

Making with Place Research Project Reflection

by

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Sequoia dyed Lotus flower fold, washing out in Georgian Bay, 2020

Major Project Report

submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies
York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

November 30, 2020



Abstract

This report is a reflection on the **Making with Place Research Project (MWP)** conducted in 2020 by Phyllis Novak and SKETCH Working Arts in partnership with York University, and PhD candidate Charlotte Lombardo, with partial funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, SSHRC. This project engaged young people who have lived experience navigating marginalization, in mixed methods research-creation and community-based participatory action research. During the global pandemic, COVID-19, these artists/researchers explored with us, arts practice and production in critical place inquiry to surface and generate knowledge invigorating new relationships with place, community and culture. We explored arts practice and production as affirmed tools for creative resistance and collective liberation particularly when positioning young people on the margins as leaders of culture and social change. In favour of co-creating with human and more-than-human collaborators, our creative activations in Toronto public spaces offered new spatiality disrupting settler colonial logics through communities of care, creativity, and regenerative reciprocity. Ultimately this project created community-based activist scholarship, through arts practice and production in collaboration with place, that revealed young people's desires and intentions for community, culture and place. MWP artist/researchers propose these very relevant desires and intentions to manifest through: making art, particularly public art, that pertains to one's life in the world; intentional regenerative reciprocity in creative and healing relationships with the earth to chart pathways beyond capitalism; mutual growth and care in community based on Dean Spade's ethic of "solidarity not charity"; responsibility, accountability and advocacy to change oppressive language and practice used in the charitable sector, academic institutions and in social systems; collaborative research with communities to create lasting change; and anti-individualism in favour of developing and sustaining, communities of collective care.



Foreword

This paper reflects on *Making with Place* (MWP), a re-search¹ project of my Master's studies through the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES), which have focused on interconnections between the three areas of concentration outlined in my Plan of Study (POS). These areas of concentration include Art and Imagination, Pedagogies of Land and Place, and Social Change in connection with Marginalized Young People.

Using arts practice and production as re-search with young people in partnership with community arts initiative, SKETCH, I explored what happens in art making and production to catalyze creative agency and generate knowledge about how young people reimagine and reanimate public space to reflect their desires and intentions for community, culture and place. Through the project I was able to reflect on my own positionality, engaging in critical place inquiry in which I was a co-learner and co-creator, developing my own artistic practice in natural dyes alongside the multi-disciplinary practices of my re-search collaborators.

The project was conducted during a time of global pandemic and global unrest regarding anti-Black racism both amplifying the urgency of creating a counter narrative that challenges the primacy of colonial knowledge repositioning young creatives, mostly identifying as Queer, Trans, Black, and Indigenous, and People of Colour (QTBIPOC) as critical thought leaders and activists engaging with the complexities of place to invent and innovate alternative ways to live together and care for each other, that encourage interdependence, inclusion and vibrancy. MWP offered me a hands-on way to engage with young people to expand my socially engaged curatorial practice understanding possibilities for my role with research-creation methodologies working with place in arts creation and production to generate emancipatory knowledge to further collective liberation.

Working together with FES, PhD candidate Charlotte Lombardo, with guidance from Lisa Myers and Sarah Flicker, York University professors, and in partnership with SKETCH, we secured partial funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to remunerate young artists as co-re-searchers in MWP, validating their work as knowledge producers rather than as objects of research. Together we supported each other to playfully take risks, and expand our skills while exploring desires and intentions for new relationships with community, culture and place.

Dedication and Acknowledgements



I dedicate this reflection to the young people that have for the last thirty years shaped my life, my mind, and my heart and challenged me to be more and to be real. They have inspired me unceasingly with their creative innovation and cultural leadership.

I dedicate this to Bkejwanong territory, which Elder and friend, Gerrard Sagasige, tells me means “the place where the Spirit is”, also known as Walpole Island. I grew up in Wallaceburg, Southwestern Ontario, beside you, I went to school with many of your young people in the 70’s and I never understood the impact of my missed the opportunity of relationship with you until this master’s education.

I am deeply grateful to my mom who still lives there, and my dad (who passed during my MES) who have foundationally shaped my life and have always been supportive. To my wife and partner in life, and our four amazing children – thank you for the love, patience and space you gave me to do this.

Heartfelt thanks and deep respect go to my co-researchers and knowledge makers: Ayrah Taerb, Jess De Vitt, Ammarah Syed, Olympia Trypis, Priya “Pree” Rehal, Jahmal Nugent, Bert Whitecrow and Nigel Edwards though he had to leave the project early.

Definite thanks to my facilitating partner, Charlotte Lombardo, to my advisor Lisa Myers and Charlotte’s advisor, Sarah Flicker, both with York University, who gave us guidance, grounding and care throughout.

Thanks to Lisa Walter who walked this journey with me, and to Gerrard Sagasige for the teachings given in friendship. You both, in completely different ways, help me to come into myself.

Gratitude to Marilyn and Fred Hudson who let me write at their beautiful place on Georgian Bay and again to my Mom for letting me fill her walls with post-it notes.

Great thanks to the big powerful and healing waters of Georgian Bay, the ancient rocks, the cedars, and birches lining the cliffs of the Niagara escarpment. Thank you to Maiwa for partnering with farmers all over the world who lovingly tend the plants that produce amazing natural dyes. Thanks to the Indigo plant, cedar trees, marigolds, dandelions, lac – made from the secretions of the insect, *Laccifer lacca*, and to sumac and sequoia trees. Humble thanks to the original stewards of Indigotin and respectful heavy-hearted acknowledgement of Black lives lost and enslaved, to farm it throughout centuries.

These lands and waters have been stewarded from time immemorial to this very day, by the Haudenosaunee, Mohawk and Iroquois, the Wendat, Ojibwe, Anishinaabeg, Chipewa, Potawatomi and Odawa and the Mississaugas of the Credit River peoples. I live and work and benefit from their past and current stewardship in T’karonto, Treaty 13 and I seek to be led by you to live in right relations with lands, waters, humans and more-than-human beings of these Anishinaabeg Territories. I am deeply grateful to the Indigenous, Black and POC scholars and artists named throughout, who school me on this journey.

I give great thanks to my supportive colleagues at SKETCH Working Arts, who I learn from daily, and all young people who have been part of making SKETCH what it is. You propel me forward and we have so much to learn from you. Deep gratitude lastly, to York University for its support and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for funding this endeavour in part, to The Bentway, Solotech, Telus and the Jonah Group for partnership, space and resources.





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PROLOGUE - A Roadmap for the Reader

At the time of writing this reflection, I am a fifty-five year old a Queer, cis female-identifying, White settler of German 'blue collar' immigrant parents, growing up in a small town in Southwestern Ontario, Bkejwanong Territory, with settler colonial privilege. I moved to Toronto in 1984 to train as a theatre artist gaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance from York University in 1988. I'm an actor, turned community/socially-engaged artist, turned founding artistic director of SKETCH, an arts initiative, turned organization, (the community partner on this project), that supports young people on the margins², to make radical art to transform lives and communities.

MWP, conducted over twenty-four weeks demonstrates in an intensive way, what has been a thirty-year *unlearning* journey for me affirming young people with lived experience working in and through the arts, as creative leaders and knowledge producers. Their inventiveness is rarely looked to for input much less for direction, and their knowledges are typically dismissed or marginalized along with their experience, generalized as a 'problems-to-be-solved' and not as critical resource in guiding necessary social, cultural, economic, political and environmental shifts, the urgency of which has been keenly felt globally, over this last year.

Research theorists Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna frame a methodology of 'research from the margins', which I borrow to shape this reflection paper involving: *Unmasking* – Exploring the Complexities of Place (Chapter One); *Creating and Affirming* – Arts practice and production - Knowledge and Tools to Make Change (Chapter Two); and *Sharing and Reconstructing* – Desires and Intentions for Community, Culture and Place (Chapter Three).

In this reflection I will refer to theorists who I depend on my to guide my understandings about place, space and spatiality, research, arts practice as research and about the margins as a space from which critical knowledge comes to reframe how we create more democratic, alive and inclusive community. This includes Mishuana Goeman's concepts of (re)mapping, Doreen Massey's theories of space, Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie's proposal of critical place inquiry as necessary to research, and Soren C. Larsen and Jay T. Johnson's concepts of placework, place learning and place agency. Estelle Barrett, Barbara Bolt, and Karyn Recollet, among others, expand my understanding of arts practice as research and arts production in public space as 'spatial glyphing' to disrupt colonial norms regarding space and place. Paulo Freire

and bell hooks confirm the perspectives and leadership of those viewed or 'placed' on the margins, as necessary to the ultimate humanization of all of society.

More important for me are the active collaborators and artist/re-searchers who have guided my learning throughout the project boldly creating during these days of the COVID-19 global pandemic and police brutality against Black peoples, both revealing and amplifying racism embedded in systems and society. They are: Beerus (Ayrach Taerb), Pree (Priya Rehal), Ammarah (Ammarah Syed), Jahmal (Jahmal Nugent), Bert (Bert Whitecrow), Jess (Jess De Vitt), Olympia (Olympia Trypis) and Nigel (Nigel Edwards). I will refer to these artist/re-searchers throughout drawing from our zoom sessions and artworks created to shape my reflections. I will refer to them as either artist/re-searchers, as my collaborators, or by their first names. I will also refer to Charlotte (Charlotte Lombardo) who partnered with me on the project as part of her PhD in Environmental Studies, looking specifically at Theories of Change used in community arts processes among other things.

Each chapter will integrate imagery and a brief narrative of my experience of the final arts production pieces, that we, myself and my collaborators, installed or enacted in public space, mostly in the west end of Toronto, at an encampment at Queen and Dufferin, along Queen west at Abell street, at Artscape Youngplace, at Yonge and Dundas Square and The Bentway. The artist/re-searchers speak to the intentions behind their projects themselves in video interviews, which will be made available through an online journal-zine called *makingwithplace.ca*, through which project findings and experiences will be shared. Due to physical and social distancing advisement of Public Health to slow down the rates of COVID-19, we were unable to invite audiences to experience our final productions. We acted as each other's audience however, treated these productions as experiments, documented through photography and video, and then debriefed these significantly as a group to uncover what each production did to amplify or articulate the knowledge generated during the project. Finally, our mind maps are offered in this paper as a way to summarize our conversations and expose our theory making to the reader.

Critical to my role as project coordinator, facilitator and researcher, was the development of my own artistic practice in natural dyes, the learnings from which are shared throughout the paper in a few Dye Journal Entries to offer what was happening for me personally. First introduced to me by artist and curator, Lisa Myers, (my advisor and York professor), I used this new practice to ground myself during these turbulent times, to learn at the feet of plants – arguably our oldest

teachers as Botany Professor and Author, Robin Kimmerer of the Potawatomi First Nation, reminds – as I collaborated with their powders and extracts to make new imprints and patterns and confront and ‘unwrap’ canonized imprints and patterns of colonial and imperialistic thought that I have internalized over time, dismissing the complexities of place. My practice offered me direct experience of what is happening in artistic process and production that generates agency to catalyze social change, alongside my fellow re-searchers. Interestingly it became an unexpected through-line that my co-re-searcher, Charlotte, felt was an anchor for the project. Bringing my work regularly to our sharing circles was vulnerable, invited a way to practice critique and constructive dialogue, and demonstrated my commitment to learn *with* and *from* young people to counter balance the positional power that I have in the project and as a director within SKETCH, the community organization that brings us together. I couldn’t however, get away from the realities of my positionality, my difference, my privilege and daily reminders that life is not precarious for me as it might be for them. It was a separation I felt throughout that stood out from the collectivity I experienced in my early days as a youth organizer and activist where unity was strengthened through a sense of sameness. This question of how I, a person of privilege from a completely other generation, (one that has failed young people in various ways), held my power and what I would do with it, became more realistic and relevant points of consideration. Additionally, through sharing my own experience, I hope to offer points of practice that can shine a light on the implications to those who hold positional authority, of a new partnership with young people that repositions them as the agents and leaders of social change and folks such as myself as platform creators/re-builders of scaffolding or as a ready-spotter, with a platform strong enough to manage a thousand falls.³

A major theme that I returned to again and again is *co-existence to equal co-resistance* as theorized by Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox who is a non-Indigenous researcher having done research together with Indigenous communities. Co-existence revealed itself as a critical goal for me implying a new kind of self-awareness needed to partner with young, mostly QTBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) artists and emerging cultural leaders.



Acknowledge place – Honour spirit

(a short film by Bert Whitecrow)

Spirit is in everything that surrounds us
Honour Nibi
who guided our ancestors
through riverways steady and strong
Honour y(our) relationships to land, to
spirit
A relationship passed
down through generations.

I care for you.

Honour the sky
the warmth of light, the feel of sun
Honour life, Honour sacrifice.
One does not exist without the other.
The will to survive,
Energies flowing through time,
Mino Bimaadiziwin
(translated to mean, the good life)

Image 1: Bert Whitecrow. *Acknowledge place – Honour spirit*. Photograph by Bert Whitecrow

BERT WHITECROW (THEY) is a 2 Spirited, Anishinaabe multidisciplinary artist from Seine River First Nation. Their work explores themes of healing, preserving and practicing ancestral knowledge. As a conceptual artist, Bert works with a variety of media, often combining traditional and unconventional materials. They are a founding member of the Weave and Mend⁴ collective, which is a mixed Indigenous collective that focuses on building relationships with Indigenous communities through art making workshops, facilitated conversation and permaculture. Bert is currently attending their fourth year at OCAD University in the Indigenous Visual Cultures program.

This is the title image for their video projection which can be found at www.sketch.ca/programs/special-projects/making-with-place.



INTRODUCTION

Bert brought a tote bag containing small seedlings they had started sowing as soon as we all went into lockdown. This was the first of our twenty-four virtual sharing circles and the simple tote and its contents were representative of Bert's commitment to 'survival arts' to sustain ourselves and our communities. This lively artwork inspired conversations about what would be a strong thread throughout the project – connections to land, self and community, and survival beyond capitalism. During the project Bert recorded and edited videos to offer to community about how to cut hair and work with quills and made a film with collective members of the *Weave and Mend Garden* to archive its design story. Bert took strength from trips home to Treaty three territory, spending hours in the bush recording life forms, small and large, and from their deep care and community building for Indigenous 2-Spirit community they nurture and thrive amongst in T'karonto (Mohawk word for meaning "where the trees stand in the water").⁵

After two months of researching their solo art practice and another two months developing art production projects that could articulate the knowledges surfaced during our collaborative practice, Bert presented their work. One early evening in mid-September, they projected their final short film *Acknowledge Place: Honour Spirit* (2020) onto the rust-iron panels of the Fort York building at The Bentway, underneath the Gardiner Expressway. The piece offered teaching, a sense of grounding and journeying, evolutions of time and place, gratitude for relationships with creatures, plants, sun, water and sustenance. The large-scale images of moving waters and skies were backgrounded with recorded sounds of water rocking a boat. Adding playful animation to the installation in real-time, were short bushes waving in front of the projections as if in front row seats, coming alive with the light of each frame illuminating their excited dance.

Bert's installation suggests a (re)mapping of this industrial infrastructure with healing waters and reminders of life-supporting open skies and tall trees juxtaposed against concrete bents and steel beamed ceilings. As I watched, the sound of cars overhead and winds blowing through the space became part of what I was experiencing. I remembered a young person I knew who said sleeping on a sandwich board wedged up into the onramp rafters, reminded him of the ocean. The work invited an embodied visceral awareness emanating a power to move and teach us

about the tensions between the natural world and industrialization as well as the strident power of nature within, surrounding and throughout globalization.

The space under the Gardiner Expressway, a main highway across the north shore on Lake Ontario in the city of Toronto has been *mapped* already many times: by the fish and eels that used to swim there before the waters receded; by Indigenous peoples creating first footpaths; zooming ahead to city infrastructure built above to efficiently move people in cars; by people making temporary shelter and community in tent cities; by Fort York to memorialize settlement conflict; and most recently by The Bentway, re-appropriating this space for arts and culture. Goeman refers to (re)mapping as related to personal being and belonging, acknowledging that all space is political and suffused with power struggles, historic and ongoing. Bert's (re)mapping animates how geographies can be placed in contrast to each other and be reworked in this case, to visually break internalized confinements created by industrial architecture or infrastructure, that limit definitions of self and community.⁶

Bert's film projection briefly altered the space with a *storyscape* of land and waters, creatures and trees, *to speak, create, and lead* us into a different or simultaneous reality to what was our present surrounding. Projected onto a comparatively small-scale space in contrast to the overhead highway, the images alone were enough to enliven a quiet yearning for intimacy with the natural world. This was expressed as a consistent desire throughout the MWP project – that of mutual call to cosmogonic relationship: us with land, elements, plants and creatures, and land, elements, plants and creatures, with us. This piece amplifies for me, a critical guiding theme of placework described as the agency of place itself *from* which human agency and selfhood are developed. Larsen and Johnson refer to many Indigenous ontologies, that speak about *Cosmogonic place* as the Spirit of Place, that manifests through personalized relationships throughout time, bringing ancestry and current realities of human and more-than-human beings together in that manifestation. Bert expresses that their desire is to create connections for community to live in relationship with land. In this way, they are responding to the placework so active and alive in nature, creating poetry in relationship with that placework and then sharing it with all of us.⁷

Each art production in public space by the Making with Place artist/re-searchers, did something similar but uniquely and distinctively as will be described throughout. During artistic practice leading up to these articulations, the complexity of *place* spanned from the overwhelming

current context of the global pandemic, the global uprisings against systemic Anti-Black racism, and the ongoing disregard of Indigenous sovereignty, to the recognition of our ever-present historical context, ancestry and lineage containing the pervasive consistent thread of European colonialism and colonization throughout. Each re-researcher with their own understanding, embodiment and experience of implied dis/placements, tapped into and articulated conviction to face imposed spatiality of colonialism, and through art, to both speak back to that imposition and create new spatiality, with which to transcend it.

