

Tracing Memories: collaborative research in the Tłıchq̓ region

by

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# Abstract

## **Background to this dissertation**

In 2012 (as part of my Master's research) I began a creative collaboration in the Tłı̨chǫ region of the Northwest Territories. Over a period of 18 months I worked with community elders and youth in the creation of an animated film (based on a historic oral story). This PhD is a continuation of that work. The next phase in this collaboration has involved a more complex process of travel and media production along with higher level involvement from participants and myself. Through this research I have worked with community members to explore how a creative practice may bridge knowledge from the past with current and future generations. The following section will elaborate on this inquiry.

## **Bridging knowledge**

In this document I will describe how knowledge was bridged through the co-creation of an animated film. Research and production behind this film involved extensive travel, a historical reenactment, and collective image-making. As I will discuss throughout part 1 of this dissertation, the process of making this film recontextualized knowledge from the past. A creative project helped mediate between ancestral memory, and twenty-first century Dene society. The following chapters will elaborate on the journey behind this project, illustrating how the past was brought into the present, while also describing multiple excursions on the land. The introduction to this dissertation provides a description of the land that I have been honoured to visit many times—it is the land that brought this research to life.

# Preface

This thesis is an original work by Adolfo Ruiz. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Tracing Memories: visualizing the story of Peace between Edzo and Akaitcho”, No. Pro00062028, March 4, 2016.

Some of the research conducted for this thesis (including the animated production of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace) forms part of a collaboration, between Adolfo Ruiz and members of the Behchokò community in the Northwest Territories.

# Acknowledgments

Research activities described in this dissertation were developed through the knowledge and effort of many people in the Northwest Territories and beyond. First, I would like to thank Tłı̨chq̓ elders for sharing their knowledge of history. It has been an honour to work with the late Harry Apples, along with Edward Camille, Philip Dryneck, Philip Husky, Joseph Judas, Jimmy Kodzin, Melanie Lafferty, Monique Mackenzie, the late Robert Mackenzie, Dora Migwi, Jimmy Nitsiza, Elizabeth Rabesca, Joe Rabesca, Michel Louis Rabesca, and Francis Willah. Their lived experiences provided ongoing guidance and inspiration since we began this creative collaboration in 2012.

The hospitality and generosity of many other people in the Tłı̨chq̓ community of Behchok̓—offering time, resources and technical support—made it possible to research the story of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace. These people include Peter Husky, Jonas Lafferty, Lucy Lafferty, Grand Chief Goerge Mackenzie, Rosa Mantla, Terri Naskan, Tammy Steinwand-Deschambeault, John B. Zoe, as well as teachers and students at Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School. I offer special mention of Tony Rabesca, for his friendship and ongoing guidance—he orchestrated many activities in the community. Tony's vision of being 'strong like two people' helped articulate the significance of this collaboration, while moving the research forward.

The creative contributions of many talented people in Behchok̓ became essential in reenacting and visualizing the animated version of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace. As part of the reenactment, I thank Doreen Apples, Darla Beaulieu, Berinda Mackenzie, Derrick Mackenzie, Charles Mantla, Kirk Mantla, Nikita Mantla, Johnny Naedzo, Marie Nedlin, Travis Quitte, Floriann Rabesca, Vincent Rabesca, Joyce Washi, Alister Wetrade, Angela Zoe, Brittanya Zoe, and Rianne Zoe. As part of the animation production I express my gratitude to Angus Beaulieu, Ray McSwain, and James Wedzin. As part of the film production I had the privilege of working with renowned Tłı̨chq̓ artist Archie Beaulieu—sadly, Archie passed away in 2017. His presence in this project was inspirational, and his memory lives on in the unique flowing linework of his paintings, that often depict oral stories from the region. The contribution of Tłı̨chq̓ artist Archie Beaverho also deserves special mention. Archie patiently rendered hundreds of

exquisite drawings that appear throughout the film. In addition, I thank Dakota House, as well as Richard Van Camp, for their creative contributions and support at different stages in this project.

I am also grateful for the wealth of knowledge and continual support offered by my PhD supervisors—Megan Strickfaden and Gavin Renwick. They encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies, and helped make this journey extremely rewarding. Methods and relationships previously established by my supervisors made this research possible. As part of this journey I have also received important advice from Thomas D. Andrews, Brendan Hokowhitu, Caroline MacDonald-Davis, and Patrick Scott. Thanks as well to Elizabeth Boone for being part of the examining committee, and Rhonda Breitreuz for chairing my final oral defence.

I thank my family for their love, as well as their practical support in many of the day-to-day challenges of graduate studies. I am grateful to my parents, Carmen and Juan, as well as my son, Sebastian.

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# Introduction

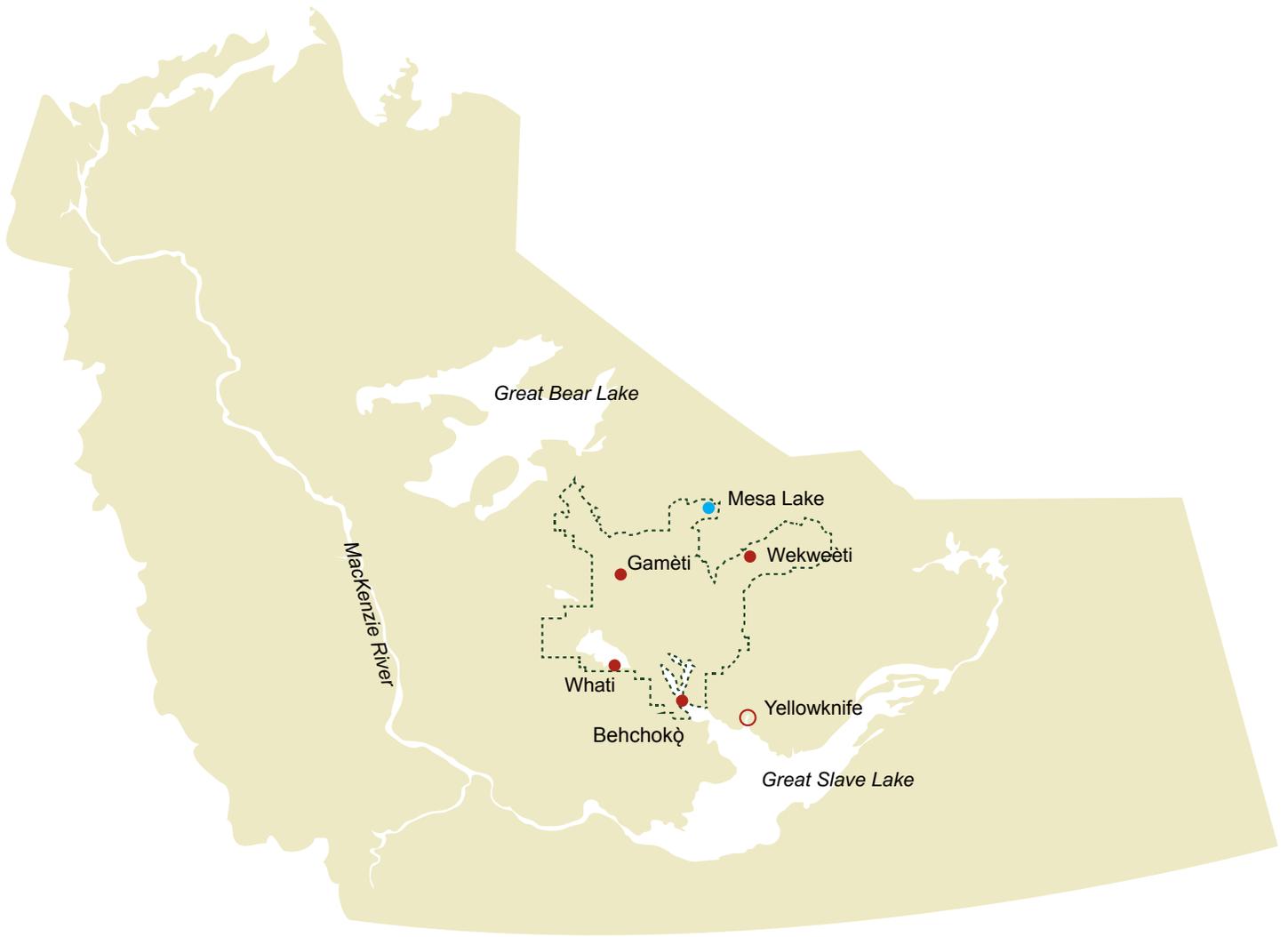


Figure 1: The self-governed Tłı̨chǫ region in the Northwest Territories.

## The Tłı̨chq̓ region

The Tłı̨chq̓ are a self-governed group of Athapaskan-speaking Dene people (over 3,000) who reside in the Northwest Territories of Canada.<sup>2</sup> Behchokq̓ is the largest community in the region, followed by smaller hamlets including Gamètı̨, Whatı̨, and Wekweètı̨. In 2005, after signing The Tłı̨chq̓ Agreement, the people of the region obtained surface and subsurface rights to 39,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land.<sup>3</sup> Geographically, the western portion of the region is made up of dense boreal forest, thinning out in the central part, where the landscape is typical of the Canadian Shield (revealing exposed precambrian rock).<sup>4</sup> The northeast consists of treeless terrain, often referred to as the barrenlands, or tundra. Mesa Lake (in the north of the region) is where Edzo and Akaitcho made peace in the 19th century—I will make reference to this lake throughout this dissertation.<sup>5</sup>

As part of my research I worked closely with elders, members of the regional government, as well as students from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School in Behchokq̓. Building on relationships developed in the region during the completion of my Master's degree, I have received ongoing support for the continuation of our research from the Tłı̨chq̓ Government.<sup>6</sup>

### Overview

Tłı̨chq̓ oral history reveals an idea that Patrick Scott discusses in his book *Talking Tools*; namely, "true knowledge is personal knowledge."<sup>6</sup> Part 1 of this dissertation begins with a chapter entitled Ways of Knowing, that looks into this idea. Through this chapter I take a critical position on issues of epistemology (describing differences between objectivist and subjectivist positions). I also discuss how reflexivity may help decolonize the writing process, and refer to the significance of storytelling, memory, and imagery within the context of this document.

Subsequent chapters in part 1 are primarily dedicated to descriptions of research activities in the Tłı̨chq̓ region. In these chapters I discuss how the past is carried into the present through engagement with meaningful material and environments. I refer to several activities on Tłı̨chq̓ lands that helped recontextualize stories from the past, including storytelling sessions in which elders shared multiple versions of Edzo's 19th century journey.

The last four chapters of part 1 focus on creative activities that led to the making of an animated film.<sup>7</sup> I will refer to image-making activities that brought elders and young people together. In these chapters I will also describe the historical reenactment of the story of peace (that took place in June, 2016 in Behchokq̓), and subsequent animation workshops (from 2016 to 2018).

In part 2 of this dissertation I describe the relevance of history, time, material culture, and human ecology within the context of this research.<sup>8</sup> Through these chapters I continue

2. Andrews, Thomas D. "There will be many stories: museum anthropology, collaboration, and the Tlı̨cho." (PhD diss., University of Dundee, 2011), 28-29, [https://wrrb.ca/sites/default/files/Andrews\\_2011\\_ThereWillBeManyStories\\_UD.pdf](https://wrrb.ca/sites/default/files/Andrews_2011_ThereWillBeManyStories_UD.pdf).

Other Athapaskan groups in the north include the Gwich'in, Sahtúot'ine, K'ahsho Got'ine, Shita Got'ine (Mountain Dene), Slavey, Yellowknives, Denesuline.

3. Patrick Scott, *Talking Tools: Faces of Aboriginal Oral Tradition in Contemporary Society* (Edmonton: CCI Press, 2012), 154.

4. Andrews, 'There will be many stories,' 51.

5. In this thesis I will often use the word "Denendeh" when referring to the north. Denendeh, or "land of the people" represents the vast homeland of several Dene groups (spanning an area of over one million square kilometres)—these groups include (from north to south): the Gwich'in, Sahtúot'ine, K'ahsho Got'ine, Shita Got'ine (Mountain Dene), Slavey, Tłı̨chq̓, Yellowknives, Denesuline..

Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2014), 57.

6. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 8.

7. The animated film created through this research is based on a 19th century peace-making event between the Tłı̨chq̓ (led by Edzo), and the Yellowknife Dene (led by Akaitcho) at Mesa Lake.

Throughout this research, the story has been referred to as Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace (this is the title I will mostly use when discussing the story, but I will occasionally refer to it as the story of peace). This story is historically significant for the Tłı̨chq̓ because it brought an end to long standing conflict, stretching back to the late 18th century—according to Hudson's Bay Company Archives, the event most likely took place in the late summer of 1829.

June Helm, *The People of Denendeh: Ethnohistory of the Indians of Canada's Northwest Territories* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 230.



Figure 2: Russell Lake, near Behchokò. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2016 [Tłı̨chǫ Government].

to discuss how knowledge from the past is reactivated through activities in the present. In the chapter on human ecology I make reference to land—as the place that connects communities to historical knowledge.

In this document I often write about the land, while reflecting on the significance of being physically present in particular environments. Traveling the land, as Thomas D. Andrews reminds us, “is central to the Tł̓ch̓q way of knowing.”<sup>9</sup> Rocks, rivers, and trees evoke ancestral knowledge. As part of this research, visiting meaningful places helped bring history to life.

8. Until World War II, Tł̓ch̓q involvement with Euro-Canadian society was mostly limited to interaction with the fur trader and missionary. In the 1950s many families moved to permanently established communities—becoming increasingly involved in the cash economy of settler society. Despite this change in lifestyle, traditional activities, including walking (along ancestral trails), hunting, trapping and fishing continue to be practiced throughout the region. Chapter 9 provides an expanded discussion of regional history.

Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 8.

Andrews, ‘There will be many stories,’ 28.

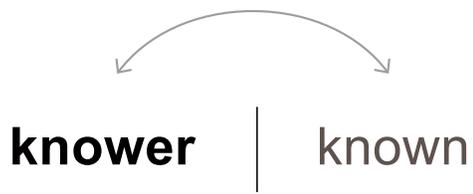
9. Andrews, ‘There will be many stories,’ 33.



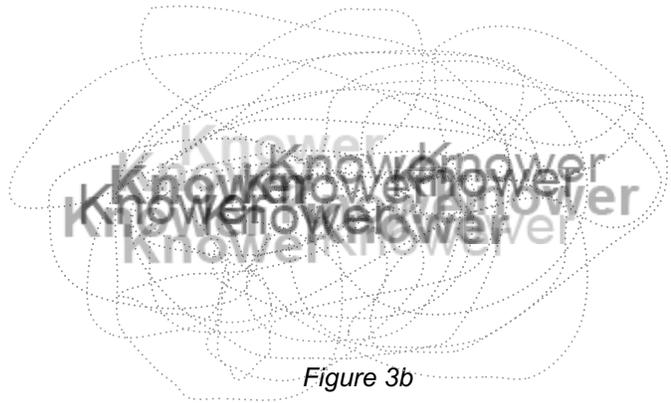
# Part 1

The animated film created as part of this research—*Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*—  
can be viewed at the following link: <https://youtu.be/wRyUMrkMoyE>

# Chapter 1: Ways of knowing



*Figure 3a*  
(objectivist)



*Figure 3b*  
(subjectivist)

Figure 3: Epistemological exploration using typography.

## Epistemology, storytelling and reflexivity

Much of this dissertation will be described through a reflexive, narrative form of writing. Back in 2015, before piecing together my PhD candidacy exam, I shared an initial draft of this text with my supervisor, Megan Strickfaden, who suggested I provide a short preface (which you are now reading) that explains my use of reflexivity and narrative. After several hours of typing, deleting, and rewording this introductory text, I came to an important realization: my approach to writing is a direct outcome of my epistemological position. That is to say, the language I use to describe my research is based on my “assumptions about what is knowable”.<sup>1</sup> A brief discussion of epistemology, therefore, will precede my explanation of why a narrative, reflexive form of writing is an appropriate way of describing this research.

Epistemology is foundational to research because it indicates what may count, and not count, as legitimate knowledge.<sup>2</sup> An epistemological perspective also describes how I “think about the process of manufacturing knowledge”.<sup>3</sup> To clarify my own position I will refer to the typographic experiments (on the left hand page), which illustrate two epistemological extremes. *Figure 3a* represents an objectivist position whereby knowledge, separated from an observer, moves along a relatively stable, predictable pathway (between knower and known). From this epistemological position, knowledge is legitimate *only* if an investigator maintains detachment and neutrality. *Figure 3b* represents a subjectivist position, in which knowledge is entangled and continually flowing along multiple, unstable pathways. Within this epistemological position, legitimate knowledge is relational rather than detached – knowledge is a co-creation that describes multiple voices and realities. Furthermore, the researcher’s subjectivity is revealed at the outset.<sup>4</sup>

*Figure 3b* also illustrates the relationship between all entities involved in an investigation. As part of my PhD research (which has involved collaborative work in a Dene community) I align myself with a subjectivist epistemology. In describing this research, I will position myself as one of many participants (as in *figure 3b*) who shares knowledge within a collaborative relationship.<sup>5</sup>

Now that I have briefly articulated my epistemological assumptions, I am in a position to discuss the significance of narrative and reflexivity within the context of this proposal. Knowledge shared in this document is often based on lived experiences, (which as Margaret Kovach indicates, provides “a legitimate way of knowing”), and storytelling (which is “a legitimate way of sharing knowledge”).<sup>6</sup> Storytelling has provided a way of putting a subjectivist epistemology (as illustrated in *figure 3b*) into words – weaving my own personal experiences with knowledge from the Dene community where this research is taking place.

Through the sharing of stories I have also engaged in a process of reflexivity, involving what Lincoln and Guba describe as “critical subjectivity and self-awareness”.<sup>7</sup> In this document I will at times reveal my subjectivity through the sharing of a story that leads

1. Kerry Daly, “Epistemological considerations in qualitative research,” in *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development*, ed. Kerry Daly (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2007), 21.

2. Alastair McIntosh. “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy.” in *Radical Human Ecology*, ed. Lewis Williams, Rose Roberts and Alastair McIntosh. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 31.

3. Daly, Epistemological considerations in qualitative research, 21.

4. Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett, “Putting Ourselves Forward: Location in Aboriginal Research.” in *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-oppressive Approaches*, ed. Leslie Brown and Susan Strega. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press/Womens’ Press, 2005), 97.

5. Within the context of Indigenous research, Shawn Wilson describes knowledge as “relational” – meaning that relationships between people, and with the cosmos, non-human animals, plants, and earth are fundamental to research.

Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2008), 56.

6. Margaret Kovach, “Emerging from the Margins: Indigenous Methodologies.” in *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-oppressive Approaches*, ed. Leslie Brown and Susan Strega. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press/Womens’ Press, 2005), 28.

7. Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Egon G. Guba, “Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences,” in *Handbook of qualitative research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990), 173.



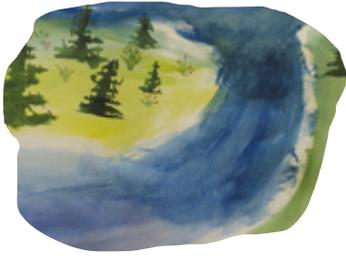
Figure 4: A painting of Mesa Lake by Tłıchq artist Ray McSwain, 2016.

me to critically reflect on my cultural heritage. At other times I will discuss how Western philosophy shaped my worldview during early educational experiences.

The connection between storytelling, reflexivity, and epistemology will be further explored in this and other chapters. Based on my epistemological allegiance, relationships will be foundational to this work.<sup>8</sup> This point will be reinforced by exploring links between events that, although seemingly disconnected, share a relationship that is of personal significance.

In the next section I will further situate myself by discussing different experiences of home through pictures and words. Subsequent sections explore how Western philosophy and literacy have shaped my worldview, while also describing ways in which the process of writing may be decolonized. It is my intention, in this chapter, to explore philosophical, cultural, and personal knowledge that has informed this collaborative work.

8. My epistemological position, along with various other topics discussed in this chapter, are integral to an Indigenous Research Methodology through which this work developed. For a detailed description of how I adapted the methodology to this collaborative research see appendix (page 202 and 203).



Tłjchq land painting, 2012



Cadiz, Spain, early 90s



My father and family in Barcelona, circa 1960



Behchokq, 2013.



With my father in Edmonton, 1975



In the bush near Behchokq, 2012



View from my flat in London UK, 1999



Tłjchq land painting, 2012



With my mother and sister in Edmonton, 1979



Behchokq, 2013.



With my mother in Barcelona, 1972



Elder Rosalie Mantla, Behchokq, 2013

Figure 5: An Exploration of home through illustration and photography.

## Experiences of home: an exploration of multiple realities through image and writing<sup>9</sup>

Since I began collaborating on Dene lands I have often thought of 1975 as a transformative year. It was the year my parents and I immigrated to Canada. It was also the year of the Dene Declaration, and the Berger Inquiry—events that transformed northern communities.<sup>10</sup> All of these events involved attempts to break away from a confining experience of home. In the case of my family, we left Spain in the final months of Francisco Franco's dictatorship, and moved to a new country. That same year, the Dene stopped the government of Canada from constructing a "multibillion-dollar pipeline" that would have cut across a northern homeland.<sup>11</sup>

Multiple, and often contradictory, notions of home have informed my research experiences in the Tłı̄chq̄ Dene region of the Northwest Territories. These contradictions revealed themselves while piecing together the images that introduce this section (left). In combining this visual material, I juxtaposed images created during trips to Behchok̄, in the Tłı̄chq̄ region, with photographs that depict personal experiences of home. Visuals from Behchok̄ were gathered during events in which community members shared notions of home through painting, walking, and storytelling.

As I organized the above composition, I began noticing the manicured lawn, the fence, and built structures that define the places where I have lived. These photographs reveal spaces that are organized and divided by straight lines. This compartmentalization of land is based on a colonial conception of space.<sup>12</sup> As I finished piecing together these opening visuals I considered the contradictions, and dissonance, evident in the early stages of my life story: I was born into a society of undisguised oppression, and later moved to a country that exercises a disguised or "invisible" form of oppression on First Nations people.<sup>13</sup>

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Locating myself as a researcher has been the most challenging part of my PhD. Articulating my place, as a non-indigenous researcher, within a project taking place on indigenous lands has involved a process of looking back at my own past, writing, and travelling to the Tłı̄chq̄ region. After piecing together the images of home, I realized that since first travelling to Behchok̄ in 2012, I have been rewriting my life-story. During the last 6 years I have reevaluated my interpretation of the past. In memory I hold a dependable account of the past—an unbroken link to former occurrences—but events from yesterday can also be adapted to evolving circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

In reevaluating the past, I have identified events from years ago that are open to interpretation, and others that are not. For instance, I come from a specific place and time – I was born in Barcelona in 1972; my mother is a mix of Andalusian and Galician ancestry, my paternal family is from Castile (this knowledge is firmly established in my life-story). But there are other events from the past that I have reexamined, such as the "meta-narrative" of "truth" I was taught during my grade school years.<sup>16</sup> At the time, history, much like to-

9. The exploration of home provided in this section is inspired by graduate course work taken with Gavin Renwick in 2011. The relationship between home and identity has also been explored extensively in human ecology and material culture literature:

Frederick Steiner, *Human Ecology: following nature's lead* (Washington: Island Press, 2014), 39.

Pierre Bourdieu, "The Berber house or the world reversed," *Social Science Information* 9:151 (1970): published by Sage, doi: 10.1177/053901847000900213

Photographs of the Tłı̄chq̄ region, shown in this visual exploration, were taken by Mike McLaughlin.

10. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 57.

11. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 56.

The MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, or Berger Inquiry, was sponsored by the Crown to investigate the impact of constructing a pipeline to transport gas via the MacKenzie River Valley to southern Canada and the U.S.

12. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 51.

13. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 48.

Coulthard references Taiaiake Alfred who argues that "oppression has become increasingly invisible... no longer constituted in conventional terms of military occupation, onerous taxation burdens, blatant land thefts" but through a "fluid confluence of politics, economics psychology and culture".

14. Revising a personal life-story is similar to revising a country's national story. Nigerian-British writer Ben Okri refers to this idea when he writes that "stories... are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and nations... nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings." Ben Okri's quote was taken from: Alastair McIntosh, *Soil and Soul: People versus Corporate Power* (London: Aurum Press, 2001), 46.



Figure 6: Mesa Lake, photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchǫ Government].

day, was taught from the perspective of the settler state, and capitalist dispossession was fully normalized.<sup>17</sup>

The collection of images referred to in this section have provided a way of reevaluating early life experiences and notions of home. As mentioned, some of these pictures reflect colonial “conceptions of space” – this includes, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, the way European and settler states “arranged their homes and towns, collected and displayed objects... set out agricultural fields and arranged gardens”.<sup>18</sup> For Dene elders, home is not exclusively defined by straight lines and boundaries – it also includes lines of travel, trails and pathways that have been walked by ancestors.<sup>19</sup> At the 1975 Berger Inquiry, former member of the NWT Legislature, George Barnaby articulated a similar concept of home: “We have no word in our language that means wilderness, as anywhere we go is our home”.<sup>20</sup>

It is through this diverse collection of images, journeys, and knowledge, that I not only rewrite ideas of home, but attempt to locate myself as a researcher – as a creative collaborator working with members of the Behchokò community. My work on Dene lands has been one of the most significant, and transformative, learning experience of my adult life. This experience has required that I engage in an ongoing process of reevaluating, and questioning, the language and underlying assumptions that inform my way of knowing. This has led me to critically consider the foundational cultural practice through which I interpret and describe the world: literacy. A good part of the remainder of this introduction involves a critique of the written word.

Before moving on, I would like to draw your attention back to the collection of old and recent pictures that opened this part of my dissertation. As mentioned, many of these pictures were taken during my visits to the Tłı̄chq̄ region. I have included video stills captured in the bush, and illustrations created by students in Behchokò. These images are visualizations of the Tłı̄chq̄ home. After walking the land, and several years of collaborating with the Behchokò community, a part of my own lived experience, memory, and story, is entangled in the trees, trails, and people of the region. My PhD is a continuation of this ongoing relationship.

Throughout this dissertation I will continue discussing my relationship with people and places in the Tłı̄chq̄ region. Before describing my journeys to Behchokò, however, I will conclude this introduction with critical explorations of philosophy and literacy. The following page will begin with a rereading of an often cited story that continues to impact Western philosophy over 350 years after it was written.

### **The Cartesian demon**

Earlier this year I reacquainted myself with brief summaries of Rene Descartes’ imaginary encounter with a trickster demon.<sup>21</sup> Each of the versions I read cover the same thought experiment originally described in 1641 – Descartes imagines a demon who presents him

15. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 140.

Henry S. Sharp, *Loon: memory, meaning, and reality in a northern Dene community* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 63.

16. Within the Spanish “meta-narrative”, evident in my high school art history textbook (from my adolescent years in Spain), *history* starts with the emergence of classical Western aesthetics – introduced through, among other events, the Roman conquest of the Iberian peninsula. Indigenous (pre-Roman) Iberian cultures are part of the nation’s *protohistory*. As for my early Canadian education, I don’t have textbooks from my elementary and junior high years in Alberta, but Amy Von Heyking describes the colonial bias evident in the Alberta social studies curriculum of the 1980s – she notes how the textbooks from that time “continued to portray aboriginal and other minority groups, defined by ethnic origin, class or political leanings, in stereotypical terms.”

José María de Azcárate Ristori, Alfonso Emilio Pérez Sanchez, and Juan Antonio Ramírez Domínguez, *Historia del Arte* (Madrid: Anaya, 1984), 64.

Amy Von Heyking, *Creating Citizens: History and Identity in Alberta’s Schools, 1905-1980* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006), 150.

Kovach, *Emerging from the Margins*, 25.

17. Kovach, *Emerging from the margins*, 25.

Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 14.

18. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 51.

19. Tłı̄chq̄ elder Robert Mackenzie has stated the following: “How can some people say a place is their land when their predecessors have not left their footprints and have not walked with their parents in these places? They did not know that area; they had no stories to guide them”. Mackenzie’s quote was taken from Alice Legat, *Walking the Land, feeding the Fire: Knowledge and stewardship among the Tłı̄chq̄ Dene* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2012), 188.

20. George Barnaby, et al., “The Political System and the Dene.” in *Dene Nation – the colony within*, ed. Mel Watkins. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 121.



Figure 7: Marker tracings exploring language and fragmentation, illustrated by the author, 2017.

with a world of illusions: as a result he questions the existence of the physical world, other minds, along with his own body.<sup>22</sup> The philosopher then concludes that under this hypothetical experience, he would indeed doubt the existence of everything with the exception of one thing: the existence of his doubting, thinking mind.<sup>23</sup>

After these readings, I was curious as to the rigid, and highly systematic nature of Descartes' interaction with the demon. The philosopher follows a series of discrete steps, while assuming a "subject-predicate" division of reality.<sup>24</sup> Descartes' demon it seems, is a creature of literacy, an outcome of the unique construction of language produced through the process of writing.

The singular "I" in Descartes' culminating statement – "I think, therefore I am" – is also a product of the written word.<sup>25</sup> The influence of writing, as a technology that creates detachment and fragmentation was the focus of Carpenter and McLuhan's 1960 anthology, *Explorations in Communication*. In the opening chapter of the book Marshall McLuhan described how the written word "isolated the reader in silence and helped create the Western "I".<sup>26</sup> Descartes himself recognized, in 1637, the impact of literacy on his worldview: "From my childhood, I have been familiar with letters... I was given to believe that by their help a clear and certain knowledge of all that is useful in life might be acquired".<sup>27</sup> Reading Descartes, through the lens of McLuhan, provided a fresh understanding of the many binary categories critiqued in graduate studies: the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter reveals a profound sense of fragmentation that is produced by phonetic literacy.<sup>28</sup>

I chose to revisit Descartes at this early stage in my dissertation for two reasons. First, because a majority of the critical literature I have encountered throughout my studies point to Cartesian duality as the source of "objective, mechanistic", and very damaging, "cultural constructs".<sup>29</sup> My PhD research involves creative collaborations on Dene lands. As part of my research, it is imperative that I dig deep, and locate the roots of Western cultural constructs that have shaped my worldview as a non-Indigenous man – it is only through a process of understanding and challenging my own preconceptions that I can locate the bias and weakness, the value and strength, that I may bring to this research.<sup>30</sup> Combing through my intellectual baggage, and preconceived ideas, has often revealed something Shawn Wilson has written about: "Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers".<sup>31</sup>

The second reason for quoting Descartes is because I wanted to describe the philosopher's mind-body split as a product of technology that deeply affects the senses. The written word may close the door to connectivity and "relationality", while opening the door to isolation and detachment.<sup>32</sup> Carpenter and McLuhan describe this process through the following:

The phonetic alphabet and all its derivatives stress a one-thing-at-a-time analytic awareness in perception. This intensity of analysis is achieved at the price of forcing all else in the field of perception into the subliminal.<sup>33</sup>

21. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 8.

Descartes' method of systematic doubt (which describes an encounter with an imaginary demon) led him to determine "that he would not believe nothing which he did not see quite clearly and distinctly to be true". His method is often referenced as the source of dualistic thinking.

The following text was also referenced: Richard Tamas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (Ballantine: New York, 1991), 227.

22. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 8.

Tamas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 277.

23. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 8.

Tamas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 277.

24. Richard Bambrough, *The Philosophy of Aristotle* (New York: Mentor Book, 1963), 206.

In reference to the philosophy of Aristotle, Richard Bambrough suggests that Western philosophical concepts may ultimately be reflective of the subject-predicate form of Indo-European languages through "which we habitually order our experience."

25. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 8.

26. Marshall McLuhan, "Classroom without walls." in *Explorations in Communication: an anthology*, ed. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 1.

27. René Descartes, "Discourse on method." in *Man and the Universe: The Philosophers of Science*, ed. Saxe Commins and Robert N. Linscott. (New York: Random House, 1947), 161.

28. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the extensions of man* (London: Routledge, 1997), 85.

29. Mere Roberts, "Revisiting 'The Natural World of the Māori'." in *Huiā histories of Māori: ngā Tāhuhu Kōrero*, ed. Danny Keenan. (Wellington: Huiā, 2012), 35.

Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 51.

30. Absolon and Willett, *Putting Ourselves Forward*, 97.

31. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 6.



Figure 8: Images of places lived and travelled, photographed by the author, 1999-2006.

It was this quote, that made me consider how the breaking up of knowledge and experience, evident in a Cartesian philosophical framework, may have its roots in phonetic literacy. This quote also brought to mind the possibility that Descartes' deceitful demon, may be related to the inner demons that haunt literate, colonial societies. The written word deeply affects how the world is sensed and interpreted.

### De-colonizing the writing process

The introductory critique of Descartes, has led me to an important realization: there is nothing neutral about the very tools through which I describe my experiences. Writing is a technology that shapes my understanding of any activity (including research). I accept this inevitability of literacy, not as a limitation, but as an opportunity to break away from linear, seemingly impartial modes of writing in order to counter "objectivity and neutrality with subjectivity... and humanity".<sup>34</sup> In writing my PhD, therefore, I have followed Four Arrows' suggestion that researchers "move away from an over-emphasis on academic writing if it tends to stifle creativity or one's true voice".<sup>35</sup> Finding my voice as a researcher has been a way of "locating" myself – an essential step in developing a collaborative research project with members of the Tłjchq community of Behchokq.<sup>36</sup>

Locating myself, is something that I have practiced in person during visits to the Tłjchq region – I have introduced myself, indicating who I am and where I come from, during meetings, storytelling sessions, and conversations with elders. Locating myself on paper, however, is something I have only recently attempted.<sup>37</sup> In developing this dissertation I have done my best to not only situate myself in each section, but to also find a unique, personal method of writing that combines *stories*, *memories*, and *imagery* as starting points for larger descriptions. I consider this writing style to be essential to the Indigenous Research Methodology through which this research developed.<sup>38</sup> I will now elaborate on the significance of using these three elements as part of my writing.

#### Stories

Storytelling is an important part of my collaboration on Tłjchq lands. Stories have often been the starting point for community based research. To honour the storytelling tradition of the Tłjchq region, I will at times share my own stories as part of this PhD. The sharing of such knowledge is also a way of supporting an important point raised by Absolon and Willett:

In our experience as Indigenous peoples, the process of telling a story is as much the point as the story itself. We resist colonial models of writing by talking about ourselves first and then relating pieces of our stories and ideas to the research topic.<sup>39</sup>

This approach to writing, as a way of connecting personal knowledge to the research topic is something I have carefully considered in this document. The stories I tell, describe

32. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 7.

33. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, "Introduction." in *Explorations in Communication: an anthology*, ed. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), xi.

34. Absolon and Willett, *Putting Ourselves Forward*, 103.

35. Four Arrows, *The Authentic Dissertation: Alternative Ways of Knowing, Research and Representation* (New York: Taylor & Francis Inc., 2008), 2.

36. Absolon and Willett, *Putting Ourselves Forward*, 97.

37. A reflexive form of writing, that reveals my subjectivity, is also a way of acknowledging a property of the physical world, as described almost a century ago by Niels Bohr. Experiments in the realm of quantum physics have long revealed that "the very act of observing a thing changes it, and... we, the observers, are in a very real sense part of the experiment – there is no clockwork that ticks away regardless of whether we look at it or not". Locating myself, therefore, acknowledges, not only my relationship to the Tłjchq region, but also the inextricable entanglement of knowledge conveyed by elders, youth, and myself.

John Gribbin, *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat: Quantum Physics and Reality* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 160.

38. For an expanded description of how I have interpreted and adapted an Indigenous Research methodology in this research, see appendix (pages, 212-213).

39. Absolon and Willett, *Putting Ourselves Forward*, 98.



Figure 9: Found imagery and text used for collage activities, compiled by the author, 2011.

journeys to the north, interactions with people, and art-making. This mode of writing has allowed me to connect these journeys to personal lived experiences, and subjective knowledge.

### *Memories*

I chose to discuss memories, as something separate from stories, because some of the experiences that I will share through the writing of my PhD, are derived from distant recollections. Moreover, stories I share are necessarily shaped by memory. Inevitably, “memory comes before knowledge”, as Chickasaw writer Eber Hampton describes:

Memory comes before knowledge. Every person’s life contains experiences and memories of these experiences. The way it works for me is that I forget these things until I unwrap them, until I actually roll out the sacred medicine bundle of my life and look for those memories. I pick them up and touch them and feel them. And each memory gives me knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

The connection between memory and knowledge is an important one. This point will be explored throughout this document, as I link personal experiences with different aspects of creative practice on Dene lands.

### *Images*

The use of imagery is another meaningful way of locating myself because it represents my background as a visual communicator and filmmaker. Imagery is also reflective of my personal way of knowing the world. At different stages in my life I have made use of drawing, painting, tracing, cutting, pasting, sculpting, filming, and projecting as a way to communicate knowledge.

I also include imagery in this thesis as a way to assert the important, and often neglected, role of the hand in generating knowledge.<sup>41</sup> As part of this research, the hand plays an important role in the production of “socially-engaged” forms of art that counter imagery derived from a settler colonial context.<sup>42</sup> The settler state has many ways of imposing colonial rule – one of them is through the “onslaught of distorted images” communicated through mainstream media.<sup>43</sup> The collaborative generation of imagery derived from elders and youth in the Tłı̨chǫ region is an important way of challenging such distortions. It is a way of countering “misrepresentations” through the community-based production of art.<sup>44</sup>

Half of this document consists of visual material. I chose to balance image and text by devoting every left-hand page of this dissertation to photos, illustrations, and collage. The right-hand page is text that often reflects on, or refers to, corresponding imagery. In my thesis there is a dynamic interplay between images and words, evocative of collaborations in Behchokǫ involving the visualization of oral history.

Imagery presented in this document is also evocative of how knowledge is integrated in this research. As with the written component, the inclusion of imagery reveals a melding of multiple media, contrasting ideas, and diversity of voices. Photographs of different

40. Along with Eber Hampton I will also refer to the writings of Paul Connerton – who also explores memory, along with types of forgetting.

Eber Hampton, “Memory Comes Before Knowledge: Research May Improve if Researchers Remember Their Motives,” *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 21 (1995): 53.

Paul Connerton, “Cultural Memory,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley et al. (London, Sage, 2006), 315.

41. McIntosh, *Soil and Soul*, 3.

Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 112.

Juhani Pallasmaa, *The thinking hand: existential and embodied wisdom in architecture* (Chichester: Wiley, 2009).

42. Nato Thompson, “Living as Form.” in *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, ed. Nato Thompson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 19.

Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 25.

Joseph Beuys, *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), 21.

43. Absolon and Willett, *Putting Ourselves Forward*, 113.

Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 31.

44. Absolon and Willett, *Putting Ourselves Forward*, 113.

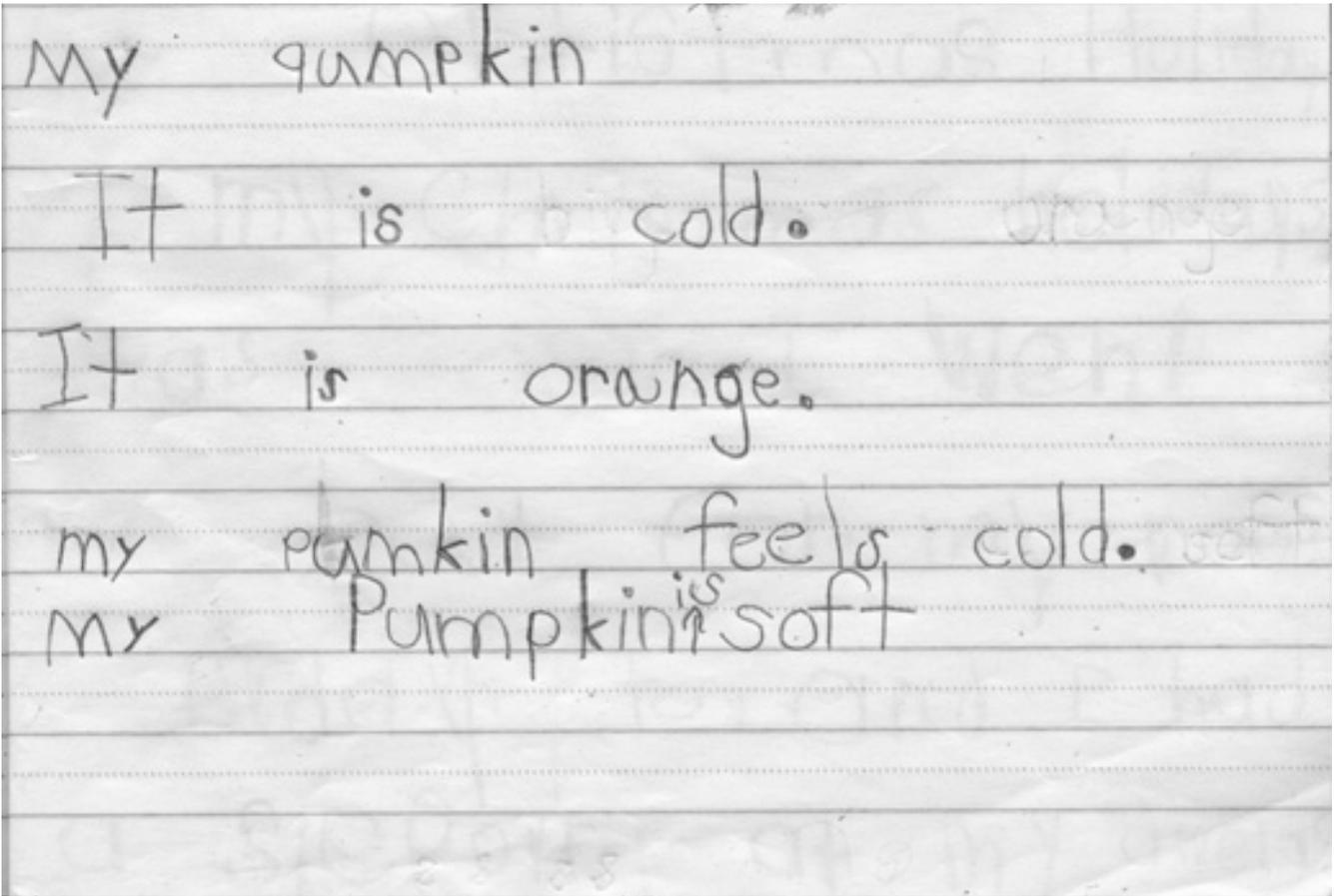


Figure 10: Printing exercises, written by the author, 1978-1979.

places, co-created illustrations, and still images of video footage are brought together in each chapter, further reinforcing the synthesis of knowledge behind my collaboration in the Tłı̨ch̓ region. The collage shown on page 20, for example, embodies this notion of synthesis. This work is made up of disparate image fragments—it is a piecing together of material gathered from different sources. Collage, as it appeared in the early twentieth century, has represented a rejection of traditional, stable material (such as oil on canvas).<sup>45</sup> This image-making technique is based on the recontextualization of imagery, eliciting multiple interpretations. The collage referenced in this paragraph offers an opportunity (early in this dissertation) to briefly address the interpretation of imagery within the context of this document. Although there are fragments in the referenced work that loosely evoke my research (air travel, the north, vision, type and image), every reader will interpret this composition through a unique lens, based on previously lived experiences. Throughout this document, therefore, I will provide brief descriptive captions under each image and, when required, elaborate on visuals that seem ambiguous.

In this section I have discussed the inappropriateness (within my research context) of adhering to a writing style that presumes objectivity and neutrality. As an alternative approach, I claim that descriptions based on stories, memories, and images are suitable as part of an Indigenous Research Methodology. This approach to conveying knowledge helps bring out experiences from the past that inform current research. Issues relating to the past, as well as the present and future, will be explored in the following section.

### **Literacy structures the world**

During the summer of 2015, as I helped my parents clean out their basement, I looked through the dusty remains of notebooks and report cards from my first years of grade school. I closely inspected the broken line-work and irregular printing from a series of early elementary school writing exercises. After turning a few pages I experienced a simultaneous attachment and detachment to these old documents. On the one hand I cherished these marks as a record of my early attempts at writing. On the other hand, I did not recall printing these words – had my name not been on the front cover I would have thought they belonged to someone else. More importantly, I realized that I have no recollection of how I learned to read and write. I was unable to remember the slow process (which I have seen my son go through) involving the identification of letterforms; the association of letters with speech sounds; the differentiation of vowels from consonants; and the eventual reading of one, two and three letter, single syllable, words.

I attribute my inability to remember this early grade school experience to the fact that I was very young at the time. Nowadays, as I patiently go through reading exercises with my son, I imagine how cumbersome my (now forgotten) experience of learning to read must have been. However, beyond the awkward, cumbersome steps involved in this learning process there is another, more significant, impact that is worth bringing up, particularly as it relates to ways of knowing that are dominant in Western culture.<sup>46</sup> The impact I am referring to is the following: in learning to read and write, *spoken language*

45. Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, *Cubism and Culture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 160.

46. Edmund Carpenter, "The New Languages." in *Explorations in Communication: an anthology*, ed. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 162.

47. Edmund Carpenter described how "Writing... didn't record oral language; it was a new language, which the spoken word came to imitate". Similarly, Foucault made reference to the "fundamental place accorded in the West to writing" from the seventeenth century onward: "Henceforth, it is the primal nature of language to be written. The sounds made by voices provide no more than a transitory and precarious translation of it".

Carpenter, *The New Languages*, 162.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 42.

48. Carpenter, *The New Languages*, 162.

49. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 121.

50. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 31.

51. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 28.

52. *Ibid*, 28.

53. In addition to material referenced in this chapter, my research has also been influenced by a range of literature from art and design, Indigenous philosophy, material culture, and human ecology. A literature review is provided in the appendix section of this dissertation (pages 204 to 213).

the Tin Soldier  
My favorite part was  
the part when I like it  
I did not like the  
part when the  
mom was agry.

Figure 11: Printing exercises, written by the author, 1978-1979.

*gradually becomes an imitation of written language.*<sup>47</sup> Writing, therefore, encourages “an analytic mode of thinking” that not only separates letterforms and speech sounds, but more importantly, structures the world, separating subject from verb, adjective from noun, actor from action, and essence from form.<sup>48</sup>

It seems fitting that a chance encounter during a spring clean-up, with discarded material from my past (old notebooks), helped me realize the underlying culture that, whether I like it or not, shaped my formative years – the culture I’m referring to is that of literacy. As a creative practitioner, involved in research on Indigenous lands, I recognize how the logic of writing (in English) informs my way of knowing the world. Writing is both a communication tool and a bias, a way of expanding horizons while setting boundaries, a way of describing reality while simultaneously creating an illusion.

Moreover, writing was, and continues to be (through treaties, textbooks, government documents, legislation), a key tool in the ongoing process of colonizing indigenous peoples and lands.<sup>49</sup> Literacy, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith states “was used as a criterion for assessing the development of a society and its progress to a stage where history can be said to begin”.<sup>50</sup> Writing, however, can also be a powerful tool in a decolonizing process.<sup>51</sup> This approach is described by Tuhiwai Smith as “rewriting and righing our position in history”.<sup>52</sup>

In this section, I acknowledge the extent to which I have been educated and shaped by a dominant cultural practice (literacy). The discovery of a grade 1 notebook revealed my early attempts at drawing straight lines, where I rendered crooked, awkward letters within linear boundaries. But during those early years I was also drawing. The practice of drawing has been a life-long pursuit. Drawing has been another, very important way of knowing, that has informed my place in the world. The drawing of lines will be referenced in different chapters of this dissertation.<sup>53</sup>

48. Carpenter, *The New Languages*, 162.

49. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 121.

50. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 31.

51. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 28.

52. *Ibid.*, 28.

53. In addition to material referenced in this chapter, my research has also been influenced by a range of literature from art and design, Indigenous philosophy, material culture, and human ecology. A literature review is provided in the appendix section of this dissertation (pages 204 to 213).

## Chapter 2: Recorded memories and the senses



Figure 12: Mesa Lake, photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].

