Research and (Re?)Conciliation: Imagining Eighth Fire Scholarship in Action

Jill Carter
University of Toronto

We have arrived despairingly at a time when compassion and care are qualities that do not lend themselves to the world of intellectual thought. (Hogan 119)

Introduction: Live Embers in the House of Shame

Weeks before I boarded a bus to attend the Woodland Cultural Centre TRC Workshop in October 2016, I had attended a gathering of scholars from across many disciplines, who had come together to wrestle with questions of ethics in their own research projects. Each one of these scholars is a highly attuned and aware individual. All shared the understanding that the research that we publish does contain power—a power to shift the balance and so change the world to come for good or for ill. And all shared a sincere desire to interrogate their own practices and fine-tune their own processes to ensure that the "yield" they distribute contributes to a project of inspired and positive reworlding.

During one presentation, a researcher mentioned that she had been invited to a party at the home of one of the participants in her oral-history research project. During the course of her project, this researcher had visited her informant, recording intimate life stories, and over this time, it seems, a relationship had developed. Nonetheless, this researcher declined the invitation. "Of course," she told us. She could not attend. Questioned at the symposium, she confided that she had not wanted to "blur the lines." She had not wanted to give her informant the idea that they were "friends."

I could not understand this because I am an Anishinaabe educator, artist, and

Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée
CRCL DECEMBER 2018 DÉCEMBRE RCLC
0319–051x/18/45.4/550

researcher. The work that I do, perforce, begins with the premise that all participants are *partners* in whatever project we are pursuing, whatever knowledge we are creating. We all have (or should have) a personal stake in the project, and for the research partner who stands outside the academy and its privileges, the stakes are precariously high: the project we undertake together may mean the difference between health and dis-ease or between continuance and dissolution—for the individual, for her family, for her community, and for her descendants yet unborn.

The idea that her would-be hostess was a colleague—a *partner* in the endeavour and not simply a "subject," an "informant," or a "participant"—seemed to surprise this researcher. The "story" she would ultimately publish about this community of women would be "research," because she *is* a "researcher." The hard-won life lessons they shared, the analyses of their experiences, and the willingness to articulate and to engage in discourse around these things were "other": they were *not* research. It is important to reiterate in this moment that this researcher is, like everybody who was in the room that day, a highly ethical, conscious, and conscientious woman. She demonstrated a deep appreciation for the responsibility she bears to her research partners and to the stories with which they had entrusted her. And yet, the institutional lacuna that divides the academic insider/specialist from those who stand outside of the academy had to be assiduously maintained.

I am not suggesting that respect—that carefully holding and nurturing the relationship between partner and partner in the research endeavour—must always result in lifelong friendship, although in the context of Indigenous research, it often does. But I wonder if this research partner was not extending an invitation to deepen their relationship? Perhaps this research partner wanted the researcher to see something that would expand her understanding and shift her own analysis of the stories she now held and would disseminate.

Neither researcher nor research partner, in this case, is Indigenous. But for me, this does not matter. It is my position that if Indigenous attitudes to the practice of research are to be adopted because *they are valuable*—because they help us to map out a good process, which results in a beneficial product—then these methods are equally valuable and applicable to projects in which there are no Indigenous participants. Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Reverence (see Archibald 41-56) are good research pillars that inform a healthy and healthful research process and that yield real and lasting benefits for Indigenous research partners. Surely, these pillars might yield like processes and benefits within Settler projects. In the project of reworlding, the reconfiguration of cognitive and processual frameworks must be bone-deep, extending far beyond occasional applications in particular settings with specific witnesses. As Mohawk scholar Taiake Alfred contends, these practices cannot be undertaken as occasional command performances: "Real change will happen only when settlers are forced into a reckoning of who they are, what they have done, and what they have inherited; then they will be *unable to function as colonials* and begin instead to engage other peoples [—*all* peoples—] as respectful human beings" (167;

emphasis mine). What Alfred is calling for is the dissolution of a cognitive framework that relies upon the strenuous maintenance of oppositional binaries—human vs. nonhuman, us vs. them, professional vs. dilettante, artist vs. subject, researcher vs. researched. And it is in this historical moment, as this nation takes conscious stock of the wreckage wrought by those who processually upheld those binaries in their quest to write a New World empire into being, that these structures, their resultant cognitive frameworks, and alternatives must be most vigorously interrogated for a process of repair to begin.

On October 20, 2016, a handful of scholars, coming together to consider the example of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to share fears and hopes about the more recent process of Truth and Reconciliation undertaken here in Canada, stood within one site of that wreckage: the infamous Mohawk Institute (a.k.a. The Mush Hole), Upper Canada's first residential school (1827-1970).

Standing in the boys' basement "play room," I chanced a look around. My
 Indigenous colleagues stood largely rooted in place, their stricken faces drained of all animation. Their masklike faces emitted no inquiry, no self-conscious solemnity, no energetic concern. Momentarily crushed by the weight of ancestral grief, we had no choice but to take in the secret, urgent testimony emanating in waves from the whispering walls. Spell-shocked, we listened while the dank air thickened and bore down upon us. Spell-shocked, we listened while flashbulbs wielded by our non-Indigenous colleagues cut across the gloom capturing old ghosts in the wheeling dust motes, which were momentarily illuminated in the glare that stung our eyes. Spell-shocked, we listened until a young black South African scholar, overcome by voices crying out to her from two ends of the earth, fled the room, hands clamped tightly over her mouth to choke back her answering cry. And then, the spell was broken, and slowly we shuffled back out into the cold light of a grey day.

This stolid and genteel structure, masquerading as a house of learning, stands smug and innocent, concealing from the eyes of casual passersby its rapine spirits—spirits that, for over a century, fed upon bodily punishment and degradation and broke the minds and spirits of the Indigenous children who were forcibly compelled to cross its threshold.