Most compelling were the unique artistic journeys of everyone in the project to wrestle with contextual realities, imposed tensions of space and place, to connect with ourselves, nature and each other in a co-created, mostly virtual, co-learning space and in arts processes leading to the productions. MWP affirmed the necessity for projects like this that invest in young artists with experience of the margins, working together with academia, who, rather than merely subjects of research, are knowledge producers and leaders in culture, committed to deep attunement to place, land and community.

Developed collectively through arts practice and production the overall **desires or intentions for community, culture and place** declared in the Making with Place project discussed in Chapter Three are:

"I have no desire to return to normal."
-Ammarah

- Art making that pertains to the world;
- Declarations of injustice especially through public art as Susie aptly pleads, "more walls please where these words can live";
- Mutual growth and a new ethic of "solidarity, not charity" ⁸ in community;
- Accountability and responsibility of systems and institutions to change oppressive language and practices;
- Collaborative research with communities to create lasting change;
- Intentional regenerative reciprocity regarding sustainability in our relationships with the earth; and
- Anti-individualism in favour of developing and sustaining, communities of collective care.

Facing my privilege and building settler colonial self-awareness throughout this project, proved to be clunky, embarrassing, and often deeply troubling because privilege is so ingrained. Unlearning the grips of internalized patterns of settler colonial privilege in particular, is something I've been embracing as part of my daily reality, as a way of playing my role in fights

for justice. It is a full body, mind and heart process that I need to learn about while in authentic relationships with those identifying as communities most impacted its harm and violence, either outright or tacit. Irlbacher-Fox, who writes about exploring her settler identity and partnership/ally role with indigenous peoples affirms my experience emphasizing that “unlearning requires consistency in reflecting a mindset and embodied reality, committed to addressing injustice [in] *co-existence that equals co-resistance*”.⁹

I carried this principle and practice, of co-existence, through the project attempting to build relationships with my collaborators that are rooted in reciprocity, which must always be sifted through for anything that confers settler privilege, idealizing White people in particular, as *saviours* and helpers, which perpetuates injustice rather than interrupts the status quo. After so many years as founding artistic director of SKETCH, I am really just in the embarrassingly beginning stages of this process. Even though I have spent years learning from young people, systems that prioritize my comfort, and practice that keeping me in some kind of non-listening sleep, have protected me from grasping much of this critical learning. This project meant not shrinking, but contending with the reality of my often problematic presence with QTBIPOC youth creatives, not because of who I am, (well sometimes because of who I am) but mostly because of what, *who I am*, represents, the power dynamics implied in my position and what I have been complicit in reifying, even through well-meaning actions of my work with SKETCH and thirty years in the charitable sector.¹⁰

Transitioning, in and through this project, to actively practicing co-existence, while unsettling, is, I believe necessary, to disrupting and then shifting long-held deeply entrenched views particularly in charitable institutions, of young people on the margins as consumers of service and always in need, repositioning them as critical knowledge leaders of community and culture. Irlbacher-Fox’s self-recorded journey guided my own to compassionately and committedly be in constant self-evaluation and self-correction, wrestling with my ego, which she refers to accurately as “a process of relational in-the-world becoming”.¹¹

My final installation of dye work at Artscape Youngplace where SKETCH is located, (Jess called it my ‘second home’), exhibits a forest of complex patterns and impressions made while contemplating these themes. The main critique that stays with me as I write this reflection, is when Bert encouraged me to simplify, think about my intentions, and attempt to create clarity and cohesion in my curation. I hope this reflection does just that.

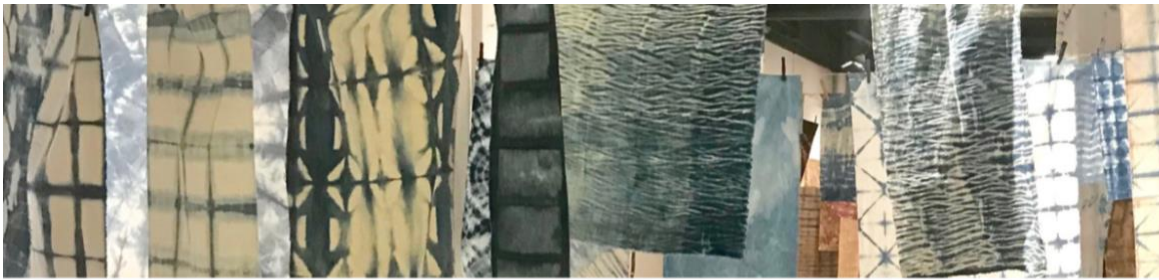


Image 2: Dye study of Water and Air with Indigo. Phyllis Novak

Working with natural dyes opened up my heart, mind and imagination as an apprentice to the agency and leadership of plants. Scouring fabrics to rid them of imposed waxes and pectins, creating vats attending to the chemistry of powders and extracts with water and air, folding and unfolding, wrapping and unwrapping, observing where colours might go and where they might be resisted, with wood, stones, elastics and found objects - I could never fully control the outcomes. Taking place in outdoor spaces through spring and summer seasons when land is so active and generative as a collaborator, repeatedly using mostly Shibori techniques, to learn what it means to work in concert with the live materials, wringing, pressing, and squeezing, not in an effort to overcome their limitations but to allow them full expression and accepting that an element of the unexpected is always present. I feel exposed, vulnerable, in showing what I know and what I don't know. Learning with natural dyes (similar to learning with MWP), was constant unsettling and required a relentless unwrapping of my settler colonial privilege and power dynamics implicit in the not-for-profit industrial complex.

In my production installation, I wanted to expose my materials as collaborators and invite people into my unlearning through working with natural dyes. I wanted to inspire ideas of how the elements are actively agents of change – water and air, earth - the minerals and plants that hold the in between spaces, and finally, fire. It seemed counter-intuitive to bring the pieces inside. I didn't want to prescribe how people might move through the installation but I wanted to illustrate the through line of my unlearning with a chronological display of dye pieces according to the involvement of the elements. In dye work my constants are: water and air co-imbriated, co-mingling constantly, compelling new possibilities; earth, its depth, heat, minerals and soils with manifestations in roots, trees, blooms and stones, extracts and powders, interacting with water and air – a collaboration of diverse and unique identities and expressions, knowledges and story – all food for pollinators, birds, creatures and humans tasked with reseeding; eventually leading us into and through fire – imaginations and activations fueled by multiple knowledges and awareness, raising consciousness and awakening, confronting injustice, and igniting unpredictable alternatives to reshape and (re)generate collective liberation.



Image 3: Dye study materials and solids; Blooms and Stones; Earth and Fire . Phyllis Novak

UNMASKING – Exploring the Complexities of Place

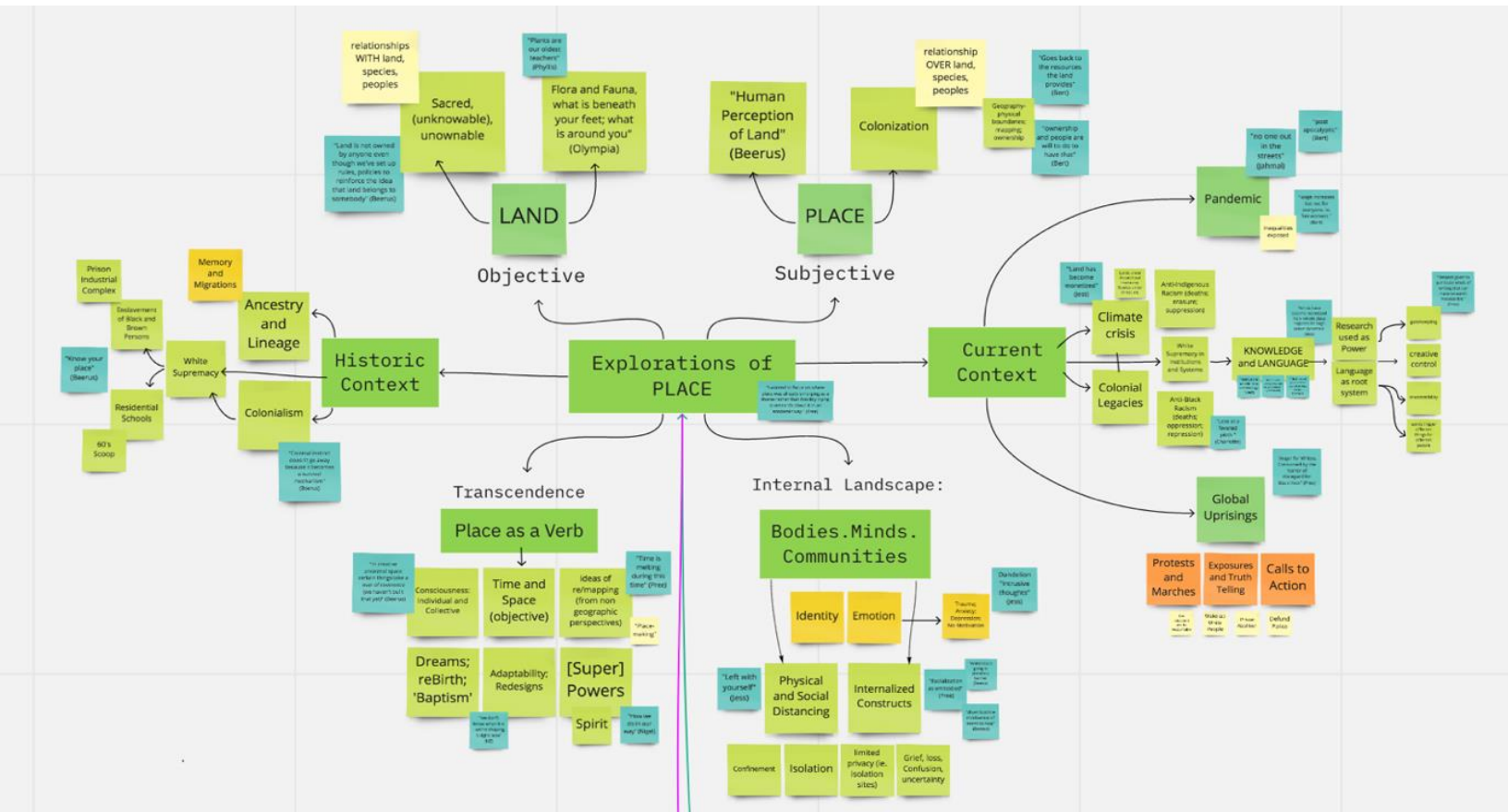


Figure 1: Explorations of Place – Mind Map

‘Unmasking’ questions and examines knowledge as socially constructed, to expose multiple understandings. It asks who creates what we know and why, what concepts and rules are used in knowledge production, and whose meanings or experiences are represented and whose are not, in what we know, and what we don’t know. Unmasking in MWP, exposed biases that center the primacy of colonial knowledge often used to maintain oppressive relations. It also however, offered illumination and amplification of knowledges that are not typically understood or regarded as important, countering that knowledge that is used to oppress. Both tasks were part of this project. Barrett and Bolt’s methodology is important as I reflect on MWP in which knowledge surfaced and generated by young people, who do identify with attunement to and lived experience of, many oppressions and repressions in society and systems, are centered,

and *unmasked* as critical radical leadership to how we can live together in the world. MWP put me in direct engagement with young artist/re-searchers to uncover relevant desires and intentions to transform community and culture that are not only for young people's liberation, but that would lead to collective liberation.¹²

The many rich understandings that emerged in arts practice and production in MWP demonstrate the complexities of *place* and why it's necessary to contend artistically and intellectually with its multiple meanings. Arts practice with place, meant creating *with* land, its physicality, horizons, forests, waters, skies, climates, and all the elements that surround, infuse and move through it, as well as the multiple human and more-than-human histories that exist in connection with land. This in addition to exploring how historical and current socio-political contexts impact our bodies, minds, and communities, expanded our understanding of the critical thinking and opportunities involved in art-making that considers multiple aspects of place to engage with it explicitly and politically.

Place is not just one thing at any one time. Predominantly our inquiry about place within our current context of global pandemic and uprisings against anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, affirmed historic and ongoing forces of colonialism, patriarchy and White Supremacy to shape, constrain, control, and constrict *place* to reify colonial ideas of land as ownable, and people, languages and cultures, flora and fauna within or connected to land, as subjective and subjectable.

Collaborators expressed passionate ethical responsibilities and accountabilities as artists in relationship with people, more-than-human beings, and place, to prioritize the disruption of the spatialized and spatializing processes of past and current colonization and capitalism. Tuck and McKenzie, confirm artist/re-searchers' explorations as *critical place inquiry* necessary for research, that recognizes place as interactive and dynamic, shifting over time and space, shaped and reshaped with and through the flows and movements of people, other species, the elements, in all their diverse identifications and practices.¹³

What follows are my attempts to summarize our inquiry around *place* that emerged in our practice, production and discourse. This will include the powerful forces of place as current context; the making of place in a virtual context; the breaking of positionalities encountered with

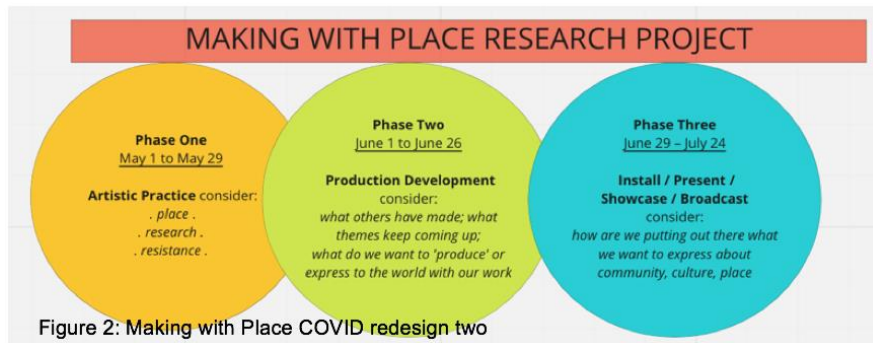
place; place as subjective; as internal landscape; as time and space; as transcendence; land, differently than place, as objective; and finally understanding place as a verb.

Place as Current Context

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown to reduce its impacts, meant we were repeatedly advised to 'stay at home' where we were to wait for what federal and provincial officials would tell us to do next. Confusion about what this virus was, how fast it travelled, recommended actions of washing our hands rigorously and repeatedly, and exhortations to wear face masks and stay six feet apart, were sudden surrealistic preoccupations of most of our imaginations and dominated the project from the start revealing current context as primary and immediate conceptions of *place*. The original project start date after months of preparations with SKETCH and York, quickly vanished and Charlotte and I, found ourselves having to reconsider if we were going to execute the project at all.

Pressing in on me was this constant advisement 'stay at home' implying that 'home' is a refuge, and safe *place* to protect us from the pandemic. Its inherent assumptions were glaring and I knew young people engaged with SKETCH would be scattered in varying versions of what 'home' was for them at that moment, and that they would quickly feel the restrictions on their movement. SKETCH sprung quickly into action connecting young people to food, technology, shelter, government support and art supplies, to reduce the impacts of isolation and strain on their mental health that we knew would be immanent.

This advisement, 'stay at home' didn't sit well with me at the time. Just two months previous the energy of Climate Action marches instigated by young people took place all over the world. Shortly after were protests of damaging pipelines through the Wet'suwet'en peoples' territories. COVID brought all activism to a halt and the big-world-connectivity, energy of solidarity and building momentum stopped dead, 'went dark' as we say in theatre, and we were left, as Jess remarked, "with only ourselves." I called the young leaders recruited as artist/re-searchers, to determine our collective and individual capacity to participate in the project. Only the folks recruited, who had relative stability in some kind of housing, even if only temporarily, were able to participate. The pandemic's force made it challenging to see beyond the immediate concerns of safety, wellness, and access, but everyone expressed desire to engage even just as a distraction or way to centre ourselves in the midst of what seemed to be, constant change.



What was originally intended as hourly waged research collaboration, 12 hours/week for 15 weeks in studio at SKETCH, was re-designed as small 'grants' supporting self-

organized artistic practice toward production, in 4-week chunks at a time, offering off-ramps at any point depending on each person's self-assessed ability to participate. There would be no tracking of how people used their time and no facilitated teaching as originally envisioned. I found lockdown challenging to my own ability to think ahead so this new design seemed manageable.

Making Place in a Virtual Context

We committed to meeting online weekly, using Zoom as our platform, to share how exploring *place* was showing up in our arts practice. Along with my co-artist/re-searchers, I embarked on my own solo art practice working with natural dyes. This was the first activity of making *place* in the project, each of us carving out time and 'space' either physically or in the imaginary, for solo practice. I was encouraged at our first zoom meeting, to see that regardless of all the stress people were facing, they seemed to jump, with deep willingness, into art. Pree grounded us with their online blog, Jess brought a power point presentation and Olympia shared dictionary definitions of place to get us started.

In true SKETCH fashion, we *named* ourselves with pronouns, something about our ancestry and lineage, our intentions with art in community and how we acknowledge these lands and territories. Offerings revealed our diversity in understandings of these lands and its histories, as well as our own. Identities offered included Queer and Trans, 2Spirit, disabled, open to all pronouns, three 'he', and two 'she' identifying. Ancestry or lineage offered by the group included Anishinaabeg-Scottish, Métis-Cree and maybe Scottish, Mexican-Italian, Punjab, Scarborough and South Asian.