## Sensory and emotional memory

In his introduction to *Trails of our Ancestors*, Tłıchq senior advisor and Behchokq resident John B. Zoe describes how the skills required to survive on the land were traditionally taught “through hands on experience while living and travelling in the bush.”<sup>1</sup> Survival on the land, as Zoe suggests, depended on practical knowledge, such as, setting traps, skinning caribou, chopping wood, cutting and sewing. In Tłıchq society, a person capable of proficiently carrying out a task is highly respected—such a person is known as being “nághóó, or capable.”<sup>2</sup> This idea is also discussed by former territorial archaeologist Thomas D. Andrews who refers to how (for Tłıchq elders) intangible qualities embodied by an object—such as experience and knowledge—can be more important than the actual object.<sup>3</sup> Material objects evoke a range of intangible qualities—skills and knowledge, as well as memory.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter I will explore how physical objects embody sensory and emotional memory. The idea that objects embody sensory and emotional memory, has been discussed by philosophers, anthropologists and even artists.<sup>5</sup> Many examples from these disciplines, however, refer to artefacts in relatively static terms—isolated and disconnected from everyday activities. The writings of Tim Ingold, as well as Nadia Seremetakis are exceptions to this tendency.<sup>6</sup> Seremetakis’ work provides rich descriptions of how artefacts elicit sensory experiences of the past, while also evoking feelings of affection, pride, and passion. Her account of Greek women’s embroidery, for example, illustrates how lived experiences become embodied in cloth.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout this chapter I will primarily draw from elder descriptions (of material objects) provided during a 2014 visit to Mesa Lake, as documented in a Tłıchq Government video of the trip (discussing how tangible material embodies sensory and emotional memories).<sup>8</sup> As I reflect on this footage, I will also describe my recollection of the physical landscape of Mesa Lake (I was honoured to be part of this trip, and maintain vivid sensorial memories of the earth, water, and sky as experienced in this northern part of the region).

In concluding this chapter I will also reflect on my personal experience of using traditional art and design media—the use of such media also embodies sensory and emotional memory. I will finish with a discussion of how articulating a lived experience, through written or spoken words, can help bring knowledge of the senses to light—as I will discuss, the Berger Inquiry in the 1970s offered rich sensory descriptions of the land that helped overcome cultural barriers while propelling a process of decolonization. The following section begins with camp activities, as documented on the shoreline of Mesa Lake.

1. John B. Zoe, “Trails of Our Ancestors: Building a Nation.” in *Trails of Our Ancestors: Building a Nation*, ed. John B. Zoe. (Behchokq: Tłıchq Government, 2007), 3.

2. Andrews, ‘There will be many stories’, 210.

3. Andrews, ‘There will be many stories’, 191.

4. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10.

5. Seremetakis refers to the “sensory-emotive experience” triggered by cultural artifacts, as described by Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, as well as surrealist artist Max Ernst. Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 10.

6. See Tim Ingold’s *Making*, and Nadia Seremetakis’ *The Senses Still*.

7. “Women circulate knowledge through multiple designs and spaces which they cover, protect and ornament. It is this transfer of the self into substance that disseminates a history of the person in dispersal.” Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 15.

8. *Mesa Lake video*, digital file (Behchokq: Tłıchq Government, 2014). Tłıchq elders, youth, and government workers took part in this trip—the group travelled by float plane on August 25, 2014 (and stayed there until August 31).



Figure 13: Setting up a camp at Mesa Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq̓ Government].

## Material in motion

On the morning of August 25, 2014 at Mesa Lake, elder Monique MacKenzie sits on the ground and uses a small ax to cut parts of a spruce tree. She brings the ax down six times to cut a large branch, and then, another three chops to remove a small cluster which she moves into a growing pile of spruce boughs—to be used to cover the floor of tents. She takes a short break after grabbing another branch, and continues cutting. Meanwhile, Peter Husky chops away at a spruce pole, until he creates a flattened tip on one end—this pole will be used to build a tent. Nearby, the first of four tents is taking shape—it has an A-frame structure using seven spruce poles (one horizontal pole supported by tripod configurations at opposite ends). A large canvas covers the frame. Additional poles, crossed at 45 degree angles, held together with pegs and rope, are used to reinforce the structure.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

Two youth participants from Behchokò are helping set up another tent. They adjust the position of poles, creating optimal tension of ropes on one end of the tent as the large canvas material expands. As afternoon approaches, camp workers move back and forth (from the shore where supplies are dropped off, to the camp area, approximately 15 metres in), moving supplies, cutting wood, tying ropes. There is effortless movement, overall co-ordination, and harmony as the west side of the lake shore is slowly transformed into a campground.<sup>9</sup>

Viewing the 2014 video of the trip to Mesa Lake, I was reminded of my first hours on the barrenlands. There were moments shortly after arriving in which I felt rather helpless amongst the flurry of activity. Late in the morning, I briefly paused after the main tent was put up—I looked around, and realized that an entire camp had been set up (with living quarters, fire pits, meeting tent, and a toilet) in just a few hours. This was one of many humbling moments I experienced during visits to the Tłı̨chò region.

## Personal knowledge

During the afternoon of this first day at Mesa Lake (inside a large tent set up for meetings) elders shared stories that revolved around experiences of *making*. Most of the stories were derived from elders who talked about the many skills acquired through a lifetime of traveling the land. At times they provided heartfelt descriptions of what, as young people, they learned, and who they learned from—special memories of material and people. Elder Robert MacKenzie for example, talked about his skill in making snowshoes from birch tree—the making of this object embodies his father’s knowledge:

My dad used to make really good snowshoes. Like myself if I make snowshoes, I make pretty good snowshoes. We used to be very observant of our parents. Today we hang on to their knowledge. It’s like yesterday, it’s like now. Today, I still remember.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 14: Mesa Lake, photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].

As elder MacKenzie indicates, the skill and craft involved in making things, can embody relationships to people and places. Stories shared by elders during the first day emerged as a result of traveling to Mesa Lake. For many elders this was an opportunity to revisit a place they had traveled to many times as children and/or young adults. Elder Elizabeth Rabesca also shared several memories of traveling to the area, and spoke at length about traditional processes of making (involving the use of, among other things, caribou hide).

At the beginning, my late dad, this was the only area he'd been to. Only to this area. From Behchok̓ they used to travel here—they used to paddle. There was no outboard motor... we did not settle in one area. We moved our camp from one to another. I still remember where and how we had travelled.

We used to make dry meat, and also they used to make caribou hide parka—they would fix their snow shoes, their toboggans, and also the ladies, all night, they would sew the caribou hide for the parka. There was only one candle light in the tent and they would fall asleep...and then next day they would say they did not have enough babiche to weave snow shoes, and they used to make babiche out of the caribou hide. Even the narrow ones they used to weave the snow shoe with the smaller babiche. People had struggled and worked very, very hard.<sup>11</sup>

Elizabeth Rabesca, along with other elders that traveled to Mesa Lake, chose to share knowledge that was part of either her own (or a parent's) life story—all based on lived experiences. Elder Monique Mackenzie mentioned this when sharing her memories: "I only wanted to talk about the story that was shared with me, because my mom had lived her life as that story... I did not want to talk about any other thing".<sup>12</sup>

## Memory and material

Before traveling to the Tł̓ch̓q region, I had not considered how the process of making things may trigger and/or embody memory and emotion. Reflecting back on my career as a graphic designer, I have given some thought to how my own processes of making, involving drawing, sculpting, folding, and colouring, may elicit what Herbert Read refers to as the "factor of 'feeling' in perception", essential to his idea of an aesthetic education.<sup>13</sup>

In writing this chapter, I have put more thought into the range of material, teachers, and life stories connected to my personal experience of skilled making. I realize now that as a designer (partially trained in traditional media), I do find that the careful delineation of a graphite line, the pressing of ink on cotton paper, or binding a book by hand, can elicit memories and emotions, gathered over many years of practice. Manual skills in making things may involve complex movement, as well as layers of memory, and emotion, that can be traced back to previous experiences. Materials may carry "a memory of their manipulation"—a story of earlier creative practices.<sup>14</sup> Stories, as Tim Ingold suggests, are

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Herbert Read, *Education through art* (London: Faber, 1958), 60.

14. Ingold, *Making*, 118.

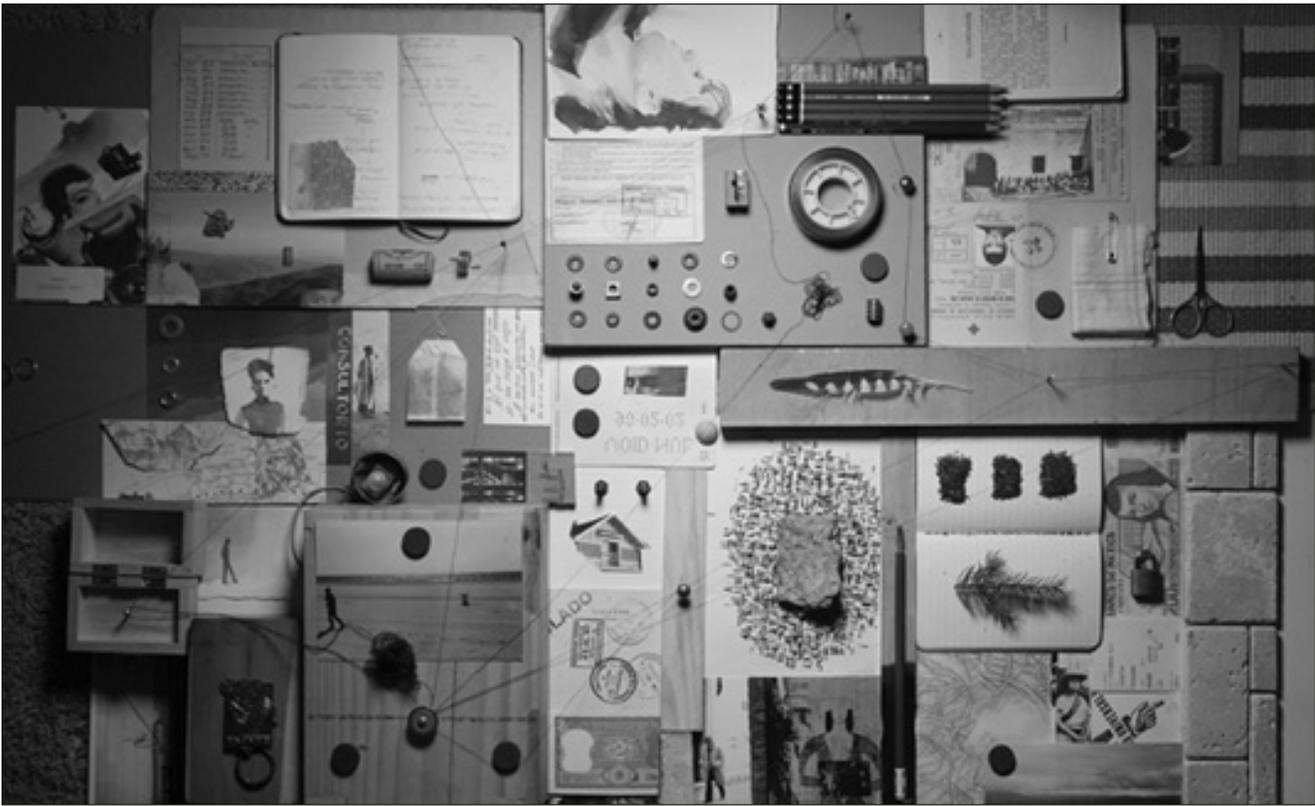


Figure 15: An exploration of material and memory through multiple media, illustrated by the author, 2017.



Figure 16: The Aurora Borealis at Mesa Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłı̨chǫ Government].

evoked through the process of making things by hand: “the hand can... tell the stories of the world in its gestures and in the written or drawn traces they yield, or in the manipulation of threads as in weaving”.<sup>15</sup>

Through precision grips, sensitivity of fingers, and manual gesture, memory and emotion, as discussed above, comes to life. In my own experience, activities such as line making or paper crafting, embody a sense of continuity between a teaching from the past and the present moment. The process of rendering an image by hand, draws out the memory of a teacher-student relationship—a transfer of knowledge—that took place many years ago. Memories shared by Tłı̄chǫ elders also make reference to manual gesture. Making snowshoes or sewing caribou hide provide, among other things, a materialization of memory. Through a lifetime of making, memories become embodied in the pushing, pulling, clutching, pressing, tweaking, and caressing of material.

### **The aurora borealis at Mesa Lake**

As dusk approached on the first day at Mesa Lake I walked to the shore by the campground. It had been a long day of travelling, setting up camp, and storytelling. I stood at the shore of the lake and looked out at the calm water. I looked up at the sky and noticed a glimmering streak of light, slowly turning into a dance of colour. A fusion of yellow-green, with traces of fuchsia and powder blue ignited the atmosphere. The sky was cloudless and ablaze with a natural spectacle of fluorescent movement: the aurora borealis.

Mesa Lake offered the most clear and powerful display of northern lights I have ever seen. That evening, the aurora borealis offered a multi-sensory experience, affecting both my visual and tactile sense. As I spent more time looking up, I felt an embodied connection to the vibrant night sky—the feeling is similar to what I experience during a prolonged life drawing session, when the contours, furrows and wrinkles of subject matter, drawn from a distance, elicit a tactile experience.

The northern lights’ undulating display of brightness seemed to enfold the land—the sensation was like a massive wave gently overlapping and spreading until it reached me, twisting back, only to return in a short while. I remained on the shore for an hour, breathing the fresh air of the barren lands, while gazing at the most vivid, night sky I had ever seen.

### **Knowledge translation and the senses**

Witnessing the aurora borealis at Mesa Lake was memorable. Putting the experience of that evening into words, however, was a challenging process involving the use of memory, handwriting, typing, and the repeated restructuring of text. In describing my recollection of that night I became aware that new meaning emerges through the very process of writing. By articulating my experience of the aurora in a thoughtful, reflective manner, I became



Figure 17: The Aurora Borealis at Mesa Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].



Figure 18: The camp at Mesa Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].

aware of a multi-sensory experience that remained ill-defined until I wrote about it. Writing about a lived experience requires careful translation—from embodied knowledge to written words.

16. Tutcho In Patrick Scott, *Stories Told: stories and images of the Berger Inquiry* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 87.

17. Martin in Scott, *Stories Told*, 11.

In this section I will briefly discuss how putting lived experiences into words can bring unique sensory experiences to light. I will focus my discussion on Dene descriptions of the land from the time of the Berger Inquiry in the mid 1970s.

During the Inquiry, people throughout the Dene region shared their thoughts regarding the proposed construction of a gas pipeline through the Mackenzie Valley. Stories shared by people in the Northwest Territories often included rich sensory descriptions that proved helpful in overcoming barriers of culture and language. Descriptions, as provided by the Dene, also evoked the interconnectedness of people and place—an important idea, that contributed to the pipeline being postponed. During the inquiry, Susie Tutcho from Fort Franklin spoke of the connection to land by referencing a strong sense of embodiment: “The grass and the trees are our flesh, the animals are our flesh.”<sup>16</sup> In this short statement, Tutcho communicates a relationship to land and animals through an evocative description.

Also part of the inquiry, Fred Martin, a trapper from Yellowknife, provided a statement that remains one of the most memorable testimonials: “Having the pipe go through our land is like driving a steel pipe through our hearts.”<sup>17</sup> Martin communicates an idea of place in an unambiguous manner. There is clarity and directness in the language. Behind many of the stories, personal accounts, and oral history shared by elders during the Berger Inquiry, is a deep affection for the land—a love of place.

Rich, evocative descriptions shared during the Inquiry were part of a decolonizing process, while also articulating a regional epistemology—a unique relationship between people and land. Statements shared by Susie Tutcho and Fred Martin suggest that each language and place elicits its own way of feeling. Sensory experiences, as testimonials from elders in this chapter suggest, are also shaped by the material, and methods of making, that are unique to a place and its people.

## Chapter 3: Ways of walking and drawing



Figure 19: A line made by walking in Edmonton's Mill Creek neighbourhood, photographed by the author, 2017.

In this chapter I continue making reference to video from the Mesa Lake trip, as I describe a walking journey to the famous rock described in Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace. I took part in this walking journey while at Mesa Lake. Based on my recollection of the landscape, and video documentation, I will provide a first-person sensory description of the walk—this text will accompany still images from the video (shown on opposing pages).

As described in the video, shortly after arriving at the rock, elders made reference to an event from the story of peace—the celebration dance that went on for several days after Edzo and Akaitcho shook hands. According to oral history, the long duration of the dance, and overlapping impressions on ground, left a visible circular mark. The dance at Mesa Lake has been referred to in versions of the story shared by elders throughout this research.

As part of my dissertation, I decided to reflect on descriptions of this dance through a series of drawings made by walking. I created five drawings by walking in different Edmonton locations—I share pictures and descriptions of these walks in the second section of this chapter. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on connections between the practice of walking and drawing.



Figure 20: Walking at Mesa Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].



Figure 21: The rock at Mesa Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].

## A walking journey to the rock

During the second day at Mesa Lake a group of elders walked from the camp, northward, towards the historic rock mentioned in the story of peace. The rock is approximately 700 metres from the camp. Cinematographer Scott Portingale captured the journey on video for the Tłı̨chǫ Government. In this section I combine my recollection of the landscape with video footage, in order to reconstruct the embodied experience of walking at Mesa Lake.<sup>1</sup>

1. Images, along with activities at the rock, described in this section are derived from the Tłı̨chǫ Government video of the Mesa Lake trip, unless otherwise stated.

\*\*\*

It is late morning and the sky is overcast. Low-growing plants sway with occasional gusts of wind. I look around. The surroundings are what the Tłı̨chǫ refer to as hozı̨ı—the barrenlands. A group of elders walk fifteen metres ahead of me. I tread carefully along soft, often spongy earth. With every step, I cross an entanglement of shrub, lichen, moss, and sedges. I traverse a small patch of dwarf birch, about one metre in height. I push a cluster of thin branches to the side as I make my way through. Copper brown extensions covered in crimson leaves swing back and forth.

I realize, through the journey, there is nothing barren about this land. The layer of earth I walk upon is teeming with life. Along with a variety of shrubs, there are other resilient plants, many under ten centimetres in height. The terrain is a canvas of earthy hues, ranging from amber orange to dark autumn green, sprinkled with white flower clusters. A crackling noise is heard with each footstep. At times the ground feels brittle. Footsteps at Mesa Lake are a tactile and aural experience. As I walk, a gentle breeze moves an expanse of small shrubs. Diffuse light passes through gaps in the shifting clouds above—sunlight intensifies the colour of the land.

Halfway between the camp and the rock, I became increasingly aware of the soundscape. I tried to unravel the multiple sounds that create this unique sense of place. It is an audible texture that emerges from repeated movements, never quite the same from one step to another. The regular sound of footsteps, gusts of wind, occasional snapping of branches, distant voices from the camp, all contribute to the ambience. There is rhythmicity in the embodied experience of walking the land. Traveling by foot also augments awareness of my own embodied rhythms: along with repeated footsteps, I inhale and exhale at regular intervals. I slow down. The rock is a few metres away.

The historic rock described in Tłı̨chǫ oral history, stands on high ground, approximately 200 metres from the south-east shore of the lake. The large rugged mass has a striking presence. At about 1.5 metres in height, it dwarfs everything around, including low-lying shrubs, clumps of grass, and small stones. As I approach the rock, I notice its unique shape—the top is relatively flat, and from a west-facing view, the bottom appears to taper, giving it a quasi symmetrical proportion. It is an ideal object to hide behind—as Edzo's son did, according to historical accounts.



Figure 22: The rock at Mesa Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].



Figure 23: Elder Harry Apple at Mesa Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].

I gently run my hand over the hard, irregular surface. The texture felt coarse, furrowed in places, crusty and undulating in others. Parts of the surface appear speckled with dark brown lichen—a symbiotic organism, made of algae and fungus. The presence of lichen reminds me that the rock, not only supports life, but is, in itself, absorbed in the currents of wind and weather—over time its surface changes through erosion; parts will dissolve into smaller particles that get absorbed into the earth. The rock is not inert matter, rather it is part of a transformative cycle that develops over millions of years.<sup>2</sup> The rock is material in flux—very slowly changing. Today, the rock is also imbued with meaning. It embodies a historic event.

Throughout my research, Tony Rabesca stressed the real significance of the story of peace: forgiveness and reconciliation (with the neighbouring Yellowknife Dene).<sup>3</sup> As part of this trip to Mesa Lake, the visit to the rock was especially meaningful, according to elders.<sup>4</sup> Elder Harry Apple spoke for several minutes about the meaning of the rock. Here is part of what he shared that day:

If we look at the rock, it is an important rock, and reminds us of reconciliation between the two tribes. This rock will sit here till end of time. People that see this rock will think of peace and forgiveness. Edzo made an important decision for us in making peace. Today, we sleep good and our children sleep good. Today, he gave us self-government and we should say Masi Cho to our great leader Edzo. I would like to say Masi Cho for returning to my home land, we would not be here without support from our Tłıchq Government and we are here to share stories and legend based on Edzo and Akaitcho making peace. If we think of Mesa Lake, we think of forgiveness and happiness.<sup>5</sup>

That day, elders sat around the rock well into the afternoon. Offerings, such as tobacco, were carefully placed within a small cavity near the top of the rock. Sun light continued to appear and disappear behind clouds.

The rock is a significant part of regional oral history—it is described in many versions of the story of peace I came across. The rock, however, is also entangled in the life stories of many elders who traveled to and/or lived at Mesa Lake as children. The rock elicits memory and ancestral knowledge—it is an entity that people remember, talk about, and relate to. The people of the Tłıchq region have a very special relationship with the rock—this relationship is an example of how people and things are interrelated or entangled.<sup>6</sup> This relationship also illustrates how the rock possesses agency—according to Carl Knappett, agency is a relational property with “a capacity for causing events to happen.”<sup>7</sup> During this visit, the rock moved people to a specific area of Mesa Lake—it also elicited stories.

The rock is part of Tłıchq history, but in addition, it is considered to be part of a “Healing Journey”, according to Tony Rabesca.<sup>8</sup> It has a degree of agency, in its ability to help as part of a holistic restoration of health.<sup>9</sup> The Cartesian boundary between subject and

2. Peter D. Moore, *Tundra* (New York: Chelsea House, 2006), 32.

3. Tony Rabesca (Cultural practices manager), conversation with author, July 14, 2017.

4. *Mesa Lake video*.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 3.

Leroy Little Bear. “Forward.” in *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*, Gregory Cajete. (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000), x.

Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 7;

7. Karl Knappett. *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 22.

8. Tony Rabesca, “The Healing Journey” (Tłıchq Government poster, Behchokq, 2017).

In 2017 Tony Rabesca developed a five-step process called, The Healing Journey. The five steps are based on moments and material from the story of peace. One of the steps in the process—forgiveness, is embodied in the rock from Mesa Lake.



Figure 24: Mesa Lake, photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].

object collapses when the Tł̓chq̓ relationship to the Mesa Lake rock is taken into account. The interconnectedness between people and this rock manifests a regional epistemology (a way of knowing elements from the land).<sup>10</sup> Based on my journeys and discussions in the Tł̓chq̓ region, material from the land (especially at Mesa Lake) can be transformative. The Mesa Lake rock pulls together people, ancestral memory, and regional history.

### **Walking as drawing**

While at the rock, elders, along with translator Peter Husky talked about the historic celebrations that took place at Mesa Lake after peace was made. According to oral testimony, the two tribes celebrated and danced for as long as four days and four nights.<sup>11</sup> Elders have also stated that this dance left a circular mark on the ground—over time, trees grew around the spot where the dance took place. Translator Peter Husky talking in English, further elaborated on details of the celebration: “According to the story, where they made peace, the tea dance—there was a groove in the ground. Then after that, some willows and trees had grown around the landmark”.<sup>12</sup>

During the 2014 visit to Mesa Lake, the location where the dance took place was not visited. Throughout my research I have often thought about this part of the story of peace—the dance that left an impression on the ground. Descriptions of the historic celebration live on in oral tradition and bring out prolonged discussions. Descriptions of the celebration also elicit powerful images of ancestors moving in a circle—repeatedly and rhythmically—pressing, and flattening the lake side terrain—leaving a tangible impression on the earth.

The celebration dance describes a material transformation of the land—an inscription made by the feet of many people. Throughout this research, descriptions of the dance have caused me to reflect on the processes, materials, and surfaces I have used to embody knowledge throughout my career. As a designer and filmmaker I have used graphite, ink, watercolour, markers, as well as, paper, metal, cardboard, and even celluloid surfaces to make images by hand. But I have never made an image by foot. Nor have I previously considered how repeatedly moving in one place, may not only leave a tangible impression, but also embody intangible knowledge (such as history, ancestral memory, or personal memory).

Animated and inspired by the story of peace, I decided, in September, 2017, to reflect on knowledge shared by Tł̓chq̓ elders by drawing lines using my feet—repeatedly walking over ground and leaving impressions. Moving over the same area of land, again and again, I have created a series of drawings using my feet and earth as artistic media.

The process of making these drawings was, in itself, an opportunity to further consider many of the teachings shared by people in the Tł̓chq̓ region. I considered my embodied experience of walking the earth, as well as my relationship to land by, at times, walking in

9. Ibid.

10. This way of knowing is comparable to Shawn Wilson’s description of relationships: “Identity for indigenous peoples is grounded in their relationships with the land, with their ancestors who have returned to the land and with future generations who will come into being on the land.”

Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 80

11. *Mesa Lake video*.

12. Ibid.



Figure 25: Walk 1, photographed by the author, 2017.



Figure 26: Walk 2, photographed by the author, 2017.

circles. As part of this exploration, I applied an image-making technique that established a strong connection to place (through repeated movement over time) while also accepting the ephemeral, impermanent nature of material. Many of these drawings will no longer be visible when I complete my PhD (many disappeared within days or hours after making a mark); therefore, documenting the results, and writing about the image-making process has provided a way to communicate work that is transformative (both in the making, and in the dissolving of marks). This is work that changes over time, responding to wind, water, snow, ice, and the footsteps of other people. The remainder of this section will show a picture of each drawing, and provide a written reflection on the line-making process.

### **Walk 1**

On Saturday, September 9, 2017, I made a drawing by walking in the south-end of Edmonton's Mill Creek Ravine Park. It took 2 hours and 15 minutes to inscribe a visible circle on the ground—I began walking at 10:48am, and finished at 1:03pm. I chose a relatively secluded area (with occasional cyclists passing) to execute this first drawing. The location is near the bottom of a slope—this allowed me to document the results from a relatively high vantage point.

I began walking, rather timidly, unsure of the steps and coordination required to make a drawing by foot. I started walking in circles and looking down, searching for unique features, leaves, or pieces of bark that could serve as reference points—I did my best to maintain a consistent pathway for each walking cycle. I spent the first half hour clarifying the path to be walked. As a circle began taking shape, I became increasingly aware of the embodied experience of simultaneously walking and mark-making. At times I shuffled my feet along the ground, removing grass, further defining a line. I switched direction from clockwise to counter clockwise, developing a rhythm of movement. Every point of contact with the earth further defined the circle. After the first hour I began to perspire. By the second hour I was exhausted. The fatigue resulting from this walk was integral to the drawing—it set a limit to the depth of the physical impression left on the ground.

### **Walk 2**

I drew a second circle in the Avonmore neighbourhood of Edmonton on Sunday, September 10. I began walking late in the afternoon (4:40pm) while my son played in an adjacent park. Trees in the area are surrounded by existing ring formations—I chose this specific location because the impression I created echoed nearby rings. Grass was relatively thin and sparse in areas, offering good conditions for the mark-making process. It took just under 2 hours to create this circle.



Figure 27: Walk 3a, photographed by the author, 2017.



Figure 28: Walk 3b, photographed by the author, 2017.

**Walk 3a and 3b** (pictures showing both ends of a line)

I returned to Mill Creek Ravine for this third drawing on Tuesday, September 12. Walking through the park in the morning I noticed existing pathways on opposite facing hills. I decided to walk a line across a grass field (between the two hills, linking the paths). I walked across the field, east to west, multiple times for approximately 30 minutes. Uncut grass made it relatively easy to leave an impression. This execution was partly inspired by Richard Long's 1967 photograph: *A Line Made by Walking*.<sup>13</sup> As part of this exercise I took a picture at both ends of the line (view from the east, and view from the west).

13. Robert Smithson's found Monuments, along with his notion of tracks, offered further examples of how geography, and walking, provide material for creative production: "if you think about tracks of any kind you'll discover that you could use tracks as a medium."

Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: the Collected Writings* (edited by Jack Flam) (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 69.



Figure 29: Walk 4, photographed by the author, 2017.



Figure 30: Walk 5, photographed by the author, 2017.

#### Walk 4

This photograph shows a line made while waiting for a bus. The mark was drawn over a 10 minute period on Friday, September 29 in Edmonton's Pleasantview neighbourhood. Approximately six metres long, this line makes direct reference to time—materializing the process of waiting for a bus.

#### Walk 5

This inscription, from October 15 was created the morning after a relatively light snowfall. To create this large drawing I walked in circles over several minutes to reveal the grassy surface under a thin layer of snow. This walk took place in the Hazeldean neighbourhood of Edmonton's southside. Unlike drawings made directly on grass, this execution required very little effort—after four walking cycles the underlying surface became exposed.

#### Mark-making on the ground and on paper

Walks documented in the previous section have led me to consider how travelling by foot may lead to unique perceptual experiences, and connections to environments (inaccessible through forms of rapid transportation such as driving).<sup>14</sup> Walking, as Robin Jarvis writes is “a form of consciousness in motion.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Rebecca Solnit indicates that walking “is the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart.”<sup>16</sup> Over long distances, walking can generate a rhythm of thinking, as physical movement on the ground elicits a journey through multiple ideas, connecting disparate thoughts.<sup>17</sup> In this section I will share thoughts elicited by walks described in the first two sections of this chapter (most of these thoughts revolve around the connection between walking and drawing).<sup>18</sup>

Movement by foot, as part of the exercises documented in the previous section, led me to consider how walking and drawing may be connected. Both processes require sensitivity to material, and careful movement. Contact between the tip of a drawing instrument (or foot) and paper (or earth) is repetitive, and rhythmic—it is a process of transformation through repetition.<sup>19</sup>

In his teaching notes, artist and Bauhaus teacher, Paul Klee articulated the connection between drawing and walking when he described how an active, freely developed line “goes out for a walk”.<sup>20</sup> Drawing lines “can inform our thinking across many disciplines and practices.”<sup>21</sup> Inscribing marks on paper, or on the ground, provides the conditions for a unique learning process by eliminating habitual thought, enhancing sensory awareness, and freeing the imagination.<sup>22</sup>

Drawing lines on paper, and inscribing lines on the ground, are both embodied experiences that involve a degree of improvisation—what Tim Ingold refers to as the “improvisatory movement”, integral to making.<sup>23</sup> Improvisation is evident in both forms of mark-making (on paper and on the ground) because the precise location of marks are not determined

14. Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (London, Macmillan Press, 1997), 67.

15. Ibid.

16. Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 5.

17. Ibid.

18. In gathering these thoughts I established links, or was inspired by, Tłchq elders, along with artists and writers, including: Richard Long, as well as Hamish Fulton (in Jarvis' *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, page 272); and Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust*. Other influential works include:

Jon Anderson, “Talking whilst walking: a geographical archaeology of knowledge,” *Area*, 36.3 (2004): 254-261.

Raymond Lucas, “Taking a Line for a Walk: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice.” in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, ed. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 169-184.

19. Adolfo Ruiz, “Transformation through Repetition: Walking, Listening and Drawing on Tlicho Lands,” *The International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 3 (2017): 253-260.

20. Paul Klee, *Notebooks Volume 1: The Thinking Eye* (London: Lund Humphries, 1961), 105).

21. Lucas, “Taking a Line for Walk”, 169.

22. Lucas, “Taking a Line for Walk”, 183. Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, iii.

Anderson, “Talking whilst walking: a geographical archaeology of knowledge”, 258.

23. Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on movement, knowledge and description* (London: Routledge, 2011), 178.



Figure 31: A second walk in the snow, photographed by the author, 2017.

before the moment of contact between pencil and paper, or foot and ground. Exploratory forms of drawing have much in common with Guy Debord's notion of the *dérive* (a drifting journey), whereby people "drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there."<sup>24</sup>

As Débord suggests, walking is a journey that is not pre-determined, but instead, slowly reveals itself step by step. Similarly, drawing may also be conceived as a type of journey—a "flow of creation" according to Rudolf Arnheim.<sup>25</sup> In the Tłı̄chq̓ region, walking is often described as a journey that links the stories of ancestors with the present—in reference to his predecessors, Dene elder Andrew Gon has indicated that, "we are still following their footprints".<sup>26</sup> Walking is indeed a way of connecting the past and the present. Walking and retracing pathways in Edmonton led me to consider aspects of my own past—my evolving life story. As walk three (from the previous section) illustrates, the lines I walk are connected to other pathways—my journey is connected to people whose life stories precede my own.

24. Debord, in Solnit, *Wanderlust*, 212.

25. Rudolf Arnheim, "Sketching and the Psychology of Design." in *The Idea of Design: A Design Issues Reader*, ed. Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 74.

26. Andrew Gon in Alice Legat, "Walking Stories; Leaving Footprints." in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, ed. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 38.

## Chapter 4: Exchanging stories and listening



Figure 32: Russell Lake, near Behchok̄. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2016 [Tłı̄chq̄ Government].

In this chapter I will talk about the significance of *exchanging knowledge* and *listening* as part of my research on Tłıchq lands. My discussion will revolve around a storytelling workshop that took place on May 23 and 24, 2016 at the Russell Lake camp (within the community of Behchok̓). On both days, elders shared several versions of the story of peace between Edzo and Akaitcho.

1. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 113.

2. Four Arrows, *The Authentic Dissertation*, 2.

In the first two sections of this chapter I will reference activities and discussions from days one and two of the workshop. In these sections I will talk about storytelling as a human exchange, and elaborate on the importance of preparatory activities, introductions, people and places—all of these elements are integral to the telling of oral history. In the third and fourth sections I will discuss the importance of listening—something elders made direct reference to in this research. Finally I will conclude with a section that describes how the educational philosophy of being ‘strong like two people’ continues to sustain collaborative research in the Tłıchq region. This philosophy offers a method for building research projects that are collaborative, inter-cultural, and based on relationships.

Much of what I refer to in this chapter is reflective of Shawn Wilson’s description of how knowledge emerges between “co-learners” in research:

...interviewing or questioning in Indigenous research cannot really take place without this level of deep listening that leads to meaningful exchanges. It’s a matter of forming a relationship that goes beyond the informant-researcher duality to become co-learners.<sup>1</sup>

*Listening*, is an important aspect of my research methodology. Carefully listening to the words of elders and other community members, as well as the sounds of the land (footsteps, fire, and wind) has allowed me to maintain sensitivity and mindfulness through collaborative journeys in the Tłıchq region. As Four Arrows’ writes, research should “reveal mindfulness every step of the way.”<sup>2</sup> The following section begins with a description of the sights and sounds from which stories emerged on day one of the spring 2016 workshop.



Figure 33: The camp at Russell Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2016 [Tłıchq Government].



Figure 34: Monique Mackenzie at Russell Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2016 [Tłıchq Government].

## Emerging stories

It is a mild spring day at Russell Lake, just outside Behchokò. A large tent has been set up for a storytelling workshop. There is a subtle haze in the air, which brings a warm and diffused natural light to our common space. The fresh scent of spruce boughs fills the area. Several Tłıchq elders, including Francis Willah and Monique MacKenzie will be sharing stories throughout the day. Also attending this workshop is Tłıchq Government worker Tony Rabesca, along with translators Mary Blackduck, Rosa Mantla, community youth and myself. Wood burns in a nearby fire pit—a continual hiss and crackle is heard from a distance. The workshop begins with an opening prayer. Afterwards, Tony Rabesca welcomes me, and I am then asked to describe the purpose of this event. I thank the community for inviting me, and refer to the ongoing relationship and research that we have developed since 2012. I then indicate that I hope to learn more about the story of peace through this event.

After I speak, there are brief moments of silence, interrupted by questions about how translations will proceed. Elders talk about who will be sharing stories. After some discussion, Rosa Mantla recommends that everyone in the tent introduce themselves before the storytelling begins.

\*\*\*

Cultural events on Tłıchq lands often start with prayers, introductions, and questions. Opening activities, as described above, can last more than 30 minutes. During this time, spoken words, burning wood, and brief moments of silence, all contribute to the storytelling experience. Preparations that take place *before* knowledge is conveyed, create the conditions for the sharing of oral history.<sup>3</sup>

Some characteristics of a shared story (including length) are not entirely determined before an elder speaks. Instead the story, emerges through the unique relationship between elder, listener(s) and place.<sup>4</sup> Since 2012 I have had the privilege of taking part in several storytelling sessions on Tłıchq lands—I have assisted in organizing activities, helped in the visualization of stories, and listened. Through these experiences I have learned, among other things, that storytelling is a dynamic human exchange. The relationship between speaker and listener(s) is important in bringing a story to life.

My experience of taking part in storytelling sessions over the last five years has led me to question epistemological assumptions that underlie many twentieth century (and more recent) social research projects (conducted by ethnographers with a commitment to positivism and/or naturalism).<sup>5</sup> Research undertaken through this ethnographic lens is often informed by Western philosophical notions of intentionality—the idea, described by Karen Barad, “that there are determinate intentional states of mind that exist ‘somewhere’ in people’s brains”, separate from their surroundings.<sup>6</sup>

3. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 139.

4. Thomas D. Andrews, John B. Zoe, Aaron Herter, “Yamqzha: Sacred Sites and the Anthropology of Travel.” in *Trails of our Ancestors: Building a Nation*, ed. John B.Zoe. (Behchokò: Tłıchq Government, 2007), 29-31.

Scott, *Talking Tools*, 139

5. Martyn Hammersley, Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: principles in practice* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 10.

6. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 21.

Intentionality is traced back to St. Anselm’s ontological argument for the existence of God, through which the eleventh century monk distinguished between things that exist in the mind, and things that exist “in reality” (outside the mind)—the origins of the ontological argument are found in ancient Greek philosophy (specifically, “the Aristotelian doctrine of the essential presence of the thing known in the mind of the knower”).<sup>7</sup>



Figure 35: Rosa Anne Mantla on the land. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2014 [Tłıchq Government].

As indicated earlier, many aspects of stories shared throughout my research were not entirely determined in advance of their delivery. Places, along with people who were present during a story's delivery (including myself) all played a role in how events from the past were described. This relationship between storytellers, listeners, and places challenges the notion of intentionality described above.

### Exchanging stories

During day 2 of the 2016 session elders made an unexpected request: they asked me to share my knowledge of the story of peace. I was, in effect, asked to briefly switch my role, from that of listener, to that of storyteller—from researcher to informant. The request for my version of the story came early in the day, before elders began sharing their own stories. I was happy (and honoured) to accept this request, although I was a bit self-conscious about being in the role of storyteller. The request was delivered from elders, via Tony Rabesca and Rosa Mantla, as follows:

Tony Rabesca: You need to explain a version or  
short story of Edzo and Akaitcho making peace.

Adolfo: Okay.

Rosa Mantla: What you've heard.

Adolfo: Okay.

Rosa Mantla: We're going to test him (laughing). So  
you've heard the story, let's see how much you know.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to this request, I had read, and listened to, multiple versions of the story of peace. I, therefore, proceeded to share my knowledge of key events, places, and people, common to all versions I had come across. My account of the peace-making was brief—just under a couple of minutes. After Rosa Mantla translated, I said Masi (thank you), and acknowledged that my knowledge of the story came from elders. Afterwards, elder Francis Willah spoke. Elder Willah began by talking about the complexity of oral storytelling—differences between versions of a narrative, and the length attributed to the story of peace. Translator Mary Blackduck noted these details in the following statement:

He said this story is very difficult to tell. For one thing it's a very frightening, scary story about war that took place, many, many years ago. For that reason, and the other reason... we don't all share the same stories, therefore it's kind of hard to tell. And he also said it's a very long story.<sup>9</sup>

After these initial comments, elder Willah shared a long and detailed version of the story of peace (his version can be found in the appendix).<sup>10</sup> Many of his descriptions informed the compiled version that was storyboarded and reenacted in June of that year. Listening to elder Willah speak, I took down notes, and even made brief sketches while he talked. His story (as translated by Blackduck) offered rich descriptions of events, actions, and dialogue. Elder Willah's version of the story was told after my brief account of the peace-

7. David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London: Longman, 1988), 22-94.

8. Tony Rabesca (Cultural practices manager) and Rosa Mantla, conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

9. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

10. For transcriptions of the story of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, see pages 214 to 218 of the appendix.



Figure 36: Elder Francis Willah during a storytelling session. Photographed by the author, 2012.

making event. Through that second day of the workshop, I came to appreciate how oral storytelling is a human exchange. I will further explore the idea of storytelling as an exchange later in this chapter. In the next section I will continue discussing events from this two-day workshop. I will specifically focus on the significance of listening.

### Listening on the land

When sharing stories during this research, Tłıchq elders often started and/or ended with extended discussions—elders would acknowledge parents and grandparents, at times they would offer advice for young listeners, and also talk about lived experiences. Extended discussions surrounding a story provided further guidance for youth. Through this additional knowledge, elders sometimes made reference to the importance of listening. In concluding his version of the story of peace, elder Francis Willah offered advice for youth. He talked about young peoples' future roles, and stressed the importance of listening. Mary Blackduck provided the following translation:

Francis said that when an elder tells you stories, pay close attention to it. Because you one day will have to tell it to maybe a grandchild, when you get a little bit older. He also says, when an elder tells you to do a chore, listen to them and never talk back. That is also them giving you an advice for your own future. And he says, all of us have parents and grandparents. That's where our stories come from—from listening to them and also not arguing with them, and also doing the chores that we are asked to do. He says that's how we have come this far, by helping each other.<sup>11</sup>

Within Dene oral tradition, the use of repetition is a common practice—it is used to help listeners absorb a key element from a story.<sup>12</sup> As part of his closing remarks, elder Willah repeatedly mentioned the importance of 'listening'. Through this repetition, elder Willah was stressing an important aspect of storytelling. The inter-generational transmission of knowledge, through oral history, requires a knowledgeable storyteller and a receptive listener. The relationship between storyteller and story-listener is what makes oral tradition a "living thing" as Dene elder Philip Zoe has said.<sup>13</sup>

On Tłıchq lands, the spoken words of elders provide an aural experience that connects people. Unlike the written word, that, as Walter Ong notes, "divides and distances", the spoken word brings people together.<sup>14</sup> Listening to oral stories has facilitated intergenerational rapport between elders and youth in the Tłıchq region.<sup>15</sup> Listening continues to be a significant part of cultural continuity today. Together with tangible activities on the land, listening is an essential part of Tłıchq pedagogy, through which knowledge is passed on from generation to generation.

### The future is 'strong like two people'

11. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

12. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 225.

13. Phillip Zoe, in Scott, *Talking Tools*, 140.

14. Walter Ong, "Writing is a technology that restructures thought." in *The Written Word: literacy in transition*, ed. Greg Baumann. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 36.

15. Listening enhances our ability to sense the world. Listening to oral stories is an experience that requires active engagement on behalf of listeners—taking notice of speech sounds, intonation, and meaning. As Walter Lightning wrote: "Listening is a kind of active participation."

Lightning has also described multiple layers of activity when listening to the words of elders: "something spoken has an effect in multiple... domains. It resonates. That can be at the physical level, where spoken words physically vibrate the air, vibrate the eardrum, and resonate meaning."

Walter C. Lightning, "Compassionate Mind: Implications of a Text by Elder Louis Sunchild," *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 19 (2) (1992): 229-232.



Figure 37: Tony Rabesca at Russell Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2016 [Tłıchq Government].

Speaking on the first day of the 2016 spring workshop, elder Monique Mackenzie talked about the use (once it gets made) of our animation in Tłıchq schools as a learning tool. She made reference to how this project may benefit community youth. Rosa Mantla translated elder Mackenzie's words:

If it becomes a project for the future of our education, for our children, we need to make it really meaningful.

She says there's a lot of things that are having an impact on our youth right now but she says, that if we share stories such as this with them... maybe it will make them start to think. So she says, I'm glad we're doing stories like this, because, I hope it will help the youth.<sup>16</sup>

Elder Monique Mackenzie talked about how sharing stories, may bring positive change to youth. As part of this workshop, elders such as Monique Mackenzie provided a vital link to stories from the past. Elders facilitated the important connection to ancestral knowledge in the context of contemporary Tłıchq society—they helped participants in this research understand the significance of being 'strong like two people.'

The merging of oral history with time-based media embodies the Tłıchq educational philosophy of being 'strong like two people.' This philosophy is based on learning, and bringing together, knowledge from two different cultures. It provides an enduring, and adaptable model for future educational endeavours in the region. As John B. Zoe has indicated, this philosophy emerged with an awareness that there would be unforeseen changes in the future—elders, like the late Chief Jimmy Bruneau "realized that the future held challenges that would alter what they had known in their own time."<sup>17</sup> On day one of this workshop, in welcoming me to the community, Tony Rabesca also made reference to the notion of being 'strong like two people.' He made specific reference to how we are combining oral stories with digital technology.

I'd like to say, welcome to the community. You've come from far away, and it's very important, working together. One of the things that I brought up is being strong like two people. We have our own tradition and way of life, in storytelling and legends, but also, using the knowledge... modern technology. If we work together then we can achieve lots. And this is what I told the elders. And in the future, the next generation, will look at all these pictures and see how people lived. Right now it's oral history, verbal, stories that have been said—if we can put it into pictures, it makes it a reality.<sup>18</sup>

Discussions of how the outcomes of this research may, in some way, influence people in the future (as Tony Rabesca referred to), has led me to consider the future of my collaboration in the Tłıchq region. These discussions have also led me to think about the level of commitment required by researchers working in northern communities.<sup>19</sup>

16. Elder Monique Mackenzie (translated by Rosa Mantla), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

17. John B. Zoe, "Strong Like Two People." in *Trails of our Ancestors: Building a Nation*, ed. John B. Zoe. (Behchokq: Tłıchq Government, 2007), 13.

18. Tony Rabesca (Cultural practices manager), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

19. Readings based on Indigenous Research Methodologies address the issue of long-term relationships. Cora Weber-Pillwax writes about how "it can take many years to establish the kind of relationships and acquire the kind of knowledge that permits a researcher to actually access and participate fully in the experiences of community." Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith also writes about "the long-term relationships which are established and extend beyond a research relationship". Addressing the same issue, Patrick Scott has talked about building "relationships of trust" that evolve over time with community members.

Cora Weber Pillwax, "Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research methods: cultural influences or cultural determinants of research methods." in *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal & Indigenous Community Health*, 2 (1) (2004): 86.

Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 15. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 9.

June Helm, "Long-term research among the Dogrib and Dene." in *Long-Term Field Research in Social Anthropology*, ed. George M. Foster, Thayer Scudder, Elizabeth Colson, and Robert V. Kemper. (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 145-163.



Figure 38: Mary Blackduck at Russell Lake. Photographed by Scott Portingale. Copyright © 2016 [Tłıchq Government].

The notion of commitment (in relation to research) is something I have pondered since first visiting the Tłıchq̓ region. With heartfelt commitment to community, I have, over the past couple of years, considered the amount of time I can realistically devote to our collaborative work (involving among other things, countless hours of drawing, along with planning and travelling). I have at times thought of possible ways in which community members may continue visualizing oral history when I am unable to visit the community. How, in other words, this research could lead to an ongoing project, existing independently of my physical presence in Behchok̓.<sup>20</sup>

My relationship with people in Behchok̓ has developed from relatively formal interaction in the early stages (back in the spring of 2012), to that of friendship in recent years. Articulating the future of this research has involved ongoing conversations with community members. For example, through discussions with Tony Rabesca (who mobilized community support and resources during my visits to the north) possibilities for the future of this research have started taking shape. We have discussed possible ways in which this research may be sustained, years down the line, when we are no longer available. We both agree that this research requires a legacy. Tony and I have talked about the possibility of developing a permanent studio in Behchok̓ with appropriate technology for visual storytelling. But we have also talked about the possibility of establishing a long-lasting relationship between the Behchok̓ community and the University of Alberta—a relationship that could live outside and beyond our involvement in this research.<sup>21</sup>

It is this last idea (of establishing an ongoing relationship with the university) that Tony has continued referring to.<sup>22</sup> We have talked about how such a relationship can be conceived as a form of knowledge exchange—a sharing of ideas from the land (in the Northwest Territories) and the university. This relationship would open new opportunities for educational excursions as well, and sharing between north and south. This possible future direction remains grounded in the philosophy of being ‘strong like two people.’ It opens new doors for dialogue, and community-based projects—situated and informed by ancestral knowledge of the land.

20. Developing a creative practice that operates independently of my involvement—a “transfer of skills”—is what Tony Golsby-Smith refers to as the “fourth order of design.”

Tony Golsby-Smith, “Fourth Order Design: A Practical Perspective.” in *Design Issues*, 12 (1) (1996): 12.

21. Tony Rabesca (Cultural practices manager), conversation with author, July 14, 2017.

22. Tony Rabesca (Cultural practices manager), conversation with author, July 14, 2017.

## Chapter 5: Relationships through image-making



Figure 39: Image-making activities at Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School (CJBHS). Photographed by the author, 2016.

In this chapter I discuss the image-making part of a storytelling workshop—it took place at Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School in Behchok̓ on Wednesday, April 27, 2016. The workshop began with elders sharing versions of the story of peace. The storytelling session was followed by image-making activities in which youth, along with elders visualized landscapes related to the story of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace.

