

***Nitawahsin Nanni* and Disrupting Journeys**

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Abstract

Nitawahsin Nanni

written by Michelle Yeo, as explained by Gabrielle Lindstrom:

Nitawashin Nanni means *the land*

but also

how

you are participating *in* the land

and *with* the land--

how you

are a part of it.

It is your

relationship

to the land, encompassing

how you interact

with the land

land not

as a *noun*, but

what you are *doing*.

The land is *you*
and
you are participating in it.

Land is a body

Land is a body

of which you are part--

this is hard.

But the grasping
creates ethical space,
as Willy Ermine says.

This is hard to understand: the land is a body,
but the land is also you,
and you are participating together.
Try to understand.

Nitawashin Nanni.

Keywords

decolonization; Indigenization; decoding the disciplines; disrupting interviews



Figure 1. Otahs'niitahtaa/ Bow River¹

Greetings

Oki, Aanii, Bhoozhoo, Kwey Kwey, Hello. We are a group of people who came together for professional reasons, but who ended up taking learning journeys that shattered Western notions of the divide between work and life, between heart, body, soul, and mind. Our meeting was sparked by the receipt of an Educational Development Grant for Exchanges from the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE). The grant provided Queen's University-based Robin Attas and Tim Yearington support to visit Mount Royal University-based Gabrielle Lindstrom, Michelle Yeo, Lee Easton, and Roberta Lexier in order to collectively explore the work the Mount Royal University (MRU) team had undertaken on what they called a disrupting interview.

An adaptation of the Decoding the Disciplines Interview (Middendorf & Pace, 2004), the disrupting interview is a technique the MRU group is developing to help interested faculty uncover colonial elements of their specific disciplines (Easton et al., 2019; Yeo et al., 2019). Because the disrupting interview has been undertaken with faculty based in Calgary/Mohkinstsis on *Nitawahsin Nanni*, Michelle, Gabrielle, Lee, and Roberta felt it would be productive for Robin and Tim to visit them in Calgary to learn more about the disrupting interview technique. More generally, the group hoped that their meeting would provide a chance for everyone to share their experiences and practices working on the decolonization of academia within institutions in two different geographical regions of the country.

We collaborated on a successful grant proposal and prepared for an exciting new research project: Accommodations were arranged, flights booked, and meeting rooms reserved. We were ready for the plan to unfold—except that wasn't what happened. As we relate below, our plans were disrupted in so many ways that we ended up experiencing much more than the conventional (but overdetermined) term *research* can encapsulate. This is the story we relate here.

Through our narratives, both individual and collective, we wish to highlight aspects of the ethical space (Ermine, 2007) that emerges when two different epistemes interact on a journey from the space of the University to the Land. As Lindstrom et al. (in press) observes elsewhere: “We search for conceptual and theoretical spaces in which Western and Indigenous paradigms intersect which may offer parallel pathways on which these two disparate worldviews can walk together in a good way” (p. 4). As this set of dialogues reveals, decolonization entails coming to grips with the disparity and the overlaps between these two worldviews. We also recognize the ways in which these two terms, Indigenous and Western, both encompass great diversity, and even among the six participants, we note a variety of identities, histories, and paradigms at work.

Methodology: The Path is Not Clear

In sharing our journey, we draw on our collective and individual stories to weave together a sense of how this project illuminated how being sensitive to the land and Indigenous understandings of the land challenge settler notions of what counts as knowledge and how it is produced and where. To tell our stor(y)ies, we deliberately push against the academic paper and its conventions, a strategy that also acts as a point of disruption and is reflective of the broader themes contained herein. We use multiple media, including poetry, prose, pictures, and maps, in order to highlight the ways that different art forms can resonate with audiences in diverse ways, and as a reflection

of the multiple pathways, both clear and unclear, that we travelled together and apart over the time we write about. When we write, at times we will identify who is writing so that we can preserve our individual voices, weaving the different textures and threads together into a single fabric (a strategy seen in other humanities-oriented articles on decolonization, for example, Hill & Coleman, 2019; Pearse et al., 2019); at other times we speak collectively.

Cree scholar Willie Ermine (2007) reminds us that the ethical space is also created through dialogue. We interpret and mobilize the ethical space through a deliberate intermingling of our voices in order to highlight how transformation is collectively and individually a reflective process. Where the writer is not directly identified, you should assume that all listed authors collaborated on the text.

The article will continue with introductions by each listed author, as well as information on our two collaborators who chose not to work with us on this piece. We then describe our initial conversations and planning, and the way those plans were disrupted as Tim and Robin journeyed to Gabrielle, Roberta, Michelle, and Lee. Our narrative then shifts in style to describe the second day of our time together, spent on the land southeast of Calgary/Mohkinstsis. Throughout these sections, headings and figure captions point towards some of the larger themes that emerged for us during and after our time together, including the implications for the disrupting interview and ourselves. We discuss these more explicitly at the end of the article.

