

JUST BECAUSE IT'S A ROAD DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO TAKE IT: A JOURNEY
OF DECOLONIZING RESISTANCE THROUGH STORYTELLING

PHILIP JONAH LOGAN GELLER

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN THEATRE
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

March 2022

© Philip Jonah Logan Geller, 2022

at first you hear the breath

then a snout appears

coyote slips onto the page

wiya looks around

wiya smiles

coyote's mouth opens wide

...

...

...

i sit down

stare at the blank page

try to imagine words into existence

words that can help

words that can be cast like spells

i put my fingers to the keyboard

coyote gentle rests a paw over my hand

licks the back of my head

*coyote smiles a big **big** coyote smile*

Abstract

This paper outlines the road and journey taken by a Métis-Jewish graduate student to direct a theatre project in partial fulfillment of an MFA in Directing. It is a contribution towards decolonizing theatre and performance study and practice. Offering processes, techniques, and tools that challenge and exist outside of colonial dominant western theatrical practice and study. This paper is part story, part research, part process, and part reflection. Discussing the deep challenges of creating decolonizing practice within the confines of a colonial institution through an artistic field entrenched in colonial ideals. This is presented as an activation to inspire ways of working that honour all our relations and allows us, as human collaborators, to show up as our full selves.

Dedication

This work centres around relationship building and reciprocity. “Research must use relational accountability, that is, must be connected to or a part of a community (set of relationships), if it is to be counted as Indigenous” (qtd in Wilson 41-42).

This work is dedicated to the Indigenous artists who find themselves working in the four walls of the colonizer. To the Indigenous artists who have to work every day to learn and unlearn who they are. To the Indigenous artists who have to spend their life decolonizing their thoughts, minds, bodies, and souls. To the artists who have walked this path before and the ones who will come after. To the mixed artists who live with feet in two, three, or four worlds. Finally, to my Métis brothers, sisters, and siblings: “My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back” - Louise Riel. May we bring the spirit back to our people. May we never stop resisting.

As resilient as a weed and as beautiful as a wildflower- Christi Belcourt

Acknowledgments

I offer gratitude to all those who have helped pave this path for me, ancestors, activists, artists, agitators, family, friends, community, mentors, and supporters. I am especially grateful to my parents, Pam and Peter, who have always lifted me and supported my voice and shown me a good path through their responsible actions. I am grateful to all those who supported me at York University, especially the students who stood with me and taught me more than I could have imagined. Our cohort, Mandy and Eish, you know. I honour all the strong matriarchs who sat with me and visited and supported my vision and process. Thank you Coyote, for keeping me humble and keeping me on my toes.

Gratitude is like coming home after a long day of hard work

Once you give in to the comfort the troubles melt away

I feel at peace with the world

I feel at peace with myself

Maarsii, Miigwetch, Hiy hiy, Kinanâskomitin, Niá:wen

Table of Contents

Coyote	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents	vi
Coyote's Title Page	vii
Chapter One: Research Paper	1
Taanshi/Shalom/Hello	1
Decolonizing as theory as praxis	6
A Road	14
What had been planned	15
Ubu, Jarry, and me	16
Adapting and the universal	19
Arriving at a concept	21
Garlic Dramaturgy	28
A Road (continued)	30
UBU BIPOC Agreement	31
A Road (continued)	34
Antiracism	35
A Road (continued)	39
Decolonizing as praxis as theory	41
Good Beginnings	41
Land-Based Dramaturgy	44
Circular understanding and (de/re)centering	47
Research Conclusion	49
Chapter Two: Director's Journal Excerpts	52
Chapter Three: Epilogue	58
Works Cited	63
Appendix	69

~~GARLIC ROOTS: AN INTERSECTION OF DECOLONIZING THEATRE~~

~~METHODOLOGIES AND ALFRED JARRY'S *UBU ROI*~~

~~A BEADED FLOWER: STITCHING \ DECOLONIZING THEATRE METHODOLOGY~~

~~THROUGH ALFRED JARRY'S *UBU ROI*~~

~~JUST BECAUSE IT'S A ROAD DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO TAKE IT: A JOURNEY~~

~~OF DECOLONIZING RESISTANCE THROUGH STORYTELLING~~

~~COYOTE TRICKS US BACK INTO EXISTENCE: AN EXTREMELY INTELLIGENT AND
ACEDMIC OFFERING~~

~~STRA ENIF FO RETSAM FO EERGED EHT ROF STNEMERIUQER EHT FO
TNEMLLIFLUF LAITRAP NI SEIDUTS ETAUDARG FO YTLUCAF EHT OT
DETTIMBUS REPAP HCRAESER A~~

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN THEATRE
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

November 2021



mîscacâkanis / aen pchi loo | coyote

JUST BECAUSE IT'S A ROAD DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO TAKE IT: A JOURNEY OF DECOLONIZING RESISTANCE THROUGH STORYTELLING

Chapter One: Research Paper

Taanshi/Shalom/Hello

I have a story to tell you. It's about a particular place and time, but that doesn't mean it doesn't relate to you. It doesn't mean it's not for you. I mean, after all, you found this story.

This paper is a path towards decolonizing understanding; therefore, it is informed deeply by the complexity and intersections of my identity (and yours). By the land I've lived on and the relationships I've created. Manitoba (Treaty one territory), Alberta (Treaty six territory), British Columbia (unceded Halkomelem-speaking Stó:lō territory), and Ontario (Toronto Purchase and Dish with One Spoon territory). Community. James, my best friend since I was five, who is now a fancy consultant. Lovers. Enemies. Heartbreaks. Embarrassing moments. But most relevantly, this paper is guided by my culture, who my community is, and who my ancestors are. I need to tell you who I am and where I come from, and I hope you take a moment to do the same.

My name is Philip Jonah Logan Geller.

My mom is Pamela Annie Louise Logan, daughter of Mary Coxhead and John Logan. On this side, Mary's family is from England; they arrived on Turtle Island in the early 1900s. John is a Métis-Half-Breed from the Logan, Dupuise, and Dolorme families, a direct descendant of Robert Logan and "Marie a Salteaux Indian", one of the first families to arrive and establish the Red River Settlement. Here we are fighters and workers. I grew up in Northern Manitoba, not really knowing about my mom's side of the family. The occasional visit with Uncles or Aunts, a

video box set of Lord of the Rings from an Uncle for Christmas, visiting Grandma Mary in Winnipeg. My mom had always kept a distance.

My dad is Peter Geoffrey Geller, son of Maxine Doctoroff and Manly Geller. On this side, we're Ashkenazi Jews, having arrived on Turtle Island, in what is now Winnipeg, Manitoba, in the early 1900s, escaping the pogroms of Russia. Here we are artists and dreamers. I grew up in Thompson, Manitoba; we were the only Jews in the city most of the time. I remember Friday night dinners with homemade Challah and Passover Seders with Matzoh shipped in from Winnipeg. Bar Mitzvah's and Mazel Tavs – I knew what it was to be Jewish, I know what it is to be Jewish.

When I was growing up people would ask me where I'm from:

"here" I'd say

"but really where are you from"

"oh, I'm jewish...I guess"

"huh" they'd say

"born in Winnipeg."

My mom doesn't really look 'white'. We both get a pretty wicked tan in the summer, my brother, not so much.

It wasn't until about five years ago that the final thread fell into place. At that time in my life, I felt lost. You know when something doesn't quite sit right, and you're not sure what it is? I

was feeling that day in and day out, a discomfort, a perpetual discomfort—a lack of purpose and direction. But then, a path began to reveal itself. After some careful consideration and a lot of research, my mom let slide where her dad was from, my grandfather John. "Métis". We were — are Métis. At first, I didn't know what that might mean for me, us, but slowly, all the pieces came together, and bits of who I am were re-contextualized. Stories I had been told, things I had felt, places I had gone, experiences, memories — all through a new lens. Since that discovery, I have made a concerted effort to reconnect, reclaim, find my way back into the circle. Because we grew up in Northern Manitoba, we found ourselves in many Cree and Dene spaces. So, I experienced parts of that way of life, but I knew I needed to understand things that are nation-specific to the Red River Métis, the place that holds the memory of so many of my ancestors. Because my grandfather had left this world long before I was born, when my mom was quite young, the stories I had of him were sparse; this was made more distant because of the complex relationship and experiences my mom had with my grandfather. I had no spoken connection to *ni mooshum*, grandfather John, so my mom and I went about (r)establishing a relationship with him, his memory, and the community he came from. We did a deep dive into ancestral research and found that we have roots in "Rooster Town", the Métis ghetto of Winnipeg. We traced cousins and aunts. We began to connect to the Red River community in the Fraser Valley, where my parents live. We (re)learned the gestures and creativity of beading. I have begun to learn the language through teacher Heather Souter. The process of reconnecting has been medicine for my mom and me. Though, I still work to collect all the beads. I still work to find all the threads. All the while, my Jewish side gives space. It's been here for a long time; the experiences have seeped into my being. I make space in the circle for Indigenous knowledge and understanding.

In speaking about the loss of culture and community, Métis Scholar Chantal Fiola shares that "Métis peoples are being called to pick up our sacred bundles and do our work to ensure that *mino-bimaadiziwin*¹ will continue at least seven generations into the future" (12). I believe it is my duty to leave a strong path forward for my community, communities – this paper is one of those paths. This paper represents a continued journey of reclamation for me as I acknowledge sites of Indigenous knowledge and praxis and attempt to reconcile them with parts of an already established colonial practice and being.

With all this, I would like to acknowledge the current climate of identity conversation in Indigenous circles, particularly in academia. I am talking about Michelle Latimer (filmmaker), Robert Lovlace (scholar at Queen's), Joseph Boyden (author), and many others in the public eye and those that are not. The conversation has risen more to the surface, and very necessary questions are finally being asked about who can claim Indigeneity and that many white-passing/presenting people are benefiting from funding and being given abundant space. I do not wish to claim space that isn't mine to claim throughout this paper or speak these ideas as if I am the only one to have thought them – I am not an authority on Métis culture and community, I do not speak for Indigenous issues. I have attempted to outline an experience, my experience, throughout the entirety of this paper. I ask that you offer me grace on this journey of finding my place in the circle. I have inevitably made mistakes and will continue to do so. And in return, I offer accountability, awareness, and an attempt to do, what I believe I, as a Métis, have to offer, which is to act as a mediator between Indigeneity and Western concepts to find balance in our communities.

¹ As Fiola describes: "...help me live a good, balanced life (*mino-bimaadiziwin*)" (10) and "...*mino-bimaadiziwin* (good life, good relations)." (76)

This paper is an offering to open up space in performance/theatre practice and performance/theatre studies for decolonizing ways of working as foundational, necessary, overlooked, and underrepresent.

This paper is a story – interspersed with research, discoveries, and theories. This paper has a few different protocols. The first, it is circular, it can be read in many different directions. You will find stories within stories within stories. The second, Coyote (wiya²) might just be your guide. ~~Or Coyote might just be annoying. Or Coyote might just be here to teach us a lesson. Or Coyote might just be here to have fun.~~ (*taanshi, says coyote, it's me! fasten your seatbelts, please silence your devices, get comfy, and somebody bring me a fucking snack.*) Third, I have worked to build relationships with knowledge. Knowledge is not something that can be gained or possessed but something that can be met with, dialogued with and shared. (*coyote licks wiya lips*). I do not claim to be an authority or expert on this research because "for us to think that we are in possession of a decolonial universal truth would not be decolonial at all but modern/colonial" (1 Walsh and Mignolo). Instead, I speak from my experience to yours. *coyote, in a suit and tie, pulls out a pen and offers it to you. please sign here if you're in agreement, says coyote, it's protocol.* _____

This paper outlines my journey through York University and the many twists and turns that have shaped my understanding of process-based-decolonizing methodologies. One time my mom said, "just because it's a road doesn't mean you have to take it," and maybe not all roads are meant for all people, and maybe this road wasn't meant for me at this time...but damnit I took it.

² From Southern Michif meaning he/she/they(singular).

By taking this road, I found new pathways and routes, I problem solved my way out of challenging situations, I worked past the hurt and the trauma, I made magic from the disappointments, I forged relationships in a dumpster fire, most importantly, I made it through to the other side.

Decolonizing³ as theory as praxis⁴

Terra Nullius
teerrrrraaa Nuulliuuuussssss
is that latin
it sounds latin
seeems latin
means new land
undiscovered land
seems like a weird place to start
New land
undiscovered land
like a blank page

But something was already here
you have to search to find it

Peel back a layer
look behind a bush
'watch for the signs'
there is always something there

If you can take the time to listen

Like a scratch and win card
just scratch
...
and win

³ I am very specific in my language around decolonizing as an act, as something active in continuous movement and transformation. I question whether or not in our current systems – that centre eurocentricity, white supremacy, and the patriarchal ideal – can we arrive at a decolonized site. Instead, we must be in constant acts of resistance, resilience, resurgence, insurgence, and reclamation. To be decolonizing at all times. On a personal level, I certainly feel that I am not in a place where I can reach a decolonial or decolonized site through my work, that the path is just beginning, and I have so much to uncover in this circular journey.

⁴ I borrow from *On Decoloniality* by Catherine E. Walsh and Walter D. Mignolo where they explore the “idea of theory-and-as-praxis and praxis-and- as-theory, and in the interdependence and continuous flow of movement of both” (7).

Join me for a moment in imagining worlds. Find your breath. Where is it living today? In what part of your body? Honour your breath at this moment. No judgement, it is where it needs to be. Is it in your chest? Your low belly? Your ribs? The small of your back? Your elbow? Breathe.

In this process of breathing, check-in with how you're feeling today. What are the areas of release and areas of tension in the body?

Soften your gaze.

Drop-in *colonization*. What begins to arise for you when you think about colonization? What does this word evoke? Follow your instincts and impulses.