The first section of this chapter describes an intergenerational image-making experience that took place early in the workshop. Subsequent sections make reference to the drawing of lines, and the embodiment of relationships through mark-making. I conclude this chapter with a drawing of Mesa Lake rendered by Tł̓chq̓ elder Philip Husky.



Figure 40: Collaborative illustration between Monique Mackenzie and CJBHS student. Photographed by the author, 2016.



Figure 41: Collaborative illustration between Monique Mackenzie and CJBHS student. Photographed by the author, 2016.

## Painting together

The April, 2016 workshop at Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School provided an opportunity for storytelling and image-making. Four elders were present in the workshop: Melanie Lafferty, Monique Mackenzie, Edward Camille, and Philip Husky. There were also six youth participants from the school, along with local artist Ray McSwain, who took part in illustration activities. The day started with opening prayers, introductions, and gift giving—I offered elders tobacco in exchange for the stories they would be sharing throughout the morning.

1. Four Arrows, *The Authentic Dissertation*, 6.

The afternoon part of the workshop was dedicated to image-making activities in which youth were given the opportunity to visualize landscapes and moments from the story of peace. Although image-making activities were designed for youth participation, I welcomed elders to participate in any capacity they considered appropriate. The creative activities that followed are an example of what Four Arrows refers to as, “art as a living process for communicating and understanding.”<sup>1</sup>

At the start of the workshop I provided a brief watercolour demo. I showed examples of how to apply pigment to paper, and briefly shared techniques for rendering elements from the land. Each participant was provided with pencils, watercolour brushes, and paper. After handing out supplies, students began exploring media. Some chose to render marks on writing paper before committing to the 12 x 18 inch sheets provided. Others chose to dive straight into the large format. I kept quiet through much of this workshop, offering advice if requested, but providing students with as much free time to explore and experiment without interruption.

About ten minutes after students started working on their illustrations I quietly walked around the room. Some students were beginning to apply a colour wash, prior to rendering landscape details. The only sound in the room was that of graphite scratchings on paper, or the occasional rinsing of brush in water. As the first layers of pigment dried, I noticed how two elders, at the south-end of the room began interacting with youth. Elders Monique Mackenzie and Melanie Lafferty referenced the work of two students. At first these elders, who sat across from the young participants, pointed things out, and offered advice during the rendering of landscapes. But as features in the illustration took shape, elders became increasingly involved in contributing their own marks.

As one of the illustrations took shape, elder Monique Mackenzie picked up a watercolour brush and began rendering landscape details (see left). She applied a lively, vigorous series of marks next to trees illustrated by one of the students. Over the next 15 minutes, elder and youth co-created a landscape painting. There was a dynamic quality to elder Mackenzie’s line-work—they emerged from painted hills and followed a curvilinear pathway into a pink sky texture. As she continued applying pigment to paper, I realized how the lines rendered by elder Mackenzie represented the trunks of trees. As her work evolved, the illustrated trees seemed to possess a life of their own—a sense of vitality conveyed through active line-work.



Figure 42: Final artwork rendered by elder Monique Mackenzie and CJBHS student (elder's trees are on the right side). Photographed by the author, 2016.

The results of this painting show a juxtaposition of different lines—robust delineations, anchored to the ground, next to curving marks that seem to dance over a loosely rendered horizon. These two approaches to mark-making remain distinct, possessing unique qualities while sharing the same space. The work is the result of an intergenerational collaboration, in which elder and youth also shared the same space. The 12 x 18 inch paper surface served as common ground for creative exploration. Sharing this one piece of paper, two participants came together to visualize a Tłı̨cẖ landscape—the landscape painting embodies the philosophy of being ‘strong like two people.’

### **The legacy of Chief Jimmy Bruneau**

The Tłı̨cẖ educational philosophy of being ‘strong like two people’ can be expressed in many ways. According to John B. Zoe, the philosophy is “about mutual recognition”—it involves “combining... two without one giving up the other”.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the painting described above, an image was created through the creative skills of two people: elder and youth. Working together they created an illustration of the land by contributing different styles of mark-making. This painting, however, also embodies two ways of telling a story: oral and visual. The painting provides a visualization of land, that earlier in the day, was described by elders through oral versions of the story of peace.

The building where this painting was made has a long history of carrying the philosophy of being ‘strong like two people.’ The building—Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School—is named after the chief who during the late 1960s and early 70s pushed the Canadian Government to build the school in the community.<sup>3</sup> After its construction, Behchoḵ children could attend school without having to leave the community. When the school was inaugurated in 1972, Chief Bruneau said the following: “I have asked for a school to be built on my land and that school will be run by my people and my people will work at that school and children will learn both ways, our way and whiteman’s way.”<sup>4</sup> Through these words, Jimmy Bruneau articulated a philosophy that has been foundational to Tłı̨cẖ education.

Jimmy Bruneau had a direct, family connection to the story of peace. Bruneau (who was born in 1882) traced his descent as great grandson of Edzo, who in 1829 made peace with Akaitcho at Mesa Lake.<sup>5</sup> Jimmy Bruneau passed away in 1975, but his memory has lived on in the Tłı̨cẖ region. Almost twenty years after the school was opened, in 1991, Tłı̨cẖ elder Elizabeth Mackenzie reflected on Chief Bruneau’s words: “If the children are taught in both cultures equally, they will be strong like two people.”<sup>6</sup> Today, the walls of the school in Behchoḵ show images of Jimmy Bruneau. The philosophy he articulated in 1972 continues to inform and inspire educational projects throughout the Tłı̨cẖ region.

### **A confident line**

The intergenerational image-making experience described earlier in this chapter provided an opportunity for a dialogue through brushwork. Lines painted by Elder Mackenzie

2. John B. Zoe in Jim Martin and Nancy Gibson, “The Story that was in Danger of Being Left Behind: Restorying Tłı̨cẖ Culture with Land Claims and Self-government. A Conversation with John B. Zoe.” in *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal & Indigenous Community Health*, 10 (2) (2012): 149.

3. Zoe, *Strong Like Two People*, 17.

4. Jimmy Bruneau in Zoe, *Strong Like Two People*, 17.

5. Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 226.

6. Elizabeth Mackenzie, in Zoe, *Strong Like Two People*, 17.

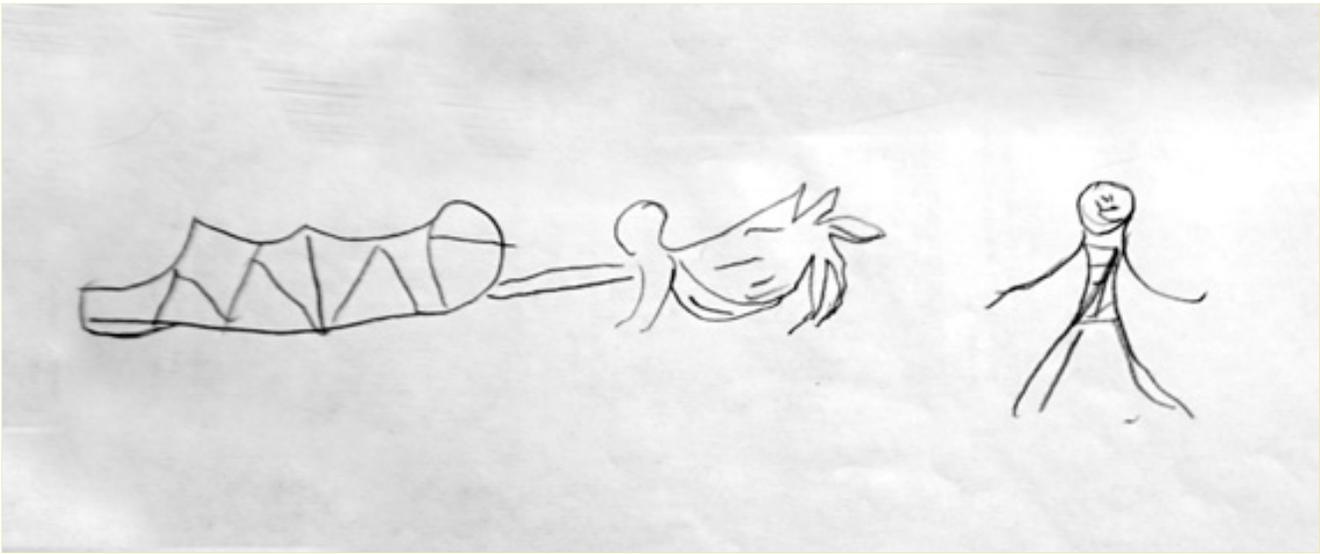


Figure 43: Drawing of a dog sled by elder Monique Mackenzie, 2016.

were followed by detailed renderings by the young student. The final painting shows the results of a conversation through the use of illustration media. The left side of the painting contains realistic depictions of the land, while the right side shows interpretations of trees that seem to be in motion. The painting embodies a unique vision of the land, developed through collaboration. During this image-making workshop, elder Monique Mackenzie also created a drawing of a dog sled. Through this drawing, she depicted the entire object and animal, including handle, harness and dog. This small graphite rendering shows the same confidence in line-work, evident in the painting.

7. László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: Paul Theobald and Company, 1969), 36.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Juhani Pallasmaa, *The thinking hand*, 110-111.

10. Klee, in Lucas, "Taking a Line for a Walk." 169.

The notion that a line can embody *confidence*, is an idea I was first exposed to during my early days as an art student. As a 16 year old, understanding this aspect of mark-making was somewhat transformative—it changed my approach to drawing. As a result of this adolescent learning experience, I avoided the rendering of choppy, erratic strokes in favour of flowing, continuous lines that evoked *confidence*. I avoided any sense of hesitancy or indecision when drawing from life. For many years (as a student, designer, and even as a teacher) I used a variety of terms to describe what I perceived as *confident* line-work—terms such as ‘dynamic’, ‘bold’, or ‘vigorous’ were often used in conversations with peers or students. In recent years, however, I have put some thought into what a line with such characteristics embodies—beyond confidence.

My inquiry initially led me to consider the forces at work during the process of drawing. There is, for instance, resistance of material to the motion and pressure of a hand-held tool.<sup>7</sup> A drawing reveals the twists and turns, fluctuation and progression, of pencil or brush, passing over material. The act of drawing shows, as László Moholy-Nagy writes, a “path of motion.”<sup>8</sup> A confident line does indeed show a trace of motion, a pathway inscribed over a surface. But the pathway that appears during the act of drawing is not one that is known in advance of its rendering. A hand-drawn line emerges through the rendering process. As a designer I have often used drawing in ideation exercises and brainstorming—as a way to figure things out through line-making. As architect Juhani Pallasmaa notes: “design is always a search for something that is not known in advance.”<sup>9</sup>

A confident line is not pre-planned, but rather *emerges* through movement. Drawing is an unplanned journey—an idea suggested by Paul Klee’s description of how “The ‘walk’ of the brush or pen over a surface generates the line.”<sup>10</sup> In the following section I will further explore an idea discussed in the previous chapter. I will explore how drawing, within the context of the Behchok̓ image-making workshop, was used to embody the experience of walking the land. Lines rendered in a drawing by elder Philip Husky illustrate a lifetime of travelling to the Mesa Lake region.

### **Relationships through drawing**

During the image-making workshop at Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, elder Philip Husky also rendered artwork. He visualized his experience of walking the land. In less than 10 minutes he sketched his recollection of the Mesa Lake area, indicating a range

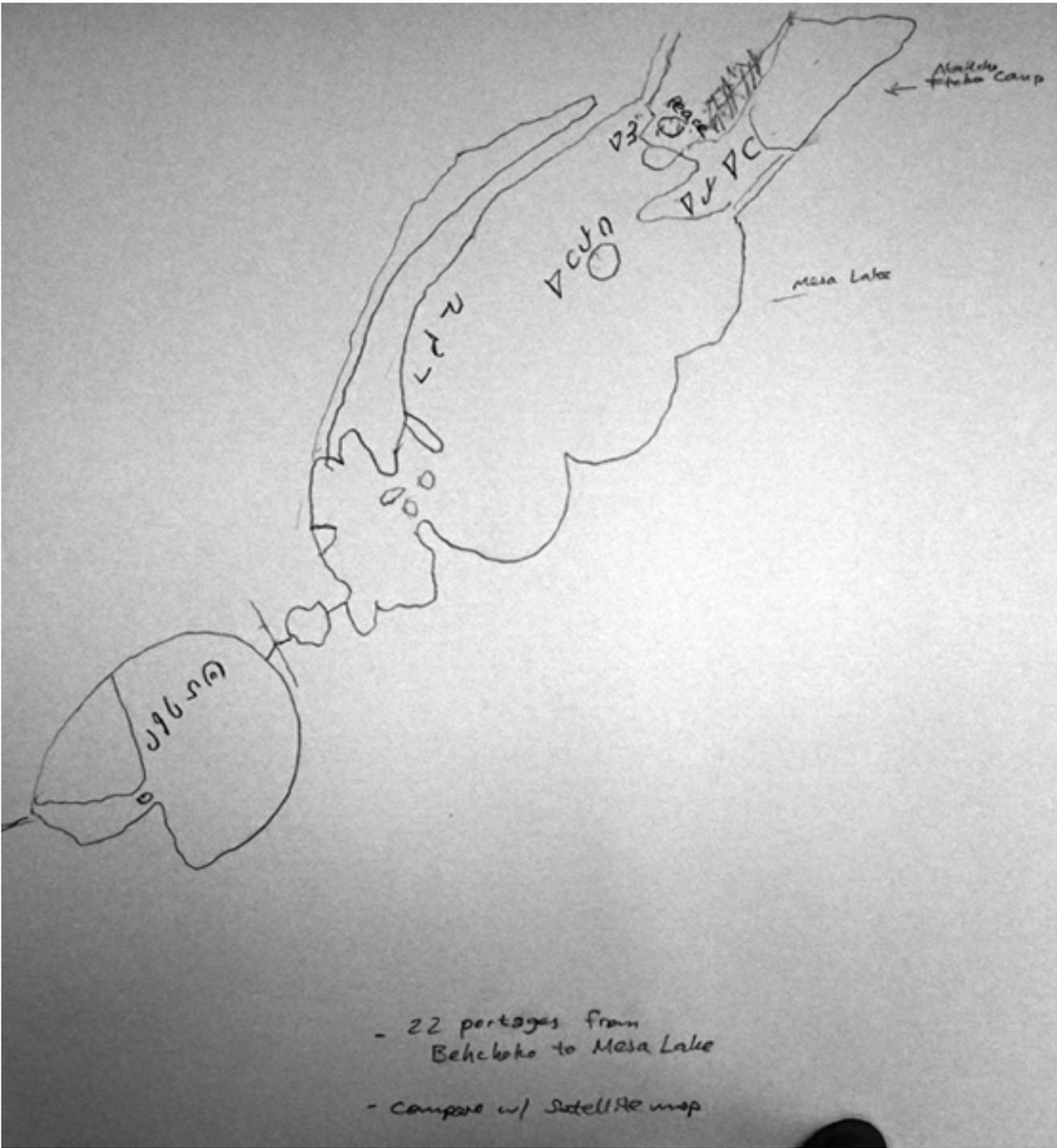


Figure 44: A drawing of Mesa Lake and surrounding area by elder Philip Husky, 2016.

of historic and geographic details, including his knowledge of the place where peace was made, along with the location of small islands and portages. His outline of the lake was drawn from lived experience—he travelled to this part of the region many times throughout his life. Upon completing the drawing elder Husky talked about the geography of Mesa Lake, while referencing his sketch. He talked about a fishing area, and pointed out that there are twenty-two portages from Behchok̓ to Mesa Lake.

After recently revisiting elder Philip Husky’s drawing, I noticed curving shorelines, and multiple lines extending out and around the body of water. The drawing shows an intimate knowledge of the region’s geography. There is, as in elder Mackenzie’s artwork, a sense of *confidence*, even certainty, in the line-work. This line-work also embodies the lived experience of walking and paddling across the region.

In translating elder Husky’s verbal description of the drawing, Tony Rabesca said that “the land is just like a street for them”.<sup>11</sup> Since I began working in the Tł̓ch̓q̓ region, I have come across several descriptions in which Dene elders compare the land to a person, or even an object familiar in Euro-Canadian society. Some elders make reference to the land as provider, or as a place of spiritual significance. These references include the following: “the land is our bible” (by elder Stanley Isaiah); “the land is just like my mom and dad” (Johnny Apple); and “the land is like a book” (elder Harry Simpson).<sup>12</sup>

Elder Husky’s drawing does indeed show a familiarity of place, comparable to the knowledge of a street or book. His drawing, however, also evokes a world of relationships. His delineations trace geographical relationships—between lakes and portages. There is also a relationship between place and history—knowledge of where Edzo and Akaitcho made peace was indicated in this rendering. Finally, this drawing elicited a relationship between people—it started a dialogue in which elder Husky shared knowledge of travelling to the barrenlands.

Philip Husky provided a unique description of the Mesa Lake area. The sketch conveys multiple layers of information. Through this visualization, lines drawn using a graphite pencil evoked relationships between land and history, while also bringing elder Husky, Tony Rabesca and myself into a conversation. Descriptions of land in terms of “relationships” reminds me of how Yellowknife Dene author Glen Coulthard described the land in his book, *Red Skin, White Masks*: “It is a profound misunderstanding to think of land or place as simply some material object of profound importance to Indigenous cultures (although it is this too); instead it ought to be understood as a field of “relationships of things to each other.”<sup>13</sup>

Since I began working in Behchok̓, elders have shared stories that describe relationships to, and within, the land. The image-making exercises discussed in this chapter provide another way of describing the interconnectedness of things throughout the Tł̓ch̓q̓ region. Elder Husky’s drawing shows the intimate connection between storyteller and place. His drawing also offers a unique way of describing history. Through carefully connected lines, curved delineations, and detailed mark-making, elder Husky’s drawing illustrates how knowledge of the past comes to life in the present.

11. Tony Rabesca (Cultural practices manager), conversation with author, April 27, 2016.

12. Isaiah, in Scott, *Talking Tools*, 229. Apple, in Scott, *Stories Told*, 62.

Simpson, in Andrews, “There will be many stories,” 16.

13. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 61.

## Chapter 6: Reenacting oral history



Figure 45: Storyboard frames for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. Illustrated by the author, 2016.

This chapter covers the community-based reenactment of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace. The event took place in Behchokò during the first week of June, 2016. This event brought many talented community members together. The reenactment offered a unique opportunity to embody historical knowledge through performance. Young community members interpreted the words of elders through physical movement, spoken word, and occasional improvisation. As in previous art workshops, the philosophy of being ‘strong like two people’ is acknowledged and celebrated, as oral storytelling was expressed through performance.

The reenactment was promoted on the Tłı̨chq̓ Government website in late May, prior to my arrival.<sup>1</sup> I had been planning and looking forward to this event for several months. This part of the research was one of the most significant and rewarding experiences of my PhD—I say this because my relationship with community members was strengthened through the process of helping to orchestrate and direct the reenactment. I worked closely with local actors and costume designers during this visit to Behchokò—our common project was a source of passion and pride. We worked hard to create respectful interpretations of every moment in the story. Each recorded scene, brought the words and movements of ancestors to life. This project was a creative collaboration that is best described as a ceremony and celebration (I will elaborate on this idea in the following sections).

In this chapter I will provide detailed descriptions of the reenactment. I begin (in the first two sections) with preparation work required for this event—involving the development of a storyboard, and an acting workshop. Subsequently, the third and fourth sections present the significance of movement, rhythm and ceremony in recording the reenactment. The final section provides descriptions of every shot in the film, covering the process, history and people behind the translation of this story into moving images.

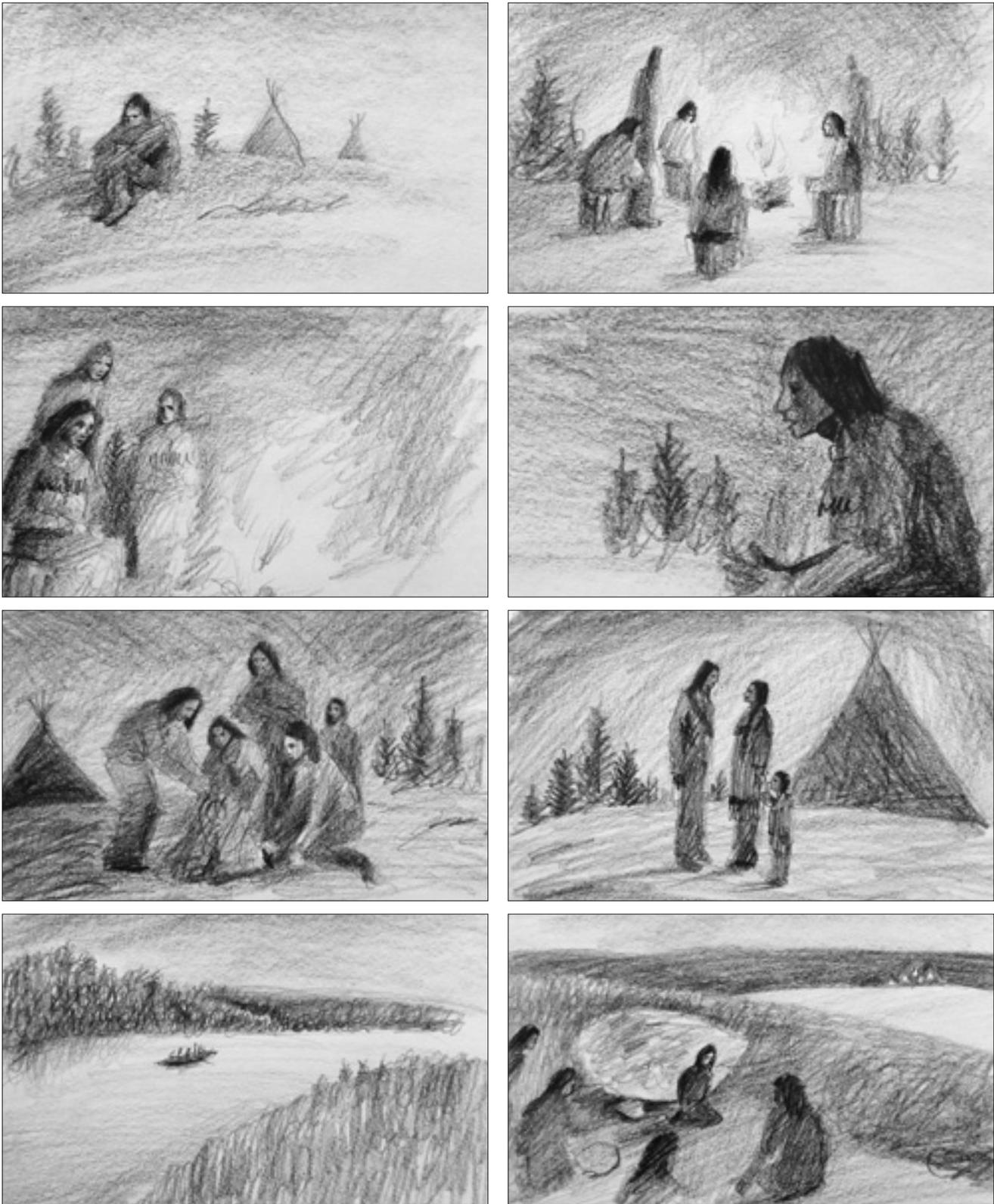


Figure 46: Storyboard frames for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. Illustrated by the author, 2016.

## Preparation for the reenactment

The reenactment of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* involved activities extending over a seven day period. Before the re-enactment, former *North of 60* actor, Dakota House delivered a 3-day workshop, providing basic training in acting for participants taking part in this event (this workshop was organized by the Tłı̨chų Government). His workshop not only focused on fundamentals of acting, but also addressed issues of expression and self-esteem. Dakota House works through a leadership initiative called Going Miles: “a program that assists participants with positive self-expression and raising self-esteem by using interactive engaging hands-on approach”.<sup>2</sup>

The Tłı̨chų Government promoted the combined acting workshop and reenactment. I met, and briefly talked, with community members (the actors) who expressed interest in taking part in this event (17 in total) on May 31 at the Friendship Centre in Behchokò—each of the 17 people who wanted to participate were offered a role in the reenactment. These meetings provided an opportunity to start building a relationship with people taking part in this event. In each meeting, I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the workshop and reenactment (as part of the research project). Each participant provided oral consent to take part in the research.<sup>3</sup>

Dakota House’s acting workshop took place on June 1, 2, and 3 at the Community Centre in Behchokò. I was present through much of the workshop. When it ended, based on workshop performances, and through consultation with Tony Rabesca, we assigned roles to be played by each of the 17 participants.

The reenactment took place on Monday, June 6 and 7, in the gym at Elizabeth Mackenzie School in Behchokò. Elder Terry Naskan, and Georgina Franki designed and sewed costumes for all 17 participants performing in the reenactment. Cinematographer Scott Portingale (who recorded video during the Mesa Lake trip in 2014), travelled to Behchokò and recorded live action footage of the reenactment. I shared a copy of the storyboard with Scott before this workshop, and explained the movement and overall visual style required for this project. The recording of scenes did not follow the chronological order of events depicted in the storyboard. Instead scenes were recorded based on the availability and schedule of performers.

## From making a storyboard to drawing lines with a camera

The *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* storyboard is made up of 36 frames—each one is a loosely rendered graphite sketch depicting a moment from the historic narrative. As in many versions of the narrative, the storyboard begins during the time of tribal wars, and concludes with a dance. Sketches depict multiple characters, traditional lodges, landscapes, and the famous rock at Mesa Lake. The storyboard is a static visual narrative, showing the main content to be recorded during the reenactment. Text beneath each

2. Going Miles, accessed July 26, 2018. <http://www.goingmiles.org/about-3/>.

3. The people of Behchokò who participated in the 2016 reenactment are

Doreen Apples  
Darla Beaulieu  
Berinda Mackenzie  
Derrick Mackenzie  
Charles Mantla  
Kirk Mantla  
Nikita Mantla  
Johnny Naedzo  
Marie Nedlin  
Travis Quitte  
Floriann Rabesca  
Vincent Rabesca  
Joyce Washi  
Alister Wettrade  
Angela Zoe  
Brittanya Zoe  
Rianne Zoe



Figure 47: Storyboard frames for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. Illustrated by the author, 2016.

frame (included in the original storyboard not the one seen in this chapter) describes a spoken narration that accompanies each scene—this verbal content was derived from translations of oral versions of the story.

Storyboard frames shown in this chapter were created as a first draft—a version that could be discussed with community members and, if required, altered before the reenactment. This first draft, however, was accepted by Tony Rabesca, without changes, as the version to be reenacted in Behchokò in June of 2016. The storyboard was also shared with community participants—the actors—who performed in the reenactment.

I drew this storyboard in May of 2016, after gathering multiple oral (and some written) versions of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace. Many of the frames show a generous amount of space surrounding characters, tonal variation from light grey to dark grey, horizon lines, and bush in the distance. The amount of physical space surrounding people and landscapes provides a sense of overall composition, while also suggesting the range of space required for camera movement when recording the reenactment—during the reenactment, the camera was usually moving into and around the many people and material included in a scene.

The idea of recording the reenactment through a continually moving camera was inspired by the image-making workshop with elders and youth (discussed in chapter 5). Drawings produced by elders during the workshop embodied a lifetime of movement on the land. They are dynamic representations of walking, hunting and paddling along ancestral trails.

Lines drawn by elders led me to consider how a digital camera could be used as a dynamic tool that evokes different aspects of the story. During the reenactment I asked cinematographer Scott Portingale to move (when appropriate) into each scene by following the movement of actors, and responding to their actions. At times the camera-work is improvised. Through continual movement, this recording device left a tangible mark on the reenactment—the pathways travelled by the camera are visible in the fluid movement of the animation.

Despite the important role of the camera in this project, the device was to be ignored by participants. It was to be an anonymous part of the reenactment. While unacknowledged, the presence of the camera (in recording mode) framed moments during which history was reenacted. There was a two-way influence between digital recording device and reenactment—oral history shaped how the camera was used. But, at the same time, the camera prompted and shaped how the reenactment unfolded (the movement of actors was at times a response to the timing and position of the camera). This synergetic relationship between camera and oral history is reflective of many other ongoing relationships on which this research is based: moving images and spoken words, elders and youth, community members and myself.



Figure 48: Storyboard frames for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. Illustrated by the author, 2016.

## Movement and rhythm

4. Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 119.

My role during the reenactment of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace was that of co-director—Tłıchq community members were also co-directors of this film. Stories and drawings shared by elders have guided this project. The reenactment was directed through a combination of elders' guidance, and my own knowledge of filmmaking. Ideas derived from oral history, the land, as well as digital media, art and design all contributed to this project. During my contribution to the direction of this film I did my best to honour knowledge shared by elders, guiding the reenactment process in a respectful manner. I realized, as day one of the reenactment approached that my responsibility was threefold: first, I would be working with actors to provide instruction while also encouraging open-ended character interpretation; second I wanted to ensure that each recorded scene depicted the historic peace-making event, roughly following the storyboard; and finally, I worked towards recording each scene in a way that created an adequate transition from the previous scene, while setting up a dynamic changeover to the next.

The first of these points (advising actors) provided an opportunity for ongoing dialogue with participants as we discussed the type of movement and expression that could be delivered through each scene. In advising each actor, I wanted to facilitate freedom of interpretation while ensuring that events from the story were enacted in a convincing manner. Each scene in the film was recorded multiple times, allowing performers to reach an increased level of comfort with each take. Dakota House's acting workshop (days before) was extremely helpful in preparing participants for this work. Much of my direction involved giving actors time to relax, as they adjusted, and repeated required movements for each shot.

The second point (depicting the story) was a relatively straight-forward, albeit evolving, process. We followed descriptions provided in the storyboard (which had already been approved), and remained faithful to the peace-making as described by elders. However, we often cropped and composed scenes differently to what was indicated in the storyboard. These formal adjustments emerged as the tangible reality of place, actors, cinematographer and lighting came together. Furthermore, I wanted to capture a sense of continual movement (discussed in the previous section) that required a roving camera—often walking through crowds of people, twisting and turning in order to capture the dynamic activities of the narrative.

The third point (that of transitioning between scenes) was in many ways, the most challenging part of the reenactment because it required coordination between multiple actors, cinematographer, and lighting. This final point was essential in ensuring an ongoing sense of movement (as discussed above) and continuity from one scene to another. The sense of movement and transitioning between shots brought rhythm to the animated version of the story of peace. This aspect of time-based media—rhythm—is as important an element as any other in building a story-world through moving pictures. The late Russian filmmaker Andey Tarkovsky made reference to rhythm in cinema through his book *Sculpting in Time*: "I am convinced that it is rhythm, and not editing, as people tend to think, that is the main formative element of cinema." <sup>4</sup>

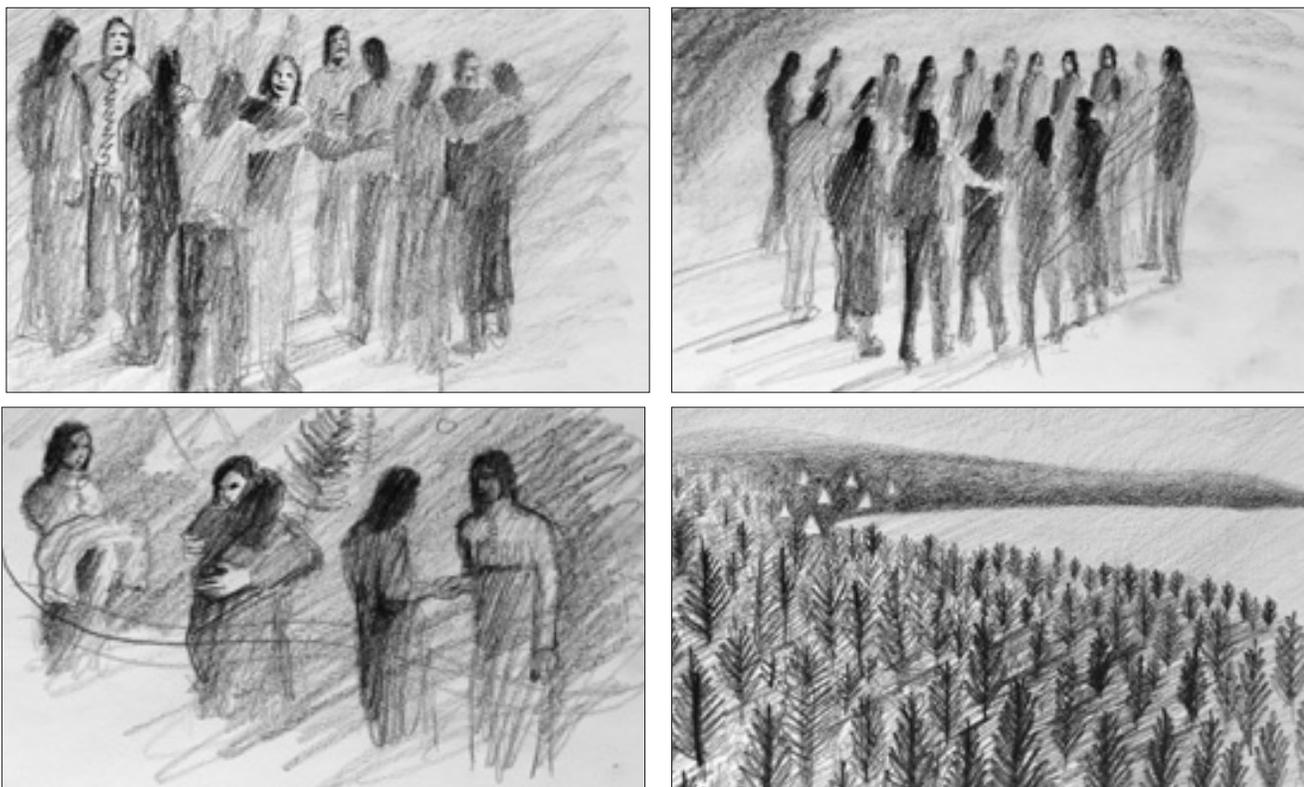


Figure 49: Storyboard frames for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. Illustrated by the author, 2016.

Building a sense of movement and rhythm helped to communicate how people, emotions, and places shifted within the story of peace. Movement and rhythm also reflect dynamic qualities of oral history. In this research, moving images show oral history as animated (in the dual sense of the word); that is, as something full of life, action and spirit, but also as a filmmaking technique. The significance of rhythm within this project will be further discussed in the next section.

### **The reenactment as ceremony and dance**

During day one of the reenactment, the opening scene in the animated version of the story of peace was recorded four times—this is the scene showing the raiding of a camp. Oral versions of the story of peace described this moment as frightening and violent. During the reenactment the first two takes recorded with participants lacked the sense of movement and urgency that would be expected during a surprise attack. In order to help actors dramatize this moment from the story, I asked Tony Rabesca, who was in the gym, to rapidly, and repeatedly, pound a drum as we recorded the third and fourth take of the scene.

The sound of the drum, reverberating throughout the gym, added a powerful, rhythmic sound, during the third take. The drum is suggestive of cyclical patterns and ancestral journeys—it is an embodiment of culture as Native American scholar Jack D. Forbes suggests:

If the world be a drum we are its  
taut skin vibrating with its messages.<sup>5</sup>

The energy built up through repeated drumming elicited a dynamic portrayal. Performers followed an audible cue as they moved in and out of frame. After consulting with cinematographer Scott Portingale, a fourth (and final) recording, allowed for a more carefully composed scene and fluid camera movement.

Although it was not my intention at the time, drumming brought a ceremonial quality to the reenactment—echoing a pattern of sound that accompanies ceremonies and dances on the land. Drumming helped to remind us that the core part of this research—the reenactment—was in fact a ceremony. To conceive of research as ceremony (as Cree scholar Shawn Wilson indicates) reinforces the many relationships involved in a project taking place on Indigenous lands.

...research is a ceremony. The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world.<sup>6</sup>

5. Jack D. Forbes, "The Nature of the Universe" in *Unraveling the Spreading Cloth of Time: Indigenous Thoughts Concerning the Universe*, ed. MariJo Moore and Trace A. Demeyer (Candler NC: Renegade Planets Publishing, 2013), 65.

6. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 11.

7. *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 44.



Shot 1



Shot 2

Figure 50: Shots 1 and 2 of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*.

The two day reenactment was an opportunity to build relationships with knowledge shared by elders. Through conversation, movement, and dramatic interpretation, The story of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace became an embodied experience. My approach to directing actors involved (as mentioned earlier) a combination of instruction and freedom of interpretation. In terms of instruction, I reminded each performer of the physical area in which they would move, and the approximate duration of a shot. Aside from these details, I left overall movement, speech, and character interpretation relatively open. Scenes were rehearsed two to three times before recording. The combination of instruction and openness, led to performances that resembled (and at times consisted of) a dance. As performers walked in and out of frame, acting the part of historic figures, each scene revealed an experience generated from a combination of rehearsal and improvisation—Erin Manning and Brian Massumi refer to this as “a movement precise with training but still open to regeneration.”<sup>7</sup>

8. Ibid.

9. Tony Rabesca (Cultural practices manager), conversation with author, July 14, 2017.

Like aspects of traditional Tłıchq knowledge, this re-enactment created opportunities to explore how “thinking is in the moving”.<sup>8</sup> Character interpretations resulting from the combined experience of instruction/rehearsal and improvisation, led to dynamic performances from beginning to end. The final scene in the film consists of a drum dance. Actors moved together, activating collective rhythm, while performing a closing dance that concluded the reenactment/ceremony. This collective effort involved experiences that are often encountered on the land: repetition, relational movement, and improvisation. Interpreting a historical event provided a unique opportunity for each participant to contribute to this research while bridging the distance with ancestral knowledge.

### **Scenes from the reenactment:**

In this section I will provide a breakdown of each scene performed during the reenactment. I will make reference to oral descriptions provided by elders, and discuss how actors interpreted each part of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace. I will also explain how camera movement (along with the movement of actors) helped to further evoke mood and atmosphere at different moments in the story. The visuals shown on the left are still images from the final edit of the film, showing graphite tracings of live action footage. As I will describe in the following chapter, *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* was animated using a rotoscoping technique, through which live action footage was traced using graphite drawing media (twelve drawings were traced for every second of footage).

The final edited version of this film does not match the shots proposed in the storyboard. In order to maintain ongoing movement throughout the animation, the first three frames (shown in the storyboard) were eliminated, and a scene showing a raven was included instead. The inclusion of the raven was the result of discussions with Tony Rabesca—he indicated that the call of a raven may sometimes foreshadow an unfortunate event.<sup>9</sup> He recommended that a raven be shown before the initial scene depicting the raiding of a Tłıchq camp. The remainder of this section will describe each shot from the film.



Shot 3



Shot 4



Shot 5



Shot 6

Figure 51: Shots 3 to 6 of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*.

**Shot 1** (raven):

This is one of few moments in the film where actors do not appear. It is the opening scene—replacing the initial idea (illustrated in the storyboard) of showing static images of the land. Instead we see an image of distant trees moving away from the viewer—at the same time a raven appears on screen, which, as Tony Rabesca indicated, foreshadows an unfortunate event.

**Shot 2** (raiding of a Tłıchq camp):

Oral versions of this story begin with, or describe (early on) the raiding of a Tłıchq camp by the neighbouring Tetsotii (Yellowknife Dene) during a time of tribal war. In 2016, elder Francis Willah began his oral testimony by referring to this as “a very frightening, scary story about war”—similarly Naedzo began his version by referring to “the time when the Dogribs and the Yellowknives were at war.”<sup>10</sup> As mentioned earlier, I asked Tony Rabesca to play the drum as we recorded this performance—the drum helped convey a sense of urgency and drama during this early stage of the story. Every available actor performed in the scene. I asked cinematographer Scott Portingale to walk into the chaos, following, and at times turning with the movement of people. The scene sets the tone for the flow of constantly changing visuals shown throughout the animation.

**Shot 3** (activities at a Tłıchq camp):

This shot illustrates activities at a Tłıchq camp. Actors were asked to gather in three groups, showing different interactions—the three groups also provided multiple focal points as the camera panned vertically. The composition of this scene follows the sketch indicated in the storyboard. Movement is slow throughout this scene, suggesting the conclusion to a day of work, as performers unpack after a journey. Tony Rabesca, along with actors helped orchestrate the movement and method for carrying material in a natural way. The inclusion of many actors, helped visualize the reference (in the narration) made to Edzo as the oldest of thirty-two brothers—as described by Andrew Gon.<sup>11</sup>

**Shot 4** (Edzo thinking of peace):

This shot also follows the associated storyboard sketch. The narration at this stage of the film tells of Edzo’s ideas on peace, the land, and respect for others. Here we see a slow moving portrait of the actor playing the role of Edzo. The camera pans horizontally, offering (for more than 10 seconds) a picture of the Tłıchq peace-maker, opening his eyes and looking into the distance (a gesture that foreshadows his meeting with Akaitcho). The background footage in this scene is a pulsating, constantly moving entanglement of lines, suggestive of branches, trails, or relationships.

**Shot 5** (Edzo’s people pass by Akaitcho’s camp):

Oral testimonies, including Naedzo’s describe Edzo and his group passing by Akaitcho’s camp without being noticed: “Somehow learning that Akaitcho and his band were lying in wait, Edzo and his band slipped past them.”<sup>12</sup> During the reenactment, the twelve actors performing this scene walked towards the camera. Scott Portingale also moved into the scene, walking past the actors, capturing a dynamic perspective as participants moved

10. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

Naedzo, in Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 224.

11. Alice Legat, *Walking the Land, Feeding the Fire Knowledge and Stewardship Among the Tłıchq Dene* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 55.

12. Naedzo, in Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 224.

13. Thomas D. Andrews and John B. Zoe, “Trails: Archaeology and the Tłıchq Cultural Landscape.” in *Trails of our Ancestors: Building a Nation*, ed. John B.Zoe. (Behchokq: Tłıchq Government, 2007), 22.

14. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.



**Shot 7**



**Shot 8**



**Shot 9**

Figure 52: Shots 7 to 9 of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*.

in and out of view. This scene depicts an experience that was often talked about during storytelling sessions: the experience of travelling the land.

15. Naedzo, in Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 224.

16. *Mesa Lake video*.

17. Naedzo, in Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 224.

**Shot 6** (Edzo thinks about meeting with Akaitcho):

During this scene, a pensive Edzo, thinks about meeting with Akaitcho. According to oral versions of Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace, Edzo's band rested on an island known as *Wek'ehajliddij*. Thomas D. Andrews and John Zoe have described this as "Edzo's Wife's Island/Woke whale ti near Mesa Lake... so-called because this is where Edzo told his wife to hide while he went to attempt a peace with the Chipewyan Akaitcho."<sup>13</sup> In recording this scene, the actor remained relatively still during a slow horizontal camera pan. As with most other scenes in this film, the camera moved in and out of the performer's space—an approach that provides a sense of ongoing movement in the final edit of the film.

**Shot 7** (a meeting between Edzo and his brothers):

The meeting between Edzo and his brothers was amongst the longest scenes in the re-enactment. This was the moment in which Edzo shares his peace-making plan. Oral versions of this moment in the story, such as Francis Willah's, indicate that Edzo's brothers "tried to convince Edzo not to go to Akaitcho's camp... afraid that he would not leave the camp alive."<sup>14</sup> In recording this scene, we worked towards capturing a dialogue between Edzo and his brothers. The discussion between actors was, therefore, recorded multiple times, in order to synchronize the shift in conversation with the movement of the camera. In the final cut of the film, we see a visual transition between each brother's contribution to the discussion (the transition is a hand-drawn effect, showing the overlapping of characters—it involved the erasing and drawing of multiple frames). These transitions are meant to convey the important choice made by Edzo at this key juncture in the story, as he decides (against his brothers' recommendations) to travel to Mesa Lake. The rapid materialization of new drawings (through these transitions) evokes the historical turning point of this conversation—this was a crucial moment that required persuasive skills according to Naedzo: "His band, fearful, refused to accompany him. But Edzo persuaded four men to turn back with him."<sup>15</sup>

**Shot 8** (packing for Edzo's trip):

As part of this film, we intended to portray, when appropriate, the practical work involved in travelling the land. Activities performed in this scene involved the gathering of material, packing, and preparation work for Edzo's trip. As part of this research elders often talked about the practical, material aspect of life on the land. During the recording of this scene, each actor is shown assembling or moving tangible items.

**Shot 9** (Edzo embraces his wife):

Edzo's departure from *Wek'ehajliddij* island, involved a farewell embrace. During storytelling sessions, elders often made reference to Edzo's parting words to his wife: "if I am not back here by your side in 10 days, you go back to our people and tell them that I have been killed".<sup>17</sup> In recording this scene, we emphasized the long embrace between Edzo and his wife, as a way to embody the emotional moment suggested in oral versions of the



Shot 10



Shot 11



Shot 12



Shot 13



Shot 14

Figure 53: Shots 10 to 14 of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*.

narrative. A hand-drawn transition (also applied in the scene showing the meeting with the brothers) was used to introduce a shift in the story, as Edzo travels to Mesa Lake.

18. Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 230.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 228.

**Shot 10** (Edzo and his group travel to Akaitcho's camp):

The journey to Akaitcho's camp is represented through the image of a landscape—Edzo and his group are in a canoe. This landscape was rendered by Tłı̨ch̨ artist Archie Beaverho. The sky is relatively dark. According to oral history, the meeting between Edzo and Akaitcho took place in the late summer; therefore, most scenes in this animation suggest varying degrees of light evident during this time of year.<sup>18</sup> Written records also provide verification of the time of year when the peace-making event took place.

A November 26, 1829, entry in the Fort Simpson post journal, tells of a tense encounter between the Tłı̨ch̨ and the Yellowknife Dene—this, and one other post entry, provide independent verification of the peace between the Tłı̨ch̨ and Yellowknife Dene, based on Euro-Canadian records.<sup>19</sup> Although the Fort Simpson post entry was written in late November, it is likely that the event did in fact take place in the summer, as Helm and Gillespie note: "That the report came to the Fort Simpson trader in November does not preclude a late summer confrontation, as specified in the legend, for in the records of the period there is frequently a considerable lag between an event in the bush and the time that someone arrives at the fort to report it to a trader."<sup>20</sup>

**Shot 11** (Approaching the camp):

Many versions of this story make reference to a large rock sitting on an esker by the site of Akaitcho's camp—today, this is a tangible material element that embodies the reconciliation between the Tłı̨ch̨ and Yellowknife Dene. During the 2014 visit to Mesa Lake (as discussed earlier), elders talked about, and walked to, the esker where part of this story took place. In oral versions of this story, Edzo's son hides behind the rock, as the rest of the group walk toward Akaitcho's camp. During the reenactment, we set up a couple of props (improvised film production equipment) covered in blankets, as a stand-in for the rock. During the digital production stage of this project, a drawing of the rock was imported as a layer, and moved accordingly in order to blend with the human movement evident in the scene.

**Shot 12** (Edzo inside the camp):

During the reenactment, the approach to the camp was broken down into two separate actions. First we recorded the initial approach, performed by actors playing the roles of Edzo and his three brothers. We then recorded Edzo's movement inside the camp separately—in the animation, the two actions are blended by dissolving background drawings and keeping the same sky colour. According to oral versions of the story, Edzo had a sister inside the camp. His sister was married to K'atehwhi—referred to as an intermediary figure. K'atehwhi, according to Helm and Gillespie, is likely the leader of a band of Chipewyans (who at the time lived in Akaitcho's camp—K'atehwhi is referred to as "Le Camarade de Mandeville" in explorers' accounts (he features in journal entries from Fort Resolution



Shot 15



Shot 16



Shot 17



Shot 18



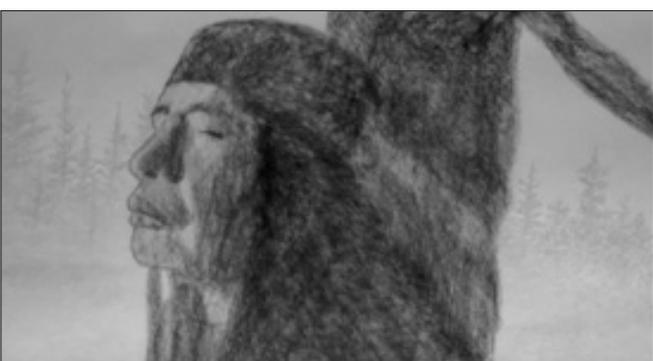
Shot 19



Shot 20



Shot 21



Shot 22

Figure 54: Shots 15 to 22 of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*.

in the 1830s).<sup>21</sup> During that decade, records identify Le Camarade de Mandeville as “Ca-tooelthel”, “Cassetooelthil”, “Caetloelthel”, and “Catouelthele” (Helm and Gillespie note that these various spelling are likely transcriptions to English of the Chipewyan name).<sup>22</sup>

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

24. Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 224.

25. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

**Shot 13** (Edzo walks into his sister’s tent):

This scene shows Edzo walking into his sister’s tent. Following descriptions from the storyboard, the two actors in this scene were asked to establish a dialogue, in order to portray a determined Edzo (insisting that he speak with Akaitcho), and a concerned sister (who tries to discourage him from facing Akaitcho). Elder Francis Willah’s version of the story provided direction for this tense moment in the film—he described the following interaction between Edzo and his sister:

So he managed to sneak into her tepee. He told his sister, ‘go find your husband, go find Akaitcho for me, I need to talk to him—I would like to meet with him’. And his sister was afraid for his life. So his sister told Edzo, ‘you have to leave right away, you have to leave now. If they find out that you’re here, they’re gonna kill you’. But Edzo was a very stubborn man, he refused to leave. He said he wanted to meet with Akaitcho”.<sup>23</sup>

**Shot 14** (Edzo is covered under a pile of dry hides):

The following response, by Edzo’s sister, also adheres to elder Francis Willah’s version of history. In his testimony, elder Willah indicated that the sister hid Edzo under a pile of dry hides. The visual composition for this scene follows the sketch drawn for the storyboard, in which we see Edzo’s sister on her knees, gathering material. In the animation, scenes inside the lodge were darkened through the use of a hand drawn graphite texture that covered the top, left and right side of the screen, providing the appearance of a dimly lit space.

**Shot 15** (Edzo’s sister finds her husband):

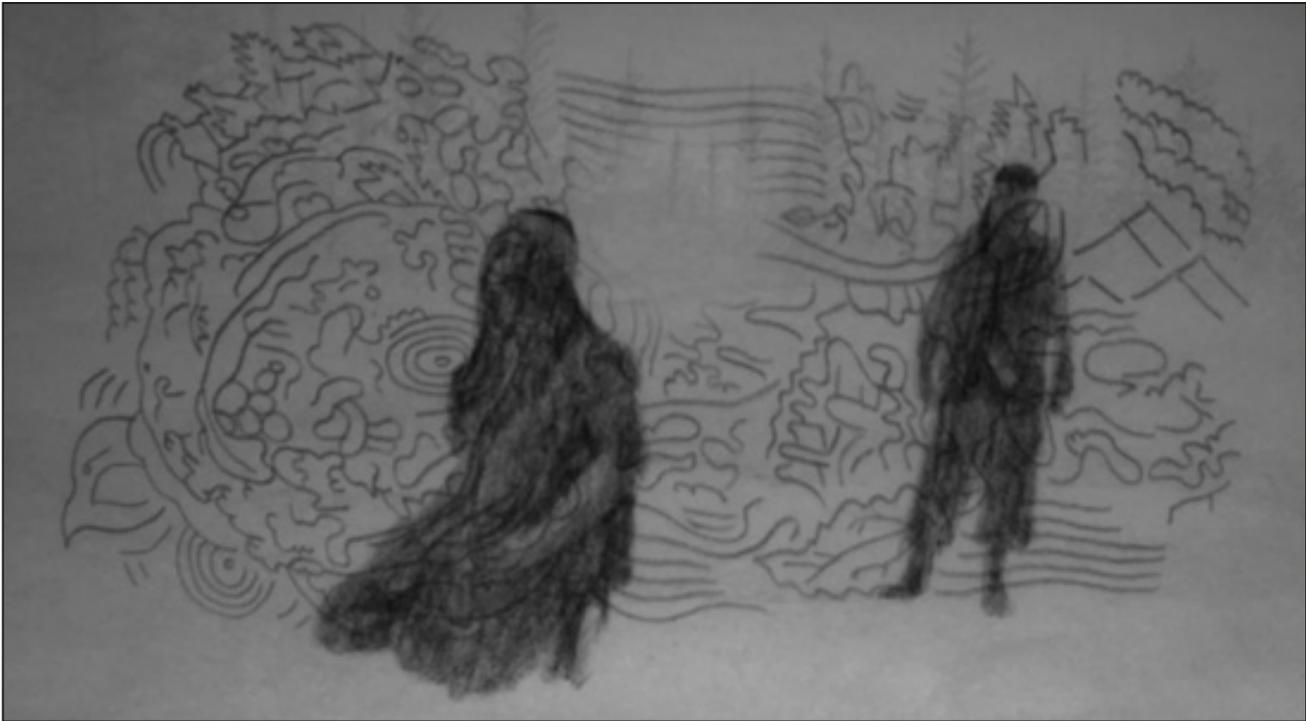
The following action (in which Edzo’s sister approaches her husband) was not described in the storyboard. As we prepared for the reenactment I made a list of additional shots that would be required to connect different moments in the story. In that list I included this brief action, in which we see Edzo’s sister approaching her husband, K’atehwhi. Although the approach is short lived—approximately 6 seconds—this action helped connect the discussion between Edzo and his sister, with K’atehwhi’s subsequent entrance into the lodge.

**Shot 16** (dialogue between Edzo and K’atehwhi):

Most versions of this story tell of a dialogue between Edzo and K’atehwhi, taking place before the encounter at the lake shore. In Naedzo’s testimony Edzo and K’atehwhi talked at midnight—according to this testimony, K’atehwhi played an intermediary role but initially tried to discourage Edzo from proceeding with his plan.<sup>24</sup> In elder Francis Willah’s version of the story, K’atehwhi played an even more prominent role in the peace-making, persuading Akaitcho to stop raiding Tł̄chq̄ camps.<sup>25</sup> In drawing the storyboard, I made reference to Alphonse Quitte’s 1994 version of the story in which Edzo “crawled under the



Shot 23 and 24



Shot 25



Shot 26



Shot 27 and 28

Figure 55: Shots 23 to 28 of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*.

flaps of his sister's tepee", talked to his sister, and eventually talked with K'atehwhi.<sup>26</sup> In the reenactment, the actors playing K'atehwhi and his wife return to the tent, and uncover Edzo—subsequently the two men planned a meeting with Akaitcho at the lake shore.

**Shot 17 and 18** (Edzo walks to the shoreline):

In these two shots Edzo walks to the shoreline. Elder Francis Willah provided a description that guided both the drawing of the storyboard, and the verbal narration heard during these shots: "Edzo went back to the shore of this lake... he knelt right on the shore where the beach meets the lake. So he sat on his knees, and his knees were sitting in the water, but his feet were on the sand, out on dry land."<sup>27</sup>

**Shot 19** (Akaitcho and his wife):

This scene, showing Akaitcho and his wife, was not originally included in the storyboard. The week before the reenactment, however, I realized, in preparing the shot list, that Akaitcho's entrance in the film was rather abrupt. This brief scene, showing Akaitcho talking with his wife, provides a less hurried introduction to the Yellowknife Dene leader. As with most other scenes, actors enter and exit the frame, in order to provide smooth transitions throughout the film.

**Shot 20, 21 and 22** (initial encounter between Edzo and Akaitcho):

These three shots show the initial encounter between Edzo and Akaitcho at the lake shore. The narration in the film makes reference to the physical strength of the Yellowknife leader, as described by Tł̄chq̄ elders. At this point in the story we also find Akaitcho yelling at Edzo, and taunting him—Edzo however remains silent through the first part of the encounter. The camera moves in and out of each character during these three shots, reflecting the shift from spoken words (conveyed by Akaitcho) to silent moments, as Edzo keeps quiet.

**Shot 23 and 24** (Akaitcho throws a knife at Edzo):

Most versions of the story of peace describe a moment in which Akaitcho throws a knife in Edzo's direction—the knife is said to land in the sand right next to the Tł̄chq̄ leader. This shot presents Akaitcho's action as described by Behchokq̄ elders. Other transcribed versions of the story also make reference to this tense moment at the lake. Naedzo's testimony even suggests Akaitcho's intentions in propelling the weapon:

Akaitcho carried a big knife [lahwin]. He said, "If you have nothing to fight me with...!" and he threw the knife toward Edzo, where it stuck in the ground. Edzo did not move.<sup>28</sup>

Alphonse Quitte's testimony provides a slightly different interpretation of the event: "even though Akaitcho threw a knife at Edzo, it only landed between his legs because Edzo's brother controlled the metal."<sup>29</sup> In each version of the story, including Naedzo's and Quitte's, Edzo remains quiet and still.

26. Quitte, in Legat, *Walking the Land, feeding the Fire*, 55.

27. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

28. Naedzo, in Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 225.

29. Quitte, in Legat, *Walking the Land, feeding the Fire*, 57.



Shot 29



Shot 30

Figure 56: Shots 29 and 30 of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*.

**Shot 25** (the leaders use medicine power):

During this scene, we see the actors playing Edzo and Akaitcho at a distance. Animated footage from the short film, *Lines*, provides an evocative overlay at this point in the story—this added layer of visual information suggests the use of medicine power as indicated in the narration. Naedzo made reference to the use of “ink’on (medicine power)” by Edzo and his brothers.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Alphonse Quitte described how Edzo and his brothers controlled mind, and metal weapons during the encounter between the two leaders at the lake shore.<sup>31</sup>

**Shot 26** (Edzo breaks the silence):

Oral versions of this story describe how Edzo eventually broke the silence, and faced Akaitcho—most elders indicate that Edzo calmly and gradually turned his body towards the Yellowknife leader. Francis Willah, for instance, said the following regarding Edzo’s initial movement: “finally Edzo turned around, he slowly started to turn to Akaitcho. Akaitcho was standing behind him.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Naedzo indicated that “Edzo lifted his head and turned partway toward Akaitcho.”<sup>33</sup> During this shot the camera moved between the two actors—the actor playing the role of Edzo was asked to move slowly during this scene, while the actor playing Akaitcho remained relatively still.

**Shot 27, 28 and 29** (Edzo faces Akaitcho):

During these shots, Edzo stands up and faces Akaitcho. Part of the narration at this point is taken straight from elder Francis Willah’s testimony, in which he describes Edzo as saying, “what you’re trying to do is not going to work.”<sup>34</sup> Most oral and transcribed versions of this story also describe trees shaking while Edzo talked. Alphonse Quitte said that Edzo’s “words were so strong that the trees started to shake, and they cracked.”<sup>35</sup>

**Shot 30 and 31** (the leaders talk about peace):

Oral accounts of this story describe Edzo and Akaitcho talking about peace late into the night.<sup>36</sup> As part of the reenactment, this moment in the story was broken in two separate shots—the first shows the two leaders sitting and talking, the second shows the men standing up and shaking hands. The camera moved away from the actors in both shots, showing the surrounding environment, and evoking the larger, historical significance of the peace agreement.

Concluding shots:

The film concludes with friendly gestures among everyone in the camp—we see people talking, shaking hands, hugging, and dancing. The final celebration lasted four days and four nights, according to Francis Willah.<sup>37</sup> These concluding shots were entirely animated by Behchokò artists. I will discuss their contribution to the film in the following chapter.

30. Naedzo, in Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 225.

31. Quitte, in Legat, *Walking the Land, feeding the Fire*, 56-57.

32. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

33. Naedzo, in Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 225.

34. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

35. Quitte, in Legat, *Walking the Land, feeding the Fire*, 57.

36. Elder Francis Willah (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with author, May 23, 2016.

37. *Ibid.*

## Chapter 7: Tracing the past



Figure 57: Layers of artwork used for the short film, *Lines*, illustrated by the author, 2016.

In this chapter I will discuss the process of animating *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* (involving workshops with Tłıchq artists in 2016 and 2018). Sharing a common space with this group of renowned artists was one of the highlights of this research. I was honoured to spend days getting to know each participant while drawing frames for the film. Our shared experiences during these workshops provided ways to visualize the story of peace while establishing a meaningful dialogue.

Each artist brought a unique approach to mark-making and sensitivity to the animation. Working with these members of the community taught me that the collective production of an animated film can facilitate meaningful interaction between people. Rendering part of this animation as a group led to conversations while drawing.

The first five sections of this chapter revolve around activities before and during the animation workshop. I will begin by describing my trip to Behchokq̓ from Edmonton (in September, 2016), followed by introductory activities with artists. During this workshop artists contributed to the making of the film through the rendering of dozens of frames—I will reference artwork and conversations that ensued from our collaborative drawing process.

I will also talk about the making of *Lines*—a 1 minute film that emerged from my journeys to the north. Footage from this film was used in *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. In the final sections I will discuss how the combined use of hand-crafted and digital production methods has facilitated the making of Tłıchq films since 2012.

### **Notes from the sky**

On September 22 and 23, 2016, I ran an animation workshop in Behchokq̓ with five renowned Tłıchq artists: Angus Beaulieu, Archie Beaulieu, Archie Beaverho, Ray McSwain, and James Wedzin. The workshop took place in a Tłıchq Government office space in Behchokq̓ (second floor of the community hotel). Through this event, community artists (who Tony Rabesca helped recruit) made a direct contribution to the animation.

In this short section I will refer to writings from my September 22 trip from Edmonton to Behchokq̓ (specifically focusing on notes written during my flight from Edmonton to Yellowknife)—in these notes I briefly explored ideas about cyclical time and animation production that I will discuss throughout this chapter. I will introduce the artists who took part in this event, and talk about the workshop itself in subsequent sections.

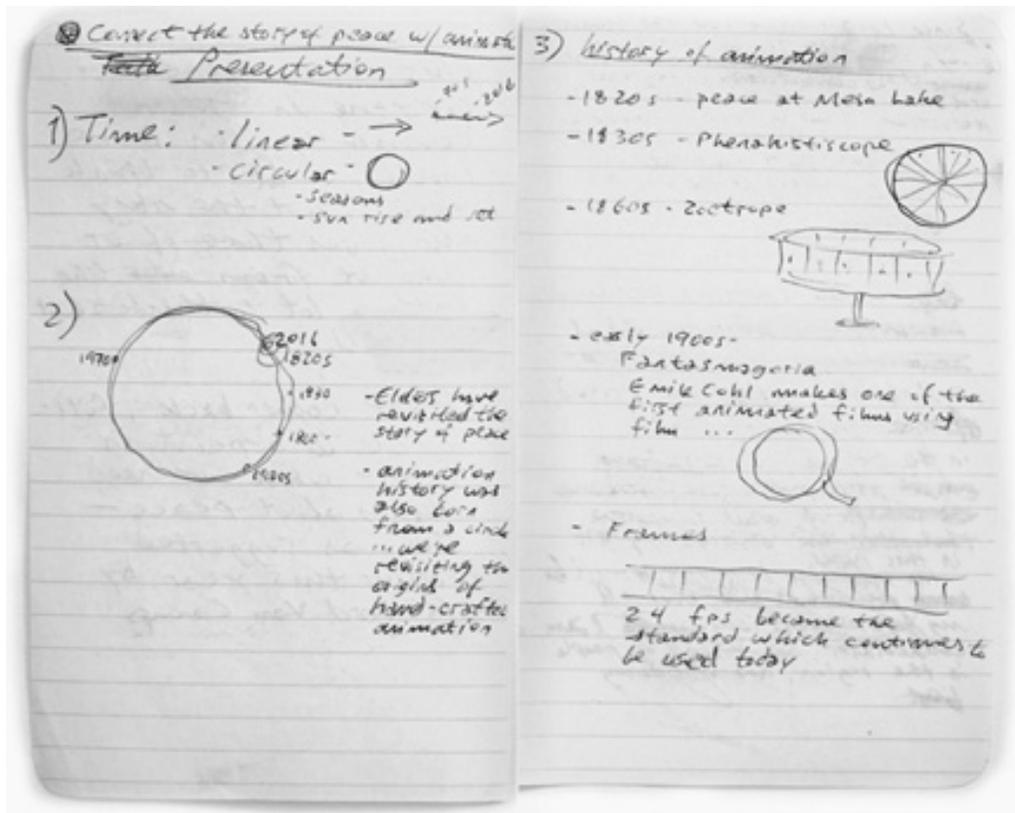
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I flew from Edmonton to Yellowknife on a hazy Thursday morning. It was the first day of autumn. Shortly after take-off, with the aircraft steadily rising, I looked out the passenger window—I was able to identify central Edmonton through a fine layer of cloud. Downtown buildings looked like tiny, shimmering blocks of glass. After several minutes, and over five thousand feet in the air, the urban grid appeared to dissolve into a patchwork of agricul-



Figure 58 (top): Image from aircraft window, flying between Edmonton and Yellowknife. Photographed by the author, 2016.

Figure 59 (right): Notes taken during the flight, by the author, 2016.



tural land. From my window I had a spectacular, albeit familiar, view of central Alberta. I say familiar because I have travelled this route over a dozen times since I began working in the Tłı̄ch̄o region. I continue to be amazed by the speed, and technology by which I am transported from the Canadian prairies to the subarctic (in under 2 hours). Above the clouds, I continued looking out the window, remembering previous journeys to the Dene region. I thought about repeated cycles of activity that facilitated my research in the north—since 2012 I have travelled to Yellowknife every autumn. This is a familiar journey.

Since I began travelling to Yellowknife, I have used my time in the air to reflect on research. My notes during this flight revolved around notions of cyclical time and animated loops. I reflected on Lev Manovich's idea that cinema was born from the animated loop—the first 19th century devices to create an illusion of movement consisted of short animated loops (the phenakistiscope, made in 1833, is an example of this pre-cinema technology).<sup>1</sup> Devices like the phenakistiscope illustrate repeated cycles of movement. These early moving pictures showed couples dancing, horses in motion, and changing facial expressions. The method used to create these animations is similar to that used in the production of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*—images are repeatedly drawn, but slightly altered from one frame to another. When viewed in rapid succession these drawings reveal an illusion of movement.

The production of a hand-drawn animated film involves cycles of movement. Gestural movement is repeated, and the application of pressure on paper is duplicated from one sketch to another. This predictable physical action reminds me of repeated cycles in the natural world that we participate in—including “the cycle of a life, the cycle of the day, the cycles of plants... and the seasons.”<sup>2</sup>

I continue scribbling thoughts on paper when I am reminded to fasten my seatbelt. The captain announces that we are descending into Yellowknife. In a short while, the centre of town is visible from the air. Landing is a familiar experience, but never the same from one flight to another—there is a sense of repetition and transformation as the plane's undercarriage touches the runway. Seconds after touchdown the aircraft moves toward the passenger terminal. I have landed here before, but every visit is unique. Returning to the ground, I feel recharged, and somewhat rejuvenated. In a similar way, making an animated film is also an experience that is repetitive and transformative. I will refer to the idea of transformation through repetition later in the chapter. In the following section I describe the drive to Behchok̄o and first part of the animation workshop.

### **Participating artists**

After landing in Yellowknife, I rented a vehicle, and drove to Behchok̄o. There was little traffic along the two-lane road—Highway 3—connecting Yellowknife and Behchok̄o. I entered the community at approximately 11am. Upon arrival I walked up the stairs of the two story Tłı̄ch̄o hotel (the second floor is converted to government office space) where five artists and Tony Rabesca waited. The room where our workshop took place has south

1. Lev Manovich, *The language of new media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001), xxxii.

2. John D. Berry, “Green Corn” in *Unraveling the Spreading Cloth of Time: Indigenous Thoughts Concerning the Universe*, ed. MariJo Moore and Trace A. Demeyer (Candler NC: Renegade Planets Publishing, 2013), 69.

David Peat, *Blackfoot Physics: A Journey into the Native American Universe* (Boston: Weiser Books, 2005), 200.



Figure 60: Ray McSwain (left), and Archie Beaulieu (right) during the animation workshop. Photographed by the author, 2016.



Figure 61: Angus Beaulieu (top left), and Archie Beaverho (bottom left) during the workshop. Photographed by the author, 2016.

facing windows and a large central table (ideal for our drawing activities). After an opening prayer, we started the workshop with introductions. I briefly met each artist on previous occasions, but this two-day event would be our first time working together. These talented creative practitioners are well known throughout the north. Their paintings are in private collections and galleries in Yellowknife and beyond. The following is a brief description of each artist and his work.

*Angus Beaulieu* has been drawing and painting since he was 5 years old—he began by sketching his grandmother’s sewing and beading work. While at high school he learned from, and painted with, Archie Beaulieu. He works in watercolour and acrylic, and is known as one of the finest wildlife and landscape artists in the Northwest Territories. He is represented by Aurora Art Emporium in Yellowknife.<sup>3</sup>

*Archie Beaulieu* from Behchokǫ, was the most experienced artist of the group. He studied at the Banff School of Fine Art in the late 1960s. His paintings show a distinctive curvilinear style, often melding animal and human forms. His work has been purchased by government dignitaries, corporations and collectors from around the world. Archie’s work is in the collections of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, as well as the Vatican. Sadly, Archie passed away in 2017.<sup>4</sup>

*Archie Beaverho*’s interest in art developed early in his life after his grandfather encouraged him to draw. Through his work, Archie depicts traditional ways of life on the land, while also conveying the importance of medicine. His paintings reveal aspects of spirituality, drumming, dancing, and hunting. Archie made a significant contribution to this project, rendering, among other things, hundreds of drawings for the animation of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* (specifically for the closing dance scene).<sup>5</sup>

*Ray McSwain* has been a recognized community artist for over 20 years. He began painting as a student at Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, and continues to work in a representational style that depicts wildlife, natural beauty, and the northern lights—his paintings are in collections throughout the north as well as the United States. He has illustrated children’s books of Tłı̄chǫ legends, and also produces jewelry and metalwork.<sup>6</sup>

*James Wedzin* developed an interest in art as a child, through his grandmother’s intricate beadwork patterns that adorned Dene clothing. He is a self-taught artist. Since 18 he has been selling his work to corporations and private collections. He is renowned for his depiction of northern landscapes, animals and the northern lights.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned in these brief descriptions, the Tłı̄chǫ land and aspects of oral history are sources of reference and inspiration for all five artists. However, Angus, Archie, Ray, and James, each have unique training and experience in the visual arts. Varied approaches to mark-making and representation—exclusive to each artist—came through in the illustrations that emerged at the end of our second day (I will talk about this work later in the chapter). In the following section I will further discuss our introductory discussion during the late morning of September 22.

3. <http://nwtarts.com/artist-profile/angus-beaulieu>

4. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/dene-artist-archie-beaulieu-1.4396855>

5. <http://nwtarts.com/artist-profile/archie-beaverho>

6. <http://nwtarts.com/artist-profile/ray-mcswain>

7. <http://nwtarts.com/artist-profile/james-wedzin>



Figure 62: Illustration for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, by Angus Beaulieu, 2016.



Figure 63: Illustration for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, by James Wedzin, 2016.

## Tracing the past and the present

Following personal introductions I briefly talked about activities that would take place during this two day workshop. This event was designed so that Behchokò artists could contribute to the animation of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. This early part of the workshop provided a general idea of previous collaborative work, while setting the stage for the current production.

I screened *the Woman Who Came Back* (created with community members, 2012-2013), to give an idea of the animation technique that would be used in the production of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. The technique I'm referring to is that of rotoscoping. Through this production method, live action footage is traced, frame by frame, facilitating the creation of detailed, life-like imagery. This technique allows animators to render each frame based on previously captured human movement. As Paul Wells indicates "rotoscoping in animated film demonstrates the most self-evident place where live action and animation meet."<sup>8</sup> This technique was used by, among others, the Fleischer Brothers' in the 1930s, Ralph Bakshi in the 1970s, and Bob Sabiston in the early 2000s.<sup>9</sup>

I originally used rotoscoping in *The Woman Who Came Back* in 2013 because the technique provided an efficient method for rendering natural fluid movement. For similar reasons, I considered the technique suitable for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. Moreover, the frame by frame tracing of human movement, based on live action footage, is easily duplicated by multiple artists (providing visual consistency while different people contribute to the animation). During the workshop, however, I realized there is another characteristic of rotoscoping that makes it appropriate for this project—through this technique, real people are recognizable in the animation. The film, therefore, not only conveys a historic narrative, it also shows familiar faces from the community that participated in the reenactment.

I realized the significance of recognizing familiar faces during the first day of the workshop. As I introduced artists to the rotoscoping technique, I shared live action footage from the reenactment. The reenactment footage showed familiar faces from the community, interpreting the historic peace-making event. All five artists in the room, as well as Tony Rabesca, recognized and named, friends and family members who took part in the reenactment.

In projecting this footage I realized that relationships can shape every stage of a media production process. Drawings generated later in the workshop by Angus Bealieu, Archie Bealieu, Archie Beaverho, Ray McSwain and James Wedzin depict friends and family members interpreting the peace making event. This animation production not only reinforces relationships to ancestors—this process also illustrates present-day relationships. The animation embodies connections to people from the past and the present.

8. Paul Wells, *The fundamentals of animation* (Lausanne: AVA, 2006), 169.

9. Ibid.



Figure 64: Illustrations for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, by Archie Beaulieu, 2016.

## Transformation through repetition

After our introductory discussions and screenings, we started the process of rendering frames for the animation. I provided each artist with a scene to animate—each scene was made up of dozens of sheets of paper. Light graphite tracings on each sheet provided a guide for artists to follow (an indication of the location and posture of human figures within each frame, that I had previously traced from the reenactment footage).

Through most of the afternoon (of September 22), and much of the following day, Behchokò artists and myself rendered dozens of drawings for the animation. I realized, near the end of our first day, that the animation was evolving through a collective effort. We occasionally talked, or laughed, as we worked—with every rendered line, however, the film was closer to completion. The frame-by-frame process, was indeed repetitive, but imagery was thoughtfully, carefully executed. Every drawn mark was deliberate, embodying the unique sensitivity of each artist.

Rapport developed through our two days of drawing. Sharing a common space, and a common project, brought us closer together. Archie Beaulieu talked about his time at the Banff School of Art. James Wedzin described the experience of teaching himself to paint with his non-dominant hand (a process he needed to go through as part of his work with a student who lost mobility). We also talked about the Edmonton art scene, creative challenges, and Bob Ross (the painter who hosted a television show in the 80s and 90s).

Making part of this film with Behchokò artists strengthened relationships between myself and community members. The experience provided another example of how relationships can emerge through a common creative activity. Interpersonal connections can develop through, what designers refer to as “the project”—Richard Buchanan has suggested that dialogue between cultures may be strengthened through design activities involving “cooperation in common enterprise.”<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the idea that animation studio production is an “industrial process” (with connotations of tedious, mechanical activity) the 2016 workshop in Behchokò provided “coherence and connection” between people involved in a shared experience.<sup>11</sup> Our collaborative animation process was indeed repetitive, but it was also transformative. A dialogue emerged over two days. The workshop resulted in conversations, interpersonal connections, as well as a visual metamorphosis in our collective imagery.

## Trails on paper

The drawings presented throughout this section depict closing scenes from Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace—they illustrate moments in which Edzo and Akaitcho’s people gathered to celebrate the reconciliation between communities. Presenting these drawings as part of this chapter, reminded me of the amount of work involved in visualizing a story through animation (even a short film like this one, requires the rendering of many images).

10. Richard Buchanan, “Branzi’s Dilemma: Design in Contemporary Culture.” in *Design Issues*, 14 (1) (1996): 17-18.

11. Wells, *The Fundamentals of Animation*, 18.

Buchanan, *Branzi’s Dilemma*, 20.

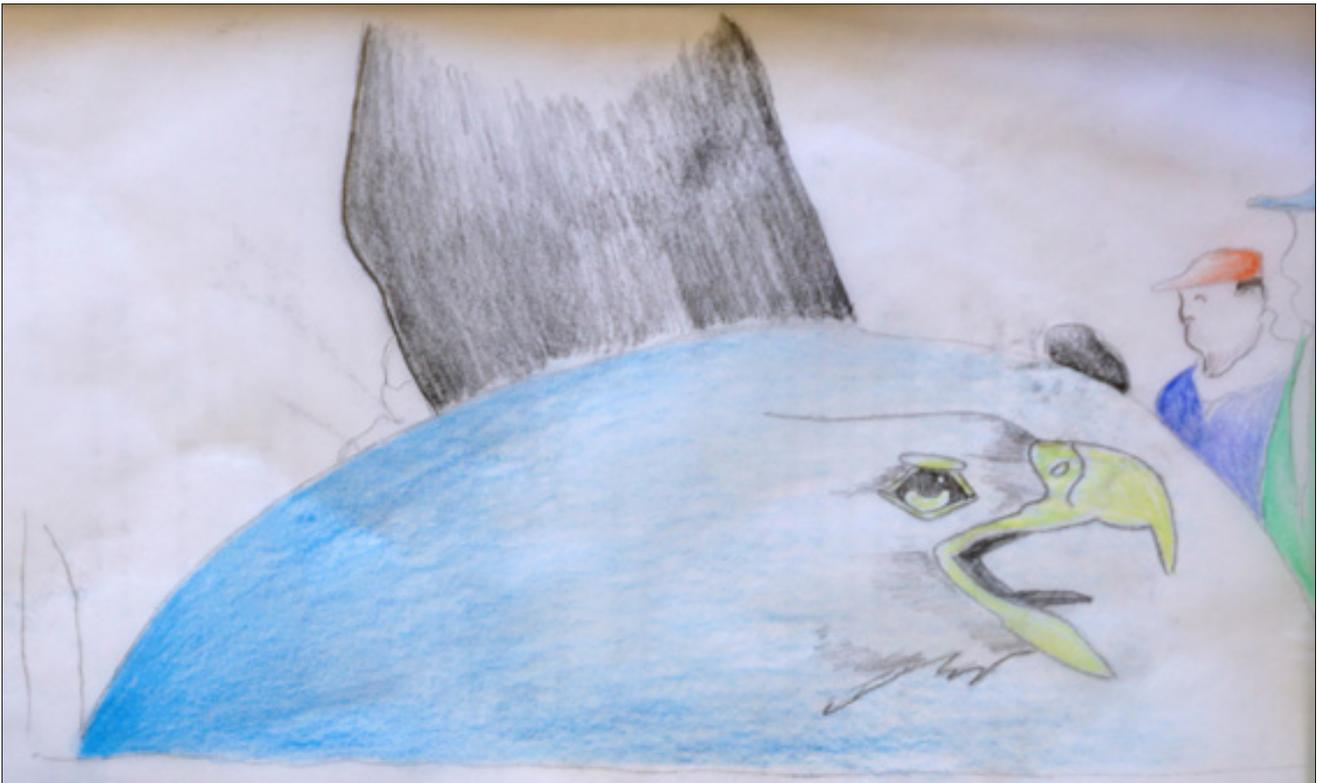


Figure 65: Illustrations for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, by Ray McSwain, 2016.

Every second of the animation is made up of 12 drawings. Each drawing is a discrete fragment of the story, like a footstep along a trail. The cumulative effect of multiple drawings, like footsteps, reveals a journey.

12. Ingold, *Being Alive*, 160.

13. In a Material Culture course taught by Dr. Megan Strickfaden.

Thousands of drawings were brought together to illustrate Edzo's journey to Mesa Lake. Comparable to the formation of ancestral trails through multiple impressions on the ground, this animation was created through a layering of thousands of handmade marks that together, tell a story. The hand of each artist involved in making this film traveled back and forth across paper surfaces, delicately, and repeatedly tracing lines. There was ongoing modulation in the mark-making process. Pressure applied to each sheet of paper changed from one moment to another. At times heavy pressure was applied, digging the graphite into the paper in order to obtain a bold, expressive line. At other times, the pencil tip hardly made contact with paper, leaving behind a barely visible hairline. Each mark contributed to the overall effect of the film. Every line contributed to the depiction of historical figures, moving through a dynamic hand-crafted landscape.

There are similarities and differences between lines rendered for this film, and physical trails visible on Tł̓chq̓ lands. Graphite lines, like ancestral trails, do tell a story. The idea that trails tell a story is described by Tim Ingold when he writes: "the things of this world are their stories, identified not by fixed attributes but by their paths of movement."<sup>12</sup>

Making this film provided an opportunity to tell a story by bringing together knowledge shared by elders on the land, together with the production of moving images. Both forms of storytelling (oral and animated) emerge from a thoughtful, step-by-step process—oral stories are in part derived from walking the land and following ancestral trails; an animated film is created through delineations, frame-by-frame, over a long period of time. Like oral history, animation embodies the continuity of the past in the present—each frame in the film is linked to a previous image. The meaning of every action is derived from prior activity.

### ***Lines***

In early 2016, I made a short, 1 minute film, entitled *Lines*, made up of thousands of entangled delineations that appear to continuously shift, overlap, connect and dissolve. The animation begins with a blank surface. Within the first couple of seconds, a tiny dot appears in the middle of the screen, and rapidly grows into a meshwork of fluid, curvilinear lines. A composition suggestive of entwined branches is sustained for approximately 4 seconds, and slowly morphs into a stylized depiction of figures from Tł̓chq̓ oral history. Transformations continue as evocations of landscapes, animals, and oral history appear and disappear on screen. The final moment in the film shows a webbing of curved lines, occupying the entire screen, and reduced to a tiny dot within a few seconds. The film ends where it begins—with a blank screen.

*Lines* emerged from journeys to the Tł̓chq̓ region, as well as research undertaken in human ecology.<sup>13</sup> The film evokes the many lines walked, danced, and drawn since I began

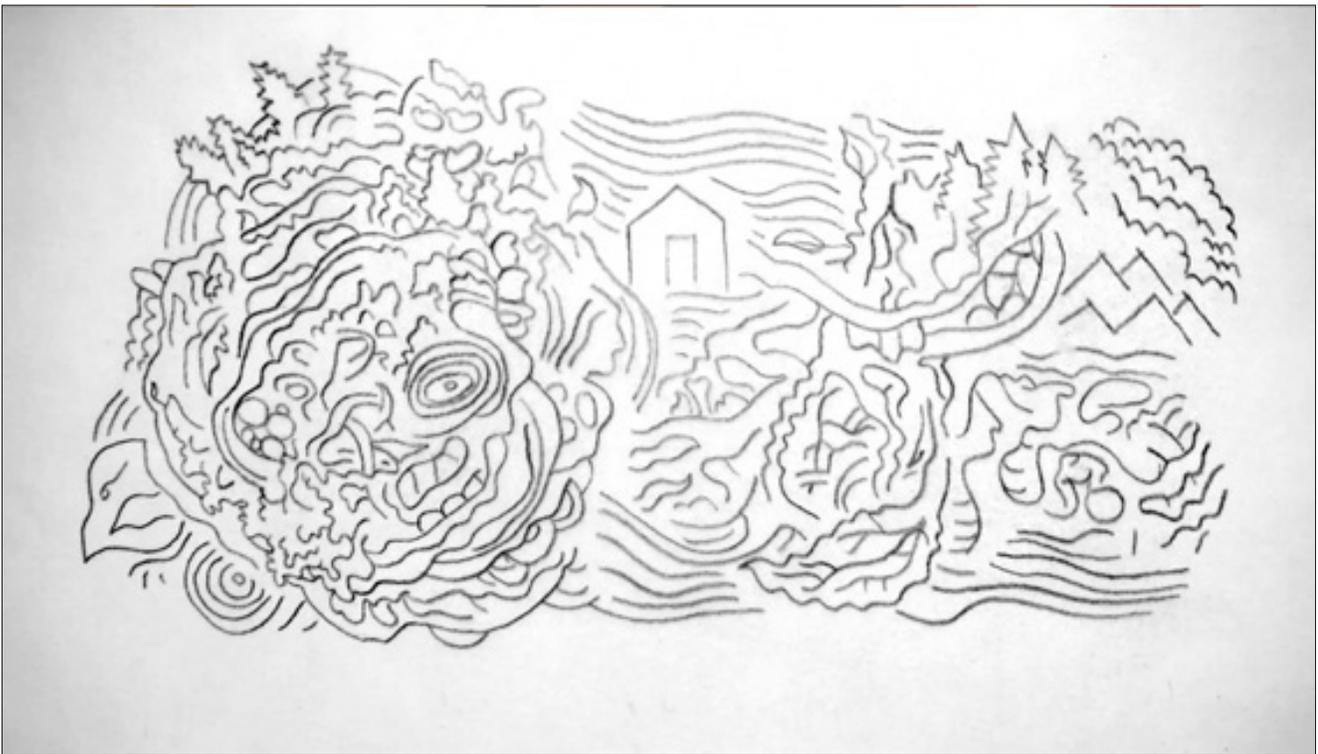
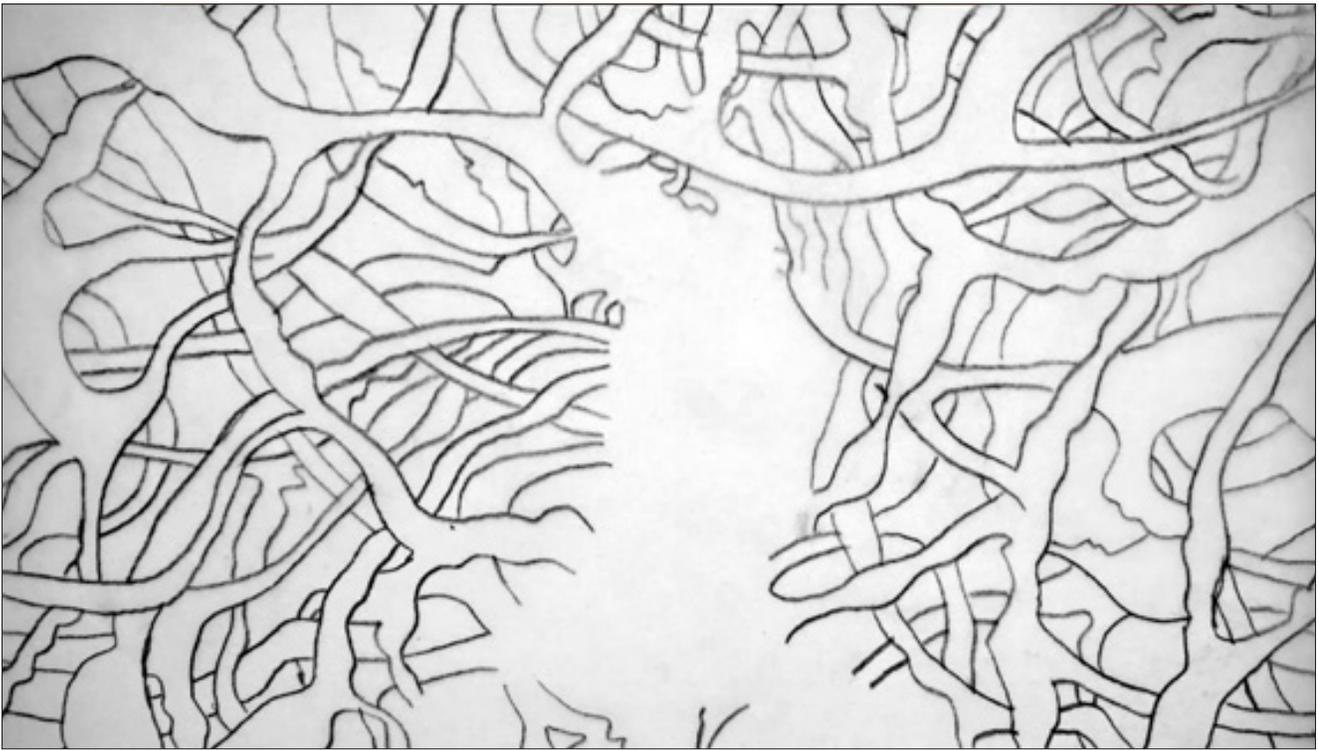


Figure 66: Images from the short film, *Lines*, illustrated by the author, 2016.

working in Behchok̓ in 2012. At times, the animation makes reference to oral stories shared by elders, while also depicting entangled lines, suggesting interconnected histories, pathways, and branches.

The initial impetus behind this film was a graphite drawing of Mesa Lake, created by elder Philip Husky (described in chapter 5). His drawing embodies a lifetime of walking the land. Multiple journeys to Mesa Lake are communicated through his sketch. The conversation that developed between elder Husky, Tony Rabesca and myself—as a result of the drawing—revolved around geography, personal memories, and information about the story of peace. Elder Husky’s drawing provided the starting point for the short film, *Lines*. Like animator Norman McLaren wrote, “A vision of a film often starts with just a single drawing on a page of paper—I have a kind of feeling—it starts with a line.”<sup>14</sup>

Making a drawing (particularly from memory) can lead to a thoughtful journey on paper. The first graphite mark inscribed on a blank surface often leads to further delineations, improvisation, gestural movement, and chance encounters that trigger unforeseen visual connections. As architect Marc Treib writes, “drawings are records of being alive, of seeing something intensely at a particular moment, in a particular way, and of getting some compelling record, an insight or feeling down in graphic form.”<sup>15</sup>

The mark-making behind *Lines* is made up entirely of carefully rendered delineations that appear to flow in and out of screen. Generating the 900 drawings for this 1 minute animation involved repetitive manual movement. Like the experience of a long walking journey, this process involved “repetition but differences within repetition.”<sup>16</sup> I described this process of making the film as “Transformation through Repetition” in a paper published by *The International Journal of Art and Design Education*.<sup>17</sup>

Parts of the animated film, *Lines*, were included in *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. The scene showing Edzo and Akaitcho at the lake shore includes an overlay of dynamic, shape-shifting line-work. These lines appear at the moment when the two leaders are using medicine power. This overlay from *Lines*, shows non-representational imagery, and complements the narration at this particular stage in the film.

*Lines* has served multiple purposes in this research—it was used as an overlay during the animated encounter between Edzo and Akaitcho. But this one minute film has also provided me with an opportunity to visualize relationships that developed since I began working in Behchok̓ in 2012: the relationship between ancestral trails and lines on paper, as well as between walking and drawing.

## Material and movement

In this section I will discuss the use of hand-crafted and digital production methods in the making of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. Manual artistry is evident in every frame of our collaborative film. However, this project could not have been made without the use of

14. Norman McLaren (compiled and edited by Donald McWilliams), *Norman McLaren: on the creative process* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1991), 25.

15. Marc Treib, *Drawing/thinking: confronting an electronic age* (London: Routledge, 2008), 84.

16. Ingold, *Being Alive*, 60.

17. Ruiz, “Transformation through Repetition”, 253.



Figure 67: Illustrations for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, by Angus Beaulieu, 2016.

digital cameras, scanners and sophisticated editing software. In making these films we have made use of both traditional and computer media.

Working with youth in Behchokò I have, for the most part, facilitated workshops that revolve around hand-crafted illustration methods (traditional media). I originally introduced these methods in 2012 because workshops often took place on the land, therefore, hand-generated techniques were easy to teach and execute in outdoor environments. There is also an immediacy and tactility to traditional image-making material that encourages collaboration and conversation—collaborative illustrations created by elders and youth (described in chapter 5) are an example of the kind of inter-generational work and dialogue that can emerge through the use of brushes and paper.

Digital technology has played an equally important role in this research. In the making of both *The Woman Who Came Back*, and *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, hand-made imagery was scanned and compiled using video editing software. In visual terms, these films embody the philosophy of being ‘strong like two people.’ Both films show hand-crafted imagery that is colour-corrected, manipulated, and layered using software programs. Gestural hand movement is evident in every frame of these films. The animations reveal the texture of graphite, watercolour, acrylic paint, and paper. The drawings that make up these films are not “hard-lined” but are rather soft, at times possessing a “fuzzy”, even “vague” quality—these qualities, according to Rudolf Arnheim, are often found in the hand generated sketches of designers.<sup>18</sup>

Hand crafted visuals that are soft rather than hard-lined, vague, rather than clear, imprecise rather than precise, provide an embodiment of oral history, that is alive, fluid, and open to multiple interpretations. At times, the precise details of characters and landscapes are not clearly defined—they remain ambiguous. As animator Norman McLaren reminds us, films can, in many ways, be open-ended: “viewers bring their own knowledge, experiences and interpretations to the viewing of a film; and, therefore, have trains of thought and reach conclusions which we filmmakers cannot forecast or control.”<sup>19</sup>

The imagery behind the film described in this chapter is not only soft, it is also shifting. There is continual unfolding of movement, as characters and elements from the land move from one end of the screen to the other. Like the experience of sewing, scraping, or carving, the film shows a constant flow of activity. As in traditional experiences of *making* described by elders, the visual form of this animation emerged through repeated, rhythmic movement.<sup>20</sup> Through this project, manual gesture and tactile engagement with material led to the creation of thousands of drawings that, after scanning and editing, create an illusion of movement—a sense of visual transformation that communicates a historic narrative.

### **Shape-shifting images**

The word ‘animation’ is rooted in the Latin term ‘anima’, which refers to life, or soul—words derived from the Latin ‘anima’ make reference, as Gregory Bateson reminds us,

18. Arnheim, “Sketching and the Psychology of Design,” 72.

19. McLaren, *Norman McLaren: on the creative process*, 11.

20. Ingold, *Making*, 115.



Figure 68: Drawings depicting the transformation of Edzo, by James Wedzin, 2018.

to something “endowed with mind or spirit.”<sup>21</sup> Through research in the Tłıchq region, animation media has offered a new way of bringing oral history to life. Time-based media, generated with community members, embodies the notion of anima, as a “continuous birth” of dynamic visuals, constantly emerging throughout the film.<sup>22</sup>

In the final version of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* there is one moment that most clearly communicates the animistic connotations of anima. This moment illustrates the metamorphosis of Edzo (from human to non-human forms). It was added in the final stages of production, and appears at the midway point in the film.

The initial rough cut of the film did not include this shape-shifting sequence. The addition of this scene emerged during a workshop/critique of the film at the Incubator for Northern Design and Innovation (INDI, University of Alberta), February 20, 21 and 22, 2018. The workshop brought together two Behchokq artists (James Wedzin and Archie Beaverho), along with community members involved in language and culture (Rosa Mantla, Lucy Lafferty, Jonas Lafferty, and Tony Rabesca).

After screening a rough cut of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* (during the first day of the workshop), community members decided that the film required a sequence of images evoking the medicine power associated with the story.<sup>23</sup> Tłıchq participants, therefore recommended that the animation include a short scene showing Edzo shape-shifting—from human form to frog, as well as from human form to tree bark. This dynamic sequence was illustrated (during the workshop) by Behchokq artist James Wedzin (he visualized the metamorphosis of Edzo to frog in 12 sketches, and the transformation to tree bark in 10). I subsequently drew multiple frames transitioning between each of James Wedzin’s sketches to render the final animated sequence.

This shape-shifting sequence embodies the notion of anima, while also illustrating how things are in “constant motion and flux”—an important part, according to Leroy Little Bear of Native science.<sup>24</sup> The metamorphosis of Edzo, along with other moments in the film, shows an unfolding of imagery. *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* reveals a continual “coming-into-being,” as landscapes, human, and non-human forms drift across the screen.<sup>25</sup> The unsteady flow of images within this film provides a unique way of communicating the dynamic content of Tłıchq stories. Drawing and animation offer unique tools to visualize aspects of Tłıchq culture that reference an animistic cosmology.

Ideas about oral history explored in this dissertation make reference to how Dene storytelling evokes a fluid sense of time and space—which complements the malleable imagery of animation. Within the context of an animated storyworld, the measured points of analytic geometry become scattered on multiple, shifting planes. Cartesian coordinate systems dissolve into states of continual mutation. New forms rapidly emerge. The *animation* of oral history can reveal dynamic ontologies that challenge objectivist conceptions of the life-world. Through time-based media we experience a world of dissolving boundaries, entangled states of agency, and shape-shifting images.

21. Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (Cresskill NJ: Hampton press), 5.

22. Wemindji Cree, in Ingold, *Being Alive*, 69.

23. Lucy Lafferty, Rosa Mantla and Tony Rabesca, conversation with author, February 21, 2018.

24. Little Bear, “Forward,” x.

25. Ingold, *Being Alive*, 67.

## Chapter 8: Recontextualizing oral history



Figure 69: Illustrations for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, by Archie Beaverho, 2016.

In this final chapter of part 1, I present ideas shared during the latest community workshop in Behchok̓—June 5, 6, and 7, 2018. The main purpose behind the workshop was to screen the latest animated version of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* to community members (including elders)—the approval of the film, by elders, was required before moving forward with further public screenings. People from Behchok̓, who took part in this workshop, offered stories, memories, and insight after seeing the film—this feedback allowed for final decisions to be made on narration, and also confirmed the final edited version of the film.<sup>1</sup> The version of the film screened during this workshop was approved by elders—the only change requested was in the name of the story (the name was changed, through consensus, from *The Peace Between the Tribes*, to *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*).

Eight elders provided feedback during this workshop—Phillip Dryneck; Phillip Husky; Dora Migwi; Monique Mackenzie; Elizabeth Rabesca; former Grand Chief, Joe Rabesca; Michel Louise Rabesca. Also taking part were Terri Naskan, Tony Rabesca, artists Archie Beaverho, and Ray McSwain; along with Johnny Neadzo, and Angela Zoe (who took part in the reenactment).

Throughout the remainder of this chapter I will share post-screening feedback offered by community members. I will also discuss how, through community-based animation, this research may help to recontextualize oral history. Before moving on to these topics, however, the next section will take a broad view of this research—I will inquire into the relationship between words and images that evolved through this ongoing collaboration.