The preceding paragraph provides you with a map to this article—but we acknowledge that even as we write, the learning from our encounter is not linear and the path forward is not clear.

Introducing and Situating Ourselves

Drawing on Indigenous practices of situating ourselves and our knowledge through relationship, we start with our introductions.

Gabrielle Lindstrom

Oki. Niisto nitanikkoo Tsapinaki nimok'tooto Kainaiawa. Greetings. My name is Gabrielle Lindstrom (nee Weasel Head) and I am from Kainaiwa. Niisto Siksikaitstapi. I am from the Blackfoot-speaking tribes and a member of the Niitsitapi, Blackfoot Confederacy. I am from the Mamoyiksi, or Fish Eaters, clan. In declaring my cultural location, I centre myself within my tribal worldview and reconstitute my identity as a member of the Niitsitapi, or real-people. This is important to me because for many years, my identity has been shaped by colonial forces that I once believed were out of my control. Self-locating is part of an individual decolonizing process of coming home to my tribal identity as a Niitsitapi. It is a deeply personal act of resistance and one that enables me to locate my ancestry as existing within a web of relational alliances that is spatially and temporally oriented to a specific place/space yet transcends a chronological and linear ordering of time. By this I am referring to how my identity is anchored to the traditional territories of Siksikaitstapi, the Blackfoot-speaking tribes, and is constituted and reconstituted by the spiritual connections to the many ancestors that came before me, all my relations today, and those that will come after me. I work as an Educational Development Consultant in Indigenous Ways of Knowing at the University of Calgary.

Robin Attas

I am a settler of English, Scottish, Irish, Norwegian, and Greek descent. My mixed heritage, mixed marriage to a Nicaraguan-Canadian, and settler privilege to move frequently have led me to reflect on where I'm "from." It's important to me to identify the land around the place currently known as Pinawa, Manitoba, as the place that raised me, the place I hold closest to my heart. I now live and work in the place known as Katarokwi or Kingston, Ontario, which I recognize as the traditional and present-day territory of the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. My academic background is as a faculty member in music theory and I continue to stay active in that field, but two years ago I shifted professions to become an educational developer in the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Queen's University.

Michelle Yeo

I am a settler of German, Austrian, and British descent. My great-grandparents came to Canada after World War I, and after crossing the Atlantic traveled on trains to farm the land in Treaty 6 territory near what is now Regina, Saskatchewan. Growing up, I always thought about this as "empty land for the taking" that was "ours" as a family. Over the past several years I have come to understand this "taking" very literally. I now live in Treaty 7 territory, traditional lands of Niitsitapi (the Blackfoot Confederacy: Siksika, Pikaani, Kainai), Íyârhe Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina Nations. I work at Mount Royal University as an educational developer and director of the Mokakiiks Centre for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

Lee Easton

I am a queer settler-scholar hailing from Sudbury, Ontario, located on Treaty 61 (the Robinson-Huron Treaty 1850) territory. However, my family roots are in the Waterloo region of the Grand River, where my maternal ancestors settled near what is known as the Haldimand Tract, a territory that has fostered much conflict between the Theandeynagea people and European settlers. As a queer working-class man, I feel affinities with how Gabe speaks about the forces of coloniality on her identity. I feel parallels with how I understand my own identity has been shaped by the larger social structures of white settler hetero-patriarchy. As a scholarly teacher, I am interested in understanding how higher education, which has played a central role in my life, has been complicit in maintaining the colonial and colonizing structures that continue to oppress Indigenous people. Here on Treaty 7 territory, I teach film studies, comics studies, and composition.

We were also joined on this experience by Tim Yearington (Grey Thunderbird), Algonquin-Métis Traditional Knowledge Keeper and a colleague of Robin's at the time of the experience. Tim resides in Kingston, Ontario, and his traditional territory is the Kitchizibi (Ottawa) River. Tim decided not to participate in this article's creation but gave us permission to share his connection with the experience and some of his words and thoughts from it. Roberta Lexier, an MRU colleague and collaborator who teaches general education and history, also participated in our August gathering and gave us permission to share her thoughts.

Negotiating Space and Time: Building Relationships Amid Disruptions

Robin first learned about the disrupting interview work of the Mount Royal University team through a conference presentation and podcast in February 2019 (Yeo et al., 2019). She reached out to the team, and then, following the protocols of the grant proposal, we developed an exchange description, project outcomes, a timeline, and, of course, a budget. Robin met the Mount Royal University team by videoconference in June, and the group planned a four-day visit to Calgary. Planning the visit was in itself a process of negotiation and relationship-building among the group.