We re-introduced ourselves with each new circle, broadening identifications beyond names and pronouns, to reveal experiences and values: an observer specifically of natural phenomenon, a young Black Father, a former DJ, a drone-flyer, a deconstructionist and reconstructionist, a

survivor of overdoses, an advocate for harm reduction, and as having a bunch of identities because no one fits except maybe ally, advocate or activist.

We shared the role of hosting check-ins prompting more naming of what's common to us, like plants that held personal significance and foods we loved; to what differentiated us with more complex questions like 'what skills are you building right now', 'what did you care about a month ago that you don't care about now', 'what are your deepest intentions', and 'who do you consider to be the 'cream of society'?

I was compelled by the way these check-ins, arguably our first act of collaborative production, helped us to land and humanize in a virtual space. They playfully ignited or provoked imagination and deep thinking that set a tone for how we'd hold the space together and transcend its challenges. Often we could have ended right after the check-in depending on how we used it. It called us to be present, to concentrate, to tell stories and to take risks in dialogue and sharing. It worked to remove generalities and assumptions uncovering the many layers of who we are challenging fixed ideas that we have about each other. Repeated re-introductions affirmed for each of us, the right to name ourselves and in as many different ways as we wanted. We used Zoom features to indicate where we were at, for example the chat or reactions functions if we didn't feel like speaking, and we agreed to midway breaks, to walk away from our screens, let our eyes adjust and stretch our bodies to move outside of the square space created by our computers, iPads, tablets or phones. Being in conversation online surfaced digital literacy challenges and required a new kind of attentiveness and slow concentration differently than gathering in person.

These basic agreements together with imaginative check-ins co-created a context within which we could self-determine our participation to make way for narrative imagination. Play, poetry, imagery, storytelling and discourse became modes through which we co-organized our learning space. The imaginary revealed itself as a critical resource to chart new ways of being together that challenge dominant constructs typically sorting our engagement based on hierarchies, roles and binaries. Goeman refers to this way of storytelling as spatial decolonization and part of (re)mapping, to challenge colonial logics and organizing principles. Our virtual spatiality, required deep listening, attention to what others offered and bravery to overcome any online awkwardness, to participate mutually in generative sensemaking. The group used all functions to affirm each other's offerings taking great care to ensure nothing and no one got missed.¹⁴

I always appreciated these check-ins as they relieved pressure on me that I perhaps assumed, to 'lead' the dialogue. Along with simple agreements to holding the space, they animated and confirmed principles emphasizing relationships of mutual respect, co-responsibility and reciprocity. They created the conditions needed to share relevant ideas, fears, failures, dreams, desires and intentions for community. This was not something planned beforehand. I have, as a practitioner, always valued imaginative check-ins to open up engagement but it seemed to take on an added dimension in this case inviting the whole group to be part of how we held our time together and how we wanted to make decisions about our participation. We were articulating and practicing the five 'R's' of Indigenous research principles, honouring perhaps most particularly, the right of refusal, all along the way, as theorized by Jean Paul Restoule.¹⁵

Breaking Positionalities encountered with Place

Artist/re-researcher, Beerus, identified his involvement early on, as a Creative Consultant to the process, my practice and leadership in the project, and to co-artist/re-researchers. At first, in what I feel now, was patronizing, I found this intriguing and something I could accept or reject at any moment. Throughout the project however, I realized that this self-proclaimed vocation was completely critical to the project's success and my own research-creation process. He was not able to attend all scheduled online zoom sessions because of family commitments but he connected through consistent texts and phone calls, which I had to adjust to at first and make time for throughout, and eventually became quite dependent on. He did this while producing three albums and multiple music videos that featured his unique style of music arrangement, song writing, recording, and performance. His rigour and discipline in arts production and consultation seemed uninterrupted and I recognized pretty quickly, that I was in no way, leader to his work, but rather in response to his invitation, I had an opportunity to become an intern or apprentice to him, and by extension, to each of the artist/re-researchers.

This awakened in me, what I would describe as, latent reflexivity muscles, surprisingly dormant since moving from collaborative theatre production in my past life to a position of artistic direction in my present life. I embarked on (re)learning a 'repositioning' practice needed for coexistence that shifted my learning *with* to *learning from* and *among*, while still holding my responsibilities as 'executive lead' of the project, the positionality Beerus often reminded me not to retreat from or relinquish. This challenged my romantic notions of participating with the research team on equal terms realizing I couldn't cancel out positionality and in fact I wasn't being asked to do so. I was being invited use my power to authentically co-create space for

unique assertions of individual authorship and power as part of the knowledge production process.

This enabled me to understand in a deeper way, Freire's theories of the limiting views of 'false charity' or 'false generosity', attitudes and practice rampant in the charitable sector in which I have been consciously and unconsciously complicit, that propose models of transformative change as only legitimate when coming from among the oppressors, maintaining ('placing'), those who identify as 'the oppressed' as *lesser* or dependent. Freire emphasizes that people engaged in the fight for their own liberation must generate their own models or pedagogies. Beerus' pedagogical impulse was authorship of his own liberation and consequently, my own.¹⁶

Place as Subjective

In that first 4-week phase many conversations illuminated artist/re-searchers' reported struggles with the pandemic's disproportionate adverse effects on those marginalized and racialized, leaving many without the supports they needed to get through this time. This frustration with injustice revealed ***place to be subjective, contextual and situated***.

Amplifying this in real time, were both the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis (May 25, 2020) and the death of Regis Korchinski-Paquet in Toronto (May 27, 2020), setting off a global and local swell of indignation about anti-Black racism and police violence as a result of White Supremacy embedded within that and most systems. A host of unjust deaths of Black persons over recent years were resurfaced and declarations of taking up space with the *names* of people lost, became a priority along with wake-up calls-to-action especially to those who benefit from systemic anti-Black racism, to recognize the cumulative violent impacts on peoples and communities urging action to make change, specifically to defund police. The power of both historic and current racism to define people and place, collided to trigger a critical turning point in the project. Absolute rage sharpened a collective resolve giving focus, urgency and purpose to our creative practices and collaboration.¹⁷

"Know your Place. Used to Enforce docility; Pay Tree Ark; Enslave Men T; Place is part of the problem; Place leaves people homeless".
-Beerus

Place as Internal Landscape

These events shook the group in so many emotional and psychosocial ways, and had significant effects on our virtual geography for the subsequent 4-week phases of consensual involvement. I thought we would lose people. Screens went dark with only names present,

voices became quiet, sentences short, and the chat box became a vehicle for support. Expressions of exhaustion, overwhelm, fear, rage and grief resulted in volatile ambivalence between a lack of drive to make art at all and a sense of immobility, to passionate focused urgency to be on the frontlines, as Ammarah expressed. Black leaders bravely making space through protests, marches, and through social media activations offered spatiality through which to funnel and find direction but artist/re-searchers nevertheless highlighted the impacts of all of this on their internal landscape, another identified *place*.

The pandemic related social distancing and isolation grew tiresome and exploited anxieties and vulnerabilities. Combined with the hyper-spatialized impacts of racialization, revealed themselves, not just as a social construct but as Pree stated, “to be embodied in our physical bodies, minds and communities.” Positionalities and power came to the forefront. Bold and emotional conversations about how we use the time or how we had or had not created trust sufficient enough to process what was happening, led to conversations about our desired intentions as artists, to make space to declare injustices, realizing however, as Beerus stated, “there are inherent tensions involved when Black people talk about White people killing them with White people present.” Artist/re-searchers articulated how important it is to bring anti-Black racism into all spaces that mattered to us because it matters to all of us. We struggled in these conversations and I was conscious that my presence alone was likely a challenging factor, but the group moved through with honesty, generosity and compassion. After the difficult zoom meeting extended conversations happened through text that affirmed group member’s individual resilience and courage as well as the right to self-determine participation.

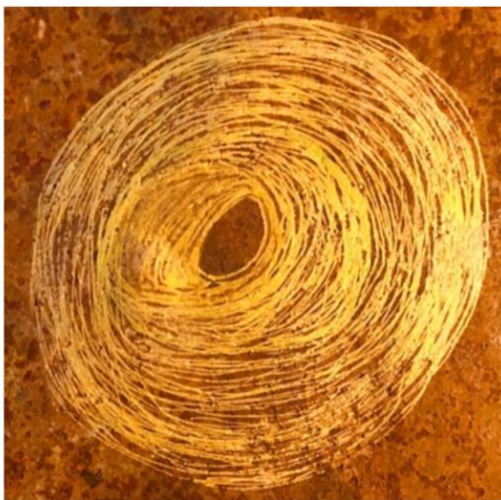


Image 4: Kokolou - a lament in cycles - film by Charlotte Lombardo. Projection at the Bentway. Photography by Charlotte Lombardo and by Jahmal Nugent.

Re-researcher, Charlotte Lombardo collaborated in song with cormorants at the Leslie Street Spit as a study of grief. Fellow artist/re-searchers recommended she record in loops and repetitive cycles similar to her drawing on this piece of metal found at the Spit. Her final piece was a sound film projected onto high walls of a stairwell at The Bentway. The effect was an eerie, dreamlike song-fullness playing over and over. The visuals provided what appeared to be a suspended portal in the night sky beside the busy expressway, drawing us in suggesting a route to another world.

Place as Time and Space

One of artist/re-searchers had to step away from the project and with all that was happening we slowed down and adjusted the design so we could follow the threads about place that were emerging while honouring what everyone needed to process events and complex emotions, in addition to staying COVID-free. I shared the budget with the group to propose different options for moving forward and everyone expressed desire to stretch the timeline. While I was challenged about not sharing the budget before this moment, I expressed my hope that sharing it now would support shared decision-making about moving forward. Even though reviewing budget options via zoom was laboursome artist/re-searchers were grateful for the transparency and the invitation to co-determine our next steps.

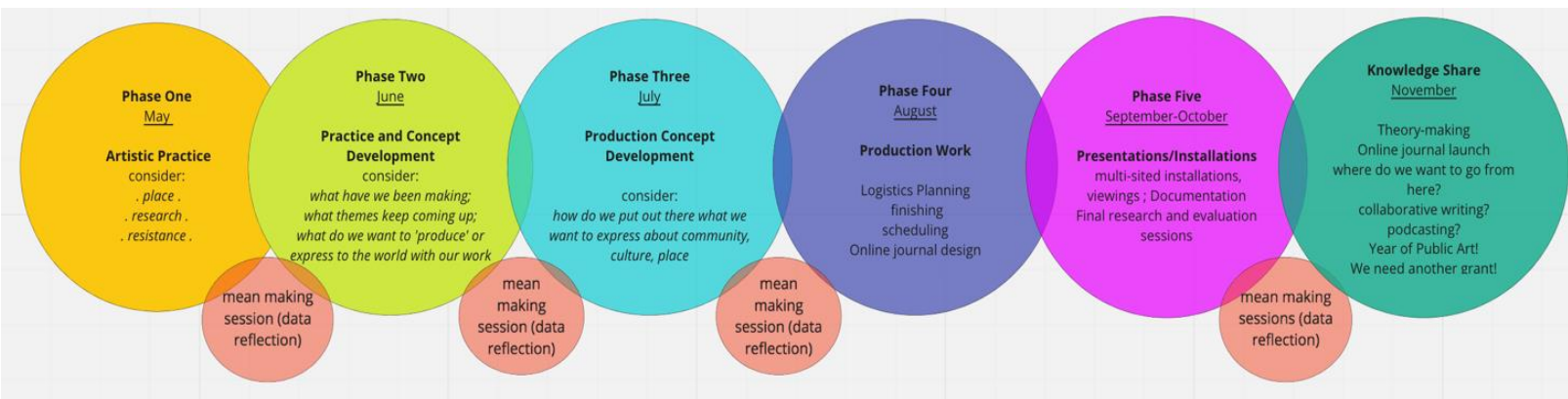


Figure 3: Making with Place redesign three

Stretching the time gave everyone breathing room. People spent time with friends, family and in nature. With shorter and less zoom meetings to reduce mutually expressed 'zoom fatigue', we communicated almost solely through the visualizations or writings of our art production practice through Instagram, WhatsApp, or text. Our attentiveness to lines, shapes, uses of light and dark, colours, sounds, and words shared in poetry, expanded the creative spatiality we had been working on through discourse and dialogue – in another more abstract but profound re-

making of place as I'll reflect on more in chapter two, in imagination. Many of the pieces shared during this time had to do with re-centering ourselves in nature or in advocacy for justice in community – two activating identifications of place holding equal value in this project.

Jess began to collaborate with community members on a mural and to design a recipe zine; Olympia envisioned ideas of sculptural 'art bombs' made with objects found in nature; Jahmal began to storyboard films and photography timelines; Pree started to paint again and design a zine celebrating artists with disabilities, Ammarah collaged photography and calligraphy and explored movement; Bert went home to shoot videos in the bush; Charlotte collaborated with a friend on music; Beerus finished an album; and I dove into my dye work. Something about that mid-summer lushness spurred on artistic ideation and focused our intentions for art production in public space.

Land as Objective

Through artistic practice, every artist contemplated what was expressed as foundational in our explorations of place – that of *land*, and our relationship to it. Land was described as objective, sacred, unknowable, and unownable; the ground wherever you are; the land beneath your feet and as everything that surrounds you; the elements, flora and fauna.

MWP artist/re-searchers were propelled by deep intentions to be in relationship with and responsible to, land, self and community in re-search, that is more than observation. Rather, re-search was desired that engages us in developing deep attunement to land, to embodying all that it holds, as a primary way of coming to know ourselves in relation to others as exemplified by Jahmal's photography on forest walks. When he shared his collection we experienced perspectives offered through being wrapped up in nature.¹⁸

Working together with *place* oscillated between this attunement with natural elements and more-than-human beings, and the awareness of situated context in these lands of undeniable historic and ongoing forces of colonialism and colonization. Awareness of rules, policies (and education) as Beerus stated, that reinforce the colonial idea that "land *belongs* to someone", artist/re-searchers wrestled with the bitter reality that physical boundaries, geographical mapping, and land ownership, are tools of European colonization determining our individual situatedness, identities and social positionalities. Contesting

"it all goes back to land and the resources the land provides; ownership and what people are willing to do to have that."
-Bert

colonialism and all its boundaries, therefore, was both a critical starting point and through line throughout our inquiry.

The Struggles of Language and Knowledge

Charlotte and I reviewed zoom transcripts and artworks, presenting mind-maps of key themes to collaborators for feedback along the way. Rich discussions about language, knowledge and research ensued in which Beerus called the mind maps “a giant equation where creativity and the academy come together”. Conversations unpacked mutually experienced frustrating relationships with education and social science research methods that were rigid, unapproachable. Artist/re-searchers expressed the failings of institutions to reflect or value knowledge outside of the western canon, prioritizing dominant imperialistic views erasing or dismissing Indigenous and Black scholarship and other nondominant knowledges. Pree expressed “gatekeeping around particular kinds of writing that makes research inaccessible”. Many of us recognized where we felt that research had simply reinforced colonial power and control, using languages that were/are often hurtful and alienating.

“Minds have become monetized. Very violent place happens through power dynamics”
-Jess

All MWP artist/re-searchers expressed the acute violence experienced with oppressive and limiting terminologies used in institutions and in particular, those used in the charitable sector. Contestation arose around over-used and narrow terms to describe young people with similar experiences to themselves in presentations, grants and research as: “street-involved”, “marginalized”, “at risk” or “homeless”. Beerus emphatically rejected the term “marginalized youth” saying that “to identify as such was essentially to accept defeat. Like I’ve allowed myself to be pushed to the margins...me saying I’m marginalized is like me saying ‘I’m lost, help me’, to the same person who’s kicking me to the curb.”

A great deal of passionate discussion emerged when Bert raised that institutions benefit from using oppressive terminology that box people into specific categories. The group urged me to consider this criticism personally and bring it to SKETCH, the community-engaged arts partner organization, to consider the harms caused by repeatedly using these ‘labels’. Ammarah exclaimed that using the term ‘homeless’ is “actively harmful and creates lack of safety because of the way that systems and society look at homeless folks.” Culture was not exempt from this criticism as Beerus noted that throughout history any time the proprietors of culture hear the word ‘research’, he felt they started thinking about infiltration and “that in a corporatist world

such provision is inevitable.” In these conversations there was a definite call to action to recognize and change oppressive language used in research, education, culture, institutions, and especially, in charities.

Place as a Verb

Through all of this we named another critical understanding of *place* as **transcendence**, where **time and space** could be **created** to nurture or call forth, individual and collective consciousness to rise above or beyond limitations of situatedness or context. Described by Nigel, as “connection to our [Super]powers” or “how we do,” this idea of transcendence while also implying a destination, more pointedly connected to an energetic proposition of Beerus’ that everything changes if we view **place as a verb**. Pree suggested square brackets around *super* to indicate that our powers implying action, could be any kind of ‘super’ that we each defined them to be. There seemed to be enlivening recognition and hopefulness in this naming of capacity to play with time and space, but it couldn’t remove us from the power of place as subjective and subjugating or situated and situating. The resolve to resiliently contend with this intellectual, psychological and creative tension and motivated agency to illuminate both in our arts productions.

While the pandemic lockdown made for restrictions of movement overall, we were actively engaged in *making place* sharing various forms of art, through which we took each other to *places* we might never have otherwise gone. The spatiality of online interaction meant we were transcending geographical definitions and as such, our conversations about place, called upon memory, our own histories, storytelling, deep listening, imagination and critical thinking across multiple understandings of space, place and time.

