weaponize the oil and gas that corporate and political bodies have allowed to violate waters, lands and atmospheres across the prairies" ("Fish"107). The River has suffered a tremendous amount of damage due to oil spills, waste, plastic disposal which have greatly affected its fish, beaver, bird and frog population. However, in her re-framing of oil as kinship within a petro-capitalist economy, Todd re-signifies those harmful and toxic elements that continue to pollute the environment as not inherently dangerous but rather made violent and dangerous by colonialism and capitalism ("Fish" 107). Aside from the importance of water, Todd's proposition invited me to re-think my relationship with the earthquakes and floods that occur regularly in Mexico City. The potential danger caused by the heavy clay soils under Mexico City, is due to colonialist's need for land to expand their settlement. The draining of the Texcoco lake and surrounding rivers resulted in a cracked soil that amplifies seismic waves and floods that the City officials seek to patch with water systems and newer building structures that do not address the underlying capitalist conditions that have made Mexico City an unstable place (a haunted place). How do we repurpose our streets, our water systems, our pavements in a way that is responsible to our water? What does living on a dried lake mean? How do we honor the body of water that has been drained and removed?

The North Saskatchewan River: A Meeting

The North Saskatchewan River is an unrelenting force from which nations continue to learn and to live. The proximity to this body of water has centered my attention to the ways in which the water moves, the fish swim, the seasonal gulls gather in the River. Maybe looking at the North Saskatchewan River closer, listening to its water, to its flow can help me name the connections that the Texcoco lake has lost.

The River defines and defies Edmonton
Abuse, misuse, the River is life and living.
It freezes and thaws, through the seasons.
The River, like its name,
swift flowing river,
is movement in time,
is flowing through place.
is a whisper inscribing
its history on the ground.
The Saskatchewan River names
Its snowy banks and flowering trees,
Colors seasons in its swift flow,
Swift passing, greeting each cycle
With renewal. End. Beginning.
Always in movement
across/through/in
amiskwaciwâskahikan.

Foreign to my tongue, lists of denominators

Trying to make this River, this word

Something familiar

Sounding familiar,

Amiss, amisk

And missing worlds

That, this tongue (esta lengua)

Atrapada

(no puede conjurar)

cannot conjure.

Maybe Texcoco, a familiar sound,

The letter *x* always grounding

My name, my difference

Diferencia grabada en una letra, en una lengua

A crossing, a different kind of Bridge

Un puente, una marca en la tierra

Marked on a land

a river meeting, a point of contact.

Even though the lake has been drained

Aunque el lago se haya drenado,

La Lluvia lo trae de vuelta

Rain indicates its return

Just like the swift flowing River, North Saskatchewan,

The lake leaves its markings on bodies and lands.

A history of Papaschase land.

Rossdale Flats

To talk about the history of the Burial Grounds in Rossdale, I have to refer to the history of the Papaschase Cree before Edmonton became a city. The "Papaschase Proposal for the Settlement of the Unlawful Surrender of Papaschase I.R #136" by Chief Calvin Bruneau, found on the Papaschase website, recounts the history of Papaschase until the unlawful surrender of lands to demand the recognition of treaty rights and the return of land reserves, including areas such as Rossdale Flats. According to Chief Bruneau, Papaschase, John Gladue Quinn was born in 1838. He and his brothers were active in the fur trade and roamed between Slave Lake and Fort Edmonton before moving to the Edmonton area, Ross Flats below the Fort, in the late 1850s. In 1876, Treaty negotiations began at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt. Four band. On August 21, 1877 Chief Papaschase and his brother Tahkoots signed adhesion to Treaty 6 at Fort Edmonton, with the promise of a land reserve. The land survey was recommended in 1877 by David Laird, Lieutenant Governor and Indian Superintendent for the North-West Territories, but took place until 1880. The Papaschase continued to occupy the Rossdale Flats and south Edmonton until then. The dominion land surveyor George Simpson was ordered to delineate what the Indian reserve No. 136 would be. Despite being legally entitled to more miles in downtown Edmonton, Papaschase were pushed away from the city. Also, disputes emerged between Simpson and Chief Papaschase, as Simpson was not only pushing them farther from the city but reducing the square miles of land that the Papaschase band was entitled to. Ultimately the dispute resulted in the reduction of land by erasing 84 band members of the band list, calling them

"The Edmonton Stragglers", approving 40 square miles of reserve land for the Papaschase Band 20 miles south of the river and no land for the Stragglers.

The remaining members were, temporarily given the Two Hills area until local newspaper publisher, and later Canadian Minister of Interior, Frank Oliver argued for the removal of the band: "Now is the time for the Government to declare the Reserve open and show whether this country is to be run in the interests of the settlers or the Indians." (qt. in Rob Shields 112). In 1881, settlers met to demand John A. Macdonald remove the band from the reserve, which was, according to them, too close to Old Strathcona and to potential lands for further settlement. Oliver incited settlers to squat upon the reserve, even before they received an answer from the government. As Bruneau states: "the north boundary of the reserve should be around 76 Avenue but instead is 51 Avenue South Edmonton" (8), far away from the original reserve and 9.9 square miles smaller than it should be.