Michelle: When we presented our piece in the EDC showcase online (Yeo et al., 2019) I remember Robin's engagement from Queen's so clearly. She seemed excited about our work, and asked many perceptive questions. Robin contacted us almost immediately afterwards, proposed a partnership, got the EDGEs grant moving, and in all ways was an inciting force for the connection. In the planning, we were a bit uncertain about the shape things would take. We discussed many possibilities and finally agreed on the itinerary. Robin and Tim kept asking about the medicine wheel, which we had a vague idea about and mistakenly thought it would be straightforward to find.

Robin: I stopped by Tim's office after talking over a draft itinerary with the MRU group in June and shared the two-day campus experience that we'd come up with. He thought about it for a bit, then said, "You know there's a 5000-year-old medicine wheel in Alberta, eh?" We Googled "Majorville Medicine Wheel" and found out it was only 90 minutes from Calgary. Knowing Tim's deep knowledge and interest in medicine wheels (a part of which is shared in written form in Yearington, 2010) and having experienced some of his teachings around medicine wheels firsthand, I was enthusiastic. "Let's do it!" I took the idea back to the MRU team, and they went along with it. I was thankful that they were so willing and accommodating to try something that might be new to them—and was also new to me.

Our planned itinerary became fixed, as Figure 2 shows.

But our plans were disrupted: by weather and flight cancellations, by thunderbirds, by chance, or on purpose. Sunday to Monday were taken up with Robin and Tim making their way to the MRU campus through a process of negotiations (with each other; with our families; with the airline, hotel, and car rental agency; with Michelle via text; with the thunderbirds). Through phone and email exchanges between Michelle and Robin in consultation with the rest of the team, we rejigged Monday's itinerary.

Day 1 (Sunday)	Day 2 (Monday)	Day 3 (Tuesday)	Day 4 (Weds.)
<p>4:00pm Tim and Robin arrive</p> <p>6:00pm Full group meets for dinner</p>	<p>9:00am Overview and sharing of projects</p> <p>10:00am Interviews of two team members</p> <p>12:30pm Meetings with Indigenous support staff on campus</p> <p>3:00pm Debrief of interviews</p>	<p>7:30am Meet at campus/Depart for Majorville Cairn and Medicine Wheel</p> <p>9:15am Arrive at Majorville Cairn</p> <p>10:00am Interview of team member</p> <p>12:00pm Leave for Blackfoot Crossing</p> <p>12:30pm Arrive at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park/Lunch</p> <p>1:00pm Outdoor Tour (weather permitting) or interview of team member</p> <p>2:00pm Interview of team member or Discussion</p> <p>4:00 Depart Blackfoot Crossing</p> <p>5:00 Arrive at residences; Debrief over dinner</p>	<p>9:00am Tim and Robin leave</p>

Figure 2. The group's planned four-day itinerary.

Robin: I remember the waiting, my anticipation and nervousness at the prospect of negotiating a journey with someone I was just getting to know, of navigating as a settler with an Algonquin-Métis Traditional Knowledge Keeper, the uncertainty around what to do, how to act. I remember Tim's partner running up to our car at the airport, saying, "The flight's been cancelled!" I remember storm clouds gathering, a gift of tobacco put in my hand and then let go on the tarmac. I remember laughing, lost sleep, and relief when we arrived. I see the flight disruptions now as part of the disruptive interview we were all undertaking, the moment when everything began to crack open and the world some of us thought we were in showed us it was something else. Showed us it had other plans....

Asking for and Receiving Permission: Where are We Going?

The group finally all met up for much-needed coffee on campus at MRU at 11am on Monday, and the rest of the day included a single disrupting interview done by Lee, Gabrielle, Roberta, and Michelle on Robin, with Tim and another MRU colleague observing. The interview itself included

important discoveries, but our purpose in this article is to share what happened the next day, on the land. Even before our journey, we had questions about who to ask for permission to visit the medicine wheel in the first place. We understood it to be on traditional Blackfoot territory, but were unsure who to ask for permission. We also had conversations about whether, since the site was on “Crown land” or “public land” and listed on the Alberta and Canadian registers of historic places (Parks Canada, n.d.; Travel Alberta, n.d.), anyone could access it without asking for permission.

Settlers sometimes are intimidated or naïve to Indigenous protocols around asking for permission. In various Indigenous cultures, the presentation of tobacco is an important way of asking for permission (Kovach, 2009; Wilson & Restoule, 2010), and tobacco played a key role in our encounters over the second day. We note that while 21st century technologies such as Google expose everything for us to see, colonization has hidden or changed existing Indigenous protocols. Decolonization means putting those preconceived notions of permission back into question.

