

CLAIMING SPACE



2012 07 10

Essays in this virtual publication are copyrighted by the authors — © 2011

Floyd Favel © (2011) *Antigone: Anatomy of a Drama in A First Nations Community.*

David Geary © (2011) *Token Poles & Aboriginality Towards an Independent State...of Mind.*

Jill Carter © (2011) *Brushstrokes, Footfalls, Breath Tracks: Producing the Centre from Wherever We Are.*

Margaret Grenier © (2011) *Carrying My Lineage through Dance.*

Penny Couchie © (2011) *Claiming a Space for Big Medicine.*

Renalta Arluk © (2011) *Work Hard, My Girl.*

Yvette Nolan © (2011) *Four Territories.*

Permission to use Copyrighted work

To use any essay in this virtual publication in its entirety or in part, in any form, be it graphic, electronic, mechanical, or print, permission must be sought from the publisher, Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance

All views and opinions expressed in these articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the editorial team or the publication as a whole.

CLAIMING SPACE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 00 **EDITOR'S WELCOME**
Falen Johnson
- 01 – 03 **ANTIGONE: ANATOMY OF A DRAMA IN A
FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY**
Floyd Favel
- 04 – 08 **TOKEN POLES & ABORIGINALITY: TOWARDS
AN INDEPENDANT STATE...OF MIND**
David Geary
- 09 – 13 **BRUSHSTROKES, FOOTFALLS, BREATH TRACKS:
PRODUCING THE CENTRE FROM WHEREVER WE ARE**
Jill Carter
- 14 – 16 **CARRYING MY LINEAGE THROUGH DANCE**
Margaret Grenier
- 17 – 22 **CLAIMING A SPACE FOR BIG MEDICINE**
Penny Couchie
- 23 – 25 **WORK HARD, MY GIRL**
Renaltta Arluk
- 26 – 29 **FOUR TERRITORIES**
Yvette Nolan

EDITOR'S WELCOME

When my cousin Tom was a little boy he used to watch his grandmother, my great-grandmother, dance in her kitchen. She had married my great-grandfather, a strict Baptist and he didn't like her to dance our traditional Haudenosaunee dances so she waited until he went out into the field to work and when he got far out of sight she would dance. She kept her eyes on the field as her feet danced across the kitchen floor.

Tom told me this story a few years ago and I thought a lot about it as we put together this publication. To me it says so much about how, where and when we practice our art. How art and everyday life are intrinsically intertwined for Indigenous people. How we claim our space.

Claiming Space seemed a fitting theme for IPAA's first ever publication. I think about this publication itself as a way of claiming space. It helps create a permanent shared forum for artists to speak about the work they create. Straight from the artist's mouth, or fingertips as it were.

We have voices from all over this shared land representing many nations as well as disciplines and it fills me with joy to see them all in the shared space of IPAA's first publication. I hope you enjoy reading the publication as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Nia:wen,

Falen Johnson

Coordinator for IPAA

ANTIGONE: ANATOMY OF A DRAMA IN A FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY

Floyd Favel

If I have any unique insight into theatre in a First Nations' community, it would be due to the fact that I live in one and I speak the language and am deeply involved in all aspects of my community. Our communities are where our ancient ceremonies, which keep the world in balance, still survive. The dark side is that our communities are often wrought with conflicts and feuds, often over money and resources. These are products of colonization. If you introduce them as topics to theatre, the results could be only interesting. In October 2010, I submitted a grant application to the Saskatchewan Arts Board to produce our version of Sophocles's *Antigone*, adapted by Cree playwright and lawyer Deanne Kasokeo, a Poundmaker Cree Nation band member like myself.

At this time it is necessary to give the reader a brief background and socio-politico-cultural context in order to understand the conflict in which our drama would become embroiled. For the past twenty years, our community has been ruled by an unaccountable leadership. This leadership has consistently refused to give full financial disclosure and it was for this reason that in 2012 band members, including me and Deanne Kasokeo, implemented our traditional band custom electoral system and voted our leadership out of office. The results of this legal traditional election were ignored by the unaccountable leadership and by the Department of Indian Affairs, and unaccountable business continued as usual in my community.

That winter, Deanne and I had been contracted to lead a literacy project at the reserve school, recording and transcribing the oral history of our community to lead to the publishing of a book. We worked on the project while we went about the planning of our *Antigone* production to open in our community on April 1, 2011.

In the original play, *Antigone* is the niece of King Creon. Creon will not allow the burial of Polynices, *Antigone's* brother, in the city-state over which Creon governs. This is the essential dramatic conflict. In my research, I had experimented with applying the Lakota Winter Count system as a dramaturgical tool. If we view the drama *Antigone* as a year and we apply the Lakota Winter Count system upon this year, we can then identify the key image action for this year. I was able to identify that this would be the 'Body of Polynices refused to be buried.' This image is the central action and metonymic image for the drama around which the other actions and images revolve. In adaptations, it is important to never lose the essential conflict of the original drama — that is what makes an adaptation work. Without the dead body there would be no *Antigone* drama. On a First Nations reserve, the Chief has the power to banish people or to prevent a burial. Therefore, the analogy is entirely appropriate. The central image action has to be plausible otherwise the adaptation does not work. For example, to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare, the action and image of ingesting

ANTIGONE: ANATOMY OF A DRAMA IN A FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY

potion can only be adapted to other societies where potion would be consumed, such as tribal societies. Incidentally, Deanne, like in the original Antigone, is also the Chief's niece, and similarly, she had been battling her uncle, the Chief, to bring accountability to our reserve.

We did not have high expectations as we began rehearsals. I managed to get bookings for our drama on other reserves in the province. I thought we could perform on the road to give the as yet inexperienced actors some performing experience before the formal opening in our community. Problems arose. It never fails, I thought, there will always be an issue with something or someone in every production. One of our actors was a member of our community's traditional society, the Machanasak. The leader of this group was a man who also held theatrical aspirations. In 2010, he staged an alleged re-enactment of the Battle of 1885. The show did not do justice to the subject matter. Our people had fought and died not meters away and here was this parody of theatre and our history. It was a mockery, as I heard one elder say.

There needs to be a way of critiquing First Nations' productions beyond saying whether they were good or bad. If we analyzed this production using the formula or theorem, Tr (tradition) \times Pr (process) = $Theatrez$ (theatre doubled, meaning theatre expanded by the contact with tradition), then regarding this alleged re-enactment, the tradition or history of the event went directly to

public performance, without any theatrical process. Process acts as the bridge and depending on the measure of theatre process we apply to tradition will inform the theatre result. The measures of tradition and process and the actual production are what we should be talking about, rather than vague subjective feelings of whether one liked a production or not.

This actor, and Machanase member came to me saying that at the direction of the leader of this society I must abandon the play as my play was being sacrilegious by mentioning the dead — the dead body of Polynices. I tried to talk some sense into this fellow, to no avail, and he quit the production. I was left scrambling to replace an actor at this late stage.

What happened next however, I had never before experienced. We had heard that the Chief was incensed by our upcoming production, throwing the script on to the floor and dancing in fury upon its pages. The leader of the Machanasak had whispered in the Chief's ear saying that Antigone was code for "Antoine gone," the Chief's last name.

Upon returning from our successful tour of other reserves, we settled in for our opening. One night, two days before our opening, we received word that the Chief had fired us from our literacy project at the school and that there had been a closed band meeting attended by the Chief, Council, and the leader of the Machanasak in which a band council resolution had been made, forbidding and

ANTIGONE: ANATOMY OF A DRAMA IN A FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY

banning any public performance of Antigone on our reserve.

We waited for one of the councilors to find an alternate venue for us. The next morning I issued a press release stating our show had been banned. It made quite the story. Calls flooded in and our story was featured and disseminated in newspapers nationally and internationally. I told Deanne, usually in other productions one is fighting for press and publicity and in this case we didn't even try. In one of these articles the Chief is quoted, "We don't have to answer to no one."