1. Final narrations for this film are based on several oral versions of the story shared by elders (see appendices). However, during this workshop, some of the wording (particularly in Tłı̄chq̓) was changed by community members (Rosa Mantla and Lucy Laferty) who are specialized in the area of language. The final narrations were read by Rosa Mantla (in Tłı̄chq̓) and Terri Nasken (in English).

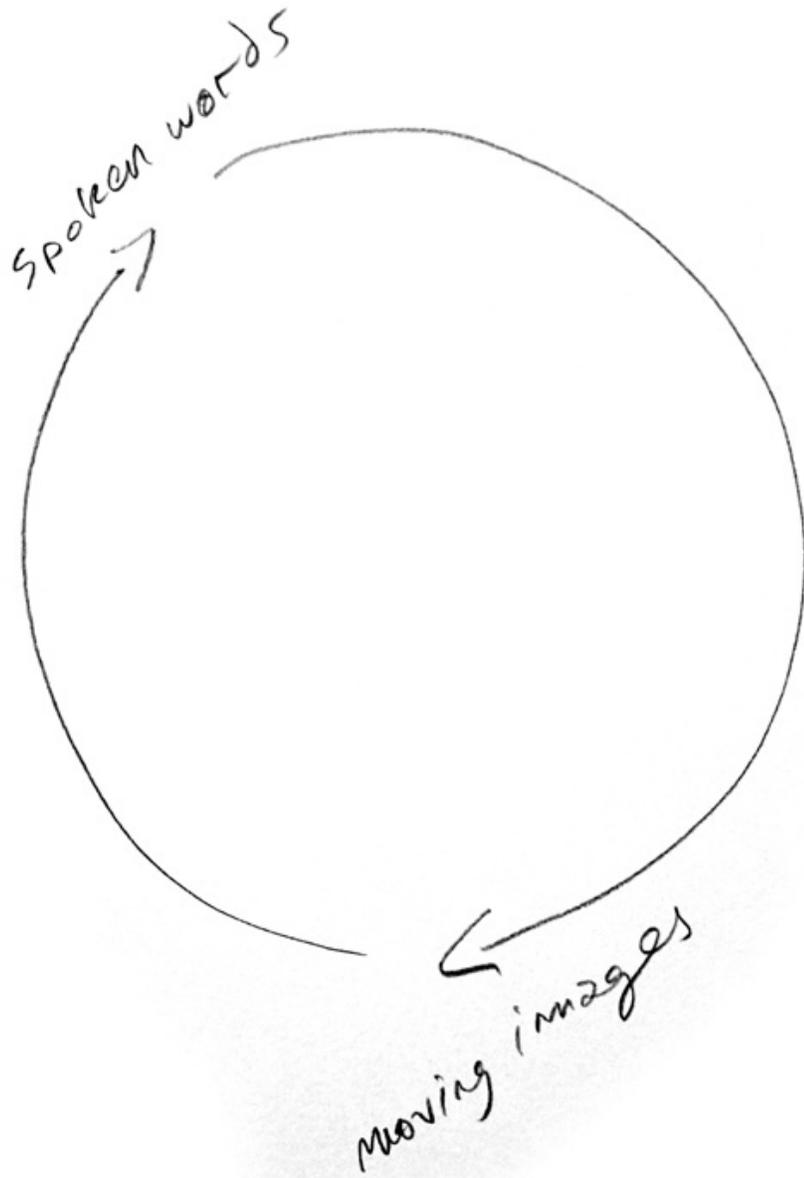


Figure 70: An illustration of the cyclical relation between spoken words and moving images, by the author, 2018.

## Words and images: a circular relationship

The June, 2018 workshop led to a range of conversations and stories. After the film screening many participants shared their own version of the story of peace, often discussing the relevance of this historical event in today's world. Post screening conversations explored the significance of Edzo's journey in the present—the animation, in other words, helped weave oral history into the fabric of contemporary Tłıchq society.

Storytelling is an important part of cultural life throughout Denendeh. The importance of stories, as Leroy Little Bear notes, is not just “the words and the listening but the actual living of the story.”<sup>2</sup> The sharing of stories is key to the “ongoing adaptability of Dene culture.”<sup>3</sup> By adapting old stories to new circumstances, oral history reinvigorates knowledge from the past. Stories are a vital source of cultural life in communities like Behchokq.

The practice of storytelling shapes regional culture, through a process in which (similar to design practice) complexity is embraced: “a social conversation in which everybody is allowed to bring ideas.”<sup>4</sup> The process in fact, is not unlike Enzo Manzini's recent description of dialogic design: “what makes a dialogic conversation in a design process is that the involved actors are willing and able to listen to each other, to change their minds, and to converge toward a common view.”<sup>5</sup>

As part of my research in the Tłıchq region, the “common view” on which different community members have converged is embodied in the animated film.<sup>6</sup> The film, however, is not an end in itself. The film, as mentioned above, has led to further conversations and oral storytelling. As I illustrate on the left-hand page, this research can be described in terms of a circular relation between spoken words and moving images. Our research began with oral stories, was subsequently translated into moving images, and has led to further oral knowledge (to be followed by future animated films). One begets the other.

## Post screening conversations

After the initial screening of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, community members discussed, among other things, how Edzo's journey reveals a path towards healing for the Tłıchq people. During post-screening discussions Tony Rabesca said that “Edzo paved the way for a healing process—a healing journey to improve life.” He then posed the question, “what can we do to move forward?”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, after seeing the film, spiritual advisor Terri Nasken described “this animation as ongoing and for future generations.”<sup>8</sup> Terri's reference to the animation as ‘ongoing’ suggests that this work is unfinished or unending—open, in other words, to new interpretations and uses in the future. Although the film is completed in a technical sense, new meaning, conversations and stories will continue to emerge from this work.

2. Little Bear, “Forward,” xii.

3. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 127.

4. Ezio Manzini, “Design Culture and Dialogic Design.” in *Design Issues*, 32 (1) (2016): 58.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Tony Rabesca (Cultural practices manager), conversation with author, June 6, 2018.

8. Terri Nasken (Spiritual advisor), conversation with author, June 6, 2018.



Figure 71: Rosa Mantla and Tony Rabesca take part in visualization activities. Photographed by the author, 2018.



Figure 72: Archie Beaverho renders a background image for *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. Photographed by the author, 2018.

Elders from Behchokq̄ also provided feedback. After viewing the animation, elder Michel Louis Rabesca said that “looking at it brought back memories.”<sup>9</sup> He then referenced the message of forgiveness that is at the heart of the story. He concluded by saying that he was “grateful for the animation,” noting that “this movie will make us think.”<sup>10</sup>

After the screening, elder Dora Migwi referred to the story of peace as a “powerful tool” while also indicating that through education this project could “help one another... moving forward.”<sup>11</sup> Elder Phillip Husky, who has been part of this research for over 4 years stated that he was “thankful for retelling this story.”<sup>12</sup>

As elder Husky noted, this film is an interpretation or retelling of Edzo’s journey. Feedback from elders reminded me that this collaboration is not about revitalizing oral history (early in my research, during my Master’s thesis, I described this collaboration as a way of *revitalizing* oral history). The notion of revitalization, however, implies that oral history is fading or being lost—which it is not. As Gregory Cajete reminds us, “knowledge is never really lost; it comes into being when it is needed, and leaves when it is no longer needed or properly used.”<sup>13</sup>

Physicist David Peat has suggested a similar concept, referring to the idea of knowledge as “a living thing that has existence independent of human beings.”<sup>14</sup> Both Cajete and Peat challenge the idea, prevalent in Western culture, that knowledge is “an abstraction with no independent existence.”<sup>15</sup>

The animated version of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* is not an example of oral history being revitalized. Instead, this film is helping to *recontextualize* oral history. I will elaborate on this idea in the following section.

### **Recontextualizing oral history**

In this concluding section of the chapter I will elaborate on how this research is helping to recontextualize oral history. The long-term process of making the animated version of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* (involving journeys on the land, multiple storytelling sessions, and image-making workshops) provided a new context for the intergenerational exchange of knowledge. Research and production behind this animation became a long term collaboration. By focusing on what designers call “the project” (in this case the making of the film), community members engaged with historical knowledge—sharing versions of an oral story that continues to resonate in contemporary Tłıchq̄ society.<sup>16</sup> Over several years, elders, youth, government workers, and myself, worked together to visualize the story, while, at times discussing ways in which the peace-making event continues to resonate in the 21st century.

The end result of this research is the film itself—it will offer new contexts through which young Tłıchq̄ students can engage with ancestral knowledge. The film will be available for all to see. *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* will be projected in classrooms, viewed

9. Elder Michel Louis Rabesca, conversation with author, June 6, 2018.

10. Elder Michel Louis Rabesca, conversation with author, June 6, 2018.

11. Elder Dora Migwi, conversation with author, June 6, 2018.

12. Elder Phillip Husky, conversation with author, June 6, 2018.

13. Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000), 9.

14. Peat, *Blackfoot Physics*, 67.

15. Ibid.

16. Buchanan, *Branzi’s Dilemma*, 18.



Figure 73: A still image from *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, 2018.

in public spaces, on television, or online. The film has offered a way through which to recontextualize oral history.

But the process through which this film was made also facilitated a recontextualization of oral history. The story was shared, visualized (illustrated by youth), and discussed extensively during the front-end research process. Elders referred to its ongoing relevance in shaping Tłıchq culture. Elders and government workers encouraged young listeners to think about the story's message of forgiveness and reconciliation, while also considering issues of spirituality, medicine power, the building of strong citizens, and the underlying significance of healing behind Edzo's journey (who managed to make peace during a time of warfare).

Through this research and film production, community members and myself developed a new context for engaging with oral history. This context (collaborative research and film production) facilitates intergenerational experiences, journeys on the land, and relationship building, while leading to the production of media work that can be projected in, and adapted to, a range of educational/cultural contexts. This research offers a way of recontextualizing oral history—reinforcing the vital interpersonal, intergenerational links (integral to traditional storytelling practice) while creating a new medium through which to communicate historical Tłıchq knowledge in the 21st century.



# Part 2



In *How it is*, Viola Cordova describes the universe as “a ball to which one slowly adds a layer; each layer is a ‘present’ that is laid over a steadily growing ‘past’ that supports the present.”<sup>1</sup> In Cordova’s vision of the universe, the past is not “temporally separate from the present.”<sup>2</sup> Instead, the past is linked to the present—accessible (to use Cordova’s metaphor) by unraveling the ball.

In Dene societies, the past is linked to the present through, among other things, oral history. Elders are the storytellers that facilitate this vital link—in Cordova’s terms, we could say that elders unravel and entwine the ball of time, moving between past and present. Elders situate past experiences in contemporary reality. In the Tłı̨chǫ region for instance, John B. Zoe describes how land-based experiences allow young participants to “look to the past and see it through the eyes of the Elders.”<sup>3</sup>

Research into the making of peace between Edzo and Akaitcho provided many opportunities to bring a historic event to life through storytelling. In Behchokǫ, elders shared multiple versions of a story that has been kept alive for almost two centuries through oral tradition. The sharing of oral stories is a process of remembering, connecting current generations to the distant past, as Sahtu Dene storyteller George Blondin reminds us:

The people of Denendeh have a complete history of themselves from ancient times, told in stories they have passed down from countless generations.

There are stories about stone-age people in the beginning of the new world and through the ages since, from long ago until the time just before our own. Everything was held in memory and handed down from generation to generation by Dene storytellers.<sup>4</sup>

As George Blondin indicates, Dene history stretches far back in time. As part of this history, the relationship between ancestors and the land is rooted in the deep past—based on oral testimony, the Dene have lived in the area currently designated as the Northwest Territories since “time immemorial”.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter I will provide brief accounts of Dene historical knowledge from before the time of contact (a time period that stretches back to what is often known as “the old world”) to recent events.<sup>6</sup> Through this historical overview I will reference artwork created by Behchokǫ community members during storytelling/image-making workshops (from 2012-2018). Many of these images make direct reference to historical events, others are suggestive of connections over time. The range of imagery presented in this chapter provides a visualization of events from the past through the creativity of present-day community members.

1. Viola Cordova, *How it is: the Native American philosophy of V.F. Cordova* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2007), 118.

2. Coulthard, in *Red Skin White Masks*, 121.

3. Zoe, “Strong Like Two People,” 13.

4. Blondin, in Scott, *Talking Tools*, xi.

5. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 53

6. Andrews, “There will be many stories,” 77.

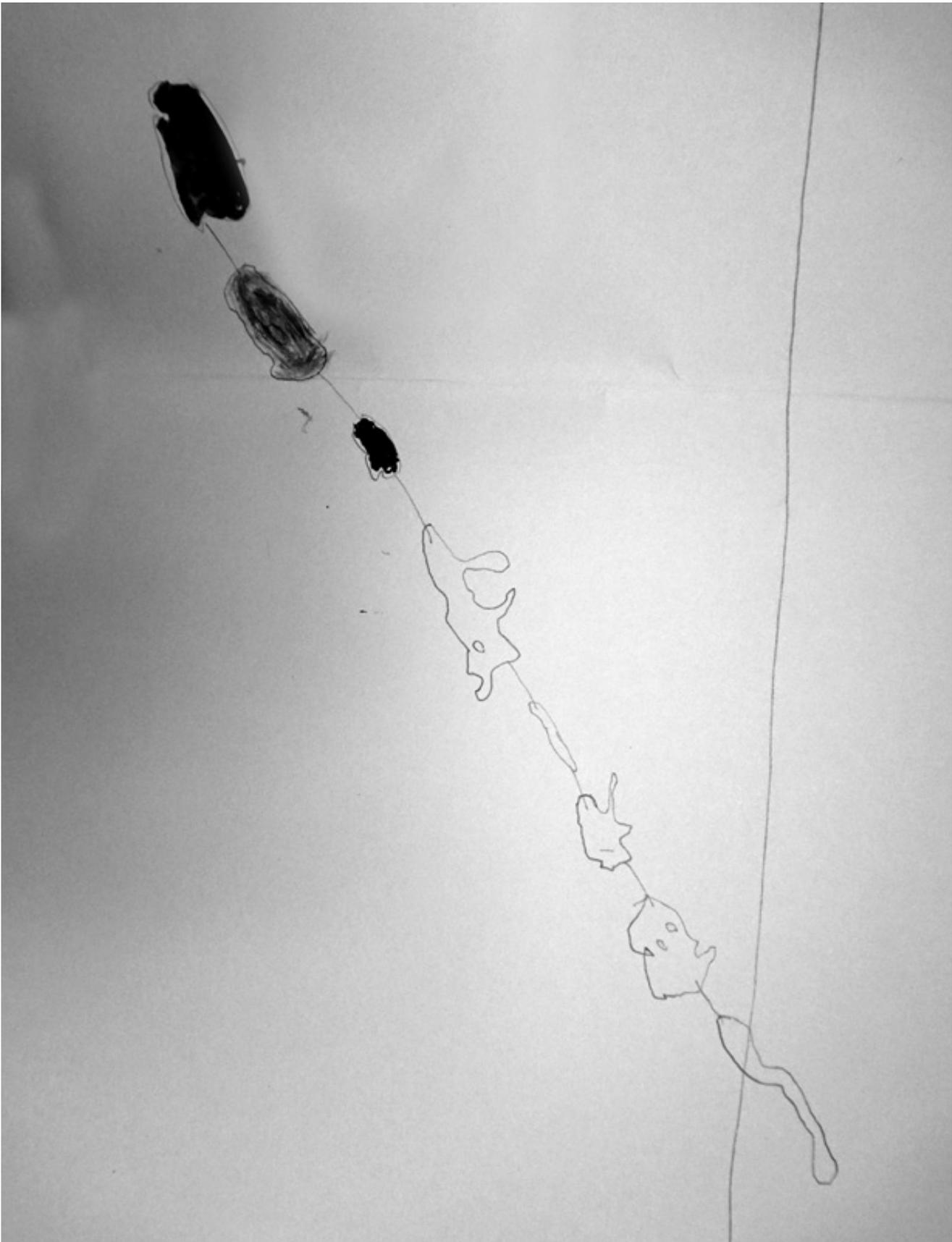


Figure 75: Drawing by Edward Camille, 2016.

## Historical links suggested through a drawing by elder Edward Camille

Elder Camille's drawing (on the left-hand side, created in the spring 2016 workshop in Behchokò) illustrates interconnected waterways and portage crossings leading to Mesa Lake. By referencing the sense of relationality expressed in elder Camille's drawing I will discuss stages in Tłıchq history—from the old world to the stories of Yamqzha.

### THE OLD WORLD AND THE ORIGIN OF THE DOGRIBS

The "old world" was a time of chaos, and shape-shifting "animal-human-persons."<sup>7</sup>

Some narratives of this era tell of a genetic relationship between animals and humans.<sup>8</sup>

The Tłıchq creation story—referred to as "The Origin of the Dogribs" by the late elder, Vital Thomas—gives an account of a dog who shifts to human form, and mates with a woman.<sup>9</sup>

### STORIES OF YAMQZHA

In Tłıchq history, the chaos and human-animal transformations from "the old world", give way to the stories of Yamqzha.<sup>10</sup> The best known of the Tłıchq culture-heroes, Yamqzha is noted "for establishing many of the laws and cultural rules important to Tłıchq existence."<sup>11</sup> Yamqzha was also responsible for "mediating the enduring relationship between the Tłıchq and the animals... and for making the landscape secure."<sup>12</sup>

Yamqzha features in the oral history of different communities throughout Denendeh. Dene groups in the Mackenzie Valley for instance, share stories of Yamqzha chasing a giant beaver off the land.<sup>13</sup> In 2015 I had the honour of animating one of the beaver stories for a Yellowknife Dene exhibit taking place at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife. This short animated film is called *The Legend of the Creation of Willideh*, and tells of a giant beaver who lived at the mouth of the Willideh (Yellowknife River) during the time of Yamqzha.<sup>14</sup>

In this brief section, elder Camille's drawing offered a visualization of links that initiated discussions of historical relationships. The last historical event presented in this section—The Legend of the Creation of Willideh—illustrates a story that is materialized in the land. The story concludes with a physical transformation that links oral history with visible rock situated in the present-day landscape. As I have discussed in other chapters (and as elder Camille's drawing illustrates), the land plays an important role in the process of remembering stories. Throughout the Dene region, the process of remembering is linked to the physical environment. History is not only contained in the many stories shared by elders—history is also inscribed on the very surface of the earth.

## Illustrations of the fur trade era by Behchokò youth

In this section, illustrations created by Behchokò youth during a 2012 workshop, provide visualizations of the fur trade era and the Tłıchq landscape. The collage on the top left was used as the trader's fort in *The Woman Who Came Back*, while the landscape on

7. Ibid.

8. Andrews, "There will be many stories," 76.

9. Vital Thomas in Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 289.

10. Andrews, "There will be many stories," 77.

11. Andrews, Zoe, and Herter, 29.

12. Andrews, Zoe, and Herter, *Yamqzha*, 29-30.

13. Andrews, "There will be many stories," 78.

14. *The Legend of the Creation of Willideh*, digital file (Yellowknife: Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, 2015).

According to oral history, the beaver dragged canoes underwater, and blocked the river from flowing into the Great Slave Lake by building a huge dam. In response to troubles caused by the beaver, Yamqzha used a snow shovel to push the giant lodge into the lake, allowing the river to flow freely. The beaver escaped by also drifting into the lake. The story concludes with the displaced lodge turning to stone—visible today as a bedrock hill at the river mouth.



Figure 76: Visualizations of the fur trade, and the Tłıchǫ landscape, by Behchokǫ youth, 2012.

the bottom left illustrates the northern landscape during the time of Whanjkw'o. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of events starting in the 1600s, and concluding with the arrival of missionaries in the 1800s.

## THE FUR TRADE

An English Royal Charter, from May 1670, granted lands to “the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson Bay”—this charter eventually opened all of what is today, western and northern Canada, to the fur trade.<sup>15</sup> It took several decades before Dene tribes began regularly interacting with “the European contact agent”; namely, the fur trader.<sup>16</sup> It wasn't until the second quarter of the 1700s that the Yellowknives Dene began trading at “the fort on the coast”—probably York Factory on the southwestern shore of Hudson Bay.<sup>17</sup> The fur trade, along with the establishment of permanent trading posts prompted a spatial reorientation of northern tribes—The Tłı̨chq̓, for instance, were temporarily displaced from their traditional territory, while permanent points of trade led to “ingathering at the post” as part of the yearly cycle of activities.<sup>18</sup>

## THE ROYAL PROCLAMATION

The 1763 Royal Proclamation, issued by King George III, established a system of governance for British North America.<sup>19</sup> It also established the framework for treaty negotiations with First Nations. Although The Royal Proclamation is often referenced as a first step in recognizing Indigenous rights (including the right to self-determination), the document was nevertheless written by British colonists, who ultimately established control and ownership of Indigenous lands.<sup>20</sup>

## THE INDIAN ACT

By the mid 1870s (less than a decade after Canadian Confederation) parliament passed The Indian Act.<sup>21</sup> This legislation provided a mechanism for control, assimilation, and a type of forgetting, described by Paul Connerton as “structural amnesia.”<sup>22</sup> The Indian Act ignored the Crown's previous (eighteenth and nineteenth century) negotiations with First Nations tribes as “independent political entities.”<sup>23</sup> The partnership and collaboration—nation to nation relationship—that characterized the fur trade was also unacknowledged in The Indian Act.<sup>24</sup>

For Dene tribes, nineteenth century legislation issued by the newly formed government, did not have immediate impact. Missionary activity, between the 1850s and 1900s, however, was significant, and telling of the openness of Dene culture. Oblate missionaries in the Tłı̨chq̓ region were unsuccessful in abolishing “medicine power”—however, according to Alice Legat, the Tłı̨chq̓ embraced the missionaries because of the apparent similarities with their own beliefs.<sup>25</sup> As Thomas D. Andrews and John B. Zoe have said: “traditional beliefs and practices have been syncretized with the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholicism.”<sup>26</sup> Throughout the 1800s, and well into the 1930s, fur production remained the most important resource activity in the north.<sup>27</sup> In the following section I will discuss recent Dene history, including the social transition from pre war fur trade, to political activities in the 1970s.

15. “HBC,” July, 27, 2018, Our History, <http://www2.hbc.com/hbc/history/>.

16. Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 108.

17. In the 1700s, the Chipewyan and Yellowknife Dene were among the first Athapaskan tribes to obtain firearms. Access to these weapons during a burgeoning fur trade most likely led to much of the chaos of the time—the tribal wars described in oral history—that led to the displacement of the Tłı̨chq̓ from their traditional lands, as a result of Yellowknife Dene aggression.

Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 108-113.

18. Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 114

19. John Milloy, *Indian Act Colonialism: A Century of Dishonour* (Ottawa: National Centre for First Nations Governance, 2008), 3.

20. The three-part system of governance described in the Proclamation became, with some amendments, the constitutional structure of Canada in 1867. The document sets out the following system of governance:

\* The Imperial Crown (which after 1867 became the federal government)

\* The colonies (which after 1867 became the provinces)

\* The self-governing First Nations (which remained a third order of government for a brief period).

Milloy, *Indian Act Colonialism*, 3.

21. The Indian Act legislation, passed by Parliament in 1876, is often described as a paradoxical document that defines special status, while exercising “social control and assimilation.” This complex document reflects core assumptions held by Euro-Canadian society in the late nineteenth century. As John Milloy writes, “the Indian Act grew out of Victorian cultural assumptions: that property ownership was the foundation of civilized society.” The basic premise of the document is summarized as providing “civilization, protection and assimilation.”

Joan Holmes, *The Original Intentions of the Indian Act* (Ottawa: Joan Holmes & Associates, 2002), 3.

Milloy, *Indian Act Colonialism*, 10.

Ken Coates, *The Indian Act and the Future of Aboriginal Governance in Canada* (Ottawa: National Centre for First Nations Governance, 2008), 2.



Figure 77: Visualizations of the fur trade, and the Tłıchǫ landscape, by Behchokǫ youth, 2012 (top), and 2016 (bottom).

## Painting the past: from Treaty signing to the Dene Nation

In this section I refer to illustrations created by students from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School in 2012 (top) and 2016 (bottom). Both images depict cabins within a natural landscape—suggesting the crossing of paths between settler and Indigenous cultures. These images are also suggestive of two ways of knowing—an idea that will be discussed in this section. In the following paragraphs I will briefly discuss significant twentieth century events in the Tłı̨chǫ region, from Treaty signing to the creation of the Dene Nation. I begin with the signing of Treaty 11 in 1921.

### TREATY SIGNING

The last of the numbered Treaties (Treaty 11), signed for the Tłı̨chǫ by Chief Monfwi, is understood (by the Dene) as a “Peace and friendship treaty for as long as the sun rises and the river flows.”<sup>28</sup> For the Dene, verbal agreements “were as binding as the Euro-Canadian practice of written contracts.”<sup>29</sup> Based on the verbal understanding, it is unlikely that chiefs would have complied with the terms of the written version of the treaty.<sup>30</sup>

### THE DECLINING FUR TRADE AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

With the declining price of fur after World War II, many families supplemented income obtained from land-based activities (trapping, hunting, and fishing) with paid labour and family allowance.<sup>31</sup> For many people in Denendeh, the 1950s and 60s was a time in which two ways of working co-existed, as families balanced traditional activities on the land, with income derived from a cash economy.<sup>32</sup> During these decades, Glen Coulthard describes the coupling of “two distinct ways of life—that of extractivist capitalism and Indigenous hunting/fishing/harvesting.”<sup>33</sup> The balance between land-based work, and a cash economy would, however, slowly make way for “northern development” as Canada transferred the administrative centre of the Northwest Territories from Ottawa to Yellowknife in 1967—this decision involved no consultation with the majority Indigenous population.<sup>34</sup> With the discovery of oil and gas in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska in 1969, the government planned the construction of a multi-billion dollar pipeline—this project would have cut through the western part of Denendeh.<sup>35</sup>

### THE DENE NATION

The push for northern industrial development, from state and corporations, was strong in the late 1960s. But this vision of aggressive economic expansion was challenged by Dene leaders who, until 1969, had no channels through which to formally voice their opinion regarding industrial projects. In an effort to articulate Dene concerns, sixteen chiefs (meeting at Fort Smith in 1969) established a political body that would eventually become the Dene Nation.<sup>36</sup> In 1973, this political body claimed an interest in over one million square kilometres of land in the Northwest Territories.<sup>37</sup> The Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories decided that the Dene had “a potentially legitimate case and at least had a right to be heard.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the Court stated that “historical evidence suggested that it was unlikely that the Dene had knowingly extinguished their title to the lands covered by Treaties 8 and 11, which they had negotiated with the Crown in 1900 and 1921, respectively.”<sup>39</sup> Oral interpretations of the treaties held ground.

22. Paul Connerton, “Cultural Memory” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Michael Rowlands and Patricia Spyer (London: Sage, 2006), 319.

23. Milloy, *Indian Act Colonialism*, 4.

24. Milloy, *Indian Act Colonialism* 9.

25. Legat, *Walking the Land, feeding the Fire*, 105

26. Andrews and Zoe, “Trails,” 25.

27. Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 129.

28. Numbered Treaties, signed between First Nations and the Canadian Government (between 1871 and 1921), have been a source of ongoing controversy—the treaties’ social, economic, and legal impact on Indigenous communities continues to this day. As Patrick Scott notes “The fundamental clash between the two interpretations of the Treaty is the basis for the modern claims process.” The ongoing disagreement surrounding these hastily signed agreements reveals differences, not only between the spoken and written word, but also between Indigenous notions of land (as home and provider) and settler notions of land (as frontier for resource extraction).

Scott, *Talking Tools*, 212-213.

29. Ibid.

30. The written version states the following: “the said Indians do hereby cede, release, surrender, and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada... forever, all their rights, titles, and privileges whatsoever to the lands.”

Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 132.

31. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask*, 55.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask* 56.

36. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask* 56.

37. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask* 57.

38. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask* 58.

39. Justice Morrow, in Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask*, 58.



Figure 78: A tea dance, illustrated by a student from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, 2012.

## Painting the future: from the Berger Inquiry to the Tłı̨ch̨ Agreement

The image for this section illustrates a tea dance. This work (created by a young participant in the 2016 spring workshop) shows a time of celebration as members of a community move in circle. Many of the themes discussed in this section are reflected in this illustration—relationship to land, revitalization of cultural knowledge, and connections within community. In this section I will talk about the Berger Inquiry—an experience of cultural revitalization for Dene communities. I will also refer to the Tłı̨ch̨ Agreement, which led to a combined self-government and land claim agreement.

### THE BERGER INQUIRY

In 1975, the Dene began a process of “re-membering”.<sup>41</sup> That year, the Crown (aware that it could not ignore the rights of northern Indigenous peoples) sponsored the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry. The Inquiry investigated the social and environmental impact of the possible pipeline project. For two and a half years, a commission, headed by Justice Thomas Berger, recorded statements and opinions, in the north and across Canada, from people who would be affected by the proposed project. For the Dene, the Inquiry was a turning point—people of the north were not only speaking, they were also being heard.<sup>42</sup> Patrick Scott, who travelled with the Inquiry as a CBC cameraman, described the significance of speaking and being heard, in his book *Stories Told*:

People came to speak, the youth, the elders and the political leaders, to tell their individual story, to express their views and to listen to each other. They heard themselves and through the media the rest of the country heard them as well.<sup>43</sup>

The process of speaking and being heard during the time of the Inquiry, from 1975 to 1977, “revitalized Dene culture.”<sup>44</sup> The public hearings became a process of re-membering through storytelling, as traditional identities were strengthened. “Telling stories”, as Patrick Scott writes, “changed people.”<sup>45</sup> Through the storytelling process, the imposed labels of “Indians” and “Eskimos” were dropped—identities were redefined, becoming known across Canada as Dene, Inuit and Inuvialuit.<sup>46</sup> The inquiry was also the start of a larger challenge to colonial power according to Dene leader Georges Erasmus: “the inquiry has been a process in which we have been decolonizing ourselves.”<sup>47</sup>

The collective storytelling process—expressed through the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry—initiated a Dene self-determination movement.<sup>48</sup> Together with the Dene Declaration of 1975, and subsequent land claims, the pipeline Inquiry, as Glen Coulthard writes, “challenged the assumed legitimacy of colonial sovereignty over and capitalist social relations on Dene territories.”<sup>49</sup> A new chapter in Dene history emerged after the mid 1970s.

### THE TŁ̨CH̨ AGREEMENT

Since the time of the Inquiry, modern-day treaties (also known as Comprehensive Land Claims) have been negotiated between Dene peoples and the federal government. The

41. Re-membering, according to Absolon and Willett involves both recalling (of memory) and reconnecting (with culture and place). Re-membering also facilitates the recovery of stories, tradition, teachings, and past experiences

Absolon and Willett, “Putting Ourselves Forward,” 118.

42. Scott, *Stories Told*, 8.

43. Scott, *Stories Told*, 9.

44. Scott, *Stories Told*, 3.

45. Scott, *Stories Told*, 9.

46. Ibid.

47. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 111.

48. Coulthard, *Stories Told*, 52.

49. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask*, 53.



Figure 79: Landscape painting by a student from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, 2012.

Tłıchq, who I have worked with since 2012, pursued a unique path towards self-determination—they negotiated a combined self-government and land claim agreement (the first in the Northwest Territories). Through the Tłıchq Agreement (which became law in August, 2005) the Tłıchq obtained surface and subsurface ownership of 39,000 square kilometres of land.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the agreement also created the Tłıchq Community Services Agency (TCSA), which is responsible for delivering education, health and social services throughout the region.<sup>51</sup>

For the Tłıchq, the path towards self-government involved ongoing reference to the oral (as opposed to the written) interpretation of Treaty 11. Tłıchq elder Alexis Arrowmaker stated the importance of remembering the verbal agreement during a public meeting in 1995: “We want to make sure that the modern treaty reflects our oral version of the original treaty.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, John B. Zoe has been critical of the written version of the treaty: “The written text of Treaty 11 is an ‘unauthorized version’ of what the Dogribs agreed to in 1921”.<sup>53</sup>

Through part of the 20th and early 21st century—from treaty signing to self-government—the people of Denendeh have engaged in a process of re-membering that challenged the terra nullius doctrine. Dene stories, told during the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, described a land that is not empty, but filled, with ancestral history and other living entities. As elder Phillip Zoe has stated, “There are no empty spaces, all spaces are used by something: fox, trees, humans... It might look empty but all the dé is used.”<sup>54</sup>

The collective experience of re-membering involved multiple voices. In the next section of this chapter I will look back at my experience of working with elders on Tłıchq lands. I will specifically discuss how the sharing of history is a collective experience—. On Dene lands, stories are interwoven, creating a rich tapestry of knowledge.

### **Sharing of history**

The first animation to result from my collaboration with Tłıchq elders and youth (*The Woman Who Came Back*) was initially screened at the TCSA building in Behchokq in the spring of 2013. Elders who shared oral versions of the story were the first to see the final work. Before the screening, tea was served as Tony Rabesca and I introduced the work and thanked elders for attending. The lights were turned off, and the animation was projected. Descriptions of the past, shared during storytelling sessions the year before unfolded in visual form on screen for over 9 minutes. At the end of the final credits, the lights were turned back on. The room was silent. After about 15 seconds elders began to speak—Melanie Lafferty, Liza MacKenzie, Monique MacKenzie, Robert MacKenzie, Rosalie Mantla, Elizabeth Rabesca, and Francis Willah each took turns. Each elder proceeded to share another oral version of the story.<sup>55</sup>

I was initially unsure of how to interpret the post-screening retelling of the story by elders. But after further feedback, I realized that *The Woman Who Came Back* anima-

50. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 152.

51. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 154.

52. Arrowmaker, in Scott, *Talking Tools*, 213.

53. Zoe, in Scott, *Talking Tools*, 213.

54. Zoe, in Legat, *Walking the Land, feeding the Fire*, 96.

55. Melanie Lafferty, Liza MacKenzie, Monique MacKenzie, Robert MacKenzie, Rosalie Mantla, Elizabeth Rabesca, and Francis Willah, conversation with the author, May 16, 2013.

56. Melanie Lafferty, conversation with the author, May 16, 2013.



Figure 80: Landscape paintings by students from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, 2012.

tion was a version of the story, among many others—coexisting with accounts shared by elders. After viewing the animation, each elder proceeded to share, her or his version of the story once again. As elder Melanie Lafferty said before telling her account, “we’re here to share.”<sup>56</sup> In Dene storytelling, no one person has complete knowledge of a historic event—instead, elders like to work together as one will fill in the gap for the other. Tłı̨ch̨q elder Philip Zoe has talked about the need to hear many versions of a story because no one person has complete knowledge of events:

A Tłı̨ch̨q story has many, many parts and no one person has the full story. To really know and use the story, and explore all of its meanings, you have to hear many versions and add your own parts...<sup>57</sup>

Listening to stories during our second research project, I continued to think of elder Melanie Lafferty’s 2013 reference to ‘sharing’. On Tłı̨ch̨q lands, storytelling sessions are indeed opportunities for elders to share many things with young listeners—knowledge of past events, the names of parents, personal reflections, advice. Historical narratives are, as Four Arrows writes, “living information systems”.<sup>58</sup> Communicating these narratives, in person, is a social experience—one that helps build intergenerational relationships.<sup>59</sup>

Where Indigenous oral histories are communal, and open to diverse tellings/interpretations (while maintaining consistent structure over time), Western notions of history are often based on a “totalizing discourse”.<sup>60</sup> The notion of “totality”—the assumption that it is possible and desirable to compile everything that is known on a given subject—is a characteristic feature of written history told through a Euro-centric lens.<sup>61</sup> The very thought of bringing together all known knowledge (on a given subject) into a single, comprehensible body of work seems like a mystifying, even dizzying idea—reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, *The Library of Babel*. In this short story, Borges conceives of the universe as an infinite library, with a book collection that contains total knowledge, including a “detailed history of the future”.<sup>62</sup>

Although Borges’ complete library is described in terms of a mind-bending fable, the ambition of obtaining total knowledge has, in reality, informed the work of European historians. As Michel Foucault wrote: “Until the mid-seventeenth century, the historian’s task was to establish the great compilation of documents and signs—of everything throughout the world”.<sup>63</sup> The notion of a “totalizing discourse” is the first in a long list of ideas that characterize Western history, according to Linda Tuhiwai Smith.<sup>64</sup> Another characteristic included in this list is “The idea that history can be told in one coherent narrative”.<sup>65</sup> The assumption behind this last point is that “all the facts” can be assembled in a precise manner and allow for the writing of “a true history of the world.”<sup>66</sup>

Like Western history, Indigenous oral history provides evidence of past events. In addition, however, oral history facilitates a unique exchange of information between storyteller and listener—an opportunity for relationship building through the sharing of

57. Zoe, in Scott, *Talking Tools*, 140.

58. Four Arrows, *The Authentic Dissertation*, 2

59. Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1998), 3.

60. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 30.

61. Ibid.

62. Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: selected stories & other writings* (New York: New Directions Books, 2007), 54.

63. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 142.

64. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 30.

65. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 31.

66. Ibid.



Figure 81: Landscape paintings by students from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, 2012.

knowledge. In the following section I will continue exploring the broader significance of sharing by referencing stories from the time of contact in Canada's north.

## History of sharing

Canada's north has often been depicted and understood (by non-indigenous Canada) through the doctrine of terra nullius (a concept used by European nations to justify colonial control of overseas territories).<sup>67</sup> This single concept continues to inform narratives of the north—which for the most part is portrayed as an empty region, a frontier, a place for resource extraction, rather than a homeland.<sup>68</sup> The myth of terra nullius ignores multiple, contrasting narratives that coexist in arctic and sub-arctic lands.<sup>69</sup>

Among the many histories of the north, there is an experience that emerged during the early stages of contact (1700s to mid 1800s) that is not often mentioned within the scope of Canadian history: the experience of sharing.<sup>70</sup> The partnership that existed between First Nations peoples and Europeans was, according to John Milloy, ignored after Canadian Confederation was established in 1867: "The partnership of cultures, which had marked the fur trade and the period of British Indian relations... ceased."<sup>71</sup> "First Nations" as Milloy writes, were not included in Confederation, "even though their reserves and unceded homelands became part of the national estate." A history of sharing, it seems, was forgotten.<sup>72</sup>

Sharing is a common practice in Canada's north. Patrick Scott has made reference to the Dene law of sharing in his book *Talking Tools*:

Anyone who lived from the land was aware of their vulnerability. Survival was always a meal away. It was to honour the Dene law of sharing, that anyone coming to your bush camp would be fed. It was as important for your survival as it was for theirs. This law was understood and deeply respected, woven into the entire value system of the Aboriginal peoples of the North.<sup>73</sup>

The crossing of paths between European and Indigenous peoples in the 18th century prompted instances of knowledge exchange in which the latter shared resources, land, information about geography, and provided guidance in travelling a vast and unfamiliar region. As James Tully notes: "Canada is founded on an act of sharing that is almost unimaginable."<sup>74</sup> In fact, one of the Mesa Lake peacemakers—Akaitcho—shared knowledge, time and resources with English explorer John Franklin during his expedition to the Arctic (1819-1822). As part of that journey, Akaitcho initially escorted, and subsequently rescued what remained of Franklin's expedition. June Helm has elaborated on this historic journey:

The Yellowknife Indian leader Akaitcho stepped upon the stage of Canadian history in the afternoon of July 30, 1820, when he met Capt. John Franklin and affirmed his willingness to guide and provision Franklin's expedition of exploration "to the shores of the polar ice sea." A year later, almost to the day,

67. Roger Epp, *We Are All Treaty People: Prairie Essays* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2008), 133.

68. Scott, *Stories Told*, 7.

69. The history of Canada's north, since the early 1700s, cannot be reduced to one coherent narrative, without eliminating a range of journeys and lived experiences. It involves (among other things) oral stories, ancestral trails, diaries, personal journals, records of business transactions, material culture, points of trade—it is an entanglement of many contested histories.

70. Epp, *We Are All Treaty People*, 133.

71. Milloy, *Indian Act Colonialism*, 2008, 9.

72. Milloy, *Indian Act Colonialism*, 2008, 9.

73. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 94.

74. Tully in Epp, *We Are All Treaty People*, 133.

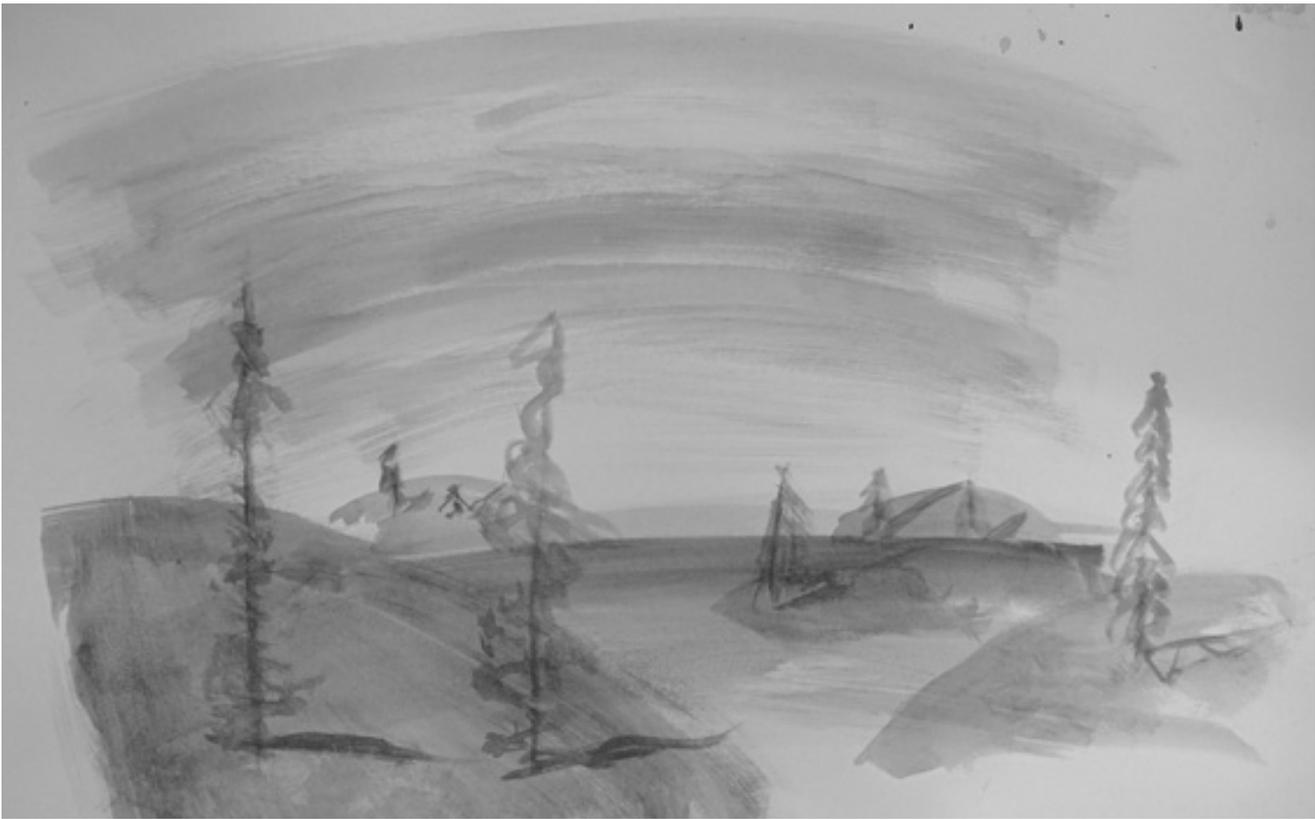


Figure 82: Landscape paintings by students from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, 2012.

Akaitcho and his band delivered Franklin and his complement to a point on the Lower Coppermine River within five hours of the ocean. The drama of the succour of the starving survivors by Akaitcho and his followers the following November assured Akaitcho's place in history.<sup>75</sup>

75. Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 321-232.

76. Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 322-233.

After being rescued, Franklin described Akaitcho's generosity in helping survivors of the expedition. Akaitcho took care of the men, offering hospitality and cooking. The helping hand of the Yellowknife leader—who is described as a friend—is documented in Franklin's *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea in the Years 1819, 20, 21, 22*. June Helm also provides a brief description of this phase of the expedition.

When, after the terrible overland return from the arctic coast, the starving remnants of the Franklin expedition were rescued by Yellowknives, Akaitcho revealed another facet of his character. Treated with the "utmost tenderness" by their rescuers, Franklin and his party from Fort Enterprise were conveyed to the camp of "our chief and companion Akaitcho." There, in Franklin's words, Akaitcho "showed us the most friendly hospitality and all sorts of personal affection, even to cooking for us with his own hands, an office he never performs for himself." To survivor George Back, Akaitcho was "generous and humane."<sup>76</sup>

The record of Akaitcho's generosity during the Franklin expedition illustrates a brief, albeit dramatic, example of sharing that took place during the early contact period in the Canadian north. Histories of sharing from arctic and sub-arctic lands dispel the myth of terra nullius. These events pose a challenge to narratives that depict a desolate land. Instead, stories of contact tell of generosity offered by Indigenous peoples of the north. These are stories that may offer a future path for post-colonial relationships—relationships based on memories of sharing.



My son and I have practiced classical guitar for almost five years. Since 2012 we have devoted approximately 3 hours a week to memorizing scale shapes, exploring patterns and rhythms, strumming, and listening. I have no musical training, but in 2012 I began reading tablatures and practiced the required finger placement for several songs. By the time I felt somewhat comfortable with the instrument, I began sharing what little I knew.

After a recent practice, my son reminded me of the first guitar I bought him back in 2012. It was a 3/4 sized nylon string instrument. He remembered its forest green colour as well as the south Edmonton strip mall where it was purchased. I realized, as he shared this early memory, that many years had passed since we embarked on this musical journey—for a nine year old, that memory is over half a lifetime away.

My son's reference to his first guitar also made me realize the deeper significance of our shared musical practice; namely, by learning to play an instrument together, we have devoted time to each other. Relationships emerge over years of sharing spaces, exchanging knowledge, talking and listening—this is true of friendship, but it also applies to family. As novelist Fae Myenne Ng writes, "it's time that makes a family, not just blood."<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is devoted to a discussion of how relationships endure, evolve and converge over time. I will make reference to the importance of sustained dialogue, as a way to enhance rapport (specifically citing my experience of working as a designer/filmmaker in the Tłı̨cẖ region). I will also challenge Western metaphysics of individualism, and describe a worldview based on relationships. I will conclude with a description of Western and Indigenous interpretations of time.

Much of what I share in this chapter is based on my experience of collaborative animated filmmaking in the Tłı̨cẖ region—films created since 2012 are examples of collaborative projects that, over time, strengthen relationships. In a similar way, my experience of practicing guitar with my son is an example of how the commitment of time to a shared project can help build rapport. Practicing the instrument involved, among other things, the development of left hand accuracy, building of calluses on fingertips, and refining of rhythm that evolved over hundreds of hours—through many sessions, musical skills improved, and a relationship was strengthened. The temporal length of events can have a unifying effect. Physical proximity, dialogue, and shared experiences leave, what in cinematic terms Andrei Tarkovsky refers to as "an impression of time."<sup>2</sup>

1. Ng, in Frederick Steiner, *Human Ecology: Following Nature's Lead* (Washington: Island Press, 2002), 50.

2. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 62.