As Massey asserts, this kind of spatial critical thinking enabled us to imagine space/place as beyond physical sites or surfaces upon which we travel and remade time and space as interrelated multiplicities which seemed to enable us to push back against external forces and make way for an equally robust multiplicity of possibilities. This co-authorship in making space, moving beyond it as a neutral backdrop narrowly defined by geography, proffered some sense of control and structure during a time where things seemed to be spinning quite out of control.¹⁹ The arts as re-search methodology engage conceptually with place in ways that mobilize analysis to engage with place explicitly and politically in an alive sense towards ethical and responsible relations.²⁰



Image 5: Phyllis Novak. *Fractal Study Pattern Stretch with Indigo*. Photography by Phyllis Novak

“What is it that preoccupies you the most as you create these pieces”, Beerus asked. “The chemistry, the interplay between the dyes, the water, the fabric. And the patterning that emerges as fixed into fabric” I answered. I realize a desire to create complex patterns in multiple layers and I shared that it related to my thinking about Whiteness – deep, tight, established and insidious patterns of Whiteness, wrapping me like a skin but also intricately structuring my insides – overlapping layers of privilege and entitlements creating thick barriers and constricting movement.

“Think about fractals”, he advised. “Particularly psychedelic patterns of white light and ultraviolet light. Also mannequins with multiple patterns projected on them up to their shoulders. Think about that for a while.” My subsequent fractal study in dye work revealed the repetition of complex patterns at different scales, created in ongoing repeated feedback loops to be constantly moving. It invited me to examine not just the pattern itself but the space around it, the centre of it and that if distorted and stretched, new pattern overlays would be revealed that are normally invisible with the potential of elaborating whole new designs. I played with varying folds in evolving patterning, to deconstruct while reconstructing in upward and outward spirals. Adrienne Maree Brown encourages that for systems to change, we need to be more fractal in order to cultivate radical imagination and keep ideating, individually, collectively and collaboratively spiralling upwards, from micro to macro. The result of this study gave me strength and courage to see that Whiteness while quite entrenched in systems, in persons, and certainly in myself, could be worked through, opened up and with successive efforts, confronted, examined, and from there, evolved.²¹

Chapter 2

CREATING AND AFFIRMING - ART PRACTICE and PRODUCTION

– Knowledge and tools to make Change



Figure 4: Arts Practice as Re-search mind map

Kirby and McKenna's methodology of research from the margins refers to **Creating** in research to build knowledge with the understanding that constructing social reality is different for those who benefit from the status quo than those who don't. **Affirming** involves recognition of the personal and collective experience and knowledge coming from those navigating the margins, and the subtle and overt ways in which those are invisibilized or silenced, aiming to name that reality and not exploit it further. MWP artist/re-searchers take this methodology a step further in using the arts to not only illuminate that social reality but to completely transform it and move beyond it. So the emphasis is not just on the experience of those marginalized in relation to oppressive knowledge and practice. In arts practice as re-search, new visions for reality are being co-constructed that demand and enact a shift in our gaze from how the oppressor should work with knowledge shared from those experiencing marginalization (disrupting extractive practices), to the artists drafting new visions which in varying and multiply diverse ways, offer new thought leadership to follow, and make change.²²

Situating ourselves in knowledge making, involved a deep look at knowledge and research generally, recognizing them both as political processes involving the navigation of differences in power. Collaborators expressed concern about a dynamic where those who have monopoly over what is considered mainstream knowledge production tend to commodify knowledge toward specific ends. Olympia demonstrated this by recounting media interviews in which she had explained critical harm reduction philosophy only to be asked to demonstrate shooting up. She and others confirmed how most often media focused on highlighting vulnerabilities, rather than generative assets that might come from one's informed experiences which come with marginalization.²³

Ammarah and Jahmal confirmed that they prefer concepts of collaborative research opposing strict binaries between those *being* researched, and those *doing* the research, where control of discourse is shared to create lasting change in communities. Ammarah emphasized that, "it's always been obvious that communities know how to help themselves, they just need to be given the tools."

"everyone's practice is a visual representation of accessible research"
-Ammarah

Research-Creation in Conversation with Community/Socially engaged Art

MWP engaged artist/re-searchers in asking questions, looking at problems, collecting information and data, observing and reflecting on our experience, and analyzing the information, to draw conclusions, posit theories and issue calls to action. We engaged to make meaning as artists situating our practice in a shared conviction as Ammarah stated, "to make art that pertains to who we are and how we move through the world." This connects with Kirby and McKenna who theorize that, "how we do our research is inextricably linked to how we see the world."²⁴

Along with Kirby and McKenna's theories, I am guided by the distinct methodology of art practice as inquiry in which Barrett and Bolt confirm:

Creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns that operate not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge. An innovative dimension of this subjective approach to research lies in its capacity to bring into view, particularities that reflect new social and other realities

"Research is acquiring knowledge that can be shared knowledge that you learned from a teacher, an elder or people in your community."
-Bert

either marginalized or not yet recognised in established social practices and discourses.²⁵

The role and capacities of the artist has more often than not been undervalued in society or 'othered' as belonging to either a divinely anointed elite or as those seeing visions and living-out-of-touch-with-reality. Community/Socially engaged art has long addressed this narrow and classist view demonstrating the power of the artist as an intermediary, engaging and collaborating *with* communities in and through arts practices, and in profound ways, to make sense of the world. Helguera asserts that most artists who produce socially engaged works are interested in creating a kind of collective art that affects the public sphere in meaningful ways beyond symbol and representation, and draws from Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* gearing communication and understanding to be true emancipatory forces with lasting effects on politics and culture.²⁶

Having worked in community/socially engaged art for many years, I have witnessed the value of it to engender new possibilities to assert voice, especially for communities identifying as on the margins. Value on collective learning and shared experience with equally valued process and product, was interwoven and confirmed to be critical in this project. Opportunities emerged through research-creation specifically as a methodology, however, that expanded the project's impacts beyond community building pursuing the multiplicity of artists' individual subjectivity as critical to and equally valued as the development of collective knowledge. MWP was additionally enriched by recognizing the agency of *place* itself, in all its varied meanings described as *placework* by Larsen and Johnson, to be equally valuable as part of the re-search collaboration. While community/socially engaged art is powerful to communicate broad experience and to mobilize groups toward change, caution of collapsing individuation is important particularly when trying to resist generalizing dominant societal definitions that might perpetuate those used to stigmatize, disenfranchise and *displace*.²⁷

What is happening *in* art making that connects with *agency* to make change?

Materiality

Bruno Latour suggests in *Actor Network Theory* that 'agency' is distributed, and understood to include combinations of human and non-human networks. Feminist new materialism as explained by Felicity Coleman, goes further to address how engagement with all *matter* can be

re-imagined and reassembled, to challenge patriarchal structures and to engender other ways of being and understanding. MWP intentionally engaged us with all manner of place, and materiality ‘expressed’ in multiple forms, to unsettle assumed monopolies on knowledge.²⁸ Through unique modalities each artist/re-researcher explored paths of reassembly that while they may generally speak to similar concepts, they resist being collapsed into one overarching or potentially homogenizing idea and as such, serve to stimulate constant flow and exchange in the process of learning.

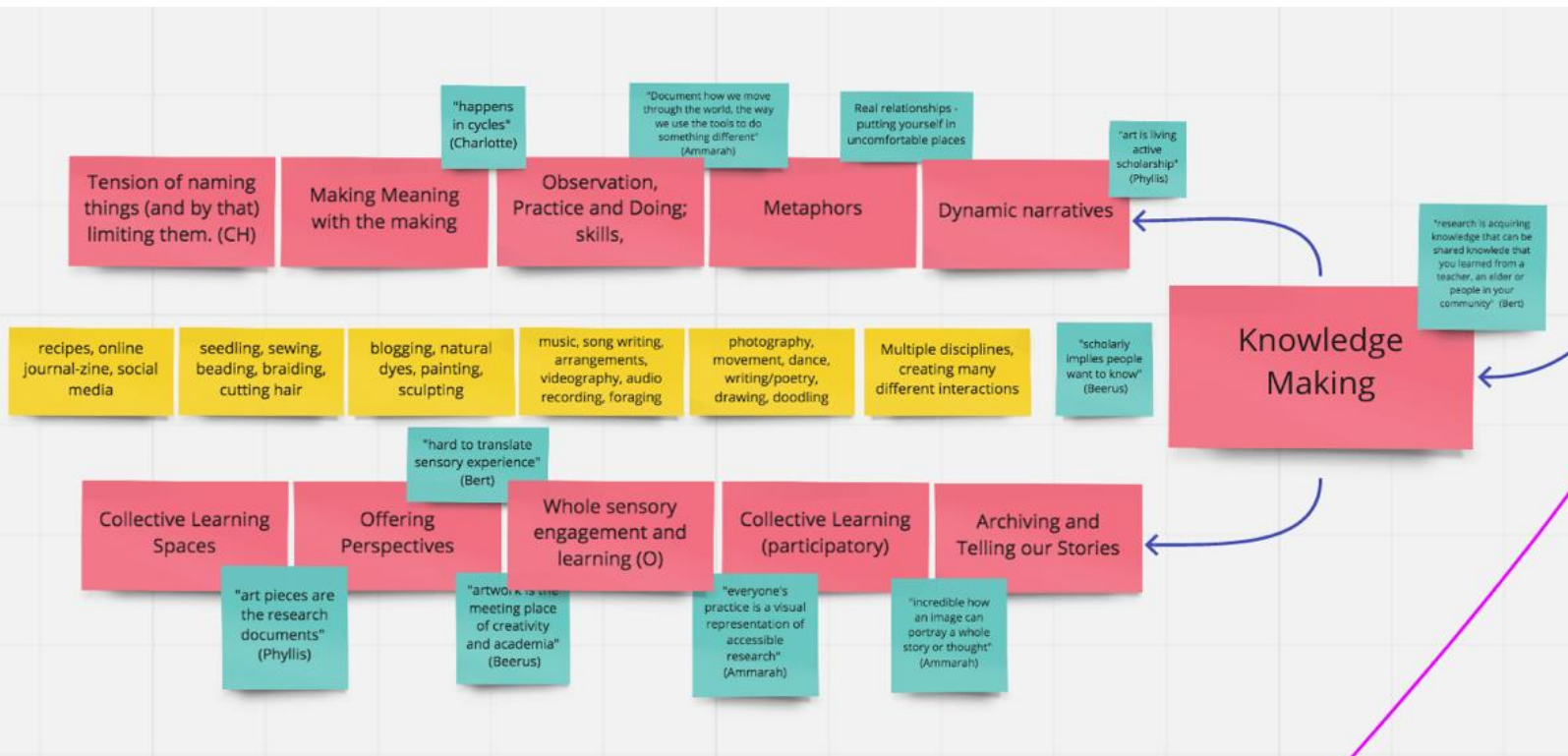


Figure 5: Knowledge Making mind map

This interplay between artist/re-researchers with placework and materiality served to (re)map, even just how knowledge-making itself works, individually and collectively, to deconstruct tired and imposed colonial paradigms. Through discourse, dynamic narratives and metaphors followed in imagery, storytelling, song, rhythm, sound, and movement, we inspired and conspired to produce powerful cognitive maps suggested by Goeman, as generating alternative conceptions that subvert the masculine project of empire building.²⁹

To understand more about how **what's happening in art making that connects to agency**, let's consider the cognitive maps of some MWP artist/re-researchers and how they manifested

into action. I've titled the sections based on themes that arose during our conversations that in part answer the research question.

Reciprocity



Image 6: Olympia Trypis. *Encampment Medicine Mobiles*. Photography by Phyllis Novak

Olympia calls herself “an artist who doesn’t like labels, and identifies as a human who is trying to live and create in harmony with earth, which is our home.” Olympia spent most of the artistic practice phases of the project at her trailer on her family’s Northern Ontario property, and going on natural material supply runs through the forest, where she would find artistic prompts in carcasses, bones, feathers, stone, birchbark, pine cones and more. She seemed to enter into deep conversation with them, crafting seemingly 24-7. The reported generosity she experienced in her wild foraging led to reciprocity in her art practice, in which she often engaged community and family members, aunts and elders, in making things to give away. This reciprocity was amplified in her final production involving medicine bundles and a large scale dreamcatcher mobile installed at a west end ‘homeless’ encampment and another medicine mobile installed at The Bentway.

Olympia’s intention in offering over 17 dreamcatchers and medicine bundles to residents of the encampment was that they take the installation apart to bring these gifts into their individual tents. We followed Olympia’s lead at this site because she had friends who lived there and had personal experience with homelessness. We were warmly

welcomed by Grizz, who had been there since losing his daughter in April. Inspired by the installation which he hung directly beside his dwelling, he gave Olympia a large circular frame he had found and promptly commissioned her to create a large-scale dreamcatcher with it. She accepted. He showed us his own formidable art collection, some by himself and some by folks that had spent time in the encampment. His easel was situated behind the outdoor communal kitchen in which Olympia conducted an interview about what they wanted to communicate about being there, about place.

Olympia's desire to offer gifts, medicines and some of the teachings from her lodge community to this community made way for honest conversations, questions and concerns about positionality, ethics of engagement in community, and honouring space and experience, as well as confronting our discomforts or fears of entering environments that are vastly different than our own. One artist/re-researcher said it felt like he was in another country, that he felt like the colonizer. Deep respect was garnered and the group subsequently decided to create art supply kits to take to the encampment as a way of staying connected and offering thanks demonstrating generative cycles of reciprocity

Dynamism



Image 7: (above) Jess De Vitt. *Intrusive Thoughts*. Photography by Jess De Vitt

Image 8: (below) Jess De Vitt. Artwork on cover of final zine



Jess took us on a journey prompted by contemplating dandelions and their prolific growth, inspiring reflections on how to work with memory while having migrated to Canada as a young person and the power of intrusive thoughts that were coming up while in isolation. Further study led Jess to discover dandelions were brought to North America by European settlers who wanted remembrances of home and who now were avidly fighting to control their takeovers of lawns and fields. This analogy generated conversation first, on the inherent invasiveness of colonization, then broadened to dandelions as food, and finally to dandelions as Indigenous medicines recognizing every part of the plant to have healing properties. This stimulated conversations about the historical and current power of Indigenous dynamism exemplified in the story of dandelion similar to Turtle Island's First Peoples, and of the experience of being on society's margins – each historic and ongoing obsessions of 'settlers' to 'bring under control'. Jess considered these polarities and in her own kind of dynamism began to re-search mutual aid and collective care activated by BIPOC food sovereignty activists. These concepts catalyzed her engagement with spoken word Black identified artist, Susie Mensah, to overlay political text onto a mural that Jess had

created a year earlier, along Queen Street West. Further to that, Jess engaged all of us to contribute to the first volume of an online community recipe zine based on principles of mutual aid. Her intent being to draw attention to collective care during this time as part of movements of liberation.³⁰

Luminosity

Ammarah took us into her daily work context at a local isolation site for COVID positive folks, namely refugees and new arrivals to Canada. Through her experience we were reminded of localized impacts of COVID to further displacing already displaced peoples. She presented to us photography of moving lights from her short road trips catching changing scenes in Toronto to and from work, sunrise to sunset, from the vantage point of driving in her recently reclaimed car. As a self-described wellness artist she explored improvised movement and used calligraphy to process thoughts creating iconography that centered her.



Image 9: Ammarah Syed, *Grounding and Activating*. Photo and text collage installed at The Bentway. Photography by Jahmal Nugent.

Ammarah describes themselves as “an interdisciplinary artist interested in documenting how modern day discourses such as capitalism, colonialism, and various power dynamics have developed to inform mental health, identity and

sexuality, aspiring to use the arts to explore how words among other factors, influence emotion, culture and politics and as a means to transform oppression into change.”

Grounding and Activating is Ammarah’s title for their two large scale photo archive and text collage assemblies that were mounted on two sides of a mobile wall in the middle of the skate path at The Bentway. Ammarah expressed intentions of *Grounding* to draw the viewer in even for just a moment to *ground themselves* in words and images with hopes to offer a sense of healing wellness during these challenging times. The symmetry of grounding statements written in calligraphy in black ink on white, does that as well as the attention to how colour in the collage leads the eyes through images of nature, sunsets, in vivid nurturing shades. Its companion piece, *Activating*, which involves a photo archive of Ammarah’s past and current involvement with activism and social movements, creates a contrasting energy to catalyze learning and motivation inviting the viewer to get involved. It offers direct links that can connect them to how they can realize their role in partnering to make change. The calligraphy on this panel is done using multicoloured inks against images that set, like building blocks, suggest activism to come from the ground up and to build upon itself. Both pieces are energizing in different ways because of Ammarah’s attention to light, shadows and movement.

These beautiful collages were added to with calligraphy embellishments post production threading all the pieces together. In debriefing this installation Ammarah worked with the geometric lines of the underbelly of the Gardiner expressway offering an image of a photo story suspended underneath this giant structure but that invites you to come close to move into its many stories. This work will be installed in the TTC in 2021 as part of *Desire Lines*, a production of VIBEarts.