Historically, theatre artists, writers, journalists, poets are often silenced, jailed or killed by despotic rulers and we were getting a glimpse of this here in Canada. We were being validated despite being obscure unknown artists living in a community far from a major urban center, filled with theatres.

Show day: I had been told that the Chief had taken the only set of keys to the hall and driven away in his truck. The caretaker had allowed our show to take place at the school, the show was on! But the Chief had also told potential audience members from our community that anyone who came to our show would be fired from their jobs and any benefits to them or their family members would be suspended.

A few brave band members showed up. The late great actor Gordon Tootosis opened the show

with a few inspirational remarks, stating how proud he felt that we could have our own theatre on our reserve, that we were band members and how proud he was of this production and our efforts. God Bless his Soul and his memory. He is one of the great Cree people in our history and this was to be one of my last encounters with my cousin, role model, and theatre colleague. The theatre Gods must have been smiling, it was the best show we had done and it also was the first time I had ever presented any production on my reserve. It was a debut to remember.

Postscript: the Chief and Council were charged with over 40 counts of fraud and other related criminal actions later that summer and will be going to court in the coming year. I write this with sadness also as it did not have to come to this and like in the ancient Greek tragedies they as actors in their own private drama are suffering the results of their hubris and abuse of power (although they are innocent until proven guilty). Sometimes I wonder what will happen to our people and our nation when I see how we govern ourselves. As First Nations we are deeply affected by centuries of colonization and our value systems have been overturned. Today, we are just as corrupt and selfish as the rest of humanity. It is our own people who can try to silence us sometimes. That said, no matter what, our communities are beautiful places and a good place to raise our children.

TOKEN POLES & ABORIGINALITY: TOWARDS AN INDEPENDENT STATE...OF MIND

David Geary

1. Claiming Space

Be the change you want to see.

– Mahatma Gandhi

Ko Taranaki toku maunga

Ko Hangatahua toku awa

Ko Taranaki ma Ngati Pakeha toku iwi

David Geary taku ingoa

Taranaki is my mountain.

Hangatahua is my river.

My people are the Maori tribe Taranaki and New Zealanders descended from Europe immigrants.

My name is David Geary.

Above is a ‘mini mihi’, an introduction we Maori of Aotearoa New Zealand use to identify ourselves. It can be formal and extensive, covering a lot of genealogy. There is a story of an elder who was asked by another person, “Who are you?” and the elder was still telling of his people’s origins the next day. But a mihi can also be casual, funny and functional, a networking tool others use to work out how they might connect with you. I’m using it here to show how in some small way I can live Gandhi’s creed. I believe the challenge for Indigenous performers is to claim space in the hearts and minds of all the peoples of their country and the world and that the best way to do this is to

make ourselves an example of what we’d like to see. That is, Aboriginality begins with us so that it might extend beyond the token totem poles at the entrance to the mall.

As a writer, I’ve tried to do this by creating work with Maori content. My last play *Mark Twain & Me in Maoriland* is about Twain’s 1895 tour of New Zealand, and the controversy around him taking the side of Maori rebels, condemned as ‘barbarians and fanatics’, who fought against Maori loyal to the Crown. Also, when I’ve written for mainstream TV shows I’ve pushed to have more parts for Maori characters.

And as a dramaturg, I no longer start workshops with everyone flopping into chairs and opening the script at page one. Instead, I instigate ‘Circle Time’, where we meet away from the table. Here we acknowledge the land we’re on, our ancestors, other’s ancestors and see each other as complete people and not just actors hired to read a script.

But there are no rules for what can happen here. I encourage everyone to contribute whatever they want. We may cover health and safety issues, the emergency procedures and boring administrative topics but I always finish with a ‘waiata’, or song. This is how we finish a mihi, by supporting it with a song that has meaning for us. It may be a traditional Maori hymn, a yoga chant in Sanskrit that praises all teachers or a Frank Zappa song.

TOKEN POLES & ABORIGINALITY: TOWARDS AN INDEPENDENT STATE...OF MIND

I don't claim this approach is exclusively Indigenous as many drama workshops begin this way. But by introducing Indigenous content and practice we claim the space for us to work there in a specific way. For example, I was lucky enough to be a dramaturg for Native Earth Theatre Company at their 2011 Weesageechak Festival of play development in Toronto. Native Earth embraces seven traditional values: humility, generosity, wisdom, patience, strength of character, tolerance and courage. At Circle Time, I always reiterated one or more of these principles; whether it be the 'courage' of the writer in sharing his work, the 'patience' of the actors in accepting the script wasn't finished, or the 'generosity' of spirit everyone had in working together.

Apart from reinforcing our Aboriginality, Circle Time helps us leave the outside world and focus on the task at hand. I end the day with another circle so we can acknowledge our work together. Similarly, because debate is a big part of Maori culture, I don't like ending readings of work without inviting the audience to offer something back. They may not want to do this in the theatre, so I also make myself available in the foyer after. I know this may invite the 'wrong' sort of feedback, but it's always worth embracing debate and giving the audience a chance to respond.

2. Claiming Space – Back To School

In the real world of 2012, my mountain is Grouse, my river is Lynn Creek, and I am dual citizen of

Canada and New Zealand. I currently live among the peoples of North Vancouver. These include the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, whose generosity allows us to live on their lands. But I'm a recent immigrant so it is a struggle for me to speak on issues relating to Indigenous performers here. Instead, I'll share what I know about a drama school in New Zealand that has changed the culture there.

In 1986, I went as an actor to the New Zealand Drama School in Wellington, NZ. It was a two-year diploma course that had ostensibly no Maori content or practice. It struggled to keep any Maori students who were accepted, probably because the school didn't feel like any sort of home to them.

In the 1990s, New Zealand went through an identity crisis. This was due to the revival of the Treaty of Waitangi, our 1840 founding document, which, allegedly, set out to form a partnership between the Crown and Maori. The reasons for the revival are complex, but I'd boil it down to years of Maori protest culminating in successful land occupations, forward thinking Maori and Pakeha politicians who envisioned a bi-cultural society and a progressive judiciary willing to reinterpret the old treaty into modern times. Thus, such things as Te Reo Maori, our native language, was designated a 'taonga' or a treasure, one that had to be preserved.

Taking on this spirit of change, the National Drama

TOKEN POLES & ABORIGINALITY: TOWARDS AN INDEPENDENT STATE...OF MIND

School re-invented itself as Toi Whakaari New Zealand Drama School, with an aim to embrace bi-culturality.. It wasn't easy. What was bi-culturality? How did it work? There were casualties. But what emerged was a school that can lead other organisations in showing how they can integrate Maori content and practice. The school has training in kapa haka (Maori dance), waiata (song) and holds an annual retreat to live on a traditional tribal marae for the whole school. It has a staff member, Teina Moetara, who is Head of Content and Practice. This involves ensuring that Tikanga Marae — the customs of Maori on their home ground or Turangawae-wae — are brought in as a lens to help the making of work in new indigenous ways. Unfortunately, I went to the school too soon and missed all this. But I've been lucky to share in the results which has been, among other things, seeing the recent graduates go on to make some of the most innovative and acclaimed works in New Zealand's performing arts community. The two leading Maori theatre companies, Taki Rua and Tawata Productions, are led by and employ many Toi Whakaari graduates. In 2011, these companies collected many of the theatre awards, proving they were no longer 'a bit of local colour' but an essential part of the theatre scene.

How do the drama schools of Canada, particularly the National Theatre School, compare? I don't know. (Maybe someone can respond to this in a later issue?) One shouldn't judge a book by its colour, or an organisation by its website; but from this you'd assume that ensuring English-French

sovereignty is the paramount concern of the national school, not those who told the first stories here. Can Canadian drama schools do more to embrace and educate students with First Nations' performing arts content and practice? I hope so. I think it crucial that these institutions lead the way. How else will we get a new generation that can make a difference, and claim some new space for all of us? When I was at Weesageechak, the Centre for Indigenous Theatre in Toronto was mentioned as a positive force and one exclusively for native performers. I'm all for that. But the challenge remains how to get mainstream drama schools to integrate some Aboriginality.