In all of these experiences, we also note that protocols may change depending on who is doing the asking, and who is giving the permission. Our group’s collection of identities meant that we were constantly negotiating, asking and giving permission on a personal level, human to human. But some of us also asked for permission from the more-than-human.

Robin: I wake at 2am the day we are to leave for the medicine wheel—do my MRU colleagues even know where to go? I spend an hour Googling “Alberta medicine wheel.” I copy GPS coordinates and rough sketches of maps—what Tim told me just yesterday he calls “dad maps”—into my notebook. I wake again at 4:30am, and rely on teachings from Tim and my own heart to find ways to ask the birds, the sun, the sky for help on our journey.

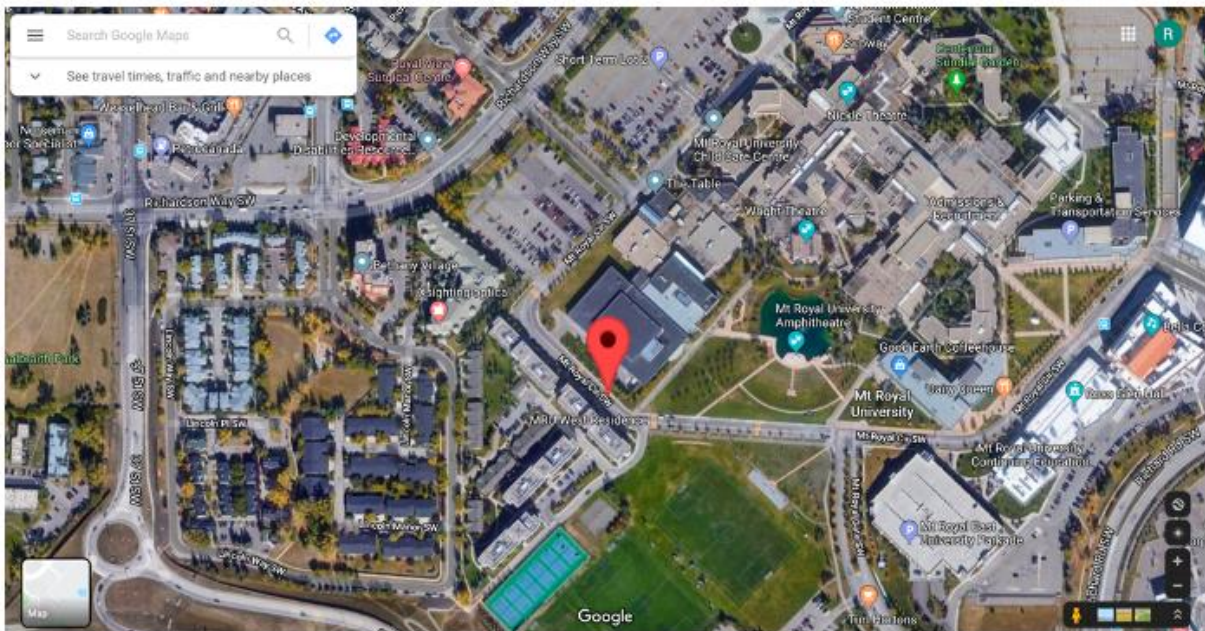


Figure 3. Who are our trusted helpers? Google? Birds? Each other?