This colonial Centre of "civilization" and the sister schools that sprang up in its wake stand as mute accusers to imperial hubris: the hubris of its citizens, its entrepreneurs, its religious leaders, its legislators, and its researchers whose shoddy methods and their resulting publications inspirited and justified unconscionable crimes against Indigenous humanity. "Research" built this house of shame, research conducted at a remove from its "subjects" and built upon centuries of racist assumption and hubristic complacence. This research dramaturged and then performed a story, which posited that, in and of themselves, Indigenous peoples, their knowledge systems, and their ways of life were insufficient: the Mohawk Institute would address this by preparing its students through rigorous training to be assimilated into settler society (TRC, *They Came* 6). Fifty years after the inception of the "Mush Hole,"

Canadian researchers were still telling the same story.

Nicholas Flood Davin, an Irish-born Torontonian, was a journalist and a lawyer. In 1879, he was commissioned by Canada's federal government to research boarding schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the United States and to produce from his investigations a series of recommendations that would guide the creation of similar schools in the Northwest Territories (TRC, *They Came* 9). Just 45 days after embarking upon the project, Davin submitted his Final Report, which would shape 150 years of policy and praxis governing the education of Indigenous people (TRC, *They Came* 10). Over those 45 days, Davin travelled to Washington, DC, where he met with government bureaucrats, to a Minnesota Mission School, and to Manitoba, where he spoke with church administrators and local politicians. Davin characterized those Indigenous people he happened to meet on his research adventures as "designing," as "chronic complainers," and as unworthy of and ill-equipped for having any say in the education of their children (TRC, *They Came* 10).

Research built this house of shame.

It is time to build a new house.

The Mohawk Institute, Brantford, ON.
Photo by Jill Carter, October 2016.

Peshik: The Researcher as Storyteller: Building Conciliation *con* Verse

In 2015, Algonquin playwright Yvette Nolan issued a compelling call for a more informed and rigorous "critical discourse" around contemporary Indigenous performance than has heretofore been manifested (132). This is a call that comes from Indigenous theatre workers in Canada themselves, who collectively identify "more critical work," "more Indigenous scholars, more writers, more people thinking about the work," and "more public discussions about the work" as paramount desiderata (132). Certainly, while we are seeing some slow growth in this area, relatively little scholarship, pertaining to Indigenous performance in North America, exists in publication. Much of the work that does exist has been undertaken by non-Indigenous critics and scholars, and apart from some very few notable exceptions, product and process are too often misunderstood and misrepresented across popular and scholarly media. Further, little interrogation of either Indigenous creative processes or aesthetic principles, outside of a few dialogues and reflections by Indigenous arts workers, exists in publicly accessible formats to aid audiences as they receive the work and to aid artistic development by bringing the artists into deeper conversation with each other and with the various communities they serve.[1]

Nolan's *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* imagines a space in which conciliation might begin, a space in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture workers might come together to strategize ways in which to productively intervene upon the dis-ease that affects and directs the precarious Settler-Indigenous relationship in these territories (21). As she navigates a tangled web into which have been bound the symptoms of this dysfunction, she illuminates some key obstacles to its repair: the dearth of Canadian audiences who seem to fear having their complacency shaken by the hard truths unearthed in Indigenous performance (18); "purposefully obtuse" (107) and/or outright racist reviews; the "centuries of [Indigenous] invisibility" (117) that have engineered a disconnect between mainstream Canadians who have been taught to imagine that their concerns are vastly removed from the concerns of their Indigenous neighbours; the exigencies of trying to produce within an infrastructure that affords little to no cultural control to the Indigenous artist; and a troubling paucity of critical discourse that emerges from any place of cultural awareness.

Conciliation[2] begins and relationships endure only through sustained and honest conversation. Indigenous theatre workers have long laboured to initiate these conversations in public spaces of performance across North America, but the one who speaks his truth *con* verse requires a partner who will receive (listen to) the call and respond accordingly. As Nolan cautions us, "dialogue is only possible if the audiences are in the theatre" (16). Whether we are scholars of theatre, commercial reviewers, artistic directors, dramaturges, producers, or any combination of these, our work

concerns itself with gathering and disseminating Story. As readers and auditors, we are responsible for the meaning we make and what we do with the stories we are given, and as tellers, we are responsible for the consequences of the stories we tell (King 29). Moreover, as Nolan has asserted of those who are privileged to hold such positions in Canada, we are the curators of the stories that build and break nations and the "gatekeepers" to their dissemination (107). If we are reviewers, "our negative response to the work can be an obstacle to even garnering an audience" (Nolan 107) and can shut down dialogue before it has even had a chance to begin. And if we practice what Sam McKegney terms "strategies of ethical disengagement" (39), which include excluding Indigenous works from the discourse altogether or privileging settler reception, analysis, and aesthetic evaluation of these works (39-40), an invaluable opportunity to engage in fruitful encounters with "what this place [Turtle Island] is going to become when our [Indigenous] stories become visible" (Nolan 135) is lost.

As an Anishinaabe theatre worker, I am simultaneously challenged, inspired, disheartened, and a little angered by a series of questions, posted in 2015 by Sioux Lakota playwright Larissa FastHorse on her blog: "Do white playwrights ever think about this? Do they worry about losing jobs for white actors? Do they question if they are writing about enough white issues? […] Do they fear [their work may somehow prove itself to be or be reimagined by the dominant culture into a tool that facilitates] the genocide of their race" (n.p.)? As an Anishinaabe researcher and educator, I find myself preoccupied (and my work *occupied*) by similar concerns: Do non-Indigenous researchers experience the same anxiety around harming those about or for whom they write, whether they are doing research among their own people or among other communities? Do non-Indigenous researchers (and their funders) privilege the needs and aspirations of the communities in and with which they work over the demands that are made upon them either to produce and publish or to languish irrelevantly? Why do we do the work that we do? Of what value are our questions, explorations, and theories to the artists with whom we engage (if we actually *do* engage) and to the audiences for whom they create? Does our work support the work of Indigenous theatre workers? Does it misrepresent that work, obfuscate that work, dismiss or erase that work? Do we regard our own work as a sacred trust? Do we handle each story with which we engage *gently*, as we would a vessel that contains the life and essence of a people?