Colonization:

What do you see?

What do you hear?

What do you smell?

What do you taste?

What do you touch?

...

I believe that colonization and decolonization always need to begin with the personal, self, and body.

I begin the paper with this section because it sets the framework for the kind of theory, praxis, and spaces of knowledge I have attempted to create within this research and exploration. It is the thread throughout. This whole paper flirts and dances between colonization and decolonization – a space of learning and unlearning. As a Métis-Jew living with my feet in many worlds, I continue to re-establish deep connections to Indigenous knowledge and community while also being drawn to certain aspects of a Eurocentric narrative. Like many Indigenous

people on Turtle Island, I have been disconnected in many ways from community and tradition. Only now in my adult life, I have made a certain choice to reclaim decolonizing sites of knowledge. In my theatre work, you can track when I made a conscious decision to create in an Indigenous way. I say conscious because I believe that as a "body of culture", as Rezma Menakem offers, I have the knowledge of my ancestors within me; although I was not always consciously thinking about my ancestors, I have always been moving towards (and within) the path of Indigenous theatre and storytelling.

What is decolonization? Decolonizing? Decolonial? These words and concepts are thrown around a lot without much concern for their real-life implications. Decolonization has become a trend for many organizations, especially in the arts sector. I believe it is necessary to dive into the very basics of this language to begin to forge a relationship of understanding with this highly complicated and pressing theory/praxis.

coyote smiles, this next bit is for anyone who needs the basics...the real basics. 101 kind of shit. no shame if you need to brush up on what imperialism is. for everyone else (i'm looking at you Indigenous kin) skip the next 3 pages.

The *Keele Manifesto for Decolonizing the Curriculum* offers this:

“Decolonization involves identifying colonial systems, structures, and relationships and working to challenge those systems. It is not “integration” or simply the token inclusion of intellectual achievements of non-White cultures. Rather it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial to the making of space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems. It is a culture shift to think more widely about why common knowledge is what it is, and so doing, adjusting cultural perceptions and power relations in real and significant ways.” (97)

It is in “identifying colonial systems, structures, and relationships” that we must begin. First, we must find the truth before we can begin to reconcile. That truth is the colonial history and present we live in.

In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Maori scholar, offers a strong survey of colonization. In fact, dedicating half her book to the affects and effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples. She states: "A constant reworking of our understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism is an important aspect of indigenous cultural politics and forms the basis of an indigenous language of critique" (25). In order to understand our position as Indigenous people in the present day, it is necessary to understand these forces of oppression and assimilation.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines imperialism as a “state policy, practice, or advocacy of extending power and dominion, especially by direct territorial acquisition or by gaining political and economic control of other areas” This is furthered in an Indigenous context when Smith offers, “the imperial imagination enabled European nations to imagine the possibility that new worlds, new wealth and new possessions existed that could be discovered and controlled” (23).

Imperialism is the insidious force and thought that the empire must expand and that it has the right to expand. In the history of this land, imperialism took the form of England and France "discovering" these shores and of a 500 year-long (and counting) "settling" of these lands.

Imperialism finds relevance in this research in that it has seeped into our collective conscience and continues to influence our collective imaginations and, therefore, our works of art.

"Colonialism became imperialism's outpost, the fort and the port of imperial outreach" (Smith 24). That is to say, colonialism is an offshoot of the imperial imagination, the active practice of "exploring" and "settling" land. As explained in the image below:

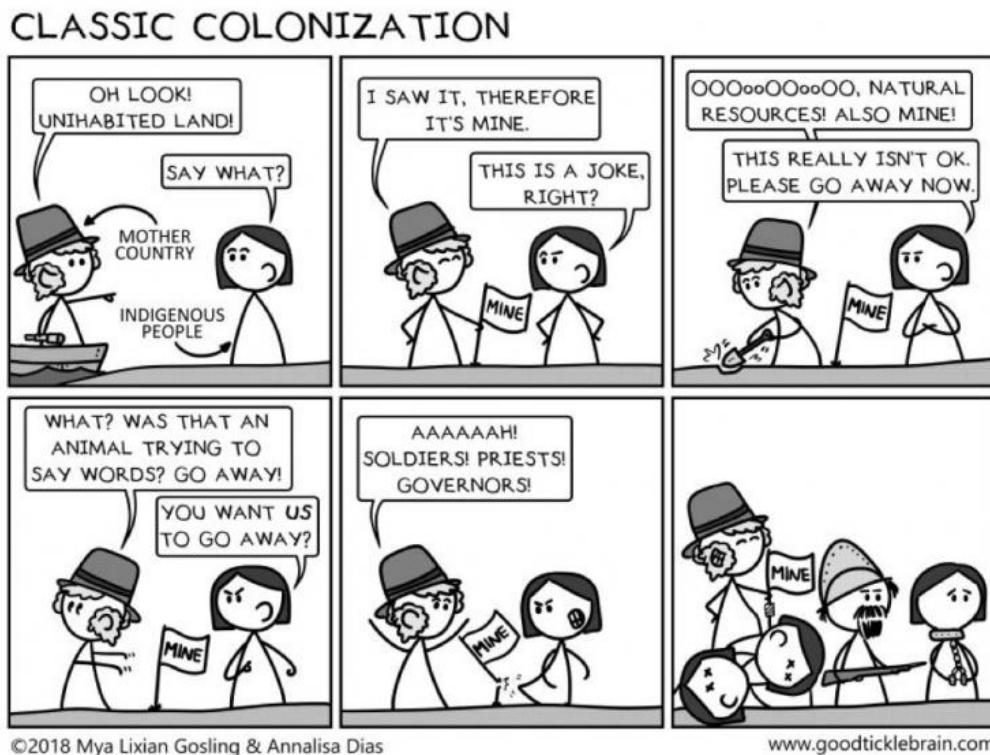


Fig. 1 *Classic Colonization* from Elliott, Jane, and Annalisa Dias. "Decolonizing Theatre/La Descolonización Del Teatro." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, howlround.com/decolonizing-theatre-la-descolonizacion-del-teatro.

Central to both imperialism and colonization is an erasure and genocide of Indigenous peoples, dealt with differently in different eras and times. From actual murder, residential schools, insidious policy to subtle (but no less harmful) forms of erasure that exist in institutions and in the collective conscious of contemporary "Canadians"⁵. That is why the work of Indigenous theatre makers is so necessary, relevant, unsettling, disruptive, and healing (and so much more). That is why I centre my practice and this project around decolonization, which is the work to decentre colonial ideas and practices and to bring to the forefront Indigenous thought, knowledge, and traditions.

Now that a brief identification has occurred, the conversation of decolonizing can move into looking at the "paradigm shift[s]" and "cultural shift[s]" that can transpire within a theatrical storytelling process.

i hope you had a good ride, says Coyote. if you wanna know more and impress all your friends at a party you could just hop on "baba Google" or read a book like "An Inconvenient Indian" by Thomas King or "Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples" by Linda Tuhiwai Smith or "Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life" by James Daschuk or "21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act" by Bob Joseph or you know what i think I know a couple of really good articles i could send you yeah let me just see if i can find those they've got to be here somewhere i think i packed them for this journey they should just be right here yeah let me just not in this pocket mmm not in this pocket either hold on just be patient, yeah these are good ones really really really really really good articles I think you should read them if I can just find them, no that's not it, that was a blueberry, this is just a bottle of water

⁵ The quotation marks represent a rejection of the state of so-called Canada as absolute and uncontested. A rejection of Canada as the only nation that inhabits this land.

Colonization is when you grow up not knowing where you're from. Colonization is when you lose the language of your ancestors. When you can't sing their songs or dance their dances. When you have a deep pulsing sense of un-belonging coursing through your veins. When your intersections, culture, sexuality, gender is confused by a binary so solid that a battering ram can't break it. When you watch communities crumble because of intergenerational trauma. When you can't fit into a world meant to consume. When the trees fall around you. When the water is poisoned. When the source of all life (mother earth) is seen as another snack to be eaten on a sunny afternoon in the park.

Decolonization is when I know the land that birthed me and my community. Decolonization is when the language of my ancestors tastes like fresh bread. When I can sing their songs and dance their dances. When I have a deep sense of belonging coursing through my veins. When I express the full extent of myself in all my intersections, breaking binaries with love and abundance. When I help communities heal. When I learn to give before I can take. When the trees and bushes blossom. When the water is fresh and clean. When mother earth holds me in a loving embrace that is more welcoming than *–anything you can imagine, says Coyote.*

Within decolonizing, I seek to displace Western practice and recentre Métis and Jewish ancestral and cultural knowledge. I focused more consciously on Métis and Indigenous performance methodology in this research journey, but the Jewish perspective through which I see the world is not forgotten. Recentring of ancestral and cultural knowledge is extended when I create in mixed company, where the work is to find space in the circle for everyone's decolonizing journey and their unique cultural and ancestral knowledge that can work towards displacing Western practice.

I find support when Frantz Fanon says, "Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder" (2). This "disorder" I believe is moving away from traditional binary thinking of an ordered society and embracing new kinds of systems of knowledge that are influenced and drawn from everyone's unique lived experience, that is to say there is no assumed order in my process, that one thing must lead to another, rather the order is revealed through the collaborators in the process. This is furthered when Catherine E. Walsh shares, "decoloniality seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought" (17).

"Displacement" and "disorder" that lead to a (re/de)centering requires action and embodied practice. Leanne Batasmosak Simpson offers that "We cannot just think, write or imagine our way to a decolonized future. Answers on how to re-build and how to resurge are therefore derived from a web of consensual relationships that is infused with movement through lived experience and embodiment" (162). It is through these movements and embodied experiences of storytelling and theatre that I find spaces of "displacement," "disorder," and (re/de)centering. If we can tell our stories in our ways, Western knowledge and thought can be removed from the equation.

The concepts that displacement and disorder lead to (re/de)centering through an embodied practice help guide the theatrical process I attempt to work within. It is a practice that requires artists to bring themselves, and their lived and ancestral experiences to the work to create a distinct process that is unique to each project. All dramaturgy is cultural dramaturgy, and (re)centering everyone's unique cultural experience creates new pathways and methods of

storytelling. It is making room for each human to navigate a process of storytelling in the way that suits themselves as well as the community, collective, and moment the best.

By allowing myself the opportunity to investigate a process that centres: my humanity and those around me, my cultural and ancestral experience, and my lived experience, I offer some tangible acts of decolonization throughout this paper that reflect my own unique process that (dis)places, (dis)orders, and (re/de)centres. These acts of decolonizing are an attempt at an embodied-relational understanding that addresses my unique ancestral and lived experience.

A Road

It's been just over a year since I began this thesis work. I chose a script and started to imagine worlds like I had been told good directors do. In the beginning, this pursuit felt lonely and siloed – me alone, building worlds months away from any kind of collaborative conversation and kilometers away from colleagues and community. As the conditions of the world began to shift, so did my thoughts on this process as a director.

As I began this project so too did the global pandemic. COVID-19 was spreading very quickly in "Canada"⁶. I left Tkaronto, where York University is situated, to find a semblance of safety at my family home on the traditional territory of the Halkomelem-speaking Stó:lō people (Abbotsford, British Columbia), where I have written much of this document. As COVID-19 continued to shake the world, cracks began to appear on the surface of our collective conscience. The pandemic began to lay bare the deep inequities that are baked into our system and society. George Floyd was murdered. Black Lives Matter protests and actions began to occur globally. Systems were being questioned, and action was being demanded.

⁶ I utilize the quotations as a site of resistance against the colonial state. To exemplify the power of naming and point towards the violent colonial introduction of Canada as a state just over 150 years ago.

I was sitting at home when all this happened. Isolated. Alone. Meeting with collaborators and friends and family over the computer and the phone. Trying to bridge great distances one Zoom call at a time. I tried to understand my place in this global narrative, a white-passing Métis-Jew trying to tell stories. Trying to foster a decolonizing process. What could that possibly mean in this context?

As the pandemic raged on, the conditions of the project continued to shift. Sitting through countless meetings where someone would say, I promise this will be happening in person in a theatre; you just have to wait a few months. To, we should get ready to do the whole thing distanced. Or the dreaded, it will be entirely online. As I felt my creative voice slowly get stripped away – drowned in logistics, being asked to create in entirely different mediums and conditions, I felt helpless, hapless, hopeless.

We moved forward, though. The producing body, Theatre@York, kept trying to keep things going, keep the gears turning. I met with designers and began to share my thoughts on the show. I sat with my thesis adviser at the time, Mark Wilson, and brainstormed creative paths forward. Then we had our official Intro Meeting, a space for the production team and members of the creative team to meet each other and the work. It was in this space that the seed for my broader research would be planted. **I realized that the systems and structures around me and this project would inherently influence the outcome of the story I wanted to tell.**

let's start at the beginning again, says coyote

What had been planned?

A hope and a dream. If you'll allow me to quote myself for a moment, this is what I had written as my thesis proposal.

“As a part of York University’s Theatre@York 2020/2021 season ‘Surviving Systems of Oppression’, I will be interrogating the intersection of decolonizing theatre methodologies and the European text of *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry. With a focus on an Indigenous theatre process, I will push against the colonial confines of dominant Western theatre practice. How do Indigenous cultural praxes on Turtle Island (North America) influence decolonizing rehearsal techniques, methodologies, protocols, and content?”

coyote coos, look how young we were

Now, let's break this down. What I am really talking about here is my desire to take something that I see as a colonial piece of text written in France imported to this land. It is by definition not Indigenous, not of this land. I was taking *Ubu Roi* and seeing how it might be able to enter the circle of decolonizing storytelling and creation and enter, perhaps, into a respectful relationship with this land and Indigenous ways of knowing. I imagined a process where we would take the text and create, in community, a response to *Ubu Roi* from a decolonizing perspective. (Please note that throughout the paper, I move between speaking of the source text, *Ubu Roi*, and the adaptation UBU). I didn't realize that the systems that I found myself working within were the very 'systems of oppression' mentioned above. But at the time, I hadn't uncovered any of that, and so I went about with my research like I had been told good directors do.