Starvation and impoverishment, including the cutting of rations to Indigenous people by Lieutenant Governor Edgar Dewdney, put First Nations in a difficult position at this time and forced them to take scrip, lose treaty status, lose land and the right to annuities. At the time, Chief Papaschase and other members continued to believe they could occupy land reserve 136 as they harvested their crops in 1886. Nevertheless, the Department of Interior proposed that the remaining members be amalgamated with another band and that became a reality in December of that year when Agent Anderson "falsely and deliberately misstated that the Papaschase band requested that they be amalgamated with the Enoch band on the Stony Plain Reserve" (6). According to Bruneau, in 1887, Assistant Commissioner Reed made the remainder of the Papaschase band to move from the 136 reserve and, according to Elders, the ones who resisted were killed. The terms to obtain a

surrender from the Papaschase Band were not fulfilled, as they did not comply with the procedures set out in section 39 of the Indian Act, where the Government must act according to the welfare of Indigenous peoples and must also collect the monies received and deposit it into an interest-bearing account, one that would be paid to the Papaschase Band, and their descendants, annually and forever. Instead, the government's actions depended on the eviction and denial of their land rights, claiming that the surrender of 3 members was enough to validate their actions. To this day, the legality of this action is still being challenged (Shields et. al., 112). In November 1888, the remaining Papaschase Indian Reserve was "surrendered" for sale. In 1891 and 1893, the federal government subdivided the reserve and sold the land to settlers (Olson). Oliver's role in removing Papaschase band is key and shows the underlying criminality that set the development of Edmonton in motion. From his efforts to make Edmonton the main town and the capital of Alberta, to his attempts to build the CP Railroad from Regina to Edmonton, instead of Calgary, Oliver's involvement in these years promoted the life of settlers over the Papaschase band. By 1911, the Indian Act allowed the expropriation of Indian lands for public works, with Minister Oliver claiming that Indian reserves would no longer impede economic development of the nation (Shields et. al. 113). As geographers Rob Shields et. al. state, "this is still a keystone of the nation's relationship to Indigenous nations: allowing the enforcement of resource extraction projects, marking the physical landscape, and also structuring the geopolitical and legal space of Canada" (113). According to Stark, the transformation of treaties from relationships to land cession contracts served to impose colonial law and to transform settlers' criminal behaviours from illegal to legal. By making Indigenous resistance, the demand for government adherence to legally agreed on treaties, an act of treason, settlement was able to create the conditions that legitimated their existence and restricted

Indigenous sovereignty. However, in order to validate itself as a nation, Canada also needed to recognize Indigenous sovereignty as well, therefore, despite the removal, political imposition of colonial law, Indigenous Nations are still recognized by Canadian law (Stark 2).

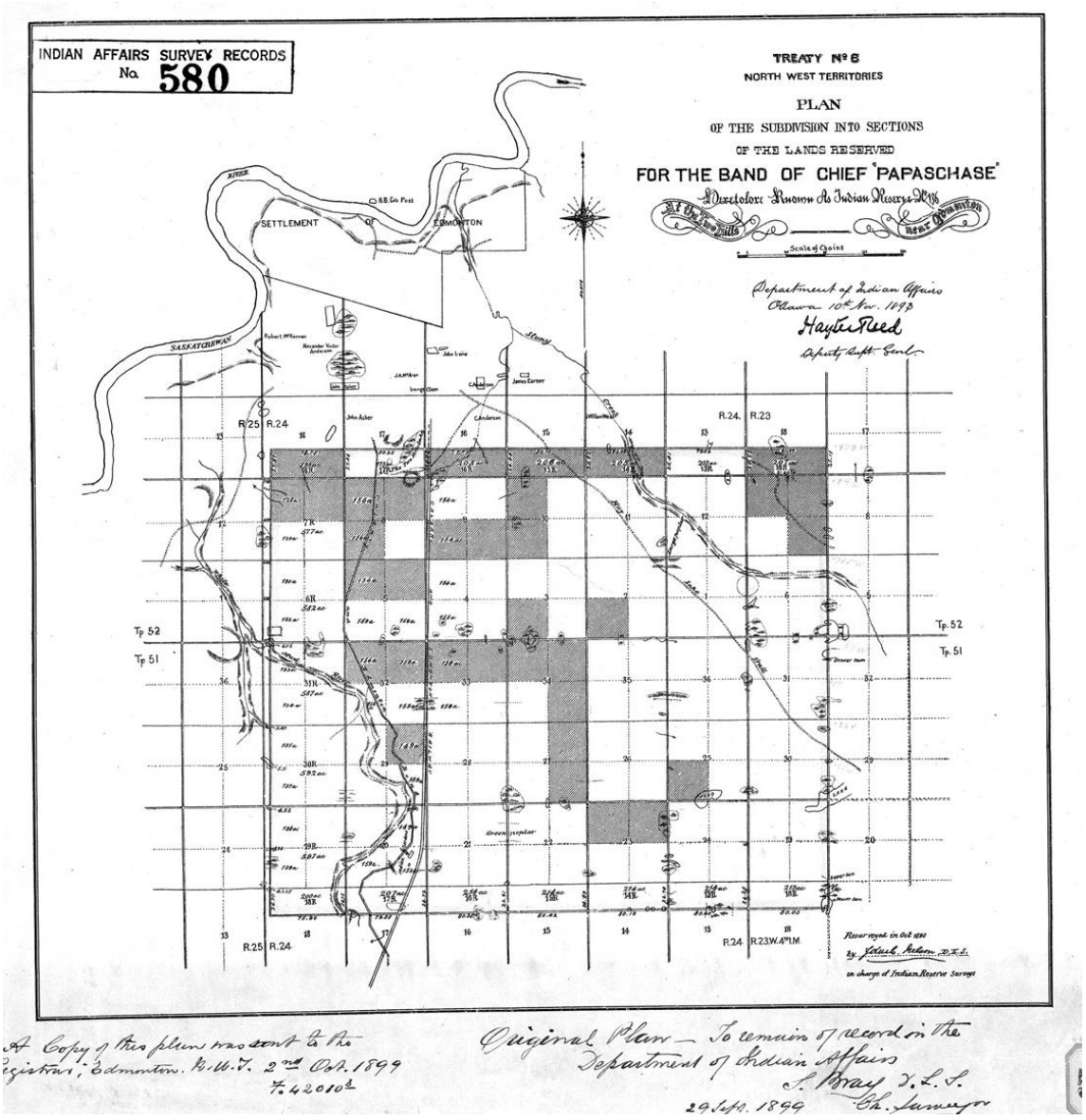

Fig. 13. Chief Papaschase Land Reservation designated by the government in 1899 (Shields et. al 109)[17]

[17] Original source could not be found.