"The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (King 2), and the truth about the stories that we tell about stories is that *they contain power*: the stories we tell can lift up the artists, their works, and their communities, or they can silence, denigrate, and destroy. The stories we tell can open up spaces of fruitful encounter between Indigenous artists, their communities, and non-Indigenous peoples, or they can engender disaffection, distrust, and disengagement. The stories we tell are the fruits of our engagement—of our commitment to engage and to facilitate engagement. But is our engagement enough? *Is it not the process we employ that shapes the character of our engagement with Indigenous artists and their works?* Is it not the process

we employ that ultimately determines the extent to which our engagement (and the fruits thereof) will stimulate conversations that bring Indigenous peoples and settlers together and move us forward in a good way towards the eighth fire?

Niizh: Sifting through the Embers of an Early, Abortive Eighth Fire Encounter

Yvette Nolan identifies *Jessica* (1981) as an early example of an "eighth fire"[3] production—one created by a group of Indigenous [Metis artist-activist Maria Campbell] and settler [Linda Griffiths and Paul Thompson] artists in an attempt to "create understanding and forge a new and healthy way forward together" (21). And because the oppositional binaries between art and theory are not relevant to Indigenous epistemologies,[4] I choose to explore this early artistic collaboration as a *research partnership gone awry*. By interrogating the dynamic between the artists and the flawed product their broken relationship engendered, I intend to stage an intervention, invoking, I hope, serious rumination on how, as researchers, we might take valuable lessons from this courageous and forward-looking attempt and adopt ways of being and ways of doing that ensure the health and success of the eighth fire collaborations in which we come to engage. Whether we are artists, scholars, or both at once, we should view our encounters with theatre workers as collaborative enterprises. The stories they tell so abundantly feed the stories we come to tell, and for this great gift, a reciprocal gift is required: our works should feed theirs. As scholars, whether we acknowledge it or not, we are, like Linda Griffiths and Paul Thompson, in treaty with Indigenous culture workers. What is the nature of that treaty? How do we keep "polishing the covenant chain," as it were? *Jessica* (the play) and the dialogic account of its making contained within *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* provide, I believe, an invaluable map, which clearly marks out the pitfalls that, once seen, can, with conscientious good will and forethought, be avoided.[5]

In the wake of the release of the Final Report and ninety-four Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, many Canadians are sincerely searching for pathways towards collective conciliation and reworlding. The time is ripe, it seems, for we who work in story and whose function it is to engineer bridges of understanding to call into play the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishinaabeg and to engage ourselves fully in an exercise of sustained and profound self-reflection.[6] Such exercises undertaken regularly can help us avoid the trap of complacency. Are the questions we ask, as scholars, the same as those our Indigenous research partners ask for themselves and feel (along with the communities they serve) we should be exploring? Do the agendas that now direct our research process lead to works that will prove to be of any real and lasting benefit to the Indigenous peoples with whom we work? These are not exercises or questions that were undertaken or asked by Linda Griffiths or Paul Thompson when they began their collaboration with Maria

Campbell thirty-five years ago. Reflection came later, as Griffiths and Campbell sifted through the smouldering wreck of a smashed relationship in an attempt to pinpoint the cause of collision and to stitch together the torn remnants of a fragile trust.

Devised by Maria Campbell, who told her stories, and Linda Griffiths, who embodied those stories, *Jessica* recounts a young Métis woman's struggle to recover balance. The play begins in a moment of grave crisis: it is initiated at the point where a spirit of murderous rage (Wolverine), fed upon a lifetime of abuse, has pushed its protagonist (Jessica) beyond acts of self-destruction (prostitution/heroin/unhealthy relationships) into a physical attack on a business partner and to the brink of utter spiritual destruction. Jessica, thus endangered, has returned to her community to seek help from the Elder Vitaline, her erstwhile spiritual teacher. Unfolding as a "how to" story, *Jessica* maps out one Métis woman's process in the project of reintegrating all aspects of self to achieve balance and healing. These aspects manifest themselves as spirit-guides (Coyote, Crow, Bear, and Wolverine)[7] and cross over into the human plane to find expression and embodiment in the four human "teachers" who crucially inform transformative events in Jessica's life. The play is framed by a whimsically hybridized healing ceremony that Vitaline conducts for Jessica, during which Jessica is transported back to those life-changing moments in which her re-encounters with flesh and spirit stimulate the process of re-integrating a fragmented psyche.

The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation lays out, I think, another kind of ceremony: it tells the story of an actress (Linda Griffiths) who offers up her instrument to experience transformation—both the transformation of actress into character and the transformation of a spiritually enervated woman through engagement with the "spiritual power" she believes her Indigenous collaborator possesses (17). This I perceive as the root of the dysfunction that gradually transforms and then erodes the relationship between the two artists and that transforms a potentially efficacious performative intervention into a lifeless metonym that actually effects the erasure of an entire people's history of oppression, struggle, and survivance.[8]

The fatal flaw in this research collaboration[9] is the clash of superobjectives:[10] what Campbell hoped to accomplish through this partnership never resonated with her research partners. Campbell hoped to create a work that would be "useful to the community," a work that would facilitate "healing" (Griffiths and Campbell 69), and Thompson and Griffiths had entered that relationship because "[they] wanted magic, [they] wanted power, but not history" (Griffiths and Campbell 35). Griffiths, in particular, throughout the processual discussion, repeatedly expresses a lack of interest in her own Celtic heritage or the historical beginnings of the craft she practices (i.e. her "theatre gods"). She is driven by a need to feel connection to something that is "alive," to something that has "power." She wants to utilize this "power," this "magic," to stimulate herself and to affect her audiences. She is less interested in healing, justifying this attitude throughout the process by declaring that Campbell is the "healer," while she is the "artist" (84).