My solution would be to show them easily how this can be done. As an example, in 2010, I taught the Masters in Scriptwriting for the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University of Wellington, NZ. In previous years the novel to screenplay adaptation exercise had always been from Mario Puzo's novel *The Godfather* to Francis Ford Coppola's acclaimed film. I decided I'd give the students a choice and created a resource for the adaptation of the popular novel *Whalerider*, by Maori novelist Witi Ihimaera, into the hit film that was written and directed by Nicki Caro (a Pakeha). Sometimes it's better to not only say, "We should do more," but also, "Here's how easy it is."

For Canada's drama schools, I'd suggest showing them how a unit on Indigenous storytelling and performing arts can be incorporated. After all,

TOKEN POLES & ABORIGINALITY: TOWARDS AN INDEPENDENT STATE...OF MIND

these are the first stories and storytellers of this land and an essential part of Canadian theatre history. Maybe this already happens? Maybe I'm talking a lot but not saying anything? If so, forgive someone fresh off the boat.

3. Claiming Space – An Independent State... Of Mind

How can we claim some new space in our heads? How can we imagine what might be? I get fidgety sometimes when I see Indigenous performers in traditional western theatres. Spaces where we dress up, pay money, sit quietly, watch, applaud, go home — it's a very European thing. I like the challenge of how other spaces can be occupied for other sorts of performance.

A good example was Archer Pechawis at a Weesageechak 2011 session, where he talked about and showed the video of his performance art piece Shoot The Indian. It took place in the foyer of a large venue at the 2008 Magnetic North Festival HIVE event in Vancouver. An old cowboy and Indian movie played backwards on a big screen. Archer put on a traditional mask West Coast mask, shimmied in front of the movie like a shooting gallery duck, and festival-goers were encouraged to shoot him with a paintball gun. For me, this challenged taboos and asked big questions: What was it to shoot an Indian? Back then? Now? In the movies? Should we still shoot artists? Had Pechawis claimed some space back for the clichéd savage Injuns in the movie? Or was it all a clown show? If

so, who was the joke really on? It was provocative, dangerous art. The artist had the bruises to prove it. This work made me want to find new space and ways of performing in them and to cultivate a more independent state of mind. Perhaps those 'token poles' at the mall, could start moving, Dawn of the Dead style, and take over? I witnessed a final example of claiming space, in a very literal way, when I saw the talk and slide show of Commander John Herrington, the only Aboriginal astronaut, at the Vancouver Planetarium last year. John is from the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma and was on the Endeavour space shuttle. His talk was in conjunction with the launch of the APTN kids' Cree-language show Tansi! Nehiyawetan After leaving NASA, John went on a 4000 mile bike trek across the USA, visiting First Nations' groups, spreading the word about Native education, and is currently doing a PhD on how Native students learn. He has been the change he wants to see, and that change is for Native students to excel, especially in sciences. He has also created a 'performance' that is his life story and taken it to venues that enhance its meaning. Sitting under the stars, listening to his story, I was taken back to the inspirational stories of the ancestors — of how some believe we came from the stars, and how scientists believe we are all stardust. And I was reminded that if we can open our minds we can go anywhere, be anything, claim any space. Kia ora.

TOKEN POLES & ABORIGINALITY: TOWARDS AN INDEPENDENT STATE...OF MIND

David Greary is an actor, fiction writer, poet, and educator, descended from the New Zealand Maori tribe Taranaki. He taught the 2010 MA in Scriptwriting at the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University of Wellington, NZ. He works in theatre, film, and television as a writer, director, story editor, and dramaturg.

*Toi Whakaari New Zealand Drama School:
www.toiwhakaari.ac.nz*

*Archer Pechawis:
<http://apxo.net/home.html>*

*John Herrington:
<http://www.rocketrek.com/>*

BRUSHSTROKES, FOOTFALLS, BREATH TRACKS: PRODUCING THE CENTRE FROM WHEREVER WE ARE¹

Jill Carter

The world we have today is the gift of the New World. (Wright, qtd. in Martin 100)

So unless you can persuade me Europe would have become rich anyway, that the Atlantic slave trade wasn't one of the major events of the last thousand years, and that wealth and technologies from America didn't change the world, then I'm going to insist that the Indian experience is at the very center of how the world we live in today came to be.

(Smith 37, emphasis added)

Brushstrokes

When Anita Benedict assumed the role of director of the University of Toronto's Office of Aboriginal Services (First Nations House) in the late 1990s, several hundred individuals yearly identified themselves as Aboriginal students and utilized the resources, counselors, and services her department offered. The department itself had, at long last, expanded from one small room to an entire split-level floor containing offices, a kitchen, a student lounge, a resource library and a student computer lab. And the Aboriginal Studies Program was beginning to flourish and expand. However, despite all that had been accomplished, just as much remained to be done. And space (in all of its manifestations) was required to do it.

Physical space is highly prized and hardly gained at our university. There is just not enough — for any department. Benedict dreamed of an entire Centre that would house both First Nations House and the Aboriginal Studies Program; a Centre that would be accessible to elderly and differently-abled bodies; and a Centre that would provide

spaces for creative endeavor, language learning, gatherings and ceremony. She requested more space for her department but did not pursue this endeavor when she was rebuffed. Instead, she campaigned for the right to commission a mural as a gift to the Borden Building in which First Nations House was (and is today) housed.

Replete with imagery and languages belonging to the original Nations of these territories, this mural winds its serpentine way up three flights of stairs from the building's main lobby. It marks the space, subtly insinuating into the minds of all who visit the idea that First Nations House is not simply a set of offices within a building but the building itself.

Over time, this subtle insinuation has taken hold and edged closer to becoming a reality. First Nations House and the Aboriginal Studies Program are now conjoined under the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives. Together, these departments occupy two floors of the building and are seen as one entity. This is noteworthy because the University of Toronto has historically insisted upon the physical

¹ Research for this essay was supported in part by a Research/Creation grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

BRUSHSTROKES, FOOTFALLS, BREATH TRACKS: PRODUCING THE CENTRE FROM WHEREVER WE ARE

and philosophical separation of services and academic programs. How interesting it is, then, that a (seemingly) cosmetic transformation of space has resulted in such a profound transformation of corporate infrastructure. With this transformation more courses, more activities and initiatives were set into motion; hence, more bodies to power these initiatives began to inhabit our spaces.

Jean Fisher has asserted that the body, not space, is the site of art (qtd. in Martin 102). And it is primarily through and by means of this “mortal coil” — itself a space to be cultivated, dramaturged, occupied and/or desecrated — that we lay claim to, produce, shape and dramaturge the spaces we have inherited. Perhaps this notion of the body, as both a space in and of itself and dramaturg of spaces beyond itself, suggests a solution to a crucial problem that so often threatens, hampers or immobilizes Native workers in the arts sector.

As Robert Houle has observed, we occupy the uncomfortable position of being Indigenous to a land in which we have been pushed (physically and in the national consciousness) to the furthest outposts that ring the colonial centre. Our histories excluded from the Nation’s narrative (Houle 121), we have become a series of “exotic” appendices, and our works have been squeezed into the backspaces (as endnotes), basements (as footnotes), and margins in what Sylvie Fortin calls the “spatial text” (106) of the dominant cultural narrative.