In the Papaschase proposal document, Chief Bruneau discusses the importance of the Rossdale Flats and the Historic Cemetery for the Papaschase as traditional lands where they lived, hunted, worked, held ceremonies and buried their dead (or those who "pass on" as the nêhiywak say). Throughout the document, Chief Bruneau highlights that the unlawful surrender of Papaschase territories, the disbandment and move to other bands resulted in significant damages to the language, culture, identity, economic opportunities and the loss of land. According to Chief Bruneau, in order to honor treaty, and re-establish a nation-to-nation agreement, the Southside Edmonton, Rossdale Flats and Cemetery and the Burial Ground by Elinor Lake, Elk Island Park and surrounding lands must be returned. In the case of Rossdale Flats and the Burial Grounds, these lands must be returned so the Papaschase can protect the Burial Grounds and set up their own businesses.

Rossdale Flats, or Pehonan, is referred to as "the womb of the community, the place that gave birth to the city of Edmonton" (Parry qt. in Goyette and Roemmich 21). Since the early 20th century and during the building of the new Bridge, excavations on these areas have unearthed human remains, some of which have been disposed of (36). Some of the human remains that were removed from Rossdale were taken to the University of Alberta in 1967 without ceremony or notification and later re-interred in 2006 ("Rossdale Historic Cemeteries"). The long process of returning these remains to the site began in 2000 when the university offered to return them (Goyette and Roemmich 36). From racetracks to power stations, the Rossdale Flats hold a complicated and bloody history that continues to be unearthed by every new excavation. In response, pushed by local Indigenous communities, the City determined that a memorial was to be built to honour the ancestors who were buried there, including French, English, Scottish and Irish people. Despite these efforts to show collaboration, websites such as the Heritage Databank Consulting have

pointed out that the act of disposing remains, ignoring and excavating traditional lands without further research continues—especially as the City continues to expand its land use. One of the players that desecrated (Delorme qt. in Goyette and Roemmich 37) these burials is EPCOR, a utility company (easily seen from the East side of the Bridge) that built a power plant over the cemetery claiming that there were few or barely any remains on the land, even though human remains were found as far back as 1943 (35). In 2000, EPCOR proposed an expansion of their facilities but was eventually refused by the city, after recommendations made to the Alberta Community Development in order to protect historic buildings—not the burial grounds. During that year, more bones were found on EPCOR and any further attempt to dig would require an Archeological permit (Miller 60). Indigenous peoples continue pressure the city into attending the treatment of these burials, the implementation of the proper protocols to handle such burials, but the City has barely responded ("Rossdale Historic Cemeteries"). Some archeological testing has been carried out; however, the examination of the remains is impeded by the City, making the testing incomplete. In 2001 Indigenous activists put up white crosses along Rossdale Road to show people they were passing through a traditional burial ground. Even after the installation of the Rossdale memorial, in 2006, the City continued to propose development plans that disturbed the Burial Grounds, while Indigenous peoples continued to demand proper protection of these grounds and the remains, following the Alberta's Cemeteries Act which legally protects this and all burial grounds. Other projects that have been halted include: a new 60,000 seat arena, the Olympic Torch Run cutting through the heart of the Cemetery, a racetrack, and the new Bridge, which was originally supposed to remove the Rossdale Memorial ("Rossdale Historic Cemeteries").

In 2011, the city proposed an informational session to consult with Indigenous peoples about the future of the EPCOR site. The plan to re-zone Rossdale included the preservation and commemorations of its history but through the idea of upgrading and developing the area. Mainly, The *West Rossdale Urban Design Plan* was put in motion in 2010 and established a long-term vision for the area, which plans to develop a sustainable and walkable community with new residential developments, provide parks and recreational opportunities and other public spaces that celebrate and enhance the history of the area "to help create a strong sense of place" (City of Edmonton Planning and Development 16). In October 2011, without further consultation, the City of Edmonton again disturbed the burial grounds that lay underneath the EPCOR power plant to continue the plan to expand and develop the site. According to Heritage Databank Consulting, in 2013 the City followed the established protocols of consultation, allowing 1 person from a selection of communities (the Edmonton Stragglers, the Mountain Cree Band, Asini Wachi Nehiyawak Band, Enoch First Nation, and Saddle Lake First Nations and Metis), chosen by the City, to visit the site for a maximum of three days ("Rossdale Historic Cemeteries"). The Rossdale memorial is held as an example of the collaboration between the City and all of the communities named above "have a particular historic, familial and legal interest in that site" ("Rossdale Historic Cemeteries"). Additional bands including Alexander, Michel and the Musckwacis, hold claims to Rossdale flats as descendants of Papaschase band were broken up, forced to take scrip and were discharged from treaty or forced relocated to these other communities (Bruneau 13). The latest project, which has been in development for years now, is "River Crossing", a revitalization of the area which will construct multi-residential buildings, foreground commercial development and will revitalize the ballpark. In September 2020, Enoch Cree nation and EPCOR signed a Memorandum of