As researchers, are our questions and our hopes for the work and its effects

aligned with those of our research partners? Are they truly equal partners in the formulation of our research agendas? What actions must we undertake within our projects to make them so?

Within the product, Griffiths's instinct to display her artistic sensibilities subsumes the original objective of the project, stripping it of its efficacy and, hence, of its potential to truly benefit its Indigenous witnesses:

> Jessica: Can you do magic? There's this girl at school, she's got blonde curly hair and white skin (*Unicorn reacts*). If I had a wish, I'd like to look like her. (126-27; emphasis mine)

"Unicorn reacts." Herein, I receive a rather glib representation of the non-White experience on stage. This reflexive reaction performed by Unicorn, a fifth (Celtic) spirit-guide imposed by Griffiths to address the sexual aspect of Jessica's being, privileges settler-guilt over Jessica's lived experience. Manifesting themselves within either the *gests* of settler-fragility or self-justification, such mimetic instances of what Anishinaabe scholar Cheryl Suzack terms "defensive self-protection" (personal communication)[11] have played themselves out generation after generation throughout the history of Imperialist empire-building. By way of example, John Strachey's seventeenth-century justification of Britain's violent penetration of North America is an encomium to the 'good intent' of those who come to break old worlds and build anew: the Romans saved the tribal peoples of the British Isles from their own ignorance and savagery by extending its empire, quelling the peoples they met, exacting tribute from them, and transforming their world into a 'filling station' out of which the imperial centre would continue to be fed (see Strachey, qtd. in Thrush, ch. 2).

Such posturing realizes itself in the latter-day twentieth-century *The Book of Jessica* script and dialogue within a series of hollow *gests* supposed to convey empathy and hence self-absolution, solidarity, or settler-fragility. Indeed, this animated 'pictograph,' "Unicorn Reacts," captures the colonial zeitgeist of forty years past, a zeitgeist that continues its hauntological incursion into even this moment, as Canada stands convicted by unpleasant truths that speak to a legacy of violent oppression and cultural genocide. Consider, for instance, the recent reflections of Canadian Senator Lynn Beyak, who took it upon herself to remind the nation of the "remarkable works, good deeds, and historical tales in the residential schools [that] go unacknowledged for the most part and are overshadowed by negative reports" (qtd. in Kirkup n.p.).

Are those who testified to the abuses they endured in the residential schools now supposed to feel badly because their "negative reports" have obscured the purported "remarkable works" and "good deeds" of some of their captors? Should they apologize to the descendants of their captors? These gestural scores, animating Canada's "narrative of denial" (see Decter and Isaac 97), have played themselves out in multiple iterations on this nation's pages, stages, and digital marketplaces since its beginnings. Rehearsed and perfected by Canadian artists, lawmakers, and political leaders, they have been adopted and adapted for personal use by individual settler-Canadians within every sphere of life. The impenetrable shield of "passive empathy" (see Decter

and Isaac 113) that presents itself as a defense of settler-fragility is not only offensive; it is an *offensive*—a repackaged iteration of the ongoing settler-violence with which Indigenous peoples have had to contend from the moment of first contact.

In this age of "Truth," the truth teller is made to feel responsible for the feelings of those who continue to profit from suffering and dispossession. Indigenous truth, here, then is valued only for its effect on the settler-population. It is a *product* to be measured, marketed, and consumed, a bitter purgative or expectorant that allows those who ingest it to feel good about themselves for having first tasted its bitterness. And it is a product to be transformed by, not to effect transformation of, the consumer. Once the *gest* has been enacted—an indicator that that the bitterness of this truth has been apprehended—all bitterness must be blanched and celebration must ensue. The Indigenous survivor is made responsible for ensuring that the uninvited 'guest' feels good about herself because she is able to feel bad about past wrongs, or that he feels good about himself because he is removed from (and therefore unaccountable for) the depredations of the colonial project (Harper, qtd. in Decter and Isaac 97).[12]

Likewise, in *Jessica*, a horrifying early manifestation of internalized colonization is afforded, *in performance*, only as much importance (within the chronicle of a Métis woman's journey through dis-ease to healing) as it offers affective satisfaction to the settler-artist and the settler-audience for whom she performs. "Unicorn reacts," and with this momentary reflex, Griffiths has smothered the complexities and truly tragic overtones of Maria's/Jessica's self-hatred. The moment offers no solutions to those people who may still be struggling with internal colonization: *Why does this little child want to be blonde? Does she (or others like her) do something to achieve this end? What are the consequences to us when we battle our hair, bleach our skins, undergo cosmetic procedures to alter our features? How do we stop our little girls from engaging in this form of self-destruction? How do we make them know they are beautiful?* If we cannot believe in our own beauty, we cannot teach our children to perceive their own.

With a momentary reflex, Griffiths erases this instance of Indigenous experience with all of the questions it raises, and a precious opportunity to initiate redress and conciliation is lost. While our contemporary settler-allies may not be responsible for the dis-ease itself, they are responsible for understanding where it comes from and how it is manifested. And they are responsible for the choices they make, the words they utter, and the behaviours they enact once they have that knowledge. To fulfill such responsibilities, of course, they require the knowledge; they must *hear* our story. Sadly, the story Linda Griffiths has chosen to tell—the story that lives on in the published archive of the play (with its precise stage directions)—is a story that closes off that possibility because it is hers.

Within our research collaborations, who ultimately will interpret the data? Will we ensure that all partners are given the space in which to digest the data, reflect upon it, and speak to the meanings it holds for them? Might *all* interpretations

(even if they are conflicting) be included in the final product and presented—perhaps, as an open conversation to be continued?