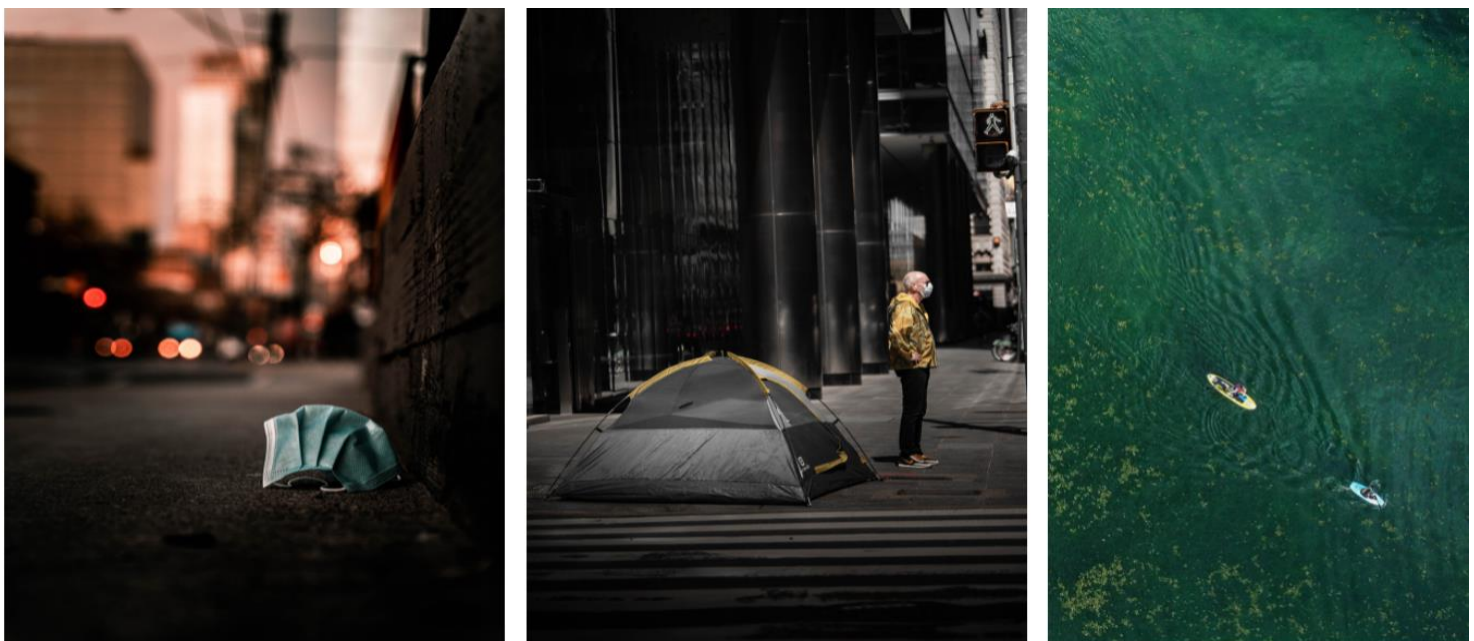
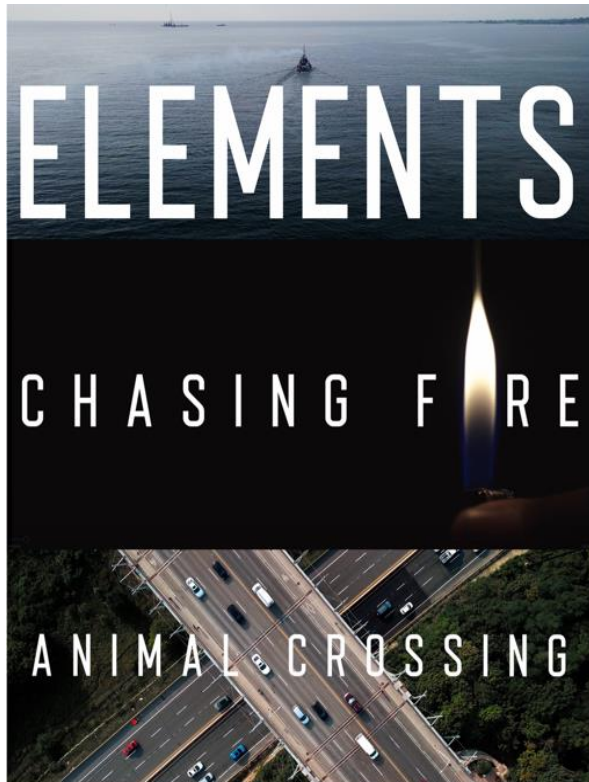


Image 10: Photography by Jahmal Nugent (aka Ninjahmal)



Perspective

Jahmal led the group digitally through his observations captured in creating stills that articulated the sudden emptiness and surrealism in the streets during lockdown. Needing to get away from it all, after the murder of George Floyd especially, his photography and video took us on deep forest walks enlivening intimate connections with creatures that reflected his aloneness in the middle of never-ending life-energy.

Jahmal continually reconnected with land, decompressing from the experience of the city which Bert expressed “swallows nature” to ground his practice and sense of self in pursuit of what Robin Kimmerer describes as *botanical belonging*, reminding us of how interrelated mental, physical and emotional health is with the natural world.³¹

Image 11: Jahmal Nugent. Elements, Chasing Fire, Animal Crossings – cinematic experience. Projection at The Bentway. Photography by Jahmal Nugent (aka Ninjahmal).

Artist Re-searcher, Jahmal Nugent describes himself as “a Visual media artist born, raised and based in Toronto, primarily focused on digital photography and videography to create, but sometimes who experiments with physical mediums also. His works mostly focus on seeing the ordinary as extraordinary and reminding us of how beautiful and amazing elements we take for granted, can be.”

In production Jahmal brought us to soaring heights and moving perspectives with powerful drone cinematography. He compiled his vast collection into three short films that were projected onto the walls of Fort York at The Bentway that offered a visual moving narrative journey from calmness to intensity to balance – rich perspective for the times we are in – using light, sharply contrasting and yet cohesive imagery enhanced by sound.

Attuned to space and place Jahmal recognized immediately that a next iteration for the films would be to recut them in connection with the walls they were projected onto. This would create an interplay between recorded images of places mapped into another space to put them into dialogue with each other. Jahmal's cinematography aimed to create an experience for us that was relatable, in and out of the city, transporting while grounding us in real viewpoints and perspectives of place. Jahmal's three short films can be seen in full at <https://www.sketch.ca/programs/special-projects/making-with-place>.

Whole-Body Learning

Nigel Edwards, a movement artist, with the project in the first two phases, led us virtually to his building's rooftop during lockdown, positioning us with a bird's eye view to witness his movement dialogue with rooftop cables and wires strewn about on rough asphalt surface. He spoke of the responsiveness of his body moving only in small increments allowed by the abrasive roof surface while expansive sky felt like it was teasing him with possibilities of flight.

Semiotic Impulse

These activated forms of learning through artistic practice involve affect, skills developed and applied, intuition, and what Olympia called "whole sensory engagement and learning", in constant flow between materialities and beings.



What makes the knowledge that's emerged through art practice come alive to stimulate action is not only the experience of the producer of the work but also the experience of the viewer or 'witness' to the work. In this way the art becomes a dialogic, or a kind of *theatre of the straight line* – where the role of the one witnessing the work (in this case mostly, artist/re-searchers) is needed to actually complete it.

Siljiva Jestrovic calls this "a semiotic impulse, which may be voluntary or involuntary on the part of the recipient, that imposes itself as an urge to engage in the meaning making process."³² The artist intention and articulation brings the work into being, but it's the experiencing of *reading into it*, that either refutes or solidifies the intention of the maker and more often than not, further develops it. Jestrovic describes this *reading into* as prompted by the need of witnesses to find their place or their own voice within the work, from which to draft their own spatio-

temporal parameters. Arts practice and production is effective in knowledge making through its subjectivity, its fluidity, its spatiality of experimentation and this invitation to engage in its iterative spatiality. So new meaning is being made in the moment of witness, that can propel what the work suggests into action carried on by the viewer.³³

Philosophy in Action

These subjective creative processes working through and responding to place and materiality, include multiple intelligences engaged in sense making that is reflexive, emergent and subject to repeated adjustments. This adds to the liveliness in creative learning making it a way of 'doing theory' or discovering and enacting 'philosophy in action' in contrast to more passive modes of learning. Animating what Barrett and Bolt emphasize as experiential problem solving, these processes are a double articulation that is central to practice-led research in that theory emerges from reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory. Through our zoom sharing, iterative art production and critique processes, and the artist/re-searcher interviews with their final art installations were all forms of the reiterative feedback cycle where artists shared work, affirmed their individual authorship in shaping and engaging with multiple knowledges and environments. All of this generates relational energy with one's art as a way of participating in a conversation, stimulating choice making response moments that propel individual sense of agency while feeding a sense of wellbeing.³⁴

Relationships

This was one of the reported finds of art production in public space as research, while its purpose may be seemingly outward-facing to offer knowledges that prompt social change, it incorporates each artist/re-searcher's relationship with self. Ammarah expressed how it "linked their life and practice" and Jess emphasized how it engaged them in "introspection and healing," offering space to grieve, while increasing awareness to others.

Bert emphasized this connection of relationship with self as always intertwined with relationship with community asking us to consider "when you situate yourself in a place or space, what is the environment that you create around yourself? Where does your energy go?" A strong sense of responsibility and accountability emerged throughout the project, confirmed in conversations around building social consciousness, being mindful of our words and what Jahmal called "a duty to protect people around us." This expanded considerations of ethics and

"I want to choose care that is embedded into the art I make and the food I eat."
-Jess

acknowledgements in connection with communities, and in making with materials, particularly natural materials, thinking of their sacredness and where they come from, aiming for sustainability in working with them, and encouraging ideas of reusing as much as possible and reducing waste.

Positionality and Ethical Engagement

Positionality was a constant conversation regarding relationship with community and land echoing Goeman's recognition of the politics of location. More than a few times the group expressed moral struggles of capturing moments in community on camera, for example, turning the camera on tenting encampments, when the bylaw on tenting in the city was temporarily lifted at the beginning of COVID. Members suggested offering trades for photos and sharing the intent of capturing/recording tenting as part of archiving critical movements and activations happening during this time.³⁵

This conversation was carried into production through Olympia's installation in the west-end 'homeless' encampment. The group identified ethical questions about relationship building and intentions of the artist as critical in engaging communities on the margins. One group member however, didn't feel comfortable going to that installation because they had no relationship with the people at the encampment. From this we had thoughtful conversations around the intentions of art production and public art in particular in communities. This challenged how we view *different* groups of people, and our sense of what community actually is and who we are accountable to, realizing that sometimes in our spoken desires to be respectful, we can risk potentially 'othering' individuals who experience negative effects feeling 'outside' of *normative* definitions. Other group members identified that they might be holding themselves back from important learning about relations with community if they missed a chance to engage with them meaningfully as learners.

The discourse working through these negotiations was honest and heartfelt in which we shared our own connections to homelessness. Passionate conversation unfolded about how important it is to counteract public or media harmful and stigmatizing stories that only highlight vulnerabilities, rather than focus on the strengths of those of communities. I was impressed with the commitment and integrity of our group to challenge fixed ideas of spatiality through courageous discourse on ethics around art making with communities. In addition to their varied

artistic expressions this reaffirmed that benefits of diverse communities of young people bringing diverse perspectives when engaging in dialogue about critical societal issues.

Affect, Sensuality and Imagination

Affect, sensuality and imagination play obvious roles in arts practice and production with place, to generate knowledge and activism. Regarding imagination and its role I refer to Dean Stokes who speaks about imagination to generate creativity and stimulate free, creative thought in which a need for absolute accuracy or ‘truth-bound-ness’, is loosened up, creating multiple forms of cognitive manipulation.³⁶ In creative processes, Stokes claims this cognitive activity often “causally interacts with affective, motivational, inferential, and free associative capacities.”³⁷ Imagination does not necessarily cause action but it may cause *affect* that when connected to **desire and interest**, generate belief and intentions to drive decision-making and motivate action. Stokes suggests that this is where imaginative playfulness moves into imaginative workfulness.³⁸

Sara Ahmed reminds me that *affect is what sticks*, sustains or preserves, the connections between ideas, values, and objects with feelings and how we are touched by what we are near. She expresses that we apply value to things and thereby ignite desire to participate in shaping what is near us.³⁹ Upon reflection I see the direct connection of this theory in Olympia’s practice where her wild foraging compels her to create with nature, give back to nature or give forward, the experience she has in making with nature. Yana Meerzon expresses that we have subjective experiences of affect that precede feelings for example, empathy or compassion, which are the emotions directly connected to our system of moral, ethical, social, cultural, and aesthetic values.⁴⁰ This is reflected in Jess’ practice where through discourse, she and collaborator Susie, discovered deep connections between personal and community experiences during COVID around gender based violence. The project was conducted within the context of pandemic in a time, as Charlotte aptly described, “of loss at a fevered pitch” which urged us to connect to compassion around injustice, sharpening our socio-cultural values and in turn spurring on creative activations.

Jane Bennet writes of the possibilities of sustainable engagements with lively, non or more-than-human bodies, questioning how political responses to public problems might change if we were to take seriously their vitality. Seeking to articulate the vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans, Bennett wonders if patterns of consumption might change if we

considered matter as an 'actant' rather than a resource or commodity. Doing dye work along the shores of Georgian Bay on the Bruce Peninsula for a time this summer, enlivened my experimentation with the stones which seemed to represent ancient stories washed onto shores in new assemblages daily. Thinking of these stones as alive, as having story, as Bennet suggests, does make me pay more attention, respect them and want to spend more time considering myself in relation to them. I would like to think that my experience of these encounters which also called all my senses to be awake, would move me to be more ethical, mindful about enacting a conscious partnership with nature to fulfill my part in a two-way relationality.⁴¹

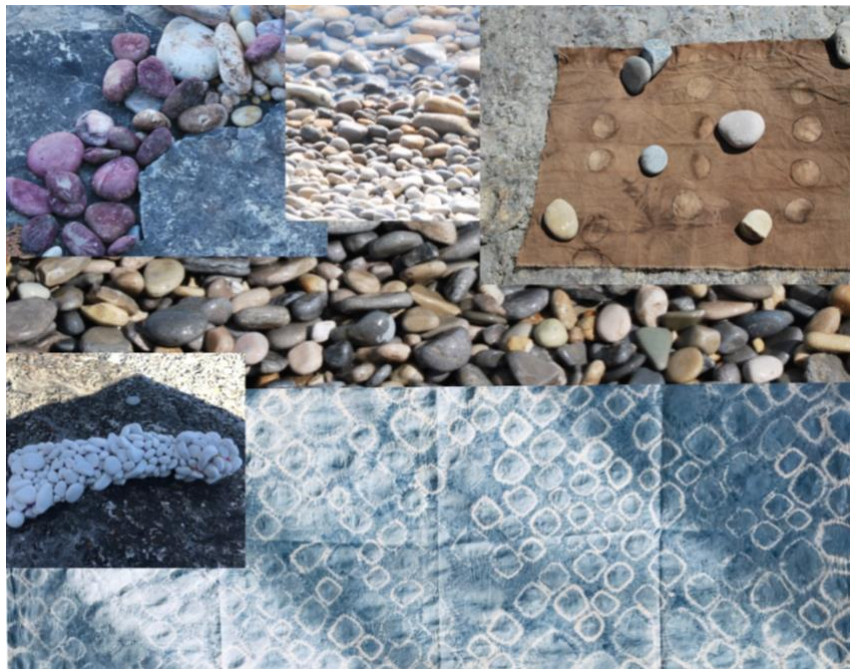


Image 13: Phyllis Novak, *Stone Studies Indigo and Sumac* collaboration with Rudy Ruttimann. Photography by Phyllis Novak

In a somewhat clumsy way, reflected in our artistic journeys, and certainly what I discovered in my own, is sensual activity. When I work with dyes the first thing to greet me is the smell of the vat, which has mnemonic affect. In the case of Indigo I'm reminded of my mom's bleach blonde hair dye used when I was a teenager and in the case of Marigold, my mouth actually waters thinking of an invigorating earthy tea reminding me of calming summer evenings. Engaging my sense of smell in this creative process is absolutely part of the pleasure it brings. Feeling marigold powder as it sticks to the fabric grainy and gluey, moves me to imagine their life before becoming dye. Fields of beautiful blooms that are also used in tinctures, medicines and food. Rinsing the fabrics wraps my hands in the cool mineral cleansing of water.