The beginnings of my research journey were in creating a relationship with *Ubu Roi* and Alfred Jarry. Then I moved into the directorial/creation methods I was going to bring into the process.

Ubu, Jarry, and me

I share some abbreviated research on the original source texts and their context since so much of my research and practice moved away from this piece. In Barbara Wright's forward to her adaptation of *Ubu Roi* she says: "What it really is becomes more apparent if one considers what its author really was" (V).

*coyote chimes in, just like we understand the story in the context of its teller! wiya looks at me expectantly with a toothy grin.
i offer wiya some blueberries*

There is so much written about Alfred Jarry that at times it is hard to discern fact from fiction. Did he truly become an Absinthe-soaked Ubu character in the years before his death? How much of a misogynist was he truly? How much of his life became devoted to caricature and upholding the image of the high priest of the eccentric (LaBelle 23). Jarry became his own type of lore; stories about him and his eccentricities spread and inevitably warped. History is just another set of stories, and for our purposes (and in honour of Jarry), we might as well choose the ones that are the most interesting.

1896 *Ubu Roi* is first presented and published in Paris, France. Jarry is 23 (three years my younger) when the show goes up. Alfred Jarry was born in 1873 in a medium-sized town about 300 km west of Paris (Wright V). He began writing the Ubu plays in high school, said to have been inspired by his physics teacher, who eventually became the template for *Ubu Roi*. Jarry was well educated and well-read (LaBelle 16), which can clearly be linked to the layers of reference found throughout *Ubu Roi*. This kind of high-brow education is seen throughout his writings, where he creates layers of literary and scholarly reference and meaning.

Jarry has been hailed as "playing a crucial role in the transition from the nineteenth-century avant-garde to the emergent modernist movements of the early twentieth century. An inspiration for Dada and Surrealism and a touchstone for the Theatre of the Absurd." (The

Morgan Library & Museum) Influencing the likes of Antonin Artaud, so much so that Artaud named his theatre after Jarry – using “masks, puppets and mannequins” (Jannarone 251) just as Jarry did in the original *Ubu Roi* production. Not only a playwright, but Jarry has also written poetry, theatre criticism, created visual art, and so much more.

Alfred Jarry’s invented branch of philosophy known as ‘pataphysics really exemplifies the kind of mind and ideology that Jarry had. The Morgan Library & Museum, in their exhibit *Alfred Jarry: The Carnival of Being*, share this about ‘pataphysics: “‘the science of imaginary solutions,’ concerned with laws that govern exceptions (the particular, rather than the general); it explains the universe supplementary to this one—or, at least, it describes a universe that could and perhaps *should* be envisioned in place of our own. Unconstrained by time, ‘pataphysics dwells in Eternity and in the imagination of the artist. ‘God—or myself—created all possible worlds,’ wrote Jarry.” ‘Pataphysics was taken up in 1948 when “a collective of avant-garde writers and artists set up the College de 'Pataphysique” including the likes of Eugene Ionesco (The Guardian). The college exists to this day.

Through Jarry's cultivated personality and provoking work, the influence he has had on Western practices of theatre and storytelling are undeniable. Even in researching Jarry and *Ubu Roi* I find myself endlessly fascinated with the man’s life and am, in some ways, drawn away from the source material. As Barbara Wright suggested, understanding the author becomes central to understanding the play.

i can't wait to be this famous one day, coyote winks

While deepening my relationship with Alfred Jarry and *Ubu Roi*, I began to research creation and directorial methodology sites that could intersect with the source material.

Adapting and the universal

Ubu Roi has been adapted to suit all kinds of contexts, communities, and locales. The grotesque figure of Père Ubu seems to resonate across cultures and time. When speaking about the location of Poland, Jarry is quoted as saying "a country so legendary and dismembered that it is Nowhere...Nowhere is everywhere, as well as the country in which we find ourselves" (qtd in LaBelle 54). At first, I am inclined to disagree with this sentiment because within it, I sense a colonial mentality; because Poland is not France, then it is not a real place, that France is the centre of everywhere. However, Jarry subverts his own language at the end and says, "nowhere is everywhere, as well as the country in which we find ourselves," in effect contradicting that France is somehow the centre of everywhere. At this moment, the genius of his 'pataphysical thinking is laid bare "correct definitions are equivalent to wrong ones" (The Guardian). In a sense, what is true is also false. I think what Jarry has grasped is that by actually being very specific in the setting of *Ubu Roi* the director or adapter is given the opportunity to imagine somewhere, which becomes everywhere, and eventually nowhere.

In the character of Père Ubu, Jarry also tried to evoke a universality. "Jarry's finest symbol is Ubu, and there is little question that Jarry gave him universal characteristics of being 'an ignoble⁷ creature, which is he resembles all of us'" (LaBelle 54). I think many of us who have embarked on interpreting or adapting *Ubu Roi* realize the power of Père Ubu (I would add Mére Ubu) as symbols to communicate larger systemic or societal issues. Further in the statement above, not only is the Ubu family symbolic, they are also us, "the individual spectator can see himself to the degree he is Ubuesque" (54). In the early stages of the

⁷ Merriam-Webster defines ignoble as "characterized by baseness, lowness, or meanness."

process, I would prompt all my collaborators by asking them: when have you embodied a Ubu character in your life?

In this space of symbolism and 'universal', I believe artists found room to adapt the piece in their way. From the work of Hollywood star Tim Robbin's most recent project *Bobbo Supreme*, Bobbo is a funhouse mirror version of Donald Trump (Dudley). To *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, which is a look at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Hoile). These examples take punches at systems and specific people and are drawn from very real circumstances that have shaped the creator's contexts. It is almost as if Jarry has provided a framework for us to play and create within.

The challenge I find myself grappling with is the idea of the universal. I have come to understand the *universal*, very often in a theatrical context, is something code for straight and/or White and/or European. It is here, in this dissonance, that I attempt to reconcile decolonizing methodology and *Ubu Roi*, written by a straight White man imported to this land from France, one of THE colonial hubs. If decolonizing is indeed a praxis "that displace[s] Western rationality" (Walsh 17) and "to challenge those systems" (Fanon 2), working with a very Western text presents its difficulties. Finding common ground can be complicated, which Métis artist and scholar David Garneau illustrates so clearly.



*i love this picture, says coyote it reminds me of the good old days
no it reminds me of today, corrects coyote
it makes me worried for the future,
chimes in coyote again*

Fig. 2 David Garneau, *Not to Confuse Politeness With Agreement* 2013

Muscle and Bone <https://muscleandboneblog.wordpress.com/tag/david-garneau/>. Accessed August 3, 2021.

I believe that by bringing my unique decolonizing practice, which is explored in depth through this paper, to the text I in some ways can present a decolonizing understanding of the world Jarry has offered us. In a way, my process has become the lens through which I adapt the text.

Arriving at a concept

I was introduced to the genre wheel by Adjunct Professor Peter Hinton-Davis as an ever-moving, non-fixed entity to describe or ascribe genre to art. Conceived by Northrop Frye, the wheel is broken up into four sections: tragedy, irony/satire, comedy, and romance, each section paired with a season. Then, each section is broken up into six smaller sections - going deeper into the seasons and looking at how each season can be different at the beginning, the middle, or the end.

Thinking about how the beginning of winter, with light snowfall and slightly frozen puddles, to the middle of winter where the snow is deep enough to fill your boots and the lakes frozen enough to drive over. I found a deep connection between this tool and the land-based dramaturgy I discuss later. The figure below shows the complete genre wheel quoted in *Frye's Geometry of Thought: Building the Great Wheel* by John Ayre. I have highlighted the sections I believe this piece lives within: the end of tragedy and the beginning of irony/satire.

in King Ubu. Jarry judiciously chose Macbeth as his tool to show how humorous tragedy can be” (LaBelle 72).

Blighted Tragedy exists as the final spoke in the wheel of tragedy, the end of fall. Frye offers, "The ironic perspective in tragedy is attained by putting the character in a state of lower freedom than the audience" (221) it is "...a world of shock and horror in which the central images are images of *sparagmos*, that is, cannibalism, mutilation and torture" (222). It is evident in many ways that all the characters have less freedom than the audience. I think the final point of "shock and horror" can be done quite effectively in the staging. Within the text there are ample battles, deaths, murders, and torture – that could be easily staged to evoke a sense of blight. Finally, Frye says "In such tragedies, the hero is in too great agony or humiliation to gain the privilege of the heroic pose," I think this one speaks for itself (222).

Blighted Tragedy moves into Irony of Corruption, the sixth stage of irony/satire and the beginning of winter on Frye's wheel. Frye says the "central principle of ironic myth is best approached as a parody of romance" (223). I can see within *Ubu Roi* massive romantic parodies – in fact, the entire text is chalked full of references to other historical or popular texts – Macbeth, Hamlet, Julius Cesar, to name a few (worth noting that the parodies I have identified are Tragic ones). Moreover, "The characters...in satire they tend to be caricatures," which can certainly be said for *Ubu Roi* (206). Père Ubu and Mére Ubu both drawing from a Punch and Judy relationship while also being inspired by an archetypical tyrant or dictator character.

Transitioning to the sixth stage, Frye says, "The sixth phase presents human life in terms largely unrelieved bondage. Its settings feature prisons, madhouses, lynching, mobs, and places of execution, and it differs from a pure inferno mainly in the fact that in human experience suffering has an end in death (238). The battlefield, the cave he finds himself trapped in, the

tombs of the king. I find this an exciting description that could certainly be better evoked through the design and aesthetic of the piece. Frye says - "The human figures of this phase are, of course, desdichado⁸ figures of misery or madness" (238) and "...the goal of the quest that isn't there" (239) both these descriptions ring highly true for *Ubu Roi*. Not only is Père Ubu in a constant state of misery, moving from one dissatisfaction and problem to another, but this also seems to be compounded by his inability to pursue a quest. As I have stated above, Père Ubu does not choose his destiny, nor really is there a clear journey prescribed, instead a series of events he finds himself in – the action does not move towards a single goal but is in reaction to situations the characters find themselves in.

Finally, what is so exciting about Irony of Corruption is in Frye's final statement about the spoke, he says that tragedy and tragic irony culminates in us seeing some evil in a personal form, but with irony we pass the evil and are able to see it from the other side (239). This, to me, is what makes *Ubu Roi*, at its heart, Irony of Corruption. The play takes us so deep into the tragic reality of capitalism, greed, corruption, and the abuse of power we are able to come out the other side with a different perspective.

I reflect on the seasonal aspects of these two genres. The end of fall and the beginning of winter is an interesting time of transition and preparation. Animals begin to prepare to hibernate, hoarding food and making dens. Plants begin to lose their leaves, storing energy and resources. Some things just die. The most interesting natural aspect, to myself, as it relates to this show, is that we plant our garlic at this time which leads into the garlic dramaturgy discussed later in this paper. The other things that grow during this time are hearty vegetables and herbs - for example, Charred, Beets, Cabbage, Kale, Onions, Rosemary, Sage, and Lavender. Animals like Bear and

⁸ Unhappy

Squirrel give birth during the winter and raise their little ones in the hibernation dens. The Salmon begin to come up the creek to spawn behind my family's home.

When I was first introduced to the genre wheel, I was immediately struck by its similarity to the Medicine Wheel - its four quadrants, each relating to a season and a direction. Worth noting that in this comparison, I do not wish to draw a definitive conclusion but create a line to the potential relationship between the two wheels for my dramaturgical purposes.

The Medicine Wheel holds many teachings for me - whenever I come across it, I am always struck by how it holds new knowledge every time I see it, depending on how I see it. I think it is best to offer how these teachings relate specifically to *Ubu Roi* to exemplify the inspiration the Medicine Wheel has provided. Thus far, I have identified that *Ubu Roi* can live in either tragedy or irony/satire, which is the end of fall and the beginning of winter. On the Medicine Wheel, that is either the West or the North - or the space between them. Some of the teachings about these quadrants that I find most provoking is that the West is a place of adulthood, autumn, water, and Sweetgrass, where the North is a place for animals, winter, fire, Elders, and Cedar.

I want to further my investigation into what it means for UBU to be a place of adulthood entering the stage of an Elder. There is something exciting about acknowledging a piece as an Elder piece, as something with knowledge and an ability to teach – something that holds stories and the past (moving towards the present) within it. I am also curious about unpacking what each of these medicines has to teach me about *Ubu Roi* - Sweetgrass as a braid or the resiliency of Cedar.

One of the major teachings that inspire me and really supplements my understanding of the genre wheel is that North is the intellect or mind, East is the physical, South is the emotional,

and West is spiritual. This is exemplified in the statements of the image below, created as a teacher's resource.



Fig. 4 *Teacher's Resource* Lai, Christina, et al., editors. *Full Circle: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Ways of Knowing*, 2012, www.osstf.on.ca/full-circle-first-nations-metis-inuit-ways-of-knowing. (5)

I think it is an exciting prospect to look at *UBU* as the transition from spiritual thought to an intellectual place or a place of analysis. This makes me question: what in *UBU* is spiritual - what is the ceremony of this play and how can it be relayed to an audience to be put in a place of 'Know it'.

As I write this, I find myself needing the patience to continue my teachings around the Medicine Wheel. I realize that I want the Medicine Wheel to provide concrete comparisons, but I cannot draw these rigid conclusions because that is not what the Wheel is teaching me right now. What the Wheel offers is constant motion and flow, the power of interpretation and story, and

how one thing will always lead to another. The Medicine Wheel reminds me of the power of the circle and, especially, the power of the circle in relation to the genre wheel.