Instances of Indigenous erasure abound throughout this project—a project that purports to illuminate "the innermost corner of [Indigenous] culture" (Griffiths and Campbell 82). The Celtic power-animal Unicorn, for instance, is Griffiths's whimsical imposition on the story. The very notation of the *dramatis personae* in the production history of *Jessica* attests to the fact that Unicorn is not an organic outgrowth of Campbell's story or of any return to Métis spiritual praxis: in 1981, during the show's first production, there was no Unicorn at all. In February 1986, Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille produced the "rewritten *Jessica*," rewritten by Griffiths without the participation of Campbell, which suddenly featured a Unicorn. Several months later, in fall 1986, Unicorn was, once again, removed from the cast in the Passe Muraille remount (see Griffiths and Campbell 114-16). It is interesting to note that three years after this remount, the play (with its fraught history) was published, not as it had been collaboratively conceived and created by Campbell, Griffiths, and Thompson, but as it had been rewritten by Griffiths.

The inclusion of Unicorn as spirit protector might initially seem an inspired choice, given that Campbell is Métis and so carries a distinctive mix of Cree, French, and Celtic bloodlines. Her language (Michif) is a distinct blend of Cree, English, French, and Celtic. Métis music (fiddle) and dance (jig) are also distinctive manifestations of a complex cultural blend that has been fully claimed and embraced by her family, community, and nation. Jessica, who carries Campbell's story, on stage is likewise Cree and Celtic, and she must balance these two cultures within her. But Unicorn (Sexuality) is a "fifth wheel" that disrupts the balance of the other four spirit-guides: the sexual aspect of our being does not occupy a domain of its own; rather, it is entwined with our mental, emotional, spiritual, and corporeal manifestations of self. Interestingly, this spirit-animal from a far shore tells Wolverine, a spirit-animal indigenous to these lands, "*I am older than you*, I can go all night" (Griffiths and Campbell 124; emphasis mine). Why does Griffiths claim that that Unicorn is older than the Indigenous spirits? Why does she invest the Celtic history, much of which she has learned from Campbell, who did the research where Griffiths would not, with greater authority and greater potency than that of the Indigenous peoples on this land? Why does she turn it into a competition?

And there *is* competition here, a competition in which Indigenous interests and concerns are continually undercut and diminished. When, as a young sex worker, Jessica reveals to a Caucasian colleague, Liz, that she was raped by an RCMP officer at the age of twelve, she is 'outdone' by Liz, who tells her: "My stepfather did it to me when I was ten" (131). In the wake of this second revelation, Griffiths crafts a reaction—the reaction of Jessica's spirit-protector—that pulls our attention away from systemic issues, such as residential school abuses, abuse of power and racial targeting by this nation's police and military personnel, or the missing and murdered Indigenous women across Canada, by undermining the impact of a Métis child's

experience: "Now," says Coyote after hearing Liz's charge against her stepfather, "I'm really going to be sick" (131).

What many people saw then, depending upon the production they attended, and what generations of others will read, or see in future productions, is *the erasure of Indigenous experience in a play that bears the seal of implied authority and co-authorship of an Indigenous Elder.* Jessica's self-hatred is eclipsed by a momentary signalling of "White guilt"; her rape by a police officer is weighed against and eclipsed by a rape perpetrated upon an even younger child by a guardian; Unicorn is older than the Native spirits, and so she eclipses them. And, in an act of ultimate, colonizing erasure, Griffiths lays claim to the oppression and the struggle of an entire people.

After years of abuse and addiction, Jessica has lost her children and been confined to a psychiatric ward. Sam, an activist, visits her and has begun to lecture her about the root causes of and the mechanisms that power her particular dis-ease:

> SAM. […] They stole our land, broke up our families, outlawed our language and religion, and worst of all, they spent a lot of money making terrible movies about us. We're outlaws, and if we can admit that, we can fight back.
> […]
> JESSICA. I don't know who 'we' is.
> SAM. 'We' is Native people. *Or maybe not, maybe 'we' is anybody with a pure heart.* (Griffiths and Campbell 144-45; emphasis mine)

Griffiths claims the Indigenous struggle for sovereignty as her own, writing this claim and its justification into the mouth of an Indigenous activist: "'We' is anybody with a pure heart."

Throughout the published history, we read that Campbell has made every effort to collaborate with Griffiths on an equal and honest footing. And certainly, she has attempted repeatedly, throughout the process, to relate to Griffiths as one colonized person to another: "This actress has a Welsh name, she must know all about the Welsh people. I figured you'd know more than me about your history, where you come from, and that *we'd exchange*" (Griffiths and Campbell 36; emphasis mine). But the struggle of which Sam speaks is the Indigenous struggle for sovereignty. "We" Indigenous people do not yet live as sovereign people; although, today, the First Nations in Canada are coming closer to this goal, Indigenous identity is still subject to, and Indigenous life is still directed by, Canada's Indian Act. "We" are still imagined as a conquered people by the colonial descendants of those who imagined that Act into being. To be sure, Griffiths is descended from a line of people who share that experience, who were once colonized before moving on to other shores to colonize others. *But to have been conquered does not make one "pure of heart."* To have been conquered does not justify one's subjugation of others.

To normalize her lack of interest in her own history, Griffiths tells Campbell that she does not want to justify herself by measuring her own defeats and woundings against the Native experience (37). But this is exactly what she has been doing throughout the entire process. Rather than collaborate honestly with Campbell by

exchanging histories and knowledge systems, she has insinuated a measuring stick into the play itself, reducing revelatory and possibly dialogic moments into shameless exhibitions featuring competing oppressions. Ultimately, by declaring herself to be "we [and] pure of heart," Griffiths diminishes the Indigenous experience by weighing our histories against either her guilt or her own legitimate wounds. She declares herself a "soldier" in the struggle without acknowledging what the struggle is. Finally, she ignores the fact that we cannot approach each other as equals, and we cannot compare battle scars or commiserate with each other until we approach each other, in the spirit of true reciprocity and exchange, as equals and equally sovereign human beings.