Understanding that, according to the EPCOR's website "formalizes the commitment of working together in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration" (EPCOR). This agreement cements a working relation that is supposed to connect the Enoch Cree Nation, Maskêkosihk, to their land "through activities such as harvesting of plants for traditional medicinal purposes, and formalizing procedures and processes related to archeological work" (EPCOR). Many of these documents continue to circulate, and despite the hopeful spirit that they convey, I must keep in mind Stark's words: "[s]tate law, both through the development of policies and the ability of local agents to act outside the parameters of legality, became the mechanism that . . . animat[es] the machinery of empire" (4). Today, procedures, consultation and other policies implemented to "enhance" the Rossdale area are bound to colonial law that considers Indigenous nations as individual subjects of the state rather than as nations (Stark 7). I am reminded of Todd's approach to the oil spill on the North Saskatchewan, in which she understands that the material is not in itself violent or dangerous but made so through a petrol driven city that cannot survive without the exploitation of oil. The Bridge has animated a similar dangerous and divisive colonial narrative, but it has also served to connect us (that deer photographed crossing the Bridge is an example I cannot forget). The Bridge in and of itself is only made violent by the policing practices that the City has placed on and around the area to prevent people from wandering, from sleeping, drinking, or doing anything that exceeds the image this capitalist city wants to portray. How different would it look if the Bridge was thought and built in a way that did not assert colonial ideology but that honoured a history of gathering in order to encourage a rich present and future of gathering?

Naturalization of White Settlement on Indigenous Land

Like the plans for the new Bridge, the Rossdale development plans are tied to an illegal idea of the state that the City of Edmonton has participated in through its naturalization of settler spaces, law and policy. In the City's archive on the new Walterdale Bridge and the planned growth of the city, the emphasis on the entrepreneurial John Walter or Frank Oliver, who displaced Indigenous peoples from their reserves and their lands to sell them for profit, continues to emphasize the value of individual capitalist achievements over community. Donald demonstrates how European settlement is embedded in the myth of the individual conquering the vast open spaces:

> The official history of the city of Edmonton—and the history of most settlements in Canada for that matter—has been founded on small acts of capitalism and entrepreneurship by individuals operating according to the dream of open spaces and unfettered frontier lands ripe for development and exploitation in the interests of economic gain. ("Edmonton Pentimento" 47)

This myth of settlers' economic prosperity in open spaces is only one of a series of myths that have configured the City of Edmonton, according to the colonial narrative that frames the prowess, strength and vision of white settlers. However, the overlapping histories of, and before, settlement, treaty, the old and new Bridge show the need to understand the enmeshed network of relations between stories, histories, peoples, and all living forms that compose Edmonton. These histories help to understand how settlers and Indigenous peoples imagined, created and affected the spaces that are historic and sacred but also new and developing. Indigenous scholars, such as Cree writer Emma La Roque and Donald, point to the civilized and savage dichotomy to explain the removal of their communities from the land. LaRoque focuses on how the image of the savage versus the

civilized holds Indigenous peoples as primitives with no "significant cultural accomplishments or civilization" (152), considering Indigenous culture, legal, economic, judicial and familial systems as in need of civilization. Donald's analysis of Fort Edmonton from an education perspective provides another one of the pervading myths that has perpetuated this division. Myths, Donald states, "are actually truths about culture and conventional views of history that have both been deeply influenced by the stories of our country that we have been told in school" ("Forts" 1). In the case of the Fort, the division between civilization and savagery is created through "the myth that forts facilitated the civilization of the land and brought civilization to the Indians, we can see that the histories and experiences of Aboriginal peoples are necessarily positioned as outside the concern of Canadians" ("Forts" 3). According to Donald, these myths, such as *terra nullius* and the Fort, trace the "social and spatial geographies that perpetuate the belief that Aboriginal peoples and Canadians inhabit separate realities". In turn, these myths have served to organize and separate people according to race, culture and civilization in separate spaces and times ("Forts" 4).

Stark identifies the processes as the illegal actions of the nation-state of Canada. Stark argues that while the logic of civilization versus savagery that pervades colonialist discourse is based on the idea that Indigenous lands are "lawless spaces absent of legal order", Canada needed to recognize Indigenous sovereignty or order to legitimize itself (1). That is, the making of treaty with an already sovereign Indigenous nation legitimized and validated Canada's settlement. Treaty then became the contract that allowed the creation and expansion of the nation-state that wishes to extinguish Indigenous peoples but cannot do so because that would eliminate the nation's sovereignty (9). Importantly, Stark's

argument points out the complex layers of illegality and savagery on the part of the Crown and the Canadian Government.

These civilized and savage perceptions have extended to the present concepts of development, growth and capital seen as civilized and civilizing while maintaining relations to the land and to other living beings as savage. Instead of being understood as relational, material reality is conceived of in terms of property and ownership, which can be developed and exploited by settlers. In their article "Decolonization is not a metaphor," Tuck (Unangax̂) and K. Wayne Yang recognize that in settler colonialism "land is what is most valuable, contested and required" not only because these lands become their home and source of capital but also "because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporarily contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation" (5). Different colonial strategies, legal, ontological, epistemic, are used time and time again to displace and erase Indigenous peoples from their land, from their bodies and from their knowledges. Settlers instead see themselves as deserving more than other groups and species because of their ability to civilize, as stated by Stark and Donald, and make the land produce for themselves (Tuck and Yang 6).