These sensual connections ignited interest and desire in me to pursue different lines of curiosity that eventually led to the invention of new pieces. Desire can pre-exist interest or it can be unearthed by interest in a chicken and egg relationship that takes one beyond oneself. This impulse to invent can stem from a frustration of connection, anger or from a sensation of silence, loss, incoherence or absence, often exhibiting an internal restlessness or desire to draw together what has been scattered apart. Put into conversation with socio-political relations involved in social change, implies that invention will involve a renegotiation, renewal or repair either with human or more-than-human connections. This constant state of iterative, whole sensory learning in arts practice and production, involving affect, sensuality and imagination, is part of its power to ignite desire, enliven curiosity and motivate agency to invent or reinvent.⁴²

ARTS PRODUCTIONS WITH PLACE

“What do I want to make that matters to me and others, and that will be the most honourable?” - Ammarah

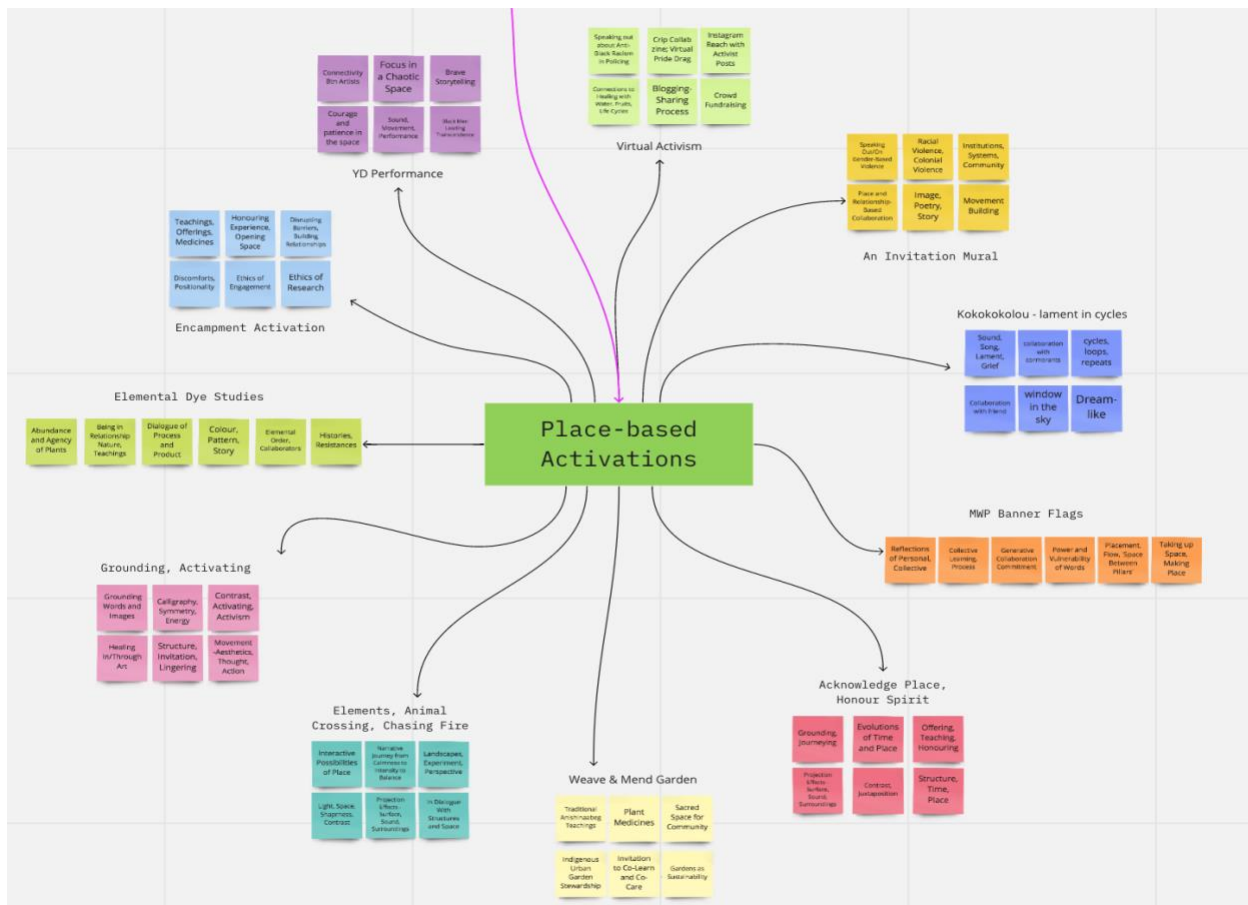


Figure 6: MWP Place-based Activations Mind Map

During our public art production, we were no longer in lockdown but still under public health advisories to meet only in small groups so we reconvened through zoom to map out our production schedule, making final decisions about pieces, sites and logistics. Since we couldn't have public audiences safely attend exhibitions, we decided to video document each installation and interview the artist involved, towards making short films to post in our online journal. Adding this layer of organizing video production was a challenge. People had work to finish artworks for installation and a new collaboration arose.

Led by Olympia who found some denim drapery, five of us came together in the SKETCH studios in September maintaining social distance and safety, to create banners that became a collaborative and public *thought cloth* referred to by Kirby and McKenna, sharing words, quotes, ideas and images that were part of our re-search process. "A thought cloth is a web of information that has a particular texture, density and colour reflecting the unique perspective of its creator(s)."⁴³ This collaboration anchored us during production. The floor of the project studio was covered for a week or so with the production work of the banners, Ammarah's collage projects, my dye work, notes and materials. There was space where others worked on editing videos and photographic work while others worked on scheduling the video shoots. Art making in shared studio practice toward production blends my love of visual art practice with theatre, where production energy gives a particular kind of focus and purpose to creating, unlike any other modality.

Solo art practice is a gift of inner and outer dialogue to understand our own journeys, how we think and what interests us. Taking these ideas into group dialogue is one thing, but the energy of co-production is a force unto itself. While not having audience or event to celebrate these works was on one hand disappointing, the idea of using the production installations as further experimentation and re-search, took off some of the pressure, prioritized the process, and allowed for us to understand this difference of creating in public space versus creating for our own understanding or curiosity.

During production, artist/re-searchers self-organized in various roles of shared leadership. Beerus took up the role of creative director for the videography engaging a crew of young people to film and produce musical scores. He also interviewed the artist/re-searchers at their installation sites. This was critical to us getting through what felt like a suddenly compressed event. We picked two days in the third week of September so that we could still have a couple

of weeks post-production to reflect on our findings. We zeroed in on eleven ambitious installs. Most of them would take place at The Bentway with others at Dundas Square (Yonge and Dundas); at Queen and Abell in Toronto's Queen west area; at Artscape Youngplace; and at an encampment at Queen and Dufferin in the Parkdale community.



Image 14: MWP co-researchers. Collaborative Banners suspended at The Bentway. Photography by Jahmal Nugent (aka Ninjahmal)

We suspended these banners reflected personal and collective learning to weave our experience together at The Bentway on heavy twine secured on two opposing bents supporting the Expressway. Installing was more challenging than anticipated as we didn't realize how heavy they were when made vertical, having only worked on them on the floor in the SKETCH studios. Moving with the wind that evening as we installed other pieces around The Bentway, the banners were a compelling display of what seemed like flags creating a fabric bridge between supports in this space. They were emblematic and in production debrief we held conversations about the power and vulnerability of using text in art, when it

seems leading, when it's unnecessary, and when it's a useful way to guide someone's experience of a work. To the point of *making place* these thoughtful collages seemed like hieroglyphics in images of nature and text hanging in the air, that offered windows into our re-search process and grounded us while we installed and filmed to beat sundown.

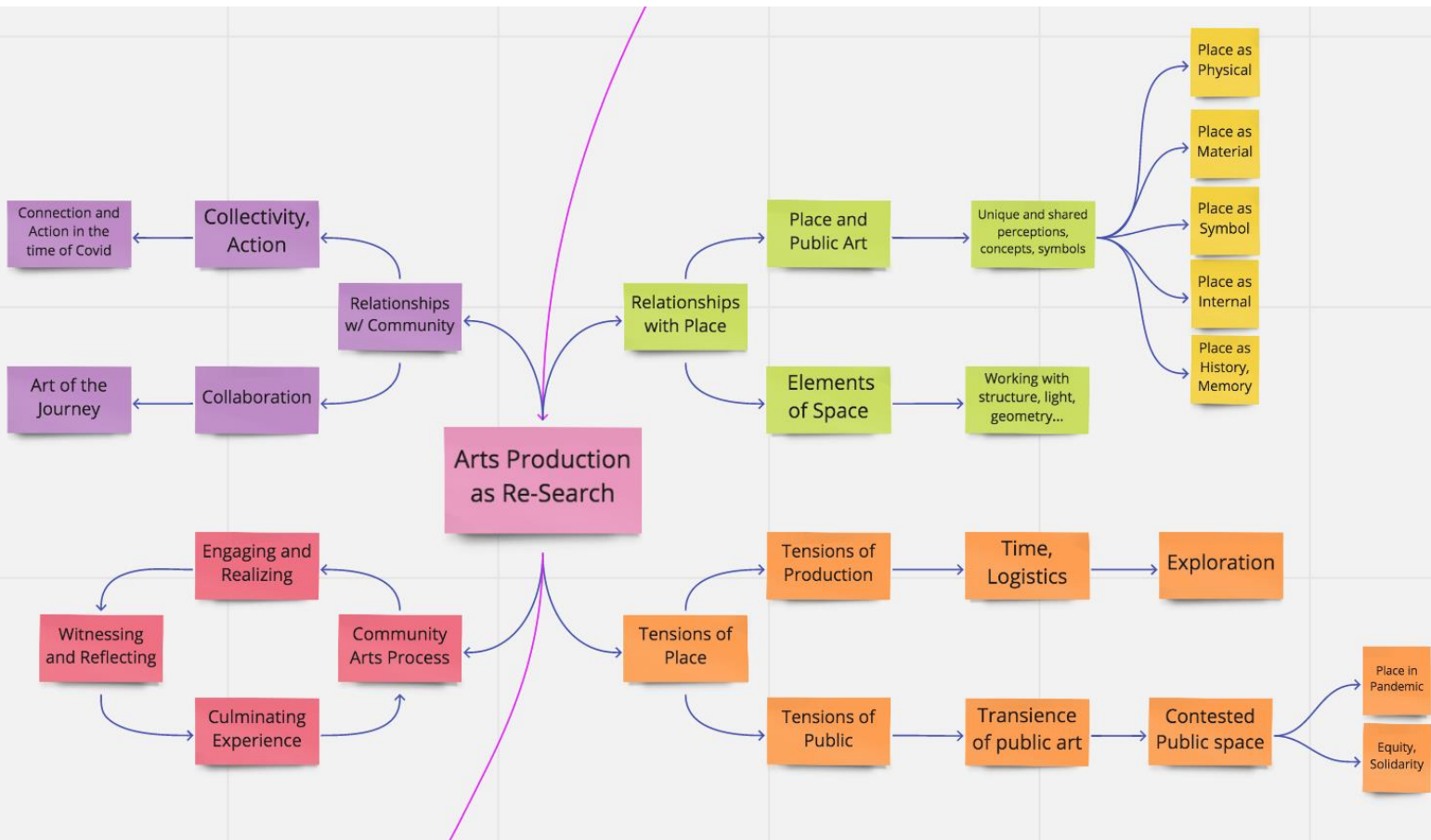


Figure 7: Production as Re-search mind map

Place Making

Place making is a somewhat over-used term in contemporary planning contexts emerging in the sixties from the work of Jane Jacobs and William Whyte that is nevertheless a great way to explain what artist/re-searchers did through production installations in public space and without prompting, is a term they decided to use in their final video documentation.⁴⁴

Place making begins with an understanding of what place is ... a location, a personal relationship to an environment, or act as a representation of the spirit of the land and our unspoken communion with it. In the simplest terms place is a space that has a distinct character. At its most complex, it embodies the essence of a location, its community,

spiritual beliefs, stories, history and aspirations. This essence or sense of place is its genius loci - its 'place-ness'. Norberg-Schulz defines the genius loci as what a thing or place is and also what it wants to be.⁴⁵

MWP place making considered relationships with local community in this time of COVID, our collectivity and collaborations with community as well as the other relationships with place that we had uncovered as important during our arts practice phase: place as physical (land and physical site), as material, symbol, internal, and as history/memory. We lived these findings in real time, with structural and aesthetic considerations of the spaces we had chosen for production such as architecture, geometry in the space depending on buildings, trees, light, sound, ambience – the combination or juxtapositions of all these things. Contrasting the sites is interesting when questioning this genius loci Norberg-Schulz describes. The encampments had very specific essence as did the mural along Queen street. The dye installation at AYP felt homeful since that is where SKETCH is located and Dundas Square has a whole other kind of energy mapped out by billboards and constant motion. The Bentway has a history that was curiously absent in our production installations there. The wide open-air spaciousness was almost too much to contend with and the Expressway structure itself was a looming reminder that we were not at all at 'home'.

We encountered tensions involved with ideas of time and space, when doing public art production with its demands on travel, installation materials, access to electricity, unpredictable sundown and weather, as well as the tensions with the public as they engage in that site and the way the spaces might be contested. We reflected on both the challenges and the power of transience in public art, because we only left work up in two sites, with the rest mounted quickly for video documentation and struck that same evening. This was a difficult counter to our reflective, time-stretch in the arts practice phase. In a way though, this also worked to ensure we would not hang on too tightly to the works recognizing that all public art is not intended to physically 'takeover' a space for long, but rather through its focused activation in space, adds to the story of that space with its (re)mapping. This made the work palimpsestic in that it is considered an overlay in space, specifically not erasing what has been there before but building on it.

This brings Massey to mind as she speaks to space as always under construction with relations embedded and active in and between them. Space is theorized as always in the process of

being made, therefore never finished or closed which is why Massey encourages “imagining space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far.”⁴⁶ Art making already does this to space because of its fluid yet disruptive nature. Public art, semi-permanent in nature, marks space adding to or redirecting the conversation that already exists in that space. This challenges our need to be so fixed, so exacting and shakes up the status quo unsettling any assumed ‘claims to space’ or entitlements socialized and perpetuated by colonialism and capitalism.

Glyphing

Karyn Recollet writes about exploring “new geographies of resistance through forms of petroglyphing urban landscapes..[through].. the production of solidarity building, social activism, and the generation of new pedagogical practices of resistance.”⁴⁷ Recollet specifically examined what she called *spatial tags* created through embodied motions of Indigenous artists, dancing with non-Indigenous settler allies, producing urban flash mob round dances.⁴⁸

Working differently, in the sense that the sole focus was not Indigenous resistance, these art installations echo the *spatial glyphs* Recollet writes about to express creative solidarity while making space for reflexivity, the pedagogy of which, she posits as *radical decolonial love* to produce counter-spaces that “resist oppressive socio-political spatial arrangements in public space.”⁴⁹ Most of our projects created momentary transformations of space. Each confronted the negotiations of difference and worked to generate experiences of unity, generosity, justice and I would say, love. “Creative solidarity can be described as an attempt to challenge the inherited coloniality of solidarity discourse as social practice through production of spatial/symbolic arrangements that mobilize a radical turn towards relationality, difference and interdependence.”⁵⁰

I reflect in the following pages on two installations and an online example of glyphing. In these activations, the artists’ intentions would stand out as a powerful (re)map expressing conceptions of solidarity that insist on interdependency. Experiencing these installations, which involved performance, collaboration, and community, demonstrated commitment to disentangle from the limiting constraints of colonialism and capitalism, engendered an embodied sense of pride and courage within the group. These installations were emotional as care flowed between artist/researchers. ‘Love’ in the sense of power and respect, overcoming contextual and historic impositions, challenged dominant powers with their production and installation collaboration, that even suggested holding these artists back.⁵¹



Image 15: Jess De Vitt and Susie Mensah. *An Invitation (fka No Nos Toquen – Don't Touch Us)*. Mural at Queen and Abell. Toronto. Photography by Jahmal Nugent and Phyllis Novak.

Artist/re-researcher, Jess De Vitt describes herself as “a community visual artist educator, freelance designer and curatorial graduate, interested in creating socially engaged art, in a framework that holds inclusive practices, accessibility and transformative justice to collaborate and share experiences.” Jess painted the mural *No Nos Toquen – Don't Touch Us*, summer of 2019 as a co-production between SKETCH and The Drake Hotel Enterprise Ltd. Jess noted that it felt surreal to have a piece that was talking about themes such as gender based violence in the kind of art that she wanted to make, without anyone telling her it had to be done a certain way. Conversations with friend, spoken word artist and frontline worker, Susie Mensah, discussing barriers that had been emerging during COVID, led them to elaborate these conversations in a mural giving voice to specific communities. As they painted text over the 2019 mural, things began happening globally and political that led them to repaint the quotes again to draw attention to some intersecting themes of gender based violence: anti-Indigenous violence, land theft, anti-Black racism, discrimination against drug users and those living without homes. Jess and Susie saw these and more issues all as part of the same thing, and how there are so few platforms where gender based violence is talked about and that it really can't be discussed, unless colonial violence that's taken place on Turtle Island, is also talked about. Olympia expressed how it was good to see this piece in that neighbourhood where many people have been lost to the drug war and police violence, and felt it great visual reminder that doesn't focus on the ugliness or violence. Ammarah commented on the power of using the platform that worked so well once, over again in another way. We discussed Jess' excitement to collaborate making the original mural even better. The artists felt it so important to be explicit in this mural, with cries for justice that most passers-by became protective of, appreciating what was offered and the engagement of the artists with the community. Jahmal pointed out how perfectly situated the three dimensional mural and text art installation were in a space in which condo development has been booming making it

a nice area where you can forget or ignore the issues that are happening right now. He felt the bright colours against the modern architecture of buildings to draw people in, only to later hit them with critical text.

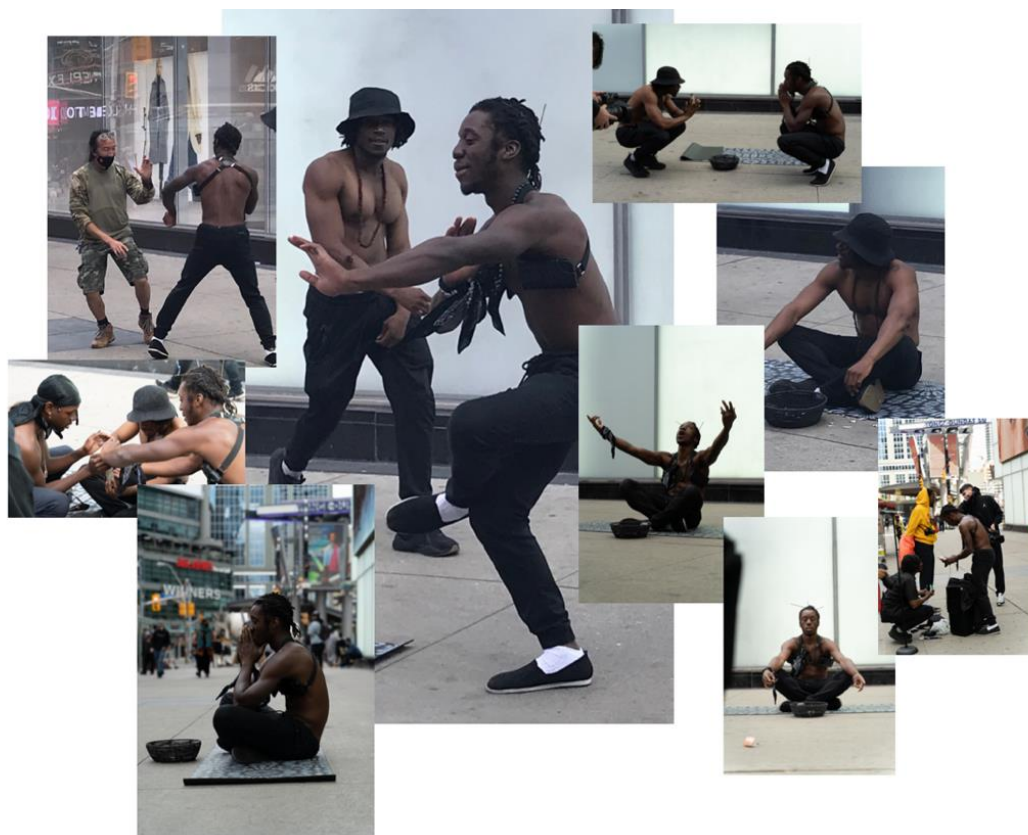


Image 16: Ayrah Taerb, Matt Somber and Eric Flow. *Performance installation, Yonge and Dundas*. Photography by Jahmal Nugent (aka Ninjahmal) and Phyllis Novak

Artist/re-searcher, Ayrah Taerb (aka Beerus) describes himself as “The Founder Of Kundalini Kurrency Khansultancy; A Collective Of Creative Professionals & Administrators Who Seek To Spread The Values Of Self Determination & Co Operative Economics Among The Global Black Community. As An Executive Producer, Creative Consultant, and Embodiment Instructor; Equipped With The Skills & Expertise Required To Develop Artists, Mentor Professionals, and Responsibly Condition Children & Youth To Exist Within The Context Of A Transcendental Society.”