Does our work engage honestly and accurately with the specifics of tribal identity, of platial identity, and with the specifics of the relationship between tribal humans and place (see Sinclair 43-45)? Does our work clearly demonstrate our own engagement with the relationship between a play, a body of work, or an entire set of aesthetic practices set into motion by Indigenous artists and the historical events that have led to or necessitated these performative utterances and the processual frameworks upon which they rest? As Anishinaabe literary scholar Niigwedom James Sinclair observes, literary (and aesthetic) scholarship cannot be conducted at a remove from political history (30) and serve either the artists or their communities in any meaningful, ethical, or responsible way.

As scholars of Indigenous theatre, are we mindfully "invest[ing] in a truly revolutionary act" (Sinclair 43)? Does our work conscientiously "recognize the full humanity of Indigenous peoples" (Sinclair 43), and are those peoples able to recognize themselves in our work?

Nswi: Just Another Broken Treaty

Jessica began as collaboration, with an unwritten "treaty." Campbell, already a critically acclaimed writer (for *Halfbreed*), had become enthralled by the possibilities she saw in theatre. She wanted to make theatre, but she felt that she didn't know how to do this effectively. Director Paul Thompson would teach her his process of collective creation by taking her through it; Campbell would give over her stories, her name as a recognized Native artist, and her cultural advice/instruction. This was the agreement (16): a treaty, dishonoured and broken. Campbell was not taught. She took her partners into her community, sharing family life, traditional teachings, and ceremony with them. Further, she taught Griffiths about the Celtic history they shared. Throughout the process, Campbell honored a covenant of which, it seems, only she was aware; her treaty partners did not reciprocate.

This lack of reciprocity manifested itself quite early in the process when a company of Indigenous actors was invited into the studio to support Linda Griffiths's work through improvisation. Reflecting later in the dialogue that precedes *Jessica*, Griffiths

notes, "the Native actors were inexperienced with improvisation" (33). So, she dispensed with them, choosing in subsequent developmental workshops to improvise the entire play alone. But *if* the skill-sets of the Indigenous artists posed obstacles, did they not also present opportunities for *exchange*? Why did Thompson and "one of the best improvisers in the country" (19) not take their Native collaborators through improvisation exercises? This may have drawn out the rehearsal process by several weeks, but it would have been well worth it. And this is not how their Indigenous collaborators approached this partnership. Cree performer Tantoo Cardinal, for instance, did not dismiss Griffiths when she displayed ignorance or lack of ability. When Griffiths could not chant, Cardinal took her down to the banks of a local river and found a way to teach her (52).

Because the Indigenous actors were so 'unskilled' at extraneous creation, Griffiths ultimately took control and improvised the entire show without them.[13] And then, in 1981, directly following *Jessica*'s premiere at Saskatoon's Twenty-Fifth Street House Theatre, Paul Thompson handed Campbell a ready-made contract[14] that contravened many of the oral agreements and the understanding that had existed between Griffiths, Thompson, and Campbell. Campbell refused to sign it, breaking with her collaborators and disassociating herself from the project: "When the production was finished in Saskatoon, I still didn't know what 'the process' was. I didn't know what the fuck had hit me […] I mean all the contract did was reinforce what I was believing. I felt betrayed" (Campbell, qtd. in Griffiths and Campbell 55). The "collaborative" creation we read today or may see in the theatre is a product of Linda Griffiths's interpretation. Ultimately, she took control of the work and reconfigured Campbell's story to answer her own questions, to serve her own needs—not those of Campbell or of Campbell's community. Griffiths, in the end, took ownership of the story of Campbell's life and control of the publication that represents that life. Campbell divorced herself from the published work and knew herself bereft: "Now the play was over, and I stepped back, outside of the theatre world, and I didn't have anything" (Campbell, qtd. in Griffiths and Campbell 56).

Where is the researcher—as ally and treaty partner—challenged in the attempt to "embrace the discomfort found in alternate approaches" in the effort to "create [real and abiding] change as we move forward together" (Alvis 19)? Do barriers to this embracement exist in the academic institutions and programs where we do our work? Are these barriers engineered by our editors and publishers? Do these barriers exist in ourselves—in our reluctance to unsettle the spaces of knowing in which we rest so comfortably? Can we name those spaces and give voice to that reluctance? Can we imagine and propose specific actions that we might undertake to contravene such barriers, to transform our processes of gathering knowledge, of partnering in the endeavour, of communicating that knowledge, and of disseminating it?

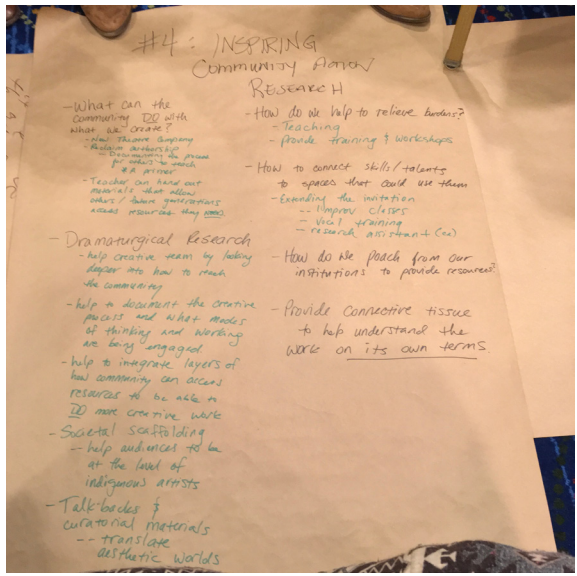
Niiwin: Entering the Eighth Fire Together in Treaty Relationship