The new Bridge, designed by the City to write a new history of the City of Edmonton is already writing a new myth about the benevolent settler, who is now aware of, and seeks to mend, the historical violence and destruction of Indigenous communities and the land. Several documents about the planning stages and the Bridge's design, conceived space as planned by architects and planners (Razack 9), center sustainable and complete neighbourhoods *(*City of Edmonton Planning and Development 7) with an emphasis on improving pedestrian and cycling connections to the river valley (City of Edmonton

Replacement and Approach, 6). These renewal or revitalization projects in Rossdale and its surrounding areas highlight the need to create spaces that preserve the historical significance of the site, remembering Indigenous people's presence on the land in Pehonan, where living well was possible for Indigenous people, as well as preserving the Burial Grounds without further disturbance. However, the claim to make this area sustainable, respectful to its history while also focusing on the future of the City taking into consideration public opinion, shows the underlying legal strategies used to maintain land as property and to reassert settlers as deserving of the land.

In the new Bridge project, the protocols put in motion, such as the duty to consult Indigenous communities, were necessary so that the city's actions are seen as legal and legitimate. But as much as these protocols are carried out and requirements are met for all new projects, the binding legal framework remains colonial and colonizing—and thus illegal. According to Stark, colonialism constructs the liminal spaces where Indigenous sovereignty is contained within the bounds of the state. By creating those liminal spaces "colonialism continuously transforms and realigns as proclaimed settler sovereignty is challenged and resisted by Indigenous nations" (Stark 1). The fact that there are several official documents highlighting the participation of Indigenous communities, although necessary, does not eliminate the criminal practices of occupation and land theft on which the Walterdale Bridge project is founded.[18]

[18] For example, the City of Edmonton's FAQ document, updated in 2014, provides answers to the historical importance of the area and describes a working and cooperative relationship between the City and the City's Aboriginal Relations Office (ARO), along with the participation of Elders from First Nations and Métis communities. Nowhere is it stated that Indigenous peoples could vote against any of the City's actions. Do Indigenous peoples actually have any power in these boards?

What if I sit underneath the Bridge for too long? How long is *too* long? Would the city remove me from this public space?

Fig. 14. A jacket under the Bridge. My photo.

This is a photo (see above) that I took towards the end of winter. I walked under the Bridge a couple of times, and the sight of this green and black jacket, or what I took to be a jacket, was always peculiar to me. This jacket was covered in dirt and arranged so that the figure of the body who once wore it was already forgotten. The square patterned lining inside the jacket had seen better days but might have offered a bit of warmth during early winter.

Definitely not suited for mid-winter though. Is there a who attached to this piece of clothing? The River is already flowing, fast, but does not tell me who this piece of clothing belonged to. It is a story between the person who wore it and the River; it is a story that I will never know. I saw other people walking that path but paying no attention to the forgotten object. It stood out among the snow. The well-kept paths are sanded and salted to prevent people from falling over. They do not encourage people to walk so close to the River. The neatly and recently placed trees were still getting used to their new location. Everything *felt* new, except for this piece of clothing. Is it a jacket? I wanted to know how long it would take for someone from the City to finally remove the jacket so that the Bridge kept its new pristine look. It was a couple of months before it was removed. The snow had already melted into the ground. I remember wanting to take a photo that showed where I was, where I could capture everything in sight, particularly the odd presence of that black and green cloth in the melting ice. The EPCOR power plant in the picture was an accident but now I see it as an unavoidable presence that needed to be in the photo and that, in a sense, defines the conditions of precarity and loss that I encountered in the discarded clothing.

Looking back to this picture now, it is curious to still feel the dissonance between the narrative of progress that the Bridge promised and the discarded clothing that belonged to someone in the City. Someone that the City, in its enduring commitment to capitalism (as represented in EPCOR), must continually leave behind. This is what I finally felt the photo portrayed, the gap between a conceived space imagined by colonial ideas of progress, and the perceived space that is used by people according to their unmet needs, like warmth, clothing, housing, shelter, food and medicine. The use of this place demonstrates how the "beneficial development projects" only serve a certain fragment of the population. As the

tilted picture represents, the unbalanced relationship between these elements, the clothing, the Bridge, the power plant, the people and the River, is manifest as long as the land continues to be exploited.

The impressive photographs of the new Bridge demonstrate how the erasure of history helps to naturalize changes on the land. Conceptually, the bridge is supposed to "blend with its natural setting" (DIALOG), yet the new Bridge does the exact opposite. Its white steel arches, decorated with different colored lighting draw people in as a photographable site. The contrast of the white steel against the green and yellow trees with a river flowing underneath modernizes the rusty old Bridge. The end result is that the Bridge is considered a "landmark gateway to the city and refreshe[s] the postcard view of the whole city" (DIALOG). This new landmark brings the conceived ideas of progress and grandeur, and underlying colonial myths and practices, to a material reality. People photograph and share this location to the world as the City of Edmonton wants people to see it: as bright, colorful and inviting to the rest of the world. The image, the narrative generated by the city about the new Bridge *places* Edmonton as "a world class city" on the map. This subtle formation of an actual place from a highly conceptualized colonial space naturalizes the displacement and erasure of Indigenous bodies from the site and our sight and from Edmonton's history while giving people the perfect photograph opportunity in a location that creates a very different visual experience of the new Walterdale Bridge and the surrounding area.