How, then, do we explode the boxes that contain us to become part of a world that has written us out of its main storyline and into its sideshows and curio-cabinets? Simply occupying space — particularly the spaces that have been set aside for us on the margins of campuses, in the back spaces of theatres, on one or two shelves that comprise the “Native” section at the bookstore, or in the antechambers of the Nation’s galleries — seems insufficient. We may speak from these spaces, but I am still left to wonder: how many people actually stop by these marginal spaces to listen (see Nolan, qtd. in Dempsey 25)? A “room of one’s own” is inefficacious if that room is simply an antechamber to be overlooked by passersby for whom we will remain a half-remembered absence. It seems then that we must step out into the centre without waiting to be invited, claim that space as our own and invite the world to join us there. This is easier said than done, but it is not impossible.

Footfalls

In 2003, Josephine Mandamin and Irene Peters staged an intervention to change mainstream perceptions of and behaviors towards water by walking around Lake Superior (McGregor 29). During their first Mother Earth Water Walk, Grandmothers Mandamin and Peters claimed over 1000 kilometers as their “stage,” launching an invitation to all Canadians to write themselves into an Anishinaabe story that ends well for the

BRUSHSTROKES, FOOTFALLS, BREATH TRACKS: PRODUCING THE CENTRE FROM WHEREVER WE ARE

waters and for all the life forms that depend upon them. Since then, thousands have entered the story, either as “players” who walk for the water or as “backstage hands,” supporting the walkers with finances, resources and the provision of even more spaces (in cyberspace, in literary space or on the airwaves) to disseminate this story and so transform its hearers.

At the 2005 Venice Biennale, the editor-in-chief of Art Papers suggested that Native contemporary artists begin to develop strategies whereby we produce space, not simply fit ourselves into spaces that have been set aside for us (Fortin 109). This, I believe, is what Mandamin and Peters did. Without governmental supports or permissions, they stepped out into a space and “produced” it as a site of intervention, remembrance and story — a story that is central to the lives of all of the peoples of this earth. And the work they have begun continues to sustain itself far beyond the geographic and seasonal borders that once seemed to contain it.

Breath Tracks

And we find ourselves out in front of Hart House, which is a very old and staid traditional type place—but not our type of traditions. And yet, we’re out in front there talking about our traditions and our way of life. I find that really amazing [...] On the other hand, what you’re doing there is very, very contemporary and shows sort of an adaptation of the culture toward something that is

brand new and very cutting edge and very leading. Native culture, if I look at you people, is not static and dead, it’s moving—alive and fluid. (Phillips np)

Kahontake Kitikan Garden is a twenty-first century “earthwork” reclaimed by the Aboriginal students at the University of Toronto on which the history of this territory, the rivers that rage beneath and the original stewards of this area may be read in the stunning simplicity of its design. Since its reclamation, Kahontake Kitikan has been the site of Ceremony and remembering for the Aboriginal community at the University of Toronto.

During ScotiaBank Nuit Blanche 2011, it became “command central” for a series of “guerilla” performances crafted to facilitate the re-emergence what has been dislocated, buried, silenced, and marginalized.

While the Medicine Garden was our installation site, it is not large enough to accommodate our student-performances. Here, the garden was “wrapped” in “water,” in the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee languages, and in the rich, warm tones of Lee Maracle’s “Breath Track.” An outdoor stage had been prepared around the corner from our installation to which audiences could repair for hourly performances and storytelling circles. Days before the event, we were evicted from our performance site because of fire regulations. And while our installation was in no danger of displacement, two-dozen artists suddenly had no

BRUSHSTROKES, FOOTFALLS, BREATH TRACKS: PRODUCING THE CENTRE FROM WHEREVER WE ARE

space from which speak. We were faced with a dilemma. Would we tailor our vision to fit whatever space might be provided at the eleventh hour or would we produce the space that would fit the vision out of which we had created? We looked to the example of our protagonist Taddle Creek: each spring, she reemerges, spilling herself over the University College Quad. Thus, she reclaims “centre-stage” for herself, rerouting many a convocation procession and forcing graduands in their long, black robes and newly shined shoes to keep to her peripheries as they make their way towards Convocation Hall and the rest of their lives.

Inspired by her boldness, we claimed and produced the spaces our stories required. On the hour, Sylvia Plain (who had walked for the water with Grandmother Mandamin only months before) gathered audience members and guided them as they walked for Taddle along her course. Each of Sylvia’s water walks took audiences to a different part of the campus, and each was punctuated by a “guerilla performance,” lit by portable work lights and amplified by the positioning of the performing body in naturally resonating spaces.

And all the while, a double-headed serpent whose progress through earth’s waterways has historically connected Indigenous Peoples around the world (Lee Maracle, *Nuit Blanche* 2011) danced with the buried waters of Taddle and danced her reemergence. In its dance, the words carried in Lee Maracle’s recurring Breath Track took shape

in living clay, reinventing a space, its text and the relationships unfolding therein.

I think of Anita Benedict and how she and so many others produce the spaces of which we have all been dreaming in such ingenious ways. I consider the example of Grandmothers Josephine Mandamin and Irene Peters. My mind swims with images of Electric Pow Wows, film crews, architecture, Native artists and Biennales, Native opera and Native Earth, Indigenous Waves and Aboriginal Voices. And I begin to perceive the import of Paul Chaat Smith’s assertion: Aboriginal experience is inextricably bound into the genesis of this ‘brave new world.. Any space we produce to fit that experience becomes a central space, resonating and expanding to touch other centers. With each brushstroke, each footfall, each sound that is carried on our breath, we go forth to become part of a world in which no border can contain us.

Jill Carter is Anishnabe. She is a Ph.D. in the Drama Centre at the University of Toronto. She is an actor, a writer, a playwright, a student, and a mentor. She teaches a course in North American Indigenous Theatre every other summer.

BRUSHSTROKES, FOOTFALLS, BREATH TRACKS: PRODUCING THE CENTRE FROM WHEREVER WE ARE

Works Cited

- Dempsey, Shawna. "Yvette Nolan Takes Centre Stage." *Herizons* (Fall 2009). 22-25.
- Fortin, Sylvie. "A Generative Map." *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity*. Washington: National Museum of the American Indian, 2006. 105-112.
- Houle, Robert. "Creating Space Within a National Identity." *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity*. Washington: National Museum of the American Indian, 2006. 121-126.
- Maracle, Lee. Writer and Performer. "Breath Track: The Double-Headed Serpent." Prod.
- Erik Betlem (CIUT FM). *Medicine Walk: Breath Tracks*. Cur. Jill Carter. ScotiaBank Nuit Blanche 2011. Sound Installation.
- Martin, Lee-Ann. "Performance and Artistic Mobility." *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity*. Washington: National Museum of the American Indian, 2006. 99-104.
- McGregor, Deborah. "Anishinaabe-Kwe, Traditional Knowledge, and Water Protection." *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme*. 26.3/4 (Winter/Spring 2008): 26-30.
- Phillips, Bob. Producer & Host. *AVR Arts Review: Nuit Blanche/U. of T. Indigenous Studies*. Aboriginal Voices Radio. 09 October 2011. Radio Broadcast.
- Smith, Paul Chaat. "Delta One Fifty." *Vision, Space, Desire: Global Perspectives and Cultural Hybridity*. Washington: National Museum of the American Indian, 2006. 31-40.

CARRYING MY LINEAGE THROUGH DANCE

Margaret Grenier

Gitxsan dance has always been deeply rooted in oral history. It is the generations of ancestral wisdom that is carried by our practice that resonates and is transformative. Traditionally, all songs and dances would come from a specific place from which their story originated. In order to successfully move our form of dance forward, we must ensure that this connection to our origin is deeply seeded in our practice. The current struggle surrounding this art form stems from the numerous barriers, including social and physical distances, that displace dance from its place of birth. Our generation must delve deep to maintain that connection when we are removed from ancestral sites and community. It is imperative to deepen our practice by exploring the relationship between dance, history and connection to land and examining how movement is used to signify, establish and translate this connection with ancestral sites. Sacred places are reminders of our past and holders of the land's authority. Land is a storyteller. It is a keeper of our peoples and our history. There is a part of the land and a part of us that will forever carry this identity and that will always remain whole. It is in nurturing this from within that we claim space.