This was a charged, energetic performance piece where the collaboration between these three musicians and martial arts practitioners was so compelling to watch, many people stopped by, excited about the performance taking up space and centering their focus at this chaotic and well known Toronto intersection of Yonge and Dundas Avenues. These young men boldly lip-synced a track that one of them had written and arranged while improvising movements and interactions for videography. They unabashedly took up an enormous amount of space on the corner and it was intriguing to watch how people gave them wide birth to do their work. It was brave place-making in which the artists led courageous activations of confrontation of racial injustice, that incorporated meditation, transcendence and mutual care. Some audience members were seemingly inebriated and made lots of noise while the activation was happening. The artists managed this so graciously offering kindness and patience while remaining unwavering in their focus. The *doing* of their performance in place enacted a sense of belonging in a very specific way, with codes

between them that audiences didn't really need to understand. The physical gestures, which were almost sculptural, in unplanned choreography, were *understanding* enough. This animated what Diane Taylor writes about, where artists using their bodies to challenge power and social norms in performance in a lively way, transmits social knowledge, memory, and identity.⁵²

This performance in improvised movements and actions asserted the freedom and authority these artists have of their own bodies in a space that is all about how commodification and capitalism organize the movement of bodies. Often Yonge and Dundas is seen as a space within which to disappear amidst crowds of people or as a tourist attraction representing the *life of the city*. This spatial glyphing, conversely, was impossible not to notice because it stood in stark contrast to these entrenched identifications of that city spot. Put in conversation with bell hooks' theories about cultural production, Beerus and his collaborators, Eric and Matt, asserted their own bold critical presence through a transcendent aesthetic, especially when they sat on yoga mats in meditative practice while pedestrian traffic swirled around them. Jahmal remarked how even though he wasn't totally sure what was going on he couldn't take his eyes off them.⁵³

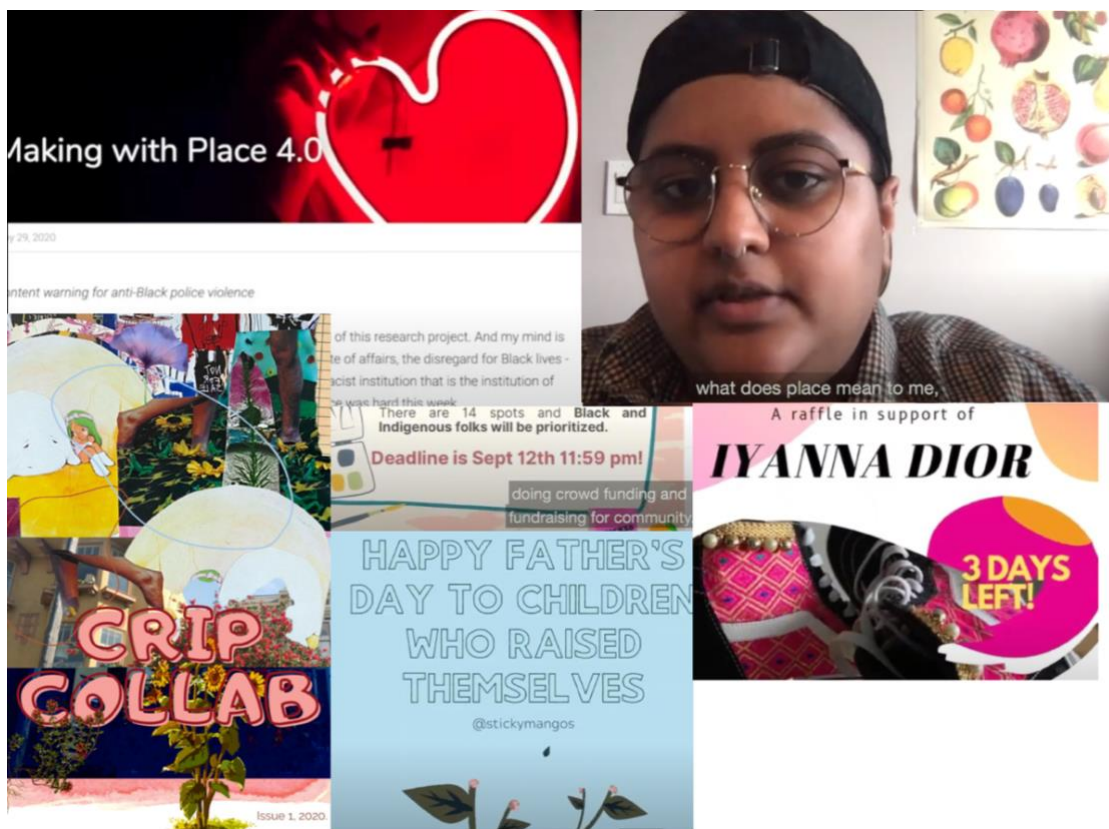


Image 17: Priya "Pree" Rehal. *Virtual activations*. Photography by Priya "Pree" Rehal.

Priya (Pree) Rehal describes themselves as "an artist educator currently based in Tkaronto, originally from Tiohtià:ke. They're the children of immigrant settlers from Punjab. Pree's work centres their identity as a queer, non-binary, trans, disabled, fat, and racialized individual. They have an interdisciplinary arts practice under the name: Sticky

Mangos and co-founded the Non-Binary Colour Collective. You can read Pree's research notes from the Making with Place project online and follow their arts practice on Instagram: @StickyMangos.”

Pree conducted spatial glyphing of another sort, all within the virtual sphere. Identifying as immunocompromised and with disabilities, Pree participated the entirety of the project online and through virtual interactions only: emails and texts, while using social media as a process and production space, to the fullest. They shared their processes publicly from the beginning with a blog for *Making with Place*. They posted their paintings far and wide and enhanced their following on most channels. At one point they created social media posts with watercolours to speak out against police violence that generated over 30,000 reactions. They further used Instagram to conduct advocacy and crowd fundraising projects for trans queer and disabled folks creating educational and awareness space for QTBIPOC community members ensuring they not be forgotten during this time. As their production project, they curated a zine for *Bricks and Glitter* called *Crip Collab*, which has been gaining attention by disabled artists in community as a space in which to showcase their art and expressions.⁵⁴

Pree also performed in drag for virtual PRIDE. This virtual *glyphing* added a different spatiality to the project and was no less effective than those done in physical space in person, just different. In fact their creations reached such broad audiences and garnered reactions that were beyond what other artist/re-searchers were able to experience given social and physical distancing to limit audience engagement. This exemplifies what Wayne Yang theorizes about virtual space for organizing remarking of its potential to provide otherwise un-propertied youth with a durable, malleable site of identity formation, social organization, and collective memory. He emphasizes the power of virtual space to facilitate political activity that could mature into transformative urban movements. Pree's work continued post project sustaining high levels of engagement that open further possibilities for online creative mobilization.⁵⁵

The dynamic intensity of production necessitated sharing skills with each other trouble shooting various logistical emergencies that occurred. It took a lot of energy and effort to stay focused and positive while concentrated. I was reminded of my theatre training. Timing and logistical elements are so specific, production can't be thrown together. On our second day of installations, one artist/re-searcher had their cell phone taken at Dundas Square and this triggered a domino of small set backs that took us off schedule. Our final site, The Bentway, our largest and most complex site yet, required us to become a production crew for each other. We arrived there late in the day, were tired and overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the space. We arranged a site visit the week before which only Charlotte and I were able to attend. This would have informed pre-design with the space to better understand issues of scope. Nevertheless, The Bentway's Operations Director stayed with us the whole evening lending great support pointing out electrical outlets and boundaries and later turning the lights up for us to continue filming after dark. Three projections and four sculptural installations were intended for the space. At the last minute I decided to drop my intended installation for this space to be crew and

runner for the others. One of my favourite moments to recount is when we needed the light kit to give us more shine on Ammarah's piece as the sun went down, but the camera was running out of battery. I volunteered to run and fetch it and while I did so, I can still hear Beerus yelling "Run, run, run!" By the time filming was complete, we were exhausted and scattered in different places. I regret that we didn't have the energy to walk the full site and witness the pieces and productions together as we had all the other place-based installations. We struck the set, loaded in van and drove back to SKETCH to unload everything again, quite late at night.

In production debrief the following week, we expressed grief about the short production period, not allowing us to linger more with each piece and installation. Two days meant moving at a regrettably fast pace driven by diminishing resources and the push to create a video for knowledge sharing post-project. These were experiments that taught us about the value of taking time, planning diligently with attention to our pacing, as we had in the practice phase, prioritizing people's wellness. In particular, regarding our activations at The Bentway with its interesting architecture and spatiality, we expressed desire to create *with* the space and longing for an audience to experience the work. This speaks to the conversational elements of art production. The artists created works based on months of inquiry in dialogue with one another. Installing them in physical spaces and documenting their own encounters was important to the cycle of creation, but there was something missing without a further dialogue involving an audience to react and respond to their work.

The amount of original art works generated by both the arts practice and production phases of the project is quite impressive. The artworks themselves were our re-search documents, that each, with a language of their own, didn't need explanation. Referred to as the meeting place of creativity and academia, they acted as an intersection between the two. The art practice and production in MWP were affirmed as critical to produce powerful cognitive maps that Goeman refers to, in which knowledge making happens in cycles of meaning making wherein, as Bert expressed, "we name what we see." This along with considerations of place and I would posit, placework active and travelling in and through our creative articulations, enabled us all to experiment with narratives that unsettle limiting geographies and work toward "countering dominant and entrenched visuality that stands in the way of collective liberation."⁵⁶



Image 18: Phyllis Novak. *Water and Wind Studies with Indigo*. Photography by Phyllis Novak

My last vat of the summer was Indigo. Harvested leaves of the Indigo fera plant grown mostly in tropical climates, have to be soaked in water to let indican, an amino acid, release glucose. As this ferments with the other plant enzymes, the water turns yellow and results in the creation of indoxyl which, when left to dry, oxidises and coagulates as blue. Mixed with an alkaline solution to make a sludge or paste, it is pressed into cakes and dried, and can be ground into a fine powder, creating its dark blue pigment.⁵⁷

To make a vat, you have to create a stock solution that is almost the opposite direction so that you reduce the colour and end up with the yellow liquid. You dip cloth in and it's best if you leave it for a bit before pulling it out again so all the fibres take in the colour, but when you do, the blue colour only begins to emerge when the cloth hits the air. To get a deep colour it's best to dip multiple times, with about twenty minutes between each dip. It's a day long process to get rich blues that have good lightfastness. Dipping and airing, dipping and airing, over and over for hours, becomes almost meditative. You breathe with the fibres of your fabrics opening and drinking in the chemicals. Unwrapping Indigo pieces reveals lines, shapes and shades that open up neurotransmitters in the brain, from which I feel calm, focus, curiosity, satisfaction and balance. Indigo, however, has a complicated history. Commodified by Euro-American settlers it partly instigated the enslavement of Black peoples in South American countries. It's known as slavery's other cash crop.⁵⁸

I'm reminded of the duality of power that exist in all things, which Kimmerer refers to as the power to destroy and the power to create. Kimmerer writes of Anishinaabeg teachings that there was an open invitation made to first settlers to follow the land, the council of plants, animals and waters. While settlers cannot become indigenous to place, Kimmerer suggests they can become naturalized to place, giving gifts to the land, living in relational awareness of this duality of power while they learn their responsibilities, "caring for the land as if our lives and the lives of our children depended on it, because they do."⁵⁹

Chapter 3

SHARING AND RECONSTRUCTING – INTENTIONS FOR COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND PLACE

“The way things are shifting and moving, it’s time for a new blueprint.” - Nigel

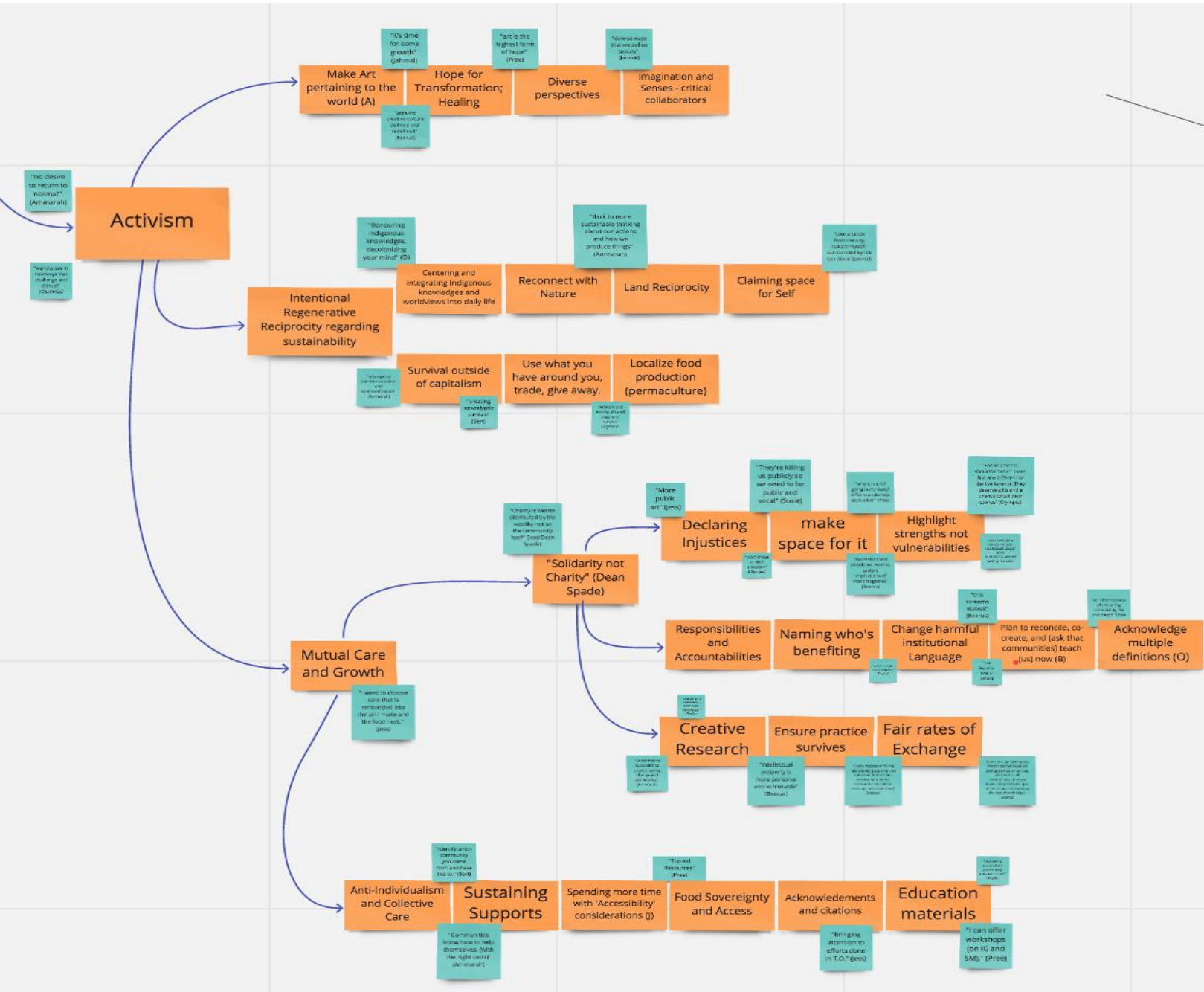


Figure 8: MWP Activism mind map

Sharing and Reconstructing involves re-search skills and methods to generate knowledge about the changes desired for society and how that knowledge connects with action. The question guiding this final chapter is **what are the desires and intentions young people have for community, culture and place that arise from this creative inquiry with place?** While there were so many desires and intentions surfaced and generated, in our mind map on activism we identified the following clusters that represent desires for individual, collective and institutional action:

1. Make Art that pertains to your life in the world

More public Art! Consider diverse perspectives; engage the imagination and senses as collaborators; expand your understanding of *place*, surfacing invisible or erased histories; awaken to historic and current contexts; and in human and more-than-human collaborations, change relationships with materiality all around us.