Burial Grounds: The Memorial

Over the past years, there have been some efforts to commemorate, honour and include Indigenous history, knowledge and presence in the land that is now called Edmonton. The Rossdale Burial Grounds and the accompanying memorial are disturbed sites where

exchanges between settlers and Indigenous peoples are visibly and palpably still present. The memorial, built by the company Manasc Isaac, comes from a series of workshops organized by the City of Edmonton, EPCOR, Indigenous communities, stakeholder and community volunteers to design a memorial that "seeks to bring healing of the pain, frustration and mistrust felt by the descendants of those buried there" (Manasc Isaac). In the history of Edmonton, the memorial has become a symbol of the reconciliation process with the city, and the lack of attention that the city pays to Indigenous peoples' demands. At the moment, the incomplete memorial, the broken circle of the sculpture, and the information panels next to the EPCOR power plant show that the agreements accepted between the City of Edmonton and Indigenous communities are still not honored. I think the memorial's incomplete circle now is not only a reflection of the uneasy relationship with EPCOR. It is also a prescient critique of the new Bridge, as the city continues to renew its roads, buildings without adequately attending to the damaged treaty relation with Indigenous peoples and Nations.

The Memorial remains uncomfortably situated against the EPCOR power plant. I walk to the Burial Grounds often, to look at the incomplete circle, trying to witness how this space has been contested by Indigenous peoples and their history. How long have they resisted settler expansion and their own historical displacement? I walk towards the burial grounds and the white crosses that lay close to the road. I walk on the grass between the Memorial and the fence that protects the EPCOR power plant, trying to hold these two places together. On the one hand, the power plant makes this area private /corporate property and holds the power to refuse Indigenous land claims to the Indigenous bodies that lie below the plant (and that are ultimately seen as an inconvenience to the expansion of the City). On the other hand, the memorial, reasserting the communal claim to the land, and

built as a result of Indigenous actions, criticizes the city's illegal actions and settlement. Together, the power plant and the memorial show two different ways of being in the world. I think that if I can somehow translate the *feel* given by this memorial, its rusty structure standing against the newer Bridge, then I can perhaps explain why this place cannot go unnoticed or be forgotten.

Fig. 15. Memorial and EPCOR power plant (Glang)

I place myself between them.

STOP

They talk and argue against each other, whispers and shouts from

Interred bodies that reclaim this place. The Memorial's

Circle expands the noise as the epicentre

Of an earthquake

Land vibrates, a humming across.

The white crosses echo a deafening silence

GO

Roaring traffic. Cars speeding

On their way to work

“Unidentified remains”

Still buried underneath

Red light

No eyes wander to their right

Memorial already forgotten

Green light

Traffic moves. I stand

Humming electricity

Wired fences protecting, preventing

The disaster

Meaning

Letting people in.

STOP

To identify their remains.

GO

Clouds pass through

Calling old names

Old faces

STOP

I stand still. Between a wired fence

And the voices of people

Who won't let this place

GO.

Strange to be caught in between these places. They are uncomfortable to experience. The buzzing from the power grids invades the sense of loss, even the pain, that the burial grounds hold. The grids' noise distorts how the ground feels, interrupting a moment to remember with the deafening sound of electricity. I wonder if the human remains can ever actually be laid to rest in this area. How do families who come here to pay respect feel? Is there enough space to actually be with the dead here without interference? I am not comfortable here, so many noises competing, so many networks of power that are being drawn and redrawn to make more settler spaces. Instead of an experience of intimacy and community, of seeing treaty relations respected, being in-between the power plant and the memorial feels like a rupture a single body cannot fix.

As the older Bridge once did, the new Bridge continues to connect the north and south side of Edmonton—lands that still belong to Indigenous peoples. On the north side, the presence of cemetery, and the history of the Papaschase Cree on Rossdale Flats, its proximity to Fort Edmonton and the signing of Treaty 6, are a reminder of the Indigenous history. On the south side, the history of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous contact, and exchange, commemorated in the installation of the ᐃᓂᐣ (ÎNÎW) River Lot 11∞ Indigenous Art Park, which was recently opened showcasing a number of art installations by Indigenous artists that were gathered to tell the story of this place. This art park is the result

of a collaborative effort between the City of Edmonton, Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, Métis Nation of Alberta, Edmonton Arts Council and Indigenous artists and community members (Edmonton Arts Council). Named ᐃᓀᐤ (ÎNÎW), pronounced "ee-nu," a Cree word meaning "I am of the Earth," the park is a series of installations located in River lot #11, where the homestead of early Métis settler Joseph McDonald used to be (Team ReconciliAction YEG). Each installation carefully reflects on the story of the place, engaging with the past and the present not as linear events but as contiguous stories that reflect on the deep connections that have been formed in this place. The installation "Pehonan" by Tiffany Shaw-Collinge was inspired by the idea of gathering and storytelling. The amphitheatre style seating, divided into 4 steps, connected to a sacred circle at the base, represent Métis culture coming together with the European seating and Indigenous sacred circles. The different layers, from top to bottom, are made out of quartzite, word, weathered steel and polished-mirror steel, to represent different periods: pre-historic time,[19] forts and Métis cabins, contemporary time and the future. If you sit at the top, closer to the past, the available perspective is greater. If you sit at the bottom, closer to the future, the perspective available is limited. (Shaw-Collinge 02:23- 04:45). This artwork shows the importance of considering the history to look and act on the present and future. Interestingly, the Bridge can be seen from the top.

The park opened in 2018, enhancing the voice of Indigenous artists and opening another space for the history of Indigenous peoples on this land.[20] Although some of the new development projects have continuously reshaped the land into different lots, private and

[19] Tiffany Shaw-Collinge utilizes this term to describe a time before the forts. The term pre-historic is contested.
[20] To know more about the Project, artists and artwork, see Edmonton Arts Council and Walkable Edmonton website.

public property, the efforts made by Indigenous communities and other Non-Indigenous communities to honor Indigenous voices has meant that these lands are never completely redesigned. Within the land, from the land, and through the voices of those who know these lands, this place still holds other ways to create and establish relationships that do not cleanse Edmonton of its past but rather clearly embody the ways in which its past is part of its present and future.