In 1967, in Prince Rupert, B.C., Ken and Margaret Harris, the founders of the Dancers of Damelahamid, began the Haw yah hawni nah Festival. The festival was maintained for twenty years and it re-defined coastal dance. This was inevitable as the

dance form was awakened into an entirely different political setting. Having followed the lifting of the Potlatch Ban, the purpose of the festival was to build community amongst the many Aboriginal people working to regain their ancestral dance and art traditions and offer a source of inspiration for young Aboriginal artists. Dances were taught from the memories of elders to a generation of dancers who had never experienced them. As for the young, they were introduced to an art form outside of the sacred space where the songs and stories had transcended since their inception. It was an immensely significant transition to maintain dance within a completely different presentation setting. It was imperative to assert this art form in order for it to maintain its stronghold within a new time and space.

I grew up with these practices, with an access to this knowledge and with a way of understanding that was such a privilege handed to me by the unyielding work of my parents. As I follow my creative process and develop the dance I have been gifted with — my inner dance — I honour those connections. But it is once again a changed time, a changed place and the dances are anew. We are as displaced as we will ever be. Now, as it will be with each generation to come, there is the perpetual challenge to claim space. As we draw upon those influences that bridge our expression of dance to our identity, we continue to establish and affirm the presence of those who have gone

CARRYING MY LINEAGE THROUGH DANCE

before us and the sacred places from which we have all descended.

My words are symbolic of my journey to an understanding of my identity, but they will always be only a reflection of the songs and dances themselves. It is only in dancing that I can represent my identity in its entirety. Through these artistic practices we have bridged many gaps that have arisen in our generation. We have co-developed and shared in a common understanding of who we are as individuals and also who we are as a collective, supporting each other in our distinct journeys. We have created the context for our children to grow up in and continued the process of teaching and learning the dances. We have shared with others these experiences and immersed them into a discourse on what it means for us to be Gitxsan, creating an intercultural exchange and a mutual understanding.

Our dance company has created a space where transcendence is possible. Celebrating the magnificence of what it is to be an Aboriginal person empowers us to affect others and to affect a changed society. Being in the presence of one another and committed to a common purpose we negotiate the barriers of otherness. Further, as a collective, we create a community that can address the audience's preconceived notions and expectations of who Aboriginal peoples are. We demonstrate that an engagement with First Nations culture is not limited to First Nations peoples alone. It is imperative that we bring our

work as artists to many to witness so that all may be involved in this process of change. It is through our work that we redefine and reconstruct our sense of society. It is from this foundation that we work towards a transformed relationship.

The symptoms of brokenness seen in our Aboriginal communities are symptomatic of ever-present colonial influences. So much of the past century has resulted in the disconnection to our sense of claimed space. Yet it has been all of the work that has come out of this hardship that has defined us. We must honour what our families have worked so hard to maintain and practice the traditions without compromise. We must turn to our Elders to ensure that our art is presented with integrity. We must listen, listen, listen and honour that they hold the wealth of knowledge that links us to our pasts. We are very much aware of the society wounds experienced by Aboriginal peoples. It is most difficult to be in those places of dissonance where we tend to lose hope.

Yet the integrity of the work also immerses us in the healing which breathes through song and dance. For me dance, song and story have provided a protective space to address our hardships and create a healing space. Our multiple realities, both the difficult and the supportive, are what reach others and instil change. Performance is, in and of itself, a form of dialogue and a creator of positive space. Areas of discomfort can be supported by the depth and beauty of the songs and

CARRYING MY LINEAGE THROUGH DANCE

the movement as a means to inspire thought. As a dancer, if you are truly present within yourself and if you share openly, the audience will be truly present for you and then you will each be able to redefine yourselves and establish a new relationship. This empowers us to fashion a new understanding of one another free of the symptoms of brokenness and free of colonial influence. The art carries the potential to affect many at that level.

As artists we question ourselves as to how to support others and be true to ourselves at the same time. There is no one approach to regaining Indigenous knowledge that would honour the diversity of people's backgrounds. Because of this the issue must be taken to an even greater level, involving awareness and understanding which will in turn empower us to discover ourselves and our interconnectedness with one another. This is a process. It is an endless process. By opening up our hearts we may be hurt. By taking risks we may hurt others. We may step backward in order to move forward. Each generation is in uncharted ground. As an Aboriginal dancer, this journey needs to be reflected in what is created. It is imperative that current choreographic expression not repeat the creative risks that were taken by the previous generation as they are no longer our risks. Rather, they are the foundation from which we may continue to evolve so that we bridge past and future dance for our unique form and style. What we share is now a very personal story. This is our story, to be told in our time and place.

We strive to maintain the gifts of our ancestors. We carry this knowledge but the knowledge loses its relevance to us if we do not create a relationship with others through it. This is the performance space that we claim. This is the venue we have been given by the work of our parents. It was their life's work and our legacy. And so we must dedicate ourselves to it. It is a lifelong practice that will cultivate a gift worthy to offer our children. This process takes time and it is in offering our time to one another that we find the spiritual connection. It is at this spiritual level that we share our art form. It is at this spiritual level that we build relationships. It is the community we build that is sacred.

Margaret Grenier is an experienced director, choreographer, and instructor for First Nations Northwest Coastal dance traditions, bridging cultural knowledge with current educational practices and community issues. Margaret is currently the artistic director of Dancers of Damlehamid.

CLAIMING A SPACE FOR BIG MEDICINE

Penny Couchie

I would like to say on the theme of claiming space that to use the word ‘claim’ implies that there is an act of resistance involved; as though there is another force laying claim to the same space that I am. However, claiming space or taking my place in this world has very much been an act of stepping into a space that has always been, and always will be, there for me. To say this though, negates the fact that as Indigenous people, our space within Canada is constantly being encroached upon. When it comes to claiming space, issues around sovereignty and self-determination keep surfacing. For me, claiming space is about asserting my right to be a sovereign and self-determined person. Like most Indigenous people I have been affected by many traumas and this siege of marginalization, land encroachment and disproportionate levels of violence against Indigenous women continues. But I am far more than just a victim. I see myself, and the many steps I’ve taken in my life to claim space as an ongoing struggle against many forces.

I’ve made seemingly effortless claims to a lot of things in my life. One of the most difficult though, has been claiming space. As a family we moved around a lot. My father worked for Parks Canada and every two years or so an offer to transfer to another National Park would come up. By the time I was sixteen I had lived in five different provinces and experienced some of the most beautiful and diverse cultures and land in Canada. While I met

a lot of really wonderful people and, at times, experienced an incredible amount of inclusion and welcoming in the communities I lived, I never really felt I had a right to the place that I stood. I never really felt I was at home.

In addition to my transient upbringing, I am also one of a majority when it comes to Aboriginal women who have been victims of early childhood sexual abuse. It’s an experience that has greatly affected my ability to claim space. The fragmentation that resulted between my mind, body and spirit is something that I still wrestle with today. Part of the residual effects was an impulse to take up as little space as I could — to become unnoticeable, maybe even invisible. I adopted a strong conviction that the less space I took up or the less noticeable I was, the more protection I would have. Although over the past twenty years I have struggled to deal with these impacts through counseling, ceremony and healing and wellness workshops, I don’t know that I will ever be entirely free of the residual effects those events left in my body.

Despite how prominent an obstacle the sexual abuse was in my ability to claim space perhaps of greatest impact however, was and is, the living legacy of colonization and genocide I have inherited. My family, community and I, like most of this country’s Indigenous people, have been devastated by colonialism. Although I studied this devastation on a national level through Aboriginal

CLAIMING A SPACE FOR BIG MEDICINE

Studies during university, I began to understand it more on a community, family and individual level when I began to learn about my own history. Despite the many incredible triumphs along the way to rebuild, reclaim and reconnect, the effects that residential school and the forced removal of children into foster homes has greatly impacted the relationship between children and their parents in my family. Both of my parents lived in communities where extreme poverty and violence were prevalent. We continue to struggle against alcoholism, drug addiction, depression and suicide. Both First Nations on either side of my family are currently in the midst of land claims negotiations. Like most First Nations, we live on a fraction of our traditional territory and this greatly impacts our ability to exist as a sovereign people. The struggle to take my place or to claim space is one fraught with these inherited conflicts, both internal and external.