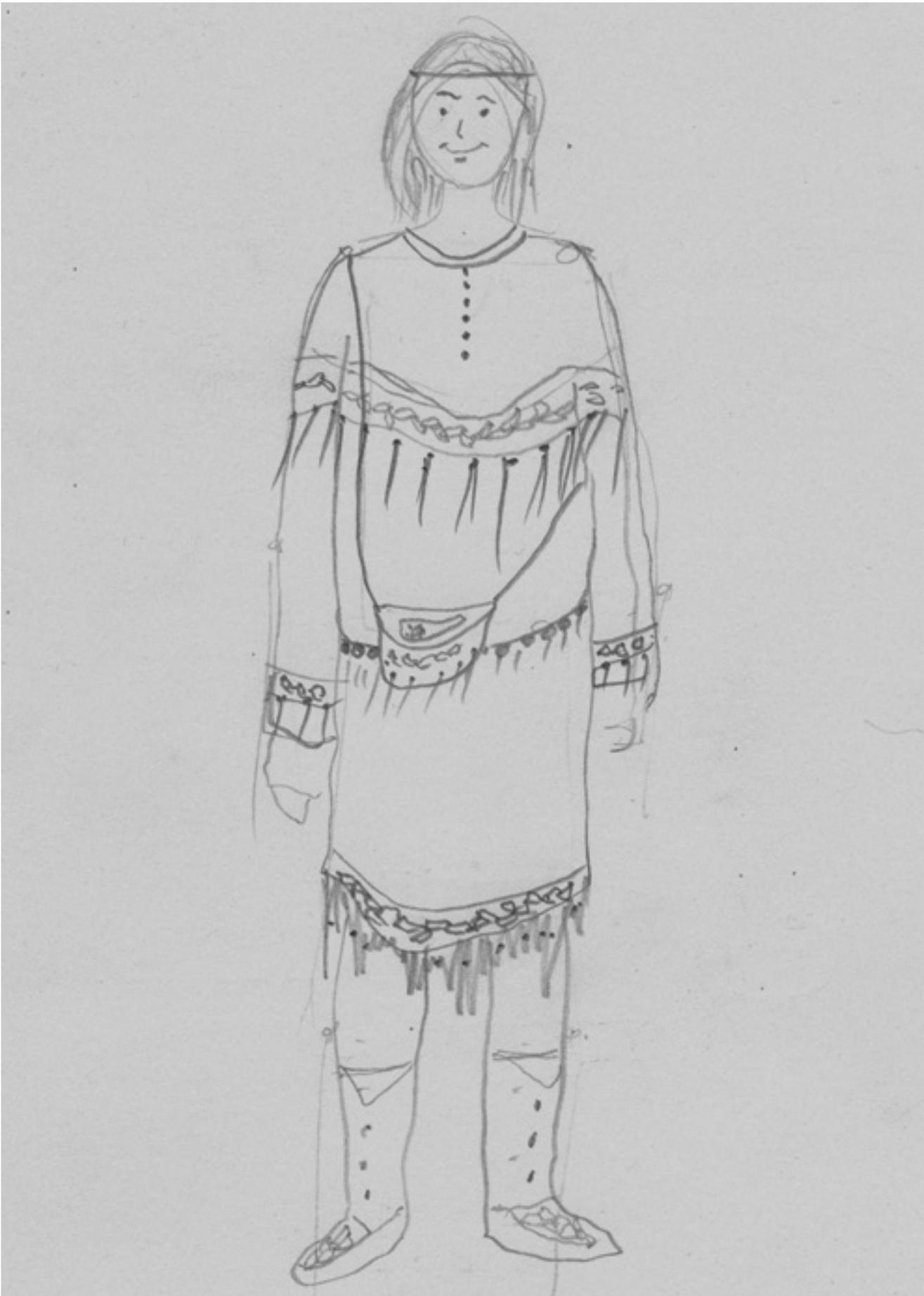


Figure 84: A drawing of Whanłkw'o by a student from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, 2012.

## Relationships are made of time

The first oral narrative I helped animate in Behchok̄ (2012-13) tells of a Tł̄chq̄ woman who was kidnapped, and escaped to a European trading post far away from her home. Near the end of the story the protagonist, Whanjkw'ō, walks back to her homeland—the walk, according to Samuel Hearne's records, lasted at least 7 months; and according to some elders, over a year.<sup>3</sup> The story concludes with Whanjkw'ō's return—"she came back to her people", and shared accounts of her ordeal with others in the camp.<sup>4</sup>

Among other important teachings, the story of Whanjkw'ō illustrates a person's inextricable connection to a larger community. Whanjkw'ō's meaning and identity is rooted in a place and its people. Unlike Western metaphysics of individualism, this story embodies a worldview based on relationships. Individualism is a historically constructed concept, a by-product of European Humanism and Renaissance ideals.<sup>5</sup>

The notion of individualism carries the ontological assumption that people, and other living organisms, are bounded entities—separated and closed off from surrounding environments. Philosopher Viola Cordova questions this commonly held belief by indicating that, "We might believe that our skin closes us off from the rest of the world, but it is actually a very permeable surface."<sup>6</sup> People are dependent, rather than independent—living in symbiotic relationships with other living entities.<sup>7</sup>

Views that challenge the notion of individualism, have been articulated by scholars in the sciences. James Lovelock for instance, describes living organisms as being embedded in, and dependent on, the energy flows of larger living systems—in *Gaia: the practical science of planetary medicine*, he illustrates how a living organism has "a partial independence, vital to the system, but is unable to exist except as part of that system."<sup>8</sup> Lovelock's description calls into question the idea of individualism—the idea that the world is made up of "individual entities" with separate properties.<sup>9</sup>

Challenges to the idea of individualism are also articulated within the field of biology. Over the last 15 years, the boundaries that characterize the "*biological individual*" have been called into question through nucleic acid analysis.<sup>11</sup> By using new technology, essentialist conceptions of individuality are being replaced by the principle of "symbiosis."<sup>12</sup> As Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber write, "a world of complex and intermingled relationships" is emerging "not only among microbes, but also between microscopic and macroscopic life."<sup>13</sup>

I chose to begin this section with events from Whanjkw'ō's journey, along with quotes from scientists, as a way to challenge the humanist idea of individualism. In Western cultures, individualism continues to inform understandings of the formation and composition of relationships. In other words, relationships are assumed to be composed of two or more entities, interacting over long periods of time (maybe even in close proximity), but ultimately separated from one another. The assumption, for instance, is that two people may travel together, talk, share the same space over many years, but, in ontological terms, remain separate.

3. Hearne, in Scott, *Talking Tools*, 235.

4. Whanjkw'ō: The Woman Who Came Back, DVD; Behchok̄: Tł̄chq̄ Government, 2013).

5. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 24.

6. Cordova, *How it is*, 230.

7. Cordova, *How it is*, 211.

8. James E. Lovelock, *Gaia: the practical science of planetary medicine* (London: Gaia Books, 1991), 50.

9. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 55.

10. Scott F. Gilbert, Jan Sapp and Alfred I. Tauber "A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals." in *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 87 (4) (2012): 325.

11. Gilbert, Sapp and Tauber, "A symbiotic View of Life," 325.

12. Gilbert, Sapp and Tauber, "A symbiotic View of Life," 326-327.

The authors further note that "the cells and bodies of animals are shared with numerous "species" of bacteria and other microbes."

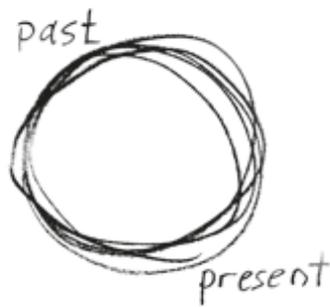
13. Ibid



*image a*



*image b*



*image c*

Figure 85: Visual interpretations of time, by the author.

Whanjkw'o's return home, however, illustrates an inseparable connection between people. The story tells, not of individual, but entangled, entities, or to use Karen Barad's words, an "entangled state of agencies."<sup>14</sup> Whanjkw'o embarks on a long and dangerous walking journey back home, in part because her identity is entangled with friends, family members, elders and youth from her homeland. She returns to a place of meaningful relationships.

Relationships emerge through shared experiences, ongoing dialogue, companionship, along with common trials and tribulations. Relationships are, as Frederick Steiner writes "a commitment to each other over time."<sup>15</sup> Long-term interaction between people involves changing temporal rhythms, continuity and discontinuity, temporary absence, followed by streams of duration—*relationships are made of time*.

Building relationships over days, months, or years, is—to use Tarkovsky's cinematic expression—a way of "Sculpting in time."<sup>16</sup> Moments in life are loaded with possible futures.<sup>17</sup> Every step taken inscribes a new forking path—a bifurcation that Adrian Ivakhiv describes as "a simultaneous arrival and passing of the possible and an opening up to new possibilities."<sup>18</sup> There is an ongoing splitting, and "gushing of time", through which people exchange words, express emotions, walk together, or part ways.<sup>19</sup> Such embodied experiences give shape to relationships—some grow and evolve over many years, others dissolve in the stream of time.

Throughout this section I have described relationships in terms of shared experiences that endure and evolve over time. I began by referencing Whanjkw'o's return journey home—a long walk that embodies the desire to reconnect with a community of people. As with other Tłıchq stories, Whanjkw'o's journey is an experience from the past, that may shed light, instruct or inform present-day circumstances. In the following section I will discuss the relationship between past and present. Western metaphysics, with its emphasis on boundaries, often creates a stark divide between events from long ago and current experiences.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Tłıchq ceremonies, such as the *feeding the fire*, respectfully acknowledge the relationship between the distant past and the present. I will continue by sharing three drawings (on the left) illustrating different interpretations of time.

### Time-lines

In a description of "Einstein's Time", astrophysicist John Gribbin wrote that "everything in the universe, past, present, and future, is connected to everything else".<sup>21</sup> Gribbin attempted to illustrate this idea by visualizing the traces of sub-atomic particles, or "particle tracks" that move through space-time. Despite the complex, often convoluted nature of Gribbin's descriptions, I found his use of simple graphic representations of "particle tracks" to be extremely effective in communicating information that may otherwise seem bewildering in written form.<sup>22</sup> In developing parts of this dissertation, I have found it similarly useful to describe lived experiences through illustrations and photographs. To begin this section I will refer to three different representations of time (image *a*, *b*, and *c*, on the left). These

14. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 23.

15. Steiner, *Human Ecology*, 50.

16. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 121.

17. Adrian J. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the moving image: cinema, affect, nature* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2013), 306.

18. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the moving image*, 307.

19. Ibid.

20. Peat, *Blackfoot Physics*, 229.

21. Gribbin, *In Search of Schrodinger's Cat*, 191.

22. Ibid.



Figure 86: A feeding the fire ceremony in Behchokò, 2012.

drawings are derived from a variety of sources, including the “folk physics of Western culture” discussed by Henry Sharp,<sup>23</sup> explorations of time provided by various Indigenous authors (including works in MariJo Moore and Trace Demeyer’s edited compilation),<sup>24</sup> and several philosophers.

In looking at the three drawings, the first (*image a*) shows a fragmented interpretation of time, establishing a sharp divide between the past and the present. The origins of breaking time down into chunks or units can be traced to, among others, a paradox described by Zeno of Elea in the fifth century B.C.E. (described in the work of Henri Bergson, as well as Jorge Luis Borges).<sup>25</sup> The second drawing (*image b*) illustrates a seamless flow of multiple experiences of time. *Image b* is partly based on one of Henry Sharp’s descriptions of time whereby the “past flows into the now without disjunction”.<sup>26</sup> Ideas of past, present, and future as a flow, have often been described in reference to Dene history. On August 5, 1975, Fort Good Hope Chief, Frank T’Seleie stated the following to the MacKenzie Valley pipeline inquiry:

Our Dene nation is like this great river. It has been flowing before any of us can remember. We take our strength and our wisdom and our ways from the flow and direction that has been established for us by ancestors we never knew, ancestors of a thousand years ago. Their wisdom flows through us to our children and our grandchildren to generations we will never know.<sup>27</sup>

Frank T’Seleie’s words suggest that knowledge is continually moving through time, and from generation to generation. *Image b* can also be seen as a segment of the third drawing: cyclical time (*image c*). This third drawing is inspired by literature from various Indigenous writers including Willie Ermine, Walter Lightning, and Shawn Wilson.<sup>28</sup>

All three drawings are visual simplifications of different interpretations of time. I want to bring attention back to the first drawing (*image a*) because colonial states interpret history through this basic idea of time, which facilitates the construction of “a story that assumes that there was a ‘point in time’ which was ‘prehistoric’”.<sup>29</sup> A dividing line between a prehistoric past, and a historic present has, and continues to be, used by settler states as a form of colonial rule.<sup>30</sup> A recent example of how the Canadian government establishes a dividing line between past and present is provided by Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox (in Coulthard) regarding the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: “by conflating specific unjust events, policies, and laws with ‘history’, what is unjust becomes temporally separate from the present, unchangeable”.<sup>31</sup>

Time, as described in the previous paragraph, can be used as a political tool in translating history. As an alternative to *image a*, I would again like to make reference to images *b* and *c*. These drawings are also made of lines. But there is a difference in relation to *image a*. The line in figure *a* is used to separate time; whereas the lines in images *b* and *c*, as mentioned, represent the continuity of time.

23. Sharp, *Loon*, 59.

24. Choctaw/Cherokee author John D. Berry explores different interpretations of time: “We are caught behind the watch face of the Euro-immigrant trap of linear time in our work a day world. However, our ceremonial cycles have adapted to deal with that, those cycles are still there and based on worldly cycles. We participate in seasonal time, the cycle of linear time, the time of the natural world. We are not above it, nor pretended masters of it, or separated from it. Past is present and future, the time of no time and all time.” Berry, “Green Corn,” 69.

25. Henri Bergson describes Zeno of Elea’s paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise as a “conviction that one can treat movement as one treats space”. In the paradox, a very slow tortoise is given a head start in a race with a very fast Achilles – the paradox builds an argument by which the latter can never catch the former: “Achilles, they say, will never overtake the tortoise he is pursuing, for when he arrives at the point where the tortoise was the latter will have had time to go further”.

Borges provides a more systematic break down of the paradox: “Achilles runs ten times faster than the tortoise and gives the animal a head start of ten meters. Achilles runs those ten meters, the tortoise one; Achilles runs that meter, the tortoise runs a decimeter; Achilles runs that decimeter, the tortoise runs a centimeter; Achilles runs... the millimeter, the tortoise, a tenth of a millimeter, and so to infinity, without the tortoise ever being overtaken”.

Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 144.

Borges, *Labyrinths*, 202.

26. Sharp, *Loon*, 60.

27. Frank T’Seleie, “Statement to the MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry” in *Dene Nation – the colony within*, ed. Mel Watkins. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 16-17.

28. Willie Ermine, “Aboriginal Epistemology.” in *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*, ed. Marie Battiste and Jean Barman, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 102.

Walter C. Lightning, “Compassionate Mind,” 215.

Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 42.



Figure 87: Dancing scene at the end of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. Drawn by Archie Beaverho, 2018.

Through what I have been able to appreciate and understand since first visiting Denendeh in 2011, particularly through ceremonies such as feeding the fire, the past can become as real as the present and future.<sup>32</sup> Maintaining a respectful connection with the past, and a careful outlook for future generations, may be as important as the present moment. In feeding the fire ceremonies people move in circle around a fire— there is drumming and singing which embody simultaneous experiences of time. The feeding of the fire is also a spiritual experience that shows respect and celebrates relationships to ancestors.<sup>32</sup> As physicist David Peat writes, “the ripples of ceremony reach into the distant future and call back into the past.”<sup>33</sup> Moving in unison, participants in the ceremony show gratitude for ancestral stories, which continue to influence current generations.

29. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 55.

30. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 120.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Through the feeding of the fire ceremony, participants show respect and gratitude for the guidance and stories of ancestors. From my experience, during storytelling workshops on the land, the ceremony involves the following steps:

- Camp assistants collect food.
- Fire is made in a large oil drum.
- Food is put into the fire.
- Caribou fat is put into the fire.
- Drumming and song.
- Participants move in circles around the fire.

33. Peat, *Blackfoot Physics*, 207.

In the Tłı̄chǫ region, fires, according to Thomas D. Andrews, “were not only critical for survival, but were used to communicate with a world where ancestral spirits dwelled.” Through the feeding of the fire ceremony, people “provide food offerings to ancestors, asking for safe travel conditions, luck in hunting, good weather or other similar wishes in return”.

Thomas D. Andrews, “Mobile Architecture, Improvisation and Museum Practice: Revitalizing the Tłı̄chǫ Caribou Skin Lodge” in *About the Hearth: Perspectives on the Home, Hearth and Household in the Circumpolar North*, ed. David G. Anderson, Robert P. Wishart, and Virginie Vaté (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 44.

## Chapter 11: Material culture on Tłıchǫ lands



Figure 88: Rock surface near Russell Lake. Picture by the author, 2016.

In this chapter I will discuss issues of material culture by referencing a brief walk on Tłıchq lands that took place in the summer of 2012. Through various demonstrations and discussions provided by Tłıchq elders, I will explore how objects, that emerge from, and dissolve on, the land, embody a cyclical process, that is not often considered in material culture literature. I will also discuss how land-based demonstrations by elders challenge the nature-culture dichotomy that informs many social science inquiries into material objects. I will conclude with a discussion of technology, in which I explore how stories and dreams have served as valuable tools when walking the land.



Figure 89: A traditional trap on Tłı̨chǫ lands. Photograph by Mike McLaughlin.



Figure 90: A tracing of the trap used in *The Woman Who Came Back*, 2013.

## Transformation over time

In the summer of 2012, during a warm afternoon near Russell Lake, a few kilometers outside Behchokq̄, elder Robert MacKenzie demonstrated the use of a traditional trap. Through a configuration of horizontally placed logs, separated by a small upright stick, fragments of a spruce tree were transformed into a technological artefact.<sup>1</sup>

Elder MacKenzie explained (as Tony Rabesca translated) how, in the old days, the Tłı̄chq̄ relied on this snare to catch small animals. The success and efficiency of the artefact is confirmed by elder MacKenzie's account of its use: "they usually catch... fifty a day; so the ones that are committed and do a lot of trapping, they can catch as much as they want".<sup>2</sup> When asked about the possible use of this technology by a historic Tłı̄chq̄ individual (Whanjkw'o), elder MacKenzie responded by indicating that she would have used the trap to catch rabbits and other animals.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Mackenzie's 2012 demonstration motivated me to see the life of material objects in a new light. Traditional Tłı̄chq̄ objects, like the one described by elder Mackenzie, emerge from the land, are adapted for specific purposes, and after their use, integrate back into their natural surroundings. There is in other words, a cyclical process in tangible Tłı̄chq̄ material—arising from, and dissolving back into, the earth. The life history of the trap described by elder Mackenzie reminds me of how, as Ian Hodder writes, "things are... stages in the process of the transformation of matter."<sup>4</sup>

The complete life history of a mass produced object—from initial raw material to final disintegration—is not always considered in material culture studies. Within the literature, objects are sometimes framed in a three-part—production, mediation, consumption—model. Dick Hebdige for instance, describes the "cultural significance" of a material object passing through these three stages, but has very little to say about the organic matter and resources from which the object is made, and the final stage of decomposition.<sup>5</sup> In the Tłı̄chq̄ region, land-based demonstrations offer a far-reaching, cyclical, rather than linear, understanding of material. According to ecologist Ulrich Loening, much of conventional applied science and agricultural practices incorporate linear models that ignore the "cyclical complexities" as well as the "time scales" of nature.<sup>6</sup>

Stories and demonstrations shared by Tłı̄chq̄ elders have led me to reflect on the significance of time in relation to material objects. Within the context of what Adrian Ivakhiv describes as "hyper-capitalism"—a "relentless and singular logic of commodification and capital accumulation"—it is often difficult to keep track of where an object comes from, where it goes after it is discarded, and how long before it dissolves back into the earth.<sup>7</sup> In reference to this uncertainty, it is worth remembering another of Ian Hodder's ideas; namely, that many things have temporalities that extend far beyond the span of an average human life—consider for instance, "the gradual decay of a stone wall."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, and in reference to industrial civilization, Ulrich Loening notes that "you cannot throw your waste away, there is no away; in nature everything is cycled, on time scales ranging from minutes to thousands of years."<sup>9</sup>

1. Robert Mackenzie (translated by Tony Rabesca), conversation with the author, July 19, 2012.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Hodder, *Entangled*, 5.

5. Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: on images and things* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 81.

6. Ulrich Loening, "The Attitude of Human Ecology" in *Radical Human Ecology: Intercultural and Indigenous Approaches*, ed. Lewis Williams, Rose Roberts and Alastair McIntosh (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 38-39.

7. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the moving image*, 332.

8. Hodder, *Entangled*, 5.

9. Loening, "The Attitude of Human Ecology," 38.

Archaeologist Ian Hodder (which I have referenced) is one of few authors associated with material culture who addresses the issue of time (in relation to objects). In a more narrowly focused manner, Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol's description of The Zimbabwe Bush Pump also provide a detailed life history of an object.

Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol, "The Zimbabwe Bush Pump: Mechanics of a Fluid Technology" in *Social Studies of Science*, 30 (2) (2000): 225-263.



Figure 91: Demonstrations of lichen and moss by Liza Mackenzie. Photographs by Mike McLaughlin, 2012.

As part of my doctoral research I have been informed by contemporary scholars who discuss a wide range of material culture topics. I have found the writings of authors such as Tim Dant, Carl Knappett, Mike Michael, and Daniel Miller insightful—ideas discussed by these authors have influenced, and in some cases found their way into, my dissertation.<sup>10</sup> Concepts explored by these authors include the following: agency and animacy; human/material dichotomy; the relationship between mind, body and objects; the agency of objects; notions of the self; the mediation between body and nature.

In describing the life history of objects—their flows and relations over long periods of time—I have (in my dissertation) referred to Dene elders, artists and designers, as well as scholars situated within the field of ecology. Adrian Ivakhiv for instance discusses how “One of the central insights of the ecological sciences is that everything comes from somewhere and goes somewhere—everything is in motion between one state of matter-energy and another.”<sup>11</sup> Through his writings, Ivakhiv considers the long term existence of material objects—their transformations, and life histories.

In the following sections I will continue talking about material culture from the Tłıchq homeland. I will make further reference to things absorbed in cyclical processes—emerging from, and returning to, the land. In this next section, however, I will focus on how descriptions from elders challenge a dichotomy that is deeply entrenched in Western thought—the divide between culture and nature.

### Lessons from the land

After the brief demonstration of the trap, we continued walking through the bush with elder Liza MacKenzie who shared her knowledge of lichen and moss. The, light green coloured lichen was referenced for its medicinal properties. Elder Liza MacKenzie indicated the following: “pull out all of the white dry moss, and... put it in a pot. If you have a tummy ache... you can drink the juice from it”.<sup>12</sup>

The moss next to the lichen had a light brown hue. It is known as “baby moss/bebis kw’ah” and “is an extremely absorbent and light weight material; the original environmentally-friendly disposable diaper”.<sup>13</sup> Elder MacKenzie described the use of this material in traditional Tłıchq society: “this used to be traditional diapers” (the elder then placed the moss on a low-lying, horizontally positioned branch—“this is how they used to dry the diapers, way back... when they were using these as diapers for babies, they never heard of a rash”).<sup>14</sup>

Elder MacKenzie’s description of the medicinal use of lichen, and utility of moss, provided another example of how material (as well as medicine) is embedded in the land. Her demonstration also challenges the habit, engrained in Western thought, of dividing the world into the realms of nature and culture.<sup>15</sup> Elders in the Tłıchq region describe an environment replete with cultural material that is entangled in the very fabric of the earth. According to Julie Cruikshank, the Dene (along with other Athapaskan oral traditions) “explore

10. Tim Dant, “Material Civilization” in *Materiality and Society*, ed. Tim Dant (Columbus: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 11-32.

Carl Knappett, *Thinking through material culture: an interdisciplinary perspective* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2005), 11-34.

Mike Michael, “These Boots Are Made for Walking...: Mundane Technology, the Body and Human-Environmental Relations.” in *Body & Society* 6 (3-4) (2000): 107-126.

Daniel Miller, “Stone age or plastic age?” in *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007): 23-27.

11. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the moving image*, 305.

12. Liza Mackenzie (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with the author, July 19, 2012.

13. Legat, *Walking the Land, Feeding the Fire*, 37.

14. Liza Mackenzie (translated by Mary Blackduck), conversation with the author, July 19, 2012.

15. Bruno Latour (in Cruikshank) refers to this separation of culture and nature as the “Great Divide.”

Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories*, 11.



Figure 92: Walking near the Russell Lake camp. Photographs by Mike McLaughlin, 2012.

the connections between nature and culture as carefully as early exploration projects tried to disentangle them”.<sup>16</sup>

In this section I will share some examples of how the nature/culture dichotomy has been addressed in material culture studies. Unlike examples shared by Tłı̄ch̄o elders, early texts from material culture show the influence of the reductive “grid of interpretive dichotomies” popular in the social sciences during the 1960s and 1970s; also known as structuralism.<sup>17</sup> During that time, the social sciences, as Hugh Brody notes, asserted “a seemingly fundamental dichotomy between culture and nature.”<sup>18</sup>

The influence of structuralism is evident in an early text associated with material culture—The Berber House or the world reversed, by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, from 1970. In this article Bourdieu writes: “The house is... endowed with a double significance; if it is true that it is opposed to the public world as nature is to culture, it is also, in another respect, culture.”<sup>19</sup>

Over a decade later, in his 1982 introduction to material culture theory, Jules David Prown referred to “a fundamental human perception of the universe as divided between earth and sky” as well as “material and spiritual, concrete and abstract, finite and infinite, real and ideal.”<sup>20</sup> Prown suggests that material culture theory is based on a dichotomous view of the world.<sup>21</sup> He indicates that the purpose of material culture, “is to some extent structuralist in its premise that the configurations or properties of an artifact correspond to patterns in the mind of the individual producer or producers.”<sup>22</sup>

Recent authors associated with material culture have challenged structuralist modes of interpretation.<sup>23</sup> Tim Ingold, for instance rejects the duality of form and matter—a duality that is traced back to Aristotle’s reference to how “form is prior to and more truly existent than the matter.”<sup>24</sup> This Aristotelean assumption is relevant to the fields of design studies, archaeology, as well as material culture—this assumption has influenced concepts of making, which describe how form (supplied by culture) is imposed over inert matter (nature).<sup>25</sup>

In his book, *Making*, Ingold questions this “active imposition of cultural form upon materials supplied by nature.”<sup>26</sup> As an alternative view, Ingold describes “form as emergent rather than imposed”—it is through gestural movement and skilled practice with material that designs emerge.<sup>27</sup>

Although Ingold, through his recent writings, challenges a structuralist premise, the nature-culture dichotomy continues to inform the work of many social scientists—some scholars, such as Bruno Latour, offer critical insight into how this dichotomy shapes perceptions of the earth. In one of his essays on science studies, Bruno Latour describes how the land is objectified through a meticulous process involving detachment, separation, classification and reassembling.<sup>28</sup> Following, and describing, the work of a botanist, soil scientist, and geographer in the Amazon Forest (who are studying the growth patterns of trees), Latour notes how, through measurements, diagrams and codes, “the land has

16. Ibid.

17. Hugh Brody, *The other side of Eden: hunters, farmers, and the shaping of the world* (New York: North Point Press, 2000), 286.

18. Ibid.

19. Bourdieu, “The Berber House or the World Reversed,” 161.

20. Jules David Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method” in *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (1) (1982): 2.

21. Prown, “Mind in Matter,” 6.

22. Ibid.

23. Björn Nilsson, “An archaeology of material stories. Dioramas as illustration and the desire of a thing-less archaeology” in *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007): 31-38.

Carl Knappett, “Materials with materiality?” in *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007): 20-23.

Christopher Tilley, “Materiality in materials” in *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007): 16-20.

24. Ingold, *Being Alive*, 82.

25. This notion of making is known as hylomorphism—the word is derived from the Greek hyle (matter), and morphe (form).

Ingold, *Making*, 20.

26. Ingold, *Making*, 41.

27. Ingold, *Making*, 44.

28. Bruno Latour, *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 39.



Figure 93: Demonstrations of traditional knowledge near Russell Lake. Photographs by Mike McLaughlin, 2012.

become a proto-laboratory—a Euclidean world where all phenomena can be registered by a collection of coordinates.”<sup>29</sup> Latour also discusses the cultural objects that facilitate this scientific enterprise:

Remove both maps, confuse cartographic conventions, erase the tens of thousands of hours invested in Radambrasil’s atlas, interfere with the radar of planes, and our four scientists would be lost in the landscape and obliged once more to begin all the work of exploration, reference marking, triangulation, and squaring performed by their hundreds of predecessors. Yes, scientists master the world, but only if the world comes to them in the form of two-dimensional, superposable, combinable inscriptions.<sup>30</sup>

Within the context of western scientific practices, nature is interpreted through technologies that objectify the land. As Latour notes, the earth is traced over by a grid of coordinates—plants are marked and classified, while the forest is “divided into squares”.<sup>31</sup> Based on Latour’s text, the nature-culture dichotomy is integral to Western science. Measurements and grids shape our perception of the earth. Leroy Little Bear has also made reference to these methods in his description of Western science:

Western paradigmatic views of science are largely about measurement using Western mathematics. But nature is not mathematical. Mathematics is superimposed on nature like a grid, and then examined from that framework.<sup>32</sup>

As an alternative to the “Western science of measurement”, Little Bear talks about Native American science, which is derived from a different paradigm. He indicates that Native science “includes ideas of constant motion and flux, existence consisting of energy waves, interrelationships, all things being animate, space/place, renewal, and all things being imbued with spirit.”<sup>33</sup> His description of science provides an appropriate conclusion to this section.

I have discussed several ideas since I referenced elder Liza Mackenzie’s description of lichen and moss. I have cited the idea of structuralism, nature-culture, form-matter, Bruno Latour’s excursion in the Amazon Forest, and Leroy Little Bear’s notions of science. Little Bear’s reference to dynamic activity (as part of Native Science) offers a relevant picture of processes and relationships that are integral to Tł̓chq̓ material culture. Through traditional Tł̓chq̓ descriptions of the land, things are inextricably linked—entangled in the currents of time, wind and weather, and embodied in material shared by elders: lichen, moss, the snare, and many other objects embody nature *and* culture.

In the following section I will further discuss aspects of Tł̓chq̓ material culture. I will, however, move on to ideas I considered several years after the 2012 journey into the bush. I will, in the following paragraphs, explore issues of oral culture and technology

29. Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 43.

30. Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 29.

31. Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 32.

32. Little Bear, “Forward,” ix.

33. Ibid.



Figure 94: Demonstrations of traditional knowledge near Russell Lake. Photographs by Mike McLaughlin, 2012.

## An expanded notion of technology

I recently came across Walter Ong's interpretation of the Phaedrus dialogue (written by Plato) in which Socrates describes writing as "inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can only be in the mind."<sup>34</sup> In the text Socrates is also critical of how writing "destroys memory and enfeebles the mind".<sup>35</sup> Phaedrus, written by Plato over 2,000 years ago, addresses issues that are applicable to present-day discussions of technology and culture.<sup>36</sup>

In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong describes the contemporary significance of Plato's Phaedrus. Ong describes writing as a technology.<sup>37</sup> He also compares writing and speech through the following statement: "By contrast with natural oral speech, writing is completely artificial".<sup>38</sup> Through these words, Ong sets up a dividing line between what is 'natural' and what is 'artificial'. This dichotomy, reflects a dominant tendency in Western thought, described by Adrian Ivakhiv as the "habit of dividing the world into two autonomous realms – culture and nature, mind and matter, humans and everything else."<sup>39</sup>

I disagree with Walter Ong's separation of a natural (oral) realm, from an artificial (written) realm. My disagreement comes from an overall rejection of Western philosophical frameworks which (as mentioned) produce dichotomies. My disagreement, however, also stems from a quote I came across in Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, in which he writes: "The spoken word was the first technology".<sup>40</sup> Through this quote, McLuhan suggests that the dividing line between the natural and artificial, or mind and matter, is not so clear. Technology, for McLuhan, has a transformative effect on humans, altering "sense ratios" and "patterns of perception".<sup>41</sup> Through his claim that *speech* is a form of *technology*, McLuhan suggests that technology resides *within* humans.<sup>42</sup>

I have devoted the first three paragraphs of this section to the topic of speech and writing, because I wanted to provide support for an idea that will carry through this and the following section—the idea is that there is no clear and easy way to separate what is technology, from what is not technology.<sup>43</sup> This idea became apparent to me when I began collaborating in the Tłıchq region. This collaboration has involved many tangible artifacts such as paper, pencils, brushes, projectors, computers, DVDs, tents and tables. All of these things could easily be described as forms of technology within a widely recognized classification system such as Jules Prown's object taxonomy.<sup>44</sup> Other forms of technology used and referred to, during collaborative work, however, include things that would not easily fall within Prown's taxonomy (things described in the first two sections of this chapter): the resin of spruce trees (used for healing), or lichen (used for medicinal purposes).

Through my research I realize that I need to expand the meaning of technology, to include processes and ways of knowing, that would not fall under a conventional definition of technology— a definition limited to a type of instrument, machine, or other tangible device.<sup>45</sup> In the following section I will provide an example of this expanded notion of technology. I will explore how intangible, subjective, ephemeral experiences—dreams and stories—become technology.

34. Walter Ong, *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word* (London: Methuen, 1982), 78.

35. Ibid.

36. Ong, *Orality and literacy*, 79.

37. Ong, *Orality and literacy*, 80.

38. Ibid.

39. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the moving image*, 34.

40. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 57.

41. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 10.

42. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 57.

43. Richard Buchanan has also referenced the rich meaning of the word "technology." In "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking" he writes that "Most people continue to think of technology in terms of its product rather than its form as a discipline of systematic thinking. He also reminds the reader that "there was a time in an earlier period of Western culture when technology was a human activity operating throughout the liberal arts. Every liberal art had its own technology or systematic discipline."

Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking" in *The Idea of Design*, ed. Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 18.

44. Prown, "Mind in Matter," 3.

45. Prown, "Mind in Matter," 3.



Figure 95: Demonstrations of traditional knowledge near Russell Lake. Photograph by Mike McLaughlin, 2012.



Figure 96: Image-making activities at Russell Lake. Photograph by Mike McLaughlin, 2012.

## Stories and dreams as intangible technologies

In August of 2012, a group of Tłıchq elders, along with Behchokq high school students, and myself took part in a two-day culture camp near Russell Lake (5 km outside the community). Activities at the camp revolved around storytelling, land-based knowledge, and art practice. The first morning was spent in a tent with elders, who shared several versions of the story of The Woman Who Came Back. In sharing this knowledge, elders would often deviate from core parts of the narrative. At times elders would digress and talk about ideas, experiences, and objects that connected to the story's theme. This additional information was a significant part of the storytelling process, as it provided a glimpse into the way of life and technology that existed before the arrival of Europeans.

Tłıchq stories contain information about technological artifacts.<sup>46</sup> One such example was shared during the 2012 culture camp, by Elder Monique MacKenzie as she described how old snowshoes were designed to confuse rival tribes:

Sometimes the raid would take place in the winter time. Dogrib people, just to survive, when they make snowshoes, they used to point both ends of their snowshoes upwards, so the tracks would look the same. Because it's pointed at both ends and also the same shape... when they're walking forward, the other tribes couldn't tell if they were going east or west, because of the way they made their snowshoes.<sup>47</sup>

This explanation of the dual purpose of snowshoes – both to walk on snow, and evade potential enemies – illustrates how storytelling incorporates knowledge of traditional technology for living and surviving on the land. Other examples of land-based technology shared throughout this research included references to the use of animal bone to make a knife, and traditional ways of creating a fire.

The example provided by elder MacKenzie teaches us that technology resides within a social practice: storytelling. The knowledge contained or elicited by a story includes information about the construction and purpose of technological artifacts. However, Dene stories do not simply contain knowledge of technology, the stories themselves are tools. As tools, stories provide cultural continuity, as Patrick Scott indicates: "Story in an Aboriginal cultural context is the tool of passing on culture, identity, and personality through each generation".<sup>48</sup> Story, as a tool or technology, is intimately connected to the land—a reason why Tłıchq elder Harry Simpson has been quoted as saying that "the land is like a book".<sup>49</sup> Oral stories provide an essential role that is similar to that of a library – oral stories are like books on philosophy, history, medicine, and geography. Oral stories provide knowledge of the past while also facilitating navigation through a contemporary world. Again, Patrick Scott elaborates on this idea:

46. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 246.

47. Monique MacKenzie (translated by Jonas Lafferty conversation with the author, July 19, 2012).

48. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 230.

49. Andrews, "There will be many stories," 16.



Figure 97: The Russell Lake camp. Photograph by Mike McLaughlin, 2012.

For the Dene, story is a mnemonic device that situates evolving traditional knowledge within the contemporary environment. The message is cosmological. The (oral) story provides the social and visual linkages that sustain the ongoing adaptability of Dene culture.<sup>50</sup>

The most famous example of how Dene people have used storytelling as a tool or technology in contemporary environments can be found in the many hearings that took place during the 1975 Berger Inquiry.<sup>51</sup> Here we find an example of storytelling being used as tool of decolonization. Through these hearings the English term 'Indian' was slowly abandoned and speakers began adapting "their own word as the common identifier for their people": Dene.<sup>52</sup> In 1975 storytelling was the key that allowed Dene people to navigate the complexities of a political process:

The Dene emerged. The decolonization of the Dene escalated, not from radical engagement or militant action, but by the simple process of individuals telling their story and hearing themselves unlike they had been able to since Europeans arrived on their lands. The inquiry became a catalyst for recovering control in their lives, while grasping onto their traditional roots and reshaping the future of their children.<sup>53</sup>

The Berger Inquiry is a powerful example of how storytelling facilitated cultural change in a relatively recent political event. There is another intangible technology, however, that I would like to discuss before concluding this chapter—it is that of dreaming. Like stories, dreams also served as a type of technology that facilitated navigation—not through contemporary politics, but rather, on the land. In fact, dreams were considered an important form of hunting technology, as Tom Andrews indicates: "Often hunters would dream of future encounters with animals – where their trails would intersect – and in this way, dreaming was a part of hunting technology".<sup>54</sup> Andrews expands on this idea in reference to Dane-zaa communities (based on research by Robin Ridington):

technology has as much to do with dreaming as with the skills of the physical hunt, where hunting depends on the ability of a hunter to engage in enduring relationships with the animal-persons inhabiting the environment. Through dreaming, the hunter mediates his relationship with animal-persons by visualizing where the trail of the animal and his will intersect. Dreaming, then, becomes an aspect of technology...<sup>55</sup>

Through this section I have described how stories and dreams are forms of technology in Dene culture. Stories are tools that allow today's young people to evolve traditional ancestral knowledge into the twenty-first century. Dreams have also played an important technological role in traditional hunting culture. Through these examples it was my intention to illustrate the expanded notion of technology that I proposed earlier in the previous section. Technology can be intangible, experiential, within environments, stories and dreams.

50. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 127.

51. Scott, *Stories Told*, 87.

52. Scott, *Stories Told*, 108.

53. Scott, *Stories Told*, 87.

54. Andrews, "There will be many stories," 25.

55. Andrews, "There will be many stories," 25.

The role of dreaming in relation to hunting among the Dane-zaa, is discussed in the following chapter by Robin Ridington:

Robin Ridington, "Tools in the Mind: Northern Athapaskan Ecology, Religion and Technology." in *Circumpolar Religion and Ecology*, ed. Takashi Irimoto and Takako Yamada. (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1994), 273-288.

## Chapter 12: Human ecology, creative practice, and the north



Figure 98: Edmonton's outskirts, captured during a Yellowknife-bound flight. Photographed by the author, 2016.

This chapter is dedicated to explorations of human ecology concepts. The first four sections present a philosophical journey in which I examine the relevance of different literature in relation to my creative practice in the north—these sections are derived from one of my PhD comprehensive exam questions. The final section was recently written, and explores boundaries—I refer to boundaries in the context of lived experiences, biology and ecology. A common thread that links these different sections has to do with the relationship between the inner and outer realms of living systems.

The first section of this chapter introduces a philosophical journey, exploring the following question—*how can the field of human ecology contribute to more holistic and appropriate contemporary creative practices within the north?* The imagery presented in this chapter is based on artwork created by Behchokò youth (some combined with my own illustration work) between 2012 and 2016.



Figure 99: Page from a hand-made book containing drawings, illustrations, collage and handwriting, made in collaboration with Behchokò youth, 2012.

## Introducing a philosophical journey

The introduction to Alastair McIntosh's *Soil and Soul* provides a Celtic truth that speaks of identity and belonging:

a person belongs inasmuch as they are willing to  
cherish and be cherished by a place and its people.<sup>1</sup>

The first time I read these words I felt like blinders had been removed. I experienced a momentary sense of clarity regarding identity and belonging – issues which I have always considered to be complex, unstable, and shifting. Growing up, I lived between two cultures: Anglo-Canadian and Spanish. I have never fully harmonized this dual identity, and never felt completely at home in either culture.

Yet for a brief moment, this Celtic proverb, brought an underlying sense of truth that transcended my personal intercultural experiences. Indeed, belonging is about cherishing and being cherished. The proverb made me ask questions about my own relationship to place: have I not sufficiently cherished the places where I've lived? But this is beside the point.

More importantly, the proverb did two things. First, it expanded my notion of identity. Second, it simplified the puzzles and contradictions through which I tend to interpret my experience of identity. The dual role of the proverb – as simultaneously expanding and simplifying meaning – is the way I see human ecology in relation to creative practice in the north. Human ecology provides a philosophical understanding that enlarges my picture of life, while also helping me make sense of the contradictions I have encountered along the pathway of PhD work and practice. Human Ecology is, like Marshall McLuhan's notion of the spoken word: it "extends and amplifies", while simultaneously connecting and building relationships.<sup>2</sup> As I will illustrate in the following section, human ecology links elements of my practice that may otherwise remain incoherent.

In the following sections I will explore how the field of human ecology contributes to a more holistic and appropriate creative practice in the north. In order to do this I will review early, and more recent, human ecology literature—this review will cover the philosophical journey that has brought me to where I am today. I will begin, therefore, by briefly examining four human ecology articles from the 1980s and 90s (I will discuss their relative applicability, or lack of, to my work in the north). I will continue by discussing Alastair McIntosh's radical human ecology, and its applicability to creative practice in the Dene region. I will conclude with a brief discussion of art-making and Patrick Geddes' 3 Hs model, (how it connects to the over arching ideas discussed throughout this chapter). As with other parts of this thesis, my reference to the 'north' is based on my collaborative experiences in the Tłı̨chǫ region.

1. McIntosh, *Soil and Soul*, 4.

2. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 79.



Figure 100: Page from a hand-made book containing drawings, illustrations, collage and handwriting, made in collaboration with Behchokò youth, 2012.

## Brief overview of Human Ecology theory in relation to creative practices in the north

In this section I will briefly review Westney, Brabble, and Edward's human ecology model, and then critique a philosophical paper by John Visvader. These will then be followed by reviews of Jeremy Pratt's Ecology of Knowing, and a short, but very important paper by Cynthia Taylor. Connections to my practice in the north will be provided at the end of each review. Although I am not partial to several of these articles, I include them because the problems I encountered (in reading some of these) helped me establish a philosophical position in relation to creative practice in the north.

### THE CONCEPTS OF HUMAN ECOLOGY MODEL

A well-known human ecology model was described in Westney, Brabble, and Edward's 1988 text entitled *Human Ecology: Concepts and Perspectives*.<sup>3</sup> Upon revisiting this text I noticed that it is informed by a Cartesian framework, presuming a separation between humans and their surrounding.<sup>4</sup> This separation is most clearly described when the authors write: "The environments of human beings are of two major types: the internal environment and the external environment".<sup>5</sup> When illustrating their model, this dichotomy remains evident. The model places an individual's "internal environment" (which includes mental and biochemical processes) at the centre of three concentric rings.<sup>6</sup> Beyond the internal environment of the individual, the model places home, family, interpersonal relationships, and apparel on the second circle.<sup>7</sup> The third outlying circle includes school, neighbourhood, economic systems, church, transportation systems and other elements that are relevant to an urban Western lifestyle.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond its cultural bias, this model is an inadequate reference for my work, because it makes little to no reference to the following: relationships, processes, spirituality, and connections to land. Admittedly, the model does make reference to air, energy, land, and water – but, these four elements play a peripheral role on the outer edges of the third circle. This model, therefore, does not provide a holistic or appropriate perspective for creative practices in the north.

### PHILOSOPHY AND HUMAN ECOLOGY ACCORDING TO JOHN VISVADER

Another theoretical framework that I would like to briefly discuss is John Visvader's *Philosophy and Human Ecology*. Visvader's text suffers from many of the same problems found in the previously discussed model; namely, the author presumes a separation between interior and exterior, or the human and natural realm.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Visvader's view of ecology is mechanistic – that is, he describes a world "viewed as a set of interwoven mechanical processes".<sup>10</sup> This is especially evident in the following passage: "Ecology is essentially a study of natural feedback systems".<sup>11</sup> The idea of imposing feedback systems over the human-ecological realm, is both mechanistic and reductive – he reduces human experience to an abstract, scientific model of reality. Visvader, however, saves the most discouraging statement for the end. In the last sentence of the essay, he writes: "Nature cannot help us... we have to help ourselves".<sup>12</sup> This final sentence is reflective of the limi-

3. Quida E. Westney, Elizabeth W. Brabble, Cecil H. Edwards. "Human ecology: concepts and perspectives." in *Human Ecology: a gathering of perspectives*, ed. Richard J. Borden and Jamien Jacobs. (College Park, MD: Society for Human Ecology, 1988), 134.

4. Grant Gillett, "Indigenous knowledges: Circumspection, metaphysics and scientific ontologies." in *Sites*, 6 (1) (2009): 5.

5. Westney et al., "Human Ecology", 133.

6. Westney et al., "Human Ecology", 134.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. John Visvader. "Philosophy and human ecology." in *Human Ecology: a gathering of perspectives*. (College Park, MD: Society for Human Ecology, 1986), 123.

10. Gillet, "Indigenous knowledges," 5.

11. Visvader, "Philosophy and human ecology," 122.

12. Visvader, *Philosophy and human ecology*, 127.

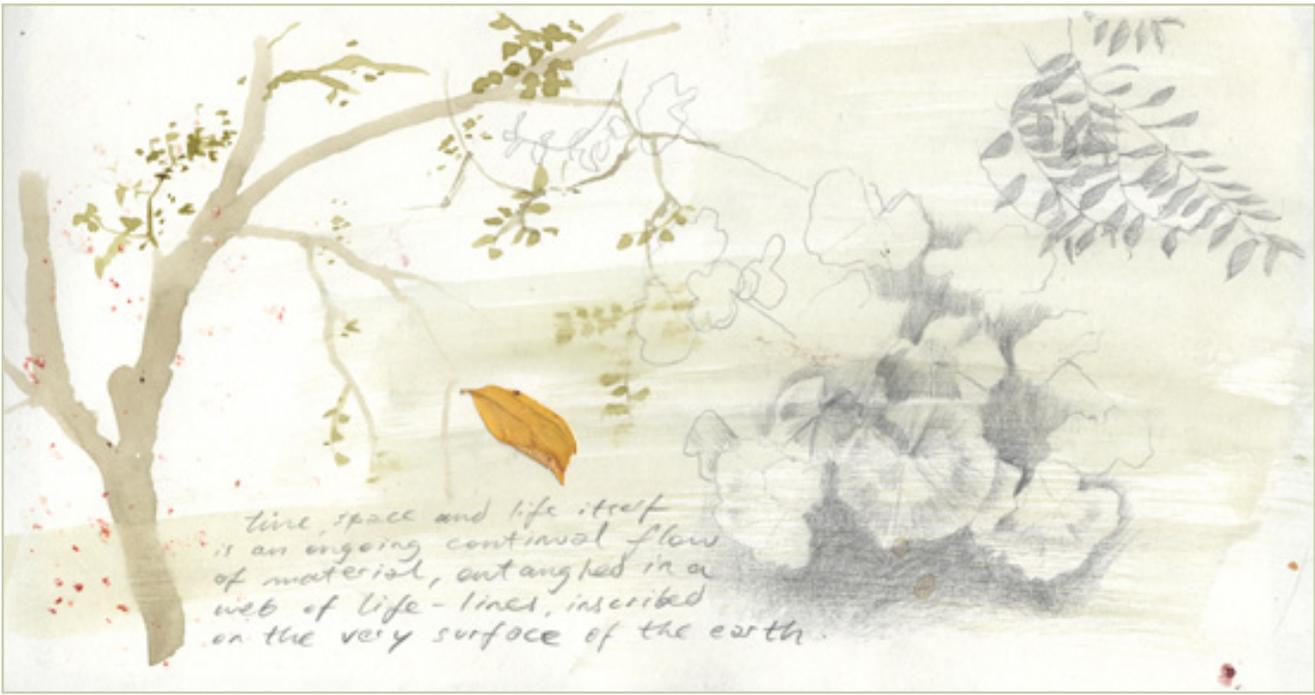


Figure 101: Page from a hand-made book containing drawings, illustrations, collage and handwriting, made in collaboration with Behchokò youth, 2012.

tations I find in many human ecology writings from the 1980s. The limitations I'm referring to have to do with epistemological assumptions—a modernist notion of truth that is based on a Cartesian model of reality.<sup>13</sup> Behind references to ecology, nature, and humans, this literature holds on to an epistemological position that separates and objectifies the world.

#### ECOLOGY OF KNOWING BY JEREMY PRATT

Jeremy Pratt's article, written in 1993, starts to provide a critical position that was largely absent in the work of previous authors. Pratt's writing appears to be informed by (what at the time was) emerging postmodern tools that "challenge power structures embedded in modernity".<sup>14</sup> Pratt attempts to deconstruct philosophical frameworks that Westney, Brabble, Edward, and Visvader did not question. In the first two pages of the article Pratt reiterates that "reality is a construction".<sup>15</sup> He describes how a particular "way of knowing" will provide, and limit, perceptions of the world.<sup>16</sup> Pratt's article, however, remains locked in an inner-world, outer-world duality. He does provide elaborate descriptions of the interaction between inner and outer: "knowing affects perception and conceptualization, and issues in specific myths and paradigms... environment feeds back to adjust action through changes in our myths and paradigms".<sup>17</sup> Despite such detailed descriptions of the dialogue between humans and environments, Pratt's theory remains locked in a binary predicament. Such ideas fall short of providing a philosophical contribution to creative practices in the north.