Fig. 16. Outlined feet. My photo.

This photo (above) was taken on the newly paved south-east side of the Bridge. The drawn outlined feet, surrounding the single hand evoke the sense of gathering that I believe this physical place allows, despite the ways in which colonial methods of policing the Bridge are enforced. The space's redesign, in which newer pathways and a new hill encompass this place, has removed the trees, the soil and even the grass to literally make a new place. To

me, this drawing suggests that people are still writing on and over this new space, carrying out communal practices and interventions. In this image, I find myself engaged by other people who have taken the opportunity to occupy this space. I am engaged with the particular feel of the pavement and the marks left by the feet outlines and the hand. I remember the way we used to draw the outlines of our feet and hands on the playground when I was younger. The ground was cold to the touch, but the experience warmed us up as laughter and the exchange of words brought us together. It was a game that made me feel grounded. I was able to identify my feet, and therefore my body, as part of a community of feet and accompanying bodies. Here, I feel that the feet I found near the Bridge represent a similar communal act of art. These images became symbols to me of community and connection. I longingly and happily reflected on this moment as being grounded once again to a place. I was reminded of that cold jolt the first time I laid my hand to be outlined on the pavement and the tickling sensation of the chalk drawing around my fingers. These feet drawn on the Bridge helped me to remember that I was in the present, on that land, and now it reminds me that I am in the present in Mexico City.

For me those feet symbolize that we can create places that we can cross, draw on, lie down on, sleep on, meet on and that there is always more than the constructed and planned spaces that the City and the state envisions for our places and for this land. The interconnected tissues that bind all living forms hold the possibility to reconfigure space and our places according to life instead of capital, compelling us to take care of and to care for our relations rather than money and economic value.

Beside this community of traced feet with one hand shared, I can read beyond colonial formations and open myself up to something else. These feet ground me literally to my community, to my friends in Edmonton and to Mexico City and to the ground we draw

on, to the land we live on. I read these outlined feet as traced by a community of family, or friends, who wanted to be connected, and who felt a connection to this particular place. In my reading, this expression of community transgresses the state sanctioned boundaries designed by the imagined space of the new Bridge and inscribes a collective feeling that links me directly to the material world. This intervention in the space, of drawn feet, altered that place, for me. My past and my present existed simultaneously for a moment and I re-lived and re-experienced my past. Now I bring that moment into my present. As I remember my own story, I think about the Indigenous Nations who re-experience and re-tell their histories every time they visit the River, or when they visit the Burial Grounds. Even though these are stories that I cannot access, I begin to understand how a particular land, seen from a particular time, and from a particular perspective can feel familiar (in the sense of family relation). I grew connected to the Bridge precisely because of how it connected me to Mexico City, my family and my own sense of place and respect for the land on which I have lived for years.

Walking across the Bridge, crossing the North Saskatchewan River, made Edmonton, and its land real to me. I found more than settler designs and promises of better life. Crossing the Bridge allowed me to feel and live on the land immersed in the City's reality which meant not only being connected to the River, the cycles of water, the trees and the ground but also to the different socially constructed spaces that I had to make my way through and around. I walked the Bridge in wonder, crossing over a flowing river and a clear blue sky that seem strange to someone coming from Mexico City: a place known for its crowded spaces, highly polluted skies; a city built over the Texcoco lake—a body of water to which we no longer connect or relate. In Edmonton, the River is the main and natural link between Edmonton and other cities in Canada. This source of water connects

different communities together, despite the political divisions that have segmented the territory. From the Rocky Mountains in British Colombia to the South Saskatchewan River at the Saskatchewan River Forks, the North Saskatchewan River flows across the prairies into Lake Winnipeg, which eventually flows into the Hudson's Bay and up to the Artic Ocean and North Atlantic (Todd, "Fish" 104). The extensive territory that this River flows through only accentuates the importance that this artery has to the continuance of life. Different life forms use the River's waters: they bathe, they swim, they eat from the River. Beavers, frogs, fish, herons, butterflies, aspen, spruce, wild roses, Saskatoon berries, among many other beings depend on its waters to survive. Unlike me, these living beings are so familiar with the weather, the slopes, the turns, other species, that you know it is still their home, despite the extreme changes that Edmonton has gone through.

The river valley has changed much since the early fur trade period. Trees have grown and trees have been cut down to make room for flat, or slightly uneven, walking paths to walk around the area and to walk to the River. The new Bridge is a particular modification as well. Older photographs show yellow and green leaves extending all across the banks, including the area near the old Bridge. Some trees were removed to make room for the two concrete decks, a promenade on the north side, new paths that connected the Bridge north and south, east and west of Edmonton.[21] For a few months, the land was made up only of soil and concrete. In their place, riparian planting in the riverbank is used to stabilize the location, new aspen trees, grown in clusters, and new shrubs decorate the space. Once installed, the new trails, the pavement, the grass and the new trees seem to

[21] More detailed information on additions, materials, design and overall aim of the project can be found on the DIALOG and ISL Engineering and Land Services entry to the Canadian Consulting Engineer awards in 2019.

stand out uncomfortably over a ground that has not settled in yet. The openness of the trails and the under Bridge probably made certain species migrate to other locations, nevertheless, the pigeons, the swimming fish, the flying gulls, remain. These new paths do not really stand out, they look like any other path on the street, on any other city. Underneath the Bridge, the shade provided by the new structure, the grey and white colors of cement and steel makes this space feel cold and uninviting. The appeal of a more modern looking Bridge has the disadvantage of looking, and feeling, sterile and lifeless. Nonetheless, it also offers plenty of lookout spaces that bring the sky, the land and the River together.