Given these circumstances, it's interesting that I chose a path in which negotiation of space and the ability to claim space is such an integral part of the art. As a dance/theatre interpreter, choreographer or instructor I'm continuously exploring the act of taking space, being present in the space, and discovering space. The act of claiming space as a dance artist however, was not a lesson that came easily to me. If anything, given my background and inherited trauma, I tried for many years to cultivate my ability to dance disconnectedly from my emotional and spiritual being. But

the desire to dance as a whole connected being was stronger and I left and returned to dance through many doorways that led to some incredible mentors along the way. The first time I was prompted to feel the width, depth, and weight of my skull, my chest cavity, my pelvis, my thighs; to acknowledge the space that I occupy, I was amazed at how simple and complex a thought like that is. To truly notice the size and weight of my bones, flesh, organs, and breath and everything that I embody through time and space is something that I hadn't really consciously experienced until that moment. Since then, I have struggled to bring the rest of my person including the sum of all of my experiences and spirit into my practice.

At the core of my artistic practice is a desire to continuously deepen my connection to family, community and land. This desire led me back to my home community. Five years ago, my husband and I and our two children moved to Nipissing First Nation. We saw the possibility of living and working as professional artists in our home community outside an urban centre. We saw the possibility of developing and maintaining relationships and partnerships with like-minded groups that we had worked with over the years. We saw the possibility of Nipissing being a home for research, development and creation of new works in dance, theatre and cross-disciplinary arts with both professional and community artists. Furthermore, we saw the opportunity to support a thriving arts community in Nipissing and surrounding area. In 2006, we

CLAIMING A SPACE FOR BIG MEDICINE

drew in other core members from the community and created Aanmitaagzi; a multi-disciplinary professional artist-run company.

Since 2006, Aanmitaagzi has been in a constant process of introducing ourselves to the community, introducing them to our work, seeing where the community and our interests, passions, curiosities intersect, asking what is the nature of our organization as Aanmitaagzi and how does it fit into the community. Paramount to our vision as a company has always been developing our working process and a governing structure that reflects the values and ideology we carry as Aboriginal people.

At a time when our communities are struggling with clean drinking water, housing, poverty, disease at epidemic proportions, and suicide, I question the relevance and role of myself as an artist. It has taken a long time to come around to the conviction that I, and we, have not only a right but also a responsibility to practice our arts. Actually, art is often at the centre of our healing and ceremonial ways of moving past these obstacles. Art is the way in which we explore, grapple with and express these issues our communities are facing. It is the way in which we imagine transformation and the way in which we respond. We do it in an artful way. I believe it is in these times, that art becomes ever more relevant.

With conviction in the relevance of art and my role in it, I began making steps towards creating

a home for art-making. After dreaming of a studio for more than twenty years, Big Medicine Studio was built. It is the result of collective efforts to make the case for art. The studio engages with vitalization and continuity of our cultures, our identities and our resistance. Art brings out in the open the devastation our communities have experienced, sheds light on the hope and offers an opportunity for a collective imagining of the possible solutions. Big Medicine Studio is a space where this can take place. Whether it's a place for our regular ongoing classes and workshops in both contemporary and traditional dance, theatre, visual arts and music or a place for ceremony and celebration it's reclamation of the place art has within our communities.

Although Big Medicine Studio is very much my way of reclaiming, rebuilding and celebrating, I see it as a continuation of the many ways we have fought to survive and make the world a better place for our children. From a great-grandmother who had a dance troupe with youth to keep the traditional dances alive, to grandparents who held dances in their homes, to aunts and uncles who continued learning and teaching traditional arts, crafts, singing and drumming, and to parents whose life work has been towards the health and wellness of the land and people, I've had much inspiration. Our family has been working collaboratively to make time and space for ceremony in our lives. We have been fasting in the spring together for the past twenty years. For the past four years,

CLAIMING A SPACE FOR BIG MEDICINE

three generations have fasted together in our traditional territory. We are part of a strong circle of people who have fought for centuries to protect our traditional territories and way of life against the omnipresent tide of colonialism. Big Medicine Studio is one of the ways in which I participate in this fight for a good life. A few years ago, I had a dream that my aunt who has passed on, came to visit me at my home. I began to clear the table because I knew she was here to do some creative and spiritual work. She walked around looking at the space and said “Yes. This is a good place for it to happen.” At the opening for Big Medicine Studio, as people were arriving and I heard the laughter and excited voices, I remembered her words and smiled.

Penny Couchie is a dancer, actor, teacher and choreographer of Ojibway and Mohawk ancestry from Nipissing First Nation, Ontario. She holds an Honors BA in Aboriginal Studies and Drama from the University of Toronto and is a graduate of The School of Toronto Dance Theatre. In 2001, she co-founded Earth in Motion World Indigenous Dance. drew in other core members from the community and created Aanmitaagzi; a multi-disciplinary professional artist-run company.

Since 2006, Aanmitaagzi has been in a constant process of introducing ourselves to the community, introducing them to our work, seeing where the community and our interests, passions, curiosities intersect, asking what is the nature of our

organization as Aanmitaagzi and how does it fit into the community. Paramount to our vision as a company has always been developing our working process and a governing structure that reflects the values and ideology we carry as Aboriginal people.

At a time when our communities are struggling with clean drinking water, housing, poverty, disease at epidemic proportions, and suicide, I question the relevance and role of myself as an artist. It has taken a long time to come around to the conviction that I, and we, have not only a right but also a responsibility to practice our arts. Actually, art is often at the centre of our healing and ceremonial ways of moving past these obstacles. Art is the way in which we explore, grapple with and express these issues our communities are facing. It is the way in which we imagine transformation and the way in which we respond. We do it in an artful way. I believe it is in these times, that art becomes ever more relevant.

With conviction in the relevance of art and my role in it, I began making steps towards creating a home for art-making. After dreaming of a studio for more than twenty years, Big Medicine Studio was built. It is the result of collective efforts to make the case for art. The studio engages with vitalization and continuity of our cultures, our identities and our resistance. Art brings out in the open the devastation our communities have experienced, sheds light on the hope and offers

CLAIMING A SPACE FOR BIG MEDICINE

an opportunity for a collective imagining of the possible solutions. Big Medicine Studio is a space where this can take place. Whether it's a place for our regular ongoing classes and workshops in both contemporary and traditional dance, theatre, visual arts and music or a place for ceremony and celebration it's reclamation of the place art has within our communities.

Although Big Medicine Studio is very much my way of reclaiming, rebuilding and celebrating, I see it as a continuation of the many ways we have fought to survive and make the world a better place for our children. From a great-grandmother who had a dance troupe with youth to keep the traditional dances alive, to grandparents who held dances in their homes, to aunts and uncles who continued learning and teaching traditional arts, crafts, singing and drumming, and to parents whose life work has been towards the health and wellness of the land and people, I've had much inspiration. Our family has been working collaboratively to make time and space for ceremony in our lives. We have been fasting in the spring together for the past twenty years. For the past four years, three generations have fasted together in our traditional territory. We are part of a strong circle of people who have fought for centuries to protect our traditional territories and way of life against the omnipresent tide of colonialism. Big Medicine Studio is one of the ways in which I participate in this fight for a good life. A few years ago, I had a dream that my aunt who has passed on, came

to visit me at my home. I began to clear the table because I knew she was here to do some creative and spiritual work. She walked around looking at the space and said "Yes. This is a good place for it to happen." At the opening for Big Medicine Studio, as people were arriving and I heard the laughter and excited voices, I remembered her words and smiled.