> *But Linda, how can I make you understand? That's no different than the man in Ottawa who writes out the Indian Act, then comes to the people after it's done and asks for their blessing and input. Out of five thousand words, there might be five hundred that are good, but the others are going to hurt them over a period of years. And then he is* […] *hurt because no one appreciates.* (Campbell, qtd. in Griffiths and Campbell 81)

This article was planned as an interrogation of and intervention upon the research relationships and practices that have shaped a discourse that continues to be "fraught and ultimately unsatisfying to varying degrees" (Nolan 118). Picking up on the cues of Indigenous colleagues from myriad disciplines, I intended to conclude with a series of challenges and recommendations that I hoped would provide inspiration to those who seek a new way forward as cultural workers and eighth fire collaborators. But the conclusion to this "story" is something that the culture-workers who seek truth and who labour to story conciliation should be "writing" *together*. In this historical moment, we must seize the opportunity to engage heuristically with our practice and to collaboratively begin to devise an intervention on our own practices and on the discipline as a whole. I leave my own intervention without conclusion and without recommendations, hoping to stimulate an ongoing conversation, so that together, *con* verse, we might reflect further upon our processes and devise the narrative structures through which the stories we tell about stories might realize themselves as powerful "speech acts," drawing Canadian witnesses into profound and productive conversations with Indigenous Story in all its iterations.

These conversations are beginning. During the 2016 meeting of the American Society for Theater Research in Minneapolis, members of the working group Methodological Transfiguration: Transforming Artist-Scholar Relationships in Indigenous Performance Research gathered to imagine a healthy process through which to transform our research practices and forge stronger partnerships rooted in unbroken trust.

How might we more fruitfully engage with Indigenous theatre as partners in an eighth fire collaboration? What transformative actions might we undertake in our practice to open up discursive pathways that will lead to greater understanding? How do we facilitate the arduous process of conciliation between the Indigenous artists who "perform" the essence, spirit, and knowledge systems of their nations and the settler populations who, now more than ever, need to receive and understand? Are we listening to the artists and their communities? Are we listening to our own communities? We are all treaty people; how might our research methods—at each stage of the process—reflect and honour this basic truth?



Envisioning Methodological Transformation: Research and Relationships:
Maintaining Unbroken Trust
Working Group: Methodological Transfiguration:
Transforming Artist-Scholar Relationships in Indigenous Performance Research
ASTR, 2016, Minneapolis.
Photo by Jill Carter, November 2016.

A treaty is a sacred thing, but a treaty has to be two equals, two people sitting down and respecting what the other one has to offer, and two people doing it together, negotiating. Otherwise it's not a treaty. (Campbell, qtd. in Griffiths and Campbell 82)

Notes

1. Floyd Favel, N. Scott Momaday, Tomson Highway, and Diane Glancy have all published essays that lay bare the processes they employ in the creation of their works. Muriel Miguel, Gloria Miguel, and the late Lisa Mayo of Spiderwoman Theater have each explicated their own approach to Storyweaving within published interviews. And, more recently, Monique Mojica and Leanne Howe have begun to write about the land-based dramaturgy they devised and employed to create their *Sideshow Freaks and Circus Injuns.*

2. Reconciliation is a contentious term, and, as David Garneau has observed, it is deceptive in its suggestion that there was a time of mutual respect and conciliatory relations between Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and the European newcomers who eventually appropriated these lands on which to establish their nation-states (13). It suggests that a relational breach occurred, and according to the current Canadian narrative, that breach was the implementation of the Indian Residential Schools in Canada—an isolated mistake, the tragic consequences of which were unforeseen and unintended. Once this breach is resolved, through a process of "reconciliation," the narrative continues, a return

to peaceful relations can occur. In the main, however, this halcyon moment never existed. And if we continue to devote our labours to the "restoration of something lost (that never quite was)" (Garneau 15), we are engaging in a futile exercise, rendering a dangerously fraught and complex task into an impossible project. I prefer, then, for the purposes of this article to use the term "conciliation," although, perhaps, "redress" would be a more useful identifier for the task that confronts Canada in this historical moment.

3. Nolan uses the term "eighth fire" with reference to the Anishinaabe Prophecy of the Seven Fires. Long before contact, the Anishinaabeg lived on the Eastern shores of the lands now called Canada. At this time, the stories tell us, the people were visited by seven prophets, each speaking of what was to come through seven eras (represented by seven fires). Each by each, they foretold the coming of a "Light-skinned Race" and outlined the stages of colonization that would unfold over these years (Benton-Banai 93). To reduce the impact of first contact, such as disease and/or outright attack, the Anishinaabeg were instructed by the first prophet to migrate west and north away from the sea to where food [wild rice] grows upon the water. If they did not, they were told, "[they would] be destroyed" (Benton-Banai 89). As was prophesied, the agents of colonization have visited greater and greater destruction on the land and peoples in each new era. Today, many Anishinaabeg believe that we are now in the time of the Seventh Fire: in this historical moment, the dominant culture has the opportunity to consult Indigenous peoples and to respectfully integrate our ancient knowledge systems into their own practices at every level of existence. If this is done, the seventh Prophet promised, both peoples would enter the time of the Eighth Fire—a time of peace, fraternity, and good life for all. If the disrespect and disregard for IK continued, we were told, then all would be lost, and all life would end (Benton-Banai 93).

4. For instance, Anishinaabe creation stories, as Leanne Simpson and Edna Manitowabi remind us, are not simply speech acts upon which we are invited to theorize. Rather, our creation stories "set the 'theoretical framework,' or give us the ontological context from which we can interpret other stories, teachings, and experiences" (280).