#### CYNTHIA TAYLOR'S RESPONSE TO ECOLOGY OF KNOWING

A response to Jeremy Pratt's article was provided by Cynthia Taylor that same year: Response to 'Ecology of Knowing'. Taylor provides an important contribution to Human Ecology literature (of the time) because she describes a way of knowing that "comes to us through feeling".<sup>18</sup> She claims that such a perspective was absent from Pratt's paper. Taylor's theory is based on, what she refers to as, "a feminine epistemology, a knowing that knows what it knows even if it cannot articulate how it knows". Part of what makes Taylor's article relevant to a creative practice in the north, is her acknowledgement of the earth. Unlike previous authors who described the earth through mechanistic, objectivist language, Taylor's perspective is closer to an Indigenous connection to land. She refers to the connection between the human senses, and the health of the planet: "If we want to stay healthy as a planet and a species, in balance with other species and Old Mother Gaia, the planet on which we travel in space, we had better get back to our senses – literally – and reinclude sensuality in our thinking and knowing".<sup>19</sup>

This final text by Taylor is an example of human ecology theory from the 1990s that offers a holistic, non-Cartesian description of human connection to the lifeworld. Her ideas would make an appropriate philosophical contribution to creative practices in, for example, a Dene cultural context. However, Taylor's text is an extremely short response to the work of Jeremy Pratt. Taylor does not expand on her central idea: that knowledge is derived through feeling. Nor does she elaborate on how such an idea may be applied in practice or research. I, therefore, conclude this section by looking ahead to the work

13. Gillet, "Indigenous knowledges", 5.

14. Alastair McIntosh. "The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy." in *Radical Human Ecology*, ed. Lewis Williams, Rose Roberts and Alastair McIntosh. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 44.

15. Jeremy Pratt. "Ecology of knowing: A brief conceptual statement." in *Human Ecology: Crossing Boundaries: Selected Papers from the Sixth Conference of the Society for Human Ecology*, ed. Scott D. Wright. (Fort Collins, CO: Society for Human Ecology, 1993), 95.

16. Pratt, "Ecology of Knowing," 95.

17. Pratt, "Ecology of Knowing," 99.

18. Cynthia B. Taylor. "Response to 'Ecology of Knowing'." in *Human Ecology: Crossing Boundaries: Selected Papers from the Sixth Conference of the Society for Human Ecology*, ed. Scott D. Wright. (Fort Collins, CO: Society for Human Ecology, 1993), 104.

19. Taylor, "Response to 'Ecology of Knowing'", 105.



Figure 102: Page from a hand-made book containing drawings, illustrations, collage and handwriting, made in collaboration with Behchokò youth, 2012.

of a writer/campaigner who addresses many of the issues discussed so far. His literature is critical of dominant “epistemological structures” but is also grounded in an Indigenous worldview.<sup>20</sup> I’m referring to the work of Alastair McIntosh.

## RADICAL HUMAN ECOLOGY AS A CONTRIBUTION TO CREATIVE PRACTICE

The Berger Inquiry of 1975, through storytelling, illustrated opposing conceptions of land: home (as described by the Dene people of the north), versus frontier (a perspective that assumes the north is a source of industrial development).<sup>21</sup> Throughout the hearings, residents of the region described their intimate connection to the land, often referring to it as a bible, a home, and even a parent. In speaking to judge Berger, Elder Fred Widow from Tulita, expressed this relationship:

This land, what we are talking about, this land, everybody knows. When you go out and set a snare and you get some rabbit it is just like saying, “Mum. I am hungry,” and she gives it to you, and when you set a trap there too it is just like saying to your father, “I want some money”, and you get it. That is why we keep saying our land and why we keep talking about it. If you got no parents this land is just like your parents that is why we keep talking about it, our land, because we know if our land is ruined our children will be poor.<sup>22</sup>

Among the many human ecology articles I have read through my doctoral studies, I am drawn to authors who declare the etymology of the word ‘ecology’ up front. Such texts, get to the root connection between land and home, as Dene elders like Fred Widow convey. The word ‘ecology’ is indeed “rooted in the Greek word *oikos* meaning household”.<sup>23</sup> This is the basis that makes human ecology an appropriate field to inform creative practice in a northern Dene context. Philosophically, human ecology supports an expanded notion of *oikos* (household), beyond a built structure – the notion of land as household.

Alastair McIntosh is one such author who reminds us of that ecology means home. Land is the foundation of McIntosh’s conception of human ecology. He makes specific reference to this idea in the opening page of *Soil and Soul* when he notes that “like the earthworm, we too are an organism of the soil. We too need grounding”.<sup>24</sup> McIntosh’s idea of human ecology, however, is not limited to physical terrain. Philosophically his work is based on what he describes as “the Scottish School of Human Ecology”.<sup>25</sup> A school which is “part of an implicit worldwide Indigenous School – one that takes its bearings from the perennial ensoulment of people and place”.<sup>26</sup> Through the remainder of this section I will elaborate on two areas that McIntosh explores: groundedness and spirituality. Through these topics McIntosh discusses a holistic concept of human ecology that can appropriately inform creative practice in a Dene community.

## GROUNDEDNESS AND SPIRITUALITY

Upon first reading the title of this sub-section—Groundedness and Spirituality—it may seem that I am referencing dominant themes from Western philosophy: materialism and

20. McIntosh, “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy,” 33.

21. Patrick Scott, *Stories Told: Stories & Images of the Berger Inquiry* (Yellowknife: The Edzo Institute, 2008), 135.

22. Scott, *Stories Told*, 25.

23. McIntosh, “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy,” 36.

24. McIntosh, *Soil and Soul*, 1.

25. McIntosh, “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy,” 33.

26. McIntosh, “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy,” 34.



Figure 103: Page from a book containing illustrations of the land—  
painted by students from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, 2016.

idealism.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, McIntosh does address fundamental issues of philosophy through his writing – the duality of materialism and idealism is one such issue that lies at the heart of his theory.<sup>28</sup> In *The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy*, he devotes several pages to discussing the historical roots as well as the significance of this belief system in contemporary societies. Unlike other present-day authors who tackle philosophical dilemmas, however, I find McIntosh’s approach to the materialism-idealism binary to be direct, relevant, vigorous and at times poetic:

I will ask why it is that our discipline often sits uncomfortably alongside both the modernity and postmodernity of the contemporary Academy. My conclusion will be that Human Ecology is, in essence, a premodern approach. As such, it poses an ancient but fundamental challenge to the very structure of knowledge. It requires clarity about what our premises, or starting points in seeking knowledge are. Specifically, it presses us to address the question of whether the basis of our values are derived from a purely physical or materialistic grounding, or whether there is also an underpinning to our being human that might be called metaphysical or “spiritual”.<sup>29</sup>

The interplay between the post/modern and premodern, as well as the physical and spiritual runs throughout McIntosh’s work. In addressing both the grounded nature of human ecology, while also emphasizing the spiritual dimension of the lifeworld, McIntosh provides a much welcomed synthesis. Within his literature, land is often the starting point: “ecology must start with the ground on which we stand”.<sup>30</sup> However, his text will often lead to, and end with reference to spiritual matters: “If we do not call back the soul we are as good as dead. Such is the challenge of radical human ecology to the Academy today”.<sup>31</sup>

McIntosh’s work resides within a very grounded sense of reality, which simultaneously connects to metaphysical, spiritual issues. The synthesis between these two ways of knowing requires, as he rightly acknowledges, a key philosophical role on behalf of human ecology. McIntosh notes that part of the task of human ecology is to challenge dominant, objectivist ways of knowing: “If mainstream epistemological structures are not user-friendly towards it, then we must think of our mission as being, in part, an epistemological project”.<sup>32</sup>

Through his work, McIntosh provides descriptions that make reference to the earth and spirit world, while providing a critical philosophical inquiry that challenges Western epistemological structures. His approach is holistic in the sense that earthly, spiritual, and intellectual domains are addressed in his writing. His work is reflective of the “3 Hs” (head, heart, hand) approach of Patrick Geddes.<sup>33</sup> In the following sub-section I will discuss the link between creative practice and Geddes’ model.

## CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

Drawing has been the shared approach behind each of the creative practices that I have been involved in during my career: graphic design, illustration, film/animation, and even

27. Adrian Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image*, 43.

28. McIntosh, “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy,” 31.

29. Ibid.

30. McIntosh, “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy,” 34.

31. McIntosh, “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy,” 52.

32. McIntosh, “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy,” 33.

33. McIntosh, “The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy,” 38.



Figure 104: Page from a book containing illustrations of the land—  
painted by students from Chief Jimmy Bruneau High School, 2016.

teaching. Traditional drawing may not necessarily be the most efficient, and cleanest way to begin conceptualizing a design or story (I have worked with colleagues who begin visualizing on a computer right after receiving a creative brief, and produce outstanding work). But, I do believe that drawing is the most engaging, and I would even say holistic way to begin a project. There is a hands-on physicality, gesture, and relationality (in pencil sketching) that is diminished in the detached experience of human-computer interaction. There is also ongoing creative insight that makes traditional drawing a unique way of knowing – it is a way of visualizing and thinking.<sup>34</sup> The act of drawing involves a dynamic hand-eye-brain relation.<sup>35</sup> There is also, however, a relation to environment that emerges through drawing. This connection to environment is not often discussed in contemporary literature on art practice. In 1923 Swiss artist Paul Klee, writing on the topic of sketching in nature, provided an early description of this relationship:

...there are other ways of looking into the object which go... further, which lead to a humanisation of the object and create, between the "I" and the object, a resonance surpassing all optical foundations. There is the non-optical way of intimate physical contact, earthbound, that reaches the eye of the artist from below, and there is the non-optical contact through the cosmic bond that descends from above.<sup>36</sup>

Through the act of drawing, Paul Klee describes a relational way of knowing the world. In the above quote he seems to be describing an experience of deep connection with entities in his surroundings as well as the cosmos. His experience involves making (a drawing), and feeling (his surroundings). I personally have often considered drawing (at its best) to be a meditative, almost boundary-dissolving experience.

This sense of relationality and dissolving boundaries, is one of the reasons that Patrick Geddes' head, heart, and hand model complemented my research on Tłıchq lands.<sup>37</sup> The model is also an appropriate guide for creative practice in the north. The model, like the experience of drawing, embodies a holistic understanding of life. Art-making can be a deeply holistic and relational way of knowing, compatible with an indigenous notion of "relationality".<sup>38</sup>

### **Creativity in the borderlands**

My research in the Tłıchq region has often involved careful consideration, and descriptions of, boundaries. The idea of fuzzy boundaries has informed how I talk about the relation between oral and visual storytelling, past and present experiences, as well as collaborations between community members and myself. In this dissertation I have often made reference to how the lines separating people, time periods, or material may seem to dissolve. From a human ecological perspective, boundaries are often described as ambiguous and shifting, but they are also considered to be discernible, at times visible and tangible—living organisms and ecological communities, after all, are contained within bounded spaces.<sup>39</sup> In this section I will discuss boundaries by making reference to an eclectic

34. Treib, *Drawing/Thinking*, viii.

35. Treibe, *Drawing/Thinking*, x.

36. Paul Klee, *Creative Confessions and other writings* (London: Tate Publishing, 2013), 16.

37. McIntosh, "The Challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy," 38.

38. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 7.

39. Steiner, *Human Ecology*, 28.



Figure 105: Overlapping watercolour textures (by the author), combined with John B. Zoe's writing—explorative work for *Talking Tools Faces of Aboriginal Oral Tradition in Contemporary Society*, 2012.

range of knowledge. I will refer to lived experiences, as well as ecology at the micro and macro scale—I will talk about microscopic organisms, as well as neighbouring ecosystems on the land.

I will begin with a discussion of the fluid boundaries within the context of my research and teaching experiences. I will subsequently talk about cell membrane as an example of a permeable boundary. I then conclude with descriptions of the dynamic spaces between ecological communities.

## INTERPERSONAL BOUNDARIES

The first issue to be discussed—boundaries between people—will make reference to intangible boundaries (these intangible boundaries are emotional and mental). They are discussed by Cree scholar Shawn Wilson:

As we relate this world into being, many... knots and connections are formed that do not take on a physical form. After all, my physical body can be defined by a boundary—generally speaking, my skin—that separates what is me from what is not. We all know though that our emotional and mental boundaries do not necessarily coincide with the physical.<sup>40</sup>

Intangible (mental and emotional) boundaries can serve a two-fold purpose—limiting certain types of interaction, while also enhancing rapport between people. This dual purpose is something I experienced during workshops with elders in the Tłı̨ch̨o region. During these events boundaries may seem firmly established, while at other times they appear to vanish.

On the one hand everyone sharing a space with elders during a workshop, respects interpersonal boundaries—we follow protocols that address when to speak and not speak, along with how questions are asked. Elders are respected at all times. In this way, boundaries are clearly defined and acknowledged. On the other hand, however, Behchok̨o art workshops are intended to bring elders and youth together in shared activities—it is our intention that through image-making activities, different generations engage in dialogue. In this way, boundaries seem to dissolve. As Shawn Wilson writes, humans are part of a large “web of relationships.”<sup>41</sup> Boundaries between people are a complex and shifting part of this web. As with other living organisms, the relative permeability of boundaries can block or facilitate interaction from one moment to another.<sup>42</sup>

## CELL MEMBRANE AS A BOUNDARY

Interpersonal boundaries are not unlike cell membrane—semipermeable. This characteristic allows cells to maintain their physical integrity, while facilitating the flow of substances. In biology, the term “selective permeability” describes how a cell maintains its integrity and cohesion, while regulating what enters and exits.<sup>43</sup> The membrane is a physical boundary that protects the cell from its surroundings. The membrane, however, is also capable of absorption and discharge as James Lovelock indicates: “Single microscopic

40. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 76.

41. Ibid.

42. Educational environments provide another example of how boundaries can assist or obstruct human interaction. As a design teacher, for instance, I require that students follow certain guidelines: respond to creative briefs, address client problems, and submit projects within a given time frame—through these requirements, boundaries are maintained. However, in the classroom I also strive to resolve, what Paolo Freire refers to as, “the teacher-student contradiction” through conversation and collaboration. In this way, I hope to dissolve boundaries.

Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 72.

43. “Selective Permeability,” Biology online dictionary, accessed July 31, 2018, [https://www.biology-online.org/dictionary/Selective\\_permeability](https://www.biology-online.org/dictionary/Selective_permeability).



Figure 106: Watercolour illustration—explorative work for  
*Talking Tools Faces of Aboriginal Oral Tradition in Contemporary Society*, 2012.

cells can take in oxygen and nutrients and excrete wastes simply by diffusion through their membranes to and from the surroundings.”<sup>44</sup>

Scientists describe cell membrane as a “fluid mosaic” because it is made up of different molecules, constantly moving in a fluid fashion—“similar to icebergs floating in the ocean”.<sup>45</sup> The cell membrane is a site of activity that is uncongealed, dynamic, and vital. This biological membrane also provides a carefully controlled boundary—separating inside from outside. It is a borderland between the cell and its surrounding environment.

## BETWEEN ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

Dynamic borderland regions also exist at larger scales, between different ecological communities on the surface of the earth. These are places where ecosystems overlap. In ecology these areas are called ecotones.<sup>46</sup> These are places that reveal a fuzzy boundary between biomes—like that between Arctic tundra and forest. There is often greater biological richness in ecotones (superior to that found in the biomes they separate).<sup>47</sup> According to biologist Eugene Odum, an ecotone “is not simply a boundary or an edge; the concept assumes the existence of active interaction between two or more ecosystems (or patches of ecosystems), which results in the ecotone having properties that do not exist in either of the adjacent ecosystems.”<sup>48</sup>

Ecotones reveal an integration of different parts—a mixing and merging of elements. My research in the Tłıchq region also involved a mixing of different elements. This collaboration has involved a synthesis of knowledge and media. In co-creating animated films different community members (elders, youth, government workers, and myself) worked towards a common goal—the making of a film. This research is an embodiment of being ‘strong like two people’—it resides in the borderland between different ways of storytelling.

### **Dissolving boundaries**

To conclude, I will briefly revisit the question explored in this chapter: philosophically, *how can the field of Human Ecology contribute to more holistic and appropriate contemporary creative practices within the north?* This chapter began with an overview of human ecology literature from the 1980s and 90s. I described the limitations of frameworks used by authors of the time. I then proceeded to discuss the radical human ecology of Alastair McIntosh, which provides a holistic approach to the field—one that illustrates the combined importance of land-based as well as spiritual issues. Moreover, his work critically engages with dominant ways of knowing in Western philosophy. I have concluded with descriptions of fluid boundaries, within biological and ecological contexts.

Human ecology is the invisible, but no less important, agent that connects the many parts of this research. Human ecology, of the Alastair McIntosh school, is relevant to every aspect of this PhD: Dene knowledge, creative practice, philosophy, and land. Human ecology has facilitated ongoing relationship building and media production on Tłıchq lands.

44. Lovelock, *Gaia*, 105.

45. Geoffrey M. Cooper, “The Cell: A Molecular Approach. 2nd edition,” accessed July 31, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK9928/>

46. Steiner, *Human Ecology*, 28.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

## Conclusion



Figure 107: Creative activities at Russell Lake. Photograph by Mike McLaughlin, 2012.

In this concluding chapter I will address the question on which this dissertation is based. How, in other words, can a creative practice bridge knowledge from the past with current and future generations? I will address this question by elaborating on a topic that has been discussed in previous chapters—storytelling.

As I have suggested in other parts of this dissertation, stories are a form of intangible knowledge that link us to the past—a reliable record of what took place.<sup>1</sup> A story can also serve as a tool, or instrument of change. Storytellers present events from the past in ways that are best suited to contemporary circumstances. Emphasis, length, and meaning can be adapted to present-day requirements—but the story in itself does not change. As Dene elders demonstrate, stories are stable accounts of historical events that reverberate through time, from generation to generation—ancient stories continue to resonate in the twenty-first century. Through events and ideas covered in this dissertation, I have explored this dynamic understanding of storytelling.

In the first part of this document I inquired into how images of home (many of which are decades old) evoke new meaning over time. In subsequent chapters, I discussed different ways in which physical environments and embodied experiences informed this research—by visiting Mesa Lake, for instance, elders recalled journeys from long ago, while recontextualizing stories from the past.

Chapters 5 to 8 were dedicated to the animated production of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*. These phases of the research brought various community members together in dynamic activities involving dramatic interpretation and mark-making. Creative activities in the present, in other words, facilitated a reanimation of the past.

Through the second part of this dissertation I inquired into issues of history, time, material culture, and human ecology, while suggesting different ways in which knowledge from the past is reactivated through activities in the present. In chapter 10, for instance, I explored how relationships endure and evolve over time—while also describing how activities on Tłı̄chq lands, including ceremonies such as feeding the fire, reinforce connections to ancestors.

In the final chapters of this dissertation I wrote about cyclical processes involved in the life of Tłı̄chq material culture, and concluded with a human ecology description of land. The final part of this dissertation reinforced dynamic relationships—between people, places, and stories—through which this research developed.

To begin this conclusion I will revisit a page from an old sketchbook. In the following section I will share a drawing created during my first trip to the Northwest Territories. As with my introductory exploration involving images of home, this old sketch evokes new meaning, years after it was rendered.

1. As part of the Delgamuukw case of 1997, the Supreme Court deemed that oral history could be admitted as proof in Canadian courts—to be treated equal to other types of evidence.

“The Canadian Encyclopedia,” July, 27, 2018, Delgamuukw Case, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/delgamuukw-case/>.



Figure 108: A sketch (by the author) of Highway 3 in the Northwest Territories.

## Arriving where I started

2. Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, 12.

In the spring of 2018, while flipping through the pages of old sketchbooks I found a drawing created during my first visit to the Northwest Territories (the image on the left). I rendered this artwork in June of 2011 while sitting in the passenger seat of Patrick Scott's vehicle, traveling along Highway 3, between Yellowknife and Wrigley (an 800 km journey). We were on our way to the Dehcho Dene General Assembly.

I was briefly transfixed after finding this old drawing. I remembered how, at the time of writing my Master's thesis in 2013, I did not consider this artwork relevant to my research. Crossing paths with this image in 2018, it seemed as if, over the years, the story behind this drawing acquired new significance.

I closely examined the range of graphite marks used to create the two overlapping road images that cover the paper surface, and realized that this small visual composition (25 centimetres wide) was the first drawing I made while in the north. It was the start of my work in Denendeh. The content of this artwork is a response to the continuity of road, and the seemingly endless expanse of rocks, trees and sky of the Dene region as experienced in 2011.

## The story behind a drawing

In formal terms there is nothing special about this drawing. Its line work reveals various transitions—from heavy, linear inscriptions, to subtle tonal variations, slowly built up while traveling the road. There are also multiple layers of lightly inscribed graphite texture in the spaces above and below the tree lines. This texture vaguely defines roadway and sky, while creating a soft, hazy quality.

I chose to present this drawing in this concluding chapter for two reasons: first, because it is a tangible record of my initial journey to Denendeh; and second, because new meaning has continued to emerge from this work, long after the process of making ended. The story behind this visual document is dynamic. Looking at the drawing (7 years after it was rendered) elicits memories of the routine behind a long road trip—which included many engaging conversations with Patrick Scott, stopping for fuel, and looking out the passenger window. The drawing, however, also reminds me of my first impression of being on Dene lands. Overlapping graphite inscriptions evoke my initial experience of traveling through a long, undulating roadway in the Northwest Territories—cutting through the rocky, precambrian surface of the Canadian Shield, and transitioning towards the Mackenzie River Valley. I was a guest on lands I had not visited before.

In making this drawing, I did not intend to render a faithful picture of the northern landscape. Instead the rendering of this drawing provided a way, as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy writes, of “seeing, feeling and thinking in relationship.”<sup>2</sup> Through this illustration I expanded my conversation with Patrick Scott, while connecting with the surrounding environ-



Figure 109: Details of material on Tł̄chq lands. Photographed by the author, 2016.

ment. The story behind this drawing, is the story of (how I started) building relationships with people and places in the north. The story has continued to grow since 2011.

### **A story is a living thing**

Since the time of the 2011 trip to Wrigley, this drawing has become something more than a mere sketch of the road. The drawing now evokes ideas that, back in 2011, I had not considered. The story behind this drawing has taken on a life of its own. The story is alive.

I first came across the idea that a story is a “living thing”, not long after the 2011 road trip, in the writings of Patrick Scott—who quoted Dene elder Philip Zoe.<sup>3</sup> When I first read elder Zoe’s quote, I became absorbed, and somewhat confounded, by the idea that a story could possess characteristics of a living thing, such as agency and growth.

Although in 2011, I appreciated how an oral narrative could be thought of as dynamic, I lacked experience and knowledge (of Dene culture) to grasp the significance of elder Zoe’s words. At the time, the idea that a story was a ‘living thing’ challenged my cultural assumptions about knowledge and reality. To better understand how stories are alive, I needed to question my own Western-informed notions of epistemology and ontology (in 2011 I had not undertaken such a task).

### **A critique of individualism**

One of the most deeply entrenched assumptions in Western metaphysics is that of individualism. This assumption, according to physicist Karen Barad is evident at both micro and macro scales: “humans, like atoms, are assumed to be discrete individuals with inherent characteristics.”<sup>4</sup> The concept of individualism is rooted in ancient atomism—a vision of the physical world “composed of an infinite number of particles” moving in a void.<sup>5</sup> An early version of atomism was described by Democritus in the 5th century BCE.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the influence of atomism in pre-Socratic philosophy, this reductive, mechanistic image of the world—based on atoms and void—was rejected by Aristotle in the 4th century BCE.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, for over one thousand years, atomism was mostly abandoned. Although the philosophy of medieval Europe was an extension of Greco-Roman culture, atomism is not known to have been a significant area of inquiry when the first European universities appeared in Salerno and Bologna in the 11th century.<sup>8</sup> Instead, medieval philosophy primarily engaged with Aristotelean logic, and Platonic idealism.<sup>9</sup>

In the 17th century, however, atomism experienced a rebirth. The most renowned philosopher of the time to revisit this idea was Rene Descartes.<sup>10</sup> Atomism, as described in the 17th century, gave rise to “the notion of the autonomous individual agent” in biological, and political terms.<sup>11</sup> By the time of the Enlightenment, individualism was on its way to becoming a fundamental belief of European philosophy—an ontological assumption. As

3. Phillip Zoe, in Scott, *Talking Tools*, 140.
4. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 5.
5. Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 267.
6. Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 21.
7. Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 61.
8. Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*, 140.
9. Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*, 13.
10. Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 278.
11. Gilbert, Sapp and Tauber, “A Symbiotic View of Life,” 326.



Figure 110: Collaborative image-making activities on the land near Behchokò in 2016.  
Photographed by Scott Portingale, 2016.

Rosi Braidotti reminds us, “Individualism is not an intrinsic part of ‘human nature’, as liberal thinkers are prone to believe, but rather a historically and culturally specific discursive formation, which, moreover, is becoming increasingly problematic.”<sup>12</sup>

The notion of the individual, as separate from the group is, according to Viola Cordova, integral to European thought.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Marshall McLuhan described the idea of “the individual or of the separate citizen” as characteristic of Western cultures.<sup>14</sup> For Karen Barad, individualism is intrinsic to Western ontologies.<sup>15</sup> Perceptions of reality in Western societies have been shaped by this assumption.

I decided to critique the metaphysics of individualism after revisiting the 2011 road trip drawing—the story behind the drawing led me to Philip Zoe’s quote, describing a story as a ‘living thing.’ Through this critique it was not my intention to arrive at an *understanding* of elder Zoe’s quote. Instead, through this critique, I reflected on my own assumptions about reality—assumptions that prevented me from appreciating (in 2011) the world view that elder Zoe was speaking from. In 2011 I had not considered how the metaphysics of individualism shaped my way of interpreting reality. But after uncovering many layers of cultural assumptions (as summarized in this section) I arrived at *individualism*—as a significant idea that frames my worldview.

To discuss the rich cultural context from which Dene oral stories emerge, I needed to question the metaphysics of individualism. Dene oral stories emerge, not through the exclusive work of individuals, but through a field of relations—between human and non-human animals, rocks, trees, and waterways.<sup>16</sup> Oral stories have agency—stories are living things (as Philip Zoe indicates)—because they are inextricably linked to a dynamic field of relations.

### **Ways of bridging knowledge**

Through my research on Tłıchq lands, community members have engaged with historical knowledge through a combination of traditional activities on the land, and a creative practice. In this section I will address the question on which this research is based—reflecting on topics covered in this dissertation, I will discuss how a creative practice may bridge knowledge from the past with current and future generations. As part of this discussion I will refer to the field of relations that connect story, community, and other entities in the region. The discussion will be presented in three parts—first I will address how, through research and film production, a story was brought to life in the community. The second part inquires into how the future became an integral part of this work. And finally I will discuss how film provided a dynamic media experience for community members.

### **BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE BY SITUATING ORAL HISTORY IN THE PRESENT**

The intention behind this research went beyond visualizing an oral narrative. During the time in which this research developed, I worked closely with community members to de-

12. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 24.

13. Cordova, *How it is*, 154.

14. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 84.

15. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 19.

16. The idea of a ‘field of relations’ is derived from Glen Coulthard’s definition of land as a field of “relationships of things to each other.”

Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask*, 61.



Figure 111: Russell Lake near Behchokò. Photographed by Mike McLaughlin, 2012.

sign workshops in which oral history could be *experienced*, through storytelling sessions, reenactment, image-making, and animation production. This research became a living part of contemporary Tłıchq̓ society.

The animated production of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* emerged from a field of relations—the many people, places, activities, and material of the Tłıchq̓ region. Multiple journeys, activities on the land, and creative work provided opportunities for the contemporary relevance of Edzo’s journey to be discussed, reenacted and visualized by elders and youth. Situating oral history within contemporary Tłıchq̓ society (through the range of lived experiences discussed in this dissertation) became a first key step in bridging knowledge from the past with the present.

## BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE BY LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Creative activities that led to the animated production of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, helped bring history to life in the present, while also shaping the future. Through the making of this film, community members considered how Edzo’s journey will remain a vital part of Tłıchq̓ society for years to come. As Tłıchq̓ Grand Chief George Mackenzie indicated during the June, 2018 film screening: “we’re sending information to continue to use in the future.”<sup>17</sup>

The future has been a constant topic of discussion throughout this research. Making the animated film provided a way of shaping the future through a creative process. In this sense, this research is closely aligned with aspects of speculative design that consider “possible futures.”<sup>18</sup> Different aspects of our research, film production, and post production served as “tools to better understand the present and to discuss the kind of future people want.”<sup>19</sup> In making this film, Behchok̓ community members carefully considered how spoken words, events, and visuals (presented in the film) will be interpreted by young people today and tomorrow. Elder Philip Husky, who was also present during the 2018 community screening, reflected on this idea when he said that this project would help in “teaching youth to use the words of elders in the future.”<sup>20</sup>

A key step in bridging ancestral knowledge with contemporary Tłıchq̓ society has therefore, involved careful consideration of *the future*. In other words, throughout this research we have considered how this film will resonate in tomorrow’s world. The future is, in part, shaped by material created in the present. The very process of making this film, in fact, has already led to discussions of how Edzo’s journey offers a forward-looking message of healing and reconciliation.<sup>21</sup> Past, present, and future, therefore, are integral when considering the ongoing significance of ancestral knowledge on Tłıchq̓ lands.

## BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE BY CREATING A DYNAMIC MEDIA EXPERIENCE

The animated version of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* presents an illusion of movement. Thousands of hand drawn frames (12 for every second) appear in rapid succession, bringing people, animals, and landscapes to life. By pausing the film, however, I am

17. George Mackenzie, conversation with the author, June 6, 2018.

18. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative everything: design, fiction, and social dreaming* (Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 2013), 2.

19. Ibid.

20. Phillip Husky, conversation with the author, June 6, 2018.

21. Tony Rabesca, conversation with the author, June 6, 2018.

22. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image*, 54.

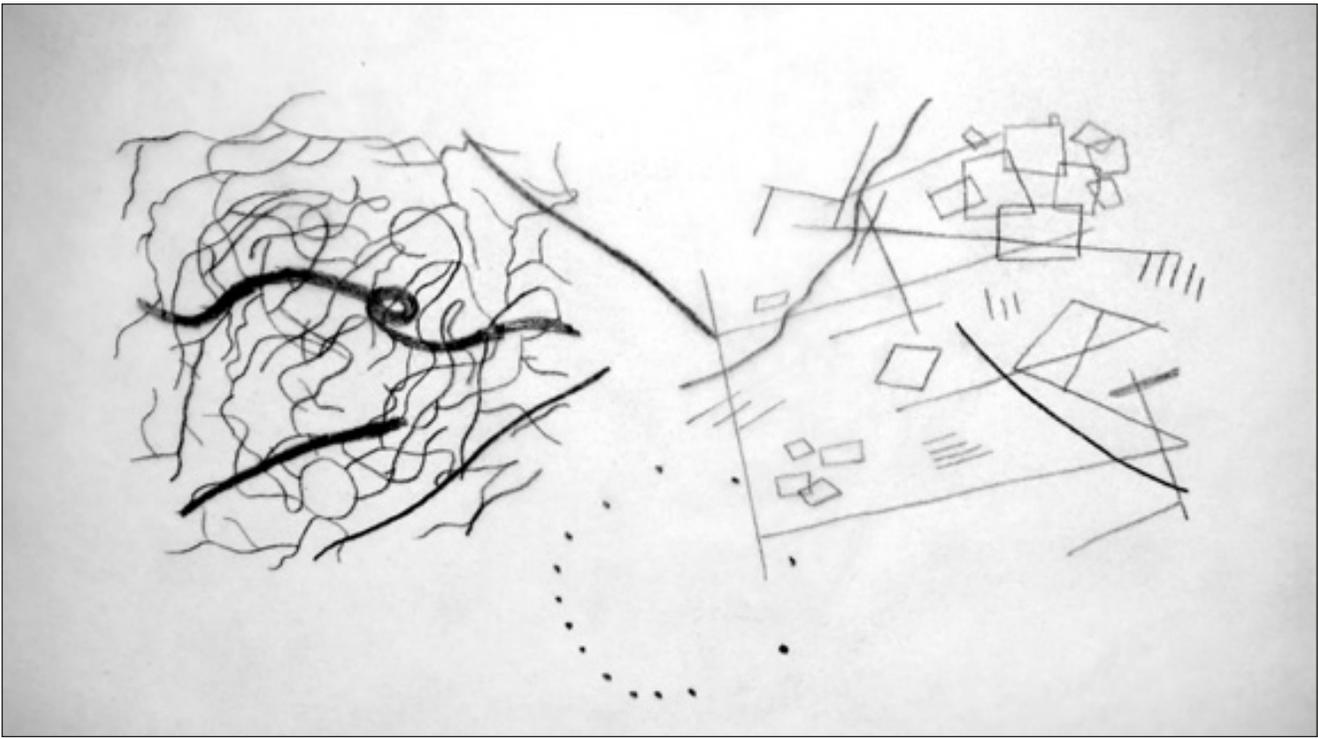


Figure 112: Interpretations of a 'process-relational' view of the world (from the short film *Lines*). Illustrated by the author, 2016.

able to distinguish a still image amongst the flux of activity—line work, texture, and detail of an individual drawing becomes visible.

Pressing the pause button on a film creates a jarring effect—fluid time-based activity is brought to an abrupt halt. The effect is the opposite of “metamorphosis” and “transformation” (evident in the earliest animations).<sup>22</sup> The effect is that of suspension and discontinuation.

But when viewed at regular speed the individual frame (of a film) is not perceived as an independent unit. Rather, each frame provides continuity between the image situated before and after. The relationship between images—appearing in sequence—is an essential part of animation. This relationship creates the “flow of imagery”, characteristic of the medium.<sup>23</sup> In *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, for instance, individual frames are not discernible, instead the animation reveals continually changing graphite textures, human silhouettes moving across screen, and an ongoing sense of transformation.

The images of an animated film flow into one another. To say that images *flow*, is to find common ground between animation and a “process-relational” view of the world—one that focuses, as Adrian Ivakhiv writes, “on the dynamism by which things are perpetually moving forward.”<sup>24</sup> This view is also aligned with the “constant motion and flux... energy waves” of Native Science, as described by Leroy Little Bear.<sup>25</sup>

In animated cinema, images flow. In the case of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, however, it is not just images that flow—the film, itself, also flows. The animation, in other words, is a form of digital information that will flow through schools, cultural events, and communities in the north. As a digital product, the film is like Marshall McLuhan’s description of “electric media”—it is “organic in character” and creates “a total field of interacting events.”<sup>26</sup>

The animated version of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* is a malleable form of communicable knowledge. It can be projected in schools and other public venues throughout the region. It can also be screened at cultural events throughout Canada, broadcast on television, and presented at international film festivals. This film will also be available to view online, in private spaces, and on hand-held devices.

Dynamic media experience—the capacity to flow—is the third way in which knowledge from the past may be bridged with the present and future. Time-based media provides a new way to experience oral history—integrated within a vast, interconnected media ecology.<sup>27</sup> Animated interpretations of oral stories can become a vibrant, living part of contemporary Tłı̨chǫ society (as opposed to an archival document)—Patrick Scott has reflected on this idea: “I believe it is vital that the current generation of Dene find the tools to ensure the sustainability of their oral tradition, not as a legacy of a bygone era, relegated to their museum archival data bases but as a modern life force, vibrant even in the wake of the contemporary electronic age.”<sup>28</sup> Films emerging from our research have become part of a larger field of relations—an integral part of the human ecological context of each community. The process of making each film engages community participants in creative

23. Wells, *The fundamentals of animation*, 7.

24. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image*, 42.

25. Little Bear, “Forward,” x.

26. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 248.

27. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image*, 348.

Adrian Ivakhiv provides a thorough discussion of the dynamic interrelations at play (involving information, physical material, ecosystems, and people) in his interpretation of media ecology. Matthew Fuller (in *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*) has also referenced this term—he draws from Felix Guattari and Gregory Bateson in his description of the concept.

28. Scott, *Talking Tools*, 254.

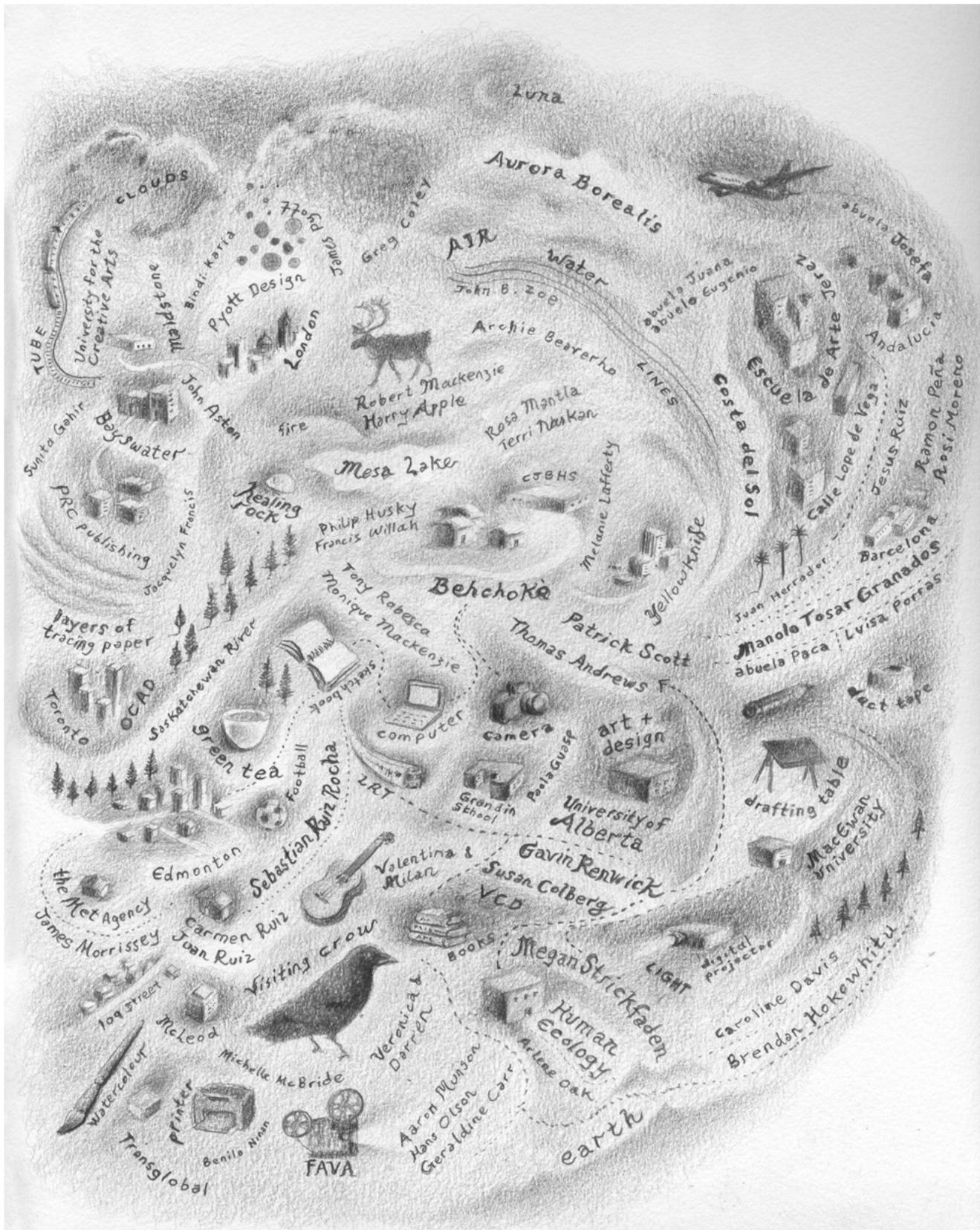


Figure 113: Drawing exploring a field of relationships, by the author, 2016.

practice. Once the production is completed, the film provides a way to disseminate cultural knowledge to current and future generations. The story behind each film, however, remains a 'living thing.'

### **Field of relations**

As part of this chapter I have revisited previously covered topics, while sharing new material. I began by exploring the story behind a drawing created in 2011, continued with a critique of individualism, and followed with descriptions of how a creative practice can help bridge knowledge from the past with the present and future. I have briefly summarized several years of research in these final pages. In writing this summary, however, I was also reminded of the transformative nature of this collaboration.

Throughout this research I worked with community members, on a long term project, intended to bring positive change to the Tłıchq region. As a result of working on this project, I have also experienced my own personal changes. My life story has been transformed through the long term process of working on Tłıchq lands.

Since 2011 I have been introduced to a culture and way of life that I was unfamiliar with. My experience of working in the north has been an immensely rich learning experience. It has led me to question my worldview—at times reconsidering assumptions about reality itself. Perception of land and history, along with my understanding of human interconnectedness, has changed since I first visited Denendeh.

During my time in the north I have worked towards respectfully following cultural protocol, fostering dialogue, while sharing my skills as a designer and filmmaker. This research has led to a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge—a creative collaboration based on two ways of storytelling. The results of this collaboration have led to the creation of animated films that serve as educational and cultural resources. One of the most important outcomes of this research, however, has to do with interconnectedness. This research has led to a creative alliance and friendship that developed as a result of my journeys to the north. Relationships are the outcome that will sustain this work for years to come.

I conclude with an extended acknowledgement of people, places, and things that have made this research possible. This acknowledgement is presented in hand rendered form (see image on the left). My work in the Tłıchq region has resulted from guidance, generosity, patience, and/or love offered by people who have been part of my life before and during my journeys to the north.

This acknowledgement is a personal field of relations (that made this research possible). I am indebted to these people, places, and things. I am alive inasmuch as I build and sustain these relationships.

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# Appendices

## An expanded description of methodology

This research is based on an Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM). In this section I will describe how I interpret this method in relation to collaborative research developed on Tłıchq lands. Drawing from the work of Shawn Wilson, Cora Weber Pillwax, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Margaret Kovach, I will describe a three part interpretation of this method—appropriate for collaborative research in the Tłıchq region (research intended to develop long term cooperation, respectful interaction, and beneficial results).<sup>1</sup> My interpretation of IRM is based on relationships, grows through a respectful adherence to cultural protocols, while bringing some form of positive change to the region. I will elaborate on these aspects of methodology through the remainder of this section.

### Relationships

Relationships are a foundational part of work described in this dissertation. An important part of this research, therefore, has consisted of social and communal experiences—informal conversations, walking the land, spending time in the community, and spending time with community members during visits to Edmonton. These experiences have fostered an alliance and friendship that continues to grow since my first visit to the region in 2012.

As part of this research, however, relationships also need to be understood from a broader perspective; namely, in terms of Shawn Wilson's notion of "relationality."<sup>2</sup> The work described in this dissertation emerged from sacred environments—barrenlands, trails, and waterways—that have been travelled by ancestors since time immemorial. Relationships between people and environments, therefore, have also been integral in the development of community-based activities.

### Cultural protocol

In developing this research I have also integrated the values and beliefs of Tłıchq society. Experiences involving spirituality, ceremony, or gift-giving have, therefore, been essential to this project. The feeding of the fire ceremony, for instance, concluded several workshops on Tłıchq lands between 2012 and 2017. When planning workshops with community members in Behchokq, formal introductions, prayers, and ceremonies were built into the list of activities. "Indigenous methodologies," as Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes "tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology"—protocols and cultural activities are "built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design."<sup>3</sup>

1. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.  
Weber Pillwax, "Indigenous Research Methodology."  
Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.  
Margaret Kovach, "Emerging from the Margins."
2. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 7.
3. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 15.

## Research that brings positive change

Through the making of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* I worked with government workers and elders in developing workshops and objectives, intended to bring positive change to the community. The idea of positive change is referenced by Cora Weber-Pillwax when she notes that research should “benefit... people who are connected to the research process.”<sup>4</sup> As I describe in chapter 1, collaborative activities, image-making workshops on the land, and historical reenactments have strengthened connections between generations, while introducing visual communication skills to youth. Furthermore, the outcomes of this research (in the form of an animated film) offer an educational resource, to be used in schools throughout the region.

## Art, design, and filmmaking

Through the practice of art, design, and filmmaking, different aspects of this Indigenous Research Methodology were strengthened. Creative practice, in other words, helped reinforce relationships, while providing a context for the respectful adherence to cultural protocol—eventually, helping to bring positive change to Tłı̨chǫ communities. The combination of Indigenous research and creative production has led to synergy between different ways of knowing—involving rich sensory experiences, nonlinear and intuitive thinking. Furthermore, there is an overlap in how place can serve as a source of inspiration.<sup>5</sup> The making of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* (through community workshops) provided an experiential, hands-on process through which to celebrate and strengthen Tłı̨chǫ culture.

In concluding this discussion on methodology, I will note that my PhD work in the Tłı̨chǫ region is an example of what SSHRC refers to as “Research-creation.”<sup>6</sup> This type of research “combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation.”<sup>7</sup> As part of my work in the north, the process of creation is “situated within the research activity.”<sup>8</sup> The co-created animation that emerged through my collaboration on Tłı̨chǫ lands was integral to the research described in this dissertation.

4. Weber-Pillwax, “Indigenous Research Methodology,” 36.

5. Tarkovsky has described how, in the process of filmmaking, “the life on location, the atmosphere on the set... can prompt one to new, stratling and unexpected strategies.”

Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 127.

Found “Monuments”, as described by Robert Smithson, provide further examples of how place can serve as a starting point for creative work.

Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, 69.

6. <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#a22>

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

## Literature review

In the following pages I will provide a review of literature from various areas of study and practice that have informed my collaborative research in the Tłıchq region. In the first two sections I will review written work derived from practitioners in the fields of art, design and film. Many authors referenced in these sections challenge simplistic or dualistic assumptions about creative practice.

In the third and fourth sections I survey literature from material culture and human ecology. Many contemporary scholars in these fields pose a challenge to structuralist interpretations of the material world. I will elaborate on how authors such as Ian Hodder, Tim Ingold, and Frederick Steiner embrace ideas about complexity when describing human-environment relations.

In the fifth section I provide an overview of work by Indigenous authors who discuss aspects of methodology, philosophy, and education. Scholars referenced in this section emphasize relationality and positive change as an integral part of research. These scholars also challenge foundational philosophical issues, that have shaped positivist approaches to research within the social sciences through much of the 20th century.

In the final section I review writings by non-Indigenous researchers working in Canada's north. Scholars discussed in this section are known for building respectful, long term relationships on arctic and/or sub-arctic regions. Relationships to land, animals, and oral history, are also discussed by authors in this section.

Before proceeding, I will acknowledge the importance of the spoken (as opposed to written) word in the development of this research. Much of what is described in this dissertation emerged through oral communication. It was through conversations, the sharing of ideas, and ongoing dialogue, in person, and over several years, that a mutual sense of trust developed between Behchokq̓ community members and myself.

In this dissertation, written words are often used to complement, support, or expand upon conversations and oral stories. The blending of spoken and written words echoes the educational philosophy that is often referenced by members of the Behchokq̓ community; namely, the philosophy of being 'strong like two people.' Knowledge derived from both oral, and written sources has provided a wide range of perspectives that communicate diverse experiences and ideas through which this dissertation developed.

## Art and design literature

### FORM AND FUNCTION: EARLY EXPERIENCES IN DESIGN EDUCATION

My early schooling in design was influenced by dualistic assumptions about graphic design (prevalent in industry and many educational programs in North America during the 1980s and 90s). The duality of logic and intuition, or the rational and artistic, were often used as frameworks when describing the work of creative practitioners.<sup>1</sup>

During my studies at OCAD in Toronto, as well the University of Alberta, the duality of form-function was often mentioned during project presentations and critiques. In class critiques of student work often revolved around how successfully form managed to function in communicating information.<sup>2</sup> Many of these teachings were influenced by Jan Tschichold's 1928 book, *The New Typography*.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to teachings about form and function, I was also (as part of my undergraduate studies) influenced by faculty and graduate students from the University of Alberta (engaging with social and cultural issues). During my final undergraduate year, I accessed literature that slowly shifted my interest (from commercial to socially engaged concerns)—this literature included: *The Idea of Design*, edited by Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan, as well as *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design*, by Ellen Lupton and Abbot Miller.

In the following three sub-sections I will refer to art and design literature that challenges many of the dualistic and simplistic assumptions discussed thus far. I will for instance describe art and design practice as a way to inquire into embodied knowledge. I will also refer to art and design practice that deals with participation. Before exploring these areas of practice, however, I will talk about literature that looks at how knowledge may be integrated rather than separated—moving beyond dualistic categories such as form and function, or logic and intuition.