Penny Couchie is a dancer, actor, teacher and choreographer of Ojibway and Mohawk ancestry from Nipissing First Nation, Ontario. She holds an Honors BA in Aboriginal Studies and Drama from the University of Toronto and is a graduate of The School of Toronto Dance Theatre. In 2001, she co-founded Earth in Motion World Indigenous Dance. three generations have fasted together in our traditional territory. We are part of a strong circle of people who have fought for centuries to protect our traditional territories and way of life against the omnipresent tide of colonialism. Big Medicine Studio is one of the ways in which I participate in this fight for a good life. A few years ago, I had a dream that my aunt who has passed on, came to visit me at my home. I began to clear the table because I knew she was here to do some creative and spiritual work. She walked around looking at the space and said "Yes. This is a good place for it to happen." At the opening for Big Medicine Studio, as people were arriving and I heard the laughter and excited voices, I remembered her words and smiled.

CLAIMING A SPACE FOR BIG MEDICINE

Penny Couchie is a dancer, actor, teacher and choreographer of Ojibway and Mohawk ancestry from Nipissing First Nation, Ontario. She holds an Honors BA in Aboriginal Studies and Drama from the University of Toronto and is a graduate of The School of Toronto Dance Theatre. In 2001, she co-founded Earth in Motion World Indigenous Dance.

WORK HARD, MY GIRL

Renalitta Arluk

Right now, as a writer, my claimed space is a queen size bed with four pillows and a down quilt. It's one of the spaces I feel safe in. Comfortable. I share this space. Beside me is a side table where my coffee goes. It wakes me up a bit and then my computer joins me. It is my bedmate. It is good company. I claim its memory and fill it with all my thoughts, likes, curiosities. It fulfills most of my whims in bed. It follows me into the kitchen, (another claimed space), it eats breakfast with me and I again fill it with more thoughts and ideas. It speaks back to me with music. It is full of random tunes that inspire. I have claimed this space as my own. My own private space is in this computer. What is lovely about this little claimed space is that in comparison to all the other spaces around me it is, affordable. With it I feel like I can physically be anywhere: coffee shop, hotel room, someone's downstairs basement, in an office. Everywhere becomes claimed space because I have my little silver keyboard. Sounds co-dependent. Yeah, well, perhaps.

As a performer my claimed space is my mind, then my body, then a room, then a stage. It goes in that order. What makes it interesting is the journey and what it takes to get there. I'm not sure when it all began, this path, this very tangled path to self-claimed space but now it's all I know.

As a child I was a nomad. My grandparents raised me on the trap line. (I've told this story many times). I don't care though. I love my grandparents. They

taught me that the heart doesn't need much, just food, acceptance and a good snowsuit. "Always dress warm my girl." "Don't go outside with wet hair, you'll go crazy." I never tested the theory. I chose to just believe. My grandfather was a well-known and respected trapper/ prospector. He knew the land in the Northwest Territories very well. He has stories that go all the way up to the Barren lands. It seems the only stories that come from that area now are about diamonds. That's ok. I still remember his. I can share them too. They're just as valuable.

From there I travelled south with my mom. Just a young one she was when she had me. She had to travel a little alone before I joined her. She joined the army, where she got her truck driver's license. She was the first woman in the NWT to do that. I remain quite proud of her, not only for that, but for many other reasons. With her I continued being a nomad all through my elementary and junior high school years. It was all down south. I really changed. It taught me that your steps could easily be forgotten. Trampled over within a day. I learned you could get lost in the city if you're not careful. I never got lost but I sure got turned around. My grandparents said I got "citified." I don't blame them. I lost touch with who I was for a lot of those years. But it takes a lot of guts to thrive up North too. You face your demons and your joys every day. Your missteps don't get tread on so easily so they remain there as a reminder for you. "Learn

WORK HARD, MY GIRL

my girl.” “Remember that my girl. That time....” It is a tough lesson.

That’s the thing about claimed space; that you can forget about it and think it will remain yours, like a stake. That is not the case. We can forget where we were and can lose where we are going. This can happen to anyone in any way, as a human being, as a person of Indigenous descent, as an artist, even as all three. Sometimes we aren’t even given the choice to claim space. For me, it has taken a lot of years to learn my path but once I knew, there was no going back. Not until, that is, I forget where I come from.

We moved back home to the North and that is where I became myself again. Got reconnected again. It’s good up here. I am not the only one who says going north is like recharging one’s batteries. It really is. Yet as a young adult I continued on my nomad way. Went much further this time though, Europe, United States, more of Canada. With each road more space was claimed but not in the way that one imagines. These ventures were all personal ones. It seemed that the more road I travelled the more my mind, body and Spirit connected. It was like each experience brushed away webs in my body to make more room for discovery. I uncovered the ones hiding deeply. Some were very scary but as they revealed themselves I claimed them. Then I went back home to figure it out. Back home North. My North. The one I was raised by and started writing about it.

Then I started telling stories about it. We all have a story to tell. We are all capable of storytelling. But to tell our stories we must first claim them. For me to tell you my story I have to wander. Maybe it’s the same for you, maybe no.

I had a conversation with my mother recently. She called me after watching a show on CBC. It got her thinking about something quite personal. About residential school, but more about looking passed the victimization of being a residential school survivor. That the person who was interviewing didn’t make the connection between the survivors experience then and how they are now. There are so few that have been able to see themselves free of being the victim they once were. She told me I should start compiling ideas around this. That she will start noting some down too. Share them with me. My mother. She believes in my abilities. Anyway. We have this conversation because my mother is a survivor of residential school. She was not treated well within the confines of those walls and, to be frank, outside of them either. Yet, she remains to be one of the most positive influences in my life. So when I think of claiming space I think of that space within our connected mind, body and Spirit that can see us through the most horrific of situations and overcome them. I also think of those spaces within us that have to be covered up to be bearable.

I guess that is why I am here too. To be a claimed daughter who listens. So my mother can pick up

WORK HARD, MY GIRL

the phone and talk openly about what she has claimed, in a good way. She shares her story with me. I become the claimed benefactor of generational victimization. Yet, I am not the only one. We carry the pain of the generations before us. I believe that. We are claimed space that has crossed time. In turn, I spent many years learning how to clear away the webs that life and generations cluttered within me. I learned to clear away the webs but not lose the story. Now I have many more stories to tell... and not all of them are mine.

My nomad ways have continued into my mid-adulthood. My trap line goes pretty far now. On the land if you do not stay active you will not survive very long. "You need to work hard my girl." That is what my grandparents taught me as well. That was their way of life. I was pretty fortunate to see space claimed that way. But stories are nomads too and sometimes they cross your path. They can come in the form of a sound or a smell, face-to-face or even through taste. I like those ones. They flavour, whisper, lick or yell them to you, depending on how you choose to listen. Sometimes they get heavy, too heavy to carry on your back. I don't mind. That story is asking you to help it on its way. When a story asks you for help you've got to make room.

That's the next step of claimed space. Allowing yourself to trust that the space within you is for borrowing. That is the better way. Making room within to be story- carriers. Share them with the

generations to come. Allow that story, those stories to live and breathe within you. Make room. For me, I am nowhere near done claiming space. I do it because this is my path. I walk with my family, with friends, with strangers and sometimes alone. I am a nomad. That's the path I walk, willingly. Join me.

Reneltha Arluk is an actor, playwright, producer, and storyteller. She is playwright in residence with Gwaandak Theatre. Her company Akpik Theatre is co-producing a radio drama adaptation of Richard Van Camps' short story I Count Myself Them. Her play TUMIT has garnered accolades across Canada .

FOUR TERRITORIES

Yvette Nolan

If we mark the beginning of a contemporary Aboriginal theatre as 1982 with two near simultaneous events some 3000 kilometers apart — Maria Campbell's production of *Jessica* in Saskatoon and the founding of Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto — time telescopes down, and we can take heart that it has only been thirty years.