This exploration of genre, seasons and the Medicine Wheel help me arrive at the aesthetic concept which will influence the design of the production. It will also assist in discerning what kind of mood and energy the piece needs to embody.

Garlic dramaturgy

The pungent scent of garlic hitting the frying pan. Garlic bread. Borscht. Garlic broccoli.

The exercise of plant-based dramaturgy is adapted from a practice introduced to me by Professor Erika Batdorf, which looks at the seed and the growing stages of the plant to map the arc of a performance. I understand it as rather than following Aristotle's dramatic arc with exposition, rising action, complication, reversal, falling action, and denouement. The plant acts as an organic structure for plotting narrative. In order to understand the effects of the plant on the story, it is necessary first to understand the plant.

Garlic is such a versatile plant. "Not native to North America" ("The Garlic Story"), imported here but able to grow on this land. Which, of course, requires a specific understanding of what kind of garlic we are accessing because globally, there are more than 1,100 varieties ("The Garlic Story"). I chose garlic as my source plant because it seemed to embody so much of what I felt and saw in *Ubu Roi* and could imagine in our adaptation. I settled on Russian Red because it grows in my mother's garden and because it has roots in the place where my father's family is from. It was important to look at how the garlic grows that "it's generally best to plant [garlic] in the fall. The cloves should be planted between three and eight weeks before the first freeze." (Douglas) After this planting stage, the garlic germinates, and after "about nine months,

the mature garlic bulbs should be ready to harvest” (Douglas). One of the few foods that are planted at this harsh time for growing. Understanding the seasonal growth of the garlic is reflected in the genres I chose from the wheel and helped inform the aesthetic choices within the piece.

Garlic as food is seen across cultures. Its scent and taste can be delicious when cooked but hard to swallow when raw (a matter of opinion, not fact). This is echoed in *Ubu Roi*, a show that is like watching a train wreck, but you can’t look away. *Ubu Roi* embodies the duality of the garlics appeal, something that can be enjoyed or something that is repulsive all while being a matter of taste. Since its first production “*Ubu Roi* has always been subjected to exalted claims or exaggerated scorn” and continues to provoke to this day, especially through adaptations (Wright V).

Then garlic can be used as medicine. “At a time when antibiotics and other pharmacy products did not exist, a bulb of garlic itself represented a whole pharmacy industry due to the broad spectrum of effects” (Petrovska and Cekovska). This is particularly interesting because I understand Indigenous theatre and storytelling to be medicine. Yvette Nolan offers such clarity into what makes Indigenous theatre medicine “by reconnecting through ceremony, through the act of remembering, through building community, and by negotiating solidarities across communities” (3). Further, Thomas King shares “that a story told one way could cure, that same story told another way could injure” (92). What medicine is *Ubu Roi* to my audience, and how can I honour that?

In this investigation of garlic, I work intuitively and through a land-based reciprocal relationship which I outline on page 36. All these pieces of garlic dramaturgy began to influence

certain understandings of content, aesthetics, and structure. Garlic became a vital seed to return to throughout the creative exploration.

In the figure below, you can see how I use garlic's image as a place to plot out major themes and moments, and it becomes the pathway for the story.

cooking hour with coyote. look i'm sure everyone is a little tired and could use a nosh. we're about halfway through this monster so let's take some time, make some soup. this paper isn't going anywhere.

russian palace borscht

1tbsp vegetable oil

1-1/2 cups onion, finely chopped

1/2 cup carrot, chopped

16 cups chicken stock

1 medium cabbage head

3 tbsp sugar

1 tsp salt

1 clove garlic mined

5 medium beets

5 tsp tomato paste

2 large potatoes

1 cup green bell pepper, chopped

1/3 cup lemon juice

1/2 tsp ground black pepper

1 tsp fresh dillweed chopped

peel and julienne raw beets to yield 4 cups. peel and cube potatoes to yield 2 1/3 cups. finely chopped cabbage to yield 6 cups

heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and saute until browned, about 5 to 7 minutes.

add beets and carrot. saute, stirring constantly. for 10 minutes.

stir in tomato paste. remove from heat and set aside

in a large stock pot, bring chicken stock to a boil over high heat. add potato and cook for 3 minutes. add cabbage and continue boiling for 5 minutes.

add reserved beet-tomato paste mixture, green pepper, sugar, lemon juice, salt and black pepper.

reduce heat to a simmer and cook for 15 minutes

remove from heat. Stir in GARLIC and dill. serve hot.

yeild: 12 servings

A road continued

My research around Jarry, *Ubu Roi*, and the context of the original story was derailed. As I dove deep into the hole of history and the effects of Jarry on different theatrical movements, I was pulled out, abruptly...suffering only mild whiplash. In the Intro Meeting, the first official

gathering for the production, a question was posed to the department and the producing body: what are you doing to shift your practices and/or support racialized and marginalized students? Keeping in mind the freshness, at that moment, of the BLM movement and the inequities that were being called to be addressed. The answer was terrifying – a lot of silence, tripped up tongues, and finally a formalized list of non-actionable and intangibles. I took this as a call to action to shift practices within the UBU production. As someone who was, in a sense, leading this production, I realized that I had work to do.

This began the process of the UBU BIPOC Agreement. A document that was drafted to serve Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour by creating safe(r)⁹ spaces.

UBU BIPOC Agreement

To see the document, please see attached appendix A.

The UBU BIPOC Agreement began with a voluntary gathering of all members of the production who identified as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Colour (BIPOC), all of whom happened to be students at the time. In these beginning meetings, we dreamt of the kind of space we wanted to work in, where there was a freedom and safety to express our full selves. For the next phase a few members and I, who had the capacity to enter into the lengthy and involved process, moved into a research phase, outlined below. But I must say the space of speaking, listening, visiting, and being together was at the heart of the document. The reason the details around that space are sparse is to respect the privacy and voice of those who helped to build the document.

⁹ A term used because no matter how hard we try, a space may never be completely safe, but it is in the act and doing of working towards safety.

At the inception of the document, there were many different public and internal calls for training institutions to take action due to the Black Lives Matter Movement's rise in public conscience and the deep inequities that the COVID 19 pandemic exposed. These calls were coming from students and at times faculty, for theatre departments to shift their practices and create safe(r) spaces for racialized people. Institutions like the National Theatre School, University of Victoria Department of Theatre, and University of Toronto Department of Theatre, to name a few. And more broadly calls to action in the theatre community, including the widely read *We See You, White American Theater*¹⁰. These acts of resistance and insurgence became inspiration and research for the potential demands for safety and action that could be and can be made. In addition to our text-based research, we took time to speak and visit with theatre artists and activists who had experience working within and pushing against white-colonial institutions. I outline two sources of major inspiration for the UBU BIPOC Agreement below.

First, is the National Theatre School letter, a call to action which begins with demands of "ideological and policy shifts" within the institution stating "Recognize that White (Eurocentric) is not neutral" (2) or "Students need to be heard : Uncomfortable conversations encourage growth on both sides" (3). The letter then moves to "CULTURE SHIFT: Actions that can be taken Immediately that require a long-term commitment" (3). In this section, there are well-defined action items that can be taken up quickly, efficiently, and to the benefit of current students. This piece is particularly inspiring – less because of its content because the conditions of its creation are calling for much broader curricular and cultural shifts – more in that it is

¹⁰ Although created specifically for the U.S., the calls and conversation around it still resonate deeply in our “Canadian” theatre ecology.

directly addressing a theatrical training institution and, in many ways, setting the stage for this kind of dialogue.

Second is *We See You, White American Theater*, an extremely comprehensive call for a shift in the U.S. theatre ecology. Organized into five sections: Statement, Principles, Demands, Accountability, and Tenets, the call clearly outlines what the movement stands for and what kind of action needs to be taken. The call is full of great wisdom and serves as incredible inspiration for decolonizing practice. In the "Principles" section the self-identified collective speaks of the "Equitable Presence", "Code of Conduct", and "Transformative Practices" demanding 50% BIPOC representation of artists then calling for theatre spaces to make room and create conditions of success and safety for these artists, finally demanding transformation of our theatrical ecosystem. In a survey of *We See You, White American Theater's Demands*, there is incredible fruit to be (honourably) harvested. The specificity in which they demand transformation leaves no room for questions, ifs ands or buts. For example, a piece we were directly inspired by: "We demand the BIPOC actors be invited to actively engage in any conversation regarding their hair and makeup/ These conversation must be anti-racist in language and tone, provide the BIPOC actor with agency concerning their final look and carried forth without retribution". The collective goes on to further specify the terms of this demand. There is an entire section that outlines demands for training institutions which we gathered gratefully into our agreement. Speaking about how anti-racism must become a core value in an institution and that anti-racism training becomes mandatory.

Not only did we borrow some direct content and ideology from these documents, but the form and structure became extremely important. In our agreement, there are three distinct

sections that first outline our "perspective," then into "guiding promises," and principles, finally moving into "commitments" (demands).

Finally, the creation of this agreement would not have been possible without visiting methodology.¹¹ There was much time spent speaking, sharing, discussing, crying, laughing, and being in space together. We also visited with many theatre organizations who voiced their support and offered firm advice in proceeding with this kind of work. Donna-Michelle St. Bernard and Cole Avis of Adhoc Assembly provided strong listening ears and open hearts in providing support as the document proceeded into the public.

In the document, you can see a direct reference to Adhoc Assembly's "Voluntary Addendum," which was created to expand on PACT/CAEA's Not in Our Space program working to cover harmful behavior that goes beyond "sexual harassment and bullying" or "questionable behaviour." Including this section from their preamble "as an acknowledgment of the vastly skewed power dynamic, this process is weighted in favour of the artist" and inspiration from the radical clause.

The BIPOC Agreement became an important pillar in the way we were going to create, work, and play. Unfortunately, it became a deep point of contention that burst the seams of an institution's empty words and laid bare the entrenched colonialism and white supremacy at the heart of its processes. All of that is a story for another time, but for now, I am left wondering how accountability can be reached.

At this moment, I feel a rush of gratitude. I want to honour deeply all the artists, activists, agitators, educators, scholars, thinkers, and everyday humans who have done this work to pave

¹¹ As outlined in *Keeoukaywin: The Visiting Way—Fostering an Indigenous Research Methodology* by Janice Cindy Gaudet

the path for a person like me. In embarking on this work, I often heard the deep frustration and exhaustion from seasoned people working to increase equity and build safe(r) spaces, frustrated and exhausted that the harm was still so prevalent. In my experience, because so much groundwork had already been laid the path was much easier to travel.

A Road (continued)

As we laboured away to create this document, it seemed that no one on the faculty or department was interested in meeting us in the middle. It was solely up to us as uncompensated students to create this document.

coyote chortles: mmmhaha

Many colleagues have asked “shouldn’t the department and faculty have realized something was wrong in the beginning, when a document was being created because students didn’t feel *safe*? Shouldn’t they have stopped to reflect and consider hmmmm something isn’t right here; a group of students are actively creating a document to assure their safety?” That to me is at the root of a lot of the challenges with this document.

hahahaaaahaa

I should qualify that the document was not solely born out of the Intro Meeting mentioned above but came from many individual conversations and group meetings – outside of this production but within the institution – where students expressed how deeply they felt unsafe and uncomfortable unheard, and unseen in the department—citing all kinds of outright racist incidents to microaggressions to failures in the curriculum.

hahahahahahhahhahhahaaaaa

The document became extremely important for me because I was made aware of a serious conflict stemming from racism within the acting company I was meant to work with. If the actors I was going to work with didn't feel safe, then I did not believe it was right to work with them or in those conditions. The tension within the group had reached such a head that the faculty would split them into pod systems so that the 14 actors would not have to work together. This kind of awareness required my research to shift again to anti-racist practices in rehearsal.

hahahhaaaaaaahaahahaha. coyote rolls on the floor laughing until wiya cries

Anti-racism

It's worth noting how, with both decolonizing and anti-racism, the oppositions run parallel to each other. That is to say, you cannot research anti-racism without first understanding the conditions that bring about racism. That anti-racism and racism run parallel to each other in a web of relationality.

Racism, as defined by Nicole Brewer in her anti-racist theatre workshops, is "racial prejudice plus societal power to codify and enforce that prejudice onto the entire society." Racism in Canada has a long and brutal legacy that influences policy, systems, and structures. Racism in Canada is very real, present, dangerous, and powerful. This is exemplified in the daily injustices that Indigenous communities face: lack of clean drinking water, extremely high suicide rates, and poverty. This is shown in the abuse of Black People by the state: police abuse, murder, mass incarceration. This is clearly seen in the racially motivated attacks happening across this country that are on the rise. Not to mention the microaggressions, the erasure, the gaslighting, the everyday barriers that Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour experience.

coyote chimes in: how does colonisation affect you? but how does it reeaally effect YOU?

Racism in learning intuitions is real. It is especially prevalent where "epistemologies and knowledge systems at our universities have not changed considerably; they remain rooted in colonial and Western-centric worldviews." (Keele Manifesto for Decolonizing the Curriculum 97) At York University I was not taught by a single Indigenous faculty member, I was not taught by anyone who is BIPOC in my entire first year, the only time I engaged with Indigenous content was through the lens of the post-colonial during a single lesson in one class. The pedagogy and curriculum taught are entrenched in colonial worldview and practice.

Racism in theatre is real. It can be seen in the necessity of movements like *The 35/50 Initiative*, in Alberta, which state on their homepage that they "are committed to seeing our civic landscape more equitably reflected in our professional landscape: a minimum of 35% BIPOC and 50% women and gender minorities in paid, professional positions". Or #inthedressingroom, which has exposed the racism rampant in Stratford Theatre's past and present. These movements respond to the lack of representation and safety for racialized people in theatre.