2. Live in Intentional Regenerative Reciprocity regarding Sustainability

a. **(Re)connect with nature** in relationships of real reciprocity and healing; with focused sustained efforts to 'decolonize/disentangle your mind; center, acknowledge and integrate Indigenous knowledges and worldviews into daily life being cautious of unacknowledged appropriation.

b. **Chart pathways beyond capitalism** – think about actions in relation to sustainability

- Acknowledge that Black and Indigenous peoples spearheading these movements and holding knowledge about sustainable relationships to the earth and traditional ways of working with land;
- Commit to localizing food production and permaculture;
- Recognize that artwork and making with nature has allowed people to survive for centuries – use what you have around you, trade and give away, remembering that everything is sacred;
- Actively rally against commercialization and commodification.

3. Commit to Mutual Care and Growth

a. **Advance “Solidarity not Charity”⁶⁰**

“Charity is wealth distributed by the wealthy, not by the community itself”
-Jess quoting Spade

- **Declare Injustices particularly through public art;** Get to the root causes of harmful conditions; Make space for grief, expression and conversations surrounding the implications of injustice; Highlight strengths not vulnerabilities of communities.
- **Address Responsibilities and Accountabilities;** Address the capital side of charity; Name who's benefitting and work with community to create alternative structures.

"They are killing us publicly so we need to be public and vocal."
-Susie Mensah
- **Advocate for Changes in harmful Institutional Language;** assert acknowledgement of harm and *scrupulously study* of the implications of using language to get money especially when it is affecting the people in whom the money is invested; Acknowledge multiple definitions, diverse terminologies and ways of knowing; Plan to reconcile and co-create advocating authentic engagement of communities with lived experience for guidance.

"Recognize that in this work on place and research – a lot of violence is inherently attached to that."
-Jess

MWP re-searchers discussed creating a terminology zine that would draw attention to activists, like Harsha Walia, advocating for terms that actually describe circumstances or situations, not persons, for example, using the term 'living in forced precarity' rather than 'poor' or 'living in poverty'.⁶¹

- **Generate Collaborative Creative Research** to create lasting change and ensure arts practices can survive; Establish fair rates of exchange that consider systemic injustice; Recognize intellectual property is more personal and vulnerable when shared by communities on the margins and honour that people need to be able to keep a level of creative control.

b. Anti-Individualism and Collective Care

- Share sustaining supports
- Spend more time on accessibility considerations
- Support Food Sovereignty and increased access to food and other resources
- Share skills and education materials
- Acknowledge and bring attention to the efforts people are making to make change.

In considering these desires and intentions, that stand on their own and don't require much interpretation or translation, I am drawn to turn to Eve Tuck's suggestion of the powerful impacts of centering research in desire rather than in damage, which MWP emphasized as a critical principle in co-re-search with young people, regarding place. Tuck writes specifically about desire-based research to counter centuries old damaged-based research with communities on the margins, in particular Indigenous communities. Damaged-based research operates from pathologizing approaches using theories of change that establish first, *the problem*, usually centered on the community itself, so that activities or causal pathways can be developed toward repair, again centered on the community. I've experienced the frustration of this countless times in my thirty years of learning with young people, while also being totally complicit and benefitting from the ways systems and society perpetuate damage-centred research in the creation of problem-based logic frameworks and theories of change. These often aim to support young people to overcome oppressive narratives without addressing and changing the actual structures that force them into 'damaged' positionality in the first place. Ammarah emphasized that communities themselves, hold power to make change and these expressed desires and intentions, which echoes Tuck's suggestions that communities embrace complexity, resist oversimplification, and celebrate survivance while confronting oppressive realities and moving beyond narrow confines, all while engaging to co-design alternatives for moving forward in de-pathologizing ways.⁶²

MWP demonstrated that art practice and production is an heuristic model that connects artist/re-searchers to their desires and interests in whole sensory ways, co-facilitating multiple innovative pedagogies to emerge that reinvent social relations. Art practice and production as an active methodology does not wait for institutional cultural capital to lead the way, and in MWP it engaged knowledge makers working with the multiplicity of place, to fully embody their own cultural capital and confidence to articulate, activate and reiterate, their preferences. The above desires and intentions are already in activation. They are not a list of recommendations that await approval from an outside authoritative body. They are being manifested in further creative action that artist/re-searchers pursue as their practices continue beyond the project.⁶³

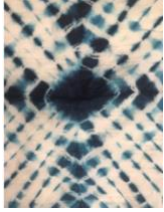


Image 19: Phyllis Novak. Resistance. Photography collage by Phyllis Novak

The first mode of resistance were elastics, the tighter you could wrap them, the more colour would be blocked from making its way into the fabric. Along the way I started experiencing the limitations of my chubby fingers, to tighten ties. After a few hours it started to really hurt. I avoided dealing with it for a while. I was applying some resistance creating light shades, lines and patterns. To get the satisfying contrasts I desired however, I needed to wrap tighter. I started working other tools: clamps, wood, large rocks, thick string and bull clips. Things really opened up for me when Shibori teachers online recommended using elastics wrapped with curtain rings while others recommended sinew, artificial but modelled after deer sinew that I could stretch. Point is, I had to reach out to others to find tools to help me.

The best results came when I learned to relish how long it all takes. If I wanted to make a lotus flower design with Sequoia dye, I had to commit to the whole process: treating the fabric first, working with it wet, pulling the sinew as tight as I could using tree branches as levers, rewrapping if necessary, taking breaks and coming back to it, and committing to tying off right only at the very end of the fabric, not quitting early because I'm close to the end anyway and who would notice. Sequoia trees are some of the oldest and largest trees on Turtle Island. Surely, I could honour them by taking more time to experience their burgundy brown shades. A close second to typing is the patience involved in dipping repeatedly which sometimes happened over the course of one or two days, for full saturation as well as the airing time needed in between dips, in the case of Indigo especially, for the colour to manifest in lightfast shades that I desired. Third, the time to unwrap also takes a while depending on the tightness of resistance. By the time I fully unwrap a piece, to be honest, I can't remember much about my intended pattern. Unwrapping, I only focus on what's emerging. I'm taken in by the depth of colour and variations in tones mapped against each other. When I hang the piece to dry, I am in a whole different place from when I started. And if I wanted to move beyond discovery and wonder alone, in my practice, I had to add the steps of making notes and taking pictures before, during and after dipping.

I never could have imagined the way they emerged to move beyond my narrow understandings of what resistance is, what it's also not, and what it entails. Particularly as a partner to young people, if I really mean what I say, it's going to hurt. It's going to require commitment, study, unique tools that I need to ask for and a lot of notetaking.



Conclusion

Research often directs the flow and urgency of information to inform policies, design of programs and services, to address issues and to strategize ways to move society forward. Young people have the right to inform themselves and others, participate in democratic processes as equal knowledge holders. This project affirmed how critical their engagement and experience is in surfacing and constructing generative knowledge, flipping the script of structurally blocking those considered by dominant culture to be subordinate, from the process of selecting, naming, disseminating and evaluating knowledge. To do this well implied what Kirby and McKenna called intersubjectivity, that I understand and experienced as authentic dialogue between all participants in research processes in which all are respected as equally knowing subjects.⁶⁴ MWP went further however, as it aimed to reposition those with lived experience as the knowledge keepers and wisdom leaders, and as those who create radical moves, that hooks refers to as spaces of radical openness not just for themselves but for the whole of society, because of “their ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised.”⁶⁵

MWP definitely exposed that ‘marginality’ be recognized as more than a site of deprivation as hooks posits, but rather “as a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance...a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse found not only in words but in habits of being and the way one lives.”⁶⁶ She defines being *in* the margins as offering a two-sightedness that is unknown to oppressors enabling one look both from the outside in, and from the inside out. This perspective of looking from the outside in, can result in speaking back to that dominant center with criticality, or it can build one’s sense of self and community when acting in solidarity, to transcend limitations imposed by that ‘center’. I wonder though about the imposition of this to young people seeking to transcend labels used to define their situatedness. I appreciate here the passionate urging of my re-search colleagues about the importance of addressing oppressive language and about increasing attentiveness to political and ethical choices involved

“all the ‘isms’
affect me – and
allow me to feel
everyone’s
discomforts.”
-Beerus

in research processes which Olympia emphasized at our last zoom session, need multiple voices in multiple modalities. hooks confirms Olympia's position recognizing language as a place of struggle that requires multiple modes such as poetry, film and photography, writing, music, visual arts, and more are needed to get out from under its oppressive limitations.⁶⁷

The result of MWP is a powerful counter archive, (re)mapping space and place with elements of place as revealed in chapter one, as collaborators, in artistic inquiry, expression and experience. Critical to its methodology was its examination of place from multiple perspectives of human and more-than-human realities, and historical and current, internalized and embodied subjectivities within the context of racism and colonization, as well as the structural impacts of these and their painful reality on the lives of young people.⁶⁸ Using arts practice and production involves the whole self and imagination in confronting these realities and instead of focusing on how youth can surmount varying 'damage', this research emphasizes young people's skills, wisdom and knowledge that perhaps are refined by the navigation of those realities, as Beerus says, "all the isms affect me and that allow me to feel everyone's discomforts". More importantly, this work surfaced this group of young people's visions for transformations in society that can lead to positive and possible futurity for all and expressed the attitude with which young people suggest we pursue these visions, through art, as Pree emphatically stated, "Art is the highest form of hope."

The project is still living out its theorizing and analysis in my view. This reflection marks only one small part from my particular vantage point and I look forward to sharing what I learned with the group in writing it, as we embark on further analysis that will inform subsequent projects and creative work together. I also know that the online journal, hosting artist/re-searchers to further engage audience will lead to more meaning making demonstrative of the ongoing nature of knowledge making in arts practice and production. It doesn't have an end. As with most creative processes, one project is information for the next and the next.

I believe Making with Place is community activist scholarship as theorized by Julia Chinyere Oparah (formerly Julia Sudbury), and Jin Haritaworn among others. In a creative learning partnership between academia, York University, a community organization, SKETCH, researchers like myself and Charlotte engaged with young artist/re-searchers were engaged in the co-production of relevant emancipatory knowledge, exchanging practical and innovative skills in arts practice and production, that support individual and collective liberation. The project

provides a roadmap for how academia and researchers like me, who are also practicing artists who seek to remain true to activist commitments, can be in critical reflection and authentic co-learning relationships with, in this case, young people with lived experience, about the complexities of liberatory work as it relates to them. This project can contribute to innovations that make academic paradigms more relevant and accessible to communities, through creative dialogue with community members, that honours their experience and voice and recognizes that they have been and are tapped into genealogies of resistance and transformation.⁶⁹



“Take
only what you
need,
give back in
reciprocity
for what you
take,
and nurture
the world
that nurtures
you”⁷⁰

Image 20: Olympia Trypis. *Medicine or Gift Mobile* installation at The Bentway. Photography by Jahmal Nugent

The last installation at The Bentway was a mobile created by Olympia that involved small vials holding different components of all of her artistic processes with nature and she had invited us to contribute to the vials with what we had gathered in the project, in collaboration with her production. Olympia envisioned the vials as offering forms of medicine and gift hoping that people encountering the mobile would be encouraged to take whatever they were drawn to. In this way she and those of us who also added to the vials, could something of what we engaged with during the project. The small creation was suspended between trees and Jess remarked how it was both a two-directional collaborative piece, one way with the project’s artist/re-searchers and another, with those that would take the vials. As with Olympia’s encampment mobile of dreamcatchers intended also for redistribution among residents, I am moved by the rhythms of making, with place, that are active here in creative co-construction – bringing items and experience together in one visual piece (quite a

sculptural data collection) for the purpose of being taken apart and reiterated. There's so much I would love to explore about that energy in making, that resonates with my dye work and with other expressive activations of artist/re-searchers – this movement of constant flow and exchange in knowledge making in the arts with place: never static, always with calls to action embedded in the articulation, offering choice about how to respond or not. I am also inspired by her art and activism offered together as gifts to those who would come close enough to examine, and to risk participation by accepting something so freely offered.

The knowledge and experience represented in Making with Place, is similar. The invitation is to come close, take some time to consider these imperfect notions and reflections, engage with these ideas and articulations around art with place, and risk getting involved to understand the intentions and desires revealed to learn how we can move forward to meet them together.

I know that I will be contemplating this project for a long time to come, grappling continuously with what I learned that continues to reshape my own understandings, particularly of my role of co-existence to equal co-resistance. Its ideas are threads that will be further developed and woven into the fabric of SKETCH as it continues to develop a platform (that can manage a thousand falls), in partnership with young makers, to indeed support their radical art to transform lives and communities.



ENDNOTES

¹ Kathleen Absolon, *Kaandossivwin: How we come to know* (Halifax NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 12. Absolon hyphenates the word 're-search', specifically regarding Indigenous re-search as a search for Indigenous ways of coming to know in the academy. There are some similarities between the relationship of academic research with youth on the margins and Indigenous peoples where they are regarded as objects of someone else's knowledge making about them. I respectfully borrow this hyphenation from Absolon to indicate the shift in this project toward young people on the margins as the knowledge makers, with full capacity to search for knowledge on their own terms.

² In MWP, 'on the margins' refers to invisible but real edges created by dominant society based on intersecting oppressions in systems and structures in society related to class, race and gender, usually to reify neoliberal capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, ableism and heteronormativity. Young people with lived experience report impacts of these oppressions to limit their access to resources, community and opportunities pushing them into isolation and sometimes, hopelessness. Marginalization is a verb pushing some people out of a determined 'center'. The results of which can be detrimental circumstances such as, but not exclusive to, houselessness, forced precarity, conflict and compounding stigma associated with managing these circumstances.

³ Max Dean, artist, used this term regarding his robotic chair that could break apart and repair itself in endless recreations on a platform within which an intricate support infrastructure was constantly being worked on and perfected.

⁴ The Weave and Mend Garden (www.sketch.ca/programs/special-projects/weave-and-mend/) is a project of Indigenous, non-binary and fem identifying young artists in relationship with SKETCH to create a sacred healing space for community in what was once a traffic turnabout at Artscape Youngplace, Toronto (Shaw and Argyle intersection) designed and created in 2018 and seeded ongoingly. SKETCH is a community engaged arts initiative engaging young people with lived experience of *the margins* to make radical art that transforms lives and communities. www.sketch.ca

⁵ The first time I learned what *T'karonto* meant was from Toronto Arts Council's Inaugural Creative Leaders Lab co-fellow, Mahlika Aweri, who calls themselves an Artist and AGO Indigenous Art Educator, in 2015

⁶ Mishuana Goeman. *Mark my words: Native Women Mapping our Nations* (Minnesota US: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 11.

⁷ Soren C. Larsen and Jay T. Johnson. "The Agency of Place: Toward a More-than-Human Geographical Self." *GeoHumanities* 2:1 (2016): 150

⁸ Dean Spade. "Solidarity Not Charity." *Social Text: Duke University Press*. 142. Vol.38:1 (2020) 131

⁹ Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox. "Traditional Knowledge, co-existence and co-resistance." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, Vol.3:3 (2014) 152

¹⁰ Ibid, 153

¹¹ Ibid, 156

¹² Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna. *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins*. (Toronto ON: Garamond Press, 1989), 97

¹³ Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie. *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology and Methods* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 19

¹⁴ Mishuana Goeman. *Mark my words: Native Women Mapping our Nations* (Minnesota US: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 30

¹⁵ Jean Paul Restoule. "The five R's of Indigenous research: Relationship, respect, relevance, responsibility and reciprocity". Lecture presented at Wise Practices II: Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network Research and Capacity Building Conference, Toronto, ON. (2008), Quoted in McGregor, Deborah, Jean-Paul Restoule, Rochelle Johnston. *Indigenous Research: Theories, Practices, and Relationships*. (Toronto ON: Canadian Scholars, CSP Books Inc. 2018), 13

¹⁶ Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004) 53

¹⁷ <https://blacklivesmatter.ca/defund-the-police/>, accessed November 12, 2020

¹⁸ Soren C. Larsen and Jay T. Johnson. *A Deeper Sense of Place* (Oregon US: Oregon State University Press, 2013), 15.

¹⁹ Doreen Massey. *For Space* (London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2005), 5.

²⁰ Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie. *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology and Methods* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 18

²¹ (Adrienne Maree Brown. *Emergent Strategies*. California: AK Press, 2017, 59)

²² Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna. *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins*. (Toronto ON: Garamond Press, 1989), 97

²³ Ibid, 26-27

²⁴ Ibid, 63

²⁵ Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt. *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd. 2010) 4

²⁶ Pablo Helguera. *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*. (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 7. Helguera addresses specifically "socially engaged art" connected to contemporary art realms which I am using to expand into community engaged work.

²⁷

²⁷ Soren C. Larsen and Jay T. Johnson. "The Agency of Place: Toward a More-than-Human Geographical Self." *GeoHumanities* 2:1 (2016): 162

²⁸ Felicity J. Colman. "Agency". Accessed May 2020. *New Materialism*, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/a/agency.html>, (2018). 1

²⁹ Mishuana Goeman. *Mark my words: Native Women Mapping our Nations* (Minnesota US: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 13

³⁰ Lisa Myers. "Serving it Up". *The Senses and Society* 7:2, (2012): 176

³¹ Robin Kimmerer. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 216

³² Siljiva Jestrovic, "Reading into Soundscapes: Between *Ma* and Concretization", *Canadian Semiotic Association*. Vol. 35: 2-3, (2016): 359

³³ Ibid 347

- ³⁴ Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt. *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd. 2010), 6-22
- ³⁵ Mishuana Goeman. *Mark my words: Native Women Mapping our Nations* (Minnesota US: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 10
- ³⁶ Dustin Stokes. "The Role of Imagination in Creativity". In *The Philosophy of Creativity: New Essays*. Edited by E. Paul and S.B. Kauffman. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 9
- ³⁷ Ibid, 20
- ³⁸ Ibid, 25
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