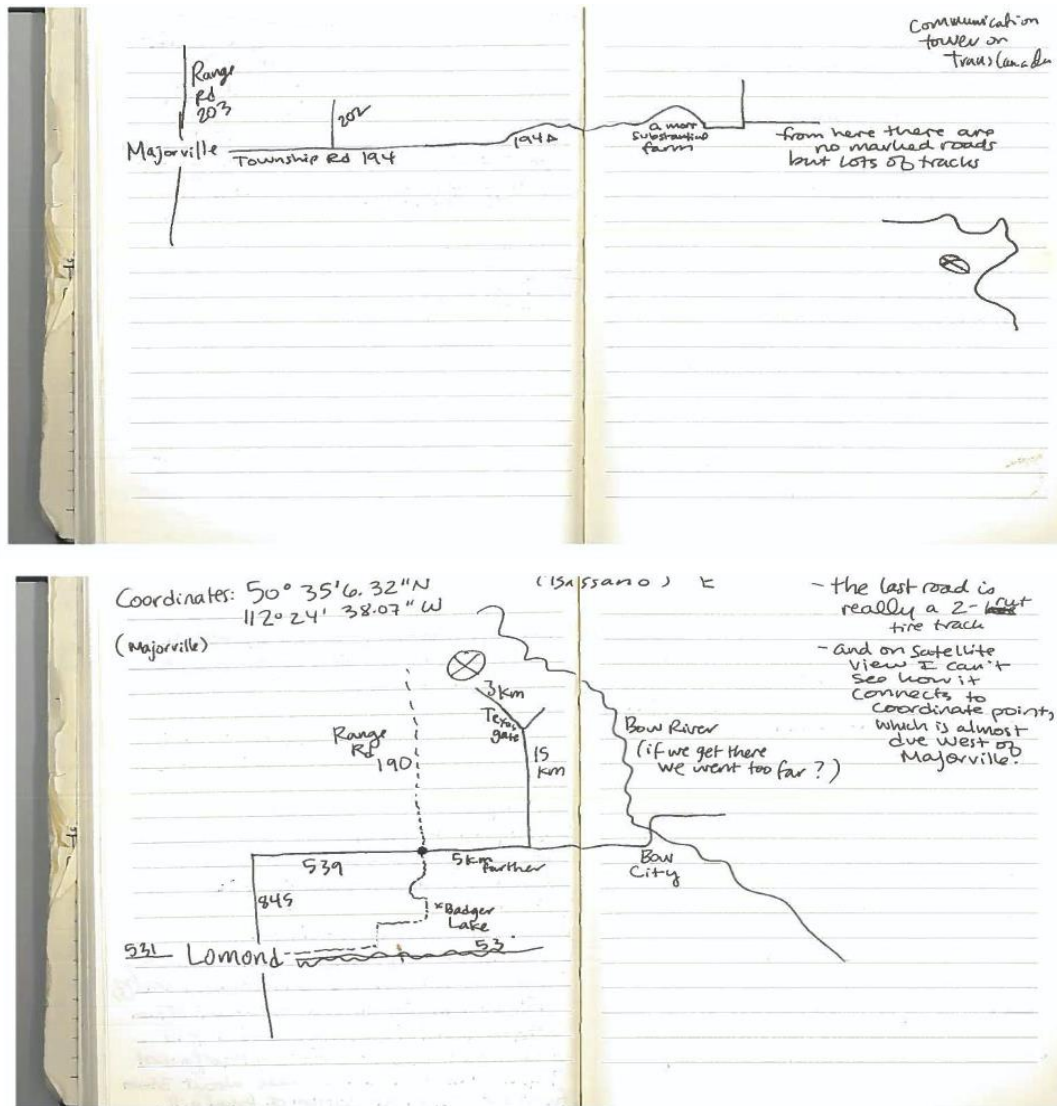


Figure 4. Rough maps in Robin's notebook.

Robin: We meet beside our rental van at 8am. I present each member of the MRU team with a notebook, a pen, a rock from the small beach that touches Lake Ontario across the street from my house. I ask, "Will you help me find the medicine wheel?" I present Tim with a tobacco bundle, asking, "Will you help me find the medicine wheel?" He accepts it, opens the bundle, and lets it fall: into a crack in the sidewalk, into a line like a snake, pointing like an arrow.

Gabrielle recommends that we drive to Blackfoot Crossing to check with an Elder to see if we can get more specific directions. We also want to follow what we feel is the appropriate protocol and get permission to visit the medicine wheel from a Blackfoot Elder. Tim and Lee present the Elder with tobacco as they ask the way to the site. Robin joins the conversation late. Lee respectfully asks for a map. Robin jots her own notes on the Elder's words. Tim listens attentively.

Gates and Finding our Way

Even with all of the directions we'd gathered, finding the medicine wheel was difficult. In part this was because the route quickly took us off named roads and onto open prairie criss-crossed with rough tire tracks and bounded by various barbed-wire fences with signs and gates (some open, some closed, some locked, some unlocked). We felt the hot August sun on our skin and heard the dry prairie grass crackle under our feet when we left the van to look around. Cows, oil and gas infrastructure, and the occasional piece of farm equipment were scattered across open fields, signs of current economic activity on the land. There were many times over the day when we encountered a closed gate with or without a "No Trespassing" sign and had a long conversation about whether to open it and drive through. Sometimes we did, sometimes we didn't.



Figure 5. Should we open these gates?

Michelle: We encountered fence after fence, gate after gate. Many had warning signs to keep out, and I learned how conditioned I am to the notion of property, of not wanting to cross these barricades whether or not they are reasonable or just or fair. It's a very physical feeling of feeling like I can't *transgress* these boundaries, that the land is "owned" by someone, that I have no right to it, no right to travel through it. Even when, in the midst of this, I am beginning to really understand that the land owns itself, and only by the grace of the land do we live, and that property ownership is the very heart of colonization.

Michelle: Disciplines have boundaries, and they have gates, deciding who is allowed in and out. Experts in the field, such as university professors, have passed through these gates, and are tasked with maintaining them. In teaching students, they are often explicit gatekeepers, teaching students

disciplinary knowledge that permits them to carry on to the next gate and/or into other fields—but only after passing through a series of tests to certify they “know” the material.