Racism in Canada, in academia, and in theatre is real. It is here in this trifecta that the work must begin. This kind of awareness requires a response from its parallel counterpart – anti-racism. What does anti-racism look like in a theatre context? Nicole Brewer offers this:

"Anti-racist theatre is defined as practices and policies which actively acknowledge and interrogate racism, anti-blackness, and other discriminatory practice, promoting anti-racist ideas, values, and policies that counter the oppression of any people during education or production of theatre.

Anti-racist theatre is practiced in reciprocity with anti-oppressive values creating space for dismantling a myriad of oppressive constructs such as ableism, paternalism, gender &

sexual orientation discrimination, bias of Indigenous peoples, religious discrimination, patriarchy, sexism and more.

The result of which transforms individual practice and organizational culture to more fully inclusive, multi-cultural, anti-oppressive and anti-racist.”

I appreciate Brewer’s words in that she speaks of the practices – as something that is active and continuous. Which I have shared is why I use the term decolonizing (see P 6). What do these practices look like for me in process as an artist and specifically within the context of creating work within the frame of York University? Taking Brewer's workshop helped informed what I imagine my anti-racist ethos is, what practice it takes, and how I show up to support (see appendix D).

Another perspective that has streamed into my practice is through Bonita Lawrence’s and Enkashi Dua’s article *Decolonizing Antiracism*. In the piece, Lawrence and Dua call upon anti-racism to recognize Indigenous struggles stating that:

“...a common error on the part of anti-racist and post-colonial theorist is to assume that genocide has been virtually complete that Indigenous peoples, however unfortunately have been consigned to the 'dustbin of history.'” (123)

Lawrence and Dua clearly position decolonizing anti-racism as inherently tied to the land and that that relationship is lost on many anti-racist writing and practices (126). In summarizing their findings and perspectives, they outline three areas as topics to be taken up. I find the first one particularly activating:

"1. Aboriginal sovereignty is a reality that is on the table. Anti-racist theorists must begin to talk about how they are going to place anti-racist agendas within the context of sovereignty and restoration of land." (137)

It is again, positioning the struggle of anti-racism in direct relationship to land and sovereignty. Lawrence and Dua's work resonated with me. I have been privy to anti-racist conversations and practices that skip over colonization or speak of Indigenous people as past. I want to acknowledge that this work was written in 2005 and that anti-racist practice has moved with time and increased awareness of Indigenous struggle. Though, what I take from their work is how can anti-racism be rooted in the land – its past, present, and future – and how can we create struggles and movements of solidarity that exist in reciprocity but do not become monolithic or “pluralistic” as Lawrence and Dua suggest, rather unique parts of a whole. This kind of thinking is positioned in the UBU BIPOC Agreement as "radical in our specificity". We did not attempt to create a single solution for every BIPOC student in the production, but rather a series of demands unique to individuals' circumstances and needs.

I must state that anti-racism is in a moment of great momentum and many theatres and individuals struggle to include racialized and marginalized voices on their stages (to varying degrees of success and failure). Because of this momentum, the conversation is moving quickly, ebbing and flowing, and as such, some of my research may already read as outdated. Because each new revelation of racist and white supremacist intent (past, present, or future) peels back layers of complicity and creates new calls to action. Though what I have found in this research, which was spoken with such clarity by Yvette Nolan at the PACT (Professional Association of Canada Theatres) conference that anti-racist/anti-oppressive work and calls to action have been happening since racialized and marginalized people have been working with institutions.

Although the conditions and contexts shift, the root of these dialogues remains relevant and 'true'.

A Road (continued)

With all these tools gained and gathered I was beginning to feel confident in entering a rehearsal room and starting creation.

Around the first rehearsal, we were finally prepared to release the UBU BIPOC Agreement. It was agreed that we would ask everyone to sign the Agreement to work on the production. Although some areas of production had already started, it was better to get the Agreement out late than never. Upon the release of the Agreement, which many members of the faculty and the chair of the department were aware of its impending introduction, a quick and damning response came from the Dean.

The email was particularly harmful in its total erasure of us as students having put in countless hours fighting for our safety; not a single attempt to enter into dialogue with the people who had created the document; and finally, it was sent not just to the UBU team but enmasse to the entire department and some alumni. This moment caused ripples which deepened the rift within the acting company, the production department, between faculty and students, students and administration. A halt was called within the department, and mediators were brought in to ascertain the cause of the conflict and a path moving forward.

coyote says, I can tell you the cause of the conflict: 500 years of barely addressed colonial violence.

I watched the department unravel around a simple request of safety for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. I questioned whether or not I could move forward. It seemed as if the faculty and Theatre @ York were wary of pushing the document forward. People would not meet with me about it because now it was a matter above all our heads.

In addition to the calamity that the UBU BIPOC Agreement brought, I was in and out of meetings about whether or not any of the work could be done in person. The answers kept shifting as the severity and restrictions of the pandemic ebbed and flowed. I felt the ground under me shake. I no longer knew where I stood or how I could stand. A paralysis began to set in.

This feeling was exacerbated by the many hurdles I had been working to surmount since coming to York. My desire to work in Indigenous contexts and decolonizing ways was met with indifference, confusion, or, more often than not, an immense amount of labour on my part.

In all of this, I decided to step away from the production as it had been planned. I did not think that there was going to be safety in the rehearsal hall. I felt that trust had been broken. And relationships sat in serious disrepair. I saw around me a system that could not accommodate change or acknowledge a human at the centre.

Decolonizing as praxis as theory

Good Beginnings

This is what I term "Good Beginnings," which is a way to set out clear values and enter into right relations from the very start of a project. This manifests as agreements and contracts, oral or written.

In my teachings, it is necessary to begin a process in a good way. That is to say before we embark on a journey, whatever that journey may be, we must start it with good thoughts, good intentions, and good relationships. This is especially relevant if we are to assume theatre is ceremony (in an Indigenous context, perhaps beyond) which has been reinforced by many scholars and artists and I myself believe¹². But what do we identify as ceremony?

Cree scholar Shawn Wilson, when outlining ceremony, offers:

¹² See Yvette Nolan's *Medicine Shows*

“A ceremony, according to Minnecunju Elder Lionel Kinunwa, is not just the period at the end of the sentence. It is the required process and preparation that happens long before the event. It is Atkinson’s (2003) translation, *dadirri*, the many ways and forms and levels of listening. It is, in Martin's (2003) terminology, Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing. It is knowing and respectful reinforcement that all things are related and connected. It is the voice from our ancestors that tell us when it is right and when it is not.” (61)

In Wilson's offering, what I find most inspiring is the work that has to go before the event. That is why setting and stating protocols when entering into a new process or relationship is so necessary for the beginning of ceremony.

That is why when I received the first Letter of Agreement (LOA) by the theatre department contracting me as an MFA Director to direct UBU I was worried, to say the least. It was a document full of legalese that came without context. It had things like, " This contract is confirmation that you have reviewed the Department of Theatre's Production Manual, specifically the pages referring to the Director’s role and responsibilities within a university setting.” The “Production Manual” noted here is a 150-page document. Or “All designs will require approval of Faculty and Staff advisors...” Or “The Artist shall be available for all rehearsals throughout and until opening performance.”

oh no, says Coytoe. i hope you didn't sign it. because you know, our ancestors have signed some pretty shitty contracts in the past.

What was so disconcerting about this document was the lack of relationship that was being created. I have been in personal contact with the production area and the chair of the department, and they would never speak this way in person, yet when creating this agreement - this beginning point - it was deemed appropriate to speak in this impersonal and declarative tone,

leaving no room for humanity. In Indigenous-led Signal Theatre their mandate speaks about placing “the human at the centre” of their theatrical practice. I felt that I couldn't begin this relationship as director and department in such a way, and so myself and the chair went about reformatting the agreement.

Borrowing from Robin Walls Kimmerer's teachings about reciprocity and a gift economy, I hope to reframe what was stated in the LOA as an exchange of gifts. And through those gifts a set of relationships and reciprocity is created (46). That rather than you as director must do this, it becomes as a director I offer my services as a gift in reciprocity to the department, and likewise, the department offers resources and other support as a gift always in reciprocity. Always remembering that "...a gift economy... has a "bundle of responsibilities" attached" (46 Kimmerer).

As we reworked the LOA (that became a living document), I looked to the Treaty that Syilx storyteller, Indigenous theorist, and cultural evolutionist Kim Senklip Harvey created with The Citadel Theatre and The Arts Club during the process of working *on Kamloopa: An Indigenous Matriarch Story* and the set of seven values or traditional principles expressed by Native Earth Performing Arts. Both these vital sources, one from an individual perspective and the other from an organizational perspective, offer excellent inspiration by laying protocol and expectations to work in a good way.

In Harvey's document, she speaks very clearly about the process and the expectations of the way she will be working. This is because colonial institutions are set in ways of working that very often do not respond or hold space for Indigenous or, for that matter, any alternative ways of working. Harvey outlines "Ceremonial Protocol" and "Indigenous Approach and Methodology," emphasising and centering "an Indigenous Matriarchal story." Explaining in each

section what that means to her - from her teachings and from her nation, allows these colonial entities to understand not only how Harvey will be working but why.

The values offered by Native Earth Performing Arts (NEPA) is a wonderful example of an organization that is putting forward a principled and values-based approach to the work. On their website NEPA offers that “in service of our mandate and mission, the company strives to operate according to 7 traditional principles which inform decisions in all undertakings”. These values could be interpreted, upon first glance, as less specific than Harvey's treaty, but I would argue otherwise. The values stated by NEPA assure a safe set of working protocols within all the relationships that might be established while working with(in) the organization. These protocols allow any collaborator strong ground to stand on, fostering things like "patience," "tolerance," and "wisdom." I think we all strive to identify shared values, especially in the theatre, but by detailing specifically what that means to each party, everyone engaged in telling the story can enter together on the same foot, in the same spirit, with the same intentions.

*so...did it work, asks coyote? were you treated with respect? did they honour the requests?
no, i reply. i don't think it did.
well what did you expect...colonial institutions aren't very good at keeping their word, sighs
coyote.*

My own LOA became a frame of reference for other agreements and protocols to come. In engaging artists in this new phase of the process away from the original UBU I created a very clear Working Agreement see appendix C.

On top of the LOA I employ community agreements or protocols in just about every creative space I enter. The community agreement lives and grows with each space I enter. I have borrowed from many different leaders, facilitators, participants, educators, and students to create

a tool kit of points of agreement. However, the beauty is that these agreements are never the same, they are truly unique to each space and relationship that is created.

Land-based dramaturgy

It has become very important for me to connect to the land and land sovereignty in all that I do. The land shapes us and our actions in all ways. This shows up most presently in the garlic dramaturgy, which I discussed earlier. However, my land-based understanding exists in all aspects of this piece. Here I offer some relationships I've built with land-based knowledge. Looking at Lindsey Lachance's writing around land-based dramaturgy, I find great inspiration, she shares

“Land-based dramaturgies are approaches to new play development rooted in maintaining relationships and working directly with the land, waterways, or skyworld... land-based dramaturgies may involve physical interaction with land and waters, they may be invoked philosophically in developing the process's framework, and/or practitioners may look to creation stories and language structures as land-based resources.” (54)

With this in mind, it became very important to root this work in a complex intersection of land relationally. Because *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry coming from a different land, I investigated the land-based conditions of its creation. What inspiration could be drawn into this work from late 19th century France? Then I moved into researching the relationship of this work to the land of Turtle Island and understanding my own ancestral and cultural connection to that reality. In doing this research, I centered what Lachance sates as presencing "a practice of activation by allowing myself to reconnect with ancestral and experiential knowledges that I carry into artistic collaborations. My conceptualization of presencing refers to the ability to call on the intangible

realities, the tiny sparks we carry within our Indigenous selves, at various moments of the artistic process" (56). My presencing with the land was made complex because my people are not Indigenous to Tkaronto, where much of this research and work was conducted, so I needed to create meaningful relations with this land. I did this primarily by connecting with Knowledge Keeper Amy Desjarlais, Waabishka Kakaki Zhaawshko Shkeezhgokwe (White Raven Woman with Turquoise eyes) from Wasausking First Nation and is Ojibway/Bodwewotomi Anishinaabe; she supported this research and subsequent project in a myriad of forms by offering a listening ear, a helping hand, wisdom, teachings, and always grounding the process in this land. I offer her an immense amount of gratitude for all her support and teachings. This understanding was supported by relations I have made with other Anishnaabe artists and community members

By allowing myself to be present with knowledge, questions, and ideas, I allowed intuitive and deep thinking to occur that helps knowledge journey from the head to the heart or from theory into praxis. In this space of presencing, I attempted to not search for solutions but merely to, as I have stated before, create webs of relationship. In presencing a relationship with the land, I return to the wisdom of Robin Wall Kimmerer

“In Western tradition there is a recognized hierarchy of beings, with, of course, the human being on the top—the pinnacle of evolution, the darling of Creation – and the plants at the bottom, But in Native ways of knowing, human people are often referred to as “the younger brothers of Creation”. We say that humans have the least experience with how to live and thus the most to learn - we must look to our teachers among the other species for guidance. Their wisdom is apparent in the way that they live. They teach us by example. They’ve been on the earth far longer than we have been, and have had time to figure things out.” (6)

I look to the teachings that my more-than-human relatives offer by being in space with them and creating respectful and reciprocal relationships through offerings and gifts. (*what gifts are ya going to give me?! calls out coyote*) For example, in the original production, we had planned to use sustainable design aspects to make sure we were respecting the materials that we're going to be used in the production. We had planned to use natural dyes for the wood to be easily recycled or reused, sourcing used materials when possible, and sourcing sustainably and ethically made materials even if that limited the budget. These limitations actually became opportunities because this allowed us to be very conscious and aware of the materials and where they were coming from, listening to our more-than-human relatives.