### BEYOND DICHOTOMIES:

#### ART AND DESIGN LITERATURE THAT DISSOLVES BOUNDARIES

Since I began graduate studies I have accessed a range of art and design literature that explores, among other things, pedagogy, design thinking, and research. Most writings were published in the last two decades—although some material was written much earlier. László Moholy-Nagy's *Vision in Motion* is an example of a source, written long ago (originally published in 1947), that addresses issues relevant to contemporary design education and research. In the book he describes design as an integrative discipline—challenging the (nineteenth and early twentieth century) tendency of academic specialization and ordering of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Moholy-Nagy's writing and pedagogy were highly influential in twentieth century design education—after teaching at the German Bauhaus, he became the founder and first direc-

1. Frascara, Jorge, "Graphic Design: Fine Art or Social Science?" in *the Idea of Design*, ed. Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 1996), 44.

The design methods movement, which began in the early 1960s, primarily emphasized the rational end of the duality discussed in this section—Horst Rittel and John Christopher Jones played an important role in the early stages of this shift in design. By the 1970s, however, many design theorists and practitioners began to question the "machine language" and "logical framework" of the movement. Claudia Mareis, "The Epistemology of the Unspoken: On the Concept of Tacit Knowledge in Contemporary Design Research." in *Design Issues*, 28 (2) (2012): 63.

2. The dictum, "form follows function", originally articulated by Louis Sullivan, was applied as a guiding principle by László Moholy-Nagy, in curriculum development of design.

Findeli, Alain, "Moholy-Nagy's Design Pedagogy in Chicago (1937-46)" in *the Idea of Design*, ed. Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 1996), 35.

3. Alex White, *The Elements of Graphic Design: space, unity, page architecture, and type* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), 29.

4. Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, 17.

tor of the American Bauhaus in Chicago in 1937.<sup>5</sup> His work in Chicago provided a significant move forward in the definition of design practice, and the development of design education.<sup>6</sup> He was forward-looking in understanding the social role of designers.<sup>7</sup>

For Moholy-Nagy, design education offered “tools of integration” that facilitate a “meaningful synthesis.”<sup>8</sup> A similar idea was explored by Herbert Read in *Education through Art*, from 1943—in the book he raises concerns about the fragmentation of knowledge: “what is wrong with our educational system is precisely... our habit of establishing separate territories and inviolable frontiers.”<sup>9</sup>

Decades later, ideas about integrative knowledge were described in an article written by Nigel Cross in which he described how “scientists problem-solve by analysis, whereas designers problem-solve by synthesis.”<sup>10</sup> Notions of design practice and education, as discussed in this section, illustrate how “Designerly Ways of Knowing”—through non-linear thinking and knowledge integration—can be compatible with aspects of an Indigenous Research Methodology.<sup>11</sup>

## ART AND DESIGN AS PARTICIPATION

Another line of inquiry that runs through much of this dissertation is that of participation. In this thesis I draw from a range of literature that is inspired by, or rooted in, socially engaged practices—traced back to, among other things, the “social sculpture” of Joseph Beuys.<sup>12</sup> In the area of design studies, “participatory experiences” developed by Elizabeth Sanders have provided a reference point for community based activities involving creative engagement.<sup>13</sup> Sanders works from the belief that “all people have something to offer to the design process.”<sup>14</sup>

In my research, the design of activities for community engagement were also influenced by “the probes approach”—tools for user-centered projects that have opened new ways of thinking about design research (designing “with people rather than for people”).<sup>15</sup> The original cultural probes, designed by Bill Gaver, Anthony Dunne, and Elena Pacenti in the late 1990s are the most relevant examples applicable to my research—they were designed to reduce distances between people, build conversation, while emphasizing empathy and engagement.<sup>16</sup> Many of the image-making workshops in Behchokq were influenced or inspired by the open-endedness and creativity elicited by cultural probes.

The 1990s was also a time when researchers and practitioners associated with *Design Issues*, offered in-depth articles about design as a form of collaboration. At the time, Richard Buchanan, suggested a repositioning of “design in the context of action and interaction.”<sup>17</sup> For Buchanan, such an approach to design involves “cooperation in common enterprise.”<sup>18</sup>

Recent literature has shifted discussions of collaborative design from participation to “social conversation.”<sup>19</sup> Ezio Manzini has described “Dialogical Design” as a way of working in which different stakeholders “are willing and able to listen to each other... and

5. Findeli, “Moholy-Nagy’s Design Pedagogy in Chicago (1937-46)” 29.

6. Findeli, “Moholy-Nagy’s Design Pedagogy in Chicago (1937-46)” 31.

7. In *Vision in Motion*, Moholy-Nagy wrote that “quality of design is dependent not alone on function, science, and technological processes, but also upon social consciousness”

Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, 55.

Later in the century, Richard Buchanan indicated that “the ultimate purpose of design in society is to conceive products which express and necessarily reconcile human values concerning what is good, just, useful, and pleasurable.”

Buchanan, *Branzi’s Dilemma*, 11.

8. Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, 19.

9. Herbert Read, *Education through Art*, 43.

10. Nigel Cross, “Designerly ways of knowing,” in *Design Studies*, 3 (4) (1982): 223.

11. Nigel Cross, “Designerly ways of knowing” 221.

12. Nato Thompson, “Living as Form,” 19.

13, 14. Elizabeth Sanders, “From User-Centered to Participatory Design Approaches” Make Tools, accessed July 24, 2013, [http://www.maketools.com/articles-papers/FromUsercenteredtoParticipatory\\_Sanders\\_%2002.pdf](http://www.maketools.com/articles-papers/FromUsercenteredtoParticipatory_Sanders_%2002.pdf).

15. Tuuli Mattalmaki, “Applying probes—from inspirational notes to collaborative insights.” in *CoDesign*, 1 (2) (2005): 84.

16. Bill Gaver, Tony Dunne and Elena Pacenti, “Cultural Probes.” in *Interactions*, 6 (1) (1999).

17. Buchanan, “Branzi’s Dilemma,” 14.

18. Buchanan, “Branzi’s Dilemma,” 17.

As part of my research I have worked towards the development of participatory experiences that Richard Buchanan, as well as Tony Golsby-Smith refer to as third and fourth order design. These orders of design involve levels of engagement that move beyond “the scope of the artifact.” In the third order, design thinking is applied at an early stage in a project. The fourth order often involves, among other things, a “transfer of skills” by which members of a community may continue to develop a project without the presence of the designer.

Buchanan, “Branzi’s Dilemma,” 14.

Golsby-Smith, “Fourth Order Design,” 7-12.

to converge toward a common view.”<sup>20</sup> Since I began working in the north, the practice of design has facilitated a synthesis of knowledge that allowed community participants and me to visualize oral history.<sup>21</sup>

## Film literature

In this section I will refer to filmmakers, film scholars, artists, and media theorists who explore ideas about movement and transformation within the context of time-based media. A common theme in this literature is what Jay Telotte refers to as “the power of transformation.”<sup>22</sup> In this dissertation I have written about transformative experiences on the land while also depicting transformation through moving images.

The technique used to create *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace* is that of rotoscoping—a combination of live action cinema (involving actors) and animation (traced by hand) which Telotte refers to as “hybrid animation.”<sup>23</sup> As with other techniques, rotoscoping builds an illusion of movement through the rapid succession of images. In describing the metamorphosis evident in the animated version of Edzo’s journey, I reference the work of film scholar Jay Telotte as well as Paul Wells. Furthermore, Adrian Ivakhiv’s notion of “processual-relational” thought has been cited when describing broad notions of transformation (on the land and on screen).<sup>24</sup>

The written works of filmmakers offered additional insight when discussing the animation production process. Andrei Tarkovsky’s “sculpting in time” provides descriptions of how time itself is structured, and manipulated in cinematic works.<sup>25</sup> The writings of animator Norman McLaren also inform descriptions of moving image production. For McLaren motion is an essential part of film.<sup>26</sup> Cinema “communicates its essential information, thoughts and feelings to the audience by means of motion.”<sup>27</sup> In terms of animation production, McLaren discusses the way in which “drawing is put into a continuous state of flux or metamorphosis”—the idea of fluid, shape-shifting line-work as the basis of animation is explored throughout chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis.<sup>28</sup>

In discussing the Behchokò-based historical re-enactment of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, I cite the work of Erin Manning and Brian Massumi—*Thought in the Act*—which explores creative practice (involving movement) as a form of thinking. For Manning and Massumi “thinking is in moving.”<sup>29</sup> Through the reenactment in Behchokò, historical knowledge was expressed through dramatic interpretation, gesture, and dancing.<sup>30</sup>

## Material culture literature

### FROM STRUCTURALISM TO IDEAS ABOUT MOVEMENT

In this section I will provide an overview of literature (associated with material culture) that challenges structuralist thought. I will also refer to literature that explores the link between

19. Manzini, “Design Culture and Dialogic Design,” 58.

20. Ibid.

21. Working in the Tłı̄chǫ region, elders have provided multiple versions of oral history—despite variations from one testimonial to another, a collaborative design process allowed us to find shared interpretations of past events, converging on “a common view.”

Manzini, “Design Culture and Dialogic Design,” 58.

22. Jay P Telotte, *Animating Space: From Mickey to Wall-E*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 27.

23. Telotte, *Animating Space*, 17.

24. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the moving image*, 34.

25. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 121.

26. McLaren, *Norman McLaren*, 17.

27. Ibid.

28. McLaren, *Norman McLaren*, 65.

29. Manning and Massumi, *Thought in the Act*, 43.

30. Descriptions of movement as a form of thinking, are connected to notions of embodied knowledge. Through my research, much of the knowledge shared by elders involved embodied knowledge in the form of: setting traps, skinning, sewing, or cutting. Through such examples, knowledge is in the tangible process of making or preparing a material thing—a tool, edible item, or other artefact. In the realm of art and design, tangible material has been acknowledged as a form of knowledge—as Christopher Frayling has indicated in reference to painting and sculpture: “thinking is... embodied in the artefact.” Donald Schön discusses a similar idea regarding creative disciplines whereby “know-how is in action.”

Christopher Frayling, “Research in art and Design.” in *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, 1 (1993): 5.

Donald Schön, *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 50.

material culture and memory. Structuralism informed anthropology and sociology throughout the second half of the 20th century.<sup>31</sup> In material culture studies *The Berber House or the World Reversed*, by Pierre Bourdieu, provides an example of a structuralist interpretation—using binary categories to describe a traditional structure of Berber culture.<sup>32</sup> Over a decade later, Jules David Prown also suggested that material culture theory is based on structuralist dualities.<sup>33</sup>

Recent material culture literature has challenged structuralist modes of interpretation, often questioning the divide between humans and environments.<sup>34</sup> Through his writings, for instance, Karl Knappett challenges the divide between animate and inanimate, or humans and environments. In *Thinking through material culture* he writes: “the unit of analysis is no longer the isolated organism or species, but... the indivisible process of organism plus environment’.”<sup>35</sup> Other authors that describe how people and material objects or environments are interconnected, include: Mike Michael (“These Boots are Made for Walking”); Karen Barad (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*); and Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol (“The Zimbabwe Bushpump”).

Ian Hodder is an archaeologist who explores current issues of material culture by referring to “the entanglement between humans and things.”<sup>36</sup> In this dissertation I cite his writings when talking about material from the land. Through the concept of entanglement, Hodder also addresses the issue of time in relation to material (I bring his ideas into my discussion of time in chapter 10). Knappett and Hodder (along with other authors) provide rich descriptions of the fuzzy boundary between people and their surroundings. However, their depictions of the world are relatively static. In other words, these authors provide little in-depth exploration of movement and change.

My interest in movement and change (in relation to material culture studies) has led me to the writings of Tim Ingold, whose research brings together, among other things, archaeology, art and architecture. For Ingold, human existence “unfolds not in places but along paths.”<sup>37</sup> Ingold’s writings are applicable to many of the experiences I share in this dissertation—from walking on the land, to drawing on paper.

Ingold, like many contemporary authors mentioned in this section, challenges the duality of mind and body.<sup>38</sup> Through his writing he also offers rich descriptions of how things emerge through processes of making. In his writings Ingold talks about the properties of materials, as well as the practical experience of physically engaging with tools.<sup>39</sup>

In the following subsection I will continue to discuss themes of material culture, relevant to this dissertation. But I will focus on authors who explore the relation between material and memory. This relation is one that carries through different areas of my research.

## MATERIAL AND MEMORY

Another source of literature that I will refer to in my thesis revolves around the subject of material culture and memory. Nadia Seremetakis is one author that inquires into how

31. Brody, *The Other Side of Eden*, 286.

32. Bourdieu, “The Berber house or the world reversed,” 1970.

33. In *Mind in Matter*, he referred to “fundamental” perceptions based on the spiritual and material, sky and earth, ideal and real.

Prown, “Mind in Matter,” 2-6.

34. The writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss were an important contribution to structuralist anthropology in the mid-twentieth century—this form of research describes the world through dichotomies.

35. Knappett, *Thinking through material culture*, 16.

36. Hodder, *Entangled*, 10.

37. Ingold, *Being Alive*, 148.

38. Ingold, *Being Alive*.

39. Ingold, *Making*, 117.

the past is embodied in present-day cultural practices. Seremetakis is best known for her integration of the senses and material culture. Her writings on “sensory memory” explore ideas that are similar to those shared by Tłıchǫ elders—communicating how tactile engagement with material may elicit knowledge from the past.<sup>40</sup>

Another influential author who combines memory and material culture is Paul Connerton—his writings are influenced by Maurice Halbwach (the philosopher who developed the concept of collective memory).<sup>41</sup> Some of Connerton’s recent writings examine ways in which societies remember and forget. I cite his work in reference to some of my own lived experiences from before and after the time I first travelled to Tłıchǫ lands.

Jon Anderson is another scholar whose research involves memory—he specifically explores the power of place to trigger experiences from the past.<sup>42</sup> His research is influenced by the writings of philosopher Edward Casey who explores how place is “constitutive of one’s sense of self.”<sup>43</sup> I further inquire into the relationship between place, material, and memory, as discussed in this section, in parts 1 and 2 of this dissertation.

### **Human Ecology literature**

Through this brief overview of human ecology literature I will discuss how scholars in the field moved from relatively reductive, Cartesian descriptions (of human-environment relations), to explorations of complexity and change. Recent human ecology literature has challenged dualistic thinking, and laid the groundwork for elaborate reflections and rich descriptions (from the mid-90s onwards).

Example of dualistic thinking (from the 1980s) are found in John Visvader’s *Philosophy and Human Ecology*, and Westney, Brabble and Edwards “Concepts in Human Ecology” model.<sup>44</sup> By the mid 90s, we find more complex, multi-faceted illustrations of human-environment relations. For instance, Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development, although highly structured, does provide a more nuanced picture of the world—he differentiates between micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono systems.<sup>45</sup>

At the same time (in the mid 90s) researchers began to question the separation of systems, evident in the above mentioned literature. Authors began to challenge the philosophical framework of earlier writers—through these inquiries we find postmodern critiques of dominant ways of knowing. Jeremy Pratt (in *Ecology of Knowing*), and Cynthia Taylor (Response to ‘*Ecology of Knowing*’) challenged structuralist descriptions from the past—the latter described a way of knowing that “comes to us through feeling.”<sup>46</sup> Through her writing, Cynthia Taylor also acknowledges the earth by using language that (unlike earlier authors) is non-objectivist, non-mechanistic.<sup>47</sup>

In 2002, environmental designer Frederick Steiner wrote the book, *Human Ecology: Following Nature’s Lead*. Influenced by several fields of study (including the sciences, social sciences, and design) Steiner offers interdisciplinary descriptions of human-environment

40. Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 7. Marshall McLuhan is another writer who explored the senses in relation to material culture. McLuhan often referred to technology as an extension of the human nervous system.

41. Connerton, “Cultural Memory,” 315.

42. Anderson, “Talking whilst walking,” 258

43. Anderson, “Talking whilst walking,” 255

44. Visvader, “Philosophy and human ecology,” 123.

45. Urie Bronfenbrenner, “Ecological models of human development” in *International encyclopedia of education*, ed. Torsten Husén and Neville Postlethwaite (New York: Elsevier Science, 1994), 1645-1646.

46. Taylor, “Response to ‘Ecology of Knowing,’” 144.

47. Taylor, “Response to ‘Ecology of Knowing,’” 105.

relations. At times, Steiner makes reference to James Lovelock, when describing the earth as Gaia—"a self-regulating entity with the capacity to keep our planet healthy by controlling the chemical and physical environment."<sup>48</sup> Unlike the rigid and compartmentalized systems discussed by earlier scholars, Steiner describes living systems "as changing and complex"—furthermore, Steiner also refers to how boundaries are fluid and overlapping.<sup>49</sup> The earth, along with its inhabitants are part of complex, dynamic processes, as described in Steiner's book.

In terms of more recent literature I reference Alastair McIntosh—a writer, academic and activist, who, unlike previous authors discussed in this section, speaks from what he refers to as "the Scottish School of Human Ecology", which he sees being part of an "implicit worldwide Indigenous School."<sup>50</sup> Within this dissertation, it is Alastair McIntosh that has provided the most relevant human ecology literature—informing multiple chapters in each section of this document. Through much of his work, McIntosh addresses issues of epistemology—he considers clarity about the "starting points in seeking knowledge" to be important in research.<sup>51</sup> He also challenges the fragmentation of knowledge in academic contexts—as an alternative, he describes integrated knowledge based on Patrick Geddes' head-heart-hand model.<sup>52</sup>

McIntosh's work is a form of "Radical Human Ecology."<sup>53</sup> He addresses issues of land, community, and spirituality that pose a challenge to the contemporary academy. In the following section I will talk about literature that also poses a challenge, not only to the academy, but to the very structure of Western knowledge. I am referring to literature written by Indigenous authors who tackle a range of topics—among other things, decolonization, research methodologies, history, and philosophy.

### **Methodology, philosophy, and education literature by Indigenous researchers**

In this section I will review literature written by Indigenous authors (from across North America as well as New Zealand), covering areas of methodology, philosophy, and education. Many of the following scholars discuss the significant role that relationships play in research. The "researcher's voice" is also emphasized in these writings.<sup>54</sup>

Through reflexivity, this literature challenges forms of social research that adhere to principles of "positivism" and "naturalism."<sup>55</sup> Authors referenced in this section, for instance, describe research that facilitates: relationship building, intergenerational dialogue, and positive change. I will begin this overview by discussing the work of researchers that write about methodology. I will conclude with a summary of work that revolves around philosophy, and education.

Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* offers rich and detailed descriptions of Indigenous Research Methods. In the book, Wilson explains how foundational philosophical issues (including ontology and epistemology) can be addressed in research.<sup>56</sup> *Research is Ceremony* has influenced the writing of this dissertation. My decision to include personal

48. Steiner, *Human Ecology*, 146.

49. Steiner, *Human Ecology*, 4.

50. McIntosh, "The challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy," 33-34.

51. McIntosh, "The challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy," 31

52. McIntosh, "The challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy," 37

53. McIntosh, "The challenge of Radical Human Ecology to the Academy," 31

54. Four Arrows, *The Authentic Dissertation*, 2.

55. Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 10.

56. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 9.

stories, first person accounts, and the names of participants, was in part derived from Wilson's style of writing.

Another significant book on research methods that influenced this thesis is *Decolonizing Methodologies* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith. In the book, the author provides a critical overview of how imperialism is embedded in research—she is especially critical of social science investigations that reinforce “imperial beliefs about the Other”—beliefs that historically helped to secure European control of Indigenous lands.<sup>57</sup> In terms of methodologies, Smith considers values, behaviours, and cultural protocols to be an integral part of an Indigenous research methodology.<sup>58</sup> She describes these protocols as “‘factors’ to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design.”<sup>59</sup>

Similar to Tuhiwai Smith's ideas on cultural protocols, Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett propose that researchers reveal their identities.<sup>60</sup> The authors indicate that “Ethnocentric writing can be avoided... if the writer reveals his or her epistemological location at the outset through a brief introductory autobiography.”<sup>61</sup> Along with the work of Shawn Wilson, this text by Absolon and Willett, was inspirational and influential in my own writing.

Additional literature referenced in this dissertation include works of philosophy. In part of two of this thesis, the work of Hispanic-Apache philosopher Viola Cordova is referred to when describing issues of time. Cordova challenges the Euro-Christian idea of the universe as finite—based on a temporal beginning, in terms of a “Big Bang” or a moment of “Creation.”<sup>62</sup> As an alternative, Cordova depicts the universe as “infinite but cyclical”—involving “constant adaptation to changing circumstances”.<sup>63</sup>

As part of my research, ideas about Indigenous philosophy are also derived from the work of renowned Blackfoot scholar Leroy Little Bear. In his forward to a book written by Gregory Cajete he discusses “Native American science” based on ideas of “interrelationships” and “constant motion”.<sup>64</sup> Similar to Cordova, Little Bear has also played an important role in advancing Indigenous philosophy from North America. For a more poetic reflection on Indigenous philosophy I have also referenced Marijo Moore and Trace A. Demeyers' edited collection, *Unraveling the Spreading Cloth of Time*—this collection includes writings by several Indigenous scholars and artists, exploring issues of motion, interrelationships, and cyclical time.<sup>65</sup>

Another scholar who addresses foundational issues of philosophy and research is Four Arrows (also known as Don Trent Jacobs). In *The Authentic Dissertation*, Four Arrows outlines several characteristics of research projects that are, as he indicates, “spiritual undertakings”—such projects “honour the centrality of the researcher's voice, experience, creativity”.<sup>66</sup> Four Arrows urges his readers to “move away from an over-emphasis on academic writing”—his celebration of creative research, with human and ecological values, was relevant and influential in the piecing together of my own dissertation.<sup>67</sup>

57. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 30.

58. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 15.

59. Ibid.

60. Absolon and Willett, “Putting ourselves forward,” 107.

61. Ibid.

62. Cordova, *How it is*, 116.

63. Cordova, *How it is*, 119.

64. Cajete, *Native Science*, x.

65. Marijo Moore and Trace A. Demeyers, eds., *Unraveling the Spreading Cloth of Time: Indigenous Thoughts Concerning the Universe* (Candler NC: Renegade Planets Publishing, 2013).

66. Four Arrows, *The Authentic Dissertation*, 2.

67. Ibid.

Scholars from the field of education, who offer critical insight into issues of pedagogy and research, have also been referenced in parts one and two of this document. Chickasaw scholar Eber Hampton, for instance, challenges the idea that research is about “the production of knowledge.”<sup>68</sup> As an alternative Hampton writes:

Some people say it [research] is about the creation of knowledge; I’m not quite that arrogant. I have to say that for me research is about learning and so is a way of finding out things.<sup>69</sup>

Eber Hampton’s idea that research is about learning, leads me to the final part of this section (in which I will refer to Dene writers). As I mention in various parts of this dissertation, the spoken words of elders have provided knowledge and guidance throughout this research. Much of what I know of Tłı̨ch̨ oral history, and the regional landscape, was shared by elders, during oral storytelling sessions. I have also, however, learned much about the politics and educational philosophy of the region by reading the work of Dene authors.

*Red Skin, White Masks*, written by Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard, is one such work that, among other things, challenges the “politics of recognition” through which (contrary to popular belief) colonial power is reproduced rather than eliminated.<sup>70</sup> Coulthard draws from Marxist philosophy, Dene self-determination, and the writings of Frantz Fanon—specifically exploring the latter’s ideas about “self-affirmative cultural practices.”<sup>71</sup> Coulthard’s work provides a critical examination of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state. His description of cultural practices that are “self-affirmative”—not imposed by the apparatus of the state—provides an important reference for my own collaborative research in Behchokò, which is driven by the desire for positive change, as articulated by community members.<sup>72</sup>

John B. Zoe is a Tłı̨ch̨ senior advisor (to the regional government), who has published writings on, among other topics, self-government, ancestral trails, and material from the land. *Trails of Our Ancestors*, edited by Zoe, is made up of six chapters exploring the revitalization of Tłı̨ch̨ culture. This work also provides insight into pre-colonial history, travel narratives, and archaeology. Former territorial archaeologist Thomas D. Andrews co-authored two of the chapters in the book. In the following section I will discuss how his work, and that of other scholars, informed the writing of this dissertation.

### **Relationship building through intercultural collaboration**

In this section I will provide a brief overview of literature by non-Indigenous researchers collaborating in the north. Despite having different areas of expertise, each one of these authors has built trust with northern communities through long-term relationships, often spanning many decades. Situated in areas as diverse as archaeology, oral history, and political studies, the following scholars also demonstrate how listening, and travelling the land, can be an important part of research.

68. Drawing from natural science as a model, such forms of research are committed to an understanding of “social phenomena as objects existing independently of the researcher.” Furthermore, the goal of research developed through this lens is, as Hammersley and Atkinson write, “the production of knowledge.”

Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 10-15.

69. Hampton, *Memory Comes Before Knowledge*, 48.

70. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask*, 3.

71. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Mask*, 23.

72. *Ibid.*

I begin by referencing Thomas D. Andrews, who has worked in Canada's north for four decades. From 1990 to 2017 he was Territorial Archaeologist at The Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife. As part of his Doctoral Thesis, he discussed the significance (for the Tłı̄chǫ) of travel and mobility, culture and landscape, humans and animals.<sup>73</sup> His work is referenced in many parts of this dissertation—in sections addressing material culture, human ecology, and relationship building

The topic of relationship building with Dene communities is also addressed in Patrick Scott's *Talking Tools*. Scott's research revolves around oral history in the north, describing how cultural revitalization has emerged through collective storytelling experiences (often referencing the Berger Inquiry). Both Andrews and Scott completed their PhD studies through practice-led research at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee (supervised by Dr. Gavin Renwick). Their experience, sensitivity, and written descriptions have provided an ongoing source of information and inspiration as I continue to build relationships of trust in the Tłı̄chǫ region.

Thomas D. Andrews acknowledges the scholarship of Professor June Helm who, from the late 1950s to 1970s conducted fieldwork on Dene lands.<sup>74</sup> Helm is well respected in the Tłı̄chǫ region—in 1997 she assisted in negotiations for repatriation of Tłı̄chǫ artifacts (including a caribou skin lodge), from the University of Iowa to the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife.<sup>75</sup> June Helm's research is often cited in chapter 6 of this thesis, where I talk about the various stages in the 19th century making of peace between Edzo and Akaitcho. In *The People of Denendeh*, June Helm shares an abbreviated version of how Edzo and Akaitcho made peace—based on the oral testimony of Joseph Naedzo (1887-1973), also known as the Bear Lake Prophet.<sup>76</sup>

Other scholars who influenced this research include Hugh Brody (who wrote *The Other Side of Eden*), and Roger Epp (professor, and current director of UAlberta North). Dr. Epp has written personal and insightful essays, often considering what it means to live, responsibly, on Treaty Six land. In *We Are All Treaty People*, he reframes the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canada as a "settler problem."<sup>77</sup> In his book, Epp offers a candid, and critical account of historical assumptions (such as treaty making and terra nullius) that prevent a respectful post-colonial relationship from taking place.<sup>78</sup>

To conclude this section, I will mention the work of Julie Cruikshank. Through her book, *The Social Life of Stories*, she describes how people are "born into complex communal narratives" while experiencing, understanding and ordering "lives as stories."<sup>79</sup> Through her research, Cruikshank inquires into how northern Indigenous communities apply and adapt stories to changing circumstances. As with other scholars discussed in this section, much of Cruikshank's research is based on long term collaborations with northern elders. Respectful partnership and alliance provide a necessary foundation for northern research. Authors referenced in this chapter illustrate how long term projects may emerge from relationships that are both meaningful and sustainable.

73. Andrews, "There Will be Many Stories."

74. Andrews, "There Will be Many Stories," 10.

75. Andrews, "There Will be Many Stories," 31.

76. June Helm, along with Beryl Gillespie, researched nineteenth century written documents of events described in regional oral history (derived from trading posts). The making of peace between Edzo and Akaitcho, for instance, is independently verified in Hudson's Bay Company archives, and a document in the Provincial Archives of Alberta. Helm's extensive research in the Tłı̄chǫ region during the mid twentieth century has provided an important source of historical knowledge in writing this dissertation.

Helm, *The People of Denendeh*, 224-231.

77. Epp, *We Are All Treaty People*, 126.

78. Epp, *We Are All Treaty People*, 132.

79. Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories*, xii.

## Transcription of oral stories

### Francis Willah version (translated by Mary Blackduck)

Edzo came from Gametti area, and he also belonged to a large clan of people, mainly Tłıchq̓. They traveled to Mesa, where Akaitcho was—he was a Chipewyan leader. Edzo was a Tłıchq̓ leader. So Edzo travelled with his group to Mesa Lake, where Akaitcho had a village with his group as well—with ladies, children, his warriors. They had a large camp. Edzo traveled over there because he wanted to speak to Akaitcho.

Edzo was thinking there's just too much violence in the villages, too much violence amongst the Chipewyan and Tłıchq̓. Edzo said, this cannot continue, it has to stop somewhere. The war between the two groups has to stop somewhere. So, Edzo traveled with 3 of his brothers, and also with his son. His son was very young, but there was only 5 in this group that traveled to Mesa. So his brothers tried to convince Edzo not to go to Akaitcho's camp, because his brothers were afraid that he would not leave the camp alive, if they find out that he snuck into Akaitcho's camp. But Edzo first thought, he wasn't gonna stop. He was gonna sneak past by his canoe past Akaitcho's camp, and go back towards Gametti. But at the same time he thought, well, if Akaitcho finds out that I snuck by his camp in my canoe with my men, then he would think that I was scared of him, frightened of him. So he told his brothers and his son, you wait here for me on this island, you hide the canoes, and you hide under the pussy willows. I'll go in and talk to my sister.

His sister is a Tłıchq̓, but she was married to one of the Chipewyan warriors. So at that time, when he was beginning to sneak into the camp—it was on a shore, on a beach at the lake. There was a group of ladies that were getting water from the lake. He didn't know where to hide, so he hid himself under these branches, and they walked right over him, to get some water, and then after they got water, they were heading back to the camp, and they somehow sensed—I guess they got medicine—they sensed that there was a Tłıchq̓ in the vicinity of their camp, and these ladies were saying, there's a Tłıchq̓ among us, somewhere here. But they went back to camp and I guess, they knew, they knew there was a Tłıchq̓. But at that time there were a lot of things happening at Akaitcho's camp. So Edzo managed to sneak in and went to his sister's tent or tepee.

At that time, all they had was caribou hide tepees. So he managed to sneak into her tepee. He told his sister, go find your husband, go find Akaitcho for me, I need to talk to him, I would like to meet with him. And his sister was afraid for his life. So his sister told Edzo, you have to leave right away, you have to leave now. If they find out that you're here, they're gonna kill you. But Edzo was a very stubborn man, he refused to leave. He said he wanted to meet with Akaitcho. So his sister hid him under this pile of dry hides that were in a tepee. And she also gave him a caribou hide bag, which they use to store pemmican and dry meat. So she gave him that and then Edzo hid under this pile of caribou hides, and while he was hiding he kept talking to his sister. So his sister finally gave in and found Akaitcho, and told Akaitcho, well Edzo wants to meet with you.

At this time they were using medicine power. They had very powerful medicine. They were able to destroy each other with it. It was very powerful. So Edzo went back to the shore of this lake. Edzo (the way Francis described it was), he knelt right on the shore where the beach meets the lake. So he sat on his knees, and his knees were sitting in this water, but his feet were on the sand, out on dry land. And he sat like that. So Edzo came to meet him at that site, and because Akaitcho still wanted to continue fighting, to continue on with the war between the two tribes (the Chipewyan and Dogrib). Akaitcho had a long machete—Edzo and his brothers didn't have any weapon, because Akaitcho and his people were using medicine to destroy all the weapons that they had, that Edzo and his group had, they left all their weapons behind, so when Edzo went to meet Akaitcho, he didn't have any weapon with him to defend himself, except his Indian medicine, medicine power.

So while he was kneeling there, Akaitcho approached him from behind, because Edzo was facing the lake. So Akaitcho approached from behind and he started an argument. He tried to convince Edzo to fight with him. He was verbally abusing him, calling him all sorts of names, like he was nothing, he was like a coward, all of these things. At the same time, Akaitcho's desire was to continue fighting, he threw a machete, a long knife, at Edzo, not to hit him with it, but he wanted Edzo to use that machete to defend himself. So he threw this machete at him, and it landed right beside Edzo, in the sand. But Edzo didn't move, he didn't say anything. And Akaitcho continued, calling him all sorts of names, just to make him respond. Just to make him act. He wanted Edzo to do something to begin fighting. But this went on all day—this argument, this name calling. It went on all day, right into the evening.

And finally Edzo turned around, he slowly started to turn to Akaitcho. Akaitcho was standing behind him. Edzo started to turn around, but he was still sitting. Just moving around really slowly to face Akaitcho. And then he says: 'I took a trip in my mind using medicine power, there's a lot of beautiful ladies in the Sahtu region.' There's a lot of them. I guess Akaitcho was trying to use his own medicine power against Edzo, using these beautiful ladies to distract him. So that he would be thinking about something else rather than concentrating on Akaitcho with his medicine. But that also didn't work, and Edzo turned around and told him: 'what you're trying to do is not going to work, what you have is not strong enough—you think you can beat me—that isn't going to happen, I can do much better than you, my power is much more stronger than yours, there's no way you're going to beat me.'

So this went on, and when Edzo started to talk, all of Akaitcho's warriors began to shake because they were frightened. Again, they were using medicine power. The Chipewyan warriors knew Edzo was serious about what he was talking about. So they were frightened of him. Francis said, at that time, Edzo was talking in loud voice, so everybody could hear him. He says, even the trees were shaking because he was using medicine, and he says Khatehfwī, was a brother in law to the both of them, to Edzo and Akaitcho. Akaitcho really wanted to continue fighting, continue killing off Tł̄chq̄, but it was Khatehfwī

that kept convincing him, and persuading him not to kill off the Tł̓chq̓ people. So this went on, and then after a lot of convincing, a lot of arguments, a lot of talks, finally when it was getting late in the evening, that's when they shook hands. After they talked they shook hands. They both agreed that there would be no more killings. And if one member kills another member, and if it's found out, then that person would be punished for it—one of the warriors. Whoever, the warrior is, will be punished for it. So there was the agreement that they made, and a lot of Tł̓chq̓ people were happy because they were relieved because they said, we can finally sleep well at night. So Khatehwi told all the ladies at the camp: 'any dry meat you have, dry fish, pemmican, bring it in, we're going to celebrate because we now have peace.' So they had a great feast and they had a tea dance at Mesa. They say there's traces of it. You can see traces of where they had this dance. The celebration, or the tea dance lasted for 4 days, and 4 nights. So it's a very, very long story.

### **Harry Apple version (translated by Rosa Mantla)**

This story, that we're talking about, peace between the tribes, is very, very special. It's like a treasure that Akaitcho and Edzo have left for all of us here. It's like a government—something to do with governing people. And they left it for us to use after they have left the earth. And they left it for all of us to use, after all these years, from generation to generation. And today this is what we're focusing on, especially with our younger generation.

During the time that Edzo was to meet with Akaitcho, he made plans with his family, to see how they can visit with Akaitcho and his tribe, so he went to his family and he asked his sons: who can make a deal to negotiate with Akaitcho? And even his sons, they probably had medicine power at that time—so his son's told him, we can do it, and one of his sons as he was preparing his firearm at that time (his gun) he said: I can do it. And he was fixing his rifle at that time. And then, his father thought, he can't. He can't do it the way he's thinking. Because maybe his son thought he's going to use his firearm to visit Akaitcho and his tribe. So finally he said, no, I'll do it, I'll do it.

They thought that the father would come to negotiate with Akaitcho—they all gave him ideas and planning. So everything that they said, he put it underneath himself, and he sat on it, like he was sitting on it. And so finally he told his son, your way of thinking is to attract people... and that's not the way to do it... whatever they share with the father (his sons) he took it in, and he strengthened his medicine powers through the ideas his sons had shared with him. So he said, I'm going to visit Akaitcho.

Akaitcho was a big warrior, a big strong warrior, he was tall and big. Akaitcho came walking—tall figure. In those days they had a long, blanket like that sits over the shoulder, and almost touching the ground. And as he was walking, they thought that he was a fearful person. So Edzo, and Akaitcho came. But as he came Edzo wasn't facing him. He sat facing the hills... Akaitcho came and started arguing with him from behind. Edzo just listened and just faced the hills. And Akaitcho would ponder on, ponder on. Just getting

angry, verbally abusing him, accusing him—all kinds of accusations to make him angry. And slowly, Edzo from facing the hills, he started to move, slowly around, until he sat straight, facing him. And when he was facing him, Akaitcho's tribe, his men, they were in tears. They were in tears because they feared that Edzo had more power, and they feared that he had planned with his tribe that they were going to defeat Akaitcho's tribe. So as soon as Edzo faced Akaitcho, he said: 'I don't want anybody to kill each other, I don't want anybody to be slaughtered by the hands of your people.' And he said, 'if your people kill off my own people, they would kill my people thinking that they're killing dogs.' And I don't want my people to be killed the way you think, because that's not the way to do it. And I left it at that, so Mari Rose finish it off.

### **Phillip Husky version (translated by James Rabesca)**

Edzo's dad was originally from Gameti area. So that's where he raised his family. He had about 11 wives. So out of 11 wives, Edzo happened to be the oldest one. So that's how the family grew... during the war days. Akaitcho he worked either for the government or for the fur traders. He was sent out to slaughter people of every race across the country.

It's a long history... when they first headed out to Akaitcho's camp, one of Edzo's brother's came along with him to help him to talk, organize how they're going to do it, at Akaitcho's camp. When they got closer to the camp... one of Edzo's brothers happened to be in the vicinity. The dog even sensed the boss is in town. So he seems to be getting suspicious—the dog seems to be making some humming noise. So Edzo's brother realized that the dogs sensing that he's in town—might start barking (people will know it), so he went back. That's how they got to the camp.

Prior to that, Edzo and his family—the whole group—went on the barren land to harvest caribou meat and dry meat, and caribou hide for the clothing. On the way back, Akaitcho and his party were out there, when they were out there—I guess they're always on the look-out for one another. They tried not to make any attraction out on the land—anything that would alert of their presence. Somehow, by some way, when Akaitcho was out not he land, he spotted a broken twig. A broken twig signifies that someone's in the vicinity. Knowing the Dogribs were in that area, knowing the Dogribs must have went through to the barren lands. Somehow they're not going to stay there to long. They have to come back, so they waited for them, to run into them on the way back.

Edzo's group realized that the Akaitcho group are in the vicinity too. So they know exactly where they were at a given day and a given night. So they made a detour around them, bypassed them—being safe, so they could always make it back home without running into trouble with them. When they know they're on the safe side, the Dogrib group were really happy that they're on safe water.

Edzo thought it's not a good idea to bypass this guy—he's a great leader. Me too—a great leader himself. He might give a message to Akaitcho thinking that the Dogrib were

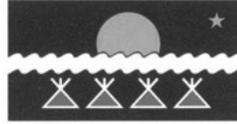
scared—bypass, detour around him (might make bad history). So what Edzo did was he told his tribe, his group to go over to the mainland: 'I'm going to go see Akaitcho myself, and I want (someone) you to come along with me.' Some of the group in the tribe decided to not come, because they decide that it was to dangerous—don't want to get killed. So Edzo convinced two brothers to come long with him. Or five of them decided to go back. So out of the five, two of them decided to go back to Akaitcho's camp, and that's when his brother, his dog seemed to recognize him, making humming sounds, so I guess his brother had to turn back.

So Edzo, himself, went in to Akaitcho's camp, at night. Time when ladies wanted to go out and fetch water to clean—washing. So they went in back for water with a can. And on the way in I guess he joined them. They didn't know Edzo was walking along with them—at night you can't tell nobody. While at the same time too, when they were walking back to the tent, he got to recognize the style of a tent—the language used inside the tent. Somehow he recognized his brother in law's tent. At the same time too, when he got close rot the tent, he had to do something, he had to use his actions, and language... he just followed them. He had to use their language to persuade them he's one of them... that's how he got into his brother in laws house. That's how he communicated with his sister: 'you're really on shaky ground. Akaitcho just about every night is talking about you how he's going to kill you... I don't think you're welcome in here.'

Somehow, he sends for his brother in law—brother in law came home, and told him that they're hiding out in the bush somewhere, I want you to meet them privately so you can send them a message—I want to plan to meet him tomorrow. So that's how they organized it, and there's a lot of body language.

Once they made peace at Mesa Lake, they came back, agreed to not kill no more... celebration took place...

## Letters of approval



**Tłichǫ Government**

Box 104, Rae Lakes, NT X0E 1R0 • [www.tlicho.ca](http://www.tlicho.ca)

January 11, 2016

To: Adolfo Ruiz

Re: Proposed Workshop Combines Traditional and Modern Forms of Image Making – Animating Workshop/ Research Project based on the Tlicho Legends/Stories – Edzo & Akaitcho Making Peace.

The Tłichǫ Government has received your proposal for the Animating Workshop/Research Project under the University of Alberta on Monday, January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

The Tłichǫ Government has accepted your application for the Animating Workshop/Research Project based on the Tlicho Legend/Story – “Edzo and Akaitcho”. The Department of Culture Management will assist and support duration of your visit to Behchoko, NT. Any changes or amendments to the protocol will require an approval by the Tłichǫ Government.

The Tłichǫ Government will require final workshop/research reports and completed animation projects based on the Tlicho legends/Stories – Edzo & Akaitcho Making Peace. We also welcome future partnership and possibility to explore other Tlicho stories into animated film. I look forward working with you and have a safe journey for 2016. Masi Cho and have a nice day.

If you require more information contact me at (867) 392-6381 or e-mail to [tonyrabesca@tlicho.com](mailto:tonyrabesca@tlicho.com)

In Tłichǫ Unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Rabesca', is written over the typed name.

Tony Rabesca,  
Culture Management,  
Tłichǫ Government

Figure 114: Letter of approval.

# Community consent

Following guidelines issued by the Tri-Council Policy Statement of Canada, this research developed through the long term building of trust between Behchokq community members and me.<sup>1</sup> As discussed in part 1 of this dissertation, the conception and planning of community workshops evolved through respectful interaction, while ensuring that activities revolve around Dene ways of knowing—bringing elders and youth together, adhering to cultural protocol, and (when possible) organizing events on the land. Community engagement has played an essential role in this research—stories, relationships, and images emerged from work done on Tłıchq lands.

1. <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/>

2. [http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter3-chapitre3/#ch3\\_en\\_a3.12](http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter3-chapitre3/#ch3_en_a3.12)

In order to maintain respect for community customs and codes of practice, I did not ask elders involved in storytelling sessions to sign consent forms. Instead, the following procedure was used for consent:

- Tłıchq elders provided oral consent for stories to be recorded and used for this research.
- Elders also provided oral consent for video and photographic documentation of storytelling sessions to be used in this research report.

The decision to request oral consent not only follows a proper code of practice, but is also based on procedures described in Article 3.12 of the TCPS:

In some types of research, and for some groups or individuals, written signed consent may be perceived as an attempt to legalize or formalize the consent process and therefore may be interpreted by the participant as a lack of trust on the part of the researcher. In these cases, oral consent, a verbal agreement or a handshake may be required, rather than signing a consent form.<sup>2</sup>

As part of this research I was given oral consent by elders to use data (in the form of oral stories, as well as photographs and drawings) in this dissertation. Community participants involved in the film production of *Edzo and Akaitcho Making Peace*, however, did sign consent forms—inviting artists to participate in the filmmaking process. This four page consent form is included in the following pages.

## Adult Participants: INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORMS

Study Title | Tracing Memories: visualizing the story of Peace between Edzo and Akaitcho

### Research Investigator:

ADOLFO RUIZ  
302 Human Ecology Building  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1  
Telephone: 780-289-7915  
email: adolfo@ualberta.ca

### Supervisor:

Gavin Renwick  
3-98 Fine Arts Building  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, AB, T9G 2C9  
Telephone: 780-660-8950  
email: adolfo@ualberta.ca

### Background

I would like to invite you to participate in the research project “Tracing Memories: visualizing the story of Peace between Edzo and Akaitcho”. This study began as a series of workshops in which young members of the Behchoko community participated in the visualization of the story of Peace between Edzo and Akaitcho. You are being invited to participate through your expressed interest. The study will be conducted as part of my PhD research, for the Department of Human Ecology at the University of Alberta.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study and workshop is to translate this Tlichq oral story into an animated film by involving Behchoko youth in re-enacting, visualizing and animating the story. The study will explore how image-making and animation may help bridge cultural knowledge from the past with present generations in the Tlichq region.

### Study Procedures

The full procedure for this study has involved the following three phases: 1) combined storytelling and art sessions in which elders shared versions of the Peace between Edzo and Akaitcho, and youth visualized this oral knowledge; 2) a re-enactment of the story, performed by youth in Behchoko; 3) the animation production of the story. In this consent form you are invited to participate in a final phase of the animation production (phase 3), which will take place over 4 days in Edmonton.

### ANIMATION PRODUCTION

Three people will take part in this final animation process in Edmonton. Each participant will contribute 12 hours of work, over the 4 day period period (in February, 2018). These individuals will learn about the final production process of making an animated film, and will help animate parts of the Peace between Edzo and Akaitcho. There will be 3 steps to this final production: 1) photographing of drawings rendered by Behchoko artists; 2) complete remaining landscapes for the film; 3) transferring of drawings and landscapes to a computer animation program. Each step is described in further detail on the following page.

1) *Photographing of drawings rendered by artists (February 20, 2018)*

A 4 hour workshop will provide participants with the required media and technical skills required to photograph artwork, using appropriate lighting and camera. Photographed artwork will be transferred to a computer.

2) *Complete remaining landscapes for the film (February 21, 2018)*

There are four more landscapes required in order to complete the animated film. The second day of the workshop will provide artists with an opportunity to render and photograph this material.

3) *Transfer drawings and landscapes to a computer program (February, 22 2018)*

A 5 hour workshop will explore how drawings and landscapes rendered by participants, are imported, and animated using Adobe After Effects software.

Participants in this animation production, will be invited to participate in informal interviews. Participants will be invited to respond to interview questions and their responses will be written down by the researcher and collected for the study.

Based on work produced during storytelling and art sessions, the story re-enactment, and animation production phases of this research, an animated version of the Peace between Edzo and Akaitcho will be completed in the spring of 2018. There will be regular contact as Adolfo Ruiz visits Behchoko.

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## **Data Collection**

Original artwork collected during this research will be returned to you upon completion of the animated film. Data collection, including digitized artwork, will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of 5 years following completion of the research project. We may use the data we obtain from this study in future research, but this must be approved by a Research Ethics Board.

#### *Data Collection*

Collected data may be shown in a PhD research exhibit and report, public presentations and in written articles. You will not be identified by name, unless you wish to be acknowledged. At the end of this form you will be asked if you wish to be acknowledged in this study.

#### *Data Return*

Original artwork will be returned to the main office at the Tlichq Government office in Behchoko upon completion of the animated film. You will receive a copy of the completed animated film resulting from this study.

#### **Benefits**

Participants in this study may benefit by becoming involved in the process of translating an oral story into images. This will be an engaging process through which drawing, collage, and various animation techniques will be taught and developed. This study will also explore how cultural continuity can be established by bringing together creative exercises, modern forms of animation, along with traditional storytelling.

#### **Risks**

The risks of participating in this study are minimal and no greater than regular participation in art activities.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary. Even if you agree to be in the study, you can change your mind and withdraw at any time before March 1, 2018. If you would like to withdraw, please contact Adolfo Ruiz. If you would like to withdraw your artwork, please contact Adolfo Ruiz and every effort will be made to return artwork to you.

#### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

The intended use of this research is for a PhD research exhibit and report, public presentation and in written articles. You will not be identified by name. Your privacy will be respected at all times. Should the researcher quote any of the contributions or comments, pseudonyms will be used to grant anonymity to the participants. Any participant who may wish to be acknowledged in the study may do so by checking the "yes" box (in response to whether or not you wish to be acknowledged) at the end of this form.

#### **Further Information**

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact Adolfo Ruiz.

*The plan for this study has been reviewed by for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For further questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent

to participate in the animation production for the study “Tracing Memories: visualizing the story of Peace between Edzo and Akaitcho”, a research project lead by Adolfo Ruiz (Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta), which will be conducted as part of a PhD thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

I wish to be acknowledged in the creative development of this research. My name can appear in film credits, public exhibits, and written reports about this research

Yes, I wish to be acknowledged in this research

No, I do not wish to be acknowledged

Please, remove this consent form and return to the main office at the Tlichq Government building  
Please, keep the letter for information.

Adolfo Ruiz  
302 Human Ecology Building  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1  
Telephone: 780-289-7915  
email: [adolfo@ualberta.ca](mailto:adolfo@ualberta.ca)

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