Lee: This time we spend with our students acculturating them to the disciplinary norms where knowledge is categorized by degrees of knowledge, each degree a barrier to be passed after an official examination. I am reading Deborah Britzman’s (2006) work, which reminds educators about education’s “other” side: the coercive, violent side which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) points out can serve the ends of cultural genocide. “Not learning” comes at a price (Britzman, 2006). bell hooks (1994) asks us to teach our students to transgress, but what really happens when we transgress to learn?

Robin: At one point as we were driving, I started deliberately telling my MRU colleagues about Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” and a verse discussing “No Trespassing” signs (for the full lyrics, see Woody Guthrie Publications, n.d.). Guthrie’s song is controversial in the context of settler colonialism (Kaufman, 2019; Obomsawin, 2019), but the notion of who the land really belongs to (if anyone) resonates with me regardless. I sensed that my willingness to trespass was greater than my new friends’, and although I was literally in the driver’s seat of the van, I didn’t want to take the figurative driver’s seat of leadership for the group. I used Guthrie’s words to offer another settler perspective, searching for a way of moving us forward together.

Stopping Places on the Journey



Figure 6. What is the right path?

Tim: Being privileged myself to “walk in both worlds” I have come to see and know what’s at stake.... Things are going to stay the same in the future unless people are willing to wake up, travel that mandatory 50% of their own learning journey trail [to a meeting place in between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of feeling, doing, believing, knowing] and then stop talking about it and instead DO something about it. That is the physical realm (red) on the medicine wheel. It is earthly

reality. So, even though I have travelled my own 50%—and much more—I am still willing to travel [towards non-Indigenous people] even more because I know what's at stake.



Figure 7. Are we lost?

Gabrielle: Looking for the ancient cairn, now referred to as a medicine wheel, I realized that all the landmarks surrounding it and which the Elder at Blackfoot Crossing directed us to look for, seemed to ensure that the place was hidden from us at that moment. Yet, other places like the hills overlooking valleys seemed just as significant. I reflected on the significance of being provided the privilege of walking on the ground that my ancestors had walked thousands of years before me and was made aware that I was scanning the same landscape and looking at the same winding river. I imagined that the birds knew my name and that the rocks had stories they were waiting to tell me. Looking back, I've learned that we are placed at specific sites and certain moments in time in order to find our connection with place. Place is both a teacher and site of transformation. Johnson (2010) talks of place as pedagogy which, if we are aware of how we are allowing ourselves to be changed by place, fosters our critical consciousness. Place seems inseparable from land, yet it has been reduced to sites of human-centric activity in ways that assume land is there for our benefit, for our enjoyment, for our advancement. By re-imagining those moments on the lands that surround the medicine wheel through a critical pedagogical lens, I am humbled by the transformative power of relationships. Being conscious of how I interact with the land, I feel that I can *place* myself in the land. I now realize that pieces of me are scattered all over this landscape. I find myself in the mountains. I find myself in the whispers of the wind. I find myself in the prairie scents and beneath the rocks. I find myself in the dry earth and in blue skies. I find myself in ripples of the waters. I find myself in the beams of Natoosi. And, when I call my spirit back, I am also calling back the spirit of the land to rest within my consciousness.

Lee: Anthropologist Julie Cruikshank (2014) draws on the work of Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who insists that Indigenous (Amerindian) theory of perspectivism understands that “animals, humans and spirits all perceive the world from distinct points of view” (p. 244). De Castro compares this paradigm to European modernity and states, “Perspectivism is more fundamental: it supposes that all beings (humans, animals, and let us include glaciers) see the world in the same way: what changes is the world they see, and indeed they see different things” (cited in Cruikshank, 2014, p. 244). Reading Gabrielle’s reflection and listening to Tim, I see how thoroughly *settlered* my perspective remains. For me, our van travels on the land, the land is separate, as an object to be surveyed and observed—I remark on the beautiful vistas, some seemingly untouched by settlers and their urge to reshape and dominate the land. Contemplating a paradigm shift from what I know—settler Eurocentric modernity—to an Indigenous perspective, I find notwithstanding my postmodern scepticisms, my commitments to settler ways of knowing are more profound than I expected. In the ethical space we are creating, different choices appear.



Figure 8. Which signs should we follow?

This journey highlighted for us the importance of being able to see and act on the right signs, something which our own abilities and specific circumstances can help or hinder. On the land, we had conversations in the van about how to know whether something is a sign in the first place. There were so many possible paths we could choose from, and our choice was never clear. Was the coyote a sign? Was the sparrow's flight a sign? Was the horsehair a sign? Were the "NO TRESPASSING" and "PRIVATE LAND" signs meant to be adhered to? What did the Elder tell us? What did our sketched maps, our phones, our intuitions say?