My land-based dramaturgical process also dialogues with the land as a site of resistance and insurgence because “for a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land” (Fanon 9). This understanding of land-based dramaturgy also offers it as a disruption of settler-colonial space – that acts of indigeneity on the land are decolonizing acts of resistance. Furthermore, acts of marginalized and racialized people disrupts because by foregrounding these experiences, the invisible becomes visible and untold stories can be told. This is furthered in the exploration of space and distance in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* that “colonialism and imperialism can be drawn together by the concept of distance” (Smith 58). This distance manifests as a separation “from the physical environment, the community” (58) which I would argue leads to a distance from the land. The acknowledgment of relationship to land counters the imperial and colonial rule “which stretched from the centre outwards” (58). This kind of distanced thinking allows for exploitation of resources on the land including knowledge. By reimagining space in a land-based way I lead us into a circular understanding and (de/re)centering.

Circular understanding and (de/re)centering

The “spatial vocabulary of colonialism in nineteenth-century Aotearoa” is outlined below in an abbreviated table from Smith.

The Line	The Centre	The Outside
maps	mother country	empty land
charts	London	terra nullius
roads	magistrate’s residence	uninhabited
boundaries	redoubt, stockade, barracks	unoccupied

(55)

Although not depicting Turtle Island specifically, there are many teachings that can be drawn from this analysis. What I notice immediately is "the line" which represents such opposition to circular understanding. It exists as boundaries, fences, and claims which serve to create separation rather than connection, relationship, and reciprocity. Of course, this separation creates an "other" or something outside, which leads to the wild, undiscovered, and untamed. By imagining a circular worldview, we can do away with spaces of separation and instead bring about inclusion. We come to understand that "Everything is in the circle." Which creates a space where "all things are related, interdependent, and in harmony" (Regneir 132). With this perspective the circle can also become a place of anti-racism and anti-oppression where everyone has space, voice, and autonomy.

In an essay by Annalisa Dias and Madeline Sayet they speak of decentering as a step within decolonization, which greatly echoes Smith's table where colonialism and imperialism began with centering "London" and "the mother country" which exists today as "capitalist

heteronormative, ableist white supremacy" at the centre (Dias and Sayet). By moving away from a centering of these ideals, we create "space in the circle so all can be heard and seen" especially "voices and bodies that have historically been silenced and/or erased" (Dias and Sayet). The decentering of these ideals break "The Line" that Smith speaks of and allows us an opportunity to create a circular space of reciprocity.

Circles are synonymous with Indigenous worldview and storytelling, Brian Rice offers: "For many Aboriginal peoples, a circle represents the space in which we live. This is reflected in our dances, ceremonies and cosmologies" (4). Storytelling as a circular space has been modeled and shared with me by Knowledge Keepers Amy Desjalrias, Knowledge Keeper Veronica Johnny, and other Indigenous community members and gatherings. Inside of a good story lives another story, and within that story another story.



coyote gently places this painting down. a picture says a thousand words, coyote round dances away.

Fig. 6 *Inward*, Belcourt, Christi. *Christi Belcourt*, christibelcourt.com/. Accessed 12 July 2021.

I include circular understanding in two major ways throughout my process, in the structure of my storytelling and the spaces that these stories are created and occupy. Of course, these two understandings are linked, though one exists in the content (the story) and the other in

the form (the space). They become most clearly connected in the creation stage, where both story and space can be actively in conversation.

A conclusion: more questions

what a road we've travelled, sighs coyote. my feet are sore. my head is spinning, and my heart is tired.

From the beginnings of hope that two disparate stories could come together. To the realization that the conditions surrounding the project could not foster decolonizing methodology. To a reimagined space of resistance and storytelling. Decolonizing is about engaging in a process that doesn't necessarily meet a determined end. Because "for us to think that we are in possession of a decolonial universal truth would not be decolonial at all but modern/colonial" (Walsh and Mignolo 1). As I attempt to embody the teachings and relationships I have built throughout this research journey, I embark on the final leg of this road.

I have now been left with little resources and support and will work to embody this research and understanding into a process that can be shared. What began as an interrogation of the intersection of decolonizing theatre methodologies and the European text of *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry, shapeshifted into something much bigger (but also smaller). This investigation brought to the surface the inequities and entrenched colonial ideals within the theatre department at York University influenced directly by the theatre industrial complex as a whole. Of course, this was all made more urgent and shaped by the current socio-political climate that has laid bare what many marginalized and racialized communities and individuals already knew: this society isn't fair or free or equal. What began as a siloed investigation of two seemingly disparate ideas

has shapeshifted into a broader look at institutions, structures, and systems. Because can you truly create a decolonizing piece of work and process within colonial boundaries?

No longer the full-scale production that had been planned, this thesis work takes on a small-scale storytelling format, outlining and questioning my experiences going through this program and the learning that occurred and continues to occur. Drawing from my embodied experience, these performance experiments, images, and tales invite everyone to question their place within a decolonial and Indigenous narrative in relationship to institutions, systems, and structures. My thesis project is now a filmed performance offered as an interactive online experience where participants will be asked to actively engage in their own understanding of decoloniality.

Not all roads are meant to be travelled by everyone. Some roads lead to dead ends, others to beautiful locations, and many lead to other roads. The road ahead of me splits in many directions, and that is the joy and excitement of decolonizing work; as we peel back the layers, create relationships, and embody praxis, the questions keep coming. Moving forward, I question: what are the conditions required to enact and embody decolonizing praxis? Having felt unable to create in a good way within the context of Theatre@York, with their deadlines, expectations, and colonial mentality. What does all this research and experience offer me in curating my own framework of resistance that uplifts and centres decolonizing?

the road curves. coyote's tail swishes in the distance. i run to catch up. i turn the corner and coyote is running off, far in the distance. i can hear the faint laughter of mischief and stories yet to be told.

Chapter Two: Director's Journals Excerpts

*i feel a tap on my back.
what are you look at, says coyote? what's down that road?
i was having a poetic moment, i say.
oh, says coyote, excuse me then.*

Here is a selection of journals and thoughts from the process of creating the new thesis presentation. From rehearsals, meetings, to filming, and creation.

August 5, 2021: third filming day

Another day of general success! No huge hiccups as we film the final scene: The Institution Song. Everyone seems to still be full of joy and play. Although, I think we are all tired.

Doing this work as film is challenging. I have looked back at some of the footage and I am happy with the look of it, but there are those nitty gritty specificities that aren't quite what I want them to be. But it's too late to go back and re-film, not enough time or resources. But I remind myself that this is a process and experiment, and as far as experiments go there has been a lot of success. In these moments of trying to get it "right" I remember that my "right" is not someone else's and that what I am seeing will communicate story/meaning even if I don't feel like it's "perfect".

The performers continue to offer such generous energy and commitment to the absurd and incongruous contexts I've offered them. The videographer continues to be patient and graceful as we work through tech challenges and learning. I am also moonlighting as the sound engineer on the project. Who would have thought...

I get angry sometimes about all the resources and collaborators that I was supposed to learn to work with. Because I find myself doing the indie production work I've done time and time again. I came to York to understand what it would be like to work with more resources and many

collaborators. I don't really feel like I have any one in that institution to turn to for support - I remember how abandoned I am. What feels like an erasure of my entire existence from that community and department. It makes it hard to push forward with the work...but I must forgive first myself that a place has exploited and harmed me (and so many).

If they take away my joy then they truly have won.

I work alone. On my rebellious piece. I am reminded of Alfred Jarry and his anti-establishment nature. The piece is certainly inspired by a kind of irreverence and profane childishness. Although I think we have found some ceremony and sacred - a healing through telling the story. Tomorrow we film a final scene which I think holds the most healing and celebratory heart.

August 4, 2021: second filming day

We're still on time! We got all the shooting we needed done today.

There was a moment when a performer kept losing their line and another performer, in solidarity, said let's just run the lines quickly. In a tone of support, reassurance, and kindness. In that moment, I was reminded that although I may be the host of this dinner party everyone is invited to bring their own dish and help clean up. That is to say, we can all help and support each other. As the initiator of this project there are certain responsibilities I hold-which makes me wish I had been given the opportunity to co-initiate this rather than feeling like the sole creator. Once again put in a space of the individual rather than a collective.

But this reminder of community, responsibility and reciprocity was a good one. I tend to over work to make sure everyone is okay and cared for, but also that the piece follows a vision rather than sharing those responsibilities. All the collaborators have the ability to step into different roles of support and it is my responsibility to make space for that.

I am generally happy with the place the work is heading. It's kind of haphazard and fuck-you like Jarry but created in a safe(r) and inclusive environment. There is a lot of joy and fun in the space. I think the performers and videographer are happy to go on this journey with me. I look forward to having some kind of debrief conversation with everyone as a part of this process.

August 3, 2021: first filming day

I'm tired.

I don't know if I'm doing this for me, for the institution, for someone?

I've been wringed clean of all my ideas and dreams. It's a machine that sucks you clean.

If I lose hope and joy they truly win. That's what I believe.

So, I hope that this project will bring something that will change people's minds, that will awaken their hearts and make a better world.

We filmed two scenes today. I wish that I had brought on a crew member or stage manager. I think I am running triple duty. The logistics make it hard to focus on the play and process. But I guess I have to find a way to incorporate it all. I am exhausted. I am so grateful for my collaborators. ITS SO IMPORTANT TO FIND GOOD PEOPLE! They all bring such joy, hard work, willingness, strength, humour, focus and their full selves to this project. I am very grateful.

The webs of relationally that I have woven begin to offer gifts. Mandy is able to lend her swipe card and her ear. The challenges that we both struggled to overcome brought us close together. I am grateful for the favor and will return it in a heartbeat.

August 2, 2021: in person "rehearsal"

We met on campus and spent some time visiting. It's obviously different to discern how to lead people in person. I hate to say that I've become used to the online platform, but it's true.

We joked

Laughed

Told some stories

I brought treats

I believe this space between, of sharing and visiting can be so important. Of gift giving. Of food. Of time. Creates a trust and understanding - a foundation for the work to build on.

After that we went to VV boutique (Value Village). I have decided that the performers should pick out there under costumes. So, they have something that uniquely speaks to them and their personality. The idea is that they begin as a full expression of their selves and the suit is donned and the transformation into a creature of the institution begins. It was great to see what pieces they chose and how they wanted to represent themselves.

We experimented with makeup looks and the costume to understand the full look we'd be playing with. Videographer Hailey was able to join us and was so generous in his time and support – sharing what would work on camera and what would need a little adjustment. It is so necessary to find the right collaborators.

The process of design and aesthetic choice always helps me to identify the concept and, in this case, the actual narrative arc. It was a constructive day for me to continue to allow this process to lead us and finding the solutions along the path.

I wished that I had the resources for a designer today. I think there were some solutions that we had to make together that may have been better discovered with a dedicated design collaborator. I really enjoy that collaborative relationship, so I was sorry to have lost it on this project today.

Tomorrow we film

July 30, 2021 Rehearsal journal

We have just completed the online phase of rehearsals. I attempted to allow myself to be immersed in process and present in each moment. I find it difficult at times to be in a fully lateral space of sharing because this is being done as “my” thesis project. I don’t want to be a dictator of the content and creation but at times throughout this week I worried that I was. I continue to dance with that space between leadership and a non-hierarchical structure.

I have so much gratitude for all my collaborators who have offered such a generosity of spirit up to this point. The three performers are always so open to any experiment or offer, they are also very generous in their feedback and reflection on content.

In my dream world we would be creating this story completely together, with many other voices...but time and space do not permit that. I think I hold this time as a beginning of something bigger, a step in a process.

On the first day we spoke briefly about where this work was coming from and what we wanted it to say, but interestingly on the final day I felt like we really needed to make space to discuss the heart of the work. We spent 2 hours visualizing, imagining, discussing, and dreaming what a decolonized space might be. I found it important to really name what we were reaching for, the dream of a world to be, and not just pointing fingers at the harm that had been done. We imagined what a decolonized space looks, smells, sounds, tastes, and feels like and speaking about the conditions required to achieve that space.

I struggled with holding space this past week. I attempt to enter into rehearsals with an open heart prepared to be responsive to the moment, collaborators, intuition, ancestors, the land, and everything around me. But this week I have been struggle with my own ability to hold space for myself...I wondered about how to manage this. If I am not able to really hold myself up how

can I hold others up? I think it would have helped if I have afforded us more time to really create a lateral space of exchange where it was clearer that we were all supporting each other. I do at times feel like the teacher or instructor – old habits that we fall into, especially when working adjacent to the institution.

The conversation around decolonizing were so full and rich, I felt a confirmation because I think this process represents a lot of what the performers spoke about.

July 22, 2021: opening feast

We just completed the opening feast. It was incredible:

Heart berries
And
Wild rice
Bring hope
For a new beginning
The space that I've been looking for
It's patient
It's kind
There is room
People share willingly
Openly

We get to know each other through open mouths, enjoying a feast (of varying sizes)
If only we could all be in person
If only
If only
But we are here

Heart berries teach us about forgiveness
I hope to bring so much kindness, joy, and love to this work that forgiveness comes as naturally
as
hope

Good beginnings
Good beginnings in action, in practice
Good beginnings bring about good middles and good endings
Good beginnings as we begin again and again each meeting, rehearsal, performance, each day
anew.

Feast for all that this project will be

Feast for all that this project can be
Feast for all that this project wants to be
Feast for ourselves
Feast for our spirits
Feast for the spirits
Feast for our ancestors
Feast, feed and, nourish

Chapter Three: Epilogue

We have created *it has come to our attention*. We have rehearsed. We have filmed. We have built the website. The project is complete. From a staged play to an interactive online offering. (Just a little sidebar, I've never made a movie before, film is not my medium. I had to translate everything from a theatrical understanding to a recorded project.)