Fig. 17. Under the Bridge. My photo.

Underneath the Bridge, the ripples caused by birds diving into the water, the sound of wind accompanying these dives, echo differently. I am not alone when I stare at these living beings. On the north east shared path, on the south side, a wedding party gathers. Bride and groom laugh for a camera that captures the moment. A special event they decided to share on the Bridge. Wind is mostly calm, with occasional breezes as if it is watching this moment and expressing its own joy. Birds circle around but cause no disruption. I take this happiness in and imagine how many times have people laughed or cried or screamed

here; how many events has the River seen and how many histories are here, waiting to be told. These moments of pure joy, of laughter and enjoyment, allow me to see the Bridge under a different light, not only as the new gateway to the City, but as an element that still manages to bring people, animals, birds, trees, stories together. In its own way, the Bridge holds the land that holds a different map that continues to resist settler's exploitation of its resources.

Fig. 18. River from the Bridge. My photo.

I read you now

Standing on my own in my own land

Clay-like soil, driven and drifting across

Ghostly wavey waters of a dried lake

Waving lines of seismic vibrations

The land vibrates, and I begin to listen.

Pehonan taught me more

About how to live

Living waters,

Break pipes,

Learned to live and flow through

And against

Paved paths that were once

Their

Passages

Water

Drips

Into

Bodies

Bodies

Drip

Slowly

Into

Others.

Conclusion: Thinking on the Bridge

In this thesis, within the context of the new Walterdale Bridge and its surrounding areas, I explored how constructed spaces are made into places to naturalize the presence of white settler bodies on Indigenous lands. I wanted to unmap the European legal land claim on what is now known as Edmonton. I focused on the Bridge, the River, its banks, the Memorial, the Rossdale Flats. As I came to realize, this is a sacred location for Indigenous peoples and an important, and contested area, for white settlement. By reading the new Bridge, I wanted to focus on the Canadian national myth, *terra nullius,* in which European settlement has depended on to talk about the land as "empty" and "uninhabited", in order to deny Indigenous histories and land claims. By looking closely at the three categories of space, conceived, perceived and lived, I analyzed the way in which places, such as the Bridge and Rossdale flats, are physical extensions of different systems of domination that have reinforced white settlement and white settler presence. By considering what constitutes conceived space (how space is planned), I was able to look at the different myths (stories) and underlying ideas that have been inscribed about the land, on the land, to rearrange it according to settler values and presence. Through perceived space, (how space determines our practices and routines), I analyzed the ways in which ideas and myths are materialized on the land to define who is able to use the space and who is not. Lastly, I looked at lived space (how people literally engage and interact with that space), I was able to look at the disruptive and disrupting social relations on and around the Walterdale Bridge that challenge the imposed notions of space. [22]

[22] It is possible to think of the three interactions with space—conceived, perceived, lived— in relation to the work on place described by Tuck and McKenzie. Although it is outside the scope of this work, some suggested readings that might open up this discussion are Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places* and Selena Couture's *Against the Current and Into the Light.*

I focused on place-based theory to acknowledge Indigenous epistemological, ontological, cosmological relationships to the land that continue to exist in Edmonton. Place in its material and physical reality, as Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie explore, is a site of relational validity in which human life is connected to and dependent on other species and the land. Centering place invited me to think about the relational and interconnected tissues that bind each living being and allowed me to think about these connections within the context of the Walterdale Bridge. As a place with Indigenous and settler histories, exploring the physical and material reality of the new Bridge also allowed me to explore the most recent history of Edmonton alongside my own history in Mexico City. That is, the Bridge allowed me to explore the ways in which I could communicate from and through both places.

Inspired by the transmaterial interventions of Springgay and Truman, I wanted to understand how my "corporeal or physical response to the textures" (5) of the Bridge, the banks, the snow and the River, were related to my upbringing in Mexico City, and how they might have been perhaps different than the responses from people who have lived in Edmonton longer. Since I was only starting to explore Edmonton, I think being drawn to the trees, the birds and particularly to the history allowed me to investigate this place in an embodied and localized way. The materiality of the different slopes, roots, and wind among other bodies brought my walking body closer to the reality of the place, to the interconnectedness of all these living forms. I was curious. By walking and listening and walking and listening, I wanted to understand the land according to the different life forms it holds—the beavers, hares, mushrooms, redosier dogwood, strong winds. Life forms that continue to occupy these spaces and to resist other occupancies by taking up space, by inhabiting place according to their own rhythms— resting, gathering, leaving without

functioning according to capitalist and colonial schedules and practices. These life forms show me that there is a balance that settlement continues to disrupt.

Springgay and Truman argue that walking "enmeshes human and non-human bodies with place [therefore] we need different accounts of embodiment that take responsibility for the intra-active manner by which space, time, bodies, events and things—including labour—are interactively performed and produced" (9). For me, walking allowed me to create a memory of the Bridge from different perspectives which made me much more aware of where I was within a network of histories, stories and living beings, both in Edmonton and in Mexico City. Placing myself within Edmonton's interactive relations between the social and the material, made clear that the material reality, with its undefined possibilities will always respond to and act against socially constructed spaces. This immersion, in turn, helped me see Mexico City as place and space differently as well. By arriving, I wanted to understand better where I was. By leaving, I wanted to understand where I had been. Now that I have returned, I want to understand where I am. I am hoping that this project will continue to allow me to engage deeply with the many different levels of meaning that I found on the Bridge, that I now find all around me in my home in Mexico City, in the land of the Nahuas, above the drained Texcoco, where I make my life.

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