Robin: We also had different abilities to act on these signs and to lead others towards action. Our growing trust in each other, but also our own personal hesitations, resulted in the journeys we had. We learned to trust each other, to trust the process, to trust the journey even when we felt lost or uncertain or unclear about what path to be on. A few weeks after our time together, Tim described our journey as a quest to find (or re-find) Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, believing, and feeling.

Michelle: I feel very grateful to all of you who shared this day of searching and finding. It was filled with both the profound and the everyday, or perhaps the profundity of the everyday. I'm also grateful to all the non-human companions, the grasshoppers and the cows, the coyote, the eagle, the grass and the wildflowers. There was such a juxtaposition with oil fields and combines. Even next to a 4000-year-old medicine wheel over a stunning canyon, there is cultivation.

Gabrielle: Journeying to the medicine wheel offered both a profound sense of connection and a sense of being insecure with who I am as a Niitsitapi (Blackfoot person). Shouldn't I have known, by instinct, where the medicine wheel was? As the day wore on and we still seemed no closer to finding the medicine wheel, I felt panic rise up in me and I began questioning my own sense of cultural direction. Too long I had lived my life without a deep appreciation for what it meant to be Niitsitapi and in those moments, I truly began to feel as if my ancestors were so far away that perhaps they had abandoned me. I am aware that these thoughts are an expression of the many ways colonization has disrupted my internal balance, forcing me to question the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge, forcing me to question my own worth as Niitsitapi. As I sat in the van surrounded by the light conversations of my friends, I realized that this sense of fragmentation was exactly how colonization works to dismantle the strength of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. I took a deep breath and instead of doubt, I simply trusted the moment of being directionless, the purpose of being "lost." In that moment, I realized I was right where I needed to be and found connectedness with myself, my friends, and most importantly, with the land. We ... find ourselves when we're on a shared journey to find something, and it's only through being lost that we realize how connected we really are. Our interviews are a metaphor for finding ourselves through our relationships. If we admit we are lost, then we find that we are everywhere.

We Arrive at the Middle of Nowhere and the Center of Everything



Figure 9. The group apart.

It was only when we opened all the gates and drove through that we eventually found the medicine wheel. We note that on both of our days together, even when it was hard we all showed up, and we all kept trying. We committed to do the work, and to do it meaningfully and with our whole selves. In this moment, we kept nothing back.

We do not have a picture of the medicine wheel itself, although Figures 9 through 11 show parts of it. Considering emotions, none of us felt it was something we wanted to do. Considering physicality, it is difficult to take any picture that would communicate the scale of the place: the expanse of the prairie, the grass, the rocks, the hill, the sky. Considering spirituality, Gabrielle has been taught it's not good to take pictures of ceremonial places. Considering intellectuality, we want to emphasize to you the reader that this encounter is about the journey, the process of learning, our engagements with the land, rather than the destination.

If you, the reader, notice in you a desire to see what we saw, to know what the medicine wheel looked like, how big it was and its precise location, we ask you to consider why. So often, Western knowledge practices have been extractive of Indigenous ones. So often, Western knowledge keepers have sought to “know everything” without ever questioning the need to know. What if you didn't know, because you weren't there? What if the medicine wheel remained a mystery to you, unless you journeyed there yourself?



Figure 10. From the west, looking back to the east.

Robin: Coming to the medicine wheel was a personal as well as professional journey. Tim's teachings over these four days and in the months previous provoked something in me that I have trouble describing with words. Lying in the grass at the spot shown in Figure 10, I sang, I cried, I thought of my family and my colleagues at Queen's. I was still.

What Do We Take from This Experience? Where Do We Go from Here?

Michelle: As we discussed our experiences on the way home and in the days, weeks, and months that followed, several themes emerged, all equally important: the importance of relationship amidst disruptions; the notion of gates and of finding our way; asking for permission; leading and following; and the importance of land and location. We've discussed each of these, and connected each to theory as appropriate; however, we are also mindful of holding each day's experiences apart, letting them speak to each other, and resisting the colonial academic impulse to understand the world solely through the mind rather than holistically as heart, body, soul, and mind.

Lee: To add to Michelle's point, I want to add that our approach to this project tries to eschew the impulse to speak metaphorically of our time on the land. Metaphors substitute and, when used cross-culturally, can become forms of epistemic violence. In my own thinking about our time, I want to read it allegorically, seeing the events representing larger meanings about knowledge production, ownership, leading, and following. The journey reveals; it does not substitute—see the wheel yourself, if you can. By reading allegorically, I hope my interpretations sit alongside Tim's and Gabrielle's insights. Together, parallel, different.