In thirty years, we have developed a community of artists whose voices are heard on stages large and small, national and international. In addition to the playwrights — Marie Clements, Tomson Highway, Daniel David Moses, Tara Beagan and all their relations — Indigenous artists have staked claim to territories in dance, performance, and new media that push against expectations and arbitrary boundaries.

The Indigenous performance world is full of examples of artists who began in one discipline and crossed to another, or rather grew broader to encompass more practices. Indigenous artists have been working across practice without much ado for as long as we have been making art. One of the inadvertent benefits of decades of inaccessibility and/or invisibility may well prove to be the fact that our practices are interwoven, that there is less fear about cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary work. It is just the way we work. When funders began to initiate interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, inter-arts programs, many Indigenous artists found it finally easier to fit into granting programs, after years of resisting

defining their work with any one label: visual art or theatre or dance or music.

Michael Greyeyes, originally from Saskatchewan, trained as a classical dancer, dancing professionally with the National Ballet, and Eliot Feld's company in New York. In the '90s, he acted in a host of movies and television program before pursuing a MFA at Kent State. In 2003 he brought those skills home to Canada where he took at position at York University, teaching Movement for Actors.

In the years since, Michael has participated in a diversity of projects, choreographing for Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble's *The Only Good Indian...*, creating site-specific dance for *Nuit Blanche* and *Dusk Dances*, making the short dance films *Triptych* and *Seven Seconds* and directing Tomson Highway's Cree opera *Pitoomeewin*. This last project inspired the creation of Michael's *from thine eyes*, a dance theatre piece that tells the story of humans moving on to the next world, which premiered at the Enwave Theatre in Toronto in a co-production with Native Earth Performing Arts, presented with DanceWorks. *from thine eyes* also marked the launch of Signal Theatre, Greyeyes' company which he identifies as a "theatre company" with a mission to explore "both physical and text-based theatre which moves through the disciplines of dance, opera, music, design and the spoken word."

FOUR TERRITORIES

Kent Monkman has been dazzling audiences all over the world with his almost description-defying work. Kent began in painting, and his paintings — in the style of 19th century landscape paintings except with Canada’s colonial past painted right in — have been exhibited all over the world. The most oft-quoted description that accompanies Kent’s paintings is that he employs an “ironic reversal of colonial narratives and ethnographic painting” (Mackenzie Gallery).

Kent’s alter-ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle has stepped right out of his paintings. At first she appeared in the 19th century landscape paintings that challenged the romanticism of the noble savage of the mainstream, and in photographs. Then she became animated in short films and video such as *Group of Seven Inches* and *Shooting Geronimo*. Next thing I knew, I was seeing Miss Chief live, surrounded by dancing boys at the Royal Ontario Museum (*Séance*) and playing Archer Pechawis’ electronic drum in the middle of the night at *Nuit Blanche (Iskootao)*. I heard tell of her performance in Warwickshire, England. Because of Kent’s facility with form, these live performances are not as ephemeral as the traditional theatre we know; they are filmed, but the resultant films are not mere chronicles, they become new pieces of work. *Group of Seven Inches* was a live performance in 2004 at the McMichael Gallery. In 2005 it reemerged as a B & W Super 8 film that travelled and was shown the world over.

In an interview in *Blackflash* in 2008, Archer Pechawis noted that Kent had worked in “performance, film, painting, set design” and asked if he had any plans to do more set design. Kent said no, because he found that set design diverted energy from his own practice, but he did go on to say that his theatre experiences played a role in his subsequent installations: “There’s a certain theatricality about them, and also in my film making work. All the different mediums inform each other, and that is how the performance work emerged, by creating this character, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle in my paintings, that was really the genesis of that. She was brought to life in a live performance, which was then also versioned as the film *Group of Seven Inches*” (Pechawis, 2008).

Archer Pechawis, performance and media artist, is one of Kent Monkman’s occasional collaborators. Archer has been “quitting theatre” for as long as I have known him. He created the male role in my play *Annie Mae’s Movement* in 1999, a performance that at that point constituted his return to theatre. Even though he has rejected theatre as a form, he has developed an extensive performance career that often places him in non-traditional spaces. Archer pegs his performance debut to an event he did in 1988 at the Museum of Anthropology at University of British Columbia at the invitation of Michael Ames, which culminated with the opening of a curtain to reveal the newest exhibition: the audience itself. Archer’s fascination is with the intersection of Cree culture (he hails from

FOUR TERRITORIES

Mistawasis First Nation in Saskatchewan) and the ever-evolving technologies of the 21st century. Out of this exploration has emerged Archer's digital drum — the very one Miss Chief Eagle Testickle beat in Iskootao that sounded out the heartbeat of the 650-tonne, billion-year-old chunk of the Canadian Shield in downtown Toronto. The same drum Archer plays in *Horse*, his performance of a reimagining of the Battle of Little Big Horn, told by voice, drum, video and cello. Like Kent's work, Archer's work tends to exist on several planes; there is the live event such as *Shoot the Indian*, an action game where participants (audience members) shoot the Indian (Archer) with a paintball gun. The event is both recorded for future iterations, and intercut with other recorded material — for instance, documentation of the artists bruises from being shot.

Michelle Olson trained as a dancer at the University of New Mexico and the Aboriginal Arts Program at the Banff Centre. In 1999, she founded Raven Spirit Dance in Vancouver, the mandate of which is “to create, develop and produce contemporary dance that is rooted in traditional and contemporary Aboriginal worldview” (Olson). While the company has created a body of work that has been shown across Canada, Michelle herself has continued to work beyond the boundaries of dance. She was a founding member of Cheyikwe Performance, a collective that created the place between, which one reviewer called “as much a fusion of dance and spoken-word theatre as it

is a fusion of the spiritual and temporal worlds” (Coulbourn, 2007). In the place between, dance and text built upon each other, song and sound creating other layers to support and elevate them. The performers were invariably called “committed,” because they were not trained dancers, but actors who integrated dance and song and text with equal dedication. She continued to pursue that kind of holistic practice as the choreographer of the National Arts Centre/Native Earth Performing Arts co-production of *Death of a Chief*, an all-Aboriginal adaptation of *Julius Caesar*, and of the National Arts Centre/Western Canada Theatre Company co-production of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. In each of these cases, Michelle's participation in the creation of the work was so integral as to be inter-gutted — one cannot pick apart her contribution from the whole without the entire thing coming apart. This was illustrated in a review of *Death of Chief* in which the fight director Siobhan Richardson was credited with the killing of *Caesar*, a sequence that was built largely by Michelle.

Indian Country is not so big that our territories do not overlap. These artists know each other, work together and affect each other. Michael has collaborated with Kent on a number of occasions including the early film *A Nation is Coming* (1996) and the 5-channel video installation *Dance to the Berdashe* (2008). Kent integrates Archer's 21st century forward engineered technologies into his work. Michelle frequently finds herself on the same program as Michael, in the same academic

FOUR TERRITORIES

publications and on the same panels. Michelle and Archer were in Full Circle Performance together. And so it goes, our nations exchanging gifts and tools, our people traversing territories to trade, intermarry and procreate, generating new work, new visions, hybrids and issue that are somehow as true and as authentic as our ancestors. This is the legacy of the past thirty years, the legacy we leave for the next.

Yvette Nolan is a playwright, director and dramaturge. Her plays include BLADE, Job's Wife, Video, Annie Mae's Movement, Scattering Jake, Two Old Women, the libretto Hilda Blake, and the radio play Owen. She is the editor of Beyond the Pale: Dramatic Writing from First Nations Writers and Writers of Colour, and of the upcoming Refractions: Solo, with Donna-Michelle St. Bernard.

Works Cited

Coulbourn, John. *Toronto Sun*, April 9, 2007.

Pechawis, Archer. "Archer Pechawis interviews Kent Monkman," *Blackflash*, Vol 25.3, 2008.