This conclusion is a space to reflect on the journey and road that has led here: to this place. I have to express how challenging this entire process was, I felt like I was working in conditions and frameworks that constantly brought about harm and discomfort. Through that, the question that I ask myself, was I truly able to create in a decolonizing way. I have to return to the major tenants of decolonizing process that I set out for myself in the research section of this paper: good beginnings, land-based dramaturgy, and circular understanding and (de/re)centering.

Good Beginnings

In this project I made sure to enact and promote agreements that supported the kind of process that I desired to create within. The community agreement and LOAs, which can be found in the appendix, were used to set clear boundaries, parameters, philosophies, and values that we strived to create within.

Beyond these documents, there was an opening feast, led by Knowledge Keeper Amy Desjarlais, which offered a tangible act of the kind of space that we were going to create within.

It was a space to lay down the intentions for the piece collectively and feast the work we were about to embark on.

I think I struggled to create rituals of good beginnings for each rehearsal and filming day. Normally, when in person, I co-create very clear beginning rituals, whether that is warm-ups or check-ins, and closing rituals. During this process, I think, partially because it was online and filmed and seemed very truncated, I did not establish very clear beginning and ending protocols/rituals. I felt myself missing them, but because of the many moving parts and new medium, I was torn in different directions and didn't take the time to establish a strong beginning and end of each day.

Land-based dramaturgy

I worked with the garlic dramaturgy to plot the journey of the show. It helped inform the shape of the website and the content that was included. It informed the order of the scenes and the way the audience journeys on the path through the story. I also shared with all the collaborators the aesthetic nature of garlic which was then held throughout the piece. (This is explored in the garlic dramaturgy section of this paper more fully.)

I was also very interested in working outdoors in relationship with the land but on York campus. First, this was as an act of disruption and reclamation. Having a group of IBPOC artists expressing themselves with joy and fervour on the site of an institution that has oppressed them, or continues to oppress them, or represents an oppression, was an important aspect of the piece. It also served as a celebration of the land itself as resilient and beautiful, resisting the concrete, bricks, and metal that have been placed over sites of food and medicines. In scouting out the locations to film, I worked to embrace the "presencing" that Lindsay Lachance speaks of. I sat with and listened to what the land was offering and what it might be interested in hosting.

A major aspect of land-based listening and understanding that I regret not focusing on, is with the use of costumes, prop, and sets. I feel that I didn't properly honour these materials and work to reduce waste. I think this challenge partly came from me working on much of the design alone, so I ended up being rushed or seeking quick fixes. For instance, the costumes worn were used pieces from Value Village but we ended up having to rip them and dirty them for the final scene, was that the most sustainable choice? What could have been done instead? Or, I ended up creating a large paper blanket for the performers to sit on during "Hamburger Agreements", I wanted to do this because it was all of the agreements we had signed as a collective and it represented that spirit of coming together, but it still was fresh paper that was printed on and not used again.

Circular understanding and (de/re)centering

Within the collaboration I tried to create equity and a circular flow of ideas. I attempted to create a space where all the collaborators felt empowered and safe in expressing their thoughts, needs, and limitations and that we were all on the same ground. I encouraged that no one in the space was more important but that we all had different roles to fulfill. That not one of us had a final say but that we would create in a consensus-based way. I did this by literally outlining these points and, as the maker of this space, modelling the behaviour by asking collaborator's opinions and thoughts as much as I could. I think I fell short in this regard because at the end of the day this was "my" thesis project and I was creating it for a very specific goal. Moving forward, I think I would like to engage a co-director or co-leadership format that promotes a diversity of voices in all levels of decision making.

In selecting people for the project, I wanted to decentre a white-Eurocentric narrative and presence a decolonizing perspective. Therefore, only people who identified as Black, Indigenous,

or a person of colour were engaged in the process. I think this helped contribute to creating a space where perspectives that challenged Eurocentricity and white supremacy were centered and celebrated. It vastly countered my other experiences at York University within the Theatre Department where, for example, I had never worked with more than one Indigenous collaborator. I think there was success in de-centering whiteness and re-centering the often-silenced narrative of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour on Turtle Island.

Finally, within the actual storytelling I attempted to create wandering circular paths that allowed the viewer/audience/participant to return again and again, each time with a new perspective. Part of this was creating three distinct and separate versions of each section. Although, often the images and text were the same, the delivery was always different and played with experiments in directing form and storytelling convention. Further, the entire direction of the piece is circular, in that once you reach the end you are brought back to the begin but with new eyes and new experiences, seeing this same beginning but with an altered perspective.

In conclusion, this project, research and creation, has taken me on a journey of self-discovery where I had to confront my values and processes of creation on a deep level. I had to ask what makes a process safe at the most basic level? How do I engage with institutions and organizations as presenting bodies? How do I envision decolonizing processes from my worldview? What is my place in telling Indigenous stories? What are my stories? I had to be nimble and constantly shift my project and my goals. I felt like the ground beneath my feet was ever shifting, and at times I had nothing to hold on to, to support myself.

However, ending this piece in a negative way would do a great disservice to myself and all those who walked this path with me. So instead I end with gratitude to all those who have helped pave this path for me, ancestors, activists, artists, agitators, family, friends, community,

mentors, and supporters. I am especially grateful to my parents Pam and Peter who have always lifted me and supported my voice and shown me a good path through their responsible actions. I am grateful to all those who supported me at York University, especially the students who stood with me and taught me more than I could have imagined. Our cohort, Mandy and Eish, you know. I honour all the strong matriarchs who sat with me and visited and supported my vision and process. Thank you Coyote, for keeping me humble and keeping me on my toes.

Gratitude is like coming home after a long day of hard work

Once you give in to the comfort the troubles melt away

You feel at peace with the world

You feel at peace with yourself

Maarsii, Miigwetch, Hiy hiy, Kinanâskomitin, Niá:wen

Works Cited

Ad Hoc Assembly, adhocasembly.wordpress.com/.

“Alfred Jarry: The Carnival of Being.” *The Morgan Library & Museum*, 4 May 2020,
www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/online/jarry.

Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, by Northrop Frye, Princeton University Press, 1973, pp.
131–239.

AS WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance, by LEANNE
BETASAMOSAKE SIMPSON, UNIV OF MINNESOTA PRESS, 2020, pp. 145–174.

ATTESTING RESISTANCE, www.attestingresistance.com/David%20Garneau.html.

Ayre, John. “Frye's Geometry of Thought: Building the Great Wheel.” *University of Toronto
Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 4, 2001, pp. 825–838., doi:10.3138/utq.70.4.825.

Belcourt, Christi. *Christi Belcourt*, christibelcourt.com/.

Brewer, Nicole. Anti-Racist Theatre: A Foundational Course, 4 August 2020, online. Workshop

brown, adrienne maree. “Unthinkable Thoughts: Call out Culture in the Age of Covid-19.”

Adrienne Maree Brown, 21 Sept. 2020, adriennemareebrown.net/2020/07/17/unthinkable-thoughts-call-out-culture-in-the-age-of-covid-19/.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Imperialism". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 8 Apr. 2021,

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/imperialism>. Accessed 18 July 2021.

Daschuk, James W. *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*. University of Regina Press, 2019.

Douglas, Jeffrey. “Garlic Growth Stages.” *The Green Pinky*, 8 June 2021,
www.thegreenpinky.com/garlic-growth-stages/.

Dudley, Joshua. “Interview: Tim Robbins Talks About His New Satire Podcast 'Bobbo Supreme' That Makes Us Laugh At Donald Trump.” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 16 Oct. 2020,
www.forbes.com/sites/joshuadudley/2020/10/15/interview-tim-robbins-talks-about-his-new-satire-podcast-bobbo-supreme-that-makes-us-laugh-at-donald-trump/?sh=390e40e141ed.

Elliott, Jane, and Annalisa Dias. “Decolonizing Theatre/La Descolonización Del Teatro.” *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, howlround.com/decolonizing-theatre-la-descolonizacion-del-teatro.

Fanon, Frantz. “On Violence.” *The Wretched of the Earth: Frantz Fanon*, Grove Press, 2004, pp. 1–62.

Fricke, Karen, and Carly Maga. “The Stratford Festival Admitted Its Own Systemic Racism and Gave Black Artists a Chance to Speak Out.” *Thestar.com*, 10 June 2020,
www.thestar.com/entertainment/stage/2020/06/10/black-like-me-a-theatre-company-wrestles-with-its-white-guilt-and-gives-artists-of-colour-a-chance-to-speak-out.html.

“The Garlic Story.” *Garlic Clubb*, www.garlicclubb.com/the-garlic-story.html.

Gaudet, Janice Cindy. "Keeoukaywin: The Visiting Way - Fostering an INDIGENOUS Research Methodology." *Aboriginal Policy Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2019, doi:10.5663/aps.v7i2.29336.

Harvey, Kim Senklip. "The Treaty." *Kimsenklipharvey*, 2018, www.kimsenklipharvey.com/the-treaty.

Hoile, Christopher. *Review - Ubu and the Truth Commission - Handspring Puppet Company, Toronto - Christopher Hoile*, 2015, www.stage-door.com/Theatre/2015/Entries/2015/4/16_Ubu_and_the_Truth_Commission.html.

"Home." *35//50 Initiative*, www.3550initiative.com/.

"Ignoble." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ignoble.

"An Introduction to 'Pataphysics.'" *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 9 Dec. 2005, www.theguardian.com/culture/2005/dec/09/8.

Jannarone, Kimberly. "The Theatre before Its Double: ARTAUD Directs in the Alfred JARRY THEATRE." *Theatre Survey*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2005, pp. 247–273., doi:10.1017/s0040557405000153.

Jarry, Alfred. *Ubu Roi: Drama in 5 Acts*. Translated by Barbara Wright, New Directions Books, 1961.

Johnson, Emily. "DECOLONIZATION RIDER." *Catalystdance.com*, www.catalystdance.com/decolonization-

[rider?fbclid=IwAR3mPjor80h8QfOjYu3LmFbIIy4aCagiPEBmlbEdHet2tCBAKEDwOkC](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/jglobfaul.5.1-2.0097)
[TcuM.](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/jglobfaul.5.1-2.0097)

“Keele Manifesto for Decolonizing the Curriculum.” *Journal of Global Faultlines*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, 2018, pp. 97–99. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/jglobfaul.5.1-2.0097. Accessed 18 July 2021.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Tantor Media, Inc., 2016.

King, Thomas. *The Truth about Stories: a Native Narrative*. House of Anansi Press Inc., 2010.

LaBelle, Maurice Marc. *Alfred Jarry, Nihilism and the Theater of the Absurd*. New York University Press, 1980.

Lachance, Lindsay. “Tiny Sparks EVERYWHERE: Birch Bark Biting AS Land-Based Dramaturgies.” *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol. 186, 2021, pp. 54–58., doi:10.3138/ctr.186.010.

Lai, Christina, et al., editors. *Full Circle: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Ways of Knowing*, 2012, www.osstf.on.ca/full-circle-first-nations-metis-inuit-ways-of-knowing.

Mignolo, Walter D., and Catherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press, 2018.

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

Okun, Tema. *WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE*, www.whitesupremacyculture.info/.

Piepenbring, Dan. "An Inglorious Slop-Pail of a Play." *The Paris Review*, 9 Sept. 2015,

www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/09/08/an-inglorious-slop-pail-of-a-play/.

Petrovska, Biljana Bauer, and Svetlana Cekovska. "Extracts from the history and medical

properties of garlic." *Pharmacognosy reviews* vol. 4,7 (2010): 106-10. doi:10.4103/0973-7847.65321

Regnier, Robert. "The Sacred Circle: A PROCESS Pedagogy of Healing." *Interchange*, vol. 25,

no. 2, 1994, pp. 129–144., doi:10.1007/bf01534540.

Rice, Brian, and Jill Elizabeth Oakes. *Seeing the World with Aboriginal Eyes: a Four*

Directional Perspective on Human and Non-Human Values, Cultures and Relationships on Turtle Island. Aboriginal Issues Press, 2005.

Signal Theatre, www.signaltheatre.ca/company/#about-us.

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

Books, 2021.

Taylor, Jane. *Ubu and the Truth Commission (Full Feature)*. YouTube, YouTube, 29 July 2016,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVgT_x53z14&ab_channel=HandspringPuppetCompany.

Tippet, Krista. "Resmaa Menakem 'Notice the Rage; Notice the Silence.'" *On Being*, 2021,

onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/#audio.

Accessed 18 July 2021.

We See You W.A.T., www.weseeyouwat.com/.

Wilson, Shawn. *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fernwood Pub., 2008.

Appendix A: UBU BIPOC Agreement

UBU BIPOC Agreement

In recognition of the ongoing and historic oppression and discrimination of racialized and marginalized bodies, minds and souls (in particular Indigenous and Black peoples) we centre their experiences and concerns in this process. In recognition of the deep and unspoken white supremacy and Eurocentricity of the theatre industrial complex, which theatre at York participates in, this agreement centres BIPOC community.

Through this agreement we are radical in our specificity, in the hopes that by speaking from our individual experiences we may work towards a stronger collective.

This agreement speaks to the individual and collective concerns and demands of the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) community engaged to work on *Ubu* as a part of theatre @ York's 2020-2021 season.

Guiding Promises and Principles

1. In this document, we acknowledge that when “student” is used, it is referring to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) students.
2. It is up to the department to fulfill these guidelines/needs and find the resources required
3. Everyone has the right to work free from the responsibility to alleviate someone else's fragile responses to confrontation.
4. As an acknowledgment of the vastly skewed power dynamic, all processes will be weighted in favour of the student.
5. Students will be listened to faculty if they feel violated / unsafe / compromised here, or elsewhere.
6. Students will be protected from overt or subtle retribution for identifying harmful behaviour
7. When a student identifies discomfort or harm and requests reprieve from said situation reprieve will be provided, even if the harm or discomfort cannot be perceived.
8. We acknowledge the larger systemic racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and classism that has led us to this point in time and that each of these ‘isms’ is rampant in the theatre industrial complex.
9. This is a living document that can be changed as we continue our dialogue. Changes are subject to approval by the Ubu BIPOC community.