Robin: The experiences I had over this four-day journey helped me better imagine what a particular Indigenous experience of the world might be. This is important because it builds my empathy. And

not just my empathy for a way of knowing that is different from the one I was taught, but for the clash and violence felt when that way of knowing comes up against the one I *was* taught.... I say this with hesitation since I don't mean to play the part of that arrogant white settler who thinks they've "gone native" or who makes claims that "my worldview has the same things".... But I say it anyway, because of the things I did over those four days, the things I saw and thought and felt and believed with all my being, to the point of arriving home in Kingston to immediately point out to my family, "Look at that thunderbird up there that let me come home!" I said it with such conviction that they believed me without question and saw it, too.

Our experiences on the land highlighted for us the importance of land and location—of place—in doing the work of decolonization. We continue to ask what it means to decolonize from within the colonial space of a university. We ask whether our rental van became a sort of "ethical space" where we were able to share our disparate worldviews, find commonalities and incongruities. Could similar ethical spaces be created on campus through conversation groups, lunchtime gatherings, reading circles, weekly walks? We fell into familiar habits—conversations in the van often focused on day-to-day details of work and family life. But we challenged ourselves to face the unfamiliar by engaging with the land. We shared a pipe ceremony and had private personal ceremonies; drove and walked; staying on the trails and found new ones. Could academics be challenged to face the unfamiliar by engaging with the land on campus? By teaching and learning outdoors? By being invited to take part in ceremonies from cultures other than their own, and by sharing their own ceremonies? By being challenged to find honesty, openness, truth, with those they encounter on their learning journeys? Through all of this, we explored how the setting and methods can impact the results in terms of the disrupting interview that had brought us together and our commitments to personal decolonization that keep us connected.

Parting Thoughts: Thunderbirds, Contiguity, and Incommensurate Differences



Figure 11. The sky above the medicine wheel.

Robin: This picture has a lot of significance to me. There are four clouds; Tim and I took a four-day trip; and there are four directions in the medicine wheel as I understood it from Tim at the time (although now I am reminded that there are more). I noticed these clouds at the wheel as I was lying in the grass on the western rim, and said to myself, “Those clouds look like thunderbirds.” As I write, I can hear Tim’s voice in my head correcting me—they *are* thunderbirds (Miigwetch, friend). That difference is the core learning I take away from this experience.

Lee: Robin’s insights underscore the central challenge associated with rebuilding relationships between settlers and Indigenous people. How do we—can we?—inhabit two different worldviews without reducing one to the other, without privileging one over another as has been the case for far too long. As feminist theorist Sneja Gunew (1993) asked long ago but which remains pertinent today, how can we accept the challenges of *irreducible difference*? Reflecting on the disrupted journeys, I have struggled with how to talk about the disrupting interview in terms of our journey on the land. Following on Robin, I want to say that what we have related *is* a disrupting interview, that our interlocutor was the land itself, and that our conversations, decisions and learnings were a very different kind of interview. However, this may be too big a conceptual and epistemological (and ontological) gap to apprehend, at least, all at once. What I do see is that there is a disrupting process and a disrupting interview which are irreducible to each other. They are, however, two aligned processes, contiguous—at times intersecting and overlapping—an ethical space—and at the times separate but running parallel—like the two boats in the two-row wampum (Hill & Coleman, 2019).

Roberta: ... Our journey together brought me emotional and spiritual peace and joy but also physical pain. I honestly believe the journey we took, and that I hope we continue to take together, is the one that we all required. I hope we can find ways to continue this work and find our way to a new world where Indigenous knowledge(s) and practices are honoured and respected by all; it’s our only hope for the future.

This article was once an academic presentation, and at the end of presentations in Western academic conferences, the presenters typically say thank you to their audience. Just as we opened with a poem and greetings in many languages, we wished to close with the same. We leave you with this: Through the task of translating “thank you,” we see the difficulty in reconciling worldviews. But it is a worthwhile difficulty, one that forces us to step carefully and critically into relationship building as we journey together in the ethical space.

We End by Thanking

written by Michelle, with references as indicated:

Thank you is so very small
 the tip of a hat
 a latte well made.

It doesn't do for something big
 we try other words - grateful, appreciate

a feeling, light as a bird
 it means gift giving is done
 I don't owe a thing.

Anishinaabe *Miigwech* means gift giving is just beginning
 Niigaan Sinclair says.

 It means, I promise to give what I've been given
 'paying it forward' inside the word itself.

Gabrielle tells us - in Blackfoot there is no word at all
 if you give something, something will always return
 everyone knows this.

 Reciprocity is in the word not spoken
 giving embedded right inside the receiving,
 and inside of that, more giving

 it's giving and receiving all the way down.

 This is how the world is, how we are
 how we could be.

Land is a body
 a gift is a commitment

try to understand

relationship is everything.

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Endnote

¹ All photos are by Robin Attas.

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