5. Linda Griffiths (prematurely) passed away from breast cancer in 2014 after a rich career as an improviser, playwright, and performer on the Canadian stage. At the time she entered into partnership with Thompson and Campbell, she was a young woman with good intentions. She had never worked with Native individuals or communities before. She had no mentors or books to consult about working in such a way. She has certainly edited the *dialogue* that precedes the published play text. Nonetheless, its very existence bespeaks a courage and humility that are worthy of our respect. The play that was birthed in this ill-starred partnership is not particularly valuable—arguably, for its artistry and inarguably, for its representation of Indigenous experience. But with *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*, Griffiths and Campbell provide us with an invaluable window into the relational and processual missteps that blighted a project that had begun with such promise. Because of the courage, humility, and candour of these artists, we who follow may avoid their errors and prevent our own research partnerships from going so violently awry.

6. In the spirit of dissolving dangerous oppositional binaries and in the spirit of humility, I use the pronouns "we" and "our." I am an Anishinaabe artist and scholar, but this does not make me an "insider" to all Indigenous communities; nor does my bloodline insure that I will not fall into old traps and old tropes that have historically rendered research in Indigenous contexts a destructive force. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith cautions, "Insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research. It also needs to be humble" (139).

7. The Medicine Wheel teaches us that we have four aspects of being: physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. For health and wholeness, all of these aspects must be balanced. We cannot, for instance, banish Wolverine from our psyches and remain healthy. Passion is good; hunger is necessary. Anger can be healthy, when it is balanced by judicious thought and spiritual understanding. But when one of these spirits (aspects) takes control of our lives and subsumes the others, we become agents of destruction. Wolverine is not to be banished within Vitaline's ceremony; s/he is to be brought into balanced relationship with the other aspects of Jessica's psychospiritual being.

8. For further insight into the processes through which the contemporary public performance may realize itself as either a vehicle of healing and transformation for its witnesses, or, alternatively, through which it may be crafted to violate the sacred and so function as an "artificial tree" that serves neither artist nor witness, see Favel Starr (69-73).

9. Griffiths herself identifies this as a research collaboration: "Under Paul's guidance, we were to make up a woman who was Maria, but not really […] I would hear stories […] *I would interpret the world she showed me*. Then, somehow there would be a play" (Griffiths and Campbell 19; emphasis mine).

10. For those unfamiliar with the practice or theory of acting, a "superobjective" is the overwhelming, life-defining want/craving that drives the choices and behaviors of a "character," whether this individual is performing on or offstage.

11. When Campbell confronts Griffiths for her impenetrable mask of innocence and wounded fragility, she says, "It was the only way I could protect myself, with innocence, niceness. I just couldn't figure out why someone would want to get mad at someone who was trying so hard" (71).

12. In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an official apology on behalf of the Dominion of Canada to former students of Canada's Indian Residential Schools. One year later, during the G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh, he asserted that Canada "has no history of colonialism" (Decter and Isaac 97).

13. Are all of the show's characters born of her body? Did nothing of the original Indigenous improvisers remain in her work? Why are they not credited for their contributions to the script (i.e. as "co-creators of the play")?

14. "I kept saying let's get a contract, let's do it now, because I don't like working without one. Then he [Thompson] just put it in front of me at a coffee shop and said, 'Sign it.' When I looked at it, it had the theatre owning film rights, video rights, television rights" (Campbell, qtd. in Griffiths and Campbell 104).

Works Cited

Alfred, Taiaiake. "Restitution is the Real Pathway to Justice for Indigenous Peoples." *Response, Responsibility and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey*, edited by Gregory Younging, Jonathan Dewar, and Mike DeGagné, Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011, pp. 163-72.

Alvis, Cole. "Indigenizing the Role of Ally." *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol. 165, 2016, pp. 14-19.

Archibald, Jo-ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. U of British Columbia P, 2008.

Benton-Banai, Edward. *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*. U of Minnesota P, 2010.

Decter, Leah, and Jaime Isaac. "Reflections on Unsettling Narratives of Denial." *The Land We Are: Artists & Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation*, edited by Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall, ARP Books, 2015, pp. 96-129.

FastHorse, Larissa. "Do White Playwrights Think About This?" *HowlRound*, 27 Feb. 2015, accessed 1 Oct. 2015, howlround.com/do-white-playwrights-think-about.

Favel Starr, Floyd. "The Artificial Tree: Native Performance Culture Research 1991-1996." *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English (Volume One): Aboriginal Drama and Theatre*, edited by Rob Appleford, Playwrights Canada, 2005, pp. 69-73.

Garneau, David. "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing." *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and beyond The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, edited by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2016, pp. 1-27.

Griffiths, Linda, and Maria Campbell. *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*. Playwrights Canada, 1999.

Hogan, Linda. "A Different Yield." *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, edited by Marie Battiste, U of British Columbia P, 2002, pp. 115-23.

King, Thomas. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. House of Anansi, 2003.

Kirkup, Kristy. "Lynn Beyak Removed from Senate Committee over Residential School Comments." *The Globe and Mail*, 5 Apr. 2017, accessed 15 May 2017, www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/beyak-removed-from-senate-committee-over-residential-school-comments/article34610016/.

McKegney, Sam. *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking History after Residential School*. U of Manitoba P, 2007.

Nolan, Yvette. *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture*. Playwrights Canada, 2015.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake, with Edna Manitowabi. "Theorizing Resurgence from Within Nishnaabeg Thought." *Centering Anishinaabe Studies: Understanding the World through Stories*, edited by Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetnepinesiik Stark, Michigan State UP and U of Winnipeg P, 2013, pp. 279-93.

Sinclair, Niigonwedom James. "Trickster Reflections Part I." *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations*, edited by Deanna Reder and Linda M. Morra, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2010, pp. 21-58.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed, 1999.

Suzack, Cheryl. Personal email communication, 2 May 2017.

Thrush, Coll. *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire*. Yale UP, 2016. Kindle edition.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). *They Came for the Children: Canada, Aboriginal People, and Residential Schools*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012. PDF.