Commitments (in no hierarchical order)

1. For the department to provide mandatory decolonizing theatre workshops (which have anti-racist/anti-oppressive focus through an Indigenous framework)
2. To acknowledge that conversations about race are difficult and that proper training and ongoing consultation should be required when discussing race, racism, and racialized people
3. To provide clear and transparent processes when race related conflict arises.
4. To provide the space where students have the right to challenge the representation of their cultural identity and lived experience.

5. To recognize that it is not the student's responsibility to educate faculty or peers around issues of race, racism and, racialized people. Further, that explicit consent is required before discussing issues of race and racism with a student and that no is always an option.
6. To acknowledge the effects of microaggressions and give the affected students the same treatment as you would a student with a physical injury.
7. To have resources that are present during rehearsal and crew times that have mental health and conflict resolution training.
8. To donate 25% of ticket sales to Black Lives Matter &/or other BIPOC charities.
9. To have equitable production practices including hair, makeup, and costume. (e.g. skin-tone appropriate mics and tights; culturally appropriate barbers, stylists and care products)

Appendix B: Letter of Agreement

A LIVING AGREEMENT BETWEEN PHILIP GELLER AND THEATRE @ YORK – DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE, YORK UNIVERSITY

This agreement is made on **September 17, 2020** between artist and student **Philip Geller**, Métis from The Red River and an Ashkenazi Jew; and **Theatre @ York**, the producing entity associated with the Department of Theatre at York University. York University is located on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations; Tkaronto which has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat, which is now home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. This agreement identifies the shared gifts and support in the directing and creation of *Ubu* inspired by Alfred Jarry's writings and adapted by Philip Geller and the company. As we recognize our role and responsibility as guests on this land we learn from and honour the teachings of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, which is the Treaty that has governed this land long before colonization. We learn from and honour the three teachings: Do not take more than your share; Ensure there is enough for everyone; and Do not dirty the dish.

Through this agreement both parties recognize the rampant white supremacy that has dominated the theatre industry in this land now called Canada and understand that this agreement represents an attempt at a different way of working, where Indigenous and decolonizing thought are centered throughout the process.

Throughout this process and beyond, we will share values that promote open, transparent and constructive communication with accountability, where the **human is the centre of the work** and where emphasis is placed on the artistic process, not the end product. These values will be inspired by the seven grandfather teachings that many Indigenous organizations and communities have adopted and adhere to especially here in Tkaronto. These values are Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility, and Wisdom. It is also understood that new values may be set in place when necessary as each new relationship, collective or individual, forms throughout this process.

In the spirit of these teachings and others:

We will foster a space for ceremony and storytelling. A space where creation and work can thrive and where the Indigenous community members and students are invited and welcome.

We will invite two (2) or three (3) community members from the Indigenous community or the members of the theatre community who are working with decolonization practices to give a greater understanding through their experiences and different ways of working. There will be a gifts budget of \$300 in total to help support these and other knowledge keepers who are invited into the creative space.

We will invite a Knowledge Keeper to open our in-person rehearsal and creative process, known as the company meeting.

We support the open use of Indigenous medicines and smudging ceremony during the process in the rehearsal, performance and requested spaces.

Pending COVID-19 health and safety guidelines and comfort of the company we support the creation of Open and/or Closed creative spaces.

We recognize that schedules and rehearsal/performance locations may need to adapt due to immediate health and safety concerns or larger University and/or governmental health and safety directives.

We recognize and support the larger company wide agreement (with a specific focus on BIPOC safety) within this agreement.

We recognize the AdHoc Assembly's *Radical Clause* in this agreement.

"We are in relationship with you and accountable to the broader community. We will listen if you feel violated / unsafe / compromised here, or elsewhere. We are willing to intervene on your behalf if asked, beyond the period of this engagement."

We will work towards facilitating a decolonizing theatre workshop for all collaborators and the broader York theatre community to further explore these ideas and to establish clear guidelines for alternative (outside the dominant narrative) ways of working.

We affirm our collective commitment to safe, harassment-free production environments. If harassment has occurred or is occurring in our creative spaces (in no particular order), it is advised to do the following:

- Speak with the Faculty Advisor, or another member of the Faculty that there is comfort in speaking with.
- Email the Faculty Advisor, or another member of the Faculty that there is comfort in speaking with.
- Speak with the Centre for Human Rights Equity and Inclusion for *Code-Based harassment* has occurred
- Speak with the Centre for Sexual Violence Support, Resources and Education ("The Centre") for *Sexual harassment*.
- The Office of Student Community Relations (OSCR) oversees the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, governing student conduct. <https://oscr.students.yorku.ca/csrr>
- Email the Chair of the Department of Theatre or
- Email the Dean of AMPD, and they have an online "Student Concern" reporting system <https://ampd.apps01.yorku.ca/machform/view.php?id=100600>

As this is a living agreement, we will continue to be accountable to one another; we will communicate and work together towards shaping and adapting this agreement to better support the creation process.

Hay Hay, Marsii, thank you to Native Earth, our ancestors, E(e)lders and K(k)nowledge K(k)eeper for their guidance in this agreement.

Appendix C: Working Agreement

LETTER OF AGREEMENT

Between

PHILIP GELLER

Hereinafter referred to as THE COMPANY

And

GLORIA MAMPUYA

Hereinafter referred to as THE COLLABORATOR

In the context of **rehearsal & performance** of *Philip Geller's Thesis Project (TBD)* THE ARTIST will participate as **PERFORMER**.

0. Grounding

This agreement is being made on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations; Tkaronto which has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat, which is now home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, regarding the shared gifts and support in the process of creation of *Philip Geller's Thesis Project (TBD)*.

As we recognize our role and responsibility on this land, we learn from and honour the teachings of the *Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant*, which is the Treaty that has governed this land far before colonization. We learn from and honour the three teachings: Do not take more than your share; Ensure there is enough for everyone; and Do not dirty the dish.

Through this agreement both parties recognize the rampant white supremacy that has dominated the theatre industry in so-called Canada and understand that this agreement represents an attempt at a different way of working, where Indigenous and decolonizing thought are centered throughout the process.

Throughout this process and beyond, we will share values that promote open, transparent and constructive communication with accountability. Where the **human is the centre of the work**, not the end product, placing emphasis on the process. These values will be inspired by the seven grandfather teachings that many Indigenous organizations and communities have adopted and adhere to especially here in Tkaronto. These values are Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility, and Wisdom.

In the spirit of these teachings and others:

We will foster a space for ceremony and storytelling. A space where creation and work can thrive and where QTBIPOC community members are invited and welcome.

1. Project Description

As a completion of Philip Geller's thesis, through York University, we will embark on a wholistic process of creation that will involve collaborative discovery. This will culminate in some form of public-interactive sharing housed in a website. The through-line is research of **decolonizing theatre methodology** which will engage a process of lateral and relational exchange. The project centres around Philip Geller's experience navigating York University as a colonial institution and the cancelled project of *UBU*. Questioning: can decolonizing acts of storytelling exist within the confines of colonial frames: what are the necessary conditions of decolonizing?

2. Project Schedule

THE COLLABORATOR will be engaged for the following time period:

- July 22 | Virtual Opening Feast
- July 23-30 | Virtual Rehearsals
- August 3-6 | In-person filming

THE COLLABORATOR and THE COMPANY agree to the attached time period. Specific call times for THE COLLABORATOR will be communicated as soon as possible. It is understood that the schedule will be made collectively dependent on all collaborators availability and as such is subject to change.

3. Responsibility of THE COMPANY

THE COMPANY is responsible for the following under the terms of this agreement:

- Providing safe(r) rehearsal environment(s) in alignment with a collectively created community agreement.
- To place the **human at the centre** of this process.
- Providing schedule changes to said schedule in a timely fashion.
- Adhering to the payment schedule unless an alternate schedule is agreed upon by THE COMPANY and THE COLLABORATOR for compelling reasons.
- Adhering to the project schedule as laid out in an attachment to this agreement with adequate breaks.
- To be available for satellite meeting at mutually agreed upon times.
- Providing contact information to the full creative team.

4. Responsibility of THE COLLABORATOR

- Agrees to participate in the collective creation of a community agreement – actively participating in a safe(r) creative process.
- To attend rehearsals as laid out in the attached schedule.
- To show up in a timely fashion and to contact PHILIP GELLER event of lateness or emergency.
- To show up ready to start at the required time and to show up ready to work.

- To participate in workshops and work collaboratively with all artistic collaborators.
- To participate in additional artistic tasks as mutually agreed upon with THE COMPANY.
- To be available for satellite meeting at mutually agreed upon times.
- Agrees to not incur expenses in regard to the production without the approval of THE COMPANY.
- Agrees to actively participate in a decolonizing process within the creation space and in whatever way that may manifest outside of assigned rehearsal times.

6. Fees/Gifts

- THE COMPANY will pay THE COLLABORATOR a fee of **\$700.00 CA** for **rehearsal and performance**, as well as participation in meetings as outlined in project schedule.
- THE COLLABORATOR is responsible for providing THE COMPANY with invoices following the schedule outlined below. Payments will be made to THE ARTIST by bank transfer upon receiving each invoice.
- Payments will be made by THE COMPANY to THE COLLABORATOR on the following schedule:

\$700 upon signing of the contract

THE COMPANY and THE COLLABORATOR must mutually agree upon changes to this schedule. THE COMPANY will notify THE COLLABORATOR immediately should funds be released earlier than these scheduled dates.

7. Promotion

- THE COLLABORATOR agrees to allow THE COMPANY video/audio recordings or photos of workshops as documentation and/or promotional materials for the artistic projects stipulated in this contract (with appropriate artistic credit given). THE COLLABORATOR will not receive any supplementary fee for THE COMPANY's use of promotional materials for non-commercial use.

8. General Considerations

- A mutually agreed upon outside resource/confidante/mediator will be brought on in the case that conflict or harm arises between collaborators that cannot be resolved interpersonally.
- Both parties agree that this agreement may be terminated without prejudice or notice for any unforeseen event or "force majeure", such as, but not limited to: death, serious illness, strike or accident that is beyond reasonable care and control of either party.

- c. THE COLLABORATOR recognizes that this engagement is a one-time contract and does not constitute an employee/employer relationship. It is understood that statutory deductions such as CPP, EI and vacation pay are not being made on behalf of the artist.
- d. Both parties agree to a process of open dialogue to go over concerns of both artistic and contractual obligations and recognize that this is a binding contract for the duration of the engagement.
- e. Artistic and intellectual property remains the property of THE COLLABORATOR during and after the project. Upon completion of the contract, artistic and intellectual property may be used in future iterations of the project with proper consultation and crediting.
- f. Any work generated during this contract pertaining to sacred and/or traditional knowledge will be treated with the proper protocols and respect.
- g. Any additional work will be drawn up in an additional contract/rider to this Letter of Agreement.
- h. Both Parties agree to a policy of zero tolerance with respect to harassment and intolerance of any kind.

9. COVID Safety Policy

The COLLABORATOR agrees to follow all requirements as set out collectively in an agreed upon COVID Safety Document.

All parties will adhere to provincial and municipal COVID safety guidelines and will do everything in their power to assure safety for all collaborators.

The joint signature and participation in an opening feast herein form a binding agreement in regard to the above information.

For an on behalf of

_____ Signature
 _____ Name (THE COLLABORATOR)
 _____ Date

For an on behalf of

_____ Signature
 _____ Name (THE COMPANY)
 _____ Date

Image: Christi Belcourt, 'Community' 2014 | "As resilient as a weed and as beautiful as a wildflower"

Appendix D: Anti-Racist Theatre Ethos

Created and revised from Nicole Brewer's Anti-racist Theatre Workshop summer 2020 and spring 2021

Ethos:

(Guiding beliefs or ideals that characterize a community/ideology)

- empathy/compassion
- kindness
- honesty
- courage
- strength of character (staying true to your teachings)
- de-centring whiteness
- decolonizing
- land based
- circular
- for community in community
- anti-capitalist
- accountable
- chips (feasting, food, medicines) care
- finding togetherness
- honouring our truths
- culturally saturated

Practice:

- Listen to what people's needs are. Listen to the room. Listen to intuition. Listen to ancestors.
- Centre Indigenous stories/experiences/practices
- Work from my own stories, practices, experiences, culture, history (bring my whole self to the room)

- Adapting and renegotiating everything that you do (process) in relationship to the story, people, land, process.
- Check triggers, health needs, accessibility needs.
- Creating working agreements/protocols in every new space with new people
- Using medicines
- Actively practice gratitude

Support:

- Read
- consult community
- take workshops
- constantly revision revise my practice
- taking care of myself (rest is radical)
- mentors
- mentoring
- intergenerational exchange
- listen to cultural knowledge
- listen to family
- participate in activist community
- eat chips
- other fields (sciences, economy, social work, medicine)
- engaging with other artists/art communities outside of theatre

Appendix E: Community Agreement

Community Agreement

Final Thesis Project (TBD)

Created July 27, 2021

- Respectful Space
 - on time (if you're late let someone know)
 - treat others how you'd want to be treated
 - all questions are valid
- Coming into the space with an open heart
 - without preconceived notions of each other and of the work
- Step up/Step back
 - If you're listening more step up into a speaking role OR if you're in a listening role step up into a speaking role
 - Acknowledge your positionality and the space you take up
- Confidentiality/Privacy
 - the teachings go, the experiences stay
- oops/ouch
 - accountability
 - Get in touch with Amy
 - third-party mediator
- Self-Care is Community-care
 - step away if you need to
 - Acknowledging that the content might be challenging and personal. That we can centre our care and healing throughout the process.
 - BIG TEARS